



# ‘The spell was broken’: Defying Petrifying Patriarchy in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* by Anne Brontë

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## Anne’s Mission

‘My object in writing the following pages was not simply to amuse the Reader, neither was it to gratify my own taste, nor yet to ingratiate myself with the Press and the Public: I wished to tell the truth, for truth always conveys its own moral to those who are able to receive it.

I shall not limit my ambition to [...] producing a perfect work of art: time and talents so spent, I should consider wasted and misapplied.

(A. Brontë, ‘Preface To The Second Edition’, 1848).

## The Angel in the House

Central to my research is a discussion of how Anne anticipates concerns of twentieth-century literary feminism. The revolutionary text, *The Madwoman in the Attic* by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, discusses the psychoanalytical phenomenon of the patriarchal imaging of women as angels and monsters. The image of the angel is aesthetically static and lifeless. Anne articulates a similar concern through the experiences of static ‘petrification’ of her heroine, Helen. It is only upon her freedom from patriarchal aesthetics and ‘the death of the Angel’ (that Virginia Woolf would later discuss in ‘Professions for Women’) that Helen is able to be spiritually free and experience true, egalitarian, romantic love.



## Refusing Perfection; Killing ‘The Angel in the House’

*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* radically defies the petrifying surface aesthetics of patriarchal ideals of women. Brontë achieves this through innovative literary techniques anticipating Nietzschean perspectivism and the feminist literary theories of Virginia Woolf, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, building on her near-contemporary, Mary Wollstonecraft. Through this, Anne’s novel asserts a radical egalitarian revision of Victorian values surrounding gender, theology, marriage, and romantic love.