

UNIVERSIDAD DE SALAMANCA  
FACULTAD DE FILOLOGÍA  
GRADO EN ESTUDIOS INGLESES  
Trabajo de Fin de Grado

# **Mundane and Spiritual Love in Wuthering Heights**

Alumno/a: ALEJANDRA ROCANDIO RANCAÑO

Tutor/a: VIORICA ELEONORA PATEA BIRK

Salamanca, 2023

### **Abstract**

This essay analyses the mundane and the spiritual love in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. It focuses first on the traditional idea of love between Catherine and Linton, rooted in social conventions. Furthermore, the essay also considers the spiritual love between Catherine and Heathcliff. This unconditional love is entirely independent of conventions and strives toward the eternal absolute.

### **Key words**

Traditional love, Spiritual love, Social conventions, Eternal absolute

### **Resumen**

Este ensayo analiza el amor mundano y el amor espiritual que Emily Brontë presenta en *Cumbres Borrascosas*. Se centra en primer lugar en la idea tradicional de amor entre Catalina y Linton, arraigado a las convenciones sociales. Además, también se centra en el amor espiritual entre Catalina y Heathcliff. Este amor incondicional está libre de cualquier tipo de conveniencia y representa la idea de eternidad.

### **Palabras clave**

Amor convencional, Amor espiritual, Convenciones Sociales, Eternidad

## Table of Contents

1. Introduction .....	4
2. Mundane Love between Catherine and Linton.....	5
3. Plato's Myth of the Androgyne in <i>Wuthering Heights</i> .....	8
4. Catherine and Heathcliff's Spiritual Love.....	10
5. Conclusion .....	13
6. Works Cited .....	15

## 1. Introduction

During the Victorian era, love relationships were governed by principles in which honor and appearances were fundamental for social virtues, especially for women. Authors like Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë or Charles Dickens wrote many literary works on the theme of love such as *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Jane Eyre* (1847) or *Great Expectations* (1860), respectively. Among these novelists the romantic Emily Brontë stands out. She is considered a classic of English literature despite having a considerably scarce number of works. The eldest of the Brontë sisters takes the theme of love one step further with her masterpiece *Wuthering Heights*. Thus, she illustrates an idea of love totally different from the accepted notion of idyllic love relationships. She depicts a notion of love that goes against common norms of the time, which were perceived as a scandal at the moment of publication. Thus, through the figures of Heathcliff and Catherine, Brontë portrays pure and eternal love referring to the myth of Plato's Androgyne, which consists of the combination of both sexes in one single being. Brontë's characters have such great love for each other that both consider themselves as two different parts of a single being. Therefore, their love is more powerful than the feelings that Catherine develops for Edgar Linton. Their love is above earthly conventions. Heathcliff, embodies the Byronic hero who puts his love before social norms which was scandalous in the nineteenth century.

This essay delves into the two different ideas of love that Emily Brontë presents in *Wuthering Heights* (1847). It focuses on the mundane or earthly love of

Catherine and Edgar Linton, and then on the spiritual love of Catherine and Heathcliff which is the most powerful love. Their love represents an absolute love and implies a sense of complementation between their souls and in turn refers to the idea of the myth of the Androgyne as mentioned in Plato's *Symposium*.

## 2. Mundane Love between Catherine and Linton

*Wuthering Heights* contains a love triangle between Catherine, Heathcliff, and Edgar Linton. Since childhood, the relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff was very close as the two become inseparable, creating an emotional bond that goes beyond the level of friendship. Their feelings were very solid and set the basis for a love that vanquishes time. However, an internal conflict emerges in Catherine when Edgar Linton enters the scene. Catherine forces herself to develop countless feelings towards him. The love that she feels for Heathcliff is not comparable to the one she feels for Linton, but Edgar can offer her a higher social status and a better life. This situation of uncertainty is reflected by the words that Catherine maintains with her housekeeper, Mrs. Dean: "My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods: time will change it, I'm well aware as winter changes the trees." (Brontë, 104).

Catherine assures that her incipient feelings for Linton will change over time, imagining the possibility of reaching the same level of love she has for Heathcliff. Nonetheless, the historical environment in which the novel takes place, imposed on people, and more specifically on women, certain conventions that they must obey if they want to have a respectable position. Catherine becomes aware that all her social needs will be covered by Linton. Hence, Catherine opts her relationship with Linton to achieve the desired life style that her real love cannot offer her. She also wants to help

him escape from Hindley's tyranny. Nelly Dean, the first person narrator, also explains her point of view. She knows that Linton will offer her a better material and social life as she asserts "you will escape from a disorderly, comfortless home into a wealthy, respectable one" (Brontë, 100). Additionally, Margaret Lenta also verifies this desire of material improvement in her article: "As the elder Catherine's marriage was advantageous to her in a material sense" (Lenta, 74). For all these reasons, Catherine tries to relegate the feelings that bind her to Heathcliff and opts for a life with Linton, choosing in turn, over love, a better lifestyle as represented in her conversation with Nelly Dean:

"First and foremost, do you love Mr Edgar?' 'Who can help it? Of course I do' she answered. Then I put her through the following catechism: for a girl of twenty-two it was not injudicious. 'Why do you love him, Miss Cathy?' 'Nonsense, I do that's sufficient.' 'By no means; you must say why' 'Well, because he is young and cheerful.' 'Bas, still.' 'And because he loves me.' 'Indifferent, coming there.' 'And he will be rich, and I shall like to be the greatest woman of the neighbourhood, and I shall be proud of having such a husband' 'Worst of all. And now, say how you love him?' 'As everybody loves you're silly, Nelly.' 'Not at all answer' 'I love the ground under his feet, and the air over his head, and everything he touches, and every word he says. I love all his looks, and his actions, and him entirely and altogether. There now!'" (Brontë, 99)

Catherine is seduced by Linton's physical appearance and also by the prospect of a comfortable life. She only has the means to give Nelly Dean superficial reasons why Edgar turns out to be an adequate suitor. However, as her housewife explains to her, these things will fade over time. Furthermore, Catherine also focuses on the adequate social status that a marriage with Linton will bring to her. Some scholars, such as Daniela Garofalo, also focus their attention on the upstanding economic situation that Linton can provide to Catherine: "Catherine stands for a kind of love that undermines

the desire necessary for capitalism to function smoothly” (Garofalo, 819). In this way, the idea of a successful economic situation represents a concern for Catherine, who wonders "if Heathcliff and I married, we should be beggars? Whereas, if I marry Linton I can aid Heathcliff to rise, and place him out of my brother’s power” (Brontë, 106). Catherine attempts to justify that she didn’t make her decision only to improve her social situation and her life, but she wants to help Heathcliff to escape from Hindley. Catherine confirms doing so in order to assist the person who has been the reason of her being, Heathcliff. There are scholars such as Margaret Lenta who read in Catherine's confession to Nelly Dean that Linton will not force her to give up Heathcliff but will also continue to be her best friend. In this way, she can use her husband's money so as to improve his life (Lenta, 71).

As the novel progresses, Emily Brontë shows how Catherine, already married to Linton, does not entirely break her bond to Heathcliff, even though she tries to present him to Edgar as a cordial for acquaintance. Linton, who shares his life with Catherine, does not conceive the idea of a friendship between Heathcliff and Catherine because Linton's way of being is so contrary to Heathcliff’s. For this very reason, Linton asked Catherine “will you give up Heathcliff hereafter, or will you give up me? It is impossible for you to be my friend and his at the same time; and I absolutely require to know which you choose” (Brontë, 151). Linton shows in this passage, with impeccable education, the impossibility for Heathcliff to continue in their lives because in one way or another he generates conflict.

Catherine refers to Heathcliff, who is her great love as “an unreclaimed creature, without refinement, without cultivation” (Brontë, 130), and she adds that he can be “a fierce, pitiless, wolfish man” (Brontë, 131) with others, especially with Isabella. These statements reveal the grief that Catherine has to deal with when Heathcliff, whom she

considered her soul mate, decides to do the same as she did and marry Isabella Linton. In addition, these expressions can likewise be understood as a way of convincing herself that Linton is Catherine's best option and a way to assume the impossibility that her love for Heathcliff can be fulfilled in real life.

Finally, this concept of conventional love ends with Catherine's experience of a worldly life with Edgar Linton. Her love for him is of a lesser order and yet, her love for Heathcliff persists and is of a different kind.

### **3. Plato's Myth of the Androgyne in Wuthering Heights**

Androgynous in Greek means two different genders, the feminine and the masculine. This word is set up by 'andras' 'andros' referring to man and 'gynaika' 'gené' for the woman. Hence, the meaning of this word supposes the combination of both sexes in one being. Plato is the one who describes this famous myth in his dialogue *The Symposium*, and he does so through Aristophanes' speech. It portrays how in ancient times, human beings were divided into three different genders, the masculine, the feminine, and the androgynous. This last one, the androgynous, represented the totality of the human being, and was described as a body made up of eight limbs and different sexual organs. They are also extraordinary in strength and vigour and as well, they had immense pride. They reach the point of conspiring against the gods, which is the cause why Zeus decides to separate them in half, giving them a separate form of man and woman. From this moment, love is defined as the self's inner aspiration to achieve a state of fullness as Aristophanes said "each of us who were separated, having one side only, like a flat fish, is but the indenture of a human being, and we are always looking for our other half" (Plato, 1). The search of and the reunion with the loved one converts the two



lovers into a single being who achieve true happiness by being reunited with his other half. This is a myth quite frequent in literature, as it is the case of the poem *Annabel Lee* by Edgar Allan Poe, for example in these verses:

“Nor the demons down under the sea  
Can ever dissever my soul from the soul  
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;” (Poe, line 31-33)

In *Wuthering Heights*, Emily Brontë introduces readers to this myth via the love between Heathcliff and Catherine. It consists of an absolute love that goes beyond the earthly sphere as the lovers live with the conviction that their two souls, are destined to be one. Irving H. Buchen presents and corroborates this idea of wholeness in his article "Emily Brontë and the Metaphysics of Childhood and Love" when he claims:

“Heathcliff becomes Catherine’s life, and she his. When the soul discovers his otherness residing in a beloved, the desire is not just to be or come together with the other but to become the other. The two halves unite to create and to make one whole, for the love of Heathcliff and Catherine is the search for the soul’s complement” (Buchen, 67).

These characters are doubtlessly aware that their love is above any type of social limitations. In their union lies true happiness, despite the impossibility of being together as Catherine confirms “Nelly, I am Heathcliff! He’s always, always in my mind: not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself, but as my own being” (Brontë, 104). Throughout the novel, Heathcliff and Catherine confess the feelings that they have towards each other and how both, Heathcliff and Catherine, are convinced that they constitute two different parts of a whole. This concept of totality is revealed at the moment when Catherine declares her love for Heathcliff stating that “Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same” (Brontë, 102). In addition, that sense of

unity between the two characters also appears, reflected in Heathcliff's monologue after Catherine's death:

“I know that ghosts have wandered on earth. Be with me always —take any form—drive me mad! Only do not leave me in this abyss, where I cannot find you! Oh, God! It is unutterable! I cannot live without my life! I cannot live without my soul” (Brontë, 213)

Heathcliff refers to the pain that he experiences after his beloved's death, which supposes the loss of his other half or, as he says, the loss of his own life. At this moment, he is unable to continue living without her. Heathcliff desires to meet her as a ghost rather than not seeing her again. Catherine represents human plenitude for him and that is the origin of Heathcliff's desire to see his beloved even after death.

Therefore, “to Brontë each soul is incomplete or created only in part at birth. The other half exists both in and beyond the world” (Buchen, 68), which is why, at that moment, Heathcliff becomes aware that after Catherine's death, he will never achieve authentic happiness.

#### **4. Catherine and Heathcliff's Spiritual Love**

The spiritual love between Catherine and Heathcliff is the most relevant aspect of the novel. This type of love is different from the conventional idea of love which she experiences with Edgar Linton. Catherine, despite being married to him, feels a love for Heathcliff that transcends time. This love is above everything and above all human beings, and goes even beyond being in heaven, as Catherine herself confirms in:

“If I were in heaven, Nelly, I should be extremely miserable ... heaven did not seem to be my home; and I broke my heart with weeping to come back to earth;

and the angels were so angry that they flung me out into the middle of the heath on the top of Wuthering Heights; where I woke sobbing for joy” (Brontë, 102)

Thus, the protagonist does not conceive life without Heathcliff, who is her true love. For Catherine, this love transcends the barriers of life and death without being able to imagine an idea of heaven if he is not there. Without Heathcliff, the greatest of the privileges would be her worst nightmare because the only thing they need is each other as Catherine declares “If all else perished, and he remained, I should still continue to be” (Brontë, 104). Therefore, both characters are considered two parts of a single being, and one without the other, is nothing. This makes reference to the Platonic idea known as the myth of the Androgyne. This type of love, despite pushing these two beings to lead their earthy lives independently, constitutes the most relevant idea of love in the novel and is attested several times by the characters in their discussions. Absolute or transcendental love and furthermore this notion of unity, are accurately observed at the moment Catherine claims:

“He shall never know how I love him: and that, not because he’s handsome, Nelly, but because he’s more myself than I am. Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same; and Linton’s is as different as a moon bean from lightening, or frost from fire” (Brontë, 102)

Catherine shows that her feelings for Heathcliff are pure. She does not focus on an acquisitive interest or a simple physical attraction, love is the only purpose. Moreover, Catherine demonstrates that her feelings for Heathcliff are much more complex, as she believes that their souls are equal and that both constitute a single being. Emily Brontë expresses through Catherine the ideal of transcendental love. As the scholar Buchen aptly observes:

“Brontë believes that the best that life has to offer exists in fullest form outside of life. Earthy life is seldom invested with any terminal relevance or primacy of its own. Rather, all life is but a temporal, shadowy stage on which the drama of eternity plays itself out” (Buchen, 64).

Catherine finds herself in a moment of uncertainty, as her feelings are divided between Heathcliff and Edgar Linton. She experiences an internal debate between what is right and what she would honestly like. Therefore, in one of the conversations she has with her housekeeper Nelly Dean, she makes a comparison between what she feels for one and the other:

“My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods: time will change it, I’m well aware as winter changes the trees. My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath: a source of little visible delight, but necessary.” (Brontë, 104)

For Catherine, her feelings for Edgar and Heathcliff are totally different. Linton offers her a life of luxury and a higher social position, which is the main motivation why she convinces herself that her love for him will "change", and that over time her love for him will increase. However, Catherine is fully aware that Heathcliff is the embodiment of her everlasting love, which has no chance of increasing because it is an unconditional love that exists all by itself and independent of her. A love that is not subject to changes in life to the decisions that she can make, and even to the time that passes.

On the other hand, besides the innumerable manifestations of love made by Catherine, Heathcliff, who is a cold and rude man with other people, also expresses the same kind of feelings when talking to Mrs. Dean. He declares “you know as well as I do, that for every thought she spends on Linton she spends a thousand on me! ...If he

loved with all the powers of his puny being, he couldn't love as much in eighty years as I could in a day." (Brontë, 190). Readers observe how Heathcliff has no doubt that the feeling they both share is unmatched since they constantly think of each other, but above all, he is convinced that no one will love Catherine as intensely as he loves her.

## 5. Conclusions

In *Wuthering Heights*, Emily Brontë depicts two different types of love but, above all, their coexistence in a single figure. In Catherine Earnshaw the spiritual love and the earthly love are in conflict. The internal debate that those feelings produce in Catherine is the driving force of the plot. But also, it is the main reason for the tension between the characters and the cause of their tragedy. Linton offers Catherine a conventional love that is far from the absolute love she finds in Heathcliff. Catherine experiences this earthly and conventional love with Linton, when she marries him, convinced that her love for him will increase over time and that he is her best option. Linton offers her a life with economic stability, framed by social norms, and above all respectable in the eyes of society. However, Catherine's aspirations are dissimilar.

The love that she experiences for Heathcliff is much more valuable. The notions of totality and eternity are the key to this spiritual or absolute love since both Catherine and Heathcliff, consider that there is a part of the other in each of them, which is why they will always be present in one way or another in the other's life. That being the case, the conclusion reached is that despite living a worldly love with Edgar Linton and living optimally within prescribed social canons, Catherine's real love is the spiritual love she shares with Heathcliff. This spiritual love is above everything, and although this love,

will never be accomplished in their mundane lives or however far apart they are, it is a love that will be forever.

## 6. Works Cited

Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights*. Planet eBook. Web

<https://www.planetebook.com/free-ebooks/wuthering-heights.pdf>

Buchen, Irving H. "Emily Brontë and the Metaphysics of Childhood and Love."

*Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, vol. 22, no. 1, 1967, pp. 63–70. Web.

<https://doi.org/10.2307/2932804>.

Garofalo, Daniela. "Impossible Love and Commodity Culture in Emily Brontë's

'Wuthering Heights.'" *Elh*, vol. 75, no. 4, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008, pp. 819–40. Web.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/27654639>.

Lenta, Margaret. "Capitalism or Patriarchy and Immortal Love: A Study of

'Wuthering Heights.'" *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory*, no. 62, Berghahn Books, 1984, pp. 63–76. Web.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/41791385>.

Plato. *Plato's Symposium*. Eds, Seth Benardete, and Allan Bloom. Chicago:

University of Chicago Press, 2001. Web.

[https://courses.lumenlearning.com/suny-eng-102-college-writing-](https://courses.lumenlearning.com/suny-eng-102-college-writing-ii/chapter/aristophanes-speech-in-platos-symposium/)

[ii/chapter/aristophanes-speech-in-platos-symposium/](https://courses.lumenlearning.com/suny-eng-102-college-writing-ii/chapter/aristophanes-speech-in-platos-symposium/)

Poe, Edgar Allan. "Annabel Lee". Poetry Foundation,

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44885/annabel-lee>. Accessed on

April 26, 2022.