

Reading the Human Heart: A Study of Emotional Realism from Austen's Politeness to Brontë's Wild Passion

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Abstract

*This study examines the evolution of emotional realism in English literature through a comparative analysis of *Emma* by Jane Austen and *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë, situating them within a broader literary continuum that includes *Sons and Lovers* and 1984. The research aims to explore how human emotions—particularly love, desire, alienation, and psychological conflict—are represented across differing socio-cultural and narrative frameworks. While Austen's work reflects emotional restraint shaped by social decorum and rational morality, Brontë's narrative foregrounds unrestrained passion and psychological intensity that challenge normative structures.*

Using a qualitative interpretative methodology supported by thematic coding and comparative literary analysis, the study identifies key dimensions of emotional realism such as emotional expression, social regulation, psychological depth, and moral consciousness. The findings reveal a transition from externally governed emotional expressions to internally driven psychological conflicts, marking a shift from social realism to psychological realism. Furthermore, the study highlights how emotional experiences are mediated by class structures, gender norms, and narrative voice. The paper concludes that emotional realism is not static but evolves as a reflection of changing human consciousness and societal expectations. Austen humanizes emotion through civility and moral refinement, whereas Brontë intensifies human experience through raw passion and existential conflict. This comparative exploration contributes to a deeper understanding of the human heart as a dynamic site of literary representation.

Keywords: *Emotional Realism, Psychological Conflict, Human Emotions, Social Realism, Psychological Realism, Jane Austen, Emily Brontë, Literary Analysis, Narrative Technique, and Human Consciousness.*

Introduction

Emotional realism constitutes a significant dimension of literary studies, focusing on the authentic and nuanced representation of human emotions within fictional narratives. It extends beyond the simple portrayal of feelings and seeks to capture the complexity, contradictions, and layered experiences of the human psyche. In English literature, emotional realism has developed alongside changing social and cultural contexts, reflecting evolving notions of individuality, morality, and psychological depth. Among the most influential contributors to this tradition are Jane Austen and Emily Brontë, whose works present distinct yet interconnected visions of emotional life. In *Emma*, Austen situates emotion within the structured environment of early nineteenth-century society, where feelings are shaped and moderated by social etiquette, class expectations, and rational thought. Emotions in Austen's narrative are rarely expressed in their raw form; instead, they are filtered through manners, conversation, and moral reflection. This controlled expression does not diminish their authenticity but rather enhances their realism by

grounding them in everyday social interactions. The emotional journey of Emma Woodhouse reveals how self-awareness, misjudgment, and gradual moral growth are central to understanding human relationships within a civilized social order. By contrast, *Wuthering Heights* presents a world where emotions erupt beyond the limits of social decorum and rational restraint. The passions of Heathcliff and Catherine are intense, often violent, and deeply rooted in psychological and existential longing. Here, emotional realism is expressed through extremity and intensity, where love transforms into obsession and suffering becomes inseparable from identity. Brontë's portrayal challenges conventional moral frameworks, emphasizing the untamed and elemental aspects of human emotion that resist societal control. These contrasting modes of emotional expression highlight a broader literary movement from externally regulated feeling to internally driven psychological experience. While Austen represents a world in which emotions are disciplined and refined, Brontë exposes the raw, unfiltered forces that lie beneath social structures. Together, they reveal that emotional realism is not limited to a single form but encompasses a spectrum ranging from restraint to passion, from social harmony to inner turmoil. Such representations resonate with wider literary developments seen in works like *Sons and Lovers*, where emotional conflict is deeply psychological and rooted in familial relationships, and *1984*, where emotions are suppressed under authoritarian control. Across these texts, the human heart emerges as a site of tension between feeling and regulation, desire and discipline, individuality and external constraint, reflecting the enduring complexity of human emotional experience.

Review of Literature

The concept of emotional realism has been widely explored in literary criticism, particularly in relation to the representation of human psychology, social behavior, and moral consciousness in English fiction. Scholars have approached emotional realism through multiple lenses, including moral philosophy, psychoanalysis, and socio-political critique, thereby establishing it as a multidimensional field of inquiry.

Emotional Realism in Social and Moral Context: Jane Austen

Critical studies on Jane Austen emphasize her significant contribution to moral psychology and social realism. In *Emma*, emotions are not portrayed as spontaneous or uncontrolled impulses but are carefully shaped by social norms, etiquette, and rational judgment. Scholars argue that Austen's narrative technique—particularly her use of irony and free indirect discourse—creates a balance between emotion and reason. Her characters exemplify a refined emotional framework in which feelings are disciplined, corrected, and ultimately harmonized with moral values. Thus, emotional realism in Austen is grounded in social interaction and ethical self-awareness.

Psychological Intensity and Emotional Excess: Emily Brontë

In contrast, literary criticism on Emily Brontë focuses on the exploration of psychological extremities and emotional intensity. *Wuthering Heights* is frequently interpreted as a text that challenges conventional boundaries of emotional expression. Scholars highlight how the characters of Heathcliff and Catherine embody unrestrained passion, where love, revenge, and suffering are intertwined. This body of literature suggests that Brontë's emotional realism lies in her ability to depict the darker, irrational, and often destructive dimensions of human experience, thereby expanding the scope of psychological representation in fiction.

Psychoanalytic Dimensions of Emotional Conflict: D. H. Lawrence

The progression of emotional realism is further developed in the works of D. H. Lawrence, particularly in *Sons and Lovers*. Scholars often interpret this novel through a psychoanalytic framework, drawing upon Freudian concepts such as the Oedipus complex, repression, and internal conflict. The emotional experiences of Paul Morel are analyzed as deeply rooted in familial relationships, especially the mother-son bond, which shapes his romantic and psychological life. This strand of literature highlights a shift from socially mediated emotions to internally conflicted psychological states, marking a significant development in emotional realism.

Political Control and Emotional Suppression: George Orwell

Modern literary criticism introduces a socio-political dimension to emotional realism through the works of George Orwell. In *1984*, emotions are not merely personal experiences but are subjected to systematic control by authoritarian power structures. Scholars argue that Orwell presents a dystopian vision where love, fear, and rebellion are manipulated or suppressed to maintain political dominance. This perspective expands the understanding of emotional realism by demonstrating how external forces, particularly political regimes, can regulate and distort human emotional expression.

Synthesis of Scholarly Perspectives

A review of existing literature indicates a clear evolution in the treatment of emotional realism—from socially regulated emotional expression in Austen, to intense psychological exploration in Brontë, to psychoanalytic depth in Lawrence, and finally to political suppression in Orwell. Collectively, these scholarly interpretations underscore that emotional realism is not confined to individual feeling alone but is deeply influenced by social structures, psychological dynamics, and ideological forces.

Objectives

1. To examine the representation of emotional realism and psychological conflict in *Emma* and *Wuthering Heights*.

2. To analyze the transformation of emotional expression from socially regulated emotions to deeper psychological realism in English literature.

Research Methodology

The present research adopts a qualitative, interpretative, and comparative approach in order to explore the dimensions of emotional realism in selected literary texts. Such an approach is particularly suitable for literary studies, as it allows for an in-depth examination of themes, character psychology, and narrative structures without relying on quantitative measurement. The study primarily engages with close reading techniques to interpret the emotional landscapes presented in *Emma* and *Wuthering Heights*, while also drawing contextual insights from *Sons and Lovers* and *1984*. The sources of data include both primary and secondary materials. Primary data is derived from the original texts themselves, focusing on narrative elements, character development, and emotional expressions. Secondary data consists of scholarly articles, critical essays, and established literary theories that provide interpretative support and contextual background. This combination ensures a comprehensive understanding of emotional realism from both textual and critical perspectives.

For analytical purposes, the study employs thematic analysis and textual interpretation as its core tools. Themes related to emotional expression, psychological conflict, social influence, and moral regulation are identified and systematically examined across the selected works. A comparative framework is further applied to highlight similarities and differences in the portrayal of emotions, enabling a structured evaluation of how emotional realism evolves across different authors and literary contexts. The overall approach of the study is grounded in humanistic and psychological literary analysis. The humanistic perspective emphasizes the lived experiences, values, and moral dimensions of characters, while the psychological approach delves into inner conflicts, motivations, and subconscious elements shaping emotional behavior. Together, these perspectives facilitate a deeper and more holistic understanding of the representation of the human heart in literature.

Analytical View

Table 1: Dimensions of Emotional Realism

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Emma (Austen)</i>	<i>Wuthering Heights (Brontë)</i>	<i>Sons and Lovers (Lawrence)</i>	<i>1984 (Orwell)</i>
Emotional Expression	Controlled	Intense & Wild	Conflicted	Suppressed

Social Influence	High	Moderate	Moderate	Extreme
Psychological Depth	Moderate	High	Very High	High
Moral Regulation	Strong	Weak	Variable	Imposed

The table reflects how emotions live and breathe differently across literary worlds. In *Emma*, emotions feel like they are wearing polite clothing—carefully controlled, shaped by society, and guided by moral discipline. People feel deeply, but they express it gently, almost cautiously. In *Wuthering Heights*, emotions lose all boundaries; they become storms—intense, wild, and uncontrollable. Here, feelings are not adjusted to society; they overpower it. Moving to *Sons and Lovers*, emotions become more personal and inward, full of confusion and conflict, as if the struggle is happening inside the soul rather than outside. In *1984*, emotions are not allowed to exist freely at all—they are suppressed, controlled by power, showing how even the most human feelings can be restricted by external forces.



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Table 2: Emotional Conflict Typology

<i>Type of Conflict</i>	<i>Austen</i>	<i>Brontë</i>	<i>Lawrence</i>	<i>Orwell</i>
Individual vs Society	High	Moderate	Moderate	High
Internal Psychological	Moderate	High	Very High	High
Romantic Conflict	High	Very High	High	Low
Existential Conflict	Low	High	High	Very High

This table shows the different battles people fight within and around themselves. In Austen's world, the struggle is often between the individual and society—how to feel and still remain socially acceptable. Brontë takes this further, where the conflict becomes deeply emotional and existential, as if characters are fighting their own nature and destiny. In Lawrence's work, the most intense struggle happens within the mind and heart—internal psychological conflict

dominates, making emotions deeply personal and complex. In Orwell’s narrative, conflict expands into a larger space, where individuals not only struggle internally but also against an overpowering system, turning emotional conflict into a fight for survival and identity.

Table 3: Character Emotional Mapping

<i>Character</i>	<i>Dominant Emotion</i>	<i>Expression Mode</i>	<i>Outcome</i>
Emma Woodhouse	Pride/Empathy	Socially Filtered	Growth
Heathcliff	Obsession	Violent/Extreme	Tragic
Paul Morel	Conflict	Internalized	Ambiguous
Winston Smith	Fear/Rebellion	Suppressed	Defeat

Each character represents a different face of the human heart. Emma Woodhouse from *Emma* begins with pride but grows into empathy, showing that emotions can mature and evolve. Heathcliff from *Wuthering Heights* embodies obsession, expressing emotions in extreme and destructive ways, leading to a tragic end—his feelings consume him entirely. Paul Morel from *Sons and Lovers* lives in constant emotional conflict, unable to fully resolve his inner struggles, leaving his journey open and uncertain. Winston Smith from *1984* experiences fear and a desire to rebel, but his emotions are suppressed so forcefully that they ultimately lead to defeat. Together, these characters show how emotions can lead to growth, destruction, confusion, or even loss of self.

Table 4: Narrative Techniques and Emotional Realism

<i>Technique</i>	<i>Austen</i>	<i>Brontë</i>	<i>Lawrence</i>	<i>Orwell</i>
Free Indirect Discourse	High	Low	Moderate	Low
Multiple Narrators	Low	High	Low	Low
Psychological Depth	Moderate	High	Very High	High
Symbolism	Moderate	High	High	Very High

The way emotions are presented is closely tied to how the story is told. Austen uses free indirect discourse, allowing readers to gently enter the minds of characters while still maintaining social distance. Brontë, on the other hand, uses multiple narrators, creating layers of emotional storytelling that make feelings appear more intense and complex. Lawrence deepens emotional realism through strong psychological narration, bringing readers directly into the inner conflicts of characters. Orwell relies heavily on symbolism, where emotions are not always directly

expressed but are represented through situations, objects, and power structures. These techniques show that emotional realism is not only about what is felt, but also how those feelings are communicated to the reader.

Table 5: Humanization Index of Emotional Realism (Hypothetical Scale)

Text	Emotional Depth (10)	Social Constraint (10)	Psychological Conflict (10)	Overall Humanization Score
Emma	7	9	6	7.3
Wuthering Heights	9	4	9	8.6
Sons and Lovers	10	6	10	9
1984	8	10	9	9

This table attempts to measure how deeply each text connects with human emotional experience. *Emma* scores high in social constraint, showing a world where emotions are shaped by society, resulting in balanced but controlled emotional depth. *Wuthering Heights* scores higher in emotional intensity and psychological conflict, reflecting a raw and powerful portrayal of human feelings. *Sons and Lovers* reaches one of the highest levels of emotional and psychological depth, as it explores the inner complexities of human relationships in a deeply personal way. *1984* presents a unique case where emotional depth exists alongside extreme social constraint, highlighting how even suppressed emotions remain a core part of being human.

Finding and Discussion

The analysis reveals that emotional realism in English literature undergoes a significant transformation from externally regulated expressions to deeply internalized and often complex psychological experiences. In *Emma*, emotions are shaped and moderated by social conventions, where propriety, rationality, and moral consciousness guide individual behavior. Emotional expression remains controlled and refined, reflecting a structured social order in which personal feelings are aligned with collective expectations. In contrast, *Wuthering Heights* presents a radically different emotional landscape, characterized by intensity, instability, and unrestrained passion. The emotional experiences of the characters transcend societal boundaries, revealing the raw and often turbulent dimensions of human nature. This shift highlights a movement from social realism to psychological realism, where internal conflicts and emotional extremities take precedence over social harmony.

The trajectory of emotional realism is further enriched in *Sons and Lovers*, where emotions are explored through a deeply introspective and psychoanalytic lens. The focus on inner conflict, particularly within familial and personal relationships, reflects a heightened awareness of subconscious motivations and emotional complexities. Similarly, *1984* introduces a distinct dimension by portraying the suppression and manipulation of emotions within a totalitarian framework. Here, emotional realism is shaped not only by psychological factors but also by political forces that regulate individual expression. Taken together, these findings illustrate that emotional realism is not confined to a single mode of representation but evolves across different literary periods and contexts. It reflects a gradual shift from socially mediated emotional expression to a more intricate understanding of internal psychological states and external ideological influences.

Conclusion

Emotional realism in English literature emerges as a dynamic and evolving construct influenced by historical, social, and psychological factors. In *Emma*, emotional life is governed by civility, moral discipline, and social expectations, whereas *Wuthering Heights* foregrounds passion, intensity, and emotional excess that challenge conventional norms. This contrast demonstrates the expanding scope of literary representation, moving from controlled emotional expression to a deeper engagement with the complexities of the human psyche. The progression is further evident in later works such as *Sons and Lovers*, where emotional experience is shaped by psychological introspection, and *1984*, where emotions are subjected to external control and ideological suppression. These variations collectively highlight that emotional expression is both an individual and a socially conditioned phenomenon.

Ultimately, the representation of emotions in literature reflects the evolving understanding of the human condition. The human heart, as depicted across these texts, emerges as a site of continuous negotiation between feeling and restraint, individuality and conformity, and freedom and control. Such portrayals underscore the enduring capacity of literature to humanize experience by revealing the inner emotional realities that define human existence across time and context.

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