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AP Literature 2A

Wuthering Heights Essay

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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 their own form through her storytelling. Mrs. Dean gives a strong insight to who Heathcliff was as a child, and how he changes 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 from the very beginning of his arrival 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 of that, Catherine could not be his wife as she was already Linton's.

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, but 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! only *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).

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, including his 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.

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 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 has fallen into a state of madness where he only sees revenge and nothing more.

There was a time when Catherine was still alive when Heathcliff was not blood-thirsty 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.

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.

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.