

# An analysis of wuthering heights by emily bronte

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' A wild, wicked slip...I believe she meant no harm' Does your opinion of Catherine match Nelly's assessment in Chapters 1-14? Catherine Earnshaw, later Linton, is first introduced to the reader by Emily Bronte in Chapter III. Throughout the novel Catherine proves to be a character whose actions and personality can either attract the audience's sympathies or quickly alienate them. Nelly's narration dominates the narrative in chapters 1-14 and it is therefore natural that the reader's views may be tainted to a degree by Nelly's assessment of Catherine's character.

Catherine is first referred to in Lockwood's narration in Chapter III where he encounters her name when he spends a turbulent night at Wuthering Heights. Catherine's name haunts Lockwood's sleep as he sees the words ' Catherine Earnshaw... Catherine Heathcliff... Catherine Linton' carved numerous times. The haunting quality of Catherine's name is shown by Bronte's gothic use of the simile ' as vivid as spectres' as these words fill his vision. Lockwood is later confronted by a ghost who sobs the words Catherine Linton as it demands to be let into the house.

Indeed this determination to get what she wants is a characteristic of Catherine, which becomes apparent through the remainder of Nelly's narration as she describes Catherine's life. This characteristic in particular is a trait that can change the reader's opinion of Catherine for the worse. However conversely this particular aspect of Catherine's character can evoke sympathy for her from the reader as it is in part Mr Kenneth's fault for recommending that ' she would not bear crossing much; she ought to have her own way' after her illness in Chapter IX.

Nelly's opinion that Catherine 'meant no harm' is proved particularly accurate in Chapter IX where Catherine approaches Nelly for the first time as a confidant. Catherine's innocence in the matter she poses to Nelly is demonstrated aptly through her question 'Where's Heathcliff?' Sympathy is evoked for Catherine as she finds herself torn between the two men she loves; Heathcliff and Edgar. However Catherine's true personality is uncovered in the ensuing dialogue in which Catherine describes her fears about Heathcliff and her reasons for marrying Edgar (which do not appear heartfelt).

Disapproval cannot be avoided as Catherine's actions appear to be driven by her social ambitions, which were initially awoken by her first visit to the Lintons, and which eventually compels her to marry Edgar. However while Cathy's claim that 'it would degrade me to marry Heathcliff now' may evoke condemnation from both Nelly and the reader, it can be seen that Catherine is simply the victim of her era. While *Wuthering Heights* itself is far from the bustle of society in its position on the moors, Catherine's desire to be 'the greatest woman of the neighbourhood' exemplifies the effect of social considerations on the character's actions.

Catherine's image is somewhat weakened due to the manner in which she is compared, perhaps unintentionally, to Edgar's sister Isabella Linton. Indeed the fact that they hold parallel positions within their intimate society and eventually end up sharing the same household allows us to see their differences with greater clarity. While Catherine represents wild nature, both in her high and lively spirits and her occasional cruelty, Isabella represents culture and civilization both in refinement and in her weakness.

The reader may disapprove of Catherine in her wild nature however Isabella soon proves in Chapter XII that strength might be an admirable quality for a woman at that time as her weakness leads her to elope with 'Yon' Heathcliff'. From Chapter XIII onwards the reader, along with Nelly, becomes suspicious of Catherine's motives as she becomes quickly ill after Edgar gives her an ultimatum. Catherine worked herself into a frenzy with 'blood on her lips' and 'her hair flying over her shoulders, her eyes flashing, the muscles of her neck and arms standing out preternaturally'.

While Edgar appears terrified of her rage, Nelly seems to see through Catherine's behaviour. Indeed as Catherine's state deteriorates and Edgar turns on Nelly, Nelly recalls 'thinking it too bad to be blamed for another's wicked waywardness' demonstrating how she does not believe the validity of Catherine's illness. However increasingly throughout Chapter XII Catherine does seem to become ill but despite her state the reader's sympathy appears to be concentrated on Edgar as he tended her 'day and night'. His loyalty makes Catherine's intimacy with Heathcliff and her love for the aforementioned seem even worse. Catherine's general treatment of Edgar, with all his loyalty and love for her, is certainly an aspect of her character which can cause abhorrence in the reader, at points demonstrating the wickedness to which Nelly makes reference. Shockingly in Chapter 11 Catherine describes to Nelly how she 'want(s) to frighten' her husband and exhibits her cruelty as she declares that 'if Edgar will be mean and jealous, I'll try to break their hearts by breaking my own'. This declaration from Catherine is evidence that her illness was self-inflicted and in a fit of cruelty.

In this respect it is therefore hard not to agree with Nelly's assessment of Catherine's character as 'wicked'. However there are points within the novel where the reader cannot help but feel respect for Catherine. The incident in Chapter VI where Heathcliff is mocked by Edgar and retaliates by throwing hot Apple sauce in his face is the point at which Catherine demonstrates fully her love for Heathcliff as she shuns the company of others and goes to find him in his room, risking the disapproval of others to comfort the one she loves.

In conclusion, Catherine is a character towards whom the reader's feelings fluctuate due to her raging tempers and occasional infliction of cruelty on other characters. However positively there are incidents, such as the one in Chapter VI that show Catherine's kind nature and indeed prove that she 'meant no harm' despite her wicked ways on occasions.

It can be seen that her inability to express her true feelings for Heathcliff, along with his three year absence, drove Catherine to assume the title that Nelly gave her of 'a wild, wicked slip'. Indeed there can always be explanations to assuage her of this title such as the societal circumstances of her era and the seemingly forbidden love that she harboured for Heathcliff. It is therefore possible to agree to an extent with Nelly's assessment however there are aspects of Catherine's character that do not agree with her view.