UNIVERSITY OF RIJEKA

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Annamaria Pauković

NARRATIVE FIGURES OF CHARACTER DISCLAIMING THE VICTORIAN NORM: EMILY BRONTË'S HEATHCLIFF AND THOMAS HARDY'S MICHAEL HENCHARD

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Supervisor:

Dr. sc. Sintija Čuljat

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ABSTRACT

Heathcliff and Michael Henchard are the protagonists in the novels *Wuthering Heights* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, written in the Victorian era by Emily Brontë and Thomas Hardy. This paper sets out to juxtapose the two characters according to the notions proposed by Gajo Peleš in *Tumačenje romana*, namely the narrative figures of character, environment and existence, and in terms of their defiance of the Victorian norm, or the system of values stressing strong moral principles. In order to portray Heathcliff and Henchard in their full complexity and relate them to the 19th-century Victorian society as a whole, the aspects explored are their impulsive and proud nature inevitably dooming them to a tragic ending, the various societal conflicts and lack of identity they struggle with, as well as the much-discussed gender roles, justification of revenge and potential redemption. The comparison of the characters derives its importance and relevance from the fact that they represent universal, timeless concepts such as human conflicts, societal pressures, construction of identity and the need for inclusion.

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INTRODUCTION

Virginia Woolf believes that the ultimate power of a "true novelist" lies in his ability to "make us believe that his characters are fellow-beings driven by their own passions and idiosyncrasies, while they have – and this is the poet's gift – something symbolical about them which is common to us all" (in Goldman 55). Two authors, both novelists and poets, who fit this description perfectly and are undeniably forces to be reckoned with are Emily Brontë and Thomas Hardy. Their novels *Wuthering Heights* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* are stories that depict human struggle and conflict in a powerful, unique and evocative way, and do so by exploring the psychology of passionate characters, men of extremes unable to reconcile contradictory elements of their own nature and the environment surrounding them.

This paper deals with the comparison of Heathcliff and Michael Henchard, the protagonists of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, respectively. The comparison is presented in terms of two criteria. The first is the 'narrative figure' as proposed by Croatian literary theoretician Gajo Peleš in his book *Tumačenje romana*. His categorization is chosen in order to give the paper a frame in which the characters can be portrayed from various perspectives, that is, as narrative figures of character, environment and existence[1]. Within that frame, another criterion is used to relate the protagonists to the period in which they were brought to life, namely the Victorian era (1837-1901). Specifically, the focus is on their

[1] The translation is obtained from *Space and Time in Language and Literature* by Marija Brala Vukanović and Lovorka Gruić Grmuša (113). The original in Croatian: "narativna figura osobnosti, skupnosti i opstojanja" (Peleš 228).

departure from the Victorian norm, a term which encompasses Victorian morality as a set of values concerning self-repression, social interaction and ethics.

The structure follows the hierarchical categorization of figures as Peleš presented it and incorporates observations on the conformity to the Victorian system of values. The characters are first represented as victims of their own impulsiveness and pride, which catalyze their downfall and enable them to attain tragic stature. The second section expands on the first to include the individual's relation to society, namely, the lack of identity, as well as the oppression, class differences and generational conflicts. The final part of the paper looks beyond the individual and explores the ideas and concepts that these characters personify, including femininity, masculinity, revenge and redemption.

The aim of juxtaposing Heathcliff and Henchard by combining different approaches and introducing a number of viewpoints is to provide a more precise and multilayered portrayal of the individuals that should in turn give insight into the reality of an entire period. Hopefully, this paper will elucidate the protagonists' idiosyncrasy in the world of Victorian characters and show the importance and relevance of the novels' stance on social and economic issues such as generational and class differences, gender roles, economic shifts, as well as the moral question of revenge and its justification.

1. VICTIMS OF CHARACTER

Gajo Peleš introduces the narrative figure of character, or psychemic narrative figure as an entity consisting of a set of features, at the heart of which is a name of a fictional individual differentiating him from other characters in a book (230-231). This section will focus solely on the nature of Heathcliff and Henchard, that is, on their pride, impulsiveness and passion, which are far removed from the conventional, strict Victorian morality and seen as the source of their suffering. Heathcliff's "violent nature" (Brontë 61) and Henchard's "passionate head" (Hardy 171) prove to be the tragic flaws behind their downfall and enable the reader to view their tempestuous stories through the lens of tragedy.

1.1. Unrestrained impulse

Heathcliff and Henchard are driven by their proud and wilful natures that challenge the highly valued Victorian notion of respectability, whereby a virtuous man is in the foreground, the "man of character" who is able to rein in "his baser desires" and practice "self-discipline and self-denial" (see Tosh).

The true nature of the characters begins to reveal itself on the first page of the books. At the beginning of Brontë's novel, Mr Lockwood, Heathcliff's tenant at the Grange, is shocked at what he finds at Wuthering Heights: he as the "normal Victorian gentleman" is expecting to find the "normal Victorian middle-class family", but what he finds is "a house seething with hatred, conflict, horror" (Kettle 132), and a deeply reserved, distrusting, inhospitable and impatient man

as its head. Lockwood's perspective is not entirely reliable, as he self-confessedly attributes his own character traits to the unknown landlord. However, the reader can clearly recognize Heathcliff's taciturnity and sternness from their conversation. At the beginning of *Mayor*[2], we observe Henchard's physical appearance: his walk is described as revealing "a dogged and cynical indifference" (Hardy 5). This apathy is further revealed by his avoidance of any contact with his wife and child.

It is important to briefly note that the characters' surroundings are not to be overlooked. The moors of Wuthering Heights with their bleakness and strong winds are a place of undeniable solitude. The fact that they are "so completely removed from the stir of society" (Brontë 3) makes them a "perfect misanthropist's Heaven" (Brontë 3). Emily Brontë herself was "a native and nursling" of the "wild and sombre moorland which she so deeply loved" (Bentley 13). What is also characteristic in Hardy's novels is "a peculiarly intense relationship between the characters and their immediate environments", one can almost say one is "impregnated with the other" (Allen 98).

After this brief, but telltale introduction, the authors shift the focus to the history of the characters, which elucidates their flawed inclinations. Heathcliff is found as a starving and abandoned child in Liverpool by Mr Earnshaw who makes him part of his family at Wuthering Heights. His "pride and black tempers" (Brontë 42) become visible in early childhood. Distinctly quiet and sullen, he is already so hardened that the violence and insults of Earnshaw's son Hindley do not seem to affect him. After his new parent figure dies, Heathcliff becomes subject to the cruel Hindley and is therefore "old beyond his years" and imposes his own horrors on the world around

[2] *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is referred to in the paper in its shortened form *Mayor*.

him (Homans 18). Henchard's childhood is never explained, as he is presented to us as a 21-year-old hay trusser who comes to Weydon-Priors searching for work and gets hopelessly drunk at the fair. Quarrelsome and domineering, he announces himself as the superior husband whose marriage was a foolish mistake and decides to auction off his wife Susan after a sailor offers him money. A couple of minutes of tasteless banter and a show of superiority makes him a man without wife and child, regretful of his hasty actions, but unable to change them. Shocked and helpless, he places the blame on Susan's "extreme simplicity of intellect" (Hardy 17), but feels intensely ashamed and takes an oath to avoid alcohol for another twenty-one years.

Both Heathcliff and Henchard are prone to making hasty and impulsive decisions to their own detriment. Henchard shows his "strong impulses" (Hardy 62) by proposing to his lover Lucetta on the spur of the moment and again later in the story when she is unattainable, as well as by welcoming the royal personage against the wishes of the Casterbridge Council: "It had been only a passing fancy of his, but his opposition crystallized it into a determination." (Hardy 244) When the sailor Newson appears after many years and asks after his daughter, Henchard coldly and ruthlessly lies to him that she is dead: "It had been the impulse of a moment." (Hardy 273). Heathcliff, upon overhearing Catherine reveal she accepted the marriage proposal of his rival Edgar as marriage with Heathcliff would be degrading, he leaves without hearing the rest of the conversation, in which she confesses her actual plans and her love for him. His impulsiveness even leads him to "murderous violence" (Brontë 185), for instance, when he fights Hindley, throws a knife at his wife Isabella or slaps Catherine's daughter Cathy.[3]

[3] Catherine's daughter Catherine will be referred to as Cathy so as to avoid confusion.

Heathcliff's character indeed treats the people around him, Isabella, their son Linton, Hindley's son Hareton and Cathy, with cruelty and inhumanity "beyond normal thought" and only strives to "achieve new refinements of horror" (Kettle 139). He feels disgust towards his genteel rival Edgar, the "slavering, shivering thing" (Brontë 121) and deems him lesser than Catherine's "dog, or her horse" (Brontë 157). Isabella, whom he tortures, asks in a letter, "Is Mr Heathcliff a man? If so, is he mad? And if not, is he a devil?" (Brontë 143). She claims, "[…] I assure you, a tiger, or a venomous serpent could not rouse terror in me equal to that which he wakens." (Brontë 152) What she has to endure, for example him hanging up her dog, are acts of pure violence and brutality. Hareton is the same oppressed boy Heathcliff was years before, and although Heathcliff knows his laudable qualities, he still ruthlessly pursues his revenge on Hindley through him. Young Linton is treated "tyrannically and wickedly" (Brontë 273) by his own father who only cares about his inheritance.

Heathcliff says, "I have no pity! I have no pity! The more worms writhe, the more I yearn to crush out their entrails! It is a moral teething, and I grind with greater energy, in proportion to the increase of pain." (Brontë 160) Kettle claims it is in this statement that Heathcliff's "monster" reveals itself (139). This part of his nature is reminiscent of the Gothic tradition. Heathcliff is actually compared to "a goblin" (Brontë 347), "a ghoul" and "a vampire" (Brontë 348) and has "eyes full of black fire" (Brontë 102), "basilisk eyes" (Brontë 192). Henchard's appearance is also frequently described using Satanic imagery and is linked to the Prince of Darkness (Kramer 320): "His dark pupils – which always seemed to have a red spark of light in them, though this could hardly be a physical fact […]" (Hardy 63) His countenance is described as "*rouge et noir*" (Hardy 63) or "red and black" (Hardy 78).

However, Henchard does not show such violence and malice as Heathcliff. He hurts others and ultimately himself with his overly proud inclination. Although he spends months searching for his wife after the incident, he refuses to include the shameful details in his story and thus finds no luck. When publicly accused of selling sprouted wheat, he arrogantly refuses to remedy his mistake and says: “But it can’t be done.” (Hardy 36) After finally meeting his wife, he still insists on hiding his “shady, headstrong, disgraceful life as a young man” (Hardy 70) and pretends to court his wife anew. The incident with Abel Whittle shows how his pride overwhelms him to the point of alienating him from his loved ones: after Henchard decides to humiliate the worker, his close friend Farfrae dares to publicly defy him in front of his employees. Henchard cannot bear it and his contempt keeps growing until it escalates during a public celebration, which proves to be another blow to his pride. He fires his sole confidante and experiences a fleeting satisfaction, but the next morning “when his jealous temper had passed away” he comes to regret the decision (Hardy 101). The “unruly volcanic stuff” (Hardy 105) of his nature cost him a marriage and a friendship. His bond with Elisabeth-Jane is doomed as well, as he is “far too self-willed” (Hardy 119) to tell the girl he is not actually her father, although he too believed that lie Susan had kept secret. “The volcanic fires of his nature” (Hardy 216) widen the gulf between them.

In both characters, feelings seem to be bubbling under the surface and are constantly on the brink of escalation. Henchard is described as a man who is not consistently kind, but prone to a rare, aggressive act of generosity; he knows “no moderation in his requests or impulses” (Hardy 72). When he takes a liking to someone, he does so intensely, even overbearingly. His affection for Farfrae is described as “tigerish” (Hardy 85). Heathcliff, on the other hand, is “almost demoniac” and expresses his feelings “with such awful intensity, such uninhibited force, such untamed violence” (Bentley 33-34). When confronted with the weak and dying Catherine, he

continues to be “morally ruthless”; instead of comforting her, he gives her “a brutal analysis of what she has done” (Kettle 138).

By the end of both novels, there is a change in the characters as they develop a “monomania” (Brontë 342) centered on their only true loves Catherine and Elisabeth-Jane. Although Heathcliff has finally fulfilled his vengeful plans, they give him no satisfaction. A “strange change” (Brontë 340) takes over him as he becomes consumed by a single wish - to see Catherine again. This yearning threatens to devour his existence and makes him eager to end his “earthly hell” (Brontë 342). His last days are spent with “a strange, joyful glitter in his eyes” (Brontë 345) as he feels that she is near. Martin Alegre maintains that Heathcliff’s monomania is actually a “manifestation of self-defeat” and a realization that he must be “sacrificed to ensure the continuity of the generations […]” (14). This can be applied to Henchard’s character as well. In the final months of his life, he lets go of his desire for revenge and suppresses his proud nature by focusing on his love for Elisabeth-Jane, who is out of reach.

Gatrell concludes that it is not only Victorian society that penalizes “powerful energies and desires” - anywhere in the world “the controlled and the equable alone prosper” (58). Thus, both characters are inevitably doomed to a tragic ending.

1.2. The underlying tragedy

As a portrayal of struggling, unconventional figures, *Wuthering Heights* and *Mayor* are imbued with a sense of tragedy in which Heathcliff and Henchard are heroes burdened with their tragic flaws.

Heathcliff's and Henchard's deep-rooted impulsive, proud natures are the catalyzer behind their undoing, and therefore represent their tragic flaws. Northrop Frye states that "the great majority of tragic heroes do possess hybris, a proud, passionate, obsessed, or soaring mind which brings about a morally intelligible downfall" (in Schauber, Spolsky 66). It is important to mention that Henchard's peculiarity is his superstitious inclination "to seek supernatural reasons for his successes and failures" (Butler 64). When he takes an oath to avoid alcohol, it is said there is "something fetichistic" (Hardy 18) in his beliefs, entailing that one of his main traits is an "irrational, superstitious reverence" (Kramer 313). His superstition makes him think that there was "something in the air which had changed his luck" (Hardy 126) after his wife and supposed daughter found him because of a "scheme of some sinister intelligence bent on punishing him" (Hardy 118). As he is about to commit suicide, he sees a double of him that is in fact the skimmington effigy, but regards it as a supernatural "interference in the case of desperate intentions" (Hardy 277). Butler emphasizes that in this case, "with destiny weaving our fates blindly, character is obviously an important element in the material that destiny works with […]" (63). Henchard's nature is the sole reason behind his downfall: "Character is Fate, said Novalis […]" (Hardy 107), and this is after all 'A Story of a Man of Character' (Pinion 42).

Henchard and Heathcliff have been compared to a number of tragic heroes. In the "downward trajectory" of Henchard's life with its twists and turns that remind us of the "turning wheel of fortune" (Dalziel 15) Butler sees "clear echoes" of Greek tragedy and *King Lear*, as well as of Job, Saul, Samson and Cain (59). Henchard indeed identifies himself with Cain at the end of the novel, who also "violated basic human ties" but is not, like Henchard, willing to meet the extent of his punishment on his own (Kramer 350). Pinion explains the comparison to *King Lear* based on Henchard's "rash impulsiveness, tragic blunders, suffering, and self-redemption" (41). Dalziel

recognizes that both Henchard and Lear "attain tragic stature" when they have taken responsibility for their own tragic fates and learned how to love (22). Pinion also sees his "initial folly and his volcanic temperament" as reminiscent of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* (41) and additionally, draws parallels with Saul, Cain and Sophocles' *King Oedipus* (42). Henchard is compared to Faust, "a vehement, gloomy being, who had quitted the ways of vulgar men without light to guide him on a better way" (Hardy 107) and likened to the Biblical Job, since he too sometimes feels he could "curse the day that gave [him] birth" (Hardy 74). Job's words are also important in Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* and are thus used to express the views of Hardy's tragic heroes who cause their own deaths, unable to live without the love of Elisabeth-Jane and Sue Bridehead (Kramer 323).

Heathcliff has been frequently related to the Byronic hero, "isolated, self-tortured, proud" (Mackay 73), and specifically to Manfred. According to Ceron, both are "inevitably doomed to failure" in the "the tragic matrix of their role" since they refuse to "be inscribed within a shared set of values, and obey only their free will" (171). Mackay expands this comparison with the parallel to Marlowe's Faustus: Faustus, Manfred and Heathcliff all feel "pride" in the "self-destructive conflict that sets them apart from other men" (72), whereby Heathcliff experiences the most "intense emotional rage" of the three (73). Leavis sees a resemblance between Heathcliff and Edmund in *King Lear*, whose "world of violence, cruelty, unnatural crimes, family disruption and physical horrors" is to be related to Brontë's world (231). Both of them bring about the destruction of two families with their malice (Leavis 231). Finally, Hoeveler and Morse argue that Heathcliff and Hamlet share a "tragic aspect and drive for revenge" (396).

When it comes to models of tragedy, the Aristotelian is seen as most influential. Dalziel argues that *Mayor* closely conforms to this model; Henchard commits more than one "error of judgment" or "hamartia", leading to "anagnorisis" or "recognition" and to eventual "fall" or

"peripeteia" (Dalziel 20). His death is then "fully tragic, inspiring cathartic pity and fear" (Dalziel 23). However, the novel does lack the unity of place, time and a five-part structure (Dalziel 21). The tragic concept can also be seen as representing Hardy's own model as defined in his autobiographical *Life and Work*: "A Plot, or Tragedy, should arise from the gradual closing in of a situation that comes of ordinary human passions, prejudices, and ambitions, by reason of the characters taking no trouble to ward off the disastrous events produced by the said passions, prejudices, and ambitions." (in Dalziel 21) *Wuthering Heights* contains some Aristotelian elements: Heathcliff, who inspires terror and pity in both characters and readers, is driven by his "hamartia" that is hubris, and experiences "anagnorisis" or a "metaphoric transformation" in the scene before Catherine's death when he seems to be ready for forgiveness (Schauber, Spolsky 69). However, Schauber and Spolsky stress that the subsequent motif of revenge poses difficulties in understanding *Wuthering Heights* in terms of a tragic structure (65).

Having portrayed Heathcliff and Henchard as victims of their character, it is important to elaborate on this argument by including societal influence as a crucial element in their tragic stories.

2. VICTIMS OF CIRCUMSTANCE

As an individual is inextricably bound to his community, so is the psychemic narrative figure bound to the sociemic figure, or the narrative figure of environment. Peleš explains that an individual is set against the backdrop of a specific environment, such as a family and a social class, and should be regarded in relation to it (243-246). Heathcliff and Henchard are to be presented as individuals faced with a world to which they can never belong, and where they are constantly falling behind. These notions will be related to the concept of change and modernity imminent in 19th-century society.

2.1. Rootless and alienated

In order to fully portray the characters' downfall, it is necessary to elaborate on their initial position in society, that is, their lack of identity and inevitable isolation. This will also more clearly delineate the inner workings of Victorian society.

Heathcliff is a man of unknown origins, a "threatening enigma" (Anolik 36). What we know is that Mr Earnshaw found him as a "dirty, ragged, black-haired child" (Brontë 38), left abandoned to roam the streets of Liverpool. He introduced him into his family at Wuthering Heights where his peculiarity was immediately noticeable. At first he was not even referred to as a human being, but called 'it'. Throughout the novel, his appearance seems to give people the liberty of perceiving him as inferior and therefore calling him a number of different things: "the

son of the fortune-teller" (Brontë 52), a "dark-skinned gipsy" (Brontë 5), "a little Lascar[4], or an American or Spanish castaway" (Brontë 53). The Lintons, for instance, assume his nature immediately upon seeing him: "the villain scowls so plainly in his face" (Brontë 52). Von Sneidern argues that his presence upsets "the social equilibrium" (175) and becomes "a source of great anxiety for the mid-nineteenth-century Victorian" (172), since he is actually "the product of a thriving Liverpool slave trade" (175). Brontë's novel was composed soon after the abolition of slavery in the British territories and amid growing tensions over slavery in America (Hoeveler, Morse 348).

Heathcliff is also represented as a gypsy figure, which, according to McDonagh, makes him stand for a "sense of existential outsider-ness" (374). An outsider since the beginning, he cannot resolve this "Otherness" as it is exacerbated by financial and social oppression (Hoeveler, Morse 348). After Mr Earnshaw dies, Heathcliff is an orphan once again, this time at Hindley's mercy, who takes pains to exclude him from the family and make his life miserable. His treatment of Heathcliff would make "a fiend of a saint" (Brontë 69). No progress, emotional, educational or otherwise, seems to be viable for him as he is mercilessly belittled. Physical deterioration accompanies the mental one: "he acquired a slouching gait, and ignoble look" (Brontë 72) and his natural reserve becomes "an almost idiotic excess of unsociable moroseness" (Brontë 72). Realizing his position, Heathcliff even assesses his inferiority to Farfrae according to his skin tone, suggestive of racial difference, which is further related to indicators of class and material wealth (Hoeveler, Morse 347-348): "I wish I had light hair and a fair skin, and was dressed […] and had a chance of being as rich as he will be." (Hardy 59) Interestingly, once he returns wearing

[4] 'Lascar' is an East Indian sailor (Hoeveler, Morse 347).

gentleman's clothes, he is no longer persistently perceived as a "dark-skinned Other" but as a "hybrid" (Hoeveler, Morse 348) of a gypsy and a gentleman.

However, Heathcliff is always perceived as an outsider, which is already suggested by his lack of a proper surname (McGlinn, McGlinn 12). Hoeveler and Morse conclude that *Wuthering Heights* represents race as an "ambiguous category constituted by social class, money, and gender", thereby linking the violence inherent in slavery with the oppression of "ostensible inferiors in an inflexible socioeconomic hierarchy" (348).

Mayor is another portrayal of a man of unknown origins who is an alienated character from the start, since he auctions off his wife and child at twenty-one and lives on as a poor, lonely hay trusser. He does not seem to have a family, just like Hardy's characters Gabriel Oak, Wildeve and Fitzpiers (Morgan 120). In the Victorian world, family was an idealized sphere characterized by "morality, stability, and comfort" (Mitchell 142), so "domestic disobedience and disorder" were deemed dishonorable (Marsden 81). Henchard's rootlessness is an immediate indicator that he will be unable to fully conform to any sphere. Indeed, reconciliation between the public and the private domain does not seem possible. During his rise to the top of the Casterbridge social ladder, he essentially does not maintain a private life and manages to establish himself in the community. With the arrival of his family and the revelation of his true nature, the townspeople lose respect for him and he becomes an outcast within the Victorian world where the community's approval is highly valued. There is no other option than to "hide his head for ever" (Hardy 287).

Henchard is forced to struggle against his roots, or the lack thereof, as well as against his social class. At the beginning of the novel, he is oppressed by poverty and desperate to escape it. The story comes full circle and at the end, Henchard is exactly in the same position, only completely weighed down by the miseries of life. One of the serious issues of the Victorian time

was “rural penury”; a number of novels are concerned with the “encroachment of the town onto the countryside”, such as *Oliver Twist* (Moore 60). Hardy’s portrayal of Wessex shows us how rapidly life in the English countryside was changing and how the local economies and communities were impacted by “distant market forces” (Moore 60). Henchard’s mistake was in fact his inability to adapt to the “economic shifts” of the time (Moore 60), as he is again an outcast and does not belong to the new generation that is prevailing. This particular conflict will be elaborated on in the adjoining section.

2.2. Class struggle and generational conflict

Both Brontë and Hardy have a particular interest in exploring social issues, the depiction of which is especially relevant for our understanding of the Victorian system of values. *Wuthering Heights* and *Mayor* both portray 19th-century England and deal with “the passions of living people, with property-ownership, the attraction of social comforts, the arrangement of marriages, the importance of education, the validity of religion, the relations of rich and poor” (Kettle 130), as well as with the question of “‘progress’, modernization, and industrialization” (Miller 437).

Brontë proves to be “firmly grounded in the social reality of the time” (Sharma 9) as she introduces the contrast between the two houses, Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange, in order to represent the tension between different classes in a rigid hierarchical system. At the same time, she juxtaposes nature and civilization, thus representing “the principle of energy and storm on the one hand and the principle of calm, of settled assurance, on the other” (Allen 195). The Earnshaws, farmers living close to nature, are indeed driven by “elemental or natural forces”, while

Lintons, the landed gentry in a comfortable home, remain "mannered, proper, and socialized" (McGlinn, McGlinn 10). It is important to note, however, that although Edgar conforms to Victorian morality and is materially superior, he is "stripped of all strength, made to seem effeminate and emotionally ineffective" (Karl 157). However cruel Heathcliff is to Edgar, we continue to sympathize with him because Emily Brontë convinces us that "what Heathcliff stands for is morally superior to what the Lintons stand for" (Kettle 137).

Heathcliff's first encounter with the Lintons is indicative of the underlying class conflict. He is an unwanted presence at the Grange, as he has "no social or biological place in the existing social structure" (Melani). While Catherine is treated as a lady to be pampered, Heathcliff is called a "wicked boy" (Brontë 53) that had better be hanged immediately since his features reveal his cruelty. The unrefined, dark-skinned, "vulgar young ruffian" (Brontë 71) is represented as "the usurper" and "a racially-hybrid encroaching outsider" (Anolik 36). Catherine's attraction to the comfort of "bourgeois life" (Kettle 135) brings about distance from the uncouth Heathcliff, who then changes his position in the social system, most probably by going away to an industrial center to quickly acquire money (Sharma 13). He returns after three years as a gentleman, "a tall, athletic, well-formed man" (Brontë 101), "without the marks of former degradation" (Brontë 101) and is intent on using the same weapons of the people who have wronged him. All the while he rebels against "shallow bourgeois values and conventions" regarding social respectability (Sharma 16-17). Eagleton argues that Heathcliff actually represents "the agrarian working class" whose rise to power is an ambivalent one, at the same time symbolizing the "triumph of the oppressed over capitalism and the triumph of capitalism over the oppressed" (Sharma 18). Sharma, on the other hand, takes into account that Heathcliff falls victim to the "masters of property" and needs to rebel against the established order, but does not accept Eagleton's purely Marxist interpretation (19).

Brontë's class conflict can be related to the generational conflict presented by Henchard and Donald Farfrae in *Mayor*. In the novel, Hardy portrays Victorian society of the late 1840s and, by implication, its state in the 1880s at the time of the novel's first publication (Dalziel 16). He was "acutely, painfully conscious of the modern world" (Allen 244) and looking to the past, "summed up in his fiction a life that was dying when he was a child […]" (Allen 244), "the lost ancestral village so nostalgically mourned by Victorians overwhelmed by the onrush of industrialization" (Morgan 19).

The contrast between Henchard and Farfrae mirrors the contrast between the old and the new world. Casterbridge is at the time of Henchard's mayoralty a place "untouched by the faintest sprinkle of modernism" (Hardy 27). The wave of modernity is first introduced by Farfrae, "the smart commercial man of his day" (Dalziel 17) for whom the "wheel of fortune never seems to turn downward" (Dalziel 18). He is an educated, charming man who thinks ahead and bases his success on inventiveness, patience and competence, unlike Henchard, who is gradually ruined by his rash, "rule-of-thumb (Pinion 142) decision-making, his "verbal agreements and approximate measures" (Dalziel 19). Farfrae's qualities help him to excel in the corn trade by himself, and establish a connection with the townspeople, while Henchard loses everyone's respect and trust. Donald is indeed "just the reverse" of Henchard (Hardy 107) - it is a case of "Northern insight matched against Southron doggedness" (Hardy 107).

Farfrae is not only his rival in business, but also love. After Farfrae courts Elisabeth-Jane, Henchard cannot help his "headstrong faculties" (Hardy 106) and tactlessness, and thus opposes a marriage between the two young people, which could have helped everyone involved. This is the "idiosyncrasy of Henchard's which had ruled his courses from the beginning, and had mainly made him what he was" (Hardy 282). The generational conflict intensifies as Farfrae becomes mayor,

marries Henchard's former lover Lucetta and moves into his house. Henchard cannot keep pace and, in a desperate effort, once more proves to be inferior by basing his harvest strategy on the words of a weather prophet. This outdated, superstitious approach of a man who "knew no patience" (Hardy 177) makes for a heavy loss. By the end of the novel, it is as if they have switched places. Henchard is exactly where he had started, in the position of a poor hay trusser, while Farfrae is at the top of the social ladder with Elisabeth-Jane by his side. Throughout their feud, Farfrae is aware of the bitterness Henchard harbors, but continues to strive for a good relationship and offers his help numerous times. That being said, the "narratorial irony" at his expense is prominent in the novel and his limitations are frequently stressed, especially in Hardy's revisions of the novel (Dalziel 19). He may be the winner and his modern ways may be crucial for "survival in the novel's world", but his supposed progress is "defined by loss", and he "lacks Henchard's depth" (Dalziel 19).

The depth of both Henchard and Heathcliff will be further revealed in the next section that is to present the bigger picture, namely, the ideas that they personify.

3. EMBODIMENTS OF IDEAS

The final narrative figure Peleš introduces is the ontemic narrative figure, or figure of existence, by the help of which he proposes that fictional characters are manifestations of one or more abstract entities (255-256). Heathcliff and Henchard indeed stand for something bigger than themselves, for concepts that are subjects of heated discussion and deserve an exploration: gender roles and the moral question of revenge and redemption.

3.1. Femininity in the Victorian male

The 19th century was a time of great change and instability on the social scene where there were very gradual, but still noticeable changes in gender relations away from the traditional male dominance towards equality. While women gained more autonomy, men still had authority over them and were held up as representatives of "courage and endeavor", of "power and privilege" (Marsh). Victorian masculinity was namely associated with "industry, self-reliance, sobriety, chastity, and family affection", "physical toughness, resourcefulness, […] and a partial separation from the feminine atmosphere of home" (see Tosh). Both Hardy and Brontë are concerned with the constructs of Victorian masculinity and femininity. Hardy's male characters struggle with ambivalence, trying to establish an identity "beyond the confines of patriarchal roles", since their wish to explore their complicated feelings is deemed unacceptable in a society where men cannot express any great emotion (Fitzgibbon). Brontë's characters are associated with images of

‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ which are not “unproblematically associated with the biologically female and male” (Pykett 132), whereby the category of gender is fluid (Hoeveler, Morse 347).

Hardy, interested in “the Victorian code of manliness, the man’s experience of marriage, the problem of paternity”, defined maturity for his tragic heroes Henchard, Jude Fawley and Angel Clare as an “identification with a woman” or, in other words, “an effort to come to terms with their own deepest selves” (in Horlacher 224). He writes in *Jude the Obscure*: "If Jude had been a woman, he must have screamed under the nervous tension which he was now undergoing. But that relief being denied to his virility, he clenched his teeth in misery." (in Fitzgibbon) *Mayor* opening with a husband selling his wife and child should already alert the reader to some complex aspects of the relations between the sexes (Moore 90). What Henchard undergoes is an ‘unmanning’. His masculinity is “inextricably bound to his authority” that is challenged in the public sphere by his rival Farfrae (Moore 90), who has much more self-control and sophistication, as well as an emotional, romantic side. Henchard is first portrayed as asexual, “something of a woman-hater” (Hardy 74), and rather directs his energies into business matters (Moore 90). His initial relationship with Lucetta follows a period of illness that leaves him “uncharacteristically vulnerable to female attraction” (Moore 90). Later, he is again attracted to her only because Farfrae is the rival – he would rather *be* Farfrae, than marry Lucetta (Moore 90-91).

A turning point in the development of his feminine side occurs after his fight with Farfrae, when Henchard’s attitude, while crouching on the corn sacks filled with remorse at attacking a man he deeply cared about, is described as womanly: “Its womanliness sat tragically on the figure of so stern a piece of virility.” (Hardy 254-255) Their fight ends, according to Elaine Showalter in her feminist reading of the novel, in Henchard’s “unmanning” which is on the whole a “pilgrimage” towards “self-discovery and tragic vulnerability” (in Moore 90). He “finally [crosses]

over psychically and strategically to the long-repressed 'feminine' side of himself." (in Daleski 120) According to her, Hardy "understood the feminine self as the estranged and essential complement of the male self" (in Daleski 120).

The exposure of Henchard's feminine side is related to his craving for emotional attachment, represented in his strong bond with Elisabeth-Jane. All he wants from her at the end of his days is "love and affection", this time "not corrupted by the fact that she is 'not his own'" (Daleski 126). In his exile, he carries with him some mementoes of her like gloves or shoes: "[…] retracing his past, he has chosen to burden himself with reminders of womanhood, and to plot his journey in relation to a female centre" (Showalter 113). Henchard's final "pilgrimage", to Elisabeth-Jane's wedding, is "detail by detail, a reliving of the journey made by the women at the beginning of the novel" (Showalter 113). As Susan was first left in the shadow of her husband's glory, Henchard is now "overwhelmed by Elisabeth-Jane's moral ascendancy" and is ultimately rejected by her (Showalter 113). She indeed proves to be the victor in the situation and is given the final say in the book with its "message of domestic serenity" and "Victorian feminine wisdom" of making the best of limited options (Showalter 113).

Virginia Woolf, one of the earliest feminist critics of Hardy's work, attributes the "'tragic power' of his characters to "a force within them which cannot be defined, […], a force which in the men is the cause of rebellion against life, and in the women implies an illimitable capacity for suffering" (in Showalter 114). In Henchard these two forces combine, resulting in his unmanning, in which Hardy "achieves a tragic power unequalled in Victorian fiction" (Showalter 114).

In the works of the Brontë sisters, female protagonists are the ones rising above male authority in order to "remodel domestic relations as the mother's purview" (Armstrong 175). In *Wuthering Heights*, "the domestic power of a daughter-figure", Cathy, triumphs over Heathcliff

(Showalter 113) as she is finally able to resist his attempts to "strip her of literacy, family affiliation, and the will to domesticate" (Armstrong 175). She makes possible that "one generation will not be doomed to repeat the tragic errors of its parents" (in Schauber, Spolsky 75).

Since early childhood, Heathcliff has identified himself with Catherine, who he finds understanding and compassion in, and can thus only "exists through the woman he loves" (Siegel 71). As she marries Edgar and becomes a "feminine young lady", their bond is irreparably damaged (Knoepflmacher 83). Heathcliff, controlled and oppressed by the domineering Hindley, adopts "a traditionally masculine gender role" (Crouse 183) and develops a need to "establish his dominance and right to Catherine" (Crouse 184). Their "androgynous whole is broken as they each assume their respective gender roles" (Crouse 184) and suppress their emotions. Martin Alegre argues that Brontë mocks Heathcliff's model of masculinity, described as "abusive, aggressively asexual" (9), by giving him an effeminate, "unsuitable" son who makes him "ashamed of his biological legacy" (12). Hareton, the other son figure and representative of the new generation, is an alternative to Heathcliff with his kindness and loyalty - his is the new "model of masculinity" better suited to the needs of Catherine's daughter (Martin Alegre 2). Although Heathcliff in the end confesses that Catherine is the sole gravity keeping him alive, he never truly lets go of his pride. Hope is presented in Cathy's marriage to Hareton that "fuses" both houses, constituting a "triumphant reconciliation of nature and civilization" in which Cathy is a combination of her "mother's energy" and "father's education", and Hareton of "Heathcliff's masculine vigor" and "a capacity for enduring affection or agape" (Mellor 204). What Brontë ultimately shows is that "female passions are infinitely valuable" (Siegel 71) and capable of overpowering the construct of masculinity.

Showalter suggests reading the *Mayor* as a "tragic taming of the heroic will, the bending and breaking of [Henchard's] savage male defiance in contest with a stoic female endurance", whereby Henchard would be a "second Heathcliff" (Showalter 113).

3.2 Revenge, remorse and redemption

The pathway from masculinity to an acceptance of a feminine side in Heathcliff and Henchard can be translated into their need for revenge that ultimately turns into feelings of remorse, which then rekindle an element of humanity and give hope for potential redemption.

Allen considers *Wuthering Heights* a novel of revenge where Heathcliff is the "revenger" trying to numb the pain of Hindley's tyranny and the frustration of his relationship with Catherine (196). His vengeful tactics are first used on Isabella Linton, Edgar's heir, who takes an innocent liking to him. Although he indeed hates her as she reminds him of her brother, he marries her with the goal of obtaining power over him, and tortures her incessantly. At Wuthering Heights, the couple finds Hindley reduced to a shadow of his former self, an indebted, gambling drunkard who easily falls victim to Heathcliff. After his death, Heathcliff acquires the Heights and is free to exact his revenge on the last Earnshaw, Hindley's son Hareton. The boy becomes dependent on his father's worst enemy who makes him into a servant, an illiterate "brute" (Brontë 209) raised as "his property" (Crouse 189). Heathcliff does not stop there and, after Isabella's death, uses their son Linton, "a pale, delicate, effeminate boy" (Brontë 213) as a means to an end, all the while feeling nothing but scorn for his frailty. In order to attain his goal of owning Thrushcross Grange, he organizes a marriage between Linton and Cathy. She is even held prisoner and coerced into

marriage, regardless of the fact that her father Edgar is on his deathbed. At the end, Heathcliff manages to acquire both houses and controls Cathy and Hareton. Kettle concludes that Heathcliff's strategies used against the Earnshaws and Lintons are their own weapons, "the classic methods of the ruling class" - expropriation and arranged marriage (140).

After achieving his goal, however, Heathcliff's need for revenge is replaced by a change that makes him strive to leave his current life behind and meet Catherine at last. Heathcliff's redeeming quality can indeed be found in the deep, undying love he feels for her. Their love is "forged in rebellion" when they are children and remains strong their entire lives (Kettle 133), "a source of little visible delight, but necessary" (Brontë 87). Catherine confesses to Nelly, "Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same […] (Brontë 85-86). This seems to be much more than love or passion alone, but an interdependence, a means of survival: they are "one body and one soul" (Karl 151). As Catherine says, "Nelly I *am* Heathcliff […]" (Brönte 87). After her death, Heathcliff is left "in this abyss" (Brontë 179) and, filled with "unspeakable sadness" (Brontë 192), even digs up her grave, after which he is convinced she haunts him for eighteen years, "incessantly – remorselessly" (Brontë 304).

At the end of *Wuthering Heights*, Heathcliff "comes to understand the hollowness of his triumph" through the union of Cathy and Hareton (Kettle 141). Only when he has faced this loss can he die, "not nobly or triumphantly, but at least as a man" and "in his death he will achieve again human dignity […]" (Kettle 142).

In *Mayor*, Henchard's revenge is directed towards Farfrae who outdoes him in all aspects of his life. His attempts at destroying his thriving business prove unsuccessful, as his approach is inferior in the first place. Twice he is even at the point of pushing Farfrae off the edge of the corn store, "a curious expression taking possession of his face" (Hardy 219), but is unable to. As he is

about to reveal to Farfrae his relationship with Lucetta and destroy their marriage, he is again incapable of doing it in such "cold blood", "by oral poison". (Hardy 228). Henchard's and Heathcliff's revenge is rooted in their oppression and loneliness, but while Heathcliff's has obvious indications of malice, Henchard's revenge seems to be a desperate attempt at putting back together the pieces of a proud man's life. Henchard feels deeply alone and ashamed, and is prone to sinking "into one of those gloomy fits" when "the world seems to have the blackness of hell" (Hardy 74). After living a solitary life with no substantial human relationships, he yearns to give someone his affection. "He was the kind of man to whom some human object for pouring out his heat upon [...] was almost a necessity." (Hardy 116) There was an "emotional void" in him that he "unconsciously craved to fill" (Hardy 138).

Elisabeth-Jane thus becomes his final refuge and "the defining purpose of his life" (Dalziel 23): "[…] in the midst of his gloom she seemed to him as a pin-point of light." (Hardy 267) However, this hope in an otherwise dark existence disappears when Newson reappears, attempting to take his "last treasure" away (Hardy 273). Having lost Susan, Farfrae, Lucetta and Elisabeth-Jane, the thought of living in utter solitude is "unendurable" to him (Hardy 275) and he even contemplates suicide. After Elisabeth-Jane decides to marry Farfrae, Henchard leaves Casterbridge capable of facing his tragic end: "I – Cain – go alone as I deserve – an outcast and a vagabond. But my punishment is *not* greater than I can bear!" (Hardy 291) In his final selfless act and attempt at redemption, he arrives to Elisabeth-Jane's wedding with a caged goldfinch as a gift and "a token of repentance" (Hardy 305). At her refusal not a sound is uttered in his defense, since his self-value is insufficient to oppose her. His final days are spent in utter poverty and he dies not long before Elisabeth-Jane arrives to offer her love and forgiveness. All that is left of him is a piece of paper with his will in which he attempts to protect Elisabeth-Jane from grief and thereby expresses

"the absoluteness of his love" (Dalziel 24). In the end, his redeeming journey towards "self-knowledge" has proven to be one towards "the loving-kindness" that Hardy so valued, which is essentially the Christian concept of charity (Dalziel 22, fn12). Henchard indeed has "a fuller humanity than anyone else in the novel" (Gatrell 56).

It is finally important to note that, regardless of the cruelty of their actions, we as readers sympathize with both characters. In Heathcliff's case, we instinctively "recognize a rough moral justice in what he has done to his oppressors and because, though he is inhuman, we understand *why* he is inhuman" (Kettle 140). Emily Brontë does not "blame faulty mortals for acting in accordance with the nature fate has given them", and does not attempt to "exonerate or excuse them; she simply portrays them – with relentless truth, but also with the compassion induced by limitless understanding." (Bentley 34-35) Henchard too is not entirely a villain, despite his "blind strength and his terrible errors"; we as readers suffer with him "because our sympathy for him is unimpeded" (Karl 42).

CONCLUSION

As the Victorian era was a time of contradictions, so are Heathcliff and Henchard characterized by a number of polarities. Following the trajectory of their lives, the readers gradually recognize that they carry within themselves the old and the new, the feminine and the male, the public and the domestic, the natural and the civilized, the contemptible and the pitiful. Removing all these pieces of their nature leaves at the core deeply impulsive, solitary personalities that strive for integration, but are living in a tragic existence. The world that they leave behind seems to breathe more easily without them to disrupt the balance, but rests on much grief and irreparable mistakes. It is not only on the world of the novels that Henchard and Heathcliff leave their mark upon, but on the world of the readership as well.

The characters affect us because, although they were created many years ago, what they represent are timeless stories of "elemental, universal passions" (Bentley 33), brought to life by writing "as powerful as the north wind which rages round Wuthering Heights" (Bentley 34). This paper attempted to shed light on these universal concepts Brontë and Hardy wished to employ, with the goal of incorporating them in the Victorian world of imminent change and modernity.

It is without a doubt that the complexity of characters such as Heathcliff and Henchard necessitates a more in-depth exploration. The notions of gender and identity are particularly intriguing and eye-opening when viewed from today's perspective, and would therefore benefit from further study.

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