TRABAJO DE FIN DE MÁSTER EN ESTUDIOS LITERARIOS INGLESES Y SU PROYECCIÓN SOCIAL.

MÁSTER UNIVERSITARIO EN ESTUDIOS LITERARIOS Y CULTURALES INGLESES Y SU PROYECCIÓN SOCIAL

Anne Brontë: A Feminist Voice in the Novel.

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CONVOCATORIA SEPTIEMBRE.

CURSO ACADÉMICO: 2020-21.

Acknowledgements.

I would like to begin this Master´s dissertation by expressing my gratitude to a considerable and significant amount of people and institutions. I owe my initial enthusiasm to the Brontë family to Professor Margarita Ardanaz Morán and Beatriz Villacañas Palomo because the former introduced me in the study of women´s literature all along the third year in the studies of English Philology in the Complutense University, and the latter supported my first dissertation about Charlotte Brontë in the same university.

I thank the Brontë Society for allowing me to attend online conferences, to publish a brief article about 'My favourite Brontë', for granting me the chance of being a member for so many years in which I have learned about the most recent studies in the lives of this extraordinary family, but above all, to be so kind whenever I get in contact with them.

I am grateful to the UNED for giving me the chance to study the Master 'Estudios Literarios Ingleses y su Proyección Social', because thanks to it I have learned new perspectives and paradigms to investigate about an author along with the influence that written or visual works have had in popular culture. I have to mention my particular appreciation to Professor Marta Cerezo Moreno as she was the first to know about this project on Anne Brontë and didactic feminism, encouraging me to develop it in the dissertation paper that is presented below. My particular gratitude goes to my tutor, Professor Ana Isabel Zamorano for her insightful conversation and professional guidance, not only with the two subjects I have studied with her, but also for her outstanding knowledge about women´s literature, and precisely about the Brontë sisters. Behind this project there is a personal and sensitive feeling and enthusiasm, and without Professor Ana Zamorano I would not have been able to see it done.

I am grateful to my beloved friends for their patience with me and the funny moments they gave to me when I was blocked or rather exhausted, you are simply unique; to my much-loved brothers, Enrique and Eduardo and my sisters-in-law, Vanessa and Aceneth for the unconditional confidence they always deposit in me.

My eternal gratitude and love are for my family, my son Carlos, my daughter Victoria, both collaborated in the search of digital media adaptations, and my husband, Juan Carlos; you three have travelled with me all along these two years in this wonderful experience, permanently supporting me with a smile and encouraging me to continue and not to

surrender.

If the moors in Haworth were influential for Charlotte and Emily, the seaside in Scarborough for Anne, I have to give my special thanks to the Cantabrian sea and the county Alfoz de Lloredo because the calmness of this green landscape and the mooing of the cows have accompanied me when I was writing this paper that I must dedicate to my mother, Isabel, sick with Alzheimer and dementia, an avid reader of women´s literature when her brain worked well. So, this is for you, “Take courage, mamma, take courage”.

Abstract.

Anne Brontë: A Feminist Voice in the Novel considers the significance that the Victorian writer has for Gender Studies when her two novels, *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* are examined from a feminist standpoint. By means of a realist narrative style, inspired by the author´s purpose of telling the truth in order to make the world a better place for humanity, her discourse endorses a didactic feminism that addresses women´s issues such as the domestic violence or the advantageous convenient marriages Victorian women had to withstand to satisfy the standards implicit in the archetype of the 'angel in the house'. Although her two novels might be read as a call of attention to her society and reformists to improve the inequitable situation of and for women, Anne Brontë´s image as a dull, unoriginal and undervalued writer has subsisted along two centuries. This lesser position that Anne Brontë has, as a remarkable literary figure, was initially nurtured by her eldest sister Charlotte, and then perpetuated by Charlotte´s first biographer, Elizabeth Gaskell and later on in time, disseminated by feminist theorists such as Elaine Showalter, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar or Terry Eagleton.

The undermined view that the contemporary world has about Anne Brontë has resulted in a non-appreciative audience of her work as popular adaptations about *Agnes Grey* do not exist, and they are rather insufficient for *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Anne Brontë´s unpopularity has motivated the construction of popular adaptations such as comic strips, sketches, parodies or memes that mock at the nineteenth- century writer. Nevertheless, recent in-depth studies on behalf of academicians such as Adelle Hay, Samantha Ellis, Patsy Stoneman or Elizabeth Langland, along with the contribution of scholars in the literary academic Brontë journal, "Brontë Studies", are fostering a new interpretation in which to see Anne Brontë and her novels in a new direction that acknowledges her courage as a woman and her talent as an author.

Keywords: Anne Brontë, *Agnes Grey, The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,* didactic feminism, popular adaptations.

Resumen.

Anne Brontë: A Feminist Voice in the Novel considera la relevancia de la escritora victoriana para los estudios de género si sus dos novelas, *Agnes Grey* y *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* son analizadas desde un punto de vista feminista. A través de un estilo narrativo realista, inspirado por la intención de la autora de revelar siempre la verdad para contribuir a que el mundo sea un lugar mejor para toda la humanidad, su discurso fomenta un feminismo didáctico que aborda cuestiones esenciales para la mujer, como por ejemplo, la violencia doméstica o los matrimonios de conveniencia que las mujeres en la época Victoriana tuvieron que aceptar para satisfacer los principios que iban implícitos en el modelo de 'angel in the house'. A pesar de que sus novelas pueden ser leídas como una llamada de atención para la sociedad y para legisladores con el objetivo de mejorar la situación desfavorecedora que vivían las mujeres, la imagen que se tiene de Anne Brontë como escritora aburrida, poco original e infravalorada se ha prolongado durante dos siglos. El lugar inferior que Anne Brontë ocupa como figura literaria fue inicialmente suscitado por Charlotte, su hermana mayor, extendido posteriormente por la primera biógrafa de Charlotte, Elizabeth Gaskell y más adelante en el tiempo reforzado por algunas teóricas feministas como Elaine Showalter, Sandra Gilbert and Gubar o Terry Eagleton.

La visión minimizada que el mundo contemporáneo tiene sobre Anne Brontë se concluye en una audiencia muy poco agradecida con su trabajo ya que no existen adaptaciones populares sobre *Agnes Grey* y en el caso de *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* continúan siendo realmente insuficientes. La escasa popularidad de Anne Brontë ha motivado la creación de adaptaciones populares en la forma de tiras de comic, sketches, parodias o memes que ridiculizan a la escritora del siglo diecinueve. A pesar de todo ello, en la actualidad contamos con estudios pormenorizados a cargo de académicas como Adelle Hay, Samantha Ellis, Patsy Stoneman o Elizabeth Langland que junto a las colaboraciones de investigadores que publican sus artículos en la revista literaria "Brontë Studies" están fomentando nuevas interpretaciones gracias a las cuales se puede visualizar a Anne Brontë y sus novelas con nuevas perspectivas que reconocen su valentía como mujer y su talento como escritora.

Palabras clave: Anne Brontë, *Agnes Grey, The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,* feminismo didáctico, adaptaciones populares.

1. Introduction.

1.1 Research Statement and Objectives.

On the 5th September 1850, Charlotte Brontë wrote a letter to her publisher´s reader, W. S. Williams, declaring the following: "'Wildfell Hall' it hardly appears to me desirable to preserve" (Smith 176). Anne Brontë´s second novel, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* had been published in 1848 which included sensitive subjects concerning women, masculine domination and corruption that implied a subservient, diminished and unfair situation for women. Anne Brontë wished to portray the wrongs of the Victorian patriarchal society she lived in, with the intention of contributing to an improvement in the condition for women and the feminist cause. However, her oldest living sister in the moment of the publication, Charlotte, did not acknowledge the value of the teachings and lessons her youngest sister wanted to offer readers, and with her opinions about the book, she motivated the emergence of the myth that has always surrounded Anne Brontë as a second-rate and unoriginal writer, and as a mild and weak woman.

Since the early beginnings, Anne Brontë´s image as regards her literary achievements has been historically undervalued, not only after her sister´s tough critical opinions about her second novel but this undermined picture, which did not admit Anne Brontë as a literary genius, was reinforced with the publication of the Biographical Notice to the new edition of *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey* in 1850. Charlotte Brontë´s depiction of her youngest sister was also backed up in *The Life of Charlotte Brontë,* the first biography of Charlotte Brontë by Elizabeth Gaskell, and later on by researchers such as Lucasta Miller, Terry Eagleton and canonical feminist critics such as Elaine Showalter or Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar.

On the other hand, a significant number of contributors to 'Brontë Studies', the literary academic journal published twice a year by the Brontë Society, together with contemporary literary critics such as Adelle Hay, Elizabeth Langland, Samantha Ellis or Nick Holland have released studies that are contributing to finishing with Anne Brontë´s marginalization in the literary world, and in consequence are granting her the importance and the literary position she deserves. Every one of the critics mentioned above follow the same principle of studying and revising Anne´s works on her own and not in the light of Charlotte, because as Elizabeth Langland claims: "Anne Brontë is surely an author worthy of interest

in her own right" (60).

Having exhibited the reasons behind Anne´s minor and lessened position in women´s literature, the aim of this Master´s dissertation is to prove the remarkable standing that her two novels, *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* should have, after examining them following a feminist standpoint. Taking into account that "not everything written by women is feminist" (Morris 2), the objective is to reveal that her two novelistic productions can be characterised as pivotal nineteenth-century feminist texts which anticipated legal reformation in favour of women, as regards marriage, divorce, property, earnings and children´s custody and that she called attention to reconsider the vain education given to young girls to attract husbands. The accomplishment of this objective will help us to classify and acknowledge Anne as a forward thinker of the upcoming feminist movements that succeeded in the essential legal and educational rights for women, but always keeping in mind that this investigation will sustain that Anne Brontë was never an active feminist militant.

A further objective in this Master´s dissertation is to illustrate the non-existing or rather insufficient popular adaptations that Anne´s works have received. Nothing exists inspired by *Agnes* Grey and there are only two TV adaptations for *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall.* Popular culture still portrays the writer of this investigation rivalling her and her work to that of her sisters, Charlotte and Emily, misjudging Anne or even mocking at her as it happens in the Psychobitches sketch about the Brontë sisters. We will try to exhibit the reasons behind her unpopularity, and moreover, demonstrate that popular culture and literary or audio-visual adaptations have not yet recognised the value and feminist weight of Anne Brontë´s works, and in consequence, there is not a continuation of her feminist legacy.

It is considered that it is more than necessary to revisit the literary texts of Anne Brontë from a new critical direction to acknowledge her worth and significance for Gender Studies. Evidencing her support to the feminist cause may help to attain a better popular image that could propose potential audio-visual or literary adaptors the possibility to create products that may radically transform the vision that the contemporary world has about this nineteenth-century novelist and poet.

To achieve the aforesaid objectives, this investigation has followed a structure of analysis in which several steps were taken. The first one was to read the two primary sources from a feminist perspective and respecting their chronological order of publication, firstly

Agnes Grey and secondly, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, as it was understood, and later on will be exposed in the related sections, that Anne Brontë´s implication in the woman debate was initiated with a subtle and tactful discourse but ended with a more overt and radical tone with her second novel.

After an in-depth evaluation of the novels, the theoretical framework of Feminism, a description of this ideology, its history, approaches and periods of development were reviewed to being able to, firstly sustain, and finally conclude that the writer of this research can be catalogued as a feminist, and more accurately as a member of the first period of feminism called First-Wave Feminism. The revision of the second period, Second-Wave Feminism, was of a foremost importance as the first assessments about the Brontës by early feminist critics were reviewed, and the study of this period also helped to discriminate which type of feminism was Anne Brontë exposing and transmitting through her characters and narrative diegesis.

A third stage in the line of this investigation was to deep into the secondary sources, to obtain solid material about the historical, social and biographical context of the nineteenth-century author, but also to find out the literary critics who backed up the hypothesis of this dissertation that defends the determination that by asserting Anne Brontë as a feminist writer she should be assigned a better position in women´s literature. Likewise, the revision of the secondary sources threw light upon those literary critics and scholars who shared a parallel judgement as Charlotte Brontë, for example Terry Eagleton who considered Anne´s works as: "her fiction is concerned either with submerged depths nor with far horizons" (Eagleton 137), Harold Bloom who does not include a sentence about her in his seminal study *The Western Canon*, or the most pertinent one for this investigation, Elaine Showalter whose work *A Literature of Their Own* thoroughly studies if there is a female literary tradition, and in her journey back to examining nineteenth-century British women writers, dismisses, neglects and simply ignores Anne Brontë.

The last step in the structure of analysis was to corroborate what Charlotte Brontë initially intended with the image and work of her youngest sister: if she desired to devalue her, not only has she succeeded along history but even contemporary times and the present period in history has not produced yet a cinematographic adaptation of none of her two novels; as previously mentioned we only count with two TV adaptations for her second novel

and there are also several comic strips which either disregard or ridicule her as a woman and as literary artist.

After all this method of research, the development of this paper is designed in the way that is presented in the next section.

1.2 Methodology and Structure.

To reach a consistent and coherent conclusion on the objectives anticipated in the first part of this introduction, the paper is arranged in the following subdivisions.

The first one is this introduction that includes a concise outline explaining the background and importance of the study, the fundamental objectives, the main hypothesis of study, the state of the question, the research scheme that was followed, the methodology, and the structure and theoretical framework employed to achieve a reliable answer.

The second section specifies the essential biographical, historical and social information to contextualize Anne Brontë, in her family, at Victorian times and as a witness of the 'Woman Question'.

A third subdivision is devoted to the feminist theoretical framework that embraces its definition, its periods, and the distinct approaches, supportive to resolve which was the type of feminism that Anne Brontë encouraged through her novelistic production.

The fourth and fifth subdivisions are exclusively committed to Anne Brontë. The fourth one is opened with an exposition of the distinctive varieties of feminist approaches that could be applied in a detailed and descriptive examination of the two primary texts, *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. What follows is the precise evaluation of her two novels from a feminist angle specifying textual evidence to support the premise of this study that asserts that Anne needs to be rethought as a forward thinker and advocate of women rights and that subsequently illustrates and clarifies the title given to this Master´s dissertation.

Before the conclusions, in which a summary of the all-inclusive procedure and findings of the dissertation will be offered, there will be a fifth section that is about to be dedicated to present the reception that her works had in nineteenth-century Victorian England and whether the novels of the youngest Brontë have had any inspiration in modern popular culture, producing either sequels or films that give perpetuation to her feminist legacy, or if

on the contrary the treatment that Anne´s works have received is such that has resulted in the low popularity and not appreciative audience of her fiction.

1.3 Theoretical framework.

As has been formerly anticipated, the theoretical framework employed to sustain this investigation is 'Feminism'. The explicit section committed to this critical framework will disclose a brief outline in the history of modern feminism dealing with political thinkers such as Mary Wollstonecraft to continue displaying the main tenets of feminist critics such as Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan, Elaine Showalter or Toril Moi. The twenty-first century academics such as Nick Holland, Samantha Ellis, Elizabeth Leaver or Rebecca Fraser, to name just a few, who have inaugurated a tendency that acknowledges a feminist reading to Anne Bronte´s novels will be commented in the introductory subdivision that forms part of the section exclusively dedicated to the writer.

This subdivision needs to incorporate as well, the description of the key features intrinsic in feminism and predominantly in first-wave feminism to justify the hypothesis of encapsulating the nineteenth-century Victorian writer into that preliminary feminist crusade.

Feminism has been structured into several stages which have produced the emergence of the feminist theory and criticism expanded on a variety of disciplines or approaches which share some common areas of analysis when confronting a potential feminist text and that were of application for the examination of Anne´s works.

Finally, showing the foremost traits in every one of the feasible literary and theoretical angles of feminist criticism will contribute to discern the type of feminism exposed in Anne Brontë´s novels, which has been conclusively labelled as 'Didactic Feminism'.

2. Biography of Anne Brontë.

2.1 Historical Context.

Anne Brontë was born on 17th January 1820, only one year after Queen Victoria had become queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. Married to Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, the couple was advocate for family life and middle-class values, principles which were about to be strikingly relevant for the society of that time, the Victorian era.

This period of history reiterated and perpetuated some values that had already started earlier in time, and that the Victorian ideology used on its own benefit and advantage to justify the constrained and unbalanced conditions it was going to apply for men and women. Essentially, the Victorian doctrine, based on patriarchal conditions, established a huge difference between the roles assigned to men and to women. This ideology granted importance to the institutions of family and marriage, producing the radical separation in the behaviour and performances of the two sexes. Men were allowed the public sphere with a twofold meaning: to get engaged in entrepreneurial businesses to obtain the nourishment and clothing for their families, but also, they had to offer a public image for their neighbourhood of well-done pragmatics. Additionally, they were appreciated to be the privileged sex as they had the right to live liberally without any social or moral constriction imposed by the law: as long as they guaranteed the vital needs for their families, they could have alcohol troubles or adulterous relationships, which many times ended in sanitary issues such as venereal diseases transmitted to wives and children, they could abuse the members of their families with no immediate consequences for them as they were covered by law under every circumstance. Men were the owners of their property, that which belonged to them by familiar inheritance or after a successful and profitable profession, and that obtained from their wives; men were the only proprietors of their children and they were irrevocably empowered to give social status and identity not only to their daughters but chiefly to the women they wedded with. In 1765, William Blackstone explained: "By marriage, the very being or legal existence of a woman is suspended, or at least incorporated or consolidated into that of the husband, under whose wing, protection, or cover she performs everything, and she is therefore called in our law a *femme covert*" (Shattock 84).

On the other side of the family, the Victorian ideology motivated the confinement and subservient condition for women who were allowed to appreciate the attributes belonging to the domestic sphere, aspect that Showalter summed up with these words: "Woman´s true place is the home" (188). It was assumed that women had the moral responsibility of preserving decorum in the home, of nursing their children and husbands, of giving an exquisite education "on lady-like activities" (Gordon 124) to their daughters, in order to find advantageous and economic prosperous husbands which would guarantee a social position and respected status to them, as it was understood that this was the only acceptable way to

achieve women´s fulfilment and therefore be successful in life. Yet, what in fact this society was generating was types of women "whose minds were wholly occupied with details of costume, coquetry and conquest; it created women ruled by vanity" (Langland 25).

The separation of spheres created by the Victorian philosophy meant that middle-class women could not have other ambitions in life but to achieve the perfect marriage and take care of household and educational questions. Women were expected to be delicate, submissive, decent, silent, nurture the members of their families, give their sons an education based on intellectual subjects and themes, give an education devoted to the tasks considered to be feminine to their daughters, and guarantee a quiet, comfortable and pleased place when husbands arrived home. These qualities are crucial and indispensable to praise women as 'feminine' and to fulfil the role intrinsic in what was labelled as 'the angel in the house', a term coined in this era, and fundamental in the Victorian dogma.

The implications that the 'angel in the house' covered did not only focus on the feminine qualities that women had to fulfil, but also spread to the professional possibilities they could have, reducing them to the teaching or the nursing sector as these labour positions did not contradict what was expected from them and consequently did not break with the Victorian feminine ideal.

Patriarchal societies have historically empowered men and diminished women who have existed in the dark, silenced and frequently physically battered or emotionally abused by their husbands with no legal possibilities of improvements for their circumstances as they "had no legal status" (Langland 24) because they were dependent on their husbands, fathers or brothers. Women had no identity on their own, they were always measured in relation to their husbands, they were the objects of their husbands; Jenni Murray reminds us that "It was not until 1929 that a case known as the Persons Case, taken by five Canadian women, persuaded the Privy Council in London to agree that a woman should be defined in law as a person. It was the Canadian women who won us the right to be defined, like men, as persons" (79).

During the second half of the Victorian era, women started to take determined actions to ameliorate their discriminated situations regarding professional fields and to reconsider the unfair treatment that the morality of that society gave to those women who decided to

remain single or that had obtained a divorce [1]as they were marked and signalled as failures in the society, unfeminine, unwomanly and ultimately labelled as the 'fallen women'. Therefore, the issues that women of the second part of the nineteenth-century began to fight about, concerned morality, education, access to labour positions, marriage and divorce conditions and political rights. Their movements were not futile, as firstly, they had their voices heard and succeeded in some reforms and, eventually set the path for upcoming advocates of human and women rights to keep progressing for the advantage of the feminist cause.

The 'Matrimonial Causes Act' passed in 1857 signified that women could solicit and get a divorce, but if the motives were to plead an adulterous affair, they had to justify aggravating circumstances. Even though the divorce could be obtained, women still could not be holders of their earnings or to have the custody of their children, they had to remain with their fathers. Aware of the necessity of improvements in this first passed act, women continued to demand entitlements for them and for their children. In a chronological line of events, there was a legal disposition in 1878 that improved the situation for women who had suffered physical abuse in the hands of their husbands. In 1882, the 'Married Women´s Property Act' was ratified which meant a separation of the properties of the husbands and their wives and thanks to this act, women gained some sort of economic independence. Finally, close to the end of the nineteenth-century, in 1886, a new legal disposition was approved that gave mothers the legitimate custody of their children.

2.2 The Woman Question.

The patriarchal society lived at Victorian times imposed oppressive norms for middle-class women that were put into practice with the archetypical and severe features of sweetness, modesty, humility or subservience that were translated into the legal, moral, social and psychological subordination of these women to men´s power, supremacy and authority. The legal and social position of women at the early stages of the nineteenth century originated the concern for women´s issues, known as 'The Woman Question'.

Women had no legal identity or individuality on their own, they were not allowed to

[1] "La igualdad de la mujer dentro del matrimonio y el acceso al divorcio eran cuestiones asumidas por la población trabajadora de la época" (Canales 189).

be owners of their possessions, inheritances or salaries, they were not permitted to have their children´s custody and they could not ask for divorce if the context was that their husbands physically maltreated them or had illicit affairs outside the marriage. Women´s social and moral duty was to hide and silence those troubles, because men, members of the public sphere could not be seen in society in another light that was not admiration and perfection; any woman who had the intention of defending her unfair state by demanding a divorce, for example, would be treated as 'unfeminine' and a disappointment for the social and moral imperatives established by the Victorian feminine standards, ultimately becoming a 'fallen woman'. Unlike women, men could obtain the divorce from their wives much more easily, aspect that will be depicted in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* when Lord Lowborough rapidly gets the divorce from Lady Lowborough after her several public and known extramarital relationships. Helen Huntingdon, on the other hand, victim of the unjust disadvantageous laws related to divorce and children´s custody, requests Arthur Huntingdon to be divorced, but after several denials she is forced to become a runaway wife, a step that transforms her social status into that of a criminal for contradicting and not tolerating the rules that demand from her to be submissive and to silence the hell she and her son were suffering.

'The Woman Question' debate focused on the inequality and subordinated position of women that had been shaped by the cultural and societal construction of the Victorian era. An accepted mechanism that women had, to participate in a potential improvement in their condition, was through literature, through writing. Pam Morris stated that: "literary texts provide a powerful understanding of the ways in which society works to the disadvantage of women" (7). By means of their novelistic production, the three Brontë sisters demanded for a reconsideration of those Victorian conceptions which affected and influenced women negatively. Although none of the three can be classified as active feminist campaigners, their novels at least contributed to call attention and challenge many traditional assumptions about the position of women.

More explicitly, in her two novels, Anne Brontë revises some of the notions associated to the feminine Victorian model. With *Agnes Grey*, for example, she explores the economic independence that women might have, represented in the education that Agnes´ parents give to their daughters to earn their livings by making use and developing the talents that they both have: the oldest sister, Mary, through painting, and Agnes, by tutoring children

as a governess. Furthermore, when Mary and Agnes´ father passes away, their mother becomes widow encountering a state in which she has to find a way to procure her sustenance, and together with Agnes, they come up with the idea of opening up and ruling a school for girls, something that they both believe to be more respectable, honourable and rewarding than accepting Alice´s father´s suggestion of accepting his inheritance in order to become a conventional lady:

> "Your grandpa has been so kind as to write to me. He says he has no doubt that I have long repented of my 'unfortunate marriage', and if I will only acknowledge this, and confess I was wrong in neglecting his advice, and that I have justly suffered for it, he will make a lady of me once again" (Brontë 117).

Anne Brontë is therefore inviting her society to finish undervaluing women if they choose and resolve to be financially autonomous by using their individual resources instead of participating in the hypocrite realm of the marriage market which for the regular conventional prototype of the Victorian feminine ideal would have been to find another prosperous husband once the last passes away. If nineteenth-century society encouraged that marriage was the only suitable occupation for women, Anne Brontë is typifying another open possibility that women may seek, as regards the professional field. With the example of Alice, Anne Brontë is illustrating, in her first novel, that the only aspiration in a woman should not be to wed a man with the purposes of reaching a praised social prestige and economic security.

If with *Agnes Grey*, regarding 'The Woman Question', the youngest of the Brontës had her voice heard using a subtle but firm speech, with *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, the writer turned out to be more overt to illuminate what was thought to be a contemporary problem at those days concerning masculine domination, domestic violence and the disadvantageous legal position of women. Anne Brontë is claiming popular attention to reform laws in favour of women, by portraying the reality of a household, witness of masculine corruption, depravation, emotional manipulation and aggressiveness towards a woman, who far from dramatizing the circumstance, seeks for the best of the solutions for her and her son.

The conditions and circumstances that Victorian women had to live were of paramount importance for Anne, and through her literature, she was proficient enough to represent those realities in a reliable, accurate but predominantly instructive way. Although

this perspective was not acknowledged by her sister Charlotte, we agree with Elizabeth Langland when she affirms: “hers was an outstanding contribution in the debate over laws, education, employment and ideology of womanhood” (Langland 28). Opposite to other Victorian women novelists such as Jane Austen or George Eliot, who recurrently portray heroines who epitomize the conventional woman in search of personal fulfilment after marrying prosperous men, Anne Brontë displays women characters who are so emotionally strong, that are endowed with the capacity of putting their talents into practice in order to gain a labour position that finally allows them, to be self-sufficient, to have their individuality and a professional identity; Anne´s heroines do not aim to attract a husband and, although both novels end up with happy marriages, these unions are the result of the heroines specific decisions grounded on a love which has its foundations in a former observance of the honest values and intellectual compatibilities shared with the men to get married to.

The Brontë sisters lived at a historical moment in which women´s destiny was to marry, become the angels of their homes and the perfect ladies for their neighbourhood and society. Not being active militants in the feminine debate, they took great advantage of the genius they had with the pen, to get engaged in the professional commitment that authorship would imply. The writing career was a tolerated labour task for women, as long as their themes and scenarios were in defence of perpetuating the feminine Victorian ideal and acclaimed the separate spheres ideology. This is not what happened with the Brontë siblings in general, and more particularly with Anne, and that is why their contribution, her contribution, to improve the condition of women was so significant. Using the mask provided by signing her works with a pseudonym, she crafted heroines who fought for self-respect, economic independence, a free determination to take their individual decisions, and above all, she and her fictional women characters were “responding to the social and political climate of the early nineteenth-century England” (Gordon 72).

2.3 The Myth of the Brontë family.

Patrick Brunty and Maria Branwell formed a family of five daughters: Maria, Elizabeth, Charlotte, Emily Jane, Anne, and one son: Patrick Branwell. Every one of the kids was born in Thornton but after the birth of Anne, the entire family moved to Haworth, to live in the place, worldwide known and popularly visited, The Brontë Parsonage. This family of the

north of Yorkshire has always been surrounded by an aura of isolation and peace shaped by the nostalgia provided by the moors which frame the region. Moreover, history wanted that this family confronted death since the kids were very little; Maria Branwell passed away just one year and a half after giving birth to the youngest of the Brontë family, Anne. And that is how one of the reasons that nurtures the legend behind the Brontë family was inaugurated by the death of their mother and followed by the early deaths of two of its members, Maria and Elizabeth, deceases that were fictionalized by Charlotte Brontë in her second novel, *Jane Eyre.* The misfortune that accompanied the family became a tragedy when the sequence of losses occurred: Aunt Branwell, who had decided to live with her nieces when her sister, Maria, had died; Branwell, consumed by drugs and alcohol after his popular allegedly unrequited love; Emily, who did not accept any doctor to attend her, and finally, Anne, who ended her days in the place where she is still buried, in Scarborough.

This section does not intend to display a precise biography of the events in the members of the Brontë family, but to follow the same line of investigation that pretends to disclose the reasons behind the underestimation of Anne Brontë, as a woman and as literary artist, and as it was anticipated in the introduction, we should go back to the main documents that work as fundamental sources to decipher the motives of leaving the author of this dissertation in the shadow, to find out that, the writer, Elizabeth Gaskell and Anne´s sister, Charlotte, were the originators of the minor position given to our writer; Samantha Ellis clarifies that "Charlotte, more than anyone, is responsible for Anne being seen as 'the other Brontë" (142).

The Brontë sisters have an acclaimed place in the corpus of English literature and their legend might be summarised by saying that all along the history they are remembered by some specific events or speculations assigned to some of their members. If the myth begins with the deaths of their mother and the eldest sisters: Maria and Elizabeth, it continues with the death of Branwell, the only masculine member of the family and therefore, according to the society standards, the 'hope' for the family, but the legend wants that we remember him as a drunk and opium addicted who had an illicit affair with married Lydia Robinson, the landlady of the Robinsons state where Anne Brontë had her second post as a governess. As regards Emily, the legend is faithful and accurate with her because of the consistency between her personality and the life she decided to have, denying any possibility of leaving the moors she adored and that is why she never accepted Charlotte´s proposal to study in Belgium or to

go to London to clarify that the three mysterious Bell writers were actually three different persons. About Charlotte Brontë, after having examined several biographical studies and articles, we are in the position of asserting what Felicia Gordon summarised about her: "Charlotte Brontë is the artificer of the Brontë legend" (8). And she was, because she took the decision of eliminating the letters, diaries, journals and fragments of her sisters´ imaginary world, action that signified that Charlotte herself is the fundamental interpreter of the lives and works of her sisters. What can be inferred from the reading of biographies and critical studies is, on the one hand, the literary rivalry that Charlotte may have felt when she encountered the extraordinary poems of Emily but that gave birth to her plan of becoming writers, or the fact that both, Emily and Anne could meet their first written books published, but Charlotte saw hers initially rejected, and never published while she was alive. Moreover, the legend about the Brontës remembers how she suffered and humiliated herself when she fell in love with her Belgian professor, Constantin Héger, a man who was married and probably never encouraged the romantic affair Charlotte fervently desired. Being the only survivor of the Brontë siblings, and suffering the anxiety or passion motivated by an unrequited love, she turned out to be the woman who had to be admired as an honourable victim and sufferer, and that is what her first biographer, Elizabeth Gaskell fostered in Charlotte´s first biography *Life of Charlotte Brontë.* Mrs Gaskell was, besides, the only responsible of creating the legend that says that Patrick Brontë did not care about his family or that Aunt Branwell was only interested in teaching their nieces to sew, when in fact she was the instigator that their nieces read and wrote.

The legend behind the Brontë sisters assigns an insignificant position to Anne Brontë. Whereas Charlotte and Emily are remembered by their novels, *Jane Eyre*, fundamentally, in the case of Charlotte, and *Wuthering Heights* in the case of Emily, Anne´s two novelistic productions are hardly notorious or remembered despite the extraordinary meaning of the narrative, the originality in the stylistics by employing a first-person narrative voice, or by the accurate delineation of women characters she presents in both novels under the scope of realism with a feminist tone. What the legend remembers about Anne´s second novel is the assumption that the spoiled and malicious character of Arthur Huntingdon was an account of her brother Branwell, when in fact, today, we acknowledge that there are two other plausible options: the story of the wife of William Busfeild´s, the curate in Keighley, Mrs Collins, who

had been abandoned by her husband and went to live in Manchester where she was capable of maintaining herself and her children; or the popular example of Lord Melbourne and Caroline Norton, who separated from her husband, lost the custody of her children and began a campaign to reform the law in favour of women. Continuing with the legend, it affirms that the first governess popularly acclaimed, was Jane Eyre, when in fact, it was Agnes Grey; Anne´s first novel portrays, for the first time, a plain, sensitive and not very pretty governess, however, the romantic, passionate Byronic tone of *Jane Eyre* contrasted with the Bildungsroman realism of *Agnes Grey* has derived in the overshadowing of the latter for the benefit of the principal heroine in Charlotte´s second written novel to be the most popular governess in the history of literature.

The youngest of the Brontës has been repeatedly identified as a mild, weak, unoriginal woman and writer, and popular culture merely remembers her because of the several inaccuracies in her headstone. Contrary to the legend that demystifies Anne Brontë, she demonstrated since a very early age that she was stronger, more independent, thoughtful, creative, ambitious and resolutive than it was thought about her. She occupied her first job as a Sunday school teacher when she was just 12. When she was nineteen, she accepted her first post as a governess with the Ingham´s family, and her second working experience moved her to the spot that would become her beloved place, Scarborough. We ascertain from her experience, that she was resolute and psychologically self-reliant to leave her family house, to work in a distant location where she did not know anyone, and although there was no confidence she could withstand that separateness circumstance, she was eventually the only Brontë member who preserved the same job for five years.

One of the goals in this Master´s dissertation is to specify enough evidence so that upcoming academics or even amateur readers could consider Anne Brontë at the same level of a mythical literary symbol as her sisters. Relying on her writing trajectory it should be acknowledged the consistency and well-defined ideas she had since she commenced to write together with her siblings in their collaborative juvenilia. Every one of them initiated their writing creativity when they were just kids, for example, Anne was only six years old when Branwell, Charlotte, Emily and Anne herself gave life to the imaginary world they titled as *Glasstown* which was subdivided in two kingdoms, that of Angria, invented and developed in collaboration by Branwell and Charlotte, and that of Gondal, worked and elaborated by

Emily and Anne. This preliminary step to what in the future would be translated into their novelistic creations, was pivotal to elucidate their narrative styles and the typification of characters they wanted to employ: whereas Charlotte and Branwell concentrated on romantic heroes and heroines, Emily, and largely Anne, gave life to a more true-to-life fiction related to daily life events "based on their everyday world" (Gordon 99). Anne was prone to exhibit a realistic depiction of the society she discerned and read from the newspapers allowed in her house´s library, giving birth to a kingdom that was inhabited with vulnerable or oppressed people, but also with ruling and powerful women. In consequence, since she was very young, Anne proved to have a strong conviction to represent confident and thoughtful women as the fundamental heroines in her future novels, and even though the Brontë legend leaves her in the dark, or unceasingly makes us remember her as the Brontë sister whose tombstone is worn out by the effects of the seaside landscape and full of mistakes, we intend to: reassure the author´s extraordinary influence to instruct women and benefit the society of her time, finish with the defamation that her literary value and life experience had to undergo because of her sister´s attitude towards her, and finally support the postulate that Samantha Ellis defends in her assertion: "I want to try to see Anne through the stories she told, not the stories told about her" (Ellis 13).

3. Theoretical framework.

3.1 The Feminist Ideology.

The notion of 'feminism' has been endlessly explained by an immeasurable amount of theorists who agree on defining it as any sort of action, movement, discourse or perception inspired by a straightforward feeling of social, economic, educational and political injustice which convey as an immediate effect a condition of inequality for women; feminism then, may be understood as every movement which aims at fighting for equal rights and legal protection for women. Pam Morris, for example, in *Literature and Feminism*, defends the postulate that this inequity is rooted in the implications inherent in patriarchal societies which largely mean the supremacy of masculine power and control, and in consequence, the subordination of women. Toril Moi, in her essay 'What is a woman?' develops the rigorous qualities that a patriarchal system implants in their individuals, broadly among women: "sweetness, modesty, subservience, humility" (30). This means that patriarchy or a male-

controlled system, involves an essentialism which considers that those features mentioned by Toril Moi have to be universal for every woman, something which compulsorily reminds us of the attributes that the Victorian feminine model: the 'angel in the house' had to fulfil.

Feminism has had a dynamic and operational progress since its origins up to our present time, giving birth to the 'feminist theory' which aims to apprehend gender inequality by means of several approaches such as Feminist Literary Criticism or Women´s Studies. Taking into account that this investigation is examining two literary texts written by a woman that exposes women personalities, behaviours and attitudes, it has been decided to employ the Feminist Literary Criticism approach, as it responds to an analysis that revisits "the significance of the images of women promulgated by literature" (Barry 85). The principal areas that are studied in a literary text to demonstrate the second-rate position of women are every one of the patriarchal aspects that we have been tackling with in the previous lines: stereotyping, objectification of women, domestic and children abuse, each of them embodied in both of Anne Brontë´s novels. However, it is of notable importance to remember not to be wrong when assuming that any text in which a woman is, either describing her experience or developing a fictional one, is a 'feminist act' (Moi 120). Toril Moi includes in her essay what Rosalind Coward had previously declared: "It is just not possible to say that woman-centred writings have any necessary relationship to feminism" (Moi 120). After these statements, it turns recommendable to wisely observe and examine the discourse displayed in a narration to finally validate that we are confronting a feminist text, and subsequently if it had a feminist impact on society or was just a contribution to the feminist movement. What should be initially accomplished when facing a text, in order to conclude that it fulfils a feminist angle, is to discern and reflect on themes such as the relationship between men and women, focusing on how their corresponding roles are defined, if there is any kind of major power of one gender upon the other, and how that empowerment operates in the discourse of the action to finally determine that the difference is founded on societal constructions. Besides, Peter Barry clarifies that if there is a depiction of power relations in favour of men, it is of paramount significance to examine if the writer, through his or her words, is trying to either defy, or in a more radical sense, to break with them. Applying this sort of exhaustive evaluation to the novels of this investigation, we will get to the conclusion that in Anne Brontë´s works, we are in front of worthy contributions to the feminist movement; should

her books had been properly acknowledged by her sister and the literary critics of the time, it is likely that they had had a feminist impact for the society of the nineteenth-century.

Although the concepts of 'feminism' and 'feminist' have been in the public speech usage since the beginnings of times, they have not been officially defined or linked to the social and political implications they do have until the 1970s. It was in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when feminist theorists started to arrange the essential and common lines of interest and study associated to 'Feminism' together with the fronted thinkers that each period has had. Today, we can acknowledge how feminist criticism has been organized in the three pivotal periods globally known as the three waves of feminism. The first stage, First-Wave Feminism ranges from about the late 1700s to the early 1920s with remarkable political thinkers such as Mary Wollstonecraft. The second period starts its movements and theories at around the 1960s and spans up until the late 1970s with fronted theorists such as Betty Friedan, Simone de Beauvoir, Elaine Showalter, Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar and the French feminist critics: Heléne Cioux, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva.

3.2 First and Second-Wave Feminism.

The earliest period of feminism as an active and functioning movement dates back in England to around the 1880s with what is known as First-Wave Feminism. When it was anticipated in the previous section that this first feminism may be traced back to around the 1700s, we were making a reference to the political, artistic, philosophical or literary actions that some women had taken, once aware of the discrimination suffered and endured by the members of their gender; some outstanding works can be traced back before that official date of the 1880s that marks the beginning of the first feminism. In 1405, for example, the philosopher and poet, Cristina da Pizzano published *Le Livre de la cité des dames*, a book praised as a precedent of feminism, exposing a fictional female city inhabited by popular women artists who discuss on concerns that influence womanhood (Bastarós and Segarra 34). Particularly analogous to one of Anne Brontë´s premises that defends an equal education for boys and girls, Marie de Gournay, wrote in 1622 a philosophical essay, *Égalité des hommes et des femmes,* defending the postulate that the only appreciative difference between men and women, was the access to education both genders had.

After the participation, all along the history of human kind, of a substantial number of

women in different fields of art or study, the official first feminism emerged, and that meant the preliminary activities that women started to take in order to improve and change their social, economic, political, legal and educational, undermined, neglected and subordinated situations. These women fought for their essential rights: to vote, to have equal working contracts to men, to own property, to have an identity as a person, to have the same access to an intellectual education as men had. Mary Wollstonecraft and Olympe de Gouges were among the first who having observed the inferior or neglected position that women were living, supported postulates which, on the one hand, encouraged the popular culture to acknowledge that unfair differentiation, and on the other, called attention to reformists, writers or politicians to reconsider the value that women might have for societies that should be centred on the substances of human rights.

Mary Wollstonecraft published in 1792, what has been historically classified as the first truly feminist manifesto, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. The eighteenth-century political thinker wrote this essay as an answer to what had happened in France in the first years of the French Revolution. A pivotal document signed in 1789 was the 'Declaration of the Rights of the Man and of the Citizen' in which women were highly disregarded and "they are confirmed as individuals without a citizenship nature"[2] (Bastarós and Segarra 44). Olympe de Gouges responded publishing the 'Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the Female Citizen' in 1791, but she was beheaded by Robespierre´s anti-democratic principles. Wollstonecraft´s reaction to all these preceding events and documents was to publish *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* one year after, in 1792. The philosophy she diffuses in this work may be summarised using her words: "I do not want them to have power over men, but over themselves. It is not empire, but equality and friendship which women want"[3] (Murray 77). She had discerned the social, legal and moralist discriminated conditions in which women had been placed because of one of the fundamental tenets of patriarchal societies that imposed the obligatory purpose for women of marrying wealthy men, something that Wollstonecraft considered as a kind of "legal prostitution"[4] (Murray 20). Several theorists state that it is unlikely that Anne Brontë could have read *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* because of the author´s scandalous private life; however, in the

[2] "las confirma como sujetos sin naturaleza de ciudadanía" (Bastarós and Segarra 44).
[3] Mary Wollstonecraft *Vindicación de los derechos de la mujer,* pg. 90.
[4] Mary Wollstonecraft *Vindicación de los derechos de la mujer,* pg. 85.

corresponding section dedicated to the examination of Anne´s novels we will appreciate some resemblances between the novelist and the eighteenth-century thinker. Wollstonecraft comprehended how difficult the situation for women was, but she also censured them heavily for their obsession with beauty, dresses and presentations to society, aspects that are traceable in both of Anne Brontë´s novels, and in this sense we could state that she had taken the legacy of the political feminist thinker of the previous century, had Anne read about Wollstonecraft or not.

Given that the early steps into defining womanhood and promulgating beneficial movements for the plight of women had relied on the hands of political theorists, philosophers and social reformers, it is a fact that "the women´s movement has always been crucially concerned with books and literature" (Barry 85). Considering literature then, first-wave feminism also covered women authors who, may have not read the works of the aforesaid mentioned intellectuals, who did not have an active mobilisation or a strong thought on 'feminism' to address women plight, but whose contribution is estimated as valuable, and this is the case of the writer of this investigation, Anne Brontë. She published her first novel, *Agnes Grey*, in 1847 and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* in 1848. Even though the years of publication are not coincidental with the official dates attributed to the beginnings of feminism, and we cannot label her as a feminist activist, what she addresses in her two novels and that will be examined in the upcoming sections of this research, is a strong compromise and commitment to contribute in the feminist cause. Being a prodigious observant of her society, despite her, and her sisters´ isolation in the north of Yorkshire, she was capable of delineating an impeccable image of the women of her time with a fervent aspiration of contributing to an amelioration in their conceited beliefs, speech and enactments.

The early 1960s witnessed the appearance of the second-wave feminism whose central concern was still the omnipresence of the patriarchal societal constructions and whose theorists persisted in the same fight as first-wave feminists to achieve legitimate and collective rights for women. Simone de Beauvoir, for instance, in *Le Deuxième Sexe* focused on the social construction of woman as the 'Other', a belief she shared with Mary Wollstonecraft, who was the first to originate the view that women are made and not born.

Furthermore, the paramount weight of this second period for the history of feminism is that it was in this stage when feminist criticism started to provide, on the one hand, distinctive

theories to the actions fulfilled by women, and on the other, to illustrate feminine or feminist readings and interpretations in the literature produced by women. Worth mentioning are theorists such as Toril Moi, Betty Friedan, Elaine Showalter, Gilbert and Gubar and the representatives of what has been labelled as 'French feminism' or 'écriture feminine': Hélene Cioux, Julia Kristeva or Luce Irigarary.

The French Feminism, also called 'Post-Structural Feminism', concentrated on theories that explained the free sexual expression of women authors, but also, and relevant for our study, was their concern and emphasis on the language that women writers employed. Not only did they highlight, as Virginia Woolf had also postulated[5], that women writers used language differently from masculine writers, but they were more explicit by declaring that language was mutually a manifestation of women´s oppressions and the domain in which stereotypes were structured. French feminists described the 'écriture feminine' as the writing stylistics employed by women by means of the confessional form narration. In this sense, it would seem appropriate to agree, with this linguistic vision of the French feminist theory for the two novels of Anne Brontë, as in both of them the confessional narration is utilized by means of a first-person narrative voice, a style that, besides, was acceptable for a woman writer and was also an innovation, inaugurated by Anne, in the literary writing stylistics tradition of the Brontë sisters.

In 1963, Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique* whose main focus of attention was how women could attain self-determination and a proper identity. She established two principles that are of application in the novels of Anne Brontë. Firstly, the feminist critic and the Victorian novelist, shared the conviction that women, did not have to fight against men and their inherent authority, what had to be accomplished was to reformulate the foundations of the society that denigrated them. Secondly, Friedan supported the initiative that some women artists had to "put their dissenting voice into words" (82), something that Anne Brontë did through the realism embodied in her literature by providing an essential prominence to the women heroines. Lastly, Friedan´s proposal for a solution is, as in Anne´s works, to apply an instructive and pedagogical methodology of lessoning the members of a society.

[5] Virginia Woolf suggested in *A Room of One´s Own* that language is gendered and socially constructed because men and women´s social positioning was different.

Anglo-American feminists, especially fronted by Elaine Showalter, dealt with the themes and motifs pictured in women literary works as epitomes of the depictions of women´s lives and experiences. As a representative of American feminist critics, in *A Literature of Their Own,* Elaine Showalter, coined the term 'gynocritics' understanding it as the study of women writers. As she points out in the introduction of her book, the objectives of her work were, on the one hand: "if there was a female literary tradition" (xiv) and on the other, to challenge the traditional canon: "It is only by considering them all – Millicent Grogan as well as Virginia Woolf, I wrote, that we can begin to record new choices in a new literary history" (xxi). The work of Showalter is of a notable interest for this investigation as she dismisses Anne Brontë from that women´s literary tradition: chapter four, for example, is entitled 'Feminine Heroines: Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot', where there are also observations about Emily Brontë´s novel, but there is simply a remarkably succinct, only four lines, mention to Anne Brontë: "Anne Brontë prefaced the second edition of *Wildfell* Hall with a defiant declaration of equal literary rights" (96). When Showalter is using the adjective 'equal' it is because the previous sentence was talking about Charlotte Brontë defending her worth as a writer and demanding recognition for her writing stylistics and not for her gender; therefore, what Showalter did was the contrary of what later on Elizabeth Langland and Nick Holland claimed for Anne Brontë: not to address the writer in perpetual contrast to her sister Charlotte.

Elaine Showalter structured the revision of women´s literary tradition in three periods: writers who were born between 1800 and 1820, subsequently, between 1820 and 1840 and the last period of her interest was of writers born between 1840 and 1860. Showalter´s exploration of the writers contained in the first period is again, worthy of comment for the purpose of this investigation, as it embraces the writers who had published their work at around the 1840s. It might be expected that having been born in 1820 and having published her novels in 1847 and 1848, Anne Brontë would be a writer to be included in the first phase the feminist critic established, but she was actually dismissed. Moreover, about those literary women who published their works at around the 1840s, Showalter stated that: "From Jane Austen to George Eliot, the woman´s novel had moved, despite its restrictions, in the direction of an all-inclusive realism, a broad, socially informed exploration of the daily lives and values of women within the family and the community" (29). If this feminist critic was

concentrated on the depiction of how Victorian women writers exhibited a domestic realism, one of the fundamental themes evidenced in Anne Brontë´s literature, we may acknowledge the historical and popular reputation that her book had in the history of the growth of the Feminist Literary Criticism, but we cannot but agree with another feminist critic, Toril Moi who criticized Showalter´s work asserting that she was provoking "a separate canon of women´s writing" (Showalter xxv).

Not only did Elaine Showalter ignore the notable significance of the feminist standpoint in Anne Brontë´s works, however subtle or radical her speech was, and that will be exposed in the upcoming subdivision of this research paper, but Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar did something truly comparable in their book, *The Madwoman in the Attic and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. They interpreted the feminine literary tradition of a selected number of nineteenth-century women writers following the Freudian psychoanalytical thesis that focused on these writers´ female anger and anxiety translated in the depiction of women characters who embodied an internal dichotomy: that of the 'angel', understanding it as the epitome of the Victorian feminine ideal, but at certain moments, that of the monster, as the alter ego who denoted the constrained ambitions and even sexual desires of the woman character, and subsequently the writer, that were not permitted to be externally revealed. Both Emily and Charlotte Brontë are dedicated an in-depth analysis of every one of their corresponding novels in exclusive chapters, but the circumstance of Anne is again repeated, as hardly some commentaries about her works are given in parallel contrast with her sisters, and not as a nineteenth-century writer who might deserve an additional exclusive section in Gilbert and Gubar´s book.

All along the previous paragraphs, we have been describing the motivations and actions promulgated in the first and second periods of feminism providing evidence that justify the encapsulation of the nineteenth-century author, initially, into that first period, and then, how some postulates of the feminist critics associated to the second, might be of relevance in the narrative of Anne Brontë, either because of its groundless omission, as in the case of Showalter or of absolute certainty as in Betty Friedan´s study or in the linguistic side of the French feminist critics.

After all this exposition on first and second periods of feminism, we might ratify the impact that every one of the actions that were taken, to improve the social and legal

conditions for women, and to decode plots, characters and settings, have had for the history of the interpretation of women´s lives and experiences. And to finish with this subdivision, it is essential to remember another feminist critic, Toril Moi, who elaborated an essay called "Feminist, Female, Feminine" whose three definitions can certainly be applied in Anne Brontë: 'female' is a matter of biology and indicates the condition of the writing by women; 'feminist' is defined as a political position, and Anne "takes a discernible anti-patriarchal and anti-sexist position" (Moi 132); and 'feminine' understood as the behaviour imposed by social and cultural norms transmuted in that feminine writers "seem to be marginalized, repressed or silenced by the ruling social and linguistic order" (Moi 132), restrictions that were discernible in the use of the mask provided by signing their fiction with a pseudonym, as Acton Bell, in the specific example of Anne Brontë.

4. Anne Brontë: A Feminist Voice in the Novel.

4.1 Description of Anne Brontë´s feminism.

Elizabeth Langland, in her study, *Anne Brontë: The Other One*, proclaimed that Anne Brontë cannot be categorised as an active revolutionary in the nineteenth-century feminist movements, statement that we have also been supporting in this investigation. However, what we are about to demonstrate in this subdivision, devoted to the works of the Victorian writer, is that there is certainly a "rich feminist dimension of her works" (Langland 156). In order to successfully resolve this hypothesis, two essentials had to be considered: first, to read her novels having in mind the principles embodied in feminism, essentially in the premises that have been explained about first-wave feminism, to conclusively obtain the necessary textual evidence that might support the hypothesis; secondly, to deep into the theories of feminist critics to find those who back up the statement that Anne Brontë´s works can be praised as feminist, but likewise, to acknowledge those who do not support it. Digging into the history of Feminist Literary Criticism, some inconveniences were encountered: the critics and writers of her own time either dismissed or underestimated her, such were the circumstances of the feminist writer, Harriet Martineau, who devoted most of her work to the situation of women and being among the first to assess the work of the Brontë sisters from a feminist perspective, she foremost focused on Charlotte´s work *Jane Eyre*, leaving no commentaries to the work of Anne. Similarly, the contemporary writer Elizabeth Gaskell, for instance,

evaluated Emily´s work as "good and vigorous" (Fraser 259) but about that of Anne, she stated that it: "had the merit of truth and simplicity" (Fraser 259). This preliminary inclination to leave Anne Brontë aside, was followed, as was explained in the previous sections, by those feminist literary critics such as Elaine Showalter or Susan and Gubar, who revising the narrative productions of women in the Victorian period did say little about our author. The treatment that Anne Brontë received on her own time, the nineteenth-century, and later on in the twentieth century and up until the 1990s as regards her plausible feminist contribution, is summarised in Marion Shaw´s words: "Her work displays a tough and thoughtful feminism which has not been its full due by subsequent generations of feminists" (Shaw 331).

An authentic specific concern on the works of the youngest of the Brontës started to emerge more than a century after the publication of her works with the biography *Anne Brontë,* released in 1959 by Winifred Gérin. The biographer presented an analysis of Anne Brontë´s first novel, *Agnes Grey* from an autobiographical point of view searching for the allegedly interrelations between the novel, its protagonist and the author´s real life. Although there are elements that the nineteenth-century writer may have acquired from her life experience, and that could have been transmuted to her fiction, Gérin´s ultimate outcome is, as Edward Chitham pointed out, a rather reductive recognition of the creative and fictional value of the Brontë writer as well as a lack of appreciation in the purposes Anne sustained to develop and blend her idiosyncratic domestic realism with imagination.

The Brontë Society has been since the 1890s the institution that has positively influenced the academic and research arena related, to the entire Brontë family, but for our particular concern, to Anne Brontë, publishing solid articles that have provided insightful interpretations about her work and that have ultimately contributed to reconsider and acknowledge a renewed interest in her fiction. As far as a feminist reading of her novels is concerned, it is worth mentioning the articles of three academics: Elizabeth Leaver who considers *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* "a genuine political contribution to the feminist cause" (28); Marion Shaw who stated that "traditional images of Anne Brontë do not do justice to her strong-minded and thoughtful feminism" (330); based on the premises that Anne was aware of the discrimination lived by the women of her time, and in possession of a strong sense of justice, Stevie Davis defended that Anne Brontë was "a radical feminist" (9) and "a radical and outspoken feminist" (10). Therefore, the hypothesis thrown in this research paper,

is supported, not only by these aforesaid academics but also by the literary critics and biographers that have already been mentioned such as Samantha Ellis or Elizabeth Langland.

We have explained in previous subdivisions that it is not possible to affirm that any text written by a woman has to be necessarily a feminist manifesto or an attack against a patriarchal society, however having established the confirmation that in the particular circumstance of Anne Brontë, it is plausible to categorize her work as feminist, we should examine how she addressed feminism and which was the main focus and concern in the discourse exhibited through the narrative diegesis in her literature. "Although all feminists may share a basic commitment to ending female oppression, they do not always approach this problem from the same philosophical or political base" (Pilcher 49). Without any speculation, but displaying the necessary textual evidence taken from her two novels, it is plausible to admit that Anne Brontë was not an overt feminist activist but anticipated the legal and social debate that later on in time would mean an improvement in the conditions for women; nevertheless, as Pilcher affirmed, it is fundamental to determine which was the type of feminist approach that the author conceived and highlighted in her literature, to contribute to the feminist cause.

An exhaustive and critical reading of her novels conveys to us that several subclassifications of feminism might be possible. We may speak about Evangelical feminism if we consider that Anne´s foremost centre of attention is to morally reform the corrupted and fallen characters such as Arthur Huntingdon, Ralph Hattersley, Lord Lowborough, Tom Bloomfield or Mr Robson. If the writer´s emphasis was to address social and legal reform, concentrating on the exploitation of women´s workplace and domestic housework, we might be dealing with Socialist feminism. Anne Brontë additionally engages in Moral feminism due to her strong bonds to religion to improve the performances of the vicious, dominating and corrupted souls. Moreover, given that Liberal feminism claims equality of men and women through political and legal reform, we could even state that Anne Brontë´s second novel accentuates noteworthy questions to ameliorate women´s legal situation such as enjoying their individual earnings, being in charge of their private property, legal custody of their children and embracing factual possibilities to litigate for a divorce. These types of feminist approaches are therefore perceived all along her two novels as it will be later on examined and exposed. However, it has been concluded the need to blend all of them into

one only label attained after the description of Anne herself both, in the first chapter of *Agnes Grey:* "All true histories contain instruction; though, in some, the treasure may be hard to find, and when found, so trivial in quantity, that they dry, shrivelled kernel scarcely compensates for the trouble of cracking the nut" (Brontë 1); and in the preface to *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall:* "but I know that such characters do exist, and if I have warned one rash youth from following in their steps, or prevented one thoughtless girl from falling into the very natural error of my heroine, the book has not been written in vain" (Brontë 4).

We appreciate that Anne´s arguments mean that the conception of her literary texts has a didactic or pedagogical commitment for the two sexes, but predominantly for women, and hence the label we might apply to Anne Brontë´s feminism is that of 'Didactic Feminism'. We are about to observe that in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, the writer counsels readers that what they are going to read is a warning to vicious potential abusers and besides an example for women in two conceivable scenarios: throughout the performances and discourse of the major character, Helen Huntingdon, Anne Brontë wishes to guide and teach women not to be submissive against domestic violent actions perpetrated by their husbands and likewise, the writer instructs women not to accept, again, tamely and wordlessly, the arduous obligations and roles deep-rooted in a patriarchal society epitomised respectively in the institution of marriage and in the womanly qualities behind the ideal 'angel in the house'.

Anne Bronte´s pedagogical feminist purpose is also present in *Agnes Grey*. It is necessary to acknowledge that it does not have the same level of strength in terms of the legal reformation that is needed for women, but that educational feminism is evidenced in the writer´s effort to soften the masculine cruelty, abuse and authority that the reader can witness, in the character of Tom, his father and his uncle: "Master Tom, not content with refusing to be ruled, must needs set up as a ruler, and manifested a determination to keep, not only his sisters, but his governess in order, by violent manual and pedal applications" (Brontë 19); and in the instruction that Agnes provides to Rosalie to make her reconsider the conventional rule that asks women to chase wealthy suitors to achieve the tolerable celebrated position in society that may eventually convey unhappiness to them, as Rosalie tells Agnes when she is already married to sir Thomas Ashby: "I detest that man (…) and despise him too (…) I know you warned me against it, and I wish I had listened to you; but it´s too late to regret that now" (Brontë 134).

Anne Brontë´s feminist instructive implication may also be inferred from a letter she wrote to Ellen Nussey on the 5th of April in 1849, when she was on the edge of dying, when her two novels had been already published and not understood in the effect and power she intended: "I long to do some good in the world before I leave it. I have many schemes in my head for future practise – humble and limited indeed – but still I should not like them to come to nothing, and myself to have lived to so little purpose" (Gaskell 274). What we may sense from her words: "come to nothing", is that she was so observant that probably she detected how her two novels did not have the appreciative audience and influence she had projected, and consequently she believed her purpose was not achieved. Far beyond that, she did "do some good" by displaying a delineation of a substantial amount of women characters, every one of them epitomising an explicit role and function that derived from their position in Victorian society: the authoritarian women rulers or matriarchs such as Mrs Bloomfield, Mrs Murray, Mrs Markham and Mrs. Hargrave; the young women with the ambition of getting married, such as Fanny and Ann Bloomfield, Rosalie and Matilda Murray, Eliza Millward and Annabella Wilmot; the young women who confront patriarchy, such as Esther Hargrave and Rose Markham; the most explicit victim of masculine aggressiveness, Millicent Hargrave; the matriarchs who allow some freedom to their daughters or niece, such as Alice Grey or Mrs Maxwell and finally, the two heroines in Anne Brontë´s novels: Agnes Grey and Helen who encapsulate a feminine and a feminist voice in both novels.

What Anne Brontë is personifying through the characters of Agnes Grey and Helen Huntingdon is a typology of women who are non-conformists to the moralist and social principles of the era they are living in; they are emotionally and psychologically strong enough to argue and reason the debates they get involved in and sufficiently self-confident to allow their voices to be heard among the most radical members of a patriarchal structure, without any fear of being repudiated as 'unfeminine' or 'unnatural'. They do not either long or aspire to passively undertake the conventional features that women should fulfil in a naturalised way to show a precise behaviour and personality that would just respond to what was inherent in the societal constructions of a patriarchal society in which the voice, power and authority was in the hands of men, leaving no individuality to women. These non-conventional women, far from tolerating masculine domestic abuse and supremacy, go beyond, and confront these attitudes with instruction and didacticism, generating a type of

woman who, the writer resolves, not to illustrate as a victim who dramatizes her circumstance, but that permanently struggles to find out the best, among the conceivable or even radical, of the solutions: "Anne Brontë´s didacticism means that although the world was a mess, she always had hope, always thought change was possible" (Ellis 113). It has already been emphasized that Anne´s feminism is neither radical nor rebellious, but educational and enlightening, and therefore the model of woman she is presenting through the characters of Agnes and Helen, is exemplary. Both novels finish with the optimism that a different society might be imaginable: if Agnes and Helen succeeded, because they were capable of developing their aptitudes through their labour positions, because they preserved their individuality, as women, by maintaining their voices and judgements, and also because they could marry the men they had elected, women in real life might as well. Anne Brontë is conveniently revealing to the nineteenth-century middle-class women that her two fictional characters, on the one hand, did not silently agree to the social and moralist conservative rules imposed to them but also what they were capable of: earning their living in order to have financial independence, having a dissimilar opinion and a powerful speech, leading a life governed by their distinctive resolutions and performances. In her essay 'Feminist, Female, Feminine', Toril Moi pointed out that: "White it is true that many women have been victimized intellectually, emotionally and physically by men, it is also true that some have managed efficiently to counter male power" (Moi 119) and this is what Anne Brontë achieved with her literature: to open the eyes of conformist women so that they could embrace other alternatives far from the only vocation of getting married, and ultimately to expose to the society of her time that those women who did not follow the Victorian conventions and obligations intrinsic in the archetype of the 'angel in the house' to the line, demonstrating to have an individuality as any other human being with the right to communicate, should not be categorised as 'unfeminine'.

4.2 Analysis of *Agnes Grey:* A lecture on education and matrimony.

Agnes Grey, which initially had the title, *Passages in the Life of an Individual*, was the first novel by the youngest of the Brontë sisters, published in 1847 together with her sister Emily´s work *Wuthering Heights*.

Critical studies about the novel insist on analysing and interpreting it as an

autobiographical memoir of the working experiences as a governess that the author had with the Ingham family and secondly with the Robinsons. Supporting Edward Chitham´s statement that claims that Anne Brontë was "writing of areas of experience" (Chitham 9), what is important for this paper is to, on the one hand, contribute to finishing reprocessing critical and biographical material and, on the other and chiefly, to illustrate the significance the novel has if studied from a feminist standpoint, more emphatically, to demonstrate through textual evidence the label of didactic feminism that has been adopted for her novelistic production.

The situation of women in nineteenth-century Victorian society was the foremost concern of the author and through this first novel, the reader will witness the experiences that a self-sufficient woman had to withstand all along her Bildungsroman process. Anne Brontë is displaying how the conservative Victorian society distinguishes and separates the education of boys and that of girls; she exhibits that the education given to the masculine gender highlights vice, dishonesty, aggressiveness and despotism because those were the traits that reinforced their supremacy and control. On the other hand, women are trained on lady-like activities, and on the attributes they must embody to obtain a prosperous and advantageous marriage. With her first novel, Anne depicts the reality of her society, but her portrayal of social realism also includes a pedagogical doctrine to reform the wicked performances of boys, and to teach young women that their ambitions in life should not be reduced to the finding of a husband. Therefore, in order to encourage a reconsideration about men and women´s functions in society, the writer decided to structure the novel in two parts that correspond to the heroine´s two working experiences as a governess. Moreover, at the opening of the novel, in-between both working experiences and at the end, Anne incorporates an interaction between the protagonist and events occurred in her family, with the objective of demonstrating that a household based on love and good principles is conceivable and this is what works as the best instruction the author can offer readers, fundamentally, women readers.

The first experience that the woman protagonist, Agnes Grey has, occupies the first five chapters of the narration that is opened with an illustration of Grey´s family moralities that indicate a feminine environment of freedom and dialogical communication in which both sisters: Mary and Agnes, are encouraged to cultivate their talents and skills to achieve a

profession and its subsequent income. Hence, Mary is allowed to enhance her aptitudes as an artist, and Agnes as a children´s tutor. Agnes accepts her first position as a governess with the Bloomfields and since her arrival, she notices the bad behaviour of the children, mostly the cruelty of the young boy, Tom Bloomfield. The first manifestation of Tom´s aggressiveness is towards a wooden horse asserting that he would do the same if the horse was authentic: "Oh, yes, I will! said he, laying on with redoubled ardour" (Brontë 13); yet, the most horrendous performance is towards his sister Mary Ann, exhibiting an abhorring violence when he lifts his fist to hit her, something that he justifies and feels proud of, because that is the instruction he has received from his father in order to guarantee his supremacy and power towards women; Agnes states that she would not like to see again that type of aggressive action and therefore be witness of the suffering of his sister, and he replies affirming: "You will sometimes: I´m obliged to do it now and then to keep her in order" (Brontë 14). As it will happen in the author´s second novel, the protagonist is convinced that she might be capable of improving and reconducting this conduct, if it was not for the outstanding governing, controlling and superior strength of the boy´s father, Mr Bloomfield, who represents patriarchy. The Victorian patriarchal structure is epitomized not only with Mr Bloomfield but also with the grandmother, and predominantly with Mrs Bloomfield´s brother, Mr Robson, introduced as: "the lofty-minded, manly Mr Robson, the scorner of the female sex" (Brontë 32). This character is significant for Anne Brontë and her didactic feminism because if she had conceded a feminist voice to Agnes in order to teach the young Bloomfield girls that intelligence and good manners should be the essentials for a woman, Mr Robson harmed her didacticism by telling his niece: "filling her head with all manner of conceited notions concerning her personal appearance" (Brontë 32); additionally, the instruction he was giving to his nephew Tom, was that of creating a vicious man who was permitted to drink to be more mannish.

The second part of the novel which covers from chapter six to twenty-five corresponds to the enthusiasm that Agnes employs to instruct Rosalie Murray about the ethics that should guide her performances, far from the beauty and the ornamental attributes to seduce men that derive from the Victorian doctrine she has acquired, with the only aspiration in life of marrying a wealthy man who could ultimately just give her some social prestige but probably not a cheerful living.

Before starting with her new post, and as we remarked at the beginning of this subsection of the paper as regards the interaction with the heroine´s family, Agnes, who had been dismissed from her previous job, came back to her family house and in this occasion, we perceive the non-conventional and non-patriarchal father she has. Agnes´ father recommends her daughters to save their incomes, attitude that fosters not only financial independence but also the private property of women, something that was different from the rigorous patriarchal father who would only expect daughters to gain financial independence through a marriage with a well-off husband.

When Agnes starts to work for the Murrays, she immediately apprehends that Mrs Murray typifies the conventional Victorian matriarch whose highest concern was: "For the girls, she seemed anxious only to render them as superficially attractive and showily accomplished as they could possibly be made" (Brontë 45), qualities that were fundamental if her primary interest was in a marriage of convenience for her daughters: Rosalie and Matilda. That is, therefore, that beauty and attraction were the central preparations that young girls should have, while the boys could be sent to school to be instructed in more intelligent matters and subjects. If Mrs Murray represents that type of conventional Victorian mother, then her daughters have to fulfil the function of being introduced into society with two objectives: to get to know the wealthy masculine members of the community as potential husbands-to-be, but also to be examined by the other matriarchs who would ratify that the education based on the Victorian feminine model, to be eligible wives, had been achieved: "Brown said she was sure no gentleman could set eyes on me without falling in love that minute; and so I may be allowed to be a little vain" (Brontë 56). Rosalie is the first to be presented in society and not only does she consent her role and function willingly, but it is assumed that she brilliantly succeeded as it can be perceived from her arrogant style to boast about men´s reactions after meeting her: "I made so many conquests in that one night – you´d be astonished to hear" (Brontë 56) and her superior attitude to comment about them:

> "Sir Thomas is young, rich and gay; but an ugly beast, nevertheless. Then, there was Henry Meltham, sir Hugh´s younger son; rather good-looking, and a pleasant fellow to flirt with: but being a younger son, that is all he is good for; then there was young Mr Green, rich enough, but of no family, and a great stupid fellow, a mere country booby; and then, our good rector, Mr Hatfield: an humble admirer he ought to consider himself, but I fear he has forgotten to number humility among his tock of Christian virtues" (Brontë 57).

Rosalie is exhibiting her proud and conceited nature, and Anne Brontë´s feminist didacticism gets to a meaningful phase when Agnes tries to teach her pupil that prettiness and compliments should not be her foremost interest and worry as those simply express a frivolous and superficial temperament: "should that delight you so very much? What good will they do you?" (Brontë 56). Rosalie, as a representative of the femininity of the period can only respond to Agnes´ feminist didactic guidance labelling her governess as 'unfeminine': "Think of any woman asking that" (Brontë 56). This debate marks an illustration of the accepted and expected type of women personified in Rosalie, her mother, and later on in young Matilda; on the other side, neither Agnes views on femininity nor her sister´s Mary, by marrying a modest, self-effacing man, implying that she will have to cook and take care of her home are acceptable but abruptly rejected, manifested again in Rosalie´s disagreements: "Oh, stop! – you´ll make me sick. How can she bear it?" (Brontë 54). The customary Victorian young girl has been trained to be exclusively fascinated with the societal regard she might achieve when joining a prospective husband without thinking on the disastrous consequences that a marital union based on financial and vanity terms would derive in.

Anne Brontë exhibits to have a mastery in the delineation of the women she has observed in her society: daughters who chase a marriage of convenience, unnoticeable women who wish to be self-sufficient through their particular resources, but in the occurrence that they could encounter a man with respectable codes, they could get married with, but without making it their life objective; and there is, additionally, a reflection on the bad reputation that spinsters had, as it was comprehended that women´s only functions were to be wives and mothers, and because women did not have any status if it was not because they were associated to a husband. As regards unmarried women, Rosalie exposes her banal and selfish opinion: "I should like to enjoy myself thoroughly, and coquet with all the world, till I am on the verge of being called an old maid" (Brontë 58). Anne Brontë is critical with this type of frivolous women that existed on her time, because accepting the role expected of them, they are reinforcing the mainstream opinion about women´s objectives in life and consequently they are not allowing any space to other types of women who intend to be self-sufficient and encourage, basically, women´s individualities. The writer then illustrates this Victorian feminine ideal, in the character of Rosalie, with the intention of instructing her with

the finality of modifying the frivolous thoughts she embodies, however, Anne Brontë is also demonstrating that the instruction and guidance will be problematic because, both Murray sisters have been raised in the prospects of reaching only one end: to obtain a spouse plenty of possessions without taking into consideration the intelligence, kindness or decent principles that they could embody. It is likely that Anne Brontë disapproved, and consequently was criticizing the superficial and useless education they were receiving instead of an education founded on respect, dialogue or discretion; if they haven´t been nurtured with these beliefs, their conduct is only expected to be conceited and superior with members of the lower class in society by, for example, laughing at their clothes or modes of speech. Parallel to the portrayal of young women who just want to charm men to marry with, Anne Brontë describes the process that a woman such as Agnes Grey lives when falling in love, and that was the writer´s objective: to explain women of her time the essentials that a husband-to-be should have so that they might ultimately agree to join their lives with in matrimony. If Anne was an exceptional observant, it is comprehensible that she decided to confer that same skill to her protagonist in order to examine Mr Weston´s characteristics such as his honourable conduct, his motivating and dialogical conversation and fundamentally, ignore about physical appearance; the Victorian writer is attempting to guide Rosalie and the women of her time to consider this sort of individual traits as crucial to be right in the election of a partner.

We have previously mentioned that social gatherings among the members of the community were the occasion of women to be approved and admired; Anne Brontë informs readers that beyond a religious devotion or obligation, women attendance to church on Sundays, even twice on the same day, was another mechanism used to seduce the men of the community. In the particular instance of Rosalie, Agnes Grey says that: “for she loved admiration that she could not bear to lose a single opportunity of obtaining it” (Brontë 76) in this moment, by Mr Hatfield, who is seduced by the young girl, for example, when he is officiating the Sunday service. Anne Brontë attempts to show readers how superficial, manipulative and light-hearted women could be when she describes Rosalie´s games with men such as Mr Hatfield: “I must have somebody to flirt with, and no one else has the sense to come here” (Brontë 85). Nonetheless, aware of the philandering nature of Rosalie, Mrs Murray does not let her daughter behave like this with the rector because the matriarch

ambitions are significantly higher, and therefore commands Agnes to watch her: “mamma won´t let me flirt with anybody but sir Thomas” (Brontë 85). The governess and the stereotypical Victorian woman are debating about this unconceivable relationship with the cleric and the discussion have a twofold significance, both of them relevant to conclude that a reconsideration of the institution of marriage for middle-class nineteenth-century women should be taken. On the one hand, Rosalie condemns her mother´s insolence because she fears that her daughter may fall in love with a man “who has not seven hundred a year to bless himself with” (Brontë 85) but what is really worth-mentioning is Rosalie´s statement about her mother´s distress: “oh, it provokes me so! To think that I could be such a fool as to fall in love! It is quite beneath the dignity of a woman to do such a thing. Love! I detest the word! as applied to one of our sex, I think it a perfect insult” (Brontë 85). What Anne Brontë is accentuating here is that potential wives have to accomplish their duties of marrying without taking into account either positive or negative love feelings. On the other hand, Rosalie is conscious that sir Thomas does not have a virtuous reputation: “as if the said son were not the greatest scamp in Christendom” (Brontë 85). Moreover, Mrs Murray knows about this fact and does not care about the future of her daughter as long as she becomes the respectful and celebrated Lady Ashby biasing her by affirming that she is clever enough to modify his dishonoured behaviour when they are married: “he´ll be all right when he´s married, as mamma says; and reformed rakes make the best husbands, everybody knows” (Brontë 85). Agnes and Mr Weston shared the same opinion regarding the institution of marriage, statement that offers a reflection of what was happening in the Victorian society: “It seems unnatural: but some people think rank and wealth the chief good; and, if they can secure that for their children, they think they have done their duty” (Brontë 113).

Agnes attempts to teach Rosalie not to be so superficial, and recommends her to stop playing with Hatfield if she is determined to marry another man, because, first, that could harm someone´s feelings but that dishonourable mode of diversions would also end with a delicate and dangerous context for Rosalie´s reputation. The Brontë writer is educating women that they should not find entertainment like Rosalie, who having rejected Hatfield´s marriage proposal, feels proud, despotic, tyrannical and powerful for having disdained such an attractive and handsome man. As far as reputation is concerned, Anne Brontë exposes the reasons that both Hatfield and Rosalie have to keep it clean, as they are the representatives

of two prominent members of the community: Hatfield as the rector, and Rosalie as an influential woman for the rest of the ladies in the neighbourhood. We could interpret the circumstance between Hatfield and Rosalie as a battle of pride to determine who is more dominant: either Rosalie, to gossip with other girls that she had rejected a handsome man, and on the other, Hatfield, who could justify his marriage proposition alleging that it came motivated by the young lady repetitive acts of coquetting, which eventually would signify a loss of social prestige for Rosalie because society may understand that she had been pursuing him. In spite of Agnes´ recommendations as regards this relationship, Rosalie is not capable of feeling any remorse, on the contrary, she affirms that she should not have dismissed Hatfield so fast because she is bored and does not have the sort of excitement that using men up provides her: "she regretted having 'used him up so soon'" (Brontë 93). The education Rosalie has received is so full of arrogance, and absent of compassion that, convinced that in the next community social reunion, sir Thomas will propose marriage, her intention and declaration is: "But if I am to be married so soon, I must make the best of the present time: I am determined Hatfield shall not be the only man who shall lay his heart at my feet, and implore me to accept the worthless gift in vain" (Brontë 99). It is possible to infer she is making a reference to the man Agnes has fallen in love with, Mr Weston, and the governess has sufficient reasons to be afraid that could happen because she is the person who best knows about Rosalie´s manipulative skills. This is the only vulnerable moment in which Agnes felt diminished or overwhelmed with so much charm, and surrendered: "I was accustomed now, to keeping silence when things distasteful to my ear were uttered; and now, too, I was used to wearing a placid smiling countenance when my heart was bitter within me" (Brontë 106), to fight for the man she loved, with the hope that when Rosalie married, Mr Weston would come back to her. Agnes is a woman who exemplifies great morals and achievements and we have exposed several instances in which the governess tried to guide Rosalie, but it seems like "an extreme case" that motivated the author´s second novel. Even though sir Thomas proposed to wed Rosalie, she maintained social relationships with other men: interchanging letters with Mr Green, for example, receiving visits from Mr Meltham and even attempted to seduce Mr Weston.

If Mrs Murray has the function of safeguarding the complete high-status position for her daughters, once it has been accomplished with Rosalie, it is the turn to adjust Matilda´s

behaviour to the standards of the feminine Victorian ideal so that she could be a delicate lady at the moment of being introduced into society: "being truly alarmed at the roughness of her manners, and thinking it high time to work a reform, had been roused at length to exert her authority, and prohibited entirely the yards, stables, kennels, and coach-house" (Brontë 110).

At the beginning of this analysis of Anne Brontë´s first novel, it was possible to show that a different education grounded on freedom and debate was plausible for women, exemplified with the presentation of Agnes Grey´s family, and that the interaction between Agnes working experiences and the events of her own family were going to be significant for the writer´s didactic feminism. Alice Grey becomes a widow and although her eldest daughter suggests that she would live with her and her husband, she proves to be a different self-sufficient mother saying:

> "I will exert myself and look out for a small house, commodiously situated in some populous but healthy district where we will take a few young ladies to board and educate – if we can get them – and as many day pupils as will come, or as we can manage to instruct" (Brontë 116).

Throughout Alice´s resolution, Anne Brontë is establishing that women have the competence to take their individual decisions to be self-ruling, and likewise, she is complaining about the strict orthodox attitude of masculine dominance represented by Alice´s father. The patriarchal society, personified in Alice´s father, rejects the independence and individuality of women:

> "He says he has no doubt that I have long repented of my 'unfortunate marriage', and if I will only acknowledge this, and confess I was wrong in neglecting his advice, and that I have justly suffered for it, he will make a lady of me once again – if that be possible after my long degradation – and remember my girls in his will" (Brontë 117).

Anne Brontë was sharp enough to criticize the Victorian mainstream essentials behind marital unions in which kindness and true love were not considered. Alice rejected her father´s requirements as regards marriage, and instead of having an 'unfortunate marriage', she enjoyed a pleasing one with a man she honestly admired, although that meant she had a less solvent financial situation or that the consideration the members of the high level in society had about her was not that of 'a lady'.

Anne Brontë decided to finish the novel with a demonstration that a marriage of convenience does not guarantee any contentment. The author´s feminist didacticism is heard

through Agnes visit to Rosalie, finally Lady Ashby, detecting she is neither satisfied nor has attained what her mother always held; firstly, because she is not the authentic woman ruler of the house as that role is occupied by her mother-in-law; secondly, because after only one year of matrimony, she talks about her husband using severe expressions: "I detest that man! Yes, I do, Miss Grey, and despise him too; and if you knew him you would not blame me" (Brontë 134). She explicitly exposes her regret for not following Agnes instruction: "I know you warned me against it, and I wish I had listened to you. And besides, mamma ought to have known better than either of us, and she never said anything against it, quite the contrary" (Brontë 134); and finally, because she has learnt to comprehend what this type of matrimonies entails: "It is too bad to feel life, health and beauty wasting away unfelt and unenjoyed, for such a brute as that!" (Brontë 134). Anne Brontë, through the voice of Rosalie, summarizes the repercussions that the Victorian ideology had for men and women:

> "but he will do as he pleases, and I must be a prisoner and a slave. He must needs have me down in the country, to lead the life of a nun lest I should dishonour him or bring him to ruin; as if he had not been ten times worse every way, with his betting book, and his gaming table, and his opera girls, and his Lady This and Mrs That – yes, and his bottles of wine, and glasses of brandy and water too!" (Brontë 134).

As we had stated in the section devoted to the Historical Context and the Woman Question, the Victorian ideology had as its highest principle the separation of spheres between men and women, allowing, as Rosalie points out, that the masculine gender could do as they pleased, partying, getting drunk, having adulterous relationships, whereas women had to remain at home preserving the function of 'angel in the house'; what is admirable in the Victorian writer is that she is allowing Rosalie, at least in this matter, to have a dissenting voice when she stresses out that discriminatory distinction between what is permitted to one gender and the other so that roles could be inverted and women could enjoy the same kind of liberties: "I would give ten thousand worlds to be Miss Murray again! If I might only be free to amuse myself and to stay in London, or have a few friends down here" (Brontë 134). Although Rosalie is able to recapitulate the role of an upper-class woman, Agnes offers her, and intrinsically Anne Brontë to the women of her society, one last lesson so that forthcoming women may have another type of upbringing and education, recommending her to devote all her efforts with her daughter so that the kid´s circumstances in the future might be different. However, we realize that the instance of Rosalie is an extreme one, when she states: "What

pleasure can I have in seeing a girl grow up to eclipse me, and enjoy those pleasures that I am for ever debarred from?" (Brontë 135). Anne Brontë is admitting that her didactic feminism was not successful with a woman such as Rosalie and we can infer that her own daughter will have to sustain the same education based on the pursuit of an affluent husband. However, our author is effective on her principle of allowing freedom to choose a husband, when she finishes the novel with the reunion between Agnes and Mr Weston and their eventual marriage. Alice Grey is proposed again to live with the new wedded couple, but her business was being so lucrative that she could employ an assistant. If the character of Rosalie is used to demonstrate that the marriages of convenience can end up in absolute sorrow, that of Alice Grey is created so that patriarchs and masculine domination realized that women can also be autonomous, run their business in a profitable way, and above all, without being addressed as 'unfeminine'.

As for feminism and its inherent intention of improving the situation for women, we could conclude that *Agnes Grey* should be considered as an apprentice novel as it incorporates the essential elements of denunciation of several aspects that the writer observed in her society such as the corrupted vices and dominant roles in which boys were upraised or the frivolous nature that emerged in those women who were educated in seducing and attracting husbands-to-be. The Victorian writer attempted to be subtle in her first lines concerning women, and probably realizing that the novel did not receive the feminist impact she had intended, she decided to spread those first introductory feminist goals and elements in her second novel, but this time using a more radical and rebellious discourse. Printing it just one year after the first, proves the sustainability of her work, along with a straightforward thought of the legacy she wanted to provide to her nineteenth-century society and upcoming ones.

4.3 Analysis of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall:* A Feminist Discourse.

The youngest of the Brontë sisters, permanently overshadowed by the popularity of the romantic and gothic fictional production of her two oldest sisters, published her second novel in 1848, merely one year after the first, and it is high time that readers, academicians and literary critics acknowledge fundamentally two aspects: firstly, that Anne Brontë was the only Brontë sister who had her novelistic creation printed with a short difference of time

between one and the other; and secondly, that the social realism she employs to delineate the discriminatory circumstances for women, should deserve a parallel level of popularity, recognition and admiration to that of her siblings.

Given that the author´s second novel is essentially remembered and decoded as an adaptation into fiction of the writer´s brother´s addictions and allegedly illicit affair with a married woman, the interpretation to be outlined in the analysis of the novel, corresponds to an instructional feminist vision of the narration. In order to successfully accomplish her didactic feminism, Anne Brontë decides to structure the novel in three parts. All along them, her objective will be clarified: to manifest unfair situations lived by the women of her age, to offer them feasible solutions, and to suggest society and legal reformists to start to contemplate necessary transformations in the conditions and circumstances of women.

Similar to the general structure of the novel, Anne Brontë included a preface that is also organized in three distinctive sections that provide relevant information to understand the creation of the realist and didactic novel, and where the essentials that frame this investigation are illustrated. Firstly, she describes the motivations behind the writing; secondly, an explanation of what she developed in the diegesis of the narration is exposed:

> "Let it not be imagined, however, that I consider myself competent to reform the errors and abuses of society, but only that I would fain contribute my humble quota towards so good an aim, and if I can gain the public ear at all, I would rather whisper a few wholesome truths therein than much soft nonsense" (Brontë 3).

Lastly, the writer incorporates a paragraph where she is defending the act of writing in itself, either created by a man, or a woman: "in my own mind, I am satisfied that if a book is a good one, it is so whatever the sex of the author may be" (Brontë 5). After the negative criticisms that her first novel, *Agnes Grey*, had received, Anne Brontë was again startled with the opinions given to her second, therefore she felt the need to clarify that those who had already read and attacked it, did so because her book had not been read with the appropriate perspective: "misapprehension of those who would read it with a prejudiced mind or be content to judge it by a hasty glance" (Brontë 3). Anne exposes the inspiration behind her story by saying that although she is criticizing society and the abuses she has observed, what she ultimately intended, was to contribute to revise and modify the dishonest and immoral conducts of some particular persons she had been observing in her contemporary society: "vicious characters" (Brontë 4) and her engagement also comprised the possibility of helping

her society: “if I am able to amuse I will try to benefit too” (Brontë 4). From the very beginning, the novelist is proposing readers to broad their visions towards a society that embodies some corrupted people whose actions derive in the torment of some others, thus her quote: “O Reader! if there were less of this delicate concealment of facts – this whispering ‘Peace, peace’, when there is no peace” (Brontë 4). If we deconstruct the elements of this statement we find the segment: ‘concealment of facts’ that may represent the control and manipulation of a patriarchal society and its principal rulers, to negate and hide the discriminated circumstances that are endured by those members of the society that are raised in their households with the strong belief that their homes will be the private sphere of calmness, but that in an extreme case, as it will be the one portrayed in this novel, ‘there is no peace’, for women, and they can only but ‘whisper’, and these two fragments have been understood as the suffocated silence of those women who are victims of a covert domestic violence[6]. Through the lines that Anne crafts in this novel, she is giving visibility and voice to those women who suffered the authoritarian and conservative restricted norms imposed by a patriarchal nineteenth-century society, becoming a feminist voice and an advocate for them, by means of a pedagogical and constructive methodology grounded on the truth: “and when I feel it my duty to speak an unpalatable truth, I will speak it” (Brontë 5).

As it has been anticipated, the first part of the novel is developed in the first fifteen chapters which correspond to the moment in which the entire story and events lived by the protagonist, Helen, have previously occurred. They are narrated in the epistolary form by Gilbert Markham who writes a succession of letters to his friend, Halford, and every precise detail is retold in an accurate way because it is not recited from memory, but from the manuscript in which everything had been written down by Helen.

Anne Brontë just needed the first chapter to delineate every one of the members of her Victorian age and society: the severe patriarchy represented by Mrs Markham and the reverend Michael Millward; the conventional women who aim to achieve the perfect marriage and accept the household impositions of the ‘angel in the house’, epitomized in Eliza Millward and Jane Wilson; the robust, tough, insensitive and dominant men such as Fergus Markham and Robert Wilson. Moreover, Anne´s didacticism is initially exhibited

[6] The notion of ‘domestic violence’ was not acknowledged in the nineteenth-century but it is expressed in this paper as performances that do not only involve physical harm but verbal abuse, infidelity or repetitive abandonments of the home.

through the portrayal of different possibilities of women and men, exemplified in: Richard Wilson, calm, shy and docile; Mary Millward, devoted to learning and radically different from her sister, Eliza; Rose Markham, a woman who reacts against her mother´s impositions; and finally, Helen, the mysterious solitary woman who come to live in the neighbourhood of this community as a representative of hope for the women who have suffered similar domestic abuses and injustices as her.

In order to be faithful to reality, and subsequently to apply her intentional didactic feminism, Anne Brontë had to, primarily portray and reveal the actions of the members who were in charge of the patriarchal supremacy, to continue exhibiting those women who were obedient followers of those who had the control of the society, and ultimately to introduce a woman character who epitomizes the difference to the canon, but who in a parallel way embodies a strong woman who struggled in life and eventually found a solution to escape from the masculine abuses of her husband. Therefore, Helen, introduced as Mrs Graham, is initially described to the reader by the members of this small society, who comment about the newcomer, in the conventional social visits that families paid ones to the others, or when they attended church on Sundays, and thus is how we know that she is "a single lady (…) quite young, reserved" (Brontë 11) but we immediately appreciate how the supremacy and authoritarian power of the patriarchy personified in Mrs Markham and in the reverend Michael Millward will exercise its power. Mrs Markham justifies the lessons she attempts to instil in Helen because, from her perspective, Helen was ignorant on some significant household matters that "every respectable female ought to know" (Brontë 13) and she is referring to the education that Helen´s son is receiving from her mother, but Helen will show that she is not the expected obedient and silent woman. Anne Brontë initiates her pedagogical instruction to society defending the upbringing that her protagonist, Helen, is delivering to her son, and consequently when Mrs Markham tells her that: "he ought not to be always tied to his mother´s apron string" (Brontë 22) or the severe statement: "the poor child will be the veriest milksop that ever was sopped" (Brontë 24) or: "you will treat him like a girl – you´ll spoil his spirit and make a mere Miss Nancy of him" (Brontë 26), Helen does not hesitate to demonstrate how proud she is with the teaching she is giving to her son grounded on the solid principles of respect and love, validated in her sentence: "I trust my son will never be ashamed to love his mother" (Brontë 23). With this first debate between a woman, who does

not passively conform to the patriarchal obligations, and the representative of the restricted society, about the doctrine that a boy must receive, Anne Brontë is confirming one of the discriminating differences between the sphere granted to men and to women.

The separation of domains and the dissimilar education given to the members of both genders is exhibited by the roles assigned to, for instance, Fergus who had been: "badger-baiting" (Brontë 10) or Gilbert, who had been: "breaking the grey colt" (Brontë 10) and on the other side, Rose, who had been: "getting the tea ready", Eliza Millward: "busy with some piece of soft embroidery" (Brontë 20) and her sister: "mending a heap of stockings" (Brontë 20). Men are performing the duties appointed to the public sphere, and women are satisfying the attributes expected and demanded from them according to the conventional feminine ideal: to be graceful, elegant, mild, submissive, learned in music and singing. Nonetheless, women also needed another particular training, stipulated in that they should be seductive and charming to finally gain a husband, and these are the cases of Eliza Millward or Jane Wilson. The two obedient ladies epitomize a guarantee that the conventions established for each gender will be fulfilled and therefore the patriarchal configuration of things will be prosperous. However, Anne Brontë defies these rigorous demands and establishment by introducing two women characters, Rose Markham and Helen, who far from being docile and passive, are going to have a voice, an individual opinion and a critical thought. Rose, for example challenges her mother, and intrinsically her society, when she argues with her about her household duties:

> "Don´t eat so much of that, Rose, Gilbert will like it for his supper – I´m nothing at all – in the parlour, it´s, 'Come Rose, put away your things, and let´s have the room nice and tidy against they come in; and keep up a good fire; Gilbert likes a cheerful fire'. In the kitchen – 'Make tha pie a large one, Rose, I dare say the boys´ll be hungry; and don´t put so much pepper in, they´ll not like it I´m sure' – or, 'Rose, don´t put so many spices in the pudding, Gilbert likes it plain', or, 'Mind you plenty of currants in the cake, Fergus likes plenty'. If I say, 'Well, mamma I don´t', I´m told I ought not to think of myself" (Brontë 45).

The extensive selection of arguments utilized by Rose are Anne´s first attempts to denounce the sort of abusive responsibilities assigned to women, but the dominance of the patriarchal structure is eminently and traditionally so strong that those arguments will be immediately confronted by Rose´s mother answer: "You know Rose, in all household matters, we have only two things to consider, first, what´s proper to be done, and secondly, what´s most

agreeable to the gentlemen of the house – anything will do for the ladies" (Brontë 45). It is evidenced, therefore, that women are neglected, but another step in Anne´s didacticism is that Gilbert who had been witness of that conversation between his mother and sister offered his unexpected judgement: "Very convenient doctrine, for us at all events" (45). Moreover, Gilbert is a representative of a feasible solution in the concern about women because he also challenges his mother in terms of the functions assigned in marriages: Mrs Markham affirms that once married "You´ll do your business, and she, if she´s worthy of you, will do hers; but it´s your business to please yourself, and hers to please you" (Brontë 46): even though the establishment is prearranged in this way, Gilbert is a hope for women when he declares: "and when I marry, I shall expect to find more pleasure in making my wife happy and comfortable, than in being made so by her" (Brontë 46), meaning that marriage for him entails a cooperation between the private and the domestic spheres and he expects to have an active role in the specific functions of a marriage.

If Anne Brontë allowed Rose to have a distinctive and straightforward opinion, the circumstance with Helen is more radical, as she symbolizes a remarkable difference for the traditional women: she lives alone only accompanied by her son and a loyal maid, she does not attend social parties, she has no intention of getting married again because she does not need a husband to be successful or to maintain her family, as she has her profession as an artist. Helen Graham is considered a 'rara avis' because she does not follow the tradition of attending social parties in which useless and trivial conversations are held: "I hate talking, when there is no exchange of ideas or sentiments, and no good given or received" (Brontë 67), and because she is also surrounded by an halo of mystery discovered by Gilbert when he encounters a painting of Wildfell Hall named Fernley Manor, and Helen has to clarify that: "I have friends – acquaintances at least – in the world, from whom I desire my present abode to be concealed and I take the precaution to give a false name to the place also" (Brontë 37). Helen represents a mature, modest, self-sufficient and read woman who has the function of showing patriarchal men, such as Gilbert, that women may have other attributes far from the beauty or the submissive attitudes displayed by Eliza Millward. Gilbert starts to feel attracted by the intelligence of Helen and in this way, Anne Brontë is demonstrating to both, men and women that the selection of a partner should not be imposed by patriarchs or women rulers but grounded on the principles and specific natural temperaments inherent in both men

and women.

With such a different woman, Anne Brontë had to depict what the reactions from the dominant members and rulers of the patriarchy might have: “You see what it is for women to affect to be different to other people” (Brontë 70). The immediate effects related to the heroine´s difference, and her attentive and scrupulous manner to keep her privacy is that people started to move rumours about her, focused on the identity of her son´s father. A peculiarity of the Victorian society Anne is portraying is that rumours and assumptions are taken as real facts without questioning its validity, and in consequence, Helen suffers from the worst of the judgements, the public criticism and repudiation of the members of her community: Jane Wilson for example declares: “the lady´s character is considered scarcely respectable” (Brontë 63). The disapproval of reverend Millward is more severe because: “He was a man of fixed principles, strong prejudices, and regular habits – intolerant of dissent in any shape, acting under a firm conviction that his opinions were always right, and whoever differed from them, must be, either most deplorably ignorant, or wilfully blind” (Brontë 15); being intolerant with whomever is essentially different from the norm, he visits Helen to warn her about: “to tell you everything that I myself see reprehensible in your conduct” (Brontë 77) and he finally concludes and informs the members of his community that her condition meant that: “nothing could be done – and sadly grieved to find her case so hopeless” (Brontë 77). Accustomed to that type of society and influenced by the reverend´s statement: “she´s not worth it” (Brontë 73), Gilbert instantly believes what is told about Helen, but he finally decides to ask her about the truth, and he is given the journal which explains every one of the experiences that brought Helen to Wildfell Hall.

The second part of the novel, that covers from chapter sixteen to forty-five, corresponds to the stages and the process that the principal heroine has to live to eventually incarnate the strong woman character who had been anticipated in the first section of the narration. The climax of the feminist didacticism that Anne Brontë wished to express is manifested in this second part, told in the first-person voice of Helen herself. What the reader is about to witness is the strategy that the Victorian author employed to teach women what happens when a marital union is decided and imposed by either patriarchs or matriarchs with the objective of an improvement in the family financial position and the woman social status; most of the times, these unions resulted in physical or psychological maltreats manifested in

overt domestic abuses or, in some radical circumstance, explicit physical batterings. Given that lessons are better learned when examples are provided, the mechanism then that our author uses is to present the instances of two women: Milicent Hargrave and Helen Huntingdon, both of them in a straightforward manner. Yet, as it has been previously explained, Anne Brontë did not intend to display these circumstances in a romanticized or dramatic manner but as an optimistic one, and she was able to achieve that intention by providing solutions to those future women who were on the verge of choosing a man to get married with.

The second part is inaugurated with a debate on marriage between Mrs Maxwell, Helen´s aunt, and her young niece which is understood as a suggestion to society to make a reflection about the matter of discussion. If the stereotype of the Victorian rigorous conventional woman was displayed throughout the first part, in the character of Mrs Markham, who only advocated for the feminine submission, in this second part we realize how another perspective is possible, epitomized in the instruction that Mrs Maxwell gives her niece about the selection of a husband, conceding her, careful freedom of thought: "Receive, coldly and dispassionately, every attention, till you have ascertained and duly considered the worth of the aspirant; and let your affections be consequent upon approbation alone" (Brontë 104). Helen´s aunt and uncle allow some freedom of choice to their niece as long as her decision was essentially substantiated on an observation of the nature and principles of the potential husband. Although they use solid testimonies to try to guide Helen to reconsider her admiration about Arthur: "You little know the misery of uniting your fortunes to such a man!" (Brontë 118) or "that young rascal (…) this young spark" (Brontë 140), she is determined to marry him, guided by the innocent belief of the women in the nineteenth-century of being capable of reforming the soul of a corrupted man: "if he had someone to advise him, and remind him of what is right" (Brontë 117). The lesson to nineteenth-century women has started, because if Helen had followed submissively her aunt´s counselling of not getting married to the adulterous and dishonoured man she had chosen, Anne Brontë could not have shown the women of her period the consequences of an incorrect choice. Helen´s error will mean a warning for those who are yet in the position of deciding for a husband, but besides, it is also a hope for those who having committed the same mistake as her, might move ahead without falling in a painful silence and

submissiveness.

In order to be successful in her didactic feminism, Anne Brontë established a process organized in different stages for her heroine, Helen. The first stage corresponds to the meetings that the couple have before getting married, which have the fundamental function of showing the personalities of both of them: Arthur demonstrates his manipulative strategies, control and authority towards Helen since the very beginning: "if you don´t value me, I must turn to somebody that will" (Brontë 127) and he is even capable of behaving in a rather more disrespectful manner when he asks Helen to interrupt her music in the piano so that Annabella Wilmot would replace her declaring to the latter: "I have been hungering and thirsting all day, for the sound of your voice" (Brontë 129). If Helen had formerly demonstrated to have a strong nature when talking to her aunt and uncle, now that she is in love, and fearing that he would lose him, she tolerates Arthur´s manipulative strategies, admitting that she had been: "treated as a perfect nonentity" (Brontë 129); this behaviour should be understood as an antecedent or premonition of what surely will happen in her upcoming married life. Now, Helen is living her second phase, that of a docile woman who accepts any kind of behaviour from her future husband.

The lesson that Anne Brontë is attempting to show women continues with the next part of Helen´s process that corresponds to her married life stage; only four months after her wedding have passed and she writes on her diary:

> "Arthur is not what I thought of him at first, and if I had known him in the beginning as thoroughly as I do now, I probably never should have loved him, and if I had loved him first, and then made the discovery, I fear I should have thought it my duty not to have married him" (Brontë 158).

Helen explains her judgement with some declarations from her husband in which he boasts about his previous affairs with women, even with married ones, or when he justifies that he has to travel to London: "Because I cannot be happy here" (Brontë 168). Aware of his promiscuity, Helen is in a position to confess: "and for the first time in my life, and I hope the last, I wished I had not married him" (Brontë 164). 'I hope the last' has to be understood because of the ethics and morals in which Helen was raised, her conviction of being able to improve her husband´s attitude, and because of her strength to continue struggling in her mission of reformation. Arthur´s repetitive journeys to London are used to emphasize the passive and submissive attitudes that women should have; the debate about what is

considered the feminine ideal conveyed in the 'angel in the house' that opened this novel with Mrs Markham arguments is continued by Arthur as he is in the powerful position of affirming to his wife that she should be patient because: "that first of woman´s virtues" (Brontë 173) or: "I won´t be dictated to by a woman, though she be my wife" (Brontë 185). Furthermore, if the debate deals with infidelities, because Helen has seen how her husband kisses Lady Lowborough´s hand, Arthur states that he can flirt with other women as long as his true love is addressed to his wife, but if Helen proposes to reverse the circumstances and brings up the possibility that a woman could also play with other men, Arthur, representative of the control and masculinity, provides a statement that displays the authentic situation for every woman: "The cases are different. It is a woman´s nature to be constant – to love one and one only, blindly, tenderly, and for ever" (Brontë 185).

The analysis of this second part of the novel anticipated that Anne Brontë was going to describe the examples of two women: Helen and Millicent Hargrave. The case of the latter is initially the most radical one, but finally it will turn out to be a success in the process of instruction and moderation that the writer intended for her novel. Millicent´s mother, Mrs Hargrave, is another example of a ruler mother who imposes prearranged marriages to her daughters, something that she achieves with Millicent, but she does not with Esther, who symbolizes the most outstanding model of a conceivable change in the circumstances for women. Millicent is forced to be married to an aggressive man, Ralph Hattersley, she does not and cannot love, and the most relevant fact is that she declares that she was afraid of him before the marriage: "he frightens me with his abrupt manners and strange hectoring ways, and I dread the thoughts of marrying him" (Brontë 174) and she was not wrong, because she suffered a public physical abuse justified by Hattersley with the following harsh words: "I positively think I ill-use her sometimes, when I´ve taken too much – but I can´t help it, for she never complains, either at the time or after. I suppose she doesn´t mind it" (Brontë 227). If Millicent endured that behaviour was because she had been educated to be submissive and accept whichever the acts or statements from her husband were; maltreated women had to learn to silence those performances, and Helen summarises it also for her own circumstance: "My nature was not originally calm. I have learned to appear so by dint of hard lessons, and many repeated efforts" (Brontë 268). Anne Brontë could not use more blatant events to suggest society that an imposed prearranged marriage may end up in a severe aggravated

situation for women, but likewise, and as we have been previously saying, the writer´s optimism was displayed with the character of Esther Hargrave as she is not about to admit her mother´s impositions about marriage under any circumstance. From the delineation of her character: "with a fearless spirit of her own, that I fancy, her mother will find some difficulty in bending to her purposes" (Brontë 182) the reader can infer that she will not succumb to her mother´s intentions, and ultimately nineteenth-century women will be witnesses of the techniques that they have to employ to not surrender passively to the conventional requirements, and eventually to be successful in marriage. The hopefulness that Esther exemplifies will be finally exhibited in the last part of the novel.

Helen Huntingdon turns into a new phase on her personal evolution when she has to struggle not only for herself but also for her son. So far, she has been capable of enduring and silencing the hell she has been living with her husband as the Victorian doctrine demanded from women: "Things that formerly shocked and disgusted me, now seem only natural" (Brontë 206), but her maternity will be decisive to find a solution to her situation and that of her son. After two years of matrimony she is resigned and proclaims what is the role of a wife:

> "Judging from appearances, his idea of a wife, is a thing to love one devotedly and to stay at home – to wait upon her husband, and amuse him and minister to his comfort in every possible way, while he chooses to stay with her; and, when he is absent, to attend to his interests, domestic or otherwise, and patiently wait his return; no matter how he may be occupied in the meantime" (Brontë 192)".

The orthodox feminine ideal is therefore that, as the wife belongs to the husband and subsequently to the domestic sphere, she has no right to contradict the rule. Helen has the capacity to sustain the overt domestic violence she is living, manifested in Arthur´s abandonment of the home when he travels to London several times, through his repetitive acts of promiscuity and infidelity with Lady Lowborough, or by means of the psychological abuse after acts of emotional manipulation. However, the situation varies when the victim of that violence is a child: when the baby is only fifteen months old, his father said: "How the devil can I waste my thoughts and feelings on a little worthless idiot like that? (…) only I can´t love it – what is there to love?" (Brontë 190). The breaking point and final stage for Helen is when young Arthur asks her mother: "Mamma, why are you wicked?" (Brontë 283) and when she is witness of the love conversation between her husband and Lady Lowborough

in which the mistress asks him: “But tell me, don´t you love her still – a little?” (Brontë 238) and he affirms to her: “Not one bit, by all that´s sacred” (Brontë 238). Witness of how her child has also been influenced, and along with the adulterous affair, Helen is determined to solicit her husband for a divorce because from her perspective: “with the mutual understanding that there is no love, friendship, or sympathy between them” (Brontë 252) and because she has realized that, reformation, in the extreme case of her husband, and as it was predicted in the preface, is not feasible. Therefore, her definite firmness of not tolerating ill-treatment any longer leads her to request her husband for a legal separation in two occasions “will you let me take our child and what remains of my fortune, and go?”, “Will you let me have the child then, without the money?” (Brontë 241). This way, Anne Brontë is teaching maltreated women a life lesson: women cannot remain humiliated, oppressed, subdued silently, or submissively as Milicent Hargrave for example did. A battered wife, mother or woman must have the right to apply for a legitimate separation from their abusers.

The reaction of Arthur is another example of the didactic feminism in the work of Anne Brontë because, as a woman reader would expect from the Victorian patriarchal society, Helen´s proposal of separation is rejected because the husband´s private domain might be affected and strongly harmed “Do you think I´m going to be made the talk of the country, for your fastidious caprices?” (Brontë 241). Arthur is demonstrating that if an entire Victorian society is full of unfaithful and adulterous men with subservient wives, he would not accept that his private situation would be different, and that is why he even blames her because of her: “unnatural, unwomanly conduct” (Brontë 253). Pierre Bourdieu stated in *Masculine Domination* that a society based on a patriarchal construction has, as an active agent, the figure of the man who needs to reinforce his masculinity by acts of repression, abuse and domination. However, at this point, Anne Brontë decides to empower her protagonist with a much more radical, rebellious and resolute action: to run away from her obnoxious husband. Helen is proceeding against the law when abandoning her husband, and her case is even worse because she is taking their son with her. It could be considered that the youngest of the Brontës is asking women to act against the law but what in fact is happening is that our Brontë writer is calling attention to think about the need of a change in laws that should give support and protection to those women who were victims of the domestic violence. Unlike what Eagleton proclaimed as “nor with far horizons” (Eagleton

137), Anne Brontë moves a little bit further. Not only is she demanding a legal reformation but also emphasizing the discriminatory situation women are living, when she shows the example of Lord Lowborough who, after his wife´s recurrent illicit affairs, sues for divorce and demands the custody of their children, obtaining both questions immediately.

With the help of her brother Frederick, with her faithful maid Rachel, and with her son Arthur, Helen is about to adopt a new identity, to start a new clandestine life but with: "the haunting dread of discovery" (Brontë 306) but decisive to save herself and her son from corruption, vice and depravity: "better far that he should live in poverty and obscurity with a fugitive mother, than in luxury and affluence with such a father" (Brontë 274). The second part of the novel finishes with Helen Huntingdon converted in Helen Graham, wearing black, because her new identity means that she will be presented as a widow.

Once that Helen has exposed every detail in her life experience before arriving to Wildfell Hall, the narration is returned again to Gilbert and his letters to his friend Halford. This third and last part in the novel, which corresponds from chapters forty-five to fifty-three, returns us back again to the present time and context of Helen, Gilbert and their community. Knowing that Helen is still married to Arthur, that the members of the community she is living in, recurrently rumour about her, that Gilbert had fallen in love with her and that she is in the legal situation of being a sort of criminal, she is forced to escape again but the unhealthy conditions of her husband makes her resolve to come back to the marital home to nurse him in his last moments of life. If we have been considering that Anne Brontë´s second novel is a feminist didactic work which advocated for an improvement in the legal situations for women, we can provide textual evidence also in this last part of the novel when Arthur asks to see his son before dying, but Helen enforces her terms: "Wherever he is, you will not see him till you have promised to leave him entirely under my care and protection, and to let me take him away whenever and wherever I please, if I should hereafter judge it necessary to remove him again" (Brontë 334) and aware of the legality as regards the custody of children, she adds: "But I cannot trust your oaths and promises: I must have a written agreement, and you must sign it in presence of a witness" (Brontë 334). Although she had run away from her husband becoming a fugitive, Helen always knew how to do things well. Anne Brontë told readers in the preface that the story she was about to tell also implied the most radical case "the case is an extreme one" (Brontë 4). She was referring to Arthur

Huntingdon, the most extreme instance in which reformation, guiding or teaching would not function well. When he was on the verge of dying, we perceive a glimpse that Helen´s instruction may have worked satisfactorily and that Arthur revealed some contrition: "Oh, Helen, if I had listened to you, it never would have come to this! And if I had heard you long ago – oh, God! how different it would have been!" (Brontë 348). However, this declaration was not honest as it is shown in the last utterance he whispers: "I wish to God I could take you with me now!" (Brontë 350) that proves that his emotional manipulation accompanies him until his last breath of life.

Once proven to her society, that the most radical example in which her pedagogical and instructional philosophy has not been possible, Anne Brontë decides to close her novel providing an account of those instances in which her lessons and recommendations, her didactic feminism, prospered. Reformation, then, has been possible in Ralph Hattersley who formerly represented the same superior role of domination and abuser as Arthur but that eventually becomes a perfect model of good and respectful behaviour towards his wife, Millicent Hargrave, due to the declarations that Helen offered to him concerning his conduct towards his wife: "You mistake her quiet submission for affection" (Brontë 295) or when he referred about Millicent physical deterioration, Helen explained to him: "it´s silent fretting and constant anxiety on your account, mingled, I suspect, with something of bodily fear on her own" (Brontë 296). Anne´s teachings, as we previously mentioned, also succeeded with Esther Hargrave, after she confronted several times the conservative obligations from her strict mother and refusing to accept a marriage of convenience. Esther´s strength, self-confidence and her refusal to yield to conventionalisms, ended up in a fulfilled life for her after joining Helen´s brother, Frederick, as a result of her own choice, observation and eventual personal decision; Anne Brontë´s didactic feminism overtly triumphs with her.

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall has followed a didactic and enlightening philosophy to show Victorian patriarchal rulers, and women who are constrained, that another society, and a successful one, is thinkable, if women are allowed to have their voices and opinions heard as it has been evidenced with the marital unions between Frederick joined to Esther Hargrave, Richard Wilson with Mary Millward and Halford with Rose Markham, every one of them grounded on their free decisions. Remembering Anne Brontë´s preface in which she stated that her intention was to amuse but also to help her society, it is possible to conclude that the

reformation of some corrupted and vicious husbands was effective with Ralph Hattersley, as it was previously exposed, and with Lord Lowborough, who got married a second time with an intelligent and sensible woman. Finally, the society that Anne Brontë has crafted as an invitation to reform the traditionalism of the Victorian society throws an ultimate reflection upon those women such as Eliza Millward or Lady Lowborough, who not having embodied honest and respectful principles end their experiences epitomizing the archetype of the Victorian spinster, a situation that implied that they had lost any possible legitimate status because the Victorian philosophy allowed an entity to women as long as they were married: "since as single women they were not defined by their relations to men" (Gordon 128).

5. Anne Brontë in popular culture.

5.1 Reception of her novelistic production.

Under this section, we are about to reveal that Anne Brontë´s works were misinterpreted since the moment that they saw the light, and above all, undermined because of the persistent contrast with those of her eldest sisters, the author suffered the worst of opinions that have spread until very recently in time. The aim in this subdivision is to justify the reasons behind the neglection of Anne Brontë as a genius writer, or her consideration as the most boring or dull one among her siblings; had she not been a Brontë family member, it is likely that her literary production had received superior commentaries and consequently her social and feminist didacticism would have been understood and appreciated. However, this does not mean that Charlotte´s ambitions and struggles to find a publisher for her and her sisters are not acclaimed.

As regards the popular reception of Anne´s two novels, we have established three distinctive stages that range from the immediate critical reactions in the 1840s and 50s, to continue with the period in which Anne´s sisters, Charlotte and Emily, started to flourish as canonical literary figures, leaving Anne on the shadow, to finally arrive to the last period which started at around the 1970s and 80s, predominantly noticeable by a remarkable movement that focused on a recovery and acknowledgment of the worth, implications and new thought-provoking interpretations of Anne´s literary creations.

Anne Brontë had her first novel, *Agnes Grey*, published in December 1847 but due to publisher´s matters, her sister Charlotte´s *Jane Eyre* had been printed two months earlier.

The circumstance of the two novels publication was about to be one of the fundamental motives for the stigmatization and dullness concurrent to *Agnes Grey*. Besides, it was the plot; although both books portray a governess, the stories are deeply different: where we encounter a romantic heroine, Jane, and a Byronic dark hero, Mr Rochester, in the instance of *Agnes Grey*, the major protagonist is a young, timid and modest woman who is learning to earn her living by means of tutoring children, and in that process she has to confront with the realities of a Victorian society which had established a substantial distinction between the education specified to boys and to girls. Anne initiated her literary vocation with a strong-minded objective: to revise the erroneous aspects of the society of her time in order to offer an instruction and another direction. Her aim and intention meant that she had to exhibit men´s brutality towards animals or young girls, how the Victorian education encouraged that young boys could behave as adults and how the institution of marriage and the patriarchal society were suggesting women to be senseless and frivolous. Although both novels delineate a governess who falls in love, Charlotte decided to present something significantly unrealistic for the society, that a well-positioned gentleman as Mr Rochester could marry a governess, while Agnes´ course of becoming in love is defined as a more thoughtful process between two people who belong to an analogous rank in society. The melodramatic contexts that the governess Jane had to experience to achieve the love of Mr Rochester was indisputably more appealing for a Victorian society who did not find any interest in that a writer such as Anne may lecture them on educational or matrimony matters. In consequence, despite Anne´s concern to improve some imperative questions in the society she was living, her first novel was criticized according to two lines.

On the one hand, as it was considered not as fascinating or less powerful than *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*, public judgement and cultural criticism originated hence her secondary position and endless comparison to her sisters: the *Douglas Jerrod´s Weekly Newspaper* wrote: "*Agnes Grey* is a tale well worth the writing and the reading. The heroine is a sort of younger sister to Jane Eyre, but inferior to her in every way" (Holland annebronte.org) or: "The story, though lacking the power and originality of *Wuthering Heights*, is infinitely more agreeable. It leaves no painful impression on the mind – some may think it leaves no impression at all" (Holland anne.bronte.org). It is understood that this latter review essentially focused on the heroine´s experiences when working, and when

finding the man, she eventually married with.

On the other hand, *Agnes Grey*, received some reviews in which the novel was categorized as unpleasant, improbable, peculiar and coarse. If what was inspected, instead of the growth and didactic objectives of the narrator, is the depiction the author offers about a woman such as Rosalie Murray, the impact on society was going to be immediate and intransigent because although she embodies some of the attributes expected in Victorian ladies, her coolness towards men, her undocile temperament and mostly, her yearnings to enjoy life as men could, was read as something against feminine canons. Although Anne Brontë´s prime purpose was to illustrate the accuracy about women the sort of Rosalie in order to guide her and them on a different behaviour and demeanour, the Victorian society took it as a threat to the docility that the Victorian dogma inflicted on women.

As for *Agnes Grey*, Nick Holland reminds us on his blog site devoted to Anne Brontë, that the Irish nineteenth-century writer George Moore supported the novel with these words:

> "*Agnes Grey* is the most perfect prose narrative in English literature … a narrative simple and beautiful as a muslin dress … We know that we are reading a masterpiece. Nothing, short of genius could have set them before us so plainly and yet with restraint … If Anne Brontë had lived ten years longer, she would have taken a place beside Jane Austen, perhaps even a higher place" (Holland annebronte.org).

The context with Anne´s second novel was considerably different from that of *Agnes Grey*, but again, the author´s moral guidance and feminist instructional purpose, that this investigation is defending, were not acknowledged either. If the first novel had been criticized for the simplicity of her heroine and the improbable exemplification of a woman character such as Rosalie, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* was attacked for its subject matter, concluding that it was disgusting because it was excessively exaggerated, that the characters, chiefly referring to Arthur, were disagreeable, or that the author had: "a morbid love for the coarse" (Alexander and Smith 137) as the American journal *Literary World* had pointed out. Plus, *The Sharpe´s London Magazine* published a report by a reader who thought: "the book was 'so revolting' that it ought not be reviewed" (Alexander and Smith 137).

Despite the adverse condemnations as regards the novel´s theme, *The Tenant* was an immediate popular success selling all the printed copies of its first edition in barely six weeks. Although the topic was a sensitive matter, every one of the members of the nineteenth-century society knew that those circumstances were actually happening, but they could not

be admitted or overtly addressed; the novel was uncomfortably realistic and revolutionary for the epoch, yet, the population consumed the narrative so fervently that the critics had to provide negative commentaries such as the one previously outlined. Aware then of the misinterpretation about the contents of her second novel, Anne decided to incorporate a preface to the second edition in which she clarified what readers were about to find and her didactic intentions for doing so. Despite her explanations, a Victorian society was not going to tolerate such a perfect depiction of men´s physical or psychological abuses towards women or such a lesson to battered wives to demand for a divorce, and if not conceded, to contravene the law by abandoning their husbands and becoming fugitives. Anne Brontë´s Victorian society could not contemplate neither type of performances, whether by corrupted men or by autonomous women, and that is why *The Sharpe´s London Magazine* took advantage of the reader´s testimony formerly mentioned to also warn women readers not to read it.

The second stage related to the critical reception of Anne Brontë´s works occurred in 1850, once the author had passed away and her eldest sister, Charlotte published the Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell for the occasion of a new combined edition of *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey.* This document is considered to be the preliminary step, responsible of the lower position of Anne along with her consideration as a: "Brontë without a genius" (Lane 103) that Margaret Lane signalled on her biographical retelling of the Brontë family. The principal motivation for that biographical memoir was that Charlotte needed to reveal that the identities of the mysterious Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell were of three distinctive women with three different temperaments and three differentiated writing styles. Charlotte Brontë condemned Anne´s second novel claiming that the choice of the topic had been a mistake:

> "The choice of subject was an entire mistake … She had in the course of her life, been called on to contemplate, near at hand and for a long time, the terrible effects of talents misused and faculties abused; hers was naturally a sensitive, reserved and dejected nature; what she saw sank very deeply into her mind; it did her harm. She brooded over it till she believed it to be a duty to reproduce every detail as a warning to others" (Smith 176).

adding in the Notice declaration that Anne was: "blameless, morbid, pure and well-intentioned but incapable of the heroic genius that Emily brought to bear on similarly dark subject matter" (Alexander and Smith 35). In this fragment, Charlotte was making a reference to the themes that Anne had included in *The Tenant* and that she denounced so openly because

she was convinced that the depiction of the dishonourable performances of Arthur Huntingdon was a fictionalization of their brother Branwell and motivated that she asked her publisher´s reader, W. S. Williams, as we remarked on the first paragraph of this investigation, not to print the novel again; Charlotte´s petition was accepted and that meant that *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* was out of sold and not reprinted again until Charlotte died. The popular impact for the nineteenth-century society was that this novel was disregarded and eventually stigmatised for the upcoming years.

Furthermore, the Biographical Notice did not only evaluate Anne´s work and specified each sister´s writing mode but it also elucidated their personalities. Once again, Anne Brontë was not defended in the line that we have been demonstrating all along this paper; in spite of a consistency of solid thoughts to contribute to an improvement of her society, and her straightforward courage to condemn some evil performances, Charlotte established the following:

> "Anne´s character was milder and more subdued, she wanted the power, the fire, the originality of her sister, but was well-endowed with quiet virtues of her own. Long-suffering, self-denying, reflective and intelligent, a constitutional reserve and taciturnity placed and kept her in the shade, and covered her mind, and especially her feelings, with a fort of nun-like veil, which was rarely lifted" (Gordon 9).

Although Charlotte asserted that she intended to erase, from the public opinion and the critics, the vision they had about Anne as a morbid writer with no scrupulous to delineate brutal circumstances, what she actually achieved was to spread an image of a writer who had unsuccessfully attempted to imitate her sister´s Emily writing style. As for Anne´s spirit, Charlotte insisted her sister´s mood was soft and mild, and nothing similar to coarseness, instead of recognizing her determination and self-confidence to depict the social realism and Anne´s perpetual desire to talk about real events and environments.

Another episode that ratified the undermined and disregarded position of Anne Brontë was the publication in 1857 of Charlotte´s first biography *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, by the nineteenth-century writer Elizabeth Gaskell. This biography has been considered until the twenty-first century as the fundamental source that every Brontë literary critic or scholar has to take into account. If Gaskell intended to portray Charlotte as a dramatized victim of the tragedies that the Brontë family had to face because, along with her father, the reverend Patrick Brontë, they were the only members who overpassed the life of a numerous family,

she, Gaskell, believed every line Charlotte had stated about her family members and in the case of Anne, scarcely any observations are given, far from her working experiences as a governess or what Charlotte herself had written about her youngest sister; Adelle Hay clarifies the circumstance with the following words: "If you are incapable of speaking for yourself, then others will do it for you. And it will probably be a very long time before they get it right" (Hay 229).

Given that Charlotte took the decision of eliminating Anne´s diary papers and the fragments of her Gondal juvenilia, leaving no primary sources as regards Anne Brontë, that Gaskell took as a fact what Charlotte retold and wrote about Anne, and that ultimately, Gaskell´s work became the most influential document to study about the Brontë family, the low consideration and popularity of Anne Brontë and her works, originated by Charlotte´s Biographical Notice was now reinforced by Gaskell´s *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*:

> "The impact that *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* had on contemporary readers and how it affected the way in which Charlotte Brontë and also her sisters were read subsequently. What they read in *The Life* was a story, a tragedy, as moving, as disturbing as any of the novels. It became another text" (Shattock 19).

After the publication of Gaskell´s biographical work, there were some years in which barely any study, review or commentary about the Brontë siblings was released. Christine Alexander and Margaret Smith claimed that there was: "one astute critic pointed out that the decline in the popularity of the Brontë novels was probably a necessary precursor to a development of serious critical interest in them" (44). After this gap, corresponding to the first years of the twentieth century, a new currency of criticism emerged that originated the establishment of Charlotte and Emily as canonical literary figures, leaving, once again, Anne aside, although she was never seriously considered to have that merit. That new tendency focused on a biographical interpretation of the siblings works following a Historical criticism standpoint: literary critics and popular culture read the novels looking for the correspondences between the fictionalized characters, locations and themes, to the real-life sources. In the case that occupies this investigation, *Agnes Grey* was interpreted as an autobiographical novel of Anne´s experiences as a governess, and in the example of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,* as a dramatization of Branwell´s alcoholic, drug and adulterous conditions. The former sections of this investigation have outlined those authors who minimized Anne Brontë´s imaginary creativity by asserting that *Agnes Grey* was essentially

an autobiography, but it also illustrated those literary critics who belong to the latest movement that is succeeding in reading Anne´s narratives without the recurrent comparison to her sisters, or biased by previous works about the Brontës, conceding them an outstanding feminine, moralist and feminist perspective.

This recent drive corresponds to the last stage related to the popular and critical reception of Anne´s literary works, which began to arise at around the 1970s when biographical interpretations about the sister´s novels were set aside, to focus on other feasible readings and perspectives. As the dates are coincidental with the second-wave movements in feminism and the instauration of feminism in the Academy, feminist literary critics produced several studies which again discussed about Charlotte and Emily´s feminist approaches, and dismissed this sort of interpretation for Anne´s literature, aspects that we have already debated in the section of feminism and its history.

Finally, it is important to highlight that nowadays, 175 years after the publication of *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Anne Brontë is still overshadowed by the acclaimed popularity of Charlotte and Emily, and if we do a survey in the streets asking only about the titles of Anne´s novels, as the person who is writing this dissertation did, most of the answers were: "Oh, I did not even know that they were three sisters" or asking secondary students about the Brontë books, the answers are reduced to: "Yes, *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*". Surprisingly enough, even though *The Tenant* was an immediate publishing success, if an amateur reader remembers something about Anne, it is *Agnes Grey*; plus, rather unfairly, there is the worldwide expression "plain Jane" when we want to express or talk about a simple, unnoticed and modest woman. Knowing that *Agnes Grey* had been written before *Jane Eyre* and that Anne introduced the first governess with these qualities in the history of English Literature, the acclaimed popular expression should be a "plain Agnes".

5.2 Contemporary cultural adaptations.

When analysing the cultural and popular dissemination that Anne Brontë´s works have had, what is immediately noticed is that today, in the year 2021, the Victorian writer is still unfamiliar and shadowed by the different sort of adaptations, derivations, transformations and, as Patsy Stoneman called, spin-offs, of her two eldest sisters´ popularity. Lucasta Miller develops in Chapter six, 'Fiction and Feminism' of her seminal study, *The Brontë Myth,* a

thorough revision of the role "the Brontës have played in culture at large" (Miller ix). She explains that it was in the 1920s when the members of this popular family, or their fictional creations, started to be protagonists in theatrical plays, films and novels. Miller outlines several of those products, but in this section, what will be presented are those adaptations that have been at reach to be analysed.

"The 1940s and 50s was the period which saw the rise of the mass-market romantic fiction designed for female readers" (Miller 156) and when Hollywood transformed both *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* into "the greatest love stories ever told" (Miller 155). It is acknowledgeable that the investment in these two romanticized and gothic novels has been fruitful and productive enough for the cinematographic and television serial industries as new big screen productions are permanently aired; Linda Hutcheon clarifies that these two novels are so adaptable that there is no financial risk in releasing repetitive adaptations of them: "It is no surprise that economic motivation affects all stages of the adaptation process. The entertainment industry is just that: an industry" (Hutcheon 88). Unlike Charlotte and Emily, Anne´s literary works have not been adapted yet, and the question might be if either her novels are not adaptable products, or if they are, there is no certainty that they would be profitable and in consequence with no guarantee that they would end up being either a commercial success or a failure. *Agnes Grey* has been and is so significantly neglected that it does not have any audio visual or literary adaptation in the market. The circumstance with *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is a similar one as we just count with two TV miniseries adaptations thanks to British productions which: "specialized in adapting the culturally accredited eighteenth and nineteenth century novel" (Hutcheon 5). Therefore, the Brontës reached TV screen in the 1970s, and in 1968 the first serial about *The Tenant* was produced by the BBC, directed by Peter Sasdy, although nowadays it is not available to be seen. The second British TV miniseries about this novel, also produced by BBC, was aired in 1996, directed by Mike Barker and adapted by Janet Barron and David Nokes. This series adaptation of *The Tenant* received the BAFTA award in the same year of its release for the best make-up and hair design.

Adaptations may respond to several motivations such as economic or ideological. With *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,* and taking into account Linda Hutcheon´s explanations: "The ideological motivation for doing a film version can be different from the novel´s author´s

feminism aim" (Hutcheon 99), it has to be acknowledged that this only audio visual adaptation of one of Anne Brontë´s novels, still existing nowadays, does not have any of the feminist elements that have been revised in the novel: Rose Markham´s explanation about the domestic obligations women have, is significantly reduced to the maximum; if the narrative offered a great hope for upper-class women, as regards the free choice of a husband exemplified in the character of Esther Hargrave, the fact is that this fundamental character is eliminated from the serial; the feminist voice that the Victorian writer conceded to Helen does not have a place either, as her feminist discourse was erased and she is therefore illustrated as a devoted, victimized wife who barely opposes to her husband´s opinions, performances and conduct. Although the TV series is opened with the scene in which Helen is grabbing her son to leave the family and abandon her husband, allowing a learned audience on the novel that some sort of feminist discourse and actions may be expected, it is actually done with the objective of introducing the character of Gilbert Markham, who is given an extraordinary role, transforming the realist novel into a romanticized TV serial:

> "That Anne Brontë has not even yet escaped from her sisters´ long shadows is suggested by the way the recent TV adaptation of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, not only gave the novel a recognizably Yorkshire setting, but altered the ending so as to make the man the heroine eventually weds, Gilbert Markham, more like a recognizably Brontë hero" (Shattock 48).

Even though it is not the object in this dissertation, it is significant to mention this television serial in terms of its fidelity to the original source because of two relevant factors: firstly, that the time allowed to a TV series is longer than that conceded to a film and therefore the verbal text should not have been so reduced or sacrificed for the benefit of a dramatic action for the purpose of entertaining audiences; although the unfolding of time, which is a central characteristic of the novel, was successfully achieved, there are other elements that were not contemplated, such as the epistolary form in the novel or the introspected psychology inherent in the character of Helen. And secondly, and remembering Hutcheon´s observation: "What if we have never read the novels upon which they [adapted texts] are based?" (Hutcheon 122): it is significant to conclude that a learned audience would have had other expectations in the adapted version, because regarding the feminist perspective this dissertation is providing to Anne´s works, the outcome with this audio-visual adaptation results in a reticent or disappointing impression.

Bearing in mind that the youngest of the Brontë siblings has been unfavourably dismissed

from the big screen, we are in a position to conclude that the author´s depiction of social realism, along with the feminist interpretation this investigation is defending in her two novels, does not have a continuation for the time being. Not having then the possibility of evaluating whether her feminist didacticism had been accurately adapted or not, apart from the explanations provided for the 1996 TV miniseries, we can only examine how the woman or the writer is perceived nowadays in the documentaries, a radio programme, a comic strip, two comic sketches, a film, two illustrated novels, a reduced number of memes and blog spaces reviewed, taking into account that in every one of these examples, the author is recurrently contrasted to her eldest sisters conclusively proving two facts that are summarised by Joanne Shattock: firstly, that there is: "A constant refrain of commentary that Anne would not be remembered at all, if it were not for her more brilliant sisters" (Shattock 47), utterance that is also backed up by Marianne Thörmalen who claims that if it had not been for Charlotte´s ambition and drive, the three sisters would not have published any of their lines. Secondly, that Anne: "has suffered, rather than benefitted, from her sisters´ glamour" (Shattock 47) because: "Nineteenth-century commentators often treated Anne Brontë as an embarrassment, as a figure who had to be mentioned because she was there, but one to be dismissed as quickly as possible" (Shattock 47).

Shattock´s testimonies are summarised in Lucasta Miller´s declaration: "popular fictionalizations may have softened Anne´s perspective on the world to a caricatured extent" (Miller 158), something that is exemplified in the comic strips *Hark! A Vagrant* of the Canadian graphic humourist Kate Beaton, in the comedy sketch called *Psychobitches* and in the comical parodies of the Lip Service theatrical duo.

On the 15th January 2020, Kate Beaton, who publishes comic strips about historical figures or fictional characters, drew one about the three Brontë sisters called *Dude Watchin´with the Brontës*. In it, the three sisters appear together making comments about the physical appearance and beauty of some men they see around, but the leading roles are those of Charlotte and Emily; Anne is illustrated as the most uninterested one on this matter, giving negative opinions about the men they observe, asserting: "I´m just telling the truth". Anne´s opinion is disregarded with sentences such as: "Honestly, Anne, you absolutely have no taste" or "no wonder nobody buys your books". The facial expression the comic artist uses for Anne, reinforces a conformist and passive attitude as she remains voiceless.

A similar discourse is employed in the sketch comedy show directed by Jeremy Dyson called *Psychobitches* in which, again, either famous historical or fictional women characters are represented attending therapy sessions with a psychologist, in order to find a solution to their particular personal issues. The sketch created for the three Brontë sisters expose the passionate discussions of Charlotte and Emily, talking and shouting at the same time, about men or sexual relationships, but Anne appears in a more quiet mode with such a low tone of voice that whenever she says something, she is hardly heard and the therapist needs to ask: "What is it, Anne?". As far as the debate of their books is concerned, Anne gently says: "I wrote a book, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, about a lady artist" and her eldest sisters laugh at her saying that she had been beaten by her own pupils. Contrary to Beaton´s Anne´s passive response, this Anne defends herself by claiming: "My books sold out in six weeks", utterance that originates a fight among sisters because Anne´s *The Tenant* sold faster than, for example, *Jane Eyre.* Although initially portrayed as a quiet woman, easy to be ridiculed, she has a determined voice to assert the high popularity her second novel had.

Following with the same tone of a parody, The Lip Service Theatre company, formed by the comical duo Maggie Box and Sue Ryding, created the comical piece *Withering Looks* that portrays a day in the life of the Brontë sisters, but curiously enough, although understanding that they are just two members, the sisters playing the action are Charlotte and Emily. Fox and Ryding clarify that Anne is not with them because she "has just popped out for a cup of sugar". The Lip Service Company also recorded a short comic video during the lockdown period last year, called *The Brontë Sisters in Quarantine* in which Charlotte and Emily are in isolated panels, and "Anne´s here but she´s keeping two metres away", they clarify; when the doll of Anne appears in scene as a puppet, she is commanded "to get back". The comical duo created the video because the year 2020 was about to commemorate the 200th anniversary of Anne´s birth and, being suspended for the global pandemic, Charlotte and Emily (Fox and Ryding) declare: "Poor Anne"; the parody about Anne continues when the couple talk about their celebrated books, but do not remember about Anne´s, concluding: "Nobody knows, nobody cares". After several generations, Anne is still today a literary figure to be laughed at.

In order to finish showing an established perception that popular culture has about the invisibility of Anne as a writer and as a woman, and that has been a motive, as Lucasta Miller

pointed out to caricature her, it is important to mention about memes. It is unavoidable to remark the risible but whimsical impact of this combination of an image and a short caption text. The three memes found with a reference to Anne Brontë ratify three aspects that have been pointed out in this subdivision of the investigation: a more acclaimed literary reputation of Charlotte and Emily; Anne´s invisibility in the literary Brontë world; but also, her instruction to reformulate convenient marriages. The one employing the characters of the cartoon show *Family Guy*, have fronted an image of a fictional angry Anne, complaining about her repeated neglected position, addressing her sisters with the short sentence: "You guys always act like you´re better than me". The literary meme that makes use of the personages in *The Simpsons*, superposes the image of Anne´s face drawing and the cover of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and it presents a dialogue in which she introduces herself by providing her name and the title of her novels; yet, not being recognized, she has to clarify that she is sister of Charlotte and Emily, and finally, Bart Simpson declares: "Ah … ¡la otra Brontë! Siempre olvido que eran tres"[7]. The last meme illustrates Boromir, a character in the film *The Lord of the Rings* who summarizes Anne´s instruction for the women of her time to reconsider marrying just for advantageous financial reasons: "When I tell you not to marry without love, I do not advise you to marry for love alone. There are many, many other things to be considered"; this utterance at least corroborates that Anne´s pedagogical feminist reading can also be encountered.

For the purpose of this investigation and in order to analyse the vision that the contemporary academic world has about Anne Brontë, two documentaries and a radio programme, with Anne as the sole protagonist, were studied.

Patsy Stoneman, a Brontë expert, and Pam Hirsch, a historian of the movements of women, were the guests in the BBC Radio 4 programme *Woman´s Hour*, broadcast on the 28th November 2011 in which they dealt about *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, supporting three postulates that have been already exposed in this dissertation. One addresses the fact that the novel was fundamentally inspired by Caroline Norton´s divorce case, as it was explained in the subsection that examined the three feasible options behind the fictional character of Arthur Huntingdon. Secondly, Stoneman develops her theory about Charlotte´s dislike and not acceptance of her sister´s narration in *The Tenant,* and her eventual decision of spreading

[7] The caption in *The Simpsons* meme is in Spanish language.

to the public opinion that the novel and its topic had been a mistake. Stoneman states and justifies that *The Tenant* could be read as a critique of *Jane Eyre* as regards the reformation of a masculine corrupted character: whereas Mr Rochester has a final restoration of his conduct and can marry Jane, in *The Tenant* the vicious soul and corrupted deeds of Arthur Huntingdon are not changed and Helen can marry Mr Markham, a man that has always revealed his decent and not dishonoured disposition and spirit. Finally, Pam Hirsch emphasises the significance that Anne´s didactic feminism, advocating for a revision in the conditions of women and for an analogous type of education for boys and girls had, not only when the narrative was published but even nowadays.

On the 20th January, 2015, Ann Dinsdale, principal curator of the Brontë Society, released the documentary *Anne Brontë: The Final Journey* that not only classifies the heroine in *The Tenant* as a "radical feminist character" but defends the position that has been adopted in this paper that considers Charlotte Brontë as a pivotal influence for the eternal depreciation of the youngest of the sisters that originated the absence of recognition as a significant literary figure that has accompanied Anne Brontë all through two centuries. Dinsdale explains that the disappearance of *The Tenant* for ten years after its author´s death came provoked by the image given about her, and the strong condemnation of the book´s topic in the Biographical Notice declaration.

The intellectuals, Adelle Hay, Samantha Ellis and Marianne Thörmalen were together last summer, on the 5th July 2020, in a streaming documentary about Anne Brontë called *Anne Bronte: In her Own Words.* They are among the most recent academicians, who belonging to the movement that is attempting to re-evaluate Anne´s works, have been researching about the author and, all along the documentary, they exhibit sufficient reasons to relocate Anne and her artistic creations in a more deserved literary and popular position than she has been and is yet. People grow up with the knowledge that Anne was the least talented and original, the most boring, and as Adelle stated: "somehow preachy" as many interpretations about her life and work are associated to her strong moral and religious convictions. The three sisters showed to have diverse but singular writing and genres stylistics that motivated the high popular culture in Charlotte and Emily and the minimized acceptance of Anne: where the reader or spectator can find fantasy and romanticism in *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, in Anne´s two novels, they are about to encounter realistic

narratives, realistic performances and circumstances in order to transform the world into a better place, but these traits have proved to be not so attractive for the audiences as the passionate romantic affairs of the protagonists in Charlotte and Emily´s tales. The choice of the genre and the fact that for example, *Agnes Grey* was printed in the same volume as *Wuthering Heights* were detrimental for Anne as it was unavoidable to read both stories in a comparative manner, and popular culture has historically been more interested in a reading for pleasure than in a deep introspective reading.

A beautiful, sensitive and elegant depiction of the Brontë family is what spectators can meet in the 2016 film, *To Walk Invisible*, directed by Sally Wainwright. The plot gives visibility to every one of the Brontë siblings, their father, the faithful family cook maid Tabby, and Ellen Nussey, a woman who has to be mentioned because she kept all the letters that she interchanged, foremostly with Charlotte but also with Emily and Anne, becoming then a fundamental source to every Brontë scholar. The title of the film responds to the intention the sisters had in the process to become anonymous authors and this is the action developed in the audio-visual code, focusing on their talents as writers since they were small kids, composing their lines and worlds in minuscule booklets. Even though the film does not have any feminist element, at least it is possible to remark two aspects: firstly, the fantastic delineation of the character of Anne who says: "I feel more alive than ever when I write" and secondly, she is fictionalized as a writer who wished to portray the real world.

Another sort of motivation for an adaptation, apart from the economic and the ideological, is the educational one as Hutcheon points out when she states that: "Teachers and students provide one of the largest audiences for adaptations" (Hutcheon 117). This educational purpose is fulfilled in the two illustrated books that have been revised, as far as Anne Brontë is concerned. On the one hand, *The Fantastically Feminist (and Totally True) Story of the Astonishing Authors The Brontë Sisters*, written and illustrated by Anna Doherty may be praised as an excellent introduction to young readers to the three women writers. Although it is a brief biography of the entire family, that focuses on the important publishing moments of the three sisters, it acknowledges *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* as "one of the first feminist books" (Doherty 20) and with this statement, it is conceivable that a young audience may find interesting to read Anne Brontë´s novel to find out about the author´s type of feminism in the nineteenth century. With so many recent movements and campaigns in favour of

women, young readers may find it curious to investigate how feminist works flourished in the history of feminism and which were the essentials concerns included in, particularly, Anne´s work.

The design of comics in the shape of panels, without boring or extensive reading, along with the worldwide positive acceptance of comics among teenagers, basically, is certainly another attractive mode of engagement. This is the example of Isabel Greenberg´s *La Ciudad de Cristal,* a beautiful illustrated book in the form of a coloured comic that blends the fictional characters that the Brontë siblings created in their juvenilia work *Glasstown* with some real events occurred in their lives. It was previously mentioned that *Glasstown* was split up in two kingdoms: that of Angria with Charlotte and Branwell as collaborative writers and that of Gondal who belonged to the imaginary world of Emily and Anne. Greenberg remarks and accepts Anne´s realist mode of writing when her character informs about her and Emily´s decision to abandon the world of Angria explaining that they do not want to display an unrealistic world in which people may die, but eventually come to life again. Moreover, Anne is favourably depicted as someone who fights for the truth and the authentic, as can be read in her suggestion to her sister Charlotte to not to be lied.

Regarding some of the fictional characters of Glasstown imaginary world, the reader knows about the story of Mary Percy who has similar elements to the first encountering between Helen and Arthur: in the same mode Helen was advised by her aunt and uncle about Arthur´s bad standing, Mary is similarly given some reasons not to marry Zamorna by her friend Quashia Quamina because his bad reputation is widely known and exemplified with his love affair with his mistress, Mina Laury, a testimony that also brings us a resemblance to Arthur´s illicit affair with Lady Lowborough.

As regards feminism, the character of Lady Zenobia is notable because she was a vigorous militant for the feminist cause, an activist woman who fought for the rights of the Blue Stocking Women´s Society in Glasstown, giving lectures about women´s emancipation and finally obtaining the vote for them. When Charlotte asserts that she would never write such radical issues, we might understand it as an acceptation that social realism was not her style of writing, but also an acknowledgement and a tribute of Anne´s intentionality in hers.

It is not possible to close this revision of contemporary cultural adaptations without mentioning the extraordinary task that some websites and blogs are performing to give an

accurate visibility of the writer protagonist of this investigation, along with providing open, public and international spaces that encourage unbiased thoughtful interpretations of the works of Anne Brontë.

The second half of the 1990s saw the emergence of internet and social network sites that have contributed to obtain information in the fastest possible way and have connected people with the same interests and anxieties all around the planet. Thirsty of all sorts of data, nowadays, the worldwide population can be updated with the latest events and publications regarding the Brontës, with, for instance, the Brontë Society website, a charity association that was founded in 1893 and is globally celebrated as one of the oldest literary societies. As they mention in their information tab, they are guided by an interest in "promoting the Brontës literary legacy with contemporary society", something they magnificently do by means of annual conferences, the publication of brief reports in the magazine called *The Gazette,* and intellectual articles in the academic journal, *The Brontë Studies*. In order to internationally promote the world around the Brontë family, the Brontë Society Museum has been commemorating the 200th anniversary of the four siblings: Charlotte, Branwell, Emily and Anne since 2016, the year that was dedicated to Charlotte, followed by Branwell in 2017, Emily in 2018 and finally, 2020 was about to commemorate the bicentenary year of Anne Brontë with a conference that was about to be held in Scarborough but unfortunately suspended due to the global pandemic issue that forced the entire planet to a lockdown.

Parallel to the Brontë Society website, there are two blogsites that are executing the wonderful labour of gathering international news related to the Brontës, to post them, in the case of www.thebronteblog:inthenews, or Nick Holland´s blogsite www.annebronte.org in which the writer publishes a column every Sunday with precise references to important dates, quotes or events connected to Anne Brontë in order to give the nineteenth-century writer the foremost visibility.

6. Conclusions.

This Master´s dissertation, *Anne Brontë: A Feminist Voice in the Novel,* that is coming to its finale, has attempted to demonstrate the exceptional significance and strength that Anne Brontë´s novels have as regards women in a patriarchal nineteenth-century society. The Victorian writer adopted the mode of realism to reflect and transmit her committed

visualisation of what nineteenth-century women had to endure. The central drive in this paper has been to defend a feminist reading and interpretation of Anne Brontë´s literature establishing the connections between her writing style and her society. It has been revealed the writer´s mastery in the delineation of women characters who exemplified different roles in the society of her time, a society that essentially demanded the fulfilment and obedience of the attributes that the Victorian philosophy enforced on women by means of the idyllic feminine archetype encapsulated in the 'angel in the house' theory, and that consequently separated them from other possibilities of achievements in life through a self-opinion or obtaining some independence. Throughout her words, the novelist´s intentionality was to improve the world as she had been a witness of the discriminatory and unfair situations some women had to live and silence for the benefit of their husbands. Her contribution to ameliorate and change some remarkable questions has not been considered as either radical or rebellious but as pedagogical and didactic. She was brave enough to display a number of issues that were generally known by the population but could not be talked about; moreover, her contribution lies on the exposition she displays in her novelistic creations of some examples that could derive in a reconsideration of matters such as the maltreat of women, with their expected passive and voiceless responses, the brutal performances of men and their dishonourable behaviours, but also the unpleasant and vacuous personality of some women as well. Yet, as it has been disclosed, Anne´s delineation of those troubles was offered in an optimistic style, providing the heroine characters in both novels, with an instructional discourse to reformulate those wrong circumstances.

Concerned with the situation of and for women, this investigation has labelled Anne´s instruction as a didactic feminism bearing always in mind that the author was not an active feminist campaigner. The feminist approach of her works has been determined to be similar to that of Wollstonecraft´s feminist manifesto as it advocated for a similar education to boys and girls. Anne Brontë similarly exposes that dissimilar upbringing and education in which boys were taught intellectual subjects and how to behave as representatives of the dominant role in a household, whereas girls were trained to be delicate, beautiful or ornamental in order to attract and seduce wealthy husbands-to-be with the two objectives of attaining a social status and the public admiration of the members in their communities, but in many cases to be submissive to the dominant roles epitomized in men and their inherent patriarchal

supremacy. The feminist perspective that has been explained in this paper was also justified by the awareness of the writer´s ambitions in life clarified in her last letter to Ellen Nussey, in the introductory lines of *Agnes Grey* and in the preface to the second edition of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall.*

Anne´s feminist activism and engagement is that of giving visibility and prominence to women, not only to those who were obedient to the patriarchal standards, but foremost, portraying a typology of women who proved to be capable of being financially independent, who could decide on the person to marry with, who were not submissive to domestic violence, who did not need to be physically admired by men and who took their decisions. Anne´s feminism results in a feasible validation that women could develop their free wills and were capable of being individuals in themselves with their feminine and feminist voices heard, and not depicted or pointed as unfeminine or unnatural for not following the mainstream conduct; what Anne Brontë defended was an improved world where exemplary self-sufficient women might have a legitimate place.

Further aspects addressed in this paper were an analysis of the immediate reactions that Anne´s contemporary world had after the publication of her novels, which is the vision that nowadays popular culture has about the writer, why she is still underrated, not known or hardly read as much as her sisters, and why she has been traditionally neglected as a canonical literature figure or even dismissed from the big screen. According to Marianne Thörmalen´s opinion, any passionate admirer of Anne Brontë should be critical with the actions that Charlotte Brontë committed to depreciate her sister and her work, as her movements were, and are still highly influential to the way we read and interpret the youngest of the Brontës. Not only Charlotte´s acts have been historically perpetuated in detriment of Anne, but the fact of being the author of the most renowned gothic and romantic love story in the history of English literature, with such passionate characters as Jane Eyre and Mr Rochester have resulted in a tendency of comparing Anne´s heroines and villains to those of Charlotte.

All in all, this dissertation has intended to form part of the recent late twentieth and twenty-first century effort to read Anne Brontë in a new light, with a new perspective, valuing the social realism and didactic feminism reflected in her literature. Inspired by Anne Brontë´s courage and optimism we expect that this investigation could be understood as a contribution with the Brontë Society so that Anne Brontë might gain the respect and attention that her

talent deserves, but also to influence upcoming film directors or script writers to produce a cinematographic version of *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall;* to call attention to young readers to be interested in the origins of feminism, and therefore contemplate Anne Brontë as a forward thinker of this philosophy and representative of the first-wave feminism.

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