

Writing Topics ~ Themes

Wuthering Heights

- The several types of love represented in Emily Bronte's novel suggest the importance of love in determining the course and action of people's lives. What attracts Catherine and Heathcliff to each other? Evaluate the quality of their love for each other.
- Obsession poisons beauty. The novel explores obsession in contrast to love.
- Love cannot be molded. The novel reveals the difference between spiritual love and superficial love.
- A loyal pet to Catherine, Heathcliff lashes out at others, biting and taunting them with his savage behavior and robbing them of their emotional stability.
- Vengeance enslaves a person. What are Heathcliff's reasons or motives for seeking revenge? How successful is his attempt to avenge himself? What role does retribution play in the story? Point out and support with examples why many readers see revenge as the dominant theme in this novel?
- Heathcliff's hardness, greed and twisted desires reveal the wild nature of mankind when fueled by anger and revenge.
- The savage winds of revenge warp and twist human nature into a stark barrenness. In Emily Bronte's Wuthering Heights, the protagonists seek freedom through revenge only to bind themselves tighter – like a dog choked by its own chain.
- Wuthering Heights reveals the true nature of man through bleak circumstances.
- Wuthering Heights deals with the perversion of nature and relationships -- the putting up of gates, locks and house walls – but beneath its wild surface, it has nothing to do with battles over stones, and instead explores "impossible" reactions between characters who are neither entirely good nor entirely bad.
- Critics have taken different views on the subject of Heathcliff's nature.

Evaluate the “hero” of *Wuthering Heights*. Is he moral, immoral or amoral? Why is he considered a classic Byronic hero?

- Heathcliff, the outcast, ignores and/or battles with the British class system, organized religion, civilized behavior and Christian values.
- To what extent does deviant behavior get characters what they want, so to speak? To what extent is deviance a way to gain control?
- Does Heathcliff become a rebel who rejects society and civilized values because of his life experiences?
- People are born into the world with nothing, and leave this world with nothing. It is how we encounter our circumstances that shapes our lives and identities. In Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights*, Heathcliff shapes his own destiny out of the choices he makes in relation to the events of his life.
- The novel explores the issue of feminism and shows how it is a destructive force in the hands of a woman who wants control.
- The novel explores the issue of women’s struggle for power in the face of anonymity.
- The moors give Catherine an escape to freedom from the boundaries imposed by her family and society.
- Running the dusty road between her feelings and her mind, Catherine wanders back and forth without rest from Heathcliff to Edgar. Love and time draw her, while power and pride pull her away; discontentment stirring her, she is the wind rustling the curtains at each of the two open windows, never settling on one.
- *Wuthering Heights* reveals the role of women in the mid 1800s, specifically their dependence on their male relatives and on marriage. It explores their social and legal rights and their responsibilities.
- Belief in God is essential to a happy, contented life. The characters of Nelly and Joseph develop and complicate this theme and explore the role of traditional Christian views in the story.
- The novel is not only about geographical isolation but also about emotional and spiritual isolation.
- At the heart of the novel is the ghost story – the belief that we are, on some level, drawn to the darkness, drawn into its maelstrom, meant to be shaped and scarred by it – to confront the face in the mirror. We are meant to know the darkness, that like Heathcliff, comes from no where, unbidden – and survives, and returns, and even when dead – remains in our hearts, a soughing reminder.

• The novel’s pantheon of characters are epic and even mythic – larger than life. Their actions explore issues of constraint and freedom.

WUTHERING HEIGHTS by Emily Brontë

1. The central story of Wuthering Heights is told by two relatively peripheral characters: Mr. Lockwood, the tenant at Thrushcross Grange, and Nelly Dean, the old family retainer. Why does Brontë choose these particular narrators? What effect does this choice have on the tale?
2. What attracts Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff to each other? Evaluate the quality of their love for each other.
3. Assess Catherine's reasons for marrying Edgar Linton. What do these reasons reveal about her character?
4. Select a recurring image in the novel, discuss its significance to the story, and discuss what it reveals about any of the characters.
5. To what extent does nature represent the characters in the novel? Discuss the effect of the environment and isolation on the characters.
6. Discuss several types of love presented in the novel, suggesting what Emily Brontë may be saying about the importance of love in determining people's lives.
7. Catherine Earnshaw dies almost exactly at the midpoint of the novel. Does this render everything that follows anticlimactic?
8. The following critics take different views on the subject of Heathcliff's nature. Evaluate the "hero" of Wuthering Heights. Is he moral, immoral, or amoral?

"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

"We continue to sympathize with Heathcliff, even after his marriage with Isabella, because Brontë 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, 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 Brontë
9. What are Heathcliff's reasons for seeking revenge? How successful is his attempt to avenge himself?
10. What do Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange represent in the novel?
11. What image of Wuthering Heights is created in Chapter 1? Discuss the effect of this image on the novel.

12. How successful is the restoration of harmony at the novel's conclusion? If you felt the ending a failure, suggest other possible conclusions.
13. Discuss an aspect of the novel not covered in the topics listed for you.
14. Discuss the religious motifs of the novel, particularly the Seven Deadly Sins and how they function. What is Brontë's moral and ethical stand?