

# Do i sympathize with heathcliff?

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



Wuthering Heights was written in 1847 by Emily Jane Bronte a year before her death. It is a love story between a poor, savage, gipsy called Heathcliff and a wealthy respectable woman called Catherine Earnshaw, set on the Yorkshire moors. Hindley, who is cruel, jealous and power-seeking, is the master of the Heights after Mr Earnshaw dies. He treats Heathcliff like a slave. As Cathy and Heathcliff grow up together their friendship develops into a passionate relationship.

However Cathy betrays Heathcliff by marrying Edgar Linton from a neighbouring house named Thrushcross Grange, which is a very large house whose owners, the Linton's, are very wealthy. In spite Heathcliff marries Isabella Linton, to gain money and respectability. The second volume of the novel is the sons and daughters of the first generation almost repeating history, and it ends in Master Heathcliff owning both houses.

Heathcliff entered the story as he was brought to Wuthering Heights by old Mr Earnshaw. He was a starving orphan from the streets of Liverpool. Bronte portrays him as a mysterious character, very cold, stubborn, heroic and extremely emotional. When he arrived Heathcliff was referred to as " the gipsy brat," and " it", by Hindley and Nelly Dean, the housekeeper. This made Heathcliff very angry, which is understandable. Old Mr Earnshaw's fondness for Heathcliff fuelled the jealousy of his son, Hindley, and the compassion of his daughter, Cathy.

Hindley treated Heathcliff very badly, almost like a slave and inferior.

" Heathcliff you may come forward' cried Hindley." He added: " You may come and wish Miss Catherine welcome, like the other servants."

Heathcliff was denied education. This made Heathcliff extremely rebellious and because he and Cathy had become good friends they used to escape from the Heights and enjoy freedom on the moors. This gave Heathcliff a respite from his mental torture at Wuthering Heights.

One night out on the moors Heathcliff and Cathy visited Thrushcross Grange. Seeing Edgar Linton and Isabella Linton fighting, Heathcliff and Cathy were seen and thinking they were robbers, Edgar set the dog on them. Cathy was very badly hurt and had to stay at the Grange for some time.

With Cathy gone, Heathcliff had lost his only friend, and his life became one of total slavery and misery at the hands of Hindley. He realised how much his friendship with Cathy meant to him. When Cathy came back from the Grange, recovered, she was clean, well dressed and turned into a proper lady " with fine clothes and flattery." When she met Heathcliff again she was extremely happy and Heathcliff was glad that things were back to normal again, " Cathy, catching a glimpse of her friend in his concealment, flew to embrace him; she bestowed seven or eight kisses on his cheek within the second." But when Cathy stopped, and burst into a laugh because he was very dirty Heathcliff was very insulted and confused by the change in Cathy. Cathy's return created a huge surge of confidence in the new master of Wuthering Heights. Heathcliff was patronised at every opportunity, " make haste Heathcliff, the Kitchen is so comfortable." And when the Linton's are asked to dinner, Heathcliff tries to smarten himself up to please Cathy but is just humiliated.

The final straw for Heathcliff is over hearing a conversation between Cathy and Nelly Dean. " It would degrade me to marry Heathcliff," he heard Cathy

say. He ran off and didn't return for three years, because he felt that everyone at the Heights and the Grange was against him.

After this time Heathcliff comes back from being abroad and he has become richer and more civilised and his appearance has smartened up, only to find that Cathy has married Edgar Linton. However this wasn't a shock to Heathcliff because there were talks of this happening before Heathcliff went away, but he still blames Cathy for this betrayal later on in the novel.

Heathcliff went to the Grange, where Cathy was now staying and asked to see her. When they met he " bestowed more kisses than ever he gave in his life before." After five minutes of seeing Cathy, Heathcliff broke down and showed some soft emotion, for the first time in the novel; " Oh, Cathy! Oh, my life! How can I bear it?" I think that Heathcliff didn't want to go away if he felt this strongly about Cathy but he was forced to.

The story continues with Heathcliff marrying Isabella Linton but treating her very badly as his true love is Cathy. Isabella realises this and knows their marriage is doomed:

" She slipped the gold ring from her third finger, and threw it on the floor. 'I'll smash it!' she continued, striking with childish spite. 'And then I'll burn it!' And she took and dropped the misused article among the coals." This results in a character change, because up until this point I have felt sympathy towards Heathcliff. From here on Heathcliff becomes darker, more cynical, and frustrated.

Catherine Earnshaw died in child birth. Heathcliff was outside when Nelly Dean came out to tell him about Cathy. At first he tried to keep his cold, hard image but once he asked about how Cathy died he broke down into " a cry of humiliation."

" And - and did she ever mention me?" After asking this question and finding that Catherine didn't recognise anyone before her death, Heathcliff became very angry: " May she wake in torment!" he cried, with frightful vehemence."

" Catherine Earnshaw, may you not rest, as long as I am living! You said I killed you - haunt me, then! The murdered do haunt their murderers."

Heathcliff couldn't bear living without Cathy. Cathy was the only person that Heathcliff could really talk to, and he loved her immensely:

" Be with me always - take any form - drive me mad! Only do not leave me in this abyss, where I cannot find you!" Heathcliff had lost his one true love.

This left him angry and incredibly sad which explains why he wanted Cathy to haunt him and never rest. Some could see this as a sign of madness but I feel sympathy for Heathcliff because Cathy was his only friend and true love but she has died without Heathcliff fulfilling his true feelings for Cathy.

After Cathy's death Heathcliff becomes very cold, hard and vicious. He returned to the Heights to find that Hindley wanted to kill him. But the fight ended in Hindley's death. This led to the question did Heathcliff murder Hindley? After the fight Hindley drank a vast amount of alcohol, but I am not sure that a young man can drink himself to death in a night, so maybe there is a possibility that Heathcliff had something to do with the death of Hindley. This is very serious, and could a bad childhood be the cause or an excuse for

this?

Heathcliff has had an awful upbringing being patronised, treated as a slave and denied education. But what Heathcliff does in his latter life with the other generation of Linton's and Earnshaw's could be inexcusable: Isabella leaves him with a baby called little Linton. He is very weak and Heathcliff doesn't accept Linton because he isn't like him. Hareton grew up to be a savage, dirty boy just like Heathcliff when he was younger because like Hindley, Heathcliff denied education to Hareton.

As old Edgar Linton was dying Heathcliff made young Cathy marry Linton by locking Cathy up in the Heights whilst her father was dying at the Grange. Heathcliff was doing this because he wanted Thrushcross Grange and all the wealth from the Lintonfamily. Finally Cathy and Linton were married, Cathy was free to go to be with her father and shortly after they were married Linton died. Heathcliff wrote Linton's will and in it stated that Linton left the Grange to Heathcliff.

During this whole episode Heathcliff was cruel to Hareton for two reasons: Hareton was very fond of Cathy but Cathy treated him like an inferior because he couldn't read or write, and because Hareton was the son of Hindley who had tormented Heathcliff from the day he set foot in Wuthering Heights, Heathcliff felt a lot of schadenfreude towards Hareton for this.

It is clear that Heathcliff's personality changed after Cathy died but can his awful upbringing be to blame for his actions in his later life? We are told little by the author of his early childhood treatment before he came to Wuthering Heights. We can only expect that his life before was one of rough street

living and neglect. In this case I do feel sympathy for Heathcliff because he wasn't accepted by his new found family and all the people who were nice to him died, namely old Mr Earnshaw and Cathy. Heathcliff has been denied happiness and true love and is in a state of desperation when he wants Cathy to haunt him because he will accept love at any cost and in any form. I can only feel sympathy for someone who has had a life long experience of bullying and exclusion:

" He would stand Hindley's blows without winking or shedding a tear, and my pinches moved him only to draw in a breath, and open his eyes as if he had hurt himself by accident." A quote from Nelly Dean who I think deep down sympathizes with Heathcliff because she was there when Heathcliff was getting brutally beaten by his master Hindley. When she was the narrator Nelly portrayed Heathcliff as the 'ugly duckling.' She realised what his upbringing had caused and passes her knowledge on to the reader.

Isabella Linton feels the exact opposite towards sympathizing with Heathcliff. Isabella doesn't know what Heathcliff has been through and because she has been brought up by the Linton family who disliked Heathcliff. She is biased and thinks bad things about Heathcliff.

Nelly Dean tries to portray an un-biased view on Heathcliff. She understands what he has been through but at times cant help hating Heathcliff and as readers because Nelly is the 'neutral' character in the whole novel then Heathcliff can be felt sympathy for.

Heathcliff's character is far too enigmatic to simplify. Bronte portrays Heathcliff as a violent person. He regularly beat his wife Isabella: " a white face scratched and bruised," and he threw a kitchen knife at her head which struck beneath her ear. He beat young Cathy whilst she was trying to escape to visit her dying father and Nelly Dean in the same incident. He has no compassion and feelings for anyone in the novel except for his rescuer, Mr Earnshaw, and his true love, Cathy. It is easy to feel hatred for him at his treatment of: Hareton, little Linton, Isabella and Edgar, whom he taunted and humiliated openly.

The greatest insight to Heathcliff's character is found early in the novel in chapter four where he blackmails Hindley into giving him Hindley's colt after his own went lame:

" You must exchange horses with me; I don't like mine and if you won't I shall tell your father of the three thrashings you've given me this week, and show him my arm, which is black to the shoulder."

Heathcliff taunts Hindley further knowing he can manipulate his temper and the tussle ends with Hindley punching Heathcliff and shouting:

" Take my colt, gipsy, then! And I pray that he may break your neck; take him and be damned you beggarly interloper! and wheedle my father out of all he has." And this is exactly the out come of the novel as Heathcliff orchestrates the inheritance of both houses. One through Hindley's debt, and the other through tricking little Linton in to altering his will.



Maybe the reason for Hindley's mistreatment towards Heathcliff is because he saw the side that no-one else saw. The vindictive, manipulative, and the dark side of Heathcliff which he recognised while they were both still young boys.

As I conclude my analysis of Heathcliff's character I find my sympathy does not lie with him, but I wonder what Heathcliff would turn out like if Mr Earnshaw would have lived longer and if Cathy had married him.