

THE TRIUMPH OF A BOURGEOIS MYTHOLOGY IN GEORGE ELIOT'S *MIDDLEMARCH*

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ABSTRACT: From the very comparison made by the English authoress George Eliot between her character, Dorothea Brooke, and the legendary Saint Teresa of Avila, this essay aims to propose a study of the transformations occurred between the Teresian Modern Age and the Victorian Age in which Eliot wrote and in which the novel is historically set. Such a study's purpose is to provide a panorama of the ascension of the bourgeoisie as a dominant class and the effect of its morality in the elaboration of a sexual pattern of behavior which, in its turn, originated the famous angelic myth of femininity condemned by Virginia Woolf in her *Professions for Women*. Imprisoned within the demands of such an ideal, Dorothea never ventures to liberate her Christian fervor or her anxieties for social transformation, as did the sixteenth-century Teresa.

Keywords: Victorian Era; bourgeois morality, Angel in the House.

O triunfo da mitologia burguesa no romance *Middlemarch*, de George Eliot

RESUMO: O artigo pretende, a partir da comparação feita pela autora inglesa George Eliot de sua personagem, Dorothea Brooke, com a lendária Santa Teresa de Ávila, propor um estudo das transformações ocorridas entre a Era Moderna teresina e a Era Vitoriana em que Eliot escreveu e em que se passa o romance. Tal estudo tem por objetivo fornecer um panorama da ascensão da burguesia enquanto classe dominante e o efeito de sua moralidade na elaboração de um padrão sexual de comportamento que, por sua vez, deu origem ao famoso mito de feminilidade angelical condenado por Virginia Woolf em seu *Professions for Women*. Encapsulada nas demandas desse ideal, Dorothea jamais logra dar vazão ao seu fervor cristão e aos seus anseios por transformações sociais, como fizera a Teresa quinhentista.

Palavras-chave: Era Vitoriana; moralidade burguesa; Anjo do Lar.

1. INTRODUCTION

The starting-point of this work is to acknowledge the parallel between *Middlemarch*'s main character Dorothea Brooke and the saint to whom she is compared by

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George Eliot at the very beginning of the novel: Saint Teresa. By doing so, what is aimed at is the acknowledgement of how the many structural transformations in economy, politics and culture which occurred between the sixteenth to the nineteenth century rendered it impossible for Dorothea to accomplish her ambitious plans to better the world and the lives of those who surrounded her – according to a Christian perspective of collective good –, as Saint Teresa supposedly did.

Teresa reformed the Carmelite order, founded seventeen cloisters, experienced a life of mystic communions with God, and wrote about it to defend herself from the fire of the Inquisition and to propagate her practices. Dorothea, on the other hand, though gifted with the same passion and the best intentions of Teresa, married for the first time in order to achieve through her husband what she considered being the highest knowledge of men, but was excluded from any substantial participation in his intellectual life; then she wasted a rich widowhood with dispersive plans, which were never enough for her grand, but uncertain dreams, and ended up marrying the man she loved and the one from whom she could draw some meaning to her empty existence.

Here is a summary, therefore, of the process of construction of bourgeois morality, which led to the production of the myth of womanhood named by the poet Coventry Patmore *The Angel in the House* (1854), and appropriated and diffused by Virginia Woolf (1966), when she wrote to declare her own condemnation and direct opposition to it. The myth of the innocent and childlike housewife and mother fabricated by the Victorian Era is here interpreted as part of a greater mechanism brought into action by the bourgeoisie and safeguarded by what Foucault calls “disciplinary power” to maintain the social order and the politico-economic stability considered necessary to the successful supremacy of the recently empowered ruling class.

The concept of “bourgeoisie”, here applied, is taken directly from Karl Marx’s Socialist ideology – that is, a broad generalization which encompasses all social groups which earn their living by trade, not by medieval aristocratic privileges and inherited lands, or by salaried work, such as proletarians and peasants. This adoption of a Marxist concept and some other appropriations of Marxist theories do not indicate that this is a Marxist-oriented work, for such measures were taken merely as a necessary means of oversimplification. Any attempt to trace a rigid and detailed historic trajectory of any incredibly heterogeneous social construct as the bourgeoisie is, whatever the purpose of the research is, would be vain. The

point of this introductory historical account is only to outline general conflicts which led to the construction of the specific myth of womanhood abovementioned.

Therefore, an overview of the bourgeoisie's birth, development and eventual conquest of political power shall be presented here as a means to validate the theory that it was precisely the lack of ancient and deeply-rooted justifications for this class's political supremacy – as the nobility had possessed – which produced an extra care with order and stability, and a demand for new solid myths upon which to legitimize its power and fix its dominion within people's minds. And thus was born the primordial guardian of Victorian morality: the Angel in the House.

2. PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

Historians not always agree as to when exactly the so-called Victorian Era began. Some cannot conceive a Victorian Age without Victoria, and, therefore, establish the year of 1837 (the first year of her reign) as the dawn of the period. However, one cannot measure the extension of a collective imaginarium and multiple social, economical, political and cultural transformations by the life of one single being whose own actions have not interfered as much powerfully over the way things had been as were themselves influenced by what the world was becoming. Victoria was not responsible for the alterations or even for the *pax britannica*, the long period of relative peace with which she was blessed. Actually, the date from which this present work will count as the beginning of the era is the year when a great step was taken to diminish the political power of nobility considerably – and consequently of royalty as well – and to place it in the hands of the commons.

Politically speaking, the beginning of the Victorian Era was the beginning of a bourgeois democracy in England, with the Reform Act 1832. One of the determinations this act was the extension of –the right to vote to all men owning property worth ten pounds or more in annual rent– (CHRIST, 1986, p. 920) – which means that it –enfranchised about half the middle class (mainly urban), but left a property qualification on voters which largely excluded the working class.– (ROBERTS, 2000, p. 689). The working class would have to wait until the Reform Act 1867 to be fairly represented.

Another fundamental measure of the Reform Bill was

the abolition in 1832 of an archaic electoral system whereby some of the new industrial cities were unrepresented in Parliament while rotten boroughs (communities which has become depopulated) elected the nominees of the local squire. (CHRIST, 1986, p. 920).

By eliminating such archaic boroughs from Parliamentary representation, the Bill greatly diminished the regional political power of lords, transferring it to the new industrial cities represented by bourgeois commons.

Because it broke up the monopoly of power that the conservative landowners had so long enjoyed (the Tory office had been in office almost continuously from 1783 until 1830), the Reform Bill represents the beginning of a new age. (Ibid.)

So important such reform was that George Eliot chose this period of transition to set her novel, and directly attached it to the plot by the standing of Mr. Brooke, Dorothea's uncle, to the Parliamentary election in 1831. He is an almost caricatured character who makes a fool of himself by defending the Bill in his candidature despite the irreconcilable fact of his being a landowner himself. The novel is thoroughly immersed in the reformist atmosphere, all characters feel in their everyday lives the consequences of this "new age" of railroads and political democracy, but it seems to be Eliot's utmost concern and regret that the main reform, that of human minds and spirits towards the common good represented by Dorothea is even farther from being reached.

Returning to the Reform Act 1832, it was actually a significant advance to the Bill of Rights from 1689, signed by William III and Mary II, and was succeeded by the two other Acts (from 1867 and 1884) which finally translated into official words many political changes suffered by England and the Western world at large during the Modern Age. After all, the Victorian Era was, as much as the Reform Bills abovementioned, the daughter of the French Revolution and of the Glorious Revolution which gave rise to the same transformations in England that all the Western world would feel abruptly at one time a hundred years afterwards. Although carrying the name of a noble "as eras usually do", this was an age whose "most important development" was "the shift from a way of life based on the ownership of land to a modern urban economy based on trade and manufacturing" (CHRIST, 1986, p. 917).

3. A TALE OF GLORY

The social construct called bourgeoisie was born an outcast within the medieval society. The Catholic Church, which was then the sovereign of Europe, condemned severely commercial profit and accumulation of riches, two things without which there could be no consistent trade. Still, from the eleventh century on, merchants organized themselves in villas with the purpose of commerce, defying a theocentric system of values that proved to be gradually declining.

Despite the manifold resistances against them, the bourgeois came to support kings against the feudal landlords in the formation of national Estates, becoming rich in the process of colonization promoted by the recently conformed countries. In the Modern Age, this peculiar social class grew richer as the power of monarchy became stronger; yet, it was still an anomalous class that had no political representation whatsoever, since the many European governments were ruled by crowned dynasties and administered by nobles. For some centuries, silently, these artful enterprisers must have suffered their well-earned money been driven away through taxes to groups of individuals who lived in privilege for the mere fact of their birth. It was the way things have always been; nobody has ever dared to think otherwise, to question the divine authority of landlords or kings.

Local rebellions grew within people's minds every day, however not specially bourgeois minds, who had more time and money than proletarians or peasants to think about the matter and unite their forces around a common cause. When the thirteen English colonies dared to declare their independence and fight against their crowned king for a democratic government, the claims of many a mind fed by the principles of the Enlightenment around the globe could no longer be kept in silence. The French Revolution eventually embodied the cries of a social formation that had been treated with political indifference for too long. This is a summarized version of the story retold up to this day of how the political power came to the hands of those who still retain it,² and how a new civilization arose from its war of independence: the winner's tale of immaculate glory.

² Representatively speaking, of course, for only in 1870 would the republican system finally be installed in France never to be disturbed and alternated by monarchist restorations or empires. Democracy was definitely not a medicine ingested at one single time in all Europe. In any case, all governments, whether monarchic or democratic, sought gradually to turn their economical policies to the bourgeoisie's interests instead of those of decaying landlords since the French Revolution.

4. THE NEW *LOCUS* OF POWER

Whether or not one agrees with the benefits brought by the shift of power from the hands of landed nobility to the hands of the industrial bourgeoisie ó which was operated in a long process that took the whole Victorian Age to be completed ó, one has to acknowledge the many (sometimes rather subtle) transformations occasioned by it.

According to Michel Foucault, õ[i]n a society like the seventeenth century one was, the body of the king was not a metaphor, but a political reality: his physical presence was necessary to the functioning of monarchy itself.ö³ (FOUCAULT, 2005, p. 145). On the other hand, in the nineteenth century society,

it is the body of society that becomes [í] the new principle. It is this body that will need to be protected in an almost medical way: instead of the rituals through which the integrity of the monarchø body was restored, therapeutic recipes shall be applied, like the elimination of the sick ones, the control of the contagious ones, the exclusion of the criminals. The elimination through torture is, therefore, replaced by methods of disinfection: criminology, Eugenia, the exclusion of the ðdegeneratedø (Ibid)

In the age of Absolutism, there were, at one side, positions that could never be touched or altered and, at the other side, people who occupied them for a period. The king absorbed meaning and power from his throne as much as the throne, the system, absorbed meaning and power from his corporeal existence. This kingø health had to be preserved because he momentarily represented the whole national State, whoever he was and whatever popular acceptance he managed to obtain from his people. This explains the famous egocentric sentence by Louis XIV: õLøÉtat cøest moi.ö His body may have been eaten by worms ó and there is every reason to believe it was ó, but, while he lived, he *was* at some great measure the State, and his material existence was preserved as such. He was the provisory owner of the *locus* of political power; nobody would look anywhere else for a source of power, for there was only one place from whence it could emerge: the throne.

The French Revolution ended this state of things, for the rebels cut the head of the king; they destroyed not only his body, but everything that he symbolized, that he incarnated. And, more importantly, they proved that the world does not come to an end when there is a shift in the *locus* of power.

³ For all quoted works in Portuguese, the translation is mine.

The disciplinary power studied by Foucault, the power of all powers, the immaterial and invisible regulator of human lives that operates through complex and contradictory rules and never ends, but goes on changing as human transformations demand it ó this power that evolved through corrective institutions developed in the nineteenth century is the very mechanism which surveys and corrects the social body, this new *locus* of power.

Any aspect of stability or social cohesion of the Modern Age ó whether achieved by consensus or terror ó derived its success from the fact that everyone knew where the power emanated from: the socio-political structures were fixed, immutable. Princes knew beforehand that they would become kings and that only premature death could prevent them, as well as the servantsø children had their burdens traced from birth. Everything was decided through considerations of birth, and every social stratus had its fixed function within society: the object of regulation of social relations was the ownership of land, and land is an infinitely more fixed property than money ó the new eraø ògodö.

All the confusion derived from these structural transformations of society can still be read in Jane Austenø novels. She lived in the Regency Period, in the middle of the Revolution, and never saw its changes set their roots irrevocably in the Western world and establish new standards within peopleø minds. She lived in a period of frantic transition ó so much that the shock of such convulsions reached her writing, even in a very subtle level, despite the fact that she lived secluded in the English countryside for her whole life. Many of her charactersø dilemmas center on the socio-political changes already felt by the power of the bourgeoisie. One is not in safe ground to determine solely by the reading of her books whether she condemned the hereditary noble rights to land and titles or merely the wrong use of it, since it seems to be the first case with characters such as Lady Catherine de Bourgh and Sir Eliot, and the second one with Mr. Darcy and Mr. Knightley ó both characters belonging to the gentry which was a particular landed class of gentlemen in England.

In any case, when the power emanates from only one corner of the country, it is relatively easy to regulate it and protect it. When this same power, however, can emanate from anywhere in the social sphere, for it is chosen by election, by the will of people ó and, with the Reform Bill of 1832, the mass of voters grew considerably ó, then the entire social body must be monitored and disinfected so that nobody suffers great surprises of an oddity being elected for the office of Prime Minister, for example. Everybody is supposed, therefore,

to be educated to vote and extraordinarily to represent (if ever elected) the newly created bourgeois democracy accordingly.

The bourgeoisie cannot count on guarantees of indefinite power like the inalienable hereditary possession of lands or titles which cannot be lost, unless by felony, and that can be transferred to the future generations forever, creating dynasties; neither is it in the position to claim the divine right of kings ó the same ones it had just now deprived of political power and even killed. This victorious social class needs to find an element of stability to legitimize its power and neutralize the instable, flying nature of money ó the uncertain ground above which its õcastlesö are founded. It happened that the great rulers of capitalist society at some point decided on the *family* to embody this element of stability. As õfamilyö is not a given concept, the bourgeois articulators have to reinvent it, to construct a specific idea of familial bonds that could be respected anywhere around the globe ó the model of which was so successfully accepted that was adopted everywhere in the Western world and is only recently being demystified. Foucault understood that this family cell started to be valued in the eighteenth century and became the locus *par excellence* of affections and sexuality.

The so-called nuclear family becomes gradually the unity and the foundation of the bourgeois society. It confers acceptability and respectability to this new ruling class in the world at large; it legitimizes the *status quo* and provides with new moral values a civilization utterly shaped upon new bases. As the unit, the center of the social body, the Victorian family becomes the main target of the disciplinary power.

It was not simply for the need of a new emblem upon which to construct a new society that the bourgeoisie was involved in such strategies. It was not only a question of legitimating the power, but also of maintaining it in a material level. Maintenance of an industrial wealth depends on education and taming of workers whose workforce is to be heavily explored and underpaid. As Foucault explains,

[t]his political investment of the body is bound up, in accordance with complex reciprocal relations, with its economic use; it is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination; but, on the other hand, its constitution as labor power is possible only if it is caught up in a system of subjection (í) This subjection is not only obtained by the instruments of violence or ideology (í) it may be calculated, organized, technically thought out; it may be subtle, make use neither of weapons nor of terror and remain of a physical order. That is to say, there may be a õknowledgeö of the body that is not exactly the science of its functioning, and a mastery of its forces that is more than the ability to conquer them: this knowledge and this mastery constitute what might be called the political technology of the body. (FOUCAULT, 1984, p. 173).

The political technology of the body, this "scientifico-legal complex from which the power to punish derives its bases, justifications, and rules" (*Ibid.*, p. 170), served many different purposes, according to the social stratus involved. If its ascetic virtues of moderation, sobriety and abstinence meant to domesticate workers and render undesirable and even medically inadvisable any appeal to their senses, feelings or thoughts that may divert them from work, the discipline imposed upon the ruling classes was not that lighter.

One must bear in mind that the most urgent need of this dominant class is to safeguard a political and economical stability that is not guaranteed by any external justifications or feudal privileges. Money is the only guarantee of power, and it is quite a devious lord to be worshiped, for it may flee at the wink of an eye: its preservation, the Victorians soon discovered, depended on a great level of self-control and contrivance.

If the heir of a duke, an earl or a marquis chose to dissipate his family's wealth in gambling, prostitution, opium and parties – and such is practically the model of aristocratic behavior – nothing would yet prevent him from inheriting his estates and his title; even if he managed to declare his economical bankruptcy, nothing would deprive him of the power of his name, blood and birth, the respect of society and deference from his tenants.⁴ He would probably end up marrying himself a fortune and keeping the same old track of life.

On the other hand, the son of a wealthy industrialist would soon become a destitute if he chose to pulverize his father's legacy in a sensuous existence, for money has no definite owner; and he would not have self-respect preserved if such occurred, for nobody was bound to his position in any legal way, but only to the material properties which he managed to annihilate. Exactly because of the dangers of such behavior to capitalism as a system, it could not be tolerated in any way by his peers; on the contrary, it should be set as an example to be

⁴ Two adequate literary examples of such dissipating behavior are Tom Bertram from Austen's *Mansfield Park*, and again Sir Walter Eliot, from *Persuasion*. Tom almost dies in the end of the novel thanks to his bohemian style of life, but is finally saved, and the reader is given to understand that, without working one penny for the preservation or growth of his legacy, he will inherit it fully nonetheless. Sir Eliot is an old baronet who wastes too much money and is forced to rent his mansion and move to a fashionable lifestyle in Bath. None of the characters harms its reputation or closes social opportunities because of such extravagances. Whatever money they possess is earned by the tenants who work their lands and live there; the greatest value of their lifestyle is the fact that they maintain their profligate existence without ever working for it.

avoided and an individual to be execrated, since he so outrageously exposed the frailty of this new system which suffered great pains to reaffirm itself.

Power, in bourgeois society, depends on merit, talents of all kinds and personal charisma (for those attract money), whereas power within the circle of nobility depended just on birth. The dominant discourse determines (and people feed it by acting accordingly and judging one another from its premises), therefore, that, in order to keep his wealth, the dishonest man must build a respectable public image of himself and to undergo the infinite journey of self-regulations, self-punishments and reconstructions demanded by the social body.

As the nineteenth century was the period of legitimizing the bourgeois authority in the world, life was separated in two spheres, the public and the private one, so that work could be maximized outside the home and men should not worry about corrupting their families with the various necessary immoralities he had to subject himself to in order to keep and further his fortune. Work was the word of order and anyone who seemed to give preeminence to anything else should be justly observed; the social order was maintained through work and guards would go out in the streets at night to make sure that workers were not rambling around and losing their money and energy in useless entertainments that might damage the quality of their activities in the morning. Work maintained the cohesion of the social organism and gave each person a sense of belonging, of usefulness and dignity. Actually, the connection between work and dignity comes from a capitalist discourse.

One of the greatest preoccupations of the nineteenth century was the social organism, and many authors dedicated their lives to understand the rules under which it operated and to try to conciliate its perfect functioning with the individual happiness of man. George Eliot and Charles Dickens were two examples of novelists who sought to reconcile a deep psychological depiction of characters with a broader understanding of the prevailing social order. Furthermore, they tried to harmonize both instances of life within the boundaries of literature, for such questions must have truly moved them.

For no other reason than the preoccupation with the functioning of the social organism, famous thinkers as Karl Marx, Max Weber and Émile Durkheim advanced the social sciences during this period. The historical context favored their interests, and their theories became ideologies that actually influenced the social conformation of some countries ó especially Marx.

The appeal of the social body's well-being hardly ever failed to arouse men's disposition to work. If it did, discursive devices and many sorts of physical or psychological constraints were disposable to change their minds. After all, it was not respectable to avoid work, and nobody would want to be deemed unrespectable in a Victorian society, since many disciplinary institutions existed specifically to remind people of the importance of such values. Dickens never failed to explore the various disgraces that might befall a poor man's (or even a boy's) life if he was impelled by necessity or coercion to choose any other path but that of hard work.

5. THE PUBLIC OPINION

Since the Enlightenment and particularly after the French Revolution, man and woman become hostages to the all-encompassing public opinion – a creation which they help to construct and to legitimize. In an interesting study of the formation of the public opinion, the post-war historian Reinhart Koselleck investigates the transformations occurred between the dawn of the Modern Age and the period of Enlightenment, respecting such theme, through two famous philosophers: Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. This analysis is important since in very little cases in History has this unofficial power constituted by the social body as a whole played so relevant a role as within the Victorian Age.

Briefly exposing, in the reading of Thomas Hobbes one is confronted with the sixteenth century's atmosphere of turbulence and fear occasioned by civil and religious wars around Europe. Individual morals crashed into one another continually, and intolerance disturbed national peace everywhere. Before such awful prospects, Hobbes idealizes that all men should abdicate of their individual morals in the public sphere and put themselves under the protection of the king, under the famous Hobbesian *raison d'État*. The State is now to be ruled by a moral policy whose only purpose is to end civil war and maintain peace; the individuals must obey the government, but they may preserve their beliefs privately. That is, actions are submitted, without exception, to the law of the State, but conviction is free (KOSELLECK, 1999, p. 37).

The Modern Age is constructing, then, the idea of the "individual", which had not existed as such hitherto. Man had been only what he could expose: it was extraordinary to suggest that he could preserve an interior existence apart from the public stage of society. But

that is the central idea that our contemporary society owes to Hobbes and many other Renaissance artists and philosophers: that man is naturally parted in two, the private and the public sides.

According to Koselleck, Locke agrees with the separation of the individual in two parts and the Enlightenment actually fixes the notion of the individual *öcoreö*, or *öessenceö*, that is indivisible and apart from his external self ó a Renaissance construction. Locke believed, however, in a second form of power (other than the king), the so-called *öpublic opinionö*, which would be a collective transposition of inner beliefs to the public sphere. When the intimate considerations of an individual find echo in others' considerations, they unite themselves to be heard and form the *öpublic opinionö* which proves its legitimacy by having political decisions taken by the power of its judgment.

Koselleck (1999, p. 52) summarizes:

Private and public spaces are in no way excluding. On the contrary, the public space emanates from the private one. The certainty that the moral interior forum has of itself resides in its capacity to become public. The private space enlarges itself by its own force in public space, and it is just in the public space that the private opinions are manifested as laws.

The public opinion is, in a certain way, the *ösoulö* of the disciplinary power. It sets the directions that must be taken by the political forces. At the same time, it is driven at great measure by such power, as both live a symbiotic relationship. The power of coercion goes as far as it can to persuade society of the necessity of order ó which is its ultimate goal ó, but it is submitted to the frontiers established by the public opinion, since any power needs legitimacy within the society in which it is acting, and this generalized opinion is the best thermometer. One regulates the other.

6. SCIENTIFIC SUPREMACY

In the nineteenth century, the public opinion was mostly regulated by two disciplinary fields of knowledge: religion and science ó although, in England, an appeal to the vague but almighty *öcommon senseö* would have been more effective and incarnated both instances. Russell Goldfarb (1970, p. 22) argues *ö[t]he stern religious attitude toward English morality was formed not öby high Anglicans in the established church, but by low church*

Evangelicals and groups of Methodists who had been expelled from the State church in the reign of George III.

These religious discourses may have had a powerful role in the construction of this Victorian morality, but the ascending social class which demanded this new imagery counted with many other discursive forces to overcome the difficult task of reeducating society within its own models. As Goldfarb (1970, p. 21) himself admits,

[r]eligious involvement was popular at least through the middle of the century when the combination of scientific findings (primarily by the geologist Charles Lyell and the naturalist Charles Darwin) and the religious findings of the Higher Criticism (Strauss, Renan) finally gathered enough force after years of coming together to make comfortable religious belief impossible.

From the 1850s onwards, then, scientific discourse became the order of the day. Except for the Evangelicals and Methodists, the majority of the capitalist society had never thought seriously of religious devotion anyway. The church was a place to be attended periodically as involuntarily as many visits to rich and pompous benefactors were, for instance. One did not give much thought to it, but only performed it accordingly. Those who actually cared for religion were struck by its inconsistencies or suffered the incompatibility of living such medieval life within modern society, like Dorothea.

Concerning sexuality, the theme to be here discussed, however, both science and religion amicably shook hands along the whole century – for different reasons, of course. Whether human beings came from Adam and Eve or prehistoric apes, it was certain that the temptations of the body should be kept on guard, for, according to recently born Biology, every impulse that men shared with animals was deemed primitive, barbarian, and, therefore, pernicious to society as a whole and to individual health. Science separated what was supposed to be “natural” from what was cultural, as much as religion has always separated body from soul. Culture would be only in its perfect condition if it were, though, subjected to this misty conception of “Nature” – an umbrella-concept that embraced anything that the disciplinary power prescribed and the public opinion applauded. Actually, everything that a Victorian chose to call “natural” had been culturally constructed as such. A Victorian fellow wearing a lustrous top hat would accept, as much as his corseted lady, that there are thousands of different cultures around the globe: the only one, however, that truly respected the “nature” of human beings was their own.

It would not be accurate to say that sexuality was repressed in the Victorian Era simply because there is no aprioristic sexuality to be repressed or freed. There is no such divine or natural impulse destined to manifest itself in human beings in a specific manner that can be barred only by external forces. In the words of Foucault (2005, p. 114), "what is involved is the production of sexuality rather than the repression of sex". What the nineteenth century did was to construct a new understanding of sexuality, a new field of knowledge, and accomplish it with special minutia, trying to fill all the blank spaces and to delimit all the areas.

It was as if the disciplinary power sought to compensate with the exhaustive construction of all the sites of human life the element of stability that the bourgeois dominion lacked; and so efficient was this extensive education that the century developed progressively the incredible device of individual self-control, coming to a state of things in which delimitations were no longer necessary. People were driven automatically by self-constraint, and, when they stayed out of guard, their sense of remorse was so acute as to conduct them to desperate measures, as thorough reformation and even suicide which turned them into models to be avoided.

As the structures of this sexual morality were being constructed by scientific knowledge, the disciplinary power and the public opinion fulfilled their duties of checking and regulating practices as much as they set the norms to be followed, in a dialectic process.

The nucleus of production and reproduction of the bourgeois sexuality was, as one would predict, the family cell. The members of the family learned from youth to supervise one another's practices constantly, and it was in the name of this institution's well-being that the knowledge about the subject claimed to be produced.

7. THE BIRTH OF A MYTH

The creation of the angel-like myth of womanhood seemed to have been as necessary as the taming of workers and any manipulation of minorities which might have damaged the industrial progress and the full development of the bourgeois imagery. After all, in the overly competitive capitalist world, the last thing Victorian men needed was to compete with their own wives for opportunities of work.

The entire population was educated to fulfill their duties to the nation, and the woman played an essential ó although in every sense subjected ó part in the process. The pragmatic separation of private and public spheres awarded the woman with a domain, the Victorian home, from whence her power was supposed to be felt by society and her values spread. The myth seemed perfectly integrated in the whole cohesive and ordained social organism; myths, however, might fail sooner or later for their obvious immateriality.

However flawed, the reminiscences of such marble figure are distinguished even today when themes such as familial/sexual roles or taboos are brought forth. As Virginia Wolf perceived in 1931, it is such a colossal mission to kill once and for all this perniciously charming *Angel in the House*. If ever murdered, the question remains of how fully to replace her omniscient presence ó and what this presence means ó, how to bury her eternally and finally forget her ó or how to feel less disturbed by her previous existence ó when her powerful selflessness is still evident in the voiceless condition of all women.

8. CONCLUSION

The whole obsession with order and solidity from the bourgeoisie and its constant panic of failing and of eventually losing its conquered supremacy produced, as one may conclude from this work, a frantically neurotic doctrine of self-repression.

The breaking of the Angel's myth was clarified by the appearance of the coquettish mermaid-like myth of womanhood whose power of transformation the rational Victorian minds could not understand and, therefore, feared , and by the profusion of the also mythical 'fallen women' in art and other cultural manifestations. These two examples and some other distortions of the central myth became progressively common from the last decades of the nineteenth century on exactly the period of decay for the flourishing Victorian Era. After all, the depiction of a disorderly womanly power in these new idealizations only reflected men's recognition of their own incapacity to control everything. From the beginning of the twentieth century on, the bourgeoisie would gradually learn that a strange however effective kind of order may spring from the constant reinventions of precious values, morals and myths. It would learn that *changes* even if momentarily chaotic are the only guarantee of permanence at least in a capitalist world.

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