It is common for people to retaliate when they desire to inflict pain on the ones who have hurt them in the past. However, seeking for revenge does not resolve the conflicting issues but instead leaves the person with an even deeper wound in him or herself. In *Wuthering Heights*, Emily Bronte uses the actions and emotions of Heathcliff to imply to her readers that seeking for revenge will not produce ultimate satisfaction and could instead lead to one's downfall.

Although Heathcliff later lived a life of determination to get revenge on Hindley for bullying him, Catherine for rejecting him, and Edgar for looking down upon him at a young age, his life surprisingly became more miserable for him. Heathcliff’s accumulation of anger towards society throughout his life finally set him off and he started using actions to release his discontent, which resulted in a disaster. Heathcliff was adopted into the Earnshaw family as a child. He was treated kindly by Mr. Earnshaw, however when Earnshaw died, he got bullied by Hindley. The actions that were thrust upon Heathcliff built up his hate for Hindley and ultimately led him to seek for revenge when he could not take in anymore abuse. As Catherine claims, “Hindley calls him a vagabond, and won’t let him sit with us, nor eat with us any more; and, he says, he and I must not play together, and threatens to turn him out of the house if we break his orders. He has been blaming our father (how dared he?) for treating H. too liberally; and swears he will reduce him to his right place” (Bronte 34). Hindley, who had never liked Heathcliff,
would not let him sit together with the rest of his family for dinner, but would instead make him eat with the servants. He believed that his father treated Heathcliff too nicely and that Heathcliff needed to realize his place in society. He assumed that Heathcliff was the cause for the death of Mr. and Mrs. Earnshaw even though Hindley himself could have been the cause of his parent’s death. He blamed Heathcliff because Mrs. Earnshaw never really approved of Heathcliff and Mr. Earnshaw liked Heathcliff better than Hindley. Hindley’s treatment towards Heathcliff did not go unnoticed. Catherine said, “Hindley is a detestable substitute - his conduct to Heathcliff is atrocious - H. and I are going to rebel - we took our initiatory step this evening” (Bronte 31). Although Catherine, who did not agree with Hindley’s actions towards Heathcliff, thought she could put a stop to the bullying, she made the situation worse for Heathcliff. Hindley did not like how Catherine associated herself with Heathcliff so he would purposely treat him worse in front of Catherine. Because of such a traumatic childhood experience, Heathcliff begins mistreating Hareton, Hindley’s son, after Hindley dies similar to how Hindley had once bullied Heathcliff. In the beginning of the novel, Heathcliff said, “Hareton, drive those dozen sheep into the barn porch. They’ll be covered if left in the fold all night: and put a plank before them” (Bronte 22). Here it is evident that Hindley is treating Hareton like a servant. Heathcliff is treating Hareton exactly like how Hindley used to treat him but worse. Nelly claims, “The unfortunate lad is the only one in all this parish that does not guess how he has been cheated” (Bronte 54). Although Heathcliff was bullied by Hindley, he did not directly bully Hindley back but instead put his anger out on Hareton, Hindley’s son. Hareton is robbed from the family’s fortune because of his father. A child should not be treated that way because of a sin his father committed but Hareton was punished on behalf of his father. This is backed up by Sanger when he claims, “Hindley dies
of drink, and Heathcliff is left in possession of Wuthering Heights with Hareton, whom, out of revenge for the way he was treated as a boy, he brings up as a mere brute” (Sanger). Heathcliff used harmful actions and words on Hareton instead of Hindley, and this did not satisfy him because when Lockwood met him at the beginning of the book, he was gloomy and found with a terrible attitude.

Getting rejected by Catherine was also something that Heathcliff could not accept; he did not believe it was fair for Catherine to marry Edgar and leave him. He knew Catherine loved him back, so in order to revenge on the person he loved, he married someone he did not love: Isabella, Edgar’s sister. Heathcliff tortured her because he believed it was Edgar’s fault that Catherine and he were miserable. He concluded that if he could not get Catherine himself, he will make someone miserable with him. Isabella said, “He told me of Catherine’s illness, and accused my brother of causing it promising that I should be Edgar’s proxy in suffering, till he could get hold of him” (Bronte 232). He married Isabella to make Catherine experience how he felt when she married Edgar. This is what Catherine would see but behind the scenes, he is abusing Isabella for Catherine's pain. The pain Heathcliff thrusted on Isabella was what he wanted Edgar to feel. He detested Edgar and is violent towards Edgar even when Catherine is there. He argued with Edgar and blamed Edgar for Catherine’s pain. Sanger wrote, “One day, after a violent scene between Heathcliff and Edgar, Catherine goes on hunger strike and gets brain fever.” (Sanger). In this scene Heathcliff thought he could relieve some of Catherine’s pain, but he was instead the one who caused her to die sooner. Levy claims that, “Heathcliff’s yearning for Catherine becomes no more than the eroticization of his own wish for death, and death itself becomes the idealization of his relationship with Catherine” (Levy). Towards the
middle of this novel, Catherine dies and leaves Heathcliff to deal with his emotions alone. Although he thought he would be happy when Catherine got a taste of her own medicine, Heathcliff did not expect her to die. He only wanted her to understand how he felt when she chose Edgar over him. But, she overreacted and died of brain fever and starvation. Because of Heathcliff’s strong desire for revenge, he caused the death of the one he loved. Heathcliff was not satisfied when he was the cause of her death, but he could not return back in time to change what had already happened. He decided to stand firmly on his grounds and blame Edgar for the cause of Catherine’s death when he knew internally that he was the cause of her death.

As well as Catherine’s rejection, Edgar and his family all looked down on Heathcliff when he was young. They changed Catherine’s mindset about him when she spent time at their dwelling to heal. They had the intention to change her to be more like the rest of society while she was the one closest to Heathcliff. During the time period, slavery was not abolished. People did not treat people with color well. When Catherine came back to Wuthering Heights from Threshold Grange, she became more feminine and more upright. The Linton’s taught her how to behave, which was what Hindley wanted. Edgar’s family did not want their children close to Heathcliff so when Edgar and Isabella came over for tea, Heathcliff would be forced to not show his face. Because of the incident with the Lintons, Catherine slowly began to look down on Heathcliff because he did not meet the high societal standards. This angered Heathcliff and to get back at Edgar, he eloped and married Isabella without the consent of her brother, when they were older. He married Isabella and let Catherine experience the pain he felt when she left him for Edgar herself, but he ended up causing Catherine’s death. He later even lied to himself by placing the blame of her death on Edgar. Heathcliff also married Isabella to prove to Edgar that
he could be as powerful as him when it came to love. Heathcliff did not only marry Isabella but also used force to get Cathy, Edgar’s daughter, to marry his son Linton. He used his own son and Edgar’s daughter to achieve his goal of conquering both Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange. This is backed by Gawthrop’s statement, “Cathy is not spared either, being on the receiving end of ‘a shower of terrific slaps on both sides of the head’ and Cathy shows Linton ‘her cheek cut on the inside, against her teeth, and her mouth filling with blood’. She is threatened with having to marry Linton immediately or remain a prisoner at Wuthering Heights until her father is dead. Ellen is imprisoned at the Heights for five nights and four days. Finally, Heathcliff removes Cathy from the Grange by force and hurries her to the Heights—his prisoner—where she is consigned to eat her meals in the kitchen with Joseph” (Gawthrop). He abused Catherine and Edgar’s daughter to return the pain that the two of them inflicted on him. Cathy eating with the servants is a scene recreated from earlier in his life when he was forced to eat with the servants in the kitchen. He also went to a greater extent of abuse by slapping Cathy across the cheek, which represents his strong hatred towards Edgar. Aside from harming Cathy, he also cares very little about his own blood-related son. This is backed by Cheetham, when he claimed, “He treats his own son abominably and does nothing to save him from a highly premature death” (Cheetham). He had known from the very beginning that Linton was ill but he never asked a doctor to come see his son. Instead he kept Linton alive enough to get Thrushcross Grange: the Linton property. Heathcliff’s entire adult life was wasted on getting the perfect revenge on people, but in the end he got nothing. He may have proved that the poor could become rich and that the rich could become poor, but other than that he never got the love he was
seeking for or the revenge he wanted everyone who treated him terribly to receive. He was not happy when he made people miserable and remained angry.

Heathcliff was not only showing desires for revenge through his actions but also through his emotions. He was not mentally stable enough to control and maintain his anger. He was angry, disappointed, and depressed throughout the novel. He was hungry for power and wanted to “crushed those beneath him” (Gawthrop, Humphrey), and this is indeed what he did. Heathcliff was angry with everyone in the novel because he believed that they were the reasons he could not be together with Catherine. Heathcliff said,

“Two words would comprehend my future - DEATH and HELL: existence, after losing her, would be hell. Yet I was a fool to fancy for a moment that she valued Edgar Linton's attachment more than mine. If he loved with all the powers of his puny being, he couldn't love as much in eighty years as I could in a day. And Catherine has a heart as deep as I have: the sea could be as readily contained in that horse- trough as her whole affection be monopolised by him. Tush! He is scarcely a degree dearer to her than her dog, or her horse. It is not in him to be loved like me: how can she love in him what he has not?” (Bronte 239).

Through this quote we can see that he was furious with the fact that Edgar married Catherine. He believed that Edgar was worth less than a dog and a horse to Catherine and that Edgar could be easily replaced. Though this may be true, blaming Edgar and trying to get a revenge on Edgar accomplished nothing as much as leaving him with a greater pain in the end.

Aside from being angry, Heathcliff was also disappointed with how society had treated him. Disappointment voided any feeling of pity he might have had in his system. For example,
Heathcliff said, “I have no pity! I have no pity! The more the worms writhe, the more I yearn to crush out their entrails! It is a moral teething; and I grind with greater energy, in proportion to the increase of pain.” In chapter 21, Heathcliff says of Hareton: “I can sympathise with all his feelings, having felt them myself. I know what he suffers now, for instance, exactly; it is merely a beginning of what he shall suffer, though ... I've got him faster than his scoundrel of a father secured me, and lower Heathcliff that of the risen slave, descended from slave stock, survives and returns to claim the Heights. Heathcliff, having cruelly belittled Isabella his wife, and thrust her from the room” (Gawthrop). The reader can see that although disappointment caused him to have no pity towards others, it did not turn out to be the greatest option and path he could have taken to get revenge on society.

Heathcliff was not only angry and disappointed; he was also depressed throughout his entire life: he suffered with major depression disorder. When Catherine died, he wanted to die with her. Nelly claimed that, “Mr. Heathcliff was there - laid on his back. His eyes met mine so keen and fierce, I started; and then he seemed to smile. I could not think him dead: but his face and throat were washed with rain; the bed-clothes dripped, and he was perfectly still” (Bronte 535). He was very controlling towards everything in his life as he had even planned out his own death, where he wanted to die exactly the way that Catherine had. Although he was able to get and accomplish everything that he wanted in his life physically, Heathcliff was never content mentally even up until his death. Heathcliff had an "arrogant-vindictive personality" (Levy), and his desire to get back at the rest of society was too powerful that it ended up leading to his own downfall.
Through the actions and emotions of Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*, Emily Bronte demonstrates that seeking for revenge will not bring satisfaction or happiness but would instead lead to one's own downfall. The “horror of great darkness’ which is the soul of this majestic, bizarre and terrifying work” (Haslam) shows the world the reality on the consequences a person could face for desiring revenge and also demonstrates that the ambition for revenge does not resolve conflicts. The hunger for revenge would instead end up eating the person alive inside out, deteriorating the happiness and the willingness to live just as it happened for Heathcliff.
Works Cited


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