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Learning or Not Learning to Overcome Trauma: Jane Eyre and A Farewell to Arms

Jessica Cutter

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Jessica Cutter

Dr. Mook

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Literary Characters Inflicted with Trauma: *Jane Eyre* and *A Farewell to Arms*

In the novels *Jane Eyre* and *A Farewell to Arms* the characters' interactions with relationships, family, marriage, war, and historical context all influence the trauma that they experience. Sandra Bloom states that "psychic trauma occurs when a sudden, unexpected, overwhelming intense emotional blow or a series of blows assaults the person from outside. Traumatic events are external, but they quickly become incorporated into the mind" (1). There are several reactions one might have to traumatic events, and within both novels the authors incorporate these realistic reactions through the main characters. As a result of their trauma, a reader of both novels can see that the women are stronger than their male counterparts because of how they handle their trauma, and the positive set up for a better future. Bloom elaborates on two of these reactions to trauma, fight-or-flight response and learned helplessness, which are exhibited in the novels *Jane Eyre*. The first, fight-or-flight, occurs when an individual is threatened; it leads to "a biological, built-in response, a protective device that only goes wrong if we are exposed to too much danger and too little protection in childhood or as adults" (2). If an individual has this reaction, he/she will either react aggressively and try to find safety through a show of force, or he/she will flee the danger and try to get away immediately. In the second, learned helplessness, the individual has been repeatedly inflicted with a life threatening trauma,

and if that person continues to experience that he will believe that nothing can be done to help get him out; he will become used to the trauma and giving up on a better future (3). Therefore, a painful experience occurs, and this then affects the individual in different ways depending on the trauma. In both novels the main characters experience trauma, but the conclusion in both vary drastically because of how the characters deal with their trauma. Both novels demonstrate the natural reaction to avoid, distract, or disassociate from one's trauma leading to more pain, but some characters also exhibit strength to move on from past experiences. Jane Eyre goes through several traumatic experiences and becomes a stronger person because of it; she recognizes the importance of self-reliance, whereas Mr. Rochester's traumas cripple him and make him reliant on Jane and others, demonstrating the strength that women can sometimes wield within a relationship as well as a universal ability to grow from and survive trauma scars.

Jane's Trauma

The Victorian setting of the novel dictates the circumstances that lead up to several of Jane's traumas. Kathryn Hughes writes about how "women were considered physically weak yet morally superior to men, which meant that they were best suited to the domestic sphere." This influences Jane's career choice as a governess because it is a domestic job, but it also deals with passing on personal life lessons to another. In the education system there were several key factors within the Victorian era that affected Jane. For example, if children were poor with no family they were sent to orphanages. These buildings were often bare and lacking creativity, schooling was very repetitive, punishments consisted of being beaten by a cane, educators were known for being cruel, and schools lacked appropriate resources to properly take care of children ("Victorian Children"). Instead of her family being poor they simply did not want her, so Jane was sent to an orphanage. There her friend Helen passes away and the educators there treat her

poorly. These contextual factors all contribute to her trauma as an individual within the time period.

From the beginning of her story Jane is mistreated, but she overcomes the cruelty of her aunt, the death of her friend, and the dishonesty of Mr. Rochester, and she learns and experiences growth. Her first trauma happens when she is 10 and staying with her aunt, Mrs. Reed, and cousins, John, Eliza and Georgiana. They take pleasure in being physically and emotionally abusive towards poor Jane. She acts out against this aggression in a natural way by defending herself. Her instinct is to fight back, but her aunt responds, “Take her to the red-room, and lock her in there” (Bronte 5). Which is an unjust response from Jane’s aunt because Jane was the one being picked on. The reader discovers that “Mr. Reed had been dead nine years: it was in this chamber he breathed his last... and, since that day, a sense of dreary consecration had guarded it from frequent intrusion” (8). This little girl is attacked and then punished by being locked in that room. Cruel treatment combined with overwhelming emotional experience within the walls of the red room leaves Jane with the feeling of injustice and helplessness. She screams, cries, bangs on the doors, and responds with panic. She is trapped within the room and is left isolated. Her instinct of fight or flight kicks in, she tries to get out, but she is forced to stay in the room and is unable to flee. Being trapped and unable to flee reinforces the trauma. Feeling that fear and being unable to get away from it creates learned helplessness, leaving Jane stranded not only physically but also mentally. This incident accentuates the importance of honesty, justice, and mercy, and how they were all absent around Jane. Because she was retraumatized in isolation through those events it sticks with her throughout her life. Following her harrowing childhood, the novel shows how Jane strives to exemplify those very qualities that her childhood lacked.

Jane develops a higher calling in order not to succumb to the trauma she experiences. This is largely due to the heavy influence of Helen. After being punished unfairly and treated with cruelty by her aunt, this leads Jane to be resentful, but she learns to let it go because of the wisdom Helen imparts to her. At one point Jane is complaining about the circumstances of her life and her treatment from her aunt, and Helen replies, “Would you not be happier if you tried to forget her severity, together with the passionate emotions it excited? Life appears to me too short to be spent in nursing animosity, or registering wrongs” (Bronte 55). That clearly affects Jane’s thinking as a girl, and she then approaches every situation similarly. She does not allow the traumas of the past to dictate the happiness in her future. Jane embodies honesty, justice, and mercy because of her desire to be the opposite of how her aunt and cousins treated her. This establishes that Jane has learned from her past trauma, and instead of remaining in the same mindset of negativity she is growing from her experiences.

After the first incident of cruelty, Jane’s living relative sends her away to Lowood School where she once again experiences trauma, however she resists the urge of the fight-or-flight response and learns how to cope with trauma. The school she is sent to is for orphans, which is another reminder that she is unwanted by her family, and that opens a door for her to experience more abuse by the headmaster and others. Jane is still treated poorly, but befriends Helen Burns. Helen demonstrates what a healthy relationship should be and models to Jane how kindness should be in the core of a person. They become close and enjoy one another’s company. Bloom points out that “the real nature of the fight-or- flight response means that if we hope to help traumatized people, then we must create safe environments to help counteract the long- term effects of chronic stress” (3). Helen provided a safe and supportive atmosphere where Jane flourished and was able to look past the trauma in her history. However, their happiness does not

last long. Helen gets sick and on her final night Jane stays with her. In the morning Jane “learned that Miss Temple, on returning to her own room at dawn, had found me laid in a little crib; my face against Helen Burns’ shoulder, my arms round her neck. I was asleep, and Helen was—dead” (81). Jane not only has no family, but also experiences the heartbreak of losing her friend. The speaker in the novel (Jane) does not share the details of her reaction to Helen’s death. However, this could be to make the point that Jane felt empty and blank after the fact. When she was younger, she was forced to stay in a room where she knew her uncle died, then the first person to show her kindness dies while they sleep in the same bed, and what follows is shock and hollowness. Feelings of injustice and cruelty resurface and are reinforced with the trauma of once again being isolated. This tragic death stresses the importance of relationships and how they can impact an individual.

To find better fortune Jane leaves Lowood School, but she encounters her greatest trauma in the next section of her life by once again experiencing the natural reaction of fight-or-flight, however for her own safety and the security of her future Jane must flee the trauma she experiences so she can grow from it. She becomes a governess at Thornfield Hall, finds peace in her life, and is to marry Rochester, the man she loves. However, Jane’s dream is interrupted at the last second by the truth she never knew. Her fiancé was already married, and thus cannot continue with the wedding, leading to the unfortunate termination of her engagement at the altar. When reflecting upon the incident at the end of the day Jane simply says, “A few words had been spoken, a calmly pronounced objection to the marriage made; some stern short questions put by Rochester; answers, explanations given, evidence adduced; an open admission of the truth had been uttered by my master; then the living proof had been seen: the intruders were gone, and all was over” (298). She was so close to finding the peace in a relationship that she wanted, and

once again had it snatched away. The emotionless and simple way she describes the altercation gives the reader a sense of shock and strange calmness. Jane is left in her room to reflect on the events that happen and once again the instinct of fight-or-flight come in: "I must go: *that* I perceived well" (299). Once again Jane experienced pain at the expense of Rochester's dishonesty and inability to act in a just way, but this time the pain she went through was caused by a relationship she chose. She couldn't pick her family, Helen initiated and started their friendship, but with Rochester she was choosing to marry him and spend her whole life with him. She is crushed and overwhelmed with grief to the point of saying, "I lay faint; longing to be dead" (299). Once again Jane has feelings of isolation, and pain, as well as the desire to flee from her circumstance. The natural instinct to flee comes when Jane needs to protect herself. Not only does Jane seek for peace in life, but she also seeks for the strength to stay alive. She fights for herself and knows not to dwell on the trauma of her past experiences because of her previous conversation with Helen. Nancy Pell says, "Jane's commitment to life is so strong that we are likely to forget how thoroughly this novel is pervaded by death" (404). When facing the option of suicide, Jane is still fighting to get out of the painful situation, thus exemplifying her strength to survive and continue growing from the trauma she has experienced. She does not let the unjust circumstances of her failed wedding hold her back from moving on to the next step in life.

To illustrate Jane's ability to move onto a better future, one must examine her self-reflection as a sign of growth. The backbone of Jane's strength is the fact that she is the narrator and the novel is her fictional autobiography. She has taken the step to go and write down her past experiences and woes to reflect on what has happened and to even grow from it. Jane achieves perspective, and to achieve a greater perspective on Jane, Lorri Nandrea analyzes *Jane Eyre* by examining the themes of sympathy and sensibility and narrows in on how

one might wonder, then, whether writing the autobiography provides Jane with an opportunity to produce what this end excludes, to repeat the kind of experience that has been suppressed in the interests of achieving mastery. In this sense, the minor particles of sensory intensity that threaten to disintegrate the narrative and its subject, giving voice to difference, are the very points at which desire is being repeated. (123)

The reader is able to see that Jane has a greater understanding of the experiences and traumas that have occurred because she details every impactful event in her life. She is the stronger character because she is independent of others and seeks improvement. She writes about every positive, negative, and maybe even dull detail by giving perspective to both her situation and Mr. Rochester's. Therefore, by writing down and repeating these events in her book Jane relives them and derives pleasure from the knowledge of her growing from her traumatic experiences.

Rochester's Trauma

When it comes to the trauma that Rochester faces there are several contextual factors that play a role in contributing to his pain. Within the Victorian Era, it was custom for marriage to be "treated more like a business deal than a romantic gesture or expression of love" ("Victorian Marriage"). This factor plays into how Rochester took part in an arranged marriage that ended up being a disaster. His family wanted the money that would be received through the marriage, but Rochester was trapped in it, which contributed to his trauma.

The reader learns about Rochester's trauma when he reflects about his past in his explanation to Jane, and how he too experienced the instinct of fight-or-flight. The reader can see he has not found a way to cope or move on from the past trauma he has experienced. After their wedding has been cancelled he shares with Jane that when he was younger he was matched with

a beautiful young woman who was mad. However, he was not aware of her madness. He says, “My father and my brother Rowland knew all this; but they thought only of the thirty thousand pounds, and joined in the plot against me” (309). He was tricked into marrying her and “Bertha Mason, –the true daughter of an infamous mother, –dragged me through all the hideous and degrading agonies which must attend a man bound to a wife at once intemperate and unchaste” (310). He couldn’t escape the marriage he had been bound to by law, and also could not do anything to break the agreement. His reaction was to flee from the relationship he was in, but he could not. Therefore, he falls into the same category as Jane by experiencing that fight-or-flight instinct which develops into learned helplessness. Along with that, surrounding his marriage were dishonest and unjust decisions on the part of his father and brother, parallel with the trauma Jane had experienced in her childhood. Rochester stayed in the marriage for years because he could not get away from it, and it became a normal part of everyday life for him. He was trapped and isolated because of his circumstances, just as Jane was confined to the red room. Rochester was deeply traumatized by the relationship he was confined in but, unlike Jane, was unable to grow or learn from the situation. He never had a person there to help challenge his negative mindset towards his past or provide any sense of stability, so therefore his trauma was more detrimental to his character.

Rochester is enveloped in yet another trauma after Jane discovers his already existing marriage and leaves. Bertha sets Thornfield Hall on fire, and “it’s quite certain that it was her and nobody but her, that set it going” (435). Rochester saves the servants and then goes to save Bertha. There are eyewitnesses that say, “we saw him approach her; and then, ‘ma’am’, she yelled, and gave a spring, and the next minute she lay smashed on the pavement” (436). Mr. Rochester’s wife commits suicide and he is left alone, blind, injured, and unable to walk without

aid. Once again being isolated, his prickly demeanor only increases after the incident and he falls into a depressed state of being. He reacts to the situation by wallowing in his state of negativity and life. Rochester's learned helplessness only increases because of his physical disabilities and he is unable to better himself after the trauma.

How is Jane a stronger character than Rochester?

The greatest difference between Jane and Rochester is how they respond to the trauma of their life experiences. Melodie Monahan makes the point that Jane's "quest for a better world expresses itself in her repeated efforts to challenge binary and vertical constructs: the haves and the have-nots, the saved and the damned, the insiders and the outcasts, the masculine and the feminine" (592). Monahan points out Jane's affinity to reflect and to connect her diverse experiences in life, which then transfers to her success at challenging her traumatic experiences and learning from them. Jane was treated with dishonesty, so she always tried to demonstrate honesty in her character, as well as exhibiting instances of both mercy and justice. In contrast to the growth Jane experiences, Mr. Rochester is still resentful when thinking about his family and how they tricked him into marrying Bertha. He never let that go and ends up hurting Jane because of this. His brother and father were cruel and dishonest in how they approached his marriage with Bertha, and he in turn lied to Jane and was manipulative when approaching their wedding. It was impossible for Mr. Rochester to move on and become a better man because he never was challenged to let go of his past or shown what a healthy relationship looks like. He was in distress and so he sought a solution in Jane. He wanted her peace and tranquility because that was what he desired after his years of torment. He was selfish in attempting to take that dishonestly from her, which demonstrates that he is the weaker character.

The true test to see that Jane is the stronger character comes when the most difficult decision in the novel is to be made: Jane must decide if she should leave Mr. Rochester. She is in love with him but has experienced a severe amount of pain and she knows that love is not enough. She thinks to herself, “Not a human being that ever lived could wish to be loved better than I was loved; and him who thus loved me I absolutely worshipped: and I must renounce love and idol. One drear word comprised my intolerable duty—‘depart’” (319). This is what makes her stronger than Mr. Rochester. He would have kept her by his side and never would have wanted her to go, and all because he wanted to subdue the trauma he was experiencing in his marriage. He felt trapped and isolated, and instead of seeking for a solution Mr. Rochester distracted himself from the pain with his relationship to Jane. This form of dissociation is not a healthy way to move on, and in fact throws Mr. Rochester into an even more devastating situation. On the other hand, Jane desired to move from the traumas of her past and let go, so instead of staying in a relationship that was unlawful she left. Despite her feelings Jane can let go for the betterment of herself and Mr. Rochester.

In the end, Mr. Rochester is left blind and disabled and he relies even more on Jane when they are reunited. He has to be assisted not only emotionally and mentally, but also physically. He says, “Hitherto I have hated to be helped—to be led: henceforth, I feel, I shall hate it no more. I did not like to put my hand into a hireling’s but it is pleasant to feel it circled by Jane’s little fingers. I preferred utter loneliness to the constant attendance of servants; but Jane’s soft ministry will be a perpetual joy. Jane suits me” (454).

Just as Mr. Rochester looks to her for peace, Jane also finds comfort in him. Throughout the whole novel Jane goes from trauma to more trauma, pain to more pain, and continues to press on. The connection between Jane and Mr. Rochester is intrinsically tied into their experiences

with trauma. They can both relate to one another, and develop a deeper relationship than simply friendship. Pamela Regis writes,

The freedom that Jane has achieved in the novel results in her ability to overcome the final barriers to her marriage to Rochester. In traveling to him, in sweeping aside the barrier in his mind, in stage-managing the proposal and, one might add, his life after their union, Jane comes into the full possession of the freedom that she has sought throughout the novel. The heroine's own agency provides the final freedom for both her and the hero. (90)

Therefore, Jane coming back to Rochester was the final step of her recovery from her trauma, and the initial step for him to get over his.

In *A Farewell to Arms*, just like in *Jane Eyre*, the characters are dealing with trauma . However, this trauma is caused through different circumstances, coped with in an unhealthy manner, and ultimately ruins the lives of Henry and Catherine. They deal with the trauma of loss, as well as PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) from the war. The loss of a loved one is so damaging according to Katherine Keyes because the loved one “can contribute importantly to a sense of identity and are often intertwined in a person’s self-concept, and as such, the death of a close loved one has unique psychological sequelae.” The psychological sequelae/aftermath causes an individual to feel lost because of that missing person. With PTSD, there is a sense of immobilization that Melinda Smith says occurs when a traumatized individual is put under too much stress. When this happens, “Your nervous system is unable to return to its normal state of balance and you’re unable to move on from the event,” even if the event has passed. If PTSD episodes occur regularly it can cause the individual to struggle with identity and lose oneself. To lose oneself could be exemplified through the inability to socialize with friends or family the same, unable to visualize a future, consistently seeking distraction from traumatic pain, etc. Both main characters struggle to deal with the trauma the war causes, which leaves them both searching for their identity and Henry relying on Catherine heavily for support, then ultimately being devastated by her death, which is a demonstration of the perpetually crippling wounds left from PTSD trauma that are a common thread in victims.

The historical setting in which the novel is based is the origination of the trauma the characters experience within the novel. It is set in Italy during WWI, and depicts the devastation that overtakes the country. Italy officially joined the war in 1915. As the novel shows, Catherine’s fiancé dies in combat along with 600,000 other Italian troops. Henry is also traumatized when he is injured in combat along with the 1,000,000 Italian soldiers that were

wounded or crippled (“Italy in WWI”). Throughout the book the reader sees Henry’s PTSD. One instance is caused when Henry experiences a life-threatening traumatic event because he was injured on the front line, just like thousands of other soldiers during the war (Smith). Henry is deeply traumatized by the death of Catherine, which is a result of lack of proper medical awareness and equipment. During the War, Italy had a huge war debt that caused a shortage in food, equipment, and medical assistance, which results in a circumstance that leads to the death of Catherine and Henry being left all alone. In many ways the novel demonstrates the consequences that war can have on a country. The war ripped families and relationships apart, mentally and physically wounded its population, failed to provide proper care for its citizens, and devastated Italy: all of these events are depicted in the novel and enhances the historical context of the events.

Catherine’s Trauma

The first moment Henry meets Miss Barkley, Catherine, she talks about the war and goes into detail about her trauma letting the reader know how she copes with her experiences. Henry comments on a stick that she is holding that belonged to a boy who was killed in the war. She says, “He was a very nice boy. He was going to marry me and he was killed in the Somme” (Hemingway 18). With that explanation she goes into detail about the regret that she feels towards her fiancé: “I would have married him or anything. I know all about it now. But then he wanted to go to war and I didn’t know” (19). Within the shock of his death she is left with an overwhelming sense of regret because she never got to marry him. The trauma of losing a loved one has caused her to lose her identity. That was a significant portion of her life and it was quickly snatched away. This traumatic loss affects how she interacts with Henry and their overall relationship. After he is injured and she is lying in bed with him she says, “I’ll do what you want

and say what you want and then I'll be a great success, won't I?" (105). The guilt Catherine carries for not marrying her previous fiancé has built up inside of her, and she is trying to fill that void with Henry. Her asking if she'll be "a great success" implies that she was not a success in her previous relationship, because of this "failure" she seeks to find affirmation and approval through Henry by being willing to do whatever he wants or needs. On top of the guilt she is feeling, there is still that loss of identity through the death of her fiancé. Her relationship defined who Catherine was (a fiancé, a lover) and she is now filling a void with Henry. But also, she is affirming her identity through her relationship with him. She continues to be a lover with a fake sense of affection and connection to cope with her past trauma.

Catherine faces yet another trauma when she becomes pregnant. Because of the war, her experience with death, her relationship with Henry, and the stigma around getting pregnant out of wedlock, being pregnant is a traumatic experience for Catherine. Her sense of identity is now found in a mother role, but the joy of new life is clouded by her insecurities with her relationship with Henry. After she tells Henry she keeps worrying about him and what he thinks. She says, "I'll try and not make trouble for you. I know I've made trouble now. But haven't I been a good girl until now?" (138). She is starting to panic and still wants that reassurance from him, but she also is trying to juggle not being a burden, which only adds to the stress of the situation, making it more traumatic.

Henry's Trauma

Within the first chapter the reader can see that the narrator has become desensitized to horrific violent experiences that occur in wartime resulting in PTSD, and this is demonstrated in how Henry has become numb to his surroundings and relates everyday normal life to death and

destruction as a result. He describes everything in a dull matter-of-fact tone that gives a sense of numbness. The scenes of nature are as normal as men marching with their guns on a muddy road, creating this image of war and nature fused together. The narrator even says, “At the start of the winter came the permanent rain and with that rain came the cholera. But it was checked and in the end only seven thousand died of it in the army” (4). This is an ironic statement because it glosses over the loss of human life and makes it appear natural to see such a large number of men die. Trevor Dodman states that Henry’s “narration operates both as a scar and wound, as tissue stitched together and lacerated apart” (250), once again exemplifying his trauma and immersion into a painful world. Right from the first setting the reader understands that trauma is prevalent not only for the narrator, but every individual involved in the war.

Hemingway develops the idea of war causing deep trauma and highlights Henry’s PTSD through his interactions with other people. While he is on the front Henry is injured, and as in the first chapter the attack is told in such a blunt way that it is confusing to understand the transition between what seems normal to something traumatic. He is eating cheese and bread when all of a sudden his ambulance is hit and he is injured in the leg. After Henry has been taken to the doctor’s tent, a man starts talking to him:

“Are you hit badly?” he asked....

“In the legs.”

“It’s not serious I hope. Will you have a cigarette?”

“Thanks.”

“They tell me you’ve lost two drivers.”

“Yes. One killed and the fellow that brought you.”

“What rotten luck...” (57).

At this time, it is perfectly normal to have a conversation about death and to exchange pleasantries such as asking if one would like a cigarette. Dodman states, “Frederic’s narration not only describes a past dissociative event but becomes in itself, in its very telling, a terribly present dissociative event” (254). A side effect of PTSD is feeling removed from a situation, which is exactly what Dodman writes and Henry does. The casual nature of the conversation correlates back to the normalization of war and death for everyone involved, not just Henry. Henry is losing his identity and grip on himself through the war, which is demonstrating the focal point of Henry’s PTSD.

As the novel pushes on, the reader sees Henry battling with expectations of fighting in the war, which he doesn’t want to do. Often soldiers join because of a sense of duty, but Henry does not have this desire to serve his country. Leaving him to be in a situation he wishes to get out of that creates learned helplessness. This learned helplessness in wartime results in Henry acknowledging that it is pointless to be involved, and War only results in death. This realization reinforces the trauma he has experienced because he now must admit that he doesn’t agree with the war, but he can’t get away from it:

I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice and the expression in vain. . . . I had seen nothing sacred, and the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices were like the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to bury it. . . . Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages. (185)

Henry sees his fellow soldiers excited and proud to serve, and he feels disconnected because he doesn't feel the same. This is directly related to his trauma/PTSD from being a part of the war, because he is unable to move on from his experiences and serve as his comrades are doing. His identity is not placed in being a soldier anymore, and he is lost. Henry sees war as a waste of life, and uses a grim simile of meat being buried to signify the soldiers being killed. This feeling of entrapment enhances his trauma. As Badri Pokharel writes, "This traumatic violence makes him completely isolated from the lump of humanity that he belongs to. The sufferings and bitter war experience make him notice the gap between the hollowness of traditional ideas and ideals, clashes and slogans related to war" (62). The traumatic violence being referred to is his leg injury that he sustains, and ultimately how it separates him from the rest of humanity. He feels disconnected from other soldiers, civilians, and even friends because of the experiences he has had.

The disconnection, and loss of identity, caused by PTSD is not remedied when Henry abandons his position, but it simply brings out his dissociation from civilian humanity. Being unable to relate to those who have experienced the same trauma (other soldiers) as him creates a disconnection in Henry, once that manifests Henry attempts to live and exist in the civilian world, but he is unable to relate to the normal life that he used to have and ends up in further isolation than before. He thinks to himself, "In civilian clothes I felt a masquerader.... The trousers felt very floppy" (243). So not only does he mentally feel like he doesn't belong in the civilian world, but also physically the clothing is unaccustomed to his body. This further isolation causes him to withdraw into Catherine to find security by dissociating himself from humanity.

How is Catherine a stronger character than Henry?

Although it may be difficult to distinguish who is stronger, there are several moments, reactions, and decisions in which Catherine demonstrates the strength she possesses over Henry. She is willing to throw herself into a war related job without the proper training. When questioned about being a nurse she says, “Oh, no. I’m something called a V.A.D. We work very hard but no one trusts us” (25). She is a Voluntary Action Deployment nurse, which makes her fearless because without the proper education she was still willing to help, and she threw herself into the job. Despite her bravery in the decision to become a V.A.D, Catherine still exhibits fear when it comes to death; she says to Henry, “I’m afraid of the rain because I sometimes see me in it dead.... And sometimes I see you dead in it” (126). This moment of vulnerability can be interpreted as brave because despite her fear of death she still trudges on through the war and her relationship. She doesn’t let it stop her, but is willing to admit that it is there by verbally telling Henry about her fear. This reflection is only seen in the character Catherine and shows her wisdom in this instance. Later in the novel, she has a conversation with Henry about bravery and death, and she says, “The brave dies perhaps two thousand deaths if he’s intelligent” (140). She reiterates her previous point by saying that a brave man thinks about dying before he actually does, and she also says that the brave always die. This is both a foreshadowing of her future, and a confirmation of her strength because she has thought about her own and Henry’s deaths (as quoted above). When Catherine is pregnant and fleeing to another country with Henry via rowboat, she offers to take a turn rowing to give Henry a break. She tells him that “Rowing in moderation is very good for the pregnant lady” (275). She not only helps get them to Switzerland, but she also does it while very pregnant with a child, illustrating that she has the strength to support herself, Henry, and now the baby. When Catherine is finally going into labor

she tells Henry to “Please go out and get something to eat.... I’m fine, really” (314). Typically, a woman in labor would want her partner with her, but Catherine doesn’t want Henry to worry so she sends him away in hopes that he’ll distract himself. She is handling the terrors of childbirth by herself and attempting to comfort Henry at the same time. When her death approaches, one of the final things she says to him is “I’m not afraid. I just hate it” (330). Followed by “It’s just a dirty trick” (331). Even in the face of death she has no fear and even makes a joke about the situation. Catherine demonstrated her strength through the action of taking care of Henry, even when she was facing death.

How did Henry rely on Catherine for support?

At the beginning of their relationship both Catherine and Henry are dealing with their own traumas and are attempting to find comfort and identity in the other. Catherine is dealing with the loss of a loved one, and Henry is searching for a lost identity as a result of his PTSD. Early on in their relationship they confess their “love” to one another, but Henry knows that “I did not love Catherine Barkley nor had any idea of loving her” (30). Yet this simple passion and interest with another person deepens throughout the novel as both of their traumas worsen. It becomes evident that Henry is deeply attached to Catherine when he plays with her hair:

I loved to take her hair down and she sat on the bed and kept very still, except suddenly she would dip down to kiss me while I was doing it, and I would take out the pins and lay them on the sheet and it would be loose and I would watch her while she kept very still and then take out the last two pins and it would all come down and she would drop her head and we would both be inside of it, and it was the feeling of inside a tent or behind a falls. (114)

He sees Catherine as a safe comforting space for him. Her hair physically cloaks them, placing them in an out-of-body experience together. Henry didn't have that connection with others because of his loss of identity. In other words, because of his separation from others, Henry forms an even closer bond with Catherine, making it even more traumatic when she dies, thus pushing him into a more isolated position. After they have run off together his life is consumed only with her. He says, "My life used to be full of everything . . . Now if you aren't with me I haven't a thing in the world" (247). Henry's deep connection and love for Catherine transcends what he could have imagined or what would be considered healthy. She goes into labor and when she isn't doing well he starts to panic and thinks, "But what if she should die? She won't die. But what if she should die? She won't. She's all right. But what if she should die? She can't die. But what if she should die? Hey, what about that? What if she should die?" (321). He's trying to rationalize what could possibly happen but can't wrap his mind around life without Catherine. She says, "I don't want to die and leave you, but I get so tired of it and I feel I'm going to die" (323). By saying that, she acknowledges his reliance and doesn't want to hurt him by leaving him alone through death. After she does die he goes into the hospital room, and he "shut the door and turned off the light it wasn't any good. It was like saying good-bye to a statue. After a while I went out and left the hospital and walked back to the hotel in the rain" (332). He is now experiencing the loss of a loved one on top of his PTSD. After panicking, praying, and trying to protect Catherine he simply walks back to the hotel in the rain, leaving the reader to see him isolated and more devastated than ever. If anything, this final scene exemplifies the value of seeking healing from trauma, because once it builds up the more difficult it is to recover from it.

Throughout their trauma-filled lives, Catherine and Henry found reliance and identity in one another that led to further devastation, and in contrast Jane and Rochester found growth from

their trauma that led to their companionship in the end. Both couples experienced trauma related to the context of their time period, dealt with it differently, and ultimately found peace or unrest in the end results of their trauma; both male leads relied heavily on their female counterparts for support through their trauma. A reader of both novels can conclude that learning and growing from a traumatic event will yield better results than avoiding, masking, or disassociating oneself from it. The decision in how to deal with the past will result in the capability of function in the future.

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