

# The Byronic Hero in Emily Bronte's Wuthering Heights

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mađarskog jezika i književnosti

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**Bajronovski junak u romanu *Orkanski visovi* Emily Brontë**

Završni rad

Mentor: prof. dr. sc. Biljana Oklopčić

Osijek, 2023.

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## **Abstract**

Emily Brontë's only novel *Wuthering Heights* challenged the traditional literary conventions due to its exploration of themes of desire, violence, and complexity of human emotions. Despite the initial neglect, the novel has gained recognition as a timeless classic. The archetypal hero created by Lord Byron served as an inspiration for Heathcliff, the protagonist of *Wuthering Heights*. This paper aims to analyze Heathcliff's character by drawing upon the characteristics associated with the Byronic hero. The Byronic hero is characterized by mystery surrounding his past and origin, his vengeful nature, and passionate love. All of these are the qualities that Heathcliff possesses. Heathcliff's origins are unknown and he remains an outcast throughout the novel. He is marked by his ruthlessness and cruelty as he carries out his revenge, but he feels intense emotions and love for Catherine. Through a character study, this paper will compare Heathcliff to the Byronic hero to provide a more precise and multilayered portrayal of his character.

**Keywords:** *Wuthering Heights*, Emily Brontë, Heathcliff, the Byronic hero, Lord Byron

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## Introduction

Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) is considered one of the most intriguing novels of the Victorian Era. Although it was perceived as immoral and sinful at the time of release, the novel has secured its place as a literary classic. In *Wuthering Heights*, Brontë explores the themes of desire, violence, and complexity of human emotions. Brontë's writing was influenced by numerous individuals, the most pivotal of whom was Lord Byron. Byron's literary works and persona, which were highly significant during the Romantic Movement, left a significant impact on Brontë, which can be seen in her characters. The themes of passion, darkness, and inner turmoil, which are prevalent in Brontë's work, can be traced back to Byron's writings. He is widely regarded as the creator of the archetype of the Byronic hero, a multifaceted and mysterious character, known for his rebellious nature, brooding demeanor, and moral ambiguity.

The archetype of the Byronic hero gained popularity after Lord Byron's death in 1824. Byronic heroes are simultaneously attractive and repulsive to the reader due to their intriguing blend of captivating qualities and inherent flaws. They are often depicted as brooding, isolated figures with a rebellious nature, mysterious and dark past, and complex emotional turmoil. One of the most popular examples of the Byronic hero is Heathcliff, the protagonist of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. Heathcliff's troubled past, vengeful nature, and emotional complexity make him the epitome of the Byronic hero.

This paper will analyze the main characteristics of Heathcliff and show how they contribute to his portrayal as the Byronic hero. The first part of this paper will focus on Emily Brontë and her novel *Wuthering Heights*, providing the background and putting the novel in a literary context. The second part of the paper will focus on the origins and characteristics of the Byronic hero. The final part will compare Heathcliff to the archetype of the Byronic hero.

## 1. *Wuthering Heights*

Emily Brontë, a renowned English novelist and poet, remains a fascination in the literary world. An imaginative and creative upbringing, which often included storytelling and creating fictional worlds, perpetuated her writing from an early age. “The Brontë sisters’ childhood experiences had a considerable impact on their literary writings’ Gothic romantic atmosphere” (Kérchy 200). Their marginalization and limited exposure to society developed their desire for creativity in writing. Brontë’s writing emerged during the Victorian Era, a time characterized by significant societal and cultural changes. Published in 1847, under the pseudonym Ellis Bell, *Wuthering Heights*’ publication was at first overshadowed by her sister’s, Charlotte Brontë’s novel *Jane Eyre*. The novel’s reception was varied. Victorian society followed a strict class structure that often constrained individuals, particularly women, in their personal and artistic pursuits. In this context, Emily Brontë’s writing, including *Wuthering Heights*, represents a divergence from the conventions of Victorian literature. Although there is much recent criticism focusing on *Wuthering Heights*, upon its release it was neglected by the nineteenth-century literary criticism. Rena-Dozier attributes this to the novel’s consistency to break down the opposition between the Gothic and domestic modes by illustrating the ways in which the domestic is predicated on acts of violence (758). By inserting the archetype of the Byronic hero, Brontë’s novel cannot be considered domestic. Brontë’s exploration of gender roles, the complexities of human emotions, and the supernatural challenged the Victorian literary norms, setting her apart from her contemporaries. Heathcliff and Catherine’s relationship and their destructive love did not align with the Victorian ideals of morality and propriety. However, this non-conformist approach contributed to the novel’s status as a classic work of literature.

Brontë uses the multi-layered narrative structure and the unreliable narrator to force the reader to enter the characters’ minds. As Phyllis Bentley has observed, Brontë shows us relentless truth but also the compassion, induced by limitless understanding, for the true nature of her characters (34). She does not exonerate or excuse Heathcliff’s cruelty, Edgar’s weakness, or Catherine’s egoism, she simply portrays them. She does not blame the faulty mortals for acting in accordance with the nature fate has given them (Bentley 34). All the characters are multi-dimensional and it is difficult to label any of them as purely good or purely evil.

What is more, Emily Brontë, who was born in Thornton, uses Yorkshire moors as the setting in her works. *Wuthering Heights* is set in the wild and desolate Yorkshire moors, removed from the rest of society. The natural setting mirrors the untamed characters in the novel. The

Romantic idea of the sublime, where the frightening beauty of nature reflects the character's psychological state, is prominent in the novel. Brontë contrasts this Romantic idea with man-made culture and civilization: "The pervasiveness of nature poetry in the [Romantic] period can be attributed to a determination to idealize the natural scene as a site where the individual could find freedom from social laws" (Abrams 15). The moors are a place of solitude and the fact that they are "so completely removed from the stir of society" (Brontë 7) makes them a "perfect misanthropist's heaven" (Brontë 7). Catherine and Heathcliff's characters are mirrored in the unfriendly landscape, stormy weather, wild winds, and misty darkness. "The gloomy Gothic scenery matches the troubled psyche of the characters maddened by love" (Kérchy 212).

## 2. The Origins of the Byronic Hero

The Byronic hero is probably the most well-known character type of the English Romantic Movement. Lord George Gordon Byron, also known as Lord Byron, is both the creator and the inspiration for the archetype of the Byronic hero. The roots of the Byronic hero can be traced back to William Shakespeare and John Milton, but Lord Byron is considered to be the one who established the characteristics of the archetype. The prototype of the Byronic hero appears in his *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, published in 1812. Many scholars agree that Byron molded his hero on his own character, or rather the role he played. There are numerous parallels that can be drawn between Childe Harold and Byron himself, the most prominent one being the mention of Augusta Ada, his daughter, in the third Canto: "Is thy face like thy mother's, my fair child! Ada! sole daughter of my house and heart? When last I saw thy young blue eyes they smiled, and then we parted, --not now as we part, but with a hope" (Byron III.1-5). Furthermore, Childe Harold roams the world, having no place in society, which mirrors Byron's life. Lord Byron disregarded society and its norms, not caring for the critique he received. Although his life was marked by numerous scandals, "Byron had achieved an immense European reputation during his own lifetime" and was regarded as "one of the greatest English poets and the very prototype of literary Romanticism" (Abrams 607).

While the character of the Byronic hero was introduced by Childe Harold, the archetype was established by the protagonist of Byron's *Manfred*. Manfred exhibits several traits that make up a Byronic character. He is set apart from any authority or power, "capable of great evil who maintains a certain majesty of demeanor, . . . with dark hair and pale complexion. He is a physically compelling, virile man, terrifying yet strangely attractive" (Fry and Craig 272). He is alienated from the rest of the society by his passionate nature, greatly intimidating, and has an "appearance of gloomy magnificence" (Fry and Craig 273). Unlike the Gothic villain, the Byronic hero is a "man of feeling" (Fry and Craig 273) and all his faults can be excused because of his undying passion expressed in love for a woman.

Several critics have cited a number of literary works as possible sources for Byron's hero. Among the first works that come up are Milton's Satan from *Paradise Lost* and Shakespeare's Hamlet. Peter Thorslev further argues that all the elements of the Byronic hero are a "product of a Romantic heroic tradition" (12) as his characteristics can be found in the character of the Romantic hero who rejects authority and is alienated from the society, the examples of whom are Goethe's Werther and Faust. Additionally, Thorslev defines the Byronic hero as one of the most prominent

English literary character types: “[t]he Byronic Hero is the protagonist who in stature and temperament best represents the tradition in England” (190). The Byronic hero can also be seen as an extension of the Gothic literary period. The sense of alienation, gloom, and mystery surrounding the Byronic hero comes from the themes of melancholy, horror, and the supernatural that were explored during the Gothic period.

However, the Byronic hero should not be confused with an anti-hero. Anti-heroes lack the traditional trait of heroism and are determined to do anything to achieve their goals, with no sense of ethics or morals. In contrast, the Byronic hero operates by his own rules. He completely disregards societal norms as his personal principles fall outside conventional morality. Anti-heroes have no sense of self-identity whereas the Byronic hero is extremely conscious of himself. Sometimes, this leads to nihilism, resulting in his rebellion against life itself (Thorslev 197).

### 3. The Characteristics of the Byronic Hero

The Byronic hero possesses an array of captivating qualities, evoking an aura of otherworldliness, mystery, and melancholy. The Byronic hero is “an alien, mysterious, and gloomy spirit, superior in his passions and powers to the common run of humanity, whom he regards with disdain” (Abrams 608). This brooding nature is an essential element of his appeal. The Byronic hero is physically set apart from the norm, “bigger than life,” always above the common level. He has the qualities of an ordinary man but with greater powers, dignity, and soul. He is physically strong and healthy, always described as handsome, but not as the other men. Additionally, what sets the Byronic hero apart is his burning passion and extraordinary abilities. They are not bound by the limitations that confine the rest of the society. Whether it be his intellect, physical powers, or artistic genius, the Byronic hero possesses a superiority that sets him apart from the masses. This inherent superiority both fascinates and intimidates those who encounter him. What is more, “[h]e harbors the torturing memory of an enormous, nameless guilt that drives him toward an inevitable doom” (Abrams 608). His passions drive him to pursue his desires with an unwavering determination that borders on obsession. These passions can range from the love of a woman to intellectual pursuits or even acts of rebellion.

There is always some obscurity or mystery surrounding the Byronic hero’s birth. The reader can only speculate about his origins, which adds another layer of mystery to his character. In some cases, the circumstances of his birth are intentionally concealed. This is a deliberate act to prevent the reader from understanding the hero’s true nature. Alternatively, the birth of the Byronic hero may be clouded in ambiguity and uncertainty. The hero himself may be unaware of his true parentage and heritage. This lack of clarity regarding his identity adds an element of internal conflict as he grapples with the questions of self-identity and belonging. Often, he is an orphan or brought up in some relatively wild and uncultivated place. However, he is always depicted as being close to nature and natural life and this association gives him moral principles and a loving nature. The ambiguity surrounding his birth may also stem from supernatural circumstances, which gives his existence an aura of destiny and foreboding from the start. Ultimately, the obscurity surrounding the hero’s birth serves to emphasize his status as an outsider.

The Byronic hero possesses a certain allure that draws the reader in. He is “invariably courteous toward women, often loves music or poetry, has a strong sense of honor, and carries about with him like the brand of Cain a deep sense of guilt” (Thorslev 8). However, his crimes do

not always involve unnecessary cruelty, as do the crimes of the Gothic villain. Christianson further describes him as

a man proud, moody, and cynical, with defiance on his brow, and misery in his heart, a scorner of his kind, implacable in revenge, yet capable of deep and strong affection. . . . He feels strong passions but they tend to be bipolar and change emotions radically. They react in non-accepted socially ways, and have enormous internal conflicts. (210)

Finally, the Byronic hero is almost always in love. His love is not ordinary affection but passionate and unreasoning, beyond human understanding, often portrayed as intense and all consuming, and it becomes a hero's driving force. He is often involved in relationships deemed not acceptable by society. Love and marriage hold no meaning to him as he perceives them as mere social conventions. The Byronic hero is drawn to enigmatic love interests, someone who mirrors his own complex nature. However, his quest for love is never straightforward or blissful. In order to receive love, the Byronic hero must face numerous obstacles and conflicts. The hero's intense emotions can lead to destructive behavior, resulting in tragedy and heartbreak. Love often becomes a catalyst for growth and transformation for the Byronic hero, as he resolves the struggle with his emotions and faces the consequences of his actions.

## 4. Heathcliff as the Byronic Hero

### 4.1. The Mysterious Origins and Alienation from Society

Heathcliff has frequently been compared to the Byronic hero as he exhibits most of the traits associated with the characters from Byron's works. He is compared specifically to Manfred with his "isolated, self-tortured, proud" character (Mackay 73). According to Ceron, both are "inevitably doomed to failure" in "the tragic matrix of their role" since they refuse to "be inscribed within a shared set of values, and obey only their free will" (6).

Identity and circumstances are shaped by the specific environment in which a person exists, such as family and social class. In order to fully understand Heathcliff as the Byronic hero it is necessary to comment on his position in society, or the lack of it. Heathcliff is found abandoned on the streets of Liverpool by Mr. Earnshaw who intends to make him a part of his family at Wuthering Heights. His origins are unknown, which only reinforces the mysterious aura that surrounds him. The lack of a surname only alienates him more. Throughout the novel, Heathcliff is also presented as an embodiment of malignancy: he is introduced as a "dirty, ragged, black-haired child" (Brontë 47). At the beginning, he is dehumanized as he is referred to as "it" (Brontë 46). This foreshadows the treatment he will receive throughout his childhood at Wuthering Heights. Throughout the novel, he is called derogating names, such as a "gipsy brat" (Brontë 47) and "an imp of Satan" (Brontë 50), and described "as dark as if he came from the devil" (Brontë 47). He is considered "only half man: not so much, and the rest fiend" (Brontë 220). Even Catherine describes him as "a fierce, pitiless, wolfish man" (Brontë 127). However, it is Isabella's portrayal of Heathcliff that leaves the most lasting impression. She describes him as "a monster and not a human being" (Brontë 187).

After Mr. Earnshaw's death, Heathcliff is subject to Hindley's mercy, who abuses him mentally and physically. He is ordered to live with the servants instead of his family and is being deprived of any kind of education. Hindley considers him "as a usurper of his father's affections and his privileges" (Brontë 49). The outcome of Hindley's abuse is Heathcliff's feeling of inferiority. Nelly remarks that "[h]e seemed a sullen, patient child; hardened, perhaps, to ill-treatment: he would stand Hindley's blows without winking or shedding a tear, and my pinches moved him only to draw in a breath and open his eyes, as if he had hurt himself by accident, and nobody was to blame" (Brontë 49). His background as an orphan only intensifies this feeling. Moreover, Heathcliff feels inferior to Edgar Linton when comparing himself to Edgar. Edgar's



social status and privileged upbringing create a stark contrast to Heathcliff's background. Additionally, Edgar's manners, education, and wealth are all highly valued characteristics that Heathcliff does not possess. Heathcliff is envious even of his physical appearance: "[i]n other words, I must wish for Edgar Linton's great blue eyes, and even forehead" (Brontë 72). However, "it is Heathcliff's disaster that Catherine's love for him does not meet the needs of her social position and education" (Vargish 7). Heathcliff believes she should have endured condemnation of society in order to be with him. In his passionate love for her, he sees societal norms as insignificant. This perspective highlights Heathcliff's defiant nature. Yet, Catherine's willingness to conform in order to meet the standards of society stems from her social awareness due to the education she received, which Heathcliff was deprived of.

Brontë further describes Wuthering Heights as a place "completely removed from society" (7). The novel takes place in two settings: Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange. Their opposition is not just physical but also represents the nature of its inhabitants. The difference between the two manors is significant. Wuthering Heights are described as "grotesque, with strong, narrow windows [that] are deeply set in the wall, and the corners defended with large, jutting stones" (Brontë 10). Lockwood also explains that the word "Wuthering" refers to the "atmospheric tumult to which its station is exposed in stormy weather" (Brontë 9). Similarly, its inhabitants reflect this unpleasant environment, which is especially visible in Heathcliff's physical appearance: "brows lowering, the eyes deep set and singular (Brontë 112), and the "black eyes withdrawn so suspiciously under their brow (Brontë 8). In contrast, Thrushcross Grange, situated lower in the valley and closer to civilization, is more bright and inviting: "it was beautiful—a splendid place carpeted with crimson, and crimson-covered chairs and tables, and a pure white ceiling bordered by gold, a shower of glass-drops hanging in silver chains from the centre, and shimmering with little soft tapers" (Brontë 61).

## **4.2. The Vengeful Nature**

In comparison to traditional literary heroes, who embody virtues such as selflessness and moral righteousness, the Byronic hero defies the traditional expectations and characteristics associated with heroic figures. The Byronic hero is a morally ambiguous character. While he possesses undeniable strength of character, he is also marked by his vengeful nature and ruthlessness. Heathcliff's ruthlessness can be seen on numerous occasions. Heathcliff treats the people around him with borderline inhumane cruelty. This can be seen in a violent conflict with

Hindley in which Heathcliff “kicked and trampled on him, and dashed his head repeatedly against the flags” (Brontë 218). Linton is so scared of his father that he shudders when Heathcliff touches him (Brontë 327). Isabella claims: “I assure you, a tiger, or a venomous serpent could not rouse terror in me equal to that which he wakens” (Brontë 152). Catherine stands out as the sole exception to these feelings. Their relationship is established on their common hatred and rebellion against Hindley. This is why Heathcliff feels hurt when Catherine betrays him, seduced by the comfortable life at Thrushcross Grange.

Stein describes Heathcliff's nature as “simultaneously attractive and horrifying” (4). This duality in his character intrigues and horrifies those who interact with him. When Heathcliff unexpectedly reappears, he seems completely transformed. While he was previously described as a “dirty, ragged, black-haired child” (Brontë 47), now bewildered Nelly describes him as a “tall, athletic, well-formed man” (Brontë 119). His demeanor is so changed that Nelly gives him a title of respect “Heathcliff – Mr. Heathcliff I should say in future” (Brontë 124). Despite his transformation, his former wildness can still be seen. He is physically transformed, but underneath his looks his character remains unchanged:

His countenance was much older in expression and decision of feature than Mr. Linton's; it looked intelligent, and retained no marks of former degradation. A Half-civilised ferocity lurked yet in the depressed brows and eyes full of black fire, but it was subdued; and his manner was even dignified: quite divested of roughness, though too stern for grace. My master's surprise equalled or exceeded mine: he remained for a minute at a loss how to address the ploughboy, as he had called him. (Brontë 69)

Catherine's betrayal serves as a catalyst that only fuels his vengeful nature and his desire to take revenge against those who wronged him becomes his driving force. His revenge starts with Isabella, as a part of his revenge against Edgar Linton for taking Catherine away. Heathcliff's vengeful nature becomes evident in his initial act of revenge – his marriage to Isabella Linton. While the Byronic hero completely disregards social norms, Heathcliff is aware that in order to achieve his vengeance he must follow the established social rules. Knowing that a direct assault on Edgar would hinder his ultimate goal, Heathcliff targets Edgar's vulnerable sister instead. Heathcliff proceeds to torment Isabella and his vengeful actions further perpetuate the cycle of revenge in the next generation. Marrying Isabella grants him access to Thrushcross Grange and authority and control over its inhabitants. After Isabella's death, Heathcliff marries off his son

Linton to Cathy. Heathcliff exploits the vulnerability of both Cathy and Linton, “a pale, delicate, effeminate boy” (Brontë 245), whom he constantly manipulates. After Hindley’s death, Heathcliff acquires Wuthering Heights, which grants him the freedom to carry out his long-awaited revenge on Hareton, the last remaining Earnshaw. By subjecting Hareton to a similar cycle of mistreatment and degradation that he himself endured, Heathcliff makes him into an illiterate “brute” (Brontë 241). These examples show his ability to exploit the vulnerabilities of those around him in his quest for revenge. In this regard, Nelly observes:

Mr. Heathcliff, I believe, had not treated him physically ill; thanks to his fearless nature, which offered no temptation to that course of oppression; It had none of the timid susceptibility that would have given zest to ill-treatment, in Heathcliff’s judgment. He appeared to have bent his malevolence on making him brute: he was never taught to read or write; never rebuked for any bad habit which did not annoy his keeper; never led a single step towards virtue, or guarded by a single precept against vice. (Brontë 241)

The Byronic hero is a hero who is wronged by circumstances, which are in Heathcliff’s case several. Undeniably, his childhood, marked with abandonment and suffering, had the most profound effect on his identity. After Mr. Earnshaw’s death, Heathcliff is left to the mercy of his son Hindley, which Brontë describes in great detail:

Hindley became tyrannical. A few words from her, evincing a dislike to Heathcliff, were enough to rouse in him all his old hatred for the boy. He drove him from their company to the servants, deprived him of the instructions of the curate, and insisted that he should labour out of doors instead; compelling him to do so hard as any other lad on the farm. (Brontë 58)

It is obvious that the abuse Heathcliff experienced was severe and affected his vengeful nature. He desired to be given the privilege of “painting the house-front with Hindley’s blood” (Brontë 61). Many critics believe that Emily Brontë deliberately incorporated the vivid descriptions of Heathcliff’s abusive childhood in order to evoke compassion in the readers and to elicit sympathy for the protagonist. Arnold Kettle claims that “despite everything he does and is, we continue to sympathize with Heathcliff – not obviously, to admire or defend him, but to give him our inmost sympathy” (193). This strategy serves to humanize the characters, allowing the readers to understand the motivations behind their actions. Indeed, it is difficult to condemn Heathcliff after knowing the cause of his cruelty. In the novel, Catherine believes that Heathcliff’s cruelty rises

from the suffering and misery he has endured: “Mr. Heathcliff, you have nobody to love you; and however miserable you make us, we shall still have the revenge of thinking that your cruelty rises from your greater misery! You are miserable, are you not? Lonely, like the devil, and envious like him? Nobody loves you - nobody will cry for you, when you die!” (Brontë 349). Bernard J. Paris argues that Brontë’s characters can be regarded as realistically drawn figures because she clearly demonstrates that cruelty arises from misery, providing evidence that “bad treatment leads to vindictiveness” (241). However, this can be seen as an attempt to excuse their evil and manipulative behavior, especially Heathcliff’s.

### **4.3. The Emotional Complexity and Love**

Lutz argues that the Byronic philosophy sees love as the ultimate, and only, essential truth and final resting place for one in this life (50). Although Heathcliff appears remorseless, he is still able to feel intense emotions. This is evident in his love towards Catherine. Heathcliff and Catherine, due to the shared trauma, become overly attached to each other. The two are inseparable during childhood and so madly in love that “they forgot everything the minute they were together” (Brontë 58). The trauma, rejection, and abuse they both suffered creates a bond between the two of them that explains their intense love and dependency on one another.

The contrast between Heathcliff’s behavior towards Catherine and his behavior towards everyone else around him is striking. It seems as if all of Heathcliff’s feelings, other than hate, are reserved exclusively for Catherine. Yet, despite showing affection only to Catherine, Heathcliff has a deep understanding of human emotions. As a part of his revenge, he attempts to create the same emotional responses in others that he himself felt in childhood, the most prominent example being his behavior towards Hindley’s son Hareton. He makes him suffer in the exact same way he did – he mocks his lack of education and subjects him to verbal and emotional cruelty, often belittling and demeaning him. He takes pleasure in demeaning Hareton’s appearance and social standing. Despite his understanding of human emotion, he does not feel empathy for his victims’ suffering.

Again, Catherine seems to be an exception to that rule. In a conversation with Nelly, Heathcliff openly expresses that his only restraint from murdering Edgar Linton is his fear that it might cause pain to Catherine: “I wish you had the sincerity enough to tell me whether Catherine would suffer greatly from his loss: the fear that she would restrains me” (Brontë 183). He

recognizes that Catherine's emotional attachment to Edgar is significant and that his demise would likely cause her immense suffering. Heathcliff also sets apart his love for Catherine from the more conventional and reserved Linton's love:

And there you see the distinction between our feelings: had he been in my place and I in his, though I hated him with a hatred that turned my life to gall, I never would have raised a hand against him. You may look incredulous, if you please! I never would have banished him from her society as long as she desired his. The moment her regard ceased, I would have torn his heart out and drank his blood! But, till then- if you don't believe me, you don't know me- till then, I would have died by inches before I touched a single hair of his head! (Brontë 183)

For the Byronic hero, love is the only force that still holds meaning and Heathcliff sees Catherine as the sole purpose of his existence "I cannot live without my life! I cannot live without my soul!" (Brontë 206). Catherine reciprocates Heathcliff's feelings with the same intensity. What Catherine feels for Linton is ordinary affection, but her love for Heathcliff is overwhelming. Catherine claims:

My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods: time will change it, I'm well aware, as winter changes the trees. My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath: a source of little visible delight, but necessary. 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" (Brontë 102).

This excessive resemblance between Heathcliff and Catherine is, however, one of the reasons why their romance fails: "He shall never know I love him: and that, not because he's handsome, but because he's more myself than I am. Whatever our souls are made out of, his and mine are the same" (Brontë 100).

Furthermore, Ceron argues that Manfred and Heathcliff, "[o]nce they lose the possibility of rejoining their split selves, in the Platonic embodiment of their beloved, . . . find no alternative aim in life, but start on a journey, far away from familiar people and places. This need to flee and try to break free from the haunting past makes up one fundamental literary *topos* of all ages, that of Cain, or of the Wandering Jew" (6). Faced with Catherine's impending death, Heathcliff's ruthlessness is evident:

You teach me now how cruel you've been—cruel and false. Why did you despise me? Why did you betray your own heart Cathy? I have not one word of comfort. You deserve this. You have killed yourself. Yes, you may kiss me, and cry: and wring out my kisses and tears: they'll blight you—they'll damn you. You loved me—then what right had you to leave me? What right—answer me—for the poor fancy you felt for Linton? Because misery and degradation, and death, and nothing that God or Satan could inflict would have parted us, you, of your own will, did it. I have not broken your heart—you have broken it; and in breaking it you have broken mine. So much the worse that I am strong. Do I want to live? What kind of living will it be when you—oh, God! would you like to live with your soul in the grave? (Brontë 198)

Recognizing that there is no comfort or hope he can offer Catherine in her final moments, Heathcliff stays morally ruthless and chooses to provide her with an honest critique of her actions as Catherine can only achieve peace by understanding their relationship and what it means to Heathcliff. “The love of the Byronic hero, although attractive in its dangerousness, superhuman feelings and pathological completeness, ends up by being destructive” (Brîndaş 32). When Catherine dies, Heathcliff's behavior further exemplifies his passionate love for her. It is not enough for him to mourn her death. Instead, he becomes consumed by his own emotions to such an extent that he withdraws into a state of self-absorption. His sorrow transforms into an obsession. Nelly describes him as “going blind with loss of sleep” (Brontë 404) as Catherine's ghost causes him to suffer from insomnia: “I closed my eyes, she was either outside the window, or sliding back the panels, or entering the room, or even resting her darling head on the same pillow as she did when a child; and I must open my lids to see. And so I opened them a hundred times a-night- to be always disappointed” (Brontë 352).

Deborah Lutz argues that the Byronic hero “exiles himself from society because his consciousness creates the world as a mirror of his hellish mind, thus becoming an interior space where all is bereft of meaning” (55). When Catherine dies, Heathcliff's life mirrors his anguish and the outside world provides him no comfort. He alienates himself as he stays imprisoned in his past and grief. He dreams about his reunion with Catherine in afterlife as well as about being haunted by her ghost in this life:

I pray one prayer—I repeat it till my tongue stiffens—Catherine Earnshaw, may you not rest as long as I am living; you said I killed you—haunt me, then! The

murdered do haunt their murderers, I believe. I know that ghosts have wandered on earth. Be with me always—take any form—drive me mad! Only do not leave me in this abyss, where I cannot find you! Oh, God! It is unutterable! I cannot live without my life! I cannot live without my soul! (Brontë 206)

Heathcliff desperately summons her to return from death: “Cathy, do come. Oh do—once more! Oh! My heart’s darling! Hear me this time –Catherine, at last!” (Brontë 39). He welcomes his torture as it is the only way he can be reunited with his love. Catherine’s death presents the ultimate suffering for Heathcliff. With it, he becomes completely isolated.

## Conclusion

Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* is prized for its multi-layered narrative structure, captivating plot, and emotional intensity. Since its publication, the novel has provoked diverse reactions due to its depiction of unconventional relationships and morally ambiguous characters. The novel challenges the conventional expectations and norms set by the Victorian literary world. While the Victorian era was characterized by societal constraints, moral values, and a focus on domesticity, *Wuthering Heights* disrupts these expectations by delving into the themes of passion, violence, and the supernatural.

The archetype of the Byronic hero owes its popularity largely to Lord George Gordon Byron. Not only was it created by Lord Byron but he also served as his inspiration. While the origins of the Byronic hero can be traced back to Shakespeare and Milton, Byron solidified his characteristics in his works *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and *Manfred*. The Byronic hero possess a captivating set of qualities that set him apart from the norm. He is of mysterious and unknown origin, exuding a sense of gloom and superiority towards ordinary people, whom he often regards with disdain. What distinguishes the Byronic hero is also his intense and burning passion that often consumes him, whether it is love or a thirst for revenge. However, his intense emotions can often lead to destructive behavior.

Heathcliff, the protagonist of *Wuthering Heights*, perfectly embodies the traits and characteristics of the Byronic hero. His troubled past, marked by abuse and humiliation, fuels his desire for revenge. Heathcliff torments those who wronged him while carrying out his revenge. Despite his apparent lack of remorse, his ability to feel intense emotions is evident in his love towards Catherine. Heathcliff's capacity for both love and hatred makes him simultaneously attractive and repulsive to the readers.



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