

# Two Catherines as Feminist Role Models in "Wuthering Heights"

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**Two Catherines as Feminist Role Models in *Wuthering Heights***

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## **Table of contents**

<b>Abstract</b> .....	1
<b>Introduction</b> .....	2
1. Scenery.....	6
2. Catherine I.....	8
3. Catherine II .....	15
4. Isabella Linton .....	20
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	22
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	23

## **Abstract**

This thesis discusses on the main female characters of *Wuthering Heights*, Catherine I and Catherine II, as well as Isabella Linton, why they are considered to be feminist role models and their similarities and differences. It shows them in the context of the social climate of the Victorian era and how they built their identities accordingly.

**Key words:** Victorian image of women, Scenery, Catherine I, Catherine II, Isabella Linton, feminism, oppression

## Introduction

It is widely known that every great artist leaves a part of themselves in their work. Many of them hide this fact more tactfully than others but to a dedicated reader, parts of the artist and their commentary on the world surrounding them left after their work is finished, are obvious.

What can we learn about Emily Brontë from her only published piece, *Wuthering Heights*? In the words of her sister, Anne, Emily was a keen observer of human character despite her somewhat secluded nature. Being a girl of only three when she lost her mother, she created a character that was, just like her, left without a maternal or traditionally feminine influence at a young age. Even though most of her life still remains a mystery, it is not hard to assume that she channelled her own feelings of loss and its aftermath through Catherine Earnshaw.

Her own words - words she spoke to her sister Charlotte while being in an academy in Brussels - mirror greatly the words of Catherine – ‘I wish to be as God made me’. The parallels continue as one digs deeper into a life of Emily Brontë. She was, just as Catherine fond of moors, wide open fields and all things wild and free. One can, without a doubt, call Emily Brontë one of the pioneers of feminism in literature due to her sharpness, free spirit and strong will that echo through her work. Emily had courage in showing that even in a restricting time as Victorian, one woman was able to find a balance between a shy, timid, angel-like Victorian figure and a self-aware, strong soldier.<sup>1</sup>

In this work I will present how she projected those features on her characters (primarily Catherine I and II and Isabella Linton secondarily). She enriched a broad spectre of emotions. Her characters are by no means flat; they are vivid and life-like. Her characters are faulty, they

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<sup>1</sup> Bibliographic data from the Internet sources

make mistakes, they do wrong to themselves and people around them but Brontë managed to psychologically characterize them so well that the reader can't help but to sympathize with them. Her heroines fight not only their fathers and brothers, but also the social norms that oppressed every woman of the Victorian era. In contrast to the Victorian image of women as a puppet, she made them *human*, depicted them with all the struggles and desires that were denied to them by the literature of that time.

In an era that condemned women to apply powder on their faces in public, Emily Brontë presented England with a married woman that runs freely in the moors wearing only her nightgown. Saying that the book was controversial would be an understatement, and many believed that behind the name of Ellis Bell was a man, due to the powerful language and vivid sexual images. In 1850, when her name was first printed on the front page, Emily Brontë proved to the world that not only that a woman was able to write in such a manner, but to imagine and create a new plot structure with intricate characters that almost screamed one thing – a woman has a sense of self.

#### Victorian image of women

In modern society it goes without saying that women can and do think for themselves, provide for themselves and make their own life choices. But the situation in the Victorian era was much different. Women were completely dependent on the men in their lives, from their fathers, brothers to their husbands. According to Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, the perfect woman was not “Madonna in the sky”, but “an angel in the house”. Women were defined as “wholly passive, completely void of generative power” and their “purity” was not merely a virtue but it also “signifies that they are, of course, *self-less*, with all the moral and psychological implications that word suggests”. (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000:20-21)

But, why would being a woman of virtue necessarily mean that they do not have a sense of self? Gilbert and Gubar explain that women's role was not to think for themselves nor of themselves: "she has no story of her own but gives advice and consolation, listens, smiles, sympathizes". (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000:22) The patriarchal society was built on such criteria. Mary Eagleton explains it in *Feminist Literary Criticism*: "Under patriarchy, Method has wiped out women's questions so totally that even women have not been able to hear and formulate our own questions to meet our own experiences. Women have been unable even to experience our own experience". (Eagleton, 2001:5)

That is strongly connected with women's role towards their husbands. A woman's virtue is "what makes her man "great". In and of herself, she is neither great nor extraordinary". This attitude was supported by the standard literature young women were concerning education: "from the eighteenth century on, conduct books for ladies had proliferated, enjoining young girls to submissiveness, modesty, selflessness; reminding all women that they should be angelic". (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000:20-23) The word "angelic" does not merely mean sweet, kind, saintly but implicates someone without their own identity, someone who serves others with a smile on their face and does so never thinking of their own needs or wants – for such a creature does not possess any needs nor it craves for anything other than being accessible to others (men and their children). "And she should do it silently, without calling attention to her exertions because "all that would tend to draw away her thoughts from others and fix them on herself, ought to be avoided as an evil to her" (...) enshrined within her home, Victorian angel-woman should become her husband's holy refuge from the blood and sweat that inevitably accompanies a *life of significant action*". (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000:24)

The question arises: were all women of the Victorian age submissive and angelic? How did society look upon those who defied the aforementioned standards? There were autonomous women, a polar opposite of submissive Victorian ideal and in their opposition to "angels" they

were called “demons”. Why were they called that? Gilbert and Gubar explain that “because male anxieties about female autonomy probably go as deep as everyone’s mother-dominated infancy, patriarchal texts have traditionally suggested that every angelic Snow White must be hunted, if not haunted, by a wickedly assertive Stepmother: for every glowing portrait of submissive women enshrined in domesticity, there exists an equally important negative image that embodies the sacrilegious fiendishness of what William Blake called the *Female Will*” and while assertiveness and aggressiveness are characteristics praised in the world of men, any women who should possess such traits was to be considered “monstrous” in the view of them being “unfeminine” and unsuitable for life of delicacy and purity”. (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000:28)

From today’s perspective it seems difficult to understand why that was so. Would men not be happy to have an equal, if for nothing else, then because of an extra pay check? Men wanted control over women, they women them depending on them, but it was not only to feed their egos, the reason is more practical one (although it is certainly not the only one): women were not permitted to own land or houses; they were unable to attain titles or inherit any of those. Therefore it was in the best interest of men that women remain docile so they could not only control the women (with the money they have) but also to control and inherit the land, titles and houses, and thus ensure satisfactory lives for themselves, not caring about their mother’s or sister’s share. Women’s autonomy, therefore, represented a grave danger of potentially losing their possession – their “angels” and property. A woman who thinks for herself, as we shall see in this work, can flee to another man’s arms, confront men, manipulate them and either cultivate them or ultimately – destroy them.



## 1. Scenery

The story begins with a man named Lockwood coming to live in the Thrushcross Grange. He is an outsider and therefore an almost objective person, but in the end he falls in love with Catherine the second, proving that no one, not even an educated outsider was immune to the charms of neither nature nor the irrepressible women who represent it. Arnold Kettle comments the aspect of nature and seclusion in *Wuthering Heights*: “(...) the great forces of nature are evoked, which change so slowly that in the span of the human life they seem unchanging”. (Kettle, 1967:130) This illustrates the finite aspect of human life in contrast to nature’s endurance and should stand as a reminder that one’s life will come to an end so characters do not restrain themselves but act on their impulses and desires. Typical for a gothic novel, the nature is also a reflection of character’s vivid emotions, a force that cannot be restrained through conforming to the standard values.

Lockwood’s idea was to spend some time in the remote, isolated part of England. The aspect of isolation is important in this novel because it not only narrowed down the people’s choice of their friends and partners, but also allowed them to be free in a sense - there was no one to control their lives, no close neighbours to watch their every step. The only restrictions were the ones they imposed on themselves. Gilbert and Gubar clarify the importance of such scenery: “these inhabitants of *Wuthering Heights* seem to live in chaos without the structuring chain of being, and therefore without the heavenly harmony God the Father’s ranking of virtues, thrones, and powers makes possible. For this reason Catherine sullenly refuses to do anything “except what I please” (chap. 4), the servant Zillah vociferously rebukes Hareton for laughing (...)”. (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000: 262) This doesn’t mean that they were not subjected to the Victorian culture – a patriarchal design that constrained women to the role of the obedient wife, landless and dependent on men to care for them – but the seclusion allowed them to defy the

norms and built their identity more independently because there was no outside (rural) model to look up to and navigate their course of building an identity.

## 2. Catherine I

Such was the story of Catherine Earnshaw. Motherless, the only role models she had was her father and brother. There were no oppressed women around her to mimic them (they had both female and male servants) so she spent her childhood roaming freely and unshackled, like a man would. Kettle compares this to the idea behind the Rousseau's *Social Contract*: "The opening sentence of the *Social Contract* gives us a simple example: 'Man was born free, but everywhere else he is in chains'." (Kettle, 1967:131)

This concurs with Catherine Earnshaw's story: her childhood was unfettered, she did not care about her looks nor customs of the Victorian era, she was one with the nature and enjoyed running through the fields and horseback riding, activities that, at the time, were attributed to the boys only. From the young age, she showed not delicacy that one would expect from Victorian fragile lady, but strength and courage: "she was hardly six years old, but she could ride any horse in the stable, and she chose a whip". (Brontë[as Ellis Bell], 1858: 32)

She chose a whip when her father asked her and her brother which present they would like to receive when he returns from his travel, in contrast to her brother who chose a fiddle. Her choice reveals her character: she chose a domineering object, not a feminine one. Gilbert and Gubar stress the importance of such choice: "And the children reply, as convention dictates, by requesting their hearts desires. In other words, they reveal their true selves, just as a father contemplating his own ultimate absence from their lives might have hoped they would." (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000: 262) They did not adjust their wishes to the norms but innocently asked for what they desired as individuals, as young children who were not yet subjected to society's formation of character. One of the leading feminist theoreticians, Judith Butler, explains that gender is a structure that is made by society. While the sex is determined by birth,

society imposes the gender: it tells us the distinction of men and women in the sense of what one should wear, what activities should a man do in contrast to what women should, and how a character of each sex should be shaped. While sex is a biological category, gender is society-made (Butler, 1999).

Catherine and Hindley were too young and too secluded in the countryside of Wuthering Heights to even be aware of such dictation, so their genuine nature is revealed: “the son who is destined to be the next master of the household, does not ask for a particularly masterful gift. His wish, indeed, seems frivolous in the context of the harsh world of the Heights. He asks for a fiddle, betraying both a secret, soft-hearted desire for culture and an almost decadent lack of virile purpose. Stranger still is Catherine’s wish for a whip (...) for, symbolically, the small Catherine’s longing for a whip seems like a powerless younger daughter’s yearning for power”. (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000: 264)

This shows that Catherine was born and raised free of the cultural chains of the Victorian era, a strong girl who was going to defy norms and stand for herself, in spite of the cultural climate of the time. Unfortunately, that did not happen. In the end, she succumbed to the social norms which led to her physical and mental downfall, but she proved that it was in (that) woman’s true nature to be strong-willed and powerful, not fragile and docile (Hindley, on the other hand, was primarily delicate and fond of culture – which were not characteristics desirable for a male heir).

The literal whip was lost but, according to Gilbert and Gubar, Catherine was given a metaphorical one in the form of a “gypsy brat” her father brought home. Named after dead oldest brother, Heathcliff, he provides Catherine “a fullness of being”.

Moreover, he brings a change in family dynamic: “Heathcliff as a fantasy replacement of the dead oldest brother does in fact supplant Hindley in the old master’s affections, and

therefore he functions as a tool of the dispossessed younger sister whose “whip” he is. Specially, he enables her for the first time to get possession of the kingdom of Wuthering Heights, which under her rule threatens to become, like Gondal, a queendom.” (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000: 265)

Catherine had always wanted power, as her wish for a whip has verified, but was not able to obtain it because she was both a younger child and a girl. The fondness was always given to Hindley, but with the arrival of the “whip”, that was changing and, having control over her father via her union with Heathcliff, she was becoming the empowered woman she desired to be. It is worth noting that her father, the patriarch, did not support her independence and strong will: “He took to Heathcliff strangely, believing all he said (for that matter, he said precious little, and generally the truth), and petting him up far above Cathy, who was too mischievous and wayward for a favourite.” (Bronte [as Ellis Bell], 1858:33)

This shows that her own father was well aware of her dominant and free-willed nature, but he condemned it: “After behaving as badly as possible all day, she sometimes came fondling to make it up at night. ‘Nay, Cathy,’ the old man would say, ‘I cannot love thee, thou’rt worse than thy brother. Go, say thy prayers, child, and ask God’s pardon. I doubt thy mother and I must rue that we ever reared thee!’ That made her cry, at first; and then being repulsed continually hardened her, and she laughed if I told her to say she was sorry for her faults, and beg to be forgiven.” (Bronte [as Ellis Bell], 1858:38) Her reaction to her father’s words showed a progress she was making as an independent person. She did not succumb to her father’s wishes, she stopped thinking about his cruelty and, because of that, became a stronger version of herself. At his deathbed, he tried to persuade Catherine to conform to the standard behaviour of the Victorian women, showing his concern for the future of a child that is *different*: “Why canst thou always be a good lass, Cathy?” to which she respond: “Why cannot you always be a good man, father?” (Brontë [as Ellis Bell], 1858:38)

Her response, her strong defiance towards her father shows that she considered herself equal to him. A “proper” Victorian woman would bow her head down and ask for forgiveness, but Catherine was not docile, she had a strong sense of self and talked back to the figure that tried to tame her. Her daughter, Catherine the second, will do the same in her quarrels with Heathcliff.

It was noted that her union with Heathcliff provided Catherine with the “fullness of being”. Gilbert and Gubar explain that he was “an alternative double for her (...) in her union with him she becomes, like Manfred in his union with his sister Astarte, a perfect androgyne. As devoid of sexual awareness as Adam and Eve were in the prelapsarian garden, she sleeps with her whip, her other half, every night in the primordial fashion of the countryside”. (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000: 265)

This demonstrates that Catherine had a relationship with a boy, a male, which was based on equality she always craved for. Considering herself equal to a man (even a boy) was unprecedented in the Victorian era, but Catherine not only managed it, she did it in a way that he listened to her, not the other way around. Gilbert and Gubar state that “if Heathcliff is the body that does her will (...) she herself is an “unfeminine” instance of transcendently vital spirit. For she is never docile, never submissive, never ladylike.” (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000:265) The spirit is “unfeminine” because it was considered male in the time of Victorian values. The man was supposed to be the mind of the partnership, but Catherine took that role, thus contradicting the norms – she was not just an equal, she was the leader of the small Catherine-Heathcliff empire. She had such a strong influence over Heathcliff that he will remain dependent on her years after her death, madly calling her spirit in the middle of the night: “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, I believe. I know that ghosts *have* wandered on earth. Be with me always—take any form—drive me mad! only *do* not leave me in this abyss, where I

cannot find you! Oh, God! it is unutterable! I *cannot* live without my life! I *cannot* live without my soul” (Brontë [as Ellis Bell], 1858:146) Calling her his soul, he too, admits she was the “male” one, the dominant one in their relationship.

Sadly, Catherine had not kept her individuality. She succumbed to the norms when she married Linton, the *appropriate* suitor. It is strongly stressed that accepting ladylike behaviour and, thus, abandoning her wildness, her girlhood aspirations and, overall, her true love Heathcliff - who symbolised her independence – lead to her to her ultimate demise. The reader was given a preview to what Catherine will become, in form of a *proper* Victorian lady, Hindley’s wife Frances. Gilbert and Gubar interpret that “as a metaphor, Frances’s tuberculosis means that she is in an advanced state of just that *social* ‘consumption’ which will eventually kill Catherine, too, so that the thin and silly bride functions for the younger girl as a sort of premonition or ghost of what she herself will become.” (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000: 268-269)

Catherine should have taken this as an omen. She despised Frances and instinctively knew she should never be like her, but her pride got the better of her and she married Linton because marrying Heathcliff would *disgrace* her. She wasn’t mean, on the contrary, she foolishly believed that with Linton’s money she could help poor Heathcliff. Lyn Pykett, in her book *Emily Brontë* suggests that “Catherine’s ambivalence about her new role and her continued identification with Heathcliff suggest how profoundly at odds she is with her true nature (...) The adult Catherine persistently yearns for the self-consistency of the girlhood state that pre-existed the self divisions induced by her education into the class-gender role of the genteel lady.”(Pykett, 1989: 90)

As mentioned before, growing up we accept the roles society gives us. Catherine accepted her “class-gender role”, she surrendered her autonomy, abandoned her natural identity in doing so and accordingly, became only a shadow of her former self, wishing “I were a girl again, half savage and hardy, and free; and laughing at injuries, not maddening under

them! Why am I so changed? Why does my blood rush into a hell of tumult at a few words? I'm sure I should be myself were I once among the heather on those hills." (Brontë [as Ellis Bell], 1858:110)

She became so mentally unstable playing the role she never should have played (that of a docile wife) that she could not recognize her own image in the mirror. This sends a strong message about conforming to the rules of patriarchal society – once a strong individual one becomes distorted and ill if one goes against his own principles. Gilbert and Gubar claim that Catherine's fall is "caused by a patriarchal past and present, besides being associated with a patriarchal future" symbolically represented in the form of a bulldog that bit her leg and forced to stay at Thruschross Grange (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000:271). Kettle expands this point stating that "the conflict here is, quite explicitly, a social one. Thruschross Grange, embodying as it does the prettier, more comfortable side of the bourgeois life, seduces Catherine", yet "once Heathcliff is near, Catherine can maintain no illusions about the Lintons". (Kettle, 1967: 135-136) By denying herself and Heathcliff, by trying to mend both worlds into one, she lost both Heathcliff and the social fulfilment she was hoping to gain by marrying Linton.

This doesn't mean that she wasn't the head of the Linton house also. Pykett states that "whether in her role as a child of nature, or in her uneasy guise of 'proper lady', Catherine Earnshaw is presented as a powerful woman" (Pykett 1989: 90), but not even that could save her from the downfall that her split personality brought her. She claims that "Heathcliff is 'more myself than I am' for he has only a single name, while she has so many that she may be said in a sense to have none" (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000:276) which refers to her split identity. Gilbert and Gubar claim that this is the product of Victorian female education where "what Catherine, or any girl, must learn is that she does not know her own name, and there cannot know either who she is or whom she is destined to be". (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000: 276)



But Catherine is not done yet. She rebels one more time in the form of starvation with which she punishes both Linton and Heathcliff. Gilbert and Gubar explain that “hunger strike is a traditional tool of the powerless, as the history of the feminist movement (and many other movements of the oppressed) will attest.” (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000: 284) Catherine, thus, circles back to her previous domineering state of childhood but this time not to achieve any goal other than to defy and take emotional revenge on the oppressors. “She whips herself because she cannot whip the world and she must whip something. Besides, in whipping herself, does she not, perhaps, torment the world?”(Gilbert and Gubar, 2000: 285) Dying, she brings her daughter, the second Catherine (further referred as Cathy) into the world.

### 3. Catherine II

Unlike Catherine's wild childhood, Cathy was growing up as a perfect Victorian lady. She dressed nicely; she never went too far from home and obeyed her father. She rarely even disobeyed Nelly, her servant, and when she did she did so in a playful way, because she wanted to explore the surroundings of her home. Unlike Catherine's, Cathy's father had no reason to scold her – she was a daughter any Victorian father could only wish for.

“If Heathcliff is Catherine's almost identical double, Catherine II really is her mother's non-identical double”, Gilbert and Gubar state “in almost every way Catherine II differs from her fierce dead mother in being culture's child, a born lady”. (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000: 298-299) Cathy was docile, dutiful and empathic towards her father and Nelly, while her mother was argumentative and hostile. Unlike her mother who was running barefoot through moors, Cathy was graceful, she spent most of her time indoors and enjoyed gentle walks around their premises. Cathy was, what was considered, an ideal Victorian woman.

The interesting development is that, while her mother was a strong, rebellious individual in her childhood and then conformed and unsuccessfully tried to settle in her adulthood, her daughter did the opposite. Cathy, from the obedient, innocent child will become a strong, assertive individual.

Her transformation begun when her aunt Isabella died. Isabella's son Linton was sent to live with the Lintons in Thrushcross Grange. Cathy became fond of him, but Linton's father, Heathcliff, came to take Linton away to Wuthering Heights.

Up to this point, Cathy was unaware of the existence of Wuthering Heights whatsoever, let alone had she known that it was once her mother's home. With this in mind, when she goes to Wuthering Heights to visit Linton, it is the first time ever that she disobeys her father. But unlike her mother and aunt who run from their fathers and brothers, Cathy “runs away from

Wuthering Heights to get *back* to her father” and “she has learned the lessons of patriarchal Christianity so well that she even piously promises Heathcliff that she will forgive both him and Linton for their sins against her” (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000: 299), all of which show her childhood as one of the obedience and conforming to the patriarchal norms. But even though her rebellion will not be as extravagant as her mothers, Cathy was far from submissive self-less puppet Victorian age wanted her to be.

Her first act of rebellion was when she, against her father’s wishes, continued writing letters to Linton: “I was still surprised to discover that they were a mass of correspondence—daily almost, it must have been—from Linton Heathcliff: answers to documents forwarded by her.” (Brontë [as Ellis Bell], 1858:195) Even though Cathy was obedient all her life, it points to the fact that she was obedient only because that suited her, in other words, she had nothing to revolt against. The very first time she was not satisfied with the instructions of her father, she did as she pleased.

Pykett states that Cathy was more progressive than her mother. She explains that despite her previous rebellion, Catherine conformed to the Victorian norms when she chose Edgar Linton over Heathcliff. In this, she showed her weakness. Cathy did no such thing. In the end she chose Hareton, an uneducated, poor, almost primitive person. “Indeed, it is perhaps Cathy, rather than Catherine, who gives Emily Brontë the opportunity of writing ‘the scene of choice’ in which heroine chooses and demands her love, giving herself freely and, throwing Jane Austen’s prudence to the winds, declaring her passion which Ellen Moers sees as characteristic of every woman writer who was a feminist in her depiction of love”, claims Pykett. She also states the reasons for Cathy’s unusual choice: “Cathy’s experience of discontents of over-civilisation in her oppressively restricted genteel life at the Grange and in Linton’s peevish and petted gentility and her experience of domestic incarceration at the Heights all lead to reassessment of class and gender stereotypes from which her courtship of Hareton proceeds”.

(Pykett, 1989: 96) This means that Cathy was mature enough to learn from hers and her mother's experience and did not make the same wrong choices her mother did – she refused to conform to the Victorian society's norms and choose a life with which *she* will be happy.<sup>2</sup>

Pykett also points out that Cathy had control over Hareton – both sexual and cultural. She mocked his ignorance at first, but then she realised she was not blessed with the education she was. Under her influence, and with her help and guidance, Hareton learns how to read. Pykett points out he does so because of the sexual influence she has over him. (Pykett, 1989: 98) Sexual or other kind, it is obvious to me that Cathy not only has influence over Hareton, she also educates a grown man, older than she is, which is a giant step out of the role of Victorian lady she was attributed by many critics.

In his essay “Feminism in Wuthering Heights”, Connor Dunkling explores how Brontë projected positive feminist qualities on Cathy. He states that despite their differences and Linton Heathcliff's oppressive character. She compromises with him and nurtures him, even though she is well aware he has not earned any of it with his behaviour. In this aspect, as well as in aspect of educating Hareton, she exhibits positive, compassionate qualities, without becoming “a puppet”.

It is worth nothing that even though she is a prisoner of Heathcliff's in Wuthering Heights, she is the only one that stands up to him: “‘I'll put my trash away, because you can make me if I refuse,’ answered the young lady, closing her book, and throwing it on a chair. ‘But I'll not do anything, though you should swear your tongue out, except what I please!’” (Brontë [as Ellis Bell], 1858:27) Nobody, none of the men ever showed the courage

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<sup>2</sup> Many critics, including Gilbert and Gubar have overlooked this and the next point in describing Cathy's character.

Cathy showed in defying Heathcliff. She proved to be more confident and more assertive than any of the men.

Heathcliff did fear her, but not because of her defiance. He was consumed in his rage towards Catherine's husband Linton and her brother Hindley, which he projected on Hindley's son Hareton, but Cathy's positive attitude and her innocent love towards Hareton made him realise how futile his revenge was.

“With his most preternatural sensitivity to threats, Heathcliff himself recognizes the danger Catherine II represents.” She offered to forgive him, which caught him off guard and called her names like “witch” and “slut”, but “she is the opposite of these: she is virtually an angel in the house. But for just those reasons she is Urizenically dangerous to Heathcliff's Pandemonium at the Heights. Besides threatening his present position, however, Catherine II's union with Hareton reminds Heathcliff specifically of the heaven he has lost”. (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000: 300)

It was Cathy's goodness that finally brought down Heathcliff's tyranny, not violence nor death. Cathy was the force that unmade the demonic inclinations that kept him going from his young age. Via her love for Hareton “Heathcliff realizes the mistakes he has made. Where he had supposed Hareton's re-enactment of his own youth might even somehow restore the lost Catherine, and thus the Catherine-Heathcliff, he now sees that Hareton's re-enactment of his youth is essentially corrective, a retelling the story the “right” way”. (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000: 301).

It is as Cathy and Hareton corrected the mistakes Catherine and Heathcliff did. They both escaped their social roles and provided a vision of what Catherine and Heathcliff's relation might have been, if she hadn't chose socially acceptable suitor and if he made an effort to civilise himself a bit. Cathy and Hareton are not the proof that love conquers all but a promise

that if we put aside our differences and compromise for the other's behalf, we could achieve a harmony and build an identity that is based not on what we rebel against, but on compassion, friendship and acceptance.

#### 4. Isabella Linton

Even though Catherine and Cathy are the feminist role models in *Wuthering Heights*, one should not omit the secondary character that is Isabella Linton. Isabella was born and raised in the civilised environment of the Thrushcross Grange. As a woman, she was in no position to either inherit the land or to choose her own path in life. She fell hopelessly in love with Heathcliff who was only too willing to take advantage of it in his revenge against the Lintons. She defied her brother and Catherine when they tried to reason with her, and she chose the husband on her own, which is shocking behaviour for a born lady she was. Gilbert and Gubar call her “the most striking of these parallel figures, for like Catherine she is a headstrong, impulsive ‘miss’ who runs away from home at adolescence”. (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000: 287) They also suggest she is a parody of Catherine, “she starves, pines and sickens, oppressed by that Miltonic grotesque, Joseph, for she is unable to stomach the rough food of nature (or hell) just as Catherine cannot swallow the food of culture (or heaven).”(Gilbert and Gubar, 2000: 288)

Isabella runs away once more, this time from the Byronic oppressor that is her husband, and proceeds to raise a child on her own, with no help from her brother nor Heathcliff, the father of the child. She heroically continues to care for her son, Linton, until the day she dies. It is never said how she financed herself, but we may assume she had it worse than either Catherine or Cathy. In a way, she is a stronger character than Catherine. Even though they both made the wrong choices, Isabella escaped from hers, she took matter into her own hands, while Catherine only tortured herself and those around her. She is not as interesting a character as either Catherine’s are because she doesn’t scheme nor is she a *femme fatale* like Catherine – she has no influence over men whatsoever and, too add to her disappointing features, she made her son (Heathcliff’s son, who had all predispositions to be strong and masculine) into feminized,

overly dramatic, spoiled nuisance. Because of that, she was not interesting enough for a bigger role in the novel.



## **Conclusion**

Emily Brontë had shaken the image of Victorian women by introducing female characters of the upper class that defy the social norms of the period. Her heroines are not passive house angels who conform to the men in their lives. They are strong individuals who choose how to live their life and desire the power men have. Both Catherine's exert strong influence over the men in their lives, but while Catherine's ultimate goal is to destroy the men that have wronged her, her daughter is shown as a person who corrects those mistakes. She approaches life with compassion, but she never forgets to fight for her own happiness. The second Catherine shows us that compromise and understanding can go a long way in contrast to destruction and violence which can never bring any fulfilment not even to those who exert them. This novel is a gateway to the rights of women and a call for every woman to explore her needs and wants, to become assertive but also to never forget that the true feminist virtues are not only assertiveness and power, but compassion and compromise as well.

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