UNIT 6: EMILY BRONTE: *WUTHERING HEIGHTS* I

UNIT STRUCTURE

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6.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- discuss some facets of Emily Bronte's personal life as well as her works
- describe the backdrop of the novel against which it has been conceived
- explore Bronte's approach to the uncanny, that is, the Gothic tradition
- critically analyse *Wuthering Heights* as a literary dossier which was much ahead of its times

6.2 INTRODUCTION

Considering the time when the Bronte Sisters (Emily, Charlotte and Anne) were writing, women writers were not expected enthusiastically, either by the publishers or the readers, to pursue their career in writing. This is why, the Brontes wrote under the pseudonyms, Ellis Bell, Curer Bell and Acton Bell, respectively. The Victorian era had experienced both a shift from the spontaneous Romanticism in literature and a bend towards a more realistic, rather verging on the pessimistic universe of human existence. A

penchant for the Gothic was another fascinating turn that this era experienced. A classic example is Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* published in 1818. But what the readers were yet to experience was a perfect blend of the gothic and an untamed, wild passion that almost verged on cruelty. Published in 1847, *Wuthering Heights* took the Victorian readers by surprise with its treatment of a raw dose of unfettered and wild human passions. This is one reason, out of many, why this novel received only a few miscellaneous reviews at the time of its publication.

6.3 EMILY BRONTE: THE NOVELIST

Emily Bronte was born in 1818 and died in 1848, and in this short span of life, she, along with her sisters, Anne and Charlotte Bronte, wrote stories, plays and poems for their own amusements. Together with Anne, Emily created a fictional world and called it Gondal. There are several poems and prose pieces centering this imaginary world and its residents. Emily Bronte lived an eccentric life, with her father who served as the rector of the Church, and her aunt, who raised the three sisters guardedly. Her aunt was a deeply religious woman however Emily did not take to her religious temperament. The sisters were a creative lot and they drew heavily from their locale, Haworth, a village in Yorkshire. Haworth—a place in the midst of bleak moors, became the inspiration behind the setting of *Wuthering Heights.* Besides *Wuthering Heights*, Emily Bronte had also written some other prose pieces and poems. Charlotte Bronte discovered some of her poems and intended to get them published together with the poems of Anne Bronte and some of her own poems. This collection was published in 1846 as *Poems.*

Wuthering Heights delineates the intertwined destinies of two families, the Earnshaws and the Lintons and their respective locales, Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange. This novel progresses as an account of love, rejection, despair, passion and revenge between the two protagonists, Heathcliff and Catherine Earnshaw.

6.3.1 Her Life

After the death of her mother, Maria Branwell, the three elder sisters of Emily—Maria, Elizabeth and Charlotte were sent to Cowen Bridge to get their education at Clergy Daughters' School. There, the sisters were frequently subjected to abuse and ill-treatment by their peers. This episode later forms a significant part of Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre.* In November, 1824, Emily Bronte joined her elder sisters in school at the age of six, but only for a short period. Soon, the school came under the attack of a typhoid epidemic and affected Maria and Elizabeth. Charlotte and Emily were soon removed from school. Maria and Elizabeth succumbed to this epidemic. The three remaining sisters, Charlotte, Anne and Emily and their brother, Patrick Branwell began their education at home under the tutelage of their father and aunt. Shaped largely by a sense of isolation, the world of Emily Bronte and her siblings soon became familiar to the works of Sir Walter Scott, Byron, Blackwood's Magazine and Shelley.

The four Bronte siblings were gifted with a great sense of imagination. They could weave stories and poems out of the materials from their immediate surroundings. Patrick Branwell had a box full of toys and around this inanimate entity the young children started creating imaginary worlds full of characters and their stories. They called this world Angria. But soon, Emily felt an urge to create her own unique world at the age of thirteen and she called it Gondal. She let Anne to share this world of hers. It was an imaginary island full of myths and characters and the two sisters wrote excessively around this world. However, only some of their Gondal poems and some of the characters created by Anne survived. Soon, at the age of seventeen, Emily was to get admitted to the Roe Head Girls' School, where Charlotte was already working as a teacher. But Emily's homesickness made her return to her home only after a few months.

In September, 1838, when she was twenty, she started working as a teacher at Law Hill School in Hailfax. But her failing health always stood as an obstacle in her career. She left her

profession in April 1839 and became secluded in her home at Haworth, tending mostly to domestic chores. It is during this period that she started learning German.

Emily and Charlotte Bronte started attending a girls' academy in Brussels, Belgium, where they wanted to improve their knowledge of German and French. Their objective was to open their own school. Even here, Emily's homesickness got the better of her and she remained immune to the Belgian ways of life. The two siblings excelled well in their French lessons. But soon, they were compelled to return to Haworth owing to their aunt's demise. In 1844, their attempt at opening their own school at home did not flourish well.

6.3.2 Her Works

Being of a shy personality, Emily Bronte was not too keen of publishing her poems. In 1844, she started revising her own poems, perusing them carefully and rearranging them into two sections. The first, she entitled, "Gondal Poems", but left the second untitled. Charlotte suggested her to get these poems published, which she refused. It was Anne who shared her little secret of writing down manuscripts herself and won her sister's confidence. Both of them formed an intimacy since they both were accustomed to reading out to each other the tales and poems of Gondal. Emily Bronte has written poems like "Come Hither Child" (1839) and "A Death Scene" (1846). Together the three siblings published *Poems by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell* in1846 under male pseudonyms. Emily's contribution to this anthology was her twenty one poems. Her *Wuthering Heights* first saw the light of publication in 1847 in London. Her publisher was Thomas Cautley Newby. The bold treatment of passion and fierce handling of wild imagery led the reading public believe that it was written by a male writer. Nevertheless, her real name did not appear until 1850. The book did not attract much attention immediately after its publication. But gradually, it achieved a place in the literary canon as one of the English classics. Emily Bronte did

not live long to see her book flourish among readers. On December 19, 1848, she died of tuberculosis, at the age of thirty.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What is Emily Bronte's fictional world called?

Q 2: Name a few poems by Emily Bronte.

6.4 CONTEXT OF THE NOVEL

The narrative of *Wuthering Heights* covers a period of approximately thirty years. It opens in the year 1801, a time when Industrial Revolution was ongoing in England. It was a time when certain changes had already started taking place in the social system of Britain, like the upward movement of the middle class to acquire a certain position among the upper class. Such a shift is noticeable in the character of Heathcliff when he vanishes for sometime from Thrushcross Grange only to return as a proper gentleman. Despite this movement in the social sector, certain things remain rigid even in the wake of the Industrial Revolution such as the patriarchal set up. One must always bear in mind that the treatment of women and children as portrayed in the novel somewhere reflects Emily Bronte's own experience as a woman. When Earnshaw introduces Heathcliff to his family, he hardly considers the discomfort of his own children. He only commands them to treat Heathcliff well. The same attitude is later adopted by Hindley and Heathcliff as patriarchs. Emily Bronte and her other siblings lived secluded lives under the care of their father and aunt. They got their works published as male writers and not as female.

The novel also portrays class conflict extensively, a phenomenon not unknown to the Victorian world. The families that the novel revolves around are wealthy families. The Earnshaws and Lintons own property estates—Thrushcross Grange and Wuthering Heights, respectively. Heathcliff does not fit into either of the two aristocratic families. He is just an

outsider. The treatment that is meted out to Heathcliff and Catherine as children is also different. When they sneak into Thrushcross Grange, both the children are caught and held hostage. But once Catherine's identity is revealed that she is an Earnshaw, she is treated with utmost care, but Heathliff is dismissed off quite irreverently as somebody "quite unfit for a decent house." It becomes an urgent necessity for Heathcliff to climb the social ladder because he overhears only small bit of the conversation between Catherine and Nelly, that "It would degrade me to marry Heathcliff now." However, he had failed to listen to the whole matter where Catherine was planning to marry Edgar Linton only for his money so that she could "aid Heathcliff to rise and place him out of my [her] bother's power." Heathcliff disappears for several years only to return as a wealthy gentleman and succeed in usurping the properties of the Lintons and Earnshaws. This is a world where property decides the social standing of an individual. Heathcliff partially succeeds in disinheriting young Hareton Earnshaw and Catherine Linton, but when the narrative inclines towards the possibility of a marriage of the couple, there is a potent chance that the couple will inherit what is rightfully theirs. Hence, it is eventually indicated that justice shall be done in the end by allowing the rightful heirs to their respective inheritance. And Heathcliff, who has been always an outsider, shall be deprived of these properties.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Does Emily Bronte deal with the issue of class conflict in the novel?

6.5 SUMMARY OF THE NOVEL

The novel unfolds itself as a narrative related to a gentleman, Lockwood, who happens to visit Yorkshire and rent a house and its surrounding park, Thrushcross Grange. There he meets an elderly caretaker,

Ellen Dean, and gradually learns about the two families, one of which had been the previous resident of Thrushcross Grange and whom Ellen Dean had served. The main plot begins sometime around 1760. A gentleman had undertaken a journey to Liverpool from his farm, Wuthering Heights, on a business trip. On his return, he found an abandoned boy on whom he took pity and so, brought him home. He already had a son, Hindley and a daughter, Catherine. He commanded his wife and his children to treat the gypsy boy as one of their siblings. He named him Heathcliff, who was supposed to be a son who had died earlier. He had a male servant, Joseph and Ellen Dean was his housekeeper, who was quite young at that time. To everyone in the Earnshaw family, Heathcliff was an uninvited intruder, especially for Hindley, Heathcliff was a threat to his share of family property. But Catherine's attitude towards Heathcliff was different from the beginning of his introduction to the family. Hindley was a few years older than him, while Catherine, a year younger. Due to his aggressive behaviour and strange attitude towards Heathcliff, he was sent to a college away from Wuthering Heights.

With the passage of time, Earnshaw's health degraded and the thought of Heathcliff constantly haunted him. He thought that Heathcliff was not accepted by his family and that after his death, Heathcliff's position in the family would worsen. Earnshaw died and Catherine and Heathcliff were left heartbroken. They grew up consoling each other and thus, came closer to each other.

Eventually, Hindley returned to his ancestral home. By then, he was twenty years old, Heathcliff was twelve and Catherine eleven. On his return, he introduced his wife Frances to everyone, whom he had married and bought along. He became the rightful owner of the house and the estate. His attitude towards Heathcliff worsened. His position in the family degraded to that of the servants. But Catherine continued her intimacy with him and taught him her lessons in the moors. They used to run and play in the fields without bothering about the punishments they received later.

One fine day, the two children, Heathcliff and Catherine sneaked into the house of the Lintons at Thrushcross Grange. There lived the two Linton children, Edgar who was thirteen, and Isabella, who was eleven. They

made faces at the Linton children through the window. This raised an alarm and Catherine and Heathcliff attempted to flee. But the family bulldog caught Catherine and the two children were trapped. When they were brought inside, her identity was revealed as Miss Earnshaw and she was treated with respect and utmost care. However, Heathcliff was despised and dismissed as "quite unfit for a decent house."

Catherine stayed with the Lintons for five weeks, and when she returned to Wuthering Heights, Heathcliff felt, she had changed. She stated dressing up and behaving as a proper lady belonging to the upper class and this delighted Hindley and his wife, Frances but disappointed Heathcliff. He felt that Catherine was gradually drifting away from him. With the passage of time, Catherine tried her best to maintain a balance between her friendship with the Lintons and her intimacy with Heathcliff.

A son was born to Hindley and Frances and she died of tuberculosis. They called him Hareton. This left Hareton shattered and due to his aggression and alcoholic nature, the Earnshaw household became disintegrated. Heathcliff became the worst sufferer of Hindley's despair. He began to be treated in an even worse manner. He became more and more distanced from Hindley. Meanwhile, Edgar Linton's love for Catherine flourished. She was also attracted towards Edgar for his wealth and polished manners but her love for Heathcliff was more serious and deep. Heathcliff fled from Wuthering Heights suddenly after the engagement of Edgar and Catherine. One night she searched for Heathcliff in the storm and fell ill. She visited Thrushcross Grange to recover there. But Edgar's parents were affected by her fever and they succumbed to it. They were married when Catherine was about nineteen years old. They lived together happily for about the year, till the sudden return of Heathcliff. He had acquired education, wealth and gentle manners mysteriously. Catherine was overwhelmed to see him again, but Edgar showed obvious dissatisfaction. At Wuthering Heights, Heathcliff started gaining control over the alcoholic Hindley by paying for his gambling. His frequent visits to Thrushcross Grange created friction in the relationship between Catherine and Edgar. Eventually, there came a day when there was a bitter quarrel between Edgar and Heathcliff. The latter

left the Grange before Edgar's servants could throw him out of the house. Catherine became furious at both the men's behaviour and shut herself up in her room for several days. Heathcliff, meanwhile, eloped with Edgar's sister, Isabella. He did not do it as a gesture of genuine love, but in order to avenge Edgar's act of marrying Catherine. But Isabella was charmed by his careless and romantic looks. Catherine's health worsened at this news. She became delirious and weak, but was carefully attended by Edgar during that time of crisis. After a few months, Catherine discovered that she was pregnant. She was still unstable. Meanwhile, Heathcliff and Isabella returned to Wuthering Heights. Isabella regretted her troublesome marriage with Heathcliff and confessed to Ellen Dean through letters that Heathcliff was a hostile and savage husband. Ellen went to visit them to help them cope with the situation and make amends. She narrated to them about Catherine's failing health. Heathcliff expressed his wish to see her.

One fine day, when Edgar was away in the Church, Heathcliff visited Catherine at Thrushcross Grange. It was a meeting full of passions and mutual forgiveness. Catherine suddenly fainted and Edgar, in the meantime, returned home. Heathcliff left immediately after. That very night Catherine died while giving birth to a baby girl. Edgar was left heartbroken and Heathcliff, wild and inconsolable. He wished Catherine's ghost to visit and trouble him. After a few days, there was a fight between Hindley and Heathcliff, and when the former wanted to murder him, he was badly wounded instead. Isabella escaped from her husband's home and took refuge in a place near London. There she gave birth to a baby boy, Linton. Hindley succumbed to his wounds and died some days after his sister's death.

Cathy, the daughter of Catherine and Edgar grew up to be a charming young lady. She was entirely oblivious of the existence of Wuthering Heights, Heathcliff or her cousin Hareton, the son of Hindley and Frances. She grew within the confinements of Thrushcross Grange and thus, she did not know anything about Wuthering Heights or its inhabitants. Once, in her playful exploration, she found out about Wuthering Heights and that Hareton was related to her; they were cousins. She was not very delighted to know about it. Ellen Dean forbade her to visit Wuthering Heights again. She revealed to

her that her family was in bad terms with Heathcliff and there was an old enmity between him and Edgar.

When Isabella died, Edgar went to fetch Linton who was then twelve years old. Linton was a frail boy but Cathy found it comforting to have someone around to play with. But when Heathcliff came to know of Linton's return to the Grange, he sent Joseph to bring his son to Wuthering Heights. When Cathy realised that Linton had left, she was disappointed but she soon recovered from her disappointment and continued leading her childhood days.

When it was Cathy's sixteenth birthday, Ellen and she accidentally stepped into Heathcliff's territory where they were invited to see Linton. In his mind, he was planning to design a relationship between Cathy and Linton, so that he could acquire Edgar's land after his death. After her return, Edgar strictly commanded Cathy not to visit Heathcliff again. But she continued her relationship with Linton through love letters. Ellen discovered them one day and stopped the correspondence altogether. Once when Edgar was ill, Heathcliff invited Cathy to his farmhouse to attend to Linton who was sick suffering from heartbreak due to her. She found Linton bossy but was charmed by him equally. Ellen had also fallen ill and could not keep a watch over her. Cathy continued her visits to Wuthering Heights and found Hareton boring and illiterate. Edgar was told by Ellen about Cathy's secret visits, and he in turn forbade her to do it. Edgar's health deteriorated and he was unaware of Linton's health and character. He thought it would be good for Cathy to marry him, since, he thought, Linton would inherit the Grange. An alliance was made between Cathy and Linton. Linton's health degraded and it seemed he was under constant threat. It was revealed that he was forced by Heathcliff to court Cathy. Heathcliff feared that Linton would die before Edgar, thus nullifying his prospect of usurping Edgar's estate. He kidnapped Cathy and Ellen and commanded that Cathy would go to meet her father without marrying Linton. She married Linton and reached Edgar just before his death. After Edgar's funeral, whose grave was placed just beside that of Catherine, Heathcliff took Cathy to Wuthering Heights to look after Linton. Meanwhile, he cleared up Thrushcross Grange to rent it out to

outsiders, Lockwood being the first tenant. Heathcliff confessed before Ellen that Catherine still haunted him after he had gazed at her body when Edgar was being buried. Cathy cared for Linton, but he soon died and she maintained a cold relationship with Heathcliff, Hareton, Joseph and Zillah, the housekeeper. Hareton secretly loved her and though Cathy despised him initially, she developed a liking towards him and started teaching him to read and write. All this happened while Lockwood was at the Grange. However, he was away for several months and Ellen had some more events to narrate. Heathcliff had grown strange and isolated and he grew more and more delirious as if Catherine's ghost was constantly haunting him. He stopped taking his food and sleeping, and one day Ellen discovered him dead, wearing a peculiar grin on his face. His body was buried next to Catherine's grave, as he had wished. Hareton was left disheartened but Cathy's company consoled him. The novel ends with Hareton and Cathy planning to wed and move to Thrushcross Grange.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Fill in the blanks with appropriate answers:

a. The Earnshaws resided in ……. whereas the Lintons lived in ….

b. The poor homeless boy was introduced to the Earnshaw family while Earnshaw was returning from a ……..

c. The name of the maid servant at Wuthering Heights was…….

d . ……was the son of Heathcliff and Isabella.

Q 5: State whether the following are True or False.

a. Catherine was the wife of Heathcliff.

b. Cathy was the daughter of Catherine and Edgar.

c. Heathcliff was murdered by Edgar in a fit of temper.

d. After his death, Heathcliff was buried near Catherine's grave, according to his wish.



6.6 LET US SUM UP

You have just finished reading Emily Bronte's only novel *Wuthering Heights.* While reading you have also noticed the projection of Victorian values in this work of fiction. The patriarchal setup, the life of women and children, the class conflicts, marriage alliances according to one's social ranking and scheming human nature occupies a great portion of the novel. Along with these social aspects, Emily Bronte also explores the dark side of human passion and the untamed, wild obsession of two individuals, weighed down by societal pressure and class consciousness. The unit will enable you to critically analyse the novel and explore its interesting facets as well.



6.7 FURTHER READING

1) Fegan, Melissa. (2008). *Wuthering Heights: Character Studies.* London: Bloomsbury.

2) Mezo, Richard E. (2002). *A Student's Guide to Wuthering Heights.* Parkland, Florida: Brown Walker Press.

3) Tytler, Graeme. (2018). *Facets of Wuthering Heights: Selected Essays.* Leicester: Troubador Publishing Ltd.

6.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Gondal.

Ans to Q No 2: "Come Hither Child" (1839) and "A Death Scene" (1846).

Ans to Q No 3: Yes. The novel portrays class conflict extensively. When Catherine and Heathcliff sneak into Thrushcross Grange and are caught, the treatment clearly brought out the issue of class difference. Once Catherine's identity is revealed that she is an Earnshaw, she is treated with utmost care, but Heathliff is dismissed off quite irreverently as somebody "quite unfit for a decent house." Hence, Heathcliff disappears for several years only to return as a

wealthy gentleman who succeeds in usurping the properties of the Lintons and Earnshaws. In the world of the novel it is property that decides the social standing of an individual.

Ans to Q No 4:

a. Wuthering Heights, Thrushcross Grange.

b. business trip.

c. Ellen Dean.

d. Linton.

Ans to Q No 5: a. False. b. True. c. False. d. True.



6.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q1: Comment on the context of the novel and how certain traits of the Victorian England are reflected in it.

Q 2: Critically analyse the life of Emily Bronte and her contribution to the literary world.

Q3: What is it in the novel that makes it classify itself as gothic fiction?

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