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Audino

Interpretive Perspectives on Wuthering Heights

"Heathcliff, indeed stands unredeemed; never once swerving in his arrow-straight course to perdition, from the time when 'the little black-haired, swarthy thing, as dark as if it came from the Devil,' was first unrolled out of the bundle and set on its feet in the farm-house kitchen, to the hour when Nelly Dean found the grim, stalwart corpse laid on its back in the panel-enclosed bed, with wide-gazing eyes that seemed to sneer at her attempt to close them, and parted lips and sharp white teeth that sneered too." --Charlotte Bronte

"We continue to sympathize with Heathcliff, even after his marriage with Isabella because Bronte convinces us that what Heathcliff stands for is morally superior to what the Lintons stand for. This is, it must be insisted, not a case of some mysterious emotional power with which Heathcliff is charged. The emotion behind his denunciation of Edgar is 'moral' emotion." --Arnold Kettle

"Heathcliff is no more ethically relevant than is flood or earthquake or whirlwind. It is as impossible to speak of him in terms of 'sin' and 'guilt' as it is to speak in this way of the natural elements or the creatures of the animal world." --Dorothy Van Ghent

"There is no "I" in Wuthering Heights. There are no governesses. There are no employers. There is love, but it is not the love of men and women. Emily was inspired by some more general conception. The impulse, which urged her to create was not her own suffering or her own injuries. She looked out upon a world cleft into gigantic disorder and felt within her the power to unite it in a book." --Virginia Woolf

Cathy is condemned as wild and cruel and self-indulgent by Nelly, but she never for a moment loses her position as heroine. Heathcliff is even more a force of destruction though Lockwood sees some distinction in his barbarity and Nelly some cause for his savagery. But he remains the pivotal figure of the book, solitary and unconnected (it is important that his son, the fruit of his parody marriage to Isabella should die), except through his ultimate affinity with Cathy. He remains a figure uncontaminated by human relationships in the normal sense of the term. He and Cathy have the power of the absolute, of the natural and supernatural combined to such a degree that the dimension in which they exist can only be communicated to the other figures in the novel as ghostly. A story of complex experience, from the simple and brutal to the visionary, is brilliantly told to us as the story of a haunting. Emily Brontë's view of reality is at once so subtle and so pure that, outside lyric poetry, she saw the best mode of expressing it as that of the ghost tale.

--Rachel Trickett
from "The Theme of Haunting"

The love of Heathcliff and Catherine transcends all human standards of behavior; and by presenting their tragedy through one who has her own view Emily Brontë avoids taking on the responsibility for attempting the impossible, that is, passing an ultimate God-like judgment herself. Unappraised by a superior human intellect, Heathcliff and Catherine are left to move outside the moral realm. Nelly cannot pull them down to her level; her imagination does not soar. But she gives them life, and once they breathe they generate their own strength to transcend not only human values but the confines of life itself.

--Vereen Bell
from "The Epic Heritage of
Wuthering Heights"