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**The Status of Women in the Victorian Society in
Anne Bronte's *The Tennant of Wildfell Hall* (1848)**

Dissertation submitted to the Department of English as partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master's in Literature and Civilization

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my loving parents who gave me the inspiration to fulfill this dream with their support, patience and encouragement.

To my lovely sisters and brothers who are always overwhelming me by their unconditional love. Also, to my nieces and nephews.

To all who share with me happy time at university during the years of my study.

To all whom I love and respect.

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Abstract

The Victorian period lasted more than half a century. During this time England changed radically in almost all respects. One of these was the rising consciousness of women about their rights and potentials. Soon, the social awareness was transmitted to literature. In retrospect we find that many women writers emerged at this critical juncture in history when women were pleading to be given voice, to achieve their rights and to be given an opportunity to come out of the shells of quiet submission enforced upon them and achieve something of their own. Three sisters living deep in the Yorkshire moors surprised the world by taking part in this ongoing struggle. This article attempts to evaluate their contributions towards achieving women's rights in English history. The aim purpose of this study is to show Anne Bronte's status of women in her novel *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. In the 1840s the ideal of domesticity was at its height, but questions were also being raised on how safe the domestic home was for women, while at the same time having to be a place of refuge for husbands who were in a position of power and ownership over their wives. Through historical gender ideals and ideals of domesticity as well as through the analysis of literary devices and genres.

Key words: *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Victorian Woman, Helen, Marriage, Independent.

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General Introduction

The Victorian period of English literature began with the accession of Queen Victoria to the throne in 1837, and lasted until her death in 1901. Britain witnessed many changes in Victorian time that influenced English society in Philosophy, economic, Politics, and Social values. On the other side, the era knew some problems such as poverty, famine, disease, child labour and the division of society into three different social classes: the upper class, the middle class and the working class.

In the nineteenth century, women lived in an age characterized by gender inequality. They enjoyed a few of legal, social rights and they were expected to remain subservient to their father or husbands. They were still dominated in many ways. Nineteenth century women were conditioned from an early age to be submissive to men. The idea of the spheres further established a separation of the genders; women were a part of the domestic sphere whilst the men belonged to the public sphere. The domestic sphere reinforced the role of women as homemakers and the ones who would take care of the house and family, and according to men of the time, as a part of the domestic sphere, women did not have great need for education.

Literature was the field of men but by the beginning of the nineteenth century women fortunately did not remain silent; they raised their voices through writing novels to call for their rights and to show that women are strong and intelligent and they deserve a better life.

Anne Bronte (1820-1849) is a famous Victorian woman writer. Her works are popular and admired by many readers; she mirrored the image of English society in her works, particularly, the issue of women in the Victorian society.

In this research work, the focus is on Anne Bronte's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* feminist novel. Anne Bronte presents an important reality of English women, and she exposes the social and moral follies of her society. This presentation includes social classes, values, marriage and women's status. She used first person narration. The novel *The Tennant* is written as the retrospective narration, but it is conceived as a set of letters. The whole story is divided into two parts. One part is written as letters of Gilbert Markham, and the other part, inserted within the first one, is actually a dairy of Helen, who can be considered to be the main character of the novel. Through Helen,

we noticed the change from inexperienced, idealistic lady into an independent and wise woman.

The aim of this work is a detailed analysis of Anne Bronte's second novel. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* first was published in 1848. It will portray the changes, and life career of the main character, which is in the novel a young, inexperienced woman. It will deal with her position in the society and mainly to what extent it influences her and her decisions. The aim is to prove that her work is certainly worth reading and people can learn many facts about contemporary time, society, and life by reading the novel. It will also try to prove that this novel was revolutionary to some extent as it broke the conventions and disclosed taboos of the contemporary society.

In fact, Anne Bronte lived in a period of the industrial revolution and in a society known by its oppression to women. So, the choice of Anne Bronte, mainly *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* in our research is based on our interest to understand the picture of women in English society, and why Anne Bronte struggled against the Victorian society and she gave different meanings to the Victorian Women by challenging gender roles and the idea of the separate spheres.

The interest of this research work is centered on the following questions:

- How was the status of women in Victorian society and literature?
- How did Anne Bronte challenge the Victorian norms in her selected work *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*?

It is hypothesized that the status of Victorian Women were very limited in society and literature, but during the nineteenth century they struggled to gain more rights and opportunities. It is also proposed that Anne Bronte challenged the Victorian norms in her novel *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* through her heroine.

The present research contains a General Introduction, and two main chapters, then General Conclusion. The first one entitled Victorian society and literature, deals with the historical background of the Victorian era. Our concern will be on social life, economy and industrial revolution and the status of women. The first chapter deals as well with the Victorian literature, Anne Bronte's life and works and it discusses feminist theory.

General Introduction

The second chapter will study the status of women in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*; recapitulate the main substantial corners especially love and marriage, It aims at making a comparison between the traditional women and the new type of women created by Bronte in her novel. In this line of thought, we will analyze Helen who represents the new independent Victorian woman. Finally, the research ends with a general conclusion.

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Victorian Society and
Literature

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Chapter one: Victorian Society and Literature

1.1. Introduction

The Victorian Era is characterized by many changes in society, economy, the status of women, and more formally known, is a time of great prosperity in Great Britain's literature. Before studying a literary work it is important to study the historical background such as the life style, tradition, and social norms.

In this chapter we will deal with Victorian society during the nineteenth century focusing on the social, economic aspects and the status of women in their conservative society, by concentrating on women's literature and to one of the famous novelist of the period Anne Bronte.

1.2. English Society During the Nineteenth Century

The nineteenth century is often called the Victorian Age, taking that name from England's Queen Victoria who ruled for over 60 years. It's characterized by many changes in society, politics, economy and the status of women that make the reign of Victoria the most progressive in English history (Fletcher, 2002). For Britain and the peoples of Britain, the nineteenth century was a century of transformation (Williams, 2004).

Furthermore, Mundra (2001) says that the Victorian Age is one of the most remarkable periods in the history of England. It was an era of material affluence, political consciousness, democratic reforms, industrial and mechanical progress, scientific advancement, social unrest, educational expansion, empire building and religious uncertainty (Azmir, 2011).

1.2.1. Social Life

The history of nineteenth century was written above all in the shifting fortunes of the classes, the eclipse of the aristocracy, the triumph of the middle class and the challenge of the working class. The nineteenth century English society was divided in several classes: "the upper class, the middle class and the working class". Each class

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had specific characteristics that defined its behavior (Mitchell, 2009). This difference in social classes could be distinguished by inequalities in wealth, education, working and living conditions (Mitchell, 2009). *David Cody*, Associate Professor of English at Hartwick College describes the Victorian class structure:

Early in the nineteenth century the labels "working classes" and "middle classes" were already coming into common usage. The old hereditary aristocracy, reinforced by the new gentry who owed their success to commerce, industry, and the professions, evolved into an "upper class" (its consciousness formed in large part by the Public Schools and Universities) which tenaciously maintained control over the political system, depriving not only the working classes but the middle classes of a voice in the political process

(“Social Class” The Victorian Web. 2002)

First, the upper class which was the wealthiest and dominant class was consisted of the aristocrats, ruling families, and religious hierarchs. People from the upper class were mostly extremely wealthy and had numerous privileges unlike other classes (William, 2004). Most of the wealthy did not work at all, and they earned their money from their family inheritance and land that they own from past generations. It was known by the fact that the upper class women did not work (Mitchell, 2009). Women from the upper class mostly didn't work, but it was expected from them to stay at home until they married. It was also expected to have a lot of children. Upper class women usually had wet nurses to feed their babies rather than doing it on their own. Children were brought up by a nanny the first few years of life. Then, they would be schooled at home by private teachers.

Second, Great Britain's population in 1801 was an estimated eleven million and in 1901 that number rapidly grew to 37 million. The rapid growth of the middle class was part of the enormous rise in the population (Mc Dowell, 1989). The middle class consisted of bankers, large shopkeepers business men, doctors, lawyers and the clergy, which was separated from the working class. That it means the middle-class have become more important politically following the Reform Bill 1832 that extended the right to vote to all males owning property (Mitchell, 2009). These revolutions opened

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the doors for more job opportunities and earn a decent living. This in turn had a positive impact on the education of children. In addition to that, middle class women who might act as housekeepers or general servants in the households of their relative; It was a strategy for mid-class families to maintain adult women outside commercial or professional activities (William, 2004).

The working class was the lowest class among the social hierarchy, the largest number were agricultural labors, domestic servants and factory hands. In addition they were a great variety of unskilled, semiskilled, and skilled jobs in mining, fishing, transportation, building, the garment industry, and other manual trades. Most working people earned just enough to stay alive, and struggling the poverty and illnesses (Mitchell, 2009). During that time many children never attended school, grew up unable to read and write. Boys and girls had to start work very young, they had little schooling, even before they were old enough for regular jobs, and they often helped in the work done by older member of the family (Mitchell, 2009).

Poverty however was found to be the root of child labor which was at that time synonymous to slavery. Child laborers were forced to work in factories, and workhouses. Many children worked 16 hour days under harsh conditions, as their elder did. The Industrial Revolution helped to create opportunities for employment and all members of the family. However, any improvement to the quality of life for the laboring class had come from a hard and bitter experience from factory labor. Workers benefited eventually, but at first they suffered bad working conditions. Because kids had to work, they weren't going to school and getting an education, and they weren't healthy. They had to work about 18 hours a day (Lamara, 2015).

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1.2.2. Economic Aspects

The Victorian Era of Great Britain is considered the height of the British industrial revolution and the top of the British Empire. England was the first country to move from agricultural economy to one based on manufacturing (Merizig, 2013). According to Joel Mokyr (1999):

Some modern economists have defined the Industrial Revolution as a shift from an economy in which capital was primarily of the circulating kind (e.g., seed in agriculture and raw materials in domestic industry) to one in which the main form which capital took was fixed capital (e.g. machines, mines, and structures) (p.7.8).

The emergence of Britain in the Victorian period as the world's most powerful trading nation was the direct result of the process of industrialization that had transformed the country since the latter part of the 18th century. This economic and social revolution had been driven by many elements, but the most significant by far was the widespread application of steam technology.

Significant changes in the economic life of the nation should fundamentally irritate its entire social structure, and the Industrial Revolution was no special case. Commonly, as well, it reared another demeanor of mind to the old issues of society; neediness, wrongdoing, obligation, disasters, and waste, and obviously, a discriminating disposition to the old and wasteful protected machinery which bore so little connection to the needs of society (Plumb, 1963).

Industrial revolution increased tremendously bringing wealth and power to Britain throughout the 19th century. In fact, industry was replacing agriculture as the basis of the British economy, also new inventions and machines were partly replacing manual work, and manufacturing was often done in people's homes, using hand tools or basic machines. Industrialization marked a shift to powered, special purpose machinery, factories and mass production. Therefore, Engles argued that

The Industrial Revolution's mainly development were the invention of the steam engine and the cotton industry. As the

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improvement of technology, the steam engine could produce more power with less energy than before. As a result, it leads to the improvement and industrialization in other areas

(Engles, 1978, p.16)

The iron and textile industries ,along with the development of the steam engine, played central roles in the industrial revolution, which also saw improved systems of transportation, communication, railway lines, telegraph and the train which supported the growth of commerce, and minimized the distance between cities (Website Victorian period).

Industrial revolution is a shift from using tools to make products to using new sources of energy, from home to the factory, from country to the city, from human or animal power to engines powered. It increased tremendously bringing wealth and power to Great Britain which became the super power of the world during the nineteenth century (Taouli, 2017).

1.2.3. The Status of Women

Victorian Era was believed to be the Era of male supremacy in all areas of life. Women had no legal rights, their husbands or fathers had rights on women's property in the 19th century. According to dominant ideology, women were created to do household, look after their children, their space was limited to the house, and they were expected to be the angels of their homes. According to Klein (1949), “innocence and inexperience and a cultivated fragility were the characteristic attributes of the Victorian girls” (p.264).

Society during this era made it impossible for women to make any advancement “whatever their social rank, in the eyes of the law women were second-class citizens” (Gallagher, 1985, p. 57). Therefore, Victorian ideology always imposed the idea that women must have knowledge about art, music and language to be angels of the houses; they had to learn things such as drawing, singing and dancing. In

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addition, the highest goal for a woman is to become a wife and a mother (Sindradóttir, 2015).

The Victorian society characterized by distinct in social classes. So, the status of women their rights and duties cannot be generalized since they varied according to the social class a woman came from.

1.2.3.1. Education

Education for women was one of their desirable goals. It was believed that women were not able to learn in the way men did. Some of them if they were fortunate enough were homeschooled, but many of them had no formal education at all. Education has always been influenced by gender, class, religion and nationality. Women's education in Britain was designed to teach middle class and upper class girls enough to make them attractive marriage material for men and lessons were often taught in the home by poorly educated governess. Education was seen as a way of making women better wives and mothers, not as a way of transforming their lives. One parliamentary report in the 19th century said girls should be educated to be decorative, modest, marriageable beings.

Women's education was vastly inferior to the education of men. In order to prepare girls for their role in the domestic sphere, they were educated in "accomplishments", normally at a boarding school or by a governess in the home (Hughes, 2017). This included music, dancing, deportment and drawing, but also foreign languages, English, and history (Purvis, 1991). Only the very privileged few were taught to a high level in subjects such as mathematics and this was usually alongside their brothers.

Women were not encouraged to have academic aspirations in case it undermined their attachment to the home and it was believed that academic study was

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against women's nature and that too much knowledge could affect women's fertility. Church leaders were often against the higher education of women because they said it went against the teachings of the Bible.

1.2.3.2. Marriage

Women's lives were controlled by men from the moment they were born going from their father's care as the head of the family to their husband's care, women rarely got the opportunity to be independent. Once they were married, all the property and income they might have had were transferred over to their husbands (Purvis, 1991). When the Victorian man and woman get married, all the rights of the wife will be given over to her husband; because the married couple became one under the law, so the only one who has the right to represent this entity was the man. The married woman must give her husband rights to what her body produced; as sex, bring children, and domestic works, Women were considered as machines just to do the domestic affairs ("Women in the Victorian Era").

When the woman became married, she will lose the few civil rights she had before, because she became as one body with her partner, as well known that the woman had no legal rights to own property comparing to men. But when the Married Women's Property Acts of 1870 and 1882 were passed, they gave women the rights to own wages and any property they owned before marriage (Klára Vlková, 2007).

1.2.3.3. Work

Women faced difficulties in different fields, they did not have enough rights; their rights were very limited in this era. Women could not vote, could not be property owners and they could not hold professional jobs apart from teachers or a domestic servant, factory workers or agricultural labors (Mitchell, 2009).

The highest job that women could hold was that of a teacher while men were given freedom to choose what they wanted to do. Even if they coveted a job, women at that time had few employment opportunities. Most of them could only choose between

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the position of a governess or a teacher. Throughout this period women were paid less than their male counterpart working alongside them, which created great financial difficulties for the working women. Women were not found in professions of skilled trade; if they worked, they worked in jobs where no higher education was required.

Women's status and rights were very miserable in the 19th century. They were deprived of many human rights and given little in return for their contributions in society. They worked mostly in the home, taking care of the family while their husbands were at work. Women were not considered able to perform tasks in the work place, and were not able to obtain their own careers. For unmarried Victorian women, society could provide them very few opportunities. The poor women could only work as household servants, farm laborers, or factory workers to survive. The only "genteel" professions open to the average middle-class women were governess, school teacher or companion to a wealthy lady with its awkward status between servant and lady (Drahotušská, 2013).

Women in the nineteenth century had many reasons to be filled with resentment. They were deprived of many human rights and given little in return for their contributions in society. Not only processes such as industrialization, but also feministic movements of those times helped women to come out to the scene. Later as time passed, women occupied the equal status as that of man (Gender Roles of Victorian Era for Men and Women).

1.3. Victorian Literature during the Nineteenth Century

It's very difficult to give a precise definition of literature, but we shall give a working definition of it in line with what we shall be studying. The word literature derived from the Latin word "Littera" which means "letters" and it is a body of written works of a specific culture, sub-culture, religion, philosophy or the study of such written work which may appear in poetry or in prose (Mark, 2009 ,N.P).

J.A. Cuddon (2013) defined literature as "a board term which usually denotes

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works which belong to the major genre: epic, drama, novel, short stories, and ode” (p. 404). Literature is classified according to the language, national origin, historical period, genre and subject matter, and it is the human expression of thought (Kharbe, 2009).

The nineteenth century is often regarded as a high point in European literature and Victorian literature. Victorian literature is literature written in England during the reign of Queen Victoria or roughly from 1837-1901. The Victorian age, more formally known, was a time of great prosperity in Great Britain’s literature (Evans, 1976). It is a literature that covers the whole nineteenth century and speaks of an age which witnessed great change. It reflects the intellectual patterns of the Victorian age, dealing with the examination of society, the law, industrialism and historical ideals. Victorian literature has one main mission: point finger at social problems to raise people consciousness (Fletcher, 2002). Merizig (2013) explains that:

Victorian literature has become a very important source for historical facts and the life style of the 19th century England mainly because it relies on a realist mode of representation. Thus, as known of Victorian era that was a time of development of science, Victorians explored issues related to their historical and social context such as industrialization, rural urban life and the condition of children and women. The later are present in many literary work in which their role and position were of interest of both female and male writers (p.06).

In the early to mid 19th century, the advancements made in the technology of printing, along with the mass production of paper and the speed of travel had a profound effect on literature and gave rise to a new reading public. Moreover, the Victorian period saw an intensive production of literary works, especially novels dealing with social realities during the Industrial Revolution (Cuddon, 1998).

The most popular form for this type of dramatization was the novel. Victorian novels represented almost every aspect of nineteenth century Victorian life (Evans, 1976). Though poetry and prose were certainly distinguished, it was the novel that ultimately proved to be the Victorians special literary achievement (Evans,

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1976). Writers of that time challenged the ideas of religion, crime, sexuality, chauvinism and over all social controversies (Lewis, 2011). Furthermore, Victorian writers attempted to achieve their commitment through expressing the spirit of the age with all resources of imagination, feeling and thought, and spotting light on the condition of England question (Pollard, 1993). In addition to that, they try to show their readers that there were many problems behind the beautiful picture of the Victorian society (Carter and McRae, 2001).

The Victorian literature's genres were poetry, drama and prose that found recognition in the Victorian period. It was not only about writing novels, but also there were many poets who produced a definite number of poetry, its main themes were social injustice, romantic love and the loss of innocence (Taouli, 2017). Williams (2004) said that:

Nineteenth-century poetry is characterized by variety: it offers a multiplicity of styles and genres, ranging in subject matter from the nonsense poems of Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll to the Christian poetry of Christina Rossetti and Gerard Manley Hopkins, and spans a time line which stretches from the classical and medieval past recalled in the poetry of Tennyson and Swinburne, to the contemporary Darwinian doubts expressed by Matthew Arnold: an eclecticism of genre, theme and tone, reflecting the educational and social range of its audience (p.446).

1.3.1. Major Victorian Writers

The Victorian period produced a big number of writers whose work today would fit between popular fiction and literature. Lord Macaulay, according to Robert Huntington Fletcher (2002) "is the first great figure, chronologically in the period" (p. 139). Thomas Carlyle is, also, "considered as an eccentric and in the same time he is the most stimulating writer of the Victorian era" (ibid). Then, Charles Dickens who is considered the most representative literary figure of the whole Victorian age. He treated the comedy and criticized certain aspects of the Victorian compromise, in addition to the problems of society like poor (Carter and McRae, 2001). William

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Makepeace Thackeray began his literary career as a journalist, he tended to depict situations of a more middle class flavor than Dickens (Ghazali, 2009).

The nineteenth century has also known the emergence of many female writing in England. For example the Bronte sisters: Charlotte, Emily and Anne who presented the female character and portrayed a picture about women and their struggles in Victorian society. Elizabeth Gaskell who was encouraged by Dickens, her novels were the mirror image of reality of the time. Also, Jane Austen who centered on women at that time and wrote mainly about young heroines as they grew up and search for personal happiness (Carter and McRae, 1997). Another important female writer Mary Wollstonecraft who fought against the dangers and social discrimination against women during the nineteenth century. Then George Eliot, her novels are based in realism and provide deep psychological insight.

Furthermore, They were many poets include Elizabeth Barret Browning, Robert Browning, Alfred Lord Tennyson and Mathew Arnold who were considered the greatest poets of the Victorian era.

1.4. Women Writers

Nineteenth century society known as the Victorian period regarded men as the superior sex and women as inferior. Women's activities were restricted and therefore their opportunities in society were restricted as well. Women grew up believing that their sole purpose in life was to become a wife and a mother. But, there were many women that challenged these beliefs, among them were women writers. They faced numerous obstacles when they stepped out of their spheres by becoming professional writers. Most of women writers wrote based on their personal experience and they tackled different themes such as their social status in British society, education, divorce and marriage (Salinovic, 2014).

For Elaine Showalter (1977) "The nineteenth century was the age of female novelists, she thought that with the emergence of Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte and George Eliot, the question of women's efficiency for fiction has been answered" (p.

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03). Indeed, women faced many obstacles when trying to write novels, since girls were restricted from various types of literature, whereas men and boys were offered different novels than that offered to girls (Sindradottir, 2015).

Through writing novels women writers challenged their fear from the society by showing that women were not inferior to men and the idea of gender roles and they raised awareness of women's rights through their heroines. Their novel contains strong heroines that were able to inspire women, as well as help them to understand the injustices that they afforded (Sindradottir, 2015).

While some Victorian women writers published their works using their real names as a mark of authorship, other preferred to use male pseudonyms to sign their work because it was very difficult for women from lower and middle class to enter the male dominant literary world (Carter and McRae, 1997).

The most women novelists, who yet are quiet important are:

1.4.1. George Eliot (1819-1880)

She was among the best of the Victorian writers. Her real name was Mary Ann Evans but she used a male pen name, because in her time, the works which written under the name of women were not accepted (Attia, 2004). She authored seven novels, known for their realism and psychological insight. Her first work was a collection of stories and sketches about the people of the town of her youth, Warwickshire. Her masterpiece, *Middlemarch*, is not only a major social record but also one of the greatest novels in the history of fiction. *The Lifted Veil* (1859) reflects the struggles Eliot went through as a woman and author in the spotlight since the success of *Adam Bede* (James, 2006).

Her work has been praised for its penetrating psychological analysis and profound insight into human character. Generally played against the backdrop of English rural life, Eliot's novels explore moral and philosophical issues with a realistic approach to character and plot development. Many of her novels are included in the

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canon of classic nineteenth century literary works, some have been adapted to film and many still in print today (Carter and McRae, 2001).

1.4.2. Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797)

One of the famous English novelists often considered the first feminist, who was an early pioneer of women's rights. Wollstonecraft is best known for *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Here she argues that equal education would make women the intellectual and political equals of men. She emphasizes on education as the best way to constitute an identity and an individual personality (Jenainati and Groves, 2007).

She was influenced by the ideas of American and French Revolutions focusing on the necessity of women's participation in all fundamental rights as equal to man, in addition to the right of vote and owning property (Jenainati and Groves, 2007). Wollstonecraft argument was based on her strong belief that both men and women possessed the same souls and the same mental capacities and therefore should be allowed the same human rights.

The publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's *The Vindication of the Rights of Women* is her main novel in which she depicts women's submission and stereotypes. She emphasizes on education as the best way to constitute an identity and an individual personality (ibid).

1.4.3. Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-1865)

She was one of the most famous female authors of Victorian England. Her writing illuminated the plight of the working class and other sometimes difficult and unpleasant social issues. She has been very interested in social problems, industrial life workers, and women in general as she did in her novels *North and South*, *Mary Barton* and *Ruth*.

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The death of her son inspired her to write novels. *Mary Barton* is her first novel to be published in 1848; it was a successful work that brought her into contact with Charles Dickens and Thomas Carlyle. Thus, Charles Dickens invited her to his new weekly, *Household Worlds* (1850-1859) and he published her two best loved-works *Cranford* (1851-1853) and *Ruth* (1853), the novel that challenged the middle class attitudes to the unmarried women (James, 2006). *North and South* is an industrial novel, it was published in (1854-1855) (Adams, 2009). This novel earned Gaskell £250 and she became wealthy and famous in her lifetime (Algotsson, 2014).

Elizabeth Gaskell was a friend of Charlotte Bronte, Jane Austen and other women writers who called for equality between men and women in all fields of life (Showalter, 1977). She was the first to write a biography of Charlotte Bronte, *Life of Charlotte Bronte*, which was published in 1857.

1.4.4. Jane Austen (1775-1817)

She was one of the pioneers of women's literature. She shows different aspects of a women's role in society throughout her novels, and how a woman deals with societies' norms, values and manners. So, most of her novels are about women in society (Alka, 2015).the important themes in her novels are marriage and male dominance in all fields of life.

Jane Austen portrayed the oppression of women in the nineteenth century. She also rebelled against the dominance of males towards women because they were treated as second class citizens (Alka, 2015). Moreover, Austen made a lot of contributions to comic drama of conduct of middle class English life in her time. Her written work was noted by her plausibility, smart sensitivity, authenticity, and splendid prose style. Through her treatment of common individuals in regular life, she was the first to give the novel its uniquely modern character (Attia, 2004).

In her writings, Jane Austen was influenced by Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, and her ideas about the situation of women in society. Most of Austen's characters want to marry and always marry for love which

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was impossible during Austen's time. Jane Austen's most famous novel *Pride and Prejudice* describes the life of young ladies. Then, the main issue in this novel is a woman who could not inherit land so for this reason the mother Mrs. Bennet searches for a wealthy husband to her daughters (Austen, 2011). At that time the works written by women were not accepted. This leads to most of Jane Austen's novels about the status of woman, especially the novel *Pride and Prejudice* refused many times because it is written from the female point of view.

1.4.5. Bronte Sisters (Charlotte, Emily and Anne)

The Brontes were remarkable for being three successful authors from one family. But, more remarkably, Charlotte, Emily and Anne were all women who were successful at a time when women didn't have much freedom, either at home or in society. Their novels are full of female characters who challenge the social conventions of their time. The Bronte's novels often revolved around the female characters finding deserving husbands, rather than breaking completely free of social conventions. However a lot of their ideas were radical for their time.

The Brontes produced at least two masterpieces of fiction which deserve to be equaled to the best poetry of Keats and Shelley. In *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* they highlighted most of the common Victorian themes: sickness, death and the pathetic. For example, from a powerful female perspective, although they did not want to be linked to the category of female writers, since the term was still seen as negative. They published under androgenous pseudonyms a recurrent strategy for female writers to avoid the double standard of criticism towards novels written by women, as Showalter (1977) shows.

The writer Thompson (1999) mentioned in her book *Victorian Women Writers and the Woman Question* that "in the Victorian literature most of the women writers as Emily and Charlotte Bronte, their novels are inherently complicated and concentrates on the woman question and the ongoing discussions about the position of woman and

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her nature, they were absolutely conflicted by their own beliefs about the proper roles of women” (p. 1, 3).

All in all, the Brontë sisters were remarkable women, who, eventually, were not afraid to enter the literary world in spite of living in a society which was not willing to accept a successful woman with higher goals than to be supported by her father or husband. The family background, situation and the environment in which they lived evidently influenced their writing, which, in that period, was mostly considered somewhat extraordinary, in some cases even outrageous.

1.5. Anne Bronte’s Life

Anne was born in the small Yorkshire village of Thorton on 17 January 1820. She was the youngest of six siblings and she was just an infant when her mother was diagnosed with cancer. As a result of her illness, her mother had to pass her remaining days confined to her bedroom in Haworth. Indeed, this must have affected Anne as she began to grow older and it is likely that this loss contributed to her doubts and insecurities about herself and her position in life. Furthermore, this might have triggered her passion for religion and life after death.

Anne is most commonly seen as the most fragile of the siblings. She was prone to colds and influenza, as well as suffering from asthma her whole life. Charlotte once recalled Anne’s childhood and she said that it was as if Anne had been preparing for an early death since she was born (Langland, 1989). Indeed, Anne might have been born with a weaker immune system and have been physically frailer than her sisters; however, she did not let this affect her.

Throughout her life, Anne was extremely observant, courageous, determined and realistic. For instance, she was playing a game with her father and siblings once, where her father asked the siblings a question each. When it was her turn, he asked her what a child like her most wanted. Without hesitating she told him “age and experience” (Langland, 1989, p. 05). This passion only grew stronger as she grew

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older. In fact, she wanted to be able to support herself and she did not want to be dependent upon others.

1.5.1. Anne Bronte's Works

Anne was largely educated at home and worked as a governess for a several years before working on a book of poetry with her sisters, Charlotte and Emily, in 1846. Anne contributed 21 poems to the work, entitled *Poems by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell*. Writing was an activity she selected in order to divert herself from her intense psychological trauma. Though she has written only two novels, they comprehensively analyze her emotions and feelings vividly.

Langland is convinced that from her letters and novels, one can assume that Anne believed that education was an important way for girls to gain a certain amount of independence, as well as experience. Indeed, she wanted to shed the image that had been made of her, the image of frail little Anne. Moreover, she wanted to show the strength and ambition that she had inside her. She went away from home to work as a governess, and in a way she left home not only to prove herself, but to work for her independence (Langland, 1989).

Anne Bronte always depicts the problems of the oppressed sections in society. Self is the nucleus from which all her literary pieces emerge. Hers was a tough childhood with an ailing mother and insecure financial background (Jacobs, 1986). All her works explore the themes of gender and discrimination. *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* are well written novels which give an insight in to the feminist perspectives of Anne Bronte.

Agnes Grey was published in December 1847, and republished in a second edition in 1850. Anne selected her own life as a source to derive themes for her novels.

Chitham observes that there striking resemblances between the character *Agnes Grey* and Anne's personal life (Chitham, 1993). *Agnes Grey* highlights the status of women in family as well as in society. She based on the author's own experience, explores the

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position of women in Victorian society through the story of a young woman forced to work as a governess when her father is ruined financially.

Agnes Grey is a charming novel, full of fine character painting and strongly marked by the exquisite development and analysis of the female heart...*Agnes Grey*, the heroine herself is one of the most vigorous and truthful drawings of character, one of the finest pieces pen-linings that we have encountered anywhere... (Qtd. in Noss).

In addition, when *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* was going to be published by T.C. Newby as a novel written by Currer Bell, the author of *Jane Eyre*, Anne went with Charlotte to reveal their identities to Smith, Elder & Co. This was because Anne wanted her work to be acknowledged as her own and judged on its own terms (Langland, 1989).

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall was published in 1848 and it became a controversial novel. It is evident from the preface to the second edition of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* that Anne wanted to be considered equal to men. In the preface she wrote: "I am satisfied that if a book is a good one, it is so whatever the sex of the author may be. All novels are or should be written for both men and women to read" (Barker, 2002, p.216).

Anne addressed the problems that women writers and women in general faced in the nineteenth century. She believed that people should realize that women were just as talented as men, and that they could just as easily express themselves. Furthermore, she touched on the subject that women were not allowed to read the same novels as men and that both men and women should be able to read what they wanted to.

Therefore, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is the "story of woman's liberation ... it describes a woman's escape from the prisonhouse of a bad marriage, and her subsequent attempts to achieve independence by establishing herself in a career as an artist" (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, p.80). As a result, the novel touches on many problems that concerned feminists in the late nineteenth century, especially the issues that New Women writers focused on.

1.6. Feminism in the Nineteenth Century

Feminism is a critical theory and movement in the evaluation of literature that aims at establishing women equality with men on political, social and economical as well as moral and ethical ground. It began late in the eighteenth century with the struggle of women's rights (Cuddon, 2013).

First found its approach to literature in the 1960s, when were clear signs of new approaches in relation to women as Virginia Wolf who feminist critics have analyzed her novels from different perspective, she concerned with women's economic and cultural disadvantages compared to men (Seldon, 2005). It seeks to enhance the quality of women's life by impacting the norms and moves of a society based on male dominance and subsequent female subordination.

Feminism attacks male notions of interpretation in literature, also, it challenges traditional male ideas about the nature of women and how they feel, act, think and write (Cuddon, 1998). It also attempts to understand representation from a woman's point of view and analyze women's writing strategies in the context of their social conditions. It pursue the existence of women in literary texts as a women authors, and features and makes women characters and ideas dominant in their work (Balogun, 2001).

Feminism has been divided into three categories by some feminist and great literary figures:

The first-wave feminism: this movement started from 1848 and ended till 1920. Followers of this movement believed that women must be given equality; they have their own existence so they must be treated equal living being. They should be given place, status and equality. The pioneer works of this wave are *A Vindication of the Right of Women* (1792) by Mary Wollstonecraft, Margaret Fuller's *Women in the Nineteenth Century* (1845) and Virginia Wolf wrote *A Room of One's Own* in the nineteenth century (Bisong and Ekanem, 2014). Finally, in that period women's institutions and organizations started to speak about women's right to vote (Jenainati

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and Groves, 2007). Later on, it came a second wave as the widest movement with its successful achievements.

Second-wave feminism: this movement started from 1848 and ended to late 1980. It generated a set of beliefs that equality is a basic right of women but they need more than it. In all walks of life and in every aspect they must be given their own place and name. The prominent works of this wave are: *The Second Sex* (1949) by Simone De Beauvoir, *Feminine Mystique* (1963) by Betty Friedan. Whereas, the first wave feminism was generally driven by middle class white women, the Second Wave part included women of color (Jenainata, Groves, 2007). Accordingly, the third wave is the more effective movement than the last two ones.

Third-wave feminism: it was launched on 1990 and it is still being accepted and practiced. It was more general in its scope than the previous one. This movement was not only about the rights of upper class women but it also talked about the basic rights of women of middle class in various areas and various societies. It generally believed that women are born equal to men so they must be treated not just as equal in means of existence, but they must be allowed to make their own identity and they must be left free to make their own name in this society. Furthermore, the symbol of this period was Rebecca Walker who used the term third wave in 1982 (Walker, 1995). In addition, the Third Wave feminism allowed new generations of feminist women to be who they wanted to be. They also believed that they should change the ways and the methods of looking for women's rights (ibid). Thus, this was the best way to make this wave more effective than the last ones.

In the period that has followed the Second Wave feminism; the mass media has become a very important source which transferred the real image through many mediums such as news papers, magazines and television. As a result, feminists started to say "Girl" instead of "women" in order to attract these new generations (TrierBieniek, 2015). Finally, the three waves of feminism had important roles in feminists' theories and politics from 1960 until now; also they had the same goal to change and ameliorate the profile and the image of woman (Freedman, 2002).

1.7. Conclusion

To sum up, this chapter has been concerned with the characteristics of Victorian period in different phases as well as the general conditions of social life. It has examined the economic aspects within the industrial revolution and the status of women in society in comparison to men. Next, this chapter has provided a short overview of the Victorian literature and its famous writers and poets focusing on women literature. It is found out that those Victorian women writers were influenced by the values of their conservative society. Last, Anne Bronte as a novelist was influenced by her personal life which serves as the starting point to achieve her literary work.

Chapter Two:
The Status of Women in
The Tenant of Wildfell Hall

Chapter Two: The Status of Women in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*

2.1. Introduction

2.2. An Overview of The Tenant of Wildfell Hall's Novel

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2.1. Introduction

In the final two decades of the Victorian era, a women's movement came into being which challenged patriarchal male superiority and addressed issues such as gender equality. The concept of the "New Woman" emerged, along with New Woman novelists such as Sarah Grand, Olive Schreiner and Mona Caird. This was an important feminist movement that called for "a redefinition of women's roles in marriage and society, and opposed the social norms imposed on women" (Diniejko, 2011). Moreover, they opposed the notion that all women should strive to be mothers and wives. They believed that women could aim for other professions than that of the "Angel in the House".

Therefore, they supported women's professional aspirations and denounced the traditional idea of womanhood. Furthermore, they supported women's independence and through their novels, they revealed how women suffered because of their inferior status and the dangers that they might encounter in conventional Victorian marriage. As a result, the New Woman fiction "emerged out of Victorian feminist rebellion and boosted debates on such issues as women's education, women's suffrage, sex and women's autonomy ... it made a lasting impact on popular imagination and ... contributed to major changes in women's lives" (Diniejko, 2011). While this is the case, many of these issues are presented in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, published well before their time. Therefore, with regard to the legal status of women in the nineteenth century, it can be argued that *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is indeed a feminist novel and a forerunner to the New Woman feminist movement.

2.2. An Overview of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall's* Novel

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall was published in 1848 and it became a controversial novel. It is evident from the preface to the second edition of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* that Anne wanted to be considered equal to men. In the preface she wrote: "I am satisfied that if a book is a good one, it is so whatever the sex of the

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author may be. All novels are or should be written for both men and women to read” (Barker, 2006, p. 216). Through the male narrator, Anne obtains the power to address a wider range of readers, because the society at that time which, as has already been mentioned, did not respect a female writer and would devalue any work just for this reason. The same loss of esteem could have affected the narrator as well, thus under a male primary narrator, the novel might have been read without these prejudices.

It is important to remember that when the novel was published in the mid nineteenth century, women were still dependent on their husbands and they had no power to defy their will. Moreover, they had no rights over their children and they could not obtain a divorce from their husbands, even though men could divorce their wives. Therefore, if a woman was being mentally or physically abused by her husband, she could not leave. In addition, the law claimed that what a woman earned or had in fortune was entitled to her husband, “under the law, her earnings were his earnings” (Langland, 1989). Therefore, women had no resources available to them and as a result, a woman and her children were entirely “dependent on his will, responsibility, and generosity” (Langland, 1989, p. 24). Anne Brontë was aware of this inequality and she challenges it in her novel. Her heroine, Helen Huntingdon, flees from her abusive husband and goes into hiding. She takes their child with her and moves into Wildfell Hall under the pseudonym Helen Graham. Her husband, Arthur Huntingdon, is an alcoholic and he abuses her emotionally, as well as being unfaithful to her. As a result, Helen pleads with him to divorce her or let her leave with their son. However, he refuses and she becomes a prisoner inside their own home. In the end, Helen sees that her husband is corrupting their son and this is what prompts her to leave her husband and go into hiding: “I was determined to show him that my heart was not his slave, and I could live without him if I chose” (A. Brontë, 1848, p.164). She does this, knowing that she is going against society’s will, as well as abandoning her domestic sphere. More importantly, she establishes her independence by becoming a professional painter to provide for herself and her son.

2.2.1. Love and Marriage

With her novel, it can be argued that Anne wanted to educate girls on these problems and make them realize that they deserved so much more than what society made them believe. Through her heroine, Anne teaches women about the dangers that they might face in society as women. In the first place, she sheds light on the dangers of marriage and reminds women that they are responsible for their own happiness. They should not be forced to marry someone that they do not love and therefore be subjected to a miserable life. However, they should also realize that love can blind, making it hard to estimate the other person's faults. Therefore, they should follow their heart, as well as their common sense to be able to escape being imprisoned in a miserable marriage. In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Helen gives her friend a similar advice: "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. Keep both heart and hand in your own possession, till you see good reason to part with them" (A. Brontë, 1848, p. 293). This is an important advice, for women could not divorce their husbands and therefore they had to marry a man that they loved, as well as a man that would treat them with kindness and respect. Furthermore, Anne wanted girls to be aware of the fact that the domestic sphere was not always as perfect as society made it out to be. Indeed, the novel "explodes the myth of domestic heaven and exposes the domestic hell, from which the protagonist ultimately flees into hiding" (Langland, 1989, p. 24, 25).

As has already been mentioned, the novel offers us a description of a horrific, abusive marriage which becomes a prison for both the wife and the husband. Helen Huntingdon enforces an independent choice of her husband, which turns out to be a wrong decision. In her misfortune, she fights her situation and the law – and the final escape is a brave step to free herself and what is more to protect her son. The strong mother is afraid neither of her abusive husband, nor the law against which she acts and fights the wrong of an established system.

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Broadly speaking, it is not surprising that women could have the feelings of imprisonment in early 19th century marriages. As Matus (2007) points out, before 1839 “there was no way out of marriage except through an ecclesiastical annulment or a private act of Parliament” (p. 99, 121). But there had to be a serious reason and it was not acknowledged that a husband's unfaithfulness (if not incestuous), or even worse domestic abuse (if not brutal) were sufficient reasons. “A wife had no possibility to escape because she would be found guilty of desertion and would have no right to dispose of her property and no right to custody of her children” (ibid).

According to Matus (2007), Anne Brontë describes “the context of the male power and privilege” (p. 99, 121). “Specifically comparing the situations of men and women in marriage, the novel offers a sustained consideration of issues such as domestic abuse, and marriage, custody and law” (ibid).

Regarding the law, I. Ward puts it as follows: “In marriage the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being of legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband.”(Ward, 2007, p.151,183). In other words even though a wife brought some property into the marriage, she had no right to this property anymore after she became married. As the married couple were regarded as one person this, as I. Ward explains, would “suppose her separate existence” (ibid).

A wife was expected to be obedient and patient, silent, blind and dumb with regards to her husband's possible misconduct. What was expected from a perfect wife in household matters is well described in the novel by one of the perfect wives, Mrs. Markham: “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.”(A. Bronte, 1848, p.57). It is not surprising that all those expectations – which definitely denied anything concerning the wife's own will and supported husband's superiority – must have been unacceptable for a woman with a sense of justice.

2.2.1.1. Helen's First Marriage: Arthur Huntingdon

Helen, who was growing up with her aunt and uncle, became a young self-contained lady influenced by her aunt's advice and being warned not to fall for “the first foolish or unprincipled person” (A. Bronte, 1848, p.29), who would try to obtain her heart. Helen obviously obeys this advice but she also acts according to her natural moral principle. She wants to decide the important matters of her life herself – as e.g. in case of her marriage. She is blind to old Mr. Boarham's courting and she strictly refuses all his attempts to make a proposal: “No consideration can induce me to marry against my inclinations” (A. Bronte, 1848, p.35).

Her aunt advises her not to marry him, but Helen is determined that their future will be one of shared happiness and nothing can deter her from her goal. She also physically desires him. As women at the time were not truly allowed to show their desire and their longings, physical affection was mitigated towards the ideal of the woman as a moral compass and saviour of the man. Women's physical desires were illicit, which led to them being coded as spiritual ones in literature (Langland, 1989). Helen truly believes in this ideology of a fairytale and of spiritual love and basically sees her marriage to Huntingdon as a mission to make him morally good, as is evident from this conversation with her aunt: I think I might have influence sufficient to save him from some errors, and I should think my life well spent in the effort to preserve so noble a nature from destruction. [...] sometimes he says that if he had me always by his side he should never do or say a wicked thing. (A. Bronte, 1848, p.124)

Huntingdon is a challenge to her, as she knows the rumours but is willing to ignore them and instead focus on the goodness that she sees in him, exclaiming that if “I hate the sins I love the sinner” (A. Bronte, 1848, p.66). Huntingdon has become her lifelong project and she is willing to risk her own happiness for the sake of his. Her longing to morally reform and uphold Huntingdon adheres perfectly to the domestic ideal of the wife, who was, after all, the angel of the house and the moral compass of the whole family. Yet, despite this wish to be his spiritual guidance, Helen did also physically desire him, as mentioned before. It seems that despite the morality of the

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time and the literary spirituality of female desire, Helen still manages to show her actual physical desire. In showing this, Brontë subtly and discreetly shows that both the spiritual and the physical can exist in women. Openly discussing sexual relations in a Victorian novel is easily done and the same is true for *Wildfell Hall*. Still, Brontë makes a clear example of Helen's and Huntingdon's relationship. After Helen finds out that Huntingdon has been unfaithful to her with Annabella, she immediately proposes to him that she will leave him. As he does not allow her and she has their son to think of, she bravely utters the following words: "I am your child's mother, and your housekeeper, nothing more. [...] I will exact no more heartless caresses from you, nor offer nor endure them either. I will not be mocked with the empty husk of conjugal endearments, when you have given the substance to another!" (A. Bronte, 1848, p.238). What is interesting about this passage is that Huntingdon goes on to agree with her. He is not interested in her physically as he sees that there is no game to win there anymore. He is already her owner and can forbid her to leave him. Once again, it is her soul, her personality that he cannot touch and own, and "heartless caresses" are not going to change that. Notable as well is that Huntingdon is not afraid to admit that he is unfaithful to Helen. Whereas Huntingdon would have grounds for divorce if Helen were to be unfaithful, his transgressions would have no consequences in court if Helen would wish to divorce him. As the extramarital affair is not one that is incestuous, for instance, Huntingdon is not able to be punished for his behaviour. Brontë clearly shows this double standard that existed for divorce. Helen's eventual flight from Huntingdon is one of many trials. Not only does Huntingdon know about her plan to leave, making it more difficult for her to eventually leave as he takes all her money and painting supplies—with which she hopes to support herself and her son—she is also further aggravated by Mr Hargrave. He, too, knows about her plans to leave and as he has always wanted her, he proposes to leave with her and to be her protector as well the one saving her virtue—something that hardly seems possible as she then would not.

Only be leaving her husband, but leaving him for another man. When Helen refuses him, he in turn becomes violent towards her, by for instance tightly holding

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her. Helen's response is anything but submissive: I never saw a man so terribly excited. He precipitated himself towards me. I snatched up my palette-knife and held it against him. This startled him: he stood and gazed at me in astonishment; I dare say I looked as fierce and resolute as he (A. Bronte, 1848, p.275). What stands out about his scene is that Helen is in fact prepared to defend herself against him. A little while later, after everyone has become witness of the scene, she even makes Mr Hargrave admit to the other men that she refused him, as she will not allow her husband and his friends to discredit her reputation and virtue as these are very dear to Helen. The fact that the men laugh at her and her husband says to her "a volley of the vilest and grossest abuse it was possible for the imagination to conceive or the tongue to utter" (A. Bronte, 1848, p. 276) invokes in her a need to defend herself immediately. This scene shows how Helen is prepared to fight and to do what is right for her as well. Helen does not only have to fear for her reputation, rumours of infidelity could prove to be enough evidence for a husband to divorce his wife or to take on sole custody of their children, as mentioned before. It is therefore in great interest for Helen to expose these rumours for the lies that they are, as they could have the gravest effects. Some academic texts claim, such as the one by Jacobs (1986), that Brontë only portrayed psychological abuse in *Wildfell Hall* between Helen and Huntingdon but there is much to be said for it actually being a portrayal of physical violence as well (p. 212).

2.2.1.2. Gilbert Markham

Gilbert Markham as a character is a very important one in *Wildfell Hall*, as he is the narrator of the whole novel, a subject which will be delved into later. Most of all he is an example of how masculinity is not rigid but can be fluid. He is an opposite to Huntingdon, perhaps even a foil, but most of all he represents a second chance at the ideal of domesticity, this time a chance that can actually become reality for Helen.

When the reader first gets acquainted with Gilbert, he is still very much a young man, a boy. He is also a product of his society and its high regard and reinforcement of traditional gender roles. Gilbert is the epitome of male privilege and gladly uses his privilege to his full advantage. He is vain and self-absorbed, constantly valuing women

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on the attention they give him. Most of all, Gilbert's behaviour is shown to be a natural result of the upbringing he has had and the milieu he lives in (Jacobs, 1986). His mother taught him that it was a woman's responsibility to provide a man's comfort, and a man's responsibility to provide comfort for himself. Despite not being the husband in his domestic environment, he still has the full advantages of it, being an adult. It is no surprise that, being a product of his society, he prefers to believe the rumours that are spread about Helen instead of believing the stories she tells him. When Helen's brother, Lawrence, is mistaken for Helen's lover by Gilbert, he attacks him. Gilbert has become the lover, but most of all a jealous one. This is his lowest point in the novel and from then on out he only changes towards becoming a better man, as this attack has made it necessary for Helen to explain her history to Gilbert. The subversive quality of Gilbert is that he is the one who needs to change his ways to become a good prospective partner for Helen, not the other way around. At first he approaches her as he has approached every eligible woman he has ever met: as a possible admirer of his. He hopes to change her into everything he desires, but quickly realises that that is not a possibility. Especially when learning about her past and her marriage, Gilbert starts to see the mistakes of his ways and is willing to change his own view on women and marriage. In allowing himself to be changed as such, Helen changes as well. She now no longer is an object, but becomes subject (Langland, 1989). In an age where women are objects of their husbands and are supposed to suppress their own emotions in favour of men, it is a revolutionary way of showing a developing relationship between a man and a woman in the Victorian Era. Brontë shows an alternative to the gender and domestic ideals that are dictated. After Huntingdon's death, the relationship between Helen and Gilbert changes, as marriage now becomes a possibility. Helen, having learnt from her previous romantic feelings, takes her time to 'test' Gilbert before deciding that she wants to be his wife. She made the mistake to quickly marry Huntingdon, blinded by her trust in the Victorian romantic ideology. Older, wiser, and more experienced, she is no longer incapable of being rational about matters of the heart. As Helen has become rich due to both her husband's and uncle's death, class distinctions between her and Gilbert become more

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apparent than ever. He can no longer court her as he is not in the position to do so, being so inferior to her in class. Gilbert, who has been quite forward in his interest in Helen so far, now becomes submissive, silent, and passive. It is Helen who has to show her feminine desire for him, which was so frowned upon before. He has become the object of her desire and it is she who proposes marriage to him. Helen no longer holds any desires to take responsibility for her future husband's happiness in the way she did with Huntingdon, and explains to Gilbert that he is the only one who can turn this marriage into a failure. She will not be held responsible, once again turning everything around and subverting the story of her first marriage (Langland, 1989). As their marriage is said to be a happy one, it is remarkable that Brontë uses this course for their relationship, as it destroys the notion that women should be submissive and that men should not take responsibility in their marriage. Helen's marriage to Huntingdon adhered to societal expectations and failed dramatically; her marriage to Gilbert is the exact opposite and is rather successful. It is a rather notable form of critique on the societal expectations of marriage. Although the idea of the subversion of the marriage is an interesting and promising one, the fact that the laws have not changed, means that Gilbert will still be in a position of power over Helen, no matter how equal they might feel in their relationship. That means that if their marriage were to fail after all—even if it is Gilbert's fault—Helen could still be the only one to truly suffer. Twenty years after their marriage, Gilbert says that they have always been happy together. Yet, Helen is never allowed to confirm this.

2.2. Education and Work

Furthermore, Anne's heroine believes that to hinder women from falling into this trap, they should receive the same education as men, so that both sexes would look upon each other as equals. For instance, in her discussions with Gilbert Markham, she declares that: "I would not send a poor girl into the world, unarmed against her foes, and ignorant of the snares that beset her path; nor would I watch and guard her, till, deprived of self-respect and self-reliance, she lost the power or the will to watch and guard herself" (A. Brontë, 1848, p.20). Indeed, boys were allowed to experience the

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world around them and they were educated on it as well. However, girls were not allowed to experience the world in the same way, for they were confined to the domestic sphere.

To prove this point Anne Brontë shows us the circumstances of Helen's life. Helen was young when she fell in love with Arthur Huntingdon and she married him although she knew that he had many faults. However, she believed that she could reform him and make him turn his life around: "I shall consider my life well spent in saving him from the consequences of his early errors, and striving to recall him to the path of virtue" (A. Bronte, 1848, p.118). This was a notion that many young women in this period had and this idea was even reinforced by writers such as Sarah Stickney Ellis, who maintained that when men have bad habits and are unkind to their wives, it must still be a "woman's part to build him up ... to raise him in his own esteem, to restore him his estimate of his moral worth" (p.68). This is exactly what Helen does in the beginning of the novel, until she realizes that she should not have to. In the end, she decides that the best thing she can do for herself and her son is to leave her husband and become independent so she can take care of herself and her son. By leaving her husband and taking her child, Helen is taking a big step for she is indeed breaking the law by doing so.

2.3. The Reflection of the Victorian Woman in the Novel

Helen may be considered to be the main character of Anne Bronte's novel *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. She is a young eighteen-year old lady who is supposed to live a life of a typical Victorian middle-class woman. She is to be introduced to a society during an oncoming season in London where she should find an acceptable gentleman, marry him and become an obedient and humble wife. She also has very good prospects of finding such a man:

... , and I may venture to say, there will be no lack of suitors; for you can boast a good family, a pretty considerable fortune and expectations, and, I may as well tell you likewise-for, if I don't, others will- that you have fair share of beauty ... (A. Bronte, 1848, p.103).

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From the quotation above, it can clearly be seen what values the Victorian society regarded as worthwhile. A man who was born in a good, reputable family and had enough money could also expect that he would wed easily. Money was the main criterion, whilst love was pushed aside and played an inferior role. This is also the case of Helen's friend Milicent Hargrave. She is forced to marry a man whom she does not love. She is a gentle, tender, and intelligent woman whose family, however, does not have enough money. She finally resigns to her fate and is driven into a marriage with Mr. Hattersley, who definitely does not deserve Milicent's love and soul.

... and I dread the thoughts of marrying him. Then Why have you accepted him? You will ask... Besides, mamma is so delighted with the idea of the match; she thinks she has managed so well for me; and I cannot bear to disappoint her. I do objects sometimes, and tell her what I feel, but you don't know how she talks. Mr. Hattersley, you know, is the son of a rich banker, and as Esther and I have no fortunes, and Walter very little, our dear mamma is very anxious to see us all well married, that is, united to rich partners-it is not my idea of being well married, but she means it all for the best (A. Bronte, 1848, p.177).

Her mother seems to ignore the fact that Milicent does not love Mr. Hattersley and that her daughter's happiness is not important for her. But appearances are deceptive. Perhaps, it is important for the mother, but as an experienced woman she is conscious of her daughter's unhappy future without fortune that would be in store for Milicent in case she will not marry. Her mother acts so only because she loves her daughter and wants the best for her. She wants her daughter not to live in need. So the important thing is Mr. Hattersley's money and the prospect of future provisions.

Both Helen and Milicent have romantic ideas about her future husband's appearance and mainly about his character. But Helen is not as submissive as Milicent. And above all, she grew up in quite different conditions. As it was mentioned above, Milicent cannot choose and decide about her future life because her family is not rich, whilst Helen can do what she wants to do. She can even decide not to marry at all because as to the money, she is not dependent on a profitable marriage. She wants more from life and is determined to marry only for love. On the one hand, she wants to

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be traditional, to marry, be a good wife, and honour her future husband, but on the other hand she wants to choose the right one. The aspect of choice makes her not to be a traditional woman. This is the first time we can see it in Helen's behaviour:

... but you don't need to fear me, for I not only should think it wrong to marry a man that was deficient in sense or in principle, but I should never be tempted to do it; for I could not like him, if he were ever so handsome, and ever so charming, in other respects; I should hate him - despise him - pity him - anything but love him (A. Bronte, 1848, p.104).

Then she meets Mr. Arthur Huntingdon and falls in love with him. She longs to become a loving, solicitous, and obedient wife after their marriage. It can be proved by the following fact. Arthur starts to be bored with peaceful life in the countryside. So he goes to London to revel with his companions for a few months there. He looks very poor and terrible after his return, but Helen " ... have not upbraided him by word or look ... " (A. Bronte, 1848, p.179). And what is more, she takes care of him lovingly and patiently like a respectable, kindhearted, and obedient wife from those times. "Obedience was all that was required of them" ("Women in the Victorian era"). But Arthur continues in his wicked behaviour and his acts start to be even worse. Very often he goes to London for a long time where he drinks with his friends, and when he comes back, he is in a very bad condition of body and mind. It is perhaps interesting to note that Anne Bronte had very similar experience with her brother Branwell. Many critics agree that she may have found a model for wicked life of Mr. Huntingdon in her brother Branwell.

It is believed that many of these details were based on Anne's observation of Branwell... Branwell destroyed his health. He had attacks of delirium tremens, and on one occasion his bedclothes caught on fire while he was drunk ... (Ockerbloom, 2004, p.67).

Arthur also invites his friends to spend some time at Grassdale where they continue in their sprees and coarse manners: " ... my son, whom his father and his father's friends delighted to encourage in all the embryo vices a little child can show, and to instruct in all the evil habits he could acquire" (A. Bronte, 1848, p.271). Helen

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even discovers Arthur's infidelity. She learns that he loves Anabella and that he does not love Helen any more:

... he was peevish and low - fretting, I suppose, over his dear Annabella's departure - and particularly illtempered to me: everything I did was wrong; I was cold-hearted, hard, insensate; my sour, pale face was perfectly repulsive; my voice made him shudder; he knew not how he could live through the winter with me.

(A. Bronte, 1848, p.251).

He treats Helen very badly. It could be said that he is slowly but surely destroying their marriage. This cannot last forever.

2.4. Breaking the Norms

Helen is not a typical Victorian woman. She does not overlook Arthur's shocking behaviour, resigns to him, and blindly comes to terms with her fate. She starts to think about leaving her husband. It is a very courageous and an unusual act at those times if one considers the status of Victorian women:

By law, a married woman is the property of her husband, and her possessions – even her children – belong to him. Influenced by the Bible, many people believe that men and women are born to fulfil different roles: men to command, and women to obey men and bear and raise their children.

(Channel4).

The woman has no rights and her husband can treat her the way he wants. The woman is completely dependent on him and Helen is aware of all that. She would be despised by the society if she left her husband, and it would be very hard for her to live a life on her own. She would become 'a fallen woman':

No matter how great the provocation, simply by leaving her husband a woman quits respectable society and becomes an outcast. Although she may have done nothing wrong, she is a 'fallen woman' ...

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and fallen women are excluded from polite society.
(Channel4).

That is probably the reason why she hesitates for so long to leave her husband. Two feelings and two different decisions are in her mind. She can either do what is socially acceptable, (i.e. to stay with her husband in spite of his terrible behaviour) or she can do what is acceptable and definitely better for her and mainly for her little son. She does not want her son to end up as her father who drank himself to death, and also as Mr. Huntingdon who seems to end up in the same way. The life with Mr. Huntingdon is worse and worse: “No answering spark of kindness - no awakening penitence, but an unappeasable ill-humour and a spirit of tyrannous exaction that increased with indulgence, and a lurking gleam of self-complacent triumph” (A. Bronte, 1848, p. 253). It finally becomes unbearable and Helen definitely decides to leave him. In spite of social prejudices and distresses, which will be connected with her departure, she decides to live a free and an independent life. And this is the turning point in her life. This is the Helen’s true act of independence which is a privilege of a modern woman.

She starts to make a plan. She knows that she will need help and the only person who can assist her is her brother Frederick. She tells him about her plan. At first he seems not to agree with her. He is a man and according to social rules he considers an abandonment of her husband as not right and not legitimate.

... he looked upon my project as wild and Impracticable ; he deemed my fears for Arthur disproportioned to the circumstances, and opposed so many objections to my plan, and devised so many milder methods for ameliorating my condition ...
(A. Bronte, 1848, p.291).

But when Helen tells him about all the horrors and bad treatment she has to bear, he changes his mind and promises to help her. She has to describe the whole story to her brother to justify her act of leaving. And she does the same with Gilbert. She gives him her diary to read, so that he can understand why she had to abandon her husband. Whether Frederick helps her only because he is her brother and loves her, or would do that in case he is not her brother is not known. But the fact that he as a

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Victorian man ranges himself with a woman and helps her with the abandonment of her husband could be considered as quite shocking at those times. Nevertheless, he does that and he provides her a safe shelter in the old Hall where they both were born. The moment the situation becomes pressing, Helen leaves the Grassdale Manor and abandons her husband.

As to the painting, women were considered as not so skillful and well educated to make their living by painting or by other artistic work. Painting was considered to be a favourite pastime of women:

The Victorian era was a male dominated world where women had great trouble being taken Seriously as artists. Releated to a genteel pastime suitable for young females waiting for marriage painting was never seriously considered as profession (Viková, 2007, p.16).

But Helen is able to break the social prejudices and conventions. When she decides to leave Arthur Huntingdon, she thinks about how she could earn the money. She realizes that she could become a professional painter. Painting was hitherto only her favourite pastime, and even though her paintings are very good, she knows that she will have to "... improve her talent and to produce something worth while as a specimen of my powers..." (A. Bronte, 1848, p.274). That means that she has to change the themes of her paintings because till this time she painted only the portraits of her little son, husband, or some imaginative person and nature. After moving to Wildfell Hall, she paints mainly its building and adjacent village. Now, painting becomes the true occupation: "The palette and the easel, my darling playmates once, must be my sober toil-fellows now" (A. Bronte, 1848, p.274). She improves her skills which can be proved with Gilbert's words when looking at Helen's paintings:

... faithfully drawn and coloured, and very elegantly and artistically handled... It was the portrait of a gentleman...but if done by the same hand as the others, it was evidently some years before;for there was far more careful minuteness of detail, and less of that freshness of colouring and freedom of handling that delighted and surprised me in them ... The picture was strikingly beautiful; it was the very scene itself, transferred as if by magic to the canvas (A. Bronte, 1848, p.34, 55).

2.5. Conclusion

In conclusion, Anne Brontë addresses the question of women equality and independence in all of Helen's words and actions. The novel provides us with a consideration about marriage, if it was possible for a woman to marry and retain her independence. It clearly communicates the message that the marriage might not be the best one could reach. The novel written in a feministic tone suggests that it is better and even more appropriate for a lady to refuse a proposal, although it would incense her family and background, than marry against her will and regret. It clearly communicates Anne's ideas and was written on purpose to inform audiences about the issue rather than to impress them with artistic abilities.

General Conclusion

It was illustrated in the first chapter the characteristics of the Victorian Society. The 19th century witnessed many changes as a result of a phenomenon called the Industrial Revolution; it led to the great progress of the country in every field. On the other side, the industrial revolution created many problems such as child labour and poverty, and this led to a great gap between social classes. Then, the ideology of separate spheres was much known during the Victorian era; men dominated all fields of life while women were classified as the weaker sex, their only role was to take care of their husband and children. Women at that time were prevented from all their rights and they could not raise their voices in public. It had been shown how the Victorian literature reflected the historical, social norms of Victorian England shedding the light on a type of literary works which is the novel, also, English women writers and the major themes that women concerned about. We found that most of the women novelists illustrated their own experience in their novels because they were influenced by the social values of their conservative society.

As has been shown, Victorian women were under the control of the patriarchy. The idea of the spheres, which took hold in the nineteenth century, helped reinforce the perpetual belief that women were better suited at home. The separation of the sexes undermined women in society and held them back from an independent life and serious education. Nearing the end of the century, women's education, as well as opportunities outside of the home, started to improve and the figure of the New Woman started to emerge. With this, women began to gain more freedom and independence in their lives, leaving behind the patriarchal prison of the Victorian era. Literature was their way to freedom; many women writers used it to question and challenge the limiting, domesticated angel in the house, and step by step they started to gain their freedom from the patriarchal society, and they began to act in the public sphere as men

The last chapter focuses on the main character of the *Tennant of Wildfell Hall*. It examines how Helen was changing from the traditional Victorian woman into a modern and independent one. There are described criteria indicating which lady or gentleman is suitable for marriage. Attention is also paid to the description of the

General Conclusion

contemporary women's position, what their rights were and also how the society perceived them if they left their husband, for example. Helen certainly does not represent the typical Victorian woman. At the beginning, she is described as a woman of tradition who wants to get married and live a happy life. But she suffers a lot because of an unhappy marriage. She finally decides to abandon her husband and to save herself and her little son, which is the decision of a modern woman.

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall is a successful work of Anne Bronte that reflect the British society during the 19th century; where women were oppressed by the patriarchal society. The aim of this research work is to analyze how Anne Bronte broke the norms of the Victorian society through her heroine Helen.

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