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Male Characters in the novels of Emily and Charlotte Brontë

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Declaration:

I hereby declare that I have written this bachelor's thesis by myself and that all the sources used during writing were properly cited.

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Abstract:

This thesis deals with the topic of the male characters in three books of Charlotte and Emily Brontë, who introduced extraordinary characters who seem not to fit into the era in which they were written. The theoretical part is focused on the Victorian period that characterized the Brontë sisters' writings as well as on other factors that shaped their way of writing. The practical part analyses the main male characters, describes their uniqueness and explains why they were remarkable, if not exceptional for their time.

Key Words:

masculinity, male characters, Byronic hero, gothic elements, Victorian era

Abstrakt:

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá tématem mužnosti mužských postav ve třech knihách Charlotte a Emily Brontë, které představily pro jejich dobu nevšední postavy, které neseděly do své doby. Teoretická část je zaměřena jak na Viktoriánské období, ve kterém sestry psaly, tak na faktory, které ovlivnilo způsob jejich psaní. Praktická část do hloubky zkoumá hlavní mužské postavy, popisuje jejich výjimečnost a vysvětluje, proč nemohly zapadnout do své doby.

Klíčová slova:

mužnost, mužské postavy, byronský hrdina, gotické prvky, Viktoriánské období

Contents:

1 - Introduction	6
THE THEORETICAL PART	8
2 – The Victorian era.....	8
2.1 - Victorian society	8
2.2 - The Victorian woman	9
2.3 - The idea of the Victorian gentleman.....	11
3 – The authors’ background and sources of inspiration	14
4 - Romanticism.....	18
4.1 - The Byronic hero	18
4.2 – Gothic elements and the villain	19
THE PRACTICAL PART	20
5 – The main male characters	20
5.1– The male characters as Byronic heroes.....	20
5.2 – Gothic elements as surroundings for Byronic heroes	22
5.3 – The villain as a Gothic element	23
6 – <i>Villette</i>	24
6.1 - The character of Lucy Snow in <i>Villette</i>	24
6.2 - John Bretton and Paul Emanuel	25
6.3 - The relationship between Paul Emanuel and Lucy Snow	28
7 – <i>Jane Eyre</i>	30
7.1 – The character of <i>Jane Eyre</i>	30
7.2 – St. John Rivers and Edward Rochester	31
7.3 – The relationship between Edward Rochester and Jane Eyre	35
8 – <i>Wuthering Heights</i>	37
8.1 – Catherine in <i>Wuthering Heights</i>	37
8.2 – Linton and Heathcliff.....	38
8.3 – The relationship between Heathcliff and Catherine.....	41
9 - Conclusion.....	43
10 - Works cited.....	45

1 - Introduction

The Brontë sisters, mainly Charlotte and Emily, are significant female writers of the first half of the 19th century, the early Victorian period. When published, the sisters used pseudonyms preserving their initials: Charlotte was Currer Bell and her one year younger sister was Ellis Bell. No one believed that a woman could write those books, especially not the book of Ellis. Women at that time were supposed to write about their sphere, including their own home and domestic issues. However, the Brontë sisters were the opposite of what was expected, which led to criticism and misunderstanding of them at that time.

Still at the beginning of the 19th century the man was the breadwinner and the woman was supposed to stay home taking care of her family. Before getting married the only reasonable job a middle-class woman could do was to become a governess, which is basically the theme of the two novels by Charlotte Brontë examined in this thesis. Although the female characters are very strong in the novels and most attention is often paid to them, the male characters are also very complex and they deserve more attention.

First, in the theoretical part of the thesis light will be shed on Victorian society and how it portrayed the Victorian gentleman. Second, the important moments of the Brontë sisters' lives will be highlighted as they shaped them and affected their works. Prominent men that accentuated their writings particularly their father and brother will be mentioned too. Eventually, the third part of the theoretical part is going to be focused on Romanticism and mainly on the Byronic hero and the villain of the Gothic novel as the thesis is focused on the main male characters in selected novels of the Brontë sisters.

In the practical part, three books are going to be studied – Charlotte's *Jane Eyre*, and *Villette* together with Emily's *Wuthering Heights*. Especially *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, both published in 1847, are nowadays very popular and one cannot decide easily which book is better. Both works are unique, so were the sisters. In these three books the main attention is going to be paid to male characters, first to the least known book, *Villette*, and the main characters John Bretton and Monsieur Paul Emanuel, then,

to the novel by the same author, Edward Rochester and St John in *Jane Eyre*. Finally, the rather controversial novel of Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, is going to be examined, where the main focus is going to be on Heathcliff and his opposite, Linton.

In all the three books the main male protagonists are going to be studied with regard to whether they are or are not typical Victorian heroes. It is interesting to detect the perception of masculinity in Charlotte and Emily's books of 1847 considering the fact they were both single at the time, a valuable part of their childhood spent in the countryside surrounded by nature but definitely not by large cities, and romantic love was known to them only from books.

Since the Brontë sisters were living at the end of Romanticism it also affected their writing. They loved to read Byron in their teens, the poet who created the Byronic hero, which has an influence in their novels. Also, the concept of the villain and other Gothic elements are present in their books and will be closely studied in the practical part.

Masculine characters in the Brontë sisters' novels are very complex. They are going to be viewed within the idea of the Victorian gentleman and also from the point of view of the strong influence of Romanticism, namely by the Byronic hero and the villain of Gothic literature.

To conclude, light will be thrown on all the main characters and explain how they fit into the society at that time and—which Romantic or Victorian characteristics they demonstrate and they lack.

THE THEORETICAL PART

2 – The Victorian era

In order to inspect the male characters in the Brontë sisters' novels, it is crucial to first consider the Victorian society in general, the Victorian woman and the characteristic features of the Victorian gentleman in particular.

The Victorian era is connected with the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901). It was an unforgettable epoch that had its pros and cons. The beginning was promising – development of the railways, the Reform Bill which granted the vote to all males owning property worth ten pounds or more in annual rent. The so-called “hungry forties” brought unemployment, poverty and famine in Ireland. But good times came again. In 1851 The Great Exhibition took place in London in Hyde Park. Around six million people wanted to see the achievements in modern industry and science. A few years later in 1877 Queen Victoria became Empress of India and ruled more than 410 million people.

In terms of literature novels were the leading genre. They were often read audibly in family gatherings; hence some topics had to be avoided. Novels were mainly realistic and focused on the relationships of the individual in society. There were an increasing number of women writers, including the Brontë sisters. But whereas, for example, Charles Dickens was an author of social realism who criticised social, economic and moral abuses of Victorian England, the Brontë sisters introduced a new point of view in their books for which they were at first criticised but later on acknowledged as great writers belonging to the best novelists of the times.

2.1 - Victorian society

Victorian society was patriarchal. A man was the head of the family, the breadwinner, extremely powerful and had the main and last word in all important issues. He had to have a respectable job; meanwhile his wife was home taking care of his children. Having a respectable job and being powerful also brought duties and burdens that he had to carry. In addition, they were involved in public issues. In other words, a man was

an important figure, who could not be overlooked, unlike his opposite female.

The 19th century was strictly religious. According to Altholz, “marked by a revival of religious activity unmatched since the days of the Puritans.” But religion was not only a church issue; it became a public matter and affected the lives of normal people. When someone was born, he or she was baptized in church, later on got married and had their funeral at the same place, not mentioning the mass that took place every Sunday. The church emphasized the importance of traditions, rituals and authorities.

All couples were expected to get married, when they refused it, they were harshly judged by the whole society. A good example of this can be seen in Thomas Hardy's novel *Jude the Obscure*, where Jude and his partner, raising children without being married, had to face many difficulties finding accommodation and a job. The end of the book is more than tragic and shows neither mercy nor understanding from the society.

On the whole, Victorian society was strictly patriarchal and religious. Much was expected from a man, the breadwinner, on the other hand, a woman was supposed to take care of the household and not be interested in public issues or political life.

2.2 - The Victorian woman

A woman was “the angel in the house”— she was pure, domestic and self-sacrificing. The phrase occurred first in Coventry Patmore’s poem. In the following part of Patmore’s poem the ideal woman and the ideal male-female relationship is presented:

Man must be pleased; but him to please
Is woman's pleasure; down the gulf
Of his condoled necessities
She casts her best, she flings herself.
How often flings for nought, and yokes
Her heart to an icicle or whim,
Whose each impatient word provokes
Another, not from her, but him;

While she, too gentle even to force
His penitence by kind replies,
Waits by, expecting his remorse,
With pardon in her pitying eyes;
And if he once, by shame oppress'd,
A comfortable word confers,
She leans and weeps against his breast,
And seems to think the sin was hers,... (Patmore 109)

No one paid much attention when the poem was first released, but its popularity later increased and it eventually influenced authors of the 20th century. Virginia Woolf reacted to this poem and later said “Killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer.” “That has proved to be a prophetic statement, for today, not only in the domain of letters, but in the entire professional world, women are still engaged in that deadly contest in their struggle for social and economic equality.” (Leaska) A Victorian woman was in her whole life subservient to a man. Firstly to her father, who she had to respect and obey, he also knew who the best husband for her was. Later on, when she got married, she had to submit to her husband. If he died, her brother was the one who she was dependent on. The only way how to lead an honourable life was to marry well; hence marriage was the biggest event in her and her parents’ lives. Nancy Armstrong describes the situation of women precisely: “Marry a man with whom you were emotionally compatible if you could, but marry a man of material means you must” (97). Considering age, young women got married sooner than nowadays.

In other words, a Victorian woman was never totally independent, which led at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century to campaigns for more rights for women, particularly the suffragette movement which demand the right to vote.

Whereas nowadays women are eager for a good career and postpone maternity to a later age, at that time a woman in the role of mother was highly appreciated. A change had taken place during the 18th century in England. As Mellor says:

Lawrence Stone, Randolph Trumbach, Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, Alice Ryerson and most recently Barbara Gelpi have all argued powerfully for the emergence during this century of a more emotionally charged “affective” nuclear family and an idealised mother who remained at home in more sustained and intimate contact with her children - breast feeding them, supervising and participating in their play, guiding them in the use of language, socializing, cleansing, amusing, and instructing them (97).

On the other hand, if a wife’s husband died and she did not have any male relatives, it could happen that she had to become a prostitute. The theme of the “fallen woman” was common at that time in literature. Because of the concept of the ideal “pure” woman as described in Patmore’s poem “The Angel in the House”, this kind of woman was considered to have lost her innocence and to have chosen a “life of sin”. Sometimes women were forced by circumstances, for example when their husband died and there was no one who could take care of them. Additionally, being a woman at that time meant it was almost impossible to find a job. In the Victorian period sexual life was restricted to marriage; therefore women's sexuality was a taboo topic.

To sum up, a woman was expected to be “the angel in the house” taking care of the household without expressing any opinions. In the case of a husband’s death, the wife often had to become a prostitute as there was no other way to earn a living. As a result of that there was a call for women rights at the end of the 19th century, since they wanted to be independent and lead an honourable life also in the case of living on their own.

2.3 - The idea of the Victorian gentleman

Since this thesis is focused on male characters, it is essential to focus now on the idea of the Victorian gentleman, a concept that was changing throughout the period. It was very complex; it included a typical way of thinking, behaviour, religion and also fashion. It is hard to define, because “the Victorians themselves were not certain what a gentleman was“ (Cody). But all men wanted to be one.

First, it is crucial to look at who could become a gentleman in Victorian society. "Members of the British aristocracy were gentlemen by right of birth" (Cody), meanwhile mercantile and industrial elites who were not a part of the aristocracy could gain the title by their growing wealth. "Other Victorians — clergy belonging to the Church of England, army officers, members of Parliament — were recognized as gentlemen by virtue of their occupations" (Cody). But, on the other hand, there were also engineers, who belonged to a respectable profession, however those men were not considered to be gentlemen. As far as political power is concerned: "The Victorian emphasis upon the gentleman served as a means of retaining upper-class political power and keeping down the middle class" (Landow). It means that the difference between the upper and middle class was considerable but all men wanted to become gentlemen, including authors.

Even Charles Dickens, who came from a rather poor background, aimed for that. As Cody says: "Great Expectations, which contains a great deal of disguised self-analysis, is at once a portrait or a definition of Dickens's concept of the Gentleman and a justification of his own claim to that title." On the other hand, Thackeray, a friend of Dickens, claimed, according to Cody, that "a writer of novels could not be a gentleman".

Also, the colour of a man's skin was important. As Lorimer says: "A white skin became one essential quality of a gentleman" (113). Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* does not fulfil this condition, as is going to be studied in the practical part.

The concept of the gentleman also included the return of a chivalric moral code.

Sir Walter Scott defined this concept of the gentleman repeatedly in his enormously influential Waverley Novels... Ruskin also maintained that "Gentlemen have to learn that it is no part of their duty of privilege to live on other people's toil," but many "gentlemen" did precisely that. (Cody)

According to Suzanne Hesse, “The ideal Victorian male should have certain characteristics such as honor, loyalty, intelligence, moral uprightness and it does not hurt to have a good income.” Hence when a heroine wanted to get married, this type of man was the ideal and he was supposed to bring her never-ending happiness.

A proper gentleman was expected to follow certain characteristic rules, although they were very often broken. “It is almost a definition of a gentleman to say he is one who never inflicts pain.... He is patient, forbearing, and resigned, on philosophical principles”. He accepts pain and death, because it is a part of his destiny.

Being a real gentleman was also based on a having a proper education that was universally accepted. Whoever studied in one of the public schools, for example “Eton, Harrow, Rugby” (Cody) which were based on classical studies including Latin, was automatically recognized as a gentleman without any consideration of his origins.

To summarize, the idea of the Victorian gentleman was very complex, beginning with behaviour and education and finishing with fashion style and skin colour. It was an honour to be a gentleman and as a result of that a large number of men aspired to become one.

3 – The authors' background and sources of inspiration

This part of the thesis is going to be focused on the authors' lives, which were not common and affected their writing. It will touch upon the men who influenced them and moments of their lives that are reflected in their novels.

For most of their lives the Brontë sisters were isolated from society. Their mother died when they were young, as Bentley mentions: “Unfortunately, in the autumn of 1821 poor young Mrs. Brontë, after bearing six children in seven years, died of cancer” (15). The sister of their passed mother, Miss Branwell, then took care of the household. Since then it was their father, Patrick Brontë, who they grew up with.

Patrick, as the local vicar, had a certain social position and therefore the Brontë sisters could not play as children with their peers. Instead of that they preferred spending time on the moors close to Haworth, which had an obvious impact on them. This life caused the extreme shyness of Charlotte and, as Mrs. Gaskell noted, the reserved behaviour of Emily. The Brontë sisters were very well educated, “including German and French literature, and, judging from Charlotte’s novels, such books as the Gothic novels of Mrs. Radcliffe, Richardson’s Pamela, The Arabian Nights, Gulliver’s Travels“ (Sherry 29). Besides literature, they were also politically educated by their father.

Four of the five Bronte sisters, including Charlotte and Emily, were sent to the Clergy Daughters' School at Cowan Bridge, but they were extremely unhappy (Sherry 12). The discipline had to be strictly kept and teachers were also harsh, not to mention their bad diet. Owing to those factors and the cold weather, girls often suffered there. As a consequence, they all returned and the two oldest sisters, Maria and Elizabeth died of tuberculosis. Charlotte was deeply affected by her sisters' deaths. Her thoughts can be read in her novel *Jane Eyre*, mainly in the character of Helen Burns, the girl who later passed away.

Afterwards, they moved back to Haworth. The six years they spent there was an extremely important formative period. “Lacking playmates, they learned to wish for none and they roamed the moors” (Bentley 27).

The local environment was especially important for Emily, since it became an inspiration for her novel *Wuthering Heights*. Elizabeth Gaskell noted what Charlotte said about her sister: “My sister Emily loved the moors. Flowers brighter than the rose bloomed in the blackest of the heath for her... She found in the bleak solitude many and dear delights; and not the least and best-loved was – liberty” (159). The local weather was very changeable, characterized by strong winds, which suited perfectly Emily’s nature.

The failure of their brother Branwell was a crucial point. On the way to London in order to study, instead of doing so he spent all his money on drinking. Then, broke, he returned. “His aunt spoiled him, and his father, allowing him greater freedom than his sisters, was not aware of how he spent his leisure time” (Sherry 17). Charlotte had in mind how free boys were, whereas girls were kept home without any possibility to act according to their free will.

“In 1842 Charlotte and Emily... went to Brussels and became pupils...” (Sherry 18). In a foreign country far from their beloved moors they did not feel comfortable at all. Whenever they were supposed to meet their friends, they were extremely shy: “Emily hardly ever uttered more than a mono-syllable. Charlotte was sometimes excited sufficiently to speak eloquently and well – on certain subjects” (Gaskell 159). Their strangeness and shyness meant they did not have many friends. Moreover, as strict Protestants it caused them problems to live in a Catholic country. All the memories were later put down in Charlotte’s book *Villette*. Their torture did not last long, their aunt died and they returned to England.

Later, Charlotte returned to Brussels and at least at the beginning she seemed to be extremely happy. She was working at the Pensionnat Heger as a teacher and it seemed she fell in love with Monsieur Heger. Nevertheless, the love was not reciprocated, and it changed her opinion about her living there. “She suffered an even greater isolation and loneliness, for Madame and Monsieur Heger became reserved and cold towards her” (Sherry 20). In the end she returned to England.

At this time the only valuable job for middle-class women was to become a governess. Her own experience was used by Charlotte in her books *Jane Eyre* and

Villette. The alternative to being a governess was to be a teacher in a school, but neither of the sisters found it interesting. They were thinking about setting up their own school, but due to a lack of qualifications they had to give up this idea. Education for women was insufficient as no one wanted to educate people who would not be able to take part in political life. Even women who had to work for living very often suffered from lack of basic skills. There was awareness of this need. “In 1847 a series of Lectures to Ladies was begun in London, and certificates of proficiency were granted” (Sherry 35). This project was a great success. The purpose was to enable women to be better at teaching and to educate them more profoundly. They were now one step closer to equality. But governesses were tied by conventions and regardless of their independent job they were often made to feel worthless, which is very nicely described in *Jane Eyre*.

Women writers struggled at that time. “Southey, replying to Charlotte’s request for advice, wrote: ‘Literature cannot be the business of a woman’s life, and it ought not to be... My idea of a perfect woman is one who can write but won’t.’” (Sherry 31). Regardless of how good their pieces of work were, it was always difficult to be fully appreciated. As a consequence, the Brontë sisters started writing under male pseudonyms.

Charlotte received three proposals of marriage but never accepted them. At the age of 36 she received a fourth one. This time she did not reject it. In 1852, a year after the proposal and later her marriage, her novel *Villette* was published. Unfortunately, in 1855 she died during her pregnancy.

Although most of their literary works were to a certain extent corresponding to contemporary novels, they were different. One of the reasons was the isolation they suffered all their lives. As Sherry says: “It is based on an original and personal viewpoint as a result of isolation, but it varied with each of them according to her nature and experience” (40). Owing to it, their novels seemed to be original and responded to their own experience. But this was what offended readers because of their “unusually open and honest – or naïve – treatment of such things as love, profligacy and violence” (Sherry 37). Yet, Charlotte focused in *Jane Eyre* on contemporary problems – governesses and teachers. She detested injustice and sought a world which would not be influenced by religion but by individual happiness. The position of a woman, including

her struggles, was nicely described in *Villette*, too.

Emily saw the world with different eyes. Whereas Charlotte was criticising the society and the acts of their brother Branwell morally disgusted her, Emily saw his free soul going his own way, the same as Heathcliff did in her novel.

To sum up, the Brontë sisters had a difficult childhood without maternal love. They spent years at schools far from their family, which is reflected in the novels of Charlotte Brontë, and when they came back home to Haworth, they found enjoyment in reading books and in the moors, which is reflected in Emily's *Wuthering Heights*. Their house was in isolation and they suffered often from loneliness, although this encouraged their creativity. They had a father; however, they did not spend much time with him. In addition, their brother Branwell did not improve the way they looked at men after his unsuccessful return. Emily never got married and therefore knew men only from books and Charlotte's greatest novels were written during her single life and during the time she was probably in love with Monsieur Heger while in Brussels. All these factors formulated their view on masculinity.

4 - Romanticism

The Brontë sisters were to a great extent influenced by Romanticism. Romantic writers were interested in nature, pathos and sentimentality. They idealized nature and strongly expressed their feelings. At that time exoticism and supernatural elements were very appealing.

George Gordon Byron was part of the second generation of the Romantic poets. Lord Byron was a romantic revolutionary, who tragically died abroad at young age. During his life he was a radical politician. One of his major contributions is his creation of “the Byronic hero” – an archetype of masculinity. His writing influenced the next generation, including the Brontë sisters since they were reading his poetry during their teens. The concept of the Byronic hero is now going to be studied more thoroughly in order to understand this type of character in the novels of the Brontë sisters.

4.1 - The Byronic hero

The Byronic hero of the 19th century is “an outsider who defines his own moral code, often defying oppressive institutional authority” (Stein 8). He is independent, selfish and aware of his own superiority. This hero has usually no close relationships, despite being passionate and charismatic. Kimmel and Aronson say that “...women writers have had a troubled yet fruitful relationship with Byron and his poetry.” (122) Rebelliousness was very appealing for women in the 19th century and it is rather a paradox that eventually “the egotism of the Byronic type is exposed and the hero is subsequently destroyed, redeemed, or domesticated” (Chew 220). In addition, Stein says that Emily Brontë makes clear to her readers that “...devoting oneself to a Byronic male is a fatal mistake” (27). Olivia Barker describes Mr Rochester as a typical example: “He rather closely resembles the Byronic hero: dark and brooding, with a mind that flares into as many capricious fits as Jane.” The lives of Byronic heroes very often finished tragically, just as G.B. Byron’s own life did.

Byronic heroes can be considered antiheroes. They are usually more appealing than traditional heroes, yet they do not have to be on the evil side of the story. Their past is not pure since usually something bad happened when they were younger. Usually it is

they who seize the attention of readers and eventually are considered true heroes of the story.

The Brontë sisters were impressed by Byron's "aspects of exile, violence and romantic love" (Sherry 29) which were a part of his life. It is obvious that it had an effect on them and this can be found mainly in Emily's *Wuthering Heights*, which takes place far from any civilisation in a remote area. It is also a bit visible in Charlotte's *Jane Eyre* since Lowood School and Thornfield Hall are both far from any big cities.

4.2 - Gothic elements and the villain

The Byronic hero is closely connected with gothic elements. The epic works of the Brontë sisters contain those elements, as will be later described in the practical part. They are "uncanny", which according to Freud means that "many people experience the feeling in the highest degree in relation to death and dead bodies, to the return of the dead, and to spirits and ghosts" (13). The most significant feature of Gothic novels is the presence of supernatural elements or frightening occurrences, very nicely seen mainly in *Wuthering Heights*. Settings are an essential part of this genre.

The villain is a character that frequently appears in Gothic novels. Alsford says that "the villain would appear to lack empathy, the ability to feel for others, to see themselves as part of a larger whole" (120) and "...being a villain has to do with the withholding of oneself from that world" (132). In the beginning of a traditional Gothic tale, the villain is not the centre of attention. However, later the complexity of this character is increasing and eventually he, as a villain is always a male character, becomes the hero of the tale. We can find him mainly in Emily's *Wuthering Heights* in the character of Heathcliff.

To sum up, Romanticism is a movement that strongly influenced the Brontë sisters' writing. The Byronic hero as a symbol of rebelliousness and freedom was very captivating in their time as well as the character of the villain and the supernatural. In the practical part, male characters will be closely studied with regard to the extent they were influenced by the conception of the Byronic hero and the villain of the Gothic novel.

THE PRACTICAL PART

In the theoretical part of this thesis, the society in which the Brontë sisters grew up was described, as well as influences on their writing. The concepts of the Victorian gentleman and the Byronic hero were introduced in order to describe different male characters which were written about at that time. Since the thesis is focused on male characters, they are going to be analysed now. Brontë's male characters were extraordinary in many aspects and did not act according to contemporary ideals, which is going to be shown later. This thesis is going to be focused on individual novels in which a minor part of the analysis is going to be dedicated to female characters in order to show their features that sometimes resemble typical male behaviour. Female characters are going to be compared to male characters since they affected and often changed the behaviour of the main male characters.

5 – The main male characters

In the beginning it is essential to be aware of the strikingly strong female characters that were created by the Brontë sisters. Charlotte Brontë wrote about the extraordinary lives of two women who became governesses and had to fight for an appropriate place in society. Because of the power of the female characters, male characters in Charlotte's novels are rather neglected, despite their interestingness. It is mainly Paul Emanuel in *Villette* and Mr Rochester in *Jane Eyre*.

On the other hand, Heathcliff has not been neglected and he has been the subject of many interpretations. Emily described brilliantly a breath-taking couple who struggled all their life for acceptance by society.

5.1– The male characters as Byronic heroes

It is crucial to point out again Byron's influence on the books of the Brontë sisters, which was already mentioned in the theoretical part. The main male characters are now going to be studied and judged as to whether they are or are not Byronic heroes.

All three male characters – Mr Rochester, Paul Emanuel and Heathcliff can be considered Byronic heroes for their characteristic features that are going to be

mentioned.

Heathcliff is a very proud man who takes revenge on everyone, yet there are also moments in his life when he feels miserable, for instance, when he knows he is going to lose Cathy who is about to marry Linton. Here it is clear that he has got strong emotions. Heathcliff's origin is mysterious enough. One may say he is a gypsy since in the novel he is described thus, "it's as dark almost as if it came from the devil."¹ He is immediately outcast by everyone and no one considers him an equal, especially after the death of his adoptive father. It seems that contemporary society was very racist and it was one of the reasons he was treated badly. During the whole novel he behaves like a dark character full of mystery. Additionally, his great passion is also a Byronic feature.

Mr Rochester also has some Byronic features: "He was moody, too; unaccountably so; I more than once...when he looked up, a morose, almost malignant, scowl blackened his features."² He is not handsome but his charisma allows him to always have the company of beautiful ladies. Jane also says: "But I believed that his moodiness, his harshness, and his former faults of morality (I say *former*, for now he seemed corrected of them) had their source in some cruel cross of fate" (*JE* 174). From the novel we know he likes to travel to exotic countries and his wife Bertha is also from one of those countries, which is very Byronic. Additionally, we are aware of some women in his past, too.

When Jane describes Mr Rochester she says that "He had a dark face, with stern features and a heavy brow" (*JE* 133). These features do not remind one of a typical British gentleman with a pale face. He is similar to Heathcliff, also dark and mysterious. It seems that a dark colour should make an impression of danger and the exotic. Both Heathcliff and Rochester are almost a different race, a race that cannot be considered good enough to be called a true Victorian gentleman.

Since Mr Rochester and Paul Emanuel were written by the same author – Charlotte Brontë, we can find similar characteristic features in both of them. Lucy Snow describes

¹ Brontë, Emily, *Wuthering Heights* (London: Penguin English Library, 2012), 39. [Subsequent page references preceded with *WH* are given in parantheses in the text.]

² Brontë, Charlotte, *Jane Eyre* (London: Penguin English Library, 2012), 174. [Subsequent page references preceded with *JE* are given in parantheses in the text.]

Paul Emanuel as “a dark little man he certainly was; pungent and austere.”³ His darkness and the passion he has for Lucy is also Byronic. His origin is the same as the origins of Mr Rochester – an enigma. Paul Emanuel has a dark past too, he lost his wife (considering Mr Rochester, his wife is also lost, the only difference is that she is still alive, however she is definitely not a typical Victorian wife) and travels a lot. One of his last missions is abroad and his life ends tragically – again there can be found Byronic features. Lord Byron was a great traveller and his life was finished unexpectedly by a tragedy.

On the whole, the main male characters remind one more of antiheroes than classical heroes, just as the Byronic hero is definitely more antiheroic. Heathcliff is cruel to those around him, but it is he who has the attention of readers and who readers pity. Mr Rochester fools Jane, which would not be expected from a traditional hero; however he only tries to protect her from his unlucky past. Paul Emanuel has also a dark mysterious past but eventually wins over the readers through his good features.

5.2 – Gothic elements as surroundings for Byronic heroes

In the beginning it is essential to repeat that the Byronic hero is closely connected with Gothic elements. They appear frequently, mainly in *Wuthering Heights*. The most prominent supernatural element is Cathy’s ghost at the beginning of the novel. “...my fingers closed on the fingers of a little, ice-cold hand! The intense horror of nightmare came over me: I tried to draw back my arm, but the hand clung to it, and a most melancholy voice sobbed.” (*WH* 26)

Later on Heathcliff himself turns into a ghost. The setting is very mysterious. “In all England, I do not believe that I could have fixed on a situation so completely removed from the stir of society” (*WH* 3). The haunted house of *Wuthering Heights* is set on the windy moors. The landscape perfectly describes Heathcliff’s savage character.

In *Jane Eyre*, Thornfield Hall is situated far from the cities and the house itself resembles a Gothic castle with its secrets, which is in this case Mr Rochester’s hidden

³ Brontë, Charlotte, *Villette* (London: Penguin English Library, 2012), 150. [Subsequent page references preceded with *V* are given in parantheses in the text.]

wife. Almost at the end of the novel Jane hears Rochester's voice, a supernatural element:

Suddenly it stood still to an inexpressible feeling that thrilled it through, and passed at once to my head and extremities. The feeling was not like an electric shock, but it was quite as sharp, as strange, as startling...

‘Jane! Jane! Jane!’ – nothing more. (*JE* 507)

The uncanny is present in both novels through familiar people and places due to the change of normal people into ghosts and ordinary houses into haunted ones

5.3 – The villain as a Gothic element

The villain as a Gothic element also appears in the books of the Brontë sisters. In *Wuthering Heights* it is Heathcliff who is a true villain. Nelly calls him “the black villain” (*WH* 119) and in the very last chapter she is asking herself “Is he a ghoul or a vampire?” (*WH* 352) and she wonders about his mysterious origin: “But where did he come from, the little dark thing, harboured by a good man to his bane?” (*WH* 352) On the other hand, Nelly cannot be considered a reliable narrator and therefore her words cannot be taken literally. Despite this fact, her description resembles the image of a villain.

Heathcliff is associated with dark, Gothic elements. Not only his behaviour, but also some of his acts could be considered as Gothic. For instance, when he is about to open Cathy’s coffin after her burial: " 'I'll have her in my arms again! If she be cold, I'll think it is this north wind that chills *me*; and if she be motionless, it is sleep." I got a spade from the tool-house, and began to delve with all my might—it scraped the coffin...' " (*WH* 309) It is an act of necrophilia and it naturally does not meet with understanding when Nelly exclaims: “You were very wicked, Mr Heathcliff... were you not ashamed to disturb the dead?” (*WH* 308)

Heathcliff is connected with the supernatural world: he believes in ghosts, he can see them and, what is important, he is not scared – a real Gothic attitude. He personally is frightening and his acts are dangerous. Summarizing all, Heathcliff is a great example of a gothic-villain character.

Mr Rochester can be also considered a villain since he is frequently associated with darkness, either physical or mental in his moods. As it was already described, he is definitely not a typical Victorian hero, yet he could be a good example of a villain. He is passionate towards Jane and once he even tells her: “Then take my word for it, - I am not a villain...” (*JE* 160). He refuses to accept himself as a villain; however he is aware of the fact that society does not share his opinion.

6 – *Villette*

Villette is a book by Charlotte Brontë which is mainly focused on the female character Lucy Snow, a governess who has to undergo many difficulties in her extraordinary life, which might not be expected from an ordinary governess.

Through the example of Lucy Snow Brontë clearly shows how women had to struggle to become independent in the 19th century. The only way to change their life positions and gain independence was either marriage, which was not Charlotte’s way of life, or becoming a governess, which she obviously found more appealing. The main female character, Lucy Snow, meets two men who influence her life and who have a completely different mentality.

6.1 - The character of Lucy Snow in *Villette*

As already mentioned, Lucy's life is influenced by two men. Lucy is an orphan and must find her own way in the world. When she grows up, she seizes the opportunity and moves to the Continent to a small European town in Belgium called Villette. It is a big step for her but she is determined in her decisions, regardless of her little knowledge of French. She meets two important male figures. The first one is Dr John Graham Bretton, who she meets when first arriving in Villette and who helps her when she probably suffers from a nervous breakdown. Lucy has affection for Dr John, although it is not reciprocated; he falls in love with another young girl – Ginevra. Despite being jealous

and not willing, Lucy resigns herself to her destiny. She does not want to push Dr John, so she lets him go. “Women, generally, were supposed to be the petty and unforgiving sex (Ginerva exemplifies this). Dr John, the gentleman, is supposed to forgive and move on. Lucy does this instead and in so doing rises in the reader's esteem“ (Hesse).

Lucy has to move on and she makes a friendship with Professor Paul Emanuel. He is a very strict person and at first glance seems to be very harsh. He causes Lucy many tears, but they find a way to each other. She just has to understand his background and then he helps her to make her teacher's dream come true. She becomes a financially independent woman, which was not common for that time. As Suzanne Hesse says: “In breaking with this tradition, the reader is given a new hero, a feminine hero, to champion. For Charlotte, the power and honor of her women seems far more important than their living happily ever after.”

6.2 - John Bretton and Paul Emanuel

As mentioned above, Lucy meets during her life story two important characters, John Bretton and Paul Emanuel. They are completely different but they share one distinctive feature: neither of them is a truly Victorian hero, hence there is always something disturbing about them.

The first one who Lucy meets in her young age is Graham Bretton. He is 16 years old and good-looking. She describes him as, “A spoiled, whimsical boy he was in those days” (V 16). From his young age Graham did not act according to Victorian standards. Lucy leaves Mrs. Bretton when she grows up and she ends up in a small town called Villette where she meets Mr. Bretton again. At first she does not recognize him. Lucy is probably suffering from a nervous breakdown and Dr John, as he is introduced this time, is going immediately to help her, which reflects a chivalric moral code typical for the Victorian era. He is a doctor helping people of all social classes. He seems to be kind-hearted. Later Lucy and Dr John become friends, but Lucy has stronger feelings for him. However they are not reciprocated and when he falls in love with Ginevra, their friendship turns into acquaintanceship.

Dr John's character does not change much over time. As a teenager he was described

as spoiled and whimsical. He had to become more serious due to his job but he still enjoys being the centre of attention, having admirers, and in his free time he loves to play games with Madame Beck and especially with her daughters. Once he meets Ginevra Fanshawe he immediately falls in love with this flighty, flirty girl and he is unable to see and hear the warnings of Lucy that it is just a game. When Ginevra slights his mother, he completely changes his mind about her. This is what he says about her:

Merely myself and my mother. As to me it is all very natural: nothing, I suppose, can be fair game than the young bourgeois doctor; but my mother? I never saw her ridiculed before. Do you know, the curling lip, and sarcastically levelled glass thus directed, gave me a most curious sensation? (V 257)

As a true gentleman he should forgive her and maintain a friendship, however at that moment he no longer wants to talk to her, hence Ginevra lost respect in his eyes.

Later on Dr John meets Paulina again, a girl who he knew from his boyhood. She was very fond of him at that time and leaving him was a very sad moment in her life. Meeting again starts as a friendship but soon it develops into love and eventually marriage. It represents a happy ending. They feel they were created for each other. Paulina, a cousin of Ginevra Farnshawe, whose whole name is Countess Paulina Mary de Bassompierre, is of noble origins, meanwhile Dr John is not. In a Victorian novel it would usually have to be the other way round: Dr John would be the gentleman with property and Paulina a woman from a lower class. Lucy suffers at the beginning seeing this happy couple, but eventually she wishes them the best and leaves them.

The second important man in Lucy's life is Paul Emanuel. She starts working in the Beck household thanks to him. But at that time Dr John has her whole attention. Paul Emanuel does not make a good impression on Lucy since he is often yelling at his students. However, as a professor of literature both at a pensionnat and at the local university he requires respect. To be more specific – he does not require it, he demands it and that is something against the Victorian ideal, since, as was mentioned in the

theoretical part, the Victorian gentleman is patient and forbearing. It could even be said that Paul Emanuel intimidates his pupils. "Especially our former acquaintance, Miss Ginevra Fanshawe... esteemed him hideously plain, and used to profess herself frightened almost into hysterics at the sound of his step or voice." (V 149)

He is like the personification of terror with no empathy for his students. According to Lucy's description, he does not look like a typical Victorian hero either: "A dark little man he certainly was; pungent and austere. Even to me he seemed a harsh apparition, with his close-shorn, black head, his broad, sallow brow, his thin cheek, his wide and quivering nostril, his thorough glance, and hurried bearing." (V 150)

Monsieur Paul Emanuel seizes every opportunity to criticize her strongly. One of the moments is when she studies a portrait of a nude Cleopatra:

"Did you come here unaccompanied?"

"No, Monsieur. Dr. Bretton brought me here."

"Dr. Bretton and Madame his mother, of course?"

"No; only Dr. Bretton."

"And he told you to look at that picture?"

"By no means; I found it out for myself." ...

"Astounding insular audacity!" cried the Professor. "Singulieres femmes que ces Anglaises!"

"What is the matter, Monsieur?"

"Matter! How dare you, a young person, sit coolly down, with the self-possession of a garçon, and look at that picture?" (V 238)

Paul Emanuel causes her many tears but just until the moment she finishes her acquaintance with Dr. John. Lucy suffers from a second nervous breakdown and this time it is Paul Emanuel who takes care of her. Then there is a sudden change and Lucy starts to understand Paul Emanuel more.

In the beginning, before I had penetrated to motives, that uncomprehended sneer of his made my heart ache, but by-and-by it only warmed the blood in my veins, and sent added action to my pulses. Whatever my powers--feminine or the contrary--God had given them, and I felt resolute to be ashamed of no faculty of his bestowal. (V 419)

It is essential to focus on Paul's background, which affected his behaviour later. At the beginning he is a total enigma to her. Later she gets to learn that he was once deeply in love. He lives humbly and enjoys making others happy. As a true Victorian man he resigns himself stoically to his fate. Nevertheless, his passions towards Lucy and his interest in travelling to far countries make him more of a Byronic hero. He only hopes for a future with Lucy, as does she for one with Paul. His great support helps her to become a respected teacher and be there whenever she needs. His life finishes tragically, which is a typical feature for Byronic heroes. On the whole, Paul Emanuel can be described as an extraordinary man for his period, with certain Byronic characteristic features.

6.3 - The relationship between Paul Emanuel and Lucy Snow

This relationship between Paul and Lucy is very unique and uncommon. Lucy is tenacious, persistent and she starts bending Paul the way she wants. They create a true friendship. His affection towards her is increasing and later their love develops and Lucy can reveal her true nature. But showing emotions is exactly what is not Victorian. He gives her confidence, support and love and she feels secure in his company. While Paul Emanuel is abroad, Lucy has her own prospering school and she is looking forward to his return. "M. Emanuel was away three years. Reader, they were the three happiest

years of my life.” (V 583) But almost at the very end Paul Emanuel highly probably shipwrecks:

That storm roared frenzied, for seven days. It did not cease till the Atlantic was strewn with wrecks: it did not lull till the deeps had gorged their full of sustenance. Not till the destroying angel of tempest had achieved his perfect work, would he fold the wings whose waft was thunder--the tremor of whose plumes was storm. (V 586)

This passage suggests that the angel of tempest was a storm that caused his drowning. It is important to realize that Charlotte did not give Lucy a typical happy life she would deserve after her whole life of struggling. Nevertheless, she gives readers hope: “Let them picture union and a happy succeeding life” (V 586).

To sum up this novel, the masculine heroes – John Bretton and Paul Emanuel are neither main protagonists of the novel, nor typical Victorian men. They have weaknesses not typical for the period they were living in. It seems that Charlotte wanted to make them weak and on the contrary create a strong woman character that surpasses them both. Lucy eventually finds herself through the main male characters, having her dream job regardless of the fact that the person who was closest to her heart probably did not survive.

7 – *Jane Eyre*

Jane Eyre deals again with the topic of governesses and teachers and difficulties in their lives. The main female character of the novel meets two men, the same as Lucy Snow in *Villette* did, and both of them influence her life. Especially Mr Rochester is the one who deserves full attention. Before the analysis of male characters, the character of Jane Eyre is going to be summed up.

7.1 – The character of *Jane Eyre*

The main heroine does not act according to the Victorian ideal at all. As an orphan she grows up with her aunt and the first male character she comes into conflict with is young John Reed. He is bullying Jane because she is an orphan and she cannot fight against him properly. She obeys him even though she is aware of being caused future harm.

I did so, not at first aware what was his intention; but when I saw him lift and poise the book and stand in act to hurl it, I instinctively started aside with a cry of alarm: not soon enough, however; the volume was flung, it hit me, and I fell, striking my head against the door and cutting it. The cut bled, the pain was sharp: my terror had passed its climax and other feelings succeeded. (*JE* 5)

The only weapon Jane can use is words. But normally she accepts everything – like a Victorian male ideal – she accepts her destiny and does not fight.

Later on when she meets Mr. Rochester who falls off his horse, it is she who offers help – and guides him home. She takes over the typical gentlemanly behaviour. Jane is not a typical governess either. She is able to express her thoughts once she is needed and Mr. Rochester is not as dominant as one may expect.

When Jane learns who the madwoman in the attic is, she runs away. By lucky accident she meets her family and owing to her uncle she inherits a great amount of

money. This is the final step to independence. No longer must she rely on anyone to employ her.

Before returning to Mr. Rochester, Jane meets another domineering man – St. John, who always uses religion as a dogma and weapon. When they know each other better, he proposes so that they can go together to carry out his missionary work in India. Jane is not in love with him and his threats of eternal damnation do not change her mind. She knows that accepting his proposal would mean a very hard life that she does not want to undergo. As a strong character she refuses until she leaves.

On the whole, Jane exceeds all the important men with her own character. She is the true heroine of the novel.

7.2 – St. John Rivers and Edward Rochester

The main male character in the novel *Jane Eyre* is without doubt Edward Rochester. At the very beginning, the story between Mr. Rochester and Jane seems to be perfectly Victorian – meeting by chance, talking, getting close to each other, falling in love and then problems appear. But appearances can be deceptive – it is not a typical Victorian novel.

The first time they meet Jane is strolling in the countryside when she hears a noise but cannot see clearly what happened. As she describes later: “Man and horse were down; they had slipped on the sheet of ice which glazed the causeway.” (*JE* 132) She is quick to give him help, which he stubbornly refuses until he realises he has no other option. At this moment it is Jane who is the main hero and who acts like a typical male Victorian protagonist. It would be more logical if the man would be the hero rescuing the girl since he could make an impression on her. In this situation Jane is not impressed at all. “Had he been a handsome, heroic-looking young gentleman, I should not have dared to stand thus questioning him against his will, and offering my services unasked” (*JE* 133). Jane does not find him attractive; in addition, helping him hurts Mr. Rochester’s masculinity, which is obviously not traditional. There is no reason to admire and respect him as a Victorian man would deserve.

Despite different work positions Mr. Rochester treats her equally. As Mr. Rochester

mentions: “Miss Eyre, I beg your pardon. The fact is, once for all, I don’t wish to treat you like an inferior” (*JE* 158). Their equality is unusual for that period, which was patriarchal, hence men ruled the world. But in some aspects he is a traditional man: he makes Jane feel jealous as he is going to make her think that he is going to marry Blanche Ingram. His intention is only to make sure that Jane cares about him.

The marriage that Mr. Rochester intends is rather inappropriate. Instead of marrying a noble woman Blanche Ingram, he proposes to Jane, who is an ordinary governess without any money or connections. Their surroundings are naturally against them, but Mr. Rochester and Jane do not take them into consideration. One typically Victorian reaction was from Mrs. Fairfax, the housekeeper, who spotted the couple after the proposal kiss: “When I looked up, on leaving his arms, there stood the widow, pale, grave, and amazed” (*JE* 307).

Even if some characters - and society through them - disagree with this relationship, Rochester does not care at all, for him only love matters. Charlotte Brontë has created a very modern masculine character who can easily forget about conventions to be truly happy in love.

The second obstacle put in front of Rochester and Jane’s happiness is the fact that the former is already married to Bertha Mason, a wife who is still alive and who is hidden in the attic of the house where they live. One might suspect that Mr. Rochester was only using Jane so that he could marry a young girl and enjoy more of her youth since he is already in his mid-thirties; however, the situation is more complicated. He was manipulated into a marriage with a woman who later appeared to be mad. “You shall see what sort of a being I was cheated into espousing, and judge whether or not I had a right to break the compact, and seek sympathy with something at least human” (*JE* 351). Thanks to her dangerous behaviour she is hidden away and locked up. The guilt is on his father’s side as he did not mention anything about the mental health of Bertha in advance and wanted this marriage only due to financial reasons. Another reason for his situation is Victorian society, which was against the separation of a married couple under any circumstances. The reason for Rochester’s miserable life is not his personality but conventions that ruled the society. It is a paradox that the previous marriage was considered a typical Victorian one because both Mr. Rochester and Bertha Mason were

from the same social class.

The next step in the even more miserable life of Mr. Rochester is Jane's leaving. She is too proud to stay with him as a mistress since marriage is not possible and divorces were at that time virtually impossible. It is a hard step for her since she has strong feelings towards him which cannot disappear.

Reader, I forgave him at the moment and on the spot. There was such deep remorse in his eyes, such true pity in his tone, such manly energy in his manner; and besides, there was such unchanged love in his whole look and mien - I forgave him all: yet not in words, not outwardly; only at my heart's core. (*JE* 360)

Mr. Rochester is just a victim of conventions. Without him Jane gains independence and finds also her relatives. When she comes back to him, everything is different. After a great fire, which was probably started by Bertha, Bertha dies and Mr. Rochester is almost blind. Jane wants to take care of him. As she says: "I love you better now, when I can really be useful to you, than I did in your state of proud independence, when you disdained every part but that of giver and protector" (*JE* 540).

Mr. Rochester seems to be more than happy to accept her company and help: "I preferred utter loneliness to the constant attendance of servants; but Jane's soft ministry will be a perpetual joy" (*JE* 540).

Now after the death of his wife they can marry and stay together. This novel finishes with a happy ending after so many obstacles. Jane gives birth to their son and Mr. Rochester starts seeing again. Only then they are equal, as is discussed later. However, the true hero of the novel remains Jane.

It is only essential to point out again Mr. Rochester's Byronic features, especially his interest in travelling into exotic countries, Bertha, his wife who is from an exotic country too, and we cannot omit his passions towards Jane.

The second most important character that influences Jane's life is St. John. She meets him when leaving Mr. Rochester and later on she discovers that he is Jane's cousin. St. John is the opposite to Mr. Rochester yet still not a real gentleman. He is a respectable religious man. From this point of view he can be considered an ideal husband; however he uses religion as a weapon, not deducing the consequences of his strong belief. In the novel his appearance is described as very exceptional.

It is seldom, indeed, an English face comes so near the antique models as did his. He might well be a little shocked at the irregularity of my lineaments, his own being so harmonious. 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. (*JE* 416)

St. John was supposed to be Jane's rescuer, yet he is definitely not. For Jane he is a member of her new-gained family, which she is glad for, however his intention is to marry her and take her with him to India as a missionary. His idea of marriage is very pragmatic. For him it means duty, not love. His life-task is his religion and specifically, at that time, his mission to India. He also admits that he is not made for love. Women in the Victorian period were supposed to do everything they were told by their husband regardless of their conviction or wishes, which is something Jane was not able to do. St. John was on one hand a respectable man but on the other hand he would not fit the ideal of a perfect husband. Such a match would destroy Jane's personality.

This step would mean for Jane to sacrifice her passion for principle and a life without true love. She is not positive about it and rejects his proposal. Instead of accepting it as a true gentleman he threatens her with damnation:

"It remains for me, then," he said, "to remember you in my prayers, and to entreat God for you, in all earnestness, that you may not indeed become a castaway. I had thought I recognised in you one of the chosen. But God sees not as man sees: His

will be done.” (*JE* 501)

For Charlotte Brontë the idea of finding a husband was not of primary importance for women, it was love, regardless of any conventions. She fundamentally rejects the idea of the typical Victorian marriage. She rejects St. John and duty for Mr. Rochester and passion and love.

7.3 – The relationship between Edward Rochester and Jane Eyre

Mr. Rochester is the master of the house, well off and he is supposed to be superior to his servants. Jane being his governess taking care of little Adele is financially dependent on him. This part is generally approved by society.

However, what is revolutionary is their relationship - a master and a governess. It was very uncommon for the Victorian period since they are not from the same social class. It is not based on superiority and submission. From the beginning Mr. Rochester is attracted to Jane despite her different social status. As a strong masculine character he is interested in women of his class, so it is extraordinary that he pays attention to Jane, too. He never truly considers her a governess.

When Mr. Rochester wants to marry her for the first time, the marriage is destroyed by the society because of his previous secret marriage. For the second time it is possible but at a very high cost. It is interesting to look at both characters at the end of the novel when society cannot protest against their marriage. Charlotte cannot let a strong masculine character be happy. His power must be emasculated.

He was taken out from under the ruins, alive, but sadly hurt: a beam had fallen in such a way as to protect him partly; but one eye was knocked out, and one hand so crushed that Mr. Carter, the surgeon, had to amputate it directly. The other eye inflamed: he lost the sight of that also. He is now helpless, indeed—blind and a cripple. (*JE* 519)

Regardless of Mr. Rochester's strong behaviour at the beginning of the novel he ends up being a cripple dependant on Jane. Charlotte raises the power of now independent Jane, so they are equal. Right now at this moment Jane is positive about accepting him and marrying him. What a paradox that he must have almost died to be really equal to Jane.

To sum up this novel, both masculine heroes - St. John and Mr. Rochester are neither typical men of the time nor true protagonists of the novel. Charlotte created male characters that are in some aspects weak. Features of the Byronic hero can be found in the character of Rochester, as discussed earlier. On the other hand, the female character is a strong independent woman from a lower social class who eventually achieves equality with the main male character due to inheritance and an accident that emasculates him, what makes him the opposite of the Victorian hero.

8 – *Wuthering Heights*

From the three novels analysed this one is the shortest one, yet arguably the most interesting. There are no governesses in this novel, but the story reveals something magic. It reminds one of Gothic novels with supernatural elements. Considering the main characters, Cathy is hardly the main heroine of the novel. Nevertheless, as the main female character she must decide between two men – Edgar Linton and Heathcliff. Her life choice becomes fatal. The very special relationship between Heathcliff and Cathy, which sends chills down the reader's spine, dominates the novel.

8.1 – Catherine in *Wuthering Heights*

Cathy is born to a middle-class family but as with characters in the novels of Charlotte, she is not an ideal Victorian woman either. The whole book is much more tragic than the novels of her sister. Cathy must from the very beginning face an impossible choice between two men. The first one is Heathcliff, who is a rebel scorned by society but who seems to be a soulmate of hers. The second one is Edgar Linton who is from a wealthy, cultivated family. The only solution is to adopt a double character. She is ladylike with the Lintons, but at the Heights she reverts to her natural self. The choice is made even worse when she realizes that to separate herself from Heathcliff would mean to cut herself from the wildness and freedom she used to have as a girl. This is what Emily experienced as a child when she had to go to school and when she had to leave her beloved moors. An unbound spirit had to be tamed and she suffered, as did Cathy later on.

Cathy says to describe both men: “My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods: time will change it, I'm well aware, as winter changes the trees. My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath: a source of little visible delight, but necessary.” (*WH* 88) They are elemental opposites.

However, she eventually opts for Edgar, which is what Victorian society expects from her. In the following dialogue it is clearly visible what reasons for her marriage were. Catherine has just told Nelly of her proposal:

‘And he will be rich, and I shall like to be the greatest woman of the neighbourhood, and I shall be proud of having such a husband.’

‘Worst of all. And now, say how you love him?’

‘As everybody loves—You’re silly, Nelly.’ (WH 84)

Marriages at that time did not necessarily include love. Most important was origin and the property of the person and this is something that Linton fulfilled. From the superficial point of view he probably fulfilled all the requirements of the Victorian ideal, which she found essential for her final decision. But soon after Cathy realizes what a mistake she has committed. The marriage was not happy and she lost a vital person in her life – Heathcliff. Neither of her choices was good and it obviously led to a disaster.

Emily is criticizing marriage in Victorian society - keeping to traditions regardless of the consequences. People were able to do everything to save face and keeping the good name of them and their family was essential. Cathy was simply born in the wrong time and could not find her peace.

8.2 - Linton and Heathcliff

The main male hero in *Wuthering Heights* is without doubt Heathcliff. His life story is told by different narrators, mainly Nelly, who took care of the household at Thrushcross Grange and who is deeply emotionally involved in the whole story.

Heathcliff is from the very beginning an exceptional child. His origin is an enigma, but what is known is that he is described rather as a gypsy, who cannot be a Victorian perfect hero, he is rather more Byronic. He was bullied since he arrived in his new home and mainly after his “father’s” death when Hindley shows him every single moment his hatred. Heathcliff is not a typical Victorian man at all. According to Norman Sherry: “Heathcliff himself, with his mysterious origin and arrival at the Heights, is a character of folk-tale and ballad, and in his career there is much of the Byronic hero, the demon lover, and the villain of the Gothic novel whose villain could not be overcome” (114).

Heathcliff is different from common heroes of the time – he is not of noble origin or a respectable gentleman. In addition, he has no means to provide for a family. He is very wild and passionate, which is partly the reason why he destroys everything and everyone around him and why he is described as a Byronic hero and a villain.

The violence and sadism which exists in the novel and yet evokes no reaction from outside forces of law and order, and which is largely accepted by the characters involved, is a further extravagance. ... Heathcliff hangs Isabella's dog, kicks and tramples on Hindley and dashes his head against the flags, throws a dinner knife at Isabella; Hindley hangs puppies from a kitchen chair. (Sherry 116)

He does not attend services on Sundays or anything connected with religion. No one knows how he gained his wealth, he simply returns after three years and it is suspicious.

Readers are always more fascinated by rebels than by obedient characters that break the rules and conventions of society. In the first part of the novel, Heathcliff is a passionate lover, meanwhile in the second part he becomes a vindictive father when he takes revenge on everyone who hurt him and his beloved Cathy when she was alive. He destroys every hint of a happy moment in the children he is responsible for.

When Heathcliff comes back after three years, it seems that years of bullying made him stronger and he becomes a real superior character. As Nelly describes:

He had grown a tall, athletic, well-formed man; beside whom my master seemed quite slender and youth like. His upright carriage suggested the idea of his having been in the army. His countenance was much older in expression and decision of feature than Mr Linton's; it looked intelligent, and retained no marks of former degradation. (WH 102)

Heathcliff is a real masculine man, while Edgar is rather weak.

Mentioning Edgar Linton we are now going to focus on this character who is the opposite of Heathcliff. In the first moment Linton seems to be a perfect Victorian man – he is respectable, religious and comes from an upper-class family. He seems to be a perfect match for Cathy.

But later we can clearly see his downsides –while Heathcliff is charismatic, Linton is rather a coward. In the following scene it is visible how weak Linton is and how superior in all aspects Heathcliff is:

‘Oh, heavens! In old days this would win you knighthood!’ exclaimed Mrs. Linton. ‘We are vanquished! We are vanquished! Heathcliff would as soon lift a finger at you as the king would march his army against a colony of mice. Cheer up! you sha’n’t be hurt! Your type is not a lamb, it’s a sucking leveret.’ (*WH* 123)

Calling Linton a sucking leveret is a great humiliation and it nicely describes the huge difference between both main male characters. Heathcliff tells Cathy then:

‘I wish you joy of the milk-blooded coward, Cathy!’ said her friend. ‘I compliment you on your taste. And that is the slaving, 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?’ (*WH* 123)

This is the moment when Heathcliff totally prevails over Linton. Linton is treated like a woman, therefore his weeping and fainting is mentioned. Eventually it appears that Linton is rather a weak character.

Linton has one great advantage from the very beginning and it is his class superiority,

thanks to which he is handled with respect. On the other hand, Heathcliff has to fight for his life, since he is oppressed and outcast. He suffers from the very beginning; however, what makes some people weak makes Heathcliff stronger as is seen after his return. Linton looks like a weak child; meanwhile Heathcliff looks older and much more mature. Linton is basically overpowered and we may say that the real hero, or rather antihero, is Heathcliff.

8.3 – The relationship between Heathcliff and Catherine

One of the most characteristic features of Romanticism is love: “it is the ultimate, even transcendent, human experience” (Mellor 24). Emily was highly influenced by Romanticism and Byron, therefore the main plot of the whole novel is love. As mentioned before, Cathy had to make her fatal decision choosing either Heathcliff or Linton and acted according to contemporary conventions. Although the love plot is largely about Heathcliff and Catherine Earnshaw and their destructive love, a gentle kind of love is also shown through young Catherine Linton, daughter of the already passed away Catherine Earnshaw, and Hareton, Catherine’s nephew.

Heathcliff’s love is definitely destructive. He is very passionate and when he comes back after three years of absence being aware of Cathy’s marriage to Linton, he destroys everything and everyone around him, Cathy included. She dies shortly after his return due to a disease that resulted from Heathcliff’s presence.

He and Cathy have a very special relationship which is dangerous for their surroundings. However, for them it is different, it is “...the transcendental experience of a fullness of being beyond cultural construction, even beyond gender” (Mellor 193). Their relationship is not conventional in any aspect. They did not meet randomly and they did not fall in love at first sight. They grew up together and created a strong bond which was beyond the comprehension of any onlooker.

“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.” (WH 88) It is impossible to describe their bond in words. It contains something supernatural. Their love is totally unreasonable, yet also powerful and everlasting.

The dying scene of Cathy when meeting Heathcliff for the very last time is rather terrifying, Nelly, the narrator admits: “I did not feel as if I were in the company of a creature of my own species” (WH 175). “The two, to a cool spectator, made a strange and fearful picture” (WH 175). Cathy regrets her decision to marry Linton, which was inevitable: “I’m not wishing you greater torment than I have, Heathcliff! I only wish us never to be parted.” (WH 173) However, Heathcliff cannot forgive so easily: “Are you possessed with a devil,..., to talk in that manner to me, when you are dying? Do you reflect that all those words will be branded in my memory, and eating deeper eternally, after you have left me?” (WH 175)

After her death it is even more peculiar, it seems to be a love-hate relationship when Heathcliff cries: “May she wake in torment!...And I pray one prayer—I repeat it till my tongue stiffens—Catherine Earnshaw, may you not rest as long as I am living; you said I killed you—haunt me, then!” (WH 181) A traditional lover would wish her peace, especially someone who loves her. It is because for Heathcliff Cathy was a half of his soul and now this part is dead. Their love is very inhuman and it more belongs to another world.

Compared to the novels of Charlotte Brontë, there is no real happy ending between the main characters in *Wuthering Heights*. They are cruel to each other and their love was never peaceful. Due to Heathcliff’s strong and aggressive masculinity, the death of Cathy seems to be a natural consequence. They are not able to merge into one unique being.

To sum up, neither of the male characters – Linton or Heathcliff can be called a Victorian hero. Linton has certain characteristic features, however he is too weak. Heathcliff is definitely not a typical Victorian hero; nevertheless he has essential features of the Byronic hero and the Gothic villain.

9 - Conclusion

The Brontë sisters are prominent writers of the Victorian era and they are especially important thanks to their male heroes. From this point of view – Mr. Rochester, Paul Emanuel and Heathcliff are exceptional and unconventional male characters.

They were living at the end of Romanticism and in the first half of the Victorian era, which is reflected in their novels – they criticise Victorian society and their books are strongly affected by Romanticism, mainly by the concept of the Byronic hero, supernatural elements and the Gothic villain. The majority of these features can be found in Emily's *Wuthering Heights* – Heathcliff is a typical example of the Byronic hero and the villain, in addition the setting of the book and the ghost of Cathy are some of the many supernatural elements of the novel. Nevertheless, Mr. Rochester in *Jane Eyre* also has Byronic characteristic features and the setting and his insane wife are good examples of Gothic features. Last, Paul Emanuel in *Villette* also has Byronic features in his passionate nature and mysterious past.

Jane Eyre and *Villette* have in common not only the same author – Charlotte Brontë – but the novels are also focused on a similar destiny and employment – the life of a governess. Both Jane Eyre and Lucy Snow meet two significant men in their lives, however those men do not fit into the age.

John Graham was a spoiled child. When he grows up his character does not change much, he still likes to be the centre of attention. When it comes to Lucy, John easily forgets about their friendship. Eventually, he is going to marry Paulina, however there is another peculiarity: it is he who is not from the proper social class, since Paulina is from a noble class and in the Victorian society this marriage would be inappropriate. All these features show that he is not a proper Victorian hero.

Monsieur Paul Emmanuel is rather a mysterious man, at least at the beginning of the novel. He is a very strict professor and one may say antagonistic in the way he demands authority. According to his physical description he does not resemble a Victorian gentleman and when we learn more about his background, it is rather Byronic. He, like John Graham, cannot be a true Victorian gentleman either.

In *Villette* St. John uses religion as a dogma and marriage is only a convention which is necessary so he can take Jane on his mission. In his eyes, love is not an essential part of marriage. Mr Rochester – the main male character – is his opposite and truly loves Jane. His masculinity is connected with his exotic past but in the end he is emasculated and made equal to Jane. This part of the novel is very interesting and unique – to emasculate a rather masculine character to create an equal relationship.

Linton is too feminine and weak to be called a Victorian hero despite his upper middle-class origin. The main protagonist and the greatest masculine character in all three novels is without doubt Heathcliff, who has many Byronic features, who, despite being born in the Victorian period, does not fit there at all. He is too passionate and wild. His masculinity is very exotic, brutal, and cruel: it destroys people around him and leads to the death of his beloved Catherine. He has also many features of an antihero.

The Brontë sisters are prominent writers of the Victorian era. Although attention has often focused more on the powerful female characters they created, Mr. Rochester, Paul Emanuel and Heathcliff are exceptional and unconventional male characters, who in many ways stand apart from Victorian conventions.

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