

LECTURE ON EMILY BRONTË, WUTHERING HEIGHTS, AND GOTHIC ROMANTICISM

Emily Brontë (1818–1848)

Backstory

- Author of *Wuthering Heights*, 1847
- She died a year later at 30 years old on December 19th, of tuberculosis
- Sister of Charlotte Brontë, author of *Jane Eyre*.
- From Thornton, Yorkshire, England.
- She wrote a book of poems with her sisters Anne and Charlotte under the pseudonyms, Ellis, Acton, and Curriss.
 - They had to use men's names so that people would buy their book. Many women had to do this well up to the 1950s in both England and North America. (S.E. Hinton, author of *The Outsiders*).
 - Since the death of her mother and two older sisters, the rest of the Brontë siblings were homeschooled and all loved partaking in literary projects with each other, most specifically, poetry.
- Emily was very shy and very introverted, she loved reading books along the moors of England and befriended many stray dogs; she was a passionate animal lover.

Family Tragedies

- Her mother, Maria Branwell Brontë, died in 1821 (Emily was 3) to ovarian cancer when she was 38.
- Her sisters, Maria and Elizabeth, died in 1824 at age 11, and 10, respectively from a typhoid epidemic at their boarding school (Emily was 6).
- Her maternal aunt, Elizabeth Branwell, who stepped in after her mother passed away, died in 1842 from, a bowel obstruction (Emily was 24) when she was 66.
- Her brother Branwell died in October 1848 at the age of 31 (Emily was 30) of tuberculosis, just before she did.
- Her sister Anne, died of tuberculosis at age 29 in May 1849, just six months after Emily.
- Her sister Charlotte, died during childbirth in 1855, at the age of 39.
- Her father, Patrick Brontë died in 1861, the last member of his family to die, and at the age of 84, and the only one to make it past 40 years of age.

The deathly tragedies Emily experienced since 3 years old up until her own young death, set both a realistic premise for her sole novel, *Wuthering Heights*, and targeted her audience's attention through gossip.

- If she hadn't died so young and didn't have a family with the same curse, her novel would have probably either barely been read, or quickly forgotten.

Victorian Era

- Era of Queen Victoria, from June 1837 until 1901
- Began with the Reform Act in 1832
 - **Representation of the People Act 1832:** an act of parliament, which introduced changes to the electoral system of England and Wales.
 - People started to have a voice, not just rich people with power
 - Designed to prevent one person from controlling every neighbourhood (borough)
 - You had to own land and have a hearth big enough to hold a pot.
 - The idea was that you had to personally take part in the community you controlled.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jvpgqFdjV8o> (9min)

Us gained independence in 1776 and Canada in 1867

The Victorian Period (1837-1901): Four Contexts

1. Industrialisation
 - The first transformation from an agricultural industry to an industrial one.
 - Caused changes in family structure, to want to be more poised and “royal”
 - Created much pressure for everyone, and was taken on the children especially.
2. Imperialism
 - A policy or ideology where extending a country’s rule over a foreign country through military action and political power to gain more economic control
 - Examples, US over Vietnam, Britain over India, and Germany over Poland.
 - Means “supreme power”
3. Darwinism
 - The theory of biological evolution
 - This brought the idea that the more important a person is, through evolution, that race becomes the “supreme” species.
4. Feminism
 - Started with Mary Wollstonecraft in the 18th century England

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ffv3GzOU5D8> (8min)

Romantic Period

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OiRWBI0JTYQ> (10min)

Wuthering Heights Themes

“Young-Adult Fiction”: a category of fiction marketed to teens; although this fiction encompasses diverse styles and genres, the search for identity and coming-of-age process are defining themes.

Gothic fiction: literature of horror, terror, and supernaturalism

British Romantic Period → 1770s-1880s

- realism
- irony
- narrative economy
- free-indirect narration

Gothic Fiction: the Gothic is a popular genre that emerged in Britain in the late 18th century. Gothic novelists sought to elicit horror and terror in readers. Supernatural elements (esp. Ghosts and monsters) play an important role. Particular settings include remote and foreboding castles and dilapidated, haunted abbeys.

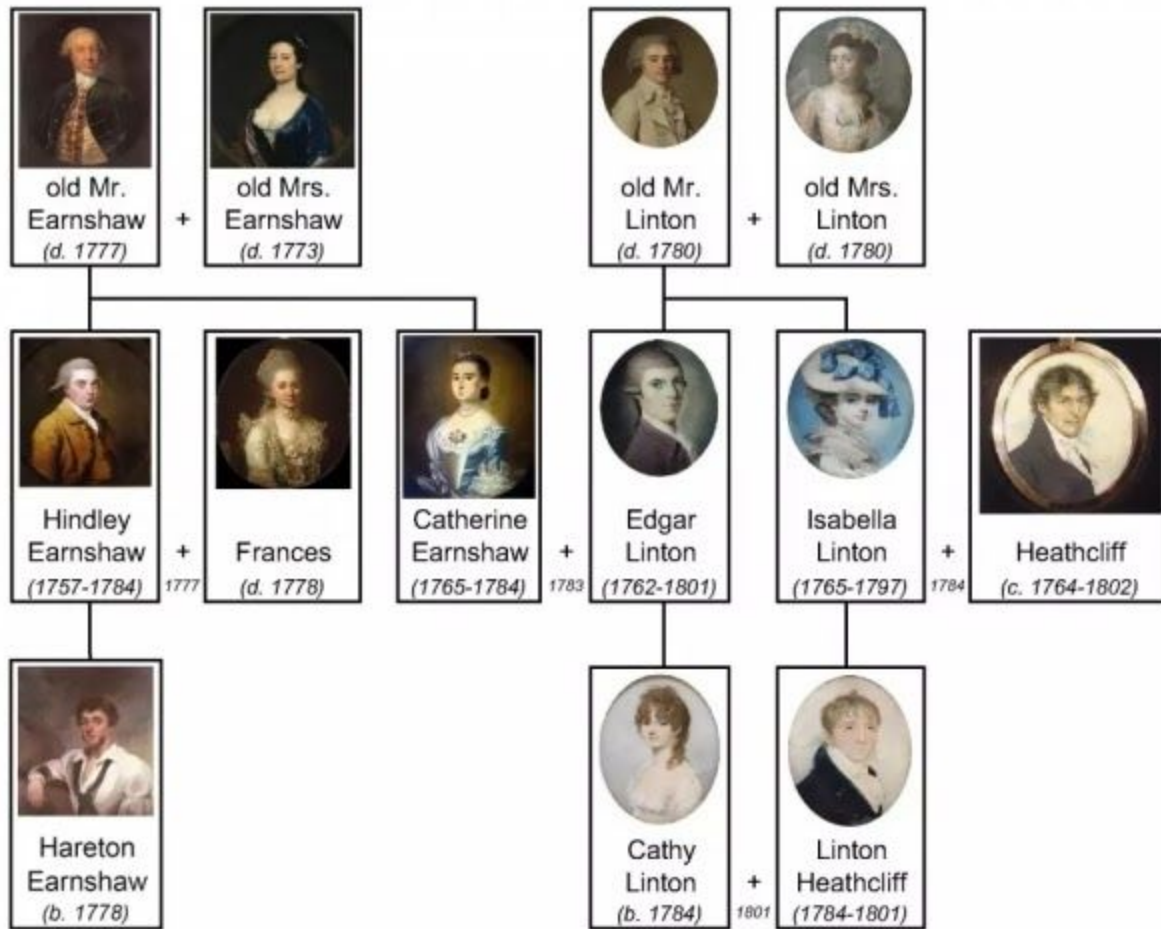
Stock characters include

- 1) the persecuted Gothic heroine,
- 2) the Gothic villain, and
- 3) the valiant hero.

A RECIPE FOR WRITING A GOTHIC NOVEL (written in 1797)

Take—An old castle, half of it ruinous.
 A long gallery, with a great many doors, some secret ones.
 Three murdered bodies, quite fresh.
 As many skeletons, in chests and presses.
 An old woman hanging by the neck; with her throat cut.
 Assassins and desperadoes, quant. suff.
 Noises, whispers, and groans, threescore at least.

Mix them together, in the form of three volumes, to be taken at any of the watering places, before going to bed.



Novel of sensibility: a type of novel popular in the 18th century. Novels of sensibility (aka sentimental novels) feature protagonists who are highly sensitive and emotional, and whose capacity to feel deeply and sympathize with others indicates their moral virtue.

Bildungsroman: a novel of growth and education; a coming-of-age novel.

Wuthering Heights Background

Emily Brontë wrote *Wuthering Heights* during a time when capitalism and the Industrial Revolution were the dominant forces in the British economy and society.

The 19th century in England was a time of rapid, often confusing, and occasionally violent social change. Groups opposed to the growing industrialization of England, such as the Luddites, engaged in violent riots, destroying wool and cotton mills.

- Luddites: a member of any of the bands of English workers who destroyed machinery, especially in cotton and woolen mills, that they believed was threatening their jobs (1811–16).

While wealth had traditionally been measured by land ownership, the 18th century had begun a trend toward a cash-based economy, and the Industrial Revolution created a middle class that was in many ways more economically powerful than its land-owning superiors.

As a result of the changing economy, the traditional relationships between the classes and the social structure began to change. The power of the yeomen, or the respectable farming class, as well as the traditional power-holding gentry was being challenged by the newly wealthy capitalists.

Each of these classes is represented in the novel by various characters.

- Hareton is a member of the respectable farming class, the Lintons are the gentry, while Heathcliff makes his fortune as a capitalist.

As the economic power of the new capitalists grew, so did their demand for political power. With the increase in political power came the movement for social acceptance. Wealthy industrialists challenged the traditional definition of a gentleman and claimed the right to be called gentlemen by virtue of their new economic and political power.

- Traditionally, being a gentleman was a right of birth, but he also needed to portray an upstanding moral character.

The changing notion of a gentleman and the shifting relationship between the classes are found in *Wuthering Heights* when Isabella, a member of the gentry, marries Heathcliff, a new capitalist, a union that would never have occurred if not for the changing status of the capitalists.

Class relationships are also prominent in Catherine's decision to wed Edgar instead of Heathcliff because of Edgar's superior social standing at the time.

Heathcliff as a class Byronic hero.

- The Byronic hero was defined by Lord Byron's epic narrative poem, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, 1812.
- The Byronic hero is generally a flawed character with the following attributes:

A Byronic hero: can be conceptualized as an extreme variation of the Romantic hero archetype.

- Traditional Romantic heroes tend to be defined by their rejection or questioning of standard social conventions and norms of behavior, their alienation from the larger society, their focus on the self as the center of existence, and their ability to inspire others to commit acts of good and kindness.
 - Intelligent, cunning, ruthless, arrogant, depressive, violent, self-aware, emotionally and intellectually tortured, traumatized, highly emotional, manipulative, self-serving, spiritually doubtful, often reckless or suicidal, prone to bursts of anger, decidedly prone to substance abuse, dedicated to pursuing matters of justice over matters of legality, given to self-destructive impulses, and seductive and sexually appealing.

Wuthering Heights is highly praised for the unique narrative technique Emily Brontë used to execute the novel, often referred to as a "frame narrative".

- Frame Narrative: is a literary technique that serves as a companion piece to a story within a story, where an introductory or main narrative sets the stage either for a more emphasized second narrative or for a set of shorter stories.
 - Nelly Dean's version told by Lockwood, making her a homodiegetic narrator, which means that she is also a character in the story she is telling.

The narrative structure has been compared to a series of Matryoshka dolls, as the levels of the story similarly nest inside of each other.

The two primary narrators are Mr. Lockwood and Nelly Dean, but other narrators arise throughout the novel when Nelly quotes what other characters have told her.

In this manner, the action of *Wuthering Heights* is told via eyewitness narration by people directly involved in the events they describe. The narrative form allows Brontë to bring the reader closer to the events of the novel.

The frame narrative form of the novel adds complexity for the reader. Lockwood is the outer layer of the narrative, pulling the story together in his diary. The reader must recognize how the story has been passed through various layers and question the reliability of Lockwood and the other narrators in reporting the accounts.

- For instance, Nelly's involvement in the action seems to result her glossing over certain events in order to minimize her guilt.

The reader must recognize that her account to Lockwood may not be completely reliable, and in turn, Lockwood may at times misinterpret or alter Nelly's statements. The uniqueness and complexity of *Wuthering Heights*' frame narrative is part of why the novel has become a literary classic.

- Conflicting emotions or moodiness
- Self-criticism
- Mysterious origins and a troubled past
- A distaste for social institutions and social norms
- Self-destructive tendencies
- A loner, rejected from society.

Wuthering Heights with Women's Rights

Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792)

- pioneering feminist work that promoted improved education for women and made an impassioned bid for female rationality.

The Romantic period started just before the revolution in 1780 and twelve years before a prominent female essayist writes the piece that would change the way society views women to date. Mary Wollstonecraft, a known protofeminist, wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) to overstate the similarities of slaves and women in order to highlight their lack of education, their stance in both religion and politics of the late Victorian period, and their conformist qualities as mutual slaves to men.

One of the most prominent concepts that was frantically discussed during this new political reform is of the education of children and women. In the Victorian Period, women were seen as "pretty objects" that shouldn't waste time on inculcating doctrines and should spend their time instead reading worthy novellas about sentimentalities, love, or manuals on how to be a lady. Because of this narrow strain of literature for women, an important question was voiced by Wollstonecraft herself, "How should a woman, void of imagination educate her children?" (Wollstonecraft 114). This general conception of women as unintelligent was the norm of the 18th century England and the highest form of education available to women was based on their behaviour and poise. Mary Wollstonecraft had a drunk father, a man who eventually drove her from home because of his masochistic rationalization about women that accompanied common reasoning during this time. Wollstonecraft became an extremely educated woman and obtained an opportunity for education that would be considered lucky today although strange and rare during her time, since women's focus wasn't towards education as much as etiquette. Their society, run by men, denied them a chance for any professional opportunity or gain in influence in the public sphere. Mary chose to leave home like many women: she educated herself and entered society the way a man does. She was free to act of her own accord, but she wasn't free to consider herself as equal. Women's only power was to marry rich, and their only ammunition was their beauty. There were only negative

implications for Wollstonecraft about the way women lived, she believed they would never learn to improve themselves or think more critically of the world because all they were allowed to learn was how to conform into the acceptably deemed 'lady' figure of their society. For some of these women, this was seen as a positive position, they wouldn't have to work a career and instead they would just occupy their knowledge based on these materialistic ideals. Unfortunately, the higher the status of a woman, the higher was the expectation to abide by these societal norms. During the French Revolution, Wollstonecraft saw the beheading of Marie Antoinette, which ultimately made her think about how powerless women are even as Queen of France. Women of her time were slaves to men: "they were the legal property of men and forced to obey them" (Wollstonecraft 105). She remarked, if men had a good reason for treating women like slaves, she maintains that she wouldn't argue with this inequality. If other women had the same opportunities she did, society could only benefit, society would have more distinguished members, and reason, which was so crucial in these times, would flourish. Men and women are "not, nor ought to be, constituted alike in temperament and character, it follows of course that they should not be educated in the same manner" (Wollstonecraft 115). Men and women are different according to Wollstonecraft, but one isn't necessarily weaker than the other; it is purely an oxymoronic truth of gender equality and gender disassociation. Though biologically different in minute ways, they should be equal. Wollstonecraft goes on to state that if women and men were independent of each other in social status that they would cease to relate at all, and the getting together of each opposite sex would never happen.

Despite the 18th century being a period of intellectual fermentation, western political society was shaped by the Christian church. There was theological thought and all other reason was blasphemous and ignorant according to the state. Man was responsible for the state of nature and the self-preservation of mankind. Wollstonecraft understood God and religion to have been incapable of making fifty-one percent of the human population without a capacity for rational thought. This idea classified her as a "rational dissenter"; someone who dismissed belief in god with logic and rationale. 8 She traps religious and social thought while opening up the rest of man's mind to the undoubtable fact that women are just as present in religion as they are in society. To make more than half of the world unreasonable would imply a major design flaw on God's part. This witty and clever train of thought is what has made Wollstonecraft so dominant in later centuries. The impervious attitude of society has created a view on the way women should be based on the "word of God". Wollstonecraft brings out the atheist in her to question how humankind, after so many centuries, has had the audacity to continue to think the way it has. She uses Jonathan Swift as an exemplar for political satire as the Juvenalian king of the 17th century, who criticized the corrupt political parties and church of his time while being a very close and important member himself. Part four of his Gulliver's Travels is an excellent prospect on the blunt realization of a normal Englishman who changes his political opinion of his own country due to the world of the Houyhnhnms (horses that act more humane than the actual humans [yahoos] on their island and society in general). Her claim in this section goes on to exaggerate that children should not be subjected to any such conservative attitudes and cookie-cut morals because their critical thinking and creativity become severely damaged. She believes youth should act and create satire to criticize and change the way that people think.

Abolitionism was just beginning its movement in the state during the 1760s in the United Kingdom, but the concept of "slavery" was still as predominant as it is today. There were many abolitionists who favoured the end of the practice and institution of capital punishment that was formerly known as slavery. However, the corporeal analogy of slaves to women stood apparent for Wollstonecraft as the harsh reality that women were "slaves" to their husbands' wishes was known to her. Women were not only discouraged from opinionating, but punished physically and mentally if they so much as insinuated so. They were only to do the "easy" tasks around the house; the simple errands and household chores. Women would do the same things around the house that servants and slaves would do; they cook and clean, take care of the children, and make sure that everything is in order for when the man of the house comes home from work. Mary Wollstonecraft's own

father exemplified this sexist ignoramus that was the standard for male dominance at the time. 11 He would abuse his wife with no regard for her own respect as a person, and oftentimes, Mary would have to defend her mother so she wouldn't die on account of his assaults. Eventually, her mom did die, and immediately afterwards her father ended up marrying the servant girl. Her parentage epitomized the social functioning of women as "slaves"; her father ended up marrying another, younger "slave" after his first "slave" died. His offspring "slaves", Mary and Eliza, were the ones to attend to his wife—"slave" on her deathbed. The only positive outcomes that can result from these situations purely relies on the paternal figure and how he chooses to deal with women. Mary Wollstonecraft ended up marrying William Godwin, who treated her with the utmost respect when she had a child with her lover and chose to keep her maiden name. Even so, he wrote positively about her after her young death and claimed that she did what she needed to do in order to be the same independent woman he fell in love with.

Mary Wollstonecraft acted of her own liberal agency for the majority of her life. Her advocacy of education was strongly heard, as the majority of first-world country students are women. Slavery has been abolished in all of the commonwealth countries, and Christianity has taken a step down from the legal pedestal and a couple of notches from societal rules. She was a pioneering feminist that promoted education for women and made an impassioned bid for female rationality. The Wollstonecraftian concept was developed after her, the idea that a woman should be more rational despite the negative social implications against this belief. After she died, she left thousands of manuscripts and a daughter named Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, who eventually married to become Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley. She exemplified her mother's feminism despite never personally knowing her, entering a writing contest against a group of men when she was only eighteen. 12 These men were all accomplished writers such as Lord Byron and Percy Shelley, but she was proclaimed to have the best horror story out of all of them. This was the summer she wrote Frankenstein. Mary Shelley learned greatly from her father's library and her mother's written works, unfortunately she was one of the few people of her time to take these essays seriously. Wollstonecraft wasn't taken seriously until the commencement of the 20th century, when her doctrines were finally being earnestly listened to. Her pioneering and undertaking claims have placed her as one of the most prominent proto-feminists to have ever lived, and well into the 21st century Mary Wollstonecraft is studied many degrees of educational institutes across the world. If she was once insecure about a place for women in the academic world, Wollstonecraft would certainly be moved to see her work displayed in millions of libraries across the world. Her message was simple yet strong, equal empowerment for all humankind, and this message sparked a movement for women's rights that spanned centuries and continues to be fought today with a much stronger voice thanks to writers like her.

Emily Brontë wrote *Wuthering Heights* during the beginning of the women's rights movement in England. The movement began in response to growing public sentiment that women were treated unfairly and the law was in need of reform.

The primary concerns of the movement were the lack of women's right to vote and the lack of married women's property rights. The latter issue arising in *Wuthering Heights*.

Under 19th century British law, married women could not legally own property. The common law doctrine of coverture dictated that upon marriage the man and woman legally became one entity, and that entity was the husband.

All property a woman took into her marriage became her husband's, as well as any inheritances she received during the marriage. Single women and widows, however, were legally capable of owning property.

- The movement to change women's property rights culminated in the passage of the Married Women's Property Act of 1882, which ensured that married women had the same right to own property as unmarried women.

Inheritance laws were also unfavourable to women. Generally, inheritances passed to sons only, and if a man had no sons, and he did not specifically provide for a daughter in his will, the closest male relative would often become the heir.

Within *Wuthering Heights*, Heathcliff exploits inheritance laws and the legal status of women to execute his revenge. He first marries Isabella, knowing Edgar has no other legal heirs, and Isabella's inheritance would automatically pass to her husband.

Later, Heathcliff recognizes that young Cathy will not be Edgar's heir. However, if Linton were to die before Edgar, and before marrying Cathy, Heathcliff would have no remaining claim to inherit Thrushcross Grange.

Therefore, Heathcliff seals his inheritance of the Grange and executes his revenge upon Edgar by forcing Linton and Cathy to marry before Edgar's death. Heathcliff's knowledge of women's property rights and inheritance laws allows him to obtain revenge against Edgar.

Romanticism refers to an artistic and intellectual movement that began in the late 18th century in Europe. Generally, Romanticism was a reaction against the dry rationality of the Enlightenment period.

- It focused on the sublimity of nature and stressed strong emotion as the source of beauty, art, and knowledge.

The Romantic literary movement was heavily influenced by the German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and a group of German Romantic writers who emerged during the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

Emily Brontë was likely exposed to and influenced by the German Romantics when she and Charlotte studied literature and the German language in Brussels at a private school.

A group of British Romantic poets emerged in England between 1798 and 1832, which included William Wordsworth, Lord Byron, and John Keats.

- These writers influenced literature throughout the 19th century.

The Brontës were also familiar with the writings of these British Romantic poets, being well versed in literature.

https://www.ted.com/talks/melissa_marshall_talk_nerdy_to_me

https://www.ted.com/talks/martin_ford_how_we_ll_earn_money_in_a_future_without_jobs

https://www.ted.com/talks/kevin_kelly_how_ai_can_bring_on_a_second_industrial_revolution

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QyTeDZZBphI> (1hr)