

Layla Muh., [6 يوليو 2025 12:11 AM] The Precariousness of Social Class As members of the gentry, the Earnshaws and the Lintons occupy a somewhat precarious place within the hierarchy of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century British society. At the top of British society was the royalty, followed by the aristocracy, then by the gentry, and then by the lower classes, who made up the vast majority of the population. Although the gentry, or upper middle class, possessed servants and often large estates, they held a nonetheless fragile social position. The social status of aristocrats was a formal and settled matter, because aristocrats had official titles. Members of the gentry, however, held no titles, and their status was thus subject to change. A man might see himself as a gentleman but find, to his embarrassment, that his neighbors did not share this view. A discussion of whether or not a man was really a gentleman would consider such questions as how much land he owned, how many tenants and servants he had, how he spoke, whether he kept horses and a carriage, and whether his money came from land or “trade”—gentlemen scorned banking and commercial activities. Considerations of class status often crucially inform the characters’ motivations in *Wuthering Heights*. Catherine’s decision to marry Edgar so that she will be “the greatest woman of the neighborhood” is only the most obvious example. The Lintons are relatively firm in their gentry status but nonetheless take great pains to prove this status through their behaviors. The Earnshaws, on the other hand, rest on much shakier ground socially. They do not have a carriage, they have less land, and their house, as Lockwood remarks with great puzzlement, resembles that of a “homely, northern farmer” and not that of a gentleman. The shifting nature of social status is demonstrated most strikingly in Heathcliff’s trajectory from homeless waif to young gentleman-by-adoption to common laborer to gentleman again (although the status-conscious Lockwood remarks that Heathcliff is only a gentleman in “dress and manners”). Layla Muh., [6 يوليو 2025 12:11 AM] The Futility of Revenge Revenge is a central focus of Heathcliff’s life and, in fact, drives most of the decisions he makes later in the novel. Though Heathcliff gains some bitter satisfaction through causing pain for others, he does not achieve any personal happiness. Instead, his single-minded pursuit of revenge leaves him empty and exhausted. After being tormented by Hindley as a child, Heathcliff becomes obsessed with the idea of getting revenge. By taking advantage of Hindley’s debt, Heathcliff gains control of *Wuthering Heights* and becomes the master of the house, a great irony considering he was once forced to work there as a de facto servant. Heathcliff seeks further revenge on Hindley by raising Hareton, who should have grown up to be a gentleman and a landowner, like a common servant, forcing on the boy the same indignity Hindley had once heaped on Heathcliff. Heathcliff is fully aware of his cruelty. As he explains to Nelly, he understands and desire Hareton’s suffering: “I know what he suffers now, for instance, exactly—it is merely a beginning of what he shall suffer, though.” Moreover, Heathcliff has the perverse pleasure of knowing Hareton loves and respects him no matter how badly he treats him. Heathcliff eventually achieves his entire plan of revenge, including marrying Cathy and Linton so that he also gains control of the Grange. However, Heathcliff’s death, alone and desperate for his lost love, represents the futility of his struggle. Though he achieved his desired revenge on those, living and dead, who had wronged him, he remains unfulfilled in his true desire—to be reunited with Catherine, which can only be achieved in death.