

07

The women in *Wuthering Heights* are shown by Brontë to be ultimately trapped and disempowered, primarily through their own sexuality. A prime example of this is the effect that Cathy and Heathcliff's love has on Cathy. Both the characters appear to have no control over their obsession with each other, and Cathy especially 'never had the power to conceal her passion'. This description of their relationship, although strange as to the lack of consummation, argues that their relationship overpowers both of them, that both Cathy and Heathcliff are a slave to a higher force. Some critics have applied the gothic feature of the sublime to the relationship, arguing that in the face of such a powerful force, Cathy and Heathcliff are disempowered. Indeed, Cathy herself is torn between Heathcliff and Edgar but essentially declares that 'I am Heathcliff', insinuating that



their love is so strong that they have become one physical being. Brontë confirms that the relationship consumes Catherine for the rest of her life when, before she dies, Cathy declares 'I will break my heart, and their hearts will break too'. This commitment, right ~~fit~~ up to her death, shows Cathy to be not just entrapped, but enslaved by her own passions.

A developed insightful argument

Added to this are the experiences of the other women in Brontë's novel. ~~Again,~~ Across the entirety of the novel, Brontë shows that every woman who ~~is~~ engages in sex dies because of it, whether it be from childbirth, or another post-coital cause. Again, this demonstrates how women are ultimately imprisoned and trapped by their own sexuality. Frances, Isabella and Cathy are effectively punished for their sexuality.

possible interpretation on

alternative view

However, it could be argued that in their sexuality, especially Cathy, although ultimately fatal, they are powerful. Cathy's power over Heathcliff appears eternal, even after her death. While she lives, Heathcliff declares she is 'my life', and he is forever haunted by her ghost: 'oh Cathy, come in my love'. This hold that Cathy maintains demonstrates her unbreaking power over Heathcliff, although she never gets to see her post-humous power over him. Essentially, this shows Cathy to be



example?

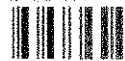
it is the men who must marry for status, quite the opposite to contemporary societal norms. This monetary empowering of women is highly unusual, but nevertheless contradicts the theme of disempowerment.

This view of the book is not unusual if the novel is put into the correct context. At the time, it would not be unusual for women to be entrapped or disempowered. In the Victorian patriarchal society, women were very much second-class citizens whose power relied on their marriage. Marriage was their primary goal, and often money overshadowed the entrapped nature of a materialistic marriage. Brontë's own position in life was one without great amounts of power, as she went away to teach, and so the fate of the women in *Wuthering Heights* could be her protest against such powerlessness. Indeed, the contemporary critics were very much shocked by the inhumanity and ambiguous morality of the novel.

Understanding of relevant contextual factors

Encompassing the entirety of the stories of these women is the frame narration of Nelly. Arguably, Brontë shows the power of women in the use of Nelly, in that Nelly filters the entirety of the story and this responsibility, far from disempowering her, empowers her to a great extent. Her influence over the story gives

good point



empowered by her passion, as opposed to disempowered.

These interpretations would be stronger, were it not for Brontë's inclusion of the domestic realist ending. Where Heathcliff failed to improve the situation between the Heights and the Grange, younger Cathy succeeds. The 'importation of plants from the Grange' to the Heights symbolises the transformation of the 'pure, bracing' heights to a more civilised place. That a woman triumphs in this argues that she is much more powerful than the men who have come before her. Indeed, Cathy is also shown to be ultimately empowered in her relationship with Hareton. She has the power to soften Hareton, and holds the power in the relationship when she educates him. Ultimately, therefore, younger Cathy succeeds where her mother failed, consequently empowering herself. Brontë's use of this parallel, with the two-volume structure, demonstrates that the women of volume one are doomed to powerlessness and entrapped by both their sexuality and their own actions, whereas the women of volume two, overcome entrapment, such as Cathy, and ultimately achieve power.

Evaluated writer's methods with some success

This shift of power relationships is further intensified by Brontë through her use of differing inheritance norms. In the book, women are heiresses to their fathers, and



an uncertainty to events, as she often expresses her opinion: 'I was out of patience with her folly', reminding the audience that the story is only from her perspective. This empowerment of Nelly therefore contradicts the statement.

However, this interpretation is weakened by Brontë due to her inclusion of Lockwood. Many critics have seen Lockwood as an unnecessary character, and many adaptations have omitted him completely. It is therefore interesting that Lockwood is used, as his influence over the story is almost non-existent. Nevertheless, his presence lessens Nelly's power as narrator by yet again filtering the story, but through a man's eyes. Therefore, even the most powerful woman, Nelly as narrator, is lessened in power by Brontë.

Overall, it is fair to say that women are disempowered and entrapped by their own sexuality and passion in the novel, however Brontë's use of female frame narrator and structure argue that women are not as powerless as they seem in *Wuthering Heights*.

This answer deals with 'disempowerment' and 'entrapment' with evaluative perception, however does not reference de Vries' colour fit.

perceptive evaluation of form

Band 6
34

