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SILENCE AND WORD IN ELIZABETH GASKELL'S *THE LIFE OF CHARLOTTE BRONTË*

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Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso apresentado como requisito parcial para a obtenção do título de Licenciada em Letras pela Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul.

Orientadora Profa. Dra. Sandra Sirangelo Maggio

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“Women and fiction remain, so far as I am concerned, unsolved problems.”

Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*

RESUMO

Biografias são elementos importantes no desenvolvimento da fortuna crítica de um escritor. Isso fica claro no caso da autora Charlotte Brontë, cuja vida pessoal é quase tão conhecida quanto suas obras literárias. Desse modo, a presente monografia analisa a primeira biografia sobre Brontë, chamada *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, escrita por Elizabeth Gaskell pouco depois da morte da autora. Essa obra foi composta a pedido do Reverendo Patrick Brontë, pai de Charlotte, e tinha a finalidade de reverter a imagem negativa que se criara devido aos elementos do estilo de Brontë que feriam uma série de preceitos vitorianos. A partir desta primeira biografia, publicada em 1857, começa a se formar a imagem mítica que até hoje envolve não apenas Charlotte Brontë, mas toda a sua família. O objetivo da pesquisa é verificar certas escolhas feitas por Gaskell sobre quais aspectos evidenciar e apresentar como verdadeiros e quais omitir ou mitigar. A metodologia utilizada é uma leitura contrastiva entre *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* e outra biografia mais recente, *The Brontës*, publicada em 1995 por Juliet Barker, a historiadora curadora da biblioteca da *Brontë Society*. Esta monografia se desenvolve em duas partes. A primeira apresenta as autoras envolvidas em *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, a biógrafa Elizabeth Gaskell e a biografada Charlotte Brontë, em relação aos motivos que levaram à apresentação que é feita de Brontë para o público vitoriano. A segunda discute o que é dito e o que é calado na biografia, analisando as razões e estabelecendo um contraponto sobre como essas questões são vistas e compreendidas hoje em dia. Como apoio teórico sobre biografias e o papel do eu-biográfico recorro a HAMILTON (2007) e SCHMIDT (2014). Ao término da pesquisa, espero que o trabalho contribua (1) para o nosso entendimento sobre o desenvolvimento da fortuna crítica de Brontë e da formação do mito cultural que envolve a família Brontë; (2) para identificarmos as diferentes visões entre aquela época e a nossa com respeito a autoria e aos papeis de gênero; e (3) para apontar as grandes diferenças entre o que se considerava ser a função arte no século XIX e a nossa visão atual.

Palavras-chave: Literatura inglesa. Biografia. *The Life of Charlotte Brontë.* Autoria. Elizabeth Gaskell. Charlotte Brontë.

ABSTRACT

Biographies are relevant elements in the development of an author's critical fortune. This is clear in the case of Charlotte Brontë, whose personal life is almost as discussed as her literary works. Therefore, the present monograph analyses Brontë's first biography, called *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, written by Elizabeth Gaskell and published two years after Brontë's death. Gaskell wrote this work by request of Reverend Patrick Brontë, Charlotte's father. The intention was to revert the negative image that was created due to some elements of Brontë's style, which did not fit the Victorian norms of morality. This first biography, published in 1857, is the starting point to the mystical imagery that involves not only Charlotte, but her whole family, to this day. The objective of the research is to verify certain choices made by Gaskell about aspects to enhance and present as truthful, and aspects to omit and mitigate. The methodology used was a contrastive reading of *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* and another recent biography, *The Brontës*, published in 1995 by Juliet Barker, the curate historian of the Brontë Society. This monograph is developed in two parts. The first presents both authors involved in *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*: the biographer, Elizabeth Gaskell, and the biographee, Charlotte Brontë, in relation to the circumstances that provoked this specific presentation of Brontë to the Victorian public. The second discusses "word" and "silence", i.e., what is emphasized and what is omitted, analysing the reasons, and establishing a counterpoint about how some issues were viewed then, and are comprehended now. As theoretical support on biographies and the biographical-self I resort to HAMILTON (2007) and SCHMIDT (2014). In the end of this research, I hope that this work may contribute (1) to our understanding about the development of Brontë's critical fortune and the creation of the cultural myth of the Brontë family; (2) to identify differences in the perception of some themes at that time and nowadays, especially regarding authorship and gender roles; and (3) to point out the big divergences between what was considered art's function in the 19th Century and our current vision on the subject.

Key words: English literature. Biography. *The Life of Charlotte Brontë.* Authorship. Elizabeth Gaskell. Charlotte Brontë.

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INTRODUCTION

Charlotte Brontë entered my life through her most famous book: *Jane Eyre*. When I was still in High School and wanted to evolve in my readings of the classics, I chose this book and read it really quickly, sharing it with my mother. Since then, my desire to know more about this author and what was behind her mind increased and was supressed until I took the English Literature course, at UFRGS, with professor Sandra Maggio. She made me look at the book and the author with other eyes – eyes that wanted to discover the implications of life and the imaginary perspective for an author. My inclination to do that began before this, because I always desired to make connections with an author, their life and the surroundings that impact in their writings – this was just emphasized with Brontë, and I carried my studies on biographies.

This monograph consists of an analysis of the first biography written about the English Victorian author Charlotte Brontë (1816-1855). The biography was published in 1857 and the author is Elizabeth Gaskell, another important female writer of the time. According to Juliet Barker, "Mrs. Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, published within two years of her subject's death, set a new standard in literary biography and is still widely read." (BARKER, 2010, pag. 8) The choice of this specific first biography, having so many other materials about the author, has this point in mind: from 1857 onwards, Gaskell's biography set the standard for all subsequent materials written not only about Charlotte Brontë, but about the Brontë Family, which became a literary national myth. In the course of the analysis, not only what is told in Gaskell's work, but also what is silenced – and for what purposes – will be taken into consideration. While exposing some facts and hiding others, Gaskell in a way turned the author and her family into characters, and there are outcomes to that.

To study the concept of biography is to study the impact not only of the person who is depicted in such text, but also the person behind, the one who is writing the text. Elizabeth Gaskell, by writing a biography about Charlotte Brontë, shows much about herself as well. And when we think about a biography written right after the biographee's death, we can imagine the impact this piece of work could have upon the person's life and production, and also the objective behind the work. The motivation, in this particular case, was to clarify some aspects of Brontë's life, because of a request made by Brontë's father, corroborated by her editor and the closer friends, who wanted to redeem the image of the author. Elizabeth Gaskell possibly

agreed to write the biography because she was interested in discovering, for herself, more about her friend's life, together with a sense of mending the confusion in people's imaginary about why Brontë's works were the way they were – rough to the Victorian ways – and how she created such stories.

My interest in this particular biography lies in the fact that it marks the beginning of the mythological aura about the Brontës; and I am also interested in Gaskell's objectives in writing such work. I first heard about Charlotte Brontë as a myth when I read *The Brontë Myth* (2005), by Lucasta Miller. Later, in *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* I found the central piece in the puzzle of ideas surrounding the author. The reading of Gaskell's biography made it clear how much she chose to tell, and how she chose to tell the facts. It is important, therefore, to keep in mind that, when writing a biography, the biographer selects what is to be worded and what is to be silenced. There are intentions behind these choices; and, in this particular case, the silences created a character rather than clarified who the person was.

This monograph is devised in two sections. The first presents some considerations about biographies, introduces the biographee and the biographer, and considers why this particular biography was written. The second section analyses and discusses what is said (the words) and what is omitted (the silence) in the book, considering the motives behind Gaskell's writings.

To analyse Gaskell´s biography, and to highlight important differences between 19th and 21st century's views about life and about art, I rely on another biography, *The Brontës*, written by Juliet Barker, because it is a well informed and recent work. Barker has probably access to more data than Elizabeth Gaskell had, and writes in a time when subjects that were taboo in the 19th century can be discussed openly. Besides being a historian, Juliet Barker worked for a long time as a librarian to the Brontë Society, the organization that maintains The Brontë Parsonage, the museum that was originally the home of the Brontë family. Barker had access to all sorts of documents, and is possibly the most informed Brontë specialist of our time. The contrast between the different points of view in these two biographies is important to my research. Barker's book is about Charlotte Brontë and the other Brontës, therefore it is possible to access more about what was happening and what may have been hidden in Gaskell's biography. Gaskell's intentions are different from Barker's, and the conclusions they reach are also different, because the material they encounter to sustain their work carries their own perspective about the subject.

In order to deal with the perspective of authors of a biography, it is necessary to learn what a biography is as a textual genre. Therefore, to discover how a biographer handles perspective, I rely on HAMILTON (2007) and his study in biographies, particularly when he

deals with Victorian biographies – that he calls *pseudobiographies*. Hamilton emphasizes that texts tend to adapt to their time, and that determines the turns of the narratives, focusing on the side of life that is in accordance to the codes of that time. That explains the points of silence in Gaskell's narrative – she has to deviate from one side of Brontë's life that would not be accepted by her contemporary readers' moral and aesthetical codes.

Another author used as support on biographical studies is SCHMIDT (2014), who discusses how the reader accepts the perspective of the author, and what the biographer chooses to show. No matter what approach is chosen, it is always an invasion of the biographee's privacy. The biographer inevitably turns the biographee into a character in a text that is, ultimately, fictional, because life is too wide and complex a subject to be contained into a narrative. In Brontë's case, we have a life that everyone is interested in knowing. We feel in this book a clear desire to shape a favourable image to the good Victorian woman the readers want to find, a person who follows a certain path because of the choices that are made for her, not the choices she would have preferred to make. Therefore the mixture of the silences and the voices in the biography portraying the mysterious life of Brontë's family brings exactly what people in the 19th century wanted and were eager to receive. Before Gaskell, they could only wonder about the facts in Charlotte Brontë's life; now they have "proof" of what "really" happened.

In order to study a biography, we consider the two persons involved: the person whose life is being narrated, the biographee; and also the biographer, with an eye on the point of view adopted by this person behind the text. Elizabeth Gaskell, while writing about Charlotte Brontë, reveals much about herself and her views concerning a number of things. Also, when we think about the fact that this work was written right after the biographee's death, we can figure out the impact it had upon the image created about the biographee's life and work. In this particular case, the biography is meant as a moral defence of Charlotte Brontë. I imagine that Gaskell also accepted the task because she was interested in discovering, for herself, more about her acquaintance's/friend's life, together with a sense of mending the state of affairs concerning Brontë's reputation. The confusion was such, at that time, that many readers thought there was only one author, Charlotte, and that Emily and Anne where fictional alter-egos whose novels were also written by Charlotte.

The reading of Gaskell's biography disclosed several choices made by its author. Some of them are conscious, and serve a specific purpose. From our standpoint, with the information and critical tools we can use in the 21st century, we can interpret Gaskell's choices about what to tell, what not to tell, why, and how. We can also see points about Gaskell that she probably

was not aware of, sometimes even in the phrasing of some sentences, that reveal that she is also involved in the Victorian frame she tries to manipulate. Which is arguably the case with Brontë as well. Gaskell approached Brontë's life through a point of view that suited their time.

1 TURNING LIFE INTO FICTION

This current chapter is divided into three sections. Its purpose is to provide information that I consider relevant for the development of the research. Section 1 discusses the concept of biography as a textual genre. Sections 2 and 3 bring some data about Gaskell's and Brontë's lives that I consider pertinent to the development of the work, and inform about the reasons why Rev. Brontë asked Mrs. Gaskell to write *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*. Gaskell and Brontë are presented both as Victorian women and as female authors. They will be considered in their position in relation to their time. A discussion of who and what is behind the writing of a biography – and what may result – is the main object here.

1.1 On Biographies

A biography stands at the frontier between life and fiction. It is not as much a work of representation about what is being seen than it is an *interpretation* of the writers (the biographers) about their subject (the biographees). According to Nigel Hamilton, author of *Biography: A Brief History* (2007), "Biography-styled fiction, together with conventional, inhabited biography, may thus best be seen as the combined way in which society records and interprets the lives of individuals." (p. 117) Thinking about the social aspect of a biography, one can only assume the background a biography written in the 19th century has within – and that accompanies the biography written by Gaskell.

The way a certain society interprets the life of an individual varies in different times and places. We can point two aspects in which our current interpretations about life and art differ from the 19th century views. First: rather than believing in the final, capitalized word "Truth", we nowadays believe in "different points of view" about certain subjects. Second: we believe that art should be freely created, while Victorians thought that art should always be moralising.

The first chapter of Portuguese literary theorist Aguiar e Silva's book *Teoria da Literatura* [Literary Theory] lists different concepts about the function art in different moments in history. For the ancient Romans, for instance, art should be "*dulce et utile*" (useful and pleasant). In the 19th century, it should be "moralizing and didactical". (cf. AGUIAR E SILVA, 2008) This is what lies at the root of the problems involving the negative critical reception of the novels written by the Brontë Sisters. Reviewers complained about the excessive amount of feeling displayed (see the intimacy shared by Heathcliff and Cathy, or Rochester and Jane); the

simultaneous involvement with different characters (see Lucy Snowe's attraction to Dr. John and M. Paul); or characters situated in odd moral position (see Helen, the separated protagonist who pretends to be a widow, in *The Tenant of Wildefell Hall*). As the readers believed that all the books had been written by Charlotte, she was charged for the immorality found in each of the Brontës' works.

There is a distinct difference between the two modes in which Gaskell shapes her story – one of them reveals the nuances of a society and the other serves to conceal what is improper and enlighten the morals. In Hamilton's words: "In sum, nonfiction and fiction divided the Victorian literary spoils in relation to the lives of individuals: the one maintaining reputations, the other destroying them—but only in make-believe." (HAMILTON, 2007, p. 123).

Omission, therefore, becomes an important building point to Victorian biographies. And because each time has its own context, biographies become a way of changing the concepts that created in the works of literature. This was particularly difficult when they had access to certain facts and information available through letters, diaries, memoirs. The selection of those documents was carefully handled so as to show that the improprieties narrated in fiction were not connected with the real life of the biographee. Victorian biographers had to choose carefully what to show and what perspective to adopt to create the appropriate chain of "facts" to be narrated.

The perspective adopted is a key element in the process of writing a biography. It is different, for instance, writing about a living author with life goals that have to be highlighted, or about a dead author with a past that has to be erased, or rephrased, in the imaginary of the readers. The intention behind the perspective adopted is not always clear, but in this case we have a biographer who could be considered an acquaintance, or even a friend of the biographee, writing the texts some months after the biographee's death. Therefore we can say that the perspective adopted here is partial and favourable. Gaskell was personally informed by Brontë's family and friends, and had access to letters and personal materials that belonged to the biographee.

Historian Benito Bisso Schmidt, who studies the limits that separate actual life from narrated fiction, says,

> It is worth mentioning that the biography and the historical genre were born at the same time. However, it gradually – particularly with Thucydides – took separate paths, since practitioners of biography were not interested in completely breaking ties with the imaginary, because, from their point of view, expressing the life lesson embodied in it was more important than revealing the "truth" about the character portrayed. (SCHMIDT, 2014, p. 5)

Hence, the objective of a biography dismisses part of the factuality that reality has to fill its own purposes. In the particular case of Victorian biographies, we have the poignant purpose of improving the moral code and leading a message of pure Christian values so that people could improve in their personal lives. So, even though history and biography might have the same starting point, their purposes differ.

After listening to many stories told by different people, reading letters and other documents, Gaskell selected what was to be used and what was to be discarded. The chosen material was quoted and shown to prove the veracity of the narrated facts. As the documents and sources were corroborated by family and contacts close to the biographee, they seemed sufficiently authentic for readers not to question their veracity. Although for us it may seem obvious that Gaskell is leading the reader to specific conclusions and ideas that they would not have alone, or would not have the power to obtain, people did not consider that possibility for two reasons. The first is that the notions of History and Truth of that time were different from ours. The second is that they were so eager to peek at the author's life that they would never question facts presented by a respected and honoured author such as Mrs. Gaskell. According to Schmidt:

> The history of the nineteenth-century, which gradually gained disciplinary configuration and its own institutional locations, did not consider the biography as its main pillars and preferred to invest in depersonalized and/or collective entities when indicating the subjects and formulating the causal nexus of its narratives: the Nation, the State, the People, the Environment, the Race. In this scenario, the biography was accepted as an accessory genre, usually practiced by dilettantes; however, fundamental to the establishment of civic and patriotic pedagogy of developing nations. (SCHMIDT, 2014, p. 8).

There were implicit notions operating in Victorian biographies, and they had to be followed, therefore Gaskell's perspective, her shaping of the narrative and the choices of sources guided the understanding of the reader need to understand. This is how the sacred space of home and county were presented.

It is important that we think of these conditions as we examine Gaskell's Victorian biography through our 21st century perspective considering another biography written in the end of the 20th century, which turns possible to consider different ways of presenting the same life. Gaskell, with her Victorian morals, Barker with the intention to reveal as much as possible – and maybe as close as possible to history –, and I passing by both realities and coming back

to my own research of what had to be said, what had not to be said and what is possible to read without saying a word.

1.2 On the Biographee

Charlotte Brontë (1816 – 1855) is a Victorian writer from Yorkshire, a place marked at the time by a strong process of industrialization. She was the daughter of a clergyman and had five siblings – two of them died in childhood, due to a pandemic plague that attacked the North of England and Scotland at the time.[1] Brontë lived most of her life in Haworth, a tiny town where most of the inhabitants belonged to the working classes. Rev. Brontë, her father, was intellectually very cultured, but economically poor. According to Juliet Barker, that was a difficult period for the clergy. They had to move among the prestigious and wealthy people from the place, but their wages were so low that they needed to be supported by the Church. (Cf. BARKER, 2010) One of the consequences of this complicated social condition is that it affected the Reverend's children. According to Sandra Maggio,

> [Charlotte] assimilated the views of her family, which were politically conservative and aristocratic views. The problem lies in the fact that her family did not belong into any station of the rural gentry, they were not prosperous, in fact they ended up entrapped in a distorted sense of identity. As the family of the local parson, the Brontës were frequently invited to the houses of wealthy people, and incorporated many of their habits. They were constantly reminded, however, that they did not belong there. As adults, each of the children bore the scars of such predicament. In the case of Charlotte Brontë, here may lie the roots for the quest for identity and love as a recurrent theme in her fiction, as Brontë´s major heroines are also socially misplaced. (MAGGIO, 1999, p. 18)

At that time the role genders were divided in a way that boys must grow up to become the providers in the family, and girls should be accomplished and learn how to become mothers and keep a household. The Brontës were not the owners of their house. They lived at the Parsonage, therefore after their father retired they would be left on their own. The four surviving siblings were one boy, Branwell, and three girls, Charlotte, Emily and Anne. The burden in the prospect of providing for them all was too heavy for Branwell, and he sank under it. Branwell turned into a drunkard and a drug addict. His sisters realized that if they remained passive, their

[1] Unless when otherwise informed, the factual data provided in this chapter comes from the reading of the two biographies, Gaskell's and Barker's. Whenever they differ as to perspective and point of view, the source will be properly indicated.

outcome would be tragical. With the financial help of their aunt, Charlotte and Emily went to study abroad, in Brussels.

Their study was a continuation of their children years, when they attended a local school for girls. The duration of their first stay in Brussels was meant for six months, but both Charlotte and Emily wanted to remain the rest of the year. They were already women and since they did not have much of a formal education before, the stay in Brussels proved to be a strong experience – they got to know another part of the world and there was a transformation in their sentiments. M. Héger, the owner of the school, who was also an excellent professor, recognized their talents and trained their writing skills. His impact on their lives was strong. According to Barker, there are hues of M. Héger in Emily's character Heathcliff, in *Wuthering Heights*, and in Charlotte's characters Mr. Rochester, in *Jane Eyre*, and M. Paul, in *Villette*.

In going back to Haworth, Emily was resolute to stay home. Charlotte wished to return to Brussels, but did not have the money. She was in a down, until a letter from M. Héger himself arrived, offering a vacancy as a teacher, and she was able to return and enjoy some further time in Brussels.

Her stay in Brussels was filled with the expectation of the presence of M. Héger, who represented much to Charlotte. It is possible to acknowledge that much of the passion the reader encounters in her novels reverts the time she got to know a special man outside her family circle, and was noticed by him in a special way. Her desire to remain in Brussels and her sadness to leave were not so much linked with the desire to learn – although she did actually learn – as to the presence of M. Héger, who opened new perspectives in her writings both technically and as an inspiration.

M. Héger was a married man, father to several children, a gentleman and morally very steady. Therefore, there was no possibility of other entries in their relationship other than the friendship involving a professor and his pupil. So that Charlotte's return to Haworth led her into a deep depression. Even so, now that she had a degree and a certificate, they needed to put the plan of opening a school into practice – both to fill their time and to earn the money they needed so badly. Except that their plan did not launch. They lived in such a distant deserted place, always haunted by the plague, that no practical family would send their daughters there to become refined ladies. They did advertise the school, and their friends tried to make some invitations, but they did not succeeded in their enterprise. It seemed that the only remaining action they could take was to try for the dreaded position of becoming governesses in other people's homes.

But before that, after discovering some of Emily's poems, they decided to try the literary world. They spent the remaining money they had publishing a collection of their poetry, under the neutral pen-names that carried their own initial C.B., E.B., and A.B.: Currer Bell, Ellis Bell, and Acton Bell.

Thus, the first collection of poems by the Bells was published. It was relatively well received by the critics, but did not sell. But even if they were not openly welcomed in the literary world, the seed of literary career was planted there. The three decided that instead of applying for the governess act, they would continue anonymously pursuing a writing career.

Then each one wrote a novel. Anne wrote *Agnes Grey*, Emily wrote *Wuthering Heights* and Charlotte wrote *The Professor*. The novels were harder to publish. As they could not pay, they needed to find a publishing house that accepted to run the risk. Charlotte was set to open the way, sending letters to many editors and writers she considered good and who could be interested in the three novels. Finally, the editor Thomas Cautley Newby accepted Anne's and Emily's novels, but not Charlotte's. The pursuit was carried on until Charlotte stumbled into Smith, Elder & Co., who were not wishing to publish *The Professor*, but did not dismiss Charlotte so quickly as the other editors.

From this sudden chance, Charlotte wrote *Jane Eyre* in four months and the three sisters managed to publish their first novels. The critics were vocal about the works, praising several aspects and blaming other aspects of their writing. Authors also manifested themselves about the newcomers into their scene. And readers responded enthusiastically. The gender of the Bell siblings was a constant question. There were also questions whether they were actually three authors, or only one. As the three novels touched subjects disagreeable to the proper ways of Victorian times, a discussion started about who these people were, why they wrote such coarse books and if they deserved to be accepted.

The conversation continued, each time more centred on the mystery of who the writers were and how they dared write those books, dealing on such subversive topics, that the subjects of said books turned into one of the reasons these writers should be discovered. However, some time would still pass before the truth was unravelled about the Brontës.

It is also worth mentioning that it was a special desire of Emily Brontë to conceal their identities, and Charlotte respected this until her sisters passed away. Therefore, Charlotte's entrance into literary society only happened later, after the bitter loss of Branwell, Emily and Anne. After that, she did not mind signing her own name, which she did in the publication of *Villette*, in 1853.

Branwell died of tuberculosis in September 1848, after suffering much because of his drinking and opium addiction. Probably Emily and Anne were infected by him, and died within three and seven months of Branwell's decease. Only rev. Brontë and Charlotte remained. What kept her going was writing and exchanging correspondence with her editors, so that she ended up, after much grief, publishing other books and coming into light about her identity.

Curiosity about the author, and speculation if there were one or three Bells, arose, and Charlotte entered into her author persona, who needed to – perhaps – create an image that was suitable to a respectful woman, which would prevent her from being constantly compared to her creation and character Jane Eyre. It was during that time that she was introduced to other authors, and encountered Elizabeth Gaskell. During a short period of time, Charlotte Brontë could experience some recognition as an author. She even had her portrait painted and displayed at the National Portrait Gallery. She was the only Brontë publicly recognized for her works.

From this point on is set the tone of the biography that follows Charlotte death – who was the author and, especially, who was the person behind the authoress. The presence of Brontë in the literary circle was short; she soon got married to her father's assistant and retreated from the literary stage. And then she died. Her distance from the literary world rekindled the emergence of a new wave of negative criticism and speculations about her person and her life. There lays the path that made possible a soon-to-be-written biography.

To counteract the rumours that there was only one Bell author, Charlotte added some prefaces to subsequent editions of Emily's and Anne's novels, aiming to clear out the confusion. She felt it was her duty to, if not clean her own moral, at least clean her sisters' names and acknowledge their own talent and story. She worked almost as a biographer to her own family. In the prefaces she wrote, Brontë refers to their early stages of authorship,

> We had very early cherished the dream of one day becoming authors. This dream, never relinquished even when distance divided and absorbing tasks occupied us, now suddenly acquired strength and consistency: it took the character of a resolve. We agreed to arrange a small selection of our poems, and, if possible, get them printed. Averse to personal publicity, we veiled our own names under those of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell; the ambiguous choice being dictated by a sort of conscientious scruple at assuming Christian names positively masculine, while we did not like to declare ourselves women, because — without at that time suspecting that our mode of writing and thinking was not what is called "feminine" — we had a vague impression that authoresses are liable to be looked on with prejudice; we had noticed how critics sometimes use for their chastisement the weapon of personality, and for their reward, a flattery which is not true praise. (BRONTË, 2004c, p. viii)

The preface may say more about the author than about the people it refers to – which is the case with biographies. When we consider the desire to make amends to prove her sisters'

morals accordingly to the Victorian precepts, there is room left to imagine that Charlotte Brontë could not endure being seen as the immoral person critics thought she was. There is no way a clergyman's daughter could accept not to be on the right side of society. Even if she is not directly defending herself (although she actually responded to some critics in the papers), she can at least defend those who are close to her and cannot speak for themselves:

> What more shall I say about them? I cannot and need not say much more. In externals, they were two unobtrusive women; a perfectly secluded life gave them retiring manners and habits. In Emily's nature the extremes of vigour and simplicity seemed to meet. Under an unsophisticated culture, inartificial tastes, and an unpretending outside, lay a secret power and tire that might have informed the brain and kindled the veins of a hero; but she had no worldly wisdom; her powers were unadapted to the practical business of life: she would fail to defend her most manifest rights, to consult her most legitimate advantage. An interpreter ought always to have stood between her and the world. Her will was not very flexible, and it generally opposed her interest. Her temper was magnanimous, but warm and sudden; her spirit altogether unbending. Anne's character was milder and more subdued; she wanted the power, the fire, the originality of her sister, but was well endowed with quiet virtues of her own. Long-suffering, self-denying, reflective, and intelligent, a constitutional reserve and taciturnity placed and kept her in the shade, and covered her mind, and especially her feelings, with a sort of nun-like veil, which was rarely lifted. Neither Emily nor Anne was learned; they had no thought of filling their pitchers at the well-spring of other minds; they always wrote from the impulse of nature, the dictates of intuition, and from such stores of observation as their limited experience had enabled them to amass. I may sum up all by saying, that for strangers they were nothing, for superficial observers less than nothing; but for those who had known them all their lives in the intimacy of close relationship, they were genuinely good and truly great. This notice has been written, because I felt it a sacred duty to wipe the dust off their gravestones, and leave their dear names free from soil. (BRONTË, 2004c, p. xiii)

Brontë dusted off her sisters' gravestones, in her own way, and maybe her words about her own family helped people around her – and, therefore, Mrs. Gaskell – to conceive the image that it would be sustained for long after her own death. We can say that Charlotte Brontë began her own myth, about three women who were truly good, whose only thing they did actually do was to write wonderfully imaginary stories – stories that had not to do with their own lives.

Not only the "Biographical Notice" enabled Brontë to create this image – her own entrance in the literary word and her tales about who she was, sustained by an image of a shy woman who had never lived in society and had not much contact with anyone outside her own family, created the future possibility that Elizabeth Gaskell seized to write *The Life of Charlotte Brontë.* Charlotte did not want to be recognized as Jane Eyre, she wanted people not to consider her sisters immoral.

Elizabeth Gaskell, as one of Brontë's acquaintances, received her share of knowledge from local reports, and from Charlotte Brontë herself. Having known Brontë as a living person, being close to the woman who needed a clearer image, she did the job Brontë had endeavoured

to do after her sisters' death: to create a narrative that showed how moral and adequate a person for the time Brontë was.

1.3 On the Biographer

Elizabeth Gaskell (1810–1865) is another important English Victorian novelist, contemporary to Brontë. The two authors have several things in common: they were born in big families, their mothers had an early death, their fathers were clergymen, they were also married to clergymen, and both earned much money with their books. But there are differences as well. As to their big families, Brontë lost two siblings in childhood; Gaskell lost six. Brontë belongs in the wild Yorkshire moors, Gaskell is a Londoner. Gaskell married young, had her own house and raised five children. Brontë married when she was 38 and died less than a year later. Religiously, Brontë and Gaskell were from different branches of the Church of England. Brontë was a traditional Anglican, Gaskell was a Unitarian. Differently from most other lines in the Church of England, Unitarians approved of the arts. They did not believe that enjoying the pleasures of art might detract a person from the road to salvation. This may be the reason why Gaskell did not write under a pen name. She signed her books "Mrs. Gaskell." Brontë, on the other hand, used the pseudonym "Currer Bell" in the poetry book and in all her novels, except the last one. When *Villette* was published everyone knew that Currer Bell was Charlotte Brontë.

Gaskell had several books published. She was an acknowledged author who circulated in the writers' society, proud of the fact that she was married to a respectable progressist who respected her work. Or, getting closer to the perspective of her time, a husband who "allowed" her to write – more as a hobby than a proper profession.

The biography written about her friend Charlotte Brontë turned out one of Gaskell's most famous publications. The relevance of this biography transcends the fact that the story is attractive and well written. Its publication took place a couple of years after Brontë's death, and set the tone of what was to be known and said about Charlotte Brontë in the future. Gaskell was no common writer, what she wrote had the power to depict Brontë's place, and time, and the society she was inserted in. Perhaps Gaskell was more successful in doing that than Brontë herself, because as a writer Gaskell's books are more focused on the moralising side, and Brontë's on the passionate side of things. Therefore, Gaskell was more authorized in the eyes of the readers. She could stand more "true" to current events, and show the people and the revolutions which were very common during her years. Another evident difference between the

biographer and her object of study is their social upbringing. Elizabeth Gaskell lived in the metropolis and married at a "proper" age, becoming what Victorians considered a "respectable lady". Charlotte Brontë was a secluded woman, she only started doing business in London and was introduced to literary society after she was a published and known author – and still unmarried.

Assuming the role of a Victorian lady, and because she knew Charlotte Brontë – or at least one version of Charlotte Brontë –, she conceived her own idea of how this person who wrote such subversive books should be presented. Gaskell, as many other people did, tried to find the character Jane Eyre in the person of Charlotte Brontë – because they thought maybe in that way it would be possible to understand how such a mind functioned. During the few years Gaskell talked to and exchanged letters with Brontë, she had the opportunity to modify the image she created of her friend. If it was a better or a more factual version, there is no way to affirm, since no one knows a living person completely. But there is, obviously, space to conjecture about these modifications in Gaskell's imaginary and look into what she created and inserted in other people's imaginary.

This is the main reason Gaskell accepted and even suggested to be the one to write Charlotte Brontë's biography. She had the ability to write – no one would question that – and she had also known Charlotte Brontë personally, being able to visit her and exchange letters with her. Not only that, she got to hear some stories from Brontë herself. She was, all in all, the perfect writer to take this position of the first biographer of Charlotte Brontë.

On the other hand, some facts should be taken into consideration when looking at this chosen biographer. For one thing, she had not been in touch with Brontë for some time, since Brontë got married. She had not published anything lately, and receded from the literary life and from the circles where Gaskell belonged. Also, Gaskell had not met the Brontë's family. She only met personally Rev. Brontë, and even him was a shadow of a figure to her – she just had a brief meeting with him, and the other aspects of his person had been brought up by Charlotte Brontë. Therefore, the main sources Elizabeth Gaskell had as a "personal friend" were her interviews with the other personal friends of Brontë and the anecdotes she heard, not only from Brontë herself, but from the others who knew her or thought that they knew her.

Hence, the perspective Gaskell adopted and the paths she chose to follow in the rendering of the life of Charlotte Brontë into a narrative were dictated even before she knew she would write such a work.

In the times when Brontë was alive, the idea of writing her biography most likely never crossed Gaskell's thoughts. What triggered that were the facts that soon after her death criticism

brought new light to her and her works, a very negative light. In consequence, Rev. Brontë appealed to Gaskell, asking her to write "a short account" of his daughter. I imagine that Gaskell took the opportunity not only to vindicate her friend, but to adjust the narrative of Brontës life into a mood that would appease the Victorian strict rules about morality and gender behaviour. Rev. Brontë thought of Gaskell as the perfect person to carry out this diplomatic work. She was an author, and a good one, as well as an acquaintance with his daughter – having the proper knowledge to clean the general gossip circulating around the name of his daughter.

Gaskell was, therefore, the chosen one on her merits; and she indulged because the request suited her intentions. Charlotte's editor also urged her into the task, and that is how Elizabeth Gaskell was directed to a new genre of writing, where her point of view was to determine many things.

The Life of Charlotte Brontë's exceeded all expectations on the part of Rev. Brontë, in spite of the fact that his image is highly distorted in the work. Not only the life of Charlotte Brontë is presented there, but also of the family, the place and the time in which they belonged.

2. A READING OF *THE LIFE OF CHARLOTTE BRONTË*

The present chapter is divided into three sections, which aim to analyse Gaskell's biography of Charlotte Brontë, from the premiss that the book seeks to harmonize Brontë's circumstances and the expectations, mainly on the part of the critics, about the standard code of behaviour of the time. First, we concentrate on the initial reception to Brontë's work, and the reasons why a defence was needed. The second section emphasizes the gaps and omissions, the silences the biography contains, and why they were considered necessary. The final section focuses on what is stated, how, and why. I believe that this contrast is relevant for us to understand the impact of this biography (a) to set the starting point in the critical fortune of Brontë's work, (b) for the creation of the Brontë Family myth, and (c) to explain a certain condescendence that we feel, on the part of the critics (maybe still nowadays), which overshadows the merit I believe she deserves as a great innovative talent of her time.

2.1 The Reception of Brontë's Work

The 19th Century discussion around Brontë's works includes points of curiosity such as who Currer Bell was, if it was a man or a woman, if the other Bells in fact existed or were alter egos of one only author.

The general observation about the writing style was that the language and the choices made in the composition of the novels were more vulgar, therefore, more masculine. Currer Bell used coarse words and the characters cursed without any restriction. At the same time, even though the language was not adequate for a Victorian lady writer, the point of view of a female character was present in the many intricate details that only a woman would and could notice. The doubt was plausible – who would this person who writes so freely and does not stop in a single type of style be?

Reviewers would spend a long time writing about those issues, often more time than they would use discussing the novels. And when they did concentrate on the novels, they would often focus on what they considered to be the negative aspects. One point that was often criticised was the excess of emotion.

A review from Fraser's Magazine draws attention to the fact that the style of the writing is evidently female:

> (…) [W]e wept over *Jane Eyre*. This, indeed, is a book after our own heart; and its merits have not forced it into notice by the time this paper comes (…). The writer is evidently a woman, (…) The form may be changed, and here and there some incidents invented; but the spirit remains such as it was. The machinery of the story may have been borrowed, but by means of this machinery, the authoress is unquestionably setting forth her own experience. This giver the book its charm: it is soul speaking to soul; it is an utterance from the depths of a struggling, suffering, much-enduring spirit" (LEWES, 2020, p. 690-691)

The fact that there is no question being made about the gender of the writer or the source of the material made Charlotte Brontë want a word with this critic. Brontë did not think this was evidently a female style of writing, and she did not desire to be linked directly with the main character of her novel. Emotion was the key point to the novel, but this did not mean to say it was all based on real life experience of a real person.

There was also a strong reaction about the lack of religious approach, or at least, of a positive religious approach in the narratives of Charlotte Brontë. She resorted more to emotion and to the characters' actions than on an all-knowing God – which was something different, and inadequate to the Victorian morals of the time.

> Altogether the auto-biography of Jane Eyre is preeminently an anti-Christian composition. There is throughout it a murmuring against the comforts of the rich and against the privations of the poor, which, as far as each individual is concerned, is a murmuring against God's appointment – there is a proud and perpetual assertion of the rights of man, for which we find no authority either in God's word or in God's providence – there is that pervading tone of ungodly discontent which is at once the most prominent and the most subtle evil which the law and the pulpit, which all civilized society in fact has at the present day to contend with. We do not hesitate to say that the tone of mind and thought which has overthrown authority and violated every code human and divine abroad, and fostered Chartism and rebellion at home, is the same which has also written Jane Eyre. (RIGBY, 2020, p. 506)

The subversive aspect of Brontë's work functions in both ways: it accentuates the interest in the work, and at the same time it makes it seem not up to the customs of the period. The general feeling was that reading Brontë's novels could be detrimental to the social and moral development of readers, especially of female readers.

Charlotte Brontë received her fair share of criticism, good and bad, and some of the contents in her books – as well of those in the novels of her sisters Anne and Emily – were heavily attacked. They are, in the end, books centred on female protagonism and fight for independence. That did not fit into the general idea of the roles of women. People did, however, enjoy reading the stories, and found Brontë's approach interesting in themes such as religion

and love. *Jane Eyre*, her first published novel, although (or because) it raised much talk, did enthral people. That was, in fact, the reason why it was published, because it was a good interesting story. And it sold well.

I, a 21st Century reader, still encounter reasons to be shocked while reading Brontë's books, so I imagine how intensely they did affect their contemporaries. This brings us back to the speculation about the sex of the author. Could a man know so much about the soul of a woman? Could a woman write such obscene words and create characters so savage and coarse? But the main pedagogical point was: should female readers be exposed to that sort of literature? Still today we speculate about the extent of the influence of the Brontës' texts on the subsequent movements about the equality of men and women.

All in all, there was much contradiction in the original reception of Brontë's works. Critics did not consider the books *per se*, but the negative influences they might trigger. In this situation, we can see that this negative influence was feared because the books were selling and being intensively read by the population. At that time, books that sell well were edited in three volumes, because of their circulation in the Circulating Libraries, a system the editing companies and libraries had to rent books, instead of selling them. So, while a person was reading Vol. 1 of a novel, another person could borrow Vol. 2 and a third person Vol. 3. Therefore, the editors of the Brontë sisters knew in advance that their three novels would sell well. This is probably the reason why Charlotte, Emily and Anne did not have to pay for the publication. It is their great popularity that made the "moral police" – or the critics – think about how they would affect the readers' imagination.

If Brontë's subversive books were a reflection of the author's deranged mind and style of life, should the critics suggest that their publication be cancelled? Eventually, when they encountered not one author, but three, the size of the problem increased. The "vulgar" stories the sisters wrote were held as something that reflected who they were and the experiences they probably had. Here comes the first premise in Gaskell's book: the root of that problem lay in the lack of "correct" upbringing these girls had – an absent father, who spent his whole time working, and could not take good care of his family. Harriet Martineau, in Brontë's obituary, also explains the "morbid" behaviour of the author through the "domestic freedom and indulgence afforded them by their studious father." (MARTINEAU, 1974, p. 32) Still, Martineau reinforced that there were two facts that should be remembered about Charlotte Brontë: she was "as able at the needle as at the pen," and "the household knew the excellence of her cookery before they heard of that of her books." (MARTINEAU, 1974, p. 32). This explanation was convenient to contrapose some thoughts that may have crossed people's minds.

They needed someone to blame, and found that the figure of a well-meaning but dysfunctional father. Rev. Brontë himself was glad to play that role, because he felt the necessity to defend his family's image. That is why he asked Mrs. Gaskell to write the biography.

Unfortunately, we must acknowledge that even nowadays there are double standards when we consider the behaviour expected from a man and from a woman. What in a man can be considered an expression of authority, power and determination, in a woman would be seen as lack of self-control, intemperance and bad education. We can imagine how things worked in the 19th century, when the female appropriate role was connected with domesticity and being subdued to father, husband, son, and to the norm. That is one of the reasons why Brontë's books were dangerous to that moral code, and viewed as "unladylike". The independence, the feelings, and the course of action of the characters contradict the expected pattern of female behaviour.

The subjects in Brontë's books are presented through a female perspective, and they show how the author viewed and portrayed society. The way the relationships among the characters were presented was innovative, and the critics could not help being interested in that. When they questioned the sex of the author, perhaps the reaction would be different if they discovered that Currer Bell was a man. But when they found the mind of a woman behind the books, they questioned the motives that led a woman to write about such aspects of life and feelings, and that blatant female protagonism. That discomfort might have created the association between character and author, mixing who Charlotte Brontë was and her characters. One of her beloved authors, William Makepeace Thackery, even referred to Brontë calling her "Jane", as a joke, or provocation, because people supposed that if Brontë depicted such an intense and vivid set of experiences, with such passion, she must have lived some of that herself. The same applies to Anne, writing about separated women, and Emily, with her very primitive, uncivilised rough characters.

> But, with that recurrent tragic pattern that made up her life, even the encouraging reception of *Jane Eyre* was spoilt for her, for *Wuthering Heights*, Emily's bid for fame and fortune, got no recognition at that time: 'But Emily – poor Emily – the pangs of disappointment as review after review came out about *Wuthering Height* were terrible', wrote Mrs. Gaskell in her letter from Haworth. 'Miss B. said she had no recollections of pleasure or gladness about *Jane Eyre*, every such feeling was lost in seeing Emily's resolute endurance yet knowing what she felt.' (Q.D. LEAVIS, 1987, p. 9-10)

The relation between the authors of the books was set in stone, and Charlotte Brontë could not enjoy the happiness of writing a successful book when it ended up being so harshly

criticised in the end. Her sisters and herself had to accept that even when publishing under pen names and not revealing who they were, they still had to face the criticism of their books.

This confusion between who the author is and who the characters are made people feel allowed to cross the barriers between life and fiction and criticize the values of the person the author is based on the behaviour of some character, as if someone could not write by observation and absorption. The ill fame associated with such distortions haunted Brontë while she used the pseudonym Currer Bell, and later, when she used her own name. It followed her even after death.

When Gaskell enters with her biography, the project is to revert that negative state of events. Less important than emphasizing the literary worth of the books, what matters is to rescue the honourability of the author. Although at the time the two things worked together, Gaskell's aim was to cause the light to shine on the person Charlotte Brontë had been: how she was and how she lived, where she learned about this and that aspect of life. The fact that *Jane Eyre* was read almost as a biography showed the necessity to write an actual biography, that would supply people with facts of normal and common life which would finally separate the vile books from the lovely woman who wrote them.

Gaskell's biography encounters, hence, the fertile path to create her own story of who Charlotte Brontë was, with the intention to clear this confusion between what was written by the pen of the author and what was actually lived by the person. The question is if what was then put in the biography had to do with making a blank canvas into Brontë's life and forgetting that she did, indeed, write works that did not follow the norms, or to create a gap as large as possible separating characters and creator, so that no one would ever confuse them again. But, maybe, in the direction of dissolving one aspect of this myth, another one was created.

2.2 Silence

As Hamilton reminds us, the point of a biography depends on the perspective adopted by the biographer (cf. HAMILTON, 2007). Gaskell's intentions were specific. Her biography not only emphasizes certain aspects of Brontë's life, but also conceals parts that were not favourable to reach the objective. The silence within the biography refers to every possible item that might corroborate the negative idea spread by critics and reviewers about the dangerous potential of Brontë's novels and the moral handicaps on the part of the author. That which could not be omitted needed to be justified, and a culprit other than the biographee must be presented.

The person emerging from this narrative must fit the Victorian patterns. Or persons, because when Gaskell talks about Charlotte Brontë, she brings the entire family into the story she shapes.

Thinking about silence in the first biography of Charlotte Brontë is thinking about silences that would follow the analysis of her work and herself as an author. One example is the aura of wilderness and space cast by their relation with the North Yorkshire moors, in a way used by Gaskell to justify the fact that the fiction of Charlotte, Emily and Anne Brontë is written by authors not well acquainted with regular urban social conventions. Considering BARKER (2011), "Mrs. Gaskell described the neighbourhood as 'desolate and wild; great tracts of bleak land, enclosed by stone dykes' but then Mrs. Gaskell, coming from the softer side of the Pennines, was never particularly attracted to the wilder countryside of Yorkshire." (p. 73), This exemplifies that it is a common mistake to take the vision of Gaskell's biography as the whole truth. The idea Gaskell draws is of "the six little creatures used to walk out, hand in hand, towards the glorious wild moors, which in after days they loved so passionately;" (GASKELL, p. 27). The evident emphasis on the wilderness and on the children walking alone in a place somewhat desolate is not so true, considering that their place was surrounded by other villages and, at the time, most people who lived in the countryside did not have an abundant amount of neighbours to make them company.

> It comes as something of a shock to discover that historic Haworth was a dramatically different place from the one of popular legend. Mrs. Gaskell's description may be a fairly accurate picture of Haworth in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but it completely ignores the Industrial Revolution and the major impact it had had on life in the nineteenth-century township. 'Isolated', 'solitary', 'lonely' are epithets on every page. But in reality, Haworth was a busy, industrial township (…) (BARKER, 2011, p. 105)

The idea of isolation suited the story Gaskell wanted to tell about the children and how they grew up tough. "They were grave and silent beyond their years" (GASKELL, p. 27) says Gaskell to point out how the childhood in Haworth's parsonage was not an easy one. "So the little things clung quietly together, (…), and they took their meals alone; sat reading, or whispering low, in the 'children's study', or wandered out on the hill-side, hand in hand" (p. 27), the picturesque vision we hold is of a sad group of children distracting themselves as they could, even "raising" themselves on their own.

> The strange and quaint simplicity of the mode taken by the father to ascertain the hidden characters of his children, and the tone and character of these questions and answers, show the curious education which was made by the

> circumstances surrounding the Brontës. They knew no other children. They knew no other modes of thought than what were suggested to them by the fragments of clerical conversation which they overheard in the parlour, or the subjects of village and loyal interest which they heard discussed in the kitchen." (GASKELL, 2019, p. 30)

The perspective here works to make an impact. The reader would understand, by what Mrs. Gaskell presented, that those children had no proper education – they were alone, without good company – how could they have turned out other than misfits? The impacts this has on other stories told about the family and the image supported by the Brontë's books took the imagination of this scenario farther. The silence here, then, echoes during the reading of not only their childhood, but their bringing up and their future writing careers.

This silence also speaks about the diplomacy and the tact on the part of the biographer to reintroduce Brontë to the judgment of the readers. It is important to remember that Gaskell was also an author, and she had her own reputation to maintain, so the decision of re-establishing her friend's reputation had also to do with her own image.

> The metanarrative and self-reflexive utterances make the biographer-persona stand out most clearly against the backgrounds of the life told in *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*. In these remarks, the persona explicitly draws attention to her own telling of Brontë's life, the act of narration itself, and the rewards and problems along the way. In doing so, she gives expression to her own feelings and attitudes. The focus thus very subtly shifts from Charlotte Brontë to the persona; very subtly indeed, because it is still the telling of Charlotte's life that triggers the persona's reactions." (HELMS, 1995, p. 348).

The output of this biography will, indeed, make a turn into hiding from the public eye the aspects that could lead them to think badly or form a mis-concepted idea of the biographee. Since Gaskell had the objective of making amends about the various gossips concerning Brontë and what her writings meant or did not mean, Gaskell would have to choose the aspects that evinced the simplicity and pureness of Charlotte Brontë.

Gaskell starts by stressing the fact that the children lost their mother at an early age, and capitalizes on the harm done by the lack of a female figure to set the example and teach the normal procedures for the behaviour of young girls. As to the father, well-intentioned as he might be, men do not handle such subtle subjects so easily. This is the excuse for the roughness around the Brontës and in their fictional worlds. A consequence to this rendering of the story is that Rev. Brontë, for almost two hundred years, was generally considered a problematic parent, inapt to raise his children, unable to be seen as a real educational presence for them.

> Most of the biographies would have us believe that their childhood was no childhood: no toys, no children's books, no playmates; only newspapers to read and their own precocious, vivid imaginations to amuse them. Mrs. Gaskell set the trend when she described them as 'grave and silent beyond their years'. (BARKER, 2010. p. 122)

What Barker's remark suggests is that there is no interest in Gaskell's text in stating that their childhood was a good one, that the father – considering he had a whole parish to take care of – protected his children as well as he could (like when he removed them from school during the pandemic), taught them whatever he knew, supported their creativity and praised their imagination, and hired private teachers whenever he could. But the image Gaskell painted is gloomy:

> Mr. Brontë wished to make his children hardy, and indifferent to the pleasures of eating and dress. In the latter he succeeded, as far as regarded his daughters. His strong, passionate, Irish nature was, in general, compressed down with resolute stoicism (…). His opinions might be often both wild and erroneous, his principles of action eccentric and strange, his views of life partial, and almost misanthropical; but not one opinion that he held could be stirred or modified by any worldly motive – he acted up to his principles of action (…) But I do not pretend to be able to harmonize points of character, and account for them, and bring them all into one consistent and intelligible whole. The family with whom I have now to do shot their roots down deeper than I can penetrate. I cannot measure them, much less is it for me to judge them. I have named these instances of eccentricity in the father because I hold knowledge of them to be necessary for a right understanding of the life of the life of is daughter" (GASKELL, 2019. p. 28.)

Gaskell, on purpose, ignores the role played by their aunt, Elizabeth Branwell, in the upbringing of the children. The aunt joined the family soon after Maria Brontë died, in 1821, and remained with them until her own death, in 1842. According to Juliet Barker, Elizabeth Branwell was a well-educated woman who had frequented polite society in Penzance and who held a private income of fifty pounds a year, which made her an independent person. After the death of the two elder children, when Rev. Brontë decided that his remaining children would be raised at home, Aunt Branwell offered to look after their education. So, we can say that – in spite of the fact that they lost their mother – the Brontë children always had a mother figure at home. (Cf. Barker, 2010)

Still, it was convenient for Gaskell to use Patrick Brontë's invented eccentricity to explain all further misfortune that overtook the family. With his connivence, Gaskell used Rev. Brontë as the one to blame for each failure in the lives of the siblings. Gaskell's narrative made their childhood set the beginning of what would possibly result in three women and a man who were unable to behave in accordance to social norms, unable to lead their own lives.

Gaskell invested in the intensity of Charlotte's relation with her brother Branwell, who is indeed very important in the development of her writings. If the four children should be

divided into two groups, one pair would be Charlotte and Branwell, the main authors of the Angrian Tales of their juvenilia; the other pair would be Emily and Anne, authors of the Gondal fictional country. In the childhood years, Branwell was probably the leader of the group. He would devise the stories, draw the maps and images, and bind the little books they made. He was the first to consider attempting to publish his poems, translations and writings.

Their childhood was peculiar. Although the girls were introduced to the domestic chores, and Branwell received the more specialized education, their conditions were similar. In the Brontës' house, at least during their growing years, they were living in the same terms as to their desires, dreams and expectations.

When we think about gender roles nowadays, we usually focus on how difficult the conditions were for a woman in the past. And they certainly were. But Branwell's situation was also difficult, in a different way. They all knew that their home did not belong to them, but to the Church of England. After Mr. Brontë died, or retired, they would have to manage on their own. That is why Rev. Brontë hired private professors to teach Branwell as many abilities as possible. As Branwell was the only brother among sisters, it was expected that he would look after the family in the future, if necessary. Branwell probably felt the weight of that responsibility. As to the girls, they were not willing to depend on other people, either. That is why, in different moments of their lives, the four siblings got jobs, so as to learn how to provide for themselves.

In one point, Gaskell and Barker seem to agree: it was difficult for the four Brontë siblings to be away from their home. They would feel desolate, get sick and return to Haworth as soon as they could. Although Gaskell's and Barker's biographies refer to these professional incursions, the emphasis given to the attempts differs. After reading Gaskell, we firm the image of the four siblings living almost permanently in Haworth. Barker goes deeper in the rendering of their experience as tutor (Branwell), teachers (Charlotte and Emily) and governesses (Charlotte, Emily and Anne). I will briefly refer to Anne's professional movements, as an instance of points that are mitigated in Gaskell's rendering of the story.

The possibilities of work for women in Anne's condition basically consisted in working as a teacher or as a governess. For either profession, she needed to know the things she was supposed to teach. Anne studied at home up to the age of fifteen. Their father had a small harpsichord, where the children had piano lessons from the church organist. She had lessons in drawing, music and art. From their aunt, the girls learned the household chores. The four children read extensively from their father's bookshelf, and learned about history and geography from the newspapers her father got from the wealthy families in the neighbourhood.

During two years, Anne attended regular school, at Blake Hall. When she left school, at the age of nineteen, she found a place as a governess with a family called Ingham, but she was dismissed after a few months. She will revisit this unhappy experience in the novel *Agnes Grey*. Refusing to disappoint her family, she tries again and gets a position as a governess with the Robinson family, in a place called Thorpe Green, where she works for five years, teaching four children, three girls and a boy. In her third year there, as the boy was growing too old to be taught by her, she suggested that they hired Branwell to work as his tutor. From 1843 to 1845 Branwell joined them at Thorpe Green. He got romantically involved with Mrs. Robinson, the mother in the family. Anne felt so uncomfortable about that that she left the job. Soon after that the affair was disclosed and Branwell was dismissed. So, although Branwell was a man, his position is similar to the position of women servants at the time, who were so often charmed, deceived and used by their superiors in an abusive way. Mrs. Robinson had declared that she loved Branwell and that she would marry him in case her sickly husband died. But when that happened, she married a wealthy gentleman from the neighbourhood instead. That was the moment when Branwell started drinking and taking drugs.

Then we reach the episode involving M. Héger, in Brussels. Gaskell deliberately omitted every trace of Charlotte Brontë's relationship with M. Héger; and, as a consequence, she did not specify how important that man was to the development of Charlotte and Emily Brontë's writings. Here we can see the double standard presented in the account Gaskell gives about how Branwell had a downfall, while Charlotte remained always untouched by so ardent feelings – vulgar feelings, if I may say so myself.

Barker comments on this in the chapter where she talks about Mrs. Robinson (a chapter that follows Barker's chapter about M. Héger). There, Barker not only tells us about how Branwell failed to handle the situation, but how Charlotte was dealing with her own problem.

> There is a double standard here, as in all Charlotte's remarks on Branwell's misdoings at this time. She accuses him of failing to look for employment yet she herself had been unemployed for two years, effectively allowing herself to be kept by her father and Anne. (…) Similarly, she criticized Brawell's lack of self-control, with its devastating effect on the family, yet, despite the rigorous suppression of her own emotions and refusal to make scenes or voice her unhappiness, as Branwell did, her deep depression had similarly been inflicted on family and friends alike. (…) It is not surprising that Charlotte had no sympathy to spare for her brother when her own suffering, from the identical cause, was so extreme. (BARKER, 2010, p. 556 – 557)

It is convenient for Gaskell to silence about Charlotte's motives and suffering, and to attribute Charlotte's depression to the fact that she was witnessing her brother's downfall. As a

consequence, Branwell ended up as the villain in the story, rather than as Charlotte's fellow in sorrow, for similar reasons. Both were persons who saw their disadvantages and failures piling up before them. I see this as a balance in Gaskell's biography, because in order to create a moral Victorian in Charlotte Brontë she needs to create an environment that would explain her doings, both in her personal and literary life. Gaskell refers to Branwell and his situation as "the Shadow" (p. 154) of the house, as something to be escaped from.

> The year 1848 opened with sad domestic distress. It is necessary, however painful, to remind the reader constantly of what was always present to the hearts of father and sisters at this time. It is well that the thoughtless critics, who spoke of the sad and gloomy views of life presented by the Brontës in their tales, should know how such words were wrung out of them by the living recollection of the long agony they suffered. It is well, too, that they who have objected to the representation of coarseness and shrank from it with repugnance, as if such conceptions arose out of the writers, should learn, that, not from imagination - not from internal conception - but from the hard cruel fact, pressed down, by external life, upon their very senses, for long months and years together, did they write out what they saw, obeying the stern dictates of their consciences. (GASKELL, 2019, p. 164)

As to Branwell's final years and "the ruin" he made of himself, Gaskell adopts a moralising Victorian tone and blames him for surrendering to the drinking and the opium. She does not consider how disappointed he was for the failure of his dreams. Gaskell uses Branwell's tragedy to cover Charlotte's own unsuccessful romance. Branwell killed himself slowly because her former lover deserted him and because of his lack of artistic opening for success. Charlotte grew gloomier and gloomier after her return from Brussels, immerse in recollections of her platonic love, and the explanation Gaskell provides for her sadness is Branwell's decay.

> The stress or what she called 'the awe and trouble of the death-scene' brought on a headache and nausea on the day itself, followed by internal pain, loss of appetite and bilious fever. No doubt her extreme reaction was caused not just by the sudden loss of the brother who had once been so close to her, but also by the recognition that she could so easily have succumbed to the same fate. Had she given in just a little more to her feelings about Monsieur Héger, perhaps she too would have been tipped over the edge. (BARKER, 2010. p. 672)

M. Héger is mentioned *en passant* in Gaskell's biography, along with several other subjects related to the Brussels experience, reducing his influence to something unimportant or maybe just a fact that occurred during Charlotte's stay at the *Pensionnat Héger*: she went to his school, studied and taught there. Nothing more than that. When she mentions the letter M. Héger wrote about Charlotte's value to his school, immediately after that she shifts the subject

to “Branwell… whatever might be his faults, or even his vices, his sisters yet held him up as their family hop” (GASKELL, 2019, p. 116), indicating that the only thing to be said about that was that Charlotte went back home, without a job, and there were no other feelings involved there.

Through these brief examples it is possible to realise how the conciliation of facts of a life can become a source of material to translate an image which will form the picture of a woman of feelings, yes, but mainly feelings towards her family – as she should. And any fault that she might have committed during her life was due to some external interchange with the bad influence of her father and brother, nothing to do with her own life experience, dreams, anxieties or expectations about her life and her future, or even her passions.

2.3 Word

Gaskell had one major advantage when writing this first biography: she and Brontë were contemporaries. She had personally known her subject and they developed a friendly relationship. They spent some time together and exchanged several letters. This was the main aspect Elizabeth Gaskell liked to point out in *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*. She even opens the second chapter saying “For a right understanding of the life of my dear friend, Charlotte Brontë” (GASKELL, 2019, p. 10, my emphasis), inferring that she not only holds the truth, but she holds the truth of someone truly dear to her. Nowadays we have a common understanding that when facts are turned into a narrative, this narrative provides one possible version of the “truth”, truth as seen from the point of view of the author of the narrative. Different versions of the same fact can present distinct – sometimes even contrary – versions of the same “truth”. But in the 19th Century they understood things differently. Victorians believed in one single version of a capitalized TRUTH, a version that should corroborate the moral, religious and legal code of behaviour that kept the order of their universe. Therefore, if they believe that Mrs. Gaskell is a respectable lady, and if she guarantees that Charlotte Brontë is her “dear friend”, Charlotte Brontë must be a respectable lady too.

Another privilege Gaskell had was first-hand contact with the Brontë family, friends and acquaintances, who offered her their stories and impressions, and also documents and letters for her to research from. The effect of this proximity gives the impression that the reader is recollecting, with Gaskell, the life of a close person, reading their correspondence and listening to what and each acquaintance has to say about what they remember most about

Brontë. Gaskell, in a way, is using Brontë's narrative strategy of bringing the "dear reader" to her side. She selects the passages that approximate Brontë and the readers, giving emphasis and credibility to the truth of the moral portrayal that is being formed. Gaskell's information has the credentials of coming directly from the source. She usually closes the rendering of the passages quoting something written by Brontë and saying something like this: "I have given this extract because I conceive it bears some reference to the life of Miss Brontë" (GASKELL, 2019, p. 23), firming the habit of using Brontë's own words to support hers.

Gaskell's main objective is to redeem Brontë's character and life. If we analyse the things she says, the anecdotes she selects and the conclusions she gets, we realize that the best strategy is to focus on the domestic person, the dutiful daughter, sister, niece, member of the Haworth community. It is not that Gaskell does not refer to the author, or to the public person, but the emphasis lies on the lonesome and wild life on the moors, by far.

Mrs. Gaskell brings to our attention the path Charlotte and her sisters followed in education, mentioning that the three younger Brontës received an education that made it possible for them to follow the profession of governess or teachers – and all three, Charlotte, Emily and Anne, did, at least for a brief period of time, exercised this education. The reader receives the information of their education in their early years and the passing of time in Brussels – which was very significant for the family, as it spent a great amount of money in the investment. The intention, of course, was to "build" a school.

> At the time of which I write, the favorite idea was that of keeping a school. They thought that, by a little contrivance, and a very little additional building, a small number of pupils, four or six, might be accommodated in the parsonage. As teaching seemed the only profession open to them, and as it appeared that Emily at least could not live away from home, while the others also suffered much from the same cause, this plan of school-keeping presented itself as most desirable. (GASKELL, 2019, p. 88)

The passage brings the situation of money and position, which turns out solvable by their aunt's savings. These savings ended up used in their education, in the hope opening a school, so that they did not have to be servants in other people's homes. Possibly the intention here was to state that they were practical women, and had other priorities in life that daydreams about being authors.

Victorian morals still had to be considered, because if these women spent money that would be "better" spent otherwise, they would be heading against the mentality of the time. To open a school they needed a refined education, therefore Charlotte and Emily went to Belgium to enhance their French. In the meanwhile, Anne would stay at home, taking care of the family.

Nonetheless, the plans of following the "path of knowledge" were broken and – thinking as true Victorians, this had to be explained following an indication of goodness and sense of responsibility with their home.

> How could [Charlotte] be otherwise than 'flat-spirited', 'a poor companion', and a 'sad drag' on the gaiety of those who were light hearted and happy! Her honest plan for earning her own livelihood had fallen away, crumbled to ashes; after all her preparations, not a pupil had offered herself; and, instead of being sorry that this wish of many years could not be realized, she had reason to be glad. Her poor father, nearly sightless, depended upon her cares in his blind helplessness; but this was a sacred pious charge, the duties of which she was blessed in fulfilling. (GASKELL, 2019, p. 131)

To that end, it is highlighted the desire to make a "just" living and the disappointment of not succeeding, as well as the pure joy of exercising a role of caring for the people she loved – as a single Victorian woman should do.

Gaskell shows what a good soul Charlotte Brontë was, and that she would have been much more so if she had received proper care.

> Here is this little girl, in a remote Yorkshire parsonage, who has probably never seen anything worthy the name of painting in her life, studying the names and characteristics of the great old Italian and Flemish masters, whose works she longs to see some time, in the dim future that lies before her! (…) showing how she had early formed those habits of close observation, and patient analysis of cause and effect, which served so well in after-life as handmaids to her genius. (GASKELL, 2019, p.43)

It is possible to identify what Gaskell is doing, as the presents Brontë's childhood, the light of genius and , while emphasizing what a caring woman Charlotte Brontë was. Any behaviour that did not follow this nature was derived from "the constitutional absence of hope, which made her slow to trust in human affection, and, consequently, slow to respond to any manifestation of it." (p. 127). Nothing wrong could really derive from Charlotte's doings.

Gaskell is creating the image of a bright and gifted person, focusing on her "uncultivated" talent and genius. This potential represents her good qualities, and were born with her. The bad qualities did not come from her, they derive from the bad conditions under which Brontë was raised.

In chapter VI we have the following description:

> Miss Brontë (…) was a quiet, thoughtful girl (…) very small in figure (…) fragile body (…) and peculiar eyes. (…) As for the rest of her features, they were plain (…) but, unless you began to catalogue them, you were hardly aware of the fact, for the eyes and power of the countenance over-balanced every physical defect. (GASKELL, 2019, p. 47)

The descriptions and explanations of who Charlotte was and how she looked were based both on what Gaskell had seen and what people had supplied her. What it presented in the biography is a blending of Gaskell's opinions and an immense number of letters and reports, which she ties up with her conclusions and commentaries of value. And each movement performed deliberately aims to convince the readers of the biography – especially the literary critics who will read the biography – was, all in all, worth of their respect.

> Gaskell's biographer-persona explains that she wants to use Brontë's letters as much as possible: 'Acting on the conviction, which I have all along entertained, that where Charlotte Brontë's own words could be used, no others ought to take their place' (288). However, the biography does not strike the reader as a random collection. The persona presents herself as being extremely self-conscious and careful in the selection of each letter. (…) And yet, while the biographer explains the function of every letter and tries to give authenticity to her presentations of Charlotte's life by using her subject's 'own words' as much as possible, the persona seems to be unaware of what her acts of quotation and montage of texts do to the originals. (…) The letters, for instance, originally a means for Brontë's to communicate with other people, in Gaskell's biography assume explanatory and complementary functions to illustrate Charlotte's life. The biographer subordinates the letters to serve her intentions. The organization of the letter also reflects her exertion of control and power: they become an expression of the persona's autobiographical choices and intentions. (HELMS, 1995, p. 350)

When I say that Gaskell extensively uses Brontë's letters, I mean that she uses the selected letter that corroborate the points she wants to emphasize. Because there are the groups of letters that were kept hidden from the public eyes form more than one century, such as the ones about Brontë's hopeless feelings regarding Professor Héger, in Brussels. On literary terms this is a complicated omission, if we consider the influence of M. Héger in the shaping of characters such as Charlotte Brontë's Mr. Rochester and Mr. Paul Emanuel, or Emily Brontë's Heathcliff.

This first biography solemnly counts on the faith of the reader, on Gaskell's own view of her friend, and on the material she collected. The attractive narrative turns the author into a peculiar character, small and plain but strong and interesting, very much like the character Jane Eyre in Brontë's famous novel. Even now, the portrait painted of Charlotte Brontë to be displayed at the National Portrait Gallery is used to illustrate the cover of *Jane Eyre*. Gaskell's rendering of Charlotte Brontë's life deals with the woman much more than with the writer, and somehow transmutes the woman into a mythical creature of nature, who lived in the moors, had few friends and did not go into society, had a strange and peculiar figure, which concentrated great powers. This is the voice that leads the reader into what Charlotte Brontë had to say to her friends and to them, her "dear readers", revealing how she "felt" – at least how she felt at certain

occasions that were proper to mention in order to bring a friendly reception and to allow Gaskell's friend's light to shine.

CONCLUSION

Having finished the work, I see that a first biography holds an important place in the construction of the image of an author in her space and time. In the case of Charlotte Brontë, there is also the element of mystery and discovery instilled in her life as well as in her work, which no one knew how to separate, or wanted to. Gaskell's biography may be filled with a voice that marks her time, but it also sets the mindset that surrounded the understanding of the author Charlotte Brontë is, and the person had been.

So much is true about the life portrayed in *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, but it is relevant to think that I, a 21st century reader, still encounter aspects worth of analysis, that deepened through this research. One focus of attention lies on the point of view of Elizabeth Gaskell about Brontë's life, the other is what determined the creation of this picture presented to the readers, the perspective through which this life has been presented. Because the two writers are from the same century, lived in the same country and were female authors, we find some characteristics shared by both. This makes the biography even more significant.

Since *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* was written at the request of a relative, soon after the death of the biographee, the approach to this work seems more intimate. I find it comforting to see that Elizabeth Gaskell deeply wanted to convince whoever was going to read the book that she has the authority of experience to certify the facts about her friend's life. The creation of a myth was not done on purpose, and not only by Gaskell, but the consolidation of the imaginary about the Brontë family became possible having the publication of this piece of work as a starting point..

Even though Gaskell used her point of view of as a Victorian person, she also relied on Charlotte Brontë's self-explanation about her life and her time – as well as on the reports she gathered from Brontë's relatives, friends and acquaintances. In this sense, the enabler of the myth was Brontë herself, who appears as a "simple authoress", an author hiding behind a man's façade, who avoided becoming a public person, and who told her own truth about her family.

Analysing the words and the silences in this biography made me think of what we, readers of the Brontës, would now think about their works and their personal characters if we had not been taken so close to the materials presented. Also critics and theorists still address Brontë and her works from the perspective proposed by Gaskell.

The movements performed in Elizabeth Gaskell's narrative teach us much about the way her society worked, especially when we contrast her biography with a more recent similar work, and imagine why some facts are omitted and other facts are emphasized.

Setting a start on the myth and trying to break the myth are intertwined actions. I cannot validate the intention to break the myth without acknowledging the myth and its power. Therefore, there effort to face Charlotte Brontë from another perspective is valid because we become free to consider the things that should be what really mattered, such as her style and the techniques she uses as an author to reach this or that effect. And maybe Brontë would be less admired as a myth and more respected as an author. One proof to that is the way famous male authors ignore her. Charles Dickens, for instance, was too busy and had more important things to do than to read the Brontës. But John Forster, Dickens' friend and first biographer, told him enthusiastically about the first-person narrative technique used in *Jane Eyre*, where the narrator addresses the 'dear reader' directly. Dickens likes the idea and puts it into practice in his most famous novel, *David Copperfield*. Three decades later, in Brazil, Machado de Assis reads Dickens and writes *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas*, where the first-person narrator also addresses the reader directly. In 1956 Riobaldo, Guimarães Rosa's first-person narrator in *Grande Sertão: Veredas* again addresses his reader. I think it would be fair to declare that this puts Charlotte Brontë at the root of what today is known as Studies of the Narratee. To certify this we have the word of two acknowledged Dickens biographers. Claire Tomalin, in *Charles Dickens: A Life* (2011), declares that Forster told Dickens about the narrative structure of *Jane Eyre*,

> As far as is known, Dickens never read *Jane Eyre* – he makes no reference to it in any surviving letters – but Forster would certainly have done so, and it was he who suggested the use of a first-person narrative to Dickens. (…) That two authors should have within a few years made the voice of an ill-used child central to a novel is a remarkable coincidence. To Charlotte Brontë the idea had come spontaneously, and if Dickens was influenced by her either directly, or indirectly through Forster, it was a happy cross-fertilization between two great writers. (…) For Dickens the change to a first-person narrative was liberating and enriching. (TOMALIN, 2011, p.

Forster, in Dickens' first biography *The Life of Charles Dickens*, remembers the episode in this way: "A suggestion that he should write [*David Copperfield*] in the first person, by way of a change, had been thrown out by me, which he took at once very gravely. (FORSTER, 2008, digital source) In short, Claire Tomalin, refers to Dickens and to Brontë as two great authors, on the same level.

Brontë read *David Copperfield*. In a letter to her editor W. S. Williams she says: "I have read DC; it seems to me very good – admirable in some parts. You said it had affinities with JE. It has, now and then – only what advantage has Dickens in his varied knowledge of men and things!" (BRONTË, 1949, p. 1)

Literary critic Joanne Shattock tells us that “Dickens denied having read *Jane Eyre* before he embarked on the story of David Copperfield (SHATTOCK, 1988, p. 76), and the reason was that “he disapproved of the whole school.” (SHATTOCK, 1988, p. 289)

If we examine the passages above we will see that 21st Century female critics (as Tomalin and Shattock) seem to consider Dickens and Brontë on equal terms. But the 19th Century equivalents have different layers for male and female authors. Brontë read Dickens, and implies that he is on a more comfortable position because he has access to “men and life”. Dickens did not read Brontë because he had more relevant things to do with his time. Had things been different at that time, I imagine Mrs. Gaskell would deal, with pleasure, with the rich literary material created by Charlotte Brontë. But she was forced to head in another direction so as to reach the aim of her enterprise. It is only through the progress made in subsequent biographies that we reached the present-day state of discussion, but I suspect we have not reached the level in which male and female authors can be said to have the same opportunities to grow and to work.

The impression that readers have of Charlotte Brontë is still very connected with this first biography. And other biographies, criticism and analyses of so many kinds, have been written on the line of what we received in Gaskell’s selection of what to highlight and what to dismiss.

In a Victorian perspective, factual events have been used and interpreted so as to present the personality and person of Charlotte Brontë was. I see that, with the passing of the time, researchers kept revisiting the first biography as a reliable repository of the source of Brontë’s facts. Even Barker, while trying to bring some light into events and to reformulate the approaches to be taken, keeps on contrasting her views with those of Elizabeth Gaskell. I do not know to what extent *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* succeeds in reaching Mrs. Gaskell and rev. Brontë’s goal of cleaning the name of the author, but it certainly connected Brontë’s name with the powerful influence of a respected writer and person as Gaskell was.

We can figure out that part of the turmoil derives from the fact that, on deciding publish their writings, the three sisters chose their arguably masculine pen-names; and that, after the deaths of Emily and Anne, Charlotte decided to reveal that they were women. She felt the urgency, as a sense of justice, of defending her sisters, who did not have the chance to show their faces and to be recognized as the authors of their master pieces. Currer Bell and Charlotte Brontë exist in the same person and serve their own purposes. Currer Bell is the author whose name can belong to a male or a female; and could own the imperial point of view of a man.

Charlotte Brontë was the force behind the female sagacity of showing a woman's anguish and desire, emotions that should be properly concealed in society.

Elizabeth Gaskell comes in the end to seal and settle the story: Charlotte Brontë was a genius who had a temperament that suffered with the adversities of her time. Maybe because of so many misfortunes that happened to her, she had to bring up this other side, a masculine side, attached to any coarse or vulgar behavior that emerged throughout her books.

Willing or not, the images I conceive, and I imagine any other reader as well, is somehow connected with the images raised in Elizabeth Gaskell's biography, which emphasizes Charlotte Brontë's sense of justice and commitment with her family. The Brontës' myth is still connected with that.

The problem still holding strong to the idea Gaskell presented is that Charlotte Brontë is a nice person "in spite of her work". Brontë is not presented as an author who innovated and created a literature that was to be repeated afterwards, by male authors – such as in the discussion about Dickens that we used to illustrate the issue. The title of Henry James' novella *The Beast in the Jungle* also comes directly from one sentence in Chapter Seven of Brontë's novel *Villette.* Brontë's text refers to anxiety represented as a tiger crouching in the jungle:

> These feelings, however, were well kept in check by the secret but ceaseless consciousness of anxiety lying in wait on enjoyment, like a tiger crouched in a jungle. The breathing of that beast of prey was in my ear always; his fierce heart panted close against mine; he never stirred in his lair but I felt him: I knew he waited only for sun-down to bound ravenous from his ambush. (BRONTË, 2004b, p. 47)

Henry James, the great modernist, fifty years later presents the same idea in this way:

> Something or other lay in wait for him, amid the twists and the turns of the months and the years, like a crouching Beast in the Jungle. It signified little whether the crouching Beast were destined to slay him or to be slain. The definite point was the inevitable spring of the creature; and the definite lesson from that was that a man of feeling didn't cause himself to be accompanied by a lady on a tiger-hunt. Such was the image under which he had ended by figuring his life. (JAMES, 2011, p. 17)

Neither Dickens not James have ever mentioned the name of Charlotte Brontë in written form, or acknowledged owing something to her. For many reasons, but probably the main one is that, in their time, Literature was seen as male territory. As to criticism, now we have people doing research and women giving voice as well as light to other women, like Dr. Joanne Shattock, who cast a look backwards and try to bring new parametres to revaluate the influence of past authors who were not so visible in their time.

In *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* Mrs. Gaskell avoids confronting that law about the predominance of male authors, and repeats time after time that, although she was a writer, Brontë was a well-behaving accomplished woman, a good lady from her time. And, from the perspective of two centuries later, I see that there is a positive side to that. Since then, it is possible to perceive that Charlotte Brontë became a figure much beloved by readers. Gaskell gave us the opportunity to identify with, humanize and pity such a woman and her circumstances. In our distance through time, when we analyse what Gaskell is doing we can also understand the values that were cherished at that time and consider to what extent we subscribe them now, or not. Gaskell's choices say as much about the biographer than about the biographee, while giving us a sense of her closeness to her subject. We take her words as living witness and we carry them close to our hearts, because this is what helps us to see what lies behind the invisible Bell authors. A biography opens a precedent to understand what has happened in one's life and in one's time, especially when centuries were surpassed the death of the author. There is no doubt about the force of the validation Elizabeth Gaskell provides with her biography, whose content is available for us to research. But there is this evident gap between what she could produce about Charlotte Brontë and other things that were needed to say.

Maybe Charlotte Brontë as a solemn author is an entity impossible to exist. The myth is set, and the collective imaginary holds much of the first words spoken about her in Gaskell's work to let go of the idea of Brontë as a proper Victorian woman. Posing these considerations, I finish this monograph stating my hope that my research, along with others being carried out about biographies, can reminds us of the fact that looking at an author and looking at a person are, ultimately, two different things, and that whenever a narrative is composed, it is through a certain point of view. There is no story – even a 'real' story – that can be grasped within one single point of view.

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