# UNIT 13: EMILY BRONTË: *WUTHERING HEIGHTS*

## UNIT STRUCTURE:


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## 13.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- trace the storyline of the novel *Wuthering Heights*
- identify the important themes that add to the significance of the novel
- discuss the narrative techniques and Brontë's art of characterization
- appreciate the novel in totality as a work of one or more literary genres

## 13.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces you to *Wuthering Heights* a novel by Emily Brontë (1818–1848). The fifth daughter of an Irish clergyman, Emily wrote only one novel apart from a number of poems which were first published in 1846 along with those of her two sisters Charlotte and Anne. In order to understand the somewhat bewildering structure of the novel with its dark, gothic and supernatural elements, you will first have to understand

Emily Brontë's life history in some detail. Also after reading the novel, you might wonder why this talented writer did not pen any other work of fiction, which could probably have been of equal merit. (In fact, she and Anne together did write numerous prose pieces which were never published and are now lost.) Many readers and critics of *Wuthering Heights* ask the same question. The answer could lie in the quality of Emily Brontë's creative imagination as in the rather unusual circumstances of her life, or in the geographical location where she grew up. The story of the novel sets in the untamed countryside of 18th century Yorkshire and deals primarily with the violent passions of the main protagonists who held sway over the other dramatis personae. The theme and its treatment have little in common with the main body of Victorian novels, which were greatly influenced by the socio-political situation of the times. After reading this unit, you will finally understand that the far-reaching changes sweeping across England, and the world seemed to have had little impact on the private world of *Wuthering Heights*.

## 13.3 THE STORY OF THE NOVEL

*Wuthering Heights* is the story of two households and their occupants spanning two generations. Several people, dramatis personae and outsiders alike, take hold of the narration and the events unfold in different sequences of time. This is perhaps one of the most significant aspects of the novel.

Lockwood, a tenant, who has rented Thrushcross Grange for a year in 1801, is the first narrator. He begins by telling us about the experiences of his visit to Wuthering Heights, the other country house, in the neighbourhood where his property owner Heathcliff resides. He does not get a warm welcome but returns the next day when he also meets young Cathy and Hareton Earnshaw. A snowstorm compels him to spend the night there even after Joseph, the surly old servant, sets the dogs on him. He is led to sleep in a room, which seems to be out of bounds for everybody. Here he finds a diary written by Catherine Earnshaw some

twenty-five years ago. At night he is awakened by a child's ghost who seizes his hand when he puts it out of the window. As he cries out in mortal fear, Heathcliff rushes in and is overcome with passion at the sight of the ghost.

Next morning, Lockwood returns to the Thrushcross Grange where Nelly Dean, his housekeeper who had worked in Wuthering Heights in the past, begins to enlighten him about the place, the people and the happenings there. Her narrative goes back to 1771 when Catherine Earnshaw and her brother Hindley were children and a foundling was brought home by their father from a trip to Liverpool. This child of about seven who spoke *'gibberish'*, grew up to become Heathcliff. Nelly observes that the child brought about a division in the family as Catherine and her father grew attached to him and Hindley grew to hate him. There was such strife in the family that Hindley was sent away to college. After Mr. Earnshaw's death in 1777, Hindley, with his newly married wife Frances, returned home and began to wield his clout as the Master. He discontinued Heathcliff's education and set him to work as a farm hand. Catherine, however, remained his friend till an escapade with him introduced her to the Lintons of Thrushcross Grange. After spending five weeks there, she was transformed into an elegant young lady and her distance from the boorish Heathcliff grew. Yet the attraction between the two did not wane though Hindley continued to mistreat the latter. In 1778, Frances gave birth to a son Hareton but died later that year. Two years later Catherine turned fifteen and Edgar began courting her. She seemed to return his affections and this alienated Heathcliff further. In the meantime, Hindley grew addicted to liquor and began mistreating his infant son.

One night Heathcliff overhears Catherine telling Nelly that she is going to marry Edgar and he vanishes from home. Then the old Linton couple catch a fever and die. Three years later in 1783 Catherine marries Edgar and moves to the Grange taking Nelly with her. Heathcliff returns the same year having mysteriously become "quite the Christian" and rich. The marital harmony between Catherine and Edgar is shattered as her passion for the prodigal is rekindled. The disquieting atmosphere and the

latter's goading infuriates the mild Edgar. Things come to a head when Heathcliff seduces Isabella and she elopes with him. Catherine develops fever and delirium and in this state is remorseful at what she feels to be her betrayal of her true love. Heathcliff brings Isabella back to Wuthering Heights, which has become a dirty and neglected place. Hindley is a wreck and his son a violent little ruffian. In a reversal of circumstances, Heathcliff looks like a gentleman. Catherine does not quite recover from her illness and dies giving birth to a daughter. Before dying, she blames him and Edgar for her plight and tells him that he will suffer as she has. At her demise, Heathcliff falls apart completely and becomes a friend. After Catherine's funeral, all hell breaks loose. Hindley in a drunken rage tries to kill Heathcliff but fails and is almost beaten to death by the latter. Isabella flees to London where her son Linton is born. Six months after his sister's death, Hindley also dies. Soon it is discovered that all the Earnshaw property is mortgaged to Heathcliff and Hareton is a destitute.

Twelve years later Isabella, realising that she is dying begs her brother to take Linton away with him. Edgar does so but Heathcliff immediately claims his son and has him brought over to Wuthering Heights where he is a tyrant. When her father is away in London, Cathy goes on a clandestine visit to the other house and meets Hareton. On her 16th birthday, she meets him and Heathcliff out in the moors and is taken to Wuthering Heights for a visit. Here she meets Linton again and is told about the two families and their relationship by the new Master of the house. The man confides to Nelly his plan of marrying Cathy to his son, ostensibly for her security. Linton at first seems to be against it but terrorised by his father falls in with the latter's plan and woos Cathy. Initially Edgar too objects vehemently but gives in because a fever has debilitated him. We are already told how Hareton is deprived of education, and mistreated by Heathcliff and Joseph. He is often taunted by Linton and Cathy too for his ignorance. We also learn that the servants neglect Linton, and already of delicate health, the young man has bouts of cough and fever. Yet mortally afraid of Heathcliff, he helps the former trick Cathy and Nelly into coming to Wuthering Heights where both are made prisoners. Catherine's daughter resists fiercely but the

man who is obsessed by her mother beats her into submission. The next day she is married to Linton while Nelly is kept locked up. The housekeeper is eventually released but the young bride remains a prisoner held by her husband and his father. She is not allowed to visit her father who is dying but manages to escape and reach his death bed. After Edgar's funeral Cathy is taken back to Wuthering Heights. In an interesting aside Heathcliff confesses to Nelly that he had opened Catherine's grave to look at her face and has bribed the Sexton to bury him next to her. Very soon Linton also dies and his father gains full control over both the families and their properties. His motive of revenge is complete as he now tyrannises over the two children.

The story then moves ahead to 1802 when Lockwood returns to Thrushcross Grange after eight months. He visits the other house and finds some changes there. The young couple has become friends and Cathy has taken up the role of teaching Hareton. Nelly lives there now and tells the tenant that Heathcliff died three months ago. Towards the end he had difficulty in eating and breathing but was strangely excited. He also confessed to her that he no longer craved for revenge and was stirred by the resemblance both the children bore to Catherine. One morning Nelly found him dead beside the open window of Catherine's old room. He was buried next to Edgar and Catherine but the villagers maintain that they have seen him roaming the moors with his beloved. Cathy and Hareton are to be married on the New Year's Day of 1803 and will move to Thrushcross Grange with Nelly. Wuthering Heights will be shut and left in the care of Joseph. The story which began with Lockwood's first visit to the house ends as he leaves it for the last time.



## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Q 1:** Who is Lockwood and how did he meet Heathcliff?

**Q 2:** Where did Heathcliff come from and what place did he have in the Earnshaw family?

**Q 3:** What role does Nelly Dean play in the novel?

## 13.4 THE GENESIS OF WUTHERING HEIGHTS

Unlike her sisters' works which contain fragments of their own experiences, Emily Brontë's novel does not give us a glimpse of her own life or her times. The Pennine highlands running past Cowan Bridge and the low-lying moors where Haworth Parsonage was located combine to form the setting of *Wuthering Heights*. Apart from this, the only verisimilitude consists of some realistic details of Yorkshire life like the dialect and interior decoration. The theme and treatment of the novel is far removed from the conventions that shaped the writing of the Victorian novelists. Where then do we look for and find the source of this work which stands out starkly against the large body of the 19th century English Fiction?

We can say with a fair degree of certainty that the novel had its genesis in the tales of Angria and Gondal which the Brontë children had created during their lonely childhood days. These tales evolved into the poems the sisters wrote when they grew up. A poem of Emily's written when she was about eighteen which began: "I am the only being whose doom/No tongue would ask, no eye would mourn..." is highly reminiscent of Heathcliff. That the novel departs from the Victorian norms of realism can be appreciated if we recognise its emergence out of a deeply private and long extended meditation on the world of Gondal. This would also explain how Emily Brontë could compose a work so elaborately and chronologically complex, as well as meticulously plotted over three generations, within a nine month period (between sometime in 1845 and July 1846). She had ,over time, so completely internalised the characters, action and stylistic devices of the Gondal saga that she was able to give the early collaborative narrative the shape and tone of a conventional novel in a relatively short time. The witty urbanities of Thackeray, the domestic bliss of Mrs. Gaskell or the social criticism and humour of Dickens, which the readers delighted in, were conspicuous by their absence in *Wuthering Heights*. Instead, we have the incest motif, the macabre opening of graves, raging passions, storms and howling winds, the ghost of Catherine, the darkly irresistible Heathcliff—all staple

fares of the Gothic literature so popular during Emily's girlhood. The Romantic Poets seemed to have taken precedence over Jane Austen, Dickens, or George Eliot as far as her reading was concerned because elements of their poetry are dominant motifs in the novel. The protagonist of *Wuthering Heights* still had the groans of the Byronic hero when the characters of the contemporary novels had become immersed in the struggle of the individual within a rapidly industrialised and complex society. In a word the Victorian novel had started documenting the ascendancy of the Superego over the Ego while *Wuthering Heights* was exploring the private world, the id of its Heathcliff and Catherine.



## LET US KNOW

**Id:** That part of the unconscious mind consisting of a person's basic inherited instinct, needs, feelings and desire.

**Ego:** That part of the mind that is responsible for the interpretation of reality and a sense of personal identity.

**Superego:** That part of the mind that acts as a conscience and makes one aware of right or wrong.

Another interesting source may be found in the Brontë family's forebears in Ireland. As garnered from the account of William Wright in "The Brontës in Ireland" (1893), Patrick Brontë's father Hugh Brunty was adopted at a young age by a cruel and vengeful uncle named Welsh. This story became folklore in the Brontë household as the Reverend told his children many times about their grandfather's virtual kidnapping and childhood abuse by the uncle. Welsh himself was a central figure in the legend. An orphan found on a boat going from Liverpool to Drogheda, he was adopted by Hugh's grandfather. Like Heathcliff, Welsh was eventually able to drive away and disinherit all the legitimate heirs of the family. He also fell in love with the daughter of the house but was unable to marry her. This ruthless ancestor bears some resemblance to the hero of Bartholmew Simmon's Gothic story 'The Bridegroom of Barna', which was set in Ireland. This tale was published in 1840 in *Blackwood's*

*Edinburgh Magazine*, a leading journal regularly read by the Brontë family. The story tells of disinheritance, revenge, and an unconsummated marriage between a woman of high birth and a man from a lower class. Although we do not know for certain, the two narratives, one real and the other fictional, could have struck a chord in Emily Brontë and given birth to the novel in general and the character of Heathcliff in particular.



### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Q 4:** Can you trace the sources of *Wuthering Heights*?

**Q 5:** How did the great Romantic poets influence Emily Brontë in the writing of her novel?

## 13.5 MAJOR THEMES

*Wuthering Heights* is a complex mosaic where the themes of love, jealousy, alienation and revenge are woven around untamed nature and social conventions. Here the supernatural acquires the stature of a spiritual harmony which defies the grave or earthly separation. Though death and misery are recurring motifs, the book ends with the promise of regeneration, continuity and happiness.

**Theme of Love and Revenge:**

The theme of the deep and almost unearthly intensity of Heathcliff and Catherine's love is paramount in the novel. The quality of this passion is emphasised by her marriage with Edgar Linton which is the result of romantic conventions accepted and blessed by society. After she tells Nelly about her decision to marry Edgar, the housekeeper asks her:

> "Why do you love him Miss Cathy?"
> Catherine replies:
> "Well, because he is handsome, and pleasant to be with."
> "And because he is young and cheerful."

She further confesses to Nelly about her passion for Heathcliff:

"my great thought of living is himself. 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. My love for Linton is like the foliage of the woods. Time will change it…my love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath…Nelly, I am Heathcliff…" (Chapter IX)

Nothing could be more in contrast than the emotions she exhibits for the two men. Catherine's marriage to Edgar finds only a brief mention in the novel as if that period is unimportant. Heathcliff's ardour is expressed through his anguish at her death: Oh God!" he cries out, *"It is unutterable! I cannot live without my life! I cannot live without my soul!"(Chapter XVI)When he beholds Catherine's ghost out of the window, he bursts "into an uncontrollable passion of tears."* His urging:*" Come in! Come in!.../Oh my heart's darling, hear me this time…"* is the exhortation of a soul desperately craving to be united with his beloved who is no more of this earth but whom he wants more than any living being. A few days before his death in Chapter XXIX he tells Nelly: "I have nearly attained my heaven." The thought of his imminent union with Catherine has purged him of every evil intent and has ended his will to live.

Among the less important characters, Hindley's love for Francis resembles a little the ardour of Heathcliff and Catherine.As for Edgar and Catherine and later in the case of Linton and Cathy it is love thwarted rather than passion consummated. The end sees the redemption of Heathcliff through love and in the union of Hareton and Cathy the unrealised desires of an earlier generation find fulfilment.

You will also notice that a sense of physical love, whether consummated or not, is powerful throughout the novel, beginning with the initial couple Hindley and Francis who are described as openly "kissing and talking nonsense by the hour." Isabella's attraction to the swarthy Heathcliff is overtly physical, and all the Heathcliff imagery is passionate and sensuous. It is now widely acknowledged that childhood is not asexual, and the descriptions of childhood embraces, kisses and caresses of Heathcliff and Catherine remind us more of the Romantic fascination for the quasi-incestuous brother-sister bond than of childhood

innocence. Only against the force of their powerful physical and emotional need for each other does the separation of Catherine and Heathcliff, first by society and then by death, have its enduring power to move us.

Another important theme woven with the love motif is revenge. Hindley hates Heathcliff because the latter has come between him and his father. He banishes the interloper from the household and starts mistreating him as soon as old Mr. Earnshaw dies. Heathcliff on his part is so vengeful towards Hindley that his very mission in life is to take control of the Earnshaw household and make every member suffer. Even the love of Catherine does not deter him from his chosen path. Her marriage to Edgar extends the scope of his revenge to the Linton family. So powerful is the revenge motive that it determines the action of the novel till its conclusion. Only in the end do we find love conquering hatred to make way for regeneration in the form of Cathy and Hareton's union.

## The Romantic Legacy:

Emily Brontë's relation to the great Romantic Poets pertains to deep affinities in the creative spirit. The literal identification of the mind and nature, which is the essence of Wordsworth's poetic originality, is displayed to a certain extent by Emily Brontë most noticeably in Heathcliff and Catherine's out of the world interaction. As for Shelley, both the creator of 'Adonais' and Emily, in evolving their image of creativity, focus upon the conflict between sense and spirit and the quest for a real 'communication' with Spirit, or lost Beloved or dead Poet. They have a similar disdain for worldly doctrines and canonical religion, a pique against worldly injustice. In *Adonais* Shelley evokes the image of a kind of dream more real than life, while the climax of *Wuthering Heights* focuses on Heathcliff's struggle with the reality of spirit. Again, Emily Brontë found in Byron's work, a poetic legitimacy for the unbridled passions of her protagonists. Heathcliff is the archetypal 'Byronic' hero with his mysterious origins, lawlessness, fatal love and self-induced death. However, *Wuthering Heights* goes far beyond the ethos of the Gondal world that permeates a poem like 'The Prisoner of Chillon' in

terms metaphysical significance. A parallel can also be drawn between the poetic-philosophical quest of the mature Coleridge, as in his 'The Ancient Mariner' and that of Emily Brontë in her poetic novel.

## Theme of the Supernatural:

Reading *Wuthering Heights* can be both intense and engaging if we are willing to suspend our disbelief long enough to immerse ourselves in the remote Yorkshire countryside at the end of the 18th century as Emily Brontë's imagination recreated it. Realistic themes like family feuds traversing generations and class prejudices are set against the Gothic motifs of dark, stormy weather and supernatural intervention. The last mentioned feature is reminiscent of the transcendental and mystic notes that constitute the essence of Romantic poetry. In fact *Wuthering Heights* has been called 'a poem of a novel' because appreciation of it involves a complex emotional response as in poetry. The Supernatural is not an extraneous element but, as in the poetry of the great Romantics, integral to the theme and treatment. This is also made possible by the fact that the spiritual note underlying the love and revenge themes seems to culminate in the supernatural encounters between Heathcliff and Catherine. The reader is less offended by the lack of verisimilitude and more satisfied that the lovers come together after their separation on earth. The Supernatural is not imposed on an unsuspecting audience as the author has prepared us for something beyond the physical.

## Complicated Nature of Family Relations:

In *Wuthering Heights,* the perverse and complicated nature of family relations acts as a severe indictment of patriarchy on several levels. Catherine, as the Gothic Female heroine, shows her mettle from her childhood when she departs from the Victorian norms of behaviour, and is described as a "wild, wicked slip". Heathcliff is essential in the story for understanding her personality and dilemma. He represents a force of nature, the embodiment of pure, unrestrained, sexual energy. The Gothic reading approximates Freudian construct as it often depicts among other things, a quasi-incestuous attraction between pseudo siblings. The early relationship between Heathcliff and Catherine is meant

to suggest a primitive pseudo marriage, a union of soul mates who do not engage in a sexual relationship but who act and think of themselves as a dyadic, androgynous unit. This pseudo marriage is a denial of the traditional, patriarchal family where she is not defined by her father or his status because she has entered it on her own volition without the mediation of a male member of her family. Her union with the nameless entity Heathcliff is a repudiation of patriarchal values and social conventions. However, these norms prove too strong for Catherine, and her civilizing process begins with the courtship of Edgar. With it comes the realization that in the present world order a woman cannot exist apart from the men who provide them with name and status. Her marriage to Edgar is a vindication of the status quo but the Gothic heroine must suffer for her betrayal. To Heathcliff's final indictment: "Why did you betray your own heart, Cathy?...What right did you have to leave me?", she replies, "I have done wrong, I'm dying for it." Death is the only release for Catherine, her only possible return to childhood and the free innocence she experienced with Heathcliff in a sort of perverse realm of infantile sexuality.



### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Q 6:** What affinities did Charlotte Brontë share with the Romantics?

**Q 7:** Do you think that Charlotte Brontë succeeds in her use of the supernatural?

**Q 8:** How is the complicated nature of family relations portrayed in the novel *Wuthering Heights*?

## 13.6 EMILE BRONTË'S ART OF CHARACTERIZATION

The timeless appeal of *Wuthering Heights* comes as much from its style and language as from its characters and plot. The last two features are entwined in a way so as to imbue the story with a fairy tale element. This is true of the two protagonists around whom the other

characters function. Emily Brontë's novel is, after all, remembered as the story of Heathcliff and Catherine.

**Heathcliff:**

All through the novel, the character of Heathcliff remains an enigma. Largely the mystery of *Wuthering Heights* has its source in his unknown ancestry and his strange relationship with Catherine. When he is brought home by old Mr. Earnshaw, he is a dark-skinned child speaking "gibberish" and Nelly refers to him as "it". There is a sense of mystery about his disappearance as a youth and till the end about his death. His demeanour and attributes are likened to the devil's by Nelly. Hindley as a boy also calls him an "imp of Satan" (Chapter IV). It would, however, be too simplistic to explain his sadism and vengefulness as the working of a possessed soul. Critics point out that his cruel streak was, perhaps, the result of an infancy spent on the streets of Liverpool as an abandoned child and the subsequent ill-treatment by Hindley. Yet another interpretation of Heathcliff's character is likening him to the natural forces. He has variously been identified with the wild, lonely moorland, the raging storm and the beast within us. Another interpretation following the Jungian paradigm positions him as the destructive animus of a woman who has been taken over by the Shadow.



## LET US KNOW

**The Animus as a Hero:**

*Wuthering Heights*, one of the best known classics in English and also very widely read, is open to a large number of analyses. One school of criticism uses the Jungian paradigm and looks at Heathcliff as the destructive animus of a woman. This school sees his demonic attributes making sense only if one takes him to be a figure in Emily Brontë's psyche that it was necessary for her to create. This psychoanalytic approach traces his creation to Emily losing her mother in her childhood and her sisters' death during her adolescence. The isolated existence in the remote

moorland only worsened her situation. According to this theory the condition of serious stress she went through could kindle the animus or the underlying masculinity in a woman. There is nothing admirable or acceptable about Heathcliff's ruthlessness or sadism on the 'real' plane. It is difficult to see him as a lover, even a demon lover. Hence, the Jungians take him to be the embodiment of the animus that developed out of Emily Brontë's uncompleted mourning to protect her from collapse. But, the animus does not consist of fiendish and brutal qualities alone. So, Heathcliff is the agent of torture as well as creative development in his author moving her towards the happy and the regenerative ending of the novel. In this sense he can be accepted as a hero or even as an idol.

**Catherine:**

The other protagonist of the novel is the girl for whom Heathcliff lived. The characterisation is such that one is woven into the other. The temperament and conduct of one can be understood in conjunction with that of the other. Catherine's nature is very different from the maidenly subservience consonant with the Victorian model. She is not the obedient daughter and displays an unruly streak. Her enduring spontaneity gives way to arrogance and selfishness as she grows up and Nelly is irritated by her behaviour (Chapter VIII). She is partial to the foundling Heathcliff her father had brought home and is a more than willing partner in his escapades. The childhood kinship takes on a passionate overtone as they become adults and not even her marriage to Edgar can change the intensity of their feelings for each other. Her marriage spurs Heathcliff on to extend his cruelty to the Linton family but she is deliriously happy at his return. At one point, she even tells her husband, "I don't want you, Edgar; I'm past wanting you" (Chapter XII) but she wants him to go on loving her. Even in death she remains the self-absorbed being and tells Heathcliff, "You have killed me_ and thriven on it…I care nothing for your sufferings. Why

shouldn't you suffer? I do!" (Chapter XV). Her sufferings do not end with death as we know from the little ghost, which Lockwood sees. In conjunction with Heathcliff, we see the mystic side of Catherine. She makes us aware of her presence even after her death through the mysterious relationship she continues to have with him. Heathcliff and Catherine occupy the unique position of being inseparable in many ways. Critics suggest that they together are Emily Brontë's approximation of energies for which description and interpretation can only be limited. Whether they represent nature, primitive urges unregulated by social order, or an unorthodox moral code, they together pose a threat to the social, sexual or cultural status quo.

**Hindley, Edgar, and Isabella:**

They occupy the roles of minor figures whose attributes and conduct are again seen in the light of the protagonists' actions and measured accordingly. For example, Edgar appears gentle, refined but also delicate and weak by the side of Heathcliff and his love also pales in comparison. However, as the story progresses, he gains in stature while the latter grows more villainous. Hindley too is measured by the reader in terms of his relationship with Heathcliff. His temperament and behaviour are shaped early in the novel by the advent of the foundling and his subsequent position in the family. Isabella, with her refined, Victorian traits, acts as a foil to the unruly, tempestuous Catherine.



## LET US KNOW

**The Second Generation:**

The author does not delineate the children as comprehensively as the parents. Again, their action and personalities are seen only in the context of the latter. Cathy is as headstrong as her mother but is more caring. She is also capable of standing up to Heathcliff. Her marriage to Linton can be seen in the general scheme of things as reparation for her mother's

rejection of Heathcliff and her loveless wedlock with Edgar. Hareton is a mere sketch, a rough, unlettered bumpkin reformed into a good soul. It is as if this ploy is necessary for the resolution, that is Heathcliff and Catherine finding happiness through their progeny, to assert the philosophy that there is meaning in existence after all.

**Lockwood:**

Lockwood is regarded by many critics as the surrogate reader in *Wuthering Heights*. Although his first visit to the house is described as an unwelcome intrusion, he is drawn to the place. His second visit and the encounter with Catherine's ghost serve to build up the atmosphere and whet the curiosity of the reader. He also introduces us to Nelly Dean, through whom the story unravels. Lockwood, who has come to the remote countryside to recover from an unhappy love-interlude, prefers to be a recluse. To a lesser degree he is a misanthrope just like Heathcliff but minus the latter's viciousness. On this level, a parallel can be drawn between the two.

**Nelly Dean:**

Nelly Dean is a well-drawn character who comes across as a credible narrator. She, a "poor man's daughter," has been brought up with the Earnshaw children and thus has their confidence. By her own admission, she is self-educated and not a coarse, illiterate servant. Yet, as has been observed earlier, her role as a narrator is conditioned by her beliefs and outlook and hence it varies in sympathy. For example, she is hard on Catherine and Heathcliff but indulgent towards the younger members. She serves her purpose in the novel well because, apart from being familiar with the actual events, she can also divine the reasons behind the actions according to her own code of ethics. Her commentaries enlighten us about both the generations of Lintons and Earnshaws and give us an insider's perspective from the novel's inception till it is wrapped up with her being a part of the story almost all the time.



## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Q 9:** How does Emily Brontë conceive the character of Heathcliff in this novel?

**Q 10:** How could you understand the idea of the 'Animus as Hero' in the novel *Wuthering Heights*?

**Q 11:** Narrate briefly the significance of Lockwood as a character in the novel.

**Q 12:** What role does Nelly Dean play as a character in the plot of the novel?

## 13.7 EMILE BRONTË'S NARRATIVE STYLE

### Multiple Narrations:

*Wuthering Heights* is one of the most carefully plotted and constructed novels in English. It is a double generation story spanning some thirty years where the author uses the device of multiple narrations. The story is begun in medias res i.e. in the middle. The first two chapters make it look like a straightforward first person narration in diary form with Lockwood and Heathcliff being the main characters. However, as the story progresses, multiple narrators come into play and several voices jostling for attention gives rise to the concept of the polyphonic effect. The idea behind this kind of recital is to acquaint the reader with several viewpoints within a first person account.

The problem of subjectivity that this kind of account involves is surmounted by introducing sundry narrators whose relationship to the events narrated is varied. Some of them, like Lockwood, are strangers to the households while others like Nelly Dean, Zillah and Catherine's diary occupy the positions of familiarity in various degrees. Moreover, the incidents, which are recounted to Nelly by others, are given to us in the words of those directly involved. Therefore, we have, at various points of the novel, the narratives of Catherine, Heathcliff, Isabella and Cathy. The multiple narrative technique is highlighted by the fact that you have the

delineation from the perspective of those who are intimately involved as well as those who, like Lockwood, are late entrants and hence are only casually associated with the story. Therefore, a fair degree of objectivity is infused into the narrative. Pursuing this line of thinking, we can also say that Lockwood, the outsider, applies certain prescriptive social norms to an environment that resists them. Therefore, his interpretation of the behaviour and incidents is far from accurate. Here, we can cite the example of his comparison of himself to Heathcliff. Nelly's recounting is also subject to her interpretation, which is conditioned by her values and expectations. Her reliability is likewise affected.

Therefore, multiple narration is one of the important aspects of the novel. The principal narrator is Ellan Dean, the secondary one Mr Lockwood– one being a native, the other a foreigner'. But, the story is also told by several other characters like Nelly Dean who are important in the plot. Among these, Isabella is probably the most important, being the source of much graphic details about Hindley and Heathcliff. Heathcliff himself narrates the Thrushcross Grange adventure. In fact, there are so many narrators that we are never quite sure who is speaking. But you should pay attention to the different versions of the same Heathcliff-Catherine story narrated by the different characters. Lockwood starts the narration in the middle, or rather chronologically speaking, towards the end. The past is unfolded by actual participants of the drama and the resolution is brought about by Nelly enlightening him about the occurrences during his absence. It is, however, Lockwood who takes up the story again and brings it to a close with an interloper's musings about the graves on the silent heath and those in eternal sleep underneath.

### The Use of Time:

One of the notable literary devices that set *Wuthering Heights* apart is the handling of time. Emily Brontë uses her narrators in a very skillful manner to go back and forth in time so that the story unfolds at a natural pace. Despite the fact that the events are not recounted chronologically there is no jarring effect at the shift. You marvel at the

smooth passage of time though the narrative goes back from the present to thirty years earlier in Chapter VII, then jumps back to the present and again goes back to Hareton's birth. This back and forth technique is repeated several times in Chapters IX, XIV and XXIX but each time the transition is excellently carried out. Indeed, all these interruptions serve to infuse into the recital a soothing tone of normalcy, represented by the present, after high points of drama have been reached in the turbulent past. Lockwood is brought back to the narrative sequence time and again in order to remind the reader that it is a tale told to a visitor standing outside the convoluted world of the Earnshaws and the Lintons which is unfolding through the narratives of participant-raconteurs.

As we have noted earlier, one of the most meticulously constructed of novels, *Wuthering Heights* gives us a clear idea of the date of every important occasion though only three dates (November 1801, September 1802 and 1778) are specifically mentioned. The perfect control that the author maintains over the chronology of events only emphasises her superior artistic skills particularly as the novel was written within the space of a year.

As has been mentioned earlier, *Wuthering Heights* has the resonance of Romantic poetry, but in more ways than one. It is a poetic novel in both theme and technique. The use of linguistic devices like colloquial similes by Nelly and the evocative metaphors by Catherine and Heathcliff enhance the lyrical quality of the prose. The rich imageries drawn from nature are highly reminiscent of the Romantic poets, as are the simple phrases, which invoke the rhythm of country life. The other major stylistic device that endows the novel with its poetic character is the powerful use of sustained imagery. The two houses exhibit certain qualities which become highly symbolic. Wuthering Heights is home to people with primeval passions but it is also a place where food is plentiful and fires are blazing. Thrushcross Grange, on the other hand, houses people who are refined, formal and undemonstrative. Meals are dainty or frugal, and Lockwood at times does not have a fire in his study. One conjures up the image of wild, uninhibited behaviour and life in the raw,

while the other stands for cold genteelness and a rarefied atmosphere. Doors, windows, locks and keys are the other components which are used throughout to depict certain emotional and physical predicament that the principals find themselves in. The other imagery used extensively has to do with animals. Dogs are presented as savage brutes to show the feral side of man. Besides this, eyes, teeth and blood are also important motifs. The weather as well as the elements 'hot' and 'cold' are used in an evocative manner in the novel. You, as the reader, can try to find other images which abound in the novel and heighten its poetic appeal. *Wuthering Heights*, after all, is a work where meaning is inseparable from form, where nothing is irrelevant, superfluous or accidental.



## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Q 13:** Do you think the author has made a good job of handling time in the novel?

**Q 14:** Briefly comment on the multiple narrative techniques in the novel *Wuthering Heights*?



## 13.8 LET US SUM UP

From your reading of the different sections of this unit, you must have understood that the novel *Wuthering Heights* is an original and enigmatic novel, and it is hardly surprising that there are many different views about its sources, themes and the issues raised by the story. One view is that since Heathcliff is the heart of the story, the theme is an examination of some aspects of evil. Another is the passionate love and equally violent hatred and revenge. Others seem to have suggested that the love of the two chief characters Heathcliff and Catherine is really mystical, metaphysical, a symbol of the desire for death; for survival after death; of the permanence of the non-human life of nature; of the spiritual craving of the individual for union with this universal 'soul', so on and so

forth. You have read that the story is set in rural Yorkshire in the last forty years of the 18th century and the first two of the 19th that is, in the period immediately before the author's own life and therefore similar to the author's own experiences. Perhaps, Emily Brontë's primary aim in this novel was to present an image of life as she understood it, a microcosm, in which the central figure at last regains innocence, his evil elements dissolving in his passionate longing for the spiritual union with his lost love. You have gone through important aspects of the novel like the major themes, narrative technique, characterisation and the style of Brontë's writing which simply add more impetus to the significance of the novel composed in a historically important period of the 18th century.



## 13.9 FURTHER READING

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## 13.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

**Ans to Q No 1:** Lockwood is a foreigner who has rented Thrushcross Grange for a year in 1801… …he meets Heathcliff during his visit to Wuthering Heights, a country house in the neighbourhood.

**Ans to Q No 2:** Heathcliff is a foundling… …he was brought to the Earnshaw family by Mr Earnshaw from a trip to Liverpool… …he did not enjoy much favour from the family as he spoke 'gibberish,'… …also he brought about a division in the family as Catherine and her father grew attached to him and Hindley started disliking him… ….this was to cause a lot of troubles in the lives of the characters of the novel.

**Ans to Q No 3:** Nelly provides some important information on the character to Heathcliff… …when in 1802 Lockwood returns to Thrushcross Grange after eight months and meets Nelly… …Nelly who now lives there informs that Heathcliff confessed to her that he no longer craved for revenge… …one morning Nelly found him dead beside the open window of Catherine's old room.

**Ans to Q No 4:** We can say with a fair degree of certainty that the novel had its genesis in the tales of Angria and Gondal which the Brontë children had created during their lonely childhood days… … the Romantic Poets seemed to have taken precedence over Emily's imaginative mind… ...another interesting source may be found in the Brontë family's forebears in Ireland.

**Ans to Q No 5:** Emily Brontë's relation to the great Romantic Poets pertains to deep affinities in the creative spirit… …the protagonist of *Wuthering Heights* seems to have had the groans of the Byronic hero… …the literal identification of the mind and nature which is the essence of Wordsworth's poetic originality is displayed to a great extent… …moreover, Shelley's *Adonais* evokes the image of a kind of dream more real than life.

**Ans to Q No 6:** The essence of Wordsworth's poetic originality is displayed Emily Brontë most noticeably in Heathcliff and

Catherine's out of the world interaction… …like Shelley Emily seemed to focus upon the conflict between sense and spirit… …again, Heathcliff may be seen as the archetypal 'Byronic' hero with his mysterious origins, lawlessness, fatal love and self-induced death.

**Ans to Q No 7:** Realistic themes like family feuds traversing generations and class prejudices are set against the Gothic motifs of dark, stormy weather and supernatural intervention… …the Supernatural is not an extraneous element but integral to the theme and treatment like in case of the Romantics.

**Ans to Q No 8:** In *Wuthering Heights,* the perverse and complicated nature of family relations acts as a severe indictment of patriarchy on several levels… …Catherine, as the Gothic Female heroine, shows her mettle from her childhood… …Heathcliff is essential in the story for understanding her personality and dilemma… …the early relationship between Heathcliff and Catherine is meant to suggest a primitive pseudo marriage, a union of soul mates.

**Ans to Q No 9:** Heathcliff remains an enigma… …he had been a dark-skinned child speaking "gibberish"… …his demeanour and attributes are likened to the devil's by Nelly… … Hindley as a boy also calls him an "imp of Satan"… …critics point out that his cruel streak was, perhaps, the result of an infancy spent on the streets of Liverpool as an abandoned child and the subsequent ill-treatment by Hindley… …some likens his character to the forces of nature.

**Ans to Q No 10:** In the context of Carl J Jung's criticism, Heathcliff is seen as the destructive animus of a woman… …this school sees his demonic attributes making sense only if one takes him to be a figure in Emily Brontë's psyche… … the condition of serious stress she went through could kindle the animus or the underlying masculinity in a woman.

**Ans to Q No 11:** Lockwood is both a narrator and a surrogate reader in *Wuthering Heights*…. … although his first visit to the house is described as an unwelcome intrusion, he is once again drawn to

the place by its mystery… …he also introduces us to Nelly Dean, through whom the story unravels.

**Ans to Q No 12:** Nelly Dean, a servant, is a well drawn character who also becomes an important narrator… …although poor, she has been brought up with the Earnshaw children and gains their confidence… …her own admission, she is self-educated and not a coarse, illiterate servant ... ... she is important as narrator as her commentaries enlighten us about both the generations of Lintons and Earnshaws and give us an insider's perspective on the characters.

**Ans to Q No 13:** Yes… …despite the fact that the events are not recounted chronologically, there is no jarring effect at the shift… … the narrative goes back from the present to thirty years earlier in Chapter VII, then jumps back to the present and again goes back to Hareton's birth… … this back and forth technique is repeated several times in Chapters IX, XIV and XXIX but each time the transition is excellently carried out.

**Ans to Q No 14:** Lockwood, Nelly Dean, Zillah and Catherine's diary play important role in the narrative of the novel… …the incidents which are recounted to Nelly by others are given to us in the words of those directly involved… …thus, we have, at various points of the novel, the narratives of Catherine, Heathcliff, Isabella and Cathy… …the multiple narrative technique is highlighted by the fact that you have the delineation from the perspective of those who are intimately involved as well as those who, like Lockwood, are late entrants and hence are only casually associated with the story.



## 13.11 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

**Q 1:** The characters of Catherine and Heathcliff are immortal creations in English literature. Analyse their relationship as portrayed in the novel *Wuthering Heights*.

**Q 2:** Comment on the narrative technique used by Emily Brontë in the novel *Wuthering Heights*.

**Q 3:** What is the purpose served by the use of multiple narrators such as Nelly Dean, Lockwood or the diary in the story of *Wuthering Heights?*

**Q 4:** Make a comparison between the relationships of Catherine and Heathcliff and those of the second generation namely: younger Catherine and Hareton.

**Q 5:** There is a beautiful blending of realism and romance in the *Wuthering Heights*. Discuss the truth of this statement with reference to the specific events in the novel.

**Q 6:** Analyse the plot of *Wuthering Heights* with special attention to the beginning and the ending and the shifts in the narration.

**Q 7:** Compare and contrast the characters of Catherine and her daughter the younger Catherine in *Wuthering Heights*.

**Q 8:** Critically comment on the themes discussed in *Wuthering Heights*. Do you think that the supernatural accords plausibility in the structure of the novel?

**Q 9:** Mention some of the psychoanalytic approaches to the reading of *Wuthering Heights*. How do these readings interpret the characters and their relationships?

**Q10:** Discuss in detail how the relationship between Heathcliff and Catherine sets the story of *Wuthering Heights* in motion.

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