

Thesis abstract

The novels of the Brontë sisters share numerous aspects: defiant heroines, male protagonists as the source of the central conflict, 1st-person layered narrative structure, historical settings, and a redeemed morality as the solution to distortion of harmony. Notably, the authors employ the novel as a medium through which they explore not only the themes of individual ethics, but also the possibilities of female self-realization in a society dominated by patriarchy. The authors' incorporation of the Byronic hero as a principle of destruction into their narratives accentuates the typically Victorian concept of doubt and self-searching not only in their male protagonists, but also in their heroines. Therefore, the male protagonists as the representatives of male dominance are crucial in understanding the development of the Brontës' individual narratives. This thesis attempts to analyse three male protagonists of the Brontës' greatest novels: Heathcliff of *Wuthering Heights*, Edward Fairfax Rochester of *Jane Eyre*, and Arthur Huntingdon of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*.

Heathcliff's foreign origin brings conflict into the moorland microcosm since his character's first arrival. The destruction of his union with Catherine Earnshaw drives Heathcliff to transgress the social sphere in order to unleash vengeance on his surroundings, an act which determines the rest of the narrative. However, as Heathcliff's ultimate desire is a union with his separated soul, the only resolution for his unrepentance is death. In order to establish a new moral order, the next generation must find harmony in adaptation of the natural principles. The implied supernatural elements in the novel, along with the absence of religious salvation, highlight the elemental essence of the protagonists.

The discord which Rochester creates at Thornfield Hall has its roots in patriarchal dominance, immorality, and refusal of religion. He serves not only as Jane Eyre's romantic interest; by embodying her test of faith, he also becomes an antagonist who Jane must overcome on her journey to maturity by adhering to her moral and religious code. Simultaneously, Rochester's redemption is conditioned by the necessity of his repentance. The final resolution in a secluded domestic happiness is achieved by Jane's gained independence and Rochester's religious humility.

Huntingdon's refusal of religious morality results in his gradual decline; the abuse he inflicts on his wife, son, and companions originates superficially in his alcoholism, but actually results from the destructive tendencies provided to him by his male dominance in the domestic sphere. Helen's rebellious reinvention of self as a working mother offers a combination of the male and female principle as the foundation of a new harmony. As Huntingdon is both unwilling and unable to reform, Gilbert Markham emerges as a more ideal suitor by adapting the female principle into his life.

Through the development of their male protagonists in relation not only to their heroines, but also to the concept of the Byronic hero, the Brontës explore the possibilities of new, more ideal dynamics between men and women in the historical, literary, and social context of the Victorian era; from their efforts, a more suitable environment of both the domestic and the social emerges.