

The Use of Windows

In *Wuthering Heights*

By Katie S.

“Wuthering Heights exists for the mind as a tension between two kinds of reality, a restrictive reality of civilized manners and codes, and the anonymous unregenerate reality of natural energies” (Van Ghent 92). In Wuthering Heights, there are many instances of contrasting worlds presented throughout the story. Emily Brontë employs the window as a medium between the two contrasts. The window is used to especially separate the supernatural from the natural and the ideal from the reality.

The evidence of the interlocking between the supernatural world and natural world becomes apparent in the beginning of the novel, during a dream of Mr. Lockwood. It features the ghost of [written at eastern alamance hs in 05] a little girl named Catherine outside the window. This is the first instance of the window as a separation between the paranormal and normal. The ghost grasps Lockwood’s hand when he sticks it through to quiet the tree tapping against it (the window is welded shut) and will not let go until he lets it into the house. To free himself, Lockwood slides the girl’s wrist across the broken glass, spilling her blood everywhere. This attempt was futile, but it metaphorically shows that “Lockwood, more successfully than anyone else in the book, has shut out the powers of darkness” (Van Ghent 92). After Lockwood tells Heathcliff of the dream, he leaves the room, but he overhears Heathcliff from the hallway. “He got on to the bed, and wrenched open the lattice, bursting, as he pulled at it, into an uncontrollable passion of [written at eastern alamance hs in 05] tears. ‘Come in! come in!’ he sobbed” (Brontë 28). Later in the novel, Heathcliff’s behavior becomes increasingly strange.

The opening of the window signifies the reentrance of Catherine's spirit into Heathcliff's mind, who is almost controlled by its presence. The next incidence occurs near the end of the novel with the death of Heathcliff. Heathcliff is found in a paneled bed by a window, and the housekeeper finds the window open with rain seeping in. This could signify the flight of Heathcliff's spirit from the world into the afterworld through the window as a passageway. Also, circumstances with windows are mentioned before and after Catherine's death, which could have been meant to [written at eastern alamance hs in 05] foreshadow and then tell of the death. In the situation before, Catherine begs for the window to be opened even though it is winter; she invites death to come in. The one after involves Heathcliff visiting the corpse of Catherine by way of the window. In the next few days, he senses the presence of Catherine's spirit with him.

The window also seems to be a channel from the reality to the desired. This seems like an obvious observation, but most of the time in the novel, the window either hinders a course or provides a means from one side to the other. An example of an obstacle would be the part in the story when Heathcliff and Catherine escape from Wuthering Heights down to Thrushcross Grange to spy on the Linton children through the drawing room window. "... And we saw—ah! It was beautiful—a splendid place carpeted with crimson, and crimson-covered chairs and tables, and a pure white ceiling bordered by gold, a shower of glass-drops hanging in silver chains from the center, and shimmering with little soft tapers... We should have thought ourselves in heaven!" (Brontë 47-48). To the children, this new world of finery was so different from their own; they could not physically enter it because of the window, and could not mentally enter because of [written at eastern alamance hs in 05] their reckless and unmannerly mindset. "Here the two unregenerate waifs look *in* from the night on the heavenly vision of the refinements and

securities of the most privileged human estate. But Heathcliff rejects the vision: seeing the Linton children blubbering and bored there (*they cannot get out!*)” (Van Ghent 92). The metaphorical window appears again in the beginning stages of Catherine’s last sickness. At one point during a mental breakdown, Catherine insists that Nelly keep the window open, even though it is winter and a slight cold could worsen her sickness. When Nelly refuses, Catherine gets out of [written at eastern alamance hs in 05] bed and does it herself. She hallucinates the lights of Wuthering Heights in the distance, even though it is miles away. Her mind seems to be there with Heathcliff. The window is a boundary between that life and her restricted one at Thrushcross Grange. Then, after she dies, Heathcliff waits in the garden for a signal from Nelly that he can visit her body inside; Nelly opens a window to let him know. Then, when he returns to Wuthering Heights, he finds the door locked and the inhabitants restless against him. “On the night after her burial, unable to follow her into death..., he returns to the Heights through the window—for the door has been barred against him—to wreak on the living the fury of his frustration” (Van Ghent 93). The window here seems to be an outlet for Heathcliff. What seems to be the final situation involves the second Catherine (Cathy). After she is held prisoner at the Heights by [written at eastern alamance hs in 05] her husband Linton and Heathcliff, Cathy finally manages to bother Linton into setting her free. He unlocks the door to her room, but she still has to find a way to escape the house. The only window she finds is the one in her mother’s old room. She opens it, climbs down the fir tree, and arrives at Thrushcross Grange in time to be with her father before he dies. The window here was a passage from the misery of Wuthering Heights to Cathy’s home.

Throughout the novel Wuthering Heights, Emily Brontë uses the window as a channel between the two contrasts of the normal and paranormal and reality and desired. “The imagery

of the window is metamorphic, suggesting a total change of mode of being by the breaking-through of [written at eastern alamance hs in 05] a separating medium” (Van Ghent 93). The idea of the window as a medium flows well with the novel. Just as windows are transparent and made of glass, all the worlds in the novel are effortlessly viewed, and the lines between them are fragile and easily broken.

Works Cited

Brontë, Emily. Wuthering Heights. Austin: Holt, Rinehart, and Wilson, 1993.

Van Ghent, Dorothy. “Wuthering Heights.” Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism. Ed. Cherie D. [written at eastern alamance hs in 05] Abbey and Janet Mullane. Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1987. 16: 92-93.