

**“A DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF HEATHCLIFF’S BEHAVIOR;  
STIMULUS-RESPONSE THEORY”**

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**ABSTRACT**

This research aims at the character and behavior analysis of Heathcliff in Emily Bronte’s novel *Wuthering Heights*. The researcher attempts to represent the behavior of Heathcliff in the light of Stimulus-Response theory in order to justify his strange, harsh and unusual behavior. The researcher applies the stimulus-response theory proposed by a renowned American Psychologist, John B. Watson, who asserts that the basic factor behind the formation of human behavior is Environment, and that human behavior is conditioned through the stimulus-response association, thus human behavior is a response to a stimulus. The research follows the descriptive method of analysis and close text-reading approach. The study shows that how the behavior of Heathcliff is shaped taking influence from his surroundings, people and his bitter experiences. The study proves that his harsh and bizarre nature is the product of his environment and his behavior being patronized through a particular stimulus -response bond.

**Key Words:** Stimulus, Response, Stimulus-Response Association

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The provoking question that has been asked since centuries is, why people behave the way they do? Man is a social animal and has to live in this world. He is forever faced with different situations and conditions, to which he must adapt himself. All human beings live in their own specific environment, which includes home; where he lives, school; where he learns, things that he owns and the garden, where he breaths. And so environment has a great effect upon human personality. Psychologists usually acknowledge our social surroundings as being very crucial in forming our personality and behavior. By the word “social” we mean all the people, with whom we interact and in turn take influence. As it is stated, “Complex organisms like human beings have evolved special sense organs that allow those organisms to be influenced by various stimulus energies in the outside world. What we see, hear, feel and smell influence what we do” (Sartin, et al 154).

Different psychologists around the world hold different views regarding the formation of human personality and behavior. Among them, is Francis Galton, a renowned psychologist, who in his book *Hereditary Genius*, (1868) writes that human beings derive their natural abilities and behavior from parents, which means that human behavior, is hereditary. While psychologists, on the other hand, belonging to another school of thought, called Behaviorism, are of the opinion that it is environment, which form human personality and behavior.

## **BEHAVIORISM**

Behaviorism is a school of thought and psychological theory, which gives emphasis to objective and scientific mode of investigation. This movement started with the publication of an article in 1913, entitled “Psychology as the behaviorist views it” by an American psychologist John. Broadus Watson. It is the science and study of behavior, which is observable.

The theoretical framework for the present research is Stimulus-Response theory, founded by John Broadus Watson. He asserts that environment is the basic factor behind the formation of human behavior. He has given his views on human behavior

and its formation in his book *Behaviorism*. He is famous for his quotation about the environment as a crucial factor behind human behavior and its formation;

Give me a dozen healthy infants, well-formed and my own specified world to bring them up in and I will guarantee to take any one at random and train him to become any type of specialist. I might select doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant, chief and yes even beggar man and thief, regardless of his talents, tendencies, abilities and race of his ancestors.” (82)

He believed that all human behavior, no matter how complex it is, is a response to a stimulus.

J.B. Watson states that the mind of human beings is Tabula Rasa (Blank Slate), the moment he is born. He writes on it with his experiences that he gets from his interaction with the external environment. He strongly believed that environment, in which the child is reared, is an effective tool or factor that forms child's behavior. He believed that human behavior is the result of stimulus-response association or bond.

### **STIMULUS-RESPONSE ASSOCIATION**

Shahida Husain Malik in her book writes that all the inward and outward behavior of human beings is a response to a stimulus. Human behavior consists of stimulus-response bond. J.B. Watson states in his book *Behaviorism*, that it is stimulus-response association leads to the conditioning of human behavior and habit formation. This concept leads him to the belief of environmentalism. Anything in the environment that affects human behavior is stimulus, while the reaction elicited from human beings as a result of that stimulus is called response and this process is known as the stimulus-response connection.

The research work attempts to obtain the following objectives:

It is to make the reader aware of the factor behind the harsh behavior of Heathcliff. Moreover to explore that environment plays important role in the formation of Heathcliff's behavior and also to justify the harsh behavior of Heathcliff in the light of stimulus-response theory.

The study is important in the sense that it fills the gap in the existing body of literature in the addressed topic, as it points out the importance of environment in the formation of human behavior, by analyzing the behavior of the protagonist with reference to behaviorism and stimulus-response theory by J.B. Watson. It studies the character of Heathcliff from the new perspective. The present research work will help the young researchers in their review of literature. They will find a new perspective in the study of Heathcliff’s character. The study will also help the reader to get a clear view of the character of Heathcliff and develop a favorable opinion about him.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. What is the elemental factor behind the violent behavior of Heathcliff?
2. How does, the environment shapes the behavior of Heathcliff?
3. Which is the stimulus-response associations, which conditions the behavior of Heathcliff?

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The novel has been studied from different perspectives by various researchers. Some critics have worked upon the structure of the novel, while some have analyzed the novel from another angle.

Shumei Gao in her paper “Id, Ego, Superego; An Analysis of Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights* on the Angle of Psychology” (2006) analyses the novel in terms of psychology. According to this paper Heathcliff, Catherine and Edgar Linton are symbols of Id, Ego and Superego. Heathcliff is the representation of Id, for he does whatever he wants. He allures Isabella and deceives her by telling a lie that he loves her truly and then marries her without the consent of her brother, in order to take revenge. He also takes *Wuthering Heights* and *Thrushcross Grange* in his possession by all unfair means in order to get power. He acts according to the pleasure principle. As Id, if without any control leads to destruction in society, Heathcliff also is the reason of all destruction in the novel. Catherine represents Ego because she is repressed and confined by the rules and conventions of society. She goes from Id to Ego. In her Childhood she is ruled by her

Id because she loves Heathcliff, but after a visit to Thrushcross Grange she changes her mind and decides to marry Edgar. She thinks of the higher social status and norms. She acts according to the pleasure principle. While Edgar represents Superego, because he takes into consideration the moral ethics. He acts according to the moral standards by taking care of Catherine when she is bitten by the dog at his house. He also forces Catherine to choose in between him and Heathcliff because he cannot bear that his wife should keep a love affair with another man. He is an educated and civilized man. So the researcher analyses the inner mind of different characters, taking the theory of Freud that personality is composed of three elements, Id, Ego and Superego.

Yukari Oda in his research paper “Emily Bronte and The Gothic Female Characters in Wuthering Heights” (2010) analyses that Catherine, the Heroine in the novel Wuthering Heights, can be placed in the generation of gothic heroines. The genre of Gothic Novel has a great influence on the novel and so Wuthering Heights is considered a Female Gothic. Yunkari Oda has discussed in his research paper that how Emily Bronte was under the influence of Gothic Genre and so has depicted it in her female characters. Isabella and Catherine Linton, the female characters are similar to Gothic Heroines. (1-19)

Natka Jankava in his paper “The Struggle of Power and Passion in Wuthering Heights and Jane Eyre” (2014) describes the theme of conflict between power and passion in both the novels Wuthering Heights and Jane Eyre. Both the sisters Emily Bronte and Charlotte Bronte have depicted this conflict in different ways. There is a great need to balance the power, in order achieve happiness and heavenly love. But in Jane Eyre the balance in between the love and power leads to happiness and the novel ended happily while in Wuthering Heights the inappropriate balance leads to the destruction of the relationships of characters and end in the death of the Heathcliff. So the reaction of both the sisters is different to Byronism. As gender was also an important arena in the Era of Queen Victoria, so both the novelists have much of this. All the character, mostly the heroes and the heroines stick to the norms and customs of their age but in Jane Eyre this leads to rapture and happiness while in the other , it brings a great volcanic eruption and destruction.

Enas Hassouneh in his research paper “The most Revolutionary Aspect of Otherness” (2015) attempts to categorize the novel as a revolutionary novel by explaining it in terms of “Otherness”, a concept given by “Edward Said”. The paper explores different dimensions of “Othering” by describing the regional, theological, racial and ethical oppressions in Bronte’s novel “Wuthering Heights”. This Othering can be found in the character of Heathcliff because he is different socially and racially and his nature is totally strange and bizarre. There is Othering in the language of the novel. All the characters including Joseph, Hareton, Nelly and Catherine speak in different tones and dialects. The novel is revolutionary in the sense that it follows the unconventional method of narration. It is narrated by two narrators Nelly Dean and Mr. Lockwood. The novel represent different genres Gothic Romanic and Metaphysical in an unconventional way. So there is the element of otherness in the presentation of social, geographical and racial incidents in the novel. The character of Heathcliff can be considered an Othering the world of the novel.

In short the novel has been studied and analyzed by different researchers from different point of views. The present research is a character analysis of the central character of the novel, Heathcliff. The research makes an attempt to study the character and behavior of Heathcliff and to justify his harsh and strange behavior. The researcher will explain the behavior of Heathcliff in the light of Stimulus-Response Association and come to the conclusion that he is not altogether the wicked character and villain. His behavior is justified to certain extent.

## **DISCUSSION**

Wuthering Heights is the story of romantic and spiritual love as well as revenge. The novel has been studied and dissected from different possible perspectives, while the themes, symbolism, style of narration and structure of the novel provide the researcher with a lot of gap to explore, yet the immense popularity of the novel rest upon its unmatched characters. The main character of the novel Heathcliff, is the most strange and wicked character. Throughout the novel the readers are shocked with the unusual behavior of Heathcliff. His experiences in life led him to learn different pattern of

behavior. He received ill-treatment at the hands of different characters and developed his behavior accordingly.

The elemental factor behind Heathcliff's bizarre nature and wicked behavior is environment. It is his circumstances and environment that shapes his behavior. He is an ordinary man like anyone else. The way he is harshly treated by other characters in the novel, his social degradation, the racial discrimination against him and his failure in love are the factors, which cause deterioration in his character. If he had been brought up and reared in a healthy and prosperous environment, he might not have behaved the way he behaves.

According to the Behaviorist school of thought Environment is the basic factor that forms human behavior, as it asserts that people are inconsistent. Quite different pattern of attitudes and behavior can be formed in different situations. In other words J.B Watson in his book *Behaviorism* , wrote the Environment has a great role in behavior formation and if a child is exposed to specific environmental forces or situations; he will develop the type of personality and behavior the environment is tended to.

Same is the case with Heathcliff; he too was exposed to harsh and deadening circumstances which made him to become a stone without having any emotions. Mr. Lockwood is a tenant of Heathcliff, who has taken Thrushcross Grange on rent. He explains the meaning of the word "Wuthering" and says that it means atmospheric tumult, to which the station is exposed. It is symbolic of the fact that the residents of the house, especially Heathcliff is automatically under the influence of its effects. This gives an impression of the great influence of environment upon the character of Heathcliff.

In chapter 4, Mr. Lockwood is struck by the strange behavior of Heathcliff, as he is not given a permission to stay for night when the weather is harsh and he is bitten by the dog. Heathcliff makes fun of him and he seems not to care for anyone. Years ago Heathcliff was brought to the house as a child by Mr. Earnshaw, when he went on journey to Liverpool. He found the child starving in the streets without any shelter. After making an enquiry about the parents of the child he came to the conclusion that the child belonged to no one. So he brought him home. As he was a little, dirty and

dark-haired boy with ragged clothes, almost all the members of the house hated him and refused to own him. In fact he was not allowed to share the beds of Catherine Earnshaw and her brother Hindley. Mrs. Ellen Dean says that he was a dismal and somber child hardened by the ill-treatment of the people as he belonged to no one and was brought up in the streets under the contempt of the people. This suggests the influence of surrounding and environment upon the character of Heathcliff:

He 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. (Bronte 46)

This is evidence that Heathcliff’s harsh behavior and his bizarre nature was inspired by the ill-treatment of the surrounding people.

Mrs. Ellen Dean tells Heathcliff never complained of illness. He was quiet and never uttered a word. Heathcliff was like lamb innocent suffering with patience. As Nelly says “though hardness, not gentleness, made him give little trouble.” (Bronte 47). This also shows that he went through hard times and so he little complained. But it is human nature that he cannot bear more than his capacity for tolerance. This patience one day is over and then there is a terrible upcoming. Same was the case with Heathcliff, his patience lost control and it burst out bringing destruction to everyone who caused him troubles. He became revengeful towards his enemies and drew them towards their terrible end.

After the death of their father the children fell lonely. They considered their father an oppressor and regarded Heathcliff as the usurper of their filial love. So they always hated him and planned to cause him sufferings and trouble, to which Heathcliff responded with a great patience. No one knew that this patience will explode one day and there will be a great blast which will turn everything to ashes.

We get another glimpse of Heathcliff stubborn nature from his fight with Hindley over the colt. Heathcliff insisted that his colt must be exchanged with that of the Hindley. He threatened Hindley that if he was not given the desired colt, he would complain to the master about the blows he had received at the hands of Hindley. Hindley refused

and pointed an iron weight at Heathcliff, but he felt no fear of injury as he was accustomed to beating; "Throw it", he said, standing still "and then I'll tell how you boasted that you would turn me out of doors as soon as he died and see whether he will not turn you directly". (Bronte 47)

This is what J.B Watson believed that a child's mind was a vacant slate by birth and it is to be written upon by his experiences which form his personality. These experiences come from his encounter with the environment.

Heathcliff was a victim of ill-treatment. He was brought to Wuthering Heights, as fatherless and dirty child, whom everyone hated, disgusted and even refused to share bed with. Mrs. Earnshaw was very angry to see the child. As Nelly says; "Mrs. Earnshaw was ready to fling it out of doors; she did fly up, asking how he could fashion to bring that gipsy brat into the house, when they had their own barns to feed and fend for?" (Bronte 45) When Cathy came to know that his father has lost a whip, which had been bought for her as a present, while attending the gipsy, she showed contempt and disgust for the child and spat at it. "They entirely refused to have it in bed with them, or even within their room." (Bronte 46)

As a result of the discrimination he developed a very harsh and wicked personality. He developed a deep hatred and contempt for all the people in world. It was the response to this particular stimulus that he hated those who caused him any harm but at the same time he became rude in his behavior with all the other people. His behavior with Mr. Lockwood is the evidence of the fact. He asked Heathcliff for one of the servants to guide his way in darkness and take him to Thrushcross Grange but Heathcliff refused any kind of help. Lockwood said that he could adjust himself in a chair, to which Heathcliff answered in a wicked manner, "No, no! A stranger is a stranger, be he rich or poor: it will not suit me to permit anyone the range of the place while I am off guard!" (Bronte 30)

His behavior with his servants and Hareton was also very harsh. He always scolded them. Even his treatment to his daughter in law was very harsh and brutal. He forced her into marriage with his son Linton. He used to scold his daughter-in-law in very

unmannerly way: “You shall pay me for the plague of having you eternally in my sight – do you hear damnable jade?” (Bronte 40)

His condemnation by his daughter-in-law, also suggests his wicked nature and cruel treatment of people related to him. Catherine on one occasion told Heathcliff: “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.” (Bronte 240)

These lines clearly show that Heathcliff himself was miserable and so he was also causing miseries for the people around him. It is the indication that he was not wicked by birth but his greater miseries made him harsh and wicked. He grew sadistic and enjoyed hurting people and see them suffering.

Heathcliff received harsh treatment at the hands of Hindley and other characters. He treated Heathcliff even more brutally and treated him like a servant and forced him to work on the farms. He was driven to the company of the servants. Whenever Heathcliff committed any mistake or showed any mischievousness, he was badly beaten and flogged by Hindley. When Catherine was bitten at the house of Lintons, they insulted Heathcliff and looked upon him an outcast and Mrs. Linton even was criticizing his language, “But who is this? Where did she pick up this companion? Oho! I declare he is the strange acquisition my late neighbor made, in his journey to Liverpool- a little Rascal, or an American or Spanish castaway.. A wicked boy at all events. (Bronte 55)

This is the evidence how he was degraded by all and this was the stimulus for his revengeful thoughts. On one of the nights Lintons were invited to Wuthering Heights, when Heathcliff went to meet, Linton made fun of his black hair that it must be very heavy upon his head. He threw a plate of hot sauce in his face for which he was heavily flogged by Hindley and locked in the garret.

Due to this ill-treatment by different characters Heathcliff developed a vindictive nature. He wanted to avenge Hindley. He told Nelly that he will wait and think how he can pay back Hindley for all the sufferings he caused to him “I am trying to settle how I shall pay Hindley back. I don’t care how long I wait, if I can only do it at last. I hope he will not die before I do.” (Bronte 64).

His revenge against Hindley was justified because he was spoiled due to the ill-treatment of Hindley. Nelly says in this regard, “His treatment of the later was enough to make a fiend of a saint. And, truly; it appeared as if the lad were possessed of something diabolical at the period.” (Bronte 67).

Heathcliff told Nelly that he takes delight seeing Hareton in this condition. Heathcliff has deprived him of education and treated him like a servant, the way his father did with Heathcliff. It is Stimulus and Response connection, which justifies Heathcliff’s cruel nature and behavior.

Heathcliff decided to marry Isabella in order to satisfy his revengeful feelings by making her life miserable. Despite all the opposition of her brother and sister-in-law, Isabella eloped with Heathcliff. In her letter to Nelly she wrote about the poor welcome she received at Wuthering Heights. “I assure you, a tiger or a venomous serpent could not rouse terror in me equal to that which he wakes. He told me of Catherin’s illness, and that I should be Edgar’s proxy in sufferings, till he could get hold of him” (Bronte 131)

As Heathcliff was raised in a great poverty, he wanted to become rich. From the very beginning of the novel it is obvious that Heathcliff was brought from Liverpool where he was found in a very poor condition, with worn out cloths and dirty hair, roaming and starving in the streets. When he was brought to Wuthering Heights, Hindley treated him like a servant and reduced to work on the farms:

He drove him 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 as hard as any other lad on the farm.. (Bronte 52)

On the other hand the Lintons also looked upon him as a social outcast and called him a beggarly interloper.. When Catherine asked her husband that where should she call Heathcliff. Edgar said that she could meet with Heathcliff in the kitchen. This means that he did not belong to the high social status. “I cannot sit in the kitchen, set two tables here, Ellen: one for your master and Miss Isabella, being Gentry; the other for Heathcliff and myself, being of the lower orders”(Bronte 91-92). Catherine refers to Heathcliff and herself, belonging to poor class.

The reason behind Catherine’s rejection of Heathcliff’s love was also rooted in materialism. As Heathcliff was financially weak and he was totally dependant on Hindley, Catherine chose to marry Edgar. The marriage between Edgar and Catherine will bring her a good fortune. Catherine thought that if she marries Heathcliff they both will become beggars and that it will degrade her to accept Heathcliff’s love and proposal. As she said, “if Heathcliff and I married, we should be beggars? Whereas, if I marry Linton, I can aid Heathcliff to rise, and place out of my brother’s power.” (Bronte 81)

As Heathcliff overheard Catherine’s words, he disappeared for three years. When he came back, he had acquired a great fortune. He was now a rich man. The source of his richness is not known, that whether he earned his money by fair or unfair means. This show Heathcliff’s greedy and miser nature. This was the result of Heathcliff dire poverty in the past, and sufferings due to the lack of money.

Heathcliff’s had no interest in Isabella, but was ready to marry her for two reasons. The first reason was to marry her and make her life miserable so that he can satisfy his revenge against the Lintons, who also played a great role in causing Heathcliff’s sufferings. The second reason was to acquire her fortune and to become rich. Heathcliff’s greedy nature is obvious from the words of Catherine, when she forbid Isabella from marrying Heathcliff:

Catherine opinion about Heathcliff, being a greedy man and planning to trap Isabella is proved correct when Catherine told Heathcliff that Isabella is in love with Heathcliff and that she wanted to marry him. Heathcliff himself asked Catherine about her fortune and said that “She is her brother’s heir, is she not?” (Bronte 101). Heathcliff also planned to arrange Catherine and Linton’s marriage is also an example of Heathcliff’s greedy nature. When Isabella died, Edgar brought his only nephew Linton home in order to give him a healthy brought up. He wanted his nephew to live the life of gentleness. But Heathcliff after knowing this claimed his custody. He had no interest in his son; on the contrary he hated his son because he was as handsome as his mother. He told to Nelly:

My son is the prospective owner of your place, and I should not wish him to die till I was certain of being his successor. (Bronte 180)

On the very day of Edgar's death, he went there and announced that he was the owner of Thrushcross Grange and that he wanted to rent the house, so that he can earn more money. Heathcliff this behavior was the result of his dire poverty and lower social status that he previously suffered from. So Heathcliff's behavior represents Stimulus-Response connection. There was a stimulus behind Heathcliff's behavior, which formed it.

Catherine rejected his love because of his poverty. This impossible love caused a great change in his personality. He grew revengeful due to failure in love and made everyone the victim of his revenge. He told Nelly that if he lost Catherine, "Two words would comprehend my future—death and hell: existence, after losing her would be hell"(Bronte 134).

When Catherine died, Heathcliff grief was unbearable; he lost his soul and his life. Heathcliff cursed Catherine that she may not rest in peace but haunt him till his death. As his love was impossible and it did not fulfill his life instincts so after her death he also wanted to die:

Every cruel act that Heathcliff performed was elicited from some stimulus in his environment. In fact he was called by different names such as the Imp of Satan, Devil, Judas, ghoulish and goblin etc and he was thought of having been possessed with the evil spirit or he had sold his soul to the devil. No matter how brutally he behaved, it was always the outcome of some stimulus; it means that his behavior was a response to a stimulus in his environment.

## **CONCLUSION**

The psychological and Behaviorist approach and stimulus-response theory asserts that human behavior is shaped through his constant interaction with the external environment. Every human behavior is a response or reaction to the stimulus in his environment. Heathcliff was shaped into a monster, villain and a fiend. Hindley’s violence, Catherine’s rejection of his love and Linton’s social discrimination against Heathcliff were the stimulus that elicited a strange and harsh behavior and response from Heathcliff. Thus Heathcliff’s behavior can be justified in the light of Stimulus-Response theory. He was the victim of bad and evil environment and so he also developed an evil personality.

The aim of the researcher in justifying the behavior is not to accelerate social violence or encourage spoiled temperaments but to eliminate such issues. This very behavior of Heathcliff is exemplary of the emotional breakdown and disobedience in the children who are exposed to the very strict treatment by the parents. Such treatment gives birth to broken personalities, cause the feelings of inferiority complex in children who in turn become so stubborn that they develop many personality disorders and issues.

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