

THE BRONTES.

CHARLOTTE (1816-1855) EMILY (1818-1848) ANNE (1820-1849)

They were born at Thornton vicarage, Yorkshire. Their father was an Irish curate. The family soon moved to Haworth, to the austere parsonage which became their lifelong home. The steep hill-village with its dark cobbled streets, and the bleak beauty of the surrounding moors were formative influences on the children. Their mother, a gentle Cornish woman, died of cancer the year the family arrived at Haworth. Her sister, Elizabeth Branwell, was persuaded to move to damp and windy Yorkshire to look after the children, five girls and a boy called Branwell. She showed little affection for her charges, and even less for the wild countryside they so loved. In 1824, Patrick Brontë managed to find a school Cowan Bridge (run by Rev. Cowan) for the four older girls. The size of the fee (&14 a year) reflected the neglect and undernourishment suffered by the girls. There they led a life of self-denial, submission, frugality, punishment and repression which in Charlotte instilled the bitter and lasting resentment she expressed some 20 years later in *Jane Eyre*. Their sisters Maria and Elizabeth died there of tuberculosis a few months after their arrival. Charlotte and Emily were brought home where Emily remained there for the next ten years and Charlotte for six. Though tutored by their father, from whom they acquired a passion for poetry, they grew up free from many of the restrictions normally placed on children. Their aunt kept a certain distance from them and their father was a remote figure who even took his meals alone. So the young Brontës drew closer together (Emily was closest to her younger sister Anne) and soon became immersed in telling, then writing stories about fantasy worlds they created. They roamed up to 20 miles a day over the moors and during these walks their imagination was fed with tales of the supernatural told by their Methodist housekeeper Tabitha Aykroyd, a widow of 56.



The story-telling began in 1826, when Papa brought home a box of wooden soldiers; each child chose one and began telling and writing stories about their characters, the Glass Town epic. Charlotte and Branwell produced the sagas of "Angria" and Emily created the "Gondal" chronicles when she was only 12.

In 1830 Mr Brontë suffered a serious illness. It brought him the fact that -lacking any conventional training- his children would become paupers if he died. So, with financial help from Charlotte's godparents, she was sent to school again, an elegant country house at Roe Head. Within 18 months she absorbed all Roe Head had to teach and returned home. The next three years were spent in domestic quietude, or absorbed in

writing romantic Angrian dramas. When Charlotte was 19 she was offered a post as assistant teacher at Roe Head, with a tiny salary and free schooling for one of her sisters. After only three months Emily, the chosen one, returned home. She missed the liberty of the country. Writing 15 years after the event, Charlotte said of her sister, "Liberty was the breath of Emily's nostrils, without it, she perished... Every morning when she woke, the vision of home and the moors rushed on her...her health was quickly broken... I felt in my heart she would die if she did not go home..." Charlotte herself returned after three years. She could not bear the enforced sociability of the school. The following year, 1839, Charlotte turned down a proposal from Rev. Henry Nusey, brother of her lifelong friend Ellen, whom she met at Roe Head. Two months later she became temporary governess to two perverse children. She returned home less than two months later and received another proposal from a young Irish curate her father knew. Two years passed at Haworth before she found another position. All the while Emily stayed at home, feeling herself to be a failure, she was thrown almost exclusively into the company of Branwell, a failure of Byronic intensity. She withdrew from the social world into her beloved moors, her dogs, cats and her hawk. She felt "terrifically and idiotically and brutally STUPID". In 1837 she tried to work as governess but returned home soon to remain there for the next four years, while Charlotte and Anne continued to work as governesses.



With the declining health of Patrick Brontë the sisters decided they would set up a school on their own. Anne Branwell agreed to finance the venture. It was decided that Charlotte and Emily should attend a school in the Continent to perfect their French and improve their German. They went to Pensionnat Heger in Brussels. When their aunt died nine months later Emily returned to look after their father, almost totally blind. In 1845 her self-contained life at home was invaded by the return of Branwell. She witnessed his gradual desintegration. Few months later both Anne and Charlotte returned home, this one suffering the pangs of an unrequited love for the married M. Heger. Her letters to him were embarrassingly ardent.

That year Charlotte discovered two scruffy notebooks, Emily's Gondal poems and others of a more personal nature. She realized their exceptional quality. Flying into a violent rage Emily accused Charlotte of betrayal but gradually consented to write a book together with their sister Anne. Although *Poems by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell* failed commercially, the three sisters each embarked on the writing of a novel. That same year Emily wrote *Wuthering Heights*, much condemned by literary critics as "disgusting, inhuman, evil, incivilized, artistically immature". Charlotte finished *The Professor* and *Jane Eyre* while Anne wrote *Agnes Grey*. Charlotte's *Jane Eyre* a few months later had a rapturous reception. In 1848, Branwell died of consumption, alcohol and drugs. Emily and Anne caught the disease and were carried off within a few months. Charlotte continued to live with her father, who nonetheless kept on taking his meals away from her. In 1852 she finished *Villette*. Two years later she married her father's boring Irish curate. She was soon pregnant, but morning sickness, endless nausea and vomiting proved too much for her frail body and she died in 1855.

Works.

By Emily: *Poems* and *Wuthering Heights*

By Anne: *Poems*, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, *Agnes Grey*

By Charlotte: *The Professor*, *Jane Eyre*, *Villette*, *Shirley*

Jane Eyre:

An Introduction by Joyce Carol OatesOriginally

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Reader, if you have yet to discover the unique voice of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, you have a special delight awaiting you.

For this most acclaimed of novels—"English," "Gothic," "romantic," "female"—is always a surprise, in the very authority, resonance, and inimitable voice of its heroine. "I resisted all the way," *Jane Eyre* states at the beginning of Chapter 2, and this attitude, this declaration of a unique and iconoclastic female rebelliousness, strikes the perfect note for the entire novel. That a woman will "resist" the terms of her destiny (social or spiritual) is not perhaps entirely new in English literature up to the publication of *Jane Eyre* in 1847: we have after all the willful heroines of certain of Shakespeare's plays, and those of Jane Austen's elegant comedies of manners. But *Jane Eyre* is a young woman wholly unprotected by social position, family, or independent wealth; she is without power; she is, as Charlotte Brontë judged herself, "small and plain and Quaker-like"—lacking the most superficial yet seemingly necessary qualities of femininity. ("You are not pretty any more than I am handsome," Rochester says bluntly.) Considered as a fictitious character and, in this instance, the vocal consciousness of a long and intricately plotted novel of considerable ambition, *Jane Eyre* was a risk for her young creator—had not Henry Fielding gambled, and lost, on the virtuous but impoverished and less than ravishingly beautiful heroine of his *Amelia*, of 1751, arousing the scorn of readers who had so applauded *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*? *Jane Eyre*, who seems to us, in retrospect, the very voice of highly educated but socially and economically disenfranchised gentility, as natural in her place in the literature of nineteenth-century England as Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* is in our literature, was unique for her time. She speaks with an apparent artlessness that strikes the ear as disturbingly forthright. (Compare the slow, clotted, indefatigably rhetorical prose of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, of 1818; or the pious and exsanguine narrative of Esther Summerson of Charles Dickens's *Bleak House*, of 1853; and the melancholy, rather overdetermined self-consciousness of Brontë's *Lucy Snowe*, the heroine of *Villette*, of 1853: "If life be a war, it seemed my destiny to conduct it singlehanded. I pondered how to break up my winter-quarters—to leave an encampment where food and forage failed. Perhaps, to effect this change, another pitched battle must be fought with fortune; if so, I had a mind to the encounter: too poor to lose, God might destine me to gain. But what road was open?—what plan available?")

One of the reasons for *Jane Eyre*'s authority over her own experience, and the confidence with which she assesses that experience, is that, as the romantically convoluted plot evolves, the reader learns that it is history rather than story. *Jane Eyre*, who is wife and mother in 1819, is recounting the events of 1799-1809 in a language that is unfailingly masterful precisely because it is after the fact: if the Romantic/Gothic novel be, in one sense, sheer wish, *Jane*'s triumph (wife to Lord Rochester after all and mother to his son—as it scarcely needs be said) represents a wish fulfillment of extraordinary dimensions. The material of legends and fairy tales, perhaps; yet also, sometimes, this time at least, of life. For we are led to believe *Jane Eyre*'s good fortune because we are led to believe her voice. It is, in its directness, its ruefulness and scarcely concealed rage, startlingly contemporary; and confirms the critical insight that all works of genius are contemporaneous both with their own times and with ours.

Jane Eyre was written under a pseudonym when Charlotte Brontë was thirty-one years old, a casualty, so to speak, of ten years of servitude as a governess. Though "Currer Bell" was an unknown author and of indeterminate sex, the novel was accepted almost immediately upon being offered to the publishing house of Smith, Elder; it was published within seven weeks and became an instant success. Like Brontë's romantic hero Lord Byron, the new author "awoke one morning to find [herself] famous."

That Jane Eyre sold so well should force us to reassess our custom of too casually dismissing the tastes and expectations of the large audience of "female" readers of the nineteenth century. For Jane Eyre, whatever its kinship to eighteenth-century Gothic and however melodramatic certain of its episodes (the one in which Rochester disguises himself as a gypsy is particularly strained), is nonetheless a work of stubbornly idiosyncratic intelligence; its strength lies as much in passages of introspective analysis as in conventionally dramatized scenes. Jane projects such rebellious undercurrents that some critics, including sympathetic readers, found the novel "coarse." Jane does not sentimentalize herself as an orphaned child any more than she sentimentalizes other children—in the scene in which she confronts Mrs. Reed her voice is "savage": "I am glad you are no relation of mine: I will never call you aunt again as long as I live. I will never come to see you when I am grown up; and if any one asks me how I liked you, and how you treated me, I will say the very thought of you makes me sick." During Jane's stay at Lowood, when so many of her classmates sicken and die, Jane voices no false piety in noting that spring is "unclouded" nonetheless. Not coarseness but an unfashionable realism provokes the child's insight: "My mind made its first earnest effort to comprehend what had been infused into it concerning heaven and hell: and for the first time it recoiled, baffled; and for the first time glancing behind, on each side, and before it, it saw all round an unfathomed gulf: it felt the one point where it stood—the present; all the rest was formless cloud and vacant depth: and it shuddered at the thought of tottering, and plunging amid that chaos." At a time when women were imagined as merely inhabiting bodies meant to bear children, but being, in other respects, chastely bodiless, Jane rejects the proffered love of the martyrish St. John Rivers because it is merely spiritual. Surely this suggests a "coarseness" very much at odds with Victorian ideals?

Like *Villette*, Jane Eyre is a story of hunger; unlike that more complex and perhaps more aesthetically "pure" novel, it is a story of hunger satisfied. That young Jane Eyre supplants the formerly exotic Bertha (the Creole heiress whom Rochester recklessly married in his youth) is not, given the terms of the novel's logic, a matter of moral ambiguity: for in her deranged and diseased state Bertha is no longer a human woman but sheer appetite, and therefore beyond the range of Jane's (and presumably the reader's) sympathy. Her laughter is "demonic"; her figure "hideous." Jane is necessarily repelled, for this is an other quite truly other, lacking even the intelligence and sense of moral proportion so artfully voiced by Dr. Frankenstein's doomed monster. When Jane first sees Rochester's lawfully wedded wife the reader is as shocked as she. In the deep shade, at the farther end of the room, a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing; and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face. This secret wife lacks even a gender. She is it, and animal: "the clothed hyena rose up, and stood tall on its hind feet." Rochester mockingly addresses Jane as a "young girl, who stands so grave and quiet at the mouth of hell, looking collectedly at the gambols of a demon." (Rochester confesses to having married Bertha, the daughter of a West India planter, in a trance of youthful "prurience" and to having discovered, after it was too late, that their natures were antithetical—her "pygmy intellect" was "common, low, narrow, and singularly incapable of being led to anything higher"; she was sexually promiscuous—"her vices sprang up fast and rank"; and diseased—"her excesses had prematurely developed the germs of insanity." That Bertha Mason suffers from atypical general paresis, the consequence of syphilitic infection, must be passed by in silence since, in realistic terms, Rochester too would be syphilitic; and would infect Jane Eyre if she married him.)

Jane Eyre's hunger and that of Bertha Mason are not seen to overlap, for one is always qualified by intellectual scrupulosity and a fierce sense of integrity; the other is, and was, sheerly animal. Jane goes

against the grain of her deepest wishes; she renounces emotional fulfillment in the service of an ideal that includes, as "Currer Bell" carefully notes in the preface to the novel's second edition, "the world-redeeming creed of Christ." Jane's self-banishment and the remarkably literal terms of her hunger—she comes close to starving after she flees Thornfield—identify her in fact as a kind of Christ: misunderstood, defiant, isolated, willing (almost) to die for her beliefs. The reiteration of "master" and "my master" in the narrative suggests Jane's ultimate if not immediate acknowledgement of her place in the hierarchy of a civilized cosmos; in this, she strikes a chord of willful submission not unlike that of Emily Dickinson, whose insistence upon "Master" as a force in her emotional life carried with it an air of obsessive conviction. How seemingly passive, how subtly aggressive! Jane Eyre is the ideal heroine as she is the ideal narrator of her romance.

It is interesting to note that the Bronte sisters—Charlotte, Emily, and Anne—began writing as children, creating a private mythology out of the exigencies of a motherless, isolated, and intensely private domestic life in Haworth Parsonage on the Yorkshire moor. In 1826, when Charlotte was ten, her father Patrick Bronte gave her brother, Branwell, a box of twelve wooden soldiers, which seemed to awaken a fervor of creativity in the children: they began making up stories in which the soldiers figured as characters. In time, they created plays, mimes, games, and serial stories transcribed in minute italic handwriting that mimics print; they were influenced by their father's storytelling and by their wide and promiscuous reading—among contemporaries, Scott, Byron, E. T. A. Hoffmann, and supernatural stories by James Hogg that appeared in serial form in Blackwood's Magazine. Out of the children's elaborate fantasizing grew two long-enduring partnerships between Emily and Anne (the "Gondal" sagas) and Charlotte and Branwell (the "Angrian" stories): Emily continued to live imaginatively in Gondal until she was at least twenty-seven years old, while Charlotte wrote her last Angrian story at the age of twenty-three. Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* is more clearly an adult's rendering of incestuous childhood obsession than are any of Charlotte Bronte's novels, but the romantically dangerous Rochester is most likely a remnant of the children's sensational world, the poetic antithesis of all that was dull, dreary, routine, and circumscribed in the world of Haworth Parsonage. Here is Jane's first vision of the man she will adore: Something of daylight still lingered, and the moon was waxing bright; I could see him plainly. His figure was enveloped in a riding cloak, fur collared and steel clasped; its details were not apparent, but I traced the general points of middle height, and considerable breadth of chest. He had a dark face, with stern features and a heavy brow; his eyes and gathered eyebrows looked ireful and thwarted . . . ; he was past youth, but had not reached middle age. Like Emily's Heathcliff, that Byronic, doomed hero; yet unlike Heathcliff—who after all starves himself to death in his deranged attachment to the past—since, by the novel's end, after he goes blind, Rochester does become domesticated. The Gothic has become tamed, and redeemed, by ordinary marital love. However unlikely for Bronte's time, or for ours, *Jane Eyre* ends upon a note of conjugal bliss: I am my husband's life as fully as he is mine. No woman was ever nearer to her mate than I am: ever more absolutely bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. I know no weariness of my Edward's society: he knows none of mine, any more than we each do of the pulsation of the heart that beats in our separate bosoms; consequently, we are ever together.... We talk, I believe, all day long: to talk to each other is but a more animated and an audible thinking. The orphan Jane is no longer "resisting all the way"; no longer, at this point, required to be Jane. The novel's passionate energies consume themselves as the apocalyptic fire at Thornfield consumes unregenerate Bertha.

Much of the power of *Jane Eyre* derives from a dialectic the author unobtrusively pursues on several structural levels. For instance, in the largest, most spacious sense the novel is about character stimulated into growth—truly remarkable growth—by place: Jane Eyre, orphaned and presumably defenseless, and a mere girl, discovers the strength of her personality by way of the challenges of several contrasting environments—the Reed household, in which she is despised; Lowood School, where she discovers a model in Miss Temple and a spiritual sister in Helen Burns; Thornfield, where she cultivates, with agreeable naturalness, a measure of sexual power; Whitcross, where, at last, she acquires the semblance of a family; and Ferndean, Rochester's retreat, a manor house of "considerable antiquity . . . deep buried in a wood," where she is at last wed.

Just as these carefully rendered places differ greatly from one another, so Jane differs greatly in them; one has the sense of a soul in ceaseless evolution. As a child in the Reed household, rebuking Mrs. Reed, Jane feels a sense of precocious triumph: "Ere I had finished this reply, my soul began to expand, to exult, with the strangest sense of freedom, of triumph, I ever felt. It seemed as if an invisible bond had burst, and that I had struggled out into unlooked-for liberty." Brontë's sense of human personality is that it is pliant, fluid, and living, in immediate (and often defiant) response to its surroundings; not that it is stable and determined, as if sculpted in marble. Jane Eyre is no portrait of a lady but the story of a young woman in a "heroic" mold, as susceptible as any man to restlessness and ennui when opposition fails to provide a cause against which to struggle. Grown bored at Thornfield, for instance, before the arrival of the master, Jane longs for a power of vision that might overpass the limits of her sequestered life, pastoral as it is. Very like the nameless governess of Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*,¹ Jane walks agitatedly about, alone, "safe in the silence and solitude," and eager for adventure: which is to say, romance.

Women are supposed to be calm, Jane says, but women feel precisely as men do, requiring exercise for their faculties and suffering from stagnation. On the third floor of Thornfield she paces about, not unlike the captive Bertha in her backward-and-forward movements, allowing "my mind's eye to dwell upon whatever bright visions rose before it— and, certainly, they were many and glowing; to let my heart be heaved by the exultant movement, which, while it swelled it in trouble, expanded it with life; and, best of all, to open my inward ear to a tale that was never ended—a tale my imagination created, and narrated continuously; quickened with all of incident, life, fire, feeling, that I desired and had not in my actual existence." Jane is Charlotte Brontë telling us of the mesmerizing psychological experience of the writing of *Jane Eyre*. (It was written in five months.)

In recounting her story, Jane typically introduces a situation meant to provoke conventional associations on the part of the reader (to whom, as to a friend, Jane speaks candidly) and then, within a paragraph or two, deftly qualifies or refutes it. The narrative's dialectic, it might be said, constitutes a plot motion of its own, quite distinct from Jane's activities. A thesis of sorts is presented; but, should we respond to it, the narrator will set us right: for she is always in control of her narrative. We learn, with Jane, that what seems to be rarely is; even when Rochester disguises himself as a fortune-telling gypsy, improbably fooling his guests, Jane is keen enough to suspect "something of a masquerade."

The novel begins with a blunt statement: "There was no possibility of taking a walk that day." The shrubbery is leafless; the winter sky overcast; the rain penetrating; Eliza, John, and Georgiana, and the despised orphan, Jane, are cooped up together in the house. But, should the reader be tempted to respond automatically to this privation, Jane immediately declares, "I was glad of it; I never liked long walks." Excluded from Christmas celebrations in the Reed household, Jane describes the festivities and exchanges of gifts she missed; then says, "To speak the truth, I had not the least wish to go into company." Given what is known of Charlotte's grief at the deaths of her two elder sisters at school, when she was a very small child, the dialectic of Chapter 9 is all the more surprising: for here the typhus epidemic at Lowood Orphan Asylum is set against an unusually idyllic spring, and while disease, death, gloom, hospital smells, and the "effluvia of mortality" predominate, Jane, untouched by the disease, is frank about her enjoyment of the situation. Forty-five out of eighty girls are affected; some go home to die (as Charlotte's sisters did, from the Cowan Bridge School), and some die at school, like Helen Burns, and are buried "quietly and quickly"; but the ten-year-old Jane, clearly no kin to child heroines in works of George Eliot or Charles Dickens, responds instinctively to the bright May sunshine and the "majestic life" that is being restored to Nature. She delights in her freedom to ramble in the woods and to eat as much as she likes, for the first time in her life: with very little Victorian delicacy, but with a refreshing air of truthfulness, Jane notes that her breakfast basin is "better filled" because the sick lack appetite. Even the death of Helen Burns is sparsely treated; and Jane's close questioning of Helen's religious convictions does not appear resolved: "Again I questioned; but this time only in thought. Where is [Heaven]? Does it exist?"

Jane Eyre is remarkable for its forthright declaration of its heroine's passions and appetites. Unlike Lucy Snowe, with whom she bears a family kinship, Jane hardly needs to work at cultivating a "healthy hunger": she is ravenous with appetite at Lowood, and, in fleeing Thornfield, in the brilliantly sustained nightmare of Chapter 28, she is in danger of literally starving to death. In the latter scene, Jane responds at first like any romantic heroine, imagining a Wordsworthian solace in the moorland: "Not a tie holds me to human society at this moment—not a charm or hope calls me where my fellow-creatures are—none that saw me would have a kind thought or good wish for me. I have no relative but the universal mother, Nature: I will seek her breast and ask repose." Outcast that she is from human society, Jane knows herself loved by Nature, to which she clings with an ingenuous "filial fondness": "Tonight, at least, I would be her guest, as I was her child: my mother would lodge me without money and without price. I had one more morsel of bread.... My hunger, sharp before, was, if not satisfied, appeased by this hermit's meal." As her reverie continues Jane speculates about God, a He set beside Nature's She: "We know that God is everywhere; but certainly we feel His presence most when His works are on the grandest scale spread out before us: and it is in the unclouded night sky, where His worlds wheel their silent course, that we read clearest His infinitude."

Jane's awakening next morning is to a bitter revelation: she begins to experience genuine hunger and to suffer the humiliation, mounting very nearly to physical terror, of near-starvation. Piety rapidly vanishes; romantic rhetoric is dropped. Bronte renders this painful interlude with such exactitude that one cannot doubt she wrote from first-hand experience, as her earliest biographer Mrs. Gaskell suggests.² Few scenes in English literature are so harrowing as those in which Jane overcomes her pride to beg for food and is given a crust of bread, or food meant for hogs, or rebuffed altogether. ("I blamed none of those who repulsed me. I felt it was what was to be expected.") Hunger has become real to Jane in a way that the platitudes of "Nature" and "God" are not. (One is reminded of the "thin, haggard, and hollow-eyed" Lucy Snowe, who, confronted with a Renoir-like portrait of a voluptuous female, ostensibly Cleopatra, responds with startling violence. Indeed, Bronte herself is so incensed by this "enormous piece of claptrap" that, for some paragraphs, the fastidiously subdued prose of *Villette* is enlivened by a genuine passion: "I calculated that this lady . . . would infallibly turn from fourteen to sixteen stone. She was, indeed, extremely well fed: very much butcher's meat—to say nothing of bread, vegetables, and liquids—must she have consumed to attain that breadth and height, that wealth of muscle, that affluence of flesh.... She had no business to lounge away the noon on a sofa. She ought likewise to have worn decent garments; a gown covering her properly." Lucy Snowe is an older and embittered Jane Eyre, recoiling from the very emblem of flesh.)

The plot of *Jane Eyre* is increasingly contrived and melodramatic—the novel is after all a late-Romantic, early Victorian form of the "manufactured fiction" of which Henry James spoke, in terms of Dickens, with some disdain—and, so far as "story" is concerned, the tensions of an interior dialectic sometimes lack subtlety. No aura of mystery or exoticism accrues to Rochester's visitor from the West Indies, Richard Mason: in Jane's sharp eyes he is sallow and unmanly, with something in his face that fails to please. "His features were regular, but too relaxed; his eye was large and well cut, but the life looking out of it was a tame, vacant life." When, later, Jane is brought into Bertha Mason's presence and mockingly introduced to Rochester's wife, she is naturally revulsed—she feels no kinship with this creature. And though Jane charges Rochester with cruelty in so despising and exhibiting his mad wife, claiming that Bertha cannot help her condition, Jane cannot really identify with the woman; and rather too readily forgives Rochester his curious (and ungentlemanly) behavior.³ That Rochester had intended to dishonestly marry her, and, in the most fundamental sense, "deflower" her, matters less to Jane than the reader anticipates. But the legitimate Mrs. Rochester, along with Thornfield Hall itself and all it represents of a diseased past, will soon be destroyed in a refining fire.

Numerous readers have felt that the long Whitcross section, consisting as it does of nearly one hundred pages, is an awkward digression in *Jane Eyre*; and one is nudged to recall that the publishing firm of Smith, Elder had rejected Charlotte Bronte's earlier novel, *The Professor*, as "undersized." (But if Currer Bell would write a full-scale, three-volume novel for them, they would be "most interested.") Still, the carefully

transcribed section is required for symmetry's sake. Bronte's authorial strategy is to balance one kind of temptation with its obverse (if Rochester is all romantic passion, urging her to succumb to emotional excess, St. John Rivers is all Christian ambition, urging her to attempt a spiritual asceticism of which she knows herself incapable): is not *Jane Eyre* an orchestrated novel of ideas, closer in temperament to the fiction of George Eliot than to that of Emily Bronte? The miraculously realized "family" of Diana, Mary, and Rivers himself strikes us as a benign adumbration of the novel's original household, in which Jane was despised by Eliza, Georgiana, and the spectacularly loathsome John Reed. Rochester, following the novel's design, must be altered too in some respect, but it is probably incorrect to read his blinding as a species of castration—as that perennial cliché of Bronte criticism would have it. Not only is the blind and crippled Rochester no less masculine than before, but, more significantly, it was never the case that *Jane Eyre*, for all her inexperience, shrank from either her master's passion or her own: the issue was not Jane's sexual timidity but her shrewd understanding that, should she become his mistress, she would lose Rochester's respect. One might say, inevitably lose his respect. These were the hardly secret terms of Victorian mores, and *Jane Eyre* would have to have been a very naive young woman, as self-deluded as George Eliot's Hetty, to have believed otherwise. And Jane is anything but naive.

"Reader, I married him," Jane announces boldly in the novel's final chapter. The tacit message is that I married him—not that he married me. What greater triumph for the orphan, the governess, the small, plain, and "Quaker-like" virgin? The novel ends with a curious aside to St. John Rivers, away in India "laboring for his race" and anticipating, with a martyr's greed, his "incorruptible crown." It is St. John's grim and exultant language that rounds the story off, however ironically: "Amen; even so, come, Lord Jesus!" But those who have love have no need of this particular Lord Jesus.

Notes for "Jane Eyre: An Introduction"

¹Henry James's fated governess has visions of "a castle of romance . . . such a place as would somehow, for diversion of the young idea, take all color out of story-books and fairy tales. Wasn't it just a story-book over which I had fallen adozed and adream?" Just before her initial encounter with the sinister Peter Quint, she thinks "that it would be as charming as a charming story suddenly to meet someone. Someone would appear there at the turn of a path and would stand before me and smile and approve." *Jane Eyre*'s romantic imagination summons forth as it were, her "master" Fairfax Rochester; James's governess, wishing for her "master," initiates disaster.

²Gaskell discusses in detail the meager diet—consisting mainly of potatoes—which the Bronte children were given at home and at the infamous Cowan Bridge School the model for Lowood. Even in adulthood Charlotte Bronte seems to have fasted intermittently, and was so malnourished at the time of her final illness that she begged constantly for food. "A wren would have starved on what she ate during those last six weeks," one observer is quoted. (See E. C. Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Bronte* [Edinburgh: John Grant, 1905].)

³For a very different account, from a Modernist perspective, of the doomed love of the West Indies heiress and her English husband, Rochester, see Jean Rhys's haunting and hallucinatory prose poem of a novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1966). Rhys's novel is the first-person account of the very Mrs. Rochester whom *Jane Eyre* supplants: a re-vision of the great Victorian classic. It is an evocation, by means of a highly compressed and elliptical language, of the authentic experience of madness—more precisely, of being driven into madness; it constitutes a brilliantly sustained anti-romance, a reverse mirror image of Charlotte Bronte's England. Where *Jane Eyre* is triumphant nineteenth-century romance, *Wide Sargasso Sea* is twentieth-century tragedy: the appropriation, colonization, exploitation, and destruction of a pastoral tropical world by a wholly alien English sensibility. When Rhys's heroine at last catches a glimpse of the young Englishwoman who will succeed her as Rochester's wife, she sees her as a "ghost" with streaming hair: "She was surrounded by a gilt frame, but I knew her." Inhabiting contrary and mutually exclusive worlds, *Womankind* split in two, the one is a savage to the other; the other, a ghost.

**THE BIGGEST SURPRISE IN CHARLOTTE BRONTË'S "JANE EYRE" IS ITS UNROMANTIC HEROINE.
BY JOYCE CAROL OATES**

"Jane Eyre" abounds in mysteries and surprises. The most immediate, for Charlotte Brontë's contemporaries, was the identity of the author of this controversial bestselling first novel of 1847. So far as readers knew, the novel was by a wholly unknown individual named "Currer Bell" -- whether male or female, no one seemed to know. Much discussion ensued in the press over the identity of "Currer Bell"; some reviewers believed the novel to be "coarse" (in its frank depiction of emotion and passion), but so intelligently conceived and written that "Currer Bell" had to be a man. ("Jane Eyre" went through several large editions before Charlotte Brontë publicly revealed herself as the author. Today, the author's sensibility seems far more feminine than masculine in its attentiveness to details of girls' and women's private domestic lives and in its wholly sympathetic portrait of a young governess virtuously resisting her employer's plea that she love him despite the fact he isn't free to marry her.)

Thirty-one, the daughter of a rural Anglican clergyman, unmarried, inexperienced, diminutive, shy and "plain" as her heroine Jane Eyre, Charlotte Brontë, like her romantic hero Lord Byron, "awoke one morning to find herself famous." Since its initial publication, this fame has never abated. "Jane Eyre" has been continuously in print and has long been established as a classic of English literature (alongside another brilliant first novel, "Wuthering Heights," by "Ellis Bell," Charlotte's younger sister Emily, also published in 1847). Significantly, it is the sole novel of its era to be reprinted in Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's groundbreaking 1985 Norton anthology, "Literature by Women."

The most immediate surprise of "Jane Eyre" for today's readers is the directness, even bluntness, of the young heroine's voice. Here is no prissy little-girl sensibility, but a startlingly independent, even skeptical perspective. At the age of 10, the orphan Jane already sees through the hypocrisy of her self-righteous Christian elders. She tells her bullying Aunt Reed, "People think you a good woman, but you are bad; hard-hearted. You are deceitful!" and "I am glad you are no relative of mine; I will never call you aunt again so long as I live. I will never come to see you when I am grown up; and if any one asks me how I liked you, and how you treated me, I will say that the very thought of you makes me sick." (In fact, when her aunt is elderly and dying, Jane does return to visit her, and forgives her. But that's far in the future.) With the logic of a mature philosopher, in fact rather like Friedrich Nietzsche to come, Jane protests the basic admonitions of Christianity as a schoolgirl: "I must resist those who ... persist in disliking me; I must resist those who punish me unjustly. It is as natural as that I should love those who show me affection, or submit to punishment when I feel that it is deserved." And this bold declaration, which would have struck readers of 1847 (in fact, of 1947) as radical and "infeminine":

"Restlessness was in my nature; it agitated me to pain sometimes ... Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a constraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer."

Instead, the novel begins with the seemingly disappointed statement: "There was no possibility of taking a walk that [rainy] day," and counters almost immediately with, "I was glad of it; I never liked long walks." When excluded from Christmas revelries in the Reed household, the child Jane says, "To speak the truth, I had not the least wish to go into company." Jane's defiance, which doesn't exclude childlike fears, strikes us as forthright in the way of the adolescent temperaments of other famous literary voices -- Jo March of Louisa May Alcott's "Little Women," Huck Finn, Holden Caulfield and their now-countless younger siblings. Here is a voice, we believe, we can trust; and our trust is not misplaced.

Another surprise of "Jane Eyre" is the seemingly "real"-- that is, non-romantic -- nature of the lovers-to-be. "Jane Eyre" is many times described as small, plain, undistinguished; her mysterious, Byronic-tempered employer Rochester is pointedly not "handsome or heroic looking"; their conversations are, from the start, marked by an unusual directness, surely rare in 19th-century women's fiction, with the underlying premise, which is never questioned, that the penniless Jane and the wealthy Rochester are equals in intelligence,

character and worth. Their attraction to, and developing love for, each other is immediate, yet grows as naturally as it might in real life, characterized by such remarks as Rochester's to Jane, "You are not pretty any more than I am handsome," and at the novel's end, after the lovers have been parted for a year, and suffered losses, an exchange that must have made readers gasp, and perhaps shed a tear:

"Am I hideous, Jane?"

"Yes, sir: you always were, you know."

Today's readers will find in "Jane Eyre" mysteries and surprises that Brontë's contemporaries would have taken for granted: the strange, harsh treatment of mental illness (as a consequence apparently of syphilis); the "double standard" of sexual behavior (in which men like Rochester were allowed a kind of gentlemanly promiscuity while unmarried women like Jane had to conform to a narrow code of chastity); the unyielding conviction with which Jane Eyre, though she loves Rochester, flees him, even to the point of wandering homeless, and nearly starving, in the novel's most disturbing, existential scenes of Chapter 28 when Jane is reduced to begging crusts of bread and ravenously devouring swill scorned by hungry hogs. (What a boldly non-Romantic portrayal of female, human want, to present to genteel English readers!)

Of course, "Jane Eyre" has a "happy" ending. Yet it is made to feel like a natural, even inevitable ending, though there are numerous melodramatic twists of the plot and coincidences beforehand. It is typical of Jane that she declares, "Reader, I married him." (Not "He married me.") It is typical of Jane that, though married at last to the man she loves, and now a mother, she looks back upon her still-young life from the perspective of mature wisdom. Why does "Jane Eyre" retain its appeal after so many decades, and so many intervening novels of virginal young heroines, Byronic moody mysterious elder men, and melodramatic disclosures? One answer is, simply, the quality of Jane's and Rochester's characters. They are believable. They are intelligent, yet emotional, superior beings who are human, even flawed; as the 19th-century reader would have discerned, they are models for us all.

Jane Eyre

Context

Charlotte Brontë was born in Yorkshire, England on April 21, 1816 to Maria Branwell and Patrick Brontë. Because Charlotte's mother died when Charlotte was five years old, Charlotte's aunt, a devout Methodist, helped her brother-in-law raise his children. In 1824 Charlotte and three of her sisters—Maria, Elizabeth, and Emily—were sent to Cowan Bridge, a school for clergymen's daughters. When an outbreak of tuberculosis killed Maria and Elizabeth, Charlotte and Emily were brought home. Several years later, Charlotte returned to school, this time in Roe Head, England. She became a teacher at the school in 1835 but decided after several years to become a private governess instead. She was hired to live with and tutor the children of the wealthy Sidgewick family in 1839, but the job was a misery to her and she soon left it. Once Charlotte recognized that her dream of starting her own school was not immediately realizable, however, she returned to working as a governess, this time for a different family. Finding herself equally disappointed with governess work the second time around, Charlotte recruited her sisters to join her in more serious preparation for the establishment of a school.

Although the Brontës' school was unsuccessful, their literary projects flourished. At a young age, the children created a fictional world they named Angria, and their many stories, poems, and plays were early predictors of shared writing talent that eventually led Emily, Anne, and Charlotte to careers as novelists. As adults, Charlotte suggested that she, Anne, and Emily collaborate on a book of poems. The three sisters

published under male pseudonyms: Charlotte's was Currer Bell, while Emily and Anne wrote as Ellis and Acton Bell, respectively. When the poetry volume received little public notice, the sisters decided to work on separate novels but retained the same pseudonyms. Anne and Emily produced their masterpieces in 1847, but Charlotte's first book, *The Professor*, never found a willing publisher during her lifetime. Charlotte wrote *Jane Eyre* later that year. The book, a critique of Victorian assumptions about gender and social class, became one of the most successful novels of its era, both critically and commercially.

Autobiographical elements are recognizable throughout *Jane Eyre*. Jane's experience at Lowood School, where her dearest friend dies of tuberculosis, recalls the death of Charlotte's sisters at Cowan Bridge. The hypocritical religious fervor of the headmaster, Mr. Brocklehurst, is based in part on that of the Reverend Carus Wilson, the Evangelical minister who ran Cowan Bridge. Charlotte took revenge upon the school that treated her so poorly by using it as the basis for the fictional Lowood. Jane's friend Helen Burns's tragic death from tuberculosis recalls the deaths of two of Charlotte's sisters, Maria and Elizabeth, who succumbed to the same disease during their time at Cowan Bridge. Additionally, John Reed's decline into alcoholism and dissolution is most likely modeled upon the life of Charlotte Brontë's brother Branwell, who slid into opium and alcohol addictions in the years preceding his death. Finally, like Charlotte, Jane becomes a governess—a comparatively neutral vantage point from which to observe and describe the oppressive social ideas and practices of nineteenth-century Victorian society.

The plot of *Jane Eyre* follows the form of a Bildungsroman, which is a novel that tells the story of a child's maturation and focuses on the emotions and experiences that accompany and incite his or her growth to adulthood. In *Jane Eyre*, there are five distinct stages of development, each linked to a particular place: Jane's childhood at Gateshead, her education at the Lowood School, her time as Adele's governess at Thornfield, her time with the Rivers family at Morton and at Marsh End (also called Moor House), and her reunion with and marriage to Rochester at Ferndean. From these various experiences, Jane becomes the mature and steady-handed woman who narrates the novel retrospectively.

But the Bildungsroman plot of *Jane Eyre*, and the book's element of social criticism, are filtered through a third literary tradition—that of the Gothic horror story. Like the Bildungsroman, the Gothic genre originated in Germany. It became popular in England in the late eighteenth century, and it generally describes supernatural experiences, remote landscapes, and mysterious occurrences, all of which are intended to create an atmosphere of suspense and fear. Jane's encounters with ghosts, dark secrets, and sinister plots add a potent and lingering sense of fantasy and mystery to the novel.

After the success of *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte revealed her identity to her publisher and went on to write several other novels, most notably *Shirley* in 1849. In the years that followed, she became a respected member of London's literary set. But the deaths of siblings Emily and Branwell in 1848, and of Anne in 1849, left her feeling dejected and emotionally isolated. In 1854, she wed the Reverend Arthur Nicholls, despite the fact that she did not love him. She died of pneumonia, while pregnant, the following year.

With Charlotte Brontë passion enters the novel. Before her, the treatment of sexual love had been of two kinds: as a scarcely tempestuous affection between man and wife on the one hand and as a healthy animal sensuality, such as we find in *Tom Jones* on the other. But passion as the romantic poets had expressed it, something transcending sensuality because of a blending of the spiritual with the physical was unknown.

Jane Eyre is remarkable for being both a powerful and atmospheric romantic novel, and a highly original account of an unloved orphan girl's development into an independent woman. Charlotte Brontë drew many of her characters from people she knew and she presents them with a startling psychological realism that was, for her time, revolutionary. Another of her gifts was for creating a kind of prose that is often quite

poetic in its beauty, and matches the novel's passionate intensity¹. The love affair between Jane and Rochester forms the core of the book, and gives it its impetus. Their love strikes the reader as real and moving, and it derives much of its credibility from the passionate and spirited character of Jane herself. The novel is also very much Jane's story, and it concerns her passionate need to establish an identity distinct from the one thrust on her by society. Her progress towards maturity involves a struggle between the dictates of reason and the prompting of instinct, a conflict which is at its height when Jane clashes with the pious St. John Rivers. As Charlotte wrote in the preface to the second edition of *Jane Eyre*, her aim was to remind people of "certain simple truths", that "conventionality is not morality, self-righteousness is not religion". In *Jane Eyre* there is an opposition between dogmatic religion and instinctive goodness.

This unrestrained force of passion in her heroines was condemned by some, *Jane Eyre* was called a "dangerous book"

Part of the undertaking involved examining the assumptions that the age made with regard to women, to the relations between the sexes and between the young and those in authority; in addition, radical scrutiny. In addition we see Charlotte hostile to the sexless ideal of love, to the Victorian idealization of the innocent brother-sister relation that we find in Dickens and Thackeray, for instance.

Her friend Mary Taylor said of Jane's book, "your novel surprises me by being so perfect a work of art; It is impossible to squeeze a moral out of your production", thus putting her finger on another element of the art of Emily and Charlotte which proves their break with the novel as they had known it. In this respect their art is more emancipated than George Eliot's, who was startled and repelled as well as fascinated by *Jane Eyre*, and by *Villette* ("even more wonderful", she wrote).

With the exception of *Shirley*, Charlotte's novels use a first-person narrative, the events being seen through the eyes of the main character. This device considerably heightens the unity and intensity of her work and imbues the settings and natural descriptions with the narrator's state of mind -making them both vividly real while powerfully imaginative.

Throughout her novels, natural imagery is used symbolically. Natural events often foretell or accompany changes or disasters in the human sphere. Concerned more than her words should be a truthful mirror of her thought than that she should write beautifully, Charlotte used slang expressions, phrases in French and provincial idioms to convey her exact meaning.

Although she travelled little, her few visits away from home provided her with useful background material for her writing. Thus, a Lancashire manor house, the Peak district and her own moorland scenery all find their way into her work. *Jane Eyre* is divided into four sharply distinct phases with their suggestive names: childhood at Gateshead; girlhood, at Lowood; adolescence at Thornfield; maturity at Marsh End, winding up, almost as a penitent in a pilgrimage, with fulfilment in marriage at Ferndean. A good deal of the effect of the book depends on the reader making out associations, and the parts are not mechanically linked by a plot as in most previous fictions but organically united (as in Shakespeare) by imagery and symbolism. For instance, books in the novel have a symbolic meaning, as birds, the chestnut-tree (a life-symbol) in Thornfield orchard.

Charlotte always insisted that *Jane Eyre* was framed "as plain and as small as herself" to prove to her sisters that a heroine could be interesting without being beautiful, but, she added "she is not myself any further than that". However many experiences at the Evangelical school and as governess were transferred to Jane. At Moor House, Jane, Diana, and Mary are reflections of Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Brontë in their tastes, dispositions, and characters; the old servant is modelled upon Tabby, the Brontë's own servant, and St John Rivers is based on a rejected suitor of Charlotte's. Mr Rochester's blinding draws from Mr Brontë's operation of cataracts, which Charlotte was forced to attend.

The Impoverished Gentlewoman

Along with thousands of other women, Charlotte Brontë and her sisters were the victims of a

¹ Charlotte rejects Jane Austen's work as "only shrewd and observant", "sensible, real (more real than true) but she cannot be great"; one sees there only "a highly-cultivated garden but no open country"; she is "without poetry"; "Can there be a great artist without poetry?"

characteristic 19C dilemma. They were too poor to live without working, yet they were also ladies, a fact that severely limited what decent society would allow them to do without loss of caste. Paradoxically, almost all ladylike employments were ill-paid, stressful and humiliating.

Often ladies came down in the world because the family fortunes collapsed in the still-unstable circumstances of early Victorian enterprise (i.e. Agnes Grey). The children of poorly paid professional men, such as Charlotte's Cambridge-educated clergyman father, were faced with poverty if the breadwinner became incapable or died (he, in fact, aged 60 when Charlotte was 21, outlived everyone of his children).

One obvious option for the impoverished gentlewoman was to live with relatives. Many educated but poor gentlewomen earned a pitiful salary teaching in charity schools. Dressmaking seemed a "genteel" occupation for a respectable woman but, in reality, it was desperately unrewarding work, employment was insecure, the hours dreadful and the wages minimal. Another way to escape poverty and degradation was through marriage, which was the norm; but marriage had severe drawbacks for a woman of independent spirit. A husband became the master of her person, and also of her property and income - a situation only remedied by Married Women's Property Acts from 1870 onwards. A wife was expected to submit to her husband's will, adopt his opinions and run the household in such a way that he remained free from its worries. Charlotte Brontë's friend and biographer, Mrs Gaskell, was one of the fortunate few women whose literary talents allowed them to earn a living respectably -but even she was obliged to work at the dining room table so that her husband could occupy the study and she could monitor the servants and the children.

A woman's proper place was the home, public office, the professions and the universities were all closed to women, while commerce and manual labour were simply not respectable. Even nursing the sick was not considered suitable work for a lady; nurses had a dubious reputation until Florence Nightingale elevated the status of nursing during the Crimea war in 1856. Writing was a respectable profession for ladies, partly because it could be carried out at home.

Victorian novels and reports did encourage public concern and in 1843 the Governesses' Benevolent Institution was founded. Towards the end of the 19C the founding of Queen's College in London, set up to give governesses a proper training, improve the situation of many other women, eager for education, including some of the future pioneers of education for women.

Key Facts

Full Title - Jane Eyre

Author - Charlotte Brontë (originally published under the male pseudonym Currer Bell)

Type of Work - Novel

Genre - A hybrid of three genres: the Gothic novel (utilizes the mysterious, the supernatural, the horrific, the romantic); the romance novel (emphasizes love and passion, represents the notion of lovers destined for each other); and the Bildungsroman (narrates the story of a character's internal development as he or she undergoes a succession of encounters with the external world)

Language - English

Time and place written - 1847 London

Date of First Publication - 1847

Publisher - Smith, Elder, and Co., Cornhill

Narrator - Jane Eyre

Climax - The novel's climax comes after Jane receives her second marriage proposal of the novel—this time from St. John Rivers, who asks Jane to accompany him to India as his wife and fellow missionary. Jane considers the proposal, even though she knows that marrying St. John would mean the death of her emotional life. She is on the verge of accepting when she hears Rochester's voice supernaturally calling her name from across the heath and knows that she must return to him. She can retain her dignity in doing so because she has proven to herself that she is not a slave to passion.

Protagonist - Jane Eyre

Antagonist - Jane meets with a series of forces that threaten her liberty, integrity, and happiness. Characters embodying these forces are: Aunt Reed, Mr. Brocklehurst, Bertha Mason, Mr. Rochester (in that he urges Jane to ignore her conscience and surrender to passion), and St. John Rivers (in his urging of the opposite extreme). The three men also represent the notion of an oppressive patriarchy. Blanche Ingram, who initially stands in the way of Jane's relations with Rochester, also embodies the notion of a rigid class system—another force keeping Jane from fulfilling her hopes.

Setting (time) - Early decades of the 19th century.

Setting (place) - The novel is structured around five separate locations, all supposedly in northern England: the Reed family's home at Gateshead, the wretched Lowood School, Rochester's manor house Thornfield, the Rivers family's home at Moor House, and Rochester's rural retreat at Ferndean.

Point of View - All of the events are told from Jane's point of view. Sometimes she narrates the events as she experienced them at the time, while at other times she focuses on her retrospective understanding of the events.

Falling Action - After Jane hears Rochester's call to her from across the heath, she returns to Thornfield and finds it burned to the ground. She learns that Bertha Mason set the fire and died in the flames; Rochester is now living at his home in Ferndean. Jane goes to him there, rebuilds her relationship with the somewhat humbled Rochester, and marries him. She claims to enjoy perfect equality in her marriage.

Tense - Past-tense; Jane Eyre tells her story ten years after the last event in the novel, her arrival at Ferndean.

Foreshadowing - The novel's main instances of foreshadowing focus on Jane's eventual inheritance (Chapter 33) from her uncle John Eyre. In Chapter 3, Jane tells Mr. Lloyd that her aunt has told her of some "poor, low relations called Eyre," but she knows nothing more about them. Jane first receives hints of her uncle's existence in Chapter 10 when Bessie visits her at Lowood and mentions that her father's brother appeared at Gateshead seven years ago, looking for Jane. He did not have the time to come to Lowood, she explains, and he subsequently went away to Madeira (a Portuguese island west of Morocco) in search of wealth. Foreshadowing again enters into the novel in Chapter 21, when, returning to Gateshead to see her dying Aunt Reed for the last time, Jane learns that her uncle had written to her aunt three years earlier, reporting that he had been successful in Madeira and expressing his desire to adopt Jane and make her his heir; her aunt had deliberately ignored the letter out of spite. Another powerful instance of foreshadowing is the chestnut tree under which Rochester proposes to Jane. Before they leave, Jane mentions that it "writhed and groaned," and that night, it splits in two, forecasting complications for Jane and Rochester's relationship (Chapter 23).

Tone - Jane Eyre's tone is both Gothic and romantic, often conjuring an atmosphere of mystery, secrecy, or even horror. Despite these Gothic elements, Jane's personality is friendly and the tone is also affectionate and confessional. Her unflagging spirit and opinionated nature further infuse the book with high energy and add a philosophical and political flavor.

Themes - Love versus autonomy; religion; social class; gender relations

Motifs - Fire and ice; substitute mothers

Symbols - Bertha Mason; the red-room

Plot Overview

Jane Eyre is a young orphan being raised by Mrs. Reed, her cruel, wealthy aunt. A servant named Bessie provides Jane with some of the few kindnesses she receives, telling her stories and singing songs to her. One day, as punishment for fighting with her bullying cousin John Reed, Jane's aunt imprisons Jane in the red-room, the room in which Jane's Uncle Reed died. While locked in, Jane, believing that she sees her uncle's ghost, screams and faints. She wakes to find herself in the care of Bessie and the kindly apothecary Mr. Lloyd, who suggests to Mrs. Reed that Jane be sent away to school. To Jane's delight, Mrs. Reed concurs.

Once at the Lowood School, Jane finds that her life is far from idyllic. The school's headmaster is Mr. Brocklehurst, a cruel, hypocritical, and abusive man. Brocklehurst preaches a doctrine of poverty and privation to his students while using the school's funds to provide a wealthy and opulent lifestyle for his own family. At Lowood, Jane befriends a young girl named Helen Burns, whose strong, martyrlike attitude toward the school's miseries is both helpful and displeasing to Jane. A massive typhus epidemic sweeps Lowood, and Helen dies of consumption. The epidemic also results in the departure of Mr. Brocklehurst by attracting attention to the insalubrious conditions at Lowood. After a group of more sympathetic gentlemen takes Brocklehurst's place, Jane's life improves dramatically. She spends eight more years at Lowood, six as a student and two as a teacher.

After teaching for two years, Jane yearns for new experiences. She accepts a governess position at a manor called Thornfield, where she teaches a lively French girl named Adèle. The distinguished housekeeper Mrs. Fairfax presides over the estate. Jane's employer at Thornfield is a dark, impassioned man named Rochester, with whom Jane finds herself falling secretly in love. She saves Rochester from a fire one night, which he claims was started by a drunken servant named Grace Poole. But because Grace Poole continues to work at Thornfield, Jane concludes that she has not been told the entire story. Jane sinks into despondency when Rochester brings home a beautiful but vicious woman named Blanche Ingram. Jane expects Rochester to propose to Blanche. But Rochester instead proposes to Jane, who accepts almost disbelievingly.

The wedding day arrives, and as Jane and Mr. Rochester prepare to exchange their vows, the voice of Mr. Mason cries out that Rochester already has a wife. Mason introduces himself as the brother of that wife—a woman named Bertha. Mr. Mason testifies that Bertha, whom Rochester married when he was a young man in Jamaica, is still alive. Rochester does not deny Mason's claims, but he explains that Bertha has gone mad. He takes the wedding party back to Thornfield, where they witness the insane Bertha Mason scurrying around on all fours and growling like an animal. Rochester keeps Bertha hidden on the third story of Thornfield and pays Grace Poole to keep his wife under control. Bertha was the real cause of the mysterious fire earlier in the story. Knowing that it is impossible for her to be with Rochester, Jane flees Thornfield.

Penniless and hungry, Jane is forced to sleep outdoors and beg for food. At last, three siblings who live in a manor alternatively called Marsh End and Moor House take her in. Their names are Mary, Diana, and St. John (pronounced "Sinjin") Rivers, and Jane quickly becomes friends with them. St. John is a clergyman, and he finds Jane a job teaching at a charity school in Morton. He surprises her one day by declaring that her uncle, John Eyre, has died and left her a large fortune: 20,000 pounds. When Jane asks how he received this news, he shocks her further by declaring that her uncle was also his uncle: Jane and the Riverses are cousins. Jane immediately decides to share her inheritance equally with her three newfound relatives.

St. John decides to travel to India as a missionary, and he urges Jane to accompany him—as his wife. Jane agrees to go to India but refuses to marry her cousin because she does not love him. St. John pressures her to reconsider, and she nearly gives in. However, she realizes that she cannot abandon forever the man she truly loves when one night she hears Rochester's voice calling her name over the moors. Jane immediately hurries back to Thornfield and finds that it has been burned to the ground by Bertha Mason, who lost her life in the fire. Rochester saved the servants but lost his eyesight and one of his hands. Jane travels on to Rochester's new residence, Ferndean, where he lives with two servants named John and Mary.

At Ferndean, Rochester and Jane rebuild their relationship and soon marry. At the end of her story, Jane writes that she has been married for ten blissful years and that she and Rochester enjoy perfect equality in their life together. She says that after two years of blindness, Rochester regained sight in one eye and was able to behold their first son at his birth.

Character List

Jane Eyre - The protagonist and narrator of the novel, Jane is an intelligent, honest, plain-featured young girl forced to contend with oppression, inequality, and hardship. Although she meets with a series of individuals who threaten her autonomy, Jane repeatedly succeeds at asserting herself and maintains her principles of justice, human dignity, and morality. She also values intellectual and emotional fulfillment. Her strong belief in gender and social equality challenges the Victorian prejudices against women and the poor. The development of Jane Eyre's character is central to the novel. From the beginning, Jane possesses a sense of her self-worth and dignity, a commitment to justice and principle, a trust in God, and a passionate disposition. Her integrity is continually tested over the course of the novel, and Jane must learn to balance the frequently conflicting aspects of herself so as to find contentment.

An orphan since early childhood, Jane feels exiled and ostracized at the beginning of the novel, and the cruel treatment she receives from her Aunt Reed and her cousins only exacerbates her feeling of alienation. Afraid that she will never find a true sense of home or community, Jane feels the need to belong somewhere, to find "kin," or at least "kindred spirits." This desire tempers her equally intense need for autonomy and freedom.

In her search for freedom, Jane also struggles with the question of what type of freedom she wants. While Rochester initially offers Jane a chance to liberate her passions, Jane comes to realize that such freedom could also mean enslavement—by living as Rochester's mistress, she would be sacrificing her dignity and integrity for the sake of her feelings. St. John Rivers offers Jane another kind of freedom: the freedom to act unreservedly on her principles. He opens to Jane the possibility of exercising her talents fully by working and living with him in India. Jane eventually realizes, though, that this freedom would also constitute a form of imprisonment, because she would be forced to keep her true feelings and her true passions always in check. Charlotte Brontë may have created the character of Jane Eyre as a means of coming to terms with elements of her own life. Much evidence suggests that Brontë, too, struggled to find a balance between love and freedom and to find others who understood her. At many points in the book, Jane voices the author's then-radical opinions on religion, social class, and gender.

Edward Rochester - Jane's employer and the master of Thornfield, Rochester is a wealthy, passionate man with a dark secret that provides much of the novel's suspense. Rochester is unconventional, ready to set aside polite manners, propriety, and consideration of social class in order to interact with Jane frankly and directly. He is rash and impetuous and has spent much of his adult life roaming about Europe in an attempt to avoid the consequences of his youthful indiscretions. His problems are partly the result of his own recklessness, but

he is a sympathetic figure because he has suffered for so long as a result of his early marriage to Bertha. Despite his stern manner and not particularly handsome appearance, Edward Rochester wins Jane's heart, because she feels they are kindred spirits, and because he is the first person in the novel to offer Jane lasting love and a real home. Although Rochester is Jane's social and economic superior, and although men were widely considered to be naturally superior to women in the Victorian period, Jane is Rochester's intellectual equal. Moreover, after their marriage is interrupted by the disclosure that Rochester is already married to Bertha Mason, Jane is proven to be Rochester's moral superior. Rochester regrets his former libertinism and lustfulness; nevertheless, he has proven himself to be weaker in many ways than Jane. Jane feels that living with Rochester as his mistress would mean the loss of her dignity. Ultimately, she would become degraded and dependent upon Rochester for love, while unprotected by any true marriage bond. Jane will only enter into marriage with Rochester after she has gained a fortune and a family, and after she has been on the verge of abandoning passion altogether. She waits until she is not unduly influenced by her own poverty, loneliness, psychological vulnerability, or passion. Additionally, because Rochester has been blinded by the fire and has lost his manor house at the end of the novel, he has become weaker while Jane has grown in strength—Jane claims that they are equals, but the marriage dynamic has actually tipped in her favor.

St. John Rivers - Along with his sisters, Mary and Diana, St. John (pronounced "Sinjin") serves as Jane's benefactor after she runs away from Thornfield, giving her food and shelter. The minister at Morton, St. John is cold, reserved, and often controlling in his interactions with others. Because he is entirely alienated from his feelings and devoted solely to an austere ambition, St. John serves as a foil to Edward Rochester. Whereas Rochester is passionate, St. John is austere and ambitious. Jane often describes Rochester's eyes as flashing and flaming, whereas she constantly associates St. John with rock, ice, and snow. Marriage with Rochester represents the abandonment of principle for the consummation of passion, but marriage to St. John would mean sacrificing passion for principle. When he invites her to come to India with him as a missionary, St. John offers Jane the chance to make a more meaningful contribution to society than she would as a housewife. At the same time, life with St. John would mean life without true love, in which Jane's need for spiritual solace would be filled only by retreat into the recesses of her own soul. Independence would be accompanied by loneliness, and joining St. John would require Jane to neglect her own legitimate needs for love and emotional support. Her consideration of St. John's proposal leads Jane to understand that, paradoxically, a large part of one's personal freedom is found in a relationship of mutual emotional dependence.

Mrs. Reed - Mrs. Reed is Jane's cruel aunt, who raises her at Gateshead Hall until Jane is sent away to school at age ten. Later in her life, Jane attempts reconciliation with her aunt, but the old woman continues to resent her because her husband had always loved Jane more than his own children.

Bessie Lee - The maid at Gateshead, Bessie is the only figure in Jane's childhood who regularly treats her kindly, telling her stories and singing her songs. Bessie later marries Robert Leaven, the Reeds' coachman.

Mr. Lloyd - Mr. Lloyd is the Reeds' apothecary, who suggests that Jane be sent away to school. Always kind to Jane, Mr. Lloyd writes a letter to Miss Temple confirming Jane's story about her childhood and clearing Jane of Mrs. Reed's charge that she is a liar.

Georgiana Reed - Georgiana Reed is Jane's cousin and one of Mrs. Reed's two daughters. The beautiful Georgiana treats Jane cruelly when they are children, but later in their lives she befriends her cousin and confides in her. Georgiana attempts to elope with a man named Lord Edwin Vere, but her sister, Eliza, alerts Mrs. Reed of the arrangement and sabotages the plan. After Mrs. Reed dies, Georgiana marries a wealthy man.

Eliza Reed - Eliza Reed is Jane's cousin and one of Mrs. Reed's two daughters (along with her sister, Georgiana). Not as beautiful as her sister, Eliza devotes herself somewhat self-righteously to the church and eventually goes to a convent in France where she becomes the Mother Superior.

John Reed - John Reed is Jane's cousin, Mrs. Reed's son, and brother to Eliza and Georgiana. John treats Jane with appalling cruelty during their childhood and later falls into a life of drinking and gambling. John commits suicide midway through the novel when his mother ceases to pay his debts for him.

Helen Burns - Helen Burns is Jane's close friend at the Lowood School. She endures her miserable life there with a passive dignity that Jane cannot understand. Helen dies of consumption in Jane's arms. Helen Burns serves as a foil to Mr. Brocklehurst as well as to Jane. While Mr. Brocklehurst embodies an evangelical form of religion that seeks to strip others of their excessive pride or of their ability to take pleasure in worldly things, Helen represents a mode of Christianity that stresses tolerance and acceptance. Brocklehurst uses religion to gain power and to control others; Helen ascetically trusts her own faith and turns the other cheek to Lowood's harsh policies. Although Helen manifests a certain strength and intellectual maturity, her efforts involve self-negation rather than self-assertion, and Helen's submissive and ascetic nature highlights Jane's more headstrong character. Like Jane, Helen is an orphan who longs for a home, but Helen believes that she will find this home in Heaven rather than Northern England. And while Helen is not oblivious to the injustices the girls suffer at Lowood, she believes that justice will be found in God's ultimate judgment—God will reward the good and punish the evil. Jane, on the other hand, is unable to have such blind faith. Her quest is for love and happiness in this world. Nevertheless, she counts on God for support and guidance in her search.

Mr. Brocklehurst - The cruel, hypocritical master of the Lowood School, Mr. Brocklehurst preaches a doctrine of privation, while stealing from the school to support his luxurious lifestyle. After a typhus epidemic sweeps Lowood, Brocklehurst's shifty and dishonest practices are brought to light and he is publicly discredited.

Maria Temple - Maria Temple is a kind teacher at Lowood, who treats Jane and Helen with respect and compassion. Along with Bessie Lee, she serves as one of Jane's first positive female role models. Miss Temple helps clear Jane of Mrs. Reed's accusations against her.

Miss Scatcherd - Jane's sour and vicious teacher at Lowood, Miss Scatcherd behaves with particular cruelty toward Helen.

Alice Fairfax - Alice Fairfax is the housekeeper at Thornfield Hall. She is the first to tell Jane that the mysterious laughter often heard echoing through the halls is, in fact, the laughter of Grace Poole—a lie that Rochester himself often repeats.

Bertha Mason - Rochester's clandestine wife, Bertha Mason is a formerly beautiful and wealthy Creole woman who has become insane, violent, and bestial. She lives locked in a secret room on the third story of Thornfield and is guarded by Grace Poole, whose occasional bouts of inebriation sometimes enable Bertha to escape. Bertha eventually burns down Thornfield, plunging to her death in the flames.

Grace Poole - Grace Poole is Bertha Mason's keeper at Thornfield, whose drunken carelessness frequently allows Bertha to escape. When Jane first arrives at Thornfield, Mrs. Fairfax attributes to Grace all evidence of Bertha's misdeeds.

Adèle Varens - Jane's pupil at Thornfield, Adèle Varens is a lively though somewhat spoiled child from France. Rochester brought her to Thornfield after her mother, Celine, abandoned her. Although Celine was once Rochester's mistress, he does not believe himself to be Adèle's father.

Celine Varens - Celine Varens is a French opera dancer with whom Rochester once had an affair. Although Rochester does not believe Celine's claims that he fathered her daughter Adèle, he nonetheless brought the girl to England when Celine abandoned her. Rochester had broken off his relationship with Celine after learning that Celine was unfaithful to him and interested only in his money.

Sophie - Sophie is Adèle's French nurse at Thornfield.

Richard Mason - Richard Mason is Bertha's brother. During a visit to Thornfield, he is injured by his mad sister. After learning of Rochester's intent to marry Jane, Mason arrives with the solicitor Briggs in order to thwart the wedding and reveal the truth of Rochester's prior marriage.

Mr. Briggs - John Eyre's attorney, Mr. Briggs helps Richard Mason prevent Jane's wedding to Rochester when he learns of the existence of Bertha Mason, Rochester's wife. After John Eyre's death, Briggs searches for Jane in order to give her her inheritance.

Blanche Ingram - Blanche Ingram is a beautiful socialite who despises Jane and hopes to marry Rochester for his money.

Diana Rivers - Diana Rivers is Jane's cousin, and the sister of St. John and Mary. Diana is a kind and intelligent person, and she urges Jane not to go to India with St. John. She serves as a model for Jane of an intellectually gifted and independent woman.

Mary Rivers - Mary Rivers is Jane's cousin, the sister of St. John and Diana. Mary is a kind and intelligent young woman who is forced to work as a governess after her father loses his fortune. Like her sister, she serves as a model for Jane of an independent woman who is also able to maintain close relationships with others and a sense of meaning in her life.

Rosamond Oliver - Rosamond is the beautiful daughter of Mr. Oliver, Morton's wealthiest inhabitant. Rosamond gives money to the school in Morton where Jane works. Although she is in love with St. John, she becomes engaged to the wealthy Mr. Granby.

John Eyre - John Eyre is Jane's uncle, who leaves her his vast fortune of 20,000 pounds.

Uncle Reed - Uncle Reed is Mrs. Reed's late husband. In her childhood, Jane believes that she feels the presence of his ghost. Because he was always fond of Jane and her mother (his sister), Uncle Reed made his wife promise that she would raise Jane as her own child. It is a promise that Mrs. Reed does not keep.

Themes, Motifs, and Symbols

Themes

Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work.

Love versus Autonomy - Jane Eyre is very much the story of a quest to be loved. Jane searches, not just for romantic love, but also for a sense of being valued, of belonging. Thus Jane says to Helen Burns: "to gain some real affection from you, or Miss Temple, or any other whom I truly love, I would willingly submit to have the bone of my arm broken, or to let a bull toss me, or to stand behind a kicking horse, and let it dash its hoof at my chest" (Chapter 8). Yet, over the course of the book, Jane must learn how to gain love without sacrificing and harming herself in the process.

Her fear of losing her autonomy motivates her refusal of Rochester's marriage proposal. Jane believes that "marrying" Rochester while he remains legally tied to Bertha would mean rendering herself a mistress and sacrificing her own integrity for the sake of emotional gratification. On the other hand, her life at Moor House tests her in the opposite manner. There, she enjoys economic independence and engages in worthwhile and useful work, teaching the poor; yet she lacks emotional sustenance. Although St. John proposes marriage, offering her a partnership built around a common purpose, Jane knows their marriage would remain loveless.

Nonetheless, the events of Jane's stay at Moor House are necessary tests of Jane's autonomy. Only after proving her self-sufficiency to herself can she marry Rochester and not be asymmetrically dependent upon him as her "master." The marriage can be one between equals. As Jane says: "I am my husband's life as fully as he is mine.... To be together is for us to be at once as free as in solitude, as gay as in company.... We are precisely suited in character—perfect concord is the result" (Chapter 38).

Religion - Throughout the novel, Jane struggles to find the right balance between moral duty and earthly pleasure, between obligation to her spirit and attention to her body. She encounters three main religious figures: Mr. Brocklehurst, Helen Burns, and St. John Rivers. Each represents a model of religion that Jane ultimately rejects as she forms her own ideas about faith and principle, and their practical consequences.

Mr. Brocklehurst illustrates the dangers and hypocrisies that Charlotte Brontë perceived in the nineteenth-century Evangelical movement. Mr. Brocklehurst adopts the rhetoric of Evangelicalism when he claims to be purging his students of pride, but his method of subjecting them to various privations and humiliations, like when he orders that the naturally curly hair of one of Jane's classmates be cut so as to lie straight, is entirely un-Christian. Of course, Brocklehurst's proscriptions are difficult to follow, and his hypocritical support of his own luxuriously wealthy family at the expense of the Lowood students shows Brontë's wariness of the Evangelical movement. Helen Burns's meek and forbearing mode of Christianity, on the other hand, is too passive for Jane to adopt as her own, although she loves and admires Helen for it. Many chapters later, St. John Rivers provides another model of Christian behavior. His is a Christianity of ambition, glory, and extreme self-importance. St. John urges Jane to sacrifice her emotional needs for the fulfillment of her moral duty, offering her a way of life that would require her to be disloyal to her own self. Although Jane ends up rejecting all three models of religion, she does not abandon morality, spiritualism, or a belief in a Christian God. When her wedding is interrupted, she prays to God for solace (Chapter 26). As she wanders the heath, poor and starving, she puts her survival in the hands of God (Chapter 28). She strongly objects to Rochester's lustful immorality, and she refuses to consider living with him while church and state still deem him married to another woman. Even so, Jane can barely bring herself to leave the only love she has ever known. She credits God with helping her to escape what she knows would have been an immoral life (Chapter 27). Jane ultimately finds a comfortable middle ground. Her spiritual understanding is not hateful and oppressive like Brocklehurst's, nor does it require retreat from the everyday world as Helen's and St. John's religions do. For Jane, religion helps curb immoderate passions, and it spurs one on to worldly efforts and achievements. These achievements include full self-knowledge and complete faith in God.

Social Class - Jane Eyre is critical of Victorian England's strict social hierarchy. Brontë's exploration of the complicated social position of governesses is perhaps the novel's most important treatment of this theme. Like Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*, Jane is a figure of ambiguous class standing and, consequently, a source of extreme tension for the characters around her. Jane's manners, sophistication, and education are those of an aristocrat, because Victorian governesses, who tutored children in etiquette as well as academics, were

expected to possess the "culture" of the aristocracy. Yet, as paid employees, they were more or less treated as servants; thus, Jane remains penniless and powerless while at Thornfield. Jane's understanding of the double standard crystallizes when she becomes aware of her feelings for Rochester; she is his intellectual, but not his social, equal. Even before the crisis surrounding Bertha Mason, Jane is hesitant to marry Rochester because she senses that she would feel indebted to him for "condescending" to marry her. Jane's distress, which appears most strongly in Chapter 17, seems to be Brontë's critique of Victorian class attitudes. Jane herself speaks out against class prejudice at certain moments in the book. For example, in Chapter 23 she chastises Rochester: "Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong!—I have as much soul as you—and full as much heart! And if God had gifted me with some beauty and much wealth, I should have made it as hard for you to leave me, as it is now for me to leave you." However, it is also important to note that the nowhere in Jane Eyre are society's boundaries bent. Ultimately, Jane is only able to marry Rochester as his equal because she has almost magically come into her own inheritance from her uncle.

Gender Relations - Jane struggles continually to achieve equality and to overcome oppression. In addition to class hierarchy, she must fight against patriarchal domination—against those who believe women to be inferior to men and try to treat them as such. Three central male figures threaten her desire for equality and dignity: Mr. Brocklehurst, Edward Rochester, and St. John Rivers. All three are misogynistic on some level. Each tries to keep Jane in a submissive position, where she is unable to express her own thoughts and feelings. In her quest for independence and self-knowledge, Jane must escape Brocklehurst, reject St. John, and come to Rochester only after ensuring that they may marry as equals. This last condition is met once Jane proves herself able to function, through the time she spends at Moor House, in a community and in a family. She will not depend solely on Rochester for love and she can be financially independent. Furthermore, Rochester is blind at the novel's end and thus dependent upon Jane to be his "prop and guide." In Chapter 12, Jane articulates what was for her time a radically feminist philosophy: Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex.

Motifs

Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, or literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text's major themes.

Fire and Ice - Fire and ice appear throughout Jane Eyre. The former represents Jane's passions, anger, and spirit, while the latter symbolizes the oppressive forces trying to extinguish Jane's vitality. Fire is also a metaphor for Jane, as the narrative repeatedly associates her with images of fire, brightness, and warmth. In Chapter 4, she likens her mind to "a ridge of lighted heath, alive, glancing, devouring." We can recognize Jane's kindred spirits by their similar links to fire; thus we read of Rochester's "flaming and flashing" eyes (Chapter 25). After he has been blinded, his face is compared to "a lamp quenched, waiting to be relit" (Chapter 37). Images of ice and cold, often appearing in association with barren landscapes or seascapes, symbolize emotional desolation, loneliness, or even death. The "death-white realms" of the arctic that Bewick describes in his History of British Birds parallel Jane's physical and spiritual isolation at Gateshead (Chapter 1). Lowood's freezing temperatures—for example, the frozen pitchers of water that greet the girls each morning—mirror Jane's sense of psychological exile. After the interrupted wedding to Rochester, Jane describes her state of mind: "A Christmas frost had come at mid-summer: a white December storm had

whirled over June; ice glazed the ripe apples, drifts crushed the blowing roses; on hay-field and corn-field lay a frozen shroud ... and the woods, which twelve hours since waved leafy and fragrant as groves between the tropics, now spread, waste, wild, and white as pine-forests in wintry Norway. My hopes were all dead...." (Chapter 26). Finally, at Moor House, St. John's fridity and stiffness are established through comparisons with ice and cold rock. Jane writes: "By degrees, he acquired a certain influence over me that took away my liberty of mind.... I fell under a freezing spell"(Chapter 34). When St. John proposes marriage to Jane, she concludes that "[a]s his curate, his comrade, all would be right.... But as his wife—at his side always, and always restrained, and always checked—forced to keep the fire of my nature continually low, to compel it to burn inwardly and never utter a cry, though the imprisoned flame consumed vital after vital—this would be unendurable" (Chapter 34).

Substitute Mothers - Poet and critic Adrienne Rich has noted that Jane encounters a series of nurturing and strong women on whom she can model herself, or to whom she can look for comfort and guidance: these women serve as mother-figures to the orphaned Jane. The first such figure that Jane encounters is the servant Bessie, who soothes Jane after her trauma in the red-room and teaches her to find comfort in stories and songs. At Lowood, Jane meets Miss Temple, who has no power in the world at large, but possesses great spiritual strength and charm. Not only does she shelter Jane from pain, she also encourages her intellectual development. Of Miss Temple, Jane writes: "she had stood by me in the stead of mother, governess, and latterly, companion" (Chapter 10). Jane also finds a comforting model in Helen Burns, whose lessons in stamina teach Jane about self-worth and the power of faith. After Jane and Rochester's wedding is cancelled, Jane finds comfort in the moon, which appears to her in a dream as a symbol of the matriarchal spirit. Jane sees the moon as "a white human form" shining in the sky, "inclining a glorious brow earthward." She tells us: "It spoke to my spirit: immeasurably distant was the tone, yet so near, it whispered in my heart—"My daughter, flee temptation." Jane answers, "Mother, I will" (Chapter 27). Waking from the dream, Jane leaves Thornfield. Jane finds two additional mother-figures in the characters of Diana and Mary Rivers. Rich points out that the sisters bear the names of the pagan and Christian versions of "the Great Goddess": Diana, the Virgin huntress, and Mary, the Virgin Mother. Unmarried and independent, the Rivers sisters love learning and reciting poetry and live as intellectual equals with their brother St. John.

Symbols

Symbols are objects, characters, figures, or colors used to represent abstract ideas or concepts.

Bertha Mason - Bertha Mason is a complex presence in Jane Eyre. She impedes Jane's happiness, but she also catalyses the growth of Jane's self-understanding. The mystery surrounding Bertha establishes suspense and terror to the plot and the atmosphere. Further, Bertha serves as a remnant and reminder of Rochester's youthful libertinism. Yet Bertha can also be interpreted as a symbol. Some critics have read her as a statement about the way Britain feared and psychologically "locked away" the other cultures it encountered at the height of its imperialism. Others have seen her as a symbolic representation of the "trapped" Victorian wife, who is expected never to travel or work outside the house and becomes ever more frenzied as she finds no outlet for her frustration and anxiety. Within the story, then, Bertha's insanity could serve as a warning to Jane of what complete surrender to Rochester could bring about. One could also see Bertha as a manifestation of Jane's subconscious feelings—specifically, of her rage against oppressive social and gender norms. Jane declares her love for Rochester, but she also secretly fears marriage to him and feels the need to rage against the imprisonment it could become for her. Jane never manifests this fear or anger, but Bertha does. Thus Bertha tears up the bridal veil, and it is Bertha's existence that indeed stops the wedding from going forth. And, when Thornfield comes to represent a state of servitude and submission for Jane, Bertha burns it to the ground. Throughout the novel, Jane describes her inner spirit as fiery, her inner landscape as a "ridge of lighted heath"

(Chapter 4). Bertha seems to be the outward manifestation of Jane's interior fire. Bertha expresses the feelings that Jane must keep in check.

The Red-Room - The red-room can be viewed as a symbol of what Jane must overcome in her struggles to find freedom, happiness, and a sense of belonging. In the red-room, Jane's position of exile and imprisonment first becomes clear. Although Jane is eventually freed from the room, she continues to be socially ostracized, financially trapped, and excluded from love; her sense of independence and her freedom of self-expression are constantly threatened. The red-room's importance as a symbol continues throughout the novel. It reappears as a memory whenever Jane makes a connection between her current situation and that first feeling of being ridiculed. Thus she recalls the room when she is humiliated at Lowood. She also thinks of the room on the night that she decides to leave Thornfield after Rochester has tried to convince her to become an undignified mistress. Her destitute condition upon her departure from Thornfield also threatens emotional and intellectual imprisonment, as does St. John's marriage proposal. Only after Jane has asserted herself, gained financial independence, and found a spiritual family—which turns out to be her real family—can she wed Rochester and find freedom in and through marriage.

One of the reasons for Jane Eyre's authority over her own experience, and the confidence with which she assesses that experience, is that, as the romantically convoluted plot evolves, the reader learns that it is history rather than story. Jane Eyre, who is wife and mother in 1819, is recounting the events of 1799-1809 in a language that is unfailingly masterful precisely because it is after the fact: if the Romantic/Gothic novel be, in one sense, sheer wish, Jane's triumph (wife to Lord Rochester after all and mother to his son—as it scarcely needs be said) represents a wish fulfillment of extraordinary dimensions. The material of legends and fairy tales, perhaps; yet also, sometimes, this time at least, of life. For we are led to believe Jane Eyre's good fortune because we are led to believe her voice. It is, in its directness, its ruefulness and scarcely concealed rage, startlingly contemporary; and confirms the critical insight that all works of genius are contemporaneous both with their own times and with ours.

Chapters 1–4 Summary

Chapter 1

The novel opens on a dreary November afternoon at Gateshead, the home of the wealthy Reed family. A young girl named Jane Eyre sits in the drawing room reading Bewick's *History of British Birds*. Jane's aunt, Mrs. Reed, has forbidden her niece to play with her cousins Eliza, Georgiana, and the bullying John. John chides Jane for being a lowly orphan who is only permitted to live with the Reeds because of his mother's charity. John then hurls a book at the young girl, pushing her to the end of her patience. Jane finally erupts, and the two cousins fight. Mrs. Reed holds Jane responsible for the scuffle and sends her to the "red-room"—the frightening chamber in which her Uncle Reed died—as punishment.

Chapter 2

Two servants, Miss Abbott and Bessie Lee, escort Jane to the red-room, and Jane resists them with all of her might. Once locked in the room, Jane catches a glimpse of her ghastly figure in the mirror, and, shocked by her meager presence, she begins to reflect on the events that have led her to such a state. She remembers her kind Uncle Reed bringing her to Gateshead after her parents' death, and she recalls his dying command that his wife promise to raise Jane as one of her own. Suddenly, Jane is struck with the impression that her Uncle Reed's ghost is in the room, and she imagines that he has come to take revenge on his wife for breaking her promise. Jane cries out in terror, but her aunt believes that she is just trying to escape her punishment, and she ignores her pleas. Jane faints in exhaustion and fear.

Chapter 3

When she wakes, Jane finds herself in her own bedroom, in the care of Mr. Lloyd, the family's kind apothecary. Bessie is also present, and she expresses disapproval of her mistress's treatment of Jane. Jane remains in bed the following day, and Bessie sings her a song. Mr. Lloyd speaks with Jane about her life at Gateshead, and he suggests to Jane's aunt that the girl be sent away to school, where she might find happiness. Jane is cautiously excited at the possibility of leaving Gateshead.

Soon after her own reflections on the past in the red-room, Jane learns more of her history when she overhears a conversation between Bessie and Miss Abbott. Jane's mother was a member of the wealthy Reed family, which strongly disapproved of Jane's father, an impoverished clergyman. When they married, Jane's wealthy maternal grandfather wrote his daughter out of his will. Not long after Jane was born, Jane's parents died from typhus, which Jane's father contracted while caring for the poor.

Chapter 4

I am glad you are no relation of mine. I will never call you aunt again as long as I live. I will never come to visit you when I am grown up; and if any one asks me how I liked you, and how you treated me, I will say the very thought of you makes me sick...."

About two months have passed, and Jane has been enduring even crueller treatment from her aunt and cousins while anxiously waiting for the arrangements to be made for her schooling. Now Jane is finally told she may attend the girls' school Lowood, and she is introduced to Mr. Brocklehurst, the stern-faced man who runs the school. Mr. Brocklehurst abrasively questions Jane about religion, and he reacts with indignation when she declares that she finds the psalms uninteresting. Jane's aunt warns Mr. Brocklehurst that the girl also has a propensity for lying, a piece of information that Mr. Brocklehurst says he intends to publicize to Jane's teachers upon her arrival. When Mr. Brocklehurst leaves, Jane is so hurt by her aunt's accusation that she cannot stop herself from defending herself to her aunt. Mrs. Reed, for once, seems to concede defeat. Shortly thereafter, Bessie tells Jane that she prefers her to the Reed children. Before Jane leaves for school, Bessie tells her stories and sings her lovely songs.

Analysis

In the early chapters, Brontë establishes the young Jane's character through her confrontations with John and Mrs. Reed, in which Jane's good-hearted but strong-willed determination and integrity become apparent. These chapters also establish the novel's mood. Beginning with Jane's experience in the red-room in Chapter 2, we sense a palpable atmosphere of mystery and the supernatural. Like Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, *Jane Eyre* draws a great deal of its stylistic inspiration from the Gothic novels that were in vogue during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. These books depicted remote, desolate landscapes, crumbling ruins, and supernatural events, all of which were designed to create a sense of psychological suspense and horror. While *Jane Eyre* is certainly not a horror novel, and its intellectually ambitious criticisms of society make it far more than a typical Gothic romance, it is Brontë's employment of Gothic conventions that gives her novel popular as well as intellectual appeal.

From its beginning, *Jane Eyre* explores and challenges the social preconceptions of nineteenth-century Victorian society. Themes of social class, gender relations, and injustice predominate throughout. *Jane Eyre* begins her story as an orphan raised by a wealthy and cultivated family, and this ambiguous social standing motivates much of the novel's internal tension and conflict. Jane's education and semi-aristocratic lifestyle are those of the upper class, but she has no money. As a penniless orphan forced to live on the charity of others, Jane is a kind of second-class citizen. In some ways she is below even the servants, who certainly have no obligation to treat her respectfully. The tensions of this contradiction emerge in the very first chapter of the

novel, when Jane suffers teasing and punishment at the hands of John Reed and his hateful mother. Jane's banishment to the red-room exemplifies her inferior position with regard to the rest of the members of the Reed household.

The red-room is the first in a series of literal and metaphorical imprisonments in the novel. Although Jane's imprisonment in the red-room is real, she will encounter spiritual, intellectual, and emotional imprisonment throughout the book. The rigid Victorian hierarchies of social class and gender will pose challenges to her freedom of movement and personal growth, and corrupt morals and religion will also constitute menaces to her ability to realize her dreams for herself. Jane will even come to fear "enslavement" to her own passions. At the same time, the red-room is also symbolic of Jane's feeling of isolation with respect to every community: she is "locked in," but she is also, in a sense, "locked out." Again, class and gender hierarchies will contribute to Jane's sense of exile. For example, her position as a governess at Thornfield once again situates her in a strange borderland between the upper class and the servant class, so that she feels part of neither group.

Important Quotations Explained

1. I am glad you are no relation of mine. I will never call you aunt again as long as I live. I will never come to visit you when I am grown up; and if any one asks me how I liked you, and how you treated me, I will say the very thought of you makes me sick, and that you treated me with miserable cruelty ... You think I have no feelings, and that I can do without one bit of love or kindness; but I cannot live so: and you have no pity. I shall remember how you thrust me back ... into the red-room ... And that punishment you made me suffer because your wicked boy struck me—knocked me down for nothing. I will tell anybody who asks me questions this exact tale. 'Ere I had finished this reply, my soul began to expand, to exult, with the strangest sense of freedom, of triumph, I ever felt. It seemed as if an invisible bond had burst, and that I had struggled out into unhopd-for liberty....

Explanation for Quotation 1

This quotation, part of Jane's outburst to her aunt just prior to her departure from Gateshead for Lowood School, appears in Chapter 4. In the passage, Jane solidifies her own orphanhood, severing her ties to the little semblance of family that remained to her ("I will never call you aunt again as long as I live," she tells Mrs. Reed). Jane asserts her fiery spirit in her tirade, and she displays a keen sense of justice and a recognition of her need for love. Along with familial liberation, the passage marks Jane's emotional liberation. Jane's imprisonment in the red-room has its psychological counterpart in her emotional suppression, and it is not until she speaks these words to Mrs. Reed that she feels her "soul begin to expand." Lastly, the passage highlights the importance of storytelling as revenge and also as a means of empowerment. Jane declares that she will "tell anybody who asks me questions this exact tale"—via authorship, Jane asserts her authority over and against her tyrannical aunt.

2. Feeling ... clamoured wildly. "Oh, comply!" it said. " ... soothe him; save him; love him; tell him you love him and will be his. Who in the world cares for you? or who will be injured by what you do?" Still indomitable was the reply: "I care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself. I will keep the law given by God; sanctioned by man. I will hold to the principles received by me when I was sane, and not mad—as I am now. Laws and principles are not for the times when there is no temptation ... They have a worth—so I have always believed; and if I cannot believe it now, it is because I am insane—quite insane: with my veins running fire, and my heart beating faster than I can count its throbs."

Explanation for Quotation 2

In this quotation, near the end of Chapter 27, Jane asserts her strong sense of moral integrity over and against her intense immediate feelings. Rochester has been trying to convince her to stay with him despite the fact that he is still legally married to Bertha Mason. His argument almost persuades Jane: Rochester is the first person who has ever truly loved her. Yet she knows that staying with him would mean compromising herself, because she would be Rochester's mistress rather than his wife. Not only would she lose her self-respect, she would probably lose Rochester's, too, in the end. Thus Jane asserts her worth and her ability to love herself regardless of how others treat her. The passage also sheds light upon Jane's understanding of religion. She sees God as the giver of the laws by which she must live. When she can no longer trust herself to exercise good judgment, she looks to these principles as an objective point of reference. Jane's allusions to her "madness" and "insanity" bring out an interesting parallel between Jane and Bertha Mason. It is possible to see Bertha as a double for Jane, who embodies what Jane feels within—especially since the externalization of interior sentiment is a trait common to the Gothic novel. The description of Jane's blood running like "fire" constitutes one of many points in the book in which Jane is associated with flames.

3. "Shall I?" I said briefly; and I looked at his features, beautiful in their harmony, but strangely formidable in their still severity; at his brow, commanding, but not open; at his eyes, bright and deep and searching, but never soft; at his tall imposing figure; and fancied myself in idea his wife. Oh! it would never do! As his curate, his comrade, all would be right: I would cross oceans with him in that capacity; toil under Eastern suns, in Asian deserts with him in that office; admire and emulate his courage and devotion and vigour: accommodate quietly to his masterhood; smile undisturbed at his ineradicable ambition I should suffer often, no doubt, attached to him only in this capacity: my body would be under a rather stringent yoke, but my heart and mind would be free. I should still have my unblighted self to turn to: my natural unenslaved feelings with which to communicate in moments of loneliness. There would be recesses in my mind which would be only mine, to which he never came; and sentiments growing there, fresh and sheltered, which his austerity could never blight, nor his measured warrior-march trample down: but as his wife—at his side always, and always restrained, and always checked—forced to keep the fire of my nature continually low, to compel it to burn inwardly and never utter a cry, though the imprisoned flame consumed vital after vital—this would be unendurable.

Explanation for Quotation 3

This passage occurs in Chapter 34. St. John Rivers has just asked Jane to join him as his wife on his missionary trip to India. Jane dramatizes the interior conflict involved in making her decision. In many ways, the proposal tempts her. It is an opportunity to perform good works and to be more than a governess, schoolteacher, or housewife—the roles traditionally open to women. Jane's teaching jobs at Lowood, Thornfield, and Morton have all made her feel trapped, and she would not mind enduring hardships for a cause in which she truly believes. Yet, St. John's principles—"ambition," "austerity," and "arrogance"—are not those that Jane upholds. Misguided religion threatens to oppress Jane throughout the book, and St. John merely embodies one form of it. He also embodies masculine dominance, another force that threatens Jane like a "stringent yoke" over the course of the novel. Thus she describes St. John's "warrior-march" and notes his assertion of his "masterhood." Jane must escape such control in order to remain true to herself, for she

realizes that her conventional manner of dealing with oppression—by retreating into herself, into the recesses of her imagination, into conversation with herself—cannot constitute a way of life. In her rejection of Rochester, Jane privileged principle over feeling; she is now aware of the negative effects such emotional repression can have. Feeling, too, must play a role in one's life: a balance must be struck.

4. I could not help it; the restlessness was in my nature; it agitated me to pain sometimes. Then my sole relief was to walk along the corridor of the third story, backwards and forwards, safe in the silence and solitude of the spot, and allow my mind's eye to dwell on whatever bright visions rose before it—and, certainly, they were many and glowing; to let my heart be heaved by the exultant movement ... and, best of all, to open my inward ear to a tale that was never ended—a tale my imagination created, and narrated continuously; quickened with all of incident, life, fire, feeling, that I desired and had not in my actual existence. It is in vain to say human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquility: they must have action; and they will make it if they cannot find it. Millions are condemned to a stiller doom than mine, and millions are in silent revolt against their lot. Nobody knows how many rebellions besides political rebellions ferment in the masses of life which people earth. Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex.

Explanation for Quotation 4

This passage appears in Chapter 12, in the midst of Jane's description of her first few weeks at Thornfield. The diction highlights Jane's feelings of imprisonment (she paces the corridors like a creature caged), and her longings for freedom and equality. Jane's words are also relevant to Brontë's own experience as a writer, and to the general condition of Victorian women. The images of restlessness and pacing, of feeling "stagnation" and "too rigid a restraint," are examples of the book's central theme of imprisonment. In addition to instances of physical imprisonment, Jane must also escape the fetters of misguided religion (represented by Brocklehurst), of passion without principle (represented at first by Rochester), and of principle without passion (represented by St. John Rivers)—not to mention those of society. Brocklehurst, Rochester, and St. John may also threaten Jane with the fetters of patriarchy, which is the specific force Jane resists in this passage. Jane extends her feeling of entrapment to her fellow women, and these sentences constitute Brontë's feminist manifesto. As she describes the "doom" to which "millions in silent revolt against their lot" "are condemned," Brontë criticizes what she believed to be stifling Victorian conceptions of proper gender roles. The passage explicitly states that the Victorian wife suffers from being metaphorically "locked up." Bertha Mason, who is eventually rendered nearly inhuman when her neglected, suppressed feelings turn to madness and fury, may be viewed as a symbol of the imprisoned female's condition. The passage suggests that Brontë's writing may have been her means of coping with such rage. Jane describes her retreat into her own mind, to find freedom in her imagination. While Brontë's greatest triumphs were the result of such self-retreat, her heroine's achievement is the balance she strikes between her need for autonomy and her desire to be an active member of society.

5. I have now been married ten years. I know what it is to live entirely for and with what I love best on earth. I hold myself supremely blest—blest beyond what language can express; because I am my husband's life as fully as he is mine. No woman was ever nearer to her mate than I am: ever more absolutely bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh. I know no weariness of my Edward's society: he knows none of mine, any more than we each do of the pulsation of the heart that beats in our separate

bosoms; consequently, we are ever together. To be together is for us to be at once as free as in solitude, as gay as in company. We talk, I believe, all day long: to talk to each other is but a more animated and an audible thinking. All my confidence is bestowed on him, all his confidence is devoted to me; we are precisely suited in character—perfect concord is the result.

Explanation for Quotation 5

This, one of the final passages of *Jane Eyre*, summarizes the novel's "happy ending." Its implications have generated much debate over the way Brontë chose to conclude her book. Some critics view Jane as having sacrificed her autonomy—no longer her own person, she and Rochester have merged, sharing one heart, each possessing the "bone" and "flesh" of the other. One might also argue that Jane relinquishes her powers of thought and expression—two characteristics that have defined her for most of the novel. Suddenly, the otherwise imaginative Jane equates her "thinking" to her conversations with Rochester—she even finds the conversations "more animated." Similarly, although ten years have elapsed since the wedding, the otherwise eloquent Jane suddenly claims that she is unable to find any "language" to "express" her experiences during this period. Other critics interpret this passage in a more positive manner. It can be read as Jane's affirmation of the equality between her and Rochester, as testimony that she has not "given up" anything. The passage is followed in the novel by a report on St. John Rivers. Jane writes: "his is the spirit of the warrior Greatheart ... his is the ambition of the high master-spirit..." (Greatheart serves as guide to the pilgrims in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*.) Emphasizing St. John's desires for "mastery" and his "warrior" characteristics, Jane describes a controlling patriarch. While Rochester may have been such a figure at the beginning of the novel, his character has changed by its conclusion. He has lost his house, his hand, and his eyesight to a fire, and the revelation of his youthful debaucheries has shown him to be Jane's moral inferior. Rochester can no longer presume to be Jane's "master" in any sense. Moreover, Jane has come to Rochester this second time in economic independence and by free choice; at Moor House she found a network of love and support, and she does not depend solely on Rochester for emotional nurturance. Optimistic critics point to Jane's description of St. John as her reminder that the marriage she rejected would have offered her a much more stifling life. By entering into marriage, Jane does enter into a sort of "bond"; yet in many ways this "bond" is the "escape" that she has sought all along. Perhaps Brontë meant Jane's closing words to celebrate her attainment of freedom; it is also possible that Brontë meant us to bemoan the tragic paradox of Jane's situation.

Study Questions and Essay Topics

Study Questions

1. In what ways is *Jane Eyre* influenced by the tradition of the Gothic novel? What do the Gothic elements contribute to the novel?

Answer for Question 1

The Gothic tradition utilizes elements such as supernatural encounters, remote locations, complicated family histories, ancient manor houses, dark secrets, and mysteries to create an atmosphere of suspense and terror, and the plot of *Jane Eyre* includes most of these elements. Lowood, Moor House, and Thornfield are all remote locations, and Thornfield, like Gateshead, is also an ancient manor house. Both Rochester and Jane possess complicated family histories—Rochester's hidden wife, Bertha, is the dark secret at the novel's core. The exposure of Bertha is one of the most important moments in the novel, and the mystery surrounding her is the main source of the novel's suspense. Other Gothic occurrences include: Jane's encounter with the ghost of her late Uncle Reed in the red-room; the moment of supernatural communication between Jane and Rochester when she hears his voice calling her across the misty heath from miles and miles away; and Jane's mistaking Rochester's dog, Pilot, for a "Gytrash," a spirit of North England that manifests itself as a horse or dog. Although Brontë's use of Gothic elements heightens her reader's interest and adds to the emotional and

philosophical tensions of the book, most of the seemingly supernatural occurrences are actually explained as the story progresses. It seems that many of the Gothic elements serve to anticipate and elevate the importance of the plot's turning points.

2. What do the names mean in *Jane Eyre*? Some names to consider include: Jane Eyre, Gateshead, Lowood, Thornfield, Reed, Rivers, Miss Temple, and Ferndean.

Answer for Question 2

Of course, there are many possible ways to address this question. The following answer includes only a few of the ways the names in *Jane Eyre* can be interpreted. The name "Jane Eyre" elicits many associations. The contrast between Jane's first name—with its traditional association with "plainness"—and the names of the novel's well-born women (Blanche, Eliza, Georgiana, Diana, Rosamond) highlights Jane's lack of status, but it also emphasizes her lack of pretence. Jane's last name has many possible interpretations, none of which mutually excludes the other. "Eyre" is an archaic spelling for "air," and throughout the book, Jane is linked to the spiritual or ethereal as she drifts, windlike, from one location to the next. In French, "aire" refers to a bird's nesting place, among other things. Jane is compared to a bird repeatedly throughout the novel, and she often uses her imagination as a "nesting-place" of sorts, a private realm where she can feel secure. In medieval times, "eyre" also signified circuit-traveling judges. Perhaps Jane's name is meant to bring attention to her role as a careful evaluator of all that she sees, and to the importance that she attaches to justice. "Eyre" also sounds like "heir," and its other homophone—"err"—could certainly be interpreted to be meaningful, especially to feminist and religious critics who take issue with Jane's actions! Place names also seem to be symbolic. Jane's story begins at "Gateshead." From there, she moves to the bosky darkness and spiritual abyss of "Lowood." At Thornfield, she must fight her way through the stings of many emotional and psychological thorns (or, as many critics argue, wear "a crown of thorns" like Jesus Christ). Jane first tastes true freedom of movement in the open spaces surrounding Moor House, while Ferndean is the home where her love can grow fertile. Thus in Chapter 37 Rochester says to Jane, "I am no better than the old lightning-struck chestnut-tree in Thornfield orchard ... And what right would that ruin have to bid a budding woodbine cover its decay with freshness?" Jane replies, "You are no ruin, sir—no lightning-struck tree: you are green and vigorous. Plants will grow about your roots, whether you ask them or not, because they take delight in your bountiful shadow; and as they grow they will lean towards you, and wind round you, because your strength offers them so safe a prop."

Suggested Essay Topics

3. Discuss Jane as a narrator and as a character. What sort of voice does she have? How does she represent her own actions? Does she seem to be a trustworthy storyteller, or does Brontë require us to read between the lines of her narrative? In light of the fact that people who treat Jane cruelly (John Reed, Mrs. Reed, Mr. Brocklehurst) all seem to come to unhappy endings, what role does Jane play as the novel's moral center?

4. In what ways might *Jane Eyre* be considered a feminist novel? What points does the novel make about the treatment and position of women in Victorian society? With particular attention to the book's treatment of marriage, is there any way in which it might be considered anti-feminist?

5. What role does Jane's ambiguous social position play in determining the conflict of her story? What larger points, if any, does the novel make about social class? Does the book criticize or reinforce existing Victorian social prejudices? Consider the treatment of Jane as a governess, but also of the other servants in the book, along with Jane's attitude toward her impoverished students at Morton.

6. Compare and contrast some of the characters who serve as foils throughout *Jane Eyre*: Blanche to Jane, St. John to Rochester, and, perhaps, Bertha to Jane. Also think about the points of comparison between the Reed and Rivers families. How do these contrasts aid the development of the book's themes?

Other questions:

Plot, theme, structure: The story involves three separate families and five separate settings. How does the author achieve unity in the novel? A defect attributed to the novel is the existence of unlikely coincidences. Give examples. Discuss Jane's attitude towards religion and faith. Discuss women's role in Victorian society. Give examples of Charlotte's biography reflected in the novel. How is suspense built and sustained throughout the novel.

Characters: Discuss the symbolism of names. Discuss characters in terms of parallels and contrasts, flatness or roundness, etc.

Setting: the story takes place in six different parts of the Midlands and northern counties of England. Explain.

Imagery & Symbolism: Discuss associations between the elements of nature or the weather and the events. Explain the use of bird imagery. Explain how Jane's journey from house to house could be allegorical. Explain the symbolism of Jane's dreams, intuitions and psychic events. What symbols are prominent? How do they relate to Jane's frustrations?

Point of view: Discuss advantages and disadvantages of first person narration.

Quiz

1. What are the names of the servants who care for Rochester at Ferndean?

- (A) John and Clara
- (B) Reginald and Mrs. Fairfax
- (C) Mrs. Fairfax and Grace Poole
- (D) John and Mary

2. Which character is in love with Rosamond?

- (A) St. John
- (B) Rochester
- (C) John Reed
- (D) Mr. Mason

3. Who sets the fire in Rochester's bedroom?

- (A) Jane
- (B) Bertha
- (C) Mrs. Fairfax
- (D) Grace Poole

4. What has just happened to Mr. Mason the first time we encounter him?

- (A) He has fallen from the roof
- (B) He has been injured
- (C) He has been poisoned
- (D) He has fallen in love

5. Which character is based on the Reverend Carus Wilson, a figure from Charlotte Brontë's childhood?

- (A) St. John Rivers
- (B) Rochester
- (C) Mr. Brocklehurst
- (D) Mr. Lloyd

6. Who writes to St. John regarding Jane's inheritance from John Eyre?

- (A) Mr. Briggs
- (B) Mr. Mason
- (C) Mr. Brocklehurst
- (D) Mrs. Reed

7. How does John Reed apparently die?

- (A) He falls from the roof of Thornfield

- (B) He is killed in a fire
- (C) He has a stroke
- (D) He commits suicide

8. Where did Rochester marry Bertha Mason?

- (A) Jamaica
- (B) Madeira
- (C) St. Kitts
- (D) Bermuda

9. Who first suggests that Jane be sent away to school?

- (A) Mrs. Reed
- (B) Mr. Brocklehurst
- (C) Mr. Lloyd
- (D) John Reed

10. What is the nationality of Jane's pupil at Thornfield?

- (A) Spanish
- (B) German
- (C) Jamaican
- (D) French

11. What does Rochester lose in the fire at Thornfield?

- (A) His hand and his eyesight
- (B) His eyesight and his fortune
- (C) His eyesight and his dog

(D) His fortune and his fiancée

12. Which teacher is kind to Jane at Lowood?

(A) Mrs. Scatcherd

(B) Miss Temple

(C) Mr. Brocklehurst

(D) Miss Ames

13. What does the kind teacher give Jane and Helen to eat?

(A) Bundt cake

(B) Strawberries

(C) Cookies

(D) Seed cake

14. How does Jane earn a living after leaving Thornfield?

(A) She paints

(B) She writes and sells short stories

(C) She becomes a governess at a different manor house

(D) St. John Rivers finds her a teaching job in the town of Morton

15. With whom does Jane believe Rochester is in love for most of her time at Thornfield?

(A) Herself

(B) Blanche Ingram

(C) Georgianna Reed

(D) Celine Varens

16. What does Jane do with the inheritance she receives from her uncle John Eyre?

- (A) She divides it equally among her cousins the Rivers
- (B) She starts a school in the town of Morton
- (C) She sends it to Gateshead to comfort the Reeds for the death of their mother
- (D) She buys ball gowns and jewelry for herself

17. What is the nature of Jane's first encounter with Rochester?

- (A) Rochester comes to Lowood to enroll Adèle there, but Jane warns him about the coldness and isolation at Lowood and recommends that he hire her as Adèle's live-in governess instead
- (B) After having been abroad for some time, Rochester returns to Thornfield and sends for Jane to come to him in his library
- (C) Jane and Rochester were long lost childhood sweethearts
- (D) Jane helps a stranger whose horse has slipped on some ice; she discovers later that the man was Rochester

18. What does Mr. Brocklehurst do to one of Jane's classmates to rid her of her "vanity"?

- (A) He makes her wear a dunce's cap
- (B) He has her naturally curly hair cut short so as to make it lie straight
- (C) He forces her to write, "I am a very silly girl" on the chalkboard 100 times
- (D) He puts a curtain over her bedroom mirror

19. How does Jane's Aunt Reed punish her for fighting with her bullying cousin John?

- (A) She makes her sleep outside in the cold
- (B) She makes her eat only burnt porridge
- (C) She makes her shine John's shoes for a week
- (D) She locks her in the red-room

20. To which destination does St. John Rivers want Jane to accompany him as his wife and fellow missionary?

- (A) India
- (B) China
- (C) The Congo
- (D) Ireland

21. What is the name of the Rivers's servant?

- (A) Alice
- (B) Bertha
- (C) Hannah
- (D) Persephone

22. What does Jane do immediately after finishing her studies at Lowood?

- (A) She answers an advertisement for a governess at Thornfield
- (B) She becomes a teacher there
- (C) She burns down the building
- (D) She is forced to wander penniless and starving across the moors

23. Who wears the disguise of a gypsy woman?

- (A) Blanche Ingram
- (B) Rochester
- (C) Lady Ingram
- (D) Lady Bartholomew

24. What happens within the first ten years of Jane and Rochester's marriage?

- (A) A daughter is born
- (B) A son is born

- (C) A star is born
- (D) None of the above

25. What is the subject of the book Jane is reading at the beginning of the novel?

- (A) Fish
- (B) British royalty
- (C) Fairies and knights
- (D) Birds

Suggestions for Further Reading

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WUTHERING HEIGHTS

The Magnanimity of Wuthering Heights

by Joyce Carol Oates

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Once upon a time, it seems, an English clergyman born Brunty or Branty, self-baptized the more romantic Bronte, brought home to his four children a box of twelve wooden soldiers. The children lived in isolation in a parsonage high on the Yorkshire moors, which is to say, at the edge of the world; each was possessed of an extraordinarily fecund imagination; the wooden soldiers soon acquired life and identities (among them the Duke of Wellington and Bonaparte). The way by which a masterpiece as unanticipated as *Wuthering Heights* comes to be written, involving, as it did, the gradual evolution from such early childish games to more complex games of written language (serial stories transcribed by the children in minute italic handwriting meant to resemble print; secret plays, or "bed plays," written at bedtime; the transcribing of the ambitious Gondal and Angria sagas, which were to be viable for nearly fifteen years) is so compelling a tale, so irresistible a legend, one is tempted to see in it a miniature history of the imagination's triumph, in the most socially restricted of environments. No poet or novelist would wish to reduce his mature works to the status of mere games, or even to acknowledge an explicit kinship with the prodigies of the child's dreaming mind; but it is clear that the play of the imagination has much to do with childish origins, and may, in truth, be inseparable from it. As Henry James has observed, in a somewhat peevish aside regarding the "romantic tradition" and the "public ecstasies" surrounding the Bronte sisters, "Literature is an objective, a projected result; it is life that is the unconscious, the agitated, the struggling, floundering cause." Certainly this is true, but its dogma is too blunt, too assured, to inspire absolute confidence. The unconscious energies feed the objective project; life fuels art, in disguised forms, though art is, of course, a highly conscious activity. Literature is far more than a game of words, a game ingeniously constructed of words, but the imagination is expansive enough to accommodate both the child's fantasies and the stratagems of the adult. Out of that long-lost box of wooden soldiers, or its forgotten equivalent, we have all sprung.

It is not simply in contrast to its origins that *Wuthering Heights* strikes us as so unique, so unanticipated. This great novel, though not inordinately long, and, contrary to general assumption, not inordinately complicated, manages to be a number of things: a romance that brilliantly challenges the basic presumptions of the "romantic"; a "gothic" that evolves—with an absolutely inevitable grace—into its temperamental opposite; a parable of innocence and loss, and childhood's necessary defeat; and a work of consummate skill on its primary level, that is, the level of language. Above all, it is a history: its first statement is the date 1801; and one of its final statements involves New Year's Day (of 1803). It seeks both to dramatize and to explain how the ancient stock of the Earnshaws are restored to their rights (the somber house of *Wuthering Heights*, built in 1500), and, at the same time, how and why the last of the Earnshaws, Hareton, will be leaving the Heights to live, with his cousin-bride, at Thrushcross Grange. One generation has given way to the next: the primitive energies of childhood have given way to the intelligent compromises of adulthood. The history of the Earnshaws and the Lintons begins to seem a history, writ small, albeit with exquisite detail, of civilization itself.

As a historical novel, published in 1847, "narrated" by Lockwood in 1801-1802, and encompassing an interior story that begins in the late summer of 1771, *Wuthering Heights* is expansive enough to present two overlapping and starkly contrasting tales: the first, and more famous, a somewhat lurid tragedy of betrayal erected upon a fantasy of childhood (or incestuous) romance"; the second, a story of education, maturing, and

accommodation to the exigencies of time. Both stories partake of the slightly fabulous, especially the first (in which, with fairy-tale inevitability, a "gypsy" foundling, named for a dead son, usurps a father's love); both seem to progress less as a consequence of individual and personal desire than of the abstract (and predetermined) evolution of "Nature" into "Society." The great theme of *Wuthering Heights*, perversely overlooked by many of its admiring critics, as well as by its detractors, is precisely this inevitability: how present-day harmony, in September of 1802, has come about. Far from being a rhapsodical ode to primitive dark energies, populated by savages (whether noble or otherwise), the novel is, in fact, as its elaborate structure makes clear, an assured demonstration of the finite and tragically self-consuming nature of "passion." Romantic and gothic elements cannot survive in the sunlit world of sanity (as Lockwood jealously observes, the second Catherine and her fiancée Hareton look as if, together, "they would brave Satan and all his legions"); the new generation will settle in the more commodious Thrushcross Grange, opening, as it does, in symbolic and literal terms, onto the rest of the world. The curious spell or curse has lifted from the principals of the drama, and will continue to hold sway—so local rumor will have it, doubtless for centuries—only on the moors, where the redoubtable Heathcliff and a woman yet walk, on every rainy night. ("Idle tales," says Mrs. Dean, "and so say I." The citybred Lockwood concurs, and we are invited, however ambiguously, to concur, in the history's closing remark, as Lockwood wonders how any one could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth.")

A novel's strategy reveals itself in structure and process, not in isolated passages or speeches, however striking. Any complex work that aspires to a statement about something larger than the experiences it depicts must be understood as a proposition on two levels: that of the immediate, or present time (the shared fiction of the "immediate" as it is evidently experienced by both participant and reader, simultaneously), and that of the historical (in which the fiction of the simultaneous experience of participant and reader is dissolved, and the reader emerges, ideally, at least, with a god's-eye view of the novelist's design). The playful braiding of narrators and magisterial creator that is so pronounced a characteristic of Nabokov's novels is perhaps more willfully ingenious than the "Chinese box" narration of Emily Brontë (which, one should hasten to say, she chose to employ, as a felicitous convention, and did not invent), but scarcely more effective. As much as any Modernist work, *Wuthering Heights* demands to be reread: the first three chapters (charting the disingenuous Lockwood's introduction to the surly enigmatic inhabitants of *Wuthering Heights*, both living and dead) yield the author's intention only upon a second reading. And this has not only to do with the time-honored device of withheld information, but with the reader's literal interpretation of Lockwood's experience: for Lockwood is himself a "reader," albeit a most confused one, in these initial chapters.

It is on the level of visceral immediacy, as a fictional "world" is evoked through the employment of language, that a novel lives or dies, or struggles along in a sort of twilight sleep; it is on this higher level, where structure and design are grasped, and all novels make claim to be "histories" (the eager demands of how and why, as well as what, accommodated), that it acquires a more cultural or generalized value. Emily Brontë's sense of the parable residing beneath her melodramatic tale guides us throughout: for we are allowed to know, despite the passionate and painfully convincing nostalgia for the Heights, the moors, and childhood, evinced by Catherine and Heathcliff, that their values, and hence their world (the Heights) are doomed. We acquiesce rather to the lyricism of the text, than to its actual claims: the triumph of the second Catherine and Hareton (the "second" Heathcliff), not only in their union but in their proposed move away from the ancient home of the Earnshaws, is a triumph that quite refutes traditional readings of the novel that dwell upon its dark, brooding, unconscious, and even savage energies. Meaning in literature cannot of course reside solely in the apprehension of design, for one might argue that "meaning" is present in every paragraph, every sentence, every word; but for the novelist such elements as scenes of a dramatic nature, description, historical background, summary of action, etc., are subordinate to the larger, grander, more spacious structure. If *Wuthering Heights* is the title of this phase of "our" collective history, ending on New Year's Day of 1803, Thrushcross Grange will be the title of the next.

Who will inherit the earth's riches? Who will inherit a stable, rather than a self-consuming, love? What endures, for mankind's sake, is not the violent and narcissistic love of Catherine and Heathcliff (who identify with each other, as fatal twins, rather than individuals), but the easier, more friendly, and altogether more plausible love of the second Catherine and Hareton Earnshaw. How ironic, then, that Bronte's brilliantly imagined dialectic, arguing for the inevitable exorcism of the old demons of childhood, and professing an attitude toward time and change that might even be called optimistic, should have been, and continues to be, misread. That professional critics identify subject matter in process with an ambitious novel's design is one of the curiosities of literary history, and bears an uncomfortable resemblance to the myopic activities of the self-appointed censor, who judges a book by a certain word, on page 58 or 339, and has no need to trouble himself with the rest. *Wuthering Heights* is no less orderly and ritualistic a work than a representative Greek tragedy, or a novel of Jane Austen's, though its author's concerns are with disorderly and even chaotic elements. One of the wonders of the novel is its astonishing magnanimity, for all the clichés of Emily Bronte's "narrowness." Where else might we find a tough-minded lyricism evoking the mystical value of Nature, contiguous with a vision of the possibilities of erotic experience very like that of the Decadents, or of Sade himself? Where else might we find passionate soliloquies and self-lacerations, of a Dostoyevskian quality, housed in utterly homely, and fastidiously rendered, surroundings? Both Bronte and Melville draw upon Shakespeare for the speeches of certain of their principals (Heathcliff being, in the remarkable concluding pages of the novel, as succinctly eloquent as Edmund, Iago, Macbeth), but it is Bronte's novel that avoids the unnatural strain of allegory, and gives a local habitation to oversized passions.

Wuthering Heights is erected upon not only the accumulated tensions and part-formed characters of adolescent fantasy (adumbrated in the Gondal sagas) but upon the very theme of adolescent, or even childish, or infantile, fantasy. In the famous and unflinchingly moving early scene in which Catherine Earnshaw tries to get into Lockwood's chamber (more specifically her old oak-paneled bed, in which, nearly a quarter of a century earlier, she and the child Heathcliff customarily slept together), it is significant that she identifies herself as Catherine Linton though she is in fact a child; and that she informs Lockwood that she had lost her way on the moor, for twenty years. As Catherine Linton, married, and even pregnant, she has never been anything other than a child: this is the pathos of her situation, and not the fact that she wrongly, or even rightly, chose to marry Edgar Linton over Heathcliff. Bronte's emotions are clearly caught up with these child's predilections, as the evidence of her poetry reveals, but the greatness of her genius as a novelist allows her a magnanimity, an imaginative elasticity, that challenges the very premises (which aspire to philosophical detachment) of the Romantic exaltation of the child and childhood's innocence.

The highly passionate relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff, forged in their embittered and savage childhood, has been variously interpreted: it is a doomed "gothic" romance, whose depth of feeling makes the inane Lockwood and his narrative-mate Mrs. Dean appear all the more shallow; it is curiously chaste, for all its emotional outpourings, and as finally "innocent" as any love between sister and brother; then again, it is rude, lurid, unwholesome, intensely erotic, and suggestive of an incestuous bond—indeed. Heathcliff is named for a dead brother of Catherine's, and he, Hindley, and Catherine have slept together as children. (The reasons for Mr. Earnshaw's adoption of the gypsy waif, the goblin, the parentless demon, the dark-skinned "cuckoo," are never made plausible within the story; but it is perhaps instructive to learn that Emily Bronte's great-great-grandfather Hugh Brunty had adopted a blackhaired foundling from Liverpool—who in turn adopted their own grandfather, the younger Hugh. So the vertiginous interrelations and mirror-selves of the novel's central household have, for all their fairy-tale implausibility, an ancestral authenticity.)

So famous are certain speeches in *Wuthering Heights* proclaiming Catherine's bond with Heathcliff ("Nelly, I am Heathcliff—he's always, always in my mind"),¹ and Heathcliff's with Catherine (Oh, God! it is unutterable! I cannot live without my life! I cannot live without my soul!)² that they scarcely require reference, at any length: the peculiarity in the lovers' feeling for each other being their intense and unshakable identification, which is an identification with the moors, and with Nature itself, that seems to preclude any human, let alone sexual" bond. They do not behave like adulterous lovers, but speak freely of their relationship

before Catherine's husband, Edgar; and they embrace, desperately and fatally, in the presence of the ubiquitous and somewhat voyeuristic Mrs. Dean. (Mrs. Dean is even present, in a sense, when, many years later, Heathcliff bribes the sexton to unearth Catherine's coffin, so that he can embrace her mummified corpse, and dream of dissolving with her, and being more happy still.) So intense an identification between lover and beloved has nothing to do with the dramatic relationship of opposites, who yearn to come together in order to be complete: it is the at-one-ness of the mystic with his God, the peaceful solitude of the unborn babe in the womb. That Heathcliff's prolonged love for the dead Catherine shades by degrees into actual madness is signaled by his breakdown at the novel's conclusion, when the "monomania" for his idol becomes a monomania for death. She, the beloved, implored to return to haunt him, has returned in a terrifying and malevolent way, and will not give him peace. ". . . For what is not connected with her to me? and what does not recall her? I cannot look down to this floor, but her features are shaped in the flags! In every cloud, in every tree-filling the air at night, and caught by glimpses in every object by day—I am surrounded with her image! The most ordinary faces of men and women—my own features—mock me with a resemblance."³ So Heathcliff tries to explain the frightening "change" that is upon him, when he sees that he and Catherine have been duplicated, in a sense, and supplanted, by the second Catherine and young Hareton. The old energies of the child's untrammelled life have passed over into the ghoulish energies of death, to which Heathcliff succumbs by degrees. "I have to remind myself to breathe—almost to remind my heart to beat!" Heathcliff, that most physical of beings, declares. "And it is like bending back a stiff spring; it is by compulsion that I do the slightest act not prompted by one thought, and by compulsion, that I notice anything alive, or dead, which is not associated with one universal idea.... I am swallowed up in the anticipation of its fulfillment."⁴

So far as the romantic plot is concerned, it is Catherine's decision to enter into a misguided engagement with Edgar Linton that precipitates the tragedy: more specifically, a melodramatic accident by which Heathcliff overhears part of Catherine's declaration to Mrs. Dean, but creeps away in shame before he can hear her avowal of abiding love for him. In truth, however, the "tragedy" has very little to do with Catherine's conscious will, but seems to have sprung from a phenomenon so impersonal as the passage of time itself. How exquisite, because irremediable, the anguish of "growing up"! Bronte's first-generation lovers would share a kingdom on the moors as timeless, and as phantasmal, as any imagined by Poe. In place of Poe's androgynous male lovers we have the immature Heathcliff (only twenty years old when Catherine dies); in place of the vampire Ligeia, or the amenorrhic Lady Madeleine, is the tomboyish Catherine, whose life has become a terrifying "blank" since the onset of puberty. No more poignant words have been written on the baffled anguish of the child-self, propelled into an unwanted maturity, and accursed by a centripetal force as pitiless as the north wind that blows upon the Heights. Catherine, though pregnant, and soon to give birth, has absolutely no consciousness of the life in her womb, which belongs to the unimagined future and will become, in fact, the "second" Catherine: she is all self, only self, so arrested in childhood that she cannot recognize her own altered face in the mirror. Bronte's genius consists in giving an unforgettable voice to this seductive and deathly centripetal force we all carry within us:

I thought . . . that I was enclosed in the oak-panelled bed at home; and my heart ached with some great grief which, just waking, I could not recollect. I pondered, and worried myself to discover what it could be, and, most strangely, the whole past seven years of my life grew a blank! I did not recall that they had been at all. I was a child; my father was just buried, and my misery arose from the separation that Hindley had ordered between me and Heathcliff. I was laid alone, for the first time, and, rousing from a dismal doze after a night of weeping, I lifted my hand to push the panels aside.... I cannot say why I felt so wildly wretched ... I wish I were a girl again, half savage, and hardy, and free; and laughing at injuries, not maddening under them! Why am I so changed? Why does my blood rush into a hell of tumult at a few words? I'm sure I should be myself were I once among the heather on those hills.⁵ Why the presumably robust Catherine Earnshaw's life should end, in a sense, at the age of twelve; why, as a married woman of nineteen, she should know herself irrevocably "changed"—the novel does not presume to explain. This is the substance of tragedy, the hell of tumult that is character and fate combined. Her passion for Heathcliff notwithstanding, Catherine's identification is with the frozen and peopleless void of an irrecoverable past, and not with anything human. The feathers she pulls out

of her pillow are of course the feathers of dead, wild birds, moorcocks and lapwings: they compel her to think not of the exuberance of childhood, but of death, and even premature death, which is associated with her companion Heathcliff. (Since Heathcliff had set a trap over the lapwing's nest, the mother dared not return, and "we saw its nest in the winter, full of little skeletons.")

This bleak, somber, deathly wisdom is as memorably expressed by Sylvia Plath in her poem "Wuthering Heights," with its characteristic images of a dissolving landscape opening upon the void. Plath, like the fictitious Catherine, suffered a stubborn and irrevocable loss in childhood, and her recognition of the precise nature of this loss is expressed in a depersonalized vocabulary. How seductive, how chill, how terrifying Bronte's beloved moor! There is no life higher than the grasstops

Or the hearts of sheep, and the wind
Pours by like destiny, bending
Everything in one direction.
I can feel it trying
To funnel my heat away.
If I pay the roots of the heather
Too close attention, they will invite me
To whiten my bones among them.⁶ It is to the roots of the heather that Catherine has paid her fiercest attention.

The novel's second movement, less dramatically focused, but no less rich in observed and often witty detail, transcribes the gradual metamorphosis of the "gothic romance" into its approximate opposite. The abandoned and brutish child Hareton, once discovered in the act of hanging puppies from a chair-back, matures into a goodhearted youth who aids the second Catherine in planting flowers in a forbidden "garden"—and becomes her protector at the Heights. Where all marriages were blighted, and two most perversely (the marriages between Heathcliff and Isabella, and the second Catherine and Heathcliff's son Linton), a marriage of emblematic significance will be celebrated. Everyone will leave the Heights, save the comically embittered old Joseph, the very spirit of sour, gnarled, uncharitable Christianity, who presumably cannot die.

How this miraculous transformation comes about, why it must be grasped as inevitable, has to do with the novelist's grasp of a cyclical timelessness beneath the melodramatic action. The rhythm of the narrative is systaltic, by which I mean not only the strophe and antistrophe of the sudden cuts back to Lockwood in Mrs. Dean's presence, and alone (musing in his diary) but also the subtle counterpoint between the poetic and theatrical speeches of the principal characters, and the life of the Heights with its harvests and apple-pickings and hearths that must be swept clean, its tenant farmers, its vividly observed and felt reality. The canny physicality of *Wuthering Heights* distinguishes it at once from the "gothic," and from Shakespeare's tragedies as well, where we are presented with an exorcism of evil and an implied (but often ritualistic) survival of good, but never really convinced that this survival is a genuine and not merely a thematic possibility.

Heathcliff, who is said never to read books, comments scornfully on the fact that his young bride Isabella had pictured in him a hero of romance. So wildly deluded was this sheltered daughter of Thrushcross Grange, she expected chivalrous devotion to her, and "unlimited indulgences." Heathcliff's mockery makes us aware of our own bookish expectations of him, for he is defiantly not a hero, and we are warned to avoid Isabella's error in "forming a fabulous notion of my character." Bronte's wit in this passage is supreme, for she allows her "hero" to define himself in opposition to a gothic-romantic stereotype she suspects her readers (well into the twentieth century) cherish; and she allows him, by way of ridiculing poor masochistic Isabella, to ridicule such readers as well.

Are you sure you hate me? If I let you alone for half a day, won't you come sighing and wheedling to me again? . . . The first thing she saw me do, on coming out of the Grange, was to hang up her little dog; and when she pleaded for it the first words I uttered were a wish that I had the hanging of every being belonging to her, except one: possibly she took that exception for herself. But no brutality disgusted her: I suppose she has an innate admiration of it, if only her precious person were secure from injury! Now, was it not the depth of absurdity—of genuine idiocy—for that pitiful, slavish, mean-minded brach to dream that I could love her? . . . I never, in all my life, met with such an abject thing as she is. She even disgraces the name of Linton; and I've sometimes relented, from pure lack of invention, in my experiments on what she could endure, and still creep shamefully cringing back!⁷ This, in Isabella's presence; and naturally Isabella is pregnant. But then Heathcliff observes, in an aside, that he, too, is caught up in this relentless "moral teething," and seems incapable of feeling pity for his victims or for himself. "The more the worms writhe, the more I yearn to crush out their entrails!" he says. " . . . And I grind with greater energy, in proportion to the increase of pain."⁸ He observes elsewhere that the mere sight of cowering, weak, fearful persons awakens the desire in him to hurt; and an evening's "slow vivisection" of his own son and his child-bride Catherine would amuse him. Even the elder Catherine, who recognizes her kinship with him, calls him a cruel, wolfish man; and she, of all the persons who know him, understands that he is beyond redemption—precisely because he is not a character in a romantic novel, or, indeed, answerable to any "fabulous notions" at all. (If he weakens at the novel's end, it is only physically. His forthright judgment on his actions is: " . . . As to repenting of my injustices, I've done no injustice, and I repent of nothing—I'm too happy, and yet I'm not happy enough.")

Heathcliff's enduring appeal is approximately that of Edmund, Iago, Richard III, the intermittent Macbeth: the villain who impresses by way of his energy, his cleverness, his peculiar sort of courage; and by his asides, inviting, as they do, the audience's or reader's collaboration in wickedness. Bronte is perfectly accurate in having her villain tell us, by way of Mrs. Dean and Lockwood, that brutality does not always disgust; and that there are those persons—often of weak, cringing, undeveloped character—who "innately admire" it, provided they themselves are not injured. (Though, in Isabella's case, it would seem that she has enjoyed, and even provoked, her husband's "experimental" sadism.) Heathcliff presides over a veritable cornucopia of darksome episodes: he beats and kicks the fallen Hindley, he throws a knife at Isabella, he savagely slaps young Catherine, he doesn't trouble to summon a doctor for his dying son, as he no longer has any use for him. Unfailingly cruel, yet sly enough to appear exasperated with his victims' testing of his cruelty, Heathcliff arouses the reader to this peculiar collaborative bond by the sheer force of his language, and his wit: for is he not, with his beloved gone, the life force gone wild? He has no opposition worthy of him; he has no natural mate remaining; he is characterless and depersonalized will—a masklike grimace that can never relax into a smile. (Significantly, Heathcliff is grinning as a corpse—"grinning at death" as old Joseph notes.) Very few readers of *Wuthering Heights* have cared to observe that there is no necessary or even probable connection between the devoted lover of Catherine, and the devoted hater of all the remaining world (including—and this most improbably—Catherine's own daughter Catherine, who resembles her): for certain stereotypes persist so stubbornly they may very well be archetypes, evoking, as they do, an involuntary identification with energy, evil, will, action. The mass murderer who is really tenderhearted, the rapist whose victims provoke him, the Fuhrer who is a vegetarian and in any case loves dogs.... Our anxieties, which may well spring from childhood experiences, have much to do with denying the actual physicality of the outrages, whether those of Heathcliff or any villain, literary or historic, and supplanting for them, however magically, however pitifully, "spiritual" values. If Heathcliff grinds his victims beneath his feet like worms, is it not natural to imagine that they are worms, and deserve their suffering, is it not natural to imagine that they are not us? We feel only contempt for the potential sadist Linton, who sucks on sugar candy, and whose relationship with his child-wife parodies a normal love relationship (he asks her not to kiss him, because it makes him breathless). Consequently our temptation is to align ourselves with Heathcliff, as Bronte shrewdly understands. Heathcliff pricks the reader's Linton-like imagination in such passages: I was embarrassed how to punish him, when I discovered his part in the business—he's such a cobweb, a pinch would annihilate him, but you'll see by his look that he has received his due! I brought him down one evening . . . and just set him in a chair, and never touched him afterwards. I sent Hareton out, and we had the room to ourselves. In two

hours, I called Joseph to carry him up again; and, since then, my presence is as potent on his nerves as a ghost; and I fancy he sees me often, though I am not near. Hareton says he wakes and shrieks in the night by the hour together....⁹ Yet the novel is saturated with gothic episodes and images, as many critics have noted, and the tone of motiveless cruelty that prevails, in the opening chapters, clearly has nothing to do with the mature Heathcliff's "plan for revenge." The presumably goodhearted and maternal Mrs. Dean tells Heathcliff that since he is taller than Edgar Linton, and twice as broad across the shoulders, he could "knock him down in a twinkling"—whereupon the boy's face brightens for a moment. The presumably genteel Lintons of Thrushcross Grange are not upset that their bulldog Skulker has caught a little girl by the ankle, and that she is bleeding badly; they evince alarmed surprise only when they learn that the child is Miss Earnshaw, of Wuthering Heights. (As for the child Heathcliff: ". . . The villain scowls so plainly in his face: would it not be a kindness to the country to hang him at once, before he shows his nature in acts, as well as features?")¹⁰ One of the most puzzling revelations in the early section is that, after Mr. Earnshaw has gone to the trouble of bringing the foundling home, his own wife's wish is to "fling it out of doors"; and Mrs. Dean places "it" on the landing with the hope that "it might be gone on the morrow"—though where the luckless creature might go in this wild landscape, one would be hard pressed to say. Clearly we are in a gothic world contiguous with Lear's, where daughters turn their fathers out into the storm, and blinded men are invited to sniff their way to safety.

This combative atmosphere is the natural and unspoiled Eden for which the dying Catherine yearns, however inhuman it is. For, like Heathcliff, she is an "exile" and "outcast" elsewhere: only the primitive and amoral child's world can accommodate her stunted character, until she is reborn and transmogrified in a Catherine part Earnshaw and part-Linton.

As for Heathcliff, with his diabolical brow and basilisk eyes, his cannibal teeth, his desperate passion for revenge, is he not a "romantic" incarnation of Iago or Vendice (of *The Revenger's Tragedy*), another Edmund fired to destroy an Edgar, a revenge-motive imposed upon a fairy tale of love and betrayal? He does not require Hindley to flog and beat him, in order to turn stoically wicked, since he has possessed an implacable will from the very first, having demonstrated no affection or gratitude for the elder Mr. Earnshaw, who had not only saved his life in Liverpool but (for reasons not at all clear in realistic terms) had loved him above his own children. Near the end of the novel Mrs. Dean wonders aloud if her master might be a ghoul or a vampire, since he has begun to prowl the moor at night, and she has read of "such hideous, incarnate demons." Her characteristic common sense wavers; she sinks into sleep, taxing herself with the rhetorical question: "But where did he come from, the little dark thing, harboured by a good man to his bane?"—a question that is presumably ours as well. From where does "evil" spring, after all, if not from "good"? And is it sired by "good"? And "harboured" by it? This particular demon is Heathcliff only: Heathcliff Heathcliff, possessing no other name: sired, it would seem, by himself, and never legally adopted by Mr. Earnshaw. (His headstone reads only "Heathcliff" and the date of his death: no one can think of an appropriate inscription for his monument.)

Yet if Heathcliff must enact the depersonalized role of a damned spirit, the "romantic" motif of the novel necessitates his having been a victim himself—not of Hindley or of the "ruling classes," but of his soul-mate Catherine. He is unkillable but may die from within, willing his own extinction, as his "soul's bliss kills his body, but does not satisfy itself." Just as the narcissistic self-laceration of the childlovers cannot yield to so social and communal a ritual as marriage, so, too, does the "romantic-gothic" mode consume itself, and retreat into history: for the fiction of *Wuthering Heights* must be that we have had Lockwood's diary put into our hands, many years after his transcription of events belonging to another century. We read his "reading" of Mrs. Dean's tale, parts of which seem remote and even legendary. Ghosts are by popular tradition trapped on an earthly plane, cursed by the need, which any compulsive-obsessive neurotic might understand, to cross and recross the same unyielding terrain, never advancing, never progressing, never attaining the freedom of adulthood. Even Edgar, the wronged husband, the master of Thrushcross Grange, soliloquizes: I've prayed often . . . for the approach of what is coming: and now I begin to shrink, and fear it. I thought the memory of the hour I came down that glen a bridegroom would be less sweet than the anticipation that I was soon, in a few months, or,

possibly, weeks, to be carried up, and laid in its lonely hollow! Ellen, I've been very happy with my little Cathy.... But I've been as happy musing by myself among those stones, under that old church, lying, through the long June evenings, on the green mound of her mother's grave, and wishing—yearning for the time when I might lie beneath it.¹¹ Considering his late wife's vehement rejection of him, this is an extraordinary statement, and Edgar goes on to say that, to prevent Heathcliff's victimization of his daughter, he would "rather resign her to God, and lay her in the earth before me." Nothing is learned in the older generation; the ease of death is preferred to the combat of life. The wonder is that so strong-willed a personality as young Catherine can have sprung from such debilitated soil.

So with the perpetual childhood of myths, fairy tales, legends, and gothic romances, which, occupying a timeless "present," relate to no time at all. Being oversized and exemplary of passions, their characters cannot be human: they are frozen in a single attitude, they are an attitude, and can never develop. Only young Catherine undergoes a change of personality, and, in willfully altering her own fate, transforms the Heights itself. She alone resists Heathcliff; she nurses her invalid husband in his final sickness, and nearly succumbs to death herself. When Heathcliff somewhat uncharacteristically asks her how she feels, after Linton has died, she says: "He's safe, and I'm free.... I should feel well—but ... you have left me so long to struggle against death alone, that I feel and see only death! I feel like death!"¹²—a speech that allows us to see how very far Catherine has come, within a remarkably brief span of time.

In another sort of novel Heathcliff would assuredly have been drawn to his widowed daughter-in-law, if only for sexual, or exploitative purposes: but *Wuthering Heights* is fiercely chaste, and none of its characters gives any impression of being violated by a sexual idea. (The fact that Catherine is pregnant, and that her pregnancy is advanced, during the final tempestuous love scene between her and Heathcliff, is never commented upon by anyone: not even by the unequivocal Mrs. Dean, whose domain is the physical world and whose eye is presumably undimmed by romance. One must be forgiven for wondering if the pregnancy—the incontestably huge belly of Catherine Linton—is not acknowledged because it is so blatant a fact of physical life, so absolute a fact of her wifeness, which excludes Heathcliff; or because, given the Victorian strictures governing author as well as characters, it cannot be acknowledged. Perhaps there is simply no vocabulary to enclose it.)

Young Catherine, however, has not inherited her mother's predilection for the grave. She soon exhibits an altogether welcome instinct for self-knowledge and compromise—for the subtle stratagems of adult life—that have been, all along, absent in her elders. Where Heathcliff by his nature remains fixed and two-dimensional, a character in a bygone drama, until his final "change" draws him so unresistingly to death, Catherine's nature is bound up with, and enforced by, the cyclical motion of the seasons: her triumph over him is therefore inevitable. Once or twice she lapses to the self-absorbed manner of the elder Catherine, in seeking (futilely) to provoke two men into fighting over her; but she is too clever to persist. That she learns to accommodate Hareton's filial affection for his monstrous "father" indicates the scope and range of her new maturity—an attribute, it must be said, that genuinely surprises the reader. For suddenly it becomes possible at *Wuthering Heights*, as if for the first time in human history, that one generation will not be doomed to repeat the tragic errors of its parents. Suddenly, childhood is past; it retreats to a darkly romantic and altogether poignant legend, a "fiction" of surpassing beauty but belonging to a remote time.

As the stylized gothic romance yields to something approaching "realism," the artfully fractured chronology begins to sort itself out, as if we are waking rapidly from a dream, and the present time of September 1802 is the authentic present, for both the diarist Lockwood and the inhabitants of *Wuthering Heights*. Mysteries are gradually dispelled; we have gained a more certain footing; as Lockwood makes his way to the Heights, he notes that "all that remained of day was a beamless, amber light along the west; but I could see every pebble on the path, and every blade of grass by that splendid moon." The shift from the gothic sensibility has been prepared from the very first, by Brontë's systematically detailed settings, which are rendered in careful prose by the narrators Lockwood and Mrs. Dean—the only characters we might reasonably

expect to see the Heights, the Grange, and the moors. The romantic lovers consume themselves in feeling; they feel deeply enough but their feeling relates only to themselves, and excludes the rest of the world. But the narrators, and, through them, the reader, are privileged to see. (It is significant that the ghost-lovers of the older generation walk the moors on rainy nights, and that the lovers of the new generation walk by moonlight.)

For all that she has been demeaned as ordinary, unimaginative, and incapable of comprehending a "grand passion" of the operatic scale of Catherine's and Heathcliff's, the novel's central narrator, Ellen Dean, in her solitary fashion, remains unshakably faithful to the actual world in which romance burns itself out: the workaday world of "splendidly reflected" light and heat, and smooth white paving stone, and high-backed chairs, and immense pewter vessels and tankards, and kitchens cheerful with great fires. Never has the physical world been rendered with more precision, and more obvious sympathy, whether it is the primitive outer world of the moors, or the interiors of the houses; that curious and endlessly fascinating oak paneled bed, with "squares cut out near the top, resembling coach windows"; Miss Catherine Earnshaw's silken costume, when she returns from five weeks at the Grange; the pipes old Joseph smokes, with evident pleasure. "I smelt the rich scent of the heating spices," Mrs. Dean reports, "and admired the shining kitchen utensils, the polished clock, decked in holly, the silver mugs ranged on a tray ready to be filled with mule ale for supper; and, above all, the speckless purity of my particular care—the scoured and well-swept floor. I gave due inward applause to every object...."¹³

It is this fidelity to the observed physical world, and Bronte's own inward applause, that makes the metamorphosis of the dark tale into its opposite so plausible, as well as so ceremonially appropriate. Though the grave is misjudged by certain persons as a place of fulfillment, the world is not after all phantasmal: it is by daylight that love survives. Long misread as a poetic and metaphysical work given a sort of sickly, fevered radiance by way of the "narrowness" of Emily Bronte's imagination, *Wuthering Heights* can be more accurately be seen as a work of mature and astonishing magnitude. The poetic and the "prosaic" are in exquisite harmony; the metaphysical is balanced by the physical. An anomaly, a sport, a freak in its own time, it can be seen by us, in ours, as brilliantly of that time—and contemporaneous with our own.

Notes for "The Magnanimity of *Wuthering Heights*"

1. Emily Bronte, *Wuthering Heights* (New York: Modern Library, n.d.), p.94.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 194.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 374.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 375.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 145.
6. Sylvia Plath, "Wuthering Heights," from *Crossing the Water* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971).
7. *Wuthering Heights*, pp. 174-175.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 176.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 331.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 296.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 339.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

Wuthering Heights

Context

Wuthering Heights, which has long been one of the most popular and highly regarded novels in English literature, seemed to hold little promise when it was published in 1847, selling very poorly and receiving only a few mixed reviews. Victorian readers found the book shocking and inappropriate in its depiction of passionate, ungoverned love and cruelty (despite the fact that the novel portrays no sex or bloodshed), and the work was virtually ignored. Even Emily Brontë's sister Charlotte—an author whose works contained similar motifs of Gothic love and desolate landscapes—remained ambivalent toward the unapologetic intensity of her sister's novel. In a preface to the book, which she wrote shortly after Emily Brontë's death, Charlotte Brontë stated, "Whether it is right or advisable to create beings like Heathcliff, I do not know. I scarcely think it is."

Emily Brontë lived an eccentric, closely guarded life. She was born in 1818, two years after Charlotte and a year and a half before her sister Anne, who also became an author. Her father worked as a church rector, and her aunt, who raised the Brontë children after their mother died, was deeply religious. Emily Brontë did not take to her aunt's Christian fervor; the character of Joseph, a caricature of an evangelical, may have been inspired by her aunt's religiosity. The Brontës lived in Haworth, a Yorkshire village in the midst of the moors. These wild, desolate expanses—later the setting of *Wuthering Heights*—made up the Brontës' daily environment, and Emily lived among them her entire life. She died in 1848, at the age of 30.

As witnessed by their extraordinary literary accomplishments, the Brontë children were a highly creative group, writing stories, plays, and poems for their own amusement. Largely left to their own devices, the children created imaginary worlds in which to play. Yet the sisters knew that the outside world would not respond favorably to their creative expression; female authors were often treated less seriously than their male counterparts in the nineteenth century. Thus the Brontë sisters thought it best to publish their adult works under assumed names. Charlotte wrote as Currer Bell, Emily as Ellis Bell, and Anne as Acton Bell. Their real identities remained secret until after Emily and Anne had died, when Charlotte at last revealed the truth of their novels' authorship.

Today, *Wuthering Heights* has a secure position in the canon of world literature, and Emily Brontë is revered as one of the finest writers—male or female—of the nineteenth century. Like Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights* is based partly on the Gothic tradition of the late eighteenth century, a style of literature that featured supernatural encounters, crumbling ruins, moonless nights, and grotesque imagery, seeking to create effects of mystery and fear. But *Wuthering Heights* transcends its genre in its sophisticated observation and artistic subtlety. The novel has been studied, analyzed, dissected, and discussed from every imaginable critical perspective, yet it remains unexhausted. And while the novel's symbolism, themes, structure, and language may all spark fertile exploration, the bulk of its popularity may rest on its unforgettable characters. As a shattering presentation of the doomed love affair between the fiercely passionate Catherine and Heathcliff, it remains one of the most haunting love stories in all of literature.

The originality and intensity of Emily's imagination, which led her to produce a novel unique in English literature, provide a fascinating subject for critical inquiry and psychological speculation. What is the meaning of the recurring sadism in the story? What, if any, kind of morality is involved? Many different interpretations are possible. In 1850 Charlotte Brontë also felt compelled to write a defence of *Wuthering Heights*, feeling it had been misunderstood. Its power and strangeness were recognised by most reviewers.

The novel is filled with natural imagery used symbolically. Natural events often foretell or accompany changes and disasters in the human sphere. The contrast between the fireless grate at Thrushcross Grange and the roaring fires of *Wuthering Heights*, the luxury and comfort of the first, lying in the soft valley below, and the fierce existence at the Heights, which lie exposed to the winds on high moorland. There are echoes of Wordsworth, Scott and Byron, whom the Brontë sisters admired.

The most striking thing about *Wuthering Heights* is its combination of matter-of-fact precision in the

telling, through Lockwood's curiosity and Nelly's common sense and the monstrous conflicts and passionate extravagance of the story, making it more disturbing.

The pages of *Wuthering Heights* are filled with echoes of the distinctive character of Yorkshire folk, their rugged independence contrasting with the bland softness of "offcomers" like the narrator Mr Lockwood. A character moulded by centuries of wrestling a living from a harsh landscape, often on remote hill farms. Food and fire are mentioned often. All these concrete domestic detail remind us that the setting is solid Yorkshire, despite all Gothic aspects. The basic idea for the plot was drawn locally from the story of the Walkers, a Halifax family of farmers and manufacturers (wool from Yorkshire sheep), whose fortunes were bedevilled by an adopted son.

Heathcliff's origin is unknown, and in the course of the novel, he showered with all sorts of epithets, a gypsy, an Armenian, a Spanish castaway ... but his character may well have been suggested by the Irish children who arrived with their starving families at Liverpool, where Mr Earnshaw finds the child, and where, in reality, Branwell must have seen them dying in the streets when he visited the city in 1845.

Heathcliff represents storm, passion, and the plot shows the ultimate futility of all human passion. But this leaves wholly unexplained the teasing ambivalence of his behaviour and the mixture of cruelty and compulsion, the human and non-human, the diabolical but irresistible. He is associated with warmth and at the same time with forces of nature as if the depths of man's nature were in some way alien to him.

The extraordinary meticulousness of the novel time-structure has been often pointed out. It is possible to work out the date of every significant event in the story if one only follows the clues of the symmetrical genealogical table. Lockwood read the names Catherine Earnshaw, Catherine Heathcliff and Catherine Linton. Catherine Earnshaw marries and becomes Catherine Linton, who marries Linton Heathcliff and becomes Catherine Heathcliff and finally marries again to become Catherine Earnshaw. The changes in the names represent the whole movement of the novel, which begins and ends with a Catherine Earnshaw. The wheel comes full circle.

Setting



A crucial part of the realistic framework provided for the reader is observation of domestic and seasonal detail. Because Nelly shifts to and from the Grange and the Heights with her two mistresses we get to know the internal working of each place. Despite their differences they both appear just as attractive.

Emily Brontë disrupts the chronological sequence of events to give prominence to the thematically crucial moments in the novel: the evening when Heathcliff and Catherine first see the Grange, their separation, the death of Catherine and the death of Heathcliff.

Catherine Earnshaw marries Edgar Linton for the wrong reasons, knowing that she should have married Heathcliff. Heathcliff hates Isabella and marries her only to have his revenge on Edgar. Their child is called Linton Heathcliff to symbolise the impossibility of the marriage. Linton and Heathcliff are incompatible and Linton Heathcliff shows they cannot co-exist. Catherine's daughter, Cathy, marries her cousin Linton and becomes Catherine Heathcliff, the name her mother might have had. Later, Cathy and Hareton fall in love (Linton is dead) and Heathcliff recognises himself and Catherine in them. With Cathy's marriage there will be a Catherine Earnshaw again and the wheel will have come full circle.

The language has a sensuous particularity that conveys a great deal to the reader's imagination. If we compare Jane Austin's language and Emily Brontë's we find that Austin's is more abstract and does not intend to give clear images of people and houses. Brontë uses language as a poet does, to appeal to the reader's imagination. We get clear visual images of dark and tall Heathcliff, fair and slender Edgar, brown-haired and brown-eyed Catherine and blond and blue-eyed Isabella, while Cathy is a compromise, with fair hair and dark eyes.

The theme of the novel is not only domestic/passional love; it also includes a variety of suggestions about life after death. It also seems to be about the incommunicable: the varieties of living, loving and dying which make up human experience. Instead of one controlling voice telling the story there are many different narrators. The characters tell themselves.

Without the narrative accounts of Nelly and Lockwood (a film for example) which root the extraordinary love of Heathcliff and Catherine in a credible realistic framework the story can appear melodramatic.

Key Facts

Full Title - Wuthering Heights

Author - Emily Brontë

Type of Work - Novel

Genre - Gothic novel (designed to both horrify and fascinate readers with scenes of passion and cruelty; supernatural elements; and a dark, foreboding atmosphere); also realist fiction (incorporates vivid circumstantial detail into a consistently and minutely thought-out plot, dealing mostly with the relationships of the characters to one another)

Language - English (including bits of Yorkshire dialect)

Time and place written - In 1846–7, Emily Brontë wrote Wuthering Heights in the parsonage of the isolated village of Haworth, in Yorkshire

Date of First Publication - 1847

Publisher - Thomas C. Newby

Narrator - Lockwood, a newcomer to the locale of Wuthering Heights, narrates the entire novel as an entry in his diary. The story that Lockwood records is told to him by Nelly, a servant, and Lockwood writes most of the narrative in her voice, describing how she told it to him. Some parts of Nelly's story are narrated by other characters, such as when Nelly receives a letter from Isabella and recites its contents verbatim.

Point of View - Most of the events of the novel are narrated in Nelly's voice, from Nelly's point of view, focusing only on what Nelly can see and hear, or what she can find out about indirectly. Nelly frequently comments on what the other characters think and feel, and on what their motivations are, but these comments are all based on her own interpretations of the other characters—she is not an omniscient narrator.

Tone - It is not easy to infer the author's attitude toward the events of the novel. The melodramatic quality of the first half of the novel suggests that Brontë views Catherine and Heathcliff's doomed love as a tragedy of lost potential and wasted passion. However, the outcome of the second half of the novel suggests that Brontë is more interested in celebrating the renewal and rebirth brought about by the passage of time, and the rise of a new generation, than she is with mourning Heathcliff and Catherine.

Tense - Both Lockwood's and Nelly's narration is in the past tense

Setting (time) - The action of Nelly's story begins in the 1770s; Lockwood leaves Yorkshire in 1802

Setting (place) - All the action of Wuthering Heights takes place in or around two neighboring houses on the Yorkshire moors—Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange

Protagonists - Heathcliff, Catherine

Major Conflicts - Heathcliff's great natural abilities, strength of character, and love for Catherine Earnshaw all enable him to raise himself from humble beginnings to the status of a wealthy gentleman, but his need to revenge himself for Hindley's abuse and Catherine's betrayal leads him into a twisted life of cruelty and hatred; Catherine is torn between her love for Heathcliff and her desire to be a gentlewoman, and her decision to marry the genteel Edgar Linton drags almost all of the novel's characters into conflict with Heathcliff

Rising Action - Heathcliff's arrival at Wuthering Heights, Hindley's abusive treatment of Heathcliff, and Catherine's first visit to Thrushcross Grange set the major conflicts in motion; once Heathcliff hears Cathy say it would "degrade" her to marry him, the conversation between Nelly and Cathy, which he secretly overhears, drives him to run away and pursue his vengeance

Climax - Catherine's death is the culmination of the conflict between herself and Heathcliff and removes any possibility that their conflict could be resolved positively; after Catherine's death, Heathcliff merely extends and deepens his drives toward revenge and cruelty

Falling Action - Heathcliff destroys Isabella and drives her away, takes possession of young Linton, forces Catherine and Linton to marry, inherits Thrushcross Grange, then loses interest in the whole project and dies; Hareton and young Catherine are to be engaged to be married, promising an end to the cycle of revenge

Themes - The destructiveness of a love that never changes; the precariousness of gentility

Motifs - Doubles, repetition, the conflict between nature and culture

Symbols - The moors, ghosts

Foreshadowing - Lockwood's initial visit to Wuthering Heights, in which the mysterious relationships and lurking resentments between the characters create an air of mystery; Lockwood's ghostly nightmares, during the night he spends in Cathy's old bed, prefigure many of the events of the rest of the novel

Chronology

The story of Wuthering Heights is told through flashbacks recorded in diary entries, and events are often presented out of chronological order—Lockwood's narrative takes place after Nelly's narrative, for instance, but is interspersed with Nelly's story in his journal. Nevertheless, the novel contains enough clues to enable an approximate reconstruction of its chronology, which was elaborately designed by Emily Brontë. For instance, Lockwood's diary entries are recorded in the late months of 1801 and in September 1802; in 1801, Nelly tells Lockwood that she has lived at Thrushcross Grange for eighteen years, since Catherine's marriage to Edgar, which must then have occurred in 1783. We know that Catherine was engaged to Linton for three years, and that Nelly was twenty-two when they were engaged, so the engagement must have taken place in 1780, and Nelly must have been born in 1758. Since Nelly is a few years older than Catherine, and since Lockwood comments that Heathcliff is about forty years old in 1801, it stands to reason that Heathcliff and

Catherine were born around 1761, three years after Nelly. There are several other clues like this in the novel (such as Hareton's birth, which occurs in June, 1778). The following chronology is based on those clues, and should closely approximate the timing of the novel's important events. A "~" before a date indicates that it cannot be precisely fixed from the evidence in the novel, but only closely estimated.

Chronological History of the Linton and Earnshaw Families

1500—The stone above the front door of Wuthering Heights, bearing the name of Hareton Earnshaw, is inscribed, possibly to mark the completion of the house.

1758—Nelly is born.

~1761—Heathcliff and Catherine are born.

~1767—Mr. Earnshaw brings Heathcliff to live at Wuthering Heights.

1772: Old Mr. Earnshaw finds a starving, orphaned child in the streets of Liverpool while on a business trip and brings him home to be raised with his children—Hindley, fourteen, and Catherine, six; the child is christened Heathcliff.

1774—Mr. Earnshaw sends Hindley away to college.

1777—Mr. Earnshaw dies; Hindley and Frances take possession of Wuthering Heights; Catherine first visits Thrushcross Grange around Christmastime.

June, 1778: Hareton Earnshaw, Hindley's child, is born. Frances dies; Hindley begins his slide into alcoholism.

1780—Catherine becomes engaged to Edgar Linton; Heathcliff leaves Wuthering Heights.

1783—Catherine and Edgar are married; Heathcliff arrives at Thrushcross Grange in September.

1784—Heathcliff and Isabella elope in the early part of the year; Catherine becomes ill with brain fever; young Catherine is born late in the year; Catherine dies.

~1785—Early in the year, Isabella flees Wuthering Heights and settles in London; ; Linton, son of Isabella and Heathcliff, is born in the south, near London.

1785—Hindley dies; Heathcliff inherits Wuthering Heights.

~1797—Young Catherine meets Hareton and visits Wuthering Heights for the first time; Linton comes from London after Isabella dies (in late 1797 or early 1798).

1800—Young Catherine stages her romance with Linton in the winter.

1801—Early in the year, young Catherine is imprisoned by Heathcliff and forced to marry Linton; Edgar Linton dies; Linton dies; Heathcliff assumes control of Thrushcross Grange. Late in the year, Lockwood rents the Grange from Heathcliff and begins his tenancy. In a winter storm, Lockwood takes ill and begins conversing with Nelly Dean.

1801–1802—During the winter, Nelly narrates her story for Lockwood.

1802—In spring, Lockwood returns to London; Catherine and Hareton fall in love; April, 1802: Heathcliff dies.

Lockwood returns in September and hears the end of the story from Nelly.

1803—On New Year's Day, young Catherine and Hareton plan to be married.

Plot Overview

In the late winter months of 1801, a man named Lockwood rents a manor house called Thrushcross Grange in the isolated moor country of England. Here, he meets his dour landlord, Heathcliff, a wealthy man who lives in the ancient manor of Wuthering Heights, four miles away from the Grange. In this wild, stormy countryside, Lockwood asks his housekeeper, Nelly Dean, to tell him the story of Heathcliff and the strange denizens of Wuthering Heights. Nelly consents, and Lockwood writes down his recollections of her tale in his diary; these written recollections form the main part of *Wuthering Heights*.

Nelly remembers her childhood. As a young girl, she works as a servant at Wuthering Heights for the owner of the manor, Mr. Earnshaw, and his family. One day, Mr. Earnshaw goes to Liverpool and returns home with an orphan boy whom he will raise with his own children. At first, the Earnshaw children—a boy named Hindley and his younger sister Catherine—detest the dark-skinned Heathcliff. But Catherine quickly comes to love him, and the two soon grow inseparable, spending their days playing on the moors. After his wife's death, Mr. Earnshaw grows to prefer Heathcliff to his own son, and when Hindley continues his cruelty to Heathcliff, Mr. Earnshaw sends Hindley away to college, keeping Heathcliff nearby.

Three years later, Mr. Earnshaw dies, and Hindley inherits Wuthering Heights. He returns with a wife, Frances, and immediately seeks revenge on Heathcliff. Once an orphan, later a pampered and favored son, Heathcliff now finds himself treated as a common laborer, forced to work in the fields. Heathcliff continues his close relationship with Catherine, however. One night they wander to Thrushcross Grange, hoping to tease Edgar and Isabella Linton, the cowardly, snobbish children who live there. Catherine is bitten by a dog and is forced to stay at the Grange to recuperate for five weeks, during which time Mrs. Linton works to make her a proper young lady. By the time Catherine returns, she has become infatuated with Edgar, and her relationship with Heathcliff grows more complicated.

When Frances dies after giving birth to a baby boy named Hareton, Hindley descends into the depths of alcoholism, and behaves even more cruelly and abusively toward Heathcliff. Eventually, Catherine's desire for social advancement prompts her to become engaged to Edgar Linton, despite her overpowering love for Heathcliff. Heathcliff runs away from Wuthering Heights, staying away for three years, and returning shortly after Catherine and Edgar's marriage.

When Heathcliff returns, he immediately sets about seeking revenge on all who have wronged him. Having come into a vast and mysterious wealth, he deviously lends money to the drunken Hindley, knowing that Hindley will increase his debts and fall into deeper despondency. When Hindley dies, Heathcliff inherits the manor. He also places himself in line to inherit Thrushcross Grange by marrying Isabella Linton, whom he treats very cruelly. Catherine becomes ill, gives birth to a daughter, and dies. Heathcliff begs her spirit to remain on Earth—she may take whatever form she will, she may haunt him, drive him mad—just as long as she does not leave him alone. Shortly thereafter, Isabella flees to London and gives birth to Heathcliff's son, named Linton after her family. She keeps the boy with her there.

Thirteen years pass, during which Nelly Dean serves as Catherine's daughter's nursemaid at Thrushcross Grange. Young Catherine is beautiful and headstrong like her mother, but her temperament is modified by her father's gentler influence. Young Catherine grows up at the Grange with no knowledge of

Wuthering Heights; one day, however, wandering through the moors, she discovers the manor, meets Hareton, and plays together with him. Soon afterwards, Isabella dies, and Linton comes to live with Heathcliff. Heathcliff treats his sickly, whining son even more cruelly than he treated the boy's mother.

Three years later, Catherine meets Heathcliff on the moors, and makes a visit to Wuthering Heights to meet Linton. She and Linton begin a secret romance conducted entirely through letters. When Nelly destroys Catherine's collection of letters, the girl begins sneaking out at night to spend time with her frail young lover, who asks her to come back and nurse him back to health. However, it quickly becomes apparent that Linton is pursuing Catherine only because Heathcliff is forcing him to; Heathcliff hopes that if Catherine marries Linton, his legal claim upon Thrushcross Grange—and his revenge upon Edgar Linton—will be complete. One day, as Edgar Linton grows ill and nears death, Heathcliff lures Nelly and Catherine back to Wuthering Heights, and holds them prisoner until Catherine marries Linton. Soon after the marriage, Edgar dies, and his death is quickly followed by the death of the sickly Linton. Heathcliff now controls both Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange. He forces Catherine to live at Wuthering Heights and act as a common servant, while he rents Thrushcross Grange to Lockwood.

Nelly's story ends as she reaches the present. Lockwood, appalled, ends his tenancy at Thrushcross Grange and returns to London. However, six months later, he pays a visit to Nelly, and learns of further developments in the story. Although Catherine originally mocked Hareton's ignorance and illiteracy (in an act of retribution, Heathcliff ended Hareton's education after Hindley died), Catherine grows to love Hareton as they live together at Wuthering Heights. Heathcliff becomes more and more obsessed with the memory of the elder Catherine, to the extent that he begins speaking to her ghost. Everything he sees reminds him of her. Shortly after a night spent walking on the moors, Heathcliff dies. Hareton and young Catherine inherit Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange, and they plan to be married on the next New Year's Day. After hearing the end of the story, Lockwood goes to visit the graves of Catherine and Heathcliff.

Synopsis

The novel can be divided into three main structural divisions for greater clarity in reading: Prologue, History of the Family, and the Epilogue.

Prologue:

Chapter 1: 1801-Lockwood, the new tenant at Thrushcross Grange, pays a visit to his landlord, Mr. Heathcliff at Wuthering Heights. Lockwood finds himself strangely attracted to a man who seems even more reclusive than he.

Chapter 2: Curiosity leads Lockwood to make a second visit the next day. This time he is snowed in and has plenty of time to discover the relationships among the occupants of the house: a young refined woman; a young man, obviously used to hard labor; and Heathcliff. Lockwood begins to have doubts about Heathcliff's character when he sees him react savagely to the young woman.

Chapter 3: Lockwood is put up for the night in one of the unused bedrooms which was the girlhood room of Catherine Earnshaw. There he discovers the books and writings of Catherine from the time when her brother Hindley was the master of the house. Lockwood falls into a fitful sleep with dreams that turn into nightmares. His cries arouse Heathcliff who thinks it is the ghost of Catherine calling out to him. After this sleepless night, Lockwood vows never to bother his neighbors again.

History of the Family:

Chapter 4: That evening, reviving a bit, Lockwood engages his housekeeper, Mrs. Dean, who had served the Earnshaws for many years, in a conversation about the inhabitants at Wuthering Heights. Mrs. Dean begins the history of the family at the time that the old master Mr. Earnshaw brings a foundling, later named Heathcliff, home to be raised as his own child. Catherine and Heathcliff become close friends, but Hindley's

resentment at his father's protective attitude towards Heathcliff soon turns into hatred.

Chapter 5: Hindley is sent off to college, and the strong bond between Catherine and Heathcliff grows as they are left to themselves to roam about the countryside. The child Catherine is full of energy and high spirits, which often puts her at odds with her father.

Chapter 6: This tranquil time is changed by the death of Mr. Earnshaw. Hindley returns for the funeral with a new wife and takes his place as master. He banishes Heathcliff from the family, requiring him to give up his education to work as a servant. Still Catherine and Heathcliff manage to sneak away for rambles on the moor. On one of these excursions, they spy on the Linton family at Thrushcross Grange. When the watchdog bites Catherine's leg, she is attended by the Lintons while Heathcliff is sent home in disgrace.

Chapter 7: Five weeks pass before Catherine returns home. She is a changed person, in appearance and manners. She now acts the part of the "lady." Heathcliff, meanwhile, has grown more ragged and dirty. Catherine still feels close to Heathcliff and doesn't understand why he resents the changes in her. But Heathcliff envies Edgar Linton, his appearance and prospects with Catherine, and resolves to revenge himself on Hindley, no matter how long it will take.

At this point, Mrs. Dean interrupts her story, wanting to move on more quickly. Lockwood insists that she continue in the same style, not leaving out any details.

Chapter 8: Mrs. Dean continues the story of the Earnshaw family. It is now the following summer, and a baby boy is born to Hindley and his wife. Mistress Earnshaw, who is sickly and consumptive, dies within the year, and the child, Hareton, is raised by Nelly Dean. Hindley gives in to desperate and dissipated mourning for his wife.

Catherine, at fifteen, tries to balance her relationship with both the Linton children and Heathcliff. This causes difficulties for her since neither side likes the other. She is still Heathcliff's constant companion, but he has turned into a boorish, uncultivated person. Piqued by the situation, Catherine quarrels with Edgar, but it leads, paradoxically, to closer intimacy between them.

Chapter 9: Catherine, seeking advice, confides to Nelly that Edgar has asked her to marry him, and she has accepted, even though she is convinced that it is Heathcliff she really loves. However, she cannot marry Heathcliff, given his social situation, and she thinks marriage to Edgar will secure Heathcliff's future. Unknown to Catherine, Heathcliff has overheard most of this conversation, except for Catherine's declaration of love for him. Heathcliff steals out of the room and leaves the countryside. Catherine is devastated by his loss and becomes seriously ill. Three years pass without any word from Heathcliff, and Catherine marries Edgar. This ends the first part of Mrs. Dean's story.

Chapter 10: Lockwood becomes sick from his walk in the snow. It is four weeks before he is well enough to ask Mrs. Dean to continue the story.

Edgar and Catherine enjoy a "honeymoon" period, but it ends with the return of Heathcliff. He is transformed into a tall, muscular, athletic, and mannered man. Catherine is overjoyed to have him back and insists that Edgar, who is of course jealous of her feelings for Heathcliff, accept him into the family. Edgar's sister, Isabella, becomes infatuated with Heathcliff and accuses her sister-in-law of monopolizing him. Catherine mocks Isabella's feelings by embarrassing her in front of Heathcliff. She doesn't change Isabella's mind, but instead plants an idea in Heathcliff's mind that such a marriage would enable him to inherit all the Linton lands. Meanwhile, Heathcliff is staying at Wuthering Heights with Hindley Earnshaw, who, regardless of the danger, has included Heathcliff in his nightly card games, hoping to win some money from him.

Chapter 11: On Heathcliff's next visit to the Linton's, he meets Isabella in the garden and kisses her. Catherine is very put out and quarrels with Heathcliff. There is a violent scene between Edgar and Heathcliff when Edgar orders him never to come to the house again. Catherine becomes so upset that she locks herself in her room.

Chapter 12: By the time Catherine lets Nelly into her room, she is sick from fever and delirium. Concerned with Catherine's health, the family doesn't realize, until it is too late, that Isabella has eloped with Heathcliff. Nelly had discovered her absence earlier but told no one, wanting to spare the family more confusion and pain.

Chapter 13: Catherine suffers through a long illness but slowly begins to recuperate. Meanwhile Isabella and Heathcliff return to Wuthering Heights. Heathcliff's cruel and evil nature is now apparent to Isabella.

Chapter 14: Nelly goes to Wuthering Heights to see Isabella, even though her brother considers her "lost" to him and insists on no communication between the two families. However, Heathcliff desires to see Catherine

again and forces Nelly to play his go-between. He says Edgar can never love Catherine as fully as he does and implies that he would kill Edgar if he thought Catherine wouldn't miss him. Nelly finally gives into his threats and agrees to carry a letter to Catherine.

There is another pause in the narrative. When the story picks up again, Lockwood is the narrator, telling the story in Mrs. Dean's "own words."

Chapter 15: Catherine is physically and mentally altered by her illness; she is listless and withdrawn, clearly marked for an early death. Heathcliff realizes this as soon as he sees her. She accuses him of having broken her heart and torments him with her prediction that he will live to forget her. She wishes that they would never be parted, and refuses to release her hold on him even when her husband enters. She falls into a faint from which she never awakens.

Chapter 16: That night a premature infant, young Catherine, is born and Catherine Linton dies. Heathcliff, who has kept a vigil in the garden, knows she is dead before Nelly comes to tell him. He begs Catherine to haunt him, not to leave him alone in this world.

Chapter 17: The next afternoon, Isabella, who is running away from Heathcliff, stops at the house and describes the violent fight between Hindley Earnshaw and Heathcliff. She is bleeding from a knife wound to the head, brought on by her own taunts to Heathcliff that he murdered Catherine. Her son, named Linton, is born a few months later, south of London.

Six months later, Hindley Earnshaw, just 27, dies. It is discovered that Heathcliff owns all the Earnshaw land. Earnshaw's son, Hareton, is penniless, completely depended on Heathcliff for everything.

Chapter 18: Twelve years pass. Young Catherine, called Miss Cathy, has grown up, never going far from home. Isabella, near death, calls Edgar to her side so she can entrust her son Linton to him. Cathy, tired of waiting for her father, decides to do some exploring on her own and ends up at Wuthering Heights. There she meets Hareton who is now eighteen and learns that he is a cousin. She is upset to discover this unlikely connection, but agrees to keep her visit a secret.

Chapter 19: Edgar returns home with his nephew, a "pale, delicate, effeminate boy." Linton is sickly and frail and quite moody, but Cathy is hopeful of making him a pet, soothing his nerves by taking care of him. However, Heathcliff demands that his son be sent to him immediately.

Chapter 20: The next morning Nelly takes Linton to Wuthering Heights. Heathcliff's plan to own all the Linton land through his son's inheritance now becomes apparent. He values the boy for this alone and will not harm him, even though he considers him a puny, weak thing.

Chapter 21: Time passes pleasantly until Cathy's sixteenth birthday. In a ramble over the moors, she meets Heathcliff, who invites her to his home to meet his son. He confides to Nelly that he wants the two cousins to fall in love, so as to avoid any legal questions when Linton inherits the property of his uncle.

Cathy, refusing to believe her father's description of Heathcliff's character, sets up a secret correspondence with Linton. When Nelly discovers the notes, she forces Cathy to stop writing at the risk of her father's displeasure.

Chapter 22: At the end of the summer, Mr. Linton gets cold that he can not shake off, and the family begins to fear for his health. Heathcliff, passing on the road one day, meets Cathy who has been on a walk. He accuses her of playing with young Linton's feelings, saying the boy is so depressed that he has made himself sick enough to die. Cathy insists that she must see for herself, and Nelly gives in, hoping that Linton's behavior will prove the falseness of Heathcliff's words.

Chapter 23: They find young Linton more frail and sickly than before. He also complains at Cathy's treatment of him, repeating his father's accusations against Mr. Linton. He demands that Cathy continue to visit him to *cure* him. Nelly protests that the visits must not be repeated.

Chapter 24: Nelly becomes sick and is laid up for three weeks. During this time, Cathy continues her secret visits to Linton in the evenings. When Nelly discovers her secret, Cathy describes her visits and her attempts to amuse Linton, usually without good results. Every time Cathy wants to end the visits, the boy blames his ill nature on his sickness. Mr. Linton insists that the visits be stopped.

Chapter 25: The narrated events of the novel have now reached just one year before 1801, the year Lockwood first came to Wuthering Heights. Edgar Linton, who feels he is dying, fears that young Linton Heathcliff is only a tool of Heathcliff's revenge and forbids any more visits between the cousins. However, he allows them to

write each other. Edgar realizes that Cathy will be left without an inheritance unless she marries Linton Heathcliff.

Chapter 26: Young Linton is also quite ill, failing rapidly. He hardly has the energy to visit with Cathy, but his fear of his father makes him beg her to come again the next week.

Chapter 27: On the next visit, Linton is even more abject terror, saying he cannot enter the house without Cathy. Heathcliff has devised a plan to kidnap Cathy and not release her until she marries Linton, even though he knows that her father is near death. In the morning, Cathy is taken to be married while Nelly is kept locked up.

Chapter 28: After five days, Nelly is released and returns to the Grange to find Mr. Edgar near death. Cathy manages to break out of Wuthering Heights just in time to comfort her father in his last hours.

Chapter 29: The evening after the funeral, Heathcliff arrives at the Grange to demand Cathy's return to Linton's side. He tells Nelly that he has had Catherine's grave opened and has made plans to be buried next to her when he dies so that their dust can mingle. Heathcliff is still haunted by Catherine. He feels her spirit, but he is in torment because she refuses to show herself.

Chapter 30: Young Linton dies, and Cathy is forced to continue living at Wuthering Heights. Heathcliff now owns all the Earnshaw and Linton property. This chapter concludes Mrs. Dean's story.

Chapter 31: Lockwood, feeling much better after his long illness, rides over to Wuthering Heights to tell Heathcliff that he doesn't intend to stay on at the Grange at the end of his year. Not much has changed among the members of the household. Cathy is still obstinate and continues to badger Hareton. But there are slight changes in Heathcliff; he is more restless, anxious, and troubled than Lockwood has seen him before.

Epilogue

Chapter 32: Eight months pass. In September, Lockwood is in the vicinity of the Grange and decides to visit Wuthering Heights to pay off his account. He learns that Heathcliff has been dead for three months. Nelly describes how Cathy and Hareton were reconciled and became fast friends, while at the same time Heathcliff became more and more estranged from the family.

Chapter 33: Nelly continues the tale. Heathcliff hardly notices what is happening around him. When Cathy stands up to him, he is caught by the look in her eyes that reminds him of Catherine. Hareton also closely resembles Catherine. Heathcliff realizes that everywhere he looks he sees reminders of Catherine. He is tormented and haunted by his desire to be reunited with Catherine.

Chapter 34: These are the last days of Heathcliff. He stops eating and sleeping; he restlessly roams through the countryside and home, seeing Catherine wherever he looks. Finally, Nelly discovers him in Catherine's bed, dead. He is buried as he wished, next to the grave of Catherine. Now the country folk swear that his restless spirit still walks.

Young Catherine and Hareton will be married on the new year and move to the Grange to begin their life together, leaving behind the ghosts of Catherine and Heathcliff.

Character List

Heathcliff - An orphan from Liverpool brought to live at Wuthering Heights by Mr. Earnshaw. He becomes Mr. Earnshaw's foster son, and the foster brother of Catherine and Hindley. He looks very different with his dark skin, hair, and eyes, and his speech is at first incoherent. He becomes best friends with Catherine, but Hindley hates him. Father favors Heathcliff, and becomes furious when he is treated poorly. They form a sort of team, though Heathcliff never shows much love or appreciation. He eventually becomes selfish and mean from all this attention, and his favored spot means he can get what he wants from his brother and sister. Heathcliff falls into an intense, unbreakable love with Mr. Earnshaw's daughter Catherine. After Mr. Earnshaw dies, his resentful son Hindley abuses Heathcliff and treats him as a servant. Because of her desire for social prominence, Catherine marries Edgar Linton instead of Heathcliff. Heathcliff's humiliation and misery prompt him to spend most of the rest of his life seeking revenge on Hindley, his beloved Catherine, and their

respective children (Hareton and young Catherine). A powerful, fierce, and often cruel man, Heathcliff acquires a fortune and uses his extraordinary powers of will to acquire both Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange, the estate of Edgar Linton. Heathcliff marries Edgar's sister, treats her terribly, and raises their son only because he can help further his revenge. And when he forces Catherine's daughter to marry Linton, his revenge is nearly complete.

Wuthering Heights centers around the story of Heathcliff. The first paragraph of the novel provides a vivid physical picture of him, as Lockwood describes how his "black eyes" withdraw suspiciously under his brows at Lockwood's approach. Nelly's story begins with his introduction into the Earnshaw family, his vengeful machinations drive the entire plot, and his death ends the book. The desire to understand him and his motivations has kept countless readers engaged in the novel. Heathcliff, however, defies being understood, and it is difficult for readers to resist seeing what they want or expect to see in him. The novel teases the reader with the possibility that Heathcliff is something other than what he seems—that his cruelty is merely an expression of his frustrated love for Catherine, or that his sinister behaviors serve to conceal the heart of a romantic hero. We expect Heathcliff's character to contain such a hidden virtue because he resembles a hero in a romance novel. Traditionally, romance novel heroes appear dangerous, brooding, and cold at first, only later to emerge as fiercely devoted and loving. One hundred years before Emily Brontë wrote Wuthering Heights, the notion that "a reformed rake makes the best husband" was already a cliché of romantic literature, and romance novels center around the same cliché to this day. However, Heathcliff does not reform, and his malevolence proves so great and long-lasting that it cannot be adequately explained even as a desire for revenge against Hindley, Catherine, Edgar, etc. As he himself points out, his abuse of Isabella is purely sadistic, as he amuses himself by seeing how much abuse she can take and still come cringing back for more. Critic Joyce Carol Oates argues that Emily Brontë does the same thing to the reader that Heathcliff does to Isabella, testing to see how many times the reader can be shocked by Heathcliff's gratuitous violence and still, masochistically, insist on seeing him as a romantic hero. It is significant that Heathcliff begins his life as a homeless orphan on the streets of Liverpool. When Brontë composed her book, in the 1840s, the English economy was severely depressed, and the conditions of the factory workers in industrial areas like Liverpool were so appalling that the upper and middle classes feared violent revolt. Thus, many of the more affluent members of society beheld these workers with a mixture of sympathy and fear. In literature, the smoky, threatening, miserable factory-towns were often represented in religious terms, and compared to hell. The poet William Blake, writing near the turn of the nineteenth century, speaks of England's "dark Satanic Mills." Heathcliff, of course, is frequently compared to a demon by the other characters in the book. Considering this historical context, Heathcliff seems to embody the anxieties that the book's upper- and middle-class audience had about the working classes. The reader may easily sympathize with him when he is powerless, as a child tyrannized by Hindley Earnshaw, but he becomes a villain when he acquires power and returns to Wuthering Heights with money and the trappings of a gentleman. This corresponds with the ambivalence the upper classes felt toward the lower classes—the upper classes had charitable impulses toward lower-class citizens when they were miserable, but feared the prospect of the lower classes trying to escape their miserable circumstances by acquiring political, social, cultural, or economic power.

Catherine Earnshaw Linton: The daughter of Mr. And Mrs. Earnshaw, sister to Hindley and Heathcliff. She can be wild and impulsive, and she likes to make trouble. Though mischievous, she is not a cruel person. She can love tenderly, but her temper can often override her loyalty. As a child, she befriends Heathcliff, and she loves him and feels he is a part of her. She claims they are the same person. However, her desire for social advancement motivates her to marry Edgar Linton instead.

Catherine is free-spirited, beautiful, spoiled, and often arrogant. She is given to fits of temper, and she is torn between her wild passion for Heathcliff and her social ambition. She brings misery to both of the men who love her. The location of Catherine's coffin symbolizes the conflict that tears apart her short life. She is not buried in

the chapel with the Lintons. Nor is her coffin placed among the tombs of the Earnshaws. Instead, as Nelly describes in Chapter XVI, Catherine is buried "in a corner of the kirkyard, where the wall is so low that heath and bilberry plants have climbed over it from the moor. Moreover, she is buried with Edgar on one side and Heathcliff on the other, suggesting her conflicted loyalties. Her actions are driven in part by her social ambitions, which initially are awakened during her first stay at the Lintons', and which eventually compel her to marry Edgar. However, she is also motivated by impulses that prompt her to violate social conventions—to love Heathcliff, throw temper tantrums, and run around on the moor.

Edgar Linton - Well-bred but rather spoiled as a boy, Edgar Linton grows into a tender, constant, but cowardly man. He is almost the ideal gentleman: Catherine accurately describes him as "handsome," "pleasant to be with," "cheerful," and "rich." However, this full assortment of gentlemanly characteristics, along with his civilized virtues, proves useless in Edgar's clashes with his foil, Heathcliff, who gains power over his wife, sister, and daughter. Just as Isabella Linton serves as Catherine's foil, Edgar Linton serves as Heathcliff's. Edgar is born and raised a gentleman. He is graceful, well-mannered, and instilled with civilized virtues. These qualities cause Catherine to choose Edgar over Heathcliff and thus to initiate the contention between the men. Nevertheless, Edgar's gentlemanly qualities ultimately prove useless in his ensuing rivalry with Heathcliff. Edgar is particularly humiliated by his confrontation with Heathcliff in Chapter XI, in which he openly shows his fear of fighting Heathcliff. Catherine, having witnessed the scene, taunts him, saying, "Heathcliff would as soon lift a finger at you as the king would march his army against a colony of mice." As the reader can see from the earliest descriptions of Edgar as a spoiled child, his refinement is tied to his helplessness and impotence. Charlotte Brontë, in her preface to the 1850 edition of *Wuthering Heights*, refers to Edgar as "an example of constancy and tenderness," and goes on to suggest that her sister Emily was using Edgar to point out that such characteristics constitute true virtues in all human beings, and not just in women, as society tended to believe. However, Charlotte's reading seems influenced by her own feminist agenda. Edgar's inability to counter Heathcliff's vengeance, and his naive belief on his deathbed in his daughter's safety and happiness, make him a weak, if sympathetic, character.

Nelly Dean - Nelly Dean (known formally as Ellen Dean) serves as the chief narrator of *Wuthering Heights*. A sensible, intelligent, and compassionate woman, she grew up essentially alongside Hindley and Catherine Earnshaw and is deeply involved in the story she tells. She has strong feelings for the characters in her story, and these feelings complicate her narration.

Lockwood - One of the narrators. He rents Thrushcross Grange from Mr. Heathcliff, and his housekeeper is Nelly Dean. After a disastrous visit to *Wuthering Heights*, in which he is visited by the ghost of Catherine Linton, Mr. Lockwood asks Nelly to tell him about Heathcliff and the Earnshaw family. Lockwood's narration forms a frame around Nelly's; he serves as an intermediary between Nelly and the reader. A somewhat vain and presumptuous gentleman, he deals very clumsily with the inhabitants of *Wuthering Heights*. Lockwood comes from a more domesticated region of England, and he finds himself at a loss when he witnesses the strange household's disregard for the social conventions that have always structured his world. As a narrator, his vanity and unfamiliarity with the story occasionally lead him to misunderstand events.

Catherine Linton Heathcliff: The daughter of Edgar Linton and Catherine Earnshaw, and the cousin to Hareton and Linton. She is a sweet, loving girl, and her father is the most important person in her life. She can be cruel; she makes fun of Hareton's ignorance and then his attempt to improve himself. Heathcliff locks her up until she agrees to marry Linton. Her beloved father dies soon after, and she becomes cold and uncaring under the influence of Heathcliff, Hareton, and Joseph. But when Linton dies and she is forced into their company, she forms an alliance with Hareton. She treats him nicer, and the two fall in love, and plan to marry.

The first Catherine begins her life as Catherine Earnshaw and ends it as Catherine Linton; her daughter begins as Catherine Linton and, assuming that she marries Hareton after the end of the story, goes on to become Catherine Earnshaw. The mother and the daughter share not only a name, but also a tendency

toward headstrong behavior, impetuosity, and occasional arrogance. However, Edgar's influence seems to have tempered young Catherine's character, and she is a gentler and more compassionate creature than her mother.

Hareton Earnshaw - The son of Hindley and Frances Earnshaw, Hareton is Catherine's nephew, cousin of Cathy and Linton. He is the rightful heir of Wuthering Heights, but his father's gambling debts allow Heathcliff to take over as the new owner. After Hindley's death, Heathcliff assumes custody of Hareton, and raises him as an uneducated field worker, just as Hindley had done to Heathcliff himself. Thus Heathcliff uses Hareton to reap revenge on Hindley. Illiterate and quick-tempered, Hareton is easily humiliated, but shows a good heart and a deep desire to improve himself.

Hareton doesn't know what he lost, and is made to work in the fields, without education, manners, or affection. He is not dumb, but his gifts have gone uncultivated. He begins to teach himself to read, hoping to gain the approval of the young Catherine, but she constantly insults him, thinking him too vulgar to be her cousin. After the death of Linton, Catherine warms to Hareton. She helps him with his learning and his manners, and the two fall in love, planning to marry soon. Despite his poor treatment, Hareton loves Heathcliff like a father, and he is the only one who mourns him when he dies. At the end of the novel, he marries young Catherine.

Linton Heathcliff - Heathcliff's son by Isabella. Weak, sniveling, demanding, and constantly ill, Linton is raised in London by his mother and does not meet his father until he is thirteen years old, when he goes to live with him after his mother's death. Heathcliff despises Linton, treats him contemptuously, and, by forcing him to marry the young Catherine, uses him to cement his control over Thrushcross Grange after Edgar Linton's death. Linton himself dies not long after this marriage.

Hindley Earnshaw - Catherine's brother, and Mr. Earnshaw's son. He hates Heathcliff, who is father's favorite. When he returns from college after his father's death, he and his new wife become the heads of the house. Hindley begins to abuse the young Heathcliff, terminating his education and forcing him to work in the fields. He turns Heathcliff into a servant, and treats his other sibling like she is an annoyance. His wife dies after Hareton is born, and Hindley cannot stand the grief. He is a selfish man, and he cannot understand why someone so important was taken from him. He ignores his new son, and starts drinking. He becomes more drunken, crazy, and violent as time wears on. He loses Wuthering Heights to Heathcliff, and dies soon after his sister.

Isabella Linton - Edgar Linton's sister, who falls in love with Heathcliff and marries him. She sees Heathcliff as a romantic figure, like a character in a novel. Ultimately, she ruins her life by falling in love with him. He never returns her feelings and treats her as a mere tool in his quest for revenge on the Linton family. Catherine's sister-in-law and Heathcliff's wife, who was born in the same year that Catherine was—serves as Catherine's foil. The two women's parallel positions allow us to see their differences with greater clarity. Catherine represents wild nature, in both her high, lively spirits and her occasional cruelty, whereas Isabella represents culture and civilization, both in her refinement and in her weakness.

Mr. Earnshaw - Catherine and Hindley's father. Mr. Earnshaw adopts Heathcliff and brings him to live at Wuthering Heights. Mr. Earnshaw prefers Heathcliff to Hindley but nevertheless bequeaths Wuthering Heights to Hindley when he dies.

Mrs. Earnshaw - Catherine and Hindley's mother, who neither likes nor trusts the orphan Heathcliff when he is brought to live at her house. She dies shortly after Heathcliff's arrival at Wuthering Heights.

Joseph - The self-righteous servant at Wuthering Heights. He feels that everyone is bent for hell except himself, and he is constantly pushing his morality. He is unkind and cold, and cares only for Hareton; he somehow feels he was meant for a greater destiny. A long-winded, fanatically religious, elderly servant,

Joseph is strange, stubborn, and unkind, and he speaks with a thick Yorkshire accent.

Frances Earnshaw - Hindley's simpering, silly wife, who treats Heathcliff cruelly. She dies shortly after giving birth to Hareton.

Mr. Linton - Edgar and Isabella's father and the proprietor of Thrushcross Grange when Heathcliff and Catherine are children. An established member of the gentry, he raises his son and daughter to be well-mannered young people.

Mrs. Linton - Mr. Linton's somewhat snobbish wife, who does not like Heathcliff to be allowed near her children, Edgar and Isabella. She teaches Catherine to act like a gentlewoman, thereby instilling her with social ambitions.

Zillah - The housekeeper at Wuthering Heights during the latter stages of the narrative.

Mr. Green - Edgar Linton's lawyer, who arrives too late to hear Edgar's final instruction to change his will, which would have prevented Heathcliff from obtaining control over Thrushcross Grange.

Themes, Motifs, and Symbols

Themes

Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work.

Family history and family relationships or sibling rivalry: Wuthering Heights is the history of two families and how an outsider tries to reconstruct that history.

The Destructiveness of a Love that Never Changes - Catherine and Heathcliff's passion for one another seems to be the center of Wuthering Heights, given that it is stronger and more lasting than any other emotion displayed in the novel, and that it is the source of most of the major conflicts that structure the novel's plot. As she tells Catherine and Heathcliff's story, Nelly criticizes both of them harshly, condemning their passion as immoral, but this passion is obviously one of the most compelling and memorable aspects of the book. It is not easy to decide whether Brontë intends the reader to condemn these lovers as blameworthy or to idealize them as romantic heroes whose love transcends social norms and conventional morality. The book is actually structured around two parallel love stories, the first half of the novel centering on the love between Catherine and Heathcliff, while the less dramatic second half features the developing love between young Catherine and Hareton. In contrast to the first, the latter tale ends happily, restoring peace and order to Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange. The differences between the two love stories contribute to the reader's understanding of why each ends the way it does. The most important feature of young Catherine and Hareton's love story is that it involves growth and change. Early in the novel Hareton seems irredeemably brutal, savage, and illiterate, but over time he becomes a loyal friend to young Catherine and learns to read. When young Catherine first meets Hareton he seems completely alien to her world, yet her attitude also evolves from contempt to love. Catherine and Heathcliff's love, on the other hand, is rooted in their childhood and is marked by the refusal to change. In choosing to marry Edgar, Catherine seeks a more genteel life, but she refuses to adapt to her role as wife, either by sacrificing Heathcliff or embracing Edgar. In Chapter XII she suggests to Nelly that the years since she was twelve years old and her father died have been like a blank to

her, and she longs to return to the moors of her childhood. Heathcliff, for his part, possesses a seemingly superhuman ability to maintain the same attitude and to nurse the same grudges over many years. Moreover, Catherine and Heathcliff's love is based on their shared perception that they are identical. Catherine declares, famously, "I am Heathcliff," while Heathcliff, upon Catherine's death, wails that he cannot live without his "soul," meaning Catherine. Their love denies difference, and is strangely asexual. The two do not kiss in dark corners or arrange secret trysts, as adulterers do. Given that Catherine and Heathcliff's love is based upon their refusal to change over time or embrace difference in others, it is fitting that the disastrous problems of their generation are overcome not by some climactic reversal, but simply by the inexorable passage of time, and the rise of a new and distinct generation. Ultimately, *Wuthering Heights* presents a vision of life as a process of change, and celebrates this process over and against the romantic intensity of its principal characters.

The Precariousness of Social Class - As members of the gentry, the Earnshaws and the Lintons occupy a somewhat precarious place within the hierarchy of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century British society. At the top of British society was the royalty, followed by the aristocracy, then by the gentry, and then by the lower classes, who made up the vast majority of the population. Although the gentry, or upper middle class, possessed servants and often large estates, they held a nonetheless fragile social position. The social status of aristocrats was a formal and settled matter, because aristocrats had official titles. Members of the gentry, however, held no titles, and their status was thus subject to change. A man might see himself as a gentleman but find, to his embarrassment, that his neighbors did not share this view. A discussion of whether or not a man was really a gentleman would consider such questions as how much land he owned, how many tenants and servants he had, how he spoke, whether he kept horses and a carriage, and whether his money came from land or "trade"—gentlemen scorned banking and commercial activities. Considerations of class status often crucially inform the characters' motivations in *Wuthering Heights*. Catherine's decision to marry Edgar so that she will be "the greatest woman of the neighborhood" is only the most obvious example. The Lintons are relatively firm in their gentry status but nonetheless take great pains to prove this status through their behaviors. The Earnshaws, on the other hand, rest on much shakier ground socially. They do not have a carriage, they have less land, and their house, as Lockwood remarks with great puzzlement, resembles that of a "homely, northern farmer" and not that of a gentleman. The shifting nature of social status is demonstrated most strikingly in Heathcliff's trajectory from homeless waif to young gentleman-by-adoption to common laborer to gentleman again (although the status-conscious Lockwood remarks that Heathcliff is only a gentleman in "dress and manners").

Revenge: Much of the action of the novel recounts Heathcliff's revenge against the Earnshaws and Lintons and raises questions about the effects of revenge.

Motifs

Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, or literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text's major themes.

Doubles - Brontë organizes her novel by arranging its elements—characters, places, and themes—into pairs. Catherine and Heathcliff are closely matched in many ways, and see themselves as identical. Catherine's character is divided into two warring sides: the side that wants Edgar and the side that wants Heathcliff. Catherine and Young Catherine are both remarkably similar and strikingly different. The two houses, *Wuthering Heights* and *Thrushcross Grange*, represent opposing worlds and values. The novel has not one but two distinctly different narrators, Nelly and Mr. Lockwood. The relation between such paired elements is usually quite complicated, with the members of each pair being neither exactly alike nor diametrically opposed. For instance, the Lintons and the Earnshaws may at first seem to represent opposing sets of values, but, by

the end of the novel, so many intermarriages have taken place that one can no longer distinguish between the two families.

Repetition - Repetition is another tactic Brontë employs in organizing *Wuthering Heights*. It seems that nothing ever ends in the world of this novel. Instead, time seems to run in cycles, and the horrors of the past repeat themselves in the present. The way that the names of the characters are recycled, so that the names of the characters of the younger generation seem only to be rescramblings of the names of their parents, leads the reader to consider how plot elements also repeat themselves. For instance, Heathcliff's degradation of Hareton repeats Hindley's degradation of Heathcliff. Also, the young Catherine's mockery of Joseph's earnest evangelical zealotry repeats her mother's. Even Heathcliff's second try at opening Catherine's grave repeats his first.

The Conflict between Nature and Culture - In *Wuthering Heights*, Brontë constantly plays nature and culture against each other. Nature is represented by the Earnshaw family, and by Catherine and Heathcliff in particular. These characters are governed by their passions, not by reflection or ideals of civility. Correspondingly, the house where they live—*Wuthering Heights*—comes to symbolize a similar wildness. On the other hand, Thrushcross Grange and the Linton family represent culture, refinement, convention, and cultivation. When, in Chapter VI, Catherine is bitten by the Lintons' dog and brought into Thrushcross Grange, the two sides are brought onto the collision course that structures the majority of the novel's plot. At the time of that first meeting between the Linton and Earnshaw households, chaos has already begun to erupt at *Wuthering Heights*, where Hindley's cruelty and injustice reign, whereas all seems to be fine and peaceful at Thrushcross Grange. However, the influence of *Wuthering Heights* soon proves overpowering, and the inhabitants of Thrushcross Grange are drawn into Catherine, Hindley, and Heathcliff's drama. Thus the reader almost may interpret *Wuthering Heights*'s impact on the Linton family as an allegory for the corruption of culture by nature, creating a curious reversal of the more traditional story of the corruption of nature by culture. However, Brontë tells her story in such a way as to prevent our interest and sympathy from straying too far from the wilder characters, and often portrays the more civilized characters as despicably weak and silly. This method of characterization prevents the novel from flattening out into a simple privileging of culture over nature, or vice versa. Thus in the end the reader must acknowledge that the novel is no mere allegory.

Symbols

Symbols are objects, characters, figures, or colors used to represent abstract ideas or concepts.

Moors - The descriptive passages in the novel create the mood. From the opening to Lockwood's final lingering stroll in the graveyard, Brontë creates a world which is often somber, depressing, and dark.

"one may guess the power of 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 constant emphasis on landscape within the text of *Wuthering Heights* endows the setting with symbolic importance. This landscape is comprised primarily of moors: wide, wild expanses, high but somewhat soggy, and thus infertile. Moorland cannot be cultivated, and its uniformity makes navigation difficult. It features particularly waterlogged patches in which people could potentially drown. (This possibility is mentioned several times in *Wuthering Heights*.) Thus, the moors serve very well as symbols of the wild threat posed by nature. As the setting for the beginnings of Catherine and Heathcliff's bond (the two play on the moors during childhood), the moorland transfers its symbolic associations onto the love affair.

The supernatural- Ghosts appear throughout *Wuthering Heights*, as they do in most other works of Gothic fiction, yet Brontë always presents them in such a way that whether they really exist remains ambiguous. Thus

the world of the novel can always be interpreted as a realistic one. Certain ghosts—such as Catherine's spirit when it appears to Lockwood in Chapter III—may be explained as nightmares. The villagers' alleged sightings of Heathcliff's ghost in Chapter XXXIV could be dismissed as unverified superstition. Whether or not the ghosts are "real," they symbolize the manifestation of the past within the present, and the way memory stays with people, permeating their day-to-day lives. How ironic, then, that Brontë's brilliantly imagined dialectic, arguing for the inevitable exorcism of the old demons of childhood, and professing an attitude toward time and change that might even be called optimistic, should have been, and continues to be, misread.

Themes, Motifs, and Symbols: tracking

Madness

Chapter 3

Heathcliff does not know that Mr. Lockwood is sleeping in Catherine's room. Therefore, when he hears the screaming, he thinks it is Catherine's ghost. He is sorely disappointed to see that it is Mr. Lockwood, and after he orders him to leave, Heathcliff opens the window and calls outside for his beloved, dead Catherine. He receives no answer.

Chapter 9

Heathcliff secretly leaves Wuthering Heights when he overhears Catherine say that it would degrade her to marry him. Guilty for what she said, Catherine looks for him even in the pouring rain. When he cannot be found, she becomes detached. But when Hindley starts to yell at her, Catherine has a fit of madness. The doctor is called, and does what he can. She is so mad and delusional, the doctor is fearful that she will kill herself.

Chapter 11

Heathcliff returns after Catherine's marriage. When he visits, he and Edgar Linton have a terrible fight, which upsets Catherine. She determines to become frenzied, which will hurt them both. Raging, she hit her head against the sofa and her lips became bloody. She was out of breath, and when Nelly told Edgar about his wife's decision to act madly, Catherine's rage hit its peak. Her muscles stood out irregularly, her eyes were wild, and Nelly feared she would turn violent.

Chapter 12

Catherine refuses all food and drink for several days. She does not understand why she is not getting her way, and becomes paranoid that her former friends are now enemies. The knowledge that her husband has been in his library, seemingly unconcerned about her welfare, makes her hysterical. She feels alone in the world, and wishes to be out on the moors, or with her Heathcliff.

Catherine plucks the feathers from her pillow, and starts to confuse the past with the present. She recalls a time when Heathcliff shot a bird, leaving the babies to die.

Catherine talks about elf-bolts and cows, the black press, and her bed in the fairy cave. She talks as though she knows more than Nelly, as though she is better off. The black press turns out to be a mirror. Catherine, lost without her Heathcliff, cannot recognize her own reflection in the mirror. Afraid it is a ghost, she makes Nelly cover it.

Chapter 13

Hindley, crazed with the loss of his wife and his land, tells Isabella about his plan to kill Heathcliff. Every night he tries to open Heathcliff's bedroom door, and when one night it is unlocked, he plans to shoot him. He believes some kind of devil urges him to settle the score this way.

Chapter 14

Heathcliff tells Nelly how blinded Isabella was to him, and how every act of meanness and violence just made her come back for more. He did nothing illegal, so she would have no grounds for divorce. Nelly is horrified at this speech and thinks Heathcliff is crazy.

Heathcliff suggests to Nelly that Isabella isn't capable of taking care of herself because she is crazy. Before coming to the Heights, Isabella never exhibited any such behavior. It is only her association with Heathcliff that seems to have brought it out.

Chapter 15

Heathcliff insists he has another visit with Catherine, despite the disastrous effects of his last one. She is dying, and her face is wild and pale. He sees that she is mad, and it hurts to see her so tortured. They embraced almost violently, and Heathcliff foams at the mouth like a wild animal.

Chapter 28

Like her mother, Cathy's fits are frightening. She married Linton, but Heathcliff still has not released her. With her father near death, Cathy becomes crazy with the idea that she may not see him before he dies. Unlike her mother, whose fits were selfish and meant to hurt others, Cathy's arise from a fear of hurting her father. Her frenzy scares Linton so much that he agrees lets her out.

Chapter 34

After nights of wandering the moors, and many days without food, Heathcliff is going mad. His face and eyes are altered; he seems excitable and agitated. There is also a strange happiness in his face. When he returns home the night before his death, Nelly hears him say Catherine's name as though she was present. She can also hear him mumbling in low tones, talking to someone who isn't there. He believes Catherine has been haunting him for years, and now that he is near death, he acts as though Catherine's spirit is closer than ever.

Topic Tracking: Nature

Chapter 1

Wuthering Heights, the home of the Earnshaws, was built alongside the moors. Winds whip across these barren fields, making the growth of trees impossible. The estate received its name because of how bad weather attacks the house and its surroundings. The moors are the favorite place for Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff to play, and it later becomes the playground of Cathy Linton. Like the Heights, which must be strong to stand against the wind, the children who love the moors are strong and independent. Neither Edgar or Isabella Linton express much interest in this barren landscape, and Linton Heathcliff is too ill to traverse the moors.

Chapter 5

At the time of Mr. Earnshaw's death, a strong wind wrapped and howled around Wuthering Heights. He was sitting inside with Catherine and the rest of the family, safe and warm inside the house. The wind roared down the chimney, and beat at the moors. A change was coming and the wind signaled it.

Chapter 8

One day when Hindley is out, Heathcliff hopes to spend the day with Catherine. But she has already invited Edgar Linton over, and Heathcliff is very jealous. Catherine complains that Heathcliff is no longer a very interesting companion, and he leaves in a huff at the sound of Edgar's horse. Heathcliff leaves as Edgar enters:

"Doubtless Catherine marked the difference between her friends, as one came in and the other went out. The contrast resembled what you see in exchanging a bleak, hilly, coal country for a beautiful fertile valley; and his voice and greeting were as opposite as his aspect." (Chapter 8, pg. 63)

Chapter 12

After the fight between Heathcliff and Edgar, Catherine determines to make herself mad. She refuses to eat for several days, and she becomes delusional. Having not left her room in days, she insists on opening the window and letting in the cold air. She thinks the only thing that will help her recover and feel like herself again is to be outdoors. The wind, a walk on the moors, will bring her back to herself.

Edgar comes into Catherine's bedroom and helps Nelly pull her away from the window. She is not happy to see her husband, and tells him that soon she will be dead, and among the hills. She wants to be buried not in the chapel, as the Lintons are, but under the stars. The Lintons are not outdoors people the way the Earnshaws are. They are more delicate, and reserved. Catherine wants to be buried in accord with the way she lived her life.

Catherine makes a distinction between her body and her soul. She tells Edgar that he may hold her body, but that her soul belongs outside, on the moors. She has a strong connection with the moors, and she feels she belongs there more than anywhere else.

Chapter 13

It is early spring and the snow is almost gone. Edgar, looking at his ailing wife, remarks that if she could walk outside on the hills, she would likely get better. He cannot deny his wife's connection with nature, and how much its absence has affected her.

Chapter 15

Catherine is no longer dangerously ill, but she is weakened and changed. Feeling like a caged animal, she tells Nelly how much she wishes to be outside, and to be always there--to be dead. She will then be apart and free, as she cannot be now.

Chapter 16

When Nelly goes to tell Heathcliff that Catherine has died, she finds him leaning against a tree. His hair is wet with dew, and he has been there so long that passing animals neither notice nor fear him. He has let himself get as close, without dying, to the nature of which his Catherine is now a part.

The townspeople are surprised that Catherine is buried not in the chapel, the house of God, or under the stone monument of the Linton's, or with her own family. Instead she is buried in the graveyard, so close to its edge that the plants of the moors are spilling inside it.

Chapter 17

After Catherine's death, a snow interrupts this early month of summer. The early flowers die under the drifts, birds go silent, and young plants die. Nature becomes completely silent in her absence, as though it is in mourning.

Chapter 22

Cathy is depressed by her father's illness. They used to take long walks together, but now he is forced to stay indoors. Nelly offers herself as a substitute, and she and Cathy go for a walk. Nelly tries to cheer her up, pointing out one of the last flowers of summer. But Cathy will not pick it, as Nelly suggests. It looks sad, and she prefers to leave it alone. Nelly compares the lonely flower to little Cathy, who is pale and solemn.

Chapter 27

Edgar Linton is dying, and Cathy hates to be away from her father's bedside. Nelly thinks a visit to her cousin might cheer her, and they head over in the afternoon. Everything about the hills and sun was comforting, but her grief was so strong that even a beautiful day could not cheer her.

"Catherine's face was just like the landscape--shadows and sunshine flitting over it in rapid succession; but the shadows rested longer, and the sunshine was more transient" (Chapter 27, pg.343).

Chapter 29

Heathcliff tells Nelly how after Catherine's death, he almost dug up her grave. It was killing him to know that only a few feet of earth separated them, and he thought that if she was cold, he could just imagine it was the wind.

Chapter 33

Joseph explodes when he sees that his trees have been dug up. He tells Heathcliff that he planned to die here, but with such changes, he cannot stand to be here. To have Cathy tear up his garden and to have Hareton help her, breaks his heart

The Supernatural

Chapter 3

Waking from a violent dream, Mr. Lockwood, who is sleeping in Catherine's bed, sees a ghost. It is a young girl who calls herself Catherine Linton. Mr. Lockwood will not let her in, even though she complains she has been wandering twenty years. It was about twenty years ago that Catherine Linton died, and Heathcliff begged her to haunt him until he died.

Chapter 9

Nelly, who claims not to believe in ghosts, does have some superstitions. She does not like to hear other people's dreams, and she refuses to hear Catherine's. Catherine suggests that it was a bad dream, maybe a prophecy. Catherine tells Nelly that she dreamed she was in heaven, and unhappy there. But Nelly stops her then, refusing to hear more. Catherine and Heathcliff are tightly connected, and Heathcliff has said that his heaven is not the religious kind, but an eternity with Catherine. Perhaps she is of the same opinion, and her dream foretold their sad end.

The night of Heathcliff's departure there is a terrible storm. Full of sorrow and guilt, Catherine refused to come inside from the drenching rain. Either the wailing winds or the thunderstorm broke a nearby tree in half, the sound terrifying Nelly and Joseph. Joseph thought the storm was a sign of the end, and Nelly wondered for once if Joseph was right.

Chapter 11

One day when passing the road to Wuthering Heights, Nelly had a vision. Thinking about Hindley, she saw his young face, with his eyes staring into hers. She suddenly felt a need to go to the Heights, and make sure he was all right. Upon reaching the gates, she saw a boy who matched her phantom. It was Hareton, Hindley's son, whom she had cared for before moving to the Grange.

Chapter 15

After the fight between Heathcliff and Edgar, Catherine became mad. After her illness receded, she became listless, quiet, and pale. Her hair she wore loose down her back, and the calmness left by her illness made her beautiful in a strange, ghostly way.

Chapter 16

Heathcliff has guessed that Catherine is dead even before Nelly tells him. He is greatly troubled by the fact that she never regained consciousness enough to ask for him before she died. Feeling cheated and alone, he begged and prayed that she would not be at peace. Since he cannot rest without her, he wants her ghost to haunt him until he dies. Unlike Linton, who is sorrowful but accepting of his wife's death, Heathcliff selfishly hopes that Catherine will have no peace without him.

Chapter 17

After Catherine's death, Isabella escapes to the Grange. She wants to leave Heathcliff, who has become mad since Catherine's death. He refuses all company, spending most of his time by the Grange. He is so interested in the dead that Isabella calls him a goblin. She is no longer sure if she married a man, a devil, or a ghost.

Chapter 29

Heathcliff, with no respect for the dead, had the gravedigger open Catherine's coffin while he was preparing Edgar's. The coffin was opened, and Catherine's face looked the same as the day she died, nearly twenty years ago.

Desperate to be with her in death, he knocked out one side of her coffin, with the instructions that one side of his be knocked out too, so that they might lie together for eternity. He tells Nelly that without this measure, he would likely haunt them all.

Heathcliff also confessed to Nelly that right after Catherine's death he almost dug her up. He wanted to hold her again, and he had begun to dig when he heard a sigh nearby, and felt a warm breath at his ear. He was certain it was Cathy, not in the grave, but on earth! After that time he was constantly looking for her, and always expected to see her wherever he went. But though he often thought he felt her, she did not show herself again.

Chapter 34

Heathcliff has been talking to Nelly about his approaching death. He has been acting strangely, refusing food and company. When Nelly came inside one night, she found him leaning out the window, intent on his cherished moors. The fire was low and the room was dark. And when Nelly's candle revealed his face, his frightful features made her think he was a ghost.

She thinks about his unknown origins, and wonders if he is human or monster.

The next morning, Nelly was alone with Heathcliff during breakfast. He asked Nelly if they were alone, as his eyes fix on a person whom Nelly can't see. He is looking outside the house, and seemed troubled by what the ghost told him. Nelly saw nothing and tried again to get him to eat.

After a late-night walk on the moors, Nelly hears Heathcliff come inside. He is addressing Catherine, and speaking to her as though she were alive and present. The closer Heathcliff grows to death, the more contact he seems to have with Catherine's ghost.

Heathcliff gives another clue of Catherine's haunting when he tells Cathy that even if everyone else hated him, there was still one who would want his company, chasing him always.

When Nelly enters Heathcliff's room, his eyes seem to look intensely at her, and his lips to smile. But he is dead, and the window to the moors is wide open. His face looks so strangely happy that Nelly tries to close his eyes, but they will not. His expression of joy seems frozen for all eternity.

Many townspeople believe Heathcliff is a ghost, and some claim to have met him along the moors, by the church, or in Wuthering Heights. Joseph also believes he has seen Heathcliff and Catherine looking out her window on rainy nights. One day, Nelly met a terrified shepherd, who was only a young boy. He claimed to have seen Heathcliff and a woman, who would not let him pass on the road. Nelly tries not to believe, but she still does not go out alone at night, or stay alone in the house if she can avoid it.

Violence

Chapter 1

Mr. Lockwood has a bad introduction to Wuthering Heights when the dogs attack him. Heathcliff warns him that they are not pets, but when Heathcliff leaves the room, Mr. Lockwood makes faces at them. When the dogs attack, Heathcliff does not hurry to help him. It is the maid who finally comes to his aid. Mr. Lockwood is not used to such treatment, and he tells Heathcliff that if he'd been bitten, he would have responded by hitting the dog. After just a few moments in the house, Mr. Lockwood is moved to contemplate violence.

Chapter 2

The snow is deep on the moors, but Heathcliff will not give Mr. Lockwood a guide home, nor does he want to let him stay at the Heights. Exasperated, Mr. Lockwood grabs Joseph's lantern and decides to try and get home himself. Joseph does not care that Mr. Lockwood said he would return the lantern, and he sends his dogs to attack him. The dogs do not hurt him, but the trouble gives Mr. Lockwood a nosebleed, and the dogs do not let him alone. Heathcliff laughed at this, and only Zillah, the housemaid, came to his aid.

Chapter 3

In Mr. Lockwood's dream, he and Joseph must listen to a preacher moralize about hundreds of sins. When Mr. Lockwood stands up to expose the preacher as a sinner himself, the preacher has the congregation attack him. Everyone, including Joseph, start to attack him with pilgrim sticks, which are meant to aid pilgrims on their travels to holy places.

When the ghost will not let go of Mr. Lockwood, he hurts it, even though it is a child. He drags her arm on the broken glass, and the blood flows onto the bed.

Later Mr. Lockwood nearly witnesses a violent attack against another Catherine. When Mrs. Heathcliff mouths off to her father-in-law, Mr. Lockwood sees her shrink back as though she expects him to hit her. It seems obvious that Heathcliff has hit her before, and he is only holding back because of Mr. Lockwood's presence.

Chapter 4

Nelly tells Mr. Lockwood a story from Heathcliff's childhood. Mr. Earnshaw had favored him, and he was able to get whatever he wanted. When Mr. Earnshaw gave each boy a horse, Heathcliff insisted on having the prettier one. When this one got hurt, Heathcliff tried to take Hindley's horse. Heathcliff threatened to tell father about all the times Hindley beat him, and in retaliation, Hindley hit him. Heathcliff seems to want Hindley to hit him, so he will have something to hold against him. Hindley complies, hitting Heathcliff with an iron weight. He tells him to take his horse, and he hopes it kicks him. The boys are very violent towards each other, and Heathcliff knows he can use it to his advantage. He doesn't even need to fight back, because father will always take his side.

Chapter 6

The Lintons, though they seem more gentle and civilized, do have violence in their hearts. It is a foolish violence, as Isabella and Edgar fight over a puppy. The violence at the Earnshaw estate is more serious, and the Lintons look silly to Catherine and Heathcliff.

Ironically, Catherine is a victim of violence at the Linton's, when their dog bites her ankle as she and Heathcliff try to escape.

Chapter 7

Heathcliff is jealous of Edgar Linton, who is so pale and delicate and well mannered. He hates that Catherine likes him, and when Linton makes a comment about Heathcliff's hair, Heathcliff throws hot applesauce in his face.

Heathcliff's violence is answered with more violence. Hindley took him upstairs and beat him, and when he came back down he told Linton that next time he should beat him himself.

Chapter 9

In his madness, Hindley has become violent. He sticks a knife into Nelly's mouth, angry that she had not yet killed his son, as he'd asked. Then his mood changes, and he wants to hug his son. Even affection is violent with him, and the boy pulls away from his father's rough embrace.

Chapter 10

Jealous of Isabella's attraction to Heathcliff, Catherine torments her sister-in-law with his presence. Catherine grabs hold of Isabella's arm, and this Earnshaw force drives Isabella to be violent too, sinking her nails into Catherine.

Chapter 11

Since Catherine's marriage, Hareton has been solely under the care of Heathcliff, Joseph, and Hindley. Heathcliff is malicious, Joseph is rough, and Hindley is crazy and a drunk. Under their teaching, he has become mean, vulgar, and violent. He throws a stone at Nelly, whose kind care he has already forgotten. Heathcliff and Catherine are arguing over his conduct with Isabella when Edgar enters. He is not a violent man, and all the agitation makes him breathless and trembling. Finally, after being excessively provoked by Heathcliff, this gentle man hits the brute in the throat.

Chapter 12

Nelly is shocked to find Isabella's dog hung from the Grange wall, near death. She soon learns that Isabella ran off with Heathcliff, and it seems likely that Heathcliff performed this vile act. But Isabella allowed him to do it.

Chapter 14

Heathcliff makes fun of Isabella, who was not disgusted by any of his violence, so strong was her infatuation. Under the spell of Heathcliff, Isabella changed and grew more hardened and used to violence, but still foolishly expected that her rough husband could love her.

Chapter 16

Suffering from the loss of Catherine, Heathcliff hits his head against a tree, causing it to bleed. Nelly sees many bloodstains on the tree, and guesses that Heathcliff had inflicted this pain on himself many times during the night.

Chapter 17

Isabella is so repulsed by her husband and Wuthering Heights that she agrees to let Hindley lock Heathcliff out. But she will not agree to violence, believing that no good ever comes of such actions, and the aggressor is often hurt as well. She does not yet share Heathcliff and Hindley's delight in the suffering of others. Both these men are desperate for revenge, with Hindley trying to shoot Heathcliff, and Heathcliff beating Hindley senseless.

Isabella is beginning to enjoy seeing others suffer. After the incident between Hindley and Heathcliff, Isabella is happy to see Heathcliff looking upset, and she taunts him about Catherine until he cries. Her cruel words lead to a cruel act, just as she previously feared--Heathcliff stabs her with a knife. The bigger surprise is that Isabella, wild and changed, throws it back at him, hoping to wound him.

Chapter 24

Linton is so weak and ill that Hareton does not have to hit him in order to hurt him. After being forced from the living room, Linton became hysterical and had a terrible coughing fit. Cathy still blamed Hareton, and she hit him with her whip as she left.

Chapter 27

When Heathcliff imprisons Cathy and Nelly, Cathy turns violent. She tries to pull the key from his hands, then bites him. Like a caged animal, she frantically tries what she can to get free. To repay her for this act, Heathcliff slapped her head repeatedly.

Chapter 31

Cathy teases Hareton so much that finally he cannot stand it anymore. Unable to match her wit, he uses his fists to quiet her.

Chapter 33

Cathy angers Heathcliff, and he grabs her hair with the intention of beating her. But something comes over him and he releases her, unexpectedly. It is unusual for Heathcliff to miss a chance to abuse someone, and they do not understand, but are grateful.

Questions and Quotations from our Webpage (some explained)

Leer el texto

Temas

📖Tarea

Read the following passage and the explanation provided for it. It points out one of the major themes in the novel.

It would degrade me to marry Heathcliff now; so he shall never know how I love him; and that, not because he's handsome, Nelly, but because he's more myself than I am. Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same, and Linton's is as different as a moonbeam from lightning, or frost from fire.

Explanation

Catherine's speech to Nelly about her acceptance of Edgar's proposal, in Chapter IX, forms the turning-point of the plot. It is at this point that Heathcliff leaves Wuthering Heights, after he has overheard Catherine say that it would "degrade" her to marry him. Although the action of Wuthering Heights takes place so far from the bustle of society, where most of Brontë's contemporaries set their scenes, social ambition motivates many of the actions of these characters, however isolated among the moors. Catherine's decision to marry Edgar Linton out of a desire to be "the greatest woman of the neighbourhood" exemplifies the effect of social considerations on the characters' actions. In Catherine's paradoxical statement that Heathcliff is "more myself than I am," readers can see how the relation between Catherine and Heathcliff often transcends a dynamic of desire and becomes one of unity. Heterosexual love is often, in literature, described in terms of complementary opposites—like moonbeam and lightning, or frost and fire—but the love between Catherine and Heathcliff opposes this convention. Catherine says not, "I love Heathcliff," but, "I am Heathcliff." In following the relationship through to its painful end, the novel ultimately may attest to the destructiveness of a love that denies difference.

📖Tarea

Discuss revenge in Wuthering Heights. In what ways is it connected to love? What is the nature of love in the novel, that it can be so closely connected to vengeance?

📖Tarea

Study the theme of love as power by examining Old Earnshaw's relationship with his children and Heathcliff. What connections are established between love and control? How is the pattern of loving and withholding love continued in subsequent generations?

📖Tarea

Explain how Emily Bronte stages the Conflict between Nature and Culture in Wuthering Heights.

Perspectivas

📖Tarea

Discuss the novel's narrative structure. Are the novel's narrators trustworthy? Why or why not? With particular reference to Nelly's story, consider what might be gained from reading between the lines of the narration. What roles do the personalities of the narrators play in the way that the story is told?

📌Tarea

How does Brontë maintain our sympathy for Catherine and Heathcliff even when their behavior becomes increasingly selfish and destructive?

📌Tarea

Make a chart of Catherine's behavior after Heathcliff's return. What judgment does it lead you to make about her character? To what extent is she responsible for the events that follow?

Progresión

📌Tarea

Answer the Review Quiz that you can find in the summary of the author in our Teoría de la asignatura and send it to me.

📌Tarea

The following questions, corresponding to the different parts of the story, will help you in writing a written paper or an oral presentation on Wuthering Heights:

The novel can best be read and discussed according to the significant divisions outlined in the synopsis: the prologue, the history of the family, the epilogue. These questions and activities can be used for whole class and small group discussions as well as adapted for journal or free writings.

Prologue (Chapters 1-3)

1. What is Lockwood's first reaction to Heathcliff? What connections does Lockwood think exist between them? What do Lockwood's comments about Heathcliff tell us about him? (Lockwood thinks that he and Heathcliff are alike, both misanthropists. Lockwood is afraid of human involvements and attachments, which is why he has chosen to live in such an isolated place as the Grange. In a perverse way he seeks out Heathcliff's company because Heathcliff wants to have nothing to do with him.)
2. How does the opening set the tone for the novel? Note the use of words like solitary, misanthropist, and desolation in the first paragraph. What mood does Brontë create with these words? (Sense of mystery, isolation)
3. How is the description of Heathcliff significant? ("He is a dark-skinned gypsy in aspect, in dress and manners a gentleman.") Note identifications between Heathcliff and animals in the opening scene. (Even Heathcliff identifies with his dogs-"Guests are so exceedingly rare in this house that I and my dogs, I am willing to own, hardly know how to receive them.")
4. After his second encounter with the inhabitants at Wuthering Heights, what conclusions does Lockwood begin to draw about their characters? (Heathcliff is savage; Cathy is a witch; and the rough Hareton is ready to fight at any imagined slight.)
5. Why is Heathcliff so moved by Lockwood's dreams? (This passage initiates one motif in the novel: The importance of dreams as a pathway to associations and knowledge not available to the rational mind. Students should watch for other references to dreams: Catherine's' dream of being returned to her childhood room; Nelly Dean's fear of dreams. There is a connection between "elemental" natures like Catherine's and Heathcliff's and the subconscious world of dreams. How could Lockwood's account of his dream be the catalyst that diverts Heathcliff from his revenge?)

Synthesis: Prologue-Chapters 1-3

Discuss the significance of each of the following quotes. In what ways do these quotes begin to shape our understanding of the characters or the themes of the novel?

1. "Mr. Heathcliff forms a singular contrast to his abode and style of living. He is a dark-skinned gypsy in aspect, in dress and manners a gentleman." (This description suggests the two side of Heathcliff's nature: the sensuous, natural man over which has been superimposed the manners and niceties of the social and

civilized world.)

2. "Terror made me cruel; and, finding it useless to attempt shaking the creature off, I pulled its wrist on the broken pane, and rubbed it to and fro till the blood ran down and soaked the bedclothes." (Lockwood's nightmare reveals his fear of human relationships; instead of helping the poor, wandering child, he desperately wants to free himself from its grasp. Lockwood doesn't want the demands that come with relationships.)
3. "Come in! Come in!...Cathy, do come. Oh do-once more! Oh! my heart's darling! Hear me this time, Catherine, at last!" (Lockwood overhears Heathcliff's anguished plea to Catherine to reveal herself. What is Heathcliff feeling at this moment? How does this speech compare with the portrayal of Heathcliff so far as a misanthropist, a man who doesn't have any feelings?)

History of the Family

This section covers chapters 4 through 31 in the novel. Because these chapters fall fairly consistently into units of three chapters each, we have subdivided the reading and discussion questions accordingly. The reading can be assigned in small or large units, and the questions adapted for class discussion or journal writing.

Chapters 4, 5, 6: Early history of the Earnshaw family

1. What are Heathcliff's origins? How does Heathcliff fit into the family? (Heathcliff is abandoned on the streets of Liverpool; although he is older than Catherine at the time Earnshaw brings him to live with the family, he never refers to his childhood. The deprivation and alienation of this period mark his character and explain why he is unable to form loving relationships. Heathcliff becomes Earnshaw's favorite, Cathy's close friend and soul mate, and Hindley's rival.)
2. How is Catherine described by Nelly? Is there any suggestion that Nelly is exaggerating or emphasizing certain traits over others? (Nelly describes herself as a "faithful servant," who is partial to the master. When she judges Catherine as unruly, it's because she makes too much trouble for Mr. Earnshaw. Also Nelly feels somewhat equal to Catherine since she has been raised as a member of the family and she doesn't like to be ordered around by Catherine. Resentment and jealousy characterize Nelly's relationship to Catherine.)
3. How does Hindley treat Heathcliff when he returns as master of the home after his father's death? (He makes Heathcliff take the role of a servant, deprives him of an education, and tries to limit his interactions with Catherine.)

Synthesis: Chapters 4, 5, 6

How do these quotes help us to understand the characters?

1. "I found that they had christened him 'Heathcliff;' it was the name of a son who died in childhood, and it served him ever since, both for Christian and surname." (The name "Heathcliff" suggests nature: the heath and the cliff, the moors and the rocks. It is also significant that Heathcliff does not have a proper surname; his identity or legal connection to the family is not legitimized. He will always be an outsider.)
2. "He complained so seldom, indeed, of such stirs as these, that I really thought him not vindictive. I was deceived completely, as you will hear." (Nelly continually fails to understand Heathcliff's true character even though his actions repeatedly disappoint her expectations. Why?)
3. "Her spirits were always at high-water mark, her tongue always going-singing, laughing, and plaguing everybody who would not do the same." (Nelly's description of Catherine indicates high spirits, but not necessarily bad behavior. Nelly complains that Catherine is not more sensitive to the feelings of others, but her behavior seems natural for a child. Think about Nelly's point of view. She would be about the same age as Catherine but she had a lot more responsibilities. Why might Nelly resent Catherine's freedom and place in the family? Compare this to Nelly's description of Heathcliff: "He seemed a sullen, patient child, hardened, perhaps to ill-treatment.")

4. "It is but a boy-but he scowls so plainly in his face; would it not be a kindness to the country to hang him at once, before he shows his nature in acts as well as features?" (This quote shows the emphasis upon outward appearance revealing the inner nature of a person. Heathcliff's features show he will be a villain. The teacher might ask students to talk about the self-fulfilling prophecy and how character judgments work upon a person to create behavior.)

Chapters 7, 8, 9

The triangle of Catherine, Heathcliff and Edgar Linton

1. How is Catherine changed by her stay at the Lintons? (She acquires the manners of a lady and enjoys nice clothing and the society life of the Lintons.)
2. What are Heathcliff's reactions to these changes in Catherine? (He envies Linton his blond good looks, his social standing and inheritance; he vows he will have revenge on Hindley for depriving him of his status and equality to Catherine.)
3. How does Hindley react to his wife's death? What connections can you see between his and Catherine's and Heathcliff's behaviors? (Hindley's excessive sorrow matches the extreme behavior of all the Earnshaws. Compare his actions to Linton's reaction to Catherine's death.)
4. How does Catherine feel about Heathcliff? (The students should closely examine Catherine's speeches on pp. 82-84.)

Synthesis: Chapters 7, 8, 9

Explain the significance of these quotes.

1. "I shall not stand to be laughed at, I shall not bear it?" (Heathcliff's pride begins to erect barriers between him and Catherine. Note: this passage should be returned to later to compare how Hareton reacts to the taunting of Cathy and Linton.)
2. "It struck me soon...there would be more sense in endeavouring to repair some of his wrongs than shedding tears over them." (Here is another instance of Nelly's loyalty to Heathcliff. She is prepared to overlook his ill nature because she sees him as the underdog. There is an identification in Nelly's mind between herself and Heathcliff. Students might begin to consider how Brontë manipulates our feelings towards Heathcliff. Why might we feel Heathcliff has been wronged? How does Brontë sustain our sympathy for Heathcliff?)
3. "Catherine and he were constant companions still as his seasons of respite from labor, but he had ceased to express his fondness for her in words, and recoiled with angry suspicion from her girlish caresses, as if conscious there could be no gratification in lavishing such marks of affection on him." (Heathcliff is constantly aware of the distance between their two stations in life and distrusts Catherine's affection. What effect do you think this distrust will have on their relationship? To what extent should Heathcliff distrust Catherine?)
4. "I've dreamt in my life dreams that have stayed with me ever after, and changed my ideas; they've gone through and through me, like wine through water, and altered the colour of my mind." (This is the dream that Nelly refuses to hear. What could it be? What clues are there in Catherine's speech?)
5. "Nelly, I am Heathcliff! He's always, always in my mind-not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself, but as my own being." (Catherine sees herself and Heathcliff as one. Does she love Heathcliff or her self in him?)

Chapters 10, 11, 12

Catherine and Edgar Linton's Married Life

1. In what ways is Heathcliff changed when he returns to Wuthering Heights? Why does he return? (Great physical changes are evident, but it soon becomes clear that he is not reconciled to losing Catherine. He begins to plan to revenge himself on the whole Earnshaw and Linton clan.)

2. What is Catherine's reaction to Isabella's infatuation with Heathcliff? (Jealousy, irritation; Catherine does not want to share Heathcliff with anyone. She embarrasses Isabella in front of Heathcliff.)
3. How does Nelly interfere in Catherine's affairs and how does she react to Catherine's hysteria and prediction that she will become dangerously ill? How culpable is Nelly for not informing Edgar about Catherine's illness? (Nelly actually precipitates the violent confrontation between Edgar and Heathcliff when she reports to Edgar the quarrel between Heathcliff and Catherine about Isabella.)
4. When Catherine becomes dangerously ill, to what time in her life does her mind return? Why? (Girlhood: a time of unrestrained emotions, a time when she was not caught in a conflict between the two sides of herself which are represented by Edgar and Heathcliff.)

Synthesis: Chapters 10, 11, 12

Explain the significance of these quotes.

1. "I've fought through a bitter life since I last heard your voice, and you must forgive me, for I struggled only for you!" (Heathcliff has done everything to make himself worthy of Catherine.)
2. "Tell her what Heathcliff is—an unreclaimed creature, without refinement, without cultivation; an arid wilderness of furze and whinstone." (Can we trust Catherine's description of Heathcliff to Isabella? What are her motives? If this is a true description, why is she attracted to him? If they are "one" as she said earlier, what does this say about her?)
3. "You are welcome to torture me to death for your amusement, only allow me to amuse myself a little in the same style, and refrain from insult as much as you are able." (Heathcliff resents Catherine's marriage to Linton and the way she tries to control him. He recognizes her manipulation and would like to pay her back for some of his suffering.)

Chapters 13, 14, 15

Catherine's Illness

1. Why does Heathcliff elope with Isabella? What does she discover about his nature? (Heathcliff sees Isabella as a tool to work out his plan of revenge against Linton. He feels total aversion for Isabella who reminds him of his rival.)
2. What happens when Catherine and Heathcliff meet again? (They both blame each other for the failure of their relationship. Catherine accuses Heathcliff of killing her and Heathcliff asks "Why did you betray your own heart, Cathy?")

Synthesis: Chapters 13, 14, 15

Explain the significance of these quotes.

1. "I have no pity! I have no pity! The more the worms writhe, the more I yearn to crush their entrails! It's a moral teething; and I grind with greater energy, in proportion to the increase of pain." (Heathcliff has lost all human feeling; he enjoys the suffering of his victims. Juxtapose this speech with his declarations of "deep" love for Catherine. Can he love only one person and despise everyone else? Can Catherine and Heathcliff create a universe of love which excludes everyone else?)
2. "I thought I prevented another explosion by my compliance; and I thought, too, it might create a favourable crisis in Catherine's mental illness." (Nelly justifies her compliance with Heathcliff. How culpable is she in this decision?)
3. "Because misery, and degradation, and death, and nothing that God or Satan could inflict would have parted us, you, of you own will, did it." (Heathcliff blames Catherine for their broken hearts; his life will be a living death without her.)

Chapters 16, 17, 18: Aftermath to Catherine's Death

1. What is Nelly's first thought after the death of Catherine and the birth of a baby girl? What does this continue to show about her feelings for Catherine? (She expresses no sorrow. Check her reactions when Catherine falls into a faint on p. 159. She is concerned about the master being left without an heir. It is cold-hearted but consistent with her attitude towards Catherine for Nelly to be worrying over legal considerations at this moment.)
2. What is Heathcliff's reaction to Catherine's death? (Anger and desolation.)
3. What is Isabella's response to Heathcliff's misery over the death of Catherine? How much satisfaction does she enjoy? (She taunts and torments Heathcliff that his love killed Catherine, but she is not satisfied with Heathcliff's suffering since she has not had a direct hand in causing it.)
4. What type of person is the child Cathy? How is she like or unlike her mother? What are her reactions when she first meets Hareton and learns he is her cousin? (Nelly describes Cathy's childhood. Cathy seems to be a happy, loving child. She is surprised to learn Hareton is her cousin since he is so rough and uncouth.)

Synthesis: Chapters 16, 17, 18

Explain the significance of these quotes.

1. "I cannot live without my life! I cannot live without my soul!" (Heathcliff desires torment for himself and Catherine rather than being left alone in the world. How consistent is this with the desire of a lover for his beloved?)
2. "I gave him my heart, and he took and pinched it to death, and flung it back to me." (How does Isabella's description of how Heathcliff destroyed her love affect our assessment of his character and love of Catherine? Note the contrast between Nelly's behavior towards Isabella and her behavior to Catherine during her illnesses.)
3. "Well, Miss Cathy, if you were aware whose house this is, you'd be glad enough to get out." (Nelly's hint leads to revelations about Cathy's connections to the Earnshaw family. Is this Nelly's intention?)

Chapters 19, 20, 21: "Courtship" of Cathy and Linton

1. What type of child is Linton? How much of his father, Heathcliff, is in his personality? How does his physical condition affect his father's reaction to him? (He resembles the Lintons closely and is sickly and frail-all characteristics which do not endear him to his father.)
2. How does Heathcliff plan to use Linton? (He wants to secure the Linton lands and property through the marriage of Linton and Cathy; his triumph over his enemies will be complete.)

Synthesis: Chapters 19, 20, 21

Explain the significance of these quotes.

1. "Do you know that, twenty times a day, I covet Hareton, with all his degradation?" (Hareton reminds Heathcliff of himself as a boy and how circumstances worked against him. But even though he pities him, he keeps Hareton in ignorance and poverty.)
2. "I began to dislike, more than to compassionate, Linton, and to excuse his father, in some measure, for holding him so cheap." (Nelly continues to make poor judgments. Why is it right or not right for her to expect different behavior from a selfish, weak child who is being manipulated?)

Chapters 22-28: Edgar's death and Cathy's downfall

1. Why does Nelly allow Cathy to visit Linton? (In hopes that Linton will not be as sick as Heathcliff says. Also, there may be some deeper motive depending on how complex the reader sees Nelly to be-perhaps she desires to see Cathy romantically involved.)

2. How does Linton get Cathy to want to visit him again? (He appeals to her pity; her desire to comfort him.)
3. Why is Cathy vulnerable to Linton's appeal for pity? (She thinks she can successfully nurse Linton back to health; she wants to mother him-to turn him into a pet.)
4. Why does Edgar agree to allow Cathy and Linton to meet on the moors? (Edgar, not knowing about Linton's true character and state of health, hopes that Linton will give Cathy some solace when Edgar is gone; also Edgar hopes that Cathy will be able to stay in Thrushcross Grange if she marries Linton, who will inherit it when Edgar is dead.)
5. Why do Cathy and Nelly consent to go to Wuthering Heights? (Cathy gives in to Linton's pleas because he is so upset.)
6. How does Heathcliff show his cruelty to Cathy? (He locks her up, slaps her, and prevents her from going to her father on his deathbed.)

Synthesis: Chapters 22-28

Explain the significance of these quotes.

1. "I can get over the wall," she said laughing. "The Grange is not a prison, Ellen, and you are not my jailer...And I'm certain Linton would recover quickly if he had me to look after him...I'd make such a pet of him, if he were mine." (This expresses Cathy's sense of independence and power. Nelly can't control her, but she is intent on controlling Linton.)
2. "I thought it over aloud, in my master's presence; walking straight from her room to his, and relating the whole story; with the exception of her conversations with her cousin, and any mention of Hareton." (If Nelly had leveled with Edgar at this point about Cathy's growing involvement with Linton and Linton's weak and peevish nature, then perhaps Edgar would not have allowed Cathy and Linton's involvement to progress to its dismal outcome.)
3. "Have you never loved anybody in all you life, Uncle? Never? Ah! you must look once-I'm so wretched-you can't help being sorry and pitying me." (This scene contrasts with the scene in the Phantom of the Opera in which Christine Daae throws herself at the mercy of the monstrous Erik. He, by contrast, has pity on Christine. Heathcliff cruelly rejects Cathy's plea. Heathcliff's obdurate inhumanity even to the children makes him one of the most thoroughly villainous characters in literature.)

Chapters 29, 30, 31: Cathy at Wuthering Heights

1. When Heathcliff comes to get Cathy to take her back to the Heights, what does she tell him that leads Nelly to say that Cathy seemed to have "entered the spirit of her future family?" (Cathy tells Heathcliff that they will have revenge in knowing that Heathcliff has the greater misery and is as lonely and envious as the devil.)
2. After Linton dies why does Cathy treat Joseph, Hareton, and Zillah so contemptuously? (She resents them for not offering her any support while Linton was dying.)
3. Why does Hareton burn his books in the fire? (Cathy has mocked his stumbling attempts to read.)

Synthesis: Chapters 29, 30, 31

What is the meaning of this quote?

"She has no lover or liker among us-and she does not deserve one...She'll snap at the master himself, and as good as dares him to thrash her; and the more hurt she gets, the more venomous she grows." (This view of the servant Zillah gives an image of how Cathy is responding to the alien atmosphere of Wuthering Heights. The reader must decide to what extent this image is distorted by Zillah's point of view.)

Epilogue

Chapters 32, 33, 34: Cathy and Hareton; the death of Heathcliff

1. How does Cathy show her sorrow for mocking Hareton's reading? (She tries to get him to read again by leaving her books about.)
2. What role does Nelly play in the reconciliation of Cathy and Hareton? (Nelly is the go-between for the two young people. She allows them to be together and encourages Hareton to be friends with Cathy, and then she delivers a present to Hareton from Cathy.)
3. What is the physical reason for Heathcliff's death? (He did not eat or drink for four days.)

Synthesis: Chapters 32, 33, 34

Explain the significance of these quotes.

1. "Con-trary!" said a voice, as sweet as a silver bell, "that for the third time, you dunce! I'm not going to tell you again. Recollect, or I pull your hair!" (Cathy teaches Hareton how to read and lovingly and playfully criticizes him with mock severity. This scene suggests how the horror of the power and love relationships of the older generation have been transformed into a romantic idyll.)
2. "The crown of all my wishes will be the union of those two. I shall envy no one on their wedding day-there won't be a happier woman than myself in England!" (Nelly reveals that she fulfills her own longings for romantic intimacy through the love of Cathy and Hareton.)
3. "I have lost the faculty of enjoying their destruction, and I am too idle to destroy for nothing." (Heathcliff does not show any magnanimity in his not destroying the lives of Cathy and Hareton. Rather, his energy for cruelty has faded as he has become more obsessed with the "ghost" of Catherine.)

Retórica y discurso

Tarea

Many of the names in *Wuthering Heights* are strikingly similar. For example, besides the two Catherines, there are a number of Lintons, Earnshaws, and Heathcliffs whose names vary only slightly. What role do specific names play in *Wuthering Heights*? (A sample-answer is provided for this question; you should answer the following ones in a similar way).

Answer

Names have a thematic significance in *Wuthering Heights*. As the second generation of characters gradually exhibits certain characteristics of the first generation, names come to represent particular attributes. The Earnshaws are wild and passionate, the Lintons tame and civilized; therefore, young Catherine Linton displays a milder disposition than her mother, Catherine Earnshaw. Linton Heathcliff becomes a mixture of the worst of both his parents. In other words, he possesses Heathcliff's arrogance and imperiousness, combined with the Lintons' cowardice and frailty. Names in *Wuthering Heights* also serve to emphasize the cyclic nature of the story. Just as the novel begins and ends with a Catherine Earnshaw, the name of Hareton Earnshaw also bookends an era; the final master of *Wuthering Heights* shares his name with a distant ancestor, whose name was inscribed above the main door in 1500.

Tarea

Repetition is another tactic Brontë employs in organizing *Wuthering Heights*. It seems that nothing ever ends in the world of this novel. Instead, time seems to run in cycles, and the horrors of the past repeat themselves in the present. The way that the names of the characters are recycled, so that the names of the characters of the younger generation seem only to be rescrablings of the names of their parents, leads the reader to consider how plot elements also repeat themselves. Explain.

Personajes

📌Tarea

Read the following description of Heathcliff and the explanation provided. Answer the following questions in a similar way.

But Mr. Heathcliff forms a singular contrast to his abode and style of living. He is a dark-skinned gypsy in aspect, in dress and manners a gentleman, that is, as much a gentleman as many a country squire: rather slovenly, perhaps, yet not looking amiss with his negligence, because he has an erect and handsome figure—and rather morose. Possibly, some people might suspect him of a degree of under-bred pride; I have a sympathetic chord within that tells me it is nothing of the sort: I know, by instinct, his reserve springs from an aversion to showy displays of feeling—to manifestations of mutual kindness. He'll love and hate, equally under cover, and esteem it a species of impertinence to be loved or hated again—No, I'm running on too fast—I bestow my own attributes over-liberally on him.

Explanation

This passage, from the first chapter and spoken in the voice of Lockwood, constitutes the first of many attempts in the book to explain the mysterious figure of Heathcliff, his character and motivations. Outside of the novel, when critics and readers discuss *Wuthering Heights*, the same question arises repeatedly. How is Heathcliff best understood? We see here that the question of his social position—is he a gentleman or a gypsy?—causes particular confusion. The situation of the reader, just beginning to enter into *Wuthering Heights* as a novel, parallels the situation of Lockwood, just beginning to enter into *Wuthering Heights* as a house. Like Lockwood, readers of the novel confront all sorts of strange scenes and characters—Heathcliff the strangest of all—and must venture interpretations of them. Later illuminations of Heathcliff's personality show this first interpretation to be a laughable failure, indicating little beyond Lockwood's vanity. Lockwood, in claiming to recognize in Heathcliff a kindred soul, whom he can understand "by instinct," makes assumptions that appear absurd once Heathcliff's history is revealed. Lockwood, while he rather proudly styles himself a great misanthrope and hermit, in fact resembles Heathcliff very little. In the many misjudgments and blunders Lockwood makes in his early visits to *Wuthering Heights*, we see how easy it is to misinterpret Heathcliff's complex character, and the similarity between our own position and Lockwood's becomes a warning to us as readers. We, too, should question our instincts.

📌Tarea

Analyze the character of Edgar Linton. Is he a sympathetic figure? How does he compare to Heathcliff? Is Catherine really in love with him?

Leer entre textos

Con voces críticas

📌Tarea

Five reviews of *Wuthering Heights* from January 1848 were found in Emily's writing desk after her death. Here is a short excerpt from Douglas Jerrold's *Weekly Newspaper*, January 15, 1848:

"In *Wuthering Heights* the reader is shocked, disgusted, almost sickened by details of cruelty, inhumanity, and the most diabolical hate and vengeance, and anon comes passages of powerful testimony to the supreme power of love—even over demons in the human form. The women in the book are of a strange fiendish-angelic nature, tantalizing, and terrible, and the men are indescribable out of the book itself." (The Brontës: *The Critical Heritage*. Ed. Miriam Allott. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974.) What is the review's analysis of the novel? Do you agree/disagree with the reviewer's comment and why?

▣ Tarea

Read the article by Joyce Carol Oates entitled "The Magnanimity of Wuthering Heights", originally published in *Critical Inquiry* Winter 1983 and reprinted in *The Profane Art: Essays and Reviews* Copyright © 1983 by The Ontario Review, Inc. You can find it in our Teoría. Write a summary of the main points defended in this article and agree or disagree with them.

▣ Tarea

The reader almost may interpret Wuthering Heights's impact on the Linton family as an allegory for the corruption of culture by nature, creating a curious reversal of the more traditional story of the corruption of nature by culture. Give your own opinion on this matter.

Con otros textos

▣ Tarea

Read the following quotation and the explanation provided.

The ledge, where I placed my candle, had a few mildewed books piled up in one corner; and it was covered with writing scratched on the paint. This writing, however, was nothing but a name repeated in all kinds of characters, large and small—Catherine Earnshaw, here and there varied to Catherine Heathcliff, and then again to Catherine Linton. In vapid listlessness I leant my head against the window, and continued spelling over Catherine Earnshaw—Heathcliff—Linton, till my eyes closed; but they had not rested five minutes when a glare of white letters started from the dark, as vivid as spectres—the air swarmed with Catherines; and rousing myself to dispel the obtrusive name, I discovered my candle wick reclining on one of the antique volumes, and perfuming the place with an odour of roasted calf-skin.

Explanation

In this passage from Chapter III, Lockwood relates the first of the troubling dreams he has in Catherine's old bed. The quotation testifies to Lockwood's role as a reader within the novel, representing the external reader—the perplexed outsider determined to discover the secrets of Wuthering Heights. Upon Lockwood's first arrival at the house, no one answers his knocks on the door, and he cries, "I don't care—I will get in!" The same blend of frustration and determination has marked the responses of many readers and critics when facing the enigmas of Wuthering Heights. The connection between Lockwood and readers is particularly clear in this passage. Catherine first appears to Lockwood, as she does to readers, as a written word—her name, scratched into the paint. When Lockwood reads over the scraped letters, they seem to take on a ghostly power—the simile Brontë uses is that they are "as vivid as spectres." Ghosts, of course, constitute a key image throughout the novel. In this instance, it is crucial to note that what comes back, in this first dream, is not a dead person but a name, and that what brings the name back is the act of reading it. We see that Brontë, by using Lockwood as a stand-in for her readers, indicates how she wants her readers to react to her book; she wants her words to come vividly before them, to haunt them. In this passage, one also can see an active example of Wuthering Heights' ambiguous genre. The work is often compared to the Gothic novels popular in the late eighteenth century, which dealt in ghosts and gloom, demonic heroes with dark glints in their eyes, and so on. But Brontë wrote her book in the 1840s, when the fashion for the Gothic novel was past and that genre was quickly being replaced as the dominant form by the socially conscious realistic novel, as represented by the work of Dickens and Thackeray. Wuthering Heights often seems to straddle the two genres, containing many Gothic elements but also obeying most of the conventions of Victorian realism. The question of genre comes to a head in the appearances of ghosts in the novel. Readers cannot be sure whether they are meant to understand the ghosts as nightmares, to explain them in terms of the psychology of the characters who claim to see them, or to take them, as in a Gothic novel, as no less substantial than the other characters. Brontë establishes this ambiguity carefully. The "spectres" here are introduced within a simile, and in a context that would support their interpretation as a nightmare. Similarly subtle ambiguities lace Lockwood's account, a few pages later, of his encounter with the ghost of Catherine.

📌Tarea

Ghosts appear throughout *Wuthering Heights*, as they do in most other works of Gothic fiction, yet Brontë always presents them in such a way that whether they really exist remains ambiguous. Thus the world of the novel can always be interpreted as a realistic one. Certain ghosts—such as Catherine's spirit when it appears to Lockwood in Chapter III—may be explained as nightmares. The villagers' alleged sightings of Heathcliff's ghost in Chapter XXXIV could be dismissed as unverified superstition. Whether or not the ghosts are "real," they symbolize the manifestation of the past within the present, and the way memory stays with people, permeating their day-to-day lives. How ironic, then, that Brontë's brilliantly imagined dialectic, arguing for the inevitable exorcism of the old demons of childhood, and professing an attitude toward time and change that might even be called optimistic, should have been, and continues to be, misread. What is your opinion on this matter?

📌Tarea

Read Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and write a small paper on the following subject: Monsters and Ghosts: Fears of sameness (the past) and otherness (the future).

📌Tarea

We have seen several narratives dealing with class conflicts (i.e. *Pride and Prejudice*, *Jane Eyre*). What role does social class and class ambiguity play in *Wuthering Heights*? To what extent is Heathcliff's social position responsible for the misery and conflict so persistent in the book?

📌Tarea

Read *The Mill on the Floss*, another novel of love across classes. How is it similar; how does it differ from *Wuthering Heights*?

Por géneros

📌Tarea

Wuthering Heights is a hybrid of three genres: the Gothic novel (utilizes the mysterious, the supernatural, the horrific, the romantic); the romance novel (emphasizes love and passion, represents the notion of lovers destined for each other); It is designed to both horrify and fascinate readers with scenes of passion and cruelty. There are also supernatural elements and a dark, foreboding atmosphere) but Emily Brontë also uses realist fiction (incorporates vivid circumstantial detail into a consistently and minutely thought-out plot, dealing mostly with the relationships of the characters to one another. Discuss the purpose that serve each one of these in the development of the action in the novel.

Junto a otras culturas

📌Tarea

Wuthering Heights's setting has enormous importance in the novel. The novel's Romantic background is one of the reasons for this. Do you think that there could also be cultural reasons in Emily's portrait of the Yorkshire region?

You can find some information about Yorkshire and The Brontës in the following internet addresses:

The Brontë Sisters Web at www.lang.nagoya-u.ac.jp/~matsuoka/Bronte.html

Haworth, Brontë Country and the Brontës at www.bronte-country.com/

Brontë Parsonage Museum at www.bronte.org.uk/

En otros códigos

- ▶▶ Click here to view de Caspar David Friedrich's painting.
- ▶▶ Click here to view the setting of Wuthering Heights .

📄Tarea

In this image, the branches and the birds disappear in the distance, becoming part of the sky. The painting represents a Romantic path in search of cosmic unity. Read the information in our Teoría. Think about the influence of the physical landscape in Wuthering Heights. What role do the moors play in the development of the story, and in the presentation of the characters? How does Catherine's abiding love of the moors help us to understand her character? What do the moors come to symbolize in the novel?

Hacia la escritura creativa

📄Tarea

Some critics have pointed out that the extreme passions portrayed in Wuthering Heights have their origin in Emily's incestuous relationship with her brother. Read about Emily's life and write a critical paper giving reasons for or against this argument. You can consult:

Barker, Juliet R. V. *The Brontës*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995.
Gregor, Ian, ed. *The Brontës*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1970.
Winniffrith, Tom. *The Brontës and their Background: Romance and Reality*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1988.

📄Tarea

Freely write about the feelings of Heathcliff after he leaves Wuthering Heights, convinced that he has been rejected by Catherine, and his return three years later. How does he feel when he first sees Catherine again? What does he say he has planned to do after seeing her? Why does he change his mind? When does he initiate his plan for revenge? How does it begin to develop? How would their lives have been different if Heathcliff had never returned?

📄Tarea

Read Emily Brontë's poem "Remembrance":

Cold in the earth-and the deep snow piled above thee
Far, far removed, cold in the dreary grave!
Have I forgot, my Only Love, to love thee,
Severed at last by Time's all-severing wave?
Cold in the earth, and fifteen wild Decembers
From those brown hills, have melted into spring-
Faithful indeed is the spirit and remembers
After such years of change and suffering!
No later light has lightened up my heaven,
No second morn has ever shone for me
All my life's bliss from thy dear life was given-
All my life's bliss is in the grave with thee.

(The Complete Poems of Emily Jane Brontë. Ed. C.W. Hatfield. New York: Columbia University Press, 1941.)

Freely write about the connections between the poem and the love relationship of Catherine and Heathcliff.

En otros tiempos

The story of *Wuthering Heights* is told through flashbacks recorded in diary entries, and events are often presented out of chronological order—Lockwood's narrative takes place after Nelly's narrative, for instance, but is interspersed with Nelly's story in his journal. Nevertheless, the novel contains enough clues to enable an approximate reconstruction of its chronology, which was elaborately designed by Emily Brontë. For instance, Lockwood's diary entries are recorded in the late months of 1801 and in September 1802; in 1801, Nelly tells Lockwood that she has lived at Thrushcross Grange for eighteen years, since Catherine's marriage to Edgar, which must then have occurred in 1783. We know that Catherine was engaged to Linton for three years, and that Nelly was twenty-two when they were engaged, so the engagement must have taken place in 1780, and Nelly must have been born in 1758. Since Nelly is a few years older than Catherine, and since Lockwood comments that Heathcliff is about forty years old in 1801, it stands to reason that Heathcliff and Catherine were born around 1761, three years after Nelly. There are several other clues like this in the novel (such as Hareton's birth, which occurs in June, 1778). The chronology that you can find in our Teoría is based on those clues.

▣ Tarea

In his essay 'Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel: Notes towards a Historical Poetics', Bakhtin analyses how the treatment of time has evolved in the novel. He begins with "'adventure novel of ordeal'..written between the second and sixth centuries A.D.' Tema 5a and Tema 5c in our Teoría del Discurso Crítico offers a summary of Bakhtin's theories. Several of the features listed below are loosely connected with *Wuthering Heights*. Explain.

87-88 There is a boy and a girl of marriageable age. Their lineage is unknown, mysterious...They are confronted with obstacles that retard and delay their union... The lovers are parted, they seek one another, find one another: again they lose each other...⁹¹ Thus all of the action in a Greek romance, all the events and adventures that fill it, constitute time-sequences that are neither historical, quotidian, biographical, nor even biological and maturational. In this kind of time, nothing changes: the world remains as it was, the biographical life of the heroes does not change, their feelings do not change, people do not even age. This empty time leaves not traces anywhere, no indications of its passing. This, we repeat, is an extratemporal hiatus that appears between two moments of a real time sequence, in this case one that is biographical. Consult Bakhtin, Mikhail. 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* ed. Michael Hoquist, tr. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: Texas University Press, 1981. You can find the book in our library. Due to its difficulty this task will receive special consideration.

Other quotes

Quote 1: "was moved to rise and denounce Jabes Branderham as the sinner of the sin that no Christian need pardon." Chapter 3, pg. 20

Quote 2: "Terror made me cruel; and finding it useless to attempt shaking the creature off, I pulled its wrist on to the broken pane, and rubbed it to and fro till the blood ran down and soaked the bedclothes..." Chapter 3, pg. 22

Quote 3: "I cannot love thee; thou 'rt worse than thy brother. Go, say thy prayers, child, and ask God's pardon. I doubt thy mother and I must rue that we ever reared thee!" Chapter 5, pg. 38

Quote 4: "I'm trying to settle how I shall pay Hindley back. I don't care how long I wait, if I can only do it at last. I hope he will not die before I do!" Chapter 7, pg. 54

Quote 5: "*do* live more in earnest, more in themselves, and less in surface change, and frivolous external things." Chapter 8, pg. 56

Quote 6: "he had ceased to express his fondness for her in words, and recoiled with angry suspicion from her girlish caresses, as if conscious there could be no gratification in lavishing such marks of affection on him." Chapter 8, pg. 61

Quote 7: "Doubtless Catherine marked the difference between her friends, as one came in and the other went out. The contrast resembled what you see in exchanging a bleak, hilly, coal country for a beautiful fertile valley; and his voice and greeting were as opposite as his aspect." Chapter 8, pg. 63

Quote 8: "It would degrade me to marry Heathcliff now; so he shall never know how I love him: and that, not because he's handsome, Nelly, but because he's more myself than I am. Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same; and Linton's is as different as a moonbeam from lightning, or frost from fire." Chapter 9, pg. 73

Quote 9: "If all else perished, and he remained, I should still continue to be; and if all else remained, and he were annihilated, the universe would turn to a mighty stranger: I should not seem a part of it...Nelly, I *am* Heathcliff! He's always, always in my mind: not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself, but as my own being." Chapter 9, pg. 74

Quote 10: "I seek no revenge on you....That's not the plan. The tyrant grinds down his slaves and they don't turn against him; they crush those beneath them...Having levelled my palace, don't erect a hovel and complacently admire your own charity in giving me that for a home." Chapter 11, pg. 103

Quote 11: "Well, if I cannot keep Heathcliff for my friend--if Edgar will be mean and jealous, I'll try to break their hearts by breaking my own. That will be a prompt way of finishing all, when I am pushed to extremity!" Chapter 11, pg. 107

Quote 12: "It is not in him to be loved like me: how can she love in him what he has not?" Chapter 14, pg. 137

Quote 13: "*That* is how I'm loved! Well, never mind. That is not *my* Heathcliff. I shall love mine yet; and take him with me: he's in my soul." Chapter 15, pg. 146

Quote 14: "Kiss me again, but don't let me see your eyes! I forgive what you have done to me. I love *my* murderer--but *yours*! How can I?" Chapter 15, pg. 148

Quote 15: "And I pray one prayer--I repeat it till my tongue stiffens--Catherine Earnshaw, may you not rest as long as I am living! You said I killed you--haunt me, then!...Be with me always--take any form--drive me mad! only *do* not leave me in this abyss, where I cannot find you!" Chapter 16, pg. 153

Quote 16: "my son is prospective owner of your place, and I should not wish him to die till I was certain of being his successor. Besides he's mine, and I want the triumph of seeing my descendant fairly lord of their estates: my child hiring their children to till their father's land for wages. That is the sole consideration which can make me endure the whelp: I despise him for himself, and hate him for the memories he revives!" Chapter 20, pg. 191

Quote 17: "But there's this difference: one is gold put to the use of paving-stones, and the other is tin polished to ape a service of silver." Chapter 21, pg. 201

Quote 18: "He wanted all to lie in an ecstasy of peace; I wanted all to sparkle and dance in a glorious jubilee. I said his heaven would be only half alive; and he said mine would be drunk: I said I should fall asleep in his; and he said he could not breathe in mine..." Chapter 24, pg. 225

Quote 19: "He'll never let his friends be at ease, and he'll never be at ease himself!" Chapter 24, pg. 233

Quote 20: "Catherine's face was just like the landscape--shadows and sunshine flitting over it in rapid succession; but the shadows rested longer, and the sunshine was more transient..." Chapter 27, pg. 243

Quote 21: "I'm glad, for I shall be master of the Grange after him--and Catherine always spoke of it as her house. It isn't hers! It's mine: papa says everything she has is mine. All her nice books are mine; she offered to give me them, and pretty birds, and her pony Minny, if I would get the key of her room, and let her out; but I told her she had nothing to give, they were all, all mine." Chapter 28, pg. 257

Quote 22: "You have left me so long to struggle against death, alone, that I feel and see only death! I feel like death!" Chapter 30, pg. 268-269

Quote 23: "I have lost the faculty of enjoying their destruction, and I am too idle to destroy for nothing." Chapter 33, pg. 295

Quote 24: "Last night, I was on the threshold of hell. To-day, I am within sight of my heaven. I have my eyes on it: hardly three feet to sever me!" Chapter 34, pg. 300

Review Quiz

1. What is inscribed above the entrance of Wuthering Heights?

- (A) "Hindley Earnshaw, 1729"
- (B) "1623"
- (C) "Abandon all hope, ye who enter here"
- (D) "Hareton Earnshaw, 1500"

2. What kind of countryside surrounds Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange?

- (A) Moorland
- (B) Savannah
- (C) Forest
- (D) Grassy plains

3. What destination does the young Catherine have in mind when she leaves Thrushcross Grange for the first time?

- (A) Wuthering Heights
- (B) The fairy caves at Penistone Crag
- (C) The nearby village
- (D) London, where her cousin Linton lives

4. What is the name of the village near Wuthering Heights?

- (A) Loch Crag
- (B) Gimmerton
- (C) Heatherton
- (D) Purvey

5. In what region of England was Emily Brontë raised?

- (A) Sussex
- (B) Gloucestershire

- (C) Yorkshire
- (D) Warwickshire

6. Who plan(s) to live at Thruscross Grange at the end of the novel?

- (A) Young Catherine and Hareton
- (B) Lockwood
- (C) Heathcliff
- (D) Young Catherine and Linton Heathcliff

7. Over the course of the novel, which characters claim to see Catherine's ghost?

- (A) Heathcliff, Hareton, young Catherine, and Joseph
- (B) Edgar Linton and Heathcliff
- (C) Joseph and Nelly Dean
- (D) Lockwood and Heathcliff

8. On what day do young Catherine and Hareton plan to be married?

- (A) New Year's Day
- (B) The Ides of March
- (C) The anniversary of Heathcliff's death
- (D) Valentine's Day

9. Why does young Catherine climb over the garden wall?

- (A) To escape from the Grange
- (B) To meet with Linton
- (C) To retrieve her hat, which fell off as she stretched for the fruit of a tree
- (D) To escape her mother's ghost

10. Who raises Hareton during the early years of his life?

- (A) Hindley
- (B) Heathcliff
- (C) Catherine
- (D) Nelly

11. Who does Lockwood believe would have given young Catherine a fairy tale life, if only she would have fallen in love with him?

- (A) Heathcliff
- (B) Hareton
- (C) Linton
- (D) Lockwood

12. Which of the following characters dies first?

- (A) Mrs. Earnshaw
- (B) Mr. Earnshaw
- (C) Mrs. Linton
- (D) Edgar Linton

13. Which of the following characters dies last?

- (A) Mr. Linton
- (B) Catherine
- (C) Heathcliff
- (D) Linton

14. According to Heathcliff, when will Catherine's body decompose?

- (A) When a hundred centuries have passed
- (B) When Edgar Linton is finally cursed to hell
- (C) Never
- (D) When Heathcliff can join her in the earth

15. Where does Lockwood record Nelly's story?

- (A) In a novel
- (B) In his diary
- (C) In the margins of his Bible
- (D) In Catherine's diary

16. Which character speaks the words "I am Heathcliff!"

- (A) Linton Heathcliff
- (B) Hareton
- (C) Heathcliff
- (D) Catherine

17. Which three names does Lockwood find inscribed in the window ledge near his bed at Wuthering Heights?

- (A) Catherine Earnshaw, Catherine Linton, and Catherine Heathcliff
- (B) Catherine Earnshaw, Hindley Earnshaw, and Hareton Earnshaw
- (C) Isabella Linton, Isabella Heathcliff, and Isabella Earnshaw
- (D) Nelly, Joseph, and Zillah

18. Where does Earnshaw originally find Heathcliff?

- (A) London
- (B) Boston
- (C) Liverpool
- (D) Gimmerton

19. Where is Catherine buried?

- (A) In a churchyard overlooking the moors
- (B) In the chapel
- (C) Under a stone wall
- (D) She is not buried, but cremated, and her ashes are scattered in the Thames

20. At what age is Linton taken away from Thrushcross Grange by Heathcliff?

- (A) Four
- (B) Twenty
- (C) Eleven
- (D) Thirteen

21. At what age is Linton reunited with young Catherine?

- (A) Twenty-two
- (B) Nineteen
- (C) Sixteen
- (D) Forty-three

22. Whom does Hindley force to work as a servant in his home?

- (A) Joseph
- (B) Heathcliff
- (C) Heathcliff's son, Linton
- (D) Edgar Linton

23. Whom does Heathcliff force to work as a servant in his home?

- (A) Hindley
- (B) Catherine
- (C) Hareton
- (D) Isabella Linton

24. Where do Catherine and Heathcliff first become close?

- (A) In the nursery at Wuthering Heights
- (B) During Catherine's visit to Liverpool

- (C) At Isabella Linton's birthday party
- (D) On the moors

25. Whom does Edgar Linton sometimes forbid his daughter to visit?

- (A) Linton Heathcliff
- (B) Hareton Earnshaw
- (C) Isabella Linton
- (D) The evangelical servant Joseph

Screen Productions

(See Brontes (castellano))

Suggestions for Further Reading

Emily was the most reserved and least social of the Brontë children. Intensely private, she was infuriated when Charlotte read her poetry notebook and suggested she publish it. She normally did not show her writings to anyone. She liked to tell stories, though, and she and her little sister Anne invented Gondal, an imaginary kingdom. Emily never tired of creating stories about the land of Gondal and its inhabitants.

Though she studied away from home several times, Emily hated being away from Haworth, and she disliked the loss of privacy and writing time. She preferred to be at home, and she helped around the house, caring for father, and doing the finances and housework.

A dishonest publisher suggested that Currer Bell (Charlotte) wrote *Wuthering Heights* too, in the hopes of increasing sales, after the success of Jane Eyre. Critics found *Wuthering Heights* to be intense and original. But they were also troubled by what they saw as moral ambiguity. They did not think the villains of the story were adequately punished. After the publication of *Wuthering Heights* in 1847, Emily wrote little. She wanted nothing to do with publishing and fame, and was not even interested in making a trip to London to affirm that it was she and not Charlotte who wrote *Wuthering Heights*.

Wuthering Heights Norton Critical Edition. Note on Edition and Textual References: In 1963, William M. Sale, Jr. From W.W. Norton & Company, published the first edition of *Wuthering Heights*, which Emily Brontë published under the name of Ellis Bell in 1847. The first printing contains many errors in spelling and punctuation, and failed to incorporate many of the corrections that Brontë had made to the proofs.

The pseudonym from *Wuthering Heights* was not removed until after Emily's death in 1848.

Her sister, Charlotte Brontë, decided to revise the work for a second edition, published in December 1850. Charlotte also added a preface and a biographical note about Emily. Charlotte, however, made extensive alterations to her sister's novel, and some critics say that she did not understand or appreciate it well enough to take such liberties. No manuscript copy has ever been found, and thus the first two faulty editions of the novel remain our only textual sources. The Norton Critical Edition is based on the novel's first printing.

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Essays

[Charlotte Bronte - Essays](#)

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Los textos en castellano de las hermanas Bronte se pueden encontrar en:

<http://www.bibliotecadebabel.com>