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Faculty of Education

Department of the English Language and Literature

BACHELOR THESIS

Marriage and the Position of Women in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*

Manželství a pozice žen v díle Anny Brontëové *Dvojitý život Heleny Grahamové* a díle Charlotte Brontëové *Jana Eyrová*

Michaela Dlouhá

Thesis supervisor: Bernadette Higgins, M.A.

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Declaration:

I hereby declare that I have elaborated this thesis individually and that all the sources that were used are listed on the Works Cited section. No other sources were used. Furthermore, I confirm that this work has not been used to obtain another or the same title before.

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Abstract

The thesis aims to explore the position of women in the Victorian era, particularly with regard to marriage, and to see how this is reflected in these two novels - *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* by Anne Brontë and *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë. The theoretical part explores the legal and social situation of women in the early nineteenth century and the practical part firstly analyses the novels separately to see how both authors reflect the realities facing women of the era. The last section of the practical part offers the overall comparison of the two chosen novels and examines differences and similarities in the central messages and in the final achievement of independence, equality and justice.

Key words: Brontë sisters, marriage, Angel in the House, education, feminism, legal form, Victorian era, the church

Abstrakt

Tato bakalářská práce si klade za cíl rozebrat postavení žen viktoriánské éry, zejména pak ve vztahu k manželství. To je ukázáno na příkladu dvou děl - *Dvojitý život paní Grahamové* autorky Anny Brontëové a *Jana Eyrová* autorky Charlotte Brontëové. Teoretická část práce se soustřeďuje na společenskou situaci žen v první polovině devatenáctého století a praktická část nejprve jednotlivě analyzuje zmíněná díla, v nichž autorky zobrazily reálné postavení žen své doby. Poslední sekce praktické části se pak věnuje porovnání těchto děl, zkoumá jejich rozdílnost a podobnost v hlavním poselství a závěrečném dosažení nezávislosti, rovnocennosti a spravedlnosti.

Klíčová slova: sestry Brontëovy, manželství, Anděl v domě, vzdělání, feminismus, legální reforma, Victoriánská doba, církev

Table of content

1	Introductory Part.....	7
2	Theoretical Part	8
2.1	Victorian society.....	8
2.1.1	Introduction to the Conditions of the Victorian Era	8
2.2	Women’s Position within the Context of Social Stratification.....	8
2.2.1.1	Women’s Position in Different Social Classes	9
2.2.1.1.1	Working-Class Women	9
2.2.1.1.2	Middle-Class Women.....	10
2.2.1.1.3	Upper-Class Women	10
2.2.2	The Importance of Religion for the General Perception of Women	11
2.2.2.1	The Biblical Division of Women	11
2.2.3	Progressive Changes for the Female Part of Society in the Victorian Era	12
2.3	The Position of Women in Victorian Society.....	13
2.3.1	The Ideal Woman	13
2.3.2	The Process of Courtship.....	15
2.3.3	The Concept of Marriage.....	16
2.3.4	Women’s Restrictions and Duties	16
2.3.5	Women’s Limited Options	18
2.3.6	Pioneering Rebellious Resistance.....	19
3	Practical Part.....	22
3.1	The Tenant of Wildfell Hall	22
3.1.1	The Process of Courtship in the Novel.....	23
3.1.1.1	Helen’s Decision as a Deterrent Example	25
3.1.1.1.1	Helen’s Suitors	25
3.1.1.1.2	Warnings	26
3.1.2	Dysfunctional Marriage.....	27
3.1.2.1	Helen and Mr. Huntingdon’s Development	27
3.1.2.1.1	Helen versus the Angel in the House	28
3.1.2.1.2	Different Means of Helen’s Escape.....	29
3.1.2.2	Other Examples of Dysfunctional Marriage.....	31
3.1.3	Contradictory Attitudes to Marriage and the Position of Women.....	32
3.1.3.1	The Traditional Attitude	32
3.1.3.2	The Innovative Attitude.....	33

3.1.4	The Final Destination of Equality and Justice	34
3.1.4.1	The Ideal Model of Marriage in Equality	35
3.1.4.2	Justice in the Form of Rewarded and Punished Characters.....	35
3.2	Jane Eyre	37
3.2.1	Jane’s Early Resistance to Social Norms	38
3.2.1.1	Possible Reasons for Jane’s Resistance.....	38
3.2.1.2	Gradual Subduing of Jane’s Anger and Resistance.....	40
3.2.2	Partial Independence and Partial Imprisonment.....	41
3.2.3	Different Types of Women and Their Positions.....	43
3.2.3.1	Aspects of the Angel in the House	43
3.2.3.2	The Fallen Women	44
3.2.3.3	Exemplary Models versus Criticized Models.....	44
3.2.3.4	Bertha’s Ambiguous Role	45
3.2.4	Courtship and Marriage in the Novel	46
3.2.4.1	The Courtship of Mr. Rochester and Blanche	47
3.2.4.2	Jane’s Rejected Suitors.....	47
3.2.5	The Final Achievement of Peace and Equality	49
3.3	The Comparison of The Tenant of Wildfell Hall and Jane Eyre.....	50
3.3.1	The Central Message	50
3.3.2	Different Ways of Reaching Independence.....	52
3.3.3	The Final Achievement of Justice	53
4	Conclusive Part.....	55

1 Introductory Part

I grew up rereading Jane Eyre again and again, mesmerized by the mysterious world Charlotte Brontë created as well as by Jane's musings, which left a serious imprint on my opinions and fantasy. Also, it caused my further interest in the Brontës, therefore it was a pleasure for me to delve into their world of quiet rebellion once again in order to create this thesis. The theme of marriage and the position of women, which I decided to analyze in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, is fundamental for me as a woman. Moreover, it is of high importance in general; for even though we live in the 21st century, women still have to face oppression, though in quite different forms than in the Victorian era.

My bachelor thesis is divided into the theoretical and the practical part. In the former I deal with the general norms set in the Victorian society in relation to women; furthermore I focus on particular topics, such as the appearance of Victorian courtship and marriage, concepts of 'the angel in the house', 'the fallen woman' and 'the new woman', what exactly ensued from women's position and on the pioneering rebellious resistance, which contributed to the overall progression of women's pitiful situation.

The analysis of the two chosen novels in the latter part is based on the findings from the theoretical part. Each novel is firstly examined individually and in the last section their comparison is offered.

The aim of this thesis is to provide an in-depth insight into the conditions of Victorian society related to the two novels and to analyze how the authors depicted marriage and the position of women in their writing, what they criticized or suggested, and most importantly how they demonstrated their desire to be accepted as human beings with an independent will equal to the male part of society by means of their heroines, who both achieved the final stage of marriage in independence and equality despite the restrictive social norms and general attitudes.

2 Theoretical Part

2.1 Victorian society

2.1.1 Introduction to the Conditions of the Victorian Era

During the era of Queen Victoria's reign, which lasted exactly between 1837 and 1901, significant changes took place in politics, law, economics, and overall in the whole society. England gradually transformed to an industrial society based on democratic principles and there was a significant shift in population stratification, religion, patterns in the area of work and education, and even in terms of women's rights and their position. Although Victorian society was still immensely patriarchal, the last decades of this epoch brought a more liberal approach even to the subject of women. At the beginning of the historical period, the general situation of the female part of society was pitiful, their rights were greatly limited and they were predominantly dependent on the male part of society. However, at the close of the century they gained several important rights and began to be deemed more respectful and worthy of treatment more equal to men (Mitchell 10-11).

Even though women did not reach their desired position of equals to men yet, the results of the very complicated struggle for their rights brought significant results. The theoretical part of this thesis deals with social norms and expectations rooted in society preventing women from the achievement of equality, as well as rebellious efforts to gain a more respectful position in society and consequent results of their endeavors. The first half focuses on the Victorian society more universally, with a special focus on social stratification, the role of religion and progressive changes in favour of women throughout the 19th century. The second part deals with women's oppression more specifically; it examines not only Victorian women's restricted position in society – what it meant, offered and prohibited, but also their function within courtship and marriage. Terms such as 'ideal woman', 'fallen woman', or "new woman" are introduced and explained. Furthermore, pioneering rebellious attempts against women's oppression are put into context with the Brontë sisters and their work. All mentioned above is contemplated on account of its interconnectedness with the practical analysis of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and *Jane Eyre*.

2.2 Women's Position within the Context of Social Stratification

Women's position in the Victorian society ensued from the social class to which they belonged. Even though throughout the course of the nineteenth century, significant changes in

the social stratification of England's population could be observed, at the beginning of the era, English society was still strictly stratified into three main social classes – the working class, the middle class and the upper class. Members of each class had to take heed of different social norms and expectations. In general, for women of all the classes there were a very limited number of rights and opportunities, which their position entailed. For most of the Victorian period, basic patterns of the stratification persisted and continued directing the course of society, as well as the destiny of women. As for the criteria of the division, the quantity of wealth was not the only decisive factor. Even though the source of people's income was of great importance, their birth and family connections were of considerable importance too.

Commonly, women were expected to respect their place in the social hierarchy and accept their position in it with all its related obligations and customs. Each class heeded certain manners; their social class affiliation could be recognized from the way they spoke, or the way they were attired. The social classes differed in their occupations, values and in the level of their education. Generally, it was considered inappropriate to behave differently from what ensued from the position they were born with, or in the case of married women from the position of their husbands, as their husbands' social status always determined their own situation (Mitchell 17).

2.2.1.1 Women's Position in Different Social Classes

2.2.1.1.1 Working-Class Women

As for working class women, their position differed substantially from the women of the middle and upper classes, for they were expected to earn money to contribute to their family budget. Moreover, their occupations were usually physically demanding and living conditions harsh. In the working class, despite being still committed to their socially inherited gender roles, they all, no matter if men or women, had to undergo the same cruel circumstances. Both girls and boys were forced to work from a very early age, and if they attended a school, then only for a considerably short period of time. Further in their lives, they typically married within their class. And again, both husbands and wives had to earn money to get by, and also to save enough to survive the period of time when children were born, during which a wife had to stay at home in order to fulfil her role of a nurturer, and thus only a husband could continue working. But as soon as possible, the wife joined her husband's efforts again and ideally, even their children. Typical occupations of working-class women were domestic servants, washerwomen, seamstresses, knitters, farmers, factory workers etc (Burnett).

2.2.1.1.2 Middle-Class Women

Considering women of the middle class, they were not expected to undergo such exertions, rather on the contrary, as most of them were not allowed to work at all. If they did, it was typically the case of unmarried women with no male relatives who would be able to provide them with a sufficient financial background. In such circumstances, they would probably end up as either governesses, or teachers, for these occupations were respectable enough for middle-class members of society and also they were not very physically demanding. Otherwise in marriage, women were restricted to the position of obedient wives, loving mothers and housekeepers, and the responsibility for the family's income usually rested completely in the hands of men, who had to be educated and, unlike the working-class members, they were expected to work rather mentally than physically. "A man's status depended primarily on his occupation and on the family into which he was born; a married woman's status derived from her husband" (Mitchell 21).

Affiliation to the middle class required observing certain morals, values, customs and standards of living. In general, they valued education, Christian principles, moral virtues, and sexual modesty. One of the most significant features of the middle class was their family togetherness. The three given roles of women – a wife, a mother and a housekeeper were expected to be respected and fulfilled. The importance of woman's obedience and motherhood was highlighted substantially. "The message that motherhood was woman's highest achievement, albeit within marriage, never weakened through the course of the century. Indeed, it was in this period that motherhood was idealised as the zenith of a woman's emotional and spiritual fulfilment. At the same time, however, motherhood was becoming a social responsibility, a duty to the state and thus a full-time job, which could not easily be combined with paid work" (Abrams).

2.2.1.1.3 Upper-Class Women

The upper class, which consisted of aristocrats and the landed gentry, was "a hereditary landowning class, whose income came from the rental of their property"(Mitchell 21). Those who inherited a title, or land, did not need to engage in paid work, though they usually had social and political obligations, which ensued from their position. Women belonging to the upper class usually spent their lives in wealth, comfort, and idleness. They were surrounded by maids, servants, and other domestic workers who were responsible for their constant well-being. Girls belonging to the upper class were commonly educated by governesses and then stayed at home until there appeared a befitting suitor for them who would ask for their hand.

Afterwards, they exchanged their confinement within their family circle for confinement within matrimony. Their life of boredom was supplemented with certain obligations connected with their social status, however, their freedom of will and choice was restricted and dependent on male authorities equally to middle-class women.

Though they differed in social status and living conditions, women throughout the whole spectrum of social classes shared the same fate of being deemed weaker, less intelligent and incapable of independent decision-making. As a result of that, they were deprived of many rights and had to depend on the male part of society in most important matters.

2.2.2 The Importance of Religion for the General Perception of Women

Firm faith in God played an important role in Victorians' reasoning, and subsequently women's function in marriage and society in the Victorian era. Throughout the whole century, The Church of England remained the country's established religion, though there were also other commonly accepted churches, such as Methodists, Baptists, Quakers, Presbyterians and others (Mitchell 243). As a result of vast majority of Christians prevailing in the 19th century, virtues and obligations shaped people's way of thinking, and no less importantly impacted on the concept of marriage and the position of women. Christianity entailed the duality of heaven and hell linked with obedience and damnation for disobedience. For women it meant double devotion and submission – to God, and to their husband.

Going to church was an ordinary part of people's social life, as well as wedding ceremonies, funerals and christenings. Local clergymen were respected as intellectual and spiritual authorities, whose main task was to enlighten both men and women, and implement faith into their everyday lives, for example by means of Sunday schools. Their main purpose was to cultivate people's belief and to educate males as well as females of all ages, and thus the impact of religion on people's daily life and thinking was profound (Mitchell 170).

2.2.2.1 The Biblical Division of Women

As formerly suggested, religion had an immense impact on the perception of women, their qualities, position and function in society. In the Bible, there appear two influential female figures, rooted in believers' minds and crucial for the Victorian outlook on women – the Virgin Mary, who supported the concept of the ideal woman, obedient, pure and virtuous; and Eve, who underpinned the concept of the fallen woman, who was disobedient, evil and damnable. It culminated in “the division of Victorian womanhood into the polarised extremes of ‘madonnas’ and ‘magdalenes’” (King 10).

The image of the Madonna connoted motherhood and chastity, two important aspects of women's lives, to which they were expected to dedicate themselves, and hence their sexuality had to be suppressed. "What emerges out of this iconography is a highly idealised picture of woman as disembodied, spiritual and, above all, chaste. Chastity, moreover, meant for many not only a lack of sexual experience, but a lack of sexual feeling, or 'passionlessness'" (King 10-11). As female sexuality was taken as inappropriate and reprehensible, women were raised to search for satisfaction in their moral strength and piety.

2.2.3 Progressive Changes for the Female Part of Society in the Victorian Era

The Victorian society was highly patriarchal, which resulted in unjust treatment and oppression of women. However, closer to the end of the century, women's situation began to change, as they gradually won more rights and were able to participate in areas which had been considered inappropriate for them before. In this section, there are introduced several important changes which led to the overall betterment of women's position in society.

Originally, England's political power rested completely in hands of the privileged upper class and only the voice of men who held enough property could be heard and followed. But throughout the course of the period, as a result of gradual relaxation of the strictly given division of social classes and gender roles, the right to vote was extended to all male householders, and also women who had never been allowed to participate in the electoral process before were given at least the right to vote in county council elections in 1888 (Mitchell 11). Furthermore, at the end of the century, they gained more respect in terms of their intelligence and qualification for education, and were allowed to be educated almost equally to men – they were permitted to attend all degrees of university studies, including medicine. In 1857, women gained the right to divorce their husbands without a special permission of Parliament (Mitchell 11). And on account of the Married Women's Property Act in 1882, their property was protected more than before. "The Act restored to married women the right to own, sell and buy property and returned their legal identities, allowing them to sue, be sued, contract debt and be made bankrupt" ("Married Women's Property and Divorce").

And thus women approached legal equality to men substantially. However, the eradication of the perception of women as weaker and less rational beings as well as of the expectations of their obedience and commitment to their socially inherited position within marriage and family required more exertion than just introducing new laws. Women's efforts

to change their current situation, to stand up for their rights and to let their voice be heard and followed were of high importance, too. The second section of the theoretical part offers a more in-depth insight into what preceded this betterment: what was required of them, what they were allowed and how they strived to overcome these restrictions.

2.3 The Position of Women in Victorian Society

Women's expected position in society entailed many limitations and lack of rights and opportunities. This second main section focuses firstly on the concept of the ideal woman, then on marriage preceded by courtship, furthermore it examines the restrictions and limited number of options in more detail, and in the end it deals with pioneering rebellious resistance and introduces important female personalities who, along with the impact of the Brontës' work, contributed to the overall progression. All the examined subjects should facilitate understanding of marriage and the position of women in the two novels analysed in the practical part.

2.3.1 The Ideal Woman

It was understood as a naturally given fact, which was supported by religion, science, and society as a whole, that "women, though enormously valuable members of society in many respects, represented a less evolved stage of human development. Compared with men, they were physically weaker, more impulsive, more neurologically sensitive thus more emotionally volatile, less capable of high-level philosophical thought and less inclined to rational argument" (Snodgrass 1). On the other hand, they were taken as "more spiritual, more nurturing, more intuitively moral, and gentler than men" (Snodgrass 1), which confirmed their qualification for the expected role of mothers and wives.

The image of the Victorian ideal woman is well displayed in a narrative poem written by Coventry Patmore where "the figure of the sexless angel crosses into domestic ideology, embodying all the Christian virtues of love, purity and self-sacrifice so as to act as moral centre of the family" (King 11). And such were the common expectations of a woman, to be spiritual, pure, devoted to her masculine authorities, also reputable, yet completely reliant on her parents as a daughter and then on her husband as a wife. The Angel, the ideal wife from Patmore's poem 'The Angel in the House', was portrayed as utterly submissive, willing to please her husband unconditionally, and fulfil his orders and wants. The Angel should serve as a role model for women to learn by her example. Therefore they grew up believing that such oppression and abuse from men is righteous, although it could seriously damage their mental health.

Man must be pleased; but him to please
Is woman's pleasure; down the gulf
Of his condoled necessities
She casts her best, she flings herself.
[...]
And if he once, by shame oppress'd,
A comfortable word confers,
She leans and weeps against his breast,
And seems to think the sin was hers;
Or any eye to see her charms,
At any time, she's still his wife,
Dearly devoted to his arms;
She loves with love that cannot tire;
And when, ah woe, she loves alone,
Through passionate duty love springs higher,
As grass grows taller round a stone.
(Patmore 109)

Not a less important role played Queen Victoria, by whose example women should learn to dedicate themselves to marriage and motherhood. “Indeed, Victoria came to be seen as the very model of marital stability and domestic virtue. Her marriage to Albert represented the ideal of marital harmony. She was described as 'the mother of the nation', and she came to embody the idea of home as a cosy, domestic space” (Abrams).

As a result, women who deviated from such expectations and proved unwillingness to submit to the social rules were deemed defective and reprehensible. Commonly, they were not expected to express their own opinions, to follow their own will, or to stand up for themselves when they were wronged, and if they did, they were criticized and sneered at. This can be observed in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* where the main protagonist Helen speaks and behaves independently on her husband and stands up for herself or her friends when maltreated. On account of that, she is considered to be mad and referred to as “devil”, or “monster” (A. Brontë 282). On the contrary, women who obeyed their husbands unconditionally and spent their lives in utter submission were often exposed to self-deprecation and abuse, which could

really lead to madness (as possibly in the case of Mr. Rochester's first wife, who eventually became as mad, which could have been caused by submission to her husband).

As an evil counterbalance of the flawless Victorian ideal woman there appears the term "fallen woman", which refers to "an irrevocable loss of innocence, a concept originating in the biblical fall in the Garden of Eden; the characterisation of Eve as temptress inextricably links her fallen state with the loss of sexual purity" (Lee). This term was used to describe women of fallen morals, which were utterly unacceptable in respectable Victorian society. However, in broader terms, it could have been used for women who deviated somehow from their expected roles as wives and mothers. Fallen women were those who disobeyed the rules of society, violated the sanctity of their family, conceived a child or had an affair outside marriage, or even engaged in prostitution (Lee; White).

2.3.2 The Process of Courtship

The concept of marriage had its strictly expected shape and it was preceded by a not less constraining process of courtship. When a girl was grown enough to leave the confinement within her family, her relatives were responsible for preparing her for future marriage and presenting her in public. Even though her parents or guardians were not completely in charge of finding her the most suitable husband, they could contribute to the process of searching for him by means of introducing her only to men respectable and prosperous enough to ask for her hand and then creating an environment conducive to falling in love.

The company into which she was brought as well as the way she was presented and attired, and also her consequent chances to attract prospective suitors ensued from her social status and the financial background of her family. "Among the respectable middle and upper classes, all courtship was essentially conducted in public: at parties, dances, and teas; during afternoon calls; at picnics and musical evenings; in the presence of chaperones" (Mitchell 159). The whole process of courtship was usually regulated by her family and there was scarcely an opportunity for her to decide individually. Moreover, there was usually no period of time before marriage during which a couple could continue seeing each other with no intrusion from the others, and thus they did not have many opportunities to get to know each other and recognize whether their personalities matched and could possibly lead to satisfactory marriage.

To protect unmarried girls from middle- and upper-class families during the process of courtship, there were chaperones, who were also in charge of introducing them to an appropriate society where they could make suitable male acquaintances and narrow her

choice. “Although arranged marriages were no longer acceptable, choices were regulated by carefully mixing suitable young people. At a dance or reception, a chaperone was needed not to prevent improper behavior but rather to evaluate men’s rank and character“ (Mitchell 156).

After there appeared a suitor agreeable enough for the girl and her family, he could propose. Their engagement could last quite a long time until the man was fully prepared to offer his future wife financial security (Mitchell 159). Afterwards, if there were no other objections, they could proceed to marriage.

2.3.3 The Concept of Marriage

Marriage was considered the peak of what a woman could aspire to and the position of a loving wife and mother was taken as her lifetime purpose. They were expected to devote their lives to the sanctity of marriage, become one with their husbands, thus submit to their will, and obediently fulfill their required roles; once married, women were under a constant legal direction of their husbands. They should strive to please their husbands and occupy themselves with childcare, household management and innocent leisure activities like embroidery, reading, playing the piano, or painting. For many women in this era self-sufficiency, freedom of choice and self-realization in marriage were beyond their power.

As Victorian feminist Barbara Leigh-Smith Bodichon reported, “A man and wife are one person in law; the wife loses all her rights...her body belongs to her husband” (Bodichon 24). Therefore women’s fate rested completely in the hands of their husbands. A wife as her husband’s legal property depended on her husband’s will and resolutions and could not decide on her own, unless she was allowed to.

However, as formerly stated, later in the 19th century women gained more independence and could even divorce their husbands, if their union was unsatisfactory. Finally, their decision who to marry was not as crucial as before, and if their former choice of partner led to dysfunctional marriage, there was a way out for them. And allegedly there were many of such cases, for the number of women divorcing their husbands increased, especially after the Married Women’s Property Act in 1882 (“Married Women’s Property and Divorce”).

2.3.4 Women’s Restrictions and Duties

The general position of women in Victorian society was onerous and restrictive, did not entail many rights, and offered very limited options to the female part of society in terms of their career, self-expression, and most importantly their own independent will. As for important decisions, they had to depend on approval of their parents or husbands, for they were commonly deemed weak and not capable of rational thinking. Regarding middle-class

and upper-class women, their main purpose in life was to find themselves a suitable husband, produce children, and then occupy themselves with creating a comfortable home, securing their husband's happiness, and nurturing the children.

There were many professions which were utterly unconceivable for women. If middle-class women were supposed to work, which could be the case of the unmarried or orphaned ones, most probably they would end up as governesses, or teachers. Still, most middle-class women married, and thus they dedicated their whole life to their husbands, which meant that further on they were under their constant control and direction. As a result of their general purpose, daughters were usually educated in order to become devoted mothers and wives. There was no need for them to be as intellectually involved as men. On the contrary, sons' education was highly supported to enable them to find themselves a sufficient working position and gain respectable enough social status (Mitchell 181-182). Not until they were able to provide sustainable financial support to their future family would they be likely to find themselves a woman to marry. Generally, women of the middle and upper classes were expected to be financially supported by their husbands or by their male relatives if they were not married. There was a great omission of women in the sphere of finances and work; furthermore they were excluded from higher education and politics (Gordon and Nair 791).

As for orphaned middle-class girls, their situation was rather intricate. They could be either adopted, or placed in an educational institution for orphans. If they were adopted by members of a higher class, they did not automatically gain higher social status; on the contrary, they were still considered members of the class into which they were born. If they were admitted to an orphan school, they "were educated for the purpose of performing lower-middle class occupation such as that of a governess" (Joshi). It was possible for them to aspire to a position of a governess, or a teacher, as these professions were considered suitable for women, and at the same time they did not require such physical exertion as occupations of working-class women. And such was exactly the case of orphaned Jane Eyre, firstly adopted, later displaced to an orphan school, and as an adult assuming the role of a governess and a teacher, too. She could scarcely aspire to a different life path, or a different occupation.

Otherwise, paid work for middle-class women was not appropriate, especially when they were married. Then their only occupation was supposed to be the position of a housewife. "The concept of a 'housewife' (a married woman who simply looked after her house and family) did not exist until the eighteenth century, until with greater urbanisation the burgeoning of the middle classes occurred and female leisure became an indication of the husband's social status" (Spencer).

However, middle-class housewives were “also discouraged from doing housework, which was left to a growing army of specialised servants including housemaids, nursemaids, cooks and footmen. Even women at the bottom of the middle class, the wives of clerks and schoolteachers, expected to have a maid-of-all-work to do the dirtiest tasks like scrubbing the steps and peeling the potatoes” (Hughes). Their mission at home was to manage the domestic workers, to please their husbands, to nurture their children, and also to represent their husbands in the society of other class members. “The lady of the house herself became a walking billboard for her husband’s material success. She might change her clothes several times a day, wearing different outfits for breakfast, making calls and dinner. Her body, too, conveyed an important message about her social class. Her smooth white hands and cumbersome crinoline skirt hinted that she had not been busy with housework“ (Hughes).

2.3.5 Women’s Limited Options

Even though a woman’s life was mostly predetermined, there were at least a limited number of options in front of her. Foremost, there may have appeared several suitors, from whom she could possibly choose the one she most approved of. Such a decision was crucial, for a girl’s future destiny, social status and standard of living, as well as her family’s reputation were at stake. However, it was not always up to her who she was going to marry. Parents, or guardians would often interfere in their daughter’s resolution, therefore her freedom of choice depended on their benevolence.

Furthermore, women restricted to the role of domesticated “angels” could choose from several ways of self-realization and self-expression in order to make their burden of confinement more bearable. For example, they could engage in painting, which was not uncommon for Victorian women, either as a leisure activity, or as another source of income, possibly even contributing to their family budget, if their husbands approved. Not only could they prove their talents, it may have also served them as a proof of independence in a way. Moreover, through painting they could express themselves, too. Interestingly, painting serves as a way of expression to some extent in both analysed novels and in Helen’s case it is also used as a means of earning money.

Writing embodied another way of self-expression, the Brontë sisters serve as an ideal example. It may not have been so common for women to engage in writing as seriously as in painting, and it definitely was not as easy for them to succeed in that field as it was for men. However, they could keep a diary at the least, to which they could confess. Other leisure activities, to which they could commit themselves, were for example music and embroidery.

Another opportunity for women was religion. In faith they may found a higher purpose of their lives and self-realization, therefore they tended to be devoted believers and not rarely decided to become nuns. A database of Victorian convents “shows that, in the course of the nineteenth century, nuns were increasingly active in the work of the Catholic Church and that the establishment and development of female religious congregations was rapid and extensive“ (McAdam 417). A possible reason for their increasing piety might well have been faith in their alleged spiritual and moral superiority to men, which was attributed to them in general (McAdam 418). As a possible result of that, women proved growing interest in religion and charitable activities. An interesting option for them was participation in The Salvation Army, “a charitable organization where women and men did both preaching and welfare work. Women were promoted up through the Salvation Army’s military ranks, and married women were expected to have a public role in addition to their domestic duties“ (Mitchell 250).

2.3.6 Pioneering Rebellious Resistance

Women’s reactions to their restricted rights and social predetermination were naturally not only obedience and submission. There appeared several important female personalities who were able to see beyond their limits and recognize the unrighteousness of their position, moreover they were not afraid to deviate from the crowd, stand up for what they believed in and publicly express their disagreement. Even though firstly their opinions and courage were looked upon as damnable, later on they undoubtedly contributed to the overall progression of women’s position in marriage and society.

Before the Victorian era there were two such women, afterwards functioning as role models for feminist movements – Mary Astell and Mary Wollstonecraft. On account of their pioneering rebellious attempts to change women’s pitiful position in society, they are sometimes referred to as early feminists. Both of them believed in a greater potential of the female part of society and proposed many innovations considering progression of women’s rights and opportunities.

Mary Astell, who lived at the turn of 17th and 18th century, summarized her progressive ideas in *Serious Proposal to the Ladies for the Advancement of their True and Greatest Interest* and *Some Reflections upon Marriage*. In these writings she focuses primarily on the problem of women’s education and marriage. Jacqueline Broad, who specializes in early women philosophers, analyses Astell’s work and her main purpose with these words: “Throughout her works, Astell appeals to different philosophical ideas to argue

that women should receive a higher education, and to undermine the belief that women are naturally intellectually inferior to men” (Broad).

In *Serious Proposal to the Ladies*, Astell openly criticizes the lack of education and opportunities women are offered, which leads to men’s intellectual superiority to women and inauspicious imbalance between the male and female parts of society. She observes that “women are from their very infancy debarred those advantages with the want of which they are afterwards reproached” and warns that “ignorance and a narrow education lay the foundation of vice” (Astell 67-68).

In another work, *Some Reflections upon Marriage*, she comments on the concept of marriage and its current degenerated state, which has lost its connection with the original purpose and sanctity. Jacqueline Broad summarizes the main message: “Astell warns her fellow women to be extremely wary of entering into marriage in the first place. She points to the fact that a wife is expected to offer blind submission to her husband, even when he does not deserve it. This expectation of submission might lead a woman to ignore the dictates of her reason, the law of God, and to act in terms of worldly self-interest instead. As a result, an unhappy marriage to a vicious man could lead to the destruction of a woman’s soul“ (Broad). And again, Astell draws a conclusion that better education for women could be the solution, ensuring their moral and intellectual strength, preventing them from bad decisions.

Mary Wollstonecraft, a significant advocate of women’s rights in the 18th century, and her works *A Vindication of the Rights of Man* and *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* can serve as another example of an attempt to draw attention to the unjust imbalance of power and to question gender conventions rooted in society. Similarly to Mary Astell, she supports the idea of women’s equality in marriage and society achieved by means of better education: “Contending for the rights of woman, my main argument is built on this simple principle, that if she be not prepared by education to become the companion of man, she will stop the progress of knowledge and virtues; for truth must be common to all, or it will be inefficacious with respect to its influence on general practice” (Wollstonecraft 6).

Mary Astell and Mary Wollstonecraft, as well as other women dissatisfied with their expected roles including Anne and Charlotte Brontë, shared the same dream – for women to be accepted as equal human beings with the same rights and opportunities as men, or if not the same then at least better than those they were offered during their lifetime. And little by little, these brave women laid a solid foundation for later feminist movements and successive overall betterment of women’s position in society. Also, they underpinned the concept of the new woman – a woman who “was intelligent, educated, emancipated, independent and self-

supporting“ (Diniejko). Such women began to appear increasingly at the end of the 19th century; they strived for liberty and education and rebelled “against the foundations of paternalistic society and the supposed bliss of the traditional Victorian marriage” (Diniejko). As for the concept of the new woman in literature, Brontë’s works were anticipatory and supported later literary works dealing with the new woman by female authors such as Olivia Shreiner, Frances Elizabeth Clarke, or George Egerton, and among male authors there were for example Thomas Hardy and Grant Allen (Diniejko).

3 Practical Part

The practical part delves into the themes of marriage and the position of women in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* by Anne Brontë and in *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë. Each of the novels is firstly examined individually and in the last section of the practical part their comparison is offered, focusing on the central messages, attitudes of the authors and subsequently their heroines, and also on the final resolution.

3.1 The Tenant of Wildfell Hall

Compared to her sisters, Charlotte and Emily, Anne Brontë's novels are less known and less appreciated. Though her work may not have the greatest literary value, it conveys an important message. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* depicts the complicated destiny of a woman who thoughtlessly marries a wrong man with the inclination to alcohol and aggression, which leads to highly dysfunctional marriage. In the end, she decides to escape from him for the sake of her son and starts anew against all the social conventions and laws.

According to Anne herself, one of her main purposes was to raise awareness of the dangers in married life and to prevent her female readers from such a wrong decision as the main protagonist Helen made. Anne, or Acton Bell as was the pseudonym under which she wrote, explains her didactic purpose in a preface of the second edition of the novel: "...if I have warned one rash youth from following in their steps, or prevented one thoughtless girl from falling into the very natural error of my heroine, the book has not been written in vain" (A. Brontë 13). Though the character of Helen's tyrannical husband may seem disproportionately exaggerated, Anne Brontë's didactic purpose has to be remembered – she comments on it with these words: "The case is an extreme one, as I trusted none would fail to perceive; but I know that such characters do exist" (A. Brontë 14). She probably alludes to her brother Bronwell, whose fate was similar to Mr. Huntingdon's (Orme 21). Therefore her writing may have served also as a way to put up with his addiction and consequent decline.

Helen's decision and marriage can be perceived as a deterrent to unmarried girls. However, the authors offered her heroine a happy ending in the form a new, better man who embodies a chance for happy marriage in equality after her first husband's death. By means of Helen's life path and development her authors probably expressed her hope and optimistic outlook on the future development of women's position in society.

The authors includes both viewpoints, male and female – she used a 1st person narrative not only from the position of Helen but also from the position of her ideal partner Gilbert

Markham, and two different forms of epistolary technique – narration by means of letters and a diary.

The analysis of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* examines the process of courtship in the novel, different examples of dysfunctional marriage, the traditional and innovative attitude to marriage and the position and function of women. Also it focuses on the final achievement of justice and equality, by which the author delivers her message about the ideal order in marriage and society.

3.1.1 The Process of Courtship in the Novel

Back then, in the Victorian era, choosing the right man played a far more pivotal role in women's lives than nowadays, as it determined not only their future social status and lifestyle but more importantly it defined under whose legal direction they were going to spend the rest of their lives. Their relatives would interfere in the final decision on account of their interest in the possible social ladder advancement and financial background which the potential husbands could bring.

Throughout the novel, there appear several examples of courtship, each with a slightly different process, attitude of the couple and extent of interference from their relatives. Readers learn about Helen's courtship with Mr. Huntingdon and then with Mr. Markham, Milicent's courtship with Mr. Hattersley and Annabella's courtship with Lord Lowborough.

In the case of the main protagonist Helen, her guardians are unusually benevolent and leave the decision mostly up to her. They express their standpoints but their attitude is rather permissive. They care about Helen's outlook on marriage and do not force her to marry as soon as possible. Therefore among her three suitors, Mr. Wilmot, Mr. Boarham and Mr. Huntingdon, she can choose the only one she approves of – Mr. Huntingdon, despite her aunt's recommendations and warnings.

Mr. Huntingdon's approach to courtship gradually confirms the validity of her aunt's worries, as he continually plays with Helen's emotions, strives to arouse her feelings by flirting with another woman, teases her to a point of humiliation and ignores her temporarily on account of her rash rejection of him. As a result, Helen is tormented by jealousy and guilty conscience. She describes him as "the reigning tyrant of my thoughts" (A. Brontë 137). Such conduct confirms his socially expected superiority and can be read as "a critique of brutal masculinity" (Berry 112). At this point she should be well aware of how harmful his influence is but still she is not able to see beyond the idealized picture of Mr. Huntingdon and continues to like him. When Helen's desperation is taken to extremes, Mr. Huntingdon proposes and

soon after their engagement they get married. During the proposal he is said to “squeeze her to death” (A. Brontë 139), which aptly foreshadows his later impact on her.

On the contrary, during the courtship with Mr. Markham Helen, as an experienced woman, is far more sober and cautious than during the courtship with Mr. Huntingdon. She firstly suppresses her emotions and considers the situation rationally. Her prudent attitude and moral persistence seem to reform Mr. Markham’s initial masculinity and superiority almost comparable to Mr. Huntingdon’s in a way (Berry 115). Gradually, he becomes equally cautious, and obeys her wishes. He respects Helen’s complicated situation as a married woman and as a widow, too. In the end, he is concerned about their differences in social status and property, and thus he firstly considers himself even unworthy of Helen’s approval. But she expresses her permission, and consequently they get married.

Both Helen’s decisions are wilful and based on love, unlike in the case of many other women in the Victorian era. And both function as exemplary, the first one serves as a warning of how dangerous such a rash decision under the influence of emotions could be; the second one presents a desirable model of how rational and careful the decision should be.

Further in the novel, Milicent and Annabella represent the dichotomy of the angel in the house and the fallen woman, which is obvious also from their courtships. Milicent obeys her mother’s wishes, as she has scarcely such freedom in her decision making as Helen, and even though she fears and disapproves of Mr. Hattersley, she is afraid to express her disagreement, and thus she forces herself to love him. “If I am to be Mr. Hattersley’s wife, I must try to love him; and I do try with all my might. [...] I had not courage to contradict them then, and how can I do it now? I cannot: they would think me mad” (A. Brontë 179). And Mr. Hattersley expects his future wife to be as submissive as Milicent is, he wants her to “let me have my own way in everything” (A. Brontë 178). Their engagement is a result of Milicent’s utter obedience and Mr. Hattersley’s accordance with the common expectations of marriage.

On the contrary, Annabella’s approach to marriage differs substantially and resembles Mr. Huntingdon’s attitude. She manipulates Lord Lowborough and provokes his feelings by arousing jealousy. Her hinted promiscuity foreshadows her future evolving into the fallen woman. She marries him for his higher social status but Lord Lowborough’s decision to marry her is caused by the blindness of love, similarly to the case of Helen’s decision for Mr. Huntingdon. There the author offers an opposite example to Helen’s courtship – when a woman functions as a man’s tyrant.

3.1.1.1 Helen's Decision as a Deterrent Example

Helen's decision to marry Mr. Huntingdon is preceded by the choice between her three suitors and several warnings, by means of which the author warns her female readers, too.

3.1.1.1.1 Helen's Suitors

At the beginning there are three men interested in Helen, from whom she can choose – Mr. Wilmot, Mr. Boarham and Mr. Huntingdon. The first mentioned she describes as rich, but “old, ugly and disagreeable – and wicked” (A. Brontë 112), and her guardians appear to be of the same opinion. The second mentioned has better manners and is definitely more honourable. From her aunt's point of view, Mr. Boarham seems to be “upright, honourable, sensible, sober, respectable” (A. Brontë 116), therefore a perfect husband for her niece, but Helen does not approve of him at all and describes him as unbearably boring and unpleasant - “his looks, voice and manners are particularly displeasing to me” (A. Brontë 116). As superior by his masculinity, age and experience, Mr. Boarham assumes a role of a fatherly educator, who does not respect Helen's views, on the contrary he expects her to adopt all his opinions as better and wiser. What repulses her most on these two suitors is their conspicuous superiority and inability to talk to her as to an equal human being. As for Mr. Boarham's proposal, the decision is left entirely up to Helen, and thus she can reject him. Whether it was wise of her or not, considering her later decision to marry Mr. Huntingdon is debatable.

The last mentioned, Arthur Huntingdon, firstly functions as Helen's rescuer from the other suitors' attention. In comparison to them, he appears to be far more suitable for her and his first impression on Helen is great; still she notices “too much careless boldness in his manner and address” (A. Brontë 113). Her uncle describes him as “a bit wildish” (A. Brontë 114), and her aunt is seriously concerned about his righteousness. On the outside, he seems to respect her and appreciate her inner qualities, but true reasons for his affection probably dwell elsewhere. What attracts him to Helen at the very beginning are her suitors - he obviously longs to defeat them. Also, he is charmed by Helen's beauty and innocence. But Helen, in her immature naivety, idealizes Mr. Huntingdon and to him she attributes qualities which he either does not possess at all, or which he only pretends to have. Also, “Helen's sexual desire is apparent. [...] A powerful physicality defines Helen's relationship to Arthur Huntingdon; they cannot keep themselves to themselves” (Berry 112).

3.1.1.1.2 Warnings

Before the wedding, Helen receives several warnings, which could prevent her from the wrong decision to marry Mr. Huntingdon. There are three important warnings she receives: from her aunt, from her closest friend Milicent and from her servant Rachel.

By the time Helen meets Mr. Huntingdon, her aunt lectures her from the position of an experienced woman and tries to prevent her from falling in love with a man whose immoral intentions or indecent behaviour could lead to a disaster: “Receive, coldly and dispassionately, every attention, till you have ascertained and duly considered the worth of your aspirant; and let your affections be consequent upon approbation alone. First study; then approve; then love” (A. Brontë 111). She emphasizes the importance of her future husband’s principles and respectability, not his wealth, nor his good looks. Helen seemingly agrees with her aunt: “I not only should think it wrong to marry a man that was deficient in sense or in principle, but I should never be tempted to do it; for I could not like him, if he were ever so handsome, and ever so charming, in other respects; I should hate him – despise him – pity him – anything but love him” (A. Brontë 111). But her opinions are not based on experience yet; her reasoning is purely theoretical and proves to be inefficient in practice.

When acquainted with Mr. Huntingdon, Helen’s aunt continually warns her about his bad reputation and inauspicious behaviour but Helen’s trust in his goodness is unshakeable; she attributes all his sins to his friends’ influence. In her opinion, his only vice is thoughtlessness. She wishes to correct him and lead him by her example as his moral mentor, which predicts her moral superiority to him. She claims: “... if I hate the sins I love the sinner, and would do much for his salvation. [...] I would willingly risk my happiness for the chance of securing his” (A. Brontë 125). Later on, this statement proves fatal, as she really loses her happiness on account of his sins.

Apart from her aunt, she is warned by her servant Rachel, whose voice representing the world of servants confirms the validity of his bad reputation, and also by her closest friend Milicent, who expresses her worries about Helen’s future happiness “because you are so superior to him in every way” (A. Brontë 148). In fact, Helen appears to be superior and subordinated to Mr. Huntingdon at the same time. Her superiority lies in her intelligence and morals; her subordination is given by her expected role of an obedient bride and future wife, but also by her young age and purity.

Mr. Huntingdon himself makes no special effort to conceal his vices; he indirectly warns Helen by the revelation of his sinful adventures, which serves as the last warning before marriage for Helen but she is not discouraged by that, rather she is determined to sacrifice

herself to the mission of improving his character. However, her decision is underpinned also by her religious belief: “Even as a young girl in love for the first time, Helen Lawrence / Huntingdon does not forget her faith; she is and remains a devout Christian, and nothing in this world matters so much to her that she will even for a moment jeopardise her hope for salvation to obtain it. Her wish to win that reward for Arthur Huntingdon [...] is one of the reasons she claims for wishing to marry him despite the difference in their dispositions” (Thormählen 82).

Her resolution to marry him, despite all the received warnings, on account of which “she suffers the consequences of a brutish husband” (Phegley 12) conveys the main message of the work – for girls to learn from Helen’s example that it is necessary to be more rational and objectively consider all signs of future difficulties in marriage. Otherwise, they would risk their lifetime happiness, as it partly happens in Helen’s exemplary life.

3.1.2 Dysfunctional Marriage

In the Victorian era, many marriages did not lead to mutual satisfaction and happiness, as it was proved by the increasing number of divorces once permitted for both men and women in the late 19th century (“Married Women’s Property and Divorce”). The author decided to introduce three models of dysfunctional marriage in the novel – Helen and Mr. Huntingdon’s, Lady and Lord Lowborough’s and Milicent and Mr. Hattersley’s. The first one culminates in disaster and Helen’s escape, the second one in equal disaster and consequent divorce and the third one is saved by improvement on both sides. Further in this section, the gradual development of each dysfunctional union is analysed individually with a special focus on the central married couple – Helen and Mr. Huntingdon.

3.1.2.1 Helen and Mr. Huntingdon’s Development

Helen accepts Mr. Huntingdon’s marriage proposal, despite his dubious righteousness. Her first impression is that her husband’s vices result from his friends’ detrimental impact on him but she gradually learns that he is the guilty one. Soon after they get married, Helen finally acknowledges her error: “I must confess, in my secret heart, that Arthur is not what I thought of him at first, and if I had known him in the beginning as thoroughly as I do now, I probably never should have loved him, and if I loved him first, and then made the discovery, I fear I should have thought it my duty not to have married” (A. Brontë 164).

There are several reasons for the consequent decline of their relationship. At first, their happiness is marred by Mr. Huntingdon’s possessive behaviour, selfishness and jealousy. He continuously longs for Helen’s attention and complains about her piety, for he is jealous of

the attention she pays to God. The same situation repeats when their son is born and occasionally, Helen has to pay more attention to him than to her husband. Also, when Helen's father dies he is unwilling to let her mourn, for he is too focused on his own comfort. On the other hand, during the period when he leaves Helen alone in order to visit his companions, he obliges her to write him every day but he himself neglects their correspondence and seems to forget her for some time, and despite her disagreement, he takes great delight in alcohol. His hypocrisy can be observed also when it comes to his flirtation with Lady Lowborough, he explains that he can arouse Helen's jealousy but Helen cannot arouse his for she should be obedient as a woman – "The cases are different. It is a woman's nature to be constant – to love one and one only, blindly, tenderly, and for ever [...] but you must have some commiseration for us, Helen; you must give us a little more licence" (A. Brontë 189).

He obviously judges his matrimonial duties very differently from hers, however, that is based on the common conventions in society – men typically decided on their own and women's voice was of no importance. Further worsening is caused by Mr. Huntingdon's faded feelings towards Helen. He makes fewer attempts to conceal his faults, is moody and at times even aggressive and abusive, renews his previous drinking habits, and in the end, his behaviour culminates in infidelity with Lady Lowborough.

Not only Helen, but also Mr. Huntingdon is imprisoned in the dysfunctional marriage and the results of their mutual dissatisfaction are catastrophic. "As much as he attempts to hold Helen and to make her a captive, it is increasingly clear that he is the captive, and that it is his own imprisonment we witness"(Berry 113).

Considering superiority and inferiority in their marriage, there is a great schism between Helen's and Huntingdon's personalities and their socially given roles. As several observers claim and as it can be obvious to readers as well, Helen is definitely superior to her husband with her intelligence, decency and moral strength. But as it is required of her as a woman, she has to fulfil the role of an obedient wife who serves her husband, loves him unconditionally and pardons his misconduct. On the other hand, Arthur, who is expected to be the superior one in their marriage, behaves conversely from a certain perspective. Not only does he lack Helen's virtues and intellectual level but he also overtly indulges in sinful behaviour, foremost drunkenness. From that point of view, he is undoubtedly inferior to his wife.

3.1.2.1.1 Helen versus the Angel in the House

Based on common expectations rooted in society, Mr. Huntingdon requires obedience and submission from Helen, which she partly respects but still she expresses her opinions and

does not hesitate to disagree with her husband or anybody else, when necessary. In comparison to the ideal of *The Angel in the House*, she is definitely not obedient enough. According to Mr. Hattersley, she “looks as if she had a will of her own” (A. Brontë 178), which was a privilege women were generally deprived of in the Victorian era. Though Helen respects the sanctity of marriage and behaves accordingly, her mind is too independent to stay silent and obedient when she feels the urge to express herself. Therefore she stands up for herself or others when treated unjustly, though she is criticized for that by her husband and his companions. On account of her audacious behaviour, she is often described as a “devil” (A. Brontë 282), “confounded slut” (173) or a madwoman with “infernally demon” inside (265), for such were the common reactions to women whose voice was not always silent and obedient as expected. And by Helen’s example the author offered her readers a critical insight into this matter.

When first problems appear, Helen tries to improve the situation by more obedience to her husband, and after he betrays her, she forgives him several times and hopes in his improvement. Even when it comes to his infidelity she offers him reconciliation if he repents and improves, still “urging her husband to reform” (Thormählen 81). But her efforts are in vain, which causes her mounting desperation and resistance. Her final decision to escape is rather the result of this absolute despair than of her rebelliousness against her husband’s authoritative role in marriage. Her escape is motivated by her “main priority”, which is “the salvation of her soul, and in due course her son’s” (Thormählen 90). Throughout the whole time, though in the eyes of many she may be perceived as such, she is far from becoming a fallen woman, for she stays devoted to her moral principles and God. Helen is neither the angel in the house, nor the fallen woman; by means of her ambiguous position, the author rather challenges these two Victorian concepts.

3.1.2.1.2 Different Means of Helen’s Escape

Over the years of their marriage, there are a very limited number of options for Helen. As her situation becomes unbearable, she searches for options to escape, if not literally at first, then at least figuratively. Foremost, she finds solace in God, in whom she firmly believes and who underlies her morals and opinions.

Also, one of her main sources of consolation is her son. But the more she clings to him, the harder it is for her to witness his father’s spoiling him, and thus he indirectly becomes the greatest source of her despair, too. Gradually, he and his education turns into the major reason for her decision to escape for real.

Furthermore, she finds comfort in reading and writing, by means of which she ventilates her otherwise suppressed feelings. Foremost, writing a diary serves her as “a means of self-expression, documentation, and consolation” (Mink 13).

Among Mr. Huntingdon’s friends, there is one person who embodies a great opportunity for Helen – Mr. Hargrave, who has fallen in love with her. Though she is in a desperate situation, an affair with him is unconceivable for her. She respects the sanctity of marriage, and thus stays faithful to her morals and resists Mr. Hargrave. Her firm resolution to resist his temptations is best expressed in their game of chess, in which Helen herself sees a double meaning. The scene suggests that Mr. Hargrave is sure of his superiority to Helen and pursues her as if it was only a game. Even though Helen is defeated in the game of chess, she resists admitting it, and when Mr. Hargrave asks her whether she acknowledges his superiority, she answers: “Yes – as a chess-player” (A. Brontë 234). But not in a real life, for Helen is determined never to submit to him, as well as she is against submission in general.

Another option Helen has is to escape literally. However, as formerly stated in the theoretical part, in the early Victorian era it was utterly inappropriate for a woman to leave her husband regardless of how dysfunctional their marriage was. Therefore after she discovers all about her husband’s affair with Lady Lowborough, she is forced to stay imprisoned in the house with the one who betrayed her and caused her despair, and thus her feelings towards him naturally turn into hatred.

Subsequently, she refuses her position of Mr. Huntingdon’s wife, but at least she continues fulfilling the role of a housekeeper and little Arthur’s mother and educator for some time. But gradually, as the relationship between her and Mr. Huntingdon worsens, he deprives her even of these two functions, leaving her with no rights and occupations at all. From then on, she is a real prisoner of him with no further impact on her son’s education, which torments her most of all. “I am a slave – a prisoner – but that is nothing; if it were myself alone, I would not complain, but I am forbidden to rescue my son from ruin, and what was once my only consolation, is become the crowning source of my despair” (A. Brontë 283). In such circumstances she resolves to escape literally this time, and thus she does, despite the fact that by doing so she commits a crime not only against her legal superior, but also against her family and society. Though not against her inner principles and belief, for she is convinced that she saves herself and her son from damnation.

3.1.2.2 Other Examples of Dysfunctional Marriage

The author offers two more examples of dysfunctional marriage – Lord and Lady Lowborough’s and Mr. and Mrs. Hattersley’s. These two models differ substantially, mostly in terms of their power distribution and willingness to improve.

The former one is quite unusual and depicts a situation of a wife superior to her husband, not legally, but with her behaviour. Such a state of affairs is primarily caused by their different reasons to get married – whereas Lord Lowborough truly falls in love with her, Annabella is more interested in his higher social status. She uses her attractiveness and emotional blackmail to manipulate him, intentionally arouses his jealousy to torment him and by that she confirms her superiority over him. “He adores her still, and would go to the world’s end to please her. She knows her power, and she uses it too; but well knowing, that to wheedle and coax is safer than to command, she judiciously tempers her despotism with flattery and blandishments enough to make him deem himself a favoured and happy man” (A. Brontë 184). Well aware of his former addiction to alcohol, she even challenges him to drink and wishes to ruin him, to which she openly admits, and later on she is unfaithful to him. Thus she is slowly approaching her final stage of the fallen woman.

From a certain perspective, their union is even worse than the one of Helen and Mr. Huntingdon, for at the beginning these two were at least mutually attracted to each other, and at Mr. Huntingdon’s side it was not mere calculation but possibly love as well as in Helen’s case, though less persistent. After Annabella and Mr. Huntingdon’s affair is revealed, their marriage is doomed to failure and in the end, Lord Lowborough divorces her. From that perspective, their marriage can be perceived as better, for the oppressed one had a legal way to escape – divorce.

The case of Milicent and Mr. Hattersley is the exact opposite and very close to the traditional model of Victorian marriage. Of all the female characters in the novel, Milicent is the most submissive and closest to the contemporary ideal of *The Angel in the House*. She, timid by nature, represses her will and opinions and submits to her husband’s direction completely. The reason why they get married is not mutual attraction but Mr. Hattersley’s wish for obedient and silent wife and Milicent’s obedience to her mother’s wishes. As a result of Milicent’s submission, Mr. Hattersley misuses his power and abuses her, for he is not satisfied with her inferiority. He describes her as “an excellent little woman, but a thought too soft – she almost melts in one’s hands. I positively think I ill-use her sometimes when I’ve taken too much – but I can’t help it, for she never complains” (A. Brontë 224). Her marriage with the oppressive husband is comparable to Helen’s – but “while Helen tries to reclaim her

single status, her friend Milicent responds to a similar marital situation by exaggerated submission” (SurrIDGE 93).

Unlike Mr. and Mrs. Huntingdon’s and Lord and Lady Lowborough’s marriages, Milicent and Hattersley’s marriage has a chance to be saved. Thanks to Helen’s guidance and Mr. Huntingdon’s deterrent example, they both improve –Mr. Hattersley becomes a decent and loving husband and Milicent more courageous and vivacious. In this example, the author expresses her belief that it is possible to reform dysfunctional marriage, and offers her advice through Helen’s opinions.

3.1.3 Contradictory Attitudes to Marriage and the Position of Women

Throughout the novel, there appear several different attitudes to marriage and to the role of women within marriage and society. Two main streams of opinions can be observed – traditional and innovative. The former is mostly expressed by means of the old generation and the latter by means of the young generation. The intermediate generation, into which the main characters belong, appears on the border of these two attitudes. They are more complex and their individual attitudes differ considerably from one another.

3.1.3.1 The Traditional Attitude

The voice of the old generation is represented mainly by Helen’s guardians, Gilbert’s mother Mrs. Markham and the village vicar Mr. Millward. Their general attitude is in accordance with the Victorian social conventions; they respect inherited gender roles and criticize their violation.

Helen’s guardians appear to be slightly more progressive with their benevolence – foremost Helen’s uncle is very permissive in comparison to the common social norms in the Victorian era. However, her aunt is stricter and warns Helen from the position of an experienced woman, she “figures as the sort of dour religious stoic that her niece might have turned into had she never left her husband” (Franklin 132). Her aunt and uncle’s dissimilarity can be observed also in their reactions to Helen’s escape. Her uncle is rather strict this time and prone to be on Mr. Huntingdon’s side, for he probably believes in women’s lifetime obedience in marriage, no matter the circumstances. On the contrary, her aunt sympathizes with her, for she understands the necessity of her escape. Although she is well aware that such conduct was generally deemed unacceptable, she probably sees it as beneficial to both Helen and her son.

The attitude of Mrs. Markham and Mr. Millward is more traditional. Mrs. Markham interferes in her children’s lives, for example she disapproves of Gilbert’s first love, Eliza,

and thus she prevents him from marrying her. Furthermore, she passes her ideas of ideal marriage and gender roles onto her children. When her daughter complains of her duties and obligations at home and how she is treated as a less worthy individual compared to her brother, the head of the family, their mother insists on the traditional order: “You know, Rose, in all household matters, we have only two things to consider, first, what’s proper to be done, and, secondly, what’s more agreeable to the gentlemen of the house – anything will do for the ladies” (A. Brontë 52). When discussing marriage with Gilbert, Mrs. Markham lectures him: “You’ll do your business, and she, if she’s worthy of you, will do hers; but it’s your business to please yourself, and hers to please you” (A. Brontë 53). Remembering her deceased husband, she proposes an example of their marriage, in which she obediently fulfilled his expectations, and thus both of them were satisfied.

As for Helen’s position of a lone woman, villagers’ reactions are also very conventional. Mrs. Markham’s and Mr. Millward’s attitudes are critical; they are prejudiced against her on account of her peculiar lifestyle and individualistic reasoning. Once Helen’s true identity and the circumstances for her escape are revealed, Mr. Millward disapproves of it and contends that her act “was a violation of her sacred duties as a wife, and a tempting of Providence by laying herself open to temptation” (A. Brontë 355).

3.1.3.2 The Innovative Attitude

The voice of the young generation is represented by Milicent’s sister Esther, Gilbert’s sister Rose and to some extent Gilbert Markham. Their general attitude was innovative, they questioned obsolete conventions rooted in society and violated them in a way.

Esther embodies the main voice of the hopeful youth. She is more or less of the same opinion on marriage as Helen and Milicent before they got married but she, unlike them, stays devoted to her principles, in spite of being under the same pressure from her mother as Milicent was. Helen and Milicent project their hopes onto Esther, and they both support her independent will. Milicent at times of dissatisfaction in her marriage persuades Helen to talk to Esther: “...I wish you would seriously impress it upon her, never, on any account, or for anybody’s persuasion, to marry for the sake of money, or rank, or establishment, or any earthly thing but true affection and well-grounded esteem” (A. Brontë 219). And Esther seems to wait for the right man who would fulfil her expectations: “I shall expect my husband to have no pleasure but what he shares with me; and if his greatest pleasure of all is not the enjoyment of my company – why – it will be the worse of him – that’s all” (A. Brontë 289).

She is depicted rather optimistically with enough courage to resist oppression, by means of which the author probably expressed her hope in future betterment (MacDonald 69).

Another interesting attitude is offered through Gilbert and his sister Rose. Though they could be fairly biased by the traditional environment in which they grow up (as they partly are, as can be observed in their initial preconceptions to Helen as a lone female), they prove resistance towards traditional social norms which their mother suggests. Rose questions her inferior role within family due to the fact that she is a woman and informs her mother and brother about her disagreement with such an imbalanced order. Her brother agrees with her and is in favour of more respectful position of women within marriage and family. "...when I marry, I shall expect to find more pleasure in making my wife happy and comfortable, than in being made so by her: I would rather give than receive" (A. Brontë 53). He seems to be searching for a more meaningful bond in marriage than it is generally expected.

The last important, though only briefly mentioned, sign of hope in the young generation's progressive future is expressed by means of Helen's and Milicent's children, whose names Arthur and Helen are highly suggestive. They probably represent a chance for the new generation not to repeat their parents' mistakes (MacDonald 69). Young Arthur is said to "have realized his mother's brightest expectations" by inhabiting the place of residence where his parents' disastrous marriage took place with "his young wife, the merry little Helen Hattersley" (A. Brontë 376).

Contrastively to the old generation, the young generation presents a new approach to the concept of marriage and the position of women, or people in general. In the end, the voice of the young generation prevails over the voice of the old generation – Milicent and Esther's mother's wishes are not obeyed, for Esther waits for the right man to marry; in the case of Gilbert and Helen, his mother and her aunt have to put up with their decision to get married despite their initial disagreement. Through the young generation the author "offers a more hopeful forecast for the next generation of men and women" (MacDonald 69).

3.1.4 The Final Destination of Equality and Justice

Anne Brontë concludes the story with a somewhat utopian verdict. The problematic role of marriage and the position of women in marriage and society, which is contemplated throughout the whole novel, is solved with the proposed model of the ideal rational decision for marriage in equality between Helen and Mr. Markham and also with justice – all the important characters are either rewarded, or punished according to their virtues or vices, and their willingness or unwillingness to improve and approach Brontë's proposed ideal model.

3.1.4.1 The Ideal Model of Marriage in Equality

The slowly developing relationship between Helen and Mr. Markham resulting in marriage introduces the ideal model of marriage. Mr. Markham represents “the better men” (A. Brontë 125) who Helen originally wanted to leave to other women, while sacrificing herself to improving Mr. Huntingdon’s faults. After all she had to suffer through in her first marriage she finally learns that only these better men are worthy of being loved and decided for. And that is what the author proposes to her female readers, too.

However, before Mr. Markham can assume the role of Helen’s husband, he must reform similarly to two other ‘rewarded’ male characters – Lord Lowborough and Mr. Hattersley. Interestingly, male characters in the novel often need the impulse to improve from women who function as their moral mentors. Mr. Markham firstly has to solve his initial arrogance and impatience, and also his tendencies to behave in the same domineering way as Mr. Huntingdon (Berry 114-115).

Not until he learns to respect Helen enough and to acknowledge her superiority given by her moral strength tested by experience and her social status can they become each other’s equals. When he is allowed to propose, he is very different from the beginning of the story – he is humble and patient, well aware of his inferiority. Therefore Helen is truly not defeated by men, as she formerly claimed after the game of chess with Mr. Hargrave. As a result, the author offers them a fairytale ending to reward them for their persistence and willingness to develop in the right direction. “I need not tell you how happily my Helen and I have lived together, and how blessed we still are in each other’s society, and in the promising young scions that are growing up about us” (A. Brontë 378).

3.1.4.2 Justice in the Form of Rewarded and Punished Characters

At the end of the novel, the author decided to either reward, or to punish all the important characters on account of their behaviour. Among the rewarded characters there are those who proved their moral strength, righteous attitude, or willingness to improve.

Except for Helen and Mr. Markham, whose reward is examined in the section above, among the rewarded ones are Milicent’s sister Esther and Helen’s brother Mr. Lawrence. The former for her persistent belief in her ideals of what marriage should look like despite her relatives’ disagreement and the latter for his willingness to help Helen during her morally right escape despite its illegality. As a reward, they marry each other and embody another example of a happy married couple along with Helen and Mr. Markham.

The same fortunate fate is offered also to Milicent and Mr. Hattersley, for they both listened to Helen's suggestions and improved themselves accordingly. In this case, Helen assumes the role of a marriage mentor, and teaches both men and women how to reach mutual satisfaction in marriage. The author, through Helen, stands up for oppressed women and advises men to treat them differently, with enough respect. "Milicent loves you more than you deserve, and that you have it in your power to make her very happy, instead of which you are her evil genius, and, I will venture to say, there is not a single day passes in which you do not inflict upon her some pang that you might spare her if you would" (A. Brontë 224). As a result of Helen's guidance, Mr. Hattersley improves substantially and so does his wife, and thus in the end their marriage becomes ideal, too.

On the contrary, for the vicious characters there is punishment and damnation. The two most reprehensible characters, Mr. Huntingdon and Lady Lowborough, are punished equally for their infidelity, heresy, disrespect to marriage and selfishness. At the end Mr. Huntingdon in his inferior position of a patient is humbled by sudden dependence on his wife's mercy. (A. Brontë 335) Helen returns to Grassdale Manor to save him, by which she confirms her moral superiority again. However, this time "tutored by years of misery, Helen knows that she is utterly powerless to save Arthur; the best she can do is to encourage him to repent" (Thormählen 84). And he is unable to repent for "he lacks awareness of his sinfulness" (Thormählen 76) in a religious sense. As a result, he is tormented by his illness, addiction to alcohol, and fear of hell, and dies consequently.

Lady Lowborough is punished comparably. "She sunk, at length, in difficulty and debt, disgrace and misery; and died at last, as I have heard, in penury, neglect, and utter wretchedness" (A. Brontë 353). On the contrary, the victim of her wickedness, Lord Lowborough is rewarded for his moral strength after his wife's betrayal. He marries a woman who proves to be "an excellent mother" and "an invaluable wife" (A. Brontë 354).

It is indirectly suggested that spending life unmarried cannot suffice. That is expressed by means of Esther for the women's part and by means of Mr. Grimsby for the men's part. Esther claims that "if I thought myself doomed to old maidenhood, I should cease to value my life" (A. Brontë 289). And the example of Mr. Grimsby who stays unmarried shows that it is undesirable for men too, for they need a woman as their moral guidance and motivation. Without a woman by his side, Mr. Grimsby "went from bad to worse, sinking from bathos to bathos of vice and villainy, consorting only with the worst members of his club and the lowest dregs of society" (A. Brontë 354).

The message of Anne Brontë's novel is clear. The proposed ideal of marriage appears to be the only means to a happy life, therefore the decision who to marry is substantial and has to be considered in all seriousness and rationality. Through the character of Helen, the author shows the deterrent example of a wrong decision leading to unfortunate marriage and challenges the concepts of the angel in the house and the fallen woman. By means of Helen's development and reward in the form of marriage with Mr. Markham, she expresses her hope in future betterment and introduces ideal process of courtship and marriage. The old and the young generation are put in contrast; the progressive voice of the young generation prevails.

3.2 Jane Eyre

Charlotte Brontë, the most well-known and the most appreciated out of the three sisters, contributed not only to the world literature but also indirectly to the overall progression of women's position. However, she was far from being a rebellious role model actively fighting for women's rights; "unlike George Sand, who by appearances and her standard of living epitomized the nineteenth-century feminist, Charlotte Brontë withdrew from a society that would not entirely accept her, and expressed her stifled ideals through her words" (Lowes).

Jane Eyre is a bildungsroman novel, in which readers observe the process of the main protagonist's moral and psychological development during a considerably long period of her life, from her early childhood until the point when she reaches the state of independence and inner equilibrium as well as the desired state of equality with Mr. Rochester, whom she marries in the end. During the process of maturation, she faces various challenges and forms of oppression, which she gradually overcomes, and thus she becomes independent. The whole novel is narrated retrospectively only from the position of Jane, which entails a deeper insight into her emotional and attitudinal development.

Though in her writing Charlotte Brontë proposed her voice to oppressed women, the novel *Jane Eyre* does not offer any constructive solutions in the form of an ideal model of the world or example of marriage to follow; rather she focused on Jane's individual process of evolving into a completely independent human being equal to her husband, which was an unreachable goal for a woman in the Victorian era. Through Jane, she demonstrated her resistance to and critique of the contemporary unsatisfactory state. In a way, Charlotte's work resembles therapeutic writing, by means of which she could reconcile with the unbalanced and oppressive society she lived in and reach independence and self congruence at least in the world of fantasy. "Through Jane, Brontë exhibits resentment toward a society that has scorned her, while maintaining a detachment toward humanity as a whole (Lowes)". According to a

Victorian essayist Frederic Harrison for instance, Charlotte's works are highly autobiographical. He labels them as "imaginary autobiographies" and "subjective sketches of a Brontë under various conditions" (Harold Bloom 41).

The analysis of *Jane Eyre* deals with the main protagonist's early resistance to social norms, various forms of her imprisonment and successive escapes, her gradual approach of the state of independence, both literal and psychological, and equality to her husband. Furthermore, other female characters, their functions and positions in the novel are examined. Also, the analysis focuses on different attitudes to marriage and women.

3.2.1 Jane's Early Resistance to Social Norms

Jane is poor and plain in her position, property, and appearance too; on the contrary her inner world is rich and her mind independent. Growing up as an orphan, with no one to confide to, no one to lean on, maltreated by cruel and oppressive Mrs. Reed and her tyrannical son, Jane has to rely solely on herself and her common sense. Such circumstances she faces as a child substantially influence her personality and perception of the world around her, and consequently cause mounting anger in Jane, which together with her independent nature culminates in her resistance to social norms. During her early years she learns to regulate her instinctive rebelliousness; however her unceasing desire for independence drives her forward until she reaches an entirely satisfactory state of affairs and of her mind, too.

In this section, the causes as well as the results of Jane's inner anger and resistance to norms rooted in society are introduced and examined. Furthermore, there is an insight into the process of subduing her instinctive defiance.

3.2.1.1 Possible Reasons for Jane's Resistance

From the very beginning of the novel, Jane does not fulfill the common expectations, ensuing from her age, social status and gender. Her attitude stems from several possible reasons.

Jane's position is that of an orphan girl of poor origin, who lives within in a house where she does not feel at home, surrounded by the Reed family with substantially higher social status. With them she has nothing in common, except for their blood relativity. She is excluded from her cousins and aunt's company, for according to her aunt, Mrs Reed, she does not deserve to be associated with them unless she behaves as a "contented, happy little" child (C. Brontë 9), therefore unless she fulfills her expected role of a grateful poor orphan fully dependant on their benefaction. Due to the Victorian norms, when a family of the higher class adopted a child of the lower class, the social status of the child remained original and "did not

permit the child to maintain relations with the higher class” (Joshi). But from the viewpoint of Jane, it is by no means understandable why she is treated so differently from the other children, as she finds no fault in herself; moreover she is convinced that she exceeds her cousins, John, Eliza and Georgiana Reed by her personality traits, and she assumes it her right not to be treated as a less worthy individual on account of her lower status. Such inequality torments her and presents the first possible reason for her anger and resistance.

The second possible reason is tightly related to the first one but it is more extreme. Jane is not only treated unequally, she is seriously abused by John and Mrs. Reed. After his father’s death, John is the only male in the Reed family; therefore he naturally assumes a patriarchal role and demands obeying his rules. Overwhelmed with his superior position towards Jane, he treats her just like a tyrant would treat his slave. Jane tries to resist but every time she stands up for herself, she is unjustly punished for her disobedient behaviour. He represents the patriarchal society and Jane’s resistance to him lays a foundation for her later efforts not to submit to men (Chi 98). Mrs. Reed’s attitude towards Jane is different; she punishes her unjustly but otherwise tries to avoid her and apparently loathes her, which supports Jane’s self-doubts and despair. Such continuous oppression in Jane’s formative years leaves a serious imprint on Jane’s mental health, which culminates in a nervous breakdown and consequent resistance.

Another reason dwells in Jane’s hesitations to believe in God, which can be taken partly as a reason and partly as a result of her resistant conduct – strict religious rules seem illogical to her, therefore she questions them and her disbelief supports her resistance, as she finds no solace in faith, no explanations, nor barriers; from a different point of view, her innate rebellious nature entails questioning of the expected order, and thus even the religious rules. By Charlotte’s contemporaries, Jane’s demeanor was considered highly outrageous. “She has inherited in fullest measure the worst sin of our fallen nature – the sin of pride,” stated in 1848 Elizabeth Rigby, a British author and art critic. She added: “Jane Eyre is proud, and therefore she is ungrateful, too. It pleased God to make her an orphan, friendless, penniless – yet she thanks nobody, and least of all Him” (Gilbert and Gubar 338).

The last important reason can be found in Jane’s deficient family background. As she lacks a sufficiently functioning parental figure in her life, she has to rely entirely on herself, and thus she matures more quickly than if she was in the position of a nurtured child. As a result, she resists her position of a child and talks to adults as their equal, which is described as “the unchildlike look and voice” (C. Brontë 237). Mrs. Reed, who should function as a substitute of her mother, completely fails, and John along with Mr. Brocklehurst, who are the

only males Jane encounters in her early years, both maltreat her. And thus Jane naturally becomes sceptical and individualistic, too mature for her age and thus deemed resistant.

3.2.1.2 Gradual Subduing of Jane's Anger and Resistance

Once she leaves her imprisonment at Gateshead and is displaced to Lowood School, her manners and attitude change substantially. For Jane, the new place of residence means “a chance to learn to govern her anger while learning to become a governess in the company of a few women she admires” (Gilbert and Gubar 344).

At Lowood she can start anew regardless of her past and the efforts to improve her manners are motivated by several opportunities in front of her: she finds herself in a collective of peers in a similar situation, therefore she is no longer in the position of a lone outcast as before; most of her new authorities are admirable and do not maltreat her; and she is offered an opportunity to be educated, which was definitely not a common case for women in general, only under specific circumstances – for example in the case of orphaned girls who were typically educated to become teachers or governesses, and such was the case of Jane, too.

At Lowood, there appear two important females who are a great source of inspiration and motivation to Jane – Miss Temple and Helen Burns. Miss Temple, the head teacher, embodies a role model for Jane, for she treats everyone equally, is reasonable and very intelligent. She partly resembles young Jane in her rebelliousness, though in Miss Temple's case it is more cleverly concealed and repressed. Although in front of Mr. Brocklehurst she stays quiet and obedient, during his absence she clearly proves her opposition to him with her actions. By her example Jane learns to moderate her passions, as she strives to imitate Miss Temple in her serenity and erudition. Thanks to her influence, Jane learns to turn her inner anger into higher ambitions and is determined to gain the most from her studies.

Jane's closest friend Helen serves her as an example of a contradictory attitude to hers in terms of obedience and piety. When maltreated and wrongly punished, Helen reacts with understanding and humble admission of her defects, which is utterly unacceptable for Jane at first. By Helen's side, Jane learns to be more submissive and not to resist so often. Helen teaches her to look at things from a completely different perspective, foremost from a perspective of a passionate believer. Thanks to their conversations Jane develops her opinions substantially, especially in terms of belief. But she does not follow Helen's example thoughtlessly - Jane tends to rely more on her inner instincts and common sense, therefore she is not capable of such strong devotion as Helen.

Due to her two mentors' influence as well as due to the other factors, Jane becomes less resistant, whereas inside she stays rebellious, and finally accepts what is considered to be appropriate, or at least she does on the surface. For acceptance and obedience of the social norms was pivotal in the Victorian society, otherwise she would be outcasted and deemed mad.

3.2.2 Partial Independence and Partial Imprisonment

In the novel, there can be observed striking continuity of imprisonment and successive escape in order to gain more independence. This section analyzes various forms of imprisonment Jane faces and her gradual striving for independence, which results in its final achievement. The forms of imprisonment and escape appear either literally, or on the psychological level and are interrelated in order to create a complex analysis of Jane's development.

The first and most powerful form of Jane's literal imprisonment is offered at the very beginning when she is unjustly punished and locked in a 'red-room', possibly representing either the threatening mansion to which she is confined with no possibility to escape, or the imprisonment given by Jane's social and gender predetermination - the threatening world with very limited options, which waits outside for her as an poor orphaned female.

Later on, she is liberated from her initial imprisonment at Gateshead and displaced to Lowood. Though firstly the school embodies a chance for Jane to gain more independence and to escape from Gateshead, years later she feels imprisoned there as well and feels the urge to move on with her life. She feels confined by the school system, and suddenly longs for passing beyond the landscape on the horizon, and beyond her own limits, too. There is a significant scene when Jane contemplates her life and her options, looking out of the window, wishing to escape her current place of residence, which is slowly suffocating her. "And now I felt that it was not enough. I tired of the routine of eight years in one afternoon. I desired liberty; for liberty I gasped; for liberty I uttered a prayer; it seemed scattered on the wind then faintly blowing. I abandoned it and framed a humbler supplication" (C. Brontë 87).

She is well aware of the lack of options in front of her as a female, moreover an orphan with a low social status. On the other hand, her orphanhood means more independence, thus more opportunities, for she does not have to depend on her relatives' decisions. Therefore Jane advertises and shortly thereafter she is admitted to a new place, Thornfield, where her position changes substantially from a girl entirely dependent on strictly given rules and

authorities to a position of a governess who, though dependent on her employee, gains at least partial independence due to her sudden ability to be self-sufficient.

There after some time she becomes imprisoned again in her position of a governess, but also in her position of a woman. For the first time she clearly formulates her resistance to gender predetermination of her life and to the common expectations of her as a female – that is to be silent and obedient and to devote herself only to the occupations suitable for women. In her musings, she turns inwards, back to her innate rebellious nature: “Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex” (C. Brontë 111).

However, after she is acquainted to Mr. Rochester, her state changes, for thanks to his influence, she reaches a higher level of independence, as he liberates her innate temperament, firstly impaired by the Reed family and then restricted by the school rules for a long time. “The ease of his manner freed me from painful restraint; the friendly frankness, as correct as cordial, with which he treated me, drew me to him” (C. Brontë 147). Furthermore, Jane’s situation becomes more complex, as she “begins to fall in love with him not because he is her master but in spite of the fact that he is, not because he is princely in manner, but because, being in some sense her equal, he is the only qualified critic of her art and soul” (Gilbert and Gubar 352). Thus she gains more independence but also loses it to some extent, for she becomes dependent on his love and approvement but at the same time her cordial feelings towards him set her free.

Also, she returns to Gateshead for some time to meet dying Mrs. Reed. This allows Jane to reach reconciliation with her past, as she realizes how far she is from her hatred and anger towards the Reed family. “I had left this woman in bitterness and hate, and I came back to her now with no other emotion than a sort of ruth for her great sufferings, and a strong yearning to forget and forgive all injuries – to be reconciled and clasp hands in amity” (C. Brontë 229). Although Mrs. Reed is not willing to act alike, Jane offers her aunt her “full and free forgiveness” (C. Brontë 238), and thus she is again a bit closer to the desired state of her inner equilibrium and liberty.

When Mr. Rochester reveals his feelings and proposes, from a certain point of view Jane could obtain more independence with the prospect of a higher social status but it appears to be rather on the contrary. The more she approaches the wedding, the less independent she becomes, for she also approaches the state of being Mr. Rochester's property and legal inferior (Gilbert and Gubar 357-358).

Jane is tormented by the schism between her love and her fear of losing the current extent of independence; therefore sudden revelation of Mr. Rochester's dark past in the form of his wife Bertha imprisoned in the attic partly serves her as a means of release. (Bertha's imprisonment is ambiguous and will be analyzed later in this section.) After the revelation Jane has two options – she can either stay by Mr. Rochester's side as his mistress, thus become a fallen woman in the eyes of Victorian society; or to escape. Following her inner principles, she decides to abandon Mr. Rochester, who deceived her and by whose side she would end up imprisoned anyway at this point. Thus she runs away to the unknown world unprotected and for the first time in her life becomes absolutely independent, though very differently from the desired state, and moreover not on the psychological level yet. "For having left Rochester, having torn off the crown of thorns he offered and repudiated the unequal charade of marriage he proposed, Jane has now gained the strength to begin to discover her real place in the world" (Gilbert and Gubar 364).

3.2.3 Different Types of Women and Their Positions

In other female characters appearing throughout the novel, there can be found aspects of the prototype of the 'angel in the house', as well as of the 'fallen woman'. Furthermore, the author introduces her own model of the ideal woman but she also offers problematic aspects of women, which she criticizes. And in the last part of this section, the formerly suggested ambiguity of Bertha's meaning is to be contemplated.

3.2.3.1 Aspects of the Angel in the House

During her stay at Lowood, Jane encounters Miss Temple and Helen, who help her to moderate her inappropriate behaviour, to become more humble and obedient, simply more suitable for the Victorian society. They represent two aspects of the Angel in the House – Miss Temple with her serenity and obedience and Helen with her piety and self-denial.

Miss Temple is depicted as angelic with her exterior as well as with her admirable virtues. Her character can be best observed in the impact she has on Jane, when she learns by Miss Temple's example and imitates her in a way – in "harmonious thoughts", "regulated feelings", "allegiance to duty and order" and quietness (C. Brontë 86). Though her character is fairly

subdued, Miss Temple does not meet the Victorian expectations in full measure, for she secretly disobeys Mr. Brocklehurst's orders and rather acts according to her own will.

Helen, contrastively to Miss Temple's apparent obedience, fails to obey the required school rules. However, she resembles the ideal of the Angel in the House with her firm belief in God. In the words of Gilbert and Gubar, she embodies "the ideal of self-renunciation, of all-consuming (and consumptive) spirituality" (345-346). Equally to the Angel in the House, whenever Helen is maltreated, she "seems to think the sin was hers" (Patmore 110).

In both cases, the author challenges the concept of the angel in the house, as Jane firstly attempts but then fails to adopt their angelic features on account of her innate rebellious tendency. In her musings, she questions righteousness of the restricted position of women in society.

3.2.3.2 The Fallen Women

Charlotte Brontë deals with the concept of the fallen woman in her work, too. The most obviously it is introduced in Mr. Rochester's former mistress Celine, a French dancer and a promiscuous belle; and indirectly also in her daughter, Mr. Rochester's ward and Jane's pupil Adèle, with her vanity and desire for attention. (Gilbert and Gubar 350) Furthermore, aspects of the fallen woman are hinted also in the case of Blanche Ingram - though she is not fallen in terms of her social status, she can be perceived as fallen with her vulgar and superficial attitude and flaunting conduct. However, her case would not fit the contemporary definition of the fallen woman. The last important case is the hypothetical fate of Jane when Mr. Rochester offers her to be his mistress – for if she decided to live by his side despite his marriage, she would definitely be considered the fallen woman.

3.2.3.3 Exemplary Models versus Criticized Models

Interestingly, the author puts two deterrent and two exemplary female models in contrast. The former case is represented by Eliza and Georgiana Reed and the latter case, apart from Jane herself (who can function as an ideal model from a certain perspective too), by Diana and Mary Rivers.

By means of Eliza and Georgiana, the author criticizes two typical aspects of women. Eliza's exaggerated self-discipline and prudence along with her piety leads to selfish and almost hateful behaviour to her frivolous sister. On the other hand, Georgiana is overly dependent on others' society and amusement and focusing on her own appearance. Jane concludes their contrastive attitudes with these words: "...here were two natures rendered, the one intolerably acrid, the other despicably savourless, for the want of it. Feeling without

judgement is a washy draught indeed; but judgement untempered by feeling is too bitter and husky a morsel for human deglutition” (C. Brontë 235).

Comparably defective nature can be observed in the case of Blanche Ingram, who appears to be a combination of Jane’s cousins in a way, for she lacks both, the feeling and the judgement. She too indulges in her own beauty and others’ blandishments and is equally self-centered and arrogant (Gilbert and Gubar 350). Despite her higher social status and beauty, Jane exceeds her with her personality as she exceeded her cousins as a child. When it appears that Blanche receives Mr. Rochester’s attention, Jane is well aware of her intellectual and moral superiority to Blanche, and thus she says that she “was not jealous, or very rarely; the nature of the pain I suffered could not be explained by that word. Miss Ingram was a mark beneath jealousy: she was too inferior to excite that feeling” (C. Brontë 185).

Contrastively to these criticized female models, Diana and Mary Rivers serve as the proposed ideals. Diana and Mary represent the good part of her family whom she is allowed to meet once she manages to escape from all the former imprisonments. According to Gilbert and Gubar, their symbolic names, alluding to Diana the huntress and Mary the virgin mother, as well as “their independence, learned, benevolent personalities” embody “the ideal of female strength for which Jane has been searching” (Gilbert and Gubar 365).

3.2.3.4 Bertha’s Ambiguous Role

Bertha, Mr. Rochester’s wife, whom he imprisoned in the attic on account of her madness, is the greatest challenge for Jane and Mr. Rochester, which they have to overcome before their marriage. There are more possible explanations of her function in the story. On one hand she functions as a hindrance to the relationship of Jane and Mr. Rochester, but on the other hand her revelation allows Jane to flee from the prospect of marriage which would be built on inequality and former deceit.

Mr. Rochester and Bertha’s marriage ended up to be a prison for both of them – they “are the victims of a marriage without love.” Bertha “loses her right to live a human life” and Mr. Rochester “not only possess her father’s money, but also the power to imprison” her (Chi 103). There arises a question what is the real cause of her madness. Her husband claims that it is inherited, but it may as well be an outcome of his patriarchal behaviour and oppression, or the oppressive society in general. Although it is not possible to say whether it was Mr. Rochester’s fault or not, such is one of the possible interpretations which is developed for example in Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* (Rigney 27).

Bertha may possibly function as Jane's other self too, or as an agent of her suppressed feelings, as suggested in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (Gilbert and Gubar 359-360). A striking similarity can be observed between the two of them, foremost in their rage and imprisonment. Whereas Jane manages to suppress her rage and escape from the various forms of imprisonment, Bertha's situation has escalated to the point when she is literally a prisoner without a chance to escape - because, or maybe therefore her rage is so unconcealed. Interestingly, Mr. Rochester perceives Jane and Bertha as each other's opposites when they meet – Jane as “so grave and quiet” and Bertha as a “fierce” “demon” (C. Brontë 292), which confirms the interpretation that Bertha embodies what Jane eradicated from her character. The link between them is also confirmed by the fact that several times Jane's passionate behaviour is described as “mad” (C. Brontë 230), or as that of “a fiend” (C. Brontë 230) or a “witch” (C. Brontë 279).

Not only does Bertha function as the incarnation of Jane's inner anger but by means of her, Jane's fear of the future imprisonment in marriage with Mr. Rochester is expressed during the scene when Bertha visits Jane in her chamber and tears her wedding veil apart. “Literally, of course, the nightmare specter is none other than Bertha Mason Rochester. But on a figurative and psychological level it seems suspiciously clear that the specter of Bertha is another [...] avatar of Jane. What Bertha now does, for instance, is what Jane wants to do” (C. Brontë 359).

And thus, Bertha is both a literal and figurative impediment: to their marriage but also to Jane's development towards her independence and equality to Mr. Rochester. Before the final achievement of her inner equilibrium and their marriage in equality, Bertha as well as Jane's rage and fear and Mr. Rochester's superiority have to be destroyed.

3.2.4 Courtship and Marriage in the Novel

The theme of marriage is introduced primarily in the case of Mr. Rochester and Blanche Ingram's courtship and then in the two suitors Jane has – Mr. Rochester and St. John Rivers. There is no explicitly presented example of either a functional or dysfunctional model of marriage (only the implicit one between Mr. Rochester and Bertha, which was mentioned in the previous section). The realization of Jane and Mr. Rochester's marriage functions as the final stage of the story – it is the desired state of independence and equality, for which both of them firstly have to suffer and overcome their own impediments.

3.2.4.1 The Courtship of Mr. Rochester and Blanche

Firstly, the courtship of Mr. Rochester and Blanche Ingram is to be examined. Mr. Rochester uses Blanche to pretend that he is in love with her to arouse jealousy in Jane and to secure her love. By doing so, he primarily confirms his detrimental superiority to women – he deceives and possibly harms both Blanche and Jane at once. But from a different perspective, he proves his inferiority to Jane in terms of moral principles because his decision to marry Blanche would be obviously not out of love but for her social status or her attractiveness, similarly to his former decision to marry Bertha “for status, for sex, for money, for everything but love and equality” (Gilbert and Gubar 356). Jane criticizes his supposed proposal “to one inferior to you – to one with whom you have no sympathy – whom I do not believe you truly love. [...] I would scorn such a union: therefore I am better than you” (C. Brontë 252). Later, Mr. Rochester himself explains one of the reasons for his deceitful conduct was that he wanted to humble Blanche’s pride; it could have also been his revenge on morally inferior women, such as Céline who betrayed him in the past.

3.2.4.2 Jane’s Rejected Suitors

There appear two suitors, who propose to Jane and who present two different opportunities for her. Both of them entail a different reason for Jane’s decision to reject them and embody a different kind of superiority and possible subsequent imprisonment in marriage.

Mr. Rochester firstly functions as Jane’s rescuer from former restrictions given by her stay at Gateshead and Lowood. Despite their different positions of a governess and her employer, they spend time together conversing as equals on the same intellectual level and he offers her the opportunity to liberate her innate nature and to fall in love. Otherwise, Mr. Rochester exceeds her by his age, experience and social status. Though Jane exceeds him by her moral strength and purity, it is not enough, and thus she stays his inferior. Nevertheless, their love is genuine and reciprocal, therefore they overcome their differences and after the process of courtship they intend to advance to marriage.

During the courtship, Mr. Rochester’s behaviour becomes more patriarchal, objectifying and possessive, which causes Jane’s partial resistance and fear. “It becomes increasingly apparent that what Brontë fears for Jane is that marriage with Rochester will not be a union of equals, but rather a loss of self, an engulfment in the identity of another, just as it was for Bertha” (Rigney 20). However, as more about Mr. Rochester’s immoral conduct is revealed, Jane’s moral superiority grows, up to the point when Bertha’s existence is proved, which leads to Jane’s rejection and consequent flight. The main reasons for her rejection are Mr.

Rochester's deceit and their striking inequality foreshadowing future imprisonment. Another obstacle is that if she continued by his side, she would become the fallen woman due to his being married. Firstly, these impediments have to be solved; Jane's part is to solve her lack of: sufficient financial background, social respectability, experience with men and inner equilibrium, for that is what she lacks in comparison with Rochester.

Jane's other suitor, clergyman St John Rivers, also functions as her rescuer – this time literally, as he discovers her at the brink of death and then helps her to recover. Also he supports her self-realization by allowing her to work as a teacher at a local school. His character is hard and cold, highly spiritual but contrastively emotionally detached from humans. He embodies a different kind of superiority to Jane with his utter religious devotion and higher aspirations, which is mirrored in his overall conduct. His decision to marry Jane is rational, for he finds her suitable for his mission due to her moral strength and persistence. "St John, however, neither loves nor needs Jane in any personal sense; it is for God's service he claims her, telling her that by refusing him she would reject God" (Thormählen 79). His superiority may be deemed a "symbol of tyranny" on account of his "desire to render Jane as an object" (Rigney 17) rather than a human being.

Her main reason for rejecting his marriage proposal is the absence of love on both sides. Moreover, after her pilgrimage for liberty it is understandable that so close to her final destination she does not want to betray her inner principles for the religious mission with St John Rivers, which would only imprison her again, and this time completely, because were she to decide for him, she would have to devote her whole life to a man who feels highly superior to her, does not even love her and subdues her innate nature, which was set free by Mr. Rochester before. Thus the whole process of Jane's striving for liberty and gradual liberation would lose its point, for she would finish her pilgrimage from the utter imprisonment at Gateshead in utter imprisonment in marriage with St John Rivers.

Comparing these two suitors, various differences but also similarities can be observed. Whereas Mr. Rochester is warm, passionate and loving, St John is cold, rational and emotionless. Whereas the former is guilty and derelict, the latter is elevated above others with his spirituality and devotion. Whereas the former offers Jane "a life of pleasure" and "a marriage of passion", the latter offers her "a life of principle" and "a marriage of spirituality" (Gilbert and Gubar 365). As for their similarities, they both present a certain kind of superiority and a threat of Jane's lifetime imprisonment. Also, they both objectify her, though in a slightly different way. Mr. Rochester wants to turn Jane into an object worthy of his social class and admiration – "I will make the world acknowledge you a beauty" (C. Brontë

258) and wishes to imprison her similarly to Bertha, though in her case on account of his love – “when once I have fairly seized you, to have and to hold, I’ll just – figuratively speaking – attach you to a chain like this” (C. Brontë 269). St. John, on the contrary, chooses Jane as an object “better calculated to endure variations of climate than many more robust” (C. Brontë 392) and subdues her formerly liberated innate nature – “I could no longer talk or laugh freely when he was by, because a tiresomely importunate instinct reminded me that vivacity (at least in me) was distasteful to him” (C. Brontë 393). Jane herself compares the prospect of marriage with St. John to “committing suicide” (C. Brontë 409), for she would kill a part of herself by such a decision.

And thus Jane’s decision to marry St. John and become “a missionary’s wife” (C. Brontë 398) would be comparably destructive to her decision to stay by Mr. Rochester’s side despite all the impediments.

3.2.5 The Final Achievement of Peace and Equality

By escaping from Mr. Rochester, Jane becomes completely independent. But this form of liberty is not the desired state she strives for. She suddenly assumes the lowest possible position in society, that of a homeless woman. She “wanders, starving, freezing, stumbling, abandoning her few possessions, her name, and even her self-respect in her search for a new home” (Gilbert and Gubar 364). Firstly, she needs to discover her identity independently on Mr. Rochester in order to return to him. Moreover, there are several obstacles they both have to overcome before their reconciliation.

This new phase of life entails a new home for Jane, where she recovers from the consequences of her sufferings on the road. There she meets St. John, Diana and Mary. The latter two embody what Jane has always endeavored to reach – they are “independent, learned, benevolent” (Gilbert and Gubar 365) and Jane’s discovery that they are her relatives allows her to become one of them. Her belonging to the Rivers family means not only a new family but also a financial background in the form of her uncle’s inheritance, by which she approaches equality to Mr. Rochester in her new social status and self-sufficiency. The quality of being self-sufficient is also offered by the opportunity to work as a teacher in a village school. There Jane acknowledges that her decision to abandon the one she loves was righteous: “I feel now that I was right when I adhered to principle and law, and scorned and crushed the insane promptings of a frenzied moment” (C. Brontë 356).

St. John’s marriage proposal means a chance for Jane to gain more experience with men; by rejecting him, she breaks his superiority and approaches Mr. Rochester, for she does not

betray her love for him, and moreover now she can arouse his jealousy, too, and thus she becomes more worthy in a way. That her decision to reject St. John was correct is confirmed by a supernatural sign, which leads Jane back to Mr. Rochester and signifies that now it is the right time to reunite.

Mr. Rochester's obstacle to overcome was foremost his marriage with Bertha. That is solved by her arson and consequent death, which inflicts punishment on him – he is wounded and blinded. His superiority is destroyed, for he becomes completely dependent on others' help. "As Jane seeks out Rochester in the final chapters to find his house in ruins, his body crippled and blinded, his worst fears realized in the depletion of his powers of masculinity, she finds herself his superior rather than his equal" (Rigney 31).

Though Jane is now physically superior to Mr. Rochester, otherwise she is his equal with her newly gained social status and financial background. To reach the state of inner equilibrium she needs Mr. Rochester's love as well as he needs hers to become complete again. Nevertheless, the story is concluded with Jane's exclamation: "Reader, I married him" (C. Brontë 444), which suggests that their mutual happiness was caused by Jane's final decision to return to him. If their first attempt to get married was successful, he would be the initiator and he would marry Jane despite her lower social status. But this time it is Jane who marries Mr. Rochester despite his physical inferiority. Subsequently, he is rewarded for his submission, and his punishment in the form of blindness is removed. And thus their equality is completed.

Jane's pilgrimage from the utter imprisonment at Gateshead is concluded, for this time in marriage with Mr. Rochester she finds everything she has ever been looking for: liberty and equality. No universal resolution is offered, only Jane's individual fate, though she can be perceived as a role model with her unceasing desire for liberation.

3.3 The Comparison of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and *Jane Eyre*

The last part of the main body of this thesis is dedicated to a comparison of the two analyzed novels with a special focus on differences and similarities found in the novels' central messages, in the heroines' attitudes and resistance to social norms, in the divergent ways of reaching independence and equality and in the final achievement of justice.

3.3.1 The Central Message

Both novels are focused on challenging the myths about womanhood in the Victorian era along with the expected ideal, which stems from *The Angel in the House*, and its evil counterbalance – the fallen woman. Both authors touch upon both of these concepts, as they

place their heroines on the brink of becoming either the former, or the latter according to the contemporary measures, but at the same time from a rational point of view their heroines really fit neither of these categories. Anne as well as Charlotte created independently thinking heroines resistant to the Victorian normative order, and thus they anticipated the concept of the new woman, for Helen and Jane more or less match the definition. Both authors use their writing to criticize the highly patriarchal society, which restricted women's rights to the point when they were deprived of their own independent will and they had to fully depend on the male authorities. They question the righteousness of such an imbalance between the male and female parts of society and by means of their heroines but also other characters they show how this oppression of women can lead to harmful consequences.

Whereas the general focus is more or less the same, the novels differ in their more specific central messages. Anne Brontë, unlike Charlotte, deals primarily with the process of courtship and marriage, with dysfunctional marriage and its reformation in particular and with the position of women in marriage and society in general. By her heroine's escape from a dysfunctional marriage motivated by her moral strength and religious belief she questions the Victorian conventions. In her novel, both male and female viewpoints are offered by means of Gilbert and Helen, male and female narrators, who both have to undergo a different kind of development to be able to build a union of two equals – however, their equality is questionable as the woman functions as the man's moral superior, under whose guidance he has to improve. The moral superiority of women is of high importance, as it is indirectly suggested as a solution – for men to be led by women's moral example. Also two different attitudes to marriage and women, the traditional one and an innovative one, are introduced. The author is apparently in favour of the latter, and proposes her view by means of ideal models of marriage opposed to the traditional models, which tend to be dysfunctional. After all, the most important message of the work is interconnected with Anne Brontë's didactic purpose. She uses the heroine's first marriage as a deterrent example and the process of reforming and preparing her future second husband for marriage as an ideal example. Also, she focuses on other characters' courtships and marriages. Her overall attitude is optimistic, as she expresses hope through the young generation.

On the other hand, Charlotte Brontë explores the problematic position of women in society by means of only one central character – Jane Eyre. Readers follow her development from an oppressed child to an independent woman and are allowed a deep insight into her private world full of controversial opinions. Charlotte's attitude is not as didactic as it is rebellious – by means of the heroine, who resists to be defined by her gender and social status

and continuously deals with injustices committed to her on account of her position of a poor orphaned female, the author criticizes the unjust conventions rooted in society. Unlike in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, in *Jane Eyre* the righteousness of religious belief is examined and temporarily questioned by means of young Jane, and further in the story also by the portrayals of Eliza Reed and St John Rivers. Strongly devoted to God, they both share emotional detachment from people and their religious belief lacks sufficient genuineness. Also, Charlotte Brontë offers a considerably different attitude to the importance of beauty. Whereas Anne's heroine is depicted as beautiful, thus worthy of attention, Jane's appearance is plain and rather unattractive, at least in her own opinion, and in spite of that she deserves to be loved and is loved, unlike her charming rival Blanche. On the contrary, in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Mary Millward, who is equally as plain as Jane, is introduced as unworthy of attention and the fact that she gets married in the end is presented as "impossible" (A. Brontë 338).

The central message of *Jane Eyre* seems to be more complex than the clearly didactic intention of her sister. However, it emphasizes the possibility of such a poor, plain, unattractive and unprivileged girl to escape from her imprisonment completely and to reach the desired state of liberty, inner peace and equality.

3.3.2 Different Ways of Reaching Independence

In both novels, the heroines reach the state of independence in the end but before that, they need to suffer through different forms of oppression, escape from different forms of imprisonment, prove their moral strength along with active resistance to what they perceive as wrong, and to reform their romantic partners in order to become suitable for marriage in equality, for in both cases the final stage means marriage. The authors prove that their overall attitudes are contradictory to the traditional ones in terms of the balance of power in relationships with men.

As for their imprisonment, in Helen's case it is primarily her first marriage, whereas Jane faces many forms of either literal or figurative imprisonment throughout the whole novel – she deals with imprisonment within her adoptive family, in the limits of her orphan school, in the unequal and socially unacceptable relationship with Mr. Rochester; figuratively then in her past and mind, as well as within the limits of society. Both heroines need to escape in order to become independent and satisfied.

Interestingly, both of them are attracted to their first romantic partners on account of their ability to liberate them: Jane values "the ease of his manner freed me from painful restraint"

(C. Brontë 147) and Helen appreciates “freedom about all he said and did, that gave a sense of repose and expansion to the mind, after so much constraint and formality” (A. Brontë 113). But later on, they become trapped in these relationships due to their partners’ superiority and betrayal, and thus they abandon them – therefore their partners really set them free in the end, though in a very different way than they anticipated. Both decisions to escape are based on their inner principles and are against the expectations of society – Helen is considered to be a fallen woman and Jane lives as a homeless woman for a while.

At the end, their fates diverge. Jane rejects her second suitor, St John Rivers, who presents a second chance for marriage and returns to Mr. Rochester; they reconcile and get married. On the other hand, Helen also rejects her second suitor and returns to her tyrannical husband, but in her case it is only to take care of him, not to return to her former position of his wife. After his death, Helen and her second suitor, Gilbert, reunite and get married.

Jane develops in order to return, reconcile and achieve mutual happiness in equality, whereas Helen returns only to prove her newly gained superiority and to free herself from the marriage, and then with enough experience she advances towards the new marriage.

3.3.3 The Final Achievement of Justice

In both novels, the authors introduce a final resolution in the form of punishment and rewarding. In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, all the important characters are divided into the sinful ones who deserve to be punished and those who either remained morally right or those who improved, and thus are worthy of being rewarded. In *Jane Eyre*, the judgement is less universal and again it rather centers on the heroine. It focuses mostly on rewarding Jane for her unceasing efforts to reach her final destination and on punishment of those who maltreated her – Mrs. Reed and her son John earlier in the story and Mr. Rochester at the end.

As for their romantic partners, Jane’s Mr. Rochester is punished, reformed and consequently rewarded, whereas Helen’s first husband is punished while Gilbert, her second suitor is reformed and rewarded - all receive what they deserve proportionately to their transgressions and willingness to repent and reform, therefore Mr. Rochester and Gilbert, who proved that their love is more powerful than their sins and who are willing to improve, are rewarded in the end and Mr. Huntingdon, whose behaviour is irredeemable, is punished.

Both heroines are rewarded not only with the ideal marriage in the end but also with an opportunity to finally defeat their partners who previously proved to be superior to them, objectified them or maltreated them.

Helen returns to her tyrannical husband to find him in an utterly inferior position of a patient in “childish desperation” (A. Brontë 345). She nurtures him but also dominates him and finally gains the power which she lacked before. This scene resembles Jane’s return to Mr. Rochester when she finds him in a pitiful state with “seared vision” and “crippled strength”, fully dependent on her help (C. Brontë 439). Whereas the first reunion leads to Mr. Huntingdon’s decline and consequent death, for he was too wicked to repent, the second leads to reconciliation and consequent marriage, for Mr. Rochester is humble and regretful, thus he deserves Jane’s approval. The last reunion is that of Helen and Gilbert. To deserve Helen’s permission, he had to learn to be patient and to respect her will. As in the case of Mr. Rochester, only after he acknowledges her newly gained superiority does he deserve to be her equal again.

Both endings contribute to the central messages of the novels. In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, the male oppressive superiority has to be defeated and men reformed in order to achieve the ideal order in marriage and society. In *Jane Eyre*, it also has to be defeated for Jane and Mr. Rochester to achieve equality in marriage and for Jane to achieve her inner equilibrium.

4 Conclusive Part

The main focus of this thesis is the position of women in marriage and society in the early Victorian era and its depiction in the two chosen novels. The analysis proves that both authors used their work to emphasize the unjustly restrictive position of women living in the Victorian era, to challenge the contemporary concepts of the ideal woman and the fallen woman, in short, to criticize the oppressive patriarchal society and to propose different, innovative order in their own specific way.

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall scrutinizes the position of women in marriage and marriage in general and focuses not only on the heroine, but also on the second narrator and other characters and their development; *Jane Eyre* centers mainly on the individual development of the heroine from the state of absolute imprisonment to relatively absolute independence, interestingly culminating in marriage.

The heroines are presented as morally superior to men, which was, however, more or less in accordance with the Victorian standards. Nonetheless, despite their morality they contradict many conventions of their age. They both resist becoming the oppressed angels in the house as was commonly expected of women and temporarily even appear on the brink of becoming the exact opposite, fallen women. By means of challenging both of these concepts, the authors expressed their disagreement with the given order and created a woman who strives and in the end manages to live as “a free human being with an independent will” (C. Brontë 252). Their self-willed and resistant heroines anticipate the concept of the new woman, breaking the Victorian stereotypes.

Anne Brontë’s purpose was foremost didactic – she warns both women and men about dangers in marriage and suggests reformation resulting in the ideal order; Charlotte Brontë created orphaned Jane, figuratively orphaned even in her resistance, and followed her striving for independence in the Victorian world full of challenges to overcome. Her purpose is not explicitly didactic, though Jane also directly or indirectly proposes innovative changes.

Both authors conclude their novels with the final achievement of justice, which entails either the reward or punishment of the characters according to their virtues or vices, and willingness or unwillingness to reform. All the heroines’ male counterparts are punished to some extent for their previous superiority and effort to subdue the heroines. On the contrary, both heroines are rewarded for their persistence and moral strength throughout the process of their development.

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