

INFLUENCE AND LEGACY: THE BRONTË SISTERS AND ANNE RICE**Alexandru-Ionuț Micu, PhD Student, "Al. Ioan Cuza" University of Iași**

Abstract: "Whoever controls the media, the images, controls the culture", said Allen Ginsberg. Those born in the 20th century have the luck to enrich their minds with literary masterpieces belonging to their predecessors. A novel or a poem is worth reading when it boosts one's imagination, leading to introspection. I pause, while reading, to ponder over an idea that impressed me; at the same time I'm thrown back to various states and memories. It's unbelievable what we discover about ourselves by simply reading.

Great writers have been inspired especially by classics. In the gothic genre we run across Matthew Lewis, Anne Radcliffe or Edgar Allan Poe; at first, one would be surprised to learn that novels "Jane Eyre" and "Wuthering Heights" include elements of the gothic. Ill-tempered characters fight for their loved ones and for their principles. Women silence men, supporting their points of view; an image unbearable in the first half of the 19th century. Novels belonging to the Brontë sisters hold the same energy as they did a century ago. No wonder they are avant-la-lettre and thought provoking.

Horror writer Anne Rice admits she was influenced by the Brontës; her vampires possess the same force and cruelty like negative characters Heathcliff and Mr. Brocklehurst. They owe supernatural powers, destroying everything around them. Moreover, misfit Catherine Earnshaw resembles Rice's creatures. They cannot find inner peace, struggling with dual personalities. Catherine's volcanic temper ends in no spiritual reconciliation; she's stuck between her nature and patriarchal pressures. She belongs to Heathcliff for eternity, but marries Linton.

Jane Eyre fights for freedom of speech, trying to win over man's authority; stubborn, smart, she rejects St. John's marriage proposal or Helen's spiritual limits. Like Lestat ("Interview with the Vampire"), she is willing to enforce her status in society in order to be accepted by the mob. Thus, mentalities can be shaped slowly but surely in order to reach that particular aim.

Keywords: passionate character, transcendental love, vampire, spiritual seclusion, crossing boundaries.

What makes a skillful writer? Each one of us has someone they look up to; especially when it comes to choosing your path in life. Writers influence each other a great deal. A work of fiction sends energy to each and every reader. He/she, in turn, passes it on to another.

Popular novels like Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights have been subjects of discussions throughout decades. From constructing feminism and one's true identity to rejecting patriarchal models and morals. Horror writer Anne Rice was inspired by the Brontës' characters; they reflect a passion for living, struggling to reach their aims.

The Brontës had a strict upbringing just like Rice did. She was raised as a Catholic and that made her feel trapped, with no freedom. She was faithful to God until the age of eighteen, when she decided to be an atheist. She wanted to see the world with her own eyes, with no

restrictions from God; she felt she had to put away God in order to grow up and see the world as is. On the other hand, the Brontës had to cope in a male dominated society, in which the woman was forbidden to hold her speech. This way, their novels picture secluded dwellings in which characters must survive one with the other; the silence of the surroundings is deafening and hard to bear. Women are held prisoners by dominating men who abuse their power. In *Jane Eyre*, Mr. Brocklehurst, at Lowood school, is portrayed as a monster who torments pupils both physically and psychologically.

Characters in Rice's novels reflect their grief for having lost God; they have no hope in salvation, rebelling against their state. They see it as unfair, like a curse. After thirty-eight years of being an agnostic, Rice turns to God; she was proud to admit it, but she loved and needed God all those years. However, a short while after embracing Church, she dismisses any organized religious group. She believes in God and is a secular humanist at present. She left the Catholic Church because of its fight against same sex relationships and against the use of condoms in Africa.

If in most gothic tales, the settings used are remote castles, the Brontës use households in this scope. Normal families are made up of adults hard to deal with, having nightmarish childhoods.

Rice reached to the vampire as a metaphor of her Christ haunted self. She felt abandoned and had to cry her disappointment through her characters. The Brontës felt silenced by abusing males the way Rice felt silenced by the Church and its norms.

Mystery is a must when making up a story; there has to be some secrets, regardless the genre of that piece of writing. No one knows about Heathcliff's past; he is described as resembling a gypsy, being found in Liverpool by Mr. Earnshaw. As a newcomer and slave-like, he is humiliated and laughed at due to his condition; like Armand (*The Vampire Armand*), he is tormented by the powerful and the rich. They take advantage of their position, to inflict violence on the weak ones. Shockingly enough, even today, one observes the silent hierarchy of power in all types of groups; from pupils to peers at the workplace. We act like beasts, identifying the alpha and trying to defeat him/her.

Kidnapped from his Russian background, Armand is taken as slave by merchants, overseas. He is believed dead by his family and suffers from loss, pain, until is bought by Marius. Just like Heathcliff, he finds hard to adapt to the new lifestyle; the Renaissance celebrated the beauty of life, the human body and the world. A tormented soul, Armand can't grasp the others' joy and approach to life. Unable to adapt, Heathcliff leaves Wuthering Heights, knowing he has no reason left to stay here; that's because he overhears Catherine's discussion with Nelly. Disappointed by Catherine's apparent unrequited love, he flees to start anew.

Armand is taken too young into immortal existence. He plunges into a senseless, savage world of people and supernatural creatures alike. That's because they all act like animals, hunting something that provides peace for a while. However, Heathcliff has to bear humiliation and cruelty imposed by Hindley Earnshaw. He has patience, bearing it all, as long as Catherine shared his pure, strong love for her.

Jane Eyre experiences, as well, moments of distress and disappointment. As governess, she can't be closer to Mr. Rochester's ward; for, she's not a relative. But she isn't viewed as distant as a servant is. Faced with rejection and lack of love, she explodes with crisis and screams like any other child would do. After years of humiliation with the Reeds and at Lowood school, she is unable to tolerate anymore contempt from anyone. Feeling inferior, useless, she rebels against the morals of the time; it seems as if her job as a teacher and governess is but a mechanical action done by a marionette. She feels like a prostitute,

having reached the ultimate level of low esteem. This way, she associates with mad Berths, believing it is normal to feel that way. Thus, she sees herself at the margins of society. In the end, it is Mr. Rochester's inner light that brings her hope; other characters interfere as well, showing her kindness and encouragement. For example Mrs. Fairfax, St. John Claire and his sisters. Still, all the while, Jane held her head up, kept going. No one around could have assumed she is distressed. She stood up for her point of view and didn't give up believing in equality between men and women.

When it comes to gender, Rice reverses patriarchal roles; she destroys healthy principles such as "traditional family", promoting homosexual relationships in her novels. She sees no difference between males and females. Nor does Emily Brontë. Both are fierce and willed when expressing their ideas. Whereas Charlotte Brontë is milder. "Wuthering Heights" is encrypted and mysterious to most of us, even today. But why try to solve a puzzle, if there wasn't any puzzle from the start? *Wuthering Heights* can be viewed as a state of mind, a troubling tune that slowly ceased, ending peacefully.

Rice's and Brontë's works abound in lack of empathy, pain, terror and torment. Characters are troubled by their other selves that come to surface. Lestat (*Interview with the Vampire*) is unsatisfied with the 21st century world he is living in. He asks for recognition from humans and wants to be all knowing. His selfishness and superiority suddenly disappear when confronted with God's image on St. Veronica's veil. He is wounded by divine light, not having believed in Christ. Vampires search for the ray of light, for the answer that there is inner peace and divinity. Louis and Armand feel bitter living as immortals among humans. Furthermore, Heathcliff and Catherine are orphans craving for the light of hope, just like Rice's vampires do.

Jane earns a status in Victorian society and in Rochester's heart, but Heathcliff and Catherine's love ends tragically. Love transcends material world in both cases; while alive, the two couldn't reunite. She was distracted by Linton's morality and was stubborn to belong to the superficial, outer world. Still, in the end, she yearned for Heathcliff's affection.

Claudia (*Interview with the Vampire*) rebels against her two vampire companions (Lestat and Louis) just like Jane rebels against men and the morals of the time. Claudia feels a woman trapped in the body of a girl; for, she was made a vampire at a young age. She is stubborn, feeling suffocated by her father's care. Blaming Louis and Lestat for her condition she decides to kill the latter. For, she was closer to Louis. On the otherhand, the woman is in the way of homosexual relationships. Jealous on the little one, Armand decides to destroy Claudia in order to get closer to Louis. Unfit in her position, she is killed in order to re-establish order among male vampires.

The absence of a mother proved a disaster for most characters in Brontë's novels. But for Rice's characters, a mother is meant to increase the child's dependence on her. It's meant to reduce the male's masculinity; his over-identification with the mother leads to his homosexual identity.

Lestat acquires a comic feature just like Heathcliff. The latter's harsh tone and appearance prove a bit funny when associated with Lockwood's uneasiness and confusion. Lestat always appears safe and sound when believes him dead or gone. Ironic and selective as usual, he acts like a spoilt brat. His ill-temper and liveliness are similar to Jane Eyre's. Numerous novels evolve around his vitality to steal the show and stand in the public eye.

Writers like the Brontë sisters and Anne Rice, bring discussions to the table. They don't judge or point the finger at someone or something; a writer achieves public recognition if he/she offers readers thought provoking themes. Among many domains, Rice searched mythology, the histories of Egypt or Italy in order to complete her novels. At the same time,

Emily Brontë was inspired by Novalis, Goethe, Schlegel, Hoffmann in order to create the action in *Wuthering Heights*. Such authors are gifted because they practiced the use of the supernatural, integrating it in our day to day busy lives.

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