International Journal of Arts and Social Science www.ijassjournal.com
ISSN: 2581-7922,
Volume 8 Issue 10, October 2025

Love, Oppression, and Resistance: Isabella's Struggle in *Wuthering Heights*

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ABSTRACT: *Isabella's role in Wuthering Heights is largely functional, advancing the plot and highlighting Heathcliff's villainy. Her suffering accentuates Heathcliff's demonic traits, and her introduction introduces new conflicts, especially after Catherine's death severs connections between Heathcliff and the residents of Thrushcross Grange. Isabella becomes a contested figure in the love triangle between Catherine, Edgar, and Heathcliff, as her vulnerability is exploited to heighten narrative tension.Isabella's trajectory demonstrates that Wuthering Heights is not only a story of Catherine and Heathcliff's transcendent passion but also a complex examination of class, marriage, and gender. Her life highlights the intersection of social expectations, patriarchal control, and individual will. Her marriage is neither a fulfillment of romantic ideal nor a simple transfer of emotion—it is a battleground, a struggle of wills, and a crucible for her transformation. While marginal in narrative space, Isabella's story enriches the novel's thematic depth, offering insight into the consequences of power, passion, and social position beyond the central romantic plot.*

KEYWORDS: Autonomy; Selfhood; Marriage; Domesticity; Revenge; Power Dynamics; Violence and abuse.

I. Introduction

Wuthering Heights may be understood as an "impressionistic romance." The literary style that prioritizes fleeting visual impressions, emotions, and subjective experiences over the detailed depiction of events or material objects can be described as impressionistic. Romance, in this sense, serves as an alternative paradigm of reality. Arnold Kettle defines it as "escapism, wishful thinking, unrealism." When complex situations in a text seem irresolvable, an imaginative or gothic framework allows the creation of a fertile narrative space, offering almost 'magical' solutions. In this context, *Wuthering Heights* functions as a romance. Catherine and Heathcliff share a unified identity yet cannot coexist in life, finding union only after death. Poetic justice is ostensibly achieved with Heathcliff's "deserved" death and the eventual peaceful union of young Cathy and Hareton.

However, this sense of resolution becomes questionable when the focus shifts to other characters, such as Edgar, or especially to Isabella. Isabella appears briefly in the novel and soon fades into the background, absorbed into the text's marginal details and ambiguities. *Wuthering Heights* contains many loose threads that are overshadowed by the extraordinary passions and intense emotions of Catherine and Heathcliff. Isabella's character is one such neglected thread. The discursive demands of the narrative limit her development, resulting in distortions of her character at multiple levels.

Structurally, Isabella's position in the narrative constrains our perception of her as a fully developed, "round" character. Narratively, she must contend with the dual perspectives of Nelly Dean, the morally and socially conventional female narrator, and Lockwood, the elitist male narrator. Both, in different ways, appropriate and

diminish her individuality. Moreover, the derogatory judgments of the central characters further shape readers' impressions of Isabella, affecting interpretation. Yet, Isabella's self-awareness and subtle resistance to these discourses provide an alternative lens for understanding the novel. Her character must be analyzed in relation to these coexisting contradictions.

I

Despite the richness of criticism on *Wuthering Heights*, most analyses focus on the principal figures, treating Isabella only marginally, often negatively, and rarely as an autonomous, thinking character. So, what is the significance of Isabella in *Wuthering Heights*? How does her character contribute to the authorial design? In many ways, Isabella functions as a structural adjunct in the novel.

Her narrative presence primarily serves to advance the plot and to highlight Heathcliff's villainy. The greater the suffering Heathcliff inflicts on Isabella, the more pronounced his demonic nature becomes. Isabella is strategically positioned to introduce new conflict, especially after Catherine's severe illness and death sever all interactions between Heathcliff and the residents of the Grange. At this crucial moment, Isabella becomes a possession at stake, reigniting tensions and shaping the lives of all those at the Heights and the Grange. Within the love triangle of Edgar, Catherine, and Heathcliff, Isabella occupies little space, crushed by the passions of more dominant figures. By severing the bond between Edgar and his sister, Heathcliff gains power, making Isabella both a victim and an instrument of his machinations.

Furthermore, Isabella serves as a narrative bridge between Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange. With Heathcliff denied entry to the Grange and Nelly Dean's perspective limited once she relocates, Isabella's presence enables the narrative to maintain continuity. Her letter to Nelly provides critical insight into events at Wuthering Heights: Hindley's increasing decay, the financial subjugation of Hindley to Heathcliff, Hareton's uncouth manners, and Joseph's enduring scorn. Through her correspondence, the complex social and domestic dynamics of Wuthering Heights are brought vividly to life, lending authenticity to Nelly Dean's otherwise partial and perforated account.

In this sense, the inclusion of Isabella's sub-narrative within the central plot becomes empowering, establishing a new link between the two hostile households. Isabella functions as a substitute for Catherine after the latter's death, though a "deficient" one—she cannot occupy the central position, as she is portrayed as inherently inferior, like all Lintons in the text. She lacks Catherine's fiery passion and consuming intensity. Emily Brontë sets up Edgar and Isabella as foils to Heathcliff and Catherine, constantly inviting comparison between their natures, appearances, habits, and temperaments. While Isabella possesses the "brightness of yellow hair and the whiteness of her skin" and dainty elegance, Catherine recognizes a fundamental weakness of character in both her and Edgar. Sandra Gilbert's observations are particularly insightful:

> "Isabella is perhaps the most striking of these parallel figures, for like Catherine she is a headstrong, impulsive 'miss' who runs away from home at adolescence. But where Catherine's fall is both fated and unconventional, a fall 'upward' from hell to heaven, Isabella's is both wilful and conventional. Falling from Thrushcross Grange to Wuthering Heights, from 'heaven' to 'hell', in exactly the opposite direction from Catherine. Isabella patently chooses her own fate, refusing to heed Catherine's warnings against Heathcliff and carefully evading her brother's vigilance. From the first, Isabella functions as Catherine's opposite, a model of the stereotypical young lady patriarchal education is designed to produce."
> — Stoneman, Patzy, *Emily Brontë's Bible of Hell*, New Casebooks: *Wuthering Heights* (London: Macmillan, 1993)

Although Isabella shares some qualities with Catherine, her choices are transparent and easily understood, whereas Catherine's seem mysterious, driven by a force beyond her control. Isabella is often stereotyped, yet she repeatedly asserts agency, resisting external constraints. Her character undergoes subtle changes that the text seldom emphasizes. Isabella constantly oscillates between conformity to the Linton mold and rebellion against it. Even when the narrative seeks to confine her within a fixed mold, she projects contradictory traits, revealing a paradox in the story. Her letter to Nelly Dean is emblematic, exposing her inner life:

> "It is to amuse myself that I dwell on such subjects as the lack of external comforts: they never occupy my thoughts, except at the moment when I miss them. I should laugh and dance for joy, if I found their absence was the total of my miseries, and the rest was an unnatural dream!"

Here Isabella is neither pampered nor passive. Adversity has sharpened her self-awareness, revealing an understanding of her circumstances, the superficiality of material comforts, and the profound need for emotional connection. Her keen perception of her situation sets her apart, as even Catherine rarely demonstrates such clarity. Nelly Dean notes Isabella's "keen feelings," a trait otherwise reserved for Catherine and Heathcliff, making her markedly un-Linton.

After her marriage, Isabella exhibits fierceness through caustic remarks and defiant glances at Heathcliff. Her letters recount the brutal reality of life at Wuthering Heights:

> "Mr Heathcliff awoke me; he had just come in, and demanded, in his loving manner, what I was doing there?"

The phrases "Mr Heathcliff" and "his loving manner" are deeply ironic, highlighting Heathcliff's ruthlessness. Isabella's heated confrontations, as when she remarks:

> "That's a poor love of yours that cannot bear a shower of snow!...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 in now, is it? You had distinctly impressed on me the idea that Catherine was the whole joy of your life: I can't imagine how you think of surviving her loss."

This underscores her courage and willingness to speak truth even from a position of vulnerability. Despite the limited narrative space, Isabella continually asserts herself. The dual narratorial perspectives further shape readers' perception. Nelly Dean's melodramatic lens frames Isabella as a victim of circumstance, emphasizing her cultured upbringing and vulnerability to Heathcliff's cruelty. Isabella becomes a moral contrast to Catherine, embodying Victorian ideals of Christian femininity, and thus a stereotype. Yet, Nelly is neither omniscient nor objective—her judgments reflect personal biases and conventional morality. Lockwood's narration compounds Isabella's marginalization. Fascinated by Heathcliff and Catherine, Lockwood regards Isabella merely as a narrative occurrence; her life and suffering fail to command his—or the reader's—attention. The limitations imposed by these narrators necessitate a nuanced, double reading of Isabella's character.

Other characters' perceptions further affect our understanding. Catherine and Heathcliff, spurning the Lintons, treat Isabella and Edgar with disdain. Early in the novel, young Heathcliff derides their privileged behavior:

> "The idiots! That was their pleasure! To quarrel over who should hold a heap of warm hair and each begins to cry because both after struggling to get it, refused to take it. We laughed outright at the petted things; we did despise them!"

Yet Isabella demonstrates resilience after her marriage, enduring humiliation and hardship at Wuthering Heights with dignity, refusing to flee to her brother or seek comfort elsewhere. Heathcliff's criticisms, such as:

> "Now, was it not the depth of absurdity—of genuine idiocy for that pitiful, slavish, mean-minded Brach to dream that I could love her? Tell your master, Nelly, that I never, in all my life, met with such an abject thing as she is."

It reveals his male-centered prejudice rather than her deficiencies. Catherine, too, superficially flatters Isabella while internally critiquing her and Edgar, highlighting the performative nature of familial and social interactions:

> "It pleases her brother to see us cordial, and that pleases me. But they are very much alike: they are spoiled children…though I humour both, I think a smart chastisement might improve them, all the same."

Through these interactions, readers initially encounter Isabella filtered through others' judgments. Only gradually does her true character—resilient, perceptive, and assertive—emerge, challenging the stereotypes imposed upon her.

II

Both Heathcliff and Catherine consistently lump Edgar and Isabella into a single homogenized category: the Lintons. This essentialist framing confines Isabella within the rigid discourse imposed upon her. Heathcliff observes of Catherine that she kindled "a spark of spirit in the vacant blue eyes of the Lintons—a dim reflection from her own enchanting face" (emphasis added). This remark exemplifies the fixed roles assigned to members of the Linton family. Consequently, when Isabella emerges after her marriage to Heathcliff as a real individual, struggling to preserve her sanity under extraordinary circumstances, readers often fail to recognize her resilience as a mark of personal strength.

Critics such as Nicholas Marsh tend to reinforce the construction of Isabella by Heathcliff and Catherine. Marsh writes:

> "Isabella rises vividly out of Heathcliff's account, with her 'silly smiles and grimaces' and her propensity to 'come sighing and wheedling to me again'. He even understands Isabella's mind and its self-deceptions, noting that she 'took that exception for herself when he said he wanted to hang her entire family except one'; and that 'it wounds her vanity to have the truth exposed.' Further, Heathcliff guesses at darker impulses in Isabella, saying 'no brutality disgusted her—I suppose she has an innate admiration of it.' This is a particularly perceptive thrust: we reconsider…when Isabella watches Heathcliff beat and kick Hindley near to death, then wakes with 'the comfort of a quiet conscience'. So, Heathcliff's account gives a vivid description of Isabella and a perceptive analysis of even hidden elements of her character."
> — Nicholas Marsh, *Emily Brontë: Wuthering Heights*, Macmillan, 1999, p. 25

Such analyses, however, preclude understanding Isabella autonomously. Marsh depends heavily on Heathcliff's perspective, presenting him as an authority on Isabella's mind and desires. He goes so far as to suggest that "there are strong signs of a sado-masochistic element in Isabella's character" (p. 96), claiming that she derives pleasure from her husband's brutality. This interpretation reflects a male-centered fantasy, valorizing the notion that Isabella enjoys her own suffering. Yet Heathcliff is her bitterest antagonist—his insight into her psyche is highly suspect. Accepting his account uncritically inevitably distorts Isabella's character.

Through the perspectives of Heathcliff and Catherine, readers are led to perceive Isabella as lacking vitality, strength, and dignity. However, a closer examination of her own experiences presents a different picture. Viewed from Isabella's vantage point, *Wuthering Heights* is as much a novel about class distinctions, constrained marital

relations, fluid personal identity, and Victorian sexuality framed by Christian morality, as it is about the passions of its central figures.

The novel meticulously depicts the hierarchical structures and behavioral codes of two contrasting households situated in the Northern English moors: Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange. At Wuthering Heights, Mr. Earnshaw and his wife, along with their children Catherine and Hindley, occupy the top tier. Below them are Ellen Dean, who served as Hindley's nurse, and Joseph, the rigid servant, representing the lower ranks. Heathcliff, the waif and outsider brought into the house by Mr. Earnshaw, occupies an ambiguous position—present yet never fully integrated. At the bottom are unnamed laborers working the estate.

At Thrushcross Grange, the hierarchy is similarly structured. Mr. and Mrs. Linton, along with their children Edgar and Isabella, occupy the privileged elite, while the household servants constitute the subordinate ranks. The rigid stratifications within and between the two houses underpin the novel's recurring conflicts, shaping interactions, power dynamics, and perceptions, including those surrounding Isabella's character. Catherine and Hareton Earnshaw at the Heights fall short in grace and elegance when compared to Edgar and Isabella Linton living at Thrushcross Grange. While Hareton adapts himself to his social position, Catherine breaches the social structure. She finds a confidant in Heathcliff and together the two constitute social deviants. Conversely, Isabella is a product of the world of narrow self-serving culture. Ever since her childhood she has had a life of comfort and ease.

III

Isabella nurtures, as women of her social positioning often do, ideas of chivalric romance, of love and passion. She has the typical feminine appearance, graceful and well looked after, but accompanied by a stubborn and destructive nature also peculiar to her class. The narrative furnishes Isabella's character with all the essential traits of a high-ranked Victorian lady. Nelly Dean tells Mr Lockwood that Isabella at the time of Heathcliff's return to Wuthering Heights, was "a charming young lady of eighteen; infantile in manners, though possessed of keen wit, keen feelings, and a keen temper, too, if irritated". Her keen temper and infantile manners are reflective of her elite upbringing. It is actually her social position that enables Isabella to determinately pursue Heathcliff. Otherwise, how is it that Isabella remains blind to Heathcliff's thorough indifference towards her? It is given in the text that Isabella's attachment to Heathcliff remains unsolicited as he shows little evidence of love for Isabella, on the contrary Heathcliff expresses strong feelings of dislike for her as in "he stared at the object of discourse (Isabella) as one might do at a strange repulsive animal: a centipede from the Indies, for instance, which curiosity leads one to examine in spite of the aversion it raises". Even though Nelly Dean claims to have secretly seen Heathcliff embracing Isabella (136), it does little to overshadow his usual disgust for her. If Isabella is even partially aware of Heathcliff's inimical feelings towards her what makes her pursue him further? Why is Isabella unable to gauge Heathcliff's evil motif when he viciously hangs up Isabella's dog, Fanny with a handkerchief before the two of them elope from the Grange? It does not altogether seem to be an outcome of her juvenile behaviour. Is it possible then that Isabella is actually aware of Heathcliff's repugnance for her and that she deliberately turns a blind eye to it for she has set her eye upon him and therefore 'must' possess him?

Here again Isabella's motives and actions are suggestive of the class culture she inhabits. The temper of her class itself is stubborn and determined to have the object it desires. The first characteristic we note about Isabella in the novel is her fitful adamancy to have the dog in her fight with Edgar as witnessed by Heathcliff and Catherine from outside the window of the house. Heathcliff says she was "screaming at the farther end of the room, shrieking as if witches were running red-hot needles into her". Accordingly, Heathcliff for Isabella is no different from the dog she desperately wanted to possess as a child. Isabella's unwillingness to yield her childish obstinacy in spite of innumerable warnings from Catherine and Nelly reveals in her the inherent ill-natured attitude of her class. The more Heathcliff reacts against it the greater is the will in Isabella to conquer him as it were. Isabella's social position enables her to nurture the idea that she is superior to Heathcliff and can therefore possess him, that Heathcliff has acquired wealth notwithstanding. Consequently it is not strange to understand why Isabella should pine and fret for a man whom she considered as a child a "frightful thing", whom Nelly terms a "nameless man",

"a bird of bad omen" who acquired wealth through mysterious means. Brought up in an environment where ideas of nobility and wealth are intertwined, Isabella is not wee-bit averse to Heathcliff's lack of it. Instead she argues "Mr. Heathcliff is not a fiend: he has an honourable soul and a true one or how could he remember her (Catherine)?" It is possible to view Isabella's sudden and strong attraction to Heathcliff as a factor restricting her from conceding to Nelly's or Catharine's view of him. As a young girl of eighteen she perhaps lacks the sense to see through his person. She terms Catherine a "poisonous friend" when the latter tells her "Pray, don't imagine that he conceals depth of benevolence and affection beneath a stern exterior! He's not a rough diamond—a pearl-containing oyster of a rustic: he's a fierce, pitiless, wolfish man". That Isabella is completely vulnerable and blind in love is again one of the conspicuous truths the text reinforces. Certain unsettling details cast doubts on such representations in the text. Mr. Kenneth, the doctor who goes to treat Catherine's illness on the same night when Isabella, elopes says to Nelly Dean "No, she's (Isabella) a sly one…she keeps her own counsel!" Therefore Isabella may be fascinated with Heathcliff's person but she nevertheless secretly nourishes a design to obtain him.

In so far as the issue of conjugal alliance and its restrictive nature is concerned, the moment Isabella enters the social relation of marriage her class position completely dismantles. Both Heathcliff and Isabella begin their marriage with a design in mind. There are two different points of view in the text, one provided by Heathcliff and the other by Isabella, on the nature of their relationship. On his side, Heathcliff is geared towards taking revenge against Edgar; his marriage with Isabella opens up the possibility of inheriting Linton's fortunes. For Heathcliff, Isabella is a mere tool employed for the purpose of gaining an advantage over Edgar. He tells Catherine "if you fancy I'll suffer unrevenged, I'll convince you of the contrary…the tyrant grinds down his slaves and they don't turn against him; they crush those beneath them. You are welcome to torture me to death for your amusement, only allow me to amuse myself a little in the same style". Heathcliff's amusement lies in torturing Isabella. It is a revenge not on Edgar alone but on the Linton family--the Linton way of life that deemed him a beggar and a waif as a child. In fact according to J Hillis Miller Heathcliff's "sadistic treatment of others is the only kind of revenge against Cathy he can take…It is also a strange and paradoxical attempt to take revenge indirectly on Cathy" (Judith O'Neill, *Critics on Charlotte and Emily Bronte,* United Book Stall, New Delhi). Nevertheless, Isabella for no fault of hers becomes a victim of Heathcliff's wrath and wickedness, she tells Nelly "He told me of Catherine's illness, and accused my brother of causing it; promising that I should be Edgar's proxy in suffering, till he could get hold of him. I do hate him—I am wretched—I have been a fool". Heathcliff exhibits an unusual abhorrence for Isabella. He goes beyond the realm of cruelty, the grisly graphic statements such as "I'd wrench them (Isabella's nails) off her fingers, if they ever menaced me" and "I have no pity! I have no pity! The more the worms writhe, the more I yearn to crush out their entrails! It is a moral teething; and I grind with greater energy, in proportion to the increase of pain" reflect Heathcliff's sheer insensitivity towards Isabella. Certainly there is no tenable defence of Heathcliff's behaviour towards Isabella.

At the same time, for Isabella also marriage with Heathcliff is a stamp of her success over him. However when Isabella becomes aware of Heathcliff's motives an altogether new conflict ensues. This takes the form of a mutual antagonism of personal wills. Isabella explicitly describes their marital combat as "he wishes to provoke Edgar to desperation: he says he has married me on purpose to obtain power over him; and he shan't obtain it—I'll die first!". Isabella's resolve to fight and not fall in Heathcliff's trap is a formal announcement of their battle. She makes it clear that Heathcliff "shan't obtain" the pleasure of defeating Edgar. Isabella makes Nelly her confidante but does not bring Edgar into the picture. She fights her own battle. However, Isabella is unable to gain victory over Heathcliff, for not only has she to fight her husband but the gruelling circumstances—a product of/ a supplement of marriage—that constantly sap her strengths.

It is important to note that in her marriage, Isabella is economically dependent on Heathcliff—a dependency that becomes a major source of power for him. Heathcliff systematically undermines Isabella's persistence by subjecting her to physical and psychological suffering. Her first day at Wuthering Heights, as described in her letter to Nelly Dean, reveals the extent of her subjugation. Firstly, Isabella is completely isolated in the house. She has no ally, no confidante with whom she can find comfort. Even her attempts to befriend the young Hareton are met with hostility. She writes to Nelly:

> "Where must I turn for comfort?...above every sorrow beside, this rose pre-eminent: despair at finding nobody who could or would be my all against Heathcliff."

Secondly, Heathcliff refuses to recognize Isabella as his wife, instead humiliating and wounding her emotionally. He tells Nelly:

> "She degenerates into a mere slut! She is tired of trying to please me, uncommonly early. You'd hardly credit it, but the very morrow of our wedding, she was weeping to go home…I'll take care she does not disgrace me by rambling abroad."

Heathcliff confines her to the house and denies her even the smallest legal or personal rights, effectively curtailing her autonomy and willpower.

Thirdly, Isabella is deprived of the physical comforts she enjoyed at Thrushcross Grange. She has no maid, insufficient food, and no private bedroom—she is relegated to a "lumber-hole smelling strong of malt and grain." The unwelcoming environment, combined with the hostility of the household, exacerbates her distress. She recounts to Nelly:

> "I was so vexed, I flung my tray and its contents on the ground; and then seated myself at the stairs-head, hid my face in my hands and cried…and so he (Joseph) went scolding to his den beneath…The period of reflection succeeding this silly action compelled me to admit the necessity of smothering my pride and choking my wrath, and bestirring myself to remove its effects."

In these circumstances, Isabella is forced to swallow her pride and adapt, as survival becomes her primary concern. Her economic dependence and the constraints of marriage leave her anxious, helpless, and vulnerable.

In her short note to her brother, she confesses:

> "…she could not help it then, and it being done, she had now no power to repeal it."

She also writes to Nelly:

> "My heart returned to Thrushcross Grange in twenty-four hours after I left it."

These statements reveal Isabella's desperate wish to return to her former stable life and underscore the psychological destabilization caused by her brutal environment.

As her life becomes increasingly intolerable, Isabella begins to adopt the very strategies of her tormentor. She grows hysterical, becomes revengeful, and experiences sub-human, animalistic impulses. Isabella evolves in response to her circumstances—a spoiled girl transforms into a calculating avenger. Life with Heathcliff exposes her to the darker emotions of the human soul: revenge, sadism, and hatred. She writes:

> "Had it been another, I would have covered my face, in the presence of such grief. In his (Heathcliff's) case I was gratified; and ignoble as it seems to insult a fallen enemy, I couldn't miss this chance of sticking in a dart: his weakness was the only time when I could taste the delight of paying wrong for wrong."

Even as she demonstrates courage and cunning, Isabella remains at a disadvantage. In a violent confrontation, she recounts:

> "…he snatched a dinner knife from the table and flung it at my head. It struck beneath my ear, and stopped the sentence I was uttering; but, pulling it out, I sprang to the door and delivered another which I hope went a little deeper than his missile."

Yet Isabella is acutely aware of her fragility and Heathcliff's superior power:

> "It is utterly impossible I can ever be revenged and therefore I cannot forgive him."

Heathcliff ultimately asserts control over both Isabella and Edgar, isolating them from their loved ones. Even after Isabella flees to London, Heathcliff maintains dominion over her infant son, Linton. He refers to Linton and Edgar's daughter, Cathy, as instruments to consolidate his power:

> "…when I want it. They may reckon on that."

Isabella's decision to name her child Linton—despite Heathcliff's aversion—is a rare act of rebellion. Yet Heathcliff's eventual acquisition of Linton following Isabella's death underscores his triumph and the continuing oppression of her lineage. Though Isabella escapes physically, she cannot protect her son, and Heathcliff's hatred transfers onto Linton, evident in his words:

> "Had I been born where laws are less strict and tastes less dainty, I should treat myself to a slow vivisection of those two (Linton and Catherine) as an evening's amusement."

Thus, what begins as a struggle between two ostensibly equal individuals becomes the revolt of the oppressed against a tyrant. Before marriage, Isabella's social standing allowed her some agency; post-marriage, she was stripped of authority, support, and security. Her position becomes increasingly vulnerable in proportion to Heathcliff's growing power, making her eventual fall inevitable.

IV

Isabella's life prior to marriage is marked by adherence to social and moral norms, but Heathcliff's entry into her world introduces a dangerous fascination. She perceives him as an outlet from the claustrophobic life at Thrushcross Grange, a man from a world completely unlike her own. In seeking freedom and excitement, she unwittingly enters into a situation that subjects her to both physical danger and moral challenge, redefining her identity under extreme circumstances.

In sum, for Isabella, conjugal life is neither a mutual pact nor the natural conclusion of passionate emotions; it marks the beginning of torture, relentless struggle, and a "battle of wills" that ultimately leads to her near-destruction. As a young provincial heiress, Isabella inhabits an illusory world of perfect happiness, having little understanding of the harsher material realities of society. She becomes infatuated with Heathcliff's robust yet genteel demeanor, constructing a romanticized image of him in her mind.

Within this world, she perceives her sister-in-law Catherine as an arch rival and the maid Nelly Dean as an accomplice of Catherine, yet she places blind trust in the stranger Heathcliff. Driven by this infatuation, she resolves to elope with him at midnight. Heathcliff, however, shows little interest in her and is repelled by her presence. After her marriage, Isabella quickly regrets her impulsive decision and longs to return to Thrushcross Grange. Heathcliff, claiming the role of her "legal protector," confines her, while her brother Edgar severs all ties with her, stating:

> "My communication with Heathcliff's family shall be as sparing as his with mine. It shall not exist."

Thus, Isabella's post-marriage life is stripped of physical comforts, emotional security, and psychological stability. Though this is not a conventional Victorian marriage, the inherent violence and oppression are unmistakable. Heathcliff denies her access to his room, finds her presence a nuisance, threatens and physically assaults her, and destroys all her dreams and aspirations. Isabella eventually describes him in extremis:

> "…he's a lying fiend! A monster and not a human being…I pray that he may forget his diabolical prudence, and kill me! The single pleasure I can imagine is to die or to see him dead."

Driven to near madness, Isabella sees little hope for happiness in her surroundings. Eventually, she manages to escape from Wuthering Heights and establishes a new life near London, though the narrative provides few details about her settlement. From this point, Isabella largely disappears from the text. We learn that she gives birth to a son, Linton, who is described as "an ailing peevish creature," and that she maintains some correspondence with Nelly Dean, though the narrative does not substantiate the details.

The final reference to Isabella occurs near the end of the novel, when Ellen Dean informs Lockwood:

> "…she had much to settle and she wished to bid him (Edgar) adieu, and deliver Linton safely into his hands."

With this, Isabella's episode comes to a close. Her story, marked by oppression, survival, and limited agency, underscores the gendered and social constraints imposed by marriage and patriarchal power in *Wuthering Heights*.

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