



## Wuthering Heights Themes

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### ABSTRACT

To understand the true inspiration of Wuthering Heights, we need to set aside the romantic machinery of passion and revenge and to consider more closely what are in fact the two central themes of the book. These themes, which may be described as the novel's "Personal" and "social" aspects respectively, are closely related to each other. The first, the "personal" theme, by which the whole story is illuminated, concerns the love of Catherine Earnshaw for Heathcliff, and of Heathcliff for her. The relationship between these two is based, no doubt, on the familiar romantic conception of irresistible passion. Like so many pairs of romantic lovers, Catherine and Heathcliff are dedicated to each other. Each of them feels his or her passion as the consuming reality of existence. What is undoubtedly personal in their relationship is the peculiar, almost religious intensity with which it is expressed and which perhaps finds its most significant manifestation in Catherine's attempt to explain her feelings to Nelly .

KEYWORDS – emotion , distraction , religious , Heathcliff, contrast.

### INTRODUCTION

The directness and intensity of feeling which characterize this passage are evident. The spirit which animates this speech is one of concentration from which considerations of sentiment or pleasure have been relentlessly excluded. The phrasing of Catherine's speech focuses the whole weight of feeling upon a relationship almost entirely stripped of the accidents of personality. The whole speech leads up to the simple and the comprehensive affirmation: "I am Heathcliff, which is clearly the statement of a necessity based upon the true being, the essential nature of the speaker, rather than upon any transitory impulse of desire. There is in this speech a true and genuine emotion whose remoteness from the mere contingencies of romantic passion is reflected in the extraordinary keenness and power of the expression. The statement of passion is

here presented in all its bareness, and expressed with a sharp clarity that is its own guarantee of truth. The speaker of these words is concerned with essentials in a way that admits of no distraction or irrelevance.

We could even say that there is about Catherine's passion a quality which can properly be called "religious". Romantic sentimentality is always self-centred, while her attitude to Heathcliff is based upon a recognition that the individual is not sufficient to himself, that the individual's experience hungers for completion through an animating contact with another individual who only can satisfy an essentially spiritual craving.

In the light of this central passion, it becomes easier to understand the second main theme of this novel, which is the contrast between the two houses-Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange. Wuthering Heights clearly reflects the character of Heathcliff who owns it. We might, indeed, regard Heathcliff as the human incarnation of this house. Severe, gloomy, and brutal in its atmosphere, there is no place in it for what is strictly necessary. It is firmly rooted in local tradition and in local custom no doubt; but it lacks the civilized adornments of existence and is a suitable background for the life of bare and primitive passion which is characteristic of Heathcliff. Thrushcross Grange, which is the home of the Lintons, differs completely from Wuthering Heights in every respect. It reflects a conception of life which appears at first sight altogether more agreeable, but which shows clear signs of decadence. Thrushcross Grange also reflects the character of its owners. Judged from a superficial point of view, adopted by Nelly Dean, the Lintons seem to possess refinement, kindness, and amiability; but a closer view shows that this is by no means the whole truth. Beneath the surface of refinement there exist moral flaws which play a most important part in the development of the story.

In the beginning of the novel, the Lintons and their house are seen from the outside, from the standpoint of external and critical observers. These observers are the young children, Heathcliff and Cathy whose first sight of this strange new world is such as to produce an impression of contemptuous hostility which will always remain with them. They observe that the Linton children (Edgar and Isabella), far from feeling themselves happy in their beautiful and luxurious home, are in fact fighting bitterly over a lap-dog which each of them desires to handle and fondle. The contempt which Heathcliff expresses for this situation is the contempt felt by a primitive soul in whom the fundamental passions are still intensely alive and associated with an equally genuine and primitive moral seriousness, because a way of life which claims to be superior is in reality trivial, selfish, and empty. Throughout the novel Emily Bronte seems to

relate the main theme (which is a spiritual conflict) to the presentation of a social contrast. The author deliberately produces an impression of excessive sweetness and decay by means of her emphasis upon the soft and clinging luxury in which the Lintons live, protected by dogs and humble servants from the intrusion of the children of the inferior world outside. The sight of so much luxury certainly strikes the two children, Heathcliff and Cathy, from outside as beautiful; but it also rouses in them a feeling of rejection which is only intensified by the behaviour of the inmates. The gold, the crimson carpets, the chair-coverings and other adornments, seen through the eyes of the children outside, point to a highly significant contrast. This contrast is an essential part of the main story.

It is, however, not enough to see this novel as a contrast between civilized decadence and primitive vitality. There is much more to be taken note of. While Cathy's love for Heathcliff is certainly of consuming importance to her, it is also true that there is beneath that love a genuine conflict. The more superficial part of her character is sufficiently attracted by the agreeable aspect of the life of the Lintons for her to marry Edgar and to become part of his family. Indeed, Cathy herself never fails to give the name of love to her feeling for Edgar Linton. Yet this love satisfies only the more superficial part of her nature. All that is permanent in her character and her emotions is not satisfied with Edgar but impels her to return to Heathcliff. Through the whole of her story we are faced with the contrast between the changing "foliage" and the "eternal rocks". Yet the foliage represents also a reality which cannot be ignored. For this, the novel represents a genuine clash of ideals; and it is the clash that gives to the novel its character and its greatness.

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