

Wuthering Heights: Story of Passion versus Love

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Abstract: Emily Bronte was writing between 1818 to 1848. She is very well known for her only English novel. Wuthering Heights is considered to be one of the greatest classic in English literature. The novel is an intelligent depiction of violence between passion and love. The central theme of the novel is a conflict between the love and passion. The passionate love can be spiteful, revengeful and all destroying whereas the power of true love is the opposite of the above. She has delineated the story in such a manner that the reader is left speechless. It is difficult to take side either of love or of passion as both are not wrong and both truly justified.

Index Terms: love, passion, orphan, revenge, farm, weather, rain, storm, emotion

“Wuthering Heights” is the only novel written by Emily Bronte. Yet the novel is so different from a typical Victorian novel of her age. It is different in the sense that it does not present an overview of the Victorian life and society as the other novels of the same period are famed to do. She is not concerned with the life of Victorians but more interested in the life of an individual. The most striking feature about the “Wuthering Heights” is its matter of fact precision in the telling and also the monstrous symbolic conflicts in the actual story. Nelly Dean is the principal narrator of the whole story.

Wuthering Heights is the name of the place of dwelling where Hindley and Catherine (a brother and a sister) live and Edgar and Isabella (a brother and a sister) live at Thrushcross Grange. Heathcliff is the intrusive element in both the families. Heathcliff was brought to the Heights by elder Mr. Earnshaw. He was a mysterious foundling and is able to oust Hindley (the son) in the affections of his father. He soon starts showing a passionate natural kinship with Catherine. After the death of Mr. Earnshaw, Hindley does not treat Heathcliff well and also puts a ban on his playing with Catherine. Catherine marries Edgar Linton and Heathcliff runs away and his whereabouts remain unknown until a long time after the marriage of Catherine.

Catherine and Heathcliff had visited the Grange together once and on that occasion Heathcliff could not go beyond but remained an outsider. He could only look into the window, whereas Catherine had been taken in the house by the Lintons as she had been hurt by a dog. She was tended and fed there and was given new clothes to wear. It was a kind of ritual transformation. After a gap of five and a half years after this incident, Edgar and Catherine get married. This marriage does not take place because Catherine and Edgar love each other but instead she wants to help Heathcliff. Heathcliff is being ill treated by her brother. She loves him but does not marry him as he is penniless and also she does not want to degrade her brother's honor. Her nature is untamed and she remains in deep sympathy for Heathcliff and all the natural objects.

After she gets married, Heathcliff returns to the same place. This time he comes after having acquired some wealth and self-confidence. He re-establishes his contact with Catherine and also asserts his natural claim on her. This leads to disruption of the Thrushcross Grange household and extraordinary strain on Catherine which eventually results in her death.

In the meanwhile Isabella Linton gets infatuated by Heathcliff who is determined and furious at the Lintons and wants to take revenge. He gets this opportunity in the form of Isabella Linton. In order to take an advantage of this infatuation he makes a run away with her as a part of a very cunningly worked out plan to get possession of the entire Linton property.

When dying, Catherine gives birth to a daughter also called Catherine. The remaining part of the novel is Heathcliff's revenge on the Linton family. He eventually succeeds in marrying the younger Catherine to his own weak and degenerating son by Isabella. Linton dies and also Heathcliff's son who survives only for two months after her marriage with the younger Catherine. Heathcliff manages to take over the entire Linton property in his hands. By this time Heathcliff is successful in destroying Hindley, who had taken to drinking and he also degraded Hindley's son Hereton. Heathcliff converts his son into an uncouth and illiterate servant of his own at Wuthering Heights. His obsession with the dead Catherine keeps his imagination fixed on her grave and keeps him in daily expectation of uniting himself with her spirit and eventually with her dead body. At last, being totally obsessed with this possibility Heathcliff ceases to eat and ultimately dies of starvation in an ecstasy of expectation of the reunion with Catherine. While the young Catherine softens and educates Hereton until he becomes civilized enough to marry her.

The central love situation in the novel is that of the love between Heathcliff and Catherine. Time has no effect on it or its intensity even after the death of the heroin. It is a love of unique intensity. Heathcliff's love for Catherine is as strong after her death as it was during her life. Heathcliff believes in the existence of the ghosts and so after the death of Catherine he visits her grave every night in the hope of seeing her one day. He has a strong and imperishable longing for an inseparable union with Catherine after his death. One strong passion possesses him throughout his life and that is his everlasting union with Catherine for which death is no barrier. He even bribes the Sexton to bury him by the side of Catherine after he dies. The scene in which Heathcliff meets Catherine at the grange before her death well exhibits the intensity of love for each other. It also reflects their hope that their love would continue ever after and even after death. The scene is quite passionate. Catherine says that Heathcliff would forget her after sometime and when he would be dying, he may not be happy at the reunion with Catherine but would be feeling sorry to leave his

wife and children. Heathcliff promises that those words would be imprinted on his heart and mind till he was alive. Catherine tells him that his distress would be felt by her underground.

The theme of love is strong and imperishable in “Wuthering Heights” that endures even after the physical death of the beloved. There are other pairs also: Hindley and Francis, Catherine with Edgar Linton and Heathcliff, Catherine junior with Hereton and junior Heathcliff.

The love of Heathcliff is like consuming fire which ultimately destroys even the object of love. He intruded on her at a time when she was too weak to bear the up rise of her strong passion. The violence of emotion at the sight of Heathcliff after a long absence proved fatal to her. Heathcliff’s love has the force and intensity of the great fire. Edgar Linton’s love for Catherine is like the warmth of fire which provides both comfort and delight. There is a difference in both the fires.

Heathcliff has been endowed with stronger feelings than any other character in the whole of the novel. The love that has been presented in the novel is extraordinary in certain respects. It is extraordinary in its intensity. The lovers think that they are inseparable. Time cannot mitigate their intensity of love. Even after when Catherine dies, Heathcliff continues to love her with the same intensity. The passions portrayed in the novel are equally unique. Heathcliff does not accept that the death of Catherine is the end of their affair but he takes revenge on those who according to him were responsible for separating them. He is just not satisfied by ruining the life of Hindley (Catherine’s brother) but also ruins the life of his son Hereton by making him work in his own farmhouse. He elopes with Isabella (Edgar’s sister) to cause him great distress; he marries her and then does not treat her well. Linton falls seriously ill. Heathcliff manages to get his frail son married to Catherine junior. He dies two months after the marriage with Catherine junior. Heathcliff eventually becomes the master of Thrushcross Grange as well as that of Wuthering Heights. Frustration in love coupled with his suffering and humiliation made him cruel, callous, and revengeful. Heathcliff is a man of unusual mental and physical power.

The central theme of the novel is the depiction of elemental or primitive passions. We can also say that the character of Heathcliff stands for elemental and primitive passions whereas the character of Edgar Linton stands for true love. The whole plot of the novel revolves around the conflict between love and passions.

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