

Catherine and Hareton's relationship and walls taken down

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



In *Wuthering Heights*, Emily Brontë develops a conflict between Catherine Linton and Hareton Earnshaw and uses the resolution of their conflict to resolve that between Catherine and Heathcliff. Though their social classes and upbringings differ, the two cousins possess the same wild spirits and match perfectly. In order to discover their compatibility, however, they must both break down their walls and let go of their bitternesses.

When Catherine the Second and Hareton Earnshaw first meet, Catherine treats Hareton with disdain and refuses to recognize him as her cousin. She has come into *Wuthering Heights* with a wall around her heart. She is unhappy about being there and resolves not to befriend its inhabitants. Hareton acts politely in the best way he knows how, and tries to give her his seat by the fire and retrieves books for her off the shelves. She turns down the seat and, according to Zillah, "turned up her nose" (217). She accepts the books from him, but then turns away to read them. Even though she does not thank him, he "felt gratified that she had accepted his assistance" (217). Hareton obviously tries hard to be someone Catherine would respect, but she continues to snub him. After she turns away, he gets really caught up in watching her and reaches out to touch a curl. This forwardness disgusts and infuriates Catherine. She asks him, "How dare you touch me?" and goes on to tell him, "I can't endure you!" (217-8). He feels foolish and grows timid in her presence. Even though he wants her to read aloud to him, he now fears her too much to ask, so he requests that Zillah ask for him. Catherine responds with another outburst, telling Hareton outright that she does not care about him at all and cannot even bear the sound of his voice. This humiliation is the final straw for Hareton.

In response to her treatment of him, Hareton stops trying to please Catherine. He grows hateful toward her and considers her snobbish and shallow. He "muttered, she might go to hell" (218), and stops refraining from engaging in activities he was formerly told might displease Catherine if they were done on a Sunday, such as cleaning his gun. It hurts his pride too much to care for her when she is hateful back, so he puts up a wall and resolves to be just as hateful, making himself less vulnerable.

Malice breeds malice, and their hatred has a bit of a snowball effect. Catherine snubs Hareton, even when he tries to be polite, so he sees her every action as a statement of her haughtiness. Then she finds him even more barbaric and is even crueler. She makes fun of his illiteracy, and he becomes bitter and embarrassed. Catherine mocks Hareton always "trying to spell and read to himself" and goes on to ridicule his struggles in the attempt (221). Hareton resents the fact "that he should be laughed at for his ignorance, and then laughed at for trying to remove it" (221). Catherine continues by informing Hareton that he has desecrated all of her favorite books through his poor readings of them. He throws the books at her angrily, but she continues to make fun of him.

However, Brontë does not leave Hareton and Catherine in conflict. In fact, through books and reading Catherine and Hareton do resolve their differences. After Nelly's arrival at Wuthering Heights, Catherine's attitude and behavior improve, and one day Catherine announces to Hareton, "I should like you to be my cousin" (230). Hareton resists at first, but Catherine persists in explaining that she does not hate him. Finally, to prove her

earnestness, she gives him a kiss on the cheek, then sends a book as a peace offering along with the message that she will teach him to read. At this point, Catherine has taken down her own wall and begun to dismantle Hareton's. She begs for, then accepts, his forgiveness and friendship, and immediately begins reading lessons. Catherine the second and Hareton become friends, and their friendship continues to grow, " though it encountered temporary interruptions. Earnshaw was not to be civilized with a wish; and my young lady was no...paragon of patience; but both their minds tending to the same point...they contrived in the end, to reach it" (232). Eventually, after both walls have been destroyed, they grow to love one another.

In a sense, the resolution of this conflict also resolves the conflict between Catherine the first and Heathcliff. When Cathy's father first brings wild little Heathcliff home, she resents him because she was expecting a whip as a surprise, not a little boy. However, unlike her brother, Cathy soon realizes Heathcliff's potential as a playmate. They grow up playing together and sharing everything, and Heathcliff allows himself to fall in love with Cathy. Cathy loves Heathcliff too, but represses those feelings after meeting the Lintons and realizing that socially, Heathcliff is beneath her. Cathy puts up a wall in order to move up in the world, and Heathcliff must do so as well in response in order to avoid getting hurt. She marries Edgar Linton to achieve social status and by doing so, gives up the opportunity to be with Heathcliff, the one she truly loves and is meant to be with. Cathy confesses her motives for marrying Linton to Nelly saying:

It would degrade me to marry Heathcliff, now; so he shall never know how I love him; and that, not because he's handsome, Nelly, but because he's more myself than I am. Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same, and Linton's is as different as a moonbeam from lightning, or frost from fire (59).

Catherine recognizes the depth of her love for Heathcliff, but is still not willing to lower herself. By this time, Heathcliff's heart has hardened and he has become bitter. He continues to try to steal Catherine back, but after his final visit to her she grows so sick from the stress that she dies. The two lovers never resolve their conflict in life, but after Heathcliff finally dies, a little boy tells Nelly "They's Heathcliff and a woman, yonder, under t'Nab" (247). Unlike the future generation of lovers, Cathy and Heathcliff's walls never come down during their lifetimes. Catherine the second and Hareton share the wild spirit possessed by both Heathcliff and the first Catherine. However, the first pair of lovers is not united until their death because Catherine the first did not put aside her feelings of superiority and traded social station for true love. Catherine the second does exchange her haughtiness for unity with Hareton.

Thus, the walls they put up blind Catherine and Hareton to the qualities in each other that so closely resemble qualities in themselves. Catherine puts up a wall first, and thus must take the first step in order for Hareton to see a potential friend in her. However, when both succeed in opening up to the other, Catherine and Hareton discover that more than just a potential for

friendship exists. The two are kindred spirits, and the breaking down of their personal walls reveals love.