

‘Everybody’s a Sleuth Nowadays’:

The Effect the Fictionalisation of Oscar Wilde, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Charles Dickens, and the Brontë sisters as Detectives has on their authorial and cultural identity in Contemporary Detective Biofiction

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Abstract

Deze thesis onderzoekt de fictionalisatie van Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Oscar Wilde, Charles Dickens en de Brontë sisters als detectives in zes geselecteerde biofictie boeken in het detective genre. Daarvoor is de volgende onderzoeksvraag opgesteld: wat voor effect heeft de fictionalisering van Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Oscar Wilde, Charles Dickens en de Brontë sisters als detectives in 21ste-eeuwse Britse en Amerikaanse biofictie op de manier waarop hun culturele identiteit, auteursidentiteit en hun werken worden vormgegeven? Om deze onderzoeksvraag te beantwoorden zal ik gebruik maken van verscheidene theorieën binnen life-writing en biofictie, specifiek gericht op concepten zoals “fictionalisering” en “biographemes” om te analyseren hoe deze auteurs neergezet worden in de boeken. Deze analyse zal gebaseerd zijn op mijn eigen geselecteerde boeken. Het hoofddoel is om te onderzoeken hoe deze historische auteurs neergezet worden in biofictie wanneer ze een andere rol aannemen dan hun auteurschap - namelijk de rol van een detective - en hoe hun werken, persoonlijkheid, en culturele en auteursidentiteit hiermee verweven zijn en het verhaal als een geheel.

Keywords:

Biofiction, fictionalisation, biographemes, authorial identity, cultural identity

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Chapter 1: Introduction

[N]o matter whether biographical novels should be read as fiction (and, thus, as non-referential), their biographical content clearly interests readers and is recognised as contributing to the subject's afterlife.

– Julia Novak, *Experiments in life-writing: an introduction*

The subject of biofiction is a relatively new one in the history of literary research. Biographical fiction – or “biofiction” – is “a narrative based on the life of a historical person, weaving biographical fact into what must otherwise be considered a novel” (Novak). It furthermore “dispenses with the claim to factual reliability or historical accuracy, permitting a fictional and speculative recreation of the subject's inner life” as Caitríona Ní Dhúill notes in her article on the meditations between life writing and metabiography (286). In other words, real-life persons are the subject of these so-called biofictional novels, paving the way to a fictional approach to real lives with endless possibilities – but also endless debates and biases that are perhaps the inevitable result of fictionalising real people's lives.

The introduction of *Biographical Fiction: A Reader*, edited by Michael Lackey, deftly composes a compact history of the phenomenon of biofiction and in particular the aforementioned biases and misconceptions that have come along with it over the years. The introduction of this book presents two separate factions in the last century who “have tried to own biofiction in order to disown it” (Lackey 1). The first one was George Lukács, who in 1937 defined the biographical novel as “a bastardized version of the historical novel”, because its “excessive focus on the psychological subject's interiority necessarily distorts and misrepresents the objective proportions of history” (1). Therefore, the biographical novel is in his view an irredeemable aesthetic form.

The second faction is represented by scholars like Paul Murray Kendall, who published *The Art of Biography* in which he, too, takes up a hostile position towards biofiction. However, other than Lukács, he defines biofictional novels in relation to life writing and asserts that these novels, which he calls “biographies-as-novels”, are doomed to fail because they are “almost wholly imaginary” (1). He faults them for being recreational tales of real people instead of being true biographical works, even though they never aimed to be factual works. The objectivity (or lack thereof) of biographies is, however, also disputable and worth investigating further in another thesis or study.

Biofiction, then, has had a difficult history in the field of literature as a whole. Yet, in more recent years, the subject has become more and more acceptable as the whole book of *Biographical Fiction: A Reader*, composed of various essays on a multitude of topics within biofiction, proves. Michael Lackey emphasises in the introduction of this book that authors of biofiction deliberately – and unapologetically – change facts at will (8). He explains how authors of biofiction, with the stress on “fiction”, seek to represent a different type of truth than a biographer: to stress one truth, for example the oppression of the lower classes in Victorian England by comparing it to the situation there today, the author of biofiction might feel the need to change or even omit other truths (such as the fact the situation now and then cannot fully be compared for various reasons) to stress that one truth they want to make a point out of (9-10). Putting it simply, Lackey says that “biographical fiction fictionalizes rather than represents the biographical subject” (11), an assertion that will play a significant part in the research of this thesis.

1.1. Research question

The following research question will be investigated in this master thesis: In what ways does the fictionalisation of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Oscar Wilde, Charles Dickens, and the Brontë sisters as detectives in British and American biofiction of the twenty-first century affect the portrayal of their authorial and cultural identity and the incorporation of their works?

In this thesis, I will explore the surprisingly popular strand within biofiction of placing historical authors in the role of detective. While there are many books that have famous historical authors reimagined as sleuths, I will narrow my selection down to a few authors who all are from the nineteenth century and who appear as a detective in at least two biofictional novels by different authors. The historical authors I choose from this period are all well-known to the public and I assume that many people have some sort of idea in their head about what these authors were like – whether based on facts or on portrayals in popular media. They all speak to the imagination and are still very much read and known to this day - in other words, they are still very much of interest in the current age.

Another reason why I chose these nineteenth-century authors was to follow in the footsteps of the scholars who demystified female authors from the same period in *Biographical Misrepresentations of British Women Writers*, edited by Brenda Ayres. The scholars who contributed to this book only considered female authors from this period, who had to deal with not only the mythologizing of themselves but also censoring because of their gender from the time in which they lived until only recent years. I will broaden the scope of

their research to not only focus on the issue of gender politics from the past decades and centuries but on the issue of mythologizing and fictionalisation as a whole by including male authors as well. I am curious to see how the authors I have selected are portrayed in these novels and how fictionalisation shapes them to fit the narrative – and to fit the expectations the reader might have of them by exaggerating and thus dramatizing real-life situations or personality traits of the authors.

I will closely read six detective novels that have the famous historical authors Oscar Wilde and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (two of the novels contain both of these authors), Charles Dickens, and the Brontë sisters portrayed as sleuths in biofiction. I will examine in what ways fictionalisation plays a part in the characterisation of these famous authors in these biofictional novels and the effect it has on the portrayal of their authorship in particular, since they are crucially also still authors next to their sleuthing or are about to be authors.

1.2.Theoretical framework

To answer the research question, I will closely read six selected novels with Doyle, Wilde, Dickens, and the Brontë sisters acting as sleuths besides being an author. I will determine how they are portrayed in the text and what efforts the author has made to distinguish them as *that* author in particular. I will compare their characterisations in each novel assigned to them and try to explain differences and similarities between the two based on existing theory about the usage of these authors in biofictional works. All of the novels that are selected for this thesis are the first instalments of a planned series of novels and crucially introduces the historical authors to their first case in which they willingly or not get involved and what new insights this brings them.

The main aim of this thesis is to analyse the occurrence of references to the featured authors' authorship, cultural identity, and works in the biofictional novels that are investigated. As shared in the hypothesis, it is expected that there will be a great deal of these references in all of the novels to distinguish the historical authors as not just ordinary detectives, but also the famous authors they still are and what effect these two roles have on each other as well. As Monica Latham puts it, the most successful fictitious biographies are those which “combine a savvy amalgamation of documentary evidence and poetic license, plausibility, and imagination” (409). In her article, she discusses multiple biofictional novels featuring Virginia Woolf as the main character, who herself asserted that the “new biography”, as she called it, served two masters: fact and fiction, something that applies to what we now call biofiction perfectly.

Biofictional works take a deep dive into the fictional, such as turning famous authors into detectives, without losing sight of some of the more generally accepted facts about their lives. These fictional narratives “map a wider territory and present greater potential”, since the created fictional situation allows the biographer to “delve into [the subject’s] imaginary inner life, construct an ‘as if,’ and bring the reader into [the subject’s] psyche” (410). Latham described biofiction as something that allowed its authors to “flirt with the truth”, to fill in the gaps an ordinary biography leaves open, to “prolong facts” mentioned in historical documents, and to explore what their subject might have actually thought and felt (420).

Latham also crucially named the concept of biographemes in her essay as valuable tools to support and validate the imaginative recreation of situations that actually took place but also serve to validate the fictional work in which they are incorporated as a whole (411). This term was originally coined by Roland Barthes, who stated that the biographical object is of interest ‘where the body draws attention to itself, where it can be seen to stir and stimulate’ (Österle 185). With his biographemes, Barthes introduces the possibility to engage more freely with factual biographical information without worrying too much about the factuality or objectivity when handling such material (185). This is a concept originally stemming from the (auto)biographical field of research, but biofictional authors will likely also make use of such biographemes to both lend more credibility to their work (since these events or characters that take up the biographemes are “real” or have at least been widely documented to have actually taken place) on the one hand and have the freedom to take these biographemes and take liberties with them on the other.

This concept of biographemes is related to another crucial term in this thesis, which is that of “fictionalisation” as mentioned in the research question, which refers to the fact that although real-life people and events can be used in fictional works, it is inevitable that these “external references” will be contaminated (that is, fictionalised) from within by including them in a fictional space (Cohn 15). In other words, these objective, seemingly factual references in fictional works should be carefully considered and not immediately be taken for truthful. This thesis in particular will consider biofictional works in which real historical authors decide to solve a crime. This development in their lives is purely made up for entertaining purposes and not based on any factual evidence, as many of the authors of the considered biofictional works are also quick to disclaim in their author’s notes, among other reassurances that their works should not be read as a faithful representation of their subject’s life and personality.

As mentioned before, I will focus in particular on the effect that the fictionalisation of the authors as detectives has on the reflection of the authorial and cultural identity of these authors and on their works. These works are what made these authors famous, so it is very plausible that their famous writings interfere in some way in these biofictional novels – perhaps the events and characters in the biofiction will be set up to “inspire” the historical author to write certain aspects in one of their famous future novels, or it happens the other way around with events from their novels being brought into connection with the events they face in the biofiction itself, causing the author to take a step back and reflect on the intersection of their own fiction with “fact”. Either way, by likely utilising the aforementioned biographemes in the biofictional novels, the authors of these works mix fact with fiction to validate their stories, which already are arguably quite implausible because of the detective storylines, something none of the examined authors were actually involved in as far as we know. Investigating where the lines between fact (the real-life person that is used) and fiction (how that real person is portrayed to fit the narrative of the fictional story) blur will provide an insight in how biographical novels are constructed and how the goal to entertain the reader is balanced with biographemes to validate these stories and elevate them above purely fictional detectives without real-life persons in them.

These particular novels contain some of the most famous historical authors of the nineteenth century, and it is therefore important that an eye is kept on their portrayal in biofictional novels. The authors could be made into flawless beings or become caricatures of themselves, both plausible consequences of biofictional novels based on people of whom we may know not quite as much as their famous works. What little *is* known about the authors could then be exaggerated and blown out of proportion by the authors of the biofictional works, or they might attempt to search for glimpses of who the historical author “actually” was in the novels they wrote, something that biographer Juliet Barker explained as “a subjective and almost invariably pointless exercise” (7).

The first case study of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Oscar Wilde explores two authors who have written detectives and/or mystery works themselves and who actually knew each other in real life based on factual documentation. Two separate twenty-first-century authors decided to capitalise on this biographical proof two famous historical authors actually met, and it might provide various insights into how these men are portrayed and how they work together. For Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, an article by Jennifer S. Palmer will be used as a reference to place the portrayal of the man in each novel. Since Doyle is the inventor of arguably the most famous detective of all time, there have been many biofictional novels in

the past that present Doyle as a detective himself. Palmer analysed these novels after which she was able to distinguish various categories of novels in which his portrayal can be divided into per novel. Her analysis will be very valuable for the research in this thesis of two novels with Doyle, one of which is only briefly mentioned in her study and one of which was written after her article was first published. Her article and findings will be further explained in Wilde and Doyle's chapter.

The case study of Dickens casts a light on an author who has written mystery stories himself and about whom a "Dickens celebrity myth" has emerged in the past few decades in popular media. The term "Dickensian" has become synonymous with "Victorian" according to Cora Kaplan, as quoted by Kay in her article about the phenomenon (198). In the same article, Charlotte Boyce and Elodie Rousselot are quoted as saying that the label "Dickensian" has become a "convenient cultural shorthand through which to signal condemnation of repressive institutions, social injustices, such as child exploitation, and governmental or bureaucratic inertia" (196). Finally, Kay stresses the following:

The Dickens phenomenon with its diverse versions of the man and author provides a source of inspiration for contemporary writers, to be dissected and reinvented for literary purposes. . . . Dickens represents something specific and "known," as well as something expansive and diverse, embracing many conflicting world-views which creative writers can harness and exploit. (199)

Therefore, examining two biofictional works about Dickens as a sleuth will serve to further explore the very popular "Dickens Myth" and how it is incorporated in those particular novels. By examining the characterisation of Dickens in the two novels I selected, Dickens's portrayal in each novel will be brought into connection with how acting as a detective contributes to Dickens's cultural and authorial identity. I can then contribute to Kay's study and connect the characterisation of Dickens in the novels to one of the different views people have had of him.

Finally, the case study of the Brontë sisters will explore female authors who have not written mystery novels before, but are people about whom the public has clear opinions about who they were due to various popular biographies on them in the past – which might all be based on false details according to the recent demystifications of their characterisation in studies such as *Biographical Misrepresentations of British Women Writers* (2017), edited by Brenda Ayres; *The Brontë Myth* (2001), written by Lucasta Miller; and *The Brontës* (2010), written by Juliet Barker. These works will all be consulted in this chapter to determine who the sisters truly were and how extensively the biofictional authors did their research on them

and whether or not they lose themselves in the well-known myths that have surrounded the sisters for so long, some of them created by Charlotte Brontë herself.

1.3. Hypotheses

I expect that the authors' works are referenced either directly or indirectly by the usage of familiar situations or characters in the biofictional novels and that their authorship will play a significant part in their role as detective and the other way around. For example, maybe they are the perfect person to investigate and solve the murder because of their research for crime novels they have written themselves, or simply because they have a creative mind and can think differently than most people.

More specifically, I expect that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Oscar Wilde, as two very well-known authors when looking at the popularity of their work and their image, will be characterised the most clearly. Oscar Wilde is known for his witticism and dandiness, while Sir Arthur Conan Doyle is best known for being the creator of Sherlock Holmes, the most famous fictional detective in the world and simultaneously a character Doyle famously hated. I expect that these facts and traits will feature very prominently in the novels and define the both of them.

Charles Dickens, however, is a different matter. He has become so much associated with the Victorian age that "Dickensian" has become a very common cultural shorthand to refer to this period. There are many different conceptions of him, as Kay stressed in her article, so he is therefore a very complex person to study and difficult to pin down. I expect that especially his work (and the social commentary therein) and the characters he created will play a big role in his characterisation to distinguish him as Dickens; perhaps especially drawing from his somewhat autobiographical works such as *David Copperfield*.

Finally, in the case of the Brontë sisters, I expect that the sisters will be characterised according to the popular previous conceptions of them *before* the recent demystifications by Lucasta Miller and Juliet Barker. In that way, they really stand apart as separate characters because of this exaggeration of their personality traits rather than if they were characterised more faithfully (but therefore more conventionally and plainly) according to recent revelations by the aforementioned biographers.

1.4. Structure of the thesis

This thesis is structured in the following manner. This first chapter containing the introduction is immediately followed by the second chapter, which is dedicated to Oscar Wilde and Sir

Arthur Conan Doyle. In this chapter, the novels *Oscar Wilde and the Candlelight Murders* (2007) by Gyles Brandreth and *The Revenant of Thraxton Hall* (2014) by Vaughn Entwistle will be read and analysed. The subsequent chapter explores Charles Dickens as a sleuth in the novels *A Tale of Two Murders* (2018) by Heather Redmond and *The Murder of Patience Brooke* (2012) by J.C. Briggs. The last case study is dedicated to the three Brontë sisters with the novels *Always Emily* (2014) by Michaela MacColl and *The Vanished Bride* (2019) by Bella Ellis. The conclusion will explain how these authors of biofiction portrayed the famous historical authors and how being a detective influences their authorial and cultural identity and the other way around. The conclusion will also contain a self-reflection on the process of writing this thesis alongside suggestions for future research on the subject of (detective) biofiction with famous historical authors as subject.

Chapter 2: Oscar Wilde and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

My chief debt, of course, is to Wilde, Sherard and Conan Doyle, whose lives and works I have plundered to create this story and its sequels.

- From the Acknowledgements of *Oscar Wilde and the Candlelight Murders*

Finally, I must acknowledge Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Oscar Wilde, true literary giants whose genius has left an enduring legacy for readers and writers alike.

- From the Acknowledgements of *The Revenant of Thraxton Hall*

2.1. Introduction

Oscar Wilde and his larger-than-life persona and appearance prove him to be a fruitful subject for biofictional novels. The main reason why he was chosen as a subject in not one but two biofictional series in which he acts as a detective was mainly because of his real-life connection to one Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who is best known for his literary creation Sherlock Holmes, a detective who is able to solve even the most difficult of crimes by utilising his extraordinary deductive skills. Famously, Doyle would grow to hate his character so much that he would kill him off – only to be pressured by his fans to bring the character back to life. Because of his famous creation, Doyle is one of the first historical authors you might expect to find in detective biofiction, as the lengthy article of Jennifer S. Palmer, “Arthur Conan Doyle’s Appearances as a Detective in Historical Crime Fiction”, proves.

Palmer identified two factors that apply specifically to Doyle and his popularity in detective biofiction: firstly, almost every reader knows about Sherlock Holmes and is likely curious about how Doyle came to invent such an illustrious character. This means that an exploration of his medical knowledge as a doctor, his private life, and his beliefs all might contribute to answering the question about how Holmes came to be. Secondly, some biofictional authors are inspired by incidents and characters from the fictional Sherlock Holmes stories and use them in their own biofictional works, thus adding another layer to the reader’s knowledge and love of the character (181). Palmer furthermore identifies that due to the fact that the character of Sherlock Holmes occupies the main interest of biofictional writers, Doyle almost never appears as the main detective in their novels, something that is illustrated in the categories she created in which she could divide numerous novels with Doyle as a character in detective biofiction.

The first category that Palmer distinguishes contains a cluster of novels in which a “young, enthusiastic and impressionable Doyle” (173) appears before he published his first Sherlock Holmes story, *A Study in Scarlet* (1887). Palmer notices the prominent role Conan Doyle’s mentor, Dr Joseph Bell, has in those novels as a mentor to the young Conan Doyle. The authors of these novels “endow Bell with the Sherlockian ability to draw conclusions from small indications” (174). This category thus incorporates all the novels featuring Doyle as a young man before his fame as an author. These novels mostly serve as a prequel to the Doyle most people nowadays are best familiar with: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle the author, not the doctor. The stories feature characters who present “Holmesian” behaviour, often the aforementioned Dr Bell, and act as the Holmes to Doyle’s Dr Watson during the investigations. These characters are then likely meant to be the “source of inspiration” for Doyle to create Sherlock Holmes.

Palmer’s second category involves all the novels in which other historical Victorians appear, often authors (175). Palmer names a few examples of such persons, such as a novel in which Charles Dodgson – better known to the public as Lewis Carroll – features as a detective with assistance from Doyle. Importantly, in this category Doyle always serves as the Dr Watson to the Sherlock Holmes of another famous historical author, just like in the first category.

The third category Palmer distinguishes involves novels that are concerned with the occult and spiritualism, often containing a Gothic setting (177). Palmer includes novels in this category that feature ghosts and monsters but also more subtle references to occultism and Doyle’s real-life interest in spiritualism. In some of these novels, Doyle takes up the mantle of Sherlock Holmes himself and poses as the main detective in these stories. In others, he mainly serves as a promoter of spiritualism and as an adviser on how to communicate with ghosts and how to detect their presence (178). Here again, another character has the role of the main (and, crucially, “serious”) detective.

The main reason for the incorporation of Doyle in biofictional works like these is mostly, as Palmer asserts, to provide the reader “with a frisson of excitement” (179). Not only is he an obvious choice for a detective biofictional work due to his creation of Sherlock Holmes, but he also provides the plot with crucial medical knowledge thanks to his background as a doctor. Furthermore, his interest in spiritualism and his eventual hatred of his own literary creation can prove to be very rich material for the authors of biofictional works to use.

In this chapter, the portrayal of Doyle in two of these novels will be analysed and placed into one or more categories created by Palmer to establish the choices the authors made in fictionalising him as a detective and how this reflects on his cultural and authorial identity. Since there are no pre-existing articles that analyse Oscar Wilde as a character in biofiction, his portrayal and how this reflects on his cultural and authorial identity will be fully analysed based on the fictionalisation of biographemes of him and his life.

2.2. Oscar Wilde and the Candlelight Murders (2007)

Gyles Brandreth wrote *Oscar Wilde and the Candlelight Murders*, which is the first novel in a series in which Oscar Wilde acts as a detective. In this first instalment, he finds the naked body of a boy he knew, Billy Wood, who appears to have been ritually murdered. However, when Wilde returns the following day, with the shock of what he saw finally drifted away, the body has vanished, leaving behind no evidence of the crime. The connection between Wilde and Billy (whether this boy was only a pupil to Wilde, as the latter claims, or something more remains unclear in the duration of the novel) prompts Wilde to get to the bottom of what happened – especially when the police at first refuses to help him because there is no evidence and no body.

Oscar Wilde is the main character of the novel and features very prominently in the novel, whereas Conan Doyle does not appear nearly as much as was initially expected. He makes only a few appearances during which he aids Wilde with his knowledge as a doctor, and not so much with his deduction skills as the author of Sherlock Holmes. Instead of Conan Doyle, it is Robert Sherard, a real-life close friend of Wilde, who fulfils the role of sidekick to Wilde's detective and acts as a mostly passive observer. Like Dr Watson in the Sherlock Holmes stories, he documents what happened during his adventures with Wilde, looking back at that time from 1939 as an old man.

Physical appearance and personality

The novel starts off immediately with a third-person omniscient point of view describing the physical appearance of Oscar Wilde. He is described as “a man in his mid-thirties – tall, a little overweight and certainly overdressed” (1). This description is very general because it is not a character from the novel who describes him as such, since the narrator of the rest of the book, Sherard, was not present there. When Sherard's perspective takes over for the rest of the novel, the descriptions of Wilde become more personal and detailed with the usage of observations:

He was neither grand nor arrogant, but he was magnificent. He was never handsome, but he was striking, having the advantage of height and the discipline of good posture. Waiters bowed instinctively as he passed; other guests – men and women alike; even, in the hotel forecourt, a King Charles spaniel – looked up and acknowledged him. None of them may have known precisely who he was, but all of them seemed to sense that he was somebody. (17)

Sherard gives an honest description of Wilde: he is positive about his friend's appearance but not excessively so. He mentions that it is especially the way Wilde carries himself that makes heads turn and not so much his good looks (which he does not really have). Furthermore, Sherard also pens down a few unflattering observations about Wilde's appearance – his clothing might always be on point, for example, but when he smiles he "reveal[s] his uneven yellow teeth" (21), and he is not exactly the most active person, always moving in an almost reluctant way (205).

Sherard is very close to Wilde, but he is not familiar at all with Conan Doyle. It is Wilde who describes the man from his perspective and who introduces him to Sherard. Wilde has nothing but praise about the young and upcoming author, saying that he is "clearly brilliant" and "rather handsome" beneath his huge moustache. His handshake is very firm, but the rest of him is "as gentle as St Sebastian and as wise as St Augustine of Hippo" (5).

When Sherard at last meets the man himself, he notes that Doyle looks "younger, slighter, more pink-cheeked than Oscar's description had led me to expect" and that he is fully entranced by Wilde and barely spares Sherard a glance (10). Despite this, Conan Doyle left a positive impression on Sherard when he and Wilde meet him again: "There, at the far end of the room, standing in front of an ornate white marble fireplace, dressed in pepper-and-salt country tweeds, with an unlit pipe in his hand, was the reassuring figure of Arthur Conan Doyle" (107).

Most of Wilde's personality that is noted down in this novel comes from the mind of the narrator, which is Robert Sherard, one of Wilde's closest friends. Therefore, a great deal of the allusions to Wilde's personality are coloured by Sherard's preconceptions about Wilde. He notes that Wilde "always laughed at the jokes of others. There was nothing mean about Oscar Wilde" (5). Only someone who knows Wilde well could make such an assured comment. But even though Sherard and Wilde are close, Sherard does share some discomforts that he feels around the man with the reader. For example, he explains that he does not always feel at ease in Oscar's company, even though the man always makes him laugh. Oscar's mood is described by him as "unpredictable" and Oscar himself was aware of his "temperamental

changeability” and that it did not always make him the easiest companion to be around (42). Halfway through the novel, Sherard also states that Wilde was, while essentially a kind and generous man, also fundamentally selfish: “he did as he pleased when he pleased” (142) and “told only what he wished to tell when he wished to tell it” (144). Although Sherard loves Wilde as a close friend, he is not blind to the man’s shortcomings.

Conan Doyle is at first described by Wilde during a conversation with Sherard as quite a serious person, but despite that, someone he likes. Conan Doyle warned Wilde that making jests of everything is a dangerous habit and that it will be his undoing. Instead of feeling offended, Wilde says that this actually made him realise Conan Doyle is his friend (7). Not only is a friendship established here between the two, there also appears to be some foreshadowing to the future when Wilde will be trialled for his alleged homosexual activities – something he does not take seriously with devastating results.

As mentioned before, Conan Doyle has not become a bitter man yet when it comes to Sherlock Holmes. He actively encourages Wilde during his investigation and is presented as a calm and reassuring man: “With Oscar’s powers of observation and detection I have little doubt that, if he chooses, he can solve the mystery, with or without the assistance of Scotland Yard” (116). Despite the fact that he offers his counsel to Wilde as a doctor, he does not play an active part in this novel.

In other words, art imitates life and life imitates art in this novel. Wilde is inspired by Conan Doyle’s Holmes to become a detective in his image, and Conan Doyle is inspired by Wilde to create a new literary character in his detective stories.

Authorship and works

The years in which this story takes place are mentioned in almost every chapter title: 1889 and 1890. Very early on in the novel, the place Conan Doyle is in with his career at that time is established when Wilde mentions he just met Doyle and that he “has caused a sensation with his new creation”, Sherlock Holmes, in *A Study in Scarlet* (1887) (Brandreth 5). He is still at the start of his Sherlock Holmes journey and does not hold any ill feelings towards his creation yet. When Sherard then asks Wilde what he is currently writing, the latter replies that he is working on a murder mystery as well, but one that “lies beyond ordinary detection” (5). What story he refers to exactly is unclear, but Wilde does start writing his most famous and only full-length novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), not long after this conversation. Brandreth takes care to utilise a great deal of Wilde’s real-life famous quotes and witticisms in his novel, one example of which is Wilde referring to himself as “the prince of

procrastination. . . . It is my besetting sin. I never put off till tomorrow what I can possibly do – the day after” (52).

In the main storyline, the difference in status between Wilde, as a famous and respected author, and the victim of the crime is palpable: “The man was Oscar Wilde, poet and playwright, and literary sensation of his age. The dead boy was Billy Wood, a male prostitute of no importance” (2). The narrator here emphasises the difference between the two, but despite their differences, Wilde still cares enough about Billy to investigate his murder – especially since the police and even Conan Doyle doubt that there even was a murder at first.

During the investigation itself, Wilde is very much inspired by Sherlock Holmes. He uses some of Holmes’s most famous phrases, such as “The game’s afoot” (54) and “Once you eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, *however improbable*, must be the truth” (277). He even uses a network of street children as spies in London, just like Holmes always does (176). His own wife, Constance, knows of his plans to solve the case, as she tells Robert Sherard that Wilde sees Sherard as the Dr Watson to his Sherlock Holmes, a character he wishes he created himself: “Oscar has become quite obsessed with ‘Mr Holmes’ and his powers of observation and perfect reasoning. To be truthful, I think Oscar may be a little jealous of Arthur Doyle and his creation” (57). This demonstrates that Wilde might be jealous of Conan Doyle’s creation – whatever it may be, Wilde does not hold any resentment against Conan Doyle. In fact, he wishes nothing more than to be his friend and to ask for his counsel.

Doyle mostly serves the story with his medical profession, and not his knowledge of being the author of the famous detective Sherlock Holmes. In fact, he pointedly creates distance between himself and his fictional character, stressing that he is not himself a consulting detective but a country doctor. Holmes, he says, is merely a figment of his imagination and he does not possess his skills of detecting (34).

Importantly, though, he does not hate his creation yet – something which does play a significant role in the second novel examined in this thesis, *Thraxton Hall*. He enjoys listening to Wilde’s deductive reasoning and even proclaims he will create a new character inspired by Wilde, Mycroft Holmes, the even smarter brother of Sherlock Holmes – he is that much impressed and amused by Wilde’s efforts to solve an actual murder case making use of his keen observing skills (123).

Not only do the works of the authors come forward in this biofictional novel, now it is even the case that the events in this novel “inspire” one of the authors, Conan Doyle in this case, to create a new character or storyline that actually exists in real life. This biofictional

novel thus plays with the facts by suggesting Wilde might have actually inspired Conan Doyle to create Mycroft Holmes.

Wilde believes himself to be one of the few men who can solve Billy's case. He explains to Sherard that some cases are so unique and bizarre that an ordinary police officer could never comprehend them, whereas Wilde, as an author, *does* have the imagination and adaptability that is required according to him to solve Billy's murder:

Policemen are not as we are, Robert. We are poets. We consider the lilies. We wear silk slippers. The language we speak, the world we inhabit, the company we keep: all these are foreign to your run-of-the-mill Metropolitan police officer. He lives his life in prose and hobnail boots, and anything that is not utterly prosaic – anything that smacks even slightly of the poetic; anything unpredictable, original, unorthodox – will alarm him, will make him suspicious... (36)

Wilde's theory might offer an explanation for the popularity of historical authors as detectives within biofiction. They mingle in different, more creative circles than the average police officer does and thus can offer different and crucial insights on mysterious murder cases like that of Billy's.

2.3. *The Revenant of Thraxton Hall* (2014)

Vaughn Entwistle wrote *The Revenant of Thraxton Hall*, the first book in his The Paranormal Casebooks of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle series, which has Doyle investigating paranormal occurrences. In this first instalment, the book starts off with Doyle having just killed off the character he is most famous for, Sherlock Holmes, and, therefore, closing off a huge chapter in his life – or so he believes at the time. After facing a great deal of backlash from disgruntled fans of his Sherlock Holmes stories, Doyle receives an invitation to meet Lady Hope Thraxton, a young woman who is also a very gifted medium. She has foreseen the scene of her own death in the near future and hopes Conan Doyle will help her uncover the murderer-to-be before it is too late. After first declining, he cannot keep this mysterious woman out of his head and accepts an invitation to her ancestral home, where a meeting of the Society of Psychological Research will be held with a wide variety of gifted persons. Leaving his deadly-ill wife, Louisa, at home with their children and servants, he and his friend Oscar Wilde travel to the gothic manor to uncover its paranormal secrets and solve a murder before it even happened.

Physical appearance and personality

Conan Doyle is on the very first page described as a “smartly dressed Scotsman” (Entwistle 1) who has a significant, strong build. On multiple occasions, Doyle’s hands are called “meaty” (4) or “fleshy” (19), and he is not easily manhandled (13). He wears a great deal of tweed suits – Wilde even mocks the fact Conan Doyle only brings three tweed suits with him when they travel to Thraxton Hall while Wilde has so much luggage that the driver of the cart that comes to pick them up has to drive multiple times to carry it all up to the manor (62).

While the author does not dwell too long or too much on Doyle’s appearance, Wilde’s clothing and general appearance receives a great deal of attention. Wilde is introduced in the third chapter of the novel, aptly titled “Wilde in the City”, when Doyle hears his tell-tale loud voice teasing him about his recent story in which he killed Holmes, calling him “London’s most celebrated murderer” (20). In this scene he is dressed in an extravagant overcoat trimmed with fur, a lemon-yellow jacket, and a broad-brimmed hat that is put slanted on his head – something, Conan Doyle notes, only Wilde would dare to wear (20). Wilde values his appearance, which is emphasised even more towards the end of the novel when Wilde is forced to enter a very dirty secret passageway in order to save Conan Doyle. He sees the choice between helping his best friend and preserving his best jacket as “a vexing dilemma”, but ultimately, he chooses his friend’s life over his vanity and enters the passageway (244-245).

The Conan Doyle in this novel is from the very start already more expressive than the version of him in *The Candlelight Murders*. When pressed into a corner in an unfamiliar situation in which he might be in danger, he disguises his fear with anger and bravura (5). He is reluctant to aid Lady Hope, but eventually he is swayed by her innocence and beauty, conveniently forgetting about his very ill wife at home. Conan Doyle is very assertive during his investigation at Thraxton Hall and thanks to the help of none other than his own Sherlock Holmes he is able to solve the case.

The Oscar Wilde in this novel is very different from his version in *The Candlelight Murders* as well. This time he is not the main sleuth but the sidekick to Conan Doyle’s detective. Even so, he is not very active during the investigation and mostly accompanies Conan Doyle to Thraxton Hall because he is his friend. Although he does not help much during the investigation, the friendship between the two men is clearly visible and Conan Doyle holds his friend in high esteem, saying that it is “impossible to be in a bad mood when Oscar Wilde was present” and that his words were never tinged with malice (20).

Oscar Wilde's sexuality is briefly touched upon during the first scene in which he is introduced in the book. He is in the presence of someone called George, but who also sometimes goes by the name Georgina. During this scene, it becomes apparent that Wilde's sexuality at this point has become a topic of discussion amongst the public, and Wilde's personality is described as something that "engulfed the table, preventing any chance of normal conversation" (22).

One poignant moment in the novel that involves Wilde is when one member of the Society of Psychical Research reads Wilde's palm and predicts a very bleak and short future for him. When a startled Wilde asks her if he will at least have a happy life, she does not answer and only tells him that his "love line breaks most interestingly. . . . Much confusion here, I fear" (127). In other words, she very accurately tells Wilde what some readers may already know to be true: he will not have a long and happy life as he had been told by countless of palm readers before, and his love life is indeed a confusing one with both men and women involved, which will ultimately indirectly lead to his premature death. This wink to the reader is possible with the benefit of hindsight and entertaining for the reader who knows what it actually signifies, but this moment also firmly established this biofictional novel as having been written in the twenty-first century, unconsciously emphasising the fictional nature of the novel and that it did not actually happen in real life - which is not technically bad, presuming that the main purpose of this biofictional work in the detective genre is to entertain the reader.

Authorship and works

Sherlock Holmes, Doyle's most famous and well-known invention, features very prominently in the novel. The story takes place just after the crucial moment when Doyle published the story in which Sherlock Holmes dies. Almost immediately, however, he is called to a house that is deprived of all light sources. He meets a young woman there, Lady Hope Thraxton, who is a gifted medium but has a disease that makes her vulnerable to light. She tries to convince Conan Doyle to help her solve her future murder, but he refuses at first, believing that even a man with such skills as a consulting detective or a medical doctor such as himself cannot alter Fate (10).

Conan Doyle does not believe in his creation anymore and wants to put distance between them, but Holmes's death has a massive and unprecedented effect on the fans. This is especially illustrated in the second chapter of the novel, called "The Most Hated Man in London", in which a mob of people wait for Doyle at his house wearing black armbands to

mourn the death of Holmes, as if he had been a real person instead of a fictional character (12). Before Conan Doyle meets this scene, he has a meeting with the senior editor of *The Strand Magazine*, in which the Sherlock Holmes stories used to be published. The editor tries to change Conan Doyle's mind, but the latter is quite adamant he made the right decision:

“In all honesty, I am weary of the man,” Conan Doyle grumbled. “Do you know I receive letters addressed to Sherlock Holmes asking for autographs? People confuse the puppet with the puppet master.” He snorted and continued, “I am afraid that Sherlock Holmes is keeping me from greater things.” (16)

Conan Doyle fears that the Sherlock Holmes stories hold him back from ever becoming a “serious” author. After also sharing that Holmes drains him “like a psychic vampire”, everything points towards Holmes staying dead for good. Of course, in hindsight, Conan Doyle never succeeded in becoming known more for a different creation of his other than Sherlock Holmes, something the novel also heavily implies with the quote ““I have many more ideas besides Sherlock Holmes. . . . Ideas that will soon make the public forget Sherlock Holmes. Ideas that will have a real impact on the world”” (16). These passages stress the fictionality of Sherlock Holmes, something which Jennifer S. Palmer analysed as the author of the biofictional work consequently “proving” the factuality of Doyle the detective, since the deductive skills of Holmes came forth from the mind of Doyle, providing him with detective skills himself (180). This did not happen in *The Candlelight Murders*, where Doyle actually stresses that Holmes is purely a figment of his imagination and that he does not possess his deductive skills himself. This might easily explain why Doyle is only a side character in that novel and does not actively partake in the investigation himself but only provides his services as a medical doctor.

The fact that Conan Doyle is unable to effectively kill Holmes off is especially illustrated by the appearance of Holmes's ghost, quite literally, shortly after his death scene is published. On multiple occasions, Holmes appears in the room when Doyle is tired or otherwise in a downward mood. He offers guidance, but most notably, he mocks his creator and his detective skills. He keeps Doyle alert and helps him further in his investigation. Just as in *The Candlelight Murders*, Holmes serves as an inspiration and guide for the makeshift detectives, although in *Thraxton Hall*, he appears in person – or at least as a figment of Conan Doyle's imagination. Conan Doyle's first encounter with Holmes is when he wakes up at his writing table, after having tried to write down ideas for new stories and characters. He first sees smoke strangely coming out of the portrait of Sherlock Holmes in his room, after which

an astonished Conan Doyle watches how Holmes climbs out of his portrait as if it is a window (38).

After this first encounter, Holmes appears whenever Conan Doyle gets stuck in his investigation at Thraxton Hall. Even though Conan Doyle tried everything in his might to create distance between himself and Holmes, it is clear that Holmes himself is at least not yet finished with Conan Doyle – something that might also allude to Conan Doyle’s eventual decision to return to his Holmes stories because the latter is still very much alive in not only his mind but in that of the public as well. Even before Holmes appears to him in a hallucination, Conan Doyle regularly asks himself the question: “What would Holmes do?”. Often, this would be followed by Conan Doyle reprimanding himself by saying that now Holmes is finally dead he can pursue the serious books he wishes to write (4).

Oscar Wilde’s works and created characters are barely mentioned in the novel. It is very much Conan Doyle’s story, but the novel does place the point in life that Wilde is in during this novel quite accurately by sharing that Wilde’s *Lady Windermere’s Fan* (1893) was a huge success “the previous year”, making him “the wealthiest and most successful man of letters in London” (22). In other words, Wilde is doing well with his career while Conan Doyle almost ended his own career by killing off his famous character. Wilde is, however, fictionalised in this novel as someone who simply serves as comic relief and is not truly present in his role of author. Conan Doyle on the other hand is forced by the author of this biofictional novel to face his hatred towards his own character, which he essentially created himself - it is almost as if he hates himself and finally loses this notion of himself towards the end of the novel, so that the fictionalised aspects of this novel almost serve to “help” the factual institution of Conan Doyle to deal with his real-life problems.

2.4. Conclusion

The first thing that stood out in these novels was the difference in importance of the roles of Conan Doyle and Wilde. In *The Candlelight Murders*, Wilde is the clear main character and detective. Conan Doyle merely features briefly as an adviser. This is very different from their roles in *Thraxton Hall*, in which it is Conan Doyle who takes up the mantle as a detective and is the main character with Wilde as his reluctant sidekick. Therefore, the first novel provides much more information about Wilde than the second one and the opposite is true for Conan Doyle.

The Oscar Wilde and Arthur Conan Doyle of *The Candlelight Murders* are quite young and still early in their respective authorships. Conan Doyle has just published his first

Sherlock Holmes story, *The Study in Scarlet*, and is working on its sequel, while Oscar Wilde begins writing and finishes his famous *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in the duration of this novel and is already well-known to the public. In *Thraxton Hall*, Conan Doyle has just killed off Sherlock Holmes and is fed up with him. He wishes to pursue other literary endeavours and does not want to be remembered solely for Holmes. Wilde meanwhile is at the height of his career and thriving, the Trials and the accusations preceding it still in the future. As noted in the novel, however, rumours about his relationships with other men are already abound, though they have not led to anything yet.

When placing the novels in the categories that Jennifer S. Palmer created, *The Candlelight Murders* fits the first category quite well. Brandreth's Conan Doyle may have already written *A Study in Scarlet*, and thus has already begun his writing career, but he still possesses the same enthusiastic and almost youthful character as Palmer distinguishes in her first cluster. And, crucially, Dr Joseph Bell is revealed in the novel as the big inspiration for Conan Doyle for creating Sherlock Holmes. When asked who Bell is, he replies:

A great man ... Not only the author of this definitive text – *A Manual of the Operations of Surgery* – but my mentor. He taught me at the Royal Infirmary in Edinburgh. As a surgeon, he was meticulous. As a lecturer, he had the quality of a mesmerist. As a master diagnostician, I do not know his equal. If anyone is the model for Sherlock Holmes, it is he. Dr Bell instilled in his students the critical importance of the powers of observation. (Brandreth 121)

Brandreth's novel also fits into Palmer's second category, however: the one in which the stories are gathered that feature other historical Victorians (175), namely Oscar Wilde and Robert Sherard, Wilde's close friend and biographer. In this novel as well, Doyle is not the main detective and mostly features in the background, all in all fitting perfectly in the first and second categories.

The Conan Doyle in *The Revenant of Thraxton Hall* neatly fits into Palmer's third category, in which the novels are incorporated that include topics of the occult and spiritualism and often have a Gothic setting (177). This novel largely takes place in a delapidated and haunted Gothic manor that is isolated from the rest of civilisation. The novel has themes that delve into the occult and spiritualism with the incorporation of The Society for Psychological Research, which gathers at Thraxton Manor for a few days. A difference between the Conan Doyle in this novel and the one in the other novels of this category is that he is not yet a firm believer of spiritualism when the novel starts. He is startled by every supernatural thing going on around him, especially the appearance of the ghost of Sherlock

Holmes as illustrated before. This supernatural encounter might instigate Doyle's belief in spiritualism and the supernatural, though.

The two novels in this thesis fit neatly in one or two of the categories created by Palmer and demonstrate a clear difference in the personality of Conan Doyle in these novels because of the difference in age. Brandreth could make use of a carefree and calm Conan Doyle for the early time period in which his novel is set, while Entwistle may have carefully chosen the later time period of his novel to be able to have a frustrated and angry Conan Doyle who hates his character and does not yet believe in spiritualism but will soon. Furthermore, his melancholy state because of his wife's illness and his authorial frustration leading to him hallucinating about Holmes fit the moody Gothic setting perfectly.

Unlike Conan Doyle, Wilde does not appear to change that much personality-wise in the two different time periods the novels take place in. He is extravagant, makes jokes, and uses his famous witticisms. One real difference is his motivation and the personal stake he has in the respective murder cases: in *The Candlelight Murders*, he is the main detective and he personally knew the victim. He is determined to solve the mystery. In *Thraxton Hall*, however, he is for the greater part of the novel an unwilling sidekick to Conan Doyle's determined detective.

Something that is similar between the two novels is the foreshadowing to Wilde's ultimate fate: in *The Candlelight Murders*, Sherard is able to allude to the future regularly since he writes the story down decades after the actual event, as already illustrated in various quotes, while in *Thraxton Hall* one member of the Society of Psychical Research reads his hand and tells him he will not have a long life. Wilde's tragic end appears to be a popular topic in these two biofictional novels, and it is possible that more biofictional novels with Wilde have this same type of foreshadowing.

In both novels the influence of Sherlock Holmes is huge on the characters and the stories. Perhaps it is because Wilde is not known for having written detectives or mystery stories that his works are not mentioned in the same capacity as Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, perhaps *the* best-known detective ever in literature. In *The Candlelight Murders* Conan Doyle might not have a significant role, but Wilde makes up for his absence by picking up Holmes's mantle. Wilde crucially states in this novel that as an author, and particularly a "poet", he is able to look at a case in a much broader sense, being therefore better equipped to solve a complicated case than the police. In other words, his authorship aids his detective skills as expected in the hypothesis of this thesis, and Brandreth might suggest that Wilde's

detective endeavours also influence his authorship since he plans to write a mystery himself shortly after meeting Conan Doyle.

The following two chapters on Charles Dickens and the Brontë sisters, respectively, will demonstrate how authors who are not primarily (or at all) known for detective and mystery novels are portrayed in the selected novels and how being a detective reflects upon their authorial and cultural identity and works. Dickens will be discussed first, a man so well-known for his honest and bleak works that his name has become synonymous with Victorian England.

Chapter 3: Charles Dickens

I think Dickens makes a good detective. He was fascinated by crime and murder. . . . Dickens is observant – it was said of him that he never forgot a face or a place. And he cared about justice for the victim. He went out with the police doing his own research into crime and police methods of investigation.

- From the note to the reader in *The Murder of Patience Brooke*

The works of Charles Dickens have stimulated fiction of mine over the years, but I never thought I'd be using his actual life in a novel. Not that I think he was ever an amateur sleuth. My plot is entirely fictitious as is most everyone in the book, though I did attempt to be faithful to Dickens's career and lifestyle as I understood it to be in his early twenties.

- From the Acknowledgments of *A Tale of Two Murders*

3.1. Introduction

Charles Dickens might have been “the first true celebrity of the popular arts” according to Jane Smiley (Kay 196). This is reflected in the popularity of Charles Dickens as a subject of biofiction but also as a metaphor for the dire circumstances of Victorian England, which may make him one of the most fictionalised historical authors in the world (196). This popularity can be explained by multiple arguments, among which is the fact that Dickens himself took actively part in creating his identity by erasing and editing events of his own life (Ford 5).

Kathryne Ford namely points out in her dissertation that scholars have previously paid a great deal of attention towards Dickens's frequent fusion of fact and fiction and his fear of legacy – the latter of which plays a significant role in his novels as well. She provides a lengthy amount of proof in Dickens's life-writing stories of his anxiety about “failing to be the hero of one's story”, and his wish to be solely remembered for his written legacy which has carefully been constructed by Dickens himself. Ford also dives into his personal life, bypassing Dickens's own self-aware accounts of his life, which paves the way to shedding a light on the man's cruel side, something that only truly became a subject of discussion in academic circles in more recent years (5). One such example of his harsher side is his treatment of his wife, who is said to have suffered from her husband's violent whims on multiple occasions, contradicting the general view of him as a loving and fatherly type who cared for all (48).

The mythmaking and fictionalisation of Charles Dickens as a complex historical figure is widely analysed by Rosemary Kay in her article “Fictionalisation in Biography: Creating the Dickens Myth”. She shares a quote by Charlotte Boyce and Elodie Rousselot who explain that the label “Dickensian” has become “a convenient cultural shorthand” through which to indicate the dire circumstances of Victorian England, such as the social injustices during that time, a subject Dickens wrote extensively about and experienced himself in his youth (Kay 196).

There are numerous other cultural meanings Charles Dickens is equated with that appear to contradict each other in some ways. Some see him as a man and cultural figure who is committed to the poor and who is “a pre-Marxian campaigner for social justice”; for others, like the more recent scholars who discovered and exposed his darker side, he is “a representative of repressive Victorian values towards women and domestic hypocrisy”; still others find him “a purveyor of colonial attitudes which we find problematic today, whilst also being associated with Christmas cheer and goodwill” (Kay 196).

In other words, Dickens invokes various different feelings in people, and how he is portrayed in biofictional novels might differ substantially from each other. This could also depend on whether or not the authors are aware of the studies that have been conducted on Dickens’s life and Dickens’s own active role in constructing what is generally known about him, as Ford aptly demonstrated. These factors could significantly influence the manner in which Dickens is portrayed in biofiction, yet the question is whether his more controversial personality traits and actions fit within these type of novels which appear to be meant to foremost entertain the reader. These novels are notably not a reconsideration of the authors’ lives but more a glimpse into their lives as they go on a wild investigation they would never have actually engaged in in their lives. In any case, this chapter will pay attention in particular to these background studies on the man and the different preconceptions people have of him and how this all might apply to the two biofictional novels that are considered in this chapter, combined with the additional fictional role as detective(’s sidekick) and how this role reflects on his cultural and authorial identity.

Kay furthermore references an important autobiographical fragment of Dickens’s, who claimed in this fragment that he already worked in the blacking factory at the age of ten while all other scraps of verifiable evidence state that he began working at age twelve. Scholars such as J.T.W. Ley have named this piece of information among several other pieces of critical evidence as prove of the self-fashioning that Dickens undertook, thus indicating that Dickens himself was already very much concerned with his own identity and others’ opinion

of him, although this did not stop people from drawing different conclusions about his character (Kay 197).

Dickens is a widely discussed subject and as a well-known cultural figure a valuable tool to describe the circumstances of Victorian England. He is therefore inevitably an often-used figure in biofictional novels that take place in this era. The fact that he actively mixed fact and fiction in both his fictional novels and his known correspondence further contributes to him being a popular subject in biofiction. This chapter will analyse two biofictional novels with Charles Dickens as the central figure in them to see how Dickens is portrayed and what effect his detective endeavours have upon his cultural and authorial identity and the other way around.

3.2. *The Murder of Patience Brooke* (2012)

The Murder of Patience Brooke is the first instalment of the Charles Dickens Investigations series by J.C. Briggs. Dickens's Home for Fallen Women, which is not a fictional addition but an actual establishment that Dickens founded with Angela Burdett-Coutts in 1847, is at the centre of the murder investigation as the victim is one of the women who lived there. Here, fact and fiction clearly blur, something Dickens himself did regularly as pointed out by both Ford and Kay before. In the novel, Dickens is personally involved with the case due to his patronage of the Home and is called to the scene together with a close friend who is a superintendent in the police force. The latter man is the main detective in the story with Dickens coming along with him and following his lead, providing the reader with the perspective of an outsider observing the main detective work of another character, the same role Robert Sherard performed as the observer of main-sleuth Oscar Wilde in *The Candlelight Murders*.

Physical appearance and personality

Charles Dickens's appearance is described to the reader very early on in the novel making use of the convenient trope of having the main character looking at him- or herself in a mirror. Briggs paints a picture of a man with a broad forehead framed by brown curled hair brushed to the side and large and brilliant eyes "which could light up a room, shining with good humour and tenderness" (15), a line designed by the author to immediately portray Dickens in a good light for the reader.

When the wife of Dickens's friend, Superintendent Sam Jones, looks at Dickens she thinks to herself that he is a man who should have all the confidence in the world with the

fame he has, yet looks at her husband sometimes as if he envied him (112). Dickens thus does not value fame very much, and although he definitely does not want to go back to his life before his fame, embarrassed as he is by his humble upbringing, he still occasionally wishes he could go outside without his face or name turning heads.

Charles Dickens is in this story already married for quite some time to his wife, Catherine, and is a father to eight children. Although there is no direct indication of him mistreating his wife in any way as Ford asserted in her aforementioned dissertation, it does become apparent in the text that he does not love his wife (anymore) and is at the very least indifferent towards her. When he is working on his latest story at the start of the novel, *David Copperfield*, he briefly thinks about the new baby and how he should perhaps go home to help take care of the boy and his wife, but he is too “dissatisfied and disquieted” to do so (14). A bit later on he compares Mrs Morson, the caretaker of the women at the Home, to his own wife and finds the latter falls short compared to the former. He thinks of Catherine as being nervous and unwell very often, and, crucially, also “temperamentally unsuited” to him, having lost her “girlish delicacy” (34). This opinion about her differs significantly from how he regarded her in his younger years according to Redmond’s *Tale of Two Murders* which will be discussed in more detail below.

Dickens is a man who is still very much aware of where and how he grew up and how far he has come since then. He refers to it as “a story of rags to riches” of which he is very proud and of which he drew regularly in his novels, supplying them thus with autobiographical elements. Dickens is especially proud of how hard he worked to get to the place where he is now, but he can never fully forget the hardships he endured (47):

Sometimes Dickens could stand outside himself, a stranger in his own life. He could hardly imagine himself as husband and father to eight children; he was still often in his own mind the solitary boy who felt himself set apart, and who had to walk three miles to the dreary wharf where the blacking factory seemed to rot into the brown river. (47)

Introspections like the one above occur frequently in this novel. Dickens’s humble past is an important theme throughout the story. He fears that his connection to the murder case might be even more personal than he originally thought when the manor his family used to serve is implicated in the investigation. He struggles with his humble past and often thinks back to the blacking factory with a feeling of shame. When it appears as if his humble upbringing might be exposed during the investigation, he gets very frightened: “Dickens froze. Here it was. The boy from the blacking factory, the little ghost stood with him” (264). His past thus haunts

him, and by the end of the novel, he is glad to leave his past behind forever by turning his back to the house in which his family used to serve (278).

Although he is ashamed of his past and wishes nothing more than to leave that part of his life behind without ever coming to terms with it, he does not spurn the lower classes and actively works to better their lives whenever and wherever he can, as is illustrated with his immediate sense of responsibility when he meets the children in the shop (91) and the fact he founded the Home for Fallen Women when many other men would not want anything to do with such women.

In other words, this novel stresses Dickens's humble past and how he deals with it. His struggles with it and the fact that he is now in a far better place puts him in a very sympathetic light, leaving no room for commentary on Dickens's worse sides as presented by Kay and Ford.

Authorship and works

Dickens is at the height of his fame and his name is easily recognised by everyone who hears it, and everyone appears to be a fan of his novels (75, 136, 145). Despite this new-found fame and fortune (or perhaps because of them), he is very committed to the less fortunate, especially to the children he meets in a shop who have to manage the store with their father sick in bed (134). He talks easily to them and returns several times to ensure their safety, and he even decides to incorporate a dog in his new book that he names Jip (55). He takes quite a shine to one of the friends of the children, an orphaned street boy called Scrap, who he employs as his spy, though he always takes care to tell the boy to be careful and put his own safety first (93). Poor orphan boys such as Scrap feature in many of Dickens's most famous novels, among which *Oliver Twist*, which he already wrote a decade before the story in this biofictional novel takes place.

When Dickens is called to the Home and sees the body of Patience, it becomes apparent that this is the first time he sees a dead body. Dickens had written about violent murders before in his novels and in his journalistic works, but, at least in this novel by Briggs, this instance is the first time he sees an actual corpse with his own eyes. He shares with the reader that he is strangely torn between pity for the girl and his writer's desire to see every detail (22), clearly establishing a blur between his two roles as a detective and an author.

Dickens is busy writing the manuscript of *David Copperfield* in the duration of this biofictional novel, which is unmistakably autobiographical as he describes how it details his first part of his life when he worked at a blacking factory, "a time of humiliation and misery"

(Briggs 14). As discussed before, Dickens's past and his dedication to battling social injustices are important subjects in the novel – these themes are also readily explored in Dickens's own novels, such as the aforementioned *David Copperfield* but also *Oliver Twist* and others, and in that aspect there is a clear reflection upon Dickens's works in this biofictional novel. Dickens essentially becomes a Dickensian character depicted with Dickensian narrative tools in a novel fully designed around him (Latham 409).

3.3. *A Tale of Two Murders* (2018)

Heather Redmond published *A Tale of Two Murders* (which is a play on the title of Charles Dickens's novel *A Tale of Two Cities*) in 2018 as the first instalment of her series. The first novel takes place in 1835 and features a young Dickens before his fame as an author. During having dinner with his boss, Mr Hogarth, the party hears a few screams from the neighbouring house. When they come to investigate, they find the seventeen-year-old daughter of their neighbour passed out on the floor, having emptied her stomach until there was nothing left. Dickens stays to help but after a long night the girl eventually dies. When Dickens finds out a girl of the same age died in a similar fashion exactly a year before, he chooses to investigate the matter with the help of Mr Hogarth's daughter, Kate, whom he wishes to court.

Besides the similar title, the novel is similar to Dickens's own *A Tale of Two Cities* in the sense that Redmond adds a great deal of references to the French Revolution in her work and has France itself play a significant part in the story and the murder cases.

Physical appearance and personality

Charles Dickens is a twenty-two-year old young man in this novel. He is still a journalist at the *Evening Chronicle* and has not written any novels yet, therefore having no fame to speak of yet. He dresses himself in nice clothing, especially whenever he is invited to dine with the Hogarths, of which the patriarch is his employer at the *Chronicle*. His daughter, Kate, is someone Dickens hopes to court if he is allowed to.

Unlike the previous novel discussed in this thesis, Dickens never looks into a mirror or thinks consciously about how he looks, but he does look at his younger brother, Fred, and muses how much he looks just like himself: "Same chin, though his brother's was dimpled, same thick eyebrows and wavy dark hair frothing out from a widow's peak at the center of his expressive forehead" (Redmond 40).

Dickens is very motivated in his work as a journalist, but this sometimes means he reacts not very appropriately to sensitive situations – when one of the titular murders takes

place before his eyes, the young Miss Lugoson dying of presumed poison, he mentally composes an article for the *Evening Chronicle* as he passively watches his beloved Miss Hogarth taking care of the girl to the best of her abilities (17). This almost conveys a coldness to his character, but this does not occur very often in the novel.

Miss Hogarth is another distraction from the murder cases at hand. During Dickens's investigation, he takes care to always bring her along as his companion and as his entryway to the higher classes whom he wishes to question to discover more about the highborn murder victims. She helps him to gain access to people whom he otherwise would not be able to approach due to his lower station, something he loathes and is ashamed of. Although Kate herself is not from the upper class as the daughter of a newspaper editor, Dickens still feels she is far above his station – something he had painfully experienced once before when he courted another woman for three years before this (40).

This shame and his wish to break free from the restraints of his humble upbringing is a recurring theme in the novel, too. Dickens cannot fully escape his past as he takes care of his younger brother, Fred, and visits his mother and his other siblings regularly. Dickens notoriously had a difficult relationship with his mother, as he claims she was the one who wanted him to keep working in the blacking factory as a child even when it was not truly necessary anymore (Kay 201, Forster 30). His father is on the run from his financial difficulties and absent during Dickens's visits, and his family clearly is going through a rough patch. In other words, Redmond makes clear references to Dickens's difficult past and how much it has influenced him and his future novels.

Authorship and works

Dickens has not written any novels yet at this early period in his life, but he is a respected journalist at the *Evening Chronicle* and writes regularly for other unnamed newspapers as well. His boss, editor George Hogarth, compliments him by calling him a “promising journalist” who is already very accomplished despite his young age (Redmond 2).

Since this novel takes place before the start of his career and his subsequent success as an author, there are no references to any of Dickens's famous works and thus it is not possible to examine how his authorial identity is portrayed in this novel and how Dickens reflects on it himself. The emphasis in this novel, however, is placed on the themes Dickens would explore later in his novels, such as social injustices. Dickens experiences first-hand the effect the class divide has on the lesser fortunate and how little opportunity they have to make a better life for themselves (42). Dickens hopes he will earn enough money in the near future to be able to

support a wife so he can marry Miss Hogarth. He also takes on the plight of the mudlarking children he comes across during his investigation, and he even creates a charity to help them, although this is mostly a shameless ploy to gain access to some higher-class people he would otherwise not be able to approach for his investigation (173).

Dickens likes to imagine the day when doors will open for him and his name will mean something significant to people. He thinks that he could be a famous solicitor or successful playwright, but the idea of being a novelist has not crossed his mind yet (85). He expresses multiple times in the novel that he cannot wait to move up in the world and distance himself from his humble upbringing and hopefully marry the woman he loves (106).

Dickens is described as observant, something that is very useful in his profession as a journalist but also as a detective and, crucially, future writer, as his colleague at the paper, William Aga, stresses at one point in the novel in an overt manner that can only be meant as a nod towards the reading audience:

“You should write fiction,” William said, clapping him on the shoulder.

“I don’t know when I would find the time,” Charles said, as they found the street again. “But I’m sure there will be quite a tale in Christiana Lugoson’s death, whenever I get to the bottom of it.” (120)

Before that quote, William already noted that Dickens has the “instincts of a dramatist” which in his opinion causes Dickens to see connections and intrigue where there very well may be none (39). In other words, Dickens has a nose for crimes and injustice, something that he would write extensively about in his journalistic works but also in his later novels, as Briggs shared in her acknowledgements section of *Patience Brooke* (287).

The author of *A Tale of Two Murders* clearly made the decision to hint towards Dickens’s future success as a writer as the above quotes and scenes illustrate. These serve as a wink to the reader, and, aside from these elements, Redmond also chose to stress the theme of social injustice that Dickens himself used in his novels in her own one, providing a reflection of Dickens’s works on his own life, or at least his life in this biofictional novel. Ultimately, Redmond chose to put Dickens in a positive light without making comments about his proven darker sides as established by scholars such as Kay and Ford.

3.4. Conclusion

The portrayal of Charles Dickens in the discussed novels differ from each other in the sense that the Dickens in *The Murder of Patience Brooke* is of an older age and already famous for

his works, while the Dickens in *A Tale of Two Murders* is still a young man and journalist at the *Evening Chronicle* and has not even thought of being an author yet at this point in his life.

The age difference in the two novels conveys a slight difference in motivation and what they find more important in their lives at that point in time they are in. *Patience Brooke*'s Dickens is very committed to fighting the social injustices of the London he lives in by having, amongst many things, established a Home for Fallen Women that stands central in the novel. The Dickens in *A Tale of Two Murders* has a journalist's keen curiosity to solve the murder cases he comes across, but he is often distracted by his companion, Kate Hogarth, whom he wishes to court. He does care about the poor conditions that street children live in, for example, but he does not truly act upon his discomfort as the confident and committed Dickens of *Patience Brooke* would easily and confidently do.

These two different takes on Dickens thus might partly be explained by the age difference and the amount of life experience, but when looking at the different iterations that Kay named in her article on the fictionalisation of Dickens, they both appear to fit within the more positive frames that have been linked to him. Both versions of Dickens are portrayed as campaigners of social injustice; the older one in *Patience Brooke* more so than the one in *A Tale of two Murders*, although he is still very young in the latter novel and does appear to slowly develop a commitment to aiding the poor.

In these novels, Dickens has the generally known big heart for the lower classes, but he crucially also demonstrates a feeling of shame when he thinks about his own humble upbringing where he had to work hard at a very young age. In *Patience Brooke*, the thought of other people finding out about his past frightens him and he is deeply ashamed when it appears there is a deeper personal connection between himself and the murder investigation. In *A Tale of Two Murders*, Dickens works hard to improve his stance in society so he can be viewed as a suitable suitor for the young woman he loves – and so that he is able to interview the persons who might have been involved in the murder of a young girl he witnessed. In other words, both authors emphasise Dickens's past and how it influences the way in which they handle their respective investigations.

Dickens's infamously low opinion of women both Ford and Kay allude to in their articles does not become apparent in a direct manner in the novels, but there are a few instances in which there appear to be references towards it. In *Patience Brooke*, despite having established a Home for Fallen Women and treating its residents quite fairly given the circumstances, he is indifferent and perhaps even cold towards his own wife, Catherine. The latter is still a young woman in *A Tale of Two Murders* and is known as Miss Kate Hogarth,

and Dickens is much more passionate towards her in this very early stage of their relationship. Yet, he enjoys outsmarting her and looks down upon the young theatre girl, Julie, who seeks his help. Perhaps these few fleeting moments are unintentional and are not meant to be construed as a commentary on who Dickens was or might have been as a person.

Largely though, both Briggs and Redmond appear to have consciously chosen to portray Dickens in a positive or at least neutral manner – there are, crucially, no references to his colonial attitude or other dubious political affiliations either in the novels, which are the reason for some negative views people have of Dickens as Kay notes (196). This decision, deliberate or not, paves the way for a sympathetic main character that the reader can identify with and root for, but it means at the same time that there is no deeper discussion about who Dickens might have truly been.

Patience Brooke's Dickens is at the height of his success and there are various direct references to his novels. He is working on the manuscript of *David Copperfield* in the novel and the characters from his novels are readily named by the people he meets during the investigation and who have all enjoyed his work. These findings corroborate with the hypothesis in the introduction of this paper, but the Dickens of *A Tale of Two Murders* does not have a fully developed authorial identity yet and thus there are no references to his famous works. His work as a journalist is garnering some esteem among the society of London, though, and the theme of social injustice Dickens frequently wrote about still stands out in this novel, although he is not as committed to these social causes as he is in *Patience Brooke* – which, as stated before, has most likely to do with the age difference.

Although Kay asserts at the beginning of this chapter that people have various associations with Dickens, the two novels that were examined have not shown two very different portrayals of him. The slight differences in these two depictions can largely be explained by the difference in Dickens's age in each novel: the older version in *Patience Brooke* has more life experience and is already successful as an author whereas the younger version of him in *Tale of Two Murders* is a promising journalist, not a published author yet, and has vastly different priorities. Briggs could make use of much more material from Dickens's life to include in her novel because of Dickens's more advanced age than Redmond, who had more room to fictionalise Dickens as a young man because there is not too much known about what this pre-author Dickens was up to exactly.

There is not a very strong connection between them acting as detectives and the influence it has on their authorship. The Dickens in *Patience Brooke* is inspired to add a little dog in his new novel because of this chance meeting with a couple of children, but other than

that, his detective role does not provide him with new insights in his authorship. In *A Tale of Two Murders*, the author decided to incorporate a younger, pre-author version of Dickens in her novel. There was one character who told Dickens he should be an author – therefore creating almost a sort of origin story for the famous author – but other than that, Dickens had his hands full with the investigation and his courtship of Miss Hogarth. Any true connections to his future famous novels and his wish to become a serious are not visible yet in this first novel of Redmond's series.

These findings do not corroborate with the hypothesis that was constructed in the introduction of this thesis. It was namely expected that Dickens's works, influential and famous as they are, would play a significant role in his characterisation, but there was very little evidence for this. Instead, the theme of social injustice was emphasised in both novels, writing Dickens as a man ashamed of his past, but determined to elevate himself to a higher class while sympathising with and helping the lower classes on some levels. There is no true commentary on his more controversial sides as shared by Kay and Ford in their very thorough analyses of Dickens, yet his active role in mixing fact with fiction in his own autobiographic fictions and non-fictions to present himself as a figure that he orchestrated himself might have something to do with the mostly positive manner in which he is portrayed in these biofictional novels – neither Briggs nor Redmond might have looked further in studies on Dickens, or they might have consciously chosen to not include a social commentary on him in their novels, instead opting for more generally accepted assertions about his character to fit the entertaining purposes of the novels.

After a chapter with two historical authors and this one with one author, the following chapter will analyse the portrayal of three historical authors: Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Brontë – three female authors and sisters who, as predicted in the hypothesis of this thesis, likely are characterised along the lines of the popular conventions that are generally “known” about them as written down by biographers over the past few centuries, and not influenced by the fairly recent demystifications of the myths surrounding them by people such as Juliet Barker and Lucasta Miller. Like Dickens and Wilde, they are not known for detective or mystery works, but the combined factors of their gender and their familial bond will provide this thesis with additional angles to explore with regards to the topic of historical authors in the role of detectives and how it reflects on their cultural and authorial identity and their works (and the other way around).

Chapter 4: The Brontë Sisters

I'd particularly like to thank Tanya Lee Stone and Laurie Halse Anderson, who convinced me that the Brontë sisters would applaud any historical liberties if it served my story. As Laurie said, "The back matter is your friend."

- From the Acknowledgements of *Always Emily* by Michael MacColl

As I came to read their books and discover more about [the Brontë sisters] I began to see them not as remote authors of dusty and impenetrable fiction, but women who fought for their right to have lives as rich and as notable as their male counterparts, refusing to believe that their gender consigned them or their talent to a polite and quiet existence that would eventually fade to nothing.

- From the Author's Note of *The Vanished Bride* by Bella Ellis

4.1. Introduction

The Brontës' lives and works have been analysed and interpreted in countless of ways by numerous people in the past few centuries. In the past few decades, scholars have attempted to sift through all these interpretations to determine the truth at its core. One such scholar is Lucasta Miller, who in the aptly named *The Brontë Myth* names various "myths" surrounding the Brontë sisters that have arisen over the years and debunks them. While Charlotte (whose life was well-documented as she was the longest surviving sibling and also one of the first people who attributed to the Brontë myth) and Emily (who is seen as the most mysterious sister with little documentation left of her life and also the most intriguing personality as asserted by Charlotte) have plenty of room in her book, Anne Brontë is notably absent. Miller explains this by asserting that Anne "had not inspired enough posthumous biographical representations to merit an afterlife study" and that people were more curious about the elder two siblings, of whom was simply written more than Anne in the past few centuries (4).

Another important work focused on finding the "true life" of the Brontës is *The Brontës* (1994) by Juliet Barker, of which a revised edition was published in 2010. She in particular names the tendency of biographers to search for information as to who the Brontës actually were in their fiction, by lack of enough strong factual documents of the Brontës' own hand and of contemporaries of the sisters – an endeavour Barker warns against as being futile and not objective, as already explained in the introduction of this thesis (7). Besides that, she names the basic character traits the biographers over the years have agreed upon for each

sister: Charlotte is the long-suffering oldest sibling, dutiful and subordinating her career as an author to the alleged tyranny of her father; Emily is a genius, wild, and generally pessimistic yet warm and compassionate towards her alcoholic brother, Branwell; Anne, finally, does not possess the rebelliousness of her sisters and is a quiet and unassuming woman who conforms to the demands of religion and society (8). Their father, Patrick Brontë, is generally assumed to have been a tyrant who repressed the talents of his daughters; yet, as Barker proves with surviving letters of his hand in newspapers and other sources, he was actually a very progressive man who concerned himself with the wellbeing of all the people in the village and who let his daughters read and write what they wanted in his library (9).

This chapter will contribute to these recent demystifications of the Brontë sisters and how the authors of the biofictional works have dealt with them, if they are even aware of them at all. Two biofictional novels starring the Brontë sisters will be discussed: *Always Emily* (2014) and *The Vanished Bride* (2019). Tellingly, in line with Miller's research, there is no Anne present in *Always Emily*, but she is present in the second novel. The focus in this chapter will therefore mainly be on the characterisation and the authorial and cultural identity of Charlotte and Emily Brontë, working with the general assumptions of their personalities as described in Charlotte's biographical notice and *The Brontës*. First, the background of these three authors will be elaborated upon to provide a clear view of the lack of documentation that is left of them and how complicated the issues of their legacies and reputations are, which have been actively rewritten by Charlotte Brontë herself.

Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Brontë were three sisters who shared one true passion: writing. With a father who had no qualms with letting them read the same type of books as their brother, Branwell, the sisters were free to explore their writing without shame or restrictions, which ultimately led to a couple of the best-known novels in British history.

The eldest sister, Charlotte, wrote multiple novels in her lifetime but is best known for *Jane Eyre* (1847), a novel in which her romantic nature becomes apparent and in which her experiences as a governess and teacher are incorporated. Emily only wrote one novel next to her poetry: *Wuthering Heights* (1847), a tale of passionate and jealous love which both beguiled and shocked contemporary audiences with its themes of social injustice and gender inequality. Anne, considerably less popular than her sisters, is known for *Agnes Grey* (1847), a novel in which she drew on her own experiences as a governess for a middle-class family and which shines a light on Victorian chauvinism and materialism. Even more socially relevant is her second novel, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), which uniquely for its time

dealt with the subject of a woman leaving an abusive husband. It is considered one of the first true feminist novels.

At the very beginning of their literary careers, the sisters chose to use male pseudonyms to be able to get published and judged fairly for their work and not their gender: Charlotte, Emily, and Anne became Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell, respectively. The decision to take on pseudonyms was the first of many active decisions Charlotte Brontë made in editing the literary reputation and reception of herself and her sisters. There are numerous sources that detail her interference in how she and her sisters were presented and perceived by the public. Maier demonstrates in her article, “The Neo-Victorian Presence(s) of Emily Brontë”, how Charlotte deliberately created a framework in which she and her sisters existed, and how she “accidentally” one day came across the poetry of Emily and how impressed she was with her sister’s work, calling it quite “unwomanlike” in a positive manner. Charlotte became highly protective of her sisters and thought it necessary to reconstitute both Emily’s and Anne’s images for the British reading public. Charlotte survived both of her sisters and served as a keeper of her sisters’ legacies until her own death in 1855. Her construction of her sisters’ literary reputations and her revisions of their poetry have been criticised numerous times over the years and some critics blame her for the stratifying effect of the so-called Brontë myth on their reception.

There are only a handful of documents left by Emily’s hand by which her personality can be derived from, so the rest has to be filled in in another way. This might lead to biographers delving into her work to determine her character by lack of other authentic material, which Maier noted as well: “Aside from this smattering of documentation, only her poetry and her novel provide the colors from which to paint a portrait of one of the most enigmatic of literary women” (290). Maier describes how the mythologizing of Emily began when she was seventeen and moved to Roe Head School to commence a short-lived education, since from that period onward all documentation about Emily did not come from her anymore but from Charlotte and her acquaintances (293). Maier puts forward various quotes by readers of Emily’s work that because of her private nature and the fact that there is little known about her, the need to know more about her is very strong, and thus susceptible for interpretations of her life and personality in biofictional works (295).

The popular stance on the personalities of the three sisters stems from the aforementioned Brontë myth. Charlotte Brontë herself is accused of instigating the century-long mythologization of her sisters, as she attempted to better her sisters’ stance among their fiercest critics after their deaths. In the biographical notice she wrote about her sisters after

their premature deaths, she describes Emily as someone who was both vigorous and simple, reserved and powerful, someone with a temper and who was unyielding, but who was also very warm. Anne's character was milder and more subdued than Emily's, whom she looked up to; she was virtuous and selfless, intelligent and reserved, something which kept her in the shadows. She did not allow to let her feelings be known freely. About their writing styles, Charlotte wrote: "Neither Emily nor Anne was learned; they had no thought of filling their pitchers at the well-spring of other minds; they always wrote from the impulse of nature, the dictates of intuition, and from such stores of observation as their limited experience had enabled them to amass" (180).

Charlotte did not only create a myth for her sisters, but also for herself as Miller asserts. Miller explains how Charlotte invented two distinct and conflicting myths, of which the second one was meant to deflect attention from the first. The first one was a myth of female self-creation embodied by her autobiographical *Jane Eyre* and *Lucy Snowe*, who fought for their self-worthiness in a world in which they were restricted in doing so. The second myth, which eventually became the one source many biographers gladly drew from, was Charlotte as "a quiet and trembling creature, reared in total seclusion, a martyr to duty, and a model of Victorian femininity, whose sins against convention, if she had unwittingly committed any, could be explained away by her isolated upbringing and the sufferings she had endured" (Miller 9).

While each of these myths was based on partial truths about Charlotte's private character, they, along with the myths she created for her sisters, were decidedly constructed in a manner that proved Charlotte was very much conscious of the effect legacies have on how people like her sisters, and thus also herself, will be remembered. There are very few documents left to accurately piece together who the sisters actually were, a feat already very difficult because there is arguably little to conclude about who a person truly is based on just words on paper. As mentioned before, Juliet Barker warned that those biographers who try to seek for the authors' true self in their fictional works are on a futile quest; therefore, for the analysis below, an eye will be kept on scenes, characters, and other influences that the authors of the biofictional novels might have drawn from the sisters' works, even if they have not written those famous novels yet at the point in time in the biofictional novels. It might be more likely that it will be the other way around, then, with there being moments in the novels that will "inspire" the sisters in their future writing.

4.2. *Always Emily* (2014)

Always Emily (2014) is a novel by Michaela MacColl and puts the focus on Charlotte and Emily Brontë, with their sister Anne only present through a couple of references. After the prologue, in which the very young Emily and Charlotte attend the funeral of their elder sibling Elizabeth that died at age ten, the main story commences ten years later when Emily is aged seventeen and Charlotte nineteen. Charlotte has become a teacher at Roe Head School and now brings Emily with her hoping that she will receive a more proper education that will enable her to earn a living once their father dies and they are forced to fend for themselves. However, their time at the school is cut short when they both return home after Emily did not fit in amongst the other students and Charlotte was dismissed indefinitely after the inappropriate romantic stories she was writing there were discovered by the head mistress.

Back at home, they get entangled in a mysterious plot in which a woman is held captive by her brother, Robert Heaton, so that the latter can claim her inheritance from their recently deceased father. Meanwhile, a mysterious man is seen camping on the grounds of Heaton, who comes into contact with Emily during one of her strolls across her beloved moors.

Physical appearance and personality

Emily is described as wild and as someone who loves being outdoors. She regularly walks across the moors, sometimes even during the night, and does not appear to care much for her appearance and how others regard her. She adores dogs, the bigger the better, and they love her in return. She is the tallest of her siblings and is described as being half a foot taller than her five-foot tall sister Charlotte (21).

Charlotte is established as the elder sibling, and therefore the most responsible one of the sisters. In the novel she is nineteen years old and at the very start of the story she travels to Roe Head School for her short-lived teaching job there. Instead of a full salary, she asked for her recompense to include tuition for Emily, something that was quite important for Charlotte: she tells Emily how important it is for her to receive a good education so she will one day be able to provide for herself after their father passes and cannot shelter and feed her and her siblings anymore (9). She emphasises how much her work means to her by saying she would even sacrifice her writing if it would mean security for her family, to which Emily replies that selflessness is Charlotte's expertise and not her own, further establishing the two sisters as polar opposites (11). Although Charlotte is adamant to provide for her family, she does lament the fact that she has to resign herself to teaching other people's children for the rest of

her life while she would love nothing more than to experience the love and adventure she writes about for herself (18).

Charlotte's small height is often mentioned in the novel and her eyesight is said to be as bad as her father's. Charlotte comes across as very maternal and stern and insists on properness. Yet, she is also a very romantic soul and often daydreams about the Duke in her stories. In the novel, John Brown, the sexton of the parsonage, is heard talking fondly, yet brutally honest about Charlotte, saying that she "doesn't have any good looks to spare" (MacColl 248).

In other words, the two siblings are firmly established as opposites in almost every way. Emily is tall, wild, confident and proactive. She does not care for conventions and what is proper for a young woman of her age and station. Charlotte on the other hand feels she has to be the responsible one since she became the eldest sibling after the death of their elder two sisters, Elizabeth and Maria. She is very short and plain and insists on properness. The title of the novel, *Always Emily*, is a phrase that is regularly thought by Charlotte whenever the conversation swiftly changes course towards discussing Emily. Whenever that happens, Charlotte feels a certain friction with her sister, especially since people tend to overlook her whenever she is with her taller, more beautiful, and wilder sister. When Harry Heaton praises Emily for her way with dogs, Charlotte laments the fact that no one ever appears to value her own "qualities of prudence, responsibility, and virtue", and that they instead only have eyes for her more unconventional sister (214). MacColl takes care to clearly establish the two sisters as polar opposites, and keeps away from the nuance established in the works of scholars such as the aforementioned Barker and Miller.

Authorship and works

One prominent theme in the novel is the writing of the two sisters. Emily is quick to defend the writing of her and her sister to their housekeeper: "It isn't scribbling, dear Tabby. Writing is what makes life sweet to the tongue" (MacColl 140). For Victorian women, options in life were very limited. As such, writing is for someone like Emily, full of energy and life, a way to escape the confines of her mundane life and enrichen it more. For Charlotte, writing also provides a means to escape from her life, although her motivations are more pointed towards her yearning to be swept away in a romance. When she is rescued by a handsome stranger from suffocation in a wooden chest in which she was hiding, she exclaims "my duke!" before fainting in his arms. This duke is the male love interest in many of her stories that take place in the fantasy world of Angria (160).

One important comment that points towards the contents of the famous novels Charlotte and Emily would write later in their lives appears at the very end of the novel, when Charlotte comforts Emily after the boy the latter liked moves away.

“If you don’t find love, you too can find solace in your stories.” Charlotte squeezed Emily’s hand. “If I wrote this story, I’d choose a happier ending.”

“I wouldn’t,” Emily assured her sister. “Life is full of tragedy, and so my stories will be, too.” (264)

Charlotte’s *Jane Eyre* would indeed have a happy ending after all the hardships the characters went through, while Emily’s *Wuthering Heights* would end quite differently. Furthermore, just sentences before the aforementioned quote, Charlotte exclaims that she would not mind marrying a disfigured man as long as he loves her, which shows both her romantic nature and inclination to fall for every man who would love her and perhaps also serves as the inspiration for *Jane Eyre*’s Mr Rochester, who becomes disfigured in a fire just like Harry in this novel, and whom Jane Eyre loves despite of his injuries (264). Emily, however, tells her sister she feels she is not destined for love and would rather think about how she can write down her experiences on paper for a story than love a man for real. On this subject the two sisters differ in opinion, since Charlotte claims she would gladly give up her writing for great love (264).

As shown above, MacColl makes clear references to the sisters’ future works and lends credibility to her work by adding a few biographemes such as the scene described above, in which the sisters basically hint towards the end of their own future novels. MacColl might fall here into the trap that Juliet Barker pointed out of taking too much inspiration from the novels her historical subjects wrote in an attempt to find their personality traits reflected back in them - however, it only serves to give the reader of this biofictional work a recognisable moment.

4.3. *The Vanished Bride* (2019)

The Vanished Bride (2019) is the first novel in a series written by Rowan Coleman under the pseudonym Bella Ellis, which is a nod towards the pseudonyms the Brontë sisters actually used when they first published their novels. Emily Brontë used the pseudonym Ellis Bell, which Coleman flipped around for her own pseudonym and made it decidedly a female name and not an ambiguous one as the pseudonyms of the sisters used to be.

In this novel all three sisters are under one roof again in 1845 after working in different towns, and after word reaches them that the young mistress of one of their schoolfriends disappeared in the night leaving behind a great amount of blood, they decide to

take matters into their own hands and investigate what truly happened to her. They call their investigation “detecting”, a term Anne derived from a newspaper article that stated the success of so-called “detectors” in London in solving crimes. In other words, the sisters actively take part in this detecting and are determined to discover the truth no matter the cost.

Physical appearance and personality

The appearance of the sisters receives very little attention by the author, outside from references to Charlotte’s tiny, almost “fairylke” figure (281). The focus lies instead on the sisters’ very distinctive personalities.

In this novel as well, Emily is established as having a very wild and untameable personality, conforming to the impression of her that the actual Charlotte shared with the public in her biographical notice. Emily does not wish to marry or work as a governess or teacher and is very headstrong. Here as well, her love for dogs takes a prominent place in the story. Her way with dogs enables the three sisters to safely enter the property of Chester, as she manages to befriend the two guard dogs who are taught to attack strangers on sight. Emily prefers actions over words and is not afraid to stand up against people to protect her sisters, as is illustrated when she literally stands up to address the whole inn she and Charlotte are in a bid to gather more information, even after they are told to leave by the innkeeper (105).

Anne, unlike *Always Emily*, does appear in this novel and is as important as her two sisters in the story. She comes across as calm and proper and in the detecting business she is the one who always keeps a cool head, meeting the description of her that has been popular among biographers over the years as described by Barker in her *The Brontës* and by Charlotte in her biographical notice.

The fictional Charlotte in *The Vanished Bride* at one point reminisces that Anne was (and still is) always seen as the baby of the family, “pure, precious and unsullied by the cruelty of life” (123), yet she recognizes that Anne has seen the worst of humanity as well and knows how it can get under your skin if you allow it to. It is something that Anne can handle, though:

Anne Brontë might look angelic, as she did now, but within her chest beat the heart of a fierce warrior. It was one of the things that set her apart from every other young woman that Charlotte had ever met – that set them all apart, Charlotte though one could say without *too* much immodesty. (123)

Anne herself reflects as well on the cruel parts of the world that she and her sisters have discovered during their detecting endeavours:

It seemed to her that the whole world had changed since they had begun detecting, that she had seen into the shadows she had always known were there, and she had not flinched or looked away. Somehow she found courage in knowing that, and something deeper: a quiet determination to how the whole world the cruelty and injustice it concentrated so hard on pretending didn't exist. (329)

Not only has detecting opened up the restricted world for the sisters, it has also allowed them to have the opportunity to acknowledge and regard the bad sides of society. Even though their upbringing was quite progressive for women in that time and place (and with a Reverend father, nonetheless) with books about the world available to them to read, it is quite a different matter to coming face to face with those situations in person.

The topics of gender and women's rights are quite modern themes, and in *The Vanished Bride* there is even a lesbian couple living in secret in a paradise where no man will ever disturb them. It is a very feminist novel and feels very much like the novel from the twenty-first century that it is, which at times will take the reader out of the novel - instead of using biographemes and elements from the period in which these sisters lived, the author of *The Vanished Bride* used her novel to reflect upon very twenty-first-century themes, although these themes were already in some way present back then as well, only not in such capacity as nowadays where discussing of these themes are very normal and accepted.

Authorship and works

There are many traces present in this novel of possible inspirations for the sisters' works. Emily purchases a fabric with a unique pattern of stormy clouds and lightning, which may sound a bit on-the-nose as a reference to her *Wuthering Heights*, but author Ellis shares a source in her author's note that proves this event actually took place (351).

Emily is the one who points out to her sisters their power of imagination and how that trait in particular is important and perhaps even crucial for detecting, emphasising that they have "great, powerful imaginations that enable us to see into the heads of anyone, even monsters like Chester. We can walk unseen amongst them, that great mass of humanity outside of this house, and *know* how they think and feel, what they want and what they will do to get it" (258). This is a parallel to Wilde's quote in *The Candlelight Murders* that was mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis, in which Wilde tells Robert Sherard that poets think very differently from policemen, who are too predictable and narrowminded sometimes to solve a crime as complex as the one Wilde investigates. Here, too, a historical author asserts that the talents and traits of a writer are very much compatible with that of detecting.

There is yet another parallel between this book and a novel with Wilde in it. The gypsy fortune-telling scene has an unexpected connection with *The Revenant of Thraxton Hall* by Vaughn Entwistle, which was discussed in the first chapter of this thesis alongside the aforementioned *Candlelight Murders*. Like Oscar Wilde in that novel, Charlotte receives a view into her future that the reader, with the insight of today, knows to be true:

“There’s a flame in you,” Kezia said eventually. “Brightest I’ve ever seen, with a light that could shine on for ever, if only you have the courage to let it burn.”

“I have no idea what you mean by those remarks,” Charlotte said.

“Oh, you do,” Kezia said. “I don’t, but you, you know the meaning very well.” (281) Charlotte herself thinks about what the remarks of the gypsy woman might signify. At first, she cannot believe that such a thing can be true of a person like her, but something about it strikes a chord within her: “What had the old gypsy woman meant about a flame within her, that if ignited might burn for ever? It seemed impossible to Charlotte that such a prediction could be true of her, and yet something about it chimed within. It was a sense of possibility” (293). This “possibility” she speaks of is likely the fact that Charlotte realises she has a novel inside of her that has the potential to become very successful and loved. The sisters’ detecting business is thus not just a regular fancy, but also a means for them to enter the actual world and explore it, providing them with knowledge they might use in their future famous novels.

At the end of this novel, Charlotte and Anne confront Emily and tell her they have read her secret notebook with poetry and that they think it is good enough to publish. This scene actually took place as shown by Maier in the introduction of this chapter, providing some credibility to Bella Ellis’s novel. Emily refuses to publish her work and shares how angry she is with her sisters for reading her work uninvitedly (478). Emily guardedness and her reluctance to put her work forward corroborates with Maier’s account of what little is known about Emily: that she was a very private person. This fact about her is used as a biographeme here, lending credibility to Ellis’s novel as Latham explained in her article.

It should be noted that Ellis does not appear to draw information from the sisters’ works in her novel, aside from the moment in which Emily buys the fabric with clouds, but that actually took place in real life. The question that arises from the analyses of this novel and the previous one, then, is what is “better” for authors of biofiction to do: incorporating elements in the biographical works from the famous novels of their historical subjects as a presumed wink to the reader, or not using such elements at all and instead keep to the facts as far as we know them to be true? And thus, crucially, should the entertaining purposes of biofictional novels weigh more than their credibility or does it not matter?

4.4. Conclusion

From reading the novels, it is clear that the authors of the biofictional novels have attempted to give each sister a very distinct personality to provide the reader with the ability to easily differentiate between them. This presentation of their character traits is based on factual documents and then exaggerated by these authors to distinguish better between the sisters, but it is not fully faithful. One of the biggest examples of this is that it is not the sisters, but their father who, uniquely for that time, enabled his daughters to write and learn to fend for themselves should he one day pass away. He has a kind and encouraging presence in both books, yet the sisters take care to hide their sleuthing from him, feeling it would both endanger and shock him. In any case, there is nothing left of the tyrannical and meanspirited father that many biographers have assumed to be true over the years.

The recent revelation in debunking books such as *The Brontë Myth* and *The Brontës* of Patrick Brontë as a compassionate and openminded man persists in these recent biofictional novels, with him encouraging the sisters instead of dissuading them from their writings, though as mentioned before, their dangerous and unwomanlike sleuthing might just be where he draws the line of what he can accept and condone. His encouraging and mild characterisation enables the sisters to roam across the moors and the countryside for their sleuthing without fear of their father punishing them if he finds out; furthermore, they can write and read as they please, thus providing the reader of these novels with “an insight” in how they came to eventually write and publish their novels.

Both novels take care to give each of the Brontë sisters a separate and clear personality. Emily is described in both as a wild girl who loves the outdoors and dogs and who clearly has her own will. This fits in the generally accepted view biographers have had of her in the past few centuries of a wild, young woman. Charlotte, as the eldest of the siblings, is described as a serious but at the same time romantic person. Her wish to take control of the investigation and what they do corroborates with her real-life role as protector of her sisters’ legacies, taking control of how they should be perceived by the public according to her. This interpretation of her also fits within the view biographers have had of her over the years as a long-suffering elder sibling who feels responsible for her younger siblings.

In reality though, according to the demystifying accounts of both Miller and Barker, Emily was as much if not more private than Charlotte and not an “unladylike” girl as established by MacColl in her novel. Also, as Maier stressed, there is very little documentation left of the sisters by which to derive their personality traits from. A close account of their personalities comes from Charlotte herself, but as already demonstrated in the

introduction of this chapter, Charlotte was aware of the effect that legacies have on how she and her sisters are viewed by the public, and she saw it fit to rectify the view people had of her late sisters by writing the biographical notice. In that notice, Emily comes forward as a simple and reserved woman who could be very reserved but also warm - these are all features that the authors of the biographical novels appear to have given their portrayal of Emily. About Anne, Charlotte wrote she was virtuous, reserved and intelligent; someone who kept herself in the shadows. This is also a matching description of the Anne in *The Vanished Bride*. Finally, the impression Charlotte left to the public about herself was of a creature who was quiet, a martyr to duty, and, most importantly, a model of Victorian femininity. Any accusations of unconventionality could be explained away by her isolated and unusual upbringing but not blamed on herself or her siblings. This view of her can be seen in both novels, with Charlotte being the responsible one, but the novels also go against this view a bit by portraying Charlotte as someone who yearns for romance and adventure.

Both novels are very much geared towards the one passion all three sisters share: writing. In between all the detective work, or “detecting” as the sisters call it in *The Vanished Bride*, their love for writing takes a prominent place in the novels. In *The Vanished Bride* especially, the sisters see first-hand that it is possible for a woman to lead a free and fulfilling life without marriage. A life in which she can pursue her passions without shame, although she cannot publish any of her work under her own name and expect to receive the same amount of respect and objectivity as any man receives. In a way, then, this novel provides a possible narrative strand that might have led to the decision of the actual Brontë sisters to take the leap and publish their stories, albeit under male pseudonyms.

In the same manner in which Jennifer S. Palmer asserted that making Sir Arthur Conan Doyle a detective in biofiction served the interest of a wide readership because of his legacy as the creator of a famous literary detective, placing the Brontë sisters in the same role in biofiction serves the need for a more feminist and triumphant “origin” story for them in which they take a more active role in deciding their fates and ultimately publishing their novels.

This chapter marks the end of the analysis of the biographical novels. The next chapter will be the conclusion and will bring all the analyses of the past chapters together to answer the research question. It will also contain a self-reflection looking back on the process of writing this thesis and suggestions for future research going forward from this thesis.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1. Research question

After the past three chapters detailing the portrayal of famous historical authors as detectives and how this reflects on their cultural and authorial identity and their works (and the other way around), it is now time to answer the following research question that was posed in the introduction of this thesis: In what ways does the fictionalisation of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Oscar Wilde, Charles Dickens, and the Brontë sisters as detectives in British and American biofiction of the twenty-first century affect the portrayal of their authorial and cultural identity and the incorporation of their works?

The way Oscar Wilde is portrayed in *Oscar Wilde and the Candlelight Murders* on the one hand and *The Revenant of Thraxton Hall* on the other contrasts with each other. This largely has to do with how big of a part Wilde receives in the story: in *The Candlelight Murders*, Oscar is the main character and he fully inserts himself into the role of detective – specifically that of Sherlock Holmes, the literary creation of his friend Sir Arthur Conan Doyle who only sparingly features in the novel. In *The Revenant of Thraxton Hall*, however, Wilde serves as a side character and as the reluctant sidekick to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's detective, the latter of whom is the main character of the novel. Wilde's ego is stroked in the first but not in the latter, resulting in their different approaches and opinions of solving a crime – a fitting interpretation looking at Wilde's eccentric personality, though this is of course purely coincidental. Although Wilde clearly is inspired by Sherlock Holmes in *The Candlelight Murders*, his own work is barely discussed – only his fame as an author is something that is often mentioned in the novel. In *The Revenant of Thraxton Hall*, Wilde is firmly portrayed as a side character, defined by his fame as an author and eccentric person, but with no further exploration of his works.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle features only fleetingly in *The Candlelight Murders*, but his literary legacy is visible throughout the novel. It is Wilde who takes up the mantle as Sherlock Holmes, Doyle's most famous creation – this happens very early in Doyle's writing career, as he has only just published the first story with Holmes in it and does not yet hate his creation. This is very differently from his opinion of the character in *The Revenant of Thraxton Hall*, where the novel starts off with Doyle having just killed off Sherlock Holmes in his latest story in the hopes of writing something new. The whole novel is concerned with Doyle's animosity towards Holmes, even seeing him and speaking to him in hallucinations during his investigation, so that by the end of the story he is more at peace with him. What being a

detective brings Doyle in this novel, then, is peace with his infamous hatred of his own character, showing him that he is not yet done with him. In fact, Holmes is the one who ultimately gives him the tools and motivation to solve the crime – so technically, Conan Doyle saved himself in the end, a blurring between fact and fiction as Palmer saw in other biofictional novels with Conan Doyle as well.

Charles Dickens has become so much associated with the period in which he lived that the term “Dickensian” became a well-known term to refer to the Victorian period and the social injustices that came with it. Unlike Wilde, Doyle, and the Brontë sisters, there have been many interpretations and “faces” of Charles Dickens. There is not one single view on Charles Dickens the person, and therefore each incarnation in a biofictional work that features Charles Dickens is different, customised almost towards the wishes of the authors of biofiction. It was even more difficult to connect the two interpretations of Dickens in the considered novels, since the one in *The Murder of Patience Brooke* is significantly older and already successful as an author when the novel begins, whereas the one in *A Tale of Two Murders* is still a young man and has not written any novels yet. Rosemary Kay named various interpretations of Dickens and the opinions people can have about him, but the novels that were investigated for this thesis both portrayed Dickens as someone who cares about the social injustices the poor people face, although the elder Dickens in *Patience Brooke* has a warmer and more engaged heart compared to the young and brass Dickens in *Two Murders*. Notably, though, the Dickens in *Patience Brooke* is indifferent and perhaps even cold towards his wife, fitting one of the popular trends associated with Dickens by some people of him being “a representative of repressive Victorian values towards women and domestic hypocrisy” (Kay 196). Ultimately, both portrayals of Dickens mention his humble past and his plight to help the lesser classes, two themes that feature heavily in Dickens’s own novels.

For the Brontë sisters, acting as a detective means taking bold decisions and gaining access into parts of the world they would otherwise never attain. Even though they had a very unusually free upbringing for women of that time period, there were still various social restrictions they had to face. Taking on the task of solving a crime, they become a bit bolder by travelling to various places to interrogate people of interest and by approaching people they would have otherwise never come into contact with. In *The Vanished Bride*, the Brontë sisters pretended they were acting in the name of two lawyers, clearly men, to open doors for themselves: if they admitted they were acting on their own behalf, no man or woman would speak to them. This gender aspect, in which women of the nineteenth century are empowered by sleuthing to act outside of their place in life, is something that was briefly considered to

include in this thesis, but it ultimately did not fit within the scope of the research, especially since the other two chapters solely look at male authors.

The authors of the six novels all make use of biographemes in their work, interweaving them with fiction. Latham asserts that the careful use of biographemes help to support and validate the imaginative recreation of situations that actually took place, but they also serve to validate the story as a whole (411). Some biographemes are more subtle than others, such as Oscar Wilde's comment in *The Candlelight Murders* about the "atrocious wallpaper" he sees, which is a reference to Wilde's real-life hatred of the wallpaper he was forced to look at in his final days leading up to his death in a hotel in France (Belford 327). Other biographemes constitute entire scenes that are documented to have truly taken place, such as the scene at the end of *The Vanished Bride* in which Charlotte and Anne Brontë try to convince Emily to publish her poetry. Gyles Brandreth chose Robert Sherard to be the narrator in *The Candlelight Murders* and let him look back on the events far after Wilde's death. This allowed Brandreth to include many foreshadowing elements in the novel, such as the homosexuality of Wilde and his ultimate demise.

To be able to fully determine how many biographemes the authors have utilised in their works and where, it is necessary to be familiar with the biographies and all the factual documents of the historical authors that are the subject in these biofictional novels. That would require more research that did not fit into the scope of this thesis, but it would certainly provide a more detailed image on this subject. For now, the fact that biographemes were used at all in each of the novels have been indicated in the previous chapters of this thesis, thus demonstrating, along with the author's note section in each of their novels, that the authors of the biographical novels did their research on their subject and took care to use certain biographemes to lend more credibility to their account of their subject.

All of the authors included such an author's note or a similar section at the end of their novels to explain what research they conducted on their subject and what creative decisions they made that they feel they have to explain and perhaps even justify in this section. This demonstrates that the authors are aware of the fact they are dealing with real people, and even though these people have passed away a long time ago, they still feel it is necessary to explain why they wrote the story and why they did so in this manner.

Another trend that featured in the novels was that there were situations, people, or other occurrences that were implied to either refer to already existing novels or provide the historical authors with material to use in a new novel. Dickens was inspired by the children in the shop to include a little, brave dog in his upcoming book, *David Copperfield*, a small yet

clearly described detail. There is also the moment when Emily buys fabric with stormy clouds on them, referring to *Wuthering Heights* and many more examples. Including these possible sources of inspirations could also be perceived as a strategy to ascribe more credibility to their novels or perhaps as a nod to the reader who will recognise these details if he or she had read the novels of the historical author in question. In other words, lending credibility to these biofictional works was an important aspect for all of the authors of the discussed novels.

Virginia Woolf described the “new biography” as something that served two masters: fact and fiction. These detective biofictions arguably serve fiction more than fact, as none of the historical authors portrayed in the biofictional novels ever acted as a detective in their real life. They act as one in these novels largely for entertaining purposes: what if this famous historical author solved a crime? The novels about the Brontë sisters, however, demonstrate that this decision to have them act as sleuths also serves to liberate them from the restrictions they face in their lives and possibly paves the way to taking the big step of publishing their work, as detailed above. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle comes to terms with the literary character that made him famous and at the same time held him back from creating something just as successful but of more literary value in *The Revenant of Thraxton Hall*. Therefore, next to the most obvious purpose of entertainment, having historical authors act as detectives to solve a crime helps them directly or indirectly with their career as an author. Sometimes it is the other way around, where being an author is what ultimately helps them with solving the crime, as Emily Brontë notes in *The Vanished Bride* when she says that imagination is a trait that will help her and her sisters to solve the crime. Wilde would have agreed with her, with his observation in *The Candlelight Murders* that authors are creative and have an open mind and might therefore be better equipped to see all the elements of a crime than actual policemen.

One unexpected connection between one of the novels about Oscar Wilde (*The Revenant of Thraxton Hall*) and one about the Brontë sisters (*The Vanished Bride*) was a fortune-telling scene that predicted the future lives of Wilde and Charlotte Brontë in a very accurate manner. Wilde receives the prediction that he will lead a short life which will not end in a happy manner while Charlotte is told that there is a flame in her that will burn bright even long after she is gone. Both cannot know at that point how accurate these predictions are, but the reader knows with the knowledge of today that both predictions turned out to be true. These type of scenes may simply serve as a wink towards the reader, a type of breaking-the-fourth-wall interaction between the author and the reader, which the latter might not suspect if he or she is not aware of the general lines of the historical author’s actual life. Yet, the fact

that the same type of predicting-the-future scene is included in two out of the six biofictional novels examined in this thesis is an interesting development.

A crucial question that arose near the end of the Brontës chapter was whether the entertaining purposes of biofictional novels should weigh more than their credibility and whether this even matters or not. It is difficult to answer this question as every reader of biofiction might have a different reason for writing their work, but it is an interesting element that these authors presumably keep in the back of their heads. It is fun as a reader to recognise a reference to a famous novel that might not mean anything (yet) to the historical author at that point in time in the novel. On the other hand, it can also slightly irritate the reader to find such a reference since it might take him or her out of the novel for a moment - he or she realises it is actually fiction that they are reading and not the actual story of a historical author they might or not admire.

5.2. Self-reflection

I accidentally came upon the subject of this thesis when I was browsing through biofictional novels and stumbled upon a list on Goodreads full of biofictional novels in which historical authors solve crimes. Since there is not much research yet on this particular strand of biofiction aside from Jennifer S. Palmer's article on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in detective biofiction, it meant two things for me: a fresh new study that could actively contribute to the relatively new debate of biofiction and, at the same time, a subject that would be difficult to explore *because* of the lack of research in this niche. It took a while to find my bearing in the research that was available and to select the sources that were relevant for my particular thesis subject.

In the first stage of orientation for this thesis, I had created a substantial amount of subquestions that all in some way were related to the main research question I wanted to investigate, but they went in too many different directions to consider them all. Instead, I have used the ideas for these initial subquestions as recommendations for future research below. They demonstrate that there is much more to explore within the topic of detective biofiction alone and that a subgenre such as detectives, seemingly largely meant to entertain and thrill the reader, can provide numerous insights in the portrayal of real-life people and their lives and what those lives might have looked like if they solved crimes beside their writing – how does it shape them into the person who wrote the famous novels we know today, or how does a famous author use their talents as an author to solve a crime when a police officer who lacks those skills might not be able to? These were the questions that popped up in my head when I

read the novels and began analysing them. Each of them had much more to the eye than I would have expected from these novels if I had not dedicated my thesis to the subject of biofiction and this branch within it specifically. Fictionalising historical authors truly provides an interesting story for biofiction: the authors become fictional characters themselves, but the link to them being real people is never lost due to the usage of biographemes by the authors of the biofictional novels in which they appear, as shown in the analyses above and in the other chapters.

This thesis has contributed a few things to biofiction research, one of which is the more extensive look into detective biofiction in a much broader scope than Jennifer S. Palmer had in her article on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. I have looked at various authors from the nineteenth century who all have much written about them in both biographies and biofictional novels, but I have gathered them all here in one thesis to look at the broader picture of authors in detective biofiction and how taking on the role of something other than being an author reflects on their authorial and cultural identity and their works and the other way around. I have found that being a detective provides some of these authors with inspirations for their future works while in other cases it is the fact that they are authors that presents the crucial key to solving a crime due to their imagination and broader view on life. In other words, these type of biofictional novels provide interesting insights in the authorship of these authors by making usage of a (at first glance) superficial story seemingly only meant to entertain the reader on the surface.

5.3. Future research

This thesis provided some interesting new insights in this specific branch of biofiction. Going forward from this, there are various directions one might take to proceed further with this particular branch of biofiction. One topic that I think is very interesting for future research is the question I mentioned a few times before in this thesis: should biofiction focus more on its entertaining purposes or on its credibility? And does it even matter? Also, the topic of gender in biofictional novels, specifically those novels in which the gender roles are actively challenged, can prove to be a fruitful subject. Especially when looking at novels in which women actively take part in an investigation that requires them to go out in the world and use their intelligence such as these detective biofictions I examined.

Another idea for a study is examining the reviews of biofictional novels and then attempt to derive from them the pre-existing idea the reader has or had of the author who appears in the novel at hand and whether this view corroborates with how the author of the

biofictional novel has portrayed him or her in the story. Delving deeper into this topic, the researcher might examine the underlying reasons why readers view certain historical authors in a particular way and if this has something to do with how they are portrayed in other popular media, biographies, or how they are perhaps seen as synonymous with the author's most popular character. The popularity of detective biofiction, since there are quite a few of such novels with almost every major historical author represented, might also prove a fruitful study. Why exactly do readers enjoy reading about historical authors, a substantial amount of whom never even wrote detectives or mystery novels of any kind themselves? This answer is somewhat explained in this thesis with the help of Palmer, who asserted in her article on Doyle that many people enjoy reading about what events and people led Doyle, but likely also the group of historical authors as a whole, to create some of the most famous and beloved characters and stories ever.

A topic I briefly considered using but ultimately decided against doing so was that of the accuracy of the portrayal of the authors and if this is even something that can be measured in any way. When is a portrayal of a real-life figure, especially one who has been long dead, accurate (enough)? Does that even matter in a book that is meant foremost to entertain the reader? The question then also arises of how to judge the portrayal of a historical author in books like the ones examined in this thesis, in which the authors are put into a whole new role (that of a detective) that they have never actually fulfilled in their life. A topic that is closely related to this one is the question whether detective conventions apply to the historical authors in these detective biofictions, and if so, what is then left of the characterisation that makes it that particular author, and not a detective like anyone else.

Finally, placing historical authors as the subject of detective biofictions in a broader context, a researcher could look into what the portrayal of a historical author in biofiction says about our current climate and our opinion of these authors and how we want to see these authors portrayed. Are these authors, for example, portrayed in a superficial and largely positive manner to emphasise the entertainment purposes of detective biofiction rather than its commentary on social and political themes? Or are there also novels like these which *do* address such themes in an active, unflinching manner without losing sight of entertaining the reader, and why might they have chosen to do so? A lot of these questions could be answered by closely reading the author's note and acknowledgements at the end of most of these novels or by examining interviews with the author of the biofiction on what they say on this topic and why they wrote their books.

As a closing note, it is clear that there are a lot of research possibilities in the branch of detective biofiction but also in biofiction as a whole. As a relatively new subject in literature studies, there is plenty to discover and analyse. This thesis only touches on a select amount of these research possibilities, but hopefully it will inspire another researcher to investigate further in this branch or another adjacent topic so that biofiction as a relevant research topic will only grow in the future.

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