



**Universitat de les  
Illes Balears**

Facultat de Filosofia i Lletres

**Memòria del Treball de Fi de Grau**

**Criticism of Victorian women stereotypes,  
professionalization, and marriage in Anne Brontë's  
*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall.***

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Any acadèmic 2019-20

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Anne Brontë, The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, Victorian women stereotyping, the professionalization of female artist, married women's position.



## Abstract

Anne Brontë published *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* in 1848. The novel follows heroine Helen Graham as she settles in Wildfell Hall after running away alongside her son from her abusive husband, Arthur Huntingdon. Upon her arrival, Helen is faced with malicious rumors that are being spread by her new neighbors related to her relationship with her landlord, her son's education, and especially, her work as a painter. This work aims to analyze Brontë's use of the female characters to criticize the situation of women in Victorian England focusing on the issues of female stereotyping, the position of women after marriage, and the professionalization of the female artist. The female characters of the novel have been analyzed following stereotypes associated with Victorian women such as The Angel in the House, the New Woman, or The Fallen Woman, as well as Auerbach's concept of Women and the Demon. Furthermore, the novel's female characters have also been analyzed to show the unfair situation of married women and the difficulties that female artists faced during their rise to professionalization. Brontë's novel works to highlight some of the problems that women faced in Victorian England, exposing them, and demanding change.

**Keywords:** Anne Brontë, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Victorian women stereotyping, the professionalization of female artist, married women's position.

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## 1. Introduction

Anne Brontë, born in 1820, was an English novelist part of the Brontë literary family alongside her sisters Charlotte and Emily, both known for their works *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Wuthering Heights* (1847), respectively. At the age of 19, Anne Brontë became a governess at Blake Hall which inspired her first novel *Agnes Grey* (1847). In 1848, Brontë published her second novel *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. After the tragic loss of her brother Branwell and her sister Emily the previous year, Anne died aged 29 in 1849.

In *The Tenant of Windfell Hall*, Helen Graham alongside her son and maid Rachel settles in Wildfell Hall where she meets Gilbert Markham who begins to develop a romantic interest in her. A malicious rumor begins to spread around town about Helen's relationship with her landlord, Frederick Lawrence. Furthermore, she is heavily criticized for the way she lives selling her artworks to support herself and her son. Markham does not believe the rumors until he sees her in a romantic embrace with Frederick. As a result, he decides to distance himself from Helen but eventually, the pair come into a confrontation that ends with her giving him her diary. Through it, we learn about her life before and after marrying rake Arthur Huntingdon. Although Helen believes she will be able to reform his character, this is proven impossible when he continues to enjoy a vicious life away from home or by having his acquaintances at Grassdale Manor. Heavily concerned about the effect of Arthur's character on their child's education and having discovered his affair with Lady Lowborough, Helen decides to run away from their home along with their son. Frederick Lawrence, who is Helen's brother, helps her escape by preparing Wildfell Hall for her arrival. After finding out the truth, Gilbert confesses his love for Helen, but she rejects him and professes her desire of not continuing to see each other. Gilbert hears rumors that Helen has returned to her husband which are later confirmed by Frederick. Arthur has fallen ill, and she has returned to take care of him until his death. Once again, Gilbert is swaged by rumors of her imminent marriage to Walter Hargrave, one of Arthur's friends, but is relieved to find out that the rumors are not true. After widowing, Helen inherits the Grove after her uncle's death which leaves Gilbert feeling of inferior social status. Eventually, he reunites with mother and son and is introduced to Helen's aunt, Mrs. Maxwell. Ultimately, the couple decides to get married in the future as soon as Gilbert receives the approval of Mrs. Maxwell.

*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is an epistolary novel for the whole text is a letter that Gilbert Markham is writing to his brother in law, Jack Halford. However, inside this first-person epistolary narration, we find a whole section that is a word-per-word transcription of

Helen's diary. Through this transcription, we get to learn about her first husband and marriage as well as how she ends up in Wildfell Hall. This unique structure has been one of the most discussed aspects of the novel with some criticizing the technique while others defended its use. In terms of the novel's genre, according to Davison, the novel could be considered a Gothic because this genre "is often deployed to shed light on the dark side of socio-political realities and institutions whose toll is usually emotional or psychological" (Davison 2012, 128). In fact, we could consider *The Tenant* to be a Female Gothic, "a sub-category of the Gothic that takes as its focus female protagonists wrestling with repressed familial histories and problematic social and institutional pressures relating to female sexuality and gender roles" (Davison 2012, 124).

One of the main topics present in the novel is alcoholism portrayed through the character of Arthur Huntingdon. Although this has never been confirmed, Anne could have inspired this character on her own experiences with her brother Branwell who had problems with alcohol and drugs. Furthermore, he had an affair with Mrs. Robinson when the Brontë siblings worked together as tutors at Thorp Green for the family. Like him, Arthur Huntingdon had a problem with alcohol and had an affair with a married woman, the only difference is that he was also married. Sutherland points out that "it was Anne who had to look after Branwell in his wild bouts of drunkenness and dreadful withdrawals" (Sutherland 2013, 123) which could have inspired her story. Coincidentally, after years of detriment due to illness and alcoholism, Branwell died in 1848, the same year *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* was published.

Charlotte Brontë stopped the re-publication of the novel after her younger sister's death because of the topics featured in Anne's novel. Perhaps because of Charlotte's intrusion, Anne's work was overlooked until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century when critics brought back up her works and she finally began to gain recognition. The delicate topics featured in the novel raised criticism that Anne herself addressed in the Preface to the second edition:

The case is an extreme one, as I trusted none would fail to perceive; but I know that such characters 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 1848, xii)

Furthermore, Anne acknowledges her position as a writer who can both amuse the reader and expose social issues. It is because of this that she feels that she needed to use her voice to bring forward society's problems present in *The Tenant*:

Such humble talents as God has given me I will endeavour to put to their greatest use; if I am able to amuse I will try to benefit too; and when I feel it my duty to speak an unpalatable truth, with the help of God, I will speak it, though it be to the prejudice of my name and to the detriment of my reader's immediate pleasure as well as my own. (Brontë 1848, xiii)

As Senf points out, "Anne Brontë proves that women can be heard: she writes a novel, a form designed to be read and talked about" (Senf 1990, 455). It is because of this that out of all the Brontë sisters, Sally McDonald from The Brontë Society considers that "she is now viewed as the most radical of the sisters, writing about tough subjects such as women's need to maintain independence, and how alcoholism can tear a family apart." (*BBC News* 2013)

To understand Brontë's criticism, we need to have a look at the situation of the women in Victorian England. To start with, as John Stuart Mill pointed out in *The Subjection of Women* (1869), "it is important to note that Victorian society conflated the concepts of sex (male/female) and gender (masculinity/femininity), considering gender [...] to be a natural and inborn quality as opposed to a culturally constructed concept" (Davison 2012, 125). Therefore, certain character qualities were expected from men and women. While men had the role of the breadwinners and heads of the family, women were expected to marry and have children. Not conforming to the established roles was considered as going against nature.

Although in Victorian England, there was an increase of women artists, there were few and their opportunities were limited which created big differences between male and female artists. After the rise of the number of female painters, there was also a rise in the debate on their situation. As Losano explains:

The woman painter [...] posed a considerable ideological problem: on the one hand, women were considered "naturally" artistic—sensitive and devoted to beauty—yet were simultaneously thought to be incapable of true artistic creativity or judgment. In a similar paradox, women were seen as necessary to art as models and muses, yet at the same time discouraged from participating in the artistic arena for modesty's sake. (Losano 2008, 2)

Legally, the differences between women and men were also huge. Women lacked legal power which unable them from inheriting or taking legal action without a male representative. The married woman "was divested of autonomous legal status to sue, to contract, to bequeath property without consent, to enjoy autonomous control of property brought into a marriage, or subsequently earned or to enjoy custody of children, or to determine their education" (Ward 2007, 153). It was because of this that many women, such

as Caroline Norton, began to protest the system. In 1827, she married George Norton who she abandoned due to his constant abuse in 1836. Caroline planned to support herself through the money she won as an author, but her husband claimed the earnings as his which resulted in her not receiving any money for her work. George took away their children and accused her of an affair with her close friend Lord Melbourne, then Whig Prime Minister. The trial ended up throwing out George's claims, but it further ruined Caroline's reputation. Since the children were the legal property of the father, George blocked her from seeing them and from getting a divorce. While it was relatively easy for husbands to get a divorce on the grounds of adultery, for women it was not as easy as they were required evidence of their husband's adultery through "incest, bigamy, desertion, or prolonged "cruelty" of a physical kind" (Ward 2007, 157).

According to Ward, Caroline Norton "disdained the "ridiculous doctrine of equality" and readily embraced the "natural position of woman" as one of "inferiority to men"" (Ward 2007, 154). Although not a feminist, Norton published different essays where she fought for the promotion of new laws such as *Separation of Mother and Child by the Laws of Custody of Infants Considered* (1837), *English Women* (1854), or *A Letter to the Queen on Lord Chancellor Cranworth's Marriage and Divorce Bill* (1855). Thanks to her activism, new laws were passed. The Custody of Infants Act, in 1839, allowed married women a right to their children for the first time. The Matrimonial Causes Act, passed in 1857, introduced a model of marriage based on a contract and improved the divorce law by making it more affordable. Lastly, The Married Women's Property Act, from 1870, gave for the first-time married women an independent identity from that of their husbands and enable them to inherit property and take court action under their name. Although it has never been confirmed, many critics believe that Brontë could have inspired *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* on Caroline Norton's story. What it is clear is that "the Victorian era witnessed unprecedented socio-political changes that radically affected and destabilized the traditional gender roles and relations undergirding marriage and motherhood." (Davison 2012, 125).

Anne Brontë uses the female characters in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* to criticize the situation of women in Victorian England, focusing especially on the issues related to stereotyping, marriage, and professionalization. The main aim of this work is to analyze the way female characters were portrayed using stereotypes as well as to examine the position of women in terms of marriage and professionalization in order to prove Brontë's criticism of the situation of women in Victorian England. The methodology used for this work was the reading and analysis of the novel *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* by Anne Brontë. The female



characters have been analyzed according to stereotypes associated with Victorian women such as the Angel in the House, the New Woman, The Fallen Woman. Furthermore, Auerbach's concept of Women and the Demon which showed society's dual classification of females has been considered. Alongside stereotyping, the novel's female characters have also been analyzed in terms of the issues regarding the position of married women and the professionalization of the female artist.

## 2. Analysis of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*.

### 2.1. The stereotyping of women in Victorian England.

In Victorian England, it was common to categorize women based on stereotypes. Some of these stereotypes were The New Woman, The Angel in the House, The Fallen Woman, or The Old Maid. Victorians “firmly believed that a woman’s place was at home caring for her family and looking after the household, while her husband was out working, earning money and protecting the family” (Kühl 2016, 173). This ideal was reflected in the poem *The Angel in the House* by Coventry Patmore, published in 1854. Inspired by his spouse, Patmore’s poem exposes the qualities that made a woman the perfect wife. The protagonist is described as a “modest, chaste and innocent” wife who “unconditionally loves and supports her husband, submits to him completely and is a caring mother to her children” (Kühl 2016, 173).

In contrast, we find the stereotype of The Fallen Woman. This label “encompassed not just street whores, but everything from unmarried women who were in relationships with men, unmarried mothers, unfaithful wives and mistresses to artists’ models and certain kinds of actresses” (Kühl 2016, 172). The strong belief of female correctness resulted in sex differences being wide:

While it was generally accepted that men had sex before they got married and that married men might frequent prostitutes every now and then, women were taught that there was no greater sin than to be with a man who was not their husband and if they were exposed their reputation was ruined. They were immediately put into the category of a fallen woman and to redeem themselves after that was nearly impossible. (Kühl 2016, 176)

With these two opposite concepts in mind, Auerbach created the concept of Women and The Demon which showed Victorians division of women into two categories: either Women or Demon. The first, the Women, were the ones that followed what society expected from a woman, a good and caring character submitted to her husband. The second, The Demon, were all those women that did not follow the gender norms previously mentioned. As Kühl points out, women “either complied with social expectations and became some sort of chaste, obedient domestic angel or they almost certainly fell within the category of a fallen woman” (Kühl 2016, 176). Both categorizations supported each other, “the domestic angels needed to be glorified in order for the transgressions of the fallen women to appear more shameful, so the differences between them would appear insurmountable” (Kühl 2017, 177). It was also during Victorian England that a new concept appeared, The New Woman. This label

“embodies everything vaguely connected to female emancipation and suffrage” (Kühl 2016, 171). The New Woman, highly promoted through the rise of the professionalization of women, attempted to find independence from men and fought for equality between sexes.

From the start of her marriage to Arthur Huntingdon, Helen Graham can be described as The Angel in the House. She can see faults in Arthur’s character even before their marriage but sees them as challenges given to her by God because she “accepts the ideology of woman as man's helpmate--particularly his spiritual guide and companion--because it offers her personal importance that amounts to an almost divine power” (Jacobs 1986, 210). As a result, we could consider Helen’s character following The Angel in the House stereotype that supported the “implicit ideal of woman's redemptive or salvatory potential” (Langland 1987, 382). Although at the start of the matrimony Arthur appears to be in good spirits, it does not last for long. Although Helen’s will to reform his character is strong, he completely refuses to change.

It is not until Helen learns about her husband’s affair with Lady Lowborough that the relationship between the matrimony gets worse to the point that Helen decides to run away from their home. The decision is fueled by her concerns about the effect of his father’s behavior on his son’s education. When Helen begins to fear that her child would take after his father, she decides to get him away from the bad influence. Against society’s educational prospects, “she is adamant that only the close guidance of a good mother can prevent children, particularly sons, from falling into vice” (Ward 2007, 160). The main reason why she leaves Grassdale Manor is that she wants little Arthur to be a good man instead of one given to pleasure. In the end, this is proven to be a positive move from her part since we learn that he has become a good and proper man as he grew up (Brontë 1848, 511). According to Langland, “in fighting her husband for her son, Helen is fighting the entire Victorian patriarchal system that produced him.” (Langland 1987, 385). Helen is presented as The Angel in the House but due to her marriage to Huntingdon, her abused character has developed, and we cannot consider her as part of this category anymore.

After some time away from Grassdale Manor, Helen returns when she discovers that Arthur has fallen ill. He does not repent of his behavior and sees her as a reminder of his sins who have come to torture him before he is sent to the afterlife. As Langland points out, when Helen returns at the end of Huntingdon’s life, she does so “only to seize ultimate control as the demon at his deathbed, reminding him by her presence of his guilt and imminent damnation” for which “she achieves an innocent revenge in returning to her husband out of a duty that becomes his punishment.” (Langland 1987, 385). Helen’s return is not due to

compassion or repentance for leaving him but a way of reversing the previous roles by being now the one in control.

Obviously, in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, we have more female characters than Helen Graham such as Lady Lowborough or Milicent and Esther Hargrave. We learn about these characters and their stories through Helen's view and narrative point. Annabella Wilmot marries Lord Lowborough not for love but for his title. During their respective marriages, Arthur Huntingdon and Lady Lowborough have an affair disguised as friendship. When Helen finds out about the true nature of the relationship between her husband and Annabella, she decides to keep the secret of the affair from Lord Lowborough. Inevitably, he ends up learning about his wife's betrayal and the marriage ends in divorce and him taking their kids away from their mother. Although we will expect her to be repentant now that she has lost her family, Annabella continues to live a life of pleasure. The last we learn about her comes from Gilbert: "she sunk, at length, in difficulty and debt, disgrace and misery; and died [...] in penury, neglect, and utter wretchedness" (Brontë 1848, 489). It is because of this that following Victorian's female categorizations, we can consider Lady Lowborough as a Fallen Woman.

Milicent and Esther Hargrave are two of Helen's best friends. Although sisters, the Hargraves have two very different characters and their storylines are also very different. On the one hand, we have Milicent, described by Helen as a kind, good, and submissive character. Although she dislikes him, she ends up marrying Ralph Hattersley due to her mother's pressure. He is a man of money and good social status who is looking for a quiet and submissive wife, The Angel in the House stereotype. Milicent fits perfectly in the type of wife he is looking for, so they end up getting married. On the other hand, we have Esther, described by Helen as a strong young girl that refuses to marry her mother's chosen suitors. Esther even threatens her mother that she prefers to run away and work for a living than marry someone she dislikes. This description of her character allows us to consider Esther as a New Woman.

During Gilbert's first-person narrative we also get to know other female characters. Some of these characters are Jane Wilson and Eliza and Mary Millward. Firstly, we are introduced to Eliza Millward who is very flirty and shallow. As soon as Gilbert's attention shifts from her to Helen, she grows jealous and helps to taint her reputation by spreading rumors about her. In the end, we learn from Gilbert that she has gotten married to a man and made his life a nightmare (Brontë 1848, 467). Secondly, we are introduced to Eliza's sister, Mary Millward who is described as less graceful than her sister. In Gilbert's words, "She was

trusted and valued by her father, loved and courted by all dogs, cats, children, and poor people, and slighted and neglected by everyone else” (Brontë 1848, 13). Gilbert’s opinion of her end up being wrong as we learn at the end of the book that Mary has gotten married to Richard Wilson after being secretly engaged for years (Brontë 1848, 466). Following Auerbach’s theory, Eliza would fit in the demon category while Mary will fit on the women. While Eliza who occupies her time flirting with men and spreading malicious rumors around town ends in an awful marriage, Mary who is quiet and helpful is rewarded by marrying a man she loves and living in a happy union. Lastly, we are introduced to Jane Wilson. She is described by Gilbert as a very elegant and beautiful girl but who is coldly ambitious. She wants to marry Frederick Lawrence for his social position while he is interested in her because he thinks her to be a good person. However, Frederick learns about her true character thanks to Gilbert and decides not to marry her. Jane Wilson ends up not getting married and living as a spinster (Brontë 1848, 467-468) for what she could be considered as an Old Maid following Victorian stereotypes.

## 2.2. The professionalization of the female artist.

One of the most important aspects featured in the novel is Helen’s profession as an artist who sells her work to support herself and her son. As Kanwit points out, “Helen does not need to work for a living, as her brother would gladly support her. But Helen—in supporting herself fully—subverts Victorian gender norms” (Kanwit 2013, 89). Brontë purposely made her heroine a professional painter because she wanted to highlight women’s need for independence and freedom. Kanwit believes that by becoming a painter, “Helen gains a certain degree of power and freedom of choice” (Kanwit 2013, 89).

When it comes to the place for art production, men painters were expected to have access to a studio with the supplies needed for their work. However, this was not the case for women. Unless they came from artistic families, women painters were expected to create their artwork in any of their house’s rooms destined for female use. Therefore, women painters were expected to not have a workplace but to have to do with rooms that were not properly destined for art production. In contrast, our protagonist, Helen, has a studio of her own. Even though she does not come from an artistic family, she has decided that her studios should be the most important room in Wildfell Hall. For Helen, her studio has “quite a professional, business-like appearance” (Brontë 1848, 417). According to Losano, the use of “both adjectives (“professional” and “business-like”) attest that this space is not a place of amateur

amusement or a room allotted for any activity other than painting and painting for profit” (Losano 2003, 29). Since she has only prepared the fireplace in that room, she has turned it into the place where she welcomes her guests. In the chapter with the title “The Studio”, Helen receives the visit to Wildfell Hall of Gilbert and his sister Rose. It was Victorian etiquette to receive visitors in a sitting room, but Helen receives them in her studio which further confirms her as an artist. During Gilbert and Rose’s visit, “Brontë represents Helen not in the feminine role of a hostess but the decidedly unfeminine role of preoccupied and grumpy genius, toiling away at a painting, with no time for society” (Losano 2003, 30 – 31).

A big issue for female artists at the time is that they did not have the same opportunities as male artists had. To start with, unless you came from an artistic family, your art education would be very basic. Many women at the time were taught to draw by making replicas of other artists' works which limited their production as well as their creativity. The inequality of education resulted in the female’s work being considered of inferior quality as well as value. To emphasize that Helen is a professional artist, Brontë notifies the reader that the protagonist has a unique painting style (Brontë 1848, 43). As result, the chapter called “The Studio” functions in the novel to get to know more about Helen as a professional painter because we learn that “she paints for money, has a studio of own and a recognizable style” which “evinces a commitment to art rather than to the self” (Losano 2003, 31). Furthermore, this chapter also highlights that to be able to sell their art. As little Arthur tells Gilbert, a man sells her paintings for her (Brontë 1848, 43) which shows that female artists, like Helen, did not directly sell their works but had a male doing so for them.

Another issue female painter faced was the sexualization of their work as well as themselves. In Victorian England, the artist was usually male while the inspiration of the artistic creation was usually a female muse. As a result, “Helen’s artistic production places her outside the traditional aesthetic scenario (male viewer/female object), and provides a sort of screen behind which Helen can hide” (Losano 2003, 23). Rebelling against the conception of the female muse, our protagonist becomes the artist instead of the source of inspiration. However, to rebel against this, she must experience it herself. Before marrying him, Arthur sexualizes her when he finds out she has painted his portrait. As Losano believes, Arthur’s praise of her work is motivated by his sexual interest in the artist rather than in the art itself:

Huntingdon’s appraisal of Helen’s artwork is misguided, motivated solely by aesthetic ignorance on the one hand and sexual interest and egotism on the other. Huntingdon sees in Helen’s artwork precisely what he wants to see—a young girl just coming to sexual awareness and waiting for his advances. (Losano 2008, 69)

Before marriage, Arthur enjoys her paintings because he feels that is a telling of her sexual interest in him. While at first, he sees her paintings as just a hobby, this changes when he discovers Helen's plans to leave and support herself through selling her works. He is not shamed by the fact that he could potentially lose his son but the fact that his wife will work as an artist to sustain herself. As Losano points out, "what he wishes to control is her "mercantile spirit" rather than [...] her intellect" (Losano 2003, 32). This shows that what truly displaces him is that she is going to sell her works not that she has produced them.

Having learned from her first marriage, as a professional artist she uses her artistic artifacts to distance herself from Gilbert's interested gaze. During the visit to Helen's studio, "The palette knife [...] distances Helen from one unwelcome lover, while the easel [...] claims the attention that Gilbert feels should be focused upon himself, and therefore forms a physical barrier against his admiring gaze" (Losano 2003, 26). Although in this chapter Brontë uses the painting artifacts to avoid Gilbert's sexualization, in the following he can witness her painting again but this time there is no stopping his admiring gaze. Gilbert finds himself mesmerized by her body rather than her art: "I stood and watched the progress of her pencil: it was a pleasure to behold it so dexterously guided by those fair and graceful fingers." (Brontë 1848, 50). Scenes like this one show the problematic many female artists faced, the sexualization of the female painter's body: "Helen (and the reader) learns that painting—because it always seems to require the presence of the female body in close proximity to the male viewer—is remarkably dangerous" (Losano 2008, 90).

After Arthur's death and receiving the inheritance from her uncle, Helen becomes a wealthy widow which allows her to recover her position of a lady and to stop painting for a living. When at the end of the novel Helen proposes to Gilbert, she gives him a rose as a symbol of herself. Gilbert is unable to understand her gift because he does not associate the rose with her body (Brontë 1848, 517). His inability shows that Arthur and Gilbert are completely different because the latter does not necessarily sexualize her persona. Overall, this scene functions to notify the reader that Helen has learned from her first marriage and "has chosen a new partner who doesn't interpret everything as emblematic of the female body" (Losano 2008, 95).

### 2.3. The situation of married women in Victorian England.

In Victorian England, women had limited economic independence because everything they owned was not truly theirs but their husbands. When Arthur discovers that Helen has already

sold some of her paintings and her jewelry to win money for her escape, he gets mad at the shame of her work but also because everything she has sold is legally his possession. Not only Helen's properties are his, but he also sees her as his possession which is shown throughout the novel. For instance, during one of his friends' visits, Arthur offers his wife to his friends but changes his mind as soon as he finds out about Walter Hargrave's interest in Helen. This is because he believes he has agency over her but if Helen chooses to elope with Hargrave then he loses that agency.

Although the novel touches on abusive marriages, Brontë did not openly write about physical abuse in the Huntingdon marriage. However, it can be assumed through several scenes. One being when he goes through her possessions, invading her personal space (Brontë 1848, 386-390). This invasion has often been considered, like in BBC's 1996 adaptation of the novel, a sexual assault (Losano 2003, 33). Whether Brontë used this scene to convey further meanings remains unknown but this interpretation is highly favored by many critics. Another possible conveyed domestic violence is related to Arthur's dogs. In several scenes, "Huntingdon's violence towards his dog points to a potential escalation from animal abuse to human cruelty" (Surrige 1994, 6). This assumption is more important if we consider the breed of the dog, a Spaniel. As Surrige points out, "Spaniels have traditionally been associated with the "feminine" qualities of gentleness, submission, subservience and with a willingness to be." (Surrige 1994, 6) Therefore, Spaniels show features that were often expected from women according to standards which could be Brontë's subtle way of letting the reader know about Arthur's spousal abuse.

Other than the Huntingdon's, we can also find another great example of an abusive marriage in Milicent and Ralph Hattersley. This couple helps to shine a light on the problem of many Victorian women, their economic dependence on a male. As Senf points out, "The desire for economic security rather than for love or respect thus clearly motivates many women's choice of husband, though Milicent Hattersley discovers that economic security is no protection from physical abuse" (Senf 1990, 453). Although she dislikes him, Milicent ends up marrying Hattersley due to her mother's pressure. Although both, Helen and Milicent, have their disastrous marriage in common, in the latter's case we know that she has been physically abused by her husband (Brontë 1848, 292-293). While Helen ends up leaving her husband, Milicent stays with hers because, in contrast to Arthur, Hattersley repents of his behavior towards his wife. At the end of Helen's diary, we learn that Hattersley has realized about his mistakes and has vowed to become a better husband and father.



Apart from these two marriages, in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, we also find other marriages. For example, Lady and Lord Lowborough, Mr. and Mrs. Maxwell, or Gilbert's parents. During her marriage to Lord Lowborough, Annabella has an affair with Arthur that is soon discovered by their partners. As a result, the Lowboroughs divorce and he takes their kids away from her, as children were legally their father's possession. We later learn through Gilbert's narrative that he has remarried to a good woman while Annabella has lived a life of vice.

Another example is Mr. and Mrs. Maxwell. Helen lives with them before getting married and they help her find a husband. Mrs. Maxwell dislikes Arthur Huntingdon from the first moment she meets him because she can see through him and prefers other suitors with better morals that would treat Helen right. However, Mrs. Maxwell's opinions are disregarded both by her niece and her husband. For Senf, "though she is not literally silent, Helen's aunt might as well be, for her husband totally ignores her" (Senf 1990, 453). This relationship helps, once again, to point out the silence in which many married women found themselves. Eventually, against her aunt's wishes, Helen decides to marry Arthur Huntingdon. Aware of her bad choice and ashamed about her reality, she lies to Mrs. Maxwell that she is in a happy marriage. Helen is aware "that she is at least partly responsible for her situation" since she married Arthur against her aunt's advice (Jacobs 1986, 212). Subsequently, she does not want to involve her family in her marriage because her "pride will not allow her to admit having made a mistake" but also because she "doesn't want to burden them" with her wrong choices (Jacobs 1986, 212). It is not after Huntingdon's death that Helen decides to reunite with Mrs. Maxwell. Helen promises that she will only marry Gilbert if he gets the approval from her aunt which not only shows her trust in her opinions but also gives freedom of choice to female characters in terms of marriage.

As when the story starts, Gilbert's father is already dead but through Mrs. Markham's statements we learn a bit about their marriage. She believes that a woman's sole purpose in life is to serve their husband:

Then you must fall each into your proper place. 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. I'm sure your poor, dear father was as good a husband as ever lived, and after the first six months or so were over, I should as soon have expected him to fly, as to put himself out of his way to pleasure me. He always said I was a good wife, and did my duty; and he always did his—bless him!—he was steady and punctual, seldom found fault without a reason, always did justice

to my good dinners, and hardly ever spoiled my cookery by delay—and that’s as much as any woman can expect of any man. (Brontë 1848, 55)

As we can see with this quote, “Gilbert’s mother sees the relationship between husband and wife as that between master and housekeeper” (Senf 1990, 453). In contrast, Gilbert disagrees with her opinions: “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 1848, 54-55).

In terms of Gilbert and Helen’s marriage, we do not have much information about it, but we know that they get happily married through Gilbert’s letter. The love story between Helen and Gilbert is not the main point of the novel as it can be pointed out through its two narrative voices structure: Gilbert, through his letter to Halford, and Helen, through her diary inside her second husband’s letter. According to Elizabeth Signorotti, “The novel becomes a much bleaker account of Helen’s inability to resist masculine control in any way, even through her own narrative – and Gilbert’s framing narrative is Brontë’s elegant way of dramatizing Helen’s complete binding by masculine authority” (Losano 2003, 21). Here Signorotti points out that Gilbert’s transcription of Helen’s diary shows he is not a trustworthy character because when she gives him the diary, Helen begs him to “don’t breathe a word of what it tells you to any living being” (Brontë 1848, 131). Therefore, Gilbert’s word by word transcription violates her request for silence.

In contrast, Landlang believes that Brontë’s main reason for adding the diary inside Gilbert’s narration lies on the fact that “his reinscription of her story and his accompanying interpretations of events legitimize her as the violated Angel in the House” while functioning “to present a feminist reformation of the indulged son of patriarchy by having him educated through Helen’s journals and her life” (Langland 1987, 386). Therefore, the diary works as an educative tool for Gilbert. Many critics also believe that “through reading Helen’s diary, Markham learns sensitivity, thereby providing Helen with the partnership of equals she is unable to have with Huntingdon” (Joshi 2009, 915). Naomi Jacobs has pointed out that “the frame narrator – Gilbert in Tenant – reports or relays the shocking story of events that occur outside (narratively and literally) the respectable reality of the narrator’s world” (Losano 2003, 20). Therefore, this framing narration functions as a device that allows for the discussion of socially unacceptable subjects such as domestic violence. Another theory comes from Rachel K. Carnell who thinks “The dual narrative [...] becomes a way for Brontë to undermine any static confinement of women or men into separate cultural realms” (Losano 2003, 21). Therefore, in a society where women were considered inferior to men, Brontë uses the fragmentation narrative technique to defy this belief.

### 3. Conclusion

After the novel's analysis, we can conclude that Anne Brontë uses the female characters in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* to criticize the situation of women in Victorian England by focusing on issues related to stereotyping, marriage, and professionalization. Having analyzed her novel, we can see that she chose certain topics that deeply affected women at the time and brought them forward intending to shine light into them. Therefore, Brontë's novel works to highlight some of the problems that women faced in Victorian England, exposing them to demand change.

First, she wanted to bring forward the problem of female stereotyping and show the deep dualization that divided women into two categories with no in-between. Auerbach created the concept of the Women and the Demon that highlighted the issue of Victorian women being divided into two types. In the first category, Victorian women were expected to follow the Angel in the House stereotype by complying with certain rules that were considered proper according to standards. In the second category, stood the Fallen Women that contradicted the behavioral rules dictated by society. Eventually, a New Women appeared. These New Women defied the dual stereotype for women in Victorian England and presented a new female that asked for a change in society and reclaimed the power of choice. In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, we find several different female characters that follow these categorizations. For instance, the protagonist Helen who appears to follow the Angel in the House stereotype evolves into a New Women when she takes agency, first, by leaving her abusive husband and, then, by working as an artist for a living. The novel also has other characters that fit into the categories previously mentioned. For example, a Fallen Women in Lady Lowborough, an Angel in the House in Milicent Hargrave, or a New Women in Esther Hargrave.

Secondly, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* touches on the issue of female professionalization. Victorian women of good status were not expected to work for a living. Instead, they were expected to stay at home and indulge themselves with banal activities. However, the New Women that appeared in Victorian England wanted independence and working as one of the ways to achieve it. It was during this time that many women started working, especially in artistic professions. This is the case of Helen Graham who leaves her rake husband and begins to work as a professional painter to make a living for herself and her son. The novel touches on her difficulties as a female painter such as the criticism from her neighbors, the sexualization of the artist or the need of a man to sell her works.

Lastly, the novel exposes the problem of marriage. All owned by a wife became her husband's property which limited the freedom and economical stance of the married woman. Another issue related to marriage that is truly highlighted in the novel is domestic abuse. It was not common in Victorian England to talk about the topic of spousal abuse but Anne Brontë included this feature in her novel through the marriages of Helen and Arthur Huntingdon and Milicent and Walter Hargrave. Although not all the marriages in the novel present spousal abuse, many of them help to shine a light on the issue of the power of the husband over the wife. For instance, in Mr. and Mrs. Maxwell's marriage, Helen's aunt's opinions are often disregarded by her husband which exemplifies the lack of voice of many wives. Another example is Gilbert's parents, widow Mrs. Markham deeply reflects the Victorian views of the expected role of the wife by supporting their subordination to their husbands.

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