

Love and Loss in Novel *Wuthering Heights*: Psychoanalysis Perspective

Devi Fitria¹, Novi Elisa²

English Literature, Universitas Bina Sarana Informatika^{1 2}
e-mail: fitriaadevi2@gmail.com, elisanovi31@gmail.com

Abstrak – Penelitian ini mengkaji tema cinta dan kehilangan (*love and loss*) dalam novel *Wuthering Heights* karya Emily Brontë melalui perspektif psikoanalisis dan sastra Gotik. Novel ini merepresentasikan hubungan emosional yang ekstrem antara Heathcliff dan Catherine Earnshaw, di mana cinta tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai pengalaman romantis, tetapi juga sebagai kekuatan psikologis yang membentuk identitas, trauma, dan kehancuran emosional. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan pendekatan analisis tematik untuk mengungkap konstruksi cinta, penyebab kehilangan, serta dampak psikologis yang dialami tokoh-tokohnya. Data diperoleh melalui pembacaan intensif terhadap dialog, narasi, dan interaksi tokoh utama. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa cinta dalam novel ini dibangun melalui keterikatan emosional masa kanak-kanak dan peleburan identitas, sementara kehilangan dipicu oleh struktur kelas sosial, keputusan Catherine untuk menikahi Edgar Linton, dan kematian Catherine yang menimbulkan kondisi melankolia pada Heathcliff. Kehilangan yang tidak terselesaikan mendorong munculnya obsesi, penderitaan psikologis, dan tindakan balas dendam. Selain itu, elemen Gotik memperkuat representasi cinta yang bertahan melampaui kematian melalui dimensi spiritual dan supernatural. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa Brontë menggambarkan cinta sebagai kekuatan eksistensial yang bersifat destruktif, di mana cinta dan kehilangan saling terkait dan menjadi pusat konflik emosional dalam keseluruhan narasi novel.

Kata Kunci: cinta, kehilangan, psikoanalisis, sastra Gotik, *Wuthering Heights*

Abstract - This study examines the theme of love and loss in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* through a psychoanalytic and Gothic perspective. The novel portrays an extreme emotional relationship between Heathcliff and Catherine Earnshaw, in which love functions not merely as a romantic experience but as a psychological force that shapes identity, trauma, and emotional destruction. This research employs a qualitative descriptive method supported by thematic analysis to explore the construction of love, the causes of loss, and their psychological consequences for the characters. The data were collected through close reading of dialogues, narrative descriptions, and character interactions. The findings reveal that love in the novel is formed through childhood emotional bonding and identity fusion, while loss is generated by rigid social class structures, Catherine's decision to marry Edgar Linton, and her death, which leads Heathcliff into a state of melancholia. This unresolved loss results in obsession, psychological suffering, and acts of revenge. Furthermore, Gothic elements reinforce the depiction of love that transcends death through spiritual and supernatural dimensions. The study concludes that Brontë represents love as an existential and destructive force, in which love and loss are inseparably intertwined and function as the central emotional conflict of the novel.

Key words: love, loss, psychoanalysis, Gothic literature, *Wuthering Heights*.

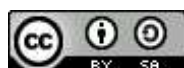
Received
16-01-2025

Revised
17-01-2025

Accepted
30-12-2025

INTRODUCTION

Wuthering Heights by Emily Brontë is one of the most emotionally complex and psychologically intense works of English literature. The novel does not merely present a tragic love story, but deeply explores themes of love, loss, trauma, revenge, and spiritual obsession. The emotional relationship between Heathcliff and Catherine Earnshaw functions as the central force that shapes the novel's narrative conflict and tragic structure. Catherine's decision to marry Edgar Linton for social security marks the beginning of emotional loss, psychological fragmentation, and moral deterioration that dominate the entire story. From a literary perspective, *Wuthering Heights* belongs to the Gothic tradition, which emphasizes darkness, emotional extremity, psychological tension, and supernatural elements. According to **Botting (1996)**, Gothic literature reflects "the return of repressed emotions, fears, and desires that society seeks to control." Brontë successfully blends Gothic conventions with deeply human psychological experiences, particularly love and loss. In this novel, love is not portrayed as a source of comfort or harmony, but as a destructive force that destabilizes identity and reason.



Love, according to Erich **Fromm (1956)**, is “an active power in man; a power which breaks through the walls which separate man from his fellow men.” Fromm argues that genuine love involves emotional unity and identity connection. This concept is clearly reflected in the relationship between Heathcliff and Catherine, whose bond transcends ordinary romantic attachment. Catherine’s famous declaration—“I am Heathcliff”—illustrates a form of identity fusion, where love becomes inseparable from the self. Consequently, the loss of the beloved becomes an existential threat rather than a mere emotional wound. Loss, according to **Freud (1917)** in *Mourning and Melancholia*, refers to the experience of losing a loved object, which can lead either to healthy mourning or pathological melancholia. In mourning, the subject gradually detaches from the lost object; in melancholia, the loss is internalized and becomes self-destructive. Heathcliff’s inability to accept Catherine’s death places him firmly in a melancholic state. His grief does not diminish over time but transforms into rage, obsession, and revenge, indicating unresolved psychological trauma.

Catherine’s decision to marry Edgar Linton further reinforces the theme of social class as a major cause of emotional loss. According to Marxist literary theory, individual desires are often suppressed by social structures and class ideology. Catherine loves Heathcliff emotionally, but her ego negotiates with social reality and chooses Edgar for material stability and social acceptance. This decision illustrates Freud’s structural model of the psyche: Id: Catherine’s instinctual desire to be with Heathcliff, driven by passion and emotional truth, Ego: Her rational consideration of social class, security, and survival, Superego: The internalized moral and social expectations that pressure her to marry Edgar as a “proper” choice for a woman of her status. Similarly, Heathcliff’s psychological development can be examined through Freud’s id, ego, and superego. His id is dominated by raw passion, desire, and rage toward loss. After Catherine’s death, his ego fails to mediate these impulses realistically, while his superego becomes distorted, justifying cruelty and revenge as moral retribution. As a result, revenge becomes his primary psychological defense mechanism to cope with unbearable loss.

The theory of love and loss suggests that intense attachment increases vulnerability to psychological collapse when separation occurs. **Bowlby’s Attachment Theory (1969)** explains that individuals who form deep emotional bonds experience profound distress when those bonds are broken. Heathcliff’s lifelong attachment to Catherine makes her loss catastrophic, explaining his inability to move forward and his fixation on her spirit even after death. The persistence of love beyond death is a defining Gothic element in the novel. Heathcliff’s belief that Catherine’s spirit continues to accompany him reflects what **Kristeva (1989)** describes as “the melancholic attachment to the lost object that resists symbolic separation.” Brontë portrays love as a spiritual force that defies physical death, reinforcing the idea that love and loss are inseparable and mutually sustaining.

This research is significant because it addresses a critical gap in previous literary studies. While many scholars focus on revenge, narrative structure, or Gothic symbolism, few examine love and loss as the foundational psychological forces that construct the novel’s emotional and narrative framework. By applying expert definitions, psychoanalytic theory, and Gothic literary analysis, this study aims to examine the formation of love, the causes of loss, and their profound psychological consequences within *Wuthering Heights*.

Studies on love in literature have been discussed by many scholars, especially in the context of intense relationships such as those in *Wuthering Heights*. Fromm (1956) explains that love is a form of existential connectedness that functions as a basic human need. In Brontë’s novel, love is not merely an emotional experience but becomes the foundation of the characters’ identities. The relationship between Heathcliff and Catherine represents an inseparable form of love, making loss a threat to the stability of the self. **Freud (1917)** distinguishes between *mourning* and *melancholia*. Mourning is a normal form of grief that can heal over time, whereas melancholia is a pathological form of loss that remains unresolved. Catherine’s death brings Heathcliff into a state of melancholia, evident in his obsession with destroying everything connected to her. This theory helps to explain Heathcliff’s extreme and unstable emotional patterns.

Within the Gothic literary tradition, emotional intensity is one of its most important elements. **Hoeverler (1998)** explains that Gothic literature presents inner conflicts, dark atmospheres, and supernatural relationships as representations of human psychological tension. *Wuthering Heights* employs Gothic settings to highlight the themes of love and loss, especially through depictions of wild landscapes, gloomy buildings, and the haunting presence of Catherine’s spirit. Previous research has examined *Wuthering Heights* from social and psychological perspectives, but few studies have explored love and loss as the novel’s central emotional structures. Therefore, this literature review emphasizes the importance of thematic analysis to understand the emotional depth that shapes the narrative.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach supported by thematic analysis, a methodological choice that aligns with the study's aim to uncover emotional, symbolic, and psychological meanings embedded within literary texts. Unlike quantitative methods that rely on measurement and numerical representation, qualitative inquiry emphasizes depth, interpretation, and contextual understanding, making it particularly suitable for analyzing the intense emotional structure and Gothic elements found in *Wuthering Heights*. The primary data source for this research is *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë, specifically the 2003 Penguin Classics edition, selected for its reliable editing and widely accepted textual accuracy. Secondary data sources include scholarly books, journal articles, and theoretical works that discuss concepts of love, loss, Gothic literature, and psychological theories relevant to emotional analysis, such as those proposed by Fromm, Freud, and prominent Gothic literature scholars.

Data collection was carried out through several interconnected procedures that allowed for a rich and systematic engagement with the text. The process began with multiple close readings of the novel to identify emotional nuances, symbolic representations, and psychological expressions conveyed by the characters. Close reading enabled the researcher to examine the novel at the level of language, imagery, dialogue, and narrative structure. From these readings, relevant quotations illustrating themes such as identity-based love, social conflict, existential loss, revenge as an emotional response, and spiritual or supernatural forms of love were identified and extracted to serve as the foundation for thematic analysis. Each selected quotation was then coded into analytical categories that reflect the emotional architecture of the narrative and align with the theoretical frameworks employed. These categories include identity-based love, class-based decisions and social conflict, existential loss and psychological disturbance, emotional revenge, and the spiritual or supernatural dimensions of love.

The analysis of the data follows the thematic analysis model developed by **Braun and Clarke (2006)**, which consists of six structured stages. The researcher first familiarized themselves with the data through repeated readings to grasp the emotional and thematic landscape of the novel. Initial codes were then generated to identify significant elements such as expressions of love, depictions of loss, acts of revenge, and references to supernatural experiences. These codes were subsequently organized into broader thematic patterns that represent recurring emotional dynamics within the narrative. The emerging themes were reviewed for coherence to ensure they accurately represented the data and aligned with the novel's structural and emotional context. Each theme was then refined and conceptually defined, and finally integrated into a cohesive analytical narrative supported by textual evidence and relevant theoretical interpretation.

To deepen the analytical process, this study incorporates theoretical frameworks from several key thinkers. Fromm's theory of existential love provides insight into the identity-based attachment between Heathcliff and Catherine, revealing how their emotional bond transcends traditional romantic boundaries. Freud's concepts of mourning and melancholia offer a psychological lens through which Heathcliff's response to Catherine's death can be understood, illuminating the destructive effects of unresolved grief. Additionally, Gothic literary theory, particularly as articulated by scholars such as Hoeverler, contextualizes the emotional intensity, supernatural motifs, and dark atmospheric elements that shape the characters' experiences. Through the integration of these theoretical perspectives, the analysis moves beyond surface-level description and offers a multidimensional interpretation of how love and loss function as the emotional core of *Wuthering Heights*.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal five major patterns in the representation of love and loss in *Wuthering Heights*, each contributing to the novel's intense emotional architecture. First, the love between Heathcliff and Catherine is rooted in their shared childhood experiences, which cultivate a deep psychological interdependence often described as identity fusion. Their early bond—formed in isolation, marginalization, and mutual emotional refuge—creates a connection so strong that their sense of self becomes inseparable. This fusion makes their relationship transcend conventional romantic attachment and instead function as a shared existential identity. Second, the rigid social class structure of 19th-century England emerges as the primary force disrupting this bond. Catherine's decision to marry Edgar Linton is driven not by emotional preference but by the constraints and expectations imposed by class status. This choice fractures her connection with Heathcliff, creating a profound emotional rupture that marks the beginning of irreversible loss for both characters. The novel demonstrates that social hierarchy is not merely a background setting but a mechanism that actively shapes emotional outcomes.

Third, Catherine's death represents the most traumatic loss in the narrative, initiating a severe psychological breakdown in Heathcliff. Her passing is not experienced by Heathcliff as a natural transition but as an existential

catastrophe that destabilizes his identity. This loss triggers symptoms consistent with melancholia, as Heathcliff becomes consumed by grief, obsession, and self-destructive impulses. His inability to accept Catherine's death manifests in prolonged emotional turmoil and an obsessive need to maintain a connection with her even after death. Fourth, revenge emerges as Heathcliff's primary emotional mechanism for coping with unresolved loss. Unable to process his grief through mourning, he redirects his pain outward, targeting those he perceives as responsible for his suffering. Revenge becomes a form of emotional survival—an attempt to exert control in a world where he has experienced profound powerlessness and abandonment. His vengeful actions toward the Linton and Earnshaw families are portrayed not simply as cruelty but as the dark consequence of catastrophic emotional trauma. Finally, love in the novel extends beyond physical existence and becomes a spiritual, even supernatural, presence characteristic of Gothic literature. Heathcliff's persistent belief that Catherine's spirit remains with him illustrates a form of love that defies death and challenges the boundaries of the material world. This spiritual dimension reinforces the Gothic atmosphere of the novel, presenting love as an overwhelming force that continues to shape the characters' lives long after the physical relationship has ended. Through this lens, love and loss become intertwined forces that transcend the natural order, highlighting the novel's exploration of emotional extremity and metaphysical connection.

DISCUSSION

This discussion provides an in-depth explanation of the dynamics of love and loss in *Wuthering Heights* through thematic analysis connected to theories of love, theories of loss, psychology, and the Gothic literary tradition. The analysis highlights that the relationship between Heathcliff and Catherine cannot be understood as ordinary romantic love; instead, their bond represents a form of identity attachment that produces complex emotional conflict and profound psychological devastation.

1. The Emotional Construction of Love: Childhood Bonding and Identity Fusion

Love in *Wuthering Heights* is constructed through the shared childhood experiences of Heathcliff and Catherine. Growing up together in a harsh and isolating environment, their emotional attachment is not rooted merely in affection or romantic attraction but in a bond shaped by shared psychological conditions. Catherine does not simply love Heathcliff—she identifies herself within him. This is reflected in her famous declaration:

“Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same.”

This statement demonstrates that their love is based on **identity fusion**, a concept describing a psychological merging between two individuals to the point where their identities are no longer separate. In the context of **Fromm's (1956)** theory, their love exceeds interpersonal affection; it is grounded in an existential need to find oneself through another person. This identity-based attachment makes their love absolute, irreplaceable, and resistant to social norms. However, because this form of love is unsupported by social structures, it becomes forbidden and unstable. Here, the seed of loss is already present: a love without a secure place in society inevitably carries the potential for tragedy.

2. Social Class, Power Structures, and the Genesis of Loss

Differences in social class become the primary obstacle that disrupts Heathcliff and Catherine's emotional bond. Although Catherine deeply loves Heathcliff, she chooses to marry Edgar Linton in pursuit of higher social status and a life deemed “proper” by societal expectations. She explicitly states:

“It would degrade me to marry Heathcliff now.”

This marks the beginning of the emotional rupture between them. Catherine realizes that love alone cannot overcome the rigid social structures that demand women marry for status, wealth, and stability. Here, Brontë voices a critique of the class system in 19th-century England. For Heathcliff, Catherine's statement is perceived as emotional betrayal, creating the first major wound of loss—the loss of love while that love is still alive. From an emotional psychology perspective, this is not merely relational loss but existential loss. Catherine is his “soul,” and in choosing another man, Heathcliff loses a core part of his identity. Thus, the novel demonstrates that human loss does not always arise from death; it can emerge from social decisions that separate individuals who deeply love one another.

3. Death, Irreversible Loss, and Heathcliff's Melancholic Collapse

The greatest loss in the novel occurs not when Catherine marries Edgar, but when she dies. Catherine's death utterly destroys Heathcliff's emotional equilibrium. His anguished cry at the moment of her death reveals the depth of this loss:

“I cannot live without my life! I cannot live without my soul!”

This expression reflects what **Freud (1917)** identifies as **melancholic grief**, a state in which loss cannot be fully processed, causing emotional wounds to become permanent aspects of identity. Unlike mourning, which heals

over time, melancholia is stagnant and destructive. Heathcliff does not merely grieve—he rejects the reality of the loss. He begs Catherine to haunt him, showing that he prefers eternal suffering over living without her. Catherine's death becomes the center of Heathcliff's psychological collapse, triggering obsessions and destructive behaviors that dominate the remainder of the novel.

4. Revenge as an Emotional Response to Loss

Revenge becomes an expression of unresolved loss. In the novel, revenge is not simply a narrative motive but a psychological phenomenon. Heathcliff destroys the Linton and Earnshaw families not out of a desire for power, but because the loss he experiences cannot be repaired. Heathcliff's actions—seizing control of Wuthering Heights, degrading Hareton, and mistreating Linton—represent manifestations of emotional wounds that never heal. Each act of revenge symbolically reenacts his attempt to “revive” Catherine by destroying those connected to their separation. This aligns with Gothic notions that extreme emotions are expressed through violence, hatred, and obsession. Thus, Heathcliff's revenge is best understood as an emotional struggle born from profound loss, not merely cruelty or malice.

5.5 Love Beyond Death: Gothic Spirituality and Eternal Attachment

One of the most distinctive aspects of the novel is the idea that the love between Heathcliff and Catherine does not end even after death. Heathcliff continues to feel Catherine's presence, believing that her spirit never truly leaves him. He even wishes to be reunited with her after death:

“I pray one prayer—I repeat it till my tongue stiffens—Catherine Earnshaw, may you not rest as long as I am living.”

This represents a form of spiritual attachment known in Gothic tradition as **haunting love**, a love that persists and refuses to end. Such love transcends the physical and social realms, entering the metaphysical. This perspective shows that loss in the novel is paradoxical: although Catherine dies, their relationship continues, becoming even stronger in spiritual form. This is the essence of Brontë's Gothic tragedy—love and loss sustain one another to the very limits of human existence.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that love and loss in *Wuthering Heights* are deeply intertwined and function as the emotional core of the novel's narrative structure. The love between Heathcliff and Catherine, formed through an intense identity-based attachment, evolves into a source of profound psychological trauma when confronted with the realities of social hierarchy and the finality of death. Their relationship illustrates that love in Brontë's novel is not merely a sentimental or romantic sentiment but an existential force that shapes, distorts, and ultimately destroys the characters involved. The findings demonstrate that the pressures of social class serve as a catalyst for emotional rupture, transforming what began as a pure childhood bond into a tragic narrative of separation and longing. Catherine's marriage to Edgar not only exposes the limitations imposed by class structures but also initiates the first major loss that destabilizes Heathcliff's sense of identity. This moment reveals Brontë's critique of societal norms that prioritize social advancement over emotional authenticity.

Catherine's death intensifies this trajectory of loss, marking the point at which emotional suffering becomes irreversible. Heathcliff's descent into melancholic obsession exemplifies Freud's notion of unresolved grief, where loss becomes internalized and destructive. His inability to detach himself from Catherine reflects the depth of their identity fusion and underscores the psychological consequences of a love that transcends conventional boundaries. Moreover, the novel portrays revenge as an emotional mechanism through which Heathcliff attempts to cope with intangible loss. His actions are not driven solely by cruelty but represent a desperate effort to reclaim control over a world shattered by abandonment and grief. Through this, Brontë illustrates the darker dimensions of love—how it can lead not only to devotion but also to vengeance, obsession, and cruelty. Finally, the Gothic framework of the novel amplifies the interplay between love and loss by extending it beyond physical existence into the spiritual realm. Heathcliff's belief in Catherine's lingering presence suggests that their connection surpasses the confines of mortality, embodying a form of eternal attachment characteristic of Gothic literature. This supernatural continuity reveals Brontë's exploration of love as a force capable of defying death itself.

In conclusion, *Wuthering Heights* presents love and loss as coexisting forces that shape human identity, influence emotional behavior, and linger beyond the boundaries of life. Through Brontë's Gothic vision, love becomes both the source of the characters' deepest fulfillment and the origin of their greatest suffering—demonstrating that in the novel, love is not simply a human emotion but a transformative, destructive, and ultimately immortal power.

REFERENCE

- Bednarek, M. (2008). *Emotion talk across corpora*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
- Brontë, E. (2003). *Wuthering Heights*. Penguin Classics.
- Freud, S. (1917). *Mourning and melancholia*. Hogarth Press.
- Fromm, E. (1956). *The art of loving*. Harper & Row.
- Hoeverler, D. (1998). *Gothic feminism: The professionalization of gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës*. Penn State Press.
- Miller, J. H. (1982). *Fiction and repetition: Seven English novels*. Harvard University Press.
- Shuttleworth, S. (1996). *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian psychology*. Cambridge University Press.
- Smith, A. (2013). *The Cambridge companion to Gothic fiction*. Cambridge University Press.
- Townshend, D. (2014). *Gothic and the theory of the novel*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Williams, R. (1973). *The English novel from Dickens to Lawrence*. Chatto & Windus.
- Wright, N. (2016). Love, grief, and revenge in Gothic narratives. *Studies in English Literature*, 56(3), 521–540.