

**UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO RIO GRANDE DO SUL  
INSTITUTO DE LETRAS**

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**“A GLOOM OVER THE MIND NOT EASILY TO BE DISPELLED”: ON THE FIRST  
REVIEWS OF *WUTHERING HEIGHTS***

**PORTO ALEGRE  
2020**

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

**ORIENTADORA: PROFA. DRA. SANDRA SIRANGELO MAGGIO**

**PORTO ALEGRE  
2020**

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO RIO GRANDE DO SUL

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Chisté, Marcela Zaccaro  
"A Gloom Over the Mind Not Easily to Be Dispelled":  
On the First Reviews of Wuthering Heights / Marcela  
Zaccaro Chisté. -- 2020.  
42 f.  
Orientadora: Sandra Sirangelo Maggio.

Trabalho de conclusão de curso (Graduação) --  
Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Instituto  
de Letras, Licenciatura em Letras: Língua Portuguesa e  
Literaturas de Língua Portuguesa, Língua Inglesa e  
Literaturas de Língua Inglesa, Porto Alegre, BR-RS,  
2020.

1. Victorian literature. 2. Emily Brontë. 3.  
Wuthering Heights. 4. Reception studies. 5.  
Readership. I. Maggio, Sandra Sirangelo, orient. II.  
Título.

**MARCELA ZACCARO CHISTÉ**

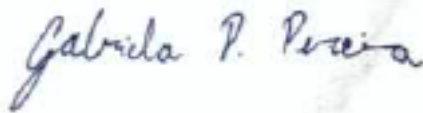
**“A GLOOM OVER THE MIND NOT EASILY TO BE DISPELLED”: ON THE  
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de Licenciada em Letras pela Universidade  
Federal do Rio Grande do Sul.

Porto Alegre, 25 de novembro de 2020.

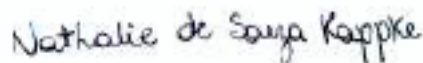
Aprovada com conceito A.

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## **AGRADECIMENTOS**

Writing this monograph during a pandemic required more than my two hands could handle. This is a small message to all the people behind these words.

Firstly, I would like to thank my parents for the unconditional love and emotional support even from an 8-hour distance. Despite all our differences, you never questioned my decisions, and supported me no matter what. Thank you for the sacrifices you have made to make sure I follow the path of my choice.

To my brothers, who unknowingly make my role as middle child both unbearable and incredibly fun. Thank you for being my friends for life.

To my grandparents, who have been my supporters since the beginning. Thank you for keeping me company, for the intellectual talks, and for the afternoons watching some cheap drama. I am forever grateful for the opportunities you have provided me with in this journey.

Thank you to all the friends that stayed by my side and to whom I resorted in times of despair.

The writing of this monograph would not be possible without the support of my advisor, Professor Sandra Maggio. Thank you for believing in me since day one and for giving me the opportunity of working with you. I do hope we can keep this partnership for a long time.

Lastly, thank you CNPq and FAPERGS for the scholarships that made my two-year research possible.

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

Emily Brontë, "Stanzas"

## RESUMO

A presente monografia analisa as primeiras resenhas publicadas sobre o romance *O Morro dos Ventos Uivantes* (1847), de Emily Brontë, com o objetivo de identificar fatores que possam ter provocado a recepção negativa que teve por parte de críticos literários, apesar do consumo desenfreado por parte do público-leitor. Para entender as razões dessa divergência, lanço mão de estudos meta-críticos e de literatura sobre a época. O trabalho vem dividido em duas partes. A primeira apresenta aspectos históricos e culturais relacionados ao período, tendo em vista os parâmetros sob os quais a obra foi lançada e criticada, retomando elementos da vida da autora considerados pertinentes para o desenvolvimento da análise. A segunda parte apresenta e comenta resenhas feitas por críticos contemporâneos a Brontë, na intenção de estabelecer uma relação entre o que era esperado de uma obra ficcional pela tradição literária de então e aquilo que o romance apresenta. Como lastro teórico, recorro principalmente a Deirdre David (2001) e Joanne Shattock (2001) em seus estudos sobre Sociologia da Leitura. Para dados biográficos referentes à autora, valho-me das pesquisas desenvolvidas por Juliet Barker (2007). Espero que este Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso contribua para os estudos sobre o momento de formação da fortuna crítica de *O Morro dos Ventos Uivantes*, que tanto destoa do atual, através de uma leitura sobre como uma obra tão diferente foi recebida, com base em parâmetros que não a representavam.

**Palavras-chave:** Literatura vitoriana. Emily Brontë. *O Morro dos Ventos Uivantes*. Recepção. Público-leitor.

## ABSTRACT

This monograph analyzes the first reviews of Emily Brontë's novel *Wuthering Heights* (1847), with the aim of identifying aspects that may have provoked the negative reception the work received from the critics, despite its success with the reading public. In order to better understand this divergence, I rely on studies about meta-analysis and on the literature of the period. This work is divided into two parts. The first presents some historical and cultural aspects that determine the parameters through which the novel was published and criticized, as well as raises pertinent biographical elements in the life of the author. The second part analyzes some reviews written by Brontë's contemporaries, in order to establish a correlation between what literary tradition expected from a fictional work then, and what the work in fact presents. As theoretical support, I use studies on Sociology of Reading written by Deirdre David (2001) and Joanne Shattock (2001). As biographical sources on the life of Emily Brontë, I count on researches carried out by Juliet Barker (2007). With this monograph, I hope to contribute to the studies about this first moment in the novel's critical fortune, which very much differs from our present-day views, while presenting my personal reading on how such a different novel as *Wuthering Heights* was initially assessed through parameters that did not represent it.

**Keywords:** Victorian literature. Emily Brontë. *Wuthering Heights*. Reception studies. Readership.



**APOIO DE FINANCIAMENTO: CNPq**

O presente trabalho foi realizado com apoio do CNPq – Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico – Brasil.

This monograph was financed in part by the *Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico* – Brazil (CNPq).

**APOIO DE FINANCIAMENTO: FAPERGS**

O presente trabalho foi realizado com apoio da FAPERGS – Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado do Rio Grande do Sul.

This monograph was financed in part by the *Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado do Rio Grande do Sul* (FAPERGS).

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## INTRODUCTION

I remember being no more than fourteen years old when I first discovered a volume of *Wuthering Heights* in my school's library. It was a black leather edition with no apparent title, and that triggered my curious nature, causing me to believe that I should take the book home and read it. After the impact of that first impulse that took me to the book, it easily became a favorite. Now, as student of English literature, I feel the urge to work with it, because the more I dig into the plot and into the processes employed by Emily Brontë in writing her novel, the more I realize how hard it is to get hold of it. The aspects that fascinate me as a reader and that make the novel richer, such as the unique characters, the complex narrative structure, the Gothic elements, are the same that almost drove me insane in trying to find a line to pursue in my research.

As my past curiosity turned into a somewhat more mature project to be followed, I decided to concentrate on a chronological approach to the critical fortune of the novel, starting from the moment when *Wuthering Heights* was made public. To my surprise, the first edition of the novel, published in December 1847, was received in a very negative way. The book was considered improper to the standards of the time, mainly due to its wild themes and strong characters, two aspects that deviate from what was expected of a Victorian novel in the mid-nineteenth century. Victorian scholars and critics praised books that would help elevate the readers, educate them, and serve as an example of good morals. Evidently, this was not the case with Emily Brontë's novel, a book whose tone and subjects were far from according with the 'domestic'<sup>1</sup> pattern. As a result, in their reviews of the novel, many critics not only emphasized several characteristics that did not meet their expectations, but also left the readers an impression of an inartistic story written by an isolated, eccentric author.

Little was known about the Brontës at the time. The novels of the three sisters were published under pseudonyms that failed to determine whether they were men or women. The fact that the eldest sister Charlotte Brontë coyly confirmed their identities only in the 1850 edition<sup>2</sup> of *Wuthering Heights* meant that the public spent more than two years

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<sup>1</sup> This definition of this term will be further analyzed in Chapter 1.

<sup>2</sup> The first edition of the novel was published by T. C. Newby, a person whose conduct Charlotte Brontë strongly suspected since he rejected her work *The Professor*. Because of that, it has been stated that she tried to convince her sisters into taking their future writings to Smith, Elder and Company, with whom she had a good experience since the publication of *Jane Eyre*. Whether or not she succeeded is unknown since both Emily and Anne died in December 1848 and May 1849, respectively. After their deaths, Smith, Elder and

speculating about their lives. It was not only until two years after Charlotte's death, in Elizabeth Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857), that readers had a glimpse of the personal life of the family. Despite having Charlotte Brontë as a centerpiece, the biography was "concerned with the woman rather than her books"<sup>3</sup> (SHATTOCK, 2001, p.19). Gaskell's book praised generally her biographee's talents as a writer, but it prioritized personal information exchanged through letters rather than offered a closer look into Charlotte Brontë's writing processes or writing subjects.

Emily Brontë's case was more complicated. There was nothing left, not even letters<sup>4</sup>, to tell the story of her short life. Therefore, this starting negative reception both on the novel and on her writing shed, for a long time, a grim shadow over her image. For years many biographers continued to paint a savage unsocial woman; a stereotypical portrait that clearly reflects aspects particularly ascribed to her novel at the time.

Although these critical reviews may come as a surprise to us, 21<sup>st</sup> century readers used to think of *Wuthering Heights* as a classical novel, they can provide useful information about the critical parameters of assessment to a literary text in the 19th century. Therefore, their importance becomes more relevant as we consider that not only the creation of a novel like *Wuthering Heights*, but especially the fact that its first editions sold so well, indicate that many things were changing not only in the literary circle, but in society as well. Events that were happening in England at the time were reflected in the literary market, initiating a debate concerning the function of a novel, what it should represent and to what reading public it was directed to. Considering their relevance as historical data and the mark they left in the critical fortune of *Wuthering Heights*, to the point of influencing its late reception, I decided to further analyze some of the reviews published during the first months of the publication of the novel. With this analysis, the aim of my monograph is to identify factors that may have contributed to the critics' disapproval of Emily Brontë's novel, despite its success among the readers.

In order to contextualize the analysis, the first chapter addresses questions related to Victorian literature and readership, as well as pertinent biographical information on the life

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Company proposed a second edition of *Wuthering Heights*, to which Charlotte Brontë eventually wrote her famous dedicatory preface (Cf. DUNN, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* was a personal request from Rev. Patrick Brontë, the father of the Brontës, to Elizabeth Gaskell, writer and friend of Charlotte Brontë. This request came from his wish to stop speculation on her life, and this justifies Gaskell's focus on Brontë as a person rather than as a writer.

<sup>4</sup> To this date, only a few letters and entries from Emily Brontë's personal diary were recovered by researchers, providing little information about her writing process.

of the author. I start the analysis, with the support of Andrew Franta, commenting on the fall of Romanticism and its audience problems, giving place to the discussion about the Victorian genre. The scholarly support relies in *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel* (2001), in which Deirdre David raises questions about the ‘new’ Victorian genre, its themes, and how it changed the way people read novels. As I further illustrate, it is David’s opinion that literature in the Victorian period was reflected both the maintaining characteristics of Romanticism and the ‘domestic realism’<sup>5</sup> that took shape in the mid-nineteenth century. Evidently, this reflects on the way literature was consumed and reviewed. To add up to the discussion, Kate Flint shows how this new genre was addressed to a new type of readership. As an effect of the Industrial Revolution, the rate of literacy among the working classes increased, which meant more people had access to reading material. However, reading literature was seen as something dangerous due to its potential to deviate citizens from the expected route. As Flint explains, this caused novel-reading to become a concern, and this may explain why critics had such strong opinions when they evaluated a book.

The research of Laurel Brake raises some issues related to literary criticism in the nineteenth century, explaining how it changed from an activity performed by amateurs into a well-spread and respected genre, with its own configurations. The research of Dr. Joanne Shattock contributes to the discussion on the reception by the critics. In her work, Shattock emphasizes the extensive contribution of women authors 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. This increased presence, however, caused an impact between the critics, who still based their opinion on parameters that were no longer valid, considering the new public that were in fact consuming literature. Following this point, the collection presented by Heather Glen in *The Cambridge Companion to the Brontës* (2007) provides further information about the life of Emily Brontë. In these essays, the authors provide not only a biographical context about the life of the Brontë family, but also analyze different aspects of their novels. The section that helps me most is that one about the village of Haworth and its context, where Juliet Barker (2007) elaborates on themes presented in *Wuthering Heights*.

The second chapter brings my analysis of the selected reviews. Since many of them bring similar opinions, I sorted them out by themes. I will start by addressing the

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<sup>5</sup> This term will be better defined in Chapter 1.

comparison with *Jane Eyre*, published a few months before *Wuthering Heights*, in order to understand how it influenced the critics opinion; then, I will comment on their impressions on the characters' morality and the effect that Emily Brontë's creations had on the critics. The corpus consists of five reviews, written in the span of approximately one year after the publication of the novel in December 1847.

By analyzing these reviews, I propose a discussion on the relation of society and literary texts, through which I hope to identify in what ways and under what parameters critics responded to *Wuthering Heights*, and what this response says about the course of society and of literary criticism.

## 1. LITERATURE IN THE VICTORIAN PERIOD

This first section of my monograph is dedicated to the different ramifications of Victorian literature that are important to the history of *Wuthering Heights*. In order to better understand its initial reception, it is important to define what was the ‘Victorian’ genre that prevailed at the time and what type of readership authors encountered. A brief contextualization will be carried out as a means of explaining why the way Victorian criticism occurred did not correspond to this new public that was in fact consuming literature.

### 1.1 Victorian Literature and the ‘New Reader’

The shift between Romanticism into what we now know as Victorian literature was marked by many changes in the literary sphere. According to Andrew Franta (2007), some of these include “the decline of patronage, the rise of the novel and the periodical press, and the emergence of the mass reading public” (FRANTA, 2007, p. 1), the last being the main reason behind the fall of poetry. In his work on Romanticism and its audience problems, the author claims this decline happened mostly because poets could no longer predict to which public they were writing to. According to him, many factors influenced this shift, mentioning that recent research on “the transformation of the literary market in the early nineteenth century has demonstrated how crucial developments in the book trade, in publishing technology, and in the transmission of texts refashioned the market for poetry in the 1820s” (FRANTA, 2007, p. 165). Although Franta’s reflections were focused on the reception of the poetic text, such comments on the periodical press and its mass reading public can easily be applied to and lay the foundation for the rise of the novel during the nineteenth century.

In being the first industrial pole, the nineteenth-century England grew more than any country not only in population, but also in wealth. Scholars Kate Flint (2001) and Jonathan Rose (2002) write a detailed analysis of this period in relation to the literary market and the readership in question. According to Flint, the public’s ascending interest in the novel and England’s economic progress were deeply related, pointing out the subsequent factors as the first steps to this new configuration:

The growth of cities, which provided concentrated markets; the development of overseas readerships in the colonies; cheaper production costs when it came to both paper and printing processes; better distribution networks, and the advertising and

promotion of books. (FLINT, 2001, p. 17)

This industrialization also meant an increase in job opportunities that now required at least some level of literacy from the working-class. As Flint points out, this, added to the fact that a good part of this group had developed poor reading abilities, resulted in “an increasing number of cheap texts, aimed at those [...] and targeted at their tastes” (FLINT, 2001, p. 19). From this situation emerged a type of fiction that “was preeminent in this print culture; above all, the stories of crime and violence, and the exaggeratedly impossible romances which so disturbed those who commented on the reading of the working classes (FLINT, 2001, p. 19). This point is further developed by Rose, who states that for this group,

Literacy was used primarily for leisure. In the second half of the century, their real incomes rose by 80–100 percent, their work hours decreased, and they could buy an ever-expanding array of cheap newspapers and magazines. All these factors – more money, more time, more printed matter – made it ever more worthwhile to learn how to read. (ROSE, 2002, p. 33)

This impression of reading as a leisure activity was even more prominent among the middle-classes. For them, this industrialization consolidated “the assumption that a male head of a household should be able to provide for the female members of his family, without them having to take paid work” (FLINT, 2001, p. 19), meaning that now the time they had for leisure activities was even more accentuated. If in the past it was predominantly a masculine activity, this establishment marked the moment in which reading became a filler for the ‘empty’ hours women spent at home. This new conception of the act of reading as a way of winding down; a mental space from the complicated business of running a home” (FLINT, 2001, p. 20) fully reflected on writing practices. Fictions writers were often advised that their reading public was not critical, intensifying “a distinction developed between intellectually, psychologically and aesthetically demanding fiction, and that which primarily served the needs of escapism and relaxation” (FLINT, 2001, p. 20). Distinctions like this culminated in a so-called scholarly and “rhetorically absolute division between the intellectuals and the masses” (FLINT, 2001, p. 20) up to the final decades of the Victorian period.

These tensions are further analyzed by Deirdre David in her introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel* (2001), where she claims that although the British novel had already been recognized as such for a little more than a century before the start of what we now name the Victorian Era, it was during this period that the habit of reading novels had a bigger recognition. As opposed to easy-reading texts, novels represented ‘serious fiction’ by the end of the Victorian period. The main difference, however, was that



novels often emerged in a serialized form.

These different modes of publication exerted particular pressures on novelists, extending their stories in order to fill three volumes; cutting and compressing in order to meet the space constraints of a magazine column; concocting the regularly spaced moments of suspense which paced serial publication and encouraged the purchase of a subsequent issue; never allowing characters to fade too long from sight. (FLINT, 2001, p. 23)

Eventually, this center position brought up certain discussions on the purpose of such text. Flint analyses this situation by saying that “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). Considering this relation to the domestic sphere, the conflict between rules of social behavior and profits in the literary market triggered a debate of whether

[...] novels should retain their racy affiliations with romance, teach uplifting moral lessons, educate curious readers about a rapidly changing society, or aim for a narrative singularity that would provide aesthetic correlation for the domestic realism that ruled the form for most of the period. (DAVID, 2001, p. 1)

The reason why such contradictory opinions would cause this big of a doubt was due to the fact that even though reading novels was still new in some social strata, as stated before, it easily became part of the cultural habits we now know as Victorian (Cf. DAVID, 2001). Paradoxes – or rather dualities – as such are known to be the roots of Victorianism. The aforementioned fast progress in England’s history that on one side increased literacy levels was not altogether positive. On the other side, social inequality reached its highest levels, resulting in an abyss between the rich and the poor: a consumer society in a wealthy country served as a contrast to the underworld that attracted crime and prostitution. As a consequence of this divergence, there came a heightened sense of awareness and a set of values was unconsciously established. Such values we can now recognize as Victorian, and some are normally attribute to the English culture, such as the importance of morality and family, the sexual repression, the woman as the angel of the house. Eventually, these were transposed to the writing of literature.

Around this period, scholars and literary experts were already familiar with the power of a book, assuming that “novels allowed you to learn something about things, places, and people, formerly unknown” (DAVID, 2001, p. 6). However, literacy levels were still

increasing and, as stated by Kate Flint in her study about Victorian readership,

Reading provoked a good deal of anxiety during the Victorian period. 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)

Bringing back the discussion on reading habits and assuming as main consumers of these textual products the working classes and women, “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). The domestic realism, then, appeared as a form of minimizing these effects. Even though this genre is not the only one to which Victorian authors were committed to, it is the one that proved to have more impact in the reception of *Wuthering Heights*. To better understand what characteristics this genre embraces, I bring Professor Caroline Levine (2012), whose studies further explain the rise of nineteenth-century realism. She starts her chapter by saying that even though realism seems easy to define, many scholars have failed in their attempts. To say in her words,

Realism has variously been associated with the ordinary, the middle class, the present, historical consciousness, industrialization, the city, and the nation; it has been linked to omniscient narration, free indirect discourse, vernacular dialogue, extended description, open-ended narrative, the panoramic, and the detail; it has been seen as a way to explore the interior lives of characters and the exterior movement of objects; it has been cast as totalizing or particularizing, as naively invested in transparency or as highly self-conscious about the problem of representation. (LEVINE, 2012, p. 84)

Basically, anything that “rejected allegory and symbol, romantic and sensational plots, supernatural explanations and idealized characters” (LEVINE, 2012, p. 84), being more prone to the real world and real-life experiences. However, as Levine notes, ‘truth’ is a term without fixed meaning and one that many Victorian writers managed to dribble. For a fact, there appeared numerous works of fiction that seemed ‘truthful’ but to which authors added plot turns, 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).

The author’s analysis goes further, claiming this rise of realist literature during the 19<sup>th</sup>

century has been debated by many scholars, with only three of their concepts being the most relevant. The one I bring here is traced back to Ian Watt and George Levine, who believed the subject of the realist novel,

may best be found by the individual, depending on her own lived experience, independent of tradition. In order to capture a convincing reality, the novel borrows from this empiricist epistemology a focus on individual characters, who rely on the evidence of their own eyes and ears to gain access to the truths of the world” (LEVINE, 2012, p. 86)

This conception of the realist novel as a product of the author’s experience and as subject of literary criticism will be further analyzed in the next section.

## **1.2 The Impact on Literary Criticism**

All these transformations that happened in England during the nineteenth century also permeated the field of literary criticism. However, talking about nineteenth-century literary criticism means talking about a subject that had not been fully understood at the time, and has yet some gaps to fill nowadays. When tackling these lacks in this field of study, Laurel Brake (1994) exposes the origin of these problems, saying that around mid-century, the periodicals that circulated worked as “an informal system of apprenticeships for the would-be writer, initially through anonymous contributions over a range of subject areas” (BRAKE, 1994, p. 2). This informality led to a system of contribution in which editors and publishers would extensively edit and manipulate the content of an essay according to their taste, which led to “a more specific problem of the authority of criticism in the nineteenth century” (BRAKE, 1994, p. 19). This anonymity allowed them to set whatever tone they wished since many texts could not be traced back to a specific author, and it seems to be the point that separated informed opinion and professional criticism during this period.

This practice, however, was inherited from a previous lack in the field of criticism. The same way “English was not firmly established as a subject for study in British schools and universities” (BRAKE, 1994, p. 2), English literature was also not seen as one, meaning that for a long time many critics did not specialize in this area of study. Due to that shortage, the terms 'critic' and 'criticism' were applied to many other areas that were not specifically literary. Brake, then, poses a problem in Victorian criticism as an activity and a discourse by stating that this confusion,

[...] attests to a chaotic time in the transition and division of the critics into journalists, literary and other scholars, and literary critics who publish in periodicals. That this growth, of the profession of literary critic and of the genre of literary criticism, is recognized by the Victorian critics is shown by the many articles in which they grope their way through problems of identity, method, and language. (BRAKE, 1994, p. 3)

Ultimately, this growth of literary criticism as a genre led to a certain self-consciousness that directly affected their writing method, culminating in the professionalization of this practice. Critics, then, started to not only review works of literature, but rather composing full-length essays. This characterized some type of metaliterature in which critics were expected to choose a subject of their interest within the literary piece and spend pages talking only about this subject, saving the last parts for the topics he did not fully grasp or that were not from his area (Cf. BAGEHOT, 1855, p. 256-57 apud BRAKE, 1994, p. 4-5). This method was later enhanced by Bagehot himself, who decided to call it 'allusive criticism' The definition to this expression is given by Brake:

This double perspective (and occasional conflict) characterizes an allusive criticism which assumes its audience well-read enough to provide its own proof, and a criticism which caters to the more general reader and popular audience who have no interest in proofs. 'Allusive criticism' reflects an increasing sense of professionalism in the essayist as both journalist and critic. (BRAKE, 1994, p. 5)

This self-consciousness that led to a discussion on the function of literary criticism by the critics themselves is proof of how seriously the critical practice started being taken seriously with time. This "contemporary theorizing on periodical-criticism occurs in the periodicals with a frequency comparable to that on realism and the novel, another important focus of criticism in the nineteenth century" (BRAKE, 1994, p. 7). With this remark, we come to the center of the discussion.

With the professionalization of literary criticism, there came a preoccupation with style and content. Moreover, this conception of criticism as a genre and not only a 'source of information', raised concerns about the subjects presented in the reviews. As previously stated by Flint, reading was an activity that was frowned upon due to the belief that people were influenced by what they read, and this awareness that what the content editors put out "had to be conceived within the limits of their notion of a family audience" (BRAKE, 1994, p. 18) resulted in a preoccupation with the content in books. As mentioned before, the novel had gone through a transition, and even though it was popular with the public, it was only by the end of the Victorian period, with the works of George Eliot, that the critics started considering

it a serious genre (Cf. BRAKE, 1994). According to Brake, ‘high literature’ was a category that included poetry and drama, stating that:

These locations of higher criticism and literature are gendered, and all pertain to areas of knowledge associated with men – politics, science, psychology, philosophy, classics, drama and poetry, while the novel is clearly associated in the period with women readers and authors. (BRAKE, 1994, p. 30)

The relation between this understanding of the novel as a genre of minor relevance and its association with women authors is not by chance, and it can be emphasized by the works of Professors Joanne Wilkes (2001) and Joanne Shattock (2001). With the analysis<sup>6</sup> of two reviews taken from the *Athenaeum*, Wilkes defends that too often reviews on works written by women were biased. She states that these two reviews:

[...] represent a minor instance of a practice endemic to nineteenth-century literary criticism – the ascription of particular characteristics to writing on the basis of its author’s sex. Although this happened to texts by writers of both sexes, the practice was more common in discussions of women’s publications. In general, such a habit fostered a reductive approach to women’s writing, since the capacities attributed to women meant that their writings were considered less substantial and significant than men’s. (WILKES, 2001, p. 35)

This association is deeply rooted in what Shattock calls a “polarization of the ‘public’ (male) and the ‘private’ (female)” (SHATTOCK, 2001, p. 3) spheres in Victorian ideology. At the time, few women managed to circulate society the way men did, meaning that their day-to-day basis was normally focused on the domestic life. Having defined the concept of domestic realism, it is expected from women writers to write about their experiences. Shattock affirms the critics’ despise towards the novel came from their belief that women’s 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). One of the ways in which they managed to get around this association was through the creation of ‘an alternative to a female literary society’, which consisted of:

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<sup>6</sup> In her analysis, Joanne Wilkes brings as an example a review in the *Athenaeum* about two novels: *Lady Betty*, by Christabel Coleridge, and *Herbert Tresham*, by the Revd J. M. Neale. There, both books are criticized, but the characteristics attributed to the work of Coleridge are according to her sex, while the ones used in Revd. Neale’s evaluation are not necessarily linked to him being a man or to his status. The reviewer states that, in the case of Coleridge’s work, the name of the author was not necessary because it was obviously written by a woman.

[...] highly intelligent women reading the work of other highly intelligent women. They knew better than to look only for self-representation in these texts. They 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. (SHATTOCK, 2001, p. 8)

Eventually, the formation of this new literary society had some effects within the literary sphere and the reading public; their works became more widespread, resulting in “the seeking of role models, and the felt need for a personal knowledge of these women” (SHATTOCK, 2001, p. 9). From their private lives away from society appeared a new fascination and the life of these women suddenly became biographical matter. When talking about their place in society, Shattock affirms:

Although professional writers, they did not inhabit the public sphere. They were not members of the universities, they could not frequent the clubs and societies which were the haunts of male writers; they did not give readings or lectures; their connection with politics and the professions was tangential, through family connections; even opportunities for travel were circumscribed. Their increasing contribution to the world of journalism was conducted from home. (SHATTOCK, 2001, p. 9)

By then, Victorian biography was not a very popular genre, but this new quest for personal knowledge meant that the lives of these women were often subject of speculation, and it was “to pre-empt further gossip and the circulation of erroneous material or to control the way their lives were presented to the public that biographies were commissioned” (SHATTOCK, 2001, p.9). This demand for biographies, in the same way that happened with literary criticism, resulted in a refinement of the genre.

Furthermore, as they gradually became more popular and were more consumed by critics and readership, they often influenced the reception of the novel. Hence the assumption that women's work was deeply related to their personal lives, this seems to be the case with *Wuthering Heights*.

### **1.3 *Wuthering Heights*: What did Emily Brontë Do?**

In her analysis about the various ways this practice in literary criticism influenced the formation of the canon, Joanne Wilkes affirms that while some female authors were already

famous by the end of the nineteenth century, this acknowledgement did not occur the same way it did with more underappreciated female authors. According to her, the works that became very well-known “escaped from the kinds of judgments about women’s writing which served to trivialize it” (WILKES, 2001, p. 36), such as those according to their sex. This group of female authors, she adds, includes the ones that are still part of the literary canon and “enjoy the highest critical reputation today – Jane Austen, Charlotte and Emily Brontë, and George Eliot” (WILKES, 2001, p. 36). Even though their works came to be recognized as examples in English literature,

[...] the process by which the *oeuvre* of these writers came to be valued more highly than those of their female contemporaries did not involve simply a kind of ‘transcendence’ of contemporary assumptions based on the authors’ sex. Rather, genuine responsiveness to these authors’ writing was often inflected by definite preconceptions about them as women. (WILKES, 2001, p. 36)

On that account, the author states that even though their works were not considered ‘too feminine’, assumptions about them as women clearly affected the way the public and the critics received their works, and biographies had an important part in this process, most of the times overshadowing their ability as writers. With Emily Brontë, her personal life directly interfered in the late reception of *Wuthering Heights*, but critical reviews on the first edition of the novel in 1847 prove that their opinion was much more influenced by the themes she presented.

This first edition of the novel was published in December of 1847, in a volume that included her sister Anne’s novel *Agnes Grey*. The responses to it were not favorable:

Reviewers were bewildered, even horrified, 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. But there was some acknowledgment of the sheer power of the writing – and this would have been one reason why the novelist was universally assumed to be male. (WILKES, 2001, p. 43)

At the time, opting for pseudonyms rather than using real names was a common practice among women; hiding their identity meant less people would know they were writers. With the Brontës, all three sisters opted for neutral pseudonyms in order to facilitate their entrance in the literary world. Even though many critics were not certain they were men or even different people, Emily’s style managed to reassure them of that.

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)

Their anonymity lasted until 1850, when Charlotte put an end to the rumors about their lives. Due to the responses of the critics to the first editions of *Wuthering Heights*, Charlotte Brontë felt the need to speak on her sisters' behalf, and to the 1850's edition of the two novels she wrote a 'Biographical Notice'. Even though Charlotte's concern "to explain her sister's novel with reference to the physical and social locale of its setting" (WILKES, 2001, p. 43) were enough proof to show that her sister did have a special bond with her place of birth, this portrayal was the first glimpse into Emily's life and the closest scholars and readers could get to her.

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. As a unique case, she did not threaten contemporary preconceptions about women's writing as such. (WILKES, 2001, p. 44-45)

Although Charlotte's account on Emily's novel and late biographies could not have influenced the first reception of the novel, they provide the reader with information that can be traced back to its creation. It is due to her description of her sister that we now know at least a little about her personality and the way her background affected her writings.

Therefore, before analyzing the content of these critical reviews on *Wuthering Heights*, I find it important to contextualize aspects that were the basis for such comments. Thus, from now on such aspects that constitute the novel and that were under evaluation by this critics will be analyzed. The hypothesis held here is that Emily Brontë was heavily influenced by her surroundings while still having total control over her creation, proving that *Wuthering Heights* represents a hybrid novel that brings elements from Romanticism and Victorian realism.

In her work about Haworth's context and its influence in the life of the Brontës, Juliet Barker (2007) states that one of the main issues concerning the Brontës' biographies is the misconception about the town they lived in. This misrepresentation of Haworth had long been done, starting by the first biography, Elizabeth Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë*. According to Barker, Gaskell remarks that 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" (BARKER, 2007, p. 14) proved how alien Gaskell was of the situation and how efficiently it helped promote an image of Haworth as this physically remote, strange and



inhospitable town that was far from reality. Moreover, Barker affirms,

The problem with Gaskell's description of Haworth was that it was almost a hundred years out of date. Haworth was not a small rural village but a busy industrial township. Even though the Brontë's themselves pandered to the idea that they lived in rural and social isolation, this was simply not the case. (BARKER, 2007, p. 15)

Throughout the nineteenth century, "Haworth was principally a working-class manufacturing town" (BARKER, 2007, p. 16) rapidly increasing in size and populations. This new configuration demanded different social activities, providing a turnover in the cultural life of the town that was then turning into breeding ground for creativity and intellectual activity.

Hewish (1969) attributes this intellectual precociousness to their unconventional upbringing. In being raised by a widowed father and an old aunt, the Brontë siblings only had themselves to look for entertainment. On this account, Barker adds that their father Patrick "made no effort to censor his children's reading and encouraged their impassioned discussion and debate on the political and religious issues of the day" (BARKER, 2007, p. 30). With time, many of their political opinions came from the newspapers, which "played a hugely important role in the Brontë household, and were regarded as a necessary expense" (BARKER, 2007, p. 24). Moreover, many of their literary influences also came from their father's library, that was modest but very rich. Being an author himself, Reverend Patrick wrote many books that included moral messages. As for the Brontë's relationship with religion,

The atmosphere of the sisters' upbringing and their social background were thus profoundly influenced by the last great religious movement in England, and by that earlier manifestation of Puritanism, Methodism (which influenced Mr. Brontë's own early life: it was the religion of his relatives by marriage, and was strong in Yorkshire). This spiritual revival was related to romanticism. (HEWISH, 1969, p. 23)

This conflict between their religious background and the changes that were happening in Haworth appears in *Wuthering Heights*, as stated by Linda M. Shires (2001), as a combination of both romantic and realist influences.

In her chapter, the author provides an analysis in which she is "concerned to trace permutations and innovations in the Victorian novel and to show how it both registers historic pressures and alters aesthetically under them" (SHIRES, 2001, p. 61). For that, she selects

two novels that mark the timeframe of the Victorian novel, one representing the beginning of this period – *Wuthering Heights* – and one representing the end – *Lord Jim*, by Joseph Conrad. Taking as starting point the Victorian novel's main subject, the interaction of the self and society, the author analyzes how this relation is influenced by pressures of ideology that have come to change the genre (Cf. SHIRES, 2001).

While focusing on one of many central characters, the plot of the realist novel is normally centered in their construction until some conventional closure. Be it marriage or death, this genre focus is on the balance of a representation of reality, without idealization. Consequently, Shires affirms this form of narrative,

[...] not only places the reader in a position of privileged knowing and moral judgment, thus shaping his/her subjectivity into middle-class Victorian norms, but often does so with the aim of creating conformity. The realist novel largely accepts middle-class ethics and mores. The emotionally complex hero or heroine is molded to the bourgeois ideal of the rational man or woman of virtue. Relying on a structure of psychological development, the classic realist novel allows lapses from a bourgeois code, but treats them as errors of judgment owing to immaturity. (SHIRES, 2001, p. 65)

In conforming to Victorian norms, the novel should be able to educate its reader. Of this conformity to morality and construction of character Emily Brontë's novel is not an example. As Shires later adds, the novel has an "understanding of the dangers of asocial energies" (SHIRES, 2001, p. 66) like any other realist novel. However, its focus on a transcendent, violent, and transgressive individualism also characterizes it as a romantic novel. Consequently, this two genres caused the novel to be "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):

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)

This difference in the two generations' relationships characterizes a tension between individualism and socializing. This structural division in *Wuthering Heights* seems to have become a common method in subsequent Victorian novels.

## 2. THE FIRST REVIEWS OF THE 1847 EDITION

In order to analyze the reviews written about the first edition of *Wuthering Heights*, the following sections present the most recurrent themes brought by the critics, in the order they appear in the reviews. The analysis will also be carried out with the support of external commentaries that will help not only contextualize, but also emphasize the origin of such opinions. To do so, I selected five reviews written between December 1847 and January 1848 which provide information on how the novel was seen just after its publication. Since only one author has been identified, I will refer to them by the name of the periodical they were published in: *Athenaeum* (December 1847), *Atlas* (January 1848), *Douglas Jerrold's Weekly Newspaper* (January 1848), *Examiner* (January 1848), and *Britannia* (January 1848). Moreover, when referring to the author, I assume they were all men.

### 2.1 “So Nearly Related to *Jane Eyre* in Cast of Thought”: In the Shadow of Charlotte Brontë

During most of 1846, the Brontë sisters were preparing to send publishers a three-volume set containing the manuscripts of *Wuthering Heights*, *Agnes Grey* and *The Master*<sup>7</sup>, written by Emily, Anne, and Charlotte Brontë, respectively. After a few failed attempts, the volumes of Emily and Anne were accepted by publisher Thomas Newby, while Charlotte's volume was rejected, possibly without the option of future modifications.

This rejection prompted Emily Brontë to expand the plot of *Wuthering Heights* as means of filling the space left by the rejected volume, and induced Charlotte Brontë to possibly leave *The Master* aside and work on a new manuscript. By June of 1847 she had already finished writing this new volume and sent it to Smith, Elder publishers. By the end of October 1847, two months prior to *Wuthering Heights*' and *Agnes Grey*'s publication, *Jane Eyre* was already available for the public. The publication of these three novels within a three-month timespan alongside the sisters' preference for pseudonyms<sup>8</sup> caused many confusions at the time. In his biography of Emily Brontë, author John Hewish affirms this was due to

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<sup>7</sup> This manuscript would later become *The Professor*, published posthumously in 1857.

<sup>8</sup> Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Brontë adopted the pen names of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell, respectively.

Newby's unclear approach to their advertisement, probably taking advantage of the success of *Jane Eyre* to profit on that of the other two novels. He adds that,

There is some evidence that, apart from intentional confusion, Newby was not clear about the identities of his authors. He advertised *Wuthering Heights* as 'Acton Bell's successful new novel' in January 1848. His advertising is revealing in other respects. In *Douglas Jerrold's Magazine* (5 February 1848) he took space for *Wuthering Heights*, 'By The Successful New Novelist', an evident attempt to connect it with the fame of *Jane Eyre*. In the *Examiner* (19 February) it was 'Mr Bell's successful new novel'. (HEWISH, 1969, p. 100)

Thomas Newby's deliberative and insinuating confusion regarding the authorship of the novel written by the Brontë sisters often misled the readers, among them the literary critics. These, in having no proof that the authors were three different people, often assumed the novel to be written by the first one to publish, Currer Bell. This confusion is emphasized by the author of the January 1848 review from the *Atlas*, in which he starts by bringing up questions related to authorship in *Wuthering Heights*, *Agnes Grey* and *Jane Eyre*:

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, pp. 282)

Although this assertion on the authorship of the novels is constantly brought up by the critics as something of minor importance, most of them use this as a comparative point between *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*. This point can be further analyzed in the subsequent comment made by the same author in *Atlas*, in which he continues by saying that:

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, pp. 282)

Even though criticism initially rejected *Jane Eyre* when it was first published, the novel ended up being a success with the public for many decades. As stated in the excerpt above, this success definitely propelled the selling of the first editions of the novels published

in late 1847; however, with the Bell name printed on the cover, the expectations for *Wuthering Heights* were very high. Consequently, this only entailed many comparisons between *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*. In the *Atlas*' review, after his statement that authorship did not influence the reception of the novel, the author takes a comparative approach, as in:

*Wuthering Heights* is a strange, inartistic story. There are evidences in every chapter of a sort of rugged power — an unconscious strength — which the possessor seems never to think of turning to the best advantage. The general effect is inexpressibly painful. 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, pp. 282-283)

Such approach is also shared by the authors of the December 1847 review from the *Athenaeum* and the January 1848 review from the *Douglas Jerrold's Weekly Newspaper*, though very briefly. In the first, the author states that:

*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. (ATHENAEUM, 2002, p. 281)

Although the author clearly disliked the experience of reading *Wuthering Heights*, he affirms it has some structural and narrative similarities with *Jane Eyre*. However, neither this, nor the realist aspects in the depiction of rural England, and Emily Brontë's writing power seem to be reason enough to buy him.

In *Douglas Jerrold's Weekly Newspaper*, the point of view of the author is similar to the one previously pictured, observing a similarity in spirit, which he calls 'unconventional' to the Victorian period. The addition here is the note on the Greek tradition in all the three novels' writing style, clearly inherited from their – Emily in special – reading habits growing up. He finishes by emphasizing their lack of elegance in writing.

Dissimilar as they are in many respects, there is a distinct family likeness between these two tales; and, if our organ of comparison be not out of order, we are not far wrong in asserting that they are not so much like each other, as they are both like a novelty recently published under the editorship of Mr. Currer Bell, viz., *Jane Eyre*. We do not mean to say that either of the tales now before us is equal in merit to that novel, but they have somewhat of the same fresh, original, and unconventional spirit; while the style of composition is, undoubtedly, of the same north-country,

Doric school; it is simple, energetic, and apparently disdainful of prettinesses and verbal display. (DOUGLAS, 2003, pp. 284)

It is clear by now that this comparison between *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* was very common in the latter's first reviews. However, the basis of these comparisons cannot be traced back due to the lack of explanation from these reviewers, whose comments are just as portrayed above, without much foundation. Yet, by analyzing the two novels and how the plots are developed, one can infer the reason why this was recurrent. Kate Flint (2007) states in her chapter about women's issues when writing fiction that:

*Wuthering Heights* is, ultimately, a novel about desire, not fulfilment. Its structure suggests Emily Brontë's own impetus to transcend the socialised boundaries of the woman's novel at this period, with its habitual, if not inevitable stress on engagement or marriage being the most desirable of conclusions. (FLINT, 2007, p. 176)

Admitting *Wuthering Heights* as partly abiding to the Romantic genre, it subverts its conventions. Even though the ending of the novel consists of Catherine II and Hareton promised to each other, representing a somewhat happy ending, this event does not represent the point in which the narrative is emphasized. In fact, the narrative subverts by proving that Catherine and Heathcliff's relationship can only be fulfilled "in some kind of spiritual unity with another person, and, in its turn, is predicated on a belief that one possesses a 'real', unsocialised self which can find Another who will complete and complement it" (FLINT, 2007, p. 177). Following the same path,

The successful romance of the novel is deliberately low-key. Hareton and the younger Catherine's relationship is a triumph of civilised norms, of domesticity. Even so, it quietly challenges conventional power relations. It is Cathy who teaches Hareton to read, thus giving him the key to unlock literature: the very thing which, the novel demonstrates by its own existence, has the potential to unsettle norms, to pose questions rather than provide answers. (FLINT, 2007, p. 177)

To Flint, Emily Brontë's novel seems to be less assertive than Charlotte's in regard to its resolution, affirming that "in many ways, her [Charlotte's] first published novel, *Jane Eyre* (1847), employs a fairly orthodox romantic structure of attraction, impediment, and final marital resolution" (FLINT, 2007, p. 180), obeying the conventions of the genre. Therefore, it might have seemed more appropriate for the critics.

## 2.2 “Painful and Exceptional Subjects”: On Heathcliff and The Representation of Reality

The impact of the subjects presented in *Wuthering Heights* caused all types of responses, and the creation of a character like Heathcliff was a common focus in criticism. Most critics attacked his lack of morality and his cruelty towards others, often stating his personality was far from reality. Even though they did not specifically link this creation to the author’s gender, often praising Emily Brontë’s writing style, most of them qualified the novel as inartistic and tasteless due to the roughness presented in the characters. These accusations led to Charlotte Brontë’s famous statement in her ‘Biographical Notice’, in which she affirms: “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.” (BRONTË, C., 2002, p. 316). This creative gift ascribed to Emily Brontë is recognized by the *Athenaeum*. However, it is not enough to make the story pleasant:

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. 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. (ATHENAEUM, 2002, p. 281)

Here the reviewer affirms the themes brought by the author only depict cruelty, not softening as the story continues. Even though he emphasizes the power of the book, he still believes such themes to be unpleasant to read. This remark on the violence presents a pattern in the reviews, most of the time being brought up by its incompatibility with reality.

The reviewer in *Britannia* points out that, in trying to represent the beauty of love “his [Ellis Bell’s] narrative leaves an unpleasant effect on the mind. There are no green spots in it on which the mind can linger with satisfaction. The story rushes onwards with impetuous force, but it is the force of a dark and sullen torrent, flowing between high and rugged rocks. (BRITANNIA, 2003, p. 289). Unlike paintings, he affirms novels should be able to represent a range of emotions, stating that,

It is permitted to painting to seize one single aspect of nature, and, the pleasure arising from its contemplation proceeds partly from love of imitation, objects

unattractive in themselves may be made interesting on canvas. But in fiction this kind of isolation is not allowed. The exhibition of one quality or passion is not sufficient for it. So far as the design extends it must present a true image of life, and if it takes in many characters it must show them animated by many motives. (BRITANNIA, 2003, p. 289)

Whether this remark on the need for many characters conveying different emotions is a rule or not, the reviewer from the *Atlas* seems to be of the same opinion. Even though he praises the vraisemblance of the novel, stating that “there is so much truth in what we may call the costumery (not applying the word in its narrow acceptation)—the general mounting of the entire piece—that we readily identify the scenes and personages of the fiction” (ATLAS, 2002, p. 283), he enumerates the male characters and concludes that “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). According to him, they “form a group of deformities such as we have rarely seen gathered together on the same canvas” (ATLAS, 2002, p. 283).

Even though most of these five reviews mention the ensemble, all of them have Heathcliff in the center of the discussion. In the *Examiner*, for instance, the reviewer seems to notice the Romantic influences in the novel, but fails to understand how a character like him could possibly be in love with Catherine:

[...] we entertain great doubts as to the truth, or rather the vraisemblance of the main character. The hardness, selfishness and cruelty of Heathcliff are in our opinion inconsistent with the romantic love that he is stated to have felt for Catherine Earnshaw. As Nelly Dean says, “he is as hard as a whinstone.” He has no gratitude, no affection, no liking for anything human except for one person, and that liking is thoroughly selfish and ferocious. (EXAMINER, 2002, p. 286)

This model of relationship, according to the reviewer from *Douglas Jerrold’s Weekly Newspaper*, comes as a surprise to the reader, who was possibly “shocked, disgusted, almost sickened by details of cruelty, inhumanity, and the most diabolical hate and vengeance, and anon come passages of powerful testimony to the supreme power of love — even over demons in the human form” (DOUGLAS, 2003, p. 285). In fact, Heathcliff’s ‘cruelty’ appears in these reviews often related to the demonization of his character. In being considered the hero of the book, the story follows only to reinforce his vengeful personality:

He is an incarnation of evil qualities; implacable hate, ingratitude, cruelty, falsehood, selfishness, and revenge. He exhibits, moreover, a certain stoical



endurance in early life, which enables him to 'bide his time', and nurse up his wrath till it becomes mature and terrible. (EXAMINER, 2003, p. 286)

This development of his character, however, is not by chance. When addressing the writer's search for an 'air of reality' when writing a novel, Deirdre David (2001, p. 3) says that 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". Rather 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, 2003, p. 3). This seems to be the case here.

In being a hybrid novel that has its origins in Romanticism, *Wuthering Heights* also has elements from the gothic fiction, which is "concerned 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). This feeling of fear in Heathcliff's case is clearly an important point for the critics, who often portray him as a demonic character.

The uncultured freedom of native character presents more rugged aspects than we meet with in educated society. Its manners are not only more rough but its passions are more violent. It knows nothing of those breakwaters to the fury of tempest which civilized training establishes to subdue the harsher workings of the soul. Its wrath is unrestrained by reflection; the lips curse and the hand strikes with the first impulse of anger. It is more subject to brutal instinct than to divine reason. (BRITANNIA, 2003, p. 288)

Here, this demonization appears attached to the fact that he listens to his instincts rather than to social norms, being his 'native character' deeply related to a type of savagery, which the reviewer in *Britannia* complements, saying it is "humanity in this wild state that the author of *Wuthering Heights* essays to depict" (BRITANNIA, 2002, p. 288). Therefore, in spite of this comparison with a gothic monster, it is possible to see that critics realize the inspiration for his character also lies in real life, stating he "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" (ATHENAEUM, 2003, p. 281). But Emily Brontë's effort to make Heathcliff more human in his life-long devotion to Catherine did not leave a good impression in the critics:

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, pp. 283-284)

This impression is also presented in the *Examiner*, whose author states that critics “are not disposed to ascribe any particular intention to the author in drawing the character of Heathcliff, nor can we perceive any very obvious moral in the story. There are certain good rough dashes at character” (EXAMINER, 2003, pp. 286). Moreover, both believe the author’s purpose in creating such a character lacks a moral resolution in the end. This is also present in *Douglas Jerrold’s Weekly Newspaper*, but there the author questions Brontë’s real intentions, affirming that she fails to direct her ability to a better purpose:

What may be the moral which the author wishes the reader to deduce from his work, it is difficult to say; and we refrain from assigning any, because to speak honestly, we have discovered none but mere glimpses of hidden morals or secondary meanings. There seems to us great power in this book but a purposeless power, which we feel a great desire to see turned to better account. (DOUGLAS, 2003, pp. 285)

The fact that reviewers address the moral of the novel proves to be important because the novel, as previously mentioned, was supposed to follow a certain structure. This is noticeable in the *Examiner*, when the reviewer spends a long paragraph lecturing on a possible second work by Ellis Bell and how he believes ‘he’ should develop it. Unlike what she did in *Wuthering Heights*, the author hopes he will give,

[...] himself [herself] more time in its composition than in the present case, developing his incidents more carefully, eschewing exaggeration and obscurity, and looking steadily at human life, under all its moods, for those pictures of the passions that he may desire to sketch for our public benefit. It may be well also to be sparing of certain oaths and phrases, which do not materially contribute to any character, and are by no means to be reckoned among the evidences of a writer’s genius. (EXAMINER, 2003, pp. 287)

Here, it is clear that Emily Brontë’s choice of subject and structure left the reviewer with the impression of a shabby work. Added to that, he can hardly find an artistic trait to praise, affirming that,

We detest the affectation and effeminate frippery which is but too frequent in the modern novel, and willingly trust ourselves with an author who goes at once fearlessly into the moors and desolate places, for his heroes; but we must at the

same time stipulate with him that he shall not drag into light all that he discovers, of coarse and loathsome, in his wanderings, but simply so much good and ill as he may find necessary to elucidate his history—so much only as may be interwoven inextricably with the persons whom he professes to paint. It is the province of an artist to modify and in some cases refine what he beholds in the ordinary world. (EXAMINER, 2003, pp. 287)

Though both excerpts provide the same train of thought, they also present a contradiction. While suggesting the author should turn to human life instead of portraying such exaggerated emotions – if it is possible to assume humans have control over their emotions –, he advises the author to modify, manipulate his writing subject.

This discussion on the subject of a novel is also present in *Britannia*, in which the reviewer provides an explanation on the purpose of fiction during this specific period in literary criticism. Having previously mentioned the way paintings are able to imitate a certain aspect of nature, he states that in fiction this “imitation is insufficient of itself to afford pleasure” (BRITANNIA, 2003, p. 289) mainly because in dealing “with brutal subjects it becomes positively disgusting” (BRITANNIA, 2003, p. 289). He continues his train of thought by stating that,

The aim of fiction is to afford some sensation of delight. We admit we cannot rejoice in the triumph of goodness—that triumph which consists in the superiority of spirit to body—without knowing its trials and sufferings. But the end of fictitious writings should always be kept in view; and that end is not merely mental excitement, for a very bad book may be very exciting. Generally we are satisfied there is some radical defect in those fictions which leave behind them an impression of pain and horror. (BRITANNIA, 2003, p. 289-290)

This preoccupation with the ending of a novel could explain their need for redemption in Heathcliff and Catherine’s relationship. After understanding how the Victorian novel works, it is fair to assume readers – mostly critics – expected a change in character in both parts. However, their redemption never happens as they become worse as the story unfolds. Moreover, the fact that critics expected the couple to come together explains why they often feel more positive towards Cathy and Hareton’s relationship, which is kept in the background but ends up providing the reader a softer ending:

Mr. Ellis Bells romance is illuminated by some gleams of sunshine towards the end which serve to cast a grateful light on the dreary path we have travelled. Flowers rise over the grave of buried horrors. The violent passions of two generations are closed in death, yet in the vision of peace with which the tale closes we almost fear their revival in the warped nature of the young survivors. (BRITANNIA, 2003, p. 289)

This lack of closure in the novel seems to be what made reviewers characterize it as a “confused; disjointed, and improbable” (EXAMINER, 2002, p. 285) tale, and could be explained by its Romantic and Realist influences. However, this did not prevent the reviewers from recognizing Emily Brontë’s originality. In dealing with inartistic subjects “so wildly grotesque, so entirely without art, that they strike us as proceeding from a mind of limited experience, but of original energy, and of a singular and distinctive cast” (BRITANNIA, 2003, p. 288-289), she managed to create a different novel that contrasts the models in English fiction.

## CONCLUSION

When *Wuthering Heights* first came into the world, it was considered a different book. Maybe not so different for a 21st century reader, but different enough for the Victorian critics whose reviews I just assessed. As pointed before, my objective with the analysis of these reviews was to understand how a book that is now considered part of the canon could have been so disapproved at the time. To justify this reception, I briefly presented the changes that were taking place in nineteenth-century England, the literary context in which the novel was published and how all of these events influenced criticism. After that, I presented the most recurrent themes in the reviews as means of understanding the parameters under which *Wuthering Heights* was being assessed.

With the historical events analyzed in the first part of this monograph, I intended to account for the considerable changes in the way authors started to write literature, how readers started to consume it, and how all of these factors influenced the reception of *Wuthering Heights* in the mid-nineteenth century. As pointed before, the Industrial Revolution started a series of social changes that eventually took root in the literary market. The expansion of the periodical press was one of the main effects, alongside the emergence of a mass reading public, meaning that at the time literature was no longer only confined to educated scholars. Quite the opposite, literary works had already started being accessed by different people from different social conditions and with varying literacy levels. Eventually, this new situation culminated in a constant questioning of the purpose of a novel. Since readership had started to change, there was an urge for novels that would be more accessible and representative of the domestic reality of the new readers. This marked the shift from Romantic to Victorian literature.

At the time, the novel was not considered a serious genre; reading novels was normally conceived as either an activity women who stayed at home would take as a hobby or that people would do while commuting. This understanding of reading as a leisure activity was shared with most Victorian critics, who often turned a blind eye when asked to review works in this genre. Even though Victorian novels were very diverse in its themes, the analysis on Victorian literary criticism shows that critics had a particular approach to these literary texts. Their conception about what could be considered 'good' literature corresponded to what we previously defined as an idea of representation of 'reality'. This representation of reality, however, was deeply attached to the belief that an author should write from his own

experience, more so if the author in question was female. In Emily Brontë's case, her choice of pseudonym allowed her to keep her anonymity until the second edition of *Wuthering Heights*, a fact that most likely influenced the first reviewers' objections often being based on her choice of subjects and style rather than her personal life. However, even though this anonymity helped her escape from such judgements, it also fueled the speculations on the life of the Brontës, heavily influencing later criticism on their novels.

Another important point concerning the Victorian periodical press is that even though its critics were entitled to judge works of literature, the profession was still very new and lacking in specialized areas in the beginning of the practice. However, by the time *Wuthering Heights* was published in 1847, the periodical press was already established as a serious medium among readers, and criticism – in this case, literary criticism – had already become a respected genre. This directly affected the tone and choice of subjects in reviews that were being published during this time because editors were constantly filtering their content to make it suitable for a family audience. This is confirmed by the five reviews presented in the second part of the monograph. In knowing the readership of these periodicals, it is clear why the critics had a deep concern in advising the public against reading *Wuthering Heights*.

The analysis of these reviews provides useful information on how critical assessment worked during the 19th century. In order to prove my point, I analyzed two main themes the critics approached in their reviews. The first one proves that being in the shadow of *Jane Eyre* was detrimental to the success of *Wuthering Heights* with the critics mainly because most of them used the writers' proximity and the mystery surrounding their pseudonyms as means of comparison between the two novels. In prioritizing desire over fulfilment, critics often judged Emily Brontë's work as a tasteless novel, preferring the other, whose story, according to them, touched the readers more deeply. This neglect in accepting the two novels as two independent works prove that their opinions on *Wuthering Heights* were undeniably biased by the success of *Jane Eyre*.

The second theme analyzed – and the most criticized in the reviews – brings up the lack of reality in the ensemble, focusing on the creation of Heathcliff. The fact that all characters were too hateful was not appreciated by the critics, but what apparently made them more unsatisfied was the fact that none of them had a moral resolution in the end. In Heathcliff's case, it is possible to affirm that in trying to create a male character who suffered from an unfulfilled love but rarely showed signs of compassion, Emily Brontë managed to shock the critics with a vengeful antihero deprived of good actions. In respect of the rest of the characters, most of the critics do not mention any – with the exception of Catherine,

Linton and Hindley in a few words that do not make an argument –, which may indicate that critics either thought Heathcliff upstaged the other characters, or believed the others were not as equally morally flawed.

If we take into account other aspects of the novel, many of them were ignored by the critics. This disregard of characteristics other than morality and characterization indicate that literary criticism during this period followed a certain pattern. The structure of the novel, for instance, is never mentioned by them; the fact that the narrative presents itself in a non-chronological order, most of the time confusing the reader due to its preference for flashbacks shown through other characters' point of view does not seem to bother them. Besides, the narrative functions employed by Lockwood and Nelly Dean were also not considered, nor was their reliability as narrators. This disregard from the critical assessment on such important aspects provides further insight into the novel's critical fortune in the following decades.

As stated before, due to its elements from both past and present traditions from the nineteenth-century English literature, *Wuthering Heights* was a novel that did not please the critics because of its unconventionality. Even though critics ignored all of the just mentioned narrative techniques employed by the author, it is possible to infer that these also influenced their opinion of it being a shattered novel that presents a different structure and gaps to be filled by the readers, a narrative device that was already put into practice in gothic novels, but was not that common in Victorian realistic literature. Moreover, this fragmentation is also reflected in her choice of characters. In that sense, *Wuthering Heights* can be defined as a hybrid novel that fits into the categories of both Romantic and Victorian literature. Therefore, in conveying her story, Emily Brontë breaks away from conventions while still conforming to them.

This pattern in the practice of literary criticism during the Victorian period started to change by the turn of the century, when other different novels started to challenge critics the same way *Wuthering Heights* did. This change in writing style led to different possibilities inside the scope of literary criticism, in which morality was no longer the center of the discussion. As previously stated, even though critics did not recommend her book, they did not fail to recognize Emily Brontë's originality. What reflects this is the fact that it was not until the turn of the century that *Wuthering Heights* started to have more visibility and to be critically acclaimed. This late popularity happened due to many factors, one of them being the understanding of fiction as a form of art rather than a representation of reality. With this, critics started revisiting the novel, with an amount of different reading possibilities emerging in order to give it new meanings, with different critical and theoretic approaches to the literary

text. Eventually, the critical fortune of *Wuthering Heights* improved as the novel started being accessed from other points of view, rather than that of the moralizing function of a work of art, that was so much cherished by Victorian reviewers.



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