
The Significance of Cycles in Emily Brontë's Novel

The natural cycles of the universe promote continuity through repetition. Emily Brontë had a very cyclical outlook on life, and uses these cycles throughout *Wuthering Heights* to exhibit this. The story itself comes full circle and death is a prominent cycle in the story. These two cycles hold extreme importance to the structure of the novel because they cause the reader to see the cynical views of Brontë's life during the Victorian period.

From the beginning of the novel, life and death are the most important cycles in *Wuthering Heights*. Lockwood introduces the reader to the supernatural in the first few chapters. In a dream sequence he grapples with the ghost of Catherine Earnshaw. "Terror made me cruel; and, finding it useless to attempt shaking the creature off, I pulled it's wrist on the broken pane, and rubbed it to and fro till the blood ran down," (Brontë, 20). This brutality between the dead Cathy and Lockwood exhibits Brontë's views how easily the veneer of civilization can be stripped away. To further her point the ghost moans, "I've been a waif for twenty years," (Brontë, 21). The word waif, meaning orphan, has a significant connection to the lost souls of Heathcliff and Cathy throughout the book, and deepens the readers curiosity about the events that lead up to this haunting. This incident also marks the strong connection between Heathcliff and Catherine, and the significance of Cathy's room. Lockwood is almost defiling her sacred place, and the ghost comes to seek revenge. The bloody and brutal language used in the quote shows how thin the line is for the 'gentleman' Lockwood to descend into violence.

Although Brontë seems to believe Cathy and Heathcliff's souls find their heaven on the moors, she goes far enough to say love can go beyond death. This gothic interpretation of events is rooted in a strong belief in the supernatural and the unknown of the afterlife. "Much of Victorian death culture developed out of subconscious reactions to wide-spread death, new scientific discoveries, and popular culture and these fears and anxieties were reflected in much of the Victorian era." Brontë uses her views on death to shape the relationship between Heathcliff and Catherine. On her death bed, Heathcliff says, "Catherine Earnshaw, many you not rest, as long as I am living! You said I killed you—haunt me then!" (Brontë, 130). It becomes evident the narrative structure, introduced to us by Lockwood reveals the veracity—Heathcliff may speak the truth and Cathy may be a ghost, as seen in the beginning.

The parallels between life and death are also significant to the author's views on the cycles of life. Brontë begins the second half of the novel with the second Catherine's birth. This is important because it shows the cyclical nature of life. Catherine, the senior, dies but, the younger Catherine is born as somewhat of a reincarnation of her mother. Mrs. Dean says, "The capacity for intense attachments reminded me of her mother," (Brontë, 146). The author

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describes both Cathy's as being similar to emphasize the importance of the novel beginning to come full circle.

Brontë also delves into the pain that death causes others as a reflection of her own life. As a young girl her mother died of cancer and a few years later her two older sisters died. This ever present, cruel, loss in her life shaped the novel. She uses her close experiences with death to give a detailed description of Catherine senior in between life and death. She's described, "The flash of her eyes had been succeeded by a dreamy and melancholy softness; they no longer gave the impression of looking at objects around her; they appeared to always be gaze beyond," (Brontë, 122). The details Brontë uses, like "doomed to decay," (122) exhibit how detailed an experience Brontë had with death when she was younger.

The notion of death is prevalent throughout the novel and reflects Brontë's cruel views of the topic. Her continuous use of life and death stems from her childhood, and Victorian era outlooks, but *Wuthering Heights*, above all, is a book of cycles and patterns. When Lockwood spends the night in Cathy Earnshaw's old room, he finds the window ledge covered with, "a name repeated in all kinds of characters, large and small—*Catherine Earnshaw*, here and there varied to *Catherine Heathcliff*, and then again to *Catherine Linton*," (Brontë, 15-16). This repetition of names becomes important with the second Catherine, as through her life she is born, married, and remarried to have all of those last names. This important pattern Brontë created exhibits her view of life: everything comes full circle.

Brontë's cyclical view of life, death, and the afterlife shape the narrative of *Wuthering Heights*. From Lockwood's encounter of the supernatural to the marriage of Catherine and Hareton, Heathcliff's son, the novel is full of cycles and repetitive patterns and behaviors of the characters. Brontë uses the children of the first generation to give the characters a chance to not make the same mistakes as their parents. Although there are some faults, to conclude is the union of the second generation's souls, which allowed for Catherine and Heathcliff to find peace among the moors.

Bibliography

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