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**Motifs of Madness in *Wuthering Heights* by  
Emily Brontë**  
Bachelor thesis

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## **PROHLÁŠENÍ**

Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci vypracovala samostatně pod odborným dohledem vedoucího práce a uvedla jsem všechny použité podklady a literaturu.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

This bachelor thesis is concerned with the examination of characters from Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847). The principal objective of this thesis is to find motifs of madness in previously mentioned books, define what influenced some of the characters to behave a certain way, and discuss whether those motifs could be defined as evidence of the character's mental state.

In order to make the search for those motifs possible, it is necessary to first define what was considered abnormal or unusual behaviour in the Victorian era in which the Brontë sisters lived, as well as include a historical research on approach to mentally unstable people, and especially women, in this era. Essential part of the thesis is explaining the metaphor Charlotte and especially Emily Brontë used. I believe both sisters metaphorically incorporated the motif of insane asylums in their books. In *Jane Eyre* it is the more obvious attic, where Bertha Mason is being held by her husband. In the book *Wuthering Heights*, it is the mansion in Wuthering Heights itself, together with the second mansion in Thrushcross Grange. Both these locations held different characters, Catherine Earnshaw and Cathy Linton being the most important ones, and sort of served as mental asylums, although it is never directly mentioned throughout the book.

The bachelor thesis is divided into six chapters. The first chapter provides the reader with introduction, definition of the aim of the text, and an explanation of the metaphor which is crucial for the analysis of characters which takes place in chapter five. The second chapter defines madness in the Victorian era, as well as covers the historical development of the issue, followed by chapter number three, in which I explain the role of women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This chapter also includes extensive research covering the situation in different insane asylums in Britain, together with mentioning specific cases, and differences between the approach to female and male patients. Chapter four presents the important events in the lives of the Brontë sisters which influenced their writings and furthermore emphasizes the metaphor for insane asylums the Brontë sisters used in *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*.

On the issue of terminology, I will use terms such as “mentally ill”, “unstable”, “insane”, or “lunatic” throughout this thesis. I am aware that these terms are now being avoided (not just) in the English language due to these words becoming labels which are considered pejorative. By using these terms, I have no intention of offending anyone, and I share a great amount of sympathy with those who have to deal with any type of mental struggle. In order, however, to maintain the historical accuracy I will be using the terminology which was used to describe a mentally unstable person in the Victorian Era, therefore the terms mentioned earlier.

## 2 DEFINING MADNESS AND NORMALCY IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

### 2.1 Insane asylums in the Victorian Era

#### 2.1.1 The development of perception of the mad people at the beginning of the nineteenth century

One of the reasons why people are interested at present in studying the 19<sup>th</sup> century is indeed the cult of “mad-doctors”. This is simply because almost everyone has a little bit of a “drama-seeker” as a part of their personality. The 1800s can be a perfect example that not much has changed when it comes to this “drama-seeking” or being fascinated by something “strange”, “weird”, or even promiscuous. 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century lunatic asylums were open to those who desired to see something considered and labelled as “taboo”. Indeed, visitors had to pay a considerable amount of money and after that they were shown what they wanted to see, the lunatics, screaming maniacs, naked and chained to the beds. These lunatics were often hard to still recognize as human beings.<sup>1</sup> This does not mean that all the patients in the asylums looked the same, however that is mostly why the visitors came. They simply wanted to see something remarkable reminiscent of the famous freak shows in circus.

By the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, it seems like the situation began to change. As Elaine Showalter, feminist, literary critic, and the founder of gynocriticism, states in her text *“Victorian Women and Insanity”*, the use of force on lunatics began to be replaced by “homelike therapeutic environment” where the supervisors tried to encourage their patients to learn patience, self-control, and self-respect.<sup>2</sup> In another book entitled *“The Female Malady”*, Showalter also writes about certain psychiatric revolution which occurred at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Prior to this, mad people were treated like animals but with the 19<sup>th</sup> century came a more considerate attitude towards lunatics and that started the shift of perception, from animals to patients.<sup>3</sup> The question

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<sup>1</sup> Elaine Showalter, “Victorian Women and Insanity,” *Victorian Studies* 23, no. 2 (1980): 158, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3827084>.

<sup>2</sup> Showalter, “Victorian Women and Insanity,” 158.

<sup>3</sup> Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 8.



is whether the situation really started to change at that point. On the one hand, there is the better treatment of the patients, on the other could be the fact, that, although visitors who desired to see some kind of an attraction were no longer allowed to enter insane asylums, journalists would still come and document the lives behind the asylum walls. Of course, they were observing the situation so that they could provide society with details and a little bit of insight into what it actually means to live a life of a lunatic person, but at the same time they were still describing mad people the same way an attraction would be described, and they were still interrupting the life inside the asylum, therefore interrupting the “peace” that had been (and still is) important for treatment of patient’s mind. It is also important to mention that journalists often described the situation in the way which was more likely to be accepted by society. To be more specific, while experts such as the first lady of sociology, Harriet Martineau, claimed that one of the biggest reasons why women were going mad was their unstable living conditions and financial issues which made them anxious, journalists often chose an explanation that society wanted to hear, therefore reasons like hysteria or unrequited love.<sup>4</sup>

The answer to previously mentioned question can also be clearly found in Showalter’s research. She mentions the Great Exhibition (described in detail in *Psychiatry for the Poor* by Richard Hunter and Ida Macalpine), an event that took place in Colney Hatch Lunatic Asylum in the year 1851, when the gates of the asylum were opened to the public, and lunatics could along with “normal people” enjoy some time filled with games and other social activities. While Showalter sees this as an undoubtedly positive impact which made madness less repulsive to the public,<sup>5</sup> we still need to keep in mind that lunatics were still viewed as an attraction. However, one must agree that after all these events truly helped insanity to become a more domesticated topic even if it was a little bit distorted. Nevertheless, Showalter calls attention to the fact that even with this revolution of psychiatry that took place in the nineteenth century, another phenomenon started happening. This phenomenon could be described as “oversexualizing” the causes of mental illnesses, by which is meant that the doctors were looking for the roots of mental disorders in sexuality and gender differences.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Showalter, “Victorian Women and Insanity,” 163.

<sup>5</sup> Showalter, “Victorian Women and Insanity,” 159.

<sup>6</sup> Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 8.

The idea of a woman dressed in a corset dress with crinoline skirt sitting by the window and blankly looking into the distance is for many people the typical picture of a mad person in the Victorian Era, and at the same time it is a general image of an upper-class woman at that time. Not many people realize, however, that in the first half of the nineteenth century there is more evidence of men being treated with mental illness than there is of women.<sup>7</sup> That leads me to a question whether it is possible that cases of mad women were simply not recorded either because they were not considered that important or that their husbands or families wanted to hide any evidence of them. This question can be hardly answered but what is more important, is the fact that the numbers started to change rapidly after the year 1845.

### **2.1.2 The Lunatics Act**

In 1845 Parliament passed a document called the *Act of 1845* which radically formed the perception of mentally ill people. The freaks and outcasts became patients. As Showalter mentions, this “totally transformed the institutional care of the insane.”<sup>8</sup> The most important change, that this document brought into society, was indeed accommodating pauper lunatics. These people were described as those who could not afford treatment due to financial causes and therefore their accommodation was paid from the public funds.<sup>9</sup> Before the Lunatics Act, lunatics were forced to join workhouses, or they were subjects of extremely cruel treatments in private madhouses for poor people. Patients of public hospitals experienced the same kind of treatment.<sup>10</sup>

These radical changes in the legislation engendered another transformation which happened as an answer to the Lunatics Act. With the increasing number of patients there was much greater need of new asylum buildings. These had to be built fast and designed to accept hundreds of patients. This new pattern of construction and expansion of asylums quickly changed into something called “lunatic colonies”.<sup>11</sup> After years of viewing mad people as freaks there was a slight enlightenment, which was soon destroyed by the fact, that recently build asylums were overflowing with patients and it is obvious that in these conditions, lunatics could not receive necessary treatment. John Arlidge in his book *On the State of Lunacy and the Legal Provision for the Insane*

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<sup>7</sup> Showalter, “Victorian Women and Insanity,” 159.

<sup>8</sup> Showalter, “Victorian Women and Insanity,” 160.

<sup>9</sup> Showalter, “Victorian Women and Insanity,” 160.

<sup>10</sup> Showalter, “Victorian Women and Insanity,” 160.

<sup>11</sup> Showalter, “Victorian Women and Insanity,” 160.

mentions that into buildings meant to hold few hundreds of patients there were often more than thousand instead.<sup>12</sup> David Wright even labels lunatic colonies and the whole institutional transformation as a “disaster”<sup>13</sup> due to the same reasons as Arlidge. Asylums were simply overcrowded and that also meant that the patients could not simply get any better.

Another transformation happened in the patient sex ratio. As mentioned earlier, men were more commonly accepted as patients into asylum houses in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, or at least there is more evidence of that. However, with the Lunatics Act the number of female lunatics grew in both asylums for lunatics and pauper lunatic asylums as well. Showalter describes the sex ratio changes by virtue of census of 1872, which states that by that year out of 58,640 patients in lunatic asylums there were 31,822 females.<sup>14</sup> She also emphasises the fact that while there was greater number of lunatic women, male patients were more common as private patients and therefore receiving better treatment. Female patients on the other hand were frequently accommodated in workhouses and single care which provided cheaper and probably less effective care.<sup>15</sup>

Anne Shephard and David Wright accentuate the importance of these previously mentioned transformations. The growth of new asylum institutions in the Victorian Era resulted in substantial grow of interest when it comes to mental illnesses and that lead into better treatments because more specialists focused on insanity, its cure possibilities, and origins. Also, the act insisted on asylums being ruled by qualified professional.<sup>16</sup> Before 1845 many hospitals for mentally unstable people were directed by self-proclaimed “experts” and that caused the treatments not to be always rational and based on medical knowledge. All of that changed with the Lunatics Act.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> John Thomas Arlidge, *On the State of Lunacy and the Legal Provision for the Insane: With Observations on the Construction and Organization of Asylums* (London: John Churchill, 1859), 102.

<sup>13</sup> David Wright, “Getting Out of the Asylum: Understanding the Confinement of the Insane in the Nineteenth Century,” *Social history of medicine* 10, no. 1 (1997): 138, <https://doi.org/10.1093/shm/10.1.137>.

<sup>14</sup> Showalter, “Victorian Women and Insanity,” 160.

<sup>15</sup> Showalter, “Victorian Women and Insanity,” 161.

<sup>16</sup> Anne Shepherd and David Wright, “Madness, Suicide and the Victorian Asylum: Attempted Self-Murder in the Age of Non-Restraint,” *Medical History* 46, no. 2 (2002): 187, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0025727300000053>.

<sup>17</sup> Shepherd and Wright, “Madness, Suicide and the Victorian Asylum,” 187.

### 2.1.3 The Poor Law

Another law that influenced the situation of insane asylums was the *Act for the Relief of the Poor* accepted long before the Victorian Era in 1597. During the Victorian Era however, this act got extended in year 1834 to *Poor Law Amendment Act*.<sup>18</sup> This law influenced the confinement of insane individuals. Defining of the insane was dependant on the “Poor Law Overseers” who were individuals appointed by state which took care of poor people who could not afford even a modest living. The Poor Law together with the Lunatics Act ensured that pauper patients were being accepted into asylums as well.<sup>19</sup>

Showalter emphasizes the importance of Poor Law mostly because it ensured poor women who could not afford treatment to receive at least some kind of help. Among these women there were mostly wives who were abandoned by their spouses, or their spouses were arrested, as well as widows or single mothers.<sup>20</sup> This, however, contributed to overfilling asylums with patients. Showalter acknowledges this fact, but she also focuses on how this social transformation was helpful to those who legitimately needed medical help which they would otherwise not have opportunity to afford.<sup>21</sup> Considering this topic, Wright calls attention to the fact that many patients were accommodated in private asylums based on family request and also that many of these patients were staying in asylums for quite a long time, which was also one of the reasons why there was an issue with exceeding capacities of the buildings.<sup>22</sup>

During this time private licensed houses started to appear more frequently and providing treatment for mostly women patients became sort of a business. Because of pressure from commissioners, private asylums had to choose which sex are they going to admit. From the records from 1870's we know that majority decided to become a female only asylums.<sup>23</sup>

### 2.1.4 Lunatics Amendment Act 1862

Another significant reform came with the year 1862 when *Lunatics Amendment Act* was passed. This law insisted on all deaths being reported and therefore

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<sup>18</sup> Rosemary Rees, *Poverty and Public Health, 1815-1948* (Oxford: Heinemann, 2001), 15.

<sup>19</sup> Shepherd and Wright, “Madness, Suicide and the Victorian Asylum,” 180.

<sup>20</sup> Showalter, “Victorian Women and Insanity,” 162.

<sup>21</sup> Showalter, “Victorian Women and Insanity,” 162.

<sup>22</sup> Wright, “Getting Out of the Asylum,” 143.

<sup>23</sup> Showalter, “Victorian Women and Insanity,” 164.

investigated. Before that there was number of suicides, which might have not been suicides at all, and unclear deaths. With this amendment to the Lunatics Act the state was making sure the situation inside asylums was under control.<sup>24</sup>

Generally, suicides were relatively a major problem in these times. Because of that fact and because of the amendment in 1862 some of the asylums were refusing to accept lunatics with suicidal tendencies.<sup>25</sup> That was probably mostly because of economics reasons, simply because suicidal patient could not share a room with anyone else and therefore would cost the asylum more money. Money had, has, and probably always will have the biggest impact on shaping society.

Nonetheless, even with overfilling asylums and rising numbers of confined lunatics, Showalter describes England in 1830s to 1870s as “mecca for doctors and social investigators”.<sup>26</sup> For many readers that might be a quite strong metaphor, however, in reality of rising number of patients there was also a greater and more sincere interest in studying and understanding mental illnesses, their causes, and their treatments.

### **2.1.5 Other conditions influencing history of asylums**

Other than legislative arrangements there are also some other facts, conditions, phenomena, or simply other subjects which shaped the development of treating mentally ill people in England in the Victorian Era. Firstly, one of the greatest influences had industrialization.

In history industrialization never existed on its own, it always occurs together with urbanization. These two processes always contribute to rapid changes in society and the Victorian Era is a perfect example of that. As society rapidly develops, the life becomes somewhat faster and that could have been one of the triggers for many people which started to “lose their mind”. Technology and therefore even society development might had been too fast for human mind to process. Showalter reacts to this by saying “madness was a disease of the highly civilized and industrialized.”<sup>27</sup> Basically, it could be said that sanity is a sacrifice society needs to make if we want to develop more. This argument is also supported by Shephard and Wright, who elaborate on the thought that

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<sup>24</sup> Shepherd and Wright, “Madness, Suicide and the Victorian Asylum,” 191.

<sup>25</sup> Shepherd and Wright, “Madness, Suicide and the Victorian Asylum,” 195.

<sup>26</sup> Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 25.

<sup>27</sup> Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 24.

“insanity was a price society was paying for higher level of civilization.”<sup>28</sup> However, not everyone agreed with this statement, for example Olive Anderson in his essay called “*Did suicide increase with industrialization in Victorian England?*” strongly opposes previously mentioned statement, and points out that there are no evidential numbers of suicides (not confined lunatics) in industrial areas compared to rural ones.<sup>29</sup>

Secondly, Showalter adds another phenomenon which shaped Victorian England and that is Darwin’s theories. These theories clearly see insanity as some form of organism failure which are caused by evolution and degeneration, which some individuals may have predispositions for.<sup>30</sup> Considering these theories therapists shaped their approaches towards patients and took on more of a mentoring type of role, who accepted mentally ill people but their main goal was not to find a cure, but more likely to protect the rest of society from those who were different and possibly dangerous, and guarded the line between normalcy and mental illness.<sup>31</sup>

### **2.1.6 The Non-restraint Movement and its results**

The last condition which shaped Victorian mental asylums with major impact was the abolition of mechanical restraint on mentally ill people. Before lunatic reforms at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century asylum keepers used mechanical restrains as the easiest way to manipulate with lunatics. We are talking about chains, handcuffs, different types of straps, crib-beds etc. In the Victorian Era some sort of enlightenment arrived together with other reforms and restraining methods were abolished.<sup>32</sup>

One of the pioneers and ambassadors of non-restrain methods in asylums was John Conolly, Victorian psychiatrist. He invested so much of his life into his work that he achieved a title of a “symbol of Victorian psychiatric progress”.<sup>33</sup> However, his idealistic approaches left some marks on him, as he himself started to suffer from insomnia and slowly became fit for a role of a patient in one of the asylums. That was due to the fact, that his somewhat utopian beliefs saw asylum treatment as an answer for

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<sup>28</sup> Shepherd and Wright, “Madness, Suicide and the Victorian Asylum,” 178.

<sup>29</sup> Olive Anderson, “Did Suicide Increase with Industrialization in Victorian England?.” *Past & Present*, no. 86 (1980): 149-173, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/650743>.

<sup>30</sup> Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 18.

<sup>31</sup> Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 18.

<sup>32</sup> Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 31-33.

<sup>33</sup> Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 47.

everything.<sup>34</sup> He was still undoubtedly important figure when it comes to the non-restraint movement, which shaped asylums in the Victorian Era.

It is necessary to mention that with abolishment of restraining methods increased usage of sedatives and other types of narcotics. Shepherd and Wright discuss the urgent need of other ways, apart from mechanical restrains, how to control and protect suicidal patients. It is only comprehensible that narcotics were the first and probably only option at that times.<sup>35</sup>

## 2.2 The Process of Confinement

The process of proclaiming someone insane in the Victorian Era was quite a complicated journey. Christina Hanganu-Bresch and Carol Berkenkotter focus on this topic in their essay published in 2011 named “*Occult Genres and the Certification of Madness in a 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Lunatic Asylum*”. In this text they provide the complete analysis of admission procedures in the middle of the Victorian Era. So called “admission procedures” records consisted of three and later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century four paged document called “Notice of Admission”, which included request of accommodating a patient, two statements of certificated doctors, and finally the confirmation of the director of specific asylum.<sup>36</sup> It is important to realize that thanks to the Lunatics Act, which is discussed earlier in this thesis, no person could be confined and placed in an asylum without previous certification of their unstable mental state.<sup>37</sup>

Although this document that was necessary for confinement included signatures of two or three experts in the area of mental health, Berkenkotter and Bresch draw attention to the fact that these “professionals” did not have to have experiences in this area, and that “they were not required to have training in treating mental illness.”<sup>38</sup> Also, this complicated process of labelling someone insane and sending them to asylums did not apply to those, especially women, who were submitted into pauper asylums because of their unfortunate economic situation.<sup>39</sup> Finally, Wright talks about how the psychiatrists and other licenced doctors had smaller impact on the process of

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<sup>34</sup> Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 48.

<sup>35</sup> Shepherd and Wright, “Madness, Suicide and the Victorian Asylum,” 179.

<sup>36</sup> Carol Berkenkotter and Cristina Hanganu-Bresch, “Occult Genres and the Certification of Madness in a 19th-Century Lunatic Asylum,” *Written Communication* 28, no. 2 (2011): 226, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0741088311401557>.

<sup>37</sup> Shepherd and Wright, “Madness, Suicide and the Victorian Asylum,” 183.

<sup>38</sup> Berkenkotter and Hanganu-Bresch, “Occult Genres and the Certification of Madness,” 227.

<sup>39</sup> Showalter, “Victorian Women and Insanity,” 161.

confinement then they should, because the more the family was wealthy, the more they had to conform to their requirements.<sup>40</sup> Hence once again as many times before, amount of money became one of the determining factors. The class of a patient remained a crucial factor, Showalter mentions that while rich people could afford the luxury of private care, and even could stay at home and have a doctor come to them, the poor had to face the danger of being abused and starved if they would stay at home or were sent to workhouses. For those living in unpleasant conditions were public asylums a rescue.<sup>41</sup>

### **2.2.1 What was considered a mental illness**

As it is mentioned earlier one of the possibilities of starting the process of declaring someone insane was an application or a request from family. It is highly probable that the confinement of an insane was also connected to family financial situation. In this case it is not dangerous lunatics who would be the problem, but more likely strange, or simply different individuals, which would cost family more money that they could afford for some type of based at home treatment. However, these cases are based on assumptions and there is little or no empirical evidence of them, nonetheless it corresponds with the setting of the Victorina Era.

More importantly, there were other types of behaviour which led to confinement and labelling a person mad. The most extreme cases indeed included self-violence and violence against individual's surroundings.<sup>42</sup> These cases did not differ considering sex of the individuals, lunatics who were found dangerous to the public were confined. However, other motives for confinement were often derived from the sex of a person. It is also important to mention that many experts in Victorian England believed that every cause of mental illness is derived from some sort of organic problem, and they remained focusing on looking for that problem for example by examining patient's blood.<sup>43</sup>

### **2.2.2 Why were women more likely to be labelled insane**

Showalter mentions that one of the many reasons why were women more likely to be confined after the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was their bigger predispositions to become poor. Women that were abandoned by their husbands and/or left alone with

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<sup>40</sup> Wright, "Getting Out of the Asylum," 141-142.

<sup>41</sup> Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 26-27.

<sup>42</sup> Shepherd and Wright, "Madness, Suicide and the Victorian Asylum," 193.

<sup>43</sup> Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 30.



children easily became paupers and “being poor made them more likely to be labelled mad.”<sup>44</sup> Among those, who would not be labelled mad in modern times, but were confined in the Victorian Era, were also women who showed signs of senility, epilepsy, were physically disabled, or even suffered from tuberculosis.<sup>45</sup> Another phenomenon was a “lactational insanity” which occurred when female breastfeed her child for too long in order to save money for food and became anaemic.<sup>46</sup>

In the book *The Female Malady* Showalter emphasises the fact, that women in the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> century were viewed as mentally weaker than men and therefore more prone to mental illnesses.<sup>47</sup> This mindset of psychiatrists and other experts influenced the mindset of public and of the whole era. More on this topic of confinement of women and the mindset towards females being more prone to mental instability will be discussed in chapter 3.

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<sup>44</sup> Showalter, “Victorian Women and Insanity,” 161.

<sup>45</sup> Showalter, “Victorian Women and Insanity,” 162.

<sup>46</sup> Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 54.

<sup>47</sup> Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 55.

### 3 WOMAN AND INSANE ASYLUMS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

#### 3.1 The role of a woman in the Victorian era and its links to insanity

The roles of women in the Victorian Era were quite simple. Basically, it meant being an obedient daughter, being a lovely and quiet teenager, being an obedient wife, and being a principled mother. If a woman owned some property or a land, it immediately became her husband's property once she married, and together with that, by giving her hand in marriage she also gave the permission to being her body used as a mean to satisfy her husband's needs without looking at her own desires and using her body to produce children.<sup>48</sup>

Apropos of career choices for Victorian woman, there were not many to choose from. Except for becoming a servant, governess, laundress, or seamstress, there were almost no other options. In addition to that, it was expected by society, that every woman should get married, give birth, and live a decent life. Any other idea would be considered strange. During these times doctors started to realize, rather slowly, that woman's life lacks mental exercise, and their life is somewhat boring compared to possibilities men had. Women were much more isolated and without opportunities for intellectual activities, some doctors even connected drug usage to this factor, because women were in their opinion becoming bored.<sup>49</sup> With no chance of expansion in the patriarchal society women started to lose their ability to dream<sup>50</sup> and it is only understandable that insanity could have been unconsciously the only option to set themselves free. However, before psychiatrists realized the impact Victorian social roles had on women, they successfully ignored any kind of psychological effect which could influence women's mental health. Even processes like biological aging were not seen as a significant factor.<sup>51</sup>

As a result of patriarchal society and expectations of social roles for women being decided by men as well, the picture of obedient wife was excessively specific. An ideal

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<sup>48</sup> Philip Alfred Buckner and R. Douglas Francis, eds. *Rediscovering the British World* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2005), 137.

<sup>49</sup> Showalter, "Victorian Women and Insanity," 174.

<sup>50</sup> Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 64.

<sup>51</sup> Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 59.

wife should have been obedient, charming, quiet, and without any indication of personal opinions or sex drive. In fact, erotic fantasies and any form of sexual excitement were considered sexually rebellious or even nymphomaniac, and therefore a form of lunacy.<sup>52</sup> Anytime a woman expressed disagreement with her social role or when she openly protested about it, she was also labelled as insane. Specific diagnosis of women who had their own opinion and decided to share it was usually hysteria.<sup>53</sup> Also, it is necessary to mention that emotions like sadness, anxiety, low self-esteem, and fear were not identified as symptoms of insanity, however aggression, irritation, expression of strong feelings and desires, or previously mentioned sex drive, were often seen as testimonies of female's insanity which led to confinement.<sup>54</sup>

At the end of chapter two it has been mentioned that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century women were considered more vulnerable and more likely to become mad than men.<sup>55</sup> This claim was based on studies performed by Victorian psychiatrists, who were certain that females suffer certain crises during their life cycle. These crises included puberty, pregnancy, childbirth, and menopause. All these crises cause instabilities in female's body, especially reproductive system, and had been accepted as a main cause for females being emotionally unstable. This instability was labelled insanity.<sup>56</sup> It is important to notice that, as in most cases in history, no one asked for actual female's opinion. All these claims were made by male doctors.

Another factor that contributed to female vulnerability to insanity was, according to Victorian experts, menstruation. While other factors may have been already outdated by current medicine, menstruation could have contributed to the development of mental discomfort, especially for Victorian girls. While the boys, brothers and friends, could be outside and play, or go to school, girls were educated at home and their social life was restricted to only couple of people and the disadvantage of menstruation, considering having no access to hygienical means we have now, only emphasized that.<sup>57</sup> In fact, doctors were so invested in exploration of female cycle and its effects, that they started to believe that "madness was a disease of blood"<sup>58</sup>. Because of that they started a series

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<sup>52</sup> Showalter, "Victorian Women and Insanity," 173.

<sup>53</sup> Showalter, "Victorian Women and Insanity," 172.

<sup>54</sup> Showalter, "Victorian Women and Insanity," 169.

<sup>55</sup> Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 7.

<sup>56</sup> Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 55.

<sup>57</sup> Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 57.

<sup>58</sup> Showalter, "Victorian Women and Insanity," 170.

of questionable experiments on young women bodies, which included preventing menstruation by taking ice cold baths and extreme low protein diets.<sup>59</sup>

### **3.1.1 Females in the healthcare industry**

Another topic is females being discriminated in the healthcare industry in the Victorian times. Females were being accepted into roles of maids and governesses and sometimes nurses, however, during the same time as Lunatics Act became valid in 1845, male doctors were the only one who could receive a licence to treat mental illnesses, and any application for medical education that came from women were rejected.<sup>60</sup> Seeing women as more prone to becoming insane resulted in directing them more towards secondary roles as helpers and matrons. On these positions however, they were paid less than men who worked in the same positions, about forty percent less, and they were not seen as reliable.<sup>61</sup> Foundation of Victorian England was that male occupied the role of the one providing treatment and female was the one receiving it. Female doctors did not occur in English mental hospital until after World War II.<sup>62</sup>

### **3.2 Life in the asylum**

Thanks to insanity becoming more domesticated with the increasing number of patients, the behaviour of physicians also underwent a transformation. More doctors in Victorian England followed Conolly's example and were accepting the approach of loving their patients as their own children.<sup>63</sup> Non-restrain movement also played a significant role. In some of the asylums they tried to make the stay as pleasant as possible for the patients. For example, in Lincolnshire County Lunatic Asylum annual fetes took place, which included fun activities and games for everyone involved. In other asylums provided patients with lectures on botany or poetry. It is necessary to mention, that these activities were not held everywhere, and usually took place in asylums for wealthier patients.<sup>64</sup> Nonetheless, this utopian dream of making patients feel welcome, like at home, organizing balls for them etc. was indeed bounded with practise of domination. Every patient in the lunatic asylum was under control, even when "having fun".<sup>65</sup> Also, it is crucial to keep in mind that, as it is previously

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<sup>59</sup> Showalter, "Victorian Women and Insanity," 170.

<sup>60</sup> Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 54.

<sup>61</sup> Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 54.

<sup>62</sup> Showalter, "Victorian Women and Insanity," 165.

<sup>63</sup> Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 28.

<sup>64</sup> Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 38.

<sup>65</sup> Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 50.

mentioned in chapter 2, the number of patients were exceeding limits of asylums buildings, therefore it is questionable, whether the patients could have received appropriate treatment.

There was only a small number of asylums with mixed male and female patients in England. Most of them adhered to segregation of sexes. Often the segregation was not only by floors but also whole buildings. Also, since the number of female patients exceeded the number of male patients, there were even female only asylums.<sup>66</sup> In this type of asylum the environment was supposed to feel like school or resemble home environment. In mixed asylums, however, was a substantial inequality in treating male and female patients.<sup>67</sup>

### **3.2.1 Differences in treating male and female patients**

In asylums for mentally ill people were indeed carefully watched both male and female patients. However, there are evidence which prove that women were being watched far more closely than men. This surveillance was performed even by censorship of mail.<sup>68</sup> This is indeed not the only difference in attitude towards male and female patients. In insane asylums psychiatrists recommended following routines which would remind of life outside asylums. That includes social roles and sex stereotypes. Therefore, male patients have variety of work and activities to choose from, for example they could take care of asylum garden and farms. For women, however, there were significantly less options, and all of them took place inside the building and they usually meant pointless work and insignificant activities like needlework. Other resembled the social role which women traditionally have, the role of housewife, which means activities like cleaning. There is even a record of activity which consisted of sorting out coloured beans by colours.<sup>69</sup>

Male patients also had more activities outside of their chores. Most importantly they had the opportunity to choose from outdoor physical exercises. Women who, according to records, seemed “restless” had only limited movement and could almost never go outside. It is obvious that that is the reason why women were more likely to be prescribed sedatives or were put in padded cells<sup>70</sup>, all of that plainly because they were

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<sup>66</sup> Showalter, “Victorian Women and Insanity,” 164.

<sup>67</sup> Showalter, “Victorian Women and Insanity,” 166.

<sup>68</sup> Showalter, “Victorian Women and Insanity,” 166.

<sup>69</sup> Showalter, “Victorian Women and Insanity,” 167-8.

<sup>70</sup> Showalter, “Victorian Women and Insanity,” 168.

denied physical activities. However, as Showalter mentions, even with this type of discrimination, the life in asylums provided women with more tolerant surroundings than they could expect outside of the asylum.<sup>71</sup>

### 3.2.2 Females in asylums

Perception of female patients in asylums was connected to reasons why they were sent there in the first place. As it is mentioned earlier, in many cases women were sent into mental asylums only because they acted rebellious or disrespectful. This behaviour usually only developed and grew stronger in asylums. Some records say that female patients behaved worse than man and that they were also harder to control. They were often obscene and vulgar, noisy, and abusive.<sup>72</sup> It is necessary to keep in mind that despite these records sounding quite alarming, they could exaggerate, because the idealistic woman should have been quiet and not talking unless invited. Because of that some asylums were trying to keep women so busy with work that they would have no time to spare and therefore not talk so much.<sup>73</sup> This can raise one specific question, or more of a thought, that maybe declaring women insane could somewhat set her free. After years of having to behave like an obedient girl, wife, mother, with no voice, no chance of having her own opinion, and no chance to express herself, there is a chance to be rebellious, even if speaking harshly and being noisy and rude is the only option to do so. Also, it almost seems like physicians in mental hospitals accepted the fact that they do not know the specific cause of female insanity, but at the same time they do not try to cure it, they just separate mad women from the public and by forcing her to continue with her ordinary life but inside asylum they hope that the insanity will fade away eventually. That could also be the reason why treatment of female lunatics was significantly less effective than treatment of males, and that on average women spent in asylums more time.

One of the issues that also had to be dealt with was seduction of female patients. Before 1845 there were reports of female patients becoming pregnant with other patients. After the revolution in psychiatry in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it became typical that only physicians and clergymen had the keys to women's rooms. However, even after that unmarried women sometimes became pregnant.<sup>74</sup> No inquiry happened

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<sup>71</sup> Showalter, "Victorian Women and Insanity," 168.

<sup>72</sup> Showalter, "Victorian Women and Insanity," 166-7.

<sup>73</sup> Showalter, "Victorian Women and Insanity," 167.

<sup>74</sup> Showalter, "Victorian Women and Insanity," 167.

in these cases or at least we do not have evidence of it, but it is alerting, because it shows that the rules of asylums were being broken even by the ones who worked there and were supposed to help the patients.

Many women were also accepted into asylums with cases of mania. It can be questioned whether the diagnosis was correct or whether female's worries were valid. Shephard and Wright specifically mention cases in which women were refusing to eat hospital food, because they were afraid of the food being poisoned.<sup>75</sup> That raises a question whether their mania was truly a mental illness, or simply a result of them being abused at home. There are records of husbands who took advantage of the system and let their wife to be confined for reasons like independent will, which was believed to be almost as serious problem as adultery.<sup>76</sup>

### **3.2.3 Sexual surgeries performed on women**

Showalter also mentions a sensitive topic of sexual surgeries performed in Victorian England. As it is mentioned earlier, many psychiatrists in this era believed that female insanity is connected to female's cycle. Together with gynaecologists they were trying to find a cure for illnesses like nymphomania or hysteria. The most famous case happened in 1866 when Isaac Bake Brown, who was convinced that masturbation caused mental illness, performed clitoridectomy, which means clitoris removal. This type of surgery became popular, and Brown highly recommended it as a cure for variety of "diagnoses", such as for restless girls, women who suffered with depression, females who were not polite or disobedient, and even for women who wanted a divorce.<sup>77</sup> These surgeries were being performed legally even in these times when non-restraint methods were promoted and encouraged. Brown did not end there and later he even performed surgery of removing labia and he was sure of his medical success.<sup>78</sup>

Another different and questionable type of treatment received women who were experiencing menopause. These women were recommended to refuse any type of sexual activity, and the treatment in asylums included ice water injections into to vagina or rectum<sup>79</sup>, and other painful, unpleasant, and in all cases experimental procedures.

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<sup>75</sup> Shephard and Wright, "Madness, Suicide and the Victorian Asylum," 189.

<sup>76</sup> Showalter, "Victorian Women and Insanity," 174.

<sup>77</sup> Showalter, "Victorian Women and Insanity," 176-7.

<sup>78</sup> Showalter, "Victorian Women and Insanity," 177.

<sup>79</sup> Showalter, "Victorian Women and Insanity," 172.

### 3.3 Specific cases

Berkenkotter and Bresch focus on reality of asylums for lunatics in previously cited text “*Occult Genres and the Certification of Madness in a 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Lunatic Asylum*”. This text is important because they used archival admissions record of patients and therefore provide the public with not easily accessible data. The authors themselves refer to these admission records and texts from asylums “occult genres”, because they were not public and only a small number of doctors had access to it.<sup>80</sup> In this subchapter I will focus on two specific cases, one male and one female patient, whose documentation was examined by Berkenkotter and Bresch.

#### 3.3.1 Henrietta Jane Unwin

First specific case of lunacy patient is Henrietta Jane Unwin, who was confined in 1866 in Ticehurst Asylum. Prior to her confinement there is an evidence of two physicians confirming her mental health state and declaring her insane. Firstly, Charles Frederic Hodson, who notes down that she ignores moral laws, desires to get away from her home, and dresses and behaves like a man, and when opposed menaces that she will destroy both herself and her spouse.<sup>81</sup> Second doctor Thomas Allen mentions that from his observations, she is not mentally healthy for she does not show any interest in taking care of her children or husband.<sup>82</sup> It is obvious that she is a perfect example of a woman who was confined simply for not fitting the role of a typical Victorian woman, and because she refused to accept social roles she was given. This type of allegation Victorian women had to countenance is called “moral insanity”.<sup>83</sup>

Because of Samuel Newington who gathered data on Unwin’s case, there is an access to information about Unwin’s background. In Newington’s notes there is record of Unwin claiming she was sexually abused by her doctor in Ilkley Wells, where she was previously treated with her mental issues. She could be considered lucky, for when she informed her husband about it, he trusted her and immediately removed her from Ilkley Wells facility.<sup>84</sup> After that the incident of her running away, dressing up as a man and cutting her hair short happened. In the context of Victorian times, it was something incredibly rebellious for a woman to do. As the notes say, she left to the train station but

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<sup>80</sup> Berkenkotter and Hanganu-Bresch, “Occult Genres and the Certification of Madness,” 221.

<sup>81</sup> Berkenkotter and Hanganu-Bresch, “Occult Genres and the Certification of Madness,” 229.

<sup>82</sup> Berkenkotter and Hanganu-Bresch, “Occult Genres and the Certification of Madness,” 230.

<sup>83</sup> Berkenkotter and Hanganu-Bresch, “Occult Genres and the Certification of Madness,” 234.

<sup>84</sup> Berkenkotter and Hanganu-Bresch, “Occult Genres and the Certification of Madness,” 235.



had no intention to travel anywhere. It can be discussed that she just wanted to have at least some control of her life and wanted to see what it feels like to do something forbidden. It is a widely known fact that usually when a woman cut her hair short it is some sort of rebellion or statement. An example from more recent times and the times of pop-culture could be when Britney Spears, known for singing and long blonde Barbie-like hair, shaved her head in 2007. Every journalist in the world described this act as losing her mind or becoming insane, however the real reason could be the same as Unwin's. She simply wanted to have at least some control over her own life.

Shortly after that incident she was confined in Ticehurst.<sup>85</sup> It is necessary to mention, that that was only a short-term confinement, in 1861, since there are long pauses in her admission letters and certifications of insanity. Her husband, Edward Unwin, had to apply for her insanity declaration several times until he succeeded in 1866.<sup>86</sup> As a patient she did not show any signs of being intellectually disabled or delusional, however the records say that she was “unstable in her moods”, and also that she showed symptoms of lustful thoughts, and did not care about the ways she was dressed.<sup>87</sup> She was finally released and claimed sane in 1867, together with a child she gave birth to while confined.<sup>88</sup>

### **3.3.2 Walter Marshall (a man, for comparison)**

Second specific case of a mentally ill patient from the same time is the case of Walter Marshall. Similarly, just like Unwin he was also confined in Ticehurst asylum, and his case was also recorded by Samuel Newington. In 1877, after he was released, he had a possibility to speak about his experience at Parliament Committee Hearing, where he proved that there is an issue with choosing a right treatment for insane person, when their symptoms are misapprehended.<sup>89</sup>

Correspondingly to Unwin's case, Marshall also had two certificated doctors to evaluate his case before he was proclaimed insane and confined. First of them was David E. Seaton, who observed that his behaviour consists of two major moods: enthusiasm and melancholy. He also mentions that he is confident in himself and believes that what he does is always right. Example of that is him providing loans to

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<sup>85</sup> Berkenkotter and Hanganu-Bresch, “Occult Genres and the Certification of Madness,” 235.

<sup>86</sup> Berkenkotter and Hanganu-Bresch, “Occult Genres and the Certification of Madness,” 236.

<sup>87</sup> Berkenkotter and Hanganu-Bresch, “Occult Genres and the Certification of Madness,” 236.

<sup>88</sup> Berkenkotter and Hanganu-Bresch, “Occult Genres and the Certification of Madness,” 236.

<sup>89</sup> Berkenkotter and Hanganu-Bresch, “Occult Genres and the Certification of Madness,” 237.

other people with no law protection of his wealth.<sup>90</sup> Second physician was John James, who noted down the same observations as Seaton. It is however important to mention that a major part of Marshall's confinement was played by his wife, Annie. She was the one who sought medical help for her spouse, after the life with him became too difficult. That is unordinary case in the Victorian times, however after Marshall assembled a family gathering, his wife announced she wants to be spared of the obligation to make decisions connected to her husband's health. It is obvious the situation affected her, as she committed suicide couple of weeks later. Marshall was proclaimed sane soon afterwards and he even got his chance to speak at previously mentioned hearing of Parliament.<sup>91</sup>

The main difference between cases of Unwin and Marshall is, that there are no records of Unwin's thoughts, no doctor recorded exactly what she had to say, she was treated as less important human being. However, Marshall had a chance to speak about himself on his own, even had a chance to speak in public forum, and when he felt unjustly confined, he had a possibility to defend himself<sup>92</sup>. Simply said, he was, unlike Unwin, respected. Realization of this difference is crucial, because it is probable that the same approach differences were not just between these two cases, but generally between male and female patients.

### **3.3.3 Other specific cases**

The proof of miscomprehension of female's mind and following discriminations could be the case of Carolyn Hart. She was a young woman in her mid-twenties, confined for her suicide attempt. From the records from Brookwood asylum, it is observable that she was received as noisy, obscene, and filthy.<sup>93</sup> This description can be questioned in present times, because the perception of women has changed. It is already mentioned before in this thesis, that anytime a woman made herself heard she was immediately described as naughty and rebellious. However, Carolyn's behaviour even earned her a restraining jacket, which was not being used regularly in 1870's, and when she did not respond, they punished her by shaving her scalp.<sup>94</sup> There is no surprise that

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<sup>90</sup> Berkenkotter and Hanganu-Bresch, "Occult Genres and the Certification of Madness," 238.

<sup>91</sup> Berkenkotter and Hanganu-Bresch, "Occult Genres and the Certification of Madness," 242.

<sup>92</sup> Berkenkotter and Hanganu-Bresch, "Occult Genres and the Certification of Madness," 236-7.

<sup>93</sup> Shepherd and Wright, "Madness, Suicide and the Victorian Asylum," 192.

<sup>94</sup> Shepherd and Wright, "Madness, Suicide and the Victorian Asylum," 193.

her condition was not improving, being so humiliated, however she was released after the treatment and claimed sane.

Among some other cases that were thoroughly recorded is the case of Catherine Tyrrell. She was confined because of her inclination towards melancholy and suicidal behaviour. Since her condition was not changing, she was sent to several different asylums, starting in Bethlem Hospital, and going through asylum in Buckinghamshire and Brookwood. In the last of the previously mentioned asylums, they immediately liberated her from the restraining suit she arrived in, and they followed her treatment with non-restrain methods. From record it is evidential that she responded well to this rediscovery of freedom, however her mental state worsen again, and she committed series of suicide attempts until she succeeded.<sup>95</sup> From this case it is obvious that although the non-restraint movement was important, it did not miraculously save patients from their diagnosis, especially not depression, which was still an unknown illness in the Victorian Era. Shepherd and Wright emphasise that suicidal behaviour was not anything extraordinary in the reality of Victorian asylums. The number they mention, based on Dr William Ogle study, is 42,630 suicide between years 1858 and 1883 (in England and Wales).<sup>96</sup>

In the context of money being the key factor of degree of received treatment, there is evidence of Mary Lamb's case. Showalter mentions her to emphasise the difference between patient reception in public and private hospitals. While in public hospitals the methods were rather cruel and sometimes even inhuman, patients in private madhouses received more considerate (therefore more expensive) care.<sup>97</sup> Mary Lamb had the privilege of receiving private treatment of her mania after she attacked and killed her mother. While in public madhouse she would be treated with disgrace, she had a chance to experience affectionate care.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Shepherd and Wright, "Madness, Suicide and the Victorian Asylum," 176.

<sup>96</sup> Shepherd and Wright, "Madness, Suicide and the Victorian Asylum," 176.

<sup>97</sup> Showalter, "Victorian Women and Insanity," 160.

<sup>98</sup> Showalter, "Victorian Women and Insanity," 160.

## 4 LIFE OF THE BRONTË FAMILY

Brontë siblings were all born during the years 1814 to 1820 in Thornton, Yorkshire, however out of six children only four survived. Among those who survived were of course the famous Brontë sisters Charlotte, Emily, and Anne, who had later become famous writers. Because of the Victorian times they had lived in, when it was not common and most importantly not desired for a woman to be publishing her thoughts (or even to be thinking), they published their texts under pseudonyms, Currer (Charlotte), Ellis (Emily), and Acton (Anne) Bell.<sup>99</sup>

The general opinion on Brontë sisters' texts is that they are not really challenging to read.<sup>100</sup> One common motif they all share however, is the struggle of main protagonists, which is usually bounded to moral issues they must face. It is probable these issues were highly inspired by lives of the Brontë sisters themselves. This chapter discusses some of the most crucial events of their lives which are later reflected in their books.

One of the most important factors, which influenced the texts of the Brontë sisters is indeed their childhood. Every Victorian writer had been shaped by living in predominantly Christian country, for Brontë siblings however, it was even more crucial because of their father, Patrick, was an Anglican clergyman.<sup>101</sup> While the beliefs they grew up in and believed in were the same as the beliefs of majority of the society they lived in, the intensity of religious teaching, which they were sort of forced into consuming, was much higher. Being a child of Christian preacher meant that none of the Brontë children could choose their religion, it was simply something they were born into and, because of their father, it became the centre of their life.<sup>102</sup> It is important to mention that thanks to Patrick Brontë's profession his children had access to education since early age and while they were sort of limited by the strong religious upbringing, they were also educated. Speaking of Brontë (surviving) children, Charlotte, Emily, Anne, and Branwell, growing up as daughters and a son of clergyman also meant living in an environment where it was common to "use hell as a threat to sinners."<sup>103</sup> The two

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<sup>99</sup> "History - The Brontë Sisters," BBC, accessed March 3, 2021, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic\\_figures/bronte\\_sisters.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/bronte_sisters.shtml).

<sup>100</sup> Heather Glen, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to the Brontës* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1.

<sup>101</sup> Glen, *The Cambridge Companion to the Brontës*, 192.

<sup>102</sup> Glen, *The Cambridge Companion to the Brontës*, 195.

<sup>103</sup> Glen, *The Cambridge Companion to the Brontës*, 196.

eldest daughters of Patrick Brontë died at school for priest's daughters at Cowan Bridge. While the cause of their death was fever, it is argued that another cause could be "Christian sadism" they were exposed to.<sup>104</sup> The concept of threatening children with hell and emphasising the factor of divine punishment is something, I believe, influenced especially Emily Brontë, since she created a character for her book *Wuthering Heights*, which has noticeably similar characteristics to her religious father, and uses hell as a threat to younger children as well. It could be argued that in this book Emily also introduces motifs of paganism, as she writes about a "wraith", ghost of deceased person, who haunts another one of her characters, which could be seen as sort of rebellious act towards Emily's Christian upbringing. Emily was not the only one influenced by her father. Her sister Charlotte, who criticised *Wuthering Heights* for its spiritual motifs, rebelled against another Victorian Anglican dogma when writing *Jane Eyre* and introducing topic of the women sexuality.<sup>105</sup>

Another crucial event which had shaped Brontë sisters' texts was the death of their mother. Maria Brontë died in 1821 of uterine cancer.<sup>106</sup> The children did not grow up without a feminine figure, since Maria's sister, Elizabeth Branwell, arrived to take care of them and help Patrick Brontë with educating and taking care of her nieces and a nephew. It is essential to mention that the loss of their mother also influenced their novels. The absence of mother is specifically noticeable in *Wuthering Heights* in which none of the protagonists have a strong relationship with mother, and in most cases the mother figure is missing completely.

After the death of the two eldest sisters, Brontë children were educated only at home, where they also spent most of their (quite short) lives.<sup>107</sup> While that is probably what contributed to the sisters becoming writers, it could also negatively influence their mental state, which is I believe is also projected in *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*. Despite the fact that there is no direct mention of the (mental) asylum in those novels, I believe that both books contain metaphors of exactly this type of hospital. In *Jane Eyre* it is the attic where Bertha Mason is being kept, and, less obviously, in *Wuthering Heights* the metaphor of mental asylum could be both mansions where most of the plot

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<sup>104</sup> Glen, *The Cambridge Companion to the Brontës*, 196.

<sup>105</sup> Glen, *The Cambridge Companion to the Brontës*, 209.

<sup>106</sup> Lyndon Fraser and Angela McCarthy, eds. *Far From Home: The English in New Zealand* (New Zealand: Otago University Press, 2012), 103.

<sup>107</sup> "Family and Friends - Aunt Branwell," The Bronte Society, accessed March 3, 2021, <https://www.bronte.org.uk/the-brontes-and-haworth/family-and-friends/aunt-branwell>.

takes place. These metaphors are profoundly discussed in the next chapter. However, it is essential to mention it in this chapter as well, as the Brontë sisters had to spend most of their lives inside their house.

The last factor that influenced Brontë sister's writings is their brother Branwell. Branwell Brontë, the only son, a writer, and a painter, is not as much famous for his work, but mostly for his alcohol and drug addiction. The loss of his two sisters affected him deeply and therefore he approved of father's decision to keep the other girls at home. As it is mentioned earlier, the greatest issue was his alcoholism and addiction to opium and laudanum.<sup>108</sup> It is possible characters like John Reed from *Jane Eyre*, or Hindley in *Wuthering Heights* were based on him, or at least strongly inspired by him.

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<sup>108</sup> David Barnett, "Branwell Bronte, the Mad, Bad and Dangerous Brother," The Independent, published September 17, 2017, [https://www.independent.co.uk/news/long\\_reads/branwell-bronte-emily-charlotte-anne-family-haworth-yorkshire-a7940396.html](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/long_reads/branwell-bronte-emily-charlotte-anne-family-haworth-yorkshire-a7940396.html).

## 5 ANALYSIS OF CHARACTERS

### 5.1 Wuthering Heights

The book *Wuthering Heights* written by Emily Brontë shows how social roles of the Victorian Era and upbringing together with education influence individual's morals, behaviour, and character, all regardless of gender. In this book there are several characters that are driven mad or at least they show some symptoms of insanity. Emily Brontë did not focus so much on the origin of the madness but more importantly on the reality of how pain can change people. As it is mentioned earlier in this thesis, the most important fact is, that the setting of majority of the plot is in gloomy Gothic house, practically secluded from the outside world, which I believe could be described as a metaphor for Victorian mental asylum, which is described in chapter three. This chapter will focus on the protagonists of the book and their motifs of madness and their developments, as well as it will mention situations which could be inspired by the author's life itself.

#### 5.2.1 Mr. Heathcliff

One of those characters that are being shaped by pain throughout the book is one of the main characters, Mr. Heathcliff. Since the beginning of the book in chapter one it is obvious that he is emotionally unavailable, and he is deeply hiding his feelings. In chapter one reader can see the result of life circumstances that influenced his character, while the story is revealed later throughout the book. Even the narrator Mr. Lockwood, who believes can relate to the main male character, states that his harsh appearance might be misleading, and he is convinced Mr. Heathcliff can both love and hate, but keeps his emotions under control, and invisible to his surroundings. "He'll love and hate, equally under cover, and esteem it a species of impertinence to be loved or hated again."<sup>109</sup>

Before the story of Heathcliff has any further explanation, it is already visible that he suffers from some type of mental disturbance. That is not because he is unsocial and rude, but because of the scene in which he cries out for "Cathy" out of the window, obviously in some sort of mental stroke, followed by him being astonishingly rude

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<sup>109</sup> Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (Richmond: Alma Classics, 2017), 5.

towards everyone, especially young Cathy, calling her “worthless”<sup>110</sup>. “(...) Come in!’ he sobbed. ‘Cathy, do come. (...) Hear me this time, Catherine, at last.”<sup>111</sup> His cry into the darkness reveals that he might be having some sort of visions and that he has been in this obviously unstable state of mind for some time.

Once Nelly Dead takes over the narration of the story, the reader gets to know a lot of details of characters backgrounds. Thanks to that Heathcliff’s childhood is revealed. From the very beginning of the narration, it is obvious that Heathcliff was being manipulative since young age. In the episode in which he asked for Hindley’s horse, it is observable he is already willing to suffer, if necessary, only to get what he desires. His strict upbringing filled with violence and lack of acceptance already shaped his character and this episode foreshadowed in which direction is his mental state going to develop. At this point however, the reader feels sympathy for poor Heathcliff, who is being mistreated and unloved. “He complained so seldom, indeed, of such stirs as these, that I really thought of him not vindictive.”<sup>112</sup> It is apparent he does not feel sorry for himself, or at least it is not visible, and he suffers all injustice happening to him. It could be argued he was emotionally unavailable already at this point, but later it is obvious that he simply acted manipulative as a child in order to somehow survive, and as Nelly states: “I was deceived completely.”<sup>113</sup>

The determinative transformation of Heathcliff’s character is bounded to the transformation of Catherine. When she comes back from Thrushcross Grange she acts differently and he, probably being in love with her already, could not take seeing her become more like other people, those who acted harshly towards him his whole life. “I’m trying to settle how I shall pay Hindley back. I don’t care how long I wait, if I can only do it at last. I hope he will not die before I do!”<sup>114</sup> Even when Catherine still shows affection towards him, he starts to speak of revenge which helps him forget his pain, this already foreshadows what is going to happen further on in the book. This could already be a slight indication of Heathcliff going insane however, he is still a child and the way he was treated left marks on him, and he becomes more and more distant and better at hiding his feelings. Some could say he is becoming emotionless however

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<sup>110</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 26.

<sup>111</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 25.

<sup>112</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 34.

<sup>113</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 34.

<sup>114</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 51.



I believe he has even stronger emotions than any other character in the book, he simply hides them so that they cannot be used to hurt him, just like everything else is. This is one of the first examples in the book which shows how upbringing and social situation deeply influences individual's character.

Another factor which contributed to his transformation is the fact that he had to work hard which made him feel exhausted all the time and therefore pessimistic with no desire for further knowledge or education. Nelly, who is still in charge of narrating the story in this part of the book, states: "...continual hard work, begun soon and concluded late, had extinguished any curiosity he once possessed in pursuit of knowledge."<sup>115</sup> That caused him to distant himself from Catherine even more. Furthermore, he gets his heart broken when Catherine claims she does not enjoy his company while she is an anger affect which happened due to her being spoiled. This episode, I believe, predetermined Heathcliff to become mad, because Catherine was the last thing that kept him alive and sane. His heart gets broken once again and this time permanently when hearing that Catherine is going to marry Edgar Linton and cannot marry him even when loving him because of wealth and social status. It is probable that this was the moment he decided to lock his feelings and intentionally become heartless and cruel, which also contributed to his mental state. This behaviour and the whole situation could be inspired by Emily's brother Branwell, who had put his hope and love interest into a woman as well, and after being refused, he fell into despair<sup>116</sup> just like Heathcliff, and he gave up his life for drugs.

After he returned to Wuthering Heights, he changed visually, and even acted more wisely, being described as "(...) quite Christian, offering the right hand of fellowship to his enemies all around."<sup>117</sup> However, the reader soon finds out his heart remained rotten, and he only came back to seek revenge. He still has deep feelings for Catherine however, it seems his love is now mixed with hatred and contempt and he arrived back to seek his revenge on Hindley. He even lets Catherine know his twisted feelings towards her, but at the same time she already showed him hers. It is probable, that at that moment they both started to be certain that their future can only end poorly.

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<sup>115</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 57.

<sup>116</sup> "The Forgotten Brontë." Living North, published May, 2017.  
<https://www.livingnorth.com/yorkshire/people-places/forgotten-bront%C3%AB>.

<sup>117</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 83.

Another transformation in Heathcliff's character proving he is becoming more insane happen, when he stops dissimulating and lets Isabelle see his true nature. Isabelle herself wonders: "Is Mr. Heathcliff a man? If so, is he mad? And if not, is he a devil?"<sup>118</sup> He might be insane but differently than Catherine, he is thinking straight and keeps plotting his revenge. By marrying Isabelle, he can control her and pursue his dream of destroying Mr. Linton and Hindley.

While Heathcliff is being accused of killing Catherine by manipulating her herself, he realizes how cruel, mad, and fake her personality is. The proof of how passionately he loved her and despised her at the same time could be seen in his desperate words: "I have not one word of comfort – you deserve this. You killed yourself. (...) what right had you to leave me? (...) I have not broken your hearth – you have broken it..."<sup>119</sup> This quotation directly shows the reader how desperate Heathcliff is, and that, if not up to this moment, then definitely right now, he has lost his mind. After they passionately share a kiss Heathcliff still calls his love a devil, however his realization does not change his deep feelings. After Catherine dies, he asks her to haunt him and curses her, which has major impact on his, already weakened, mind. The fact that he screams: "(...) haunt me than! (...) I know ghosts have wandered on earth. (...) drive me mad!"<sup>120</sup>, implies that he believes that his demand could happen, he states he believes in ghosts, and he wants Catherine to make him go insane. That could be explained as a wicked sort of coping mechanism of someone who believes in causing death of a beloved person. However, it seems like the perfect example of unfulfilled love desire resulting in broken hearth and vulnerable mind.

When his son arrives, he prepares a room and hires a teacher for him, however his wicked character only grew stronger. The only reason why he is dedicated to take care of Linton is so that he can make him marry Cathy, and therefore inherit her property. His mind is now possessed by three thoughts, revenge and money, and dead Catherine. He somehow manages to act sane, but he himself already knows, that his mind is ill. There is one moment however, in which he shows what was left of the old Heathcliff, when he realizes, that Hareton would be a great husband for Cathy, and he feels sorry for him, since he is uneducated and poor, which is a direct parallel to his own

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<sup>118</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 115.

<sup>119</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 136.

<sup>120</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 141.

situation with Catherine years ago. This situation does not soften his heart, and he manipulates Cathy into feelings for Linton and threatens her that if Linton is going to die, it will be her fault. He does not see Cathy as something valuable that was left here from her mother whom he misses, he even beats her and humiliates her. Heathcliff became a violent mad person who is driven by fear and especially pain of others.

As the story climaxes Heathcliff provides the reader with yet another proof of his serious mental conditions. He confesses he had been haunted by Catherine's ghost for eighteen years, which is exactly what he wished for when Catherine died. "I felt her by me – I could almost see her, and yet I could not! (...) She showed herself, as she often was in life, a devil to me!"<sup>121</sup> I believe this is the final proof of his insanity, caused by a number of reasons. These reasons include his difficult childhood, love that ended in tragedy, manipulative tendencies, and guilt with hatred combined with alcohol use. The final state of Heathcliff's madness could be described as apathy. Brontë uses the theme of mysticism more times in the book and it is obvious that she is somewhat blurring the line between the motifs of madness with these supernatural motifs represented by devil and ghosts. That makes the decision up to the reader whether he believes Catherine comes back to haunt Heathcliff, or that he went mad, in his own secluded sort of "asylum-like" mansion in Wuthering Heights, far away from society.

### **5.2.2 Cathy Linton**

Young Cathy is, similarly to Heathcliff, also introduced in the first chapter. The reader can once again observe the result of something that will be revealed as the story develops later. She seems rude, childish, disrespectful and with no manners, and even is accused of witchcraft, but the reader quickly finds out her husband died at a young age, so there is no wonder she is also acting harsh. However, that is only the first impression provided by Mr. Lockwood, her story is far more complicated and interesting.

The consequences around Cathy's birth could make a reader wonder. When Catherine was pregnant with her daughter Cathy she was already suffering from several mental issues, she had mental strokes and did not eat properly, so there is a possibility her child would suffer too, however it seems like newborn Cathy was healthy both physically and mentally. Furthermore, she was lucky enough her father coped with the

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<sup>121</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 242.

death of the love of his life rather well and he started a quite healthy and intensive relationship with his new daughter.

Just like her mother Catherine, Cathy was also significantly influenced by her upbringing. She shared similar features with her mother by being wild and sensitive, but she was also cheerful, lovely, and deeply loving her father. However, similarly to her mother, she also had troubles with rebelling, and when someone tried to make her behave, she felt hurt and offended. Her father therefore did not let anyone tell her to behave, he educated her himself, and she was not allowed to leave his demesne. It seems like sometimes father figures simply cannot understand that by overprotecting children they guide them into the danger, because nothing is more desirable than forbidden fruit. The fact she had to stay within the property of the family could metaphorically lead the reader into believing Cathy must have had at least some minor issues growing up secluded from other children and outside world. It is probable this situation is also inspired by Emily's childhood, when she also spent most of her life in her father's house. Cathy is also described as "mild as dove"<sup>122</sup> and that "(...) her anger was never furious, her love never fierce: it was deep and tender."<sup>123</sup> That only proves that even though she might be growing up to become a spoiled young lady, her heart was by no means evil. It is crucial to mention that just like her mother, she also grows up without a mother figure and lacks the mother-daughter bond, just like the author herself.

While Catherine realized her social role and status later and had no troubles playing with Heathcliff as a child, Cathy is aware of her role since young age. She acts like a princess and wants to be treated like one. The proof of that is in the episode when she breaks the forbiddance of her father and visits Wuthering Heights, where she met Hareton. As soon as she finds out he is not wealthy, she treats him like a lesser human being. "Mustn't he be made to do so as I ask him? You wicked creature, I shall tell Papa what you said..."<sup>124</sup> The message Cathy is sending to young Hareton is loud and clear, she is the princess, he is the servant, and if he does not obey her, he will have to suffer the consequences. Being spoiled cannot be described as motif of madness, however Catherine also became mad gradually, therefore the same thing is expected for little Cathy.

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<sup>122</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 158.

<sup>123</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 159.

<sup>124</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 164.

After being manipulated into relationship with Linton, she seems to become less dominant, and her character starts to change slowly. She is crueller to Hareton than before, but there could be an explanation that she simply needs to vent the iniquity she suffers while taking care of selfish and childish Linton. However, she is not insane yet. She even realizes the situation she finds herself at and decides to end things with Linton, but she likes him too much to do it. Important fact is that she does not lose her self-confidence. She has no troubles stating that she loves her father more than she loves Linton whom she sees as a coward. "I'll either break or burn a way out of the house. Be quiet! You're in no danger, but if you'll hinder me... Linton, I love Papa better than you!"<sup>125</sup> These strong rebellious words have no connotation to madness however, because anyone in her situation, even in the Victorian Era, is obviously right to be angry and cruel. It is necessary to realize that these strong words are coming out of a mouth of a young girl, who is being locked in a house against her will, as if she is some kind of lunatic in an asylum, even though she is not mentally ill, and therefore her words are not just rebellious, but needs to be seen as courageous. This could result into her being seen as mad in the Victorian society, but from the perspective of the 21<sup>st</sup> century she is just fighting for her freedom and refuses to be manipulated by others.

Her characters became even less gentle and harsher after her husband dies, also she becomes surprisingly successful in emotional attacks on Heathcliff. She knows exactly which soft spots there are left in Heathcliff's mind from the times when he was younger and sane, and she persistently targets them, especially when she repeats that he is all alone, and no one loves him. "You are miserable, are you not? Lonely like the devil, and envious like him? Nobody loves you..."<sup>126</sup> Her behaviour and words are manipulative in different ways. It seems like she is aware of Heathcliff's weakened mind and she is trying to make him go insane faster by choosing painful words. As I mentioned earlier, another proof of her manipulative behaviour could be found in situation where she is manipulating the religious servant Joseph through fear. Joseph fears she is involved in some sort of witchcraft, which she finds amusing and uses it for her own benefit. "Are you not afraid of being carried away bodily, whenever you mention Devil's name? (...) I'll show you how far I progressed in the black art..."<sup>127</sup> By these actions she is probably preparing herself for the hard times that are ahead of her in

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<sup>125</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 228.

<sup>126</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 240.

<sup>127</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 13.

Wuthering Heights, and it could be discussed Emily also slightly rebels against the religious views she was brought up in, and sort of uses the fear of hell she was threatened by as a child to strike back and cause fear in the old religious man. After her husband dies, she maintains to keep her pride and she acts like a princess which the reader already knows from the very first chapter of the book, even though she lost everything. Her character significantly changes and is even better than prior meeting Heathcliff, after Heathcliff dies. Shortly before that when Heathcliff tries to hurt her the reader can see that Hareton still values his foster father as a person, and Cathy, as much as she hates that fact, respects it, which shows another great evolution of her character. Later, she continues to be rebellious but in somewhat cute way when she lets her heart choose Hareton.

### 5.2.3 Catherine Earnshaw

Catherine Linton, by her maiden name Catherine Earnshaw, is firstly described as an exceptionally wild child, who enjoys being in argument with others, even with adults, and seems to like to emotionally hurt and make fun of people around her. “(...) she laughed if I told her to say she was sorry for her faults (...)”<sup>128</sup> She is obviously a rebellious kid, who shows signs of spoiled character. That would not be a significant issue, however from the first part of this thesis it is apparent, that rebelliousness was not a desired character, especially for girls. At this point in the book, when she is still a child, none of her characteristics could be described as madness, however her rebellious behaviour does not follow the social role of a young, educated lady and charming wife which is being expected of her, so it is presumptive that she is going to have a problematic future. An example of a well-behaved Victorian woman is Mrs. Earnshaw, wife of Catherine’s brother Hindley, who, even while being sensitive, is still obedient and far from rebellious. She starts to be irritated the longer she stays at Wuthering Heights, however no signs of rebelliousness had been mentioned in the book, except for when she is on her deathbed, and keeps laughing, however when her husband complains about her talking too much, she agrees to not speak. “I promise I won’t speak, but that does not bind me not to laugh at him.”<sup>129</sup> Mrs. Earnshaw speaks these words despite knowing about her coming towards the end of life. This type of

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<sup>128</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 36.

<sup>129</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 54..

subordination is an unknown characteristic for Catherine, but at the same time this can be seen as a hint of stubbornness, which Catherine indeed demonstrates as well.

Catherine's transformation further begins at the end of chapter six, when she is introduced to the Linton's family for the first time and is followed by transformation in chapter seven. She seemed to have sympathy for Heathcliff before and enjoyed his company, which is evident from her wanting to play with him most of the time, however once she got the chance to be with wealthier and socially higher ranked people, she did not hesitate. This could be discussed as one of the signs of her corrupted character, but the reader needs to keep in mind that she is still quite young and probably only curious. Her long stay at Thrushcross Grange influenced her character significantly. As it is described in the book, she basically came back to Wuthering Heights as a young lady, with disappearing signs of the wild girl which she used to be. The proof that she has not changed completely is that she still cares for Heathcliff and does not care that he looks poor, however her hesitation to touch him when seeing he is dirty shows the change in her thinking. "She gazed concernedly at the dusky fingers she held in her own and also at her dress, which she feared had gained no embellishment from its contact with his."<sup>130</sup> Further on Catherine is described as charming and beautiful, exactly the way society wanted women to be in the Victorian times, however she shows rising signs of stubbornness and pride, and the courtship of wealthy Edgar Linton, her future husband, did not help. Catherine seems to have the situation under control, balancing her time with Heathcliff, uneducated and poor, and Linton's siblings, wealthy and intelligent. She acts differently depending on who she spends time with and thanks to that she is liked by both sides, however she is not as strong as she probably thought she was, and it is probable that this double-faced role influenced her character's development and could contribute to her becoming the central mad woman in the story.

The first time Catherine shows serious symptoms of mental disturbance is when she loses control over the situation at her home and Edgar Linton and Heathcliff meet. In that moment she did not know what to do, because her double-faced character had to choose how to react, since the boys both knew different side of her. She tries to control herself, however she becomes violent and goes into some sort of mental stroke in which she cannot control her anger. "Her eyes began to glisten and her lids to twinkle. (...)

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<sup>130</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 45.

She dropped down on her knees by a chair, and set to weeping in serious earnest.”<sup>131</sup> In this affect she physically, and probably even mentally, hurts everyone involved, including both males that have feeling for her, and as a result when she realizes she lost control over the situation, she becomes extremely manipulative towards Edgar, who saw the real herself for the first time, claiming that they can all go and “I’ll cry myself sick!”<sup>132</sup>

The fact that she is not emotionless is supported when she comes to confess to Nelly about her engagement to Edgar, while loving Heathcliff, despite the fact that she was supposed to apologize to Nelly for her previous behaviour, but she only came to her to selfishly complain about her life. She admits she loves both, but her love for Heathcliff is much more passionate, natural, wild, and honest, while her love for Edgar is derived from her social role and not heart in the first place. “And he (Edgar) will be rich, and I shall like to be the greatest woman of the neighbourhood...”<sup>133</sup> When Nelly tries to explain to her that her reasons to marry Edgar are not right by saying some of the most revolutionary thoughts of the book, which makes Nelly quite a rebel with revolutionary thoughts herself for the first and last time, Catherine’s spoiled character shows and she becomes angry. She is dedicated marry Edgar even while feeling that it is not right because her true feelings are targeting someone else. Being emotionally torn at such a young age is probably another factor which caused her to lose her mind later in the story, however it is not entirely her fault, as she made a decision which was expected from her by her family and society. That is something many women had to suffer in Victorian Emily Brontë brilliantly emphasises this fact using Catherine’s character.

Catherine’s transformation continues when Heathcliff disappears. She becomes ill and has strokes of madness because of her fever. After her recovery, her character remains changed as she is more controlling than usual. “Our young lady returned to us saucier and more passionate and haughtier than ever. (...) she esteemed herself a woman and our mistress, and thought her illness gave her own way.”<sup>134</sup> It is a matter of discussion whether she has changed on purpose in order to hide from the fact her words drove Heathcliff away, because regardless of her age and firm decision to follow her

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<sup>131</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 61.

<sup>132</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 61.

<sup>133</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 66.

<sup>134</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 75.



mind and not heart, she was still sensitive and emotive girl. With her controlling character and anger issues reader could expect someone to confront her, however that did not happen, firstly because the doctor advised otherwise due to her illness and secondly because her brother wanted to get rid of her by marrying her into Linton's wealthy family. That caused that Catherine became even more spoiled than before.

Her spoiled character grew even bigger after marrying Edgar and moving to Thrushcross Grange, since no one dared to stand in her way. It is questionable whether that could also contribute to her growing mental illness, however it is probable, that being in her opposition would only make things harder, since the situation was already complicated, regardless of Catherine's symptoms not being that obvious. It is mentioned in the book however, that she felt into silence and became melancholic occasionally, being described as: "Catherine had seasons of gloom and silence now and then..."<sup>135</sup> Upon Heathcliff's return she acts excited but that does not last long, and her mental state gets worse. However, she is convinced she is the one making compromises, not the others, and her selfishness grows so strong she even calls herself an angel. "I can afford to suffer anything hereafter. (...) Goodnight! I'm an angel!"<sup>136</sup> The more she believes she is innocent the more manipulative she becomes. That is shown when she finds out that Isabella Linton has feelings for Heathcliff, and she absolutely disgraces her. That shows her twisted character and the real cruel person she has become. Another proof of her insanity is when she continues believing she is innocent and starts to be even more manipulative, claiming that her husband and Heathcliff want to break her, but she will destroy them by destroying herself first. "Well, if I cannot keep Heathcliff for my friend, if Edgar will be mean and jealous, I'll try to break their hearts by breaking my own. (...) I am pushed to extremity!"<sup>137</sup> These are the words of a certainly mad woman, which suffers from several issues, while anger issues and obsessive manipulation are the most visible among them.

This anger issue is something Catherine often misuses to manipulate people around her into doing things she wants them to do. She often starts shaking and goes into a mental stroke, but as Nelly realizes, she does so on purpose. With every chapter Catherine is becoming more unsympathetic to the reader, she lets her spoiled and

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<sup>135</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 78.

<sup>136</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 84.

<sup>137</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 99.

manipulative character take control, but it makes reader wonder, if that is not what Brontë wanted. She might have used Catherine's character to show that the only way a woman could rebel in the Victorian Era was to try to control her position, which in Catherine's case was only possible by her intentional mental strokes.

These strokes which were supposed to provide her with attention caused her condition to worsen and by repeatedly claiming she is going to die, she lost control over these strokes. She stops recognizing herself in the mirror, she suffers from nightmares, fevers, and food deprivation, and it seems like she has gone mad permanently." (...) the whole last seven years of my life grew blank! I did not recall that they had been at all. (...) You may fancy a glimpse of the abyss where I grovelled! Shake your head as you will, Nelly, you have helped to unsettle me!"<sup>138</sup> Blaming Nelly, the only person in the whole story who has always been honest and deeply concerned for Catherine, of what has happened to her, is another reason to believe she is completely delusional. Catherine becomes not only insane but unbelievable cruel. That is also the last moment she sees Heathcliff for she gives birth to a daughter and dies soon after. That is the end for this mad woman with unhappy life. It is a question whether her life was unhappy because of her madness, or if she was mad because of her unhappy life. Brontë wisely left the question open, however it is obvious that the social role Catherine decided to accept together with denying her true feelings were the sticking points. Either way, it is important to mention, once again, that something that could contribute to her mental state, and maybe even cause it, is the fact that she basically spent all her life in only two houses, firstly Wuthering Heights and later Thrushcross Grange. Especially Thrushcross Grange became her own private asylum, as she rarely left the house and only was meeting with a small number of people which were taking care of her.

#### **5.2.4 Hindley Earnshaw**

Hindley Earnshaw, Catherine's brother and the target of Heathcliff's revenge and hatred, is one of the characters in *Wuthering Heights* who is safe to be claimed mad. Despite being described as violent at the beginning of the book, he did not go insane until he lost his wife. After that he started to show signs of mental instability. Brontë therefore shows that not only women are prone to becoming insane after suffering emotionally, but the same can happen to men. The example of Hindley's madness could

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<sup>138</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 106.

be the episode in chapter eight in which he came back to Wuthering Heights drunk and Nelly automatically removes bullets from his gun. “I (Nelly) went to hide little Hareton, and to take the shot out of the master’s fowling piece, which he was fond of playing with in his insane excitement...”<sup>139</sup> That shows at this situation happened more than once before, and that Hindley becomes dangerously violent. He lost his mind from socially understandable reasons however, because he lost his wife. His mental condition is so unstable that in one moment he believes others want to kill his son Hareton, whom he did not care about before, and wants to kill them, followed by him going into mental stroke and wanting to kill his son on his own, which he later blames Nelly for. “By heaven and hell, you’ve sworn between you to murder that child! (...) I shall make you swallow the carving knife, Nelly!”<sup>140</sup> This type of behaviour is of course encouraged by alcohol consumption, however not caused by it. Hindley is unquestionably the first character who could be described as mentally ill. Later in the story he becomes naïve and greedy man who only cares about money, which makes him an easy target for Heathcliff’s revenge. As it is mentioned earlier, Hindley character is probably inspired by Emily’s brother Branwell, who drank himself to death and also had an unsuccessful love life.

### **5.2.5 Isabelle Linton**

Isabella’s character in the books starts with innocent and wealthy girl. Even when betrayed and disgraced by Catherine she continues to be naïve young lady with deep feelings for a man she used to avoid, Heathcliff. She becomes this typical Victorian sad young woman, wandering through park in silence or crying. “(...) Miss Linton moped about the park and garden, always silent and almost always in tears...”<sup>141</sup>

Isabelle’s character rapidly changes after running away with Heathcliff. When they move into Wuthering Heights, she realizes her newlywed husband never loved her and only used her to hurt her brother, Edgar Linton. In a letter she sends to Nelly she claims he is evil, mad, violent and with stone cold heart, meaning she finally sees through him and is afraid of him. She is locked like a bird but despite her desperate feelings, she manages to free herself and escape. By this action she most probably saved herself from becoming insane like Catherine. That does not mean that Isabelle would be

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<sup>139</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 61.

<sup>140</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 62.

<sup>141</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 101.

a saint. She spent her times at Wuthering Height by purposely driving her husband mad and she proudly admits to it to Nelly: "I'd rather he suffered less, if I might cause his suffering and he might know that I was the cause."<sup>142</sup> The reader is not angry with Isabelle however, because in this situation it is obvious, she acted like this in a self-defence. She was provoking him into mental strokes, and he treated her like a dirt, therefore one could say that they are even. Just like Catherine, young Cathy, Heathcliff, and other characters, she also finds herself locked in a house with no access to influence of other people and the world and that could cause her feelings of despair.

The reader wishes Isabelle to be able to escape from the consequences of marrying mad man, however he or she soon finds out she gave birth to Heathcliff's son Lincoln, who is weak just like her and his uncle. Regardless of the impossibility of escaping from her torturer, she manages to keep her mind sane and her story ends.

#### **5.2.6 Hareton Earnshaw**

The story of Hareton is the most heart breaking throughout the whole book. Innocent boy who first lost his mother, then his nanny, is left to live with his mad father who does not care for him and after even he dies, he must live under the tyranny of Heathcliff who promised to break him just like he did break his father. It is questionable how Hareton managed to stay alive and sane, however when he meets Cathy, he is acting reasonably, and even when he is angry after being mistreated by her, he came to her to make up. By this he shows a great level of maturity, even though it is probable that by living with Heathcliff, he had to learn how to be mature the hard way.

In opposition to young Linton, Hareton is sensitive, but not weak, and he feels less valuable. He is, however, able to control himself. Hareton resembles Heathcliff when he was a boy, but that does not make Heathcliff feel any sympathy for him, because he is too consumed with hatred and he wants everyone around him to suffer the same. Unfortunately for Hareton, he is the one who suffers the most. When he was young, he was intimidated for not being smart enough and then when older he is being intimidated again for wanting to be smarter. Cathy mocks him by saying: "Yes, I hear him trying to spell and read to himself (...) it was extremely funny."<sup>143</sup> Surprisingly, he is the only character in the book, except for the narrator Nelly, who, regardless of his

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<sup>142</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 151.

<sup>143</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 251.

emotional suffering, stayed sane and did not show any signs of becoming mad. Brontë most likely rewards him by giving him Cathy, whom he was in love with, as his future wife.

### 5.2.7 Linton Heathcliff

Regardless of his weak appearance, which he inherited from his mother's side of the family, Linton Heathcliff also shows weakness on mind. However, it can be argued that life was not so gentle with him either. For example, as soon as he gets to Thrushcross Grange, he is told not to cry, despite the fact his mother just died, only because it could make his cousin Cathy feel sad. "(...) mind you don't grieve her (Cathy) by crying tonight, try to be cheerful now..."<sup>144</sup> As soon as he arrives his father Heathcliff comes for him and the reader almost immediately accepts poor boy's fate. Just as expected, Linton becomes selfish and even weaker due to the emotionless surroundings.

Despite Linton not being the son of Catherine Linton, he shares some similar characteristics. The main one is that after he gets ill, he starts to hate everyone and wants them to take care of him. He acts childish and when he does not receive the care he desires, he pretends a stroke to stop Cathy from leaving him, even though he was the one who sent her away in the first place. It could be a matter of discussion whether Linton is mentally ill, however it seems like he is ill mainly physically. Even he himself is aware of it, but he is obviously being threatened and therefore he strongly manipulates otherwise controlling Cathy into what he is being told. At that point in the story, it is believable that he is also aware that he is dying but his fear of his father is stronger. "You mustn't go and leave me after all. You must obey my father, you must!"<sup>145</sup> The example of how wicked he actually got towards the end of his life, probably because of his own pain, is when he marries Cathy and his father breaks his promise and does not let her go see her father, he actually approves of his father decision, does not say anything when Cathy is beaten, and requires her attention and care.

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<sup>144</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 168.

<sup>145</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 228.

### 5.2.8 Mr. Lockwood

Mr. Lockwood, nevertheless it might seem like he is one of the main characters in the beginning of the book, is in the story mainly for the purpose of narration. He is however not the narrator of the whole story, that is of course Nelly Dean, the good Christian woman who cares for everyone and in a way substitutes the missing mother figure for both Cathy and Catherine, which could be inspired by the relationship of Brontë sisters and their aunt. When it comes to Mr. Lockwood's personality, one might argue there are some symptoms of mental instability as well, but more likely he is just slightly annoying, based on how persistent he is in chapter one and two. He also has only a little bit of understanding for personal space, since he keeps coming back to Wuthering Heights even when he knows he is not welcomed there. Chapter two even reveals that even when knowing he is not welcomed, he still has the audacity to become angry when he is not treated friendly. Because of that he can be described as even more childish than young Cathy when they first meet, however that is only a part of his character which probably originates in his social role of rich master, not a sign of mental uneasiness. On this line between sane and insane behaviour Brontë placed most of her characters.

### 5.2 Bertha Mason (*Jane Eyre*)

While previously mentioned characters from Emily Brontë's book *Wuthering Heights* carried some motifs of insanity, they were never actually confined, and their separation from the world was happening somewhat unnoticeably. The situation of Bertha Mason from Charlotte Brontë's book is significantly different as she was confined and directly labelled as mad.

The character who labelled Bertha Mason as mad was none other than her husband, Edward Rochester (Mr. Rochester). When Jane, the main character of the book, is first introduced to Bertha's existence, Mr. Rochester describes her: "Bertha Mason is mad; and she came of a mad family; idiots and maniacs through three generations?"<sup>146</sup> He also claims he had been manipulated into the marriage, as he was not aware of her relatives with mental struggles, and emphasizes, that he was "cheated

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<sup>146</sup> Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 1992), 257.

into espousing”.<sup>147</sup> He also mentions that he thought Bertha’s mother died, but later he learnt “...she was only mad, and shut up in a lunatic asylum.”<sup>148</sup> Rochester admits Bertha was well known for her beauty and he, without having any real eye to eye conversation with her, fell for her beauty and wealth, as she came from rich Jamaican family, and married her instantly. When he is explaining his situation to Jane, whom he loves and wants to marry, but cannot, since he is already married to Bertha, he mentions that he had feelings for her, but was deceived. “I thought I loved her. (...) I did not even know her.”<sup>149</sup> This is important to mention, because it makes the reader sympathize with Rochester, because he truly was deceived in a way, not being informed about mental diseases in Bertha’s family. However, the way in which he decided to treat Bertha resulting in her being locked down in the attic for several years is certainly horrifying and makes Rochester sort a villain.

If the reader contrasted some character from *Wuthering Heights*, for example Catherine, with the story of Bertha Mason, he could see how the character is being described in very distinct way. While in *Wuthering Heights* the reader follows character’s childhood, growth, and sees how different situations shape and influence the character, the story of Bertha Mason is being told by her husband and at moment, when he has no other option, if he wants to get what he desired (Jane’s hand in marriage). That makes the narration of what truly happened (when Bertha started to act different) biased and slightly unreliable.

One of Jane’s first encounters with Bertha is in fact quite early in the book, in chapter 15, when she could hear her through the wall of the building. “This was a demonic laugh – low, suppressed, and deep – uttered...”<sup>150</sup> That happened long before she found out about her existence in chapter 26 during her wedding. It is also essential to mention that Jane actually did meet Bertha before her wedding, in an incident when Bertha tried to destroy Jane’s wedding veil. Jane describes her as: “tall and large, with thick and dark hair hanging long down her back. (...) I never saw a face like it! It was a discoloured face—it was a savage face.”<sup>151</sup> The reader has a quite graphic description of what Bertha looks like at that moment and it is not surprising Jane is shocked and

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<sup>147</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 258.

<sup>148</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 270.

<sup>149</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 269.

<sup>150</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 129.

<sup>151</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 250.

scared, and describes Bertha as a savage. The fact that Bertha is after the veil and the wedding dress shows, that, regardless that she is probably truly insane, she is aware of her surroundings, and can estimate what is going to happen. I am almost certain Bertha realizes her husband is planning to marry someone else, and that makes her, quite understandably, furious. It is important to note that she is not aggressive towards Jane, but towards the veil, so it could be argued her anger is directed at her husband, as she could feel deceived by him. All these arguments support the claim, that Bertha could not be as mad as her husband tries to make her look. Her terrifying appearance, which is then described again when she is revealed by Rochester, could arguably not be a result of her mental illness, but of her husband's behaviour, as instead of providing her with an access to a nice private asylum, which he could have done, since the family was wealthy enough, he instead locked her down in the attic of his mansion.

Another reason why it could be claimed that Bertha was less mad than one could assume, is revealed towards the end of the book, when Jane finds out Bertha escaped again, set the house on fire, and then killed herself by jumping off the roof. "We saw him (Rochester) approach her (Bertha); and then, ma'am, she yelled and gave a spring, and the next minute she lay smashed on the pavement."<sup>152</sup> By killing herself, it could be said that Bertha set her husband free. I believe that even though she obviously suffered from some sort of mental illness, she was not as mad as her husband thought, and the greatest reason why her condition got rapidly worse, and her appearance became horrifying, is that she was kept against her will, and the confinement happened because her husband decided so. Simply said, she was locked down as a wild animal and so she became one. However, the incident with Jane's veil and her suicide reveals that she remained human with emotions. She could be aware of the fact her husband is not happy and that she is causing him more pain, therefore she decided to end her own life in order to set him free, and at the same time take the control over her own actions, which is something she had lost after being locked down. Her anger episodes are understandable as well as the fact that her mental state was getting worse. The motif of suicide as an act of becoming free and taking control over one's life is not uncommon, and I believe it is highly inspired by the Victorian times, when, as it is discussed in chapters 2 and 3, it was frequent for a husband to make decision over his wife's life.

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<sup>152</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 379.



Especially when the female started to act strange, undesirably, and inappropriate for a woman in that era.

## 6 CONCLUSION

The aim of this bachelor thesis was to search for motifs of madness in specifically chosen characters from Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, and Bertha Mason from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, and also to search for situations, plots, or character behaviour, which were influenced by the authors personal experience. In both novels there is the occurrence of the insane asylum metaphor, which is seen in the locations chosen for *Wuthering Heights*, and in Bertha Mason's confinement. Before the actual analysis of the characters, the thesis contains the historical background of insane asylums in the Victorian era together with essential attention to the approach toward female patients. This background is necessary for better understanding of the situation and the times in which were written both discussed novels.

The essential part of the thesis is undoubtedly the chapter about the life of the Brontë family. Emily, Charlotte, and their siblings grew up as children of a clergyman, without a mother, and it could be said that they themselves were locked down in their own private asylums, their home. While it is also probably the reason why they created such masterpieces as *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*, I believe it is also the reason for their desire to revolt, to rebel, to raise their voice, and point out the (nowadays) obvious problematic approach society had towards women. Emily powerfully described the shift from normal to mad person, especially speaking of Heathcliff and Catherine, and used the metaphor for insane asylums. Both sisters used female characters such as Catherine Earnshaw, Cathy Linton, Isabelle Linton, and Bertha Mason to point out the fact, that the role of women in society was inferior compared to men, and that all important decisions in those times were often made by man even if they directly involved a woman. Women had no voice and as I mentioned in chapter 3.1, women sometimes became bored, unhappy, and with unfulfilled desires, which often resulted in their confinement. This mindset of society was exactly what the Brontë sisters grew up in.

The metaphor for the insane asylum used in both mentioned books could be described as proof of the Brontë sisters' awareness of the dismal situation of women in the Victorian era. Despite their short lives they left the world with a great legacy, which influenced generations of authors, and shaped the future of female writers. The Brontë sisters became an inspiration for many more authors to come, for example Charlotte Perkins Gilman and her book *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892), which tells another story of

a desperate women, who, after being locked down, gradually becomes more and more insane, until she is mad completely. Another example of a female character, who is also labelled mad and rebellious, is Edna Pontellier. Edna Pontellier, from the novel *The Awakening* (1899), by Kate Chopin, who rebels against the conventional role of a woman, discovering there are other ways to live life than being a mother and an obedient wife. The book calls for an awakening of society and especially women, who should wake up and stand up for themselves, and demand to be treated as equals by men. I believe it was these novels, *Wuthering Heights*, and *Jane Eyre*, that played an important role in shaping society and influencing the feminist movement.

## RESUMÉ

Tématem této bakalářské práce je analýza vybraných postav z románů *Wuthering Heights* od Emily Brontë a *Jane Eyre* od Charlotte Brontë. Hlavním cílem je hledání motivů šílenosti u těchto postav, v kontextu doby Viktoriánské éry, poukázání na situace, které mohly chování postav ovlivnit, a diskuse nad tím, zda postavy lze označit za mentálně nestabilní.

V první části práce je rozebraný kontext doby 19. století, legislativní úpravy zákonů, které pojednávaly o psychicky nemocných lidech, a je zde shrnut vývoj přístupu k lidem, kteří byli označeni za labilní, či šílené, včetně jejich života v ústavech pro duševně choré, se zvýšeným důrazem na problematiku přístupu k ženám. Zároveň je popsán rozdíl přístupu k pacientům mužského a ženského pohlaví. Aby bylo možné provést analýzu postav v románu *Wuthering Heights*, bylo taktéž nutno definovat a vymežit co bylo ve Viktoriánské éře považované za důkaz mentální nerovnováhy, a jaký byl proces prohlášení někoho za mentálně narušeného. Součástí této části práce je také uvedení konkrétních příkladů pacientů z této doby. Důležité je i zmínění života sester Brontëových, především ty situace z jejichž života, které následně ovlivnily jejich tvorbu, nebo se přímo projektovaly do některých ze zápletek a postav. V neposlední řadě je také v práci rozebráno očekávané chování žen ve Viktoriánské éře, jaké role společnost očekávala, že žena přijme a naplní, a jak se tyto role lišily od těch mužských. V této části je také ukázáno, jak toto očekávání, které stavělo ženy do podřadného podstavení ve srovnání s muži, mohlo ovlivnit ženskou psychiku, a přispět k nárstu mentálních problémů v rámci ženské populace.

Podstatnou částí textu je práce s metaforou, která se, dle mého názoru, projektuje především v knize *Wuthering Heights*, stejně tak jako v románu *Jane Eyre*. Touto metaforou je míněno umístění děje, které Emily Brontë zvolila pro svůj román. Sídlo *Wuthering Heights* stejně jako druhé sídlo *Thrushcross Grange*, ve kterých se odehrává prakticky celý děj, nepřímo symbolizuje ústav pro mentálně choré. Stejně jako nemocní pacienti jsou drženy ve svých pokojích a nemocnicích, postavy románů mají omezený pohyb pouze po těchto místech a trpí. V knize *Jane Eyre* je stejným metaforickým a o něco jasnějším přístupem pracováno s půdou, ve které je zavřena Bertha Mason, uváděná jako typická šílená žena z literatury Viktoriánské doby.

Bakalářská práce je rozdělena do šesti kapitol. První kapitola poskytuje čtenáři úvod, vymezení cíle práce a vysvětlení metafory, která je podstatná pro následnou analýzu postav v kapitole pět. Druhá kapitola definuje pojem šílenosti ve Viktoriánské éře a zároveň zmiňuje historický vývoj problematiky během 19. století. Kapitola tři vysvětluje pozici, kterou v této době zaujímaly ženy, a na konkrétních příkladech popisuje přístup lékařů k mentálně nemocným lidem, a zdůrazňuje kontrast mezi přístupem k nemocným mužům a ženám. Následující kapitola zmiňuje důležité body života sester Brontëových, a reálné postavy z jejich života, které následně projektovaly do svých děl. Již zmiňovaná kapitola pět pak provádí samotnou analýzu postav s vybraných knih, a popisuje motivy šílenosti, které se u jednotlivých postav v konkrétních situacích objevují. Tyto motivy jsou popsány s ohledem na situaci, ve které se postava nachází.

Co se týče terminologie práce pracuje s anglickými termíny jako „mentally ill“ (psychicky nemocný), „unstable“ (nestabilní), „insane“ (šílený), nebo „lunatic“ (blázen). Tyto pojmy jsou v současné době nahrazovány jinými, jelikož u mnoho z nich je považováno, že nesou pejorativní příznačnost. Používáním této terminologie, která byla během Viktoriánské éry běžná, se snažím této době přiblížit, a v žádném případě nechci negativně ovlivnit čtenáře, a soucítím s lidmi, kteří musí osobně, či ve své blízkosti řešit jakýkoliv typ mentálního postižení, či psychické nemoci.

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## ANOTACE

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Klíčová slova: viktoriánská literatura, britský román, ženská osobnost, Charlotte Brontë, Emily Brontë, motivy šílenosti,

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá analýzou postav z knih *Wuthering Heights* od Emily Brontë a postavou Berthy Mason z knihy *Jane Eyre* od Charlotte Brontë, s důrazem na motivy šílenosti. Podstatnou částí práce je historický a sociální context doby, ve které byly obě knihy napsány. Hlavním cílem je popsat realitu ústavů pro psychicky nemocné ve Viktoránské éře, definovat co bylo v této době považováno za šílenství, a hledat tyto motivy v knihách sester Brontëových.



## ANNOTATION

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This bachelor thesis deals with a character analysis of characters from *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë and the character of Bertha Mason from *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë, with the focus on the motifs of madness. The fundamental part of the thesis is the historical and social context of the times when the books were written. The main goal is to describe the reality of insane asylums in the Victorian era, define what was considered a madness, and look for those motifs in the novels of the Brontë sisters.