

# Heathcliff - A “Hellish Villain” or a Victim of Trauma?

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Heathcliff – A “Hellish Villain” or a Victim of Trauma?

Završni rad

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## 1. Introduction

*Wuthering Heights*, a novel by Emily Bronte published in 1847, is perhaps one of the most famous literary works of all time, and the reason for its popularity may just hide in the fact that no matter how much time passes, readers will find new and creative ways to interpret it.

Like other novelists from the Victorian period, Bronte uses fiction as a tool for fighting the social injustice of the era. The Bronte sisters, Charlotte, Emily, and Anne were known for never shying away from showcasing concerns about child abuse and domestic violence in their works, especially through the ability to “express the deepest emotions of their characters in powerful and affecting ways” (Morris 157). After its publication in 1847, *Wuthering Heights* found itself under public scrutiny and was believed to be a controversial and sinful novel. According to Suzuki, who examined reviews published in the year of the first edition, readers used words such as “unpleasant,” “repulsive,” “coarse,” “painful,” and “strange” to describe the novel (109). This was because novels were generally regarded as a form of entertainment, and therefore, depressing and dark stories were not in favor of the audiences. Despite the growing demand for realistic novels, people still believed that books ought to be a pleasant experience so that readers could escape from unpleasant reality. The dark tone, accompanied by descriptions of physical pain and brutality, seemed inappropriate for family readings and was not seen by the general public as something they wanted to read about. Although the novel was harshly criticized, some contemporary reviewers recognized the enormous potential of *Wuthering Heights*, calling it a strange book with excessive qualities and a colossal promise (Suzuki 111). Due to such beliefs, Emily Bronte, along with her writing, was considered different from her sisters Charlotte and Anne.

While there were several people who helped bring this artistry to life, one individual is of utmost significance for this thesis – Lord Byron, a highly influential figure of the English Romantic period and the creator of the character later known as the “Byronic Hero.” Due to this, Bronte’s only work is considered as “displaying Romantic features while inhabiting a Victorian framework” (Gonzalez Diaz 7).

In other words, the archetypal hero coined by Byron provided a model for Heathcliff, the protagonist of *Wuthering Heights*. In the novel, he is depicted as a dark and complex individual. His problematic past, self-destructive behavior, and inner turmoil make him the epitome of the Byronic hero. The entire plot centers around this mysterious man who enters *Wuthering Heights* as an orphan and until his death remains a high-powered landlord. The evolution of his character may be why he is regarded as the character that holds great intrigue in the English literature.

The aim of this paper, therefore, is to examine the portrayal of Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* in order to assess whether he is primarily a victim of long-term abuse and a broken heart, resulting in PTSD, or whether he is merely the perpetrator of said abuse. This paper will provide a comprehensive analysis of his character and experiences to support this argument. Specifically, the second chapter will offer an outline of Heathcliff and his life in *Wuthering Heights*. The third chapter will examine his character and argue that he can be seen as a Byronic hero. The focus here will be on exploring his complex and mysterious nature, his rebelliousness, as well as his struggle with inner demons. The fourth chapter will look into the concept of the Byronic hero and his connection to trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder on the example of Lord Byron’s *Manfred* to pave the way for discussing Heathcliff’s connection to trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder. Finally, in chapter five, the author will analyze how Heathcliff’s

traumatic experiences, such as abusive upbringing and lost love, contributed to the development of PTSD symptoms and shaped his actions and relationships throughout the novel.

## **2. Who is Heathcliff?**

From his very arrival to Wuthering Heights as a foundling, Heathcliff is presented as an embodiment of darkness, which is stressed several times throughout the novel. Mr. Earnshaw, who had found him on his journey to Liverpool, depicts him as “dark almost as if it came from the devil” (Bronte 43). On different occasions, Hindley addresses Heathcliff as an “imp of Satan” (Bronte 46) and a “hellish villain” (Bronte 141). Characters like the mild Edgar Linton, Isabella Linton, and even Ellen describe him as a diabolical being at least once in the novel, with Edgar describing him to young Cathy as a “most diabolical man, delighting to wrong and ruin those he hates” (Bronte 222). Even Heathcliff himself once exclaimed to Isabella Linton, whom he would elope with in order to cause her brother, Edgar Linton, pain and have access to her fortune, “You would imagine I was the devil himself, Miss Linton, to excite such horror” (Bronte 266).

The ragged, black-haired child brought home by Mr. Earnshaw doesn't have a name, social status, or possessions of any kind. At Wuthering Heights, Catherine Linton is the sole person apart from her father who exhibits affection toward Heathcliff. In contrast, her brother, Hindley, regards him as competition for their father's affection and heirship, resulting in regular mistreatment. The housekeeper, Nelly, who grew up alongside the family, often reminds Heathcliff that he is an outsider and does not belong there, referring to him as a “stupid little thing” (Bronte 44). She also says “From the very beginning he bred a bad feeling in the house” (Bronte 45).



Arguably, all of the mental and physical cruelty that Heathcliff underwent in his childhood at Wuthering Heights had an intense effect on him and could be seen as a trigger for everything that goes wrong in the end. For example, Saleh proposes that Heathcliff can be analyzed as both a victim and a perpetrator. The turning point when he becomes the latter is when Catherine, after kissing him on the cheek, laughs in his face and calls him “black and cross” and “funny and grim” (Saleh, “Child Abuse” 8). It is evident that this causes him immense pain and significantly shapes his character in the remaining part of the story. He undergoes a transformation and ceases to be the meek child who silently tolerates mistreatment; instead, he chooses to resist and fight back. Attaining the status of the oppressor, he plans to take revenge on Hindley and the Linton family by exploiting and degrading their children in the exact same way that he once was exploited and degraded. He becomes worse than his oppressors, Edgar and Hindley, and is transformed into an exploitative and bitter villain incapable of redemption (Al Balola and Ibrahim 351).

The different types of neglect and abuse that he had faced as a foundling are reflected in his treatment of other people around him – in his view, no one was worth his trust and respect, and his reaction towards the injustice he endured as a young man was anger, rage, and vengeance. His attitude would eventually destroy both the people around him and himself. Despite presenting himself as a powerful and superior being to other members of the household, he had low self-esteem and was extremely fragile. He employed these strategies in order to protect himself from feelings of distress and recollections of negative experiences, with the goal of lessening the trauma he had endured in the past.

### 3. Heathcliff as a Byronic Hero

The Byronic hero is perhaps one of the most recognizable fictional personas of the Romantic period. The term was coined by Lady Caroline Lamb in her novel *Glenarvon* (1816) and used to target Lord Byron, after whom it was named. Nowadays, the term generally refers to the main characters in works by Lord Byron, such as Childe Harold in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812) or Manfred in *Manfred* (1817), or to characters who share similar characteristics with the aforementioned writer (Hsu 1), such as Lord Ruthven in John William Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819) and Victor Frankenstein in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; Or; The Modern Prometheus* (1818). The Byronic hero has come to inspire many authors and artists, becoming the prototype of numerous characters of the Romantic period, as well as those in the Victorian era. Even today, the archetype can be found in popular culture, albeit in a slightly modified form, such as Dream of the Endless from Neil Gaiman's graphic novel *The Sandman* (1989-) and Edward Cullen in the *Twilight* series written by Stephanie Meyer (2005-2020).

While the conventional literary hero is marked by his valor, intrinsic goodness, courage, and utter selflessness (Villar Rodriguez 7), the Byronic hero possesses contrasting attributes that contradict typical perceptions of heroism. One of them is that he could be considered as a rebel. Although he may possess some kind of "heroic virtue," he also has many dark qualities. This persona is described as a "fatal homme" (Mangione 13), a "noble outlaw" (Villar Rodriguez 6), a passionate man with a dark and mysterious past, who carries perpetual longing and guilt.

The typical traits of the Byronic hero include being an outsider and a wanderer, who is sometimes exiled due to external factors or self-imposed. He tends to possess intelligence, cynicism, sensitivity, charm, craftiness, and arrogance. Additionally, he often engages in

behavior that is self-destructive, leading to rebellion against society and life (Brândas 26). He is constantly torn between extremes – a stoic personality, which he maintains outwardly, versus extreme emotions, which he keeps hidden from others; his villainous appearance is juxtaposed with compassionate actions. There is a perpetual conflict with with his own inconsistencies, as well as with the norms and power structures of society (Van Zeldert 6).

The reason why characters like these are so sympathized with on the one hand, and so demonized on the other, is because of their questionable morals and perpetual searching for wholeness, which, when combined, creates an irresistible blend that easily appeals to the audience's imagination. Many people are familiar with the Byronic hero's internal conflict regarding his identity, flaws and secrets, and the portrayal of this curse through an imperfect character evokes sympathy within readers. Moreover, Mangione also mentions in her paper that one of the reasons why the Byronic hero transforms into a misanthropic individual, separated from the rest of society, and who feels that his life and existence no longer have meaning, is due to the death of his love interest (14), just as it happened to Manfred, who had to mourn his beloved Astarte because of their unnamed sin.

Heathcliff, a character created by Emily Bronte, is frequently identified as a Byronic hero due to the fact that he possesses many of the qualities found within the literary works of George Gordon Byron. In order to investigate Heathcliff's alignment with the archetype of the Byronic hero and how he differs from the inhabitants of Thrushcross Grange, such as Edgar Linton, his character can be analyzed based on his physical appearance, the descriptions given by other characters in the novel, and his behavior.

First, a few words about how Heathcliff differs from the inhabitants of Thrushcross Grange. When we start reading the novel, at first glance we may feel that it is a book about love and the obstacles that the two lovers must overcome in order to reach their happy ending.

However, that is not what happens. The impossible love between Catherine and Heathcliff causes him to become increasingly alienated from social life. Even Brontë refers to this situation of isolation in her work, referring to *Wuthering Heights* as a “situation so completely removed from the stir of society,” as well as a “perfect misanthropist’s Heaven” (11). The novel is set in two different locations, one of them being *Wuthering Heights*, and the other *Thrushcross Grange*, both of which are situated in the moors of Yorkshire, in the north of England. They symbolize the temperaments and attitudes of the characters that reside there. *Wuthering Heights* exudes a chilly and dreary atmosphere, in contrast to the lively and inviting vibe of *Thrushcross Grange* and its occupants. Therefore, this highlights not only the difference between Heathcliff and Edgar Linton, but also between the other inhabitants of the two houses. Edgar and the rest of the residents of *Thrushcross Grange* are portrayed as perfect hosts who treat their guests with respect and kindness. On the other hand, the latter man is described in the first sentence of the novel as “the solitary neighbour” (Brontë 11) who has a tendency to get irritated by the presence of others and prefers being on his own. Undoubtedly, the gap between the two residences signifies more than just a geographical separation, as it embodies the alienation between the two households.

Secondly, the stereotypical physical appearance of a Byronic hero can be seen in Heathcliff: he has dark hair (Brontë 43), black eyes (11), a tall (101), and handsome figure, accompanied by dark skin (13), and a gloomy countenance (59). When he returns to *Wuthering Heights* after being absent for years, Nelly is amazed to see how much he has transformed: “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” (101). This description creates a dark yet attractive and passionate impression of Heathcliff’s appearance and character, which seems to be quite in line with other Byronic heroes. Although he has undergone physical changes, in

the inner core of his being, under the guise of a gentlemanly manner, remains the same sinister man who is tormented by his tumultuous history and is forced to endure an “unbearable present” (Bríndas 31). Despite his potential to grow and enhance his life situation, his past experiences obstruct his ability to move forward.

Third, Mr. Lockwood’s description gives more insight into how outsiders perceive him: “He is a dark-skinned gipsy in aspect, in dress and manners a gentleman: that is, as much a gentleman as many a country squire: rather slovenly, perhaps, yet not looking amiss with his negligence, because he has an erect and handsome figure; and rather morose” (13). These words reveal to us what kind of hero Heathcliff is and foreshadow the life experiences he has had over the years, that have also affected his character. He is a man who has sinned and lives to seek vengeance upon the world that has drawn out his dark potential and distorted his good side.

Fourth, as for Heathcliff’s behavior – there are moments in the novel where it is shown that Heathcliff is capable of deep feeling and compassion, which forces us to reconsider our judgement of his character. Although cruel and brute, he has gone so far as to escort Mr. Lockwood to Thrushcross Grange, where the servants who believed their master had died in the storm, receive him with joy. Nevertheless, despite these redemptive qualities that Heathcliff occasionally displays, it is still exceedingly difficult to ever redeem him, as the Byronic hero is known to be stigmatized by a dark secret from his past. In Heathcliff’s case, the mysterious aura surrounding him is much more pronounced since his origins are unknown. There are some clues to suggest that Heathcliff may be the illegitimate child of Mr. Earnshaw, yet the enigma surrounding his origins remains unsolved, leaving him as an otherworldly creature who is unable to assimilate into society.

Apart from his mysterious past, it is his emotional complexity that makes him a desirable Byronic hero-villain. Stein depicts the threat the Byronic hero poses to his lover’s

independence, autonomy, and life, and highlights the irresistible and dangerous physical attraction he emanates (25). Through the relationship between Heathcliff and Catherine, Emily Bronte provides her readers with an ideal fantasy of a stormy and passionate love in which both parties identify completely with one another. She does, however, warn her readers not to invest too much in the fantasy – Catherine inevitably dies from not being able to prevent her affair with Heathcliff from affecting her marriage.

In other words, as attractive as he may seem, the Byronic hero does not have a heart of gold and will make a dysfunctional and savage spouse, a fact that is even more evident in the relationship between Isabella and Heathcliff. After Isabella confesses her love for Heathcliff to Catherine, she tries to change her mind about marrying the man: "...and he'd crush you like a sparrow's egg, Isabella, if he found you a troublesome charge" (Bronte 108). Heathcliff's savagery and cruelty become clear later when he describes how he hanged Isabella's pet dog, Fanny, on the day they eloped: "The first thing she saw me do, on coming out of the Grange, was to hang up her little dog; and when she pleaded for it, the first words I uttered were a wish that I had the hanging of every being belonging to her, except one" (Bronte 154). He shows neither remorse for this action nor empathy for his spouse. As a result, the allure of a hero's love may seem enticing in its riskiness, but ultimately it becomes ruinous.

Regarding Catherine and Heathcliff's relationship – the only way for the Byronic duos to come together again is through death. Heathcliff desires to be tormented by the ghost of his beloved Cathy: "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!" (Bronte 170). He also attempts to invoke her return from the dead: "Come in! come in!" he sobbed. "Cathy, do come. Oh, do—once more! Oh! my heart's darling! hear me this time, Catherine, at last!" (Bronte 36). He has decided to welcome his

demise with open arms, because he is aware of the fact that he can be reunited with his beloved only if he dies.

To conclude, the aim of this chapter was to position Heathcliff as a Byronic hero based on physical and behavioral traits usually associated with this Romantic literary type. The following chapter will focus on trauma and resulting post-traumatic stress disorder that are often associated with the Byronic hero. After outlining the theoretical framework of the connection between trauma, PTSD, and the Byronic hero and examining it through the example of Lord Byron's *Manfred*, the most pronounced example of the archetype, the fifth chapter will examine it in relation to Bronte's *Heathcliff*.

#### **4. The Byronic Hero, Trauma, and PTSD**

This chapter will be dedicated to the analysis of the phenomenon of trauma, which, according to Adams, was considered inherently feminine in the Victorian era, meaning that being a woman automatically meant being traumatized (3). Our present beliefs about trauma are directly influenced by this notion, although the topic receives far more attention today because its effects on both women and men can begin in childhood and continue into adulthood. Hu's research from 2016 indicates that despite women being more prone to developing post-traumatic stress disorder after a traumatic experience, men encounter a higher number of life-traumatic events (22). According to Saleh, some of the most common residual effects of such events are lack of trust, aggression or anger, relational imbalances, anxiety and fears, and intimacy disturbances ("Heathcliff and Snape" 324). Hence, understanding these effects is essential for the comprehension of the behavior and choices of the Byronic hero, allowing for a more informed and nuanced analysis of the characters and their stories.

Trauma theory may have thrived during the 1990s when the long-needed insight into symptoms following traumatic experiences was being established, but if we read Lord Byron's works and try to understand the underlying cause of the Byronic hero's behavior, we can come to the conclusion that he was familiar with it before it was first professionally discussed and diagnosed. As noted previously, scholars agree on the definition of the Byronic hero as an individual who is plagued by guilt and despair and is cosmically and socially alienated. Scholars have largely overlooked the traumatic experiences and the resulting trauma presented in works of Lord Byron, with the exception of Matt Chapelsky, the author of *Natural Descriptions After Trauma*, who acknowledged the trauma of *Manfred's* Manfred and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner's* Mariner back in 2005. Both of them are unable to come to terms with their pasts and therefore must revisit them. However, what makes these characters so different is the way they come to terms with their "crimes." The Mariner does this by voicing his guilt throughout the poem by telling his tale, while Manfred refuses to verbalize what he had done in the past (Chapelsky). He is not open to acceptance, which is why he will never be welcomed back into society.

Due to the lack of publications on this topic, the objective of this section, therefore, is to establish a link between the Byronic hero, trauma, and the resulting post-traumatic stress disorder using Lord Byron's *Manfred* as an example in order to "validate" the analysis of this link in chapter five using Heathcliff as an example. Since Emily Bronte was influenced by the Byronic hero in creating Heathcliff, validating the connection will allow for a deeper analysis of Heathcliff's behavior than simply attributing it to his "demonic" nature.

A defining characteristic of the Byronic hero is that he is deeply affected and shaped by his traumatic past experiences, leading to a complex portrayal of his persona that highlights his flaws, inner conflicts, and unconventional attitudes toward morality and societal norms.



Whether the trauma results from incest or also known as “unnamed crime” (which we may observe in *Manfred's* Manfred and Astarte), it is evident that the hero must come to terms with the consequences of his past deeds, which may lead us to conclude that he may be suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. This section will examine the post-traumatic stress disorder of Manfred, whom Lara Assaad refers to as the “Byronic hero par excellence” (153), as out of all Byronic heroes, his symptoms are the most evident, which is why he is considered by some to be a “stereotype” for said hero (Brîndas 28).

According to the fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, published by the American Psychiatric Association, the “essential feature of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is the development of characteristic symptoms following exposure to one or more traumatic events” (*DSM-5* 274). The manual presents the standards for diagnosis of PTSD applicable to individuals aged six and above, including adults, adolescents, and children, all of which include “exposure to traumatic events,” mentioned under Criterion A (271), followed by “presence of intrusion symptoms,” which can be found in Criterion B (271). Furthermore, the manual mentions “avoidance” under Criterion C (271), “negative alternations in cognitions and mood” in Criterion D (272), while “alternations in arousal and reactivity” are noted under Criterion E (272). Next, the duration must be over one month, as is written in Criterion F (272), and the distress must be “clinically significant” according to Criterion G (272). Finally, Criterion H emphasizes that the disturbance must not be “attributable to the effects of substances and other medical conditions” (272).

The trauma may result from confrontation with death or danger to life, injuries that require urgent care, or even sexual violence. The images of the trauma may enter an individual’s subconsciousness in the form of recurring distressing dreams, flashbacks, and hallucinations, that are in one way or another connected to the event that caused said trauma, and are making

the victim re-live the incident (*DSM-5* 271). Throughout Byron's *Manfred*, Manfred's main concern is the death of his lover. The memories that linger in a person's past can serve as a key to unlocking the past traumatic events, especially if the person has difficulty recognizing the event that caused the trauma. The moment when the Byronic hero's traumatic past invades his present life can be found early in Act II of *Manfred*, where Manfred becomes agitated after being offered a cup of wine in order to calm him down. However, instead of seeing wine, he sees "blood upon the brim" (Byron, Act II, scene 1, line 21 qtd. in Assaad 153), and so his erratic behavior leads the chamois hunter to believe that he has lost his mind. In Act I of *Manfred*, Manfred delivers a soliloquy in which he says, "...and yet I live, and bear / The aspect and the form of breathing men" (Byron, Act I, scene I, lines 7-8). Here he describes the feeling of inadequacy with himself as a living human being; he is in a state of hopelessness and has a negative image of himself and humanity. The *DSM-5* provides a list of indicators that practitioners can use to diagnose PTSD in adults, adolescents and children older than six, which may be found under Criterion D: "Persistent and exaggerated negative beliefs about oneself, others or the world (e.g., 'I am bad')" (*DSM-5* 272). Furthermore, Criterion E mentions sleep disturbances, and Manfred concurs with this, stating in his soliloquy that: "My slumbers—if I slumber—are not sleep, / But a continuance of enduring thought..." (Byron, Act 1, Scene 1, lines 3-4), implying that he cannot stop thinking and is incapable of falling asleep. Manfred's feelings of detachment from others (presented in Criterion D) can also be seen as symptoms of PTSD. After being consumed by shame and grief over the death of his beloved Astarte, he withdraws from others and has difficulty trusting them, which later leads to social isolation and a sense of loneliness. His loneliness, though, can be seen as a coping mechanism he uses to deal with his trauma. By isolating himself, he avoids situations that might trigger memories of his distressing experiences.

One thing Manfred wishes for is forgetfulness – he wants to leave everything behind and be absolved of the memories of what he has done. Assaad argues that while some individuals may experience amnesia, others suffer from hypermnesia, which is the improvement or the enhancement of memory (155). Thus, when we reconsider the scene with the glass of wine, we can see that the imaginary blood on the rim triggers a memory, or rather, a re-enactment of Astarte’s death. Prior to this scene, readers are only aware of Manfred’s desire to erase whatever is troubling him. At this moment, however, Manfred begins to reveal the story of Astarte’s death. He could not prevent it. Perhaps he was even the cause of it, and this has deeply traumatized him. Moreover, it has also led him into a state of “emotional numbness”, which can be found under Criterion D in the *DSM-5* (272). To him, there is no life after Astarte’s death: “Since that all—nameless hour. I have no dread, / And feel the curse to have no natural fear, / Nor fluttering throb, that beats with hopes or wishes, / Or lurking love of something on the earth.” (Byron, Act I, scene I, lines 24-27). Nothing can help him endure life, so he makes numerous efforts to find a way to be with Astarte once again. However, when his pleas are unanswered by the spirits, he contemplates ending his life by leaping from the Jungfrau Mountain (as seen in Criterion E, characterized by outbursts and reckless, self-destructive behavior), which also ends with Manfred being denied death.

As we have seen, the Byronic hero, or more specifically, Manfred exhibits various symptoms, such as hallucinations, exaggerated negative beliefs about himself and the world, a negative emotional state, estrangement from others, sleep disturbances, and even suicidal thoughts, all of which can be symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. Having established the link between the Byronic hero in general, trauma, and PTSD, the following chapter examines it using Heathcliff as an example, bearing in mind that he himself has already been positioned as a Byronic hero in chapter three.

## 5. Heathcliff, Trauma, and PTSD

As mentioned earlier, this section will explore the possibility of seeing Heathcliff as a character suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder through the analysis of several scenes depicting the trauma he has suffered throughout his life and the effects it has had. Apart from that, the chapter will also take into consideration the controversial question of whether Heathcliff is, as some see him, a villain or a victim of a lifetime of abuse and heartbreak. The character written by Emily Bronte is extremely complex and develops throughout the novel, which is why both his childhood and adult life ought to be included in the analysis.

Heathcliff is not warmly received into the family as a child. This relates to both Criterion A – immediate exposure to traumatic events – and Criterion F – when the duration of the disturbances is longer than one month (*DSM-5* 272), as Heathcliff has been exposed to these events throughout his life. As for Criterion A – from his very first day at Wuthering Heights, Heathcliff is deprived of his humanity, as Nelly repeatedly refers to him as “it” in her description of their first encounter: “...and Mrs. Earnshaw was ready to fling *it* out of doors” and “What he meant to do with *it*” (43; emphasis added). This pronoun is meant to be derogatory; it reflects her negative perception of him and her attempt to distance herself from him. Also, after their first encounter, the children do not want to let him sleep in the same room as them, so Nelly leaves him on the stairs “hoping *it* might be gone on the morrow” (44; emphasis added). In their eyes, Heathcliff is less than an animal and is treated as such.

However, this is not the only instance of violence projected onto Heathcliff by the Earnshaw family, which points toward Criterion F. For example, Catherine notes in her diary the verbal and physical abuse he has to endure daily: “Hindley calls him a vagabond, and won’t let him sit with us, nor eat with us any more; and, he says, he and I must not play together, and threatens to turn him out of the house if we break his orders” (30). Moreover, we also learn of

Hindley Earnshaw's bullying, and how Heathcliff "would stand Hindley's blows without winking or shedding a tear" (44), showing that Heathcliff did not try fighting back, and instead learned to take insults from other members of the family. This passive attitude would later turn out to be a desire for revenge against those who had wronged him in the past. This behavior could also be seen as an attempt to regain control of his life and a way of asserting power. Hindley's mistreatment of Heathcliff after the death of Mr. Earnshaw is a pivotal moment in both Heathcliff's character development and in the unraveling of events that follow. He isolates Heathcliff and demotes him to the status of a mere servant, effectively catalyzing a sequence of unfortunate events. Hindley's constant humiliation provides ammunition for his vendetta against his descendants. Raymond B. Flannery refers to this sad, yet ironic outcome of untreated trauma in his paper, saying that "some victims of violence themselves become violent toward others subsequent to their own victimization" (232).

It can be asserted that Heathcliff lacked a secure setting to grow his identity right from the start. When a person is unable to process or come to terms with a traumatic experience, they are bound to repeat it over and over again ("The Cycle of Violence"). This pattern of behavior is called the cycle of violence, and that is what happens to Isabella after they get married, and later to Linton, Hareton, and Cathy. Heathcliff, fueled by his deep-seated desire for revenge, verbally and physically abuses Isabella. He isolates her from her family, as we can see from his words: "No; you're not fit to be your own guardian, Isabella, now; and I, being your legal protector, must retain you in my custody, however distasteful the obligation may be" (155). Hareton, on the other hand, embodies the mistreatment Heathcliff once endured at the hands of Hindley, so that Heathcliff inflicts pain and suffering on him that mirrors the torment he himself once lived through.

Gimenez adds in her paper that Heathcliff normalizes violence in order to survive it (7). Basically, violence is a coping mechanism for him. This is evident in Nelly's description of Heathcliff: "He seemed a sullen, patient child; hardened, perhaps, to ill-treatment" (44). This quote suggests that he had experienced so much pain and hardship throughout his life that it had become something he was accustomed to. Moreover, his angry outbursts and verbal and physical aggression toward the residents of Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange can be connected to Criterion E of the *DSM-5* (272), which marks notable changes in arousal and reactivity that either began or intensified after the traumatic event, including behaviors such as aggression and destructive actions. This can be seen in the way he refers to his wife Isabella – "a mere slut" (152) – after hanging her little dog. Another example of his physical aggression and angry outbursts is shown when young Catherine tries to grab the keys to escape Wuthering Heights, but instead is repeatedly hit on the head: "...he seized her with the liberated hand, and, pulling her on his knee, administered with the other a shower of terrific slaps on both sides of the head, each sufficient to have fulfilled his threat, had she been able to fall" (267). This is just one of many incidents that showcase Heathcliff's brutality towards those weaker than himself.

What helps Heathcliff move forward and continue to live in his own personal hell, Wuthering Heights, is his intense friendship with Catherine. In one scene he approaches Nelly, exclaiming: "Nelly, make me decent, I'm going to be good" (61). This line is closely connected to Criterion D, which indicates that the person may feel persistent negative beliefs about themselves (*DSM-5* 271). By saying this, he wants to imply that the traits of being "decent" and "good" are not applicable to him, which actually stems from years of name-calling and psychological abuse. This sentence also shows that he is only concerned with Cathy's perception of him, which in itself is not a criterion for diagnosis of PTSD, but the loss of Catherine and the bond they shared and the intense emotions and memories associated with her

could have triggered his condition. Emily Bronte undermines this statement by having it follow directly after Heathcliff's statement that he likes "to be dirty" and "will be dirty" (60).

Needless to say, his life revolves around Catherine, and when she dies, it is almost as if a part of his own soul dies as well. It is obvious that he is emotionally dependent on Catherine, a fact that has great consequences. Her untimely death triggers his downfall, and so he commands her ghost to haunt him because he would rather stay in touch with his memory of her than live his present life without her in it. He is completely tormented by her death and thus loses interest in life, wanders around, and neglects his health.

The villainous Heathcliff becomes possibly suicidal around this time. The cause of his death is never revealed to the readers, but Nelly suggests that in his last days, he refused food and water, could not sleep, and isolated himself from society, which subsequently led to serious illness and mental instability. According to Criterion G and Criterion E, this checks out – the trauma causes severe impairment in several important areas of functioning (*DSM-5* 272), as well as sleep disturbances and self-destructive behavior. He spent his last days wandering around, talking to himself, and telling Nelly he was "within sight of my heaven" and that he had "his eyes on it" (323). This suggests that he knew he was going to die, and that he even welcomed it because it meant that the end of his painful existence was near, and he could finally join Catherine. He expresses this desire at certain points in the story, such as: "['] Oh, God! it is unutterable! I cannot live without my life! I cannot live without my soul!' He dashed his head against the knotted trunk; and, lifting up his eyes, howled, not like a man, but like a savage beast being goaded to death with knives and spears" (170). It is evident that the pain of losing Catherine, combined with his feelings of abandonment and betrayal definitely contributed to his emotional turmoil and exacerbated his symptoms of PTSD over time.

To conclude this chapter, it is safe to say that the character of Heathcliff exhibits several indications of post-traumatic stress disorder as outlined in the *DSM-5*, starting with Criterion A – which notes that Heathcliff was exposed to traumatic events upon arriving at Wuthering Heights. Next, the duration of violence projected onto him points toward Criterion F, indicating that Heathcliff suffered continuous abuse, while his destructiveness and physical and verbal aggression towards several different characters can be tied to Criterion E. Furthermore, we may connect his negative self-perception with Criterion D, and lastly, Criterion G can be observed in the way his trauma impedes crucial aspects of functioning, such as difficulty getting sleep and harmful behavior toward himself.

His difficult childhood and the abuse he suffered at the hands of his foster family, as well as his traumatic experiences at Wuthering Heights, may have all contributed to his long-lasting emotional pain and psychological distress. His desire for revenge and his tendency to isolate himself from society only worsened his situation and led him down a path of destruction and self-destruction. His eventual death, while tragic, can be seen as a form of release from his emotional and psychological pain.

Therefore, many works in the past have addressed the question of whether Heathcliff should be found guilty of his actions or whether he is just one of the many children who would pass on their wounds to another generation (Saleh 20; Wood 34). Ultimately, whether Heathcliff is a victim is open to interpretation, and it depends on the reader's values and perspective. On the one hand, Heathcliff suffered many injustices throughout his life, such as being orphaned as a child and facing discrimination due to his physical appearance and social status, which is why his sympathizers view him as a victim of circumstance. These experiences may have contributed to his vindictive behavior toward others, particularly those who hurt him or his loved ones. On the other hand, he is portrayed by Bronte as a controlling and cruel figure who



manipulates others to get his way. He inflicts both emotional and physical harm on others, including his own wife and child, and claims that he enjoys it. Taking all of this into account, it is possible to acknowledge Heathcliff's tragic past and the impact it has had on his whole being, while also acknowledging his responsibility for his own actions and their negative impact on those around him.

## **6. Conclusion**

If we take everything mentioned above into consideration, it could be argued that Emily Bronte's Heathcliff suffers from PTSD, and there is substantial evidence to support this statement.

Namely, the analysis of Heathcliff's character and actions suggests that he suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder which stemmed from his childhood experiences at Wuthering Heights, providing a link to Criterion A. Additionally, the prolonged violence inflicted upon him corresponds to Criterion F, while his destructive actions and aggressive behavior are related to Criterion E. Furthermore, his negative self-image corresponds to criterion D, and the effects of his trauma on aspects of functioning, such as sleep and self-harm, demonstrate Criterion G. The trauma he has suffered throughout his life and the consequences it has had are evident in his behavior, his outbursts of anger, his self-sabotage, and his emotional dependence on Catherine. He is an extremely complex character, and his actions are open to many interpretations, leading to a never-ending debate about whether he is a villain or a victim of a lifetime of abuse, alienation, and heartbreak. Some consider him evil, others a hero, but the story is so multi-layered that he should not be portrayed in a "black-and-white" manner. It is highly debatable whether he possesses some innate prerequisites that stem from his mysterious

background, as Hindley and Nelly believe. On the contrary, there is evidence that he was inherently good. He consistently demonstrates that he is capable of loving and being loved, and perhaps it was the very connection he had with Cathy that helped him remain “human.” However, some might even suggest that his love for Cathy did him more harm than good, that it just “masquerades as a love story” (Redmayne), when it was actually a “study in trauma” (Redmayne), sadism, and cruelty, and that they ultimately destroyed each other.

Despite his aggressive behavior towards other characters in the novel, it can be seen that his underlying issues are related to his past trauma and his inability to learn how to cope with it in a healthy way. Heathcliff’s sad ending can be traced back to his traumatic experiences at a young age, which haunted him until his death.

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## 8. HEATHCLIFF – A “HELLISH VILLAIN” OR A VICTIM OF TRAUMA?:

### Summary and keywords

This paper addresses the question of whether the character of Heathcliff from Emily Bronte’s 1847 literary classic *Wuthering Heights* suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder, a topic that has been partially neglected due to the fact that in the Victorian era the concept of trauma was considered to be a “woman’s disease.” In various analyses, Heathcliff is often viewed from a negative angle – as an arrogant and vindictive man – and specific mental disorders or illnesses are not adequately studied. However, given the presence of several symptoms of PTSD, it is appropriate to examine the possibility that Heathcliff suffers from this disorder. The paper first offers a broad introduction of Heathcliff’s life. It then characterizes Heathcliff as a Byronic hero. The following chapter focuses on the link between this type of hero, trauma, and PTSD, which then leads to the analysis of some anomalies in Heathcliff’s behavior that could be observed as symptoms of PTSD, as well as the possible reasons for their development. Ultimately, the paper highlights that Heathcliff does indeed suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, the primary cause of which is the trauma he suffered from abuse in his youth and the death of Catherine.

Keywords: Trauma, *Wuthering Heights*, Heathcliff, Post-traumatic stress disorder, *DSM-5*, victim, villain

## **9. HEATHCLIFF – „PAKLENI ZLIKOVAC” ILI ŽRTVA TRAUME?: Sažetak i ključne riječi**

Ovaj rad proučava posttraumatski stresni poremećaj na primjeru Heathcliffa, lika iz *Orkanskih visova* (1847.), književnog klasika Emily Bronte. Ta je poveznica nedostavno istražena zbog toga što se u viktorijansko doba trauma smatrala „ženskom bolesti“. Heathcliff se najčešće negativno percipira i to kao iznimno arogantan i osvetoljubiv pojedinac. Radovi u kojima se istražuju uzroci njegova ponašanja, kao na primjer određeni psihički poremećaji, su iznimno rijetki. No, s obzirom na to da se u njegovom ponašanju mogu iščitati neki od simptoma PTSP-a, ovaj rad istražuje mogućnost da Heathcliff pati od navedenog poremećaja. Rad prvo nudi opći pregled Heathcliffova života. Slijedom toga, pozicionira Heathcliffa kao byronovskog junaka. Sljedeće poglavlje fokusira se na poveznicu između byronovskog junaka, traume i PTSP-a, što zatim vodi prema analizi nekih anomalija u Heathcliffovom ponašanju koje bi se mogle promatrati kao simptomi PTSP-a. Posljednje poglavlje ističe kako je Heathcliff doista patio od posttraumatskog stresnog poremećaja. Uzrok poremećaja je trauma koju je pretrpio zbog zlostavljanja u mladosti i Catherinina smrt.

Ključne riječi: Trauma, *Orkanski Visovi*, Heathcliff, Posttraumatski stresni poremećaj, *DSM-5*, žrtva, zločinac