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## Catherine

### Who is Catherine?

- Catherine is born Catherine Earnshaw and grows up at Wuthering Heights.
- She marries Edgar Linton but passionately loves Heathcliff.
- Catherine dies after the birth of her daughter, Cathy.

### Ghostly Catherine

The reader's first introduction to Catherine Earnshaw takes the form of the signature of a ghost: her name is scratched upon the window ledge in her childhood bedroom, the room where Lockwood will have his disturbing nightmares. We cannot avoid the figure of Catherine, as it is carved into the very text. At the end of the novel, Heathcliff is tormented by everything that signals to him his loss of Catherine. She is as elusive and forbidden to him as she is incomprehensible to Lockwood.

### A fragmented identity

The names which Lockwood finds inscribed upon the window – Catherine Earnshaw, Catherine Linton, Catherine Heathcliff – can be read as indicative of Catherine's fractured or fragmented social identity. She struggles with conflicting ideas of herself as she tries to combine two irreconcilable lives: the life of passion fully experienced, and the life of social convention that secures her to either her father or her husband.

## Study focus: Culture versus nature

The conflict that disturbs Catherine's sense of self is played out in the novel through the **theme** of culture versus nature. In deciding to marry Edgar Linton, Catherine chooses culture over nature. This is directly contrasted with a **narrative** insistence upon her love of nature and her oneness with nature. As a child, for example, rather than read, she and Heathcliff prefer to scramble on the moors. Her diary, which documents the fact, pays scrupulous attention to her jettisoning of her book but neglects to describe her impression of the moors. From Catherine's perspective, nature does not need to be named and it does not lend itself to narrative representation or to culture. If we accept this reading, then Catherine's choice of Edgar over Heathcliff cannot be expected to be successful.



## Key quotation: Catherine

Catherine declares to Nelly Dean: 'I am Heathcliff' (Vol. I, Ch. IX, p. 82).

Her assertion is both dramatic and memorable, and shows her great passion. It shows her unstable sense of identity which cannot be fixed by Heathcliff as he too is enigmatic and uncertain.

## Heathcliff

### Who is Heathcliff?

- Heathcliff is a foundling who is brought home by Mr Earnshaw from a trip to Liverpool, and is named after a dead son.
- He is passionately in love with Catherine, but forms no other meaningful attachments.
- He marries Isabella Linton and together they have a son, Linton Heathcliff.
- He dies longing to be reunited with Catherine.

### The outsider

Unlike every other character in the novel, Heathcliff has only a single name that serves him as both Christian name and surname. This places him radically outside social patterns and conventions, and Heathcliff is described by Catherine as an 'unreclaimed creature' (Vol. I, Ch. X, p. 102), showing how he exists outside social structures such as the family. Heathcliff belongs first nowhere and finally anywhere. The fact that he inherits his name from a dead son also signals the potential for belonging and invention, since this name might be thought of as that of a ghost: a character who is no longer present.

### Contradictions

As a foundling, Heathcliff is introduced into the close-knit family structure as an outsider; he is perceived as both gift and threat, and these conflicting identifications form part of the compelling undecidability of his character. Contradiction typifies Heathcliff. To Catherine he is brother and lover; to Isabella he is romantic hero and pitiless oppressor. He epitomises potency, yet he fathers an exceptionally frail child. He encompasses vast philosophical opposites: love and death, culture and nature, evil and heroism. Some critics, most notably Clifton Snider, have focused on the supernatural qualities of this novel to read Heathcliff as vampiric. Whether we read Heathcliff as monstrous or as a **Byronic hero**, he disturbs the conventional structure of the novel, and of the world created within it.

## Study focus: A Byronic or Romantic hero

Critics have most often cited Heathcliff as a Byronic hero: powerful, attractive, melancholy and brutal. Through most of the first volume of the novel Heathcliff's rise to power details the ascension of the **Romantic** hero, with his intrusion into and transformation of a conventional and socially limited world. However, by making such romantic conventions manifest in an energetic new form, Heathcliff actually cancels out Romantic possibilities and reduces that system to mere superstition. Thus in creating Heathcliff, Brontë may well have been acknowledging Byron's influence. But in the character of Catherine she also suggests a revision of Byron and demonstrates his vision as a fundamentally male literary myth.

## Key quotation: Heathcliff

Catherine warns Isabella about Heathcliff when she says: 'He's not a rough diamond – a pearl-containing oyster of a rustic; he's a fierce, pitiless, wolfish man' (Vol. I, Ch. X, p. 103). He is uncivilised, and even love will not tame him. The fact that this assessment comes from Catherine, who loves him, means that we treat it seriously.



### A05 KEY INTERPRETATION

When we meet Heathcliff as a child, the things we find out about him are that he is capable of enduring anything (Vol. I, Ch. IV, p. 38) and that he has a profound connection with Catherine. These two characteristics remain with him throughout the novel, and are what enable him to achieve his ends.

### A03 KEY CONTEXT

The description 'Byronic' means characteristic of or resembling Byron or his poetry: that is, contemptuous of and rebelling against conventional morality. Lord Byron (1788–1824), the most flamboyant and notorious of the Romantic poets, created the idea of the Romantic hero: unruly, melancholy and haunted by secret guilt. It is clear that in many ways Heathcliff typifies this description.

### KEY INTERPRETATION

A05

Brontë's characterisation of Catherine starts and ends in an enigma: the world of the novel is testament to her character, but it is testament to a character that can leave only the ghostly signs of itself behind.

### PROGRESS BOOSTER

A02

It is conventional to consider characterisation in terms of identity. What characterises this person? How are they identified? One of the key elements of identity might be thought to be a character's name, yet *Wuthering Heights* is a novel in which there scarcely seem enough names to go round. Certain names occur and recur through the three generations of the novel. Consider the **symbolic** reasons why Brontë chose to give some characters the same names.



## HOW TO WRITE HIGH-QUALITY RESPONSES

The quality of your writing – how you express your ideas – is vital for getting a higher grade, and **AO1** and **AO2** are specifically about **how** you respond.

### Five key areas

The quality of your responses can be broken down into **five** key areas.

#### 1. The structure of your answer/essay

- First, get **straight to the point in your opening paragraph**. Use a sharp, direct first sentence that deals with a key aspect and then follow up with evidence or detailed reference.
- Put forward an argument or point of view** (you won't **always** be able to challenge or take issue with the essay question, but generally, where you can, you are more likely to write in an interesting way).
- Signpost your ideas** with connectives and references which help the essay flow. Aim to present an overall argument or conceptual response to the task, not a series of unconnected points.
- Don't repeat points already made**, not even in the conclusion, unless you have something new to add.

#### EXAMINER'S TIP

AO1 and AO2 are equally important in AS and A Level responses.

### Aiming high: Effective opening paragraphs

Let's imagine that you have been asked about what is hidden and what is revealed in *Wuthering Heights*, and the structural and **symbolic** importance of hiding places, graves and bedrooms. Here's an example of a successful opening paragraph:

Gets straight to the point

Good use of quotation

How comfortable we are as readers with unlocking secrets will determine how we respond to this novel, with its many different layers of interlocking stories. The structure of the novel might seem at first to be deliberately obstructive. It opens with Lockwood's narrative, through which, via a series of barriers: a closed gate, a 'range of gaunt thorns' and an almost impenetrable 'penetrarium' we enter *Wuthering Heights* and the world of the novel. Lockwood's account then gives way to Nelly Dean's. Nelly offers us images of further enclosure: the two houses, the closet bed (which resembles a coffin), the barred door, the soldered casement window. From the beginning of the novel then, we are aware that this will be a novel full of withheld secrets.

Sets up some interesting ideas that will be tackled in subsequent paragraphs

#### 2. Use of titles, names, etc.

This is a simple, but important, tip to stay on the right side of the examiners.

- Make sure that you spell correctly the titles of the texts, chapters, authors and so on. Present them correctly too, with inverted commas and capitals as appropriate. For example, '*Wuthering Heights*'.
- Use the **full title**, unless there is a good reason not to (e.g. it's very long).
- Use the term 'text' rather than 'book' or 'story'. If you use the word 'story', the examiner may think you mean the plot/action rather than the 'text' as a whole.

#### 3. Effective quotations

Do not 'bolt on' quotations to the points you make. You will get some marks for including them, but examiners will not find your writing very fluent.

The best quotations are:

- Relevant and not too long (you are going to have to memorise them, so that will help you select shorter ones)
- Integrated into your argument/sentence
- Linked to effect and implications

### Aiming high: Effective use of quotations

Here is an example of an effective use of a quotation about passion as a source of pain in the novel:

Explicit meaning

Inferred meaning

When Heathcliff asserts to Nelly at the end of Volume 1 'The more the worms writhe, the more I yearn to crush out their entrails!', it is more than just hyperbole describing his pitiless violence. It is also suggestive of the grave, the fact that we return to worms, and presages his grisly desire to lie in the grave with Catherine. That it comes immediately after his extravagant declaration of love for Catherine and his sadistic contempt for Isabella only emphasises the satanic flavour of his passion.

Short, relevant quotation, embedded in sentence

Remember – quotations can also be one or two single words or phrases embedded in a sentence to build a picture or explanation, or they can be longer ones that are explored and picked apart.

#### 4. Techniques and terminology

Mention literary terms, techniques, conventions, critical theories or people **but** make sure that you:

- Understand what they mean
- Are able to link them to what you're saying
- Spell them correctly

#### 5. General writing skills

Try to use standard English as this will mean that your argument sounds authoritative.

- Avoid colloquial or everyday expressions such as 'got', 'alright', 'ok' and so on.
- Use terms such as 'convey', 'suggest', 'imply', 'infer' to explain the writer's methods.
- Refer to 'we' when discussing the audience/reader.
- Avoid assertions and generalisations; don't just state a general point of view, but analyse closely with clear evidence and textual detail.

Note the professional approach here in the choice of vocabulary and awareness of the effect on the reader:

*Brontë conveys the sense of a society in conflict with its own past, and mistrustful of its future. She uses the Gothic conventions to challenge the ideas of the time. As readers we too feel haunted by Lockwood's dream as the ghosts of passion and chaos threaten to disrupt our understanding of what is real.*

#### EXAMINER'S TIP

Something examiners pick up is that students confuse '**narrator**' and 'author'. Remember that Lockwood is a character as well as a narrator and don't confuse him with the novel's author, Emily Brontë.