

## To Grange, To Heights, or To None: Resurrecting the Ostracised Isabella Linton in *Wuthering Heights*

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### Abstract

Cradled at Thrushcross Grange in comparative grandeur, moved to the tyrannical world of *Wuthering Heights* after marriage, confounded over what monster she has married with, Isabella Linton screams to her maker to alter the “travesty of the poetic justice”. Ensnared between Van Ghent’s “nonhuman” love/s, Isabella notwithstanding everyone’s warnings harbours romanticised fantasy for Heathcliff’s carnage that wrecks over her his fury of vengeance for committing the crime of allowing him into the community of the locality. Gullible at birth, thus breaking the blood bond, however, insensible to the dire consequences she runs away, eventually turns into a fugitive human being, who denies validation to Heathcliff’s demonic behaviour, afterwards dies on snivelling at her blunder of elopement. Nevertheless, she articulates her uncertainty on living a prolific life; however, overwhelmed by her originator who despises her by snatching all her legitimate dwellings, stalwartly questions her, where do I belong: To Grange, To Heights or To None?

**Key Words:** Catherine Earnshaw, Heathcliff, Isabella Linton, Poetic Justice Thrushcross Grange, *Wuthering Heights*

### Introduction

Traversing the world of Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights*, the societal half sibling’s, (Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff) and the central narrators (Mr. Lockwood and Nelly Dean) arrest reader’s attention strongly, overshadowing the existence of Isabella Linton as an incredible character. The together raised inseparable brother and sister share toxic relationship within which the separation stands impracticable. Therefore, truthfully speaking no reader’s soul has been audacious enough to deny its tremendous power on making its impact on their psyche. Emily Bronte effectively endows authoritative manifestation to these passionate lovers and the raconteurs of the frame narrative, thus, ignoring Isabella mostly,

who despite the fact of being an element of the whole unfolding is portrayed as “an important participant-narrator”. She garners no critical acclaim, stands simply reduced to “another Lockwood” (Brick 84), gets exposed to the tumultuous world of Wuthering Heights, feeble enough “to contrive to preserve the common sympathies of human nature” and “recognise any sentiment” (154-155) of compassion towards those living around her. Illustrated as a “temporary narrator” (Pike 350), the disorientation regarding Isabella’s portrayal appears noticeable because the preliminary manifestation of her character becomes evident as an embodiment of “relative magnificence” accordingly fades in the due course, falls into the snares of suppression and domestic abuse regardless of the fact of committing any fatal flaw.

The shocking scene in the form of unintended rejection of Heathcliff by Catherine Earnshaw emerges as a result of dramatic irony, when Heathcliff overhears half of the conversation between Catherine and Nelly. For that reason, Isabella Linton different from Catherine Earnshaw, out rightly accepts the unknowable Heathcliff after his mysterious escape and return elopes with him not making an allowance for the evil lurking in his heart and regardless of Edgar Linton’s aggressive warnings of disowning her. Contextually Isabella stands an anti-conventional personality and keeping this untraditional attitude in view, the provocative discussion that originates in her psyche is her spiteful treatment by the hands of her maker who allows her husband to inflict his violent actions over her, eventually writes to Nelly: “He says he has married me on purpose to obtain power over him [Edgar]: and he shan’t obtain it- I’ll die first! I just hope, I pray, that he may forget his diabolic prudence, and kill me! The single pleasure I can imagine is to die, or see him dead!” (150). For marrying Heathcliff, she abandoned her noble legacy immediately to become trapped in the obnoxious world of Wuthering Heights manifesting “would I be condemned to a perpetual dwelling in the infernal regions than, even for one night, abide beneath the roof of Wuthering Heights again” (205) therefore expresses her bafflement to her maker who on the one hand provides her every bit and piece prior to marriage, however, snatches everything subsequently leaving her dumbfounded.

Therefore, navigating into the uncharted territories of *Wuthering Heights*, Isabella emphasizes that her creator focuses absolutely on the “violent, self-indulgent and self-destructive” (emphasis added, Stevenson 62) lovers along with the main narrators, largely ignoring her, irrespective of being herself a voice exemplifying the cynical repercussions of revenge, indicative of a transition she no longer thinking herself a victim, however, victimised inhumanely articulates “I’ve recovered from my desire to be killed by him: I’d

rather he killed himself” (194). The sacrifices that she made in spite of the unanticipated consequences, offers him her heart who shows no claim on her charity “took it and pinched it to death, and flung it back” (194) makes her eventually fall into the vicious circle of exploitation. However, the present day reader demands her portrayal to be acknowledged authentically without being the victim of disgrace by the hands of her maker and the person she openly vouched for against of all the odds.

### **Questioning the Creator, Where do I Belong?**

Reviewed earlier by critics, *Wuthering Heights* (1847) by Emily Bronte has been the matter of numerous critical interpretations subject to the coarseness manifesting the extremity of the unchecked passion shared by its most important characters. Considered as an inappropriate text extensively, especially for female readers, because of the indecorous style and characterization, it demonstrates the offensive scenes leading at times to the admonishing of its author. Likewise, “considerable critical attention has been paid to questions that arise from Bronte’s use of framed narrative regarding the reliability and the role of the two central narrators, Lockwood and Nelly” (Pike 350). The initial 19<sup>th</sup> century reviewers “generally gloss over Isabella’s role as one of the three narrators of this framed narrative” (Pike 348). Moreover, “critics have been loath to give Isabella voice due to her supposed marginal role in the novel” (Pike 350). Emily Bronte unenthusiastically gives her narrative voice a seminal role in the form of a letter, however, critics like Susan Stewart in “The Ballad in *Wuthering Heights*” summarily “dismisses the significance of Isabella’s letter by calling it a ‘deviation’ from Nelly’s narrative control, and she makes no further mention of Isabella’s role as a narrator” (184). Likewise, Margaret Homans disregards the importance of Isabella’s narration by “directly contradicting Emily Bronte’s own estimation of Isabella’s letter” (pp. 9-19, emphasis added). While living, Isabella’s letter has been safeguarded by Nelly, and it is only after her death, Nelly reads out the letter by asserting “any relic of the dead is precious, if they were valued living” (153). Thus keeping this situation in view Homans reduces Isabella’s role as a narrator by expressing that she is not a central character but a mere “plot fuller” whose letter “is interesting more because it supplies part of the story that Nelly cannot have witnessed herself than because it is a sample of a previous voice” (Repression and Sublimation, p.10, emphasis added). Therefore, the substantial existence of Isabella as an influential narrator stands abortive not only after the publishing of the novel but even after a century she appears largely lacking the essential characteristics to stand in and out individually.

Until Isabella's elopement with Heathcliff, she is rendered inconsequential. A reviewer for *Eclectic Review* instantly writes "Isabella Linton is one of the silliest and most credulous girls that fancy ever painted"<sup>1</sup> (*Eclectic Review: The Brontes* 298). Therefore, described as a passive character, it is her elopement that provides her recognition to develop fully as a character in her own right. Unaware of the dark realities of life, while living at Grange, however, after marriage makes her passage into Heights, afterwards confronts some of the darker aspects of the life there. She witnesses the dormant callous character of Heathcliff who so far has concealed his appalling activities for ensnaring Isabella in his trap compelling her to assert "that my heart returned to Thrushcross Grange in twenty-four hours after I left it" (153). He unleashes his diabolical mind-set over Isabella to make her suffer the way it satiates his burning soul, leaving her perplexed enough to confirm from Nelly Dean "Is Mr. Heathcliff a man? If so, is he mad and if not, is he a devil? I shan't tell my reasons for making this inquiry; but I beseech you to explain, if you can, what I have married:" (154). So considering the inhumane treatment of Heathcliff upon Isabella in common parlance suggests the abhorring of his character, however, paradoxically stands glorified not only by the reviewer's of the Victorian era but by the Modern day readers as well, who despite the fact of knowing his frightful attitude likes the Byronic qualities entrenched in him. Likewise, the matter of the fact changes and those arresting immediate attention, nonetheless, conceived as indecorous in the Victorian period and proving licentious to the existing generation, eventually proved modern to the present-day readers by offering the unimagined action. Thus, the previously unsophisticated relationship, however, later proving an exemplary one, narrated by Nelly Dean to Lockwood forms a tetra-character circle that dismantles the accepted notions of offensive therefore proves incredibly striking to the modern reader.

Heathcliff, dark and uncivilised, defined extensively as an extraneous element speculated to disturb the natural course of Wuthering Heights, brought home from the Liverpool Streets by Mr. Earnshaw. Exposed to an environment with plethora of opportunities to change his fate, unpredictably, steals the whole show who "not only acts and suffers, but causes others to act and suffer" (Watson 89) shocking the readers blatantly entering as a guest ends up being an owner of Wuthering Heights. Embedded of strong will and unwavering purpose, his elemental bearing has been reshaped by external battering to continue being his own being. At Yorkshire Moors his existence was made tough and disillusioned, first by the unsympathetic behaviour of Hindley who had brought Heathcliff so low that he reduced him merely to a miserable wretch and secondly devastated by what he

feels the deceitfulness of Catherine Earnshaw on whom he has showered his love passionately from the heart of his heart. Degraded down to a different species, it was only Catherine Earnshaw who took delight in being wild the way Heathcliff was, therefore, ending up falling in love with each other. They lived, they loved, they chatted, they charted every moment whenever free from the responsibilities.

Although unacceptable to nature, the devil hovering over their heads took them to peek into Thrushcross Grange that eventually introduces Catherine to an altogether different world of more refinement and politeness. There, to this new world, Catherine Earnshaw throws her arms open for Edgar Linton, however, superficially, nevertheless, creating discouraging apprehensions in Heathcliff's mind concerning the fear of losing her. The anticipated catastrophe befalls on him immediately when he receives the blow of betrayal thus ends up "being the most unfortunate creature that ever was born" (93). Catherine confesses to Nelly Dean her final decision to marry Edgar by speaking "I love the ground under his feet, and the air over his head, and everything he touches, and every word he says. I love all his looks, and all his actions, and him entirely and altogether" (89). Nevertheless, the dramatic irony lies in Heathcliff's overhearing the half conversation, and he thinks Catherine has deceived him for his dirty looks and the absence of elegance, therefore, Catherine expressing to Nelly that "it would degrade me to marry Heathcliff now (92), however, marrying someone like Edgar Linton who is more refined, more polished and who possess more wealth will certainly lift my status. "I shall like to be the greatest woman of the neighbourhood, and I shall be proud of having such a husband" (89). Thus, Heathcliff leaves in anger and frustration, not lending ears to Catherine, confessing to Nelly her oneness with Heathcliff "If all else perished, and *he* remained, *I* should still continue to be; and if all else remained, and he were annihilated, the universe would turn to a mighty stranger: Nelly, *I am* Heathcliff. He's always, always in my mind: not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself, but as my own being" (94). Viewing himself deserted, therefore aggravated, in spite of sharing relationship in which he was ready to annihilate himself decides to leave Wuthering Heights to disappear to mysterious circumstances, however, to achieve what he has been abandoned for. He resolves himself to inflict his hatred over those who have toughened the regular course of his life. Returning exactly after three years of dubious absence, Heathcliff prepared himself to unleash his hateful vengeance not only on Catherine and Edgar (who married each other) but also on Hindley (the solitary mortal who has been responsible for degrading his persona to total destruction) and Isabella who in one

way or the other is associated to Catherine. Hence, “he resolves to even scores by crushing everyone who has stood in his way *and* everyone who has helped to thwart his happiness” (Watson 90). Heathcliff plans to walk over everyone and wreak his havoc while sparing none; however, the only human being potential enough that could have abated the storm rising within him was Catherine Earnshaw, who unfortunately has lost this magical tendency after marrying Edgar Linton. Heathcliff sets his course and the road taken to quench his retribution is absolutely threatening. The love that he showers strikes venom to the heart of the beloved. “His power for good and for evil shocks and surprises the reader” (Watson 89). He lashes terror not only over those responsible for his melancholic state but intensely reprimands their off springs as well. His soul is haunted, he sacks everyone into the life of debauchery and his victims are Hindley, Isabella, Hareton, young Cathy, and Edgar Linton. He stands in and out as a venomous creature inflicting pain over every soul to make them taste the horrendous impacts of his sufferings making the whole novel an atrocious space to traverse into.

Yet, in spite of “its impulses and its desires, its loves and its hates, its disasters and its triumphs, its defeats and its victories” (Watson 87), Emily Bronte considerably creates an atmosphere for these superhuman characters good enough to be accepted unquestionably nonetheless fails to call forth a sympathizing tear for Isabella Linton. She attempts to make the tyrannical world of Heathcliff, a reasonable space, even though every critic and reviewer cautions about looking in him for “Christian morals or virtues; *suggesting of Heathcliff* a primitive, pagan soul” (Watson 92), therefore creating more aggressiveness in Isabella’s consciousness regarding her quandary of despising in treating her character always a “chaff to be trampled underfoot” (Watson 91). Therefore, Isabella questions her maker that even though portraying her strong and anti-conventional, why couldn’t she make her like Catherine who firstly deserted Heathcliff and secondly after her death, loves her more passionately thus creating an impression in Isabella’s mind to scream at him by asserting “Heathcliff, if I were you, I’d go stretch myself over her grave and die like a faithful dog. The world is surely not worth living now, is it? You had distinctly impressed on me an idea that Catherine was the whole joy of your life: I can’t imagine how you think of surviving her loss” (198) and stands baffled for creating her as a medium for him who can authoritatively traverse into the corners of Thrushcross Grange. Naive and emotional, a capricious character absolutely lacking the knowledge to comprehend the evil lurking into men and ignorant of their motives, she is infatuated towards the external appearance of Heathcliff irrespective of

Edgar's threat of disinheriting her. Isabella in pursuit of adding an acquaintance lacks the knowledge to discover that she is considered nothing more but a blank creature therefore replaceable after its usage. However, the description of Isabella to the reviewers of the Victorian and Modern era doesn't satiate the present day reader's questions bequeathing importance to the dead people over the living ones, who against all odds stood there, illustrating herself as an unconventional figure accepting the dark, handsome, and indecipherable and well-dressed Heathcliff.

The present day reader's dismantle the centuries old rhetoric of Isabella's trivial demeanour who has "generally been the tenor of the cursory comments" (Pike 348) commences to bestow a soul to her screams and depict her differently by offering a perspective powerful enough to reincarnate her unacknowledged alienated self. Isabella's character is articulated in a diminished manner against Catherine's who possesses the power to control the villainous Heathcliff. Nonetheless, if Isabella had been offered a chance to traverse into the moors like Catherine, who entered into the Grange, the situation could have been completely different. Isabella could have controlled Heathcliff even more passionately the way Catherine did because she appears more loyal and true to the circumstances by overcoming the barriers of class consciousness encompassed by Catherine. Contrarily Isabella's "white face *is* scratched and bruised, and a frame hardly able to support to itself through fatigue" (192) observed "after all it is preferable to be hated than loved by him" (203) desires of Heathcliff, who has habituated the persona of a "Monster! ... could be blotted out of creation and out of my memory" (194). Here keeping in view the authoritative enterprise the present day reader's demand the reversal of roles to speculate the possibility of overpowering Isabella, who has been rendered insignificant. Isabella, even though the victim of Heathcliff's wrath, unescorted, nevertheless, attains the personality of a fugitive wife, compels the reader to think of controlling the primitive and the pagan soul. "Her transformation from a 'petted' darling to a married woman, one who flees domestic abuse, marks her as a singular character" (Pike 349). She took pleasure in rushing from Heathcliff's bondage in feeling "blessed as a soul escaped from purgatory ... bounded, leaped and flew down the steep road; ... rolling over banks, and wading through marshes: precipitating ... towards the beacon-light of the Grange" (205). She thinks her maker could have comforted her stay at her respective dwelling the way Catherine dies at Grange, she was married into. However, ironically, her defiant attitude depicts her true nature, capable enough to overcome the pain inflicted by Heathcliff therefore the present reader speculates that Isabella could

have easily controlled and subsidized the seventeen year revenge harboured into Heathcliff's consciousness if provided the appropriate chance by her creator. What they contemplate is after Catherine's death; Isabella should have been demonstrated as a pain healer, a substitute of tranquilising Catherine's rejection, irrespective of offering her the unanticipated resurrection after her death. The trajectory of such a supposition could have saved the startling ferocity and the delusional behaviour Heathcliff has gone through all these years. His anger, his untimely horrifying death and his gothic stature could have been averted, had the consequences represented Isabella signifying oneness with Catherine Earnshaw.

However, despite "it's strange elemental fierceness and barbarity, its stormy setting, divorced from the world as we know it ... *Wuthering Heights* is not an easy book to discuss" (Watson 87). Emily Bronte, an individual efficient enough rejected the existing dogmas to offer recognition to the gypsy and dark skinned Heathcliff and the wild, beautiful and deceitful Catherine, nonetheless, neglects the sophisticated and steadfast Isabella who restricts to cultivate within her consciousness any sort of vengeance. Therefore, Emily Bronte proves herself quite anti-conventional whose heroes fail to stand out, however, innovative enough in portraying "a villain who overrides the action and is at last triumphantly united with the heroine who has died midway through the book" (Watson 88). Describing insignificantly the living ones and revivifying the dead is what eventually leads the maker to choose some unnecessary course to make it look more relevant. But the reader's couldn't understand why Emily Bronte has done so. Therefore, attesting her assertions "the plan then becomes inconvertibly confusing, the point of the view too blatantly awkward, the presence of the two generations unnecessary, and the conclusion a travesty of poetic justice" (Watson 88). Emily Bronte, no doubt lived under some undesirable circumstances therefore, emerged as an individual who refused the anticipated conventions, and her plight gets visible underneath the fabric of this book.

However, someone who has seen the inconsolable situations in their life cannot make other people look wretched for the sake of their own speculations to demonstrate their truthfulness. The act of demonstrating such tapestry relegates the architect by bringing down the position to less prominence than to more creating a thwarting image constructed so far therefore denigrating the last half making the conclusion of the book extremely off key. And an answer to such a speculation that can alter the predictability lies engraved in Isabella's character that even though tortured brutally, she does not harbour any wicked notion therefore dextrously qualifies to be resurrected and grant her the respect that she has been



defined incompetent so far. Hindley, who has been the victim of Heathcliff's butchery, nevertheless, brutal enough to gain sympathetic expression from the readers, persuades Isabella to resolve the unsettled beef with Heathcliff "You and I, [Hindley] said, "have each a great debt to settle with the man out yonder! ... We might combine to discharge it" however, Isabella who underwent dramatic shift in her character understands the repercussion of taming hatred tries to convince Hindley by asserting that "treachery and violence are spears pointed at both ends; they wound those who resort to them worse than their enemies" (197). Conclusively she represents a voice exemplifying that by harbouring vengeance against someone ironically collapses the possessor to the core therefore contrarily escapes from these depressed circumstances without annexing to bounce back on her persecutor therefore allows Heathcliff to sink into the vicious circle of retribution.

### **Conclusion**

Atrociously brutalised and sadistically manipulated after marriage, used as nothing more but a tool to seek revenge and a lawful right over Thrushcross Grange, Isabella resurrects metaphorically from her abhorrent position as an embodiment of forgiveness. The resurrection bestows her a rebellious character, with an ability to wither quietness and fearfulness, hence expressing hysterical and delirious attitude. Regardless of Isabella's role as a "temporary narrator" merely stuffing in a "dead space", she manages to resuscitate from being labelled as a superfluous "deviation" with complex and at times ironic voice possessing a fading presence to being argumentative and a stronger being powerful enough to overcome independently the hard-hearted hammering inflicted upon her. Isabella sequentially congregates sufficient bravery for healthier life to her unborn baby and endeavours to follow her own heart by defying the authoritative creature brutalising her heartlessly by conclusively running away as a resilient human being, however, unfortunately dies in enigmatic circumstances.

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<sup>1</sup> [Anon.], rev. of *Wuthering Heights*, *Eclectic Review* (February 1851), in *The Brontes*, p.298.