**ROMANTIC LOVE IN WUTHERING HEIGHTS**

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Romantic love takes many forms in Wuthering Heights: the grand passion of Heathcliff and Catherine, the insipid sentimental languishing of Lockwood, the **coupleism** of Hindley and Frances, the **tame indulgence** of Edgar, the **romantic infatuation of Isabella**, the **puppy love of Cathy and Linton,** and the **flirtatious sexual attraction of Cathy and Hareton**. These lovers, with the possible exception of Hareton and Cathy, are ultimately self-centered and ignore the needs, feelings, and claims of others; what matters is the lovers' own feelings and needs.

Nevertheless, it is the **passion of Heathcliff and Catherine** that most readers respond to and remember and that has made this novel one of the great love stories not merely of English literature but of European literature as well. Simone de Beauvoir cites Catherine's cry, "I am Heathcliff," in her discussion of romantic love, and movie adaptations of the novel include a Mexican and a French version. In addition, their love has passed into popular culture; Kate Bush and Pat Benetar both recorded "Wuthering Heights," a song which Bush wrote, and MTV showcased the lovers in a musical version.

The love-relationship of Heathcliff and Catherine, but not that of the other lovers, has become an archetype; it expresses **the passionate longing to be whole, to give oneself unreservedly to another and gain a whole self or sense of identity back, to be all-in-all for each other, so that nothing else in the world matters, and to be loved in this way forever**. This type of passion-love can be summed up in the phrase more--and still more , for it is insatiable, unfulfillable, and unrelenting in its demands upon both lovers.

HEATHCLIFF AND CATHERINE: TRUE LOVERS?

Despite the generally accepted view that Heathcliff and Catherine are deeply in love with each other, the question of whether they really "love" each other has to be addressed. This question raises another; what kind of love--or feeling--is Emily Brontë depicting? Her sister Charlotte, for example, called Heathcliff's feelings "perverted passion and passionate perversity."

I list below a number of interpretations of their love/ostensible love.

Soulmates. Their love exists on a higher or spiritual plane; they are soul mates, two people who have an affinity for each other which draws them together irresistibly. Heathcliff repeatedly calls Catherine his soul. Such a love is not necessarily fortunate or happy. For C. Day Lewis, Heathcliff and Catherine "represent the essential isolation of the soul, the agony of two souls–or rather, shall we say? two halves of a single soul–forever sundered and struggling to unite."

A life-force relationship. Clifford Collins calls their love a life-force relationship, a principle that is not conditioned by anything but itself. It is a principle because the relationship is of an ideal nature; it does not exist in life, though as in many statements of an ideal this principle has implications of a profound living significance. Catherine's conventional feelings for Edgar Linton and his superficial appeal contrast with her profound love for Heathcliff, which is "an acceptance of identity below the level of consciousness." Their relationship expresses "the impersonal essence of personal existence," an essence which Collins calls the life-force. This fact explains why Catherine and Heathcliff several times describe their love in impersonal terms. Because such feelings cannot be fulfilled in an actual relationship, Brontë provides the relationship of Hareton and Cathy to integrate the principle into everyday life.

Creating meaning. Are Catherine and Heathcliff rejecting the emptiness of the universe, social institutions, and their relationships with others by finding meaning in their relationship with each other, by a desperate assertion of identity based on the other? Catherine explains to Nelly:

...surely you and everybody have a notion that there is, or should be, an existence of yours beyond you. What were the use of my creation if I were entirely contained here? My great miseries in this world have been Heathcliff's miseries, and I watched and felt each from the beginning; my great thought in living is himself. If all else perished, and he remained, I should still continue to be; and, if all else remained, and he were annihilated, the Universe would turn to a mighty stranger. I should not seem part of it" (Ch. ix, p. 64).

Dying, Catherine again confides to Nelly her feelings about the emptiness and torment of living in this world and her belief in a fulfilling alternative: "I'm tired, tired of being enclosed here. I'm wearying to escape into that glorious world, and to be always there; not seeing it dimly through tears, and yearning for it through the walls of an aching heart; but really with it, and in it" (Ch. xv, p. 125).

Transcending isolation. Their love is an attempt to break the boundaries of self and to fuse with another to transcend the inherent separateness of the human condition; fusion with another will by uniting two incomplete individuals create a whole and achieve new sense of identity, a complete and unified identity. This need for fusion motivates Heathcliff's determination to "absorb" Catherine's corpse into his and for them to "dissolve" into each other so thoroughly that Edgar will not be able to distinguish Catherine from him.

Freud explained this urge as an inherent part of love: "At the height of being in love the boundary between ego and object threatens to melt away. Against all the evidence of his senses, a man who is in love declares ‘I' and 'you' are one, and is prepared to behave as if it were a fact."

Love as religion. Love has become a religion in *Wuthering Heights*, providing a shield against the fear of death and the annihilation of personal identity or consciousness. This use of love would explain the inexorable connection between love and death in the characters' speeches and actions.

Robert M. Polhemus sees Brontë's religion of love as individualistic and capitalistic:

Wuthering Heights is filled with a religious urgency–unprecedented in British novels–to imagine a faith that might replace the old. Cathy's "secret" is blasphemous, and Emily Brontë's secret, in the novel, is the raging heresy that has become common in modern life: redemption, if it is possible, lies in personal desire, imaginative power, and love. Nobody else's heaven is good enough. Echoing Cathy, Heathcliff says late in the book, "I have nearly attained my heaven; and that of others is altogether unvalued and uncoveted by me!" ...The hope for salvation becomes a matter of eroticized private enterprise....

... Catherine and Heathcliff have faith in their vocation of being in love with one another.... They both believe that they have their being in the other, as Christians, Jews, and Moslems believe that they have their being in God. Look at the mystical passion of these two: devotion to shared experience and intimacy with the other; willingness to suffer anything, up to, and including, death, for the sake of this connection; ecstatic expression; mutilation of both social custom and the flesh; and mania for self-transcendence through the other. That passion is a way of overcoming the threat of death and the separateness of existence. Their calling is to be the other; and that calling, mad and destructive as it sometimes seems, is religious.

The desire for transcendence takes the form of crossing **boundaries and rejecting conventions**; this is the source of the torment of being imprisoned in a body and in this life, the uncontrolled passion expressed in extreme and violent ways, the usurpation of property, the literal and figurative imprisonments, the necrophilia, the hints of incest and adultery, the ghosts of Catherine and Heathcliff–all, in other words, that has shocked readers from the novel's first publication. Each has replaced God for the other, and they anticipate being reunited in love after death, just as Christians anticipate being reunited with God after death. Nevertheless, Catherine and Heathcliff are inconsistent in their attitude toward death, which both unites and separates. After crying "Heathcliff! I only wish us never to be parted," Catherine goes on to say, "I'm wearying to escape into that glorious world," a wish which necessarily involves separation (Ch. xv, p. 125).

Portrayal of conventional religion

Conventional religion is presented negatively in the novel. The abandoned church at Gimmerton is decaying; the minister stops visiting Wuthering Heights because of Hindley's degeneracy. Catherine and Heathcliff reject Joseph's religion, which is narrow, self-righteous, and punitive. Is conventional religion replaced by the religion of love, and does the fulfillment of Heathcliff and Catherine's love after death affect the love of Hareton and Cathy in any way? Does the redemptive power of love, which is obvious in Cathy's civilizing Hareton, relate to love-as-religion experienced by Heathcliff and Catherine?

Love as addiction. Is what Catherine and Heathcliff call love and generations of readers have accepted as Ideal Love really an addiction? Stanton Peele argues that romantic or passion love is in itself an addiction. What exactly does he mean by addiction?

An addiction exists when a person's attachment to a sensation, an object, or another person is such as to lessen his appreciation of and ability to deal with other things in his environment, or in himself, so that he has become increasingly dependent on that experience as his only source of gratification.

Individuals who lack direction and commitment, who are emotionally unstable, or who are isolated and have few interests are especially vulnerable to addictions. An addictive love wants to break down the boundaries of identity and merge with the lover into one identity. Lacking inner resources, love addicts look outside themselves for meaning and purpose, usually in people similar to themselves. Even if the initial pleasure and sense of fulfillment or satisfaction does not last, the love-addict is driven by need and clings desperately to the relationship and the lover. Catherine, for example, calls her relationship "a source of little visible delight, but necessary." The loss of the lover, whether through rejection or death, causes the addict withdrawal symptoms, often extreme ones like illness, not eating, and faintness. The addict wants possession of the lover regardless of the consequences to the loved one; a healthy love, on the other hand, is capable of putting the needs of the beloved first.