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The Power Of Influence

People are greatly influenced by those who are around them. In Emily Bronte's novel, *Wuthering Heights*, there are many contributing factors that steer the characters' development. It is because of the influences surrounding them that the characters evolve into their eventual selves. Heathcliff, Catherine, Hareton and Cathy are the characters that are most influenced by the people around them.

As the end of Catherine's life draws near, her character has changed into someone who has become mentally unstable. This is as a result of the many people who have had strong influences over her. Hindley is the person whose influence first starts driving Catherine mad. He treats her with cruelty and disdain after the death of her father. After a time when Hindley has been particularly mean to her, Catherine says "How little did I dream that Hindley would ever make me cry so!.. My head aches, till I cannot keep it on the pillow, and I still can't give over." (Bronte, 27) As Catherine suffers from Hindley's mental and emotional abuse, she grows to have low self-esteem and a shattered confidence. This leads her to have torturous thoughts about herself that eventually, with the added influence of others, drives her insane. To continue, when

Catherine meets the Lintons, they are not pleased with the reckless manner in which she behaves. This family is the influence that changes Catherine from the wild child she wants to be, into a proper lady. After the time she spends with the Lintons she is described as having “manners much improved [and] self-respect.. so that, instead of a wild, hatless little savage jumping in the house, there lighted from a handsome black pony a very dignified person.” (55) With the Lintons forcing Catherine to behave like someone she was not used to being, her true self is trapped inside. Over the years as she keeps her identity hidden, her reckless and wild ways flourish, waiting to be released at the end of her life when she loses her mind. Finally, Heathcliff is the one who has the strongest influence over Catherine since she is easily driven by her love for him. When Catherine discovers Heathcliff missing from the Grange, she is heartbroken. Nelly says that “...she [Catherine] burst into uncontrollable grief... I shall never forget what a scene she acted... it terrified me; I thought she was going mad.. and it proved the commencement of delirium.” (89) Heathcliff leaving weakens her emotionally as well as mentally; this is made worse when he returns at a point when she can no longer be with him. Her forbidden love for him drives her crazy and causes her to ruin any other healthy relationships she could've had. The many influences constantly surrounding Catherine eventually push her into her final state of madness.

Hareton is another character whose eventual introverted, angry self is highly influenced by the others around him. He is transformed into the harsh person the novel portrays because of the horrible things he experiences. Throughout his childhood Hareton was abused by his father, Hindley, and this heavily influences his later life and actions. As Hindley continuously abuses

Hareton, Nelly accuses him of being “worse than a heathen.. treating your own flesh and blood in that manner” (77) It is the many years of hateful treatment Hareton endures which influences his character and leads him to become an angry, distant young man. He is quick to violence now that he is older because it is all he knew as a child. Another character who has a huge influence over Hareton is Heathcliff. As Hareton shrinks away from his father, Heathcliff becomes his only ally. In the novel when Cathy is insulting Heathcliff, Hareton becomes defensive, “he wouldn’t suffer a word to be uttered to him, in his [Heathcliff’s] disparagement... he would stand by him; and he’d rather she would abuse himself.. then begin on Mr. Heathcliff.” (304) It is Heathcliff’s manipulative ways that make Hareton believe he is his only friend, and thus Hareton allows himself to be treated as a lowly servant. Under Heathcliff, he is still abused verbally and emotionally, which leads him to become even more reserved and he begins to be ashamed of himself. The torment of his early life clearly influence Hareton’s final character. He would not be the same young man who is quick to anger if he had been raised in a tender and loving home.

Cathy’s character also changes drastically from the time of her childhood to the final state the novel portrays her as due to the influences of those surrounding her. Firstly, as a young girl, Cathy’s father, Edgar, smothered her with love and affection. She was cherished and always treated with kindness. Nelly describes their relationship as one “without anger; he spoke in.. deep tenderness... to his treasure [Cathy].” (245) This causes her to be naive as well as unprepared for when she would come face to face with Heathcliff’s devilish ways. She was cared for and she was happy but that would soon change. Secondly, when Cathy is introduced to Heathcliff, she falls under his devious, influential ways and becomes spiteful as a result of the cruel treatment

she undergoes. Once, when Cathy angers Heathcliff, he “caught hold of her... his hand in her hair... he seemed ready to tear Catherine in pieces.” (304) It is the stark difference between the way, her loving father and the destructive Heathcliff, treat her that influences Cathy to turn from the sweet young girl her father raised her to be into the resentful angry woman seen at the end of the novel. Though she was once happy and carefree, Cathy now lives a burdened life, as a result of the influence the others had over her.

Heathcliff's hateful character is revealed throughout the novel, as he is greatly influenced by those around him and their behaviour towards him. It is Hindley who has a huge influence over Heathcliff, as he tortures him and abuses him all throughout his early life. Heathcliff undergoes both physical and verbal abuse, Catherine says “Poor Heathcliff! Hindley calls him a vagabond, and won't let him sit with us, nor eat with us... [he] threatens to turn him out of the house.” (27) This demeaning treatment is what first starts to bring out the evil and want for revenge within Heathcliff. It is because of the many years, during which Hindley abused him, that Heathcliff has a deep anger and hatred that sticks with him until the end. Edgar also plays a large role in the making of Heathcliff's heinous character. He brings out the worst in Heathcliff as he gets in the way of his love for Catherine. Once when Heathcliff is extremely mad, he resorts to violence on the “one [Edgar] whom he seemed to hate, even then as a rival. He seized a torrent of hot applesauce... and dashed it against the speaker's face and neck.” As the two men compete for Catherine's affection, Edgar's persistence angers Heathcliff. It is the influence of Edgar refusing to give up on his love that causes Heathcliff to become enraged as the novel continues. In addition, Catherine has a strong influence over Heathcliff's final character as she

chooses to marry Edgar, which breaks his heart. As Heathcliff confesses he is heartbroken, he says “Why did you betray your own heart Cathy? You loved me - then what right had you to leave me... for the poor fancy you felt for Linton? I have not broken your heart... you have broken mine.” (158) When Heathcliff learns of Catherine's choice, he is furious because he loved her so deeply and she did not wait for him. This definitely sets him on the path to hatred with no return. He is still stuck there years later as he continues to be cruel to everyone around him. Clearly, the other character's actions and behaviours strongly influence Heathcliff and cause him to be the bitter character seen at the end of the novel.

The influences of the other characters surrounding, Catherine, Hareton, Cathy and Heathcliff greatly impact them as they are pushed into their final state of being. Each of these four characters undergo experiences and situations, caused by those they associate with, which change the overall selves. It is clear to see that the people who one surrounds themselves with can have the greatest influences over their lives and ultimately shape their final character.

Works Cited

Bronte, Emily. *Wuthering Heights*. New York: New American Library, 1959. Print.