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THE GOVERNESS NOVEL AS A LITERARY GENRE: A DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS OF ITS MAIN FEATURES AND THEMES

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Abstract

The object of this dissertation is to describe the figure of the governess and her fictional features in the governess novel within the context of a changing society in Victorian England. The rapid economic changes would enhance the enrichment of non-aristocratic families who would try to imitate the lifestyle of the higher classes. Likewise, a succession of wrong capital investments will lead many gentlemen to declare bankruptcy, compelling their daughters to work to earn a living as governesses. As a result, the new middle-class riches will hire more governesses to instruct their children for their future in society. The literature of the time will collect the experiences of these working women through different literary texts, namely guidelines and autobiographies, as well as the emergence of a new literary genre: the governess novel. Further analysis will discuss the reasons to consider the governess novel a genre as well as the exposition of its primary characteristics and topics by examining Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey* (1847) and Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* (1898).

Keywords: governess, Victorian England, literary genre, social classes, governess novel, *Jane Eyre*, *Agnes Grey*, *The Turn of the Screw*.

1. Introduction

The main goal of the present study is to demonstrate that the governess novel is a Victorian genre whose emergence is tightly related to socioeconomic changes. Furthermore, the characteristics of the genre along with its essential themes will be exposed and consequently illustrated through the literary analysis of three canonical works with their respective heroines.

1.1. Justification

English Victorian literature comprises an extensive list of literary texts in which the governess is the central axis of the narration. These works are divided into fictional and non-fictional texts. Non-fictional texts are real autobiographies or special guidelines and manuals for governesses and employers which dictate protocols, etiquette rules and correct demeanour. The contents of these texts are based on real-life accounts and their final aim is to guide newly arrived governesses or employers who do not know how to deal with their employees. In opposition to real accounts, fictional texts are literary constructs in which there is an imaginary story about a governess and her tribulations within the household. Sometimes these fictional texts could be written by women who had already worked as governesses, as in the case of the Brontë sisters, who fictionalised their heroines from their own experience. Yet, other authors would invent the governess' lifetime from their self-knowledge as citizens of a society in which it was usual to hire a governess to instruct children at home. Widely known authors such as Henry James or William M. Thackeray would create their fictional governesses to give life to *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) and *Vanity Fair* (1848), respectively.

The figure of the governess portrayed from a fictional perspective has led to a formal debate about the suitability of considering the governess novel as a genre. Specifically speaking, Kathryn Hughes, author of *The Victorian Governess* (2003) and one of the most specialised researchers on this topic, states that the governess novel is not a literary genre on its own. Albeit, another relevant researcher called Cecilia Wadsö, author of *The Victorian Governess Novel* (2001), asserts that the governess novel is a genre with clear influences from other fashionable Victorian genres and whose heroine usually conveys a series of common traits present in other works. The present study will not only support Wadsö's statement, but it will also explain the reasons why the governess novel is a genre from a sheer literary perspective and its fundamental features.

1.2. Objectives

The following objectives are the specific concerns to be addressed in order to develop the aforementioned issue:

- To provide a historical background explaining the role of women in Victorian society.
- To illustrate the hierarchy of classes in Victorian society to understand the awkward social position of the governess.
- To demonstrate that the governess novel is a literary genre originated during the Victorian period in England.
- To lay the foundations of the governess novel by exposing its main features and themes as a literary genre.
- To analyse three famous fictional works to provide tangible examples of the characteristics of the governess novel.

1.3. Structure

This study has been structured following a logical sequence in which the contents will be deployed in a sieve-like structure, from most general to most specific. Chapter 2 will introduce the literature review of the present research, namely the main critics related to the analysis of the figure of the governess. Chapter 3 will describe the methodology used to analyse the governess novel as a literary genre. Chapter 4 will display a panoramic portrayal of Victorian England to understand the changing roles of class and gender as a result of industrialisation. Chapter 5 will describe the background, social position and future expectations of governesses. Chapter 6 will analyse the governess novel as a literary genre, describing its main features, themes and literary influences from other genres in vogue during the Victorian period. Chapter 7 will examine Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey* (1847) and Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) after a careful analysis aimed at illustrating the main characteristics of the governess novel through the heroines of these classic works. Finally, chapter 8 will close the study with a brief conclusion, which will underline the hypothesis that the governess novel can be considered a literary genre.

2. Literature Review

Many different critics such as Phillip L. Allingham, Ronald Pearsall or Sarah Cutts among others, have written extensive essays about the Victorian governess and her social restraints. Whilst searching for information for this study, it was noticeable to check that most of the works dealing with the figure of the governess pointed at the same bibliographical references, namely Kathryn Hughes' *The Victorian Governess* (2003) and Cecilia Wadsö's *The Victorian Governess Novel* (2001). Undoubtedly, these have hitherto been the most outstanding and extensive research works on the governess. Hughes' work is a thorough, complete research on historical documents about governesses' employment, guidelines for future governesses and employers, personal accounts from real governesses, advertisements or demographic data. The splendid compilation of information denotes the intense research labour of this journalist and academic when it comes to gathering even the most minute information. Her work is an admirable instance of historical research on the non-fictional governess that has helped many other researchers to complete their works. One of these researchers was Cecilia Wadsö, an English literature professor who made use of Hughes' work to obtain information and polish her own work. In opposition to Hughes, Wadsö's research consists of an extensive analysis of the governess from a fictional perspective, although always taking into account non-fictional governess texts. Albeit, the main difference between both authors is that Hughes exposes the data from an objective analysis of data whereas Wadsö conducts her analysis after a subjective literary viewpoint.

Hughes states from an objective angle that the governess novel is not a genre on its own, even though she does not provide further explanations to debate on this issue. On her part, Wadsö defends the Victorian governess novel as a literary genre with particular traits that distinguishes itself from other genres. What is more, she even asserts that new contemporary literary works have been written under the influence of the governess novel. Throughout this study, the different features analysed by Wadsö and Hughes, along with other characteristics unfolded after a close perusal of three governess novels, will lay the foundations to classify the main traits of the governess novel as a literary genre.

3. Methodology

The present study includes a description of the historical background to delve into the socioeconomic reasons that fostered profound changes in the 19th century. These series of changes may account for the relevance of the governess novel, ranging from industrialisation, the meddling of the new riches in the aristocratic lifestyle, the emergence of the first vindications of the rights of women and the economic reasons that forced many women to work in factories and households. A thorough, comparative reading of the main authors (Wadsö-Lecaros, 2001; Hughes, 2003) specialised on the figure of the governess will provide the theoretical background to describe and discuss the most relevant traits of the governess novel helping us to defend the thesis that it can be considered a distinctive genre. Once described the primary features of the genre, a comparative analysis of three governess novels will be accomplished to exemplify the main features and themes of the governess novel as a literary genre, namely Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey* (1847) and Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* (1898). The textual analysis of the novels will show the coincidences between three works from the same historical period, being the latter the one corresponding to the last stage of the genre.

4. The 19th Century in Great Britain: A Portrayal of the Role of Women

4.1. An Overview of Victorian Society

During Queen Victoria's reign (1837-1901), Great Britain attained extraordinary riches and power after the flourishing of the Industrial Revolution in England. The British Empire spanned the world, bringing greater political stability and innovative transportation, communication advancements and intellectual achievements. A class-based society, an increasing number of citizens -women included- eligible to vote, the abolition of slavery, the national development of both State and economy, and Britain's standing as the world's most powerful empire were the most outstanding characteristics of Victorian England.

The country's oftentimes outdated political structure was under enormous strain as a result of the increasing population promoted by rural unemployment and the subsequent migration to cities. The aftermath of these migrations was the creation of enormous cities in comparison with medieval urbanisation. London, “with a population of over half a million people by 1700, was the largest” city in Western Europe (More, 2000, p. 4). Likewise,

London was also the world's greatest metropolis and harbour and the global centre of trade and culture due to the magnitude and power of the Empire. Throughout Victoria's reign, the struggle between a small, traditional state and the rapid changes fostered by industrialisation were continuously confronting each other. Late in the century, Britain began to weaken as a global political and economic influence, but this degradation did not become obvious until after World War II, which meant the costly rebuilding of the country.

Nonetheless, the increasing population also reflected the effects of industrial work and the appalling circumstances in which the lower classes lived and worked, which favoured the creation of “working-class political action, most notably Chartism¹” (Steinbach, 2019, para.3). Despite its industrialisation, England remained mostly a countryside nation. Workers from non-urban areas began to migrate to the emerging towns to work in the mills and factories, where they were usually treated unfairly. Women were mistreated and underpaid because of being considered inferior workers, and children were frequently exploited as they worked in deplorable conditions, as in the case with minors working in Black Country's coalmining. The workforce of children at early ages led to the creation of the *Report of the Children's Employment Commission in 1842*, which helped to legislate the working conditions of infants “to secure minimum safety standards in mines and factories, as well as general controls on the employment of children” (The British Library, 2014, *Report on Child Labour, 1842*). Industrialisation had terrible effects on the poorest classes through the increase of children's and women's exploitation, squalor, misdemeanours and felonies or the filthy conditions in which workers had to live. Charles Dickens (1812-1870) outlined many realistic depictions of London's dirt and crime in some of his most famous works, where Dickens highlighted the hard life that the working class was compelled to endure.

Between 1820 and 1873, the British economy developed at a breakneck speed. The invention of the telegraph, the railway and the steam engine fostered an even faster change in Britain's industrialisation and wealth. An economic depression followed after a half-century of expansion. Nevertheless, and despite the economic difficulties provoked by the depression, living conditions were improving. The 1840s, commonly labelled as The Hungry Forties, meant terrible times for the countryside workers, as the exiguous harvests wreaked havoc among the poorest families (Steinbach, 2019, para.1). The Irish Famine of 1845–1849 was the

¹ Working-class movement that sought a parliamentary reform to give the working classes more political power and influence (1836-1848).

worst of all, with over a million people dying and another two million emigrating because of the potato blight. After the famine, scarcity and precariousness were diminishing in Victorian society, particularly when working-class individuals saw how their income increased, so that “for the first time rapid population increase was accompanied by sustained growth in income per person” (More, 2000, p.1). As a result, the lower classes perceived an evident amelioration in their lifestyles, as they could afford some simple items such as clothing or newspapers, previously deemed as luxury products. Likewise, many workers from humble origins found new labour opportunities in the cities working as servants for the middle and upper classes, who moved to the metropolitan areas. Working as a cook, a housemaid or a gardener within a rich family guaranteed a cosy place to live, food, a discrete salary and a sense of safety compared to the harsh conditions of factory workers.

4.2. The Ideology of a Class-Based Society

The Victorian period was particularly marked by the ideology of a classist society where most citizens pertained to the working class, whereas a small proportion of the population belonged to the middle and upper classes. The contrast between the poorest and richest classes was devastating at all levels. The working class comprised unskilled workers who were compelled to work in harsh circumstances under unhealthy conditions, underpaid salaries and never-ending workdays, lacking basic goods like salubrious water, food, clothing and education. On the other hand, the wealthiest classes were basically divided into the upper-class, from an aristocratic background, and the middle-class, mainly constituted by prominent officials and lords, as well as well-heeled men and business entrepreneurs and professionals (among them, doctors and lawyers) from the lower-upper classes. The fast growth of cities and the economy contributed to the rise of the middle class or bourgeoisie, who worked hard to sustain themselves and their families through local and international trade across the British Empire. The children of the middle class “flooded the grammar and private school systems only to be turned out half-educated, half-gentleman unfitted for industrial employment” (Neale, 1968, p. 14), creating so an intermediate educational position between the working class and the upper class.

Regarding the aristocratic values of the upper class, manual work was rarely reported as it was considered vulgar. Instead, aristocrats were landowners who employed lower-class workers or made profitable investments from their inherited assets. The luxurious lifestyle of the aristocrats was enhanced by the family fortune amassed for centuries, which meant they

had no necessity to work. Rather, both men and women devoted their time to an idle life characterised by journeys, sports, games, balls, tea time and spending large sums of money on luxury items, particularly clothing. Contrarily to the middle class, the children of the richest families stopped attending boarding schools since they received an exquisite education from private tutors at home. As it will be explained later on, this tendency would change inasmuch as the wealthiest middle-class families tried to imitate the lifestyle and etiquette of the aristocrats as a logical effect of “their social class-consciousness” (Neale, 1968, p.15). According to the worldview of aristocracy, manual work was deemed something vulgar and dirty, primarily thought for unskilled individuals like servants.

Nothing could be more terrible within Victorian ideology than descending in the social hierarchy and being unavoidably compelled to earn a living through work. In the case of women, as it occurred to the governesses, the humiliating transition from being “the angel in the house” to become the “fallen woman” (Hughes, 2003) was among the worst calamities that any Victorian woman could suffer. Descending from a wealthy class to the working class meant an immense degradation and public stigmatisation in a class-based society, finding uncomfortable situations where identity, status and gender role clashed in opposition to the wealthy origin of the fallen woman.

4.3. The Woman Question

The nineteenth century in Great Britain was a time of tremendous development, being the nation's industrialisation and the worldwide trade encouraged by the colonies among its most significant events. Along with these historical shifts, the status of women in society started to undergo a fundamental transition, paving the way for future feminist movements.

Many Victorian values were regulated according to the notion of the ‘separate spheres.’ Women were considered predominantly moral, lacking sexual appetite and devoted to reproduction and household. The role of women was always set in the domestic sphere, with no possibility to partake in public life beyond tea-time and balls. Men were considered immoral by nature, sexually active, devoted to providing for the family and engaged in public life through economy, legislation, education and politics. Certainly, men and women were biologically categorised by science and society, granting men intellectual superiority (Hughes, 2014, para.3). On the other hand, women were regarded as “physically weaker yet morally superior to men, which meant that they were best suited to the domestic sphere” (Hughes,

2014, para.2). These idealised dichotomies between gender roles brought a visible double standard to the fore in Victorian society. The rise of female voices who fought to get rid of the seclusion within the domestic sphere would vindicate the active participation of women in public life at the same level as men.

From a contemporary perspective, the Victorian stereotype and double standard would connote “a prudish refusal to admit the existence of sex, hypocritically combined with constant discussions of sex, thinly veiled as a series of warnings” (Steinbach, 2019, para.1). The previously mentioned double standard promoted the idea that men needed sex whereas women were devoid of sexual desire and succumbed to sex merely to satisfy their husbands. This Victorian stereotype did not fit the reality of a society that included prostitution, pornography, venereal diseases, sexually frustrated women or homosexuality. The criteria of this double standard were also applied to the functions of men and women, who were meant to accomplish different duties according to the hierarchies constructed around gender and class. The classification of gender roles was biologically based, which meant that nature created men and women for different purposes. Thus, men were perceived as strong, sexually active and economically independent citizens who could take part in public life through business, work and politics — including the right to vote. In contrast with men, women were regarded as weak second-rate citizens who primarily depended on men through the institution of marriage or kinship, be it through a brother or close relative in charge of the spinster lady. The active participation of women in public life, high education, finances or politics was rejected; hence the patriarchal refusal of granting women their right to vote – leading to the emergence of the first suffrage society in 1867 (*The Suffragettes*, 2016, p.2), or to the general idea that working women were deemed as low class. On the other hand, middle-class and upper-class ladies were not expected to work given that it was the head of the family — father or husband — who would provide for the whole family, including all the expensive fashion vagaries of the period that ladies used to follow according to their status. The upper class possessed titles, riches, and/or land, and controlled local, national and imperial affairs whilst the working class — which accounted for 70 to 80 per cent of the population — obtained its incomes from wages typically falling below £100 per year (Steinbach, 2019, para.2).

Even though working women were frowned upon due to the standardised notions of gender and social status, they were thoroughly necessary to provide for the family as a result of the scant household incomes. Precisely, the Industrial Revolution indirectly forced the split of the separate spheres between men and women. Migrating to the cities mostly implied

working in the emerging industries or wealthy houses as servants. Women had traditionally worked alongside the rest of the family for centuries, mostly in areas related to farming and stockbreeding. Industrialisation did not only turn male farmers into commuters, but it also promoted the introduction of women into the factories, namely textile industries. Thus, women found more than feasible reasons to work as a consequence of a changing world that needed their manual labour, as well as economic reasons linked to the family income.

The notion of “The New Woman” (Utell, 2006) started to emerge with greater force at the turn of the 19th century, encouraged by the liberation from the domestic sphere where marriage as a way of survival was denied. Instead, “The New Woman” sought to be independent, sexually free, educated, professional and politically active, allowing so “a transition from Victorian ideals of ‘womanliness’ to modern(ist) ideas of womanhood” (Utell, 2006, p.2; emphasis in original). The New Woman would give the first steps out of the domestic sphere to partake in public life as a citizen, propelling the first women’s movements for social change. These movements, led by middle-class women, were mainly concerned with issues related to “marriage, property, employment, education” (Utell, 2006, p.1). During the late Victorian period, women’s movements achieved great breakthroughs in their rights as women: the founding of university colleges for women in Cambridge (namely, Girton and Newnham Colleges; 1873 and 1876); the passing of the Married Women’s Property Acts (1882/1891) which allowed women to be economically independent of their husbands; or the creation of The National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies (NUWS, 1867), the first suffrage society followed by the foundation of The Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU, 1903) led by the activist Emmeline Pankhurst (*The Suffragettes*, 2016, p.2-7).

As seen so far, the Victorian period caught a glimpse of the first attempts of women to vindicate their rights and demand the unavoidable redefinition of women’s roles in society to access public life and education. Furthermore, the effects of industrialisation on the countryside workers fostered the emancipation of women to work in the factories and households located in the new cities and towns. Socioeconomic changes were affecting both the female workers and the women from the richest classes at different levels. Women had to face a great number of challenges in which social class and gender roles shaped an imposed identity on women “cast upon them by the dominant group” (Davidoff, 1979, p.92). Hence the particularly difficult situation of being a governess during this period of changes, where the middle-classes mingled with the upper classes and women were also entering the labour market far from the household. In addition, as it will be exposed in the following sections, the

governess was an upper or middle class 'fallen woman' who was compelled to work as part of domesticity in a wealthy family. The humiliation of this new situation along with solitude, scorn, mockery or coldness by those belonging to her same social background, made the governess a literary character that would be particularly appealing to a certain readership.

5. The Victorian Governess

5.1. Hiring a Governess

It may be arguable to think that education in the Victorian Age was conceived as a synonym for an educated society. Despite the collections of expensive works of art, journeys around Europe, concerts, grand operas and balls, all these activities were more closely connected with social class than with cultural issues. In Victorian society, education was formulated as a means of distinction and discrimination among classes, a reflection of the tight social structures. As a matter of fact, in the first half of the 19th-century education was exclusively confined to the private sector and it was not until the Education Act in 1870 ("The 1870 Education Act", *UK Parliament*) that primary education became public. However, the level of schooling was too elementary in these schools, where reading, writing, the singing of hymns and psalms were the only subjects expected to be learnt. Considering that only a reduced part of the population could acquire a good educational level, the rest of society remained virtually illiterate.

Education could only be afforded by wealthy families until the second half of the century. The high-class boys were usually sent to private centres and later on to university, where they studied the classics and the proper behaviour to follow in society as elite youngsters. Meanwhile, the girls were confined to the domestic sphere to learn manners in society and some cultural knowledge with the purpose of becoming accomplished ladies and find a well-heeled husband in the future (Hughes, 2003, p.16). At this point, the importance of the governess is plainly evidenced: girls were usually educated by a governess whose task was not only teaching music, sewing or reading literature but also teaching social manners and mores.

The phenomenon of the governess turned into a fashion among the middle and upper-class Victorian families. The employment of a governess to educate girls at home acted not

only as a useful agent for the family to educate their children or learn high-class etiquette but also as a splendid demonstration of power and wealth vis-à-vis society. Traditionally, parents used to send their daughters to girls' boarding schools until the education standards began to fall in the 19th century. Apart from the increasing teaching of etiquette to the detriment of academic subjects, the daughters of doctors or retailers started to attend these schools so that it was "impossible to tell who was a lady and who was not" (Hughes, 2003, p.19). Even though fees were increased, many wealthy families began to hire governesses to avoid social mix between the gentry and the middle class. At the turn of the century, the richest middle class began to imitate and try to mingle with the aristocrats. To do so, it was necessary to learn the upper-class etiquette and manners. The most suitable way to reach this goal was hiring a governess who would instruct the middle-class children to be accomplished enough for social life.

In many different cases, most governesses in the Victorian period were the daughters of ruined gentlemen who were compelled to leave the commodities of their cosy hearth to earn their own living and preserve their economic independence (Wadsö-Lecaros, 2001, p. 47). Governesses could be classified into three types according to their social status: the homeless orphan, the daughter of a ruined clergyman or the daughter of a ruined upper-class gentleman. The homeless orphan would have usually obtained an education in a charity school, whereas the clergyman's daughter belonging to the middle class and the high-class lady would have received a formal education at home. As a result, the wealthiest the governess background was, the more socially humiliated she was and the more difficult it was to perform her job as a governess (Wadsö-Lecaros, 2001, p. 47-48). Such a situation was probably one of the worst things that could happen to a woman during this period due to the social importance of class distinctions. The young 'lady' who was compelled to become a governess for economic issues was no longer a lady for the rest of her 'peers' as she had just descended from her privileged position as a lady to be stooped at the servants' level. According to the illustrative definition of *The Quarterly Review*, a governess in Victorian England was "our equal in birth, manners and education, but our inferior in worldly wealth" (Rigby, 1848, p.176).

Most early literary portrayals of governesses had a didactic purpose and were considered to be highly appreciated teachers until the 1830s. From then on, the governess heroine would be depicted as a victim of her circumstances and a victim of her employers.

Therefore, plots started to focus on both the social and working conditions of the governess. As a response to this contemporary concern, manuals and guidelines, usually written by women who were experienced governesses, were published to exemplify “how governesses, and sometimes their employers, were recommended to behave” (Wadsö-Lecaros, 2001, p.23). Some examples of these works are Anna Jameson’s *The Relative Position of Mothers and Governesses* (1846) or F.D. Maurice’s *Governess Life: Its Trials, Duties, and Encouragements* (1849). The relationship between employee and employer, employment conditions, and educational difficulties with the children were common topics developed in these guidelines. Many of these manuals were particularly addressed to employers from the middle class who were trying to imitate the gentry by hiring a governess (Hughes, 2003, p.21). As the middle-class did not know how to behave with the governess, she was usually underpaid, mistreated, humiliated and disdained. The poor conditions of governesses raised a social debate concerning the middle class’ lack of experience with aristocratic education. In addition, governesses grew old, sick or could be temporarily unemployed, which led them to extremely precarious situations. As a means to help these women, the Governesses’ Benevolent Institution (GBI) was created in 1843, providing a temporary home and economic aid.

5.2. The Fallen Woman

The unfavourable financial circumstances of the daughter of a ruined gentleman triggered many difficulties for the woman who descended from her social status to become a “fallen woman” (Hughes, 2003, p. 120). In the event the lady had no male relatives who could accommodate her under the same roof, the search for a new home to work as a governess and earn a living was essential. Governesses could enquire into their closest relations and acquaintances to find a position in a wealthy family or could advertise their services in local newspapers or apply for an employer’s advertisement. Once the post was achieved, the fallen woman would start a new life surrounded by strangers who will never treat her like a lady despite her social background.

The awkward transition from one social standing to a new one was a severe blow for a Victorian woman, who was suddenly deprived of her class privileges. Governesses were continually humiliated because of their degradation in society even though employing one was a sign of culture and means. They were victims of class differences at all levels. On the one hand, they were not at the level of their employers because of monetary reasons, even

though both the governess and the family usually had the same social level and education. In the event the governess pertained to the upper class and worked as a governess for a household of new riches, the educational differences were of greater magnitude. All in all, well-to-do people would frequently ignore the governess in social meetings, be it at the church with other high-class parishioners or relatives and friends visiting the household.

On the other hand, they were not exactly considered servants, but they were paid a servant's salary. Thus, any governess would always feel at a loss in an ambiguous position. Many governesses had serious co-existence problems with the servants of the house because they were neither members of the family — though on some occasions they could join the parlour with them — nor servants despite they were almost paid the same salary. The governess “was trapped in an intermediate and undefined position” in which she was “ranked above the servants, but she was as dependent as they were” (Wadsö-Lecaros, 2001, p.20). Governesses usually had to ask other servants to do some tasks previously commanded by the master/mistress. This circumstance was utterly displeasing for the team of domestics, as they thought it was degrading to serve or obey a person they considered to be at their same economic level and who, moreover, behaved like a lady. Consequently, the governess had little power over the servants, who often mocked and disdained her even though they were compelled to serve her.

5.3 Expectations of Real Life and Fictional Governesses

If the main goal for any woman in Victorian society was marrying to secure her future, becoming a governess was commonly regarded as turning into a spinster with little possibilities to improve her situation. Even though some daily governesses were married, “those women who lived with their employers were expected, along with domestic servants, to remain single” (Hughes, 2003, p.118).

At this point, it is essential to clarify a relevant distinction between real-life governesses and the fictional governesses depicted in the novels. Considering that writers like Anne and Charlotte Brontë — as it will be explained in chapter 7 — worked as governesses, it is not hare-brained to think that the daydreaming of a real governess may change the fictional governess' fate. In real life, no Jane Eyre would ever marry a wealthy man like Mr Rochester as depicted in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847). Instead, the governess would remain a spinster for the rest of her life or would marry a man who could be on equal terms with her.

The governess was confined to the domestic sphere and would occasionally go out on her own. The only way to meet a suitor from a similar social status would be through visits to church on Sundays or through visitors like music or language masters who would regularly attend the household. Governesses would marry curates, clergymen or professional teachers (Hughes, 2003, p. 141); these were the only men who could be at the reach of a governess according to her rank and life of domestic confinement. In this sense, Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey* (1847) portrays a more realistic reflection of the marriage expectations of a Victorian governess, since Agnes Grey eventually marries Mr Wexton, a curate. As Hughes points out:

Life continued to be financially precarious and socially ambiguous: according to the summary reports of the Governesses' Benevolent Institution, many who left the profession to marry were forced to return to their former way of life following the death of their husbands (2003, p. 143)

In real life, no prince charming would rescue the fallen lady to restore her position. Instead, a married governess would have a humble and economically unstable life. Nonetheless, most governesses would remain spinsters for the rest of their lives (Hughes, 2003, p. 143).

6. The Governess Novel

The figure of the governess was quite frequent in 19th-century novels, both as the central character and, mostly, as a satellite character enriching the plot. This frequency in the recurrent appearance of the governess provides meaningful evidence regarding the social normalisation of counting on her presence within the domestic sphere. It goes without saying that the mere presence of a given character is not enough to outline a literary genre. Even though there is not a unique and scholarly agreed definition of genre given its complexity, it is crucial to lay the foundations of any particular genre by outlining its literary development, its overlapping genres and the heroine features.

6.1. The Governess Novel as a Genre

Domínguez Caparrós (2007) highlights that the characteristics of any genre are varied, leading to multiple variations, namely the emergence of successive genres sharing similar features, the modification of an existing genre or its final disappearance. Yet, new genres tend

to attach to pre-existing ones. In this way “genres may have several sorts of mutual relations, such as inclusion, combination (tragicomedy), inversion (romance and picaresque), and contrast (sonnet and epigram)” (Fowler, 1979, p.100). Each genre comprises specific features that give readers roughly what they expect based on previous experiences with similar works (Baldick, 2008), which makes this narrative particularly recognisable for the readership through its own literary conventions. As aforementioned, there is a variety of ways in which genres interact with each other and the aftermath of these interactions is a hybrid overlapping of genres that enrich global literary productions. After writing a detailed and extensive work on the Victorian governess, Kathryn Hughes (2003) determined that she had found no common and coherent features to classify the governess novel as a genre. Despite the inherent difficulty of trying to describe the concept of genre, it is worth noting that no novel assigned to a certain genre possesses all of the traits that may be described as characteristic of that genre, so that the aforementioned overlapping of genres is thoroughly feasible in the case of the Governess novel.

The governess-novel genre evidences its own evolution according to the historical circumstances of its period. Cecilia Wadsö (2001) outlines the different phases of the genre, which, following her, I will classify into four stages. The first stage covers the works prior to the 1830s, mostly portraying well-accomplished teachers who were decidedly esteemed by their employers and fairly paid by their services. The second stage starts in the 1830s, where a crucial shift takes place as a result of the increasing hostility towards the figure of the governess. The third stage begins in the 1840s as a consequence of the social debate on the governess question related to her poor working conditions. The fourth stage ranges from the 1840s to the 1860s, comprising the most intense literary production about the governess’ tribulations and thus, becoming the peak of the governess-novel genre. Finally, the fifth stage reflects the decline of the genre as a response to social changes: as the number of governesses decreased because of a lack of labour demand, so did the number of governess novels. From this chronological evolution, it is easily perceived the development of this genre in accordance with political, economic and sociocultural circumstances pertaining to the Victorian period.

In this context, it is easier to delimitate the adjacent novel genres that constitute the corpus of the governess novel. In order to clarify this issue, by analysing the distinctive features of the domestic novel, the silver-fork novel and the Bildungsroman it is easy to

recognise some features shared with the governess-novel genre. Obviously, these common features go beyond mere coincidences. Literature, as Even-Zohar (2021) described, is a complex literary polysystem where different genres — as well as literary studies — interact and provide constant feedback to the system. It is reasonable to believe that no system can persist in a continual state of crisis in the long run, even though some polysystems have successfully survived after several changes and critical junctures. Some subgenres within the system like the domestic novel, the silver-fork novel and the Bildungsroman would be enclosed and juxtaposed inside the novel system (including the governess novel), which are recurrently enriching and interacting with each other. From this principle, it is patent that there is no such a thing as a pure system or a pure genre. In other words, genres interact, assimilate and mix with each other creating new traits within a genre, constructing new combinations or casting new hybrids aside inside the literary polysystem. Hence the emergence of the governess novel as a genre composed of a variety of different literary genres fully in vogue during the Victorian period.

6.2. The Influence of Other Contemporary Genres on the Governess Novel

Anyone who has read novels like Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* (1860), James Joyce's *The Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* (1916) or Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), will have followed the stories of several young men struggling to overcome adversity while learning how to walk hard through life. This kind of fiction "detailing personal development or educational maturation" (Childs, 2009, p.18) is denominated Bildungsroman or novel of growth. This type of literature traces the hero — usually a man — or heroine's growth from infancy or youth to maturity, often via a painful search for identity. Numerous great books from the 19th and early 20th centuries fit into this category of self-improvement and personal development (Baldick, 2008). Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey* (1847) follow this same pattern, where both heroines need to set forth to find a home and earn their own living, being the reader a distant witness of the different life stages of the heroines. The genre's emphasis on self-integration made it a unique representation of bourgeois capitalist principles and the large-scale social effects of industrialisation in a continuously shifting global setting. The Bildungsroman became associated with a "certain sense of social dislocation and of problematic identity" (Childs, 2009, pp.18-19) in British society. In line with the previous definition, the governess novel could be considered one more natural outcome of the Bildungsroman in Victorian England

due to the economic difficulties that so many citizens had to face under these harsh circumstances. To be more precise, the common thread of many governesses' stories is the search for a home as a result of a father who has gone bankrupt or the marginalised position of the orphan heroine from the earliest childhood. Financial issues are the cause of the governess leaving the hostile outside world to find a job and earn a livelihood that can no longer be provided by the head of the family, be it the father or another male relative.

Between the 1820s and the 1860s, the genre known as "domestic novel" represented the daily lives of an ever-increasing number of middle-class women who felt identified with the heroines portrayed in these works. The heroine was an archetype of the practical, sensible woman who was usually trying to hold back her deepest passions and feelings. She used to get married to a man whom the heroine's virtue has transformed for the better at the end of the story. Another typical trait of this genre is the constant comparison between the heroine and an incompetent, uneducated lady or a lady whose morality is questioned. Also, she might be abused by people in positions of authority. Domestic novels were commonly addressed to the female readership, making use of overly sentimental language whose background is always an idealized love story. The triumph of this genre in the 1850s has to be seen within a socioeconomic backdrop. Domestic fiction storylines and settings represented the daily lives of an ever-increasing number of middle-class women readers who delighted in identifying their own issues with the heroines of these works. The 1850s were very likely to be "the last decade in which the great majority of women were still content to make home, husband, and children their whole sphere" (Fryckstedt, 1987, p.14). The common characteristics shared by the domestic novel and the governess novel are evident given the similarities that both incorporate in their plots, contextualised within the domestic sphere.

Another type of popular literature in the United Kingdom from the 1820s to the 1840s, characterized by a focus on fashionable etiquette and manners of high society (Baldick, 2008), was the silver-fork novel or novel of fashionable highlife, usually addressed to the "middling classes" as they promised tantalizing glimpses into highlife (Wagner, 2018). The genre of the governess novel shares some important traits with the silver-fork novel, especially with those works in which the governess develops her daily work within an aristocratic family. Throughout these novels, the reader could glimpse the ins and outs of high-society life, its vicissitudes, vagaries and social conventions. The contrast between the governess who was part of an aristocratic family and the governess who had to live with a

middle-class family lacking education, distinction and etiquette, further increased the social vision of the precarious situation of the governesses.

A separate remark should be done for another famous genre denominated the Gothic novel, a type of fantastic text that enjoyed great popularity in Victorian England. The Gothic novel is characterised by a setting that includes castles, mansions, priories, ruined buildings, or dismal environs, as well as by individuals that are, or appear to be, the epitome of good or evil. The possibility of death seems to lurk over everyone under the power of some supernatural force that seeks to “threaten both individual integrity and the material order of society” (Childs, 2009, p. 100). Gothic fiction frequently deals with supernatural phenomena or natural events that are difficult to explain or over which there is no human control. It usually follows a suspenseful and mysterious storyline. Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) is an excellent example of a governess novel incorporating Gothic elements into the plot, creating a shocking effect on the reader, since a popular character such as the governess is compelled to live a harsh intrusion of the inexplicable into her ordinary life. The reader cannot tell whether the hallucinations of ghosts are caused by the protagonist's suppressed emotions, or whether they are external to her (Childs, 2009, p. 100). This is one more example of a successful overlapping of genres, where the final outcome is one of the most famous works in English literature.

6.3. Main Features and Themes of the Governess Novel

Undoubtedly, the governess novel takes elements from other novel genres of the time to shape its own literary characteristics. Therefore, it is not surprising to conclude that this genre contains essential features of the Bildungsroman, the domestic novel, the silver-fork novel or, in some cases, from other fantastic genres such as the Gothic novel. Considering that the previous literary features have arisen as a result of the natural overlapping of genres within the literary polysystem, it is feasible to deduce the textual characteristics of the governess novel.

From the aforementioned literary features, it can be concluded that the governess heroine is usually a young woman fighting against adversity within a wealthy family who hires her services. She seeks to find her own place and delve into her “new” identity in the house as the lady who cannot be either treated like a lady or considered a servant. In most cases, the reader can follow the traces of the heroine from infancy or youth until adulthood.

Many governess heroines are depicted as young women lacking a loving home because of being an orphan or staying far away from home to earn a living after family financial problems. The heroine is continually searching for her own identity in a world with plenty of social contradictions in which the discrimination of classes is still more evident under the penetrating gaze of the young governess as a victim of social conventions. The heroine's narration in the first person as an autobiographical account of her poor working conditions as a governess is also a recurrent feature.

The personal development of the protagonist from childhood or adolescence until adulthood makes the governess novel an interesting novel of growth with remarkable parallelisms regarding the Bildungsroman. When the genre started to decrease in the 1860s, a series of new elements borrowed from other textual types were included in the governess novel, namely detective plots or supernatural forces typically used in Gothic literature.

In rough outlines, the themes commonly present in the governess novel are:

- The loss of social status to enter an intermediate position.
- The moral of the governess versus the abusive practices of her employers.
- Personal development towards maturity.
- Loneliness in a hostile world as the aftermath of the heroine's intermediate position.
- Initial loss (e.g. father's death, bankrupt, etc.) that forces the heroine to seek a new home.
- The impact of a lady who is compelled to enter the labour market as a governess becoming so a 'fallen woman'.
- The role of the governess as a kind of surrogate mother for the children she must raise or, contrarily, as the target of teasing, mistreatment and humiliation by the children of the house.
- Development of a love story in which the governess achieves happiness through marriage, sometimes with her widowed employer. In these cases, the heroine's social status is restored or even improved through her husband's personal assets.
- The social stigmatisation of an unmarried, childless woman.
- The continuous brushes with the servants in the house because of her ladylike manners.

- The introduction of a companion who helps and comforts the governess when problematic issues arise. This friend is usually a servant, a future husband or a motherly figure.
- The awkward intrinsic tensions with the lady of the house, who could regard the young governess as a threat from an educational perspective (in case the lady pertained to the middle-class and the governess was originally from the upper-class) as much as from a purely 'feminine' perspective, both as a sexual menace for the husband or as a usurper with whom to compete for the love of the children.

As a literary genre, the governess novel comprises a varied range of other contemporary genres in vogue which overlap and complement each another, enriching the new governess-novel genre with new themes and elements pertaining to other types of literary texts. It is worth noting the remarkable parallelism between the Bildungsroman's hero and the governess novel's heroine, particularly when considering that in this specific period women began to vindicate their rights as citizens.

7. Analysis of *Jane Eyre* (1847), *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) and *Agnes Grey* (1847).

The evidence from the previous chapter points out that the governess novel is a literary genre on its own which comprises a series of specific characteristics. Following these premises, the present chapter will accomplish a thorough analysis of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey* (1847) and Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) to examine and determine whether the aforementioned hypothesis of the governess novel as a genre is feasible in these works.

7.1. Going Out as a Governess: the Intermediate Position in Society

By leaving her home and going out into the world alone, the typical governess heroine shows a constant journey towards maturity and well-being throughout the novel, becoming so a round character whose personality is improved by means of her circumstances. Often, she has to face terrible situations with her pupils, employers, guests and servants, who make her miserable given her odd social situation where nobody seems to feel empathy for her except the reader, who is usually sympathetic with the governess' painful experiences and troubles.

Jane Eyre was an orphan girl who was brought up with her aunt and cousins in Gateshead. Despite the fact that Mrs Reed had promised her late husband on his deathbed that she would “rear and maintain” Jane as “one of her own children” (Brontë 1996, p.24), she only kept her word partially by providing the child with a roof but no fondness or education just like her own offspring. Jane experienced from her childhood the cruelties of class difference due to her lack of wealth and relations. For these reasons she was considered “less than a servant” in Gateshead (p.18) where Mrs Reed was just her benefactress and young John Reed her master: “I was a discord in Gateshead Hall; I was like *nobody* there [...] They were not bound to regard with affection a *thing* that could not sympathize with one amongst them” (p.23; the emphasis is mine). It is relevant to notice the word used by Jane: “thing”. A thing in this context means something without importance, worthless, that is, nobody. Jane Eyre could not be someone in Gateshead because she was no heiress of a huge fortune. She was just allowed to live with the Reed family as an act of charity. For the Reeds she was less than a servant because she was a useless low-class intruder living the life of a middle-class family, i.e. she was living a life that did not correspond to her position. Given this privilege, Mrs Reed could not allow an equality of terms between Jane and her children and kept the girl at due distance and even below the level of the servants, who treated her in consequence as an inferior. Mrs Reed eventually sent her to Lowood charity school to get rid of her. In Lowood, Jane would be at the same level as her peers and would acquire an education for eight years, allowing her so to become a teacher for two years in Lowood and afterwards a governess in Thornfield Hall.

Agnes Grey, unlike Jane Eyre, was not compelled to work as a governess because she had no other choice. She was the daughter of a middle-class businessman who declared himself bankrupt after investing his fortune in a wrecked freight ship. Agnes decided to become a governess to help her father, who was heavily in debt, and in doing so she would help her mother and sister. However, when Agnes told her family she wanted to become a governess, the succession of reactions was utterly negative. Mrs Grey, who was raised in an upper-class family, pointed out that “there is no necessity whatever for such a step; it is merely a whim of her own” (p. 11). Agnes’ family was fully aware of the impact that her post as a governess would have on her social status. Likewise, the nameless governess in *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) would be “the youngest of several daughters of a poor country parson” (James, 2012, p. 3) who is compelled to work as a governess to make a living.

Most governesses were the daughters of wealthy families in bankrupt who could only work as governesses in order to earn their own living. In opposition, Jane Eyre was an orphan who was educated by a middle-class family. However, she could not be considered a lady despite her education because she was deemed an intruder within the high class. The main difference between Jane Eyre (and also perhaps Henry James' governess) and those ladies who were forced to become governesses is that the latter found themselves in a degrading situation after descending their social status. Agnes Grey is undoubtedly a striking exception since she decided to become a governess with no urgent financial necessity. In opposition to governesses belonging to a high-class background, Jane considerably improved her situation when rising to a higher social position until she eventually became a rich heiress. After leaving Gateshead and becoming a pupil at Lowood, she managed to turn into a teacher in the charity school for two years until she decided to leave to start a new life. Whilst Jane improved her socioeconomic situation, Agnes worsened her social status descending from a middle-class position to domesticity. On her part, the governess in *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) found a shocking situation in which she would be paid more than expected and furthermore, "she would be in supreme authority" in the house regarding the rest of the domestic service (p. 3). In this case, the governess' situation would be substantially improved.

Starting a new life as a governess required to advertise or answer an advertisement in a local newspaper. The advertisement offered a description of the governess' qualifications or the accomplishments the employer was seeking. Some of these requirements, among others, were music, speaking foreign languages like German, French or Italian, sewing, drawing, singing or dancing. Agnes Grey's first post as a governess was achieved through her mother's acquaintances and relatives, who recommended her to work for the Murrays, an upper-middle-class family. After the terrible experience of trying to instruct a couple of wild, whimsical children at Wellwood House, she published an advertisement in a newspaper highlighting her qualifications in "music, singing, drawing, French, Latin and German" (p. 57). Mrs Murray, the mistress of Horton Lodge, would answer this advertisement. The governess in *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) obtained her post through a newspaper advertisement published by the young gentleman who was in charge of his niece and nephew. Soon after keeping correspondence with her future employer, she would meet the gentleman in a house in Harley Street, London. The governess would accept the post and would immediately arrange her journey towards Bly, a magnificent mansion in the middle of the

English countryside. Likewise, Jane Eyre would have also turned to local newspapers by posting her own advertisement where she detailed her preferences and qualifications:

A young lady accustomed to tuition [...]is desirous of meeting with a situation in a private family where the children are under fourteen [...]She is qualified to teach the usual branches of a good English education, together with French, Drawing and Music. Address, J.E., Post-office, Lowton, -shire. (p. 125).

Once the position was achieved, the governess would move into a new house surrounded by strangers, consisting of the family and the house servants. The governess would face numerous disagreements with both sides as a result of her unclear social position, where she was considered neither a lady nor a servant.

7.2. The Social Relationships of the Governess Within the Household

7.2.1. The Relationship with the Servants

In the typical high-class Victorian home, the governess would always try to be at distance with both the family members and the house servants given her “social intermediate position” (Wadsö-Lecaros, 2001). This was an evident obstacle for the governess, which would withdraw her from keeping social relationships indoors, drowning her in a miserable state of isolation and loneliness. The governess used to avoid contact with the family to evade class tensions or with the servants to elude interactions with a lower class. Albeit, the housekeepers and servants also turned their back on the governess and tried to take any chance to deride a higher-class person. However, neither Jane nor Mrs Fairfax (such as Mrs Grose in Henry James’ *The Turn of the Screw*) seem to take these things into account and keep a splendid relationship overcoming class boundaries.

Before Jane Eyre realised that Mrs Fairfax was the housekeeper instead of the mistress of Thornfield Hall, she seemed to be highly impressed by her reception: “She treats me like a visitor [...] I anticipated coldness and stiffness: this is not like what I have heard of the treatment of governesses; but I must not exult too soon” (p. 111). Jane was as cautious as suspicious of Mrs Fairfax’s behaviour as a mistress due to the general idea that people had in this period regarding governesses. Apparently, what actually caught Jane’s eye was the way

in which the old lady talked to her and expressed her joy to be on equal terms with the new governess:

I am so glad you are come; it will be quite pleasant living here now with a companion [...]Leah is a nice girl to be sure, and John and his wife are very decent people; but then you see they are only servants, and one can't converse with them on terms of equality: one must keep them at due distance, for fear of losing one's authority. (p. 112).

Mrs Fairfax perfectly underlined in the previous lines the significance of social hierarchies within the same class. She was the housekeeper of Thornfield Hall, so she was in charge of the domestic service and the good management of the house. She performed the role of manager among the servants, the one who commanded what they were to do. Precisely, this was the circumstance that encouraged her to keep distance from the servants even though she was one of them. If Mrs Fairfax was the servants' manager, she could not be on equal terms with them. Notwithstanding, Mrs Fairfax considered Jane to be her equal though, in truth, Jane was in a higher position regarding education and culture. Yet, it is still unusual to find a governess and a housekeeper who are able to enjoy one another's company.

Curiously, this unusual situation is also depicted in Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* (1898). Before arriving at Bly, the governess is worried because of the possible tensions she could find with the domestic service once she had been informed that "she would be in supreme authority" (p. 3). Once she met the housekeeper, Mrs Grose, she described her as "an excellent woman" (p. 3) and established a warm relationship with her. The governess would soon discover that "there were further [domestic servants], a cook, a housemaid, a dairy-woman, an old pony, an old groom and an old gardener, all likewise thoroughly respectable" (p. 4). In the case of this governess, no tensions arose with the servants. On the contrary, they were anxious to have a governess back home. Obviously, this is part of the uncanny plot in Henry James' Gothic novel, where the real challenges of the governess have no relation with children's misbehaviour, ill-mannered mistresses or scornful servants, but with the world of supernatural forces.

Regarding Agnes Grey, there was no remarkable event related to her interaction with domesticity when she entered Wellwood House. In rough outlines, the servants were reasonably polite with the new governess. However, the manners shown by the domestic

service were thoroughly rude at her arrival at Horton Lodge. The butler gave her a cold reception in which she would not be offered a seat or a refreshment after her long journey. Instead, the butler would take her straight into the schoolroom to meet her pupils (p. 62). After this reception, she was taken to her room where she discovered she had no bell to call the servants. As her luggage had not been brought yet and she wanted to go to sleep, she ventured out to find someone who could inform her about her belongings. She found the lady's maid, who would call for someone to bring her luggage "with the air of one conferring an unusual favour" (p. 63). Finally, she heard near her door "the sound of voices and laughter" and once they left her luggage into the room she thought that "neither of them [had been] very respectful in their demeanour to me" (p. 63). Agnes would eventually reflect on the reason why the servants would mistreat her like that. She understood that the "little estimation the governess was held by both parents and children, regulated their [the servants] behaviour by the same standard" (p. 76). The marginalisation of the governess was even more visible when the servants imitated their employers' attitude and ridiculed her because of her undefined position. The governess "was supposedly her employers' equal, but nonetheless, she was paid to work for them" (Hughes, 2003, p.20) in the same way the house servants were also paid. As Agnes stated, the servants "are too easily corrupted by the carelessness and bad example of those above them" (p. 76).

The tensions between the governess and the domestic servants are a recurring theme in the governess novel which is tightly related to class prejudices. In like manner, the traditional Victorian values would play a relevant role in the degradation of the governess into an ambiguous position where the figure of the fallen woman is particularly disdained. Even though the governess could deal with these tensions in both fiction and real life, it is worth mentioning that the governess novel usually includes a companion who aids and encourages the lonely governess when problems arise. This friend may be a maternal figure, a future husband or a house servant. In *Jane Eyre* (1847), different friendly figures are present in Jane's life through the thick and thin, such as St John Rivers and his sisters Mary and Diana. In addition, Mrs Fairfax also comforted Jane at any time or Mr Rochester himself, who eventually became Jane's husband. In the same way, *Agnes Grey* (1847) also presents a couple of sympathetic characters who befriend the governess. Nancy Brown, an elderly cottager, would be the only person with whom Agnes would feel she had the "only moment of real social intercourse" (p. 105) or Mr Weston, the parish's curate and Agnes' future husband.

7.2.2. The Relationship with the Middle and Upper Classes

The governess was usually marginalised by her social milieu. Not only did the domestic service disdain her character and position, but also the ones belonging to her same middle-class rank and who kept their status unaltered. Even though bankruptcy was not the governesses' fault, both middle and high classes despised them, given their imminent fall from their social sphere to the world of labour, which meant shame and little sympathy for them. Despite the fact that Jane Eyre was very lucky in her relationship with the servants (reflected in the figure of Mrs Fairfax, her master Mr Rochester or even her little pupil Adèle), she had no luck when it comes to avoiding social mockery and contempt. When Blanche Ingram asks Mr Rochester why he is in charge of Adèle and notices that the little girl is being educated by a governess, she starts ridiculing governesses in general and seems to believe that it is a waste of time and money to pay one:

You men never do consider economy and common sense. You should hear mama on the chapter of governesses: Mary and I have had, I should think, a dozen at least in our day; half of them detestable and the rest ridiculous, and all incubi (p. 252).

A woman's allusion to the expenses and intelligence in men sounds very dauntless. In the Victorian period, women were not allowed to give an opinion regarding men's business. Albeit, Blanche Ingram also depicts governesses as "detestable", "ridiculous" and "incubi" (p. 252). The first two terms may reflect what people her class usually thought about these private teachers. However, the term "incubi" suggests two different meanings. First, Miss Ingram may be referring to governesses who were actually like a nightmare for them because of their inappropriate behaviour towards their pupils or men. Second, the reference may be related to keeping an active sexual life when they were supposed to remain innocent and asexual as a reference to their female pupils. Thus, Miss Ingram may not only be criticising the competency of governesses but also their alleged lack of morals.

Governesses are mentioned negatively again by Mrs Ingram (Blanche Ingram's mother) by stating "my dearest, don't mention governesses; the word makes me nervous. I have suffered a martyrdom from their incompetency and caprice; I thank Heaven I have now done with them!" (p. 252). Here Mrs Ingram seems to be victimised by all her former governesses who have neglected their duties and have asked maybe too much despite their "incompetency" (p. 252). Mrs Dent notices Jane's presence in the room and warns Mrs

Ingram whispering in her ear. Jane supposes that this warning was a mere “reminder that one of the anathematized race was present” (p. 252) but Mrs Ingram continues her speech after the warning by stating “I hope it may do her good [...] I noticed her; I am a judge of physiognomy, and in hers I see all the faults of her class” (p. 252). The uncomfortable situation lived by Jane reflects the imminent collision between the governess and the gentry. This is the reason why the governess commonly avoided the company of the family or any invitation to join the parlour or enjoy their same entertainments. Despite the splendid relationship between Mr Rochester and Jane, she emphatically rejects the invitation to join the parlour with the rest of the guests at the party. Partly, as it happens in this chapter, she rejects the invitation because of the embarrassing incommode of meeting Mr Rochester’s fiancée and partly, due to the social differences that create an awkward atmosphere related to the governess’ presence in the room.

In *Agnes Grey* (1847) the aforementioned scornful behaviour is commonly subtler through body language and manners. During her stay with the Bloomfield family at Wellwood House, Agnes would describe Mrs Bloomfield’s attitude towards her as “chilly in her manner” (p. 17) or would refer to her mistress as “the awful lady” (p. 18), “irksome...cold, grave and forbidding” (p. 23). If Agnes pertained to a middle-class family, Mr and Mrs Bloomfield would belong to the upper-middle class. Mr Bloomfield was a brutish, uneducated retired tradesman with no gentleman-like manners. Both Mr and Mrs Bloomfield were a couple of new riches who tried to imitate the gentry in their customs, manners and lifestyle. As Kathryn Hughes pinpoints, the definition of gentility started to expand to include the new riches in the 19th century, so that the notion of gentleman could also be used for those who had earned their fortunes “by professional success and displayed through attention to dress, speech and behaviour” (Hughes, 2003, p. 12). Mr and Mrs Bloomfield are a perfect depiction of the new riches who mimicked the aristocracy in their banalities and paid little attention to how they raised and educated their children.

At Horton Lodge, Agnes realised that Mr Murray was not at the same hierarchical level as Mr Bloomfield. The Murray family was part of the gentry and, as aristocrats, they lived an idle life. Agnes described Mr Murray as “a devoted fox-hunter, a skilful horse jockey and farrier, an active, practical farmer and a hearty bon vivant...I never saw him from month to month unless, in crossing the hall or walking in the grounds” (p. 65). Similarly, Mrs Murray was depicted as an idle lady “whose chief enjoyments were, or seems to be, in giving

or frequenting parties, and in dressing at the very top of the fashion” (p. 66). Even though their manners were correct towards Agnes, the subtle repudiation of governesses was remarkably present through the servants’ attitude, other aristocrats or, more subtly, through Mrs Murray herself. In their first tête-à-tête, Mrs Murray somehow warns Agnes about her losing her temper with the children to enforce obedience since “I have hitherto found all the governesses, even the very best of them, faulty in this particular” (p. 67). Thus, Mrs Murray expected Agnes to educate her spoilt children with no reprisal or any other type of educational tool. In doing so, the governess would feel extremely powerless when it comes to exerting any educational influence on the pupils.

The high-class social life was out of the reach of the governess. Her intermediate position would cause awkward situations in which she would feel highly embarrassed. Agnes Grey would clearly point out her non-existent relationship with the middle and upper class:

Mr Hatfield never spoke to me, neither did Sir Hugh or lady Meltham, nor Mr Harry or Miss Meltham, nor Mr Green or his sisters, nor any other lady or gentleman who frequented that church, nor, in fact, anyone that visited at Horton Lodge (p.87)

A small party would usually walk together on their way back home from the church on Sundays, where she was ignored by all the aristocrats. In her attempt to avoid a hostile scenario, Agnes walked behind the group on her own:

It was disagreeable, too, to walk behind, and thus appear to acknowledge my own inferiority, for, in truth, I considered myself pretty nearly as good as the best of them, and wished them to know that I did so, and not to imagine that I looked upon myself as a mere domestic, who knew her own place too well to walk beside such fine ladies and gentlemen as they were (p.114)

These frequent situations in the governess’ life would demonstrate that the “typical marginalisation of the governess heroine could easily be achieved by positioning her against snobbish upper-class employers with little or no understanding of her situation” (Wadsö-Lecaros, 2001, p.32). Precisely, the governess novel depicts these awkward issues to highlight the working conditions of the governess as a consequence of her new undefined social position. The only exception in this depiction would be the governess in *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), where classist tensions with the servants or the gentry are non-existent.

7.2.3. The Relationship with the Children of the House

As Cecilia Wadsö explains, children underwent a transition from the nursery, where they were looked after by nurse-maids, to the schoolroom where the governess would be in charge of their formal education (Wadsö-Lecaros, 2001, p.156). The governess would instruct both girls and boys until the latter turned 10 years old and were sent to private boarding schools. Some examples can be found in Anne Brontë's and Henry James' novels, where the young boys are sent to private schools to complete their education. Girls would be instructed to become accomplished ladies with the final aim of entering society and finding a suitable husband to maintain them. The role of the governess was crucial for the adolescent girls in her charge. She was the female instructor who would guide the young ladies into the world of "etiquette and protocol that they would need to negotiate the social world" (Hughes, 2003, p.134). Likewise, they would be responsible for chaperoning and watching her pupils in society, particularly to protect them from men. In the case of young boys, parents were aware that they "began to require an education that would fit them for their new role as gentlemen" (Hughes, 2003, p.16). For this reason, they could hire language and music male masters to instruct them at home, who could complement the governess' lessons to be sent to school later on. The relationship between the governess and her pupils would virtually depend on the values their parents transmitted to them regarding governesses and manners in general terms. The challenges the governess had to face when attempting to instruct her pupils, as well as the mistress's lack of support, are frequently highlighted in the governess novel.

In *Jane Eyre* (1847), Mrs Ingram's bad experiences with governesses are questioned from the moment in which she gave no clue to understand her position. Nonetheless, the unreliability of her statement was soon clarified when her daughter said that governesses were "[...] a nuisance. Not that I ever suffered much from them; I took care to turn the tables" (p. 201). Soon afterwards, she would explain the way her brother Theodore and herself normally played on their governesses by ridiculing and mocking them:

The best fun was with Madame Joubert: Miss Wilson was a poor sickly thing, lachrymose and low-spirited: not worth the trouble of vanquishing, in short; and Mrs Grey was coarse and insensible: no blow took effect on her. But poor Madame Joubert! I see her yet in her raging passions, when we had driven her to extremities – spilt our teas, crumbled our bread and butter, tossed our books

up to the ceiling, and played a charivari with the ruler and desk, the fender and fire-irons (p. 201)

From Miss Ingram's story, we deduce that it was the governess herself who suffered martyrdom instead of Mrs Ingram and her children. Here we find a good example to reflect the position of the governess with her pupils and masters as, commonly, children were the reflection of their parents' attitude. Governesses were considered fair game for many of their pupils so that they enjoyed teasing their governess by insulting her, encouraging both private and public humiliations, using disobedience as a weapon against her authority or making use of physical cruelty. Hughes provides an illustrative example to explain that "Victorian autobiographies are full of tales of governess-baiting - a sport in which small boys, chafing under petticoat rule, were only too happy to lead" (Hughes, 2003, p.68). Even the elder boys could try to harass her sexually inasmuch as the governess, who aroused some sexual interest in the girls as a female prototype to follow, also "provoked altogether more urgent feelings in their brothers" (Hughes, 2003, p.136). Miss Ingram's story about governesses continues dealing with the same topic with her brother Theodore, the one with whom she played tricks and hard abuses on her governesses. The children abused their governess on purpose and looked down on her as an inferior entity not only due to her social position but also because of her alleged ignorance. This attitude in children reflects the arrogance probably learnt from their mother. What is more, their arrogance makes them think that they have the right to intervene in their governess' love relationship and make her affair with Tedo's tutor public ("He and Miss Wilson took the liberty of falling in love with each other"; p. 201-202).

In the Victorian period, the governess was supposed to be an unfeminine, asexual kind of woman whose duty consisted in staying at home educating her pupils and teaching them manners in society, particularly teaching girls how to become accomplished ladies in order to achieve a suitable husband. Such an educational duty also conveyed the governess' obligation to instruct her pupils regarding chastity before marriage and keeping a decent, respectful behaviour towards men. As Miss Ingram pointed out, bad examples could transmit the wrong message to pupils by corrupting them and spoiling their "innocence of childhood" (p. 254). However, on the other hand, the governess' sexuality was consequently denied, a fact which is fairly appreciated in Miss Ingram's words when stating "[they] took the liberty of falling in love with each other" (p. 201-202), which means she thought, as well as her social milieu, that her governess had no right to fall in love and keep a love relationship. It

seems that Miss Ingram's statement suggests that governesses were usually treated as if they were one more possession in the family, since they were not allowed to make their own decisions without the family's say-so or even their falling in love was considered insolence.

Despite the examples previously provided, it is worth noticing that Jane Eyre would not suffer these terrible situations with her French pupil Adèle at Thornfield Hall. Additionally, she would not suffer any humiliation or uncomfortable issue with Mr Rochester or Miss Fairfax, so that it could be stated that Jane lived an extraordinarily still life as a governess.

In *Agnes Grey* (1847) the protagonist suffered the terrible misbehaviour of the two eldest children at Wellwood House. Tom Murray and Mary Ann Murray were 7 and almost 6 years old, respectively. Agnes described actions and situations that portrayed the picture of two spoilt, whimsical children who "had never been properly taught the distinction between right and wrong", and thus "tyrannize[d] over nurses, governesses and servants" (p. 68-69). Young Tom Murray was a tyrannical child who threatened and bossed his sister, his governess, his mother and the servants, imitating his father's violent behaviour. This reproduction of patriarchal values is clearly seen when he menaced his sister by beating her and stated he had to do so "to keep her in order" (p.20). Agnes is even more speechless when she observes how far the child's violence can go when she realises he enjoys torturing birds with their parents' approval. The child imitated the adults in the family, namely his father and uncle so that torturing animals would not be a wicked action because adults consented to it. In the same way, the child understood that he could give orders, disobey or look down on the governess because he had his parents' consent to do so. Furthermore, Agnes had no authority over the children since Mrs Bloomfield did not allow her to punish them. The only way to exert authority over the children was through Mr Bloomfield's violent behaviour. Thus, Agnes' pupils had learnt from their early childhood that brutal and despotic demeanour was the right way to treat those under their social class. The same occurred to Agnes' pupils at Horton Lodge, who tyrannised the domestic service or those below their social rank, although they did it to a lesser extent than the Bloomfields. Mrs Murray had prohibited Agnes to punish her children or exert any authority over them. Yet, she urged her to accomplish successfully her duties as an instructor and educator. The governess felt overwhelmed by her powerless position regarding her pupils. Being respected by spoiled youngsters whose parents

had no control over them was especially difficult. Agnes stated under these harsh circumstances she was “in the point of losing or resigning my situation” (p. 72).

Nevertheless, not all pupils were so cruel with their governess and not all masters were tyrants who burdened them “with sewing, housework, and errands or refused to allow their relatives to visit them, or discouraged unattached young men from making approaches. And not all governesses were necessarily meek and lady-like” (Allingham, 2000). When a governess joined a family where the employers were good-natured, she had the chance to fulfil her duties properly, fearless, and with impunity at all levels. In the event she wanted to discipline her pupils, the due punishments would be immediately executed as a token of respect.

Even though the story of the governess in *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) was particularly different from the other two novels because of its Gothic features with spooky ghosts, it is worth noticing that this governess kept an excellent and affectionate relationship with her pupils. Notwithstanding, the governess novel usually depicts the ups and downs of the heroine with her pupils, particularly when expressing her frustration when she feels helpless and lonely in her role as instructor.

8. Conclusion

Returning to the hypothesis formulated at the beginning of this study, it is now possible to state that the comparative analysis of the three canonical works coincides with the main features and themes previously described in chapter 6. In the three texts, the heroine is a young woman, orphan or daughter of a humble or ruined father, who is hired by a wealthy family to instruct the children of the house. The three heroines experiment loneliness, the introduction of a companion who comforts them, personal development towards maturity and the development of a love story, be it real as in *Agnes Grey* (1847) and *Jane Eyre* (1847) or a platonic relationship as in *The Turn of the Screw* (1898). From the three works, *Agnes Grey* is undoubtedly the heroine whose experience as a governess is closer to real life. On the contrary, even though the governess in Henry James’ novel was part of an uncanny Gothic narration in which she could see ghosts, *Jane Eyre*’s experience as a fictional governess is far from reality and closer to romantic daydreaming. Despite the differences between the texts, the textual similarities shed light on the issue of the governess novel as a genre on its own.

From the present analysis, further research could be accomplished in the future to check whether the governess-centred contemporary works such as *Silence in Court* (2016) by Patricia Wentworth, Carrie Turansky's *The Governess of Highland Hall* (2013), or Julie Klassen's *The Silent Governess* (2009), exhibit the same features and themes as their predecessors in the 19th century.

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