

Critique Reading and Explorer of Victorian Women's Fantasy in Virginia Woolf's "The Angel in the House".

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قراءة نقدية واستكشاف خيال المرأة الفيكتورية في رواية "الملاك في البيت"

لفرجينيا وولف

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الملخص:

انطلاقاً من افتراض أن الرواية البريطانية في القرن التاسع عشر هي أسلوب سردي يتألف من عنصرين أساسيين هما الخيال وبناء الراوي الذي يروي الحكاية التي يتم سردها، تستكشف وتحلل مساهمتنا نمو رواية المرأة الفيكتورية باعتبارها نتاج لعدة روائيات كاتبات واعيات بطبيعتهن الأنثوية واللواتي يشاركن في تحليل الجنس الأنثوي من خلال نتاجاتهم الأدبية، مما يقدم للقارئ توضيحاً للاختلاف الذي يلقي الضوء ويؤكد على البناء الثقافي للمرأة في القرن التاسع عشر. في التشبيه الأساسي للمرأة كتعبير مجازي "الملاك في المنزل" كما وصفتها فرجينيا وولف، فإننا نعارض "المرأة الجديدة" والحركات الجديدة التي تهدف نحو تحرير المرأة، والنموذج الجديد للأنوثة والذي أدى إلى سرد التباين (الذكورة الأنثوية)، والذي أعطى فرصة بألقاء نظرة عامة على نماذج بارزات من هذا النوع على سبيل المثال: ماري وولستونكرافت، وإميلي برونتي، وإليزابيث بنيت، وإيلين وود، وماري إليزابيث برادون. هؤلاء كانوا تجسيد لمواجهة المبدأ الأخلاقي والسلوك السائد الذي كان سارياً طوال القرن التاسع عشر في إنجلترا، ودليل تاريخي على التفرد والقدرة الشخصية والجماعية التي كانت مهمشة بسبب الوضع السائد آنذاك والتي ركنت إلى هامش التاريخ. الكلمات المفتاحية: النساء الفيكتوريات ، الأنوثة ، النوع الجنسي ، النسوية ، الذكورة ، الرواية . ملاحظة : لغة البحث هي اللغة الانكليزية

Abstract

: Starting from the presumption that the nineteenth-century British novel is a style of narrative that has as two of its basic components the fictionality and the construction of a narrator that narrates the tale that is narrated, our contribution explores the growth of Victorian women's novel as the production of several women authors aware of their feminine qualities and who are involved with analysing the female universe in their literary exhibition, offering the reader an illustration of the difference that emphasises the cultural construction of women in the nineteenth century. To the central metaphor of the woman as "the angel in the house" as described by Virginia Woolf, we oppose the "new woman" and the movement towards women's liberation, and a new model of femininity which resulted in a narrative of the contrast (the female masculinity), which permits for an overview of noteworthy representatives of the genre: Mary Wollstonecraft, Emily Brontë, Elizabeth Bennet, Ellen Wood, Mary Elizabeth Braddon. These are embodiments of a confrontation of the ethical principle and predominant behaviour in force throughout the nineteenth century in England, historical proof of the uniqueness and personal capability of a collective marginalized by the predominant status and relegated to the margins of history.

Keywords: Victorian women, femininity, gender, feminism, masculinity, novel .

1. Intertextuality, history, dialogism, and literary studies According to Roland Barthes, the narratives of the world are countless (1994). For Barthes, the narrative is, above all, a tremendous diversity of genres that in turn can be picked up through different media. Barthes characteristics narrative as qualified for being expressed in detailed language (both oral and written), in images or gesticulations, for example. He also asserts that narrative is present in myths, novels, legends, biographies, fables, history, cinema, painting, and even in discussion. On the other hand, the narrative is present in all epochs of history in one form or another, in all places and societies, so we can conclude that it starts with the history of humanity and residues since then. The most recent studies of narratology – such as those of Mieke Bal, Mark Currie, Martin McQuillan, and George Hughes – argue that narrative is correlative to the representation of identity since it is as inherent to human beings as language. Bennet and Royle, in this same orientation, present five propositions around which it is possible to direct the discussion about the narrative: (1) the stories are everywhere; (2) We not only apprise tales, but tales inform us too; (3) the action of telling a tale is inevitably related to the practice of power, possessions and authority; (4) the tales are multiple, so there are always more than one; and (5) the tales always reveal something about themselves, so they inevitably have self-reflective measurements (Bennett and Royle 1996:41).

21st-century narratology commonly begins from the supposition that narrative is everywhere since it is the way of thinking and existing of the human being and, therefore, assumes that any reasonable technique to its study happens to be necessarily interdisciplinary. Also, analysts today naturally approve that any text lacks separate meaning. We can guide here to the creation of Julia Kristeva (the notion of intertextuality) and Mikhail Bakhtin (the vision of dialogism) as philosophers who have marked a before and after in the critical review of the narrative and the literary text in all-around. That is, the meaning of a text is found not so much in the text itself, but instead in the relationships that can be appointed between that text and all those to which it guides or with which it can be bonded so that it depends on a network of textual relationships. The intertextuality of every text issues to its inevitably plural, reversible nature and is open to the presuppositions of the reader himself. The texts, eventually, lack obvious rules and in one form or another are concerned with the expression or repression of the various dialogical voices that exist in society at any given time. The novel, and, at this point, the nineteenth-century British novel, is a form of narrative that has as two of its fundamental elements the fictionality and the construction of a narrator that narrates the tale that is narrated. The first of these two elements, fictionality, is established on the presumption that the personalities and circumstances narrated in a novel, although they may proclaim realism or are even directly inspired by facts or real moments, are surely fictitious. It is an obvious, a priori disparity between a novel and a historical narrative. Nevertheless, despite its nature as fiction, the novel can be, and certainly in the issue that concerns us often is, realistic. This means that although the tale can be based on the creation of fictitious personalities, the world that is recreated in fiction is often real and moves in coordinates that are applied in reality, being reliable concerning the same. The novel may even have specifically that objective: to recreate a real world. The novels of Charles Dickens, to cite a case, obviously describe the England of his time, analysing this reality with carefulness to create a naturalistic image of the epoch of clear historical-cultural value. On the other hand, and like every tale that is narrated, the novel needs a narrator, someone who narrates it. This narrator can assume diverse forms that go from the anonymous narration in the third person to the narration in the first person and in the mouth of one of the characters of the novel itself. The novel shares with the historical narrative the construction of a narrator in a specific position concerning the novel that is narrated and that, as Bennet and Royle say, he discovers by narrating the tale a practice that is not exempt from power, property and domination For a reader of the 21st century, the nineteenth-century novel is a document of a fictional nature but at the same time of historical significance that, without a suspicion, presents the opportunity of having at its disposal a diversity of eyesight and readings of the time. Focusing exclusively on the authors deemed habitually canonical, one can assert without suspicion of misinterpreting the significance of his work in the present not only as a literary text but also as a historical document. The novels of writers like Jane Austen, the Brontë sisters, Charles Dickens, W. M. Thackeray, George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell, Thomas Hardy, Rudyard Kipling or Joseph Conrad are for the current reader resources of knowledge of the truth of nineteenth-century England with his images of the status of women, the family, the British Empire, the middle class or education throughout the century. Regardless, in the case of the British novel, and this long century that can be stated to range from the French Revolution to the First World War, its ambit can hardly be valued if the role played by women, not only as readers, is discarded, but also as authors, within the literary scenery and of the growth of thought in the Anglo-Saxon world. This period, determined in literary terms by Romanticism and Modernism, contains the whole nineteenth century, including Victorian

literature at its centre. Within this long nineteenth century, the role of women authors of the prominence of Jane Austen, the Brontë sisters, Elizabeth Gaskell, George Eliot and Virginia Woolf is today incontrovertible, not only for their contribution to the English novel, but for their practical role as feminists, and as “historians of women” – that is, authors conscious of their feminine nature and who are interested with exploring the female universe in their literary production, offering the reader an illustration of the difference that emphasises the cultural construction of women in the nineteenth century. The contribution of women to English narrative and the development of thought during this period, nonetheless, has a range that is often more unfamiliar and forgotten but which is relevant to our knowledge of the cultural construction of the feminine further, as well as its presentation of contrast in all its complicatedness.

2. Victorian England women The history of women in nineteenth-century England is a long avenue that starts symbolically with the publication of the seminal work of Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and culminates when women acquired the right to vote in 1918, after World War I. During the eighteenth century, it was believed that the centre of female life was the home and that the woman could be recognised only as a wife and mother. The rising of the bourgeoisie during the nineteenth century, and the wealthy classes (the rising and increasingly powerful middle class, together with the classical aristocracy) gradually required that women master the arts of entertainment and ornament, a direction that bumbles, nonetheless, with the horror motivated by wise women. However, throughout the nineteenth-century women started to be educated, not as an end in itself, but as a purpose to expand their “thanks” to the opposing sex. The construction of women is a style of varnish in “general culture” and will continue well into the twentieth century. The women of the time started to learn languages (mainly French), although they rejected access to learning the classical languages, considered the basis of the education of the male sex. In line with the philosophy of puritanic life distinctive of the middle class of the moment, it is about women crediting “desirability”, to further their position and fortune to be eligible as suitable wives. Although throughout the nineteenth century, women restarted to be educated mainly at home, it is certainly true that the growing interest in the education of women is reflected in the proliferation of boarding schools for young women. In these centres, women are taught the suppression of any unprompted motive. Completely sequestered from the world, young women are educated with a single ambition: husband hunt. After completing their preparation in the arts of entertainment and ornamentation – music, painting, modern languages, sewing and manners form the core of the training given to them – these young women are thrown into the world to achieve the purpose: a husband. The society of the moment marginalizes the single woman, who is seen as a real failure. In this middle-high-class environment, it is out of the question for women to aspire to a profession, to which they only resort in case of need. From Jane Austen, through Thackeray or Dickens, for example, the English-language novel of the time shows many examples of this situation, which almost always appears as a tragicomic aspect of the life of female characters. The legal status of women in nineteenth-century England greatly separates single women from married women to the clear detriment of the latter. Even though a single woman of legal age has no right to vote, she cannot exercise any official functions or practice a liberal profession, enjoy the same rights as men about personal property or real estate and be able to freely dispose of them in life or by will. On the contrary, a married woman becomes a slave before marriage in all matters about her property, her children and her very person. Until 1884 the husband has a right over the woman’s person. Following the principles of Common Law, marriage makes the husband the owner of all the woman’s property, in exchange for which she is obliged to protect her and satisfy her needs. The status of the wife in terms of the rights of the children in the marriage is also discriminatory for the woman. In 1837 justice still did not admit the wife’s right to abandon her husband unless he was found guilty of cruelty to her person, and even if the law did not force the wife to return to the conjugal home, the husband retained all rights over property. The law does not grant separation to the wife for the adultery of the husband. The father currently has unlimited rights over his children, and may even separate them from their mother, who does not exist before the law, and entrust them to the care of a person of his choice. In 1939 the first reform was achieved with a new custody law that contemplates for the first time that, in the case of separation of the parents, the mother can submit the petition that custody of children under seven years be granted automatically as well as regulating the right of visit of children over this age. The law of 1857 stipulates that to open a divorce process it is enough for a man to prove an act of wife infidelity, while the wife must prove the adultery of the husband, aggravation by abandonment, cruelty, incest, rape, sodomy or bestiality. It was in 1870 when they started to record incredible progress in what refers to the legal status of married women and their right to children. Once married, the English women of this period spent much of their time at home. The increasing wealth of the middle class has as an outcome the liberation of women from domestic tasks, leaving them often idle. The home is

conceived as a social unit, where the functions of man and woman are completely determined, both being understood as the positive and negative poles of the same reality. The bourgeois man must seek to progress in society, in the outside world, while the fundamental function of women is to preserve the home specifically from the corruption coming from the outside world. For this, the woman must remain pure and uncorrupted. And so the ideal of the “angel of the house” is imposed in this society, based on the famous poem that Coventry Patmore dedicated to his wife Emily in 1854: “Man must be pleased, But to please is woman’s pleasure”. Coventry Patmore (1823-1896), the English poet and critic, has gone down in history for his poem “The Angel in the House”, which he published in 1854 and afterwards in a revised version in 1862. Originally, the poem did not obtain much critical attention, although its popularity was increasing with the passing of the years. For Virginia Woolf, this repressive ideal was still too powerful in the twentieth century. In her essay “Professions for Women”, the result of a lecture she addressed to the Women’s Service League on January 21, 1931, and whose text was later included in *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays* (1942), Woolf describes the “angel of the house” in the following terms: “She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily ... Above all – I need not say it – she was pure. Her purity was supposed to be her chief beauty – her blushes, her great day. In those days – the last of Queen Victoria – every house had its Angel” (Woolf 1942: 237). As we have seen, the prominent decades of the nineteenth century designate a period of unification and diffusion of the bourgeois ideal, an ideal of work, austerity, chastity and worship of the patriarchal and monogamous family; ideals that contrast with the more relaxed way of life of a progressively decadent and entirely idle aristocracy. In the last years of the century, however, there are important incisions that point to essential changes that will take place in the 20th century. Victorian Puritanism falls into deterioration and is openly questioned from a multitude of positions. Darwin’s theory of evolution, emerging socialist ideologies, and suffragist movements or anti-colonialist arguments are clear examples that something is changing rapidly. The ideal of the “angel of the house” also forms to be questioned at this moment and the “new woman” appears. This “new woman” is nothing but a reaction against the cult of domesticity that the “angel of the house” had encapsulated. The movement is towards the freedom of what is beginning to be seen as a highly repressive and castrating standard for women and society in general. In all-around terms, this new model of femininity will support education like that of men for women, the ability to earn money and, thus, to be financially self-sustaining, participate in the political discussions of the country and have decision-making authority over his life, both point out to marriage and motherhood, for example. Things started to change, and the most powerful sign that this change no longer had a return happened when women attained the right to vote in 1918.

3. A novel of the dissimilarity: female masculinity

In “An Introduction to Female Masculinity: Masculinity Without Men”, a study of her book *Female Masculinity*, Judith Halberstam discusses that masculinity is the social and cultural idiom of masculinity (insofar as it guides the male/male sex). For this reason, she argues that what she requisitions “feminine masculinity” is not only an imitation of the masculine (indicated to the male), but it is a phenomenon that permits exactly detecting how masculinity is constructed as such in society. For Judith Halberstam, what we know as “heroic masculinity” has been generated by and through both male and female bodies. Halberstam claims in her essay that female masculinity has been showily ignored both in all-around culture and in academic studies on masculinity, which is somehow reflected in complicated social configurations that specifically associate masculinity inevitably to what is masculine and, by stretching, with power and authority. Why? It is possibly because masculinity has traditionally been associated with the practice of authority, legitimacy and privilege, in the exact way that it symbolically indicates the power of the State and the unequal distribution of wealth. Masculinity, according to the controversy of Halberstam, branches out towards the patriarchy and the family, representing by expansion of the power of the inheritance. What we call “dominant masculinity” would then be a natural connection between the masculine and the authority, which sarcastically reverts in that we can disclose and analyse masculinity precisely when it departs the bourgeois masculine body. This line of discussion brings back Halberstam to the critical concern of the analysis of non-normative masculinity, as is the point of feminine masculinity. Female adolescence is a stage of trouble since it forms a circle of transformation from girl to woman in a society overwhelmed by men. According to Halberstam, for boys, it is a ritual of course to a higher standing in terms of social control, in the matter of girls it is a task of containment, punishment and repression. Tomboyism, which is associated with the desire of some girls for the greater possibilities of liberty and mobility of children, also reflects a certain desire for independence and personal satisfaction. At the time of adolescence, the instincts towards girls’ tomboyism try to reform themselves towards figures of femininity appropriate to the factual social standard. In this case, feminine masculinity also

exists as a field of fruitful research, if only because it is often analysed as an even pathological signal of an absence of identification, of inequality it indicates the desire to be and to have a power that for girls it will always be out of reach. Finally, for Halberstam, the conclusion is that masculinity is not only multiple but that it specifies conditions and modulates all cultural beings, whether male or female. For this reasoning, the study of masculinities beyond normative masculinity (bourgeois white man) is critically relevant and culturally subversive, since it questions the dominant central position of masculinity as a standard of gender stability and reference of possible deviations. At the same time, it allows analysis of how masculinity is constructed in discourse. The thinking of Judith Halberstam includes, in my opinion, critical ramifications beyond the queer analyses in which the American critique has been encapsulated and that can bring us new perspectives and therefore new readings, in this case about the British narrative of women in the nineteenth century. In a first approximation within the case that interests us, there are two axes around which one can pivot, taking as a starting point the direction of female masculinity of this North American critique. On the one hand, we have the carefulness of women authors in themselves, as artists and creators in an eminently patriarchal society that imagines women as a complement to men, occupying the sphere of the personal, while the public sphere is designed as exclusively male. On the other hand, it is the review of the texts themselves and of the options and terrains that are explored in them. Virginia Woolf already confirms that the woman author has before her a challenge: to kill the angel of the house if she wants to create if she wants to write. She also asserts that the very existence of the woman author makes the patriarchy reel, insofar as it indicates the possibility that the woman may have a mind of her own, an independent thought, which in British society in the nineteenth century is generally considered an inherently masculine attribute.

٤. Women novelists and female-authored works

As we have witnessed, British society of the nineteenth century is, in a broad sense, a bourgeois, puritanical and eminently patriarchal society. The woman is confined in the domestic space and becomes a standard for the moral values that can be transmitted from generation to generation. In all-around terms, and with great contrasts between the panorama that is breathed at the beginning of the nineteenth century (in the Jane Austen era, so to tell) and at the beginning of the XX century (in the Virginia Woolf era), the woman is considered to be fragile, ethereal, vulnerable, inferior to man; her main function is, of course, the representation and transmission of culture and, hence, she must be protected and maintained from the world to ensure that she can carry out her mission in the social fabric. Everything that attempts against this standard is considered subversive and dangerous and must be repressed, hidden or silenced. In this scenario, the novel blossoms and establishes itself as the predominant literary genre. The middle-class woman, often idle, starts reading novels and it turns out, finally, that the reading public of the moment is eminently feminine. The novel is the genre that dominates the literary panorama of the 19th century in England, particularly during the Victorian era, when serialized publication was imposed (with the notorious exception of the Brontë sisters), which also impacted the enormous diffusion and popularity of the genre at this time. But, as if that were not sufficiently, and in an even more ironic way, the woman launches into writing with such fervour that the spread of women novelists during this time is at least shocking if we bear in mind that the notion of women novelist is an example of what Judith Halberstam articulates as a male woman (the female masculine), according to the predominant ideology. From Jane Austen to Virginia Woolf, the woman launches into the novel and intends to become a professional author, in the same way that it happens with novelists in general and throughout the century. The woman novelist does not write only to entertain herself but often does it as a profession to make a living and, being a profession certainly risky for a woman, to be regarded as an unseemly ostentation, at least of independence and intellect, sometimes does disguise as a man, under a masculine pseudonym. The female novelistic production throughout this long nineteenth century is a good illustration of the arguments presented so far. Hence, among the women novelists of this long period, and beyond the novelists of the time recognized as canonical (Jane Austen, the Brontë sisters, Elizabeth Gaskell, George Eliot and Virginia Woolf mainly), we can mention Fanny Burney, Elizabeth Inchbald, Mary Wollstonecraft, Anne Radcliffe, Mary Russell Mitford, Mary Shelley, Dinah Craig, Caroline Norton, Ellen Wood, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Eliza Linton, Florence Marryat, Charlotte Yonge, Olive Schreiner, VF Martin, Margaret Oliphant, George Egerton, Sarah Grand, Mona Caird and May Sinclair, to name a few. Their status as professional authors represents a questioning of the patriarchal proposals of the moment and points to their masculinity (ironically many of them assumed masculine pseudonyms) since they are women with a profession in a society that relegates women to the domestic sphere only. The woman finds in this genre, still young in English letters, a suitable state of expression to explore her universe. Among them, and for reasons of space, we will highlight some issues to verify the arguments established so far. In *A Room of One's Own* Virginia Woolf discusses that to write the woman, she needed, in the

first instance, a room of her own. Woolf concentrates on Jane Austen, Charlotte and Emily Brontë and George Eliot to defend their argument that, to be novelists, nineteenth-century women have to “give up their motherhood,” since both were incompatible. Lacking a room of their own, she discusses, women have to write their works in the living room of the house, incorporation. Woolf talks about women as trained, in a natural way, in the observation of people. For all that, according to her, she begins writing novels and not poetry, for example. The conclusion reached by Woolf is that women started to write openly in the nineteenth century and that, when she did, she chose the novel because it is the most convenient genre to her in formation and content. Certainly, a review of nineteenth-century women’s novels in England in the broadest sense will verify that Woolf is wrong. Many women authors were not only married but were also mothers. Nevertheless, Woolf is not wrong in evaluating the tremendous difficulties with which women struggle when they want to aspire to be novelists, to develop a mind of their own, a genuine aberration in the historical-cultural environment to which we are referring. Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) was forced by family conditions to make a living very early as an escort, governess, dressmaker and teacher; she also began to write early, motivated by her matters for social change. A social and political activist, she had a stormy relationship with a French painter before her relationship with the philosopher William Godwin, with whom she had a daughter, the novelist Mary Shelley. Jane Austen (1775-1817), like other novelist authors of the long nineteenth century, stayed single and economically dependent on her father first and one of her brothers on the death of the first, challenging the system and choosing the marginal status concerning society, that of a “spinster”. Mary Shelley (1797-1851) began a relationship with Percy Shelley, who was married, which caused her social and family ostracism. Although he later married the poet, his untimely death forced Mary to return to England with her only surviving son to consecrate herself to writing as a professional writer to survive economically. Caroline Norton (1808-1877) married George Norton to alleviate her mother’s financial position, but her marriage was a complete disaster. Norton physically abused Caroline for years until she decided to leave him. Not only did he lose custody of his children, but he was denied access to them. Caroline then became an active and fierce fighter for the rights of married women over their children. Their struggle centred on the battle against the Custody of Children Act of 1839. The British Parliament, in part thanks to the work of this woman, approved the Marriage and Divorce Act in 1857. George Eliot (Mary Anne Evans, 1819-1880) lived a very unconventional life since moving to London to work as assistant editor of the Westminster Review in 1851. She became a scandalous figure of professional development and autonomy. In addition, she met George Henry Lewes in 1851, who was married, and began a relationship with him. They settled down to live together and from that moment they were completely marginalized by the society of the time. Sarah Grand (1854-1943), meanwhile, left her husband (a widowed surgeon who had a son and who had travelled a lot) changing her name to “Madame” Sarah Grand. From that moment on, she became a leading figure in the feminist movement of the second half of the 19th century, exploring the possibility of women’s liberation at a professional level. Like many women of the time, their positioning is ambiguous and even contradictory in the issues connected to women, lacking the rebelliousness that can be detected in other authors. Finally, in this passage, George Egerton (1859-1945) runs away with a man named Higginson, who died two years later, and during this period she meets Ibsen and Nietzsche. Subsequently, she married Egerton Clairmonte in 1893 divorced in 1901 and remarried a theatrical agent. With her, we are faced with a sincerely intelligent woman, an active fighter for the cause of the liberation of women. The first mention of Nietzsche in English literature can be found in Keynotes, a collection of short stories published in 1893. These novelists are a sample of masculine women, insofar as their presence is a challenge to the building of patriarchy of masculinity/femininity during the Victorian era. They are also a demonstration that masculinity transcends the male body and is a cultural construction. They offer us the possibility of exploring the extent to which nineteenth-century Victorian society refuses to dynamite the gender-sex binomial pair by restricting masculinity to the male body – and therefore preserving it from contamination to maintain the hegemony of masculinity, with man at the top of the ladder of social, political and cultural hierarchy. This is not surprising in an era distinguished by the progressive, constant and growing demands of feminists for women’s rights to education, political representation and economic emancipation. The purpose of the suffrage movements of the second half of the nineteenth century are precisely that, of dynamiting the Victorian patriarchy, often attacking the binomial masculinity-male / femininity-woman. The result is that in many cases, the authors of this time (as is the case of Sarah Grand, for example) reflect contradictory discourses in themselves. Regarding the novels written by women during this period, it is relevant to consider the line of discussion that Marina Warner (2012) follows: the texts (in this case the novel) give life to the impossible in the process of exchange between the fantasy of the reader and that of the author. For Warner, the tales that are narrated always become very powerful ways of exploring

alternative worlds. And that is what makes the novel a space where desire can be explored, or in the words of Catherine Belsey, that a story is always a matter of desire: "Stories are narratives of a succession of events; they involve a difference between past and future; they refer that things change. Stories involve enigmas, suspense, challenge, the risk that the wished-for future might in practice be worse, not better" (Belsey 1994: 208). A critical issue for the discussion proposed by this work is situated around the novel as an area where the topic can explore issues connected to desire and meaning, having the opportunity to become for a moment the owner and master of a novel. About feminine masculinity, as Halberstam discusses, the novel becomes a space where it is possible to explore the otherness of female masculinity and non-normative forms of masculinity. The desire for variousness, for metamorphosis, is also a desire that, like all forms of desire, never culminates, but exists in so far as it stays deferred. The tales contained in the novel are engaging for the reader because they permit him to explore his otherness, his multiplicity. For a moment you can analyse otherness, you can express desire through transformation and metamorphosis, and this ephemeral moment can be repeated infinitely because the tales are endless. They are always there. Mary Wollstonecraft's *Mary, A Fiction* (1788), Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), Jane Eyre (Charlotte Brontë, 1847), Dinah Craik's *Olive* (1850), Mrs Henry Wood's *East Lynne* (1861), Mary E. Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), Margaret Oliphant's *Kirsteen* (1890), Sarah Grand's *The Heavenly Twins* (1893), Mona Caird's *Daughters of Danaus* (1894), and May Sinclair's *Mary Olivier, A Life* (1919); all these novels present the reading public of the time the chance of exploring alternative feminine spaces, the possibility of exploring otherness, female masculinity. Curiously, the graduation of these novels in time helps us to appreciate the development of the fiction that the woman writer makes in her novels. *Mary, A Fiction* is a novel by social activist Mary Wollstonecraft, written to denounce a series of social troubles that the author finds discriminatory for women through its main character, Mary – a socially liberated being portrayed as a male woman, following the controversy of Halberstam, as it is characterized by having an inquisitive mind, interested in philosophy rather than novels, for instance. The novel describes how Mary is departed aside by her mother, growing up in an isolation that, far from preparing her to be a woman in the community of the moment, gives her a liberation that permits her harmony with nature according to the growth of her nature as a human being, outside the limitations assessed by the current social code. But Mary is obliged to marry later for economic reasons and by order of her father, and the novel concentrates on analysing her reaction to this marriage and her desire further to free herself from what she realizes as a responsibility and social imposition. This subject of the social code as oppressive and emasculate for women is explored in deepness in the only novel by Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*. The female protagonist, Cathy, lives a motherless childhood in liberation, and connection with nature, outside the enduring social codes of the time. This life makes possible the relationship between Cathy and Heathcliff, the orphan adopted by Mr. Earnshaw, Cathy's father, a true social castaway who lacks identity and therefore is totally out of the system. The problem happens when Cathy spends a few days at Mr. Linton's house, symbolically marking her passage from childhood to maturity, when she learns what it means to be a woman in Victorian England, and ends up returning home as a young lady. Cathy's trouble is that she can not naturally incorporate this process and lives the transition to maturity as an authentic castration and, eventually, the annihilation of her being. For this reason, Cathy embodies Halberstam's argument very well when she talks about what adolescence means for women, while the text emphasizes to what extent the prevailing code of behaviour could be challenging for the woman of the time. At first glance, it may appear strange to try to combine the conventional Jane Austen in this novel of alternative histories of contrast. Her central work is *Pride and Prejudice*, in which Austen shows us Elizabeth Bennet and tells us a fiction about women, marriage and money, the central subject of her work. Despite writing her novels during the first decade of the nineteenth century, Austen is more a neoclassical than a romantic author. In her novels logic overwhelms, and order is conceived as essential to the world and inherent to the human being, that is, to the white man. Elizabeth Bennet is, without a doubt, an amazing heroine and, within the Austenian universe, absolutely incendiary. The features that make Elizabeth a distinctive hero have to do with her mind since Austen Proves through her that reason is inherent not only to the man but also to the woman. Elizabeth Bennet is, First of all, an intellectual woman, with reason, analytical talents, irony and liberated judgment. In a world in which women married out of necessity, Elizabeth makes her judgments and choices. Women like Elizabeth usually stayed single (like Jane Austen herself), but Austen rewards Elizabeth specifically for her reason, her independence of decisions and her ability to choose. By making it reasonable, Austen justly promotes Elizabeth and makes her "masculine," since rationality is commonly believed in this period to be an inherent quality of the white man. Austen's novel aims for reconciliation, and that's why the system combines Elizabeth who has as a final award the neoclassical Mr. Darcy. *Olive* has been frequently connected to

Jane Eyre, which was published a couple of years later. Undoubtedly, there are many issues of association between the two texts, both infused with fanatic ideology in the purest sense: both stress the significance of work and personal sacrifice, unlimited austerity and a strict and comprehensive ethical-moral code. Nevertheless, in both the major characters are a woman and a brave woman, in authority of her own life, with endeavour and decision about her life and with a pure, brilliant and capable mind. We can talk about both Jane Eyre and Olive as masculine women, in the reason that they want to be independent, liberated and unrestricted in making their judgments. The criticism guides to Jane Eyre, described in first person, as the first female Bildungsroman, and in this intent, Jane is promoted to the classification of the classic male personalities of the Bildungsroman. Olive, as Jane Eyre's inheritor, too feeds on these features and even affirms in both cases the unsightly physique of the protagonists, one more technique to concentrate on the flaws of her femininity and emphasise what are offered as virtues, these qualities being traditionally associated with masculinity. In both cases, the text negotiates the masculinity of these women with their femininity, to find a final equilibrium that lets their insertion in patriarchy. They are doubtful texts, since they explore new options, although they finally bargain with patriarchy to aim for a solution of commitment, reinsertion and social pact. The 1860s saw the publication of what came to be named a "sensationalist novel" in England. No doubt, the two best samples in terms of novels written by women in this field are Ellen Wood's East Lynne and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's Lady Audley's Secret. Both novels are bestsellers of the period and open front-line argument issues in a sensationalistic style and with a high plot strength. East Lynne evolved at the time to significant commercial success, with a circulation that positions it as one of the best-selling novels of the century, a true best-seller. Lady Audley's Secret is a fascinating novel, heir to the tradition designated by Wilkie Collins's novel, The Woman in White, serialized in 1859-1860. East Lynne narrates the tale of Lady Isabel Vane and her marriage to Mr. Carlyle. It is a miserable story of adultery, divorce and rights over children. Lady Audley's Secret, on the other hand, is a criminal narrative of abandonment, bigamy and madness. In both circumstances, the domestic part is proposed as a terrain of anxiety and instability. Lady Isabel and Lady Audley have little in common since one is a victim of her femininity (as a cultural discourse) while the other, a masculine woman, knowingly exploits and manages her cultural construction as a woman in the political speech of the time for her usefulness. Both Lady Isabel and Lady Audley are disfigurations, with limited areas to explore relevant topics connected to the role of women in marriage, divorce, or the relationship between femininity and motherhood. The texts, contrary to what occurs in Olive, do not aim for reconciliation but eventually punish the perversion. Both women become Forbidden, physically and mentally distorted, and punished for disobeying the ruling appointed by patriarchy. The last decades of the century noticed the publication of texts that rejected the sensationalistic style we have seen in the visions cited and dedicated more immediately to exploring more radical choices to the predominant standard of femininity of Victorian society. In Kirsteen, Margaret Oliphant presents us with an adventurous, disobedient woman, a fighter for her liberation and autonomy, who challenges the closed clan system in Scotland to escape and settle professionally in London. Kirsteen is a male woman, following the debates of Judith Halberstam. Her autonomy of mind, her judgment and her ambition to fight for her life, jointly with her advancement and growth in the business world are emblematic of the self-made man, in the most refined sense of the vision. Kirsteen's endeavour is a male ambition because it is an ambition for personal evolution. If we read the novel as an alternative scope for the exploration of desire, we can read the text as a freedom where the reader of the time who lives a life peaceful and maintained from the world, can live the imagination of masculinity, of the opportunities that masculinity presents and that femininity deprives in the culture of the period. In this line but in another way, both The Heavenly Twins and Daughters of Danaus curiously present very radical personalities of thinking, with absolutely subversive thoughts, although they always carry within the allowable principles of marriage. In both opportunities, the discussion surrounding what came to be called the new woman is critically beneficial and socially relevant. This new woman or "new woman" has greatly to do with a more masculine femininity, a femininity that progressively appropriates qualities of masculinity to try to integrate them and acquire that: a new woman. Some of the novels written by women at the end of the century become domains to explore the possible ramifications that masculine femininity, this new hybrid genre, has in a social and cultural context as determined as the end of the Victorian era and the starting of the Edwardian age, with the pledge of evolution and openness that it inevitably carries with it. Finally, in Mary Olivier, A Life, we look forward to the work of Virginia Woolf and the modernist novel, with its analysis of the female subconscious through the inner monologue. It is impressive to critically evaluate the analysis of the female subconscious that assumes a place in this novel, which is encouraged by psychoanalysis and which – as Virginia Woolf will later argue – witnesses the subconscious as common and hybrid, neither male nor female, dynamiting with it the male-

male, female-female binomial. Mary also has an unconventional nature in terms of gender construction. The novel analyses the terrain of masculinised femininity from the moment in which the protagonist's aspiration is centred around her growth as an individual and submits an alternative and more masculine standard of femininity, following Halberstam's argument.

5. Conclusion: history(s) of the dissimilarity Accordingly, the novelist woman displays a conflict of the ethical code and prevalent behaviour in force throughout the nineteenth century in England. Its mere presence is historical proof of the individualism and private capability of a collective marginalized by the prevailing position and relegated to the margins of history. As a document of historical importance, the novels that these women construct pour onto the patriarchal perspectives from the margins of the system that degrade and question dominant principles that try to present themselves as unique and coherent. Likewise, a Victorian novel written by women explores the possibility of an alternative femininity that invades the terrain of masculinity and arises as a more hybrid genre, analysing and exploring the possibility of a model of a masculine woman according to the contemporary canons. The masculine woman is a dream, but a dream full of dangers, Contrariness and paradoxes. In a century that witnessed in its beginnings the controversy about women with the publication of Vindication of Women's Rights, the women's novel evolves a fruitful environment to explore the possibilities/alternatives to the model of femininity imposed by the predominant ethical-moral code of the Victorian era. Similarly, the presence of a distinguished feminine reading public even proves the curiosity of the woman of the period to explore her multiplicity and her otherness. The woman, who lives locked in the domestic environment, employs the novel to escape from it, even in a virtual way. Nevertheless, this possibility of metamorphosing vicariously undoubtedly plays a necessary role also as a basis of inspiration for true social change. Finally, the significance of this type of citation other than those traditionally used by historians to comprehend alternative history(s): the history(s) of the difference is unquestionable if one pretends to have an expansive and complicated vision of social facts in a given historical moment. In a society like nineteenth-century England – which lacks universal education or civil rights common to all citizens – one's capable of accessing sources that offer a glance at/from underprivileged social classifications points being able to access their tales. Conceivably, the knowledge of the histories of difference can convert the notion of History, even doubting its presence as exceptional, trustworthy and unmistakable.

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