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The Byronic Hero's Portrayal

A Comparative Analysis of Emily Brontë's Heathcliff and Charlotte Brontë's Rochester

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Summary

In this thesis I analyse and compare the character profiles of two Byronic heroes – Charlotte Brontë's Rochester and Emily Brontë's Heathcliff – in order to come to a better understanding of the Byronic hero as an archetype that has been popular since the nineteenth century. While the academic world has been discussing this topic for a long time, the theory around the Byronic hero is not yet as nuanced as it can be, which is why the goal in this thesis is to come to a clearer understanding of his characterisation through a comparative analysis of two of the most well-known examples.

In preparation for the comparison, the first three chapters contain an overview of existing theory and separate character analyses of Heathcliff and Rochester that include views from secondary literature where appropriate. Theory and analyses finally come together in the last chapter, where it becomes clear that – while there are many Byronic features a character can have – there are only a few that must be present for a character to be a Byronic hero: a spiritualised love for his counterpart and an aversion to authority.

Since the possibility for a more nuanced theoretical frame for the Byronic hero clearly exists, it would be valuable to re-examine the existing theory and implement changes where necessary, so we can come to a deeper understanding of this popular character type and its characterisation, both in literature and in popular culture.

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Introduction

In recent years there has been an influx of morally grey characters in popular culture. These include characters such as Professor Snape from the *Harry Potter* series and more recently Kylo Ren from the *Star Wars* sequel trilogy. These characters share many traits with the heroes that Lord Byron wrote and the Byronic heroes written by Jane Austen, Charlotte and Emily Brontë, and Mary Shelley, among others.

These older Byronic heroes are more strongly influenced by Lord Byron and his heroes, but already show a deviation of the path Lord Byron often chose for his characters. With the rise of film, many of the most popular Byronic heroes were reimagined in adaptations every ten to twenty years – think of film adaptations of *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Frankenstein* – in order to cater to a public that is fascinated with this morally grey character type (Stein par. 3).

This thesis disregards all adaptations, but rather goes back to the roots of two Byronic characters – Heathcliff and Rochester – as they were written by Charlotte and Emily Brontë in 1847. The goal here is to analyse both characters and then compare them in order to come to a better understanding of the Byronic hero as a character type that allows for a large amount of deviation within its parameters.

I use *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* in this thesis, because those novels allow for a comparison of characters in novels that were published in the same year, 1847, and that were written by two of the Brontë sisters, which means that their characters were most likely influenced by similar novels and experiences. That way the comparison yields a better understanding of the core characteristics present in the Byronic hero at the time Emily and Charlotte Brontë wrote their novels, while also showing important differences between the different renditions of the Byronic hero.

The first three chapters of this thesis focus on the academically understood aspects of the Byronic hero and the character analyses of Heathcliff and Rochester, whereas the fourth chapter includes the comparative analysis of the two characters that shows their similarities and differences. The conclusion of this thesis shows that – while there is much room for interpretation of the Byronic hero – there is a set of core characteristics which allows us to recognise a Byronic hero. Most relevant is the fact that the Byronic hero always has a counterpart whom he loves deeply, and that he is an emotionally complex character that tends to keep people at an emotional or physical distance. The set of characteristics of the Byronic hero that exists does not differentiate between aspects that are always present and those that are often – but not always – there. As such, there is room for a more accurate representation of the Byronic hero by distinguishing the core characteristics – a spiritualised love for his counterpart and an aversion to authority – from those that are not always present.

Chapter 1

The Byronic Hero

That Lord Byron is what one of the more popular character types – the Byronic hero – was named after, already shows the influence he had on its popularisation. More interesting than the fact that Byron created this character, is that he did so with his own experiences. That is likely the most important reason that his audience tied his characters to Lord Byron himself. A second reason is that actors who performed his heroes on stage gave the performance as though they were Byron playing his own character (Burwick 5), popularising the idea that Lord Byron was a real-life Byronic hero.

This meant that Byron's heroes were always seen as reflections of Byron himself (Poole 7-8; Levine 127; Hishmeh 97), and caused the Byronic hero, as we often see him today, to look the way he does: dark features, brooding, sarcastic, but with an intense depth of emotion that he shares with the heroine, his love interest (Rapf 640). His darkness is inspired by the Gothic villain, whose features and unwillingness to bow to authority are also aspects of the Byronic hero. That darkness is contrasted with his behaviour, complex motivations (Poole 9), self-reflection and the evolution of the Byronic hero into a 'better' version of himself by the end of the narrative.

That does not mean that the hero is not still tormented, brooding and melancholy, tortured by guilt (Hurst 34), in a perpetual crisis of identity (Poole 12; West 223), and torn between his external image and his internal reality (Poole 7).

While the first Byronic heroes – such as Byron's Conrad – were villains whose past crimes left them with guilt (Michaels 71; Olsen 470), the more recent ones, like Rochester, are not necessarily criminals, but rather men who act on the fringes of morality, leaving them outcasts. They are not outlaws since they function within the parameters of society's laws, but they are not included in normal social behaviour either. The fact that they toe the line between

outlaw and socially accepted, is one of the Byronic heroes' most important features. They are also constantly torn between extremes that they can never seem to reconcile: outward stoicism versus extreme inner feeling, their 'villainous' appearance contrasted with actions that point to feelings of compassion. They are continuously involved in a struggle with their own contradictions, but also with society at large and any authority not their own (Kendrick 248).

This perpetual searching, the questionable morality, and Byronic features, come together in a character that the reader can sympathise with, while still recognising that their existence in reality would be undesirable (Stein par. 3): the Byronic hero is romanticised on one hand and demonised on the other (Olsen 470), a combination that usually captures the imagination of an audience. The Byronic hero's struggle with secrets, identity, and mistakes is one that most people are familiar with and seeing that struggle represented in a character often makes the reader sympathise, something that is still frequently aimed for in popular culture today.

Chapter 2

Heathcliff's Quest for Revenge

As stated in the introduction, this thesis focuses solely on Heathcliff and Rochester as Byronic heroes in order to understand what parameters can be ascribed to this character model. The previous chapter discussed the general idea of what the Byronic hero is, and this chapter deals with how Heathcliff fits into that character type.

Heathcliff is among the most well-known Byronic heroes, owing to the immense popularity gothic novels written in the nineteenth century still enjoy. His story has been adapted in films and stage plays, ensuring that Heathcliff has been interpreted in many ways, leading to different aspects of his original personality being highlighted throughout the years. However, I do not take any adaptations into consideration. Rather, this chapter provides a view of the Heathcliff found in *Wuthering Heights* to see how he fits into the Byronic hero's character model.

To do this, I am taking a closer look at Emily Brontë's Heathcliff and the place he occupies in the original story with the aid of the theoretical frame from the first chapter, secondary literature, and *Wuthering Heights*. In this chapter, I represent Heathcliff as accurately as possible in preparation of the last chapter of this thesis, where I compare Heathcliff to Rochester. In order to keep that comparison straightforward, the character analysis is based on the three aspects mentioned in the introduction: physical appearance, behaviour, and the descriptions used by characters in the novel.

Joanna Rapf used a similar distinction in her article, where she separates the physical and spiritual aspect of the Byronic hero (641). For the purpose of this thesis, however, it is important to note, aside from appearance and behaviour, the distinction between the hero as he is and the way in which the characters – himself included – perceive him.

To begin, Heathcliff's physical appearance is that of the (stereo)typical Byronic hero; he has dark hair (E. Brontë 181), dark eyes (1), a handsome form (3), and a dark countenance (156), aspects the Byronic hero shares with the Gothic Villain (Poole 9-10).

The physical similarities to the Gothic villain are likely there to evoke the expectation of evil behaviour and perhaps the idea that the kind of love most of humanity has the capacity to feel is impossible for him because he is evil, while also building up to a large contrast between appearance and behaviour. The love that Heathcliff feels for Cathy is what establishes this contrast by showing the reader there is not just an evil side to him, but also a good one.

The juxtaposition of the expectations evoked by his appearance and the reality of his spirit brings us to Heathcliff's behaviour. After being brought to Wuthering Heights by Mr Earnshaw, Heathcliff is brought up alongside Earnshaw's own children, who dislike him at first. Earnshaw's son, Hindley, is jealous of Heathcliff and ensures that he is not educated further after Earnshaw's death. According to Kitty Carlisle, Heathcliff ending up in this household where jealousy is an important aspect of life, shaped him into a man who believes acting upon jealousy is the only way to get what he wants (47). She believes that Heathcliff would not have grown into the vindictive and jealous man that is shown throughout *Wuthering Heights*, if he had not been taught from an early age that it was the best way to reach his goals.

Carlisle is not alone in believing that it was not nature, but nurture that made Heathcliff who he is. James Hafley has written about the 'true villain' in *Wuthering Heights*, arguing that it is not Heathcliff but Nelly Dean, one of the servants and the narrator of the story. Hafley writes that Nelly manipulates Heathcliff and that he does not realise that until it is too late (213). If Nelly did manipulate him, Heathcliff does not have the Byronic trait of mastery over others (Stein par. 3). Since "[n]early all of Byron's heroes have had their

predicaments forced upon them" (West 223), however, it does show another way in which the model fits Heathcliff.

If his circumstances were forced upon him, his behaviour is more understandable: his reaction to hearing Cathy say she could never marry him is to leave and return only when he has become someone worthier of her, something Carlisle interprets as driven by jealousy: Linton had the education that Heathcliff never did and seeing Cathy care about that drove Heathcliff to leave and return a more civilised man to win her over and marry her anyway (47).

When he returns Cathy has already married Linton, but the love Cathy and Heathcliff feel for each other keeps drawing them together. Heathcliff in particular ignores that Cathy is married, while she continues to hold him at a distance until she is delirious and dying. According to Miriam Allott, Cathy's reluctance to allow Heathcliff closer – and her choice for the 'safe' option of marrying Linton – might come from the familial bond between them that *Wuthering Heights* hints at (30): Earnshaw brought Heathcliff into his house and raised him as his own. Paired with Earnshaw's preference for Heathcliff over Hindley, this indicates that Heathcliff might have been Earnshaw's illegitimate son (Solomon 82). That Cathy chooses Linton instead of the person with whom she shares a bond and whom she loves most (E. Brontë 71), shows that she may have been subconsciously aware of the incestuous implications of their feelings.

Since Byron himself was rumoured to struggle with incestuous love during his lifetime (Burwick 4; Rapf 643), and his heroes are undeniably based upon his own life (Levine 127), it is not unreasonable to state that another facet of the Byronic hero is the implication of incestuous love (Rapf 641). Because incest is something Byronic heroes sometimes struggle with, and since they often idealise or spiritualise the love they feel for their 'reflection' (Olsen

472), Heathcliff and Cathy – who shared a childhood and cannot let each other go, even after death – fit the mould well.

Heathcliff's feelings for Cathy make him violent, even when she is on her deathbed (E. Brontë 142). It seems like Heathcliff can no longer distinguish between love and hatred. After her death, he uses his pain to cause as much suffering as possible for the second generation – Catherine Linton, Linton Heathcliff, and Hareton Earnshaw – in order to take revenge on Cathy for leaving him. Allott argues that Heathcliff loses himself in his quest for vengeance and becomes a villain without any of the depth he had before Cathy's death. She states that he only regains his complexity when he releases his hatred for the second generation and allows them their peace (45).

The fact that Heathcliff spends most of his life treating the people around him poorly might also be the reason he is mostly described negatively. Other characters refer to him as a "devil" (E. Brontë 120), "villain" (99), "ruffian" (242), and a "scoundrel" (246), but while these descriptions make him out to be a very undesirable person, he is also said to be handsome (50). This means that the comparisons drawn between Heathcliff and evil creatures come from interpretations of his behaviour, rather than his appearance, which would likely inspire more positive comparisons.

As such, it becomes even clearer that there is a rift between Heathcliff's appearance (and the expectations it inspires) and his actual behaviour. He acts in a way most people cannot accept, and his handsomeness does not make up for his malicious behaviour. The only one that Heathcliff cannot seem to drive away is Cathy, because she is used to his behaviour and because she is his equal: she can be just as cold and callous as Heathcliff, and she challenges him. In Cathy, Heathcliff has found his equal, and by finding his equal – the person in whom he recognises himself – he has found the one person he can truly love (Rapf 644).

In conclusion, Heathcliff's appearance and attitude towards Cathy largely adhere to the character type of the Byronic hero. His dark features and cold attitude but also emotional internal world are aspects often found in this type of hero. The way he develops throughout the story, however, is not as common. That he loses himself in his revenge for a time, thereby becoming a flat character rather than the fleshed-out one the Byronic hero usually is, is something that does not happen often. This makes Heathcliff's character arch an uncommon one that shows the Byronic hero from another angle, showing that his state is not constant, and that loss of depth can be overcome by reflecting on what is important.

Chapter 3

Rochester's Happy Ending

This chapter describes Rochester and his role in *Jane Eyre* similarly to how the previous

chapter analyses Heathcliff. Though there are many interpretations and adaptations available

of Rochester, too, I again do not use any of those, but rather focus on Charlotte Brontë's

original character. I am again using the theoretical frame, secondary literature, and *Jane Eyre*,

and I differentiate between these aspects: physical appearance, behaviour, and the descriptions

used by characters in the novel.

Rochester shows some of the Byronic hero's physicalities, but not all. He has stern

features (C. Brontë 133), a dark face (136), black eyes (246), and black hair (530). He is said

to be of middle height and square but athletic build (133, 141), but he is also called "ugly"

(157), something that most Byronic heroes are not. To describe him, Charlotte Brontë uses

adjectives that denote stone and rough edges (155, 207, 219), indicating that Rochester

appears rough. He is untouchable, cold, and harsh on the outside, which is emphasised by his

self-enforced isolation at Thornfield. Even his traveling could denote this: he has not made

lasting friendships anywhere, and the only person whom he is said to be friends with is

Richard Mason, his brother-in-law. Rochester seems avoidant of meaningful relationships

with others.

That this isolation is self-enforced – and not the result of social anxiety or ineptitude –

becomes clear in his behaviour: in order to make Jane jealous (C. Brontë 314), he invites

several acquaintances to stay at Thornfield and pretends to be interested in Blanche Ingram,

one of those acquaintances. He is adept at entertaining guests: they are always happy when

their host is around and their mood changes negatively whenever he is absent (C. Brontë 224).

Aside from showing that Rochester is socially adept, this situation is also imperative in

showing that he understands people well enough to manipulate them and benefit from social

interactions. He convinces Blanche Ingram that he wants to marry her, and then manipulates her into breaking off the engagement by spreading the rumour that he has less than a third of the fortune he is thought to have (C. Brontë 305). His success means he is able to read people very well: he suspects Blanche Ingram likes him for his money, and therefore a rumour that he has less than she thinks will lead her to break off the engagement.

This keen sense of people is in line with Stein's idea of the skills the Byronic hero possesses. She states that the Byronic hero's strong personality gives him mastery over others (par. 3): he can get the people around him to do what he wants. To succeed, he needs to be aware of how people think, how interactions play out, and what needs to happen for him to reach his goal. The only person Rochester cannot achieve this mastery over is Jane: she wants to marry him, but when she finds out about Bertha Mason, the wife he keeps locked in the attic, she refuses to allow Rochester to manipulate her into staying with him.

That Rochester could not persuade Jane to stay is not so much the failing of his persuasive powers as it is an indication that Jane is his equal and consequently not susceptible to the strength of his character (Gilbert 790). He cannot master her, because she is his spiritual equal. The only mastery he has is in his status as her employer, but when it comes to matters of the heart and soul Jane chooses her own path, even if it means hurting herself: what is most important to her is respecting herself (C. Brontë 382). If Rochester tells the truth when he says he would not have forced her to stay (533), that is an indication that he knows she would never submit to him. He clearly spiritualises his love for her, something that Olsen states is one of the Byronic hero's traits (472), when Rochester explains to Jane that she is the first person he has met that he can love (C. Brontë 379-381). Rochester's actions – manipulation and trying to marry Jane when he cannot lawfully do so – echo those the Byronic hero is known for: spiritual love, passion, and disregard for social rules.

His strong personality and his tendency to internalise everything ensure that Rochester is largely liked by the people that know him: he does not act out his anger or pain on other people and he is quiet but not unpleasant. He does not lash out, but rather withdraws, earning him the description of "hermit" (C. Brontë 518), for example. He is not viewed negatively: Rochester is described as a "liberal landlord" (123), a potentially "gallant gentleman-highwayman" (219), and an "indefatigable horseman" (295). The only 'bad' thing that is said about him is that he is an "ugly man" (157), which happens a few times throughout the novel but is stated more as truth than opinion. Any negative descriptions usually come from Rochester himself: things like "sinner" (160), devil to women whom he finds unengaging (312), "scoundrel" (360), and "low rake" (361). Throughout *Jane Eyre*, Rochester is the only one who speaks badly of himself.

The ways in which he describes himself are 'not positive', rather than negative, however: the fact that he says he is "not a general philanthropist" instead of calling himself a misanthrope (C. Brontë 156), or that he says he is a sinner but not a villain (160). This could mean that – even though he may not think he is good – he does not necessarily believe that he cannot become better and adapt to new circumstances in a way that the Byronic hero is known for.

This self-awareness and the way he views himself do not, however, keep him from treating people around him as lesser beings (Stein par. 12; Poole 9). It is Rochester himself who calls attention to his unpleasantness to women he finds boring (C. Brontë 312). He seems to either forget or not care that other people have feelings just as complex as his own. This is shown in the way he treats Blanche and Jane: he uses Blanche's interest in him to further his own goal – making Jane jealous – without sparing a thought for either of their feelings. Aside from that, Rochester also decides to marry Jane while knowing that the marriage is not legal because he already has a wife. He wants to marry Jane because he loves her, but he does not

stop to think that a betrayal of her trust will hurt her (and their relationship) when the truth will inevitably come out. Only after that has happened does he backtrack and acknowledge he should have told her the truth, but he follows this by trying to manipulate her into staying with him (C. Brontë 384). Of all the people around him whom he tries to influence, Jane is the only one who refuses to go along and instead – by leaving – presents him with consequences to his actions.

It is this unwillingness to submit to Rochester that shows that Jane is his equal. She reflects him, and he her. The overbearing, passionate nature of the hero is faced with an opposing force that is just as strong, because he cannot "be whole" without the person who reflects his nature back at him (Rapf 640-641).

In short, Rochester exhibits many of the Byronic hero's traditional attributes: he has the physical aspects like dark hair and eyes, he has a tendency to isolate himself, and he leans towards self-loathing and self-punishment through isolation and guilt (Michaels 71). He disregards societal values in favour of his own and is great at manipulating situations and people. Rochester's arch makes it both easier and more difficult for him to fit into society in the end: the fact that he is blinded and crippled after the fire at Thornfield makes him more of an outcast than he was before, but it does not take away from his strength of character and his position in society. Rather, he seems more engaged, which is shown in the fact that he dictates letters that Jane writes down (C. Brontë 547). Rochester deviates from the usual arch by having a happy ending: usually the Byronic hero is exiled or killed or 'punished' in some other way (West 222), sometimes by himself through guilt or grief (Olsen 471). Rochester, however, ends up married to Jane and living a good life. Perhaps Rochester shows us what would become of the Byronic hero if he survived and married the heroine: would they be happy, or would the struggle remain? In Rochester's case, it seems that his struggle is over.

Chapter 4

A Comparison of *Wuthering Heights*' Heathcliff and *Jane Eyre*'s Rochester

In this chapter I use the information from the previous ones to compare Heathcliff and

Rochester on the three aspects I used for their character analysis: physical appearance,

behaviour, and descriptions used to denote them. The goal of this comparative analysis is to

define more clearly what the core characteristics of the Byronic hero are, and thereby also

showing where there is room for deviation.

Physically, Heathcliff and Rochester are similar: they both have black hair, dark eyes,

and a dark face. There are two notable differences, however: height and handsomeness.

Heathcliff is tall and handsome (E. Brontë 82, 50), whereas Rochester is of average height

and ugly (C. Brontë 133, 157).

In this respect, Rochester is more in line with the roots of the Byronic hero than

Heathcliff is: the Byronic hero is based on the Gothic villain (Burwick 6; Poole 9-10), and

since the Gothic villain is generally seen as the physical manifestation of evil, he is ugly

(Marshall 161). The villain's darkness and dangerousness have also bled into the character of

the Byronic hero, leaving him with a dark but erotic appeal (Stein par. 7). With his dark

features and the implication that the darkness could be synonymous with evil, the Byronic

hero's appearance evokes expectations that usually turn out differently than the reader

thought. This contrast makes him mysterious, something that is associated with both

Heathcliff and Rochester because of the secrets they keep. While they may not be dangerous

in the 'Gothic villain' sense, they do still pose a danger for Cathy and Jane, respectively.

The danger that Heathcliff poses for Cathy is the temptation to follow her heart and

follow him in his wildness. Their passion for each other is violent and, as shown in the second

chapter, 'wrong' with the incestuous implication that scares Cathy away from Heathcliff and

into a marriage with Linton, who is mild and whose love is easy. Heathcliff's love is the

temptation of not being a woman like society expects, but rather being herself, which could have made Cathy an outsider in society.

The danger of Rochester is in the difference in status between him and Jane and in the temptation for her to give up her morality. They are not equals in society, and that might bleed through in a relationship. With Jane's need to remain herself and retain her autonomous mind, the possibility of losing her authority as a person to someone else – no matter how much she loves them – is one she cannot allow (Pell 415). Because Jane is Rochester's reflection and his equal, it is impossible for her to submit to him: she is the counterpart of the Byronic hero, the one who mirrors his personality (Rapf 640-41), and therefore needs to be of equal strength. She employs this strength when leaving Thornfield and Rochester after the discovery of Bertha Mason: instead of allowing herself to choose what she wants – which is to stay with Rochester – she denies temptation in favour of keeping up her own values.

Despite the risks, it is clear that both Heathcliff and Rochester love deeply. Their love, however, threatens not only Cathy and Jane, but Heathcliff and Rochester themselves, too. Heathcliff lives through rejection when Cathy marries Linton while stating that she loves him more (E. Brontë 71), and then has to endure her death and subsequent absence from his life. Cathy's death sends Heathcliff spinning out of control: in his inability to deal with his grief, Heathcliff turns against the people around him and hurts them to the best of his abilities. As said before, that is where Heathcliff is no longer a Byronic hero (Allott 45), but merely a character that is there to torment the protagonists without feeling any guilt. Once his self-reflection and conscience return towards the end of the novel, Heathcliff reclaims his status as Byronic hero before he spends his last days in a delirium (E. Brontë 290-98), and the second generation is finally free to live their own lives.

It is Heathcliff's obsessive love that destroys him: it robs him of a normal life, it takes away his complexity of character and leaves him a hatred-driven villain, and when he

manages to reobtain his depth of character it leaves him in a delirium until his death. He lives his life lost in regret and bitterness, and by the end of *Wuthering Heights* Heathcliff has not lived his own life but has rather been yearning for one he would never have.

Rochester's love is less insidious. Contrary to Heathcliff, Rochester has already experienced love at least once, with Celine Varens. When he meets Jane, he has perspective on his feelings, even though his previous experiences have ended badly. He is bitter, because he does not think he will find someone who will love him back. What Rochester starts to feel for Jane is a love that he experiences spiritually: he believes he can marry her while he is already wedded, because his heart is not bound to Bertha. When Jane refuses him after finding out about Bertha, Rochester is crushed, but has a different impulse than Heathcliff: instead of taking the time and space to better himself before trying again, Rochester looks for Jane wherever he can, only to isolate himself at Thornfield when he fails to find her.

Rochester and Heathcliff are easily caught up in their emotions to the point that when they want something they do not intend to let anything stand in their way. Their reasoning likely being that if they want it as much as they do, surely it cannot be a bad thing? This is where Cathy and Jane push back with equal force: they do care about laws and morality, and they will not sacrifice that for love.

The difference is in their reaction to heartbreak. Where Rochester turns inward and retreats from society even more than he already did, turning into a hermit (C. Brontë 518), Heathcliff lashes out and makes others share in his pain. As far as the reader can tell, Rochester in no way takes out his pain on his servants or his wife, Bertha Mason, but rather suffers quietly. This is a far cry from Heathcliff's reaction to Cathy's marriage and death: he does not suffer quietly but uses his pain to hurt everyone around him, turning into a vindictive villain whose only goal is to hurt as many people as possible. This glaring difference between the ways in which they deal with pain tells us that Heathcliff is naturally more vengeful and

inclined to externalise his pain, whereas Rochester is the exact opposite, turning inward and bottling everything up. He is more inclined to keep things private, while Heathcliff wants everyone to know he feels wronged. The reason may be that Heathcliff has learned to act on his jealousy to get what he wants (Carlisle 46). Outward influences made Heathcliff realise that acting on jealousy was the only way to achieve his goals (Carlisle 47). It might be that Heathcliff is trying to deal with his pain and longing in the same way he has been his whole life: making sure that no one around him is happy either.

This difference in how they handle pain might also explain the difference in the descriptions used for them. Heathcliff is often described negatively, as things like "evil beast" (E. Brontë 95), "scoundrel" (80), "black villain" (99), and "lying fiend" (134). All of these show negative feelings other characters have for Heathcliff, likely owing to his tendency to lash out at others when he is hurting. The way Rochester is described is neutral: "liberal landlord" (C. Brontë 123), "potentially gallant gentleman-highwayman" (219), "hapless owner" (514), and "hermit" (518). These descriptors do not carry negative implications so much as uncertainty about the kind of person Rochester really is, likely because of his tendency to hide his feelings and intentions. The only one who consistently describes Rochester negatively is the man himself. He uses words like "sinner" (C. Brontë 160), "devil" (312), "scoundrel" (360), and "blockhead" (368), to denote himself. Rochester might owe his more negative self-image to his self-reflection: he knows everything he has done, and perhaps he feels others would think horribly of him if they knew everything. If that is the case, Jane's departure might have been even more painful for him: she learned about the worst things he did and left. Rochester might have interpreted that as rejection instead of the self-preservation it was for Jane.

In contrast to Rochester, Heathcliff either does not care or does not think about his own actions, since there is hardly anything in Wuthering Heights that points to self-reflection

on Heathcliff's part. It also seems that, whereas Rochester comes to respect Jane's decision and her autonomy (C. Brontë 533), Heathcliff feels entitled to Cathy's love in a way that leads him to violence in his passionate need to be near her (E. Brontë 141).

What Heathcliff and Rochester have in common is a spiritualised love and a disregard for norms and rules. These are the two core concepts their characters were built around, and two core concepts that the Byronic hero needs to have. This character type is built around its reliance on another character in the story; in order to be whole, the Byronic hero needs his counterpart. It is his reflection in the other character that forces him to come to terms with authorities outside of himself because he cannot do that on his own: he needs his intense energy matched, because that forces him to re-evaluate his life and change in ways he needs to change. For many Byronic heroes, this does not lessen the guilt and torture they foist upon themselves – especially if their counterpart has died or is otherwise unavailable to them – but for some it makes the difference between being an outcast and finally belonging in society.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have taken a closer look at the Byronic hero as an archetype, and the characteristics that the character is largely known for. By analysing two well-known Byronic heroes – Emily Brontë's Heathcliff and Charlotte Brontë's Rochester – and then comparing them, I have highlighted their similarities and differences, thereby showing that, while there are many characteristics that can be absent or altered, two core characteristics are necessary for the Byronic hero to exist. These fundamental aspects of the character are his spiritualised love for his counterpart, and his aversion to any authority that is not his own.

As I have shown, the Byronic hero is not tied to set physical features or a set of behavioural rules, and there is no norm for the character being hated or liked by the people around him. These are all open to interpretation, but without the conflict between the hero and the heroine and the hero and society, there is no Byronic hero. His appeal lies in his darkness and haughty disdain for authority, which leave him on the fringes of society. The sense of danger that the audience gets and the power that the Byronic hero claims, speak to the imagination, because people in the audience never get to claim such authority for themselves, which makes the possibility intriguing (Stein par. 3).

While this thesis includes close readings of both Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* and Rochester in and *Jane Eyre*, there are still many possibilities for research or interpretation when it comes to the topic of the Byronic hero. I have covered only a small part of these characters, and there are countless other Byronic heroes that could also be included, as well as the many adaptations of novels that provide a lot of different interpretations of those characters. Aside from other Byronic heroes, it would be interesting to research the dynamic between the Byronic hero and other character types like – for example – the Gothic villain that was mentioned previously, in order to come to a better understanding of the different roles they have in their narratives.

Because the audience's interest in the criminal point of view remains (Stein par. 3), the morally grey character will continue to be popular in literature and film for the foreseeable future. This type of character – which includes the Byronic hero – will, therefore, continue to be explored and experimented with. Because this character remains relevant, a more nuanced approach in its interpretation is called for, which makes the steps taken in this thesis for an altered theoretical frame imperative.

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