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Sexing the Male: Manifestations of Masculinity in Jane Eyre, Wuthering Heights, and Villette

Emma Foye Quinn
Bucknell University, efq001@bucknell.edu

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Sexing the Male: Manifestations of Masculinity in *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *Villette*

By

Emma F. Quinn

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Approved by:

Ghislaine McDayter

Adviser: Ghislaine McDayter

Department Chairperson: Ghislaine McDayter
Abstract: This project considers Emily and Charlotte Brontë’s constructions of masculinity in *Jane Eyre, Wuthering Heights, and Villette*. There is a vast proliferation of scholarship focusing on gender in the Victorian Era, but as much of this criticism focuses on women, the analysis of heterosexual masculinity in these novels provides a unique perspective on the complexities involved in gender constructions during this period. Masculine identity was in a transitory state in the early nineteenth century, as Romantic values were replaced by Victorian conceptions of masculinity, largely influencing the expectations of men. This paper argues that based on an understanding of femininity and masculinity as defined in relation to each other, the Brontë heroes look to the female characters as a source of stability to define themselves against, constructing a stagnant feminine role to frame an understanding of how masculinity was changing. The female characters resist this categorization, however, never allowing the men to fully classify them into stable feminine roles, which leads both shifting gender roles to intertwine and collapse in the novels, undermining any conceptualization of a stable or universal understanding of gender. The paper considers the role of masculinity based in class, relationships with women, and the understanding of sexual passion, to argue that the Brontës’ portrayal of men emulates the anxieties surrounding the shift from Romantic to Victorian values of manliness, ultimately rejecting any stable definition of the nineteenth-century man.
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Introduction

“Mr. Rochester had sometimes read my unspoken thoughts with an acumen to me incomprehensible: in the present instance he took no notice of my abrupt vocal response; but he smiled at me with a certain smile he had of his own, and which he used but on rare occasions. He seemed to think it too good for common purposes: it was the real sunshine of feeling—he shed it over me now.” (Jane Eyre 245-6)

Gender was at the epicenter of social relations in the nineteenth century, as the transition out of the Romantic period and into the heart of Victorianism largely affected social discourse about class, love, and sexuality. Society began to embrace the idea of companionate love, which completely shifted the way men and women viewed each other, reshaping what was desired in a mate and therefore which aspects of masculinity and femininity were ideal. The first half of the nineteenth century was an especially transitional period for both genders, as the eighteenth-century roles of sensible woman and flamboyant gentleman decreased in prevalence, while a celebration of strength in the masculine and docile domesticity in the feminine came with the dawning of Queen Victoria’s reign. The complexities involved in these gender transitions are encapsulated in the works of Charlotte and Emily Brontë, whose depictions of passionate relations among characters have received much critical attention in their portrayals of gender codes and structures. Though the Brontës’ representations of female characters are the subject of much of this literature, it is equally important to understand how the male role functions in these novels, as the male heroes demonstrate the complex and contradictory demands involved in the construction of masculinity. Guided by social and cultural codes inherent in the text, the male characters in Jane Eyre, Wuthering Heights, and Villette explore the intricacies of masculinity through their class status, interactions with women, and degrees of passionate sexuality, revealing that although biological maleness is important in acquiring power, male genitalia does not necessarily make a man.
By exploring and unpacking the contradictory demands placed on men in the nineteenth century, the Brontë sisters embrace the density of this masculine role, both complicating and deconstructing the concept of masculinity through their unique heroes. The Brontës’ treatment of male heroes within the context of gender has earned significant attention since the sisters started publishing in 1846, and although Jane Eyre’s Mr. Rochester, Wuthering Heights’ Heathcliff, and Villette’s M. Paul are all different from each other, they each embody a sense of strong, introspective masculinity that was associated with the Victorian man. At the same time, however, these characters’ names have become synonymous with the tall, dark, sardonic quality of Romantic Byronic heroes, reminiscent of the archetypal male image of “anti-hero” that emerged at the end of the eighteenth century. The traits that characterize the men in these novels are contradictory in that they combine Romantic and Victorian qualities: the men are celebrated for being simultaneously wealthy and hard-working, moral and passionate, and respectful yet sexually aggressive. These conflicting values lead to an incoherent definition of masculinity in the novels, which brings to light the contradictions involved in gender construction for the man transitioning from the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries. The Brontës simultaneously explore, exploit, and deconstruct perceptions of both the Romantic and the Victorian man, using their male characters to reveal the inconsistencies involved in a shifting understanding of manhood.

A discussion of masculine definitions in these novels is especially relevant in light of the proliferation of scholarship revolving around the Victorian woman and relative deficiency of similar gender studies surrounding the roles of heterosexual men. Because the narrators and protagonists of the Brontë novels are primarily female, much criticism centering on the feminine role has arisen, and the field lacks comparable analysis of how heterosexual masculinity played
into understandings of gender during the nineteenth century\(^1\). In actuality, these subjects are inextricably linked in that masculinity can only be defined in relation to femininity; neither can be understood without the other. Due to the unstable nature of masculine identity during transitory period at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Brontë heroes look to the female characters as a source of stability to define themselves against, constructing a stagnant feminine role to frame an understanding of how masculinity was changing. Masculine power is dependent upon a stable conception of gender roles, and so the men compartmentalize the women in these novels in an attempt to maintain a sense of stability when they could not control the shifting understanding of masculinity. The female characters resist this categorization, however, never allowing the men to fully classify them into stable feminine roles, which leads both shifting gender roles to intertwine and collapse in the novels, undermining any conceptualization of a stable or universal understanding of gender. *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *Villette* portray the intricacies involved in the emulation of masculinity in the nineteenth century in relation to femininity, the male characters providing unique insight into the complexity of the transition from the Romantic to the Victorian era by embodying several contradicting and shifting portrayals of maleness.

**Methodology**

This project relies upon a breadth of critical sources, aiming to survey a wide array of scholarship on gender politics in the nineteenth century. I make use of a range of critical sources

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\(^1\) Some of the best-known scholarship on gender in the nineteenth century includes Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s *Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), which explores the role of sexuality and its relation to madness for Victorian women, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Between Men* (1985) and other works centering around homosexuality and homosocial relations in Victorian literature and culture. These works focus on sexual degeneracy and anti-normative gender and sex roles during the period, leaving a gap in the literature in relation to the role of the heteronormative male.
relating specifically to gender roles in Victorian literature; Daniela Garofalo’s book, *Manly Leaders: Despotic Seductions and the Threat of Democracy in Nineteenth-century England* is especially helpful in analyzing how men use their power in different forms, and Elizabeth Langland’s article, “Nobody's Angels: Domestic Ideology and Middle-Class Women in the Victorian Novel” similarly surveys a wide sample of Victorian literature to establish a general conversation about the role of gender discourse. In addition, Richard Dellamora’s *Victorian Sexual Dissidence* analyzes the underlying deviance involved in defining Victorian sexuality, which is useful for this project in that it reveals different aspects of masculinity that were constructed as anti-normative. These sources, among others, directly address the role of male characters in Victorian novels, and are therefore useful in synthesizing information about masculinity in specific cases. However, these sources do not give wider context for the social and cultural backdrop of the period, so it is necessary to integrate these modern critical sources with historical background in order to get a full picture of the transitioning masculine role.

Sources contemporary to the Brontë novels such as male conduct books from the period provide this general context, grounding this paper’s analysis in a deeper understanding of the era. Henry N. Guernsey’s *Plain Talk on Avoided Subjects* is one of many such conduct manuals that provides insight into the contemporary discourse on the proper male role, and I will use this type of source to compare and contrast the historical attitudes toward men during the period with the portrayal of such attitudes in literature.

My analysis relies heavily on the theorizations of Michel Foucault in *The History of Sexuality* (1984), referencing his “repressive hypothesis” to analyze how masculinity and power discourse related to sex have influenced each other. Similarly, Herbert Sussman’s book, *Victorian Masculinities: Manhood and Masculine Poetics in Early Victorian Literature and*
Art (1995), adds to the conceptualization of masculinity in these novels through a study of male authors’ treatment of male characters. Sussman’s book is central to the definition of manhood as an overarching goal, a status that Victorian men strived to attain (10). I will engage the Brontë texts and Londa Schiebinger’s The Mind Has No Sex? in order to demonstrate how they deconstruct “complementarity,” an eighteenth-century theoretical school of thought that defined men and women as polar opposites, complementary to each other in that the woman brought frailty and elegance, the man imposing strength and intelligence. These novels not only problematize the dominant theory of complementarity, but also completely destroy the foundations of this concept, because if women and men share a similar propensity for passionate love, they cannot be complete opposites. I will explore this dichotomy of gender relations in all three texts through analysis of the manifestation of masculine identity as theorized by these critics and scholars.

Finally, the project relies on close readings of imagery and language from each Brontë novel. Jane Eyre, Wuthering Heights, and Villette are successful in their portrayals of romantic, passionate and sometimes uncivilized heroes, and each character reflects upon the conceptions of masculine energy in the nineteenth century. Rochester, Heathcliff, and Paul Emanuel are in some ways archetypes of Romantic male heroes and in other ways emulate Victorian ideals, and analyzing their interactions with women, other men, and society informs an understanding of how masculinity in literature reflects and complicates ideological structures of male dominance, simultaneously shedding light on the attitude of female authors towards this same gendered role. This project supplies a reading of nineteenth-century literature that reveals a system of constructed masculinity that has yet to be fully explored, bringing about new ways of reading some of literature’s most complex heroes and their impact on past and present culture.
Historical and Theoretical Underpinnings

The transition from the eighteenth into the nineteenth centuries was accompanied by vast changes in the way gender was understood, completely altering the way men and women interacted with each other. This historical context was a major influence on the Brontës’ writings, and it is because Emily and Charlotte wrote at such a transitional time that their popular novels had such an influence on gender discourse of the period. The transition from the Romantic to Victorian era led to problematic contradictions in what was considered masculine; the Romantic gentleman was passionate and flamboyant, often emulating sensible qualities that were associated with effeminacy, and his power was very much tied up in his wealth and status (Mackie 4). Moving into the Victorian era, the rise of industry brought a focus on hard work, encouraging men to be strong and aggressive while simultaneously in control of their natural passions. The industrial revolution led to a popularization of the self-made man, a more robust and physical character than theeighteenth-century idealization of man; the Victorians came to admire self-control and strength in their men, which contrasted with the ideals of the Romantic man: “effeminacy, by contrast, was evil because it prized individual self-indulgence above the welfare of the state” (Fasick qtd. in Losey and Brewer 216). For Victorians, manliness stood in opposition to effeminate lifestyles that were seen as wasteful, and not in honor of the state’s goals. Because men were the proponents of society and the forward thinkers responsible for upholding social order, it became unacceptable for them to embrace the flamboyant nature of the Romantic man. In addition, as rational beings, Victorian men were expected to abstain from any activity that was self-indulgent, including sexual and passionate pleasures (Garofalo 149). Therefore, although Victorian masculinity demanded that men show physical and carnal
prowess, they were expected to abstain from sex as a sign of willful and moral strength. The ideal Victorian male was in some ways the opposite of the Romantic man; he was strong enough to quiet the natural, often deafening sexual call, and for the Victorians overly sexual behavior became associated with femininity, standing in direct opposition to definitions of the masculine. This contradiction led to complications in codes of behavior, as men were caught in a transition and were expected to emulate Romantic qualities in some senses, and Victorian attributes in others. As a result, their domestic and social lives were often at odds with each other, due to the contradiction between Romantic passion and Victorian control in the public and private spheres: “the uneasy relation between the male sphere and the domestic sphere, the opposition of bonds within the all-male world of work to the heterosexual ties of marriage” (Sussman 5). Men lived under constant pressure to be both a man of men and a man of women, simultaneously strong and sensitive, but these sexual and homosocial roles did not always fit together. This tension increased as the acceptability of sexual male relationships dissipated during the eighteenth century, leading to the development of homophobia as a consequence of extensive male interaction in patriarchal society and a Victorian fascination with what they viewed as sexual abnormalities (Sedgwick 2). The anxiety surrounding public and private masculine roles is especially apparent in the treatment of masculinity in late Romantic and early Victorian male conduct books, as the proliferation of such behavior manuals for men demonstrated contradictions in how men were expected to act with their wives versus in the public sphere (Mackie 1). These manuals reflected the social feelings towards self-control, which celebrated men’s power to exercise control but at the same time treated it with caution: “While psychic discipline defines what the Victorians term manliness, if such discipline becomes too rigorous the extreme constraint of male desire will distort the male psyche and deform the very
energy that powers and empowers men” (Sussman 3). Manliness was associated with both
dominance and control, reflecting an amalgamation of values from the eighteenth and nineteenth
centuries. Modern scholars refer to nineteenth-century constructions of maleness in the plural,
“masculinities,” to account for the complex nature of gender formations during this period (8).

The theoretical model that articulates the constructions of masculinity during this period
is extensive, and much of this project relies on one of the most prominent theorists in this area,
Michel Foucault. Foucault’s theoretical construction of sexuality in his book *The History of
Sexuality*, published in its entirety in 1984, highlights the importance of sexual discourse in
developing an understanding of society. Foucault argues against the “repressive hypothesis,” a
twentieth-century idea suggesting that the discussion of sexuality was quelled in discourse
throughout the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries. According to Foucault, ideas about
sexuality were not necessarily repressed for Victorians and their predecessors, but were
discussed only in certain codified channels, so that sex was actually quite powerful as part of a
secretive discourse: “The society that emerged in the nineteenth century—bourgeois, capitalist,
or industrial society, call it what you will—did not confront sex with a fundamental refusal of
recognition. On the contrary, it put into operation an entire machinery for producing true
discourses concerning it” (69). In the eighteenth century, according to Foucault, this discourse
revolved around married couples, so that sex was an appropriate topic for public discourse only
in relation to childbearing marital sex (57). Transitioning into the nineteenth century, public
discussions of sexuality came to revolve around degeneracy (58), perhaps accounting for the
proliferation of scholarship on sexual degeneracy in literature, such as the aforementioned work
by Eve Sedgwick on homosocial and homosexual anxieties, and Gilbert and Gubar’s writings on
the overtly sexual and therefore degenerative female. These discussions of sexuality in different
channels allowed sex to become a source of power; because sex was not spoken about openly, it led to a manifestation of power for those who could manipulate sex to gain control over the more socially powerful. Foucault’s ideas, then, reveal how essential the study of sexual power is to an understanding of Victorian society, as the gender and sex roles of this period were a central defining factor of the patriarchal power manifested in society and literature during the nineteenth century.

The cementation of this patriarchal power was inextricably linked to the role of women, as the shifting identity of masculinity was largely rooted in a perceived stable definition of femininity. Women were forced into the role of domestic servant, the “angel in the home,” partially as a way for men to keep femininity stable in order to give structure to gender relations while masculinity was shifting so drastically. Women were expected to submit to their husbands, with no real sense of power outside the domestic sphere, and were responsible for a “harmonious atmosphere” in the home, including servitude for their husbands (Hoffman 265). Although this was not the reality for many, and this role is problematized in all of the Brontë novels, the perception of this traditional gender role was in some senses a way for men to maintain control over the definition of femininity, in an attempt to hold power over the changing aspects of masculinity that were beyond their reach. Patriarchy depends upon a stable definition of gender in order to maintain control, and because masculinity was so fluid during this period, society attempted to portray femininity as stable to avoid the entire system of gender from collapsing in on itself. Lord Byron emulates this conceptualization about the presence of women in the late eighteenth century. He writes, “There is something to me very softening in the presence of a woman, some strange influence, even if one is not in love with them, which I cannot at all account for, having no very high opinion of the sex. But yet, I always feel in better humour with
myself and every thing else, if there is a woman within ken” (Byron, *Letters*). Byron describes being in a “better humour” when there are women around, perhaps suggesting that an understanding of women as “soft” and domestic eased masculine anxieties about gender roles during the Romantic era. We see this in the primary novels as well, as M. Paul constantly tells Lucy what she should and should not know, and St. John attempts to pigeonhole Jane into the tidy role of domestic wife, when she does not wish to marry him. Ultimately, this perceived understanding of femininity as solid and stable, although a misconception in reality, came to embody how early Victorians viewed gender. The discourse classifies “maleness” as a status to be achieved, a goal that men attempted to reach rather than a state dictated by biology: “Masculinity is a ‘becoming’, a process as opposed to a perceived feminine ‘being’ or state. Like ‘progress’ within patriarchy, it is something to be achieved and to be experienced as triumph over nature, and therefore it seeks to penetrate and appropriate virgin frontiers. It is linear in orientation and directed towards goals” (Flannigan-Saint-Aubin 241). This conception of masculinity was formulated, in some ways, as a response to anxieties about the changing role of maleness: society could not fully articulate what masculinity meant, and so the construction of gender relied on a stable understanding of femininity in order to better frame a definition of the masculine.

*Rochester, Heathcliff, and M. Paul: The Essence of Masculinity*

The romantic and sexual draw of the masculine aura is constantly referenced in nineteenth-century literature, highlighting a masculine essence that while unnamable is almost intoxicating for female characters. *Jane Eyre, Wuthering Heights,* and *Villette* frame this *je ne sais quoi* as a combination of Romantic and Victorian values, so that the characteristics that
make Rochester, Heathcliff, and M. Paul appealing to both female characters and readers exist in a web of contradictory, transitional definitions of maleness. These novels represent this tangle of complexities as an unnamable essence in the male characters, portraying the heroes as indescribable, and in some senses supernatural. Rochester is elevated through Jane’s eyes as a female narrator into a level of supernatural, sublime mystery, as she cannot seem to fully capture the essence of his masculine aura in concrete images:

“As this horse approached, and as I watched for it to appear through the dusk, I remembered certain of Bessie’s tales, wherein figured a North-of-England spirit called a ‘Gytrash,’ which, in the form of horse, mule, or large dog, haunted solitary ways, and sometimes came upon belated travellers, as this horse was now coming upon me… It was exactly one form of Bessie’s Gytrash—a lion-like creature with long hair and a huge head: …Something of daylight still lingered, and the moon was waxing bright: I could see him plainly. His figure was enveloped in a riding cloak, fur collared and steel clasped; its details were not apparent, but I traced the general points of middle height and considerable breadth of chest.” (*Jane Eyre* 112-3)

The representation of Rochester as a “Gytrash,” a potentially dangerous creature that can take multiple forms, is suggestive of this quality of “unknowableness” in masculinity. Supernatural forces are mystical, and Rochester emanates a mysticism of masculine power in his first meeting with Jane. He is a “spirit” who “haunt[s],” evoking the image of someone who is not fully manifested but who “linger[s]” like the sun at the end of a day. He is described as “lion-like,” with “details not apparent,” words that suggest a potential image but are not able to fully encapsulate it; his shape is “considerable” but “not apparent,” and although Jane says that she “can see him plainly,” she goes on to describe him in these vague terms. This may suggest that
while she can see him, she does not yet understand what he represents, similar to Milton’s description of Satan in *Paradise Lost*. This idea is reinforced further in the novel when Jane asks Mrs. Fairfax about Rochester: “‘In what way is he peculiar?’ ‘I don’t know—it is not easy to describe—nothing striking, but you feel it when he speaks to you; you cannot be always sure whether he is in jest or earnest, whether he is pleased or the contrary; you don’t thoroughly understand him, in short—at least, I don’t: but it is of no consequence, he is a very good master’” (*Jane Eyre* 105). Rochester is not only “peculiar,” but he is peculiar in a way that is unspeakable. Mrs. Fairfax attempts to describe him in a bodily sense, “you feel it when he speaks to you,” making it seem as if he cannot be contained with words; his manliness, his ability to be a “master,” manifests itself physically. His role as a “master” is linked with being neither “easy to describe,” nor “thoroughly understand[able],” which creates a link between his masculine power and the indescribable aura he possesses. This portrayal of Rochester as a supernatural, unknowable force portrays the anxieties that Victorians had about classifying and describing masculinity.

Heathcliff is portrayed similarly in *Wuthering Heights*; his mysterious persona leads people to describe him in gothic, supernatural imagery. Nelly is the one to best articulate this, as she uses distinctly monstrous terms:

> “‘Is he a ghoul or a vampire?’ I mused. I had read of such hideous incarnate demons. And then I set myself to reflect how I had tended him in infancy, and watched him grow to youth, and followed him almost through his whole course; and what absurd nonsense it was to yield to that sense of horror. ‘But where did he come from, the little dark thing, harboured by a good man to his bane?’ muttered Superstition.” (*Wuthering Heights* 376)
The traditionally malevolent nature of the “ghoul,” the “demon” and the “vampire” conveys a sense of wickedness in Heathcliff, so that he is not only constructed as mysterious, but also potentially sinful in his masculine role. Nelly tries to talk herself out of this fear, remembering Heathcliff’s childhood, but still cannot bring herself to consider him a human, calling him “the little dark thing.” Nelly’s inability to describe Heathcliff in concrete or non-supernatural terms is indicative of his otherworldly type of masculinity, and in ending this passage with the question of where he comes from, Brontë leaves the reader with the sense that Heathcliff is not fully comprehensible. When Catherine dies, Nelly comments on Heathcliff’s reaction: “I did not feel as if I were in the company of a creature of my own species” (Wuthering Heights 185). This depiction of Heathcliff as a non-human, powerful entity, simultaneously a demon, an animal, and representing the elements, portrays the same sense of inability to know or understand how masculinity takes its form.

Monsieur Paul Emanuel emanates a similar aura of ineffability, albeit in a less gothic manner. He exists as an omnipresent force: “I heard him, too, in the warm evenings, lecturing with open doors, and his name, with anecdotes of him, resounded in ones ears from all sides... She esteemed him hideously plain, and used to profess herself frightened almost into hysterics at the sound of his step or voice. A dark little man he certainly was; pungent and austere. Even to me he seemed a harsh apparition” (Villette 114). Lucy hears his voice everywhere, as if he is always present, which speaks to the degree of power he holds over them. Ginevra is “frightened” by M. Paul, and the term “hideously plain” is in itself indicative of her inability to describe him; the phrase is an oxymoron in a sense, “hideous” indicating a heightened response, but “plain” evoking only a lack of response and an inability to articulate. M. Paul is categorized as a “harsh apparition,” and although the ghostly imagery is less directly supernatural than the descriptions
of the other two anti-heroes, it still evokes an image of a spectre that is almost visible and understandable, but always slightly out of reach. These depictions of men as supernatural follow the confused discourse on masculinity in the nineteenth century, as manhood was built from such an agglomeration of celebrated qualities. Both textual and historical evidence support the concept of a mysterious aura surrounding the male, developed and cultivated through centuries and pulled apart by the Brontë heroes.

**Project Outline**

This paper will analyze the depiction of heroes of Emily and Charlotte Brontë’s novels, focusing on how the male characters bring to light the complexities involved in defining and understanding the changing role of masculinity during the first half of the nineteenth century. Chapters focusing on class and social status, relationships between men and women, and the role of sexuality in masculinity will demonstrate the contradictions and complications involved in the masculine role, proving that masculinity was not simply a component of patriarchal power, but also a complex web of demands placed on a gendered group, similar to and often dependent upon feminine gender roles. This project ventures to “sex” the male, focusing on literature’s depiction of masculinity in relation to the feminine role, ultimately leading to a better understanding of how masculinity was interpreted and emulated. Taking this a step further, this analysis of male characters will reveal how the Brontës interpreted the changing definitions of masculinity, from the eighteenth-century Romantic understanding to the nineteenth-century Victorian role, considering how the male characters define themselves in relation to the female characters.
The first chapter of this project explores social and class-related masculinity in light of the primary texts, relying heavily on the class differences between the rough, deeply reflective and strong Byronic heroes and the other male characters in the novels, including St John Rivers, Edgar Linton, and Dr. John Bretton. The characterization here is interesting, as Rochester, Heathcliff, and M. Paul have a physical and mental strength and drive that unarguably render them the most outwardly masculine characters in these novels. However, they do not all fit within the Romantic version of gentlemanliness; Heathcliff has no real family and therefore no property to call his own in the beginning of the novel, which is problematic for genteel status, and Rochester and M. Paul are both very physical characters, without the necessary demeanor of upper-class gentlemen. Edgar Linton, in contrast, is a weak and effeminate man, but because he has power and status, he has control in the public, male-dominated sphere and is portrayed as masculine in this way. While Linton emulates masculine power in a social sense, Heathcliff’s masculinity evolves in his displays of passion and emotion, without any social clout, so these men are opposites of each other and yet each has masculine qualities. In some cases, class status stands in opposition to passion and romantic love in these novels, as Catherine must choose between Linton and Heathcliff, who entice her for contrasting reasons, and Jane is not united with Rochester until he has lost his power as a wealthy landowner. This relationship between class and love challenges Victorian ideals of masculinity, and by setting social status as an opposition to passion, the Brontë sisters use their male characters to question accepted gender ideals.

The second chapter focuses on gender relations and rituals between the sexes, as an understanding of courting and marriage is integral to an understanding of masculine responsibility because the male characters in these novels define themselves around female
characters. We see this in many of the smaller plotlines in these novels, as Catherine and Edgar, Ginevra and De Hamal, and even Rochester and Blanche Ingram seem to have flirtatious relationships. However, the idea of romance reaches further than these minor relationships, femininity affecting the way masculinity is understood. The novels suggest that men need to have a stable understanding of femininity, even if it is perceived and not realistic, because the concept of “manliness” cannot be socially defined until a stable and fixed concept of femininity is understood. Victorians defined the woman’s realm as domestic, and so with this construction in mind, the Brontë sisters bring into question what a proper man should be responsible for. The Brontë novels complicate the idea of the domestic versus public spheres, entwining the role of women with the role of men in order to bring out the complications involved in a sturdy definition of gender construction.

Stemming from this, the final chapter will move on to a study of sexuality and passion, as this stands out to me as the greatest paradox in definitions of Victorian masculinity. Maleness is associated in these novels with physical prowess and a certain carnal knowledge, as the men are celebrated for their sexual conquering of females. Rochester, Heathcliff, and Paul Emanuel are each recognized for their passion and heightened emotion, and this connection between sexuality and manliness is apparent in close-readings of the texts, as the sexual undertones are revealed in descriptions of these heroes. However, giving in to sexual tendencies is also portrayed as weak, and therefore emasculating, as demonstrated by the anxieties about overly sexual males in the novels. Lord Byron, the originator of the Byronic hero, articulated a similar concept in his letters: “But the worst is, the devil always came with it,— till I starved him out,— and I will not be the slave of any appetite” (Byron 183). As a male, he took pride in independence and strived to repress any “appetite” or desire, especially the passionate appetites associated with women.
which in these texts are manifested most clearly in the form of Bertha Mason. This provides a further complication of defining masculinity, lending itself to an exploration of how the men in 

*Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *Villette* act within their sexual roles.

I will conclude the project by considering how these contrasting ideas of masculinity, filtered through female authors, contribute to an understanding of maleness and gender in nineteenth-century novels. These heroes sacrifice several socially defined masculine qualities, by losing class status, giving up their power over women by falling in love, and being openly sexual, yet are able to maintain their reputation among critics and readers as an epitomization of masculine heroes. The characters’ actions convey the complexity that is the Victorian masculine gender role, as they both embody and fail to embody countless qualities involved in the nineteenth-century understanding of masculinity. Through their male characters, the Brontë sisters unravel what it means to be masculine, their heroes coming to represent the contradictory nature of expectations for men entering into the Victorian era.
Chapter One: Class, Status, and the Role of the Gentleman

“A dark-skinned gypsy in aspect, in dress and manners a gentleman”

“The idea of the gentleman could never have fascinated the Victorians as it did if it had been limited by caste or by a strict sense of heraldry, nor, on the other hand, if it had been a totally moralized concept, a mere synonym for the good man. It was the subtle and shifting balance between social and moral attributes that gave gentlemanliness its fascination.” (Gilmour 4)

“‘Is Mr. Rochester an exacting, fastidious sort of man?’ ‘Not particularly so; but he has a gentleman’s tastes and habits, and he expects to have things managed in conformity to them.’ ‘Do you like him? Is he generally liked?’ ‘Oh, yes; the family have always been respected here. Almost all the land in this neighbourhood, as far as you can see, has belonged to the Rochesters time out of mind’… ‘But has he no peculiarities? What, in short, is his character?’” (Jane Eyre 104-5)

Class and social status played an integral role in the Victorian definition of masculinity, and much of the anxiety surrounding the masculine role during the 1800’s was due to the transition from the Romantic to Victorian conception of the gentleman. The eighteenth-century English gentleman, known for his flamboyant nature, was transitioning out of public favor, to be replaced by a Victorian masculinity more grounded in the physical strength associated with the middle class. The role of the gentleman was therefore not fully established as of the mid-nineteenth century, as the more contemporary gentleman flourished in the industrial revolution and contributed to the productivity of society, which was in direct contrast to the more effeminate, frivolous English gentleman of the previous century (Mackie 3). Victorians, then, were faced with two versions of masculinity that stood largely in opposition to each other, making the construction of an ideal man nearly impossible. The middle-class understanding of how class influenced masculinity began to shift, moving from an emphasis on family status and wealth to a reverence for the working gentleman: “Bourgeois industrial manhood defines manliness as success within the male sphere, the new arena of commerce and technology in which sexual energy is transmitted into constructive labor” (Sussman 4). These concepts of
manhood were contradictory; one was defined by a lavish lifestyle and the other by success in a world of labor, and these separate definitions of maleness are depicted as conflicting attributes of man in the literature of the period. The Brontës’ novels, viewed as important contributions to the body of quintessential Victorian texts, demonstrate this tension through binaries of masculinity, both among pairs of characters and within single heroes; these binaries depict the earlier vision of gentility as being in competition with later Victorian masculine qualities. Masculinity is presented, then, as an amalgamation of qualities from different eras, as the heroes demonstrate aspects of both the Romantic and Victorian gentleman, and yet this hybrid of masculine roles is also highly contradictory. The Brontës’ novels thus ironically convey the very impossibility of bourgeois manhood, highlighting the social contradictions involved in the role of nineteenth-century “gentleman.”

*The Rule of the Gentleman*

The complex construction of the nineteenth-century gentleman was rooted in the historical eighteenth-century genteel figure, maintaining an appreciation for social status as well as monetary worth. *Villette*’s Colonel de Hamal is a representation of the effeminate, frivolous eighteenth-century gentleman, as he has the status, gentility, and look to make him a perfect gentleman, and yet these traits suggest a lack of strong features. Lucy describes him as small and feminine: “his lineaments were small, and so were his hands and feet; and he was pretty and smooth, and as trim as a doll: so nicely dressed, so nicely curled, so booted and gloved and cravated… the colonel's hands were scarce larger than Miss Fanshawe's own, and [I] suggested that this circumstance might be convenient, as he could wear her gloves at a pinch” (*Villette*
Lucy pokes fun at de Hamal, as he has feminine characteristics in his size, his “dress,” and his “curl[s].” This description evokes imagery of a “doll,” which is not only dainty and frail, but is also an image most commonly associated with women. Lucy also calls him a “dandy” earlier in the passage, which evokes images of effeminate, frivolous gentlemen in the eighteenth century2 (Gilmour 43). De Hamal is attractive and “smooth,” but these qualities make him appear feminine to Lucy, so that his genteel qualities and masculine status are in contradiction. Emily Brontë’s initial description of Edgar Linton in Wuthering Heights evokes much of the same imagery, as Mr. Lockwood describes Linton’s portrait: “I discerned a soft-featured face, exceedingly resembling the young lady at the Heights, but more pensive and amiable in expression. It formed a sweet picture. The long light hair curled slightly on the temples; the eyes were large and serious; the figure almost too graceful” (Wuthering Heights 75). The men are described similarly, “smooth,” “sweet,” “soft,” “pretty,” all with feminine undertones. Lockwood says outright that Linton looks like a woman, while Lucy Snowe only hints at this aspect of de Hamal’s character, but the lack of masculine power is present in both descriptions. They are depicted as frail and sweet, womanly and able to be manipulated as opposed to the commanding strength a man was expected to have. Finally, the image of “curls” comes up in both passages, suggesting a feminine beauty in that the emphasis on hair and luscious curls is typically associated with the sexualized female. These descriptions of more frivolous, frail gentleman figures, occurring early in both Villette and Wuthering Heights, introduce a dichotomy of masculinity, where men are praised for acting in accordance with eighteenth-century standards of gentility, and yet are emasculated in doing so.

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The novels still depict the pre-Victorian gentleman as a desirable figure, however, and the text provides examples of male characters wanting to emulate the genteel style as well as women desiring to marry men who fulfill this role. Even Heathcliff, a character epitomized for his anti-hero status, wishes to be like Edgar Linton in his youth: “But, Nelly, if I knocked [Linton] down twenty times, that wouldn't make him less handsome or me more so. I wish I had light hair and a fair skin, and was dressed and behaved as well, and had a chance of being as rich as he will be!” (Wuthering Heights 64). Heathcliff wishes to be “light” and “fair,” both stereotypically womanly traits, and also to be well “dressed” and “behaved,” indicating the upbringing of a gentleman. Heathcliff focuses on the power dynamic between him and Linton, frustrated with the fact that no matter how much physical strength he exerts, Linton will still have the advantage of look and temperament, and Heathcliff can never overpower him in this way. Heathcliff also mentions the monetary aspect of Linton’s character, wishing just for “a chance” to be as rich as Linton “will be.” Linton’s fate is certain, and Heathcliff bemoans that his own fate to be less wealthy is just as certain. In Villette, Ginevra Fanshawe demonstrates a similar attitude towards Colonel de Hamal, telling Lucy that she wants to be with the colonel over John Graham Bretton because of his gentlemanly qualities:

“‘Him you call the man,’ said she, ‘is bourgeois, sandy-haired, and answers to the name of John—cela suffit: je n’en veux pas. Colonel de Hamal is a gentleman of excellent connections, perfect manners, sweet appearance, with pale interesting face, and hair and eyes like an Italian. Then, too, he is the most delightful company possible—a man quite in my way; not sensible and serious like the other, but one with whom I can talk on equal terms—who does not plague and bore, and harass me with depths, and heights, and passions, and talents for which I have no taste.’”(Villette 133)
Ginevra’s vanity leads her to value de Hamal’s “connections” and “manners” above all, as she mentions them first. Notably, these appealing characteristics are inextricably related to his monetary status. She even cites the flatness of his shallow character as a positive trait for a suitor, “who does not… harass me with depths, and heights, and passion, and talents for which I have no taste.” She does not wish to be challenged, to marry a man with passionate highs and lows, but commends de Hamal’s lack of these “passions.” Ginevra’s value of status over other factors of a relationship reflects the views of many women of the period that social class was the most important factor involved in marriage. The role of the gentleman, then, began to take on multifaceted definitions, both embodying and evading masculinity under different lenses.

The appeal of the gentleman for Emily Brontë’s characters does not rest solely in monetary advantage; although the potential wealth and status of the gentleman is enticing to Catherine, there is also a personality that accompanies Linton, and his character has the ability to draw her interest. Cathy’s choice to marry Linton is an example of the enticing quality of such a character, as her decision is partially based in lifestyle and partially in love: “Nelly, I see now, you think me a selfish wretch, but, did it never strike you that, if Heathcliff and I married, we should be beggars? Whereas, if I marry Linton, I can aid Heathcliff to rise, and place him out of my brother’s power” (Wuthering Heights 93). Cathy does mention economic benefits to marrying Linton, including avoiding becoming a “beggar” and “aid[ing] Heathcliff to rise,” indicating that she finds fiscal stability valuable for both herself and others. However, because Catherine does not speak of a desire to be rich, but only of a desire to avoid poverty, we can assume that monetary gain is not her sole motivation for this marriage and that the focus on finances here is logical. She also speaks of “power,” suggesting that it is the independence that she values in monetary stability, not necessarily the comfort. Although class becomes a barrier to
Cathy’s relationship with Heathcliff, it is not only Linton’s money that makes her want to marry him. When Nelly asks Cathy if she loves Linton, she answers, “Who can help it? Of course I do” (88), followed with her statement that he is “handsome, and pleasant to be with,” “young and cheerful,” “because he loves me,” and because “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” (89). Cathy first admits to loving Linton, and in saying “who can help it,” she admits that he is easy to love by anyone’s standards. She follows by mentioning his physical appearance, “handsome” and “young,” and his temperament, “pleasant to be with” and “cheerful.” She goes on to list the monetary reasons for their union, primarily that she would be able to change her social situation, “I shall like to be the greatest woman of the neighbourhood,” and that she would be “proud” to have a husband of such a class. It is notable that Cathy lists Linton’s personal and physical qualities first, and then moves into the monetary benefits of their union, contrasting with Ginevra’s aforementioned description of de Hamal that focuses solely on money. This could indicate that Linton’s social class is only an afterthought to her, or that it is more important than she wishes Nelly to know, but in either case Linton’s genteel status seems to be enticing for Cathy. However, it is clear that she does love him, as Nelly tells the reader this multiple times, and Catherine’s mention of personality, appearance, and class all at the same time indicates that there are many factors involved in achieving gentlemanly status. It is not just Linton’s money that makes him enticing, but the attitude, look, and status he has gained from being raised in gentility, the type of person this status has lead him to become. Emily Brontë’s depiction of Linton, then, embraces the confusion about class that plagued understandings of gender in demonstrating how class and property were not always the most important aspects of a man, but that other eighteenth-century genteel qualities were also appealing to women.
Although Catherine chooses to marry Linton for all of these reasons, she cannot fully articulate what it is she loves about him, and her confusion about what will make him a good husband reflects Victorian social anxieties about defining masculinity. She describes Linton’s masculinity as a type of aura, idealizing what it means to be a gentleman: “I love the ground under his feet, and the air over his head, and everything he touches, and every word he says—I love all his looks, and all his actions, and him entirely, and altogether” (*Wuthering Heights* 88-9). She cannot name exactly what it is about him, but his general atmosphere is exciting to her, not only his person but “the ground under” him, “the air over” him, and “everything he touches.” Her descriptions of Linton are not concrete, but encapsulate his entire being, which conveys the sense that she does not know or cannot name what she admires so much about him. This confusion parallels nineteenth-century uncertainties about the role of gentility in masculinity: “Victorians themselves were, if not confused, then at least much more uncertain than their grandfathers had been about what constituted a gentleman, and that this uncertainty, which made definition difficult, was an important part of the appeal which gentlemanly status held for outsiders hoping to attain it” (Gilmour 3). Although it was impossible to define the role of gentleman, it was an appealing role to assume, and therefore it became desirable for both women and men to focus on social status. Catherine’s confusion but ultimate decision to marry Linton indicates the prevalence of this view, as the construction of gentlemanliness was murky and yet the gentleman still had a prevalent role in society as well as the marriage market.

Heathcliff, who lacks the money, title, or family to be considered a gentleman, is unable to please Catherine because he does not have this unknowable gentlemanly quality. By midway through his life, he has acquired appropriate clothing and even a sense of genteel temperament, but he does not have the same aura that the characters admire in Linton: “He is a dark-skinned
gypsy in aspect, in dress and manners a gentleman: that is, as much a gentleman as many a
country squire: rather slovenly, perhaps, yet not looking amiss with his negligence, because he
has an erect and handsome figure; and rather morose” (Wuthering Heights 4). Heathcliff has
gained the “dress and manners” of a “gentleman” or “squire,” but this is not enough for the
narrator to qualify him as such. His appearance, “a dark-skinned gypsy” paints him as a lower-
class man, and therefore cannot fully embrace the role. The word “slovenly” evokes images of
both a “course, vulgar, disreputable” nature and a sense of his being “untidy, dirty, or habitually
careless” (“Slovenly”). Further, Cathy criticizes his educational status in response to his
comment about class: “‘You never told me before that I talked too little, or that you disliked my
company, Cathy!’ exclaimed Heathcliff, in much agitation. ‘It’s no company at all, when people
know nothing and say nothing,’ she muttered” (Wuthering Heights 79). Cathy finds issue with
Heathcliff’s lack of education, as she accuses him of “know[ing] nothing and say[ing] nothing,”
which is a direct result of his social status and lack of education. In telling Heathcliff that she
cannot hold a conversation with him, Cathy is comparing his education and company with that of
Linton, who is more intellectually stimulating. No matter how much money or property
Heathcliff may acquire, Cathy values a type of cultural capital that he will never learn, a cultural
capital that her envisioned future with Linton is guaranteed to include. It was not only monetary
status, then, that was appealing as an aspect of gentlemanly status; Linton’s education has
allowed him to become an interesting and knowledgeable companion, and Catherine’s
appreciation of this quality reinforces the widespread benefits of social status. Although
Heathcliff has certain physical qualities that make him appear a gentleman, his lack of education
betrays him as a working-class man, demonstrating the fact that clothing and appearances do not
constitute masculinity. The text’s depiction of behavioral patterns associated with the gentleman
reveals that there was an emphasis on conduct in defining the nineteenth-century man, leading to an unknowable quality associated with the gentleman.

The role of the gentleman is further complicated in *Jane Eyre*, as Mr. Rochester begins the novel as a gentleman and eventually loses his belongings and physical strength to a fire, so that the “aura” of the gentleman is broken down, as he maintains aspects of his gentility and loses others. There was a sense of “noble” essence associated with Victorian gentlemen (Gilmour 4), so even when Rochester loses the ancestral home that symbolizes his material wealth, he has a temperament, bloodline, and land ownership that lead him to remain a gentleman. Genteel status came to define a certain type of masculinity, as exemplified when Jane asks Mrs. Fairfax about Mr. Rochester:

“‘Is Mr. Rochester an exacting, fastidious sort of man?’ ‘Not particularly so; but he has a gentleman’s tastes and habits, and he expects to have things managed in conformity to them.’ ‘Do you like him? Is he generally liked?’ ‘Oh, yes; the family have always been respected here. Almost all the land in this neighbourhood, as far as you can see, has belonged to the Rochesters time out of mind.’ ‘Well, but, leaving his land out of the question, do you like him? Is he liked for himself?’ … ‘he is considered a just and liberal landlord by his tenants: but he has never lived much amongst them.’ ‘But has he no peculiarities? What, in short, is his character?’” (*Jane Eyre* 104-5)

Mrs. Fairfax relays the general social feeling about Mr. Rochester, which is solely based on his title and gentleman-like qualities. He is said to have “a gentleman’s tastes and habits,” which immediately establishes that he values wealth. When Jane asks if he is “generally liked,” Mrs. Fairfax responds that his “family” is “respected” due to land ownership, and although this is unrelated to his personal character, Mrs. Fairfax sees it as an imperative factor in his overall
appeal. These aspects of his person are solely based on monetary value, and his status as a member of the landed gentry proves to be highly valued from a communal point of view. The highest praise Mrs. Fairfax gives is that he is “just” and “liberal” as an authority figure, but yet never stoops to their level, “never lived much among them.” His ability to act chivalrously towards his inferiors, exhibiting gallantry and courtesy for them but never lowering himself to their status, is thought to be commendable by Mrs. Fairfax, demonstrating one aspect of value in a gentlemanly character. Jane, however, does not show concern for these genteeel traits, and in wishing to know more about his personality, she shows another, less socially influenced view of what traits a man should embody. This is the first passage in *Jane Eyre* in which we see the inconsistency between Rochester as a gentleman and what Jane desires in a man, foreshadowing the power shift that makes their companionship possible, and demonstrating the complexity of the socially constructed role of gentleman. This passage challenges constructions of gentility because Mrs. Fairfax cares about Rochester’s “gentleman’s tastes” and Jane does not, conveying contrasting opinions within one text about the necessary qualities involved in bourgeois masculinity.

While Jane is complacent about Rochester’s genteel qualities, she portrays St. John Rivers’ gentlemanly traits in a negative light, associating his behavior and status as gentleman with a lack of passion. She is clearest about this distaste when St. John, who adequately fits the temperament, if not the affluence of a gentleman, asks Jane to marry him:

“I looked at his features, beautiful in their harmony, but strangely formidable in their still severity; at his brow, commanding but not open; at his eyes, bright and deep and searching, but never soft; at his tall imposing figure; and fancied myself in idea *his* wife…forced to keep the fire of my nature continually low, to compel it to burn inwardly...
and never utter a cry, though the imprisoned flame consumed vital after vital—*this would be unendurable.*” (Jane Eyre 406)

St John has all the fine looks of a gentleman, a “commanding brow,” “beautiful” yet “formidable features,” and an “imposing figure.” He seems to have the politeness and charm of a perfect gentleman, with both feminine features, “beautiful,” and features that refuse femininity, “never soft.” St. John’s personality is stimulating, but the disconnect is that he is not stimulating in the way that Jane needs; he is “commanding,” “bright,” and “searching,” and yet never “bright,” or “open,” indicating a type of fire that is different from Jane’s. He is passionate about God and his mission, and desires a social arrangement out of a marriage, whereas Jane desires more: “He prizes me as a soldier would a good weapon; and that is all” (*Jane Eyre* 405). She feels that he desires her as a means to an end, as opposed to an end in herself, which is not enough for her. This is the reason she would have to “keep the fire of [her] nature continually low”; St. John has passion, but it fits the Victorian mold of religious and social passion, contrasting with Jane’s desire for an emotionally passionate mate more reminiscent of a Romantic gentleman.

*Contemporary Gentility: The Productive Man*

The female protagonists in the Brontë novels idealize and identify with the kind of middle class values that are associated with hard working and strong men in a Victorian definition. With the idea of the elegant gentleman in decline, the more masculinized view of manhood came in the image of the physical middle class man (Mackie 8). The concept of rank as the sole indicator of masculinity had faded by the beginning of the nineteenth century, and so a man’s profession and actions joined family status as defining factors of masculinity, bringing
about a changing definition of gentility (Connell 192). This view is expressed by all three of the novels’ female protagonists, as they admire middle-class qualities in the male characters. In *Villette*, this idea manifests itself in that Lucy is surprised by her admiration for M. Paul’s work ethic:

“Not tall but active, alive with the energy and movement of three tall men. How M. Paul did work! How he issued directions, and, at the same time, set his own shoulder to the wheel! Half-a-dozen assistants were at his back to remove the pianos, etc.; no matter, he must add to their strength his own. The redundancy of his alertness was half-vexing, half-ludicrous, in my mind I both disapproved and derided most of this fuss. Yet, in the midst of prejudice and annoyance, I could not, while watching, avoid perceiving a certain not disagreeable naïveté in all he did and said.” (*Villette* 199)

Paul is “not tall,” lacking the naturally pleasing facial features of other characters, but it is his activity that Lucy notices and admires, giving him the “movement of three tall men.” He is “active,” “alive with energy,” “alert,” and she commends his ability to both serve as a leader and also put work into the task himself. His status as a man who will submit to physical labor is attractive to her, and these active adjectives allow readers to identify with M. Paul’s actions as well. Lucy is confused, however, as she “both dissaprove[s] and deride[s]” the “fuss” happening around M. Paul. She cannot completely commit to admiring him, suggesting her pause in accepting the role of the new productive man; even though she is enamored, she never fully commits to adoring his active quality. However, the passage ends with a wholly positive attitude towards M. Paul’s display of manliness, as although Lucy is resisting falling for him, she admits to herself that she “could not… avoid perceiving” a “not disagreeable naïveté” in his personality. No matter how much she guards herself, she is forced to concede that she feels attracted to him,
in relation to his exemplary performance of middle-class masculinity. This represents the Victorian concept of work and relationships among men and between men and women: “The dominant code of Victorian manliness, with its emphasis on self-control, hard work and independence, was that of the professional and business classes, and manly behaviour was what (among other things) established a man's class credentials vis-a-vis his peers and his subordinates” (Tosh 183). Paul emulates this “self-control” and “hard work,” fulfilling a Victorian understanding of masculinity. M. Paul’s life as a working man, teaching and acting as a type of administrator, represents the dominant and passionate personality that draws Lucy in, reflecting a partial departure from the more traditional and historical understanding of gentility.

Mr. Rochester demonstrates the physicality of a nineteenth-century anti-hero throughout *Jane Eyre*, but it is just after he loses his home and land that Jane notices this quality most explicitly. This is significant in that the loss of his home represents the symbolic loss of his wealth, and so as the monetary status associated with eighteenth-century gentility phases out of his character, Jane comes to embrace the more physical side of him:

“His form was of the same strong and stalwart contour as ever: his port was still erect, his hair was still raven-black; nor were his features altered or sunk: not in one year’s space, by any sorrow, could his athletic strength be quelled, or his vigorous prime blighted. But in his countenance I saw a change: that looked desperate and brooding—that reminded me of some wronged and fettered wild beast or bird, dangerous to approach his sullen woe. The caged eagle, whose gold-ringèd eyes cruelty has extinguished, might look as looked that sightless Samson.” (*Jane Eyre* 367)

Rochester is “strong,” “stalwart,” and relatively unattractive, which makes the physical effects of the fire less devastating, because he was never attractive in a traditional definition. Jane as
narrator also mentions Rochester’s “athletic strength” and “vigorous prime,” indicating that a loss of part of his estate has not broken him; in fact, he can now embody more fully the masculine value of the middle class. His refusal to marry a gentlewoman further rejects traditional roles of gentility, as he forgoes beneficial social matches to pursue his romantic feelings towards Jane. The change in Rochester is the most relevant aspect of this passage, however; he is now “desperate and brooding”; he is compared to a wild beast that is “fettered” or restrained. There is a strong, fearful message that this description gives, as an eagle “caged,” that indicates an underlying power in Rochester’s new attitudes and actions that is restrained socially and physically. This change only happens in his countenance and not his form, suggesting an internal change separate from the physical. Unlike Lucy, Jane celebrates Rochester’s physicality, admiring his “form,” and while Lucy holds back in her admiration for M. Paul, Jane does not hesitate to celebrate this strength in her description of Rochester. Ultimately, the sacrifice of Rochester’s home, although involuntary, allows him to embrace a new set of masculine values that reflect a more modern Victorian cultural construction of maleness.

In all three of the works considered here, the Brontës provide us with pairs of male characters, each pair fulfilling a binary of eighteenth versus nineteenth-century masculinity to represent the social tension in the shifting definition of maleness. These pairs not only lead to the exploration of contrasting views of the gentleman, but also allow us to see the reactions and choices of the female protagonists, and what they appreciate in men both personally and culturally (Miller 86). Heathcliff and Linton are the classic example of this binary, as they are in constant competition with each other throughout Wuthering Heights:

“He [Heathcliff] had grown a tall, athletic, well-formed man; beside whom [Edgar] 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. A half-civilised ferocity lurked yet in the depressed brows and eyes full of black fire, but it was subdued; and his manner was even dignified: quite divested of roughness, though stern for grace.” (*Wuthering Heights* 109)

Heathcliff is “tall,” “athletic,” and “well-formed,” with the same vivacity we have seen Lucy admire in M. Paul. In comparison with Edgar, who is “youth-like,” Heathcliff seems “older” and “intelligent,” sophisticated, whereas Mr. Linton represents the frail opposite. The suggestion of his position in the army is indicative of the status of a self-made man, along with good manners and strength, embodying this new idea of Victorian masculinity. His face, “half-civilised” and “full of black fire,” suggests a passion that he is repressing, allowing him to remain “dignified” and “stern.” Both Linton and Heathcliff are able to act civilly in this scene; the difference between them is that Heathcliff fights to control the ferocity behind his eyes, whereas if Linton has such a fire, it is not mentioned. Heathcliff is portrayed as hypermasculine because he is able to control his inner passions, and yet the very existence of those passions adds to his erotic desirability. The contrast of Heathcliff’s strength and virility compared to Edgar’s frailty reflects Victorian views about self-control and masculine character: “Manliness as control validated the hegemony of the bourgeoisie by valorizing manliness as self-regulation over what was seen through middle-class eyes as the libertinism and idleness of the gentry and the irregularity and sexual license of the working class” (Sussman 11). Because the disciplined, productive male was associated with the bourgeoisie, the frivolity and delicate beauty associated with Linton and other higher-class gentleman are portrayed as less masculine. The oppositional binary that these men construct allows us to see differences between their traits, and although this passage is
heavily positive towards Heathcliff’s countenance, we know he has monstrous qualities as well, which is part of the reason Catherine chooses to marry Linton. The contradictions in male definition are interpretable in many different ways, and though Heathcliff fulfills the role of the middle-class anti-hero at this point in the novel, Brontë shows us that the frail gentleman still has some status and clout, as Catherine chooses Linton.

The conflict between roles of gentility is further demonstrated in contrasts between characters, their redeemable qualities mixed with the negative to create a blurry picture of what is expected or valued in a man. Rochester describes himself to Jane as a “Vulcan” when he is reunited with her: “The picture you have just drawn is suggestive of a rather too overwhelming contrast. Your words have delineated very prettily a graceful Apollo: he is present to your imagination,— tall, fair, blue-eyed, and with a Grecian profile. Your eyes dwell on a Vulcan,— a real blacksmith, brown, broad-shouldered, and blind and lame into the bargain” (Jane Eyre 376). Rochester indicates that Jane sees St. John as “Apollo,” a Grecian god representing youth and maleness, and described as “graceful,” “tall, fair, blue-eyed,” and “with a Grecian profile,” indicating beauty. These are the qualities he sees in St. John, and imagines that Jane also sees and desires. His view of himself, however, is the polar opposite: he describes a “Vulcan,” a god of fire and metalwork, evoking images of Hephaestus, the lame blacksmith of Greek mythology who stood in opposition to Apollo. He describes himself as “brown, broad-shouldered, and blind and lame,” qualities that portray him as the dark anti-hero, the antithesis of gentility. This view is especially unique coming from Rochester’s eyes, as we are able to understand how he views himself as opposed to seeing St. John. What Rochester sees in St. John is not the same as what Jane sees, which emphasizes the idea that men were confused about the shifting definition of masculinity, and about what women desired. Rochester and Jane each expect each other to desire
certain qualities in a mate, and yet they do not recognize the positive qualities in their own characters. Rochester is wrapped up in the complex web of values that defined masculinity in this transitory period, and therefore paints St. John as a binary opposition to himself in order to better understand how each of them emulate masculinity differently.

These contrasting images are also present in Villette, as similar language portrays De Hamal and Dr. John in conflicting images:

“'You, Dr. John, and every man of a less refined mould than he [De Hamal], must feel for him a sort of admiring affection, such as Mars and the coarser deities may be supposed to have borne the young, graceful Apollo.’ ‘An unprincipled, gambling, little jackanapes!’”

Said Dr. John curtly, “whom, with one hand, I could lift up by the waistband ay day, and lay low in the kennel if I like.” (Villette 136)

The image of Apollo here parallels the description of St. John above, as De Hamal is described as a “young, graceful Apollo,” lining up with Rochester’s assumption of how Jane views St. John. Here, Apollo is contrasted with “Mars,” the god of war, who demonstrates aggression and who had sex with Aphrodite, the wife of Hephaestus the “Vulcan”. The reference to Mars is different than the reference to a “Vulcan” in Jane Eyre, as it does not have the same dirty, lower class connotation, as Mars is a more distinguished God. Still, Mars is grouped with the “courser deities,” drawing a parallel between these two comparisons. If we take these comparisons in tandem, there is a level of jealousy involved with the references to mythology; Hephaestus the Vulcan was married to Aphrodite, who cheated on him with Mars, so ultimately Rochester’s comments reference his jealous worry that other men are earning Jane’s love. This metaphor also portrays Jane as Aphrodite, which is such a stark contrast that it sheds light on the inconsistencies involved in how men and women view each other and themselves. Just as Mr.
Rochester contrasts himself to St. John, Dr. John “others” De Hamal as a feminine character, calling him “An unprincipled, gambling, little jackanapes!,” indicating that John sees these qualities as the opposite of gentlemanly. These passages, in their parallel imagery and language, convey the eighteenth-century flamboyance of the “tall,” “fair,” “blue-eyed,” “Grecian,” and “graceful,” man as well as the Victorian value of physical labor in adjectives like “broad,” “brown,” and “course.” This demonstrates the contradiction between different manifestations of masculinity, and forces female characters to choose between opposing models of maleness.

St. John and Rochester are also contrasted in their treatment of passion, striving to fit with the temperament of the Victorian “gentleman.” Jane says that St. John lives, “only to aspire—after what was good and great, certainly; but still he would never rest, nor approve of others resting round him. As I looked at his lofty forehead, still and pale as a white stone—at his fine lineaments fixed in study—I comprehended all at once that he would hardly make a good husband: that it would be a trying thing to be his wife” (Jane Eyre 392). St. John is always moving forward, “he would never rest, nor approve of others resting,” and so uses his energy for business. He is described as “lofty,” “still,” “pale,” “white,” and “stone,” portraying him as the type of stoic character who is consumed by his goals, becoming immovable. Critic Jane Miller argues that, “the warm, dark, ugliness of Mr. Rochester is illuminated by the ethereally pale and ascetic beauty of St John Rivers” (Miller 85). These men represent two completely contrasting depictions of manhood, and although St. John is passionate in some ways, his passion is directed towards his religious mission, and Rochester is the one who has passion for Jane. By creating this binary representation of masculinity, Brontë can investigate the two relevant definitions of manhood in tandem: “[Pairs of men] do more than explore different male types. They make it possible to focus on the contradictions in the heroines themselves, in terms of what these women
want and expect of men and how they are caught by (and learn to evade) men’s visions of them” (Miller 86). Although gentility is portrayed as desirable in a man, the definition of gentility remains under interpretation for the characters in these texts, as the characters represent hybrids of gentlemanly qualities from the 1700’s into the emerging 1800’s.
Chapter Two: Masculinity Reflected in Relationships
“He made me love him without looking at me”

“Precisely because men had to adopt a calm and calculating demeanor in their public sphere, they sought a richly expressive private counterpart. Family constituted more than a tranquil haven; it became a site for deep passions. Men argued that it was only through love that their true selves could shine through. They accepted, even gloried in the idea that love required full emotional disclosure, agreeing with women that any holding back contradicted the basic goals of love. They accepted also the pain that love could bring, sometimes noting their jealousy when a lover showed interest in others, even more commonly citing their grief when a loved one was absent” (Stearns and Knapp 771)

“‘You said I killed you- haunt me, then! The murdered do haunt their murderers. I believe- I know that ghosts have wandered on earth. Be with me always- take any form- drive me mad! Only do not leave me in this abyss, where I cannot find you! Oh, God! It is unutterable! I cannot live without my life! I cannot live without my soul!’” (Wuthering Heights 169)

The Brontë sisters are known for the depictions of love and romance in their novels; their works feature passionate, unconventional relationships, avoiding the traditional courting tropes and simple marriage plots featured in much of their contemporaries’ writing. This new romantic nature that was introduced to relationships stood in protest of the economic marriage market that ruled relations between men and women throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, reflecting the general movement towards a potential alternative to the social system of finding partners based on family status. The relationships between men and women greatly influence definitions of masculinity because femininity and masculinity are inextricably linked; they are traditionally defined in opposition to each other, and so both genders have the power to shape and construct the other. The changes in social interactions between genders during the Victorian era allowed for increased personal connection between men and women, changing the way masculinity was viewed. The Victorian fascination with romantic relationships between men and women contributed to a change in marriage politics, so that passionate love became a more important factor in a relationship than they had been in previous centuries. These changing traditions from the eighteenth to nineteenth century brought on a shift in masculine character, as
men came to be defined partially by their romantic capabilities. Following this, domestic versus public roles began to change as well, as the choice to enter a marriage shifted, at least theoretically, into a mutual decision. Still, men retained their power over women as owners of property, and although the concept of marriage seemed to celebrate equal and loving partnerships, this was not true for all couples, and remained a distant ideal for many. However, the romanticization of love did have a wide influence on masculinity, changing the way men pursued and courted women and leading to new developments between the genders. Nineteenth-century literature complicates this shift into romantic love, because the male characters emulate both Romantic and Victorian values in their treatment of women. The Brontës’ depiction of this shift further demonstrates the complexity of the masculine role during this period, as there were no clear standards as to how relationships functioned.

*Power Dynamics in Romantic Love*

The Brontë heroes emulate this shift into the idealization of love and marriage in their expressions of soulful love for the female protagonists. Mr. Rochester, who is constantly described as having a rough exterior, shows vulnerability when it comes to Jane:

“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 cord of communion will be snapt; and then I’ve a nervous notion I should take to bleeding inwardly. As for you,—you’d forget me.” (Jane Eyre 252)

He describes their relationship as if they are physically tied, and it would bring him bodily harm to separate from her. Not only does Rochester mention the pain it would cause him to be without her, but he implies that she is not as vulnerable as he; while he would “bleed inwardly” at their separation, she would simply “forget.” He expresses to her that his health and life are dependent upon their relationship, giving her power over him in this moment, and he uses the words “nervous” and “afraid” to describe himself, which are adjectives that indicate vulnerability and femininity. The discussion of his heart, which is “somewhere under [his] left ribs,” shows an emotional side to his character, and his willingness to speak openly about these feelings requires sacrificing the pride in his masculinity to confess his love for her. This introduces a contradiction, then; Rochester’s masculinity may seem to be undermined by this sensitive expression of love, while at the same time it adds to his appeal as an emotional hero, in a sense contributing to his masculine charm. He is able to maintain a sense of masculinity in this speech, in mentioning that her “little frame” is attached to his “rib,” evoking biblical imagery of Eve’s creation coming from Adam’s rib. Charlotte Brontë here confronts the image of the emotional man directly, suggesting that romantic love allowed men to exert control over women, yet simultaneously led them to become more sensitive and self-sacrificing in relationships. In their article, “Men and Romantic Love: Pinpointing a 20th-Century Change,” Peter Stearns and Mark Knapp analyze the primary theories and constructions of masculinity in the eighteenth through twentieth centuries, in order to understand how the gender role has changed. They argue that the movement towards romantic love was part of a larger social trend: “a strong cultural commitment to love cannot be denied, and no alternative values gained wide support in the
Victorian middle class. …Not surprisingly, popular literature directed at Victorian men, advice manuals in particular, confirmed the importance of romantic love in middle-class male culture and doubtless helped to solidify it” (Stearns and Knapp 772). True love became a part of gender discourse in the Victorian era, and the concept was soon incorporated into literature and other forms of popular culture. Rochester emulates these values in his absolute dedication to Jane, as he believes his well-being is rooted in her presence.

Gender politics of power within relationships also play out in *Villette*, because although the men in Lucy’s life seem to support her, there are moments where both Graham and M. Paul take advantage of her romantic feelings toward them, leaving her vulnerable. Lucy’s feelings for Graham give him the ability to both wound and save her, which she asserts in her description of his words:

“All things are words and wrongs like knives, whose deep-inflicted lacerations never heal—cutting injuries and insults of serrated and poison-dripping edge—so, too, there are consolations of tone too fine for the ear not fondly and for ever to retain their echo: caressing kindesses… I have been told since that Dr. Bretton was not nearly so perfect as I thought him: that his actual character lacked the depth, height, compass, and endurance it possessed in my creed. I don’t know: he was as good to me as the well is to the parched wayfarer—as the sun to the shivering jailbird. I remember him heroic. Heroic at this moment will I hold him to be.” (*Villette* 224)

Lucy describes words as weapons, “knives, whose deep-inflicted lacerations never heal,” with the ability to “poison” her, so that in her mind words have violent power. At the same time, words have the ability to “caress kindesses,” “too fine” for the ear not to love. These contrasting powers suggest that Graham’s words can do anything, either fulfilling or destroying Lucy’s
happiness. Graham’s words have this effect because Lucy has feelings for him, leaving her vulnerable to Graham’s potential “poison” as well as his “kindness.” The imagery at the end of the passage likens Dr. John Graham Bretton to a “well… to the parched wayfarer,” and “the sun to the shivering jailbird.” This expresses Lucy’s dependence on Graham, as a “parched wayfarer” would need the “well” to survive, and the “shivering jailbird” would thrive on “the sun.” By portraying Graham as these necessary and powerful natural forces, Lucy demonstrates the potentially all-encompassing power of masculinity in romantic relationships, as Graham has complete control over Lucy’s emotions. Lucy’s present narration breaks down this image of masculine power, as she admits that she “ha[s] been told since that Dr. Bretton was not nearly so perfect as [she] thought him” (Villette 224). As she no longer has feelings for him, she can understand that he does not maintain sole power over her now. She still chooses to remember him as “heroic,” however, allowing him to have that sovereignty over her emotions in this memory. Lucy’s feelings are also unrequited, so Graham has increased power over her in that he does not return her love, and is not vulnerable in this way. This balance of power is associated with a sense of anxiety in the text, the imagery suggesting needs that cannot be fulfilled, which indicates uncertainty about the masculine role that is rooted in the shifting of masculine values over time. Men were simultaneously dependent upon their lovers and also able to hold power over them, reflecting a combination of Romantic gender roles and the increasingly prevalent conceptualization of Victorian companionship. The power dynamic from earlier centuries by no means disappeared: “While courting men, even married men, might well find hierarchy challenged by the love they shared with women, men's advisors made it clear that love and gender distinctions went hand in hand” (Stearns and Knapp 773). There was still a level of
gender hierarchy involved in romantic love, even though the idealized trope of “true love” was often associated with a type of gender equality that did not exist in the prior marriage market.

Jane, Lucy, and Catherine all feel at some time that they are at the mercy of men in a romantic sense, as their descriptions of love convey a sense of helplessness. This lines up with ideologies of the period, which highlighted men as the more accomplished party in the spectacle of romance: "In the modern division of sexual labor, women [were] still addressed en masse as amateur specialists of the heart, practicing an inconsequential mastery in the antechambers of male professionalism" (Matthews 425). Men had the ability to enchant women, exerting a sense of romantic power over them. Lucy expresses a feeling of powerlessness in relation to Graham: “Who could help liking him? He betrayed no weakness” (Villette 202). Lucy asks “who could help,” as if it would be impossible for anyone to dislike him, but also suggesting that she herself cannot “help liking him,” as if she has no control over her feelings. Catherine makes a similar comment about Linton when Nelly asks, “First and foremost, do you love Mr Edgar?” ‘Who can help it? Of course I do,’ she answered” (Wuthering Heights 88). As previously referenced, Catherine asks, “who can help it,” turning Nelly’s question outward instead of answering it directly. She emulates a feeling of powerlessness just as Lucy does, as if Edgar’s charms outweigh her self-control. Finally, Jane says the same about Rochester: “I could not help it. I thought of him now—in his room—watching the sunrise; hoping I should soon come to say I would stay with him and be his” (Jane Eyre 321). Jane cannot “help” thinking about Rochester as she is leaving him, and in one of her best moments of feminine empowerment, when she has refused his proposal after finding out about Bertha, she still is at his mercy, and cannot “help” herself. These strong women consistently find themselves helpless to man’s will, demonstrating the potential patriarchal power that romance introduced.
Paul Emanuel’s power over Lucy manifests itself in a similar way, as their romantic connection is idealized in some ways, and is simultaneously portrayed as stifling for Lucy’s independence. At the end of the novel, when she is asking him about their relationship, he responds in an arbitrary way: “Do I displease your eyes much?” I took courage to urge: the point had its vital import for me. He stopped, and gave me a short, strong answer; an answer which silenced, subdued, yet profoundly satisfied. Ever after that I knew what I was for him; and what I might be for the rest of the world, I ceased painfully to care” (Villette 440). This response is romantic, assumedly a kiss, and is a culmination of the romantic tension that has been building between the characters. It makes Lucy happy, and therefore it is pleasing as a resolution to their love plot. However, the language describing the kiss speaks to the power dynamic between the characters: the kiss “silenced,” “subdued,” and “satisfied” her, words that evoke imagery of subservience, loss of power, and sexual gratification as opposed to addressing her as an equal. Lucy only cares “what [she] was for him,” making Paul her primary source of happiness; she is asking whether she is enough for him, as if he has the power to judge her merit. Their romantic connection puts him in a position of power over her, which reflects on the potential inequality between genders that the idea of true love brought about. However, M. Paul does not take advantage of his power over Lucy, and although the potential for exploitation is there, he instead takes the opportunity to support her independence. He buys her a school and helps her reach financial independence: “Reader, they were three happiest years of my life… I commenced my school; I worked- I worked hard (448). Lucy is able to achieve her goal of owning a school through Paul’s kindness, and although these “three happ[y] years” are the ones without him, they are provided to her through his generosity. The romanticization of love allowed men to exert power over women in both intentional and inadvertent ways, leading to a feeling of necessity or
desire that made women vulnerable, yet sometimes resulting in more fulfilling relationships. It is important to note that it is not only the fact that M. Paul is a man that gives him power; he is able to control Lucy through actual romantic acts, indicating a power dynamic based not only in gender but in loving marital relationships. Masculinity therefore encompasses both power and vulnerability in romantic relationships, demonstrated in Lucy’s maintenance of power over M. Paul and his simultaneous ability to overpower her.

*Wuthering Heights* is known for its portrayal of deep, spiritual love, as Heathcliff’s very being seems to depend upon his love for Catherine. When Catherine is dying, Heathcliff laments her death as if he is a part of her, as he believes that their souls are entwined. Heathcliff sacrifices masculine pride and power in favor of a romantic connection:

“‘May she wake in torment!’ he cried, with frightful vehemence, stamping his foot, and groaning in a sudden paroxysm of ungovernable passion. ‘Why, she’s a liar to the end! Where is she? Not *there*—not in heaven—not perished—where? Oh! you said you cared nothing for my sufferings! 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! The murdered *do* haunt their murderers, I believe. I know that ghosts *have* wandered on earth. Be with me always—take any form—drive me mad! only *do* not leave me in this abyss, where I cannot find you! Oh, God! it is unutterable! I *cannot* live without my life! I *cannot* live without my soul!’” (*Wuthering Heights* 191)

Heathcliff “cannot” understand a life on earth without Catherine. His feelings are “ungovernable”; he not only begs her to “haunt” him, but even to drive him “mad” if he is able to maintain contact with her. He speaks as if he and Catherine are one person, calling her “my life” and “my soul,” demonstrating that he does not know who he is without her: he is completely
dependent. The word “unutterable” is extremely powerful here, showing that he is incapable of thinking or speaking about a world without her. This portrayal of Heathcliff’s reliance on Catherine is indicative of a power dynamic contrasting those we have already seen: Heathcliff is willing to relinquish any power he has on earth in order to be haunted by her. He is giving her full reign to take control of his life, simply because he loves her so much. While he maintains some masculine power in his demanding tone, his message is desperate, begging her to remain with him and not to come to rest, as he cannot exist without her. This kind of message portrays another contrasting vision of masculinity, as Heathcliff gives all the power to his lover in order to maintain what he feels is a manifestation of true love.

Victorian men were expected to show a sensitive side in their romantic relationships that contrasted with the strong aggressive energy they exerted in the public sphere, and the Brontë sisters both engage with and challenge this trope in their works. We see this with Heathcliff, whose hardened exterior breaks down in Catherine’s presence: “They were silent—their faces hid against each other, and washed by each other’s tears. At least, I suppose the weeping was on both sides; as it seemed Heathcliff could weep on a great occasion like this” (Wuthering Heights 185). It takes a “great occasion” for Heathcliff to shed tears, as Catherine is dying, and Nelly can only “suppose” that he is crying because it happens so rarely. The “rough,” “stern” exterior that Heathcliff usually exhibits is broken down into a “half-civilised ferocity,” with “eyes full of black fire” when Catherine is present (Wuthering Heights 109). Heathcliff’s vulnerability in the face of Catherine’s death either suggests that he allows himself to express emotions through love, or that he cannot help himself to do so. In either case, his sensitivity is inextricably linked to feelings of love, leading him to set aside a typical strength associated with masculinity when
he is having a private moment with Catherine. This follows a model of male behavior in public versus private, indicating a discrepancy between internalized and social values:

“Precisely because men had to adopt a calm and calculating demeanor in their public sphere, they sought a richly expressive private counterpart… They accepted, even gloried in the idea that love required full emotional disclosure, agreeing with women that any holding back contradicted the basic goals of love. They accepted also the pain that love could bring, sometimes noting their jealousy when a lover showed interest in others.”

(Stearns and Knapp 771)

In some ways, relationships served as emotional channels for men that had not existed before, as they were able to show vulnerability within the domestic sphere. This concept of Victorian companionate relationships, then, provides an outlet for Heathcliff to surrender the hyper-masculine façade and embrace a more Romantic definition of masculinity, exhibiting heightened emotion and sensibility. In this way, the companionate love associated with the Victorian era actually provided men a way to relapse into sensible masculinity without being classified as feminine; romantic love separated sensitivity from femininity.

In contrast to Emily Brontë’s depiction of Heathcliff, M. Paul and Rochester are able to cohere with a façade of masculinity in their displays of romantic love. These men still demonstrate passionate love, but only admit to the emotions attached when they are in private. Social norms demanded that men exhibit moral and mental strength, which in some ways conflicted with the demonstration of emotion: "the trope of mid-century love at first sight constructs male heterosexuality as a performance of simultaneously instinctual and moral passion" (Matthews 426). Although the concept of “performance” is often associated with women, men also took part, and were expected to demonstrate an understanding of “moral”
reasoning as well as “instinctual passion,” representing both the conscientious and passionate man at once. This binary is demonstrated in the men’s smiles: “I saw Mr. Rochester smile:—his stern features softened; his eye grew both brilliant and gentle, its ray both searching and sweet” (Jane Eyre 175). Mr. Rochester is “softened” by the smile, implying that he has shed his hard exterior. His eyes grow “gentle” and “sweet,” and yet simultaneously become “brilliant” and “searching,” representing the binary of romantic softness and simultaneous intellectual rationality. M. Paul goes through a similar transition: “He smiled… any illuminated sign of milder or warmer feelings struck me as wholly new in his visage. It changed it as from a mask to a face: the deep lines left his features; the very complexion seemed clearer and fresher; that swart, sallow, southern darkness which spoke his Spanish blood, became displaced by a lighter hue” (Villette 293). Paul’s smile is associated with warmth as well, and just as Mr. Rochester’s face is transformed, Paul’s face is “changed… as from as mask to a face,” completely softened and “fresher.” The “sallow” aspect of his “visage” is eradicated, introducing a more emotional side; however Lucy does not speak of Paul losing his moral integrity, as he is described as seeming even “clearer and fresher.” These men maintain an air of social sentience while emulating subtle feelings of romantic love, which is in direct contrast to Heathcliff’s displays of passionate energy, and complicates the construction of men in love. For Rochester and M. Paul, romantic love is still a venue in which to be vulnerable, conflating several separate definitions of sexuality, and yet they still operate within social norms for Victorians, showing how traits of the Romantic era can shift into Victorianism.

Complementarity
Victorian romantic love frequently celebrated the soul as a manifestation of passionate love, so that a connection of the soul became representative of a deeper connection between people. This is especially apparent in *Wuthering Heights*, as Catherine continually contrasts Heathcliff to Linton in a discussion of their souls: “because he’s more myself than I am. Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same; and Linton’s is as different as a moonbeam from lightning, or frost from fire” (*Wuthering Heights* 91). Catherine feels a different connection to Heathcliff in that they are “the same,” whereas Linton, while desirable, is “different.” Heathcliff represents both the passionate “fire” and “lightning” that Catherine associates with herself, while Linton’s soul of “moonbeam” and “frost” is the polar opposite: peaceful and cool as opposed to wildly hot and uncontrollable. This lines up with the nineteenth-century understanding of complementarity, a major theory of gender construction that suggested men and women were complete opposites, but complements of each other: “Complementarians articulated a vision of men and women not just as opposites but as interdependent parts of a physical and moral whole in which their complementary opposition (and not sameness or equality) was important to the smooth working of society” (Schiebinger 224). Men and women, it was theorized, metaphorically make up two parts of one whole, and so a man’s wife should be his perfect opposite, the “other half” of his personality. This theory suggests that men and women are opposite in every way, which provided a basis for discrimination centered around “essential” differences between genders (225). Complementarity was associated with a connection between souls, but in a way that allowed women to be othered in the context of their romantic relationships. This passage in *Wuthering Heights* completely explodes the theory of complementarity in that it undoes gender difference. If Catherine and Heathcliff are the same, making Linton their complement, then the very concept that women and men are opposites of
each other are undermined. Linton is defined here as Heathcliff’s complement as well as Catherine’s, and if two men can embody complementary traits, then the idea that one man and one woman serve as perfect complements is destroyed in that Linton has two complements, and one of them is male. This introduces a level of complexity in that Emily Brontë is undermining widely accepted theorizations of the period by interrupting the one-on-one Victorian relationship with a triangulation of similarity and difference.

Emily Brontë adopts the language of complementarity in her descriptions of Heathcliff and Linton, as she portrays Heathcliff as Catherine’s equal, while Linton is her complement, her opposite. In choosing to marry Linton, Catherine embraces the ideology of complementarity, and yet her continued spiritual connection to Heathcliff contradicts the validity of this choice:

“My great miseries in this world have been Heathcliff’s miseries, and I watched and felt each from the beginning: my great thought in living is himself. If all else perished, and he remained, I should still continue to be; and if all else remained, and he were annihilated, the universe would turn to a mighty stranger: I should not seem a part of it.—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. 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. So don’t talk of our separation again: it is impracticable….”

*(Wuthering Heights 93)*

Catherine and Heathcliff are portrayed as the same soul in two bodies; not opposite parts of a whole, but two manifestations of the same being. Catherine finds nothing else on earth necessary to her survival but Heathcliff: “if all else perished, and he remained, I should still continue to
be,” and she cannot survive without him. Linton is associated with “the foliage in the woods”; he is changeable, contrasting with Heathcliff’s solidity: “the eternal rocks beneath.” Catherine says, “I am Heathcliff,” connecting herself with these “eternal rocks,” portraying Linton as her complement, and interestingly, also a complement to Heathcliff. The image of the tree here suggests both life and death, something beautiful but changeable and something that will fade away. Heathcliff’s love is sturdy and immovable, not beautiful or romantic, but ever lasting, a structure upon which everything else stands. Catherine identifies with these ever-present rocks, which associates her with the more solid, masculine image, and Linton with the more feminine tree. Mixing these gender roles as such undermines complementarity, and although a tree needs rocks in order to grow, that same tree will break rock down into dirt with its roots, so the triangular relationship between the three lovers is highly complicated and problematizes complementarity. Catherine’s “separation” from Heathcliff is “impracticable,” suggesting a spiritual bond that is unbreakable, forming an obsessive relationship. Catherine’s relation to Linton, her complement, will be “change[d]” by “time,” whereas she expects her relationship with Heathcliff to be “eternal.” This directly challenges the theory of complementarity, as the relationship between Catherine and Linton has less longevity than Catherine’s feelings for her identical counterpart.

These patterns continue into the second generation of *Wuthering Heights* in that complementarity is disrupted by triangular relationships between men and women. Although the final scene between Hareton and Cathy is widely interpreted as a revision of the previous generation, a perfect domestic scene in which she teaches him to read in an equal partnership. Heathcliff, however, has had so much control over their relationship that he never fully disappears, and so remains ingrained in their connection as a third party:
“Then she comprehended that Earnshaw took the master’s reputation home to himself; and was attached by ties stronger than reason could break—chains, forged by habit, which it would be cruel to attempt to loosen. She showed a good heart, thenceforth, in avoiding both complaints and expressions of antipathy concerning Heathcliff; and confessed to me her sorrow that she had endeavoured to raise a bad spirit between him and Hareton: indeed, I don’t believe she has ever breathed a syllable, in the latter’s hearing, against her oppressor since.” (Wuthering Heights 356)

Hareton is linked to Heathcliff by “ties stronger than reason could break”; even reason, understood as the weapon of man, could not undo their connection to each other, and so Heathcliff becomes an immovable object, ingrained in Cathy’s relationship to Hareton. Heathcliff brought Linton and Cathy together to spite older Catherine as well as his son with Isabella, and it is partially this miserable relationship that leads Cathy to Hareton. Cathy also serves as an interruption to Heathcliff and Hareton’s relationship, as she wishes to “avoid” further actions that may “raise a bad spirit” between the men. Cathy, Hareton, and Heathcliff are involved in a homosocial and domestic relationship that ultimately interrupts the perfect domestic scene between Cathy and Hareton, as the “master” even influences what Cathy says to Hareton, “I don’t believe she has ever breathed a syllable, in the latter’s hearing, against her oppressor since.” Emily Brontë uses this triangulation to complicate the role of men in relationships by undermining the concept of complementarity, therefore refusing a fully concrete definition of masculinity that paints men as opposites of women.

Complementarity was supported by much discourse of the period, including social and scientific research; therefore Brontë’s challenge to this theory would have been controversial. In

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her book, *The Mind Has No Sex?*, Londa Schiebinger explicates the Victorian understanding of complementarity, structuring her argument around scientific data from the period. She writes, “Complementarity, developed with the enthusiastic participation of the scientific community, provided the fundamental justification for the continued exclusion of women from science. But it was not simply *women* who were to be excluded from science. Rather, a whole set of values, qualities, and characteristics subsumed under the term *femininity* was barred” (Schiebinger 233-4). The theory of complementarity revolved around biological differences between the male and female, and essentially provided a systematic form of discrimination against women through a lens of gender relations. The idea that men and women were exact opposites fit into other gender discourse of the period as well, as women were understood as occupying a different space than men. Even female conduct books of the period embraced the complement theory. Emily Davies’ *The Higher Education of Women* (1866) articulates the relationship between complementarity and marriage:

"There is a theory afloat, extensively prevalent, and probably influencing many persons who have never stated it definitely to themselves, that the human ideal is composed of two elements, the male and the female, each requiring the other as its complement; and that the realisation of this deal is to be found in no single human being, man or woman, but in the union of individuals by marriage, or by some sort of vague marriage of the whole race.” (Davies 16-17)

Not only would a complementary man and woman make perfect spouses for each other, according to Davies, but there was only one complement for each person in the world, meaning that everyone had only one perfect partner. In this way, complementarity was romanticized to reflect tropes of the “one true love,” and many Victorians wholeheartedly subscribed to this
connection between social relations and science. A man’s ultimate goal under this theory was to find his complement, which would lead to an emulation of “perfect womanhood,” as the separate masculine and feminine spheres could operate in tandem (Schiebinger 5). By tearing down this prevalent theory, the Brontës challenge a popular gender discourse, simultaneously challenging and complicating the conceptualization of how men were to function in marriages and relationships, if not as foil to their wives.

*Jane Eyre* interacts with complementarity in a similar way, in the contrast between Jane and Blanche Ingram and their relationships with Rochester. Jane describes Rochester as “of [her] kind”: “‘He is not to them what he is to me,’ I thought: ‘he is not of their kind. I believe he is of mine;—I am sure he is—I feel akin to him—I understand the language of his countenance and movements: though rank and wealth sever us widely, I have something in my brain and heart, in my blood and nerves, that assimilates me mentally to him’” (*Jane Eyre* 175). Blanche and her group are not of Rochester’s “kind,” implying their opposition, while Jane seems to “understand” him in a unique way. In some ways, Rochester’s “rank and wealth” are complementary to Jane, as she is his opposite in that respect, and the language “sever us widely” is reminiscent of complementarian discourse. However, their “brain[s] and heart[s]” are of the same “kind,” indicating a connection similar to Catherine and Heathcliff’s, in contradiction of complementarity. This goes beyond complementarity, suggesting that the lovers are the same person, even more intimately connected than two parts of a whole, and that their shared being may not necessarily gendered. Blanche Ingram’s comments further this distinction between sameness and complementarity, as she states that in marriage, “I am resolved my husband shall not be a rival, but a foil to me. I will suffer no competitor near the throne; I shall exact and undivided homage: his devotions shall not be shared between me and the shape he sees in his
mirror” (*Jane Eyre* 179). Blanche desires a complement, not someone to “rival” or challenge her, but a “foil,” which Oxford defines as “what is trampled under foot” (“foil”). She wants a husband to give her full attention without competition, which is language directly reflecting complementarity: “By assigning men and women separate yet complementary spheres or moral competence, complementarians felt that men and women would complete-rather than compete with-one another” (Shiebinger 226). In engaging with complementary language so directly, Charlotte Brontë connects Blanche with the idea of complementarity, the failure of her relationship with Rochester reflecting problematic aspects of the theory. The Brontës add complexity to relations between the genders by invoking language associated with complementarity, challenging the theory and suggesting that masculinity and femininity may not be essentially oppositional; a loving relationship can result from a man and woman who are actually the same. Importantly, this challenge to complementarity undermines the idea that women should occupy a domestic sphere because of innate biological differences, complicating social views of the separation of spheres.

*Challenging the Separation of Spheres*

A central aspect of relations between men and women was how they interacted in and outside the home, and in engaging with gender politics the Brontës challenge the strict separation of domestic and public spheres that was still prevalent in the early 1800’s. One aspect of socialized masculinity was the expectation that men would have primary power in the public sphere, caring for all matters outside the home, while women were expected to rule over the domestic domain (Garton 43). In practice, however, these spheres were not so clearly separated,
since much of a man’s public image was related to the status of his home. We see this in all three novels, as there is a lack of conventionally public or private spaces: the characters exist in hybrid spaces, which evades the standard separation of men and women. The Brontës complicate depictions of power in the public and private spheres in the relationships between men and women, highlighting the interactive and unstable relationship of the domestic and social worlds. These novels highlight a separation of spheres and construct the image of “angel in the home” just to deconstruct them, portraying these separations as inorganic, roles put upon the female characters by the males to categorize them into certain functions. This male reliance upon placing the female in traditional roles reflects masculine anxiety about the definition of masculinity; the men in these novels attempt to keep the female characters constant in order to define their own changing identities around a more stable concept. Although the female characters resist this compartmentalization, the male characters’ attempts to categorize them further demonstrates the shifting nature of masculinity, portraying the separation of spheres as an anxious attempt by men to keep the construction of gender from collapsing in on itself.

Charlotte Brontë’s treatment of the separation of spheres is connected with the source of male versus female power, and yet in Villette, she suggests inconsistencies in the Victorians’ reliance on the separation of domestic and public, demonstrating the impracticability of this segregation:

“How often, while women and girls sit warm at snug fire-sides, their hearts and imaginations are doomed to divorce from the comfort surrounding their persons, forced out by night to wander through dark ways, to dare stress of weather, to contend with the snow-blast, to wait at lonely gates and stiles in wildest storms, watching and listening to see and hear the father, the son, the husband coming home.” (Villette 254)
As the women “wait” in “comfort,” they endure mental anxiety in hoping for the safety of their “men,” the women’s lives revolving around the man’s “coming home.” He is out in public, dealing with business, while she is maintaining the home: this image conveys a view of the hard-working, dedicated male, catered to and cared for by his wife, daughter, or mother. The figure of the “angel in the house” developed as a result of this ideal sphere separation, portraying women as dainty domestic servants who perfectly maintained the home for their husbands. However, this passage also has a darker tone; the women are “doomed,” “forced,” and “stress[ed]” as they care for their men. This represents the implausibility of completely separating public and private spheres. The angel in the home ideal was nearly impossible to maintain, and men and women often inhabited both the public and the private worlds. This was largely because the domestic image was not private at all, but had a great impact on a family’s social status, so that the spheres blended together: “…it’s now widely recognized that constant emphasis on the 'separation of spheres' is misleading, partly because men's privileged ability to pass freely between the public and the private was integral to the social order” (Tosh 188). Although Victorians tried to uphold this separation of spheres, the fact that the domestic sphere had an impact on the public immediately connected them, giving women power outside the home and therefore undermining the public, male source of power. The Brontës embrace this complexity of spheres in their novels, as the public and private are repeatedly intertwined, and sometimes portrayed as completely nonexistent. This undermines man’s monopoly on the public sphere of business, so that masculinity is no longer necessarily rooted in a man’s power over the traditionally feminine.

*Jane Eyre, Wuthering Heights,* and *Villette* all incorporate the image of the angel as a representation of domestic life, but the trope is complicated in its symbolic representation of sphere separation. Rochester’s view of Jane as an angel is suggestive of his imagined role for her
in their marriage, but she demands that he reassess this vision:

“Ten years since, I flew through Europe half mad; with disgust, hate, and rage as my companions: now I shall revisit it healed and cleansed, with a very angel as my comforter.” I laughed at him as he said this. “I am not an angel,” I asserted; “and I will not be one till I die: I will be myself. Mr. Rochester, you must neither expect nor exact anything celestial of me—for you will not get it, any more than I shall get it of you: which I do not at all anticipate.” (Jane Eyre 260)

Rochester compares Jane to Bertha, juxtaposing his “angel” with a demon that caused him “disgust, hate, and rage,” his comment that he was “half mad” hinting at their marriage, her position as his other half. He calls Jane an “angel” and “comforter,” evoking imagery of the angel in the house and suggesting that he expects her to fill this comforting, domestic role. Rochester attempts to close Jane off into the role of angel, and this can be seen as an attempt to compartmentalize her in order to better understand his own role in their relationship. Women and men are defined in opposition to each other, and so if Jane is constructed as the angel, this allows Rochester to frame his confused understanding of masculinity around a stagnant role, as opposed to both genders being in a constant state of change. This represents the appeal of the “angel in the house” role; as the role of masculinity shifted drastically during this period, men attempted to keep women categorized as domestic so that they could have a more solid gender role to define themselves against, as the system of gender construction would collapse in on itself if there were no constant. Jane, however, immediately challenges this definition of her role. She will not claim the title: “I am not an angel,” and the active verb “asserted” shows her commitment to this position. She instructs him to adjust his expectations, telling him he “must neither expect no exact anything celestial of [her],” which simultaneously tells him that she will not be perfect and
that she will not be his domestic servant. She also does not expect him to be “celestial,” errorless in his endeavors. Jane tells Rochester in this scene that their marriage will not fit conventional understandings of gender roles, that masculine love does not require a strict application of the division between private and public. Charlotte Brontë’s heroine refuses the categorization as an angel, which puts her on a more even plane with Rochester but undermines his attempts to construct femininity as an opposition to masculinity.

Graham Bretton’s treatment of Ginevra Fanshawe in *Villette* demonstrates the woman-worship associated with the angel in the house, as his language makes the image of the angel seem idealized and unattainable. He says, “‘She is so lovely, one cannot but be loving towards her. You—every woman older than herself, must feel for such a simple, innocent, girlish fairy a sort of motherly or elder-sisterly fondness. Graceful angel! Does not your heart yearn towards her when she pours into your ear her pure, childlike confidences? How you are privileged!’ And he sighed” (*Villette* 135). There is a sense of innocence and beauty associated with the angel in this male fantasy; she is “simple,” “innocent,” “lovely,” “graceful,” and “childlike.” He also likens her to a “girlish fairy,” a supernatural reference which associates a mythical quality with the angel. This is an idealized image, and readers know that Ginevra is nothing like Graham’s description: his depiction is magical but not realistic. The perfect domestic woman, according to Dr. John Graham Bretton, acts like a child; she is easily controlled and beautiful to look at. This reflects a masculine idealization of women, reinforcing the fact that men attempted to characterize women as idyllic angels in order to keep the role of femininity as a constant against which to understand masculinity. Graham’s celebration of this ideal is proven fruitless when he comes to see Ginevra’s true coquettish character. Virginia Woolf has been quoted saying, “killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer” (*Woolf* 1384),
and Charlotte Brontë does just this in her depiction of Graham’s feelings toward Ginevra. The unrealistic nature of the angel image reflects the impossibility of such a role, and breaks down the construction of men as masters of the public domain in opposition to women who were perfectly domestic, embodying “the ideal of womanhood… the selflessly devoted and submissive wife and mother” (Hoffman 264). Brontë deconstructs these roles in order to simultaneously demonstrate the complexity of these roles in relation to each other, and to emphasize masculine anxieties about their inability to define maleness.

*Wuthering Heights* further erodes this concept of angelhood, as Catherine is completely expelled from this domestic role. She envisions herself being cast out of heaven: “…heaven did not seem to be my home; and I broke my heart with weeping to come back to earth; and the angels were so angry that they flung me out into the middle of the heath on the top of Wuthering Heights; where I woke sobbing for joy…I’ve no more business to marry Edgar Linton than I have to be in heaven” (*Wuthering Heights* 91). Catherine associates becoming a Linton with being an angel; as his wife, she will be expected to embody middle class angelic ideals, and she does not believe this type of lifestyle will suit her: “did not seem to be my home.” She wishes to “come back to earth” and “the heath,” suggesting Heathcliff’s more natural, earthly state of being, and in her dream she is returned to “the middle of the heath” of Wuthering Heights, which is uncivilized landscape that contrasts social norms. She understands that “angels” reside in “heaven”; she sees an ideal life, a beautiful picture of domesticity, but does not feel that she belongs there. This places Catherine’s two potential lives in conflict with each other, depicted as “heaven” and “the heath,” and in this passage she wishes to return to nature, outside the constricting spheres of the home and the image of the angel. This not only places Linton and Heathcliff in direct competition, but also portrays Linton as a more stagnant form of masculine,
one which is the companion of the angel, whereas Heathcliff fits into no such category. Emily Brontë here interacts with the angel in a different way, juxtaposing it with more a natural livelihood, which portrays the angel as unnatural and constructed. Catherine does choose to be with Linton, suggesting that this life is not necessarily undesirable, but the fact that as a woman, Catherine does not feel she fits within the heavenly world indicates that the idyllic image of the angel is forced upon women, not an innate aspect of femininity. At the root of these deconstructed examples of the woman as “angel” is an analysis of how masculinity and femininity interact in a relationship: the heroes and heroines in these novels do not fit into typical male-female roles within the domestic sphere, suggesting that relationships are able to transcend these constructed façades. The male characters’ attempts to force these women into categories represent their desire to keep women stagnant so that they can better understand their own gender roles.

The Brontës also manipulate setting to challenge understandings of spheres, as all three novels feature these types of uncategorized spaces; they are not public or private, but open to both genders. These spaces represent a breakdown of traditional gender roles, exploring the complexity of masculine and feminine relationships. Thornfield Hall is one such space, as it functions both as Rochester and Jane’s home as well as his venue for entertainment, which affects his public image. Rochester also invites Jane to join the party he hosts, telling Mrs. Fairfax that it is “my particular wish” (Jane Eyre 169), and although the party takes place in a domestic space, Rochester takes the opportunity to introduce Jane into his social sphere by asking her to be present in the company of Blanche Ingram and the others. Rochester takes a risk in breaking the sphere separation in this way, putting Jane is in a liminal position between Rochester’s public and private life, both in her role as a governess and in his feelings for her.
This then complicates the strict separation of women and men in their respective spheres. The boundary between the private and public spheres is essentially eradicated here, as Rochester blends his social and domestic reputations and responsibilities through Jane. Jane’s influence on Rochester then introduces a new type of space, not public or private, but something in between. Many of the spaces in *Jane Eyre* fit this mold: Lowood School, Thornfield, Fern Dean, and Marsh End all exist in a combination of public and private, and the only truly private space is the attic where Bertha resides, which portrays the private, domestic, womanly sphere as haunted and demonic. Jane does not have the typical feminine influence over Rochester, but is able to control his masculinity in more powerful ways: “Jane’s influence does not constitute her as the angel in the home, the figure of domestic benevolence and civility… here, influence means the capacity to engage with a greater power while enjoying one’s capacity to keep it in check” (Garofalo 146-7). Jane interacts with Rochester on a social level, becoming part of his economic life in her role as his employee. She is automatically incorporated into Rochester’s public life because she is part of his business, and her influence on his social sphere goes even further than this professional relationship: “Did I forbid myself to think of him in any other light than as a paymaster? Blasphemy against nature!” (*Jane Eyre* 175). Jane is involved with Rochester both as an employee and as a lover, so that she is an integral part of his economic affairs, which would be considered part of his public life, but is also involved in the private domesticity of his relationship.

The setting in *Wuthering Heights* similarly amalgamates the public and private spheres, breaking down the associated feminine and masculine boundaries. Catherine and Heathcliff exist in a state of natural wilderness in the beginning of *Wuthering Heights*, neither fully a part of the domestic or social spheres:
“We ran from the top of the Heights to the park, without stopping—Catherine completely beaten in the race, because she was barefoot. You’ll have to seek for her shoes in the bog tomorrow… Both of us were able to look in by standing on the basement, and clinging to the ledge, and we saw—ah! it was beautiful—a splendid place carpeted with crimson, and crimson-covered chairs and tables, and a pure white ceiling bordered by gold.”

*(Wuthering Heights 53)*

Catherine and Heathcliff are connected in this passage as if they are the same person, running through a mutual space. Catherine removes her shoes, expressing a lack of concern for seeming feminine or frail in public. The language focuses on “we” and “both of us,” linking the two together in a space that is neither private nor in the eye of the public: it is out in the open, but belongs to only the two of them in this moment. Heathcliff and Catherine are also shut out of the Linton home together. They look in on the domestic space and are in awe of its beauty, calling it “splendid,” “beautiful,” and remarking the “crimson” and “gold,” colors indicative of wealth. However, they are only able to see from the outside, were able to look in by standing on the basement, and clinging to the ledge,” implying that neither of them are welcome in this domestic space. They are excluded from the private but are not in public, which places them together in a natural, unsocialized space. The breakdown of these spheres serves as a metaphor for the erosion of traditional gender roles in their relationship, so that Catherine and Heathcliff come to be the same person, taking on identical roles. Catherine is eventually taken into the feminized, domestic Linton household, where gender roles are more structured, while Heathcliff continues to exist in the hybrid worlds of Wuthering Heights and the moors. However, Catherine’s diary remains with Heathcliff as an anchor to him, and through her return as a ghost as well as the diary, Catherine escapes typical limits of space and completely breaks down the concept of public and private in
"Wuthering Heights" (Berg 7). This breakdown of spheres forces Heathcliff’s masculinity to exist in an amalgamation of public and private spheres, bringing Catherine and Heathcliff closer in that they can exist in both public and private together.

The settings in all three novels resist categorization as public or private, domestic or social: Rochester’s private home, which is the scene of the most social actions of the novel; the untamed landscape of Wuthering Heights, both the estate and its surrounding moors; Mme. Beck’s school, which is both Lucy’s living space and her workplace, where she has no privacy due to her employer’s snooping. The Brontës resist caging their heroines into strictly domestic spheres, therefore allowing these women to have power over social image and therefore portrayals of both femininity and masculinity. In her article “Homesick: The Domestic Interiors of Villette,” Monica Feinberg says of the novel: “the distinction between public or impersonal social transactions and private or personal social transactions breaks down” (Feinberg 173). The women and men are not equal in all aspects in these novels, but in bringing together the social and personal transactions, the Brontës downplay the imagined differences that result from social construction of gender roles. These themes bring up questions of how masculine power manifests itself: men must rely not only on themselves, but also on women and other men to reinforce their masculinity, demonstrating that masculine power comes from interactions with others, not solely an “inner essence” of manhood. The male characters therefore attempt to place women in the category of “angel” in order to better frame their own changing masculine role, keeping the feminine stagnant to balance the shifting masculine. The women’s refusal to accept this leads to a breakdown of separation between domestic and public, maintaining a construction of complex masculinity that has the potential to unravel without a constant definition of the feminine.


Chapter Three: Sexual Desire, Passion, and the Masculine Ideal

“I loved him in his wrath with a passion beyond what I had yet felt”:

“His eyes, wide and wet, at last flashed fiercely on her; his breast heaved convulsively. An instant they held asunder, and then how they met I hardly saw, but Catherine made a spring, and he caught her, and they were locked in an embrace from which I thought my mistress would never be released alive: in fact, to my eyes, she seemed directly insensible. He flung himself into the nearest seat, and on my approaching hurriedly to ascertain if she had fainted, he gnashed at me, and foamed like a mad dog, and gathered her to him with greedy jealousy. I did not feel as if I were in the company of a creature of my own species.” (Wuthering Heights 184)

“Victorians defined maleness as the possession of an innate, distinctively male energy that, in contrast to Freud, they did not represent as necessarily sexualized, but as an inchoate force that could be expressed in a variety of ways, only one of which is sexual. This interior energy was consistently imagined or fantasized in a metaphors of fluid, suggestively seminal, and in an imagery of flame.” (Sussman 10)

Victorian gender politics were inextricably linked to sexual passion and energy, and although the treatment of sex in nineteenth-century England was highly controversial, passion was undeniably important in governing how men and women interacted. Sexual desire was directly connected to eighteenth-century masculinity, as sexual control was an essential aspect of patriarchal power, and yet upon entering the Victorian era, men were also expected to demonstrate the ability to control themselves, suggesting that restraint was a necessary quality for a civilized man. Therefore, the very definition of masculine sexuality presented a contradiction for Victorians, as men were expected to hold power over their wives through sex, but also to maintain control over their own sexual passion to remain chaste, as it was a sign of masculine strength to refuse indulgence. Foucault argues that it was because of a quiet Victorian fascination with sex that sexuality transformed into an issue of power, enabling the maintenance and concealment of desire to quickly become a way for people to control each other (Foucault 57). He writes, “The learned discourse on sex that was pronounced in the nineteenth century was imbued with age-old delusions, but also with systematic blindnesses: a refusal to see and to understand; but further—and this is the crucial point—a refusal concerning the very thing that
was brought to light and whose formulation was urgently solicited” (55). Because sex brought power, then, it became associated with male control, allowing any man who could manipulate sex to hold power over anyone who desired him. Granted, women could use this tool in the same way, leading to a power struggle between genders in the realm of passionate desire. Sex gained power with secrecy, and although this encouraged sexual desire for males in some senses, it also discouraged open discussion or displays of sexuality, leading to a conflict between sexual power and self-control for Victorian men.

*The Maleness of Sexual Passion and Aggression*

Sexuality was engrained in the social functions of the nineteenth century, and in some senses allowed men to express their masculinity without concern. The Brontës utilize pronounced sexual imagery in these novels to examine the role of sex in Victorian lives: “Up the blood rushed to his face; forth flashed the fire from his eyes; erect he sprang; he held his arms out” (*Jane Eyre* 319). Rochester is infuriated here, and his passion is heightened in tandem with his anger, demonstrated in the “blood rush[ing]” to his face, the “fire” coming from his eyes, and the fact that he becomes “erect.” When faced with Jane leaving him, Rochester is portrayed as an erotic being, connecting his emotional need for Jane with his sexual desire for her. Similarly, Lucy appreciates the passionate aspect of M. Paul’s character: “He was roused, and I loved him in his wrath with a passion beyond what I had yet felt” (*Villette* 438). There is a sexual energy implied in Lucy’s “passion,” as she is enticed by his “wrath.” These men are more attractive and more enticing when they emote their passionate, more erotic sides, allowing their masculine energy to manifest itself in a physical, obvious way. Even Sylvester Graham, an author and

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4 The word “erect” was first documented in writing in a sexual context, in reference to the penis, in 1897 (OED). The etymology of the word, then, was evolving toward this meaning when *Villette* was written, and would have been understood in that sense by many readers.
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speaker famous for his condemnation of sex, writes favorably on the subject in his *Lecture to Young Men, on Chastity* in 1848. He is referenced here by Steven Seidman, author of “The Power of Desire and the Danger of Pleasure: Victorian Sexuality Reconsidered”: “Sex is necessary, argued Graham, to promote individual health and guarantee the reproduction of the species. To ensure that these ends are accomplished, sex is accompanied by sensual pleasure. These pleasures serve as a means by which the design of nature and God are realized” (Seidman 52). Graham spent most of his life preaching the evils of sex, and yet still concedes that sex is biologically and mentally good for a person’s “health.” Being sexual not only allowed men to exert their power, but also led them to promote “the reproduction of the species,” so that sex became a necessary and defining masculine force.

Expressions of sexual love, then, were particularly acceptable and celebrated in marital situations, as men were expected to maintain sexual relations with their wives. This was largely allowable because marital sex served a purpose: “Within the framework of true marriage sex is cleansed of all sensual desires and pleasures; it functions as a vehicle to express spiritual love” (Seidman 54). Because Victorians valued romantic love, sex in the context of such love and for the aim of reproduction in a marriage was generally seen as acceptable, similar to how modern society views marital relationships. Emily Brontë alters this ideal in her portrayal of Catherine and Heathcliff; although they are not married, the language celebrates his passion for her: “He got on to the bed, and wrenched open the lattice, bursting, as he pulled at it, into an uncontrollable passion of tears. ‘Come in! come in!’ he sobbed. ‘Cathy, do come. Oh, do—once more! Oh! my heart’s darling! hear me this time, Catherine, at last!’” (*Wuthering Heights* 31). Heathcliff’s “passion” for Catherine is romanticized here, as he uses language like “heart’s darling” and “at last,” suggesting a spiritual aspect to their love. The fact that Catherine’s soul
exists as a ghost is symbolic of a bond between Catherine and Heathcliff that goes beyond the social or physical, and their spiritual connection is then celebrated in sexual terms. The repetition of the word “oh,” along with the short sentences, dashes, and exclamation points suggests a breathlessness in Heathcliff’s language, and because this “passion” is “uncontrollable,” it evokes images of a reaction below consciousness, rooted in the soul. Catherine’s existence as a ghost is the object of Heathcliff’s desire, and Brontë’s description of their spiritual love in sexual terms represents the connection between sexual desire and spiritual or emotional need in a relationship. In her portrayal of Heathcliff’s love for Catherine, Emily Brontë conveys the message that the social institution of marriage is not a prerequisite of sexual desire; indeed, no physical or social being at all is necessary. Sexuality can and does manifest itself in solely spiritual and emotional relationships. The celebration of this type of spiritual sexuality portrays sexual desire as a deeper and more soulful connection than the social bonds of marriage that end when death “part[s]” a couple.

Spiritual and sexual desire was, however, associated with the ideal Victorian marriage, and although some schools of thought found any sexuality beyond procreation to be inappropriate or sinful, there was a general fear of emasculation in marriage that seemed to be offset with sexual behavior. *Jane Eyre* reflects anxieties about sexless marriages, especially in the image of the chestnut tree that is struck down by lightning, “writh[ing] and groan[ing],” (*Jane Eyre* 256) upon Rochester’s proposal to Jane. The image of this tree, symbolically castrated upon the foundation of Jane and Rochester’s relationship, arguably represents anxieties about fertility: “The cloven halves were not broken from each other, for the firm base and strong roots kept them unsundered below; though community of vitality was destroyed—the sap could flow no more: their great boughs on each side were dead, and next winter’s tempests would be sure to fell one or both to
earth: as yet, however, they might be said to form one tree—a ruin, but an entire ruin” (Jane Eyre 276). The tree, although still “one tree,” is in “ruin.” Its “vitality” has been destroyed, taking away its potential to create new life, and the “sap” can no longer “flow,” leaving the tree powerless. The tree stump as a phallic image has been castrated, representing a masculine force that can no longer exert erotic energy. Rochester then associates himself with the tree: “‘I am no better than the old lightning-struck chestnut-tree in Thornfield orchard,’ he remarked ere long. ‘And what right would that ruin have to bid a budding woodbine cover its decay with freshness?’” (Jane Eyre 444). The tree is not only symbolic of a loss of masculinity, but it also directly affects Rochester’s view of himself, and he associates with it because he has been metaphorically castrated in the fire. Jane, on the other hand, is “budding” and “fresh,” suggesting fertility and youth, which in Rochester’s eyes, makes her sexually superior to him. Rochester is weakened, feeling that he has no “right” to have Jane “cover” his “decay,” evoking a sense of lost masculinity and shame. Rochester’s reaction to this metaphoric castration, suggests that the infertility and the inability to be sexual was detrimental to a man’s sense of masculine power. The tree can also be read as a representation of Rochester’s failed relationship with Bertha, which again serves as a threat to Jane’s love for Rochester. The idea of a sexless marriage caused anxiety about masculinity for Victorians: “It is also interesting that public figures who were widely believed to practice abstinence in marriage, like John Stuart Mill or John Ruskin, suffered a loss of masculine reputation” (Tosh 183). It was emasculating to be in a relationship without sex, because sexual desire was a sign of masculine power.

The same anxiety about fertility is also expressed through bodily imagery, the fingers and hands portrayed as phallic symbols that represent male virility. The emphasis on bodily strength is imperative here, as it highlights the focus on physical masculinity that permeated the Victorian
psyche: “I at once noticed that hand. It was no more the withered limb of eld than my own; it was a rounded supple member, with smooth fingers, symmetrically turned” (Jane Eyre 202). Rochester’s hand as a “supple member” represents his youth and freshness, the “smooth,” “symmetrical” nature of this limb becoming a metaphor for the appeal of male sexuality. In using fingers and hands to emulate phallic imagery, Brontë is able to connect the nature of masculine sexuality inextricably to the male body, representing physical ability and strength as sexual robustness. This image directly contrasts with Rochester’s castrated limb later in the novel: “On this arm, I have neither hand nor nails,” he said, drawing the mutilated limb from his breast, and showing it to me. “It is a mere stump—a ghastly sight! Don’t you think so, Jane?”…“I thought you would be revolted, Jane, when you saw my arm, and my cicatrised visage” (Jane Eyre 436). Rochester is emasculated in the loss of his limb, the “mere stump” symbolic of his damaged nature and his loss of power over Jane. Castration then moves from a reflection of sex and passion to an important aspect of gender power dynamics, suggesting that a man’s sexual organ is part of his power over women. Although Rochester is not physically castrated, the loss of this body part leads to a loss of power, so that he is forced to be dependent upon Jane in some ways. The injury therefore becomes representative of castration, as both represent the loss of masculine power. Ultimately, this again links sexuality to a discourse of power between men and women, cementing the importance of the sexed body in determining masculine power.

_Corporeal Sources of Masculine Sexuality_

The male sexual drive is celebrated through images of the body in the Brontë novels, conveying the importance of bodily energy in the construction of masculinity and sexual behavior. R.W. Connell analyzes the anthropological argument that masculinity comes from a
bodily source, emanating from a sense of power in the corporeal self: “True masculinity is almost always thought to proceed from men’s bodies—to be inherent in a male body or to express something about a male body” (Connell 45). In Villette, this connection between body and sexuality is manifested in the sexual imagery associated with hands. A man’s hand, and specifically his grip, demonstrates a sense of masculine power, which represents the type of strength that Victorians valued in men. In its representation of bodily masculinity, Villette suggests both a value for passionate sexuality and a simultaneous need for men to exhibit chastity and self-control. Graham’s hand is directly associated with his personality, emulating multiple aspects of masculinity through the physical manifestation of his handwriting and letter seal: “Graham's hand is like himself, Lucy, and so is his seal—all clear, firm, and rounded—no slovenly splash of wax—a full, solid, steady drop—a distinct impress; no pointed turns harshly pricking the optic nerve, but a clean, mellow, pleasant manuscript, that soothes you as you read. It is like his face—just like the chiseling of his features: do you know his autograph?” (Villette 340). His “clear, firm, and rounded” strength, manifested in his “hand” and “seal,” is celebrated in this passage; these are adjectives that suggest control and restraint, and yet the words “firm” and “rounded” give a sense of physicality to the seal, evoking images of sexual arousal. Imagery of fluid is also representative of masculinity here, as Graham is able to give a “full, solid, steady drop” as opposed to a “slovenly splash of wax.” The “solid, steady” quality stands in opposition to the “slovenly splash”; the tone here indicates a general distaste for those men who cannot control their sexual passion, and the imagery suggests a reference to seminal energy. However, there is still a hinted appreciation for the “full, solid, steady drop,” and the “sooth[ing]” aspect of Graham’s physical writing, meaning that a sense of sexual attraction and awareness of masculine energy is present. Because Polly is speaking here, this indicates a level of sexuality that she
values in her relationship with Graham, as well as a sense of sexual satisfaction that she gets from him. Finally, because Graham’s hand and seal are equated with his body, “just like his face... the chiseling of his features,” these qualities of masculinity are directly associated with his body. Graham’s handwriting and seal, as an extension of his self, represent a respect for chastity of manhood, yet at the same time Polly’s words harbor a desire for a sexual satisfaction, and an appreciation of Graham’s sexual energy.

Mr. Rochester embodies this tension in a similar way, as Jane comments on both his passion and his control. She says, “Mr. Rochester heard, but heeded not: he stood stubborn and rigid, making no movement but to possess himself of my hand. What a hot and strong grasp he had! and how like quarried marble was his pale, firm, massive front at this moment! How his eye shone, still watchful, and yet wild beneath! (Jane Eyre 289). Mr. Rochester’s body movement emits both a feeling of strength and restraint, of “rigid,” “stubborn,” quality and of a “hot and strong grasp” that is undeniably sexual. Jane sees him as a “pale, firm,” statue, and simultaneously speaks about the heat she feels from his body. The last sentence is successful in showing the contradiction in masculine sexuality: “How his eye shone, still watchful, and yet wild beneath!” Rochester is able to “shine” with both a “watchful” quality and a “wild” one, and although these traits stand in contradiction to each other, it is their combination that leads Jane to see Rochester as a hero. The exclamation points in this passage evoke a feeling of surprise and excitement, portraying Rochester as a unique example of combined passion and control in masculinity that Jane has not seen elsewhere. The contradicting values of masculinity so often expressed in Victorian society and literature come together in this passage for Rochester, and yet when Jane says this, she is on the brink of losing her entire relationship due to Rochester’s past. Ultimately, then, although the novel gives us glimpses of an ideally balanced man in Rochester’s
level-headed love for Jane, Rochester and the other anti-heroes are not perfect, and continually struggle to embody the values society has prescribed for them.

The Brontë sisters embrace the celebration of carnal energy and sexual desire perhaps more than their contemporaries, so though they do impress upon readers the importance of the masculine dichotomy of control and chastity versus sexual indulgence, they tend to more emphatically embrace the desire for raw male sexuality. In each of the three novels, a more chaste man is offered as a pale second to the more sexual, robust man, which suggests a certain value in male sexual energy. The male characters express carnal desire in a direct tone that would have been decidedly sexual for Victorians, as it is in a modern reading:

“‘I never met your likeness, Jane: you please me, and you master me—you seem to submit, and I like the sense of pliancy you impart; and while I am twining the soft, silken skein round my finger, it sends a thrill up my arm to my heart. I am influenced—conquered; and the influence is sweeter than I can express; and the conquest I undergo has a witchery beyond any triumph I can win.’” (Jane Eyre 293)

Rochester’s general passion is linked to sex in this passage, establishing him as a sexual, masculine character. His language is laden with sexual references, as Jane “pleases,” “masters,” “conquers,” and “influences” him, and his mention of her skin, his fingers, and the thrill touching gives him is explicitly sexual. He forgoes the abstinent aspect of Victorian masculinity to let his carnal passion for Jane take over, embodying a hero that is simultaneously masculine and sexual. Because the language is grounded in the sense of touch, the body, and the veins, Rochester’s discussion of her “sweet[ness],” “master[y],” and “pleas[ure]” have a sexual connotation. Rochester references another dichotomy of Victorian society in that he enjoys that Jane both “submit[s]” to and “master[s]” him, referring to the complex sexual roles of women during this
time. The contradicting values of sex roles for both men and women in this passage represent the
general confusion for Victorians surrounding sexuality, but even amongst these complications,
Brontë seems to be celebrating a sense of sexual passion in relationships. Even male conduct
books of the era, which were notoriously traditional, admitted the value of intercourse in
relationships: “The greatest longevity and the best health are found among fathers and mothers;
thereby proving that orderly and well-regulated sexual intercourse is just as necessary to the
married couple as are the functional demands of all other organs of the body” (Guernsey 93).
Intercourse was not only “necessary,” but just as necessary as the “demands of all other organs,”
situating the need for sex with the need for food.

The complexity of sexual roles was complicated in its association with bodily control, as
being able to control one’s body was an imperative aspect of Victorian masculinity. It was a
battle to take over bodily functions to achieve complete management of the self, and this
conquering of energy was the goal of Victorian men: “Manliness is defined not as this essence
but as a hard-won achievement, a continuous process of maintaining a perilous psychic balance
characterized by regulation of this potentially destructive male energy” (Sussman 25). Maleness
was held as the opposite of femaleness: the achievement of control and power, as opposed to the
female tendency to give in to weaker wills. Men, then, had to be separated from the “sexual
contagion” of the female in order to reach this goal, held in separate spheres with the men
helping discipline the woman until they could be united according to social norms (Sussman
148). This differentiation in sexual roles of men and women contributed to the confusion about
men’s sexual roles. The necessity of a balance between sexual aggression and chastity was
linked to the body, so that the control of bodily forces, including seminal energy, was directly
indicative of masculine power.
Fluid Energy and Masculine Passion

For Victorians, the issues of masculinity and sexuality were united in the concept of bodily power, and the ability to demonstrate strength and self-control were imperative to the construction of manliness. In fact, the kind of energy involved controlling one’s body was required in all aspects of masculine life:

“Victorians defined maleness as the possession of an innate, distinctively male energy that, in contrast to Freud, they did not represent as necessarily sexualized, but as an inchoate force that could be expressed in a variety of ways, only one of which is sexual. This interior energy was consistently imagined or fantasized in a metaphorsics of fluid, suggestively seminal, and in an imagery of flame. The point of problematization for manhood or what the Victorian middle-class termed “manliness” was situated in developing what Foucault calls “practices of the self” (II: I3) for properly regulating or managing this internal, natural energy, “technologies of the self” (II: I I) that were consistently identified with the technologies of an industrializing society obsessed with harnessing the natural energy of water and fire.” (Sussman 10-11)

This concept of masculine “energy,” as defined by Herbert Sussman’s reading of Foucault, draws connections between sexual and social expectations, conjoining these spheres under a common expectation of strength and self-discipline. Controlling seminal fluid in terms of abstinence then relates to the industrial obsession with controlling natural powers, and was considered masculine as an extension of this fascination. Not only were these “natural energies” controlled, but men were to practice to become proficient at managing these forces, so that power over sexuality became codified akin to industrial power controlling water and fire. By
achieving this control, in both spheres, an individual could achieve “manliness”; in short, masculinity was reached by gaining power over the self. Bodily control then became a symbol of this masculinity, and an “obsession” with the control of fluid, seminal energy developed (Sussman 21). This control of fluid was undermined by nocturnal emissions and other unconscious sexual phenomena, leading to an increase of scientific study in this area (Sussman 20). Seminal control and fluid energy became representative of male sexuality during this period, and this image is referenced in many different types of primary sources from the era.

Male conduct books especially emphasized the importance of male power as liquid energy, as they were often based in science that understood semen as the physical manifestation of masculinity. One such conduct book, *The Relations of the Sexes* (1876) by Eliza B. Duffey, claimed that if a man were to lose too much of his semen, then he would sacrifice the valuable liquid that fed his male power:

“The semen is an important constituent of manhood. It contains the very essence of life. It is necessary for the proper development of a man, that this should be secreted, and then reabsorbed into his system, adding vigor and tone to his whole being. When this semen is secreted, nature notifies a man of the fact by giving him strong sexual desires; but if every desire is to be listened to and gratified, then no semen will be retained for absorption, and the most important agent for the nourishment of the brain, and strengthening and hardening the body is wasted. Men who are thus given to profitless use of this important secretion, in either lawful or unlawful indulgence, become weak, vacillating, and unenergetic in their natures, less firm in bone and muscle, have voices more approaching the feminine tone, and have lighter beards. They are, in fact, imperfect men, for they have been spendthrift of their manhood.” (Duffey 180)
Semen was synonymous with manhood, and was seen to feed into masculinity, so that if it were wasted it would lead to a lack of male power. Not only did this energy contribute to masculinity, but it was actually “necessary for the proper development of a man,” as it would be “reabsorbed” to reaffirm male strength and help contribute to the masculine quality of a man. Duffey calls semen the “most important agent for the nourishment of the brain,” essentially saying that men’s brains are innately different from women’s, as they are nourished by the male sex organ. This also places semen, and by association male sexuality, above any other factor in the development of masculinity. Without the “reabsorb[tion]” of semen, a man loses his manly qualities: he gains a “feminine tone,” a “lighter beard,” and becomes “imperfect.” Therefore, Duffey acknowledges sexuality as essential in determining manliness, but insists that the man must keep this sexual drive to himself to avoid “wasting” this “important constituent of manhood.” Biologically speaking, sexual activity is necessary for a man to continue his family line, and a sense of sexual aggression was often commended in men. This scientific terminology reflects the idea that men should be strong enough to have control over their sexuality, representing the ultimate contradiction in Victorian definitions of maleness: men had to be sexual to be considered masculine, but had to control that masculinity in order to maintain the sexual energy within their own bodies. The fact that The Relations of the Sexes was written by a woman furthers the work’s significance, as its representation of women’s view of men is unique.

Duffey’s ideas represent a popular Victorian school of thought, and other conduct books emulate similar ideals about the importance of males controlling their energy through liquid imagery. Sylvester Graham, an aforementioned American activist, wrote a Lecture to Young Men, on Chastity in 1848, a piece that expressed similar ideas. He wrote, “…the excretion of semen is to waste manhood and decrease the amount of manly fluid in the body (Graham 58).
Even in America, the concept that “manly fluid” and “manhood” were synonymous was a widely accepted view. This highlighted the importance of control for men of the period not only in the British Isles, but all over the world, emphasizing self-regulation and discipline as an aspect of the ideal Victorian man. Masturbation in particular was seen as damaging, as it was a waste of semen to no direct biological purpose. This is expressed by Henry N. Guernsey, an American doctor with an M.D., in his 1882 book, *Plain Talk on Avoided Subjects*, as he discusses the ways in which boys masturbating is damaging to their health. He says of young boys’ genitals:

“…[they] handle them so as to excite pleasurable sensations; erections of the penis are thus produced and finally, by this continual excitation with the hand, the height of sexual orgasm is reached, ejaculation of semen occurs and *self-pollution* is the consequence. This act is called “masturbation” and becomes a *secret vice of the worst kind!*” (Guernsey 34). The fact that self-pleasuring is, to Guernsey, “a secret vice of the worst kind,” resulting in “self-pollution” is representative of the Victorian fascination with masculine self-control. This text portrays masturbation as inexcusable and vile, primarily because the boy “excite[s] pleasurable sensations,” and leads to a loss of fluids, and this lack of sexual restraint is not representative of masculine ideals. Although these samplings from conduct books may only be a partial representation of opinions on the exertion of semen and masculinity in the form of fluid energy, they are contemporary accounts that provide insight into public knowledge of the period. Sexual energy was required in men; it came to define their manhood, and yet sexual activity was widely discouraged as an act of overindulgence and lack of self-control.

The Brontës incorporate the theme of fluid control through their female narrators, who describe men in the novels with images of liquid. These descriptions both fit and contrast with the contemporary male conduct books, as the female narrators often celebrate liquid energy as a
sense of masculinity: they associate fluidity with masculinity just as the conduct books do, but do not place the same emphasis on semen as a physical manifestation of male energy. The imagery paints fluidity in men as an enticing trait, drawing the female protagonists to these men. This fluidity also speaks to the importance of energy control in the development of manliness, however, which is directly related to the conduct book statements. Interestingly, Jane describes Rochester as a drink she can consume: “And if I had loved him less I should have thought his accent and look of exultation savage; but, sitting by him, roused from the nightmare of parting—called to the paradise of union—I thought only of the bliss given me to drink in so abundant a flow (Jane Eyre 255-6). She refers to his “accent and look of exultation” as a “drink in so abundant a flow,” so that his masculine look is manifested as a liquid presence. Rochester is depicted as emulating masculinity here, as he has “abundant” flow. The image of Jane ingesting Rochester as a “drink” is also sexualized, associating their potential sexual relationship with his masculine energy. M. Paul is described similarly in Villette, as Lucy speaks of “tasting” his “elixir”: “A cordial word from his lips, or a gentle look from his eyes, would do me good, for all the span of life that remained to me; it would be comfort in the last strait of loneliness; I would take it—I would taste the elixir, and pride should not spill the cup” (Villette 437). The word “taste” is even more sexualized than “drink,” as it evokes images of Lucy’s lips and tongue. “Elixir” is representative of a necessary or even life-saving drink, conveying the idea that Lucy needs this masculine energy in some way. Charlotte Brontë may not be directly referencing oral sex here, but the female ingestion of a manly liquid is essential in a symbolic way. Both Lucy and Jane take the liquid into themselves, and so if masculine fluid represents the embodiment of maleness, this could either indicate that the women become more masculine by consuming it, or that they are succumbing to the masculine energy. The men do not seem to lose any sense of
masculinity in this act, and yet there is still a sense in these novels that the fluidity associated with masculinity is connected to self-control. This further complicates the representation of the masculine role in sexuality, as the representation of fluid is both sexualized and connected with chastity.

Masculinity is further connected to sex in images of liquid control in *Jane Eyre*, as St. John Rivers describes his feelings for Rosamond Oliver in these terms. Although St. John never consummates his relationship with Rosamond, their feelings for each other are highly sexualized, and this passage is especially useful in that it is spoken by St. John himself in a discussion of their potential relationship:

“‘Fancy me yielding and melting, as I am doing: human love rising like a freshly opened fountain in my mind and overflowing with sweet inundation all the field I have so carefully and with such labour prepared—so assiduously sown with the seeds of good intentions, of self-denying plans. And now it is deluged with a nectarous flood—the young germs swamped—delicious poison cankering them: now I see myself stretched... at my bride Rosamond Oliver’s feet... —my heart is full of delight—my senses are entranced...Now,’ said he, ‘that little space was given to delirium and delusion. I rested my temples on the breast of temptation, and put my neck voluntarily under her yoke of flowers. I tasted her cup. The pillow was burning: there is an asp in the garland: the wine has a bitter taste: her promises are hollow—her offers false: I see and know all this.’” (*Jane Eyre* 373)

St. John begins by telling Jane that he is “yielding” and “melting,” describing his own feelings and body as fluid, and associating this fluidity with “human love.” The tone is celebratory; these feelings flow from him like “a freshly opened fountain,” suggesting happiness but also
suggesting a potential problem in the “overflowing” of fluid, a potential lack of control. The mention of the “fountain” also evokes the concept of industrialization and the masculine desire to control natural forces with technology. However, the potential lack of control is realized in the next line, as the “fountain” becomes a “flood,” “swamp[ing]” the “field” like a “poison.” This negative portrayal of the destruction of flowing water represents St. John’s passion for Rosamond, and the negative connotation associated with the flood reflects both St. John’s apprehensive feelings toward the relationship, as well as a general societal negativity towards the overflowing of passionate love or expressions of sexual feeling. At the same time, there is a sense of lament in St. John’s refusal of love, which demonstrates the negative side of a focus on self-control. St. John also describes his “senses” as being “entranced,” and although the hypothetical scene makes him happy, he knows it must come to an unhappy end. He describes his theoretical relationship with imagery of the body, “breast,” “temple,” “neck,” each suggesting a sexualized part of the body. The association of liquid is reversed in the end of this passage, as St. John says, “I tasted her cup,” indicating that Rosamond also has a sexual nature represented in liquid imagery. Further, this cup “has a bitter taste,” again commenting on the negative social feeling toward sexuality. The control of liquid was deeply engrained in a Victorian understanding of male sexuality, due to the association between masculine energy and natural fluid. The portrayal of sexuality in images of liquid energy reveals the underlying anxieties about man’s ability to control himself and the sources of energy around him, highlighting the Victorian view that self-restraint was a necessary masculine qualities.

*Dangers of Overt Sexuality*
The Brontë novels convey both sides of the passion and control dichotomy, celebrating and complicating male sexuality while also presenting the dangers and concerns that Victorians associated with desire. There was severe anxiety associated with men being overtly sexual, as weakness and an inability to control sexual desires was seen as danger for females and therefore avoidable by men who had the strength to resist temptation. Primary sources from the Victorian era showed anxieties about males showing their more sexual sides: “What a beautiful significance the word virtue has! Manliness! A man cannot be virtuous, that is, a true man, except by preserving his chastity, which conduces to the development of his man-like traits” (Duffey 190). “Manliness” and “virtue” are here made identical, both aiding in the “development” of “a true man,” therefore standing in opposition to constructions of masculinity that embraced sexuality. These contradicting definitions of manhood continued to cause problems for men throughout the era, these struggles captured in the literature published during this time.

The sexual contagion of the female was perceived as a very real threat to Victorian masculinity, and therefore masculinity and chastity were often paired together, in a refusal of promiscuity (Sussman 148). Bertha Mason is a well-known example of the sexual “madwoman” that pervaded nineteenth-century literature, and the contrast between her behavior and Rochester’s is telling in that it the language sets the two apart:

“Mr. Rochester flung me behind him; the lunatic sprang and grappled his throat viciously, and laid her teeth to his cheek: they struggled. She was a big woman, in stature almost equaling her husband, and corpulent besides: she showed virile force in the contest—more than once she almost throttled him, athletic as he was. He could have
settled her with a well-planted blow; but he would not strike: he would only wrestle (*Jane Eyre* 293).

While Bertha is “vicious” with Rochester, showing no mercy and attacking his “throat” and “cheek” with her “teeth,” Rochester does not strike in the same way. He refuses to hit her, although he easily could, and chooses only to “wrestle.” Bertha is described as “corpulent” and “virile,” and while Rochester is “athletic,” he also acts gentlemanly, refusing to strike her. The contrast here paints Rochester as resistant to Bertha’s sexual energy, so that his masculine power allows him to stand against the assumed sexual corruption and therefore insanity that plagues Bertha Mason. Although Rochester has been portrayed as sexual earlier in the novel, almost to a problematic point, here he is celebrated for remaining in control.

Heathcliff, however, provides an example of a man overcome with sexuality, which *Wuthering Heights* portrays as a result of true, passionate love, and yet a force that transforms Heathcliff into an inhuman creature. This represents a common feeling among Victorians that overtly sexual beings were associated with animals: “…self-indulgence and excess of animal appetite as a descent into barbarism. In contrast, control and self-denial were the hallmark of civilization” (Garton 56). Civilization and natural animal passions were in conflict, and Heathcliff is a symbol of the latter:

“His eyes, wide and wet, at last flashed fiercely on her; his breast heaved convulsively. An instant they held asunder, and then how they met I hardly saw, but Catherine made a spring, and he caught her, and they were locked in an embrace from which I thought my mistress would never be released alive: in fact, to my eyes, she seemed directly insensible. He flung himself into the nearest seat, and on my approaching hurriedly to ascertain if she had fainted, he gnashed at me, and foamed like a mad dog, and gathered
her to him with greedy jealousy. I did not feel as if I were in the company of a creature of my own species.” (Wuthering Heights 184)

The “convulsive” nature of Heathcliff’s behavior immediately marks the passage as sexual; as the two “embrace,” their passion cannot be extinguished, and the language focuses on images of both of their bodies. Catherine is also “insensible,” so that the relationship between them seems to involve mutual passion. Heathcliff is overcome by sexuality, however, as he becomes animalistic, “foam[ing],” “gnash[ing],” and emulating qualities that Nelly associates with a “mad dog.” It is Heathcliff’s sexual qualities and passionate desires that lead him to be portrayed as an animal, not only below the status of a human but also so out of control that he is lowered to a level of madness. Heathcliff here demonstrates pure passion, both sexual and emotional, and yet loses masculine status because his sexuality reduces him to the status of a dog. This represents the essence of the contradiction in masculine expectation, as it was nearly impossible for men to be simultaneously disciplined and sexually passionate.

The fear of sexuality overcoming men reached beyond a personal level, extending to a concern for society as a whole. Animal passions had the potential to override civilized qualities, the Victorians believed, and therefore they saw sexual desire as a potential destructive force for society as a whole: “Elevating erotic pleasure to an autonomous value opens the way to the dominance of animal passions over reason in human affairs. Controlled by sensual urges the individual loses self-control and social purpose. This inevitably leads to self-destruction and to social chaos and decline” (Seidman 52). Although sex was integral to masculine creation and reproduction, it was when this passion became too strong that it became dangerous to the general “social purpose.” Heathcliff’s actions after Catherine’s death represent this particular fear, as he sacrifices all social graces and personal well-being in the throes of his passion for her: “He
dashed his head against the knotted trunk; and, lifting up his eyes, howled, not like a man, but like a savage beast being goaded to death with knives and spears. I observed several splashes of blood about the bark of the tree, and his hand and forehead were both stained; probably the scene I witnessed was a repetition of others acted during the night” (*Wuthering Heights* 192).

Heathcliff causes himself pain, again being compared to a “beast,” indicating a lack of reverence for social norms and values; he defies class restrictions in order to achieve satisfaction. Heathcliff is metaphorically compared to a beast who is “being goaded to death with knives and spears,” weapons of civilization, portraying his animalistic actions as directly oppositional to society. This represents a larger concern with male sexuality that pervaded Victorian society, as the sexual passions of man have the potential to turn him against social norms and morals.

The Brontë heroes’ use of sexuality as a tool of power embodies both the value of and disgust with sexual passion that existed in the Victorian era. Whether sexuality is chastised or celebrated, it is almost always portrayed as a form of control. Rochester’s masculinity fits this role, as his sexuality is portrayed as a tool of control; his attempts to stop Jane from leaving him are laced with sexual language:

“His voice and hand quivered: his large nostrils dilated; his eye blazed: still I dared to speak… ‘Jane, I am not a gentle-tempered man—you forget that: I am not long-enduring; I am not cool and dispassionate. Out of pity to me and yourself, put your finger on my pulse, feel how it throbs, and—beware!’ He bared his wrist, and offered it to me: the blood was forsaking his cheek and lips, they were growing livid; I was distressed on all hands. To agitate him thus deeply, by a resistance he so abhorred, was cruel: to yield was out of the question. I did what human beings do instinctively when they are driven to
utter extremity—looked for aid to one higher than man: the words ‘God help me!’ burst involuntarily from my lips.” (*Jane Eyre* 304)

The language here borders on the suggestion of rape, as Rochester demands that Jane “feel how [his pulse] throbs,” and Jane feels that she cannot deny him. At the same time, she feels that she is “cruel” in refusing him, and she knows that there is romantic love behind the sexualized demands. The illustration of the male sexual role is exceedingly complex in these novels: men are encouraged to utilize sexuality as aggression, as a necessary reproductive tool and expression of love in an emulation of Romantic values, and are also chastised in a Victorian sense for overexciting their sexual desires. These male characters, as an amalgamation of the two eras, battle with the shifting sexual undercurrents involved in the transition into the 1800’s, representing the complex factors involved in the construction of masculine sexuality in the nineteenth century.
Conclusion

“He smiled. You should have seen him smile, reader; and you should have marked the difference between his countenance now, and that he wore half an hour ago. I cannot affirm that I had ever witnessed the smile of pleasure, or content, or kindness round M. Paul's lips, or in his eyes before.” (Villette 292)

Victorian masculinity encompassed all aspects of social and private life; a man was assessed based on his class, his behavior within his relationship, and his sexual desires, all within the context of socialized morals and values. Just as the study of women and femininity brings about issues of complexity in gender roles, analyzing masculine characters unearths a web of contradictory traits that come together to define the overarching concept of manhood. The patriarchy holds such a hegemonic grip on society, both in the Victorian era and in a more modern sense, that it seems unnerving to deconstruct the vision of the idealized, powerful man. Because masculinity and femininity can only be understood in comparison to the other, deconstructing one brings the potential danger of collapsing our understanding of the gender system. However, this examination allows us to better understand how power dynamics are constructed, and how interactions and differences between genders develop due to the structure of masculine power.

A history of criticism celebrates Mr. Rochester, Heathcliff, and Paul Emanuel as model anti-heroes, representing the Byronic tradition and bringing the idea of the new man into the nineteenth century. Through the female protagonists’ eyes, we see masculine traits that would at one point have been seen as flaws blossom into beautiful aspects of male character:

“I compared him with his guests. What was the gallant grace of the Lynns, the languid elegance of Lord Ingram,—even the military distinction of Colonel Dent, contrasted with his look of native pith and genuine power? I had no sympathy in their appearance, their expression: yet I could imagine that most observers would call them attractive,
handsome, imposing; while they would pronounce Mr. Rochester at once harsh-featured and melancholy-looking. I saw them smile, laugh—it was nothing; the light of the candles had as much soul in it as their smile; the tinkle of the bell as much significance as their laugh.” (Jane Eyre 175)

Through Jane’s eyes, we see the romantic period phase out to allow a new understanding of gender to become prominent; the “gallant grace” and “languid elegance” of the eighteenth century are no longer enticing to her as a woman, and even “military distinction” cannot compare to the sheer “genuine power” Mr. Rochester emanates. Rochester’s “harsh featured,” “melancholy-looking” appearance is intoxicating for Jane, and although these are not positive words, they represent Rochester’s pure power, an aspect of his character that excites Jane. She does not try to convince herself that he is handsome; she finds him objectively unnatractive. However, this only contributes to her infatuation with him, suggesting a completely different construction of masculine values. Jane’s words echo many other Victorian heroines; she is infatuated with the powerful masculine energy that accompanies the nineteenth-century anti-hero, suggesting a common feeling of admiration for these characters. Yet this fondness is complicated by the complexity involved in the web of masculine traits that these men emanate. Rochester’s status as unarguably masculine is the result of countless qualities, related to class, social behavior, and his relationship to Jane. He could not have reached masculine status without Jane opposite him; it is her admiration as well as her love for him that maintains his manliness, as well as his ability to both exert power over her and feel vulnerable to her. In this way the literature shows us that Victorian men are fire to the eighteenth-century gentleman’s “candle,” a gong to their “bell”; however, it also reveals that underneath such strong passion and power is a web of interrelated and contradictory traits that are dependent upon factors outside the individual
man. These men can never be completely in control of their masculinity: the raw, introspective strength that seems objective is fragilely constructed, dependent upon women, money, and class, and therefore the solid construction of masculine power has the potential to unravel. Underneath the passionate, sexual control of Victorian men is a more vulnerable infrastructure of manliness that is determined by societal values, this construction providing insight as to where masculine power comes from.

The Victorian era is especially relevant in this kind of gender study because the separation of men and women provided for a new type of dynamic:

“Gender separation creates the possibility of an encounter in which a man first experiences desire across-sparked and structured by-gender difference. Implying that this desire is qualitatively different from that potentially experienced in homosocial settings like colleges and ships, such a doctrine posits love at first sight as a significant, if not primary, gateway to male heterosexual desire.” (Matthews 437)

Romantic love gained importance and influence because men and women were kept apart; the separation led to mystery, which maintained flirtation and deferred desire. Understanding “gender separation” as a “gateway” to love is imperative here, as love is depicted as a result of men and women being treated differently. This gave men an outlet through which to “other” women, because they were constantly apart, leading to a romanticized ideal of relationships. This separation evaporated in the twentieth and into the twenty-first century, as men and women came in contact with each other more often in public and friendly settings (Stearns and Knapp 776). Dating multiple partners during adolescence increased starting in 1900, and although sex before marriage was still uncommon in the early twentieth century, male sexual restraint eased in that men could be generally more sexual with women (776). The trend from gender separation to
integration therefore was accompanied by a shift away from love at first sight and flirtatious deference, completely changing the way men and women viewed each other. This change demonstrates the importance of gender relations in determining masculinity, as it is men’s interactions with women that define masculinity from a social standpoint.

In their article "Men and Romantic Love: Pinpointing a 20th-Century Change,” Peter Stearns and Mark Knapp explore how nineteenth-century standards of love and gender have affected and shaped the way relationships formed throughout the rest of history. They use Esquire Magazine, founded in 1932, as an example of how the twentieth century understanding of masculinity reacted to and transitioned from Victorian sexuality:

“Editorial policy, attacking Victorian love standards for men, stated that ‘this is a man's magazine, it isn't edited for the junior miss. It isn't dedicated to the dissemination of sweetness and light.’ Esquire trumpeted the idea of a ‘New Love,’ explicitly different from the etherealized and spiritual ideals urged on Victorian men. In defining the New Love and emphasizing the unsuitability of love old-style, Esquire made its initial mark in suggesting the advent of new male standards.” (Stearns and Knapp 769)

Victorian sexuality continued to affect how men viewed sexuality long into the twentieth century, as the idea of passionate and romantic love provided a springboard for new eroticisms to arise. Esquire attempted to re-define nineteenth-century love standards, moving forward from the traditional ideas about love and relationships in the Victorian era. The fact that Victorian sexual roles are so deeply ingrained in more modern definitions of sexuality speaks to the influence of Victorian masculinity on the definition of the gender. Eventually, this led to a shifting of the subject of masculine desire, and therefore a new understanding of gender relations: “By the mid-1950s, clearly, many young middle class men were open to reading matter that talked about
relations with women in quite unromantic terms, and that prized physical pleasures over emotional depth” (Stearns and Knapp 777). *Esquire*, which began as one of the first “men’s magazines,” has now transitioned from a twentieth century periodical catering to men’s interest to a twenty-first century erotica piece (Stearns and Knapp 769). That a magazine catering to men’s needs has now become eroticized speaks to the shifting understanding of what men desire and are interested in. When love and relationships were not part of the public discourse, men desired to read about them, and then when relationships became a common aspect of public discussion in the 1900’s, the magazine began to publish erotica to keep readerly interest in a topic not often discussed.

Victorian gender discourse looked to women’s influence as a way to encourage civility and cultivation among men. Although females were painted as weak and potentially able to fall victim to the overpowering of sexual desire, femininity was seen as a refining force that was required to quell masculine passion and aggression, a dynamic that was reflected in the wives’ responsibility to keep her husbands civilized. Indeed, Victorian masculinity was dependent upon femininity in that the two could only exist in opposition to each other, and therefore the existence of the masculine was only possible in relation to the feminine. In an era when masculinity was constantly being reevaluated and deconstructed, it was imperative that femininity remain stable in order to keep both roles from collapsing. Jane Eyre and Catherine are physical manifestations of this theoretical connection, as it is their constant presence that allows Rochester and Heathcliff to understand their own masculinity. Lucy’s support of M. Paul serves a similar function, as she constructs and maintains his understanding of gender. Without these heroines, the masculine qualities of the Brontë heroes would be completely undermined, and it is only because the female characters remain constant that we are able to deconstruct the male gender role. The Victorian
era brought vast changes to the construction of masculinity, and the inextricable connection between notions of masculine and feminine was what kept the web of complex qualities that constituted masculinity from completely unraveling.

A study of nineteenth-century masculinity is imperative in informing how we view gender in a modern sense, and helps us understand how the relationships between men and women affect gender construction. Our present understanding of gender and sexuality is much more complex than ever before. The only way we can understand individuality in sexual identity is if we understand gender assumptions and constructions, critically analyzing them in order to see how people differ from the socially constructed “norm.” Nineteenth-century masculinity was the beginning of the modern man as we know it: strong; healthy; passionate in both body and mind, but still able to control himself. Charlotte and Emily Brontë embrace this further with their individual heroes, who bring out the complexity in masculine roles but also challenge what was understood about Victorian men at the time. The Victorian era was an essential period in the movement towards what we now consider modern gender roles, as it led to sex entering the public discourse: “The society that emerged in the nineteenth century- bourgeois, capitalist, or industrial society, call it what you will—did not confront sex with a fundamental refusal of recognition. On the contrary, it put into operation an entire machinery for producing true discourses concerning it” (Foucault 69). An analysis of Victorian masculinity reveals the importance of sex in their lives and discourse, giving us a starting point for understanding the development of sexual discourse. We cannot understand gender constructions without dissecting the role of the gender in power, and in unpacking the complexities of masculine identity in the Victorian era, we gain access to a clearer picture of where patriarchal power comes from, and how this affects male identity within the construction of masculinity.
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