love in *Wuthering Heights*

From: *Encyclopedia of Themes in Literature.*

*Wuthering Heights* is renowned as one of the greatest love stories in English literature. The relationship between Heathcliff and Catherine Earnshaw—unconsummated and bizarrely unerotic—is difficult, dangerous, and illicit, wreaking havoc on both the protagonists' lives and the lives of those around them. This is not a love for the fainthearted.

Early on in the novel, we learn that even as a child, "[Catherine] was much too fond of Heathcliff. The greatest punishment we could invent for her was to keep her separate from him." An obsessive relationship develops between these two young people, one (Heathcliff) an illegitimate foundling; the other (Catherine) motherless and neglected, both brought up in the same house (alongside Catherine's brother, Hindley). The resulting passionate relationship between, in effect, two siblings, sits uneasily with 20th-century sensibilities.

Heathcliff's love for Catherine is a never-ending obsession, down to the tiniest detail. In his growing jealousy at the amount of time Catherine is spending with his love rival, Edgar Linton, he remarks: "[L]ook at the almanack on that wall.... The crosses are for the evenings you have spent with the Lintons, the dots for those spent with me." Catherine's eventual marriage to Edgar, purely for financial and social reasons, destroys Heathcliff to the extent that he disappears for three years. This is the pivotal event in the novel—Catherine's choice of Edgar over Heathcliff—and the rest of the novel's tragic denouement hangs on this choice.

Although Catherine has achieved her goal of marriage to Edgar, she nevertheless confides to her servant, Nelly: "Whatever our souls are made of, [Heathcliff's] and mine are the same.... Nelly, I *am* Heathcliff." Edgar is, of course, completely infatuated with the exotic and beautiful Catherine, and he "believed himself the happiest man alive on the day he led her to Gimmerton chapel."

Heathcliff, however, cannot stay away for ever. His addiction to Catherine draws him back, and their obsessive love will ultimately lead to both their deaths. His meeting with Catherine (in the presence of Edgar) leads to the pair of them being "too much absorbed in their mutual joy to suffer embarrassment." Even more disastrously, Edgar's sister, Isabella, now develops "a sudden and irresistible attraction towards [Heathcliff]." Heathcliff charms Isabella into marriage, to the horror of both Edgar and Catherine, and then abuses her both emotionally and physically, in revenge for Edgar having married Catherine.

The emotional swings of Catherine's love for Heathcliff result in her becoming desperately ill. Heathcliff contrives one last meeting: "[He] gathered her to him with greedy jealousy ... covering her with frantic caresses." Catherine's death, following the premature birth of her daughter by Edgar (also Catherine, known as Cathy), renders Heathcliff almost insane with sorrow: "He dashed his head against the knotted trunk; and, lifting up his eyes, howled, not like a man, but like a savage beast getting goaded to death with knives and spears." In his obsession, his refusal to let go, he has, in effect, murdered his love. His mania becomes even more entrenched, leading him at one point to have Catherine's body exhumed in a disturbing scene bordering on necrophilia. His manic desire for revenge means he is never fully able to forgive Catherine for marrying Edgar, and this will ultimately lead him to
attempt to ruin the life of her daughter, Cathy. Meanwhile, poor Isabella comes to the chilling understanding that Heathcliff married her only in revenge: "I gave him my heart, and he took and pinched it to death; and flung it back to me."

Both Heathcliff and Edgar eventually die of broken hearts, unable to reconcile themselves to Catherine's death. As if to bring the story full circle, Brontë presents us finally with the possibility of true love and happiness within a relationship—that between the two cousins, Cathy and Hareton (the son of Catherine's dead brother, Hindley), "one loving and desiring to esteem, and the other loving and desiring to be esteemed." There is no grand passion here, but no violence, either. The novel is a stark warning against the former, and, in Hareton and Cathy's reasoned and gentle love, it promotes the latter as the only sane way to live. In this way, Wuthering Heights can be seen to be not so much a "love story" but, rather, an investigation into romantic love, comprising a discourse on social conventions, blind passion, violence, jealousy, and revenge, together with the notion of good versus evil.

Citation Information

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Chicago Manual of Style

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