Class Conflict in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*

*Dedria Bryfonski, Book Editor*
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Chapter 1: Background on Emily Brontë 17
1. The Life of Emily Brontë
   Tom Winnifrith
   Relatively little is known about Emily Brontë. She wrote just one novel, the tempestuous masterpiece *Wuthering Heights*, and lived a short, uneventful life. The novel seems to be wholly imaginative, with no autobiographical elements.

2. Emily Brontë Wrote About a Countryside She Knew and People She Imagined
   Charlotte Brontë
   Charlotte Brontë claimed that in *Wuthering Heights*, her sheltered and withdrawn sister Emily was describing a setting she had grown up in and knew well, but that she never knew anyone like the passionate and tormented characters described in the novel.

3. Branwell Brontë Was the Inspiration for Heathcliff
   A. Mary F. Robinson
   To say that Emily Brontë wrote *Wuthering Heights* from her imagination rather than from her experiences is incorrect. Although she lived a sheltered life, her tormented brother, Branwell, brought chaos and suffering into the family home and provided Emily with a character model.

Chapter 2: *Wuthering Heights* and Class Conflict 44
1. *Wuthering Heights* Reflects the Social Changes of Its Time
   Beth Newman
Understanding the social changes taking place in England between 1801 and 1847 provides context for an appreciation of *Wuthering Heights*. As industrialization spread, a growing middle class challenged the position of the landed gentry. The Earnshaws and Heathcliff represent this momentum.

### 2. *Wuthering Heights* Depicts the Conflict Between Natural and Social Values

*Richard Benvenuto*

The duality at the center of *Wuthering Heights* is mirrored in the contrasting worlds of the Heights and the Grange. The former is elemental and uncivilized, the latter a place where order is maintained through upholding the conventions of society.

### 3. Heathcliff Symbolizes the Rise of Capitalism

*Daniela Garofalo*

Heathcliff's rise from an orphaned urchin to landholder in *Wuthering Heights* is a paradigm for the origins of capitalism within society.

### 4. *Wuthering Heights* Depicts a Marxist Struggle

*Terry Eagleton*

By rejecting the socially inferior Heathcliff in favor of Edgar Linton, Catherine breaks Heathcliff's heart, and his revenge sets off a chain of events resulting in death and destruction for two generations. Heathcliff symbolizes capitalism struggling against the traditional upper class.

### 5. Darwin's Theories Influenced *Wuthering Heights*

*Barbara Munson Goff*

Many critics offer a sociological interpretation of *Wuthering Heights*; some consider more closely its concern with the human condition. *Wuthering Heights* offers Brontë's view of natural selection: the stronger of the species may be the survivors, but this hierarchy harms rather than improves the species.

### 6. *Wuthering Heights* Demonstrates That Rebellion Against Class Conventions Can Succeed

*Arnold Kettle*
Heathcliff and Catherine's rejection of the bourgeois values of Thrushcross Grange symbolizes the conflict in Victorian society between those attempting to preserve class privileges and those attempting to build a classless world.

7. The Desire to Possess Property Causes Conflict in *Wuthering Heights*

*Peter Miles*

*Wuthering Heights* is set during a time when the old social order of rigid class distinctions, importance of heredity, and strict guidelines for the passing down of property within the same class and family were being challenged. Heathcliff leads this challenge successfully.

8. Servants in *Wuthering Heights* Have Power Over Their Masters

*Graeme Tytler*

An unusual aspect of *Wuthering Heights* is the prominent role servants play in the novel. One of the two narrators is the housekeeper, Nelly Dean, who in addition to relating the history of the two families, influences their eventual destinies by her actions.

Chapter 3: Contemporary Perspectives on Class Conflict

1. The Major Social Conflict Is Now Between Classes, Not Races

*Joel Kotkin*

Class conflict has replaced racial conflict as the major division in American culture and politics. The gap between rich and poor has widened, resulting in a social chasm that is increasingly difficult to cross.

2. America Remains Divided by Class

*Patrick Martin*

The victories won by blacks, feminists, Hispanics, and gays have obscured the fact that the major inequality in American society remains. There is a fundamental and lasting divide between the working class and capitalist owners, and no progress is being made to bridge that divide.
3. In Cross-Class Relationships, the Real Issue Is Power

*Tamar Lewin*

In cross-class relationships, the person with more money often has a better education and more enhancing life experiences and generally wields the power in the relationship.

4. Class Distinctions Extend to Social Networks

*Breeanna Hare*

A Nielsen study found that Facebook users tend to be more affluent than users of Myspace. Findings indicate that the class distinctions in society are being reinforced by the Internet and social networks rather than being broken down.