

Wuthering Heights

Emily Brontë · 115,872 words · EN · Generated April 19, 2026

ANALYSIS SUMMARY

Wuthering Heights is a structurally intricate novel of extraordinary power, organised around a double frame (Lockwood/Nelly) and a generational mirror (elder Catherine–Heathcliff / young Cathy–Hareton) that gives it an architecture rare in Victorian fiction. The dialogue voices are exceptionally well differentiated — from Joseph's impenetrable Yorkshire to Lockwood's urbane irony to Heathcliff's register-shifting between sardonic command and visionary rapture — and the novel sustains this differentiation across thirty-four chapters with remarkable consistency. The embedded narration creates a layered unreliability that is itself thematically productive: Nelly's moral judgements, strategic omissions, and self-justifications become part of the novel's meaning rather than flaws in its execution.

The most significant editorial observation concerns the novel's timeline, which is dense and occasionally strained. Hareton's stated age of eighteen in Chapter 18, after a twelve-year gap during which he appeared to be a very young child, presents a possible arithmetic inconsistency — though it depends on ambiguities in his exact age at earlier points. The legal mechanics of Heathcliff's property acquisition are left deliberately vague ('I suppose legally,' Nelly hedges), which serves the narrative's interests but may leave attentive readers unsatisfied. Brontë's handling of show-versus-tell is generally masterful, with the embedded narrator structure converting most 'telling' into characterisation of Nelly's voice; the few genuine instances of flat summary narration occur in transitional passages and time-skip sections where they are structurally necessary. The novel's dialogue is occasionally direct to a degree that borders on the on-the-nose — Heathcliff in particular announces his schemes and psychological states with a candour that strains plausibility — but Brontë consistently frames this directness as characterisation: Heathcliff's transparency is itself a form of contempt, and his refusal to conceal his villainy is part of his psychological portrait. Overall, the novel's craft is formidable, and the editorial concerns that emerge are minor relative to the ambition and execution of the whole.

Catherine Linton

449 scenes · Chapter 2 'Chapter 34

Young Cathy begins as a sheltered, spirited girl raised in near-total seclusion at Thrushcross Grange, combining her mother's dark Earnshaw eyes with Linton fairness. Through Heathcliff's machinations she is forced into marriage with the sickly Linton Heathcliff, widowed, stripped of property, and imprisoned at Wuthering Heights. She emerges from this ordeal with genuine moral stature and ultimately turns toward Hareton Earnshaw, becoming the agent of his education and redemption — reversing her mother's destructive pattern.

CONSISTENCY

None noted. Her characterisation is consistent throughout — youthful impetuosity gives way to hardened defiance and then to quiet tenderness.

KEY RELATIONSHIPS

Hareton Earnshaw

Heathcliff

Edgar Linton

Linton Heathcliff

Master Heathcliff

250 scenes · Chapter 1 'Chapter 34

Heathcliff enters as a foundling brought to Wuthering Heights, is degraded by Hindley after Mr. Earnshaw's death, and departs after overhearing Catherine say it would 'degrade' her to marry him. He returns transformed — wealthy, commanding, and consumed by vengeance — systematically destroying both the Earnshaw and Linton families through legal, financial, and psychological manipulation. In the final chapters his obsession with the elder Catherine's ghost overwhelms his will to live, and he dies in a state of uncanny rapture, having relinquished his revenge without renouncing it.

CONSISTENCY

The three-year absence (Chapters 9–10) is never explained; this is a deliberate narrative gap, not an error. His claim in Chapter 14 to have avoided giving Isabella legal grounds for separation sits in mild tension with the violence described in Chapter 13, but is plausible within the era's narrow domestic law.

KEY RELATIONSHIPS

Catherine Earnshaw

Hareton Earnshaw

Catherine Linton

Hindley Earnshaw

Hareton Earnshaw

177 scenes · Chapter 1 'Chapter 34

Hareton is introduced in Chapter 1 as a rough, apparently uneducated young man of ambiguous household status, and the novel gradually reveals how he was systematically degraded by Heathcliff from rightful heir to illiterate servant. Despite this, he retains a core of natural dignity and generosity — he mourns Heathcliff more deeply than anyone else — and through young Cathy's influence begins recovering his literacy and his inheritance, emerging as the novel's figure of redemption.

CONSISTENCY

Hareton's age in Chapter 18 is described as 'a great, strong lad of eighteen,' but the timeline places him at roughly twelve to thirteen years older than that chapter's twelve-year time-skip from infancy would suggest. This is a possible arithmetic inconsistency (see [continuity_errors](#)).

KEY RELATIONSHIPS

Heathcliff

Catherine Linton

Hindley Earnshaw

Nelly Dean

Nelly Dean

73 scenes · Chapter 6 'Chapter 34

Nelly serves as the primary embedded narrator, recounting the two-generation saga to Lockwood from the position of lifelong servant-witness. She presents herself as a 'steady, reasonable kind of body' but her narrative repeatedly reveals acts of strategic omission, delayed action, and moral compromise — she withholds information from Edgar, enables Heathcliff's access to Catherine, and betrays young Cathy's confidences. Her arc is less one of change than of gradually revealed complicity.

CONSISTENCY

None noted. Her voice and moral positioning remain consistent throughout, including her self-aware acknowledgements of unreliability.

KEY RELATIONSHIPS

Catherine Earnshaw

Catherine Linton

Heathcliff

Edgar Linton

Edgar Linton

71 scenes · Chapter 6 'Chapter 28

Edgar is introduced as a pampered child of Thrushcross Grange whose marriage to the elder Catherine brings him into catastrophic proximity with Heathcliff. He endures Catherine's death, Isabella's elopement, and Heathcliff's systematic encroachment with a combination of moral dignity and constitutional passivity. His final chapters show him dying with gentle lucidity, his only remaining anxiety being young Cathy's welfare after his death.

CONSISTENCY

Edgar's age of thirty-nine in Chapter 25 is consistent with his having been a contemporary of the elder Catherine (born c. 1762–65) within the novel's frame year of 1801.

KEY RELATIONSHIPS

Catherine Earnshaw

Catherine Linton

Heathcliff

Isabella Linton

Hindley Earnshaw

48 scenes · Chapter 3 'Chapter 17

Hindley begins as the elder Earnshaw son whose jealousy of the foundling Heathcliff curdles into tyranny after his father's death. He degrades Heathcliff, then is himself degraded — widowed young, he descends into alcoholism, gambling, and violence, eventually mortgaging Wuthering Heights to Heathcliff and dying drunk at twenty-seven. His arc is a precise mirror of the degradation he inflicted: the novel uses him to show how cruelty reproduces itself across generations.

CONSISTENCY

The doctor's remark that Hindley is 'barely twenty-seven' and Nelly's same age is broadly consistent with their established childhood contemporaneity, though the exact alignment was not previously confirmed.

KEY RELATIONSHIPS

Heathcliff

Catherine Earnshaw

Hareton Earnshaw

Frances Earnshaw

Catherine Earnshaw

7 scenes · Chapter 3 'Chapter 34

The elder Catherine is the novel's originating force — her childhood bond with Heathcliff, her socially motivated marriage to Edgar, and her early death structure both generations of the narrative. She appears directly in only a handful of scenes (diary fragments, the delirium, the reunion with Heathcliff, and as a ghost or haunting presence) but her influence pervades the entire novel. Her arc moves from wild childhood freedom through a catastrophic division of self — 'I am Heathcliff' set against 'it would degrade me to marry Heathcliff' — to a death that functions as both escape and eternal entrapment.

CONSISTENCY

The ghost identifies herself as 'Catherine Linton' in Chapter 3, which is correct (she died as Catherine Linton, Edgar's wife) but deliberately puzzling since Lockwood has been reading 'Catherine Earnshaw.' This is an intentional ambiguity, not an error.

KEY RELATIONSHIPS

Heathcliff

Edgar Linton

Nelly Dean

Hindley Earnshaw

TIMELINE & STRUCTURE

STRUCTURE

The novel employs a double frame: Lockwood narrates in 1801–1802, within which Nelly Dean's embedded narration covers roughly 1771–1801. The first generation's story (Chapters 3–17) spans approximately 1771–1784; a twelve-year gap separates the two halves; the second generation's story (Chapters 18–34) runs from approximately 1797 to early 1802. Lockwood's own visits bookend the narrative.

PACING

The first half is densely paced, with closely sequential scenes covering months. The twelve-year gap between Chapters 17 and 18 is the novel's sharpest temporal rupture. The second half compresses events more aggressively — Cathy's secret visits, Linton's death, and Edgar's decline all occur within about a year. The final chapters accelerate toward Heathcliff's death with a four-day compressed arc.

NOTES

The novel's timeline is notoriously complex and relies on scattered date-markers (Hareton Earnshaw's name carved on the house, the '1500' inscription, the 'twenty years' of the ghost's claim). Most internal chronology is consistent, but the density of events in the second half creates compression that occasionally strains plausibility — particularly the speed of Edgar's decline and Linton's coerced will.

POTENTIAL GAPS

Heathcliff's three-year absence (Chapters 9–10) is never accounted for — his transformation from degraded stable-boy to wealthy gentleman is presented as a deliberate mystery.

The twelve-year gap between Chapters 17 and 18 is covered only by Nelly's summary narration; no scenes dramatise Cathy's childhood or Hareton's adolescence under Heathcliff's control.

Hareton's age presents a possible arithmetic problem: if twelve years have passed since Hindley's death when Hareton was a very young child, he should be roughly twelve to thirteen in Chapter 18, not the stated eighteen. This depends on his exact age at Hindley's death, which is ambiguous.

PLOT THREADS

The novel's plot threads are organised around generational doubling and inversion. Nearly every first-generation thread (Catherine–Heathcliff's destructive love, Hindley's degradation of Heathcliff, the Earnshaw–Linton class conflict) has a second-generation counterpart that revises or redeems it. The one truly unresolved thread — Heathcliff's origins — is left open by design, functioning as a permanent interpretive provocation.

Heathcliff's revenge on the Earnshaw line

RESOLVED

Introduced: Chapter 7 (Heathcliff declares 'I'm trying to settle how I shall pay Hindley back') · Resolved: Chapter 34 (Heathcliff dies having relinquished active control, Hareton restored to inheritance)

The revenge is achieved structurally — Hareton is degraded, the Heights possessed — but Heathcliff abandons it in spirit before dying, and Hareton's restoration undoes its effects.

Heathcliff's revenge on the Linton line

RESOLVED

Introduced: Chapter 10 (Heathcliff returns and begins cultivating Isabella's infatuation) · Resolved: Chapter 30 (Linton Heathcliff dies; Heathcliff holds both properties through legal machination)

Executed through Isabella's elopement, Linton's coerced marriage to Cathy, and the forced will. Edgar's death completes the dispossession.

The elder Catherine and Heathcliff's bond

RESOLVED

Introduced: Chapter 3 (Catherine's diary; the ghost at the window) · Resolved: Chapter 34 (Heathcliff dies in Catherine's room, apparently reunited; the three graves on the moor)

The novel leaves the resolution deliberately ambiguous — Lockwood 'wondered how any one could ever imagine unquiet slumbers' but the local shepherd boy claims to have seen ghosts. Supernatural reunion is suggested but never confirmed.

Young Cathy and Hareton's redemptive bond

RESOLVED

Introduced: Chapter 18 (their first meeting at Wuthering Heights) · Resolved: Chapter 34 (impending marriage on New Year's Day; mutual education and affection)

This thread directly inverts the elder Catherine–Heathcliff pattern. Where the first generation's love was destructive and self-consuming, the second generation's turns toward literacy, domesticity, and mutual growth.

Heathcliff's mystery origins and transformation

OPEN

Introduced: Chapter 1 (Lockwood observes 'a dark-skinned gipsy in aspect, in dress and manners a gentleman')

The novel never reveals where Heathcliff came from, how he acquired his wealth, or what he did during his three-year absence. Mr. Linton's speculation ('a little Lascar, or an American or Spanish castaway') is the closest the text comes to addressing his racial or ethnic background. This is a deliberate structural gap.

Hareton's dispossession and recovery

RESOLVED

Introduced: Chapter 17 (Heathcliff claims Wuthering Heights; 'Now, my bonny lad, you are mine!') · Resolved: Chapter 34 (Joseph celebrates that 'the lawful master and the ancient stock were restored to their rights')

Hareton's arc is the novel's structural spine — the reading guide correctly identifies his appearance in Chapter 1 as a deliberate framing choice. His ending carries the weight of both generations' suffering.

Lockwood's frame narrative

RESOLVED

Introduced: Chapter 1 (Lockwood visits Wuthering Heights as new tenant) · Resolved: Chapter 34 (Lockwood revisits, observes Cathy and Hareton, walks to the graves)

Lockwood functions as a lens rather than a protagonist — his obtuse misreadings in Chapters 1–3 establish the novel's concern with interpretation and reliability, and his quiet final paragraphs provide the elegiac closure.

CONTINUITY ERRORS

None found.

DIALOGUE VOICES

Heathcliff

VOICE

Heathcliff's speech ranges from monosyllabic contempt to sustained, rhetorically elaborate confession, often within a single scene. His default register is terse and commanding, but when speaking of the elder Catherine he shifts into lyrical, quasi-metaphysical intensity. He deploys sardonic courtesy as a weapon and frequently states his cruelties with deliberate transparency, using candour as an instrument of domination.

CONSISTENCY

Consistent throughout. The shift between cold command and passionate confession is established early and maintained. His speech to Nelly in Chapter 21 — openly declaring his scheme to marry the cousins — is unusually transparent even for him, but is justified by his calculation that she cannot stop him.

SAMPLE QUOTES

"I have no pity! I have no pity! The more the worms writhe, the more I yearn to crush out their entrails!"

"Last night I was on the threshold of hell. To-day, I am within sight of my heaven. I have my eyes on it: hardly three feet to sever me!"

"I forgive what you have done to me. I love my murderer—but yours! How can I?"

Catherine Earnshaw (elder)

VOICE

The elder Catherine's speech is the most rhetorically complex in the novel, moving from coquetry through anguished metaphysics to delirious stream-of-consciousness. She thinks in cosmic oppositions — foliage versus rock, heaven versus earth — and oscillates between transcendent self-analysis and sharp social calculation within single speeches. In delirium, her voice becomes associative, imagistic, and pre-rational.

CONSISTENCY

Consistent. Her speech registers shift appropriately with her declining mental state — from the articulate confession of Chapter 9 through the delirium of Chapter 12 to the prophetic-tender mode of Chapter 15.

SAMPLE QUOTES

"My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods... My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath."

"I am Heathcliff!"

"I'll not lie there by myself: they may bury me twelve feet deep, and throw the church down over me, but I won't rest till you are with me."

Catherine Linton (young Cathy)

VOICE

Young Cathy's speech is spontaneous, affectionate, and socially confident, reflecting her sheltered upbringing at the Grange. She is emotionally direct and quick-moving, with a tendency toward performative indignation. Under Heathcliff's domination her voice hardens into compressed defiance, and by the final chapters she achieves a quiet moral authority.

CONSISTENCY

Consistent. Her voice matures appropriately from girlish impetuosity to hardened defiance across the second half of the novel.

SAMPLE QUOTES

"Mr. Heathcliff, you have nobody to love you; and, however miserable you make us, we shall still have the revenge of thinking that your cruelty arises from your greater misery."

"He's safe, and I'm free... you have left me so long to struggle against death alone, that I feel and see only death!"

"Naughty Ellen! Wicked Ellen!"

Nelly Dean

VOICE

Nelly's speech is crisp, pragmatic, and morally inflected, deploying common-sense corrections and folk wisdom with brisk confidence. She constructs her own credibility as narrator through self-conscious asides

to Lockwood. She is sententious but self-aware, occasionally admitting moral compromise with notable candour.

CONSISTENCY

Consistent throughout. Her moralising tone and practical register are maintained from Chapter 6 to Chapter 34. Her occasional warmth toward Heathcliff in early chapters and increasing fear of him in later ones represent natural development, not inconsistency.

SAMPLE QUOTES

"I certainly esteem myself a steady, reasonable kind of body... I have undergone sharp discipline, which has taught me wisdom."

"I was right or wrong? I fear it was wrong, though expedient."

"A good heart will help you to a bonny face, my lad."

Edgar Linton

VOICE

Edgar's speech is formal, controlled, and emotionally restrained even under extreme pressure. He uses measured sentences and latinate vocabulary, maintaining moral precision in his phrasing. His diction reveals a man who manages feeling through propriety — even his abandonments are carefully qualified.

CONSISTENCY

Consistent. His restrained register is maintained throughout, with his most emotionally open speech appropriately placed in his dying chapters (25–28).

SAMPLE QUOTES

"She went of her own accord. She had a right to go if she pleased. Hereafter she is only my sister in name: not because I disown her, but because she has disowned me."

"I've prayed often for the approach of what is coming; and now I begin to shrink, and fear it."

"Your presence is a moral poison that would contaminate the most virtuous."

Hindley Earnshaw

VOICE

Hindley's speech lurches between menace, maudlin affection, and blasphemous self-pity, reflecting a disintegrating mind. His diction retains traces of educated Earnshaw formality beneath the ruin, and his swearing is biblical in register. He is explosive in short bursts and grandiose in collapse.

CONSISTENCY

Consistent. His escalating degradation is tracked through increasingly fragmented and violent speech patterns from Chapter 9 through his final appearance in Chapter 17.

SAMPLE QUOTES

"By heaven and hell, you've sworn between you to murder that child!"

"Nobody alive would regret me, or be ashamed, though I cut my throat this minute."

"Come, what! it won't? Kiss me, Hareton! Damn thee, kiss me!"

Lockwood

VOICE

Lockwood is highly educated, self-conscious, and prone to ironic self-deprecation. His syntax is elaborate and performative, projecting social confidence he does not quite feel. He intellectualises compulsively and uses ostentatiously literary comparisons, serving as both reader surrogate and object of gentle satire.

CONSISTENCY

Consistent. His urbane detachment is maintained from Chapter 1 to Chapter 34, with his final paragraphs appropriately subdued — the rhetorical defensiveness is stripped away for the elegiac close.

SAMPLE QUOTES

"I do myself the honour of calling as soon as possible after my arrival, to express the hope that I have not inconvenienced you."

"I perceive that people in these regions acquire over people in towns the value that a spider in a dungeon does over a spider in a cottage."

"I should be in a curious taking if I surrendered my heart to that young person."

Joseph

VOICE

Joseph speaks in heavy, phonetically rendered Yorkshire dialect that is barely intelligible to outsiders. Every utterance combines domestic instruction with religious condemnation; he functions as a grotesque Old Testament chorus. His register is entirely unchanged across the novel.

CONSISTENCY

Entirely consistent. Joseph's dialect, piety, and moral certainty are unvarying from first appearance to last.

SAMPLE QUOTES

"Th' divil's harried off his soul... Ech! what a wicked 'un he looks, girning at death!"

"Aw wonder how yah can faishion to stand thear i' idleness un war."

"I wer sure he'd sarve ye out!"

Isabella Linton

VOICE

Isabella begins with the genteel vocabulary of her Grange upbringing but is transformed by her experience at Wuthering Heights into a speaker of vivid, hyperbolic precision. Her speech after her escape is breathless and lurches between laughter and tears, mixing educated diction with raw, almost philosophical bitterness about cruelty and revenge.

CONSISTENCY

Consistent. Her transformation from naïve romantic to hardened survivor is tracked through her shifting register across Chapters 13–17.

SAMPLE QUOTES

"I just hope, I pray, that he may forget his diabolical prudence and kill me! The single pleasure I can imagine is to die, or to see him dead!"

"I can recollect yet how I loved him; and can dimly imagine that I could still be loving him, if—no, no!"

"No one has a right to talk in that manner, and I won't hear my brother depreciated in silence!"

Hareton Earnshaw

VOICE

Hareton barely speaks in complete sentences for most of the novel, his speech dialect-roughened and blunt. His most articulate moments are assertions of identity or wounded pride. His near-silence is itself eloquent — sensitivity shows through darkened expression and retreat rather than words.

CONSISTENCY

Consistent. His roughness in early chapters and gradual softening in the final chapters track his arc from degraded to recovering.

SAMPLE QUOTES

"My name is Hareton Earnshaw, and I'd counsel you to respect it!"

"If thou weren't more a lass than a lad, I'd fell thee this minute, I would; pitiful lath of a crater!"

"It wouldn't do mitch hurt if it did."

SHOW VS TELL

Chapter 30

"I had a long talk with Zillah about six weeks ago, a little before you came, one day when we foregathered on the moor; and this is what she told me."

ISSUE

Purely transitional summary narration that tells the reader the source and circumstance of a substantial narrative block without dramatising the encounter itself, flattening a key shift in narrative perspective.

SUGGESTION

Consider dramatising even a brief moment of the Nelly–Zillah exchange on the moor to establish Zillah's tone and Nelly's reactions before the extended reported speech begins, giving the transition scenic texture.

Chapter 17

"Time brought resignation, and a melancholy sweeter than common joy."

ISSUE

Edgar's emotional evolution over a substantial period is compressed into an abstract summary statement rather than dramatised through specific behaviour or scene.

SUGGESTION

Consider anchoring this summary in one brief, concrete image of Edgar's daily life — a gesture, a habit, a specific moment — that embodies the resignation and melancholy rather than naming them.

Chapter 21

"My design is as honest as possible. I'll inform you of its whole scope. That the two cousins may fall in love, and get married."

ISSUE

Heathcliff directly states his entire second-generation scheme to Nelly in plain terms, converting a complex strategic plot into exposition. While the text justifies this by showing Heathcliff calculates that Nelly cannot stop him, the transparency removes any dramatic tension from the revelation.

SUGGESTION

Consider having Heathcliff hint at or partially disclose his aim — allowing Nelly (and the reader) to infer the full scope from his actions and half-statements rather than receiving a complete briefing.