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Education, Instruction & Knowledge in *Agnes Grey & The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* by Anne Brontë

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Blessed is he who has found his work; let him ask no other blessedness. He has a work, a life-purpose; he has found it, and will follow it! How, as a free-flowing channel, dug and torn by noble force through the sour mud-swamp of one's existence, like an ever-deepening river there, it runs and flows; — draining-off the sour festering water, gradually from the root of the remotest grass-blade; making, instead of pestilential swamp, a green fruitful meadow with its clear-flowing stream.

Thomas Carlyle, *Chartism. Past and Present*, 1858.

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INTRODUCTION

"Of all many-sided subjects, [education] is the one which has the greatest number of sides."[1]

[1] John Stuart MILL, *Inaugural Address: Delivered to the University of St. Andrews, Feb. 1st 1867*, (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1867), 4.

The entire object of true education is to make people not merely do the right things, but enjoy the right things — not merely industrious, but to love industry — not merely learned, but to love knowledge — not merely pure, but to love purity — not merely just, but to hunger and thirst after justice.

John RUSKIN, *Unto this Last, and Other Writings*, 1860.

The famous Victorian critic John Ruskin stresses the importance of happiness in the process of education. It implies an emotional dimension, which is rarely attached to the sphere of education because of the widespread idea that education is merely an intellectual process. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, education is "the process of teaching or learning, especially in a school or college, or the knowledge that you get from this."[2] At first glance, the definition seems to confirm the traditional belief that education is directed towards reason. Reason is put in parallel with the concept of morality, in the French Dictionary *Littré* (which dates back to the nineteenth century), as education is: "Action d'élever, de former un enfant, un jeune homme; ensemble des habiletés intellectuelles ou manuelles qui s'acquièrent, et ensemble des qualités morales qui se développent."[3] What gives credit to the Cambridge Dictionary definition is that passion should not be involved and that the very consequence of the process of education, according to the definition, is "the knowledge that you get from this." Thus, the definition of knowledge seems to concern the acquired result of education.

Yet, the Cambridge Dictionary defines the word "knowledge" as being an: "understanding of information about a subject that you get by experience or study, either known by one person or by people generally."[4] The *Littré* Dictionary specifies the kind of understanding; knowledge is defined as: "État de l'esprit de celui qui connaît et discerne."[5] The understanding of information gives the subject an active role, and it is developed: "La connaissance de Dieu. La connaissance du bien et du mal. La connaissance du cœur humain."[6] Or, knowledge can be internal and personal: "État de celui qui se connaît lui-même, qui a le sentiment de son existence."[7]

[2] Cambridge Dictionary, online, Internet, 11 Jan. 2021. Available: https://dictionary.cambridge.org/fr/.
[3] Dictionnaire Littré - Dictionnaire de la langue française, online, Internet, 28 Jan. 2021. , Available: https://www.littre.org/.
[4] Cambridge Dictionary.
[5] Dictionnaire Littré - Dictionnaire de la langue française.
[6] *Ibid.*
[7] *Ibid*.

In any cases, we find again the idea of something being acquired, but the definition brings forward a new means: experience. Now, it is crucial to see how the Cambridge Dictionary defines the concept of experience. According to them, experience is: "(the process of getting) knowledge or skill from doing, seeing, or feeling things."[8] The focus is put on feelings in the *Littré* Dictionary: "Acte d'éprouver, d'avoir éprouvé."[9] Both definitions explicitly place feelings at the core of experience – even though the French definition of "experience" does not really insist on the knowledge acquired from experience. The link between feelings and experience converges with Ruskin's standpoint on education: happiness must be the sole end of the process of education, and – following the Cambridge Dictionary definitions – that end can be reached through experience. Experience is intrinsically linked with the process of "socialisation," according to the French philosopher François Flahault.[10] As a consequence, this aspect of the process of education seems to be an emotional quest. But through the point of view of the *Littré* Dictionary, education by experience is indeed an emotional quest, but a long-term quest: "Connaissance des choses acquises par un long usage."[11] The long-term acquisition and the use of a certain knowledge imply repetition, which is a key tool used at school to make pupils remember the transmitted information. As stated by Alan Richardson, from the eighteenth century, teaching focuses on: "formal training by drill and repetition."[12] Therefore, we may wonder what we can make of the acquisition of knowledge through study.

Studies are usually enacted at school, through the medium of instruction. This concept is defined by the Cambridge Dictionary as being: "the teaching of a particular skill or subject."[13] We may understand "instruction" then as being a hyponym of the wider concept of "education", both aiming at the acquisition of knowledge. Nevertheless, François Flahault warns us on the misconception of education in our modern occidental cultures: there is the widespread belief that education is derived from instruction, and the acquisition of knowledge. We can wonder if it is true, or if these three notions have a complementary and interdependent relationship.

[8] Cambridge Dictionary.
[9] Dictionnaire Littré - Dictionnaire de la langue française.
[10] Cf. François FLAHAULT, 'Instruction, éducation et transmission entre générations' *Revue du MAUSS*. 28 (2006): 295–304. "Cette transmission qui s'opère dans l'expérience quotidienne du rapport avec les adultes constitue la base de l'existence de l'enfant et de sa socialisation," 295.
[11] Dictionnaire Littré - Dictionnaire de la langue française.
[12] Alan RICHARDSON, 'The Politics of Childhood: Wordsworth, Blake, and Catechistic Method' *ELH*. 56.4 (1989): 853–868, 853.
[13] Cambridge Dictionary.

What we have first stated is that both education and instruction lead to knowledge. Another thesis unveiled is that instruction, or intellectual study, is part of education, and seems to evolve along with experience. Both notions have often been understood as being opposed in traditional epistemology, mainly through the dispute between rationalism and empiricism. Indeed, for rationalists, the experience we get through reason provides knowledge *a priori* because it is affirmed by reason even before being confirmed by experience. Whereas on the contrary, empiricists consider that knowledge – if we ever reach it – is to be gained *a posteriori*, thanks to sense experience.[14] According to *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, the two can only be incompatible on the same subject, but most of the time, we need both theories for our knowledge of the external world. Rationalism helps us to use our cognitive abilities when empiricism – especially sense empiricism – encourages our physical abilities. Therefore, if both schools may explain the sources of knowledge, we need to educate both our minds et our bodies. The importance of the education of both the body and the mind slowly started to emerge during the nineteenth century.

There was a growing belief that body too should be educated and taken care of for general good health. Psychiatrists of the time, by trying to classify diseases, established which ones were related to the mind, and which ones to the body. They discovered more and more that there was often a combination of the two.[15] That is what led William Ewart Gladstone himself to argue in 1857 that boys should remember: "manly sports."[16] Therefore, not only in the medical field but also in society there was a tendency to preserve the welfare of the body in order to preserve the welfare of the mind. As Bruce Haley summarises it: "the mind cannot live without the body; neglect the well-being of one and you endanger the other."[17] Indeed, Charlotte Brontë herself experienced Haley's theory. When she was feeling a deep sentiment of solitude, leaving place to an overall mental lassitude, she started to have fever, which led her to state: "I am well aware myself that extreme and continuous depression of spirits has had much to do with the origin of the illness."[18] The association of the body and the mind also helped the Victorian doctors to try and find moral causes to some diseases. Therefore, the physical

[14] Peter MARKIE, 'Rationalism vs. Empiricism' in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. 2017. (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2017).
[15] Cf. Bruce HALEY, *The Healthy Body and Victorian Culture*, (Cambridge ; Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1978). James Cowles Prichard was one of the firsts, in the first half of the nineteenth century to suggest that "madness and allied diseases have a physical basis […]" but still should be cured with remedies for the mind. For instance, Prichard believed that one of the ways to avoid such diseases was to have a healthy and moral education, 25.
[16] Quoted in Bruce HALEY, *op. cit*, 23.
[17] *Ibid.*, 23
[18] *Ibid*, 27.

education could be at the origin of new knowledge regarding medicine, psychology, and physiology. That would lead then to the scientific instruction of people, essentially helping them by giving them advice to be able to conserve their bodies. *Agnes Grey,* which is the story of a young governess – daughter of a clergyman – trying to educate aristocratic children, often plays with them outside, to educate their bodies. Helen Huntingdon, the protagonist of Anne Brontë's second novel *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* often relates the outings of her young boy Arthur. His physical education is crucial to her, as the story revolves around Helen trying to escape her brutal and wrongly influential husband, Arthur Huntingdon.

These considerations also seem to be attached to the social expectations of the time. Thus, we may argue that the concepts of education, instruction, and knowledge as interdependent all seem to base their definitions in a peculiar spatial and temporal context. The spatial context being not the most relevant for our subject, we should focus on the temporal context of the nineteenth century. As Ruskin presents it, the principle of education – encompassing instruction and the acquisition of knowledge – was probably synonymous with happiness, pleasure during the Victorian era. The Victorian British philosopher Herbert Spencer seems to have taken the same path than his contemporary Ruskin. According to him, the process of education should guarantee a certain amount of pleasure, of heartfulness, necessary for the well-appropriation of knowledge. He explains: "we go on to remark that a pleasurable state of feeling is far more favourable to intellectual action than a state of indifference or disgust."[19]

Both Ruskin and Spencer's beliefs may come from more ancient theories, among which we can find the vision of the Scottish scholar James Pillans: "where young people are taught as they ought to be, they are quite as happy in school as at play, seldom less delighted, nay, often more, with the well-directed exercise of their mental energies than with that of their muscular powers."[20] Another theory is stated here: Pillans insists on the use of "mental energies," which lays the emphasis on the use of individual intellectual faculties. Spencer calls it the process of "self-instruction."[21] Alongside with the pleasure felt during the process, we should learn thanks to the discovery of things by ourselves. According to Spencer, it is the other key means for knowledge to be properly and stably acquired. If we manage to draw conclusions by ourselves, the mixing of the activity of the mind, the concentration required, and the pride of having

[19] Herbert SPENCER, 'The Essential Need for Independence, Self-Discovery, and Pleasure in Self-Directed Learning in Education' *The Victorian Web*. online, Internet, 9 Jan. 2021. Available: http://www.victorianweb.org/history/education/index.html.
[20] *Ibid.*
[21] *Ibid.*

unveiled something guarantee the long-term establishment of this conclusion – or piece of knowledge – in our minds. It echoes the already mentioned importance of experience, experience which needs to be personal and individual.

Nonetheless, the desire for personal and individual experience seems to be antagonistic with the core codified principles of the Victorian era. The nineteenth century was a period of vast changes, which was counterbalanced by an upsurge of traditional rules, including for instance the separation of masculine and feminine spheres. Rachel K. Carnell raises the issue of public and private spheres, through an analysis of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall'*s narratology.[22] She uses Jürgen Habermas' theory of the public sphere being exclusively masculine,[23] whereas women are expected to stay in the private, domestic sphere, far from any political considerations. Therefore, the clear distinction between the two spheres implies a difference earlier in education. The main criterium of differentiation is gender. Indeed, boys are raised to be able to have a voice in the political discourse, whereas girls are educated towards the ends of marriage and motherhood. Through the spectrum of social gender rules, the freedom of personal and individual experience and cognitive implication is rather limited for girls, if not inexistant. For instance, Anne Brontë herself could not go to school and, as all girls, was supposed to be raised in the prospective of finding a husband. Contrary to the expectations, her father, Patrick Brontë, had enlightened ideas for the time. Instead of wishing a good marriage for his five daughters, he: "saw education as being important for daughters as well as sons."[24] Being a scholar himself, he had a huge library of which the access was left free for his children. Anne Brontë's education and admiration for literature were developed there.

Thus, she inscribed herself in the legacy of Jürgen Habermas' theory of a new sphere, including mainly women, and resembling more the public sphere than the private sphere. According to him, there were some women who had a greater impact in society, outside of the private sphere. They belonged to what he calls a literary public sphere. He believes that: "female reader as well as apprentices and servants often took a more active part… than the owners of private property and family heads themselves."[25] If some women, such as Anne Brontë,

[22] Rachel K. CARNELL, 'Feminism and the Public Sphere in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*' *Nineteenth-Century Literature*. 53 (1998): 1–24.
[23] Cf. *Ibid.* Jürgen Habermas distinguished two spheres. The public sphere was the sphere of men, where they would gather and discuss about politics for the common good. Carnell explains that this public sphere happened "among educated men who gathered in coffee houses to critique government actions and protest against any perceived abuses of power." Whereas the private sphere – not necessarily synonymous with domestic sphere – was the feminine one, where no important matters would be tackled, 4.
[24] Nick HOLLAND, *In Search of Anne Brontë*, (Cheltenham ; Gloucestershire: The History Press, 2017), 25.
[25] Quoted in CARNELL, *op. cit*, 6.

managed to challenge the classical binary structure of society, it meant that they managed to free themselves from the traditional model of education and instruction. In both Habermas and Brontë's cases, the instrument of emancipation is literature. This theory links directly literature – and we may argue art in general – to emancipation, thanks to the help personal experience and study. Anne Brontë's two protagonists, Agnes Grey and Helen Huntingdon (especially the latter) count on art and writing to break free from their constraints. There is an acquisition of knowledge, if we apply for example the philosopher Locke's conceptualisation of knowledge. He believes that we use our own concrete experiences to: "generalise so that we have some rule or idea that applies in circumstances beyond our direct experience."[26] Both Agnes et Helen exploit their direct experiences and represent them in their arts, so that it makes their experiences more abstract and applicable to other experiences. When Helen paints Wildfell Hall, it is her own experience, but she transforms it as a universal piece of knowledge by representing it; her perception of Wildfell Hall can be turned into the symbol of a Hall, and therefore shared by other persons. Still, we shall consider the limits of that source of knowledge, which is subjective.

It is then a wider knowledge of the world, far from the mere restricted knowledge required for women as wives and mothers, during the Victorian era. The concept of Victorian education (in its broad meaning, encompassing instruction and knowledge) is re-appropriated towards the more general goal of emancipation. This postulate shows that education, instruction, and knowledge can not only serve the purpose of one society, but they can also be ends in themselves, fulfilling one's desire for independence.

However: "women who read, much more women who write, are, in the existing constitution of things, a contradiction and a disturbing element […]."[27] Indeed, literary women could not erase the classical distinctions between the public and the private spheres. Anne Brontë and her sisters, for instance, could not publish any of their work under their names. Therefore, when they decided to publish a collection of poems, they chose masculine pseudonyms: Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell – respectively corresponding to Charlotte, Emily and Anne. According to the BBC movie *To Walk Invisible* directed by Sally Wainwright, Charlotte would have said "we must walk invisible,"[28] in order to be considered seriously by editors and

[26] Caspar HEWETT, 'The Great Debate: John Locke's Theory of Knowledge', 2006, online, Internet, 27 Jan. 2021. , Available: http://www.thegreatdebate.org.uk/LockeEpistem.html.
[27] John Stuart MILL and Harriet Taylor MILL, *The Subjection of Women*, (Auckland, NZ: The Floating Press, 2009), 52.
[28] Sally WAINWRIGHT, *To Walk Invisible: The Brontë Sisters*, Biography, Drama, History, (BBC Wales, 29016).

publishers. Thus, literary women could not blossom as women in such a society, given that education was still gendered and restricted.

Indeed, the notions of education, instruction and knowledge rely almost entirely on social rules. Therefore, people's education is dictated by society, so that social identity is built according to these rules. Another dimension is crucial then: after the distinctions based on genre, there came classes' distinctions. At the time when Anne Brontë wrote her two novels *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, there was a clear contrast between the children of aristocratic families who would be taught at home by a governess, or the elder boys who would go to public schools, and the working-class children who had to work to help their parents, mostly in coal mines and textile mills. Therefore, children from poor families would only have a practical education, based on experience, without any form of formal instruction leading to the acquisition of knowledge. The first attempt to grant these working-class children with a basic instruction was the creation of Ragged Schools.[29] It was only in 1870 that school became compulsory in Britain, for children from five to ten. On the contrary, boys from aristocratic families had principally an intellectual education. Most of the time, the governess was required to teach subjects she did not even learn herself. That is the case with Agnes Grey, who becomes a governess, successively in two houses, and struggles to educate the children. Actually, during the early Victorian era, there were few information provided about the exact role of the governess in one's family. Kathryn Hughes insists on the political and social position of the Victorian governess. From the beginning, she puts forward that there were no royal commissions nor parliamentary reports about domestic life.[30]

It reveals a major paradox about education during the Victorian era. The social codes were particularly strict, society was divided on the basis of many different criteria, and yet the actual laws were rather blurred concerning the aims of education, and how to conduct instruction. As a consequence, instruction differs from one instructor to another, and as a result the knowledge acquired varies too. Furthermore, what is crucial is also the relationship between the instructor and the instructed. First of all, in the whole process of education, the aspect of intellectual instruction (as opposed here to experience), implies a relationship between at least two persons. It is important to focus on the nature and the impact of this relationship in the

[29] Cf. Anne DELONG, *The Victorian World: A Historical Exploration of Literature*, (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2018). A ragged school is defined by the author as: "independent, secular, charitable schools" where "indigent children and adults were welcomed to learn the fundamentals of reading, writing, and arithmetic." The writer Charles Dickens visited one of these schools in 1846 and he made a report in a letter to *The Daily News*. He vouched for even more governmental effort in the creation of educational systems, 34.
[30] Kathryn HUGHES, *The Victorian Governess*, (London ; Rio Grande, Ohio: Hambledon Press, 1993), 11.

entire process of education. François Flahault explains that learning requires first a basis of "socialisation." He argues: "l'apprentissage s'opère d'autant mieux que les fondations en ont été apportées par des processus de socialisation."[31] At school for instance, the intergenerational contact between teachers and pupils is the first step towards cultural transmission (as being opposed to biological transmission in his argumentation). To illustrate his theory, he uses the example of language. He states that a child learns to speak in a social context, surrounded by other, older persons. The relationship with the other determines the child's capacity to learn how to speak, and how to communicate with the other. This is a virtuous circle of which the starting point is the social contact. Therefore, home even prior to school, adopts an educative role for children. As Flahault summarises it: "L'éducation repose sur le fait que des adultes bienveillants assurent une médiation entre les enfants et la société dans laquelle ceux-ci devront trouver leur place."[32]

He adds another characteristic to the whole process; he speaks of benevolence. Thus, education should be about transmission, in a global atmosphere of benevolence and joy, a theory which recalls Ruskin's words regarding the search for happiness – "the feeling of being pleased"[33] – in the process of education. The first positive consequence is that the new information will be more easily acquired if it is transmitted in a serene atmosphere, and the second one is that it gives credit to the importance of the awakening of emotions, in parallel with the acquisition of knowledge. The exchange with the other allows us to feel, which is part of the knowledge of life, of the understanding of life. The most prominent feeling is probably love, which is a leitmotiv in Anne Brontë's two novels. Both Agnes and Helen feel powerful enough to assert themselves and their decisions thanks to love. This feeling is synonymous with hope: Agnes eventually builds and runs her own school when Helen succeeds in choosing her own destiny against her aunt's opinion. Even though the two protagonists do not have the same happy outcome, their love feelings for the other allow them to affirm their decisions; passion educates reason, which confirms their individuality and by extension their humanity.

The cruciality of the other as a reminder of our humanity is echoed in Michel Tournier's words, in his novel *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique*: "Autrui, pièce maîtresse de mon univers."[34] This sentence comes from Robinson's logbook; he insists on his loss of landmarks once he realises his complete solitude in the island, where he is alienated by his own

[31] FLAHAULT, *op. cit*, 297.
[32] FLAHAULT, *op. cit*, 299.
[33] Cambridge Dictionary.
[34] Michel TOURNIER, *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 62.

perceptions. Deprived of any possibility of communication with his peers, he progressively feels that his humanity is leaving him. He proposes one potential solution, being the one of the artists. He argues that either a painter, a sculptor, or we could guess a writer, is able to introduce characters in a landscape, which in a way helps to fill the emptiness. This theme is primordial in the mind of Anne Brontë's, whose two main protagonists use art as a way to escape their solitary destinies. When Agnes, in *Agnes Grey* uses her pen to open up to a new perspective of the world, Helen in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* has recourse to painting. As being entrapped in solitude, both women cannot rely on the benevolent relationships with others to educate and instruct themselves, that is why they decide to make something of this solitude. Through art, they manage to compensate the exchange they cannot have with other persons. In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, on chapter eighteen, Helen has just had an argument with her aunt, and she does not want to stay among the other ladies in the drawing-room. When she leaves for the library, she explains: "The easel and the painting apparatus would serve as an excuse for abandoning the drawing-room […]."[35] Agnes in *Agnes Grey* also takes refuge in her art, her writing, when she does not want to deal with people around her. When Agnes argues with Mrs Bloomfield concerning her son's misdemeanour, she realises she cannot make her change her mind, so she "judged it prudent to say no more."[36] She does not speak anymore, but she writes it. Indeed, she sets her goal from the beginning. In the first lines, Agnes explains that she "will candidly lay before the public what I would not disclose to the most intimate friend."[37] Therefore, she still manages to express herself even though she is morally and intellectually – as Helen is – plunged in solitude. Therefore, they somehow self-educate themselves through the medium of art, but we may wonder if art is truly a reliable source of knowledge.

Isabelle Hersant gives a definition of art which would be: "ensemble de connaissances spécifiques structurées en un champ disciplinaire et reconnues dans leur valeur à être transmises."[38] This is the highly spread definition when art started to be studied at the university. If art finds its way in our modern universities, it means that art is instructed, part of the students' education. The word "transmises" brings us back to the original goal of education, which is the idea of transmission. Consequently, thanks to the previous definitions and arguments, we can deduce that art is a branch of the knowledge we may acquire at school. However, Hersant warns us on the fact that art in itself knows no scientific dialectic, which

[35] Anne BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, (1848). (London: Penguin Classics, 1985), 174.
[36] Anne BRONTE, *Agnes Grey*, (1847). (London: Penguin Books, 1988), 48.
[37] *Ibid*, 3.
[38] Isabelle HERSANT, 'L'Art comme savoir ?' *Marges. Revue d'art contemporain*. (2005): 15–29, 21.

would make it objectively knowledge. If art cannot be knowledge, it can articulate itself as knowledge. This articulation can only be made through the work of art, and not the artist itself. Once the work of art is made, it bears an unutterable thought, which escapes from the artist's control, and which becomes knowledge and can be transmitted as such. Obviously, in that case, knowledge cannot be taught, but must be experienced. The author summarises: "l'art comme savoir pourrait se transmettre mais non se dire – se dire au sens de s'articuler en discours."[39] Therefore, art can be a source of knowledge, but only from an empiricist point of view.

Experiencing art is omnipresent in Anne Brontë's life: beside being a writer, she used to draw and paint, especially at Roe Head with her sister Charlotte. The critic Samantha Ellis even puts forward Anne's desire to experiment through art, and not only copy. She wanted to take an active role in the experience, probably to understand the knowledge she was acquiring: "Anne had never thought about becoming a painter, but she did work at her drawing, and had to be proficient enough to teach her pupils. She also flouted the convention that women shouldn't make original pictures but should only copy existing works."[40] This desire is also expressed through Charlotte Brontë's work, in her novel *Jane Eyre*. In the thirteenth chapter, Mr Rochester scrutinises Jane's sketches and paintings, and he starts questioning Jane about the origin of her work. He asks: "'Where did you get your copies?' / 'Out of my head'"[41] is her answer.

The desire to make "original pictures" adds another layer to the process of education (in this case of education by art). Anne wanted to have the main role in her artistic experience, and to be able to express her own voice. Actually, her proposition recalls Herbert Spencer's theory of self-instruction: "Throughout youth, as in early childhood and in maturity, the process [of education] shall be one of self-instruction […]."[42] Both theories resemble one another: they rely on the expression and the emancipation of the self. In that way, "self-instruction" is a polysemous term: we may learn by ourselves, and on ourselves, thanks to art in the case of Anne Brontë. And we know from Spencer that self-instruction is the best way to remember more easily the acquired knowledge. Indeed, the person who is learning can go through his or her own stages of evolution, and the self-discovery is gratifying. That was probably Anne's belief, that is why her two protagonists experience and develop their art in autonomy.

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[39] *Ibid*.
[40] Samantha ELLIS, *Take Courage: Anne Brontë and the Art of Life*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 2017), 275.
[41] Charlotte BRONTE, *Jane Eyre*, (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 146.
[42] SPENCER, 'The Essential Need for Independence, Self-Discovery, and Pleasure in Self-Directed Learning in Education, '*op. cit.*

Therefore, both novels are directly concerned with art through the individualities of the main characters. The two protagonists are also the two narrators. *Agnes Grey* is about Agnes' telling of her story as a governess, and the meta-artistic dimension is rendered explicit at different moments in the novel, when she addresses the reader, but mostly with the last sentence: "And now I think I have said sufficient."[43] In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* Helen Huntingdon's narration is also meta-artistic as it is encircled by Gilbert Markham's narration, presented in the epistolary form. Furthermore, both women draw and paint. Their art is at the core of the novels. But we may ponder on what they learn exactly from their artistic experiences.

Even if we have demonstrated that artistic education and experimentation could lead to the acquisition of knowledge, we need to define that sort of knowledge.[44] If the knowledge transmitted by art is determined by sensible experience, then it is particular to each individual. Therefore, we may wonder if it is possible to consider this knowledge as truth. Indeed, from the education of art as we defined it only derive personal interpretations; the knowledge acquired is subjective. That is why Isabelle Hersant deals with: "un savoir non communicable"[45] which creates a gap between the traditional complementarity and interdependency of knowledge and instruction. In that case, it is no formal instruction which can provide such knowledge, but the process of education through sensible experience. Thus, if there is no formal instruction, that sort of knowledge seems to be far from scientific truth. It is a knowledge that is not formally taught, as in schools or universities (except in art schools, which concerns only a small number of people). Consequently, we may argue that knowledge can be relative, as long as education and instruction are relative too, and are not limited to the scholar and institutionalised sphere. We can wonder if truth is then to be ever reached.

The quest for knowledge is an individual ongoing process, which can be applied to anyone. It is a personal process which has a universal scope. It is the case for instance for Anne Brontë. She decided to use her art, her writings, to have a more universal impact. It is precisely her objective, and she exposed it in the preface to the second edition of her second novel *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. She wrote: "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."[46] As a consequence, her individual quest

[43] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey*, *op. cit,* 193.
[44] HERSANT, *op. cit,*. 21.
[45] *Ibid,* 21.
[46] Quoted in Nick HOLLAND, 'Anne Brontë's Preface To The Tenant Of Wildfell Hall' *Anne Brontë*. , 2018, online, Internet, 19 Jan. 2021. , Available: http://www.annebronte.org/2018/08/19/anne-brontes-preface-to-the-tenant-of-wildfell-hall/.

towards knowledge is carried out through her art. Therefore, she desired to transmit this acquired knowledge to others, through the act of reading. That was an objective commonly shared by Victorian authors, such as George Eliot or Charles Dickens. They were engaged in the project of using art as a political tool, to reform society. There is a democratic dimension attached to the use of art, especially to writings, during the Victorian era. We can deduce that knowledge, even though it is apprehended personally, can be a common and endless quest. It can be brought up collectively through education.

This democratic vision could be seen as belonging to what emerged as proto-feminism during the nineteenth century. Along with the aspiration to enlarge the domain of education and knowledge in order to encompass everyone, and the desire to enlarge the access to school and so to formal instruction to all children, some women and some men started to consider that gender criteria should be abolished as much as social classes barriers.

That is why, thanks to the example of Anne Brontë, we shall strive to analyse the relationship between on one side education, instruction, and knowledge, and on the other side humanity with a particular focus on femininity or even early feminism. We might be agreed upon an established principle of education, which is believed to be divisive, and see how it is progressively challenged, through the medium of art, especially literature, towards the adoption of a more egalitarian dimension, focused on the human, with a rehabilitation of women's role for instance. We shall first focus on the nature of education, instruction, and knowledge, and how they overlap to build one's identity. However, the construction of one's identity is not only an individual process. From childhood, a young person is raised among others, and he or she also benefits from a social education. During the Victorian era, the social education is widely ruled by a strict morality, mainly framed by the omnipresence of religion and modesty. Therefore, our attention shall be drawn, in a second part, to the interdependent relationship between social morality and the process of edification. As a consequence, if the education of one individual is largely influenced by social codes which do not derive from his natural choices, this individual may feel the need, at one point, to question these social codes and to try and re-appropriate his or her identity and education. That is what happened for instance with Anne Brontë. Thus, in the final analysis, it will be interesting, to see how she managed to protest against the established orders, showing for instance the limits and frontiers of the three concepts of education, instruction and knowledge. Anne Brontë used education as a means to spread her ideas, and as an end to redefine her identity as a person and as a woman, to reform and democratise society, and to display new perspectives.

PART I

I. The Construction of Identity

A. "The Child is Father of the Man"[47]

> Lastly, she pictured to herself how this same little sister of hers would, in the after-time, be herself a grown woman; and how she would keep, through all her riper years, the simple and loving heart of her childhood; and how she would gather about her other little children, and make their eyes bright and eager with many a strange tale, perhaps even with the dream of Wonderland of long ago; and how she would feel with all their simple sorrows, and find a pleasure in all their simple joys, remembering her own child-life, and the happy summer days.
> Lewis CAROLL, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, 1865.

a. Natural Education

Through the voice of Alice's sister, closing the first volume of the Alices, the Victorian writer Lewis Carroll depicts the ideal of a continuity between a child's world of imagination and his or her state of mind as an adult. This nostalgia of childhood can be understood through the Victorian spectrum of "The Cult of Childhood." This theory worded by Ernest Dowson was progressively emerging during the nineteenth century, as opposed to the previous assumption that children were miniature adults, to whom we had to inculcate the same values. On the contrary, the innocence of children was now praised and seen as precious, especially thanks to children's outstanding capacity to fantasise. It reminds us of Emily and Anne Brontë's first literary prowess, as children, when they invented the world of Gondal in 1831. Fantasising means a certain freedom of thought, a freedom of actions which were praised by Victorian adults stuck in rigor. Therefore, these adults try to regain this liberty through their children. To do that, they infantilise their children, even when they are almost adults. Anne Brontë's characters embody this theory. When in *Agnes Grey* Agnes proposes her help to her sister, the latter answers: "what would you do in a house full of strangers, without me or mamma to speak and act for you…"[48] The desire to prevent one's child from entering the adults' world is reverberated through Mrs Markham's attitude, in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. She keeps on trying to convince her son Gilbert not to marry Eliza Millward. Even though she gives him a series of arguments to explain her point of view, as readers we may conclude that she only

[47] Quoted in Oliver TEARLE, "'The Child Is Father of the Man": A Short Analysis of William Wordsworth's "My heart leaps up"' *Interesting Literature*. (2018), online, Internet, 25 Jan. 2021. , Available: https://interestingliterature.com/2018/01/the-child-is-father-of-the-man-a-short-analysis-of-william-wordsworths-my-heart-leaps-up/.
[48] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey*, *op. cit*, 10.

wishes her Gilbert to stay away from marriage – as marriage epitomises the entry in the adults' world. She claims: "Do wait awhile and see!"[49] These reactions convey a sense of glorification of childhood.

The French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau's theories participate in this ode to childhood. According to him, the first stage of education is natural education, which happens during childhood, prior to any intervention of nurture or culture. He believes in a natural *a priori* education and instruction of children. He says: "Nous commençons à nous instruire en commençant à vivre; notre éducation commence avec nous […]"[50] He divides education in three categories, and he puts forward the first one: "l'éducation de la nature" which is "le développement interne de nos facultés et de nos organes."[51] Therefore, if a child only knows natural education before being nurtured, he is free to develop his own mind and body, which is the privileged process according to Rousseau. Obviously for Rousseau, natural evolution is always synonymous with truth. At the beginning of the first book of his essay *Emile, ou de l'éducation*, the philosopher establishes the following assertion: "Tout est bien sortant des mains de l'Auteur des choses, tout dégénère entre les mains de l'homme."[52] This sentence justifies the "Cult of Childhood." So, we should encourage and preserve this childhood. The Victorian poet William Wordsworth epitomised it with his famous verse "The Child is father of the Man" in his poem "My Heart Leaps Up."

> My heart leaps up when I behold
> A rainbow in the sky:
> So was it when my life began;
> So is it now I am a man;
> So be it when I shall grow old,
> Or let me die!
> The Child is father of the Man;
> And I could wish my days to be
> Bound each to each by natural piety.[53]

This poem comes from the poet's observation of a rainbow. The speaker feels joy and delight, which reminds him of former joys he could have felt when he was younger. Even if he is now adult, he still feels this joy. Through the verses "So be it when I shall grow old / Or let me die!" the reader understands the vital necessity for an adult to keep the feelings of a child,

[49] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, *op. cit*, 66.
[50] Jean-Jacques ROUSSEAU, *Émile, ou, De l'éducation*, (Paris: Flammarion, 2009), 52.
[51] *Ibid*, 47.
[52] *Ibid*, 45.
[53] TEARLE, *op. cit*.

otherwise it is even better to be dead. He re-establishes the importance of childhood sensations, as opposed to the monologic dimension of education in his time, as he would criticise it. Indeed, he considers the adults' propension of insistence in teaching, trying to transmit a certain truth to children, absurd, as his idealised vision of childhood relies on children's innocence. Alan Richardson summarises: "These nobles savages are naturally resistant to the adults' attempt to form (or deform) them; their mentalities are rooted in a transcendental nature rather than culturally produced."[54] In his poem "My Heart Leaps Up," Wordsworth's nostalgia of the "transcendental nature" of children is transcribed both through the hyponym of the rainbow, and in the last verse: "natural piety." By desiring all his days to be bound to this "natural piety," Wordsworth expresses his longing for eternal innocence. Indeed, childhood should remain timeless. To summarise, alongside with the Romantic literary movement, Wordsworth was convinced that children were endowed with an extreme aesthetic sensitivity, from which adults should learn in order to understand themselves, as one's childhood has an endless impact on one's life. Agnes in *Agnes Grey* uses her childhood to understand some aspects of her life as an adult. When Mary Ann does not care about not receiving a goodnight kiss, whereas Agnes argues: "In *my* childhood, I could not imagine more afflictive punishment than for my mother to refuse to kiss me at night."[55] We may image that the Bloomfield children's innocence and natural affection have already been challenged, as Rousseau argues: "tout dégénère entre les mains de l'homme."[56] If everything which is naturally well-defined is then corrupted by nurture and culture, then adults may feel nostalgia toward their lost natural education as children.

But we can wonder why this natural education degenerates because of men, according to Rousseau. First, we have to understand that natural education – the prime education of children – is the building of their individual self. However, as children are still deprived of any other form of education, they are innocent. For instance, during the religious and modest Victorian era, innocence would be the unawareness of the social and religious codes. Thus, children do not have the knowledge of sin and sexuality. In short, children are ignorant of the distinction between good and evil, as they do not have the keys to understand what is bad. That is what Professor Estevez argues: "But for Victorians, the moral category of "innocence" was defined by ignorance."[57] As a consequence, Victorian children may not always realise the

[54] RICHARDSON, *op. cit,* 861.
[55] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey*, *op. cit,* 31.
[56] ROUSSEAU, *op. cit,* 45.
[57] Rafael ESTEVEZ, 'Psychoanalysis and Literature: The Victorian Cult of the Child: Innocence and Experience, Ignorance and Knowledge' *English 271.* , 2014. Available: http://psychlit271.blogspot.com/2014/10/the-victorian-cult-of-child-innocence.html.

impact of their behaviours, which is the case in both Anne Brontë's novels: *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. While in *Agnes Grey* the eponymous character Agnes is working for the Bloomfield family, she is astonished by young Tom Bloomfield's behaviour. His favourite pastime is to capture and torture birds, "to see how long it will live – and then, to see what it will taste."[58] From Agnes' evangelist standpoint the scene is horrifying. The scene echoes the end of the first chapter of *Jane Eyre* when Jane is hurt by John Reed, a fourteen-year-old schoolboy. She is horrified:

> He ran headlong at me: I felt him grasp my hair and my shoulder: he had closed with a desperate thing. I really saw in him a tyrant, a murderer. I felt a drop or two of blood from my head trickle down my neck, and was sensible of somewhat pungent suffering: these sensations for the time predominated over fear, and I received him in frantic sort.[59]

Moreover, the young Tom Bloomfield is encouraged by his uncle to drink: "He [Mr Robson] taught his nephew to imitate him in this [drinking] to the utmost of his ability, and to believe that the more wine and spirits he would take, and the better he liked them […]"[60] Regarding the same leitmotiv of alcohol, Helen Huntingdon, the protagonist of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is hurt by the behaviour of her son Arthur who is encouraged by male adults around him:

> To see such things done with the roguish naiveté of that pretty little child and hear such things spoken by that small infantile voice, was as peculiarly piquant and irresistibly droll to them [Arthur Huntingdon and his male friends] as it was inexpressibly distressing and painful to me.[61]

These young boys are unaware of the wickedness of their behaviours because of their innocence as ignorance, and their thoughts and actions are dictated by the influence of adults. Tom explains to Agnes after the episode of the birds: "Papa knows how I treat them, and he never blames me for it, he says it's just what *he* used to do when *he* was a boy […]"[62] and

[58] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey*, *op. cit,* 20.
[59] BRONTE, *Jane Eyre*, *op. cit,* 14.
[60] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey*, *op. cit,* 45.
[61] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, *op. cit,* 356.
[62] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey*, *op. cit,* 20.

Arthur: "would look round delightedly upon them all, and add his shrill laugh to theirs."[63] Arthur imitates the adults.

b. Education by Imitation

Through the two examples above, we witness that the motif of mimesis is at the origin of the children's misdemeanours, influenced by their imitation of adults. More precisely, young boys follow their fathers' examples. As all children, young boys construct their identities by witnessing the actions of adult men. It corresponds to what the French philosopher Flahault states, regarding the importance of intergenerational exchanges. Indeed, he asserts: "l'enfant assimile également, par mimétisme, des manières d'être, des pratiques relationnelles et des savoir-faire." This process of imitation has already been exposed by the philosopher John Locke in his work *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, but he does not encompass all "manières d'être, pratiques relationnelles et savoir-faire," he abstracts everything with the word "manners": "Manners […], I think, are rather to be learnt by example than rules."[64] When Locke mostly deals with the role of parents, Flahault focuses more on the role of the teacher as a mediator between his pupils and the world. But through the comparison between the two philosophers, we can argue that parents endorse the same role to help their children to be prepared for the world. Flahault explains that for instance parents who are not socialised themselves will not have their children socialised. It is embodied through young Arthur Huntingdon, when at the beginning of the third chapter, Mrs Markham does not understand why Helen has brought her son with her. Helen replies: "It is a long walk for him; but I must have either taken him with me, or relinquished the visit altogether: for I never leave him alone."[65] Indeed, as Arthur is still very young, Helen often refuses to visit people, and encloses herself in Wildfell Hall, which prevents her and by default Arthur from encountering new people. She decides for the two of them. This intergenerational relationship indeed, Flahault adds, is based on the principle of authority, as opposed to authoritarianism. And he goes on: "la notion d'autorité implique, par définition, une asymétrie."[66] According to him, this asymmetry is fundamental in the educative process. More than just following their parents' examples,

[63] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, *op. cit*, 356.
[64] John LOCKE, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, (Online: Odin's Library Classics, 2017), 23.
[65] *Ibid*, 51.
[66] FLAHAULT, *op. cit*, 300.

children are compelled to obey to them, as they have authority and power over them. Moreover, during the Victorian era, authority is hierarchised at another level. Wives were literally the possessions of their husbands, and children the possessions of both. That is why in both Brontë's novels, the masculine adult figure is so decisive in the development of young boys.

The main masculine figures represent corruption in the two novels. And these men must agree with the children's imitation of their behaviours, as Locke warns: "You must do nothing before him [a child], which you would not have him imitate."[67] Therefore, if men's actions are dictated by corruption, they cannot expect anything different from younger generations. For instance, in *Agnes Grey* Mr Hatfield is supposed to embody the absolute faith through his position as a religious man; however, Anne Brontë made a description of a man whose faith and compassion are damaged. In the chapter "The Cottagers", Nancy Brown tells Agnes that Mr Hatfield has rejected her when she asked for help, "he said he hadn't time to attend to me them."[68] He does not do his duty and does not appear as the example he should be, especially for children. Mr Hatfield is mirrored through the figure of the vicar Mr Millward in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. When Mrs Markham enquires about the taste in alcohol for young boys, after her conversation with Helen who wants to keep her son far from any alcohol-related temptation, Mr Millward "then entered fully into the question, and explained at large the folly and impiety of such a proceeding."[69] The belief that prohibition of alcohol would be a "folly and impiety" is quite antagonistic with the core principle of rigor in Evangelism. Once again, the representant of faith and order does not do his duty. The theme of alcohol is recurrent in the transmission of corrupted customs, in Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. It is the origin of a latent violence throughout the novel, and above all a presentation of bad example for Helen's son. Even though *Agnes Grey* does not give the same importance to the motif of alcohol, the result of masculine influence of violence and vices is also present. Concerning the potential influence of the father on his son, we may question the place of genetics in such behaviours. As a rising Victorian issue, we may wonder if Anne Brontë's young masculine characters are wrongly behaving because of a bad education, or because of bad genetics.

[67] LOCKE, *op. cit,* 27.
[68] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey*, *op. cit,* 91.
[69] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 64.

c. Imitation or Genetics?

The issue of genetics started to be studied principally during the nineteenth century, with scientists such as Charles Darwin or Gregor Mendel. The latter especially is considered as the father of genetics. His theory is summarised by Mirko Drazen Grmek: "Mendel inventa un calcul formel original, une veritable "algèbre de l'hérédité", où les majuscules indiquent les caractères dominants et les minuscules les caractères récessifs."[70] Therefore, this theory brings under the spotlight the idea that there are some characteristics among living beings which are transmitted by blood, from one generation to another. This belief goes against the very principle of education which gives the priority to teaching and learning. Genetics cannot be taught or learnt, as they are inherent characteristics of an individual. It corresponds to what Rousseau calls "l'éducation de la nature." It was quickly represented in literature in the nineteenth century, with authors such as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and his detective Sherlock Holmes.[71] Based on this nature-related education, Professor Elizabeth Pellerito makes an analogy between the growing up of plants and the growing up of children. The comparison is explicit in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* when Helen discusses with Mrs Markham on how to educate a little girl, and she develops on the subject: "you would have her to be tenderly and delicately nurtures, like a hothouse plant – taught to cling to others for direction and support, and guarded, as much as possible, from the very knowledge of evil."[72] There is also a metaphor in *Agnes Grey*, when Agnes explains what she means by educating children as a governess: "To train the tender plants, and watch their buds unfolding day by day!"[73] She explains that the nurturing of plants and of children are conditioned by reproduction, but also by the environment in which they are raised. Rousseau has already made the comparison: "On façonne les plantes par la culture, et les hommes par l'éducation."[74]

Yet, the part of genetical reproduction is still present. As Miss Rigby comments in the 1847 report of the *Governesses' Benevolent Institution*: "We need the imprudences,

[70] Mirko Drazen GRMEK, 'Le Centenaire des lois de Mendel' *Annales*. 22 (1967): 845–848, 846.
[71] Cf. Dalton Lee BROCK, '"Vile Blood: Hereditary Degeneracy in Victorian England" by Dalton Lee Brock'Arkansas Tech, 2019, online, Internet, 1 Apr. 2021. Available: https://orc.library.atu.edu/etds_2019/16/. The author suggests that: "Doyle, having been very familiar with the medical field, used the concept of a throwback to suggest the retrogression of the family line from Hugo and its inherited effects on Stapleton's criminal instincts." Therefore, he believes that genetics transmitted from older generations have a great impact on the innate dispositions of younger generations, 32-33.
[72] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 56.
[73] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 11.
[74] ROUSSEAU, *op. cit,* 46.

extravagancies, mistakes, or crimes of a certain number of fathers, to sow that seed from which we reap the harvest of governesses."[75] The parallel between plants and children, and mainly the reproductive dimension of the two, is established. Even though genetics are slightly presented in *Agnes Grey*, the novel is more focused on the social and cultural education which can be offered to the children. There is no insistence on the inherited qualities of the children, from their parents. On the contrary, the genetical disposition of Arthur Huntingdon is what scares his wife Helen in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and it is the reason why she finds the courage to leave the familial mansion. She believes that her son Arthur may have inherited his father's propensity for alcohol. She argues she has "the germs of his evil tendencies to search out and eradicate […]"[76] and she laments: "My greatest source of uneasiness, in this time of trial, was my son, whom his father and his father's friends delighted to encourage in all the embryo vices a little child can show […]"[77] The "germs" and "embryo vices" refer to the vices the young boy already had in himself, even before his birth. By leaving, Helen wants to diminish and to make disappear these "germs" or "embryo vices" in her son. Pellerito comments: "As gardener, Helen would allow no form of reproduction; as woman, she metaphorically castrates him."[78]

We may wonder in what ways Helen castrates her son. By deciding to prevent him from drinking alcohol, she prevents him from making his own experiences. Even worse, she alters his experiences. In the chapter "Hope Springs Eternal in the Human Breast" (which is a direct quotation from the British poet Alexander Pope, and which brings a message of hope and optimism) Helen confesses that she has poisoned the alcohol his son is drinking to make him hate alcohol: "into every glass I surreptitiously introduced a small quantity of tartar-emetic,"[79] which is a poison destined to make someone vomit. Thus, Helen prefers to endanger her son, and lie to him than to see him enjoy drinking alcohol. She opts for immorality to achieve a grander moral objective to her eyes. She challenges his experiences with the world surrounding him. The image of the castrating mother is not present in *Agnes Grey*. On the contrary, the figure of the mother appears to be entirely permissive with the experiences of the children. When Agnes tells Mrs Bloomfield that her son is harming innocent birds, the latter answers:

[75] Quoted in Inga Stina EWBANK, *Their Proper Sphere: A Study of the Bronte Sisters as Early Victorian Female Novelists*, (Cambridge ; Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968), 60.
[76] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 333.
[77] *Ibid*, 356.
[78] Elizabeth PELLERITO, 'Domesticating the Child: Maternal Responses to Hereditary Discourse in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall' Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net*. 12 (2012).
[79] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 375.

"You seem to have forgotten […] that the creatures were all created for our conveniences."[80] She allows her children to experiment whatever they want to experiment.

d. Empiricism and Rationalism

Through an empiricist point of view, Tom's attitude is the best one to acquire knowledge. When both Agnes and Helen want to guide the behaviours of the children – from a religious and moralist scope – for a better knowledge of the world, empiricism is based on the idea that only sensible experience can be the source of knowledge. The theory is more complex than that according to the philosopher Bacon. He believes that both reason and experience could bring knowledge, but only observation and experimental actions could bring certainty and assert the supposed truth previously acquired.[81] Therefore, even though a child is educated and instructed by his or her parents, at school or at home, the certainty of his knowledge can only be verified by sensible experience. Rousseau uses the example of emotions, to illustrate the idea that only experience can be useful to acquire knowledge in some specific fields. He recommends: "Observez la nature, et suivez la route qu'elle vous trace. Elle exerce continuellement les enfants; elle endurcit leur temperament par des épreuves de toute espèce; elle leur apprend de bonne heure ce que c'est peine et douleur"[82] whereas he condemns mothers who preserve their children from everything they can experience, such as Helen Huntingdon. Everything is about experience and feelings for Rousseau, and his thesis could be recapitulated with this sentence: "L'homme qui a le plus vécu n'est pas celui qui a compté le plus d'années, mais celui qui a le plus senti la vie."[83] To feel is essential, particularly because experience is private. First, there is the input of knowledge, which is more pregnant when a child discovers something by himself. As the American educational reformer Horace Mann states, education should be more about training than telling. He argues: "what the learner discovers by mental exertion is better known than what is told to him."[84] Secondly, it helps a child in his or her quest for individuality and identity. That is an issue raised by Alfred Jules Ayer, in his book *The Problem of Knowledge*. He alleges that even though we all understand the concept of pain, it is

[80] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey*, *op. cit,* 47.
[81] Herbert HOCHBERG, 'The Empirical Philosophy of Roger and Francis Bacon' *Philosophy of Science*. 20.4 (1953): 313–326, 316.
[82] ROUSSEAU, *op. cit,* 60.
[83] *Ibid,* 53.
[84] Quoted in SPENCER, 'The Essential Need for Independence, Self-Discovery, and Pleasure in Self-Directed Learning in Education,' *op. cit.*

a direct experience, and we have no proof that the feeling is the same for everyone.[85] When you feel pain, only your personal experience of pain would lead you to know that you are suffering. When Agnes in *Agnes Grey* assures: "my heart was in my throat"[86] she is making a metaphor which represents the state of her pain, her individual pain. It is her proper image for the pain she is feeling, as Helen Huntingdon when she says: "I was well-nigh sinking to the earth."[87] She is not literally sinking, but it is her way to interpret her feeling of pain. Both women know what they are feeling, but we may wonder if it is enough to be considered as knowledge.

To Ayer, empirical statements are not enough. That is what the American philosopher Edmund Gettier explains later: we can have a justified true belief, which can happen to be false and so not considered as knowledge.[88] Therefore, it is important to work more on formal education and instruction, in the field of reason as opposed to experience, to transmit true knowledge. During the Victorian era, the desire to transmit a morality true to Evangelism was omnipresent. Therefore, Evangelists considered that this morality had to be installed as soon as possible, when children were still very young and still full of innocence. That is why from the late eighteenth century, Sunday schools started to emerge, for everybody, and they: "placed more or less emphasis on "religious and moral" instruction."[89] Even though there are no Sunday schools in both Brontë's novels, the author's Evangelist state of mind led her to write about this need to grant children with formal instruction. The formal instruction in both novels is epitomised through the figure of the governess. When in *Agnes Grey* Agnes dreams of being a governess, she aims at making "Virtue practicable, Instruction desirable, and Religion lovely and comprehensible."[90] The use of capital letters reinforces the "religious and moral" dimension mentioned above. While the role of the governess is positively presented in Brontë's first novel, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* gives a rather negative image. When Helen Huntingdon relates the evolution of the young Esther Hargrave, she explains that the latter's society consisted only in her mother and her governess, which was procured by the mother "to rectify the pupil's natural qualities."[91]

[85] Alfred Jules AYER and Formerly Wykeham Professor of Logic A. J. AYER, *The Problem of Knowledge*, (London: Macmillan, 1956), 31.
[86] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey*, *op. cit,* 129.
[87] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 313.
[88] Edmund GETTIER, 'Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?' (1963): 3.
[89] Anne M. BOYLAN, 'Sunday Schools and Changing Evangelical Views of Children in the 1820s,' *Church History*. 48 (1979): 320–333, 322.
[90] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey*, *op. cit,* 11.
[91] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 292.

Even though the role of the governess seems to be to teach, particularly religion and morality, her main occupation appears to be to suppress the flaws inherent to the children's dispositions, granted by Nature. This belief goes along with the Victorian desire to use the child and his or her innocence to be able to mould him or her in accordance with the society's exigencies. From the nineteenth century, there was the growing belief that what could be acquired during childhood could be used later. One key explanation of this different perspective is the belief that in childhood lay the foundations of adulthood, that what happens in childhood has an impact in adulthood. Actually, childhood is the first stage of life when education and instruction occur. Yet, the process of education is an endless process, which contributes to the ongoing construction of identity. Therefore, one's identity is never fixed, and is in constant evolution. It is the case with Anne Brontë, as her identity evolved through her writings. Indeed, at first, she literally changed her identity, and adopted a masculine name to be able to publish her novels. And then, until today, her name and the ones of her sisters are universally known. Her art allowed her to gain emancipation, and that is what she tries to represent through her two female protagonists in her two novels. As a consequence, we may argue that both Agnes Grey and Helen Huntingdon are seeking for recognition, through their art and their faculties. Throughout the novel, they both face varied obstacles, which eventually help them to assert themselves. It reminds us of the concept of the "Bildungsroman" as defined by Maurice Shroder as: "the "Bildungsroman" is not a special category; the theme of the novel [as a genre] is essentially that of formation, of education."[92] Both protagonists never stop to educate themselves.

[92] Quoted in Cates BALDRIDGE, '"Agnes Grey": Brontë's "Bildungsroman" That Isn't' *The Journal of Narrative Technique*. 23 (1993): 31–45, 36.

B. Education and Nature

A sound mind in a sound body, is a short, but full description of a happy state in this world.
John LOCKE, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education,* 1693.

a. Nature and Art

If the concept is defined by the evolution from childhood to adulthood through the acquisition of new knowledge, then *Agnes Grey* is not a "Bildungsroman," as surprising as it might seem. Agnes' education seems to be already fixed, without any possible evolution. She is a pious character from the beginning, despite the tests she encounters throughout the novel. Indeed, *Agnes Grey* appears to belong more to the classical tradition of Greek Romances, than to the 19th century culture of the "Bildungsroman." It is Mikhail Bakhtin's reading of the concept. According to him, the whole plot in the Greek Romance revolves around the testing of "the durability of an already finished product."[93] It appears to be the case with Agnes Grey: even if she grows up and gains in maturity, she has constantly to contradict the people around her who do not adopt a proper moral behaviour. Towards the end of the novel, Agnes seems to be more conscious of her own morality: she asserts "I was more worthy of his [Mr Weston's] love than Rosalie Murray, charming and engaging as she was; for I could appreciate his excellence, which she could not."[94] She compares her behaviour with Rosalie's and for the first time she places herself in a superior position. Helen Huntingdon in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* faces the same difficulties. She also adopts the role of the bearer of morality. She wants to marry Arthur Huntingdon in order to reform him, and to turn him into a model of piety. She tells her aunt: "I think I might have influence sufficient to save him from his errors."[95] As Agnes, Helen is conscious of her morality. Even though both are confronted to psychological challenges and fail to transmit their piety (Agnes and her pupils, and Helen and her husband), they manage to stay true to their pious beliefs. Agnes confesses: "My task of instruction and surveillance, instead of becoming easier as my charges and I got better accustomed to each other, became more arduous as their characters unfolded."[96] Helen Huntingdon is confronted to the same

[93] Quoted in *Ibid*, 35.
[94] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey*, *op. cit*, 141.
[95] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, *op. cit*, 165-166.
[96] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey*, *op. cit*, 26.

disillusion, as she acknowledges at one point: "he shocked and horrified me by another instance of his unreasonable exaction."[97]

It seems that all characters do not undergo any psychological evolution, as their behaviours are constant within the novels. Agnes struggles to teach her pupils. Not long after her arrival, she is surprised to realise that: "Mrs Bloomfield sent for me, and calmly told me that after Midsummer my services would be no longer required."[98] And, Helen is constantly horrified by the behaviour of her husband. The cultivation of one's mind in the novel seems to be complicated from the beginning, for all the characters. In *Agnes Grey*, the insistence is directed towards the education of the Bloomfields' children. In the first chapter of *Agnes Grey*, "The Parsonage," the narrator eulogises the job of governing. Almost the entirety of the eleventh page is marked with exclamative sentences, showing Agnes' enthusiasm about her future occupation. She declares: "How delightful it would be to be a governess!"[99] or "And then, how charming to be intrusted with the care and education of children!"[100] Whereas in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* the reader follows Helen's desire to fill her own mind. Helen seems to be wishing to acquire knowledge coming from books. She affirms several times her adoration for books. At one point, she relates her daily habits: "The reading and answering of my letters […] afforded me ample employment for the morning."[101] The emphasis on these habits is laid again later, when Helen lists what are her main occupations: "I had my books and pencil."[102] And what is the most relevant is that Gilbert gives Helen a book, and she lends him her diary in the fifteen chapter. Therefore, the book symbolises the first physical contact between Helen and Gilbert, and most importantly Helen's contact with the external world.

This sort of education, as stated by Sarah Lewis, is at least as crucial as the cultivation of the mind. She laments: "Intellectual cultivation was too long considered as education, properly so called."[103] Actually, Helen's contact with the external world is also crystallised by her connexion with the outside, through different approaches. What is recurrent is the novel is the use of the "paysage état d'âme," which corresponds to nature mirroring one's emotions or desires. The concept will be subject to a further analysis alongside with romanticism. Thus, both the mind and the body are involved in this concept. When some feelings are exacerbated,

[97] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 217.
[98] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 49.
[99] *Ibid*, 11.
[100] *Ibid*, 11.
[101] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 224.
[102] *Ibid*, 259.
[103] Sarah LEWIS, *Woman's Mission*, (Cambridge, UK: John W. Parker, 1839), 62.

they have an impact on one's perception of the outside world, supposedly objective. This theory is described by Sergio Cigada as: "la combinaison allégorique d'abstraction psychologique et de paysages élaborés."[104] The twelfth chapter, entitled "A Tête-à-Tête and a Discovery," illustrates this theory. In this chapter, Gilbert witnesses Helen and Frederick Lawrence together, really closed, so that he instantly feels bad. At the end of the chapter, full of anger and despair, Gilbert says: "It was a dull, gloomy morning, the weather had changed like my prospects, and the rain was pattering against the window."[105] Rain and a bad weather are here synonymous with sadness, when the sun is associated with joy. Helen extends on a metaphor between her son and the sun: "he knows he is my sun, but when he chooses to withhold his light, he would have my sky to be all darkness […]"[106] In *Agnes Grey* not only do the feelings impact the perception of the outside world, but the outside world may also have a direct impact on the feelings. In the chapter "The Sands" the landscape before Agnes helps her to understand the range of opportunities offered before her. She walks alone on the beach and she says: "the sea was my delight."[107] This key sentence symbolises the infinity of possibilities leading to a certain freedom, through the image of the sea.

b. Nature and Beauty

The image of the sea belongs to the sphere of nature, which is omnipresent in Brontë's works. Indeed, this theme is latent in the two novels through all the main characters' connection with nature. Therefore, nature has a great place in the development, evolution and overall education of the characters throughout the novels, which is part of the construction of their identities. The critic Enid L. Duthie argues: "The theme of nature is introduced in *Agnes Grey* only when it is felt by the author to have direct relevance to the development of the main subject."[108] The main subject of the novel being the education and instruction of aristocratic children through the position of the governess, the link between nature and education is made obvious, especially when Agnes brings the children outside, for recreation. This link is less

[104] Cf. Quoted in Liana NISSIM, "Paysages symbolistes, allégories de l'âme," *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France.* 112.2 (2012): 393–408. This concept was widespread for instance during the French Romanticism. It allowed poets to offer a landscape with psychological features, or to deliver a personification of the human thoughts in nature. This potent analogy was made by Charles Baudelaire, in *Les Fleurs du Mal.* Thus, it shows the Romantic characteristics still present in Anne Brontë's prose, 395.
[105] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 127.
[106] *Ibid*, 243.
[107] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 182.
[108] Enid L. DUTHIE, *The Brontës and Nature,* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1986), 91.

evident in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. One key moment – as exemplified by Duthie – is when Helen needs to go near the sea to find inspiration for her art. It is an intense moment for her, if we trust the description of the scene: "Mrs Graham was studying the distinctive characters of the different varieties of trees in their winter nakedness, and copying, with a spirited, though delicate touch, their various ramifications."[109] Helen is concentrated while she acquires the knowledge of trees. The critic Duthie explains: "The visit to the coast, when it does take place, amply fulfills her expectation, providing a magnificent view from a cliff top, which she later transfers with great success to her canvas."[110] In this case, nature has a direct impact on Helen's work, and her education takes the form of the acquisition of knowledge from nature, which she depicts and transmits thanks to her paintings. What Helen learns from Nature is probably beauty. Beauty is defined as: "the quality of being pleasing, especially to look at […]"[111] in the Cambridge Dictionary. And in a second time, she fixes beauty in her pictural art, which permits the transmission of beauty thanks to its insistence on visual effects. Indeed, it is the poet John Keats' vision on art. He considers that art allows to freeze beauty in time, at its apogee. In his poem "Ode to a Grecian Urn" he writes:

> When old age shall this generation waste,
> Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
> Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,
> "Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all
> Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."[112]

Education from nature follows three steps. First, nature teaches beauty. Then, the understood beauty is transposed in art by the witness of this natural beauty. Eventually, the knowledge of beauty is transmitted through art, even though natural beauty has vanished (epitomised through the verse "when old age shall this generation waste"). This statement also considers that truth is linked to a superficial motive, the motif of appearances, found in nature. *A priori* then, it is nature which is the educator, then nature represents a source of knowledge. This is this first step which should be kept in mind, as if natural beauty is knowledge, it is objective. On the contrary, when it is re-appropriated through art, it becomes a subjective interpretation. And yet, the writer M. H Abrams challenges this logical belief, and puts

[109] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit*, 74.
[110] DUTHIE, *op. cit*, 105.
[111] Cambridge Dictionary.
[112] John KEATS, 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' *Poetry Foundation*. (Poetry Foundation, 1819), online, Internet, 6 Apr. 2021. Available: https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44477/ode-on-a-grecian-urn.

perception at the same level than reason. He states: "Even taste, it could be maintained, no less than reason, is an organ for perceiving truth."[113] To assert this theory, he uses John Dennis' words: "That which we call Taste in Writing, is nothing but a fine Discernment of Truth."[114] Both believe in the inherent human predisposition to perceive truth, through beauty. It was also John Ruskin's speech as a defender of the painter J.M.W Turner: "capturing the soul of nature is for Ruskin a moral act of a moral sensibility, just as appreciating that achievement is preconditioned by the moral sensibility of the viewer."[115] The artist tends to be more moral than other human beings, as he is the one granted with the sensibility to capture the "soul of nature." Thus, we may defend the idea that nature awakens a person's morality. And this morality might be the first step towards the acquisition of truth, through a representation of nature in art, nonliteral though. For Ruskin, morality on one side and truth, beauty and goodness on the other side evolve in an interdependent relationship. He claims that: "Language leads artist and critic to the true, the beautiful, and the good, which are essential to both a moral art and a moral life."[116] Truth is thus inherent to nature, waiting to be revealed by the artist.

That is why the romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge explicitly makes an ode to nature's role as a teacher, a guide, and not an ode to art and artists, in his poem "Frost at Midnight:"

> The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible
> Of that eternal language, which thy God
> Utters, who from eternity doth teach
> Himself in all, and all things in himself.
> Great universal Teacher! he shall mould
> Thy spirit, and by giving make it ask.[117]

Nature is called "Great universal Teacher" with a capital letter for "teacher," which adds a dramatic aspect to the appellation. Moreover, Coleridge insists on the infinity of nature's capacities as an educator. Nature speaks an "eternal language" and it "from eternity doth teach." With the help of his poem, Coleridge manages to represent the primordiality of nature in our lives. Nature has something empowering to offer, something which nurtures creativity and

[113] Meyer Howard ABRAMS, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), 263.
[114] Quoted in *Ibid*, 263.
[115] Joseph WIESENFARTH, '*Middlemarch* : The Language of Art' *Cambridge University Press*. 97. (1982): 363-377, 365.
[116] *Ibid*, 365.
[117] Samuel Taylor COLERIDGE, 'Frost at Midnight' *Poetry Foundation*. (Poetry Foundation, 1798), online, Internet, 26 Mar. 2021. Available: https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43986/frost-at-midnight.

imagination. That is why, artists need to celebrate its endless powers, through the medium of art. Nature has something appealing to offer, something infinite, which contrasts with the repetitive everyday life of the house, enclosed within four walls. Therefore, nature obviously triggers a desire to go outside, in nature, and to explore its possibilities. This desire is inherent to Agnes' personality in *Agnes Grey;* and she states it from the beginning: "a vague and secret wish to see more of the world."[118] That is what Anne Brontë herself was longing for. Before the redaction of her two novels, she had already expressed her love for nature through her drawings and paintings:

FIGURE 2 – BRONTE, Anne. Woman Gazing at a Sunrise Over a Seascape. 1839. The Brontë Parsonage Museum, Haworth.

This drawing is entitled "Woman Gazing at a Sunrise Over a Seascape." It could be considered as a self-portrait, knowing that Anne Brontë preferred imagining more than copying. She wanted to express individuality and her personal perception of nature through her art.[119]

[118] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey*, *op. cit*, 4.

[119] Cf. Christine ALEXANDER and Jane SELLARS, *The Art of the Brontës*, (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Anne Brontë had to provoke her own personal artistic education, as conformity was reigning at that time. As Alexander and Sellars comment: "individuality was an alien concept for all amateur artists," 140.

Her art also encompasses her writings. *Agnes Grey* is widely inspired by Anne's own life and experiences, so that the drawing above could represent the young Agnes Grey as well. Anne and Agnes were both overprotected in their childhoods. Anne Brontë was the last of six children, and her mother died right after having given birth to her. Nick Holland explains that: "People whispered that it [six children] was this that proved too much for her and caused the cancer that ate her anyway."[120] First, Anne may have always felt the weight of culpability over her shoulders. And above all, she was always taken care of by the rest of the family, as she never knew her mother. Everyone considered her important, starting by her father: "my dear little Anne I intend to keep at home for another year under her aunt's tuition and my own."[121] Despite the caring and affectionate vocabulary chosen, her father seems to have been really patronising. The same situation is to be found in *Agnes Grey* in the early pages. When Agnes offers her help to her sister Mary, she is rejected: "No, love, you cannot indeed – there's nothing here you can do."[122] Mary means no harm as well, but it is a real frustration for Agnes, as it was for Anne Brontë. It may have emphasised her attraction for adventure.

c. From Autonomy to Introspection

Although Agnes fails with the Bloomfields' children, she repeats her wish: "I was not yet weary of adventure."[123] It underlines her recklessness and determination, and it also gives the whole novel an optimistic prospective, which might foreshadow the good ending. Nature indeed provides hope and an infinity of possibilities. We should not forget how dear to Anne Brontë were the Yorkshire moors in which she probably found her inspiration. Anne loved rambling in nature, and her nostalgy of the Yorkshire moors is reverberated through Agnes. It is evident in the title "The Primroses," the thirteenth chapter of *Agnes Grey*. She walks outside and "longed intensely for some familiar flower that might recall the woody dales or green hill-sides of home."[124] Therefore, nature, and more precisely flowers, are associated with happiness, with good memories, shared with someone else. Indeed, the scene is rhythmed by intimacy. Mr Weston collects the primroses for Agnes, who cannot reach them. An echo is created with the scene of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* when Helen recalls the moment when she handed flowers

[120] HOLLAND, *In Search of Anne Brontë, op. cit,* 23.
[121] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* "Introduction" by Angeline GOREAU, 17.
[122] *Ibid*, 8.
[123] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey,* 50.
[124] *Ibid*, 105.

to her son. In the two scenes, there is transmission – a transmission which may symbolise the circulation and circularity of knowledge:

> I had taken little Arthur into the wood that skirts the park, and there seated him on the moss-cushioned roots of an old oak; and, having gathered a handful of bluebells and wild roses, I was kneeling before him, and presenting them, one by one, to the grasp of his tiny fingers; enjoying the heavenly beauty of the flowers, through the medium of his smiling eyes; forgetting, for the moment, all my cares, laughing at his gleeful laughter, and delighting myself with his delight […].[125]

Time has stopped in this scene. The connection with nature has provided a better apprehension of time, which is more intimate. The subjectivity of time reminds us of Agnes when she is longing for the flowers of her home. Moreover, the fixing of the present is also to be found in *Agnes Grey* when Agnes walks on the beach, she says: "Refreshed, delighted, invigorated, I walked along, forgetting all my cares."[126] The time of her narration is internal, personal. In both cases, the present is fixed, and at that precise moment, there is no evolution of the narration. The fixing of time in a natural environment allows the protagonists of the two novels to undertake an introspection. The education of nature aims at helping the individual to find his or her self, potentially after the alienation of society. This theory takes its origin in Rousseau's works, more precisely in *Emile, ou de l'éducation* in which he stresses the tension between man and citizen: "Forcé de combattre la nature ou les institutions sociales, il faut opter entre faire un homme ou un citoyen : car on ne peut faire à la fois l'un et l'autre."[127] According to him, social institutions are denaturing, as they build a social identity which denies the natural self. As a consequence, the best way to know the individuality is to leave society and try to rediscover himself or herself in nature. That is precisely what led the American philosopher Henry David Thoreau to leave the city and stay in exile for two years (between 1845 and 1847). He relates his experience in his essay *Walden, or Life in the Woods*. David Latour explains that Thoreau was living in a house lent by his friend Emerson, by himself, in order to understand his position in the world, and to have access to his self. An entire chapter is entitled "Solitude," in which Thoreau explains that instead of feeling lonely, being surrounded by natural elements, and feeling them prevent him from being melancholic:

[125] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 263.
[126] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 183.
[127] ROUSSEAU, *op. cit,* 48.

> Yet I experienced sometimes that the most sweet and tender, the most innocent and encouraging society may be found in any natural object, even for the poor misanthrope and most melancholy man. There can be no very black melancholy to him who lives in the midst of Nature and has his senses still.[128]

Thus, David Latour concludes: "La perte des autres autour de soi permet de se (re)trouver en un lieu qui devient le point de départ d'un projet autant poétique que politique."[129] Even though Helen Huntingdon's exile does not start from a desire to understand her own self, the freedom she experiences by arriving at Wildfell Hall illustrates the oppression she underwent because of her social obligations. The chapter intitled "The Retreat" in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* opens up with the exclamation: "Thank Heaven,"[130] which is followed by the lexical field of relief, raising in crescendo the more Helen and her son enter in the countryside. The second stanza starts with "What trembling joy […]"[131] and the fourth one with "Oh, what delight […]."[132]

The physical liberation is transcribed through the metaphor of prison she uses to depict her marital house. By escaping, Helen leaves "a prison and despair"[133] behind her. The metaphor is echoed in *Agnes Grey* with Rosalie Murray, who spouses Helen Huntingdon's destiny by marrying a horrible man and becoming Lady Ashby. When Agnes visits her, Rosalie laments: "I must be a prisoner and a slave."[134] In both cases, the metaphor of the prison is to be understood literally, as both women are physically entrapped. Yet, the prison is largely psychological, as these women have to bear their social responsibilities. In *Agnes Grey,* Rosalie complains about her husband: "he must needs [sic] have me down in the country, to lead the life of a nun, lest I should dishonour him or bring him to ruin."[135] She is physically oppressed, but her mind and behaviour are also decided by her husband. Arthur Huntingdon is also the one who decides for his wife in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. When Helen suggests a separation – after having caught Arthur with Annabella Wilmot – he concludes: "it would not do: he was not going to be the talk of all the old gossips in the neighbourhood."[136]

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[128] Henry D. THOREAU, *Walden, or Life in the Woods,* (Princeton University Press, 2004), 131.
[129] David LATOUR, 'Henry David Thoreau ou les rêveries écologiques d'un promeneur solitaire' *Les chantiers de la création. Revue pluridisciplinaire en Lettres, Langues, Arts et Civilisations*. (2010).
[130] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 394.
[131] *Ibid*, 394.
[132] *Ibid*, 395.
[133] *Ibid*, 395.
[134] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 179.
[135] *Ibid*, 179.
[136] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 329.

Thus, these women are undermined by both the masculine figures and by social reputation, and so they are unable to recover their own identities as individuals and to decide by themselves. On the contrary, when they enter the outside world, both silence and solitude help them to have access to their own thoughts. They may start a process of self-education, through their experience in nature. The invading silence empowers Agnes in the chapter "The Sands" in *Agnes Grey*. The climax is reached when Agnes explains "My footsteps were the first to press the firm, unbroken sands."[137] The footsteps are highly allegorical. Beyond the re-birth of the protagonist, the fact that they – which break with the immaculateness of the sands – are Agnes' footsteps, give her importance and helps her to regain her individuality. Helen seems to enter the same process in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* in the chapter "The Excursion," when she visits the seashores with Gilbert Markham, among others. The latter describes the scene, when he is watching Helen in front of the landscape: "There was an aspect of subdued exhilaration in her face, […]. Never had she looked so lovely: never had my heart so warmly cleaved to her as now."[138] Even though as readers we do not have direct access to Helen's thoughts, we can guess that she is fascinated by the scene, and that she experiences a re-birth – so does Agnes – thanks to the "cool, reviving breeze."[139] The proof of her re-birth is that she eventually leaves her son to Miss Millward to draw a sketch from the landscape, whereas she has argued at first that she would never accept to be separated from her son ("for I never leave him […]"[140]) The physical solitude in nature engenders a solipsism of both characters' consciousnesses, who feel reinvigorated now that they are on their own. Moreover, we can argue that the two women's perceptions in front of these natural landscapes are proper knowledge. Indeed, Theaetetus, a character in one of Plato's dialogues, explains that knowledge is a person's perception, but which needs to be "birthed" through a Protagorean point of view (which is the idea that man is the measure of all things)[141]. We can ask ourselves through which instruments any man can provide any truth, because: "if we survey the great historical immensity that constitutes man, we come away with a frameless picture: contradictory, confusing, and complex in a variety of ways."[142] Every man could have his own interpretation of things. That is what Protagoras probably means by measure: "it is clear that man is the measure not of the existence of these

[137] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 183.
[138] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 86.
[139] *Ibid*, 86.
[140] *Ibid*, 51.
[141] Christopher ROWE, *Plato: Theaetetus and Sophist*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
[142] Jeremy MILLINGTON, 'Man as the Measure of All Things. Thoughts on Moral Perfection, Finitude, and Metaethics' *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*. II (2010).

things and facts, but rather of the way in which they present themselves."[143] Therefore, when he argues that man is the measure of all things, he wants to underline the fact that every individual man builds his own theories and opinions from his own experiences, based on his or her sensations.

We can then wonder if a person's measure is enough to declare a perception as knowledge. Nonetheless, the physical solitude might be an obstacle, especially in a Victorian society which considered home as the place of comfort. The art critic John Ruskin describes the house as: "'the place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt and division."[144] Therefore, if home is the place where there is no doubt, it is by opposition the place of certainty. According to the Victorians, home was a microcosm, the domestic reproduction of society, so that it was the place of truth, of absolutism. In the chapter "The Parsonage Again," Agnes Grey is relieved to find again the comfort of her house: "For a few months I remained peaceably at home, in the quiet enjoyment of liberty and rest."[145] On the contrary, Helen does not perceive home as a place of comfort. Indeed, home is mostly a place of solitude; she regularly laments in her diary on her husband's departures: "Oh, it is cruel to leave me so long alone!"[146]

Thus, what constitutes this comfort is probably the physical exchanges between different persons within the house. The same belief is shared by Michel Tournier's protagonist, lost in a desert island, in his work *Vendredi, ou les limbes du Pacifique.* He laments: "Et ma solitude n'attaque pas que l'intelligibilité des choses. Elle mine jusqu'au fondement même de leur existence. De plus en plus, je suis assailli de doutes sur la véractié du témoignage de mes sens."[147] The character raises here an important issue. He confesses that his sensible experience may fail him, and so that it cannot assure him a real knowledge of the world. He presents the limits of his own, unique sensible experience. The problem of the veracity of sensible experiences is echoed in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. First, when she witnesses the adultery between Arthur and Annabella, Helen exclaims "My senses seemed to fail me,"[148] since the scene is unbelievable for her. Then, an entire chapter is intitled "The Warnings of Experience." But the most striking element is when Gilbert overhears a conversation between Helen and Mr

[143] Mauro BONAZZI, 'Protagoras' in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Ed. Edward N. ZALTA, 2020th ed. (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2020), online, Internet, 14 Feb. 2021.
[144] Quoted in IAN WARD, 'The Case of Helen Huntingdon' *Criticism*. 49 (2007): 151–182, 154.
[145] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 51.
[146] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 232.
[147] TOURNIER, *op. cit,* 63.
[148] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 313.

Lawrence, and when he sees them together. He is fooled by his senses – but he does not realise it, contrary to Helen – as he is sure to know the nature of their relationship, and it provokes "a paroxysm of anger and despair"[149] in him. Indeed, he is wrong, and he cannot be contradicted, as he prefers to remain in his mental solitude. In fact, he answers his mother, who asks him what is happening: "Nothing, nothing – give me a candle."[150]

d. The Limits to Solipsism

By refusing to open his consciousness to someone else, Gilbert prevents himself from potentially hearing the truth about the situation. Because of his mental solipsism, he is convinced to have the knowledge of the situation, which is false. Therefore, it seems that the company of the other may help the mind to be educated towards true knowledge. And in this situation, by sharing his experience and learning the truth of the situation, Gilbert would have also reached relief and happiness, thanks to knowledge. Indeed, the whole process of education and acquisition of knowledge should be synonymous with happiness – a sort of happiness which is selfish. In Gilbert's case, knowing the true nature of Helen and Mr Lawrence's relationship would have appeased only himself. Actually, the quest for knowledge as a source of happiness is a mark of selfishness, which is unavoidable for Jeremy Bentham. He considers that every man's action is directed towards his or her happiness, and that nothing can change it. Moreover, he encourages the laws to act and promote education towards the individual happiness of the greatest number, as the utility of any action should be measured regarding its level of pain or pleasure obtained. A Utilitarian society is seeking for the highest amount of pleasure for the greatest number:

[149] *Ibid*, 125.
[150] *Ibid*, 125.

> Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, *pain* and *pleasure*. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do. On the one hand the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects, are fastened to their throne. They govern us in all we do, in all we say, in all we think: every effort we can make to throw off our subjection, will serve but to demonstrate and confirm it. In words a man may pretend to abjure their empire: but in reality he will remain subject to it all the while. The *principle of utility* recognises this subjection, and assumes it for the foundation of that system, the object of which is to rear the fabric of felicity by the hands of reason and of law.[151]

The calculation of the amount of pleasure and pain should be the first objective of every individual, in his or her interest, but also of legislators when they write and implement laws in society. Therefore, for the good functioning of society, it is important that all the citizens' interests can coexist. That is a Utilitarianist theory: "Pour échapper à l'obstacle de la « guerre de chacun contre chacun », il faut mettre des bornes à la recherche de l'avantage personnel. Autrui n'est cependant pas seulement un ennemi à ménager pour qu'il ne devienne pas nuisible, il est aussi une source potentielle de plaisir."[152] This quotation from Marie-Laure Leroy lays the emphasis on the importance of "socialisation."

The philosophers François Flahault and Jean-Marie Schaeffer share the belief that the other is not only required but essential in one's development. They evoke: "une tension entre l'affirmation de soi (le désir d'un être-soi dans la complétude) et le fait que, précisément pour être soi, on dépend des autres, ce qui voue chacun à l'incomplétude."[153] What they reveal is that one's individuality cannot be built on its own, but by the recourse to the other, this individuality cannot be personal and complete. Therefore, one cannot be true to himself or herself only thanks to a social education. That is why the education of nature is also crucial, and the two types of educations appear to be interdependent. Indeed, Flahault and Schaeffer comment that the Lumières were favorable to such an education: "l'ouverture au monde de la pédagogie des Lumières n'en maintient pas moins le projet de protéger l'intégrité native de l'enfant contre les vices d'une société corrompue."[154] Such a definition echoes Rousseau's ideal of the natural

[151] James E. CRIMMINS, 'Jeremy Bentham' in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Ed. Edward N. ZALTA, 2020th ed. (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2020).
[152] Marie-Laure LEROY, 'L'Education à la sociabilité selon Jeremy Bentham. La bienfaisance intéressée contre les pièges de la rhétorique altruiste' *Revue d'études benthamiennes*. (2007).
[153] François FLAHAULT and Jean-Marie SCHAEFFER, 'Présentation' *Communications*. 72 (2002): 5–16, 8.
[154] *Ibid*, 11.

education, but still highlights the necessity to extend this education through pedagogy. This duality of education is present in both Brontë novels, where all the children educated in the novels oscillate between indoor lessons and outdoor exercise. In *Agnes Grey*, the chapter "A Few More Lessons" opens with Agnes' explanation of her method: "I managed to get something done in the course of the morning, and then accompanied my young charge out in the garden and adjacent grounds […]."[155] Helen and her friend Milicent also accompany their children outside: "Milicent and I were in the garden enjoying a brief half hour together with our children."[156]

Mixing the cultivation of the mind and the preservation of the body through physical outdoor exercise is at the core of the French Dictionary *Littré* definition of the concept of education: "Action d'élever, de former un enfant, un jeune homme; ensemble des habiletés intellectuelles ou manuelles qui s'acquièrent […]."[157] This definition is a growing preoccupation during the Victorian era. Still, the nineteenth century's psychology was marked by René Descartes' division of the body and the mind:

> That I am a thinking thing, I rightly conclude that my whole essence consists in this one thing, that I am a thinking thing… because on the one hand I have a clear and distinct idea of myself, insofar as I am only a thinking thing, not extended, and on the other hand a distinct idea of body insofar as it is only an extended thing, not thinking, it is certain that I am really distinct from my body and can exist without it.[158]

However, this theory is inconsistent according to Charles Spearman, who develops the idea that the mind functions as a system of pushers and pullers, which acts upon the body. This associationism tends to put the mind and the body under the same rules.[159] The association is illustrated by Agnes in the chapter "The Walk" in *Agnes Grey* where Agnes confesses: "for my heart was in my throat"[160] and later she deals with "a passionate burst of tears."[161] She is in love, and the love she feels in her mind and in her heart have physical repercussions; her body is affected by her love feelings.

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[155] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 23.
[156] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 292.
[157] Dictionnaire Littré - Dictionnaire de la langue française.
[158] Quoted in Steven J. WAGNER, 'Descartes's Arguments for Mind-Body Distinctness' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. 43 (1983): 499–517, 499-500.
[159] HALEY, *op. cit,* 35.
[160] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 129.
[161] *Ibid,* 129.

The two novels seem to encompass both the education of nature, and education of society. Natural education appears to be genderless. In *Agnes Grey,* Agnes accompanies the young Tom Bloomfield outside, but Milicent's daughter, in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* plays outside with the young Arthur: "they toddled together along the broad, sunny walk."[162]

[162] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 292.

C. Education and Genre

> Young women endowed with good understandings, but desirous of justifying the mental indolence which they have permitted themselves to indulge; […] are occasionally heard to declare their opinion.
> Thomas GISBORNE, *An Inquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex,* 1797.

a. The Rejection of Women

The mixed education does not last long. Thomas Gisborne, in his book *An Inquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex,* explains: "children of each sex being, in general, under maternal tuition during their childhood, and girls until they become women."[163] His assertion marks the evolution of the type of education alongside with the evolution of children. When children reach a certain age, most of the time, their education take different paths according to their gender. Anne Brontë's situation was probably an exception. Her father, Patrick Brontë, had enlightened ideas for the time. Instead of wishing a good marriage for his five daughters, he "saw education as being important for daughters as well as sons."[164] Being an intellectual himself, he had a huge library, and its access was left free for his children. As a consequence, Anne Brontë's education and admiration for literature were developed here. Yet, she must have been aware of the unicity of her situation, as she: "suggests that the physical and mental differences in gender are at least partly due to the differences in how we educate boys and girls."[165] Indeed, she wanted to depict the different types of education transmitted, according to gender, as it was the case during the nineteenth century, and to show the consequences of such gender expectations. Yet, the unicity of her childhood does not only hinge on her chance thanks to her father's choice for his daughters, but also her chance considering the bad financial situation of the family. Samantha Ellis, a specialist of Anne Brontë, affirms that: "Anne grew up poor."[166]

Therefore, the difference of education and knowledge regarding the difference of social classes is omnipresent in her novels, especially in *Agnes Grey*. First, Agnes Grey and Anne

[163] Thomas GISBORNE, *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex*, (New York, Garland Pub., 1974), 13.
[164] HOLLAND, *In Search of Anne Brontë, op. cit,* 25.
[165] PELLERITO, *op. cit*.
[166] Samantha ELLIS, 'Anne Brontë: The Sister Who Got There First' *The Guardian*. , 2017, online, Internet, 3 Feb. 2021. Available: http://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/jan/06/anne-bronte-agnes-grey-jane-eyre-charlotte.

Brontë share the same nuclear family: "Of six children, my sister Mary and myself were the only two that survived the perils of infancy and early childhood."[167] Moreover, when Agnes explains her story: "My father was a clergyman of the north of England"[168] we may hear Anne Brontë's own words. The autobiographic elements may be useful to establish a parallel between Agnes' and Anne's educations. Thanks to Agnes' description of her infancy, we can imagine a typical Victorian middle-class education. Agnes explains in the first chapter that she was educated at home, by her mother, and that she and her sisters were kept: "in the strictest seclusion."[169] The lexical field of isolation is omnipresent in the whole paragraph: "there was no society in the neighbourhood."[170] Therefore, the concept of education through "socialisation" is absent in the novel. "Socialisation" was more accessible for the upper-class. As before 1870 there was no institutionalised educational system, only people with financial security could afford the formal instruction of their children, through schools. Even though the College of Preceptors emerged in 1846,[171] it had to face the radical opposition of teachers from prestigious universities, for instance in Oxford and Cambridge, who were reluctant to the standardisation of education, and so to the training of teachers for middle-class or lower-class children. In fact, one of their mains fears – as presented by the former British Prime Minister Robert Peel – was that by the creation of a universal system of education, people from middle and lower classes would raise their hopes and expectations of improving their social status. That is why he states: "there is an education for the rich; there is one likewise for the poor; but they are totally distinct."[172]

Moreover, these Oxford and Cambridge teachers were so traditional that they were also reluctant to accept women in the universities. The American writer Laura Schwartz analyses the evolution of women's education in the nineteenth century, and she explains that when Queen's College, in London, quickly authorised women to have access to higher education: "resistance to women's higher education was especially strong at Oxford and Cambridge, where

[167] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey*, *op. cit*, 4.
[168] *Ibid*, 4.
[169] *Ibid*, 4.
[170] *Ibid*, 4.
[171] Cf. Richard ALDRICH, *School and society in Victorian Britain Joseph Payne and the New World of Education*, (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 2012). The College of Preceptors emerged mainly as a reaction to Charles Dickens' depiction of the disastrous conditions of education for both the middle and the lower classes. Thus, this grouping of teachers was seeking for the standardisation of education, through for instance the instauration of training and of a universal test of competences to guarantee the best teachers for every child.
[172] Quoted in Paul KEEN, *A Defence of the Humanities in a Utilitarian Age Imagining What We Know, 1800-1850*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 119.

women were not admitted to read for degrees until 1920 and 1947 respectively."[173] This rejection was in accordance with the social vision of women's education. As Sarah Lewis explains, the object of the feminine education was the preparation of her future duties, which are marriage and maternity.[174] This principle is highly exemplified in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* in the sixteenth chapter, "The Warnings of Experience," when Helen and her aunt have a conversation about marriage. Twice, the word "career" is used as a metaphor for marriage: "the very commencement of your career"[175] is echoed by Helen two pages later when she says: "I commenced my career."[176] The word "career" implies studies, a prior formal instruction to access a certain position in society. But paradoxically, marriage does not require formal instruction. However, Helen's aunt furthers the comparison between marriage and career by stating: "Believe me, *matrimony is a serious thing* [sic]."[177] The use of italics emphasises the importance of her assertion. It seems rather paradoxical, because finding a husband relies more on physical qualities, whereas a career relies on intellectual qualities. Mary Fields Beeler laments on the consequences of the education towards marriage: "with marriage the only career open to girls, it is not surprising to find their education of such a nature as to cultivate their "charms," rather than their minds."[178] What was mainly expected of a Victorian woman only concerns physical characteristics, which are principally: "elegance and grace."[179] These principles largely resonate in Anne's work because she had doubtlessly read Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindications of the Rights of Woman* in her father's library. It is a plausible assumption if we take a look at Mary Wollstonecraft's arguments in her pamphlet. In the introduction, she deals with how the education of young women prevent them from acquiring a critical mind:

> It is acknowledged that they spend many of their earliest years acquiring a smattering of accomplishments, but strength of body and mind are sacrificed to libertine notions of beauty, to the desire to get themselves settled by marriage—the only way women can rise in the world.[180]

[173] Laura SCHWARTZ, 'Feminist Thinking on Education in Victorian England' *Oxford Review of Education*. 37 (2011): 669–682, 672.
[174] LEWIS, *op. cit*, 62.
[175] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 149.
[176] *Ibid*, 151.
[177] *Ibid*, 150.
[178] Mary FIELDS BEELER, 'Female Education as Reflected in Victorian Fiction,' 1940, 14.
[179] GISBORNE, *op. cit*, 20.
[180] Quoted in Jonathan BENNETT, 'A Vindication of the Rights of Woman with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects' *Online*. (2017): 111, 6.

b. Feminine Superficiality

Indeed, during the Victorian era, young girls were most of the time deprived of intellectual education and instruction, for the benefit of an education based on superficiality. Herbert Spencer summarises the belief: "Among mental as among bodily acquisitions, the ornamental comes before the useful."[181] The character of Rosalie Murray embodies this education in *Agnes Grey*. Here are Mrs Murray's desires for her children: "For the girls, she seemed anxious only to render them as superficially attractive and showily accomplished as they could possibly be made."[182] That is why Laura Riding insists on the idea that a woman is sadly only: "both her mirror and her body."[183] Anne Brontë was a direct witness of the concrete application of these principles, as Mrs Robinson – whose children's education was to be assured by Anne – was the daughter of Thomas Gisborne, who wrote *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex*. Thus, her eldest daughter, Lydia, incarnates elegance, and grace. She "loved the frivolous things in life, and serious things could be hanged."[184]

Furthermore, there was the common belief that "serious things" in a woman's head would deprive her of her femininity and her innocence. The British writer Joan Burstyn summarises this popular view: "a learned woman, therefore, lost the very essence of her femininity."[185] Helen embodies this theory in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, talking about the education of girls at large: "she may be pure and innocent as long as she is kept in ignorance and restraint."[186] At that time, it was highly believed that educated women represented a danger for the proper functioning of society, because it would lead them out of their sphere, and they would question the established order. Indeed, there seemed to be a dichotomy between the intellectual education and the physical education, in society. There was the fear that an intellectual education would weaken a woman's duties. Joan Burstyn explains: "There was no point in endangering a woman's chances of marriage by educating her so tightly that she was sure to become an old maid."[187] On one side, the education of nature would provide the education and preservation of both intellectual and physical educations, whereas society

[181] Herbert SPENCER, *Essays on Education and Kindred Subjects - Everyman's Library*, (Online: Qontro Classic Books, 2010), 8.
[182] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 62.
[183] Quoted in Sandra M. GILBERT and Susan GUBAR, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2000), 3.
[184] HOLLAND, *In Search of Anne Brontë, op. cit,* 109.
[185] Joan N. BURSTYN, *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood*, (London: Routledge, 2016), 37.
[186] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 57.
[187] BURSTYN, *op. cit,* 42.

presents a Manichean vision of education. And obviously, society wins over individuality in terms of defining the intrinsic nature of female education.

Sarah Lewis expands on the type of education Victorian girls would receive. She explains that there were two principal ramifications. The most important is that young girls needed to train for flourishing certain accomplishments essential for their shining in society. These accomplishments belonged to the field of art; music and especially piano were central. Yet, the knowledge of music was not oriented towards self-satisfaction and the construction of the self as an individual, but rather animated by a: "rage for universal exhibition."[188] This desire for social recognition is explicit in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* when Helen laments: "I cannot enjoy my music, because there is no one to hear it."[189] Her appreciation of her own art depends on her public. As a consequence, we may wonder whether or not her artistic education brings her knowledge *per se* or if it is only an accomplishment with superficial motives.

Women were denied the access to formal instruction. Beyond universities' refusal to accept them, they were not intellectually taught, for fear of their potential rebellion against the established order. In *Agnes Grey,* Rosalie is eager to seduce all men she encounters, even if she does not love them; she wants to put forward her beauty because she: "was swallowed up in the all-absorbing ambition to attract and dazzle the other sex,"[190] but the main reason of her behaviour is that: "her mind had never been cultivated"[191] The non-education of the female mind was a key foundation of Victorian respectability. Women were kept in ignorance – which is synonymous with a lack of instruction. In French, there is even an expression: "manquer d'instruction" which is an antagonism of knowledge. In the French dictionary *Littré* from the end of the nineteenth century, the definition of instruction is: "Savoir, connaissances. Avoir de l'instruction. Manquer d'instruction. C'est un homme d'une grande instruction."[192] Women were obviously not led outside of the cave. Indeed, thanks to Peter Losin's explanations, we may compare women's ignorance to Plato's parable of the cave. He argues:

[188] LEWIS, *op. cit,* 60.
[189] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 148.
[190] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 65.
[191] *Ibid*, 64.
[192] Dictionnaire Littré - Dictionnaire de la langue française.

> […] the cave is the region accessible to sight or perception; the world outside and above the cave is the intelligible region accessible not to perception but to reasoning; the upward journey out of the cave into daylight is the soul's ascent to the intelligible realm. The educator's task is a matter of turning souls around rather than introducing "knowledge into a soul which doesn't have it."[193]

The world inside the cave may be known through sensible experience, when the outside world needs to be intellectualised if we follow this definition. Thus, if women are not intellectually prepared for the outside world, they will be unable to acquire the knowledge of the world. During the Victorian era, through the examples of the two novels of our corpus, it seems that in all cases the educator does not "turn souls around" but "introduce knowledge into a soul," – knowledge being how to present well and shine in society. As a consequence, women are not actively engaged in the process of discovering the outside world by themselves and particularly thanks to their own minds. On the contrary, they are indistinctly educated through indoctrination, without having the possibility to be conscious of it or to express themselves. Therefore, young women are so unexperienced that they are extremely naïve.

This naiveté is reflected upon progressive and growing disillusions in both Brontë novels. Actually, Anne Brontë herself – as a young Victorian woman – was disenchanted in her life. As a governess, she experienced a grand disillusion. Staying almost five years at Thorp Green Hall, it is the job which offered her a certain maturation which allowed her to adopt a real clairvoyance. In her diary paper, she wrote: "I have had some very unpleasant and undreamt-of experiences of human nature."[194] One of the main reasons is the adulterous relationship her employer, Mrs Robinson, had with Anne Brontë's brother: Branwell Brontë. It probably led her to resign.[195] Obviously, it contributed to her underestimation, leading to her disappointment. This could be applied to Agnes. It is easy to notice the echo of Anne's life in her fiction. Agnes is rapidly disappointed by her limited freedom of movement. From the second chapter, there is a growing decrescendo of hope. Agnes even expresses more and more explicitly her daily pain. It starts when Agnes compares Mary Ann's attitude to her own in her childhood. This comparison by contrast parallels Agnes' thoughts on page 11 when she innocently considers she could teach her pupils by using only the material she had learnt in her own childhood. It reflects the evolution and her growing disenchantment. On page 32, she

[193] Peter LOSIN, 'Education and Plato's Parable of the Cave' *The Journal of Education*. 178 (1996): 49–65, 49.
[194] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* "Introduction" by Angeline GOREAU, 27.
[195] Juliet R. V. BARKER, *The Brontës: A Life in Letters*, (London: Little, Brown, 2016), 226.

portrays the little Fanny, saying that her behaviour is quickly sufficient to "destroy the illusion."[196] Actually, the description of Fanny reveals a greater disillusion. Helen's disillusion in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is oriented towards her inability to educate her husband. In the chapter "Traits of Friendship" she realises: "His very heart, that I trusted so, is, I fear, less warm and generous than I thought it."[197] In both situations, women believed in their first impressions, without having any experience in either of the subjects. Therefore, their naiveté is obvious, regarding the absence of their empirical knowledge. Their minds are passive, they are believed to be unable to have any opinion. And when they express one, their lack of experience guides them wrongly. Because of this vicious circle, women should keep quiet. As Nancy Armstrong puts it: "As gender came to mark the most important difference among individuals, men were still men and women still women, of course, but the difference between male and female was understood in terms of their respective qualities of mind."[198]

Consequently, when women voice themselves out, it comes as a shock, and it is noticed. As Mr Hattersley comments about Helen in the chapter "First Absence:" "she looks as if she had a will of her own."[199] The description is very revealing, as it shows what probably most of Victorian men would think – that women could not have "a will of their own." Yet even women are aware and endorse their roles of quiet human beings. When Esther Hargrave comes back from London with her mother, Helen relates in her diary that: "Her mother sought out an excellent match for her, and even brought the gentleman to lay his heart and fortune at her feet; but Esther had the audacity to refuse the noble gifts."[200] By deciding for herself, Esther took an active role and is perceived as audacious for that.

c. Feminine Passivity

Esther's initiative is surprising, as the passivity of women during the Victorian era was a common pattern. It is so common that is has been widely represented by artists. The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood's artist John Everett Millais for instance painted a picture named *Mariana,* after the poet Tennyson's eponymous poem:

[196] *Ibid*, 32.
[197] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 200.
[198] Quoted in CARNELL, *op. cit,* 9.
[199] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 234.
[200] *Ibid*, 179.

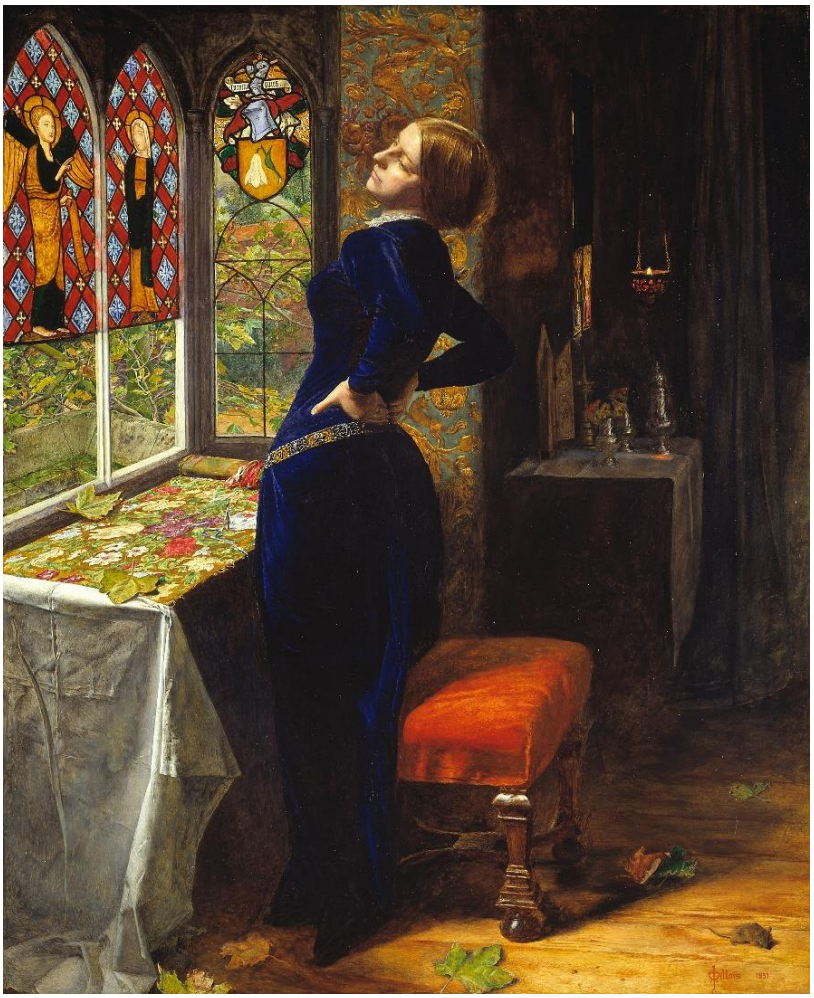

FIGURE 3 – MILLAIS, John Everett. *Mariana*. 1851. Tate Britain, London.

On this painting, we can see a long woman waiting in front of a window, with her back which is probably hurting her. It is doubtlessly a proof of her physical inactivity. She embodies "the isolation of the embowered woman."[201] According to Elizabeth Nelson, the embowered woman is waiting at the window, longing for her loved one, while trapped within a world of artificiality, deprived of any natural elements. Without nature, and within a constant and repetitive atmosphere, these women are unable to have any sensible experience. There is no evolution towards more understanding of the world and acquisition of knowledge. In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,* there is a passage which could be used as a description for the painting above. Actually, Helen is not longing for the loved one, she is rather longing for the time when she can leave him, but her attitude and her aspiration for the outside free world are similar to

[201] Elizabeth NELSON, 'The Embowered Woman: Pictorial Interpretations of "The Lady of Shalott"' *The Victorian Web*. , 2004, online, Internet, 8 Feb. 2021, Available: http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/tennyson/losbower.html.

Mariana's. After: "so long a period of seclusion,"[202] she explains: "I had just ensconced myself within the bow of the window, and was looking out upon the west, where the darkening hills rose sharply defined against the clear amber light of evening, […]."[203] Despite the resemblance between the painting and this scene, in Helen's case, she chooses inactivity, as a response to her husband's violence. Indeed, the largest quantity of action verbs in the two novels is associated with men. In the chapter "Social Virtues" of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,* Arthur and Huntingdon and his friends are drunk, and enter the drawing-room where the ladies are conversing. First, they are the ones entering, when the ladies are sitting, still. Moreover, the description of the scene creates the mental image of all the men rushing onto the ladies:

> Meantime, Mr Grimsby seated himself by me, in the chair vacated by Hargrave as they entered, and gravely stated that he would thank me for a cup of tea: and Arthur placed himself beside poor Milicent, confidentially pushing his head into her face, and drawing in closer to her as she shrunk away from him.[204]

d. From Masculine Power to Masculine Rivalry

In *Agnes Grey*, even the young boys have the monopole of activity over women. When Agnes first meets Tom Bloomfield, he decides on the unfolding of the events. She relates: "Then, ordering his sister to hold the reins, he mounted, and made me stand for ten minutes, watching how manfully he used his whip and spurs."[205] In this scene, Tom is the character in actions, when the young girl Mary Ann "holds the reins" and Agnes "stands." Moreover, with the word "order" we may imagine Tom uses the imperative form to speak. Indeed, he also uses the modal "must" two times on page nineteen, while addressing Agnes. Indeed, in both novels, the use of imperative form is recurrent when it comes to men. In *The Tenant of Widlfell Hall* and in the chapter "Domestic Scenes," Arthur gives an order to Helen: "Now get me a glass of wine […]."[206] The injunction is echoed twenty pages later with Mr Hattersley who orders to his wife Milicent: "Come now, you *shall* tell me! [sic]"[207] The use of italics reinforces the violence

[202] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit*, 346.
[203] *Ibid*, 346.
[204] *Ibid*, 286.
[205] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit*, 19.
[206] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit*, 269.
[207] *Ibid*, 289.

of the utterance. By using imperative forms, men own the control of women's actions. In fact, men own the power of decision in everything even in the household. It is paradoxical, considering that the domestic sphere was supposed to belong to women. Yet, they are the ones who decide the menus. Gabriel Mihaila-Lica argues: "The difference between the educational messages sent to the boys and those received by the girls is seen even from the food that is put on their plates."[208] In *Agnes Grey* there a is a perfect example for this argument. At one point, while dining, Mr Bloomfield successively rejects different meals composed of meat and fish, as if none of them was enough for him. Every time food is presented before him, he starts to eat "but with the most rueful expressions of discontent."[209] And his discontent is revealed through the profusion of exclamation marks, and the repetition, twice, of "Dear – dear!"[210] Once more, it is the man who decides, and who exclaims his discontent with violence.

Actually, it seems that men are raised in violence and towards violence. Obviously, there is the scene in *Agnes Grey* when Tom Bloomfield tortures the birds: his father knows and his uncle Robson encourages him, as Tom relates: "and he laughed, and said I was a fine boy."[211] This uncle Robson is central in Tom's education. An entire chapter is named after him: "The Uncle." One of the most prominent themes in this chapter concerns the vice of alcohol. It is explicitly said that Mr Robson: "taught his nephew to imitate him in this to the utmost of his ability,"[212] this being the swallowing of "great quantities of wine."[213] Even Mr Bloomfield, Tom's father: "had not much to say against it, for *his* favourite beverage was gin and water."[214] Thus, the three masculine figures of the novel represent the alcoholism which was probably synonymous with virility. Helen laments on the fact that her husband Arthur wants to inculcate alcoholism to their son to: "make a man of him."[215] It seems that drinking alcohol is a rite of passage into adulthood for a young boy. It is a leitmotiv in the two novels. Arthur Huntingdon resembles Mr Robson and Mr Bloomfield in his love for liquor. When Arthur leaves for London for several months, he spends his time gambling and drinking. Helen reproaches him with his behaviour in the chapter "Domestic Scenes" of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. When she accuses him of degrading himself mostly by drinking, he answers: "Do you think I have nothing to do

[208] Gabriela MIHAILA-LICA, 'Education of Children in the Tenant of Wildfell Hall by Anne Bronte' *International Conference Knowledge-Based Organization*. 26 (2020): 314–318, 315.
[209] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 25.
[210] *Ibid*, 25.
[211] *Ibid*, 20.
[212] *Ibid*, 45.
[213] *Ibid*, 45.
[214] *Ibid*, 45.
[215] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 356.

but to stay at home and take care of myself like a woman?"[216] Drinking alcohol is a sign of manliness, as it is a sign of going out in the public sphere. Arthur enjoys it because it guarantees him a place in society, which is the foundation of his identity. Indeed, he even argues three pages later: "I've lived more in these four months, Helen, than you have in the whole course of your existence […]."[217] This assertion enlightens the reader on two issues. Firstly, it confirms Arthur's need to evolve in society to assert his identity as a man. Secondly, it shows that he acknowledges Helen's inactivity – alongside with all women.

Eventually, Arthur's comparison reveals a society based on competition. Either in the female or the male spheres, rivalry is pivotal for the acceptation in society. This is probably due to the historical context of the nineteenth century. This century is marked by great discoveries, so that every great mind was competing for the next great discovery. Moreover, the military campaigns and desires for colonial expansions symbolised this competition with other powerful countries. Therefore, "men were figured as competitors in the amoral, economic realm."[218] The latent competitivity of society is present at a smaller scale in Brontë's work. In Agnes' words, a reader clearly notices the comparison she makes between Mr Hatfield and Mr Weston. In order to build her opinion on the new rector, Mr Weston, she compares him with Mr Hatfield. When she meets Mr Weston in the chapter "The Church," she comments: "I was well pleased to observe that the new curate resembled him, as far as I could see, in none of these particulars."[219] And the comparison is repeated through the cottager Nancy Brown's voice who explains that Mr Hatfield "hadn't time to attend to [her] then."[220] A few lines later, she continues: "But I heard Maister Weston… Maister Weston was there miss […]."[221] The motif of analogy is so central in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* that even a chapter is intitled "Comparisons: Information Rejected." In the chapter, Helen discusses with her friend Milicent, and asks her: "And is he [Arthur] so *much* [sic] worse, Milicent, than Mr Hattersley?" It seems that Helen needs the comparison with other men to value her husband. There may be two reasons to this attitude. On one hand, the need for comparison puts the light on the competition which itself stems from the hierarchisation of society. On the other hand, the pursuit of

[216] *Ibid*, 266.
[217] *Ibid*, 269.
[218] Jan MARSH, 'Gender Ideology & Separate Spheres in the 19th Century' *Victoria and Albert Museum*. (Victoria and Albert Museum, Cromwell Road, South Kensington, London SW7 2RL. Telephone +44 (0)20 7942 2000. Email vanda@vam.ac.uk, 2011), online, Internet, 10 Feb. 2021. Available: http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/g/gender-ideology-and-separate-spheres-19th-century/.
[219] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit*, 83.
[220] *Ibid*, 91.
[221] *Ibid*, 91.

comparison reveals the need for the others' opinions, which is part of the principle of reputation – a key concern in Victorian times.

PART II

II. The Edification of the Mind

A. "The Fault is Partly in Society"[222]

"You can't shoot me into society," she said good-naturedly. "Remember, my dear, that I was but a governess, and you, you poor silly old man, have the worst reputation for debt, and dice, and all sorts of wickedness. We shall get quite as many friends as we want by and by, and in the meanwhile you must be a good boy and obey your schoolmistress in everything she tells you to do" […].
William Makepeace THACKERAY, *Vanity Fair,* 1846.

a. Gossips and Truth

Having a good reputation in the neighbourhood is central in Victorian times, especially within the upper-class sphere. Most of the time, reputation is built upon small talks between families. That is why every unusual action should be prohibited, to avoid questions and rumours. It explains the reaction of Helen's aunt when she has a quarrel with her niece about Arthur Huntingdon: "The ladies are directing enquiring glances towards us at this moment, I see. I shall join them. Do you come too, when you are sufficiently composed to appear as usual."[223] Moreover, when Agnes is looking for a job as a governess, her mother: "wrote to [her] father's relations"[224] and she eventually signs for a job in the Bloomfield family: "whom [her] kind, prim Aunt Grey had known in her youth."[225] Everything happens thanks to social relations. That is when François Flahault's theory of "socialisation"[226] seems crucial: Agnes Grey would not have found a job so easily if it was not for her family's social situation. Therefore, with the concept of reputation underlies the concept of "socialisation." Both have an interdependent relationship. According to Priti Joshi, small talks are essential in social relationship, and he believes Anne Brontë wanted to put forward this point of view in her work: "Although Brontë presents daily life in Linder-Car as punctuated by small talk, rumor, and gossip […] she does not dismiss this talk as Helen does, but presents it as serving the vital

[222] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 127.
[223] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 164.
[224] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 12.
[225] *Ibid*, 12.
[226] Cf. FLAHAULT, *op. cit*. Flahault considers that a child's education requires his or her parents' socialisation with the outside world. He asserts: "Seuls les parents qui ont une assiette sociale suffisante peuvent remplir convenablement leur rôle de parents." According to him, society has a major role in a child's education, at least as much as the parents, 299-300.

function of creating fellowship and community."[227] Talks, instead of only contributing to one's reputation, have also the power to reunite.

Yet, when small talks turn into gossiping, a negative connotation emerges. In the Cambridge Dictionary, the word gossip is defined as: "conversation or reports about other people's private lives that might be unkind, disapproving, or not true."[228] The first interesting aspect of the definition is the fact that these small talks concern "other people's private lives", and these talks can be "unkind, disapproving." The most relevant point though, is that these talks may be "not true." As a consequence, it seems *a priori* complicated to build one's education and knowledge on the basis of gossips. Gossiping belongs to one of Rousseau's principles of education, but the worst one according to the philosopher: the education coming from men. As reworded by Laurent Fedi: "Or, Rousseau constate que c'est par cette éducation que l'homme dégénère, parce que celle-ci, faite par et pour la société, le pervertit, le déprave, altère ses penchants naturels."[229]

And yet, gossips constitute one of the foundations of knowledge in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Gossips are part of the characters' lives mainly, as Fergus says it explicitly to Helen: "for some of us have nothing better to do than to talk about our neighbours' concerns."[230] Anne might have wanted this reflexion to be sarcastic, in order to mock this aristocratic habit. And Fergus was right, as in the chapter "A Snake in the Grass," Eliza Millward asks Gilbert: "what do you think of these shocking reports about Mrs Graham. – can you encourage us to disbelieve them?"[231] Thus, she implies that she believes them. Yet, she argues she should not believe the rumours, because: "I know Mrs Graham too well!"[232] Still, when in the first case she relies on her sensible experience, her hearing of the rumours, to establish her knowledge, in the second case it is also her experience with Helen Graham which helps her to say: "I know her." In both cases, it cannot be proper knowledge according to Ayer. He stresses that: "Claims to know empirical statements may by upheld by a reference of perception, or to memory, or to testimony, or to historical records, or to scientific laws. But such backing is not always strong

[227] Priti JOSHI, 'Masculinity and Gossip in Anne Brontë's *Tenant,*' *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*. 49 (2009): 907–924, 909.
[228] Cambridge Dictionary.
[229] Laurent FEDI, 'Les Paradoxes éducatifs de Rousseau' *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger*. 136 (2011): 487–506.
[230] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit*, 83.
[231] *Ibid*, 96.
[232] *Ibid*, 97.

enough for knowledge."[233] What Ayer explains is that empiricism is intrinsically subjective, even though the experiences can be supported by universal and scientific facts.

Gossiping might be dangerous if its content is directly taken as absolute truth. For instance, Gilbert Markham does not believe any of the rumours at first, but eventually the gossips seem to condition his actions. In the chapter "An Assault," Gilbert encounters Lawrence coming from Wildfell Hall and he attacks him. Even if it is not said explicitly, Gilbert probably attacks him because he is shaken by the gossips concerning Helen Graham and her potential love affair with Mr Lawrence. Yet, the influence of gossips is unconscious, as after the attack Gilbert asserts being: "excited by a combination of feelings it would not be easy to analyse."[234] He is disturbed by his own feelings, which recalls Agnes who is disturbed to realise the Bloomfield family does not correspond to the description she has had. On page twelve, Agnes explains that her aunt had asserted that Mrs Bloomfield was: "a very nice woman."[235] Agnes deeply believes in her aunt's impressions, as she repeats it three pages later: "if Mrs Bloomfield were a kind, motherly woman, I might do very well after all […]."[236] However, Agnes quickly realises her: "inability to satisfy Mrs Bloomfield."[237] Actually, both Gilbert and Agnes are fooled by the beliefs of one of their acquaintances, but not the same way. Gilbert struggles to stay far from the gossips and is eventually led by them. On the contrary, Agnes directly gives credit to the gossips, before quickly realising there were false information.

b. Social Morality

We may wonder why some much importance is given to gossips and small talks. Besides the creation of a community, we should focus more on the building of one's reputation, and notably of one's Victorian respectability – a concept belonging to the sphere of social morality. Valerie Mack explains:

[233] AYER and AYER, *op. cit,* 29-30.
[234] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 134*l*.
[235] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 12.
[236] *Ibid*, 15.
[237] *Ibid*, 32.

> Social morality was also associated with this idea, with "the essence of that morality […] summed up in the single word 'respectability'." The label came not only with the guarantee that a person's peers thought highly of him or her, but also with the certainty that this was a good, honest, and moral person—labels that every upper-class person was expected to hold. Because reputation meant so much in this time, it was important to maintain respectability and keep up appearances.[238]

There are different issues stated here. The most important is probably that morality is calculated regarding the ability to maintain appearances in order to appear respectable. "Appearances" is defined by the Cambridge Dictionary as: "what things look like or seem to be rather than what they actually are."[239] Therefore, there is an opposition created between what things look like, and their actual essence. Appearances then are antagonistic with truth, knowledge. Furthermore, if appearances are "what things look like" it means that only the superficial and artificial cover counts in society. What is primordial is to look like, more than to be.

Victorian society is based on appearances. For example, when a young girl is old enough to find a husband, she starts to go to balls and social events, to be presented to society. In the upper-class world, everything happens in the sphere of leisure. Indeed, idler a family was, richer the family was.[240] In *Agnes Grey*, Rosalie Murray: "was to make her debut in the third of January"[241] and in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*: "Esther is full of her first season in town."[242] For aristocratic families, it was part of their respectability, part of the social "etiquette" to present their daughters at their best in order to find the perfect suitor for the daughter and especially for the family. Thus, social education relies on the young girls' attitudes and looks. It is so important at the scale of the whole family that when Esther is trying to reconciliate Helen and her brother Walter, her mother Mrs Hargrave cries: "Surely, you never will learn to conduct yourself like a lady!"[243] She is not the only mother who embodies these mores. Another perfect example is to be found through Mrs Markham's words. While discussing with Gilbert, she tells him about a conversation she has had with Helen, and specifically on: "what every respectable

[238] Valerie MACK, 'Reputation and Social Perfection: The Social Creation of Mr. Hyde,' 2012, 3.
[239] Cambridge Dictionary.
[240] Cf. JOSHI, 'Masculinity and Gossip in Anne Brontë's *Tenant*'. In her article, Priti Joshi uses many times the word "idle talk" to qualify the sort of discussions the upper-class families were having. He also explains that the persons having these "idle talks" were living "aimless, idle lives," 907.
[241] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 72.
[242] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 379.
[243] *Ibid*, 336.

woman ought to know:"[244] "On household matters, and all the little niceties of cookery, and such things, that every lady ought to be familiar with, whether she be required to make a practical use of her knowledge or not."[245] What counts for Mrs Markham is that a lady should be able to show that she can do it, even if she will never concretely use it. It reminds us of Sarah Lewis' theory on young girls' education. It must be directed towards: "her fame,"[246] which can be understood as a synonym of "reputation" and "respectability." Sarah Lewis develops on the fact that: "the grand evil of such an education, is the mistaking means for ends."[247] Indeed, she explains that Victorian society expects women to be the moral bearers, when at the same time they are educated towards artificiality and vanity, which is, according to Lewis, a short-term objective: "and the most unimportant and irresponsible of the whole of life!"[248]

It seems that Victorian respectability is based upon a paradox, the paradox of women's condition. Women were most of the time denied the access to proper and formal instruction, but at the same time, they were granted with a central role in society: "to engage the understanding and the affection of the pupil in favour of piety and virtue."[249] Indeed, they were perceived as the bearer of Victorian morality and piety, as opposed to men who were created by God towards violence and war, in order to protect women – weaker by nature.[250] This theory of the "moral woman" expanded even on the other side of the Atlantic. In the freshly independent United States, as puritan as Britain would have been, the role of the woman was rather similar. To describe woman as a bearer of morality, the historian Francis D. Cogliano's talks about the *Republican Motherhood*, which is the fact that: "women as mothers played the crucial role in promoting virtue […]."[251] In *Agnes Grey*, the two mothers (Mrs Bloomfield and Mrs Murray) seem eager to teach morality to their children, but through the help of someone else, a governess. Agnes tells the reader that Mrs Murray puts the accent on an: "impeachable morality."[252] Helen Huntingdon on the contrary seems willing to endorse this role herself with her son Arthur, by trying to keep him far from the temptations of vice. To her, morality is preventing her son from even encountering any form of vice: "I will lead him by the hand, Mr Markham, till he has strength to go alone; and I will clear as many stones from his path as I can,

[244] *Ibid*, 39.
[245] *Ibid*, 39.
[246] LEWIS, *op. cit*, 62.
[247] *Ibid*, 63.
[248] *Ibid*, 63.
[249] GISBORNE, *op. cit*, 43.
[250] *Ibid*, 19.
[251] Francis D. COGLIANO, *Revolutionary America, 1763-1815: A Political History*, (New York: Routledge, 2008), 194.
[252] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey*, *op. cit*, 55.

and teach him to avoid the *rest* […]."[253] The stones being here a metaphor for temptations, Helen considers that men cannot resist temptation, whereas Mrs Markham believes that a man's virtue is measured through his capacity to resist temptation. She argues: "If you would have your son to walk honourably through the world, you must not attempt to clear the stones from his path, but teach him to walk firmly over them […]."[254] Therefore, both women – both mothers – do not share the same definition of virtue, of morality.

If these two mothers, in addition belonging to the same social class, disagree, we may wonder if there was any precise Victorian definition of morality, and if so, what it was. The American historian Gertrude Himmelfarb tries to describe morality: "Manners and morals"[255] – the expression is unmistakably Victorian." She develops later: "It was this conjunction of "small morals"[256] and large that made Victorian society so moralistic, in aspiration at least, if not always in achievement."[257] Through this definition, it is easy to see that moral and virtue were key concerns in Victorian society, while there were no universal definition of these concepts *per se*. Therefore, Victorian people, particularly in the upper-class, had to follow certain abstract moral rules, above anything else. That is a central aspect on which Gertrude Himmelfarb laments, arguing that: "The Victorians thought it no small virtue to maintain the appearance, the manners, of good conduct even while violating some moral principle, for in their demeanor they affirmed the legitimacy of the principle itself."[258] A paradox emerges here, as it was widely allowed and even advisable to behave immorally be it for the appearance of morality. That is what led Agnes, while working among the Murray family, to say that she "was the only person in the house who steadily professed good principles."[259] Thanks to her own education ruled by modesty, after her family has become impoverished, she does not understand the aristocratic tendance of laying the emphasis on appearances. Because of the insistence on appearances, there can be no place for intellectual learning then. The author William Thackeray criticises it: "It is not learning, it is not virtue, about which people inquire in society; it is

[253] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 54.
[254] *Ibid*, 54.
[255] Gertrude HIMMELFARB, *The De-Moralization of Society: from Victorian Virtues to Modern Values*, (London: Institute for Economic Affairs, 1995), 21.
[256] Cf. *Ibid*. The expression "small morals" comes from the philosopher Thomas Hobbes. He established a distinction between these "small morals" which are: "decency of behaviour; as how one man should salute another, or pick his teeth before company […]," and "manners" which are defined as: "those qualities of mankind, that concern their living together in peace and unity," 22.
[257] *Ibid*, 22.
[258] *Ibid*, 23.
[259] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 63.

manners."[260] Indeed, he was right if we believe Agnes' words about Rosalie Murray: "she had never been properly taught the distinction between right and wrong."[261] The frivolous disposition of Rosalie is reverberated through the character of Arthur Huntingdon in Brontë's second novel. When Helen discusses with her aunt in the chapter "Further Warnings," she tells her: "Thanks to you, aunt, I have been well brought up, and had good examples always before me, which he, most likely, has not […]."[262] Arthur too has never been taught the distinction between right and wrong. He does not share Helen's social education.

c. Gender Discrimination

The reason of such a difference is probably related to economic, social and gender distinctions. Alongside with the Victorian "etiquette," we should focus on the hierarchisation of society. The hierarchisation is institutionalized, and it is based on different parameters. We should pay attention first to gender distinctions. In Victorian society, men and women endorse different roles. Men belonged to the public, politic sphere, and women were supposed to stay in the private, domestic sphere. Indeed, women were part of the house, and were considered as men's possessions, as would be objects or pieces of furniture. Arthur Huntingdon "dreams of possessing such a treasure"[263] – the treasure being his future wife, Helen. Actually, a woman was denied her identity from the moment when she married a man. The politician Sir William Blackstone states that "by marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law."[264] This idea was widespread in Victorian literature. In Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, the protagonist, Catherine Morland, addresses Henry Tilney: "People that marry can never part, but must go and keep house together […]."[265] Yet, despite the fusion of identities, a hierarchy is paradoxically maintained between the two. To Blackstone, the union between a man and a woman meant that every married woman is "under the protection and influence of her husband,

[260] Quoted in HIMMELFARB, *op. cit,* 22. Thackeray's quotation derives from his non-fiction work *The Four Georges* which is an analysis of the four British kings named George – even if Thackeray himself explains that he is not a historian, 268.
[261] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 64.
[262] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 165.
[263] *Ibid*, 185.
[264] Cf. Sir William BLACKSTONE, *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, (London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1765) The author argued that if men and women are one single person, it is impossible for a husband to grant anything to his wife, as it would mean considering they have a separate existence. Thus, "to covenant with her, would be only to covenant with himself," 430.
[265] Jane AUSTEN, *Northanger Abbey*, (London: Vintage Books, 2014), 82.

her *baron,* or lord."[266] The titles *"baron"* and "lord" clearly set women's inferior position in all domains – principally social or political. Two examples in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* seem to illustrate Blackstone's statement. The two times it occurs through Helen's voice. The first time, she comments: "I feel his degradation, his failings, and transgressions as my own […] contaminated by the union."[267] She goes on later when Mr Hargrave insults Mr Huntingdon: "for, bad as he is, he is part of myself, and you cannot abuse him without offending me."[268] Mr Weston, Agnes' husband at the end of *Agnes Grey* appears to be part of herself too, since she explains that they: "endeavour to fortify ourselves."[269] The use of the plural pronoun reveals the unification of both their identities. There is therefore a denial of individuality. Mainly in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,* women only exist as the shadow of their husbands, which means that their personal education can know no evolution. The prospective of social and political education seems limited for Victorian women. Anne Brontë drew a portrait of the masculine oppressive superiority especially in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. At the beginning of the second volume, Arthur Huntingdon calls his wife: "My own Helen!"[270] She is his possession, so that she cannot exist without him. It is exemplified in the chapter "The Guests" when Helen relates Arthur's latest mark of jealousy: "he dislikes me to have any pleasure but in himself."[271] Women exist only through their husbands, through masculine figures in general. It is confirmed by Helen when she deals directly with her education and acquisition of knowledge: "In all my employments, whatever I do, or see, or hear, has an ultimate reference to him: whatever skill or knowledge I acquire is some day to be turned to his advantage or amusement."[272]

The whole process of preventing women from expressing their individual identity is the one of "inferiorization."[273] According to Susan Gubar and Sandra Gilbert, it is a phenomenon in which the feminine identity as a creative and capable self is denied. Therefore, women have no other choice than to accept such a denomination and they experience an: "isolation that felt like illness, alienation that felt like madness."[274] What Gubar et Gilbert underline is that women are confronted to otherness – otherness from their own identities as individuals but also as women.

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[266] BLACKSTONE, *op. cit,* 430.
[267] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 273.
[268] *Ibid*, 285.
[269] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 192.
[270] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 187.
[271] *Ibid*, 243.
[272] *Ibid*, 168.
[273] GILBERT and GUBAR, *op. cit,* 50.
[274] *Ibid*, 51.

The alienation can even become a form of dehumanisation. Indeed, the superiority of men over women is also expressed through their behaviour towards animals, which is comparable to the one towards women. One of the most striking aspects of masculine dominance is the physical treatment of the animals. Indeed, animals are at the bottom of the hierarchy. It is easy to attack them, so that most of the men of the novel show an extreme violence towards them in order to maintain their superiority. The brutality towards animals was a main concern during the Victorian era: it was part of Evangelical struggles.[275] Lashing out at animals was a proof of immorality. That is why "Anne Brontë believed that a person's character could be judged from his behaviour to animals."[276] She considered it essential to denounce this injustice. Maggie Berg also pinpoints the animalistic tableau in Anne Brontë's first novel: "*Agnes Grey* employs the representation of animals to challenge and denaturalize the 'natural hierarchy'."[277] The first event of such a mistreatment concerns Tom Bloomfield who captures and tortures birds, "to see how long it will live – and then, to see what it will taste."[278] Both violence and sadism are explicit here, which deeply contrasts with the supposed innocence of children. Actually, Tom adopts such a behaviour because he is encouraged to do so by following his father's example. Therefore, the dominance of men seems to be part of Victorian education and it circles through generations. It does not evolve through the novel: even the representant of order and faith confirms that patriarchy. Mr Hatfield "administered a resounding thwack upon the animal's skull;"[279] the animal being Snap, the Murrays' dog. In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,* another dog, Helen's dog, Dash, is mistreated by Arthur Huntingdon. At one point, Dash does not respond to Arthur's call. So: "enraged at this, his master snatched up a heavy book and hurled it at his head."[280] He affirms his superiority over the dog through violence, a recurrent attitude he also adopts with his wife. Moreover, Arthur talks to Helen as if she were an animal. Later in the book, he demeans her: "Come then, Helen, are you going to be a good girl?"[281]

Carol Adams underlines the "intersection of the oppression of women and the oppression of animals."[282] Indeed, women are often assimilated to animals, and treated like

[275] Élise OUVRARD, 'L'Engagement moral et religieux dans l'œuvre romanesque d'Anne Brontë : le modèle évangélique', (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2019), 129–141.
[276] F. B. PINION, *A Bronte Companion: Literary Assessment, Background and Reference*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1975), 239.
[277] Maggie BERG, '"Hapless Dependents": Women and Animals in Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey*' *Studies in the Novel*. 34 (2002): 177–197, 178.
[278] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 20.
[279] *Ibid*, 112.
[280] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 225.
[281] *Ibid*, 228.
[282] Quoted in BERG, *op. cit,* 178.

them, especially governesses who are constantly treated as inferior creatures. Thus, their knowledge of the world seems to be limited to mistreatment and submission. Lady Amberley, who was a Victorian suffragist, and who read *Agnes Grey,* said she "should like to give it [*Agnes Grey*] to every family with a governess and shall read it through again when I have a governess to remind me to be human."[283]

d. The Ambiguous Role of the Governess

Lady Amberley's reflexion leads us to a second crucial parameter in the social hierarchy, which is social status. Power does not rely on the amount of knowledge, but on the amount of money. Education is no more the prior criterium in Victorian society, nor is the social status *per se.* Even age and experience are no more criteria of superiority in *Agnes Grey*: Agnes shares her disagreeable surprise with the Bloomfields' children: "I found they had no notion of going with *me*: I must go with *them* whenever they chose to lead me. […] This, I thought, was reversing the order of things."[284] The children here are younger, but richer than Agnes. The priority given to money in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is revealed through Lord Lowborough's words, when he is confessing his pain to Mr Huntingdon, in the chapter "Traits of Friendship." He tragically laments: "I might hope; but as it is, Huntingdon, do you think *any*body would take me – ruined and wretched as I am?"[285] The use of italics for "any" lays the emphasis on the fact that because of his ruin, Lord Lowborough is aware that he will not have many opportunities of marriage, and that he should be ready to accept any proposal. Katherine Hallemeier precises the consequences of loss fortune in *Agnes Grey*:

> Through Agnes's [sic] father is – like Mr. Bloomfield – a professional, and Agnes's [sic] mother is -like Mrs. Murray – an aristocrat, the loss of the Grey family fortune that leads Agnes to seek out a position as a governess effectively enables both the Bloomfields and Murrays to treat Agnes as socially inferior.[286]

[283] Quoted in Adelle HAY, *Anne Bronte Reimagined: A View from the Twenty-first Century*, (Salford: Saraband, 2020), 73.
[284] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 23.
[285] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 209.
[286] Katherine HALLEMEIER, 'Anne Brontë's Shameful Agnes Grey' *Victorian Literature and Culture*. 41 (2013): 251–260, 254.

Besides the loss of fortune, which is a central element, the quotation pinpoints the link between the loss of fortune, and the necessity to find a job – becoming a governess. Obviously, the role of the governess in the social hierarchy is a key aspect we should comment on – considering also that it is the leitmotiv of the novel *Agnes Grey.* Agnes is looking for a job to help her family, and governing is the only one offered to her. Mary Atkinson Maurice develops on the reasons leading a young girl to the job of governess. One key resemblance is that "many were the daughters of clergymen."[287] Agnes explains: "My father was a clergyman of the North of England."[288] In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,* Helen tells the reader about the governess Miss Myers' background: "She told me she was a clergyman's daughter, and had been left an orphan from her childhood."[289] During the early Victorian era, even though the job of governess was the only one accessible for middle-class or impoverished young girls, there were few information provided about the exact role of the governess in one's family. Kathryn Hughes insists on the political and social position of the Victorian governess. From the beginning, she puts forward that there were no royal commissions nor parliamentary reports about domestic life.[290] In general, young women wishing to endorse the role of the governess had a candid and naïve vision of the governing task. Agnes Grey idealises the role and is: "full of bright hopes and ardent expectations."[291] And yet, she soon discovers that the governess' role in the family is ambiguous.

In fact, she is considered as a mere servant, whereas her responsibility is much more determinant for the children's education. Agnes confesses: "I had to spend a considerable portion of my valuable leisure moments on my knees upon the floor, in painfully reducing things to order."[292] She is literally inferior (on her knees) but also figuratively, by obeying and endorsing the role of the servant, because "to submit and oblige was the governess's part."[293] In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* there is only the chapter "The Boundary Passed" which deals with a governess. After having discovered Helen's scheme of escape, her husband decides to punish her by procuring a governess for their son. Thus, probably because of the context, Helen despises Miss Myers, the governess. Yet, she insists on the governess's behaviour which

[287] Mary Atkinson MAURICE, *Mothers and Governesses, by the Author of 'Aids to Developement'.*, (John W. Parker, 1847), 18.
[288] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 3.
[289] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 388.
[290] HUGHES, *The Victorian Governess,* "Preface," 11.
[291] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 12.
[292] *Ibid*, 42.
[293] *Ibid*, 103.

underlines her inferior position: “In her behaviour, she was respectful and complaisant even to servility […].”[294]

The governess could not even rely on the servant, who used to demonstrate animosity towards her. Mrs Blenkinsop’s reaction in *Vanity Fair* by William Thackeray also points out contempt. As the Sedleys’ housekeeper, she gives her opinion on Becky Sharp, and on governesses at large: “I don’t trust them governesses. […] They give themselves the hairs and hupstarts [sic] of ladies, and their wages is [sic] no better than you nor me.”[295] The governess was the only person the servant could judge and look down on. Even Helen’s servant, Rachel, told her mistress “that she was ‘down of that new governess’.”[296] The main reason is that servants were enjoying greater liberties and better wages than governesses during the Victorian age. Kathryn Hughes underlines this aspect: domestic servants were able to ascend in the hierarchy so that their wages increased, while a governess “received barely more than pocket money on top of their board and keep.”[297] Therefore, servants themselves had no big esteem for governesses, as we can observe in *Agnes Grey*: “The servants, seeing in what little estimation the governess was held by both parents and children, regulated their behaviour by the same standard.”[298] The fact that the whole paragraph is isolated emphasises its importance.

What contributes to this treatment is the behaviour of the children towards the governess. Even if they are young, they seem to already understand the social hierarchy. Indeed, “the children, however, recognize that as a paid employee and economic dependent Agnes is essentially a working-class servant.”[299] As a consequence, the children show little respect, and the class consciousness undermines Agnes’ credibility as a figure of authority. Class is the strongest obstacle: “class undermines Agnes’ power perhaps more than the fact she is not the natural mother of the children.”[300] Tom Bloomfield dares to threaten Agnes when she wants to save the little birds, he tells her: “You daren’t touch them for your life!”[301] He implies that he has the power of life and death over Agnes. This attitude challenges the very first role of the

[294] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 388.
[295] William Makepeace THACKERAY, *Vanity Fair*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014), 69.
[296] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 388.
[297] Cf. HUGHES, *op. cit,*. People do not want to pay governesses a lot because they were attached to economic liberalism they had been enjoying. However, such economy provoked bankruptcy. It is a vicious circle, because daughters from middle-class families were desperately looking for a job while the upper-class families decided to pay them lower because they had the choice, 147.
[298] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 70.
[299] “Chapter 3: Class, Matriarchy, and Power: Contextualizing the Governess in *Agnes Grey*” by James R. SIMMONS, Jr. Barbara A. SUESS, *New Approaches to the Literary Art of Anne Brontë*, (London: Routledge, 2017), 41.
[300] *Ibid*, 32.
[301] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 48.

governess. If she has no authority over her pupils, the entire process of instructing seems jeopardised.

B. Morality and Transmission

All who have insight and education have automatically their own wilderness; and at some point in their life they will have their temptation.
John FOWLES, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, 1969.

a. The Governess and Instruction

So as to analyse the exact role of the governess in the process of education of children, it is crucial to understand the context of her hiring, through the aristocratic families' point of view. There can be several reasons for a family to employ a governess. The first one concerns mothers' desire not to burden themselves with the instruction of their children. Mrs Bloomfield explains to Agnes: "I have had so little time to attend to their education myself."[302] Later in the novel, Rosalie Murray echoes Mrs Bloomfield's opinion on this subject, when she writes to Helen and tells her about her little girl: "I am not troubled with nursing it."[303] Both mothers do not wish to endorse the role of the educator for their children, which is entirely in opposition to Helen Huntingdon's desire in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. In the chapter "Dual Solitude" she says a first time: "the well-being and culture of my son is all I have to live for."[304] Then, in the chapter "The Boundary Passed" she goes on: "the child's education was the only pleasure and business of my life […]."[305] Even though Helen is confident in her capacities of teaching, her husband considers that she: "was not fit to teach children, or be with them."[306] Be it because of his resentment against his wife or because of a real conviction of Helen's teaching incompetence, he decides to hire a governess for young Arthur. It leads us to another reason for the employment of the governess. It was trendy during the Victorian era to have a governess, as it was a sign of fortune and prestige – the hiring of governess can be also dictated by the "etiquette." At that time, it was essential to resort to a governess for the education of children. Kathryn Hughes underlines the non-adequacy of the boarding schools at that time. "Academic incompetence"[307] describes them. During the 19th century, it justified the aristocratic desire to withdraw their children from those schools and instead pay for a strong education with the help

[302] *Ibid*, 17.
[303] *Ibid*, 168.
[304] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 333.
[305] *Ibid*, 387.
[306] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 387.
[307] HUGHES, *op. cit,* 19.

of a personal governess. Mothers were not supposed to teach their children themselves; it was badly seen, and it probably tarnished the whole family's reputation if it was so. As a consequence, the governess was perceived as a surrogate mother figure by becoming the warrant of the children's good education and behaviour.

In a first place, the mother is the one supposed to epitomise morality in the family, hiring a governess seems rather paradoxical. Kathryn Hughes underlines a crucial point: "the fact that the childless governess could perform many of the functions of a mother suggested that far from being instinctual, maternal affection was something which might be bought."[308] Thus, choosing a childless woman to educate children appears contradictory and artificial. Anne Brontë was even ironical about this absurdity in *Agnes Grey* through Mrs Murray's words: "if *any* governess had but half a mother's watchfulness – half a mother's anxious care, I should be saved this trouble […]."[309] This paradox questions the legitimacy of a governess. Another key parameter is that there were very few governesses for the increasing number of families requiring the help of a governess. At first, it is the growing number of governesses which leads Anne Jameson to argue: "governesses have become a class, and a class so numerous, that the supply has, in numbers at least, exceeded the demand."[310] And yet, Anna Jameson continues and explains about: "the difficulty of procuring on any terms such a woman as they would choose to entrust their children to […]."[311] Therefore, there is here a second paradox: there were many governesses but few of them were considered qualified enough for the upper-class families' expectations.

We may wonder what a Victorian governess's formation was to be able to transmit knowledge and to educate children. First, there is a hybrid objective required from governesses. As responsible for the education of children, a Victorian governess is supposed to teach them morality and how to behave properly regarding their social status (education may be defined as: "ensemble des qualités morales qui se développent,"[312]) but she is also supposed to instruct them, give them scholar knowledge (education may also be: "ensemble des habiletés

[308] *Ibid*, 56.
[309] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey*, *op. cit*, 111.
[310] Anna JAMESON, *The Relative Position of Mothers and Governesses ... Second Edition, Etc*, (London: Spottiswoode & Shaw, 1848), 7.
[311] *Ibid*, 7.
[312] Dictionnaire Littré - Dictionnaire de la langue française.

intellectuelles ou manuelles qui s'acquièrent."[313]) This double scope is summarised by Agnes when she explains "My task of instruction and surveillance."[314]

Firstly, the formal instruction of children requires a preparation. Actually, there were very few institutions for the training of governesses. Mary Atkinson Maurice explains that there were "finishing schools" in which young girls in the prospect of becoming governesses were sent for one year. Or, the existence of private schools is also pointed up, but they were rare and expensive. Therefore, according to Maurice, the formal preparation of governesses will not be satisfying until: "more active, extensive, and permanent measures are taken."[315]

b. Education and Transmission

Therefore, it is difficult to try and identify the formation of governesses, as they probably all had different educations and knowledge. Moreover, Maurice also draws our attention on the fact that: "to learn anything thoroughly is no easy task; to communicate it is a still more difficult one."[316] Having knowledge is not enough, pedagogy is needed to impart it. These two aspects correspond to two different kinds of knowledge which can be acquired through two different kinds of education according to Jean-Jacques Rousseau: "On voudrait que le gouverneur eût déjà une education. C'est trop ; un même homme n'en peut faire qu'une : s'il en fallait deux pour réussir, de quel droit entreprendrait-on la première ?"[317] For instance, throughout *Agnes Grey* it is obvious that Agnes struggles to transmit her knowledge. To start with: "Agnes' own educational background comes into conflict with the focus on accomplishments as a means of social advancement. Since the Greys have not furnished their daughter with an accomplished education, she faces trouble having to teach and practise these subjects."[318] Indeed, in the chapter "Horton Lodge," Agnes confesses: "Of fancy-work I knew nothing but what I gathered from my pupil and my own observation […]."[319] By fancy-work, in this context, she means music as the acquisition of: "so attractive an accomplishment,"[320]

[313] *Ibid.*
[314] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 26.
[315] MAURICE, *op. cit,* 29.
[316] *Ibid,* 12.
[317] ROUSSEAU, *op. cit,* 67.
[318] Cecilia Wadsö LECAROS, '"Lessons in the Art of Instruction": Education in Theory and Practice in Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey*' *Nordic Journal of English Studies*. 1 (2002): 133–151, 136.
[319] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 64.
[320] *Ibid,* 64.

which is Mrs Murray's choice for her daughters. Thus, instructions for the governess are subjective and relative to the employer. That is then a challenge proper to governesses, contrary to mothers, because they hardly ever belong to the same social class than their pupils, which means they had a different education. Still, there are usual and almost universal requirements, that is why when Agnes prepares her advertisement, she is advised to write: "Music, singing, drawing, French, Latin, and German."[321] "Music, singing" particularly seem important, especially for Anne Brontë, because Helen underlines these two accomplishments when she relates Miss Myers' abilities: "She had a fine voice, and could sing like a nightingale, and accompany herself sufficiently well on the piano."[322]

There seems to be a common pattern which may group together the Victorian governesses. Actually, we may apply a standard profile to educators as a whole. Indeed, Sarah Lewis draws a general portrait of the ideal Victorian teacher. She explains that the ideal teacher is no younger, as he has been able to come off: "the follies of childhood, or the indiscretions of youth."[323] The need for age difference resonates in Flahault's insistence on: "la transmission culturelle intergénérationnelle."[324] This relationship obviously implies a hierarchisation – based for instance on the amount of experience. Thanks to his or her experience, the educator is able to: "retrace his own steps, take him [the pupil] by the hand, and sustain him, till he is passed the dangerous and slippery paths of youth."[325] Thanks to the wisdom of age, a teacher may be a good guide for a young pupil. That is probably why Anne was seeking for: "age and experience."[326] And it seems to be a logical process, in all societies, as it is presented as a general truth: "In society, the more senior members feel it as their duty to impart their knowledge to the less experienced ones."[327] Even though Helen Huntingdon is young, she seems to have acknowledged the importance of the role of guide. For her son, she wants to be: "his shield, instruction, friend – to guide him along the perilous path of youth […]."[328] Regarding this guidance theory, obviously Agnes Grey is unable to be a good teacher. At the beginning of the book, not only does she reveal her young age, but she also confesses her childlike attitude: "True; I was near nineteen, but, thanks to my retired life, and the protecting care of my mother and sister, I well knew that many of a girl of fifteen, or under, was gifted

[321] *Ibid*, 54.
[322] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 388.
[323] LEWIS, *op. cit,* 71.
[324] FLAHAULT, *op. cit,* 295.
[325] LEWIS, *op. cit,* 71.
[326] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* "Introduction" by Angeline GOREAU, 16.
[327] MIHAILA-LICA, *op. cit,* 316.
[328] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 252.

with a more womanly address, and greater ease and self-possession, than I was."[329] According to Lewis, Agnes is thus unfit for the job of educator. Yet, according to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's theory, Agnes would be the perfect educator:

> Je remarquerai seulement, contre l'opinion commune, que le gouverneur d'un enfant doit être jeune, et même aussi jeune que peut l'être un homme sage. Je voudrais qu'il fût lui-même enfant, s'il était possible, qu'il pût devenir le compagnon de son élève, et s'attirer sa confiance en partageant ses amusements.[330]

Indeed, it is not only experience which counts, but indulgence as well. We might recap Lewis' theory with this quotation: "Experience can never benefit youth, except when combined with indulgence."[331] However, this indulgence must not be exaggerated, otherwise the pupil will feel free to act as he wishes to. That is one default Helen reproaches Miss Myers with. She criticises: "I was obliged to remonstrate with her on the subject of over-indulgence and injudicious praise."[332]

For a good educator to be able to educate, authority is essential – it is part of the pedagogic role of teachers.[333] In the Cambridge Dictionary, "authority" is defined as: "the moral or legal right or ability to control."[334] It brings us back to the notion of hierarchy, and the idea that the educator is supposed to be morally and legally superior to his pupil. Yet, the definition highlights two issues: the right and the ability to control. Even though the educator has "the moral or legal right" to control, he may not have the ability. That is a key problem for Agnes Grey. She is frustrated because she wants to use violence and punishment as a weapon to maintain her control of the situation, but she cannot. She explains her method with Mary Ann: "Sometimes, exasperated to the utmost pitch, I would shake her violently by the shoulders, or pull her long hair, or put her in the corner […]."[335] The ternary enumeration underlines her growing anger. But right after, Mary Ann cries, and Agnes is blamed by the Bloomfields. Agnes can never even try her own methods to educate the children, as she is constantly overseen by

[329] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 15.
[330] ROUSSEAU, *op. cit,* 67.
[331] LEWIS, *op. cit,* 71.
[332] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 388.
[333] Cf. FLAHAULT, *op. cit.* The principle of authority s inherent to the French system of education notably, as the *Conseil National des Programmes* is quoted by the philosopher Flahault in his article: "L'autorité fondée sur un contrat, dit un document émanant de l'Éducation nationale, est la seule qui convienne aux peuples démocratiques," 300.
[334] Cambridge Dictionary.
[335] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 30.

the parents. There is a sketch drawn by the Victorian cartoonist Charles Keene representing a governess teaching a young boy, under the pressure of the mother:

FIGURE 4 - KEENE, Charles. *Considerate – Very!* 1864. Punch Limited, online galleries.

In the background, we witness a woman – presumably the boy's mother – staring at the ongoing lesson with an inquisitorial eye. One precise sentence from *Agnes Grey* could serve as a caption for this sketch. Agnes worries: "their [the children] mother's presence kept me under an unpleasant restraint."[336] Actually, Helen Huntingdon could be the mother on the left. After the arrival of Miss Myers, she realises Rachel does not like the governess either. And she adds: "I soon found she watched her quite as narrowly as I did […]."[337] That is probably what led the critic P. J. M Scott to comment on governesses who were: "officially employed to turn them [the children] into rational well-conducted creatures but who has hardly any real chance of doing so."[338] Governesses were limited, both in their functions as educators and as instructors.

[336] *Ibid*, 18.
[337] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 389.
[338] P. J. M. SCOTT, *Anne Brontë: A New Critical Assessment*, (London: Vision Press Ltd, 1983), 26.

c. Knowledge and Usefulness

Another aspect to study in the limits of transmission is indeed the transmission of knowledge through scholarly instruction in this context. We may first have a look on the content of this instruction. In 1825, the Scottish poet Thomas Campbell exposed his views on the role of universities, in a letter addressed to Henry Brougham, right before the establishment of the University College of London. He argued that he wanted a university: "in the sense of *liberal* [sic] knowledge, or what I might say, of knowledge universally for what kind of knowledge can be called illiberal? All knowledge is more or less useful."[339] His assertion underlines the ongoing debate at that time regarding what was "useful knowledge." Facing Campbell and Brougham's desires, conservatives saw this modern view on knowledge as a threat to classical learning. Moreover, they considered that this universal access to education, through a wide range of subjects taught at the university, would also be a threat to the established social order. Paul Keen expresses their apprehension: "Many of them suspected that these different issues were bound up together: the challenge to the sanctity of traditional forms of higher knowledge was part of a larger assault on the social order that it had helped to sustain."[340]

Anne Brontë herself might have benefited from this spreading of liberal education, and also from the gain of interest in humanities. She was nine years old when the article "On Education" was launched by students in the *London University Magazine* in 1829. According to Paul Keen, here was the students' main concern:

> Its insistence that "there can be nothing so well worthy of our first and last attention, of our deepest study, if our situation allows us time for study, as the genius of our own tongue, through the medium of our best authors in history, in philosophy, in poetry," embraced a broad education that included both the humanities and the sciences as a preparation for "the active duties of life."[341]

[339] Quoted in KEEN, *op. cit*, 105.
[340] *Ibid*, 113.
[341] *Ibid*, 108.

Anne Brontë had the chance to have access to her father's library and started to write from her infancy, with her sister Emily, the Gondal's poems. Therefore, she and her sisters managed to take advantage of the situation, and the three of them succeeded in becoming famous authors. Thanks to reading and writing, the three sisters were instructed: "through the medium of our best authors in history, in philosophy, in poetry" as enumerated by the students in the *London Magazine.* This instruction through humanities was so crucial in Anne's life that it is reflected upon her two novels. Indeed, reading and writing are omnipresent in both diegesis. *Agnes Grey* is derived from Anne's own diary which was entitled *Passages in the Life of an Individual.* The scenario is reproduced is *Agnes Grey,* with the eponymous character relating her story using the first-person narrative. Books have an important role in the novel, and it is reflected upon the two protagonists who are keen on reading. Rosalie Murray reproaches Agnes with: "you were always so buried in your books."[342] And Arthur Huntingdon wants to prevent his wife Helen from reading: "when he sees me occupied with a book, he won't let me rest till I close it […]."[343] It seems that Anne wanted to lay the emphasis on the importance of literary art.

Art – here the art of writing – might be considered as knowledge, according to Isabelle Hersant. If both Agnes and Helen are so eager to read books it might be to satisfy their thirst of knowledge. However, art knows no scientific definition and cannot be considered as transmitting formal knowledge. Isabelle Hersant explains: "l'art comme savoir pourrait se transmettre mais non se dire – se dire au sens de s'articuler en discours."[344] Therefore, it is all about experience, both for the reader and for the author, to reach knowledge. Furthermore, we may add that the biographical elements, especially in *Agnes Grey*, must help Anne to discover and understand more her proper self, through her writing. The same way, Agnes and Helen may learn about themselves by confessing their experiences on paper. It then corresponds to one of the *Littré* definitions for knowledge: "État de celui qui se connaît lui-même, qui a le sentiment de son existence."[345] In this case, to re-use Campbell's words, art as a source of knowledge can be qualified as "useful knowledge."

Actually, Anne Brontë considers that writing is a talent, and that it must be useful, indeed, but at a larger scale. Inga-Stina Ewbank explains that Anne was the one who believed

[342] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 140.
[343] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 221.
[344] HERSANT, *op. cit.*
[345] Dictionnaire Littré - Dictionnaire de la langue française.

the most in the idea of innate talent,[346] that is probably why she was obsessed with the idea that her talent should serve a purpose. In the preface to the second edition of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* she explained: "Such humble talents as God has given me I will endeavour to put them to their greatest use."[347] Be it either talent or artistic and literary education, Anne learnt and was willing to teach and transmit what she learnt, still through the ubiquitous scope of morality she bears thanks to her religious impregnation.

d. From Didacticism to Improvements

Therefore, Anne had doubtlessly two main objectives while writing both *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. First, her novels aimed to be didactic. In the Cambridge Dictionary, "didactic" is associated with "literature," so that "didactic literature" is defined as: "intended to teach people a moral lesson."[348] That is why Agnes Grey opens up with a statement written in capital letters: "ALL TRUE HISTORIES CONTAIN instruction [sic]."[349] The desire to teach, to instruct is established from the beginning, through the spectrum of "true histories." It will be interesting to understand the linking between truth and instruction, later in our analysis. Anne Brontë devoted more than five years of her life to the task of instruction, when she was a governess. This experience aroused in her the need to write about it then led her to build a work of art whose goal is deeper than a flat criticism of society. Among the critics who confirm this we can find Elizabeth Langland, who argues: "Agnes Grey is foremost a novel dealing with education; it is a novel of education (Agnes's) and about education (her attempts as governess to educate her charges) whose goal is to bring about an education in the reader."[350] Anne explained it explicitly in the preface to the second edition of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* when she wrote: "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."[351] She is eager to profess good principles to her readers – principles in accordance with morality. Indeed, as Jessica Brown puts it: "Brontë made it clear that the purpose of her works was didactic, and Agnes Grey certainly has its moments of heavy-handed

[346] EWBANK, *op. cit,* 49.
[347] Quoted in *Ibid,* 49.
[348] Cambridge Dictionary.
[349] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 3.
[350] Quoted in LECAROS, *op. cit,* 133.
[351] HOLLAND, 'Anne Brontë's Preface To *The Tenant Of Wildfell Hall,*' *op. cit.*

moralization."[352] One relevant example is to be found in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* in the chapter "A Scheme of Escape" in which Helen confesses her plans in her diary, to the reader. The sharing of secrecy between the narrator and the reader conveys a sense of intimacy and veracity to Helen's words – which gives the impression of reading Anne Brontë herself more clearly. Helen is radical: "But this should not continue; my child must not be abandoned to this corruption: better far that he should live in poverty and obscurity with a fugitive mother, than in luxury and affluence with such a father."[353] This argument is central and reveals Anne's overwhelming sense of morality. Giving a moral education to a child is so important to her, that she would prefer to sacrifice one's reputation (which is essential in Victorian society) if it is the price to pay for avoiding corruption. She vouches for truth instead of superficiality and appearances.

In a way, Anne is wishing to reform society, by reforming people. That is probably why the character of Helen is so concerned with the young Arthur's education, and acts as an overprotective mother. Arthur embodies the future generations. The desire to change the nature of society through the education given to the younger generations echoes what the philosopher Immanuel Kant believes. First, he considers that education is an art, of which the principles and doctrines are never fully established, hence the need for men to find the goals and ends to education and instruction. According to Kant, education as an institutionalised concept only leads children to adapt to the actual society, which is horrifying to him – considering society as immoral. As a consequence, he exposes his point of view: "Les parents élèvent communément leurs enfants dans le seul dessein qu'ils s'adaptent au monde présent, fût-il corrompu. Or, ils devraient les éduquer pour que naisse un meilleur état futur."[354] In regard to Kant's standpoint then, educating a child to make society moral means taking him away from the actual stat of things, from the potential experience of the present world. Indeed, Kant sees the world as immoral, and educating a child by keeping him in the social order is a: "stratégie d'adaptation."[355] Adaptability means first alienation: one person is denied his or her own individuality to the benefice of society. Moreover, adaptability means repetition. If children are educated to fit in without questions, they will never be able to acknowledge the immorality of the situation, and to try and change it. That is why in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* in the chapter

[352] Jessica BROWN, 'Reading Holiness: *Agnes Grey*, Ælfric, and the Augustinian Hermeneutic,' 2010. Available: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/2365, 15.
[353] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 357.
[354] Quoted in Laurent BACHLER, 'L'Enfant et la destination de l'humanité' *Spirale*. 85 (2018): 185–187, 186.
[355] *Ibid*, 186.

"A Controversy" based on the theme of education, Helen's monologue emphasises the need to keep her child out of society, to help him acquiring the keys to distinguish morality from immorality:

> You would have us to encourage our sons to prove all things by their own experience, while our daughters must not even profit by the experience of others. Now *I* would have both so to benefit by the experience of others, and the precepts of a higher authority, that they should know beforehand to refuse the evil and choose the good […][356]

Helen's thesis seems to focus on the necessity of past experiences, at the scale of humanity, and to consider them as truths, in order not to reproduce the same mistakes. This point of view – obviously Anne's – was already present in *Agnes Grey*, less pregnant though: "I still preserve those relics of past sufferings and experience, like pillars of witness set up in travelling through the vale of life, to mark particular occurrences."[357] There seems also to be a masochist dimension to this process; Agnes presents herself as a martyr, who: "enjoys an activity or situation that most people would find very unpleasant"[358] to achieve a greater end. Indeed, this empiricist vision of education and knowledge tends to evolve – throughout Anne's writing evolution – towards the education of people, towards a greater end. The end being: "En somme, qu'ils [les enfants] permettent à la société de progresser vers ce qui est la destination finale de l'humanité tout entière. Tel est l'horizon de l'éducation de nos enfants : participer à la destination de l'humanité. Cette destination, pour Kant, est morale."[359] Anne Brontë presumably shared Kant's ambition to turn society into a moral environment thanks to future generations.

[356] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 57.
[357] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 142.
[358] Cambridge Dictionary.
[359] BACHLER, *op. cit,* 186.

C. Morality and Religion

Of Course—I prayed—
And did God Care?
He cared as much as on the Air
A Bird—had stamped her foot—
And cried "Give Me"—
My Reason—Life—
I had not had—but for Yourself—
'Twere better Charity
To leave me in the Atom's Tomb—
Merry, and Nought, and gay, and numb—
Than this smart Misery.
Emily DICKINSON, "Of Course – I prayed," 1862.

a. Evangelicalism and Reform

Trying to participate in the elaboration of "la destination de l'humanité" is synonymous with making the world more moral. As a consequence, the most moral persons should turn themselves into moral transmitters and educate the immoral souls – the dissenters. According to Vineta Colby who summarises Valentine Cunningham's work *Everywhere Spoken Against: Dissent in the Victorian Novel*, dissenters are considered as snobbish: "Far more deeply rooted was a fundamental snobbism that associated Dissent with chapel going, hymn singing, tea meetings – a whole vision of petty bourgeois."[360] This is the description of the behaviour of the leisure class. Being focused on their appearances in society, they do not care about their inner and true morality. In *Agnes Grey*, the character of Rosalie Murray embodies this dissenting attitude. When she breaks the promise she made to Mr Hatfield by telling Agnes the story of his proposal, Agnes is shocked: "'But you have broken your promise already!' said I, truly horrified at her perfidy."[361] And later, she tries to reform Rosalie's state of mind, when she visits her at Ashby Park. She explains: "I exhorted her to seek consolation in doing her duty to God and man, to put her trust in Heaven, and solace herself with the care and nurture of her little daughter."[362] Agnes' piece of advice resembles a religious sermon. Helen also endorses

[360] Vineta COLBY, 'Review of Everywhere Spoken against: Dissent in the Victorian Novel' *Modern Philology*. 76 (1979): 424–428, 425.
[361] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 120.
[362] *Ibid,* 180.

the role of the preacher with her husband Arthur. Right after their wedding, she makes a monologue about the importance of one's faithfulness to God and how Arthur should behave according to this principle:

> You are not without the capacity of veneration, and faith and hops, and conscience and reason, and every other requisite to a Christian's character, if you choose to employ them; but all our talents increase in the using, and every faculty, both good and bad, strengthens by exercise; therefore if you choose to use the bad – or those which tend to evil till they become your masters – and neglect the good till they dwindle away, you have only yourself to blame.[363]

Both Agnes and Helen want to profess Evangelical principles to the persons they consider less pious around them. In Helen's sermon, the use of a long sentence accelerates the rhythm and shows the urgency of the situation, but also Helen's personal implication in the process. When it comes to religion, both young women consider that it is their role, their mission to educate the others who need moral improvements. In fact, this desire is part to the very essence of the Evangelical religion. Indeed, the word "Evangelicalism" echoes the word "Evangelism," which is defined in the Cambridge Dictionary as: "the activity of persuading people to become Christians, often by travelling around and telling people about your beliefs."[364] There is a strong idea of transmission in Evangelicalism. Thus, Victorian society is marked with religious education, through moral educators. In Brontë's two novels, there are several characters who are supposed to embody this transmission. The two protagonists – as true Evangelists – obviously want to transmit their religious knowledge.

This education is not only oriented towards dissenters, but it is also part of a global desire to help every person in need. It reminds us of the religious movement initiated from John Wesley, an English evangelist of the late 18th century. Wesley used to preach: "Gain all you can… Save all you can… Give all you can."[365] It belongs to the principle of "philanthropy" in which people were brought to help the poor as much as they could. In practise, the list of actions which were conducted resemble the ones we can find in *Agnes Grey.* John Wesley was trying to implement those moral principles: "by taking up collections for the poor, setting up loan funds and work projects, and instructing his followers to pay "visitations" to the sick and to

[363] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 218.
[364] Cambridge Dictionary.
[365] Quoted in. HIMMELFARB, *op. cit*, 144.

prisoners in jail."[366] It is actually what both Agnes and Mr Weston are doing in *Agnes Grey* by visiting Nancy Brown who cannot read the Bible anymore, because of her progressive blindness. Agnes says: "I was desired to go alone, to fulfil some promise which they had been more ready to make than to perform, to carry some small donation, or read to one who was sick, or seriously disposed […]."[367] Religious education, in the case of Evangelicalism, occurs through transmission not only through generations, but via different moral and social groups.

b. Religious Instruction

We may wonder now what sort of religious instruction was transmitted by moral educators. In Evangelicalism, the fundamental piece of knowledge to acquire is the Manichean division of the world. Evangelical persons should know the difference between good and evil. This theory appears to have been pregnant throughout different countries in the nineteenth century, as the French Dictionary *Littré* uses it as the first definition of the word "savoir:" "État de l'esprit de celui qui connaît et discerne. La connaissance de Dieu. La connaissance du bien et du mal."[368] Thus, a good person is obviously a moral person, considering Evangelical standards. Anne Brontë agreed with this belief, as she gave her voice to Agnes and Helen who incarnate the dichotomy. One key statement from Helen Huntingdon is: "God has sent me a soul to educate for Heaven"[369] when she speaks of her son. Heaven is for good people when hell is the destiny of bad souls. This dichotomy can be applied to men and women as belonging to two opposite spheres. Women have "a natural tendency to goodness."[370] On the contrary, men are corrupted by different temptations, to which they have to resist by themselves (according to Mrs Markham). That is why a good man is a man who had to struggle against his natural disposition, his education by nature. The struggle is symbolised through Mr Hargrave's metaphor: "I am in paradise now; but I have fought my way through flood and fire to win it."[371] He explains that he had to escape hell – where he was *a priori* because he is a man – to reach heaven, through his right actions. Equally, when Agnes advises Rosalie towards the end of the

[366] Cf. *Ibid,* Some philanthropists were even more radical, as some were also reformists in order to improve the living conditions of the less advantaged people. Indeed, people such as John Howard operated to reform the prison system, or Jonas Hanway who challenged the "boarding out" (144) system by trying to remove infants from the poorhouses, 144.
[367] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 85.
[368] Dictionnaire Littré - Dictionnaire de la langue française.
[369] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 252.
[370] *Ibid*, 57.
[371] *Ibid*, 284.

novel she moralises: "The best way to enjoy yourself is to do what is right, and hate nobody."[372] The call for forgiveness is also something crucial in Evangelicalism which will be analysed later. Rosalie is encouraged to do what is right, and so to be a good person. It is also fundamental for Helen, who exclaims: "There *is* essential goodness in him [sic]; - and what delight to unfold it!"[373] when she wants to believe that Arthur Huntingdon is a moral and pious person. Even when she is disillusioned later in the novel, she reiterates her sermon to try and change Arthur's nature: "I would have you to fortify yourself against temptation, and not to call evil good, and good, evil […]."[374] The dichotomy is inherent to Anne Brontë's works, so that Terry Eagleton affirms: "Les romans d'Anne Brontë montrent l'opposition entre le vice et la vertu."[375] That is why Jennifer M. Stolpa considers *Agnes Grey* as a: "good sermon,"[376] which uses different devices to preach for the good.

In order to know if a behaviour is right or wrong, Katherine Hallemeier explains that *Agnes Grey* uses the strategy of analysing the level of shame which is felt. Throughout the novel, Agnes reassures herself drawing on her shame. It is a strategy which helps her to morally distinguish her from her employers. Her strict and pious education makes her feel shame for instance when Mr Bloomfield criticises the food served. She exclaims: "I never felt so ashamed and uncomfortable in my life for anything that was not my own fault."[377] With this sentence, the reader understands two points. First, it implies that Agnes has already felt shame before. Secondly, the sentence implies that she bears the burden of another's shame for herself – as the other in question, Mr Bloomfield, is unable to perceive it. She creates a distinction between the two of them and establishes herself in a morally superior position. Indeed, as Hallemeier comments: "By feeling and expressing shame while those around her do not, Agnes proclaims that she is more virtuous, more humane, than they are."[378] Shame is a feeling which reveals virtue and the fear to act wrongly without being aware. And Agnes feels it again later, when she deals with her first failure as a governess: "I had now, in some measure, got rid of the *mauvaise honte* that had formerly oppressed me so much […]."[379] Thus, Agnes is twice as virtuous as her employers. Indeed, she directly asserts it in the chapter "Horton Lodge:" "I was

[372] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 180.
[373] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 168.
[374] *Ibid*, 219-220.
[375] Quoted in Claire BAZIN, *La Vision du mal chez les soeurs Brontë*, (Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Midi, 1995), 202.
[376] Quoted in HALLEMEIER, *op. cit,* 252.
[377] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 25-26.
[378] HALLEMEIER, *op. cit,* 256.
[379] *Ibid*, 55.

the only person in the house who steadily professed good principles."[380] In the same vein, Helen feels shame when it comes to bad behaviour. She forgives Arthur after having been hurt that he contemplated Annabella Wilmot playing the piano. Actually, he is the one who should be ashamed, as the reader learns later that he has an adultery relationship with Annabella. But instead, Helen confesses: "I felt ashamed at my pettish resentment of such a trifle – ashamed too of those bitter envious pangs that gnawed my inmost heart […]."[381] Still, she tries to make Arthur feel ashamed and guilty of his wrong behaviour. She directly expresses it with certainty: "I will shame him into virtue if I can."[382] Furthermore, at the beginning she tells him how hard it will be to obtain her aunt's consent for the marriage. She wants to shame him by saying: "If you really mean to deceive my aunt as you say, you are very wicked; and if not, you are very wrong to jest on such a subject."[383] Her goal is to make him be right. Yet, Arthur answers with irony: "Oh, I forgot, you are a saint, too,"[384] which foreshadows Helen' failure regarding the moral and religious education of her husband.

c. Sacrifice and Universal Salvation

Arthur mocks her because Helen sees herself as a prophet, for example when she reassures her aunt several times. When the latter is anguish about the influence of Arthur's friends on him, Helen affirms: "Then I will save him from them"[385] even if her aunt advises her to keep far from Arthur and his reputation. But Helen is so convinced of her influence as a moral educator that she is ready to sacrifice herself for the benefit of Arthur: "I would willingly risk my happiness for the chance of securing his."[386] The notion of sacrifice is inherent to Evangelicalism – and omnipresent in both novels. When Agnes laments on Rosalie's former education, she enumerates her deficiencies, which are among others: "the distinction between right and wrong […], or to sacrific [sic] her own pleasure for the good of others."[387] Therefore, for Agnes too sacrifice is something normal and even advocated for. She must have been instructed to praise for sacrifice by her mother, an aristocrat who left everything to marry Mr

[380] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 63.
[381] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 181.
[382] *Ibid*, 237.
[383] *Ibid*, 188.
[384] *Ibid*, 188.
[385] *Ibid*, 167.
[386] *Ibid*, 167.
[387] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 64.

Grey – who is conscious: "of the sacrifices his dear wife had made for him."[388] It is a concept linked to femininity, as Mary Atkinson Maurice highlights: "The living principles of a mother's life, should be self-forgetfulness, and self-denial, and in a truly Christian mother's life, they will be so […]."[389] Through sacrifice then, both Agnes and Helen consider it is their mission to redeem every sinner, in order to save the world at a wider scale. Tom Winnifrith presents it as being part of both *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*: "through suffering hell on this earth, we remove hell's power over the world."[390] The moral and good persons have to endorse the role of moral educators and instructors, and to suffer in it, in order to transmit the knowledge of God to immoral and bad persons, to improve the world. The image of Helen Huntingdon as a martyr is seen when she addresses a prayer to God: "in spite of earth and hell I should have strength for all my trials, and win a glorious rest at last!"[391] Not only does Helen want to save Arthur, but she believes that by helping him she would also guarantee her own place in paradise. This thought challenges the essence of sacrifice, which is supposed to be selfless. Actually, Jeremy Bentham formulates the theory that even the most disinterested action in appearances is oriented towards the person's self-interest:

> Dites-vous qu'un homme montre tant de sympathie qu'il recherche l'intérêt des autres ? Je vous le concède, mais y compris dans ce cas, il recherche en même temps son propre intérêt, quoiqu'il ne pense pas à lui-même. Du fait qu'il recherche l'intérêt d'un autre, il ne s'ensuit pas qu'il ne recherche pas le sien propre. C'est à lui qu'appartient le cœur où résident la douleur et le plaisir de la sympathie.[392]

In Helen's case, she is trying to gain "l'intérêt d'un autre," who is God, and to feel "le plaisir de la sympathie," which could be epitomised in God's acceptance to send her to Heaven. Once again, the first goal pursued is redemption. And while these moralists try to save every single soul to be in accordance with the principle of universal salvation - the core principle of Evangelicalism – they also need to try and save their own souls. It is typically Evangelical to be concerned with the idea that everyone should be redeemed, as the human beings are fundamentally good. That is what Tom Winnifrith calls the: "strenuous plea for universal

[388] *Ibid*, 5.
[389] MAURICE, *op. cit*, 10.
[390] WINNIFRITH, *op. cit*, 62-63.
[391] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit*, 313.
[392] Quoted in LEROY, *op. cit*.

salvation."[393] As an evangelist, Anne Brontë rejected the predestination inherent to Calvinism. She expressed it in her poem "A Word to the Calvinists" written in 1843:

> That as in Adam all have died
> In Christ shall all men live
> And ever round his throne abide
> Eternal praise to give;
>
> That even the wicked shall at last
> Be fitted for the skies
> And when their dreadful doom is past
> To life and light arise.[394]

"That even the wicked shall at last / Be fitted for the skies" sums up Anne Brontë's evangelical convictions, and more precisely her belief that every soul could be redeemed.

The first step to redeem a sinner is to forgive him. It is a recurrent motif in both novels. Towards the end of *Agnes Grey* Agnes pays a visit to Rosalie Murray, who complains in a letter. Agnes is moved by Rosalie's suffering, and asserts: "Poor girl! I really loved her then; and forgave her from my heart all the injury she had done me – and others also; she had not half known it, I was sure; and I prayed God to pardon her too."[395] Agnes builds her moral education on forgiveness. In this precise case, she excuses Rosalie's misdemeanours with her ignorance. She did not have the knowledge of virtue and morality; it was not her fault. Young Arthur in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is concerned with the same sense of compassion for his dying father at the end of the novel: "The little moralist paused and pondered. I tried in vain to divert his mind from the subject. 'I'm sorry papa's wicked,' said he, mournfully, at length, 'fir I don't want him to go to hell." And so saying he burst into tears."[396] Once again, religious concerns and education circles through generations, as Arthur has probably been inculcated this desire to save the other by his mother Helen. In both cases, the characters feel compassion, which is part of their individual experience. We should mention the definition of "experience" from the Cambridge Dictionary: "(the process of getting) knowledge or skill from doing, seeing, or feeling things."[397] Therefore, Arthur and Agnes' prayers for the salvation of the other are part of their religious education, as it arises in them new feelings – in this situation it is compassion.

[393] Tom WINNIFRITH, *The Brontës and their Background: Romance and Reality*, (London: Macmillan, 1973), 61.
[394] HOLLAND, *In Search of Anne Brontë, op. cit,* 68.
[395] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 145.
[396] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 369.
[397] Cambridge Dictionary.

Still, the process of leading everyone towards redemption seems to be repetitive and exhausting. Even if Arthur Huntingdon has committed adultery with Annabella Wilmot and has demanded that Helen stays with him at Wildfell Hall, she continues to state: "Yet I do my part to save him still […]."[398] And she also tries to save all the immoral and bad persons around her, because she keeps believing that: "it is never too late to reform, as long as you have the sense to desire it, and the strength to execute your purpose."[399] Thus, we may guess that to be able to forgive one should be patient, which seems also to be a key aspect of the Evangelical education. As Claire Bazin summarises: "seules la vertu, la foi et la patience peuvent mener au bonheur."[400] Patience is part of Agnes' disposition with the two families she works for. When she lives among the Bloomfields, she managed to have the lessons done "by dint of great labour and patience."[401] Later, with the Murrays, she witnesses a slight amelioration in the children's behaviours thanks to "time and patience."[402] According to Agnes then, patience is one of the best characteristics an instructor or educator should have to transmit his or her knowledge to his pupils. Arthur Huntingdon also believes in the importance of patience, but for his wife only. While the word "impatience" is used to qualify Arthur twice on the same page: "when his impatience is roused"[403] or "by impatiently exclaiming,"[404] he exhorts his wife to: "the exercise of patience, 'that first of woman's virtues,' […]"[405] as Helen quotes him, when he answers after her lamentation regarding his long absence.

d. Love and Blindness

Indeed, patience and longing are two aspects of women's education – for example through the image of the embowered woman. Therefore, Victorian women were used to wait piously, and never to complain. As women were lacking any formal instruction, they could not open their minds to understand the submission they had to endure. We saw that education could lead to the improvement of the world, morally speaking, through Kant's point of view, so that ignorance may be synonymous with stagnation. Thus, before the rising of the early feminists'

[398] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 330.
[399] *Ibid*, 383.
[400] BAZIN, *op. cit,* 192.
[401] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit*, 23.
[402] *Ibid*, 71.
[403] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 253.
[404] *Ibid*, 253.
[405] *Ibid*, 233.

voice, women were accustomed to this state of being and would do nothing to change it. Nina Auerbach exemplifies this theory through a comparison with *The Little Mermaid.* She argues: "Hans Christian Andersen's beloved tale "The Little Mermaid" is one allegory of a good woman's mutilated power"[406] considering that she chooses not to kill the prince even though it means that she has to remain silent. Based on this assumption, Auerbach explains that *The Little Mermaid* tends to epitomise the: "vital Victorian mythology whose lovable woman is a silent and self-disinherited mutilate."[407] At least twice in *Agnes Grey* the protagonist acknowledges and accepts her duty to keep silent. After an argument, she confesses: "I judged it prudent to say no more."[408] And later she even generalises: "it was part of my business to hear, and not to speak."[409]

Women's silencing, rather than being acknowledged and recognised by women, is something they nurture. Indeed, the love for God which is omnipresent in both novels, and which dictates the moral codes, but we should also consider love, as a concept at large, as a recurrent motif. Animated by their love for the other, they are indoctrinated to follow a certain path, the same way their behaviours are conducted by religion. Actually, the love for God and the love for the other overlap in Evangelicalism. Mr Weston embodies the theory in *Agnes Grey*: "God is LOVE [sic]; and the more of love we have within us, the nearer we are to Him, and the more of His spirit we possess."[410] The critic Marianne Thormählen summarises the connection: "Evangelical divines kept exhorting their parishioners to remember that God required *all* their hearts."[411] Therefore, everyone can be redeemed as long as there is mutual respect and love. Thus, this love – the importance of which is underlined through the use of capital letters – should not only concern God, but a mutual love among people regardless of the social background. When in *Agnes Grey* Nancy Brown replies that she should not love her neighbours who vex her, Mr Weston professes again that: "we ought also to love one another."[412]

Yet, it is probably the priority given to love which blinds the characters in the two novels – especially the two protagonists. First of all, love contributes to the derealisation of their

[406] Nina AUERBACH, *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth*, (Cambridge ; Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982), 8.
[407] *Ibid*, 8.
[408] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit*, 48.
[409] *Ibid*, 149.
[410] *Ibid*, 93.
[411] Marianne THORMAHLEN, *The Brontës and Religion*, (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 22.
[412] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit*, 93.

surroundings. The loved person is idealised. In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* Gilbert's reflexion about Helen: "How sweet, how musical my own name sounded in her mouth!"[413] is mirrored through Helen's words for Arthur, saying that it was: "a delight to look at his face, and hear the music of his voice […]."[414] Both comments are entirely subjective, and may constitute knowledge from experience, knowledge as true belief, but it cannot be scientific knowledge. Therefore, according for instance to Helen's aunt, love is not enough to distinguish good from bad – or it can, worse still, be deceptive. That is why Helen's aunt, a wise and thoughtful woman, recommends: "First study; then approve; then love."[415] Love may be a consequence but should not be a means. Otherwise, people act on the sole basis of their feelings, which they take for granted. Yet, if we remember Ayer's assertion: "Claims to know empirical statements may by upheld by a reference of perception, or to memory, or to testimony, or to historical records, or to scientific laws. But such backing is not always strong enough for knowledge,"[416] then love cannot lead to truth.

At least, love brings hope, which is central in both novels. Beyond the fact that love gives the impression of having true knowledge, it also conveys a sense of omnipotence. Actually, in Agnes' case, love is not the source of her hopes, at least not a feeling of love for the other. Agnes is in love with the prospect of being autonomous in the outside world. In fact, she is dazzled by her: "bright hopes and ardent expectations."[417] The more the diegesis goes on, the more Agnes wants to comfort herself through her hopeful sentiments. The second day at the Bloomfields, Agnes wakes up: "with a feeling of hopeful exhilaration, in spite of the disappointments already experienced […]."[418] She is naïve, and still believes in her first hopes and impressions. In the Cambridge Dicitonary, naivety is defined as: "trust based on not having much experience."[419] Indeed, having been overprotected and kept in an enclosed place for most of her life, Agnes – alongside with other Victorian young women – has been kept in ignorance, without the possibility of having her own sensible experiences in the outside world. Helen shares this naivety when she continues to assert: "I trust we shall be happy yet"[420] even though she starts to acknowledge Arthur's mischiefs. It reminds us of Edmund Gettier's questionings

[413] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 111.
[414] *Ibid*, 161.
[415] *Ibid*, 150.
[416] AYER and AYER, *op. cit,* 29-30.
[417] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 12.
[418] *Ibid*, 23.
[419] Cambridge Dictionary.
[420] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 229.

about the nature of knowledge, and his conclusions on the fact that true beliefs, or empirical statements, cannot, strictly speaking, be considered as true knowledge.[421]

His theory can be verified in Brontë's two novels, in which both young women are confronted to a reality which contradicts their first impressions and hopes. P. J. M Scott comments Helen's attitude in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*: "She has been guilty of wilful blindness on the subject."[422] Unfortunately, she starts to realise the true nature of her husband in the chapter "First Weeks of Matrimony." She discovers that she was mistaken: "I must confess, in my secret heart, that Arthur is not what I thought of him at first."[423] Later, she also realises that she has overestimated her capacities as an educator. In a flash of lucidity, Helen acknowledges the situation, and her disillusion is expressed through a *mea culpa* addressed to herself and to God: "Fool that I was to dream that I had strength and purity enough to save myself and him!"[424] Her love blinded her and made her believe she could easily transmit her knowledge. Thus, she settled for the knowledge she already had, which prevented her from trying to increase her knowledge. Because of her false beliefs, the process of her education is blocked and there is no evolution possible.

However, the recognition of their mistakes is already a first step to enhance changes. Confronted to several disillusions, they realise that they were mistaken, and they begin to emancipate themselves from their constraints. Both protagonists then undergo an evolution throughout the unfolding of the diegeses, especially through their progressive self-assertion as individuals and women. For instance, Helen starts to emotionally distance herself from Arthur, with her love which becomes hatred: "Surely that man will make me dislike him at last!"[425] Helen's contradictory feelings allow her introspection and wonders about the true nature of her emotions, which is essential for her quest for knowledge and truth. Through her writing, Anne Brontë undertook the same objective. She expressed her voice in her novels, that is why Maria H. Frawley wrote that Anne Brontë's narrative is a: "significant statement of self-empowerment."[426] The author, also a Victorian woman, must have felt the ambivalent feelings she depicted in her protagonists. She must have been concerned by the balance between her religious and social standards, and her desire to assert and emancipate herself. Thus, she concretised these feelings ("love and hatred, serenity and anger, superiority and inferiority,

[421] GETTIER, *op, cit.*
[422] SCOTT, *op. cit,* 85.
[423] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 215.
[424] *Ibid*, 274.
[425] *Ibid*, 280.
[426] Quoted in HALLEMEIER, *op. cit,* 251.

kindness and meanness, generosity and egotism, dependency and independence"[427]) and she projected them on her characters. It was a source of liberation for her. Indeed, Bettina L. Knapp analyses George Moore's choice of the word "dress" when he notes that the novel *Agnes Grey* is: "simple and beautiful as a muslin dress."[428] She argues that the word "dress" is relevant because it conveys the sense of the characters and plot having been chosen in order to cover the real motif of the fiction: Anne Brontë's feelings. The autobiographical dimension of her novels, particularly *Agnes Grey* allows the reader to understand that the characters reflect the author's own challenges and inquiries. The first-person narrative and the internal focalisation reinforce the fact that Anne probably underwent an evolution as both an author and a woman – alongside with the intra-diegetic and the extra-diegetic evolution of her characters.

[427] "Chapter 5: Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey*: The Feminist; 'I must stand alone'" by Bettina L. KNAPP. SUESS, *op, cit*, 60.
[428] Quoted in *Ibid*, 60.

PART III

III. Art and the Quest for Truth

A. "Oh God, Art is Forever / And our Life is Brief"[429]

A perfect woman, nobly planned,
To warn, to comfort, and command;
And yet a spirit still, and bright
With something of an angel light.
William WORDSWORTH, "She Was a Phantom of Delight," 1803.

a. Knowledge and Elusiveness

Anne, Agnes and Helen all faced a plethora of disillusions during their experiences, notably as governesses. What triggered the growing realisation of the situation is probably the progressive feeling of degradation engendered by the surrounding persons. This is evidenced mostly in *Agnes Grey* in which Agnes gradually complains about the immoral influence her employers have on her. First, she confesses: "I sometimes felt myself degraded by the life I led […]."[430] She develops later on the details of her degradation: "I seemed to feel my intellect deteriorated, my heart petrifying, my soul contracting […]."[431] There is then an evolution, but rather a sort of devolution. We may wonder if Agnes loses her morality because of her bad frequentations; or more generally if it might engender the loss if her already acquired knowledge. For instance, we may focus on the religious knowledge she had acquired through her Evangelical instruction, and if it can be jeopardised because of the immorality of people around her – leading her not to nurture her morality. According to the French Dictionary *Littré,* experience is defined as: "Connaissance des choses acquises par un long usage."[432] It means thus that Agnes needs to use her knowledge to be experimented, as opposed to innocence. Therefore, knowledge might be lost if it is not nurtured. For example, in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* Helen and Esther, Milicent's sister, do not lose the knowledge of their social education, but they are progressively led to fit in society, which implies the denial of their natural self and education. Helen is delighted to notice that Esther is a "fearless spirit of her own […]"[433] but she eventually gets married. Helen gets married as well, but she manages to keep her "fearless spirit" through her writing, which prevents her from being degraded as Agnes can be.

[429] Johann Wolfgang von GOETHE, *Faust*, (New York: Anchor, 1962), 111.
[430] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey*, *op. cit*, 70.
[431] *Ibid*, 97.
[432] Cambridge Dictionary.
[433] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, *op. cit*, 244.

As a consequence, thanks to her writing in her diary, Helen manages to nurture her critical thinking, and even to improve it. Writing is a way to counter the degradation, to stabilise her morality. Helen addresses some prayers to God at different moments in the novel. Even though she is challenged in her own morality, she finds other means to stay true to her faith. It was Anne's objective as well. She started to write what was about to become *Agnes Grey* while she was working at Thorp Green Hall: it was entitled *Passages in the Life of an Individual.* Writing was a source of escapism and allowed her to nurture her faith: by depicting the absolute immoral behaviour of the aristocrats, she made it more concrete, which highlighted the distinction between their disposition and hers. Furthermore, this depiction allowed a second consequence; it was probably cathartic to express her anger on paper. Writing also endows a certain form of revenge – revenge on the injustice she had witnessed and even lived as a governess. It corresponds to Charlotte Brontë's feeling about *Agnes Grey,* reported by Elizabeth Gaskell : "the novel in which her sister Anne pretty literally describes her own experience as a governess."[434] It justifies Samantha Ellis' words: "her incandescent anger at the Inghams is so palpable in *Agnes Grey.*"[435] Such a desire to write became eventually a need, but also a means to try and reach truth. When Gilbert Markham feels deceived by Helen, the latter wants to restore the truth in Gilbert's mind about her situation. She lends him her manuscript because she believes he would have a nicer image of her. She asks him twice "Would you be *very* glad […] to find that you were mistaken in your conclusions?"[436] and "but would you be glad to discover I was better than you think me?"[437] She considers that because her diary contains her own words, and is therefore a true account of her life.

Agnes is driven by the same impulse, as the narrative of *Agnes Grey* opens with "ALL TRUE HISTORIES CONTAIN instruction [sic]."[438] We need to focus on the link Anne created between the concept of truth and the concept of instruction. Instruction is a hyponym of education, corresponding to the transmission of knowledge generally in a particular skill or subject. In the French Dictionary *Littré* "true" translated as "vrai" is defined as: "Conforme à la réalité, à ce qui est."[439] Therefore, if we interpret Agnes' statement with this definition, "true histories" are "histories which reflect reality. And then, these histories which represent reality are a source of instruction for the reader. Agnes considers that real life is a source of knowledge.

[434] HAY, *op. cit,* 72.
[435] ELLIS, *Take Courage: Anne Brontë and the Art of Life, op. cit,* 164.
[436] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 146.
[437] *Ibid*, 146.
[438] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 3.
[439] Dictionnaire Littré - Dictionnaire de la langue française.

However, she does not deal with the concept of beauty which can be found in the real life, in nature. Contrary to other nineteenth century poets and writers, Anne made her protagonists believe in the link between instruction and truth, instead of the one between beauty and truth. In this case then, it is not education of nature but social education. As reality constantly evolves, then truth must evolve as well, to remain: "conforme à la réalité." For instance, it implies that the knowledge of the Victorian era – when Agnes writes this statement – is not the same than a century later. In these conditions, knowledge is an infinite concept – as would be the quest for knowledge. Whereas beauty, when replicated in art, is fixed in time. Beauty does not evolve, when nature does. As a consequence, we may imagine that there is a discrepancy between beauty, which knows an end when perceived and reproduced in art, and truth, which is standardised by a certain context. If truth is relative, then knowledge evolves accordingly. The system which conditions the concept of truth also encompasses knowledge and establishes its criteria regarding the said context. If knowledge is to be understood as evolving in adequation with reality, there cannot be indeed one fixed knowledge considering that reality changes with its socio-historical context. That is Michel Foucault's definition of "vérité." Gérard Leclerc tells us that Foucault's approach to "la vérité" is: "celle qu'on désigne ordinairement sous l'étiquette du relativisme, et même, plus précisément, de l'historicisme."[440] As a consequence: "Il n'y a pas de Vérité en soi, pas de Vérité absolue. Il n'y a que des Vérités, des figures historiques de la Vérité, qui se dévoilent au long des périodes culturelles, dans des contextes sociologiques et politiques variés."[441] The quest for absolute knowledge is so an infinite frustration for human beings, who are anchored in a particular spatial and temporal context.

The legend of *Dr Faustus* is built on this theory. The character of Faustus is looking for absolute knowledge, for absolute truth. However, he cannot reach his objective as a human being, that is why he has to make an agreement with the devil, Mephistopheles. When the German writer Goethe decides to use this legend and to write his own interpretation of it, he draws inspiration from his own life. "It would be his testament to mankind." [442] One key private experience transcribed in *Dr Faustus* is Goethe's unsatisfaction in his quest for absolute knowledge.[443] He does not have the impression of evolving in his intellectual faculties. Even though he does not particularly feel degraded, he does not feel upgraded either. He keeps

[440] Gérard LECLERC, 'Histoire de la vérité et généalogie de l'autorité' *Cahiers internationaux de sociologie*. n° 111 (2001): 205–231, 205.
[441] *Ibid*, 205.
[442] B. W. WELLS, 'Goethe's "Faust."' *The Sewanee Review*. 2 (1894): 385–412, 388.
[443] *Ibid*, 387.

looking for knowledge, that is why the French writer and translator Jean-Yves Masson argues that Faust is: "l'archétype du chercheur intellectuel."[444] He is constantly trying to learn, trying to eventually reach an impossible absolutism.

We may moot the idea that it is not actually the reward which is exciting for him, but the quest leading to it. The most interesting part of the quest for knowledge is the quest in itself, with all it comprises. Indeed, we might draw a parallel between education and love. What is inspiring is the desire to have the reward, which is respectively knowledge and the love of another person. This desire will be the impulse which will lead us towards this objective with confidence. And the means employed for the end, in both cases, are stimulating because they contribute to our edification. In the quest for knowledge, our curiosity is driven by the desire to reach absolutism in knowledge. Thus, thanks to this curiosity, we try and gather many different information which complete our instruction. In the quest for love, it is not a question of curiosity but of emotions. The desire to reach happiness with the other leads to feelings of affection. Thanks to this affection then, we try and multiply the words and actions to reach absolutism and recognition in our relationship to the other. According to the sociologist Eva Illouz, love is a codified concept, which exists in a particular system. Through our comparison between education and love, we might deduce that the quest for knowledge is something which is also framed in social standards. And during the nineteenth century, standards were ruling people's behaviours in society.

Anne Brontë was no exception. This thirst for knowledge is reverberated in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall.* The chapter "First Weeks of Matrimony" foreshadows Helen's upcoming frustration and unhappiness. She gives her reader an account of her bridal tour, lamenting: "I came back nearly as ignorant as I went."[445] Helen's knowledge has then not evolved as it would have been supposed to, through travels. Moreover, her frustration in her quest for knowledge might be extended to her frustration in her quest for love as well, as the rest of the story unveils it. This tale of her tour conveys Helen's desire to learn, instead of just settling for the certainty that her good reputation is nurtured in society thanks to her travels. Even if *Agnes Grey* does not focus on Agnes' formal acquisition of knowledge, her point of view may easily be exemplified by Helen's comments above. Indeed, she professes: "If the mind be but well cultivated, and the heart well disposed, no one ever cares for the exterior."[446] Helen would

[444] Jean-Yves MASSON, *Faust ou la Mélancolie du savoir*, (Paris: Desjonquères, 2003), 9.
[445] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 216.
[446] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 134.

prefer to have been cultivated during her travels, and to have been able to share her emotions and sentiments with her husband, instead of boasting about traveling, just for society.

b. An Omnipresent Solitude

Therefore, both protagonists position themselves as anti-conformists in a Victorian society marked by image and superficiality. They vouch for truth through instruction, and not from beauty and other aesthetic principles, which are required in society. As a consequence, they cannot rely on anyone or anything to instruct themselves. It corresponds to Herbert Spencer's perception of education and especially instruction. To him, self-instruction is essential because the different steps of acquisition of knowledge: "must correspond with the stages of evolution in his faculties."[447] Therefore, instruction for him is an internal process which encompasses the individuality of a person. And we may stress the fact that self-instruction becomes even more significant in Agnes and Helen's cases, as social requirements are not congruous with their personal desires. Thus, it reinforces Spencer's theory that self-instruction is the best type of instruction, corresponding to the person's inner self.

But Spencer also insists on the necessity for "moral culture:" "*Courage in attacking difficulties, patient concentration of the attention, perseverance through failures—these are characteristics which after-life specially requires* [sic]."[448] This enumeration of moral qualities is echoed in *Agnes Grey.* She has the courage to undertake the responsibility of the education of disobedient children, the patience to continue her task, and to reiterate the experience despite the obstacles encountered. Thus, she might be in the good disposition to self-instruct herself. Yet, she is completely alone in her evolution, which might be a limit to her education, considering Flahault's emphasis on socialisation.

Solitude is omnipresent in both novels. It is represented by the impossibility of speaking. For instance, in *Agnes Grey*, Agnes declares "I had never told her [Mrs Bloomfield] my feelings."[449] She never has the chance to tell them, but she is still free to have some. Nonetheless, there is no real evolution throughout the novel as Agnes is not able to express her feelings, even later in the novel. Her emotional education seems impossible. While she thinks

[447] SPENCER, *op. cit*.
[448] *Ibid*.
[449] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 34.

she is going to see Mr Weston for the last time, Agnes desires to be alone in her room because she confesses: "I might deliver myself up to my feelings."[450] She has explained earlier that she has to hide her emotions, by saying: "but alas! I must restrain and swallow back my feelings still."[451] Helen also keeps the secrecy about her emotions in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall:* "(to this silent paper I may confess it)."[452] Both cannot express her feelings, which may also be a typical Victorian attitude due to expectations women had to fulfil. Helen is even more radical than Agnes because not only does she want to hide her emotions, but she would like to control them: "What a good thing it is to be able to command one's temper!"[453] Her fear is probably linked to the Victorian widespread idea that women were subject to a disease called "hysteria".[454] That is why women had to behave properly in order not to be accused of having such a disease – it led to modesty.

c. An Evolving Identity

The constant threat of social codes seems to challenge the assertion of the self. The limit of the process of social education brings us back to the importance of natural education in the quest for self-empowerment and knowledge. The philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau expands on "l'éducation de la nature" as seen in the first part, and he notably insists on the importance of the preservation of our natural dispositions: "Voulez-vous donc qu'il [l'enfant] garde sa forme originelle, conservez-la dès l'instant qu'il vient au monde. Sitôt qu'il naît, emparez-vous de lui, et ne le quittez plus qu'il ne soit homme: vous ne réussirez jamais sans cela."[455] At this point, Rousseau does not reject social education nor social codes, but grants priority to natural education, and explains that the role of parents and educators is to preserve their child's natural disposition up to a maximum. He explains that nature is preparing humans the right way towards their preservation, so that parents should accompany their children in this direction. For instance, Rousseau argues about nature: "endurcit leur [des enfants] tempérament par des

[450] *Ibid*, 162.
[451] *Ibid*, 129.
[452] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 256.
[453] *Ibid*, 326.
[454] Cf. Sandra M. GILBERT and Susan GUBAR, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, (New Haven; Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2000). The word "hysteria" comes from the ancient word for womb, which was "hyster." It was said that it was "the organ […] supposed to "cause" this emotional disturbance" as underlined by the authors, 53.
[455] ROUSSEAU, *op. cit,* 63.

épreuves de toutes espèces."[456] But if they manage to overcome these hardships, they will assert their identities. We might add an example to illustrate this theory. If a child is afraid of the dark, he or she will instinctively avoid the dark in the future. Indeed, he or she learns about himself through his or her experiences and does not need any adult's intervention to know what is best for himself or herself. Then, he or she will learn by himself, by overcoming his or her fears, that dark is not something to be afraid of. Even though he will learn it rationally, it is his or her innate instincts which will erase this fear. Humans are naturally led towards self-preservation, even before the impact of society.

This principle of evolution is bound to the concept of "Bildungsroman." We should look at Claude Burgelin's definition of this concept. To him, "Bildungsromane" are: "les récits qui décrivent les péripéties que connaît un héros dans son apprentissage du monde et qui montrent les leçons qui en sont tirées."[457] Burgelin adds another layer to Shroder's definition, mentioned on page 27. Not only does Burgelin insist on the process of education and of formation, but he deals with the means of this formation, which are the obstacles encountered, provoking the shift from disillusion to redefinition. His definition may find an example in Brontë's novel *Agnes Grey*, when the reader follows Agnes' evolution from progressive disillusions towards happiness, the same way Helen's misery is progressively appeased. If we correlate Burgelin's definition with Rousseau's one, alongside with the: "apprentissage du monde," we need to know and learn about ourselves, for our preservations. As a consequence, both natural and social educations seem essential for an individual's development. Therefore, both protagonists undergo an evolution marked by changes in their identities. These identities are protean, as they are splitting because of the double nature of their education: Agnes and Helen slowly assert themselves as individuals, but also as women. The ambivalence of their identities is revealed for instance towards the end of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* when Gilbert is about to propose to Helen, after Arthur's death: "Yet, there was another barrier: doubtless there was a wide distinction between the rank and circumstances of Mrs Huntingdon, the lady of Grass-dale Manor, and those of Mrs Graham the artist, the tenant of Wildfell Hall […]."[458]

This quotation also pinpoints a crucial aspect: Helen identifies herself as an artist. When her first identity was the one of Mrs Huntingdon, the perfect docile housewife, she wants to present herself as an independent woman, Mrs Graham. The role of art in her growing autonomy

[456] *Ibid*, 60.
[457] Claude BURGELIN, 'Roman d'éducation ou roman d'apprentissage' *Encyclopædia Universalis*, online, Internet, 8 Mar. 2021. Available: https://www.universalis.fr/auteurs/claude-burgelin/.
[458] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 454.

is essential. In *Agnes Grey,* art *per se* is less pregnant, but Agnes still experiences a re-birth. Obviously, by marrying Mr Weston at the end of the novel, she literally changes her name "Grey" for "Weston." But Agnes finds her purpose of life not in art, but in teaching. It reminds us of Kant's belief: "l'éducation est un art."[459] Bachler explains that Kant built this theory on the fact that education knows no fixed rules and is in constant evolution, which thus prevents it from being associated with science. Indeed, when something is discovered in science, it is already fixed before evolving. For instance, even though the principles genetics evolved since its discovery in the first part of the nineteenth century, we still remember the persons who were the first to materialise it, and which were the techniques used. It is chronologically framed, and certain principles part of the genetic transmission are considered are truth and no longer questioned, so that they no longer evolve. On the contrary, we might say that education and art know no frontier, no beginning, and no end. Education is an art in the sense that it cannot be fixed. Therefore, it is easier to establish a comparison between Helen and Agnes' evolutions in terms of education. The most evident mark of Agnes' evolution is after her return from Horton Lodge, when she decides to open a school for girls with her mother. She recognises that:

> I set myself with befitting energy to discharge the duties of this new mode of life – I call it *new*, for there was, indeed, a considerable difference between working with my mother in a school of our own, and working as a hireling among strangers, despised and trampled upon by old and young; and for the first few weeks I was by no means unhappy.[460]

Agnes' confession of her happiness epitomises one crucial step of her education as an individual. Happiness in the process of education brings us back to Ruskin's belief, as presented in the introduction. Herbert Spencer also stresses the importance of happiness, and he even strengthens his analysis by putting in parallel happiness and morality: "Unless we are to return to an ascetic morality (or rather im-morality) the maintenance of youthful happiness must be considered as in itself a worthy aim."[461] Yet, Agnes' happiness is not complete at this point. She laments on the fact that she may probably never see Mr Weston again. On Helen's side, we may guess that her happiness is uncomplete as well. When she is at Arthur's deathbed, she laments on the fact that he will not be redeemed: "How could I endure to think that that poor trembling soul was hurried away to everlasting torment?"[462] In both cases, the young women

[459] BACHLER, *op. cit,* 185.
[460] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 164.
[461] SPENCER, *op. cit*.
[462] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 452.

feel powerless and abandoned to themselves after having failed in their missions. Even though they managed to educate themselves and evolve after their disillusions, they still feel frustrated and lonely. Indeed, there is no one to witness their achievements. Agnes and Helen are cloistered in their own consciousnesses, and they probably try to be happy in order to be recognised socially. The process is obviously unconscious; they may want to reach it because happiness is supposed to be the most agreeable emotion. Thus, they focus their attention on this quest probably without having considered if it would correspond to them.

Actually, it may come from the fact that Anne Brontë herself was not entirely satisfied and thus had the impression that her life was not fully accomplished. Even if she found her purpose in life through writing, she led a life of seclusion and solitude. She cannot recognise her own accomplishment because she has no one to share it with. She fell in love with William Weightman, her father's curate in Haworth, but he unfortunately died from cholera at twenty-eight. Anne probably had the feeling of being abandoned. However, Samatha Ellis lays the emphasis on one key aspect: "But if she [Anne] had become Mrs Weightman, she might not have become Acton Bell."[463]

What Ellis stresses here is that through solitude, Anne had managed to emancipate herself not only as an individual, but also as a woman. Indeed, we know that marriage was synonymous with the fusion of the husband and his wife's identities. Without the weight of marriage, Anne could keep her integrity and her freedom of actions, without constraints. On her own, it was easier to emancipate herself. Indeed, she used her solitude alongside with her silence to build her thoughts and her identity. With the figure of Anne Brontë, there is a feeling of re-appropriation of the usual Victorian habit to silence women. Both in legislation and in facts, women were actually reduced to silence. This silencing occurred on the other side of the Atlantic as well. In the early part of the nineteenth century, some American women started to question their roles in the public sphere and discovered that they could not speak and express their thoughts and desires, in several domains. The American author Sally McMillen summarises this truth: "Female submission was proclaimed to be part of God's order. In church, women were to sit in silence and never dream of occupying the pulpit."[464] Therefore, women's social education was limited and intended not to evolve, as they were not allowed to speak. Helen confirms this expectation by reproachfully addressing Mr Hattersley: "Did you not tell

[463] ELLIS, *Take Courage: Anne Brontë and the Art of Life*, *op. cit*, 179.
[464] Sally MC MILLEN, *Seneca Falls and the Origins of the Women's Rights Movement*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 18.

Mr Huntingdon you must have one that would submit to anything without a murmur, and never blame you, whatever you did?"[465] Milicent, of whom Helen speaks, epitomises the silencing of women, their "aphasia," which is: "a medical condition that makes a person unable to speak, write, or understand speech or writing because of damage to the brain."[466] Therefore, not only women could not speak, but could think and understand. Thus, in McMillen's quotation, we should also pay attention to the interdiction of dreaming for women – also a mark of forced "aphasia." It is important to state precisely the limits of women's possibilities to understand the radical contrast between their social submission and their progressive self-assertion.

d. Creation and Self-Assertion

However, while freedom of speech could be censored or even abolished, freedom of thought cannot be controlled. And to organise her thoughts, Anne opted for writing. Indeed, the fictional dimension allows the author to control the unfolding story, while he or she cannot control his or her own destiny. Through the act of creation, the writer is able to concede a delightful destiny to his protagonist, when it is impossible in his life. This way of thinking was shared by the French Existentialist Albert Camus: "Qu'est-ce que le roman, en effet, sinon cet univers où l'action trouve sa forme, où les mots de la fin sont prononcés, les êtres livrés aux êtres, où toute vie prend le visage du destin."[467] That is why Anne Brontë granted Agnes Grey with her marriage with Mr Weston,[468] while herself endured a lifelong suffering caused by the death of the man she cherished, William Weightman. Her writings and artistic increasing knowledge were a substantial step towards independence, if we trust Albert Camus' words on the act of writing: "La façon la plus simple et la plus commune d'envisager l'expression romanesque consiste donc à y voir un exercice d'évasion."[469] Fiction is an escapism from social constraints and codes. And then, fiction can be a source of social recognition when the writings are received by readers.

Anne's self-assertion through fiction reaches a climax when she makes Mr Hargrave – while Mr Hattersley utters vulgar words when entering the room and: "endeavoured to check

[465] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 298.
[466] Cambridge Dictionary.
[467] Albert CAMUS, *L'Homme révolté*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), 328.
[468] Cf. BRONTE, *Agnes Grey*, *op. cit,* Agnes' happiness about her situation marks the end of the novel: "I became the wife of Edward Weston, and never found cause to repent it, and am certain that I never shall," 192.
[469] CAMUS, *op. cit,* 324.

by entreating him to remember the ladies."[470] This sentence obviously echoes Abigail Adams' requirements to her husband John Adams, just before the latter joined the committee of the drafters and signatories of the Declaration of Independence of the United States in 1776. In a letter to John Adams, Abigail Adams asked: "I desire you would Remember the Ladies."[471] By making a reference to Adams' letter, Anne put forward three major elements. First, as already expressed, she used fiction to assert her point of view; fiction symbolises freedom of speech. Secondly, she also displayed her knowledge of history. Eventually, the fact that she made a masculine character (Mr Hargrave) say Abigail Adams' words aimed at showing that "remembering the ladies" or being feminist is not something absurd, as even a man may share feminist beliefs.

Along with other 19th century writers, Anne Brontë anticipated the twentieth century school called Feminism. In the Cambridge Dictionary, "feminism" is: "the belief that women should be allowed the same rights, power, and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way, or the set of activities intended to achieve this state." [472] At the time when Anne Brontë lived and wrote, the movement was called proto-feminism, as it foresaw the future feminist concepts. Thus, some nineteenth century women writers were wishing to put women under the spotlight to give women their voices back and to vindicate for their desires. Nonetheless, this vindication required first the acknowledgement of the feminine social inferior position. Most of the time, women did not raise their voices, not because they did not want to, but because they did not realise society was unfair to them. Therefore, the desire to reverse the established order to speak up concerned only a minority of enlightened women in the nineteenth century.

If we use Gilbert and Gubar's theories, there was indeed an obstacle to realisation: memory. In their critical work *The Madwoman in the Attic* they argue: "aphasia and amnesia– two illnesses which symbolically represent (and parody) the sort of intellectual incapacity patriarchal culture has traditionally required of women […]." [473] Alongside with "aphasia," women were progressively led to forget, as the concept of "amnesia" is defined as: "a medical condition that makes you unable to remember things."[474] Thus, if they want to

[470] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 285.
[471] Abigail ADAMS, 'Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 31 March - 5 April 1776' *Massachusetts Historical Society*. online, Internet, 9 Mar. 2021. Available: https://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/archive/doc?id=L17760331aa.
[472] Cambridge Dictionary.
[473] GILBERT and GUBAR, *op. cit,* 58.
[474] Cambridge Dictionary.

assert their voices, they have to remember their voices, and to overcome the trauma of the patriarchal society. Indeed, some social rules have been implemented in society for so long that they appear natural. It contradicts the very principle of knowledge which is supposed to always evolve. If there is a discrepancy between knowledge and the social codes, then identity is threatened. In women's case, the loss of their memory creates this discrepancy between social rules and the knowledge of their identities – the latter being stuck in another context. We may say that it engenders a vicious circle: women lose the knowledge of their identities because society does not allow knowledge to evolve at the same speed, which causes women to lose the knowledge of their identities. In that case, natural and social educations intermingle, and women are no longer able to dissociate one from the other. They have forgotten the origin of their submission, because of the repetition through time. John Stuart-Mill affirms it: "Everything which is usual appears natural. The subjection of women to men being a universal custom, any departure from it quite naturally appears unnatural."[475]

Thanks to art, women could start again their instruction, by putting words on their feelings and thoughts, in contradiction with what was previously stated in society. Art may help them to unveil what they feel internally, and which can reveal that their actual situation is not something natural. They need to surpass the rupture between reality and knowledge. For instance, when Agnes meets Mr Robson, she makes an acerb description of the man's behaviour: "He seldom deigned to notice me; and when he did, it was with a certain supercilious insolence of tone and manner that convinced me that he was no gentleman, though it was intended to have a contrary effect."[476] Even though Mr Robson's superiority complex is probably accepted and even encouraged by society, as Agnes believes it would make him a gentleman, she positions herself in opposition to the common patriarchal view because she feels ignored and belittled.

The motif of opposition, of denial, is also part of the growing feminist tendency to free and express their voices. In fact, women embody negation and refusal. Even men are conscious of it in Victorian literature. In *Northanger Abbey*, Jane Austen uses the character of Henry Tilney to convey her thoughts, as explained by Gilbert and Gubar:[477] "You will allow, that in both, man has the advantage of choice, woman only the power of refusal."[478] Women's need to educate themselves to positivity – so as to find their own identity as women – must take its

[475] Quoted in Linda NOCHLIN, 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?' (1971): 26, 6.
[476] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 44.
[477] GILBERT and GUBAR, *op. cit,* 58
[478] AUSTEN, *op. cit,* 82.

roots in rebellion and rejection. The use of negative forms in both Brontë novels strengthens this theory. In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,* Helen asserts: "I was determined to show him that my heart was not his slave […]."[479] The word "slave" echoes Rosalie Ashby's sentence at the end of *Agnes Grey* when she has become Sir Ashby's wife: "I must be a prisoner and a slave."[480] Therefore, as *Agnes Grey* was written and published before *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,* we may interpret the evolution of the use of the word "slave" from a positive form to a negative form as Anne's growing desire of emancipation, in the wider proto-feminist movement.

Through the denial of what has been established by the patriarchal society, women try to create or recreate their identities. Anne Brontë probably wanted to depict this ongoing process in her works. Indeed, it is important to underline her commitment to truth – either about the reality of women's inferior legal and social position of about the reality of women's feelings and thoughts. Actually: "many critics […] contend that the writer's feminism is inextricable from her commitment to artistic 'truth' or realism."[481] It is important to see how truth, literature and feminism are intrinsically linked.

[479] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 223.
[480] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 179.
[481] Catherine Paula HAN, 'The Myth of Anne Brontë' *Brontë Studies*. 42 (2017): 48–59, 56.

B. Literature and Reality

> But he forgot why he had collected them. He could not remember the design or the object. He piled them all wildly into one heap fifty feet high; and when he had done it all the rich and influential went into a passion of applause and cried, "This is real art! This is Realism! This is things as they really are!" That, I fancy, is the only true origin of Realism. Realism is simply Romanticism that has lost its reason.
> Gilbert Keith CHESTERTON, *Alarms and Discursions,* 1911.

a. Women and Metafiction

Women considered that art, and especially literature, was not faithful to the fair sex. The first explanation is that literature was done by men and for men. Therefore, literary education could only be subjective as it was exclusively masculine. Gilbert and Gubar highlight this long-lived tradition: "For Western literary history *is* overwhelmingly male – or, more accurately, patriarchal – and Bloom analyzes and explains this fact, while other theorists have ignored it, precisely, one supposes, because they assumed literature had to be male."[482] Harold Bloom is a at the origin of the theory of "anxiety of influence" which is the artist's fear: "that he is not his own creator and that the works of his predecessors, existing before and beyond him, assume essential priority over his own writings."[483] Thus, we can use the metaphor of the father-son relationship, with an intergenerational transmission. We can wonder in such a situation how a woman may find her place, considering that literature is assumed to be a matter of masculine intergenerational transmission. The principle corresponds to the purpose of education according to Flahault,'s focus on intergenerational transmission and the principle of mimesis.[484] Indeed, women had no one to imitate, that is why Gilbert and Gubar double Bloom's "anxiety of influence" with a prior "anxiety of authorship."[485] It corresponds to the fact that the first women who were brave enough to write had to ramp up in order to bloom and to inscribe themselves in the legacy of literature. It was not without consequences: it was really hard to have enough self-confidence to enter this process. Thus, women first groped their ways to find their place among great authors. We may deduce that it led them to try different literary devices and techniques, and to explore different genres as well. As a consequence, the nineteenth century

[482] GILBERT and GUBAR, *op. cit,* 47
[483] *Ibid*, 46.
[484] FLAHAULT, *op. cit,* 295.
[485] GILBERT and GUBAR, *op. cit,* 48-49.

knew a wide range of different artistic genres and styles which overlapped. We can argue that the overlapping also encouraged authors to question the very essence and purpose of literature. Therefore, as writers, they would use language to question literature, or fiction to question fiction.

This correspond to the concept of "metafiction," which was – *inter alia* – used by Anne Brontë to insist even more on the process of literary creation. Indeed, in the Cambridge Dictionary "metafiction" is defined as: "writing about imaginary characters and events in which the process of writing is discussed or described."[486] Metafiction is made explicit when Agnes says: "I began this book with the intention of concealing nothing."[487] The climax of metafiction in *Agnes Grey* arises when Agnes complains about Rosalie's behaviour with Mr Weston: "Had I seen it depicted in a novel I should have though it unnatural; had I heard it described by others, I should have deemed it a mistake or an exaggeration […]."[488] The sentence is ironical; the reader knows this is fiction but Agnes talks as if she was a real person. It is a clever use of metafiction from Anne's part because it reinforces the dramatic dimension of the scene. It is too absurd, even for a fictional character, who acts as if she was a real person. The metafictional dimension is repeated in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* but through different devices. This time, it is an epistolary novel, in which Gilbert Markham's letters to his friend Halford enclose Helen Huntingdon's diary – which is also a first-person narrative. Thus, when Gilbert addresses Halford, the reader might feel concerned as well, when for instance Gilbert asks: "Well, Halford, what do you think of all this?"[489] The reader might want to answer; he is given an active role. The process of writing is obviously evoked and even discussed implicitly with the reader, with the character of Agnes Grey, who includes the reader in her inquiries: "I might go on prosing more and more, I might dive much deeper, and puzzled to answer, and deduce arguments that might startle his prejudices, or perhaps provoke his ridicule, because he could not comprehend them; but I forbear."[490]

The enumeration reflects Agnes' flow of thoughts, which is a typical modernist narrative technique, the "stream of consciousness," which is defined as: "a style in literature that is used to represent a character's feelings and thoughts as they experience them, using long, continuous pieces of text without obvious organization or structure."[491] Even though this concept was

[486] Cambridge Dictionary.
[487] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 108.
[488] *Ibid*, 138.
[489] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 402.
[490] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 135.
[491] Cambridge Dictionary.

named and materialised in the twentieth century, we may argue that Anne used the simultaneity of the experience of a character and his or her conclusions drawn on the said experience – conclusions which are the feelings and emotions. This technique tends to be oriented more towards empiricism than rationalism. Indeed, the knowledge of a situation steps in the mind of a character instantly after the experience, *a posteriori* then. As the flow of thoughts is spontaneous, the character does not even seem conscious of his or her reflexion on the experience. What he or she gains from experience is a feeling, which is something internal and personal, which cannot be rationally explained.

However, these feelings may subsequently engender a reflection. In the example above, taken from *Agnes Grey*, Agnes' feelings lead her to ponder on her auto-permission to write about all her experiences and feelings in her writings. This auto-censorship transcribed in fiction through the stream of consciousness examines the very nature of language, in the case of literature, and raises the question of what can or cannot be written down. Indeed, we may add the argument that what is written down is fixed on paper, whereas experiences and feelings are evolving. That is probably why in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* Gilbert is particularly attached to his appearance in Helen's diary; it will make his importance explicit and unquestionable, as put on paper:

> How cruel – just when she was going to mention me! For I could not doubt it *was* your humble servant she was about to mention, though not very favourably of course – I could tell that, as well by those few words as by the recollection of her whole aspect and demeanour towards me in the commencement of our acquaintance.[492]

b. The Impact of Romanticism

The insistence on human feeling and thoughts reminds us of the literary movement of romanticism, which is: "a style of art, music, and literature, popular in Europe in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, that deals with the beauty of nature and human emotions."[493] Yet, it is important to underline that the movement of romanticism took different forms regarding the location. It is Arthur O. Lovejoy who explains it: "the 'romanticism' of one country may have little in common with that of another, that there is, in fact, a plurality of romanticisms, of

[492] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 400.
[493] Cambridge Dictionary.

possibly quite distinct thought-complexes."[494] In our case, we are going to use the Cambridge Dictionary definition. More precisely, what counts the most in this definition is the parallelism between "the beauty of nature" and "human emotions," which has already been dealt with through the concept of "paysage état d'âme" which is the impact of someone's emotions on his or her perceptions of nature. It is omnipresent in Anne's works. From the beginning of *Agnes Grey,* when the eponymous protagonist leaves her home for her first job as a governess, she has a final glance towards her parsonage, which was: "basking in a slanting beam of sunshine."[495] The "beam of sunshine" symbolises Agnes' attachment for her home and her family, which she explicitly explains: "it was but a sickly ray, but the village and surrounding hills were all in sombre shade, and I hailed the wandering beam as a propitious omen to my home."[496] Indeed, as long as she turns away: "the sunshine was departing."[497] In this case, the weather and the departing sunshine may enlighten Agnes about her future; it foreshadows the forthcoming difficulties. Nature educates her on her future life. In this case, nature does not endorse the role of the educator, but of the fortune-teller who announces a prophecy. In the same vein, Gilbert Markham in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* seeks to interpret nature to anticipate his future. When he has just attacked Mr Lawrence, whom he sees as his rival to conquer Helen's heart, he explains: "The late rain had so sweetly freshened and cleared the air, and washed the sky, and left such glittering gems on branch and blade, that not even the farmers could have the heart to blame it."[498] Through Gilbert's description of the weather, we may deduce that he was hopeful considering his situation with Helen. "The late rain" could be a metaphor for his assault on Mr Lawrence, which consequently "freshened and cleared the air", or erased any possible rivalry for the conquest of Helen's heart. The "glittering gems on branch and blade" could epitomise his future with Helen. Thanks to the use of the "paysage état d'âme," Anne represented the education of her characters on their own personalities and feelings. Still, we may wonder if this education is viable. Nature may be seen as a transmitter of knowledge, but the reception is subjective and oriented, as limited to one person's solipsism. In *Agnes Grey,* Agnes interprets the weather as a message here to strengthen her turmoil. When Rosalie Murray provokes her

[494] René WELLEK, 'The Concept of "Romanticism" in Literary History. I. The Term "Romantic" and Its Derivatives' *Comparative Literature*. 1 (1949): 1–23, 1.
[495] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 14.
[496] *Ibid*, 14.
[497] *Ibid*, 14.
[498] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 140.

by arguing that she could seduce Mr Weston, Agnes' feelings make her say: "Next Sunday was one of the gloomiest of April days, a day of thick dark clouds, and heavy showers."[499]

Indeed, the combination of nature and human emotions often results in melancholy and in this resembles classical tragedies. In the Cambridge Dictionary, the concept of "tragedy" is defined as: "a play about death or suffering with a sad end, or this type of play generally."[500] After Gilbert's gain of hope, the coordinating conjunction "but" highlights his suffering, and his pessimism on the situation: "But no ray of sunshine could reach my heart […]."[501] This pessimism grows in crescendo the more the novel unfolds. Before the assault, Gilbert has discovered Mr Lawrence and Helen together, assuming they were having an affair. First, at the moment of the discovery, the lexical field of tragedy invades the narration: "a tremulous darkness obscured my sight, my heart sickened and my head burned like fire […]" or: "a paroxysm of anger and despair" or eventually: "a torrent of tears."[502] The "torrent of tears" may be a reference to *Agnes Grey* which was written before, and particularly when she evokes her: "burst of tears."[503] And after this realisation, Gilbert reproaches Helen with her behaviour. The exclamation points give the narration a theatrical aspect, and also underline the potential sad end of Gilbert's situation: "Yes; you have done me an injury you can never repair – or any other either – you have blighted the freshness and promise of youth, and made my life a wilderness! I might live a hundred years, but I could never recover from the effects of this withering blow – and never forget it!"[504] Gilbert believes that one single experience gives him the knowledge of the upfolding of his life until his death. Once again, empiricism dominates. Gilbert does not think about the entire upfolding of his life before being confronted to a disagreeable experience, which leads him to assert that he knows he will never recover.

Gilbert is obviously wrong, as he ends up marrying Helen. He anticipates his future through the sole spectrum of his feelings and subjectivity. With the scepticism on the question of subjective knowledge, as demonstrated by Gettier or Ayer, we may deduce that Gilbert's assumption might be exaggerated. Indeed, the historian Miroslav Hroch presents the democratised approach to romanticism, which underlines the subjectivity and the solipsism of consciousness: "Usually, by 'Romantic approach' [sic] one understands a strong emphasis on emotion, the subjectivization of attitudes, an attempt to be unconventional, the absence of a

[499] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 130.
[500] Cambridge Dictionary.
[501] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 140.
[502] *Ibid*, 125.
[503] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 129.
[504] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 145-146.

realistic approach to the world, and so forth."[505] What is interesting in this quotation is that Romanticism is associated with "the absence of a realistic approach to the world." Therefore, Romanticism as a literary concept is antinomic with a true depiction of the world. "Vrai" is defined as: "Conforme à la réalité, à ce qui est."[506] In our case then, romanticism may not be a reliable source of true knowledge. However, Anne placed herself as an author willing to transmit truth, to instruct people toward truth. She wrote in the preface of the second edition of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*: "and when I feel it my duty to speak an unpalatable truth, with the help of God, I will speak it."[507] This desire is embodied through different characters in her novels, such as Milicent in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. The latter wants to educate her little sister Esther on matrimonial matters, and she turns to Helen by explaining: "But romantic notions will not do: I want her to have true notions."[508] Once again, romanticism as a literary genre or at least romantic notions are dressed in opposition to truth. Indeed, Anne put the truth of life in opposition to romanticism – metaphorised through the words "branches and flowers" – in a rhetorical question in the preface to the second edition to *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*: "Is it better to reveal the snares and pitfalls of life to the young and thoughtless traveller, or to cover them with branches and flowers?"[509] Obviously, the good answer is the first one. And the revelation of "the snares and pitfalls of life" correspond to realism.

c. Towards Realism

Realism as a literary genre may be the most appropriate solution to represent reality and to spread truth to the ignorant "young and thoughtless traveller." This principle is central, as the genre is defined as: "paintings, films, books, etc. that try to represent life as it really is."[510] It was slowly emerging during the nineteenth century, even though there was no accepted definition of the word realism, as explained by the writer Merritt Moseley. He uses a quotation from Thomas Hardy, which states that realism was: "an unfortunate, an ambiguous word."[511]

[505] Miroslav HROCH, 'National Romanticism' in *National Romanticism: The Formation of National Movements : Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe 1770–1945, volume II*. by Balázs TRENCSENYI and Michal KOPECEK, (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2013), 4–18.
[506] Dictionnaire Littré - Dictionnaire de la langue française.
[507] BROWN, *op. cit*, 13.
[508] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit*, 293.
[509] HOLLAND, 'Anne Brontë's Preface To The Tenant Of Wildfell Hall,' *op. cit*.
[510] Cambridge Dictionary.
[511] Quoted in Merritt MOSELEY, 'Realism and the Victorian Novel' *The Sewanee Review*. 93 (1985): 485–492, 486.

Therefore, we may have to choose some characteristics of realism which are inherent to Anne's novels, to understand her implication in the sphere of realism. If realism concerns the representation of life, it is linked to the motif of ordinariness. Being ordinary is: "the quality of not being different or special or unexpected in any way."[512] An ordinary person is a someone who has human characteristics, including failures. An ordinary person is not by definition extraordinary. We may use the comparison between the definitions of "hero" and "anti-hero" to understand the opposition. A "hero" is : "a person who is admired for having done something very brave or having achieved something great"[513] according to the Cambridge Dictionary. Therefore, it is someone who has done one or several actions which are not ordinary, which do not occur in everyday life, and someone who arouses admiration for this or these actions. In the Cambridge definition of the antihero the admiration is still present, but for other reasons. An "antihero" is: "the central character in a play, book, or film who does not have traditionally heroic qualities, such as courage, and is admired instead for what society generally considers to be a weakness of their character."[514] In the definition of the "antihero" then, there is a demystification of the role of the protagonist of a novel, through a revalorisation of human features, even flaws an failures, because they belong to the real world, which should be celebrated. We can argue that Agnes and Helen can be considered as "antiheros;" they are not given superhuman qualities.

In *Agnes Grey,* Agnes for instance, is not idealised and she recognises her failures. While coming back home after her first job, she ponders on: "and I longed to redeem my lost honour in the eyes of those whose opinion was more than that of all the world to me."[515] She acknowledges that she failed. This is incompatible with the association of a heroine with perfection. Furthermore, she is rendered more human when her mother notices: "you are a good deal paler and thinner than when you first left home."[516] It challenges the common vision of the strong hero, and it also underlines the toughness of her position. Her fragile condition reminds us of Anne herself, whose health was very frail. Through realism, Anne wanted doubtlessly to teach the reader that humanity is no perfection. Actually, Helen fails in the first instance to realise that she cannot help and save Arthur on her own in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall.* She acknowledges her failure in the chapter "First Weeks of Matrimony:" "I must confess, in my

[512] Cambridge Dictionary.
[513] *Ibid*.
[514] *Ibid.*
[515] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 50.
[516] *Ibid*, 53.

secret heart, that Arthur is not what I thought him at first […].”[517] Thus, by recognising her limits, Helen also means that her education is not complete and that she still has many things to learn. It is a theory she asserts later: “But THIS [sic] time Arthur, […] show me that you can, and teach me that I need not fear to trust you!”[518]

Therefore, realism in Anne Brontë’s two novels help to humanise fiction, and to accept what is not related to idealisation nor perfection. We may associate the absence of perfection to the absence of absolutism in knowledge. Anne’s novels put forward the limits of human cognitive and physical abilities. Human beings are finite species who can never reach infinite concepts, such as perfection or knowledge. This has already been dealt with, but now we need to accept it. Thus, Anne was eager to help us acknowledge our human limits, hence the establishment of frontiers to our quests. Actually, a book in its very form epitomises our human restrictions: the diegesis has a beginning and an end.

Still, between the established beginning and the established end there must be an evolution, a progression. The characters undergo an evolution, which tends to be oriented towards perfection anyway. At the beginning of the *Agnes Grey* for instance, Agnes appears weak and always belittled by her family. Anne needed to present a character with a flaw to be able to develop her act of growth throughout the novel. It was something recurrent among Victorian British writers: “The English novel up to her time typically portrayed growth by showing a character with a flaw […] which, during the course of the narrative, is corrected.”[519] Even though Agnes’ intellectual knowledge does not evolve, she experiences a psychological evolution through the benevolent eye of the reader. The reader is required to approve the flaw of the protagonist, otherwise he will not hope for a happy ending. This theory is materialised in *Agnes Grey* with the help of the internal point of view: “showing the story through Agnes’ eyes in order to ensure that we travel with the heroine rather than stand against her.”[520] The evolution of Helen also occurs through the benevolent eye of the reader. When Helen accepts Gilbert’s hand, she insists on the process of reflexion she has had in order to make a wise decision: “I should not have offered myself to one too proud to take me, or too indifferent to make his affection outweigh my worldly good.”[521] Helen’s intellectual knowledge does not evolve – neither does Agnes’ one – but both protagonists are educated thanks to their failures and bad

[517] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 215.
[518] *Ibid*, 258.
[519] “Chapter 2: The First Chapter of *Agnes Grey:* An Analysis of the Sympathetic Narrator” by Larry H. PEER. SUESS, *op. cit*, 24.
[520] *Ibid*, 25.
[521] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 485.

experiences. Actually, the use of fiction may help Anne to concretise a more general and abstract critique, as evocated by Cecilia Wadsö Lecaros: "By presenting Agnes as a flawed heroine, Bronte manages not only to highlight the precarious situation of governesses but, more importantly, to demonstrate some shortcomings of the contemporary educational system."[522] Indeed, Lecaros talks about the paradox of the popularity of governesses and their lack of trainings. This paradox also reveals another paradox: governesses were required in society, as they embodied social education, but they were not prepared for the job, which implies that we relied on their natural education to teach social codes towards the end of social recognition. In this case, Victorian convention conciliated both natural and social education, whereas it also vouched for the annihilation of natural education for the benefit of social education.

d. Realism Versus Reality

However, we may question the nature of the critique just mentionned. Agnes and Helen's evolutions and Anne's didacticism rely on her subjectivity as a writer. Actually, Anne seems to have convinced her audience especially through her depiction of the governess. According to some critics, the realism inherent to the novel renders *Agnes Grey* unique: "it is in a novel by another Brontë that we find the most realistic portrayal of the life of a governess […] nowhere is the governess more realistically depicted than in Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey*."[523] An argument which can be used to confirm this theory is the fact that Anne backed away from the received idea that governesses were well-treated by their employers. Anne uses Agnes' naivety to set this idea: "I have known several among the higher ranks, who treated their governesses quite as one of the family […]." But Anne made her assert this to counter the theory throughout the upfolding of the diegesis and of Agnes' experiences. As Mary Atkinson Maurice laments: "[…] if the general treatment experienced [by governesses] was that of kindness and consideration; but, alas! An insight into the real facts of the case, prove it to be far otherwise."[524] The "real facts" can be Agnes' disillusion regarding Mrs Bloomfield senior, the grandmother of the Bloomfields' children. Agnes has overheard a conversation and concludes: "now I looked upon her as hypocritical and insincere, a flatterer, and a spy upon my words and deeds."[525] This

[522] LECAROS, *op. cit,* 134.
[523] "Chapter 3: Class, Matriarchy, and Power: Contextualizing the Governess in *Agnes Grey*" by James, R. SIMMONS, Jr. SUESS, *op. cit,* 31.
[524] MAURICE, *op. cit,* 31.
[525] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 38.

is Agnes' feeling, Agnes' "real fact," but nothing can prove it to be objective. Knowledge is reduced to Agnes' solipsism.

Indeed, even though the aspects of life described and depicted by Anne in her novels seem to correspond to reality, it appears complicated to state with certainty that she has the absolute knowledge of the subject. As already mentioned, Anne's novels use autobiographical elements, which tends to emphasise the realistic aspect of her writings, derived from her own life. Yet, the true elements of her life can only be reproduced in fiction, they do not constitute reality as it is. That is another aspect of the definition of realism as a literary genre, which considers that this genre is a: "reference that gives an illusion of exact correspondence with reality in its limited aspects."[526] Therefore, realism as a literary genre is all about illusion, trying to create an accordance between the true real world and fiction. "It only has a semblance of reality"[527] as would say Mary Francis Slattery, because realism, especially in literature, is: "an illusion of reality, an image shaped of verbal significations."[528] This preoccupation tending to dissociate the image of something and the real thing dates back from Antiquity. Plato himself considered the image, "eikon" in Greek, as deceptive, belonging to "l'art du simulacre."[529] The writer Vassiliki-Piyi Christopoulou develops this theory by using the metaphor of the mirror, being used in the artistic sphere under the name of realism:

> Le thème du miroir, pour commencer par celui-ci, est loin d'avoir toujours été le modèle du réalisme et l'instrument de la découverte du vrai. […] L'art a fait par ailleurs du miroir un instrument technique qui va inspirer la philosophie et la literature sous la forme d'une métaphore plus que sous l'espèce d'un object. Ainsi l'artiste peut-il s'en servir pour corriger la perception ou pour construire un espace. […] Mais il ne s'agit que d'une connaissance indirecte et insuffisante : Le miroir que la verité nous tend donne une image inverse de la réalité.[530]

What Christopoulou stresses here is that a reader may not take for knowledge – as synonymous with truth – what is exposed in literature. A book for instance corresponds to the artist's choice: "pour corriger la perception ou pour construire un espace." Thus, the writer is the only decision-maker. In the cases of *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, the

[526] Mary Francis SLATTERY, 'What Is Literary Realism?' *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*. 31 (1972): 55–62, 55.
[527] *Ibid*, 62.
[528] *Ibid*, 56.
[529] Vassiliki-Piyi CHRISTOPOULOU, 'L'Image, entre simulacre et vérité' *Imaginaire Inconscient*. n° 34 (2014): 35–46.
[530] *Ibid*.

solipsism of the point of view is reinforce by the internal focalisation. In *Agnes Grey,* when Agnes explains: "I SPARE MY READERS THE [sic] account of my delight on coming home […]."[531] it is actually Anne's choice as a reader not to expand on this subject. She has the power to select what she may or may not say. And her selection might correspond to what has been already evoked; Anne implicitly questioned the very essence of literature, and what she allowed herself to fix in her writings. Yet again, it is her subjectivity which controls the content of her novels.

Therefore, we may argue that if a single subjectivity is not enough to render truth and give knowledge (it is: "une connaissance indirecte et insuffisante" as argued by Christopoulou, given that the image seen in a mirror is deformed), the quest for knowledge as true and objective must confront different subjectivities to draw near to absolutism. Anne's second novel *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* seems to get closer to the multiplication of subjectivities, notably through the use of Helen's letters within the diegesis. Indeed, the author offers at first Gilbert's subjectivity which gives the reader one point of view. And with this point of view, the reader is led to believe the gossips about Helen and Mr Lawrence. The reader indeed follows Gilbert's rejection of the gossips, until he witnesses Helen being close to Mr Lawrence, which leads him to conclude: "I had too good reason, now, to credit their reports concerning Mrs Graham."[532] As a consequence, the reader is led to agree with Gilbert and to take for granted the information he gives. Yet, strong of this piece of knowledge, the reader alongside with Gilbert soon discovers that he has been deceived. Thanks to Helen's letters and so her subjectivity, the reader is given other pieces of information which help him to settle a more enlightened knowledge of the situation. We may then deduce that *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* draws nearer to truth, thanks to its narratology, than *Agnes Grey.* That is why Ian Ward argues on this novel that: "[…] it did speak a "truth," one that is just as pressing today as it was a century and a half ago."[533]

The resort to writing, or art in general, may be useful to get closer to truth. The nineteenth century undeniably saw the emergence of art as a political tool. Art can be used as a medium of representation of the real world, without being real though. Yet, it may be used to raise consciousnesses. Even though art (even realistic art) is subject to imitation and copy, its conformity with reality might be helpful to identify to the characters and the situations. Even if in *Agnes Grey* the Bloomfields are a fictional family, they are copied from the real family for

[531] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 35.
[532] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 129.
[533] WARD, *op. cit,* 171.

whom Anne worked, the Inghams. Even though the scenes in the novel are not real, they can teach the reader on what it was like to live among an aristocratic family. As Lee A. Talley reports: "Anne Brontë viewed writings as an important medium through which to speak of earthly experience and to instruct the innocent about the ways of the world."[534] It appears even more possible in literature than in any other form of art, considering that literature is the only form of art which uses a narrator. In *Agnes Grey*, the eponymous narrator is crucial to instruct the reader "about the ways of the world," or the way we live among aristocrats, in this situation. This narrator epitomises the "potentiality of consciousness"[535] according to Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth. That is why, with the increasing of realism during the Victorian era, Victorian writers wanted to depict society as they perceived it, in order to be able to voice some criticism. Criticism would then lead to social reform. Indeed, reform was starting to threaten the mores of the time. As for other authors, such as Charles Dickens or George Eliot: "what Anne Brontë aimed at was reform,"[536] an idea repeated because she was: "above all, a novelist whose purpose was reform."[537] And reform should occur thanks to the intermediary of art. George Eliot for instance was longing for art as a vector of truth, rather than vector of beauty. In the nineteenth century, for some artists art was no more supposed to be beautiful, as were the artistic expectations of the Classicist era. Thus, Victorian social writers created a rupture with tradition. Truth became synonymous with instruction and education at large, and no more with beauty. Anne, through the voice of Agnes in *Agnes Grey* seems to have shared Eliot's ideal. In the chapter "Confessions," Agnes claims: "It is foolish to wish for beauty."[538] According to Agnes, beauty is definitely not the best tool to access truth and knowledge. On the contrary, Victorian writers who were reformers tended to lay the emphasis on the transmission of truth, their truth which was a violent criticism of society, in order to make people react. By associating truth with instruction and education, these writers also wish to give people a more active role. If beauty is truth, then it is enough to contemplate beauty to access truth, and there is then no active process, nor any understanding of this truth.

These writers needed literature to be realistic, and to achieve this goal, they needed to adopt a very detailed approach of reality. The importance of details and especially tough details would have a better impact of the reader. If a reader is shocked, he will better remember the

[534] "Chapter 8: Anne Brontë's Method of Social Protest in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*" by Lee A. TALLEY. SUESS, *op. cit*, 114.
[535] Quoted in MOSELEY, *op. cit*, 486.
[536] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit*, "Introduction" by Angeline GOREAU, 38.
[537] *Ibid*, "Introduction" by Angeline GOREAU, 47.
[538] *Ibid*, 134.

critique. The most famous Victorian writer to have depicted with extreme precision the life of the British working-class during the nineteenth century is Charles Dickens. For example, in *Hard Times,* the alienation of the workers is presented thanks to different devices and figures of speech:

> So many hundred Hands in this Mill; so many hundred horse Steam Power. It is known, to the force of a single pound weight, what the engine will do, but, not all the calculators of the National Debt can tell me the capacity for good or evil, for love of hatred, for patriotism or discontent, for the decomposition of virtue into vice, or the reverse, at any single moment in the soul of one of these its quiet servants, with the composed faces and the regulated actions.[539]

The most relevant figure of speech is the metonymy; "Hands" replace people. This description underlines the reduction of the workers to their hands, to their work, while their individualities as persons are denied. In this case, the work of miners is not idealised. Their "composed faces" and "regulated actions" as they are, without embellishment. Anne Brontë is said to use the same detailed approach: "She explores in almost excruciating detail the horrors of a bad marriage in order to challenge the gendered way in which her culture divides the realms of public and private, and girls' and boys' education, and opposes the ways that dominant culture perceives marriage."[540] The use of details allowed Anne to denounce the harsh conditions of living, when Dickens focused more on the harshness of the working conditions. If we use again the empiricist theory, if the readers are shocked, their emotion is subsequently engendering a reflection on the subject at the origin of the feeling of shock. And this process relies essentially on a realistic depiction of the world. For criticism first, and reform then, realism is essential. That is crucial for George Eliot for instance, who: "wishes that literature could be as exact as possible, without deforming or embellishing facts, since misrepresentations prevents the upper-classes from acting in helping the poor."[541] Eliot believes that hiding the truth will prevent society from evolving, because it will prevent people from being educated. Contrariwise, she vouched for the use of literature to educate people so that they will not repeat the same mistakes. If we trust Charlotte Brontë's words about her little sister, Anne had the same opinion: "She brooded over it till she believed it to be a duty to reproduce every detail (of

[539] Charles DICKENS, *Hard Times*, (New York: Harper, 1854), 78.
[540] "Chapter 8: Anne Brontë's Method of Social Protest in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*" by Lee A. TALLEY. SUESS, *op. cit*, 113.
[541] Lawrence GASQUET, 'Dossier #1 George Eliot, Millais's Christ in the House of His Parents', 2020.

course with fictitious characters, incidents, and situations) as a warning to others."[542] Literature has a social scope for most of the Victorian writers; it aimed at changing society and at implementing more democratic codes and mores.

[542] "Chapter 8: Anne Brontë's Method of Social Protest in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*" by Lee A. TALLEY. SUESS, *op. cit*, 113.

C. Democracy and Universality

In the world of carnival the awareness of the people's immortality is combined with the realization that established authority and truth are relative.
Mikhail BAKHTIN, *Rabelais and his World*, 1965.

a. The Carnivalesque Tradition

The action of writing obviously implies putting everything down on paper in a linear mode. Therefore, every piece of information finds its place in the same horizontal axis, which is a sheet of paper. This horizontality is echoed in the first aspect of the definition of democracy in the Cambridge Dictionary: "the belief in freedom and equality between people […]."[543] On paper, everything is written down, so that no piece of information seems superior to any other. The principle of equality seems to be respected. That is why we may argue that literature is egalitarian by essence. The principle of putting everything down and creating a horizontal line is to be found in the "Carnivalesque." Carnival is: "(a special occasion or period of) public enjoyment and entertainment involving wearing unusual clothes, dancing, and eating and drinking, usually held in the streets of a city."[544] The "unusual clothes" are particularly relevant in the Victorian era marked by the priority given to appearances and superficiality. Changing clothes could signify a change of social status. For instance, in *Agnes Grey* it is the people belonging to aristocracy who pay attention to their outfits. Before going to her first ball, Rosalie expresses her enthusiasm: "[…] and, above all, see me in my splendid new dress!"[545] She believes it is her dress and her appearance which give her merit and credit: "[…] no gentleman could set eyes on me without falling in love that minute."[546] Therefore, one person who changes clothes for a carnival, may change his or her role in society, and his or her position in comparison to others. A person's identity vanishes to the benefice of a new identity, a chosen identity. When some women decided to voice themselves and write about their stories, they put on the costume of writers, and eventually endorsed the role they defined for themselves. And thanks to literature, they can mould this identity according to their thoughts and beliefs. This is an experience of re-birth, as symbolised through Mikhail Bakhtin's point of view on the

[543] Cambridge Dictionary.
[544] *Ibid*.
[545] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit*, 73.
[546] *Ibid*, 76.

carnivalesque tradition: "They [carnivals] were the second life of the people, who for a time entered the utopian realm of community, freedom, equality, and abundance."[547]

Putting everything on the same level also allows to unveil inequalities. In *Agnes Grey,* we find a young clergyman's daughter working within an aristocratic family. Her inferiority is revealed on paper through Agnes' description: "I found they had no notion of going with *me* [sic]*:* I must go with *them* [sic] wherever they chose to lead me. I must run, walk, or stand exactly as it suited their fancy."[548] The use of verbal signifiers helps the reader to picture the scene in his or her mind, and he or she might imagine Agnes walking behind. Indeed, later in the novel, the Murrays' children forbid Agnes to walk beside them, because they consider: "you can't walk as fast as we do; you know you're always lagging behind."[549] This sentence can be read as a metaphor for Agnes' inferior social and economic position. She cannot walk as fast as them because she is meant to stay behind, or under in the vertical scale of social hierarchisation. Even though she might try and propel herself to the rank of aristocrats, the Murrays remind her of her inferior position – position which cannot be changed as it is the social established order. In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* the latent inequalities do not concern social differences but rather gender differences. Both Helen and Arthur belong to the same social class, and still do not have the same power nor opportunities. One key proof of the asymmetrical distribution of power is that Arthur often goes to London and expects his wife to stay at home. He literally has the freedom of movement Helen lacks. It is obvious at the beginning of the chapter "First Absence," when Helen explains: "I returned, in obedience to Arthur's wish: very much against my own, because I left him behind."[550] And Helen's inferiority is strengthened with Arthur's words: "you *must* go home, Helen […]."[551] The use of the modal "must" and in addition in italics, insists on Arthur's established superiority.

And yet, it is Anne Brontë who makes Arthur speak, she is the one who has the control thereupon. Her control resonates through Helen's words when Helen has a discussion with Arthur on Annabella and Lord Lowborough's future union. She transforms Arthur's sentence: "when he's got her" into: "when she's got *him* [sic]"[552] which are Helen's words. Helen's superiority is strengthened later, not regarding her eloquence but her intellectual capacities. The vocabulary used gives Arthur the attributes of a child. For instance, he was: "sadly at a loss for

[547] Mikhail BAKHTIN, *Rabelais and His World* (1965), (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 96.
[548] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 23.
[549] *Ibid*, 139.
[550] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 230.
[551] *Ibid*, 231.
[552] *Ibid*, 200.

something to amuse him or to occupy his time,"[553] and when Helen wants him to read, she laments on the fact that he destroyed: "the lesson I wanted to give him."[554] Anne ridiculed her masculine main figure. Thanks to her position as a writer, she – as a woman – reverses the hierarchy. She might be able to access the public sphere, the intellectual sphere. Being published, even if it was under the masculine – or at least genderless – name of Acton Bell, proved that she was at least as much able as any other man to write a novel. Anne then participated in the advocation for the recognition of women in society, outside the domestic and private sphere. Yet, we may even affirm that this contributed to the abolition of the frontiers between masculine and feminine educations. Not only did Anne enter the public sphere, but this entrance actually weakened the educational division based on gender. In her life, Anne did not operate in the domestic sphere. Never married and childless, she could not have the opportunity to be the perfect "angel of the house." Therefore, her entry in the public sphere does not correspond to a shift of spheres, but rather of a destruction of the system of spheres. As she was not predefined in a sphere, she did not need to escape from her sphere to enter another, and she could choose more easily where to define herself. We may find here a larger freedom of action.

b. Art and Redefining

Yet, Anne's activism takes the form of art. George Eliot theorises it by saying that it is more useful to serve the cause: "as an artist rather than an activist."[555] Indeed, Anne's approach to feminism was rather subtle. One of the reasons why Anne Brontë was never a proper activist is probably that the implication of women in the political field to defend their rights started right after her death. While she passed away in 1849, the requirement for the women's franchise was submitted to the Parliament for the first time in 1851, following Harriet Taylor's essay "On the Enfranchisement of Women" published in the Westminster Review.[556] It was a significant step for the further emancipation of women, starting in the political field. Even if this first submission was a failure, it permitted the future involvement of other persons, of which some men were to be counted. Indeed, the involvement of some women in the defence

[553] *Ibid*, 224.
[554] *Ibid*, 224.
[555] Quoted in Anand MATHEW, 'Victorian Women Writing: A Work of Proto Feminism' *Academia.edu*. (2013): 1–6, 4.
[556] Marion SHAW, 'Anne Brontë: A Quiet Feminist' *Brontë Studies*. 38 (2013): 330–338, 334.

of their rights gave the possibility to show to others that it was possible to try and change the established order. It challenged the shape of society, and brought people out of their lethargy, in which there was no possible evolution. One of the most iconic figures of this movement was John Stuart Mill. He was the first to officially record his visions on feminism in his book *The Subjection of Women* published in 1869. He was in favour of women's enfranchisement, as he strongly believed that: "the principles of liberty and equality apply to them [women] as much as to men."[557] The implication of a man at that point was largely beneficial for the whole movement, as he could have more influence on both social and political scales. As a man's voice had more weight than a woman's one, the investment of men such as John Stuart Mill could educate people to tolerance and equality.

All of this permitted to promulgate new bases for women's freedom, notably in the literary branch. The renowned writer Virginia Woolf insists on the heritage left by the 19th century women writers. In the collection of essays *Women and Writing* (edited by the scholar Michèle Barrett), Virginia Woolf praises women's courage and recklessness to challenge the traditional literary subjects by developing subjects that could plead for women's rights. Moreover, she compliments their capacity to abandon the usual structure of novels and to re-invent it so that it could be more suitable to their convictions. Virginia Woolf argues that upcoming women have continuously been able to write and stand out thanks to some women who, at one point, made the decision to write about their daily lives and thoughts. That is what makes her say: "the extraordinary woman depends on the ordinary woman."[558] We might understand this quotation thanks to a chronology. First, ordinary is polysemous. They may be called ordinary women because they live an ordinary life, or a life conform to social requirements, which does not differ from them. But ordinary may also qualify them, as women who all behave the same way, without having an unexpected behaviour. Thus, even though these women are stuck in their daily lives of submission, they do not always realise its unfairness, because they are used to it. Yet, changes can only come from these women's realisation of their situations, and the outcry gains in legitimacy when it comes from the inside. Consequently, the women who managed to realise the unfairness of the situation and who outstood were no longer considered as ordinary women, but became extraordinary, by refusing social requirements and acting in an unexpected way. We might argue that the origin of the awareness lies in the comparison with the other. Women who could stand out were

[557] HIMMELFARB, *op. cit*, 89.
[558] Virginia WOOLF, *Virginia Woolf, Women and Writing*, (San Diego, California: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), 44.

probably those who had access to other lifestyles, in literature for instance. We may deduce that literary women – which represents a small part of the feminine population in the Victorian era – have a higher propensity to break the habit. As old habits can be deconstructed, new habits can also be rebuilt. Then, education by imitation of habits does not only concern children, but adults may also benefit from this lesson. Indeed, these women's courage paved the way to ordinary women who would not have realised the situation and who would have done nothing to counter it. And Woolf encourages this extraordinariness by highlighting how it gives hope to future generations of women, considering that the process is educative and continuous.

There is indeed an idea of progeny in literature, an idea of intergenerational transmission, but within a particular group. The Suffragettes of the beginning of the twentieth century also acknowledged the impact these women writers had. During a fundraising event for the Suffragettes, many of them – among whom there was May Sinclair – were dressed as Victorian women writers and they were also waving placards with these women's names on it:

FIGURE 5 – UNKNOWN. *Women's Coronation Procession*. 1911. Online.

In the image, we can read distinctly the name of "Charlotte Brontë." We may guess that Anne Brontë was also part of the writers presented. Indeed, Anne's commitment to

community is revealed in the two studied novels. In *Agnes Grey* the rally actually echoes the early feminist trend, and it is particularly relevant towards the end of the diegesis. Agnes' mother receives a letter of her father, who offers to welcome her back home, with her two daughters Mary and Agnes, if she recognises the mistake she made by marrying Mr Grey. Mrs Grey refuses, and Agnes exclaims: "Of course, we both applauded our mother's resolution […]."[559] There is also a sentiment of admiration from the daughters for their mother, visible through the verb "applauded." So as to be true to themselves, to their consciousnesses and to access autonomy and independence, these three women are ready to sacrifice money and family. Anne's novels teach her reader the importance of integrity and autonomy, above all. At this point, sacrifice becomes a selfish concept, aiming at self-realisation. Feminine solidarity also emerges at one crucial point in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. When Helen plans on escaping with her son, Rachel refuses to abandon her. She argues:

> 'What *signifies*!' replied she, in some excitement. 'You'll want somebody to clean, and wash, and cook, won't you? I can do all you that; and never mind the wages – I've my bits of o' savings yet and if you wouldn't take me, I should have to find my own board and lodging out of 'em somewhere, or else works among strangers – and it's what I'm not used to – so you can please yourself, ma'am.'[560]

Beyond Rachel's deference for her mistress, we may here understand her admiration for Helen's courage to counter Arthur's wish to keep her nearby. Rachel's ordinariness depends on Helen's extraordinariness. Helen stands against her husband, a man, the same way Mrs Grey stands against her father, another man. As the Greys' daughters spontaneously embrace their mother's decision, despite the consequences, Rachel supports Helen, and she is ready to sacrifice her "bits of o' savings" in order to follow Helen in her runaway. In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* not only do we find the feminine alliance, but we also witness the abolition of social class barriers. Rachel is Helen's servant, which ranks her in a social inferior position. Yet, speaking of Rachel, Helen relates that she was: "embracing her faithful friend."[561] Rachel has become Helen's friend, so she is no longer defined by her social status. The eradication of class distinctions also takes place in *Agnes Grey.* In the chapter "The School," Agnes receives a letter from Rosalie, now ranked Mrs Ashby, in which Rosalie asks her: "I want you to visit

[559] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 157.
[560] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 389.
[561] *Ibid,* 390.

me as a *friend* [sic]."[562] Thus, in both novels, some women choose to erase social classes et to vouch for independence, whatever the costs may be. These women most of the time belong to the younger generations, whereas older women such as Mrs Bloomfield, Mrs Murray or Helen's aunt do not try to challenge the order so that they do not seek for solidarity.

Through independence, they may learn about their selves, no longer as individuals, but as women. The appurtenance to a group may instruct them on their identities as women. As everything established before is abolished, social identity vanishes too, and needs to be rebuilt as well. This time, social education does not aim at erasing natural education. By choosing their social education, women can choose to overlap these two types of educations. Their definition and recognition as women do not negate their identity as individuals. On the contrary, we might say that the accumulation of the two allow them to get even closer to the full knowledge of their identities. Universally, we may argue that every human needs to have access to both his or her natural education, and the social one, which must be in accordance with the first one. This theory corresponds to one of the Littré Dictionary definitions for the word "savoir:" "État de celui qui se connaît lui-même, qui a le sentiment de son existence."[563] Therefore, by coexisting and supporting each other, women may try and find their own identity, their feminine identity. When Jean-Jacques Rousseau believes that the most important form of education is the education of nature, the natural education, and that education coming from men is perversive, Anne Brontë's work seems to teach us that social education is indeed also part of one's identity. Thanks to different devices such as literature, women try to find and define the feminine identity, and to plea for its social recognition. Gilbert and Gubar clarify the quest: "The one plot that seems to be concealed in most of the 19th century literature by women… is some sense a story of the woman writer's quest for her own story, it is the story, in other words, of the woman's quest for self-definition."[564] The first step towards self-definition is self-assertion, through writing in the case of Anne Brontë. Once self-definition is attained and known, women need to spread it to transform the codes of society. Indeed, when social education is redefined, it needs to be accepted and recognised in society. Once again, literature appears to be the best tool for the purpose of re-writing concepts which were kept unaltered for too long.

[562] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 168.
[563] Dictionnaire Littré - Dictionnaire de la langue française.
[564] Quoted in MATHEW, *op. cit,* 1.

c. Redefining and Love

In her novels, Anne chose to use for instance the concept of love, but a new aspect of love. This very concept is no longer solely a source of suffering. In the two diegeses, love is also a source of empowerment, when it is treated through the feminine perspective. First, love is a means to share a relationship with the other and is part of the social education. When Helen laments on Arthur's numerous stays out of the marital house, she explains the positive impact his return has on her: "He is come and gone. He would not stay above a fortnight. The time passed quickly, but very, very happily, and it has done me good."[565] On the contrary, his repetitive departures make her complain: "my soul is sick of solitude."[566] Love creates dependence, or even interdependency. In the chapter "Parental Feelings," Arthur complains to Helen that she neglects him for the benefit of their son. He is looking for Helen's love and attention because he wants to: "escape the pains of solitude."[567] Agnes finds a refuge against solitude in love as well in *Agnes Grey.* Feeling belittled or even ignored by her employers, she finds comfort in her love for Mr Weston; it helps her to gain her self-confidence back: "Yes! At least, they could not deprive me of that; I could think of him day and night; and I could feel that he was worthy to be thought of. Nobody knew him as I did; nobody could appreciate him as I did; nobody could love him as I… could, […]."[568] The enumeration with the use of semicolons conveys a sense of lyricism in this sentence. Actually, Anne probably depicted Agnes' love the way she loved William Weightman. She was probably wishing to escape from solitude by sharing her love feelings with him. As the critic Samantha Ellis points out: "Anne did want love, wishing, in "Self-Communion" for:

> One look that bods our fears depart,
> And well assures the trusting heart
> It beats not in the world alone – ."[569]

Love finds its place in the process of socialisation. Unable to satisfy her own desire, Anne transposed it in her fiction, by giving her protagonist the ending she would have wanted for her own life. Indeed, Agnes and Mr Weston's love reaches its climax at the end of the novel,

[565] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 377.
[566] *Ibid*, 377.
[567] *Ibid*, 253.
[568] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 143.
[569] ELLIS, *Take Courage: Anne Brontë and the Art of Life, op. cit,* 179.

which ends on a more positive note than *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Agnes' solitude is replaced by her marriage with Mr Weston, a partner she has chosen.

Love can be empowering, because it gives the impression of having the choice to find a partner, for the domestic life, as opposed to the dictated social constraints. However, the desire to find a partner is a social construction according to Eva Illouz. She explains: "La liberté est un dispositif social, organisé dans des institutions, des règles et des lois."[570] Her theory could be put in parallel with Jon Elster's analysis on emotions and their origins. According to him, love especially is also a social construction. Indeed, he considers that emotions that are not conceptualised by society do exist but are less pregnant in people's lives. He uses a quotation for La Rochefoucauld to reinforce his argument: "Il y a des gens qui n'auraient jamais été amoureux s'ils n'avaient pas entendu parler de l'amour."[571] Therefore, we are all trying to find a partner because we are socially told that love is an agreeable emotion, and in order to assuage social expectations. From Illouz' strandpoint, there are two main reasons. First, every individual needs to find a witness of his or her individuality in his or her lover. And then, this witness can also be part of the individual's process of social recognition.[572] Therefore, love helps to access a social identification, thanks to the passage from "I" to "we." However, if love is only a social construct, then we would all try to find a lover who shares the same social status, yet it is not systematic. Agnes and Mr Weston did not originally evolve in the same social class. It is another lesson the concept of love may teach; not only does it reunite people, but it reunites people from different social spheres. That is why Terry Eagleton imagines what could have been Anne's thesis in her work: "You must love where you truly love, undistracted by social distinction."[573] With feelings of love, everyone is put on an equal footing, which challenges society hierarchisation. Love focuses on the human and knows no society. In this sense, we may conclude that the concept of love may have its own existence outside of institutions. *Agnes Grey* indeed reflects a marriage which differs from social requirements. Even though Agnes and Mr Weston get married and by doing so agree with social codes, they decide to redefine their vision of marriage according to themselves, as individuals and as a couple.

The last stanza of the last chapter deals with Agnes and Mr Weston's current life as a married couple. What is the most relevant proof of their union is the shift from the pronoun "I"

[570] Barbara CARNEVALI, Emanuele COCCIA, and Eva ILLOUZ, 'La Liberté organisée de l'amour entretien avec Eva Illouz' *Diogene*. n° 241 (2013): 115–120, 118.
[571] Jon ELSTER, 'L'Influence négative des émotions sur la cognition' *Terrains/Théories*. (2015), online, Internet, 2 Apr. 2021. .
[572] CARNEVALI, COCCIA, and ILLOUZ, *op. cit*, 119.
[573] Terry EAGLETON, *A Marxist Study of the Brontës*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 129.

which punctuated the whole novel, to the pronoun "we" or "our." Yet, this time, the union between the two lovers does not seem to correspond to the traditional Victorian vision of a married couple, which implies the wife's submission to her husband. Indeed, they are both included in both the private and the public spheres. Agnes talks of: "our modest income" or "the economy we learnt in harder times."[574] In their situation, gender equality seems to have been reached, and they both seem to undergo a genderless education. The happy ending for Helen is less obvious in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,* as it is Gilbert's voice which concludes the narration. Still, if we believe Gilbert, their marriage seems promising: "I need not tell you how happily my Helen and I have lived and loved together, and how blessed we still are in each other's society, and in the promising young scions that are growing up about us." Once again, there is no gender distinction in Gilbert's discourse. That is probably why Terry Eagleton argues that Anne's literature conveys a sense of: "concluding optimism."[575]

This is coherent with Anne's hopeful wish to create a genderless literature. After having redefined the woman's identity, essentially by enlarging her sphere of action, Anne wanted to educate people towards gender equality in the intellectual and artistic faculties. She vouched for this theory for example in the preface to the second edition of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. She affirmed:

> 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, and I am at a loss to conceive how a man should permit himself to write anything that would be really disgraceful to a woman, or why a woman should be censured for writing anything that would be proper and becoming for a man.[576]

Anne considered that literature has the capacity to link men and women, to intermingle their standpoints and histories. She advocated for the democratisation of literature. During the nineteenth century, the empowering middle-class started to get more and more interested in literature, as it was part of the general taste for leisure, including reading. Indeed, middle-class women for instance gained in literacy, and would prefer to spend time reading instead of working, as work was designed for the working-class. Still, Anne wanted a type of literature which would know neither class barriers nor gender ones.

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[574] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 193.
[575] EAGLETON, *op. cit,* 125.
[576] HOLLAND, 'Anne Brontë's Preface To The Tenant Of Wildfell Hall,' *op. cit*.

d. Literature and Democracy

Actually, literature and democracy share common features which can make us argue that they cannot be dissociated. The French philosopher Jacques Derrida makes a comparison of the two:

> La littérature lie ainsi son destin à une certaine non-censure, à l'espace de la liberté démocratique (liberté de la presse, liberté d'opinion, etc.). Pas de démocratie sans littérature, pas de littérature sans démocratie. On peut toujours ne vouloir ni de celle-ci ni de celle-là, et l'on ne se prive pas de s'en passer sous tous les régimes; on peut ne pas les considérer, ni l'une ni l'autre, comme des biens inconditionnels et des droits indispensables. Mais on ne peut, en aucun cas, les dissocier l'une de l'autre.[577]

Derrida reinforces the analogy by giving the example of censorship. If a novel is censored, then it means that democracy is endangered. Indeed, in both cases, the freedom of speech is crucial. In literature, the artist has the right to say anything he wants on paper. Then, his mark left on his work is progressively lost to the benefit of the readers, and the multiplicity of individual interpretations they may offer. In the process of literature, even though the artist may be willing to transmit his point of view, the reader endorses an active role in the apprehension and understanding of the novel. In this sense, literature is an educator which tries to solicit our cognitive abilities, instead of just trying to fill our minds with already established ideas. We may guess that it is the reason why knowledge constantly evolves. If it is unconsciously transmitted from one mind to another, then knowledge is never questioned. Whereas by stimulating our intellects, we might all be legitimate to question knowledge and its whys and wherefores. Thus, knowledge evolves alongside with people, and people are all granted with the same rights and duties regarding knowledge.

Thus, a work might be didactic and instructive, but only thanks to the reader's reception of it. It is what Isabelle Hersant explains when she deals with the knowledge of art. She believes that even if a work of art emanates for an artist's mind, once produced the work of art obtains its own identity as an: "objet pensant ou sujet d'une pensée qui demeure insaisissable pour l'artiste même."[578] Therefore, the mind of the object of art is different from the artist's mind

[577] Jacques DERRIDA, *Passions*, vols (Paris: Galilée, 2006), 32.
[578] HERSANT, *op. cit.*

and constitutes what Hersant calls: "savoir rhizomant."[579] The word "rhizomant" comes from the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze's theory of "rhizome" which considers that the mind evolves constantly in a horizontal axis. Once again, the horizontality echoes the democratic dimension of art. To summarise this theory, what Hersant wants to state is that a work of art allows a multiplicity of interpretations, which are all put in an equal footing and still in constant evolution, which makes the establishment of a unique artistic knowledge impossible. Therefore, literary knowledge in our case needs the perpetual implication of the reader to develop itself. In the case of *Agnes Grey*, each reader may have different opinions on the behaviour of aristocratic children. On one side, the critic Scott justifies their constant violence and misbehaviour by a need to attract attention. It is the argument that children from upper-class families, during the Victorian era, cried for attention,[580] because they were neglected by their parents. Thus, a reader who follows Scott's theory may feel pity for these children. On the other side, another reader may be shocked by the egocentricity of the children, for instance when Rosalie shouts at her sister: "Do be quiet, Matilda; and let me tell my news first."[581]

The plurality of readings contributes then to the evolution of knowledge, which adapts itself regarding the context. To keep in mind *Agnes Grey* as an example, a twenty-first century reader would not apprehend the governess's techniques the same way a nineteenth century reader would. When Agnes writes about Mary Ann that: "Sometimes, exasperated to the utmost pitch, I would shake her violently by the shoulders, or pull her long hair, […]"[582] a twenty-first century reader must be shocked by the resort to physical violence and must consider the scene as child abuse. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* must generate the same reaction when Helen is proud to explain how she managed to make her son Arthur reject any sort of alcohol. She poisons him so that his mind would associate the taste of alcohol to his sickness due to poison, and she even relates that she uses the threat of alcohol as a psychological means of pressure on her sonr: "I have given up teasing him about them, except now and then as objects of terror in cases of misbehaviour."[583] This educational method is more controversial nowadays than it was probably during the nineteenth century.

[579] *Ibid.*
[580] SCOTT, *op. cit,* 27.
[581] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit* , 75.
[582] *Ibid*, 30.
[583] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 376.

e. Democracy and Perfection

The evolution of knowledge is linked to the evolution of social codes. And both evolutions are possible thanks to some people who are endlessly questioning the established order. And this questioning is accessible to anyone who has been trained to develop and use his or her critical mind. This is the Faustian quest of knowledge, shared by one of its creators Goethe, who explains that younger, he found satisfaction in none of his legal and metaphysical studies, so that her had the feeling to know as much as the instructor.[584] Indeed, his absence of satisfaction lies in the very nature of knowledge, and its volatility and variability. Later, Goethe wrote probably as a fatalistic conclusion: "Await no finality. The last-solved problem of the history of the world and of mankind discloses immediately a new one to be solved."[585] It is the democratic dimension of knowledge: once we have been instructed that knowledge is not fixed by an intellectual elite and can be defined by everyone, then instructors are no longer superior to their pupils. We all have a finite and limited role in the collective quest for knowledge, which acts like an endless chain of information and transmission.

If human beings cannot reach absolutism in knowledge, as knowledge is elusive, they may find an intellectual stimulation in trying to get closer to perfection, used in this situation as a synonym of absolutism. As the French philosopher Montesquieu comments, we all have a: "desire to augment the excellence of our nature."[586] Anne Brontë must have been driven by the same intellectual impulse. On her deathbed, she wailed about her usefulness in the world:

> But I wish it would please God to spare me not only for Papa's and Charlotte's sakes, but because I long to do some good in the world before I leave it. I may have many schemes in my head for future practise – humble and limited indeed – but still I should not like them to come to nothing, and myself to have lived to do so little purpose.[587]

Even though she had already written two novels and several poems before dying at the age of twenty-nine, she considered she had not done enough. Her frustration may be understood through Matthew Arnold's viewpoint on culture. He argues that: "Not a having and a resting,

[584] WELLS, *op. cit*, 387.
[585] Quoted in *Ibid*, 388.
[586] Quoted in Matthew ARNOLD, *Culture and Anarchy*, (Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2009), 4.
[587] Quoted in HOLLAND, *op.cit*, 234.

but a growing and a becoming is the character of perfection as culture conceives it."[588] The constant desire for expansion prevents from receiving any form of satisfaction. Thus, Anne was confronted to the same problem as Goethe before: the realisation of the incompleteness of knowledge, whatever the education and instruction might be. Still, Anne seems to have been conscious of the impossibility reaching an end such as perfection. In a conversation between Agnes and Mr Weston in *Agnes Grey*, she makes her protagonist comment: "If you require perfection, you never will"[589] to which Mr Weston answers: "I do not – I have no right to, being so far from perfection myself."[590]

Still, trying to reach the ideal of perfection is what drives human nature to accomplish great things according to Matthew Arnold – in parallel with the human need to access absolute knowledge. Arnold argues that through time, people have failed in trying to reach perfection because they were inwardly convinced of their sinfulness, due to religious indoctrination. Even though he believes in the moral dimension of religion in order to lead human beings towards perfection, he considers that religion is not enough *per se.* What he vouches for is an internal moral quest, which is supposed to bring: "inward peace and satisfaction."[591] To reach this objective, Arnold explains that every human being needs to look for: "a perfection in which the characters of beauty and intelligence are both present, […]."[592] To Arnold, it is the notion of perfection known as culture, an analysis derived from the Greek philosopher Epictetus. Therefore, this principle of encompassing both mental and physical qualities dates back from Antiquity, and yet it was not applied in the Victorian era, when mental and physical cares were separated and attributed respectively to men and women in society. Thus, trying to reconcile the two echoes the possibility of reconciliation between men and women, and more largely to reach a genderless ideal of: "human perfection complete on all sides."[593]

The collective and universal aspect of the quest for knowledge characterised by a quest for absolutism and perfection implies the abolition of the pre-established principles. There is this need to create a horizontal axis as opposed to a vertical tree structure. It means that everything is put on the same level. In knowledge, it means that all pieces of knowledge are considered of equal importance and truth. As a consequence, we may legitimately deduce that if we grant the same value to every piece of information, some of them are either stepped up or

[588] ARNOLD, *op. cit,* 7.
[589] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 186.
[590] *Ibid,* 186.
[591] ARNOLD, *op. cit,* 14.
[592] *Ibid,* 13.
[593] *Ibid,* 16.

lowered down. We may wonder if this process cannot be threatening for knowledge, considering for instance that contradictory propositions may be found on the same level. In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Gilbert first believes, thanks to his sensible experience, that Mr Lawrence is Helen's lover. However, he discovers later thanks to Helen's diary that he is her brother. Both pieces of information are perceived as true knowledge for Gilbert, at two different moments of the diegesis. In the end, the reader understands that the second proposition is true (because it is: "Conforme à la réalité, à ce qui est."[594]) even though both are presented on the same level on paper.

Thus, it raises the question of truth. As dealt with above, knowledge seems *a priori* impossible to reach in its entirety as it constantly evolves. Moreover, if the prestigious characteristic granted to some pieces of knowledge is lost, then nothing and everything can be understood as truth, all at once. And if there is no truth, identity is endangered. According to Plato, as assumed by François Flahault: "L'âme, la personne, a tendance à être oublieuse d'elle-même, et c'est la connaissance vraie qui lui permet de se diriger à bon escient et de se retrouver. Le sujet connaissant est donc hiérarchiquement supérieur au sujet existant."[595] Without true knowledge, the individuality cannot be fulfilled. This conviction stresses the idea that education is limited to the amount of knowledge, and that the "sujet existant" without knowledge is not a true subject. Therefore, if true and absolute knowledge cannot be reached, then human beings are condemned not to reach their identities, both as individuals and as humanity.

[594] Dictionnaire Littré - Dictionnaire de la langue française.
[595] FLAHAULT, *op. cit,* 296.

CONCLUSION

“And now I think I have said sufficient.”[596]

[596] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey*, *op. cit*, 193.

The great aim of education is not knowledge but action.
Herbert SPENCER, *Education: Intellectual, Moral and Physical,* 1860.

Within the concept of education other concepts can be found, such as instruction and knowledge. Yet, they do not all have the same relationship of dependency. While instruction cannot exist without being part of education, education has an existence *per se* independent of the process of instruction. For instance, Rousseau's natural education comes from nature. Thus, there is no conscious instructive work. The education of nature is the first education known by a child from infancy. There is no reflexion behind it, but there still can be education and acquisition of knowledge. Nature is the first step in one's education to life, and also the first step towards the edification of identity, through the acknowledgment of the body and the mind in the world. Indeed, Rousseau praises particularly one aspect of the education of nature, which is spontaneity. One of the child's main characteristics is his innocence, because his or her behaviour is not yet dictated by social codes. Therefore, his or her actions are driven by natural and personal impulses. Quoted in an article written by Laurent Fedi, Rousseau recommends: "La seule habitude qu'on doit laisser prendre à l'enfant est de n'en contracter aucune."[597] According to Rousseau then, we should maintain the child's state of nature as long as possible. This theory also takes in consideration the child's quest for his or her own identity. In the nineteenth century, there was this growing belief that childhood was precious, so that an atmosphere of nostalgia doubled with an interest in romanticism as a literary genre contributed to the sacralisation of childhood. We may find Victorian poets such as William Wordsworth (and his poem "My Heart Leaps Up") or Samuel Taylor Coleridge (with for instance the poem "Frost at Midnight," written for his son). In both cases, the poets praise the innocence of childhood – when children can still acknowledge the beauty and purity of nature.

This nostalgia of innocence reveals its loss because of the passing of time. An adult progressively loses the innate innocence and spontaneity he or she has *a priori* before the edification of the individuality through social education. Nevertheless, social education was not granted the same way to everyone. When it came to imbeciles for instance, there was paradoxically no possibility for them to change their natural disposition. It is dramatically ironical: while innocence and spontaneity were praised and valorised, they were shaken by social education. And while imbecility was supposed to be got rid of, imbeciles were cloistered in asylums, such as Caterham asylum near London. They were kept in ostracism, far from

[597] FEDI, *op. cit*.

socialisation. People were confined in blocks, all looking alike, which was extremely dehumanising.[598] In their cases, their education was fixed and kept in its natural form only.

During the Victorian era, there is also another standpoint on childhood. With the impregnation of Evangelism, there was the growing desire to use the absence of codes and habits in the child to format him or her according to religious and moral standards. That is for instance Helen's wish for her son in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*; she laments on the bad habits he is starting to acquire by following the bad example of his father. Thus, she wishes to change his disposition while he is still very young. The desire to mould a child's disposition also questions the origins of this disposition. Indeed, some habits may derive from a child's innate and natural disposition, and within these innate inclinations we may find genetics. In this case, there is a combination of the social education of the parents – Arthur Huntingdon's propensity to drink in our case study – and of the natural education of their child, because of the transmission of habits in the genes. However, there is also the hypothesis that a child's habit is built through the process of imitation. In *Agnes Grey,* Tom Bloomfield copies his father and his uncle's behaviour, notably by belittling the governess, the servants and all the women in his close surroundings.

And this imitation is a human conduct. There is a need to find an equilibrium between natural education and social education. Nevertheless, in Anne's novels for examples, the omnipresence and omnipotence of religious morality prevents the characters from nurturing their natural dispositions. Their social education is multidimensional. There is first the need for "socialisation," or mixing with the other outside of the familial house. It was a widespread habit for aristocratic families during the Victorian era, as the "etiquette" required that their daily life would be about leisure and pleasure, epitomised for instance in balls or receptions. During these social events, there was a strict code to respect. Young girls and young boys' educations were oriented towards the satisfaction of this code. Thus, the social education is gendered from a young age, and the social requirements for women were the most clearly defined, especially in *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. In both novels, the end of the young women's educations is their shining in society. Truth and knowledge rely on superficial motives, all governed by the end of beauty. Herbert Spencer summarises: "In the treatment of both mind and body, the decorative element has continued to predominate in a greater degree among

[598] Pete BARHAM, 'St. Lawrence's Hospital, Caterham' *County Asylums*. 2020 2003, online, Internet, 1 Apr. 2021. Available: https://www.countyasylums.co.uk/caterham-mental-hospital/.

women than among men."[599] A young woman was supposed to be beautiful and graceful, and to please men. Indeed, Victorian feminine education was oriented towards men's purpose: "Women's history first saw women as victims of an ideology which served men, and drew on men's prescriptive writings about women's place."[600] As a consequence, the cultivation of a young woman's mind was perceived as useless and even time consuming or dangerous, because it would make her question her position and long for other accomplishments. This fear also reveals the fact that social codes and social education are constructions, which can be easily destroyed when acknowledged and rejected.

A dichotomy is created between the education of the mind and the education of the body. Indeed, intellectual instruction was limited to men, and the public sphere. Therefore, the Victorian society was a structure based on a Manichean division between men and women, the mind and the body. Paradoxically, the nineteenth century marked the progressive acknowledgement of the interdependent relationship of the mind and the body, with scientific discoveries proving that the origin of physical diseases could be mental, and the other way round. Scientists such as the Scottish physician William Culler associated both the mind and the body in the nervous system.[601] Consequently, privileging one side and denying the other would only prevent identity from being fully accomplished.

Thus, through this point of view, the education of young men and young women during the nineteenth century could not evolve, if one side of their selves remained uneducated. *A priori*, there could not seem to be any change possible. In Anne's novels, the characters all seem stuck in their social role and hierarchy. Even when there is an attempt to challenge the pre-established aspects of education, Anne quickly shows the limits of reform. Even if in *Agnes Grey* Agnes is desirous to instruct the Bloomfields' children, and later the Murrays' girls principally, she does not have a chance, considering that even the parents – first source of authority over the children – follow the social behaviours required from the aristocracy. In the same vein, in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* Helen wishes to reform her son's love for alcohol but her husband – the represent of authority in the house – eradicates her attempts right away. As social education is not innate, it can be controlled. And the control is carried out by the social elite, and by the dominating gender. Therefore, only aristocratic men could have the power to

[599] Herbert SPENCER, *Education: Intellectual, Moral and Physical*, vols (London: Williams & Norgate, 1911), 3.
[600] Sheldon A. SILVERMEN, 'Review: The Bonds of Womanhood by Nancy F. Cott: "Woman's Sphere" In New England, 1780-1835' *The Journal of Educational Thought (JET) / Revue de la Pensée Éducative*. 11 (1977): 281–283, 281.
[601] HALEY, *op. cit*, 25.

change the codes of education, and they were obviously not willing to, as they benefited from the situation.

In order to break the vicious circle of male domination, some nineteenth century women started to use some techniques. Activists such as Frances Power Cobbe used journalism to expose their vindications for the defence of women. At that time, she exposed herself as a radical feminist struggling against patriarchy. But women who decided to fight publicly and to unveil their identities were mocked and not taken seriously. That is why other women considered that they had to use men's techniques and to proceed anonymously in order to have a chance to be heard. In the legacy of social writers such as Charles Dickens, Anne Brontë used her writing skills to expose her vision of society and published her work through a masculine name: Acton Bell. Even though there were suspicions about the potential feminine identity of the author, the mask she put on to remain unknown allowed her no to be censored directly. In this case, the readers' ignorance was beneficial; it prevented them from having any *a priori* cliché before opening the novel. And this neutrality was crucial, as Anne's art was in line with other nineteenth century writers, who wanted truth to be exposed through a realistic and didactic literature. Moreover, the democratisation and the spreading of literature among a growing middle-class would make the impact greater. Thus, in the nineteenth century art started to be used as a political tool. Realism emerged in the nineteenth century in Britain, in parallel with other social literary movements, such as naturalism. In the Cambridge Dictionary, the movement is described as: "showing people and experiences as they really are, instead of suggesting that they are better than they really are or representing them in a fixed style."[602] This definition echoes that of realism. Yet, naturalism encompasses new aspects, such as the psychological facet, if we pay attention to the French dominant figure of naturalism: Emile Zola. In the preface to *La Fortune des Rougon,* he comments on the fact that he is eager to show how:

> The slow succession of accidents of nerve and blood declare themselves in a race as the result of a primary organic lesion, and determine according to his surroundings in each of the individuals that compose it, the feelings, desires, passions, all the human manifestations, natural and instinctive, to whose products we give the conventional names, virtues and vices.[603]

[602] Cambridge Dictionary.
[603] Quoted in B. W. WELLS, 'Zola and Literary Naturalism' *The Sewanee Review*. 1 (1893): 385–401, 385.

This quotation informs us on Zola's commitment to human psychological depths through the depiction of the fictional family named Rougon. Zola brings realism one step further, by studying with meticulousness not only society and its hierarchisation, but also the functioning of the human psyche. Zola aims at enlightening his readers on the knowledge of this psyche. Through this scientific approach, Zola conciliates literature and science, giving thus more credit to the literary knowledge. Artistic knowledge cannot be absolute and objective, but if it is combined with scientific research, it acquires more legitimacy. Furthermore, the study of the psychological dimension and its reflection in fiction touches everyone. As Zola underlines it, he wants to work on "all the human manifestations," which know no class nor gender barriers. We find the democratic dimension in Zola's naturalism then, but actually it is present in the very essence of literature as an art.

As epitomised by Jacques Derrida, literature is democratic through the freedom of speech it provides. And thanks to this freedom of speech, writers may say what they want. With the creation of a fictional world, writers have the possibility to alter the reality. Even if most of the nineteenth century writers aimed at depicting the truth as synonymous with reality, they resorted to other literary devices. In his or her fiction, a writer controls the use of language and the narratology. Anne for instance decided to insist on the point of view of the governess in *Agnes Grey*, instead of giving the reader a point of comparison through the point of view of her employers. Another central element is that Anne's protagonists in both *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* are women. Therefore, Anne did not derive from reality as it was, but she decided what to do with this reality. Thanks to her fiction, Anne could then express her own identity as an individual, but also as a woman struggling to make her voice heard in a patriarchal nineteenth century society. Therefore, fiction may offer new possibilities, more possibilities for a greater number of people. *Agnes Grey* insists on a young middle-class woman's struggle to be recognised in society. Actually, Agnes' struggle even starts when she cannot be recognised and accepted as a capable woman. The senior Mrs Bloomfield seriously questions her son about Agnes: "Do you think, my dear, she's a *proper person* [sic]*?*"[604] The use of italics highlights the gravity of the interrogation. Before seeking for recognition, Agnes needs acceptance of her value, even though she does not belong to the aristocratic world. Rather than being class oriented, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* related a young woman's struggle to eradicate the stereotypes around aristocratic women. Thus, both novels are complementary, and when joined together, might have a more universal dimension. Furthermore, each reading can bring another

[604] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 37.

interpretation to Anne' work, so that her freedom of speech is the starting point of the reader's freedom of mind. Even though both novels are concentrated on women, the novels do not neither present only evil masculine figures. In *Agnes Grey*, Mr Weston could be the perfect gentleman, repeated in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* through the figure of Walter Hargrave. Thus, Anne's focus was not essentially on feminism, but more on the human. However, Victorian society did not conceive equality in terms of humanity, but in terms of social status. Anne did not agree with these inequalities and used fiction to depict it.

Indeed, by giving a representation of society and principally of the inequalities inherent to the Victorian era, Anne created a vivid criticism which aimed at raising consciousnesses. Political literature is a means to make people realise their condition, it instructs them on their situation, which leads them to desire an improvement. Their awareness triggers the enrichment of their knowledge and the desire to make society evolve. Helen's description of her unhappy first marriage must have led some women to realise the injustice of their own situation. There are leitmotifs in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* which were probably recurrent vices during Victorian times. Violence, alcohol, and adultery are Helen's challenges, but her case is obviously not isolated. Thus, the realisation of women's mistreatment engenders a movement of rejection. The rejection is physical in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* because Helen literally escapes and finds refuge in Wildfell Hall where she exclaims with relief: "I am free and safe at last!"[605] But the rejection can be intellectual too. Some women must have stood against their inferior position by denying the social education required for and of them. Helen for instance, at different moments in the novel, defies her husband's point of view. When at the beginning of their marriage he reveals to his wife the affair he has had with a married woman, Helen does not hesitate to tell him her opinion: "If you had told me these things before, Arthur, I never should have given you the chance."[606] Agnes tries to assert her point of view too. When Mr Bloomfield reproaches her with letting the children play outside in the snow, she stands against him: "Then, sir, you must call them yourself, if you please, for they won't listen to me."[607] She dares to use the modal "must" which expresses the obligation. Both protagonists reject the identity they are supposed to endorse, and therefore they abolish the established codes by challenging the hierarchy. Both Agnes and Helen elevate themselves to the level of the leading figures: aristocratic men. Fiction places everyone on the same horizontal axis.

[605] BRONTE, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, op. cit,* 394.
[606] *Ibid*, 222.
[607] BRONTE, *Agnes Grey, op. cit,* 37.

In that case, it seems that Anne's art managed to reconcile the class and gender separations in terms of education and knowledge. Yet, there are some limits to the theory. The power to choose how to represent reality in fiction leads to a "selective representation,"[608] which cannot be considered as absolute truth. Once again, artistic knowledge derives from the artist's subjectivity at first. It challenges for instance John Keats' assertion: "beauty is truth"[609] in his poem "Ode to a Grecian Urn". Even though it is the beauty of nature which is represented, it is only a subjective copy from reality, a singular representation deriving from the artist's interpretation. Thus, in the case of Anne Brontë and her desire to touch a larger public, the quest for social identity seems also compromised in this context. Even though the democratic quality of her novels tends to allow everyone to redefine his or her place in society, and to rebuild and re-educate his or her social identity, nothing can guarantee that the basis of this new social education is fairer and more objective than before, as once again it comes from the subjectivity of one or several writers. Moreover, in the case of Anne Brontë this is the subjectivity of a Victorian woman wishing to assert herself. Therefore, her vision of society is obviously biased by her familial and social context. As a consequence, the universal identification to her writing, be it extremely realistic, remains complicated.

The subjectivity of art might be a reason why some artistic movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century aroused to criticise the use of art as a political and social tool. George P. Landow explains the nature of the movement of aestheticism, which emerged in the nineteenth century. Drawing its inspiration from the French artistic movement "L'Art pour l'Art," aestheticism: "meant that art should avoid social, political, and moral themes and concentrate instead on creating beauty, so it really meant "art for the sake of beauty and its elevating effects.""[610] Therefore, there is a desire to go back to the ideal of beauty, instead of the growing didacticism of art, and mainly literature in the nineteenth century. Indeed, Landow develops on the idea of M. H. Abrams that a piece of art should be considered for the artist's sake, without the interference of any socio-political context. This movement – *inter alia* – aims at disconnecting instruction from art, so that art remains synonymous with beauty and pleasure, pleasure in the creation for the artist, and pleasure in the contemplation for the spectator. From this assumption we may deduce – by considering the division the other way round – that in the

[608] Richard SHIFF, 'Art History and the Nineteenth Century: Realism and Resistance' *The Art Bulletin*. 70 (1988): 25–48, 33.
[609] KEATS, *op. cit*.
[610] George P. LANDOW, 'Aesthetes, Decadents, and the Idea of Art for Art's Sake' *The Victorian Web*. online, Internet, 30 Mar. 2021. Available: https://victorianweb.org/decadence/artsake.html.

process of instruction, no pleasure can be felt, if it is restricted to the artistic field. In this case, instruction becomes only useful, in terms of acquisition of scientific knowledge, and no longer agreeable. However, if we consider Ruskin's statement, instruction and pleasure should not be dissociated, as pleasure favours instruction:

> The entire object of true education is to make people not merely do the right things, but enjoy the right things — not merely industrious, but to love industry — not merely learned, but to love knowledge — not merely pure, but to love purity — not merely just, but to hunger and thirst after justice.[611]

As a consequence, if instruction needs pleasure, pleasure might also be instructive. If we assent to this theory of interdependency between instruction and pleasure, the pleasure felt while observing and studying a work of art may also be instructive, without entailing the denaturing neither of the work of art, nor of the artist. Contrariwise, art may help to serve a political cause, such as feminism. Linda Nochlin spells out the link between art and politics in her essay "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" She excludes the answer which assumes women's natural intellectual inferiority. Actually, she tries and offers different solutions, and eventually concludes that there is no solution to be found, but the question *per se* should be considered. She argues:

> The fault lies not in our stars, our hormones, our menstrual cycles, or our empty internal spaces, but in our institutions and our education--education understood to include everything that happens to us from the moment we enter this world of meaningful symbols, signs, and signals.[612]

This quotation is a direct reference to Caesar' words when he addresses his son Brutus in Shakespeare's play *Julius Caesar*. Nochlin means that the problem does not come from women, but from our social education which has conditioned us and which has largely discouraged women from accomplishing first, and then from showing their accomplishments. Thus, she inspires women, and encourage them: "*women* must conceive of themselves as potentially, if not actually, equal subjects [sic]."[613] The self-confidence is necessary to stand out in a masculine society. Nochlin insists on the courage women need to be able to assert themselves, more than men, as society is not prepared to accept women as "great artists."

[611] John RUSKIN, *Unto This Last and Other Writings*, (London: Penguin UK, 2005), **93**.
[612] NOCHLIN, *op. cit*, 5.
[613] *Ibid*, 6.

Nochlin also explains that: “the Great Artist is, of course, conceived of as one who has "Genius".[614] In the Cambridge Dictionary, “genius” is defined as a: “very great and rare natural ability or skill, especially in a particular area such as science or art […].”[615] The word “great” associated with “art” echo Nochlin’s theory that a “great artist” has “genius.” Moreover, “genius” is clearly understood as “natural” in this definition. Consequently, it is granted by nature, and social education has nothing to do with it. We may then deduce that men and women may have genius, indifferently, regardless of social indoctrinations which condition us.

Regarding the feminist cause, Anne Brontë has been called a genius. The British journalist and writer Lucy Mangan has written an article in *The Guardian* intitled “The Forgotten Genius: Why Anne Wins the Battle of the Brontës.” To support her theory, she uses the British writer May Sinclair’s words: “Anne Brontë attacks her problem with a freedom and audacity before which her sisters’ boldest enterprises seem cowardly and restrained. Her behaviour is revolutionary.”[616] The connotation of the last word is strong, and what May Sinclair refers to is perhaps the idea that Anne Brontë was the first one to stand out and speak up against the criticism, whereas Charlotte for instance tried to discredit Anne after her death by stopping the publication of the novel. Her words on Anne’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* are harsh: ““Wildfell Hall” it hardly appears desirable to preserve. The choice of subject in that work is a mistake.”[617] Charlotte was maybe less bold than Anne, or at least less ready to confront the critique. In fact, when Anne was accused of overwhelming coarseness and exaggeration mainly after the publication of her second novel, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, she reacted personally in the preface to the second edition:

> I wished to tell the truth, for truth always conveys its own moral to those who are able to receive it. But as the priceless treasure too frequently hides at the bottom of a well, it needs some courage to dive for it, especially as he that does so will be likely to incur more scorn and obloquy for the mud and water into which he has ventured to plunge, than thanks for the jewel he procures.[618]

[614] *Ibid*, 7.
[615] Cambridge Dictionary.
[616] Lucy MANGAN, ‘The Forgotten Genius: Why Anne Wins the Battle of the Brontës’ *The Guardian*. , 2016, online, Internet, 30 Dec. 2019. Available: https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/mar/23/being-the-brontes-bbc-lucy-mangan-anne-bronte.
[617] Nick HOLLAND, ‘An Entire Mistake: The Suppression Of The Tenant Of Wildfell Hall’ *Anne Brontë*. , 2 Apr. 2017, online, Internet, 1 Apr. 2021. , Available: https://www.annebronte.org/2017/04/02/an-entire-mistake-the-suppression-of-the-tenant-of-wildfell-hall/.
[618] HOLLAND, ‘Anne Brontë’s Preface To The Tenant Of Wildfell Hall,’ *op. cit*.

In her preface, Anne decided to stand against her detractors, by re-asserting her desire to tell the truth, and mostly to spread it. Without arguing whether or not it worked and still works, we may affirm that her boldness has had an impact. The specialist Nick Holland uses May Sinclair's metaphor to show this impact on society: "the slamming of Helen's bedroom door against her husband reverberated throughout Victorian England."[619] Anne was actually one of the firsts to write the truth about a woman misguided and trapped in an unhappy marriage, which epitomises the indoctrination and imprisonment of society at large.

[619] Nick HOLLAND, 'IWD: May Sinclair And The Three Brontës' *Anne Brontë*. , 2020, online, Internet, 1 Apr. 2021. Available: https://www.annebronte.org/2020/03/08/iwd-may-sinclair-and-the-three-brontes/.

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