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AP Literature 2A

Wuthering Heights Essay

April 30, 2013

It's Really a Man's World

Every human being possesses a past that holds both good and bad memories. It is life experiences in these past memories that defines a person to further shape their characteristic, morals, and view on life.

In *Wuthering Heights*, nearly all of Heathcliff's life became illuminated through a tale told by a housekeeper named Nelly Dean. What had occurred at Wuthering Heights is highlighted through her narration, and all of the characters take on their own form through her storytelling. Mrs. Dean gives a strong insight to who Heathcliff was as a child, and how he changes through time as the novel progresses.

Heathcliff enters the novel as an orphan that was unwanted by everyone except for the man who found him and took him in as his own: Mr. Earnshaw. The children of the Earnshaw household mistreated Heathcliff for being the stranger in their family. Although he was bullied, Heathcliff refused to show his pain. "He seemed sullen...hardened perhaps to ill-treatment: he would stand Hindley's blows without winking or shedding a tear; and my pinches moved him only to draw in breath and open his eyes, as if he had hurt himself by accident and nobody was to blame" (Brontë 39). With the harsh life that Heathcliff had already begun to endure from the very beginning of the novel, readers become evoked with the emotion of empathy for him since the moment that he arrived at Wuthering Heights.

After the death of Mr. Earnshaw, his eldest son Hindley becomes the primary owner of the household and Heathcliff becomes a servant under him. The only person that grew to love Heathcliff and considered him to be a friend was Hindley's sister, Catherine. Yet, the two inseparable childhood friends parted on bad terms for a few years, and Catherine came to marry Heathcliff's foil, Linton.

Heathcliff reappeared back in Catherine's life completely changed as he became a civilized man. Despite his foreign outward appearance, Heathcliff maintained a feature about him that he could not hide. "A half-civilized ferocity lurked yet in the depressed brows and eyes full of black fire, but it was subdued" (Brontë 95). The only person that Heathcliff cared for, and in turn cared for him, was now the wife of another man. There becomes a greater build-up of sympathy towards Heathcliff for not being able to marry the only person he genuinely loved. He had received little to nothing his entire childhood, and atop that, Catherine could not be his wife as she was already Linton's.

Having not been a wealthy person to begin with, Heathcliff was unable to obtain Catherine. Yet when he did become wealthy, the love of his life was already married to another man. Heathcliff had endured several hardships that Linton himself had never faced before. It becomes unjustified that someone who had worked to earn his status and money was not able to win against someone who had simply inherited his wealth.

In order to seek revenge on everyone that had wronged him, Heathcliff feigned interest in Linton's sister, Isabella. Having been infatuated with Heathcliff, Isabella blindly eloped with him. Despite the fact that Heathcliff married Isabella, he never loved her as he solely devoted himself to loving only Catherine. The devotion that he had to loving only one person wholeheartedly is the strongest quality that Heathcliff possesses. Although Catherine became Linton's

wife, Heathcliff did not waver in his love for her. Devotion is a heart-throbbing quality that women look for within a male, and Heathcliff maintained this act of devotion throughout the entire novel without once breaking out of character.

During the last few moments of Catherine's life, Heathcliff managed to be beside her. They both recognized that they had wronged one another, and they had no one to blame but each other. Catherine died shortly after speaking with Heathcliff, and when Mrs. Dean came to report the death of her mistress to him, she found him to have already expected the news. Even with her death, Heathcliff could not bear to part with the love of his life and begged for her to stay with him in whatever form she should take. "Be with me always—take any form—drive me mad! I *do* not leave me in this abyss, where I cannot find you! I *cannot* live without my life! I *cannot* live without my soul!" (Brontë 165). Even through death, Heathcliff didn't want Catherine to leave him. He would have willingly and happily have her haunt him for his entire life just for the sake of her presence beside him.

Heathcliff gained a strong sense of motivation to put forth in action a plan of revenge to all those who he believed to have caused Catherine to die. He manipulated everyone he could in order to make them as miserable as he had become. No one was spared from his raging wrath of hatred that he possessed. Heathcliff was so obsessed with his plan that he didn't even spare his only son Linton who was frail and weak. Heathcliff used his son in order to win the affection of Catherine and Linton's daughter, Catherine. It is during this period that Heathcliff reveals himself to be the dark and evil man that everyone believes him to be, and this marked him to be the villain of the novel.

The loss of Catherine had affected both Heathcliff and Linton strongly. Having a kind heart, Linton never pursued Heathcliff for the death of his wife. Heathcliff, on the other hand,

does not hesitate to throw the blame of Catherine's death upon Linton's shoulder. His method of seeking out revenge did not stop with Linton, but it carried on to the next generation with their children. Heathcliff became more ominous and cruel in order to achieve his goals. His actions deem him unworthy of winning understanding or sympathy from anyone, and he had fallen into a state of madness where he only saw revenge and nothing more.

There was a time when Catherine was still alive when Heathcliff was not bloodthirsty for revenge. Her death drove him nearly mad, and there is a drive to want to help him recover from what he had turned himself into. Heathcliff at the beginning of the novel had received sympathy from the readers for all that he had endured, and that emotion maintains to be there even as Heathcliff destroys this visual image of himself through the actions he takes place after Catherine's death. There is still the need to save him from his own destruction because there is hope that his wrongdoings can be redeemed. He had corrupted himself and divulged himself into fulfilling one goal to destroy everyone's life.

There are moments in Mrs. Dean's narration that make readers want to reconnect with Heathcliff by sympathizing with him once again. After having been forced to marry Linton, Catherine despises Heathcliff for what he had done to her and his own son. "Mr. Heathcliff, *you* have *nobody* to love you... You *are* miserable, are you not? Lonely, like the devil, and envious like him? *Nobody* loves you—*nobody* will cry for you when you die!" (Brontë 277). The harsh tone that Catherine has towards Heathcliff addresses the way that he has built his life for himself where no one loves him, and how he will die alone knowing that no one will weep for his loss.

Targeting everyone who could have potentially killed his Catherine gave Heathcliff a purpose in life. Without this purpose to achieve his goal, he would have driven himself completely insane. Ruining the lives of others kept Heathcliff alive, and it isn't until he makes

everyone he can completely miserable that he starts to become truly mad. Heathcliff sees Catherine everywhere, and he kept hoping but he was sanguine to have her beside him. "I cannot look down to this floor, but her features are shaped in the flags! In every cloud, in every tree—filling the air at night, and caught by glimpses in every object by day—I am surrounded with her image! The most ordinary faces of men and women—my own features—mock me with a resemblance. The entire world is a dreadful collection of memoranda that she did exist, and that I have lost her!" (Brontë 313).

Heathcliff's obsession to seek revenge came from his pain. It wasn't until after he had made everyone miserable that he reached the brink of insanity himself. He no longer had something to distract himself from Catherine's death. There were no longer any distractions, and he became open to the overwhelming fact that the love of his life was dead, and that he needed to join her.

There is a sense of empathy that readers feel for Heathcliff at the destruction that he has become. Heathcliff devoted his entire life to one woman, and even death could not change that fact. Despite the fact that Heathcliff was evil for manipulating and abusing the second generation of their line in order to fulfill his motive, readers are still drawn to him. It is not only his devotion towards his love, but what he had experienced and faced that caused him to act the way that he did that makes him so intriguing.

Work Cited

Brontë , Emily. *Wuthering Heights*. New York: Barnes & Noble, 2004.