

The main characters in wuthering heights and their resemblance to children

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Life would be strangely different if no person matured past the state of childhood: if one possessed the physical qualities of an adult, but the faculties of only a juvenile. The environment would most definitely be a harsher, more difficult one. Survival would be based on primal instincts and untamed passions. This is the exact environment created by Emily Brontë in her novel *Wuthering Heights*. An entire generation, namely Catherine, Heathcliff, Edgar and Isabella, remain fixed in time, unevolved, throughout each of their adult lives. The most evident case of this childishness is seen in Catherine Earnshaw-Linton. Married to Edgar, she is beautiful and wild. Unfortunately, her childish behaviors lead her to a life racked with sorrows. As a child, Catherine was tossed aside by her father because he thought her too noisy and boisterous. In fact, he told her he loved her only when she was quiet. Consequently, in order to feel loved, she needed to hide her true self. This was further compounded by her unfortunate visit to Thrushcross Grange, where she was 'civilized' by the Lintons. After staying there, it appeared to Catherine that she must hide herself behind fancy clothes and good manners. These ornamentations prohibited her from developing her own personality, and therefore kept her childlike. As an adult, she exhibits her puerile behavior in her actions toward others. She has no concept of reality. To Catherine, the fantastic seems equally possible. This quality becomes evident in her dealings with Heathcliff and Edgar. At one point, the two were feuding for her attentions, and Heathcliff, of large build and stature, threatened meek Edgar. Instead of abetting Edgar's escape, she prepared to enjoy the imminent brutality by locking his only escape route. According to Nelly Dean, the event went like this: " ' Cathy, this lamb of yours

threatens like a bull.' [Heathcliff] said. ' It is in danger of splitting its skull against my knuckles.' . . . My master glanced toward the passage and signed me to fetch the men. He had no intention of hazarding a personal encounter. I obeyed the hint; but Mrs. Linton, suspecting something, followed; and when I attempted to call them, she pulled me back, slammed the door to, and locked it." (118) She had no notion of the danger of the situation, or the severity of the consequences. She only sees it as a game for her enjoyment, much as a child would. To Catherine, the lives of others are a show that she can manipulate and enjoy. Along these same lines, Catherine cannot stand being ignored. She insists on being the center of attention, again like a child. Unfortunately, the method she chooses to gain the attentions of Edgar proves fatal. She feigns illness so as to provoke Edgar's guilt. She tells Nelly to ". . . say to Edgar . . . that I'm in danger of being seriously ill. I wish it may prove true . . . I want to frighten him." (120). When Edgar does not respond, she remains so adamant that she actually does fall ill, eventually proving to be her undoing. Her obstinacy is another sign of her immaturity, as well as her inability to see the consequences of her actions. In her childish mind, death is only a myth that cannot possibly affect a young woman such as herself. Heathcliff, the brooding foundling, is similar to Catherine in that he, too, lacks a sense of adult value. His misconceptions of life and death are taken to an extreme level because of his morose, passionate nature. He has difficulty discerning the differences between life and death. To him, death is simply what follows life. Consequently, he is harsh, as shown a conversation with Catherine. He says of a meeting with Isabella, " The first thing she saw me do . . . was to hang up her little dog." (155). In other words, whilst

speaking with Isabella, he hangs her dog. He feels no guilt for what he has done, just as a mischievous boy who tortures animals for amusement would. In both instances, these actions might appear sadistic, but they are in fact learning experiences for both Heathcliff and the child. Unlike Heathcliff, though, the child will feel remorse when the frog or fish dies. Heathcliff feels nothing. Because he is locked in his childhood ways, he cannot grow or develop as an adult. In essence, the lesson presented is wasted on Heathcliff as he is unable to comprehend the true relationship between life and death. As with the dog, all of Heathcliff's actions are wild. He is unpredictable; he lives by relying on his animal instincts. Since he has developed no sense of right and wrong, he does not fear the consequences of his actions. Despite this flaw, he manages to fall in love with Catherine, the only other person truly like him. She, in turn, betrays his love by virtue of her need to be that which is expected of her. This drives him nearly insane with jealousy. Still, later, when she dies, his childlike, untainted, even obsessive love for her makes him wish for death as well. When Nelly came to tell him that Catherine had died, " He clashed his head against the knotted trunk; and, lifting up his eyes, howled, not like a man, but like a savage beast being goaded to death with knives and spears." (171). When he loses her, his own life lacks meaning, much like a child who has lost his mother or sister. Since he has not developed as an adult, Heathcliff cannot cope with death or loss. Edgar, though being raised a different kind of child altogether, is emotionally underdeveloped like both Catherine and Heathcliff. The well-bred, learned young man also has delusions about the ways of the world. He has been sheltered his entire life, kept both physically and mentally within the reliable

walls of Thrushcross Grange. When young, he was spoiled and the object of his parents' adoration, along with his sister Isabella. He retains his childhood naïveté; he judges based solely on appearances. Catherine pretends to love him because it is what she believes is expected of her. He falls for her ruse because he is trusting, as a child would be. When he realizes that Catherine truly loves Heathcliff, he denies it to himself; he is unable to comprehend any sort of change in his mental world. In fact, he blames her behaviors on Heathcliff's influence. He says, " I have been so far forbearing with you, sir . . . and Catherine, wishing to keep up your acquaintance, I acquiesced foolishly. Your presence is like a moral poison that could contaminate the most virtuous." (118). This denial stems partly from his sheltered life. He was never exposed to humanity, so though he acts sophisticated, he really has no conception of what exists outside his limited environment. His undying trust prevents him from ever having cause to doubt a person's integrity, including Catherine's. Isabella, much like Edgar, is completely ignorant to the nature of others, comparable to a child. She lays her trust in Heathcliff, completely ignoring his savage qualities. In an encounter with Heathcliff, " The first words I [Heathcliff] uttered were a wish that I had the hanging of every being belonging to her except one: possibly she took that exception for herself." (154). Instead, she creates an image of a misunderstood, but wildly passionate and romantic man who she expects will love her ineffably. Much the same as Edgar, she insists on seeing only the best in those she likes. She also shows her immaturity by refusing to heed Edgar and Catherine's warnings to keep away from Heathcliff. She prefers to remain comfortably nestled within her own fantasies. When she does run away to

marry, she finds only strife, contrary to what she expected. According to Heathcliff, " She abandoned them under a delusion . . . picturing in me a hero of romance, and expecting unlimited indulgences from my chivalrous devotion." (155). When she attempts to return to Thrushcross Grange, Edgar will not accept her. Her response to this is once again to run away, rather than confront her problems. She forsakes her life and flees, as a child would in a similarly dangerous situation. Her actions are those of a fanciful child escaping the nightmares that have overtaken her fantasies the only way she knows how. Isabella's juvenile behavior, like the others, prevents her from ever finding happiness in life. Though both sets of characters (Catherine and Heathcliff versus Edgar and Isabella) were raised in vastly different environments, not one developed emotionally past the state of childhood. All four, at some point in their lives, ceased to mature. Consequently, they all remained fixed in the emotional state of childhood. This underdevelopment brought each of them only grief; not one of them found happiness or resolution by the end of the novel, except, maybe, in death.