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Faculty of Arts

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**The Portrayal and Comparison of Jane Eyre by Brontë and
Fanny Price by Austen in Terms of Social Status**

Charakteristika a srovnání postav Jany Eyrové od Brontëové a
Fanny Priceové od Austenové z hlediska společenského postavení

Bachelor Thesis

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I hereby declare and confirm with my signature that this bachelor's thesis is exclusively the result of my own autonomous work based on the literature, which is seen in the notes and bibliography used.

In Olomouc Signature:

Acknowledgment

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1. Introduction

The authors Jane Austen (1775 – 1817) and Charlotte Brontë (1816 – 1855) belong to the most significant and popular women writers of the Regency era and the subsequent Victorian era. Their novels have served as an endless source of inspiration for many succeeding writers and have been transformed into the countless film adaptations.

In this bachelor thesis, I will focus on two popular heroines of these authors — Fanny Price from *Mansfield Park* and Jane Eyre from the novel *Jane Eyre*. Both these heroines function as moral centres of the novels as they have a strong sense of right and wrong and are often only ones who persevere despite the wiles of fate. Their fortunes seem to carry a strong resemblance to the Cinderella story. They share a similar origin as well as a fate of a poor relative. They both come from a destitute lower-class background and subsequently they experience a rather unhappy childhood. Ultimately, they marry above their social status as they are able to find love with a man of higher social rank.

However, the authors Austen and Brontë belong to the different movements of British literature, thus they use dissimilar approaches to the storyline and the characters. Jane Austen was not only an authoress living the Regency era but also an heiress of classic literature of the eighteenth century, the age of reason and the society which put a high emphasis on decorum and restraint. Therefore, Austen did not describe in her work a fantastic imaginary world as for example Brontë, but she rather focused on the real everyday events and an ordinary family life. Her characters do not display a variety of emotions nor are they driven by a passion. In like manner, Austen seems to be an impersonal narrator.

Austen wrote the *novel of manners* in which she used ironic, humorous way to criticise a moral, ‘a marriage market’ and an education of women at the end of eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century. The traces of feminism can be also found in her novels, yet it is a rather subtle domestic feminism than a heroic one. Her heroines do not directly enforce their independence but they ‘find other ways to develop and assert their womanhood despite restrictions placed on them’¹. Austen was a prolific author and while the general public has considered *Pride and Prejudice* to be her best novel, many critics appreciate *Mansfield Park* for its elaboration and social criticism while retaining its artistic value.

Charlotte Brontë was an author of the Romantic movement of the first half of the nineteenth century and therefore her work shows strong traits of Romanticism. In her most famous novel, *Jane Eyre*, Brontë creates the characters driven by their unhappy past, ardent natures and passionate emotions. The story focuses chiefly on two main heroes and emphasises their individualism. The heroine Jane Eyre is a strong woman with a desire to find her place in society but also freedom and love. The main hero Rochester shows the strong characteristics of the Byronic hero — a typical hero of the Romantic literature. Apart from Austen’s novels, the plot of Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* is much more dramatic with its fantastic events and change of settings. The novel also displays some elements of the Gothic novel with the mad woman in the attic or the mysterious psychological connection between the heroes.

The feministic features appear in Brontë’s work much stronger than in Austen’s novels. The main heroine herself is the main and most significant theme of feminism in the novel. Jane is a strong and independent woman who is not afraid to overcome

¹ Quoted in Todd, Janet. *Jane Austen in Context*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2005) 103.

hardships and fight for love but also an independence and an equality. As well as Austen, Brontë used her work to criticise the matters she perceived as unfavourable in society. Since she personally experienced difficulties of the life of a governess, in her most famous novel Brontë does not hesitate to criticise the position and living conditions of governesses in the Victorian society.

The beginning of the nineteenth century is a period when a real change of a position of women in society finally started to happen. In terms of statistic, in the Victorian period, there were more women writers than ever before. This was possible mainly because of a growing number of the literate people, an expansion of the publishing houses and thus resulting price reduction of the books as well as a greater accessibility of the books. The women writers started to appear with their attempts to promote this social change, to express their opinions on society or politics, to change their own social positions or some of them simply wrote to make a living. They focused on a variety of forms as novels, poetry, lectures, essays and others. However, the novel became dominant in the Victorian literature as it was the most suitable form to express the growing bourgeois ideas and attitudes.

Though Brontë was a critic of Austen, both authors have some matters in common. Firstly, both Austen and Brontë did not write under their real names. It is not surprising that women authors did not want to use their real names. The society in both Regency and Victorian periods was strongly man-dominated and any woman writer put herself at risk of being judged and rejected simply because of her gender since women were considered intellectually inferior. When publishing her novels, Austen boldly used the pseudonym 'A Lady' not covering her feminine nature. Her identity was not revealed until after her death. Charlotte Brontë used deliberately masculine pen name Currer Bell as she together with her sisters was afraid of prejudice of society and literary world connected with

women authors. And her persuasion was justified as she was told by the famous Victorian poet Southey that literature is not a matter of women. Furthermore, her story of *Jane Eyre* was severely criticised and considered outrages and immoral by some of her contemporary critics.

Though, as I stated above, both authors had different attitudes to their writing, they were interested in the similar and feminine subjects of writing, notably love, courtship, a female heroine, marriage, a position of women in society and a lower middle class. Apart from these topics, their novels are infused with a critique of society and also feminist beliefs which each of the authoresses expressed by using her own distinct and remarkable style.

2. Society in the Regency Era

The Regency era is a period of the reign of Prince Regent, later crowned as George IV. The era lasted from 1811 to 1820 and can be considered a sub-period of the Georgian era. In 1811 the Prince of Wales seized the power and became Prince Regent. It happened so, because the behaviour of King George III, his father, became erratic due to a mental illness. The era officially ended in 1820, when George III deceased and Prince Regent acceded to the throne and became King George IV. Unofficially, much longer period of time can be considered the Regency era. That is from 1795 to 1837 when Queen Victoria ascended to the throne.

The Regency era is the period of the life and authorship of Jane Austen. Although Austen was not much interested in politics and her works were rather engaged in social themes, she disliked Prince Regent. Her disfavour was probably caused by his numerous excesses and a self-indulgence, which cost the treasury a lot of money.

During this era, a great social, political and economic change occurred. Society was still considerably stratified and a vast gap between the rich and the poor existed. Upper class thrived, however, there was a dark side of the society existing mainly in the destitute parts of larger cities, especially London. There the city slums existed, inhabited not only by poor people but also criminals and prostitutes.

The social hierarchy was a crucial factor in the society of the Regency era. The highest position in the hierarchy was occupied by Royalty, followed by Nobility and Commoners. Jane Austen in her novels was mainly concerned with the middle class and the upper middle class and she herself was born to the lower nobility. The rank of a person was determined by a family background, a wealth, and a title. The social position of

an individual significantly affected a life of a person, most importantly an upbringing, an education and a standard of living.

The social circumstances of men and women greatly differed as the social position of men was substantially better than that of women. Men had many legal rights that women did not have. Only men could inherit, women merely in case that there was no male heir. The eldest son was the heir of his father's title and of a family estate. Younger sons had a few possibilities to make a living, either to find a wealthy bride or to acquire a career. They could become clergymen, join the army, study at university and become lawyers. Furthermore, double standards were applied in the society. Moral and social misdemeanours of men, such as adultery, was judged considerably more mildly than that of women.

Women had a much more difficult role in the society. They were almost completely reliant on men. As mentioned above, women did not inherit. They could not work without tarnishing their reputation, with the exception of a few occupations as a lady's companion, governess, tutor or writer. In addition, most of these professions were low paid. A woman was dependent upon her employers and often considered a servant in just a little better position than regular servants.

The only way to gain a higher social position and secure decent living conditions was through marriage. However, this institution also had its difficulties. Prior to a marriage, a woman had a legal guardian, who was usually a father or an older brother. After a wedding, a woman became a matter of a husband. Women had essentially no legal rights. All the property of a wife as her dowry belonged to a husband and he supported her for the entire life.

In average, young women married at the age of twenty-two. The marriage market was very competitive. The young woman as a debutante was introduced to the society at

a debutante ball. In order to get married and to become a perfect wife they were raised to be elegant, accomplished and with the proper social manners. When a woman did not marry until the age of thirty, she was considered a spinster. It usually meant that she had to live with her family and be supported by them or choose one of the occupations mentioned above.

Marriage for love was exceptional. Most of the time, marriage was based on the financial and social reasons. In case of a divorce, which was usually a matter of the rich higher class only, the woman became a social pariah. She had no right to her children as the husband would acquire children to the custody, regardless of the circumstances of the divorce, such as an abusive or insane husband.

3. Society in the Victorian Era

The Victorian era started in 1837 when Queen Victoria succeeded to the throne and lasted until her death in 1901. It has been a period of peace, growth and prosperity. The population almost doubled during this era. No great war erupted and the realm thrived.

Queen Victoria set a tone of the entire society since she herself was an illustration of morality and family values, at least, most of the time. She married her cousin Prince Albert and bore him nine children.

What concerns the society, the social values did not transform extensively from the Regency era or the Georgian era. Cultural mood transferred from Rationalism to Romanticism with respect to social values, religion and arts. Victorian Society is known for its highly moralistic language and behaviour.

Etiquette was a crucial factor in the life of aristocracy. The proper behaviour was more important than ever. The title was a significant feature and addressing a person with a wrong title was considered a faux pas. A young lady could not be found alone with a gentleman or else her reputation would be destroyed. Indeed, the etiquette and the moral of the Victorian era was strict. The aristocracy kept occupied itself with numerous balls, parties, visits and, of course, gossips. A woman, again, had to be a perfect elegant wife with flawless manners and no possibility of a scandal.

The aristocracy was followed by the middle class, which consisted of doctors, lawyers, businessmen, priests and others. The member of the middle class sometimes could advance to the higher society, everything depended on the wealth one possessed.

The lower class was invisible to the higher classes. The poor population was considered a burden on the society. The living conditions were horrendous and not

improving much during the Victorian era. Despite charity attempts, the living standard did not rise, mainly because of the deficient education, shortage of work opportunities and insufficient reformation. The slums in the cities, mainly in London, expanded. The prostitution was seen as a significant problem. Therefore, it can be stated that the high moral was not the focus of interest of the lower class.

The concept of a wife as '*an angel in the house*' was developed. The husband was head of the family and the woman supposed to be a perfect creature, who should worship and obey her husband and sacrifice herself to a family life. The role of a wife and a mother was supposed to fulfil a woman's life. A woman and her children were still considered a property of her husband and divorce was regarded as a social taboo. In spite of this social frame of mind, the feminist ideas emerged and spread among the middle class. The suffrage movement arose and asserted.

Although the women's rights were still very limited during Victoria's reign, a reformation brought into force several laws concerning the rights of women. These laws improved women's position in marriage or after divorce. They newly guaranteed to women a right to own a property in the marriage or to gain a custody of children after the divorce and others. In a small way, an emancipation of women began. A higher number of women embarked on working, whether it was out of a necessity or a desire for independence. Charlotte Brontë was one of those women.

Charlotte Brontë was born to a poor middle-class family, and in her novels was concerned with the middle class, as well, and the heroines in similar life conditions as was hers. Charlotte Brontë could be considered a voice of an oppressed woman. She felt that options for a poor middle-class woman were limited and bounding. It was often a choice between the marriage because of financial and social reasons or restricted options of work opportunities.

4. Life of Jane Austen

Jane Austen was born on 16 December 1775 into the family of a lower landed gentry. Her father was Reverend George Austen and at that time served at Steventon, Hampshire, where Jane was born as a seventh child of her mother Cassandra Austen. She was the second daughter and the two sisters were surrounded by six brothers. Her older sister Cassandra was Jane's dearest friend and accompanied Jane through her life. Cassandra remained unmarried as well as Jane.

'The immediate Austen family was warm and affectionate. George Austen was fond of his wife and children.'² George Austen was a scholar and encouraged the children in reading and learning.

The first year of her life Jane spent with the family of Elizabeth Littlewood, who nursed her. In 1783 Jane and Cassandra were sent to a boarding school in Oxford and later moved to Southampton. There Jane contracted typhus and nearly died. Since she was raised and taught at home until 1785 when the girls were sent to another boarding school. The sisters returned home soon, because of financial reasons. Ever since Jane was raised by her family.

Both girls, Cassandra and Jane, from now on were educated by their father and older brothers. George Austen encouraged the children in learning, reading and also writing. The passionate discussions about politics and society were led in the household. Another source of an entertainment for the family was acting.

First known time of Jane's writing is about the year 1787. Till 1793 she wrote many poems, short stories and plays mainly for the entertainment of her family. These writings were later published in three volumes. Already at that time, Jane was concerned

² Valerie G. Myer. *Jane Austen, Obstinate Heart: A Biography*. (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1997) 25.

with the problems of women in the society. She wrote a short novel *Lady Susan* about an intelligent and witty woman, whose acts led to her self-destruction.

Jane's only contact with society occurred merely through the balls and visits in Steventon village. 'Jane was fond of dancing, and excelled in it.'³

In 1795, when Jane was twenty, young Tom Lefroy visited Steventon and they befriended. Lefroy fell in love with Jane. Nevertheless, the relationship had no future as Lefroy was only a student, had no money and was dependent on his uncle. As Jane's family was not rich either and did not have a high status, Lefroy's family interfered and Tom was sent away. Jane never saw him again as all contact was prevented by the families.

Approximately at that time Jane started to write her novels. The first one, called *Elinor and Marianne*, was written and read for the amusement of the family. This novel was published much later in 1811 as *Sense and Sensibility*. Then she began to pen *First Impression*, later known as *Pride and Prejudice*. All the work was read to the family since Jane was working on adjustments and revisions.

George Austen was a supporter of Jane's work and tried to get her works published. He wrote to a London publisher Thomas Cadell, however, his attempt came in vain. Jane embarked on writing another novel called *Susan*, which was also later renamed for *Northanger Abbey*.

In 1800 George Austen decided to retire and move the entire family. At the age of twenty-seven Jane had to leave Steventon, the only home she had known, and the family moved to the town of Bath.

In 1802 Jane received a proposal from Harris Bigg-Wither. As Bigg-Wither was a young heir of the Hampshire family he was considered a desirable bachelor. Perhaps

³ Claire Tomalin. *Jane Austen: A Life*. (New York: Knopf, 1997) 102.

Jane felt the responsibility and opportunity of ensuring the future of hers and her family and probably for this reason Jane accepted the proposal. Yet, the next day she changed her mind and cancelled the engagement. Jane was not in love and she would not marry for financial reasons. It can be also seen in her novels, in which the heroines do not marry for money, but for love.

Another attempt of publishing Jane's novel was made by her brother Henry, but even this try remained unsuccessful.

Jane started to write a new novel *The Watsons*, which remained uncompleted. George Austen was taken ill and died suddenly. Jane put out writing of *The Watsons* in order to help her family in the difficult times. The death of George Austen left Mrs. Austen and the girls in the financial difficulties. Even though they were supported by their brothers, they lived a life of a constant movement. Eventually, they moved in with brother Frank to Chawton cottage, where Jane began to write again. This was a very productive part of Jane's life.

Henry Austen, working as a banker, took also a function of Jane's literary agent. He approached another publisher in London, Thomas Egerton. This time was Henry fruitful and in 1811 *Sense and Sensibility* was finally published. The book sold well and received fine reviews, thus it meant a much needed financial income for the family.

In 1813 *Pride and Prejudice* was put into print and was an immediate bestseller. Soon followed her other novel *Mansfield Park*, which was no less successful. The public could not get enough of Austen's stories. In that time Jane changed her publisher for more reputable one. Another novel *Emma* was released along with the second editions of her other works.

Unfortunately, a banking business of her brother Henry went bankrupt and that took down also his brothers. The family was again in an uncertain financial position. Jane plunged into writing of *The Elliots*, published as *Persuasion*.

At the beginning of 1816 Jane's health began to decline. Nevertheless, Jane was still working hard, despite the health issues. Her state deteriorated quickly and she was forced to give up writing. The family took Jane to Winchester in order to find a medical treatment. Their quest turned out to be futile and in 1817 Jane died and left some of her works uncompleted. Henry made use of his contacts and had Jane buried in Winchester Cathedral.

After Jane's death, Cassandra and Henry arranged publishing *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey* as a set in 1817. In this publication, Henry revealed an identity of the author Jane Austen which was unknown until then.

5. Life of Charlotte Brontë

Charlotte Brontë was born in 1816 into the family of Anglican clergyman Patrick Brontë. The family belonged to the poor middle class. Patrick Brontë was a well-educated man, who studied at Cambridge. Charlotte's mother was Maria Branwell Brontë.

Reverend Patrick Brontë served in several parishes and in 1820 moved with his family to the rectory of Haworth. Soon after Maria Brontë died after a long suffering caused by illness, allegedly cancer. Before her death, Maria had managed to give birth to six children. The two oldest sisters were Maria and Elizabeth. Charlotte was third. She was followed by Emily, Anne and the only son Branwell. The aunt Elizabeth Branwell left her home and moved to Haworth in order to help with the upbringing of the children. The siblings grew up isolated from other children and were very close to each other.

'Their fierce devotion to one another and to their home grew out of their isolation and confirmed it. Virtually from infancy, they looked to one another for nurturance and support.'⁴

In 1824, all the girls with the exception of Anne, who was too young, were sent to the Clergy Daughter's School at Cowan's Bridge in Lancashire. The school living conditions were harsh, the girls suffered from a lack of food and the discipline was strict. Charlotte Brontë blamed the school for hastening the death of her sisters, Maria and Elizabeth, who died of tuberculosis in 1825. Charlotte's health was weakened as well. The events and conditions of the Clergy Daughter's School served as an inspiration for her novel *Jane Eyre*.

⁴ Helene Moglen. *Charlotte Brontë: The Self Conceived*. (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press Ltd., 1984) 20.

After the death of the older sisters, Charlotte and Emily returned home and all the children lived there together for over five years. Patrick Brontë was an intelligent and literate man and the children were influenced and inspired by him. ‘His wit amused them, his intelligence stimulated them, his reading and writing shaped their aspirations and formed their tastes.’⁵

They invented their imaginary worlds and wrote stories and poetry about them. Charlotte and Branwell devised Angria, Emily with Anne made up Gondal. They elaborated the stories and these activities most likely helped them in their future literary occupations.

In 1831 Charlotte started to attend a school at Roe Head. There she befriended Ellen Nussey and this friendship lasted through letters until Charlotte’s death. Charlotte did not stay there long. Soon she returned home in order to teach her younger sisters. Later she came back to school and stayed there as a teacher from 1835 to 1838.

Her brother Branwell was a talented artist. Nevertheless, he was unstable and weak. Eventually, he descended into alcoholism, lost all his occupations and contracted debts.

In 1839 Charlotte rejected a proposal from Reverend Henry Nussey, brother of her friend Ellen. A marriage would be an easy way to solve her living situation, but ‘Charlotte still shared her heroines’ romantic dreams of love and was unwilling to compromise.’⁶ In the same year Charlotte began her first work as a governess in Yorkshire. She was employed in several families, however, she was not particularly happy as some children were unruly and even tyrannical. She felt excluded to ‘an

⁵ Ibid. 24.

⁶ Ibid. 61.

undefined area between the domestic servants and the members of the family, she had neither friends nor rights.’⁷

The sisters came with an idea of opening their own school. In 1842 Charlotte and Emily travelled to Brussels in order to improve their French and acquire the basics of German. They enrolled in a boarding school led by Constantin Héger and his wife. The intelligence of Charlotte and Emily did not stay unnoticed by Héger. In addition to studying, the sisters began also teaching in the school. Charlotte developed a deep devotion to Constantin Héger, which was not reciprocated. Moreover, Héger’s wife did not favour Charlotte. The sisters returned home. During their stay in Brussels, their aunt Elizabeth died. Charlotte’s experiences of the boarding school in Brussels were used in her novels *The Professor* and *Villette*.

The attempt to run the school in Haworth failed. Charlotte, Emily and Anne wrote a collection of poems under the pseudonyms *Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell* and they published it at their own expense. They felt need to use the pseudonyms as they feared how the book would be received if the readers knew that the authors were women. Unfortunately, the book was not successful and only two copies were sold. Despite this failure, they made contacts in the world of publishing and attempted to let publish their novels. Charlotte’s first novel *The Professor* was declined by a publishing company. However, her other novel *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography* was accepted and turned out to be an immediate success.

The future which followed was tragic for Charlotte’s personal life. Almost all Charlotte’s family died out. First Branwell died, subsequently Emily and Anne. What concerns another side of her life, Charlotte’s career thrived. She completed *Shirley*, visited London, met Elizabeth Gaskell and declined another marriage proposal, as well.

⁷ Ibid. 60.

In 1854 she married Arthur Bell Nicholls, a curate of her father, who loved her for a long time. Nicholls was a long-time friend of the family and supported the sisters in writing. Charlotte was not particularly in love but she felt that Nicholls was an honest and kind man.

‘I trust I feel thankful to God for having enabled me to make what seems a right choice; and I pray to be enabled to repay as I ought the affectionate devotion of a truthful, honourable man.’⁸

Nevertheless, his courtship was not received well by Patrick and took several months to persuade him. Nicholls was originally an Irishman and the newlyweds spent their honeymoon in Ireland. After their return, Nicholls continued to work as a curate and Charlotte began to write a novel *Emma*, which eventually stayed unfinished. Although her husband was not so literary engaged and was more of a practical nature, he respected Charlotte and her work. The marriage did not last long. In 1855 Charlotte conceived but unfortunately died in the early stages of the pregnancy. Her first novel *The Professor* was published posthumously.

⁸ Elizabeth C. Gaskell. *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*. Volume II. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 316.

6. Individual person in relation to society

The heroines of Jane Eyre and Fanny Price can be contrasted as the individual persons in relation to the British society. Both novels were written as the works of the different literary movements and thus both authors approached their characters from the different angles. These literary movements – Neoclassicism and Romanticism – represent the contrary attitudes of the society towards an individual.

Jane Austen as an authoress of the Neoclassical movement reflects some of its attitudes. According to these views an individual is expected to conform to the established social norms. The man is not seen as an individual person, but an important piece of whole – society. It is important to behave in accordance with the conventional social conduct. Rebelling against the established rules and customs is considered impudent and absurd. And although Austen is not a proponent of a blind following of conventions, she holds the view that the proper manners are important as a display of self-restraint and for gaining the public esteem.

This approach against individualism can be noticed in a distribution of an attention she pays to the characters in *Mansfield Park*. Although Fanny Price is the main heroine of the novel and we perceive the story mainly through her eyes and mind, Austen is not centrally concentrated on one individual hero but divides the space more or less evenly between other characters.

In like manner, the main heroine Fanny Price is not a strong individual. In fact, by many critics she is rather considered a dull, priggish and indistinctive character and not very likeable one, as well. Fanny also seems to be quite different from other Austen's heroines, which appear to be more strong-willed. Fanny is not a rebellious person and she hardly ever manages to express her own opinion or stand her ground, although she might

be in the right since she is constantly bullied by her nosy Aunt Norris. Nor is Fanny able to actively fight for her love to Edmund. She is a rather passive person standing aside, in shadow expecting to be noticed. ‘She resists the misdemeanours and the importunings of others, and very occasionally she ventures actions of her own...’⁹ She also possesses the self-restraint so highly appreciated in the era and expresses very little emotions and by no means strong passions as for example her jealousy of Edmund and Miss Crawford. She conceals and hides all her emotions and desires in her heart.

The only exception when Fanny rebels is when she is compelled to the marriage with unloved Major Crawford. Fanny defies her uncle Lord Bertram and in this way extensionally the whole society.

‘The advantage or disadvantage of your family, of your parents, your brothers and sisters, never seems to have had a moment's share in your thoughts on this occasion. How they might be benefited, how they must rejoice in such an establishment for you, is nothing to you. You think only of yourself...’¹⁰

She is accused of putting herself and her comfort above the good of a greater whole and that contradicts the neoclassical ideas. The pressure exerted upon Fanny is immense, however, she is able to rebel passively, at least. She is not able to refuse Crawford's proposal directly but chooses more evasive means. She denies the existence of Crawford's feelings, and attempts to avoid him. However, Fanny has good reasons to refuse Major Crawford's proposal. Firstly, she witnessed of his ‘dandy’ behaviour — his flirting with both her cousins without involving his own feelings or having any serious intentions. With her high moral Fanny despises such behaviour. Secondly, and more

⁹ Sandie Byrne, *Jane Austen: Mansfield Park* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) 208.

¹⁰ Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park: A Novel* (London: Richard Bentley, 1833) 282.

significantly, she is in love with Edmund Bertram and therefore ‘it is not moral rectitude that saves her from Henry Crawford, but her love for Edmund.’¹¹ Nevertheless, in the course of time, as Crawford courts Fanny, she starts to relent toward him. Had it not been for Edmund she would probably marry him and, as the authoress further speculates, their marriage would be probably happy.

To further explain the relationship between the main heroine and the society, Fanny does not feel to be important and the society has the same attitude. An individual is insignificant and expendable. What also supports the impression of Fanny’s irrelevance is that to her love story is dedicated a very little part of the story. Edmund’s falling in love with her and their marriage are very quickly concluded in the last chapter.

Furthermore, even women’s education concludes to this anti-individualist approach of the society. The girls are raised and educated in order to marry favourably and to contribute to a course and a continuation of the society. They are not educated in a manner to develop an individual or exceptional mind.

‘Sir Thomas deplors the fact that the expensive education which he had given them had been directed only to their understanding and manners and not to their characters.’¹²

From a point of view of residents of Mansfield Park, which we can consider the representatives of the society, Fanny is only significant in terms of her purpose to the others and how she can serve and benefit the course of Mansfield Park.

¹¹ Hazel Jones, *Jane Austen and Marriage* (London: Continuum, 2009) 4.

¹² J. B. E. Turner, *Brodie’s Notes on Jane Austen’s Mansfield Park* (London: Pan Books Ltd., 1977) 4.

‘[...] throughout the novel Fanny is thought of by everyone as ‘comfort’ and ‘acquisition’ despite herself. [...] Fanny is both device and instrument in a larger pattern, as well as fully fledged novelistic character.’¹³

With the exception of Edmund, no one cares about Fanny’s feelings, interests or welfare. We can imagine that it went likewise in the Regency era, in which the emotions of one were not in the interest of the society. Fanny Price’s relationship with the people of Mansfield Park can be likened to a relationship between an individual and the whole society of the Regency era. We can perceive ‘the continuity of social structure’¹⁴ since we can see ‘the estate as ... a metonym for other inherited structures – society as a whole, a code of morality, a body of manners, a system of language.’¹⁵

The famous feminist of late eighteenth century Mary Wollstonecraft expressed a related opinion. Her work, ‘*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) argued that the structure of the family paralleled that of the state so that husbands assumed the right to be undisputed rulers of the household.’¹⁶

However, Austen’s ‘novels both affirm and subvert the dominant (if frequently disguised) patriarchal discourse of Austen’s society.’¹⁷ The man is a controlling head of a family and an estate, nevertheless, his position is weakened in his absence and ‘the disruption is brought the sexual transgression of a female character.’¹⁸

The authoress also notes on different attitudes of the society towards a woman and a man. The society of the Regency era is deeply patriarchal and this is also reflected in

¹³ Sandie Byrne, *Jane Austen: Mansfield Park* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) 208.

¹⁴ Quoted in Janet Todd, *Jane Austen in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 94.

¹⁵ Ibid. 94.

¹⁶ Ibid. 205.

¹⁷ Ibid. 219.

¹⁸ Ibid. 219.

the approach towards women as well as their misdeeds. While men's misdemeanours were often overlooked, women were punished much more severely.

'That punishment, the public punishment of disgrace, should in a just measure attend *his* share of the offence is, we know, not one of the barriers which society gives to virtue.'¹⁹

Maria's abandonment of a husband for her lover ends with 'a life sentence'²⁰ as she is condemned by the society as well as her family to live in a seclusion, while her lover Crawford endures this scandal almost without harm to his reputation.

In contrast, the Romantic movement approaches an individual person exactly oppositely. Romanticism rejects the principles of Classicism. The movement builds on, among others, on individualism. It values an individual over the society and also nature over the urban life. It is concerned with emotions and passion rather than rationality. Authors of the Romantic movement questioned the rules and institutions of the society. Even the Byronic hero is a type of individualist protruding from the society and violating the social rules. Charlotte Brontë is a typical author of Romanticism and especially *Jane Eyre* reflects all the elements mentioned above.

When *Jane Eyre* was published in 1847, the novel stirred up the Victorian public since the work was considered subversive, outrageous and radical. The heroine was 'described as an emblem of 'pedantry, stupidity, or gross vulgarity' while the text as a whole was condemned as fundamentally 'anti-Christian', 'unrealistic', [...]'²¹ The protagonist Jane Eyre was criticised for her pride as well as ungratefulness. What the Victorian people outraged the most was Jane's anger.

¹⁹ Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park: A Novel* (London: Richard Bentley, 1833) 419.

²⁰ Christopher Gillie, *A Preface to Jane Austen*, (London: Longman, 1985) 124.

²¹ Sean Purchase, *Key Concepts in Victorian Literature*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) 171.

First, the highlight of an individual appears in the structure of the novel. Apart from *Mansfield Park*, where the authoress gives all the characters approximately the same attention, the story of *Jane Eyre* focuses chiefly on the main heroine Jane Eyre and perhaps even Rochester. The other characters appear marginally and are described in terms of their relationship to Jane.

What is more, the whole story is written as an autobiography of one insignificant common person, not particularly beautiful or extraordinary. A woman, who is at the bottom of the social hierarchy, an orphan without any significant property and working as a governess. All these factors stand against an individual person, especially a woman, in the Victorian society. Women still had a difficult position in the Victorian era, as the society was strongly patriarchal, though some changes started to appear when the new feminist opinions and laws in favour of women started to appear.

The heroine is an orphan, who does have some relatives, but they do not care if she is dead or alive. Also, the heroine works as a governess and governesses had a difficult position on the social scale. In fact, a governess was condemned to an indeterminate status — not belonging among the servants in a real sense, but too poor and dependent to be seen as equal to her masters.²² If a governess was really unfortunate, she came to a family as the Ingrams, where she was disdained and condemned to a mere servitude. And yet the authoress pursues the fate of this unimportant woman, who fights against the society which does not offer much to a plain poor woman and this woman is able to assert and climb higher on the social scale. Though, she is able to move within the social hierarchy through the only way possible for the Victorian woman and that is via marriage. In the

²² Robin Gilmour, *The Novel in the Victorian Age: A Modern Introduction*. (London: Edward Arnold, 1986) 62.

spirit of the Romantic movement, Brontë proves that every little person and his or her day-to-day problems can be relevant.

Brontë in *Jane Eyre* is also concerned with a journey of an oppressed Victorian girl of towards maturity and becoming a woman. The story of *Jane Eyre* belongs to a category of ‘Victorian *Bildungsroman* – the ‘education’ or ‘formation’ novel – in which the ‘individual’ is shaped by his or her journey from childhood to maturity.’²³ Brontë does not omit the childhood the heroine and thus does not begin with a finished mature person, but deals with heroine’s growing up which partly or fully shapes the personality of the individual. She attempts ‘to construct a coherent sense of identity or self against the adversities of life [...]’²⁴ Brontë quite in detail describes Jane’s childhood experiences and that denotes that she, indeed, considers them significant for the character of the protagonist. Jane had a miserable childhood. She was an orphan, who was taken by her relatives, the Reeds, who despised her and abused her. Then she was sent to a boarding school where her situation did not improve much. There is no wonder that she grows up into a young woman who is rebellious and desires for freedom. On a journey towards maturity and success Jane experiences ‘difficulties every woman in patriarchal society must meet and overcome: oppression (at Gateshead), starvation (at Lowood), madness (at Thornfield), and coldness (at Marsh End).’²⁵

Jane Eyre is a strong and individualist character. As well as Rochester, Jane carries some traits of a Byronic hero. Apart from Fanny who bears her unhappy childhood with suppleness and suffers silently, Jane rebels and defies and is ‘excluded from the Reed family group in the drawing room, because *she* is not a ‘contented, happy little child’ –

²³ Sean Purchase, *Key Concepts in Victorian Literature*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) 169.

²⁴ Ibid. 169

²⁵ Sandra M. Gilbert, Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (London: Yale University Press, 1984) 339.

excluded, that is, from ‘normal’ society [...]’²⁶ While growing up in Lowood, Jane opposes to the injustice and authority and also doubts Christian faith and therefore as typical the Romantic hero questions the authorities and institutions. As a mature woman, she is discontent with her situation and longs for freedom and adventure. With Rochester she experiences a passionate but unfortunate love as it is revealed that Rochester already has a wife. Then she leaves Thornfield Hall and runs away hoping to find a refuge, but is again refused by the society and therefore retires into nature. However, it seems that Jane cannot find her place within or outside the society.

‘Nor does nature in *Jane Eyre* offer succour from the cruelties of human interactions and human arrangements. Fleeing from Rochester, Jane almost perishes out on the moors.’²⁷

As there are conflicts of Jane with the society, there are also ‘conflicts within the character of Jane herself – conflicts of duty and desire, assertion and restraint [...]’²⁸ Jane longs for to be with her beloved Rochester, but at the same time she realises that she has a duty to herself and to her moral and she cannot stay with him regardless of the consequences.

Jane Eyre, even as a child, has no clear space in the society and she continues to seek her position throughout the whole story, though it is difficult as whenever she finds a place there appears an obstacle to her happiness. As a governess, she is disrespected by the guests of Rochester and dependent on her employer, as the fiancée of Rochester she cannot wed him because he is already married and as a country teacher, she has to live

²⁶ Ibid. 339.

²⁷ Heather Glen, *The Cambridge Companion to Brontës* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 113.

²⁸ Robin Gilmour, *The Novel in the Victorian Age: A Modern Introduction*. (London: Edward Arnold, 1986) 63.

without her beloved man. Eventually, she finds her place as a wife of Rochester and joins him in his rather solitary living. And this perhaps suggests that her place lies outside the society as she is such an individualist that cannot live within the society.

Perhaps, the greatest issue Jane has with the Victorian society is that it is patriarchal and she cannot flourish under the dominance of man. In Gateshead John Reed is the tyrannical patriarch, in the Lowood it is represented by Mr. Brocklehurst, in Thornfield Hall it is Rochester and at Marsh End it is St. John Rivers. Ultimately, she prevails in the marriage with Rochester, but only when he is crippled and blind and dependent on Jane and she becomes the dominant one in their relationship. In this way, Jane Eyre overcomes the patriarchal society that oppresses her.

The stress on a tension between the individual and the society appeared also in other novels of that time, such as another *Bildungsroman* — *David Copperfield* (1850) by Dickens.

‘Both novels begin in childhood misery and end with adult success, which in these stories amounts to marriage, and both suggest that the individual hero or heroine will learn, progress and, ultimately, prevail.’²⁹

As mentioned above, Jane, apart from Fanny, is a strong and passionate character and this mirrors also in a different way of opposing to the matters which are against heroines’ moral or will. Rochester asks Jane to live with him in France where she would be considered his mistress, she would live in shame and she would breach her moral principles. Even though Rochester tries to convince Jane that he cannot be married because his wife is mad, Jane does not let herself be fooled and directly and actively

²⁹ Sean Purchase, *Key Concepts in Victorian Literature*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) 170.

declines this offer. Subsequently, she chooses even more active way of refusing and leaves the manor. Jane realises that she will not find love again and no one will love her as Rochester, however, if she had become his mistress she would degrade herself to the lowest position of the society possible. She would lose all her independence and destroy all her achievements, so she runs as 'it is necessary for her own self-preservation.'³⁰

Rochester is as Jane an individualist in the Victorian society and also a type of the Byronic hero. His life prior Jane was not easy nor exactly proper. He led more of a wild and profligate life. He had several affairs and mistresses and now he is raising an illegitimate child which may or may not be his. After he was decoyed into the marriage with a mad woman because of the greediness of his family, he has a reason to be angry with the life and the society. He is trapped in the marriage which he cannot escape because of the social rules and customs and when he finds love, the society again interferes and foils his chance for happiness. Another trait of the Byronic hero appears further in the novel since during the fire in Thornfield Hall Rochester is crippled and withdraws into a solitude living.

³⁰ Sandra M. Gilbert, Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (London: Yale University Press, 1984) 363.

7. Stratification of society and marriage

In the Regency period as well as the Victorian period, British society was severely stratified and any change happening in this regard came very slowly. As the stratification was so deeply rooted, some of its remnants are still relevant in the British society. The social classes were rigidly set and a movement upwards within the social scale was quite difficult, especially for women. Fundamentally, the only way for a woman to move up on the social scale was via marriage and that is well reflected in both novels. Nevertheless, similarly to authors' approaches to their main characters, Austen and Brontë have also different attitudes towards a marriage of the heroes and their social background involved.

Both authors use as a heroine a character which can be seen as an archetype of a poor girl, basically an orphan, who is brought up by the relatives who neglect or abuse her. When the girl matures she falls in love and marries a well-off young man. This storyline conspicuously reminds a plot of Cinderella's tale.

Fanny's story, as well as Jane's one, seems to be a depiction of the Cinderella story.³¹ Mrs. Norris represents an evil stepmother. She despises Fanny and does not miss an opportunity to criticise her and manifest that Fanny does not equal to her cousins. Edmund is a representation of a prince, who comes to save Fanny from her misery. Her two female cousins depict the evil stepsisters, who sneer at her and take advantage of her.

Prior Fanny's marriage, she is just a poor relative, who the Bertrams took as a case of charity. She is not entirely a maid, but also not an adequate member of the Bertram family. She is always treated as inferior to her cousins. '[...] they cannot be equals. Their rank, fortune, rights, and expectations will always be different.'³² In fact, her position

³¹ Christopher Gillie, *A Preface to Jane Austen*, (London: Longman, 1985) 122.

³² Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park: A Novel* (London: Richard Bentley, 1833) 8.

seems to be similar to a governess Jane Eyre, because they both does not have a clearly defined place in the society.

As well as Fanny Price's fate, Jane's one also carries the traits of the Cinderella story, with a depiction of evil stepmother Mrs. Reed, Jane's cousins Eliza and Georgiana as stepsisters and her dark prince Rochester.³³ As mentioned before, Jane Eyre is an orphan with only relatives, the Reeds, which she despised as she was treated unwell in their custody. Jane was often reminded that she was just a poor relative and was at the mercy of the Reeds. She was neglected and tormented. Soon the Reeds disposed of Fanny and sent her to a boarding school Lowood.

Apart from Fanny, Jane has one more character in her Cinderella tale. That is Miss Temple who symbolises Jane's fairy godmother. Miss Temple represents a positive influence on Jane. She feeds starving Jane and shows her kindness Jane had never experienced but was lacking. Nevertheless, Miss Temple is oppressed by the patriarchal society as well as Jane.

'[...] she is closer to a fairy godmother than anyone else Jane has met, closer even to a true mother. By the fire in her pretty room, she feeds her starving pupils tea and emblematic seedcake, nourishing body and soul together despite Mr. Brocklehurst's puritanical dicta.'³⁴

Miss Temple would love to secure proper food and clothing for her pupils, but she is socially subordinate to a man, Mr. Brocklehurst, and does not have that power.

³³ Robin Gilmour, *The Novel in the Victorian Age: A Modern Introduction*. (London: Edward Arnold, 1986) 65.

³⁴ Sandra M. Gilbert, Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (London: Yale University Press, 1984) 345.

As mentioned, the only way to climb the social ladder for a woman was through marriage, because the social position of a woman was determined by the social status of her husband.

‘It begins, rather, with marriages that brutally divide three sisters into three different social classes. [...] Financial inequality between the Bertrams and the Prices has easily converted into social inequality.’³⁵

Fanny Price’s mother, Frances Ward, came from a middle-class family. The family of Ward was not very wealthy, yet not impoverished. The older sister of Frances, Maria Ward, married preferably. She married Sir Thomas Bertram and elevated to the status of baronet despite her dowry, which was stated to be ‘short of any equitable claim to it.’³⁶ The eldest sister married Reverend Norris, who was not entirely poor, though without any considerable fortune. Miss Frances fared the worst of all the sisters. She married in defiance of her family and she chose for a husband Mr. Price, ‘a Lieutenant of Marines without education, fortune, or connexions.’³⁷ Because Frances Ward married a poor ignoble husband she descended on the social scale. The authoress shows us that this transgression was not without consequences. Mrs. Frances Price has to raise, dress and feed nine children and, of course, with her poor alcoholic husband it is quite problematic. Not being able to liberate herself from this unfortunate marriage, she resigns and her household looks accordingly.

When young Fanny comes to visit her home she is horrified by the state of the household. The seat of the Price family is a rather small house with confined rooms. They

³⁵ Sandie Byrne, *Jane Austen: Mansfield Park* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) 221-222.

³⁶ Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park: A Novel* (London: Richard Bentley, 1833) 1.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 2.

are served by only one maid, who is quite indolent and deficient. The Price offspring live in joint rooms and are ill-mannered. Fanny's mother does not feel any deep affection for her and father's indulgence in alcohol has advanced. The whole household is in disorder and Fanny is disappointed and ashamed. Fanny cannot resist contrasting Mansfield Park and the seat of Price family. In this comparison, Mansfield Park wins with its quiet nature, order and decency in contrast to her home, which turns out to be 'a cage' for Fanny.³⁸ This certainly is not a life that would Fanny or any young woman of early nineteenth century imagined for herself. In this marriage, there is no freedom, but confinement in a poverty.

In *Mansfield Park*, Austen prefers marriages of people which are suitable for each other, but at the same time criticises marriages which are based only on the interest in money or social class. Austen 'disliked the cash nexus as the basis for marriage and abhorred the financial calculations which set a dowry of so-many thousand pounds as the purchasing price of a husband [...]'³⁹ She disapproves of the exaggerated emphasis on a fortune and a social status and forced marriages without respect to other circumstances as for example affection.

'Her privileging of 'good' marriages as narrative resolution (and even as a moral imperative) is therefore explicitly edged with a critique of patriarchal social norms.'⁴⁰

As another example of a failed matrimony can be mentioned the marriage of Maria Bertram who marries only on the basis of money and a desire to enhance her social status.

³⁸ Christopher Gillie, *A Preface to Jane Austen*, (London: Longman, 1985) 124.

³⁹ Ian Littlewood, *Jane Austen: Critical Assessments*, (Mountfield, East Sussex: Helm Information, 1998) 258.

⁴⁰ Jane Todd, *Jane Austen in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 104.

‘Maria Bertram marries for wealth and position, and her father, though anxious for her happiness, allows the marriage, thinking of the social advantages of the match.’⁴¹

Her marriage subsequently fails. By presenting the examples of the unsuitable marriages the authoress appears to warn the readers against the choice of an inappropriate partner.

It seems that according to Austen a good marriage is between the individuals who are suitable for each other not only in terms of a status and a wealth but also in terms of the character qualities and opinions. They necessarily do not have to be completely equal in the social ranks, but Austen appears to prefer marriages of the individuals who come from the same social class and environment, but she does not blindly follow the money as it was common in the Regency society. A good marriage also has to be based on the affection, but it in itself is not a sufficient trait for it.

‘With so much true merit and true love, and no want of fortune and friends, the happiness of the married cousins must appear as secure as earthly happiness can be. Equally formed for domestic life, and attached to country pleasures, their home was the home of affection and comfort; [...]’⁴²

One could argue that Fanny Price was not equal to Edmund Bertram by her social position. That is true in the beginning of the story as she comes from a destitute family and is a mere poor relative. Nevertheless, at the Bertrams she gains a proper education for an eligible wife and also becomes an essential member of the family and the Bertrams become dependent on her. She grew up with Edmund and they share similar thinking and

⁴¹ J. B. E. Turner, *Brodie's Notes on Jane Austen's Mansfield Park* (London: Pan Books Ltd., 1977) 7.

⁴² Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park: A Novel* (London: Richard Bentley, 1833) 423.

opinions. What is more, Fanny is devoted to Edmund. Therefore, they are suitable for each other in more than one aspects. Albeit Fanny does not bring any additional fortune to the manor, their marriage strengthens the family and therefore the position of Mansfield Park.

‘In marrying Edmund instead of Henry Crawford, Fanny indeed helps Sir Thomas to consolidate his empire and to protect his property from dispersion at the hands of outsiders.’⁴³

Austen and Brontë have dissimilar views on a marriage between the representatives of the different social classes. Although in *Jane Eyre* the social classes play an important role as well, Brontë does not display a preference for the marriages based on the equality of a social rank or a fortune. Quite the contrary, Brontë challenges the social scale by placing Jane Eyre and Rochester far apart on the social ladder. Jane Eyre is far below Rochester as she is poor, has no family, and is an employee of affluent Rochester. Jane is deeply aware of this social inequality.

‘Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong!—I have as much soul as you,—and full as much heart! And if God had gifted me with some beauty and much wealth, I should have made it as hard for you to leave me, as it is now for me to leave you.’⁴⁴

Nonetheless, they are equal emotionally. Rochester treats Jane as even to him since her arrival to Thornfield Hall. He invites her to tea in a parlour and is interested in

⁴³ Sandie Byrne, *Jane Austen: Mansfield Park* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) 233.

⁴⁴ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre: A Novel* (New York: Carleton, 1864) 267.

Jane and her opinions. He invites her to join the company of the arriving noble guests. It is an unusual behaviour of an employer toward a governess, which was often treated as to be invisible. Therefore, Jane develops a feeling of their equality.

‘[...] it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God’s feet, equal,—as we are!’⁴⁵

In this way, Brontë disregards the social classes deeply rooted in the British society and also inequality of men and women. In a very progressive and feministic way, Brontë sees them as even creatures.

‘Charlotte Brontë appears to have imagined a world in which the prince and Cinderella are democratically equal, [...], master and servant are profoundly alike.’⁴⁶

Given that, money or the rank are not the obstacles in their wedding. However, the matter of inequality is the very essence of a marriage of the Victorian society as well as the Regency one. The marriage inherently makes them uneven. The man wields all the power over the woman and is superior to her. The woman has no or very little rights and loses her freedom and is dependent on the whims of a husband. The authoress appears to ‘solve’ some of her issues with the inequality as Jane inherits a fortune from her uncle and she gains an esteem by becoming a respectable teacher. Also, Rochester is crippled and partly blinded in a fire. Consequently, their inequality in the marriage seems to be balanced out by Rochester’s newly acquired dependency on Jane.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 268.

⁴⁶ Sandra M. Gilbert, Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (London: Yale University Press, 1984) 354.

What concerns the social status, one of the issues Brontë is concerned with is also a position of a governess on the social scale. The occupation of a governess appears in the novel several times. Jane's newly found cousins, Diana and Mary Rivers, work as governesses as well. Jane decides to give them a part of her inherited money in order to enable them to stop working. It seems that poor intelligent women of the middle class with proper education and manners cannot avoid this occupation and almost all of them end exploited, constrained by their position and not belonging anywhere.

'[...] the real discomfort of a governess's position arises from the fact that it is undefined. She is not a relation, not a guest, not a mistress, not a servant – but something made up of all. No one knows exactly how to treat her.'⁴⁷

This describes quite well the situation of Jane. Jane was well-educated in Lowood, where she polished her manners and received an education and an experience, which prepared her for a future employment. Despite Rochester's treatment of Jane, she is still in this indeterminate status of being nor servant nor gentlewoman, since she is not fully accepted by none of these social groups. 'Many of Jane's problems [...] can be traced to her ambiguous status as a governess at Thornfield.'⁴⁸

Though both heroines, Jane Eyre and Fanny Price, are greatly different in characteristics and thinking, they use different means toward the same objective. The objective, that is perhaps still relevant in current days. They want to find love or at least an affection, they want to assert themselves in the men-dominated society, they want to live safe and comfortable life. However, perhaps the greatest goal is to find freedom of

⁴⁷ Robin Gilmour, *The Novel in the Victorian Age: A Modern Introduction* (London: Edward Arnold, 1986) 62.

⁴⁸ Sandra M. Gilbert, Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (London: Yale University Press, 1984) 349.

an individual which is almost unattainable to a woman of the nineteenth century. The only way to gain this relative freedom is through marriage, but only marriage based on love with a man who will allow his beloved wife to acquire this freedom. A conventional marriage with a despised, despotic and ruling husband represents an imprisonment for a woman.

‘Unless [...] a woman had a private income, happy matrimony was the only way of life in which middle- and upper-class women could normally hope to find themselves satisfied, esteemed and secure.’⁴⁹

In the end of both novels, the heroines are able to find this liberty and overcome all the obstacles. The obstacles disappear rather by the influence of circumstances than the heroines’ own conduct. Nevertheless, the heroines show a perseverance and insistence on their moral convictions without which they would not come to fruition. Fanny Price is rid of hateful Mr. Norris and unwanted suitor Henry Crawford and becomes a favourite person in the Bertram family. Through the marriage with her beloved Edmund, she gains her own household, where she is free to rule. Her livelihood is secured and she is no longer dependent on a charity of her relatives. The only person she is reliant on is her husband, but because he loves her as well it is likely that he would be lenient.

Jane Eyre achieves her happiness as well. Her wrongdoers John Reed and Mrs. Reed passed away. She found a family she longed for and inherited a considerable amount of money, so she is no longer a poor orphan. She is finally able to wed Rochester and in this marriage, her passionate nature does not have to be confined. She is not financially or physically dependent on her husband and finally gains a respectable social status.

⁴⁹ Christopher Gillie, *A Preface to Jane Austen* (London: Longman, 1985) 98.

8. Desire for freedom

Jane Eyre and Fanny Price are two heroines which are not quite usual to compare. It is apparent that the story of Jane Eyre is much more ardent, adventurous and feministic than Fanny Price's story. At least at the first sight. It is true that Austen's *Mansfield Park* rather concerns with a domestic environment and does not follow any thrilling storyline. The story is much less emotional and thus in agreement with the Neoclassical movement. Austen's approach is more detached and engages a satirical and ironic criticism of the middle-class society. The feminism of Jane Austen is not as radical as Brontë's one, but more subtle and domestic, pursuing the women's ability to gain at least a partial freedom and power in marriage.

Charlotte Brontë, in compliance with Romanticism, narrates more extraordinary story with the stronger feminist traits. Brontë dives into the mind of a woman who struggles to maintain her personal freedom in the society ruled by men. Her story is highly emotional – full of passion, rage and desire. It seems that the authoress projected her own feelings of a former governess and a female author in a literary world dominated by men.

In *Mansfield Park*, Fanny Price's desire for her personal freedom is put rather moderately. She does not long for an adventure and full independence, but she yearns for some kind of freedom of choice. She wants to freely choose her husband and not to be merely a slave of a society and marry a man that is eligible in the terms of property.

Fanny thinks of herself as of the lowest irrelevant member of the society since Mrs. Norris as a representative of the society smothered any feeling of importance or singularity in Fanny. Therefore, Fanny constantly doubts her opinions and even her right to think what she is thinking.

‘[...] she had begun to feel undecided as to what she *ought to do*; and as she walked round the room her doubts were increasing. Was she *right* in refusing what was so warmly asked, so strongly wished for—what might be so essential to a scheme on which some of those to whom she owed the greatest complaisance had set their hearts? Was it not ill-nature, selfishness, and a fear of exposing herself?’⁵⁰

When Fanny is reproached for her rejection of the favourable marriage she feels guilty. She does not consider that she should have the right to refuse a man she does not love without a remorse. Fanny is not able to actively oppose the reprimand and persuasion, however, she manages to persist and not to break under the pressure. In this sense, Fanny is a very passive ‘rebel’. The society oppresses her and she cannot freely express herself, but she accomplishes to assert her will passively.

‘For example, in *Mansfield Park*, Fanny Price’s inability to communicate to her uncle her perfectly clear, well thought out objections to Crawford as a husband rests on clear, rational principles but remains incommunicable because she cannot make an open statement of the evidence on which she has formed her view of him.’⁵¹

In the position of an unmarried young woman who is at the same time a poor relative, Fanny cannot afford to voice the beliefs that could destroy her insecure position. The position of single women in the nineteenth century was very complicated since a great pressure was put on them to maintain a clean reputation and represent an ideal future wife. In a romantic relationship and consequently marriage women could afford to exhibit a behaviour she could not as a single woman.

⁵⁰ Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park: A Novel* (London: Richard Bentley, 1833) 135.

⁵¹ Ian Littlewood, *Jane Austen: Critical Assessments*, (Mountfield, East Sussex: Helm Information, 1998) 257.

‘An engaged woman is always more agreeable than a disengaged. She is satisfied with herself. Her cares are over, and she feels that she may exert all her powers of pleasing without suspicion. All is safe with a lady engaged: no harm can be done.’⁵²

Fanny is able to communicate her opinions with less restraint only in the romantic relationship with Edmund. With Edmund, who is likely minded and at a similar age she is not afraid to even criticise a person. Therefore, in the romantic relationship Fanny gains freedom of expression and thought.

‘Oh yes, she ought not to have spoken of her uncle as she did. I was quite astonished. An uncle with whom she has been living so many years, and who, whatever his faults may be, is so very fond of her brother, treating him, they say, quite like a son. I could not have believed it!’⁵³

‘Whereas a man’s judgement of character and motive, as it affected individual conduct in ‘public life’, might be openly expressed and yet held free of personal animus or bias, this could rarely apply to women, whose sphere was so much more limited as scarcely to admit the possibility of the exercise of rational, principled, moral judgements, independent of moral interest.’⁵⁴

In the marriage, Austen releases Fanny from other ties of the society which could limit her newly gained freedom. Fanny moves to her own household, in other words, a new sphere of activity where she can freely rule. She is rid of Mrs. Norris and almost the whole Bertram family which ruled Fanny’s time and suppressed her character and will.

⁵² Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park: A Novel* (London: Richard Bentley, 1833) 39.

⁵³ Ibid. 56.

⁵⁴ Ian Littlewood, *Jane Austen: Critical Assessments* (Mountfield, East Sussex: Helm Information, 1998) 257.

Jane Eyre, in a sense, deals with the similar issue. However, Jane Eyre's desire for freedom is more explicitly conveyed in the story. At the beginning of the story, Jane voices her desire to be free from the confinement in Lowood and to experience the world.

'My world had for some years been in Lowood: my experience had been of its rules and systems; now I remembered that the real world was wide, and that a varied field of hopes and fears, of sensations and excitements, awaited those who had courage to go forth into its expanse, to seek real knowledge of life amidst its perils. [...] 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; [...]'⁵⁵

Jane Eyre has greater issues with the society than Fanny. Jane fights with the social classes which limit the choice of a partner as well as with the oppressive nature of marriage. Due to her low social position and a lack of physical beauty, Jane doubts her right to love a man of the higher social status. However, she surmounts this impression and eventually is capable of asserting herself and not to yield to the pressure of the society. As a poor governess without a family Jane is supposed to feel subordinate to Rochester, however, she sees herself as equal to him, at least mentally when not socially. Like Fanny, Jane is able to communicate her radical opinions of equality between a man and a woman, a poor governess and a rich master, only to Rochester in their romantic relationship as she considers him a like-minded soul mate.

'I feel akin to him—I understand the language of his countenance and movements: though rank and wealth sever us widely, I have something in my brain and heart, in my blood and nerves, that assimilates me mentally to him.'⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre: A Novel* (New York: Carleton, 1864) 87.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 183.

Jane does not reconcile with what she was given but fights for more. She desires freedom and equality with her husband as much as it is possible in the Victorian era. When St. Rivers proposes to Jane with the intention to take her on a missionary journey, Jane manages to defy St. River's very strong and dominant will. Jane feels that in this marriage she would lose not only her freedom but her whole personality and soul.

'[...] but as his wife — at his side always, and always restrained, and always checked — forced to keep the fire of my nature continually low, to compel it to burn inwardly and never utter a cry, though the imprisoned flame consumed vital after vital — *this* would be unendurable.'⁵⁷

Eventually, Jane returns to the relationship with Rochester who is now physically impaired. Thus, she is able to gain psychological freedom with a like-minded partner as well as physical freedom due to his dependence on her. In this marriage, they are as equal as they could ever be in Victorian society. '[...] our heroine does eventually find fortune and 'freedom', of a sort, in romantic love and marriage to Rochester.'⁵⁸

'To be together is for us to be at once as free as in solitude, as gay as in company. [...] All my confidence is bestowed on him, all his confidence is devoted to me; we are precisely suited in character—perfect concord is the result.'⁵⁹

Although the heroines are so diverse in character, ultimately Jane and Fanny reflect the same desires of the women of the early nineteenth century. Their objectives are not so high from our current perspective, but at that period were quite difficult to

⁵⁷ Ibid. 434.

⁵⁸ Sean Purchase, *Key Concepts in Victorian Literature*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) 216.

⁵⁹ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre: A Novel* (New York: Carleton, 1864) 481.

achieve. They yearn to gain liberty of an individual in the oppressive society which enforces an established behaviour and often stands against an individualism. In other words, their main aspiration is a wish for freedom. For each heroine, it can represent something else. It may be a free choice of a lifelong partner, an independence from an employer or a husband, or a possibility to express an opinion.

9. Conclusion

The authors Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë lived in a very difficult era in Great Britain what concerns the position of women in the society. In this period, the fight for acknowledgement of a woman as a valid and equal member of the society just had started to pay dividends. Nevertheless, the change in stiff British society and mainly in thinking of people had come very slow.

The female authors as Austen, Brontë or Eliot had a difficult position in the literary world mainly ruled by men. Therefore, the women authors often chose to use a pen name in order to cover their identity or to prevent their work being judged on a basis of their sex. Nonetheless, their identity was often revealed and if their novels were innovative or radical, they often received much harsher critique than men authors would have got.

Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë are authors of two different literary movements which advocate the principles of literature that essentially stand in contrast. Jane Austen is an authoress of Neoclassicism and as such she displays its features. Austen concerns with the middle-class society as well as a marriage and a courtship. Though her main theme is a romantic love, her conception of it is not so sentimental. She does not see love as a sufficient feature for marriage. She is quite rational and pragmatic in this sense. The ideal couple has to have some other features common as a background, a close social position or similar sentiments. Nonetheless, Austen is not completely materialistic, in fact, she despises marriages solely based on the possessions. In her approach to an individual figure, she as well conducts according to the convictions of the Neoclassical movement. In her novels, Austen does not focus on an individual heroine but rather on a group of characters, which she does not hesitate to satirise or use a crisp irony in its

description and thus creates her favourite 'novel of manners'. Austen does not allow her heroines to deviate from the line. Similarly to Austen's detached approach, her heroines show only a small amount of emotions and comply with an established social conduct. When they 'rebel' against their wrongdoers or the society, they do it only in a passive way.

Charlotte Brontë is a representative of the Romantic movement. Accordingly, her novel is utterly different from *Mansfield Park* what concerns the emotional part as well as the storyline of the novel. Charlotte Brontë focuses merely on one character – the heroine – and follows her fortunes from a childhood to a maturity and thus uses a form of a *Bildungsroman*. She is interested in the plainest character of the plain, standing at the bottom of the social ladder. An ordinary, not beautiful orphan girl. However, Brontë reveals heroine's mind and proves that even such a plain girl can be someone worth noting. Jane Eyre is a passionate woman longing for love and freedom. She fights against the society that oppresses her and forces her into the confinement of social classes as well as the women subordination. Apart from Fanny's passive resistance, Jane Eyre acts actively in her rebellion. She does not hesitate to overcome the restraints of the social classes, to fight a man's will or change the course of her fate. Jane's character is emotional and she expresses a rage, dissatisfaction as well as passion. She constantly pursues her independence and freedom. She could be regarded as a female counterpart of a Byronic hero.

Although both stories are so different in these features, they have a lot in common as well. The novels display a strong resemblance to the Cinderella story. Both heroines are poor girls and unwanted relatives, treated amiss. They are able to marry a man of higher social rank and thus elevate their own social position and secure a comfortable life. It does not seem to be an accident that their happiness is reached through marriage

as the possibilities of women in the Regency and the Victorian periods were significantly limited and, essentially, marriage was the only possibility to ensure a life of quality and at least partial freedom. And actually, the personal freedom is the main objective of both heroines. In *Mansfield Park*, the desire for freedom is not as explicitly expressed but Fanny Price would like to freely choose a lifelong partner and release herself from the oppression of the Bertram family. In *Jane Eyre* Jane's longing for liberty can be noticed quite easily. The heroine voices her yearning directly. She is hungry for life and she wants to explore the world. She wants to arrange her own independent life. She wants to marry her chosen man despite the social restrictions. Jane has many desires, which ultimately merge into one and that is a desire for liberty. However, this liberty is not easy to reach in the patriarchal society of the Regency and Victorian Eras. They are able to gain only partial liberty, but it is all they can obtain in the British society of early nineteenth century.

10. Résumé

Spisovatelky Jane Austenová a Charlotte Brontëová jsou považovány za jedny z nejdůležitějších a nejpopulárnějších autorek Regentské a Viktoriánské doby. V této bakalářské práci se zaměřuji na dvě oblíbené románové hrdinky těchto autorek, a to konkrétně na Fanny Priceovou z románu *Mansfieldské panství* a Janu Eyrovou z románu *Jana Eyrová*. Obě tyto hrdinky mají mnoho společného. V románech obě hrdinky představují morální střed. Mají silný smysl pro rozlišení dobra a zla, a jako jediné postavy vždy odolávají nástrahám a pokušením života. V příbězích obou hrdinek můžeme vidět silnou podobnost s pohádkou o Popelce. Stejně jako ona, hrdinky pocházejí z chudobného prostředí a dostávají se do pozice chudé příbuzné závislé na milosti své rodiny. Obě taktéž prožívají poněkud nešťastné dětství. Nakonec jsou ale schopny změnit svůj osud, zamilovat se a provdat se za muže vyššího společenského postavení. Tím se oprostí od minulosti a získávají aspoň relativní svobodu a nezávislost.

Nicméně, Jane Austenová a Charlotte Brontëová jako spisovatelky patří do různých hnutí britské literatury a tak si můžeme povšimnout, že každá z nich má jiný přístup k dějové linii stejně jako vykreslení postav. Jane Austenová je spisovatelkou Regentské éry a také dědičkou klasické literatury osmnáctého století, známé jako věk rozumu a společnosti kladoucí důraz na dekorum a zdrženlivost. Austenová tedy ve svých románech nevytváří nějakou fantastickou realitu, ale zaměřuje se spíše na každodenní události a běžný rodinný život. Její postavy neprojevují mnoho emocí a už vůbec nejsou ovládány vášní, jako je tomu například u Jany Eyrové. Sama Austenová se zdá být neosobním vypravěčem. Austenová se ve svých románech nebojí kritizovat svým ironickým a vtipným způsobem morálku společnosti, manželské svazky a také výchovu

a vzdělání dívek na začátku devatenáctého století. V jejích románech také můžeme najít náznaky feminizmu, ale tento druh feminizmu je spíše jemný a rodinný než radikální.

Charlotte Brontëová je spisovatelkou Romantismu a její romány vykazují silné znaky tohoto hnutí. V jejím nejslavnějším románu *Jana Eyrová* Brontëová vytváří postavy, které jsou ovládány jejich nešťastnou minulostí a silnými emocemi. Román se zaměřuje na dva hlavní hrdiny a vyzdvihuje jejich individualismus. Hlavní hrdinka Jana Eyrová je silná postava, která nejenže touží najít své místo ve společnosti, ale také získat svobodu a nezávislost. Mužský hlavní hrdina vykazuje silné rysy Byronského hrdiny, což je typická postava Romantické literatury. Na rozdíl od románů Austenové, *Jana Eyrová* obsahuje mnohem dramatičtější zápletku s neobyčejnými událostmi a častou změnou prostředí. Feministické prvky se v románu Brontëové objevují mnohem silněji než v práci Austenové. Hlavní hrdinka sama je silná a nezávislá žena, která se snaží překonat nástrahy osudu a bojuje za rovnost a svobodu. Stejně jako Austenová, Brontëová v její práci neváhá kritizovat společnost. Zaměřuje se především na složitou situaci guvernantek ve Viktoriánské společnosti, přičemž čerpá z vlastních zkušeností.

Přestože obě spisovatelky mají velmi rozdílné přístupy k psaní jejich příběhů, jejich práce mají něco společného. Zabývají se tématy jako láska, dvoření, manželství, společenské postavení, pozice žen ve společnosti a také v manželství, a touha po nezávislosti a svobodě. Ačkoliv hrdinky mohou být charakterově odlišné, jsou to stále ženy žijící ve společnosti, která je ovládána muži a omezuje je. Jejich cíl je proto totožný, a to získat aspoň takovou svobodu, jaká je jen možná na začátku devatenáctého století. Tu však často mohou získat pouze díky manželství s bohatším mužem vyššího společenského postavení, který je může zabezpečit a umožnit jim být aspoň částečně svou vlastní paní.

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12. Annotation

The aim of this bachelor thesis is to compare and contrast the main characters of the novels *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë and *Mansfield Park* by Jane Austen. The thesis will provide a brief résumé of the lives of both authors, their historical background focusing on the social terms of women in their eras, the literary analyses of both novels and primarily analyses of chief figures. The main objective of this thesis is to explore an archetype of a destitute young woman marrying an affluent man as the only way to gain a higher social status in the Regency and Victorian eras.