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Diplomová práce

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Representations of Feminist Attitudes in Selected Novels of the 19th Century
Vyjádření feministických postojů ve vybraných románech 19. století

Diplomová práce

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Diplomová práce se zabývá vyjádřením feministických postojů, které můžeme nalézt v některých dílech ženských autorek žijících v 19. století. Analyzovány jsou romány Jane Eyre od Charlotty Brontëové a Dvojí život Heleny Grahamové od Anne Brontëové. Cílem je poukázat na přítomnost feministického myšlení, které je patrné ve zvolených románech a porovnat, v jaké míře se v každém z nich vyskytuje. Pozornost je dále věnována postavení žen v této době, charakteristice hlavních hrdinek a feminismu obecně.

BRONTĚ, Anne: The Tenant of Wildfell Hall. Middlesex. Penguin books, 1994, 377s., ISBN 0-14-062043-5 BRONTĚ, Charlotte: Jane Eyre. London. Penguin Books. 1994, 447 s., ISBN 0-14-062011-7 BRONTĚ, Charlotte: Jane Eyre; Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism edited by Beth Newman. Boston. Bedford/St. Martin's, New York. 1996, 646 s., ISBN 0-312-09545-7 INGHAM, Patricia: The Brontës. Oxford. Oxford University Press. 2006, xix, 273 s., ISBN 0-19-284035-5 The Cambridge companion to the Brontës / Edited by Heather Glen Cambridge companions to literature. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press. 2002, 251 s., ISBN 0-521-77971-5

Anotace:

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Prohlášení

Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto diplomovou práci vypracovala samostatně pod vedením Mgr. Heleny Polehlové a na základě vlastních poznatků, a že jsem uvedla všechny použité prameny a literaturu.

V Hradci Králové dne

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Podpis

Poděkování

Tímto bych chtěla poděkovat vedoucí práce, Mgr. Heleně Polehlové, za odborné vedení, spolupráci a cenné rady, kterými přispěla k vypracování této práce. Dále děkuji prof. PhDr. Bohuslavu Mánkovi, CSc. za poskytnutí jeho publikace *Anne Brontëová – zapomínaná třetí sestra* a tudíž za možnost využít ji jako jeden ze zdrojů.

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Tato diplomová práce se zabývá vyjádřením feministických postojů, které můžeme nalézt v některých dílech ženských autorek žijících v 19. století. Analyzovány jsou romány *Jana Eyrová* od Charlotty Brontëové a *Dvojitý život Heleny Grahamové* od Anne Brontëové. Cílem je poukázat na přítomnost feministického myšlení, které je patrné ve zvolených románech a porovnat, v jaké míře se v každém z nich vyskytuje. Pozornost je dále věnována postavení žen v této době, charakteristice hlavních hrdinek a feminismu obecně.

Klíčová slova:

Feminismus, feministické postoje, 19. století, román, Anne Brontë, Charlotte Brontë, postavení žen

Annotation

HAVLINOVÁ, Lenka. *Representations of Feminist Attitudes in Selected Novels of the 19th Century*. Hradec Králové: Faculty of Education, University of Hradec Králové, 2018. 90 pp. Diploma Thesis.

This diploma thesis focuses on the representations of feminist attitudes that are reflected in selected novels written by female English writers living in the 19th century. The novels *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* by Anne Brontë are analyzed. The aim of the thesis is to point out the presence of feminist attitudes evident in both of the novels and to compare the extent to which they appear in each novel. Attention is also paid to the position of women in those times, exploration of the heroines, and feminism in general.

Key words:

Feminism, feminist attitudes, 19th century, novel, Anne Brontë, Charlotte Brontë, position of women

Prohlášení

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Introduction

When Feminist literary criticism emerged in the late 1960s¹ as a result of the spread of feminism and brought the renewed interest in reinterpreting literature written by women, feminist literary critics pointed to the fact that many representations of feminist attitudes can be found in the works of the nineteenth-century female writers (among others). In the times of the Brontë sisters, when conventions dictated submissiveness for women, the most brilliant novels refusing such conventions and showing rebellion against the male-dominated society and against the stereotype that women are limited to the domestic sphere were written. The nineteenth century introduced many significant female novelists amongst which, however, the Brontë sisters are the most distinctive ones.

This diploma thesis focuses on the representations of feminist attitudes reflected in the novels *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* by Anne Brontë; the former being probably written with no previous intention of the author of giving the impression of a feminist writing (however, later on, as the movements demanding equality and rights for women started to spread out and resulted in the birth of feminism, and as Feminist literary criticism emerged, *Jane Eyre* started to be understood as a novel with an apparent presence of feminist thinking), while the latter being often regarded as the first sustained feminist novel.

The aim of the thesis is to point out the presence of feminist attitudes in both of the novels, and to compare the extent to which such attitudes appear in each of them and analyze how different or similar their representations are for the two authors (including similar motifs and themes). The reasons these very two novels have been selected are as follows: as already mentioned, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is said to be the first sustained feminist novel and is now widely regarded as “an early feminist classic”² because of its addressing the subject of women’s equality, and there is no doubt that *Jane Eyre* contains many demonstrations of feminist thinking as well. Since the authors of the two novels were sisters, it is interesting to observe to what extent their style, points of view, and the ways how their attitudes towards the subject matter are expressed are identical and to what extent they differ. The analysis of the two novels provides the opportunity to compare the works and ideas of the two authors which are very different in a certain way, yet do have many similar aspects. It would be interesting

¹ TYSON, Lois. *Critical Theory Today*, s. 84.

² *The Brilliant Brontë Sisters* 2013. YouTube [online]. 2016 [cit. 11. 4. 2017]. Dostupné z: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dLI1Bm6rNuc>>

to compare the works of all the three Brontë sisters indeed; however, Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, although it does contain some representations of feminist attitudes, deals primarily with different subjects (such as the dark sides of human nature and extremes of human obsessions) than *Jane Eyre* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Other novels by the Brontë sisters, especially Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* which is, according to Gilbert and Gubar, her "most overtly and despairingly feminist novel"³, also contain many examples of feminist thinking and could be, therefore, used for analysis as well but that would require much more extensive thesis than this.

Jane Eyre is generally regarded as one of the masterpieces of British literature, which is another reason for choosing this particular novel. The following quote by Anthony Trollope aptly expresses its significance: "I venture to predict that *Jane Eyre* will be read among English novels when many whose names are now better known shall have been forgotten."⁴ Nevertheless, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, although favourably received, has never been as popular and widely read as *Jane Eyre*, and has been considered to be controversial, even by Charlotte Brontë. When discussing the publication of other editions of *Wuthering Heights* (Emily Brontë) and *Agnes Grey* (Anne Brontë) with her publishers after her sisters' death, Charlotte excluded *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* declaring that it was a work "hardly desirable to preserve and whose subject is so distasteful"⁵. It is interesting, though, that she considered *Wuthering Heights* less outrageous than *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*.

The first chapter of the thesis focuses briefly on feminism in general and more closely on feminism in literature (including a brief overview of Feminist literary criticism and presentation of the motifs and themes characteristic of feminist writings, which is an essential part of the thesis), and describes the difficulties that the female writers living in the nineteenth century were confronted with. The second one deals with the position of women in the times of the Brontë sisters (and since the heroine of one of the analyzed novels is a governess, a subchapter dealing with the position of governesses is included as well) and outlines briefly the historical background. Since both the authors were English, we take into consideration mainly this area, thus when speaking about the position of women in the nineteenth century, the main focus is on the middle-class English women, not on the nineteenth-century women in general. The third chapter explores the lives, works, and influences of the two authors. The last chapter focuses on the feminist attitudes represented in the two novels, and provides the

³ GILBERT Sandra M.; GUBAR, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic*, s. 299.

⁴ ALLOTT, Miriam. *The Brontës: The Critical Heritage* [online], s. 444. [cit. 11. 12. 2017]. Dostupné z: <<https://books.google.cz/books>>

⁵ ALEXANDER, Christine; SMITH, Margareth. *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*, s. 497.

exploration of the heroines and comparison of the two novels regarding the feminist attitudes in them and how they are represented and reflected in the selected works. The fourth chapter draws from the previous chapters and is grounded in the analysis of the two selected novels therefore it contains a lot of extracts from them. The methods of analysis and comparison are used.

Considering the subject of this thesis, it is essential to point out that both of the novels were published under male pseudonyms, which was rather usual in the nineteenth century - when culture, society, and public life were all dominated by men - as "literature could not be the business of a woman's life"⁶. Charlotte Brontë published her novels under the pseudonym Currer Bell and Anne Brontë used the pseudonym Acton Bell (to keep their initials). This suggests that they were perfectly aware of the fact that their works would be taken more seriously and judged less stringently if it were believed that they had been written by a male writer as women were profoundly disadvantaged on the fields of art, politics, and literature. The works by "Bells", particularly those by Currer Bell, were extensively reviewed in the public press and many critics often questioned the sex of the authors. There were many arguments that would indicate that Currer and Acton Bell were in fact women because both *Jane Eyre* (Currer Bell) and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (Acton Bell) deal with the subject of women's equality and independence, and sometimes depict some of the male characters in a very negative way. Other arguments, on the other hand, tried to exclude the possibility that the authorship belongs to a woman writer and to prove otherwise. An example of such an argument is as follows: "no man would have made his sex appeal so disgusting and ridiculous, yet a bold coarseness, a reckless freedom of language and familiarity with the worst style of fast men suggest no woman would have written the book."⁷ These speculations, however, were soon unravelled as the true identity of the authors had been revealed but only Charlotte was still alive when it happened.

Last but not least, it should be pointed out that the works of Charlotte and Anne Brontë are considerably autobiographical⁸; therefore the readers can see some reflections of their lives through their stories and heroines in whom they are often mirrored and through whom they express their ideas, ideals, and beliefs. The novels by the Brontë sisters, therefore, not only provide us with the opportunity to observe the times and their lives, but also offer an insight into the authors' brilliant minds.

⁶ See p. 29

⁷ ALEXANDER, Christine; SMITH, Margareth. *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*, s. 503.

⁸ MÁNEK, Bohuslav. *Anne Brontëová – zapomínaná třetí sestra*.

1 Feminism and feminist approaches to literature

This thesis focuses on the feminist attitudes that are reflected in the novels *Jane Eyre* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (although written over a century before the spread of feminism) hence it is impossible to leave out the characterization of feminism and defining its ideals. The following subchapters outline the main ideas of feminism and focus more closely on feminism in literature, and explain why it was so difficult for literary women to preserve their female identities in times when women were regarded as subordinate to men and were not supposed to interfere in the public sphere and become "poetesses" or "authoresses".

Despite this unenviable situation of the nineteenth-century female writers (which is described in further detail in chapter 1.4) and the fact that the world did not allow them voice, according to Elaine Showalter, the Victorian period was, and it might seem to be in contradiction with the previous statement, "the only literary period in which women were accepted as canonical writers"⁹. Indeed, the nineteenth-century female writers, for instance Charlotte and Emily Brontë (unfortunately, the "third sister", Anne Brontë, is often being forgotten), Elizabeth Gaskell, and Mary Ann Evans, who is, however, better known under her male pseudonym George Eliot, are unique and have been ranked among the greatest writers ever.

Attention is also paid to Feminist literary criticism and to the themes and motifs that are characteristic of feminist writing, which is a very important part of the thesis for many of them are represented in both of the selected novels and are analyzed in more detail in the last chapter. This outline of the gist of Feminist literary criticism and general summary of the features typical of writings with presence of feminist attitudes provided in this chapter serves as a "platform" for further analysis of the feminist attitudes represented in *Jane Eyre* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*.

1.1 Feminism

Although its origins can be noticed from the previous centuries, we speak about feminism as such since the late 1960s¹⁰. To explain it properly, the ideas of women's equality and the movements seeking equal rights for women appeared much earlier; however, it was

⁹ SHOWALTER, Elaine. *Twenty Years On: A Literature of Their Own Revisited*, s. 406.

¹⁰ *History and Theory of Feminism* [online]. [cit. 8. 10. 2017]. Dostupné z: <http://www.gender.cawater-info.net/knowledge_base/rubricator/feminism_e.htm>

not until 1970 that the term "feminism" and its ideology became widespread.¹¹ Various sources mostly refer to three waves of feminism; the first two of them being, according to June Hannam, the key periods of feminist activism.¹² The first wave of feminism started in 1860s and lasted to 1920, the period of 1960s and 1970s is referred to as "second wave feminism"¹³, and the third one has been ongoing since 1990¹⁴.

Feminism is both cultural and political movement that believes in the social, economic, and political equality of the sexes¹⁵, seeks for equal rights for women, and has objections to the stereotype that women are irrational, emotional, and submissive and are, therefore, inferior to men. "The belief that men are superior to women has been used, feminists have observed, to justify and maintain the male monopoly of positions of economic, political, and social power, in other words, to keep women powerless by denying them the educational and occupational means of acquiring economic, political, and social power."¹⁶

According to Thomas Schmitz, one of the key texts of feminism is Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) which he sees as a revolutionary and groundbreaking work that inspired number of political movements seeking women's equality and liberation.¹⁷ Nevertheless, Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), written over a century and half earlier, should be referred to as well for it is regarded as one of the first important texts proclaiming feminist ideology and "has been seen as a founding text of British and American feminism"¹⁸. "Challenging the notion that women exist only to please men, she [Mary Wollstonecraft] proposed that women and men [should] be given equal opportunities in education, work and politics"¹⁹ and refuted the notion that "the highest aim for woman is to attain knowledge enough to make herself an agreeable companion to [her] husband or brothers"²⁰. In her prefatory note to *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Elizabeth Robins Pennel asserts that Mary Wollstonecraft should be always remembered and honoured because "[...] she had courage to say what she thought and knew at a time when

¹¹ *History and Theory of Feminism* [online]. [cit. 8. 10. 2017]. Dostupné z: <http://www.gender.cawater-info.net/knowledge_base/rubricator/feminism_e.htm>

¹² HANNAM, June. *Feminism* [online], s. 8. [cit. 5. 12. 2017]. Dostupné z: <https://books.google.cz/books?id=vRyBAAAAQBAJ> >

¹³ HANNAM, cit. 12, s. 8.

¹⁴ BRUNELL, Laura; BURKETT, Elinor. *Feminism* [online]. [cit. 6. 11. 2017]. Dostupné z: <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/feminism>>

¹⁵ BRUNELL; BURKETT, cit. 14.

¹⁶ TYSON, Lois. *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*, s. 86

¹⁷ SCHMITZ, Thomas. *Modern Literary Theory and Ancient Texts: An Introduction*, s. 177.

¹⁸ HANNAM, cit. 12, xi.

¹⁹ BRUNELL; BURKETT, Elinor, cit. 14. [cit. 2. 3. 2018].

²⁰ WOLLSTONECRAFT, Mary. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, xi (Prefatory note).

women were not expected to think or to know anything [...]”²¹. The following quote perfectly justifies the reasons why it has been regarded as one of the fundamental feminist texts that undoubtedly influenced and filled many individuals liberal in their views with enthusiasm; yet must have filled the others with indignation for its revolutionary ideas regarding the position of women:

“I will allow that bodily strength seems to give man a natural superiority over woman, and this is the only solid basis on which the superiority of the sex can be built. But I still insist that not only the virtue but the knowledge of the two sexes should be the same in nature, if not in degree, and that women, considered not only as moral but rational creatures, ought to endeavour to acquire human virtues (or perfections) by the same means as men, instead of being educated like a fanciful kind of *half* being [...]”²²

The statement presented below clearly suggests that many literary works are concerned with the gender issues of the times when these particular works had been produced (therefore such works sometimes serve as well as a historical source) and that their authors used them, whether intentionally or unintentionally, as means of proclaiming their feminist ideals, and that the feminist ideology has influenced many disciplines and many fields considerably, one of them being Feminist literary criticism which is described in further detail in chapter 1.2.1:

“All feminist activity, including feminist theory and literary criticism, has as its ultimate goal to change the world by promoting women’s equality. Thus, all feminist activity can be seen as a form of activism [...]. Gender issues play a part in every aspect of human production and experience, including the production and experience of literature, whether we are consciously aware of these issues or not.”²³

Even though there were many female representatives in the previous centuries who demonstrated or professed the same ideals as feminists proclaim (as proven by many works written by the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth-century female writers in which such ideals are manifested), it was not until the second half of the nineteenth-century that the

²¹ WOLLSTONECRAFT, Mary. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, vii (Prefatory note).

²² WOLLSTONECRAFT, Mary. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, vii (Prefatory note).

²³ TYSON, Lois. *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*, s. 92.

women's movement started and "[...] it was not until the first half of the twentieth century that the main demands of women were fulfilled in most Western countries [...]"²⁴. Despite the fact that women were finally given the right to vote and to own property, and were allowed to go to universities, according to Schmitz, "[...] the formal equality had not led to a significant change in their actual social and economic circumstances"²⁵.

1.2 Feminism in literature

Before exploring and analyzing the two selected novels (*Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* by Anne Brontë) in detail, attention should be paid to feminism in literature in general. The first noteworthy manifestations of feminist thinking can be already seen in the works of the seventeenth and eighteenth-century female literary predecessors of the Brontë sisters (it is interesting to note that Carolyn Dinshaw in her contribution to *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism*, edited by Gill Plain and Susan Sellers, makes a query whether there was such a thing as feminist literary criticism in the Middle Ages and mentions, for instance, Geoffrey Chaucer's works in this context²⁶). This subchapter mentions the most significant women writers of the previous centuries (with a special consideration for the nineteenth-century ones) whose works, be it prose or poetry, include a lot of feminist ideals and whose significance is aptly expressed in the following statement:

"For if contemporary women do now attempt the pen with energy and authority, they are able to do so only because their eighteenth and nineteenth-century foremothers struggled in isolation that felt like illness, alienation that felt like madness, obscurity that felt like paralysis to overcome the anxiety of authorship that was endemic to their literary subculture."²⁷

In the previous centuries there have been many female writers who might be nowadays regarded as feminists and whose works, more or less overtly, express their concern with the question of women's equality and independence, and their rebellion against their "imprisonment" and subordinate position in the patriarchal society. Although we speak about

²⁴ SCHMITZ, Thomas. *Modern Literary Theory and Ancient Texts: An Introduction*, s. 176.

²⁵ SCHMITZ, Thomas. *Modern Literary Theory and Ancient Texts: An Introduction*, s. 176.

²⁶ PLAIN, Gill; SELLERS, Susan. *History of Feminist Literary Criticism*, s. 11.

²⁷ GILBERT Sandra M.; GUBAR, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic*, s. 51.

feminism as such since the late 1960s²⁸, some reflections of feminist attitudes can be already seen in the works of female writers (mostly poets and even playwrights) living in the seventeenth century. Aphra Behn, Margaret Cavendish, Mary Astell, and Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea, who are nowadays regarded as the early feminist writers, are the most significant of them.

In her brilliant *A Room of One's Own*, which is an extensive essay on women and fiction, Virginia Woolf frequently refers to Lady Winchilsea (Anne Finch) and Aphra Behn, and claims that “without these forerunners, Jane Austen and The Brontës and George Eliot could no more have written than Shakespeare could have written without Marlowe, or Marlowe without Chaucer, or Chaucer without those forgotten poets who paved the ways and tamed the natural savagery of the tongue”²⁹. She adds that “it was her [Aphra Behn] who earned them [the nineteenth-century female writers] the right to speak their minds”³⁰.

The eighteenth century was more prolific regarding the "feminist writers". Mary Wollstonecraft, Delarivier Manley, and Eliza Haywood are the best known of them. Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), which is said to have been a “groundbreaking work of literature which still resonates in feminism and human rights movements of today”³¹ and “the bible of the women's movement in Great Britain”³², is full of progressive and revolutionary thoughts regarding the rights, position, and roles of women, and includes also author's comments on education of women and her conviction that “women [...], in common with men, are placed on this earth to unfold their faculties”³³. Despite the fact that *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* was certainly a massively influential work - admired by some and considered to be scandalous by others - after its publication Mary Wollstonecraft was “[...] denounced as a social outcast – a ‘hyena in petticoats’ [and] a ‘philosophising serpent’ [...]”³⁴.

Gilbert and Gubar state that “[...] the nineteenth century continues to provide a lively field of activity for feminist thinking [...]”³⁵. Indeed, the Victorian period was extremely productive regarding literature in general and saw many significant writers, both male and female. Jane Austen, the Brontë sisters, Elizabeth Gaskell, and George Eliot are nowadays

²⁸ See p. 13

²⁹ WOOLF, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*, s. 55.

³⁰ WOOLF, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*, s. 55.

³¹ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* [online]. [cit. 16. 3. 2018]. Dostupné z: <<https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/mary-wollstonecraft-a-vindication-of-the-rights-of-woman>>

³² PLAIN, Gill; SELLERS, Susan (ed). *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism*, introduction, s. 9.

³³ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, cit. 31.

³⁴ PLAIN, Gill; SELLERS, Susan (ed). *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism*, vii (Prefatory note).

³⁵ GILBERT, Sandra M.; GUBAR, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Introduction xxxii.

regarded as the greatest of female novelists (Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Christina Rossetti, the most significant of the nineteenth century female poets, should be mentioned as well for their works are nowadays regarded as "feminist") and all of them are mentioned at this point because in their novels they express many attitudes, ideals, and thoughts that can be interpreted as feminist. Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* and *Persuasion*, Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and *Agnes Grey*, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley*, *Villette*, and *The Professor*, Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*, and George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, for instance, are all feminist in many ways. A passage from Jane Austen's *Persuasion* where we can see the author's concern about the traditional view of women as passive and emotional instead of rational human beings can be given as an example of a feminist attitude: "But I hate to hear you talking so like a fine gentleman, and as if women were all fine ladies, instead of rational creatures. We none of us expect to be in smooth water all our days."³⁶

Since this thesis focuses on the selected works by Charlotte and Anne Brontë it would be convenient to illustrate a few examples of feminist attitudes reflected in their other works, particularly in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* which is, according to Gilbert and Gubar, her "most overtly and despairingly feminist novel"³⁷, and in Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey*. Gilbert and Gubar point out that "[...] Lucy Snowe, *Villette*'s protagonist-narrator, older and wiser than any of Brontë's other heroines, is from first to last a woman *without* – outside society, without parents or friends, without physical or mental attractions, without money or confidence or health – and her story is perhaps the most moving and terrifying account of female deprivation ever written."³⁸ According to Kate Millet, "in Lucy one may perceive what effects her life in a male-supremacist society has under the psyche of a woman."³⁹ The following passage from *Agnes Grey* shows the author's implication that it is not a woman's only purpose and her main duty to be "an agreeable companion to [her] husband"⁴⁰: "And so you think I should lay myself out for his amusement! No; that's not my idea of a wife. It's the husband's part to please the wife, not hers to please him; and if he isn't satisfied with her as she is - and thankful to possess her too, he isn't worthy of her [...]."⁴¹

The ideas presented in the novels by the aforementioned female writers were later developed by the twentieth century feminist writers such as Virginia Woolf (*A Room of One's*

³⁶ *Fine ladies & rational creatures*. Jane Austen Quotes [online] 20. 8. 2007 [cit. 18. 10. 2017]. Dostupné z: <<http://www.austenquotes.com/fine-ladies-rat/>> (see AUSTEN, Jane: *Persuasion*, Chapter 8).

³⁷ GILBERT Sandra M.; GUBAR, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic*, s. 299.

³⁸ GILBERT, Sandra M.; GUBAR, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic*, s. 399-400.

³⁹ MILLET, Kate. *Sexual Politics*, s. 140.

⁴⁰ See p. 14

⁴¹ BRONTË, Anne. *Agnes Grey*. Project Gutenberg eBook [online], s. 166 (Chapter 22). [cit. 25. 3. 2018]. Dostupné z: <<http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/767>>

Own, Mrs. Dalloway), Kate Chopin (*The Awakening*) and Sarah Perkins Gilman (*The Yellow Wallpaper, Benigna Machiavelli*). Although this thesis deals only with English female writers and focuses on the nineteenth-century writers in particular, Kate Chopin and Sarah Perkins Gilman, the most distinctive twentieth-century American feminist writers, ought to be at least mentioned.

1.2.1 Feminist literary criticism

Along with the rising feminist activity, Feminist literary criticism started to develop in the late 1960s⁴² as one of the disciplines associated with and influenced by feminism and its ideology. Since we are referring to the twentieth century although this thesis focuses on the nineteenth-century novels, not the twentieth-century ones, it is necessary to explain why it is important for the Feminist literary criticism to be included and explored in the thesis. Feminist literary criticism is an approach applied to literary works, whose object is to re-interpret literary texts (written by both female and male writers) from the feminist perspective and to search for the representations of feminist ideals in such texts (or, in some cases, to bring attention to the women's literature that has been hitherto neglected). The analysis of *Jane Eyre* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* as "feminist" novels has been, therefore, grounded in this approach.

In her *Critical Theory Today*, Lois Tyson describes several questions feminist critics ask when studying a literary text from the feminist point of view. It is undoubtedly convenient to present here at least some of them for they very aptly illustrate what Feminist literary criticism is concerned with:

“What does the work reveal about the operations of patriarchy? How are women portrayed? How do these portrayals relate to the gender issues of the period in which the novel was written or is set? Does the work reinforce or undermine patriarchal ideology?”

What does the history of the work's reception by the public and by the critics tell us about the operations of patriarchy? Has the literary work been ignored or neglected in the past?

⁴² TYSON, Lois. *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*, s. 84.

What does the work suggest about women's creativity? To answer this question, biographical data about the author and historical data about the culture in which she lived will be required.

What might an examination of the author's style contribute to the ongoing efforts to delineate a specifically feminine form of writing?"⁴³

This suggests that feminist literary criticism focuses not only on the work itself but also on the author. The author's social and cultural background, as well as her style of writing and the critical reception of the work, is also taken into consideration. When analyzing the selected novels, *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* by Anne Brontë, attention has been, therefore, paid to all of the aforementioned aspects. The lives and works of the Brontë sisters have attracted a lot of attention since the first publications of their poems and novels, especially of those of *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* (Emily Brontë), happened to be known to the public and thanks to this lively interest in them plenty of various sources that provide a lot of useful information about the authors and their works (including the biographies of the authors and critical receptions of their works) are available. Furthermore, many of the feminist literary critics who are interested in literature written by women and in reinterpreting it from the feminist point of view frequently refer to the works of the Brontë sisters.

In his lecture on The Classical Feminist Tradition, the Yale professor, Paul Fry, mentions several important stages in the history of Feminist literary criticism, such as the first wave (Mary Ellman, Kate Millett) and second wave (Elaine Showalter's gynocriticism, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar) of Feminist criticism, The Madwoman Thesis (Sarah Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*), and French feminism (Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous).⁴⁴ He also mentions the foremost feminist literary critics, such as Ann Douglas, Mary Ellman (*Thinking About Women*), Kate Millett (*Sexual Politics*), Elaine Showalter (*A Literature of Their Own*, which, however, is not an allusion to Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*⁴⁵), Virginia Woolf (*A Room of One's Own, Three Guineas*), and last but not least Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (*The Madwoman in the Attic, No Man's Land*), who

⁴³ TYSON, Lois. *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*, s. 119-120. Note: the quotes have been abridged.

⁴⁴ FRY, Paul H. *The Classical Feminist Tradition (lecture)* by Open Yale [online], [cit. 18. 8. 2017]. Dostupné z: <<http://writersinspire.org/content/classical-feminist-tradition-lecture>>

⁴⁵ In her *Twenty Years On: A Literature of Their Own Revisited*, Elaine Showalter explains her choice of the title and claims: "[...] almost all reviewers of the book ignored my reference to Mill. They interpreted the title as a reference to Virginia Woolf, whom, some thought, I had treated with insufficient reverence." - see SHOWALTER, Elaine. *Twenty Years On: A Literature of Their Own Revisited*, s. 401 [s. 3].

should be mentioned here as well. Let us pay more attention to Elaine Showalter, who was one of the pioneers of Feminist criticism, and whose *A Literature of Their Own*, in her own words, “helped create the new field of feminist literary history and gynocriticism”⁴⁶, and later to one of the most significant English feminist writers, Virginia Woolf, and to Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar.

Gynocriticism, which is the term for the study of women’s writing that Showalter invented, is rooted in three major aspects: the examination of female writers and their place in literary history, the consideration of the treatment of female characters in books by both male and female writers, and, most importantly, the discovery and exploration of a canon of literature written by women⁴⁷. Professor Paul Fry argues that gynocriticism “is not so much concerned with men’s treatment of women in fiction as with the place of women as writers in literary history and as characters regardless whether they are characters in men’s or women’s books”⁴⁸.

According to Showalter, three phases in the history of British women’s novel writing can be distinguished: feminine, feminist, and female⁴⁹. Feminine phase is also referred to as Androgynist poetics, feminist phase as feminist critique, and female phase as female Aesthetic.⁵⁰ In the feminine phase, female writers tried to write as men and often adopted male pseudonyms. They did not, however, usually comment on women’s place in the society; that was the domain of the women writers who belonged to the feminist phase. Such female writers used literature to express their disapproval of oppression of women and their concern with the subordinate position of women in the society, which was the central theme of their writing (in other words, writers of the feminist phase saw their writing, which was usually full of anger, as a way of protest).⁵¹ “In the female phase, ongoing since 1920, women reject both imitation [peculiar to feminine phase] and protest [peculiar to feminist phase] – two forms of dependency – and turn instead to female experience as the source of an

⁴⁶ SHOWALTER, Elaine. *Twenty Years On: A Literature of Their Own Revisited*, s. 402 [s. 4].

⁴⁷ O’CONNOR, Kate. *Feminist Approaches to Literature* [online] [cit. 20. 5. 2017]. Dostupné z: <<http://writersinspire.org/content/feminist-approaches-literature>>

⁴⁸ FRY, Paul H.: *The Classical Feminist Tradition (lecture)* by Open Yale [online] [cit. 18. 8. 2017]. Dostupné z: <<http://writersinspire.org/content/classical-feminist-tradition-lecture>>

⁴⁹ SHOWALTER, Elaine. *Towards a Feminist Poetics* [online], s. 36. [cit. 21. 3. 2017]. Dostupné z: <<https://books.google.cz/books>> (Feminine phase (1840 – 1880), feminist phase (1880 – 1920), female phase (since 1920))

⁵⁰ LEE, Elizabeth. *Feminist Theory – An Overview (1996)* [online]. 1996 [cit. 6. 9. 2017]. Dostupné z: <<http://www.victorianweb.org/gender/femtheory.html>>

⁵¹ O’CONNOR, cit. 47.

autonomous art, extending the feminist analysis of culture to forms and techniques of literature.”⁵²

The Brontë sisters, therefore, would be considered as the writers of the feminine phase. As already mentioned in the introduction, they did adopt male pseudonyms (Acton, Ellis and Currer Bell). Some may argue that they also commented on women’s place in the society and showed a certain anger and revolt against the oppression of women, which was typical of the writers of the feminist phase; however, despite the fact that their works certainly contain many comments expressing their disapproval of the subordinate position of women, their protest and anger is not so intense as it can be found in the works of the writers belonging to the feminist phase. It is interesting to note that Showalter “describes *Jane Eyre* as a classic feminine novel which combines realistic narrative techniques with symbolic device that Showalter sees as peculiar to women’s literature [...]”⁵³.

Virginia Woolf would be, most likely, considered as a writer of the female phase which lacks the anger typical of feminist phase and focuses on a self-discovery, female consciousness, and uniquely feminine tradition in literature.⁵⁴ Her *A Room of One’s Own*, an extensive essay on women and fiction (which focuses on both women in fiction and women writing fiction), provides a very interesting study of many female writers, such as Lady Winchilsea, Aphra Behn, and “the four great novelists”⁵⁵ - Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, Emily Brontë, and George Eliot (even here Charlotte and Emily are praised whether Anne Brontë is left out). In one of the passages in *A Room of One’s Own*, she even goes back to the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and speculates about the course of life of William Shakespeare’s imaginary sister whom she calls “Judith Shakespeare”. Although there is over two centuries time difference between William Shakespeare and the Brontë sisters, the following quote is very interesting and convenient regarding the subject of this thesis because it as well reflects the limited opportunities of women in the nineteenth century (lack of educational and artistic opportunities, suppressed potential and creativity, limitation to the domestic sphere):

“Meanwhile his [Shakespeare’s] extraordinarily gifted sister, let us suppose, remained at home. She was as adventurous, as imaginative, as agog to see the

⁵² SHOWALTER, Elaine. *Towards a Feminist Poetics* [online], s. 36. [cit. 21. 3. 2017]. Dostupné z: <<https://books.google.cz/books>>

⁵³ ALEXANDER, Christine; SMITH, Margareth. *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*, s. 188.

⁵⁴ LEE, Elizabeth. *Feminist Theory – An Overview (1996)* [online]. 1996 [cit. 6. 9. 2017]. Dostupné z: <<http://www.victorianweb.org/gender/femtheory.html>>

⁵⁵ WOOLF, Virginia. *A Room of One’s Own*, s. 56; 67.

world as he was. But she was not sent to school. She had no chance of learning grammar and logic, let alone of reading Horace and Virgil. She picked up a book now and then, one of her brother's perhaps, and read a few pages. But then her parents came in and told her to mend the stockings or mind the stew and not moon about with books and papers. They would have spoken sharply but kindly, for they were substantial people who knew the conditions of life for a woman [...]"⁵⁶

This suggests that if William Shakespeare has had a sister who would possess the same literary genius as he did, she would not, however, have had the opportunity to unfold her potential because she would not be allowed to go to the university, to travel the world, or to become a professional artist. The same applied for the nineteenth-century women. Although the Brontë sisters to some extent challenged the stereotypes about the position of women, especially on the paper, and had more educational opportunities than most of other Victorian middle-class women, the following quote suggests that it was their brother who was supposed to break through: "What they [the Brontë sisters] could only do in their spare time and what they could only fantasize about, Branwell – the male, the son, the brother – could become. He could be their effective agent in the world."⁵⁷

Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, belonging to the second phase of Feminist literary criticism, are best known for their *The Madwoman in the Attic* which is considered to be a real masterpiece of Feminist literary criticism and which has had a huge influence on many other similar works. In their overtly feminist *The Madwoman in the Attic*, with the subtitle *The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, which has been a very valuable source for this thesis, Gilbert and Gubar are concerned with female writers and poets, mostly the nineteenth-century ones, and analyze their works from the feminist perspective. To explain the title, it is an allusion to Mr. Rochester's mad wife, Bertha, who is hidden, or rather "imprisoned", in the attic at Thornfield Hall. Their choice of giving such a peculiar title was, most likely, influenced by the fact that female madness - which was understood as a result of powerlessness and suppressed potential, creativity, and sexuality of women⁵⁸ - is one of the themes that are nowadays considered as characteristic of feminist writings. "Gilbert and Gubar's book belongs to the second phase of feminist criticism on the Brontës which sought to situate them within a specifically feminist version of literary history

⁵⁶ WOOLF, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*, s. 39-40.

⁵⁷ MOGLEN, Helene. *Charlotte Brontë: The Self Conceived* [online], s. 34. [cit. 22. 8. 2017]. Dostupné z: <<https://books.google.cz/books>>

⁵⁸ See pp. 27-28

and within a newly identified tradition of women's writing".⁵⁹ As pointed out in one of its reviews, "it is unlikely that anyone reading this massive, brilliantly argued and radically re-interpretive study of Jane Austen, Mary Shelley, Emily and Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot and Emily Dickinson (among others) will ever see these writers quite as they did before."⁶⁰

1.3 Motifs and themes characteristic of feminist writings

When Feminist literary criticism emerged as a result of the spread of feminism, feminist critics started to analyze and reinterpret many works written by female authors, and pointed to the fact that many representations of feminist ideals can be found in the works by the nineteenth-century literary women (amongst others). Such works share many similar features that can be, therefore, considered as characteristic of feminist writings. This subchapter provides the overview of the motifs and themes which are very often represented in writings that can be understood as feminist. Addressing the subject of women's equality and independence, rebellion against the male dominance, the motif of imprisonment and escape, portrayal of an unhappy marriage, female artistry and creativity, and female sexuality and madness are the most essential ones of them.

When analyzing a piece of writing from the feminist point of view, one should pay attention not only to the aforementioned aspects but also to the author's conception of the heroine and other female and male characters, and to the treatment of women. Female author very often identifies herself with the heroine and projects her disapproval of the disadvantaged position of women, refusal of the conventional view that women must be submissive, and her effort to reinforce the possibility that women are destined to do more than just to "knit stockings and make puddings"⁶¹ to her writing. Heroine is usually portrayed as a human being with free will who expresses her opinions freely and whose voice should be heard; she challenges the stereotype that women are limited to the domestic sphere and her creativity and artistry can be somehow developed.

Obviously, the most characteristic aspect of a feminist writing is its concern with the female position in the society dominated by men, revolt against conventions that proclaim male superiority, and addressing the subject of women's equality. A passage from *Jane Eyre*

⁵⁹ ALEXANDER, Christine; SMITH, Margareth. *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*, s. 187-188.

⁶⁰ GILBERT, Sandra M.; GUBAR, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic* – review by *Publishers Weekly*.

⁶¹ The phrase used in this sentence is an allusion to *Jane Eyre*: "[...] it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings [...]" - see BRONTË, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*, Chapter 12.

when Jane, very passionately, speaks to Mr. Rochester can be used here as an example of author's comments on equality: "[...]it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God's feet, equal – as we are!"⁶²

The subject of women's independence, both spiritual and financial, is as equally significant as the subject of women's equality. A very usual aspect of a feminist writing connected with the subject of independence and emancipation is that an unexpected situation occurs, usually at the end of the story, that brings some independence for the heroine. Jane Eyre, for instance, unexpectedly inherits a great fortune from her uncle she did not even know she had and therefore becomes a financially independent woman whereas the heroine of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Helen Huntingdon, obtains her independence as her patriarchal and brutal husband dies and she is finally allowed to find happiness with Mr. Markham.

Helene Moglen argues that "in *The Professor*, Charlotte Brontë asks the question, 'What is female?' Her answer is, 'powerlessness'"⁶³. Indeed, women felt powerless in their subordinate position and felt imprisoned in their feminine roles. However, the heroines of works with feminist tone do not settle for such conditions and show a certain revolt against patriarchalism and dissatisfaction with their powerlessness and monotony of their lives. They are intellectually and morally strong, independent (to some extent), rational women, who make their own decisions, and who do not lack self-respect and very often show a certain kind of rebelliousness. Jane Eyre (*Jane Eyre*), Helen Graham (*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*), Anne Eliot (*Persuasion* by Jane Austen), Elinor Dashwood (*Sense and Sensibility* by Jane Austen), Margaret Hale (*North and South* by Elizabeth Gaskell) are all very apt examples of such characteristics. On the one hand there are strong, self-sufficient women, who are not afraid to say their opinions, and on the other hand, other female characters, who perfectly represent the conventional view that a woman has to be submissive and that she is not expected "to think or to know anything"⁶⁴, are displayed. Heroines are often put into contrast with other female characters; Jane Eyre is put into contrast with her cousins, Eliza and Georgiana Reed, then with obedient Helen Burns, and later with Blanche Ingram and Bertha Mason (Rochester) (however, it can be said that Jane's suppressed desires are mirrored in Bertha's behaviour therefore they are both opposites and parallels⁶⁵), and Helen Graham also stands out amongst

⁶² BRONTË, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. 1966, s. 281 (Chapter 23).

⁶³ MOGLEN, Helene. *Charlotte Brontë – The Self Conceived* [online], s. 105. [cit. 22. 8. 2017]. Dostupné z: <<https://books.google.cz/books>>

⁶⁴ An allusion to Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication to the Rights of Woman* (see p. 15)

⁶⁵ *Jane Eyre: Bertha Mason* – YouTube [online] 2014 [cit. 19. 10. 2017]. Dostupné z: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zJ7QzRBuZ8c&feature=youtu.be>>

the other female characters who are either very submissive (Millicent Hattersley) or, in lady Anabella Lowborough's case, depraved.

Heroines are often engaged in conversations on topics that would be in real life usually considered as inappropriate for women. "In her impassioned and articulate speeches against drinking, against boarding school education, and against the irrational differences in the education of girls and boys, Helen Huntingdon enacts the sort of 'talking on a large scale' that Victorian conduct books such as Sarah Ellis's *The Wives of England* would prohibit. Helen's voice is rational, confident, and self-sufficient at this point in the narrative – and by the norms of the day, her discourse would certainly be deemed as masculine."⁶⁶

Male characters, on the other hand, are often associated with some unpleasant subjects, such as adultery, violence, bigamy, and alcoholism, which is another important feature of feminist writings. Some of the male characters are, furthermore, displayed as patriarchs and "oppressors", and treat women as their inferiors. Rachel K. Carnell argues that *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* - and the same can be certainly said about some other feminist works - "[...] is about the way patriarchal culture encourages men to become domestic tyrants [...]."⁶⁷

One of the motifs which are represented very frequently in feminist writings is the motif of imprisonment and escape. It is interesting to note that houses were often interpreted as symbols of female imprisonment. "Women [...] were imprisoned in their homes, their father's houses; indeed, almost all nineteenth-century women were in some sense imprisoned in man's houses."⁶⁸ Gilbert and Gubar state that "dramatization of imprisonment and escape are so all-pervasive in nineteenth-century literature by women that [they] believe they represent a uniquely female tradition in this period"⁶⁹. Nevertheless, many male writers also used imagery of enclosure and escape but there was a significant difference between female and male conception of imprisonment; while male was understood literally, female one was very often only figurative⁷⁰. Therefore the heroines (Jane Eyre, Helen Huntingdon, etc.) are not literally "locked up" anywhere because we do not speak about the real imprisonment (though some examples of real imprisonment, for instance when Jane is imprisoned in the Red room and Bertha is imprisoned in her room in the attic, can be presented; yet it is obvious that they have a metaphorical significance as well) but psychological; they feel like prisoners under male dominance, they feel hopeless in their disadvantaged and inferior position, they feel

⁶⁶ CARNELL, Rachel K. *Feminism and the Public Sphere in Anne Brontë's The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, s. 10.

⁶⁷ CARNELL, Rachel K. *Feminism and the Public Sphere in Anne Brontë's The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, s. 5.

⁶⁸ GILBERT, Sandra M.; GUBAR, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic*, s. 83.

⁶⁹ GILBERT, Sandra M.; GUBAR, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic*, s. 85.

⁷⁰ GILBERT, Sandra M.; GUBAR, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic*, s. 86.

imprisoned in unhappy marriage, and they feel imprisoned because of their limited opportunities. According to Gilbert and Gubar, “imagery of enclosure reflects the woman writer’s own discomfort, her sense of powerlessness.”⁷¹ Charlotte Brontë, for instance, “saw the unproductive repetitiveness of domesticity as a form of imprisonment.”⁷² It is interesting to note that in their writing, female writers usually portray an unhappy marriage, which is another theme typical of feminist writings, as a form of imprisonment.

As for the motif of escape, it can be escape from an unhappy marriage, male dominance, monotony of life, but it can be also escape from reality and daydreaming about distant countries (or in other words heroines’ desire to escape somewhere far from their father’s houses where they would be no longer under the male dominance): “Then I longed for a power of vision which might overpass that limit; which might reach the busy world, towns, regions full of life I had heard of but never seen: that then I desired more of practical experience than I possessed [...].”⁷³

An important theme that is very often represented in feminist writings is female artistry and creativity. Female creativity was associated with freedom from male domination⁷⁴, which is the reason why heroines of such writings are often portrayed as artists; by depicting a heroine as an artist, a female writer shows a certain revolt against the stereotype of those times that women were limited to the domestic sphere and were not supposed to become artists. Both of the heroines of the analyzed novels, Jane Eyre and Helen Graham are portrayed as artists. Although Jane Eyre does not earn her living by being an artist but by working as a governess, it was important for the author to present her as a painter and to make comments on her paintings, and Helen Graham even tries to earn some money by selling her paintings; however, the latter conceals her female identity by using a male pseudonym. Since the author herself was an artist, it was probably her purpose to portray the displeasing reality in which female artists were given almost no chance to break through. It is obvious that the author expresses her dissatisfaction with such reality and wants to show her disapproval of women being disadvantaged and forbidden to interfere in the public sphere, which is also one of the typical features of feminist writings.

As already suggested, women could not express themselves overtly and could not express themselves as well as artists; their creativity and potential was suppressed and their opportunities were limited. Female madness was sometimes explained as a result of this

⁷¹ GILBERT, Sandra M.; GUBAR, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic*, s. 84.

⁷² INGHAM, Patricia. *The Brontës*, s. 55.

⁷³ BRONTË, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. 1966, s. 140-141(Chapter 12).

⁷⁴ GILBERT, Sandra M.; GUBAR, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic*, s. 82.

suppression and powerlessness; women felt so trapped and hopeless that they, eventually, lost their mind. Bertha Mason, the mad wife of Mr. Rochester, represents the theme of madness in *Jane Eyre*. Bertha and Jane are both parallels and opposites⁷⁵, and it is interesting to note that Bertha can be in fact understood as Jane's "truest and darkest double"⁷⁶.

Along with the theme of madness, the theme of female sexuality is introduced as another typical aspect of feminist writing (Christine Alexander and Margaret Smith point out that "in [...] literature Victorians frequently associated expressions of female sexuality with madness"⁷⁷). At this point it would be convenient to mention Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* for it can be seen as one of the first novels overtly addressing the subject of female sexuality. All of the aforementioned motifs, themes, and features of feminist writing are very well reflected in both *Jane Eyre* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and are analyzed in further detail in the last chapter of the thesis.

1.4 The struggle of the nineteenth-century female writers

As Rachel K. Carnell in her essay on *Feminism and the Public Sphere in Anne Brontë's The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* states, the nineteenth-century female writers were, surprisingly, in slightly more difficult situation than female writers living during The Age of Reason.⁷⁸ Carnell mentions the eighteenth-century women writers, such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Eliza Haywood, Delarivier Manley, or Aphra Behn (who is mistakenly put amongst the eighteenth-century female writers in Carnell's essay although she lived during the seventeenth century), who openly wrote and published under their names and dared to say their political opinions publicly (yet, they were rather exceptional), and who, considering their attitudes, might be thought of as early feminists. For instance Aphra Behn in her preface to *The Lucky Chance* even "[...] protests against her work being judged by different standards than those applied to male playwrights simply because she is a woman"⁷⁹.

Nevertheless, in the times of the Brontë sisters, women were limited to the domestic sphere, were not expected to comment on politics and many other subjects, and definitely were not supposed to become writers or poets (this applied for the eighteenth-century women as well but it seems that they did not feel the same need of adopting male pseudonyms as the

⁷⁵ See pp. 25; 63

⁷⁶ GILBERT, Sandra M.; GUBAR, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic*, s. 360.

⁷⁷ ALEXANDER, Christine; SMITH, Margareth. *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*, s. 458.

⁷⁸ CARNELL, Rachel K. *Feminism and the Public Sphere in Anne Brontë's The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, s. 7.

⁷⁹ CARNELL, Rachel K. *Feminism and the Public Sphere in Anne Brontë's The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, s. 7-8.

nineteenth-century female writers did). At this point, it is convenient to mention that Charlotte Brontë sent some of her poems to Robert Southey, whom she admired greatly, asking for his opinion and “[...] telling him of her ambition to be for ever known as a poetess”⁸⁰. He replied to her that “literature cannot be the business of a woman’s life, and it ought not to be”⁸¹, but on the other hand, he told her that she should continue writing poetry but only for herself.

The nineteenth century is often defined as the "Golden age of women’s writing" and it seems to be a very truthful declaration, indeed. The greatest of female novelists – the Brontë sisters, George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell, and Jane Austen (although born a few decades earlier than the others) - lived during the nineteenth century and all of them were to some extent concerned with the female question in the society. However, “the nineteenth-century tendency for women writers to adapt male pseudonyms suggests the difficulty that women experienced in maintaining their separate identities as they introduced their texts into the public spheres.”⁸² The Brontë sisters were not exceptions and also published their works using male pseudonym Bell (Anne – Acton, Emily – Ellis, Charlotte – Currer), feeling the necessity of such doing. Furthermore, they assumed that their works would be judged by different standards if it were publicly known that they had been written by women. “[...] The ‘male identified’ woman writer felt that, dressed in the male ‘costume’ of her pseudonym, she could walk more freely about the provinces of literature that were ordinarily forbidden to ladies.”⁸³

It is interesting to point out that the same literary work, be it poetry or prose, would be often judged differently depending on the sex of the author. Some aspects and subjects of the work, therefore, would be considered appropriate if written by a male author but inappropriate and coarse if written by a woman. This can be very well seen in G. H. Lewes’ critique of *Jane Eyre*. Before knowing the true "female" identity of the author, he praised the novel. However, with an acknowledgment of the author’s sex, his opinion had changed and he claimed that “the grand function of woman is, and ever must be, Maternity! [...] Since women are all designed to be mothers, it is impossible to know who are to escape that destiny, till it is too late to begin the training necessary for artists, scholars, or politicians!”⁸⁴ G. H. Lewes, who at that time already had discovered Currer Bell’s true identity, also commented on Charlotte Brontë’s another novel and declared that “*Shirley* cannot be received as a work of art” and

⁸⁰ ALEXANDER, Christine; SMITH, Margareth. *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*, s. 83.

⁸¹ NEWMAN, Beth (ed). *Charlotte Brontë: Jane Eyre*, s. 6.

⁸² CARNELL, Rachel K. *Feminism and the Public Sphere in Anne Brontë’s The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, s. 12.

⁸³ GILBERT, Sandra M.; GUBAR, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic*, s. 65.

⁸⁴ INGHAM, Patricia. *The Brontës*, s. 88.

that “such vulgarities as would be inexcusable - even in a man”⁸⁵. His often innuendoes about the gender of the author of *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley* caused that Charlotte was “[...] no longer able to maintain her [and her sisters’] anonymity [...]”⁸⁶.

Charlotte immediately started to write a biographical memoir of her dead sisters (whose authorship was not revealed during their lifetime) and included also comments on their writings and explanation of their choice to adopt male pseudonyms: “[...] we did not like to declare ourselves women, because – without at that time suspecting that our mode of writing and thinking was not what is called ‘feminine’ - we had a vague impression that authoresses are liable to be looked on with prejudice [...]”⁸⁷. Nevertheless, Patricia Ingham in her *The Brontës* claims that “Charlotte, unlike Anne, offers a double standard when writing of her own and her sister’s novels: in public statements she accepts conventional views; but in letters, particularly in those to Williams, her literary confidant, her true beliefs break through.”⁸⁸ This shows that even such an opinionated woman as Charlotte did not dare to go against conventions and was concerned with her and her sister’s reputation.

Although the title of this subchapter points to the difficult position of the nineteenth-century female writers, the term "difficult" might apply for the situation of female writers in general for the prevailing opinion that “literature cannot be the business of a woman’s life”⁸⁹ was probably always there. “[...] The literary woman has always faced equally degrading options when she had to define her public presence in the world. If she did not suppress her work entirely or publish it pseudonymously or anonymously, she could modestly confess her female ‘limitations’ and concentrate on the ‘lesser’ subjects reserved for ladies as becoming to their inferior powers.”⁹⁰

Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, the authors of *The Madwoman in the Attic* - a publication that focuses on English female writers and has a deeply feminist tone - and feminist critics, ask the question: “Where does such an implicitly or explicitly patriarchal theory of literature leave literary women?”⁹¹ By "patriarchal theory of literature" they allude to the theory that “pen” is actually a “metaphorical penis”⁹², therefore inappropriate for women and to be used only by men. As the examples of a discontent with this understanding literature as a solely men’s business they quote Anne Finch and Jane Austen. In *Persuasion*

⁸⁵ ALEXANDER, Christine; SMITH, Margareth. *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*, s. 138.

⁸⁶ ALEXANDER, Christine; SMITH, Margareth. *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*, s. 138.

⁸⁷ INGHAM, Patricia. *The Brontës*, s. 88.

⁸⁸ INGHAM, Patricia. *The Brontës*, s. 92.

⁸⁹ An allusion to the famous declaration of Robert Southy (see p. 29)

⁹⁰ GILBERT, Sandra M.; GUBAR, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic*, s. 64.

⁹¹ GILBERT, Sandra M.; GUBAR, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic*, s. 7.

⁹² GILBERT, Sandra M.; GUBAR, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic*, s. 3.

by Jane Austen, Anne Elliot expresses her concern about the fact that “men have had every advantage of us in telling their story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands.”⁹³ The following extract is from *The Introduction to Miscellany Poems* (1713) by Anne Finch, the Countess of Winchilsea:

[.....]
Alas! a woman that attempts the pen,
Such an intruder on the rights of men,
Such a presumptuous creature, is esteemed,
The fault can by no virtue be redeemed.

They tell us we mistake our sex and way;
Good breeding, fashion, dancing, dressing, play
Are the accomplishments we should desire;
To write, or read, or think, or to inquire

Would cloud our beauty, and exhaust our time,
And interrupt the conquests of our prime;
Whilst the dull manage of a servile house
Is held by some our outmost art, and use.⁹⁴

[.....]

Reading the extracts above, it is obvious that in their works, both of the authors express many ideas, thoughts, or attitudes that might be understood as feminist (in Finch’s case it is expressed in the each line of her verses, with a considerable amount of irony and sarcasm indeed, and in Austen’s case it is expressed through opinions, whether expressed or only thought, of the heroine). Virginia Woolf, who commented on Anne Finch in her *A Room of One’s Own* and quoted the extract from her poetry which is presented below, even claims that “one has only to open her poetry to find her bursting out in indignation against the position of women.”⁹⁵

[.....]
How we are fallen! fallen by mistaken rules,
And Education's more than Nature's fools;
Debarred from all improvements of the mind,
And to be dull, expected and designed;

⁹³ GILBERT, Sandra M.; GUBAR, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic*, s. 7.

⁹⁴ *The Introduction by Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea* [online] www.poetryfoundation.org [cit. 15. 4. 2017]. Dostupné z: <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/50564>>

⁹⁵ WOOLF, Virginia. *A Room of One’s Own*, s. 49.

And if someone would soar above the rest,
With warmer fancy, and ambition pressed,
So strong the opposing faction still appears,
The hopes to thrive can ne'er outweigh the fears.⁹⁶
[.....]

Obviously, there have been many other female writers apart from the Countess of Winchelsea and Jane Austen in the previous centuries, whose works contain a lot of representations of feminist attitudes and express "authoresses'" concern with the position of women, some of them (Aphra Behn, Eliza Haywood, Mary Wollstonecraft, the Brontë sisters, George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell, and Virginia Woolf) being mentioned in this subchapter.

Let us conclude this chapter with the question that Gilbert and Gubar are concerned with in their *Madwoman in the Attic* and which perfectly defines the difficult position of a woman writer in the previous centuries - "what does it mean to be a woman writer in a culture whose fundamental definitions of literary authority are, as we have seen, both overtly and covertly patriarchal"⁹⁷ - and with the quote signifying their appreciation for the eighteenth and nineteenth-century "authoresses" and "poetesses": "Far from reinforcing socially oppressive sexual stereotyping, only a full consideration of such problems can reveal the extraordinary strength of women's literary accomplishments in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries."⁹⁸

⁹⁶ WOOLF, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*, s. 49.

⁹⁷ GILBERT, Sandra M.; GUBAR, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic*, s. 45-46.

⁹⁸ GILBERT, Sandra M.; GUBAR, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic*, s. 51.

2 The position of women in the 19th century

Before exploring the position of women in the nineteenth century, it is necessary to outline the times and to mention the most significant events that occurred in the Brontë sisters' lifetimes. In 1837, Queen Victoria, who was only eighteen years old, ascended the throne. During her reign there was a rapid growth of population and economy in England. This period of her reign is usually referred to as the Victorian era and is often associated with strict morality, conventionality, and attaching importance to manners and etiquette. Despite the fact that it was a period full of progress, it was also a time of riots, strikes, and discontent caused by the awareness of the social injustices and negative effects which came along with the industrialization. The Chartist movement and the Suffrage movement, the former being concerned with the conditions of workers and the latter fighting for the right to vote for women, were the most significant issues of this period which was full of social and economic changes.

The Victorian era was very prolific regarding the production of literature indeed. The greatest and best known of the English writers - the Brontë sisters, Elizabeth Gaskell, George Eliot, William M. Thackeray, and Charles Dickens - were all Victorian writers. Although the separate spheres ideology, which was a phenomenon of the Victorian England, did not encourage women to become artists or writers, the nineteenth century saw many significant female novelists whose works are easily comparable to those of the greatest of the English male writers. All of the aforementioned writers were representatives of the Critical Realism and sought to capture a truthful image of the reality. Their novels, therefore, provide us with an accurate insight into the social issues of the times and offer an illustration of the Victorian gender roles.

As suggested above, the industrialization inflicted many negative impacts on the society. Writers were very well-aware of the social injustices and tried to depict them in their works, which was a certain way of their protest against it. Charles Dickens, for instance, was concerned with child's labour and was addressing the subjects such as unhappy childhood and poor treatment of children; Elizabeth Gaskell, on the other hand, described the poor conditions of workers in factories. Charlotte and Anne Brontë were concerned mainly with the position of women and governesses but also commented on the position of workers, which is reflected, for instance, in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* which is regarded as an "industrial

novel that successfully tackles both gender and class issues during the Industrial revolution in England”⁹⁹.

The Chartist movement, striving for the improvement of conditions of workers, was one of the most important events of the Victorian era. “Chartism was the first movement both working class in character and national in scope that grew out of the protest against the injustices of the new industrial and political order in Britain.”¹⁰⁰ The main demands of the Chartists were as follows: votes for all men, vote by ballot, equal electoral districts, annually elected Parliaments, payment of members of Parliament, and abolition of the property qualifications for membership.¹⁰¹

In the times we refer to, women did not have many rights or chances to win some recognition indeed; their opportunities were limited. Not only Victorian women did not have the right to vote but their inferiority to men would not even allow them to go to universities, have any representation in government, gain their own property and therefore to be independent, attend any respectable profession except for being a teacher or governess, and even to express their opinions on many subjects publicly. As Patricia Ingham states, during the lifetime of the Brontë sisters, “women were second-class people, hardly to be called citizens since none of them was able to vote [...]. Even the Chartists, when demanding universal suffrage, did not take universal to include women; and when it was suggested, rejected the idea”.¹⁰²

In the nineteenth century, the “university education was not open to women, and education abroad was exceptional”¹⁰³ (Charlotte and Emily Brontë, nevertheless, had the opportunity to study at Brussels); the only reason for education of women was to teach them things that “custom has pronounced necessary for their sex”¹⁰⁴ and prepare them for being good wives to their husbands and providing them with entertainment, not to prepare them for the public sphere. If a woman was too educated or was too interested in literature, politics, or other subjects, she was considered to be masculine. As Kathryn Hughes points out, some

⁹⁹ DINIEJKO, Andrzej. *Shirley As a Condition-of-England Novel* [online] Last modified 13. 2. 2010 [cit. 10. 2. 2018]. Dostupné z: <<http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/bronte/cbronte/diniejko.html>>

¹⁰⁰ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica: *Chartism* [online] Updated 8. 2. 2018 [cit. 15. 3. 2018]. Dostupné z: <<https://www.britannica.com/event/Chartism-British-history>>

¹⁰¹ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica: *Chartism*, cit. 100.

¹⁰² INGHAM, Patricia. *The Brontës*, s. 50-51.

¹⁰³ ALEXANDER, Christine; SMITH, Margareth. *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*, s. 176.

¹⁰⁴ An allusion to *Jane Eyre* (see p. 58)

Victorians believed that the more a girl read the more masculine her appearance, literally, was¹⁰⁵.

Mostly, women did not have any autonomy; they were not independent because they could not be owners of property and had only few opportunities to earn money (the earning power of women would greatly contribute to their independence) as many doors were closed for them simply because they were women. Middle-class women with no independent means, therefore, had either to get married or work as governesses or teachers, which were perhaps the only respected occupations open for women. They could not break through as artists because of the present stereotypes regarding roles of women; it would be against the conventions.

“[...] It is fairly evident that even in the nineteenth century a woman was not encouraged to be an artist. On the contrary, she was snubbed, slapped, lectured and exhorted. Her mind must have been strained and her vitality lowered by the need of opposing this, of disproving that. For here again we come within range of that very interesting and obscure masculine complex which has had so much influence upon the woman’s movement; that deep-seated desire, not so much that SHE shall be inferior as that HE shall be superior, which plants him wherever one looks, not only in front of the arts, but barring the way to politics too [...].”¹⁰⁶

Yet, many cases when it came to light that some literary works, paintings, or compositions were not actually written, painted, or composed by men as it were believed but by their sisters or wives have happened to be known. For instance, it has been proven recently that some compositions by one of the best known composers of the nineteenth century, Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, can be in fact attributed to his sister¹⁰⁷, who, unfortunately, was not allowed to break through as a composer because, as Virginia Woolf states, “the woman composer stands [even in her times and in the previous centuries] where the actress stood in the times of Shakespeare”¹⁰⁸.

Nonetheless, there was this general view that no true lady worked. By taking a job the social status of a respected woman would lower (Charlotte and Anne Brontë had, more than

¹⁰⁵ *Gender in 19th Century Britain*. YouTube [online]. 19. 12. 2014 [cit. 14. 11. 2017]. Dostupné z: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vkJJFX8Qn90>>

¹⁰⁶ WOOLF, Virginia. *A Room of One’s Own*, s. 46.

¹⁰⁷ HAYMAN, Sheila. *A Fanny Mendelssohn masterpiece finally gets its due* [online] 8. 3. 2017 [cit. 10. 7. 2017]. Dostupné z: <<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2017/mar/08/fanny-mendelssohn-easter-sonata-premiere-sheila-hayman>>

¹⁰⁸ WOOLF, Virginia. *A Room of One’s Own*, s. 45-46.

once, such experience when they were employed as governesses). The same, however, did not apply for gentlemen as it is evident in the words of S. S. Ellis: “It is a curious anomaly in the structure of modern society that gentlemen may employ their hours of business in almost any degrading occupation [...] and may be gentlemen still; while, if a lady but touch any article, no matter how delicate, in the way of trade, she loses caste and ceases to be lady.”¹⁰⁹

2.1 Separate spheres

“As workplace and home separated more emphatically [...], Victorians embraced the ‘separate spheres’ ideology [...]”¹¹⁰ Under the term "separate spheres" the contrasts between the domestic and public spheres and their separation from one another can be understood. This general belief that men were “naturally equipped for the public arena”¹¹¹ whereas women were predestined to inhabit a domestic sphere left most women in a subordinate and less active position, with a little chance to become active participants in the public sphere. Women were seen as the "Angels in the House" whereas men had much better educational and professional opportunities, and were, therefore, prepared for the public sphere. The phenomenon of the "separate spheres" seems to be associated particularly with the Victorian era. Kathryn Hughes, in her article on Gender and Sexuality in the Victorian era, states that “during the Victorian period men and women’s roles became more sharply defined than at any time in history.”¹¹²

“Most recent critics who discuss Brontë’s analysis of Victorian gender roles refer to the stereotypical distinction between a female domestic sphere and a male public sphere.”¹¹³ It is important to note that “the Brontës’ novels clearly address the condition of women by criticizing the separate spheres, confining feminine ideals, and women’s limited professional and educational opportunities”¹¹⁴. Indeed, both Charlotte and Anne Brontë portray their heroines as artists and it is obvious that they certainly do not accept the domestic ideal of a woman.

¹⁰⁹ *The Westminster Review*. VOLUME XXXV. January and April, 1841. *Woman, and her Social Position* [online], s. 18. [cit. 2. 9. 2017]. Dostupné z: <<https://books.google.cz/books?id=-yegAAAAMAAJ>>

¹¹⁰ ALEXANDER, Christine; SMITH, Margareth. *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*, s. 545.

¹¹¹ ALEXANDER, Christine; SMITH, Margareth. *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*, s. 545.

¹¹² HUGHES, Kathryn. *Gender roles in the 19th century* [online] 15. 5. 2014 [cit. 3. 2. 2018]. Dostupné z: <<https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/gender-roles-in-the-19th-century>>

¹¹³ CARNELL, Rachel K. *Feminism and the Public Sphere in Anne Brontë’s The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, s. 1.

¹¹⁴ ALEXANDER, Christine; SMITH, Margareth. *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*, s. 546.

2.2 The role of women within the society

As already pointed out, the nineteenth-century middle-class women were much less privileged than the members of the opposite sex and were limited to the domestic sphere. Their “function in society was constructed as biologically determined and the construction of proper femininity was predicated upon an ideal, domesticated middle-class wife far less rational than a man but intuitive, emotional, with a natural maternal instinct and an equally natural nurturing ability”.¹¹⁵ “Women were destined to fill their lives with domestic and nurturing duties to their families.”¹¹⁶

Women were not supposed to be active, assertive, or to break through; that was the privilege of the other sex. In fact, they could not do many things only because they were women such as to go to the public libraries, get involved into discussions on politics, or to earn their living by writing, composing, or painting. But what they needed was to be educated in languages (French, German, or Latin), music, drawing, needlework, and etiquette so that they could be considered to be "accomplished". The main purpose of such accomplishment, which was important for social mobility of women, was to equip them so they could be sophisticated and attract a suitable suitor and then gain more respect and a better position with the status of a married woman.

Some women, certainly, must have been concerned with their monotonous lives. For instance in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*, “Caroline Helstone repeatedly asks herself a significant question: ‘I have to live perhaps till seventy years...half a century of existence may lie before me. How am I to occupy it? What am I to do to fill the interval of time which spreads between me and the grave?’”¹¹⁷ A similar attitude, although definitely not the same, is also evident in a passage from *Jane Eyre* where we can see Jane's frustration over the emptiness and monotony of her life (however, it changes when she meets Mr. Rochester whose arrival makes her life much more exciting and with whom she can enjoy having rational and engaging conversations). Jane is wondering that she would spend the rest of her life doing occupations that women were expected to do, such as “making puddings and knitting stockings”. It is evident that the author herself finds these occupations for women very boring and frustrating:

“Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their

¹¹⁵ INGHAM, Patricia. *The Brontës*, s. 50-51.

¹¹⁶ INGHAM, Patricia. *The Brontës*, s. 128.

¹¹⁷ INGHAM, Patricia. *The Brontës*, s. 128.

brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags.”¹¹⁸

2.2.1 "The Angel in the House"

During the Victorian period, “woman was idealized as the ‘Angel in the House’, a relational creature who derived her value and purpose from relationships, as daughter, wife, [and] mother.”¹¹⁹ While the man was the head of family, provider of material security, and the owner of all the properties, the woman was supposed to be the provider of comfort and love, and the figure of purity and goodness as the word "Angel" suggests. She was there to care for others. A perfect embodiment of such a woman would be Amy Dorrit (*Little Dorrit* by Charles Dickens) who endures any misfortune with patience and sacrifices everything for her father and brother.

The term "Angel in the house" was derived from the poem of the same name by Coventry Patmore who, inspired by his wife, in this long narrative poem described this recessive, submissive, passive, pure, humble, and self-sacrificing portrayal of an ideal woman which was later criticized and even satirized by female writers, especially by Virginia Woolf who once declared that “killing the Angel in the house was part of the occupation of a woman writer”¹²⁰.

“*The Angel in the House* by Coventry Patmore promotes a domestic-centred ideal of women and femininity.”¹²¹ “For some, the angel in the house is evidence of [...] an era when men and women had separate roles in the social hierarchy. For others, she is a symbol of oppressed woman trapped in the gilded cage of Victorian male domination.”¹²² It seems that neither Charlotte nor Anne Brontë did share this view of an ideal woman as the "Angel in the house" and felt rather imprisoned in monotony of their lives, in their female roles, in their father's and brother's house, in their inferior roles, in occupations that were expected from

¹¹⁸ BRONTË, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. 1966, s. 141 (Chapter 12).

¹¹⁹ ALEXANDER, Christine; SMITH, Margareth. *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*, s. 545.

¹²⁰ WOOLF, Virginia. *Professions for Women* [online] 27. 3. 2016 [cit. 18. 2. 2018]. Dostupné z: <<https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/w/woolf/virginia/w91d/chapter27.html>>

¹²¹ HUGHES, Kathryn. *Gender roles in the 19th century* [online] 15. 5. 2014 [cit. 3. 2. 2018]. Dostupné z: <<https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/gender-roles-in-the-19th-century>>

¹²² PETERSON, M. Jeanne. *No Angels in the House: The Victorian Myth and the Paget Women* [online], s. 678. [cit. 16. 2. 2018]. Dostupné z: <<https://academic.oup.com/ahr/article/89/3/677/103661>>

women, and under the bondage of conventions. Charlotte, especially, in her novels displays many female characters that are occupied with such activities that were expected from women but it is apparent that they are to be looked on with derision and even disdain. There is no doubt that none of the Brontë sisters was the "Angel in the house" (though Anne was always willing to care for others and help with housekeeping) and neither were their heroines.

2.2.2 Mrs. Beeton's Book of Household Management and other nineteenth-century conduct books

In the Victorian era, women were expected to fulfil their domestic duties, hence they needed to be skilful at housekeeping, cooking, and entertaining their husbands. Due to these demands on women, plenty of articles and books for women, which were actually manuals, had been written. The most famous of them, and very popular in the nineteenth century indeed, would be *Mrs. Beeton's Book of Household Management*, the "domestic Bible for Victorian women"¹²³, published in 1861. It is interesting to note, however, that Isabella Beeton was only twenty-five years old when she wrote this book which immediately became a phenomenon therefore she did not have much experience with many of the things she was concerned with in the book. This "handbook", full of useful and practical material, contains about 2000 recipes, plenty of illustrations, advice and comments on various topics and issues (from housekeeping to how to act appropriately in the society), and was a very useful guide for contemporary women since it helped them to be successful in their married life.¹²⁴

Even though *Mrs. Beeton's Book of Household Management* include a lot of comments on the importance of women as the following quote indicates, it is obvious that Mrs. Beeton saw the role of a woman primarily as the one of the provider of comfort and happiness for her husband and family and supported the ideas of the separate spheres ideology that women are limited to the domestic spheres. Although the author called the "mistress of the house" the "Alfa and Omega" and a "Commander of an Army", she limited her power only to the domestic area:

¹²³ *The Marvelous Mrs. Beeton* -YouTube [online]. Uploaded 17. 11. 2016. [cit. 1. 6. 2017]. Dostupné z: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZPHeaPrfKo8>>

¹²⁴ *Isabella Beeton's Book of Household Management: A Victorian Phenomenon* [online] 17. 2. 2016 [cit. 31. 3. 2017]. Dostupné z: <<https://mimimatthews.com/2016/02/17/isabella-beetons-book-of-household-management-a-victorian-phenomenon/>>

“Any woman who felt her position to be unimportant and useless could be persuaded by the strength of Mrs. Beeton’s rhetoric: the mistress is ‘the first and last, the Alpha and Omega in the government of her establishment’ and ‘it is by her conduct that its whole internal policy is regulated.’ In her opening sentence, Mrs. Beeton compares the mistress of the house to ‘a Commander of an Army’ who attains the ‘highest rank’ of the female character when she enters into knowledge of household duties.”¹²⁵

There were many other conduct books, manuals, and articles, written by both men and women, usually addressing women and advising them "how to do" many things from cooking to behaving. Harriet Martineau’s *Household Education*, Frances Power Cobbe’s *Duties of Women*, S. S. Ellis’ *The Women of England: The Social Duties and Domestic Habits*, and *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (which includes topics such as “differences between men and women, female education, choosing a husband, raising children, and how women should spend their free time”¹²⁶) can be given as examples.

Some of them maintained the traditional view of women’s position; some of them, however, had a rather feminist tone. Susan Hamilton in her essay *A Crisis in Woman’s History: Frances Power Cobbe’s Duties of Women and the Practice of Everyday Feminism* claims that “Cobbe’s *Duties of Women* instructs women to practice feminism appropriately in everyday life, and to display courage and self-reliance while remaining dutifully conscientious, unselfish, temperate, and chaste”¹²⁷. As for the Martineau’s *Household Education*, Linda H. Peterson in her *Harriet Martineau’s Household Education: Revising the Feminine Tradition* describes the book as “an important radical work for its dismissal of differences in the educational needs of girls and boys, and for its suggestion that male-dominated public schools are unnecessary and that education is best done at home, giving girls increased opportunity to be instructed and women increased opportunity to instruct”¹²⁸.

¹²⁵ *Isabella Beeton’s Book of Household Management: A Victorian Phenomenon* [online] 17. 2. 2016 [cit. 31. 3. 2017]. Dostupné z: <<https://mimimatthews.com/2016/02/17/isabella-beetons-book-of-household-management-a-victorian-phenomenon/>>

¹²⁶ *Conduct book for women* [online] [cit. 31. 3. 2017] Available from: <<https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/conduct-book-for-women>>

¹²⁷ *Conduct Books in Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism: Feminist Revisions - Essay* [online] [cit. 2. 4. 2017]. Dostupné z: <<https://www.enotes.com/topics/conduct-books-nineteenth-century-literature/critical-essays/criticism-feminist-revisions>>

¹²⁸ *Conduct Books in Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism: Feminist Revisions – Essay*, cit. 127.

2.3 The position of unmarried women, married women, and widows

“The way that society was structured left few options for women and built perceived inferiority into the system, with many articles and conduct books to reinforce this characterization of women’s nature, which frequently seemed the norm even for the women themselves. Indeed, those who did not achieve married status became, in the words of a famous article about what to do with such women, ‘redundant’.”¹²⁹ (More information on articles and conduct books for women is given in the chapter 2.2.2)

As already mentioned in the previous subchapters, women were generally considered as inferior to men and were regarded as irrational, emotional and passive creatures. However, the way they were treated and looked upon depended greatly on their status. There were considerable differences between the position of an unmarried woman, married woman, and a widow. Women who were not married were considered to be "redundant" (as illustrated in the quote above). That is the reason why the main purpose or aim in women’s lives was matrimony. This explains why in so many novels we can see the effort that a young lady, or, more often, her mother, makes to find a husband (a great example for this statement would be *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen who satirizes this "chase" for a suitable, which would mean very wealthy, husband). Widows, however, were treated with much respect. That can be probably one of the reasons why Helen Huntingdon, the heroine of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, found it inevitable to pretend to be a widow and changed her name to Helen Graham. However, this change of name may be as well interpreted as a symbol of liberation from male dominance.

As far as married women are concerned, it was somewhat questionable. On one hand, they had a better position and more respect than unmarried women, and they managed to avoid being seen as redundant; on the other hand, once they achieved a married status they actually lost their legal status as proven by the statement by Sir William Blackstone (*Commentaries on the Laws of England*, 1765): “By marriage the husband and wife are one person in law: that is the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of her husband; under whose wing, protection, and cover, she performs everything; and is therefore called in our law-french

¹²⁹ INGHAM, Patricia. *The Brontës*, s. 51.

a feme covert.”¹³⁰ This implies that by getting married women would lose their rights to their property (that they owned before marriage, gained during marriage, or inherited) which would automatically become their husbands’ unless there were made certain arrangements before marriage. To explain the term "feme covert", it is a term for a married woman who is dependent on her husband and has no control over her property¹³¹; coverture (a married woman’s legal status) dictated the subordinate status of women during the marriage.¹³² The Married Women’s Property Acts (1870, 1882, and 1893) finally enabled married women to have full control over their own or inherited properties.¹³³

2.3.1 The Suffrage movement

According to Kathryn Hughes, the nineteenth-century “women were considered to be physically weaker yet morally superior to men”¹³⁴, which was one of the reasons women were limited to the domestic sphere while the public life was the domain of men. Hughes claims that “the fact that women had such great influence at home was used as an argument against giving them the [right to] vote.”¹³⁵ As already suggested, Victorian women did not have the right to vote and own property, and had no representation in government. They became more and more concerned with this situation and their disadvantaged position in the patriarchal society, and demanded equality and their rights. This resulted into the beginnings of the women’s right movements.

The Suffrage Movement, demanding rights to vote for women, was one of the most important events that occurred during the Victorian era and has been one of the essential events in the history of feminism. The followers of the Suffrage Movement were called Suffragettes. Millicent G. Fawcett and Emmeline Pankhurst were the leading figures in the British Suffrage Movement. Millicent G. Fawcett, who was the leader of the Suffragettes in Britain and led the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies¹³⁶, claimed that the

¹³⁰ INGHAM, Patricia. *The Brontës*, s. 51.

¹³¹ LEWIS, Jone Johnson. *Coverture: Women’s Nonexistence Under Law* [online] Updated 31. 8. 2017 [cit. 24. 11. 2017]. Dostupné z: <<https://www.thoughtco.com/coverture-in-english-american-law-3529483>>

¹³² The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica: *Coverture* [online] 8. 10. 2007 [cit. 26. 11. 2017] Dostupné z: <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/coverture>>

¹³³ JONES, Claire. *The Married Women’s Property Acts (UK, 1870, 1882 and 1893)* [online] 7. 7. 2012 [cit. 12. 2. 2018]. Dostupné z: <<https://herstoria.com/the-married-womens-property-acts-uk-1870-1882-and-1893/>>

¹³⁴ HUGHES, Kathryn. *Gender roles in the 19th century* [online] 15. 5. 2014 [cit. 3. 2. 2018]. Dostupné z: <<https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/gender-roles-in-the-19th-century>>

¹³⁵ HUGHES, cit. 135

¹³⁶ HANNAM, June. *Feminism* [online], xii. [cit. 19. 2. 2018]. Dostupné z: <<https://books.google.cz/books?id=vRyBAAAAQBAJ>>

women's movement was one of the "biggest things that has ever taken place in history of the world"¹³⁷ because it had been so far the only movement which had aimed at raising the status of an entire sex and it affected more people than any former reform movement.¹³⁸ "The legal status of married women was a major issue in the struggle for woman suffrage."¹³⁹

"In Great Britain woman suffrage was first advocated by Mary Wollstonecraft in her [...] *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) [...]. The demand for woman suffrage was increasingly taken up by prominent liberal intellectuals in England from the 1850s on, notably by John Stuart Mill and his wife, Harriet. The first woman suffrage committee was formed in Manchester in 1865, and in 1867 Mill presented to Parliament this society's petition which demanded the vote for women and contained about 1,550 signatures. The Reform Bill of 1867 contained no provision for woman suffrage, but meanwhile woman suffrage societies were forming in most of the major cities of Britain, and in the 1870s these organizations submitted to Parliament petitions demanding the franchise for women and containing a total of almost three million signatures."¹⁴⁰

Results of the Women's Suffrage movement were following: in 1918 women have been finally given the right to vote.¹⁴¹ "However, many women, particularly working-class women, were still excluded from the franchise. [...] Universal franchise was finally granted with the Equal Franchise Act of 1928."¹⁴²

2.4 The position of governesses

From 1840 governesses were often set as heroines of the fiction.¹⁴³ Since the heroine of one of the analyzed novels, *Jane Eyre*, is a governess, it is assuredly necessary to devote a

¹³⁷ HANNAM, June. *Feminism* [online]. Introduction, s. 1. [cit. 5. 12. 2017]. Dostupné z: <<https://books.google.cz/books?id=vRyBAAAAQBAJ>>

¹³⁸ HANNAM, cit. 138, s. 1.

¹³⁹ Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. *Coverture* [online] 8. 10. 2007 [cit. 26. 11. 2017]. Dostupné z: <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/coverture>>

¹⁴⁰ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. *Woman Suffrage* [online] 8. 2. 2018 [cit. 2. 3. 2018]. Dostupné z: <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/woman-suffrage>>

¹⁴¹ British Library Learning. *The campaign for women's suffrage: an introduction* [online] 6. 2. 2018 [cit. 18. 3. 2018]. Dostupné z: <<https://www.bl.uk/votes-for-women/articles/the-campaign-for-womens-suffrage-an-introduction>>

¹⁴² British Library Learning. *The campaign for women's suffrage: an introduction*, cit. 142.

¹⁴³ HUGHES, Kathryn. *The figure of the governess* [online] 15. 5. 2014 [cit. 16. 5. 2017]. Dostupné z: <<https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/the-figure-of-the-governess>>

special space to the position and social status of governesses. The term *governess* has had several meanings throughout the previous centuries; for instance, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it was regarded as an honourable position and was usually connected with an educated and noble lady, whereas in the nineteenth century, governesses (women who had charge of a person, female supervisors of a school, assistant teachers) did not necessarily have to be educated that well.¹⁴⁴

In the nineteenth century, the number of governesses increased¹⁴⁵. For wealthy families it was common to keep a governess rather than to send their children to school. However, “most governesses were paid very low salaries”¹⁴⁶ and had quite a strange position because they lived with the family but were not servants, and neither were they a part of the family. Nonetheless, they were probably respected, at least to some extent, by their employers. Charlotte and Anne Brontë, as daughters of a respectable man, not once had a higher social status than their employers; however, as it has already been pointed out, no true ladies worked and by taking a job their status lowered.

Governesses taught their pupils French language, history, geography, arithmetic, to read and write, and were also responsible for their moral education. They also gave the older young ladies lessons of playing the piano, drawing, dancing and deportment, which were activities that any accomplished woman should have been engaged with. However, governesses were not allowed to show affection for their pupils and otherwise. It once happened to Charlotte that mother of the children she took care of instructed them not to like Charlotte because it was not appropriate and possible to like a governess¹⁴⁷. For Charlotte, it must have been a very painful incident because it was her self-esteem that had been injured. Furthermore, governesses could not have suitors and had to wear very simple dresses. Many authors of conduct books even recommended that masters should hire only a plain woman as a governess in order to avoid her having an affair with an acquaintance, friend, or member of the family.

Charlotte, as well as Anne, herself was a governess and this experience was, obviously, an important source of inspiration for her when writing *Jane Eyre*. Nevertheless, from the letters that Charlotte was sending to her siblings it is obvious that she understood the life of governesses as uneventful and did not enjoy (to put it as a euphemism) being a governess, as well as she did not enjoy being a teacher. Her depression and frustration that she

¹⁴⁴ ALEXANDER, Christine; SMITH, Margareth. *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*, s. 223.

¹⁴⁵ ALEXANDER, Christine; SMITH, Margareth. *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*, s. 223.

¹⁴⁶ ALEXANDER, Christine; SMITH, Margareth. *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*, s. 224.

¹⁴⁷ ALEXANDER, Christine; SMITH, Margareth. *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*, s. 224.

felt when she was a teacher at Roe Head School are very well reflected in the following words:

“The thought came over me: Am I to spend all the best part of my life in this wretched bondage, forcibly suppressing my rage at the idleness, the apathy, and the hyperbolic and the most asinine stupidity of these fat-headed oafs, and on compulsion assuming an air of kindness, patience and assiduity? Must I from day to day sit chained to this chair, prisoned within these four bare walls [...]”¹⁴⁸

Although this thesis does not include any detailed analysis of other works by the Brontë sisters apart from *Jane Eyre* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Anne Brontë’s *Agnes Grey*, first published in 1847, should be mentioned at this point for the novel is concerned with the life of a governess. *Agnes Grey*, although published after *Jane Eyre*, was actually written before it. It is based on Anne’s experience (rather unpleasant) as a governess and it shows an accurate image of the negative aspects of the life of governesses. Comparing it with other works by Bells, *Agnes Grey* was received less favourably even though it was thought to be more acceptable and not that revolting – but less powerful¹⁴⁹. One of its reviewers declared that the novel leaves “no painful impression on the mind – some may think it leaves no impression at all.”¹⁵⁰ Anne (in *Agnes Grey*) and Charlotte Brontë (in *Jane Eyre*) were both concerned with situation of governesses and with their place in the society in their novels; they “[...] illustrate this disparaging view of the governess in order to express strong disapproval of it.”¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ MOGLEN, Helene. *Charlotte Brontë - The Self Conceived* [online], s. 45. [cit. 22. 8. 2017]. Dostupné z: <<https://books.google.cz/books>>

¹⁴⁹ ALEXANDER, Christine; SMITH, Margareth. *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*, s. 137.

¹⁵⁰ ALEXANDER, Christine; SMITH, Margareth. *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*, s. 10.

¹⁵¹ INGHAM, Patricia. *The Brontës*, s. 103-104.

3 Lives and works of Charlotte Brontë and Anne Brontë¹⁵²

Charlotte (1816 – 1855) and Anne Brontë (1820 – 1849) were born in Thornton, Yorkshire, as daughters of Reverend Patrick Brontë, who was an ambitious and very sophisticated man. In 1820, soon after Anne, who was the youngest child, was born, the Brontë family (with six children - Maria, Elizabeth, Charlotte, Branwell, Emily, and Anne) moved to Haworth where Patrick Brontë was made a curate. Anon their mother died, probably of a cancer. The two eldest sisters (and later also Charlotte) were sent to Cowan Bridge School, depicted very accurately as Lowood in *Jane Eyre*, where they suffered from harsh discipline and poor treatment, and consequently both died of tuberculosis. After this incident, Rev. Brontë decided that his surviving children would be educated at home.

Charlotte, Branwell, Emily, and Anne were, therefore, educated at home by their father with help of their aunt. All four of them were unusually bright and intelligent, had a vivid imagination, and shared great interest in art and literature, as well as passion for storytelling. Charlotte and Anne then attended Roe Head School where they returned as teachers a few years later. Both of them also worked as governesses, which was rather unhappy and mortifying experience for them. Nevertheless, if it had not been for such experience, *Jane Eyre* and *Agnes Grey* would not have probably been written.

In the Victorian period, the “university education was not open to women, and education abroad was exceptional”¹⁵³. Nevertheless, Charlotte and Emily had the opportunity to study abroad, mainly thanks to their aunt’s financial support. “She [Charlotte] and Emily planned to acquire the extra skills in French, German, and music, which would enable them to set up a school of their own.”¹⁵⁴ For this reason, they travelled to Brussels where they attended the Pensionat Héger where Charlotte returned as a teacher later. Her stay at the pensionat had a huge impact on her and her works; the master of the pensionat, monsieur Constantin Héger, happened to be a model for her heroes and the only man who could be worthy of her worship (Charlotte Brontë was a woman who would only marry a man who would be worthy of her respect and who would not harm her self-respect). Nevertheless, her hopes regarding Monsieur Héger (who had already been married) were dashed, and Charlotte came back to Haworth. Unfortunately, her and Emily’s attempt to set up their own school

¹⁵² This chapter has been inspired by a documentary about the Brontë sisters *The Brilliant Brontë Sisters* 2013 (Dostupné z: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dLI1Bm6rNuc>>) and by *Život sestier Brontëovských* by Emilie and Georges Romieu.

¹⁵³ ALEXANDER, Christine; SMITH, Margareth. *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*, s. 176.

¹⁵⁴ ALEXANDER, Christine; SMITH, Margareth. *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*, s. 84.

where they would teach everything they learnt in Brussels was thwarted because no applicants appeared; the reputation of “weird spinsters”¹⁵⁵ and the vision of bleak Haworth was not attractive for them indeed.

Moreover, Haworth turned out to be a very unhealthy place to live in. The average life expectancy there was only twenty-five years, which was a result of the diseases caused by pollution of the drinking water by the local graveyard. All the three sisters had very poor health and their only brother destroyed himself by his indecent life and fondness for alcohol and opium. Branwell died in 1848 at the age of thirty-one and Emily followed him three months later (at the age of thirty). Anne died the next year when she was only twenty-nine and Charlotte was left alone with the memory of the last words of Anne’s: “Take courage”¹⁵⁶. Charlotte died six years after that at the age of thirty-eight, soon after her wedding, of an illness associated with her pregnancy. It is remarkable, indeed, that during their extremely short lives the three sisters managed to write such extraordinary novels, and also poems, which are considered as real masterpieces of literature and have been widely read since.

All of the three Brontë sisters - Charlotte, Anne and Emily - were exceptional; they were well educated and well read and certainly escaped all those stereotypes about women in those times. Their self-sufficiency is very well reflected in the tone of their writings which contain a lot of objects for feminist analysis. In the Brontës’ attitudes, there is an obvious reinforcement of the possibility that marriage and housekeeping was not the limit of what women were capable of. Despite the Victorian standards regarding the roles of women, none of the Brontë sisters was the "Angel in the House".

Charlotte Brontë is undoubtedly the most admired of the three sisters not only nowadays but it was so even in her times, and it seems that she was as well the most ambitious one. If it had not been for her ambition and want of celebrity, it is possible that any of the novels written by the sisters Brontë would not have been known.¹⁵⁷ “Her first novel, ‘*The Professor*’, was rejected [more than once], but she went on to write ‘*Jane Eyre*’, which is her true claim to greatness.”¹⁵⁸ Apart from *The Professor* and *Jane Eyre*, she wrote two other novels, *Villette* and *Shirley*, and all of them are feminist. “*Shirley*, written during and after the tragic deaths of her three siblings within a single year, displayed Charlotte’s engagement with

¹⁵⁵ *The Brilliant Brontë Sisters* 2013. YouTube [online]. 2016 [cit. 11. 4. 2017]. Dostupné z: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dLI1Bm6rNuc>>

¹⁵⁶ *The Brilliant Brontë Sisters* 2013, cit. 158.

¹⁵⁷ *The Brilliant Brontë Sisters* 2013, cit. 158.

¹⁵⁸ BRONTË, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. 1994, Introduction.

both women's rights and radical workers' movements."¹⁵⁹ Let us conclude this part about Charlotte with her own words:

“Were I obliged to copy any former novelist, even the greatest, even Scott, in anything, I would not write. Unless I have something of my own to say, and a way of my own to say it, I have no business to publish; unless I can look beyond the greatest Masters, and study Nature herself, I have no right to paint; unless I can have the courage to use the language of Truth in preference to the jargon of Conventionality, I ought to be silent.”¹⁶⁰

Anne, the least known of the three Brontë sisters, was the youngest and is best known for her two novels, *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* which are considered less prevailing and powerful than *Jane Eyre* (Charlotte Brontë) and *Wuthering Heights* (Emily Brontë) and not as widely read. She was definitely not as ambitious as Charlotte, and adopted male pseudonym particularly because she wanted to preserve her anonymity. In her Preface to the Second Edition of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Anne explains that her main object in writing was not “simply to amuse the Reader” but to “tell the truth”¹⁶¹ and declares the following words:

“As the story of *Agnes Grey* was accused of extravagant over colouring in those very parts that were carefully copied from the life, with a most scrupulous avoidance of all exaggeration, so, in the present work, I find myself censured for depicting con amore, with ‘a morbid love of the coarse, if not of the brutal’, those scenes which, I will venture to say, have not been more painful for the most fastidious of my critics to read than they were for me to describe.”¹⁶²

The aforementioned statement clearly suggests that she depicted nothing but the displeasing reality and that she did not enjoy writing about such detestable subjects. However, she, as she herself asserts, felt it to be her duty to “speak an unpalatable truth”¹⁶³.

Although this thesis focuses only on novels by Charlotte and Anne Brontë, their sister Emily should not be left out. Emily Brontë had only one novel published but she also wrote

¹⁵⁹ Charlotte Brontë [online] British Library. www.bl.uk. [cit. 16. 4. 2017]. Dostupné z: <<https://www.bl.uk/people/charlotte-bronte>>

¹⁶⁰ INGHAM, Patricia. *The Brontës*, s. 98.

¹⁶¹ BRONTË, Anne. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Preface to the Second Edition, s. 13.

¹⁶² BRONTË, Anne. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Preface to the Second Edition, s. 13.

¹⁶³ BRONTË, Anne. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Preface to the Second Edition, s. 14.

remarkable poems (Charlotte and Anne wrote poems as well and the three sisters even published some of them and called this collection *Poems by Acton, Ellis and Currer Bell* but they were told that Ellis's poems stand out amongst the others) – even Charlotte was impressed by her poems and made a huge effort to persuade her that poems of such “sterling excellence” “merited publication”¹⁶⁴. Nevertheless, Emily never wrote for fame but for herself (she was furious when she found out that Charlotte had read her poems, and later when Charlotte decided to reveal the true identity of Acton, Ellis, and Currer Bell to her publishers, she even refused to go to London with her and Anne – she loved her moors and did not want to be far from there)¹⁶⁵. Although she had little experience, it seems that she knew the nature of women and men so well, and her only published novel, *Wuthering Heights*, is a brilliant piece of writing full of deep study of human character dealing with such themes as obsession, love, and betrayal and is easily comparable to the works of her sisters' considering its quality, yet is very different as for she was different than her two sisters. Her main inspiration was her love for the moors, which is reflected in *Wuthering Heights*, and her childhood fantasies.

Although the works by the Brontë sisters were first published under the male pseudonyms, the readers, critics, and reviewers often speculated about the sex of the authors and some of them even thought that Acton, Currer and Ellis Bell might have been one person. There were also some opinions suggesting that *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* might have been written by a female author but with an assistance of her husband¹⁶⁶. As for *Jane Eyre*, many believed that it was written by a woman. “The true identity of Ellis (Emily) and Acton (Anne) Bell remained unknown during their short lifetimes”¹⁶⁷; however, the true identity of Charlotte, who lived seven years longer than her siblings, was publicly known by 1849¹⁶⁸.

When the "female" identity of the authors of *Jane Eyre*, *Agnes Grey*, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and *Wuthering Heights*, both admired by some and criticized by others, was revealed to the Victorian readers and critics, Charlotte felt the need to write a Biographical Notice to the 1850 edition of *Agnes Grey*, *Wuthering Heights*, and some of Anne's and Emily's poems in which she defended her sisters' works and more importantly their character because it was generally thought that women were not supposed write that way and to write of such subjects.

¹⁶⁴ ALEXANDER, Christine; SMITH, Margareth. *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*, s. 386.

¹⁶⁵ *The Brilliant Brontë Sisters* 2013 – YouTube [online]. 2016 [cit. 11. 4. 2017]. Dostupné z: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dLI1Bm6rNuc>>

¹⁶⁶ ALEXANDER, Christine; SMITH, Margareth. *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*, s. 503.

¹⁶⁷ ALEXANDER, Christine; SMITH, Margareth. *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*, s. 126.

¹⁶⁸ ALEXANDER, Christine; SMITH, Margareth. *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*, s. 134.

3.1 Influences

Both Charlotte and Anne Brontë were well educated and shared a great interest in literature, which is obvious from their use of language and style of writing which is full of insightful thoughts and allusions to other literary texts. It was rather usual for many Victorian writers to be acquainted with *The Bible*, *The Prayer Book*, John Bunyan's *Pilgrim Progress*, or *Aesop's Fables*, but what was not usual was the access to works of William Shakespeare, John Milton, and some other writers¹⁶⁹. Charlotte, Emily, Anne and their brother Branwell had this extraordinary and uncensored access to many books, magazines, and articles thanks to their father's extensive library and they even had the opportunity to read Gothic novels, Samuel Richardson's and Sir Walter Scott's novels, and the works of the Romantic poets (William Wordsworth, Robert Southey, and George Gordon Byron) which they enjoyed and found very captivating.¹⁷⁰ Obviously, all of these great poets and writers inspired them considerably, enriched their imagination and lexicon, and influenced their writing. However, the person who had the most significant influence on their writing was probably their father because if it had not been for him, they would have never had the opportunity to have read all these books. Only few women had the same privilege because we refer to the times when women were not even allowed to go to the public libraries and were expected to fulfil their domestic duties, not to spend time reading and, even worse, writing literature.

Moreover, Charlotte Brontë also made comments on the works of other writers, mostly her contemporaries, which proves that she was an extraordinarily persistent reader. She commented on Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*, Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* and *Bleak House*, Jane Austen's novels, and William M. Thackeray's novels (among others)¹⁷¹. In her *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte also mentions *Rasselas* by Dr. Samuel Johnson, Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and Oliver Goldsmith. Therefore, she must have read all of them.

Another important source of inspiration for their writing, next to the aforementioned writers, would be their personal experience for their novels are considerably autobiographical.¹⁷² Most of their characters are based on people that Charlotte and Anne knew and many of the subjects and themes appearing in the novels are inspired by real life events and experiences of the authors, for instance the literary and artistic experience of the both sisters and also their experiences as governesses.

¹⁶⁹ INGHAM, Patricia. *The Brontës*, s. 70.

¹⁷⁰ INGHAM, Patricia. *The Brontës*, s. 70.

¹⁷¹ INGHAM, Patricia. *The Brontës*, s. 94-96.

¹⁷² See p. 12

Arthur Huntingdon (*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*) is most likely to have been based on Branwell Brontë, who destroyed himself for his fondness for alcohol and opium. Although he was their brother, the three sisters probably saw him as a patriarch and debauchee and must have been, to some extent, ashamed of him. But he was the only son in the family, therefore had every advantage that they, as women, did not have. An acquaintance of the Brontë family, Mrs. Collins, might have been an inspiration for Helen Huntingdon (*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*) and her escape from her depraved husband.¹⁷³ Their eldest sister, Maria, who died of tuberculosis during her stay at Cowan Bridge School, is said to have been a model for Helen Burns (*Jane Eyre*)¹⁷⁴.

3.2 *Jane Eyre*

W. M. Thackeray, whom Charlotte Brontë admired very much, once wrote of *Jane Eyre*: “*Jane Eyre* [...] interested me so much that I have lost (or won if you like) a whole day in reading it at the busiest period”¹⁷⁵ (when he was supposed to be working on his *Vanity Fair*). He was certainly not the only one. *Jane Eyre* was first published in 1847 under the pseudonym Currer Bell and immediately became very popular. It has been admired for its passion and rebellion, and for its “refreshing unconventionalities”¹⁷⁶. The name of its heroine, Jane Eyre, started to evoke many strong feelings. After publication of *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte wrote to critics: “To you I am neither Man nor Woman – I come before you as an Author only – it is the sole standard by which you have a right to judge me – the sole grand on which I accept your judgement.”¹⁷⁷

Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar understand *Jane Eyre* as a female version of John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*.¹⁷⁸ To explain this statement, Jane is seen as a female parallel to Christian; as Christian has to overcome many obstacles and resist many temptations during his pilgrimage, Jane also has to overcome many obstacles, from self-denial to almost starving to death, until her character fully develops and she becomes an independent woman.

¹⁷³ ALEXANDER, Christine; SMITH, Margareth. *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*, s. 499.

¹⁷⁴ ALEXANDER, Christine; SMITH, Margareth. *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*, s. 111

¹⁷⁵ ALEXANDER, Christine; SMITH, Margareth. *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*, s. 135.

¹⁷⁶ NEWMAN, Beth (ed). *Charlotte Brontë: Jane Eyre*, s. 445.

¹⁷⁷ INGHAM, Patricia. *The Brontës*, s. 99.

¹⁷⁸ GILBERT, Sandra M.; GUBAR, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic*, s. 342.

“[...] Obviously, *Jane Eyre* is a feminist tract, an argument for the social betterment of governesses and equal rights for women”¹⁷⁹, Gilbert and Gubar quote Richard Chase and add that it was not primarily coarseness and sexuality that was shocking but its “refusal to accept the forms, customs, and standards of society – in short its rebellious feminism.”¹⁸⁰ Charlotte (not only) here “opened her eyes to female realities within her and around her: confinement, orphanhood, starvation, rage even to madness”¹⁸¹.

One of the features distinguishing *Jane Eyre* from other works by Bells is that *Jane Eyre* is a Bildungsroman, which means that it describes the life of the main protagonist from her childhood and deals with her development, both physical and intellectual, as she matures. Furthermore, it contains some features of a Gothic novel, for instance the enigmatic atmosphere of Thornfield Hall, the mystery connected with Mr. Rochester’s mad wife, Bertha, and the presence of the supernatural (when Jane hears Mr. Rochester’s voice although they are miles apart). The novel is written in the first person narrative, which makes the feminist tone of the novel even more persuasive. The heroine, who is at the same time the narrator of the story, often addresses the reader, which is rather unusual in the nineteenth-century fiction.

As already pointed out, the works of Currer, Acton and Ellis Bell had been frequently reviewed in the periodicals. Nevertheless, Currer Bell’s novels, especially *Jane Eyre* which caused quite a “sensation” and “*Jane Eyre* fever”¹⁸², have been considered the most noteworthy and attracted a lot of attention. The following quote from an unsigned review shows the appreciation of the reviewer for *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*: “[...] *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* are not things to be forgotten. The works of Currer Bell is a great performance; that of Ellis Bell is only a promise, but it is a colossal one.”¹⁸³ It is possible, however, that if it had not been for this extraordinary success of and genuine interest in *Jane Eyre* and its author, the other novels by the "Bells" would have never become so popular. The importance of the publication of *Jane Eyre* for the subsequent success of other works by Bells can be very well seen in the following statement: “This lively interest in the Brontës had its beginnings [...] in the immediate and dramatic success of *Jane Eyre* in October 1847, and was

¹⁷⁹ GILBERT, Sandra M.; GUBAR, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic*, s. 338.

¹⁸⁰ GILBERT, Sandra M.; GUBAR, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic*, s. 338.

¹⁸¹ GILBERT, Sandra M.; GUBAR, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic*, s. 336.

¹⁸² NEWMAN, Beth (ed). *Charlotte Brontë: Jane Eyre*, s. 445.

¹⁸³ ALLOT, Miriam. *The Brontës: The Critical Heritage* [online], s. 233. [cit. 10. 2. 2018]. Dostupné z: <<https://books.google.cz/books>>

kept alive during the next two years by the mystery of ‘the Bells’ identity and sex, which was a favourite topic of contemporary literary gossip.”¹⁸⁴

3.3 *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*

“My object in writing the following pages, was not simply to amuse the Reader, neither was it to gratify my own taste, nor yet to ingratiate myself with the Press and the Public: I wished to tell the truth, for truth always conveys its own moral to those who are able to receive it.”¹⁸⁵ These are the words from the author’s Preface to the Second Edition of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* which was first published in 1848 (a year after the first publication of *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë) under the pseudonym Acton Bell. It is, therefore, evident that Anne Brontë in her novels displayed nothing but reality. Yet, many critics criticized her for describing such detestable and unrealistic subjects in her novels.¹⁸⁶

Although received quite favourably, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* has never been as popular and widely read as *Jane Eyre*, and has been considered to be very controversial even for the author’s sister, Charlotte, who refused its republication after Anne’s death. It is not completely clear what reasons she might have had for doing so; some sources state that she might have been jealous of her sister (though there would be no reason for that for Charlotte was, of all the three sisters, always the most admired one), but the more likely option is that she wanted to protect Anne’s reputation (because the discovery that Acton, Currer, and Ellis Bell are in fact women caused quite a scandal because women were not supposed to write in such a way and about such subjects; in fact they were not supposed to write at all). There is also a possibility that Charlotte was ashamed of the parallel between their brother Branwell and the figure of Arthur Huntingdon, who is displayed as a drunkard and debauchee in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. However, she probably considered it (or was, at least, showing consideration for public opinion more than expressing her own) as a very controversial novel and called it “an unfortunate choice of subject”¹⁸⁷ and “an entire mistake”¹⁸⁸.

Although *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* was first published under the pseudonym Acton Bell, it was often being questioned whether the authorship should be attributed to a woman or

¹⁸⁴ ALLOT, Miriam. *The Brontës: The Critical Heritage* [online], Introduction, s. 2. [cit. 10. 2. 2018]. Dostupné z: <<https://books.google.cz/books>>

¹⁸⁵ BRONTË, Anne. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Preface to the Second Edition, s. 13.

¹⁸⁶ See p. 48

¹⁸⁷ ALEXANDER, Christine; SMITH, Margareth. *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*, s. 495.

¹⁸⁸ ALEXANDER, Christine; SMITH, Margareth. *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*, s. 138.

man. To these speculations, Anne reacts with the following words (found in the Preface to the second edition of the novel) which, for those who had doubts, make it pretty clear that the author is rather a woman:

“As little, I should think, can it matter whether the writer so designated is a man, or a woman, as one or two of my critics profess to have discovered. I take the imputation in good part, as a compliment to the just delineation of my female characters; and though I am bound to attribute much of the severity of my censurers to this suspicion, I make no effort to refute it, because, in my own mind, I am satisfied that if a book is a good one, it is so whatever the sex of the author may be. All novels are, or should be, written for both men and women to read, and I am at a loss to conceive how a man should permit himself to write anything that would be really disgraceful to a woman, or why a woman should be censured for writing anything that would be proper and becoming for a man.”¹⁸⁹

This extract is quoted here mainly because each sentence of it contains a lot of feminist attitudes, and reveals the author’s indignation about the fact that “the criteria applied to literary works in order to assess their merit were also affected by the gender or presumed gender of the author at a time when fairly often female authors took masculine pseudonyms.”¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁹ BRONTË, Anne. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Preface to the Second Edition, s. 14-15.

¹⁹⁰ INGHAM, Patricia. *The Brontës*, s. 88.

4 Feminist attitudes in *Jane Eyre* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*

The main objective of this thesis is to point out and analyze the representations of feminist attitudes reflected in *Jane Eyre* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, to explore the themes and motifs characteristic of feminist writings in them, and to make a comparison of the two novels based on such analysis. The reasons these two particular novels have been selected are that they are both concerned with the question of women's equality, and contain many ideals and attitudes that can be interpreted as feminist as well as many themes and motifs that are typical of feminist writings. Furthermore, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and her other works have been understood as "[...] novels of protest against the social prescriptions that limited women's behaviour and opportunities in the Victorian era"¹⁹¹ and Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* as "[...] a novel of startling modernity in its bold treatment of the issue of women's equality [...]"¹⁹²

The authors' approach and their feminist attitudes are very well reflected in the tone of their writing and it can be certainly said that they as well identify themselves with the heroines through whom they express such attitudes. However, it is far more evident in Charlotte Brontë's case; *Jane Eyre*, obviously, is an epitome of Charlotte and in her impassioned speeches, mental processes, and in her actions, the reader can see Charlotte's passion, determination, self-esteem, and her desires. Although Anne Brontë does project her opinions and ideals into her writing through her heroines, it seems that her heroines are far less "real" and passionate than Charlotte's; nevertheless, it is certainly a truthful declaration that she managed to portray a very accurate image of the negative aspects of the patriarchal society in her novels, especially in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* where she described terrifying consequences of unhappy marriage of the heroine who married a man "destitute of principle, and prone to every vice that is common to youth"¹⁹³ and of alcoholism, and depicted scenes that must have been, undoubtedly, scandalous and shocking for the Victorian readers. Despite the fact that Anne Brontë's novels lack the passion and imagination that her sisters' novels have been admired for, her two novels, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and *Agnes Grey*, provide the most accurate description of the social issues of the times¹⁹⁴.

In chapter 1.2.1 of the thesis, some examples of the questions that a feminist critic asks when analyzing a literary work from the feminist perspective have been presented. Therefore,

¹⁹¹ ALEXANDER, Christine; SMITH, Margareth. *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*, s. 187.

¹⁹² BRONTË, Anne. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Cover.

¹⁹³ BRONTË, Anne. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, s. 114 (Chapter 16).

¹⁹⁴ STRÍBRNÝ, Zdeněk. *Dějiny anglické literatury 2*, s. 476.

when analyzing *Jane Eyre* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, we focused on the following questions: How does the novel criticize patriarchal ideology? How are women portrayed? What is the author's conception of a heroine? What is the author's conception of female and male characters? Is female creativity and artistry one of the themes? What representations of feminist attitudes can be seen in the author's approach? What is known about authors themselves and about the position of women in the times when the novels were written?¹⁹⁵ Nevertheless, attention has been paid not only to the questions stated above but also to the critical reception of the work and particular motifs and themes that feminist writings are characterized by, such as the motif of imprisonment and escape, equality and independence, and female artistry and creativity (amongst others), all of them being reflected in both *Jane Eyre* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*.

The quote presented below supports the notion that *Jane Eyre*, in fact, is a "feminist novel" and contains many motifs and themes typical of such a novel (enclosure and escape, difficult position of women in the patriarchal society, oppression, and madness):

Jane Eyre "is a story of enclosure and escape, a distinctively female *Bildungsroman* in which the problems encountered by the protagonist as she struggles from the imprisonment of her childhood toward an almost unthinkable goal of mature freedom are symptomatic of difficulties Everywoman in a patriarchal society must meet and overcome: oppression (at Gateshead), starvation (at Lowood), madness (at Thornfield), and coldness (at Marsh End)."¹⁹⁶

In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* Anne Brontë's "determination [...] to defend a married woman's rights and to present an argument for moral equality between the sexes [...]" can be seen. "Here was a challenge to the concept of the dutiful Victorian wife in the unconventional behaviour of a woman who believed in her right to think and act according to her conscience, unendorsed by the law. In 1848, a wife had no legal rights to her children or to her property."¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁵ See chapter 1.2.1

¹⁹⁶ GILBERT, Sandra M.; GUBAR, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic*, s. 339.

¹⁹⁷ ALEXANDER, Christine; SMITH, Margareth. *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*, s. 502.

4.1 Motifs and themes

As already pointed out in chapter 1.4 which provides the general presentation of the motifs and themes peculiar to feminist writings, the literary works with an apparent presence of feminist thinking often deal with similar subjects and include the same motifs and themes, for instance addressing the subject of women's equality and independence, heroine's rebellion against conventions dictating male superiority and female submissiveness, the motif of imprisonment and escape, portrayal of an unhappy marriage as a form of imprisonment, female artistry and creativity, portrayal of a heroine as an artist, and female sexuality and madness. It is important to note that all of the aspects mentioned above are plentifully represented in both of the analyzed novels.

4.1.1 Women's equality and independence

The most important aspect which makes a literary work feminist is its addressing the subject of women's equality and independence, and focus on the question of the female position in the society. Both *Jane Eyre* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* contain many comments on equality, independence, and liberty ("I desired liberty; for liberty I gasped; for liberty I uttered a prayer."¹⁹⁸), and express a certain rebellion against male dominance. Charlotte Brontë's and "Anne [Brontë]'s novels depict women bent on some independence"¹⁹⁹ and as the following quote indicates, their heroines are portrayed as free human beings with an independent will: "I am no bird; and no net ensnares me; I am a free human being with an independent will."²⁰⁰

In the times of the Brontë sisters, women were limited to the domestic sphere and were generally regarded as passive, submissive, irrational creatures whose only objective was to be accomplished and to find themselves a husband to whom they would be "agreeable companions"²⁰¹. Charlotte Brontë in her *Jane Eyre* challenges such stereotypes and reinforces the possibility that women can "do more and learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex" and can be as equally passionate, creative, intelligent, and rational as

¹⁹⁸ BRONTË, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. 1994, s. 87 (Chapter 10).

¹⁹⁹ INGHAM, Patricia. *The Brontë*, s. 129.

²⁰⁰ BRONTË, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. 1966, s. 282 (Chapter 23).

²⁰¹ an allusion to Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* - see p. 14

men, and that they need to have some excitement and adventure in their rather monotonous and passive lives:

“It is in vain to say human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquillity: they must have action; and they will make it if they cannot find it. Millions are condemned to a stiller doom than mine, and millions are in silent revolt against their lot. [...] Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex.”²⁰²

In the following passage from *Jane Eyre*, another example of the heroine’s (or author’s if you like) comments on equality is represented.

“I tell you I must go!’ I retorted, roused to do something like passion. ‘Do you think I am an automaton?- a machine without feelings? And can bear to have my morsel of bread snatched from my lips, and my drop of living water dashed from my cup? Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong! – I have as much soul as you – and full as much heart! And if God had gifted me with some beauty and much wealth, I should have made it as hard for you to leave me, as it is now for me to leave you. I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, nor even of mortal flesh: it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God’s feet, equal – as we are!’”²⁰³

Anne Brontë in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* through her heroine, Helen Graham, often criticizes the irrational differences in the education of girls and boys²⁰⁴. Although women living in the nineteenth century were not supposed to be involved in serious debates on various subjects, Helen Graham is often engaged in such debates. During one of their first

²⁰² BRONTË, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. 1994, s. 111 (Chapter 12).

²⁰³ BRONTË, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. 1994, s. 251 (Chapter 23).

²⁰⁴ See p. 26

conversations, Helen Graham and Gilbert Markham get into arguments regarding their different opinions on upbringing boys and girls. Gilbert criticizes Helen's methods of raising her son and claims:

“[...]‘I only say that it is better to arm and strengthen your hero, than to disarm and enfeeble the foe; - and if you were to rear an oak sapling in a hothouse, tending it carefully night and day, and shielding it from every breath of wind, you could not expect it to become a hardy tree, like that which has grown up on the mountain side, exposed to all the action of the elements, and not even sheltered from the shock of the tempest.’”²⁰⁵

Helen asks if he would use the same argument with regard to a girl, to which he replies that “certainly not”. This is her reaction to his answer: “No; you would have her to be tenderly and delicately nurtured, like a hot-house plant – taught to cling to others for direction and support, and guarded, as much as possible, from the very knowledge of evil. But will you be so good as to inform me why you make this distinction? Is it that you think she has no virtue?”²⁰⁶ Another similar example of the heroine's comments on equality is as follows: “You would have us encourage our sons to prove all things by their own experience, while our daughters must not even profit by the experience of others.”²⁰⁷

Since this subchapter deals with independence and emancipation, it would be convenient to mention Helen Huntingdon's decision to change her name to Helen Graham. It would be shocking in those times if a woman decided to leave her husband (not to mention that it would be probably illegal); the heroine, therefore, had no other choice than to escape from him with her son and pretend to be a widow because widows were treated with respect in those times. However, this change of name certainly has more symbolic significance because it was not only her way how to conceal herself, but it can be as well understood as a symbol of breaking free from the male dominance and negative influence of her patriarchal husband.

In both *Jane Eyre* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* a fortunate and unexpected situation that brings independence for the heroine occurs. Jane Eyre inherits a great fortune from her uncle and is, therefore, financially independent. Arthur Huntingdon dies and Helen no longer has to conceal herself and is free to marry Mr. Markham.

²⁰⁵ BRONTË, Anne. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, s. 34 (Chapter 3).

²⁰⁶ BRONTË, Anne. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, s. 34 (Chapter 3).

²⁰⁷ BRONTË, Anne. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, s. 35 (Chapter 3).

4.1.2 Imprisonment and escape

The motif of imprisonment and escape is a very significant aspect that often appears in the works with presence of feminist thinking. As already pointed out in chapter 1.3, it usually does not refer to the actual imprisonment but it is mostly only metaphorical. It is interesting to note that this presence of the motif of imprisonment and escape in feminist writings apparently results from the all-pervasive “feeling of enclosure in feminine roles and patriarchal houses” and “passionate desire to flee such roles or houses”²⁰⁸ which the nineteenth-century female writers projected into their writings.

Jane Eyre is imprisoned in the house of her aunt, Mrs. Reed (once, she is locked in the Red room, which is a very traumatic incident for her), then in Lowood, and then in the repetitiveness and monotony of her life at Thornfield Hall, which changes with the arrival of Mr. Rochester. She escapes from Mr. Rochester after she finds out that he is married and his mad wife is living at Thornfield. She does not want to leave, but it would be against her best judgment to stay. The following quote expresses Jane’s determination to escape from Mr. Rochester regardless her feelings or future, and her resolution to do what she believes is morally right although she knows that it would break her heart; her moral sense, self-respect, and dignity are stronger than the vision of happiness and comfort:

“I care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself. I will keep the law given by God; sanctioned by man. I will hold to the principles received by me when I was sane, and not mad – as I am now. Laws and principles are not for times when there is no temptation: they are for such moments as this, when body and soul rise in mutiny against their rigour; stringent are they; inviolate they shall be.”²⁰⁹

Jane also feels imprisoned and oppressed by dominant St. John Rivers as suggested in the following quote: “As for me, I daily wished more to please him [St. John]; but to do so, I felt daily more and more that I must disown half my nature, stifle half my faculties, wrest my tastes from their original bent, force myself to the adoption of pursuits for which I had no natural vocation.”²¹⁰ Later, she escapes from him and returns back to Mr. Rochester.

Another important example of the motif of imprisonment and escape represented in *Jane Eyre* is the imprisonment of Mr. Rochester’s mad wife, Bertha, in the room in the attic

²⁰⁸ GILBERT, Sandra M.; GUBAR, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic*, s. 313.

²⁰⁹ BRONTË, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. 1994, s. 314 (Chapter 27).

²¹⁰ BRONTË, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. 1994, s. 394 (Chapter 34).

and her repeated attempts to escape from there. Although the imprisonment is usually only a metaphor for the powerlessness and subordinate position of women, in this case it can be understood both literally and figuratively. Mr. Rochester's unhappy marriage and his hopelessness resulting from this situation can be, in fact, understood as a form of imprisonment as well.

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall as well contains many examples of the motif of enclosure and escape. Helen Huntingdon is imprisoned in her marriage with a depraved man and decides to escape from him with her son to prevent him from the bad influence of his father. Despite freeing herself from the "bondage" of her unfortunate marriage, the feeling of enclosure remains for she still feels imprisoned at Wildfell Hall and becomes a victim of gossips, and later she also escapes from Wildfell Hall and from Mr. Markham.

An unhappy marriage, which is one of the themes that appears frequently in feminist writings, can be in fact understood as a form of imprisonment. In both *Jane Eyre* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, an unhappy marriage is displayed; however, whereas *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* describes suffering of the heroine resulting from such a marriage, in *Jane Eyre* it is not the heroine who suffers from consequences of a bad marriage but Mr. Rochester.

Both the heroines also feel imprisoned in their feminine roles and feel trapped in their passive and monotonous lives and in their limited opportunities as it is evident in the following passage from *Jane Eyre*:

“Then I longed for a power of vision which might overpass that limit; which might reach the busy world, towns, regions full of life I had heard of but never seen: that then I desired more of practical experience than I possessed; more of intercourse with my kind, of acquaintance with variety of character than was here within my reach. I valued what was good in Mrs Fairfax and what was good in Adele; but I believed in the existence of other and more vivid kinds of goodness, and what I believed in I wished to behold.”²¹¹

4.1.3 Female artistry and creativity

The nineteenth-century women were not encouraged to become artists and their potential and creativity were suppressed as they were limited to the domestic sphere. Both Charlotte and Anne Brontë were artists, both writers and painters, and included the motif of

²¹¹ BRONTË, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. 1966, s. 140-141 (Chapter 12).

female artistry and creativity into their works. Portrayal of a heroine as an artist is one of the examples of the demonstration of feminist thinking in a piece of writing. On one hand, it manifests the female author's discontent with the fact that women were not allowed to break through as artists and if they wanted to present their work of art to the world, they had to conceal their female identities and adopt male pseudonyms; on the other hand, female artistry and creativity can be understood as a form of setting women free from the male dominance²¹².

Both Jane Eyre and Helen Graham are depicted as painters and Helen even sells some of her paintings (under male pseudonym) to earn some money. Anne Brontë in her *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* "describes a woman's escape from the prisonhouse of a bad marriage, and her subsequent attempts to achieve independence by establishing herself in a career as an artist."²¹³ "*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is unique in Victorian literature in having a woman artist as heroine. Helen Huntingdon's work as a painter exemplifies women's disadvantages in the art field in her lack of professional training and need for a male representative to market her work."²¹⁴

4.1.4 Female sexuality and madness

"[...] The Victorian period has long been identified with sexual repression [...]"²¹⁵ and there was this general idea that "women have little or no sexual feelings"²¹⁶. Furthermore, "[...] Victorians frequently associated expressions of female sexuality with madness."²¹⁷ It is necessary, however, to put the emphasis on the words "women" and "female" in the previous statements for the same apparently did not apply for men for whom it was more natural to express their sexuality. Despite the fact that sexuality was seen as something rather inappropriate (women were even warned not to be too attractive - for instance Helen Graham's aunt warns Helen that "beauty is that quality which, next to money, is generally most attractive to the worst kinds of men"²¹⁸), Christine Alexander and Margaret Smith point out that many "mid-Victorian writers represented sexual matters with surprising frankness, though their methods were often metaphorically suggestive or euphemistic."²¹⁹

²¹² See p. 27

²¹³ GILBERT, Sandra M.; GUBAR, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic*, s. 80.

²¹⁴ ALEXANDER, Christine; SMITH, Margareth. *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*, s. 23.

²¹⁵ ALEXANDER, Christine; SMITH, Margareth. *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*, s. 457.

²¹⁶ NEWMAN, Beth (Edited by). *Charlotte Brontë: Jane Eyre*, s. 10.

²¹⁷ ALEXANDER, Christine; SMITH, Margareth. *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*, s. 458.

²¹⁸ BRONTË, Anne. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, s. 110 (Chapter 16).

²¹⁹ ALEXANDER, Christine; SMITH, Margareth. *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*, s. 457.

As already suggested, women felt trapped and imprisoned because of their limited opportunities and felt hopeless because their potential and creativity was suppressed as well as their sexuality. Female madness was sometimes explained as a consequence of this suppression and powerlessness. A very interesting theme of madness and sexuality is included in *Jane Eyre*. Bertha Mason, whose “demonic sexuality [...], physical strength and determination are markedly in contrast to prevailing notions of feminine delicacy and compliancy”²²⁰, can be in fact understood as Jane’s “truest and darkest double”²²¹. Bertha represents both the theme of sexuality and madness in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*.

“[Elaine] Showalter describes *Jane Eyre* as a classic feminine novel which combines realistic narrative techniques with symbolic device that Showalter sees as peculiar to women’s literature; for example, the use of spatial metaphors of rooms and houses to represent female sexual and psychosexual experience (the red-room thus signifies menarche, whereas Lowood suggests the repression of female sexual drives and Thornfield allows for the reassertation of the animal aspects of womanhood).”²²²

However, Bertha’s behaviour and her twisted whims that Mr. Rochester describes with a scorn and disgust are not the only representations of the theme of sexuality and madness in *Jane Eyre*. “Both Jane and Rochester speak openly about the strength of their passions; Rochester confesses his sexual transgressions to (of all people) a young unmarried woman [...]”²²³ and Jane Eyre is, undoubtedly, sexually (as well as intellectually) attracted to Mr. Rochester as well. Furthermore, there are presented few moments during which she loses her sanity, for instance when she is imprisoned in the Red Room at Gateshead. In *The Tenant of the Wildfell Hall*, the theme of sexuality is represented more overtly and more frequently (Arthur Huntingdon’s and Lady Anabella Lowborough’s adulteries). The motif of female madness is not included in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*; however it can be said that Arthur Huntingdon’s behaviour can be sometimes seen as a state of madness, therefore male madness is included.

²²⁰ GILBERT, Sandra M.; GUBAR, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic*, s. 463.

²²¹ GILBERT, Sandra M.; GUBAR, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic*, s. 360.

²²² ALEXANDER, Christine; SMITH, Margareth. *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*, s. 188.

²²³ NEWMAN, Beth (ed). *Charlotte Brontë: Jane Eyre*, s. 447.

4.1.5 The author's conception of female and male characters

Both *Jane Eyre* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* introduce many interesting and diverse characters, both female and male. The heroines, Jane Eyre and Helen Graham, are independent and self-sufficient women, and they are often put into considerable contrast with other female characters, who are either typical examples of very submissive women (Helen Burns and Mrs. Fairfax in *Jane Eyre*, Milicent Hargrave-Hattersley in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*) and are, therefore, to be looked upon with pity and sometimes with derision, or cruel or depraved women deserving nothing but contempt (Blanche Ingram, Mrs. Reed, and Bertha Mason-Rochester in *Jane Eyre*, lady Annabella Wilmot-Lowborough, and Eliza Millward in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*). Male characters are often portrayed as patriarchal figures (Mr. Brocklehurst and St. John Rivers in *Jane Eyre*, Arthur Huntingdon and Mr. Hattersley in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*) and they treat women as inferior and do not show them much respect.

The most significant submissive female characters in *Jane Eyre* are Helen Burns and Mrs. Fairfax. Helen Burns, based on Charlotte Brontë's eldest sister, Maria, who was treated very badly at Cowan Bridge School (depicted as Lowood in *Jane Eyre*) and subsequently died of tuberculosis, was Jane's only friend. Jane could not, however, understand her submissiveness and was very irritated by her endurance and obedience. Her anger and indignation is very well reflected in the following passage describing Jane's feelings when Helen was punished by Miss Scatcherd and had to have the word "Slattern" bound round her forehead:

“The moment Miss Scatcherd withdrew, after afternoon school, I ran to Helen, tore it off, and thrust it into the fire. The fury of which she was incapable had been burning in my soul all day, and tears, hot and large, had continually been scalding my cheek; for the spectacle of her sad resignation gave me an intolerable pain at the heart.”²²⁴

Although Helen Burns withstands everything with such humility, Jane feels all the anger that Helen is incapable of for her and declares: “I heard her [Helen] with wonder: I could not comprehend this doctrine of endurance; and still less could I understand or sympathize with the forbearance she expressed for her chastiser.”²²⁵ She was, as she herself claims, “no Helen

²²⁴ BRONTË, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. 1994, s. 77 (Chapter 8).

²²⁵ BRONTË, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. 1994, s. 58 (Chapter 6).

Burns”²²⁶. Mrs. Fairfax is a typical example of a domestic, narrow-minded, and passive woman: “She [Mrs. Fairfax] was occupied in knitting; a large cat sat demurely at her feet; nothing, in short, was wanting to complete the beau-ideal of domestic comfort.”²²⁷

Milicent Hargrave-Hattersley, Helen Graham’s friend, is probably the most distinctive female submissive character in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. However, it can be certainly said that Helen herself used to be a submissive wife to her husband as well but her character develops and she becomes an independent woman who “[...] refuses the gender role dictated to her by her culture, insists on her status as a professional painter, [...] and challenges the economic subordination of wives”²²⁸.

As already mentioned in chapter 1.4, the male characters are often associated with unpleasant motifs such as violence, adultery, bigamy and alcoholism, and some of them are displayed in a very negative way. Mr. Rochester is one to be blamed for bigamy, Arthur Huntingdon for alcoholism, adultery, and violence, and even Gilbert Markham is sometimes depicted as a violent and possessive man who does not show much respect to some women. It is interesting to note that “*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and also *Wuthering Heights* reveal the disastrous consequences of the imbalance of power that results from separate spheres. Both give accounts of unfettered male dominance resulting in aggression, mental cruelty, and violence.”²²⁹

Mr. Rochester, although depicted as an unpredictable man, always treats Jane as his equal and claims “only such superiority as must result from twenty years difference in age and a century’s advance in experience”²³⁰. On the other hand, he does not show any respect to women whom he finds irrational and foolish and therefore not deserving of his respect (for instance Blanche Ingram, Mrs. Fairfax, Adèle Vareuse, or Bertha Mason). Gilbert Markham treats other women rather as inferior and sometimes even with a scorn. The only exception is his treatment of Helen – it seems that she has a great power over him and she appears not only equal to him but even superior. Although he is the hero of the story and is, therefore, depicted in a rather positive way, he also represents some negative aspects of masculine dominance; not knowing that Mr. Lawrence is in fact Helen’s brother and believing that he and Helen are lovers, he attacks him and injures him.

²²⁶ BRONTË, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. 1994, s. 68. “I was no Helen Burns”

²²⁷ BRONTË, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. 1994, s. 97 (Chapter 11).

²²⁸ CARNELL, Rachel K. *Feminism and the Public Sphere in Anne Brontë’s The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, s. 23.

²²⁹ INGHAM, Patricia. *The Brontës*, s. 152.

²³⁰ BRONTË, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. 1966, s. 164 (Chapter 14).

In both *Jane Eyre* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, many male characters that can be understood as symbols of masculine domination are displayed. In *Jane Eyre*, it is primarily Mr. Brocklehurst and St. John Rivers. The latter, although he is a principled man, represents a very strong patriarchal figure. In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Arthur Huntingdon and Mr. Hattersly are the most distinctive patriarchal figures.

4.2 The heroines

The heroines of the novels with presence of feminist thinking usually stand out amongst other female characters, and the same applies for the heroines of the two selected novels, *Jane Eyre* and *Helen Graham*. Hardly any other female character comparable to Helen Graham can be found in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*; however, in *Jane Eyre* two other female characters, Mary and Diana Rivers (who are, most likely, embodiments of Charlotte Brontë's two sisters, Emily and Anne), who are easily comparable to Jane regarding their qualities, intellect, and character, can be found. Although Jane and Helen differ in many ways (social status, age, family background, appearance), they share the same characteristics and ideals. Both are principled, rational, strong women who do not lack self-respect and self-esteem, and who always say their opinion on various subjects regardless the conventionalities and who seek for independence and self-assertion.

4.2.1 Jane Eyre

“[Charlotte Brontë] once told her sisters that they were wrong – even morally wrong – in making their heroines beautiful as a matter of course. They replied that it was impossible to make a heroine interesting on any other terms. Her answer was, ‘I will prove to you that you are wrong; I will show you a heroine as plain and small as myself, who shall be as interesting as any of yours’.”²³¹

And she did prove them wrong. Not only that she presented a heroine who was as interesting as any other heroine but she created a heroine, a female model role, who was, we dare say, far more interesting. Helen Moglene argues that “paradoxically, in freeing *Jane Eyre* from the

²³¹ GASKELL, Elizabeth. *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* [online], s. 215-216. [cit. 10. 9. 2017]. Dostupné z: <<https://archive.org/stream/lifecharlottebr00unkngoog#page/n10/mode/2up>>

conventional trappings of femininity and granting her liberty to feel and express her feelings, to think and express her thoughts, in asserting her 'humanness', Charlotte Brontë created the first 'antiheroine'.²³²

4.2.2 Helen Graham (Huntingdon)

Before analyzing the heroine herself, attention should be paid to her name. Even though she is a married woman and her real name is Helen Huntingdon, she pretends to be a widow and adopts her mother's maiden name, Graham. However, it is the character of Helen Graham which should be analyzed as for she is the real, and we can say "feminist", heroine. Before and during her marriage to Arthur Huntingdon she was rather submissive and not as assertive as she was after her decision to leave him, thus it can be said that her character developed a lot. This change of name is a very significant example of a feminist attitude for it can be in fact understood as a protest against the male domination and symbol of setting free from it.

"[...] [Anne Brontë] allows her heroine, Helen Huntingdon, to speak out in the manner of the exceptional eighteenth-century woman writer and to make broad claims about nature, culture, and education."²³³ "Helen represents a woman who, within the confines of her inner narrative, refuses the gender role dictated to her by her culture, insists on her status as a professional painter, pursues an affective and humanistic bond between herself and her loyal servant Rachel, and challenges the economic subordination of wives."²³⁴

4.3 The comparison of *Jane Eyre* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*

Charlotte Brontë was a very remarkable, and to some extent unconventional, woman, indeed, and introduced one of the greatest novels ever written as well as one of the most admired heroines in British literature. In her *Jane Eyre*, she presented a heroine, "plain, obscure, and little", with no family and no fortune, but, more importantly, with self-respect and passion, which was something that neither the author nor the heroine would be able to live without. However, despite her progressive and we could say even revolutionary ideals

²³² MOGLEN, Helene. *Charlotte Brontë - The Self Conceived* [online], s. 106. [cit. 14. 9. 2017]. Dostupné z: <<https://books.google.cz/books>>

²³³ CARNELL, Rachel K. *Feminism and the Public Sphere in Anne Brontë's The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, s. 10.

²³⁴ CARNELL, Rachel K. *Feminism and the Public Sphere in Anne Brontë's The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, s. 23.

regarding the women's equality, and position and roles of women that she projected into her works, it would be, according to Melissa Lowes, "an insufferable misrepresentation"²³⁵ to refer to Charlotte Brontë as a feminist. To explain such a statement Lowes points to the difference between George Sand²³⁶, who "by appearance and her standard of living epitomized the nineteenth-century feminist"²³⁷, and Charlotte, who expressed her "feminist ideals" solely on the paper.

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* has been regarded as one of the masterpieces of British literature; Anne Brontë's novels, however, have never been as widely read as the works of her sisters. Indeed, Anne is the least known of the Brontë sisters and has often been overlooked. A critic once wrote of her *Agnes Grey* that it "leaves no impression at all"²³⁸. Nevertheless, her *Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is often said to be the first sustained feminist novel and although it has never been as popular and admired as *Jane Eyre*, or Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, it is unique and praised for its "bold treatment of women's equality"²³⁹ and accurate portrayal of the gender roles and social issues of the times.

Although the authors of the selected novels were sisters, each of the novels is different in many aspects, which undoubtedly mirrors different personal traits and dispositions of the two sisters. However, many similar features, one of them being the presence of feminist attitudes, can be found in both of the novels. Another similar aspect is that both Charlotte and Anne Brontë drew inspiration for their works from their own experience and many of their characters are based on people they actually knew. For instance, Arthur Huntingdon, who is displayed as a patriarch and debauchee in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, is, most likely, based on their brother Branwell.

Virginia Woolf in her extensive feminist essay *A Room of One's Own* claims that Charlotte Brontë "had been starved of her proper due of experience – she had been made to stagnate in a parsonage mending stockings when she wanted to wonder free over the world. Her imagination swerved from indignation [...]"²⁴⁰. All this anger that she felt is projected into Charlotte's writing – through *Jane Eyre* and her other heroines she was expressing her indignation and rage, but also passion and courage. Anne Brontë was different than her sister.

²³⁵ LOWES, Melissa. *Charlotte Brontë: A Modern Woman* [online] Last modified 15 February 2008 [cit. 20. 4. 2017]. Dostupné z: <<http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/bronte/cbronte/lowes1.html>>

²³⁶ George Sand was a feminist and one of the most significant French female writers of the nineteenth century

²³⁷ LOWES, cit. 239.

²³⁸ ALLOTT, Miriam. *The Brontës: The Critical Heritage* [online], s. 233. [cit. 11. 12. 2017]. Dostupné z: <<https://books.google.cz/books>>

²³⁹ BRONTË, Anne. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Cover.

²⁴⁰ WOOLF, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*, s. 61.

It seems that her main objective was to tell the truth²⁴¹ and to portray, very often displeasing, reality. However, her novels are often said to lack the passion that was so typical of Charlotte's writing. Although Anne Brontë certainly shows an accurate portrayal of the negative aspects of the society (which was in all aspects patriarchal), Charlotte shows much more passion, imagery, and imagination in her novels.

Nevertheless, the aim of this thesis is not to draw a comparison between the two sisters (however, it is necessary to pay at least a little attention to it for their personality is mirrored in their works) but to compare the two novels, one by the most and the other by the least known of the Brontë sisters. Both the novels contain a considerable amount of attitudes that are nowadays understood as feminist and the main object of this thesis is to point out and analyze such attitudes, and to find both similar and different aspects regarding the feminist attitudes in the two novels. Both *Jane Eyre* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* are concerned with the subject of women's equality and independence, and both heroines are strong, self-sufficient, and rational women, who seek independence and show a certain degree of rebelliousness. It is evident that the authors themselves are concerned and dissatisfied with the question of the female position in the society, and express their own revolt against patriarchalism through their heroines. Both *Jane Eyre* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* are full of female rebellion against the stereotypes regarding the position of women and revolt against the patriarchal society, and deal with themes and motifs such as imprisonment and escape, unhappy marriage, oppression of women, female equality and independence, female artistry and creativity, female sexuality and, as far as *Jane Eyre* is concerned, also with madness, which are features characteristic of feminist writing.

As already pointed out, one of the characteristic features of feminist writings is the presence of the motif of enclosure (metaphorically speaking) and escape (from the "stifling enclosures of patriarchy"²⁴²), and it is, obviously, represented plentifully in both *Jane Eyre* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Let us begin with the letter for it can be said that in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* we can find only two most important enclosures and escapes. The first one is Helen's imprisonment in a very bad marriage and her consequent escape from her husband, and the second one is her imprisonment in Wildfell Hall (she feels trapped there, she is a victim of gossips) and her escape from there. In *Jane Eyre*, more of the motifs of imprisonment and escape can be found – imprisonment in the Red Room (at Gateshead), then in Lowood, then in her monotonous life at Thornfield, and finally her feeling of constraint

²⁴¹ See p. 53

²⁴² GILBERT, Sandra M.; GUBAR, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic*, s. 333.

under the patriarchal dominance of St. John Rivers, and her escape from Mr. Rochester after she finds out that he is already married and later her escape from St. John Rivers and her return, as an independent woman, to Mr. Rochester.

Both of the novels are written in the first-person narrative; however, the narrator of the former is the main character herself while the narrator of the latter is a man, Gilbert Markham. The feminist tone of *Jane Eyre* is, therefore, more persuasive, which is caused by the fact that heroine is the main protagonist and her female voice is very strong here. In *The Tenant* it is Gilbert Markham's voice that is stronger because the story begins with his letters to his friend (and at the same time brother-in-law) and the reader gets to know Helen's story through her diary that she shows to Mr. Markham. *Jane Eyre* is a bildungsroman whilst *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is inspired by Samuel Richardson's epistolary novels. Therefore, the development of Jane's character can be observed from her childhood whilst Helen's story happens to be known to the reader after she shows her diary to Mr. Markham.

Another difference is that in *Jane Eyre*, a bad marriage of the main male character is described whereas in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, it is the heroine who suffers from the consequences of marrying the man who destroys himself and his family with his alcoholism and debauchery. Depiction of consequences of a bad marriage is one of the typical features of feminist writings. Nevertheless, both of the novels end with a happy marriage. "In all her novels, she [Charlotte] equivocates finally on the question of male-female equality in a marriage."²⁴³ It is interesting that *Jane Eyre* ends with the words "Reader I married him" (not he married me) and the same applies for *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* which ends with a happy marriage of Helen and Gilbert Markham.

Rachel K. Carnell in her essay on feminism in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* states that *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is a "powerful woman's story" with a "male-centred ending"²⁴⁴. *Jane Eyre* is, we dare say, entirely a "powerful female-centred story". Furthermore, Mr. Rochester's wound and his dependence on Jane clearly supports the feminist tone of the story – Jane becomes a financially independent woman and freely chooses to marry Mr. Rochester.

Jane and Helen, the heroines of the two analyzed novels, are very different in a certain way; yet do share the same qualities. They are principled, religious, intelligent, rational, and self-sufficient women who seek the independence and both of them are displayed as artists. Regardless of the conventions, they make their own decisions and are very decisive in

²⁴³ INGHAM, Patricia. *The Brontës*, s. 154.

²⁴⁴ CARNELL, Rachel K. *Feminism and the Public Sphere in Anne Brontë's The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, s. 6.

expressing their opinions on various subjects. These characteristics both Jane and Helen have in common, but what is different is their social status, age, and their appearance. Jane is an orphan and a governess with no means (although morally and intellectually equal to Mr. Rochester, Jane is aware of their inequality regarding their social status and position); Helen is a widow (though she is not actually a widow), she is more independent, she is older therefore more experienced. Helen is described as a very pretty and attractive woman; Charlotte, on the other hand, depicted Jane as small, plain, and not possessing almost any beauty. Yet, Jane is, amongst the readers, one of the most admired heroines and remarkable characters of all the times – for her moral strength, self-respect, and dignity (despite the fact that she was many times treated as an inferior by her aunt Mrs. Reed, then in Lowood, and then by Blanche Ingram).

Despite their different social status, Rochester and Jane appear to be equal to the reader. He never treats her as an inferior and asserts that “I claim only such superiority as must result from twenty years difference in age and a century’s advance in experience”²⁴⁵, and she feels as if he were her relative rather than her master. Helen and Gilbert have a completely different relationship than Jane and Rochester. There is no significant difference between them considering their social position. Helen pretends to be a widow and widows were treated with respect in those times, which makes her appear even superior to Gilbert. Besides, the fact that he has fallen in love with her and admires her gives her a great power over him.

Although *Jane Eyre* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* deal with the same subjects and contain many identical motifs and themes, a few differences should be pointed to. In Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, the theme of female madness is represented and the author, through the heroine, also makes allusions to the Orient and slavery, which is not reflected in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. On the other hand, having changed the name of the heroine of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* from Helen Huntingdon to Helen Graham, Anne Brontë introduced a very interesting manifestation of protest against the male dominance and set the heroine free from the influence of her patriarchal husband.

It is interesting to note that Charlotte Brontë in *Jane Eyre* often refers to the orient and makes allusions to slavery (and harem - polygamy), which can be undoubtedly regarded as a manifestation of feminist thinking. These allusions to orient, on one hand, symbolize her need of escape to a distant country, and on the other hand express her disapproval of the poor treatment of women:

²⁴⁵ BRONTË, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. 1966, s. 164 (Chapter 14).

“I’ll be preparing myself to go out as a missionary to preach liberty to them that are enslaved - your harem inmates amongst the rest. I’ll get admitted there, and I’ll stir up mutiny; and you, three-tailed bashaw as you are, sir, shall in a trice find yourself fettered amongst our hands: nor will I, for one, consent to cut your bonds till you have signed a charter, the most liberal that despot ever yet conferred.”²⁴⁶

To conclude this chapter, let us pay a little attention to the critical reception of the two selected novels. As far as *Jane Eyre* is concerned “[...] there was general agreement about the new writer’s [Currer Bell] ‘extraordinary freshness and originality’. The phrase is taken from the review of *Jane Eyre* in the *Church of England Quarterly* for April 1848, which broke its rule never to review novels, because this one was so enthralling and had created such a powerful impression in the six months since its appearance.”²⁴⁷ Anne Brontë’s two novels, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and *Agnes Grey*, have never been as widely reviewed and read as Charlotte’s novels and Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*, and were not received with such an enthusiasm. Nonetheless, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is a very remarkable novel and “its bold treatment of the subject of women’s equality, at a time when convention dictated submissiveness, meant that it has often been hailed as the first sustained feminist novel”²⁴⁸.

²⁴⁶ BRONTË, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. 1966, s. 297-298 (Chapter 24).

²⁴⁷ ALLOTT, Miriam. *The Brontës: The Critical Heritage* [online], Introduction, s. 22. [cit. 10.2.2018]. Dostupné z: Dostupné z: <<https://books.google.cz/books>>

²⁴⁸ BRONTË Anne. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Introduction.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that women living in the nineteenth century were limited to the domestic sphere, suffered from the lack of educational and professional opportunities, and were not supposed to become professional writers or artists, the nineteenth century saw many significant female novelists whose works express their rebellion against such stereotypes and their discontent with the subordinate position of women, and who can be, therefore, nowadays regarded as "feminists". The Brontë sisters are, apparently, the most known of them. The novels by the Brontë sisters certainly offer an accurate portrayal of the gender roles and social issues of the Victorian England, show the authors' concern with the question of women's equality, and challenge the notion that women are irrational and passive human beings whose main aim in their lives is to be good, which means submissive, wives to their husbands. All of the novels by the Brontë sisters, therefore, provide a lively field for the feminist analysis and have been subjects of interest for Feminist literary criticism.

“Across the historical expanse of the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries many women could have stood as pioneers of ‘protofeminism’: writers and activists whose thinking, writing and ‘living’ challenged the tenets of patriarchal social organization and questioned the prescriptive norms of gender. In Britain writers such as Mary Shelley, Maria Edgeworth, Charlotte Brontë, Mrs. Gaskell and George Eliot produced unconventional texts – and in some cases lived unconventional lives.”²⁴⁹

The statement presented above suggests that in the previous centuries there were many female writers, one of them being Charlotte Brontë, whose works contain a lot of attitudes that can be nowadays interpreted as feminist. However, this thesis, although containing many references to and comments on other works by the seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth-century female writers, deals primarily with *Jane Eyre*, written by the most admired of the Brontë sisters, and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, written by the "third sister" who is often being neglected. Despite the fact that *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* by Anne Brontë are very different in a certain way, both the novels deal with the same subjects and themes and contain many representations of feminist attitudes. Both the authors are concerned with the female position and roles of women in the

²⁴⁹ PLAIN, Gill; SELLERS, Susan (ed). *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism*, Introduction, s. 7.

patriarchal society and focus on the question of women's equality and independence. Although there are certain disparities between the two heroines (with regard to their age, experience, appearance, and social status), both Jane Eyre and Helen Graham (Huntingdon) are principled, rational, self-sufficient, and we dare say unconventional women who, despite the Victorian stereotypes regarding the roles of women, have an independent will and express their opinions on many subjects without any restraint. Furthermore, by being displayed as artists they refute in those time prevailing opinion that women are not supposed to interfere in the public sphere. The motifs and themes that are characteristic of feminist writing, such as the motif of imprisonment and escape, female artistry and creativity, and female sexuality (among others), are plentifully represented in both *Jane Eyre* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Charlotte Brontë, furthermore, in her *Jane Eyre* included also the theme of female madness and commented on the Orient and slavery, which is not represented in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*.

According to Gilbert and Gubar, "[...] *Jane Eyre*, though rebelliously feminist in its implications, used a sort of fairy tale structure to enable the novelist to conceal even from herself her deepening pessimism about woman's place in man's society."²⁵⁰ It seems that Charlotte wrote her *Jane Eyre* without any previous intention of giving the impression of feminist writing (it seems that it focuses more on the heroine herself and on her development, and self-assertion and self-realization); she probably wanted to express herself – her suppressed desires, her passion and also irritation - through her heroine. Anne Brontë's main objective, however, was to tell the truth and to portray the displeasing reality in which women are oppressed and "imprisoned" in their brothers', fathers' and husbands' houses and their educational and artistic opportunities are limited, as well as to show the consequences of indecent way of life and alcoholism - as a warning to others²⁵¹. Indeed, Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, as well as her *Agnes Grey*, includes "[...] parts that were carefully copied from the life [...]"²⁵² and even though some critics accused her of "extravagant over-colouring"²⁵³, she only spoke the "unpalatable truth"²⁵⁴. Charlotte Brontë, on the other hand, shows much more imagination in her novels and her *Jane Eyre*, especially, has been praised for its passion.

²⁵⁰ GILBERT, Sandra M.; GUBAR, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic*, s. 399.

²⁵¹ See p. 85

²⁵² BRONTË, Anne. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Preface to the Second Edition, s. 13.

²⁵³ BRONTË, Anne. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Preface to the Second Edition, s. 13.

²⁵⁴ BRONTË, Anne. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Preface to the Second Edition, s. 14.

As already pointed out in the previous chapters, the nineteenth century female writers were confronted with many difficulties because there was this general view that “literature cannot be the business of a woman’s life”²⁵⁵. Susan Sellers claims that “a woman writer – though mirroring the anxieties of the age in her often ambivalent or defensive attitude to her role – could indeed play the part of a protofeminist simply by virtue of her decision to write.”²⁵⁶ It is interesting to note, however, that if Charlotte Brontë had not discovered and read Emily Brontë’s remarkable poems behind her back²⁵⁷, it is possible that the three extremely gifted sisters would have never had courage to confess that they occupy themselves with writing and would not have even decided to write novels. Charlotte, furthermore, made a contribution to the publications of all of her and her sister’s works which were first published under the male pseudonyms Currer, Acton and Ellis Bell. The identity of “the Bells”, as well as the speculations about the sex of the authors, was a favourite topic of contemporary literary gossips²⁵⁸. This genuine and extraordinary interest in the works and lives of the Brontë sisters, which has been ongoing since their novels had been first published, led to the production of many studies on the Brontës. Along with the birth of Feminism and Feminist literary criticism, and with the growing interest in literature written by women, many publications dealing with the feminist analysis of the works by the Brontë sisters (among others) have been written. *The Madwoman in the Attic* by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar and *A Room of One’s Own* by Virginia Woolf (who, although praising Charlotte and Emily, unfortunately omitted Anne Brontë), for instance, have been very valuable sources for this thesis.

One of the reasons *Jane Eyre* has been selected for analysis is that it has been generally regarded as a masterpiece of English literature. Anne Brontë’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, on the other hand, has never been as widely read as Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* and Emily Brontë’s only novel *Wuthering Heights*. Nevertheless, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* has often been hailed as “the first sustained feminist novel”²⁵⁹ and is unique because it “describes a woman’s escape from the prisonhouse of a bad marriage, and her subsequent attempts to achieve independence by establishing herself in a career as an artist.”²⁶⁰, which are the reasons why this particular novel has been selected along with *Jane Eyre*.

²⁵⁵ See chapter 1.4

²⁵⁶ PLAIN, Gill; SELLERS, Susan (ed). *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism*, s. 31.

²⁵⁷ *The Brilliant Brontë Sisters* 2013 - YouTube [online]. 2016 [cit. 10. 2. 2018]. Dostupné z: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dLI1Bm6rNuc>>

²⁵⁸ See p. 53

²⁵⁹ BRONTË, Anne. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Introduction.

²⁶⁰ GILBERT, Sandra M.; GUBAR, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic*, s. 80.

Although the Brontë sisters were no "Angels in the House" and to some extent challenged the Victorian stereotypes regarding the position of women, they spent almost their whole short lives in a remote parsonage at Haworth. It is fairly remarkable that young women in their late twenties, with little experience, wrote such extraordinary novels in which they described, so authentically, things that they were actually missing in their real life. If it had not been for Charlotte Brontë's ambition, determination, and desire for fame²⁶¹, however, we would have never heard of Jane and Mr. Rochester (*Jane Eyre*), Helen Graham and Gilbert Markham (*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*), or Heathcliff and Cathy (*Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë) and we would have never acknowledged the genius of the Brontë sisters' own. To express the importance of the Brontë sisters for the literary world, let us conclude this thesis with the words that Virginia Woolf opens her famous feminist essay, *A Room of One's Own*, with:

“When you asked me to speak about women and fiction I sat down on the banks of a river and begun to wonder what the words meant. They might mean simply a few remarks about Fanny Burney; a few more about Jane Austen; a tribute to the Brontës and a sketch of Haworth Parsonage under snow; some witticism if possible about Miss Mitford; a respectful allusion to George Eliot; a reference to Mrs. Gaskell and one would have done.”²⁶²

²⁶¹ *The Brilliant Brontë Sisters* 2013 - YouTube [online]. 2016 [cit. 10. 3. 2018]. Dostupné z: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dLI1Bm6rNuc>>

²⁶² WOOLF, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*, s. 4

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Appendix A



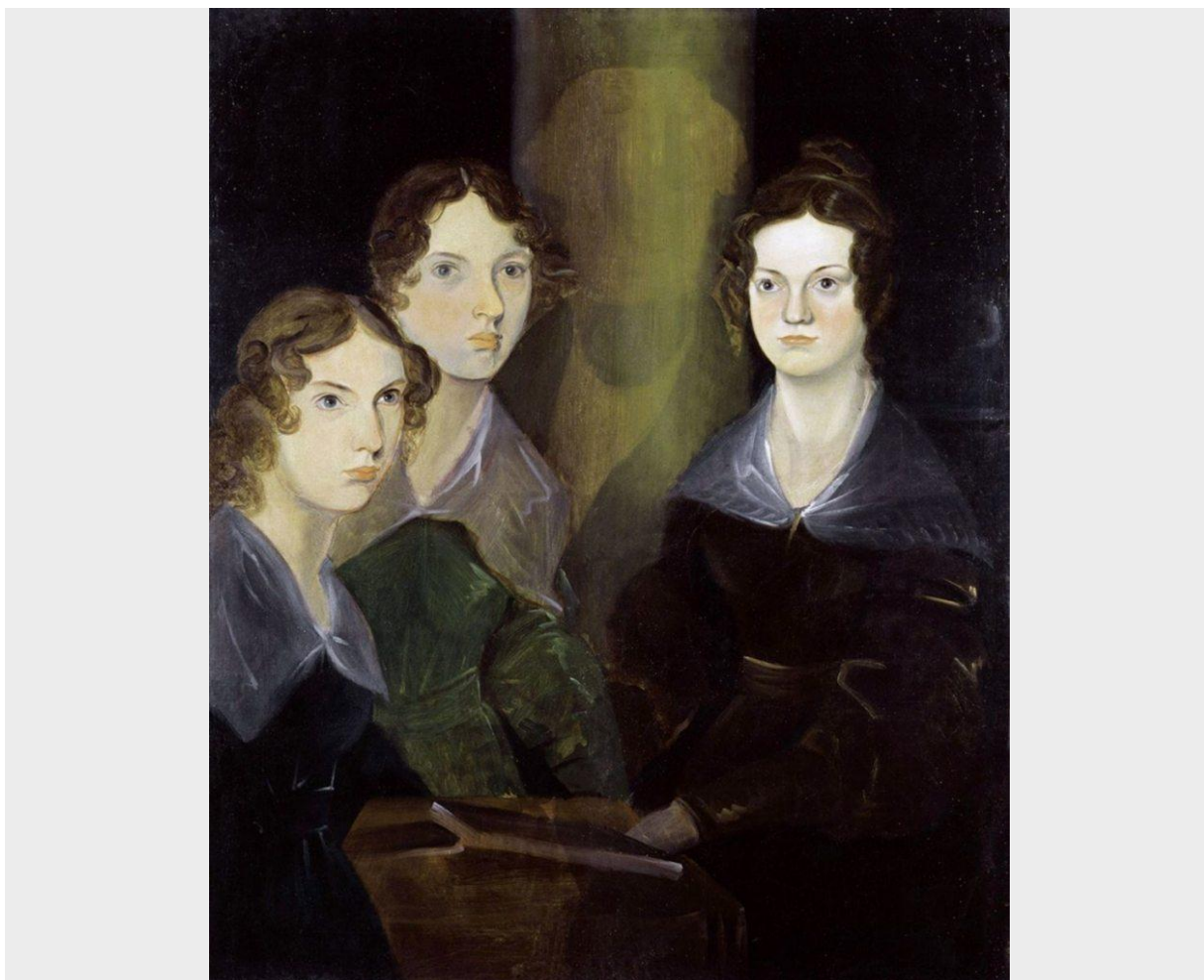
A portrait of Charlotte Brontë²⁶³



A portrait of Anne Brontë (by Charlotte Brontë)²⁶⁴

²⁶³ Charlotte Brontëová – Wikipedie. [www.wikipedia.org](https://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charlotte_Bront%C3%ABov%C3%A1) [online] [cit. 16. 10. 2017]. Dostupné z: <https://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charlotte_Bront%C3%ABov%C3%A1>

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A portrait of the Brontë sisters (by their brother Branwell)²⁶⁵

²⁶⁵ *The lives of the Sisters Brontë*. Raptis Rare Books. *Fine Rare and Antiquarian First Edition Books | Raptis Rare Books* [online]. 30. 11. 2016 [cit. 16. 10. 2017] Copyright ©2016 RAPTIS RARE BOOKS. Dostupné z: <<https://www.raptisrarebooks.com/authors/the-lives-of-the-sisters-bronte/>>

Appendix B

“I venture to predict that *Jane Eyre* will be read among English novels when many whose names are now better known shall have been forgotten.”

- Anthony Trollope on *Jane Eyre*²⁶⁶

“I wish you had not sent me *Jane Eyre*. It interested me so much that I have lost (or won if you like) a whole day in reading it at the busiest period [...].”

- William M. Thackeray on *Jane Eyre*²⁶⁷

“In Passion and Power – those noble twins of Genius – Currer Bell has no living rival except George Sand.”

- G. H. Lewes on Charlotte Brontë²⁶⁸

“[...] *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* are not things to be forgotten. The works of Currer Bell is a great performance; that of Ellis Bell is only a promise, but it is a colossal one.”

- From an unsigned review, *Atlas*²⁶⁹

“The choice of subject was an entire mistake. [...] she [Anne Brontë] believed it to be a duty to reproduce every detail (of course with fictitious characters, incidents, and situations) as a warning to others. She hated her work, but would pursue it. When reasoned with on the subject, she regarded such reasonings as a temptation to self-indulgence. She must be honest; she must not varnish, soften, or conceal.”

- Charlotte Brontë on *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*²⁷⁰

“There are foul and accursed undercurrents in plenty, in this same smug, respectable, whitewashed English society, which must be exposed now and then; and Society owes thanks, not sneers, to those who dare to show her the image of her own ugly, hypocritical visage.”

- Charles Kingsley on *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*²⁷¹

²⁶⁶ ALLOTT, Miriam. *The Brontës: The Critical Heritage* [online], s. 444. [cit. 11. 12. 2017] Dostupné z: <<https://books.google.cz/books>>

²⁶⁷ ALLOTT, cit. 269, s. 70. [cit. 11. 12. 2017]

²⁶⁸ ALLOTT, cit. 269, s. 24. [cit. 10. 2. 2018]

²⁶⁹ ALLOTT, cit. 269, s. 233. [cit. 10. 2. 2018]

²⁷⁰ ALLOTT, cit. 269, s. 274. [cit. 6. 3. 2018]

²⁷¹ ALLOTT, cit. 269, s. 270. [cit. 6. 3. 2018]

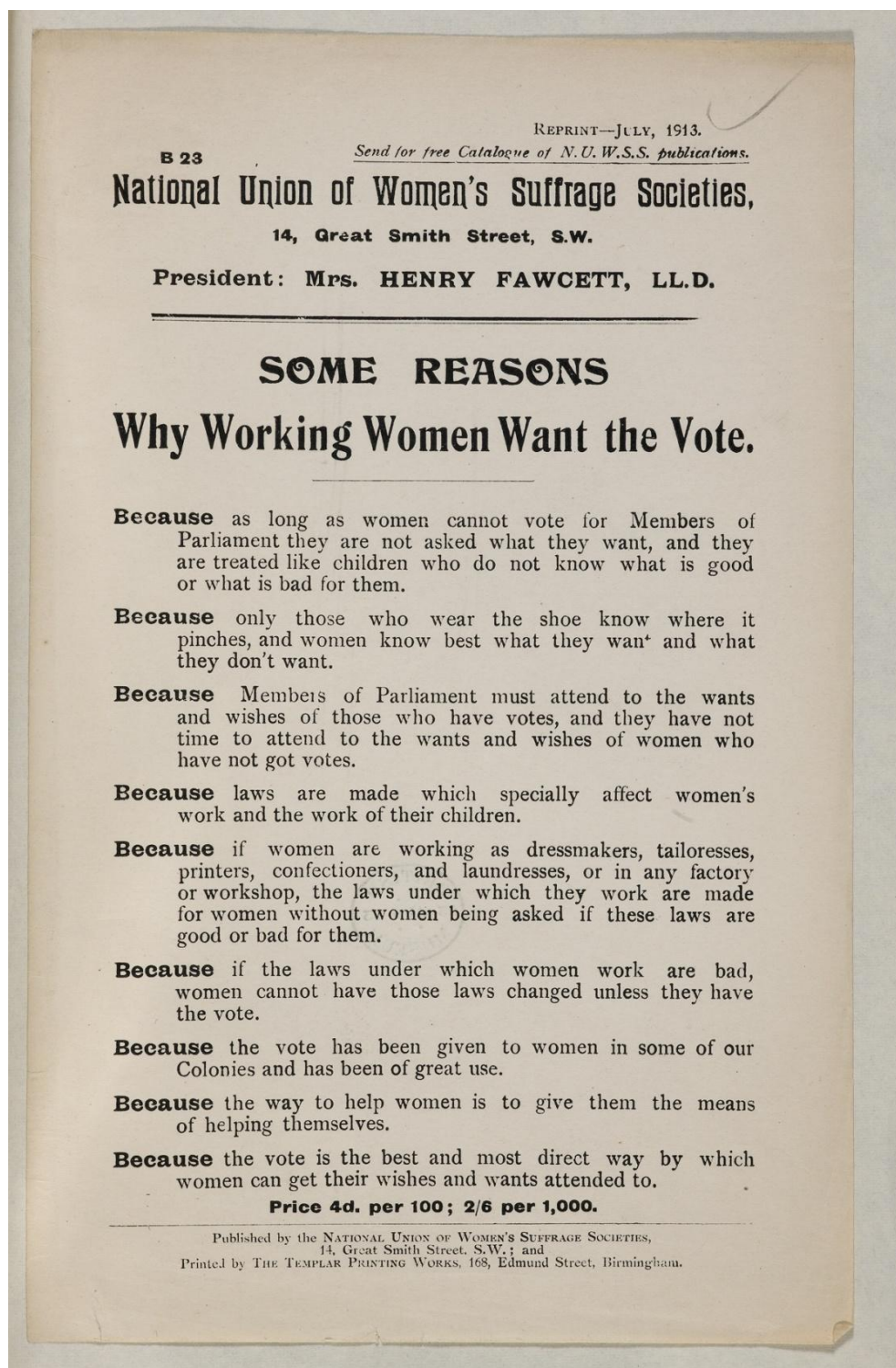
Appendix C



An illustration from *Mrs. Beeton's Book of Household Management*²⁷²

²⁷² *Isabella Beeton's Book of Household Management: A Victorian Phenomenon* – www.mimimatthews.com [online] 17. 2. 2016 [cit. 31. 3. 2017] Dostupné z: <<https://mimimatthews.com/2016/02/17/isabella-beetons-book-of-household-management-a-victorian-phenomenon/>>

Appendix D



A pamphlet published by the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies²⁷³

²⁷³ NUWSS pamphlets - The British Library. *The British Library* [online] [cit. 6. 2. 2018] Dostupné z: <<https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/nuwss-pamphlets>>

REPRINTED—JULY, 1913.

Send for free Catalogue of N.U.W.S.S. publications.

B 44

National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies,

14, Gt. SMITH STREET, WESTMINSTER, LONDON, S.W.

LAW-ABIDING.

NON-PARTY.

President: Mrs. HENRY FAWCETT, LL.D.

Women in the Home.

Women, we are told, should **stay in their own homes.**

But they are not to be idle there! What ought they to be doing?

Looking after the children.

Seeing that they are properly fed.

Taking care of their health.

Cooking the husband's dinner.

Making the money go as far as it can.

All this is "the woman's job."

How will the vote help them?

By giving them a share in making the laws that govern all these things.

Do you think the laws have nothing to do with women's homes and their children, and the price of food? Why, **all** these things are affected by laws! Look at

The Education Act.

The Poor-Law Acts.

The Insurance Act.

The Children's Charter.

These laws have to do with children, and with the trials of sickness and unemployment and poverty. In all these, the woman suffers first.

Then there is the question of **Free Trade and Tariff Reform.** That is a woman's business, too, because she is the one who has to do the housekeeping. If the money doesn't go as far as it used to, or if it comes in less plentifully, she will be the first to go short. A mother will always stint herself before her little ones.

But we are told we have **the Municipal Vote**, and we can do all we need with that, because it is by the Municipal Councils that the law is worked. But can we? Can we make a bad or a stupid law into a good one by using the Municipal Vote? **Of course not!**

You can do something by **working** a law as well as it can be worked; but if it is really unjust or stupid, your work will be mostly thrown away.

Women want to be consulted when the laws are made. And the way to give your opinion so that politicians will listen to it, is **to vote.**

Isn't it time the "**Woman in the Home**" voted on questions that concern the home, since she knows most about them?

Price 4d. per 100; 2/6 per 1,000.

Published by the NATIONAL UNION OF WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE SOCIETIES,
14, Great Smith Street, S.W.; and
Printed by THE TEMPLAR PRINTING WORKS, 168, Edmund Street, Birmingham.

A pamphlet published by the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies²⁷⁴

²⁷⁴ NUWSS pamphlets - The British Library. *The British Library* [online] [cit. 6. 2. 2018] Dostupné z: <<https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/nuwss-pamphlets>>

Appendix E

Chronology²⁷⁵

- 1816 – Charlotte Brontë was born
- 1818 – Emily Brontë was born
- 1820 – Anne Brontë was born
- 1837 – Queen Victoria ascended the throne
- 1838 - 1848 – The Chartist Movement
- 1839 – The Custody of Infants Act (divorced mothers can be granted custody of their children under age of 7)
- 1842 – Charlotte and Emily go to Brussels to study
- 1847 – *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë was first published
- 1847 – *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë was first published
- 1847 – *Agnes Grey* by Anne Brontë was first published
- 1848 – *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* by Anne Brontë was first published
- 1849 – *Shirley* by Charlotte Brontë was first published
- 1849 – Anne Brontë dies
- 1853 – *Villette* by Charlotte Brontë was first published
- 1855 – Charlotte Brontë dies
- 1857 – *The Professor* by Charlotte Brontë was published posthumously
- 1857 - Matrimonial Causes Act makes divorce available without special act of Parliament (and for both sexes)
- 1870, 1882, 1893 - the Married Women's Property Acts enabled women to have full control over their property
- 1918 – Right to vote for women

²⁷⁵ ALEXANDER, Christine; SMITH, Margareth. *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*, xxxiii-xlvi.