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**The Status of Women in the Victorian Age
through Anne Bronte's *Agnes Grey* (1847)**

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of the requirements for Master's degree in Literature and Civilization*

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Dedications

I dedicate this work from all my heart to my dear parents, Djamel eddine and Nawel for their love, patience, continuous encouragement and support

To my soul mate and best friend, Serhan Zahra, for supporting and believing in me.

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Abstract

The Victorian era was a significant period in the English history, it changed England radically in almost every aspect. Most noticeably this age marked the rise of women's awareness about their rights and potentials. This social awareness was in turn reflected in literature. Indeed, this was a time during which women were pleading to be given voice and to be listened to in order to achieve something of their own. Similar to many other female Victorian writers, the Bronte sisters were part of this ongoing struggle. The present research specifically focuses on Anne Bronte's novel - *Agnes Grey* in which the protagonist is a Victorian woman who worked as a governess. The target objective is to show the status of the Victorian woman and to portray her battle against the oppression and prejudices of her society. Within this perspective, Agnes defies patriarchal norms and traditions that regarded her as a domestic servant rather than a scholar and an educator. In terms of intellectuality and moral propriety, she outperforms her cruel and egoistic employers, who constantly ignored her needs and sentiments due to her social standing as a governess.

Keywords: Victorian age, women, *Agnes Grey*, governess

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General Introduction

General Introduction

The Victorian era was a period in British history in when Queen Victoria ruled from 1837 until she died in 1901. It was a controversial age, a time of prosperity, poverty of morality, and social protest. It witnessed the significant advancement of technology and industry. The growing Urbanization of England brought railways, manufacturing developments and wealth to the country that became the first industrial and financial nation in the world as well as the world's leading imperial power. Such advancements, however, turned England into a class-based society. In fact, although peace and prosperity were there, there were still issues within the social structure. As a result, Victorian society was divided into two nations: the rich and the poor.

This era was also known for the marginalization of women who faced many difficulties because of the vision of the ideal woman held by society. Progressively, women's status changed as a result of the continuous claims and protests of women to enjoy equal rights. According to the predominant traditional culture, women were expected to take care of household chores and children while men worked outside. In such society, there was a strong presence of male dominance. Women were expected to obey blindly men's desires and wishes without objection until the revolution's appearance which contributed in spreading awareness among women, and therefore, allowed them to work and earn money. Working women, however, did not only share the financial burden; their lives were no longer restricted to houses and children.

During the reign of Victoria, women were deprived of their rights, abused, and oppressed due to policies that included discriminatory laws. Women could not vote, own property, or hold professional jobs apart from teachers, domestic servants, factory workers, or agricultural laborers.(Mitchell, 2009).

The English society did not hold the belief that women required formal education. This latter was generally reserved for men only. Thus, it was uncommon to find women in skilled jobs requiring a higher or intermediate level of education. At the time, women were generally expected to be housekeepers or homemakers. Therefore, the changes in this period made the reign of Victoria the most progressive

in English history (Fletcher, 2020). There were changes in politics, society, and economy, as well as in the character of the English nation, all of which affected the standards of life. Most of the known classics of that time were written by Victorian writers, including Anne Bronte (1820-1849), a famous Victorian woman writer; Pseudo named Acton Bell.

During the Victorian era, the existence of governesses held a unique position and became a social phenomenon in England. The governess became a popular character. Many novelists drew on their own experiences as governesses. Anne Bronte, who is the essence of this research, is an excellent example of this category. Anne Bronte depicted the life of a governess in her first novel *Agnes Grey* through her female main character, Agnes Grey. (Rochmah, 2015).

In the story Anne Bronte depicts herself. She was the youngest girl in her family, consisting of her father and mother, her siblings, two sisters and one brother. Agnes decided to work as a governess to help her family which was facing a financial unrest. However, she did not get the support because no one believed in her capacity. Her family always considered her a child no matter how grown up she was but eventually, she managed to impose herself. As part of examining the status of women during the Victorian age, the present work seeks to answer the following research questions:

-What status did women hold in Victorian society?

-How did Anne Bronte depict the status and the struggle of the Victorian woman in her novel *Agnes Grey*?

These two fundamental questions within this research are to be addressed from historical and feminist perspectives. The present dissertation is divided into two main chapters. The first one provides an overview and a historical background of Victorian society. In short, it attempts to shed light on the Victorians, the general conditions in which they lived, and their beliefs and thoughts. It also focuses on women and how they were seen and treated during this era. The second chapter is devoted to the

practical side of the work. It seeks to display the status of women in the novel *Agnes Grey*. Brontë's novel has a simple plot; it is the story of the personal development of a young governess. It exposes the sad reality of the daily lives of women. Within this line of thought, the focus of analysis is centred on the major character - Agnes - who represents the new independent Victorian woman.

Chapter One

Victorian Society and Literature

1.1 Introduction

Prior to dive in any study of a given literary work, it is a requisite to make an investigation about the period and society in which the writer lived as well as people and their lifestyle, traditions and social norms. Within this vein of thought, this chapter will deal with Victorian society during the nineteenth century focusing on the social and economic sides. It fundamentally seeks to highlight the position of women in England in their conservative society by evoking women's literature and its major trends and tendencies, and it is within this area that the Bronte sisters are introduced.

1.2 English Society in Victorian Era

The 19th century is known as the Victorian age. This period changed the course of British history; it was characterized by many changes in society, economy, and the status of women. It was the period of the reign of Queen Victoria, who ruled for sixty years.

The novelist Charles Dickens, in his opening lines of his famous novel *A Tale of Two Cities*, describes the reign of Queen Victoria as a period of extreme contradiction.

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way in short the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only. (Dickens, 1921, p.3)

1.2.1 Social Life in the 19 th Century

The Victorian era was marked by fast change and development in practically every sector. This quick shift had a significant impact on the country's attitude over time: a period that began with optimism and confidence, leading to economic development and prosperity, eventually gave way to uncertainty and doubt about Britain's standing in the world .(Shepherd, 2001).

British society in the 19th century comprised a hierarchical structure that enveloped the upper, middle, and working classes. This difference in social classes can be explained by wealth, education, working and living conditions (Michell, 2009). Hence, the basic quality of daily life in Victorian England was built on basic structures related to class, shaped by traditional rural and urban lifestyles and city life. Also, the classes lived in different areas, and Victorians believed each class had its own standards, and people were expected to fit the role of their class. The Industrial Revolution marked a fundamental shift in Victorian England. It had a significant impact on society, including the mass migration of workers from agricultural areas to industrial cities, where they lived in new urban slums. As a consequence of a rapid increase in the population, figures in Great Britain jumped from 15.74 million in 1801 to 27.39 million in 1851. That led to a demand for factory jobs for women and children, in severe working conditions; they were employed to scramble under machinery, retrieve cotton bobbins, and work in mines and other manufacturing plants. (Khan, 2017).

The working class was the lowest social class, with agricultural laborers, domestic servants, and factory workers representing most of the population. They were encountered in various sectors, both skilled and unskilled, including mining, fishing, transportation, industry, and other manual labors. Furthermore, their main concern was earning enough money to stay alive while combating poverty and illness. Printers, bookbinders, and shoemakers were among the skilled workers who formed up 15% of the working class. (Mitchell, 2009). Many children had not given the chance to attend

school during that time, and half of them grew up unable to read or write and ended up in a workhouse, which sheltered and nourished people who were unable to sustain themselves and were otherwise forced to work. Boys and girls were required to start working at a very young age, and they often helped with the work done by older family members. As communities grew fast, living standards deteriorated.

The new industrial cities were densely populated, filthy, and unclean, with poor housing conditions for the working class. Furthermore, the Industrial Revolution had a negative impact on women's working conditions. They had to work in farms, drill, and pick cotton, and when the demand for labor expanded with the industrial revolution, they switched to mines. The fortunate women became maids for upper-class families, if they were married, they might be a servant, but if they were single, they could be teachers or governesses (Mitchell, 2009).

Moreover, the newly emerging middle class was made up of large shopkeepers, businessmen, doctors, lawyers, retailers, and clergy, who were distanced from the working class. As a result of the shift from a commercial to an industrial society, the middle class grew in size as the number of industrialists and factory owners increased. Following the Reform Bill of 1832, which gave all males who owned property the right to vote, it became more important politically (Mitchells, 2009). They were central to the nineteenth-century Bourgeois identity and were absorbed by politicians and social commentators (Williams, 2004). After 1832, the middle classes began to gain political clout.

Their political representation and the monarchy's power limitations relied significantly on their family's inherited property to protect their physical well-being and social prestige. Over and above, middle-class women may work as housewives or general servants in their relatives' homes. It was a method used by middle-class households to keep adult women from commercial or professional pursuits (William, 2004).

The industrial development impacted the upper class, which was wealthy and dominant, and its elites and aristocrats controlled the majority of state clout. The

British aristocracy became heavily involved in the construction of mining, canals, and railways due to the advent of industrialization. As landowners, they were in charge of the majority of the agricultural countries. Further, their lives were pleasant; they lived in a rural mansion with a large staff and a landed estate as a source of income, then, land would be passed down to the eldest son, who was expected to do something useful, for instance, participate in parliament or local matters.

Upper-class women did not usually work; they were expected to stay at home until they married. It was also expected of them to have a large number of kids. Upper-class ladies would hire nursemaids instead of feeding their kids alone. They used to look after the children in the first few years of their lives, and then they would be educated at home by private tutors. (Dehak, 2018)

1.2.2 Economic Field in the 19th Century

The nineteenth century was characterized by economic expansion, rapid changes in industrial techniques and production, and new technologies (Carter, McRae, 1997). It was a period of significant prosperity for the British economy, as the country was the catalyst for the Industrial Revolution; thus, it became the world's workshop through mining raw materials, converting them into commodities, and then selling them to other European countries (Mc Dowell, 1989). Actually, industry was displacing agriculture as the foundation of the British economy, while new technologies and machinery were displacing manual labor to some extent. Because of the Industrial Revolution, Britain's huge empire transformed it into a dominant world power (Mitchell, 2009).

The Industrial Revolution was at its peak, an era of economic and technological progress brought about by the use of steel, new energy sources, and factory systems that in turn gave rise to machinery and enhanced outputs. Also, communication fields (railroad lines, telegraph) and the train aided business growth and significantly reduced the distance between cities (Mitchell, 2009).

The Industrial Revolution was the most significant beneficial event that Britain could have wished for; it transformed England from a traditional to an industrial civilization, opening the door to prosperity. England rose to a position of global influence and strength as a vast empire. It was the world's workshop thanks to its large exporters and importers, as well as its imperialists, and, as a result, its economic strength.

To recall, the Victorian era lasted for a long period of time during which the United Kingdom became an industrialized and urbanized country. Yet, it is worth noting that unemployment, poverty, unrest, and appalling working conditions for women and children characterized the 1830s and 1840s. The mid-Victorian period (1848–1870) was a time of prosperity, stability, and optimism. On the other hand, the Late Victorian Period (1870–1901) witnessed the decline of Victorian values; British imperialism; the Boer War; the Irish question; and Bismarck's Germany, which became a rival power. In addition, this period witnessed an enormous development in machinery, resulting in a lack of work for the working class. Thousands of women were forced into prostitution due to poor working conditions and unemployment (Mitchell, 2009).

All in all, the industrial progress of the country especially in the beginning and mid years of the nineteenth century was characterized by the supremacy of the British manufactured products that dominated global trade. This is because the majority of mass-produced goods were created more efficiently and cost-effectively in Britain than in the rest of the world. (Sbia & Hadj Abdelkader, 2016).

1.3 The Status of Women in the 19th Century

The Victorian era was a time of male dominance in all aspects of life. Women had no legal rights over their property; their husbands or fathers rather had. Women were instead intended to do housework, take care of their children, and be the angels of their homes. According to this male dominant ideology, their space was limited to home.

Commenting on this status of females during this age, Klein (1949) writes that “innocence and inexperience and a cultivated fragility were the characteristics attribute of the Victorian girls” (p.264). Considering England's dreadful socioeconomic conditions, the status of women in the 19th century is generally perceived as being contradictory par excellence. Because of the vision shared by society of the ideal woman, they faced several and severe challenges. Women were needy of their rights; they were abused, and oppressed due to a number of enacted and practiced policies that included gender -discriminatory laws.

Owing to the fact that society did not believe that women needed formal education, this latter was mainly and exclusively reserved for men. Women were expected to be housekeepers or homemakers. Their role was typically limited to being wives or mothers responsible for their children and keeping their husbands' home order. Furthermore, women's rights and responsibilities could not be generalized because they differ depending on woman's income status. Their social status determined the pattern of their lives and the conditions they endured. (Khan, 2017)

1.3.1. Education in the 19 th centery

Education was one of women's target goals and aspirations. It was a predominant belief that females cannot learn the same way as males. Some of them were lucky enough to be homeschooled, but most of them had no official and formal education at all (Dehak, 2018). The main organizing principles of Victorian society were gender and class. Victorian gender ideology was premised on the doctrine of separate spheres. This orientation of thought implied the fact that men and women were different. Men were physically strong, independent, they belong to the public sphere and were meant to participate in politics and in paid work . While women were considered weak , dependent, they belonged to the private spheres, and were meant to run households and raise their families only.

Women were allowed to have specific education to become good wives and to learn proper etiquette. Their education was designed to teach middle and upper-class

girls enough to make them acceptable marriage material for males. And they were given this education at home by poorly trained governesses. This includes sewing, needlework, drawing, dancing, music, foreign languages, and history.

However, women who had devoted themselves enthusiastically to intellectual pursuits were considered unfeminine and off-putting. Their education was intended to make them better wives, not to change their lives. In addition, the academic study was believed to be against women's nature and that too much information could harm women's fertility. They were discouraged from pursuing educational goals for fear of losing their loyalty to their homes. Church officials frequently opposed women's higher education, as they claimed that it contradicted biblical precepts (Dehak, 2018).

1.3.2 Marriage in the 19 th century

Because of the predominance of the patriarchal logic, women during this age were rarely allowed to be independent from their families' circle. In addition; all their belongings and possessions would be given to their husbands once they got married. Purvis (2001) reports that any income they had was handed to their husbands.

As a result, the man was the only person who could legally represent this corporation. Women must grant her husband's rights to what her body has produced. Women were seen as machines when it comes to children and domestic duties.

When a woman got married, she was likely to lose the little civil rights she previously had since she became one body with her partner. This stemmed from the belief and yet from the practice that women have no legal rights to hold property in comparison to males. However, the years 1870 and 1882 marked the enactment of the *Women's Property Acts* that granted women the right to own property. Prior to marriage, they had their own salaries and also their own property (Klára Vlčková, 2007).

1.3.3. Work in the 19 th Century

Women faced challenges in various sectors; they lacked sufficient rights. They were not allowed to vote, possess property, or work in professions other than teaching or as domestic servants, factory employees, or agricultural laborers. (Mitchell, 2009) their rights were severely constrained in this age .The highest position a woman could hold was that of a teacher, whereas males were allowed to do whatever they chose. They had few career prospects, even if they desired one. Most of them had to choose between being a governess or a teacher. During this time, women were paid less than their male counterparts who worked with them, putting them in a precarious financial situation. They were not found in skilled trade professions; if they were involved in work, this was in jobs that did not require higher education.

In the nineteenth century, women's status and rights were highly unsecure. Many of their rights were ignored, and they received little in return for their efforts in society. They mostly worked at home, caring for their families while their husbands were at work. Women were not regarded as capable of performing work-related duties and were unable to create and pursue their careers. In addition, society provided few opportunities for unmarried Victorian women. Poor women had to work as domestic maids, farm laborers, or manufacturing workers to earn good living conditions. Governess, school teacher, or companion to a wealthy woman was the only "genteel" vocations offered to average middle-class women (Drahotuská, 2013).

1.4 Victorian Literature

The phrase "Victorian literature" refers to English literature written during the reign of Queen Victoria (1837–1901). The nineteenth century is widely considered as being the Golden Age of English literature, especially in fiction. The novel became the leading literary genre of the English literary sphere .The literature of the age was a

fertile ground that evoked and reflected the major tendencies such as, the conflict between science and religion, morality, revolt, and the new forms of education.

Over the six decades of Queen Victoria's reign, some 60.000 works of prose fiction were published. This growth was partly due to the spread of education, the emergence of the middle classes, and the proliferation of more affordable reading materials, as the percentage of the literate population hugely increased. The need for new genres of literature grew as well, a demand that was supplied by almost 7000 authors, such as: George Eliot, Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell, the Bronte Sisters ... etc. Queen Victoria ascended to the throne amid the world's first Industrial Revolution, a significant change and progress period that enormously impacted literature and literary productions.

The rise of the railway network, combined with advancements in communication systems, resulted in a boom in print output and dissemination. Novels dominated the Victorian literary marketplace, first appearing in the standard three-volume format. However, these triple dickers were expensive for the middle and working classes. As consequence, the dominant publishing format for the era made novels more affordable to the growing masses of new readers. Novelists like Charles Dickens, William Thackeray, and George Eliot serialized their work by publishing their novels in a combination of installments. The writers frequently ended each installment on a cliff hanger, making the reader anxious for the next episodes. The writers were impelled to depict life, as it affected them, representing a social reality told through adventure tales, science fiction, etc.

The development of science profoundly influenced the literature of the Victorian era. Non-fiction works, from philosophical writings to political essays, made their mark on the literature of that period. Following Romanticism, Victorian poets were influenced by the themes of the previous era. Writers developed works that reflected and criticized the religious, economic, social, and philosophical ideas of the time. On the other hand, stories were intended as messages to convey moral lessons to the audience. Following the Romantic resurgence, the Victorian era entered a new

phase. The literature of this period reflected a mix of pure romance and brutal realism. Though this era produced many great poets, it is equally remembered for the quality of its writing. Its literature tended to mirror the practical challenges and interests of everyday life. It has developed into a potent tool for human advancement. Industrialism was on the rise socially and economically, as were many reform movements such as emancipation, child labor and women's rights evolution (Baba Ahmed & Benazza, 2017).

The British Empire expanded imperially during the nineteenth century, a development that did not go unnoticed nor unquestioned by authors at the end of Victoria's reign. The British Empire had extended over about one-fifth of the earth's surface, encompassing almost a quarter of the world's population; explorers, soldiers, and colonial administrators, among others who traveled in the service of the empire, produced accounts of their experiences. The legacy left behind by Victorian writers reflected the enormous changes of the period.

1.5 Victorian Women Writers

As previously stated, the Victorian era was a significant phase in the field of literature. It is also worth recalling the fact that men were considered superior to women in every walk of life, not least in literature. Women writers were among the numerous women who opposed these discriminatory notions and practices. (Dehak, 2018). When they decided to leave their comfort zone and become professional authors, women encountered enormous hindrances and severe challenges.

Within such unfavorable circumstances and discouraging conditions, most female writers wrote from personal experiences and addressed various topics, including their social status in British culture, education, divorce, and marriage (Salinovic, 2014). According to Showalter (1977) "female writers such as Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, and George Eliot flourished during the nineteenth century". She added that women writers faced a terrible situation but their writings were the only

chance to resist the patriarchal culture and find ways to critique and stand against women's oppression.

Actually, these female authors utilized their works to emphasize their demands for gender equality and the abolition of injustice and misery. (Baba Ahmed & Benazza, 2017). Women writers addressed their fear and anxiety in society by claiming that women were not inferior to men through their heroines, and in so doing they raised awareness of women's rights. Their stories have powerful heroines who were able to inspire and educate women about the injustices they faced (Sindradottir, 2015). While some Victorian women writers used their names as a signal of authorship, others preferred to sign their work under male pseudonyms because it was tough for women from the lower and middle classes to break into the male-dominated literary world (Carter & McRae, 1997). It is quite hard to cover the heterogeneity of the literary works produced by women during this era. Thus, an attempt was made to shed light on some famous women writers and their literary masterpieces.

1.5.1. George Eliot

George Eliot was the pen name of Mary Ann Evans, one of the outstanding English novelists of the Victorian period. She was born on 22 November 1819 in the rural region of Warwickshire. After the death of her mother in 1836, Eliot was obliged to leave school to help run her father's household. In 1841, she moved with him to Coventry and lived with him there until his death in 1849. Eliot then travelled in Europe, and eventually settled in London. During her early life, Eliot was a Methodist receiving a strict religious schooling, but soon she lost her Christian beliefs altogether, choosing instead to see and consider life as fully determined by one's own choices and most importantly by actions (Grellet, 2000).

The year 1850 marked the beginning of Eliot's contribution to the 'Westminster Review', a famous and leading journal for philosophical radicals. Eliot's devotion to her work enabled her to become the editor of the journal. During this period of time, Eliot

became at the core of a literary circle that, in turn, allowed her to meet with George Henry Lewes, the man with whom she lived until he died in 1878.

Yet, Lewes was a married man and their relationship provoked a scandal. Nonetheless, Lewes was a source of support and encouragement for Eliot to start a brilliant literary career. In 1856, she began '*Scenes of Clerical Life*'. These were basically stories that recount the life of people in her native country town Warwickshire. Eliot's first novel *Adam Bede* was published in 1859 and produced a remarkable success. She opted for a male pen name to guarantee that her writings would be taken seriously at a time when female authors were most often associated with romantic works. (Grellet, 2000).

Eliot's other famous novels include *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), *Silas Marner* (1861), *Romola* (1863), *Middlemarch* (1872) and *Daniel Deronda* (1876). Most of her fiction studies the development of character within a small country community, often in the Midlands that she knew. Within such a realistic background, she provided her readers with a penetrating study of her characters' motivations and feelings, their hesitations and choices between temptation and dignity. She equally strived to display the significance of the social environment in shaping the individual. Her moral concern for her characters, her distinguished sympathy and compassion are most vivid throughout her works. In sum, Eliot's novels follow the moral, spiritual and sentimental progress of sensitive and yet intelligent heroines facing moral crises. Characterised by their detailed portraits of rural and provincial life, her novels sought to show the determining role of the social environment, religion, education and family background in driving the life of people. Eliot died on 22 December 1880 and was buried in Highgate Cemetery in north London.

1.5.2. Elizabeth Gaskell

Elizabeth Cleghorn Stevenson was an English author, and short story writer often referred to as Mrs. Gaskell. Her novels vividly depicted the lives of people from all walks of life in Victorian society, including the impoverished.

She was interested in both social historians and book lovers. (Sbia& Hadj Abdelkader,2016). She was one of Victorian England's most well-known female authors. Her writing shed light on the plight of the working class and other thorny and unpleasant social issues. She was fascinated with social issues, factory workers, and women in general, as evidenced by her novels *North and South*, *Mary Barton*, and *Ruth*. (Dehak, 2018).

Mrs. Gaskell's first novel, *Mary Barton*, was published in 1848 as a diversion from her grief over the loss of a son; as Showalter (1987) points out her attitude represents a trend that turned out to be recurrent among women who became authors in the nineteenth century. In addition, her second novel, *Cranford*, was published in Dickens magazine at irregular intervals from December 1851 to May 1853. In this story, she captured the peaceful and amusing atmosphere of middle-class women living in a small town and the equally quiet disasters. "The society depicted is almost entirely feminine, and the book is a small triumph of literary tact," Allen writes (1991, p. 183). (ibid)

Among other novels and short tales, Mrs. Gaskell released *Ruth* in 1853, a novel about the concealment of an unmarried working-class mother's issue, and *North and South* (1855), another industrial narrative. Mrs. Gaskell continued to conduct fictional examinations of what was referred to as the 'condition of England' question" in the nineteenth century in this story, which contrasts "the industrialized north of England with the more agrarian south" (Gilbert & Gubar, 1996, p. 421)

Finally, Elizabeth was a friend of Charlotte Bronte, Jane Austen, and other female authors who advocated and claimed for gender equality in all aspects of life. (Showalter,1987). She was the one to write the biography of Charlotte Bronte as a request from her father and publish it in 1857.

1.5.3. Bronte Sisters(Charlotte, Emily, Anne)

According to Cuddon(1998), the Bronte sisters first surfaced in the literary market in the 1840s, the writer's decade, when the profession of novelist became recognized in England. Along with Scott, Thackeray, Dickens, Trollope, and Elizabeth Gaskell, they were part of the early Victorian generation of great novelists. (1998), while women were still trying to make a place for themselves within a patriarchal society. There were three successful, brilliant Bronte's authors Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Bronte; more remarkably, were all successful women at a time when women did not have much freedom in their homes or society.

Therefore, their writing was mainly concerned with challenging the social conventions of that time. To better understand the significance of the Bronte sisters for the Victorian era and English fiction, consider Freedman's (1978, p. 28; my translation) argues that when the Romantic movement arrived in England at the end of the 19th century, it first became stronger in poetry—the most representative names were Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelly, and Byron—and was not fertile in novels. However, "the Bronte sisters produced at least two masterpieces of fiction which ought to be comparable to the best poetry of Keats and Shelley" after the initial romantic wave.

They emphasized on the most famous Victorian themes in *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*: disease, death, and misery. In addition, there was a common method for female writers to evade the double standard of criticism directed at novels written by women. Prominent women did not want to be associated with the category of female writers because the phrase was still perceived as derogatory. As a result, they are published under ambiguous pseudonyms, as Showalter demonstrates. The Brontes used their initial letters to hide their names: Charlotte was "Currer Bell," Emily was "Ellis Bell," and Anne was "Acton Bell." (1977).

The Bronte sisters: Charlotte Bronte, the eldest of the three sisters, was an English novelist, probably most famous for *Jane Eyre* (1847); Charlotte had a powerful story of a woman in confronting with her natural wants and social circumstances. The novel offered Victorian fiction a greater sense of realism.

Also, *Shirley* (1849) and *Villette* (1850) were her latter works.

Finally, Emily Bronte, full name Emily Jane Bronte, pseudonym Ellis Bell, was an English novelist and poet who wrote just one novel, *Wuthering Heights* (1847), a highly creative masterpiece of passion and hate set on the Yorkshire moors. Emily Bronte was probably the best of the three Bronte sisters. Still, the chronicle of her life was exceedingly sparse because she was quiet and withdrawn and left no exciting correspondence. Her solo work added to the mystery of her spiritual existence rather than solved it. Anne Bronte's alias was Acton Bell, the younger sister of Charlotte and Emily Bronte. She was an English poet, novelist, and author of *Agnes Grey* (1847) and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848). (Tompkins,nd)

1.6 Conclusion:

To sum up, this chapter has provided a general overview of the Victorian age and people, the social hierarchy, the economic field, and the leading place that Britain enjoyed as a world power. In addition, it tackled the status and position of women in this era. The chapter has paid specific attention to the aspect of education which was banned for women . Moreover, it has briefly mentioned the major literary tendencies of the age, emphasizing the flourishing of the novel. Within this course of thought, women writers such as Elizabeth Gaskell, George Eliot and the Bronte sisters have been introduced.

Chapter Two

Female Struggle in Agnes Grey

2.1. Introduction

This chapter is devoted to the analytical aspect of the present research. In line with the stated objectives, it basically seeks to depict the status of women in the Victorian age through a close reading and examination of Anne Bronte's novel *Agnes Grey*. Anne Bronte is one of the greatest female authors of English literature who took a position as a governess. Her experiences were to a larger extent negative and painful, but they greatly served her as materials for inspiration in penning her novel. In this respect, Langland (1989) rightly notes that "Anne not only took her subjects and techniques from her world, but, like all creative artists, she transformed them." (p.148). In essence, the novel recounts the story of the personal development of a young governess. As such, the novel shows the oppression of Agnes Grey in her family and in society in general. It equally displays the struggle she went through while serving as a governess.

2.2. Anne Bronte's Life

Anne Bronte was born in Thornton in a small village called Yorkshire, England, on January 17, 1820, her father, Patrick Bronte, was the curate of the local church, and Maria Barnwell her mother, died in 1821 after a few months of the birth of Anne because of ovarian cancer. After her mother's death, Aunt Elizabeth Barnwell came to care for her nieces and nephews, the Bronte's children. Who grew up in neighboring Haworth, Anne was the youngest of six children and had four older sisters, Maria, Elizabeth, Charlotte and Emily Jane and one older brother Patrick Barnwell.

In addition, Anne was the only one of her sisters not sent away to the clergy daughter's boarding school at Cowan Bridge. Anne's education mainly came from her father that taught her a love of reading and passionate conviction that women and girls should have the same opportunities to learn as men and boys; this was something she was explicitly addressed in her preface to the second edition of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* : "I wish to tell the truth, for truth always conveys its own moral to those who are able to receive it." (A. Bronte, 1847,p.9)

Anne Bronte, Author's Preface for the Second Edition of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* where she targeted the widespread tendency that keeps women ignorant of everything deemed a harsh truth, most women at the time would have received an education focused on duty, deportment, piano playing and embroidery rather than classics and history. Anne was fortunate to receive a mix of both. She received some formal schooling in her teens. She went to Roe Head School for two years to further her education, and from 1839 and 1845, she worked as a governess for two households. All the Bronte siblings took drawing lessons and were keen visual artists; art, music and reading were essential to the Brontes' lives. Anne the youngest and most biddable family member, was often pressed into service as an artist model. And she died of tuberculosis on May 28, 1849, shortly after the deaths of both Branwell and Emily Bronte.

2.2.1 Anne Bronte's Literary Career

Before launching into the pivotal stages of Anne's literary career, it is quite necessary to note the fact that her style differs from Emily's and Charlotte's in that her literature is less Romantic and more realistic. Both *Agnes Grey*, the protagonist of the named novel, and Anne Bronte, the novelist, are Victorian ladies from the North of England who worked as governesses in wealthy manor houses. (Mallmann, 2018)

In shedding light on the novelist Anne Bronte, it is necessary to go back to her personal life, which is challenging in itself. Anne Bronte was born in Thornton in 1820. Anne and two of her sisters, Emily and Charlotte, were known as poets and writers. When Anne's mother died her aunt Maria raised them, they were always more inclined towards her love of literature. When Anne was four years old her elder sisters Maria, Elizabeth, Charlotte and Emily were sent to school. However, the appalling conditions of that school contributed the deaths of both Maria and Elizabeth from tuberculosis. Anne's father Patrick decided to teach the rest of his children privately at home, with the time they became one unit full of comfort, strength and compassion, their imaginations started to soar through reading and art, they began by writing their stories in form of newspapers and chronically in tiny books, like *Glass Town Confederacy* and the imaginary world *Angria*. When Anne was 11 years old she broke away from her sisters except Emily to start their new adventure in writing and develop

their own fictional island *Gondal*. both *Angria* and *Gondal* were referred to as literary genre, which in the present era belong to speculative fiction or fantasy fiction, they were narrowing a fictional elements ,which were so far from reality, the genre of these stories was close to the romantic style, which was not popular at that time as the realistic style . (Mallman, 2018)

Furthermore, at the age of 19, she left their homeland Haworth and worked as a governess between 1839 and 1845. Then after leaving her teaching position, she fulfilled her literary ambitions. She published a volume of poetry with her sisters (Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell in 1846). However, the first three copies were delivered to Haworth parsonage, which received some favorable reviews but was a dismal failure, with only two copies sold in the first year.

When she decided to write and publish her novel, she knew she was leaving the realm of romance. Her first novel, *Agnes Grey*, was published in the same year her sisters published their novels (1847). Anne selected her own life and wrote her story. *Agnes Grey's* plot contains a variety of characteristics that remind us of the author's life. Agnes is a curate's youngest daughter. When her family's finances become strained, she decides to work as a governess. Agnes' family is not enthusiastic about her plan. For one thing, they come from a time when a woman working was seen as a failure on the part of the family, as they were responsible for the upkeep of unmarried daughters. Agnes is also treated as a child by the family, who doubts her ability to sustain herself. Despite this lack of encouragement, the protagonist is confident in her skills and gets work as the Bloomfield children's governess and then at the Murrays family.

Despite their many similarities, each of the Bronte sisters has her inct style, which is particularly noticeable in Anne Bronte. While Charlotte and Emily's writings are more romantic, incorporating magical and Gothic element, Anne's writing is more realistic. The plots are based on her observations of the individuals in her environment. As a result, Anne's manner may have come across as less appealing to Victorian readers. Nonetheless, Anne Bronte is a brave author; Langland claims that “Anne was, of the sisters, perhaps the most rigorously logical, the most quietly observant, the most

realistic, and, in certain spheres, the most tenacious, the most determined, and the most courageous” (Langland, 1989 p, 4).

Anne released her second novel *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* which was an immediate success and sold out within the first six weeks. Its portrayal of alcoholism and debauchery shocked its contemporary Victorian audience, challenging the social and legal structure of the time and revealing the positions experienced by women. She fiercely rebuffed critics of her graphic and disturbing portrayal of the character of Huntington which included her sister Charlotte, stating that vicious characters are better depicted as they are. When Anne Bronte's second novel, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, was initially published, it was deemed as “a book which was to be so profoundly disturbing to contemporary ideas of decency that it was to sink without a trace for almost 150 years after its conception”. (Baker, 2002 p. 530).

In the foreword to the second edition of the book, released in 1848, there were rumors that the same author wrote the *Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and *Jane Eyre* novels because both stories shared a lot of similar elements; they narrow how governesses suffered in this era. Both contain the rate of reality, but each story includes a different tone, Anne and Charlotte corrected this misunderstanding and revealed their identities to Charlotte's publisher George Smith. However, the Brontes were only in their late twenties by this time. A flourishing literary career was all but inevitable, but tragedy loomed over the family; In September 1848, after suffering from poor health and alcoholism for many years, Anne's brother Branwell died suddenly. Emily then became ill and deteriorated rapidly, dying in December of the same year; the loss of Emily's sister affected Anne intensely; thus, the following week, she contracted influenza; Anne died on the 28th of May, 1849, at the age of 29. After her death, her work remained relatively overshadowed until the present day.

2.3. An Overview of *Agnes Grey*

Agnes Grey is an autobiographical novel with solid parallels to Anne's own experiences as a governess. Indeed, Charlotte Bronte claims that Anne's own experiences largely inspired the plot of *Agnes* as a governess. "Dear, peaceful" Anne,

like Agnes, was the youngest child of a poor clergyman. Even though many critics discussed Anne Bronte's novel *Agnes Grey* (1847) as "simplistic, conventional, and conservative, it's thought-provoking, contentious, and unique. Anne, in particular, defies traditional Christian assumptions by delving into discussions formerly thought to be the domain of the clergy. Sermons are a central theme in the novel's critique of institutional Christianity.

Her novel's transformation into a good sermon marks her entry into a male-dominated genre of the time: theological treatises and sermon-style handbooks. As she wrote in the book, in England no major Christian organization allowed women to preach at the time. Within Christianity, there was almost little support. (Stolpa, 2003) The plot of the novel is straightforward. It depicts Agnes' struggles to teach the misbehaving Bloomfield children and then the obstinate Murray children, highlighting the difficulties of governess life. The tale concludes with a happy marriage for Agnes, who appears to be rewarded for her patience and good behavior. Agnes is no longer a teacher, and she is free to write. And she narrates in the hopes of altering the lives of others, less fortunate governesses. Several commentators who study the works of all the Brontes remain relatively indifferent to *Agnes Grey*, presumably because of the traditional plot.

The novel is charming yet not outstanding in style or character, by Barbara and Gareth Lloyd Evans in the Scribner companion to the Bronte. And evidence that Anne is a minor author "Charlotte and Emily Bronte in the Bronte's: Charlotte Bronte and her family Agnes Grey are described by Rebecca Fraser as a "simple tale, and it mentions Anne's religiosity, which is present in Agnes, but it makes few additional parallels to the novel. (Stolpa, 2003). In addition, some critical readers may perceive *Agnes Grey* as little more than a moral sketch intended to promote patriarchal Christian principles. This position is exacerbated further if those modern readers reject Christianity. Furthermore, critics like Elizabeth Hollis Berry contradict these claims by arguing that there is more to *Agnes Grey* than a simple moral story; they often appear to be a widespread critical consensus that the novel will not provide many insights into Victorian literature and culture.

2.3.1 Plot Summary

Agnes Grey's modest plot contains a variety of characteristics that remind us of the author's life. Agnes is the curate's youngest daughter. When her family suffered financially, she decided to work as a governess. "I should like to be a governess." (A.Bronte, 1847,p. 8). However, her family members opposed her plan for one reason as they belong to a society within which a woman's work was seen as a failure to the family in supporting unmarried daughters. Furthermore, the family members regarded Agnes as a child, and they did not believe in her abilities to sustain herself, as can be seen from the quotation bellow:

" I should like to be a governess". My mother uttered an exclamation of surprise and laughed. My sister dropped her work in astonishment, exclaiming, "You a governess, Agnes! What can you be dreaming of?" (A.Bronte, 1847 p. 8)

Despite the lack of encouragement, the protagonist was confident in her abilities and found a work as the governess of the Bloomfield children. The Bloomfield was not a typical family, despite their wealth. They were emergent with no social refinement and treated Agnes poorly. She was in charge of educating two young children, a boy named Tom and a girl named Mary Ann. The governess lacked the authority to discipline the youngsters.

The governess lacked the power to punish the youngsters, who did not take her seriously. Eventually, Agnes could not properly execute her job as a governess because she lacked the authority to supervise and educate the children. She was discharged after a few months and returned home. Then, Agnes decided to give it another shot rather than accept everyone's perception of her inability; this time, she was employed by the Murrays, a wealthier and more conservative family. Rosalie and Matilda, two sisters, were under her supervision. This time Agnes was treated better by the Murrays than by her previous employers. However, there were no affection and almost no genuine respect. Agnes spends the majority of her time with the Murray sisters.

Rosalie is a "coquette,"; a woman who likes to flirt and attract men's attention, while Matilda appeared to be more interested in

masculine pursuits, such as hunting, than in things a young woman should care about. "Matilda was all right, full of life, vigor, and activity; as an intelligent being, she was barbarously ignorant, indocile, careless, and irrational, and, consequently, very distressing to one who had the task of cultivating her understanding, reforming her manners, and aiding her to acquire those ornamental attainments which, unlike her sister, she despised as much as the rest." (A. Bronte, 1847, p. 51).

What is more, Agnes met new neighbors and had feelings for a young clergyman named Mr. Weston. When Agnes' father died, she returned home to help her mother and they decided to open a small school. Later on, Mr. Weston starts visiting them and ending proposing to Agnes.

2.4. Depiction of Female Struggle in Agnes Grey

As it is commonly known, women's rights were ignored by society in that era. Women were living in a patriarchal society wherein men's decisions and desires were largely allowed and strictly followed. Women were oppressed and marginalized, they were believed to serve in the house only; they were called the "angels of the house." However, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, women started raising the alarm of change. They began asking for their legal right of education, then to become writers, as well as working and having their income. This is typically found in the novel *Agnes Grey* where Agnes worked as a governess and proved herself to her family and society that were against women's working. Worse still, the governess position was an indicator of failure of the family's background.

But Agnes was different. She was strong enough to follow her dream of becoming a governess despite the struggle and difficulties that she faced while doing so. She did not give up and continued working and teaching. According to Langland:

In *Agnes Grey*, Anne developed the governess story in ways, which were to influence Charlotte significantly in the writing of both *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*. The younger sister first recognized

narrative potential inherent in the story of an intelligent and discriminating, yet obscure, young woman who is placed in a scene of responsibility where she perceives her situation in a substantially different way than others do. (1989,p.66)

Agnes rejects patriarchal rules and traditions that treated women as domestic servants rather than educated women. In addition, in terms of rationality, Agnes outperforms cruel and selfish employers who ignored her wants and feelings due to her social status as a governess. Agnes was considered inferior in both families where she works, particularly with the Bloomfield, due to their social concerns; they were newly to money and socially superior to Agnes. While The Murrays were more careless than hostile, they do not care about Agnes's feelings.

Agnes Grey depicts the complex ways in which people become entangled in repressive social customs and practices that force people to succumb to things they do not believe in and make life challenging for everyone. Bloomfield's entire family urges Tom to be "manly," which means selfish, superior to all females (even his governess), and cruel for instance his father and uncle encouraged him to torture birds for pleasure. He said:

Oh; pooh! I shan't. 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. Last Summer he gave me a nest full of young sparrows, and he saw me pulling off their legs and wings, and heads, and never said anything, except that they were nasty things, and I must not let them soil my trousers; and uncle Robson was there too, and he laughed, and said I was a fine boy. (A. Bronte, 1847,p.16).

As a result, his younger sister Mary Ann must always be set aside as Tom strives to be the center of Agnes' attention. Nonetheless, when they are simply playing in the mud together, all of those external forces vanish, demonstrating that they would be better kids without the bad influences.

The depiction of women in the novel can be seen in two different ways. First of Agnes as a daughter and second as a Governess. On the one hand, as a daughter, how Agnes is portrayed by her mother; she was considered unskilled since her mother does not want her help. And so does her sister. These treatments make Agnes feel useless. She even thinks that her kitten is much more helpful than her. This happened because every time she offered her Mother and sister some help, they directly rejected her offer and asked her to play with her cat or play some music. Agnes then felt oppressed by her mother and sister's treatment toward her. She felt oppressed because she thought she is useless and her family did not need her. She also felt that she was not better than her kitten. As a result, Agnes was determined to work as a governess as a way to escape from her family's oppression.

Her family also rejected her idea and desire to become a governess. It is shown that Agnes was precious to them. Thus, they did not want let her do what she wanted; she could not do anything according to her own will. And she could not do any housework since her Mother never taught her how to do it.

Therefore, she did not have any skills to work and could only watch her mother and sister while they were working. However, being the youngest did not make her become a spoiled child. She was determined to become a governess to support her family, even though her family did not like her idea. Agnes was bound to be more than the family pet “to convince mama and Mary that I’m not the helpless girl (A. Bronte, 1847,p. 9). At first, she was scared to show or express her feelings about becoming a governess, but as time passed, she convinced her family to let her become a governess.

Agnes Grey can be seen as a rebellious person. She rebelled against her family rules and made her Character develop as an independent individual. Agnes also said that she was pretty mature to work and can take care of herself, and her family should not worry about her.

Conversely, being a governess is not as easy as Agnes thought. At first, Agnes thought that teaching was an easy task; however, it was a hard one as she felt lonely since she had no one to talk to and had no friends to accompany her. As can be seen from this quotation:

“It was with a strange feeling of desolation, mingled with a strong sense of the novelty of my situation” (A. Bronte, p.46).

2.4.1 Oppression in her Family

Agnes faced a different type of oppression from her own family. She was considered a family pet. She lacked the appreciation from her householders. She wanted to feel like a grown-up as she was, but eventually, they considered her a child. For instance, whenever she wanted to offer her help in something, the recurrent answer she received from her mother is : “No, love, you cannot indeed—there’s nothing here you can do.” (A. Bronte, 1948, p.7)

Moreover, Agnes’s family tried their best to keep her under their comfort zone, as they always ask her to keep her attention in her study and to practice music instead of helping “You cannot indeed dear child. Go and practice your music, or play with the kitten.” (A. Bronte, 1948, p.7). They thought they were expressing their love to her in that way, they didn’t know that this behavior would make her feel a helpless, thoughtless being. Thus, she would have a hard time dealing with her problems in the future and facing difficulties. Their affection to her made her unskillful and useless. It can be clearly seen that Agnes’s family made her a dependent person, so she felt like a burden to her family.

This is why she thought of working as a governess, at least to release them from her burden. This oppression that Agnes suffered from was a non-physical one. There are indeed two types of oppression: physical and non-physical. They touched her pride rather than her body by limiting her right to make any decision, making her feel weak and dependent because they did not give her the right or the chance to make even a minor decision. For instance, when she told them about her desire to become a governess to help them when they experienced financial unrest, they rejected her decision rather than listened to her. They even told her she was not qualified for the job and that she was not mature enough to work. This idea is well seen in the following scene :

“Only think,” said Mary, “what would you do in a house full of strangers, without me or mamma to speak and act for you ... with a parcel of children, besides yourself, to attend to; and no one to look to for advice? You would not even know what clothes to put on.” (A. Bronte, 1847, p.8)

They believe that she was too young despite she was nineteen years old. For them, she was just a kid and was not prepared to have a serious job or take care of herself; “But my love, you have not learnt to take care of yourself yet “(A. Bronte,1847,p. 8) without even giving her the chance to express herself and her ideas, she states: “But mamma, I am above eighteen and, quite able to take care of myself, and others too. You do not know half the wisdom and prudence I possess, because I have never been tried.” (ibid)

In addition, the oppression she faced from her family is due to their love and care only. However, she felt that this mistreatment toward her was unfair because they had prejudgment about her, and they did not even give her a chance to show and prove herself. Since she obeyed the majority of their orders, she did not have the courage and the ability to defend her opinions and beliefs, she was a peaceful and calm girl. She said: “You think, because I always do as you bid me, I have no judgment of my own: but only try me—that is all I ask—and you shall see what I can do. (A. Bronte,1847,p. 9).

They never knew that they unintentionally oppressed her by their actions, and they never thought of the effects of their behaviors toward her. In most of the novels of the age, it was men who generally oppressed women. However, the situation here is different; Agnes was oppressed by her mother, sisters and even the woman who worked as a governess. Her family always considered her a little girl, no matter how grown up she was. And it took her a long time to persuade them of her decision.

2.4.2 Oppression in Society

Agnes worked as a governess for two families: the Bloomfield and the Murrays. Her first employer did not always assign Agnes hard work during her tenure as a governess. The Bloomfield family also believed she was an unfit governess because she

could not properly educate their children. Agnes' earnings from Bloomfield were insufficient to compensate for everything she had gone through. Furthermore, her employment only gave her a limited amount of time off around the Christmas vacation.

“About Christmas I was allowed a visit home, but only of a fortnight’s duration “For,” said Mrs. Bloomfield, “I thought, as you had seen your friends so lately, you would not care for a longer stay.” (A.Bronte,1847, p.26)

Agnes felt sad and upset since she would not be able to see her family and friends for a long time after being apart for nearly six months. Rather than being content with her job, she felt lonely because she could not contact her family and had no friends at her employer's residence. In addition, her employer oppressed her by not giving her sufficient vacation time. Mrs. Bloomfield further oppressed Agnes by paying her a pittance.

It is evident that her employer is playing with her emotions. She oppressed her by limiting her employee rights. This can also be seen in terms of social class. Mrs. Bloomfield treated Agnes badly because she was her boss. She believed she had more control on Agnes, and she never referred to Agnes as her governess, instead she treated her as being her maid. Mrs. Bloomfield had always a negative attitude towards her. When Agnes finally arrived at Bloomfield Manor, she was served a cold lunch after her lengthy trip to their house. Agnes accordingly says:

My hands are so benumbed with the cold that I can scarcely handle my knife and fork. I dare say you would find it cold,” replied she with a cool, immutable gravity that did not serve to re-assure me. (A.Bronte, 1847,p.13)

On the other hand, her pupils never appreciated her as their governess. They never listened to her and were constantly devising new methods to enrage Agnes. They always assumed that driving Agnes upset was a success for them, because, as a governess, Agnes had to maintain emotional control and not allow her anger to take over when educating children. Tom and Mary Ann, her pupils, were likewise cruel to her. For instance, Tom usually took Agnes with him wherever he went, and she would not object.

“No matter—you must come; I shall allow of no excuses,” replied the consequential little gentleman. And as it was the first day of our acquaintance, I thought I might as well indulge him.....who liked to have me all to himself. (A. Bronte, 1847,p. 15)

The oppression she faced was terrible. All their eyes were on her, and they blamed her for everything: ‘I knew this was all pointed at me; and these and all similar innuendos affected me far more deeply than any open accusations would have done “(A.Bronte,1847, p.25)

She had no authority over the children; they had no discipline at all, and she did not manage to teach or control them, especially the little Mary Ann:

Sometimes.... I would shake her violently by the shoulders, or pull her long hair, or put her in the comer, for which she punished me with loud, shrill, piercing screams, that went through my head like a knife. She knew I hated this, and when she had shrieked her utmost, would look into my face with an air of vindictive satisfaction, exclaiming— “Now then! that’s for you!” And then shriek again and again, till I was forced to stop my ears. (A.Bronte,1847,p. 23)

The Bloomfield family blamed Agnes for things she did not have control over. For instance, on Mary Anne’s lousy behavior; Agnes made the following comment:

Another troublesome trait in Mary Ann, was her incorrigible propensity to keep running into the nursery to play with her little sisters, and the nurse. This was natural enough, but, as it was against her mother’s express desire, I, of course, forbade her to do so, and did my utmost to keep her with me, but that only increased her relish for the nursery; and the more I strove to keep her out of it, the oftener she went, and the longer she stayed; to the great dissatisfaction of Mrs. Bloomfield, who, I well knew, would impute all the blame of the matter to me. (A.Bronte, 1847,p.24)

And despite all this, Agnes still excuses them for their neglect and carelessness.

She left her to think so still; but she little knew how long, how wearisome those fourteen weeks of absence had been to me, how intensely I had longed for my holidays, how greatly I was disappointed at their curtailment. Yet she was not to blame in this; I had never told her my feelings, and she could not be expected to divine them; I had not been with her a full term and she was justified in not allowing me a full vacation."

(A.Bronte,1847,p. 26)

The Murrays was another family with whom Agnes worked. Agnes' role at the Murrays was only to teach the girls, and she was in charge of preparing the girls to be ready for society by teaching them appropriate manners and abilities. Her students, on the other hand, were rude to her. They always saw Agnes as a second-class citizen. Even though they were from the same class, they mistreated Agnes because they believed since they were the ones who paid her money; they had the right to do her anything they desired. This is clear from the way they treated her while traveling in a horse carriage. They did not consider her as their educator but rather their maid. She accordingly said:

If some of my pupils chose to walk and take me with them, it was well for me; for otherwise, my position in the carriage was, to be crushed into the corner farthest from the open window, and with my back to the horses, a position which invariably made me sick; and if Imy devotions were disturbed with a feeling of languor and sickliness, head-ache was generally my companion throughout the day. (A. Bronte, 1847, p.53)

It can be seen that she was obliged to sit in an uncomfortable place, making her feel sick whenever they went to the church.

Another illustrative example is stated below to show that they had no respect for Agnes as their tutor, and that instead they were fascinated with playing with her feelings, causing her a mental pressure:

"... send the maid to call me up at half-past five, without any scruple or apology; sometimes, I was told to be ready precisely at six, and, having dressed in a hurry, came down to an empty room, and after waiting a long time in suspense, discovered that they had changed their minds, and were still in bed; or, perhaps, if it were a fine summer morning, Brown would come to tell me that the young ladies and gentlemen had taken a holiday, and were gone out; and then, I was kept waiting for breakfast, till I was almost ready to faint; they having fortified themselves with something before they. (A. Bronte, 1847,p. 53)

The following quote is also an instance that overtly display that her students regarded her as inferior to them. This can be seen in the way they addressed her:

And now Miss Grey, attend to me; I'm going to tell you about the ball. You must be dying to hear about it, I know. Oh, such a ball! You never saw or heard, or read, or dreamt of anything like it in all your life! (A. Bronte, 1847,p 60)

From this way of addressing her, it can be seen that they are degenerating her. They also regarded her as lower than them, even though she belongs to the same social class. Agnes was subjected to oppression because of her social class.

. On the other hand, the blame should also be on Agnes, the one who never refused a demand or voiced an objection to something she disagreed with.

2.4.3. The Struggle of being a Governess

Despite the fact that the governess' work has existed since the Tudor period, the governess became very popular in Victorian England households. The governess used to provide companion to the children, thus taking over the mother's role as the children's first teacher. In some ways, her presence within a family was often associated with economic power and wealth of that family because the ladies of the houses loved to

show the other families that they had a governess. In the early part of the nineteenth century, England had a high percentage of women who would seek jobs as governesses through the Dark Benevolent Institution in London, which was founded in 1841. During this era, many female authors wrote about governesses, and some of them worked as governesses. Anne Bronte wrote about her experiences as a governess. She was a governess and a writer of a novel that tells the story of the governess Agnes Grey. When Agne's family faced financial difficulties, she worked as a governess to help them. She begins her book with the following expressive lines:

All true histories contain instruction; though, in some, the treasure may be hard to find, and when found, so trivial in quantity that the dry, shriveled kernel scarcely compensates for the trouble of cracking the nut. (A.Bronte, 1847,p.3)

In this sense, we may grasp two lessons: to respect the hardships of the governess' life and the difficulties she faced in teaching boys and girls at that time. Furthermore, Agnes was fond of becoming a governess; she rightly said:

How delightful it would be to be a governess! To go out into the world; to enter upon a new life; to act for myself; to exercise my unused faculties; to try my unknown powers; to earn my own maintenance, and something to comfort and help my father, mother, and sister, besides exonerating them from the provision of my food and clothing; to show papa what his little Agnes could do; to convince mamma and Mary that I was not quite the helpless, thoughtless being they supposed.... comprehensible. (A. Bronte, 1847,p. 9).

The story delved into the role of governesses in Victorian society, confronting the reader with the brutal realities of these women's daily life. Thus, she ended up with two different families in the novel .In the first family, the children were terrible. She states:

Tom.... so he would stand twisting his body and face into the most grotesque and singular contortions—laughable, no doubt, to an unconcerned spectator, but not to me—and uttering loud yells and

doleful outcries, intended to represent weeping, but wholly without the accompaniment of tears. I knew this was done solely for the purpose of annoying me; and, therefore, however I might inwardly tremble with impatience and irritation, I manfully strove to suppress all visible signs of molestation, and affected to sit, with calm indifference, waiting till it should please him to cease this pastime,, by casting his eye on the book, and reading or repeating the few words he was required to say. (A. Bronte , 1847, p.22)

The governess's work is challenging in many different aspects. In expressing this feeling, she says, "I returned, however, with unabated vigor to my work—a more arduous task than anyone can imagine." (A. Bronte, 1847, p.19) However, Agnes lacked appreciation and respect from her masters. For instance, she was mistreated by her lady: "And fixing her cold, stony eyes upon me with a look that could not be mistaken, she would shut the door and walk away." (A. Bronte, 1847, p. 24).

Anne Bronte, in her novel, showed how governesses suffered; they worked hard, and were poorly treated, and gained a low income. Agnes pictured this idea by saying :

I flattered myself I was benefitting my parents and sister by my continuance here; for, small as the salary was, I still was earning something, and, with strict economy, I could easily manage to have something to spare for them, if they would favor me by taking it. (A. Bronte, 1947,p. 26).

Despite the struggles, difficulties, and mistreatment that Agnes had experienced, she remained strong, patient, and capable of taking her responsibility and that of her family too. She states:

Then, it was by my own will that I had got the place, I had brought all this tribulation on myself, and I was determined to bear it; nay, more than that, I did not even regret the step I had taken, and I longed to show my friends that, even now, I was competent to undertake the charge, and able to acquit myself honorably to the end; and, if ever I felt it degrading to submit so quietly, or intolerable to toil so constantly, I would turn towards my home,

and say within myself— “They may crush, but they shall not subdue me. (26).

2.5 Conclusion

The present chapter has briefly introduced Anne Bronte’s life and her literary career and the sources of her fictional inspirations. Focusing on her novel *Agnes Grey*, an attempt was accordingly made to locate the relevant instances that clearly show the status of women during the Victorian times. In so doing and within a particular reference to the experiences undergone by the major character Agnes, it has been clearly revealed that woman was under the pressure of both family and society. Yet, in spite of all these forms of pressure and oppression, the representative character in the novel managed to face the huge challenges and the immense hurdles in performing her job as a governess. In short, she reached the status of an independent individual.

General Conclusion

General Conclusion

The present dissertation sought to enlighten the picture of women's status during the Victorian period. This endeavour was carried out via the analysis of Bronte's novel *Agnes Grey*. The first part of the research was theoretical per se. An attempt was accordingly made to briefly examine the characteristics of Victorian society.

The nineteenth century witnessed many changes in the different walks of life owing to the consequences and implications of the Industrial Revolution. Victorian Britain became a world leading nation thanks to technological and industrial advancement. Yet, in spite of all these shapes of development, the Victorian age was an era of social doubt and unrest. Britain was divided into two nations: the rich and the poor.

Socially wise, male dominated ideologies were still predominant in almost every field, while women's roles were limited to taking care of their household and their husband. In fact, women at that time were prevented from exercising their rights and were supposed to be under the patriarchal control. In surveying the literary scene, was shown how Victorian literature was so cautious and to a larger extent faithful in reflecting social norms of British society. Thus, Shedding light on the flourishing and sophistication of the novel during this age, entailed bringing into play the rise of female writers and their significant contribution to the Victorian literary sphere though many of female writings were not taken seriously.

Anne Bronte was among the most talented female writers of this age. Similar to other women writers, who were profoundly influenced by the social norms of their conservative society, she chose to duplicate her life experiences in her fictional writings.

To recall, Victorian women were living in a patriarchal society; the idea of separate spheres or angels of the house was spread at that time when women were oppressed and marginalized. However, by the end of the 19th century, they decided to free themselves from this patriarchal prison, and they started asking for their legal rights to have the proper education, to gain more freedom and independence in their lives. Eventually, literature was their refuge to escape as well as improve themselves and

challenge the limiting, domesticated angels of the house, and step by step, they succeeded in entering the public sphere as men.

The second chapter focused on the main character of Agnes Grey's novel. It showed how Agnes changed from being a traditional Victorian girl into an independent and modern one. Agnes challenged herself and she was determined to support her family while they had financial problems. And decided to work as a governess, also to prove them that she was no longer a little girl. She could afford her life and could work and gain her income. She also challenged the society that devalued her as being lower in social standing. Facing the struggles of being a governess in both Bloomfield and Murray's families, whose moral values are derived from ambition and class consciousness. First, Agnes suffered while teaching the Bloomfield's misbehaving kids despite having no absolute authority over them.

Then, she was responsible for teaching Murray's selfish and unpleasant girls, and although Agnes's position was slightly better than the one before, she was frequently ignored or used in the girls' schemes. Eventually, she ended up abandoning this challenging job and finally finding her passion and opening a boarding school with the help of her mother to teach girls. And after falling in love with a local curate, he ends up proposing to her.

The story of Agnes Grey is a wonderfully simple and well-written one; however, it was overshadowed by the success of her sisters' novels. The novel was significant and revolutionary because it reflected the situation of the governesses in the Victorian era, when women were oppressed and mistreated, and it showed the difference between social classes. This research was in essence an endeavour to analyze how Anne Bronte challenged the norms of Victorian society through her heroine Agnes.

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