MARCELA ZACCARO CHISTÉ

SHAPING THE STATUE:

THREE MOMENTS IN THE CRITICAL RECEPTION OF *WUTHERING HEIGHTS*

Porto Alegre

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I'll walk where my own nature will be leading:
It vexes me to choose another guide

Emily Brontë, "Often rebuked, yet always back returning"

RESUMO

O presente trabalho examina diferentes momentos na fortuna crítica de *O Morro dos Ventos Uivantes* (1847), único romance de Emily Brontë, para determinar de que forma as reações dos leitores e dos críticos refletem os parâmetros da época em que se inserem. A dissertação vem estruturada em três seções. A primeira aponta como era vista a literatura no Século XIX e o que se considerava ser a função da literatura em tempos vitorianos. Apresenta aspectos da vida da autora e as condições de produção de *O Morro dos Ventos Uivantes,* além de uma breve introdução a conceitos dos estudos sobre Recepção. A segunda seção analisa as reações dos críticos e leitores das recepções do romance, ocorridas durante o século XIX, utilizando como apoio uma seleção de textos críticos extraídos dos periódicos *Athenaeum* (1847) e *Atlas* (1848), e também o texto escrito por Charlotte Brontë no "Prefácio à Segunda Edição de *O Morro dos Ventos Uivantes*" (1850). A terceira seção observa como os diferentes olhares sobre a autora e o romance refletem as mudanças de parâmetros ocorridas em cada parâmetro crítico adotado. A vida da autora e seu tempo são abordados através de *The Brontës*, de Juliet Barker (2007). A recepção crítica de Emily Brontë é acessada através da historiógrafa crítica Joanne Shattock (1997 e 2001). As teorias da recepção são contempladas via Iser (1978) e Jauss (1982). Espero que este exame de diferentes recepções cronológicas de *O Morro dos Ventos Uivantes* possa também nos informar sobre o desenvolvimento das discussões sobre identidade, papéis de gênero e autoria nos dois últimos séculos.

Palavras-chave: Literatura inglesa. Emily Brontë. *O Morro dos Ventos Uivantes.* Fortuna crítica. Recepção. Crítica literária.

ABSTRACT

The present work examines different moments in the critical reception of Emily Brontë's only novel, *Wuthering Heights* (1847), aiming to verify in what ways readers' and critics' reactions to the book reflect the parameters of the epochs they are inserted in. The thesis is structured in three sections. The first comments on how literature was seen in the 19th century and imagines what was considered to be the function of literature in Victorian times. Aspects of the author's life are presented, and the conditions of production of *Wuthering Heights* are taking into consideration. Concepts from the area of Reception Studies are briefly addressed as well. The second section analyses the reactions of critics and readers in the first reception of the novel, during the 19th century, using as support a selection of critical texts extracted from the journals *Athenaeum* (1847) and *Atlas* (1848), and the text written by Charlotte Brontë in the "Preface to the Second Edition of Wuthering Heights" (1850). The third section observes how the different views on the author and the novel reflect the new critical parameters adopted in the literary circles. The author's life and her time are addressed through Juliet Barker's *The Brontës* (2007). Emily Brontë's critical reception is accessed through critical historiographer Joanne Shattock (1997 and 2001). The Reception theories are contemplated via Iser (1978) and Jauss (1982). I hope that this examination of different chronological receptions of *Wuthering Heights* can also inform us about the development of discussions on identity, gender roles and authorship in the last two centuries.

Keywords: English literature. Emily Brontë. *Wuthering Heights.* Critical fortune. Reception. Literary criticism.

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INTRODUCTION

My first contact with Emily Brontë started with *Twilight* (2008), a romantic saga whose protagonist, Bella, has *Wuthering Heights* as her favourite book. As most teenage-targeted media, the series quickly gained popularity, with its success eventually falling over. Although I was compelled by the parallels drawn by Bella as she compared her own experiences to those of Catherine Earnshaw in Brontë's book, I did not go to *Wuthering Heights* immediately. As a twelve-year-old, the singularities of this nineteenth-century novel were still very distant from my world, and for the time being I decided to stick to my range of young adult novels.

A few years later, a new book appeared in my school's library. The place was not that big and varied, so no new book could go unnoticed by regulars like me. I was used to going to the library all the time, sometimes with a teacher and the rest of the class to do some activity which required research. Provided that we finished everything on time, we were allowed to pass time rifling through the shelves. Other times I went alone, to borrow books to read at home. I would easily recognize a new book in the familiar sections whenever I had enough time to spend there. This one was a plain, black-leathered hardcover edition with nothing on it apart from the library's identification on its spine. As soon as I opened the book and read *O Morro dos Ventos Uivantes* on the top of the first page, I decided that was the perfect opportunity to give it a try. As I later found out, the edition, written in an outdated Portuguese spelling, was a donation from a former student that, somehow, landed in my hands at the perfect moment.

As the title and previous pages of this dissertation anticipate, the novel obviously grew on me. Apart from the fact that it was an old, translated edition, with words that were no longer in use and unnecessarily extensive sentences, I was immediately compelled to the strangeness of the story and how much it differed from the ones I used to read back then. The first impression I had was that I was reading the events of a nightmare or, to be more positive, a dark fairy tale. This effect, enhanced by the constant shifts between the present and the past through

the point of view of an outsider who was as impressed as myself reading it for the first time, remains to this day, but my opinion on the novel changed as I grew up.

Through the years, my opinion on *Wuthering Heights* went through different stages. As a teenager, I was obsessed with the story and believed it was the most romantic account ever written, an impression that did not outlast my forthcoming experiences with the novel. With time, I became more critical and developed some kind of animosity towards the characters. Somehow, I began to despise all of them, especially Heathcliff and Catherine, because I began to understand the dynamics of their relationship and could no longer read it like a love story. Instead, my interest laid somewhere within the way the story was told, the mystery, and the symbolism it suggested. By the time I became an undergraduate student, I felt that 'romantic' was the least appropriate adjective to assign to it when there were more interesting aspects involved, such as the contrast between the techniques employed by Emily Brontë and the tools available to her in life/her lifetime. But before my interest in literary studies started to emerge, such thoughts had never crossed my mind, and it was only when I became aware that *Wuthering Heights* was considered a classic that I began to question what exactly makes it so important to English literature. From this came an urge to unveil the novel.

Although it might hold the title of "unquestionably the greatest of the Brontë novels" (WATSON, 1958, p. 107), *Wuthering Heights* was not always as highly regarded as this designation might suggest. The chronology of the publication of the novel starts in 1846, when Charlotte Brontë, the oldest of the sisters and the one who mostly desired to live off of writing, sent out the manuscripts of three novels written respectively by herself, her middle sister Emily, and the youngest Anne: *The Professor*, *Wuthering Heights,* and *Agnes Grey*. Having published together their first compilation of poems earlier in that same year and seeing how poorly it sold, the sisters decided to turn to novel-writing, which turned out to be a more promising market. Despite her expectations, Charlotte's *The Professor* was sent back, but the other two works were accepted and published at the end of 1847. *Wuthering Heights* alone composed two thirds of the volume and was published under masculine pen names in the same fashion as *Poems*, as stated by Charlotte

Brontë herself in her ‘Biographical Notice’, especially written to the 1850 edition of *Wuthering Heights*:

> 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. (C. BRONTË, 2003, p. 308)[1]

Although this comment was made in 1850, almost three years after the backlash of first edition of the novel, the Brontës’ early prediction that their work would be subjected to unfair judgement had their real names been written on their book covers was proved right. Victorian reviewers could not affirm they were indeed women behind the names of Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell because they had only their intuition to account for, but they could not either completely believe they were men because “the Bells seem[ed] to affect painful and exceptional subjects: —the misdeeds and oppressions of tyranny—the eccentricities of “woman’s fantasy” (CHORLEY, 2002, p. 281). Particularly in the case of *Wuthering Heights*, reviewers seemed to be uncertain because they recognized a masculine force of nature that, in their limited perception, could not have come from a woman writer who never had such experiences. Despite not having any proof of their real identities, reviewers could only but speculate and raise concern about the matter.

The earliest reviews written right after the first edition was published, in 1847, reveal that despite recognizing the quality of Ellis’s prose and the accurate descriptions of scenery, there was an overall concern with the moral of the characters he created, the nature of the relationships established among them and what that said about the author himself. As a general rule, this concern could reflect the changes nineteenth-century Britain was facing and how these affected the

[1] Throughout the work, the reader will come across Charlotte and Emily Brontë’s words referred to as C. Brontë and E. Brontë, respectively. Since most of their texts are taken from the same source, we refer to them as such to avoid confusion as to what Brontë is being addressed at a determined moment.

literary market and aesthetic values of the period. With an ever changing society, the growing conflict between rules of social behavior and profits in the literary market triggered a debate of whether a novel should retain its “racy affiliations with romance, teach uplifting moral lessons, educate curious readers about a rapidly changing society, or aim for […] the domestic realism that ruled the form for most of the period” (DAVID, 2001, p. 1). As critics rightly noticed, *Wuthering Heights* did not conform to these rules—portraying a dysfunctional family that did not fit into the role model of Victorian class-based society—and they responded accordingly by paying special attention to the writer ‘himself’ and somehow justifying the sister’s prediction of being judged by their writings.

While past tradition still expected literature to accurately represent reality, with the turn of the century literature started to be understood as form of art rather than a representation of reality. At first considered a strange book, Emily Brontë’s novel started to gain more visibility and to be critically acclaimed through the lens of this modern concept of literature that encouraged revaluations of past works. Such delayed response to the novel Lucasta Miller (2004) would later refer to as a “critical zeitgeist” in the Brontës’ reception; one that opened their way into mass culture and established their works, especially *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*, “not just as literary classics but as what might be called modern myths”.

Although most modern theoretical approaches tend to ignore the life of the author when evaluating a piece of work and rather restricted their opinions to the work itself, the popularity of the Brontës within mass culture and the mystery surrounding their personal lives became inevitable. The mystery surrounding the story of a family that produced at least three significantly famous authors played a massive role in the sister’s popularity in mass culture. Although Charlotte Brontë, the last surviving sister, was already acknowledged as a famous writer by the time of her death in 1855, her sisters Emily and Anne did not live to experience the fame they conquered, having died before their 30s with little personal information disclosed. Emily, the most private of the three and the only one who until her last days refused to become public, became known through the few descriptions provided by her sisters in letters written to friends, being portrayed as a hermit after Charlotte’s ‘Preface’ to the 1850 edition of *Wuthering Heights*, published after

Emily's death, and later on settled by Elizabeth Gaskell in her biography *Life of Charlotte Brontë*.

Even after almost 175 years since its publication and the diverse critical fortune on the novel, the general opinion was that its intricate form and themes, as well as Emily Brontë's biographical profile, were almost impossible to assess. Such preoccupation with her personal life and the lack of sources from other family members meant that modern readership had only the previous assumptions made about the author and her novel to resort to. On a more positive light, however, *Wuthering Heights* somehow managed to remain relevant by constantly responding to both past and present processes of interpretation that incessantly tried to categorize it, a type of specialized criticism that "has demonstrated that the mind and imagination which produced this book were tough, profound and original, and far from encouraging self-indulgent fantasy, were engaged in the projection of a daring statement about certain kinds of human conflict" (ALLOT, 1992, p. 13).

This thesis is devised in three parts. Chapter 1 provides a contextualization of different topics addressed in this work that need further explanation. Because the function of art has changed since 1847, when *Wuthering Heights* was published, a contextualization of the Victorian period is necessary before diving into the first reception of the novel. Thus, to better understand Victorian criticism, section 1.1 focuses on the Victorian period as a whole, from its definition to the effects of the process of industrialization and how it affect Britain all around, especially the access to education. During the nineteenth century, the literacy levels started to increase and the act of reading was put under scrutiny due to a preoccupation with the consumption of bad content. As a consequence to that awareness, there was a boom of different genres considered easier to understand, thus impacting the literary market as a whole. This diversity of Victorian fiction has direct impact on the practice of literary criticism during the nineteenth century and the ascension of the novel as the main literary format during this period.

Section 1.2 dives into the life of Emily Brontë, a female author who lived during the nineteenth century and was able to write and publish one novel. The analysis of biographical elements and the different approaches adopted by biographers in different moments in time says much about the intention of the work

and favors the debate about some interesting views on the function of literature and what is valued or not by the common reader and by the critics of that time. In order to understand which conditions led Brontë to write such novel, this section addresses some biographical elements of the author's life in Haworth, arguing whether such geographical and circumstantial aspects were determinant to the final product of *Wuthering Heights*. There, I suggest that Brontë was heavily influenced by her surroundings while still having total control over her creation, trying to prove that contrary to what Victorian critics argued and to what was believed to be the truth about women's writing at the time—"that they could only write of what they knew" (SHATTOCK, 2001, p.8)—, her character was not limited to her work. Such pieces of information on critical assessment written at the time of the first edition of the novel will be analyzed, as well as the counterpoint in which, from excerpts taken from her diaries and letters, it is clear that Emily Brontë was continually editing her novel before finally submitting it to publication. Therefore, contrary to what the critics affirmed, *Wuthering Heights* was not written on a whim, but through much planning.

Besides, the analysis will also acknowledge Haworth, where she lived most of her life, in the intention to picture the township in a way different than what Elizabeth Gaskell did when affirming the sisters had suffered such critical reproach "only because they had innocently, but accurately, reproduced the harsh realities of life in Haworth in their novels, unaware that it differed significantly from society at large" (BARKER, 2007, p.14), promoting an image of Haworth as a physically remote, strange and inhospitable place was far from reality.

Having said that, the analysis will be carried out with Brontë's introduction to the literary market and what conditions made it possible for her to publish her novel exploring the writing conditions of a female author in the nineteenth century, dealing with historical and cultural aspects of that period, prioritizing the circumstances of the literary market—a predominantly masculine territory—with theoretical support of Joanne Shattock, whose research focuses mainly on the reception of periodical press. The author emphasizes women author's extensive contributions to the literary marketplace, the impact they caused by penetrating its different spheres, and how their active presence got them inserted into what we

now know as the canon. According to Shattock, this happened due to a growing sense of community between these women, new to the literary society, who started to read each other's works:

> They [the women] were astute critics of one another's work and conveyed their views, sometimes in personal correspondence, sometimes in published reviews. But to these writers, reading one another's books made them feel that they knew the authors. It was an alternative to a female literary society. (SHATTOCK, 2001, p.8)

The author states that, among other things, this sense of protection led to the popularization of biographies as an effort to prevent the publication of unofficial material speculating about their private lives, preserving their reputation. Also taking Elizabeth Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* as example, Shattock affirms the biography was too much "concerned with the woman rather than her books" (SHATTOCK, 2001, p.19). Though it elevated Charlotte Brontë's talents as a writer, it prioritized personal information exchanged through letters between the two friends rather than providing a closer look into her writing process and into her writing subjects. As a reflect of this approach to their personal lives, Emily Brontë's reconstruction was the one that made a significant impact:

> The picture she presented of Emily was a partial one, filtered through Charlotte. The stories she relates, particularly those which convey her ruthlessness, punishing her dog Keeper, and her stoicism, branding her arm with a hot iron, and her courage when facing death, were responsible for the image of a grim, humourless and somewhat unearthly creature, which later biographers sought to correct. The renegotiation of the sisters' positions vis-à-vis one another also began, with the result that, by the end of the century, Emily was seen as the more original of the two. (SHATTOCK, 2001, p. 20)

Since Emily Brontë did not live long enough to tell her own story, this portrayal was the first glimpse into her life and the closest scholars and readers could get to her. In fact, her image as an author was for long coined by the many biographers that somehow continued to paint a picture of this savage and unsocial woman, a stereotypical portrait that clearly reflects aspects particularly ascribed to her novel at the time. The aid Shattock provides for this research has further importance when she states that these failed attempts in trying to grasp Brontë's

personality led to this urge of retelling the author's story, to the point that by the turn of the century the critics' interest in Emily Brontë started to overcome Charlotte's. This idea seems to reinforce *Wuthering Heights*' late success.

Chapter two analyzes the first reception of *Wuthering Heights*, focusing on the reasons why the critical reaction was so negative, and considering how it determined the way the novel and its author were perceived for a long time. We look for the reasons for the paradoxical discrepancies found in Charlotte Brontë's "Biographical Notice" and "Preface" to the 1850 reprint of *Wuthering Heights*, where Charlotte takes the role of protector of her younger sister's reputation. Chapter three considers the most recent views on *Wuthering Heights*. There, different approaches to the novel are analyzed, in the light of Reception theory, as an attempt to understand how criticism of the novel changed over the course of almost two centuries since its publication. This will be executed with an analysis of three moments in the critical fortune of the novel in which different theoretic approaches were applied. Thus, the intention here is to explore the novel's most important themes – the different structure, the gothic aspects, the disruptive family, the effects of the patriarchal household, etc. – that were under evaluation according to which point of view the novel was accessed by the readers.

1 **CONTEXTUALIZATION**

1.1 THE VICTORIAN ERA: LITERATURE AND READERSHIP

A straightforward reading of the term “Victorian age” would imply the timeframe within which the British Empire was under the rule of Queen Victoria, who ascended to the throne in 1837 and ruled until her death, in early 1901. However, the question of when the Victorian period began and when it ended is far more complex than Queen Victoria’s royal longevity. According to Susie Steinbach (2017), such “strictly regnal periodizations of history have fallen out of favour, largely because they privilege the lives of a very few individuals to characterize human history” (STEINBACH, 2017, p. 3), thus prioritizing high politics over sociocultural aspects which, in her opinion, are more representative of the real experience of people who lived in Britain around that time. The author, whose work provides a new approach to the Victorian period by considering not only the political and economic history, but also including discussions regarding gender, race, and class in that society, believes what can be considered the beginning of said period goes back to the second decade of the nineteenth century, when Britain was going through the earliest stages of what would be known as the Industrial Revolution[2]. As the first country to go through this process of industrialization, between 1820 and 1850 Britain saw crucial developments which directly affected the way its growing population lived.

Cities were growing bigger, money was circulating within the gentry, middle class, and working class, with an expanding economy that was relying less in the agricultural sector—albeit still present and necessary to industrialization—and more in the industrial profits. Although most people still lived in rural areas, the total population who lived in the metropolitan area of London in the beginning of the

[2] Steinbach (2017) also highlights historians have questioned the misleading use of the term “revolution”, when in fact there were not that many industries in the 1800s: “in the first decade of the nineteenth century factories were the rule only in the cotton industry, and as late as 1850 most consumer goods were still produced by hand in small workshops” (p. 86).

century came close to 1 million, reaching 1.4 million people by the end of 1821. In the northern area of Manchester—where the effects of the industrialization were more prominent—and Birmingham, for instance, “populations had been about 70,000 each in 1801, but were about 106,000 by 1821—a jump of 50%—and they would rise to 145,000 each by 1831” (STEINBACH, 2017, p. 89), a growth that would not only reverberate in different areas of economy, but also constitute the overall sentiment of the period. That is, by the thick of the Victorian period, the majority of its population was still young, productive, and more importantly, longing for a change into a more representative system that could keep track of the nineteenth century industrializing and urbanizing atmosphere. Steinbach defines the Victorian period as,

> [...] among other things, a period of reform. Liberalism dominated the political and philosophical temper and debates of the day, and encouraged an atmosphere of gradual and moderate but deliberate and persistent reforms. These led to restrictions on work hours, improvements in public health, the growth of civil service bureaucracies, and enlargements of the electorate towards a more representative system. (STEINBACH, 2017, p. 4)

Small changes in promoting intellectual and scientific thinking took place in the beginning of Queen Victoria’s reign, with investments in the construction of new schools, and the job of teaching reading and writing skills to children, albeit mostly boys, became the church’s responsibility. Even though it is not possible to assume all working-class children had access to such schools, and those who did presumably went to factory or workhouse schools of lower quality, the levels of literacy were impressive, and “in 1840, between two thirds and three quarters of working-class people had achieved rudimentary literacy” (STEINBACH, 2017, p. 131). The situation would improve after the passage of the 1870 Education Act, a legislation that “allowed voluntary schools to carry on unchanged, but established a system of 'school boards' to build and manage schools in areas where they were needed” (UK PARLIAMENT, 2022), thus including also working-class children who did not have access to education until then. With a newly established educational system with compulsory attendance, this initial promotion of literacy helped

accelerate the growth in literacy levels[3] within those with an underprivileged background. With greater access to schools and an emerging working-class readership, books, magazines, newspapers, and journals were no longer solely targeted to the bourgeois society and had to entertain a variety of audiences. Consequently, due to such changes in literacy, print culture and aesthetic values were also heavily impacted during those times of economic progress in Britain. Furthermore, the economic growth within the nation and the circulating currency in its colonies provided a cheaper cost of production of printed material while also allowing a better circulation and promotion thereof.

From the eighteenth-century up to this point, poetry was considered the most elevated form[4] of literature, but it became less widely-read as the literacy levels began to rise and the diversity of audiences was progressively expanding. In his study on the fall of Romanticism, Andrew Franta (2001) states that although the public's opinion "[...] is central to poetic practice in the Romantic period because it is through reflection on the idea of the reading public that poets seek to come to grips with the implications of an emergent mass society" (FRANTA, 2001, p. 4), there is historical evidence that there was an impending sense of discrimination from these poets towards this new mass reading public that emerged from the lower social classes. As poetry was considered too difficult to be relatable to this new audience, new forms of literature emerged. The novel—an easier format and its understanding more accessible to the general reader—became the central literary form.

Although the novel first appeared during the eighteenth century with Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, it became more popular during the Victorian period, to the point where "between "Victorian" and "the novel," it is hard to say which defines the other more" (STEINBACH, 2017, p. 222). Likewise, in her study on Victorian readership,

[3] Although some have tried to compile data on literacy levels during the Victorian period, the task has been proven insufficient and unclear, mostly due to lack of records that separated the literate from the illiterate. However, numbers on publishing material available attest to an increased consumption of print, as compared to the previous century.

[4] Further discussion on different literary formats and their status among scholars is provided by Deirdre David, in her introduction to the *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel* (2001). There, the author summarizes the ascension of the novel among Victorian authors and how its visibility was shadowed by its ambition and demand of the reader.

scholar Kate Flint (2001) affirms the increasing interest in the novel was deeply related to this fast-moving economic progress Britain experienced throughout the nineteenth century. The author believes the propelling engine of industrialization entailed better product distribution systems and, because they were no longer restricted to an academic circle, nor to the higher social classes, books were instead travelling farther away, as well as reaching the middle and working-class households. This meant that similarly to what people were experiencing in real life, fiction started to become more diverse. Linda M. Shires (2001), whose work analyses the aesthetic of the Victorian novel when it first appeared and the metamorphosis in suffered until the end of the period, summarizes the main subject of the Victorian novel as “the relation between self and society” (SHIRES, 2001, p. 61), a topic that can also explain why there are so many ways in which it is done.

> The Victorian novel comprises many sub-genres, as we learn from the different chapters in this volume, such as the historical novel, the domestic novel, the silver fork novel, the detective novel, the industrial novel, and the science fiction novel. Moreover, Victorian literary discourse intersects with many other important cultural discourses of the period, most prominently religion, science, and political economy. (SHIRES, 2001, p. 68)

According to the author, the advances which happened during the nineteenth century also meant that pressures of ideology began to influence the form of the Victorian novel as well. Aiming at a bigger audience, the novel should be relatable and accessible to all publics:

> Victorian novels were typically quite long, with large casts of characters and complex but clearly resolved plots. These often revolved around marriage, revealing the institution’s centrality to Victorian culture; one history of the Victorian novel could be the history of its marriage plots. More broadly, Victorian novels explored the relationships between the social and the psychological and between the public and private realms. (STEINBACH, 2017, p. 223)

Associated to that is also the concept of leisure, one that came with new legislations that controlled working hours and allowed the working-class to enjoy more free time. This approximation between audiences from different social classes was often approached with concern about what was considered suitable

reading material, such much so that “middle-class reformers were intent on luring working-class people away from traditional pastimes to more uplifting ones such as lectures, long walks in the countryside, and certain improving forms of music and theatre” (STEINBACH, 2017, p. 212). Reading novels became the source of a new anxiety, and:

> At the centre of this anxiety about what constituted suitable reading material and ways of reading lay concerns about class, and concerns about gender. In both cases, fiction was regarded as particularly suspect: likely to influence adversely, to stimulate inappropriate ambitions and desires, to corrupt. (FLINT, 2001, p. 17)

Eventually, this concern with a novels’ effect and the belief that its content was capable of perverting people led to the over-criticizing tone of literary reviews during the Victorian period, and “the assumption that novels were a particularly influential form of communication meant that their effects, or presumed effects, on these groups of readers were repeatedly put under scrutiny” (FLINT, 2001, p. 17-18). Among fiction targeted at the working-class, such preoccupation with prudery and morality was found, for instance, even in the most prominent novelists like Charles Dickens and Thomas Hardy, who would present the perfect Victorian model, with very coherent plots, rising and falling actions, and a clear resolution towards the end.

What also added to this preoccupation was the fact that reading was an activity that often took place within the domestic environment, with family members reading aloud to each other. This provoked a heightened sense of precaution and directly influenced the way authors started to create, with an increasing interest in conveying what they considered the “reality” of the traditional domestic household.

> The fact that reading was a common sociable family activity within the middle-class home, members taking it in turn to read aloud from the current volume, set up a demand that nothing should appear in print which was not suitable for every potential listener. (FLINT, 2001, p. 24)

This provoked a heightened sense of precaution and directly influenced the way authors started to create, with an increasing interest in conveying what they considered the “reality” of the traditional domestic household. Literary critics who evaluated the new publications were, too, often careful with what type of stories they recommended to their public, preferring plots that depicted real life, with clear and straightforward actions and their implications. So, if the work of fiction presented a character whose moral intentions diverted from what was expected, his/her actions should have consequences that would teach him/her out of it. Thus, in a sense, although nineteenth-century novelists intended to convey realistic portrayals of real life, their representations of truth were not always similar because different authors employed different techniques in their writings.

This point of view could also provide an answer as to why Victorian fiction is so diverse, with many supernatural, gothic tropes, sensational plots, or different types of narrators, all of which have their own set of rules and individually convey different aspects of a society that was changing drastically and helped delineate Victorianism as the umbrella term we know today. In a way, the range of genres produced within the Victorian age reflects the constant progression in the political and cultural spheres in a time when Britain was at its prime. As added by Steinbach, this diversity is not only presented in literature, but in other forms of entertainment:

> Victorian artistic, theatrical, and print cultures were rife with conflicts between good and evil. They featured events that were “sensational” and “extraordinary”: those words appear again and again in everything from newspaper headlines to advertisements for novels to critical responses to literature and drama. Complex plots revolved around marriage, concealed identities, inheritances, and last-minute reprieves, and often featured debt, entailed estates, detectives, and other features of the Victorian legal system. They also featured violence. Newspaper reporting on violent crimes functioned as both news and entertainment, not just in popular newspapers such as *Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper* but in “quality” papers such as the *Times* as well. (STEINBACH, 2017, 211)

The lack of a shared, fixed set of characteristics among the novels, as according to scholar Caroline Levine (2012), makes it impossible to conceive it as

a genre. The author's concern with the definition is solved by perceiving it as a *syndrome*, that is, a set of intersecting features in which "novelists as different as Dickens and Eliot, the Brontë's and Trollope, Gaskell and Thackeray, may all be productively read as realists" (LEVINE, 2012, p. 85).

The realist movement, originated in France in the mid-nineteenth century, came to light as a response to the concept of art that for long had been associated with the sublime and with the ideal beauty. Attempting to shock by showing the real conditions of the working-people and peasants, realism was first introduced by painters who decided to portray the crude reality of these people, and shortly started to permeate different artistic areas; in the words of Caroline Levine (2012), "rather than distracting us with ideal beauty, writers should prompt audiences to recognize the dignity of commonplace lives" (LEVINE, 2012, p. 89). Although there are a few examples of marginal characters in English literature before this movement, such as in *Moll Flanders* and *Pamela*,

> [...] nineteenth-century writers continued to widen the field of representation to capture the truths of prosaic, gritty, and hideous experience. Thanks to the realists, poor, marginal, and hitherto neglected figures, such as seamstresses, pawn-brokers, factory workers, drunks, prostitutes, and beggars came to be seen not only as serious artistic subject matter, but also subjects in the philosophical sense, sources of knowledge and action in the novel rather than picturesque or comic objects. (LEVINE, 2012, p. 89)

Yet, in Victorian literature, this intent of widening the scope of subjects in the novel posed a problem of who could actually be considered a good representation of these real people, with Victorian authors often resorting to children protagonists in the classic coming-of-age storytelling, for instance. Although the intent of such novelists was to depict real life, Victorian realism lies not, in Ian Watt's words, "in the kind of life it presents, but in the way it presents it" (WATT, 1957, p. 10). However, a good share of writers did struggle to convey the social importance of their characters as representatives of a determined social group.

Despite their use of more common subjects, the "reality effect" in these novels was also heavily based on description, with many objects and narrative arcs

being employed to this purpose. This overuse of descriptive elements was probably influenced by the way nineteenth-century novelists used to publish at the time. Many novels from the Victorian period were first published in serialized form, a format that allowed writers to develop their plots more carefully and intentionally, adding cliff-hangers, observing the reception of the audience week by week, and writing the following chapters accordingly. In a way, their intention was to keep readers interested in the bulk of the story so that they would keep buying the magazine or newspaper in which the story was published.

This freedom to enlarge the story, adding different twists and turns to it, propitiated an exploration of different narrative mechanisms, with little preoccupation with the conformity of the ending, but also complicated the overall verisimilitude of it. It is not by chance that most Victorian novels return “again and again to the neat resolutions of the marriage plot, or the fascinating mysteries of detection, and incorporat[e] sensational events, sentimental love, and even pivotal coincidences along the way" (LEVINE, 2012, p. 101). Real life was considered too boring to be put into fiction word by word, so novelists resorted to these tropes in order to keep their plots more interesting.

> The ending, in this context, is not so much a logical or natural result of narrative unfolding as it is one among many plausible outcomes. Indeed, realist novels sometimes foreground this fact: *Great Expectations*, with its two different conclusions, or *Villette*, which leaves us suspended, remind readers that realist narratives do not always end in satisfying closure. (LEVINE, 2012, p. 102)

Consequently, as Levine (2012) points out, the very concept of *reality* started being questioned, inciting different answers. The most accepted one, based on a Cartesian model, “imagines that truth may best be found by the individual, depending on her own lived experience, independent of tradition” (LEVINE, 2012, p. 86), meaning that reality is a concept that could change according to the person who experiences it. In this light, there is no universal truth and one could make up a plot based on its own experiences.

In respect of women writers, this is particularly interesting. Scholars such as Joanne Shattock (2001) and Elaine Showalter (1977) provide extensive information on women's contributions to literature during the nineteenth century and both agree that, in being women, these writers have suffered differently—and been received differently by the critics—inside the literary sphere mainly because of the role they played as women in their personal lives. The former affirms the critics' disdain towards novels written by women came from their belief that their writings were mainly autobiographical, stating that "the charge that they could only write of what they knew, and that what they knew best was themselves, was made regularly by reviewers. The easy association of the life and the work [...] was crucial to the reading of these writers by their contemporaries" (SHATTOCK, 2001, p. 8), which meant that their value as writers depended on the themes and situations described in their stories. If the critics thought their work was too inappropriate, the woman would be judged likewise.

At the same time, Showalter points out, "Victorians expected women's novels to reflect the feminine values they exalted" (SHOWALTER, 1977, p. 7), but a novel considered too feminine would also have its aesthetic value compromised:

> There was a place for such fiction, but even the most conservative and devout women novelists, such as Charlotte Yonge and Dinah Craik, were aware that the "feminine" novel also stood for feebleness, ignorance, prudery, refinement, propriety, and sentimentality, while the feminine novelist was portrayed as vain, publicity-seeking, and self-assertive. At the same time that Victorian reviewers assumed that women readers and women writers were dictating the content of fiction, they deplored the pettiness and narrowness implied by a feminine value system. (SHOWALTER, 1977, p. 20)

Even though this genre is not the only one to which Victorian authors were committed to, as already pointed out, it is the one that proved to have more impact in the reception of *Wuthering Heights*, whose author, like others from her time, managed to create a novel that seemed 'truthful' enough, mixing "realist features with elements that are typically considered anti-realist: gothic tropes (*Wuthering Heights*), sensational plots (*Great Expectations*), even intrusive narrators who

comment on the artifices involved in storytelling (*Vanity Fair* and *Barchester Towers*)" (LEVINE, 2012, p. 85).

1.2 EMILY BRONTË, THE AUTHOR OF *WUTHERING HEIGHTS*

In the introduction to the biography *The Brontës*, first published in 1994 and reissued in 2010, author Juliet Barker explains that her choice of the whole Brontë family as subject comes from the fact that it provided the field of English literature with at least three successful female authors in a time when publishing novels was not considered a respectable role for a woman. While the author believes it impossible to look at each of the sisters individually because of their symbiotic relationship with each other, the lack of useful information about their personal lives is most likely the main reason why biographical studies on each of them separately are not as productive as the ones considering them as a whole, thus why she believes "taking one of them out of context creates the sort of imbalance and distortion of facts" (BARKER, 2010, p. xviii) they have been subjected to ever since publishing their works. In that sense, studies that isolate them and take them out of their context only reinforce the Brontë myth, an expression used due to the amount of speculation and visibility the family gained years after their deaths.

This impression is reinforced by Lucasta Miller (2004), who also elaborates on the role played by the family in collective consciousness and the ways in which their posthumous prominence in the literary market influenced the way readers consume literature. Singling out *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* as literary classics, the author points out that just like the novels, "the tragic story of the Brontë family has been told and retold time and again in endless new configurations" (MILLER, 2004) and of much of initial critical commentary on the novels have taken too much interest in their personal lives to the detriment of the work's aesthetic value.

From the three sisters, the one most affected was Emily Brontë, who “has too often been deintellectualized since her death” (MILLER, 2004). Having died at the age of 30, only months after publishing *Wuthering Heights*, much speculation has surfaced about her life, especially after Charlotte’s preface[5] to the 1850 reprint of *Wuthering Heights*, where she provided the first glimpse into Emily’s life, even before assuming their real identities:

> Emily emerges, then, as a figure too little a woman to be patronized as a writer, but, although she may be man-like, she is not completely so. Moreover, her unusual personality and her unusually solitary life, amidst the fierce Yorkshire people and the wild Yorkshire moors make her, if a literary genius, a one-off phenomenon. (WILKES, 2001, p. 44-45)

As defended by Miller, historical facts of their personal lives do not provide a final answer, but they can help one understand from where the work was created and what conditions allowed it to come to life. Although Charlotte’s account on Emily’s novel and late biographies could not have influenced the reception of the novel, they provide the reader with information that can be traced back to its creation and how readers of that period might have taken her writings.

Because the Brontës were fairly known in Haworth, hence Patrick Brontë’s occupation as the curate of the village, the sisters kept their authorship disclosed before and after publishing their novels, which meant there were few who knew of their craft and that could have asked the questions we wished to ask today. Luckily enough, as writers often do, the family embraced the habit of keeping diaries and exchanging letters with friends, all of which have served to this day as resource to studies dedicated to their lives. The first to make use of these in order to provide an inside look into their lives was Elizabeth Gaskell with *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, a biography commissioned by Patrick Brontë after the passing of his last-surviving daughter.

Although Patrick’s intention with providing Gaskell, a renowned author at the time and personal friend of Charlotte’s, with the material to write a biography about

[5]The text will be further analyzed in Chapter 2.

his daughter was to put an end to speculation about her domestic life, the posthumous biography of the eldest and most prolific writer of the Brontës helped establish the way the sisters were perceived by the literary sphere: “the mysterious, closely bonded sisters, producing works of literary genius in a wild and lonely Yorkshire village, but with lives tragically cut short in their prime” (WILKES, 2001, p. 41). There, Gaskell deviates the discussion from literature and the relevance of Charlotte, Emily, and Anne as authors because the intention of that biography is to redeem their reputation and prove that, in spite of having written such outrageous books, they were decent women and good persons.

In *The Brontës*, Barker takes a different approach to delineate the domestic life of the family by looking to the poems, letters, and memorabilia available, as well as to official documents that had been somehow overlooked by almost all biographers of the family, but that have proven essential to reconstructing an accurate account of the environment in which this family of authors grew up in. Different from what was expected of Gaskell when she wrote a biography on the eldest of the sisters, Barker’s intention in assembling a complete biography of the whole family based on both official and personal documents is not to clear their reputation, but to demystify some of the main misconceptions that had been perpetuated by Gaskell and other biographers and that only created more mystery. By doing that, Barker provides a chronological order of events that allow a clear outlook on their path to becoming famous authors.

In Emily’s chronology, the first hints of *Wuthering Heights* can be seen even before she could imagine it would one day be published. All the four surviving Brontë children—Charlotte, Branwell, Anne, and Emily—were prolific writers who, ever since their childhood, created imaginary worlds that allowed their artistic expression to flourish. Close in age, the Brontë siblings started to create stories even before learning how to write and, “from a very early age the whole Brontë family adopted the practice of writing in a tiny script meant originally to mimic the print of magazines and newspapers, which the Brontës were trying to imitate in the production of their own journals” (CHITHAM, 2001, p. 8), therefore contradicting the misconception that they had a difficult childhood with little access to local culture and entertainment.

According to Barker, such impression was endorsed by Gaskell, who, by describing the Brontë children as grave creatures, “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” (BARKER, 2010, p. 122). Moreover, Gaskell also managed to pass the wrong idea of Haworth, promoting an image of it as this “physically remote”, “strange and inhospitable” place (BARKER, 2007, p. 14) which was far from reality. Contrary to that, as illuminated by Barker (2007, p. 16), “Haworth was principally a working-class manufacturing town” rapidly increasing in size and population, which demanded different social activities; this, alongside the Brontë’s unconventional upbringing through their father’s unorthodox methods in education, were breeding ground creativity and intellectual activity. Thus, although the sisters might not have manifested an early interest in becoming professional authors, their access to books and newspapers, as well as their unique domestic life, allowed their creativity to flow freely.

Despite not showing any particular interest in publishing their works, Chitham (2001) argues what might have provoked it was the lack of fulfilment in their teaching careers, a profession that all three sisters tried at one point in their lives. From the three, Emily was the most resistant to publish her poems, but might have been convinced by her preoccupation with making money for the family and her lack of interest for the teaching career. During her school days, as both student and teacher, her literary production would diminish considerably, and interpretations of her preferred themes indicate that she was the one who suffered the most from homesickness. Such opinion can be confirmed by the number of poems written by herself who,

> [...] released from the bondage of school life, was deep in the throes of Gondal composition. Though no Gondal prose tales are extant, some of her poems of this period are preserved, written in her minuscule print on tiny scraps of paper. They are the earliest of her fictional writings in existence and reveal a mind that, in stark contrast to her elder sister's, was calm and content. She had already established the pattern of her future work, taking her inspiration from the beauties of nature or even simple contemplation of the weather before progressing to Gondal scenes and characters. (BARKER, 2010, p. 293-294)

For Emily, the act of writing Gondal and Angrian stories seems to have been an essential part of her schedule, something she did almost religiously, for “it was neither a relief from, nor a frustration of, the daily routine” (BARKER, 2010, p. 513). Although Charlotte knew she wrote diligently, her surprise when she secretly looked through a notebook with Emily’s writings filled her with excitement and set her in motion to convincing her sister into compiling all their poems in a small volume for publication. Emily did not take it well, as Charlotte described in her “Biographical Notice” to the 1850 reprint of *Wuthering Heights*:

> My sister Emily was not a person of demonstrative character, nor one, on the recesses of whose mind and feelings, even those nearest and dearest to her could, with impunity, intrude unlicensed; it took hours to reconcile her to the discovery I had made, and days to persuade her that such poems merited publication. I knew, however, that a mind like hers could not be without some latent spark of honourable ambition, and refused to be discouraged in my attempts to fan that spark of flame. (C. BRONTË, 2003, p. 308)

Even though Emily was rightfully enraged after Charlotte’s intrusion, the eldest managed to win her over, albeit “she had to make two important concessions to her sister: the Gondal origins of her verse would be disguised by judicious emendation of the text and, more importantly, the poems would be published under pseudonyms and their authors’ true identity was to remain a secret” (BARKER, 2010, p. 565). Considering how valuable she believed Emily’s writing to be, it seems logical that Charlotte would make every effort to bring her sister around. Her opinion on Emily’s writing—then referred to as Ellis Bell—is clearly manifested some years before in a letter sent to W. S. Williams, literary editor of their publisher Smith, Elder & Co:

> Ellis Bell’s is of a different stamp—of its sterling excellence I am deeply convinced, and have been from the first moment the M.S. fell by chance into my hands. The pieces are short, but they are very genuine: they stirred my heart like the sound of a trumpet when I read them alone and in secret. The deep excitement I felt forced from me the confession of the discovery I had made—I was sternly rated at first for having taken an

> unwarrantable liberty—this I expected—for Ellis Bell is of no flexible or ordinary materials—but by dint of entreaty and reason—I at last wrung out a reluctant consent to have the “rhymes” (as they were contemptuously termed) published—The author never alludes to them—or when she does—it is with scorn—but I know—no woman that ever lived—ever wrote such poetry before—condensed energy, clearness, finish—strange, strong pathos are their characteristics—utterly different from the weak diffusiveness—the laboured yet most feeble wordiness which dilute the writings of even very popular poetesses. (SMITH, 2007, 0. 119)

Clearly, every effort made by Charlotte was worth it. Although the first printed edition of the collection *Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell*, published in 1846, was a sales failure, it most certainly made Charlotte realize they should be focusing on publishing novels due to their importance and profitability in the literary market. Predicted by Branwell, “poetry did not sell and it was not economic to pay for the publication of one's own work: if they seriously intended to attempt to earn a living from their writing, then they would have to be a lot more hard-headed about the whole business” (BARKER, 2010, p. 590).

Ever since its publication in 1847, *Wuthering Heights* has divided opinions within literary criticism. Calling it a sport in nineteenth-century literature, Chitham (2001) believes *Wuthering Heights* had this effect “is because its author [...] is not predominantly concerned with the fiction of the ages in which she lives and which preceded her (CHITHAM, 2001, p. 5). Set in the beginning of the nineteenth century, the novel follows narrator Mr Lockwood as he flees from city life and finds temporary residency in the Yorkshire moors to enjoy a sabbatical year. The plot starts as Lockwood arrives at his temporary abode, Thrushcross Grange, and in not finding his tenant to greet him upon his arrival, decides to pay a visit to him at his own house, Wuthering Heights. Although being referred to as “A capital fellow!” (E. BRONTË, 2003, p. 3) by the narrator right after their first encounter, Heathcliff seems to be quite the opposite of that with his cold and unwelcoming manner towards not only his visitors, but also the other inhabitants of the place.

Despite witnessing the rudeness of his host, Lockwood takes interest in his strange personality to the point of constantly visiting the place by his own will. The narrator’s curiosity is specially stirred when during a snowstorm, he is unable to go back to Thrushcross Grange after one of his visits and has to spend the night in

one of the vacant rooms at Wuthering Heights. That night, he comes across the name Catherine Earnshaw/Heathcliff/Linton written on the ledge of the window and finds a journal apparently written by the same person. The more he reads her journal entries, the more he dives into the story of young Catherine and her close relationship with Heathcliff. Through his back-and-forth visits to his tenant and his nightly conversations with Nelly Dean—a former housekeeper at Wuthering Heights who also grew up in the place and witnessed everything first-hand—, Lockwood finds himself more and more interested in the life of the Earnshaws. Nelly Dean, amused with his interest in her stories, is given the word by our narrator as she tells the story of how Heathcliff was adopted into the family and how his relationship with Catherine, the youngest of them, developed.

The first evidence of Victorian comments on the novel shows the critic's struggles to categorize it. Owing to both Romantic and Gothic traditions, it depicted very little evidence of the realistic and objective portrayal of society Victorian critics were expecting to find in a novel at that time and, instead. According to Barker, while Charlotte was conflicted with her the influence her Angrian tone might have in the writing of her novel:

> For Emily, it would seem, there was no such conflict, for without Gondal there was no writing. *Wuthering Heights*, which, ironically, is regarded as the archetypal Yorkshire novel, was actually Gondal through and through and therefore owed as much, if not more, to Walter Scott's Border country as to Emily's beloved moorlands of home. (BARKER, 2010, p. 591-592)

Although most reviewers praised the author for her ability to describe nature and its effects on her characters, comments that the novel was strange were not difficult to find, but "all the things which so shocked the critics when the novel was published were typical of both Gondal and Angria, from the amoral tone to the scenes of drunken debauchery, casual cruelty and passionate love" (BARKER, 2010, p. 593). As defended by Barker, the reading public was not prepared for *Wuthering Heights* in the way it was presented to the literary sphere, "without preface, introduction or explanation and it was left to Charlotte, ever her sister's

apologist, to insist that it was simply a tale of the ‘wild moors of the north of England’ produced by a ‘homebred country girl’” (BARKER, 2010, p. 593).

For a fact, *Wuthering Heights* could not be considered a representative of all Victorian literature. Going against the conventions of the Victorian novel, which aimed at showing the life of common people accurately, what Emily Brontë offered in *Wuthering Heights* was exactly the opposite of that:

> Considered as a novel of that [Victorian] kind, it is a miserable failure, badly organized and badly told, with two heroes—Edgar Linton and Hareton Earnshaw—neither of whom is strong or prominent enough to carry the story, and with a villain who overrides the action and is at last triumphantly united with the heroine who has died midway through the book. The plan then becomes incontrovertibly confusing, the point of view too blatantly awkward, the presence of two generations unnecessary, and the conclusion a travesty of poetic justice. (WATSON, 1949, p. 88)

From the author’s point of view, Emily Brontë was “an individualist who spurned the easy road of convention” (WATSON, 1949, p. 87-88) mostly because the novel does not entirely conform to either Romantic or Realist conventions: the romantic plot too weak because there is no conventional closure, and the realist plot only possible through the author’s highly praised descriptions of the Yorkshire moors. While the novel, as opposed to poetry, was not considered ‘high literature’ during most of the nineteenth century because of its expected readership, modern criticism, less interested in plots with moral and romantic resolutions, seemed more open to what a novel like *Wuthering Heights* proposed as a piece of literature. With the turn of the century and the understanding of literature as art and not only an accurate representation of life, Emily Brontë’s novel started being assessed from different theoretic approaches.

The structure of the novel, for instance, is one element that critics still dwell upon to this day. The constant time shifts within a double plot narrative told through both Lockwood and Nelly Dean’s perspective motivated structuralist analyses such as those carried out by C. P. Sanger (1926) and A. Stuart Daley (1995), which aimed at chronologically organizing the confusing timeline and the genealogy of the Earnshaw and Linton families. Although some might believe such efforts may

have compromised the interpretation of the novel, they also opened the door to richer discussions that were not considered during the Victorian period.

More than a century after the first edition of *Wuthering Heights*, Woodring (1957) drew attention to the role of the narrators. He believed that studies on the structure of the novel had been misled by “an older view [...] that the story, suffering from ‘inferior technique,’ is in parts ‘uncertainly conceived’ and ‘in general ill constructed’” (WOODRING, 1957, p. 298), adding that part of this belief was deeply grounded on the lack of analysis on Lockwood and Nelly Dean, which most critics assumed to have been intuitively created out of Emily Brontë’s past literary experiences with Gothic tales.

1.3 ON RECEPTION THEORY

When explaining the idea for his famous works *The Implied Reader* (1974) and *The Act of Reading* (1978), Wolfgang Iser (2008) affirms the concept came from his belief that the role of the reader had been previously neglected by different areas in literary studies, and not only by modern theories such as Marxism, Hermeneutics and Psychoanalysis. According to him, while these had been attracting attention in the intellectual scene of those days, an empirical theory of literature which explored the response from potential readers also started to gain visibility. The main purpose of this new reader-response approach was “to register people’s responses and to draw inferences concerning the social code governing their attitudes” (ISER, 2008, p. 58). In other words, this approach aimed at analyzing the audience’s reaction to a work and obtaining from it information about the audience’s social condition and background. Although no interaction with a text is similar to previous experiences, an audience from a same social context has shared characteristics and parameters that allow an analysis of patterns.

According to the author, literature had a sociocultural importance due to its all-encompassing function of both entertaining and documenting reality at the same

time, and although with time literature was overrun by other media, people's need for fictionalizing still persists to this day. Because of literature's function of importing realities into text,

> As the creation of an author, the literary text evidences a particular attitude through which the author directs himself or herself into the world. Therefore each text makes inroads into extratextual fields of reference and, by disrupting them, creates an eventful disorder. [...] Every literary text inevitably contains a selection from a variety of social, historical, cultural and literary systems that exist as referential fields outside the text. (ISER, 2008, p. 18)

Even though such contributions to the reception theory do not refer specifically to the relationship between a work and its audience, it corroborates the Iser's interest in understanding the effect of a text based on his idea that "if a literary text does something to its readers, it also simultaneously tells us something about them" (ISER, 2008, p. 15):

> Reader-response criticism and aesthetics of reception were not, then, an attack on current literary theories and methods, but a counterbalance to the interest focused solely on the text and on the author respectively. For this reason, reception theory conceived of the text in terms of a process, i.e. an interrelation between author, text, and reader, and tried to devise a framework in order to assess this inter-relationship. (ISER, 2008, p. 59)

In other text, Iser (2006) elaborates further into the text-reader relationship, stating that the study of any literary work has two poles, the artistic—related to the author and his/her text— and the aesthetic—related to the audience and the realization of the text accomplished by it. This opposing forces within a same text are proof that "the work itself cannot be identical with the text or with its actualization but must be situated somewhere between the two" (ISER, 2006, p. 391) because the text the reader has written is not the same as the one perceived by a reader, whose experience goes beyond the assimilation of word sequences and image-constructing. In being positioned between the author and the reader,

the work itself is dynamic and “it cannot be reduced to the reality of the text or to the subjectivity of the reader” (ISER, 2006, p. 391).

Moreover, due to its dynamicity, Iser defends it is up to the reader to establish the codes that might regulate the text-reader interaction because there are no pre-established rules, only fragmented hints throughout the text that must be assembled by the reader. These are the gaps, “the fundamental asymmetry between text and reader, that give rise to communication in the reading process; the lack of a common situation and a common frame of reference corresponds to the ‘no thing’, which brings about the interaction between persons” (ISER, 2006, p. 392).

> Communication in literature, then, is a process set in motion and regulated, not by a given code, but by a mutually restrictive and magnifying interaction between the explicit and the implicit, between revelation and concealment. What is concealed spurs the reader into action, but this action is also controlled by what is revealed; the explicit in its turn is transformed when the implicit has been brought to light. Whenever the reader bridges the gaps, communication begins. (ISER, 2006, p. 393)

The same opinion is shared by Jauss (1970). While discussing literary theory and the problem it faces when it comes to literary history, the author also defends historical and aesthetic approaches fall short in their methods because both do not sufficiently map out the role of the reader. To illustrate, the author mentions the well-known dispute between formalist and Marxist schools, whose “methods understand the literary fact in terms of the circular aesthetic system of production and of representation” (JAUSS, 1970, p. 7), thus laying more emphasis on the author and the work itself and overlooking its reception and historical impact, two aspects that say a lot about the social relevance and function of literature. While the formalist school perceives the reader as a passive agent whose relevance hinges on how it perceives the text and reacts to it according to its form, the Marxist school does not differentiate the way it analyzes both author and reader because the essence is found where they stand socially in a structured society and how they are affected by the economic basis of production.

Based on the idea that literary history depends on the audience, Jauss proposes a shift in this traditional fashion, where “the historical relevance of literature is not based on an organization of literary works which is established *post factum* but on the reader's past experience of the ‘literary data’” (JAUSS, 1970, p. 9). In his conception, literary history cannot be described as a series of events occurred during an isolated period of time because such perception does not consider a work’s relevance in literary history or as something that depends on the audience’s reception of a literary work: it “must be understood as creating a dialogue, and philological scholarship has to be founded on a continuous re-reading of texts, not on mere facts” (JAUSS, 1970, p. 10). In his opinion, before classifying a work and providing its own aesthetic evaluation, the literary historian must also take place of reader and reflective critic through his personal experience as reader.

Thereby, the author believes the true role of the reader had yet to be considered and proposes a relationship between author, work, and audience, in which all three parts are equally important. In discussing the importance of literary history in this process, Jauss endorses such equality because,

> In the triangle of author, work and reading public the latter is no passive part, no chain of mere reactions, but even history-making energy. The historical life of a literary work is unthinkable without the active participation of its audience. For it is only through the process of its communication that the work reaches the changing horizon of experience in a continuity in which the continual change occurs from simple reception to critical understanding, from passive to active reception, from recognized aesthetic norms to a new production which surpasses them. (JAUSS, 1970, p. 8)

In a similar fashion to Iser and even going further, then, Jauss defends the audience has an active role in the process of reading because it is responsible not only for understanding and recognizing aesthetic norms, but also passing them onto new productions, thus justifying why “the historicity of literature as well as its communicative character presupposes a relation of work, audience and new work which takes the form of a dialogue as well as a process” (JAUSS, 1970, p. 8). In

this light, it is possible to infer the importance of the reader in the creation of new works based on their previous experiences.

The role of the reader in the process of reception is further reinforced by historian Roger Chartier (2006), who believes that a text does not exist without an audience to give it meaning. The author's work, although not directly linked to the aesthetics of reception, dwells upon the book history and reading practices, and contributes to the argument presented by Jauss and Iser, providing additional information on the evolution of reading practices and the modes of access to texts. According to him, the historical approach of examining the concrete act of reading and interpreting—which he calls "actualizing"—comes with some hardships:

> To reconstruct in its historical dimensions this process of the 'actualization' of texts above all requires us to realize that their meaning depends upon the forms through which they are received and appropriated by their readers (or listeners). Readers, in fact, never confront abstract, idealized texts detached from any materiality. They hold in their hands or perceive objects and forms whose structures and modalities govern their reading or hearing, and consequently the possible comprehension of the text read or heard. (CHARTIER, 2006, p. 88)

This tradition of norms and reading practices is important to the reception of the novel in the history of literary criticism due to its relation to the different social, historical, and literary systems in which it is received because different audiences follow different social and cultural norms, therefore providing different experiences with a same text. On a same note, Jauss complements:

> A literary work, even if it seems new, does not appear as something absolutely new in an informational vacuum, but predisposes its readers to a very definite type of reception by textual strategies, overt and covert signals, familiar characteristics or implicit allusions. It awakens memories of the familiar, stirs particular emotions in the reader and with its "beginning" arouses expectations for the "middle and end," which can then be continued intact, changed, re-oriented or even ironically fulfilled in the course of reading according to certain rules of the genre or type of text. (JAUSS, 1970, p. 12)

In the theory of reception, this “circular system of production and representation” consists of a relationship between work and readership, where the historical implication is “that the appreciation of the first reader will be continued and enriched through further “receptions” from generation to generation” (JAUSS, 1970, p. 8), revealing a work’s historical importance and aesthetic value to the literary sphere. In other words, the relevance of a work is mainly based on the audience’s past experience and expectations and how those influence future works:

> The new text evokes for the reader (listener) the horizon of expectations and roles familiar from earlier texts, which are then varied, corrected, changed or just reproduced. Variation and correction determine the scope, alteration and reproduction of the borders and structure of the genre. The interpretative reception of a text always presupposes the context of experience of aesthetic perception. (JAUSS, 1970, p. 13)

In coming across a new work, the reader compares it with past works to determine its aesthetic value. Therefore, one can say reception theories understands the text as a process that relies on the relationship between literature and the public, one that encompasses “the fact that every work has its specific, historically and sociologically determined audience, that every writer is dependent upon the milieu, views and ideology of his readers” (JAUSS, 1970, p. 15).

Similarly, when Iser (2008) affirmed “literary fictions incorporate an identifiable reality that is subjected to an unforeseeable refashioning” (ISER, 2008, p. 16), he reinforced the idea that literary texts bear existing social, historical, cultural, and literary systems which “exist as referential fields outside the text” (ISER, 2008, p. 18). Such anthropological approach, Iser points out, perceives literature—working “as a channel for this particular kind of innovation” (ISER, 2008, p. 62)—through a process of a recoding of patterns of our reality. In that sense, when analyzing the reception of a determined work, it is important to understand the context of the selected audience in order to understand its parameters and expectations. This approach to literature justifies its function “as a means of divining, identifying and exploring the deficiencies in the patters of our reality” (ISER, 2008, p. 62) due to its ability of carrying certain social codes within itself.

In this perspective, reception theory seems to provide the most adequate framework to assess the function of literature in different historical contexts. In the case of *Wuthering Heights*, a difficult novel to categorize, an analysis of its reception by different audiences allows an overview of how reading practices and literary criticism have changed over time. Given the importance of the reader in the critical fortune of *Wuthering Heights*, it seems vital to briefly investigate reading practices, how they have changed in the course of time, and how they influenced the way we perceive the novel today. For the authors above-mentioned, the history of literature is considered part of a tradition that is constantly changing the meaning of the work according to the period in time in which they are received. Therefore, to explore criticism written on *Wuthering Heights* over the decades, this thesis relies on their contributions to the reception theory because they allow for a better understanding of how different audiences reacted to Emily Brontë's novel and what their reactions elucidate about some aspects of their social conditions and the aesthetics norms in terms of literary history.

2 19th CENTURY CRITICISM

2.1 THE 1847 EDITION: THE FIRST REVIEWS

As previously mentioned, in May 1846 the first work published by the Brontë sisters, a collection with 61 poems called *Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell,* was already circulating. As their first work, it was not particularly a critics' success, having motivated only two anonymous reviews after two months of complete silence from periodicals. Both reviews appeared on July 4, 1846: the first was published in the *Critic* and the second in the *Athenaeum*.

Although Charlotte was the one who envisioned the project of publishing their verses, Barker (2010) believes she was the least affected by their sales failure because, unlike Emily and Anne, she had already grown out of writing poetry and was more focused on writing prose. It is not clear to biographers how she managed to convince her sisters into risking yet another failed publication, but it is likely that a few favourable comments on Emily's poems gave them some perspective and they quickly embarked into their new project, working on their three novels throughout the winter and spring of 1846. Barker (2010) explains "the sisters wrote their books in close collaboration, reading passages aloud to each other and discussing the handling of their plots and their characters as they walked round and round the dining-room table each evening" (BARKER, 2010, p. 590), a habit they had cultivated in their childhood, but had not shared in their early adulthood. While for *Poems* they gathered verses that had already been written, now, for the first time, the sisters carefully created their works imagining they would one day circulate the literary circles.

By the beginning of July 1846, a package containing the manuscripts of *Wuthering Heights*, *Agnes Grey,* and *The Professor*[6] was already on the way to

[6] This novel would only be published posthumously, in 1857.

publishing houses in London, but it would only spark some interest in critics a year after that. Although their intention was to publish the three novels together as a three-volume novel, Charlotte's *Professor* was the only one not accepted. Barker (2010) believes this might have been influenced by a miscalculation from Emily, whose novel *Wuthering Heights* occupied at least two volumes, the lengthiest of the three, thus hindering their initial plan:

> The difficulty of getting published for the first time was compounded by the fact that the Brontës expected to be paid for their work. Emily had also unwittingly contributed to their problems by producing a manuscript which was far too long for either of the proposed formats. *Wuthering Heights* on its own filled two volumes, making a three-volume set impractical unless one of the other two novels was dropped. Though it is impossible she may have originally intended to write *Wuthering Heights* in one volume, the complex structure and neat resolution of the plot suggests that she simply miscalculated the conversion of manuscript pages to print, as had happened with *Poems*. (BARKER, 2010, p. 594)

Anxious for making a living out their works, Charlotte, then, gave up on her manuscript and started to work on a new novel that would become *Jane Eyre*. The reason why Charlotte's timeline is as important as Emily's derives from the fact that although *Jane Eyre* was completed long after her sisters' novels, Charlotte sent it to a different publisher and it ended up being put on the market in October 1847, two months before the publication of *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey*. The publication of these three novels within a three-month timespan alongside the sisters' preference for pseudonyms caused much confusion at the time and influenced the reception of *Wuthering Heights* specifically. The literary critics, in having no proof that the authors were three different people, often assumed the novel to be written by Currer Bell, the first one to make a name for herself and,

> Soon it seemed that the Brontës decision to use pseudonyms had had almost the opposite effect to that intended: instead of securing an objective hearing for their work, they had unwittingly invited a hoard of amateur detectives to speculate on their identities. The authors, not the books, increasingly became the focus of interest. (MILLER, 2004, 442)

In his biography of Emily Brontë, Hewish (1969) states this was due to Emily and Anne's publisher's, Thomas Newby, unclear approach to their advertisement. It is likely the publisher delayed the publication of the two novels and waited until Charlotte's was already on the market spreading their last name, thus taking advantage of the success of her novel to profit on the other two novels written under the same Bell. Hewish (1969) goes as far as affirming that Newby himself was not so sure about the identity of the sisters, and his real yet opportunistic confusion regarding the authorship of the novels likely misled the readers, among them the literary critics, and raised speculations about the personal lives of the three authors whose identity was still a mystery. On the other hand, Brontë (2010) provides a different side, stating Newby had only accepted *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey* after *Jane Eyre* was already on the market, which could mean the first two were published on a rush to take advantage of the Bell's notoriety:

> Though Emily and Anne's desire to achieve success independently of their sister was laudable, it was somewhat misguided. Newby had only begun to give serious attention to the publication of their novels when he realized that there was reflected glory—not to mention money—to be made from the magical name of Bell. The mystery surrounding the sex and identity of Currer Bell would fuel interest in his own publication of works by Ellis and Acton Bell and, as circumstances would swiftly prove, he was not averse to manipulating the truth in order to gain maximum publicity and sales. (BARKER, 2010, p. 636)

In Brontë scholarship, some famous reviews have been on the spotlight. The most notorious are the ones written for the *Athenaeum* (December 1847), the *Atlas* (January 1848), the *Douglas Jerrold's Weekly Newspaper* (January 1848), the *Examiner* (January 1848), and the *Britannia* (January 1848), well-known periodicals which circulated all over England. All except for the first were found among Emily Brontë's belongings after her death, so it is appropriate to say she read at least those. For our interest, the first two mentioned are the ones that had greater impact in Emily Brontë's critical fortune because they raised more speculation about her life and work. These will be thoroughly assessed from now on.

The first review was the one written by Henry Fothergill Chorley for the *Athenaeum*, issued on December 25, 1847, a week after *Wuthering Heights* was published. In the first few lines of his review, it is possible to see that Chorley puts the authorship of the novels in question. The critic, who would later meet Charlotte in person in 1849 after both Emily and Anne had passed, starts his review by implying the three novels could have been written by the same person, an opinion most reviewers seemed to share and which their publishers did not clarify, because the three are deeply related in terms of theme and language:

> *Jane Eyre*, it will be recollected, was edited by Mr. Currer Bell. Here are two tales so nearly related to *Jane Eyre* in cast of thought, incident, and language as to excite some curiosity. All three might be the work of one hand, — but the first issued remains the best. In spite of much power and cleverness; in spite of its truth to life in the remote nooks and corners of England, *Wuthering Heights* is a disagreeable story. (CHORLEY, 2002, p. 281)

Affirming that *Jane Eyre* was, in his opinion, a better novel, Chorley carries on with his evaluation in a manner similar to that of other critics: by comparing *Wuthering Heights* with *Jane Eyre* and almost completely ignoring the third, *Agnes Grey*, along the way. Similar approach is taken in the review issued in the *Atlas*, around the first month of 1848. The author, however, is disclosed and the review was published anonymously:

> Whether, as there is little reason to believe, the names which we have written are the genuine names of actual personages—whether they are, on the other hand, mere publishing names, as is our own private conviction—whether they represent three distinct individuals, or whether a single personage is the actual representative of the “three gentlemen at once” of the title-pages—whether the authorship of the poems and the novels is to be assigned to one gentleman or to one lady, to three gentlemen or three ladies, or to a mixed male and female triad of authors—are questions over which the curious may puzzle themselves, but are matters really of little account. (ATLAS, 2003, p. 282)

It is interesting that although its author affirms the mystery surrounding the authorship and the gender of the writers should not be subjected to speculation,

he ultimately contributes to the discussion by providing a variety of possibilities to an unanswered question. Although the matter of the novels' authorship is constantly brought up by the critics as something of minor importance, most of them use it as grounds for comparison between *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, as it is done by the same author in the *Atlas*:

> One thing is certain; as in the poems, so in the novels, the signature of "Currer Bell" is attached to pre-eminently the best performance. We were the first to welcome the author of *Jane Eyre* as a new writer of no ordinary power. A new edition of that singular work had been called for, and we do not doubt that its success has done much to ensure a favourable reception for the volumes which are now before us. (ATLAS, 2003, p. 282)

Although the literary critics rejected *Jane Eyre* at first, the novel ended up being a success with the public. As reinforced in the excerpt above, it is likely that its success propelled the selling of the novels published under the name Bell, since the expectations for a new work were high. Similarly to Chorley, this anonymous author also believes the first novel to be better than the second based on the idea that *Jane Eyre* would be succeeded by a better novel by the same author. In other words, although he recognized the novels could have been written by different people, he is judging them as if they written by the same person who would, preferably, improve its writing for a second novel, and evaluating them accordingly. Consequently, this only fueled more comparisons between *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, the latter being "considered an altogether stranger, more provocative" (HEWISH, 1969, p. 161), but inferior work. In the *Atlas*, after his statement that authorship did not influence the reception of the novel, the author takes a more explicit comparative approach, as in:

> We know nothing in the whole range of our fictitious literature which presents such shocking pictures of the worst forms of humanity. *Jane Eyre* is a book which affects the reader to tears; it touches the most hidden sources of emotion. *Wuthering Heights* casts a gloom over the mind not easily to be dispelled. It does not soften; it harasses, it extenterates [sic]. (ATLAS, 2003, p. 282-283)

Barker (2010) would later explain that part of that interest in finding out who the Bells were derives from the fact that, “as the more dramatic of the two new works, [*Wuthering Heights*] attracted by far the greater proportion of comment and the same criticisms recur again and again” (BARKER, 2010, p. 637) due to the critics’ constant search for the moral of the story, which in hindsight was done in vain due to *Wuthering Heights* different composition. While the curiosity was probably there when *Jane Eyre* first came out, the novel was not that outrageous, but *Wuthering Heights*, a different novel for the standards of its time, presumably caught their attention and, for good or for bad, this by itself enhanced its reputation. Moreover, the critics were intrigued not only by the mystery of their authors’ identities and gender, but also by the themes presented in the novels, which were not very common at the time.

In a sense, all three sisters innovated with their novels: in *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte presented the female point of view of an orphan heroine; in *Agnes Grey*, Anne described the plain life of a governess; in *Wuthering Heights*, Emily brought back features from the Gothic and the Romantic and turned it into a Yorkshire novel. Although such novelties in fiction writing are better interpreted nowadays, literary criticism did not take them as refined. Due to their strange choice of subjects, Chorley even considers the Bells’ works as a whole, calling their thematic and narrative choices abnormal and tasteless:

> The Bells seem to affect painful and exceptional subjects:—the misdeeds and oppressions of tyranny—the eccentricities of “woman’s fantasy.” They do not turn away from dwelling upon those physical acts of cruelty which we know to have their warrant in the real annals of crime and suffering,—but the contemplation of which true taste rejects. (CHORLEY, 2002, p. 281)

As mentioned before, even though Victorian literature was diverse, the novels of the Brontës did not abide to a specific genre and were difficult to categorize. *Wuthering Heights*, for instance, was praised by its description of “the general mounting of the entire piece” (ATLAS, 2003, p. 283), but its themes horrified reviewers “by what they saw as the ferocity and the improbability of the

characters, the coarseness of the language, and the author's apparent lack of a clear moral viewpoint" (WILKES, 2001, p. 43). From that point of view, Emily's choice of publishing under the pseudonym Ellis Bell was worthwhile because, as a result of her powerful writing and the use of a pseudonym, she was one of the Victorian female authors that was not specifically subjected to sex-based criticism, as appointed by Wilkes (2001):

> It is notable [...] that Victorian responses to *Wuthering Heights* are largely free of preconceptions based on the author's sex, and Charlotte's representation of her sister contributed to this circumstance as well. For Charlotte's Emily was a strange and (in Victorian terms) androgynous creature. (WILKES, 2001, p. 44)

The androgynous quality of her writing had already been noticed by Constantin Héger, her tutor in a boarding school in Brussels. He later confided to Mrs. Gaskell he rated Emily's capacity "as 'something even higher' than Charlotte's. She had [...] 'a head for logic, and a capability or argument, unusual in a man, and rare indeed in a woman'" (BARKER, 2010, p. 460). He even adds that, had she been born a man, she would have made better use of her powerful ability of argumentation, which could convince any reader. Despite attesting to her exceptional abilities as a writer, such discriminatory comments only reinforce Emily's preoccupation with putting her own name on the cover of the novel. If Constantin Héger—who taught Emily in person and saw with his own eyes her abilities as a female author—only believed she could have achieved all she was meant to if she was a man, perhaps the critics, with no relation or respect for her whatsoever, would have responded worse to *Wuthering Heights*.

Following her own intuition and knowing she would leave her personal reputation untouched by criticism, Emily kept herself completely absorbed by her imaginary worlds and made no "perceivable break between her Gondal writings and her novel; indeed, it seems likely that she went straight from writing her long Gondal poem 'The Prisioner', to *Wuthering Heights*" (BARKER, 2010, p. 592). Different from Anne and Charlotte, who made visible effort to break free from their roots and portray more aspects of real life, it is likely that Emily did not bother to do

so and kept her plot strictly set in the Yorkshire moors, “set in an indistinct past and in an imprecise location” (BARKER, 2010, p. 593). From that perspective, it is logical the themes from her juvenilia became inherent to her writing. The literary critics, however, could not have accessed Gondal and her previous writings because even though most of her contributions to *Poems* were indeed adaptations from her juvenilia verses, she managed to hide any allusion to it in order to keep its origins—and mostly her authorship—a secret. Therefore, it is valid that critics might have considered the themes of their novels, especially in Emily’s case, strange for the time in which they were living. More so if the authors were women.

Responding to it, the critic in the *Atlas* believes the abilities of the author of *Wuthering Heights* could have been better developed had the themes and characters of the novel been different. He calls the novel “a strange, inartistic story” (ATLAS, 2002, p. 282), even though he believes it holds “a sort of rugged power—an unconscious strength—which the possessor seems never to think of turning to the best advantage” (ATLAS, 2002, p. 282). Similarly to Héger after her stay in Brussels, the author sees prospective in Emily Brontë’s novel but feels she does not achieve her fullest potential in *Wuthering Heights*. However, he praises her realistic descriptions of character and nature, stating “the reality of unreality has never been so aptly illustrated as in the scenes of almost savage life which Ellis Bell has brought so vividly before us” (ATLAS, 2002, p. 283), but believes they would have benefited from better subjects. Similarly, Chorley believes, “in both these tales [*Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey*] there is so much feeling for character, and nice marking of scenery, that we cannot leave them without once again warning their authors against what is eccentric and unpleasant” (CHORLEY, 2002, p. 282). Both critics, then, advise the author against the abnormal and the tasteless subjects in their future works.

According to Barker (2010), “there was a constant litany complaint about the brutality and violence of some of the scenes and about the use of expletives, which, contrary to custom, Emily had written out in full rather than indicated by a dash” (BARKER, 2010, p. 637), apart from Brontë’s unscrupulous description of violent scenes, during which the author did not rush through and wrote in details. The characterization of the protagonist, Heathcliff, in such scenes was often put under

the spotlight by critics. In the *Athenaeum*, for instance, the author believes the character was based on men cut off from society and his presence and negative energy could have been less prominent in the novel as a whole. This remark on Heathcliff's violent disposition is a pattern in the reviews as well, most of the time being brought up by its incompatibility with reality:

> The brutal master of the lonely house on "Wuthering Heights"—a prison which might be pictured from life—has doubtless had his prototype in those ungenial and remote districts where human beings, like the trees, grow gnarled and dwarfed and distorted by the inclement climate; but he might have been indicated with far fewer touches, in place of so entirely filling the canvas that there is hardly a scene untainted by his presence. (CHORLEY, 2002, p. 282)

Dissatisfied with the ensemble as a whole, mostly with the male characters, the author in *Atlas* concludes "there is not in the entire *dramatis personae* a single character which is not utterly hateful or thoroughly contemptible. If you do not detest the person, you despise him; and if you do not despise him, you detest him with your whole heart" (ATLAS, 2002, p. 283). About Heathcliff, he specifically says that there is a brutality and wickedness to his personality, "a selfishness—a ferocity in the love of Heathcliff, which scarcely suffer it, in spite of its rugged constancy, to relieve the darker parts of his nature" (ATLAS, 2002, p. 284). The critic recognizes the author's attempt at making Heathcliff more relatable as a human being in his life-long devotion for and worship of Catherine, but that effort is not enough to soften him in the eyes of the reader:

> The author seems to have designed to throw some redeeming touches into the character of the brutal Heathcliff by portraying him as one faithful to the "idol of his boyhood"—loving to the very last—long, long after death had divided them, the unhappy girl who had cheered and brightened up the early days of his wretched life. Here is the touch of nature which makes the whole world kin—but it fails of the intended effect. (ATLAS, 2003, p. 283-284)

He concludes by adding the ensemble as a whole "form a group of deformities such as we have rarely seen gathered together on the same canvas"

(ATLAS, 2002, p. 283), meaning that although they seem based on real people, they should not be portrayed in fiction because they are not agreeable. The comment that “the general effect is inexpressibly painful” (ATLAS, 2002, p. 283) can summarize not only both authors’ discontent with *Wuthering Heights*, but also what other readers could have said about the novel in those times.

That is probably why Hewish defends the critics’ opinion “was not only a question of morality, but of a new relationship—in which, of course, morality was involved—between novelist and reader” (HEWISH, 1969, p. 161). As mentioned before, Victorian critics were very careful with what type of novels they recommended to the public due to their concern with which novel was advisable or not, more so in the beginning of the period when there was not much diversity in representation. With time, there came a moment where “a window on aesthetic and ideological transformations in the era's fiction” (SHIRES, 2001, p. 61) took place, but at this first moment in criticism, a novel should educate its reader by teaching a moral lesson and presenting a conventional closure.

While focusing on one of many central characters, the plot of the realist novel was generally character-centered until some conventional closure. Be it marriage or death, this genre’s focus was on the balance of a representation of reality, without idealization. *Wuthering Heights*, then, appeared as a novel that has been considered “to be so different, in fact, that it has been described as closer to Elizabethan drama than to any fiction of its own time. It is a work of generic ambiguity” (SHIRES, 2001, p. 64) which brought conflict to the realist and didactic function of the novel. In that sense, with *Wuthering Heights*, Emily Brontë started a change in the central paradigm of the Victorian novel because of “its relation to contemporary and complex realist conventions” (SHIRES, 2001, p. 65) which appear separately in the narratives of the two generations:

> Yet *Wuthering Heights* speaks what a realist novel knows, but does not usually tell so fully. It has a realist novel's understanding of the dangers of asocial energies, yet it is also a romantic, even sometimes a gothic fiction, with a desiring individualism so violent and transgressive that it crosses the material world into the spiritual realm. This novel is formally bifurcated right down the middle, according to the narratives of two

> generations, so that the first half is considered the asocial romance and the second is considered the realist socialization. (SHIRES, 2001, p. 66)

When David (2001) addresses the writer's search for an 'air of reality' when writing a novel, she affirms this quest "must not be taken, of course, either as an exclusive characterization of the Victorian novel, or as an ambition necessarily shared by all Victorian novelists" (DAVID, 2001, p. 3). Quite the opposite, she states that "a number of critics have observed that the fantastic and sensationalistic aspects of Victorian fiction inherited from early nineteenth-century Gothic narratives undermine the devotion to formal realism shared by the majority of Victorian novelists and readers" (DAVID, 2001, p. 3).

As endorsed by Shires, this seems to be the case of *Wuthering Heights*, a novel that, according to her, presents qualities of both Realism and Romantism. While "the first half of Brontë's novel (the residual) defends Romantic individualism through the intense relationship of Cathy I and Heathcliff; the second half of the novel (the dominant) defends realist socialization through the taming relationship of Cathy II and Hareton" (SHIRES, 2001, p. 66):

> While its aesthetic can be read in realist and coherent terms, this novel also points to unresolvable ideological fissures; it forcefully illustrates the ideological split between Romantic individualism and social consensus that rests at the heart of the novel form, which later Victorian novels will be increasingly hard pressed to heal aesthetically. It also mingles residual, dominant, and emergent forms that will be recombined and altered as the novel develops through the Victorian era. (SHIRES, 2001, p. 66)

Shires reading of *Wuthering Heights* as a both realist and romantic novel, then, could provide an answer to the silence of critics regarding the second part of the novel. In neither the *Athenaeum* nor the *Atlas* have the authors manifested any problem with the second part of the narrative.

2.2 THE 1850 REPRINT: CHARLOTTE BRONTË'S COMMENTARY

After the publication of *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey* at the end of 1847, the Brontë household could not have expected the impending tragedy that was about to happen. In 1848, after a severe winter in Haworth, both Branwell and Emily died of consumption. While the first died very suddenly in September, just some days after falling ill, the latter managed to endure until December despite refusing to take any medicine and seeing a physician (BARKER, 2010).

Her novel's reputation, however, did not take rest with her death. In 1850, a review written by Sydney Dobell for the *Palladium* caught Charlotte Brontë's and her publisher's, William Smith Williams, attention. In this particular review, Dobell evaluates *Wuthering Heights*, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*[7], *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley*[8]—"placing in an assumed order of production (though not of publication)" (DOBELL, 2003, p. 293)—as if they were all written by the same author, Currer Bell. In praising the qualities of Emily's fiction and portrayal of characters, the critic affirms "not a subordinate place or person in this novel but bears more or less the stamp of high genius" (DOBELL, 2003, p. 295), thus recognizing an ability which had been previously associated only with her description of nature. Probably prompted by the positives comments, Smith, Elder & Co approached Charlotte with a proposal for a reprint of *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey*.

At the time, Charlotte had already left her anonymity behind her in favor of the literary career she aimed to pursue and had already met some critics that had previously written not only about her work, but also about her sisters'. Thus, she took the opportunity and volunteered to write the first public statement provided by a Brontë in the format of a preface to this new edition. In order to separate the three figures of Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell, she also provided an outline of their character without giving too much detail on their personal lives.

Charlotte's aim at ending with speculation about their lives goes back to the personal attacks her sisters, especially Emily, suffered after their novels. Her

[7] Anne Brontë's second and last novel, published in 1848. Dobell refers to it as *Wildfell Hall*.
[8] At the time, Charlotte Brontë had already finished a second novel, *Shirley*, published in 1849.

insights on the “Editor’s Preface to the New Edition of *Wuthering Heights*” (1850), she “confessed in her concluding sentence, [...] were written with only one purpose in mind, and that was to answer the critics who had complained that ‘Ellis’ and ‘Acton’ loved the coarse, brutal and degrading” (BARKER, 2010, p. 772). In her attempt to clear Emily’s reputation after the first reception of *Wuthering Heights*, however, she provides her own insights on the novel and establishes a new image of her sister.

She starts her preface to *Wuthering Heights* explaining Emily’s use of the Yorkshire moors as reference for her descriptions of nature in the novel, stating she understands why “the language, the manners, the very dwellings and household customs of the scattered inhabitants of those districts, must be to such readers in a great measure unintelligible, and—where intelligible—repulsive” (C. BRONTË, 2003, p. 313). According to her description, Yorkshire people who “have grown up untaught and unchecked, except by mentors as harsh as themselves” (C. BRONTË, 2003, p. 313) and their habits would not be understood by a readership that was used to calmness and was taught social manners and “if *Wuthering Heights* was at all coarse, Charlotte blamed these people, whose rough manners and unbridled passions, she claimed, were the only example of humanity Emily had had to draw on” (MILLER, 2004, 652).

Naturally, she states, Emily belonged to the environment and her novel could not be set somewhere different and tell a different story. Agreeing with the critics, she describes the novel as “rustic all through. It is moorish, and wild, and knotty as a root of heath” (C. BRONTË, 2003, p. 313), attributing to Emily’s seclusion and lack of connections the creation of such despicable characters:

> Where delineation of human character is concerned, the case is different. I am bound to avow that she had scarcely more practical knowledge of the peasantry amongst whom she lived, then a nun has of the country people who sometimes pass her convent gates. My sister’s disposition was not naturally gregarious; circumstances favoured and fostered her tendency to seclusion. (C. BRONTË, 2003, p. 314)

In other words, Charlotte defends that Emily, in her preference for solitude over social gatherings, was not sufficiently connected with people other than her own family, thus endorsing the idea “that her sister was a 'natural' or naive writer, who conceived her work and the narrative technique with which she presented it in isolation” (HEWISH, 1969, p. 118). Portrayed as a native of the moors and the most stern of the sisters, then, Emily could not have written characters with livelier disposition because she could not have the right models for that.

> Having formed these beings, she did not know what she had done. If the auditor of her work when read in manuscript, shuddered under the grinding influence of natures so relentless and implacable, of spirits so lost and fallen; if it was complained that the mere hearing of certain vivid and fearful scenes banished sleep by night, and disturbed mental peace by day, Ellis Bell would wonder what was meant, and suspect the complainant of affectation. (C. BRONTË, 2003, p. 314)

Despite her opinion on the ensemble, she believes Heathcliff was the only character in the novel whose personality was unredeemable. As opposed to characters Nelly Dean and Edgar Linton, to whom the author of *Jane Eyre* refers to as “spots where clouded daylight and the eclipsed sun still attest their existence” (C. BRONTË, 2003, p. 315) within the dark atmosphere of the book, the eldest of the Brontës compares Heathcliff to “a man’s shape animated by demon life” (C. BRONTË, 2003, p. 316), whose only human feeling is expressed through his strained relationship with Hareton and Nelly.

Following the discussion on the characters, Charlotte explores the idea of creative genius, one she had previously discussed back and forth with Constantin Héger during her stay in Brussels. According to Barker (2010), while in Brussels, Charlotte wrote at least three essays about the question of the nature of genius, something she recognized as “the spiritual flame within”[9] (BARKER, 2010, p. 486) which overcame any physical insignificance of a writer. In her strong opinion, she believed creative genius was innate to an artist, something you were either born

[9]Here, Barker (2010) refers to Charlotte’s essay ‘Peter the Hermit’, in which she identifies herself with the priest.

with or not—which Barker (2010) attributes to her Calvinist [10] tendencies in literature—and defended you could not develop such skill. Héger believed his pupils would "develop their own prose by emulating that of famous authors" (MILLER, 2004, 352) and constantly proposed writing exercises in this format. While for herself art was born from an artist's intuition, he believed studying and practicing led to perfection. Although Charlotte was initially opposed to this practice, her conception changed after some feedbacks to her essays, in which he argued every artist must hone one's skills through the process of imitation from the classics instead of accepting the mediocre because, to him, "emulation was the key to self-improvement" (BARKER, 2010, p. 491). In the preface, then, written years after those first insights on creative genius, she goes back to the same concept in order to support her sister's novel, which she affirms was made out of simple resources:

> "Wuthering Heights" was hewn in a wild workshop, with simple tools, out of homely materials. The statuary found a granite block on a solitary moor: gazing thereon, he saw how from the crag might be elicited a head, savage, swart, sinister; a form moulded with at least one element of grandeur—power. He wrought with a rude chisel, and from no model but the vision of his meditations. With time and labour, the crag took human shape: and there it stands colossal, dark, and frowning, half statue, half rock in the former sense, terrible and goblin-like; in the latter, almost beautiful, for its colouring is of mellow grey,' and moorland moss clothes it; and heath, with its blooming bells and balmy fragrance, grows faithfully close to the giant's foot. (C. BRONTË, 2003, p. 316)

As Hewish (1969) elucidates, Charlotte's suggestion that Emily possessed a creative genius was detrimental to her reputation because it led critics into believing she wrote the novel on a whim, without much planning. Nowadays this idea is dethroned by the innumerous evidence which trace *Wuthering Heights* and its themes back not only to her Gondal poems, but also to other famous authors, such as Walter Scott and Lord Byron. However, the first critics did not have access to these materials. In that sense, according to the author,

[10] "In literature, if not in religion, Charlotte was a Calvinist: she had no doubt that she was one of the elect who possessed genius and that those who did not, no matter how hard they tried, could never achieve greatness" (BARKER, 2010, p. 487)

> Her account is one side of the question in a fairly long-standing debate about Emily Brontë's self-awareness as a writer and the models, if any, of her art. One must give Charlotte the benefit of the doubt by first recognising that she may have been aware of the sort of qualities in *Wuthering Heights* that have led to more recent accusations of 'immaturity'. [...] Nevertheless one can't help feeling that she distorts the portrait in this Preface. (HEWISH, 1969, p. 119)

In her last attempt at defending *Wuthering Heights*, Charlotte affirms an author is expected to create according to norms which were not defined by herself/himself, and emphasizes that "whether it is right or advisable to create beings like Heathcliff, I do not know: I scarcely think it is. But this I know; the writer who possesses the creative gift owns something of which he is not always master—something that at times strangely wills and works for itself" (C. BRONTË, 2003, p. 316). Thus, in her conception, the author does not have control over the creation, but is subjected to appraisal or criticism depending on the work's effect on the audience:

> Be the work grim or glorious, dread or divine, you have little choice left but quiescent adoption. As for you—the nominal artist—your share in it has been to work passively under dictates you neither delivered nor could question—that would not be uttered at your prayer, nor suppressed nor changed at your caprice. If the result be attractive, the World will praise you, who little deserve praise; if it be repulsive, the same World will blame you, who almost as little deserve blame. (C. BRONTË, 2003, p. 316)

Therefore, despite her best intentions of clearing her sister's name in the literary sphere, what Charlotte Brontë managed to do instead was to "establish the rhetorical stance which has been characteristic of all criticism of this novel. This stance involves dismissing most previous critics and claiming one has oneself solved the enigma, cracked the code" (MILLER, 1980, p. 87). By exploiting Emily Brontë's authorial privilege, Charlotte Brontë's reading of the novel left no space for different interpretations and further questioning of *Wuthering Heights*.

In her own way, she anticipates the idea that a piece of work should stand alone without the author's interference, a concept of art that would only be widely

defended decades later, well into the 20th century. In using these words to embrace the whole creative process of *Wuthering Heights*, Charlotte Brontë helped not only "built the edifice under which the Brontës have sheltered ever since, portraying them as children of nature, whose inexperience, innocence and sense of truth led them to portray life as they saw it, in ignorance of the sensibilities of a more sophisticated reading public" (BARKER, 2010, p. 772), but also foreshadowed the novel's critical appraisal in future decades. Because she was the last surviving sibling, Charlotte's account, then, was unquestionable and eventually became a hallmark in the Brontë's critical fortune. According to Lucasta Miller, while the nineteenth century was marked by the success of *Jane Eyre*, the 20th century marked the moment in which Emily

> [...] topped her elder sister from her preeminent position and became enshrined as the free spirit of the moors. It was through the cult of Emily that the myth of the Brontës as forces of nature rising ineluctably out of the wuthering landscape gained currency. Images of storm-tossed passion associated with her-or with the Hollywoodization of *Wuthering Heights* are now part and parcel of the Brontë brand. (MILLER, 2004, 2313)

The author also points out that because of "her wildness and apparent disregard for social norms, which had been vilified of ignored in the decades after her death" (MILLER, 2004, 2881), Emily Brontë became a more attractive figure because of the atemporal quality attributed to herself and her work which Victorian critics could not yet appreciate. Consequently, her novel "has become something of a standard by which the taste—the aesthetic and critical climate of its period—has been judged" (HEWISH, 1969, p. 160).

3 *WUTHERING HEIGHTS*: OTHER APPROACHES

3.1 "A REMARKABLE PIECE OF SYMMETRY IN A TEMPESTUOUS BOOK"[11]: IN THE LIGHT OF STRUCTURALISM

While previous comments on the novel focused on its accordance to a period's aesthetic values, the 20th century brought with it various methods of interpretation which allowed to look at a same work of art from different points of view, making the rediscovery of *Wuthering Heights* possible. What Hewish (1969, p. 168) calls "the stage of defence of Emily Brontë as an artist" started with David Cecil and C. P. Sanger in the early 1920s, when the novel started being assessed in different ways. This rediscovery of Emily's talent reflects a bigger change that was taking place within literary criticism as a whole,

> It has been partly a matter of warier reading, of alertness to the hidden nature of works produced under cultural restraint or influenced by personal conflict [...], and, above all, of better understanding of the subtleties of fiction as an art that can present experience in many ways, of which direct imitation is only one. (HEWISH, 1969, p. 168-169)

In the case of *Wuthering Heights*, Hewish defends "its violence, suggestions of perversity, subjectivity and the personal alienation of its author have a modish appeal that has led to some misplacement of emphasis and to neglect of her more positive and life-enhancing qualities, such as an essential respect for nature (how relevant now!) and for life" (HEWISH, 1969, p. 169). Thus, the novel benefited from the changes seen in literary criticism. By paying more attention to the details rather than considering the work tasteless as a whole, criticism started to organically develop methods of interpretation which would allow an increased understanding of a work by looking at it from different angles, recognizing what parts of it shone better when examined from different parameters.

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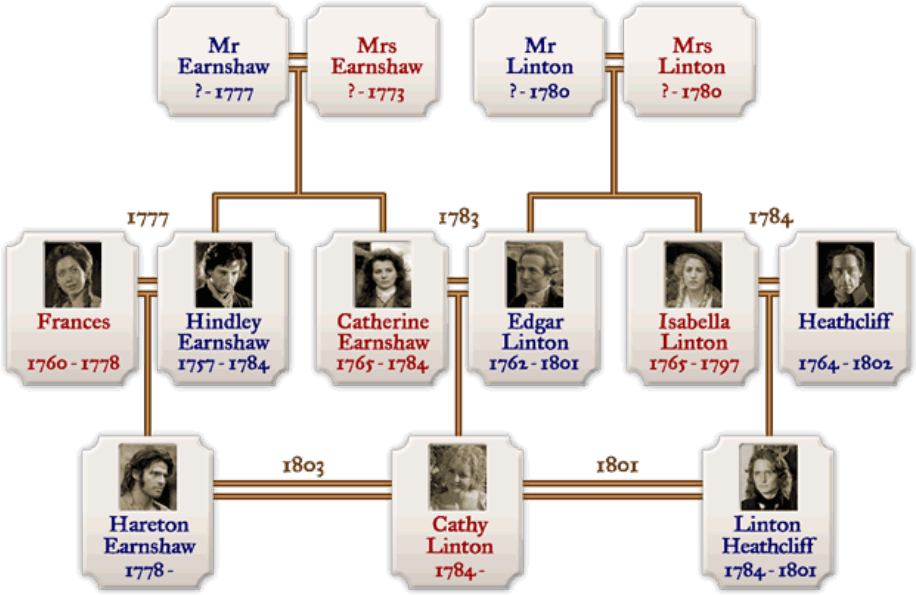
[11] SANGER, 1992, p. 110.

In 1926, Charles Percy Sanger (1992) published *The Structure of Wuthering Heights*, a work that, differently from what had been previously done, analysed the novel's accuracy in terms of timeline, geography, and property laws. Called "a critical watershed" (MILLER, 2004) in the critical fortune of the novel, the author's analysis appeared as a way to prove that Emily Brontë's novel was carefully schemed, mixing legal issues from real life with her fiction.

He starts his investigation by exploring what he calls the "symmetry of pedigree" of the two families that would later merge together in two different generations: the Earnshaws from Wuthering Heights and the Lintons from Thrushcross Grange. Both genealogies start with the two couple of parents, Mr. and Mrs. Earnshaw, and Mr. and Mrs. Linton, both of which had two children: the former had Hindley and Catherine Earnshaw; the latter had Edgar and Isabella Linton. With time, Hindley met Frances, an outsider, and from their relationship Hareton Earnshaw was born. Likewise, from Isabella's relationship with Heathcliff, another outsider, Linton Heathcliff was born. These two, Hareton and Linton, would later in life, and at different times, marry their cousin Cathy Linton, daughter of Catherine Earnshaw and Edgar Linton. Cathy, then, appears as the symbol of the two families' union. Thus, the symmetry appears not only in the number of children, but also in the similar setting of their relationships with people outside of the familiar circle, consequently forming two distinct relationships and two different children that would later be related to their own cousin, Cathy Linton.

Although complex to explain in words, the structure of the genealogy of the two families becomes clearer as a mirrored image, with each of the characters from one family posing oppositely to its correspondent on the other side, as represented in the following image:

IMAGE - Characters Genealogy



Source: The Reader's Guide to *Wuthering Heights*.[12]

Moreover, the author maps out every mention of specific dates in order to establish the age of the characters and the dates of important events. Apart from the beginning of the first and second chapters of the novel, which start with the present years of 1801 and 1802 respectively, there is only one specific date mentioned by Nelly Dean. Talking to Lockwood, she says: “However, if I am to follow my story in true gossip’s fashion, I had better go on; and instead of leaping three years, I will be content to pass to the next summer—the summer of 1778, that is, nearly twenty-three years ago” (E. BRONTË, 2003, p. 49). About her comment, Sanger adds that it “gives no further information, as 1801 is twenty-three years after 1778, but in the first sentence of the next chapter she tells us that Hareton was born in June. This is how I get June 1778 for Hareton’s birth in the pedigree” (SANGER, 1992, p. 110). From Hareton’s birthday it is possible to assume the date of Catherine and Edgar’s marriage, which in turn gives the reader the approximate date of Heathcliff’s return to Wuthering Heights:

[12] Available online at: <https://wuthering-heights.co.uk/images/trees/genealogyplan.png>. Accessed on 3 January 2023.

> We already know that Hareton was born in June 1778; we are told that he was nearly five when Catherine Earnshaw married Edgar Linton, so that the marriage was before June 1783. But Heathcliff returned in September after they had been happily married for six months. Thus the marriage was in April 1783. (SANGER, 1992, p. 112)

According to him, however, "one has to go warily and consider all the indications together, for there is a curious subtlety that sometimes the characters are described as *looking* some ages which are not exact" (SANGER, 1992, p. 112), an example being the case of Heathcliff and Cathy Linton, to whom Lockwood attributes at least forty and less than seventeen years, respectively. From Sanger's estimation, which he does not elaborate further, Heathcliff should have been thirty eight while Cathy would have passed her seventeens. Thus, Sanger follows the same logic to get to other member's years of birth, Cathy included:

> There are a considerable number (perhaps nearly a hundred) indications of various kinds to help us—intervals of time, ages of characters, the months, the harvest moon, the last grouse, and so forth, and we learn, incidentally, that the younger Catherine's birthday was on 20 March. Sometimes, too, we know the day of the week—thus Ellen Dean will remember something which happened on a Sunday, or on a Christmas Eve. (SANGER, 1992, p. 110)

Because her mother, Catherine Earnshaw, died after giving birth, it is possible to confirm the day of her mother's death from her own birthday, on the 20th of March 1784. The only imprecise date Sanger finds within the novel is the one provided by Nelly Dean herself. As stated by Mr. Kenneth in the novel[13], she is said to be of the same age of Hindley, the eldest of the Earnshaw children, but as she narrates "she makes two mistakes about her own age" (SANGER, 1992, p. 113).

Sanger's exhaustive work of piecing together every reference to specific dates to create a whole timeline of events mixes real life information in order to give structure to Emily Brontë's fictional world. In order to discover the exact

[13] Mr. Kenneth to Nelly Dean on the occasion of Hindley's death: "He's barely twenty-seven, it seems; that's your own age; who would have thought you were born in one year!" (E. BRONTË, 2003, p. 144)

starting point of Lockwood's narrative in the year of 1801, Sanger uses the narrator's reference to the snowy weather to infer his tenancy at Wuthering Heights might have happened somewhere around January/February or November/December of said year. However, Lockwood "returns in 1802 before his year's tenancy is out. Hence the story begins at the end of 1801. A Michaelmas[14] tenancy begins on 10 October—not on 20 September—because when the calendar was reformed eleven days were left out. Therefore, the story begins after 10 October 1801" (SANGER, 1992, p. 112).

It is also worth mentioning his appreciation of Emily Brontë's description of the topography of the area where both Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange were located. In his understanding, Emily's love for the moors gave her enough knowledge to give the reader the distance between the two houses and the precise amount of time which would have taken to go from one house to the other, had the places existed in real life:

> On going from Thrushcross Grange to the village of Gimmerton a highway branches off to the moor on the left. There is a stone pillar there. Thrushcross Grange lies to the south-west, Gimmerton to the east, and Wuthering Heights to the north. The distance from Thrushcross Grange to Wuthering Heights is four miles, and Penistone Crags lie a mile and a half farther on. It was half an hour from Gimmerton to Thrushcross Grange. (SANGER, 1992, p. 112)

One question Sanger spends more time unravelling is how Emily Brontë's manage to make it legally possible for Heathcliff to get the two properties for himself and which law she used as basis. The problem starts with the difference between the period during which the novel happens and the timeframe of Emily's writing. The novel was published in 1847 and it is unlikely it was written too long before that. The story, however, takes place a century before, with the first generation having lived from 1771 onwards. The timeframe that separates the two dates—the

[14] Michaelmas, also known as the "Feast of Michael and All Angels", is a Christian celebration that takes place every 29 of September.

author's and the story's—saw innumerous legal changes, as in The Inheritance Act of 1834, the Wills Act of 1837 and the Game Act of 1831, as exemplified by Sanger.

According to him, one would have needed profound knowledge of the law to make Heathcliff the sole inheritor of the properties because "there was a fundamental difference between the law of land (real property) and that of money and goods (personal property)" (SANGER, 1992, p. 113). With Mr. Earnshaw's death, the land would be passed down to Hindley, as according to the law. Apart from that, other personal properties would have been divided between all the children, in this case Hindley and Catherine. However, in being married to Edgar Linton, Catherine's rights to any of her father's belongings would have been transferred to her husband's custody. Logically, the same law applies to the Lintons. With Mr. Linton's death, the land would be passed down to the first heir, Edgar. Any personal property would have been divided between the two siblings, Edgar and Isabella. In being married to Heathcliff, Isabella's rights would have been transferred to her husband's custody. The situation of Wuthering Heights is rather simple, as elucidated by Sanger. Hindley spends away all his money in alcohol and gambling, and all the property under his name is completely mortgaged. Heathcliff, in search for revenge for Hindley's treatment of him in the past, becomes the mortgagee and gets the rights to all the property that once belonged to Hindley. Moreover, "the personal property would also be liable to the debts. So that Heathcliff is mortgagee in possession and, for practical purposes, owner of all the Earnshaw property except any personalty that had gone to Catherine" (SANGER, 1992, p. 114).

In the case of Thrushcross Grange, however, the situation is more complicated and enters the legal area of real property law. While the Earnshaws had only Wuthering Heights as property, the Lintons were better off and even had tenants. Sanger, then, explains the law of entails, which descends according to certain rules of preference: "(1) males are preferred to females; (2) males take in order according to seniority of birth, but females take equally; (3) descendants represent their ancestor. In case of a conflict between them, rule (3) prevails" (SANGER, 1992, p. 114).

However, Sanger points out, “a tenant in tail of full age in possession could by means of a fictitious action [...] bar the entail and obtain the fee-simple, which practically amounts to absolute ownership” (SANGER, 1992, p. 114). This seems to be the breach Emily used in favor of Heathcliff. After Mr. Linton’s death, all his properties were handed down to Edgar, whose death made “Linton Heathcliff the tenant in tail in possession during the few weeks he survived his uncle” (SANGER, 1992, p. 115). In the novel, it is clear that Edgar had the intention of altering his will and leaving all his property to his daughter Cathy:

> When dying he decides, in order to prevent Heathcliff getting at them, to alter his will so as to settle them on Catherine for life and then for her children. The attorney for whom he sends is, however, kept from going by Heathcliff, and Edgar dies before his will is altered, so the money passes to Catherine and then to her husband, Linton. He, though a minor, could (before the year 1838) make a will of personalty. He is induced or forced to do so, and leaves it all to Heathcliff. (SANGER, 1992, p. 115).

Through his analysis, then, it is possible to affirm that “Emily Brontë clearly had a considerable knowledge of the law” (SANGER, 1992, p. 113) and the legal processes which Heathcliff’s character would have to pass through to obtain both properties. As opposed to what Charlotte Brontë implied in her preface to *Wuthering Heights*, such symmetry proves that Emily Brontë had complete control over the internal scheme of her narrative.

3.2 “AS DARK ALMOST AS IF IT CAME FROM THE DEVIL”: IN THE LIGHT OF MARXISM AND POSTCOLONIALISM

As mentioned before, Victorian readers criticized Heathcliff for its lack of realistic implications, justifying the critics’ and Charlotte Brontë’s urge to describe him as a disagreeable character. Further analysis can trace the effects of Emily Brontë’s creation back to the novel’s Gothic aspects, which are known “to depict and explore feeling in character, but also (perhaps mainly) to create feeling or affect

in the reader. The main feelings gothic fictions seek to arouse in their readers are those of fear and terror" (PYKETT, 2001, p. 196), thus justifying the critics' and Charlotte Brontë's urge to describe him as a demonic character. In that sense, it seems logical that a character like him would not be liked by Victorian readership.

Nowadays, this anxiety caused by his characterization and in relation to his position within the Earnshaws as an orphan who is inserted into the familial dynamic, but is never given a proper treatment of a family member, can be seen from different perspectives, and better explored with different interpretive tools. According to Brantlinger (2001), the monstrous characters that so famously protagonized Victorian fiction often implicitly refer to historical racial conflicts that happened as a consequence of the expansion of the British empire, an intersection that brought different anxieties reflecting "several aspects of late-Victorian racism: anxieties about immigration, especially from eastern Europe; the anti-Semitism that such immigration aroused; and the fear of racial degeneration among the English themselves" (BRANTLINGER, 2001, p. 161).

Race and gender are themes that have been present in the Brontë's juvenilia ever since their writings about Angria and Gondal, where the siblings created a whole other universe with different social organizations, and where "there is a general development from simple affirmation of conquest to a far more complex, critical preoccupation with both racial and gender oppression" (BRANTLINGER, 2001, p. 159). These were expressed through stories in the most various places, such as military installations, government buildings, restaurantes, with also varying characters, such as soldiers, artists, warriors from other continents, and so on, proving that the situation with British colonies influenced their writing and allowed them, in their role as women in the middle of a dispute for territory, to bring up characters that were considered "inferior" at the time.

In *Wuthering Heights*, Emily Brontë turns to the Gothic in her play with the Victorian imaginary by creating an antagonist whose origins are uncertain, leaving only minor references to his skin color and possible background. Such allusion to his possible foreign descent raised speculation about the characters' origins, with many analysis tracing his character back to the refugees of the Irish Famine in

England, to the Liverpool port of slave trade, or to the British self-made man, known as Smilesean man.

Terry Eagleton (1995), in his theoretical and historical studies on Irish culture, places Heathcliff in the heart of the conflict between England and Ireland based on biographical evidence which states that Branwell Brontë visited Liverpool in 1845, where refugees of the Famine used to arrive at, and that Emily Brontë started writing *Wuthering Heights* a few months after his return to Haworth. According to Eagleton, despite the fact that the timeline of the Famine and the moment Branwell was in Liverpool do not add up, his visit to the port city makes it possible to affirm that Heathcliff's character could have been inspired by the refugee situation in Liverpool.

As part of the British empire, "Ireland, in this as in other ways, then comes to figure as the monstrous unconscious of the metropolitan society, the secret materialist history of endemically idealist England" (EAGLETON, 1995, p. 8), which contributed to the political catastrophe that is the Great Famine to Irish history, and potentially threatens to lay bare Britain's own incivility:

> Just as we indulge in the world of the id in actions which the ego would find intolerable, so nineteenth-century Ireland became the place where the British were forced to betray their own principles, in a kind of negation or inversion of their conscious beliefs. It was the scene of an intensive state intervention which mocked its own *laissez faire* doctrines; it was the place where it was forced to make grudging political concessions to physical-force movements; it was the country whose custom-bound, unwritten sense of rights on the land it had finally to respect, against the grain of its own contractualist ideology; and it was an island ruled by a landowning oligarchy which it was forced in the end to expropriate. (EAGLETON, 1995, p. 9)

For Eagleton, the ideological implications of the conflict between Nature and Culture, Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange, are embodied in Heathcliff, whose early life is marked by a symbolical hunger and oppression, and whose presence presents a threat to the Grange's alleged civility.

Similar approach to Heathcliff's origins is provided by von Sneidern (1995), whose analysis also places the origins of the character in the Liverpool port, but

gives him a different background. In the author's opinion, Heathcliff's introduction to Wuthering Heights being carried by Mr. Earnshaw alongside "a whip for Cathy and a fiddle for Hindley, objects emblematic of the cruelty and indolence nurtured by institutionalized slavery" (VON SNEIDERN, 1995, p. 172), and Nelly's reference to him as "the dark little thing" are sufficient to conclude he is a remnant of slavery, an origin that provoked a great deal of anxiety for the mid-nineteenth-century Victorian society. According to von Sneidern, although the slave trade in Britain had been abolished in the beginning of the nineteenth-century with enough political support, some periodicals still:

> [...] continued to focus on the diverse elements intimately and problematically bound to a slave economy: the technological advances thought to herald the obsolescence of slave labor, the production figures of cotton and sugar (the two commodities most dependent on slave labor), and the moral threat of prostitution, exacerbated by the short-sighted economics of a slavery that privileged male productivity. (VON SNEIDERN, 1995, p. 174)

With this heightened concern with male productivity there began a new Anglo-Saxon appropriation of the concept of liberty, followed by a mystification of race that "glorifies and sentimentalizes the savage, hardy, free Anglo-Saxon whose natural liberty was corrupted by the imposition of an unnatural autocratic rule" (VON SNEIDERN, 1995, p. 174). A myth based on racial superiority that, after Waterloo, was taken to higher levels based on the premise that the men's 'pure Anglo-Saxon blood' was their source of success.

In the author's opinion, *Wuthering Heights* symbolizes Anglo-Saxon mythology in the relationship between Heathcliff, Hindley, and Catherine. Through their dynamics, it is possible to observe the same discourses of abolitionist, anti-abolitionist, and Anglo-Saxon racialist principles, respectively. The world of Wuthering Heights, unstable due to Heathcliff's unpremeditated arrival and "corrupted by the introduction of the racially other, is the place where the figures of a system of bondage work out their relationships" (VON SNEIDERN, 1995, p. 174), reproduces the same system found in plantations "not on the margins of the empire,

some exotic island half way around the world, but in the heart of Yorkshire" (VON SNEIDERN, 1995, p. 174).

Rylance (2007) does not exclude the two possibilities raised by Eagleton and von Sneidern, but rather develops his own having these as starting points. In his analysis of characters in the novels of the Brontës, the scholar also focuses on the background of the novels, the social changes that were happening at the time these were written, and the literary context in which they were inserted. By analyzing the term 'character', Rylance deals with the two different aspects that this term comprises: the psychological aspect of a character's description, and the Victorian moral aspect that qualifies a character's behavior as either good or bad.

In the Victorian context, "to be thought to be 'of good character' was, in most circles of the literate population of Victorian Britain, an absolute requirement of those entering employment. It was also essential for those entering respectable marriage" (RYLANCE, 2007, p. 148). According to the author, this requirement of 'getting on' with their lives, whether on their careers or romantic relationships, meant an economic opportunity of "making a success of one's life, building a career, finding a place in the mainstream of society, often from beginnings that were disadvantaged or isolated" (RYLANCE, 2007, p. 148), an idea that is included in all Brontë novels due to the nineteenth-century economic prosperity Britain was experiencing. Considering some male self-made characters present in the Brontë novels, Heathcliff, Mr. Rochester, Paul Emmanuel, and Robert Moore, all fit the requirements of this category of psychologically complex characters:

> The typical person would be young, energetic and male. He would also possess that most nebulous of Victorian personal attributes 'character', which [...] increasingly dominated the discourse of Victorian economics, politics and morality at the mid century. In one sense, ideas of respectable 'character' regulated movement in a newly mobile, expanding population. Thus, the idea of being 'of good character' was prominent in the assessment of social reputations, and was closely identified with the idea of the gentleman. (RYLANCE, 2007, p. 148)

In Rylance's interpretation, Heathcliff has caused anxiety in Victorian reviewers and readers because he represents the self-made man, a 'character' in

the Victorian imaginary that corresponds “those who purportedly ‘got on’ under their own steam [and] suppressed the advantage of their origins to enhance their own achievements and to confirm a popular, self-legitimating fantasy” (RYLANCE, 2007, p. 155).

The archetype of the self-made Smilesean man draws a parallel between Moretti’s (1997) analysis of Stoker’s vampire Count Dracula. As a metaphor for capitalism, Dracula is also a self-made foreigner whose predatory actions represent the dangers of monopolism. Then, in the same way Heathcliff operates by climbing his way up social ranks, Dracula’s “curse compels him to make ever more victims, just as the capitalist is compelled to accumulate. His nature forces him to struggle to be unlimited, to subjugate the whole of society” (MORETTI, 1997, p. 92). In *Wuthering Heights*, however, Emily Brontë “exposes violence, moral corruption, deceit and rapacity – but also that notorious, appealing glamour” (RYLANCE, 2007, p. 167) of the life he earned for himself, albeit in ways unknown to other characters and the reader.

In postcolonial terms, Ezzeldin (2017) proposes Heathcliff represents the image of the subaltern, a character “that never speaks because he is not given a chance to speak; and even when he is given this chance, there is always an ‘omnipotent’ individual who speaks for him thinking that he is not gifted with the faculty of talking and expressing himself” (2017, p. 106). Appointing Bertha Mason as another example of this figure—her character being even more silenced than Heathcliff—in Victorian literature, the author affirms as the mirror of society, “the history of race in Victorian literature testifies to the brutal reality that even though as it appears, on the surface at least, that the British Empire aimed for freedom and connectedness, this target was haunted and tarnished by racism and oppression” (EZZELDIN, 2017, p. 107). Heathcliff, in being adopted by the Earnshaw, could never be considered a member of the family and was, except for Catherine, dehumanized because of his unknown origin. His position in relation to the Earnshaws is clearer in his relationship with Hindley, who tortured Heathcliff from a young age until his last days, when he eventually lost not only his money, but Wuthering Heights.

In *Wuthering Heights*, Brontë plays with the Victorian imaginary by creating an antagonist whose origins are uncertain, but leaves minor references to his skin color and possible background which allows readers to associate him with racially oppressed groups. In that sense, reading in the light of Marxism and Postcolonialism provide similar assessments that are interrelated by their common reading of Heathcliff as a monstrous manifestation whose feelings of anxiety allow a better understanding of social and cultural aspects of Victorian society.

3.3 (UN)RELIABILITY IN *WUTHERING HEIGHTS*: DIFFERENT APPROACHES

This resent section is proposed as an exemplification about the way a piece of literature responds to the challenges posed by any approach through which it is addressed. Therefore, based on the concept of “reliable of unreliable narrator”, a notion that starts with Structuralism and reaches maturity in Narratology Studies, we will revisit the narrative scheme of *Wuthering Heights*.

More than a century after the first edition of *Wuthering Heights*, Woodring (1957) drew attention to the role of the narrators. He believed that studies on the structure of the novel had been misled by “an older view [...] that the story, suffering from ‘inferior technique,’ is in parts ‘uncertainly conceived’ and ‘in general ill constructed"'’” (WOODRING, 1957, p. 298), adding that part of this belief was deeply grounded on the lack of analysis on Lockwood and Nelly Dean, which most critics assumed to have been intuitively created out of Emily Brontë’s past literary experiences with Gothic tales.

In fact, *Wuthering Heights* has been appointed as the first novel to introduce multiple narrators into British fiction (PETERSON, 2003), and while nineteenth-century critics paid little attention to the new configuration this phenomenon would suggest, Woodring and others believed their function was not that of merely conveying the main story to the reader, but rather an active one, which Cohn (2000, p. 308) later called an “adjectival discourse”, one that influences how readers

perceive the story. As critics started to pay more attention to narrators, different opinions started to emerge, with a clear division between those who believed in the narrator's credibility and those who suspected their distance from the events narrated.

It was not until Wayne C. Booth (1961) first proposed the concept of unreliable narration in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* that scholars could give a name to their discussion. There, the author created a model determining the main differences between reliable and unreliable narrators, with his famous definition – “I have called a narrator reliable when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say the implied author's norms), unreliable when he does not” (BOOTH, 1961, p. 158-159). Despite its shortcomings, his thesis easily became the basis for textual analysis and, consequently, served as a model for different interpretations of *Wuthering Heights*, influencing the way readers have interpreted the story so far. Some of these are explored in the next section.

3.3.1 *Wuthering Heights*: Unreliability After Booth

In his study, Gideon Shunami (1973) starts by questioning Nelly Dean’s objectivity as a narrator, a characteristic openly ascribed to her by scholars such as McKibben (1960), Van Ghent (1953), and Mathison (1956), to whom her function as eyewitness had no influence in the plot. According to Shunami, this sympathetic attitude towards the governess had been directly influenced by Charlotte Brontë’s commentary on the novel, included as preface after 1850, when the second edition of the novel was published.

In those, the eldest of the Brontë’s responds to the first negative comments on the novel, putting herself in the shoes of a reader to whom life in the moors was unknown. As she tries to justify her sister’s reasons for writing such a novel, Charlotte suggests that Emily’s seclusion meant that her choices of themes and characters were not purposely created, but they were all she knew due to her limited social interactions. However, as poorly related as Emily might have been

because of her introverted personality, Charlotte also paints her as an attentive listener, a role similar to that of Nelly Dean in *Wuthering Heights*: “[...] she knew them: knew their ways, their language, their family histories; she could hear of them with interest, and talk of them with detail, minute, graphic, and accurate; but with them, she rarely exchanged a word” (C. BRONTË, 2003, p. 314).

By relating the two figures of Emily Brontë and Nelly Dean, Charlotte Brontë managed to draw attention to the most relatable and likable character in the novel – according to the critics – while also granting her a degree of narrative authority she would not have otherwise. Moreover, Brontë adds that the weaknesses of the novel the critics were referring to were not something Emily Brontë could control, they were mirroring her own experiences:

> Having formed these beings, she did not know what she had done. If the auditor of her work when read in manuscript, shuddered under the grinding influence of natures so relentless and implacable, of spirits so lost and fallen; if it was complained that the mere hearing of certain vivid and fearful scenes banished sleep by night, and disturbed mental peace by day, Ellis Bell would wonder what was meant, and suspect the complainant of affectation. (C. BRONTË, 2003, p. 314)

Therefore, despite her best intentions of clearing her sister’s name in the literary sphere, what Charlotte Brontë managed to do instead was to “establish the rhetorical stance which has been characteristic of all criticism of this novel. This stance involves dismissing most previous critics and claiming one has oneself solved the enigma, cracked the code” (MILLER, 1980, p. 87). By exploiting Emily Brontë’s authorial privilege, Charlotte Brontë’s reading of the novel left no space for different interpretations and further questioning of *Wuthering Heights*.

While the realist norm in nineteenth-century literature meant that “an unambiguous presentation of fictional worlds largely remained unquestioned” by critics (ZERWECK, 2001, p. 160), early modern criticism on *Wuthering Heights*, influenced by Charlotte Brontë’s interpretation of the novel, also tended to accept Nelly Dean as a credible source, “to the extent that if there are defects or inconsistencies in her behavior, these are connected to her formal function and not

to her lack of personal trustworthiness” (SHUNAMI, 1973, p. 451). Going the opposite way of his predecessors, Shunami believes Nelly Dean is a complex character who has total control of her narrative. His attempt, then, is to prove that the servant’s limited point of view as a character not only attests to her personal involvement and interest in the story, but it also classifies her as an unreliable narrator. To prove his point, the author proposes a thorough analysis of her sources of information, her behavior towards her superiors on different occasions, and her personal dialogues with Lockwood.

According to the author, there are three main points that regulate Nelly Dean’s storytelling. First, she works as an authorial device, one that seems to have no influence in the plot, but serves a major purpose of telling the story and entertaining her listener, Mr. Lockwood. Borrowed from the Gothic convention, this technique would indicate that, although she experienced first-hand most of the scenes she tells Lockwood about, her own private judgements and opinions about the characters are also being passed on as she reports to him. In that sense, the information is not necessarily “linked to internal psychological process of the characters of the novel or to the plot produced by the network of relationships among them. Instead, they arise from the "literary" imperative to supply the reader with the required information at any price” (SHUNAMI, 1973, p. 452). In other words, Shunami believes Nelly Dean’s position as storyteller only makes her more prone to embellishing the story than others with the same function, as it is the case of Lockwood.

The following point on the author’s argument is Nelly Dean’s closeness to the story and its subjects. The fact that she grew up watching the Earnshaw offspring without really being a part of it means that she is placed right outside the narrative circle. Her placement within the family would also explain her different ways of gathering information about the member of the family:

> They are many and varied: beginning with the direct testimony of her eyes and ears, continuing with the extensive confessions of the protagonists and with the detailed letters which they send her of their own free will, and concluding with her eavesdropping behind locked doors, delving into

> closed drawers, and slyly peeping--of which the major figures of the novel have no idea. (SHUNAMI, 1963, p. 452)

Moreover, in her role as servant in a motherless household, Nelly Dean became part of the family and helped raise all three children – Hindley, Catherine, and Heathcliff –, usually as a reconciling influence. Thus, her tendency to manipulate situations on her own accord would explain her want for information which she would keep from her masters. One example the author brings is the servant's involvement in Catherine's love life, which she constantly undermines. In her belief that she can manage Catherine's life better than herself, Nelly often keeps information from her in order to keep "everything" under control.

> Since Nelly has no private life of her own and, in contrast to Catherine, no romantic involvement or prospects for a family, she unconsciously effaces her own feminine personality and loses herself more and more in the life of her mistress. She thus unknowingly compensates for her thwarted romantic longings with Catherine's lovers, thereby determining that Catherine remain ignorant of her own romantic and conjugal future. (SHUNAMI, 1973, p. 454)

From childhood, Nelly Dean shows signs of having very little patience with Catherine and her authoritative personality, and the strange power dynamics within their relationship continues throughout the years. One important scene that portrays such dynamics is when Catherine tells Nelly that Edgar has proposed to her, but that she believes she would be doing the wrong thing marrying him because of her love for Heathcliff. Such conversation is full of sarcasm from Nelly's part, and despite knowing that Heathcliff was in fact listening to half of their conversation, she lies to Catherine by saying he was away in the stables as a way of punishing her mistress. Clearly unsatisfied with Catherine's opinions, Nelly shows no sympathy towards her dilemma and rejects[15] her demands for attention.

[15] Shunami (1973, p. 455) emphasizes Nelly Dean's words at this moment: "She paused, and hid her face in the folds of my gown; but I jerked it forcibly away. I was out of patience with her folly! / "If I can make any sense of your nonsense, Miss," I said, "it only goes to convince me that you are ignorant of the duties you undertake in marrying; or else that you are a wicked, unprincipled girl. But trouble me with no more secrets. I'll not promise to keep them" (E. BRONTË, 2003, p. 64-65).

About Nelly’s influence in Catherine and Heathcliff’s relationship, Shunami affirms that,

> It is probable that Nelly has already decided, for clear social reasons, that Catherine should marry the wealthy Edgar and not penniless Heathcliff. Therefore, she must do everything she can to banish the foolish love for Heathcliff from Catherine's mind. When Heathcliff's sudden disappearance becomes known, the roles are ironically reversed, and the servant, in a patronizing, self-confident manner, charges her lady with what she considers to be her fault. [...] Nelly thus exonerates herself as she places the guilt for her own actions on her mistress and continues in her unwitting hypocrisy in the further course of events as well. (SHUNAMI, 1973, p. 455-456)

Another moment the author refers to is when Nelly tells Lockwood about Catherine’s “hallucination” when she falls ill. In the scene, Nelly and Catherine are alone in a room when the latter sees another person in the mirror, claiming the room is haunted and they are in danger. According to Shunami, this scene works as a metaphor of Nelly’s never-ending influence, since “Nelly's reflection in the mirror, beside Catherine, represents Catherine's fears that, because of her own weakening will, Nelly will soon seize control” (SHUNAMI, 1973, p. 456). When reporting this episode to Lockwood, Nelly rather presents Catherine’s response as:

> [...] an example of a deluded and sick woman's impulsive outbursts. Since they were expressed in the midst of hysterical outpourings, she thus is not apprehensive about transmitting to Lockwood in detail all of Catherine's accusations against her. She is confident that he will distinguish between the confused delusions of a pathetically sick patient and the self-evident truth coming from a healthy and "spontaneous" woman like herself. (SHUNAMI, 1973, p. 456)

Shunami adds that because of her personality and bias towards the story, the servant “exploits the informational resources known only by her and the special circumstances of the narrative in order to join the intricate system of relationships among the novel's heroes” (SHUNAMI, 1973, p. 453), in a way that the development of the plot not only depends on her, but also only happens *because* of her. In other words, the whole narrative entanglement only exists because of her

own actions, making it “impossible to understand the plot without a comprehension of the motives, deeds, and commentary of Nelly Dean” (SHUNAMI, 1973, p. 543), not only because she is the one conveying it, but because she is deeply involved in it, despite the nature of her intentions. Thus, Shunami concludes her personal involvement with the narrative and her lack of analysis of the relationships makes her more unreliable.

Finally, although Shunami does not analyze the role of Lockwood in particular, he tries to prove that Lockwood’s role as both an interlocutor to Nelly and a filter through whom readers have access to the story also aggravates her lack of credibility as a narrator.

According to the author, Nelly Dean and Lockwood destroy each other's credibility as narrators. Since Nelly is the only source to these stories of the family, her distorted representations lure Lockwood into believing that “that he understands the characters and their actions on just a first impression” (SHUNAMI, 1973, p. 460), consequently reinforcing her own unreliability. The obvious example would be his naive attraction to Cathy, whose romantic figure he only creates as an opposition to her mother’s demonic figure that was influenced by Nelly’s own interpretation of Catherine, not his. Because of this interconnection in their points of view, Shunami considers both narrators as simplistic:

> Nelly's story is based on her own human reactions, her diligent probes, and her crafty exegeses of occurrences, and not on a direct and profound attempt at analysis of the pattern of relationships among the protagonists and the events which thereby result. Lockwood's simplicity is thus patently apparent in his total faith in all of Nelly Dean's words. (SHUNAMI, 1973, p. 463)

Similar interpretation of Nelly Dean and Lockwood is carried out by Jacqueline Viswanathan (1974), who also believes a study on perspective is profitable for understanding unreliability in *Wuthering Heights*. In her approach[16],

[16] Viswanathan (1974) choses three novels to work with, Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847), Joseph Conrad’s *Under Western Eyes* (1911), and Thomas Mann’s *Doktor Faustus* (1947). Despite being published at completely different times, the author intends to prove all three novels have narrators performing the same role.

the author also seeks to understand how the point of view of a first-person narrator influences the way we perceive the story, but by pointing out which techniques allow the reader to read beyond the narrator's words. According to her, the importance of investigating the narrators' perspective is because they provide a contrasting element: while their presence in the events is not as relevant as the protagonists', their participation as mediators through whom we have access to the events (even if from a limited perspective) is of major importance to the novel because it evokes different responses from readers. Going a step further than Shunami (1973), Viswanathan explains her point by affirming that:

> The narrators' mediation between the main characters and the reader reveals a way of responding, a type of sensibility which does not seem to be well suited to the material of the story. Besides the remarks which show their emotional response, the narrators interfere in the course of the stories with extensive comments of a type common with omniscient narrators: they express their opinion about the moral significance of the story, they pass judgement on the moral values of the characters. (VISWANATHAN, 1974, p. 43)

According to the author, this is more frequent in tragic episodes that represent a great change in the lives of the characters involved. Viswanathan defends that "although, according to the narrators themselves, their stories do not belong to the realm of fiction, [in such cases] they are very similar to conventional novels in their extensive use of scenic presentation" (VISWANATHAN, 1974, p. 43), and by employing this narrative technique similar to that of the omniscient narrator in key scenes of *Wuthering Heights*, Nelly Dean takes a step off and puts herself in the shoes of an expectator, an approach completely different from the one chosen for the rest of the narrative. Her exaggerated morals and religiosity, which tend to appear whenever she tries to evaluate the events to her interlocutor, are less clear. In those cases, Viswanathan believes the reader's interpretation of the story would depend on whether they trust the narrator or not. However, this credibility would only be possible if the narrator kept the same style throughout the narrative and followed the rules implied by the author.

According to the author, Nelly Dean constantly misreads people and their intentions, mostly Catherine and Heathcliff. In the scene when both intend to have a secret meeting before Edgar's arrival, Nelly helps arrange and chaperones the meeting because of Catherine's deteriorating health, but misinterprets the whole situation by assuming that, "in spite of Cathy's desperate physical and mental condition, Heathcliff would dutifully return to Wuthering Heights after the interview" (VISWANATHAN, 1974, p. 44). At this point in the narrative, her interlocutor is well aware, as Nelly would also be expected to hence their long acquaintance, of Heathcliff's bad temper and unpredictability, and how meeting Catherine would most likely bring back strong emotions. Viswanathan points out that such mistakes are present throughout the narrative, but become more clear in these important scenes, where:

> They usually fall into the sarne category, showing the narrators' reluctance to dive too deeply into a world of frightening shadows. The scenes, however, are the only passages in which the narrators reveal shortcomings in their emotional response. The dominant emotion of the narrators during the scenes is fear. (VISWANATHAN, 1974, p. 46)

Since this is the episode that leads up to Catherine's death the following morning, Nelly's narrative is not free of "reluctance to accept the occurrence of extremely tragic episodes" (VISWANATHAN, 1974, p. 46), because had she given it a second thought, Catherine's death might not have happened. Thus, by recognizing her own share of guilt, Nelly distances herself from the scene and takes on a limited perspective which minimizes "the tragic overtones of the meeting" (VISWANATHAN, 1974, p. 45) most likely in the intention of misguiding her interlocutor through her distant display of emotions towards the scene. However, as Viswanathan indicates, her choice of words[17] while referring to the characters

[17] One scene mentioned by Viswanathan (1974) is right before Catherine receives the letter from Heathcliff and Nelly announces his presence: "Her appearance was altered, as I had told Heathcliff, but when she was calm, there seemed *unearthly beauty* in the change. The flash of her eyes had been succeeded by a dreamy and melancholy softness; they no longer gave the impression of looking at the objects around her; they appeared always to gaze beyond, and far beyond—you would have said out of this world." (E. BRONTË, 2003, p. 122; our emphasis)

gives her in to the reader. Nelly's use of elevated vocabulary and the lack of humor that normally permeates her narrative seem strange to the reader, who realizes,

> The narrator's response is unsuitable [...] for the characters' tragic greatness. In the narrative parts, all the information clearly comes from the narrator's mouth and bears the stamp of their subjective opinion; but in the scenes, some descriptions of the characters' features, of their gestures, of the tone of their voice do not fit the narrators' judgement, or their emotional response; they seem to offer a very different perspective on the characters. (VISWANATHAN, 1974, p. 48)

The author also emphasizes how Catherine and Heathcliff are given a different perspective through the language patterns recreated by Nelly when recreating the important scenes between them. In those, "the characters make use of a series of metaphors, repeated in each of those tragic scenes, which gradually build up into a consistent pattern of imagery. These images are never used by the narrators; they belong to the characters' utterances exclusively" (VISWANATHAN, 1974, p. 49). Consequently, the employment of more elevated and characteristic styles establishes the different levels between characters and narrators, despite the protagonists' perspective not being fully penetrable since their words and actions are all the reader has access to. "Thus, the characters' essential mystery is still preserved. The narrators' full reliability is undermined, but no other truth is substituted" (VISWANATHAN, 1974, p. 51).

Other techniques Viswanathan appoints as attesting to the narrator's unreliability are Lockwood's inclusion of Catherine's personal writings in her bible and Nelly's inclusion of Isabella's letter, a device commonly used in fiction "for modifying or widening the narrators' judgement of the characters" (VISWANATHAN, 1974, p. 51) since it is supposed to be untouched by the narrator's opinion, consequently allowing the reader to have some sort of "reliable" material to resort to.

Finally, the conclusion Viswanathan intends to arrive at is that "the narrators' unreliability only makes sense in relation to their "reliability" in general" (VISWANATHAN, 1974, p. 58). In other words, to be considered reliable, a narrator

has to keep a pattern it itself created throughout the narrative. However, Viswanathan believes that in *Wuthering Heights* “the reader becomes aware of a level in the story and a depth in the characters which are beyond the narrators' understanding” (VISWANATHAN, 1974, p. 58), thus discrediting Nelly Dean’s point of view.

Although not explicitly, both Shunami (1973) and Viswanathan (1974) have referred to Booth’s rhetoric approach to unreliability in their interpretations of *Wuthering Heights*. According to Booth (1961), narratorial unreliability depends on the distance between narrators and implied author, be it moral, intellectual, physical, or temporal (BOOTH, 1961, p. 156). However, from a contemporary perspective, Booth’s conceptualization tends to lack clarity in numerous aspects and these analyses on the role of Nelly Dean can help illustrate its shortcomings.

In his proposal of different types of narration, Booth claims unreliability “is most often a matter of what [Henry] James calls *inconscience*; the narrator is mistaken, or he believes himself to have qualities which the author denies him” (BOOTH, 1961, p. 159, author’s emphasis). In the case of Nelly Dean, both Shunami and Viswanathan believe her account on the events is hindered by her limited point of view in the story and her misinterpretation when it comes to the characters actions. Her ignorance, then, leads her into believing she is acting out of benevolence, when in fact she is the one who helped things fall apart. In that sense, she is deemed unreliable the moment the reader realizes her unconscious attempts to mask her influence in the tragic outcome of Catherine and Heathcliff’s relationship at the moment of telling Lockwood about the past. From Booth’s point of view, this literary effect is only possible because of the distance between Nelly and the norms of the book, which place the servant as a character with not only a limited perspective, but one both socially and emotionally inferior to other characters, because different from Catherine and Heahtcliff, who often react with strong emotions, Nelly is reserved and constantly misunderstands the family’s aggressive fallouts.

Both works refer to certain narrative rules which can be traced back to the concept of implied author developed by Booth. According to him, the implied author

is a textual device created by authors and it occupies a different position from its creator since it establishes “the core of norms and choices” (BOOTH, 1961, p. 74) that regulate a work of literature. However, as seen in the analysis by Shunami and Viswanathan, the norms of the novel tend to be difficult to arrive at not only because they are not completely clear due to the embedded narrative structure but also because there seems to be no clear narrative voice besides that of the narrators. In *Wuthering Heights*, Lockwood is the main narrator who frames the narrative Nelly tells him in retrospect, at the same time that he records his own experience with the surviving family members in real time.

While Shunami (1973) uses Booth’s theory to develop an argument based almost exclusively on Nelly’s subjective perspective, minimizing Lockwood’s importance, Viswanathan (1974) often refers to the distance created between narrators and characters because of the narrators' use of different vocabulary when referring to the protagonists. However, the rules in question are not clarified, which makes one question if there could be a place for an implied author in the novel, with authority superior to that of Lockwood and inferior to that of Emily Brontë. Moreover, if the experience of reading implies “a dialogue among author, narrator, the other characters, and the reader” (BOOTH, 1961, p. 155), then would not the concept of the implied author establish an exchange system between novel and reader? If so, narrative unreliability in *Wuthering Heights* would vary according to the changes in reading practices. Thus, the problems with finding the implied author within Emily Brontë’s novel could indicate a problem with Booth’s definition of the implied author and its practical applicability.

3.3.2 Revisiting *Wuthering Heights*: New Possibilities

Cognitive and constructivist narratologists such as Olson (2003), Nünning (2005), and Meir Sternberg and Tamar Yacobi (2015) have tried to reconceptualize Booth’s well-known definitions. According to Zerweck (2001), who provides a timeline of how narrative unreliability has been applied in the narratological field ever since Booth’s introduction, Ansgar Nünning (2005) was the first to provide an

alternative reader-centered approach, which eliminates the concept of implied author.

For the German author, Booth's concept of implied author "is quite problematic because it creates the illusion that it is a purely textual phenomenon. But it is obvious from many of the definitions that the implied author is a construct established by the reader on the basis of the whole structure of a text" (NÜNNING, 2005, p. 91). Thus, by assimilating the implied author as part of the reader's reception process, it would be impossible to find textual evidence of the norms and values of it since these are all diluted within the final work. Moreover, if a narrator's unreliability is only apprehended through its distance from the norms of the work, which are not available in text form, then unreliability can only be an effect, "an interpretive strategy of the reader" (NÜNNING, 2005, p. 94). From that starting point, Nünning proposes a reader-centered approach to unreliability – later questioned by Meir Sternberg and Tamar Yacobi (2015) – claiming unreliability can be determined "in the context of frame theory as a projection by the reader who tries to resolve ambiguities and textual inconsistencies by attributing them to the narrator's unreliability" (NÜNNING, 2005, p. 95).

In his work about unreliable narration in British fiction, Nünning (1997) brings back the notion of objectivity in Victorian fiction, which did not provide many examples of unreliable narrators in view of the popularity of realist novels at the time. In his opinion, however, *Wuthering Heights* would be one of the few notable Victorian novels that presents two unreliable narrators, stating:

> The juxtaposition of their accounts not only reveals a number of judgmental errors in Lockwood's shallow description, but also calls into doubt the normative standards that he represents. While the main reasons for his unreliability are his lack of knowledge and his normative view of the world, Nelly Dean's strong bias results from a high degree of emotional involvement, from her divided loyalties, and from her overt partiality. With its juxtaposition of two unreliable narrators, *Wuthering Heights* seriously undermines the assumption that an objective or authoritative version of events can in principle be established. (NÜNNING, 1997, p. 92)

Nünning's approach to unreliability, however, is criticized by Sternberg and Yacobi (2015), who believe the German scholar "sometimes runs to the extreme diametrically opposed to the reader-centered, or subject-oriented, namely, sheer objectivism, as though unreliability were all in the text" (p. 475), thus going back to the text-centered approach he criticized. In their words,

> [Nünning's] unreliability does not count here as a "technique" of reading, like our perspectival and other mechanisms; it counts still less so than as a product of reading. Nor, strictly, does it make here even a technique of narrating, because narrators do not as a rule choose to be deemed unreliable, only to render others so: among the voices and views they themselves quote. (STERNBERG; YACOBI, 2015, p. 402)

Thus, Sternberg and Yacobi (2015) propose their constructivist model, causing a second turn in the study of narrative unreliability. The authors stem from the point that the problem with Booth goes a lot deeper because, besides providing a concept with no applicability, he also "leaves us without any idea of how to go about reconstructing, however problematically or debatably, this [implied] author and normative scheme and their relation to the narrator (or any other mediator)" (STERNBERG; YACOBI, 2015, p. 394). Akin to the cognitivist approach, Sternberg and Yacobi believe unreliability depends on the way the narrative is put together, stating it "is a perspectival hypothesis that we readers (hearers, viewers) form as sense-makers, especially under the pressure or threat of ill-constructed discourse" (STERNBERG; YACOBI, 2015, p. 402). Consequently, different from what Booth and Nünning were convinced of, their opinion is that narrative unreliability cannot be particularly ascribed to narrators since it is not diagnosed through textual clues, but through the reader's whole experience with a literary work.

What Sternberg and Yacobi (2015) defend is that readers organize narrative inconsistencies through a process of *integration*, which puts different sense-making mechanisms to work, simultaneously or not. The five mechanisms selected by the authors (*generic*, *genetic*, *functional*, *existential*, and *perspectival*) are believed to be the ones that more deeply affect reliability judgment. However, Sternberg and Yacobi do not provide an alternative reading after identifying the

problems with Nünning's account of Lockwood and Nelly Dean, but a reading based on their constructivist model would be beneficial to the novel's critical fortune since it has been considered an unreliable narrative. If readers from different periods have had the same thought, it indicates that there might be at least one mechanism at work.

The narrative inconsistencies presented in Nelly Dean's discourse are shown through her confusing ambivalent attitude towards Catherine and Heathcliff, with her either defending and helping them, or criticizing and demonizing them. According to Sternberg and Yacobi, when faced with such inconsistencies, readers tries to explain it through a process called *integration*, "transferring it [the blame for inconsistencies] and them elsewhere – to the perspective of an unreliable mediator, to a suitable frame of existence, to the work's genetic process, to a genre, to a function, or to some other (e.g., figurative) explanatory principle" (STERNBERG; YACOBI, 2015, p. 431). In the case of the narrators in *Wuthering Heights*, such inconsistencies are attributed to Nelly Dean, "a fictional subject [...] through whose perspective the represented world is taken to be refracted, and so (re)constructing that mediating subject as unreliable" (STERNBERG; YACOBI, 2015, p. 411). Her unreliability, then, is a result of and can be understood as a sense-making hypothesis readers arrive at because of her contrasting opinions that vary as the story goes.

Given that *Wuthering Heights* is a Gothic novel, the organization of the novel seems to be an important aspect that Shunami (1973) and Viswanathan (1974) ignore when considering Nelly Dean's narrative. The fact that the course of the novel and Nelly's stories are being controlled by Lockwood, the frame narrator who comes from the city and whose first impression of Wuthering Heights was macabre to say the least, could indicate that the structure of the novel, presented in two storylines intertwined with one another, has a *functional* purpose of evoking similar effects to that of ghost stories or folktales. According to Sternberg and Yacobi, in the functional mechanism, "a work's aesthetic, thematic, and persuasive goals operate as a major, versatile guideline to its integration: they make functional sense of its peculiarities—clashes, breaches, dissonances—as well as of its regular

features. (STERNBERG; YACOBI, 2015, p. 407). Thus, Nelly's ambivalent behavior towards the protagonists only potentializes this aesthetic purpose.

Although both Shunami (1973) and Viswanathan (1974) try to point out textual evidence of Nelly Dean's limited point of view and how it compromises her reliability, the latter sheds more light to the role of the reader, even if subtly like Nünning. However, when considering the constructivist model, the narrative inconsistencies that have been reckoned as proof of their unreliability only provide a starting point in the discussion, and do not bear out since the authors do not consider the whole function of the text. Applying the +*functional* and the *perspectival* mechanisms allows a wider understanding of Lockwood and Nelly Dean and their perspectives in the story.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This diachronic overview of some moments in the critical fortune of *Wuthering Heights* makes it clear that, in each specific epoch, the critical reception reflects the parameters that are predominant in their time. The case with *Wuthering Heights* shows that, initially, the novel has been rejected for being too raw and direct. Later, its mathematically constructed structure has been highly praised. Decade after decade, from then on, the psychological, social, political, gender views projected on the interpretation have triggered different reactions to the book. With this work, I aimed to understand in what ways it responds to different critical challenges. Starting from the moment it was first published, to more recent days, I commented on some of the most notorious pieces of criticism written about *Wuthering Heights* and what the authors had to contribute to the discussion. Because the aesthetic values are constantly changing, I hope to have provided at least some insight into the practice of literary criticism by pointing out the different approaches in different historical periods.

The first chapter aimed at giving context to the first reviews of the novel, providing background information of the Victorian period and the practice of literary criticism at the time. As mentioned above, the nineteenth century was a historical moment of many advances in the socioeconomic, educational, and industrial departments, which, as a consequence of better circulation, eventually increased literacy levels all around Britain. However, while the literacy levels skyrocketed, there was also an increased preoccupation with what was considered suitable reading content for this new readership that belonged mostly to the working classes. Thus, the novel appeared as a new format that allowed readers a moment of leisure, with a diverse range of genres, such as detective, supernatural and gothic stories. With such a diverse range, the Victorian novel became difficult to define. Critics, then, concerned about the influence a practice like reading could provoke on its readership, started to censor what was considered suitable reading material.

It was in this scenario that *Wuthering Heights* was published, in December 1847, after the Brontë sisters's failed attempt at becoming successful poets with

their collection *Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell*. Due to Charlotte Brontë's unbending effort, the sisters managed to put together a volume with two novels which was published under their chosen pseudonyms, a matter that would only raise speculation about the personal lives of the authors and their works. Conceived after Emily Brontë's experience in writing poems about Gondal, *Wuthering Heights* appears as a different novel for the standards of its time, which praised novels that depicted real life and provided the reader with a clear closure. Contrary to the Victorian aesthetic value which praised realism over romantism, Emily, deeply connected with her Gondal creations, put together a novel that deals with violent feelings and strange characters.

Being published only two months after *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights* suffered the consequences of the critics' confusion about their use of pseudonyms and their high expectations for a new novel which, in their opinion, should have been better than the first. Considered a successor of *Jane Eyre*, then, *Wuthering Heights* was from the beginning compared to Charlotte's novel and was rarely considered the best of the two. The first reviews of the novel never failed to mention the differences between the novels, emphasizing their questions about their real authorship. Although *Jane Eyre* was considered superior, it is fair to say it *Wuthering Heights* that attracted more attention because of its dramaticism, prompting further good and bad responses overall. The author caught the critics' attention due to her faithful to the scenery and descriptions of nature, which unfortunately were not enough to win the critics over. They were of the opinion that Emily Brontë, having created a character like Heathcliff, could have chosen better subjects for her novel.

After Emily's death, Charlotte seized the opportunity of writing a preface to the reprint of *Wuthering Heights* with the aim of ending speculation about their identity. Identifying herself, Ellis and Acton Bell as real sisters, Charlotte provides her own reading of Emily's novel. Although unintentionally, her preface containing the first personal statement provided by a Brontë was detrimental to Emily's reputation as an isolate, secluded woman. Stating her sister had barely any idea of the power of her creation, Charlotte attributes to Emily's genius her capacity for so good a representation of the characters of West Yorkshire, where the family

came from, that a well-educated reader could not have empathized with such different personality. Thus, Charlotte defended that Emily was born with a natural gift, one that allowed her to be separated from her work, which stood alone by itself. Such initial reception of *Wuthering Heights*—provided by the first critics and Charlotte Brontë—set the tone of how the novel and the author would be perceived for some years after its publication. The turn of the 20th century, however, was more fruitful in the critical fortune of *Wuthering Heights.*

Contrary to expectations, the novel responded well to modern theories that looked at subsidiary aspects of a novel instead of approaching it as either tasteful or not. As attested in the third chapter, the Structuralist approach clearly benefited from the structure *Wuthering Heights*, a novel that was carefully well organized and based itself on real life laws to regulate the events of the novel. Moreover, a Marxist and Postcolonial approach to the novel deeply contributes to the novel's Gothic origins. In portraying Heathcliff as the antihero, Emily Brontë managed to compile the cultural anxieties provoked by immigrants in Britain as a result of colonization.

This discussion on the reception of *Wuthering Heights* in different moments of its critical fortune was supported by Reception theories developed by Jauss and Iser, which contemplate the important role of the reader in the reading process. According to the authors, different readers from different places understand a same work in different manners. In having access to different readings, then, we are able to understand an audience's social condition and cultural background because of shared experiences. There are patterns of analysis, the authors attest, that contribute to the study of the changing aesthetic values throughout the history of literary criticism. In that sense, through the analysis of the reception of *Wuthering Heights* on its first edition, it is possible to affirm that society praised the description of life as presented in the real world, without too much affectation. In other words, *Wuthering Heights* might not have been successful back then had the Brontë's not sparked curiosity on their personal lives.

By the 1920s, however, the concept of art had drastically changed. Literary criticism took replaced past practices with a new way of interpretation, and scholars started to look at different aspects of the novel, usually choosing the one in which the novel stood out the most. What the Structuralist approach to *Wuthering Heights*

informs us about its readership is that the structure carries as much weight as the content of the book itself. Then, it was not that common to see critics theorizing about the personal lives of artists and how much of themselves they had put into their works. Opposite of that, modern theories tended to completely ignore the author as they believed the work should be self-sufficient, a concept foreshadowed by Charlotte Brontë in her definition of genius. By the end of the century, the author's relevance starts to come with full force again as Marxist and Postcolonial theories started to draw attention to an author's ideology. In that sense, the work of art is placed within a determined context in which it purposefully choses to whom it gives voice. Thus, *Wuthering Heights* is not a political novel, although it puts Heathcliff, an orphan whose origins are unknown, at the centre of the narrative. Despite being the male protagonist, Heathcliff suffers his way into life as someone without the means to thrive socially and culturally and ends up being dramatized as a demonic character, a common way out in both Romantic and Victorian literature.

Although Victorian critics considered *Wuthering Heights* a strange novel because of its themes and characters, the novel stands to this day as a classic of English literature, proving that, as opposed to the critics' beliefs, being a different novel did not qualify it as either good or bad literature. While Victorian critics were offended by the novel, modern readers praised it according to its strong features. With this overview, it is possible to infer that studies which isolated different aspects of *Wuthering Heights* have provided better answers than those that aimed at finding its real meaning because the novel has too many nuances. In other words, Therefore, *Wuthering Heights* appears as a novel that continues to provide different answers to each interpretive method.

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