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***Déjà Lu: Prophetic Reading in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and  
*Shirley****

Belo Horizonte

Faculdade de Letras

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***Déjà Lu: Prophetic Reading in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and  
Shirley***

By

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To my mother, Rute, who has always believed in me, whose  
enthusiasm inspired me from the very beginning to the  
dreamed end. Her strength will always bring tears of joy and  
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## ABSTRACT

In Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley*, an attentive reader is able to find more than meets the eye. While any contemporary reader reads these stories and enjoys them – or not, the reader who did it by the time of their first publication, who was used to reading great works, would actually appreciate them by interacting with the text and understanding their intertextual relations with literary works such as the Bible. Recognizing the dialogue between *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley* with other literary works, mainly the Bible, enables the reader, among other things, to make guesses on the characters' future. Such reading has been lost due to the lack of Biblical knowledge by most contemporary readers. In this sense, my work intends to analyze *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley* by comparing their plots and the way they confirm or frustrate the reader's expectations towards the future of those characters having as reference the stories from the Scriptures. Besides analyzing these novels, though, I propose a discussion on the types of readers who could possibly read and appreciate them. Also, I draw the religious scenario in which they were written in order to see the Biblical allusions through the lenses of the historical reader, understanding the predictions he or she would make, to observe if the allusions confirm or deny the Biblical text.

Keywords: Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley*, Bible, Reader-response.

## RESUMO

Em *Jane Eyre* e *Shirley*, de Charlotte Brontë, um leitor atento é capaz de encontrar mais do que os olhos podem ver. Enquanto qualquer leitor contemporâneo lê as histórias e se diverte – ou não, o leitor que o fez na época de suas primeiras publicações, que estava habituado a ler grandes obras, iria realmente apreciá-las ao interagir com o texto e compreender suas relações intertextuais com obras literárias como a Bíblia. Reconhecer o diálogo entre *Jane Eyre* e *Shirley* com outras obras literárias, sobretudo a Bíblia, habilita o leitor, entre outras coisas, a fazer suposições a respeito do futuro das personagens. Tal leitura tem estado perdida devido à falta de conhecimento Bíblico por parte da maioria dos leitores contemporâneos. Neste sentido, meu trabalho pretende analisar *Jane Eyre* e *Shirley*, comparando seus enredos e a forma com que confirmam ou frustram as expectativas do leitor com respeito ao futuro daquelas personagens tendo como referência os relatos das Escrituras. Além de analisar os romances, no entanto, proponho uma discussão sobre os tipos de leitores que poderiam ler e apreciá-los. Igualmente, traço o cenário religioso no qual eles foram escritos, a fim de ver as alusões Bíblicas através das lentes do leitor histórico, compreendendo as previsões que ele ou ela poderiam fazer, para observar se as alusões confirmam ou negam o texto Bíblico.

Palavras-chave: Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley*, Bíblia, Estética da recepção.

What has happened before will happen again. What has been done before will be done again. There is nothing new in the whole world. (*Good News Translation*, Ecc. 1.9)

## INTRODUCTION

Among the many nineteenth-century English literature writers who happened to allude to the Bible in their works, there is a woman writer who seems to admit more Biblical references in her novels than the average number: Charlotte Brontë. Daughter of the Anglican clergyman Patrick Brontë, author of poems, novellas and novels, Brontë should receive greater attention than she does now owing to the unusual number of Biblical references and their significance in her work. In her four novels an attentive reader is able to identify over 450 Biblical quotations and allusions against, for example, her sisters Anne's 130 and Emily's 14<sup>1</sup>. Such a remarkable number ought to have a meaning and deserves to be deeply analyzed.

Regardless of how many the allusions are, critics have focused on subjects such as how the sense of Christian duty either restricts Charlotte Brontë's characters or makes them suffer like Christ did; or how her narratives sound like a pilgrimage or present apocalyptic motifs; or even how the presence of Pauline theology in her novels is substantial<sup>2</sup>. The fact is that Brontë's work has not been deeply explored when it comes to the analysis of these allusions' effect on the reading, specifically their signification as a whole and their individual importance to the story itself, namely, their foreshadowing effect.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the Clarendon editions of novels by the Brontë sisters. (Jenkins 12; Wang, "The Holy Spirit in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights and Poetry*", 1).

<sup>2</sup> These themes can be observed in some works by Simon Marsden, Kevin Mills, Mary Schwingen, and Lisa Wang, for example.

Therefore, the object to be studied here is the incidence of Biblical allusions and its prediction-effect in two of Charlotte Brontë's novels: *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Shirley* (1849). The choice of these specific novels considers their completeness to develop an argument on what is being proposed. As for *Jane Eyre*, it has been her most celebrated and criticized work, and the foreshadowing allusions in it seem to be more evident than in her other works, making it clearer for the reader to recognize them in his or her reading. To bring a contrast to *Jane Eyre* among Brontë's novels, *Shirley* was chosen owing mainly to its completely opposing esthetical project and silent reception. Analyzing *Villette* (1853) or *The Professor* (1857) would have been just as motivating as it is with *Jane Eyre*, but it simply would not provoke the same contrast that *Shirley* does. However, such difference does not influence the number of allusions in any of them. The prediction effect these allusions elicit I name "Prophetic Reading" as a reference to the Old Testament prophets, who were exceptional readers or interpreters of the time and politico-cultural environment they lived. The Biblical allusions transform the reader into a kind of "prophet" or interpreter of cultural and linguistic signs.

This topic was chosen firstly because it has not been deeply explored yet, particularly in Brazil. Various critics have mentioned it, such as Marit Fimland, Linda Freedman, Mark Knight and Emma Mason, Simon Mardsen and Kevin Mills. However, deeper analyses are rare; in fact, I have found only two critics dealing more or less with a similar theme to mine.

In her dissertation, Lisa Wang deals with the three Brontë sisters and their seven novels, plus some poems, commenting on their use of allusions, providing a full list of these<sup>3</sup>. She also discusses Charlotte Brontë's incorporation of theology into narrative

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<sup>3</sup> Lisa Wang, "The Use of Theological Discourse in the Novels of the Brontë Sisters", unpublished dissertation, Birkbeck College, 1998.

fiction, proposing the study of typology in the Brontë sisters' work. When analyzing Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*, for instance, Wang assays the use of theological discourse within an eschatological vision. In her article "Unveiling the Hidden God in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*", which is a chapter from her dissertation, Wang defends that

*Villette* constructs a framework of specific theological reference primarily through the appropriation of certain Biblical tropes and topoi associated with concepts of the 'end'. (...) Yet the presence of such discourse in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* is far more than simply a matter of convenience or convention. It represents a pointed and effective means of working towards the infusion of real theological content into the novel as a whole. (342-343).

Wang, in her article "The Holy Spirit in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and Poetry", which is also a chapter from her dissertation, explains that, once the reader understands the religious discourse in Emily Brontë's poetry, it becomes easier to recognize her emphasis on "the primal nature of religious experience over and above its formal expressions" (160). In this sense, each analysis on each novel introduces a new theological perspective on them. Thus, the extent of what Wang adds to literary criticism concerning the Brontë sisters is superior to what most works have added before her.

Still, although broad – for she deals with three authors and seven novels – and deep in its main concern, Wang's perspective does not (and does not mean to) embrace what Keith Allen Jenkins writes in his thesis, *The Influence of Anxiety: Bricolage Brontë Style*, which he later turned into a book (*Charlotte Brontë's Atypical Typology*, 2010). Jenkins' work is on gender reversal in the Biblical allusions found in Charlotte

Brontë's four novels. He explains: "She subverts traditional Christian interpretations of the Bible, virtually rewriting many familiar passages to suit her own personal and literary purposes" (*The Influence* 2). Jenkins seeks to answer two questions: What motivated Brontë's rewriting of Biblical material and what she saw as her authority for doing so. He also discusses typology in her work, understanding this term, very roughly speaking, as a mode of interpretation in which a literary work contains symbols from the Bible. The *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines Typology as being

a system of interpretation applied by early Christian theologians to the Hebrew scriptures (the 'Old Testament'), by which certain events, images, and personages of pre-Christian legend could be understood as prophetic 'types' or 'figures' foreshadowing the life of Christ. Typology – literally the study of types – is thus a method of re-reading the Old Testament anachronistically in terms of the New Testament, so that Adam, Isaac, Jonah, and other characters are pre-figurings of Christ, the Tree of Knowledge in Eden is a type of the Cross, and so on. (...). ("Typology")

In this sense, such typology would have been invariably and deliberately designed to be there and suit the author's intentions. Whereas Jenkins speculates about the causes, I, on the other hand, consider the consequences. Although I am not positioning myself as a reader or critic who will retrieve something that has been lost, as an anthropologist would, regardless of the approach, the nature of the material Brontë employs in her novels must be clarified. In his book's introduction, Jenkins elucidates such nature of the employed material. They are:

1. specific characters (e.g. Adam or Eve),

2. specific events (e.g. the Exodus or the Crucifixion),
3. specific biblical locales (e.g. Garden of Eden or Egypt) and general biblical landscapes (e.g. Wilderness or Promised Land),
4. biblical stories as “narrative” (e.g. Noah’s ark or Nathan’s parable of the one ewe lamb), and
5. recognizable biblical objects disconnected from any narrative framework (e.g. the tabernacle or manna).

Brontë’s novels also contain numerous instances in which

6. biblical character roles or bits of narrative are recognizable in the fiction, but with no overt allusions (e.g. Jane’s passion experience as she leaves Thornfield and journeys to Marsh End). (*Atypical Typology* 15)

While considering the consequences of such Biblical phraseology, the allusions which interest me most are those which compare her characters to Biblical ones and tend to create in the reader expectations about the plot. These allusions are presented in the form of metaphors, allegories or paraphrases, allegory being understood as, according to the *Sterling Dictionary of Literary Terms*:

a passing and brief reference, often indirect to a person, event or condition presumed to be familiar to the reader . . . These allusions may be topical, personal, biblical, imitative or even structural . . . The intention and purpose behind allusions is to widen the meaning of a statement by associating it with wider experience and knowledge. (“Allegory”)

Meyer Howard Abrams adds that allegory is also

a narrative in which the agents and actions, and sometimes the setting as well, are contrived by the author to make coherent sense on the “literal”, or

primary, level of signification, and at the same time to signify a second, correlated order of signification. (5)

It is important to stress that allegories necessarily *widen the meaning of a statement by associating it with wider experience and knowledge*, while a paraphrase would be “A brief restatement in one’s own words of all or part of a literary or critical work, as opposed to quotation, in which one reproduces all or part of a literary or critical work word-for-word, exactly” (Wheeler). Indeed, what can be observed in the allusions and paraphrases found throughout Brontë’s work is that they wear the meaning of a character or situation as the reader sees what is behind the allusion, constructing his or her own signification out of the comparison. Yet, they are *presumed* to be familiar to the reader; otherwise, the allusions would not be understood.

Aiming to understand the effect of the allusions through allegories or paraphrases, I observe their result and, so far, the results have shown that the comparisons made through the allusions tend to give the reader a broader view of the story. Having the possibility of comparing characters and situations of Charlotte Brontë’s novels to Biblical ones, the reader is able to enrich his or her knowledge about the story.

Thus, when we read Brontë’s novels, we see that they do present a structure, symbols, language, ideas and characters similar to those found in the Bible in a way that a person with Biblical knowledge – that is, most literate people in the nineteenth-century England – would make use of typology and be able to read between the lines, recognizing either Jacob, or David, or even Jesus in Jane Eyre, being able to know this character better and guess her personality, predict her actions and perhaps her ending. Sometimes these predictions are confirmed, at other times they are intentionally frustrated as if to rewrite the story. Despite the outcome, Steven Marx says that repetitions of plot or

images create a sense of *déjà vu*, or *déjà lu*, and premonition, “hinting that discreet events have some greater symbolic significance” (164). The *Sterling Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines *Déjà vu* as a French phrase meaning ‘something already seen’, or even a situation which seems as if ‘already been in.’ One can also use the term as *déjà entendu* (already heard) or *déjà lu* (already read), depending on the circumstance.

Another reason for Brontë’s work to remind the reader of the Bible so much is that the Biblical allusions reaffirm what many authors have said about Brontë’s work: they look like a story from the Bible. Stories in the Bible are self-referencial, that is, they usually quote the Bible itself. Such is the case in the books of Joshua, Psalms, Isaiah, the Gospels and many others. Her novels also sound like a Biblical story, for they contain features common to the Bible: flawed protagonists (either ugly, or weak, or eventually wicked); suffering and recompense; crime and punishment; unhappy outcomings inside the plot; and a pilgrimage. Her novels also resemble the Old and New Testament in the way the stories are constructed, that is, the second half seems to respond or to address many of the questions raised in the first. Accordingly, her novels sound perfectly as a speech from Paul or Jesus – real examples of speeches which quote the Bible naturally and deliberately.

Northrop Frye’s Structuralist analysis of the Biblical narrative, *The Great Code: the Bible and Literature*, claims the existence of four categories in the Bible which have exercised influence on Western literature structure. They are language, myth (plot, narrative), metaphor and typology, the latter being the most influential.

Frye also argues that the Biblical narrative follows the typically comical “U-Shaped plot”, as commented by Steven Marx in “Northrop Frye’s Bible”. What characterizes this shape is a harmonious beginning followed by a fall into an extensive swinging of failures and accomplishments, ending up with one last rise back to an

everlasting harmony. Inside the main plot there is a handful of minor plots, independent stories collected together, with falls and rises, such as the stories of Moses, Esther, or David, each of them working as a suggestion or a representation in advance of the Biblical narrative as a whole and its central story. Frye also notices a repetition of images, numbers, symbols, namely, the image of the tree, or the number forty. These repetitions of plot and symbols (typology) create the already mentioned sense of *déjà vu* and predictability noticeable in the Bible as well as in other narratives which follow the U-shape, such as Charlotte Brontë's novels. As Vincent Leitch writes about Poststructuralism, "every text is an intertext that borrows, knowingly or not, from the immense archive of previous culture" (21); and such is the case with Brontë, among others.

Although it is widely known that the three main critics who discuss literature and Bible are Northrop Frye, Harold Bloom and C. S. Lewis, criticism by the latter two have little to contribute to this particular research. Bloom's most famous works on literary criticism related to the Bible are *The Book of J* (1990) and *Jesus and Yahweh: The Names Divine* (2005), both of them dealing with Biblical historical interpretation. *The Book of J* works with the Pentateuch – the first five books of the Bible – and suggests that its authors did not intend to write a dogmatically religious manuscript. In *Jesus and Yahweh*, Bloom focuses on the characters who named his book and their being no more than literary characters only.

Bloom's *A Map of Misreading*, as well as his *The Anxiety of Influence*, on the other side, addresses an issue already studied in Jenkins, that of the influence literature has upon itself. Bloom says in his introduction to *A Map of Misreading*: "Influence, as I conceive it, means that there are *no* texts, but only relationships *between* texts" (3). Surely, Bloom's thesis concerning influence applies to Brontë and adds to Frye's

analysis. However, again, my aim is different from Jenkins', whose research studies the causes for the influence Brontë received along her life rather than its consequences. Thus, a particularly Bloomian analysis is excused.

The Christian apologist C. S. Lewis also writes about literary criticism, such as in *The Discarded Image* (1964) and *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama* (1973). His *An Experiment in Criticism* (1961) would be closer to any possible contribution to this research, for it has the reasoning of Reader Response criticism. Its main thesis is that books should not be judged according to what is written in them, but rather according to how they have been read. Yet, the discussion it brings forward does not add to the specific content of this work, hence neither Bloom nor Lewis are used to support it.

It is worth remembering that while the usual occurrence of similarities with the Scriptures in Brontë's work may be clear for the historical reader, that is "the one who actually reads the text at the time of its publication" (Leitch 18), for others, who lack Biblical knowledge, perhaps it is not so much. In the film *Shakespeare in Love*, for example, there are many allusions to *Romeo and Juliet* and *Twelfth Night*. One can always enjoy the film without knowing those two Shakespearean works, but it certainly deepens one's experience of the film to identify the echoes<sup>4</sup>. Likewise, one can enjoy Brontë's novels without knowing the Biblical references, but they definitely expand one's understanding of the books once the echoes are identified. In order to exemplify how poorly explored Victorian works have been due to the readers' lack of Biblical knowledge, George Landow affirms:

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<sup>4</sup> Example taken from Mako A. Nagasawa's article *How to Study Biblical Narrative* (2002).

Although it is a commonplace that we have lost the intimate knowledge of the Bible that characterized literate people of the last century, we have yet to perceive the full implications of our loss. . . . When we modern readers fail to recognize allusions [to the Bible] . . . we deprive many Victorian works of a large part of their context . . . we under-read and misread many works, and the danger is that the greater the work, the more our ignorance will distort and inevitably reduce it. (*Victorian Types* 3)

Thus, the reasons for the choice of the theme of this research I undertake are the lack of analyses on this subject, and the deficient appreciation of Brontë's work, caused precisely by such negligence.

This investigation points to a more interactive reading once the reader is expected to recognize the Biblical pattern in Brontë's novels and anticipate a certain behavior towards the characters and their outcomes. The reader at stake is the historical reader, which, in this case, is also considered the ideal and the implied reader as well, "who knows everything necessary to make sense of [the work]" (Leitch 18) and indeed does. The twenty-first century average reader is not expected to recognize these allusions and, thus, not likely to interpret them. Therefore, much of the meaning has been veiled and its significance is considerably compromised. Given this fact, Umberto Eco's *The Role of the Reader* and *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* will assist my building a solid foundation for the study of the allusions from a contemporary perspective. Both texts deal with how the reader must address the text. Eco says it is "absolutely impossible to speak apropos of the anaphorical role of an expression without invoking, if a not a precise and empirical reader, at least the 'addressee' as an abstract and constitutive element in the process of actualization of a text" (*The Role of*

*the Reader*, 4). That is, Brontë's novels are intended to a specific reader, so that its specific message can be decodified. Eco adds that

[t]he existence of various codes and subcodes, the variety of sociocultural circumstances in which a message is emitted (where the codes of the addressee can be different from those of the sender), and the rate of initiative displayed by the addressee in making presuppositions and abductions – all result in making a message. (5)

The already mentioned problem is that the implied message conveyed in Brontë's work through Biblical allusions has not been properly understood by the contemporary reader.

Both George Landow in his *Victorian Types, Victorian Shadows: Biblical Typology in Victorian Literature, Art and Thought* and Mark Knight and Emma Mason in their *Nineteenth-Century Religion and Literature*, describe the Biblical influence over Victorian works. Their books demonstrate the society that built the Victorian reader and will be used to confirm that a nineteenth-century average reader is better prepared to analyze Brontë's novels and foresee her character's path than our contemporary reader. Umberto Eco's discussion on *The Role of the Reader* introduces the issue of the expected reader, regardless the time of reading. The reader is expected to interpret the message of a text, for "you cannot use the text as you want, but only as the text wants you to use it" (Eco, *The Role of the Reader* 9), that is, not any reading can be made out of a text. In Brontë's case, there are plenty of possible readings, but this Biblical one is lost and deserves to be found.

Besides providing this dissertation with context, that is, a panorama of the nineteenth-century religious influence in literature, it is important to identify the

historical factors which made my objects of study, *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley*, to present such an enormous amount of Biblical material. For that reason, it becomes imperative to mention the most important religious events of the period, once they may have influenced in smaller or greater degrees, the scenario in which *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley* were produced. Knight and Mason explain that narrowing down the whole nineteenth-century to a single Christian belief-system does not help understanding the period's literature, for it is partly due to the differences that its literature can be better understood. One has to see through the movements as they developed in society. They say:

Tensions between religion and other cultural forces are evident throughout the nineteenth century, as between different religious belief systems: to ignore this and argue for an all-purpose definition of religion risks homogenizing and caricaturing beliefs. (3)

Therefore, it is necessary to pass over the dissenting groups and counter-movements of that period. The analysis of a Victorian work demands a religious perspective so that the reader can contextualize the work, the passions and the thoughts of that people in his or her mind. After all, as Robert Lee Wolff says in his *Gains and Losses: Novels of Faith and Doubt in Victorian England*, "of all the subjects that interested Victorians, and therefore preoccupied their novelists, none . . . held their attention as much as religion. And of all the subjects none is more obscure to the modern readers" (2).

All the Biblical allusions Charlotte Brontë uses as literary devices evidence the complexity of her work; they provide a different reading, richer in content and density. The relevance of this topic lies on the opening of new possibilities for the analysis both

of Brontë's works and of several other works dealing with Biblical allusions. This dissertation will provide literary studies in Brazil with a deeper knowledge about the roles of religion in literature, especially Christianity.

CHAPTER ONE – LITERATURE, CHRISTIANITY, AND THE READER IN  
EVIDENCE IN *JANE EYRE* AND *SHIRLEY*

1.1 A Fellowship to Remember: Christianity and Literature in the Nineteenth Century

His voice goes out into all the earth, his  
words to the ends of the world. (Ps. 19.4)

This chapter starts with an allusion to Psalm 19.4, which reads that God’s words would be spread, eventually reaching all peoples, all nations. There are at least seven other references to the fact that what is written down in the Scriptures should be spread all over (Matt. 24.14; Acts 1.8; Rom. 1.8, 10.18; Col. 1.6,23; 1 Thess. 1.8). What the text does not mention are the means to achieve such an ambitious feat. It is clear to us now, however, that whether intentionally or not, the so-called words of God have been spread by diverse means, including by and in Western literature. It could not have been otherwise, for ever since there has been literature, whatever is most ordinary and intrinsically connected to society has been mirrored on it – that is a generally recognized fact.

As one of the main cultural aspects of any society, religion has been constantly mentioned and vastly criticized in literary works. From the Homeric verses, which are “pervaded with the religious atmosphere of wonder, of obedience to the eternal, and of the recognition of the interest of the gods in human affairs” (Thwing, pt. 1), to

contemporary literature, the whole existent literature contains, in smaller or greater amounts, religious traits. In “Religion and Literature”, Charles Thwing discusses their similar interests:

Religion and literature spring from the same fundamental sources. Religion is the relation which man bears to ultimate Being. It is concerned with the substance which lies behind phenomena, and also with the duty which man owes to this Being, universal and eternal. It is concerned, too, with the questions what, whence, whither. Literature, in its final analysis, represents the same fundamental relationship: it seeks to explain, to justify, to reconcile, to interpret, and even to comfort and to console. (pt. 1)

Thus, what literature and religion share lies on their very basis and essence, thereby making it almost impossible to work with either one separately from the other.

Thwing also explains how religion has influenced literature by pointing out the significance it held from Greek literature to today’s works. Mentioning Homer, Vergil, Lucretius, and non-Christian mythology, Thwing affirms that literature has always dealt with issues concerning a Divine Providence, the belief in the eternal, the inevitableness of penalty and the assurance of reward, in addition to the characteristic religious mystery and submission. Besides, as Stephen Greenblatt affirms, “Literature is conceived to mirror the period’s beliefs, but to mirror them, as it were, from a safe distance” (2254).

In the nineteenth century, despite the instability of the religious scenario, religion became<sup>5</sup> part of public and everyday life, and categorizing its influence over literature becomes problematical. Josef L. Altholz, in “The Warfare of Conscience with Theology,” points out that more than any other potentially influencing factor, religion occupied a prominent place in public consciousness and had a central role in the intellectual life of the time. Louis James, in *The Victorian Novel*, supports this assertion by affirming that “Religious issues underpin the Victorian novel, implicated in its concern with moral choice, its attitudes to scientific knowledge, to the childhood and family, to life and death, and its reverence for beauty” (50). Jonathan Culler, in his *Literary Theory: a very short introduction*, goes further by claiming that literature worked as a replacement for religion, such was its influence:

In nineteenth-century England, literature emerged as an extremely important idea, a special kind of writing charged with several functions. Made a subject of instruction in the colonies of the British Empire, it was charged with giving the natives an appreciation of the greatness of England and engaging them as grateful participants in a historic civilizing enterprise. At home it would counter the selfishness and materialism fostered by the new capitalist economy, offering the middle classes and the aristocrats alternative values and giving the workers a stake in the culture that, materially, relegated them to a subordinate position. It would at once teach disinterested appreciation, provide a sense of national greatness, create fellow-feeling among the classes, and ultimately, function as a replacement for religion, which seemed no longer to be able to hold society together. (35-36)

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<sup>5</sup> From Middle Age, religion was already part of public and everyday life. Except that, because of the advent of press and a higher literacy rate in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, only then religion and literature did become popular – even among the masses.

Religious variety, mainly in what concerns Christianity, led to the formation of several branches of the same religion, as a way to fit the diversity of the people itself. Mark Knight and Emma Mason, in *Nineteenth-Century Religion and Literature*, argue that “Christianity in particular interrogated and reconstructed itself over and over . . . stirred by new approaches to Scripture, doctrine, and the structure of the Church and its community” (7).

To fully understand the Biblical allusions in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley*, it is crucial to reflect on Christianity – and not on other religious expressions – in the context of 19<sup>th</sup> century England. Knight and Mason remark that “despite the import of non-Christian religions in the period, notably Judaism and Islam, Britain was predominantly a Christian culture” (3). Louis James further points out that a considerable share of Victorian novels was openly drawn to faith issues. He allocated two chapters in his book to discuss “Religion and Morals” and “Religious Novels”, as he calls them. James mentions Elizabeth Jay’s *The Religion of the Heart*, which notes that along the nineteenth century the percentage of religious works published only increased, and he comments: “Even non-believers like George Eliot and Thomas Hardy explore issues of faith, and as theological certainties were challenged by social science and the implications of evolution, scientific belief itself assumed a quasi-religious authority” (210). James, along with Knight and Mason, alludes to each of the religious movements of the century and the works influenced by them.

Considering that there were plenty of different traditions in nineteenth-century Christianity, Knight and Mason add that these traditions “sought God in different places, from the realm of feeling to the realm of rational thought, from conservative to radical politics, and from practical action through doctrinal purity to the realm of aesthetics” (4). That is, different works of literature would present different views of

doctrine according to the tradition it followed. Willingly or not, one's actions, writings, thoughts, the way one presents a certain point of view, all express one's belief. Knight and Mason's analysis, as they themselves defend, does not seek to lock any writer or work into a particular belief-system or religious ideology; they make it clear they are not "concerned to shut down what Christianity signifies, either doctrinally or culturally" (Knight and Mason 10), the choice for a Christian-centered analysis is the acknowledgment of a fact.

Another issue to consider in the scenario in which *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley* were produced is the variety of historical events connected to religion which marked the nineteenth century. According to Peter Bolt, such religious context allowed Brontë to weave in her narratives a complex web of ethical and moral values which hid her deep religious knowledge and her strong Christian principles. It is not different with *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley*: the evangelical discourse in them is clear, even if criticized rather than praised. However, it does not necessarily mean this discourse is found in the Biblical allusions. Evangelical traces can be found in dialogues, descriptions of characters or a tendentious narration. The rewriting of Biblical material, as it will be discussed in the next chapter, is the resource rather than tool used to stay away from the given and let readers think for themselves.

When analyzing a Biblical reference in any literary work, it is worth remembering that the very same Bible has been interpreted over the last 2,000 years by "a Church that is diverse and frequently in disagreement as to what the Biblical narratives mean" (Knight and Mason 5). When a writer includes a Biblical allusion in his or her work, it can but does not necessarily mean this writer is in agreement with any movement's interpretation of that specific passage. It does not even mean that he or she even thought about its interpretation. In the case of this analysis of Biblical allusions

in Brontë's works, what they mean inside the movement's perspectives is not as relevant as their plain existence. That is, the allusions' association to the movements is important and they must be thus interpreted, without, however, losing sight of their main function in this analysis, that is, their agreement and cooperation with their prophetic reading found in *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley*.

Many of the nineteenth-century English writers did use religion in their texts to the end of "employing or reinscribing Christian ideas and doctrines to comment on contemporary issues" (Knight and Mason 8). It is not at all difficult to understand this behavior for, as declared in *Radical Christianity* by the theologian Christopher Rowland, Christianity contains a message of hope in a better future and eternal life. In this sense, Rowland further argues, the Christian message unveils social and cultural conditions and offers an "eschatological expectation of how society might be in the future" (Knight and Mason 7). There might be Biblical allusions which work as critiques of social and religious issues in Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley*; however, a deeper analysis on such subject would digress from this study's original purpose. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that using the Bible to criticize society and religion itself was and still is a common practice.

To mention one of the most appreciated writers of that century, William Blake's works, for instance, may be regarded through several religious lenses; but above all the movements' doctrines one could possibly find in his works, they remain "prophetic, apocalyptic, homiletic, and poetic, assuming an art form which consistently makes reference to, and is invested in, a body of belief represented by Jesus Christ" (Knight and Mason 10). That is to say, whichever movement he favored, whichever doctrine he followed, he followed Jesus beyond them all. Knight and Mason explain:

Jesus is an artist for Blake because he creatively imagines ways of compassionately responding to human suffering: debates which lie outside of the redemption of humanity are simply not 'Christian' for him. As Blake declares at the start of *A Vision of the Last Judgment* (1810): 'The Last Judgment when all those are Cast away who trouble Religion with Questions concerning Good & Evil or Eating of the Tree of those Knowledges or Reasonings which hinder the Vision of God.' Those who seek to muddy God's redemptive Christian vision by reducing it to moral dichotomies or fixed laws, Blake suggests, are guilty of reasoning it away or paralyzing its meaning. (10)

In any case, in different proportions, the influence of the main religious movements in the nineteenth-century English literature is undeniable. Knight and Mason, in their first chapter, delineate to what extent the earliest of these influences, the Dissent culture, dominated the eighteenth century. The Dissent rejected "ceremonial ritual and orderly worship for a public and spontaneous form of communal prayer marked by express intimacy with God" (Knight and Mason 11). Knight and Mason clarify the intense force of the Evangelical Revival, responsible for the expansion of Christianity as well as for a new particular lyric to be observed later on, after being reformulated by the Romantics. Writers who were thus persuaded and endorsed the Dissent movement were Anna Barbauld and Joseph Priestley, who would call it a movement "able to re-sensitize the emergent Enlightenment Christian, in order that he or she approach God with his or her heart, rather than head" (Knight and Mason 11). The chapter calls attention to the innovations brought by Isaac Watts and John Wesley, the unconventional and nonconformist writing of Smart and Blake, and the passionate religious writing of Hannah More and Emily Brontë.

In turn, Unitarianism, a branch of Dissent, found its roots in liberal capitalism and rationalism, as well as in the Enlightenment culture. The Unitarians, who were, in their majority, middle-class believers, “denied the divinity of Christ, the existence of ‘mythical’ realms like heaven and hell, and those doctrines difficult to discuss empirically, such as the Immaculate Conception and the Resurrection” (Knight and Mason 11). The massive value attributed to the Trinity by other Christians kept the Unitarians away. Also, their major concerns embraced secular issues such as education, women’s rights, and the poor; their influence can be observed predominantly in the works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Richard Price, Felicia Hemans, Elizabeth Gaskell, Wordsworth and Coleridge, as Knight and Mason explain. Unitarian works are marked by “the loss of mysterious or revelatory elements of faith” (Knight and Mason 12).

Mark Jackson, in “Spiritual Revelation in *Jane Eyre*”, affirms that in the nineteenth century, at the time of Tennyson and Brontë, the Evangelical Protestants were “a minority party of the Church of England but a dominant force in English life between 1789 to 1850.” The Evangelicals were a group that was often deeply hostile to the Oxford Movement, which will be commented on later. Still, they crossed denominational boundaries which included those between the Dissent and the Established Church.

Starting in 1730 by the “Low Church”, the Evangelical Movement preached the necessity of a personal salvation, the maximum authority of the Bible, emphasis in the Gospels and death and resurrection of Christ. Such aspects, even if more emphasized in the eighteenth century, are still present in the doctrine found in the works of Brontë, for example, one century later. It is found in *Jane Eyre*, through the praised character of Helen Burns and her discourse, mainly in her ultimate speech. The fact that its main features are too extensive – called a “diversity of theological perspective” by Knight

and Mason – complicates the classification of Evangelical-oriented works. More often than not Evangelical Protestants were defined by what they were not: they were *not* Catholic, they were *not* Broad Church. Evangelical writers seemed worried with conversion mainly, as it is the case in Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna’s works. Knight and Mason see and discuss Evangelicalism in many novels, namely *David Copperfield*, *The Moonstone*, *Bleak House*, *Middlemarch* and *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*.

As Laura DeVere explains, in “Evangelicalism at Lowood”, the Brontë sisters were also influenced by the Low Church, but approaching another issue; they would attack the repressive aspect of Evangelicalism, as it happens in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* in relation to Mr. Brocklehurst and Lowood, and in *Shirley* with all the curates. James, writing about the huge religious influence over the Brontë sister, explains the impossibility of their being otherwise, and their own realization of this fact:

novelists like the Brontë sisters, brought up in the isolation of Haworth rectory, their early lives dominated by both their Anglican father and their Wesleyan Methodist Aunt Branwell, who brought with her a complete file of *The Methodist Magazine*. Charlotte Brontë in *Shirley* described this reading as ‘mad . . . full of miracles and apparitions, of preternatural warnings, ominous dreams, and frenzied fanaticisms’.” Emily would use much of this Methodist influence in Heathcliff’s passionate speech, for instance. (52)

In 1833, with the beginning of the Oxford Movement, or Tractarianism, by the “High Church”, society started to appreciate the ritualistic tradition as well as spirituality. Its main concern was with the stagnated and sleeping Church and it encouraged its spiritual revival reinforcing tradition and the Catholic Church’s original

lineage. In order to reach the intended revival, there was an exaggerated ostentation concerning tradition, which leads to another extreme, Ritualism, typical of the second phase of the Oxford Movement. As the name itself defines, Ritualism sought to regain the beauty of ancient liturgy, not only in the service order, but also in music and clothing. According to Glenn Everett and George Landow (2007), the Oxford Movement

added a conservative option to the lively atmosphere of Victorian religious debate. The Victorians who abhorred the atheism of the Utilitarians and the agnosticism of the scientists, were put off by the enthusiasm of the Evangelicals, found the Broad Church too latitudinarian to have any meaning left to its doctrine, and yet could not stomach going over to Rome, found these High Church Anglicans a perfect conservative solution.

The Oxford Movement was mainly interested in the historical past, influencing Gothic and biographical novels as *Hawkstone*, by William Sewell. Tractarians also had a major influence on literature due to their concern with aesthetics, winning writers from Wordsworth to Walter Pater, Christina Rossetti and Gerard Manley Hopkins, as well as Charlotte Yonge (Knight and Mason 12). They would proscribe, as Knight and Mason write,

those literary methodologies they regarded as most suitable for communicating with God. Keble's *Lectures on Poetry* (1832–41) read like a manifesto designed to educate the reader in religious poetics while teaching him or her how to respond to it correctly. (12)

Furthermore, some poets, such as Keble, Isaac Williams and Frederick Faber, intended to teach Christians how to write poetry, and that because poetry was considered to “reliev[e] readers from the troubles of an anxious world and lead them back to God” (Knight and Mason 12).

Secularization cannot be left unattended. Somehow the second half of the nineteenth century, although not unreligious, managed to divert from a more committed Christianity to other kinds of belief which allowed for ghost stories, for instance, as observed in Charles Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol*. There were then so many theological differences; some Christians sought God in the Gospels, others in liturgical tradition, or in the world beyond, or even in the here and now. The growth of the city contributed to the widening of disparities among Christians, for while some regarded it negatively, others saw it as the opportunity to “restore a prophetic role to the Church, one that took seriously the call found in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7) for the people of God to be salt and light” (Knight and Mason 13). Thus, in the late nineteenth century literature started to present “debates about blasphemy and freethinking”, as Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure*, which, despite everything, reminds its reader “of the rewriting that is intrinsic to the Christian tradition” (Knight and Mason 13).

Late nineteenth-century writers come up with all sorts of associations, from Catholicism to Mysticism. Among the great names are J. K. Huysmans, Oscar Wilde, Bram Stoker, Michael Field (the pseudonym of Edith Cooper and Katherine Bradley), Alice Meynell, Marie Corelli, W. B. Yeats and G. K. Chesterton. Charlotte Brontë died before that, in 1855. However, she certainly felt the changes coming, though she may not have suffered its consequence so intensely.

Such unstable scenario was actually used as source of inspiration to the creative minds. James says:

Religious institutions and clergy were a 'godsend' for the novelist looking for material . . . The hierarchies and customs of church and chapel provided a microcosm of wider society in Trollope's *Barchester Chronicles* and provided a background for Mrs. Oliphant's *Chronicles of Carlingford*. In general, clergy and ministers come off poorly in Victorian fiction. Evangelical clergy, who emphasized personal holiness and an inward conviction of salvation, were particularly vulnerable to attack. (50)

It becomes, thus, impossible to escape from Christianity in literature, particularly in nineteenth-century English literature. Once a scholar is committed to study the literary field of such period, he or she must inevitably step into religion, for "While a large sub-genre of the Victorian novel was devoted to Christian topics, it is hard to read far in this fiction without encountering religious issues" (James 212) because, as it has been demonstrated, religious consciousness had an impact in the whole Victorian fiction (James 51-52).

*Jane Eyre* and *Shirley* are no exception. Charlotte Brontë manages to fill her novels with insinuations, hints of Biblical passages, suggestions of a critical thinking concerning the Christianity in which she was inserted. On the one hand, Brontë uses a typically Evangelical system called Typology which related Old Testament figures to New Testament ones. Also, her heroines do seem in agreement with what Evangelical discourse preaches, since they would rather follow Christ's commands and nurture a relationship with God than focus on their Church attendance, for instance. On the other

hand, Brontë draws Jane to abhor the hypocrite Evangelical institution where she was brought up, the Evangelical Mr. Brocklehurst, and other Evangelical figures along the novel, for example. Thus, religious influence in Brontë's novels is not to be definitive, but rather relative. That is, one cannot define her writings as either black or white, for it looks rather gray, now defending and later complaining about some religious aspect. This feature points to the need of alternative ways to analyze the Biblical material in her work that add to the historical analysis. The following section proposes the analysis of the effect of predictions made out of Biblical allusions – the prophetic reading – which may be of help.

## 1.2 The Supposed Reader

Therefore my people will go into exile  
for lack of understanding (*New  
International Version*, Isa. 5.13)

My people are destroyed for lack of  
knowledge. (*Good News Translation*,  
Hos. 4.6a)

How wrong you are! It is because you do not know the Scriptures or God's power.

(*Good News Translation*, Matt. 22.29)

Regarding its utmost objective, the reading of any sort of text, whether for academic purposes or pleasure, aims at fully understanding the text's main message. In what concerns the text, it is an unchanging element of the reading process. And why is that it seems to change from one reading to another? The text does not change. What changes is the reading, that is, what takes place within the reader's mind. Jane Tompkins, in her introduction to *Reader-response Criticism: from Formalist to Post-Structuralism*, discusses various approaches to Reader-response criticism, namely New Criticism, structuralism, phenomenology, psychoanalysis, and deconstruction. She quotes Stanley Fish, who says that "the place where sense is made or not is the reader's mind rather than the printed page or the space between the covers of a book" (qtd. in Tompkins xvii). Fish is quite correct in his statement, for all interpretation is born first in the mind of the reader. However, it drives the attempt to make an accurate analysis to a dead end.

The task of criticizing literature becomes extra difficult when the reader's experience is taken as the source of all meaning. The analysis becomes strenuous, problematical, and never the same from one reading to the next. Therefore, the source of all meaning should not be placed on the reader alone. When it comes to the interpretation of a text, there must be what Umberto Eco, drinking from Charles S. Peirce's semiology, calls an interpretative cooperation (*Lector in Fabula*, 1979). Herbert Grabes explains:

A sign is not to be considered as, or rather in the image of, a thing transferred to the receiver's mind: it can only make sense through the creation of another sign, which Peirce names "interpretant". The sign originally produced is thus "translated", to take its place "within another system of signs," entering into "a process of unlimited semiosis," with a potentially indefinite number of connections. Of course, this translation is not a random operation. The connections actually activated within the receiving mind are determined, or at least directed, by the nature of the original sign. (317)

To be precise, the text cooperates with the reader and the reader cooperates with the text in order to reach a final – not conclusive – interpretation. One thing is to share the participation in the interpretative process; a whole other thing is to condition it all to the disposition of the reader.

Jane Tompkins explains that interpretation is constructed; it is built by the effect of the reading. This effect leads interpretation and, although it is not to be taken as the one or most important source of meaning, the reader's response can never be "left out of account" (xiii) when the meaning of a text is to be portrayed accurately. She says:

a poem cannot be understood apart from its results. Its 'effects', psychological and otherwise, are essential to any accurate description of its meaning, since that meaning has no effective existence outside of its realization in the mind of a reader. (Tompkins ix)

Also, Tompkins believes it to be mandatory, one of the literary text's innate demands, that it must "be conceived in such a way that it will engage the reader's imagination in the task of working things out for himself" (51). The text must stimulate

the reader to supply what is not there, in a way that the reader's attention is half upon the present moment, half upon the future. Wolfgang Iser agrees that the text causes the reader to naturally expect something from it, and construct meaning through it. He explains that

The text provokes certain expectations which in turn we project onto the text in such a way that we reduce the polysemantic possibilities to a single interpretation in keeping with the expectations aroused, thus extracting an individual, configurative meaning. (Iser 59)

Therefore, meaning is the reader and the text working together to reach an agreement. Tompkins, commenting on Iser, explains his understanding of readers as co-creators, once they supply the fractions of the text which are not in the paper, but only implied. She completes: "But he does not grant the reader autonomy or even a partial independence from textual constraints. The reader's activity is only a fulfillment of what is already implicit in the structure of the work" (xv).

It may happen that the reader is unaware of his or her responsibility in the interpretative process. And that is when the reading becomes incomplete, wanting. It is possible that the reader does not even acknowledge the dangers of his or her misreading. The one thing that makes the difference, thus, is the knowledge to contextualize a text, identify implicit information and interpret them; only then the text reaches its purpose of being properly read.

In the epigraphs to this section, we see a text presumably written by the Biblical prophet Hosea, oriented by God, who said that the people of Israel and Judah was doomed<sup>6</sup>, ruined<sup>7</sup>, cut off<sup>8</sup>, had been silent<sup>9</sup>, because they had not learned<sup>10</sup> about God.

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<sup>6</sup> Good News Translation.

The very same situation had happened before, during prophet Isaiah's time. That is, they ignored the meaning of the Scriptures, of the written Law. These verses exemplify how harmful ignorance can be. In Matthew 22.29, Jesus exclaims how wrong people are due to their ignorance. Jonathan Culler claims in his article "Literary Competence" that the reader must bring to the text a previous and implicit understanding of how the literary discourse works. Anyone unfamiliar with the literary system and its conventions would otherwise be mystified in face of an unknown form or style, such as a poem. Culler explains why:

His knowledge of the language would enable him to understand phrases and sentences, but he would not know, quite literally, what to *make* of this strange concatenation of phrases. He would be unable to read it as literature . . . because he lacks the complex "literary competence" which enables others to proceed. He has not internalized the "grammar" of literature which would permit him to convert linguistic sequences into literary structures and meaning. (102)

When any work of literature is read by a reader who lacks specific information on certain intertextualities found throughout the text – a reader who does not even notice the intertextualities, references, jokes, because he or she lacks specific information (knowledge) – what happens, as one might expect, is that the reading gets spoiled and the work of literature is not properly appreciated. And that is due to the fact that when any work of literature contains allusions, it naturally allows less flexibility while interpreting it, for there are only so many possible readings for the same allusion.

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<sup>7</sup> The Message.

<sup>8</sup> Young's Literal Translation.

<sup>9</sup> Douay-Rheims 1899 American Edition.

<sup>10</sup> New Life Version.

Similarly, Charlotte Brontë's novels require certain knowledge from the reader in order to make complete sense. It has been noticed that the twenty-first century average reader<sup>11</sup> of Charlotte Brontë's novels lacks part of the required information to an utter understanding of the text. The information I am referring to is the Biblical knowledge necessary to appreciate these novels and extract from them a considerable share of meaning, for these allusions aim at something beyond what they actually say, they are always indications of something that is to come. Thus, there must be an expected reader for this text and for each text.

Fish suggests the idea of the Informed reader, a reader that would meet all the needs of a text, leaving no loose ends. He admits:

Obviously, my reader is a construct, an ideal or idealized reader; somewhat like Wardhaugh's 'mature reader' or Milton's 'fit' reader, . . . The informed reader is someone who (1) is a competent speaker of the language out of which the text is built up; (2) is in full possession of . . . the knowledge (that is, the experience, both as a producer and comprehender) of lexical sets, collocation probabilities, idioms, professional and other dialects, etc; (3) has *literary* competence. (Fish 86-7)

Fish recognizes that such a concept of informed reader would demand several informed readers, apt to deal with "a matrix of political, cultural, and literary determinants" (Fish 87). Each writer would demand a different informed reader to understand his or her work.

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<sup>11</sup> The average reader would be a common person, as opposed to scholars.

In a similar perspective, John Dryden, Samuel Johnson, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Northrop Frye also talk about the notion of an Ideal reader. However, their notions are not as well elaborated as Umberto Eco's. Eco dedicates a book, *The Role of the Reader*, to the explanation of what a reader is supposed to be. As he develops his argument, the concept of a Model reader and an Ideal reader comes up.

Firstly, Eco displays the possible kinds of texts, leaving the responsibility of being understood to the writer. He discusses the elements which should pervade the writer's mind<sup>12</sup> in order to have an organized text.

its author has to rely upon a series of codes that assign given contents to the expressions he uses. To make his text communicative, the author has to assume that the ensemble of codes he relies upon is the same as that shared by his possible reader. The author has thus to foresee a model of the possible reader (hereafter Model Reader) supposedly able to deal interpretatively with the expressions in the same way as the author deals generatively with them. At the minimal level, every type of text explicitly selects a very general model of possible reader through the choice (i) of a specific linguistic code, (ii) of a certain literary style, and (iii) of specific specialization-indices. (Eco 7)

The importance of knowing such codes is that, even if they are not consciously used by the writer, they are probably used anyhow, for it is impossible to think of a text without thinking of its public, for a text "not only calls for the cooperation of its own reader, but also wants this reader to make a series of interpretive choices which even though not infinite are, however, more than one" (Eco 4). Thus, in the case of *Jane Eyre*

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<sup>12</sup> It is worth saying that there are no intentions in this work to investigate Brontë's concerns – authorial intentions – while writing her pieces.

and *Shirley*, for instance, whether Brontë included all the Biblical references deliberately or not, whether they came to her spontaneously or not, either way the reader is expected to recognize and understand them just as naturally as they were written.

Eco says it is “absolutely impossible to speak apropos of the anaphorical role of an expression without invoking, if a not a precise and empirical reader, at least the ‘addressee’ as an abstract and constitutive element in the process of actualization of a text” (*The Role of the Reader*, 4). Thus we may claim that Brontë’s novels are intended to a specific reader, so that its specific message can be decodified. Eco adds that

[t]he existence of various codes and subcodes, the variety of sociocultural circumstances in which a message is emitted (where the codes of the addressee can be different from those of the sender), and the rate of initiative displayed by the addressee in making presuppositions and abductions – all result in making a message. (5)

The problem is that the messages implied in Brontë’s work through Biblical allusions have not been properly understood by the contemporary reader. A similar case is the example of a story by Alphonse Allais, *Un drame bien parisien*, which can be read in two different ways: “The naive reader will be unable to enjoy the story (he will suffer a final uneasiness), but the critical reader will succeed only by enjoying the defeat of the former” (Eco 10). Eco explains the fact that sometimes the actual reader is not the reader initially intended by the author: “They [the authors] have in mind an average addressee referred to a given social context. Nobody can say what happens when the actual reader is different from the ‘average’ one”. It is not that Brontë’s work obsessively aims at arousing a precise response on the part of the reader. Having the means to make predictions out of Biblical allusions is more of a tool than an aim.

### 1.3 Concluding Remarks

The people there were more open-minded than the people in Thessalonica. They listened to the message with great eagerness, and everyday they studied the Scriptures to see if what Paul said was really true. (Acts 17.11)

The more one is aware of the interconnections or overlapping between religion and literature, the more prepared one is to be the “right” reader for Charlotte Brontë and most of the nineteenth-century writers; that is, a reader able to identify, understand and appreciate a text to its totality. Understanding the influence and the role of religion in literature, particularly in Brontë’s work, is a necessary task in order to imbibe the wholeness of the messages in her books. The analysis of religious movements and their influence upon writers such as Brontë has brought to light the reflection of to what extent it is worth recognizing and understanding the Biblical references in her works.

The ideal reader, in the case of Brontë’s pieces, would have to be gifted not only with “literary competence”, as one might expect, but also with Biblical knowledge. Although that was not a problem among the historical readers (those who read the work by the time of its first publication), it has become a problem since the last century – when people, gradually, ceased to prioritize Christian/Biblical education. What we face nowadays is a series of readers who are far from the Historical, Informed, Model, or Ideal expected reader. The average contemporary reader, the actual reader, does not

comprehend works such as *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley* in their totality, unless he or she makes up for it. The people of Berea, cited in the epigraph, are known to be “of more noble character<sup>13</sup>” for receiving the message and examining it. Likewise, the reader is supposed to make up for any ignorance he or she feels to be disturbing his or her interpretation of the text, by seeking knowledge, studying.

Umberto Eco’s discussion on *The Role of the Reader* approaches the issue of the expected reader, regardless the time of reading; the reader is expected to interpret the message of a text, for “you cannot use the text as you want, but only as the text wants you to use it. An open text, however ‘open’ it be, cannot afford whatever interpretation.” (Eco, *The Role of the Reader*, 9). In other words, not any reading can be made out of a text. *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley* allow plenty of possible readings; the Biblical allusions found in the novel offer great semantic potential, yet this Biblical reading has been lost and deserves to be reconstructed.

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<sup>13</sup> New International Version to Acts 17.11.

## CHAPTER TWO – *JANE EYRE*: BEYOND EXPECTATIONS

‘Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven.’  
- St Matt. v. 16. I read these words over and over again: I felt that an explanation belonged to them, and was unable fully to penetrate their import. (Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 51)

### 2.1 *Jane Eyre*'s Narrative Structure

A short synopsis of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* would consist basically of the sequence of events which steer the narrative. And that being as it follows:

Featuring a rather melancholic tone, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* tells the life of its heroine, Jane Eyre, from her childhood until the closing of the events that summarize a 19<sup>th</sup> century woman's life: marriage and motherhood. It is a first-person narrative, limited to the thoughts and feelings of Jane herself. Throughout the story, the reader watches Jane's relatives ill-behave towards her, followed by the 10-years stay at Lowood School as student and afterwards as teacher. The reader keeps on tracking her

desire of leaving the school and meet new people, new places, culminating with a new post as governess to Mr. Rochester's young ward. Jane falls in love with her master, however cold he treats her. Afterwards he proposes to her but they are prevented from marrying because he is found husband to the mentally-ill Bertha. Jane runs away and, after wandering about, meets the Rivers and lives with them for two years. Afterwards they are found to be her cousins and she is found rich. She returns to a crippled, blind and widowed Rochester, and they finally marry. The tale indicates they lived happily ever after.

No synopsis composed by an average reader, however, would include even an insignificant comparison of the book's characters to Biblical ones. It is so because (a) such a comparison is seldom perceived and (b) because, when it is, readers tend to think it is of no use, that is, it is not important enough to be mentioned in a synopsis. After all, it has been previously exposed how contemporary readers have been misreading Brontë's works.

Yet, *Jane Eyre's* narrative structure presents all the four aspects mentioned by Northrop Frye in his *The Great Code: the Bible and Literature: Language, Myth (plot, narrative), Metaphor and Typology* influenced by the Bible. Despite its profoundly Christian nature and all the Biblical references by means of paraphrases and allegories – exemplifying Frye's Language and Metaphor categories –, its structure follows the same comical U-shaped pattern of the “divine comedy”, the Bible. There, as Frye lays out, the man

loses the tree and water of life at the beginning of Genesis and gets them back at the end of Revelation. In between, the story of Israel is told as a series of declines into the power of heathen kingdoms, Egypt, Philistia,

Babylon, Syria, Rome, each followed by a rise into a brief moment of relative independence. (169)

The U-shaped narrative is also outside the historical sections, in individual accounts such as Job's, in which he "follows, not the horizontal line of precedent and prudence, but the U-shaped progression of original prosperity, descent to humiliation, and return. The prophetic element in the book is thus connected with its narrative shape" (Frye 198). In *Jane Eyre*, it is quite clear while presenting the life of the orphaned heroine, Jane, who used to live happily with her parents, from a humiliating beginning, passing through a series of ups and downs, brief moments of little joys immediately followed by disgrace and frustration. In the end, her life is completely changed in all possible ways to fit in the comical ending. She finds her relatives, becomes rich, gets married and has a baby. Thus, it presents traits of the Biblical myth as well.

Northrop Frye dissects the Biblical narrative structure claiming the existence of what he calls the "Phases of Revelation", present not only in the Bible but also in literary works which tend to mimic its structure, such as Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*. They are "creation, revolution or exodus (Israel in Egypt), law, wisdom, prophecy, gospel, and apocalypse" (106). He also discusses imagery such as sheep and pasture, harvest and vintage, cities and temples, trees and water, the lamb (139); and he draws some tables to illustrate that, such as the following (166), which analyzes apocalyptic imagery.

### Table of Apocalyptic Imagery

Category	Class or Group Form	Individual
Divine	[Trinity]	God
Spiritual or Angelic	1) Fire-spirits (Seraphim) 2) Air-spirits (Cherubim)	Spirit as Flame Spirit as Dove or Wind
Paradisal	Garden of Eden	Tree of Life Water of Life
Human	People as Bride (Israel)	Bridegroom
Animal	Sheepfold or Flock	1) Shepherd 2) Lamb (Body and Blood)
Vegetable	Harvest and Vintage	Bread and Wine (First Fruits)
Mineral	City (Jerusalem) Highway	Temple; Stone

(All individual categories metaphorically identified with Christ)

*Jane Eyre* is also filled with the same symbols and imagery found in the Biblical narrative and presented by Frye in *Typology*. The symbol of the Three Days, for instance, appears in the novel at least five times: when it mentions that Mr. Rochester shall return in *three days* (Brontë 163), and also after Jane runs away from Thornfield Hall: she is as dead for *three days*, wandering aimlessly, decomposing with starvation and lack of care until she finds St-John (321). Other *three days* pass before she is fully restored (335). After a *three-day* trip back to Thornfield Hall, she meets Mr. Rochester

(433) and on the *third day* after this meeting, they are to be married (440). The three-day period found in the Bible, mainly related to a period of death followed by resurrection as it happens in the stories of Jonah, Jesus and in other passages; is also present in *Jane Eyre*, carrying the same sense of standing-by before the rebirth.

Besides the symbol of Three Days, the figure of the veil rent in two halves is extremely strong both in the Bible as in *Jane Eyre*. Its significance was major in both contexts. According to the Law God had instructed Moses to follow, there was a veil in the temple made from an expensive strong fabric (Exod. 26.1; 36.35), which separated the people and even the priests from the sacred place where God was. When Jesus dies, it is said that the veil was rent in two from top to bottom (Matt. 27.50-51). The meaning of such episode is deep (Heb. 10.19-20). Charles Spurgeon explains in his Sermon *The Rent Veil*, from 1888, what the author of Hebrews says:

the rending of the veil chiefly meant that the way into the holiest, which was not before made manifest, was now laid open to all believers. Once in the year the high priest solemnly lifted a corner of this veil with fear and trembling, and with blood and holy incense he passed into the immediate presence of Jehovah; but the tearing of the veil laid open the secret place. The rent front top to bottom gives ample space for all to enter who are called of God's grace, to approach the throne, and to commune with the Eternal One.

The veil in *Jane Eyre* is a bridal one, suggesting the idea of purity, chastity and modesty. In a way, it is similar to the Biblical veil, which hides the Holiest place. It also conveys protection from evil spirits, as believed by the Romans and Greeks. Jane's veil is as valuable as the Biblical one too, for Rochester makes sure she wears one as costly

as jewelry (278). The night before Jane's wedding, Bertha Mason goes into her bedroom and rents it in two halves, from top to bottom. To that, Rochester exclaims that if anything malignant did come near her, thank God that was only the veil that had been harmed (282). Thus there is also a protective association to the bridal veil. The rent veil in *Jane Eyre* is the pivot event to uncloak Rochester, allowing Jane to have a more transparent relationship with him, resembling the people in relation to God and their closer relationship.

There is a multitude of other Biblical symbols, such as the thirty silver coins used to sell Jesus out, as a payment to Judas, associated to the thirty pounds agreed as a fair payment price for Jane's services. These relations would fit in the sort of material that Keith Jenkins categorizes as recognizable Biblical objects and Biblical character roles or bits of narrative (*Atypical Typology* 15). They contribute to the allusions discussed here in the sense they help the readers build a similar Biblical structure in their minds, activating all their previous knowledge concerning the Scriptures, allowing them to put up their predictions of the characters' paths and endings.

The Biblical narrative offers a variety of genres, such as historical accounts (I & II Kings, I & II Chron.), poetry (Ps., Song of Sol.) and biographies (the Gospels). In spite of the fact that it was written in a thousand years, by dozens of authors, in three different languages, it still suggests a unity, as in a patchwork. Thus, Frye regards the Bible as a work of *bricolage* (xxi), to borrow Lévi-Strauss terminology. The term heteroglossia, as discussed by Fowler, comes from Mikhail Bakhtin and refers to a pluralism of speeches interacting in the same text, none of them excelling the other. It is similar to a patchwork or *bricolage*. The heteroglossia in the Bible is there, undeniable, present in the different genres, different writing styles, and different languages.

In *The Influence of Anxiety: the Bricolage Brontë Style*, Jenkins refers to *bricolage* as Charlotte Brontë's strategy in order to employ the Biblical typology (15). Jenkins dialogues with Janet Larson's comments on Charles Dickens' same quality, showing how it is a fracturing of the Bible to be rearranged, later on, in a new way. Still, *Jane Eyre* demonstrates the possibility of several narrative voices in one text, just as it happens with the Bible. According to Hohne and Wussow, *Jane Eyre* also brings up heteroglossia, as they say:

By the end of the novel, we realize that Jane has achieved heteroglossia, for she can manipulate and control not one narrative voice but a host of them: the language of gothic, of autobiography, of writing-to-the-moment, of feminism. (xx)

And I would add that Jane has also managed to bring in Biblical language, or speech into her novel. That would be the language which quotes Biblical passages and use them to whatever purpose she has in mind; either to make a comparison between people or situations, to teach a lesson, or to illustrate a fact. Jane always has a Biblical text at the tip of her tongue, just as Jesus, Paul or the Pharisees, who would also master the Scriptures.

## 2.2 The Biblical Speech and its Prophetic Reading in *Jane Eyre*

In one of the first passages alluding to the Bible, the protagonist, Jane, is still a child. She is being interviewed by Mr. Brocklehurst, the priest responsible for the institution where she is going to study at (Brontë, 34-35). Mr. Brocklehurst's first

question, about where the wicked go after death, refers to Psalm 9.17: “Hell is the destiny of all the wicked, of all those who reject God.” He seems to be particularly interested in attacking Jane from the beginning. The following question, as the previous one, is about hell and is meant to frighten her. At this point, the reader has already developed disgust towards this man who has just been introduced.

When Brocklehurst, continuing his interview with Jane, asks about her praying routine and whether she prays night and morning, the reader is reminded of two figures which set the example to do so: Daniel<sup>14</sup> and Paul<sup>15</sup>. Both men are known for their devotion to God in an evil world. Mr. Brocklehurst would only be compared to them as to set the contrast. Both Daniel’s and Paul’s life were good testimony among their people. They were leaders in their circumstances, as Mr. Brocklehurst is, and many lives depended on them. The reader can expect a change in Mr. Brocklehurst’s attitude, since Paul passed through one. However, such prediction does not sound credible. Besides, later on other passages, Mr. Brocklehurst shows how he distorts the Scriptures in order to suit his personal values and beliefs. Therefore, the reader may expect him to be punished by God, according to 2 Peter 2.1-21, which is about the destruction of false teachers and wicked influential people:

But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, (...) In their greed these teachers will exploit you with fabricated stories. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping. (...) Bold and arrogant, they are not

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<sup>14</sup> Daniel 6.10b: “There, just as he had always done, he knelt down at the open windows and prayed to God three times a day.”

<sup>15</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5.17: “Pray at all times”. Ephesians 6.18b: “Pray on every occasion, as the Spirits leads.”

afraid to heap abuse on celestial beings; (...) They will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done. (...) They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Bezer, who loved the wages of wickedness. (...) Blackest darkness is reserved for them (...)  
*(Good News Translation, 2 Pet. 2.1-21)*

The reader is not told in details what happens to Mr. Brocklehurst. One can only presume something “mortifying” happens, according to this passage:

The unhealthy nature of the site [Lowood]; the quantity and quality of the children’s food; the brackish, fetid water used in its preparation; the pupils’ wretched clothing and accommodations – all these things were discovered, and the discovery produced a result mortifying to Mr. Brocklehurst, but beneficial to the institution. (Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 85)

Still during the interview, Jane is then asked whether she takes pleasure on reading the Bible. She answers by naming the books she likes most. The first one she mentions is Revelation, followed by Daniel. Both deal with prophecies concerning the end of times and hope in a better future that was to come after the Great Tribulation. From such information, an attentive reader can already infer a rather unhappy yet hopeful Jane. The reader is induced to believe that, in spite of the great tribulations Jane passes through, one must hope for the best, for the best of God is still to come<sup>16</sup>.

What is remarkable is that, except for Revelation, she does not mention any of the other New Testament books, not even the gospels. Also, Jane remarks she thinks Psalms are not interesting. Surely they do not tell a story, they are about praising God or

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<sup>16</sup> Jane’s friend, Helen, lives by this belief, which pervades the Biblical narrative, and can be literally found Isaiah 64.4 and repeated in 1 Corinthians 2.9: “However, as the scripture says, ‘What no one ever saw or heard, what no one ever thought could happen, is the very thing God prepared for those who love him.’ ”

prayers for help, or repentance. That means Jane is not interested in praising God, or in praying for help, nor in repentance. Her relationship with God so far sounds shallow. Only after knowing Helen Burns she starts wondering about God and Jesus<sup>17</sup>.

Brocklehurst finishes his interrogatory offering a parallel with the book of Ezekiel 11.19 and 36.26<sup>18</sup>, when he says: ““That proves you to have a wicked heart; and you must pray to God to change it: to give you a new and clean one: to take away your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh”” (Brontë, *Jane Eyre* 35). Indeed, Jane’s heart resembles a stone then. In the Biblical context, Ezekiel is talking to the people of Israel. Whereas in 11.19, before the fall of that nation, this verse is followed by a sentence of punishment against idolaters in 36.26, under new circumstances – after the fall of Israel, when the people is already captive in Babylon – , the text is followed by a prophecy of hope, of total physical and spiritual restoration. The reader might guess Jane should find major difficulties in her path, eventually overcoming them all. Such prediction upon her life would be consistent with the previous one, regarding the Great Tribulation and Heaven in the end. Indeed, after this episode, Jane’s situation is worsened in all possible ways – the Babylonian captivity – but, as time goes by, her heart does become softer, and she is restored to her real family and friends.

So far, what has been predicted has reached its fulfillment. The epigraph to this text, however, demonstrates how Brontë’s use of Biblical references not always confirms its original message. The passage in evidence, read by Jane as a child in Lowood, was located in a stone tablet over the door of one of the buildings. It was put there by the late Mrs. Naomi Brocklehurst, Mr. Brocklehurst’s mother. It is ironic, to

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<sup>17</sup> On page 60, which is going to be analyzed further, it sounds as if she had just been introduced to Christ by her friend, Helen.

<sup>18</sup> Which reads: “I [God] will give them a new heart and a new mind. I will take away their stubborn heart of stone and will give them an obedient heart.”

say the least, to relate Mr. Brocklehurst to good works. In this sense, this passage would work as a foil to emphasize his evil nature. It creates a contrast with the Biblical version.

Later on, Helen Burns, Jane's only friend in Lowood, starts to christianize Jane during their talks. Helen represents Christ himself; she is a sufferer and endurer. One of these dialogues reads:

'But I feel this, Helen: I must dislike those who, whatever I do to please them, persist in disliking me; I must resist those who punish me unjustly. It is as natural as that I should love those who show me affection, or submit to punishment when I feel it is deserved.'

'Heathens and savage tribes hold that doctrine; but Christians and civilized nations disown it.'

'How? I don't understand.'

'It is not violence that best overcomes hate – nor vengeance that most certainly heals injury.'

'What then?'

'Read the New Testament, and observe what Christ says, and how he acts; make His word your rule, and His conduct your example.'

'What does he say?'

'Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you and despitefully use you.' (Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 60)

As the reader is led to observe, Jane cherishes Helen and keeps her in high esteem. If Jane hearkens Helen and makes Jesus' conduct her example, one can foresee her subsequent conversion. Such conversion is proven right, for when Jane has the

opportunity to pay back her enemies, not only does she let it go, but also she helps them in their trouble<sup>19</sup>.

Furthermore, Helen gives a speech to Jane about comfort in Heaven after death. It seems a preparation speech from someone who knows is dying, to his or her friends. Similar to that uttered by Jesus in *John* 14 and 16, in which he speaks to his disciples about Heaven and his departure to meet the Father. At this point, the reader had not been informed about Helen's critical health situation. However, the content of her speech hints to the upcoming events – Helen's death.

‘ . . . Besides this earth, and besides the race of men, there is an invisible world and a kingdom of spirits . . . if we were dying in pain and shame, if scorn smote us on all sides, and hatred crushed us, angels see our tortures, recognize our innocence . . . and God waits only the separation of spirit from flesh to crown us with a full reward. Why, then, should we ever sink overwhelmed with distress, when life is so soon over, and death is so certain an entrance to happiness – to glory?’ (Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 71)

Indeed, Helen dies. Because she is so esteemed by Jane, praised until the end, Helen is a character who is able to mirror the Dissent movement or the Evangelicalism in a good way, highlighting its advantages, its bright spots. Her death, although heartfelt by the reader, finds comfort in her faith as well as in the fact she had been preparing her audience through her Sermon-on-the-Mount-like speeches.

But many other predictions are to come along Jane's path. In her return to Thornfield, from the Reeds, Mr. Rochester welcomes her, inviting her in, to *her home*.

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<sup>19</sup> Jane's enemies would be those who always did her bad, the Reeds. From when she was ten until the age of nineteen, Jane had not heard from the Reeds (p. 87). Still, she helps the family in their time of distress, through Mrs. Reed's loss of her son, her illness and death (Chapter 21).

Jane takes it as a great compliment and dares to answer: ““Thank you, Mr. Rochester, for your great kindness. I am strangely glad to get back again to you: and wherever you are is my home – my only home”” (Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 244). This specific line follows the very same structure and boldness as in biblical Ruth, which goes: “wherever you go I will go; wherever you live I will live. Your people will be my people and your God will be my God” (Ruth 1.16).

Ruth, the Moabite, was a foreigner to the Israelites. She was newly widowed and had no children. If we consider that when a woman marries, she leaves her parents behind, and from then on her husband will look after her, in a sense, Ruth was as orphaned as Jane. Still, after such statement of loyalty towards the Israelite Naomi, who was her mother-in-law, Ruth was rewarded with a new husband, who was much older than her and happened to be her employer – just like Rochester – , and a relative of Naomi: someone who was expected to be her *redeemer*, according to the Hebrew law. His name was Boaz, a type of Christ, one would say.

As Ruth, Jane is a friendless hard worker; they convey strength and sweetness, fragility and wit in their nature. Unlike Ruth, Jane’s wedding does not take place until her circumstance is reversed. It is not Boaz, or Rochester who rescues her from her poverty, but rather the opposite. Jane reaches financial wealth without any help from Rochester and, in the occasion of their wedding, it is she who rescues him from his (spiritual) misery.

Keith Jenkins’ argument that Brontë rewrites Biblical passages to suit her (feminist) purposes fits well. Here, the reader’s expectations are frustrated; possible assumptions about Jane being *saved* by Rochester are put down. It is not Rochester who is a type of Christ, but Jane. Even Rochester’s desperate cry for Jane when she is at a

three-day trip distance, and her being able to listen and answer (Brontë 414-5; 441-2), is a supernatural quality worthy of a type of Christ.

Still, St John Rivers, sounding very Paul-like, compares Jane to a Biblical character who is quite the opposite of Christ:

(...) your good sense will tell you that it is too soon yet to yield to the vacillating fears of Lot's wife. What you had left before I saw you, of course, I do not know; but I counsel you to resist firmly every temptation which would incline you to look back; pursue your present career steadily, for some months at least. (Brontë 357)

The unnamed wife of Lot is known for being disobedient and for succumbing to temptation. Chapter 19 of the *Book of Genesis* describes her grief for having to leave her home, and her looking back at Sodom after being told by God not to. According to the narrative, she is instantly punished by becoming a pillar of salt.

The similarities between these stories are many. Sodom and Gomorrah are known by their sins related to promiscuity and prostitution<sup>20</sup> (Genesis 19) ; Thornfield's master not only confesses to have lived a promiscuous life (308), but also tries to marry Jane while his former wife is still alive (chapter 26), to the point of proposing Jane to be his concubine (chapter 27). God condemns such sins and punishes both cities with fire. Thornfield is likewise burnt down (421). Thornfield can also be understood as a secular place, filled with sin, when it is compared to the tent of Achan (298), the place where Achan hid what he had stolen. God punished him and his family with death for disobedience on the book of *Joshua*, chapter 7. Landow discusses this theme in his article

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<sup>20</sup> There is a plethora of references to these cities along the Biblical narrative, throughout the Old and New Testaments, setting them as examples not to be followed.

“Typology and Characterization (2): Dramatic Irony and Rochester’s Characterization in *Jane Eyre*”, which derives from his book *Victorian Types, Victorian Shadows*, and states that

Rochester, who still refuses to see that he has done anything wrong, . . . believes that Thornfield Hall is a “tent of Achan” only in so far as it contains the evidence of crime. . . . Thus, in a manner quite common in works whose characters misapply types to themselves and their situations, *Jane Eyre* uses such symbolism to convict Rochester of both sin and lack of self-knowledge. (par. 2)

Thus, the reader who compares Jane to Lot’s wife may predict Jane’s looking back at Thornfield, her home<sup>21</sup>, and this reader might even predict Thornfield’s fire as a parallel to Sodom and Gomorrah’s. In the Biblical narrative the wages of sin is death<sup>22</sup>, Lot’s wife dies and the sin cities are destroyed never to be rebuilt<sup>23</sup>. In Brontë’s narrative, Jane does go back to a burnt down, destroyed Thornfield, but only to start over a new life, in a new place, with a new Rochester. Unlike Lot’s wife, Jane finds redemption.

Although *Jane Eyre* allows the reader to predict punishment out of the comparison between Jane and Lot’s wife, to be consistent with itself, it hints that nothing utterly bad would result from Jane’s looking back. The hints are all over the narrative, but mainly in Helen’s discourse about love and forgiveness, and in her focus on the New Testament, which praises Grace – unmerited favor – over Old Testament’s Law<sup>24</sup>. The historical context of the Dissent and Evangelicalism, as explained on the previous

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<sup>21</sup> As Jane states on page 244, her home is with Rochester. Since he is at Thornfield, it becomes her home too.

<sup>22</sup> Romans 6.23a

<sup>23</sup> Isaiah 13.19-20

<sup>24</sup> The Old Testament is known as the time of Law, whilst the New Testament is the time of Grace. Although Grace does not abolish Law, it makes it more flexible. See Galatians 3.24-25 and Romans 3.31.

chapter, also produces a reader willing to forgive Jane, if she is to be forgiven; to cherish a relationship with God over religiosity. Thus, what is most important in Jane's attitude of looking back is not the fact she disobeyed St John, but the new beginning she is offered, without punishment. Her God is not a tyrant or oppressor; He is Love<sup>25</sup>, as mirrored in the Dissent and the Evangelical movements. The historical reader would feel this way and predict correctly.

The same line of reasoning can be found when Rochester is compared to Samson, whose story is told in the *Book of Judges*, chapters 13 through 16. Allusions to Samson happen at least four times along the narrative, all of them referring to Rochester. In the first one, very subtly, Rochester explains how he enjoys getting pleasure from life: "And I may get it as sweet and fresh as the wild honey the bee gathers on the moor" (Brontë 137). Samson is known to eat much honey and enjoy it, as well as the pleasures of life (Judges 14.8-9). And right after Rochester says that, Jane answers him, the dialogue proceeding as it follows:

'It will sting – it will taste bitter, sir.'

...

'It is no devil, I assure you; or if it be, it has put on the robes of an angel of light. I think I must admit so fair a guest when it asks entrance to my heart.'

'Distrust it, sir; it is not a true angel.' (Brontë 137-8)

Jane warns Rochester about the dangers of a Delilah, or a devil dressed as an angel, without actually alluding to Samson and Delilah, but to 2 Corinthians 11.14, which reads: "Well, no wonder! Even Satan can disguise himself to look like an angel of light!"

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<sup>25</sup> 1 John 4.8.

Later on, Jane confesses Rochester reminds her of “Hercules and Samson with their charmers” (259). The third reference to Samson is when Rochester, in a rage attack, wishes to be like Samson by saying: “I long to exert a fraction of Samson’s strength, and break the entanglement like tow!” (300).

By such comparison, the reader who knows either Hercules or Samson’s story is already able to imagine a man easily deceived by foreign women, as both of them were. Samson had two disappointments with two beautiful foreign women. The second one caused his blindness (Judg. 14.1-2, 12-17; 16.4-6, 21). A footnote by Michael Mason to the first allusion says: “Samson foolishly yields to the blandishments of a woman twice, in disclosing the answer to a riddle to his wife, and in revealing the secret of his strength to his mistress Delilah” (520). Rochester confesses to Jane his weakness in this specific area of his life:

Yet I could not live alone; so I tried the companionship of mistresses. The first I chose was Céline Varens – another of those steps which make a man spurn himself when he recalls them. You already know what she was, and how my liaison with her terminated. She had two successors: an Italian, Giacinta, and a German, Clara; both considered singularly handsome (Brontë *Jane Eyre* 308).

Rochester’s superficiality is in evidence, together with his Achille’s heel. Although he is showing his weakness, he intends to justify himself, alluring Jane with his touch and words: “Just put your hands in mine, Janet – that I may have the evidence of touch as well as sight, to prove you are near me – and I will in a few words show you the real state of the case” (302). Here, Rochester places himself in the position of Christ correcting Thomas when the latter claims he would not believe in Jesus’ resurrection

unless he saw the scars of the nails and put his fingers on those scars. To that, Jesus replies: "Put your finger here, and look at my hands; then stretch out your hand and put it in my side. Stop your doubting, and believe!" (Jn. 20.27). Rochester is also comparing Jane to the skeptic Thomas, albeit the reader would not fall for that. Rochester has shown too much slyness and dissimulation already, in a way that his words are not to be trusted, especially if they go against Jane's instinct and what the reader knows of her. He has shown too much weakness.

However, the reader is also able to picture a strong, proud and manly figure out of him and, perhaps, predict an unfortunate incident in his life that will kill his pride, as it happens to Samson. Such prediction is confirmed. Rochester becomes crippled and blind. In the end, Jane sees him and thinks: "The caged eagle, whose gold-ringed eyes cruelty has extinguished, might look as looked that sightless Samson" (426).

On page 260, Jane calls him King Ahasuerus (or Xerxes, King of Persia), who married the beautiful and poor Esther in the Biblical book of that name. This comparison also reinforces Rochester being a powerful man as Boaz, Samson and King Ahasuerus, and it helps understanding his character, since Rochester also meant to marry the poor Jane, as Boaz married Ruth and Ahasuerus, Esther. Ahasuerus was a man very easily allured by a woman's looks, similarly to Rochester and Samson.

Unlike Samson, Rochester does not die, although he does go blind and repents of his sins. Once again, Brontë reflects the period's belief, namely Evangelicalism, by giving another chance to the humbled Rochester. A reader who is able to connect Samson to Rochester and predict the restoration of his character by confronting a difficult circumstance which results in loss, reaches a level of interpretation which the average

contemporary reader is not expected to reach. Only the Historical or the Ideal reader would come up with such outcome.

The impression one has about St John Rivers, so far, is that of a very strict man, whose main concern is with the things of God. He just wishes Jane would care as much as he does; and he makes it quite clear in one of his last speeches, on the Book of Revelation, chapter 21, in which he tries to manipulate Jane to marry him because, by doing so, she would be “choosing the better part”, as he says while paraphrasing the Book of Luke, chapter 10, verse 42: “God give you strength to choose that better part which shall not be taken from you!” (Brontë 413). By reading Revelation and paraphrasing Jesus words, he stands in the position of Christ himself, for Revelation is understood as Jesus’ direct speech. Still, it becomes hard for the reader to assimilate such a figure of Christ, due to his lack of sympathy and harshness – even offensiveness – towards Jane’s feelings, as it has been previously shown. Thus, such allusion is easily put down, working the other way round: St John works so hard to remind Jesus in his speeches – although his actions prove the contrary – that his words only make the reader infer that the person he subjugates is the real Christ(ian).

The same feeling can be aroused in the reader towards Mr. Brocklehurst, a character who is constantly quoting Biblical passages and occupies a leadership position directly related to the Church, as St John does. Their roles in the narrative evoke a criticism over the Evangelical movement Church – not its beliefs, but practice. At some point, the Church’s practice failed in the sense that it claimed to worship God, but their words were meaningless because their hearts were somewhere else; their religion was nothing but human rules and traditions, which they had simply memorized<sup>26</sup>. This is how Brontë makes a very clear criticism over the Church and the Evangelical movement, and

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<sup>26</sup> Isa. 29.13 and Matt. 15.8-9.

it is also why her reader will, once again, picture Jesus in Jane and resent St John as well as Mr. Brocklehurst.

There is a clear tendency to follow Jenkins' argument once again, when Rochester declares Jane's resemblance to David, because, as Jenkins explains, Brontë is showing a feminist perspective over the Scriptures. In the context, Rochester praises Jane for her calm, her wits, and is thankful for her coming back to him, making him satisfied at last. Rochester's compliment to Jane means she frightens away his inner demons so angelical she is. She makes him good. Thus, he declares: "If Saul could have had you for his David, the evil spirit would have been exorcised without the aid of the harp" (Brontë 433). This is an obvious parallel with the Biblical text: "From then on, whenever the evil spirit sent by God came on Saul, David would get his harp and play it. The evil spirit would leave, and Saul would feel better and be all right again" (1 Sam. 16.23).

David is understood to be a type of Christ in the Old Testament; and Jane has developed the very same impression over the reader. Consequently, when the reader faces such comparison, it works only to confirm what has been shown along the story. And, although it is already the end of the story, when it is realized that David eventually takes control over Saul's kingdom, the reader can see in the now powerful Jane a new queen over Rochester.

Now, when Rochester is put beside Saul, it is understood he has been compared to Samson, rendering the idea of a initially good man, who starts leading a promiscuous life and ends up dying (but not before regretting his decisions). The Biblical Saul, from a broad perspective, follows similar basic steps: an honest man who is driven mad and dies in his misery. By suggesting this last comparison with Rochester, Brontë is definitely confirming whichever predictions the reader could possibly have concerning this

character. His nature is crystal clear, his ending is predicted. He will suffer the consequences of his sins, although, through the forgiveness offered by the Evangelical Movement's God, they will not kill him, but rather shape him into the righteous man God had first intended him to be, as the Evangelicals would say. And Jane, David, the type of Christ, is the only one who is able to redeem him, just as Jesus' redemption of humanity, or Boaz's redemption of Ruth (inversed roles). Rochester shows his dependence on the Divine.

Brontë chooses to end *Jane Eyre* with a Biblical allusion to the verse which ends the Bible itself. The book of Revelation is a letter and, as such, starts and finishes with a greeting. However, before its final greeting, it declares "Come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev. 22.20) which is the motto of all genuine Christian churches from then on. Brontë places the very same exclamation in the end of a letter from St John, which also closes the novel. Such choice seems to work only to point, once again, to the Biblical language or speech, and shape, which influences the nature of the narrative as a whole, as the perfect ending to a novel like this.

CHAPTER THREE – *SHIRLEY*: LOW EXPECTATIONS

The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple (*New International Version*, Ps. 119.130)

The Historical reader of *Shirley* comes from the reading of *Jane Eyre* full of expectations. Unlike Brontë's previous novel, *Shirley*'s reception was – and still is – timid. It is narrated by a third-person omniscient voice and presents two heroines instead of one, who share equal significance to the story. The one common thing left besides having the same author is its U-shaped Biblical language. In addition to their differences, while *Jane Eyre* is profoundly emotional and passionate, *Shirley* defines itself from its second paragraph with such words:

If you think, from this prelude, that anything like a romance is preparing for you, reader, you never were more mistaken. Do you anticipate sentiment, and poetry, and reverie? Do you expect passion, and stimulus, and melodrama? Calm your expectations; reduce them to a lowly standard. Something real, cool, and solid, lies before you; something unromantic as Monday morning, when all who have work wake with the consciousness that they must rise and betake themselves thereto. It is not positively affirmed that you shall not have a taste of the exciting, perhaps towards the middle and close of the meal, but it is resolved that the first

dish set upon the table shall be one that a Catholic – ay, even an Anglo-Catholic – might eat on Good Friday in Passion Week: it shall be cold lentils, and vinegar without oil; it shall be unleavened bread with bitter herbs, and no roast lamb<sup>27</sup>. (Brontë, *Shirley*, 5)

By writing these words, Brontë admits, through her narrator's voice, that she considers the reader's expectations, or at least that she had considered them earlier – in *Jane Eyre*, one might presume. She confesses it to be, as Eco says in *The Role of the Reader*, one of the elements which pervade her mind: “The author has thus to foresee a model of the possible reader (hereafter Model Reader) supposedly able to deal interpretatively with the expressions in the same way as the author deals generatively with them” (7). It is unquestionable now how Brontë writes to a certain audience and expects interaction from it; she expects her readers to make predictions.

These first words addressed to the reader cause uneasiness by such swaggering comment, especially due to the first Biblical allusion, which is the title to the chapter: “Levitical”. This is a reference to the admittedly most challenging-to-read among the sixty-six books in the Bible – Leviticus<sup>28</sup>. It is dull and it demands great effort from the reader to appreciate all the ceremonial rules it describes in minimal details. The whole book consists basically of rules.

The uneasiness comes also because its following pages confirm its Monday-morning nature by introducing unemotional, weary characters in a reunion of curates, thus the title of the chapter. And there in the passage in evidence, the second paragraph to her novel is also the second Biblical allusion in it. It alludes to Exodus 12.8, which

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<sup>27</sup> Jessica Cox explains in her notes to one of *Shirley*'s editions: “A reference to the controversial attempts by the Oxford movement of the 1830's to increase the following of the Church of England by emphasizing its Catholic origins.” (Brontë, *Shirley* 620)

<sup>28</sup> Leviticus means “about the Levite”, who were the priests, responsible for carrying out the Law.

reads “That night the meat is to be roasted, and eaten with bitter herbs and with bread made without yeast.<sup>29</sup>” This was part of the instructions to the celebration of the Passover. But on the narrator’s paraphrase, there is no roast meat. The novel is, then, a savorless meal; a meal which lacks its main course, the Passover without its paschal lamb. Although very solemn, the Passover was a celebration. Thus, there may be hope for such novel, one might predict.

To this allusion, Jenkins comments, very optimistically: “Even the metaphor of the meager Good Friday meal used in the opening pages to foretell the novel’s alleged simplicity of style carries far-reaching associations which belie the narrator’s assurance of a mimetic realism” (*The Influence* 184), as to mean that the Biblical language and imagery bear so much to interpret that it is enough in itself to the appreciation of the reader.

*Shirley* is concerned not only with romantic feelings, but mainly with the social-political situation of the time, covering gender and class issues. The story is set in Yorkshire, in 1811-12, while England lived a period of unrest due to the Napoleonic Wars and the industry depression, together with the Luddite (a labor movement to protect the working class). Shirley Keeldar is a wealthy and independent young woman whose friend, Robert Moore, is going through financial woes due to his introduction of labor-saving machinery to his mill, increasing unemployment and discontent among his workers. Robert considers marriage to Shirley to solve his problems, although he loves the poor Caroline Helstone, a dependent to her uncle, the clergyman Mr. Helstone. Shirley would rather marry Robert’s brother, Louis, but he is a match opposed by her family due to his impoverished circumstance. In the end, however, the four are reconciled

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<sup>29</sup> Roasting eliminates fat and spares the use of water; bitter herbs were associated to suffering (Lam. 3.15); and the bread without yeast was meant to remind them of their haste during the exodus.

within a typically comical ending. Yes, it ends well. But it does not start well, neither continues well. The path each character is to follow is hard and the gate to their happiness is narrow<sup>30</sup>.

“Levitical” presents some characters, the curates, and draws their nature very clearly. It criticizes them in the same way Mr. Brocklehurst is in *Jane Eyre*; it criticizes the Church: “What attracts them, it would be difficult to say. . . . It is not religion; the thing is never named amongst them: theology they may discuss occasionally, but piety – never” (Brontë, *Shirley* 7). Their disregard towards piety, love and what Jesus teaches in the Gospels is undeniable from the beginning, for the narrator knows them very well: “While they sipped, they argued; not on politics, nor on philosophy, . . . but on minute points of ecclesiastical discipline, frivolities which seemed empty as bubbles to all save themselves” (Brontë, *Shirley* 9). Numerous storms figure in the setting, as if they were very frequent. Caroline, discussing them with Shirley, recalls the deluge (200), which is a reference to Genesis 6 and its flood sent by God as punishment for the wickedness of men. Those curates are actually wicked men, as well as most of the characters in *Shirley*.

When Mr. Helstone unexpectedly arrives at the reunion, he exclaims “What! Has the miracle of Pentecost been renewed? Have the cloven tongues come down again? Where are they? The sound filled the whole house just now. I heard the seventeen languages in full action” (12), alluding to Acts 2.1-11. In the Biblical text, the apostles and believers are “filled with the Holy Spirit and began to talk in other languages, as the Spirit enabled them to speak.” (Acts 2.4) By this, he would be comparing the three curates to apostles. However, he amends himself immediately after realizing such

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<sup>30</sup> Matt. 7.14.

comparison, by changing the Biblical allusion to Genesis 11, which talks about the Babel Tower. He says:

What do I talk about the gift of tongues? Gift, indeed! I mistook the chapter, and book, and testament: – Gospel for law, Acts for Genesis, the city of Jerusalem for the plain of Shinar. It was no gift, but the confusion of tongues which has gabbled me deaf as a post. *You*, apostles? What! – you three? Certainly not: – three presumptuous Babylonish masons, neither more nor less! (Brontë, *Shirley* 12)

Jenkins suggests that “this passage might be read as nothing more than a depiction of Mr. Helstone’s penchant for rather grandiose biblical allusions as part of his clerical demeanor” (*The Influence* 186). However, he argues, it rather shows Mr. Helstone’s appropriation of Biblical interpretation (*The Influence* 186). Yet, the comparison he draws between his fellow curates and apostles, and then Babylonish masons can tell the reader something else. It tells the reader he or she will face false teachers (2 Pet. 2.1-21), as previously mentioned towards Mr. Brocklehurst. And Mr. Helstone’s frankness and lack of love in throwing this to their faces only aggregates him to their group of false teachers.

The Biblical material in *Shirley* is more obvious than in *Jane Eyre*, as anyone can see, namely, the average contemporary reader. However, most of the allusions which compare its characters to Biblical ones are understood as dispensable, unnecessary, or even pointless to this research in the sense they do not foreshadow any action or ending. In “Levitical”, for instance, Mr. Helstone sketches four associations between those men and men from the Scriptures. He says:

Mike, like a wise Daniel as he is, not only rehearsed the vision, but gave the interpretation thereof . . . little David [Sweeting] shall be the champion, or spotless Joseph [Donne]. Malone, you are but a great floundering Saul after all, good only to lend your armour. (Brontë, *Shirley* 17)

The reader feels mystified then, for hitherto the narrator has indicated how those men do not carry on a holy life. How come Mr. Helstone equals them to holy men – except, in the case of Saul’s last stage? However, Mr. Helstone is teasing them, for he knows they would not join in the defense of Robert’s mill, the subject of their conversation. Since this character is already regarded with critical eyes, the reader is led to believe him to be distorting Biblical passages, as an appropriation of Biblical interpretation (Jenkins, *The Influence* 186). Jenkins, commenting on such apparently pointless allusions, argues that:

it is difficult to see any profound interaction between the Biblical text and the novel. As far as we can see, Sweeting and young King David share very little beyond a common name, and though Donne does exhibit a certain arrogance that recalls the negative side of the Biblical Joseph’s attitude towards his family, the connection is pursued no farther. These minor typological skirmishes early in the novel serve a greater purpose than merely developing character or furthering the plot. They help create the atmosphere of hermeneutical instability which seems to prevail throughout all of Brontë’s mature fiction. (*The Influence* 188)

That is, most of Brontë’s use of Biblical material in *Shirley* does not imply the prophetic reading they did in her previous works, *Jane Eyre* and *The Professor*. As Jenkins argues, most of the subsequent allusions fit in his thesis of gender reversal and

appropriation of Biblical interpretation. Brontë's insistence on alluding to the Bible from then on begins to reflect something else rather than the characters themselves.

Also, many of the allusions are due to the fact that some characters' given names are taken from the Scriptures. Naming, in some cultures, including the Hebrew culture, is extremely important; a name defines one's life and nature. Naming after Biblical characters was and still is a common practice in Christian countries, as well as in literature – take Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, for instance. However, apparently Shirley's names have been chosen randomly – they are meaningless in face of their characters<sup>31</sup>, as it has been observed in the case of the clergymen. What it tells the reader is precisely the irony behind the dissemblance from the curates to their namesakes. Still, there are some allusions which awaken in the reader not only the *déjà lu* effect, but the prophetic as well.

Nevertheless, it is worthless to discuss the denouements of minor characters that are compared to Biblical ones, whose conclusions are not brought up; besides, there are tens of characters in this novel, which makes it impossible to provide a full analyzes on each and every one of them. Such is the case with Mr. Yorke, Miss Hardman and Mr. Donne, for that matter, who are compared to Biblical characters, though they lack a closure.

Caroline, who shares her post of heroine with Shirley, is significant enough in the narrative and worthy of an ending by the narrator. She is first compared to Abel, by her dearest Robert Moore, while they talk about her prayers for him. He says that, because they come out “from innocent lips: they should be acceptable as Abel's offering” (Brontë,

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<sup>31</sup> It does not mean that Brontë did not mind her characters' name. Observing the novel's title name, Shirley, for example, it holds feminism in it; this name was a distinctly male name and, after the novel, it became a distinctly female name.

*Shirley* 119). In the Scriptures, Abel's offerings are accepted by God, while his brother's, Cain's, are not (Gen. 4.4-5). The reader has been analyzing the story and, as he or she sees this allusion, it adds to what he or she had already figured out of these characters: that Caroline has a sweet nature and pure heart and Robert does not.

It is not surprising when, later on, Caroline is twice compared to the Virgin Mary (506, 569). From such allusion, one can also see Robert as Cain, whose prayers are not heard. Robert is actually compared to Cain, when he feels a "Cain-like desolation" during an argument with Shirley (502). Cain is his own brother's assassin, as one can see in Genesis 4.8. Although expecting a murder from Robert is an extreme bouncer, he does cause great pain in Caroline when showing his inclination to marry Shirley, leaving her nearly dead on chapter 24, entitled "The Valley of the Shadow of Death", which is a reference to Psalm 23, meaning a most difficult situation.

What stands between Abel and Caroline is exactly death; while the former dies, Caroline falls sick, but Charlotte Brontë's redeeming grace observed in *Jane Eyre* towards her characters would not allow her to jeopardize her comical structure. "A little cloud, like a man's hand arouse in the west" (414), as an allusion to 1 Kings 18.44, is a sign of rain in a land so parched, so dry, where people and cattle died of thirsty. The little hand is a sign of hope, of healing. The rain comes; Caroline is healed.

Robert, like Cain, is expected to be cast out and wander off the narrative having harmed both Caroline and Shirley, who feels offended by his money-based proposal. He goes to London and stays there for some time, away from the plot. However, as the Scriptures say, God looked after Cain (Gen. 4.15), even while he wandered; and Robert is looked after and comes back regretful, ready to change. Again, the Evangelical side of

Brontë gives her characters a second chance, as opposed to the Old Testament and the Church's harshness.

Robert is compared to a variety of Biblical characters in different moments within the narrative. The reader gets used to the over-incidence of Biblical allusions in the novel, as there are occasions in which the narrator mentions one Biblical character or episode repeatedly to refer to two or more different characters and episodes<sup>32</sup>. Therefore, there are no attachments, nothing to force one character and one allusion to remain fixed to each other. When Robert compares himself to Achan by saying "to entreat me to put the accursed thing out of my tent" (125), the reader foreshadows a bad future to him. As Rochester is compared before him, it has been exposed in the last chapter what the image of the tent means according to Joshua 7. Later on, once again Achan's image is evoked by calling Robert "the Troubler" (250), as to designate Achan according to 1 Chronicles 2.7. With Rochester, disaster follows disaster after he declares such comparison upon himself. Robert, by saying this, admits that the labor-saving machinery is in fact an accursed thing which brings disaster not only to himself but also to his people. He is regarded by them as Achan, the Troubler (250). Robert is persecuted and even fights back against his people. He is compared to Saul and Eliab (297) due to his height and warrior skills. The reader could predict his victory, since he is compared to such great warriors. However, he loses the battle; after all he is Cain, who does not deserve to win, he is Achan, his penalty should be death; defeat is the least he deserves.

During Shirley's argument with Robert, narrated on chapter 30, "Rushedgedge, a Confessional", besides the comparison with Cain, she calls him Judas (500), Moloch (501), and Lucifer (502). These are bad characters, traitors, and that is the feature she

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<sup>32</sup> As it happens with the tower of Babel, the gift of tongues, Cain and Abel, Saul, Lucifer, Jacob, among others.

wants to highlight on him. Now, the reader cannot make up any prediction out a past fact, for she calls him so due to past actions. These are Biblical allusions to support his evil nature, as if the other way around worked too; that is, the Biblical allusions here confirm previous allusions; they do not hint to an idea, they affirm what Robert is based on earlier ideas. Of course, the reader would not suppose he is as evil as Lucifer, but understand it as a hyperbole.

When Caroline believes she is going to die, in her deathbed she utters the words which invite Robert to seek her through a medium after her death, in order to communicate still.

What can my departed soul feel then? Can it see or know what happens to the clay? Can spirits, through any medium, communicate with living flesh? Can the dead at all revisit those they leave? Can they come in the elements? Will wind, water, fire, lend me a path to Moore? (398).

In 1 Samuel 28, Saul seeks to talk to Samuel's ghost through a medium too, in an act of total contempt motivated by anxiety. The parallel drawn between these stories places Robert once again in Saul's position and Caroline in Samuel's, although Samuel never intended to be requested as Caroline does.

Consulting a medium is a deadly sin in accordance with the Law in Leviticus 19.31<sup>33</sup>, 20.6<sup>34</sup>; and Deuteronomy 18.11<sup>35</sup>. The mere mention to it is an indication of how much Saul had sunk. The same way as Caroline and Robert were sunk. Caroline seems not to fear God anymore; her God is likely to have been replaced by Robert. Still in

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<sup>33</sup> Which reads "Do not go for advice to people who consult the spirits of the dead. If you do, you will be ritually unclean. I am the LORD your God."

<sup>34</sup> Which reads "If any of you go for advice to people who consult the spirits of the dead, I will turn against you and will no longer consider you one of my people."

<sup>35</sup> Which reads "and don't let them consult the spirits of the dead."

chapter 6, Caroline goes to Robert for help because she would “get the rough place made smooth by his aid” (75), alluding to Isaiah 40.4<sup>36</sup> and Luke 3.5<sup>37</sup>. In the Biblical text, the only one who can and does this is God himself. If, for Caroline, Robert is able to make her rough place smooth, she is inferring he had become her god. Jenkins states that Caroline sees in Robert a “liberating God figure” and, upon this passage, he continues an argument according to his thesis (*The Influence* 198).

In what concerns Robert and his taking the place of Saul, the reader could also prophesy his death, since it is written that Saul dies because of this sin, of consulting the spirits<sup>38</sup>. Under the circumstances, they are condemned; both Caroline, for considering appealing to it, and Robert, who even though not hearing her wish, led such a sinful life that made Caroline suppose he would not mind it.

Robert once again is put side by side with Saul, except this time the comparison intends to seem charming, the same way it does when used in *Jane Eyre* and with the same purpose. Robert had been shot and he is weakened. Caroline meets him in his bed to look after him. It presents itself as a parallel to Jane meeting Rochester after he becomes blind and crippled. Robert then utters: “Tell me anything – only keep talking. I am Saul: but for music I should perish.” (546), alluding to 1 Samuel 16.23<sup>39</sup>, in which the evil spirit which plagues Saul is driven away by the music from David’s harp.

Regarding Rochester the reader interprets a confirmation of his character together with other allusions to Samson, or Boaz, as it has been discussed earlier. It endorses his

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<sup>36</sup> Which reads: “Fill every valley; level every mountain. The hills will become a plain, and the rough country will be made smooth.”

<sup>37</sup> Which reads: “Every valley must be filled up, every hill and mountain leveled off. The winding roads must be made straight, and the rough paths made smooth.”

<sup>38</sup> According to 1 Chronicles 10.13, which reads: “Saul died because he was unfaithful to the LORD. He disobeyed the LORD’s commands; he tried to find guidance by consulting the spirits of the dead.”

<sup>39</sup> Which reads: “From then on, whenever the evil spirit sent by God came on Saul, David would get his harp and play it. The evil spirit would leave, and Saul would feel better and be all right again.”

strong nature, and dependence on the Divine, which is materialized in Jane, or David. As for Jane being compared to David, she had being shown as a type of Christ and, thus, it all matches perfectly.

Robert's nature, very similar to Rochester's, supports the same interpretation. The reader would be led not think otherwise; this allusion is nothing but a confirmation of the previous ones. Saul is not killed by the evil spirits which pervade him, nor would Robert be killed by a gunshot wound; on the contrary, they are healed due to the Divine presence of their Davids – and this can easily be predicted by the historical reader. While for Caroline, her sweetness throughout the novel is not enough to make of her a type of Christ. She does not have enough power inside the plot for the reader to infer her taking over him. She is, however, a medicine, an angelic presence that advances Robert's full restoration.

Agnes Pryor may not be one of the two heroines of *Shirley*, however, she is found to be the mother to one of them. To such an outcoming there are no hints whatsoever. After the surprising news, which is brought up while she is taking care of Caroline in her illness, Mrs. Pryor is said to have spent the night “as Jacob at Peniel. Till break of day, she wrestled with God in earnest prayer” (411), praying for Caroline to be healed. In the Biblical version, Jacob struggles intensely against this heavenly being, concentrating all his strength on winning. The text says he wins the fight and is very much blessed from then on<sup>40</sup>. From this, to say the least, the reader guesses Mrs. Pryor would be successful in her prayers and Caroline would be healed – as she is.

To such an allusion, Jenkins calls attention to the fact that this passage is interpreted as a type for Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane; in this sense, Mrs.

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<sup>40</sup> Genesis 32.22-32.

Pryor would be related to Jesus as well as to Jacob. Also, Jenkins reminds the reader that Mrs. Pryor's given name is Agnes, which means Lamb in Latin, as in *Agnus Dei* – the Lamb of God. Mrs. Pryor is, in fact, more than a mother or blessing; she is a Savior, at least for Caroline, who has got a reason to live, someone to live for. Mrs. Pryor replaces Robert as Caroline's god, after all, when Caroline states she had no reason to live before knowing Mrs. Pryor is her mother (410).

Mrs. Pryor ends up well and happy, in the company of her daughter and friends. She is blessed by God, with whom she fights. Caroline and Robert get married, as expected by the Ideal reader who saw behind each allusion a discreet hint to their romance.

Hortense Moore may not have such an important a role in the plot, being Robert and Louis' sister and Caroline's French tutor and friend. Nevertheless, she is twice referred to as a virtuous woman, similar to the one depicted in Proverbs 31. The narrator says in the beginning she is "a very orderly, economical person; the petticoat, camisole, and curl-papers were her morning costume, in which, of forenoons, she had always been accustomed to 'go her household ways' " (61), thereby alluding to Proverbs 31.27. Again, when Caroline is talking to herself and wondering about women's role, she traces similarities between these women (370-71) and concludes this model woman was a manufacturer, an agriculturist, a manager – although she does not mention *wife*.

Caroline praises such model of woman for her faculties and skills, not for being either a wife or a mother. In this monologue, the author highlights, once again, the novel's feminist character by praising such aspects of a woman's life. Hortense would never get married, the reader may predict. Indeed, she never does. But she would always be praised by her family and friends due to so many qualities.

Louis Moore shows up in the narrative when it is already far developed, on chapter 23, leaving not many allusions or predictions to be made out of him. He is not *Shirley's* main male character; even so, he ends up marrying the woman whose romance is named after her. One of the Biblical allusions which relates to Louis compares him to Daniel, who is a prophet of God as well as a teacher of the Law, the only person able to interpret the message written on the wall to King Belshazzar on Daniel chapter 5. What is there to be interpreted in the novel is Shirley's face: "Again he [Mr. Sympson] waited – waited in silence – absolutely not daring to speak: kept mute by something in Shirley's face, – a very awful something – inscrutable to him as the writing on the wall to Belshazzar"(512). The interesting part lies on Mr. Sympson's thinking on Louis as the only person to decipher it: "He was moved more than once to call Daniel, in the person of Louis Moore, and to ask an interpretation" (512). Besides the fact that both Louis and Daniel are intelligent teachers, instead of hinting that Louis and Daniel or Mr. Sympson and Belshazzar have anything in common, the allusion calls attention to the fact that Louis reads Shirley better than anyone else – actually, he is said to be the only one able to do so, in an episode which deals ironically with Shirley's destined husband, Sir Phillip Nunnely. There is no direct romantic allusion to indicate their marriage, only that such intimacy Louis shows in relation to Shirley, as Daniel in relation to God, and the fact it is public, is made clearer by the comparison with Daniel.

Shirley is, at times, compared to Biblical characters as the others. She compares herself to Cain, for example; and, in subtle passages as the latter, she can be regarded as a god. The Biblical allusions towards her, however, do not offer material to be used as possible predictions to her path and end, which is interesting for the main character of a Brontëian work. Perhaps the intention is exactly that: to remain clueless. Is she going to accept Robert's proposal? Is she going to remain single, stressing the feminism she holds

in her character? Is she going to end up with any of her suitor? Is she going to end up with Louis...? The reader cannot tell. At least not by any Biblical allusion – not even by the latter, as a matter of fact.

Shirley is a mystery.

## CONCLUSION

He has set the right time for everything.  
He has given us a desire to know the future, but never gives us the satisfaction of fully understanding what he does. . . .  
Whatever happens or can happen has already happened before. God makes the same thing happen again and again. (Ecc. 3.11, 15)

Ideally, a text should be read, understood and appreciated by any reader who attempts to do so. Unfortunately, as it has been explained from the beginning, not any reader is able to do it for many reasons: distance in time and space, lack of specific knowledge, among others. About this, Anthony C. Thiselton says:

All the same, if texts can transform readers, readers can and do transform texts. Hermeneutics traces paths by which this process occurs. Sometimes readers transform texts through ignorance, blindness, or misunderstanding. Sometimes readers either consciously or through processes of self-deception find ways of rendering harmless texts which would otherwise prove to be disturbing and call for change. It is customarily acknowledged that understanding may be difficult in cases where the subject-matter of a

text or its genre or code may be distant from the reader's assumptions and expectations and entirely unfamiliar. (35)

What Thiselton claims, in accordance with Tompkins, Iser and Eco, is that the text needs the reader in order to fulfill its purpose; a text without a reader to interpret it is nothing but words. The fulfillment of its meaning is born through the combination of the written text with the imaginative mind of the reader; and it is due to such attribute that Charlotte Brontë's works have not been cherished to its full limit. The feature in evidence in her texts is the Biblical allusions which, as they are released in her novel, start a *déjà lu* effect, tending to leave clues to the characters' path and resolution in the plot – the prophetic reading.

Brontë does so without Christianizing purposes; otherwise, she would have chosen Christianizing passages. Her purpose is far from converting Catholics to Protestantism, for although she does criticize them, she never actually argues about it. The insistence on using Biblical allusions all over her works is, in fact, a reaffirmation of the autobiographical character her novels hold, since she is known to have read the Bible more often than most people, owing to her strict Christian education. I have never intended to discuss her intentions; however, it is a fact that she is simply referring to the most read and known book of all times, a book read by all literate people in her days, and specially by herself. She does refer to other works and writers, not as commonly as to the Bible, though. The incidence of Biblical allusions and their nature are also a reflection of the Dissent and the Evangelical Movements' influence over the author. Having set this, it becomes immensely easier to actually *read* Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley*, and others in all its glory.

Direct Biblical allusions which compare Biblical characters to *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley*'s have been dissected through the lenses of its most influencing movements and its Ideal reader. The context in which *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley* were written determines their influencing movements – mainly the Evangelical Movement – and the sort of people who would read and understand them. Different types of reader have been explained in an attempt to define *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley*'s Ideal reader, and that would be the Historical reader – the one who read them by the time of their first publication. The average contemporary reader, however, is unable to fully grasp the Biblical allusions and benefit from the *déjà lu* effect. When discussing the transformation that happens when texts are placed in new contexts, or re-contextualized in new situations, Thiselton cites Hans-Georg Gadamer, who believes that the meaning of a text is changed under such circumstance. However, Thiselton clarifies this thought through E. D. Hirsch's statement: what changes is not meaning, but significance (Thiselton 36). For that reason, the allusions have lost significance to the contemporary reader.

The amount of Biblical material explored by Charlotte Brontë in *Shirley* is much wider than in *Jane Eyre*, since the average contemporary reader would not find much difficulty on at least recognizing it and its source. Nonetheless, they are unresponsive, offering few opportunities for the reader to fill in the gaps – there are not many gaps – and work things out in his or her mind. *Shirley* is not as interactive as *Jane Eyre*, with its fan of prophecies. At the end of the story, it is as if the narrator was laughing at the reader's face with an "I told you" look. Just as it is warned on its first page, the meal gets better in the end – but there is only a small portion of allusions to be *déjà lu* and prophesied in the end of the novel. *Shirley* is what it says it is from the start: real, cool, solid, unromantic (5).

The comparison between the two novels once again praises *Jane Eyre* over *Shirley*. It cannot be otherwise with such different styles and narrators. In *Jane Eyre*, the reader dives in a sea of disguised Biblical allusions which confer so much meaning to the characters in way that *Shirley* could not possibly do. It is understood, therefore, the fact that *Jane Eyre*'s reception was – and still is – greater than *Shirley*'s. It seems that this vast material can serve other purposes besides the prophetic reading here analyzed.

The significance of a work such as this lies on the awareness of the possibility of having a different (albeit not new) reading over Charlotte Brontë's, Victorian's, or any work of literature which at least mentions the Bible. Its mere reference might mean something more than meets the eye. The sum of possibilities is massive. It is up to the reader's skills to (fore)see or not to (fore)see it.

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