



Universidad de Valladolid

FACULTAD de FILOSOFÍA Y LETRAS
DEPARTAMENTO de FILOLOGÍA INGLESA
Grado en Estudios Ingleses

TRABAJO DE FIN DE GRADO

Autofiction and Autobiography in *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte
Brontë

Lourdes Villalón Criado

Tutor: José Manuel Barrio Marco
2017-2018

Abstract

Jane Eyre is considered a classic of 19th century English literature. This novel extolled Charlotte Brontë as one of the best writers of the Victorian period. Although *Jane Eyre* was presented as an autobiography, it is not a proper autobiography. However, this term has been essential to establish theories about the biographical content of Brontë on her novel. More recent genres such as autofiction have helped to identify the process by which real aspects are represented by fictional facts. This essay collects the most relevant anecdotes of the life of Brontë, as well as the controversial reactions to her novel, such as the vindication by William Shephard. The aim of this essay is to establish the connection between real events of the life of Brontë and the fictional elements in her novel. The analysis focuses on the first ten chapters of her work, which correspond to the childhood of the protagonist, and where there are many similarities with the life of Brontë.

Keywords: Jane Eyre, Brontë, autofiction, biography, autobiography, reality.

Jane Eyre es considerada un clásico de la literatura inglesa del siglo XIX. Esta novela encumbró a Charlotte Brontë como una de las mejores escritoras de la época victoriana. Aunque *Jane Eyre* se presenta como una autobiografía, no es una autobiografía propiamente dicha. Sin embargo, este término ha sido esencial a la hora de establecer teorías acerca del contenido biográfico de Brontë en su novela. Géneros más recientes como la autoficción han ayudado a identificar el proceso mediante el cual aspectos reales se pueden representar con hechos ficticiales. Esta composición recoge las anécdotas más relevantes de la vida de Brontë, así como las reacciones polémicas a su novela, como la defensa de William Shephard. El objetivo de este ensayo es establecer la conexión entre los hechos reales de la vida de Brontë y los elementos ficticios de su novela. El análisis se centra en los diez primeros capítulos de su obra, los cuales corresponden a la infancia de la protagonista, y donde se encuentran el mayor número de similitudes con la vida de la autora.

Palabras clave: Jane Eyre, Brontë, autoficción, ficción, biografía, realidad.

Contents

1. Introduction	p.2
2. Contextualization of the author	p.3
3. State of the issue	p.5
4. Theoretical framework	p.7
5. Analysis of the connections between real and fictional aspects in <i>Jane Eyre</i> according:	p.13
5.1. Paternal figure of Brontë and religion	p.15
5.2. Personality of Brontë and lack of affection	p.18
5.3. Healthy conditions of the institution and public repercussion	p.21
6. Conclusion	p.25
7. Works cited	p.29

1. Introduction

Charlotte Brontë is the author of one of the best-rated novels of the nineteenth century. *Jane Eyre, An Autobiography* was published in 1847, in which Charlotte Brontë; under the pseudonym of Currer Bell, applied the tradition and puritan education to define her literary style. She created a novel ahead of her time in certain aspects. From the moment of its publication, it has been surrounded by controversy and criticism, since its contemporaries considered it inadequate for the Victorian era and society. After the studying of the author and her literary works, I became interested in the rumours caused by reviews. Although, the trigger that led me to investigate this issue was the vindication of Carus Wilson; director of the Cowan Bridge School, published by Henry Shephard in 1857. Two of the Brontë sisters studied in this institution and subsequent to their stay, they died. Brontë¹ believed that the adverse conditions and the management of the institution caused this. This accusation was formally carried out by Elizabeth Gaskell, in her work *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857). Later authors, such as Purificación Fernández Nistal, have defined *Jane Eyre* with the term “bildungsroman”². This term refers to the novels of learning, evolution and personal growth. Certainly, *Jane Eyre* is an archetypal journey about the personal development of the protagonist. However, beyond this definition, the biography of Brontë allows to relate fictional aspects of the novel to real aspects of her life. This controversial point between autobiography and fiction novel encourages describing *Jane Eyre* as a pseudo-autobiographical novel.

Keeping in mind the above, *Jane Eyre* can be considered an autobiographical novel of fiction, in other words, it is a fictional autobiography. This genre implies the difficulty of maintaining the veracity and authorship typical of autobiographies. In an autobiography a pact is established between author and reader, establishing that everything related is true. Notwithstanding, the case of *Jane Eyre*; which apparently it is entirely fictitious, it is difficult to validate this pact. Therefore, it is necessary to assess other aspects besides the autobiographical. One of them is autofiction. An author creates autofiction when their real experiences convert into fictitious ones, using metafiction or

¹ Henceforth, I will refer to Charlotte Brontë, simply as Brontë.

² Bildungsroman: German term refers to learning novels. It was coined by Friedrich von Blackenburg in his work *Versuch über den Roman*, (1774). This information is provided by Escudero Prieto, Victor. *Reflexiones sobre el sujeto en el primer Bildungsroman*. Universitat de Barcelona, 2008. p.9.

the fiction of “I”. This technique consists of interspersing reality and fiction. Essentially, I follow this line for the purpose of my essay, which is to identify these real aspects of the life of Brontë present in her novel. In addition to this, some external elements to the novel, such as her family, environment and society, have allowed to establish these connections. In the following pages I will analyse these elements, in order to identify and clarify the true facts that Brontë masterfully camouflaged in *Jane Eyre*.

2. Contextualization of the author

In this section, I intend to sketch several aspects of the life of Brontë, such as the place where she grew up and lived, her religion, and her family. The purpose is to know her origins and to establish the influential aspects of her life, in the formation of her character and her mentality, as well as in her literary creativity. In other words, to contextualize the Brontë of the nineteenth century.

Charlotte Brontë was born in 1816 and died in 1855³. She was the author of several publications that would give her fame, that has lasted through to our time. Brontë was the third of six siblings and was orphaned at just five years of age after the death of her mother. She grew up in Haworth, a town in Yorkshire where there was a long evangelical tradition. Her father, the Anglican Reverend Patrick Brontë, was the clergyman in charge of the Protestant parish of Haworth. At this time, Fernández Nistal clarifies that both methodists and evangelists shared Protestant religious tendencies (62). These Protestant tendencies preached rigid beliefs about eternal damnation, good and evil, salvation through suffering, and the Last Judgment. Brontë was influenced by these ideas inculcated by her father. Because of this, she perfectly reflected these fears in *Jane Eyre*.

Leaving aside the religious sphere, it is necessary to know the place that welcomed the Brontë family. Juliet Barker argues in *The Cambridge Companion to The Brontës* (2004), that the description offered by Gaskell about Haworth is far from the reality of the time. Haworth was a thriving commercial city, which, at the hands of Gaskell, became

³ For the elaboration of this section on Charlotte Brontë I have used Glen, Heather et al. *The Cambridge Companion to the Brontës*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. p.13-165. and Fernández Nistal, Purificación. *Charlotte Brontë y la tradición puritana...* Valladolid: Universidad de Valladolid, 1986. p.23-119. (Other authors mentioned belong to *The Cambridge Companion*)

a strange town of wastelands, and isolated from the world by hills (14). Nevertheless, Haworth was a living place. It is surrounded by hills divided into valleys and forests that provided pastures for livestock. Its industry made Haworth a reference for the wool trade and the manufacture of fabrics and contributed to the leisure and enrichment of social life. Although Haworth was a prosperous town, the consequences of the industrial revolution made a dent in the region. The wood industry was affected producing unemployment and poverty. That provoked side effects such as poor sanitary conditions.

In a view of the occupation of Patrick Brontë, he and his family enjoyed a good social position. But, his position kept him busy, so he did not pay the necessary attention to his children, even after his wife, Maria Branwell, died. The Brontë siblings substituted that lack of attention with the company of each other. Even though he was a busy man, Patrick was seriously concerned about the education of the children. His intention was to influence the artistic side of his children through reading. He did not censor what his children read, although, the Bible occupied a privileged place in the education of the little Brontës. His private library contained books of history, classic literature, ornithology, and romantic literature, highlighting the works of William Makepeace Thackeray. The latter was a mighty literary referent to Brontë. She admired Thackeray to the point of dedicating to him the second edition of *Jane Eyre*. The books were her refuge and her source of imagination. However, the most influential figure for her literary spirit was her father, in terms of aspirations and discipline.

Despite his efforts to cultivate the minds of his six children, he worried about the future because of his salary was not enough to give the desired education to his five daughters. Luckily, in 1823 a group of evangelists arrived at Haworth to establish a school under the direction of the Reverend William Carus Wilson. The centre of charity would be called “The Clergy Daughters’ School”. Maria and Elizabeth, the older sisters, were the first to enter the institution in the summer of 1824. The next ones to attend the centre were Charlotte; who was disgusted to be away from home, and Emily. Unfortunately, the sisters’ stay at the school was short. Maria and Elizabeth died in early 1825 because of tuberculosis, which precipitated the return home of Charlotte and Emily.

After this episode, Brontë continued her education at home under the supervision of her father and her aunt. Fernández Nistal affirms that during these years the creative activity was impressive, and the imagination of Brontë and her sisters quickly surfaced (70). However, Brontë renounced her literary activity and her comforting life in Haworth.

In 1831, Brontë attended the school of Miss Wooller in Roe Head where she met one of her best friends, Ellen Nussey. Nussey was the responsible for providing the letters and the private details about the life of Brontë. This material was the main source for Gaskell. Nussey was a witness to the agony that caused Brontë to relate and live with strangers. Despite this, Roe Head was a liberating experience, in a way, for Brontë. She had grown up in a strict and conservative environment and had been educated under the ideals of humility and simplicity, and rejection of beauty. The reason why Nussey and Brontë fraternized, was that both had the same criteria and religious belief. The numerous letters that they sent to each other are proof of this.

In 1846, Patrick was operated for cataracts in Manchester, and Brontë took care of her father, meanwhile she began to write *Jane Eyre*. After that period, she needed the approval of her father to marry Arthur Bell Nicholls in 1852, and three years later she died. The official cause of her death was tuberculosis, but typhus and complications in pregnancy were other causes that ended her life in 1855. The life of Brontë could be considered tragic, but her background shaped her as a person and as a writer. The set of these elements and her life experiences as a source of inspiration, have been responsible for the success of her novels and her fame.

3. State of the issue

The novels of the Brontë sisters have been a turning point in the Victorian English literature for almost one hundred and fifty years, as Heather Glen explains in *The Cambridge Companion to The Brontës*, (2004) “they have been the most popular of English canonical literature” (10). However, their legacy has not ceased to arouse interest. Numerous studies on the Brontë family and their works have been published. This essay focuses on the novel *Jane Eyre, an Autobiography* by Charlotte Brontë specifically on the chapters related to the childhood of the protagonist. Therefore, I have highlighted some relevant studies about the life and work of Brontë, which follow different areas of investigation. These can be grouped according to their perspectives: feminism, gothic and romanticism, moral, literary and biographical.

The studies on feminism in the novels of Bronte, probably, are the most numerous. The role of women in the Victorian period is one of the topics most debated by authors

interested in Brontë. A large number of works that belong to this category develop the role of women as heroines, obedient or oppressed figures by society. For instance, the dissertation “*Pseudonymity, authorship, selfhood: the names and life of Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot*” by Sonja Nikkila, of the University of Edinburgh, (2006) collects these issues, and she focuses on how women could be writers in the historical-cultural context of the Victorian era.

Gothicism and romanticism have also been recurrent themes in the Victorian novels such as *Jane Eyre*. Most of the authors have researched and analysed its gothic elements and characteristics. An example of these studies is the article by Carmen Grimaldi Herrera “Elementos góticos en *Jane Eyre*” (2009) for the scholarly journal *Contribuciones a las Ciencias Sociales* of the University of Malaga. It is an essay that details the gothic elements and values in *Jane Eyre*. In this article, she analyses the gothic traits of the characters, as well as the places that appear in the novel.

In the same way as feminism, the moral approach has been another topic of interest. In a way, both studies are related because in many cases they are the opposite perspective. One of the most recent and interesting studies is the thesis of Kj Swanson of the University of St Andrews, (2017) “*A Liberative Imagination of Charlotte Brontë in light of feminist theology*”, in which he discusses the Christian doctrines on morality, sin and grace that reflect the women of the Victorian period, and how writing gave raise to feminist theologies. He takes Brontë as an example, for her “liberating imagination”.

Literary approaches are as numerous as the previous ones. Most of them focus on analysing the form, style, the literary techniques and the intellectual development in the works of Brontë. One of the most complete and insightful works is *Misreading Jane Eyre: A Postformalist Paradigm*, (1996) by Jerome Beaty. He proposes a critical analysis, exposing his views and scrutinizing the novel of Brontë page to page. His purpose is to understand the novel through all possible theories.

Last but not least, the biographical interpretation. It begins with the work of Elizabeth Gaskell. In 1857, Gaskell published *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* and with it began numerous studies and comparisons about her real life and her novel. According to Fernández Nistal, this perspective dominates Brontëan studies during the nineteenth century and part of the twentieth (22). This line of research includes the identification of the sources of inspiration for Brontë. Authors such as Fernández Nistal affirms that she was inspired by the works of Walter Scott and John Bunyan, whose copies were available

in the library of her father (22). Nevertheless, some authors such as Robert Bernard Martin, reject this biographical approach, although he supports its possible veracity. Regarding this approach, I must mention the vindication that Henry Shephard writes about Clergy Daughters' School and W. Carus Wilson, *A Vindication of The Clergy Daughters' School, And of The Rev. W. Carus Wilson, From in The Remarks in "The Life of Charlotte Brontë"* (1857). This vindication was crucial in questioning the biographical content in the novel.

Through this essay, I intend to prove that Brontë really used her experiences, memories and environment to shape her novel. Although it is true that there is no way to demonstrate with complete certainty that this was so, after reading the research and previous works on this issue, I think that there are enough indications and authors to support this theory. Therefore, this essay follows the authors that support the supposition about the biographical aspects of Brontë present in *Jane Eyre*.

4. Theoretical framework

As aforementioned, I firmly believe that Brontë used real aspects of her life to write her novel, including the people to whom she was related. When an author creates a work, it has a part of the author, since the work is the result of imagination itself. "Every work has implicit the life of its author, every thought has been created by the personality, memories and experiences of its creator" (Kohan 17). The hypothesis that I follow is that her childhood experiences were decisive to write *Jane Eyre*. Those memories, probably very distorted due to her youthful age, were her basis for the childhood of Jane. Also, the figure of her father, Patrick Brontë, has an immense importance in her life. I think he is constantly represented in the characters of her novel.

This theory is based on the indications that I have been analysing in my previous research, i.e. fundamentally in the biography of Brontë by Gaskell and the defence of Carus Wilson by Shephard. The core of this work is based on identifying and connecting these real aspects within the fiction that Brontë created. My surmise is that Brontë masked, modified and hidden those facts and real memories through fiction, autofiction and the autobiographical recourse. Firstly, before developing my proposal, it is necessary to define and explain these terms in relation to this essay.

The autofiction is closely related to autobiography, so it is important to remember the full title of the work of Brontë, *Jane Eyre, an Autobiography*. The autobiography was a frequent literary resource during nineteenth century. For temporal reasons, when Brontë wrote her novel, autofiction was a very recent term for her knowledge. However, the characteristics of this recent literary genre allow to frame *Jane Eyre* within its limits. According to Manuel Alberca, the origin of this term is due to Serge Doubrovsky, who coined it in his novel *Fils* (1977). Until Doubrovsky defined that term, literary critics had not become aware of this type of novels or stories. Works such as *Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri (1321), works by Unamuno and Azorín found their place in this genre (141).

Silvia Adela Kohan explains in her work *Autoficción: escribe tu vida real o novelada* (2016), writing an autobiography or a novel that contains aspects of the lived experience of the author, are options that are part of autofiction (17). Autofiction can be as close to autobiography as it is to novels, but in both cases, it is always connected to lived experience. Kohan is also based on the work of Doubrovsky to define autofiction as a fiction of real events, or as a fictional story whose purpose is autobiography. To a certain extent, this is a somewhat ambiguous term between the real and the imagined (25).

Another interesting feature related to autofiction, which both Kohan and Fernández Nistal mention, is the perspective of psychoanalysis in fiction novels. The perspective of psychoanalysis can analyse some elements of her childhood and environment. Regarding this point, Kohan explains the relationship between the psychological and the imagination. Since we remember fragments of lived experiences, we tend to replace those forgotten spaces, by the imagined. Memory and imagination are part of the same mental process; therefore, imagining is an autobiographical act (21). This explanation confirms my supposition about the diffuse memories of Brontë, when she was a child, and their subsequent modification to use them in her novel. In many cases, we convince ourselves of an idea or we believe that something has happened in one way or another, for the simple reason that it appears like this in our mind. Brontë had a terrible experience during her stay at Cowan Bridge that affected her psychologically.

A separate way of defining autofiction, according to Kohan, is the fiction of the I, true novel, or metafiction. The autofiction is an act in which experience becomes fiction. Many authors wrote autofiction although they were not acquainted with the genre. They wrote works in which they reinvented themselves in some way (25). Since Kohan briefly

mentions the term metafiction, it is susceptible to relate it to the other terms since they are all connected. The concept of metafiction was used for the first time by the American critic novelist William H. Gass in 1970. Although it is a term typical of modernist and post-modernist novels, it appears in earlier works, such as *Don Quixote* by Miguel de Cervantes (1605), and then in novels like *To the Lighthouse* by Virginia Woolf (1927) and *Ulysses* by James Joyce (1922). Its structure provides several valuable perspectives that can be applied in this essay.

The work of Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (1984), can help to link this concept to the autofiction and fiction present in *Jane Eyre*. Waugh points out that the mind is both a product of language and a producer of language (2). Our knowledge of the world is acquired through language, so the study of characters in novels can determine the degree to which individuals occupy a real role. In this way we can understand the construction of the subjective elements in the novels (Waugh 3). This process could be developed by Brontë, when creating her characters, but it is also a process used by the reader when trying to relate the characters to real people outside the fiction. As Waugh mentions, metafiction is a tendency or function inherent in all novels. It is a form of fiction whose ideas offer a vision of the representative nature of all fiction, as well as the literary history of the novel as a genre (5). Metafiction novels are built on the creation of a fictional illusion and the nakedness of that illusion. The simplest common definition of metafiction is to simultaneously create a fiction and provide a statement about the creation of that fiction (Waugh 6).

Although Brontë does not expressly develop this resource, in some parts of her novel the protagonist discusses what she is going to say about her life or summarizes what she has said:

Hitherto I have recorded in detail the events of my insignificant existence: to the first ten years of my life I have given almost as many chapters. But this is not to be a regular autobiography. I am only bound to invoke Memory where I know her responses will possess some degree of interest; therefore I now pass to space of eight years almost in silence: a few lines only are necessary to keep up the links of connection. (Brontë 96)

In chapter eleven, there is another example of metafiction. These examples are another form of metafiction; the author shows a fictitious protagonist talking about her own fictitious life:

A new chapter in a novel is something like a new scene in a play; when I draw up the curtain this time, reader, you must fancy you see a room in the George Inn Millcote [...] Reader, though I took comfortably accommodated, I am not very tranquil in my mind. I thought when the coach stopped here there would be someone to meet me. (Brontë 109)

Jane Eyre is considered as belonging to the nineteenth century, to which the term realism is related. Waugh clarifies that in the case of nineteenth-century realism, the forms of fiction derive from a firm belief in a world of history that is commonly experienced and objectively existent (6). Fernández Nistal notes that Brontë was a recipient of the puritan tradition and history, and methodism was fundamental in her literary style (74). Fernández Nistal clarifies that the study of the history influenced her character, which is reflected in Brontë as a conviction in the search for truth and reflect reality through fiction (118). By this, I mean that Brontë, in an attempt to narrate her authentic experience through a character with a fictitious life, unconsciously she developed a type of what years later would be called metafiction. Consistent with this, Waugh argues that, from the philosophical point of view of fiction, aestheticians and metafictional writers explore the relationship between fiction and reality. All of them focus on two issues: first, the problem related to the identity of the fictional characters; and second, the problem of referentiality, in other words: the state of literary-fictional discourse (90).

The first two problems of identity and referentiality are summarized in the following fragment: a character is only a voice and is aware of its existence, when it is pronounced. However, the character has no power to conclude the statement. A character does not go beyond an author. Of course, the voice of the author is the utterance. Language is the totality of existence, that is, the text is the reality (Waugh 91). This complex idea establishes the relationship between author and character, and likewise the voice of the narrator. As I have exposed previously, it is Jane herself who announces what she is going to say. In this metafictional point, the author, the character and the narrator converge in the same fictional I.

Concerning the fiction of I, Alberca explains and summarizes this relationship between the I of the author, and the I of the narrator or the protagonist. This is relevant in this study since the personality of Brontë is reflected in different characters and scenes. The I of the author changes, showing or hiding the identity. This narrative process is produced by the ambiguous pact that Alberca develops in his work. On the one hand, Alberca presents the fictional autobiography, which is the case of *Jane Eyre*, in which the

principle of identity is that the author is a different person from the narrator and the protagonist. However, the narrator and protagonist are the same person, as are the author and the editor. On the other hand, Alberca presents the principle of autofiction identity, with which I agree. This principle constitutes the same identity for the author, the narrator and the protagonist. In this case, the nominal identity is express, while in the case of autobiography, the nominal identity is fictitious (92). The case of *Jane Eyre* presents both since it is a fictional autobiography, but it is also autofiction because the author used her own life to create fiction. The purpose of a fictional autobiography is to simulate an authentic one. Brontë used this same purpose through the autobiographical discourse.

Nevertheless, there is a detail that should not be forgotten, and that is the name of the author with which the novel was originally published. Brontë wrote this and other works under the pseudonym of Currer Bell. Although the authorship of the novel is utterly proven, this fact does not indicate a separation between author, narrator or protagonist. Brontë wrote the work, but her real name did not appear on the cover, so her identity was hidden and exposed to interpretations. The fictional author that Brontë used to publish her novel is not the narrator. Alberca provides interesting ideas in relation to the above. An author can adopt the narrative voice in the first person and at the same time also be the protagonist. This narrates a life or an episode through the autobiographical resource. Further, considering the words of Robert Folkenflik “Autobiographies are generally narratives about the past of the writer” (15). The author may include biographical elements for the characters, these elements can be recognized if the reader knows the biography of the author. The intention of the fictional narrator is not to provide real signals, but to simulate that the story is true; although, the extreme simulation of veracity consists in hiding the real name and surname of the author (Alberca 94). The computation of these fictitious and real elements complicates the analysis of *Jane Eyre* from the biographical view. Whenever the name of the author appears explicitly on the cover of the novel, it means that there is a distance between the author and the narrator-protagonist. Folkenflik explains, “the case of fiction may seem to offer a crude dividing line: autobiographies are generally written by those who bear the same name as the protagonists of their narratives” (14). The fictitious author is separated from the nominal author. While in *Jane Eyre* the opposite occurs, this is a clear sign that there is not a referential mark that separates the fictitious author (Eyre) from the nominal author (Brontë). This phenomenon is frequent in historical novels, where the protagonist is a

historical figure. Galván notes that the life of the protagonist is not real but is an invention to try to bring the reader to the possible life of the character (96).

Returning to the perspective of autobiography, whether fictional or not, *Jane Eyre* contains the keys to identify this genre. The first undeniable indicator is the complete title of the novel. Folkenflik argues a revelatory piece of data, “*Jane Eyre: An Autobiography* by Charlotte Brontë, was perhaps the first novel by a woman with *autobiography* in the title” (6). There are other clues throughout the novel. The narrator in the first person is essential to know the protagonist. The narrator-protagonist reveals step by step the most significant aspects of her life. The title conditions the reader to identify the narrator with the protagonist. However, there is not a clarification for it. This is because *Jane Eyre* is a kind of ambiguous autobiography narrated in the first person. Alberca describes these autobiographies as those that present an anonymous or generic narrator, which produces uncertainty in the reader. Such uncertainty results in biographical suspicion, which is what provokes the reader to intuit that the author hides behind the narrator (100). If the narrative I is apparently anonymous, as in the case of *Jane Eyre*, Alberca proposes applying the pragmatic principle. This principle applies if the author expresses the explicit veracity to the reader.

The narrator-protagonist of *Jane Eyre* is at first anonymous. Nevertheless, at the end of the novel, Brontë reveals the identity of the protagonist, ending with the suspicions of the readers about the protagonist. Fernández Nistal indicates that Brontë uses this technique to provoke in the reader the interest in the destiny of the protagonist until the end. The protagonist narrates her life and shows her feelings, thus maintaining a close relationship with the reader (116). Alberca defines this process as a reading pact. The author promises to tell the truth, and the reader promises to believe what the author narrates. The value of this pact could be doubtful in a case such as *Jane Eyre*. As aforementioned, the protagonist and the author do not use the same name, so this confirms the fictitious nature of the novel. Nonetheless, this issue does not prevent the novel contains both autobiographical and biographical material.

At this point, there is enough material to clarify that *Jane Eyre* is not an autobiographical novel but a fictional autobiography. From the point of view of the reader, both seem identical; however, as Alberca explains, the difference resides in the substantial. The substantial in fictional autobiographies is the autobiographical, the accidental and the fictitious. All of this serves to direct the attention to the invented story.

On the other hand, the substantial in autobiographical novels is the fictitious, while the autobiographical is a simple accidental complement. In this way, the reader concentrates the attention on the private part of the story, and the fictitious remains in the second level (101). The idea of a second plane leads me to think that Brontë produced the opposite effect. If she tried to hide her life behind her character; the reader focuses the attention on fiction and moves away from the possible reality that is hidden. Alberca emphasizes that the origin of the autobiographical novel fostered both the concealment of the private, and in telling a private truth. Thus, hiding and showing the intimate self of the author was the contradictory nature of the autobiographies from their origin (104).

In the words of Brontë I find a certain fear of the response of the public to her novel, which would fit with the handicap of autobiography that Alberca explained: “The world may not like to see these ideas dissevered, for it has been accustomed to blend them [...] It may hate him who dares to scrutinise and expose, to rase the gilding and show base metal under it” (Brontë xii). Hence, in the first pages of her novel, that opposition between hiding and publicly recounting something is already reflected. This internal struggle, for recounting and at the same time hiding her real experiences, is reflected in the first ten chapters of her novel, which I will analyse from the perspective of Gaskell, Shephard and Brontë herself.

5. Analysis of the connexions between real and fictional aspects in *Jane Eyre*.

Previously, I have established connections between theories and researches about the life and work of Brontë. Since her apparition, *Jane Eyre* has provoked a multitude of theories and suspicions concerning biographical content in her novel. A halo of mystery confined the novel to critics and rumours. Nevertheless, the great literary style employed by Brontë has situated *Jane Eyre* as one of the best novels of the Victorian period. Brontë presented her novel at the first time under the pseudonym of Currer Bell. This fact created several unanswered questions about the authority of the novel. Alan Shelston explains in the introduction of *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* that the intrigue was solved in 1850, when publishers, with the permission of Brontë, revealed the identity of the author (14). After the death of Brontë, Gaskell published the biography of her friend. *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* opened a range of possibilities to compare the private life of Brontë with her novel.

Those who knew the environment and personality of Brontë could relate them to certain aspects of her novel. The similitudes between the childhood of the protagonist and of the Brontë, led the readers to think that *Jane Eyre* was the real autobiography of Brontë. However, some critics and readers have found relationships between some characters and real persons. For instance, Carus Wilson, the director of Clergy Daughters' School on Cowan Bridge, could relate his own identity reflected in Mr. Brocklehurst. Shelston claims that Carus Wilson was directly affected by the novel and by the work of Gaskell. The school of Carus Wilson and his methodology were easily recognisable in Lowood School (28). Further on, the work of Gaskell confirmed the suspicions of Carus Wilson with the following confession: "Miss Bronte more than once said to me, that she should not have written what she did of Lowood in 'Jane Eyre', if she had thought the place would have been so immediately identified with Cowan Bridge, although there was not a word in her account of the institution but what was true at the time when she knew it;" (98). To this, Gaskell added another revealing confession, which was interpreted as an accusation: "she had not considered it necessary, in a work of fiction, to state impartially every human failings, as she might have done, if she dispassionately analysing the conduct of those who had the superintendence of the institution" (98). Due to Brontë never using the name of Carus Wilson, he lodged a complaint against Gaskell, who wrote about him. As Shelston clarifies, Gaskell changed the version of the controversial passages and omitted names in the third edition, in order to solve that legal issue (29).

This denounce is crucial to establish the connection between the fictional version of Brontë about the school and her authentic experience. Brontë protected herself under the name of Currer Bell and by changing the real names for fictitious ones. However, the inherent truth in her narration revealed the origin of her inspiration. It is necessary to note Brontë's age when she was in Cowan Bridge. The memories of a girl of eight years cannot be considered as an absolute truth. Possibly, she was intensely affected at this time and these memories had been increasing and changing as time passed. The result was a distorted and exaggerated idea of that stage, which she reflected in her novel. In this section, I will identify the key aspects and passages in the first ten chapters of her novel connected to her real life, as well as the connection to the versions of Gaskell and Shephard. Gaskell supported Brontë's version, a version narrated through the novel and her letters. Whereas Shephard supported the version of Carus Wilson, who was directly implicated in the story, and as a result his reputation was publicly damaged. I have grouped

the passages according to different themes of influence. These themes are related to the childhood, religion, parent-child relationship, personality and character of Brontë, including study and readings, and the health conditions of the institution.

Apart from the influence of that stage of her childhood, which in several cases goes parallel to the childhood of Brontë, there are more relevant aspects of her life reflected in the novel. First of all, I would like to briefly point out the coincidence of some important names. Writers often use the names of people they know in their works. However, there are two revealing names. The first one is Jane. This is the name of the protagonist, but it was also the name of one of the Brontë's little sisters, Emily Jane. The second name is Helen Burns. Helen is Jane's best friend during her stay in Lowood, with whom she finds the complicity of a sister. Coincidentally, Ellen Nussey was Brontë's best friend, who was her support during her stay at the Roe Head School. Both names have a special meaning, they are not chosen at random. However, it must be pointed out that Brontë did not represent her friend, but her late sister María in the character of Helen Burns, "her thin face, her sunken gray eye, like a reflection from the aspect of an angel" (Brontë 76). Gaskell confirms that Maria had the same experiences and sufferings that Brontë narrates for Helen (104). In addition to Gaskell, Shephard also established the connection between fictional and real characters:

It is now acknowledged that the "Lowood" school in "Jane Eyre" was intended by Miss Brontë as, in general, contributor of the Clergy Daughters' School, as first established by Mr. Carus Wilson, at Cowen Bridge; that "Helen Burns" meant Maria Bronte, and; "Miss Scatcherd" one of the teachers, whom Mrs. Gaskell has been prudent enough to decline identifying; the "Rev. Mr. Brocklehurst" being, of course, Mr. Carus Wilson himself. (Shephard 4)

Once again, the content and connection of the real world to the fictional one is confirmed. Next, I will detail the most relevant examples of what I have explained in previous points.

5.1 Paternal figure of Brontë and religion.

I would like to start with the figure of Patrick Brontë. Patrick was undoubtedly an essential influence on the character and personality of Brontë. His strict moral and mentality with respect to manners and religion, strongly marked the spirit of Brontë. The character of Mr. Brocklehurst was endowed with the same qualities as Patrick. Although, Mr. Brocklehurst also agrees with Carus Wilson. Both Patrick and Carus Wilson were reverends, so their ideas and dogmas of faith were similar. Brontë interspersed distinct

aspects of her real referents, in her fictional characters throughout different episodes. The aspect associated with this character is religion. The doctrine of faith and morals are strongly reflected, as in the life of Brontë. In relation to Patrick, one of the most notable coincidences between Brontë and Jane was that Jane's father had the same occupation as Patrick "Miss Abbot's communications to Bessie, that my father had been a poor clergyman;" (Brontë 24). This data helps to establish a connection between author and protagonist. The following fragment is an example of the Puritan belief about salvation and condemnation, which was so important in the puritan life and education that Patrick desired for his children:

"No sight so sad as that of a naughty child," he began, "especially a naughty little girl. Do you know where the wicked go after death?"- "They go to hell," was my ready and orthodox answer. - "And what is hell? Can you tell me that?"- "A pit full of fire." [...] "Deceit is, indeed, a sad fault in a child," said Mr. Brocklehurst; - "it is akin to falsehood, and all liars will have their portion in the lake burning with fire and brimstone..." (Brontë 32-33)

As I noted earlier, Patrick was involved in the education and beliefs of his children. Gaskell transcribed a letter in which Patrick gave a sample of it. This fragment is comparable to the previous episode that takes place between Jane and Mr. Brocklehurst, where the study of the Bible was considered fundamental. This ideology was common to Patrick and Carus Wilson.

"By considering the difference between them as to their bodies." I then asked Charlotte what was the best book in the world; she answered, "The Bible." And what was the next best; she answered, "The Book of Nature." I then asked the next what was the best mode of education for a woman; she answered, "That which would make her rule her house well." Lastly, I asked the oldest what was the best mode of spending time; she answered, "By laying it out in preparation for a happy eternity." (Gaskell 94)

In relation to this last fragment in which Patrick revealed Brontë's fondness for nature books, (without forgetting that the library of Patrick contained a copy of ornithology), there are two passages of the novel in which Brontë betrayed the same passion, "I returned to my book - Bewick's 'History of British Birds'" (Brontë 2). Her fondness for nature and birds denotes the desire for freedom, which perhaps her way of life did not allow her to have: "she brought up with her a tart on a certain brightly painted china plate, the bird of paradise, nestling in a wreath of convolvuli and rosebuds, had been the most enthusiastic sense of admiration, [...] I could not eat the tart: and the plumage of the bird, the tints of the flowers, seemed strangely faded!" (Brontë 17). Gaskell clarifies that this

need for freedom was due to the loneliness that the wastelands contributed to the character of the Yorkshiremen (60).

Another of the characteristic aspects of Patrick is the strict decorum that he imposed on both his wife and his daughters. He firmly believed in a way of life based on simplicity, firm hand and austerity. Patrick did not allow his daughters to take pleasure in beauty, luxuries, clothes, or ostentation. Gaskell narrates certain episodes that are easily identifiable in the novel of Brontë, “for there was plenty and even waste in the house [...], but he thought that children should be brought up simply and hardily” (87). It is the same doctrine followed by Mr. Brocklehurst, “Humility is a Christian grace, and one peculiarly appropriate to the pupils of Lowood” (Brontë 34); “Consistency madame, is the first of Christian duties [...] the establishment of Lowood: plain fare, simple attire, unsophisticated accommodations, hardly and active habits” (Brontë 35). The discipline in terms of humility and simplicity also included the way of dressing. “Mr. Brontë wished to make his children hardly, and indifferent to the pleasures of eating and dress” (Gaskell 88). Gaskell collects two particularly cruel examples that little Brontë lived. Gaskell recounts the testimony of Mrs. Brontë’s nurse, in which she told her that one cold and rainy day waiting for the children to return from one of their walks through the moors, she placed some colourful boots near the fireplace so that the children will warm their feet when they return. However, Patrick who did not tolerate “nothing that offended his antique simplicity” burned the boots (89). This testimony has its counterpart in the novel:

The almost impassable roads prevented our stirring beyond the garden walls, except to go to church, but within these limits we had to pass an hour every day in the open air. Our clothing was insufficient to protect us from the severe cold, we had no boot, the snow got into our shoes, and melted there [...] I remember well the distracting irritation I endured from this cause everything, when my feet inflamed (Brontë 66).

The next example is related to dress, Gaskell relates that the character of Patrick was severe, and even furious, as this example shows: Mrs. Bronte had a dressing gown that she kept under lock and she never wore because it did not conform to the strict decorum of her husband. One day she forgot the key and heard her husband in the room, when she arrived, Patrick had torn the delicate dressing gown (89). The moral connotation of this episode coincides with many passages of the novel. One of the most representative is the following refers to Mr. Brocklehurst: “The laundress tells me some of the girls have two clean tuckers in a week: it is too much; [...] You are aware that my plan in bringing up these girls is, not to accustom them to habits of luxury and indulgence, but to render them

hardy, patient, self-denying” (Brontë 69). Brontë shared the same idea as Patrick about dress. In the following fragment, Brontë expressed herself through the daughters of Mr. Brocklehurst: “Oh dear papa, how quiet and plain all the girls at Lowood look with their long pinafores, and those little holland pockets outside their frocks, they are almost like poor people’s children;” (Brontë 34). Brontë uses the strategy of adopting the personality of one character or another, based on the conviction of her ideas. The voice of the author is not static in character of Jane, as I developed on the page 11.

To end with the connections between Patrick Brontë and Mr. Brocklehurst, I want to add the similarity in the description of both. Brontë described Mr. Brocklehurst, almost portraying the physical appearance of her father, which Gaskell described. Brontë dedicated the following sentences to the description:

I looked up at a black pillar;... the straight, narrow, sable-clad shape standing erect on the rug; the grim face at the top was like a carved mask,[...] having examined me with the two inquisitive-looking gray eyes which twinkled under a pair of bushy brows, said solemnly, and in a bass voice.[...] He seemed to me a tall gentleman, but then I was very little, his features were large, and they and all the lines of his frame were equally harsh and prim. (Brontë 31)

The meetings that Gaskell had with Patrick, allowed her to detail his appearance, which coincides with the description of Mr. Brocklehurst: “This large family was remarkable for great physical strength, and much personal beauty. Even in his old age, Mr. Bronte is a striking looking man, above the common height, with a nobly shaped head, and erect carriage [...] he never could have shown his Celtic descent in the straight Greek lines and long oval of his face;” (Gaskell 78). The comparison of these aspects shows that the character and influence of Patrick are latent in the novel.

5.2 Personality of Brontë and lack of affection.

In relation to the above, another of the identifiable aspects is the striking lack of affection that both Brontë and Jane denounce. This lack of affection, as I have already explained, was due to the lack of attention of Patrick to his children. Another problem was added to this need for affection; Brontë felt a strong discomfort whenever she was in an unfamiliar environment or with strangers. At several points of the novel, Jane expresses this same regret: “My first quarter at Lowood seemed an age, and not the golden age either; it compromised an irksome struggle with difficulties in habituating myself to new rules and unwonted tasks. The fear of failure in these points harassed me worse than

the physical hardships of my lot, though these were no trifles” (Brontë 66). Fernandez Nistal explains that Brontë was afraid of living with new people and in unknown places, so she had to make a significant effort to overcome her shyness (70). Brontë’s personality consisted of three states, abnegation, rebellion and passion. All of them derived from that lack of attention and the loneliness that she shared with her siblings. She followed the doctrine and ideas of her father, which shows self-denial and righteousness. But this same state was provoked by a feeling of rebellion and resentment. Brontë fought that resentment with hidden passions such as reading and writing. That was a way of liberation and an escape route. Analysing the character of Jane, these three states appear in numerous episodes. Although, the author is not only reflected in Jane, in some episodes it is reflected in Helen Burns, and in others in Mr. Brocklehurst. For instance, the following words belong to Mr. Brocklehurst, but reflect the strong belief of Brontë in saving the soul through suffering: “Keep your eyes on her movements, weigh well her words, scrutinise her actions, punish her body to save her soul, if, indeed, such salvation be possible for this girl, this child from the native Christian land” (Brontë 74). The following passage corresponds to Helen Burns: “We all must die one day, and the disease that is taking me away is not painful; is gentle and gradual, my mind is at rest. I leave no one to regret me much [...] I believe, I have faith: I am going to God... My maker and yours, who will never destroy what He created” (Brontë 93-94). In this passage Helen explains how the disease affects her, although the words are of Brontë. She knew the process of the disease, since her sisters suffered it.

The early death of her mother deprived Brontë of a fundamental sentimental pillar. Gaskell affirms that Mrs. Brontë did not want to see her children when she fell ill, and Patrick was not so fond of children as to spend time with them: “the mother was not very anxious to see much of her children, [...] So the little things clung quietly together, for their father was busy in his study... and they took their meals alone; sat reading, or whispering low” (87). This absence of a mother figure is reflected in the following fragment: “Eliza, John and Georgiana were now clustered round their mamma in the drawing-room: she lay reclined on a sofa by the fireside, and with her darlings about her [...] looked perfectly happy. Me she had dispensed from joining group” (Brontë 1). The sense of orphanhood was profound in Brontë, and she reflected it on numerous occasions throughout her novel. Gaskell relates that the affection of the maids brought strength since the relationship with her father was restrained (80). The following fragment is a stanza

that the nursemaid used to sing to Jane. This is a clear example that encompasses this feeling of loneliness, the faith and love of a surrogate mother figure: “there is a thought that for strength should avail me; though both of shelter and kindred despoiled; heaven is a home, and a rest will not fail me; God is a friend to the poor orphan child” (Brontë 19).

Another interesting example identifies with the analogue childhood of Brontë, in which she found comfort in secondary elements such as reading, is the following: “human beings must love something, and, in the dearth of worthier objects of affection, I contrived to find a pleasure in loving and cherishing a faded graven image, shabby as a miniature scarecrow” (Brontë 27). As these examples show, the demand for affection is almost constant in the chapters corresponding to the childhood of the protagonist. From the same point, Brontë found comfort in reading and studying. Literature was a balm for Brontë and for Jane. In the most difficult moments, the protagonist finds consolation in adventure books such as *Gulliver’s Travels* by Jonathan Swift (1726), or classic history. Gaskell emphasizes in a conversation with Patrick, the fondness of Brontë for analysing historical figures: “the Duke of Wellington, my daughter Charlotte’s hero, was sure to come off with a quest, when a dispute would not unfrequently arise among them regarding the comparative merits of him, Buonaparte, Hannibal, and Caesar” (94). The ensuing fragment represents the equivalent passion in Jane: “I had read Goldsmith’s ‘History of Rome’, and had formed my opinion of Nero, Caligula, etc” (Brontë 6). This example not only reflects intellectual maturity but exposes the Puritan influence in the importance of history in Victorian education. While history provided her with a critical thinking, adventure literature enhanced her imagination as Jane reflects: “Bessie asked if I would have a book: the word book acted as a transient stimulus, and I begged her to fetch ‘Gulliver’s Travels’ from the library. This book I had again and again perused with delight” (Brontë 18).

Nevertheless, there is another recurrent feeling in that stage, that of rebelliousness. Brontë developed a powerful sense of duty and justice. The death of her sisters provoked feelings of resentment and anger. She was a woman who dominated her passions and instincts, but in the novel, she gave free rein to that fury. Her distorted memories by the immature age, caused her the same sensation as an adult. The next fragment reflects this reflection, “Children can feel, but they cannot analyse their feelings; and if the analysis is partially effected in thought, they know not how to express the result of the process in words” (Brontë 21). Throughout the novel this rebellious behaviour can be identified.

Most of cases involve the character of Helen Burns, with whom Brontë represented one of her sisters. Brontë firmly believed in the defence with the same attack. That is, their solution to injustices was to treat them in the same way they were produced. Gaskell provides a key phrase for this belief, “Keep a stone in thy pocket seven year; turn it, and keep it seven years longer, that it may be ready to thine hand when thine enemy draws near” (61). This statement has a representative replica in the novel, when Jane explains Helen her position against injustice:

If people were always kind and obedient to those who are cruel and unjust, the wicked people would have it all their own way, they would grow worse and worse. When we are struck at without a reason, we should strike back again very har, I am sure we should- so hard as to teach the person who struck us never to do it again. (Brontë 63)

5.3 Healthy conditions of the institution and public repercussion.

At this point and related to the above, it is necessary to mention the situation of Carus Wilson. He was identified himself in the novel, and he was alluded to because of phrases like the following: “When a criminal is accused, he is always allowed to speak in his own defence. You have been charged with falsehood, defend yourself to me as well as you can. Say whatever your memory suggests as true but add nothing and exaggerate nothing” (Brontë 80). Brontë blamed the director of the school mainly for the poor health conditions, which included food, humidity, cold and crowded conditions. These are favourable conditions for diseases such as typhus and tuberculosis appeared. In the novel, Jane formulates the same social complaint and launches the same attack on the director of Lowood. As I mentioned on the page 14, Carus Wilson did not take legal action against Brontë, but against Gaskell. Shephard explains the reason:

Mrs. Gaskell has herself renewed whatever was injurious to him in the novel of “Jane Eyre”: the obloquy raised by that publication had long since died away and would have lain buried in oblivion had not Mrs. Gaskell revived it. The caricature of the Cowen Bridge School, under the name of “Lowood,” had even not been recognized as an intended portrait by many readers who knew the School; but is now avowed and re-published by Mrs. Gaskell, with large additions, and all the seriousness of a professed record of facts. (Shephard 4)

Although the intention of Shephard was not to support Brontë, this statement supports her version. Shephard says that those who knew the school could recognize it in Lowood. Hence, that is a sign that there were indeed aspects of the novel that coincided with Cowan Bridge. The critical point of the matter was produced by the insinuations of Brontë about

the poor health conditions of the school, which she expressed in her novel. These conditions were probably common in centres of that time. However, although Shephard contributes data that revaluing this accusation, the public image of Carus Wilson was damaged:

But it is rather hard on Mr. Wilson, whose reputation is an affair of public, we might say, national interest, that his good name should be introduced in other parts of the country under circumstances so prejudicial." (Lancaster Gazelle.) So wide and strong has been the current of popular feeling against the Clergy Daughters' School, in consequence of Mrs. Gaskell's publication. (Shephard 5)

This fragment reveals that the accusations in *Jane Eyre* and in the work of Gaskell had a profound impact, not only in the private sphere of the interested parties. Concerning the poor healthy conditions, Brontë continually refers to rotten and scan food: "Ravenous, and now very faint, I devoured a spoonful or two of my portion without thinking of its taste; But the first edge of hunger blunted, I perceived I had got in hand to nauseous mess- burnt porridge is almost as bad as rotten potatoes, famine itself soon sickens over it" (Brontë 48). Examples like the previous passage are recurrent when the author refers to Lowood. Gaskell collects the testimony of other Brontë colleagues who support her version:

To some children oatmeal porridge is distasteful, and consequently unwholesome, even when properly made; at the Cowan Bridge School it was too often felt up, not merely burnt, but with offensive fragments of other substances discoverable in it. [...] the I thought I would be pervaded, morning, noon, and night, by the odour of rancid fat that steamed out of the oven in which much of their food was prepared. (Gaskell 102)

This testimony catches my attention because Brontë describes with almost the same words the smell of the food: "The dinner was served in two huge tinplated vessels, whence rose a strong steam from the rancid fat. I found the mess to consist of indifferent potatoes and strange shreds of rusty meat, mixed and cooked together" (Brontë 55). Both versions, despite being temporarily distanced, keep a close resemblance. But what really brings truth to the numerous complaints about food is the version of Shephard, "the complaints of bad food were chiefly owing to the bad management of a cook, who was speedily dismissed; and that henceforward the food was so well prepared that no one could ever reasonably complain of it" (Shephard 14). This fact could cause serious criticism to the direction of the school. However, I would like to provide a vote of confidence to Carus Wilson, since Shephard confirms the status of the matter, there is no evidence to doubt the resolution of this problem: "Mr. Wilson himself ordered in the food, and was anxious

that it should be of good quality: that during the fever, Mr. Wilson supplied everything ordered by the doctors, of the best quality and in the most literal manner” (Shepherd 6).

The issue of food developed into the delicate subject of diseases. This matter is treated in detail both in the novel, as in the work of Gaskell and in the defence of Shepherd. The implication of all the parties demonstrates the importance of the matter and the controversial content that accompanies the truth and the rumour. The poor health conditions resulted in diseases such as typhus and tuberculosis, both with similar foci and which were in Lowood and Cowan Bridge. The lack of food and its inadequate quality, along with conditions of cold, humidity and overcrowding caused these diseases in the school attended by the Brontë sisters. Brontë narrated these passages with absolute knowledge about the causes of disease, “That forest dell, where Lowood lay, was the cradle of fog and fog-bred pestilence, which, quickening with the quickening spring, crept into the Orphan Asylum, breathed typhus through its crowded schoolroom and dormitory, and, ere May arrived, transformed the seminary into a hospital” (Brontë 87). Shepherd once again confirms this outbreak of typhoid fever that did not only affect the school, but the entire Haworth region. Shepherd agrees on this point with Brontë, since both claim that the focus was located in the region and was not an isolated cause of the school, “the fever which broke out in the school was already in the village, and may, therefore, probably have been carried into the school by infection” (Shepherd 9). To conclude this matter, I want to add a fundamental explanation to this fact that ratifies the version of Shepherd: “Most seriously, of all, the water supply which served almost everyone in the town by means of nine pumps and two public wells was polluted by these effluents; one spring even ran through the churchyard. In the circumstances, it is not surprising that ill-health was endemic” (Barker 18).

Another of the topics of confrontation is related to the number of students. This matter may seem insignificant, but one of the causes that enhances the spread of diseases is overcrowding. Brontë relates through her novel, that the number of students was around eighty and Gaskell confirms: “as far as I can make out from seventy to eighty pupils” (Gaskell 101). Shepherd denies the previous versions regarding the number of students. He argues that during the stay of Brontë only fifty-three students were internal: “The whole number admitted during the first eighteen months, up to the time when Charlotte Brontë left the school, was 53” (Shepherd 8). Although the number of students was not stable, Brontë narrated some episodes of Lowood that would explain the high rate of

illness and contagion that occurred in Cowan Bridge. “The portions were delivered; those who like to take a drink of water, the cup is common for everyone” (Brontë 46). Aside from the conditions of the meal, a common cup meant contagion. The following fragment is an example of the mentioned overcrowded: “I glanced at the long rows of beds, each of which was quickly filled with two occupants” (Brontë 47). Personal hygiene was another important factor related to diseases, “This morning we were obliged to dispense with the ceremony of washing. The water in the pitchers was frozen” (Brontë 57). All these factors that Brontë included, certainly increased the risk of contracting typhus and consumption.

Following the thread of this topic and to conclude, I would like to comment on two Gaskell narratives, perhaps more objective and revealing than the previous ones. After investigating about the childhood of Brontë, her environment and family, and the conditions of the school she attended, Gaskell issues the following: “perhaps the hamlet of Cowan Bridge had a more prosperous look than it bears at present. It is prettily situated; just where the Leck-fells swoop into the plain; [...] I can hardly understand how the school came to be so unhealthy, the air all round about was so sweet and thyme-scented, when I visited it last summer” (Gaskell 100). The reflection of Gaskell is very revealing, since it creates a slight doubt about the version of Brontë. Finally, I would like to comment on the episode in which Helen Burns dies. Brontë suffered the loss of her older sister when she was in Cowan Bridge, although no student died in school, it is true that many suffered the symptoms of typhus and consumption. Gaskell knowing all the biographical data reflects the following doubt: “I only wonder that she did not remonstrate against her father’s decision to send her and Emily back to Cowan Bridge, after Maria’s and Elizabeth’s deaths” (Gaskell 105). The doubt of Gaskell was reasonable, since as she herself knew, the health of the Brontë sisters before reaching Cowan Bridge was very weak. This was due to environmental factors that favoured the appearance of diseases; as to poor nutrition. Gaskell details the diet that the Brontë family was to follow at the behest of Patrick (for his eagerness to austerity): “I set down to a fancy Mr Brontë had of not letting them have flesh-meat to eat [...] so they had nothing but potatoes for their dinner” (Gaskell 87). Another comment that refutes Brontë’s version, is the following: “It was possible to recommend their removal from school, as it was evident that the damp situation of the house at Cowan’s Bridge did not suit their health” (Gaskell 109). The

school management warned of the delicate health of the girls, so it is not reasonable to justify the death of the Brontë sisters exclusively with their stay in the school.

Therefore, after the analysis of the fragments and the information provided by Shephard and Gaskell, I must consider that in the version of Brontë there are true facts, but also facts taken out of context, that is, exaggerated. The goof judgment of Gaskell allowed her to be objective in the face of irrefutable facts exposed by Shephard; although, perhaps she decided to be cautious due to the legal issue of this matter. Despite everything, both works of Gaskell and Shephard support the story of Brontë at some points, but especially Gaskell. She was the main defender of Brontë and responsible for telling her life faithfully; she supported and refuted the version of her friend, which undoubtedly brought credibility to the life of Brontë.

6. Conclusion

After reading carefully the previous studies on the subject in question, I realise that the majority of them treat the subject superficially. The authors previously mentioned on pages 6 and 7, despite acknowledging the existence of biographical content in *Jane Eyre*, do not deepen in the analysis of such content. This essay provides details and concrete facts that relate the real life of Brontë to fictional episodes of her novel. In addition to considering the points of connection, the knowledge of the life of the author and her environment allow me to obtain an explanation of why this biographical content exists. The overall vision of the life of Brontë and the life of the protagonist reveals the similarity between both figures.

Thanks to the development of Alberca about the relationship between author, character and narrator; the pact between reader and author allows to consider certain passages of *Jane Eyre* as the narrative in first person of Brontë. Despite this and taking into account the element of fiction, I do not consider the novel as a faithful testimony of Brontë but reading between the lines reveals her real discourse. Gaskell, on the other hand, if she collected the words of Brontë, that is, she worked with information directly provided by the source. With this I want to clarify that the information provided by Gaskell is considered true. However, both were close friends, so the version of Gaskell is susceptible to subjectivity.

On the other hand, the defence of Shephard in favour of Carus Wilson, provides data similar to those that appear in the novel. The fact that Shephard wrote that vindication leads me to think that in the novel with the work of Gaskell there are true facts. The need to clear the name of Carus Wilson publicly confirms the suspicion that the direction of the school was not free from blame. There are three factors that support this. First, this novel of fiction damaged to the reputation of the renowned institution despite not providing real names or similar, not even the author's. Second, the novel was written almost twenty years after the stay of Brontë at Cowan Bridge, and yet classmates and school staff identified the institution in the pages of the novel. And finally, Carus Wilson saw himself represented in the novel, and subsequently Shephard recognizes the connection of certain aspects of the novel; like typhus fever, to the school. Considering all this I reaffirm that the biographical content in the novel is real.

As I said before, the novel cannot be considered as an absolute truth, neither about the life of Brontë nor with what happened in Cowan Bridge. The explanation is in what Brontë urged to narrate the facts thus. The trigger takes place with the authoritarian figure of her father, who marked her childhood and her character. Brontë began writing the novel while taking care of him, which enhanced her childhood memories and gave rise to the first chapters of her novel, curiously the saddest and most revealing ones. The rage and rebelliousness present in the novel are due to the resentment that Brontë herself felt. First the death of her mother; which Brontë substituted for her sister Maria and nursemaid; then the lack of attention of her father and death of her two sisters; and finally, the stay at school far from her family, all of that produced a strong resentment in Brontë. *Jane Eyre* reflects the need to do justice, and to make a social complaint about what happened to her sisters. Brontë suffered a traumatic experience in Cowan Bridge caused by the factors mentioned above, so I think Brontë was fully aware of what she wrote and why. She established too many similarities that were not mere coincidences. However, I also think that she magnified that experience, and that in some episodes she exaggerated her memories to arouse interest and controversy. It should not be forgotten that, as a writer, she had interest in her novel achieving social repercussion, and she was aware that there were still people who could be related to her novel.

Finally, I want to add that both Gaskell and Shephard find points in which the version of Brontë lacks credibility, as I have already commented on page 24. That said, and to conclude with this essay, I believe that Brontë concealed and masked her truth,

helping herself with imagination, fiction and her pseudonym. Somehow, Brontë tried to bring objectivity to these ten chapters that I have analysed, creating a vindication of the tragic period in Cowan Bridge, which under her perspective was forgotten. Nevertheless, *Jane Eyre* managed to rescue it from oblivion, since the feeling of the girl of eight years was still present in the adult mind of the writer.

Works cited

- Alberca, Manuel. *El pacto ambiguo: de la novela autobiográfica a la autoficción*. Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2007. Print.
- Beaty, Jerome. *Misreading Jane Eyre: A Postformalist Paradigm*. The Ohio State University Press, 1924. The Ohio State University. <https://kb.osu.edu/dspace/handle/1811/6286> Accessed. 8 Mar 2018.
- Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre, an Autobiography*. London: Penguin English Library, 2012. Print.
- Escudero Prieto, Víctor. “Reflexiones sobre el sujeto en el primer Bildungsroman.” PhD thesis, Universitat de Barcelona, 2008. <http://hdl.handle.net/2445/12126> Accessed. 18 Mar 2018.
- Fernández Nistal, Purificación. *Charlotte Brontë y la tradición puritana: The pilgrim's progress de John Bunyan en la vida y en la obra de Charlotte Brontë*. Valladolid: Universidad de Valladolid, 1986. Print.
- Folkenflik, Robert. *The Culture of Autobiography: Constructions of Self-Representation*. Edited by Robert Folkenflik, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993. Print.
- Galván, Fernando. *Ensayos sobre metaficción inglesa*. La Laguna: Universidad de la Laguna, 1994. Print.
- Gaskell, Elizabeth. *The Life of Charlotte Brontë; Edited by Alan Shelston*. London: Penguin Books, 1985. Print.
- Glen, Heather et al. *The Cambridge Companion to The Brontës*. Ed., Heather Glen, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. Print.
- Grimaldi Herrera, Carmen. “Elementos góticos en *Jane Eyre*”. *Contribuciones a las Ciencias Sociales* vol., no.6, noviembre 2009, Eumed.Net. <http://www.eumed.net/rev/ccss/06/cgh12.htm> Accessed. 3 Apr 2018.
- Kohan, Silvia Adela. *Autoficción: escribe tu vida real o novelada*. Barcelona: Alba, 2016. Print.

- Nikkila, Sonja Renee. "*Pseudonymity, Authorship, Selfhood: The Names and Lives of Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot*". PhD thesis. The University of Edinburgh, 2006. EThOS. <http://hdl.handle.net/1842/17556> Accessed. 6 Mar 2018
- Martin, Robert Bernard. *Accents of Persuasion: Charlotte Brontë's Novels*. London: Faber, 1966. Print.
- Shepherd M.A, W. Henry. *A Vindication of The Clergy Daughters' School, And of The Rev. W. Carus Wilson, From in The Remarks in "The Life of Charlotte Brontë"*. London: Kirkby Lonsdale, 1857. Google Books. https://books.google.es/books?id=iSFcAAAAQAAJ&hl=es&source=gbs_navlinks_s Accessed. 17 Feb 2018.
- Swanson, Kj. "*A Liberative Imagination: Reconsidering the Fiction of Charlotte Brontë in Light of Feminist Theology*". PhD thesis. University of St Andrews, 2016. EThOs. <http://hdl.handle.net/10023/11051> Accessed. 6 Mar 2018.
- Waugh, Patricia. *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*. London: Routledge, 1984. Print

