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Anne Brontë's Bestiary Novels: Animal Representation and Morality in *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*

Master's thesis in English Literature

Supervisor: Paul Goring

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Abstract

This thesis examines animal representation and the role of animals as indicators of characters' morality in Anne Brontë's two novels *Agnes Grey* (1847) and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1849). It explores the many animals that are introduced during the course of these novels, and their literal and symbolic values. The analysis compares the animal-human connections and their implications, and it considers how animals are positioned by Brontë as instructive emblems of empathy and morality. The results indicate that the characters who are kind to animals are considered to be good people, and are, accordingly, rewarded for their treatment of them; the characters who do not treat animals well are portrayed as having poor morals and are understood as 'bad people'. They are consequently punished for their actions. There are also proven links between violence to animals and cruelty to humans. As such, these results point to Anne Brontë's firm opposition to cruelty towards animals, and indicate her didactic project to teach her readers principles of right and wrong through the treatment of animals.

Acknowledgements

This thesis concludes an era of studies and a wonderful chapter of my life. It is the perfect ending to a journey that started my first year at NTNU on a trip to York, Haworth, and the Brontë Parsonage Museum.

I would like to thank my supervisor, Paul Goring, for his tremendous patience. I truly appreciate your encouragement and guidance. Thank you for your detailed comments and advice, our valuable ‘Zoom-chats’ and for keeping my spirits up. I also want to thank Domhnall Mitchell and Yuri Cowan for their humor and enthusiasm, respectively, in the lessons of my first year; I am grateful that you piqued my interest for poetry and Gothic literature.

Throughout the challenging years of university, and through the process of writing this thesis, my dearest friend, Helene, has kept me going. Thank you for always being there for me, no matter the situation. I would also like to thank my friend Magnus, for making me laugh and helping me through hard times with your continuous support. Without you two, these last six years would have been unbearable.

Finally, I could not have done this without my loving and supportive family. Thank you to my dear parents, Lene and Birger, for the profound and constant encouragement and support. I would also like to acknowledge my dog Dollar, for inspiring this thesis along with the Brontë sisters.

A very heartfelt thank you to all the people in my life; I could not have done this without you.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Anne Brontë: Life and Influences

Anne Brontë was born on 17 January 1820 at Thornton Main Street. Her biographer, Edward Chitham, writes that, as the ‘youngest of six children’, she was ‘petted and patronized’, and this idea of her as a type of pet seems to have followed Anne throughout her life; there are also many traces of it in her fiction. There is certainly good evidence that she was patronized. In the preface of the second edition of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Anne’s second novel, Charlotte writes:

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall by Acton Bell, had likewise an unfavourable reception. At this I cannot wonder. The choice of subject was an entire mistake. Nothing less congruous with the writer’s nature could be conceived. The motives which dictated this choice were pure, but, I think, slightly morbid. She had, in the course of her life, been called on to contemplate, near at hand and for a long time, the terrible effects of talents misused and faculties abused; hers was naturally a sensitive, reserved, and dejected nature; what she saw sank very deeply into her mind; it did her harm. She brooded over it till she believed it to be a duty to reproduce every detail (...) as a warning to others. She hated her work, but would pursue it. (...) She must be honest; she must not varnish, soften, or conceal. (Bell et al., 1850, pp. xii-xiii).

Because of Charlotte’s words of disapproval regarding the novel, Felicia Gordon (1989) suspects that Anne was patronized by Charlotte, and contends that she has been patronized by critics ever since (p. 9). However, this passage can also be read as a defense of her, then deceased, sister. What they had experienced in relation to Branwell affected Anne deeply, and Charlotte paints her as a victim of their brother’s drug-use and alcoholism. Although Charlotte excused Anne’s writing about the sensitive subject, there is evidence of Anne standing by her writing about issues that are ‘coarse’: “To represent a bad thing in its least offensive light, is doubtless, the most agreeable course for a writer of fiction to pursue” (Brontë & McDonagh, 2008, p. 4). She also defends the rights of women to read books:

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. (Brontë & McDonagh, 2008, p. 5).

While her sisters were thought to have genius by their contemporaries for writing novels with a Gothic edge, Anne was not recognized at the time for her feminist writing, which was probably a result of most critics of that era being male.

Ellen Nussey, Charlotte's lifelong friend, states that Anne and Emily were like twins, and were "in the very closest sympathy which never had any interruption" (Alexander & Smith, 2003, p. 66). One can detect this closeness in the similarities of *Wuthering Heights* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*: the epistolary technique, the names starting with H, the starting point of a new tenant arriving, unfaithfulness, drunkenness and violence (Chitham, 1983, pp. 99-100). However, Chitham (1983) argues that the similarities between the two novels are deliberate, and that the differences are intended to emphasize what Anne may have viewed as the inadequacies of her sister's philosophical outlook (p. 100). Anne's writing comes from a perspective of honesty and didacticism: "I wished to tell the truth, for truth always conveys its own moral to those who are able to receive it." (Brontë & McDonagh, 2008, p. 3). Her first novel, *Agnes Grey*, begins with: "All true stories contain instruction" (Brontë & Shuttleworth, 2010, p. 5). Even though she is described as being "sensitive, reserved, and dejected" by Charlotte, Anne demonstrates through her writing that this is not the case.

As children, the Brontës read precociously and voraciously. Their father, Patrick Brontë, appears to have given his children free rein in their reading; thus, they devoured any reading matter they could acquire, both popular and serious literature (Gordon, 1989, p. 86). Gordon (1989) argues that Lord Byron was the "single greatest literary influence" on the Brontë-sisters. Byron and Byronism permeate the juvenilia and the adult fiction, particularly the notion of fatal, tormented passions, and the Byronic conceptions of love are evidenced in the Brontës' poetry and fiction, as well as in their personal life (p. 92). This is demonstrated in their male protagonists Heathcliff, Rochester, and Huntingdon, and may be credited to both Byronism, and their brother, Branwell's, mercurial mood and alcoholic tendencies. However, it could be argued that Anne is attempting to de-romanticize the Byronic hero with her character Mr. Huntingdon, as Helen leaves him. Gordon (1989) argues that the novel "can be read as a dialogue between didacticism and Byronic libertinism" (p. 94). Although it is not

known if Anne read works of radical women writers of the 1790s, such as Mary Wollstonecraft, one can detect similar ideas in the novels concerning the rights of women and their critique of libertine men (Brontë & McDonagh, 2008, p. xxxi).

There is plenty of evidence of the Brontës' great knowledge and love of animals; Edward Chitham (1991) notes that "it seems likely that Anne shared this family trait very early" (p. 20). The Brontës kept many pets, and Charlotte, Branwell, Emily, and Anne have immortalized them and other animals in drawings, paintings and writing. Christine Alexander and Jane Sellars present Anne and Emily's drawings and paintings of animals in their book *The Art of the Brontës* (1995): Grasper, an Irish terrier; Emily's dog, Keeper, a labrador and mastiff cross-breed; Anne's dog, Flossy, a spaniel; the cats Tiger and Tom; and Nero, a merlin (pp. 376, 380, 384, 388, 390, 408-410). In addition, we know that they kept two pet geese, Victoria and Adelaide (Sinclair, 1911, p. 34). Emily and Anne in particular seem very concerned about their animals. Writing 'birthday notes' was a tradition that Anne and Emily shared; they wrote a few words about their day, and the notes were to be read on the same day four years later. Anne and Emily always mentioned their pets in these notes (Spark, 1966, pp. 90-91, 120-124). Alexander and Smith (2003) argue that in the novels of Anne and Charlotte, "there is the typical Victorian equation between concern for animal welfare and the moral well-being of a character" (p. 14). Ellen Nussey also confirms the Brontës' love for animals: "The Brontës' love of dumb creatures made them very sensitive of the treatment bestowed upon them, for any one to offend in this respect was with them an infallible bad sign." (Smith, 1995, p. 606).

Anne detested cruelty to animals, and it is likely that Agnes Grey's intense distress at the Bloomfield family's brutal treatment of them mirrors Anne's own feelings (Alexander & Smith, 2003, p. 66). Anne writes in the preface of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*:

As the story of 'Agnes Grey' was accused of extravagant over-colouring in those very parts that were carefully copied from the life, with a most scrupulous avoidance of all exaggeration, so, in the present work, I find myself censured for depicting *con amore*,¹

¹ In music, *con amore* means playing with love and sincerity, rather than following the notes exactly. (Scholes, 1980, p. 99).

with ‘a morbid love of the coarse, if not of the brutal,’ those scenes which, I will venture to say, have not been more painful for the most fastidious of my critics to read, than they were for me to describe. (Brontë & McDonagh, 2008, p. 3).

It is here implied that *Agnes Grey* is relatively autobiographical. Anne suggests that the cruelty perpetrated by the Bloomfield family, as it is ‘carefully copied from the life’, actually happened at her post as a governess with the Ingham family. She also emphasizes that although the ‘brutal’ scenes may be difficult to read, they were more demanding to write. presumably because she experienced them.

An extensive literature has developed concerning the Brontës’ lives and work. However, critics have been less interested in, or in some cases condescending to, Anne’s novels; they have looked at them as beneath serious notice when comparing her work with that of her sisters. Chitham (1979) states “Anne is writing a different kind of novel from her sisters, which cannot be judged by the same criteria.” (p. 1). By focusing on other themes than her sisters, Winnifrieth (1973) observes that contemporary critics “made Anne chief whipping boy for her unpalatable doctrines on eternal punishment, sexual morality and the social hierarchy” (p. 4). In more recent years, the criticism surrounding *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* has increased. Topics such as the role of the governess, religion, violence, alcoholism and feminism have been examined. Animals are a vital part of Anne’s work, and though there are some critics who have discussed this subject in relation to *Agnes Grey*, I could only find one source which examines animals in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. This may be for the reason that there are fewer scenes involving animals in the latter novel; however, both novels contain plenty of animal references, symbolism and imagery. Anne Brontë’s resentment against cruelty towards animals is a premise that permeates her novels; the characters are judged by their treatment of animals and what these animals signify. This thesis is concerned with the representations of animals and their role as indicators of characters’ morality in Anne Brontë’s two novels *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. I argue that the characters’ moral stature is measured by the way in which they treat animals.

1.2 What is an Animal?

Discussing whether nonhuman animals can be considered as ‘persons’ requires us to reflect upon what makes us human. Marc Bekoff (2002) describes the criteria that are used to designate a being as a person: “being conscious of one’s surroundings, being able to reason, experiencing various emotions, having a sense of self, adjusting to changing situations, and performing various cognitive and intellectual tasks.” (p. 14). While many humans satisfy these criteria, there are some that do not, such as infants and mentally challenged people and they are considered to be persons. Many people have pets that they feel fulfill these standards, and there is plenty of evidence that shows that animals have, for example, emotions. In *The Smile of a Dolphin* many well-respected researchers share stories, supported by empirical data, that demonstrate animals experiencing deep emotions such as joyful glee when playing, and grief, bereavement and depression over the loss of a child, mate, or other friend (as cited in Bekoff, 2002, p. 103). Also, in the 1960s, Stanley Wechlin and his colleagues did a study that revealed that a hungry rhesus monkey would not take food if it meant that another monkey would receive a shock of electricity (Bekoff, 2002, p. 123). The monkey displayed what we consider to be human emotions of empathy, and the boundary between humans and animals is again tested. If we classify animals into categories like ‘others’ or ‘them’, we lose a lot of the richness that makes us all animals. Bekoff argues against this hierarchy of classification:

If we follow Aristotle, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas in arguing for a hierarchical view of nature in which there are “lower” and “higher” animals, then we often make value judgements that portray higher animals as better or more valuable than lower animals, with lower animals existing solely for the service of humans. (Bekoff, 2002, p. 41).

It seems that the men who mistreat animals in Brontë’s two novels follow Aristotle, Augustine and Aquinas’s argument. Mr. Bloomfield, Mr. Robson, Mr. Murray, Mr. Huntingdon and his friends all view animals, human and nonhuman, that are below them in the hierarchy as less valuable, and, consequently, treats them accordingly.

Ivan Kreilkamp (2018) states that dogs were most likely the preeminent domestic animal in the Victorian period; they were often welcomed into the home and granted pride of place. Therefore, he argues, the dog was the animal that seemed closest to the human. He poses the

question: “If they are almost human, living in the home of the human, are they fully animal?” (n.p.). This question of boundary between humans and animals is evident in Brontë’s novels in the usage of the word ‘creature’; the word appears numerous times, fifty-two altogether, in the two novels, and it is used to describe women, animals, or people of the lower classes. Thus, the line between animal and human becomes blurred, and may prompt the question of what an animal is, and what constitutes a human. The word ‘creature’ functions as a means to belittle them, and emphasize their role as the “lower” animals in the social hierarchy.

1.3 Animal Welfare Laws

Animals of different species permeated late eighteenth-century disputes about the right of man. Jane Spencer (2020) states that “British writers turned their attention to animal life as they engaged with a culture profoundly affected by revolutions in France and America and struggle for reform at home.” (p. 2). Animals were significant to political debate, not only because they served as vital figures in which to express human argument, but also because of the transformation by this period in the conception of their relation to human society. This was a movement towards a greater acknowledgement of human-animal relationship, and the moral claims of animals. By the late eighteenth century, animals had progressed from being ‘beasts’ and ‘brutes’ to being ‘fellow beasts’ and ‘fellow creatures’, and finally, ‘friends’ and ‘companions’. Concern about cruelty to animals was spread across Britain more than before which led to a moral, and by the early nineteenth century, a parliamentary campaign to provide them some amount of protection. (Spencer, 2020, pp. 3-5). Spencer argues that the literature of sympathy and sentiment brought together discourses of nonhuman and human rights together; Victorians placed a high value on compassion and became known for their love of animals (p. 9).

Harriet Ritvo (1987) states that nineteenth-century English law viewed animals merely as property of humans, and they were therefore not responsible for their actions. Instead, their owners were responsible for assessing the danger they might pose to others, and subsequently, act accordingly (pp. 1-2). This contributed to the acts that were passed and societies that were formed:

From the 1822 passing of Martin’s Act—the “Act to prevent the cruel and improper treatment of Cattle”—and the subsequent founding in 1824 of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (after 1840 the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals), to the 1876 passing of the Cruelty to Animals Act, and into the 1870s and 1880s vivisection debates, Victorian culture struggled over these ethical, political, and legislative questions, and this history of reform has been less well-considered—especially in relation to literary history—cruel and inhuman. (Kreilkamp, 2018, n.p.).

Many advances against cruelty towards animals were taken in Anne Brontë’s lifetime. This may have contributed to her interest in animals and their welfare. By immortalizing her pet dog, Flossy, through drawing and depicting all sorts of animals in her novels, Brontë contributed to the new interest in and sentiments for animals in the nineteenth century.

2 Animal Representation and Morality in *Agnes Grey*

In *Agnes Grey*, Anne Brontë presents an incisive critique of how people of the middle and upper classes in Victorian England are teaching their daughters and sons degraded models of morality. Rather than depicting people of the upper-middle and upper classes acting charitably and compassionately towards their ‘dependents’, Brontë suggests that they often abuse their privilege, and pass on the same forms of behavior and manners to their children. Brontë reveals how traditional child-rearing accepts violent and aggressive behavior, and that it is often focused on females, animals, and people of a lower class. In doing so, she utilizes the characters’ behavior towards animals to determine their moral stature. Animals serve as a vital motif and as important symbols throughout the novel; thus, animals connect the different situations of the Greys, Bloomfields, Murrays, and finally, at A——. Characters with authorial approval are connected by their respect and sympathy towards animals, and Kreilkamp (2018) views this as a “general attempt to redeem a carnivorous and cruel society” (n.p.). The animal-human connections function as a moral guide as well as a way of indicating the morality of the characters.

2.1 Ponies, Kittens, and the Greys

2.1.1 The Pony

The importance of animals, how to treat them, and their welfare in *Agnes Grey* is made clear as early as the first chapter, before Agnes commences her work as a governess. Like Anne Brontë and other members of her family, Agnes is forced into governessing because of her family’s financial problems; after a bad investment, Agnes’s father weakens mentally and physically, and the pony phaeton is sold, along with the “stout well-fed pony—the old favorite that we had fully determined should end its days in peace, and never pass from our hands; the little coach house and stable were let, the servant boy, and the more efficient (being the more expensive) of the two maid servants was dismissed.” (*AG*², p. 9). Ivan Kreilkamp

² Brontë, A., & Shuttleworth, S (2010). *Agnes Grey*. (R. Inglesfield & H. Marsden, Eds.). Oxford University Press. I will abbreviate the source to *AG* henceforward.

(2018) suggests that there is a recurring emphasis on the household animals or pets as essential and basic to the entirety of the domestic whole throughout the novel (n.p.). While I agree that animals, and especially the pony, seem to be essential to the peace of the Grey family, I contend that the other animals serve a different function in the Bloomfield and Murray households. However, as Kreilkamp determines, the ‘old favorite’ pony’s well-being seems to be the backbone for the ‘peace’ of the household. The pony is amongst the objects the family has to sell; however, it is likened, or even elevated, to a level above the servants the family has to let go. The pony becomes a symbol for the more prosperous life the family led before, which also translates to the way Brontë applies the use of horses in the upper-middle class families of the Murrays and the Bloomfields. The pony could also be linked to Agnes, in a more symbolic manner. “The old favorite that we had fully determined should end its days in peace, and never pass from our hands” (*AG*, p. 9). The favorite animal that should end its days in peace of the household of the Grey family is Agnes, and they envision her never leaving, like a spinster who never leaves the family home. Monica Flegel (2015) claims that the connection between a spinster and a cat is their shared role as supplements to their family (p. 60). This is reinforced in the reading of young Agnes as akin to a pet kitten, which grows up to become a cat.

2.1.2 The Kitten

The father’s decline in wealth and health is equivalent to his decline of authority; it seems that the mother is the head of the family now. This creates a problem for Agnes in relation to her own power or authority in the family; she is eighteen years old, and a woman in her estimation, but “still a child in theirs” (*AG*, p. 9). Even though the women of the family have a great deal to do since they have let go of most of the servants, Agnes is refused being allowed to help by both her mother and sister when she asks to help with chores: “You cannot indeed, dear child. Go and practice your music, or play with the kitten.” (*AG*, p.10). As Kreilkamp (2018) suggests, “animals in the Victorian period are often treated as semihuman”(n.p.); here, Agnes scathingly equates herself to the pet kitten, making it semi-human: “although I was not many degrees more useful than the kitten, my idleness was not entirely without excuse.” (*AG*, p. 10). The realization of her own utility in the household prompts her to seek employment, but the request to become a governess is met with resistance by her family; suddenly, they ‘cannot spare her’, and her sister wonders what she will do if she does not have her or their

mother to ‘speak or act for’ her (*AG*, pp. 11-12). They finally agree that Agnes can go, and before her departure, she describes parting with her kitten:

My dear little friend, the kitten, would certainly be changed; she was already growing a fine cat; and when I returned, even for a hasty visit at Christmas, would most likely have forgotten both her playmate and her merry pranks. I had romped with her for the last time; and when I stroked her soft bright fur, while she lay purring herself to sleep in my lap, it was with a feeling of sadness I could not easily disguise. (*AG*, pp. 13-14).

The kitten is presented as a counterpart to Agnes; she will change and grow in the coming times, and while she reminisces about the childhood she will leave behind, she feels sad. The parting with the kitten and the “old Agnes” is completed, and governessing is used as a means of getting away from her repressive place in the family – she wants to escape from being a version of the family kitten. Sarah Amato (2015) states that to care and protect animals was considered to be one of the ‘healthiest instincts’ of Victorian English women and men. Major Leigh (1859) states: “on the whole there is something humanizing in a Pet, which makes the heart open to genial warmth of kindness.” (as cited in Amato, 2015, p. 39). Before she leaves, Agnes pets the pigeons and the cat, and thus, along with the pony, establishes that animals are a vital part of the Grey family’s life; these family values are inherent in Agnes and is a vital part of her character and moral identity.

2.2 Meats, Nestlings, Dogs, (Wooden) Horses, and the Bloomfields

2.2.1 Meat, Blood, and Gentlemanly Horse-Riding

Upon Agnes’s arrival at the Bloomfield’s residence, the reader is immediately invited to recognize that she is not going to enjoy herself. Christie Harner (2020) suggests the coldness of the house and its inhabitants foreshadows Agnes’s future experience in the employment of the Bloomfields (p. 583); the house has a ‘bitter wind’ and the inhabitants are ‘strange’, including Mrs. Bloomfield with her ‘cold grey eyes’ and ‘cool, immutable gravity’ (*AG*, pp. 16-17). She is served beefsteaks and half cold potatoes, and while Mrs. Bloomfield watches her and endeavors to sustain a conversation, Agnes’s attention “was almost wholly absorbed in my dinner; not from ravenous appetite, but from distress at the toughness of the beefsteaks” (*AG*, p. 17). Her reaction to and thoughts about the beefsteaks and their toughness may indicate that Agnes is vegetarian as she would “gladly have eaten the potatoes and let the

meat alone” (*AG*, p. 17), but politeness prevails. Letting the ‘meat alone’ suggests that she thinks of the meat as a living animal, and that her ‘distress at the toughness’ is actually her envisioning killing it, something that is against her morals.

Agnes’s first meal with the family is an uncomfortable demonstration of male tyranny. Mr. Bloomfield serves mutton to his family and Agnes, and when everyone has been served, he declares the meat ‘not fit to be eaten’: “It is quite overdone. Don’t you taste, Mrs. Bloomfield, that all the goodness is roasted out of it? And can’t you see that all that nice, red gravy is completely dried away?” (*AG*, p. 24). Mr. Bloomfield’s bloodthirstiness, and therefore his disrespect for animals, is not only symbolically demonstrated in his overindulgence of meat, it is also literally confirmed for his longing for the ‘nice, red gravy’. Because of the lack of blood in the mutton, beef is served instead. Mr. Bloomfield cuts it ‘with the most rueful expressions of discontent’ (*AG*, p. 24), and says the joint is ruined because it has been incorrectly carved in the kitchen:

No doubt they cut it wrong in the kitchen – the savages! Dear-dear! Did ever any one see such a fine piece of beef so completely ruined? But remember that, in the future, when a decent dish leaves this table, they shall not touch it in the kitchen. Remember that Mrs. Bloomfield! (*AG*, p. 25).

Here, he compares the servants to savages; obviously, a properly carved joint indicates civilized society. How a man treated his servants was regarded, in the Victorian period, as a sign of gentlemanly status. In his *True Manhood* (1861), for example, William Landels insisted that one can judge whom is a gentleman based on how he treats his servants. He explains: “when he speaks to a servant, and you will find that he could not assume a harsher, more contemptuous tone were he speaking to a dog. (...). I tell you he has no more real courtesy than that half-clad, painted savage” (p. 180). The same way one can judge a gentleman from his treatment of his servants, one can also judge his gentlemanliness in the treatment of animals. Mr. Bloomfield possesses neither courtesy nor decorum, as is evidenced in his cursing when his children are nearby, and he also refers to the children as “‘em” – failing to use proper diction.

Mr. Bloomfield also torments his wife with the disapproval of her housekeeping. He inquires after dinner and Mrs. Bloomfield replies that there will be turkey, grouse, and fish. Mr. Bloomfield asks what kind of fish will be served, and she does not know:

“You don’t know?” cried he, looking solemnly up from his plate, and suspending his knife and fork in astonishment.

“No. I told the cook to get some fish — I did not particularise what.”

“Well, that beats every thing! A lady professes to order fish, and doesn’t specify what!”

“Perhaps, Mr. Bloomfield, you will order dinner yourself in future” (*AG*, p. 25).

The bloodthirstiness of Mr. Bloomfield is complemented by disdain for his wife because he challenges her right to be considered a lady and her social standing, or a good wife for the reason that she is careless when it comes to her family’s meat-consumption. Not caring about what type of meat is for dinner equates to not caring for her husband and their family. Carol Adams (2016) asserts that “Meat eating is the re-inscription of male power at every meal. (...). If meat is a symbol of male dominance then the presence of meat proclaims the disempowering of women” (p. 178). Adams points out that meat is a symbol of male authority for several reasons, including its connection to aggressive behavior, armed hunting, and virility (p. 180). Applying this to the situation may indicate that Mr. Bloomfield is violent towards his wife. Lisa Surridge (1994) states that Victorian authors approached marital violence representing it indirectly (p. 4); wife-beating is therefore indicated, but not explicitly written. In his preoccupation with dead animals and their red gravy, Mr. Bloomfield is presented as a character who is an enemy of the animals. His actions and diction make the reader unsympathetic to him, rendering him a character we do not like. The fact that Mr. Bloomfield encourages Tom to kill animals and his taste for bloody meat represent a violent statement of dominance over other beings taught from father to son, continuing the male tradition of violence towards animals.

Agnes first recognizes Mr. Bloomfield as ‘a gentleman on horseback’ (*AG*, p. 24). Edwards and Graham (2012) assert that “Horsemanship was deemed one of the essential attributes of a gentleman.” (p. 11). They argue that to be seen riding a spirited horse was to promote an image of authority and power and, the mastery of such a creature asserting the rider’s fitness to rule. Agnes first describes Mr. Bloomfield as a gentleman, but reevaluates him soon after.

The reason is probably his behavior at dinner and his violent treatment of the dead animals, but it may also be because he criticizes Agnes and the children immediately after he enters the gate and meets her for the first time: “keep out of that water” and “Don’t you see how Miss Bloomfield has soiled her frock? – and that Master Bloomfield’s socks are quite wet? – and both of them without gloves! Dear! dear! Let me *request* that in future you will keep them *decent*, at least!” (*AG*, p. 24). He later also uses his paternal authority in a despicable manner, and Agnes describes the children’s distress: “The habitual fear of their father’s peevish temper, and the dread of the punishments he was wont to inflict when irritated, kept them generally within bounds in his immediate presence.” (*AG*, p. 26).

Judith Pike (2012) contends that his threat of physical violence was a trait linked with the lower classes by the genteel Victorians (p. 116). Mr. Bloomfield is ill-mannered and is described as ‘perfectly ferocious’. Considering his paternal role and his middle-class position in society, his language, too, is inappropriate and discourteous; when the children dismiss Agnes’s instructions, Mr. Bloomfield shouts: “Come in with you, you filthy brats; or I’ll horse-whip you every one!” (*AG*, p. 35). This is also reinforcing the indication of marital violence; if he horse-whips his children, he is very likely to do the same to his wife. Mr. Bloomfield certainly holds the power and authority, but may not be fit to rule the household. Agnes does not call him a gentleman after these situations. Pia Cuneo argues that “To ride well (...) was a noble art, one that called for the possession of a range of qualities: physical, emotional and moral.” (as cited in Edwards & Graham, 2012, p. 11). Mr. Bloomfield does not possess any of these qualities, according to Agnes: “He was a man of ordinary stature – rather below than above, and rather thin than stout” (*AG*, p. 24); emotions and morals do not seem to impress Agnes either, as she points out several times during her time there. Thus, Agnes’s image of the ‘gentleman on horseback’ disappears because of his treatment of others – his wife, children, animals and servants – and her estimation of Mr. Bloomfield as a good gentleman goes with it.

2.2.2 Alcohol, Nestlings and Dogs

In the same chapter where Agnes loses her position as governess, we meet Mr. Robson, the Bloomfield children’s maternal uncle. Agnes describes him as ‘lofty-minded’, ‘manly’, and ‘the scorner of the female sex’ (*AG*, p. 41). Berg (2002) argues that the portrait Anne Brontë

paints of Mr. Robson is “the pretext for outlining the systematic nature and effects of a violent hierarchy of male domination.” (p. 186). Tom is only seven years old, yet Mr. Robson instructs Tom to ‘imitate’ his drinking habits, “and to believe that the more wine and spirits he could take, and the better he liked them, the more he manifested his bold and manly spirit, and rose superior to his sisters.” (*AG*, p. 42). Mr. Robson’s drinking habits are described as follows: “Though not a positive drunkard, Mr. Robson habitually swallowed great quantities of wine, and took with relish an occasional glass of brandy and water” (*AG*, p. 41). Beth Torgerson (2005) claims that Mr. Robson possibly threatens Tom’s health because alcohol addiction acquired at such a young age may be difficult to cure (p. 23). Mr. Robson likens drinking with manliness, and Torgerson explains that this is a belief that remained from the eighteenth century, which connected the consumption of large quantities of alcohol to masculinity. Mr. Robson’s view that drinking lots of alcohol provides a sense of superiority over others will most likely prove harmful, not only for Tom, but for all people who are in subordinate positions to him as he grows up. This view of alcohol consequently connects to violence and illness, and signify and encourages hierarchies of power. Anne Brontë describes the drinking habits of Mr. Bloomfield and Mr. Robson, upper middle-class males, and Mr. Murray, a member of the upper class; they are all portrayed as habitual drinkers. Torgerson (2005) asserts that Brontë’s representations of illness, and especially those of intemperance or alcoholism, “call into question issues of inequality within a culture based upon hierarchies of power, such as hierarchies based upon distinction of class and gender” (p. 22).

Alongside encouraging Tom to drink alcohol, Mr. Robson similarly supports Tom’s inclination to persecute ‘the lower creation’. Tom has been out in the garden with his uncle and comes running in ‘high glee’ with “a brood of little callow nestlings in his hands. (...) his face twisted into all manner of contortions in the ecstasy of his delight” (*AG*, p. 42). After naming all the horrendous things he intends to do to the birds, Agnes says she will not allow him to; he must either kill them all at once, or bring them back to the place he got them from. If he does not comply, Agnes says she will kill them herself, and Master Tom replies: “You daren’t touch them for your life! because you know papa and mama and uncle Robson would be angry. Ha, hah! I’ve caught you there, Miss!” (*AG*, p. 43). She again asks him what he intends to do, and he repeats his list of torments; Agnes kills the birds. Tom cries out and curses when Agnes kills the birds, and when Mr. Robson comes back with his gun while kicking his dog, Tom says he would rather kick Agnes than the dog. Keeping the ‘well-fed’

pony of her family in mind, Agnes wants to pay what little money she has to see the dogs get their revenge: “he treated them so brutally that, poor as I was, I would have given a sovereign any day to see one of them bite him, provided the animal could have done it with impunity” (*AG*, p. 42). She is willing to spend her last sovereign to turn the tables and teach Tom a lesson.

Agnes’s act is ‘shocking’ to the males because it transgresses the boundaries of the power-hierarchy: she is a woman, a servant, and also a member of a lower class. Kreilkamp (2018) asserts that Anne Brontë “raises a set of ethical and representational questions concerning the limits and requirements of sympathy with animals, cruelty or violence to animals, and the depiction of such violence” (n.p.). The reader learns of Agnes’s compassion and morality by means of her objection in form of sacrificing the birds with a quick death compared to Tom’s imminent torture. Violence performed on an animal is a necessary measure in the novel because in pursuance of criticizing the people of their behavior towards animals, Agnes has to demonstrate the morality and sympathy behind her action. Marion Shaw (2013) argues that Tom demonstrates what he has learned from his father and uncle: “a brutal code of conduct in which women are to be despised and tenderness of feeling abandoned with infancy.” (p. 332). Afterwards, Mr. Robson “laughed excessively at the violence of his nephew’s passion, and the bitter maledictions and opprobrious epithets he heaped upon me.” (*AG*, p. 43) and then, he said:

Damme, but the lad has some spunk in him too! Curse me, if ever I saw a nobler little scoundrel than that! He’s beyond petticoat government already: —by G—, he defies mother, granny, governess, and all! Ha, ha, ha! Never mind, Tom, I’ll get you another brood to-morrow. (*AG*, p. 43).

Mr. Robson’s statement performs several functions: it incites cursing, announces Tom’s commencement of manhood and masculinity, encourages defiance towards women, and approves and emboldens Tom’s violent behavior towards animals.

2.2.3 Masculine Power and the Rocking Horse

At the beginning of the novel, Agnes is an eighteen-year-old girl who wants to become a governess to support her family financially. Agnes has a Romantic view of children as

uncorrupted and innocent, and is excited when thinking about her new profession: “To train the tender plants, and watch their buds unfolding day by day! (*AG*, p. 12). Continuing the mixed metaphor between flora and fauna, Mrs. Bloomfield describes her son as “the flower of the flock” (*AG*, p. 18) and Agnes quickly learns that this is an ironic statement; the Bloomfield children, and particularly Master Tom, are no ‘tender plants’. Pike (2012) argues that Brontë’s portrait of Tom Bloomfield demonstrates how young boys are tainted by the inculcation of masculine privilege, and she claims that the entitlements of primogeniture and inheritance laws breed potential tyrants. Primogeniture rights, the tradition of the eldest son inheriting the property, were historically associated with the aristocracy, but by the 1800s this tradition had been implemented by the middle classes (p. 114). Kathryn Miele (2008) identifies the central problem facing Agnes Grey as how to teach someone to ‘feel’ and empathize with someone else (p. 9). Kreilkamp (2018) suggests that the paradox of the governess “can be found precisely in her ambiguous status as both dominated being and supposed master of the creatures of the household, situated unstably on the boundary of a series of power relationships of gender, class, and also of species.” (n.p.). The paradox of the governess, then, implies that Agnes’s story evolves into a matter of contending her mastery over the household animal life; however, she achieves this by her acts towards nonhumans, not by assertions of power.

Though Master Tom is only seven years old, he already presents himself as master over his sisters and Agnes:

[He] claimed all my attention to himself: he stood bolt upright between me and the fire, with his hands behind his back, talking away like an orator, occasionally interrupting his discourse with a sharp reproof to his sisters when they made too much noise. (*AG*, p. 18).

Here, Tom already shows signs of masculine privilege and power. When he is about to show Agnes his school-room and his new books, his sister Mary Ann says they are hers too; Tom replies ‘decisively’ “They’re mine” (*AG*, p. 19). Agnes struggles with this new mastery and feels that she is being dragged around by her charges: “I found they had no notion of going with me: I must go with them, wherever they chose to lead me. I must run, walk, or stand, exactly as it suited their fancy.” (*AG*, p. 23). The comparison between Agnes and the pony is tangible, and becomes even more clear when Tom shows Agnes his rocking-horse: “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.” (*AG*, p. 19). The implication of Agnes being aligned with the rocking-horse is multifaceted because of what Agnes represents; she is a woman, a servant and is of a lower class. Thus, how Tom treats, or will treat, the rocking-horse indicates how he treats “Agneses” and animals. Furthermore, every time Brontë utilizes the word ‘manly’, she uses it ironically to emphasize the exploitation of masculinity. Pike (2012) explains that while Mrs. Bloomfield portrays her son as a “generous, noble-spirited boy” (*AG*, p. 18), Brontë shows how Tom’s behavior violates all the principles of a Victorian gentleman; he takes great pleasure in dominating his sisters and Agnes, and enjoys torturing animals (p. 115). When Agnes says she hopes he will not use his whip and spurs on a real pony, Master Tom sharply responds: “I’ll cut into him like smoke! Eeh! my word! but he shall sweat for it!” (*AG*, p. 19). After this, red-faced by the ‘redoubled ardour’ of flogging his rocking-horse, Tom raises his fist ‘with a menacing gesture’ at his sister; Agnes expresses her hope that she will never see him strike Mary Ann, and he replies: “You will sometimes, I’m obliged to do it now and then to keep her in order.” (*AG*, p. 19). Maggie Berg (2002) claims that through his actions in this chapter, Tom upholds his hierarchy by means of brute force (p. 180). What may seem like rather dramatic child play is a display of masculine authority. This symbolic whipping of the wooden horse signifies abuse of females, lower-class people and animals. Brontë shows how boys, and the eldest son in particular, are taught early on to claim control and dominance over women and property.

Brontë’s portrait of Master Tom becomes even more disturbing when Agnes learns that he has traps for birds in his garden, and asks what he does to the birds when he catches them. Tom answers: “Sometimes I give them to the cat; sometimes I cut them in pieces with my penknife; but the next, I mean to roast alive.” (*AG*, p. 20). Tom is obviously encouraged to do this, because he tells Agnes that: “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.” (*AG*, p. 21). Kreilkamp (2018) links Tom’s torturing to animal vivisection. Tom dismisses Agnes’s demand of sympathizing and imagining the birds’ pain: “I’m not a bird, and I can’t feel what I do to them.” (*AG*, p. 20). His statement can be read as Tom being ignorant and stupid, but also shockingly cruel; the fact that Tom cannot feel sympathy for something so innocent as baby birds gives us an indication of his morality and ethics overall. The nestlings may be somewhere on the bottom of the social hierarchy of animals, including humans, so Tom’s lack of empathy for the birds

reveals his empathy for other people – “lesser beings” – in general. Since 1751, when William Hogarth published *Four Stages of Cruelty* – showing the development of a boy who begins by torturing dogs and cats, and ends at the gallows for murder – a commonplace notion in English culture was that cruelty to animals led to violence and cruelty towards human beings (as cited in Kreilkamp, 2018, n.p.). Following this notion, the reader could only imagine what was going to happen to people and animals in Tom’s life.

By condoning Tom’s behavior, Mr. Bloomfield demonstrates that torturing animals is an integral part of growing up and becoming a ‘gentleman’ like himself, and Tom is already a good student in this course. It means that violence against animals consequently becomes a compulsory part of boyhood. Tom will soon leave for school and continue his training in manliness; he will therefore be even further removed from females and their influence, and therefore, among other things, the way they treat other beings, including animals. Shaw (2013) draws a parallel between the young Tom Bloomfield, and his already harmful, ‘manly’ ways, and the grown man whom Rosalie Murray marries, Sir Thomas Ashby (p. 332):

He was tall, thin, and wasted, with a slight stoop in the shoulders, a pale face, but somewhat blotchy, and disagreeably red about the eyelids, plain features, and a general appearance of languor and flatness, relieved by a sinister expression in the mouth and the dull, soulless eyes. (...) with his betting book, and his gaming table, and his opera girls, and his Lady this and Mrs. that — yes and his bottles of wine, and glasses of brandy and water too — filthy beast! (*AG*, pp. 160-161).

Towards the end of the novel, Brontë reminds the reader of Tom Bloomfield by mentioning the Murray-boys and describing Sir Thomas Ashby, and perhaps tries to tell the reader that he is everything – a nonhuman, a filthy beast – Tom Bloomfield will become if he continues his training in ‘gentlemanliness’ according to the lessons he has learned from his father and uncle.

2.3 Hares, Mares, Cats, Dogs, and the Murrays

2.3.1 Mares and Hares

After being let go from the Bloomfield family, Agnes is employed by the Murrays, an even wealthier family than the previous one. She is to be a governess for the two teenage girls of the family, Rosalie and Matilda. Agnes describes the family, and ‘to begin with the head’, Mr. Murray is “a blustering, roystering country squire, a devoted fox-hunter, a skilful horse-jockey and farrier, an active, practical farmer, and a hearty *bon-vivant*” and his “scarlet cheeks and crimson nose” indicate his habits of drinking alcohol (*AG*, p. 55). Agnes is not formally introduced to Mr. Murray, but says that “Frequently indeed, his loud laugh reached me from afar, and oftener still, I heard him swearing and blaspheming against the footmen, groom, coachman, or some other hapless dependent.” (*AG*, p. 55). Brontë may introduce Mr. Murray in this way to signify the continuing theme of gentlemanly drinking and violence towards animals and ‘lower creatures’.

Sixteen-year-old Rosalie Murray is portrayed as being a ‘very pretty girl’ and “lively, light-hearted, and could be very agreeable, with those who did not cross her will” (*AG*, p. 57). Agnes continues describing the children, and says that “While Rosalie knew all her charms (...); Matilda thought she was well enough, but cared little about the matter; still less did she care about the cultivation of her mind, and the acquisition of ornamental accomplishments”. (*AG*, p. 59). Agnes also describes thirteen-year-old Matilda as an animal and at the same time an ‘intelligent being’: “As an animal, Matilda was all right, full of life, vigour, and activity; as an intelligent being she was barbarously ignorant, indocile, careless and irrational” (*AG*, p. 59). The fact that Agnes herself differs an animal from an intelligent being can be understood in different ways; she may be defining the difference between animals and people through intellect, or she may be unknowingly hypocritical, describing animals as the opposite of intelligent – like the dumb creatures everyone treats her like.

Matilda’s relationship with horses is used to demonstrate her ‘manliness’; the Misses Murray burst into the school-room, and Matilda tells Agnes eagerly in a long account about her new mare while using several swear-words. Rosalie tells her “dear Matilda, try to be a little more lady-like. Miss Grey, I wish you *would* tell her not to use such shocking words; (...) she *must*

have learnt it from the grooms.” (AG, p. 68). Matilda replies that she learnt it from their father and his ‘jolly friends’ while she cracks a hunting-whip, and one is immediately reminded of Tom Bloomfield and his whips and spurs. Even though Matilda is a girl, she is being taught gentlemanly ways to behave through spending time the “yards, stables, kennels and coach-house” (AG, p. 133); Agnes reflects that Matilda would make “a fine lad” and even Mr. Murray could see that she was “not quite what a young lady ought to be” (AG, p. 133), and she is consequently punished by Mr. Murray by being banned from these places.

Matilda declares that “I’m as good a judge of horseflesh as the best of ’em.” (AG, p. 69). Berg (2002) asserts that “Matilda is not supposed to *judge* flesh, because she is supposed to *be* it.” (p. 190). While Matilda does not realize this, Rosalie has accepted the role as the prized pony – being sold to the highest bidder, Sir Thomas Ashby – and the situation of the two sisters is symbolically illustrated when Agnes, Mr. Weston and Matilda are out on a walk; Matilda pursues her dog which is chasing a leveret³, and she comes “panting back, with the lacerated body of the young hare in her hand” (AG, p. 135). Mr. Weston, puzzled by her ‘gleeful countenance’ asks if she intended to kill the hare or save it, and she replies:

I pretended to want to save it, (...) as it was so glaringly out of season; but I was better pleased to see it killed. However, you can both witness that I couldn’t help it; Prince was determined to have her; and he clutched her by the back, and killed her in a minute! Wasn’t it a noble chase? (AG, p. 136).

Matilda says she ‘pretended to want to save’ the hare because the current season was not at the time for hunting. So to follow the rules of her father, being banned from hunting, she ‘pretended’ to want to save it. Matilda’s dog is presumably a hunting dog, and Sarah Amato (2015) asserts that the aristocracy kept an old tradition of keeping hunting and sporting dogs, and that the keeping of dogs could be seen as a prestigious activity which improved a person or family’s social reputation (pp. 25-26). In addition, the dog is named Prince and he carried out a ‘noble chase’, which complements the indication of nobility. Symbolically, Prince is ‘the noble’ Sir Thomas Ashby and Rosalie is the young hare; Rosalie is being discarded for nobility through her marriage to Sir Thomas Ashby, and this is compared to Prince breaking

³ OED: A young hare, strictly one in its first year. At the time, Rosalie Murray is on her honeymoon and in her first year of marriage.

the hare's back. Overall, the connotation between Rosalie and the hare and Matilda and the mare points to their status as objects that are sold on the marriage market.

The men in the novel are not the only people who look down on animals and people from lower classes; in the same way as Mrs. Bloomfield spoke about the nestlings and how she treated Agnes, Agnes indicates that Mrs. Murray does not respect her: "I did not see her till eleven o'clock on the morning after my arrival, when she honoured me with a visit" (*AG*, p. 55). Agnes also notes her unfriendly manner and lack of comforting words. The same attitude seems to be inherited by her daughter, Rosalie, who "seldom lost sight (...) of the fact of my being a hireling, and a poor curate's daughter" (*AG*, p. 57). Also, as Mrs. Bloomfield sees Agnes as like a nestling, a creature created for her convenience, she is perceived in the same manner at her new post. One time, when walking home from church, Agnes relates the feeling of invisibility: "if their eyes, in speaking, chanced to fall on me, it seemed as if they looked on vacancy – as if they either did not see me, or were very desirous to make it appear so." (*AG*, p. 94). Here, Agnes is not even compared to an animal, she is compared to air. On one of the walks returning from church, Mr. Weston helps her pick primroses, and two months later, again on her way home from church, he gives her bluebells. Agnes feels that he *sees* her: "it was something that he had noticed so accurately the time I had ceased to be visible." (*AG*, p. 136). Mr. Weston does not look down on her like some 'lower creature' like everyone else; he is nice to her and to all other creatures.

2.3.2 Cats and Cottagers

The treatment of Nancy Brown's cat is utilized to indicate the important differences between the two clergymen Mr. Weston and Mr. Hatfield. Agnes starts visiting the old, poor widow Nancy, and she reads the Bible for her due to an inflammation in the eyes. Nancy asks Agnes how she likes Mr. Weston, and then goes on to say that he comes to see her and all the other 'poor bodies' in village. She says that Mr. Weston visits more than Mr. Hatfield, and comparing the two, she states:

When [Mr. Hatfield] comes into a house, they say he's sure to find summut wrong, and begin a calling 'em as soon as he crosses th' doorstuns (...) and very oft, he comes o' purpose to reprove folk for not coming to church, or not kneeling an' standing when other folks does, or going to th' Methody chapel, or summut o' that sort." (*AG*, p. 80).

Mr. Hatfield also seems to scorn Nancy, telling her to come to church even though she has terrible rheumatism. Nancy says he seemed more interested in knowing where ‘the ladies o’ th’ Hall’, Rosalie and Matilda, are; she tells him, and he kicks her “poor cat right across th’ floor, an went off after ’em” (*AG*, p. 81), trading caring for the cottagers with the pursuit of women.

Mr. Weston, by contrast, takes his time talking to Nancy, and, significantly does not mind the ‘muck’ and ‘washing pots’: “an’ I expected he’d begin a calling me for my idle ways as Maister Hatfield would a’ done; but I was mista’en: he only bid me good mornin’ like, in a quiet dacent way.” (*AG*, p. 83). Mr. Weston is also nice to her cat:

And when th’ cat, poor thing, jumped on to his knee, he only stroked her, and gave a bit of a smile: so I thought that was a good sign; for once, when she did so to [Mr. Hatfield], he knocked her off, like as it might be in scorn and anger, poor thing. (*AG*, p. 83).

Newman (1996) contends that “Mr. Weston displays an Evangelical charity and patience which is conveyed by his behaviour with the cat.” (p. 239). In addition, Mr. Weston saves her cat from the Murrays’ gamekeeper; serving as a contrast to Mr. Hatfield, he is not scared of the squire’s unfounded cruelty, and defends himself against it. Thus, the difference between the two clergymen is reinforced by their behavior towards Nancy and her cat. Brontë’s use of the pet cat functions as a moral indicator regarding both Mr. Weston and Mr. Hatfield.

2.3.3 Snap the Terrier

The terrier Snap first belonged to Matilda, who bought him when he was a puppy. Matilda soon becomes “tired of so helpless and troublesome a nursling,” however, Agnes, “by carefully nursing the little creature from infancy to adolescence, of course, had obtained its affections” (*AG*, p. 100). The difference between Agnes and Matilda is determined through their ability to care for Snap. Agnes’s ability to love a shabby but loyal animal speaks to her aptitude for perceiving value on the inside; this skill is what makes her notice Mr. Weston’s good nature and character, while the Misses Murray flirts with inappropriate and vain men like Mr. Hatfield. Berg (2002) argues that there are “obvious links with the little terrier and Agnes” (p. 190); both have low positions in the hierarchy of the Murray household, and,

similarly, a lower-class status overall. According to Berg (2002), “The pure breeding of pets took off at the same time that the hierarchy of human beings was celebrated; terriers, like governesses, were somewhere near the bottom” (p. 191).

Snap can also be understood as a representation of Mr. Weston, Agnes’s love interest. He is portrayed by Rosalie as “an insensate, ugly, stupid blockhead” (*AG*, p. 70), but Agnes thinks that while his face is “too square for beauty” and his eyebrows “too projecting,” his eyes are “strikingly brilliant, and full of expression.” (*AG*, p. 88). This description makes Mr. Weston comparable to Snap, who is “rough-visaged,” “bright-eyed,” and “warm-hearted.” (*AG*, p. 130). While not specified, it is likely that Brontë had an Irish terrier in mind in her representation of Snap; Alexander and Sellars (1995) states that the Brontës kept an Irish terrier named Grasper for at least four years (p. 376). Irish terriers are spirited and clever, as well as being flock and family guardians (American Kennel Club, 2021). Snap’s breed, therefore, reinforces the notion of the dog as a counterpart for Mr. Weston. Both Mr. Weston and Snap are ‘stolen’ from Agnes by the Misses Murray, who first deprive her of her dog: “Snap, my little (...) companion, the only thing I had to love me, was taken away, and delivered over to the tender mercies of the village ratcatcher, a man notorious for his brutal treatment of his canine slaves.” (*AG*, p. 130). The dog is sold mainly because Matilda resents Snap’s allegiance to Agnes: “she affirmed it was fit for nothing, and had not even the sense to know its own mistress” (*AG*, p. 100). Similarly, Rosalie and Matilda decide to prevent Agnes from having contact with Mr. Weston by Rosalie trying to fascinate and pursue him. Flegel (2015) argues that “As moneyed young ladies, Matilda and [Rosalie] should outstrip Agnes who is beneath them in class and dignity” (p. 24). However, Agnes surpasses them in the qualities that matters, such as affection, kindness, and her ability to look at a person’s character and morals, and not their appearance.

Mr. Weston does not fall for Matilda and Rosalie’s tricks, just as Snap gives his affection to Agnes instead of Matilda. Both are restored to Agnes in the end at A—:

I heard a snuffling sound behind me, and then a dog came frisking and wriggling to my feet. It was my own Snap—the little dark, wire-haired terrier! When I spoke his name, he leapt up in my face, and yelled for joy. (...) I looked round, and beheld—

Mr. Weston!

“Your dog remembers you well, Miss Grey,” said he.” (*AG*, pp. 165-166).

In Mr. Weston’s kindness to Agnes’s dog by rescuing him from a miserable life, he demonstrates his compassion towards animals. Flegel (2015) contends that this shows he is well suited for his future role as guardian and protector of the household (p. 25). While Mr. Hatfield establishes his poor morality by kicking and hitting Nancy’s cat and by administering a ‘resounding thwack’ upon Snap’s skull with his cane (*AG*, p. 102). In contrast, Mr. Weston saves both Snap and the cat, thus reinforcing his good character and morality.

Flegel (2015) states that dogs were known as “family-constituting beings” in Victorian England; as such, they played an important role in signaling the readiness of female and male characters for a heteronormative future (p. 23). Agnes’s attachment to Snap therefore serves as a counterpart of Agnes being prepared for maternal and conjugal love. When Agnes and Mr. Weston parts at the beach, he says that he will not offer to restore Snap to her; Agnes replies: “Oh, I don’t want him (...) now that he has a good master; I’m quite satisfied.” (*AG*, p. 169). Berg (2002) suggests that like Snap, Agnes’s happiness is dependent upon finding a kind master. Also, when Mr. Weston proposes to Agnes, she symbolically replaces Snap because he is left at home (p. 192). Newman (1996) observes that Mr. Weston most likely bought Snap because he reminded him of Agnes (p. 240). Thus, Agnes returns to her early identification as the family pet; Agnes starts out the novel as spoiled by her parents, and is “too helpless and dependent, too unfit for buffeting with the cares and turmoils of life” (*AG*, p. 6), which makes her “not many degrees more useful than the kitten” (*AG*, p. 10). However, Agnes says goodbye to her kitten and is, by the end of the novel, identified with Snap, a dog that represents marital love. For the reason that Mr. Weston is kind to all animals, it is indicated that he will be a good master and husband to Agnes. Mr. Weston’s superiority over the other male characters in *Agnes Grey* is indicated by the fact that neither cats and dogs, nor governesses are beneath his notice. Mr. Weston is rewarded with marriage because of his treatment of animals, and we shall see that similarly, Gilbert is too.

3 Animal Representation and Morality in

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall

In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* Brontë presents insights into the relationship between human beings and animals, which reveals a social hierarchy based on violence. The novel links violence towards animals to violence towards humans that are regarded as less than human by the male characters. Brontë illustrates the effect upper-class men, who spend their days hunting, womanizing and drinking, have on animals, women and servants. Like the fathers in *Agnes Grey*, Arthur Huntingdon⁴ passes on the ‘gentlemanly’ behavior of drinking and abusing animals through hunting to his son, Arthur. Helen leaves with Arthur before it is too late to instill a superior version of manliness in him. The men in *The Tenant at Wildfell Hall* abuse their privilege and act horribly towards their ‘dependents’; they hit and humiliate women, throw things at and abuse animals, and they mistreat servants. The characters are represented as animals throughout the novel, and Brontë utilizes the characters’ behavior towards animals, and the characters they represent, to determine their moral stature. Animals serve as essential symbols throughout the novel. The characters’ treatment of animals functions as an indication of their morality.

This is an epistolary novel with a disorganized timeline, and the reader is taken back and forth in time. I have therefore divided this chapter into three sections, based on the narrator of either letters or diary. First, in 1827, Gilbert Markham is the narrator through his letter to his brother in law, Mr. Jack Halford. Helen Huntingdon has now left her abusive, adulterous and alcoholic husband, Arthur Huntingdon, and brings her child with her. Second, we are told the story of Helen and Mr. Huntingdon’s time together by means of Helen’s diary from 1821 to 1827. Third, the reader is brought back to 1827 with Gilbert as narrator.

⁴ Henceforward, I will refer to Arthur Huntingdon Jr. as ‘Arthur’, and Arthur Huntingdon Sr. as ‘Mr. Huntingdon’.

3.1 Puppies, Kittens, Dogs, Ponies, Horses, and the Markhams

3.1.1 Dogs

The first time Gilbert and Helen meet, he is out hunting with his dog, Sancho. In Victorian England, dogs were considered to be examples of guilelessness, loyalty and chivalric heroism, and these traits had long been associated with an idealized masculinity. Sarah Amato (2015) asserts that Victorians understood the masculine qualities of the dog as ideals of Victorian manliness (p. 74). Dogs were believed to share characteristics with their owners. Sancho is a setter, and this breed is an excellent gundog used mostly to retrieve birds; it is very energetic, friendly and has a calm temperament, in addition to being very good with children (Norsk Kennel Klub, 2021). Sancho is, to a certain extent, a mirror of Gilbert. Helen may find the fact that Sancho, and Gilbert, likes hunting as unsettling because of its relation to the gentlemanly drinking behavior; however, all the other characteristics are, most likely, attractive to Helen compared to her drunk and violent husband who trains their son to be exactly like him. In addition, Sancho indicates idealized masculinity in Gilbert. Like Snap in *Agnes Grey*, Sancho functions as an intermediary in Gilbert's courtship with Helen, and not only because of the characteristics of the dog, but also because Arthur likes Sancho, and therefore Gilbert.

Another interesting aspect is Sancho's name, because it may refer to Sancho Panza in *Don Quixote*. Young (2000) notes that the relationship between Don Quixote and Sancho is that of a master and servant (p. 381). When applied to the relationship between Helen and Gilbert, Gilbert acts like a servant, or a puppy as we shall see later, and he is always at Helen's 'service'. Sancho is also a poor, local farmer, who may be a bit dim, and one could easily apply this to Gilbert. Additionally, Don Quixote and Sancho's different social status is reflected in the class difference between Helen and Gilbert.

3.1.2 Cats and Kittens

Before Gilbert meets Helen, he is courting Eliza Millward. After 'discovering' Helen, Gilbert compares Eliza to a cat and a kitten: "Her voice was gentle and childish, her tread light and soft as that of a cat;—but her manners more frequently resembled those of a pretty, playful kitten, that is now pert and roguish, now timid and demure, according to its own sweet will."

(*TWH*⁵, p. 17). Berg (2010) suggests that “what makes these women’s gazes so provoking to the men—prompting both to make an analogy to a cat—is that they cannot be pinned down” (p. 32). Similarly, Amato (2015) points out that the cat was viewed by Victorians as promiscuous and independent, but also feeble (p. 60); in addition, they were perceived to be highly sexual animals (p. 58). Eliza is shallow, flighty and seductive; she is not characterized as a dog, which as we have seen indicates married bliss, she is characterized as an erratic and promiscuous cat. This may be the reason Gilbert loses interest in her and focuses on Helen.

Gilbert visits the Millwards, and while Eliza is embroidering, her sister, Mary, mends stockings with a ‘cat on her knee’; Eliza asks her sister to pick up ‘the ball of cotton’ that had rolled under the table, and, instead, Gilbert picks it up:

‘Thank you, Mr. Markham,’ said she, as I presented it to her. ‘I would have picked it up myself; only I did not want to disturb the cat.’

‘Mary, dear, *that* won’t excuse you in Mr. Markham’s eyes,’ said Eliza; ‘he hates cats, I daresay, as cordially as he does old maids—like all other gentlemen—don’t you, Mr. Markham?’

‘I believe it is natural for our unamiable sex to dislike the creatures,’ replied I; ‘for you ladies lavish so many caresses upon them.’

‘Bless them—little darlings!’ cried she, in a sudden burst of enthusiasm, turning round and overwhelming her sister’s pet with a shower of kisses.

‘Don’t, Eliza!’ said Miss Millward, somewhat gruffly, as she impatiently pushed her away. (*TWH*, p. 24).

While Eliza is described as a cat in an alluring way, Mary is likened more to the role of the spinster, being “several years older” (*TWH*, p. 17) than Eliza. Mary is reminiscent here of Miss Nancy Brown in *Agnes Grey*, with the cat on her knee and seemingly dependent on it. Eliza indicates that gentlemen hate both cats and old maids, and Gilbert agrees, saying that it is natural for men to dislike cats because they get the attention of the ladies. The depiction of Mary as the cat is strengthened when Eliza showers the cat with kisses, and Mary grumpily

⁵ Brontë, A., & McDonagh, J. (2008). *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. (H. Rosengarten, Ed.). Oxford University Press. I will abbreviate the source to *TWH* henceforward.

pushes her away. The sisters are both compared to felines; Eliza as the seductive and flighty kitten, and Mary as the spinster's cat.

3.1.3 Ponies and Horses

In the novel, the words 'pony' and 'horse' are collectively mentioned seventy-five times, and this emphasizes their importance. According to Ritvo (1987), Victorian Britons of all ranks and social classes were known for their love of horses (p. 19). The reason is, perhaps, that horses were utilized for several activities, such as transportation, farming, and hunting. Mr. Lawrence owns a grey pony that he uses for riding, and it is mentioned several times throughout the novel. Through giving Mr. Lawrence a pony instead of a horse, Brontë may be investing several meanings in the animal. The main difference between ponies and horses is based on their height; ponies are 148 cm or shorter (Henderson, 1999, p. 10). The fact that the pony is smaller in size may indicate that Mr. Lawrence is not a threat to Gilbert, compared to Mr. Huntingdon, with his bigger hunting horses. In this way, the pony may signify that there is a difference between Mr. Lawrence and the 'gentlemen' who shoot and drink. Also, Ensminger (1991) contends that ponies usually have a high level of intelligence, and also have calmer temperaments than horses (pp. 11-12). Consequently, Mr. Lawrence is a reflection of the pony. An important aspect connected to the pony is that the reader does not see Mr. Lawrence hunting with it, or indeed hunting at all. Since Brontë operates with an ideology in which gentlemanly hunting devalues a character's moral stature, Mr. Lawrence is a morally good character with authorial approval.

3.2 Dogs, Horses, Birds, Cats, Gentlemen's Clubs, and the Huntingdons

3.2.1 Dependents and Gentlemanly Shooting and Drinking

The horse was characterized as 'noble' by popular natural history writers in the Victorian era; sometimes, they were considered nobler than the humans charged with their care. In addition, there were plenty of prints and paintings that reflected the traditional association with horses and aristocratic sport (Ritvo, 1987, pp. 19-20). This is reflected in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* several times through Helen's diary and her story involving Mr. Huntingdon and his gentlemen friends. Helen and Mr. Huntingdon's marriage is set in the context of hunting,

because his pursuit of her develops exclusively during shooting parties. Mr. Huntingdon's death is ironically caused by him falling off his horse. This may be Brontë's way of punishing him for his treatment of animals. It is also significant that Mr. Huntingdon seems to enjoy hunting and womanizing more while others are present: "[Mr. Huntingdon] never *attempted* to help me, till he saw Mr. Boarham coming to do so; and then he stepped laughingly forward and said, 'Come, I'll preserve you from that infliction.'" (*TWH*, p. 115). Berg (2010) argues that "Hunting, like the pursuit of women, is a manifestation of homosocial desire" (p. 24); Eve Sedgwick uses this term to describe strong affective relationships between men and the 'glue' of patriarchal society (as cited in Berg, 2010, p. 24). The homosociality between Mr. Huntingdon and his friends is largely based on hunting and drinking, and the hunters' excitement for killing challenges their moral superiority as aristocratic or upper class men.

Whenever Mr. Huntingdon is unable to go hunting or drinking with his friends, he torments various members of his household:

He spent the remainder of the morning and the whole afternoon in fidgeting about (...) alternately petting, and, teasing, and abusing his dogs, (...) and very often fixedly gazing at me, when he thought I did not perceive it, with the vain hope of detecting some traces of tears, or some tokens of remorseful anguish in my face. (*TWH*, p. 179).

Mr. Huntingdon also abuses his servants, finding "finding fault with everything on the table" (*TWH*, p. 114) and declaring that they must change their cook. We are reminded of Mr. Bloomfield and his abuse of his servants, calling them 'savages' for carving a joint incorrectly. Benson, the footman, stumbles on the carpet and causes 'a rather alarming concussion' of crockery, and "[Mr. Huntingdon] turned furiously around upon him, and swore at him with savage coarseness." (*TWH*, p. 115). When Helen defends Benson, he retorts: "do you think I could stop to consider the feelings of an insensate brute like that, when my own nerves were racked and torn to pieces by his confounded blunders?" (*TWH*, p. 215). Mr. Huntingdon compares Benson to an animal by calling him a 'brute'; however, Brontë implies that it is, indeed, he who is the brute by treating his animals, wife and servants poorly.

Berg (2010) argues that to Mr. Huntingdon, Arthur is a "body that does not matter until it can reflect and admire him" (p. 27). Until Arthur is at an age where this is attainable, Mr.

Huntingdon regards him as a “little wretch” and “worthless idiot” (*TWH*, p. 204). The reader learns of Helen’s plan to leave during one of the dinner parties with Mr. Huntingdon and his friends, where Arthur is learning the gentlemanly habit of drinking. Mr. Huntingdon cheats on Helen and abuses her, but it is not until Helen sees the way Arthur copies his father’s vices that she decides to leave. These vices, such as gentlemanly hunting and drinking, function as indicators of male dominance and violence towards ‘lesser creatures’ such as women, servants and animals; consequently, the men in the novel who partake in these activities are understood as characters of poor morals.

3.2.2 The Spaniels

Anne Brontë, among other Victorian writers, approached the issue of wife battering by deflecting violence from the body of a woman onto the body of a domestic animal. Lisa Surridge (1994) suggests that in doing so, the violence between husband and wife is not directly represented; rather, abuse towards an animal suggests the presence of abuse in the marriage (p. 4). The connection between the beaten wife and the beaten animal suggests a correlation between the position of a wife and that of a domestic pet. Also, Surridge contends that “Victorian polemic on wife battery repeatedly compared wives, dogs and horses as beings over which a man has legal and proprietary control.” (p. 4). Brontë uses Dash, the cocker spaniel, to illustrate the conflation of abused wife and pet:

He made a long stay in the dining-room after dinner, and, I fear, took an unusual quantity of wine, (...) his favourite cocker, Dash, that had been lying at my feet, took the liberty of jumping upon him and beginning to lick his face. He struck it off with a smart blow; and the poor dog squeaked, and ran cowering back to me. When he woke up, (...) he called it to him again; but Dash only looked sheepish and wagged the tip of his tail. He called again, more sharply, but Dash only clung the closer to me, and licked my hand as if imploring protection. Enraged at this, his master snatched up a heavy book and hurled it at his head. The poor dog set up a piteous outcry and ran to the door. I let him out, and then quietly took up the book.

‘Give that book to me,’ said Arthur, in no very courteous tone.

I gave it to him.

‘Why did you let the dog out?’ he asked. ‘You knew I wanted him.’

‘By what token?’ I replied; ‘by your throwing the book at him? but perhaps, it was

intended for me?’

‘No — but I see you’ve got a taste of it,’ said he, looking at my hand, that had also been struck, and was rather severely grazed. (*TWH*, pp. 179-180).

The situation indicates several meaningful elements. Firstly, Helen and Dash are identically situated as recipients of Mr. Huntingdon’s verbal abuse. Secondly, there is a transferal of physical violence; while he strikes and throws a book at the dog, it is the woman who is wounded. Apparently, the injury is accidental – Mr. Huntingdon denies that he meant to hit Helen – however, the lingering question ‘Perhaps it was intended for me?’ is laden with meaning. Surridge (1994) argues that the breed of dog, cocker spaniel, reinforces the comparison between beaten wife and beaten pet. Spaniels were traditionally connected to ‘feminine’ qualities such as submission, subservience, gentleness, and, also, a willingness to be beaten (p. 6).

While only implying wife beating between Helen and Mr. Huntingdon through violence towards Dash, Brontë explicitly portrays violence between husband and wife through Mr. Hattersley and his wife Milicent. He marries her because he wants a wife who is quiet and will let him do what he pleases without complaint. This is represented when Mr. Hattersley crushes Milicent’s arm, shakes and throws her from him “with such violence that she fell on her side” (*TWH*, p. 236). Mr. Hattersley protects his right to abuse his wife when her friend, Helen, and her brother, Mr. Hargrave, interfere:

‘Don’t let him treat your sister in that way,’ said I to Mr. Hargrave. (...) [Mr. Hargrave] made an effort to unclasp the ruffian’s fingers from her arm, but was suddenly driven backward and nearly laid upon the floor by a violent blow on the chest accompanied with the admonition,
‘Take that for your insolence! — and learn not to interfere between me and mine again.’ (*TWH*, p. 236).

Not only does the reader get to see violence towards the wife, but Mr. Hattersley also hits another man. This may indicate that Brontë wants the novel to be received more acceptable to male readers, or, it could emphasize, since Mr. Hattersley is “beastly drunk” (*TWH*, p. 236), that gentlemanly drinking leads to crossing even larger boundaries than ‘just’ violence towards ‘lower creatures’. Mr. Hattersley seems to revel in his violence towards Milicent, both physical and emotional, as he tells Helen: “I sometimes think she has no feeling at all;

and then I go on until she cries — and that satisfies me.” (*TWH*, p. 246). In addition, Mr. Hattersley wonders how he can help ‘teazing’ Millicent “when she lies down like a spaniel at my feet and never so much as squeaks to tell me that’s enough?” (*TWH*, p. 246). This equation between Millicent and a spaniel reinforces the idea that alongside Dash, Helen, too, is abused.

3.2.3 Tigresses and Cats

Although cats and kittens function as symbols of the spinster relating to Agnes, Nancy Brown, and Eliza Millward, Brontë uses comparisons with feline animals in a different way to describe Helen. Helen is compared to feline animals on two occasions; in these instances, the cat’s characteristics invite a different kind of interpretation. Previously, the women who are being compared actually keep a specific kitten or a cat, but here, Helen is likened to *the cat* and its perception in the Victorian era. The first time Helen is associated with a feline animal, she and Mr. Huntingdon have had a quarrel because he told her about his ‘intrigue’ with Lady F—. Helen tells him that she would not have married him if he had told her ‘these things’ before, and Mr. Huntingdon says that he would be very angry if he believed her. He says “Though you stand there with your white face and flashing eyes, looking at me like a very tigress, I know the heart within you” (*TWH*, p. 177). Helen is portrayed as being fiercely cross, with her ‘flashing eyes’. The tiger could have been utilized to show the symbolic qualities of the tiger. Mr. Huntingdon knows ‘the heart within’ her, which indicates that he thinks Helen ultimately loves him no matter what he does. The application of this simile may suggest the times ahead, where Helen gathers up the boldness and strength of the tiger to leave him.

The other occasion where Helen is connected to a cat transpires after Mr. Huntingdon discovers and burns her painting equipment, possibly because he suspects Helen’s plans of leaving him. The burning of these signify him destroying her means of leaving. Again, Mr. Huntingdon compares her to a feline animal after an ‘argument’: “She’s the very devil for spite! Did *ever* any mortal see such eyes? — they shine in the dark like a cat’s.” (*TWH*, p. 310). Time has passed, and Mr. Huntingdon values Helen less and less, and therefore, he is not so kind when describing her this time; not only does he equate her to a cat, but also to the devil. Amato (2015) contends that portrayals of the feline character likened cats to women

who wanted to escape domesticity (p. 61). Hence, the comparison highlights what later ensues. Amato also states that in the Victorian era, the cat “was understood as strong-willed, independent, and promiscuous as well as a feeble and self-destructive creature that could somehow be reformed into a more ideal and dependent pet.” (p. 60). Brontë is therefore emphasizing Helen’s nature as an independent and resolute woman; she also accentuates Helen’s role of being the dependent pet after her self-destruction portrayed by marrying Mr. Huntingdon, despite multiple warning signs in form of Mr. Huntingdon’s actions. After Mr. Huntingdon burns and takes away her painting equipment, Helen knocks a candle to the floor in defiance. Amato (2015) suggests that “perceptions of the cat as an innately emotive animal given to bouts of passion and mischief also suggested a correlation between cats and women.” (p. 62). Consequently, the connection between Helen and a feline animal is, again, strengthened.

3.3 Dogs, Puppies, and the Markhams – again

As the novel moves back to the beginning, dogs continue to have significance. We are presented with Mr. Lawrence’s dogs, and the dog representation for Gilbert suggests new implications.

3.3.1 Dogs and Mr. Lawrence

Mr. Lawrence’s dogs are significant because they portray who he is. An important factor when it comes to Mr. Lawrence’s dogs is that the reader is not introduced to them until he is established as a morally good character; it is only after Gilbert finds out that Mr. Lawrence is Helen’s brother, and that he has helped her, that the reader is presented to his dogs. According to Amato (2015), the Victorians perceived both male and female dogs as masculine creatures: honest, loyal, and characteristically heroic (p. 58). This is recognized in Mr. Lawrence and his actions, helping both his sister and Gilbert; Mr. Lawrence helps Helen by covering for her to the villagers and giving her a place to stay, and he aids Gilbert by not telling Helen that Gilbert attacked him and showing him the letters from Helen later in the novel. There are several elements that reveal something about Mr. Lawrence’s character in this excerpt:

A clear, red fire was burning in the polished grate: a superannuated greyhound, given up to idleness and good living, lay basking before it on the thick, soft rug, on one corner of which, beside the sofa, sat a smart young springer, looking wistfully up in its

master's face; perhaps asking permission to share his couch, or, it might be, only soliciting a caress from his hand or a kind word from his lips. (*TWH*, p. 346).

The dogs are comfortable in his presence, laying 'basking' on a rug and 'looking wistfully' at their owner; in contrast, Dash tries to lick Mr. Huntingdon, a sign of submission, anxiety or pain (Robins, 2019), and then lies on Helen's feet instead of his master's.

Mr. Lawrence's dogs are also a portrayal of him as a person. Amato (2015) states that if a dog's owner was a man, the dogs were considered by Victorians to share characteristics with him (p. 58); also, representations showing the resemblances between men and dogs often attributed masculine characteristics to dogs as a means of emphasizing class differences (p. 76). One of Mr. Lawrence's dogs is a greyhound, and this breed was understood as a dog of the purest breed, a noble hound who was a suitable representative of the 'High Life'. Amato (2015) also asserts that ownership of a highbred dog signified masculine character, thus, the greyhound epitomized English nobility. The spaniel was often connected to a battered wife, as previously stated, but when it was associated with masculinity, the spaniel represented intelligent and cultured manliness (pp. 77, 79). Mr. Lawrence's two dogs represent him and his qualities of nobility, education and intelligence, and, importantly, shows his good moral character.

3.3.2 Gilbert the Hunter, Puppy, and Stray

Compared to Snap's role as courtship through dog, the example of Sancho and Gilbert as a means of gaining Helen's affections is more complex. Initially, Gilbert detects a scornful look from Helen, and reflects: "She thinks me an impudent puppy" (*TWH*, p. 16). However, after Arthur forms a bond with Sancho, Gilbert gives him a puppy to increase his chances with Helen: "My first pretext for invading the sanctum, was to bring Arthur a waddling little puppy of which Sancho was the father, and which delighted the child beyond expression, and, consequently, could not fail to please his mamma." (*TWH*, p. 63). He continues to visit, saying that: "But an apology for invading the hermitage was still necessary; so I had furnished myself with a blue morocco collar for Arthur's little dog" (*TWH*, p. 63). His use of the words 'invade', 'hermitage' and 'sanctum' suggests a more troubling tone than Mr. Weston's accidental and innocent approach. Gilbert's utilization of his dog as a way of entering Helen's private space suggests his recognition that the dog has a more agile social status than himself;

the dog is invited into the ‘sanctum’ immediately, something that Gilbert, the ‘impudent puppy’, also wishes he could be allowed. Flegel (2015) argues that “in using the dog as a seemingly innocent interloper within the home – a clear representation of his own wished-for role – Gilbert, consciously or not, relies on a collapsing of boundaries central to pet-hood” (pp. 26-27). Gilbert uses his connection to Sancho to show Helen that he is charming, harmless, safe to be around children, and to be invited into the ‘sanctum’. However, Helen does not know if she can trust him yet, coming from a situation where charming facades can conceal a frightening character.

Berg (2010) understands Gilbert as “little better than that scoundrel of a first husband” (p. 23), a reading that connects Gilbert to a hunter and Helen to a prey. The first time they meet, Gilbert is out hunting with his gun and dog, and one can easily understand the comparison Helen draws to her husband. Also, at the beginning of the novel, Gilbert is “breaking in the grey colt”⁶ (*TWH*, p. 12), while Fergus, his younger brother, has been ‘badger-baiting’ with his dogs. Gilbert says that he should be doing something else, so it is suggested that Fergus is the colt Gilbert is trying to break in. This is another situation where Gilbert acts more like his unknown opponent, Mr. Huntingdon, and the reader may devalue Gilbert’s moral character by his treatment of the horse. However, it is significant that after Helen and Gilbert’s initial meeting, the reader does not see Gilbert hunt or be mean to animals again.

Gilbert trades in his gun for books; while his first excuse for visiting was to bring Arthur a puppy, his second pretext was to bring him a book. He continues to use books as an excuse to see Helen:

My last visit had been to return the book she had lent me; and then it was, that, in casually discussing the poetry of Sir Walter Scott, she had expressed a wish to see ‘Marmion,’ and I had conceived the presumptuous idea of making her a present of it, and, on my return home, instantly sent from the smart little volume I had this morning received. (*TWH*, p. 63).

⁶ Collins: “A colt is young male horse.” OED: figurative: “A young or inexperienced person (...) young person who needs to be broken in.”

The reading of Gilbert as the puppy may be evident here; he goes back and forth to fetch anything his master desires. He is also getting closer to being invited in to the inner 'sanctum' like Arthur's puppy has been. Gilbert's actions after meeting Helen and Arthur may change the reader's understanding of him as just another man of the patriarchy who abuses the 'lower creatures'. The reading of Gilbert as a stray dog, who wants to become loved by the family, strengthens the view of Helen as a domesticator; she tames the wild side of Gilbert that breaks in the colt, likes to hunt, loses his temper and attacks her brother by showing the story of his predecessor. Subsequently, Gilbert symbolically becomes tamed by correcting his own behavior and understanding what Mr. Huntingdon did not: "Oh, Helen, if I had listened to you, it never would have come to this!" (*TWH*, p. 378). Mr. Weston is rewarded with marriage by showing kindness to animals. In contrast, Gilbert is rewarded with marriage by learning good moral character. Gilbert wins Helen's hand in marriage by respecting her and her opinions as a woman, to stop hurting animals by trading his gun with books, and therefore quit hunting, and for showing kindness to animals and children.

4 Conclusion

In *Agnes Grey*, Anne Brontë begins her story by telling the reader that “All true histories contain instruction”, and in her two novels *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, this seems to be her goal. Animal representations and their role as indicators of characters’ morality is a permeating theme in her stories, and this is demonstrated through the characters’ treatment of animals. ‘Petted and patronized’ herself, Brontë was surrounded by pets and animals while growing up. In an era where acts against cruelty to animals emerged, Brontë contributed to the growing literature which gave focus to animals. She promotes an egalitarian morality which extends to animals. The purpose of this thesis is to bring new understandings of animal representation in *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and to study the connections between humans and animals in the novels. By examining how animals function to indicate good or poor morals in a character, I proposed that characters’ moral stature is measured by the way in which they treat animals. This is demonstrated throughout the novels.

In *Agnes Grey*, animals are used to convey the moral strengths and weaknesses of the people Agnes meets. After leaving her own household as the family pet, Agnes becomes a governess in employment of the Bloomfield family where Mr. and Mrs. Bloomfield teach their children degraded models of morality through their treatment of animals. Agnes attends her first dinner with the family, and Mr. Bloomfield’s lack of empathy for animals is evidenced through his bloodthirstiness during the meal. The moral inferiority of the Bloomfields is revealed by their treatment of animals, and this is especially demonstrated through their support for Tom wanting to torture the nestlings. By condoning Tom’s behavior, Mr. Bloomfield demonstrates that torturing animals is an integral part of growing up and becoming a ‘gentleman’ like himself; it also means that violence against animals consequently becomes a tradition in the family. To express her disapproval of the manner in which Tom is taught cruelty against animals, Agnes kills the birds by dropping a rock on the nest. The reader learns of Agnes’s compassion and morality by means of her objection to the family’s cruel acts; she sacrifices the birds with a quick death instead of letting the nestlings live through Tom’s imminent torture. The violence towards the birds is a necessary measure in pursuance of criticizing the

Bloomfields and their low moral stature. Agnes has to perform an act of violence to demonstrate moral goodness towards animals.

In Agnes's second post as a governess, she is responsible for Rosalie and Matilda Murray. Mr. Murray is portrayed similarly to Mr. Bloomfield, and his love for hunting is emphasized. However, the most prominent example of moral indications by means of animal treatment is found in the dichotomy between Mr. Weston and Mr. Hatfield behavior towards Nancy Brown's cat. Mr. Hatfield kicks the cat across the floor in his pursuit of the Misses Murray, and he also knocks the cat off his knee "in scorn and anger". Mr. Hatfield is similarly mean to the cottagers, always finding faults in how they keep their homes and reproofing people for not coming to church. In contrast, Mr. Weston strokes the cat and smiles when it jumps onto his lap. He also rescues the cat from the Murrays' gamekeeper. Additionally, Mr. Weston does not mind the 'muck' and 'washing pots', he visits the cottagers often and takes his time when talking to them. The contrast between Mr. Hatfield and Mr. Weston's treatment of the cat reinforces the argument of animals as moral indicators.

In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Brontë presents insights into the relationship between human beings and animals, which reveal a social hierarchy based on violence. Most significant is Mr. Huntingdon's treatment of the cocker spaniel Dash. Brontë uses Dash to illustrate the conflation of abused wife and pet, however, the violence between Mr. Huntingdon and Helen is not directly represented. Rather, abuse towards an animal suggests the presence of abuse in the marriage and consequently, Mr. Huntingdon's treatment of Dash indicates his poor moral character. In contrast, Gilbert and Mr. Lawrence's dogs are treated well and are used to indicate their kindness to all the 'lesser creatures', including animals. Mr. Lawrence's dogs are basking on a rug in front of the fire while supporting their master in his time of need. Gilbert's relationship with his dog, Sancho, is used to demonstrate his charms, harmlessness, and that he is good with children. Sancho and his puppy Rover, which is given to Arthur, are presented to gain Helen's affections and to win her trust, because his kindness towards animals will demonstrate his good moral character.

With the exception of the Bloomfields' treatment of the nestlings, I have not discussed the avian species in this paper. In addition to dogs, it seems that Anne Brontë has a strong connection to birds. This relationship is supported in her birthday notes including her pet birds Nero the merlin, and Adelaide and Victoria the geese. Also, in her poem 'Self-Communion', Brontë identifies with a dove and records her grief over 'a sparrow's death'. Both novels contain extensive bird representation and symbolism. While other researchers have included birds in their analysis of *Agnes Grey*, I have not found any literature focusing solely on the avian species in *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Consequently, birds in the novels of Anne Brontë could serve as a theme for a new study.

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Appendix

Relevance for the Teaching Profession

While writing this thesis, there have been several aspects which I have found to be relevant for my future profession as a teacher. The themes in this thesis are relevant for discussions in the classroom, because the place of the animal is more relevant than ever as we live in an age of mass distinction. It is appropriate for children and young people to be learning about animals in this day and age, and it is of vital importance that a modern human being learns about animals and the mass extinction of species. One approach for learning this is by thinking about the representation of animals in literature. One of the core values of the core curriculum is “Respect for nature and environmental awareness”; Utdanningsdirektoratet (2017) states: “Children and young people will need to deal with the today's and tomorrow's challenges, and our common future depends on the coming generations and their willingness and ability to protect our world.” (n.p.). In learning about animal representation, the students learn how to respect nature and develop climate and environmental awareness.

Another relevant aspect is linked to the writing process itself. Writing this thesis has been incredibly time-consuming, and it has taught me the importance of thorough feedback. My supervisor’s guidance has brought me new understandings on how to provide effective and good feedback during the writing process of a paper. I have become a better writer, and this will in turn help me guide students when it comes to structure, rereading and rewriting texts. Also, searching for references has been an important part of this process, and I have learned to be more critical of sources. This is an important aspect relating to my own practice as a teacher – finding relevant and reliable sources for my teaching material – and when teaching students to search for references in their own work.

