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Tereza Bejvlová

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Vedoucí práce: Doc. Justin Quinn, Ph.D.

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MARRIAGE IN THE WORKS OF THE BRONTËS

UNDERGRADUATE THESIS

Tereza Bejvlová

Supervisor: Doc. Justin Quinn, Ph.D.

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Abstract

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Supervisor: Doc. Justin Quinn, Ph.D.

The object of this undergraduate thesis is to analyze the various themes of marriage in three of Charlotte Brontë's novels - *Jane Eyre*, *Villette* and *Shirley*. It explores the theme of marriage while taking into account the historical situation of women. It also tries to understand the motivation behind selected characters and their opinions that affect their future view of marriage.

The chapters are divided according to the novels. The first deals with *Jane Eyre*, the second focuses on *Villette* and the third on *Shirley* and its two main couples representing the conventional and revolutionary views of marriage.

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Introduction

Marriage was not, in most cases, a matter of choice for women in the Victorian period. The “physical and mental inferiority” (Basch, 1974, p. 16) of women was a common belief and the inequality and subjection could be seen mainly in political rights and education. Education was focused on shaping the weaker gender into what was expected of them by their future husbands - quiet submission.

In his essay, Mill (1869) states that:

All women are brought up from the very earliest years in the belief that their ideal of character is the very opposite to that of men; not self-will, and government by self-control, but submission, and yielding to the control of others. All the moralities tell them that it is the duty of women, and all the current sentimentalities that it is their nature, to live for others; to make complete abnegation of themselves, and to have no life but in their. (p. 28)

In this sense marriage resembles more slavery than a mutual and voluntary decision. Basch (1974) agrees by stating that a woman was a “powerless slave of a husband who might be guilty of desertion, adultery and cruelty” (p. 17). Instead an idea of an ideal woman and wife is presented. It is not enough that a woman is deemed and treated as completely powerless, she is encouraged to view her situation favorably. She is not to be “a forced slave but a willing one” (Mill, 1869, p. 69) because “men do not want solely the obedience of women, they want their sentiments” (p. 69) to be able to further control them. From an early age women were indoctrinated into believing the goal of their lives is marriage and children thus ceasing any thoughts of equality. Basch (1874) emphasizes that: “When the woman is denied all capacity for creation, action and authority, her contribution in the masculine world becomes the emotional and moral guidance which are her vocations as wife and mother” (p. 5). Open support of “Christian virtues of love, purity and self-sacrifice” (King, 2005, p. 11) only cements women’s unenviable role in Victorian society.

It is important however to distinguish the situation of wealthy and poorer women. Wealthy women were not forced to marry. Perkin (1989) observes that: “After marriage, wealthy women who had separate estates were the most liberated group of women in nineteenth-century England. These women could generally do as they pleased, and usually did” (p. 76).

In this respect, money was important for the working class. While marriage was “more as a convenient way of life than as an emotional union” (p. 156) for them, women were expected to have some kind of work to support their families while managing the family finances and taking care of the children as well.

I would like to focus my thesis on the individual representations of marriage in three different works (*Jane Eyre*, *Villette* and *Shirley*) by Charlotte Brontë. Her feminist view of women in general can be clearly seen in all three books. The female characters in her books often feel the need to be strong, independent and have control over their lives, in marriage and outside it, while at the same time are also struggling with their almost crippling inability to initiate action. And while some characters submit to expectations of the society, sometimes against their will and sometimes willingly, others stubbornly defy them.

1. Marriage in Jane Eyre

Jane Eyre overflows with various views of marriage and it seems as if the book itself is built on characters and their views of this important joining of two people. In many cases their opinions of marriage are not very favorable - they are often coerced or manipulated into it, they are lied to and shielded from the possible devastating and life-altering consequences. This chapter will explore the interesting and often treacherous world of marriage from the point of view of four different characters.

Glen (2002) writes that *Jane Eyre* is: “A passionate, headstrong narrative of a young woman confronting the world with obstinate integrity, it treats of marginality and loneliness, of the desire for adventure, intimacy and independence” (p. 99). However, ethic is also a strong theme in the book. Gilbert and Gubar (2000) believe that “we tend today to think of *Jane Eyre* as moral gothic” (p. 337). The fact that the main female character is strong and unyielding in her own beliefs and the emphasis on the moral side foreshadows that not all relationships (and marriages) in *Jane Eyre* will bow to the standards dictated by society.

1.1. *The survivor*

The reader meets variety of characters in *Jane Eyre* but there is no stronger and braver character than Jane Eyre. Her point of view is the most complex and interesting. As a child she was mistreated and sent away to Lowood School although her relative who was supposed to take care of her certainly was not poor. Although the dreadful experience of this forgotten school seems exaggerated. Charlotte Brontë drew on her own experience. She wrote in one of her letters: “Perhaps too the first part of ‘Jane Eyre’ may suit the public taste better than you anticipate—for it is true and Truth has a severe charm of its own” (Smith, 2007, p. 86). These two initial stages of her life, Jane’s childhood at Gateshead where she suffered from lack of reciprocated feelings and her education at Lowood School where she gained her strong sense of ethics drove her the rest of her life and affected her view of marriage.

She is not however a passive observer of her life but makes her own choices and is more than able to decide for herself what is right and what is wrong. According to

Mitchell & Osland (2005) she is “the forebear of a new breed of romance heroines who participate as much as men in the pursuit of an intense, overwhelming passion” (p. 175).

In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar remark that:

Yet, curiously enough, it seems not to have been primarily the coarseness and sexuality of *Jane Eyre* which shocked Victorian reviewers [...], but, as we have seen, its “anti-Christian” refusal to accept the forms, customs, and standards of society—in short, its rebellious feminism (2000, p. 338)

Her relationship to Mr. Rochester is not driven by the desire to obtain his money (which might be Blanche Ingram’s case) and defies the expectations of the society. This is obvious from the twenty first chapter where she refuses more money than is rightfully hers. She feels no need to become someone who she is not or climb the social ladder. Her main goal is to find her soul mate, a person connected to her on a deeper and more personal level than simply money or social status. In *Jane Eyre* Jane declares that:

He is not to them what he is to me, [...] he is not of their kind. I believe he is of mine; —I am sure he is,—I feel akin to him,—I understand the language of his countenance and movements; though rank and wealth sever us widely, I have something in my brain and heart, in my blood and nerves, that assimilates me mentally to him. [...] I must then repeat continually that we are for ever sundered;—and yet, while I breathe and think I must love him.’ (Brontë, 2001, p. 149)

Jane is sure that she has found her equal in Mr. Rochester. Still the deep personal connection between them seems almost impossible considering their different social status. But for Jane, society and its expectations mean nothing. Her only guide is her own conscience and she is more than willing to follow what she wants with fierceness of her own. After Mr. Rochester’s mind games and then his confession, Jane explodes:

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! (p. 216)

Her need to love and be loved is so strong that even her own will fails.

But even though she finds her perfect match and her feelings are finally reciprocated, there is still her strong sense of ethics. Jane makes this clear: “I am no bird; and no net ensnares me: I am a free human being with an independent will”

(p. 216). She refuses to do something she deems wrong. She is an individual with her own set of beliefs and values no matter what society says.

1.2. The victim

Each character in *Jane Eyre* is unique and has a story to tell. Mr. Rochester is paying for one single mistake (and not even of his own doing) for most of his life. The elusive master of Thornfield Hall and guardian of little Adele Varens is a suffering character. Unlike Jane Eyre he is unable to deal with his demons and live a full satisfying life. His suffering is so crippling that it affects not only his view of marriage in general but his ethical decisions connected to it as well.

1.2.1. The skeleton in the attic

Bertha, a daughter of a very wealthy family living in Spanish Town in Jamaica, is chosen to be Mr. Rochester's first wife. Being still young, Mr. Rochester is coerced into marrying a complete stranger. The reason is simple: there is an older son, Rowland, in the family who inherits everything so the estate is not divided. Mr. Rochester is left poor but his father finds it inappropriate and goes on a search for a possible wife.

It is an ideal situation promising a complete and utter disaster. A young man freshly out of college, a beautiful woman and too many people around them inconspicuously coercing him to marry. The whole setup is magical. It seems to be a perfectly arranged marriage with all the advantages and assumed affection. But it is nothing but a ploy and he is too fixated on her stunning beauty - she is "tall, dark, and majestic" (Brontë, 2001, p. 260).

From the first moment Mr. Rochester steps on the shores of Jamaica, he is being used because of his ignorance. He has no control over what is happening, but what is even worse, he has no knowledge he is being manipulated by everyone around except him. It is obvious that Mr. Rochester is only a pawn in the game played by his own family. Subtle manipulation is all it is needed to get the future husband where he needs to be. In the end he becomes a part of the pretended act when he voluntarily starts believing that the marriage was what he himself wanted. But is it really true he had no choice?

Mr. Rochester feels cheated and hurt by his family and everyone else who had something to do with his marriage to Bertha for the most of his life. He does not believe he was at fault or could have done something differently or better. His family and the family of the bride are the guilty party and that suits him.

The initial affection is gone but he is irrevocably tied to her. Sutherland (1997) explains why Mr. Rochester did not divorce her: “But before the aggrieved husband can use her vile adulteries as grounds for divorce, Bertha cheats him by falling victim to the Mason curse. Lunatics cannot be held responsible in law for their acts. Edward is chained to Bertha” (p. 71). The fact that he is determined to refuse her as his legal wife is most likely an act of rebellion. He tries to free himself from the harmful influence of his family (though they are already dead). The act of marrying again, this time of his own will, is a declaration of independence and the fact he is his own master and he alone decides what his future will be. He is trying to take back control he lost as a young man and was unable to retrieve during the time he spent running from his own past. It makes the readers sympathize with him at least as much as with Jane. Though he tries to commit bigamy, his actions are justifiable. He has been manipulated and cheated and his whole life is completely destroyed. Even the light at the end of the tunnel, the “almost unearthly thing“ (Brontë, 2001, p. 217) that would not yield, flickers and then is gone from his reach. According to Sutherland (1997), “In *Jane Eyre* we are encouraged, in the last chapters, to feel sympathy for [...] a husband more sinned against than sinning” (p. 69). It is not only the last chapters that pictures Mr. Rochester as a good man slowly destroyed by his past, a man unable to control his future. Jane’s conversations with her employer and his self condemnation evokes rather pity than anger or disgust. At the same time, we are aware of his sins and his past is more filled with his sins than his good decisions and deeds. Yet it does not matter.

Even the strange way Mr. Rochester handles his wife Bertha after her mental illness comes to light does not surprise or discompose the readers. Still it is quite strange that Mr. Rochester did not send her wife to an asylum but provided her with a home. She was hidden inside a house he rarely visited, for obvious reasons since nothing good awaited him there, but provided for. Why did he keep her hidden and did not send her to some kind of institution where she would be really taken care of in a more professional way? Was it kindness or a faint hope that his wife would sooner rather than later die in the unprofessional care of one often drunk woman? Sutherland (1997) wonders:

Who is responsible for the fire at Thornfield—the madwoman, the drunk woman, or the husband who, despite these warnings, did not dismiss the drunk woman and put the madwoman under proper supervision? (p. 71)

But perhaps there should be another question, which is not asked often. Was the fire that destroyed Thornfield Hall just an accident or was it intentional?

Mrs. Fairfax, the housekeeper, told Jane later in the book:

I witnessed, and several more witnessed Mr. Rochester ascend through the skylight on to the roof: we heard him call "Bertha!" We saw him approach her; and then, ma'am, she yelled, and gave a spring, and the next minute she lay smashed on the pavement.' (Brontë, 2001, p. 365)

Is it possible that Mr. Rochester, mourning Jane's sudden departure and therefore the loss of the real love of his life, was capable of burning Thornfield Hall? Was the convincing of Bertha on the roof really rather a successful effort to get rid of the woman that was the reason he lost the most important thing in his life? Whatever the answer, with these dramatic events Brontë explores the deep forces that interact in marriage, leaving no character's life unaffected.

1.2.2. A means to an end

Mr. Rochester's relationship with Miss Ingram is a carefully staged play. To an uninvolved observer and even to Blanche herself it seems real, and because the book is told from Jane's point of view, she has no idea what is really happening and believes everything she sees (and because of that the reader as well).

Sutherland (1997) believes that "Rochester had every intention of marrying Blanche Ingram" (p. 78). Though that may be logical, Miss Ingram was indeed beautiful and quite lovely when she wanted, Mr. Rochester's behavior appears to be a test, elaborate and cruel, a subtle way to manipulate Jane into discovering and then finally showing him her real feelings so he is no longer left guessing. He himself admits that: "I feigned courtship [...], because I wished to render you as madly in love with me as I was with you; and I knew jealousy would be the best ally I could call in for the furtherance of that end" (Brontë, 2001, p. 224). Perhaps there was a moment when Mr. Rochester was considering this marriage but in the end it only served as a means to an end.

1.2.3. The refreshing mystery

After a lifetime of misery due to his unfortunate marriage to Bertha Mason, Mr. Rochester meets Jane Eyre who becomes the new governess of his ward, Adele Varens. Jane Eyre seems to be almost angelic in her innocence and view of life. He admits: “Ten years since, I flew through Europe half mad; with disgust, hate, and rage, as my companions; now I shall revisit it healed and cleansed, with a very angel as my comforter” (p. 221). But it is not only the angelic side of Jane Eyre that is appealing to Mr. Rochester. It is gradually obvious, not only to him but to readers as well, that there is more to Jane.

She is content with her life in servitude and often calls Mr. Rochester her master. This acknowledgement of his power and dominance is also alluring to Mr. Rochester. In *Jane Eyre* he tells Jane: “I never met your likeness. Jane: you please me, and you master me— you seem to submit, and I like the sense of pliancy you impart” (p. 222). It is without doubt Jane’s submission that is the main source of her power over Mr. Rochester.

However the idea of her submission is not the only thing that makes Jane who she is. Beyond this apparent need to find her place in the power structure of Mr. Rochester’s home, there is also a hidden strength and fierceness which is shown at the end of the book when she decides to leave him: “I am no bird; and no net ensnares me: I am a free human being with an independent will; which I now exert to leave you” (p. 216). It is the need for freedom and moral certitude that drives her most of her life and is another appealing aspect of her personality. This duality of Jane’s personality - the need to yield and to fight for what she believes at the same time - makes her unique and she inevitably draws Mr. Rochester’s attention and gives him a new desire to live.

Mr. Rochester without doubt believes that his actions are sanctioned by God and therefore right. He is aware that not always are the ways of men same as the ways of God and sometimes things people would condemn are in God’s eyes alright. It might be the reason why he talks about his first wife as Bertha Mason, using her family name. It seems that he does not acknowledge that she is indeed his wife. If he feels to be unmarried, and is able to justify his opinion, the engagement with Jane seems only logical. He is free to find happiness, is he not? He is tired of his promiscuous life, of all the evil and injustice. He himself says that: “I have myself—I tell it you without parable—been a worldly, dissipated, restless man; and I believe I have found the

instrument for my cure” (Brontë, 2001, p. 186), and only one woman was mesmerizing and different enough for him to finally catch his breath and settle down. “You—you strange—you almost unearthly thing!—I love as my own flesh” (p. 217), he declares in *Jane Eyre*. Few lines after that Mr. Rochester emphasizes his opinion by saying that he has to own her.

According to Sutherland (1997):

We are to assume that—after some moral re-education—Jane will be blissfully happy with a Bluebeard who has wholly mended his ways. It is the more daring since (putting to one side the intent to commit bigamy), Edward Rochester is responsible for Bertha Rochester's death. (p. 69)

Mr. Rochester's actions are not always morally correct. Still Charlotte Brontë emphasizes his difficult past and painful marriage while stressing the fact that Mr. Rochester can and will be saved by Jane and that their future pairing and marriage will bring them balance. But in this vision of their future happiness, Brontë presents a revisionary idea of marriage where, granted the wife submits to the domination of the husband in a traditional manner, but she also possesses another type of mastery over him, which stems from her moral being, and perhaps more importantly her intelligence.

1.3. The social climber

We first hear about Blanche Ingram after the fire in Mr. Rochester's bedroom. Soon after that Mr. Rochester leaves Thornfield Hall and travels to the Leas to join the assembled party. Amongst others, there is also Miss Ingram. Mrs. Fairfax describes her in a very eloquent way (Brontë, 2001, p. 135). Why would such a person, obviously gifted in many ways, a beautiful, intelligent, noble and educated lady want to unite her life with Mr. Rochester? What could be her hidden motivations? Charlotte Brontë explained in one of her letters addressed to her friend Ellen Nussey that:

No young lady should fall in love till the offer has been made, accepted – ... the marriage ceremony performed and the first half year of wedded life has passed away – a woman may then begin to love, but with great precaution – very coolly – very moderately – very rationally. (Mitchell & Osland, 2005, p. 180)

It is obvious that in this pairing no love was expected. Miss Ingram is the daughter of Lord Ingram and Lady Ingram who Blanche addresses once as “baroness Ingram, of Ingram Park” (Brontë, 2001, p. 152). She is indeed a member of a noble house and her view of marriage is different from an ordinary person. Given her social position she is expected to marry a gentlemen of at least the same status as hers, but possibly with more money, estates, power, political influence and titles. What she seeks in her potential husband the most is money since she has none and even Mrs. Fairfax mentions her lack of dowry. It is no wonder she does not think of love when she has to keep in mind that she needs to find someone who would secure her financially.

Blanche’s character is mentioned later by Jane:

Her face was like her mother's; a youthful unfurrowed likeness: the same low brow, the same high features, the same pride. It was not, however, so saturnine a pride: she laughed continually; her laugh was satirical, and so was the habitual expression of her arched and haughty lip. (p. 147)

The irritable and sometimes almost hostile behavior towards Adele Varens, Mr. Rochester’s ward, was seen not only by Jane but also by Mr. Rochester himself and surely was not met with approval. But Jane Eyre also observes: “Surely she cannot truly like him, or not like him with true affection. If she did, she need not coin her smiles so lavishly, flash her glances so unremittingly, manufacture airs so elaborate, graces so multitudinous.” (p. 159).

Her obligation is to carry on in her family steps as best as she can and use whatever means possible to achieve this goal. Mr. Rochester seems to be the ideal suitor. He is talented, likes society, his wealth and his blood is adequate, and all of this compensates his imperfect appearance. However, when she is met with unforeseen failure she backtracks her steps to look for a different suitor. Later in the book, Mr. Rochester admits that he spread a rumor that his fortune is not that great and then observed what would happen. He was most likely not surprised by the coldness from Blanche and her mother. Only Blanche herself would be able to answer the poignant question if she did so willingly, and in that case was a striking image of her own mother and the nobility in general, or was made to do so by her mother and her family because the pursuit of money was something that would keep the family and Blanche living comfortably for the rest of their lives.

But what does she want besides the expectations of her status and family? The age difference does not seem to be an issue since Blanche does not mention this even

once although she is confident enough to present her opinions to the other companions during one evening in Thornfield Hall. She does not find young men of her age charming. She finds them too scared to think or act for themselves. They are self-absorbed and too concerned by their own beauty. She informs them that:

To my mind a man is nothing without a spice of the devil in him; and history may say what it will of James Hepburn, but I have a notion he was just the sort of wild, fierce, bandit hero whom I could have consented to gift with my hand. (p. 152)

And she continues by saying that if she ever marries, she will suffer no man as a rival. Only she alone will be beautiful and thus get all the attention. This deliberately attracts attention to Mr. Rochester as he is not described as handsome. In the beginning of *Jane Eyre* there is written that: “He had a dark face, with stern features and a heavy brow; his eyes and gathered eyebrows looked ireful and thwarted just now” (p. 96).

With the evidence of her own words, Blanche seems to be an example of a woman yearning to be someone else, a free woman who is able to pursue her own ideas of how her life should look like, someone she cannot be since she is thoroughly shaped by her society. She doesn't have Jane's strength to oppose society's expectations - perhaps it does not even occur to her to question those expectations. In the end she can only declare that: “An English hero of the road would be the next best thing to an Italian bandit; and that could only be surpassed by a Levantine pirate” (p. 157). Through the contrast of Jane and Blanche's views of marriage, Brontë forcefully explores social values of her time, raising questions rather than simply taking them for granted.

1.4. The extremist

St. John Eyre Rivers is a frightening image of an extreme Christian, a fanatic in a way, and though he may seem gentle to some, “in some things he is inexorable as death” (Brontë, 2001, p. 304). Although readers might suppose Christian St. John would be a supporter of love in marriage they are mistaken. “I will give my heart to God. [...] You do not want it” (p. 346), responds Jane Eyre to his coercion. His behavior is not surprising. St. John is so absorbed by his belief that he twists it so it serves him the way he wants. He tends to use manipulations, lies, threats and fear to his advantage.

I shall be absent a fortnight—take that space of time to consider my offer: and do not forget that if you reject it, it is not me you deny, but God. [...] Tremble lest in that case you should be numbered with those who have denied the faith, and are worse than infidels! (p. 348)

The threat of eternal damnation if described in detail with all the inevitable consequences is at least alarming for an ordinary person. For a woman, like Jane Eyre, who is a fervent believer, this threat is extremely frightening.

But in his quest to acquire a suitable companion St. John repeatedly changes his statements, slightly altering them to suit his needs. Even the declaration: “You shall be mine: I claim you—not for my pleasure, but for my Sovereign's service” (p. 343) is a lie and is contradicted by saying he wants someone he could influence. It is questionable if he himself believes his own words. If we take into account that he is a believer, his own belief, the silent and corrupted inner voice, controls and manipulates him. He is not free. Not only does he enslave others with fear, he himself is an unwitting prisoner. Even if he manages to find a woman who will be intimidated by him into marriage, this union (though it may last) cannot be happy. But this will never be perceived as an obstacle for St. John, since happiness is not what he seeks.

As can be seen in the chapter, Jane Eyre is overflowing with characters with their own unique experiences. This makes them interesting examples of the many different views of marriage.

The driving force behind almost all the actions connected with marriage seems to be manipulation. While some characters (like Blanche Ingram) succumb to the expectations of the society or family, others are blindly guided by their own beliefs, however fanatical and twisted, forcing their opinions on others.

The two main characters of *Jane Eyre* are more complicated, however. There is no other more prominent survivor in the book than Jane Eyre herself. Her view of life and world, and her strong moral side affect her all her life. She desires a relationship, and marriage, based on connection of two souls and equality. But love is not the only thing she craves. The need to do what she deems right is an almost overwhelming need to her. The norms the society dictates mean nothing to her. She is not frightened by them or forced to do anything she believes to be wrong. She is and always will be a strong character and an ideal example of what a human being should strive to become.

Mr. Rochester on the other hand is a character completely imperfect and flawed. The fact he was tricked into a marriage in his early years makes his opinion of marriage anything but favorable and affects his future behavior. It is not without importance that Mr. Rochester can be viewed as a more than questionable character. Like other characters in *Jane Eyre* even he uses manipulation and marriage itself as a means to an end. Still he is a character searching for redemption. Jane is submissive in nature (she often acknowledges the power and dominance of her master), while fierce at the same time and this duality intrigues Mr. Rochester. The marriage of Jane and Mr. Rochester is only natural as the union with Jane balances them both.

The next chapter dealing with marriage in *Villette* moves on from analyzing marriage from the point of view of the individual characters like it was done in *Jane Eyre* and focuses more on another way to analyze the theme of marriage. It explores the different possible reasons why the characters even consider marriage as a plausible solution and offers more insight into the education in Victorian society.

2. Marriage in *Villette*

Charlotte Brontë's gift for portraying not only strong female but also male characters is obvious. In *Villette* the author goes even further seemingly pushing side characters themselves, focusing more on specific themes within the book.

Perhaps it is not visible upon the first reading, but *Villette* is almost overflowing with themes of endurance and survival, and how survivors deal with their pasts in order to have futures; the inability to move forward because of the crippling fear; insecurities and the ways to overcome them; confinement and the need for freedom; and most of all, tolerance because even two people raised in different environments with different sets of values and beliefs can love each other truly and peacefully. Glen (2002) suggests that *Villette* "continues to work within the language and culture of Christianity, even as it focuses more constantly on the secular destiny of one woman" (p. 209) and is "recycling traditional religious mythic language into a language to describe not existence and metaphysics, the outside world, but psychology, the inside world" (p. 10). It may feel as if Lucy Snowe is the main character of this book but often it seems that she is, like the readers themselves, just an observer of events (partly because of her phlegmatic nature) absorbing everything around her including the conflict between Catholics and Protestants and the different characters' view of marriage in its many different forms.

2.1. *Fair exchange*

The idea of marriage as an exchange can be seen throughout *Villette*. Several characters are in a position where they do not necessarily expect affection from marriage but rather seek to make their lives easier: marriage appears to be the solution.

The main character of Lucy Snowe is a good example. She is a woman in a foreign country, without family, friends or money. She has no one to give her advice: she does not know where she is going or what she is going to do or who will take care of her, aside from the fact she wants to go away and leave everything behind and become a governess. It is this vulnerability that drives her to seek a person who would support her in her time of need.

From the moment Lucy Snowe meets the mysterious doctor, she is enchanted. They first meet during their childhood in Bretton. This shared time is not excessively

long or intense but it provides a strong basis for their relationship. If reconnected, childhood friends can become important in adult life. Thus it is with Lucy and Graham. After ten years of separation they meet again during Lucy's arrival in Villette. It seems almost fateful that when she finally gives up everything she knows, all her acquaintances, her past and her native country, she accidentally meets her long lost childhood friend. It is only after the young doctor comes to Madame Beck's school that the recognition process begins in Jane's mind. But even as she discovers subtle hints and starts to put all pieces together, she starts to fall in love with him.

It is a combination of courage, foolishness and sheer luck that this journey is successful. She is guided every step of the way by her inner voice and instinct and coincidence brings the right people to her to guide her further. One wrong step and she would be lost in a foreign country, without the knowledge of the language or anyone to help her at all. She bravely fights her way through all the disadvantages of her unfortunate situation and the following inconveniences and secures herself a place where she can rest and further build her future. In *The Madwoman in the Attic* Gilbert and Gubar remark that: "*Villette* is in many ways Charlotte Brontë's most overtly and despairingly feminist novel" (2000, p. 399). No other heroine in Charlotte Brontë's novels had to fight so hard to secure her own future with so little at her disposal. And while she does not oppose the idea of love in marriage it strengthens her position.

But while she leaves everything behind, she is lost in her desperation and grief. Dr. Graham who helps her and guides her like a guardian angel to her future home, a safe place, though not easy to live in at all. He was perhaps the only person who could make her see that her situation is not so dire. Her decision to run away from her homeland is an opportunity to start a new life, a different one and leading her to different places. It is a solid plan but it is only the beginning of the process leading to her own death. Eagleton stated that Lucy is: "both enterprising individualist and helpless victim" (2005, p. 64), while Peschier (2005) believed that:

In *Villette* Brontë uses the symbol of the convent to provide a physical place of enforced isolation for Lucy Snowe. The power exercised within the Pensionnat Beck is in the hands of the proprietress, Madame Beck, who plays the part of a Mother Superior or female Jesuit. (p. 144)

Though these authors think Lucy's isolation is forced, it seems to be her own choice. It is her own decision not to have friends. It is her decision to seek empty rooms and avoid

other people. No one, not even outside forces, strong and powerful personalities such as Madame Beck and M. Emanuel are able to break her determination to isolate herself.

Madame Beck may try to make her life very unpleasant by snooping around, inconspicuously listening behind closed doors and reading her mail; M. Emanuel may be ill-tempered all the time, controlling and insulting; her godmother and Dr. Graham too friendly and accepting, this however does not affect Lucy. Gilbert and Gubar suggest that Lucy is “locked into herself, defeated from the start” (2000, p. 400). She often fills her time in an empty classroom, reading or resting, or in her secret and favorite place in the garden where no one else ever comes. This feels like a deliberate choice to give up life itself. While she has things to do, she becomes almost a machine always working rarely leaving the sanctuary of the school but beyond this she has no friends and chooses solitude over an attempt to change her situation. Marriage for her is an escape, the last possible solution that can save her from death - if not physical death, then death of mind.

However, there are other characters present who view marriage as a way to deal with life. Lucy observes, “Poor Zélie! It was much her wont to declare about this time, that she was tired to death of a life of seclusion and labour; that she longed to have the means and leisure for relaxation” (p. 353).

The relationship she has with M. Emanuel is short-lived a most likely a result of her life in seclusion inside of Madame Beck’s school. It is a place where the ignorance is not only tolerated, but more importantly supported. The mind guided to oblivion is not dangerous.

Ginevra Fanshawe, later Ginevra Laura de Hamal, is the image of a spoiled young girl, that has “light, careless temperament” (Brontë, 1853, p. 58) and “satiric wit” (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, p. 409) that makes her see the world in so vibrant colors.

It is no wonder that her behavior intensifies, or worsens as Lucy feels, as she obtains the access to the upper class and with that to Alfred de Hamal. He would seem to be a perfect match for her, though in her letter to Lucy she later admits that his advantages are not as strong as she thought at first (he does not have money besides his title and his pay).

In an attempt worthy of Jane Eyre’s Blanche Ingram she tries to provide herself a husband with higher status and like Blanche she strives for a secure and comfortable

position. In this case however, her motivation for marriage seems to be more of her own choice than those around her. There are no manipulative relatives who pressure her into a convenient alliance, no quiet voice of her parents to define the best course of action. She makes her own decisions.

Another thing to consider is Ginevra's vibrant personality that only deepens her need for more activity. This is absolutely vital for her survival and is also one of the driving forces behind her decisions concerning relationships and marriage. She refuses to be lost in the school's rigidity or become another Lucy - a lost and gloomy soul. She is willing to do whatever necessary to avoid becoming something she is not. If creating a love triangle or eloping with someone makes her feel alive she is more than capable of doing so.

2.2. *My religion is not yours*

The idea of marriage as an exchange is further developed in Lucy's relationship with M. Paul Emanuel, this time closely connected with religion.

Like Madame Beck, M. Paul Carl David Emanuel is strong and omnipresent. Even though the book follows the story of Lucy Snowe, M. Emanuel is always present in the background almost like some kind of anchor of a ship or a main pillar of a building. He teaches at Madame Beck's school and the neighboring one for boys, he organizes birthday plays, has passionate lectures, walks through the forgotten parts of the school (such as almost empty classrooms - like Lucy), visits the theatre, attends flashy celebrations and so much more. It matters not where Lucy's steps take her, for the teacher with a very sharp mind and words is no doubt there with her to listen, observe and eventually to correct inappropriate behavior or opinions. What stops him from becoming Lucy's husband?

It is perhaps the need to right Lucy's wrongs, to reshape her into a proper Catholic woman and her tenacity and strong will that attracts him. He says: "For you I am neither a man nor a Christian. You see me void of affection and religion, unattached by friend or family, unpiloted by principle or faith" (Brontë, 1853, p. 426). Lucy's personality compliments his and she constantly challenges him. If she would simply submit, he would not feel the need to give her more of his time and attention than she deserves.

But their relationship is based on a deep friendship and mutual understanding that evolves and intensifies but doesn't seem to have a future in marriage (although it would perhaps be a logical and expected outcome). Lucy herself declares that: "I wanted companionship, I wanted friendship, I wanted counsel" (p. 195). And in the last chapter she confesses: "M. Emanuel was away three years. Reader, they were the three happiest years of my life" (p. 520). She does not necessarily seek marriage that would bind her but rather a way to become independent. Is M. Emanuel aware of this? Is this the reason why he shapes her beliefs and guides her? Is this why he gives her a means to support herself by presenting her a school of her own?

The author herself was not in favor of this pairing. "If Lucy marries anybody—it must be the Professor—a man in whom there is much to forgive—much to put up with" (Smith, 2007, p. 256), declares Brontë in one of her letters. She continues: "But I am not leniently disposed towards Miss Frost—from the beginning I never intended to appoint her lines in pleasant places" (p. 256). It was without a doubt the death of her two sisters and a brother few years earlier that affected her decision to not give Lucy a happy ending.

Compared to the calm and tolerant Dr. Graham, M. Paul Emanuel is a fierce being, with insecurities of his own, and a paradoxically healthy amount of restraint. Eagleton (2005) remarks:

Fiery though he is, Paul is also puritanically austere, and so provides Lucy with precisely the right amalgam of passion and censoriousness. He is, in fact, [...] scoffing but covertly a soul-mate, caustic but secretly charitable. Like Madame Beck he is a sly intriguer, but unlike her he is turbulent, impetuous and hair-raisingly ferocious into the bargain. (p. 66)

It is this dualism that both soothes and comforts Lucy by giving her the boundaries and restrictions she so desperately needs and brings her will to live and experience the emotional world of the living. In the Victorian sense, he would thus make an excellent husband.

It is vital to understand that Lucy is aware of all the aspects, both positive and negative, of M. Emanuel's personality but is not intimidated or discouraged by them. When talking to him, she clearly says: "You are a philosopher, Monsieur; a cynic philosopher [...] despising the foibles of humanity—above its luxuries— independent of its comforts" (Brontë, 1853, p. 426). She conveys her opinion of him this bluntly so he would understand that her mind is not depicting him in bright unblemished colors, she is

not confused and indeed sees clearly, and thus is able to take this into consideration. But it is not only the negative aspects of his personality she is aware of. There is his loving and nurturing nature, hidden and fiercely protected from the outside world (although M. Emanuel and Lucy claim to be friends, he never tells her about either Père Silas or Madame Walravens, two people he is very protective of) because it is likely he thinks of this part of himself as a weakness that could be exploited and used against him. Still, he cannot help himself and tells Lucy that: “You need watching, and watching over” (p. 381). Eagleton (2005) explains that: “Being watched is objectionable, but in so far as it involves being watched over - cared for - it is clearly desirable” (p. 69). There is nothing more Lucy wants than to be cared for. She is like a fragile flower in need of regular care, otherwise she will slowly and inevitably wither away and die. If given the attention and care she needs, she will flourish.

The fact that M. Emanuel is Catholic (formed and shaped by Jesuits) and she is Protestant matters little to her. For her it is not important (on several occasions she successfully tries to find the good side of his beliefs and support her findings with specific examples), though she fiercely defends her own belief when it is sullied. Eagleton (2005) believes that: “Paul unites a 'sensible' anti-radicalism with fiery reformist zeal, Protestant rationalism with Catholic spirit” (p. 68), and this strongly appeals to Lucy.

2.3. *Love conquers all*

Love as a reason for marriage or as its fundamental component is a less visible theme in *Villette*. Still it is possible to find traces of this in characters of Dr. John Graham Bretton and the mysterious Justine Marie.

Dr. Bretton is a good example of a character who deeply desires more than a loveless relationship and then marriage. He is a good-natured man seemingly without any significant flaws. Still he falls in love with a woman that most likely only wants to use him for her own amusement while seeking the attention of another. “I love Miss Fanshawe far more than de Hamal loves any human being” (Brontë, 1853, p. 159), he declares passionately. It is with passion and by his own decision he loves her and endures her whims.

Even after his disappointing first relationship with Ginevra Dr. Graham still seeks a healthy and balanced relationship built on love and mutual respect. Polly Home (Paulina de Bassompierre) is in Dr. Graham's eyes a celestial being. Being submitted to the harsh behavior of Ginevra Fanshawe and somewhat cold behavior of Lucy he meets this innocent being, shy at first, but dignified with good-natured temperament. Brontë (1853) wrote in *Villette*:

Ten years ago this pair had always found abundance to say to each other; the intervening decade had not narrowed the experience or impoverished the intelligence of either: besides, there are certain natures of which the mutual influence is such, that the more they say, the more they have to say. For these out of association grows adhesion, and out of adhesion, amalgamation. (p. 304)

Such couples are rare. No matter how long they know each other, there is still more to be said. The longer they are together, the quicker their relationship evolves. Even Lucy, though at that time she still loved Dr. Graham, was quite clear in her opinion on the couple: "I think it is deemed good that you two should live in peace and be happy— not as angels, but as few are happy amongst mortals" (p. 396).

2.4. Marriage as a form of power and control

Madame Beck, the head of the female school, is one of the major custodians of the institution of marriage. Her cold, calculating and phlegmatic nature is well known, and the book gives several examples of her behavior. But is there something else behind the facade that could make the readers understand her better? Gilbert and Gubar (2000) suggest that "she is motivated only by self-interest" (p. 408). Lucy also observes that her actions are motivated mainly by her interests and things possibly convenient to her. While she might have some feelings towards Dr. Graham, her cousin and a teacher at her school would be most likely simply a convenient way to help her achieve her goals.

Her need to control and manipulate is so strong, she "haunts the school in her soundless slippers and rules over all through espionage and surveillance" (p. 408). It is no secret, however. Everyone knows what she is doing but is conditioned to be content,

or at least not complain about it and thus create a disarray and anger the mistress of the house. Peschier (2005) points out that:

The use of spying, isolating and 'instructing' are the mechanisms by which the custodians of the nineteenth century mental asylum controlled and subdued their female patients. They are also perceived to be the main methods used by the Catholic Church to convert the Protestant and exercise power over its female flock. (p. 145)

In this case the mental asylum is the same as Madame Beck's school. The isolation and lack of care of the mental needs of her students creates a prerequisite for a possible future mental illness. However, this also makes them obedient for the time being and subjects to Madame Beck's need for control. Having a school she is able to shape, form and influence in a major way the untrained and ignorant minds she has at her disposal. But it is not only Madame Beck who will benefit from such conditioning. The famed school is a former convent. And as the convent was a symbol of solitude, simplicity of mind and austerity, so is the school. The young women are prepared for a life of submission. Their sexuality, their knowledge and their affections will be policed in a similar way by their husbands.

Madame Beck's behavior is in this sense very unusual. She deliberately creates an environment that trains other women for their future servitude but she herself is untouched by this philosophy. She remains a strong and stern dominant character throughout the book holding power and knowledge firmly in her hand. She seemingly puts the idea of a vulnerable and powerless woman aside. In many ways she resembles more the husbands her charges will marry one day than a woman and in this she becomes the ultimate image of what a woman should not be and how a woman should not act.

Many women in *Villette* are aware of the fact they cannot survive on their own. Lucy Snowe is only one of the characters that is lost in her own life, desperate and alone. She knows her only salvation is a man with a different character than hers who can bring new life and happiness into her dark and bleary existence.

Others, like Ginevra Fanshawe, strive for something beyond their reach and desire more than they have at the moment. They are unable to obtain everything they could want from life and marriage seems to be the answer.

And for some, relationships in general and especially marriage are the easiest form of control and power. Though not many in number, these woman are present in *Villette* and leave a strong and lasting impression on the reader.

Although some of the characters in *Shirley* seem to comply with the practice of marriage as an exchange, the next chapter moves on to a different view of the subject and explores a conventional and a revolutionary marriage.

3. Marriage in Shirley

Although the novel focuses on the wartime crisis in England and is mainly about “the expensive delicacies of the rich, the eccentric cookery of foreigners, the food riots in manufacturing towns, the abundant provisions due soldiers, the scanty dinner baskets of child laborers, and the starvation of the unemployed” (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, p. 373), the themes of marriage, though not many in number, are also present in the book. While *Jane Eyre* was presented as mostly a character-based book and *Villette* as a study of various themes, *Shirley* deals with two contradicting views of marriage. This chapter will focus on the idea of a conventional marriage where all parties submit to the expectations of the society and the revolutionary idea of marriage thus presenting another way to look at this subject.

Although *Villette* is about Lucy Snowe, a self-appointed martyr internally dying in a former convent, exploring the theme of deep loneliness and the absolute inability to move forward and the related results of such life, *Shirley* explores this theme even further. It expands and instead of affecting only selected characters in the book it seemingly affects them all. Gilbert and Gubar (2000) believe that *Shirley* is a story: “about impotence, [...] a story about characters defined by their very inability to initiate action” (p. 375). For the most of the book it seems as if the characters were waiting for something indefinable, unhappy and tired, but the book itself continues on without them as if they were not important for the story. In this *Shirley* seems to be building on the environment of the book and the society rather than on the characters themselves.

3.1. Conventional marriage

The refreshing thing about Caroline Helstone and *Shirley* in general is the absence of any disturbing love triangle. Caroline loves Robert from the beginning of the book to the very end of it. And though she literally snivels most of the book because she cannot have the love of her life for her own and at one point even falls ill because of that, there is no other that could or would even for a moment take Robert’s place. This distinguishes the book from *Villette* and is closer to *Jane Eyre* and Jane’s obvious loyalty to a chosen man.

The depressive tone of the book is, as was the case with *Villette*, without doubt mostly the result of the death of Charlotte Brontë's brother, Branwell, and sister Emily in the same year the book was written and the death of her last remaining sister Anne few months later in 1849. The feeling of desolation and hopelessness is present throughout the book especially with the main character Caroline, and this is true of her view of relationships and marriage in general. The resigned feeling of powerlessness or outright inability to pursue happiness is a crippling factor in the book.

"The feeling called love is and has been for two years the predominant emotion of my heart; always there, always awake, always astir" (Brontë, 2007, p. 147), declares Caroline but never tries to gain Robert's attentions, almost mimicking the actions of Lucy Snowe. Like Lucy, she remains a passive character silently suffering throughout the book, an outside observer that seems more dead than alive. Only the image of what she could become in the form of the old maids shakes her stillness. Lamonica (2003) suggests that "these women only offer Caroline depressing portraits of potentiality in their narrow and loveless existence" (p. 171).

Caroline is one of few women, if not the only woman, in Charlotte Brontë's novels who doesn't work. She is taken care of her entire life and this is what she craves to have in her future as well - a husband that would take care of her and protect her. In this sense she resembles the students in Madame Beck's school, although in her case it is her own decision.

As her uncle is prepared to take care of her, there is no need for her to fear for her future, still she contemplates the possibility of working as a governess because the man she chooses to turn her attentions to refuses to see her as anything else than a mere acquaintance. Yet she has no qualification aside from what a proper woman can do. Her own uncle tells her: "Stick to the needle—learn shirt-making and gown-making, and pie-crust-making, and you'll be a clever woman some day" (Brontë, 2007, p. 84) and discourages her from work. The only possibility is the career of a governess, but she is again denied. She is supposed to either marry or become an old maid. Lamonica (2003) agrees that "Caroline's sole aim and opportunity is marriage. She is not given any life-alternatives to marriage" (p. 173), confirming the expectations the society had on Victorian women.

Though Caroline is active and in contact with other people she still feels confined. And as Lucy was slowly dying in her former convent, Caroline slowly perishes inside a house that seems like a tomb with graveyard close by. Being rejected,

“Caroline is left to scrounge for emotional sustenance” (p. 163). Both these characters are in strong need of an emotional connection. Without it they wither and die. Like other characters in Charlotte Brontë’s novels, both Caroline and Lucy are unshakable in their opinions. Caroline declares that: “I will either be all or nothing to a man like Robert” (Brontë, 2007, p. 219).

Others are similarly stubborn. At the beginning of the book, Brontë presents us with a character, Malone, who voices the course of Robert’s future pursues:

If there is one notion I hate more than another, it is that of marriage; I mean marriage in the vulgar weak sense, as a mere matter of sentiment; two beggarly fools agreeing to unite their indigence by some fantastic tie of feeling—humbug! But an advantageous connection, such as can be formed in consonance with dignity of views, and permanency of solid interests, is not so bad—eh? (Brontë, 2007, p. 21)

Robert’s heritage is the core of the conflict in the book. His inability to see past the factory and his need to “rebuild the fallen house of Gérard and Moore on a scale at least equal to its former greatness“ (p. 25) is destructive and dangerous and makes him unable to accept Caroline’s love. This almost blind focus on one single thing resembles Caroline’s. Glen (2002) points out that he is “presented in terms which emphasise passivity and unfreedom” (p. 129). This is what drives him and nothing, not even his own happiness, will distract him from what needs to be done. If the marriage to a wealthy woman is the answer, his love to Caroline is doomed. Lamonica (2003) emphasizes that:

In practice, however, he, too, applies a single standard of behavior to both his private and public relations—the callous, profit-seeking, self-interest of the marketplace, which he displays to both heroines of Shirley in casting off Caroline and in proposing a loveless but advantageous marriage to Shirley. (p. 166)

Unlike Caroline, he is not waiting for everything to magically fit into place and is very careful not to lose the possibility of the success he seeks from his sight. His “ambition and his impotence” (Glen, 2002, p. 130) are the two competing traits that clash in his personality. His mill and his love. The past and the future.

3.2. Revolutionary marriage

Shirley is another shining example of woman who is not afraid to show her individuality and who will not be forced to act against her beliefs. She resembles Jane Eyre in many ways. Her vibrant personality yearning for freedom is a source of inspiration for other characters. In a society where she is expected to marry a wealthy and socially well established and powerful man she proudly refuses to submit.

Given the role of the master of her house, she strives for independence and equality (especially towards men in general). Lamonica (2003) agrees by writing: “Able to support herself, Shirley is a figure of female freedom, unburdened by the need, either financial or emotional, to be a wife or mother” (p. 172). Unlike Caroline she is free to not only think for herself and for her own unique beliefs but also implement them in her life. But it is not the only thing she seeks. Another is: “spiritual, intellectual and emotional affinity” (Singh, 1987, p. 165). The fact she has her own money means she is able to shape her own life in more prominent way than regular people without outside forces dictating her what she should do or whom she should be. The lack of direct family gives her even more freedom. This way she can present her own ideas about marriage without limitation and not be punished or penalized for them. Her uncle may try to control and manipulate her into doing what suits his interest, but as she is a unique and unbending personality, she will not yield to any idea she does not agree with. “Marriages, Shirley insists, not rooted in mutual respect, love, and trust but formed out of worldly interests are the sources of domestic strife, the corrupting agents of family life” (p. 175).

Shirley has undoubtedly very clear idea of what marriage should be built on and how it should work in the future. This idea of equality in marriage is revolutionary and defies all common beliefs. She does not look favorably on women who are just passive observers of their lives and are easily manipulated. She wants to have her life firmly in her own hand and be the only one to decide her own future.

As an independent woman Shirley seeks further freedom even in marriage itself and supports the idea of love as the main pillar of any relationship. And although she is a firm believer in equality, she also seeks a man who can dominate and master her:

Did I not say I prefer a *master*? One in whose presence I shall feel obliged and disposed to be good. One whose control my impatient temper must acknowledge. A man whose approbation can reward—

whose displeasure punish me. A man I shall feel it impossible not to love, and very possible to fear. (Brontë, 2007, p. 462)

She is drawn, like Jane, to a dominant man she would be able to pass on the control over her life to. Eagleton (2005) believes that “Shirley yearns to be sexually mastered” (p. 58). It is this trust that is essential in any possible future relationship she might have. It seems to be an almost insurmountable internal struggle - the need to have the control of her life and to relinquish it without succumbing to fear at the same time.

And while the people surrounding Shirley think she should marry someone with money and political power (like Blanche Ingram) to secure even more comfortable position for herself, none of the men who proposed to her in the past would be able to master her the way she wants and needs, so she simply, without any repercussions, refuses them and gives all her attention to a man without any money at all.

The book presents two very different views of marriage. On one side stands Caroline and Robert. Robert’s strong will and stubbornness in all things matches Caroline’s. Caroline on the other hand with all her opinions and views of marriage is a likeable character as she is viewed not as an anomaly, an exception that contradicts conventional views as to how a woman should behave and think, but as a typical representative in a realistic vision of society. She is one of many and as such can be relatable and her need for romantic love and persistence is attractive even to women nowadays.

On the other side, Shirley and Louis’ relationship opposes the conservative idea of marriage of the time period and stand in contrast to more acceptable relationship of Louis’ brother Robert and Caroline. And like Jane and Mr. Rochester create a different couple that defies every societal norm giving the reader another point of view while clearly stating that there is nothing wrong with either of these views. Both heroines however seek emotional connection and believe this is what is supposed to be the main pillar of every relationship and are not afraid to express their opinions.

Conclusion

Marriage is in Charlotte Brontë's books unavoidable almost as life itself. It is a central theme of her unique and compelling books that have found many readers generation after generation. It is the struggle against the societal norms, the deep and overwhelming need to hold on to our own non-interchangeable identity that translates even nowadays and without any doubt will even in the future.

And although many rebelled, women in general were viewed as a weak and inferior gender. Their roles were strictly dictated and enforced. The main and only goal in woman's life was to marry and then find the meaning of life in her husband and children. The historical period was not ideal for women and the many female writers emerging and writing about this theme only exemplify the rising discontent.

But Brontë did not only explore rebellious characters. Very often side by side stands a free, independent woman pursuing her happiness without fear and a woman bound by the expectations of society and her own family. In some cases the final pages show a surprising development - even some of the characters that decide to submit, can still find contentment and even happiness within the confinements of society.

The purpose of this thesis was to analyze the different views of marriage in three distinctive novels written by Charlotte Brontë - *Jane Eyre*, *Villette* and *Shirley*. The expectation was to gain more insight into the complicated world of marriage in Brontë's books and understand the motivations behind the selected characters while taking into account the real historical situation.

I came to conclusion that Charlotte Brontë founded all her books on the striking difference between those characters that decide (voluntarily or against their will) to succumb to what the society dictates and those that oppose the established society norms. And although Brontë, as a feminist, favors the female characters that are unique, unyielding and firm, she recognizes that even those who wish to live according to the society rules and expectations can be happy and content in marriage and in life in general.

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Summary in Czech

Předmětem této bakalářské práce je analyzovat různá témata související s manželstvím ve třech románech Charlotte Brontëové - *Janě Eyrové*, *Villette* a *Shirley*. Práce zkoumá manželství, přičemž bere v úvahu historickou situaci žen. Také se snaží pochopit motivaci vybraných postav a jejich názory, které ovlivňují jejich budoucí pohled na manželství.

Kapitoly jsou rozděleny dle románů. První se zabývá *Janou Eyrovou*, druhá se zaměřuje na *Villette* a třetí na *Shirley* a její dva hlavní páry reprezentující konvenční a revoluční pohled na manželství.