
The Depiction of Hindley's Search for Justice

Justice and revenge are two similar terms between which exists a very thin line. Both have the intention of correcting some wrong action, whether physical or intangible. The difference lies within how action is taken against the wrongdoer: revenge is emotion-driven, personal, and intentionally harmful, whereas justice seeks rational, fair balance without unnecessary suffering. Despite their dissimilarities, justice and revenge are considered to be exactly the same in Emily Brontë's novel *Wuthering Heights*, especially by the antagonist Hindley Earnshaw.

Hindley is the only biological son in the Earnshaw family, and as "a boy of fourteen," he is nearly fit to be a man (Brontë 37). His family are landowners who own servants that "[hang] about the farm ready for anything that anybody would set [them] to" (Brontë 36). Because they live on a farm and not in an elite mansion like Thrushcross Grange, they aren't exactly part of the upper class, but their ownership of servants demonstrates that the family is still financially well-off. Besides his societal standing, Hindley appears to have a serene family life. Hindley's father, Mr. Earnshaw, clearly dotes on him, referring to him as "[his] bonny man" and allowing him to "choose what [he would] like" Mr. Earnshaw to get for him on his trip to Liverpool (Brontë 36). All in all, Hindley has a great life: he's a white young man whose home life is financially stable and loving.

Hindley's life is forever altered when "a dirty, ragged, black-haired child" is rescued from the Liverpool streets by Mr. Earnshaw (Brontë 37). Nothing is known about the boy, except that he was "starving, and houseless, and as good as dumb" (Brontë 37). Even so, the boy is integrated into the family and "christened him... 'Heathcliff'... [after] the name of a son who died in childhood" (Brontë 38). From that point on, Heathcliff steadily rises to the rank of his foster father's favorite. His high status, protected by Mr. Earnshaw, gives Heathcliff the power to manipulate his siblings into giving him whatever he desires. He repeatedly blackmails and provokes his older foster brother Hindley. Hindley is then enraged and humiliated that he can't fight back because he'd face his father's wrath if he "attempted to impose upon, or domineer over, [Mr. Earnshaw's] favourite" (Brontë 41). Being Mr. Earnshaw's only biological son, Hindley was once held in very great esteem—until he was replaced by Heathcliff as the "favourite" (Brontë 38). From the beginning, young Hindley "[regards]... Heathcliff as a usurper of his parent's affections and his privileges" (Brontë 38) and as time goes on, his resentment only increases.

Hindley hates Heathcliff for two reasons: one, Heathcliff is "as dark as if [he] came from the devil," while the Earnshaw's all possess white skin (Brontë 37). Racism was alive and well in the early 1800's (in fact, slavery hadn't even been abolished yet in England during this novel's timeframe, and it is referred to by Heathcliff himself in Chapter 11). From this, and because Heathcliff is described as "dusky" (Brontë 54) and called a "gipsy" (Brontë 40) several times throughout the novel, it can be inferred that Hindley's prejudice against Heathcliff is stirred by racism.

However, Hindley's rage is more than skin-deep: he primarily despises Heathcliff because the latter boy snatched away Mr. Earnshaw's affection and Hindley's seat of power. Hindley feels that he is entitled to more power and love than Heathcliff because he was raised as a

gentleman, whereas Heathcliff was picked up off the streets. The class structure was extremely important in 19th century England, and the dark-skinned orphan boy Heathcliff violates all rules of conduct by maintaining power over his older, white brother.

Heathcliff's reign doesn't last forever. When Mr. Earnshaw dies and is replaced by his eldest son Hindley as the family's father figure, Hindley takes his opportunity to knock Heathcliff down to the lowly rank of "any other lad on the farm" (Brontë 46). Hindley "[drives Heathcliff] from [the family's] company to the servants...[and] deprived him of the instructions of the curate" (Brontë 46). Hindley was never really deprived of his comfortable societal status or any necessities; he simply received less attention and more criticism than Heathcliff. Hindley's goal isn't treating Heathcliff the same as he was when he was a child; Hindley takes his childhood neglect too personally, and wants Heathcliff to feel even more degraded than Hindley himself had. Heathcliff is an impressionable young man during this time, so he thinks Hindley's revenge is the only way to correct injustice. From then on, he devotes his life to searching for justice in the form of revenge, first on Hindley and later on the Edgar Linton as well. Thus, the events of the rest of the book can be traced back to Hindley's inaccurate understanding that revenge and justice are equal.

Hindley's search for justice isn't even successful because "Heathcliff [bore] his degradation pretty well" with the help of his foster sister Cathy (Brontë 46). Later on, it would be Cathy, not Hindley, who makes Heathcliff feel ashamed of his ploughboy status. Abusing Heathcliff doesn't bring Hindley happiness, either, or bring back his father's attentions; Hindley becomes a drunk, Mr. Earnshaw stays dead in the earth, and Heathcliff eventually carries out his own plans of revenge against Hindley that result in the alcoholic's death. The story of Hindley's miserable, vengeful life and Heathcliff's repetition of revenge serve to remind readers that justice and revenge are not the same concepts, and one cannot receive justice through revenge.