

## Prose 1900

### *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte

*Wuthering Heights* is a novel of revenge and romantic love. It tells the stories of two families: the Earnshaws who live at the Heights, at the edge of the moors, and the genteel and refined Lintons who live at Thrushcross Grange. The main themes of this novel are love, revenge, and social classes. This novel further contains supernatural elements such as the appearance of ghosts.

#### **Main characters:**

Heathcliff: He is the main character of the novel. He is an orphan who is raised by Mr. Earnshaw. Heathcliff falls in love with Catherine Earnshaw, Mr. Earnshaw's daughter. Catherine's marriage to another man make him spend most of his life acting out revenge. He is abusive, brutal, and cruel. His revenge makes him gain control over Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange.

Catherine Earnshaw: She is Heathcliff's beloved. She is arrogant and selfish. When both Heathcliff and Edgar fall in love with her, she torments both of them. Her ambition to be a lady of a high social status pushes her to choose Edgar. Ultimately, Catherine's selfishness ends up hurting everyone she loves, including herself.

Hindley Earnshaw: He is Catherine's brother. He is jealous of Heathcliff. He loses both his son and his family's home to Heathcliff at the end.

Frances Earnshaw: She is Hindley's wife who shortly dies after giving birth.

Edgar Linton: He falls in love with Catherine and marries her.

Isabella Linton: She is Edgar's sister. She later becomes Heathcliff's wife.

## **The Children:**

Hareton Earnshaw: He is Hindley's son.

Young Catherine / Cathy: She is Catherine's daughter. She marries Linton Heathcliff, but after the deaths of Linton and Heathcliff, she marries Hareton.

Linton Heathcliff: He is Heathcliff's son. He is used by his father as a tool to achieve his revenge.

## **Narrators:**

Nelly Dean: She is the main narrator of the novel. She grew up as a servant in Wuthering Heights. Her narration might be biased as she is deeply involved in the story she tells. She has strong feelings for the characters in her story, and these feelings complicate her narration. She knows almost everything as she served the Earnshaw family for a long time. We see the characters through the eyes of Nelly Dean. She is the housekeeper of Thrushcross Grange. She tells the story to Lockwood who tells the story to the readers.

Lockwood: He is Heathcliff's tenant at Thrushcross Grange. His narrative forms a frame around Nelly's narrative. He is curious to know more about the story of Heathcliff, the Earnshaw family, and the Linton family.

## **Note about the narrators:**

Brontë's use of point of view leads to many questions about the narrators who control the unraveling of events. They are characters which participate in the plot which means they cannot possibly be objective. It is as if the main characters are seen through a series of mirrors, each causing a certain amount of distortion. Without an omniscient voice controlling sympathies, the reader must get inside the characters' minds, the one telling the story as well as the one about whom the story is being told.

### **Summary of the main events of the novel:**

This novel begins in the winter of 1801. Lockwood shows up at Wuthering Heights to make arrangements with Heathcliff to rent Thrushcross Grange. Heathcliff becomes a source of deep curiosity to Lockwood. A snowstorm forces Lockwood to spend the night at Wuthering Heights, and he has crazy nightmares complete with a wailing ghost named Catherine Linton trying to come through the window.

When Lockwood settles in his new house, he invites the housekeeper, Nelly Dean, to tell him the story of the inhabitants of Wuthering Heights. The novel moves to the past as Nelly recounts the story. Nelly starts to work for the Earnshaw family as a young girl. Mr. Earnshaw takes a trip to Liverpool and returns with an orphan named Heathcliff. Though Earnshaw's daughter, Catherine, takes to the boy after only some initial aversion, the son, Hindley, resents his father's favoritism of the strange mannerless boy. Soon Catherine and Heathcliff become inseparable, but Hindley's bitterness has only grown, so he goes off to college. Catherine and Heathcliff briefly enjoy a sort of idyllic, adventurous childhood out on the stormy moors.

When Mr. Earnshaw dies, Hindley returns from college, with his new wife, Frances, to claim his place as the master of Wuthering Heights. College hasn't altered Hindley's feelings toward Heathcliff, so he decides to make Heathcliff's life miserable by treating him like a servant. One time, Heathcliff and Catherine go to Thrushcross Grange to spy on the Linton children, Edgar and Isabella, who live a pampered life. When a dog bites Catherine, she is forced to stay at the Grange for five weeks to recover. While there, Edgar Linton falls in love with her. Back at Wuthering Heights, life without Catherine has been miserable for Heathcliff.

Frances, Hindley's wife, dies after giving birth to a son, Hareton. Without his wife to help tone down his rage, Hindley becomes even more vengeful toward Heathcliff. Hindley resents his new son, and he becomes an abusive alcoholic. His primary activity is making life miserable for Heathcliff and, as a consequence, for everyone else in the house.

Though Catherine confesses to Nelly that she loves Heathcliff, she still marries Edgar because of her desire for a high social class. Heathcliff overhears Catherine's words and takes off for three years to who knows where. When he returns, Heathcliff finds Catherine and Edgar married and living at Thrushcross Grange.

Heathcliff has gained a lot of money during his mysterious absence. He starts his plan to acquire Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange. He exploits the fact that Hindley is a drunkard and engages him in extended bouts of gambling. Eventually, Hindley has to mortgage Wuthering Heights to pay his debts. The house now belongs to Heathcliff. Heathcliff continues to visit Catherine at Thrushcross Grange, though her husband Edgar treats him like a low-born outsider. In order to acquire Edgar's property, Heathcliff marries Isabella Linton, who brings out all of his abusive instincts.

A violent argument between Edgar and Heathcliff sends Catherine to the sickbed, from which she never really recovers. She does, however, give birth to a daughter, also named Catherine (Cathy / Young Catherine). When Catherine dies, Heathcliff's sorrow and rage increase and he pleads for Catherine's ghost to haunt him. Unable to take his abusiveness any longer, Isabella flees for London, where she gives birth to a son, Linton Heathcliff.

For the next thirteen years, Nelly Dean stays at Thrushcross Grange to raise Young Catherine. Edgar and Nelly make sure that Catherine knows nothing of Wuthering Heights or its master. But, like her mother, Catherine is drawn to

adventure and wants to explore the moors. When Nelly forbids her to leave Thrushcross Grange, Catherine goes off on her own. She ends up at Wuthering Heights, where she meets Hindley's son, Hareton. Heathcliff treats Hareton in a bad way which turns Hareton into uneducated boy.

When Isabella dies, Edgar retrieves his fragile nephew, Linton, and brings him back to live with them at Thrushcross Grange. Heathcliff has other plans, and demands that his son lives with him, though Linton did not even know his father existed. The contrast between Linton and Hareton is stark, but Heathcliff can't stand either of them.

Eventually young Catherine encounters Heathcliff on the moors and ventures to Wuthering Heights, where she meets Linton, whom she only vaguely remembers. She and Linton begin a secret correspondence of love letters. Linton becomes a tool of his father's plot for revenge—marrying Catherine would ensure that Linton inherits Thrushcross Grange. Eventually, he forces Cathy to marry his son, Linton. By this time, he has control of the Heights and with Edgar's death, he has control of the Grange.

Soon after, Edgar dies and so does the sickly, young Linton. Heathcliff is now master of both Wuthering Height and Thrushcross Grange. He keeps his widowed daughter-in-law with him at Wuthering Heights so that she can work for him as a common servant. He rents out Thrushcross Grange to Lockwood.

Nelly's story is now complete. Lockwood's fascination with Heathcliff has turned to disgust and he gives notice to Heathcliff that he will be leaving Thrushcross Grange to return to London. Six months later, however, he is back in the neighborhood and visits Nelly, who gives him an update on the dramatic tale.

Despite her initial rejection of Hareton as an illiterate boor, Catherine warms to him and begins teaching him how to read. Heathcliff finds himself too

obsessed with the dead Catherine to even care about the younger generation or even to bother eating or sleeping. Instead of continuing his cycle of abuse and revenge, he wanders the moors, stares into the middle distance, and makes broken-hearted appeals to Catherine's ghost. Through all of this, though, the ghost of Catherine haunts Heathcliff. What he truly desires more than anything else is to be reunited with his soul mate. At the end of the novel, Heathcliff and Catherine are united in death. Hareton and Catherine inherit the two houses. They plan to marry on New Year's day and have created a new atmosphere of renewal and hope.

### **Synopsis of each chapter:**

The novel can be divided into three main structural divisions: Prologue, History of the Family, and the Epilogue.

#### **Prologue:**

Chapter 1: 1801—Lockwood, the new tenant at Thrushcross Grange, pays a visit to his landlord, Mr. Heathcliff at Wuthering Heights. Lockwood finds himself curious about Heathcliff.

Chapter 2: Curiosity leads Lockwood to make a second visit the next day. This time he is locked in because of the snow and has plenty of time to discover the relationships among the occupants of the house: a young refined woman; a young man, obviously used to hard labor; and Heathcliff. Lockwood begins to have doubts about Heathcliff's character when he sees him react savagely to the young woman.

Chapter 3: Lockwood is put up for the night in one of the unused bedrooms which was the girlhood room of Catherine Earnshaw. There he discovers the books and writings of Catherine from the time when her brother Hindley was the master of

the house. Lockwood falls into a fitful sleep with dreams that turn into nightmares. His cries arouse Heathcliff who thinks it is the ghost of Catherine calling out to him. After this sleepless night, Lockwood vows never to bother his neighbors again.

### **History of the Family:**

Chapter 4: That evening, reviving a bit, Lockwood engages his housekeeper, Nelly Dean, who had served the Earnshaws for many years, in a conversation about the inhabitants at Wuthering Heights. Nelly Dean begins the history of the family at the time that the old master Mr. Earnshaw brings a foundling, later named Heathcliff, home to be raised as his own child. Catherine and Heathcliff become close friends, but Hindley's resentment at his father's protective attitude towards Heathcliff soon turns into hatred.

Chapter 5: Hindley is sent off to college, and the strong bond between Catherine and Heathcliff grows as they are left to themselves to roam about the countryside. The child Catherine is full of energy and high spirits, which often puts her at odds with her father.

Chapter 6: This tranquil time is changed by the death of Mr. Earnshaw. Hindley returns for the funeral with a new wife and takes his place as master. He banishes Heathcliff from the family, requiring him to give up his education to work as a servant. Still Catherine and Heathcliff manage to sneak away for rambles on the moor. On one of these excursions, they spy on the Linton family at Thrushcross Grange. When the watchdog bites Catherine's leg, she is attended by the Lintons while Heathcliff is sent home in disgrace.

Chapter 7: Five weeks pass before Catherine returns home. She is a changed person, in appearance and manners. She now acts the part of the "lady." Heathcliff, meanwhile, has grown more ragged and dirty. Catherine still feels

close to Heathcliff and doesn't understand why he resents the changes in her. But Heathcliff envies Edgar Linton, his appearance and prospects with Catherine, and resolves to revenge himself on Hindley, no matter how long it will take. At this point, Nelly Dean interrupts her story, wanting to move on more quickly. Lockwood insists that she continue in the same style, not leaving out any details.

Chapter 8: Nelly Dean continues the story of the Earnshaw family. It is now the following summer, and a baby boy is born to Hindley and his wife who dies within the year. The child, Hareton, is raised by Nelly Dean. Hindley gives in to desperate and dissipated mourning for his wife. Catherine, at fifteen, tries to balance her relationship with both the Linton children and Heathcliff. This causes difficulties for her since neither side likes the other. She is still Heathcliff's constant companion, but he has turned into a boorish, uncultivated person. Piqued by the situation, Catherine quarrels with Edgar, but it leads, paradoxically, to closer intimacy between them.

Chapter 9: Catherine, seeking advice, confides to Nelly that Edgar has asked her to marry him, and she has accepted, even though she is convinced that it is Heathcliff she really loves. However, she cannot marry Heathcliff, given his social situation, and she thinks marriage to Edgar will secure Heathcliff's future. Unknown to Catherine, Heathcliff has overheard most of this conversation, except for Catherine's declaration of love for him. Heathcliff steals out of the room and leaves the countryside. Catherine is devastated by his loss and becomes seriously ill. Three years pass without any word from Heathcliff, and Catherine marries Edgar. This ends the first part of Nelly Dean's story.

Chapter 10: Lockwood becomes sick from his walk in the snow. It is four weeks before he is well enough to ask Nelly Dean to continue the story. Edgar and Catherine enjoy a "honeymoon" period, but it ends with the return of Heathcliff. He is transformed into a tall, muscular, athletic, and mannered man. Catherine is overjoyed to have him back and insists that Edgar, who is of course jealous of her



feelings for Heathcliff, accept him into the family. Edgar's sister, Isabella, becomes infatuated with Heathcliff and accuses her sister-in-law of monopolizing him. Catherine mocks Isabella's feelings by embarrassing her in front of Heathcliff. She doesn't change Isabella's mind, but instead plants an idea in Heathcliff's mind that such a marriage would enable him to inherit all the Linton lands. Meanwhile, Heathcliff is staying at Wuthering Heights with Hindley Earnshaw, who, regardless of the danger, has included Heathcliff in his nightly card games, hoping to win some money from him.

Chapter 11: On Heathcliff's next visit to the Linton's, he meets Isabella in the garden and kisses her. Catherine is very put out and quarrels with Heathcliff. There is a violent scene between Edgar and Heathcliff when Edgar orders him never to come to the house again. Catherine becomes so upset that she locks herself in her room.

Chapter 12: By the time Catherine lets Nelly into her room, she is sick from fever and delirium. Concerned with Catherine's health, the family doesn't realize, until it is too late, that Isabella has eloped with Heathcliff. Nelly had discovered her absence earlier but told no one, wanting to spare the family more confusion and pain.

Chapter 13: Catherine suffers through a long illness but slowly begins to recover. Meanwhile Isabella and Heathcliff return to Wuthering Heights. Heathcliff's cruel and evil nature is now apparent to Isabella.

Chapter 14: Nelly goes to Wuthering Heights to see Isabella, even though her brother considers her "lost" to him and insists on no communication between the two families. However, Heathcliff desires to see Catherine again and forces Nelly to play his go-between. He says Edgar can never love Catherine as fully as he does and implies that he would kill Edgar if he thought Catherine wouldn't miss him. Nelly finally gives into his threats and agrees to carry a letter to Catherine.

There is another pause in the narrative. When the story picks up again, Lockwood is the narrator, telling the story in Nelly Dean's "own words."

Chapter 15: Catherine is physically and mentally altered by her illness; she is listless and withdrawn, clearly marked for an early death. Heathcliff realizes this as soon as he sees her. She accuses him of having broken her heart and torments him with her prediction that he will live to forget her. She wishes that they would never be parted, and refuses to release her hold on him even when her husband enters. She falls into a faint from which she never awakens.

Chapter 16: That night a premature infant, young Catherine, is born and Catherine Linton dies. Heathcliff, who has kept a vigil in the garden, knows she is dead before Nelly comes to tell him. He begs Catherine to haunt him, not to leave him alone in this world.

Chapter 17: The next afternoon, Isabella, who is running away from Heathcliff, stops at the house and describes the violent fight between Hindley Earnshaw and Heathcliff. She is bleeding from a knife wound to the head, brought on by her own taunts to Heathcliff that he murdered Catherine. Her son, named Linton, is born a few months later, south of London. Six months later, Hindley Earnshaw, just 27, dies. It is discovered that Heathcliff owns all the Earnshaw land. Earnshaw's son, Hareton, is penniless, completely depended on Heathcliff for everything.

Chapter 18: Twelve years pass. Young Catherine, called Miss Cathy, has grown up, never going far from home. Isabella, near death, calls Edgar to her side so she can entrust her son Linton to him. Cathy, tired of waiting for her father, decides to do some exploring on her own and ends up at Wuthering Heights. There she meets Hareton who is now eighteen and learns that he is a cousin. She is upset to discover this unlikely connection, but agrees to keep her visit a secret.

Chapter 19: Edgar returns home with his nephew, a “pale, delicate, effeminate boy.” Linton is sickly and frail and quite moody, but Cathy is hopeful of making him a pet, soothing his nerves by taking care of him. However, Heathcliff demands that his son be sent to him immediately.

Chapter 20: The next morning Nelly takes Linton to Wuthering Heights. Heathcliff’s plan to own all the Linton land through his son’s inheritance now becomes apparent. He values the boy for this alone and will not harm him, even though he considers him a puny, weak thing.

Chapter 21: Time passes pleasantly until Cathy’s sixteenth birthday. In a ramble over the moors, she meets Heathcliff, who invites her to his home to meet his son. He confides to Nelly that he wants the two cousins to fall in love, so as to avoid any legal questions when Linton inherits the property of his uncle. Cathy, refusing to believe her father’s description of Heathcliff’s character, sets up a secret correspondence with Linton. When Nelly discovers the notes, she forces Cathy to stop writing at the risk of her father’s displeasure.

Chapter 22: At the end of the summer, Edgar Linton gets cold that he cannot shake off, and the family begins to fear for his health. Heathcliff, passing on the road one day, meets Cathy who has been on a walk. He accuses her of playing with young Linton’s feelings, saying the boy is so depressed that he has made himself sick enough to die. Cathy insists that she must see for herself, and Nelly gives in, hoping that Linton’s behavior will prove the falseness of Heathcliff’s words.

Chapter 23: They find young Linton more frail and sickly than before. He also complains at Cathy’s treatment of him, repeating his father’s accusations against Edgar Linton. He demands that Cathy continue to visit him to cure him. Nelly protests that the visits must not be repeated.

Chapter 24: Nelly becomes sick and is laid up for three weeks. During this time, Cathy continues her secret visits to Linton in the evenings. When Nelly discovers her secret, Cathy describes her visits and her attempts to amuse Linton, usually without good results. Every time Cathy wants to end the visits, the boy blames his ill nature on his sickness. Edgar Linton insists that the visits be stopped.

Chapter 25: The narrated events of the novel have now reached just one year before 1801, the year Lockwood first came to Wuthering Heights. Edgar Linton, who feels he is dying, fears that young Linton Heathcliff is only a tool of Heathcliff's revenge and forbids any more visits between the cousins. However, he allows them to write each other. Edgar realizes that Cathy will be left without an inheritance unless she marries Linton Heathcliff.

Chapter 26: Young Linton is also quite ill. He hardly has the energy to visit with Cathy, but his fear of his father makes him beg her to come again the next week.

Chapter 27: On the next visit, Linton is even more abject terror, saying he cannot enter the house without Cathy. Heathcliff has devised a plan to kidnap Cathy and not release her until she marries Linton, even though he knows that her father is near death. In the morning, Cathy is taken to be married while Nelly is kept locked up.

Chapter 28: After five days, Nelly is released and returns to the Grange to find Mr. Edgar near death. Cathy manages to break out of Wuthering Heights just in time to comfort her father in his last hours.

Chapter 29: The evening after the funeral, Heathcliff arrives at the Grange to demand Cathy's return to Linton's side. He tells Nelly that he has had Catherine's grave opened and has made plans to be buried next to her when he dies so that their dust can mingle. Heathcliff is still haunted by Catherine. He feels her spirit, but he is in torment because she refuses to show herself.

Chapter 30: Young Linton dies, and Cathy is forced to continue living at Wuthering Heights. Heathcliff now owns all the Earnshaw and Linton property. This chapter concludes Nelly Dean's story.

Chapter 31: Lockwood, feeling much better after his long illness, rides over to Wuthering Heights to tell Heathcliff that he doesn't intend to stay on at the Grange at the end of his year. Not much has changed among the members of the household. Cathy is still obstinate and continues to badger Hareton. But there are slight changes in Heathcliff; he is more restless, anxious, and troubled than Lockwood has seen him before.

## **Epilogue**

Chapter 32: Eight months pass. In September, Lockwood is in the vicinity of the Grange and decides to visit Wuthering Heights to pay off his account. He learns that Heathcliff has been dead for three months. Nelly describes how Cathy and Hareton were reconciled and became fast friends, while at the same time Heathcliff became more and more estranged from the family.

Chapter 33: Nelly continues the tale. Heathcliff hardly notices what is happening around him. When Cathy stands up to him, he is caught by the look in her eyes that reminds him of Catherine. Hareton also closely resembles Catherine. Heathcliff realizes that everywhere he looks he sees reminders of Catherine. He is tormented and haunted by his desire to be reunited with Catherine.

Chapter 34: These are the last days of Heathcliff. He stops eating and sleeping; he restlessly roams through the countryside and home, seeing Catherine wherever he looks. Finally, Nelly discovers him in Catherine's bed, dead. He is buried as he wished, next to the grave of Catherine. Now the country folk swear that his restless spirit still walks. Young Catherine and Hareton will be married on the

new year and move to the Grange to begin their life together, leaving behind the ghosts of Catherine and Heathcliff.

### **Chronological History of the Linton and Earnshaw Families**

1772: Old Mr. Earnshaw finds a starving, orphaned child in the streets of Liverpool while on a business trip and brings him home to be raised with his children—Hindley, fourteen, and Catherine, six; the child is christened Heathcliff.

June, 1778: Hareton Earnshaw, Hindley's child, is born.

1780: Heathcliff leaves Wuthering heights.

1783: Edgar Linton marries Catherine Earnshaw.

1784: Catherine Linton dies and her baby Catherine is born. Isabella runs away from Wuthering heights after the funeral of Catherine; Linton, son of Isabella and Heathcliff, is born in the south, near London. Hindley Earnshaw dies.

1801: Catherine Linton and Linton Heathcliff are married. Edgar Linton dies. Linton Heathcliff dies within weeks of his uncle's death.

April, 1802: Heathcliff dies.