

Power and Inequality in Emily Bronte's Wuthering Heights

OPEN ACCESS

Volume: 11

Special Issue: 5

Month: March

Year: 2024

P-ISSN: 2321-788X

E-ISSN: 2582-0397

Received: 20.01.2024

Accepted: 10.02.2024

Published: 01.03.2024

Citation:

Maheswari, D., and A. Priyadharshini. "Power and Inequality in Emily Bronte's Wuthering Heights." *Shanlax International Journal of Arts, Science and Humanities*, vol. 11, no. S5, 2024, pp. 1–5.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.34293/sijash.v11iS5-Mar.7639>

D. Maheswari

Head and Assistant Professor, Department of English
Sakthi College of Arts and Science for Women, Oddanchatram

A. Priyadharshini

MA Student, Department of English
Sakthi College of Arts and Science for Women, Oddanchatram

Abstract

Wuthering Heights novel was written by Emily Bronte. It was published by T.C. Newby in 1947. *Wuthering Heights* was a famous novel from the Victorian era. The novel's story telling method was innovative in that time. The novel is filled with love, revenge, nature, social class and passion. Super natural elements also present in this novel. The plot follows Earnshaws who lived in *Wuthering Heights* and Lintons who lived in *Thrushcross Grange*, respectively. Mr. Earnshaw had two children, Catherine and Hindly, and adopted Heathcliff as his own. Hindly illtreats the gothic protagonist Heathcliff. Catherine and Heathcliff fell in love but the family refused to marry due to his lower caste status. The vital theme of this novel is power and inequality. The tale concludes with Heathcliff exacting his retribution on the next generation of the two families. Nelly, Heathcliff's servant, witnessed the story silently throughout the entire novel.

Keywords: Supernatural, Power, Inequality, Storytelling, Gothic

Introduction

Wuthering Heights is a novel by Emily Bronte that delves deeply into themes of power and inequality, particularly through its exploration of social class, gender dynamics, and the destructive effects of obsession and revenge. The main plot revolves around society where social class determines one's status and opportunities. Heathcliff, the protagonist, is of uncertain origins and is treated as inferior by characters like Hindley Earnshaw Catherine. Despite his love for Catherine, Heathcliff's lack of social standing prevents him from being considered a suitable match for her. The novel highlights the ways in which individuals seek to assert power and control in a society where inequality is deeply ingrained.

Emily Bronte was a British writer. She was a novelist and poet who published just single novel, *Wuthering Heights*. Emily Bronte's writing career primarily flourished during her time at the family's home in Haworth, where she spends most of her life during the early 1840s. Emily Bronte was the fifth of six children in the Bronte family. She, along with her sisters Charlotte and Anne, is renowned for her contributions to English literature. She started writing poetry at a young age and later expanded her literary pursuits to include prose fiction. In 1847, J. Cautley Newby recognised Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* and Anne Bronte's *Agnes Grey* for their dual

publication. However, publication was delayed until Charlotte's *Jane Eyre*, which was successful. *Wuthering Heights* was written under her pen name Ellis Bell. It was a gothic masterpiece of desire and hatred set on the Yorkshire moors. Emily was undoubtedly the best of the three Bronte sisters, yet the greatest of her lifetime is exceedingly scant, as she was mute and reclusive, leaving no communication of importance. Her only work deepens slightly than explains the paradox of her mystical presence. The novel, characterized by its melodramatic and rhythmical demonstration, lack of authorial intrusion, and unique structure, and it faced criticism for being savage, animal-like, and clumsy, but later became considered one of the premium novels in the English linguistic.

The Theme of Power and Inequality

Power refers to the ability to perform or act, or the authority to control or command others. Power is the effect that a separate or organisation has on the ideas, emotional state, or activities of others in a social setting. It can originate from sources like authority, knowledge, personality, or social contacts, and it can be intentionally or subconsciously used. Power is active and context-dependent, with its step varying based on state of affairs, associations, and cultural customs. Thoughtful power is critical for evaluating devising interventions to encourage optimistic behaviour transformation or solve social challenges. The power held by dominant others can manifest in different ways, including commercial power control over possessions and prosperity, radical power control over decision-making processes and governance, community power influence within social networks and institutions, and social power regulator over rules, standards, and ideologies. This involves the ability to influence others through punishment, threats, or the imposition of negative consequences for non-compliance.

Inequality refers to the unequal distribution of treatment, status, or opportunity, often affecting social status, civil rights and chances. The persistent awareness of ethnic, communal, and prosperity inequality and judgement in society leads to unhappiness, annoyance, and anxiety. Social factors such as discrimination, prejudice, and biases depend on features such as race, gender, society, faith, and incapacity can prime to social inequalities. These biases can result in unequal treatment and opportunities in several compasses of life, containing education, occupation, health care, and illegal impartiality. Inequality is often accompanied by injustice and oppression, where certain groups are denied basic rights, freedoms, and opportunities due to systemic biases, discrimination, or prejudice. Power as a source of inequality, those who possess power, whether it be economic, political, social, or cultural, often use it to maintain and perpetuate existing inequalities. Power and inequality are frequently merged, as persons who possess power frequently have the capability to perpetuate and reinforce systems of inequality to maintain their positions of dominance and privilege. Conversely, those who experience inequality may lack the power to challenge or change the structures that perpetuate their marginalization. Inequality often reflects underlying power dynamics within culture. Persons who have more power and influence have better access to properties, chances, and social honour, whereas those with less power confront impediments to advancement and suffer higher disadvantages.

Power and Inequality in Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*

Power dynamics are central to the narrative of *Wuthering Heights*, as Emily Bronte intricately weaves a tapestry of dominance, submission, and manipulation among the characters. The novel explores various forms of power, including social, emotional, and psychological, often depicting how these forces shape relationships and drive individuals to extreme actions. At its core, the novel portrays a struggle for dominance within the Earnshaw and Linton families, particularly embodied

in the character of Heathcliff. As an orphaned outsider taken in by the Earnshaws, Heathcliff is subjected to abuse and mistreatment, fuelling his desire for revenge and eventual acquisition of power. Hindley's mistreatment of Heathcliff stems from feelings of jealousy, insecurity, and resentment, as well as from Heathcliff's outsider status and Mr. Earnshaw's favouritism towards Heathcliff. Hindley's maltreatment escalates following Mr. Earnshaw's death, as Hindley becomes the lord of Wuthering Heights and degrades Heathcliff to the rank of a butler. Through cunning and manipulation, Heathcliff ascends to a position of authority, exerting control over those around him and perpetuating cycles of cruelty. The novel also explores power dynamics within romantic relationships, notably between Heathcliff and Catherine Earnshaw. Their passionate but tumultuous bond is characterized by a constant push and pull for dominance, with each seeking to assert their will over the other. Catherine's decision to marry Edgar Linton for he comes from a wealthy and respectable family, and marrying him would elevate Catherine's social status and provide her with financial security. Edgar represents the conventional choice in terms of social expectations and stability, offering Catherine a life of comfort and privilege. social advancement highlights the influence of societal power structures on personal relationships, while Heathcliff's relentless pursuit of Catherine's affections demonstrates the extent to which love can become intertwined with notions of power and control.

Psychological Dimensions of Power and Inequality

Furthermore, Bronte delves into the psychological dimensions of power, examining how it manifests in the characters psyches and influences their behaviour. Heathcliff's thirst for revenge and his manipulation of others reflects a deep-seated desire to assert his dominance and reclaim his perceived loss of power. Similarly, characters like Hindley Earnshaw and Joseph wield power through tyranny and religious, respectively, showcasing the diverse manifestations of power within the novel. Inequality is a pervasive theme reflecting the social and economic disparities prevalent in 19th-century English society. Emily Bronte deftly explores various forms of inequality throughout the novel, highlighting the consequences of class divisions, gender roles, and societal norms. Class distinctions play a significant role particularly in the divide between the Earnshaw family, who are of a lower social class, and the Linton family, who are wealthier and of higher social standing. Heathcliff's origin as an orphan from the streets of Liverpool accentuates his outsider status and highlights the prejudices and discrimination faced by those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Hindley Earnshaw's mistreatment of Heathcliff due to his social inferiority exemplifies the class-based inequality prevalent in the novel.

Heathcliff's Acquisition Power

The novel portrays unequal power dynamics in relationships, particularly in Heathcliff's treatment of those around him. His abusive behaviour towards Hindley, Isabella, and Hareton Earnshaw underscores the power imbalances inherent in their interactions. He exploits Hindley's weaknesses and vices, such as gambling and alcoholism, to gain control of the estate through deception and manipulation. Heathcliff's acquisition of Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange through his manipulative schemes grants him considerable wealth and control over valuable estates. Owning these properties gives him authority over the land, resources, and inhabitants, allowing him to exert influence over the lives of those living there. Heathcliff's marriage to Isabella is primarily motivated by his desire to exact revenge on Edgar Linton, who is Catherine's husband and Isabella's brother. By marrying Isabella, Heathcliff gains control over Thrushcross Grange, the Linton family estate, and further humiliates Edgar.

Additionally, the unequal power of dynamic between Catherine and Heathcliff, despite their deep emotional connection, contributes to their tragic fate. The lack of educational and economic opportunities for characters like Heathcliff and Hareton Earnshaw further perpetuates inequality in the novel. Hindley's neglect of Hareton's education and his subsequent descent into alcoholism symbolizes the cycle of poverty and lack of upward mobility experienced by those from disadvantaged backgrounds. After Hindley's death, Heathcliff takes possession of Wuthering Heights and assumes guardianship of Hareton. However, instead of nurturing and caring for Hareton, Heathcliff subjects him to neglect, abuse, and degradation. Heathcliff denies Hareton an education, forces him to work as a servant, and treats him with cruelty and contempt, mirroring the mistreatment Heathcliff himself endured as a child.

Linton is the son of Heathcliff and Isabella Linton, and he grows up at Wuthering Heights under Heathcliff's care. Heathcliff manipulates Linton for his own purposes, using him as a means to gain control of Thrushcross Grange by arranging his marriage to Catherine Linton. Heathcliff's treatment of Linton is characterized by exploitation and manipulation, as he uses his son as a tool in his quest for revenge and power. Gender roles and expectations also contribute to inequality in this novel. Women in the novel are often depicted as subordinate to men and constrained by societal norms. Catherine Earnshaw's unwillingness to select Heathcliff over Edgar Linton owing to societal expectations demonstrates the limited power allowed to females in matters of love and marriage. Isabella Linton's marriage to Heathcliff, driven by infatuation and rebellion against societal norms, ultimately results in her subjugation and mistreatment by Heathcliff. Similarly, Isabella Linton's mistreatment at the hands of Heathcliff underscores the vulnerability of women within male-dominated power structures.

Heathcliff's inequality towards others in Wuthering Heights is driven by his desire for revenge, his thirst for power, and his willingness to manipulate and mistreat those around him to achieve his goals. His treatment of others reflects the deep-seated injustices and social inequalities that pervade the world of the novel, highlighting the destructive consequences of unchecked power and revenge. Wuthering Heights portrays various forms of power and inequality, including social class, gender, and economic disparities, which shape characters' lives and relationships in profound ways. These inequalities contribute to the conflicts and tragedies that unfold throughout the novel, highlighting the pervasive influence of social structures and norms on individual destinies.

Summing Up

Wuthering Heights by Emily Brontë is a complex and haunting tale of passion, revenge, and the destructive power of love and inequality. Set in the rugged Yorkshire moors, the novel spans generations and explores the intertwined fates of the Earnshaw and Linton families, centred around the doomed love between Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff. The story unfolds through the narration of Mr. Lockwood, a newcomer to the area, and the housekeeper, Nelly Dean, who recounts the tumultuous history of Wuthering Heights and its inhabitants. At the heart of the novel is the passionate yet destructive relationship between Heathcliff and Catherine, whose intense bond is shaped by their shared experiences of childhood and the harsh environment of the moors. Despite their profound love for each other, their relationship is marked by conflict, jealousy, and betrayal. Catherine's decision to marry Edgar Linton, a man of greater social standing, initiates a series of events that leads to calamity and vengeance.

Heathcliff's insistent hunt of vengeance oppose those who wronged him drives much of the narrative, as he seeks to exact retribution for the pain and sufferings, he endured as a young orphan. His manipulation and cruelty impact the lives of everyone around him, including the next generation of Earnshaws and Lintons. Through its complex characters and intricate plot, Wuthering

Heights delves into themes of social class, revenge, the destructive power of love, and the cycle of violence perpetuated by unresolved trauma. Bronte's masterful narrative and evocative picture of the Yorkshire landscape combine to produce a haunting and atmospheric story that continues to fascinate readers with its ageless investigation of human nature and the dark mysteries of the heart.

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