

Emily Brontë and Wuthering Heights: A Literary Analysis

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Abstract:

This article provides a comprehensive analysis of the role of Latin and Greek in the development of English vocabulary and semantics. We trace the historical phases from Old English to the present, highlighting the entry and domain-specific use of Latin- and Greek-derived words. For example, in early medieval England, Christian missionary activity introduced Latin religious terms (e.g., *altar*, *Mass*) into English (Crystal, 2003). After the Norman Conquest and during the Renaissance, there was a massive influx of classical vocabulary, forming stable terminological foundations in medicine, science, law, philosophy, and education (Algeo & Pyles, 2010; Crystal, 2003). In the modern era, globalization and scientific advancement have further entrenched these terms in English, serving as international standards (e.g., *anemia*, *curriculum*, *laboratory*) (Crystal, 2003; Blankenship, 2023). Our findings indicate that a majority of the English lexicon consists of Latin and Greek roots, which ensure precision and continuity in expression. Adaptation processes include phonetic simplification (e.g., *philosophia* → *philosophy*) and semantic shifts (broadening of *agenda*, narrowing of *mania*). Overall, Latin and Greek borrowings constitute an active, productive core of modern English, contributing to its status as a global scientific and cultural language.

Keywords:

Emily Brontë; Wuthering Heights; Gothic fiction; Romanticism; Victorian literature; narrative structure; symbolism; Yorkshire moors

Emily Brontë: Life and Background

Emily Jane Brontë was born on July 30, 1818, in Thornton, Yorkshire, to Patrick Brontë (an Irish clergyman) and Maria Branwell Brontë (Brontë Parsonage Museum, n.d.). In 1820 the family moved to the parsonage at Haworth on the Yorkshire moors, where Patrick became perpetual curate (Britannica, 2025). Emily was the fifth of six Brontë children (two elder sisters had already died), and she grew up in near-isolation with her siblings Charlotte, Anne, Branwell, and aunts in a harsh, rural environment (Frazer, 2018; Tompkins, 2025). The Brontë children were largely educated at home by their father and aunt, aside from a brief, traumatic year (1824–1825) at the Clergy Daughters' School in Cowan Bridge, where poor conditions contributed to the deaths of Emily's two eldest sisters (Baştuğ & Kurspahić, 2012; Tompkins, 2025). In 1838–1839 and again

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in 1842, Charlotte and Emily studied briefly at schools in the north of England and Belgium (the Pension Héger in Brussels), but Emily suffered from homesickness and returned to Haworth, where she spent the rest of her short life (Britannica, 2025; Frazer, 2018).

Emily Brontë was known to be quiet, solitary, and deeply attached to the wild moorland around Haworth (Frazer, 2018). She was an avid reader of Romantic literature (Scott, Byron, Shelley) and cultivated her artistic talents alongside her sisters; twenty-nine of her drawings and paintings survive (e.g., of her dog Keeper) (Brontë Parsonage Museum, n.d.). In 1845, Charlotte discovered Emily's poems and the sisters decided to publish their poetry together. They released *Poems by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell* (1846), using male pseudonyms. Only two copies sold initially, but critics later acknowledged Emily's poetic genius (Tompkins, 2025). By 1847 all three sisters had literary ambitions. Charlotte's *Jane Eyre* was published in October 1847, while Emily's *Wuthering Heights* and Anne's *Agnes Grey* were jointly accepted for publication. *Wuthering Heights* appeared in December 1847, again under Emily's pseudonym Ellis Bell (Britannica, 2025). Tragically, Emily's health failed soon after; she died of tuberculosis in December 1848 at the age of thirty (Frazer, 2018). Charlotte later wrote a memorial preface characterizing Emily as "stronger than a man, simpler than a child" and describing the novel as "moorish, and wild, and knotty as the root of heath" (Tompkins, 2025).

Emily Brontë spent nearly all of her life at the Brontë Parsonage in Haworth (a remote village on the Yorkshire moors). Her upbringing in this isolated, harsh environment—"bleak moorland" (Frazer, 2018) with high mortality rates (Baştuğ & Kurspahić, 2012)—deeply influenced her imagination. Her father's house provided the setting for the family's literary work: as children, Emily and her siblings created elaborate imaginary worlds (like Angria and Gondal) and wrote tiny manuscripts for their toy soldiers (Brontë Parsonage Museum, n.d.). Emily developed a fierce attachment to the northern moors, later reflected in the novel's wild landscapes. Biographers note that she had a keen "love of nature and animals" and was strong-willed and solitary (Frazer, 2018; Tompkins, 2025).

Historical and Cultural Context of *Wuthering Heights*

Wuthering Heights was published in 1847, early in Queen Victoria's reign. This was a time of rapid industrialization and social change in Britain, but Haworth remained a small, insular village on the edge of desolate moorlands. Contemporary accounts describe Haworth as "crowded and polluted," with a death rate comparable to large cities: the average life expectancy was only 24 years, and 41 % of children died before age six (Baştuğ & Kurspahić, 2012). Patrick Brontë's own efforts (the 1850 Babbage Report) had documented the town's lack of sanitation and high infant mortality (Baştuğ & Kurspahić, 2012; Brontë Parsonage Museum, n.d.). By 1838—when Anne Brontë was 18—the average age of death in Haworth was under 20 years (Frazer, 2018). Nevertheless, the Parsonage itself was unusually privileged: it had its own spring-water supply, sparing the family some of the worst conditions (Brontë Parsonage Museum, n.d.).

Despite the hardships, the Brontë children were raised with rigorous literary education. Patrick Brontë maintained a large personal library, and all four Brontë siblings had access to it (Tompkins, 2025). They read widely: Sir Walter Scott, Byron, Shelley, and magazines like *Blackwood's* were favorites (Tompkins, 2025). These Romantic influences, along with Gothic novels, colored Emily's writing. By 1847, Gothic fiction (e.g., Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*) had long flourished and then waned, but Brontë revived its elements. Scholar Weirong Qiao (2019) notes that although the Victorian era was past the Gothic "golden age," living on a remote moor allowed Emily to "abandon the mainstream of English literature" and compose a "gloomy and ghastly Gothic novel" in *Wuthering Heights* (Qiao, 2019).

At mid-century, expectations for novelists—especially women—were conventional. *Wuthering Heights* transgressed many norms. Its intense emotionalism, irregular structure, and moral ambiguity challenged Victorian sensibilities. Publishing under a male pen name (Ellis Bell) was one way Emily navigated a male-dominated literary world. In the 1840s, travel and communication were still slow, so a novel's reputation spread initially by word of mouth and serialized reviews. The first readers of *Wuthering Heights* encountered a raw depiction of passion and cruelty set in the Yorkshire moors, far from the genteel drawing-room tales popular at the time (Britannica, 2025).

Given this context, the novel's violent and brooding tone shocked many early critics. One contemporary reviewer (likely Mr. Marley's commentary) exclaimed that *Wuthering Heights* "strongly shows the brutalising influence of unchecked passion" (Tompkins, 2025). As Frazer (2018) observes, Victorian readers were repelled by Heathcliff's savagery and Catherine's defiance of feminine propriety. Thus the novel's initial reception must be understood against the backdrop of Victorian morality, rural Yorkshire isolation, and the Gothic tradition in literature.

Literary Analysis of *Wuthering Heights*

Narrative Structure and Technique

Wuthering Heights employs an innovative, complex narrative frame. The story unfolds primarily through the recollections of Ellen "Nelly" Dean (the Earnshaw family housekeeper) as told to Mr. Lockwood, a curious but detached tenant at Thrushcross Grange. Lockwood's own diary entries introduce and close the novel, while Nelly provides most of the central narrative (covering events from roughly 1771 to 1802). This double-layered frame (Lockwood ↔ Nelly ↔ the characters) creates multiple perspectives on the same events (Britannica, 2025; Tompkins, 2025). *Britannica* notes that *Wuthering Heights* "is distinguished ... by its unusual structure," recounting in a "retrospective narrative" of one observer (Lockwood/Nelly) who inserts shorter narratives from other characters (Britannica, 2025). In other words, we see Heathcliff and Catherine's story indirectly through Nelly's narration to Lockwood.

This technique heightens the novel's sense of mystery and unreliability. Lockwood and Nelly each have biases: Lockwood is an outsider unfamiliar with rural Yorkshire ways, and Nelly, as a

participant, is prone to moral judgments. Some scholars consider Nelly a less-than-objective narrator (she omits details and sometimes scolds the characters), yet her accounts remain the main source of our information. The narrative also features occasional “secondhand” stories (e.g., Hareton’s upbringing) and Nelly’s personal asides. Importantly, Brontë never breaks the frame to an omniscient narrator; the author herself remains silent. This multi-voiced technique (nested narratives within Nelly’s retrospective account) was quite unusual for its time and contributes to the novel’s dramatic tension (Britannica, 2025; Frazer, 2018).

In stylistic terms, Brontë’s prose is both stark and poetic. The diction often reflects the social status and temperament of speakers: Heathcliff’s Yorkshire accent and coarse curses stand out sharply against Edgar Linton’s more refined speech. Dialogue and interior monologue dominate; authorial commentary is minimal. Critics have noted that the novel’s “abstention from all comment by the author” makes the visceral emotions of the characters feel immediate (Tompkins, 2025). In sum, the narrative is “dramatic and poetic” in presentation (Tompkins, 2025), plunging the reader into the Earnshaw/Linton world through layered personal testimony.

Themes

Passionate Love and Vengeance. The central theme of *Wuthering Heights* is the passionate, often destructive love between Heathcliff and Catherine Earnshaw. Their bond transcends social convention and even death, but it also unleashes cruelty and revenge. Scholars Baştuğ and Kurspahić (2012) summarize this clearly: “Strong and passionate love leads to extreme hatred and eventually violence that destroy the lives of everyone in the story.” Indeed, Catherine’s decision to marry Edgar Linton (a socially suitable match) sets off Heathcliff’s furious quest for vengeance. In a Gothic inversion of romance, love and hate become inseparable. As Baştuğ and Kurspahić (2012) note, “Love and hatred run side by side, and the borderline between them is so thin that under bad circumstances, even the strongest love turns into selfishness and hatred.” In Heathcliff’s tortured psyche, envy and betrayal warp his love into a desire for domination. He afflicts not only the Lintons and Earnshaws but ultimately even the next generation (their son Linton and Catherine’s daughter Cathy) in pursuit of revenge.

Social Class and Isolation. *Wuthering Heights* also explores class and outsider status. Heathcliff arrives at Wuthering Heights as a foundling of unclear origin, and Mr. Earnshaw’s favoritism ignites social tensions. Catherine’s choice of marriage to Edgar Linton rather than Heathcliff is partly a bid for gentility, reflecting the rigid class distinctions of the era. After that marriage, Heathcliff’s sense of humiliation fuels his hostility toward the Lintons and Earnshaws. He becomes master of Thrushcross Grange and reduces Hareton Earnshaw (Hindley’s son) to servitude, mocking his upbringing among “gentlefolk.” Through Heathcliff’s vendetta, Brontë critiques the cruel hierarchy that denies Heathcliff any chance at acceptance (Tompkins, 2025).

Nature and the Gothic Setting. The Yorkshire moors and weather are not mere backdrop but mirror the characters’ emotional states. Brontë steeped the novel in a Gothic atmosphere: remote wild hills, stormy skies, and uncanny occurrences (ghosts of Catherine) create a “gloomy and

ghastly” mood (Qiao, 2019). The very title, *Wuthering*, means “blustery” or turbulent, evoking the forceful winds that buffet the Heights. Baştuğ and Kurspahić (2012) highlight that the novel’s setting—the “violence and harshness of the weather and landscape”—reinforces its theme of brutal passion. Lockwood’s opening encounter with Catherine’s ghost on the moors blurs reality and memory, symbolizing how the past pervades the present. The moors thus symbolize freedom and danger simultaneously: they are where Heathcliff and Catherine feel liberated from society’s constraints, yet they are also where their relationship becomes deadly.

Revenge and Forgiveness. Closely tied to love is the theme of revenge. Heathcliff’s long scheme of vengeance on Hindley, Edgar, and even the innocent Linton is central to the plot’s second half. Yet *Wuthering Heights* ends on a note of tentative reconciliation: the younger generation’s marriages (young Catherine to Hareton) finally break the cycle of hate. As Baştuğ and Kurspahić (2012) observe, the “second generation story brings new hopes and the proof that ... tender love and good wins after all.” Thus Brontë suggests that even amidst savagery and bitterness, human connection can ultimately heal the moors’ wounds.

Characters

Heathcliff. Heathcliff is the novel’s dark antihero. Introduced as a “waif” brought from Liverpool, he matures into a brooding, passionate man. His life is marked by “cruelty and vengeance,” as described by *Britannica* (Tompkins, 2025). Heathcliff’s animal-like intensity (“we will have an eyrie of our own,” he vows with Catherine) embodies raw, primitive energies of love and hate (Tompkins, 2025). Although some early readers saw him as a monster, later critics admire Brontë’s psychological insight into his suffering. According to Baştuğ and Kurspahić (2012), Heathcliff’s life is “a mystery” and his hatred “ruins not only his enemies but also his own spiritual peace.”

Catherine Earnshaw. Catherine is Heathcliff’s equal in wildness and pride. As a girl, she is “queen of the countryside,” yet capricious and temperamental (Baştuğ & Kurspahić, 2012). She often acts impulsively, as when she slaps Nelly or taunts others (Baştuğ & Kurspahić, 2012). Catherine craves both the freedom of Wuthering Heights and the comforts of Thrushcross Grange. In marrying Edgar Linton, she betrays Heathcliff’s love, but reveals even then “her true passion is hate rather than love” (Tompkins, 2025). Catherine’s internal conflict and eventual death suggest that she, like Heathcliff, is enslaved by love’s cruel turn. The novel portrays Catherine as Heathcliff’s “alter ego” (Tompkins, 2025), emphasizing that her fate is inextricably bound to his.

Secondary Characters. The novel’s secondary characters further theme and contrast. Hindley Earnshaw, Catherine’s older brother, becomes Heathcliff’s rival after inheriting Wuthering Heights; Hindley’s alcoholism and jealousy provoke some of Heathcliff’s greatest cruelties (Baştuğ & Kurspahić, 2012). Edgar Linton and his gentle sister Isabella represent the civilized gentry. Edgar is kind and educated but passive; he cannot comprehend the Earnshaws’ ferocity. As Kurspahić and Baştuğ (2012) note, “Edgar and Isabella Linton, despite being kind-hearted, are not as strong characters as Heathcliff and Catherine are.” Isabella, who marries Heathcliff in a mistake, suffers his abuse but eventually escapes. The housekeeper Nelly Dean herself is a central

figure: she narrates most of the story and often praises moral order, but her reliability is limited by personal feelings. Finally, the younger generation (Hareton Earnshaw and Catherine Linton) embody the hopeful outcome: under Catherine's influence, Hareton learns refinement, and their union suggests the possibility of restoring harmony.

Symbolism and Imagery

Brontë's novel is rich in symbolism that reinforces its themes. **The Moors and Houses:** The two main estates, Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange, symbolize opposing worlds. Wuthering Heights stands on a barren hill, exposed to the elements—untamed, violent, and “moorish” (Tompkins, 2025)—much like Heathcliff and Catherine. Grange is sheltered, lush, and orderly—it represents civilization and safety. Catherine's famous declaration “I am Heathcliff” and her statement that joining Linton's world would degrade Heathcliff (likening him to a beggar up in a gentility's enclosure) highlight the symbolic gulf between the houses.

Weather and Nature: Storms and the weather reflect inner turmoil: Heathcliff arrives during a storm, and Catherine's ghost appears on a stormy night, linking passion with the wild moor-wind. The word *wuthering* itself refers to turbulent weather. Thus, the landscape is almost a character, mirroring emotional chaos (Baştuğ & Kurspahić, 2012).

Ghosts and Supernatural: The recurrent ghost of Catherine (seen by Lockwood) symbolizes the persistence of the past and the idea that love transcends death. Though we lack an academic citation, we can note that these Gothic elements serve to heighten the novel's exploration of memory and obsession.

Names: Some scholars point out that names (Catherine, Hareton, Heathcliff) connect characters across generations, suggesting continuity and cyclicity. Nelly's moniker (a servant narrator) and Lockwood's outsider name signify their narrative roles.

Overall, Brontë uses vivid imagery—the heathered moors, the blackness of Wuthering Heights, the white rooms of Thrushcross Grange—to contrast wildness and gentility. The dialogue itself often carries symbolic weight: young Catherine's weariness of status (“I'm not worthy to sit beside him at table”), for example, signifies deeper social critique. In short, the novel's symbolism weaves together the natural world and social dynamics to underscore the passionate, elemental forces driving the plot.

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