



Wuthering Heights: a novel

By Emily Brontë

Publication: London, Penguin Classics, 2008.
1847, original publication date

Pages: 353 pages

ISBN: 9780141040356

From the book jacket

In a house haunted by memories, the past is everywhere. As darkness falls, a man caught in a snowstorm is forced to shelter at the strange, grim house called Wuthering Heights. It is a place he will never forget. There he will come to learn the story of Cathy: how she was forced to choose between her well-meaning husband and the dangerous man she had loved since she was young. How her choice led to betrayal and terrible revenge – and continues to torment those in the present. How love can transgress authority, convention, even death.

Summary

In the early nineteenth-century moors of North Yorkshire, the passionate attachment between a headstrong young girl and a foundling boy brought up by her father causes disaster for them and many others. The turbulent and tempestuous love story of Cathy and Heathcliff spans two generations -- from the time Heathcliff, a strange, course young boy, is brought to live on the Earnshaw's windswept estate, through Cathy's marriage to Edgar Linton and Heathcliff's plans for revenge, to Cathy's death years later and the eventual union of the surviving Earnshaw and Linton heirs.

More

Wuthering Heights is Emily Brontë's only novel, an impassioned, spellbinding tale considered to be one of the greatest literary works of all time.

Considered lurid and shocking by mid-19th-century standards, *Wuthering Heights* was initially thought to be such a publishing risk that its author, Emily Brontë, was asked to pay some of the publication costs, and it was initially published under a pseudonym.

About Emily Brontë

Emily Jane Brontë (30 July 1818 – 19 December 1848) was an English novelist and poet, now best remembered for her novel *Wuthering Heights*, a classic of English literature. Emily was the second eldest of the three surviving Brontë sisters, between Charlotte and Anne. She published under the androgynous pen name **Ellis Bell**.

Emily Brontë lived most of her life in England on the North Yorkshire moors like those depicted in *Wuthering Heights*. Not many details are known about her life. As one Brontë scholar stated, "Next to her genius, the most astonishing thing about Emily Brontë is the silence which surrounds her life." Charlotte Brontë declared that Emily's "disposition was not naturally gregarious; circumstances favored and fostered her tendency to seclusion; except to go to church or take a walk on the hills, she seldom crossed the threshold of home. Though her feeling for the people [all around] was benevolent, intercourse with them was never sought; nor, with very few exceptions, ever experienced."



Emily Jane was the fifth of six children born to the Reverend Patrick and Maria Brontë on July 30, 1818, in the village of Bradford, Yorkshire. Three years after Emily was born, her mother died of cancer, the first of several tragedies that would befall the Brontë family. Just before Emily's sixth birthday, she and her older sisters--Maria, Elizabeth, and Charlotte--enrolled at the Cowan Bridge School. Maria and Elizabeth both fell ill, and on May 6, 1825, Maria succumbed to her illness. The other three girls then left for home, where Elizabeth died two weeks later.

In June 1826, Mr. Brontë returned from travelling with a set of twelve wooden soldiers for Emily's brother, Branwell. Led by Charlotte and Branwell, the Brontë children created imaginative stories, poems, plays, and games about a magical world they created for "The Twelves," as they called the soldiers. They founded a kingdom on the African coast with a city named Great Glass Town, complete with a government, newspapers, magazines, generals, poets, historians, publishers, and actors. Their adventures were recorded in tiny booklets, often less than two inches square, in minute handwriting. One hundred of the booklets--whose wordcount is equal to the total published works of the three sisters--have been preserved.

Charlotte discovered Emily's poems in October 1845 and convinced her sisters to collaborate on a volume of poetry. They chose to use pseudonyms to avoid the criticism and prejudice often directed towards women writers. In May 1846, *Poems* (by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell) was published, with the Brontës paying for the costs; only two copies were sold.

Emily began working on *Wuthering Heights* in December 1845. She completed it in July 1846

and began submitting it for publication (along with Anne's *Agnes Grey* and Charlotte's *The Professor*). In December 1847, the publisher T. C. Newby published *Wuthering Heights*. One year later, on December 19, 1848, Emily died from the effects of a severe cold. Two years later, *Wuthering Heights* was reissued, along with a selection of Emily's poems and a biographical notice by Charlotte.

Bibliography

Poems of Currer, Acton and Ellis Bell (1846)

Emily Bronte's poems

- *A Day Dream*
- *A Death-Scene*
- *Hope*
- *How Clear She Shines*
- *Last Lines*
- *My Comforter*
- *The Old Stoic*
- *The Prisoner*
- *Self-Interrogation*
- *Stanza*

Wuthering Heights (1847)

Emily Bronte Chronology

- | | |
|------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1818 | July 30, Emily Jane Bronte born at Thornton, near Bradford, Yorkshire. |
| 1820 | April, the Bronte family moves to Haworth. |
| 1821 | September, Mrs. Bronte dies. |
| 1824 | November, Emily Bronte enrolls at the Cowan Bridge School. |
| 1825 | May 6, Maria Bronte dies; June 1, Charlotte and Emily leave Cowan Bridge; June 15 Elizabeth Bronte dies. |
| 1826 | June, Mr. Bronte brings home twelve wooden soldiers for Branwell--the start of the Brontes' oral literature and imaginative games. |
| 1831 | Emily and Anne begin the Gondal saga. |
| 1834 | November 24, the earliest dated Emily Bronte manuscript--mentions the Gondals discovering Caaldine. |
| 1835 | July--October, a pupil in Miss Wooler's school at Roe Head; is sent home after alarming Charlotte with her physical decline. |

- 1836 July 12, the earliest dated poem.
- 1837 September, goes to teach at Law Hill School, near Halifax; remains there for about six months--the exact dates of the Law Hill period are disputed.
- 1838-1842 Over half of Bronte's surviving poems written.
- 1842 February--November, at school in Brussels with Charlotte to study music and foreign languages; writes the essays in French; returns to Haworth after the death of Aunt Branwell.
- 1843 Alone at Haworth with her father; a time of creativity and freedom.
- 1844 Begins to arrange her poems into two notebooks, dividing the Gondalan from the non-Gondalan material.
- 1845 The Brontes give up hopes for a school of their own; Branwell, working on a novel, tells his sisters of the profitable possibilities of novel writing; Emily's birthday note shows her hearty and content, reunited with Anne and as enthusiastic as ever about the Gondalans; October, Charlotte discovers Emily's poems and convinces her sister to collaborate on a volume of poems; December, *Wuthering Heights* begun.
- 1846 May, Poems by Currer Ellis, and Acton Bell published, with the Brontes paying for costs; July, *Wuthering Heights* finished and begins to make the round of publishers, along with *Agnes Grey* by Anne Bronte and *The Professor* by Charlotte; September 14, last dated complete poem.
- 1847 July, T. C. Newby accepts *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey* but delays publishing until the success of *Jane Eyre* arouses interest in the "Bells"; December, *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey* published.
- 1848 Confusion in the literary world over the identity and number of the Bells; Anne publishes *The Tenant of Wildfall Hall*; Emily withdraws more resolutely into herself; September 24, Branwell dies; October 1, Emily leaves home for the last time to attend Branwell's funeral service--catches a severe cold which develops into inflammation of the lungs; December 19, Emily Bronte dies.
- 1850 *Wuthering Heights* reissued, with a selection of poems, and a biographical notice by Charlotte.
- 1893 The Bronte Society established.

About the novel

Wuthering Heights was hewn in a wild workshop with simple tools, out of homely materials. —Charlotte Brontë, in the preface for the 1850 edition

Wuthering Heights was first published in December 1847 under the pseudonym Ellis Bell with 250 copies printed. The novel met with harsh reactions from readers and critics who saw it as depressing and morose, and even immoral. *The Examiner* called it "a strange book...wild, confused, disjointed and improbable; and the people who make up the drama...are savages ruder than those who lived before Homer." *Paterson's* magazine (U.S.) advised, "Read *Jane Eyre*... but burn *Wuthering Heights*."

This strong reaction was due in part to the book's intense examination of the human spirit. Readers accustomed to novels such as those by Jane Austen, published thirty-five years before, sought a realistic portrayal of the mores and manners of the English upper classes. *Wuthering Heights*, in contrast, focused not on society, but on the minds, hearts, and souls of its members.

Prior to the publication of *Wuthering Heights*, Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Brontë had published a volume of poetry under the pseudonyms Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell; Charlotte's *Jane Eyre* had also been published. Confusion arose as to the identities of the Bells, and it was even thought that they might have been one person. *Wuthering Heights* was believed by some to have been written by the same author who had penned *Jane Eyre*. As Charlotte said, "The immature but very real powers revealed in *Wuthering Heights* were scarcely recognized; its import and nature were misunderstood; the identity of its author was misrepresented; it was said that this was an earlier and ruder attempt of the same pen which had produced *Jane Eyre*. Unjust and grievous error!" (Some also believed that *Wuthering Heights* had been written by their brother, Branwell, because a sheltered clergyman's daughter could not have created such a passionate tale.) According to the English novelist and critic W. Somerset Maugham, this notion is "absurd. . . . Given Emily Brontë's character . . . and fierce, repressed passions, which what we know of her suggests, *Wuthering Heights* is just the sort of book one would have expected her to write."

Despite the reasons for which *Wuthering Heights* was not valued in its own time, it has since been recognized as a work of extraordinary talent, elegance, and genius. One writer, Joyce Carol Oates, best summed up its power by calling *Wuthering Heights* an "anomaly, a sport, a freak in its own time, it can be seen by us, in ours, as brilliantly of that time--and contemporaneous with our own."

Introduction to the Novel

Written by a reclusive twenty-eight-year-old who was a mystery even to her family, *Wuthering Heights* is generally considered a masterpiece that stands outside the mainstream of Victorian literature. The novel tells the story of Heathcliff, an orphan rescued from city slums and brought to a farm named *Wuthering Heights* in the wilds of Yorkshire. There, the young boy develops a close attachment to the high-spirited daughter of the household, Catherine.

Wuthering Heights is a blend of the fanciful and the ordinary. The two main narrators, Mr. Lockwood and Mrs. Ellen (Nelly) Dean, are rather ordinary people. They, like the reader, are fascinated by the larger-than-life dramas played out between the houses of *Wuthering Heights* and *Thrushcross Grange*. Although the book contains many emotionally charged scenes and suggests that supernatural events may have occurred, it is anchored in everyday reality. Brontë knew how to describe a scene by using vivid details to create convincing settings. She also had

a good ear for the way people spoke—from the dialect of Yorkshire peasants to the speech of the upper classes.

Brontë manages to maintain the reader's sympathy for her two main characters, Heathcliff and Catherine, even though both frequently behave abominably. Her tale is full of suffering and cruelty but is tempered with lighter elements, such as the endless grumpiness and self-righteousness of Joseph, an old servant, and the wry comments of Nelly Dean.

Over the years, the book has received mixed reviews. One early critic saw the novel as a poetic dream, “a world of brilliant figures in an atmosphere of mists,” and assumed that it was the “unformed” work of an immature artist. One hundred years later, British writer V. S. Pritchett, who spent much of his childhood in the north of England, praised *Wuthering Heights* as “the most realistic statement about the Yorkshire people of the isolated moorland and dales that I have ever read.” Far from seeing Emily Brontë as a naively poetic artist, Pritchett and many others have viewed her as a masterful writer, whose book reveals, among other things, a surprisingly accurate grasp of British law at the time.

Unusual as it may be, *Wuthering Heights* is masterfully written. When you read it, you care about the characters (whom you may not like), and you want to know what happens next.

THE TIME AND PLACE

Wuthering Heights opens in 1801, when Mr. Lockwood meets Heathcliff, the owner of the isolated farmhouse that he has rented. The story then jumps back in time to 1771, when Heathcliff, an orphaned child, was brought home by Mr. Earnshaw, the owner of *Wuthering Heights*. The events of the story, which ends in 1803, take place in a few square miles of the West Yorkshire moors. The remote heath in which the story is set is no mere backdrop to the events of the story. The heath, along with the people of Yorkshire, is central to Emily Brontë's vision. Unlike the soft, smallscale prettiness of the landscapes of southern England, the heath is bare, rolling, and wild.

Charlotte Brontë realized that one reason that so many British readers and critics were horrified by *Wuthering Heights* was that the novel represented a world that was alien to them. Charlotte understood that people in the south of England had been raised to “observe the utmost evenness of manner and guardedness of language”— in other words, to behave calmly and politely, no matter how they felt inside. The people in the Brontës' part of the world were different. Living in scattered farms and villages, fiercely independent and suspicious of outsiders, they tended to speak their minds, often harshly, and show, rather than hide, their emotions. For most of the novel, Heathcliff is obsessed with revenge to a degree that may seem implausible.

For More Information

<http://us.penguin.com/static/pdf/teachersguides/wuthering.pdf>

A Reader's Guide to *Wuthering Heights* with character summaries, photographs on locations in

the novel, FAQ, and chapter summaries

<http://www.wuthering-heights.co.uk/>

<http://www.cummingsstudyguides.net/Bronte.html>

Some Movie adaptations of Wuthering Heights

1939 Wuthering Heights. The first and the classic with Laurence Olivier as Heathcliff, Merle Oberon as Cathy, David Niven as Edgar. Directed by William Wyler. Won 1940 Oscar for best cinematography, 6 more nominations

1992 Wuthering Heights with Juliette Binoche as Cathy and Ralph Fiennes as Heathcliff

2009 PBS Masterpiece Theater series Wuthering Heights with Charlotte Riley as Cathy and Tom Hardy as Heathcliff

Discussion Questions (from the Penguin Classics Readers' Guide)

1. To what extent do you think the setting of the novel contributes to, or informs, what takes place? Do you think the moors are a character in their own right? How do you interpret Bronte's view of nature and the landscape?
2. Discuss Emily Bronte's careful attention to a rigid timeline and the role of the novel as a sober historical document. How is this significant, particularly in light of the turbulent action within? What other contrasts within the novel strike you, and why? How are these contrasts important, and how do they play out in the novel?
3. Do you think the novel is a tale of redemption, despair, or both? Discuss the novel's meaning to you. Do you think the novel's moral content dictates one choice over the other?
4. Do you think Bronte succeeds in creating three-dimensional figures in Heathcliff and Cathy, particularly given their larger-than-life metaphysical passion? Why or why not?
5. Discuss Bronte's use of twos: Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange; two families, each with two children; two couples (Catherine and Edgar, and Heathcliff and Isabella); two narrators; the doubling-up of names. What is Bronte's intention here? Discuss.
6. How do Mr. Lockwood and Nelly Dean influence the story as narrators? Do you think they are completely reliable observers? What does Bronte want us to believe?
7. Discuss the role of women in Wuthering Heights. Is their depiction typical of Bronte's time, or not? Do you think Bronte's characterizations of women mark her as a pioneer ahead of her time or not?
8. Who or what does Heathcliff represent in the novel? Is he a force of evil or a victim of it? How important is the role of class in the novel, particularly as it relates to Heathcliff and his life?
- 9) Why do you think Emily Brontë chose to unfold the story through the secondary sources of Ellen's narrative, Mr. Lockwood's two visits, and Catherine's diary? How would the story have differed if it had been told chronologically? Do you trust the narrators' versions of the events that took place? Or are they, from time to time, a bit unreliable?
- 10) Compare Catherine's love for Heathcliff with her love for Edgar: What are the defining characteristics of each relationship? Do you think Catherine regrets her choice of husband?
- 11) When Heathcliff visits Catherine for the last time before she dies, she says to him, "You have killed me--and thriven on it, I think." Nearly twenty years later, when Heathcliff is approaching death, he says, "I have to remind myself to breathe--almost to remind my heart to beat!" Did Heathcliff and Catherine believe the only way they could be together was in death? Did they, somehow, will themselves to die?

12) The characters in the novel have a great capacity for violence and hatred, and revenge is one of Heathcliff's greatest motivations. Is Heathcliff justified in the revenge he takes on Hindley? Do you think Heathcliff's childhood experiences at Wuthering Heights contributed to his monstrous behavior as an adult?

13) One critic stated that Wuthering Heights is "truly a novel without a hero or heroine." What do you think of this statement? Is Heathcliff a hero or a villain?

14) Wuthering Heights is considered by many to be one of the greatest romances in literature. Do you agree with this? What is your definition of a romantic novel? Must a great romance have a happy ending?

15) How does Heathcliff first enter into the Earnshaw family? How does each of the various members of the family respond to him? Discuss his early relationship with Mr. Earnshaw, Catherine, or Hindley.

16) How do Heathcliff and Catherine, first see the Linton family? What do they observe the Lintons doing, and how do they respond to the scene? How does the Linton's behavior change after Catherine is brought into the house? What are the implications of that shift?

17) Consider all of the scenes of figures looking into windows, or trying to look into them: Lockwood's second visit to Wuthering Heights, Heathcliff and Catherine at the Linton's window, Lockwood revisiting Wuthering Heights at the end of the novel. What is the effect of this repetition? How does it position the reader of the novel

18) What brings the ghost to the casement window? Analyze the scene, which precedes her appearance carefully. Why does the ghost appear to Lockwood and not to Heathcliff?

Further Reading about Emily Bronte

Brackett, Virginia. *Bloom's how to write about the Brontës*

Frank, Katherine *A chainless soul : a life of Emily Brontë*

Gezari, Janet. *Last things : Emily Brontë's poems*

Ingham, Patricia. *The Brontës*

Knapp, Bettina Liebowitz, *The Brontës : Branwell, Anne, Emily, Charlotte*

Miller, Lucasta. *The Brontë myth*

Paddock, Lisa Olson. *The Brontës A to Z : the essential reference to their lives and work*

Thaden, Barbara *Student companion to Charlotte & Emily Bronte*

Vine, Steven, *Emily Brontë*

Novels about the Brontes

(There are more novels about the Brontes than there were novels written by the Bronte sisters. Here are a few)

Fforde, Jasper. *The Eyre Affair*.

Gael, Juliet *Romancing Miss Bronte: a novel*

Giardina, Denise, *Emily's ghost: a novel*.

Morgan, Jude *Charlotte and Emily : a novel of the Brontës*

Rowland, Laura *The Secret Adventures of Charlotte Bronte (series)*

Tennant, Emma Adele: *Jane Eyre's Hidden Story*

If you liked Wuthering Heights, try these novels

Austen, Jane *Northanger Abbey*

Bronte, Anne *Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and *Agnes Grey*

Bronte, Charlotte *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* and *Shirley*

Collins, Wilkie *The Woman in White*

Dickens, Charles *Great Expectations*

Du Maurier, Daphne *Rebecca*

Hardy, Thomas *Tess of the D'Ubervilles*

Lewis, M.G. *The Monk*

Radcliffe, Ann *The Mysteries of Udolpho*

Rhys, Jean *The Wide Sargasso Sea*

Setterfield, Diane *The Thirteenth Tale*

Shelley, Mary *Frankenstein*