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The Image of Belgium in Charlotte Brontë´s Novels "The Professor" and "Shirley": a Comparative Analysis

(Britanska književnost i kultura)

Kandidat: Gabrijela Marić

Mentor: Prof. dr. sc. Tatjana Jukić Gregurić

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1. Introduction:

This paper will analyse the image of Belgium in Charlotte Brontë´s *The Professor* and *Shirley* by focusing on the manner in which political and cultural differences between England and Belgium came into contact and collision within the domestic framework under the new middle-class domestic woman´s authority. More specifically, I will examine how these socio-political differences between the two countries were transposed into the private domain of life where the domestic woman regulated courtship procedures, family relations, household management and leisure-time activities.

First, I will explain in more detail the socio-political context that influenced the specific relationship between England and Belgium in the 19th century, i.e. why many Englishmen at the time travelled to Belgium (including Charlotte and Emily Brontë), how English stereotypes about it were formed, and how the English wanted to colonise it. Second, my analysis will refer to Nancy Armstrong's crucial work *Desire and Domestic Fiction* (1987) where she links the rise of the new female ideal with the rise of the novel and of the middle class at the beginning of the 19th century. She defines the institution of marriage as a sexual contract, first depicted in fiction, then actualised in practice, in which the female and male gender roles are strictly defined, making the male political and the female domestic. Being domestic, the new middle-class woman desires to domesticate, or transform her husband from a harsh, competitive brute into a benevolent husband and father. Also, her duty is to render their home functional, comfortable and tasteful by converting a certain quantity of his income into a certain quality of family life. These female duties define her role and by extension, demonstrate her inner qualities. Being ever-vigilant and self-regulated, the Victorian domestic woman represents the basis of the new capitalist society. Gender relations and the domestic woman´s role are crucial for my analysis because it is precisely in the private sphere of home that Brontë contrasts English and Belgian values by simultaneously constructing both national identities. Furthermore, she introduces "hybrid" characters who embody the two identities, and builds the plot of her novels around their domestication, or more precisely, colonisation since their "Other" side should be diminished/ extinguished in order for the English side to

dominate. That is why their domestication is twofold– they should reach both desired gender and national ideals. Hence, the last chapter of the analysis will focus on this process, or who performs it and in which manner, and what its results are.

2. The Relationship Between England and Belgium in the 19th Century:

Since the title of this paper is *The Image of Belgium in Charlotte Brontë´s Novels "The Professor" and "Shirley": a Comparative Analysis,* it is crucial to examine in more detail the specific relationship between England and Belgium in the 19th century, more precisely, the socio-political context that influenced a particular English attitude towards Belgium, their mass travel to that country and their wish to culturally colonise it. The English stance on Belgium is well seen in the above-mentioned two novels by Charlotte Brontë, from which some citations will further demonstrate the case in point. Anne Longmuir perceives in her article that:

> Critical investigations of the foreign settings of Charlotte Brontë´s *The Professor* and *Villette* (whose plot is set in Belgium, parenthesis mine) to conceive Belgium (fictionalized as Labassecour in *Villette*) as simply "not England". Terry Eagleton, for example, argues that the foreign settings of Brontë´s fiction represent "a blank surface on to which private fantasies may be feverishly projected" (...). This reluctance to consider the particular significance of Belgium in Brontë´s fiction may stem in part from an overreliance on the author´s biography: critics tend to assume that Brontë set *The Professor* in Belgium because she lived in Brussels from 1842 to 1843. (163-164)

Indeed, Charlotte Brontë did go to Belgium, i.e. Brussels with her sister Emily in 1842 to "'acquire a thorough familiarity with French' and more ambitiously, to get the education and credentials that would help them found a school of their own" (Sue Lonoff 388). One should bear in mind the fact that they chose Brussels as the place where they wanted to learn French, and not Paris or some other city in France. This fact illustrates what Longmuir calls "wider Victorian attitudes toward Belgium" (164), that is to say, their choice of Brussels was not arbitrary, but as a matter of fact, very indicative of the political relationship between England and Belgium in the mid 19th century. Not only is that relationship visible in Charlotte and Emily Brontë´s personal choice of Belgium as the place of their education, but also in Charlotte Brontë´s work, more specifically, in the way she conceived the image of England in its relation to Belgium. Or vice-versa, in the way she conceived the image of Belgium in its relation to England, since these two images are mutually dependable, the one could not exist without the other. The role of Belgium was very important for the formation of English

national identity– “the discourse on the Other produced in British writings on Europe contributes more than has been understood to nation-making, the making and promoting of Englishness as a position of difference” (Nyman 4). This difference is crucial because it enables the comparison between the two, the juxtaposition of England and the Other, in this case, Belgium.

Moreover, many Victorian artists, writers and critics, including Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Makepeace Thackeray, John Ruskin, etc. used this difference in order to construct Englishness/Britishness[1] in their work. The same principle persists in Charlotte Brontë´s fiction– “while Englishness and Britishness enjoy a relatively uncomplicated relationship in Brontë´s fiction, there is no such accord between British and European identity. Indeed, a conflict between British and Continental, especially French, values dominates Brontë´s fiction” (Longmuir 165).

The conflict based on difference is not seen only “*between* characters in her fiction, but *within* her characters as well” (Longmuir 166, emphasis in the original). The conflict *within* will be analysed in more detail in the fifth chapter. For the time being, it is essential to explain what exactly influenced this specific interest of Charlotte Brontë as well as of other Victorian artists in the relationship between England and Belgium, and why “in the British imagination, Europe was both admired and despised; and [why] with Belgium and Flanders only the latter emotion seem[ed] to be involved” (Demoor 2).

There were two important reasons that formed a particular English attitude towards Belgium in the 19th century, and therefore influenced Charlotte Brontë´s personal and political views on that country, and which was consequently visible in all her novels:

The first is the Battle of Waterloo where a French army under the command of Napoleon was defeated by two of the armies of the Seventh Coalition: an Anglo-allied army under the command of the Duke of Wellington, and a Prussian army under the command of Gebhard Leberecht von Blücher. Since Waterloo is situated only 13 km south-east from Brussels, it became the site of constant visits by Victorian tourists on their travel to the Continent. Anne Longmuir further explains:

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[1]Anne Longmuir explains that “Brontë uses ‘English’ to refer beyond the geographic boundaries of England itself, to point to a broader British identity, while ‘British’ is associated with the British Isles as a whole” (164-165).

> Historians regard the Napoleonic Wars, and in particular the Battle of Waterloo, as key to consolidation of British identity, because the British "defined themselves against the French". (...) the final decisive battle against the French at Waterloo is widely recognized as laying the foundation of Britain´s century of triumph. (...) Indeed, so significant was the conflict to mid-nineteenth-century Britain´s understanding of itself that the Battle of Waterloo and the Napoleonic Wars continued to dominate the cultural life of Britain– and of Brontë– during the 1840s and 1850s. (167-168)

In other words, the battle was integral to the conception of British identity and the place itself became the epitome of British supremacy over the French. Given this symbolism of Waterloo, Patrick Brontë visited the site after accompanying his daughters Charlotte and Emily to Brussels in 1842. The visit to Waterloo was obligatory for everyone who felt patriotic feelings towards England– "[t]he visit or pilgrimage to Waterloo is one which every true Briton, finding himself in Brussels, was bound to make" (Longmuir 169). Waterloo became a holy place in the British mind. Hence, Longmuir concludes "[j]ust as Waterloo maintained a continual presence in British culture at home, so these trips to Belgium almost unfailingly included the trip to the battlefield itself, a convention reinforced by standardized itineraries produced in guidebooks" (168).

When it comes to Charlotte Brontë herself and her political standpoint, it is well known that she was a great supporter and admirer of the Duke of Wellington, the brave national hero, who was both, like her, a Tory and of Anglo-Irish descent.

Her admiration for Wellington and her contempt for Napoleon are visible in many places in her work. Her characters are described according to their respective political affiliations, i.e. "the Wellington-Napoleon conflict is a touchstone by which the political reactions of characters of differing nationalities can be judged" (Longmuir 167). This characterisation will be analysed more thoroughly in the fifth chapter, but for present purposes, considering the fact that the Napoleonic Wars influenced its plot, some examples from *Shirley* (1849) will suffice to show how she depicted this dichotomy through opinions of certain characters and the narrator´s comments. The first example from the novel is when Mr. Sympson, Shirley´s uncle, demands that she finally tell him who her beloved man is and she replies:

> 'But my hero is mightier of the two. His mind has the clearness of the deep sea, the patience of its rocks, the force of its billows.' (...)
> 'This country will change and change again in her demeanour to him; he will never change in his duty to her. Come cease to chafe, uncle, I shall tell you his name.'
> 'You shall tell me, or–'
> 'Listen! Arthur Wellesley, Lord Wellington.' (576)

Even though this scene is comic, Shirley deliberately attributes the qualities Lord Wellington possesses to her lover because in Brontë´s mind, he represents an ideal man and a perfect role model. In addition, further in the novel the narrator comments:

> Men of Manchester (...) Lord Wellington, is, for you, only a decayed old gentleman now. (...) you have taunted him with his age and the loss of his physical vigour. What fine heroes you are yourselves! Men like you have a right to trample on what is mortal in a demigod. Scoff at your ease; your scorn can never break his grand old heart. (666)

This was written during 1847-1848, hence some thirty years after the Battle of Waterloo, when Lord Wellington was already old. The opinion of new English capitalists, men of Manchester, was not quite high due to Wellington´s old age and most probably outdated political views, but Charlotte Brontë remained fascinated with him. When it comes to Napoleon Bonaparte, the situation is rather different:

> Understanding Brontë as a romantic writer helps us understand this ambivalence toward both French radicalism and France in her work. (...) Brontë shares the Romantics´ conflicted attitude toward France and the French Revolution, most famously espoused by Wordsworth in *The Prelude* (1850). Just as the Romantics were first seduced and then repelled by French radicalism, so is Brontë. She shares their conflicted attitude toward Napoleon, as her devoir *La Mort de Napoléon* (written in 1843 in Brussels), illustrates. For Brontë, as for the Romantics, "Napoleon, the man and soldier" is a hero, while "Napoleon the emperor" is a tyrant and villain. (Longmuir 174)

Napoleon is referred to as a tyrant and villain, or as these examples from *Shirley* show, as "the Corsican bandit" (175), "the rude Cossack" (175), or even "a barbarous stoic" (665). This clearly demonstrates that even if she had ever had respect for him, that respect had vanished by the time she started to write her adult fiction. It would have been very contradictory of her to praise the key adversary of her country, and what is more, of her hero, Lord Wellington.

The second reason why Belgium was important in the eyes of Englishmen was the fact that "Belgium did not only contain a geographic space considered integral to British identity (Waterloo), but that it was also increasingly conceived as ripe for Anglicization" (Longmuir 172). Or, more precisely, Belgium was considered ripe for English cultural domination, i.e. its colonisation. Richard Bonfiglio gives one of the reasons why Belgium was a fertile ground for English colonisation:

> Brontë travelled at a fascinating time in the country´s history, only twelve years after the establishment of national sovereignty in 1830 and five years before the nation fully consolidated its independence in 1848. Belgium represented both one of the most culturally diverse and most homely countries in Europe. Havingbeen occupied by numerous European powers for centuries, (...) Belgium still retained during the 1840s strong traces of the various cultural influences of its occupiers. (602)

Since Belgium had a long history of external rule, the English regarded it as susceptible to their influence, and as a natural addition to their sphere of interest, especially after the defeat of Napoleon by Wellington on the Belgian ground. Consequently, Belgium was known as a culturally diverse country, where people of various nationalities resided. Charlotte Brontë demonstrates this cultural diversity in *The Professor* by describing Brussels as "the capital of cosmopolitan character" (89), or by commenting that Pelet´s school in Brussels "was merely an epitome of the Belgian nation" (98).

Also, "Britain was determined to create a bulwark against French expansion in Europe. Indeed, a special relationship of sorts between Britain and Belgium soon developed after the signing of the Treaty of London in 1839, which guaranteed Belgian neutrality protected by Britain" (Longmuir 175-176).

Further, the English viewed Belgium as a desirable space because "[f]or many English travellers of the 1840s, Belgium felt more culturally accessible than France and shared more similarities with England" (Bonfiglio 603). They were both parliamentary monarchies, moreover the Belgian king Leopold I was Queen Victoria´s uncle; "both countries strove to unify several different cultures within each national identity" (Longmuir 178); only Belgium and England escaped revolution in 1848 due to their good politics; and finally, Belgium emerged in the mid 19th century as the first modern industrial nation on the Continent, which "fairly rival[ed] England herself in her peculiar and hitherto undisputed domain" (Bonfiglio 603).

At the same time, Belgium was similar to France in that it had the same culture, religion and official language, and thus offered a "safer, more manageable version of France and a Continental atmosphere" (Longmuir 177). In Bonfiglio´s view, this new nation represented "a more homely version of France, England´s political and cultural rival" (603). If England was not able to dominate France, then its little surrogate, Belgium, would be a satisfactory alternative.

Longmuir contends that “Belgian space [was] both integral to the formation of British identity and potentially British, as [it] came to represent the reconciliation as well as the opposition of Continental and English values” (170). Belgium most definitely was seen as a fertile ground for English colonisation as the name “Labassecour” in Charlotte Brontë´s novel *Villette* suggests, meaning “farmyard” in French and denoting Belgium itself. Also, the fact that she set the plot of her two novels in Belgium– *The Professor* and *Villette*– is indicative enough. Belgium had enough predispositions to become an English space.

Furthermore, it is important to explain the Victorian stereotype of Belgium. W. M. Thackeray described Brussels as having “an absurd kind of Lilliput look with it” (Longmuir 177). Another Victorian commentator claimed that “Brussels has the character of Paris on a small scale” (Longmuir 177). Charlotte Brontë perceived it in the same manner: in *The Professor*, she described Belgian fields “as fertile as the beds of a Brobdingnagian kitchen-garden” (192), suggesting that “even Belgian agriculture cannot be taken seriously” (Longmuir 177). Obviously, these references to Jonathan Swift´s *Gulliver´s Travels* are descriptive enough. Also, the name of her fourth novel *Villette* stands for “a little city” and thus refers to Brussels. This stereotype indicated that Belgium was not taken seriously as an independent country; on the contrary, it represented a potentially English space. Demoor argues that “Belgium (...) is usually presented as a helpless, preferably female or childlike” (12). Just because it was so small and young, similar to a child, or rather to a damsel (in distress), Belgium was in need of external, British rule to protect it, to improve it or to enlighten it. This was a typical colonial rhetoric justifying their desire for colonisation. Especially in the context of war, “[t]he British were articulated in terms of manliness and courage with– again– Belgium as the victim in need of rescue” (Demoor 12).

More to the point, in order to further vindicate the need for their colonisation, “the British despised Belgium and Flanders” (Demoor 2). More precisely, “[t]he British loved to loathe Belgians, [and] [i]n order to do so, they had to diminish the country´s cultural importance and distort its history” (Demoor 3). Therefore, even though Belgium had some positive characteristics (similarities with England), it was still predominantly viewed negatively because of its aforementioned resemblance with France, and its ridiculously small size. Moreover, Belgium, like France, was associated in English minds with “devout, hard core Catholicism”, which shows that “religion played a major role” (Demoor 3) in forming this scornful image. Demoor also demonstrates in her article that the famous Anglo-American writer Henry James helped build this specific image of Belgium in his non-fictional work, and

by way of contrast, helped construct British national identity while writing about Rubens´s art, which was an emblem, for most of the British art critics, of Catholic vulgar, coarse and primitive art. Accordingly, Rubens represented Flemish and by extension, Catholic “culture”. The specific (rather negative) opinion about Catholicism in the English/Protestant mindset lies behind the differences between English and Continental values in Victorian fiction. This attitude towards Catholics influenced Charlotte Brontë´s depiction of her Belgian characters, who will be analysed in the fifth chapter, but for purposes of the present argument, it should be mentioned that in Protestant world view Roman Catholicism represented “an enchanted universe (…) with its Latin masses, elaborate rituals and ceremonies, carnivals, confessionals, saints’ days, religious vocations” (Clarke 969), whose followers were overtly sensual and undisciplined, deceitful, duplicitous, hypocritical, in need of “control and suppression of desire, renunciation and surveillance” (Clarke 975) by Catholic institutions. In contrast, Protestants were self-disciplined, self-reliant, industrious and individualistic people “endowed by God with reason and free will in order to pursue life, liberty and happiness” (Clarke 969).

It follows then that by writing negatively about one of the most important Flemish artists, James denigrated not only Rubens´s art, but also Flemish culture in general, and by extension their Catholicism. Henry James was one of many art critics and literary authors who shared stereotypes and prejudices of mid-Victorian anti-Catholicism, including W. M. Thackeray and Charlotte Brontë. This is a citation from *The Professor* in which William Crimsworth, the narrator and the central protagonist, talks with his cosmopolite friend Hunsden about women. Hunsden describes his ideal woman, by belittling William´s fiancée Frances Henri (who is Anglo-Swiss). This is their conversation:

> ‘Don’t be vainglorious. Your lace-mender is too good for you, but not good enough for me; neither physically nor morally does she come up to my ideal of woman. (…) You, indeed, may put up with that minois chiffonné; but when I marry I must have straighter and more harmonious features, to say nothing of a nobler and better developed shape than that perverse, ill-thriven child can boast.’
> ‘Bribe a seraph to fetch you a coal of fire from heaven, if you will’, said I, ‘and with it kindle life in the tallest, most boneless, fullest-blooded of Rubens´ painted women– leave me only my Alpine péri and I´ll not envy you.’ (268)

The comment about Rubens´s women is self-explanatory: they are bulky, fleshy, overtly sensual, lifeless, and thus vulgar. Obviously Charlotte Brontë and Henry James had the same opinion about him.

In the aggregate, this specific rhetoric about Belgium, predominantly based on religious differences between the two countries helped formulate both the images of Belgium and England by constructing and consolidating English national identity. As a Catholic country, it was looked down upon and denigrated. As a small and young nation, it could not be taken seriously when compared to the mighty masculine England. Being similar to France, it was desirable, but even more despised; bearing some resemblances with England too, it was considered as a potential "English extension" on the Continent, a fertile ground for their dominance, which was (the only) Belgian positive characteristic, and consequently the exception that proves the rule.

In other words, "Belgium represented an opportunity for the English to mold the country in England´s own image" (Bonfiglio 604). With this in mind, the main focus of this paper is on the process of English colonisation depicted in *The Professor* and *Shirley*, i.e. on the manner in which this specific socio-political context and relations were demonstrated in Charlotte Brontë´s domestic fiction, where the domestic woman was a key figure who translated the political into the private sphere.

3. The Sexual Contract:

In her seminal work *Desire and Domestic Fiction* (1987), Nancy Armstrong wrote about the interrelation of the new female ideal, the rise of the novel and the rise of the middle class, arguing that "the rise of the domestic woman was a major event in political history" (3). Since domestic fiction depicted the new domestic woman and her governance of the private sphere of life, it "antedated– was indeed necessarily antecedent to– the way of life it represented" (9). In other words, this new female ideal first existed in fiction and then in practice. The new woman appeared at the turn of the 19th century, approximately parallel with the First Industrial Revolution and with the rise of the novel, a relatively new literary genre. According to Armstrong, "such a woman [was] available to virtually anyone, this ideal eventually reached beyond the beliefs of region, faction and religious sect to unify the interests of those groups who were neither extremely rich nor very poor" (3). Therefore, domestic fiction sought to "contest the reigning notion of kinship relations that attached most power and privilege to certain family lines (...) the female was the figure, above all else, on whom depended the outcome of the struggle of competing ideologies" (Armstrong 4). More precisely, this new domestic woman represented a centripetal force that unified all those people who were neither the aristocracy nor the labouring poor. They actually formed a new social group– the middle class, who were the basis of a new industrial-capitalist society. The domestic woman thus linked the rise of the novel to social homogenisation and middle-class empowerment. Being in the focus of the new literary genre, the new woman represented a new kind of subjectivity, the first modern individual who was characterised by her inner, psychological qualities. Her moral values and virtues were much more important than her ancestry, wealth, social standing, beauty, etc. The above-mentioned struggle "took a form of a struggle to individuate wherever there was a collective body, to attach psychological motives to what had been the openly political behaviour of political groups, and to evaluate these according to a set of moral norms that exalted the domestic woman over and above her aristocratic counterpart" (Armstrong 4). She further explains that "[i]t is only by thus subordinating all social differences to those based on gender that these novels brought order to social relationships. (...) The power of the middle classes had everything to do with middle-class love" (4). It follows then that all these socio-political differences were understood in terms of gender differences, which made men political and women domestic. That was the most important social differentiation in the new capitalist society.

One of essential things for this paper is to explain how the middle-class love was produced and maintained in culture, i.e. how the institution of marriage, or in Armstrong´s words, "the sexual contract" (36) was defined and what its logic was. This explanation is important for my thesis because the institution of marriage represents the space where the Anglo-Belgian socio-political relations are transposed under the domestic woman´s authority. Accordingly, it is important to show how Armstrong defined the sexual contract with the aim of analysing courtship procedures and marriage itself in *The Professor* and *Shirley*.

First, in order to understand the sexual contract, Nancy Armstrong employs Rousseau´s *The Social Contract* (1762). She states that "[d]omestic fiction represented sexual relationships according to an idea of the social contract that empowered certain qualities of an individual´s mind over membership in a particular group or faction" (30). An individual´s mind was thus more important than their socio-economic status, and the contract with the state helped their personal development. One´s "signing" of the contract through an act of voluntary submission was inspired by "self-perfection, personal growth and development" (Armstrong 32). Therefore, the individual was motivated to enter into the contract by an exclusively psychological force. After making the contract, the individual would transform into a better person, their "individuality [wasn't] repressed, but rather extended and perfected" (Armstrong 31). By enhancing one´s personality, the contract would serve the needs of the common good.

The Social Contract was written in 1762 and it influenced the changes that happened in the early 19th century; it also paved the way for the new socio-political context based on capitalism:

> The contract created a language for social relationships that was immensely useful for purposes of an emergent capitalism. (...) Freeing the identities of various groups of individuals in this way was probably instrumental in producing wage labour. Although at that time the contract represented a minority view, it took the form of a self-authorizing strategy that eventually empowered the emergent classes (...). This was the moment in history when people began to understand social relations in terms of the modern class society, and when political affiliations were understood, not as function of loyalties to those above and below one in a chain of economic dependency, but in reaction to those who derived their economic livelihood from similar sources in labour, land, service, or capital. (Armstrong 37)

The new capitalist society broke the bonds and loyalties typical of and crucial for the functioning of the old feudal society. Individuals were now divided according to gender and generation. Rousseau´s idea of the contract was first seen in fiction, i.e. in the novel form where "political conflict [was] represented in terms of sexual differences that upheld a peculiarly middle-class notion of love" (Armstrong 41). Hence, the struggle between competing ideologies was depicted as "a struggle between the sexes that can be completely resolved in terms of the sexual contract" (Armstrong 49). Therefore, fiction was the space where the social contract was actualised as the sexual contract, or marriage. One may conclude that middle-class love resolved different kinds of socio-political conflicts. This is the reason why the concept of marriage is so important for this paper– it represents the private sphere of life where various differences between England and Belgium came into contact and collision. Armstrong states that "it had been established that novels were supposed to rewrite political history as personal histories that elaborated on the courtship procedures ensuring a happy domestic life" (38). Thus, the novel was the means of transposing the social contract into the sexual one and in that manner, prepared the ground for big socio-economic changes characterising the rise of the middle class.

The role of the novel was significant– it promoted the sexual contract as something desirable for both men and women. It would ensure, like the social contract, the individual´s happy life, their personal improvement and the establishment of the common good. Accordingly, fiction served as a means of education and social control. The novel, especially the domestic novel, "represented the existing field of social information as contrasting masculine and feminine spheres" (Armstrong 9). By defining these spheres as masculine and feminine, the domestic novel clearly demonstrated the function of both parties of the sexual contract. In consequence, marriage represented "the union of the female who relinquished political control to the male in order to acquire exclusive authority over domestic life, emotions, taste and morality" (Armstrong 41). She lived "a life free of physical labour and [was] secured by the patronage of a benevolent man" (Armstrong 42). The female was morally superior to and economically dependent upon the male. In marriage, or in their "mutually beneficial exchange" (Armstrong 33), the husband earned money and provided for his family, whereas the wife took care of them and governed the household. It is important to note how Charles Darwin made the parallel between the sexual contract and animals´ behaviour, claiming that "the male fights with competing members of his species for her, and she in turn domesticates him" (Armstrong 40). In other words, just as in the animal world, the

female transformed the male “from a competitive brute into a benevolent father” (Armstrong 56). With the aim of succeeding in the process, she had to possess “chastity, wit, practicality, duty, manners, imagination, sympathy, generosity, kindness” (Armstrong 50). She had to improve him by virtue of her female qualities. With this in mind, the female domain of the household represented “an apolitical realm of the culture, and was called ‘the counterimage’ of the modern marketplace” (Armstrong 48). Modern domesticity was the only “haven from the trials of the heartless economic world” (Armstrong 8). That is why home represented sanctuary in Victorian society. The division of spheres and gender roles was conceived as something natural and universal. Everyone should aspire to marry, especially women, because they were born to be mothers and wives. Marriage would improve people and ensure a happy life.

In other words, the novel “illustrated a model of sexual exchange that created a gendered form of power peculiar to society that was undergoing industrialisation” (Armstrong 41). Being the centre of family, or of the nuclear social unit, the domestic woman was the most essential component of middle-class supremacy in the new capitalist society. Therefore, the middle class would not exist without the domestic woman and the novel. First in fiction, and then in practice, she had the crucial role of transforming a political history into personal ones, and thus of “domesticating culture” (Armstrong 3).

4. The Domestic Woman:

Since the domestic woman represents a key figure in both *The Professor* and *Shirley*, it is necessary to explain her role and characteristics in more detail to better understand these novels. This chapter will for that reason focus once again on Nancy Armstrong´s *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, where she described how the new domestic woman came into being and how she helped form the new class society.

First and foremost, Armstrong explains that it was the woman who united various socio-political groups “divided by occupation, political faction, or religious affiliation” (69) under the same common denominator because “socially hostile groups felt they could all agree in bringing into being a concept of the household and a new domestic woman” (69). This is why the eighteenth-century conduct books, that is works of instruction in desirable female behaviour and household governance, focused on forming a new female ideal in order to “provide a basis for imagining economic interests in common” (Armstrong 59). In fact, the new female ideal allowed the formation of the modern society with the middle class at its centre. It should be noticed that conduct books were very popular in the 18th century, especially “in the years 1760-1820” (Armstrong 61), and the rise of the middle class happened in the first half of the 19th century. This proves to be a historical paradox because “in comparing the domestic ideal as represented in conduct books to its appearance on the English countryside, one discovers time lapse between these written accounts and their social realization” (Armstrong 74).

Conduct books located the new female ideal in an old and familiar space– a country house. In the old agrarian society, the country house had been an emblem of aristocratic culture and of self-sufficient economy. Armstrong explains why this old space was the perfect place to situate a new domestic economy:

> To situate a new domestic economy within the country house wouldremove it from the forms of rivalry and dependency that organized the world of men. Since the new domestic economy derived power from interest-bearing investments, this form of income would effectively destroy the old agrarian ideal by effacing the whole system of status signs which leant that ideal its value. At the same time, the new country house harked back to an earlier agrarian world where the household was a largely self-contained unit. (75)

Although the economic system started to change from the end of the 18th century, with investments becoming the main source of income for the new social class, the country house still remained the symbol of self-sufficient economy, and as such represented a perfect space

to situate the new middle-class household. With this in mind, the country house, now invested with new meanings, became a common denominator for “the middle ranks of the old society” (Armstrong 64), and simultaneously ceased to be “the site of aristocratic (male) power, but became the perfect realization of the domestic woman´s (non-aristocratic) character” (Armstrong 74).

Conduct books thoroughly defined the domestic woman´s character and duties because it was she who took care of her family and regulated the domestic economy. Without her, the whole domestic system would collapse. Thus, her inner qualities were described in terms of practicality, modesty, regularity, discretion and frugality. Possessing these qualities, she could successfully translate her husband´s income into a well-governed home. Armstrong argues that “income alone represents the male party of the sexual contract, while the female operates in it to transform a given quantity of income into a desirable quality of life. Her moral virtues and power of supervision ensure the income will be distributed according to certain proportions designated to meet certain domestic criteria, no matter what the amount of the husband´s income may be” (84). Therefore, the domestic woman made possible for men of various economic means to indulge in a happy domestic life. In other words, “the household ceased to display the value of the man´s income and instead took on the innermost human qualities of the woman who regulated the domestic economy” (Armstrong 86). The household became the epitome of the domestic woman herself.

In consequence, the domestic woman had to be an industrious and efficient housewife: “[e]xcept for unqualified obedience to her husband, the virtues of the ideal wife appeared to be active. Her duties were household management, regulation of servants, supervision of children, planning of entertainment, and concern for the sick. It quickly became apparent, however, that the main duty of the new housewife was to supervise the servants who were the ones to take care of these matters” (Armstrong 67). In fact, the domestic woman executed “a form of labour that was superior to labour” (Armstrong 81), i.e. that of self-regulation and supervision. By regulating her own desire and putting the needs of her family before her own, and also, by supervising her servants, who did actual labour, the domestic woman fulfilled her gender role. Indeed, “her supervision constituted a form of value in its own right and was therefore capable of enhancing the value of other people and things” (Armstrong 81).

Further, it is important to note the manner in which conduct books illustrated the new female ideal– they usually depicted the domestic woman in contrast to both the aristocratic woman and the labouring woman. In the first place, "[c]onduct books portrayed aristocratic women along with those who harboured aristocratic pretensions as the very embodiments of corrupted desire, namely desire that sought its gratification in economic and political terms. These books took care to explain how this form of desire destroyed the very virtues of a wife and mother" (Armstrong 60). Aristocratic women "spent their time in idle amusements, whose aim was to put the body on display, a carry-over from the Renaissance display of aristocratic power. For a woman to display herself in such a manner was the same as saying that she was supposed to be valued for her ornamental (material) body, not for virtues she might possess as a woman and wife" (Armstrong 75). In addition, aristocratic women were "too expensive to keep" (73) because they were used to "an ostentatious style of living" (Armstrong 73) and would expect from their husbands the same standard. In economic terms– they were not a good investment. On the other hand, the new domestic woman "complemented the new economic man as an earner and producer with being a wise spender and tasteful consumer. Her desires were not of necessity attracted to material things" (Armstrong 59). Being discreet, modest and primarily frugal, she represented "a solid investment" (Armstrong 73). Alternatively, labouring women were undesirable because they too "located value in material body" (Armstrong 76). As they worked for money, they were perceived to sell their bodies, and were often compared to prostitutes. Because both aristocratic and labouring women put their respective bodies on display and emphasised its material dimension, conduct books insisted on the housewife´s inner or psychological characteristics. The importance of her subjectivity proved that she had depth. Conduct-book authors claimed that women could not "excel in both public and private spheres, i.e. they couldn´t be the object of the gaze and still possess the subjective qualities required of a good wife and mother" (Armstrong 78). Thus, by putting their respective bodies on display, aristocratic women spent their time in idle amusements, while labouring women neglected their domestic duties in consequence of working too much. That is why "conduct books appear to be so sensitive to the difference between labour and leisure" (Armstrong 75). Although conduct books defined the domestic woman in opposition to both aristocratic and labouring women, "they still represent the woman of the house as apparently nothing to do" (Armstrong 79). With the aim of avoiding the dangers of empty hours, conduct books suggested certain leisure-time activities consisting of "fine arts", such as "drawing, painting, modelling, making artificial flowers, embroidery, writing letters, reading, etc." (Armstrong

100). Among these activities, reading was most important because it “offered the most efficient means for shaping individuals” (Armstrong 100). Female taste in literature defined her inner qualities because “she was what she read” (Armstrong 101), and also, by extension, it defined the characteristics of her husband and children because she was supposed to pass on her knowledge to others. By educating others, especially men, she domesticated their brutal nature and transformed them into good husbands and fathers. It was then the female who, within the private realm of home and isolated from the competitive world of men, defined both male and female gender roles and their respective spheres of life. Middle-class society depended upon her virtues and capability to transform others so that domestication and regulation of men´s desire actually “constituted a political force of no meagre consequence” (Armstrong 90).

Granting all this, it can be concluded that the Victorian domestic woman was characterised by her subjectivity, governance of the household, leisure-time activities and the relationship with family members, servants and friends. Her power resided in the psychological depth, not on her bodily surface or in socio-economic status. By means of self-regulation and constant vigilance, she controlled the private sphere of life. Although considered apolitical, her gender role significantly influenced the political events characterising the middle-class culture. Her portrayal in the eighteenth-century conduct books played the crucial role in forming both the new domestic ideal and the middle class, and thus prepared the ground for what we know today as modern society. Because conduct books appeared to have no political bias, they “took on the power of natural law, and as a result, they presented– in actuality, still present– readers with ideology in its most powerful form” (Armstrong 60).

5. The Domestication of Hybrid Characters:

It has already been said that *The Professor* and *Shirley* are two novels in which the relationship between England and Belgium has a significant role. Victorian domestic fiction, including Charlotte Brontë´s oeuvre, depicts the manner in which the public world of socio-political relations is translated into the private world of one´s psychological characteristics and interpersonal relationships, especially those before and within marriage. The main focus of this chapter is the Anglo-Belgian contact and collision within the individual´s subjectivity and within courtship procedures and marriage. "[T]he conflict *within*" (Longmuir 166) is typical of the so-called "hybrid" characters having both English and French/Swiss/Belgian ancestries. Their characterisation and, what is more, their domestication is of particular interest for this chapter because it shows how the fulfilment of the female gender role, where she regulates her own and her husband´s desire by transforming him into a good spouse and father, applies to the transformation from "the Other" into "entirely English" (*Shirley* 91). Moreover, the process of domestication becomes a means for English cultural colonisation. Accordingly, the private sphere of life becomes the site where Anglo-French/Swiss/Belgian, or socio-political differences are transposed into the subjectivities of certain characters and their relationships with others. Therefore, I will analyse the manner in which "hybrid" characters are depicted by focusing on the process of domestication, in both narrow (transformation into a desired gender ideal) and broad (transformation into a desired national ideal, in this case, English) sense. Also, I will show that men who domesticated their wives-to-be are characterised as feminised. And finally, I will examine the link between unsuccessful domestication and an unmarried state.

My analysis begins with brief summaries of both novels:

Charlotte Brontë´s mature phase began with *The Professor*, written in 1846, and published (after nine rejections) only in 1857. Its plot is "a simple one, organised in linear, chronological fashion with tree settings, the central section in Brussels sandwiched between two English sections" (R. B. Martin 29). The book is a first-person narrative of a young man William Crimsworth, who seeks fortune as a teacher of English in Brussels after resigning from the post of clerk at his brother Edward´s mill. With the help of Mr. Hunsden, he first finds a job at an all-boys boarding school. The school is run by M. Pelet, a Frenchman, who treats him kindly and politely. Soon after, Mlle Reuter, a headmistress of the neighbouring all-girls boarding school, offers him a position and he accepts. At first, he is seduced by Mlle

Reuter´s charm and intelligence, leading him to fall in love with her. But suddenly, William overhears her conversation with M. Pelet and realises that the two are engaged. Consequently, he begins to see their true nature and begins to treat them with cold civility. At that point in the novel, William receives a new pupil who is also a teacher of lace-mending at the school. Her name is Frances Evans Henri and she is a Protestant of Anglo-Swiss descent. As he becomes more and more aware of her Protestant virtues, he slowly falls in love with her. Being jealous of their love, Mlle Reuter dismisses Frances and tells William that she did it for Frances´s good. William decides to leave the establishment and to find Frances. After finding her at the Protestant graveyard outside of Brussels, they decide to marry. They first find new positions as teachers in Brussels and earn high wages. After obtaining financial security, which they both deserved by hard work, they move to England with their son Victor.

Shirley was published in 1849 and is the only Charlotte Brontë´s novel written in the third person. The novel has two narrative threads– the struggles of workers against mill owners in Yorkshire during 1811-1812, known as the Luddite uprisings, and the romantic entanglements of two female heroines. Many literary critics have defined it as a social or historical novel because it deals with social conflicts, the position of women in Victorian society and religion. Its male protagonist is Robert Gérard Moore, an Anglo-Belgian mill owner whose business is in difficulties due to the Luddite unrests and Orders in Council, which forbid British trade with the United States. He is depicted as a ruthless and very ambitious man whose goal is to restore his family´s fortune. He moved to England with his spinster sister Hortense a couple of years before the plot´s beginning. His distant relative Caroline Helstone is in love with him, but he rejects the idea of their marriage because of his poverty. Caroline embodies Victorian female virtues by being quiet, modest, discreet and delicate. Her opposite is Shirley Keeldar, a wealthy, lively, cheerful, independent and self-assured aristocrat. She is often referred to as lioness, leopardess, she-eagle, etc. because of her power. At the end of the novel, Shirley falls in love with Robert´s brother Louis, a poor private tutor educated in England. He leads a quiet life and is restrained and proud. After some significant changes on the political scene, as well as in the private lives of the main characters, marriage is allowed to both Robert and Caroline and Louis and Shirley.

5.1. Domestication Through the Agency of a Woman:

As noted, marriage represents "a dynamics of sexual exchange such that the female gains authority only by redeeming the male" (Armstrong 55). Her authority forms a basis for a new middle-class culture because "it depends not so much on the competitive prowess of the male as on the female´s ability to domesticate him", in other words, to transform him into a good husband and father (Armstrong 224). She thus has to find and attract a man who needs domestication, and if she does not succeed in the process, "it will put civilisation itself at the mercy of the male´s unregulated competitive instincts" (Armstrong 224). This chapter will examine how the process of domestication applies to a broader, national sphere, where the male becomes not only a respectable family man, but also a respectable Englishman. It follows that domestication assumes an important political role in being a socialising force, although represented as apolitical because essentially feminine. This process occupies the female´s leisure time and is in Charlotte Brontë´s novels performed through reading and interpreting, "the most efficient means for shaping individuals" (Armstrong 100).

In *Shirley*, there is a scene of reading of Shakespeare´s *Coriolanus* where its interpretation serves political ends of Robert´s domestication, or rather Anglicisation. This is the reason why "Caroline Helstone, in one of her notably few acts of self-assertion, chooses to read Shakespeare as a way of passing leisure hours with her cousin Robert Moore" (Armstrong 215). They reject the idea of playing chess, draughts and backgammon because they are "silent games that only keep one´s hands employed" (*Shirley* 91). They also reject the idea of gossip since they are not "sufficiently interested in anybody to take pleasure in pulling their characters to pieces" (*Shirley* 91). It can be immediately seen from this quote that they dismiss frivolous activities typical of aristocratic culture and intend to spend their leisure time constructively. Armstrong argues that "reading enables to mediate the relationship between male and female", and in their case, "is the only moment of intimacy until Caroline visits Robert´s sickbed near the end of the novel, and in so doing, cements their relationship" (215). This scene of reading is crucial because it represents a civilising force necessary for the male´s, in this case, Robert´s transformation. To Armstrong´s way of thinking, "*Shirley* begins where *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* end. The figure of a woman with a book has already come to represent the sexual contract" (215).

Caroline is capable of performing the task of domestication because she is the embodiment of Victorian virtues: “she [is] quiet, retiring, look[s] delicate, and seem[s] as if she needed someone to take care of her” (*Shirley* 231). She spends her leisure time in sewing for the Jew basket, reading, and aspiring to find a good husband for whom she “would be an excellent wife” (*Shirley* 103). Opposite to Robert´s sister Hortense, Caroline´s sewing has a specific purpose, although rather racist, since the proceeds of its contents “made by the hands of Christian ladies (...) are applied to the conversion of the Jews, the seeking up of the ten missing tribes, and to the regeneration of the interesting coloured population of the globe[2]” (*Shirley* 116). In addition, Caroline´s mind is sketched by her literary taste, a typical Brontëan method, claiming “[i]t seems to me that nobody should write poetry to exhibit intellect or attainment. Who cares for that sort of poetry? Who cares for learning– who cares for fine words in poetry? And who does not care for feeling– real feeling– however simply, even rudely expressed?” (*Shirley* 234). In other words, she knows how to discern “false sentimentality and pompous pretension” from “the value of the true ore” (*Shirley* 232), and accordingly prefers “the romantic poetry of Chénier in French, and the poetry of Cowper in her own tongue” (R.B. Martin 126) to the one written by the classicist Racine and Corneille, imposed upon by Hortense Moore during their French lessons. Hortense exalts Racine and Corneille´s didactic and artificial poetry restricted by the étiquette that should help Caroline attain “a system, a method of thought, a set of opinions, the perfect control and guidance of her feelings” (*Shirley* 68), necessary for her “ill-regulated mind” (*Shirley* 68). She cannot understand why Caroline dismisses their verse as an “unnatural, unhealthy and repulsive mass of weakness made of clay and gold” (*Shirley* 235). More to the point, Caroline´s love of Chénier and Cowper´s poetry praising nature, the simplicity of everyday life and powerful emotions shows that she prefers the depth of content and the truthfulness of real feeling to superficial morality and ornamental form.[3]

[2] This citation is another proof that Victorian women played a crucial role in English colonisation of the Other, in this case the Other being different in terms of religion– “the Jews”, and race– “coloured population”.
[3] Although Brontë depicts Caroline as having a literary taste that Hortense lacks, Hortense actually might have a better literary taste than Caroline because Racine and Corneille belong to the canon of French literature and cannot be reduced to mere superficiality and ornamental form.

Therefore, being "the soul of conscientious punctuality and nice exactitude, she would precisely suit the domestic habits– so delicate, dexterous, quaint, quick, quiet, all done to a minute, all arranged to a strawbreadth" (*Shirley* 544). What is more, as she is "quite English in expression" and possesses "all insular grace and purity" (*Shirley* 544), she has the capability to colonise what is non-English and transform it into "entirely English" (*Shirley* 91).

Robert Gérard Moore is a "semi-foreigner of double-character and thorough-going progressist" (*Shirley* 29), often referred to in the novel as "an alien" (41), "a hybrid" (25) of "a very foreign aspect" (25), and "displeasing manner of speaking" (25). Being of Anglo-Belgian descent, he came to England from Antwerp two years before the novel´s beginning with his spinster sister Hortense. As an ambitious young man, wanting to restore his family´s fame and fortune, he settles in Yorkshire beginning from a scratch in textile industry. As "a foreigner and outsider and with no fixed social or patriotic principles", he has an "unhesitating allegiance to only what will benefit himself" (R. B. Martin 37), and that is the end of the Napoleonic Wars (thinking that Napoleon should win considering his grandeur and invincibility), the Orders in Council (forbidding British trade in American markets), and the Luddite rebellions against the new labour-saving machinery introduced in his mill, which all impede his success. Consequently, he is a part-time "bitter Whig– a Whig at least, as far as opposition to the war-party was concerned, that being the question which affected his own interest" (*Shirley* 36). Terry Eagleton argues that "his foreignness serves to emphasise his individualism and to excuse his brutality and neglect of philanthropy" (55). I contend that his brutality, together with his selfishness, insensitivity and rough individualism demonstrate his "other", Belgian side. Brontë emphasises this even more in Robert´s "exchange of abuse in French with Mr. Yorke" (W. A. Craik 146) during their political disputes, where it is used as the language of brutality. These negative characteristics serve as sufficient justification for English cultural colonisation.

Nevertheless, Robert´s domestication, or more precisely Anglicisation, could not happen if he did not represent a "fertile ground" for the process, or as Eagleton puts it, if "a sensitive dreamer didn't lurk behind his 'hard dog' exterior" (51). Brontë describes him as possessing "a certain sedate charm", "a kind nature of feeling that may wear well at home– patient, forbearing, possibly faithful feelings" (*Shirley* 25). This immediately points to his potential for a good husband, but I would also add, to his potential for becoming a complete Englishman, where home assumes a broader meaning of the whole nation. Also, he acts as a

middleman between Caroline and Hortense because the two cannot reach an agreement when it comes to dress style, literary taste, sewing, etc. He, unlike his sister, understands that English customs are more modern and sophisticated than Belgian. I would like to argue that his qualities exist precisely because of his half-Englishness and that his both ancestries represent potential for the transformation– the Belgian side must be diminished (even extinguished) in order for his English side to dominate. Consequently, everything is ready for his domestication through Caroline´s agency in the scene of reading.

The scene begins with Caroline saying "your French forefathers don't speak so sweetly, nor so solemnly, nor so impressively as your English ancestors, Robert. To-night you shall be entirely English. You shall read an English book. (...) discover by the feelings the reading will give you at once how low and how high you are" (*Shirley* 91-92). The fact that she insists upon the importance of his feelings during the reading shows how exactly the process of domestication works– his political identity (his double ancestry) is transposed into his psychological identity (the feelings incited during the reading). *Coriolanus* functions here as a historical and political text that is translated into Robert´s psychological identity. This translation is actually an act of a twofold domestication– not only will it transform him into a man possessing "the most basic qualities of human nature" (Armstrong 216), but also into a complete Englishman. Accordingly, his desired inner characteristics are identified with his Englishness. Thus, "the difference between what is truly English and what is not" (Armstrong 218) is actually the difference between the man who is capable of having humane feelings and the one who is, in French fashion, "sceptical and sneering" (*Shirley* 92).

Caroline concludes the scene of reading with these words: "(...) and you must not be proud to your workpeople; you must not neglect chances of soothing them; and you must not be of an inflexible nature, uttering a request as austerely as if it were a command" (*Shirley* 95). Providing a moral for Robert by using Shakespeare´s text, she asks him "to renounce one mode of power– which she associates with the imperiously patriarchal nature of Coriolanus– and to adopt another– which she adopts as a benevolent form of paternalism" (Armstrong 217). Caroline thus teaches him how "to self-regulate his subjectivity", or how to transform his brutality towards his workpeople into "internal authority" (Armstrong 216) by bringing to life Shakespeare´s text. In doing so, she extends her Victorian virtues to Robert and prepares the ground for their future marriage. Shirley also influences Robert´s emotional development by rejecting his marriage proposal motivated only by money. Hence, Shirley too fulfils the new middle-class ideal (although aristocrat) in controlling courtship procedures and giving

priority to love over money. After this rejection, and an attempt at his life by one of his workers, he realises true life values and transforms from a "proud, angry and disappointed man" into someone "wiser" (*Shirley* 622). Still, one should not discredit the importance of socio-political context, that is to say, he can marry only when the Orders in Council are repealed, for this socio-political change enables him to earn money and therefore provide for his future family.

All in all, Brontë uses Shakespeare´s *Coriolanus*, "with his specific political cautions", for Robert´s domestication, "assigning Caroline as his maternal tutor to teach him universal lessons for family" (Wilt 16). Here she intertwines what Boumelha calls "the plot of romance", whose goal is marriage, with "the plot of *Bildung*" (19), whose goal is self-determination and vocation for both characters– in Caroline´s case, becoming a good mother and wife and in Robert´s case, becoming a good employer to his workers and also a good husband and father to his family. Once the process of domestication has finished[4], and in Robert´s case, his transformation in both psychological and socio-political terms, marriage is allowed. That is why Caroline finally concludes "[y]ou are a gentleman all through, Robert, to the bone, and nowhere so perfect a gentleman as at your own fireside" (*Shirley* 672).

5.2. Domestication Through the Agency of a Man:

This chapter begins with the description of Belgium in *The Professor*, whose plot is set in Brussels, and is frequently referred to as Charlotte Brontë´s Belgian novel (together with *Villette*). After the analysis of certain Belgian characters, the chapter´s focus will shift on the process of domestication, in this case mediated through a man, resulting in his feminisation. Certain citations from the novel will help prove this contention.

After accepting the position of teacher in Brussels, the novel´s protagonist William Crimsworth begins his narrative about Belgium with a thorough description of its life and customs based on encounters with its inhabitants of various European ancestries. On arriving for the first time on the Belgian soil, he meets a Flemish housemaid with "a broad face" and "eminently stupid physiognomy" (*The Professor* 89). His pupils at a male boarding school make similar impressions being "the moon-faced youth", who "snuffled, snorted and wheezed" (*The Professor* 94) while trying to pronounce English words, and whose

[4]It should be noted that domestication continues through marriage, otherwise the institution itself would be without purpose. But, it is also important to emphasise that the spouses-to-be in Brontë´s fiction must reach an equal level (emotional, moral, intellectual, socio-political, etc.) in order that their legal union can be allowed.

“intellectual faculties were generally weak, but their animal propensities strong. (...) Having short memories, dense intelligence, feeble reflective powers, they recoiled with repugnance from any occupation that demanded close study or deep thought. Had the abhorred effort been extorted from them (...), they would have resisted as obstinately, as clamorously, as desperate swine” (*The Professor* 98).

William´s explicit denigration of the Flemish, comparing them with undisciplined and stupid swine, demonstrates his sense of English superiority and the need for their cultural colonisation. Anne Longmuir connects colonialism with teaching, contending that teaching represents a strategy of British counter-colonisation, an attempt to replace French dominance over Flemish-speaking population with British cultural dominance (180). Also, she claims that “being a ‘despot’ (*The Professor* 98) towards his pupils, William, and by extension Britain, can impose British values on them and their country” (181). It follows that the British cultural colonisation, caused by the socio-political relations between England, France and Belgium in the mid 19th century, is depicted as a literal domestication of “the Flemish primitives” (Demoor 6) or swine, performed by a male tutor who uses education as a means of domestication with a broader political meaning.

Pursuing the same line of thinking, his descriptions of female pupils at Mlle Zoraïde Reuter´s boarding school do not vary much from his experience at M. Pelet´s school:

> As I sat on my estrade and glanced over the long range of desks, I had under my eye French, English, Belgians, Austrians and Prussians. (...) In dress all were nearly similar, and in manners there was small difference, exceptions there were to the general rule, but majority gave the tone to the establishment, and that tone was rough, boisterous, marked by a point-blank disregard of all forbearance towards each other or their teachers, (...) a coarse indifference to the interest and convenience of everyone else. Most of them could lie with audacity (...) backbiting and talebiting were universal. They were each and all supposed to have been reared in utter unconsciousness of vice. The precautions used to keep them ignorant, if not innocent, were innumerable. How was it, then, that scarcely one of those girls having attained the age of fourteen could look a man in the face with modesty and propriety? An air of bold, impudent flirtation, or a loose, silly leer, was sure to answer the most ordinary glance from a masculine eye. I know nothing of the arcana of the Roman Catholic religion, and I am not a bigot in matters of theology, but I suspect the root of this precocious impurity, so obvious, so general in Popish countries, is to be found in the discipline, if not the doctrines, of the Church of Rome. I record what I have seen: these girls belonged to what are called the respectable ranks of society; they had all been carefully brought up, yet was the mass of them mentally depraved. (*The Professor* 127)

On the other hand, British students are "[m]ore intellectual than the Belgians. They had a general air of native propriety and decency; by this last circumstance alone I could at a glance distinguish the daughter of Albion and nursling of Protestantism from the foster-child of Rome" (*The Professor* 123). It is obvious from these descriptions that William puts Continental pupils´ negative mental features under the same common denominator– their Catholicism. His opinion is a product of a long enmity between Protestants and Catholics, dating back to the Reformation, and being revived in the mid 19th century as a consequence of the Oxford Movement. Roman Catholics were considered to be "adherents harbouring dangerous loyalties to foreign powers" (M. M. Clarke 974), and they "constituted a threat to infect and undo William´s sense of himself and his Englishness" (Plasa 3). Hence, this political context influenced a general antagonism towards Popish countries, visible in William´s negative description of his Continental pupils. By way of contrast, Protestant native propriety, decency and intellectual superiority vindicate their need for colonising the Catholic Other. Therefore, I contend that the division between these two religions forms the basis for Brontë´s illustration of respectively English/Protestant and Continental/Catholic characters, where these socio-political differences are transposed into specific inner qualities.

William´s depiction of Belgium is even more elaborated in his relationship with M. Pelet, "a Frenchman both by birth and parentage" (*The Professor* 93), and with Mlle Zoraïde Reuter, a Flamande born and bred in Belgium. The three are entangled in a platonic love triangle because William is charmed by Zoraïde´s apparent "tact, 'caractère', judgment, discretion", which lead him to reflect upon their possible marriage, saying "[h]ad she been born an Englishwoman, and reared a Protestant, might not she have added straight integrity to all her other excellencies? Supposing she were to marry an English and Protestant husband, would she not, rational and sensible as she is, quickly acknowledge the superiority of right over expediency, honesty over policy?" (*The Professor* 137). William is seduced precisely because she has potential for successful colonisation by a Protestant husband. Nevertheless, he realises soon afterwards that she gave him false hopes and is engaged to Pelet. She is actually "guileful, shifty and untrustworthy" (R. B. Martin 31), Pelet being her male equivalent. He too makes a very good first impression, but William eventually concludes that he is not only corrupt but also licentious:

> He was not married and I soon perceived he had all a Frenchman´s, all a Parisian´s notions about matrimony and women; I suspected a degree of laxity in his code of morals, there was something so cold and blasé in his tone whenever he alluded to what he called "le beau sexe", (...) I hated his fashion of mentioning Love, I abhorred from my soul, mere Licentiousness. (*The Professor* 100)

Thus, "[t]he difference of notions between them resolved itself into a difference of nations, as Crimsworth scrupulously retreats from the lavish expenditures of a Continental sexuality" (Plasa 13). The triangle is resolved when William falls in love with his Protestant pupil Frances, and decides to resign from Zoraïde´s school, explaining "[i]f I stayed, the probability was that, in three months´ time, a practical modern French novel would be in full process of concoction. Now, modern French novels are not to my taste, either practically or theoretically" (*The Professor* 214). He alludes to the possibility of being part of ménage à trois, which for him, "a cold frigid islander" (*The Professor* 121), having Protestant virtues of morality, self-denial and honesty, is not an option.

In addition, William´s Belgian experience is humorously described in his encounter with M. Pelet and Mlle Reuter´s respective mothers, whose characterisation is "among the raciest observations of human nature ever made by Charlotte Brontë" (Gérin 29).

William is invited at Mme Pelet´s house for le goûter, an equivalent of English tea. First "a queer idea glanced across [his] mind" that she could be romantically interested in him because he had heard of "old Frenchwomen doing odd things in that line; and the goûter? They generally begin such affairs with eating and drinking" (*The Professor* 101). She indeed "amply supplied" the table with "confitures, cakes and coffee", which she "ate with no delicate appetite, having demolished a large portion of the solids accompanied with punch" (*The Professor* 103). As to her looks and behaviour, Mme Pelet was:

> [u]gly as only Continental old ladies would be, her style of dress made her look even uglier. Indoors, she would go about without cap, her grey hair strangely dishevelled; at home she seldom wore a gown– only a shabby cotton camisole, shoes too were strangers to her feet, and in lieu of them she sported roomy slippers, trodden down at the heels. On the other hand, on Sundays, and fête-days, she would put some very brilliant-coloured dress, usually of thin texture, a silk bonnet of wreath of flowers, and a very fine shawl. (*The Professor* 100)

She received William in "a light green muslin gown, a lace cap with flourishing red roses in the frill" (*The Professor* 102). William also comments that he would frequently see her "sitting with a trencher on her knee, engaged in the threefold employment of eating her dinner, gossiping with her favourite servant, the housemaid, and scolding her antagonist, the

cook" (*The Professor* 101). Also, he observes that during conversations "she laughed loud and long" (*The Professor* 104). Her other guest Mme Reuter was not any exception to the rule. She "looked like a joyous, free-living Flemish fermière, or even maîtresse d´auberge" (*The Professor* 103). Since "all this chatter and circumlocution with the ladies began to bore him very much", he returned to his room and concluded that "in general the Continental, or at least the Belgium old women permit themselves a licence of manners, speech, and aspect, such as our venerable granddames would recoil from as absolutely disreputable. These details sound very odd in English ears, but Belgium is not England, and its ways are not our ways" (*The Professor* 101-103).

This grotesque description of Mme Pelet´s dress style, being either shabby and messy or tawdry with its bright colours, silken materials, lace and kitschy decorations, together with the lack of manners and propriety, visible in her gluttony and consummation of alcohol, loud laughing, frivolous conversation and gossip, flirtation, etc. shows that she and her uncouth friend Mme Reuter overtly express and indulge in sensual pleasures. They both lack inner qualities of taste, decency, moderation and self-control. This illustration serves, by way of contrast, to construct and justify the Protestant system of values and its domestic ideal. As these women do not possess enough virtues, it is logical to conclude that their respective children, M. Pelet and Mlle Reuter, are equally problematic.

In sum, the image of Belgium is illustrated through the characterisation of its various inhabitants with whom William has some kind of contact– his pupils of Flemish, French or other Continental descent, M. Pelet and Mlle Reuter, and their respective mothers. What they all have in common is the Catholic religion and negative personal qualities. In William´s opinion, his Flemish pupils are mentally depraved swine, the French girls are rough, boisterous, indifferent, impudent, flirtatious and undisciplined; Pelet and Zoraïde are sly, deceitful, dishonest, duplicitous, hypocritical and corrupt. Also, their respective mothers are the embodiments of disreputable behaviour, being licentious in manners, speech and aspect, far from the female domestic ideal. He finds the reason for this in the discipline of the Church of Rome, which serves as a perfect ground for constructing English/Protestant superiority in that Continental Catholics lack virtues that Protestants possess– intelligence, propriety, decency, self-control, discipline, honesty, taste, moderation, etc. It is important to emphasise once again that national identity is depicted through inner characteristics of its people, seen primarily within the private sphere of life, and not through overt socio-political relations with other countries.

Therefore, Charlotte Brontë introduces a new Protestant character soon after William has revealed the true nature of Continental women. She is Frances Evans Henri, who shares with him “the classic values of the *Self-Help* tradition– industry and perseverance, self-reliance and independence, self-respect and self-control” with which they both succeed in life “not because of birth or good fortune but despite handicaps, and through [their] own unaided efforts” (Heather Glen 11). She is an orphan of Anglo-Swiss descent, who is both a teacher of lace-mending and a pupil in Mlle Reuter´s school. Even though netting is an esteemed skill among Continental women, she regards it as a “flimsy art” (*The Professor* 133), which “wearies her and injures her sight” (*The Professor* 218). As a Protestant lady, she considers such a skill to be superficial and useless because its only real purpose is to decorate the female body. For that reason she attends William´s lessons of English, and aspires to move to England, her “Canaan” (203), where she would like to open her own school. Also, in her view, “Protestants are more honest than treacherous, duplicitous and deceitful Catholics” (*The Professor* 173). William immediately perceives her “voice of Albion and its pure and silvery accent” (*The Professor* 154), as well as her inner virtues as “perseverance and a sense of duty” (*The Professor* 159), together with “application, love of knowledge, natural capacity, docility, truthfulness, gratefulness”, which are “the charms that attract his notice and win his regard” (*The Professor* 149). These virtues are reflected in her refined, decent, unobtrusive style of dress, very different from other female characters in the novel:

> (…) she came out a model of frugal neatness, with her well-fitting black stuff dress, so accurately defining her elegant bust and taper waist, with her spotless white collar turned back from a fair and shapely neck, with her plenteous brown hair arranged in smooth bands on her temples, and in a large Grecian plait behind: ornaments she had none– neither brooch, ring, nor ribbon; she did well enough without them– perfection of fit, proportion of form, grace of carriage, agreeably supplied their place.(*The Professor* 199)

Economy, frugality, taste, neatness and charm are seen in her home too, where “the articles of furniture were few, but all bright and exquisitely clean; order reigned through its narrow limits. Poor the place may be; poor, truly it was; but its neatness was better than elegance” (*The Professor* 199). The values of “rationality and order” reveal her inner qualities and oppose “sensuality, passion, vulgarity and coarseness of the novel as a whole” (W. A. Craik 66). Frances accordingly represents Victorian virtues and potential to become a good wife, unlike other girls from the school, or Zoraïde, Mme Pelet and Mme Reuter. After attaining professional success and financial security, William and Frances marry, have a son named Victor, and then move to England, their “promised land” (*The Professor* 272), where they enjoy “hope, health, harmony of thought and deed as rewards on diligence and perseverance”

(*The Professor* 273). Their home Daisy Lane is their "sanctuary" (*The Professor* 196) and "heaven" (*The Professor* 276), an idyllic setting removed from industrial cities where they raise their son and prepare him for Eton.

Nevertheless, William emphasises that he has "two wives" (*The Professor* 273), implying that Frances is a "hybrid", her ancestry being double– English and Swiss. Born and raised in Geneva, although completely Protestant, she still has certain Continental characteristics that should be rectified in order for her to become a true Englishwoman. As Longmuir contends, "in Brontë´s moral universe, English and French are more than two different languages; they are two different moral systems, where French represents inherent corruption, and English honesty, discipline and self-control" (181). Frances thus has "a new identity constructed through the medium of a second language" (P. S. Yaeger 22), where "moving from English to French, she simultaneously translates herself across the fragile border between sexual self-control and sexual excess" (Plasa 23). This dichotomy between the two languages and moral systems is seen in the following passage:

> Talk French to me she would, and many a punishment she has had for her wilfulness– I fear the choice of chastisement must have been injudicious, for instead of correcting the fault, it seemed to encourage its renewal. (…) In those moments (…) she would show me what she had of vivacity, of mirth, of originality in her well-dowered nature. She would show, too, some stores of raillery, of "malice", and would vex, tease, pique me sometimes about what she called my "bizarreries anglaises", my "caprices insulaires", with a wild and witty wickedness that made a perfect white demon of her while it lasted. (…) Then I made her get a book, and read English to me for an hour by way of penance. I frequently dosed her with Wordsworth in this way, and Wordsworth steadied her soon; she had a difficulty in comprehending his deep, serene, and sober mind; (…) Byron excited her, Scott she loved; Wordsworth only she puzzled at, wondered over, and hesitated to pronounce an opinion upon. (*The Professor* 276-277)

Language operates here as "the sado-masochistic medium in which the questions of sexuality, nation and race are fused. When Frances talks French to William, she disrupts the illusion he has carefully built around her. On these occasions, she behaves less like 'the fair-complexioned, English-looking girl' (*The Professor* 174) of his repressive fantasies than 'the arrant coquettes' (*The Professor* 95) of the daymares suffered at Zoraïde´s school. Such linguistic lapses are implicitly sexual ones, as Frances unnervingly changes from angel in the house to perfect white demon" (Plasa 24).

Accordingly, her "demonic" side, a consequence of her breeding in a Francophone culture, is rectified through William´s imposition of English literature, where he uses the same method he has adopted with his foreign students. Their Otherness represents a lack of English virtues and simultaneously justifies English superiority. He first domesticates her in the classroom, and afterwards in their home, where, although now married, she never ceases to be his "pupil" (*The Professor* 248), and he her "master" (*The Professor* 248), who punishes and rectifies her Continental half via the reading of English literature. It follows that, as it has already been mentioned, teaching is a means of cultural colonisation, i.e. domestication that is performed not only in the educational system, but also in the privacy of home. Granting all this, I would like to argue that William is actually feminised since he performs the female gender role. It is important to note that being a teacher at a boarding school, he works where he lives, residing on the border between the public and the private sphere. He makes money from the activity that is considered to be a female duty performed within home, i.e. education and teaching with the aim of socialisation. Taking on the female role, he identifies teaching with colonisation and extends domestication to a broader, national sphere. Indeed, educational institutions are "carved out territories for domestic work in the larger social arena" (Armstrong 92). Moreover, when he is alone with Frances in their home, he "usurps the woman´s prerogative to control leisure time" (Armstrong 220) and supervises her reading of certain English authors with the aim of educating/domesticating/colonising her. Besides, there is also another place in the novel that points to William´s feminine side. William decides to leave England because he cannot stand the pressure his tyrannical brother Edward imposes upon him while working at his mill. His friend Hunsden tells him "as it is, you´ve no power; you can do nothing; you are wrecked and stranded on the shores of commerce; forced into collision with practical men, with whom you cannot cope, *for you´ll never be a tradesman*" (*The Professor* 69, emphasis in the original). William´s powerlessness, inferiority, passivity (often behaving in a "frigidly shy" (*The Professor* 230) manner) and victimisation seen in relation to his brother reveal his implicit femininity and incapability to survive in the arena of harsh capitalism.

All in all, when *Shirley* and *The Professor* are compared, it can be concluded that the process of domestication begins with courtship procedures (Caroline and Robert), and continues through educational institutions and marriage (William and Frances). Domestication defines both gender roles, implying women should desire what men desire them to be, i.e. good mothers and wives who control the private domain of life and transform

their men into benevolent husbands and fathers. This domestic ideal aligns middle-class love with socialisation and acculturation. In these two Brontë´s novels, the process assumes a broader sense of cultural colonisation, or Anglicisation, being justified by English/Protestant superiority over Continental Catholics. The political difference between the domestic and the Other is transposed into the private sphere where the woman is supposed to control leisure time by interpreting the most famous English authors like Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Scott and Byron as the means of domestication/colonisation of the Other. In the scenes of reading, English is used as a language of seduction (*Shirley*) or punishment (*The Professor*), whereas French is used as a language of abuse (*Shirley*) or erotic flirtation (*The Professor*). Also, in *The Professor*, the male protagonist assumes the female gender role of education and supervision of leisure time through the reading of English literature, which consequently makes him feminised. And finally, only the "hybrid" characters like Robert or Frances can become entirely domesticated because, being half-English, they have enough potential to be completely colonised and turned into respectable Englishmen.

5.3. Undomesticated hybrid characters:

This chapter will analyse two characters from *The Professor* and *Shirley* respectively whose "hybridness" is connected with not only their ancestries but even more with their subjectivities. Also, their undomesticated state is closely linked to their unmarried state and lack of Victorian values.

In *Shirley*, Hortense Moore, Robert´ s older sister, is an Anglo-Belgian "hybrid" character, who moved from Antwerp to Yorkshire with her brother two years before the plot´s beginning. She is similar in many respects to Mmes Pelet and Reuter in *The Professor*. This is the narrator´s illustration of her appearance:

> The strangest point was her dress– a stuff petticoat and a striped cotton camisole. The petticoat was short, displaying well a pair of feet and ankles which left much to be desired in the article of symmetry. (…) The petticoat, camisole and curl-papers in her hair were her morning costume, in which, of forenoons, she had been accustomed to "go her household ways" in her own country. She did not choose to adopt English fashions because she was obliged to live in England; she adhered to her old Belgian modes, quite satisfied that there was a merit in so doing. (*Shirley* 63)

Like the two ladies from *The Professor*, she also has "something in her whole appearance one felt inclined to be half provoked and half amused at" (*Shirley* 63), implying that Englishwomen look down upon her, often "sneering" or "laughing" at her appearance

(*Shirley*63), mocking her lack of taste and old-fashioned dresses, and putting her "quite into the background" (*Shirley* 66) at tea-parties. Also, her kitchen maid Sarah professes a superior taste in food, claiming that Belgian meals like "bouilli" or "choucroute" are no better than "greasy warm water" or "food for pigs" (*Shirley* 64). Further, like a true Belgian lady, she spends almost all her leisure time in sewing. Being "specially skilful with her needle, Mademoiselle by no means thought it waste of time to devote unnumbered hours to fine embroidery, sight-destroying lace-work, marvellous netting and knitting, and above all, to most elaborate stocking-mending" (*Shirley* 83). Caroline resents this practice, calling it "a grievous burden wearying her eyes, fingers and spirit" (*Shirley* 83). What is more, she considers Caroline, a young Victorian woman, to be insufficiently "girlish and submissive", but with the help of her "education, intelligence, manner, principles– all, in short, which belongs to a person well born and bred", she will make Caroline "uniformly sedate and decorous" (*Shirley* 67). Believing that women should be uniformly sedate and decorous, spending most of their time in futile activities like lace-mending, opposes Victorian ever-vigilant and industrious housewives. All these descriptions are depicted in comparison with Englishwomen possessing the virtues Hortense lacks– "love of decency", "sensibility", "simplicity", "harmony", "modesty" and "taste" (*Shirley* 307). I state that the parameters defining the domestic woman and her household as dress style, preparation of food, relationship with servants and leisure-time activities serve to form the dichotomy between the Continental and English housewife, the first being inferior and the latter superior. This dichotomy uses female subjectivity and house governance in order to show broader socio-political relations, where the private sphere of home and the domestic woman at its centre represent the site of political contacts and collisions between English and Belgian identities by simultaneously defining them. In doing so, home becomes the space where the English stereotype of Belgium´s inferiority and ridiculousness is epitomized in the Belgian housewife.

Furthermore, refusing to admit English superiority, Hortense dismisses her brother´s advice to "do at Rome as Romans do" (*Shirley* 66), and in a self-complacent manner rejects Caroline´s attempt to domesticate/Anglicise her. This can be seen in a situation where Robert advises her to ask Caroline for help so that she teaches her how to dress in English style, and Hortense responds "Caroline! *I* ask Caroline? *I* consult her about my dress? It is *she* who on all points should consult me" (*Shirley* 66, emphases in the original). This reaction shows her unwillingness to change and fit into a new (superior) culture, and, in my view, causes her undesirability. I contend that she remains spinster throughout the novel not only because she

lacks Victorian female virtues, but also because she rejects to submit to English colonisation. Since she persists in being entirely Continental/ Other, the English can only condescendingly regard her as an undesirable caricature, and exclude her from the beneficial effects of Victorian marriage.

The second undomesticated "hybrid" character is Hunsden from *The Professor*. "A radical, sardonic Whig capitalist" (Eagleton 33), he is William´s friend who helped him find a job in Brussels. Early on in the novel William perceives that Hunsden is different:

> I know not what it was in Mr. Hunsden that, as I watched him, suggested to me, every now and then, the idea of a foreigner. In form and features he might be pronounced English, though even there one caught a dash of something Gallic; but he had no English shyness: he had learnt somewhere, somehow, the art of setting himself quite at his ease, and of allowing no insular timidity to intervene as a barrier between him and his convenience or pleasure. (…) He was not odd– no quiz– yet he resembled no one else I had ever seen before (…). (*The Professor* 61)

Although a complete Englishman, Hunsden does not possess Victorian virtues, which is visible in his stance towards marriage and women. He has a different, rather aristocratic taste, giving preference to ornamental bodies of European beauties and to their social standing, saying that he "dreams of a woman" who is "physically and morally far beyond Mlle Henri" (*The Professor* 268). After meeting Frances, he sarcastically tells William: "And that is your lace-mender? And you reckon you have done a fine, magnanimous thing in offering to marry her? You have proved your disdain of social distinctions by taking up with an 'ouvrière'[5]?" (*The Professor* 267). He shows here his superficiality and snobbery, neglecting the priority of female virtues over her material body and wealth. Thus, as Eagleton notes, Hunsden is both William´s and Frances´s opposite, especially when it comes to "meek piety and patriotism" (39) Frances advocates, whereas he professes cosmopolitanism:

> 'England is your country?' asked Frances.
> 'Yes.'
> 'And you don't like it?'
> 'I´d be sorry to like it! A little corrupt, venal, lord-and-king cursed nation, full of mucky pride and helpless pauperism; rotten with abuses, worm-eaten with prejudices!' (…)
> 'I was not thinking of the wretchedness and vice in England; I was thinking of the good side– of what is elevated in your character as a nation. (…) I am English too; half the blood in my veins is English; thus I have a right to a double power of patriotism, possessing an interest in two noble, free, and fortunate countries.' (*The Professor* 260)

[5]Theworking woman

Frances´s double power of patriotism serves as "a natural extension of her domestic duties" (Bonfiglio 599), while Hunsden´s "universal patriotism", claiming that "[his] country is the world" (*The Professor* 264), shows his metaphorical foreignness. Indeed, his cosmopolitanism, or rather unpatriotic disdain of England, his fluency in French, preference for European Romantic writers as George Sand, Goethe and Schiller (*The Professor* 65), liaisons with European women, etc. reveal his "Norman race" (*The Professor* 257). Hence, Hunsden´s self-importance, selfishness, snobbery and cosmopolitanism betray the lack of Victorian values as well as his Otherness. I argue that Brontë deliberately focuses on subjectivity rather than ethnicity in order to emphasise the priority of one´s individuality over socio-political factors. That is why Hunsden is "hybrid"– although English by ancestry, he is French by subjectivity. Using the same principle in her oeuvre, Brontë once again identifies one´s subjectivity with a certain culture. She pushes it even further when Hunsden and Frances refer to Napoleon/Wellington dichotomy in their dispute, her well-known method of characterization via political affiliation. At the end of their verbal fight, Frances concludes:

> Though I have neither logic nor wealth of words, yet in a case where my opinion really differed from yours, I would adhere to it (…). You speak of Waterloo; your Wellington ought to have been conquered there, according to Napoleon; but he preserved in spite of the laws of war, and was victorious in defiance of military tactics. I would do as he did. (*The Professor* 265)

Comparing herself with Wellington, and Hunsden with Napoleon, the domestic space of her home, where the verbal fight occurs, becomes a metaphorical Waterloo, taking on a broader political meaning of two colliding cultures and world views– English and French. In the opinion of Longmuir, "Frances´s rejection of Napoleon in favour of Wellington signals clearly her desire to exchange French values for English ones, as their argument reenacts not only France´s and Britain´s clash at Waterloo, but also Britain´s propensity to define itself in opposition to the French" (171). The dispute demonstrates not only their respective subjectivities, but also English and French national identities.

In addition, claiming that it is "better to be without logic than without feeling" (*The Professor* 264), Frances implies that his lack of emotions is caused not only by his "Frenchness", but also by his unmarried state. Being single, there is no woman who could domesticate him and teach him the ways of heart. I argue that the double domestication Hunsden needs– to become an emotional husband and father, and also a proud English patriot– could happen only with the guidance of a respectable English lady. His ex-lover Lucia, a Continental woman, ran away from him, proving that Continental women do not

have enough inner qualities to perform the task. Consequently, becoming a good family man is identified with possessing English values.

Finally, when Hortense from *Shirley* and Hunsden from *The Professor* are compared, their Otherness stems more from their respective subjectivities than from their descent. Indeed, Hunsden is a true Englishman of “an old stem” (*The Professor* 60), but his cultivation is French. Precisely because both of them refuse to acknowledge English superiority, they actually refuse to be domesticated, or colonised. As a result of this, they are either insufficiently desirable for marriage (Hortense) or they reject entering into it (Hunsden), which separates them even more from Victorian gender ideals since marriage represents a space for improvement in both personal and political aspects, aligning one´s subjectivity with one´s national identity.

6. Conclusion:

The main point of my thesis was to analyse how cultural and socio-political differences between England and Belgium influenced the dynamics of the private life under the middle-class domestic woman´s authority. More precisely, my aim was to show the manner in which the image of Belgium, and consequently, England was constructed through the agency of the domestic woman. In order to do so, I referred to Nancy Armstrong´s *Desire and Domestic Fiction* (1987) and her definition of the institution of marriage, i.e. "the sexual contract", explanation of its logic and function, and more importantly, of the new middle-class domestic woman´s role who, by virtue of certain inner qualities, had to domesticate her husband and transform him into a respectable man. Being the centripetal force of the nuclear family, she was responsible for its functioning and, on a broader scale, for the functioning of the society. After giving a brief historical overview of Anglo-Belgian contacts in the 19th century, this paper dealt with the role of the domestic woman in *The Professor* and *Shirley*, her characteristics and relationships with others, especially men, first in courtship procedures, then in marriage. In these two novels, domestication extended itself from the sphere of home to the sphere of the nation by assuming a broader meaning of colonisation, or Anglicisation. The focus of my analysis was on the manner in which it was performed, who was in charge of it, and what its consequences were. Also, I examined the case where a male character assumed a female role of domestication/colonisation and illustrated his consequent femininity. Additionally, I related the unmarried state of certain characters to their failed domestication. On the whole, this work demonstrated the constant process of transposition from the public into the private sphere, which enabled not only the definition of gender roles, but also of national identities, equating a desired gender ideal with a desired national ideal.

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