

Narrative Perspectives in *Wuthering Heights*: The Role of Nelly Dean and Mr. Lockwood as Character-Narrators

Dr. Adnan Riaz

adnan.riaz@uot.edu.pk

Assistant Professor, Department of English, University of Turbat, Pakistan

Dur Jan

durainmalik@gmail.com

Lecturer,, Department of Education, Home Department University of Gwadar, Currently Serving University of Turbat, Pakistan

Mazhar Ali

mazhargichki785@gmail.com

Lecturer, Department of English, University of Turbat, Pakistan

Corresponding Author: Dr. Adnan Riaz adnan.riaz@uot.edu.pk

Received: 10-05-2025

Revised: 24-05-2025

Accepted: 08-06-2025

Published: 21-06-2025

ABSTRACT

In this paper, the narrative structure of Wuthering Heights by Emily Brontë will be discussed in relation to dual narrative functions of Nelly Dean and Mr. Lockwood. The novel uses a complicated narrative method where the novel story is presented in more than one perspective instead of using one omniscient narrator. Lockwood, who is an outsider, a tenant at Thrushcross Grange, is the first person to bring in the mysterious world of Wuthering Heights and Nelly Dean, who serves in the events over many years, is the one who tells the core of the past. With the help of such a stratification of narration, Brontë creates a complex characterization of characters like Heathcliff and Catherine Earnshaw with the readers being able to observe events through a prism of both social status and personal prejudices. The paper states that the plot of interaction between Lockwood and Nelly Dean adds to the realism, suspense, and psychological meaning of the novel. Lockwood is an interested spectator who acts as a framer of the story, and Nelly Dean is the main narrator who connects two generations of characters and happenings. Their views influence the readers with the perception of the themes of passion, class struggle, and human suffering. However, in the end, the novel unfamiliar narrative approach reveals the literary artistry of Brontë and adds much to the complexity and depth of Wuthering Heights that persists up to this day.

Keywords: *Wuthering Heights; Emily Brontë; narrative technique; Nelly Dean; Mr. Lockwood*

INTRODUCTION

Wuthering Heights by Emily Brontë was first published in 1847 and is today heavily cited as a masterpiece of English literature, but did not have much acknowledgment in its early years. A lot of critics who lived during this time had a very strong reaction to the novel mainly due to the vividness of the passionate love and the display of un-tamed emotions which seemed to run counter to the morality and societal norms of the Victorian era. Their relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff was intense and defiant of social conventions which in particular was discomposing to early readers and critics. However, with time, the opinion of critics changed and the novel slowly began to be recognized as a work of originality, psychological depth, and a novel narrative structure. Nowadays Emily Brontë is regarded as one of the most influential literary personalities of the 19th century. A critical uncertainty that surrounds the work early was expressed in a review of Douglas Jerrold in the Weekly Newspaper who wrote of the novel as a strange sort of book, inexplicable to all normal criticism; but impossible to start and not to finish; and quite

impossible to put down thereafter and say nothing about it. The review also ended by leaving the judgment to the readers and they said that it was up to our readers to define what kind of a book it is (Wasowski 2). Such a response at an early stage underscores how hard critics had it in classifying and judging this nonconventional novel by Brontë.

Partly an embodiment of the Gothic inclinations in the nineteenth-century literature, *Wuthering Heights* includes certain features, including the suggestions of supernatural, wastelands, dark nights, and ghostly visions, all of which add to the gloomy and enigmatic mood of the novel. These elements help Emily Brontë carry one to the gloomy and full of emotion atmosphere of *Wuthering Heights*. Despite the extensive readership, analysis, and interpretation of the novel by many critical lenses, much more can be done to explore the novel. Combination of passionate love and strict class organization, which is represented in the relations of Heathcliff and Catherine plus the unique imagery, narrative style, vocabulary, and characterization has ensured its lasting and powerful presence in the English literature.

One of the main features of the artistic accomplishment of the novel is its narrative style. Nelly Dean and Mr. Lockwood are two main narrators, who are involved in the development of the story and share other perspectives about the described events. Instead of using an omniscient narrator, Brontë creates a stratified narrative where the narration is told by a number of voices, with each voice being dictated by a particular experience, social status, and worldview. This method needs much narrative ability; otherwise this complicated form may easily get out of hand. On the surface level, the story is told by Nelly Dean and Lockwood, but other characters also play a significant role in the narration. Majority of such narrators are members of the society of *Wuthering Heights* and *Thrushcross Grange* and Lockwood is an outsider and begins to be involved as some kind of observer. Both the narrators add a certain element to certain events hence making the story multidimensional and dynamic. Though technically complicated, this technique makes the plot richer and is an effective way of accommodating the protracted time span of the novel.

Being an outsider to the social world of *Wuthering Heights*, Lockwood is able to serve as an initial translator of the strange world. Since he does not know anything about the past, he strongly uses the vivid memories of Nelly Dean to learn the relations and the conflicts between the characters. The narrative itself of Nelly includes the testimonies of other characters, therefore even furthering the narrative structure. As Jyoti Dahiya notes, there are some other voices in the narration, Heathcliff (Chapters 6 and 29), Isabella (Chapters 13 and 17), Cathy (Chapter 24), and Zilla, (Chapter 30), narrate specific chapters of the novel (Dahiya 1).

With this multiplicity of perspectives, the novel enables readers to see the things with various sets of eyes and minds as many other traditional novels were based on one omniscient position. This narration technique gives the impression of realism, because it provides different interpretations of the same characters and occurrences. The perception of the story by the readers keeps on changing as they read the novel. The world of *Wuthering Heights* seems to be dark, hostile and mysterious at the beginning. But as Nelly starts the recollection the reader slowly finds out that the place was alive and active in the past but after the tragedy it was changed.

Introduction of the novel is a successful way to make the reader switch his or her point of view to the inner history of the Heights. In this regard, Lockwood, who is the tenant of *Thrushcross Grange*, is a suitable narrative mediator. Being a stranger in the new world with the strange view, his interest in the dark environment prompts him to find out the answers to Nelly Dean. With the help of this narrative device, Brontë shows the readers the characters and the tense situation that defines the current situation at the house. The author lets the characters speak out, show themselves in their actions, in their dialogue, in the behavior, and nearly connect the current events to the previous experiences as time goes by. To illustrate, Heathcliff is not that welcoming and open at first, which leaves the reader with the first impression of his personality. However, the memory of his coming to the world of an impoverished orphan by Nelly Dean makes one

sympathize and shows us his vulnerable origins. She relates his initiation into the Earnshaw house in the following way:

We pressed in, and, between the head and shoulders of Miss Cathy I had a glance at a dirty, ragged, black-haired kid; big enough to walk and talk... but, on getting on its legs, it simply stared about, and uttered, time and again, some sort of gibberish which not one of us could make out. I became frightened, and Mrs Earnshaw was about to hurl it out of the window... This memory not only reveals the low background of Heathcliff but also preconditions the emotional and social conflicts which will enforce the plot development of the story.

Both narrators of *Wuthering Heights* are placed in the story in a strategic manner such that the progression of the story develops slowly but in a logical manner that leaves the reader fully involved in the story. The role of Mr. Lockwood almost comes like a proxy to the reader as he comes into the unknown world of *Wuthering Heights* with curiosity and a need to know what is happening in the enigmatic state of the people in the house. This relationship is developed at the start of the novel itself, in which the reader shares the exploration of Lockwood among the characters and the world around them. When the main characters are presented, the story slowly starts to development and after several pages, the reader turns into the deepest interest in the events that occurred.

Lockwood, a town resident and tenant at Thrushcross Grange, is another character who is introduced at the beginning of the novel as a person who wants to find his individuality in the secluded countryside. Nonetheless, over the course of the story, he is pulled into a world that is more complicated and emotionally loaded and which at first perplexes him but eventually intrigues him. His initial diary entry shows how inquisitive he is as well as the initial impressions that he has of Heathcliff and of the lonely setting of the moors:

1801 -I have just returned after paying a visit to my landlord -the lone neighbour with which I shall be harassed. It is definitely a beautiful country! I do not suppose I could have chained myself thus securely to an affair so totally uncoupled with the fervor of society in all England. The Heaven of a perfect misanthropist -and Mr Heathcliff and myself would be such a learned couple to share the desolation between us...(Brontë).

The entry of Lockwood is a structural divide between the present and the past in the story. His personal diary serves more like a documentary account which seems to be quite independent of personal preferences thus forming an effect of objectivity. Being a keen and sensitive narrator, Lockwood describes the surrounding world and the people he meets in details. The weird environment of *Wuthering Heights* arouses his interest and makes him explore more about the history of the house. His fantasy in the room of Catherine, e.g., enhances this interest. According to Harold Bloom, the scratching of Catherine and the books of her library, which also have the margins which her diary is written on, plays the biggest part in the dreams of Lockwood (Bloom 54). By means of such experiences, Lockwood is made the middleman upon whom the reader starts to discover the concealed past of the Heights.

In spite of the fact that the framing portions of the novel are told by Lockwood, the main narrative is presented by the means of the Nelly Dean whose interpretation is the central part of the story. Even Lockwood himself admits that her narration is effective and asks her to share the story in detail. His intellectual background and analytical attitude are also shown by the language he uses which is characterized by the complex syntax and the commentary which is reflective. As an example, his elaborate explanation of the architecture of the house shows that he is an observant writer:

Beyond the threshold I stopped to look at a measure of grotesque carving lavished upon the front... in a wilderness of crumbling griffins... I made the date out 1500, and the name of one, Hareton Earnshaw (Brontë, Ch. 1).

Nelly Dean can be considered a vivid and descriptive narrator in contrast with the reflective detachment of Lockwood, and she is intimately familiar with the events she is describing. She is, at times, a hyperactive gossip, who comments extensively about the characters, and their situation. As an illustration, in discussing the presence of Heathcliff in the house she says: "It is a cuckoo, sir - I know about it... Hareton has been rejected like an unbred dunnock..." Nevertheless, despite this preference toward making personal comments, Nelly is a very acute and insightful observer who stands in the middle of the web of relations and conflicts that the novel is full of. She knows her characters too well, which enables her to define their personalities with a clear picture in mind, when she refers to Heathcliff as being rough as a saw-edge and hard as whinstone (Brontë, Ch. 4). According to Lockwood himself, her drive to narrate leaves much to be desired, when he writes: You have done well to tell the story at leisure, I care about all your characters you have mentioned (Brontë, Ch. 7).

Nelly also shows that she is both a confidante and observer since her close relationship with Catherine Earnshaw. Catherine shares with Nelly her emotional distress in high detail and even proclaims her deep relationship with Heathcliff: But whatever we are composed out of, his is, and mine is, as well... I am Heathcliff, Nelly, I am Heathcliff! (Brontë, Ch. 9). It is these instances that allow Nelly to be the eye witness to the hot and devastating relationship that is at the heart of the novel. She sees the life of two generations, seeing both the childhood and deaths of the first generation and then she can take the responsibility of raising the second generation. Her account in this way permeates the whole time structure of the novel.

However, Nelly does not see things in a totally objective way. Her evaluation and color coding affect the way the reader sees some of the characters especially Heathcliff. She at one time or another switches between sympathy and suspicion. Applying the concept of goblins and monsters when explaining Heathcliff to be an incarnated goblin and a monster, Nelly encourages her to do more favors and points out that he is a human being as well. Looking at Heathcliff in his agony following the death of Catherine, she looks back on him with pity: you poor wretch! you have a heart and nerves that are just like your brother men! However, later, she becomes herself uncertain, whether he is a ghoul, or a vampire (Paris 65). These changes demonstrate the depth of her story.

The other significant narrative incident happens when Lockwood stays in the old room of Catherine. The things that he finds there especially the diary of Catherine that she writes in the margins of old books give us a clue about her defiant nature and her association with Heathcliff. The sentence of Catherine reflects her opposition to the respect and her strong propensity towards Heathcliff emotionally: An awful Sunday. Hindley is an ugly replacement, his behavior towards Heathcliff is revolting, H. and I will rebel, etc. (Brontë, Ch. 3). These fragments of the voice of Catherine also serve to enrich the story as it provides the character with the chance to speak personally, the other layer to the already complicated narrative structure.

On the whole, the complex narrative structure of *Wuthering Heights* is an important part of its artistic strength. Instead of using one omniscient narrator, Emily Brontë builds a multi-layered story where the action switches between the time periods and perspectives and voices. The intricacy and depth of the novel are also augmented through the Gothic mood, symbolism and emotionally charged characters. The past and the present are intertwined through the process of interaction between Lockwood and Nelly Dean to form a logical structure of narration.

At the end of the day, the narrative aspect of the novel is dependent on the two characters and their ability to narrate the story. The way they choose, arrange and present the events in the book influences the

perception of the reader about the world of *Wuthering Heights*. Lockwood and Nelly Dean, by following the reader through the progression of the action but remaining somewhat removed participants, serve as the mediators between the narrative and the reader, and the convoluted history of the Heights is revealed bit by bit, and described in a very vivid manner.

CONCLUSION

The plot of *Wuthering Heights* is one of the most prominent structural characteristics of the novel of Emily Brontë. Using Nelly Dean and Mr. Lockwood as character-narrators, Brontë invents a layered narrator structure that enables the novel events to be told in a multi-faceted way using different perspectives. Lockwood being the outsider who is not knowledgeable about the history of *Wuthering Heights* provides the setting and introduces the enigmatic personalities in the setting. His inquisitiveness motivates the narration of the events that took place before and is the outline against which the story starts and finishes.

Nelly Dean, on the contrary, serves as the main narrator, who links the past and present. Being old time members both of the Earnshaw and Linton families, she is well acquainted with the characters and their interrelations. Her story re-creates the stormy past of Heathcliff and Catherine, and the emotional triggers, social strains and personal tragedies which define the story. Meanwhile, her functions as a participant and as a spectator also complicate the story, as her insights and verdicts are bound to shape the manner in which they are discussed to the reader.

By means of the dialogue between these two narrators, Brontë does not have to stick to that one side of the authoritative voice but provides the narrative structure that is dynamic and multi-layered. Lockwood and Nelly Dean views help readers to doubt the authenticity of narration and be able to interpret the characters and events on their own. Not only does this technique add a deeper complexity of psychological and thematic content to the novel but also corresponds to the complexity of relations and emotional contradictions that typify the world of *Wuthering Heights*.

Finally, the literary style of narration used in *Wuthering Heights* shows the great innovative literary method used by Brontë. This blend of views of Lockwood and Nelly Dean turns the novel into the multifaceted and engaging piece of work as the readers get to feel the drama as it goes on both through the eyes of an outsider and through the memory of an insider. Thus, Brontë creates a narrative decision-making that has made her work highly critical and became an everlasting contribution to the English literature.

WORKS CITED

Dahiya, Jyoti. "Narrative Techniques in *Wuthering Heights*." *Research Journal of English Language and Literature (RJELAL)*. 1 Sept. 2013. Web. 5 Dec. 2015.

Bronte, Emily. *Wuthering Heights*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1994. Print.

Carol, Jacobs. *Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2008. Print.

J. Paris Bernard *Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2008. Print

Wasowski, Richard P. *Wuthering Heights : Notes*. New York: Cliff Notes, 2000. Print.