T55 Back to Wuthering Heights

The following extract points out the distinction between life at Thrushcross Grange and at Wuthering Heights, and hints at the beginning of Heathcliff's tragedy.

Cathy stayed at Thrushcross Grange five weeks: till Christmas. By that time her ankle was thoroughly cured, and her manners much improved. The mistress visited her often in the interval, and commenced her plan of reform by trying to raise her self-respect with fine clothes and flattery¹, which she took readily; so that, instead of a wild, hatless²

- 5 little savage jumping into the house, and rushing to squeeze us all breathless³, there 'lighted⁴ from a handsome black pony a very dignified person, with brown ringlets falling from the cover of a feathered beaver⁵, and a long cloth habit⁶, which she was obliged to hold up with both hands that she might sail in⁷. Hindley lifted her from her horse, exclaiming delightedly, 'Why, Cathy, you are quite a beauty! I should scarcely
- have known you: you look like a lady now. Isabella Linton is not to be compared with her, is she, Frances?' Isabella has not her natural advantages,' replied his wife: 'but she must mind and not grow wild again here. Ellen, help Miss Catherine off with her things – Stay, dear, you will disarrange your curls – let me untie your hat.'
- I removed the habit, and there shone forth beneath a grand plaid silk frock⁸, white trousers, and burnished shoes; and, while her eyes sparkled joyfully when the dogs came bounding up to welcome her, she dared⁹ hardly touch them lest they should fawn upon her splendid garments¹⁰. She kissed me gently: I was all flour making the Christmas cake, and it would not have done¹¹ to give me a hug; and then she looked round for Heathcliff. Mr and Mrs Earnshaw watched anxiously their meeting; thinking it would enable them to judge, in some measure, what grounds they had for hoping to
- 20 it would enable them to judge, in some mea succeed in separating the two friends.

Heathcliff was hard to discover, at first. If he were careless, and uncared for, before Catherine's absence, he had been ten times more so since. Nobody but I¹² even did him the kindness to call him a dirty boy, and bid him¹³ wash himself, once a week; and

- children of his age seldom have a natural pleasure in soap and water. Therefore, not to mention his clothes, which had seen three months' service in mire and dust¹⁴, and his thick uncombed¹⁵ hair, the surface of his face and hands was dismally beclouded¹⁶. He might well skulk behind the settle¹⁷, on beholding¹⁸ such a bright, graceful damsel enter the house, instead of a rough-headed counterpart of himself, as he expected.
- ³⁰ 'Is Heathcliff not here?' she demanded, pulling off her gloves, and displaying fingers wonderfully whitened with doing nothing and staying indoors.

'Heathcliff, you may come forward,' cried Mr Hindley, enjoying his discomfiture, and gratified to see what a forbidding young blackguard¹⁹ he would be compelled to present himself. 'You may come and wish Miss Catherine welcome, like the other servants.'

Cathy, catching a glimpse of her friend in his concealment, flew to embrace him; she bestowed²⁰ seven or eight kisses on his cheek within the second, and then stopped, and drawing back, burst into a laugh, exclaiming, 'Why, how very black and cross you look! and how – how funny and grim²¹! But that's because I'm used to Edgar and Isabella Linton. Well, Heathcliff, have you forgotten me?'

She had some reason to put the question, for shame and pride threw double gloom over his countenance, and kept him immovable.

'Shake hands, Heathcliff,' said Mr Earnshaw, condescendingly; 'once in a way, that is permitted.'

'I shall not,' replied the boy, finding his tongue at last; 'I shall not stand to be laughed at. I shall not bear it²²!' And he would have broken from the circle, but Miss Cathy seized²³ him again.

'I did not mean to laugh at you,' she said; 'I could not hinder myself²⁴: Heathcliff, shake hands at least! What are you sulky²⁵ for? It was only that you looked odd. If you

- 1 flattery. Adulazione, lusinga.
- 2 hatless. Senza cappello.
- 3 **rushing ... breathless.** Corre per stringerci fino a lasciarci
- senza fiato. 4 **'lighted.** Scese, smontò.
- feathered beaver. Cappello di
- feltro piumato.
- 6 **long cloth habit.** Lungo soprabito.
- 7 **sail in.** Entrare con disinvoltura.
- 8 a grand plaid silk frock. Un magnifico abito di seta a scacchi.
- dared. Osava.
- 10 **lest ... garments.** Per paura che le facessero festa sui suoi splendidi indumenti.
- 11 **it would not have done.** Non sarebbe stato appropriato.
- 12 but I. Tranne me.
- 13 bid him. Gli ordinava.
- 14 **in mire and dust.** Tra melma e polvere.
- uncombed. Spettinati.
 dismally beclouded.
- Cupamente offuscata. 17 **settle.** Panca.
- 18 on beholding. Nel vedere.
- 19 forbidding young blackguard. Repellente giovane canaglia.
- 20 she bestowed. Diede.
- grim. Arcigno, torvo.
 I shall not bear it. Non lo
- 22 I snan not bear it. Non lo tollererò.
 22 aviend A.C. Y
- 23 seized. Afferrò.
- 24 hinder myself. Trattenermi.
- 25 sulky. Imbronciato.

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50 wash your face and brush your hair, it will be all right: but you are so dirty!' She gazed concernedly at the dusky²⁶ fingers she held in her own, and also at her

dress; which she feared had gained no embellishment from its contact with his. 'You needn't have touched me!' he answered, following her eye and snatching away his hand.'I shall be as dirty as I please: and I like to be dirty, and I will be dirty.'

LITERARY COMPETENCE

> VOCABULARY

1 **READ** the text and match the highlighted words with their meaning.

- 6 appearance 1
- 7 completely
 8 jumping
 9 barely, hardly
 10 a young woman
 11 curled locks of hair
 12 hiding place

> COMPETENCE: READING AND UNDERSTANDING A TEXT

- 2 **READ** the text again, note down the names of the characters and say how they are related. Then explain
- where Cathy has been, how long for and why;
- what the mistress of Thrushcross Grange has tried to do;
- why Cathy hardly touches the dogs;
- what Ellen is doing when Cathy arrives;
- how Cathy's absence has affected Heathcliff;
- Hindley's attitude to Heathcliff;
- Heathcliff's behaviour towards Cathy.

> COMPETENCE: ANALYSING AND INTERPRETING A TEXT

WRITE the name of the narrator and find the lines where she makes a personal remark. What underlines this shift in the narration?



ANALYSE Catherine's character.

Pick out the phrases referring to what she was like before and after her stay at Thrushcross Grange. Fill in the table below.

Before	After

- 2 Explain the transformation she has undergone.
- 3 Point out the sentences showing that, though changed in manners, Cathy still retains her energy and vitality.

26 dusky. Scure.

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WRITE down the words and expressions referring to Heathcliff's

clothes: hair: face and hands; attitude; looks. How would you describe his personality? What insight does the passage give into the tie between Catherine and Heathcliff, and on what will eventually separate them? **CONSIDER** the two houses, Thrushcross Grange and Wuthering Heights. Say what the following phrase tell the reader about the life at Wuthering Heights: 'fingers wonderfully whitened with doing nothing and staying indoors'. What values is Thrushcross Grange associated with? FOCUS on the main theme of the text, that is, the passage from childhood to adulthood. How are these two states connoted? Are both Catherine and Heathcliff able to accept such a change? COMPETENCE: ESTABLISHING LINKS AND RELATIONSHIPS **CONSIDER** Cathy's conflict between a condition which offers few advantages and a socially acceptable one. Would you define her as a Victorian woman? **COMPETENCE: CONTRASTING AUTHORS** DISCUSS. Compare the heroines presented by Jane Austen, William Makepeace Thackeray and Emily Brontë pointing out by what means these three characters achieve improvement, and whether they must accept compromise.