Wuthering Heights

The lonely moorland home of the Earnshaw family in Emily Brontë's GOTHIC-influenced novel of the same name (1847). 'Wuthering' is a Yorkshire dialect word for turbulent weather. See also HEATHCLIFF.

Wuthering Heights

The only novel by Emily Brontë, first published in 1847.

The story is told by Lockwood, a gentleman visiting the Yorkshire moors, and Mrs Dean, servant to the Earnshaw family. Heathcliff, a foundling from the streets of Liverpool, is brought to Wuthering Heights by Mr Earnshaw to be treated like his own children, Catherine and Hindley. But after Mr Earnshaw's death Heathcliff is bullied and degraded by Hindley, now married and head of the household. Heathcliff, who is of a passionate and ferocious nature, falls in love with Catherine, who returns his affection even though she feels it would be humiliating to marry him. Upon learning this Heathcliff slips quietly away. Meanwhile Hindley's wife has died, leaving him a son, Hareton. Catherine is attracted to the soft, luxurious life of the Lintons of Thrushcross Grange and marries Edgar Linton.

When Heathcliff returns to Wuthering Heights his vengeful nature begins to assert itself. His first victim is his beloved Catherine, whose death he hastens by incessant and vehement accusations of betrayal, of contempt for himself and of cruelty; she dies giving birth to a girl, another Catherine. A further victim is Edgar's sister Isabella, whom Heathcliff marries and mistreats until she runs away. He also destroys Hindley, a heavy drinker and gambler, and gains control of the Heights. To secure the Linton family property he forces a marriage between young Catherine and Linton, his sickly son by Isabella. When Linton dies the young widow develops an interest in Hareton, Hindley's son, whom Heathcliff has brought up in brutish ignorance. By now Heathcliff, all passion spent, longs for death and union with Catherine. Increasingly alienated from daily life, he experiences visions and supernatural portents of reconciliation with his beloved Catherine. He dies having failed to extirpate the Earnshaws and the Lintons, and leaves to the younger generation, Catherine and Hareton, hopes of a richer life.

The novel's stern power, which disturbed and shocked contemporaries but has impressed later generations of readers, owes much to the deliberately enigmatic portrait of Heathcliff. Hardly less remarkable is the way that the tortuous and violent plot, instead of seeming merely melodramatic, is given solidity by the precisely realized Yorkshire locations and subtlety by the shifting narrative viewpoints.
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