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CLASS TREATMENT OF ANIMALS IN THE NOVELS OF ANNE BRONTE

Anne Bronte'nin Romanlarında Hayvanlara Sınıfsal Davranışlar

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ABSTRACT

The 19th century represents a crucial epoch in the nascent field of animal studies, garnering the interest of scholars and writers from a variety of disciplines. The Victorian era initiated a discussion regarding the status of animals, a topic that endures in modern times. Anne Bronte, a prominent English Victorian author, presents her perspective on the contentious issue of animal rights in her literary works. The extent to which Bronte's characters respect, sympathize with, and look out for the well-being of animals is most evident in her novels. Through her straightforward portrayal of animals and their connections to people's social status, she shows how middle-class culture emerges in her novels. Anne Bronte's two novels, *The Tenant of Widfell Hall* and *Agnes Grey*, both feature animal writing, highlighting the vital part that an animal-centric worldview plays in the formation and maintenance of middle-class identities and traditions. Bronte's protagonists come from the upper and middle classes, and these two socioeconomic groups clearly contrast in their treatment of animals. In this regard, the purpose of this study is to further our understanding of Anne Bronte's animal writing by analyzing its role in the formation of middle-class culture.

Keywords: class, animals, abusing, sympathy, compatibility.

ÖZ

19. yüzyıl, çeşitli disiplinlerden bilim insanlarının ve yazarların ilgisini çeken, dönem içerisinde gelişmekte olan hayvan çalışmaları alanında çok önemli bir dönemi temsil etmektedir. Viktorya dönemi, modern zamanlarda devam eden bir konu olan hayvanların statüsüne ilişkin bir tartışma alanı yaratmıştır. İngiliz Viktorya döneminin önde gelen yazarlarından Anne Bronte, eserlerinde hayvan haklarıyla ilgili tartışmaları ele almaktadır. Bronte'nin karakterlerinin hayvanlara ne kadar saygı duyduğu, onlara sempati duyduğu ve refahını gözettiği en çok romanlarında belirgindir. Hayvanları ve onların insanların sosyal statüsüyle olan bağlantılarını dolaysız tasviriyle, romanlarında orta sınıf kültürünün nasıl ortaya çıktığını gösterir. Anne Bronte'nin iki

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romanı, *Wildfell Konağı Kiracısı* ve *Agnes Grey*, hayvan yazınına yer vererek, orta sınıf kimliklerinin ve geleneklerinin oluşumunda ve sürdürülmesinde hayvan merkezli bir dünya görüşünün oynadığı hayati rolü vurgulamaktadır. Bronte'nin kahramanları üst ve orta sınıftan gelir ve bu iki sosyoekonomik grup, hayvanlara davranışlarında belirgin bir karşıtlık göstermektedir. Bu bağlamda, bu çalışmanın amacı, Anne Bronte'nin hayvan yazınının orta sınıf kültürünün oluşumundaki rolünü analiz ederek bu konudaki kavrayışımızın gelişmesine katkıda bulunmaktır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: sınıf, hayvanlar, suistimal, sempati, uyum.

Introduction

Anne Bronte (1820-1849) was a nineteenth-century British author who published only two novels during her brief writing career. She is a truthful writer who persistently presents life as it truly is. Despite the fact that her basic plots and straightforward language make her less well-known than her two sisters, her works continue to exude warmth and power and garner increasing attention from scholars and critics. Animal writing is an integral aspect of her works and merits additional analysis and investigation. Bronte's writings are the most explicit regarding her characters' admiration, sympathy, and care for the welfare of animals. In her novels, she "uses animal imagery to make larger arguments about class and gender relations" (Harner, 2020: 578) and depicts the formation of middle-class culture through her direct animal writing that is intimately tied to the socioeconomic rank of the people. It is plausible to assume that Anne Brontes' affinity for writing about animals was strongly tied to this social condition. Animal images in Anne Bronte's writings are very diverse, influenced by social surroundings. As Elizabeth King states, "from working horses to lap dogs to hunted prey, her depictions of animals dominated by human characters reveal an underlying critique of how difference is used to justify practices of domination and exploitation" (King, 2017: 3). To better display her writing about animals, we may divide them into three categories based on the author's conception of animals: working animals, household pets, and wild animals.

Working animals, typically domesticated animals retained by humans to perform tasks such as riding, hunting, and transportation, played a crucial role in nineteenth-century British life. For instance, throughout the first fifty years of this century, when industry and trade flourished, horses became a vital element of the nation's wealth (Kean, 1998: 50). In Anne Bronte's novels, there are numerous pertinent references to working animals

"providing power for the performance of work" (Falvey, 1985: 28), primarily horses and hunting hounds, that cannot be disregarded. In *Agnes Grey* for instance, the protagonist Agnes finds her first position as a governess at Wellwood House. During her stay, horses and hunting dogs are frequently mentioned and are typically associated with violence and brutality. Tom Bloomfield, the eldest child in the Bloomfield family, makes his governess stand for ten minutes on the first day of her instruction to observe how frequently he uses his rocking horse with whips and spurs. Later, Tom is gifted with a "little rough colt" (Bronte, 1988: 79) rather than a nice carriage horse, which was intentionally produced and reared for his entertainment. Mr. Robson's hunting dogs are also mentioned. Every time the man shoots over the Bloomfield grounds, he brings his favorite dogs whom he treats so viciously that the heroine cannot bear to see them. The gorgeous prey pony owned by Mr. Lawrence and Markham's hunting dog in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* appears more fortunate than the previously stated sad creatures. The pony is kept in pristine condition and may appreciate her master "nicely reducing and entanglement in the pony's redundant, hoary mane" (Bronte, 1992: 52). Markham's beautiful and good-natured black-and-white setter prefers to develop close relationships with his owner and little Arthur.

In addition to the widespread use of working animals for affluence, pet ownership increased in Victorian England and "petkeeping became respectable among ordinary citizens" (Ritvo, 1987: 85). As depicted in Anne Bronte's works, people of various social strata are likely to maintain a pet "as a companion" (Amato, 2015: 6), primarily cats and dogs, in their homes. House pets in her stories can be loosely separated into two categories: human companions and friends who receive excellent care, and property and social status symbols who are viewed as emotionless objects. Agnes affectionately refers to her pet cat as "my dear little friend, the kitten" (Bronte, 1988: 71). Before her leave, she strokes her smooth, bright fur and feels a profound sense of loss as she observes "she lay purring herself to sleep in my lap" (Bronte, 1988: 71). In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, the daughter of the pastor also has a pet cat, which she would lavish with kisses while it rested on her sister's knee. Nancy Brown, a cottager with whom Agnes becomes acquainted through her second employment, is also immensely fond of her cat. She would place a little sackcloth cushion at her feet while crocheting by her fireplace for "the accommodation of her gentle friend" (Bronte, 1988: 145). When the cat is discovered after a day's absence, she would cry tears of joy. In the scene in which Markham visits Mr. Lawrance,

an indolent greyhound of good living and a smart springer are seated by the sofa. These animals provide their owner with companionship and receive care and affection in return, they are "in love with their domestic partners" (Haraway, 2003: 14). However, not all of their animal companions are so fortunate. The owner of Miss Matilda's small rough terrier treats it as a possession and attacks it with harsh words and nasty kicks. After its owner becomes bored of caring for it, it is sold to a ruthless rat-catcher. Dash, Arthur Huntingdon's favorite cocker, is likewise mistreated by his irritable owner. In a scene in which Dash rushes on Huntingdon and licks his face, Huntingdon "struck it off with a smart blow" (Bronte, 1992: 221), and subsequently the dog's head is thrown by a hefty book. In *Agnes Grey*, when Agnes accepts Rosalie Murray's invitation to visit Ashby park, the hostess shows her the fat French poodle "that lay curled up on a silk cushion" (Bronte, 1988: 230), just as she displays her fine Italian paintings and various other items, as well as the small jeweled watch she purchased in Geneva. For her, the pet is merely an emotionless item to demonstrate her rank and wealth, not a living being deserving of love and care.

The description of wild creatures is also an integral part of Anne Bronte's writing about animals which shows that "most Victorians perceived themselves as teetering at the top of the chain of being [...] thereby had the right to make animals serve them" (Ayres, 2019: 11). In most of her novels, wild animals link to human amusements such as hunting and activity. Arthur Huntimgdon and his unscrupulous buddies routinely invite one another on recreational hunts. For them, wild animals are inanimate objects for target practice. They take joy in the expressions "make war with the pheasants" (Bronte, 1992: 173) and "murder [...] birds by wholesale" (Bronte, 1992: 163). Devoted hunters such as Mr. Murray and Mr. Huntington frequently engage in excessive hunting and "in the masculinized violence of blood sports" (Stevens, 2021: 680), putting partridges and pheasants in constant danger of being pursued and killed during shooting seasons. In addition to the risk of being tortured, non-hunted wild animals are also at risk of being harmed. The moles, weasels, and sparrows that are trapped and beaten to death by Tom Bloomfield and his uncle, as well as the juvenile hare that is pursued by Matilda's dog, all illustrate the weakness and sorrow of these natural animals.

There are further wild animals that serve as representatives of nature's splendor and beauty, bringing their viewers joy and comfort. When Helen and other linden-car occupants go on an expedition to the peak of a steep

hill, the breathtaking image of little sea mews flying over the blue sea with "their white wings glittering in the sunshine" (Bronte, 1992: 63) is clearly depicted and has an invigorating effect on Helen and Markham. Helen is awakened by "the flutter and chirp of the sparrows, and the gleeful twitter of the swallows" (Bronte, 1992: 234) on a sunny morning at Grassdale Manor. These active wild creatures, along with other natural landscapes such as wooded hills and golden haze, not only fill the house with life and happiness, but also improve the viewer's disposition.

As seen, Anne Bronte offers her take on the controversy surrounding animal rights in her works. The extent to which Bronte's characters respect, sympathize with, and look out for the well-being of animals is most evident in her novels. Through her straightforward portrayal of animals and their connections to people's social status, she shows how middle-class culture emerges in her novels. However, due to the preceding, we can conclude that there are definite limitations to Anne's animal writing studies in which feminism is a hot topic. Given this, it is worthwhile for researchers to investigate the study of her animal writing from alternative angles. With a cursory reading of Anne Bronte's works about animals, it is not difficult to discern their relationship to social class. Throughout her works, characters of various social classes, primarily the upper-class and middle-class, appear to have varied attitudes regarding animals. Why she decides to handle these animal writings in this manner merits investigation. Anne Bronte's two novels, *The Tenant of Widfell Hall* and *Agnes Grey*, both feature animal writing, highlighting the vital part that an animal-centric worldview plays in the formation and maintenance of middle-class identities and traditions. Bronte's protagonists come from the upper and middle classes, and these two socioeconomic groups clearly contrast in their treatment of animals. In this regard, the purpose of this study is to further our understanding of Anne Bronte's animal writing by analyzing its role in the formation of middle-class culture.

Aristocratic Treatment of Animals

In the nineteenth century, Britain's social class system saw substantial alterations. The emergence and expansion of the middle class in the eighteenth century could not be overlooked, despite the aristocracy's continued dominance, unrivaled influence, and long effects on British society as a whole. They were instrumental in the transformation of British society. To acquire their own class identification, they must critique the aspects of other classes' cultures with which they disagree. As Harriet Ritvo states, "nine-

teenth-century English law viewed animals as simply as the property of human owners [...] animals became significant primarily as the objects of human manipulation" (Ritvo, 1987: 2). In her two novels, *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Anne Bronte reveals and criticizes undesirable characteristics of the upper class, such as savagery, corruption, and hypocrisy, through the use of animal writing.

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall is the second and final novel written by Anne Bronte. In the history of literature, it was dubbed as a declaration of female liberation for its portrayal of a bold and independent heroine who leaves her degenerate and womanizing husband with her son and servant to pursue her own pleasure and freedom. In this novel, Arthur Huntingdon, Helen's husband, and his club pals are typical wasteful and unscrupulous upper-class men who pursue both women and animals, because "the activity of hunting is [...] only essential for the attainment of full manhood" (Kheel, 1999: 96). The aristocracy always brags about its unparalleled influence and long-lasting effects on British society as a whole. They are privileged and care nothing about the welfare of other beings. In the novel, "women's oppression is interwoven with that of animals" (Adams, 1994: 70) and the aristocracy's traditional pastime of hunting becomes an excellent opportunity to demonstrate their dominance. Arthur Huntingdon enjoys hunting and frequently participates in shooting sports with his pals. They engage in wholesale partridge hunting and a conflict with pheasants. They have no sense of moderation due to their hedonistic and slothful lifestyles. Without regard for the devastation they inflict on those unfortunate non-human beings, they engage in irresponsible hunting as they would drinking or gambling.

For this degenerate elite, women are but another form of prey with which they can toy and involves "the use of animals for humiliation and sexual exploitation" (Adams, 1994: 67). Arthur's pursuit of Helen can be compared as a hunting expedition and "the consumption of women's sexuality" (Adams, 2010: 19). According to Maggie Berg, "Helen's marriage to Huntingdon is set in the context of a hunting ethos, and his pursuit of her takes place entirely during shooting parties" (2010: 27). When they first meet, Helen is attempting to reject an unpleasant suitor, Mr. Boarham. Huntingdon laughs at her and makes a favorable impression by assisting her in escaping the situation. When they reunite, he also woos Helen away from another suitor, the elderly and wasteful Mr. Wilmot. Huntingdon acknowledges that his benevolence is "partly from a feeling of spite to [...]

tormentors" (Bronte, 1992: 138) who would like to challenge him "for the affront" (Bronte, 1992: 138). It appears that in his behavior conscious power predominated over tenderness (Bronte, 1992: 138). Helen seems to him more like a prize for male competitiveness than a woman deserving of love and respect; this "male psychology is the underlying cause of the mistreatment of animals as well as the exploitation of women" (Donovan, 1993: 174). In a different scenario, Helen is sketching a painting of a pair of turtle-doves and a girl staring at them from beneath a tree in the library when Huntingdon passes by the window prior to their hunting trip. Huntingdon decides "to abandon the field in the pursuit of a brighter treasure" (Bronte, 1992: 185) and climbs through the window to speak with Helen. He proposes that Helen dye the child's hair black (exactly like Helen) and claims that the girl will be wooed and won in the same manner as the lovely hen dove. When Helen refuses to hand over her portfolio, he deftly pulls out the contents and says, "let me have its bowels then" (Bronte, 1992: 151). This is a fascinating metaphor: disemboweling is a typical practice following the slaughter of an animal, "the threat or actual use of a pet to intimidate, coerce, control, or violate a woman is a form of sexual control or mastery over women by men" (Adams, 1994: 67).

In their marriage, Helen's relationship with animals has grown. On the occasion of their wedding tour, Huntingdon does not allow Helen sufficient time to appreciate the European scenery. He is unwilling to expose Helen to society because he considers her as a "frail butterfly" (Bronte, 1992: 192) and desires to keep her to himself. Helen must dress against her preference in order to satisfy her spouse; she dons sparkly diamonds and clothing to resemble a "painted butterfly" (Bronte, 1992: 206). Helen is an emotionless and defenseless animal in his view, and she should be entirely at his disposal. As soon as he realizes that the pet is not the docile puppet he desires, he abandons his masquerade and cruelly torments Helen with his apathy and brutality. Although there is no explicit depiction of Huntingdon's physical aggression against Helen, a scene in which he hits a pet suggests that he may have assaulted his wife. When the couple had their first argument, Huntingdon sleeps on the sofa after a lengthy stay in the dining room. Dash, his favorite cocker, "took the liberty of jumping upon him and beginning to lick his face" (Bronte, 1992: 201) at this time. In a fit of wrath, Huntingdon hurls a heavy book at Dash's head. Helen inquires if his behavior is intended for her, and he responds, "No-but I see you've got a taste of it" (Bronte, 1992: 201). Clearly, through inflicting pain on animals, he wishes to demon-

strate his power and authority. As Lisa Surridge remarks, "Huntingdon's violence towards his dog points to a potential escalation from animal abuse to human cruelty" (1994: 6). In addition to riding hounds and killing pheasants and partridges for a living, he also enjoys cursing and torturing slaves. For them, they are insensible brutes unworthy of consideration and regard. To retain his status as a member of the upper class, he disregards the subjectivity of those he deems lesser and inflicts them with his aggression and brutality, resulting in his final fight with serious sickness and isolation.

Like Arthur Huntingdon, his carefree and promiscuous buddies enjoy hunting and womanizing, especially in the presence of other guys. According to Carol J. Adams, "harm to animals is a strategic expression of masculine power and can be found throughout male controls over women" (Adams, 1999: 78). In contrast to Huntingdon and Helen, whose aggression is latent, the Hattersleys' violence is explicit. At the Grassdale Manor shooting party, he treats his wife so roughly in front of all the guests that she must bite her lip to prevent herself from crying out in pain. He forcibly shoves his wife to the ground, causing her to fall on her side and says: "how can I help teazing her when she's so invitingly meek and mim–when she lies down like a spaniel at my feet and never so much as squeaks to tell me that's enough?" (Bronte, 1992: 278). For him, his wife is merely a domesticated animal, and he finds it amusing to tease and physically abuse her because "woman-battering is one form of animal abuse in which animals are objectified, ontologized as usable, and viewed instrumentally" (Adams, 1999: 78). Hargrave, another friend and neighbor of Huntingdon, pursues Helen in the context of competing against his friend in a hunting competition. He expands his plunder into Arthur's territory and attempts to steal his bride; "the conflict over a woman is deflected into the hunt" (Berg, 2010: 31). During a shooting party, he challenges Helen to a game of chess, but Helen is aware that the game is more of a competition. Helen feels offended and irritated by his cruelty and ruthlessness. He corners her and murmurs, "beaten-beaten! [...] with an expression of ardour and tenderness yet more insulting" (Bronte, 1992: 289). Helen is "inextricably entangled in the snare of [...] antagonist" (Bronte, 1992: 317). For these noble men, mercilessly hunting animals and women is a legitimate career and source of pride, thus "the categories woman and animal serve the same symbolic function in patriarchal society" (Gruen, 1993: 61).

In addition to this, noble ladies in *Agnes Grey* desert pet animals. Agnes obtains a position as a governess with Rosalie and Matilda Murray, who are

older and more manageable than Tom Bloomfield and his sisters, following her dismissal from the Bloomfield family due to the children's failure to improve their educational attainments or their behavior. However, the new position poses a distinct set of challenges. In contrast to Mr. Bloomfield, who is only a nouveau riche businessman imitating aristocratic behavior, Mr. Murray is "one of those genuine thorough-bred gentry" (Bronte, 1988: 44). Agnes believes that, compared to the arrogant and cruel Bloomfields, these gentlemen and women from a somewhat more affluent family are significantly more likely to treat her with respect, perceiving her as a respectable and educated lady rather than a common upper servant. She wishes for the aristocratic women to be more cultured, moral, and sympathetic. However, the scenario turns out to be inverted. In their handling of animals and the destitute, the Murray ladies reveal their shallowness and ruthlessness in a comprehensive manner.

Miss Matilda Murray is an irresponsible and violent hoyden who enjoys riding her pony and playing with the dogs due to the influence of her father, Mr. Murray, an avid fox-hunter and skilled horse-jockey. This tiny woman also enjoys discussing the breeding, pedigree, and gaits of her mares as well as her exceptional riding abilities. She always carries a hunting whip, and going hunting with her father brings her great joy. Agnes and her mother are repeatedly astounded by her profane language. Matilda enjoys playing with animals, but she is more likely to view these dogs and horses as toys than as sentient beings, let alone as respected companions. As soon as she grew weary of these creatures, she would viciously torture and abandon them, or sell them to a new owner who would do the same. Snap, the little rough terrier, serves as an illustration. Matilda acquires this puppy when it is very young. Initially, she is so attached to the terrier that she bans anyone from petting it. However, dwindling freshness and tedious nursing gradually diminish her interest. After some time, she relinquishes control of Snap to Agnes. Upon observing her governess receive the dog's affections, Matilda begins to consider transferring it to a harsh and stony-hearted master. In addition to failing in her relationship with the dog, Matilda demonstrates a lack of compassion and mercy by permitting her hunting dog Prince to pursue and ultimately kill a hare. When she brings the young hare's bloody body back with a joyful expression, Weston asks her if she intends to save or kill the hare. The lady says without remorse, "I pretended to want to save it [...] as it was so glaringly out of season; but I was better pleased to see it

killed" (Bronte, 1988: 208). The agony of her animals appears to be a form of profession and a spectacle to satisfy her bloodlust.

Miss Rosalie Murray, Matilda's older sister, is likewise insensitive toward animals. For this exquisitely beautiful young lady, animals are merely symbols of riches and rank. Rosalie never pays any attention to Snap, the small terrier. For her, terriers are little more than low-quality hunting dogs, scarcely registering in compared to "her fat French poodle that lay curled up on a silk cushion" (Bronte, 1988: 230). Rosalie's husband, Sir Thomas Ashby, will not leave any inheritance to their newborn daughter. Rosalie's attitude toward her admirer, Mr. Hatfield, demonstrates her ruthlessness and moral weakness. Though she makes up her decision very early on to marry the ugly but wealthy lord of Ashby Park, she gives the rector the impression that he has the opportunity to marry her in order to satisfy her vanity. In the same way that Matilda abandons her puppy without hesitation when she becomes exhausted, Rosalie would ruthlessly reject the man's pursuit once she becomes weary, leaving him in uncertainty and suffering. The author's rejection and criticism of Rosalie Murray's merciless behavior are indicated by her wretched and lonely circumstances following her marriage. The two Murray noblewomen also treat their father's cottagers as if they were animals. They poke fun of their cuisine, eating style, and provincial idioms. Even to the elderly's faces, they refer to them as "old fools and silly old blockheads" (Bronte, 1988: 144). The two ladies are unwilling to visit these humble cottagers, leaving Agnes to carry out the duty. When Rosalie attempts to win Weston's affection by feigning compassion and altruism, she would accompany Weston on visits to the impoverished. Once the date of her wedding is fixed and she is no longer interested in courting the curate, she will cruelly abandon these helpless creatures. These ruthless and superficial upper-class women stand in stark contrast to the caring and cultured middle-class personalities Agnes and Weston who "have affectionate embodied encounters with animals" (Stevens, 2021: 684). In *Agnes Grey*, as Terry Eagleton states, "it is clear that there is a close bond between class and morality: the lower your rung on the social (and, to some extent, ecclesiastical) ladder, the more virtuous you are likely to be" (Eagleton, 2005: 128).

Abusing Animals

The Bloomfield family, Agnes's first employer, is the subject of discussion in this section. Mr. Bloomfield is a wealthy merchant with a great desire to ascend the social hierarchy. He imitates the lifestyle and conduct of the

other class without discrimination, making him the most direct recipient of upper-class culture. As Cates Baldridge observes, "the household of the Bloomfields, the first in which Agnes finds employment, is vaguely middle-class, but has been corrupted by exaggerated pretensions gentility. Mrs. Bloomfield has raised her children in what might be termed aristocratic rather than a bourgeois" (Baldridge, 1993: 36). Little Tom Bloomfield, influenced by negative aristocratic characteristics such as moral sloppiness and egoism, develops into a spoiled, violent monster rather than the bourgeois ideal of a silent, angelic youngster. His viciousness and egotism are illustrated by multiple animal-related situations. When Agnes begins her teaching career for the first time, Tom shows her for ten minutes "how manfully he used his whip and spurs" (Bronte, 1988: 77) on his rocking horse. When Agnes expresses her hope that he will use his whip and spurs less when riding a genuine pony, he responds, "Oh, yes, I will [...] I'll cut into him like smoke" (Bronte, 1988: 77). When asked what he will do with birds caught in his traps, he suggests many cruel methods, including giving them to his cat, slicing them up with his knife, and cooking them alive. For amusement, he also sets numerous mole- and weasel-traps in the stack-yard. The sight of animals in distress may only induce in him fever and sadomania, not compassion and gentleness. After learning how other family members feel about animal abuse, it is evident that his vicious behavior stems from his parents' moral corruption.

Mr. Bloomfield never holds Tom accountable for his cruelty to animals. He even gives his son a nest full of newborn sparrows, and he observes him removing their legs, wings, and heads without uttering a word. Mrs. Bloomfield instructs Tom to do what he pleases with the misbehaving sparrows, mice, and rats. As Hilary Newman states, "another family member comes out no better in these scenes with Tom: Uncle Robson only encourages the evil propensities of his nephew" (2013: 238). Robson consumes large quantities of wine daily and frequently visits his brother-in-property law's to shoot. Agnes would be happy to pay a guinea any day to see one of his favorite dogs bite him, "provided the animal could have done it with impunity" (Bronte, 1988: 103). When Tom mistreats sparrows, Uncle Robson chuckles and compliments him for being such a good youngster. Agnes first hopes to prevent the boy from torturing these poor creatures and instill in the children a sense of justice and empathy. She discovers, however, that "ten minutes' bird-nesting with uncle Robson, or even a laugh from him at some relation of their former barbarities, was sufficient, at once, to destroy

the effect of [...] whole elaborate course of reasoning and persuasion" (Bronte, 1988: 103). It appears that the entire family is incapable of comprehending the pain felt by other sentient beings. In truth, they are incapable of understanding the agony of weaker human beings. Agnes is too inferior to be considered a person; she is merely a convenience animal. The first day this family's arrival, they were hungry and exhausted. Mrs. Bloomfield only offers Agnes some tough beefsteaks and half-cold potatoes, along with her apathy and slight. The male members of this family have an even lower opinion of her. As Berg notes, "upon taking her new post, Agnes finds herself being dragged by her pupils like a pony, which, she thinks, was "reversing the order of things" (2002: 180). Mr. Bloomfield and Uncle Robson hardly have the decency to look Agnes in the eye or speak to her kindly. All of these factors contribute to Agnes's helplessness and loneliness in her family. The Bloomfield family's treatment of their governess and animals is shockingly explicit and shocking. The upper class has a long-standing practice of abusing defenseless animals. For them, the power manifested through controlling and dominating other beings is a significant indicator of their superiority.

Compassion for Animals

Since the nineteenth century, Britain has experienced comprehensive and rapid development caused by the intensification of industrialization and the acceleration of urbanization, which, along with the expansion of public institutions and the continuous improvement of the educational system substantially promote the growth of the British Middle Class in terms of both its size and economic strength. This complex yet informal social group is comprised of persons with many professions, including businessmen, lawyers, Anglican priests, bankers, etc. Members of this newly-matured class are keen to rebuild their social identity. This group is more likely to be loosely bonded by cultural variables such as shared values and a similar lifestyle in order to attain class identity, distinguishing itself from the upper class and the lower working class. In the same manner, Anne Bronte achieves the class identification of the middle class in her novels, building a distinct middle-class culture through the use of animal writing.

In the nineteenth century, the British middle class ascribed increasing weight to the family unit, considering family culture as a significant aspect of their class identity. The notion of family, the division of family roles, the usual lifestyle and entertainment, and family education collectively comprise the unique family culture of the British middle class, which is an es-

sential element of its class culture. Along with the increase of productivity during this time period, the economic activities of the middle class steadily separated from the private family sector. Between the private and public spheres, a distinct boundary began to develop. In addition, as an indication of its growing class consciousness, the middle class began to separate itself from the lower classes. They respected and maintained seclusion and intimacy within the family by dismissing additional servants and limiting visitors, which led to a natural reduction in household size. As a result, they preferred closed and intimate family atmosphere more than those of the upper class, who lived in vast, open-lineage families. They believed that in such a family, members were more likely to build healthy and close relationships, and their children were more likely to grow up to be morally upright. Specifically, the middle-class championed its more loving and sheltered bourgeois family atmosphere over all class-rivals, which is seen in Anne Bronte's first work *Agnes Grey*, as the Grey family has a typical milieu.

Agnes is the youngest daughter of a pastor from the north country. There are only her parents, her older sisters, and several maids in their home. Agnes and her sister are raised in the strictest solitude because their mother, who is "being at once highly accomplished, well-informed, and fond of employment", (Bronte, 1988: 62) assumes all responsibility for their education. Agnes recalls that her entire family pampered and treated her as if she were a pet. But there is no reason to criticize in this narrative because they do not naively indulge her, but instead provide her with unending warmth and care, which tremendously assists the protagonist in becoming a compassionate and kind individual. Agnes's virtuousness is confirmed by the fact that she is eager to become a governess for financial help if her family experiences financial difficulties. A glimpse of Agnes's relationship with her family's pets can also demonstrate the value of a loving middle-class family atmosphere and "indicates the contributions animals made to the domestic environment" (Strange, 2021: 222). Agnes has a pleasant relationship with the family's animals, in contrast to the Bloomfield children who are cruel to animals. The kitten is her favorite animal. The cat had nothing to do but play with Agnes. Due to the affection and care of the family members, the kitten is able to grow up calmly and mature into a spry elderly cat. Agnes is so devoted to the cat that she kisses it as she leaves the house, much to Sally's shock which implies that "Bronte emphasizes the kiss and the uniqueness of Agne's physical bond with her companion animal by noting Sally's disapproval" (Stevens, 2021: 684). In addition,

Agnes frequently walks with her sister on the moors and feeds their pet pigeons in the backyard. They have domesticated these magnificent beasts to eat from their hands. Agnes feeds the pigeons for the final time prior to her first departure, giving "a farewell stroke to all their silky backs as they crowded in [her] lap", tenderly kissing her "own peculiar favorites, the pair of snow-white fantails" (Bronte, 1988: 70). In stark contrast to Matilda's apathetic attitude towards her pet, Snap, Agnes is more inclined to view these animals as companions that she cannot bear to part with than as heartless playthings. The family members' response to the large pony demonstrates their compassion and gentility. After the ship carrying the family's money sinks, the Greys are forced to lay off two maids and sell their handy pony in order to regain financial stability. They are exceedingly distressed since they have resolved to end the creature's life in peace and never pass it on to anybody else. It is evident that for them, this pony is a family member worthy of care, not a disposable working animal which shows that "keeping pets [...] involve(s) familial negotiation" (Strange, 2021: 223). It is also evident that Agnes' values are the direct product of her parental upbringing. In contrast to the Bloomfield family's parental apathy, the personal education and practice of the heroine's parents are clearly instructive and influential.

When Agnes leaves the moral protection of her family and exposes herself to a far more complex and dangerous world, her words and actions demonstrate that the qualities molded by her middle-class home are impermeable and enduring. By examining how she treats animals in the two households where she served as a governess, we can ascertain this with certainty. Agnes would courageously call attention to Tom and his uncle's animal cruelty in the first scenario, despite the fact that they are her employers. In order to defend these unfortunate creatures, she is willing to risk dismissal. When she is unable to stop Tom from tormenting a nestling brood, she typically throws a stone at Tom's intended victims, despite his rage. In the Murray household, she spares no effort in caring for Snap, the terrier Matilda abandoned. When it gets struck on the head by Mr. Hatfield, she caresses Snap to demonstrate her pompous compassion. Snap's abduction by the village rat-catcher, infamous for his cruel treatment of his canine slaves, causes her to shed many tears.

To sum up, all of her acts of kindness toward animals during her employment demonstrate her morality and the strong influence of her loving middle-class family. On the other hand, Tom Bloomfield and Matilda Mur-

ray's cruel treatment of animals and their incorrigible character demonstrate the tragic failure of home arrangements that do not adhere to middle-class standards.

Animal Discourse in Middle-Class Ideology Construction

The key to the emergence and development of the middle class, which is a significant force in the change of modern society, is the formation of its own class consciousness. A social class gradually attains class identification as a result of inheriting and accepting these ideological influences such as similar modes of thought, worldviews, and values. In order to gain a firm grip on the social stage, the middle class must prioritize the development of its own ideology which also "ontologizes animals as consumable" (Adams, 1993: 202). Anne Bronte also addresses this topic in her works. By depicting her characters' handling of animals, the author demonstrates her conceptions regarding the formation of middle-class ideology, including her perspectives on humankind, marriage, and nature.

In the early years of the Victorian era, despite a burgeoning economy, Britain faced significant social issues. Since the adoption of the Great Reform act of 1832, state power has been moved from the deteriorating aristocracy to the new industrial capitalists from the middle class. Numerous technological advancements and innovations, like as railroads, steamships, textile machines, and printing machines, contributed fresh forces to the national economy as the great industrial revolution reached its zenith. By establishing abroad markets and exploiting colonies, the nation amassed a substantial amount of wealth. Underneath this prosperity and wealth, however, were the poverty and misery of the working class, the prevalence of money worship, and the decline of social decency. As Önder Kocatürk emphasizes, "this new trend came to demonstrate the prevalent sense of crisis in British society by focusing particularly on the social discontent and unhappiness caused by the hard and unbearable living and working conditions of industrial capitalism" (2022: 20). In this context, it is crucial to convey a renewed emphasis on humanity. During the same time as Anne Bronte and her sisters were involved in literary creation, concern for animals grew, and animal protection organizations and anti-cruelty laws expanded. Darwin's research on human animality, along with a newly awoken concern for pain, led to a shift in how humans and animals were perceived. Anne Bronte was among a group of writers who paid great attention to social concerns who were concerned with the plight of the poor and non-human animals, both as people with less power and as the objects of

apathy and brutality. Though she was neither a militant animal rights activist nor a critical realist, her descriptions of various human characters and their treatment of animals eloquently conveyed her views on how moral humans should behave.

The upper-class characters in Anne Bronte's novels are typically the greedy ones who support the mistreatment and exploitation of other humans and animals and devoid of compassion and goodwill. According to Valeri L. Stevens, in the Victorian age "violence was often considered a trait of upper-class masculinity" (2021: 686). For them, all nonhuman creatures are created for the convenience of humans as property, food, or entertainment tools deprived of being "subjects-of-a-life" (Regan, 2004: 53). The author's attitude toward them is equally illustrative; she disapproves of and condemns their conduct as well as their vision of humanity. Such cruel acts not only harm the victim, but also diminish the perpetrator's morality and soul. In stark contrast to those monstrous upper-class people, the middle-class characters in her novels consistently demonstrate compassion and kindness toward animals.

In *Agnes Grey*, she provides numerous examples of animal appreciation and sympathetic portrayal to demonstrate her middle-class perspective on humans. The Greys concern for the peace and well-being of the family pony, as if it were a family member. When Agnes witnesses the Bloomfields abusing and torturing animals in various ways, she becomes enraged and distressed. Her compassion and altruism also make her accountable and righteous. She asserts, "when Master Bloomfield's amusements consist in injuring sentient creatures, [...] I think it's my duty to interfere" (Bronte, 1988:105). Even at the danger of dismissal, she is courageous enough to defend the welfare of animals to her bosses. While waiting in the Ashby Park waiting room, she witnesses a group of loud rooks and develops sympathy for the rookery's bustling inhabitants. In her compassionate heart, all common creatures merit true attention and care, just as any poor person with a low standing, such as the cottager, merits respect and assistance. She draws parallels between the human protagonists' pain and the suffering of non-human animals implying that "animals are capable of feeling [...] pain" (Singer, 2002: 234). In a single chapter, she describes two causes of her father's deteriorating health and the abduction and delivery of Snap to the notoriously brutal town rat-catcher. For her, losing a dog companion may be as distressing as receiving bad news about a close relative. In the novel, "the Victorian ideal of proper feminine mercy" (Stevens, 2021: 688),

the awakening of compassion and benevolence for animals and other humans stands in stark contrast to the cruel and barbaric torture and exploitation of animals by upper-class individuals. She appears to represent a middle-class that is more moral than the upper class and has a greater sense of what it means to be compassionate.

The perspective on marriage is also a significant aspect of class society. The marriage system of the British aristocracy is typically organized by two families for economic or political reasons "by which families were consolidated, strong bonds of friendship, patronage and career advancement were forged, and the family's reputation was made" (Perkin, 1989: 64). The noble family was therefore held together by law, custom, and practicality, not by affection and love. In contrast to the conventional other-directed marriage system of the upper class, marriage in the middle class is more free and independent. In addition to prioritizing material basis and family interests like their upper-class opponents, they recognize that love and affection are necessary for a successful marriage. Anne Bronte's nineteenth-century works deal with the question of marriage from the perspective of different social classes. In her works, she depicts many types of marriage and expresses her stance on them in detail. By examining the marriage of Agnes Grey and Edward Weston, two representations of the middle class, we can gain a better understanding of Anne Bronte's stance on marriage and the role of animal writing in her construction of the middle class.

In *Agnes Grey*, Agnes is a plain governess who is disliked and ignored by her upper-class employers and other ladies in the neighborhood. Weston is a reticent and unremarkable-looking minister. It is doubtful that they are aware of one another's presence. However, they are not only able to recognize and respect the invaluable qualities of the other party, but also to forge marital bonds and establish a happy family. Through a careful investigation of the work, it is not difficult for readers to determine that numerous animals—Nancy's cat, Matilda's dog, and the rabbit being followed by a hound—play a significant role in the couple's acquaintance, mutual affection, and eventual union. In the beginning, when Nancy Brown (the cottager) asks Agnes about her opinion of Weston, she can simply respond, "I think he preaches very well" (Bronte, 1988: 146), because she has not yet spoken to Weston. Actually, she never sees anyone to converse with other than the young women in the hall. Her understanding of this young curator is enhanced by Nancy's portrayal and remarks. This serious and sensible widow raves about Weston to Agnes, explaining that he routinely visits all

the impoverished cottages, treating them with genuine kindness and decency, and resolving their doubts with a far more patient attitude. In addition, he would use her low pay to purchase essential but scarce items, such as a bag of coals, for the needy. On a bright day in the last week of February, when Agnes is reading the Bible to Nancy, who is suffering from an inflammation of the eyes, she mentions Weston's gentle treatment of her cat: "when th' cat, poor thing, jumped on to his knee, he only stroked her, and gave a bit of a smile" (Bronte, 1988: 150), which is likely reminiscent of Agnes's care and compassion for this small creature. It is abundantly clear that the young curate and kind governess share a common trait: biophilia, which Edward O. Wilson defines as "the innate tendency to focus on life and lifelike processes" (2003: 1) or a love of life and the living world as well as a human affinity for other life forms. Agnes and Weston are representative examples of this character, which, along with their genuine love, pulls them together naturally.

Numerous later episodes illustrate their affection and closeness with non-human creatures. When visiting Nancy Brown during the second week of March, Agnes discovers that she is anxious about her missing cat. Fortunately, Weston subsequently comes with the unfortunate creature in his arms, explaining that he rescued it from Mr. Murray's gamekeeper's gun. When confronted with the violent upper-class gentleman's quite unladylike abuse, he courageously retorts, "he might better spare all his rabbits than she her cat" (Bronte, 1988: 159), which is very similar to Agnes's "attempts to keep the animals from needless suffering" (Stevens, 2021: 680) and her argument with the Bloomfields for the welfare of some birds. The aristocracy views animals not as playthings or prey, but as other living creatures demanding respect and affection. Thus, upon witnessing Matilda's dog chase a leveret, they would express the same disdain and sympathy. For the same reason, Mr. Weston has the patience and sensitivity to comment on Agnes's tiny rough friend, the terrier, when he encounters the two of them on the road, when other gentlemen and ladies would deliberately disregard the existence of Agnes Grey, a genuine human being. In addition, they share a passion for plants, especially flowers, and other creatures in nature, which facilitates their frequent gatherings and fascinating conversations. For instance, in a fine March afternoon, while loitering behind the women and observing various birds, insects, trees, and flowers, Agnes meets Weston by accident and receives a bouquet of beautiful primroses from the curate. They initially discuss their shared appreciation for

wildflowers and other forms of life in nature, before moving on to more profound topics such as life experience and other interests. After having these dialogues, they have a deeper understanding of each other and a stronger sense of identity, which plays a crucial part in their marriage.

Despite a time of separation during which Agnes leaves the Horton lodge to begin a school with her mother and Weston moves to another parish, the two are able to reunite and marry with Snap, the terrier, acting as a facilitator and witness. When Agnes takes a solo stroll on the beaches while the rest of the world is asleep, she recognizes Snap and meets his new owner, Edward Weston, with tremendous delight and amazement: "Presently, I heard a snuffling sound behind me, and then a dog came frisking and wriggling to my feet. It was my own Snap -the little dark, wire-haired terrier [...] I looked round, and beheld – Mr. Weston" (Bronte, 1988: 242). Weston rescues Snap from the rat-catcher and delivers him to his new place of employment. With Snap's assistance, Weston can immediately recognize Agnes, and the two may build a happy family with Snap as a necessary member. In contrast to the marriage of Rosalie Murray and Ashby, the marriage of this happy pair appears to be founded on genuine love and shared biophilia. The latter is founded solely on wealth and reputation and results in misery and resentment, allowing us to deduce Anne Bronte's marriage philosophy and how it contributes to the formation of a more stable and contented middle-class family.

Compatibility between Humans and Animals

Many more English families had pets during the Victorian era, and there was a corresponding rise in public concern for animal rights and the prevention of domestic violence. The bulk of middle-class social progressives have founded animal protection campaigns and animal protection associations. Writers of the time, like Anne Bronte and Emily Bronte, mirrored this heightened sensitivity in their works by responding to sentimentality, animal mistreatment, pet ownership, and the human-animal bond. During the nineteenth century, the relationship between humans and animals was a hotly contested topic in Victorian Britain. Influenced by contemporary literary trends and the environment in which she grew up, Anne Bronte also delves into this issue in her novels through the use of realistic animal depictions and moralizing prose.

In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Anne Bronte vividly depicts how social class influences people's perspectives and treatment of animals. In the

eyes of the upper-class, animals are created for human convenience, whereas the middle-class respects their existence and advocates for a harmonious human-animal relationship. In this novel, the bond between a domestic animal and its owner is tightly tied to the owner's social status. Arthur Huntingdon, a member of the aristocratic class, swears and beats his dog, while Gilbert Markham and young Arthur, representing the rising middle-class gentleman, view their dogs as intimate and loyal companions. This contrast challenges the upper-class traditional perspectives on the human-animal relationship and demonstrates the progressiveness of the middle-class view of animals. While Sancho, Gilbert's "beautiful black and white setter" (Bronte, 1992: 21), helps him meet and get to know Arthur and Helen, he also represents the improvement of humankind's relationship with animals. The tiny kid's first meeting with Sancho is incredibly heart-warming. One Tuesday, Gilbert runs across little Arthur slipping from the wall. The boy is greatly delightful of the sight of Sancho and the dog shows great friendliness to this new face. Though having dropped from the wall, the boy can quickly be soothed by the dog and begins to smile through his tears. This kind of spiritual connection between human and animal immensely breaks down the rigid human-animal divide.

Animals play a role in everything from the development of human relationships to the formation of interspecies bonds in this story. Even though Arthur is initially timid around Gilbert, the dog's undeniable pull on the youngster eventually leads to the two being fast friends. Actually, Helen (at least initially) continues to put up with Gilbert's presence because young Arthur enjoys being with Sancho. Later, Anne Bronte gives more depth to Arthur and Sancho's friendship, even including Sancho among Arthur's human pals. Arthur "did not like being in the carriage with strangers, while all his four friends, Mamma, and Sancho, and Mr. Markham and Miss Millward, were on foot, journey in far behind, or passing through distant fields and lanes" (Bronte, 1992: 60). More importantly, their relationship is two-way friendship—not only the little boy cherishes his dog friend but the latter also gives back the same love. Every time Sancho sees Arthur, he would be genuinely delightful just like a human being would look like when he or she catches sight of dear friends: "Sancho, who, immediately upon perceiving his young friend, scoured at full gallop the intervening space, and pounced upon him with an impetuous mirth that precipitated the child almost into the middle of the beck [...]" (Bronte, 1992: 49). Such a harmonious picture is

one typical interpretation of what benign human-animal relationship should be.

The harmony between human being and wild animals are also reflected in Anne Bronte's novels. Compared with their upper-class rivals who only regard wild animals like pheasant and fox as prey, those middle-class characters evidently have a better understanding and appreciation ability of the other creatures in nature. For them, just like plants and other elements of nature, wild animals serve as agents of glorious and pleasant nature, the beauty and vigour of which can save people from anxiety and loneliness and lessen their misery. For his inability to enjoy picturesque natural scenery in the countryside, Huntingdon always stays in the bustling city for amusement, leaving Helen alone in their large-scale but hollow manor. This lonely mistress turns to nature for comfort and power. Helen cherishes genuine love for plants like flowers and trees and all kinds of wild animals, remaining a close contact with nature. She views nature as her friendly companion. The components of nature are the most valuable material of her artistic creation. At morning, she would be roused by "the flutter and chirp of the sparrows, and the gleeful twitter of the swallows" (Bronte, 1992: 212). When settling down in the Wildfell Tenant, she spends more time in nature to gain pure delight and peace. When going on an excursion, she stands on the summit of a steep acclivity, looking downward to see little sea mews that sported above the twinkling blue sea, with "their white wings glittering in the sunshine" (Bronte, 1992: 61). This glorious scenery can endow her a sense of contradictory exhilaration and tranquility. Markham Gilbert, the other middle-class in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, also keep a close and harmonious relationship with wild animals. He is willing to spending time gazing "the lovely face of nature" (Bronte, 1992: 382) in a splendid morning, enjoying the scenery of "half-frozen dew lay thick on the grass, [...] the rooks cawing and cows lowing in the distance" (Bronte, 1992: 381). When it comes to the treatment of wild animals, what the members of the middle-class like Helen and Markham in Anne's writings would advocate is enjoying their existence without causing any disturbance or damage. For them, immersing oneself in nature is truly a great means of refining taste and elevating mind.

Conclusion

This study explores the connection between Anne Bronte's animal writing and the construction of middle-class culture. Animal writing in Anne Bronte's two novels presents the significant role an orientation towards

animals plays in the construction and consolidation of middle-class identities and culture. In her novels, characters of different classes, mainly the upper-class and the middle-class, have obviously different attitudes towards animals. In Anne Bronte's view, before constructing its own culture, the middle-class firstly need to expose and criticize the negative ingredients of mainstream upper-class culture. The Arthur Hungtingdon group hunt animals immoderately and fool with women; The Murray ladies optionally abandon their pets; The Bloomfields mercilessly abuse innocent animals. Traits like degeneration and brutality of the upper-class or aristocracy are vividly demonstrated in these upper-class members' attitudes towards animal and their corresponding actions. Then, the writer's approval of the middle-class kindness to animals and the class features behind the kindness is explored. The middle-class culture represented by the loving Greys, and the appearance of new middle-class career woman with Helen as an example are all the best interpretations of middle-class culture. Finally, Anne Bronte's animal discourse in constructing middle-class culture is touched. In this part, middle-class's view of humanity, marriage and nature are discussed. Agnes' kindness to animals displays that a true human being should be benevolent and sympathetic. Weston and his wife forge bond through animal and finally get married to construct a happy family. Their experience proves that marriage based on love and biophilia is more likely to bring happiness. Other middle-class characters like little Arthur and Helen make friends with animals and find peace and pleasure in nature, which reveals the view of nature Anne advocates, that is, loving nature rather than conquering it and keeping harmonious relationship with animals.

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