

Catherine Earnshaw

Catherine Earnshaw is a character at war with herself. Her conflicting turns of character make her at once complex, confusing and interesting. Her co-stars, Heathcliff and Edgar, are so ridiculously polarized, so simple and predictable, that consideration of Catherine both encompasses and overwhelms them. The notion that Edgar could tend quietly to his books while Catherine starves, or that Heathcliff could, by sheer force of passion, will himself to die, seems to hint that perhaps these two characters are intended as satirical commentary on two sides of the human spectrum. Catherine contains a little of both: there is some of Heathcliff, the passionate ruffian in her, and there is also a touch of the effete nobleman that Edgar represents in her character. The battle for dominance of these two characters within Catherine is responsible for her fickle personality. Furthermore, we can divide Catherine's dominant personality traits into those that are reflections of Heathcliff and Edgar, and those that are unique to Catherine and result from the combination of her suitors' characters. The two most notable traits that should be considered in this latter category are Catherine's self-absorbed narcissism and her surprisingly powerful and accurate powers of introspection. Both of these traits are the result of a combination of Heathcliff's personality with Edgar's that make Catherine narcissistically blind to herself and yet also give her such a limpid understanding of her feelings.

Comment: Well defined thesis

Comment: Note: precision and clarity

Catherine's character is further complicated by a set of personality traits which are native to neither Heathcliff nor Edgar, but come about as a combination of those two sides of herself. Nelly tells us that Catherine is "never so happy as when we were all scolding her at once," (Ch 5, pg 35) a quote which indicates Catherine's desire to be the center of attention. Even more surprising is the scene where Heathcliff erupts in anger over Catherine's preferential treatment of the Lintons, and Catherine scolds Nelly, saying "you've combed my hair quite out of curl," (Ch 8, pg 58) interrupting her conversation with Heathcliff and making us wonder if she's more worried about her childhood friend or her beautiful hair. This sort of self absorption is not observable in Heathcliff. When Nelly tells Heathcliff that she thinks he might envy Catherine, Nelly reports that Heathcliff finds the notion of envying Catherine "incomprehensible". Heathcliff's inability to be wounded by Nelly's statement is evidence not of a humble nature, but rather of

Comment: Good use of the text

his lack of self consciousness. Heathcliff and Catherine note that Edgar is spoiled the first time they see him, but there is nothing arrogant or narcissistic in his nature. Catherine's narcissism makes sense only as a combination of the two: it is the spoiled self absorption of Edgar combined with the powerfully self assured and passionately emotive air of Heathcliff.

Comment: Good distinction

Catherine also possesses a deeply introspective streak that seems similarly alien to Edgar and Heathcliff. Neither of the men possesses this characteristic: Heathcliff's inability to judge his own character is apparent in the way he is unable recognize that the very actions he takes in order to get his revenge on Edgar are painful to Catherine, for whom he is driven to revenge in the first place. His frequent disappearances, the passionate, sudden entrances and the discord he sows at Thrushcross Grange hurt his heart's foremost desire more than they do Edgar, but Heathcliff lacks the ability to see the consequences of his actions or even to see the flaw in his motives. Edgar is similarly blind to himself. Neither man is able to express themselves to Catherine in an adequate manner. Edgar's best and only expression of love is in his proposal of marriage. Heathcliff assiduously asserts that he loves Catherine, but neither man can prove so convincing as Catherine does when she tells Nelly that Heathcliff is "more myself than I am" (Ch 9, pg 68). What Heathcliff does possess is a cutting insight into others. His evaluations of many characters are unerringly accurate. One obvious example is his ability to see Hareton and Linton for what they really are despite the reverse natures that have been imposed upon them. This positive trait is complemented in Edgar's unthinking self absorption that leads him to withdraw to the library for days despite Catherine's hunger fast. Catherine turns Heathcliff's magnifying glass in on herself, yielding an impressive self awareness that is unmatched among her suitors.

Comment: Note: thesis develops here

Catherine combines the passionate but reckless sensibilities of Heathcliff with the calm, withdrawn manner of Edgar to arrive at a mean where her passion can be mitigated while avoiding the torpor that Edgar regularly sinks into. This combination of Heathcliff and Edgar's characters grants her qualities that neither of them is capable of possessing on the far ends of the spectrum.

Comment: A excellent paper – you define a clear, arguable thesis very well, and the paper develops the thesis with concrete evidence – the writing is always lively, precise and forceful – in many ways, a model paper