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## Heathcliff's multiple references in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*

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#### Abstract

*Wuthering Heights* is considered one of the most controversial novels in the history of English literature due to its debatable themes and other messages. However, the novel is examined intensively and receives many critical commentaries. The earliest reviewers show less interest in this novel and its themes. Moreover, they harshly criticize the aggressive depiction of the relations and the unfavorable portrayal of the female characters. On the other hand, other critics greatly praise the uniqueness and originality of the writing style and intelligent analysis of Victorian society. Between the two opposing views, the reader may understand that Emily Brontë wants to build this controversial status to shed light on the unspoken issues in British society during the Victorian era. One of the most attractive points in this novel is the skillful portrayal of the main character, Heathcliff. Brontë manipulates these characters cunningly to represent all of the drawbacks of society. She uses this character to criticize the nature of relationships, the social situation, the political aspect, and the economic status of British society at that time. Due to the multiple facets of this character, the reader may find it difficult to understand his behaviors, attitudes, and emotions. Brontë makes the reader fluctuate between loving and sympathizing with this character to hating and disagreeing with most of his deeds. These doubtful reactions towards this character may remain till the end of the novel. Undoubtedly, the reader may enjoy reading this novel and understand the nature of this complicated web of relationships and elicit unspoken messages.

**Keywords:** colonization, heathcliff, imperialism, Victorian era, wuthering heights



### Public Interest Statement

This paper testifies the ideals and untouchable moral and ethical standards of Victorian age. Through Brontë's novel, the paper examines the dark side of the Victorians particularly with the people of different races. Clearly stating in this paper that the attitude and behaviours of any person should be justified based on his personal experience or background. So, no one has the right to decide the destiny of anyone without knowing or at least understanding the motifs behind these behaviours.

### Introduction

*Wuthering Heights* is an exciting story from the first stance, and it carries many different aspects of the inner status of human beings. Emily Brontë tries to give the readers a new model of fictional works that differs from the dominant tendency during 19th-century novels. During the Victorian era, everything was restricted by highly respected norms and traditions and should comply with the standards. In *Wuthering Heights*, Brontë boldly exposes the dark side of the human being without decoration to convey that no one can be perfect in all situations and should have a kind of downfalls. So, many critics consider that Brontë moves against the grains with this novel, and she successfully mirrors the many contradictions of British society during the Victorian era. From the literary perspective, the reader can examine this story on two levels; the first can be a direct story of mysterious characters with different backgrounds and inner adventures that lead to physical adventures. Readers may find much excitement and tension parallel with some marginal love stories.

From a deeper level, this story is a true reflection of British society during a significant period of history. The story discloses the unspoken issues and problems within society skillfully and cunningly. It can be the main reason behind disliking the novel from the earliest reviewers and readers and making it "underestimated and misunderstood at the time of its publication" (Watson & Towheed, 2012, p. 170). In other words, due to the different nature of this novel, many critical studies examine the multiple themes and references which Brontë wanted to convey. Accordingly, some critics may praise the novel's originality, unconventional spirit, and style. There are many aspects of mysterious characters and unfamiliar themes. Others can harshly criticize the novel for its detailed depiction of violence and passive female portrayals. Again, it is well-noted that Emily Brontë skillfully presents a well-structured fictional work with different dimensions that can carefully grasp the attention of the readers till the last page of the story. The writer's sister, Charlotte Brontë, describes the novel as "a rude and strange production" (Brontë & Dunn, 2002, p. 313).

Throughout the novel, Brontë compares two houses and two families to create a carefully complicated web of relationships to dig deeper into the characters' inner psyches to reflect the human beings' true nature. Also, Brontë uses a creative narration technique as she uses two main narrators and other minor narrators to comment on the story's incidents and give the readers their impressions about the hidden's feelings and concealed emotions. One of the main characters and the key figure in this story is Heathcliff. Brontë has manipulated Heathcliff's character to achieve many of her goals in this story. She creatively forms this character to convey many messages and shed light on British society's contradictions and issues. She presents an "unconventional" character with exceptional love emotions and an eccentric spirit of revenge. Throughout this character, Brontë exposes both sides of the human being; the bright and kind side and the dark side with all evil intentions. The readers may feel perplexed before forming their impressions about this character as they can find a mixture of positive and negative features. In many instances, Brontë opposes the dominant flow of Victorian novels and novelists. She intends to leave the characters reflecting their true feelings regardless of the moral codes of that time.

*Wuthering Heights* has received plenty of critical commentaries from its publication until today. The earliest reviewers considered Brontë's novel "coarse and loathsome, strange and repellent" (Levy, 1991, p. 75). Nowadays, this novel has been revisited and considered one of the most influential classic novels in the history of English literature due to the uniqueness of its complicated characterization, narration style, setting, and its imageries, and metaphors. Different critics have examined the novel from the feminist point of view or the psychoanalysis aspect. Also, they have checked according to the cultural and Marxist dimensions. Much of this criticism is directed at the novel's main character, Heathcliff. Many critical studies handle the multiple references of this character and how his race and social class play an important role in structuring his character's attitudes and behaviors on the one hand and others' reactions to his character on the other hand. Additionally, these two issues may refer to the hidden reasons behind his genuine and deep interest in revenge until the novel's end.

Brontë wants to give the reader a preliminary insight into Heathcliff's character as an orphan with unknown origins to drag our attention to the first main issue of this character. The writer has deepened the issue of race through the character's features and behaviors and may provide a kind of justification for his reactions. His mysterious origin gives him "no natural social standing – neither social nor biological. Nevertheless, he disrupts the Earnshaw family's social structure, resulting in conflicts – especially between Heathcliff and Hindley (the original son) (Eagleton, 2005, p. 397). On the other hand, some critics consider this mysterious origin a privilege, and this merit enables him to be free from the limitations of social structures and formulas. Catherine is one of those who praise the unknown origin of Heathcliff, and it is one of the reasons that pushes her to be attracted to and fall in love with him. Regardless of both opinions, Heathcliff's lack of relevance and mysterious origin cause many clashes and conflicts for all characters. The writer imposes Heathcliff in an unfamiliar environment and causes a kind of disruption to this stable social structure.

On the other hand, the significance of Heathcliff's race issue is elaborated comprehensively in this novel. Brontë creates this issue as the central impulse of his villainous acts and makes his relationship with Catherine more of a "mistress-bondsman" relation than a love relation (Sneidern, 1995, p. 178). Moreover, Brontë makes Heathcliff a representative of foreignness and "otherness." She wants to shed light on the race problem in British society during the 19th century and examine all subsidiary problems resulting from this central issue. Furthermore, Brontë wants to hint at the status of those who arrived in British society during that time and how they were dealt with as enslaved people due to their race or being foreigners.

As mentioned, *Wuthering Heights* is not preferable for many of the earliest critics and readers due to the aggressive and repulsive attitude of creating the characters and their attitudes. Throughout the novel, Emily Brontë does not want to frankly oppose the dominant values and traditions of the Victorian Age, but also she cleverly exposes the dark side of human nature and Victorian society. Most characters are presented without moral drives, and their attitudes aim to hurt others. Upon publication, the novel was harshly criticized for its aggressive notion and violence. For example, *The North American Review* describes the content of this novel as "an attempt to corrupt the virtue of the sturdy descendants of the Puritans" (Brontë & Sale, 1972, p. 278). In other words, Brontë tries to uncover the unspoken issues of Victorian society and attacks the claims of this idealism of the Victorians. Also, the *Examiner* describes the novel as "wild, confused, disjointed, and improbable; and the people who make up the drama, which is tragic enough in its consequences, are savages ruder than those who lived before the days of Homer" (Brontë & Sale, 1972, p. 281). Many scholars and critics are encouraged to attack this novel to defend the stabilized "untouchable" virtues of Victorian society and save the fabric of this community from the maximum level of savagery and immoral behavior exposed in this novel. The reader may exclaim why all critics attack Brontë for

her novel simultaneously; however, other novels written by well-known writers like Charles Dickens also attack Victorian society. The answer to this question may come with forming the other novels' themes and characters. The reader can find that the heroes and heroines possess a morality level matching Victorian virtues and ideals.

In *Wuthering Heights*, Brontë criticizes different aspects of Victorian life. She starts with the assumption of righteous life and acclaims perfectionism in everything. Then, she satirizes the materialistic notion dominating all kinds of relationships in society and even within the same family. Moreover, she mocks marriage as a vehicle of social status mobility. Through the characters, she aggressively hits the barbaric behaviors of males driven by their desires. This novel can be considered a genuine and honest mirror of 19th-century society with both sides. Brontë reflects on her point of view about society and her experience as a person who witnessed the reign of Queen Victoria. She experienced many societal changes, some of which conflicted with her perception of the value of family.

So, she uses Heathcliff to critique the racial discrimination in this society and how someone without known origins can be maltreated and humiliated without a single room of tolerance or acceptance. Subsequently, she states the outcomes of this maltreatment of those individuals in society and how they can ruin everything to take revenge on society. Brontë uses *Wuthering Heights* to shed light on the spoiled part of society as per her understanding of culture and its implications.

It is clearly stated that *Wuthering Heights* attacks 19th-century capitalism and its impacts on upper-class individuals. Throughout the novel, Brontë explains how the aristocratic and wealthy families become lazy and self-centered after being noble and respectable in society due to their lust for wealth and materialistic gains. Therefore, she presents the middle-class as more dynamic and eager to move upper and higher on the social ladder. She states that middle-class individuals can succeed in positioning a more prominent status in society due to their ambitions. In this regard, the reader may understand that Victorian society "complained that upper-class had abdicated their social responsibilities" and these social parasites wild their days... in their well-guarded preserves...lazing. . .in townhouses splendid with the kind of ostentatious lousy taste that only unlimited money can buy" (Altick, 1973, p. 21). In other words, the materialistic life controls all aspects of British society and smashes the values and the concept of hard work. All that Brontë presents in her novel cunningly and cleverly through quirky characters and themes.

In general, Emily Brontë cleverly uses the comparison between the two houses, *Wuthering Heights* and *Thrushcross Grange*, to compare the two internal communities within British society during the Victorian era. She wants to explore the unseen layers of this ideal society. According to the critic George Henry Lewes, *Wuthering Heights* can be considered "a combination of heightened description and a telling engagement with real issues and emotions, which for him was the basis for the realist novel's claim to 'truth'" (Watson & Towheed, 2012, p. 195). In other words, *Wuthering Heights* exposes the bold and clear truth about the different issues of this Victorian society like; "the realities of domestic life, social exclusion, and economic dispossession" (Watson & Towheed, 2012, p. 196).

Additionally, the writer examines the impact of imperialism on British society in general and the economic situation in specific. Brontë draws attention to the link between the economic and social structure on the one hand and the entrance of Heathcliff to the scene of wealthy people's world on the other hand. She makes this entrance clear and influential in understanding the concepts of imperialism and the value of wealth regardless of the person's origin. In this case, Brontë examines the side effects of the history of colonization of Britain during this Age. Starting from comparing the two houses, *Wuthering Heights* and *Thrushcross Grange*, and their inhabitants, Brontë portrays the Earnshaw family members as newcomers who gained property due to the ongoing changes of the industrial revolution. They are presented as a part of the new bourgeoisie in the British community.

On the other hand, Linton's family members are presented as the old and original part of the elite social

class (Kemp, 1967, p. 15). Then, Brontë gives us the details of the appearance of Heathcliff, who is brought by Mr. Earnshaw from the streets of Liverpool. His entrance to this mainstream changes the stabilized and well-known social structure and raises fundamental questions about the consequences of the history of British colonization. Previously, the colonized countries were considered sources of goods and other things that may support the economy. In addition, they found their interest in these countries of cheap labor. After these countries' independence, people of the colonized countries found their future in the land of their colonizers. They looked at the role models of development and better life in these countries.

In *Wuthering Heights*, Brontë paralleled this complicated relationship between the colonizer and colonized in the form of the relation between Earnshaw and Heathcliff, and the relation between the Heights and the Grange and their inhabitants on the other hand (Gandhi, 2019, p. 11). The impacts of this relationship are clearly stated and represented like the future relations among different characters and the mistreatment Heathcliff receives from all the characters.

### Heathcliff Character: Analysis of Multiple References

Emily Brontë uses the character of Heathcliff effectively to reflect the many contradictions of the Victorian personality. Through Heathcliff, Brontë proves that many Victorian characters can be described as uncanny and mysterious due to their internal clashes and psychological complexities. Also, she portrays this character as a representative of oppressed ethnic groups to examine their sufferings and how they are heavily mistreated in a society with claims of idealism and perfectionism. On the other hand, she sheds light on the impacts of these traumatic experiences on the community and its inhabitants. Heathcliff's character can be analyzed on different levels and from different perspectives. It is worth noting that this character "preoccupied commentators on the novel for a good century after its publication" (Watson & Towheed, 2012, p. 181).

This part will examine this character to identify the multiple references the reader can elicit as per his behaviors and attitudes. Furthermore, the reader can understand how Brontë exploits the character as a vehicle to reflect the unspoken issues and problems of Victorian society according to her understanding. From the novel's beginning, she uses exceptional language to portray Heathcliff character to give the reader initial impressions and to draw attention to his behaviors and actions. Brontë leaves the space for readers to decide whether they may love and sympathize with or hate him. She takes care of every single characteristic of Heathcliff, from describing as dark and gypsy-like to focusing on his only first name without giving a second name to him like the other characters in the novel.

The critics prominently disagree on Heathcliff's character due to the multiple dimensions of his personality and contradicting features and traits presented in the novel. For example, Heathcliff is an example of a romantic hero according to his eternal love for Catherine and his decision to get buried beside her after death. Also, some critics consider him a representative of a Byronic hero due to his deep feeling of revenge and early traumatic experience. All his endeavors are driven by his eagerness to focus his revenge on restoring his position in *Wuthering Heights*. He is presented as a rebellious and outrageous character who opposes the dominating laws and traditions. At this point, the reader should remember that this young man is humiliated and mistreated in different situations by Hindley (the son of Mr. Earnshaw). This mistreatment reaches to peak after Mr. Earnshaw's death as he is also forced to leave the only love in his life (Catherine) and leave *Wuthering Heights* and lose his dignity. So, the reader can find many justifications for his horrific acts and unstoppable interest in revenge due to the previous history in *Wuthering Heights* and within this community in general.

Heathcliff comes into existence in Earnshaw's family through the father, Mr. Earnshaw, who picks him up as

an orphan from the streets of Liverpool. All the family members except the son care for this new member. From the beginning of the story, Hindley and Catherine (Mr. Earnshaw's children) are presented as two different personalities with different attitudes. The reader can understand this point through how they treat Heathcliff as an adopted son. Heathcliff's smooth life and timely treatment and care have turned upside down after Mr. Earnshaw's death. He started to face the true face of Hindley and was treated no better than a servant.

Additionally, he cannot save his only love Catherine due to the imposed restrictions, and she moves to marry Edgar Linton. This situation reveals the bold fact about his status in this family and that community. He is only an adopted son with unknown origins and has no privileges in the community. One important point should be considered at this level; Heathcliff is the only character that is given only a first name. The other characters are called by their first name and family name. This repetition of these names and titles enhances the inferiority of Heathcliff in society as a person with mysterious origins and backgrounds. The reader may sympathize with Heathcliff at this stage due to the previously mentioned facts about his life. Subsequently, Heathcliff leaves the scene for an unknown place and stays for some time. Then, he returns with tremendous money to impose himself quickly into the business community and become a well-known wealthy man. At this point, the reader can see a new version of this character with a villainous spirit and acts driven by his engrained interest in revenge. He comes to take his revenge on all who have mistreated him. The reader can understand that he wants to punish society and life in general, which presents him with an orphan status.

From the story's beginning, Brontë makes different characters contribute to constituting the multiple images of Heathcliff's character. The readers may be polarized in understanding this character and the motifs behind his vindictive machinations. However, the precise point is that his eagerness for revenge pushes the story's incidents forward and manages the entire plot from the beginning to the end to the extent that his death brings the end to this story. So, all readers and critics should give enough time to understand all aspects of this character to be able to connect all threads of the different relationships. Brontë cleverly plays with this character and tries to tease the readers and critics to show Heathcliff as a single side character. Then, the readers can explore the hidden side of the character. In other words, Brontë exposes this character as an orphan and adopted son, and this status should draw attention and sympathy. Then, she presents Heathcliff as a subject of all types of mistreatment and humiliation at the hands of Hindley after Mr. Earnshaw's death. Meanwhile, he receives a decisive strike by Catherine and her marriage from Edgar to deepen his feeling of unfairness. These hints can give the reader enough justification to stand beside this character and defend his acts. In the novel's second part, his deliberate disappearance and return with this "mysterious" fortune to restore his position in Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross can be considered an indicator of the subsequent shift in this character. However, his deep and endless eagerness for revenge from all can hint at his unhuman nature, which is exposed clearly upon his mysterious return.

Heathcliff has the opportunity to reform his attitudes and behaviors, remarkably has been compensated in some ways, but he continues his deeds without feeling guilty. His virulence and manacle are deepened and enhanced as time forward. Additionally, his interest in revenge is increased daily by Hindley, Edgar, Catherine, and all members of Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange. It is difficult to identify a single aspect of his character to satisfy the reader and critic with analyzing his behaviors. His villainous endeavors reach the level of humiliating Isabella, and he enjoys this type of mistreatment of his wife. Due to the multiple aspects of Heathcliff, the reader may be interested in understanding more about this mysterious character. Unfortunately, the writer does not leave enough space to confirm these aspects until the end. The mystery of his origins, his mystery over his disappearance, and the mysterious source of the wealth still till end open end questions with clear answers or convincing resolutions (Watson & Towheed, 2012, p. 182).

Brontë's critique of the Victorian era is evident in many stances through Heathcliff's character and his mysterious behaviors and villainous acts. Critics argue that by giving the main character from a different background and another ethnic group, Brontë wants to shed light on the suffering of ethnic groups in British society during the Victorian Age. Other critics consider his character as an example of the negative influence of British colonization history. In this regard, Heathcliff is described as "associated with various victims of British colonialism ... a symptomatic effect. His supposedly barbaric origins serve starkly to expose, by comparison, the barbarism of his civilized new environment" (Beaumont, 2004, p. 138). In other words, the mixture of traits and features of his character can give the reader many hints about the treatment of the ethnic groups at that time.

Due to the colonization history of the United Kingdom, it has become a home of minorities from different ethnic groups. With his unknown descent and rough and rude behaviors, Heathcliff can be considered an unwelcome person in the environment of Heights. So, Brontë gives Heathcliff the status of being a representative of all oppressed ethnic groups and the marginalized people in British society to expose the mistreatment they have received and to question Victorian ideals. During the second part of the story, Brontë wants to show how this oppressed person can reflect the mistreatment he has received from society and its members. Heathcliff tries to reflect this mistreatment to Isabella and enjoys doing that as a part of his reactionary feeling to his traumatic experience. His barbaric, "uncivilized," and inhuman acts are only reactions and reflections of the oppressors' mistreatment. In this case, the reader may find that "victims of oppression tend to take on the characteristics of their oppressors" (De Grazia, 1978, p. 81). So, the reader may reach the valid conclusion that Heathcliff is a victim of his environment and mysterious origins.

Evidently, the relationship between Heathcliff and Isabella represented this tense link between the colonizer and colonized. Isabella is expected to be treated well as superior to Heathcliff. The same expectation the British had about their colonies. On the contrary, they faced high hostility and mistreatment due to their deeds in these colonies. Similarly, Isabella is mistreated and physically abused by Heathcliff due to his previous experience of mistreatment at the hands of Isabella and others in the Heights.

Additionally, Hindley faces severe humiliation and mistreatment from Heathcliff, but he cannot return this mistreatment anymore because Heathcliff has reached a level of power and authority to protect himself well. The exact status can be found in the case of British society and its suffering with the colonies. The people of these colonies reflect all British villainous deeds to British people and within the British community as a part of their revenge for their destroyed and stolen countries and treasures (Thompson, 2005, p. 39). The British people start to recognize these facts later to deal with the new social structure and the consequences of their black history in different regions worldwide.

## Conclusion

Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* is one of the most controversial literary texts, as it has received many contradicting critical commentaries. These critical points of view are differences between the earlier and modern reviewers. However, it is considered a nice piece of writing that can be used to examine many of the issues during the Victorian era in British society. Brontë uses every literary element in this novel to draw our attention to the different aspects of the community and expose the unspoken issues of the British people at that time. The different techniques used play an important role in enhancing the reader's understanding of the surrounding environment and other relevant factors. Brontë presents the Victorian community without false claims or unreal justifications. The comparison used in this novel plays a vital role in comparing the different groups within the same community and how each other interacts and lives together with different ways of thinking and intentions. The characters are carefully portrayed and

presented to reflect the nature of characters in the community and read their interests extensively.

Additionally, the relationship map is drawn skillfully to reflect on the nature of relationships within society and comprehend the hidden motivation behind all the abnormal or cruel attitudes found at that time. Moreover, the writer examines the nature of the relationship between the majority and the minorities brought to society through different legal and illegal channels. In the end, she wants to examine the impacts of the minorities' attitudes on British society, and mainly they came to this society with their hatred and interest in revenge on their destroyed home countries.

Additionally, Brontë cleverly uses the main character of this novel, Heathcliff, to reflect all of the issues of Victorian society according to her understanding. She portrays a mixture of contradicting traits person. The reader cannot make a final decision towards or against this character due to the different characteristics and various impulses behind his attitude and behaviors. His traumatic experience during the first early Age and his deep feeling of loneliness as an adopted son of unknown origin has caused many troubles for him within this conservative society. Heathcliff has been considered in many situations as “unconscious and impulsive with no moral rules and governed by sexual and aggressive impulses” (Giordano, 2020, p. 30). The reader can offer much sympathy to him due to the mental and physical mistreatment he has received from Hindley to the extent of considering him not better than an enslaved person. Then, the broken strike is given by his life love Catherine when she decides to marry Edgar. No one can deny these factors' profound and influential impacts on deepening the feeling of revenge and aggression against all Heights inhabitants. During the first part of the story, he tries to be a trouble-less and disciplined child, but he changes later due to all the aforementioned reasons, and his traumas have fostered his intense desire for revenge.

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### **Authorship and Level of Contribution**

The idea for this article was initiated by the author and this paper is a product of the author's endeavor.



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