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**LITERARY ANALYSIS: EMILY BRONTË'S
WUTHERING HEIGHTS**

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1. Introduction: A Radical Departure from Victorian Domesticity

Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) stands as a radical departure from the moralistic Victorian domestic novel. By employing a complex nested narrative—filtered through the bourgeois perspectives of Lockwood and Nelly Dean—Brontë constructs a text that resists conventional ethical categories. The novel operates primarily on dualities: nature versus culture, elemental passion versus institutional order, and systemic abuse versus generational cycle.

2. Metaphysical Identity vs. Social Pragmatism

“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 moonbeam from lightning, or frost from fire.”

— Catherine Earnshaw, Chapter 9

Literary Analysis

In this passage, Catherine articulates a distinction between transactional affection and ontological oneness. Her attraction to Edgar Linton is tied to social mobility, gentility, and Victorian class performance. Conversely, her connection to Heathcliff operates beyond human emotion; it is a shared essence.

Brontë employs stark elemental antitheses (“lightning” versus “moonbeam,” “fire” versus “frost”) to destabilize traditional romance trope expectations. Catherine does not view her bond with Heathcliff as a choice, but as an existential condition. Her ultimate attempt to marry Edgar while retaining Heathcliff triggers the novel's central tragedy, demonstrating the impossibility of reconciling Victorian social structures with absolute metaphysical desire.

3. Spatial Dialectic: Nature vs. Culture

“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.”

— Catherine Earnshaw, Chapter 9

Literary Analysis

The architecture and geography of the novel function as psychological and socio-political metaphors. Wuthering Heights represents raw, untamed nature, physical passion, and socio-economic vulnerability. Thrushcross Grange represents polished civilization, economic security, and physical containment.

Catherine's metaphor frames her feelings through geological imagery. Her regard for Edgar is organic and mutable (“foliage”), subject to temporal decay. Her bond with Heathcliff is mineralogical (“eternal rocks”), subterranean, devoid of superficial ornament (“little visible delight”), but structurally fundamental. By placing the moorland landscape at the core of their identity, Brontë posits that human instinct fundamentally resists the domesticating forces of Victorian propriety.

4. Systemic Revenge and Generational Trauma

“I’m trying to settle how I shall pay Hindley back. I don’t care how long I wait, if I can only do it at last. I hope he will not die before I do!”

— Heathcliff, Chapter 7

Literary Analysis

Heathcliff begins as a racialized, disenfranchised outsider subjected to institutional abuse by Hindley Earnshaw. His psychological trajectory illustrates how trauma reproduces itself when unchecked by legal or social justice.

Rather than remaining a victim, Heathcliff masters the tools of his oppressors: capitalist acquisition, legal disenfranchisement, and domestic tyranny. He weaponizes Victorian legal frameworks (primogeniture and coverture) to disinherit

Hindley's son, Hareton, and Catherine's daughter, Cathy. The novel's two-part generational structure demonstrates how cycles of revenge convert Wuthering Heights into a site of penal isolation, turning the abused into the absolute abuser.

5. Gothic Transcendence and Secular Immortality

“Catherine Earnshaw, may you not rest as long as I am living; you said I killed you—haunt me, then! The victim does suffer his murderers, I believe. 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!”

— Heathcliff, Chapter 16

Literary Analysis

Standing over Catherine's corpse, Heathcliff subverts conventional Christian theology. He rejects traditional notions of heavenly salvation, preferring earthly damnation and spectral torment over physical separation. His plea to be “driven mad” underscores the Gothic subversion of rationalist philosophy: madness and haunting are preferred over peaceful isolation.

Brontë uses Gothic conventions not merely for atmosphere, but to explore the boundaries of human consciousness. Death in Wuthering Heights does not signify closure; it represents a dissolution of physical boundaries that allows Heathcliff and Catherine to re-merge with the moorland environment, bypassing Victorian religious and moral norms entirely.