

**Emily Bronte: Wuthering Heights**  
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**Lecture 25**

**Gothic Displacement: The conflict between children and parental authority**  
(Refer Slide Time: 00:11)

Week 5: Emily  
Bronte: *Wuthering  
Heights*



Lecture 5E: Gothic Displacement: The conflict between children and parental authority

Image source: <https://www.vox.com/culture/2018/7/30/17629978/emily-bronte-200-birthday-wuthering-heights>



Hello, and welcome to week five's lectures on Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*. In today's session, I am going to talk about Gothic Displacement in relation to the conflict between children and parental authority.

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**"The abusive patriarch and patriarchal family".**



- "The male heads of household abuse females and males who are weak or powerless. This can be seen in their use of various kinds of imprisonment or confinement, which takes social, emotional, financial, legal, and physical forms. Mr. Earnshaw expects Catherine to behave properly and hurtfully rejects her "bad-girl" behavior. Edgar's ultimatum that Catherine must make a final choice between him or Heathcliff restricts Catherine's identity by forcing her to reject an essential part of her nature; with loving selfishness Edgar confines his daughter Cathy to the boundaries of Thrushcross Grange."

• Source: [http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel\\_19c/wuthering/themes.html](http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel_19c/wuthering/themes.html)



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There are two important aspects that emerge from this piece of criticism. Firstly, you can see how fathers control their daughters. Mr. Earnshaw expects Catherine to adhere to the norms of society, he wants her to be well behaved and the way he disciplines her does impact negatively on Catherine, she is hurt by the way Mr. Earnshaw disciplines her. You can see how Mr. Earnshaw’s behavior is parallel to the behavior of Edgar.

Edgar becomes the father to young Catherine and his way of discipline is not much different to the way Mr. Earnshaw disciplines because both of them, though they want the best for their daughters, try to confine them within either social norms and expectations or physically within the boundaries of their house.

So even though Edgar is a loving father, he is controlling the mobility, the freedom of his young daughter, Cathy. You can also see how the word Cathy, the name Cathy is repeated, the name Cathy is circulated time and again, implying that things do not change drastically for the daughters across generations.

Now, the other point on the slide that is interesting for us to notice is that husbands also control their wives and that is seen in the way Edgar controls his wife Catherine, the daughter of Mr. Earnshaw. He offers her an ultimatum and says that she has to make the final choice between him or Heathcliff and that kind of choice, a forced choice on Cathy, on Catherine, the first Catherine confines her, constricts her, circumscribes her and she is forced to reject an essential part of her nature and that would be Heathcliff, Heathcliff becomes a part, an essential part of Catherine. Because of this ultimatum, you can see that there is a huge emotional toll on her mind.

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## “The abusive patriarch and patriarchal family”.



- “A vindictive Hindley strips Heathcliff of his position in the family, thereby trapping him in a degraded laboring position. Heathcliff literally incarcerates Isabella (as her husband and legal overseer), and later he imprisons both Cathy and Nellie; also, Cathy is isolated from the rest of the household after her marriage to Linton by Heathcliff’s contempt for and hatred of them”.

- [http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel\\_19c/wuthering/theses.html](http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel_19c/wuthering/theses.html)



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Here, once again, you can see the animosity between the members of the family in Wuthering Heights. There is animosity between Hindley, the son of Mr. Earnshaw and Heathcliff, the adopted son of Mr. Earnshaw, whom he brings from Liverpool. There is a kind of a clash between Heathcliff and Hindley, which is ongoing.

While Mr. Earnshaw is alive, Heathcliff has the upper hand because Mr. Earnshaw does favor Heathcliff over Hindley. And when Mr. Earnshaw dies, Hindley tries to get the upper hand and he puts Heathcliff in a position which is lower than that of a family position. So you can see the back and forth going on between members of a family and this again repeats itself when Heathcliff returns to the Heights as a rich man and he strips Hindley of his respectability and finally of his possession of Wuthering Heights.

We further see how Heathcliff incarcerates Isabella, his own wife because as a husband he has utter power over her and later he imprisons his daughter-in-law Cathy and his housekeeper Nellie as well. So, Heathcliff’s behavior is completely sadistic and displays his authority over all members of the family who come within his power.

We also see how even after Cathy, the young Cathy's marriage to his son Linton, she is isolated from the rest of the family. So there is isolation within Wuthering Heights that is constant for certain members of the family. Now, what is interesting about this idea of incarceration is that this is an important gothic attribute. The idea of degrading somebody may not be particularly a gothic attribute, but the notion of shutting people up and shutting people out is definitely a gothic trope and women especially suffer in this fashion more than the male members.

You can see how the first Catherine and the second Catherine are shut up within Wuthering Heights and the fact that history repeats itself is an interesting trajectory for female growth and our identity.

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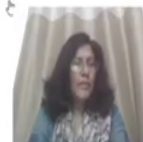
## The Whip



- "For all the members of the house, except for Catherine, Heathcliff is an intruder, who, by becoming the father's favourite, will alter the family's balance of power and authority. Gilbert and Gubar pertinently read Heathcliff's irruption into the family as the fulfilment of Cathy's wish for a whip, an expression of the younger child's ambition to become empowered":

• Carmen Pérez Riu, 2000, p.166

• Source:  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/41054976.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A7ba9d1f763dbeb20c52d29e24b0983>



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So we know that Heathcliff is an outsider, he is called as the gypsy because he was found by Mr. Earnshaw on the streets of Liverpool. So when he is brought into the household at Wuthering Heights, he does unbalance the dynamics of power and authority within the house, he becomes the favourite of the father and he is useful to Cathy as well because she wants a

whip, a weapon which can make her empowered. So, Heathcliff becomes the whip of Catherine, the younger child's tool to accrue power for herself.

It is very interesting to see how Heathcliff fits into the structure of power within Wuthering Heights. And of course, his presence embitters Hindley, because he, that is, Heathcliff becomes quite a favourite with Mr. Earnshaw.

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## Catherine's Whip



- "Catherine gets her whip. She gets it figuratively - in the form of a 'gypsy brat' - rather than literally, but nevertheless 'it' (both whip and brat) functions just as she must unconsciously have hoped it would, smashing her rival-brother's fiddle and making a desirable third among the children in the family so as to insulate her from the pressure of her brother's domination. (Gilbert and Gubar 1984, p.264)"

• Carmen Pérez Riu, 2000, p.166

• Source:  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/41054976.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A7ba9d1f763dbeb20c52d29e24b098324>



Thus, “Catherine gets her whip, she gets it figuratively in the form of a gypsy brat, rather than literally, but nevertheless, it, both whip and brat functions just as she must unconsciously have hoped it would, smashing her rival-brother’s fiddle and making a desirable third among the children in the family so as to insulate her from the pressure of her brother's domination.”

So, you can see how the power dynamics within Wuthering Heights is shifted by the presence of the third child that is Heathcliff and he somehow comes in between Hindley and Catherine and thus, shielding the latter that is Catherine from the brother’s domination. So, Heathcliff is Catherine's wish come true, even though he is just the gypsy brat because he does what he is supposed to by breaking Catherine's brother's fiddle and becoming the favourite of Mr. Earnshaw as well and thus, the power that emerges from Hindley is minimized in some sense.

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## Study of childhood and the family.

- "The hostility toward and the abuse of children and family members at Wuthering Heights cut across the generations. The savagery of children finds full expression in Hindley's animosity toward Heathcliff and in Heathcliff's plans of vengeance".

• Source: [http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel\\_19c/wuthering/themes.html](http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel_19c/wuthering/themes.html)

• Image source: <https://www.penguin.com.au/books/wuthering-heights-vintage-classics-bronte-series-9781784870744>



The hostility toward and the abuse of children and family members at Wuthering Heights cut across the generations. The savagery of children finds full expression in Hindley's animosity toward Heathcliff, and in Heathcliff's plan for vengeance.

As I pointed out, you can see how this narrative of vengeance, this trajectory of violence and revenge is carried on from one generation to another. Children who fought amongst themselves continue to fight once they become adults and that is definitely the case with Hindley and Heathcliff. Heathcliff returns to the Heights to take revenge not only with Catherine, but also with Hindley because he wants to get back on all the wrongs that Hindley committed against Heathcliff after the death of Mr. Earnshaw. Hindley degrades Heathcliff, turns him into a labourer, pushes him out of the house once the patriarch, Mr. Earnshaw is no longer around.

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## “Study of childhood and the family.”



- “Wrapped in the self-centeredness of childhood, Heathcliff claims Hindley's horse and uses Mr. Earnshaw's partiality to his own advantage, making no return of affection. Mr. Earnshaw's disapproval of Catherine hardens her and, like many mistreated children, she becomes rebellious. Despite abuse, Catherine and Heathcliff show the strength of children to survive, and abuse at least partly forms the adult characters and behavior of Catherine and Heathcliff and forges an important bond between them.”

- Source:  
[http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel\\_19c/wuthering/t\\_hemes.html](http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel_19c/wuthering/t_hemes.html)



“Wrapped in the self-centeredness of childhood, Heathcliff claims Hindley’s horse and uses Mr. Earnshaw’s partiality to his own advantage, making no return of affection. Mr. Earnshaw’s disapproval of Catherine hardens her and like many mistreated children, she becomes rebellious. Despite abuse, Catherine and Heathcliff show the strength of children to survive and abuse at least partly forms the adult characters and behaviour of Catherine and Heathcliff and forges an important bond between them.”

One can see pretty clearly that Heathcliff was not a saint either, he was equally self-centered in childhood and he exploits Mr. Earnshaw’s partiality towards him in order to snatch Hindley's horse. So you can see how the selfishness of childhood is not properly disciplined away by the patriarch and we have also seen how Catherine is hardened by the way she was disciplined by Mr. Earnshaw.

So since the disciplining process is not ideal, she also becomes very rebellious and the system of abuse becomes and shapes the nature of these children, Heathcliff and Catherine and this also structures their adult nature and the past forges an important bond between them. So, systemic abuse within the family somehow dictates the character of the adults that they grow into.

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## Rejection of parental authority



- "Heathcliff's arrival and his deep attachment to Cathy works to give her autonomy and power to do as she wishes, that is, to reject paternal authority; and the two children grow in an atmosphere of wild freedom. Their affection and mutual dependency is later reinforced by their complicity to overcome the tyranny of the eldest brother."

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So what emerges from these set of ideas is this, to the children Cathy and Heathcliff, Wuthering Heights becomes a gothic space, a space of power, either through Hindley or through Mr. Earnshaw. And these children, Heathcliff and Cathy, they work together to reject paternal authority and later, after the death of Mr. Earnshaw, these two work together, they become complicit in their efforts to overcome the tyranny of the eldest brother.



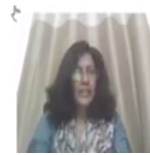
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## “The effects of intense suffering”.



- “In the passion-driven characters—Catherine, Heathcliff, and Hindley—pain leads them to turn on and to torment others. Inflicting pain provides them some relief; this behavior raises questions about whether they are cruel by nature or are formed by childhood abuse and to what extent they should be held responsible for or blamed for their cruelties.”

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So there is exceptional dysfunctionality in all the characters such as Catherine, Heathcliff and Hindley, especially and we can see how they seem to go to each other, they seem to kind of not help but inflict pain on one another, tormenting the other comes so easily and in fact, one can argue and say that pain itself provides an outlet for them, it becomes a way of kind of enjoying some kind of relief. And such a nature of course, prompts us to question whether this cruelty is inbuilt, does it come to them by nature or is it the illustration of previous childhood abuse and what extent are we to hold them responsible for their cruel behavior?

So this idea of cruelty inflicted on the other is again a gothic motive. So what becomes extremely bizarre for us is to see them being performed by children as well as by adults.

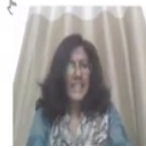
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## “The effect of intense suffering”



- “Suffering also sears the weak; Isabella and her son Linton become vindictive, and Edgar turns into a self-indulgent, melancholy recluse. The children of love, the degraded Hareton and the imprisoned Cathy, are able to overcome Heathcliff’s abuse and to find love and a future with each other. Is John Hagan right that “*Wuthering Heights* is such a remarkable work partly because it persuades us forcibly to pity victims and victimizers alike”?

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Suffering is enjoyed by almost all the characters in the novel. Isabella and her son Linton become vindictive even though they are extremely weak, the suffering is not something that turn them into forgiving people. The power to inflict pain is not relevant or pertinent to the powerful alone. Isabella and Linton become self-indulgent and melancholic and not just that we can see how in their own small ways they can, they become very vindictive and make those who are weaker than themselves suffer.

Ultimately, we realise that the degraded Hareton, the son of Hindley and imprisoned Cathy, the Cathy who is imprisoned in *Wuthering Heights* are able to overcome the kind of cruelty that they suffer at the hands of Heathcliff. Heathcliff does degrade Hareton because he wanted to take a revenge on the father Hindley who degraded him when he was at the Heights and under his mercy after the death of Mr. Earnshaw. So the degraded Hareton and the imprisoned Cathy are able to forget the abuse that their past is and come together to find a loving future with each other.

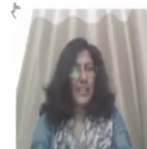
So while we see all these aspects of suffering, we are kind of forced to think about whether this novel is remarkable because it does persuade us to pity the victims as well along with the victimizers. We pity Heathcliff, we pity Isabella, we pity Linton, we pity Hindley. So, and these people are victims as well as victimizers.

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### Self-imposed or self-generated confinement and escape.

• “Both Catherine and Heathcliff find their bodies prisons which trap their spirits and prevent the fulfillment of their desires: Catherine yearns to be united with Heathcliff, with a lost childhood freedom, with Nature, and with a spiritual realm; Heathcliff wants possession of and union with Catherine”.

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• Image source: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0b3ftjc>



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We see how prisons are not just houses and prisoners are not just figures like Heathcliff, prisons are also bodies. Catherine wants to get out of her body so that she can find freedom on the moors as a spirit so that she can find the freedom that she found as a lost child on the moors. Heathcliff wants freedom from his own body so that he can be in union with Catherine. So bodies themselves become prisons in this narrative.

We also saw earlier how such notion of imprisonment could also be a symbolic imprisonment that the society has become for free spirits like Catherine and Heathcliff.

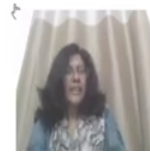
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## Gothic and Confinement



- "Confinement also defines the course of Catherine's life: in childhood, she alternates between the constraint of Wuthering Heights and the freedom of the moors; in puberty, she is restricted by her injury to a couch at Thrushcross Grange; finally womanhood and her choice of husband confine her to the gentility of Thrushcross Grange, from which she escapes into the freedom of death."

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“Confinement also defines the cause of Catherine's life. In childhood, she alternates between the constraint of Wuthering Heights and the freedom of the moors. In puberty, she is restricted by her injury to a couch at Thrushcross Grange. Finally, womanhood and her choice of husband confine her to the gentility of Thrushcross Grange, from which she escapes into the freedom of death.”

So the first Catherine's life is a series of imprisonments, she is in prison by the norms of gender, to which she is ordered to follow and she fails at it, thereby resulting in the disciplining of Mr. Earnshaw. So the freedom is offered to her by the moors, imprisonment by Wuthering Heights and when she is injured, when she is bitten by dogs, she is restricted to the couch at Thrushcross Grange where she is nursed back to health.

And finally, when she marries Edgar Linton, she is confined to that gentility of that class and from which she can escape only by dying. So you can see that her narrative is a narrative of confinement and there is gothic aspects to such a confinement, a series of confinements that she escapes and gets trapped into time and time and again.

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## Displacement, dispossession, and exile.



- "Heathcliff enters the novel possessed of nothing, is not even given a last or family name, and loses his privileged status after Mr. Earnshaw's death. Heathcliff displaces Hindley in the family structure. Catherine is thrown out of heaven, where she feels displaced, sees herself an exile at Thrushcross Grange at the end, and wanders the moors for twenty years as a ghost."

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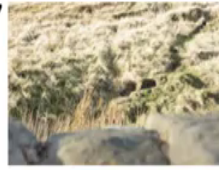
When Heathcliff enters the novel, he possesses nothing, he is completely devoid of any property, he does not even have a surname and when he enters this Heights, he gets the name of Heathcliff and he gets an identity and a privileged status as well, which he quickly loses after the death of Mr. Earnshaw. And Heathcliff also displaces Hindley in the family structure by becoming close to the father first and later Heathcliff loses his identity. So you can see the seesaw of gain and loss with regard to Heathcliff and Hindley.

And Catherine imagines being thrown out of heaven when she feels displaced, and she sees herself as an exile at Thrushcross Grange at the end. So being within the boundaries of Thrushcross Grange is for her becoming an exile at the end, and she does wander the moors for 20 years as a ghost. So there is a series of exiles experienced by certain characters in the novel.

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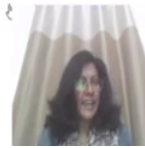
## Displacement, dispossession, and exile

- "Hareton is dispossessed of property, education, and social status. Isabella cannot return to her beloved



Thrushcross Grange and brother. Linton (Heathcliff's son) is displaced twice after his mother's death, being removed first to Thrushcross Grange and then to Wuthering Heights. Cathy is displaced from her home, Thrushcross Grange."

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- Image source: <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/videos/wuthering-heights-who-is-heathcliff>



“Hareton is dispossessed of property, education and social status. Isabella cannot return to her beloved Thrushcross Grange and brother Linton, Heathcliff's son is displaced twice after his mother's death, being first removed to Thrushcross Grange and then to Wuthering Heights. Cathy is displaced from her home and Thrushcross Grange.”

So people are dispossessed of property as you can see that Heathcliff dispossessed Hindley. People do not get education, Heathcliff did not get an education. Hareton, the son of Hindley is devoid of his education, deprived of it by Heathcliff. Social status is given and taken away. Heathcliff gets a social status through the assistance of Mr. Earnshaw and then it is snatched away by Hindley. Isabella marries Heathcliff because she falls in love with Heathcliff, but she soon realises that he is not a hero, but a demon of sorts and she wants to return to her beloved home Thrushcross Grange and to her brother which is not possible.

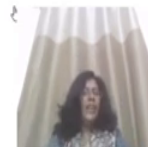
Linton, Heathcliff's son, and Heathcliff and Isabella's son is displaced twice after the death of Isabella. First he is taken to Thrushcross Grange, but then he is brought back to Wuthering Heights. So you can see how people are shunted between abodes and Cathy of course is displaced from Wuthering Heights when she marries and goes to the Grange and when she is there, she feels as if she is an exile from her beloved home, Wuthering Heights.

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## Sample Questions



- Section I
- Where did Mr Earnshaw pick up Heathcliff from?
- A. London
- B. Liverpool
- C. Bath
- D. India
- **Answer: B**



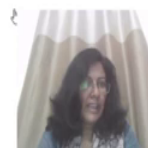
Now, here are some sample questions. In the semester examination, the final examination there will be a Section 1, where you will be asked to find the correct answer from a given list of options. For example, questions can be like the following. Where did Mr. Earnshaw pickup Heathcliff from? You will have some options, so you need to choose the best option. He did not get Heathcliff from London, he did not get him from Bath or India, he picks him up from Liverpool. So that would be the answer.

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## Sample Questions



- **Section II** State whether the statement is true or false.
- *Wuthering Heights burns down at the end of the novel.*  
Answer: False
- **Section III**
- Short Note: Please respond in not more than 250 words
- How is nature and culture represented in *Wuthering Heights*?



Then there will be a Section 2 where you would be asked to state whether the statement given is true or false. Wuthering Heights burns down at the end of the novel. The answer is false, it does not burn down at the end of the novel.

Section 3 would be the short note section, you are asked to respond in the form of a paragraph containing not more than 250 words. The questions can be what, how is nature and culture represented in Wuthering Heights? And you need to discuss the answer, you might have to think about what is nature, is it literal nature or is it symbolic nature.

People of nature in this novel would mean Catherine, Earnshaw, Heathcliff, they love going about in the wild moors and culture would be represented by Thrushcross Grange, the Lintons especially. So you might want to see how the novel is in fact a clash between these two concepts, people of nature, people who kind of work with, love nature are brought into this genteel world of Thrushcross Grange and what are the effects on nature as a result? How does Thrushcross Grange have a negative impact on the relationship between Heathcliff and Catherine can also be part of your answer.

Thank you for watching, I will continue in the next session.