

## ABSTRACT

### SELECT, ORDER, SHAPE: WOMEN'S AUTHORITY AND THE GENERIC CONVENTIONS OF LIFE-WRITING IN THE NOVELS OF ANNE BRONTË

This study of Anne Brontë novels, Agnes Grey and The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, examines how narrative codes for writing the self and identity underwrite the gendered division of the public and the private spheres in the Victorian era. This thesis focuses on the interrelated genres of the autobiography, diary, *Bildungsroman*, and confessional to interrogate women's ability to manipulate genre and gender dichotomies to resist their containment in the private sphere and exclusion from discursive authority. Though the heroines of Brontë's novels conform to certain conservative aspects of gender construction and related narrative conventions, they are able to situate themselves within the competing models of masculine and feminine subjectivity so that they are able to offer authoritative critiques of the ideologies that disempower them, and destabilize the naturalized divisions between public and private, and male and female through their performances of gender and genre on both sides of the binary.

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