# Universidad Zaragoza
## 1542

## Trabajo Fin de Grado

Intermediality and Female Agency in *Wuthering Heights*: A Comparative Study of Brontë's Novel and Emma Rice's Theatrical Adaptation

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2025

**Index**

**Abstract**

This dissertation analyses and compares Emily Brontë's classic novel *Wuthering Heights* with Emma Rice's modern theatrical adaptation. Through an examination of intermediality in the adaptation process, it explores the elements that are integrated in the play to create a contemporary reinterpretation. The study also investigates how both works approach the theme of female agency within their respective contexts. The conclusion that is reached is that Rice offers a dynamic and renewed vision of Brontë's novel, remaining faithful to the essence of the source text, while employing the multimedial aspects of theatre to engage with the audience and foster empathy towards the female anxieties portrayed.

**Keywords:** *Wuthering Heights,* intermediality, adaptation, female agency, theatre

**Resumen**

Este trabajo analiza y compara la novela clásica de Emily Brontë, *Cumbres Borrascosas,* con su adaptación moderna al teatro, escrita y producida por Emma Rice. Mediante una revisión del fenómeno de intermedialidad en el proceso de la adaptación, se exploran los elementos que han sido integrados en la obra de teatro para crear una reinterpretación contemporánea. Este estudio también investiga la manera en que ambas obras enfocan el tema de la agencia femenina, dentro de sus respectivos contextos. Se concluye que Rice ofrece una visión renovada y dinámica de la novela de Brontë, en la que se mantiene fiel a la esencia del texto original, empleando las características multimediales del teatro para conectar con la audiencia y fomentar la empatía hacia las inquietudes femeninas representadas.

**Palabras clave:** *Cumbres Borrascosas*, intermedialidad, adaptación, agencia femenina, teatro

## 1. Introduction

Widely regarded as a classic of English Literature, Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) remains a remarkably influential work which has inspired numerous reinterpretations across a variety of media, including film, music and theatre, each aiming to capture the novel's emotional depth.[1] A notable instance of these adaptations is the recent reimagining in the dramatic genre by renowned British actress, director and playwright Emma Rice, which premiered in 2021 at Bristol Old Vic, a theatre company based at Bristol's Theatre Royal. As is the case with any adaptation that transcends the boundaries of its original work's form to adjust to a different medium, Rice's play has undergone an "intermedial transformation process" in which Brontë's "original text" serves as "the source of the newly formed media product" (Rajewsky 51). Thus, the concept of intermediality plays a significant role in understanding how Rice reinterprets the novel through the addition of new elements that employ the multimedial aspects of the theatre. Included among these elements are: a mediating chorus composed of the personified Yorkshire Moors, songs, the capability of characters to address the audience whenever they feel helpless, puppets which convey the younger versions of the characters, and a minimalist set design that evokes the desolation of the harsh landscape.

It is also crucial for the understanding of Rice's adaptation to bear in mind her emphasis on the agency of female characters, as well as their challenge to male figures of authority and to social expectations throughout the story, themes that Brontë already embedded in her work at a time when addressing such issues—and especially as a woman writer—was considered completely inappropriate. Thus, the purpose of this dissertation is to elaborate a comparison between Rice's theatrical adaptation of *Wuthering Heights* and the original novel, taking into account how both Rice's inclusion of new elements in the intermedial transformation process and her approach to feminist

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[1] To name just a few of these reinterpretations, distinguished examples include the film adaptations of William Wyler (1939) and Peter Kosminsky (1992), as well as Kate Bush's famous song "Wuthering Heights," released in 1978. Regarding more contemporary adaptations, Andrea Arnold directed a film starring Kaya Scodelario as Catherine in 2011. More recently, Margot Robbie and Jacob Elordi have been cast as the main protagonists in a film adaptation by Emerald Fennell, whose release is scheduled for 2026.

themes manage to resonate with contemporary audiences, while preserving the essence of Brontë's Gothic exploration of the human heart and its intense emotions.

## 2. Theoretical Frameworks

### 2.1. Intermediality

To begin with, establishing intermediality as the primary theoretical framework on which my comparison will be founded requires a clear understanding of its fundamental principles. According to Irina Rajewsky, intermediality encapsulates all phenomena which contain a "crossing of borders between [different] media" (50). Some studies in this field suggest a distinction between several types of intermedial phenomena and consider the adaptation of texts to a different medium (e.g. the conversion of a poem to music, the cinematisation or the theatricalisation of a novel) as a case of intermedial transformation (Arvidson et al. 15; Clüver 24). In these transformations the original work is commonly referred to as *the source text*, while the adapted version is known as *the target work*. Given that "elements of the source text are carried over into the target [work]" (Clüver 24), any adaptation implies an "ongoing dialogical process" (Hutcheon 21) in which the constant influence of the source text becomes perceptible to those who are experiencing the adapted work, provided that they are familiarised with the original one (Hutcheon 6).

Despite the fact that this connection leads to an inevitable comparison between both works, I align with Linda Hutcheon's claim that adaptations are, in fact, distinct "autonomous works" (6) since they can be described as "repetition without replication" (7) and they require a creative process of reinterpretation from the adapter (22). Consequently, in order to fully comprehend Rice's work, it is essential to take into consideration all the elements that compose the play—script, set design, music, and chorus, among others—both as parts of Rice's target work and in relation to the source text from Brontë. In a similar way, the diversity of the components of her play contribute to Manfred Pfister's definition of drama as a "multimedial" text, an idea which refers to the way theatre is designed to be experienced through different media, including "verbal, visual and acoustic" channels (2).

Since my dissertation aims to compare two works from the dramatic and the narrative genre respectively, it is important to consider the aspects these two media

share, as well as the ones that distinguish them. As Eli Rozik states, both forms of expression possess the ability to "describe fictional worlds" (413) composed of their own characters, the interactions between them and the events in which they get involved (396). While literary fiction presents such events by *telling* them, through the elaboration of a narrative that relies on "the evocative power of words" (396) and on human imagination, theatre constitutes a "dynamic medium [that] generates continuous sequences of images, just as in real life" (402), therefore relying on "direct perception" (Hutcheon 23) and *showing* instead. Furthermore, the narrative genre possesses a narrative voice which mediates the events being told to a narratee, whereas in the theatrical genre such events are usually presented without a mediating communication system (Pfister 4).

Nevertheless, there are certain exceptions that differ from this "normal model of dramatic presentation" and which entail the "creation of a mediating communication system in drama," as is the case of the inclusion of the mediating chorus in Rice's play, which addresses the audience and whose function is similar to the narrator figure at certain moments throughout the play (Pfister 4). Due to the defining immediacy of the theatre, dramatic plays are capable of representing events in a more direct and brief manner, whereas novels are usually characterised by their extension. For this reason, theatrical adaptations from long novels like *Wuthering Heights* tend to require a procedure of "subtraction or contraction" (Hutcheon 19), transforming and compressing the pace of the events in order to adapt them to the new medium (11). In the section of the analysis devoted to intermediality, I will focus on the study of the new intermedial elements that Rice introduces in her adaptation to present a more modern, experimental vision of Brontë's classic.

## 2.2. Female Agency

Another significant aspect to consider in the analysis of *Wuthering Heights* is the depiction of women, both in the original text by Emily Brontë—written at a time when women were neither expected to be active agents who defied male figures of authority, like her main character, Catherine, nor to be writers, as Brontë was herself—and in the theatrical adaptation by Emma Rice, produced in a contemporary society in which feminist concerns are brought to the forefront in a significantly more prominent manner.

According to Hannah Kiester, female writers from the nineteenth century like the Brontë sisters and Mary Shelley "wrote in the Gothic form," which was originally dominated by male writers, "and subverted the traditions of the genre" from within to claim female agency and women's recognition "long before recognised feminist movements began," at a time when women were reduced to the domestic sphere, to passivity and submission (2–3).

Although nowadays the Brontë sisters are regarded as crucial authors of English literature, at the time they published their works they had to employ male pseudonyms (that is, Charlotte, Emily and Anne Brontë wrote under the pen names of Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell) because writing was considered an activity which was exclusive for men and improper for women, who were expected to be devoted to housekeeping and were not supposed to leave the domestic sphere. Thus, by writing with male pseudonyms and within the male-dominated genre of the Gothic—a genre which, since its origins, aimed to defy reason by exploring the uncanny, 'the other,' the tensions in the patriarchal family and the social-political anxieties through Gothic elements—, these female authors challenged the expectations that the oppressive system in which they lived had on women, and managed to portray a more complex and psychologically rich image of female characters (Heiland 3, 5). Their portrayal of female characters departed from previous idealisations that used to depict women as passive victims, incapable of showing anger, who were selfless, and who usually constituted clear examples of the Victorian concept of "the angel in the house," a concept named after Coventry Patmore's poem "The Angel in the House" in 1854, and which defines a pure and self-sacrificing woman entirely devoted to her family.

Feminist literary critics Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar questioned this notion of the nineteenth-century woman as angel and highlighted the importance for female writers to transcend not only that stereotype, but also its opposite, the one of the woman as "the madwoman in the attic"—a concept that was inspired by Charlotte Brontë's character Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* (Gilbert and Gubar, *Literary Theory* 812). This symbolic figure of the madwoman was seen as a monster, but it was in reality a personification of "many distinctively female anxieties," a representation of a side of women that had never been portrayed in literature before, marked by ambitions, anger and passions (Gilbert and Gubar, *Madwoman* xviii). Hence, the metaphor of "the madwoman in the attic" could be related to the figure of the female writer struggling to "free [herself] from social and literary confinement through strategic redefinitions of

self, art and society" (xviii). In *Wuthering Heights,* there are constant tensions between the need of being a "dutiful daughter" (Rice 108) or wife—the proper Victorian lady—and the risk of being considered selfish for having ambitions or showing anger, which leads the female characters to a constant struggle to shape their own destiny in a world ruled by social expectations and patriarchal rules.

In the decades following Emily Brontë's lifetime, organised feminist movements began to emerge, gradually evolving into distinct waves aimed at eradicating "sexist ideologies and systems" that perpetuate gender inequality (Dicker and Piepmeier 4–5). In spite of the fact that these feminist waves have considerably expanded women's rights over time, the pursuit of gender equality remains far from finished, with contemporary feminism continuing to address gender issues through the use of diverse resources, such as the "new technologies of the Internet, . . . [the] activism of protest marches . . . popular music" (Dicker and Piepmeier 5) and the revisioning of the portrayal of female characters in "old texts from a new critical direction" (Rich 18). In the section of the analysis that focuses on female agency, I will discuss how evolving feminist discourse may influence the way in which female characters—in this case in Rice's theatrical adaptation of *Wuthering Heights*—are perceived by modern audiences.

## 3. Analysis

### 3.1. Analysis: Intermediality

Firstly, while Brontë portrays the harsh, wild nature of the Yorkshire moors as a highly symbolic setting for this passionate and violent story to unfold, Rice decides to transform "The Moor" into a real communal character, embodied by a group of actors who represent a chorus. This chorus follows the principles of the originary Greek chorus, as defined by Aristotle in his *Poetics*, in which he claimed that the chorus "should be regarded as one of the actors; it should be an integral part of the whole [action]" (ch. 18).[2] It is noteworthy how despite the fact that Rice takes the idea of the personification of the landscape to a new level, in Brontë's novel, nature already

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[2] According to Aristotle's classical theories of drama, the Greek chorus is usually considered a "passive observer, who is only active in a verbal sense, offering words of advice, warning or prayer" (Pfister 79). Therefore, this type of chorus can establish a dialogue with the protagonists while remaining able to distance itself from the dramatic action and reflect upon it.

functioned almost as a character in its own right, mirroring the characters' inner psychology in a way that resembles Ruskin's notion of the pathetic fallacy[3] and T.S. Eliot's concept of the objective correlative.[4]

Brontë's depiction of Wuthering Heights highlights from the beginning its harsh climatic conditions, as noted by the narrator Lockwood when describing the estate's name's connotations: "*Wuthering* being a significant provincial adjective, descriptive of the atmospheric tumult to which its station is exposed in stormy weather" (Brontë 2; my emphasis). I concur with Jonathan Frank Goodridge's argument that in such a place, only those elements possessing "a fortress-like strength," as is the case of the rocks, can endure the "exposure to the power of the wind" (69). Thus, the setting created by Brontë serves as a metaphor to picture how the purest and most resilient emotions and passions are the only thing that can prevail despite harsh diversities. The love between Heathcliff and Catherine remains in spite of his corruption, the dominance of their flaws over their personalities, the social obstacles and the influence of the violent environment in which they were raised. Reinforcing this metaphor, Catherine describes her love for Heathcliff as one that "resembles the eternal rocks beneath" (Brontë 74).

Proving her understanding of the importance of nature in this story, Rice's personification of the landscape allows The Moor to assume various functions from the position of the chorus. One of the most prominent roles The Moor presents is the one of being witness to the complex story that has taken place in Wuthering Heights throughout the years and which has led to the current situation that Lockwood encounters at his arrival. Rice plays with the idea of the permanence of nature to create this wise, "wild and elemental [chorus]" (Rice 18) who seems to know everything that has happened in the land. The exposition of the play is carried out by The Moor by presenting the past events and the characters involved, both to Lockwood and to the audience through visual and verbal content, and acting as a mediating element that

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[3] Victorian critic John Ruskin coined the term "pathetic fallacy," which consists of "the attribution of human aspects and emotions" to the natural world (Miles 210). This literary device has been commonly associated with movements like Romanticism and the Gothic, and serves as a means of projecting the character's intense emotions onto the outer world. In this way, nature becomes a medium of expression, responding to and mirroring the character's feelings.

[4] Literary critic, poet and playwright Thomas Stearns Eliot considered the "objective correlative" as "the only way of expressing emotion in the form of art," achieved through the inclusion of "a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events [or] external facts" that, whenever they are presented, manage to evoke a "*particular* emotion" (qtd. in Matthiessen 85). For example, in Brontë's novel, every time there is an explicit reference to the moors' harsh landscape, the intense passions of the characters seem to be evoked and externalised.

replaces the figure of the narrator—occupied in the source text by the visitor Lockwood at an extradiegetic level, and by the servant Nelly at an intradiegetic level, with the latter not appearing in the play.

Hence, I would contend that in the intermedial transformation, Lockwood transitions from his role as a narrator to that of a "perceiver," defined by Chiel Kattenbelt as one "who assumes the position of the spectator" and who is aware, just as the audience is, that he is "witnessing a staged 'reality'" (32)—in Lockwood's case, a representation of the events prior to his arrival—, thus reinforcing the self-reflective and metafictional feature of the theatre. In other words, Lockwood becomes the one who has to discover the story gradually alongside the audience as the past events are represented on stage, which introduces a hint of humour, due to his comments on the intricacies of the plot (e.g. "This is all too difficult. . . . How is anyone expected to follow this? . . . Everyone's related, all the names sound the same . . ." [Rice 20]). The exposition includes a summary of the entire genealogy depicted in the novel, which is told by The Moor as the tombstones of the majority of the deceased characters in the present timeline are shown to the audience. This method constitutes a dynamic approach for conveying the dense storyline, simplifying the original narrative in order to facilitate the audience's comprehension.

Even though both the play and the novel share a non-linear plot, they are organised differently, conforming to the defining features of the medium to which they belong. While the novel is structured in thirty-four chapters and employs the technique of "a story within a story within a story"—with Lockwood acting as the frame narrator who must reconstruct all the past events told by Nelly and narrate them to the implied reader—, the play is divided into four parts, in addition to a prologue and an epilogue. To depict the diverse timelines that compose this non-linear plot in the theatre, on some occasions The Moor introduces analepses, implying such temporal shifts through a transformation in the staging—i.e. a change of set design, of the characters that are on stage or of the situation in which they find themselves. The beginning of Part One serves as an illustration of this inclusion of analepsis: after The Leader of The Moor mentions that Heathcliff "was found by Mr Earnshaw . . . at the Liverpool docks," the sound effects change to convey the different setting in which that past event took place, adding the murmur of people, music, and other "man-made sounds" that contribute to creating the atmosphere of "the bustling Liverpool Dock" (Rice 21–22)—an atmosphere

of a place in which civilisation predominates and which contrasts with the harsh, solitary environment of Wuthering Heights, ruled by the forces of nature .

Moreover, contributing to the implication that a chronological jump has occurred on stage, the actor that plays Heathcliff employs a puppet of a little dark boy in his performance to create the illusion that it was a younger Heathcliff who was found lost in the dock. On the other hand, in the novel, this analepsis is embedded in the narration shortly after Lockwood's arrival to Wuthering Heights, when Nelly tells him about Mr. Earnshaw, "the old master," and about how "one fine summer morning" he went to Liverpool and some days after that, he returned with little Heathcliff (Brontë 30–31). Thus, while the play uses the chorus's storytelling and the visual transformations on stage to introduce analepses in a way that relies on direct perception, in the novel, Nelly simply details with her words the chronological moment in which each of the events she narrates occurred, thus relying on the imagination of the narratee (a role embodied by both Lockwood and the implied reader). It is also worth noting, regarding the narratee's task of imagining the events narrated, that in the play, this process is represented onstage by Lockwood, who dramatises the activity carried out by the implied reader when interpreting the book—e.g. when Lockwood is trying to understand the relationship among all the characters and drawing conclusions from what The Moor tells him (Rice 21).

In view of the fact that the play adapts a considerably extensive novel, the pacing of events needs to be adjusted in the intermedial transformation in order to suit the temporal limitations of a two-hour production, and The Moor plays a symbolic role in this process. In order to convey the illusion of the passing of time on stage, there are instances in which a chain of events that occurs throughout a longer period of time in the novel, is compressed in a brief, meaningful sequence in the play. For example, at the end of Part Three, after Heathcliff has visited Catherine when she is approaching death, the fatal destinies of the characters are represented successively, by means of glimpses or fragmentary images of their downfalls. In this case, the audience sees in a brief sequence how "Isabella escapes from Wuthering Heights and runs for her life," pregnant with Heathcliff's child, "Hindley drinks himself to death, Hareton tries to bring his father back to life but is left [alone]," Catherine is shown dead and finally, Heathcliff curses her soul to never rest, out of the torment provoked by his loss (Rice 75). In contrast, in the novel, all these events are narrated by Nelly to Lockwood across various chapters. That is, chapter 16 begins with the narration of Catherine's death and in

chapter 17, Nelly tells how Isabella visited her to inform her of her misfortunes as Heathcliff's wife and of her imminent departure, before running away to somewhere near London; this chapter also records Dr. Kenneth and Nelly's conversation in which Nelly finds out about Hindley's death (Brontë 150, 166, 169).

Thus, Rice compresses Brontë's narration by subtracting several details and by constructing the aforementioned tragic sequence of the essential events, which unfolds in a visual, impactful way. Throughout the entire sequence, the chorus sings the song "I Am the Moor" (Rice 75), in which The Moor is associated with the idea of the immutability and the permanence of nature, as well as with the concept of the personified landscape which witnesses all these adversities. However, The Moor also seems to embody the unchangeable, inevitable notion of destiny itself, as a force that cannot be controlled. This is not only implied in some of the song lines, like "Nothing here can change me . . . I stick to my story," but also in scenes such as the one in which The Moor takes Heathcliff and Isabella's child from the safety provided by Edgar Linton and carries him to the harshness of Wuthering Heights—owned by the child's wicked father—, while telling Edgar that he does not have any "influence over his destiny" (Rice 85). Thus, I would argue that the musical element of "I Am the Moor," introduced in the intermedial transformation, symbolises how the different destinies the characters encounter are either consequences of their actions and their tragic flaws (in a way that resembles Aristotle's idea of a tragic plot[5]), or result from the capriciousness and the inevitability of fate.

Having briefly mentioned the symbolic meaning that the song "I Am the Moor" adds to the play, my dissertation will now explore the contribution of the soundtrack (composed by Ian Ross) to the creation of a dynamic and more modern version of the story, as well as its role in the process of intermediality. I would argue that the inclusion

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[5] In Aristotle's *Poetics* he defends that, to be considered tragic, heroes needed to possess a tragic flaw, which inevitably would lead them to their downfall—a change from "happiness into misery . . . brought upon [them] . . . by some error of judgment" (ch. 13). It could be argued that Catherine commits an error of judgement by believing that by marrying Edgar Linton she would be able to help Heathcliff and herself more than if she married Heathcliff—which she thinks would degrade her—, and that leads her to unhappiness and eventually to her death. On the other hand, Heathcliff is guided by anger and revengeful purposes at his return to Wuthering Heights as a gentleman—for he has been racially marginalised ever since he was a child, and has lost the opportunity to be together with Catherine—, and his immoral actions lead him to become a wicked master and to never find happiness. In this play, just like in Aristotle's notion of the tragic, there are incidents which provoke "pity and fear" in the audience and which "are consequences of one another" (ch. 9), affecting all the characters that live in that environment. However, the ending of *Wuthering Heights* includes a hint of hope and happiness, which is not characteristic of tragedy.

of songs in the play corresponds to the definition of one of Rajewsky's subcategories of intermediality, i.e. "media combination," which is "the result of combining at least two conventionally distinct media or medial forms of articulation . . . each present in their own materiality and [contributing] to the constitution and signification of the entire product" (52). Moreover, one of the songs that are sung throughout the play is a conversion of a poem by Emily Brontë, "The Bluebell" (1846), into music, which constitutes an intertextual reference to the literary production of Brontë, following Julia Kristeva's theory of intertextuality as a constant dialogue between different texts that appears, in this case, by means of an explicit allusion to another text. As a final remark, due to its characteristics, this specific soundtrack could also be related to Bertolt Brecht's modern conception of songs as an element of the epic theatre.[6]

Regarding the lyrical content of the soundtrack, each song reinforces the dramatic context of the scene in which it is embedded, thereby heightening its emotional impact. To name a few of these songs, "Paper Love" is sung by Catherine's Ghost while The Moor is delivering the letters from Young Cathy to Little Linton, and its lyrics suggest how Young Cathy's love for him is fragile and artificial like paper and therefore is not meant to endure, unlike love which possesses the strength of nature, such as Catherine and Heathcliff's, that "stands the fire" and does not "drown in the flood" (Rice 95). The aforementioned "Bluebell" reflects on the transience of life through the imagery of the bluebell itself, which is initially described as "the sweetest flower," but by the end of the song "has lost its bloom" and "yields no sweet perfume" (Rice 27–28). This song appears both during Mr. Earnshaw's death in Part One and in the scene in which Catherine's Ghost—who was lying beside Edgar's grave—takes Heathcliff's hand and they both sing together, leaving Edgar's Ghost alone and employing the lyrics to contemplate the contrast between life and death, a division that now separates them (Rice 27–28, 109). It is worth noting how, as characters in the play die, they become part of the chorus, symbolising how they merge both literally and metaphorically with the earth and with the moor, while reinforcing the dichotomy between the fragility of life and the enduring essence of the natural world. Lastly, the final lines from the song "Home," sung by The Moor in the Epilogue—"Hate and fear all melt away / Hope and love remain"—, are highly symbolic, as they represent the end

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[6] According to Bertolt Brecht, songs "break or transcend [the internal communication system of the play] by addressing the audience directly," in a way in which characters become 'accomplices of the playwright' and "establish a mediating communication system that exposes the fictionality of the play and subjects it to a critical and distanced commentary" (Pfister 80).

of the transgenerational cycle of pain and the hope for a new, purer love—embodied by Young Cathy and Hareton, who have learnt from the mistakes of their predecessors (Rice 117).

## 3.2. Analysis: Female Agency

The second key aspect that the present dissertation intends to analyse is the portrayal of female agency in Rice's theatrical adaptation, while also examining the situations in which certain female characters from the original text struggle within a patriarchal society, as well as their representation on stage. Due to the complexity of her character and her central role in the plot, Catherine is one of the most crucial figures to focus on in this study. From the beginning, both in the play and in the novel, she is presented as a rebellious girl, a trait that is reinforced through her dialogue. For example, in the play Catherine explicitly declares "I am never so happy as when all are scolding me at once!" (Rice 26), a line rephrased by Nelly's narration in the novel: "she was never so happy as when we were all scolding her at once" (Brontë 36). Another instance would be Catherine's response (identical in both the original text and its theatrical adaptation) to her father's question—"Why canst thou not always be a good lass, Catherine?"—being "Why canst thou not always be a good man, father?" (Brontë 37; Rice 27). As illustrated by these examples, Catherine defies male figures of authority and challenges the societal expectations placed on women, not conforming to the established patterns of the dutiful daughter, "the angel in the house" and the idealised, flawless and passive heroines that were common in previous literary traditions, as previously discussed in Section 2.2.

Indeed, Catherine is an active heroine who can be seen behaving according to her own beliefs, regardless of what is expected from her. For instance, as a child, she befriends Heathcliff and defends him whenever Hindley mistreats him—and it could be argued that Hindley marginalises Heathcliff mostly for being racially and socially perceived by him as "the Other," while Catherine herself embodies a similar form of otherness, given her position as a woman in a patriarchal society. By befriending Heathcliff, Catherine challenges another male figure of authority in the patriarchal house, in this case the one of her brother, the rightful heir to the property. To further highlight Catherine's agency, Rice includes a scene in the play in which Hindley steals a

crown of "bracken and heather" from Heathcliff and places it on his own head (Rice 24). Heathcliff and Catherine had crafted the crown after running together across the moors—in a previous scene that visually emphasises Catherine's need to be active, as well as her athleticism, another unusual trait for a female heroine in Brontë's times. Upon seeing Hindley with the crown, Catherine declares, "[i]f you want the crown, you will have to take me on too. I have fight enough in me to take on an army" (25), thereby likening herself to a soldier and evoking the semantic field of war, a domain traditionally associated with masculinity, but used here by Rice to assert female strength.

On the other hand, the fact that Hindley places the crown on his head could also be interpreted as him claiming his position as the legitimate heir of Wuthering Heights and reminding the audience that according to "the natural order of things" (28), neither an outsider like Heathcliff nor a woman like Catherine could inherit the property, but he would—in spite of his wicked personality. It is also worth noting, as another symbolic implication of the way in which patriarchism is preserved through systems like the inheritance of property, how Hindley starts behaving like his father in the play when he becomes the master of Wuthering Heights. Rice's adaptation dramatises this mimicry by showing how Hindley hides his wife Frances inside of his coat at his return to the property, before revealing her to the audience and to the rest of the characters, imitating the same process in which the former master, Mr. Earnshaw, revealed Heathcliff when he brought him to their house (23, 29).

Regarding the struggles of the female main character to shape her own destiny in a patriarchal society, Catherine's psychological complexity lies in the way in which she tries to navigate such a society, for she possesses certain flaws which end up dominating her personality and her decision-making, and which eventually lead to her unhappiness. Despite the fact that Catherine is flawed with selfishness and ambition, it is crucial to take into consideration, from a contemporary and feminist reinterpretation of the original novel, that, although the Earnshaws had possessions, she was not meant to inherit any property within a patriarchal society that was dominated by rules established by men. Thus, the only way of acquiring economic stability for a woman like her at the time was by getting married to someone who could provide her with such, i.e. Edgar Linton, whose property, Thrushcross Grange, is described throughout the novel as a superior, wealthier and "respectable" residence in comparison to Wuthering Heights (Brontë 28, 71). I concur with Hanna Kiester's argument that, instead of offering the

readers an outcome for the novel based on the male fantasy of the Gothic female protagonist "following her passion" for the man she has intense feelings for, regardless of his rank "into the abyss of social rejection" (6), female authors like Emily Brontë decided to write a more realistic narrative, presenting the few options that were left for women to climb the social ladder, as well as the difficulties those options presented—for often those women had to act according to sense and reason, rather than following their desires, and that, as is the case of Catherine, could result in their dissatisfaction. Throughout both the play and the novel, this conflict between her sense and passions is made evident, alongside her violent temper whenever the events do not unfold in her favour; for example, in the moment in which she grabs Hareton when he is still a baby and starts shaking him while screaming, or when she strikes other characters, like Linton and—in the case of the play—even The Moor (Rice 49–50; Brontë 63).

Turning now to the portrayal of other female characters in Rice's theatrical adaptation of *Wuthering Heights*, it is essential to address Rice's decision to omit Nelly from the play, a choice that, paradoxically, emphasises in an implicit manner the importance her character held in the original novel. In a brief presentation of her play for the Brighton Festival 2022, Rice stated that she "gave a lot of [Nelly's] wit and humour to this new character, The Moors" ("Emma Rice" 00:00:55–00:01:01). As a result, a significant number of Nelly's lines of dialogue and actions from Brontë's novel are reassigned to The Moor in the play. For instance, the scene in which Nelly asks Catherine if she really loves Edgar becomes a conversation between The Moor and Catherine in the play (Brontë 70, Rice 51). Moreover, The Moor assumes a similar role to that of Nelly's narrative voice in the novel, showing past events—which The Moor, like Nelly in the source text, witnessed—and helping Lockwood understand the story of Wuthering Heights. Nevertheless, what stands out from the influence of Nelly's character on The Moor is the fact that the latter advises the characters on several occasions in the play, like the former often did in the novel.

To name some of The Moor's advice, I would highlight the scene in which The Leader tells Heathcliff to "swallow his pride" and helps him appear like "a prince in disguise" (Rice 41) so that Catherine would like him, for The Moor initially cared about the two of them, while still being highly aware of their flaws and suffering the effects of them—in a similar way to Nelly, who was usually mistreated by both of them. A comparison could be established between the aforementioned scene in which Catherine

strikes The Moor and the way in which the former mistreated Nelly in the novel, harassing her "terribly" (Brontë 33), pinching her and slapping her, as Nelly describes, "impelled by the naughty spirit within her", for "[Catherine] never had the power to conceal her passion" (63). The second example of The Moor's advice to highlight takes place when The Moor acts as an intermediary between Young Cathy and Hareton, trying to bring them together, aligning with Nelly's wishes in the novel, who had taken care of both of them and was fond of them, and who stated that with "the union of those two . . . there won't be a happier woman than [herself] in England" (Rice 115, Brontë 288).

Hence, I would argue that the allusion to Nelly's importance is taken a step further in the creation of The Moor, for this chorus appears almost as an embodiment of the notion of Mother Nature, that is, a female personification of nature that typically highlights the nurturing aspects of both nature and women. Such a notion could be related to Nelly's role as a nurturer who raises the children from Wuthering Heights, advising them as they grow up and almost playing the role of a mother, especially for Young Cathy and Hareton. This idea of The Moor as a portrayal of Mother Nature would be reinforced by the fact that The Leader is played by a female actress. On the other hand, The Moor could also be associated with the notion of nature as a shelter, attempting to assist the characters—and, like Nelly, often in accordance with The Moor's biases and emotional attachments—whenever they feel helpless. Lastly, Rice's decision to create this relation between Nelly and The Moor resolves an intermedial problem related to the process of adapting an extensive novel—with a frame story narrative that relies on the dialogue between an intradiegetic narrator and an extradiegetic one—into a theatrical play. In other words, had Rice chosen to include Nelly's character on stage, maintaining the features she possessed in the source text and assigning Nelly her original role as the narrator, the storytelling would have become significantly less dynamic—something worth considering, given that theatrical plays are intended to be a dynamic medium for representing stories, one that relies on showing rather than on telling.

Another relevant aspect to mention in this study is the sense of confinement experienced by women when reduced to the domestic sphere, and in this regard, Isabella Linton becomes a key character to analyse. While it is undeniable that Brontë's novel contains several Gothic elements (also present in Rice's adaptation), such as the dark, harsh atmosphere of the Yorkshire moors, the recurring violence, Catherine's ghost, the evolution of Heathcliff into a Gothic villain, and Lockwood's perception of him as the

wicked master of a mysterious house—which, like its owner, seems to hide obscure secrets—, I would argue that Isabella Linton represents one of the most significant Gothic symbols, as she plays the role of the Gothic victim. After marrying and eloping with Heathcliff, Isabella becomes an oppressed, vulnerable figure who no longer has the support of her family—i.e. in the play, Edgar tells The Leader "trouble me no more with her . . . hereafter she is only my sister in name" (Rice 68). Furthermore, she is unable to find her place at Wuthering Heights, where she is even denied a bedroom at her arrival. Isabella experiences profound discomfort there, and becomes an outsider in her new house—an embodiment of "the Other." It could be argued that Isabella's imprisonment dramatises, in an extreme form, the female anxieties that women could feel in oppressive patriarchal environments, where they were constantly reminded of the unequal gender relationships that existed in society. In Isabella's case, it is Heathcliff who exposes the inequality of their relationship, for she is merely an object for him to achieve his vengeance, and he makes clear (after she tells him that she was waiting for him to go to *their* bedroom) that what is *his* should never be *hers* (Rice 71; Brontë 131).

Given that in the novel Isabella writes a letter to Nelly to tell her about her helpless situation, what becomes most striking in Rice's portrayal of Isabella is that, despite the previously established relation between The Moor and Nelly, Isabella does not address the former. Instead, for the first time in the play, a character breaks the fourth wall and addresses the audience directly, symbolising Isabella's need to tell her own story and find an empathic listener. She explains that she has "no other friend to talk to," and even asks the spectators for permission to speak (Rice 68). There is another instance where she talks to the audience—after Heathcliff "violently pushes her into the dark" and The Moor "covers what is happening," hiding the darker aspects of the story but making them clear implicitly—and begs the spectators: "Remember my name please. I am Isabella Linton. No. I forgot. I am Isabella Heathcliff. I don't want to disappear" (71). This impactful line emphasises the struggles Isabella faces in her new life as a wife in a marriage without love, as well as the important role that marriage played for women at the time, since they became dependent on their husbands and even lost part of their names—which could be interpreted as losing part of their identities.

As a final point, although Young Cathy shares certain traits with her mother—such as her need to be active, her stubbornness, and her capability to show bitterness, mostly towards Hareton at first—, she eventually becomes a symbol of regeneration and hope for a better future. Unlike her mother, Young Cathy manages to

resist being dominated by her flaws and remains good-natured, ultimately finding the purest form of love that is presented in the novel. Gilbert and Gubar propose that Catherine Earnshaw was "a daughter of nature" who "fell into decline"—partly influenced by the violent environment and social expectations in a "poisonous . . . culture"—and whose character was fragmented between a "mad" part and a "gentler" one, with Young Cathy inheriting the latter (qtd. in Stoneman 149). In the play, upon introducing herself to The Moor and, indirectly, to the audience, Young Cathy expresses her desire to "go out," for "she had not once been beyond the range of her father's land by herself" (Rice 79). However, once she ventures into Wuthering Heights, she is soon relegated to the position of Heathcliff's prisoner, partly mirroring Isabella's imprisonment.

Moreover, in the theatrical adaptation, during her initial visit to Wuthering Heights—which already foreshadows her confinement—she is portrayed as "casting a longing look to the door, eager to be active" (91). Even though Heathcliff prevents her from leaving and becomes violent towards her—throwing her to the ground and slapping her—, Young Cathy insists that she is "not afraid" (102) of him, reasserting her stubbornness and female strength, daring to defy the male figure of authority. Another instance of her defiance, as portrayed in the play, occurs when Little Linton tells her that she "must obey [his] father" and him, and she replies that she must only obey herself (104). While Young Cathy was raised with love and gentleness by Edgar Linton, Hareton and Little Linton have grown up in a violent environment in Heathcliff's property, which has resulted in Hareton's "brutishness" and Little Linton's selfishness (92). Nevertheless, Young Cathy is able to empathise with both of them: she marries Little Linton under coercion, but also out of pity, and eventually comes to understand Hareton, helping him to improve, as they both take "quite some time to heal" together (114). Hence, both in the novel and in its theatrical adaptation, Young Cathy's good nature prevails despite the harsh circumstances, and she is ultimately rewarded by finding a happy ending alongside Hareton, with both of them appearing as a better version of their predecessors, Catherine and Heathcliff. The play ends with the rest of the cast members—who now play the role of deceased characters that have been integrated into The Moor—"[gathering] to watch what is happening," for something really unusual "seems to have found its way" into those moors affected by generations of pain and mistakes, and that "something" is love (117–118).

## 4. Conclusion

Since its publication in 1847 and over the years, *Wuthering Heights* has received a considerable amount of contrasting criticism. Some of Brontë's contemporaries argued that the novel "did not conform to the accepted standards of Victorian novel writing" (Watson 245), and with the passing of time, many have denounced its excessively dark atmosphere and the alleged immorality of its characters (248). However, others have praised Brontë's analysis of the complexities of human passions (244) and her message of the way in which "Nature takes her own laws" (254), giving way to the "reestablishment of . . . harmony" that had previously been destroyed (262). Ultimately, its influence on literature is undeniable, and many different adaptations have been made to date. This dissertation has investigated Emma Rice's theatrical reinterpretation of the novel, focusing on the alterations that have taken place during the intermedial transformation process, as well as on the representation of female agency on stage.

As a conclusion, Rice's play manages to condense the content from the source text and integrate it into a two-hour production that engages with a contemporary audience through innovative and dynamic techniques such as the use of puppets, the inclusion of meaningful songs, the interaction with the spectators and the personification of The Moor as a crucial character. These elements, incorporated during the adaptation process, allow viewers to connect and empathise with the characters while maintaining the dark essence of the original text. Regarding the representation of female characters on stage, Rice successfully portrays the complexities and ambitions of Catherine, the influence of Nelly's role in the story through the symbolism of The Moor, the helplessness of Isabella, and the depiction of Young Cathy as the perfect balance between a good-natured and an assertive girl who manages to shape her destiny despite the obstacles of a violent environment and a patriarchal society. In the end, Rice's adaptation not only pays a powerful tribute to Brontë's groundbreaking work—which from the beginning challenged patriarchal norms both by her decision to write being a woman, and by her subversion of the male-centred Gothic novel genre's tradition from within—but also successfully captures its intensity and ensures that its lasting influence continues in contemporary forms of art.

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