

# The problem of split personalities in wuthering heights

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



Note: Oxford University Press Version of Wuthering Heights used for this paper. In Bronte's novel, Wuthering Heights, a person has the capacity to attain happiness only if his external state of being is a true and accurate manifestation of his internal state of being. The "double character" which Catherine "adopts" in order to simultaneously maintain her relationship with the high brow Linton family and her low class friend, Heathcliff (66), is also manifested by most of the other main characters in the novel, though the split is usually less obvious in the other characters. It is less obvious because rather than being split between two contrasting external states (only one of Catherine's reflects her internal state), the characters are usually split between their internal experiences of the world and their external facades. For all of the characters, the possibility of happiness depends on a consistency between their internal and external ways of being. Catherine, in her inability to attain happiness, is the most clear example of this in the novel, but the novel's other three crucial characters: Heathcliff, Cathy (II), and Hareton, also demonstrate this. Catherine and Heathcliff's relationship is a primary example of possible happiness disabled by the inconsistency (internal vs. external) of one of its participants, Catherine. Catherine holds up a façade of "ingenuous cordiality" to gain the love of the Linton children (Isabella and Edgar) to hide her true "unruly nature." She allows this "unruly nature" to come out only when she is in the privacy of her home, Wuthering Heights, with Heathcliff (66). Catherine splits herself into two personalities. She demonstrates her "unruly" one in the company of her true friend, Heathcliff, when she is in the comfortable environment of her home. This 'personality' reflects the way she feels about herself internally. The

other, which she dons to impress the Lintons, is fake. Catherine herself admits this incongruity when she is speaking with the narrator, her servant, Ellen Dean. She claims " I am Heathcliff," but, at the same time, she says that she doesn't want to marry him because then she would be a " beggar" (81-2). If she really were Heathcliff, then being a beggar would not cause her discomfort because she would be acting as herself, and what is appropriate to her nature. Catherine, however, chooses to live with the inconsistency and thus denies herself the capacity to attain happiness by living as an " unruly" with Heathcliff. Her love, Heathcliff, is similarly incapacitated by her choice. In the first half of the novel, he attempts to be consistent, in and out. While Catherine was split, Heathcliff remained " inwardly and outwardly repulsive" (67). At that point, were Catherine to join him, they would have had the possibility to become happy. But, because, she does not, she compels Heathcliff to forgo his uniformity and become split, as she is. Bronte shows Heathcliff's split in the second half of the book, when he returns to Wuthering Heights. During this time, he has an underlying motive of revenge (on those who kept him away from Catherine), and an external demeanor which exhibits false ' love.' His false ' love' is only kept up partially, but is intended to deceive both Isabella and Hareton. Heathcliff " deceives" Isabella, Edgar's sister, into thinking that he loves her in order to " inflict revenge" on Edgar (113). Catherine chooses to marry Edgar because he is more high class than Heathcliff, and the choice that Edgar's presence gives her, keeps Heathcliff from her. This is why Heathcliff desires revenge upon him. Then, Heathcliff deceives Hareton, his enemy, Hindley's, son, into believing that he is the only one who loves him in order to keep him "

ignorant" and thus exact his revenge on Hindley (187). He desires revenge on Hindley because it was he that made Catherine aware that Heathcliff was 'too beggarly' for her. This split, between an internal desire to remedy his past absence from Catherine through revenge, and his external posture that makes this revenge possible, remains with him until the end of the novel. And, it keeps him from any experience of happiness. At the end of the novel, Heathcliff finally attains a sense of "cheerfulness" and "joy," but only after he has made peace with the difference between his internal state and his external state, and chosen to follow his internal state fully by following Catherine to the grave (326-8). This capacity for happiness for both Catherine and Heathcliff when they are together is present throughout the entire novel. When they are children, they derive pleasure from running about together. And then, even after Catherine has been 'civilized' by the Lintons, she claims the music of a dinner party they are all at is "sweetest at the top of the steps (where Heathcliff [is] confined)" (59). Things are most "sweet" for her when she is near Heathcliff. Their last meeting before Catherine's death is also indicative of this possible happiness. Heathcliff cries to Catherine "why did you betray your own heart? You have broken it and in breaking it, you have broken mine" (161). The implication of this cry is that they could have been happy if only they had stayed together. Along these same lines, both Catherine and Heathcliff articulate a feeling of 'oneness' with the other. Catherine says that Heathcliff is "in her soul" (160) and that he is "more herself than she is" (80). Likewise, Heathcliff wails, after Catherine dies, "I cannot live without my life! I cannot live without my soul!" (167). It is possible for them to be happy when they are together because

they bring the true internal states of one another out into external behavior. They do this naturally because since they perceive themselves to be 'one' with the other, it is useless for them to try to hide anything (or assume a false air) in the other's presence. In contrast, the persevering two characters of the second generation, Cathy and Hareton, do obtain happiness. They do so by not betraying themselves as Catherine (and Heathcliff) do, and by acting according to their natures. Hareton is unhappy growing up because he is raised roughly by Heathcliff. This roughness, which he was obliged to mimic, went against his natural inclination toward "softer feelings" (300). He is happy when he and Cathy establish their friendship because she encourages those softer feelings which he kept inside to come to the surface. Cathy too goes through a period of unhappiness between her happy life with her father at Thrushcross Grange and her happy life with Hareton at the end of the novel. She is happy with her father and Hareton because they nourish her "deep and tender love" (188), and do not ask her to deny that integral part of herself. Her unhappiness begins with an incongruity between the way she is acting and the way she is feeling, which is brought about by her interactions with Linton and Heathcliff. Cathy's relationship with Linton initiates the split between her internal and external selves. Ellen, Cathy's nurse, intercepts her secret relationship with Linton, and forbids her to further pursue it. At this point, Cathy is required, in order to keep the relationship a secret from her father, to put on a false front to conceal her sadness. Although she is crushed inside, she acts "marvellously subdued in outward aspect" (228). Likewise, even after she has ceased to enjoy Linton's company, she keeps "pretending" to enjoy it, out of "pity" (267). Then,

Heathcliff's harsh treatment of her (as her master) forces her to suppress her "deep and tender love" and put on a coarse exterior. Mr. Lockwood notices that she "disregards" even the most "common forms of politeness" (299). Because of the internal / external dichotomy, Cathy is unable to be happy during this period. Her relationship with Hareton reawakens her internal self and brings her back to a state of happiness. They get married following Heathcliff's self-inflicted death, and theoretically live 'happily ever after,' being true to themselves. Heathcliff sees Cathy and Hareton's relationship to be the realized embodiment of his aborted relationship with Catherine. He sees both Catherine and himself in Hareton. He says "when I look for [Hareton's] father in his face, I find her [Catherine] every day more" (303). Similarly, he says "Hareton seems a personification of my youth" (323). Then, it is clear that he sees the relationship to be there as well when he imposes what he knows to be his own feelings toward Catherine onto Hareton's feelings for Cathy, saying "how could [he] want the company of any body else [other than Cathy]" (328). Cathy and Hareton allow their relationship to blossom by always being 'real' around one another, and choosing to always be together (in marriage).