

Key themes in Emily Brontë's "Wuthering Heights"

LOVE

- Different types of love presented throughout the novel. The Greeks classified different types of love to include *agape* (altruistic, charitable love), *ludus* (the playful affection of children and lovers), *pragma* (the understanding that exists between a long married couple), *storge* (the love that develops between comrade or sibling after they have been through much together) and finally *mania* (obsession) which was strongly linked with *eros* (sexual passion)
- Book is structured around two parallel love stories
- Separation of those who should be together brings havoc and misery. Love presented as one-ness and inseparability, rather than two separate people caring for each other.
- Emotions verge between passionate love and hatred/rage. Arguably the two are interdependent, hence the extremity of the language and actions of protagonists and vivid/forceful imagery.
- Catherine and Heathcliff's passion seemingly the centre of novel. Passion condemned as immoral by Nelly and Victorian readers but could interpret as a love that transcends social boundaries and idealise them as romantic hero/heroine.
- Catherine and Hareton's love is less dramatic but restores harmony and equilibrium. It is based on growth, change and mutual improvement. Love denies difference and is perhaps asexual. However, Lockwood is forced to recognise the strength of their love: 'Together, they were afraid of nothing...Together they would brave Satan and all his legions.'

SOCIAL CLASS

- Earnshaws and Lintons members of gentry. In late 18th/19th century, gentry's position is precarious (underneath royalty and aristocracy), as it is unestablished and fluid. Lockwood for instance, is puzzled by their position.
- Considerations of class status inform much of the characters' decisions. Catherine marries Edgar so she can be 'the greatest woman in the neighbourhood'.
- Heathcliff represent shifting status making transition from homeless waif to gentleman, although Lockwood remarks that he is similar only to a gentleman in 'dress and manners,'

NATURE V CULTURE

- Nature represented by Earnshaw (Cathy and Heathcliff in particular) and culture represented by Lintons.
- 'Nature' governed by passions/ wildness
- 'Culture' governed by convention, civility, refinement and ideals.
- In ways, nature corrupts culture in this novel as the world of WH dominates that of TG. Similarly, Brontë reverses expectations when the 'cultured' characters are often presented as silly and shallow. However, we cannot define the novel as an allegory for either side winning; it defies social expectations. Could be compared to *Jane Eyre* where the heroine seeks her own personal/moral code, although it depends whether you view the ending as reconciliation/compromise with the uniting of Cathy and Hareton.

RELIGION

- Religion is more personal and related to 'this world' than the next (see Cathy's speech to Nelly about her idea of heaven)
- Characters have variety of outlooks:
 - o Joseph; emphasis on hell/damnation/sin which is a possible parody of evangelical attitudes prevalent in Victorian period
 - o Edgar; representative of conventional morality/ reunion of souls after death
 - o Nelly; believes in higher power, perhaps because of her social position. She constantly reminds that it is not our place to judge/moralise/ take revenge as it is God's privilege.
 - o Catherine and Heathcliff; heaven is within the moors and within each other, hence their longing for death so they can be together.

POWER AND REVENGE

- Both explored through social view of novel; close knit community where hierarchy is firmly established.
- 2 houses symbolise the sheltered and protected world of the upper class and the exposure of the Earnshaws is brought about by decline of household. Heathcliff however, corrupts Thrushcross Grange and slowly erodes it.
- Heathcliff's status as 'gypsy' lacking in social status or a name changes to owner/heir of both TG and WH.

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- Money/power essential to survival.
- Heathcliff's revenge for thwarted passion is based upon acquiring social status and power. This is perhaps reflective of Victorian society where status is all.
- Heathcliff presented throughout as an outside, forcing his way in literally and symbolically. His power represented by association with fire/storms; fierce love and implacable hatred. He is even described as devilish/ vampire/ it/ ghoul suggesting he is outside humanity altogether.
- Narrators are also socially placed despite the fact they are in control of the story; they anchor the wildness of the story itself.