

THEMES

Wuthering Heights explores the tensions between thwarted obsession and unfettered love, as well as nature versus civilisation. Revenge and the supernatural are also key themes in the novel.

Love

There are several types of love in the novel, romantic and familial. However, two types of love form a natural opposition - passionate, obsessive love, which is destructive of itself and everyone involved, and 'good' love, which is unselfish and allows for positive change to occur.

Obsessive love

This is the love that Catherine and Heathcliff share. She describes the two of them as one person, and he calls her his "soul". His despair at her death is very powerful. Perversely, when he is dying, he becomes happy as he senses her spirit nearby, which prompts talk of his "heaven". This passion destroys them and their families. Catherine cannot marry Heathcliff because as an orphan he is not from her class - it would "degrade" her to marry Heathcliff - nor can she see that she should give him up when she marries someone else, even though she is forced to. Heathcliff is broken by her marriage to Edgar. Their thwarted passion leads to Heathcliff taking revenge.

Good love

This is most clearly demonstrated in the relationship between the younger Catherine and Hareton at the end of the novel. They move from a position of feud, when Lockwood leaves the area, to falling in love and ready to marry on his return. This change occurs because Catherine is willing to admit that she has been wrong and asks for Hareton's forgiveness. They support each other with friendship, and make life more bearable under Heathcliff. Their love enables each to change - Hareton learns to read and becomes cheerful and friendly, and Catherine regains her friendliness, warmth and generosity.

Nature versus civilisation

This theme is part of the Romantic aspect to the book. Taking place out in the wilds of the Yorkshire moors, the novel is set well away from the staid and civilised centres of Victorian society.

There are many ways in which you can see the opposition explored in the novel. You could argue that Heathcliff, the wild orphan boy who loves the moors, represents **nature**, whereas the middle-class family he joins are **civilisation**. Alternatively, both nature and civilisation can be seen in Catherine - she runs wild and natural on the moors, until she hurts her ankle;

when she returns from the Linton household she is civilised, symbolically dressed in white, and frightened of her dress getting dirty. The conflict between nature and civilisation can be blamed for the failure of Catherine to marry Heathcliff, leading to the unhappiness that is visited on everyone.

The final happy ending comes with the combination of nature and civilisation, as represented by the younger Catherine and Hareton. Hareton is raised to be a completely natural person, because Heathcliff refuses to let him be 'civilised' by education, books or manners (although the fact that Hareton tries to read anyway is a sign that he is searching for civilisation).

Catherine begins as the completely civilised child, although she loves the outdoors. At the end of the novel the pair move smoothly from a reading lesson to walking together on the moors, ending the opposition between the two themes.

The two households

The two houses can also represent nature versus civilisation - Thrushcross Grange, the home of the Lintons, is civilised, and Wuthering Heights is the home of the children who run wild. But more importantly the moors are the embodiment of nature and the emotions, completely wild, untamed and, as Lockwood remarks at the beginning of the novel, "completely removed from the stir of society".

For the Romantics, living life as 'naturally' as possible is the ideal. The tension created when people are not able to follow their emotions leads to trouble - as in *Wuthering Heights*. But if people could control their strong emotions, as civilisation encourages them to, could that also lead to happiness? *Wuthering Heights* can be read either way, if you make the right argument.

Revenge

The idea of revenge is a major element in the novel - Hindley is revenged on Heathcliff for being displaced from their father's affection, and Heathcliff takes his revenge on everyone - on Hindley for his cruelty, on Catherine for marrying someone else, on the Lintons for taking Catherine away from him and on Hareton because he's the son of his enemy.

Edgar Linton also takes revenge on his sister for marrying Heathcliff by cutting her off and refusing to have any contact with her, which is harsh since she has no one else to turn to after she discovers Heathcliff's true, cruel nature. However, Edgar does not take it to extremes: he agrees to her dying wish that her son Linton should come to live at Thrushcross Grange.

Revenge becomes a cycle: the cruelty that Hindley inflicts on Heathcliff results in Heathcliff's return to take Hindley's wealth; Heathcliff also treats Hindley's son Hareton with the same cruelty, denying him education and class, and turning him into a labourer on the land.

The only way to break the cycle is through love - the love between the younger Catherine and Hareton. Their likeness to Catherine stops Heathcliff from continuing with his vengeful plan, which is unspecified, and instead he becomes obsessed with Catherine and her ghost.

Doubling as a motif in the novel

Doubling is a motif related to the theme of nature versus civilisation, but is also a major element in the novel in its own right.

The doubling of the **narration**, with Lockwood framing Nelly Dean, allows for two perspectives on the story, from the benign insider, as well as from the traditional moral Victorian outsider.

The **setting** reflects this motif: the two houses, Thrushcross Grange and Wuthering Heights, which at times directly reflect the Nature/Civilisation split, with the Lintons starting off as respectable, middle-class Victorians, and later the young Catherine and her father living in a respectable, educated way at the Grange, while the Heights is home to the debased and debasing Hindley, Heathcliff and Hareton. The fact that the two houses are unified in the ownership of Catherine at the end of the novel also reflects the reconciliation of the two sides.

The **names** of the characters and the repetitions or echoes of names demonstrate the doubling.

The younger Catherine and Hareton **double the generation** above, of Catherine and Heathcliff, and get the happy ending which their parents were denied. This doubling enables the conclusion of the cycle of revenge and cruelty, which contributes to the idea of fate in the novel because Catherine and Hareton are free to be happy and 'natural' in a way that Catherine the older and Heathcliff were not.

Supernatural

The supernatural is symbolised in the ghost of Catherine, who Lockwood hears as the novel opens, and the sighting of the spirits of Catherine and Heathcliff together as the novel closes. The powerful scene of Heathcliff's grief after Catherine's death leads to him calling on her spirit to walk the earth and haunt him rather than rest peacefully. Her spirit does seem to haunt him towards the end of his life, as he says he sees her "in every cloud, in every tree", but this makes him "happy".

Nelly Dean envisages Heathcliff as a goblin, a ghoul and a vampire, wondering where he came from to create such destruction within the family. As he is an orphan of unknown origin she can imagine him coming from some strange, unnatural parentage. However, she realises that it is only superstition: is this supernatural "black thing" a metaphor for the darkness in

Heathcliff's character? Isabella also calls Heathcliff a "monster", suggesting he is not human. Hindley also accuses Hareton of regarding him as a "goblin".

The Gothic elements are not emphasised, but they are treated as genuine - Lockwood, depicted as the proper, clear-headed outsider, is the one to first witness the supernatural.

LANGUAGES

Wuthering Heights is narrated by two quite different characters, includes Yorkshire dialect (which adds to the exploration of class differences in the novel) and is dominated by religious imagery.

Religion

Religious imagery appears throughout *Wuthering Heights*. Heathcliff describes Cathy as his "soul" and his "heaven", sacrilegious references that demonstrate the depth of his feeling and the fact that this love will damn him and is ultimately wrong. **Religious imagery dominates from the outset**, in the description of Lockwood's dream and onwards. Joseph is also constantly referring to religion and sin: his Biblical vocabulary emphasises the motif of the afterlife in the novel, and the question of right and wrong.

Dialect

Some of the book is written in strong Yorkshire dialect, particularly Joseph's speech and sometimes that of Hareton. Nelly Dean also uses dialect but to a lesser extent. This phonetic representation of the accent can be difficult to figure out, but serves as a reminder of class. **The middle-class characters in the book talk 'properly' in contrast to the working-class characters who use dialect.** So dialect adds to the setting - an important part of the book - making it more powerful.

Narrative techniques

The language of the novel changes according to the two different narrators. Nelly Dean's language is mildly Yorkshire and is generally simple and direct. She describes things vividly and with great detail. Lockwood, on the other hand, uses more complex Latinated vocabulary: his two-paragraph description of the Heights is an excellent example of this. The sections which are in Lockwood's voice have far more punctuation, including colons, dashes and semi-colons. His language tells us that he is an educated, civilised man.

One of the key narrative techniques in the whole book is the use of dialogue. Events are told in characters' own words, in the direct way that they happened. This is mostly due to Nelly Dean's vivid narration and adds to the novel's immediacy and authenticity.