

Wuthering Heights: Theme of the Novel:

The novel is actually structured around a story both of love and revenge. Catherine and Heathcliff's passion for one another seems to be the centre of Wuthering Heights, given that it is stronger and more lasting than any other emotion displayed in the novel, and it is the source of most of the major conflicts that structure the novel's plot.

It is not easy to decide whether Bronte 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 encapsulates two parallel love stories, the first half of the novel concentrating on the love between ~~that~~ Catherine and Heathcliff, while the less dramatic second half depicts the developing love between young Catherine and Hareton, son of Hindley. In contrast to the first, the later tale ends happily, restoring peace and order to Wuthering Heights and Thorscross Grange.

The differences between the two love stories contributes to the reader's understanding of why each ends the way it does.

The important features of Catherine and Hareton's love story is that it involves growth and change. Early in the novel Hareton appears irredeemably brutal, savage and illiterate, but with the passage of time he becomes a loyal friend to Catherine and also learns to read. Catherine, on the other hand makes her attitude more liberal towards her fiance Hareton and also evolves ~~as~~ from contempt to love.

As far as the Catherine and Heathcliff's love is concerned, it is rooted in their childhood and is marked by the refusal to change. Catherine, while choosing to marry Edgar, seeks a more gentle life, but she refuses to adapt to her role as wife, either by sacrificing Heathcliff or embracing Edgar. This is because, Catherine and Heathcliff's love is based on their ~~shared~~ shared perception that they are identical. Catherine declares, famously, "I am Heathcliff", while Heathcliff upon Catherine's death, wails that he can not live without his "soul", meaning that Catherine. Their love denies difference, and is strangely asexual. They 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 climatic 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.

Consideration of class status often crucially highlights the character's motivations in *Wuthering Heights*. Catherine's decision to marry Edgar so that she will be "the greatest woman of the neighbourhood" 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 behaviour. The shifting nature of social status is demonstrated most strikingly in Heathcliff's trajectory from homeless waif to young gentleman - by adoption to common labourer to gentleman again (although the status-conscious Lockwood remarks that Heathcliff is only a gentleman in "dress and manners").

[To be continued in next]
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