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**Anne Elliot as the Pre-Victorian Woman in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*:
Embodying the *Angel in the House* and the *New Woman* in Pre-Victorian English Literature**

Treball de Fi de Grau/ BA dissertation

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Abstract

Jane Austen's heroines have long held an important and crucial place amongst worldwide literary canons. Austen's writing, her wit, narrative style and heroines have enraptured readers and critics alike, forging for themselves a rightful place amongst English Literary history. However, although Anne Elliot seems to be the most overlooked character, she is one of Austen's most complex and compelling heroines. Austen's last novel, *Persuasion* (1818), can be conceived as a bridge between the Romantic and the Victorian literary periods, especially concerning the portrayal of the female heroine; coming from the female romantic heroine to the new notions of the 'Angel in the House' and the 'New Woman'. Consequently, I propose to do a thorough analysis of Anne Elliot's character to prove how Jane Austen's last heroine can be seen as the pre-Victorian embodiment of the 'Angel and the House', as she is considered to be one of the exemplary heroines on female good nature, and the 'New Woman' at the same time – embodied due to the economic situation of the family and her position amongst her social circle. In this paper, I am going to analyse Jane Austen's *Persuasion* and dive into a character analysis of the heroine Anne Elliot, in relation to the narrative events and characters of the novel. Ultimately, Anne Elliot can be read as a transition character from the married-young previous heroines of Jane Austen towards the proto-feminist characters of the Brontë sisters during the Victorian literary period.

Keywords: *Persuasion*, Anne Elliot, Angel in the House, New Woman, pre-Victorian, female character, heroine.

0. Introduction

Jane Austen's heroines have often been studied and read as feminist, romantic characters. The author herself has been usually referred to as a feminist writer, critiquing with her wit and sharp pen the societal constructs and expectations placed upon the female sex, especially young women of marriageable age. Throughout the English literary tradition, women have been placed under specific prototypes and images that helped patriarchy maintain control over the female sex. During the course of history, women's roles in society evolved and each era brought with it new portrayals and images that women had to shape themselves to fit into. In the Victorian Era, women were placed under different categories according to their behaviour, and two of the most prominent ones were the 'Angel in the House' and the 'New Woman' – two different images that fall on different sides of the spectrum. According to literary criticism on the topic, women could only embody one of the topics, rarely was a woman identified as two of the Victorian prototypes. Nevertheless, women are far more complex characters than the simplistic patriarchal idea to place them inside designated boxes, and some Romantic authors, predecessors of the Victorian Era already wrote astounding complex female characters.

Jane Austen is considered to be one of the English novelists par excellence and has also been read as a feminist writer, displaying a variety of different heroines, each with their complexities and own identities. Austen's last novel, *Persuasion* (1818) distances itself from her previous works with the portrayal of its heroine, Anne Elliot. Austen's last heroine and also her novel itself seem to me of utmost importance to understand the up-coming Victorian literary tradition and also to understand where the female topic and images placed upon Victorian women originated. The aim of his paper is to highlight how Anne Elliot, Austen's last heroine can be read as the pre-

embodiment of the Victorian literary figures of both the Angel in the House and the New Woman. One of my main objectives is to portray how the dual images of the Angel in the House and the New Woman can be embodied together in one heroine. I aim to contribute my grain of sand to analyse Anne Elliot as both the Angel in the House and the New Woman consequently as I feel it is of utmost importance to see and understand the value of Austen's last novel, *Persuasion*, in order to fully comprehend the upcoming Victorian literature as well.

In the first part of my TFG I analyse Anne Elliot as the Angel in the House figure. My analysis of her Angel in the House personality will focus on her demeanour during the first part of the novel and her relationships with the people comprising her social circle. Many critics portray Anne as a young heroine of genteel character, devoted to the family and in possession of excellent female manners. Following these lines, she embodies the Victorian image of the Angel in the House, whose main purpose was to be discreet and make life as comfortable as possible to the husband, children and family at her care. The assimilation of The Angel in the House can fall under a feminist wing, but it has not usually been associated nor related to the New Woman figure, as both fall under different sides of the spectrum.

On the second part of my TFG, I portray Anne Elliot as the New Woman and justify at the same time how both literary topics can be embodied in the same female character. For that, I focus on Anne's development throughout the novel, how the financial circumstances of her family, her long-lasting feelings for Captain Wentworth and her potential courtships improve her character, mannerism and thoughts towards a more mature New Woman position. Many critics from my research align Anne Elliot's character more with those of the up-coming Victorian New Woman representations. For that, I focus on Anne's development throughout the novel.

The aim of my research is to break away from the traditional analysis of Anne Elliot that follow an Austenian literary criticism and instead analyse her through a Victorian perspective. My aim for this paper is to go deeper in the analysis of Anne Elliot's character and social circumstances through the perspective of the Angel in the House as well as the New Woman so as to defend that one heroine can embody both traits, and that they are not mutually exclusive. In this paper I am going to prove that Anne Elliot can be read as the pre-Victorian embodiment of both the Angel in the House and the New Woman while still maintaining her position as a romantic heroine.

0.1 Austen's last heroine Anne Elliot

Upon reading all six of Austen's novels, I have found that Anne Elliot can be considered as the pre-embodiment of the Victorian literary figures of both the Angel in the House and the New Woman. Several academic articles deal with Anne's feminist character, her manner and her situation amongst her social circle. Anne Elliot mainly seems to fall under the wing of the Angel in the House figure. Many critics portray Anne as a young heroine of genteel character, devoted to the family and in possession of excellent female manners. Consequently, the critical literary community apparently places her as a powerless character within her family, constantly overlooked and not paid much attention to by the father, Sir Elliot, and her sisters, Elizabeth Elliot and Mary Musgrove. Following these lines, she embodies the Victorian image of the Angel in the House, whose main purpose was to be discreet and make life as comfortable as possible to the people under her care; the husband, the children and the family. Wiltshire (2011), Moon (2014) and Judge (2001) all attribute these character traits to our heroine in *Persuasion*. Nonetheless, they also defend Anne as a feminist within her position and place her as an outstanding Jane Austen heroine.

Anne's character does follow the tradition of her time, being 'a model of female excellence' but, at the same time, she does not "reproduce the tradition." (Moon, 27) When analysing female characters, Miss Anne Elliot in this case, we can find a feminist underscore to their nature, misinterpreted by the heroine's social circle (Moon, 2014), allowing the heroine to redefine their character and turn into who they want to become (Kühl, 2022). The assimilation of The Angel in the House can fall under a feminist wing, but it has not usually been associated nor related to the New Woman figure, as both are interpreted to be complete opposites.

Changing to the literary figure of the New Woman, many critics from my research align Anne Elliot's character more with those of the up-coming Victorian New Woman representations. For that, they delve into the self-perception of various heroines, which "reflects the conflicted cultural perception of them" (Fay, 193). This awareness of the self in alienation with society's perception of what is adequate, proper and becoming of a young woman has a constant presence in Anne's mind. Romantic heroines, as well as the New Woman, did not provide neither escapism nor fantasy, as both literary heroines present the reader with an analysis of their world with a critical eye (Fay, 1998). Considering their roles in society, Monaghan (1998) observes Austen's operating on "the assumption that women are inherently as intelligent and rational as men." (64), and to that extent, Anne Elliot is a clear example of Austen's inherently intelligent heroine. Pykett (2015) defends Flint's theory that the bildungsroman was a frequent form adopted by the New Woman writers. Thus, Austen's *Persuasion* can be also read as Anne's bildungsroman since we can see her personal growth from the nineteen-year old young woman who was persuaded to decline [Lieutenant] Wentworth's proposal and the new woman of seven and twenty that refuses to be persuaded and relies on her own convictions and character.

Despite a more traditional analysis of Anne Elliot as an Austenian heroine, she can also be read through the later Victorian literary images of the Angel in the House and the New Woman in order to understand her character with more depth. My aim for this paper is to go deeper in the analysis of Anne Elliot's character and social circumstances through the perspective of the Angel in the House as well as the New Woman so as to defend that one heroine can have this duality of character and that they are not mutually exclusive. These features can be applied to a literature that precedes their social and cultural background of the late Nineteenth- and Twentieth-century, as some of the above-mentioned critics have already suggested.

1. The Angel in the House

1.1. Regency's Angel in the House

In most novels written during Romantic and Victorian periods, many heroines shared similar character traits that made them excellent examples of feminine virtue and excellence that the female readers of the time were encouraged to strive for and mirror. Despite the fact that the 'Angel in the House' is a Victorian construct brought to life by literature which subjected women to further scrutiny and which further restricted them in a patriarchal society, there is a background and pre-formulation of it. During the Romantic period we can find a great number of prolific writers, nevertheless, we are focusing on the complexity of Jane Austen and her works, more specifically *Persuasion*.

In almost every novel written by Jane Austen, there is always one female character described and idolized as the excellence of female virtue: Elinor Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), Jane Bennett in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), Jane Fairfax in *Emma* (1815) and now Anne Elliot in *Persuasion* (1818). This is not to say that all

these female characters have no other characteristics and qualities that might prompt them to be analysed through a different perspective, but one of their most prominent traits is the pre-embodiment of the prototypical image of the Angel in the House figure. The Angel in the House has been commonly described as the “Victorian Ideal of the good woman” (Moghari, 169) and “the perfect housewife, the domestic goddess of the middle class [associated] with the 19th century” (Kühl, 171), and no other Victorian literary representation of female character; New Woman, Fallen Woman nor Mad Woman, can attain such high praise amongst the English society. According to Moghari, this Angel in the House is “a lady who keeps her husband’s house serene and tranquil, one who brings peace and tranquillity to her husband and her children. Her sustenance is what allows her husband to get the joyful family life he has continuously desired for” (169).

It is worth pointing out that this is a very strict depiction of the Angel in the House that cannot be fully identified in any of Austen’s heroines, as each of them presents their own (pre-)version of this Victorian figure. Notwithstanding, Moghari also states that this embodiment of domestic perfection is “a good caretaker, a homemaker who usually has a habit of working only for the benefit of others” (169), which can definitely be associated to our heroine Anne Elliot and her devotion to her family and the people she cares about among her companions and social circle.

Although the Angel in the House is not a prominent figure of the Regency period and not known to the English society of the time, there was certainly a social and cultural equivalent of female excellence in literature and in real-life. Moon suggests that in *Persuasion* “the reader is given a sketched-in awareness of the particular tradition of the ideal woman that Jane Austen was drawing on” (27). I want to state that I am analysing Anne Elliot through the figure of the Angel in the House but with the social

and cultural differences of the Regency period. Moon follows that by exemplifying that “Anne’s character is aligned to a tradition, but it does not simply reproduce the tradition. Through the novel an earlier ideal is reworked;” (27), meaning that Anne Elliot is presented as her own version of female excellence and her own definition of the Angel in the House.

1.2. Anne Elliot as the Angel in the House

Our heroine, Miss Anne Elliot, is Austen’s last heroine and a complex female character. She is more than simply a pre-embodiment of the Victorian Angel in the House; she has been analysed and read through many literary movements, notwithstanding, apart from being described as a feminist character, which falls more in line with the image of the New Woman presented later on in this paper, she is described with very similar characteristics to those of the perfect Victorian woman, which were dictated by patriarchy. Following those lines, E. B. Moon notes that “Anne’s character has been established as not only gentle and self-effacing but also as morally strong and exemplary” (25). Complementary to Moon’s statement, Anne’s character progressively changes throughout the novel, providing her with the chance of self-growth and self-understanding, which Austen usually bestows to her heroines upon reaching the end of the novel.

The comparison of Anne Elliot’s character to that of the Angel in the House is by no means bad or meant as criticism of Austen’s so-called proto-feminist stance. It is, rather, a complimentary trait that aids in Miss Anne’s transformation and growth of character, which goes from an Angel in the House prototype to a more proto-feminist character similar to the New Woman, emblazoned in her towards the end of the novel. I want to highlight that, after all my readings, I see Anne’s Angel in the House persona as

her choice (and taking control of her agency), her own way of empowerment within her social circle and by no means a character flaw, as Moon points out:

In endorsing gentle and reflective Anne as ‘a model of female excellence’ Jane Austen has not, I believe, at all turned her back on wit and vivacity. Anne is neither a stuffy, didactic exemplar nor a prig. She is capable of wry amusement at herself and her own actions, as she assesses others shrewdly and well (38).

Furthermore, the audience knows that there is more to Anne than her Angel in the House mannerism towards her social circle, which we get the chance to explore through her conscience, her thoughts and her inner nature; all intertwining the Angel in the House figure with the New Woman she is becoming as the novel progresses.

Anne Elliot has been described at the very beginning of the novel, to be a young woman “with an elegance of mind and sweetness of character, [...] was nobody with either father or sister: her word had no weight; her convenience was always to give way; - she was only Anne” (11).

We first meet Miss Anne Elliot at the age of seven and twenty, when her character has matured from her nineteen-year-old self who got engaged to [Lieutenant] Wentworth, and was persuaded to break such engagement by Lady Russell. After eight years, the author presents us with a changed Anne who continuously reflects on her past self and especially her succumbing to the persuasion and counsel of Lady Russell, a mother figure for the young Anne; “She had been forced into prudence in her youth, she learned romance as she grew older- the natural sequel of an unnatural beginning” (30). The aversion Anne’s social circle had of her engagement to Captain Wentworth (former Lieutenant), can be clearly associated to the Victorian obsession with marrying amongst the same social class to maintain the appearance of social stability and not let wealth slip away. The reactions of both Anne’s father, Sir Walter Elliot, and her friend and

mentor, Lady Russell, give away to this relation with the Victorian era and the acknowledgement of Anne as an Angel in the House:

Anne Elliot, with all her claims of birth, beauty, and mind, to throw herself away at nineteen; involve herself at nineteen in an engagement with a young man, who had nothing but himself to recommend him, and no hopes of attaining affluence, but in the chances of a most uncertain profession, and no connexions to secure even his farther rise in that profession; would be, indeed, a throwing away, which she [Lady Russell] grieved to think of! (27)

With Anne's experience of romance in her youth and her reflections on it after eight years, there is a slow but constant transformation from her nineteen Angel in the House demeanour and her seven and twenty New Woman transformation. At the same time, there is the topic of persuasion which is a heavy weight on Anne's shoulders and on the plot of the story. Through the notion of persuasion, here, many critics are inspecting "a special kind of female character; [...] traditionally considered as 'feminine' characteristics, is both genteel and yielding, but which can only mistakenly be seen, [...] as necessarily weak or excessively pliable" (Moon, 25), which is how Anne is perceived by most of her family and acquaintances.

Within the construct of the Angel in the House in relation to Anne's character there is the so-called nature of the female character self-imposed by society. The society that surrounds her does not seem to give her the opportunity to be someone else, to act more selfishly, despite her good nature and disposition towards her loved ones. As Wiltshire states in his chapter in *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*, "Isolated within her family, she [Anne] naturally takes the position of silent observer and is often privately amused at what she sees. Her own perception that she must accommodate to whatever social commonwealth she inhabits sets her always at a slight distance" (78).

This can be seen in many moments of the novel; for instance, when Anne goes to Uppercross to visit her sister, Mary Musgrove, and the children of the married couple, Mary and Charles Musgrove. During her stay there, she assumes a role of caretaker as Mary “always [fancied] herself ill” (40). Despite being the devoted sister and aunt to the children that she undertakes during her stay with the Musgroves, they do treat her better than her own father and eldest sister. The good-nature of the Musgroves and their love and affinity for family and their general well-being prompts Anne to develop more freely her Angel in the House nature; providing comfort when needed and helping out: “Anne was delighted with what she had done, and felt that she could not spend her last morning at Uppercross better than in assisting their preparations, and seeing them off at an early hour, though her being left to the solitary range of the house was the consequence” (100).

Another instance in which her caring nature is revealed is when she takes care of her nephew during her stay at Uppercross and later on, when the party is at Lyme, and Louisa suffers a bad fall and an injury to the head. On the first circumstance, Austen clearly establishes the different roles of man and woman in a situation of childcare and makes evident Anne’s role amongst the Musgrove family: “The child was to be kept in bed, and amused as quietly as possible; but what was there for a father to do? This was quite a female case” (49). In such a situation, the wife and mother is the one expected to stay in the home and care for the injured child, such as is portrayed in the Angel in the House figure, nevertheless, in this case, due to Mary’s neglect at childcare and her seemingly unaware abuse of Anne’s good nature and disposition to care for the child, it is Anne who embodies the Angel in the House figure.

Afterwards in Lyme, her self-assuredness of what needs to be done to help and care for Louisa Musgrove, places her once more in the caretaker uniform, however, in

this instance, she does so with a confidence, product of her transition to her New Woman status: “Anne, attending with all the strength and zeal, and thought, which instinct supplied, to Henrietta, still tried, at intervals, to suggest comfort to the others, tried to quiet Mary, to animate Charles, to assuage the feelings of Captain Wentworth. Both seemed to look her for directions” (92-93).

Anne’s role as the Angel figure amongst her social circle is also enforced by them, her family and acquaintances who seeing an unmarried young woman of seven and twenty, already might consider her a spinster and therefore the designated caretaker of the family and the elder. Be that as it may, her personal growth as the novel progresses, brings her closer to becoming a new woman. This certainly places her under a different light to many of the other characters, and especially under Captain Wentworth’s eyes, “Anne Elliot was not out of his thoughts, when he more seriously described the woman he should wish to meet with. ‘A strong mind, with sweetness of manner,’” (54), who, as seen in this quotation, was still in love with Anne at the beginning of the novel even though he was trying to find fault in her character and simultaneously suppress his feelings.

Though Anne’s character progressively changes towards the New Woman image, she “does not undervalue her services: their merit does not depend upon the approbation of others. Her quiet confidence in her usefulness establishes her as a person who knows her worth” (Judge, 48). Anne is becoming more aware of her qualities and of her position amongst society; she does not have to succumb to other’s expectations of her, she only has to be true to herself and embody her own armour of the Angel in the House, which can be modified and re-shaped in any way she needs to become her true self and the New Woman she is slowly but surely developing into.

2. The New Woman

2.1. Regency's New Woman

The image of the New Woman falls more in line with the feminist portrayal of the Austenian heroine, analysed and admired by critics and readers alike. The Victorian New Woman is a timid attempt to break away from the patriarchal images of the Angel in the House and a small step away from the idea that a woman could only be one of the two main social images enforced on them: either an Angel in the House or a Fallen Woman.

The image of the New Woman was mostly unknown to English society of the Regency era, nonetheless, they were familiar with a certain movement of feminism that started to demand women's rights. Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) is one of the best examples of this feminist movement that the later Victorian patriarchy would try to subvert. On that note, Lloyd W. Brown suggests that Austen's "themes are comparable with the eighteenth-century feminism of a Mary Wollstonecraft insofar as such feminism questioned certain masculine assumptions in society" (324)¹.

With Lloyd's contribution on the topic, it is clear that feminist tendencies were not unknown and unpractised amongst female authors and women of the Regency period. Claims on education equality, rights of women and economic freedom were starting to circle the society of the time and those are the very topics present in

¹ Later on in this paper, Lloyd W. Brown's assumptions will be further analysed when discussing Anne Elliot as a New Woman. It is important to point out that there is no written proof that Austen and Wollstonecraft shared the same views and ideas, or that even they knew of each other's work – it is all based on the assumptions of the literary critical community.

Persuasion and which Anne Elliot reflects on. According to Lyn Pykett, the New Woman novel deals with the

[c]oncerns and anxieties about the nature and limitations of women's role within the family; the limited opportunities available to middle-class women outside of the family; the economic and emotional dynamics of marriage and its unequal power relations under the current state of the laws governing marriage, inheritance, and women's property rights; the desirability (or otherwise) of divorce, and the circumstances under which it might be obtained; the rights of the divorced woman (particularly in relation to the custody of her children); [and] the operations of the sexual double standard (in which chastity before marriage and sexual fidelity after it were expected of women but not of men) (136).

Although not all of these issues are present in Austen's *Persuasion*, there are enough to consider Austen's last work as a New Woman novel as Anne's character acquiesces to the concerns over these aforementioned aspects. One of the most recurrent themes in Austen's novels – which is also characteristic of the New Woman novel – is that of marriage². The social pressure placed on young women to find a husband while they still retained the bloom of their youth was most commonly embodied by the worried and devoted mother figure, who was determined to find a good match for her daughters and marry them young. All these efforts were aimed at avoiding the undesirable fate of young ladies becoming spinsters in a society where spinsterhood, even if you had a good amount of money and did not need to marry to secure a fortune, was frowned on.

The New Woman of the Regency period is a woman who “protest[s] against the male's abuse of his socioliterary prerogatives” and who “[questions] the assumption that

² Some of Austen's heroines are known to marry late in their twenties, when society considers they are losing their bloom and are at the doorstep to become the dreaded spinsters. Elinor Dashwood (*Sense and Sensibility*), Jane and Elizabeth Bennett (*Pride and Prejudice*), Emma Woodhouse (*Emma*) and Anne Elliot (*Persuasion*) are great examples of young women from good society who marry late in their twenties, thus subverting the status quo of the married-young regency heroines.

inequalities and differences in society and education are beyond reproach, regret and redress" (Brown, 325). All those presumptuous theses on women and their natures can be found on conduct manuals such as Thomas Gisborne's *Enquiry in the Duties of Female Sex* (1797) and James Fordyce's *Sermons to Young Women* (1766). Both texts arose scepticism amongst many female readers and female authors of the time, amongst which Jane Austen and Mary Wollstonecraft stand out. Fordyce's *Sermons* appears in Austen's most acclaimed novel, *Pride and Prejudice*, when Mr. Collins wishes to read some fragments to the Bennett sisters one evening. The reaction Austen attributes to some of the young ladies, advances a proto-feminist attitude from the sisters as well as from the author herself.

To sum up, although the term New Woman comes later during the Victorian times, the main characteristics of it were already appropriated by many of the women of the Regency era and seen in many works by female authors. In *Persuasion*, Austen introduces us to a heroine who questions her society's widespread standards and who stands out as a sort of proto-New Woman female figure.

2.2. Anne Elliot as the New Woman

Throughout *Persuasion*, Anne Elliot slowly redefines and finds herself. Sarah Kühl mentions that "The New Woman, [...] provided a way out of this confining opposition and allowed women to slowly redefine who they wanted to be" (177). Austen foreshadows the New Woman tendency Anne has acquired throughout the time spent with the Musgroves and which she reinforces even more during her stay at Bath. Anne's desire to be her own person is manifested upon her return to Bath to meet with her family, "She finds herself prepared to stand up to her solipsistic father and sister, to establish her own social life and to plan a future" (Judge, 48). Our heroine is determined to not be influenced by her family nor by Lady Russell in any aspect of her own life.

The maturity and self-perception that the last eight years have bestowed on her have enabled her to now value and trust her own mind, heart, intuition and perception.

As I have discussed in the previous section of this paper: “Anne as the Angel in the House,” our heroine in the first half of the novel can be perceived as her Angel in the House phase, nonetheless, throughout the novel and as the plot progresses, she grows into a more feminist mindset and develops a new strength of character. Notwithstanding, even at the very beginning of the novel, Anne asserts a certain independence of thought and an active demeanour in terms of money and responsibility towards the family. With Sir Elliot’s lavish way of life and the consequent debt he finds himself in, Anne springs to action in providing alternative and vigorous measures to quickly cover the debt, “every emendation of Anne’s had been on the side of honesty against importance. She wanted more vigorous measures, a more complete reformation, a quicker release from debt, a much higher tone of indifference for every thing but justice and equity” (16).

However, it is of no surprise that neither her father nor her elder sister pay much attention to her counsel and disregard her measures all too quickly. Their fixated snobbery and self-importance and determination to maintain their social status and appearances proves that their adapting with the changing time and social structure of the English society will pose a struggle, whereas Anne, whose adaptability and strong character will provide her with an easier approach to change³.

Anne’s perception of her relationship with Captain Wentworth also displays her tendencies towards the New Woman figure. When reflecting on her breaking up the

³ The New Woman’s strong character and independent nature bring out this sense of adaptability which will later on help her [Anne Elliot] adapt and participate in the social mobility amongst her society and according to their time.

engagement and on her being persuaded by Lady Russell, Austen allows us access to Anne's subconscious and her real feelings on having been easily persuaded:

at seven and twenty, [...] she did not blame Lady Russell, she did not blame herself for having been guided by her; but she felt that were any young person, in similar circumstances, to apply to her for counsel, they would never receive any of such certain immediate wretchedness, such uncertain future good (29).

Circling back to the topic of marriage and her early and unadvised engagement with Captain Wentworth, the author reflects on Anne “[being] forced into prudence in her youth, [and learning] romance as she grew older- the natural sequel of an unnatural beginning” (30). With this beginning into the marriage market and romantic life, Anne already distances herself from the early Austenian and Regency heroine who first learns romance during the courtship with the man she is going to marry by the end of the novel.

The marriage plot found in *Persuasion* helps Anne gain more self-knowledge and confidence as well. Monaghan also suggests that for Austen, “the proper marriage is one in which the two parties operate on a basis of mutual respect” (65), applied and seen in *Persuasion*. Through the different encounters with Captain Wentworth when they are found together amongst the same social circle and through the interactions Anne has with them, she grows in confidence, which also improves her appearance at the eyes of others, including her superficial and snob father: “He [Sir Elliot] began to compliment her on her improved looks; he thought her ‘less thin in her person, in her cheeks; her skin, her complexion, greatly improved – clearer, fresher. Had she been using any thing in particular?’” (118).

This physical change in her appearance combined with her own knowledge of herself, her character and her views on her past behaviour and actions create in Anne

Elliot an air of maturity and independence of mind, placing her closer to the image of the New Woman. On that note, Fay (1998) mentions on how there is a double-bind on how outer beauty – or the lack of it – pits against the self-consciousness of many women of the late Romantic period, amongst which Anne can be found. Anne's ultimate breaking away from her past self and embracing her new persona is seen when she and Captain Wentworth confess their unfaltering feelings for each other and resume their romance:

If I was wrong in yielding to persuasion once, remember that it was to persuasion exerted on the side of safety, not of risk. When I yielded, I thought it was to duty; but no duty could be called in aid here. In marrying a man indifferent to me, all risk would have been incurred, and all duty violated (197).

Anne's reflecting on Lady Russell's influence over her and how that has changed from being persuaded eight years prior to break the engagement with [Lieutenant] Wentworth to her not succumbing to Lady Russell's insistence and persuasion to accept Mr. Elliot's marriage proposal so that she could step into her mother's legacy as the new Lady Elliot. As Lynda A. Hall comments, "Anne begins the novel as superfluous, but regains her value within her community and finally prospers in the marriage market" (188). Her being aware of this change in herself gives her a sense of confidence and of trust, which is what her surrounding social circle notice in her countenance, demeanour and voice; she has most certainly grown into a New Woman.

Another topic of importance for Anne Elliot is that of education and the perception that the male population have of the female sex. Both are undergoing topics throughout the whole of the novel, but it is towards the end, once Anne has regained her confidence and the respect of her community, where she voices her opinions on those

matters. In a conversation with Captain Harville, Anne quickly distinguishes and exemplifies to him the different realities of the lives of women and men respectively and how these can shape how one feels and deals with missing a loved one or with the separation from the loved one:

We certainly do not forget you, so soon as you forget us. It is, perhaps, our fate rather than our merit. We cannot help ourselves. We live at home, quiet, confined, and our feelings prey upon us. You are forced on exertion. You have always a profession, pursuits, business of some sort or other, to take you back into the world immediately, and continual occupation and change soon weaken impressions (187).

Further on when her judgement is being questioned by Captain Harville, he states that there is no evidence in story nor text of Anne's claim that women are more constant in their feeling of love when separated from their partner: "I do not think I ever opened a book in my life which had not something to say upon woman's inconstancy. Songs and proverbs, all talk of woman's fickleness" (188).

Anne's answer to Captain Harville's comment turns the focus on the topic of education and the differences between the education available to men and the education available to young ladies. The world of literature was widely accessible to men, to both read from it and write for it, nevertheless, women's access to literature was more restricted as patriarchy dictated what kind of books were appropriate for them to read and which ones were not. Few were the women who defied patriarchy by writing and publishing their texts, but usually the few texts that made it to the hands of the readers were under a male pseudonym. On that note Anne adds to her argument that "men have had every advantage of us in telling their story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands. I will not allow books to prove any thing" (188).

Hall supports Anne's statement on the topic of education with the idea that "a woman's education in the long eighteenth century was generally limited to ornamental accomplishments, preparing her to compete on the marriage market," (55) little to no importance was paid to the knowledge of literature and fine arts, which only "for a brief period in the sixteenth century, [...] aristocratic women were able to receive a similar classical education as men" (55). Many critics will state that Austen's heroines are all literate and some might be versed in a classic language, but their 'academic' knowledge only extends so far as their education shifts towards the goal of attaining a good marriage when they become young women. Contrary to Captain Harville's beliefs, "those 'unenviable' qualities which are supposed to be the 'glory of the female sex' really result from the woman's conditioning in a male-oriented world." (Brown, 326), proving that women yet again have to behave in a proper way so as to keep up with that glory bestowed upon them by patriarchy.

Anne's questioning of young girl's education, of the differences of character between men and women on the subject of love is part of her maturing from the Angel in the House to the New Woman. As Brown says, "Anne's own maturation involves a progression from the vulnerable "tenderness" of an overtly persuadable youth to the firm, but humane, feelings of her adulthood" (326).

3. Conclusions

In this TFG, I have thoroughly analysed Anne Elliot's character in an attempt to validate my thesis statement and to argue that the Victorian images of the Angel in the House and the New Woman are not mutually exclusive, as the patriarchal society of the time insisted them to be. The choosing of Anne Elliot as the subject of analysis for this paper has proven helpful in more ways than I had anticipated, but most importantly it

has enabled me to validate my thesis and exemplify a heroine who is not only embodying both Victorian female prototypes, but who also belongs to the prior literary movement, the Romantic period.

At the same time, I wanted to refute the patriarchy-set ideas of the Angel in the House and the New Woman and show that they are not truly creations of the Victorian literary tradition. When analysing Anne Elliot as the Angel in the House figure in *Persuasion* (1818) I came across a diversity of instances in which she takes on that role without her being a wife, nor a mother, nor the woman of the house – traditional and patriarchal views of the figure of the Angel in the House. I have found that her Angelic demeanour comes out of her own agency and good-natured character, not by a societal imposition or enforced by patriarchy. Through this analysis, it has been observed that Anne subverts the canon of the Angel in the House and provides a new meaning to the female prototype, thus embodying a proto-Angel in the House figure.

Although Anne Elliot and the other Austen heroines can be considered to be feminist heroines, the New Woman ideology provides them with a new scope of analysis and characteristics. In this TFG it has been shown that the figure of the New Woman is a means to an end, as it helps our heroine redefine herself and find her place amongst her family and social circle, and it also provides her with the tools and the confidence needed to attain such goals.

As for the relationship Anne has with *Persuasion*, my analysis of the novel has assessed how it has changed and how much it has influenced Anne's journey towards the New Woman prototype. Apart from being the title of the novel, the theme of *Persuasion* is present from beginning to end, marking the pivotal moments of Anne's growth, self-assuredness and confidence. Every time Anne reflects upon her being persuaded when she was eight and twenty to not marry [Lieutenant Wentworth], she

distances herself more from the Angel in the House image and comes closer to her New Woman ego. Instead of the notion of persuasion being seen as a derogative notion by the critic reader, I have found through my analysis of the novel, that, for Anne it is a learning experience and a rite of passage. Persuasion is what enables her to embrace change, her self-confidence and proto-New Woman attitude.

The general idea of education fit for the female sex is also questioned in the novel and in my TFG, where I identify Anne's attitude towards it as a symbol of her development towards the New Woman. On the one hand, there is the appropriate and dictated learning for women to become the perfect embodiments of femininity and good-natured character. On the other hand, there is the realisation that, once grown, women found themselves on the verge of spinsterhood and becoming aware that they were shunned from a wide scope of learning and knowledge. As Anne's journey towards the New Woman slowly comes to an end, she questions the education system and the availability to literature and texts women have in comparison to men – shedding a light to an on-going debate which placed an important setback for women.

To conclude, throughout the analysis of Persuasion and the secondary sources, I have found most interesting Anne's development towards the New Woman figure without putting aside her Angel in the House ego. Anne Elliot proves that both stereotypes can co-exist within the same female character. One is needed in order to become the other and vice versa, and the female persona is far more complex than what patriarchal and sexist society throughout history tried to portray. Women cannot be placed into boxes, nor defined by their so-called purity and sin; we have complex characters and Austen's Anne Elliot has certainly exposed patriarchy's shortcomings.

4. Further Research

In this TFG I have introduced some aspects that I could not fully develop within the scope of my research on Austen's *Persuasion* (1818). The topics I am going to mention concern both the Romantic and Victorian literary periods of the English literary tradition. Both research areas are also relevant for the further analysis of Austen's works and *Persuasion*, concerning this paper.

An engaging research area that was brought to my attention thanks to a reading set for my class on Modern North-American Literature this semester, is that of the marriage plot present in the 19th century English novel. As the title of Jeffrey Eugenides's novel conveys, *The Marriage Plot* (2011), this is an undergoing theme in all of Austen's novels as all of her works end in marriage. I consider this area of research to be of utmost importance to further understand Austen's works and many of the English novels popular of the time.

The last engaging research area is the study of Anne Elliot and of Austen's subsequent heroines through the modern day feminist tradition. Austen's heroines have been analysed and studied as feminist characters in the context of the Regency era, that is, in the historical context of the novels, however, not in the present-day feminist identity. What I would have liked to further research is an analysis of Anne Elliot in a present day feminist perspective.

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