

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Research

Ambiguity takes an important role in the portrayal of characters in literary works, especially in classic novels where characters often display psychological depth and moral complexity. Rather than portraying characters as entirely good or evil, many 19th-century English novels depict individuals whose identities blur the lines between good and evil, reason and emotion, or strength and weakness. This ambiguity sparks diverse interpretations and deeper critical engagement from readers, making it a central element in literary analysis. Chakraborty (2025) in his article states that according to the New Critics, a truly remarkable work of art is one that deliberately generates ambiguity—not because the writer is confused, but because they skillfully use language to do so. This purposeful ambiguity enhances the depth and impact of the piece, making it more powerful and meaningful. In fact, ambiguity can often serve to strengthen a literary work.

In Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, ambiguity is intricately woven into the formation of the main characters. Jane, for example, is portrayed as both obedient and rebellious, moral and emotionally passionate, while Edward Rochester is depicted as powerful yet deeply emotional. Similarly, Heathcliff oscillates between victim and villain, lover and tormentor, and Catherine, who is rational yet weak, embodies contradictions that defy rigid categorization. This characterization challenges simplistic readings and instead opens up space to explore deeper layers of meaning within the text.

This study using the New Criticism approach, which emphasizes in-depth reading and the internal structure of literary works without referring to the author's intent or external context. One of the core concepts of New Criticism is ambiguity, as defined by critics such as William Empson, who sees it as the existence of multiple and often conflicting meanings in a single word, phrase, or paragraph. Through this approach, this study focuses on how ambiguity in characters and narrative voice operates within the formal elements of the novel—such as language, structure, imagery, and irony.

By applying the New Criticism framework to *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, this study aims to reveal how ambiguity enriches a work with meaning. Additionally, it challenges singular interpretations of the characters. Thus, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexity of characterization in literary works. The reason the author chose this topic for research is because the researcher is interested in the characters Heathcliff, Catherine, Jane Eyre, and Edward Rochester because they are complex characters. Unlike characters in general who can be interpreted in a single way, such as good characters or evil characters. These characters have two opposing sides within themselves that overlap and explain why they have those traits.

1.2 Identification of the Problems

Characters in literary works are often built with complex traits. In Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* and Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, the main characters Heathcliff, Catherine, Jane Eyre and Edward Rochester show contradictory behaviors and values that make them ambiguous characters. They exhibit rational and irrational thinking, strength and weakness, obedience and

disobedience. This ambiguity in characterization invites various interpretations and raises questions about their characterizations.

Such complexity suggests that the characters are not simply heroes or villains, but ambiguous figures shaped by internal conflicts and opposing traits. These contradictions can be structurally studied using Tension concept which reveals how meaning is constructed through opposite ideas. In addition, the New Criticism approach allows the analysis to focus strictly on the text itself, without relying on external biographical or historical context.

Therefore, the problem identification in this study focuses on how ambiguity in characterization is formed through binary opposition, and how such ambiguity contributes to the depth of meaning of the two novels.

1.3 Review of Related Studies

The topic of this research is the ambiguity within main characters in Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* and Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*: Jane Eyre, Edward Rochester, Heathcliff, and Catherine Earnshaw using binary opposition concepts: rational and irrational, strong and weak, obedient and disobedient. This study will refer to several studies, such as journal articles related to *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre* to help develop the analysis of this research.

First, Aringo Bizimaana Peter (2019), in his article entitled “The Complexity of Characterization in Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights*: Focus on Heathcliff and Catherine Earnshaw” discusses the complexity of characterization in *Wuthering Heights*, especially in Heathcliff and Catherine. Neither of them can be divided into “good” or “evil” labels. They reflect the overlapping binary oppositions of strong-weak, love-hate, and obey-rebel. The ambiguity of their

characters becomes the center of the novel's conflict and artistic power, as the reader can never absolutely judge who is right or wrong. The strength of this article is that it provides an in-depth analysis of the dynamic characters of Heathcliff and Catherine. In addition, it also emphasizes that *Wuthering Heights* is an open-ended novel that cannot be forced into a single meaning, but must be interpreted as an open-ended work, which is certainly in line with the concept of ambiguity that blurs the boundaries between two contradictory things. Despite its strengths, this article also has weaknesses, that it does not explicitly develop the theory of binary opposition and does not apply a structuralist framework. Additionally, there is a lack of direct quotations from the novel that demonstrate ambiguity. This article expands our understanding of the transformation of Heathcliff and Catherine's characters from everyday personalities to spiritual entities, a concept rarely discussed in detail in general literary criticism. The relevance of this article to my thesis is that it emphasizes that the novel does not have a single meaning, which supports the analysis of ambiguity in my research. This article also supports the writer's analysis of the ambiguity of meaning through the internal conflict and relational dynamics between two characters who are both destructive and intertwined.

Second, Jennifer Lodine Chaffey (2013), in his article entitled "Heathcliff's Abject State in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*" discusses Heathcliff's ambivalent state as an "abject" character who is rejected from the social, moral, and family systems using psychological and semiotic approaches. Heathcliff is a symbol of something outside the boundaries of the order, at once threatening and touching. Heathcliff's ambiguity lies in his position as victim and perpetrator, weak and

strong, lover and destroyer. This article also shows the internal tensions and contradictions in the text structure and characters of *Wuthering Heights*. The strength of this study lies in its detailed explanation of Heathcliff's personality traits: for example, his harsh attitude toward humans and animals, his violation of social norms, and his obsession with Catherine. However, the article also has a weakness in that it focuses solely on one character, Heathcliff. This article introduces Heathcliff as a character who experiences abjection—not as an ordinary social being, but as a figure who has fallen beyond the boundaries of identity, becoming an entity that rejects normative social structures. This enriches our understanding of the character as one on the brink of identity. The relevance of this article to my research is that it discusses one of the characters I examine in my study.

Third, Lia Syafitri (2024) in her article entitled “Revenge in Emily Brontë’s Novel *Wuthering Heights*” explores the central role of revenge in shaping the character of Heathcliff. The study examines how personal trauma and social rejection fuel Heathcliff’s vengeful actions, and how these actions contribute to the emotional and psychological unraveling of not only himself but also those around him. Using psychological frameworks, the study concludes that Heathcliff’s identity is formed through a complex interplay of oppression, obsession, and emotional torment. The article applies a descriptive qualitative method and draws primarily from textual analysis, in line with New Criticism principles. The strength of this article is the detailed focus on Heathcliff’s emotional and psychological motivations. It offers a rich examination of how trauma influences character development and morality, particularly in the form of long-term revenge. Furthermore, its close attention to the primary text aligns well with the textual

analysis approach emphasized in New Criticism. However, the article is somewhat limited in scope, as it focuses only on Heathcliff and does not discuss other characters or broader structural elements such as narrative form or symbolic dualities. In relation to the current study titled *Ambiguity Characterization in Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre and Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights*, Syafitri's analysis supports the argument that Heathcliff embodies moral and psychological ambiguity. His dual role as both a victim and a villain reinforces the binary opposition between strength and weakness, love and vengeance—highlighting how a single character can simultaneously occupy conflicting roles. While the article does not explicitly explore ambiguity or binary opposition, its findings contribute useful textual insights that can be interpreted through these lenses, making it a valuable supporting source.

Fourth, Jie Zhuang (2018) in her article entitled "Ambiguous Agency: The Construction of Femininity in the Gothic Writing of Burney, Radcliffe, Brontë, and Austen" discussed ambiguity in *Wuthering Heights* as a theme and structural principle. Focus on three types of ambiguity: perception, narrative, and the narrated world. The author explains that the novel exploits the interpretive tension between observation and reality; between the narrator Lockwood and the reality of the characters; and between the realistic and supernatural worlds. The strength of this article lies in its sharp textual analysis of how the narrator creates ambiguity. Additionally, the article highlights forms of ambiguity at the linguistic and narrative levels, which are relevant to the New Criticism approach and close reading. However, unfortunately, the article only focuses on analyzing the novel *Wuthering Heights* and does not explicitly discuss binary opposition, and the approach used is

more focused on the phenomenon of ambiguity than on the structure of duality. Nevertheless, there is still relevance between this article and the author's research, as there is ambiguity in the character of Jane, which is explained through the narrative.

1.4 Research Questions

In analyzing the novels *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte and *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte, the writer creates several research questions to limit this discussion, as follows:

1. How does the novel represent tension in characters?
2. What kind of tensions are used to construct ambiguity in the characters?

1.5 Scope of the Study

This study will focus on the ambiguity characterization of the main characters in Emily Bronte's novel *Wuthering Heights* and Emily Bronte's novel *Jane Eyre*. This research is limited to a few points. First, this study will explain the ambiguity characterization in *Wuthering Heights* novel by Emily Bronte. Second, this study will explain the ambiguity characterization in *Jane Eyre* novel by Charlotte Bronte. These characterizations are strong, weak, rational, irrational, obedient, and disobedient

1.6 Objective of the Study

The objectives of this research are as follows:

1. To analyze how ambiguity is represented in the characterization of the main characters in *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*.
2. To identify the tension (such as rational vs irrational, strong vs weak, and obedient vs disobedient) that construct the ambiguity within the characters.