

MALE CHARACTERS IN THE
NOVELS OF THE BRONTË SISTERS:
WHY ARE THEY UNIQUE FOR THEIR TIME?

TRABAJO DE MADUREZ.

BY

ANA TORRE BRÄNDLE.

SUPERVISOR: ROY KERN.

CO-SUPERVISOR: CLAIRE JESKE.

COLEGIO SUIZO DE MADRID:

CARRETERA DE BURGOS, KM. 14

28108 ALCOBENDAS, MADRID

2023.

Male characters in the novels of the Brontë sisters:
Why are they unique for their time?

Report submitted for the *Diploma de Madurez*

Author: Ana Torre Brändle
Supervisor: Roy Kern
Co-supervisor: Claire Jeske
School: Colegio Suizo de Madrid
Class: 12B
Date: November 14, 2023

The Byronic hero, incapable of love, or capable only of an impossible love, suffers endlessly. He is solitary, languid, his condition exhausts him. If he wants to feel alive, it must be in the terrible exaltation of a brief and destructive action.

Albert Camus, The Rebel

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyse the male characters of the Brontë sisters and to determine whether they fit into the literary conventions of the Victorian period. To achieve this, the first part will situate the work of the Brontës within the corresponding literary period. The focus will be on the main characteristics of the Victorian period, and how it shaped the literary works of the time. Likewise, attention will be paid to the specific influences that the Brontë sisters had to create their characters. The next part analyses three male characters, focusing on their physical aspects, their personalities, and their relationships. The focus of the final part is to compare them, describe their unique features, and state how they differ from the characters of a traditional Victorian novel. The paper concludes by answering the question of why these characters are unique for their time.

El objetivo de este trabajo es analizar los personajes masculinos de las hermanas Brontë y determinar si se ajustan a los estándares literarios de la era victoriana. Para ello, en la primera parte se situará la obra de las hermanas Brontë dentro del periodo literario correspondiente. La atención girará en torno a las principales características de la era victoriana, y cómo éstas afectaron a las obras literarias de la época. Asimismo, se examinarán las influencias particulares que tuvieron las hermanas Brontë para crear sus personajes. La siguiente parte analiza tres personajes masculinos, centrándose en su aspecto físico, su personalidad y sus relaciones. La parte final se dedicará a compararlos, describir sus rasgos únicos y señalar en qué se diferencian de los personajes de una novela victoriana tradicional. El trabajo concluye respondiendo a la pregunta de por qué estos personajes son únicos para su época.

Ziel dieser Arbeit ist es, die männlichen Figuren der Brontë-Schwester zu analysieren und festzustellen, ob sie zum literarischen Stil des viktorianischen Zeitalters passen. Um dies zu erreichen, wird im ersten Teil das Werk der Geschwister in die entsprechende literarische Epoche eingeordnet. Der Schwerpunkt liegt dabei auf den Hauptmerkmalen der viktorianischen Periode und der Art und Weise, wie sie die dichterischen Werke dieser Zeit geprägt hat. Ebenso wird auf die besonderen Einflüsse der Brontë-Schwester bei der Gestaltung ihrer Figuren eingegangen. Im nächsten Teil werden drei männliche Figuren analysiert, wobei das Hauptaugenmerk auf ihrer körperlichen Erscheinung, ihrer Persönlichkeit und ihren Beziehungen liegt. Im letzten Teil werden sie miteinander verglichen, ihre besonderen Eigenschaften beschrieben und ihre Unterschiede zu den Figuren eines traditionellen viktorianischen Romans aufgezeigt. Die Arbeit endet mit einer Aussage zur Einzigartigkeit der behandelten Figuren für ihre Epoche.

WUTHERING HEIGHTS

A NOVEL,

BY

ELLIS BELL,

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

THOMAS CAUTLEY NEWBY, PUBLISHER,
72, MORTIMER St., CAVENDISH Sq.

1847.

Illustration 1. Title page for the first volume of the first edition of *Wuthering Heights*.

JANE EYRE.

An Autobiography.

EDITED BY

CURRIER BELL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
SMITH, ELDER, AND CO., CORNHILL.

1847.

Illustration 2. Title page for the first volume of the first edition of *Jane Eyre*.

THE TENANT
OF
WILDFELL HALL.

BY
ACTON BELL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON :
T. C. NEWBY, PUBLISHER,
72, MORTIMER STREET, CAVENDISH SQUARE.
1848.

Illustration 3. Title page for the first volume of the first edition of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*.

Contents

1	Introduction	1
2	The Victorian Period	3
2.1	Historical, social, and literary context	3
2.2	The Victorian Ideal	5
3	Influences	7
3.1	Lord Byron	7
3.2	Branwell Brontë	8
3.3	The Gothic Novel	10
4	Analysis of the characters	11
4.1	<i>Wuthering Heights</i> : Heathcliff	13
4.2	<i>Jane Eyre</i> : Edward Rochester	17
4.3	<i>The Tenant of Wildfell Hall</i> : Arthur Huntingdon	20
5	Comparison of the characters	25
5.1	Similarities and differences	25
5.2	How the authors view their characters	27
5.2.1	Heathcliff and Edgar Linton	27
5.2.2	Mr. Rochester and St. John Rivers	29
5.2.3	Arthur Huntingdon and Gilbert Markham	30
5.3	How the characters fit in the literary standards of the time	32
6	Conclusion	35
	Bibliography	39

1.

Introduction

The Brontë sisters, Charlotte (1816-1855), Emily (1818-1848), and Anne (1820-1849), were three significant writers of the nineteenth century, more precisely, of the English Victorian period. In fact, they form the world's most famous literary family, and their works are still read all around the world. Moreover, their novels *Wuthering Heights* (Emily Brontë), *Jane Eyre* (Charlotte Brontë), and to a lesser extent *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (Anne Brontë) are considered by contemporary critics to be classics of English literature.¹ Not only do they give us an insight into how life was lived at that time, but they also have compelling stories and unique characters.

Charlotte, Emily, and Anne faced many problems when they first published their books. During the nineteenth century, women were excluded from certain experiences such as politics or business. Apart from that, the work of female writers was dismissed as romantic and sentimental, and not taken seriously. The few women who could publish their work were supposed to write about their own sphere and experiences.² The Brontë sisters did exactly the opposite. However, they had to hide their identities as women and they first published their books under the male pseudonyms of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell, maintaining the initials of their names.³ Because of this, there was a great mystery surrounding the authorship of their work. Finally, in 1850 Charlotte Brontë wrote "The Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell", in which she made known, among other things, that the writers of those famous novels were women.⁴

The fact that women could have written those stories was unbelievable at the time. This led to a lot of criticism surrounding their novels, especially because of the characters that are present in these stories: strong female leads, and obscure and dark male characters.⁵

The readers of the time were shocked by these characters, and they were heavily criticised. An article published in the *The Quarterly Review* described Mr. Rochester, the male hero of *Jane Eyre*, with the following words: "Mr. Rochester is a man who deliberately and secretly seeks to violate the laws of both God and man and yet we will be bound half our lady readers are enchanted with him for a model of generosity and honour."⁶ As this statement shows, the

¹See Hughes, 2016.

²See Woolf, 1979, p. 46.

³See Taylor, 2020.

⁴See Taylor, 2020.

⁵See C. Brontë, 1847, p. 3.

⁶Rigby, 1848, p. 84.

male characters of the Brontës were not only criticised, but the readers were also fascinated by them. As Virginia Woolf wrote about Heathcliff, the main character of *Wuthering Heights*: “No boy in literature has a more vivid existence than his.”⁷

These features make the work of the Brontë sisters an interesting object of study. In fact, a lot of research has been done about the female characters of these novels, who were shocking and innovative for the time, considering the patriarchal society the Brontës lived in. However, not nearly as many studies have been conducted about their male heroes, which are equally as important and complex as the female figures. Only in recent years have they begun to be studied in depth.⁸

Three male characters will be analysed in this work: Heathcliff from *Wuthering Heights*, Mr. Rochester from *Jane Eyre*, and Arthur Huntingdon from *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. This piece of work aims to answer several questions regarding the male heroes created by the Brontë sisters: Are they traditional characters or rather unconventional? What are their special characteristics? Can they be compared to other literary heroes of the time? Studying them can give us an insight into how the Brontë sisters viewed masculinity, and how that view differs from the standard during the Victorian period. However, the most important matter is the following question: “Why are these characters unique for their time?” The chief concern of this paper is to answer that key question. To do so, I will use the following methodology.

First, we will look at the historical and literary context of the Victorian period, and what was expected of men during the nineteenth century, to be able to determine what the norm for male characters was. Then, we will briefly explain the influences the Brontës may have had to create their characters, and how these affect them in different ways. This is important, since the Brontë sisters spent most of their lives in isolation from society, and had very little contact with men⁹, so it is probable that they took influence from what was closer to them rather than from the outside world.

Afterward, the three characters will be analysed in the context of the novels, considering their physical aspects, their personalities, and their relationships with other characters. Special attention will be paid to the features that make them unique. For the final part, the three of them will be compared and contrasted, to expose the different views the Brontë sisters had on masculinity, and to be able to determine how their male characters fit into the literary conventions of the time.

⁷Woolf, 1979, p. 132.

⁸See Nyborg, 2016, p. 9.

⁹See Palášková, 2015, p. 7.

2. The Victorian Period

2.1. Historical, social, and literary context

The Brontë sisters lived and published their works in a time period in the history of England that is known as the Victorian period. To contextualise their work, it is essential that we learn about what was happening at that time in society and in the literary world.

The Victorian period started in England approximately in 1820 and ended in 1914. This era corresponds roughly to the period of Queen Victoria's reign, which lasted from 1837 to 1901. As this period spans many years, there was time for many radical changes to take place, which affected society and literature significantly.¹⁰

Important demographic changes took place. The population of England grew extremely during the nineteenth century, from 9 to 32.5 million. Apart from that, people started to leave rural areas to work in the city.¹¹ Britain was being transformed from a rural society into an urban and industrial one. New technologies, such as the railroads or the steam printing press were being introduced. The latter made the printing and distribution of literary works much easier, which caused its increase in popularity. While in the eighteenth century, literature was aimed mainly at an elite audience, in the Victorian period, thanks to the easy distribution of texts, literature was being mass-produced and read by more people. New genres appeared to appeal to the lower classes.¹²

Society was also changing rapidly. Although the higher classes maintained their conservative moral beliefs and values, the working classes were fighting for the right to vote, safe workplaces, and universal education.¹³ The intellectual debate between religion and science was also important. Victorian society is known for having been extremely religious. However, religious faith was being challenged through scientific discoveries, such as the release of *On the Origin of Species* by Charles Darwin. This book shocked Victorian society and made people question their religious beliefs.¹⁴ These social concerns all had an influence on Victorian literature. Walter Houghton, in his book *The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830-1870* designated Victorian literature as “a virtual catalogue of imaginative responses to a constant

¹⁰See Bowden, n.d.

¹¹See David, 2001, p. 5.

¹²See Bowden, n.d.

¹³See Bowden, n.d.

¹⁴See David, 2001, p. 224.

succession of shattering developments.”¹⁵ Some of those crucial events are illustrated in the timeline below.

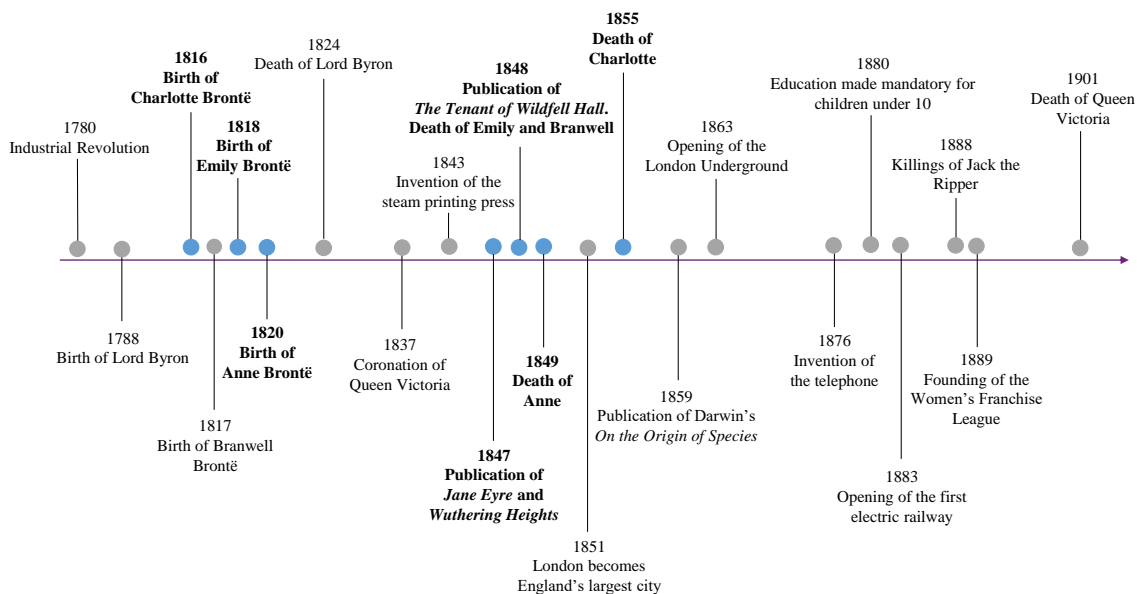


Illustration 4. Milestones during the Victorian period.

Even though poetry and plays were important during the Victorian period, the novel was the most cultivated literary genre. The Victorian novel is famously known for being very long. This was due to the form of publishing: the novels were published either as a series of short instalments, or also typically in volumes. *Jane Eyre*, for example, was first published in three volumes. The cheaper printing also contributed to the length of the novels. The predominant narrative mode of the Victorian novel was realism, which emerged as an opposition to the previous predominant literary movement, romanticism. This new literary current aimed to portray events in a realistic way.¹⁶

Some of the most famous and important authors of the Victorian period, who cultivated this genre, are Charles Dickens (1812-1870), Wilkie Collins (1824-1889), George Eliot (1819-1880), and Thomas Hardy (1840-1928). Over the most part of the nineteenth-century, they all contributed to the rise and popularity of the realistic novel, with works, such as *David Copperfield*, *The Woman in White*, or *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*.

The characteristics of the Victorian novel can also be appreciated in the work of the Brontë sisters. In their novels, they discussed important social concerns, such as religion, class, and gender. More than that, they concerned themselves with emotions, suffering, and the human soul. However, their greatest contribution to the English novel is the incorporation of the woman as the heroine of the story.¹⁷

¹⁵Houghton, 1957, p. 67.

¹⁶See Bowden, n.d.

¹⁷See Ash, n.d.

2.2. The Victorian Ideal

Since we are focusing on the male characters of the three novels, it is crucial to state first the ideas and expectations of the Victorian male. This can help us understand how these expectations affected the male heroes of the novels at the time, and in this case, the characters in the novels of the Brontë sisters.

Victorian men were subjected to very unrealistic and strict standards of what an ideal man should be. The concept of the “gentleman” was a very complex one and encompassed a lot of different aspects of a man’s life. Not even the people of that time were completely sure of what a real “gentleman” was. Even so, everyone wanted to become one.¹⁸

The idea of what it was to be a gentleman was changing. Prior to the Victorian period, it was only a title given to those of high birth. Now it was more focused on morality and conduct, rather than on wealth.¹⁹ Still, not every man could be regarded as a “gentleman”. Some men were gentlemen by right of birth, like those belonging to the British aristocracy; others could gain this title through their wealth and influence, which was the case of middle-class merchants and businessmen. Men of the church, army officers, and members of the Parliament were also recognized as gentlemen by virtue of their respectable occupation.²⁰

The moral component of what it was to be a gentleman, made the concept ambiguous and difficult to define. It was precisely this which made gentlemanliness fascinating for the middle class. It gave them more opportunities to attain this title since it was no longer focused only on wealth. This issue was particularly important during the mid-nineteenth century and affected society as well as literature.²¹

Although the concept was difficult to define, there were some qualities that a gentleman should have, that were universally accepted. Two important features included manners and proper social behaviour. John Newman in his book “The Idea of a University” describes these qualities with the following statement:

*He has his eyes on all his company; he is tender towards the bashful, gentle towards the distant, and merciful towards the absurd; he can recollect to whom he is speaking; he guards against unseasonable allusions or topics which may irritate; he is seldom prominent in conversation, and never wearisome.*²²

¹⁸See Cody, 2019.

¹⁹See Hesse, 2004.

²⁰See Cody, 2019.

²¹See Cody, 2019.

²²Newman, 1852

This definition describes simply the perfect balance of not only the strong but also of the tender qualities a gentleman should have. It also highlights the perfectly polite and courteous behaviour he should display in society.

Additionally, a gentleman should have a proper education at a reputable public school. This would automatically qualify him as a gentleman, no matter his origins. His education also meant that a gentleman would not need to do manual labour for a living. He should not pay excessive attention to business, for it was thought that “leisure enabled a man to cultivate the style and pursuits of the gentlemanly life.”²³ Even so, a gentleman should have a respectable job, and be able to provide for his family. This is why a man belonging to the working class could never be regarded as a gentleman.²⁴

Another important trait of a gentleman was his involvement in religion. The Victorian era was an extremely religious time period. Religion was the base of everything and it shaped the society and morality of the time. The Church was powerful and at the centre of Victorian life: everyone was baptised, was married in the Church, and attended services on Sundays. Of course, a respectable gentleman was expected to follow this conduct.²⁵

To summarise, the idea of a Victorian gentleman was very complex; they had to follow strict rules and have certain characteristics like honesty, intelligence, loyalty, respectability, and most importantly, a strong sense of morality. Being a gentleman was an honour, and everyone strove to be one.

This idea affected the literary works of the time. Male heroes in many Victorian novels also followed these rules, and in many books, the heroines could only marry such men to lead a happy and respectable life. The influence of the Victorian Ideal can be seen for example in the works of Dickens, Thackeray, and Trollope, who were fascinated by the idea of the gentleman.²⁶

²³Gilmour, 1981, p. 7.

²⁴See Rompteaux, 2012, p. 9.

²⁵See Rompteaux, 2012, p. 10.

²⁶See Gilmour, 1981, p.2.

3.

Influences

As mentioned before, the three Brontë sisters spent a considerable part of their lives in isolation from society; so, how could they write such compelling novels and create such remarkable characters? To explain this, it is important to look at the events and people that influenced their literary works, and most importantly their characters.

This part shall be focused on their literary influences, such as certain literary trends and authors; and the effect that certain people had on their work. We are going to discuss the poet Lord Byron, the influence of their brother Branwell, and the Gothic Novel,

3.1. Lord Byron

George Gordon Byron, better known as Lord Byron (1788-1824), arguably one of the most famous and influential poets of the English Romantic Period had, perhaps, the most influence on the writing of the Brontë sisters, especially on that of Charlotte and Emily.²⁷ He was made famous overnight after the publication of the autobiographical poem *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812). Today, he is better known for the satirical poem *Don Juan* (1819).²⁸

The Brontës spent their teenage years reading the works of Byron and became fascinated by not only his poems but also his life, something which impacted the style and characters of their own works. Most importantly, their characters were influenced by the archetype of the Byronic hero.²⁹

During the nineteenth century, Lord Byron was an extremely polemic figure. Not only his work, but also his life, was fascinating to readers. Elements such as his incestuous relationship with his sister, his illegitimate children, and his exile from England made Byron a scandalous celebrity.³⁰ He was an eccentric and idealistic figure, who led a life full of adventure all across Europe. He even became involved in the Greek revolution against the Ottoman Empire. His tragic death in 1824, when he was only 36 years old, consecrated him as a Romantic hero.³¹

²⁷See Alexander and Smith, 2003, p. 329.

²⁸See Marchand, 2023.

²⁹See Alexander and Smith, 2003, p. 331.

³⁰See Bone, 2004, p. 8.

³¹See Pujol, 2023.

This dark and unusual life full of mystery and scandal provided some of the characteristics for the Byronic hero, “the gloomy, brooding figure who scowls his way through [Byron’s] early poems”.³²

A typical Byronic hero is far from the expectations of nineteenth-century masculinity, and lacks traditional heroic features. This archetype is identified by unflattering and hostile features and an intelligent but arrogant personality. He is often an anti-hero, with a dark and mysterious past, in which he committed a crime, for which he does not feel repentance, as, given his proud personality, he usually feels above societal and moral laws.³³ Byronic heroes are also characterised by their ambition, gloominess, isolation, and passionate feelings. These characteristics captivated readers and encouraged sympathy for this type of character.³⁴

Most important, and what makes the Byronic hero so fascinating to readers, is how ambiguous he is. He possesses a mixture of good qualities and dark attributes and is neither a villain nor a hero.³⁵ An article published in *The Modern Language Review* described the Byronic hero as follows:

*A typical Byronic hero is ‘a man proud, moody, cynical, with defiance in his brow, and misery in his heart, a scorner of his kind, implacable in revenge, yet capable of deep and strong affection.’*³⁶

As many contemporary critics have noticed, this description can be easily associated with the characters of Heathcliff, Mr. Rochester, and to a lesser extent, Arthur Huntingdon.³⁷

3.2. Branwell Brontë

Branwell Brontë (1817-1848) was the brother of the Brontë sisters. Being the only boy in the family, he was educated by his father at home and later sent to London to continue his studies. He dedicated his life to painting and writing, and although he wrote quite a lot of poems, he was never as successful as his sisters.³⁸

When he grew up and went to London, he became very popular because of his charming personality and good looks.³⁹ While in London, he spent all his money on drinking and going

³²Bone, 2004, p. 57.

³³See Forina, 2014, p. 85.

³⁴See Constans Renco, 2020, p. 1.

³⁵See Constans Renco, 2020, p. 1.

³⁶Brown, 1939

³⁷See Alexander and Smith, 2003, p. 333.

³⁸See Alexander and Smith, 2003, p. 262.

³⁹See Alexander and Smith, 2003, p. 262.

out. When he returned home broke, his aunt and father spoiled him and allowed him greater freedom than his sisters. His three sisters, devastated by his behaviour, tried to convince themselves, perhaps blinded by love, that Branwell would change and become a better man.⁴⁰

In 1847, having had no successful career in writing, he became dependent on alcohol and opium, something which caused his family great embarrassment. A year later, he died of tuberculosis.⁴¹ His death produced a great shock in his three sisters. Charlotte fell ill, and Emily never again left the house after her brother's death.⁴²



Illustration 5. The Brontë Sisters by Patrick Branwell Brontë.

Branwell's life and behaviour had a great impact on the view his sisters had on masculinity and men in general. Since he was one of the few men they had contact with, he greatly influenced their male heroes. Their characters are in a way reminiscent of their brother's life and conduct, although they each portray different aspects of his brother's personality and life in their characters. The most problematic elements of Branwell's personality can be observed for example in the characters of Hindley Earnshaw in *Wuthering Heights* and

⁴⁰See Gaskell, 1857, p. 138.

⁴¹See Alexander and Smith, 2003, p. 270.

⁴²See Gaskell, 1857, p. 277.

Arthur Huntingdon in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. His addictions and vices are portrayed in several male characters in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, as well as in the character of John Reed in *Jane Eyre*. Branwell can also be seen in Heathcliff's conduct and personality. Emily was especially close to her brother during the months before his death, and in *Wuthering Heights* she portrayed that relationship through Catherine and Heathcliff.⁴³

3.3. The Gothic Novel

The Gothic Novel is a literary genre, popular during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, whose main characteristics are an ominous setting, mysteries, and supernatural phenomena. All contribute to a general atmosphere of terror. The Brontë sisters were familiar with this type of novel from an early age.⁴⁴

This literary genre takes its name from the Gothic architectural style, since Gothic novels are commonly set in dark and haunted medieval castles or monasteries. The literary current was initiated with the novel *The Castle of Otranto* (1765) written by Horace Walpole. Other examples of the genre are Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1797), or Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796).⁴⁵

The first and most obvious characteristic of the Gothic Novel is the presence of the supernatural.⁴⁶ This can be seen in both *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*, with, for example, the apparition of ghosts.

Another characteristic, from which the Brontës took great inspiration, is the character of the villain-hero. The action in the Gothic Novel centres around this type of character, who is "fearsome and profoundly ambiguous".⁴⁷ This description could certainly apply to the characters of Heathcliff and Mr. Rochester.

A further Gothic element is the mysterious and dark atmosphere, which surrounds the story.⁴⁸ This dark setting is present in the three novels that are going to be analysed: *Wuthering Heights* is set on the Yorkshire moors, isolated from society, *Jane Eyre* mainly takes place in Mr. Rochester's manor, which is full of mysteries and strange occurrences, and in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, the main character lives in a decaying and old house, and has a mysterious past herself.

⁴³See Miller, 1986, p. 82.

⁴⁴See Alexander and Smith, 2003, p. 537.

⁴⁵See Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2023.

⁴⁶See Hume, 1969, p. 284.

⁴⁷Hume, 1969, p. 287.

⁴⁸See Hume, 1969, p. 286.

4. Analysis of the characters

This section will focus on the main male characters of the Brontë sisters: Heathcliff of *Wuthering Heights* (1847), Mr. Rochester of *Jane Eyre* (1847), and Arthur Huntingdon of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848). Each one of them will be analysed separately, based on several aspects of their conduct, which will later demonstrate how they fit into the literary standards of the Victorian period.

To be able to fully understand these analyses, it is helpful to have an overview of the main characters of each novel since they will be mentioned multiple times during the course of this section. The following three charts show the main characters of each novel and their relationships with each other.

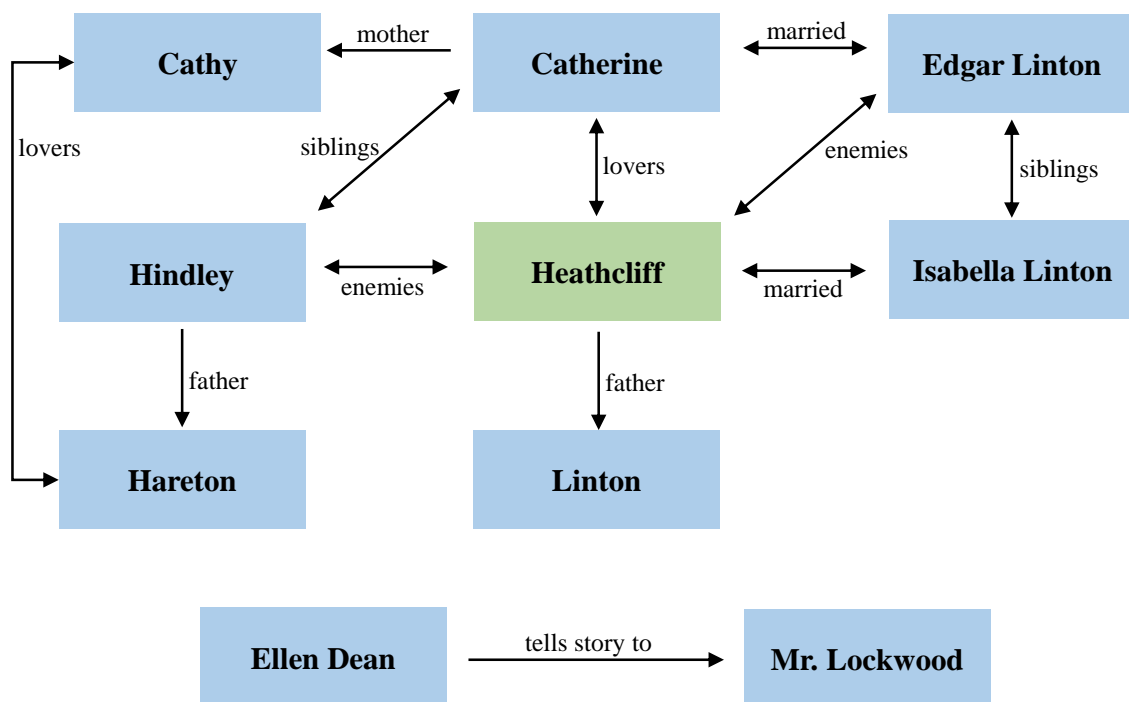


Illustration 6. Character map *Wuthering Heights*.

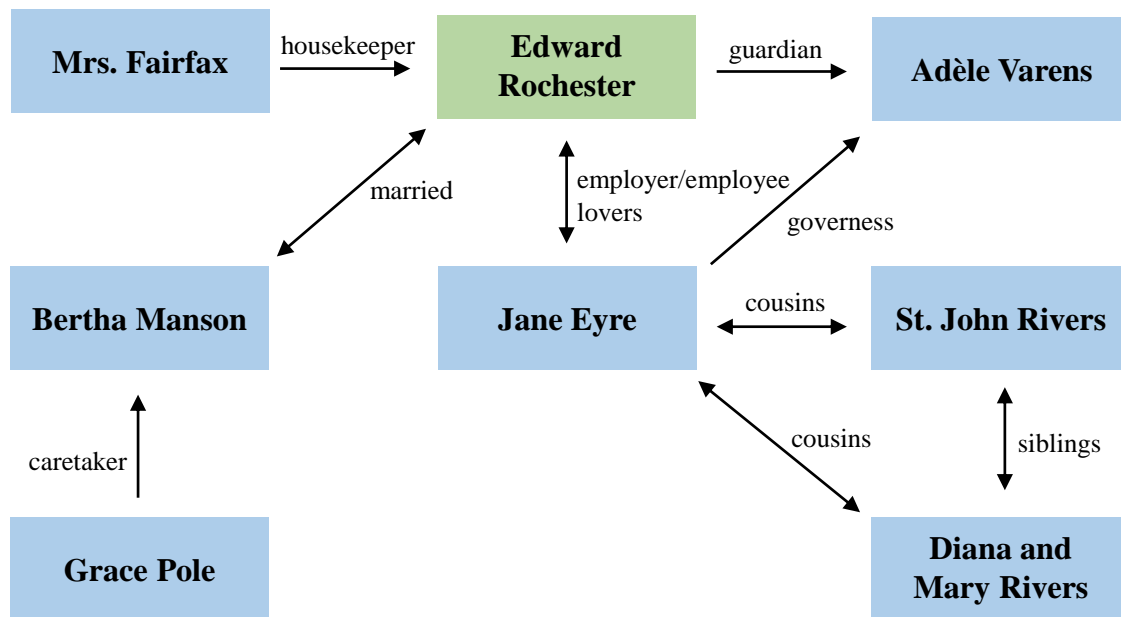


Illustration 7. Character map *Jane Eyre*.

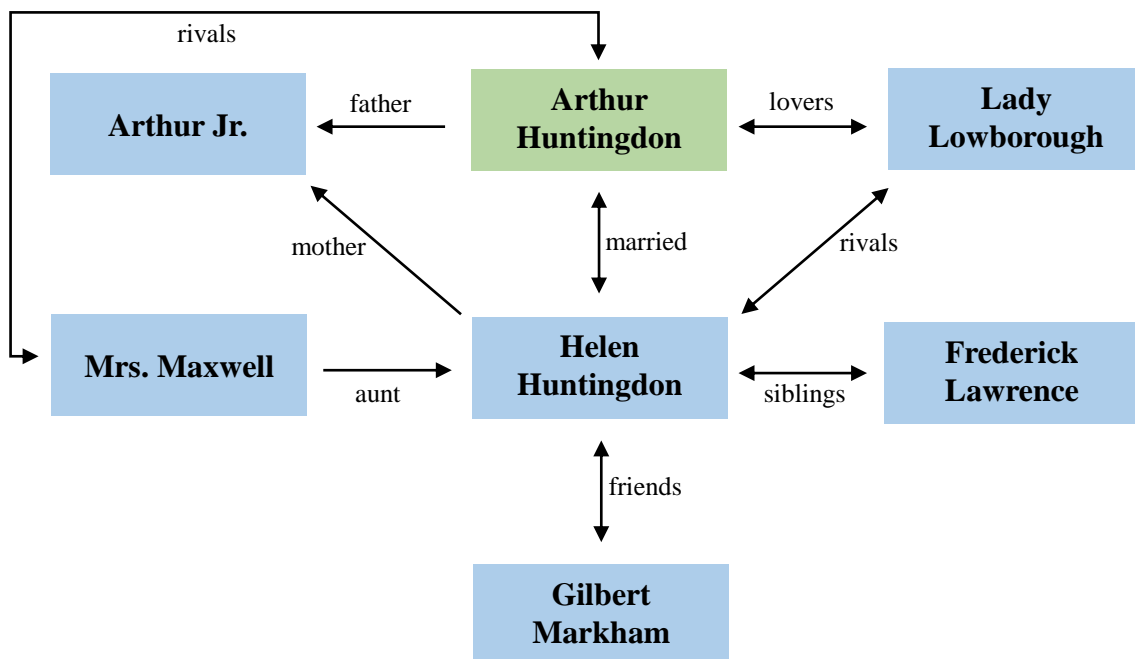


Illustration 8. Character map *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*.

4.1. *Wuthering Heights*: Heathcliff

Heathcliff is undoubtedly the main character in the novel *Wuthering Heights*, since the whole story centres around him, his relationships with other characters, and his evolution throughout the novel. Some critics have considered him both protagonist and villain of the novel.⁴⁹

He is introduced early on in the story. As a child, he is found by Mr. Earnshaw, Catherine's father, in the streets of Liverpool. He is brought to live with them and becomes part of the family. However, he is not treated kindly by the rest of the family, especially by Hindley, Mr. Earnshaw's son, who bullies him and makes his life impossible. Later on, as he develops a romantic relationship with Catherine, he is regarded as unsuitable for her, since he does not fulfil the requirements of a respectable man.

To begin talking about Heathcliff, it is important that we briefly touch on his origins and family. Having been found "starving, and houseless, and as good as dumb in the streets of Liverpool"⁵⁰, his origins are a mystery and he has no known family. Having no family, he possesses no inheritance and has little possibility of becoming rich and respectable. When he is adopted by the Earnshaws, it would seem as if he gains a family, but they never really regard him as a son. He never has the opportunity to fully become part of the family, and remains alone and unattached, developing no close feelings of family with anyone.

The physical appearance of Heathcliff is highly unconventional for a male protagonist of a Victorian novel. He is described as being dark-skinned, and having a rough appearance that causes repulsiveness and fear in other people. Skin colour was a very important matter to Victorian society. As Lorimer states, in his book *Colour, class, and the Victorians*: "A white skin became one essential quality of a gentleman".⁵¹ Heathcliff's appearance, which does not align with that of a gentleman, may have contributed to him being rejected by other people, especially during his childhood. In fact, at an early point of the story, he compares himself to Edgar Linton, their neighbour. Edgar is a perfect Victorian child, and later, when he grows up, a perfect Victorian gentleman. In the words of Catherine, "he is handsome, pleasant to be with, young and cheerful, and he will be rich."⁵² Heathcliff is the complete opposite of that archetype, and because of that, he is looked down on by Catherine, who prefers to spend her time with Linton. Feeling rejected and abandoned, he wishes to be more like Edgar in hopes that people will accept him.

Regarding Heathcliff's personality, we can say that, certainly, he has very defined and unique traits. The first one is his violent nature. Already at the beginning of the book, when we meet

⁴⁹See Everitt, 1967.

⁵⁰E. Brontë, 1847, p. 39.

⁵¹Lorimer, 1978, p. 113.

⁵²E. Brontë, 1847, p. 84.

Heathcliff as an adult, Mr. Lockwood describes his way of talking and treating people as aggressive. This violent nature is also noticed by Ellen Dean, the other narrator of the book. During a conversation she has with Heathcliff when he is a teenager, she also describes him as bad-natured, using very similar words to the ones Mr. Lockwood uses. Heathcliff is, in this part of the story, even described as “diabolical”.⁵³ Clearly, the hero of a story would never be described using those words, which makes Heathcliff quite atypical.

Another important character trait, perhaps the most important of all, is the capacity to feel and show strong emotions. Heathcliff is always very affected by the things that happen to him, both good and bad, and he often demonstrates this with strong reactions, both verbal and physical. He expresses his feelings in front of other people in a dramatic and sometimes exaggerated way, something a traditional Victorian hero, who is well-mannered and discreet, would not do. A good example of this is a scene, halfway through the book, in which he is talking to Ellen about his love for Catherine. He expresses his feelings with the following phrase:

*Two words would comprehend my future - death and hell - existence, after losing her, would be hell.*⁵⁴

With this statement, Heathcliff shows how vivid and intense his emotions are. It is also valuable to note that, as stated before, his outward reactions to these strong emotions are not only verbal but in some cases also physical. We can see this towards the end of the novel, particularly in one scene where he is having tea with Cathy, Catherine’s daughter. After a little verbal fight, Heathcliff loses his patience and hits Cathy several times.

The reason why the intense emotions of Heathcliff are so important for the development of the character is that these strong reactions are the cause of the destruction of everything around him. This destruction is not only caused by his negative actions but also by his on-the-surface positive feelings. Like Ellen says: “It is preferable to be hated than loved by him”⁵⁵, hinting at the destructiveness and negative consequences that his love, normally viewed as a positive emotion, entails.

The next unique aspect of Heathcliff’s character which is relevant to the story is his search for revenge by any means. This revenge, linked to the character, is also regarded as one of the main themes of the novel itself. It is also interesting to point out, that revenge is a trait that also characterises the Byronic hero. Revenge is an idea present in Heathcliff’s mind from early on in his life. He wants to take, for instance, revenge on Hindley for how badly he treated him when he was a child. He achieves this by dispossessing Hindley of *Wuthering Heights* and

⁵³E. Brontë, 1847, p. 70.

⁵⁴E. Brontë, 1847, p. 159

⁵⁵E. Brontë, 1847, p. 195.

becoming master of the house, and by denying Hareton, Hindley's son, an education. This behaviour echoes the treatment he received from Hindley when he was young.

Heathcliff also decides to take revenge on Edgar for marrying Catherine.⁵⁶ He does this by first marrying Edgar's sister Isabella, to later abandon her; and then by forcing Cathy, Catherine, and Edgar's daughter, to marry his own son, Linton. This way, all of Edgar's properties would, in the end, go to him.

Although the desire for revenge is what motivates most of Heathcliff's actions, in the end, however, he gives up and loses all his desire for it. In a final conversation with Ellen, he says: "I have lost the faculty of enjoying their destruction, and I am too idle to destroy for nothing."⁵⁷ Days later he dies, and he is finally able to reconnect with Catherine in death.

Heathcliff's conduct can also be observed through his relationships and the way he interacts with other characters in the novel. In his case, some of these relationships also shape his character, which is interesting to look at. I will pay special attention to Heathcliff's relationship with Catherine.

Because of Mr. Earnshaw, Heathcliff is educated alongside Catherine, and treated like part of the family, so during the first years, he leads a happy life. However, when Mr. Earnshaw dies, Hindley, his older son, becomes the one in charge of the family, and things change for Heathcliff. Hindley is obviously jealous of the treatment Heathcliff receives and begins to treat him like a servant. This shapes Heathcliff's character. As said by the narrator of the story, "by the age of sixteen he had become moody, and angry, and had lost all his curiosity for the world around him".⁵⁸

Other characters that also contributed to Heathcliff's development are the Linton family, who were the neighbours of the Earnshaws. As said before, during his childhood, Heathcliff is constantly compared to Edgar, the son of the Lintons, both in looks and character. After their first encounter, the Lintons decide that they do not want their children to be acquainted with "that naughty, swearing boy"⁵⁹. Even though the Linton family does not like Heathcliff, he ends up marrying Isabella, Edgar's sister. Together they have a son, whom Isabella names Linton. Heathcliff treats both of them terribly, even though Linton has delicate health and suffers from many illnesses. Heathcliff describes his feelings towards his son as follows: "I despise him for himself and hate him for the memories he revives!"⁶⁰ This implies that Heathcliff not only does not like his son for who he is but for being connected to the Linton family, who have caused him much harm during his life. Also connected to the Linton family, there is Cathy, Catherine and Edgar's daughter, who lives only with her father, after her

⁵⁶See Skinner, 2023.

⁵⁷E. Brontë, 1847, p. 344.

⁵⁸E. Brontë, 1847, p. 72.

⁵⁹E. Brontë, 1847, p. 58.

⁶⁰E. Brontë, 1847, p. 223.

mother died. Heathcliff also shows feelings of hate towards her, presumably for the same reasons he hates Linton.

However, the person who had the biggest impact on Heathcliff's life is without a doubt, Catherine. Heathcliff and Catherine certainly have a very special relationship. Having met as children, they have formed a strong bond, incomprehensible to anyone else. Catherine describes her feelings for Heathcliff with the following words:

*Nelly, I am Heathcliff- he's always, always in my mind- not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself- but, as my own being.*⁶¹

Clearly, the bond that they share is extremely strong and powerful. It is almost supernatural. Apart from that, their love is also extremely dangerous and destructive. In fact, it is Heathcliff's love that ends up killing Catherine. After her death, Heathcliff becomes even more destructive and wild. Instead of wishing Catherine peace, he wants her spirit to haunt him forever. In his madness, he says: "I cannot live without my life! I cannot live without my soul."⁶² This shows how unusual the love is. Heathcliff feels that Catherine is half of his soul, and that part of him is dead. It becomes clear that his love for Catherine changes Heathcliff's life, motivates his actions, and conditions his relationship with the rest of the world.

It is also interesting to see how the other characters perceive Heathcliff. During the course of the novel, he is called numerous different nicknames given by the other characters, especially by Ellen, who narrates most of the story. Some of the most relevant ones are "vagabond", "imp of Satan", "monster", "incarnate goblin", "devil", and "villain". These nicknames are clearly more fitting for a villain than for a hero, noting the type of character Heathcliff is, a type of villain-hero, typical in the Gothic Novel, and not conventional for the Victorian novel.

Beginning the story as an orphan, Heathcliff then proceeds to make a great fortune, becoming master of Wuthering Heights, and finally fulfilling his life purpose: revenge. At the end of the novel, still greatly affected by Catherine's death, he becomes mentally unstable and even forgets to eat. Finally, he dies of starvation, alone in his room in Wuthering Heights. In death, he is finally able to reunite with Catherine, his true soulmate.

Summing up, it can be said that Heathcliff is a very special and unique character of Victorian literature since from the very beginning of the novel he does not fulfil any of the requirements of a gentleman, like, for example, Edgar Linton does. His strong personality eventually leads to the destruction of everything around him, and even the death of Catherine, leading consequently to his own death.

⁶¹E. Brontë, 1847, p. 88

⁶²E. Brontë, 1847, p. 181.

4.2. *Jane Eyre*: Edward Rochester

While Heathcliff is considered to be the main character of *Wuthering Heights*, Mr. Rochester cannot be considered the main one of *Jane Eyre*. The story follows the life of Jane, and Mr. Rochester does not even appear during the first third of the novel. Although he cannot be considered the hero of the story, he, like Heathcliff, is considered a sort of villain-hero.⁶³ Mr. Rochester is introduced as Jane's employer, and she meets him when she is hired as a governess for a little French girl, who is Mr. Rochester's *protégée*.

Mr. Rochester was the second son of a wealthy English family and lived an accommodated life while he was young. However, his father did not want to divide his properties between Mr. Rochester and his older brother, so he left everything to his first son and had to secure a wealthy marriage for his second. When Mr. Rochester finished college, he was sent to Jamaica, to marry Bertha Mason, the daughter of a rich merchant. At first, he thought Bertha to be beautiful and charming, but when they were married he discovered that he did not like her at all and that their interests and personalities did not align. He was rich but extremely unhappy.

[...] a nature the most gross, impure, depraved I ever saw, was associated with mine, and called by the law and by society a part of me.⁶⁴

These are some of the words Mr. Rochester uses to describe his wife. On top of that, he later discovered that Bertha was mad, and felt extreme shame for being married to her. He even contemplated killing himself. Mr. Rochester resolved to move back to England, lock Bertha in the attic of Thornfield Hall, his old family home, and pass for an unmarried man in society. It is at this point that he takes on Grace Poole, to look after Bertha, and Jane, to be the governess for Adèle, his illegitimate daughter.

Although Mr. Rochester is not the hero of the novel and is therefore not bound to follow the characteristics of one, he is still the male love interest of the heroine. He has many physical and personal characteristics that do not align with that type of character. Let us start with his physical appearance. Jane, who is the narrator of the story, describes him as having dark hair and a face, with stern features and a heavy brow. She does not think him handsome. Later she expresses that his features are "more remarkable for character than for beauty"⁶⁵, and that he is "neither tall nor graceful".⁶⁶

Another interesting thing is that Mr. Rochester is constantly compared to animals, especially

⁶³See Rompteaux, 2012.

⁶⁵C. Brontë, 1847, p. 117.

⁶⁶C. Brontë, 1847, p. 117.

birds, like an eagle or a hawk. At some point, Jane even compares him to a wild beast. These animals can certainly be used to accentuate the ungraceful and dark physical aspect of Mr. Rochester, but also to show his character. Throughout the novel, animal imagery is used both for Jane and Mr. Rochester to describe the untamable. Because animals do not follow social conventions, they provide a good example of this.⁶⁷

Concerning Rochester's personality, something that stands out is how mysterious he is. When Jane meets him, she is desperate to know more about him and his past, and every time she asks questions about it, no one is able to answer. They say, that Mr. Rochester is a mystery to everyone. It is not until they are going to be married, that Mr. Rochester tells Jane about his dark past. He therefore does not have the respectable quality of honesty that gentlemen are expected to possess.

Something else that is noticeable about Mr. Rochester's character is how imperfect he is, not only in appearance but also in terms of personality. Most importantly, he admits to his own imperfections. He and Jane have a long conversation about this. During this exchange, he says: "I have plenty of faults of my own: I know it and I don't wish to palliate them, I assure you".⁶⁸ His wish not to lessen his faults can be linked to the archetype of the Byronic Hero, who, as discussed in Section Three, usually feels above moral laws and does not feel repent for his actions. Later, he tells Jane that she must not consider him a villain, since he is imperfect not because of his nature, but because of the circumstances that were presented to him in his life.⁶⁹ In a letter that Charlotte Brontë, the author, wrote to W. S. Williams, a literary editor, in 1848, she does a short analysis of Mr. Rochester's character, in which she states that Rochester's errors are all committed through inexperience. Being better than many other men, he is not content with that kind of "degraded life"⁷⁰, and has the sense to learn from his mistakes. She finishes by saying that the good in him still remains after all those mistakes and that "his nature is like the wine of a good vintage, time cannot sour, but only mellows him."⁷¹

Now that we have stated his most important personality traits, let us now look into his relationships, to show whether his way of behaving is, or not, out of the ordinary for a Victorian gentleman.

There is actually not much information about Mr. Rochester's acts on social occasions, since Jane, who narrates the story, is usually not present during those gatherings. However, we do get a short comment on this topic provided by Mrs. Fairfax, the housekeeper. Mr. Rochester is said to be very lively in society, making him very likable, especially to the ladies. He is also

⁶⁷See Wells, 1993.

⁶⁸C. Brontë, 1847, p. 132.

⁶⁹See C. Brontë, 1847, p. 133.

⁷⁰C. Brontë, 1847, p. 478.

⁷¹C. Brontë, 1847, p. 478.

good at making reunions more entertaining since he is a very good singer and has good taste in music. Referencing back to Section Two, it is observable that Mr. Rochester fulfils many of the main characteristics of an ideal Victorian gentleman: apart from being rich and coming from a good family, he is good company and behaves perfectly well in social situations. It is only when one looks deeper into his personality, that it becomes obvious, that he does not meet certain moral characteristics of this standard. These include honesty and morality. As we will now see, his love relationship with Jane is, like Heathcliff and Catherine's, also highly unconventional.

To begin with, all throughout their relationship, Mr. Rochester treats Jane as an equal, which is rather rare since they lived in a time when women were subjected to men, and had absolutely no power in society. Their relationship as equals is shown through many of Rochester's actions towards Jane. From the beginning of their acquaintance, Mr. Rochester invites Jane to talk to him in the evenings, which he usually spends alone in the living room; and they have long conversations about a variety of different topics. Rochester encourages Jane to speak her mind as much as she can, and it is clear that he respects her opinion dearly. During the first of their conversations, the following exchange occurs:

"You are human and fallible."

"I am: so are you - what then?"⁷²

The first sentence is said by Jane, who considers Mr. Rochester imperfect. The second sentence, said by Rochester, clearly shows that he agrees with Jane. As said before he admits his own faults, but more than that, he states that she is also imperfect. In that way, they are equals and since they are both imperfect in their own ways, none of them is superior to the other.

Like Heathcliff, Mr. Rochester expresses his emotions strongly when he is with Jane. A great example of this can be seen in the scene in which Rochester proposes to Jane. At some point during their conversation, he describes his connection to Jane with the following words:

I sometimes have a queer feeling with regard to you-especially when you are near me, as now: it is as if I had a string somewhere under my left ribs, tightly and inextricably knotted to a similar string situated in the corresponding quarter of your little frame. And if that boisterous channel and two hundred miles or so of land come broad between us, I am afraid that chord of communion will be snapt; and then I've a nervous motion I should take to bleeding inwardly.⁷³

⁷²C. Brontë, 1847, p. 135

⁷³C. Brontë, 1847, p. 245

In this passage, Mr. Rochester expresses the love he feels towards Jane, referring to their hearts bound with a string, and how his heart would bleed, in other words, he would die, if they were separated. He shows his love verbally through statements like the one above throughout the chapters following their engagement. Finally, Jane learns that Rochester is already married and decides to leave Thornfield Hall. Mr. Rochester tries to manipulate her into staying, telling her all sorts of nice things, and then accusing Jane of not loving him. The art of manipulating people, especially women, is something we have already seen in Heathcliff, and that will also be present in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* in the character of Arthur Huntingdon.

The connection between Rochester and Jane mentioned above, can be seen again towards the end of the novel. During this time Jane is living with her cousins, St. John, Diana, and Mary. One night Jane hears Rochester calling her name, even though they are far away from each other. Jane answers the calling, and it is revealed at the end, that Mr. Rochester heard her words too. This spiritual, almost telepathic connection, is evidence of the influence Charlotte Brontë got from the supernatural elements in the Gothic novels.

Since the novel does not span over a long period of time, Mr. Rochester does not experience a great evolution of character. Nevertheless, there is still a change in him after Jane leaves, which is described at the end of the book, when they reunite. As explained in the book, after Jane leaves, there is a fire at Thornfield Hall, started by Bertha Mason, Rochester's wife. Rochester tries to save all of his servants, but in doing so, he is left with several injuries: he loses a hand and his sight. The physical change is not the only thing that Jane notices when they meet again; she sees something in him that she describes as "desperate and brooding"⁷⁴. This melancholy Jane notes, could well be the result of not seeing her for so long. In the end, they get married. Like Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*, Mr. Rochester gets redemption after all his bad actions in life and is finally able to love Jane, who takes care of him and his injuries.

As a conclusion to this analysis, it can be said that, in terms of his behaviour in society and economic level, Mr. Rochester can be regarded as a perfect gentleman. However, his physical aspect, personality, and conduct are very far from that ideal.

4.3. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*: Arthur Huntingdon

The character of Arthur Huntingdon is very different from Heathcliff and Mr. Rochester. In no way can he be considered the hero of the story; he is in fact the villain. He does not have a mysterious or dark past, but not much is known about his origins either, only that he comes

⁷⁴C. Brontë, 1847, p. 419.

from a wealthy and well-positioned family. He and Helen meet at a party and he is introduced as the son of Helen's uncle's friend. At first, they get along very well, and even though he has some faults, Helen decides to marry him. It is only after they get married that Helen discovers his true character and realises the mistake she has made.⁷⁵

Of the three characters we are analysing, Arthur is physically the most conventionally attractive of them, which is probably why Helen feels drawn to him in the first place. The most complete description of his looks we get is from a portrait Helen paints of him. He is described as having a friendly face with bright blue eyes and full lips which "seemed ready to break into a smile"⁷⁶. His hair is wavy and has a bright colour, almost blonde. All of these characteristics contribute to making him a quite good-looking man.

Next, it is vital to discuss Arthur Huntingdon's personality and how it affects his relationships and consequently his life. If one only pays attention to his origins and looks and takes into account that he is charming in social situations, he would seem a perfect Victorian man, a gentleman. Similar to Mr. Rochester, it is only when one looks deeper into his personality, that his true nature can be appreciated.

To start, he is very arrogant and selfish, which can mostly be observed through his relationship with Helen. An example of this is a situation that takes place during their second meeting. They have an argument over a drawing Helen had made. She wants to leave, as she is getting annoyed, but he will not let her and kisses her. Taking into account that they were not married and not even in a relationship, this was an act of great audacity and arrogance. Of course, Helen was furious. Contrary to Helen's reaction, for him it meant nothing and he continued to act as if nothing had happened. The greatest expression of his selfishness occurs during their marriage. After the wedding, they go on a long trip for their honeymoon. When they return, they settle in a country house to begin their married life. However, after the novelty of marriage has worn off, Arthur begins to get bored by the country life he is living and begins to spend most of the year in London with his friends. He writes very few letters to Helen and only comes back for the hunting season. He always brings his friends along, and Helen ends up feeling really uncomfortable and out of place.

Moreover, Helen discovers just before their wedding, that Arthur is not in any way religious, and he is in fact rather annoyed by Helen's strong religious beliefs. As seen in Section Two, religion was an important part of the lives of most Victorian people, and the church was a powerful institution. It was very strange for a respectable gentleman not to be religious. Helen is very disappointed when she finds this out about Arthur since her aunt wants her to marry "none but a really good man."⁷⁷ Arthur agrees, in the end, to go to church with Helen and her aunt, but to Helen's disappointment, he does not behave well during the service. He

⁷⁵See Alexander and Smith, 2003.

⁷⁶A. Brontë, 1848, p. 298.

⁷⁷A. Brontë, 1848, p. 147.

even holds his prayer book upside down. It seems that Mr. Huntingdon, who was already not particularly fond of religion, is not even prepared to try his best for his future wife's sake.

Probably the most important feature of Arthur, and also the one that makes the character the most problematic of the three is his tendency towards vice. Helen's aunt notices this early on and warns her niece about it long before they even begin to develop a relationship: "He's a fine lad, that young Huntingdon, but a bit wildish I fancy. [...] destitute of principle, and prone to every vice that is common to youth."⁷⁸ Mrs. Maxwell provides this judgment on Huntingdon when Helen first shows interest in him, and even though Helen does not pay much attention to it, it turns out to be correct.

The first time we see these vices in Arthur is when Helen finds out about his hatred of religion. However, it becomes more problematic after she and Arthur have their first fight. Just weeks after they are married Arthur quarrels with Helen about his boredom with country life. After dinner he sits in the dining room for longer than usual and has "an unusual quantity of wine"⁷⁹. Even if not explicitly said in the novel, it is implied that he gets very drunk, and because of this, he ends up hitting one of his dogs and fighting again with Helen. Although he tries to abstain from drinking more than once, he always fails and the situation becomes worse every time, particularly for Helen, who has to put up with all of it. He is aware of how he is ruining his life, but when he is drunk, he blames all his sufferings and errors on Helen, who has to defend herself against this injustice. So in the end they fight again every time this happens, making both of their lives miserable.

As said before, Helen and Arthur meet at a party. Helen falls almost instantly in love with him, and although her aunt warns her of the doubtful life Arthur leads, she does not listen to reason. In fact, she believes herself able to save Arthur from his many vices.

*There is essential goodness in him; -and what delight to unfold it! If he has wandered, what bliss to recall him! If he is now exposed to the baneful influence of corrupting and wicked companions, what glory to deliver him from them! -Oh! if I could believe that Heaven has designed me for this!*⁸⁰

As we can observe in the quote above, Helen, perhaps blinded by her love for him, thinks she is able to direct Arthur to the right path in life. Based on this, we can conclude that it is probable that Helen falls in love with Arthur because she thinks she will be able to save him from his wrong way of living; and not because she really loves him as a person. Arthur, on the other hand, during their first few meetings, shows his feelings towards Helen directly, with words and actions, and seems passionately in love with her. He tries as much as possible

⁷⁸A. Brontë, 1848, p. 115.

⁷⁹A. Brontë, 1848, p. 179.

⁸⁰A. Brontë, 1848, p. 129

to spend time alone with her and even kisses her before they get engaged, which shows how desperate he is for Helen to love her. Arthur, like Heathcliff and Rochester, is capable of strong emotions. Helen describes his love for her with the following words:

*sometimes liken it to a fire of dry twigs and branches compared with one of solid coal, -very bright and hot, but if it should burn itself out and leave nothing but ashes behind, what shall I do?*⁸¹

Helen compares Arthur's feelings to "a fire of twigs and branches"⁸², which create a flame that if not well fed, burns out rapidly. This is exactly what happens after the first few months of marriage. Things between them start to go terribly wrong when Arthur involves himself in an affair with Lady Lowborough, his friend's wife. Helen quickly finds out, and when she confronts him about it, Arthur shows how little he cares about the situation and his wife's feelings by saying: "If you had not seen me, it would have done no harm."⁸³ Contrary to Mr. Rochester, this response clearly shows that he feels superior to his wife and her feelings and that he does not care whether what he does is right or wrong.

Eventually, Helen and Arthur have a child, whom they name Arthur Jr. His father hates him from the moment he is born, simply because he takes up all of Helen's time, which shows again how possessive and selfish Arthur is. He will later, during the following few years, "instruct him in all the evil habits he could acquire".⁸⁴ It is interesting to note, that this initiative is also seen in *Wuthering Heights*, when Heathcliff "educates" Hareton in his way of living.

Arthur would also not let Helen go to her father's funeral and portrays himself as very controlling and possessive of his wife. In this particular case, he tries to manipulate her into not going by showing her that he still loves her. This shows a really contradictory conduct, since for the most part, he wants to be in London away from Helen, but when she has to go it seems that he cannot bear to be away from her. Sadly, even after all these things, Helen still refuses to call Arthur a bad person.

After some time Helen finds her life unbearable and decides to run away with her son. She saves money by selling her art pieces and plans everything with the help of her brother Frederick. The first attempt at running away fails: Arthur finds out and confiscates all of her money, and she has to start all over again. Finally, a few months later, she escapes from her husband. After that, Arthur, alone and distraught for having ruined his marriage, goes back to drinking and ends up also ruining his life. In his final moments, he calls Helen to him, and she takes

⁸¹A. Brontë, 1848, p. 171

⁸²A. Brontë, 1848, p. 171.

⁸³A. Brontë, 1848, p. 199.

⁸⁴A. Brontë, 1848, p. 296.

care of him during those final months, although she does not forgive him. It would seem logical, that being so close to death Arthur would repent all of his past actions; but according to Helen, in those moments he only fears what will come next for him. Arthur ends his life in this way, fearing the consequences of his actions for himself, but not regretting them for having wronged the lives of so many people around him.

On the whole, it can be said, that Arthur Huntingdon is first portrayed in the novel as an ideal Victorian gentleman: charming, elegant, and rich, though a bit wild, but nothing too noticeable. However, as time passes and his true character is found, it is shown that he is arrogant, manipulative, controlling, and does not care at all about morality and religion. These characteristics, along with some bad company, lead to his eventual downfall and the ruining of his marriage and his life.

5. Comparison of the characters

Now that the three characters have been analysed, the focus of this section will be the comparison between them: the things they have in common, and the features that make them different from each other. We will also pay attention to the view each author has of their own male hero. This will give us an insight into how each of them fits into the literary standards of the time.

5.1. Similarities and differences

For the comparison of the three characters, we will follow a similar order as in the analyses. We will start comparing their physical aspect, then their most important personality traits, and lastly their way of interacting with others.

Regarding the physical aspect of the three of them, we can say that Heathcliff and Mr. Rochester follow similar characteristics, while Arthur Huntingdon differs greatly from them. Both Heathcliff and Rochester are described as not being particularly handsome, with a rough and stern appearance, that seems ungraceful, and in the case of Heathcliff even causes repulsiveness. Both have dark hair and eyes, and Heathcliff has a darker skin tone than expected for an English man. On the other hand, the physical description of Arthur Huntingdon is that of a conventionally attractive man, with a friendly face, blue eyes, and light hair. This difference accentuates the darkness revolving around Heathcliff and Mr. Rochester, and makes Arthur seem much nicer to be with. In fact, Arthur spends a great deal of time around people, attending parties and social gatherings, while Mr. Rochester and Heathcliff, especially the latter, are much more shut out from the world. In my opinion, there seems to be a concordance between their looks and their personality: Heathcliff and Mr. Rochester have an ungraceful appearance and are more withdrawn from society, while Arthur has friendlier looks, and is therefore seen as a social and nice person.

Now for their personality traits, it can be observed that there are certain things that they all share. The most important one is the intensity of their emotions, especially of their love. In the novels, all of them form romantic relationships, and they show their love both verbally and physically. Heathcliff and Huntingdon are undoubtedly more passionate and their way of showing their love is more physical; Arthur even kisses Helen before they are married. Mr. Rochester is far more gentle and discreet, perhaps because he is older and has more

experienced. That does not mean, however, that his love is less strong. In fact, he almost goes mad during the time of Jane's absence. It is clear that they all love deeply and sincerely, but if there is one of them whose love is not as strong, it is Arthur Huntingdon. Both Mr. Rochester and Heathcliff do everything they can to be with Jane and Catherine respectively, and their feelings for them are shown all throughout the books. On the other hand, although Arthur's love is very passionate in the beginning, it loses strength as his marriage with Helen progresses, which leads me to believe that it was just an infatuation and not real love.

These strong feelings, in the case of Heathcliff and Arthur Huntingdon, lead eventually to violence and destruction: Heathcliff causes the death of Catherine and abuses her daughter both verbally and physically. Arthur's passionate love turns into abuse and the destruction of his marriage and Helen's life. Mr. Rochester case is different. Although he once threatens Jane to use violence against her when she does not want to marry him, he actually never does it. In my opinion, Mr. Rochester seems to have more control over his emotions than the other two characters, and he probably realises, that hurting Jane would only cause more damage.

Another feature that these characters share is that they are all mysterious. Heathcliff has a mysterious past since no one knows where he came from and he has no known family. Apart from that, during his three-year absence from Wuthering Heights, he becomes extremely rich, and no one knows how he managed to make his fortune. He is a very private person and does not form strong connections to anyone, except for Catherine, so no one really knows much about his life or his feelings. The case of Mr. Rochester is very similar: he has a dark past that no one knows about. Even though he has some friends and attends social gatherings, those relationships are, in my opinion, only superficial. Prior to his wedding with Jane no one knows about his past marriage, and that he keeps his wife locked in the attic of his house. Maybe this mystery around them is what makes them so attractive and fascinating to the readers. The case of Arthur Huntingdon is a bit different. He does not have mystery and darkness surrounding his past, and he is much more straightforward about how he lives his life. He has a lot of relations and attends many social gatherings. However, it is true for all of them that part of their mystery is related to their change in personality in society versus in their private lives. Except maybe for Heathcliff, they all have no problem behaving accordingly in society, but in private they prove to be very far away from the ideal man.

Something that the three of them have in common is their own imperfections; none of them is ideal in any way. Heathcliff and Mr. Rochester both have a dark and unflattering appearance, especially Mr. Rochester after he loses his hand and his sight in the fire. Mr. Rochester also states that he has many faults in terms of morals and character, but he does not wish to be better. Heathcliff is constantly contrasted with Edgar Linton, who is considered to be perfect. This comparison highlights Heathcliff's own physical and moral imperfections. Arthur, although physically he could be described as perfectly ideal, has many character faults: he is selfish, arrogant, and has a strong tendency towards drinking. These imperfections they all share is

a key factor of the characters because it really shows that they are very far from the ideal Victorian man.

Regarding their relationships with other characters, many important things can be said. As we have already stated, Heathcliff is the loneliest of them all; he is completely shut out from the world around him. Meanwhile, Arthur Huntingdon is a very social person and spends all his time surrounded by people. Mr. Rochester is kind of the middle ground. Although he spends most of his time secluded in his house, he attends a few social gatherings and knows how to behave in society, like a true gentleman. When it comes to their relationships, they all share a common behaviour: The three of them are extremely manipulative and possessive. Heathcliff uses everyone to get his revenge, for example, making Isabella fall in love with him or forcing his son to marry Catherine's daughter. Rochester tries to manipulate Jane into staying with him after Jane finds out about his previous wife. He tries to convince her, begs her to stay, and even threatens to use violence. The case of Arthur is similar: he tries to manipulate his wife using emotional blackmail and verbal violence. For example, he does not want her to go to her father's funeral, because he wants to have complete control over her. This behaviour can be also seen in *Wuthering Heights* when Heathcliff refuses to allow Cathy to see her sick father. Evidently, this manipulative behaviour can in no way be connected with that of a gentleman.

In short, although they are three very elaborate characters in themselves, with their own particularities, the three sisters built imperfect men similar in their weaknesses and their attitudes.

5.2. How the authors view their characters

Although the three characters have many things in common probably because of the similar influences the Brontë sisters had, each of them is unique in their own way. This has to do with the way each author views her character. To analyse this, we will be comparing Heathcliff, Rochester, and Arthur Huntingdon to other male characters in the same novels, to determine how each one of the male heroes is portrayed.

5.2.1. Heathcliff and Edgar Linton

Heathcliff is clearly the main hero in *Wuthering Heights*, but there is another male character that is relevant to the story, and that is Edgar Linton. Catherine develops a love relationship with both of them. In the end, she decides to marry Edgar, but her feelings towards Heathcliff are still present until the moment of her death. With these two male characters, Emily Brontë presents two distinct types of masculinity, between which Catherine has to choose.

The two of them are clearly different in every way. Edgar is what would be considered a perfect Victorian gentleman: he is handsome, respectable, religious, and comes from a wealthy and important family. Heathcliff, on the other hand, is raised as a working-class man, does not have a proper education, and lacks manners and refinement. Far from the Victorian Ideal, he seems to be closer to a Byronic Hero: he is arrogant, destructive, mysterious, and passionate. The great difference between both of them is noticed by Catherine and expressed with the following words:

Doubtless Catherine marked the difference between her friends as one came in, and the other went out. The contrast resembled what you see in exchanging a bleak, hilly, coal country for a beautiful fertile valley; and his voice and greeting were as opposite as his aspect- He had a sweet, low manner of speaking, and pronounced his words as you do, that's less gruff than we talk here, and softer.⁸⁵

In this passage, Heathcliff is described as bleak and hilly, while Edgar is compared to a fertile valley. Edgar is also depicted as soft. Here is where the real difference between them lies. During the course of the novel, Heathcliff is always described as stronger, while Edgar is “gentle to the point of weakness”.⁸⁶ Weakness is obviously not a very respectable trait for a Victorian gentleman like Edgar. During all his encounters with Heathcliff, Edgar is clearly inferior to him. This can be observed in a scene when they have a fight over Catherine. Heathcliff says the following to Catherine:

“I wish you joy of the milk-blooded coward, Cathy! I compliment you on your taste: and that is the slavering shivering thing you preferred to me! I would not strike him with my fist, but I'd kick him with my foot, and experience considerable satisfaction. Is he weeping, or is he going to faint for fear?”⁸⁷

He calls Linton a coward for not wanting to fight with him and sarcastically asks if he is going to weep and faint. Fainting and weeping are actions, which are traditionally not associated with men. Edgar is treated by Heathcliff like a child or even a woman. He is inferior and does not have the strong masculine traits that Heathcliff shows. Edgar looks “slender” and “youth-like” next to Heathcliff, who is “tall” and “athletic”.⁸⁸ Edgar can not defend himself against Heathcliff’s power, and he is not able to protect his family from him. In fact, he ends up losing his sister, his wife, and his daughter to Heathcliff.⁸⁹

⁸⁵E. Brontë, 1847, p. 75

⁸⁶Drew, 1964, p. 372.

⁸⁷E. Brontë, 1847, p. 123

⁸⁸See E. Brontë, 1847, p. 102.

⁸⁹See Rompteaux, 2012, p. 19.

In *Wuthering Heights* Catherine has the choice between marrying Heathcliff, a lower-class man whom she truly loves, or Edgar, an aristocratic gentleman who will better her social position.⁹⁰ Even though Catherine marries Edgar, who aligns with the Victorian Ideal, she ends up leading an unhappy life, which hints at the absurdity of marrying only by convention. It seems that Emily Brontë was more in favour of male characters far from traditional conventions, hence why she made Heathcliff the hero of her novel. Through the character of Edgar Linton, she rejects and even ridicules the traditional Victorian man. Edgar, who could be the hero of a traditional Victorian novel, is made weak and boring compared to the Byronic Heathcliff, who is far from the traditional Victorian Ideal.⁹¹

5.2.2. Mr. Rochester and St. John Rivers

In *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë presents many different male characters. Apart from Mr. Rochester, the most important of them is St. John Rivers. During the novel, Jane receives two proposals of marriage, the first one from Rochester, whom she ends up marrying, and the second one from St. John, her cousin. Each of them represents a different type of masculinity. Like Catherine in *Wuthering Heights*, Jane has to choose between the two of them.

Rochester, as we have already seen, has clearly Byronic traits, and a very aggressive, mysterious, and arrogant masculinity. Since he is an aristocrat, he is considered a gentleman by right of birth, even though his characteristics do not align with those of the Victorian Ideal. St. John, on the other hand, is an emotionless clergyman, whose life centres mainly around religion. Because of his position, he is a gentleman by profession.⁹² Although they are both gentlemen, they are very different from each other.

The first difference we can find between the two men is their physical aspect. While Rochester is described by Jane as being ungraceful and far from handsome, St. John is the complete opposite. She depicts him in the following way:

*He was young [...] -tall, slender; his face riveted the eye: it was like a Greek face, very pure in outline; quite a straight, classic nose; quite an Athenian mouth and chin. [...] His eyes were large and blue, with brown lashes; his high forehead, colourless as ivory, was partially streaked over by careless locks of fair hair.*⁹³

This description makes clear, that St. John is much closer to the Victorian Ideal in terms of beauty than Mr. Rochester is. His appearance is similar to that of Edgar Linton in *Wuthering*

⁹⁰See Crowhurst, 2014, p. 39.

⁹¹See Rompteaux, 2012, p. 19.

⁹²See Crowhurst, 2014, p. 12.

⁹³C. Brontë, 1847, p. 335

Heights since they both have graceful and delicate features.

Another key difference between Rochester and St. John has to do with the way they see love and marriage. As we have seen in Section Four, Mr. Rochester always treats Jane as an equal; he urges her to speak her mind and always asks her opinion about everything. He proposes a marriage of partnership, in which they are equals, and he is not in any way superior to her. Besides, he loves her very dearly and passionately. Regarding his love, Jane says: "I shall never know the sweet homage given to beauty, youth, and grace-for never to anyone else shall I seem to possess these charms."⁹⁴ For her, Rochester is the only one who truly appreciates her, and loves her unconditionally. On the other hand, St. John proposes Jane a marriage based on religious missionary duties and patriarchal control; Jane would be subordinate to him. Apart from that, he does not really love her; he only wants her to assist him on missionary trips in India. He tells Jane: "You are formed for labour, not for love."⁹⁵ His idea of a marriage is not a marriage of love, he only sees his wife as an assistant to achieve his goals.

In the end, Jane leaves St. John and goes back to Mr. Rochester to marry him. This clearly shows that Charlotte Brontë rejects the idea of a traditional marriage of convention, in which the woman is subordinate to her husband. That is why she marries her heroine to a man who loves her unconditionally and treats her as an equal.⁹⁶ She prefers the Byronic masculinity of Rochester over the traditional Victorian masculinity that St. John represents. However, Charlotte, contrary to her sister Emily, is more interested in a "tamed" Byronic hero. As we have seen in the analysis of Mr. Rochester, he possesses many Byronic traits: he is arrogant, mysterious, possessive, and dominant. However, during the course of the novel, this strong masculinity is weakened, until at the end, he is completely dependant on Jane. He evolves into a reformed and humbled Byronic hero.⁹⁷ This makes clear that Charlotte Brontë rejects the traditional Victorian Ideal in favour of a more Byronic male.

5.2.3. Arthur Huntingdon and Gilbert Markham

The case of Arthur Huntingdon is a bit different from the two characters discussed before. He is not in any way an ambiguous villain-hero; he is very clearly depicted as the villain of the story. His counterpart, the character of Gilbert Markham, is the hero of the novel. Another difference is that in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* Helen is not given a choice between the two male characters. She has already married Arthur, and after he dies she has to decide if it is sensible to marry Gilbert.

The differences between Arthur and Gilbert are clear. Arthur is arrogant, possessive, and ag-

⁹⁴C. Brontë, 1847, p. 350.

⁹⁵C. Brontë, 1847, p. 391.

⁹⁶See Crowhurst, 2014, p. 22.

⁹⁷See Crowhurst, 2014, p. 13.

gressive. He psychologically abuses Helen during their marriage. In this way he is similar to Heathcliff, who does the same to Isabella during the time they are married. He also drinks too much and spends his and his wife's money on gambling. It is said, that Anne Brontë's brother Branwell could have been the inspiration for this behaviour.⁹⁸ Gilbert, on the other hand, is a middle-class man, honest and moral, who in the end proves to be worthy to marry Helen. Lisa Surridge in her book *Bleak Houses: Marital Violence in Victorian Fiction* writes that Gilbert "exemplifies Victorian manliness and self-control".⁹⁹ As we previously saw in Section Two, middle-class men could attain the title of gentleman since it was not only focused on wealth. This way, Gilbert Markham can be described as a Victorian gentleman. While Arthur just wants to exert control over his wife, Gilbert's idea of marriage is more domestic.

*"When I marry, I shall expect to find more pleasure in making my wife happy and comfortable, than in being made so by her: I would rather give than receive."*¹⁰⁰

Gilbert is not selfish and possessive like Arthur, which is probably why in the end, when Helen and he marry, she is finally happy. On the other hand, at the end of the novel, Arthur and all other characters who share his behaviour end up destroying themselves, while Gilbert marries Helen and lives a happy life. As said in the paper *The Subjection of Men*, regarding this particular subject, the death of Huntingdon represents the triumph of the traditional domestic Victorian masculinity, over immorality.¹⁰¹ I completely agree with this point of view, and more than that, I argue that it helps illustrate the big difference in the way Anne Brontë viewed masculinity compared to her sisters.

With the characters of Heathcliff and Mr. Rochester, Emily, and Charlotte Brontë created two charismatic Byronic heroes. Their abusive and destructive behaviour is romanticised, hence the reason they get a happy ending with the heroines.¹⁰² Anne Brontë, on the other hand, depicts Arthur Huntingdon as the villain of her story and refuses to romanticise his behaviour. Instead, she chooses Gilbert Markham as her hero, a gentle farmer who represents all the Victorian ideal characteristics. In Section Three we stated Branwell Brontë as one of the main influences for the Brontë sisters. As I see it, his behaviour can be observed in different ways in the characters of Heathcliff, Mr. Rochester, and Arthur Huntingdon. The difference lies in the different ending each of them gave to the literary version of their brother. With the characters of Heathcliff and Mr. Rochester Branwell is given a form of "redemption" for his behaviour, which is clearly romanticised. Anne Brontë, on the other hand, "refused to wear rose-tinted glasses".¹⁰³

⁹⁸See Constans Renco, 2020, p. 6.

⁹⁹Surridge, 2005, p. 73.

¹⁰⁰A. Brontë, 1848, p. 50

¹⁰¹See Johnson, 2010, p. 91.

¹⁰²See Devaney, 2014.

¹⁰³Devaney, 2014.

More than that, I strongly believe that both Emily and Charlotte Brontë tried to justify the bad and destructive behaviour of their characters. Emily Brontë gave Heathcliff a lonely and unhappy childhood, in which he was bullied. She then proceeded to excuse Heathcliff's actions as an adult, pleading that he had had "some ups and downs in life".¹⁰⁴ Ellen Dean, the narrator of the story, is clearly biased and supports Heathcliff's behaviour.

In *Jane Eyre* there is a similar situation with Mr. Rochester. Although not as obvious as with Heathcliff, his actions are also partially excused. His behaviour and bad actions are justified by the fact that he was forced to marry a mad woman, and consequently led an unhappy life. Anne Brontë, on the other hand, makes clear from the start that everything Arthur does is his fault. He has no excuse, and that is why in the end Helen chooses to marry Gilbert.

5.3. How the characters fit in the literary standards of the time

To be able to answer the key question "Why are these characters unique for their time?", in this section we will look at the way in which they fit into the literary standards of the time. Do they fulfil the characteristics of the Victorian Ideal? Or are they closer to a Byronic hero? What features make them unique? These questions will be answered with the help of charts 9 and 10.

In Illustration 9, we can observe how each character aligns with the Victorian Ideal.

	Manners	Morality	Attractiveness	Income & Education
Heathcliff			(✓)	
Mr. Rochester	✓	(✓)		✓
A. Huntingdon	✓		✓	✓

Illustration 9. Characteristics of the Victorian Ideal.

At first glance, we can see, that Heathcliff only partially fulfils one of the characteristics of a gentleman. He has no manners in society, he is not a moral and religious person, and he does not have an education. The only characteristic he partially fulfils is attractiveness. In *Wuthering Heights* it never becomes exactly clear whether Heathcliff is attractive, but since he is always portrayed in contrast with Edgar Linton, who is described as handsome, we can assume that Heathcliff is not entirely attractive. Because of the information shown above, we can discard Heathcliff as a Victorian gentleman.

¹⁰⁴E. Brontë, 1847, p. 37.

Mr. Rochester on the other hand, fulfils almost all the characteristics of the Victorian Ideal. He has manners and knows how to behave in society, and he does not have to work for a living, since he comes from a good family with a high income. The concept of morality he only partially fulfils. Although not specifically stated in the book, there are hints that he is most likely religious. For example, he wants to marry Jane in church. However, having Bertha locked in his attic is not exactly something that a morally good man would do. Apart from that, Rochester is not attractive. It is explicitly stated in *Jane Eyre* that Mr. Rochester is not handsome in any way. We can conclude then, that Mr. Rochester could be considered a gentleman because of his education, fortune, and social behaviour. However, he lacks certain characteristics like morality and honesty.

The case of Arthur is similar. On the outside he seems perfect: he is attractive, social, and comes from a good family. Nevertheless, he does not meet the moral component of what it is to be a gentleman. As we stated in Section Two, during the Victorian period, morality became more important than wealth and income. Arthur does not live a morally acceptable life, he drinks and gambles, and more than that, he despises religion. Like Mr. Rochester, he fulfils certain features of the Victorian Ideal, but he lacks the moral component.

Illustration 10 shows the typical characteristics of the Byronic hero as described in Section Three.

	Mysterious	Arrogant	Aggressive	Strong feelings
Heathcliff	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mr. Rochester	✓	✓	(✓)	✓
A. Huntingdon		✓	✓	(✓)

Illustration 10. Characteristics of the Byronic Hero.

Starting with Heathcliff, it can be observed, that he fulfils all the main characteristics of a Byronic hero. Since he lives alone and has little contact with the outside world, his life is a mystery to everyone. He also shows very arrogant and aggressive behaviour towards everyone. Most importantly, he is able to feel strong emotions, both good and bad. The best example of this is his relationship with Catherine, where he shows a very passionate and strong love.

The character of Mr. Rochester also aligns with the archetype of the Byronic hero. There is great mystery surrounding him, and he has a dark past that no one knows about. He is sometimes also arrogant and feels superior to moral laws. His feelings are also passionate and strong, something which can be seen through his relationship with Jane. The feature of aggressiveness he does not satisfy entirely. He is never physically aggressive like Heathcliff or Arthur are, but he threatens Jane by using violence and emotional blackmail.

Arthur is a bit different from the other two. He only entirely fulfils two of the characteristics of a Byronic hero: he is arrogant and aggressive. If he is able to feel strong emotions, that is debatable. His love for Helen, although passionate in the beginning, wears off very quickly. The difference with Heathcliff and Mr. Rochester is that Arthur only possesses the negative Byronic qualities. The appeal of the Byronic hero, as discussed in Section Three, is the mixture of good and bad qualities. Heathcliff and Mr. Rochester fulfil this characteristic, and they have at the same time the role of hero and villain. On the other hand, Arthur is depicted only as the villain of the story and is not meant to be appealing or fascinating in any way.

In summary, it can be said, that the three characters lack the values and features of the traditional Victorian Ideal, some more than others. However, they meet most of the standards of the Byronic hero. They are flawed, not like a Victorian gentleman, who was considered to be perfect. This imperfection, along with the characteristics of the Byronic hero, makes them stand outside the Victorian Ideal. Therefore, they do not completely fit the literary conventions of the Victorian period, and they are unique for their time.

6.

Conclusion

Let us come back to the key question that is the subject of this paper: “Are the male characters of the Brontë sisters unique for their time? And if so, why are they unique?”. The answer to the first question is undoubtedly yes. But why? What makes them different and special?

During the nineteenth century, men were subjected to high and strict standards of what an ideal Victorian gentleman should be. Consequently, this affected the literary male figures of the time. However, the Brontë sisters were not at all concerned with these expectations, and in their novels, they presented non-traditional male characters. In fact, the characters we have analysed in this paper are far from the Victorian Ideal since they do not meet requirements like honesty, morality, and proper social behaviour. This makes them unique for their time.

Emily Brontë created Heathcliff, a character who has none of the qualities expected from a gentleman: he is aggressive, manipulative, and destructive. Contrary to literary conventions, she made this character the hero of her story. Charlotte also created a unique male hero, Mr. Rochester, who has a mysterious past and no sense of morality. However, she stayed far closer to the above mentioned expectations than her sister Emily. The third sister, Anne, created the character of Arthur Huntingdon, an aggressive man who drinks, gambles, and cheats on his wife. This behaviour was shocking since, to my knowledge, it had been never shown in Victorian literature.

Some of their unique characteristics stand out at first glance. Nonetheless, an extensive analysis is needed to appreciate how special they truly are. The character of Heathcliff is perhaps the most straightforward of the three. He is clearly shown as unconventional and far from the expectations of society. The only characteristic of the Victorian Ideal he partially fulfils is wealthiness. Even so, his personality and behaviour are far from usual. Mr. Rochester and Arthur Huntingdon could be considered traditional Victorian heroes; they are wealthy, respectable, and behave properly in society. However, when one goes deeper into the characters, it becomes clear that they are very far from the Victorian Ideal: they are manipulative, arrogant, and have no sense of morality. We could say then that they are gentlemen only on the surface, but in reality, they do not meet the expectations of society.

The behaviour and personalities of Heathcliff, Mr. Rochester, and Arthur Huntingdon align much better with the archetype of the Byronic hero. They meet most of the features of that type of character: they are mysterious, destructive, able to feel strong emotions, and profoundly ambiguous. This is not surprising, given that the Brontë sisters were heavily influ-

enced by the poet Lord Byron. Since the Byronic hero differs considerably from the Victorian hero, it makes these male characters even more special.

The uniqueness of these characters becomes even more clear when they are compared to other male characters of the Brontë sisters. Heathcliff can be compared to Edgar Linton, the other male character in *Wuthering Heights*. Since Edgar is a perfect Victorian gentleman, Heathcliff stands out as being completely out of the ordinary. The same occurs with Mr. Rochester and the character of St. John Rivers in *Jane Eyre*. They are constantly compared to highlight the difference between traditional and Byronic masculinity. In both *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*, the female hero must choose between the socially acceptable man (Edgar Linton and St. John Rivers), and the Byronic hero (Heathcliff and Mr. Rochester). In both cases, they choose the non-traditional Byronic hero, who does not fulfil the expectations of society. This leads me to believe, that Emily and Charlotte Brontë favoured this type of character over the Victorian hero. Through the characters of Edgar and St. John, they neglect and ridicule the Victorian Ideal and make clear their preference for Byronic characters. The third character, Arthur Huntingdon is compared to Gilbert Markham in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Gilbert represents traditional Victorian masculinity, while Arthur depicts Byronic masculinity. Anne Brontë, contrary to her sisters, does not romanticise Arthur's Byronic behaviour. She clearly shows her predilection for traditional Victorian heroes, making Arthur the villain of the story, and Gilbert the hero.

However, what is most fascinating and special about these three characters is that the Brontë sisters created them while they lived in almost complete isolation from the outside world. This makes their characters especially unique since they could not have been influenced by the traditional literary expectations of the Victorian period. The Brontë sisters had little contact with men and had no other inspiration apart from what they read in books. That is why their characters were heavily based on the Byronic hero. The three of them also took inspiration from their brother Branwell to create such characters. He was one of the few men they had contact with, and they were all greatly affected by his gambling and alcoholism. It is evident that Branwell's personality can be found in different ways in Heathcliff, Rochester, and Arthur.

The three Brontë sisters are undoubtedly some of the most important writers of the Victorian period, whose novels have become classics of English literature. Their male heroes appalled as well as fascinated the readers of the time because of their unique nature. The characters of Heathcliff, Mr. Rochester, and Arthur Huntingdon all lack traditional Victorian values. Apart from that, they meet many of the standards of the Byronic hero. Even if written during the Victorian period, they cannot be called Victorian heroes. They are clearly unique, not only for their personalities and behaviour, but also because of the personal influences the Brontës had to create them. With these characters, the Brontë sisters showed the unusual view they had of masculinity and human relations and created a new concept of what a male hero should be.

Not only the three male characters are special. As I see it, Emily, Charlotte, and Anne Brontë are unique in themselves. They have created compelling novels and remarkable characters while being mostly isolated and having very few real experiences in the outside world.

We have seen that the characters of Heathcliff, Mr. Rochester, and Arthur Huntingdon are unique and special for their time. The vision that the Brontë sisters present of women and men in society, the relationships between them and the portrayal of their characters were unusual and to some extent modern in the nineteenth century.

I strongly believe that is why *Wuthering Heights*, *Jane Eyre*, and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, together with Heathcliff, Mr. Rochester, and Arthur Huntingdon continue to fascinate readers nowadays.

Bibliography

- Alexander, Christine and Margaret Smith (2003). *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*. 3rd edition, 2018. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ash, Jackie (n.d.). *Brontë Sisters: Biographical Sketch & Literary Contribution*. Accessed: 12-11-2023. URL: <https://www.englishliterature.info/2021/08/bronte-sisters-literary-contribution.html>.
- Bone, Drummond (2004). *The Cambridge Companion to Byron*. 2nd edition, 2005. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bowden, Mary (n.d.). *The Victorian Period*. Accessed: 05-07-2023. URL: <https://www.easternct.edu/speichera/understanding-literary-history-all/the-victorian-period.html>.
- Brontë, Anne (1848). *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. 2nd edition, 2008. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Brontë, Charlotte (1847). *Jane Eyre*. 7th edition, 2019. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Brontë, Emily (1847). *Wuthering Heights*. 2nd edition, 2012. London: Penguin English Library.
- Brown, Helen (1939). "The Influence of Byron on Emily Brontë". In: *The Modern Language Review* 34, pp. 374–381.
- Cody, David (2019). *The Gentleman*. Accessed: 04-07-2023. URL: <https://victorianweb.org/history/gentleman.html>.
- Constans Renco, Ivette (2020). "Death or Punishment: Responding to the Byronic Hero in the novels of Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Brontë". PhD thesis. Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.
- Crowhurst, Sylvia (2014). "The Victorian Man: Re-defining and re-negotiating masculinity in Brontë and Gaskell". PhD thesis. University of South Florida St. Petersburg.
- David, Deirdre (2001). *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel*. 4th edition, 2005. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Devaney, Beulah Maud (2014). *Anne Brontë: the unsung sister, who turned the gaze on men*. Accessed: 13-10-2023. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2014/jan/17/anne-bronte-sister-men-charlotte-emily>.
- Drew, Philip (1964). "Charlotte Brontë as a Critic of *Wuthering Heights*". In: *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 18, pp. 365–381.
- Encyclopaedia Britannica (2023). *Gothic Novel*. Accessed: 11-11-2023. URL: <https://www.britannica.com/art/Gothic-novel>.
- Everitt, Alastair (1967). *Wuthering Heights, an Anthology of Criticism*. 1st edition, 1967. Cass.
- Forina, Marybeth (2014). "Edward Rochester: A new byronic hero". In: *The undergraduate review* 10, pp. 85–88.
- Gaskell, Elizabeth (1857). *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*. London: Penguin Classics, 1997.
- Gilmour, Robin (1981). *The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel*. 2nd edition, 2016. New York: Routledge.
- Hesse, Suzanne (2004). *The Victorian Ideal: Male characters in Jane Eyre and Villette*. Accessed: 04-07-2023. URL: <https://victorianweb.org/authors/bronte/cbronte/hesse1.html#:~:text=The%20ideal%20Victorian%20male%20should,to%20have%20a%20good%20income>.
- Houghton, Walter (1957). *The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830-1870*. 13th edition, 1963. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Hughes, Sarah (2016). *Why those subversive Brontë sisters still hypnotise us*. Accessed: 13-10-2023. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/mar/27/bronte-sisters-enduring-love-affair>.
- Hume, Robert D. (1969). "Gothic versus Romantic: A Revaluation of the Gothic Novel". In: *PMLA* 84, pp. 282–290.
- Johnson, Erin Melissa (2010). "The Subjection of Men: The Domestication and Embourgeoisement of the Gothic Villain-Hero in Three Brontë Novels". PhD thesis. University of Saskatchewan.
- Lorimer, Douglas A. (1978). *Colour, class, and the Victorians*. 1st edition, 1978. Leicester: Leicester University Press.
- Marchand, Leslie A. (2023). *Lord Byron*. Accessed: 11-11-2023. URL: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Lord-Byron-poet>.

- Miller, Jane (1986). *Women writing about men*. 1st edition, 1986. New York: Pantheon.
- Newman, John (1852). *The Idea of a University*. 1st edition, 2015. London: Aeterna Press.
- Nyborg, Erin (2016). “The Brontës and Masculinity”. PhD thesis. University of Oxford.
- Palášková, Martina (2015). “Male Characters in the novels of Emily and Charlotte Brontë”. PhD thesis. Charles University of Prague.
- Pujol, Elena (2023). *Lord Byron, el poeta del romanticismo que quiso liberar Grecia*. Accessed: 11-11-2023. URL: https://historia.nationalgeographic.com.es/a/lord-byron-el-poeta-del-romanticismo-que-quiso-liberar-grecia_7626.
- Rigby, Elizabeth (1848). “Vanity Fair and Jane Eyre”. In: *The Quarterly Review* 84, pp. 82–99.
- Rompteaux, Marine (2012). “The Brontës and their conception of the masculine hero: The case of Heathcliff and Mr. Rochester”. PhD thesis. Université Stendhal.
- Skinner, Sally (2023). *Revenge and Repetition: Theme analysis*. Accessed: 08-09-2023. URL: <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/wuthering-heights/themes/revenge-and-repetition>.
- SurrIDGE, Lisa (2005). *Bleak Houses: Marital Violence in Victorian Fiction*. 1st edition, 2005. Ohio: Ohio University Press.
- Taylor, Jasmine (2020). *Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell*. Accessed: 01-10-2023. URL: <https://www.literaryladiesguide.com/literary-musings/biographical-notice-of-ellis-and-acton-bell/>.
- Wells, Erin (1993). *Fighting back*. Accessed: 08-09-2023. URL: <https://victorianweb.org/authors/bronte/cbronte/61brnt18.html>.
- Woolf, Virginia (1979). *Women and Writing*. 1st edition, 1980. San Diego: Harcourt, 1980.

List of Illustrations

1	Title page of <i>Wuthering Heights</i> https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/	iii
2	Title page of <i>Jane Eyre</i> https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/	v
3	Title page of <i>The Tenant of Wildfell Hall</i> https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/	vii
4	Milestones during the Victorian period Prepared by the author	4
5	The Brontë Sisters by Patrick Branwell Brontë National Portrait Gallery NPG1727 http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/	9
6	Character map <i>Wuthering Heights</i> Prepared by the author	11
7	Character map <i>Jane Eyre</i> Prepared by the author	12
8	Character map <i>The Tenant of Wildfell Hall</i> Prepared by the author	12
9	Characteristics of the Victorian Ideal Prepared by the author	32
10	Characteristics of the Byronic Hero Prepared by the author	33

