University of Stavanger

FACULTY OF ARTS AND EDUCATION

MASTER'S THESIS

Programme of study: Master in Literacy Studies	Spring semester, 2016 Open
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Thesis title: The Cultural Significance of the Governess in *Agnes Grey*, *Jane Eyre* and *The Turn of the Screw*	
Keywords: The Victorian Era Governess Patriarchy *Unwoman*	No. of pages: 103 + appendices/other: 13 Stavanger, May 12, 2016

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my brilliant supervisor Janne Stigen Drangsholt for her insightful comments, constructive criticism and quick wit throughout the year. I also want to thank my lecturers Brita Strand Rangnes, Jena Habegger-Conti, Aidan Keally Conti, Eric Dean Rasmussen and Ion Drew for making my three years at UIS a truly inspiring period. In addition, I am ever grateful to my fantastic and caring family. You fed me when I forgot to eat, gave me inspiration when I was exhausted, and motivated me by planning exciting post-thesis adventures. Last but not least, I want to thank my supporting friends and colleagues and my encouraging fellow students Ida and Kurt. There would be no thesis without your help.

Abstract

My thesis explores how Victorian society viewed the women who did not live up to the female ideal created by patriarchy. I base my study on Anne Brontë's (1820-1849) *Agnes Grey* (1847), Charlotte Brontë's (1816-1855) *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Henry James' (1843-1916) *The Turn of the Screw* (1898). I investigate and analyse the governess protagonists in these three novels in order to question the representation of women in Victorian novels.

I primarily base my theoretical work on feminist criticism, stretching from early feminist Mary Wollstonecraft's (1759-1797) views on the domestication of women, to current critique on gender ideology as presented by Toril Moi. My chosen theorists contribute with their thoughts on patriarchy, traditional gender roles and the concept of the *unwoman*, or women as the nonsignificant *other*. As member of the middle-class, the governess, who typically did not marry and who entered the work market, was considered unfeminine and therefore a potential *unwoman*. She gives insight into the sociological and psychological factors that influenced Victorian women's lives and psyches in a patriarchal society. The governess is among the few women who are in a position to cast a light on women's life both in the domestic and in the public sphere.

My studies show that the governess enters the work force either as an escape from the domestic sphere, or because it is the only tolerably respectable way of making a living as an unmarried middle-class woman. In her position, she experiences stigmatization and great isolation. The Brontës attempt to reduce the governess' *otherness* whereas Henry James' novel portray her as a neurotic, sexually repressed woman. Public interest in the governess was apparent during the Victorian era, and the fascination with the governess as a literary character is still evident today.

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1. Introduction

> Not a mother, the governess nevertheless performed the mother's tasks; not a prostitute, she was nevertheless suspiciously close to other sexualized women; not a lunatic, she was nevertheless deviant simply because she was a middle-class woman who had to work.
>
> (Poovey 2007: 14)

The inspiration for this thesis was the figure of the Victorian governess. Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* first sparked my fascination with this character. In Jane, I recognized a rebellious and atypical Victorian female protagonist. Her appearance was plain, and her orphan background made her unimportant or invisible to others. Still, she embodied characteristics that made her worthy of becoming the novel's protagonist. Charlotte Brontë gives the insignificant governess a significant role by making her a representative for all Victorian women. The governess gives an insight into the sociological and psychological factors that influenced Victorian women's lives and psyches in a patriarchal society.

The aim of my thesis is to explore how Victorian society viewed the women who did not live up to the female ideal created by patriarchy. I base my study on Anne Brontë's (1820-1849) *Agnes Grey* (1847), Charlotte Brontë's (1816-1855) *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Henry James' (1843-1916) *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), and I seek to investigate and analyse the governess protagonists in these three novels in order to question the representation of women in Victorian novels. I will primarily base my theoretical work on feminist criticism in order to investigate patriarchy, traditional gender roles and the concept of the *unwoman*, or women as the nonsignificant *other*. I construct my studies on theories ranging from early feminist Mary Wollstonecraft's views on the domestication of women, to current critique on gender ideology as presented by Toril Moi.

Through *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë advocates for women to have the same opportunities as men to experience individual freedom, to develop their minds and to have careers. Brontë's contemporary, Florence Nightingale, fights for the same cause. Her essay *Cassandra* (1852) suggests that characterization of feminine nature confined middle-class women intellectually. She

identifies the great limitations that women suffered in Britain during the mid-nineteenth century when asking, "[w]hy have women passion, intellect, moral activity – these three – and a place in society where no one of the three can be exercised?" (Nightingale [1852] 1979: 25).

My thesis is divided into four parts. The first part is the literary review, which presents the main topics of my thesis and the primary and secondary literature connected to my focus points. I give an overview of society and culture as a backdrop for analysing the Victorian governess in fiction. The aim is to analyse how a patriarchal society influenced, restricted and shaped women's individual personalities and social roles. According to *A Concise Glossary of Feminist Theory* (1997), "[p]atriarchy refers to an over-arching system of male dominance. The term is reserved for the rule of the father over his wife, immature children, and any other household dependants" (Andermahr et al. 1997: 159). During the Victorian period, women had limited possibilities to enter the public realm and there were strict norms that women had to follow in order to maintain their femininity. Women who dared to challenge standards set by patriarchy were deemed *others*, madwomen or monsters. The governess was in a position of uncertainty, as she had to leave her own home in order to carry out her work. She therefore threatened traditional Victorian gender norms, and became a potential *unwoman*. The governess became a popular literary character as she both intimidated and fascinated the Victorian public.

Not only the governess was on the verge of becoming an *unwoman*, female authors were also considered outsiders, and they often chose to hide their femininity and their political agendas behind male pseudonyms. The Brontës were part of a struggling group of female writers, and I will focus on their challenges and their victories as authors as well as how they portray their protagonists and what messages they wish to convey to the reader. Henry James who published his novel half a century after the Brontës had more freedom as an author, a fact that is reflected in a bolder approach to writing. Finally, I introduce my main secondary sources, such as feminist theorists Mary Wollstonecraft, Florence Nightingale, Gilbert and Gubar, Elaine Showalter and Toril Moi. Relevant theories for James' novel are Sigmund Freud and his essay on "The Uncanny" (1919) and Shoshana Felman's thoughts on writing and madness.

In chapter three, I examine *Agnes Grey*. Out of my three chosen novels, Anne Brontë's is the least complex both in plot and in narrative style. It has received very little critical attention compared to the other two novels discussed in my thesis. It does not present complicated literary techniques, nor does it keep the reader in nail-biting suspense. What it does demonstrate, is a

straightforward and realistic narrative about the dreary life of the Victorian governess. *Agnes Grey* gives insight into the emotional dimensions of a governess' life. Anne Brontë proves a quiet challenger of patriarchal society. The novel is a most fitting text to give insight into the ambiguous role of the governess. In addition, it demonstrates important topics that I focus on in my thesis, such as the limited possibilities for women under patriarchal control, the gender ideology of the two separate spheres and female education.

Equal to her sister's novel, *Agnes Grey*, Charlotte Brontë presents a governess protagonist in *Jane Eyre*. I examine Charlotte Brontë's novel in chapter four. Brontë puts focus on issues concerning gender, social class and the position of women in the early to mid-Victorian era. Jane's character proved just the type of role model that Victorian women craved, comprising a combination of "inspiring professional [role-model]" and "romantic [heroine]" (Showalter 2014b: 85). Similar to *Agnes Grey, Jane Eyre* explores the conditions of women in nineteenth-century England. Even though both Brontë sisters have governess protagonists and share motives in their writing, their narrative techniques vary immensely. Charlotte Brontë wants to do more than simply describe the dreariness of governess life. Her writing has more in common with the third Brontë sister, Emily Brontë, who wrote *Wuthering Heights* (1847). Emily and Charlotte borrow elements from the gothic and romantic genre to create a more entertaining narrative than their sister Anne does.

In chapter five, I examine Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw*. First, I describe changes in society since the mid-nineteenth century in order to identify James' influences towards the end of the Victorian era. Second, I look at how James portrays his two governesses, and compare it to how the Brontës portrayed their protagonists. As James depicts his characters in a far more daring manner than the Brontës, I find it useful to explore whether he could do so because of his gender. He boldly addresses topics like female sexuality, corruption of innocence and madness.

During the *fin de siècle*, new scientific theories influenced literature, and James' novel is no exception. *The Turn of the Screw* is on one level a ghost story and on another level a portrayal of a psychologically tormented governess. Focusing on the psychological aspect of James' novel, I find it useful to explore the text from a Freudian perspective, looking for "uncanny" elements in his narrative.

2. Literary review

2.1 The ideal

In the introduction to "The Victorian Age" in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* (2006), Stephen Greenblatt gives a historic overview of the era, including the role of the Victorian middle-class woman. He explains that Queen Victoria's long reign from 1837 to 1901, defines the historical period that bears her name. The Victorian era is associated with Britain's great age of industrial expansion and economic progress. During Victoria's reign, the British Empire doubled in size, encompassing Canada, Australia, India and various territories in Africa and the South Pacific. The Queen and her husband Albert were great supporters of middle-class pursuits such as industry, finance and technological advancement. Equally important however, was their influence on an ideological level (cf. Greenblatt 2006: 1886-1891).

The Queen came to represent a type of femininity that revolved around the family, motherhood and respectability. Accompanied by her husband and their nine children, she represented a domestic fidelity that her citizens embraced. She became the icon of middle-class femininity, moral responsibility and domestic propriety (cf. Greenblatt 2006: 1886-1891). In *Victorian Literature and Culture* (2006), Maureen Moran elaborates by stating, "[m]iddle-class women identified with the queen who portrayed herself as wife and mother" (M. Moran 2006: 2). As women gradually began to challenge this ideology, however, the Queen felt the need to express her concerns stating, "God created men and women different - then let them remain each in their own position" (Hardie 1963: 140). Many women supported the Queen's sentiments. According to Ruth Brandon (2008), women themselves had internalized their inferiority (Brandon 2008: 209). These women did not experience oppression, but rather focused on the fact that patriarchy offered idolization and protection. After Albert's death in 1861, the queen retreated from the public eye, an act that accentuated the belief that the appropriate place for a woman was in the home. This ideology had major effects also politically.

Women struggled, as they had no political power whatsoever. During the Victorian era, society did not recognize women as citizens. Sonya Andermahr et al. (1997) voice that historically "full citizenship rights are seen to rest on particular definitions of active participation,

such as participation in paid employment, however, women are likely to be disadvantaged" (Andermahr et.al. 1997: 26). This definition demands a citizen to participate in the public realm. Confined to the domestic sphere, women could not possibly claim citizenship. This clearly indicates that women are not seen as important members of society.

Patriarchy was the foundation of Victorian society. The *Oxford English Dictionary*, hereby referred to as *OED,* defines patriarchy as "[a] form of social organization in which the father or oldest male is the head of the family, and descent and relationship are reckoned through the male line; government or rule by a man or men" (OED 2016a). Patriarchal society determined that women had no physical, social, economic or political power. Patriarchal society forbade women the same privileges as men. Consequently, women were attributed feminine duties of caring for the home and pursuing the outlets of feminine creativity. Because women were refused the opportunity to work or take part in the domestic sphere, they spent their youth preparing for marriage. Maureen Moran (2006) describes the few opportunities women had to enter public life. They were excluded from higher education until the last part of the century, and they did not have the right to vote. Society did, however, acknowledge works of writing by women, but only if they stuck to subjects considered to be within their expertise and suitable for their sphere. Topics on refined arts, management of the house, love, courtship, marriage, family life and fidelity were accepted (cf. M. Moran 2006: 37). This had sparked outrage in the past, and continued to do so throughout Victoria's reign.

Middle-class women's only need for education was preparation for the role of "angel in the house". This was the favourite metaphor for Victorian womanhood. The term originates from Coventry Patmore's popular 1854 poem, "The Angel in the House", where he describes his "perfect" wife. The angel character became the ideal woman in Victorian male-dominated literature. The qualities of female innocence, purity and passivity were routinely being celebrated in written culture and continuously reinforced through religious teaching, medical and psychological theories and the law (cf. M. Moran: 35-36). Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar discuss the angel in *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Imagination* (2000). They express that the she possessed the "eternal feminine" virtues of modesty, gracefulness, purity, delicacy, civility, compliancy, chastity and politeness. The angel character was selfless, modest, dispassionate, and submissive (cf. Gilbert and Gubar 2000: 22-23). The ideal woman, as promoted by the Queen, had to adopt these characteristics in order to

secure her femininity. According to Moran (2006), Victorian social structures and institutions tried to impose a single version of ideal femininity, much at odds with women's own sense of their experience (cf. M. Moran 2006: 35). The discussion regarding women's characters, social roles and rights, also known as "the Woman Question", proved a hot topic throughout the era.

Moran (2006) states that Victorians referred to *the woman question* whenever they discussed the cultural upheaval that arose from women's changing expectations about their roles and possible destinies. At the centre of the bourgeois view of women was the philosophy of the two separate spheres. Society placed women in the private or domestic realm, whereas men were naturally suited to the active and intellectual domains of public life, including commerce, government and the professions. In this gender ideology, biological difference mixed with assumptions about women's bodies, emotional temperament and maternal instincts underpinned the concept of the Victorian female presence as spiritually inspiring (cf. M. Moran 2006: 35-36). There was an established belief that women were born with "natural" characteristics inferior to those of men. This ideology, based on stereotypes, is called "essentialism". It is a way of "conceiving people, cultures, etc. as having certain innate, natural or universal characteristics" (Bennett and Royle 2014: 322). Feminist critics question and challenge stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity.

In her text, "Feminist Literary Criticism" in *Modern Literary Theory* (1986), Toril Moi explains that patriarchy "wants us to believe that there is such a thing as an essence of femaleness, called femininity" (Moi 1986: 209). She further confirms that the opposite qualities attached to male/masculine and female/feminine are heavily imbricated in the patriarchal value system. She points to French feminist Hélène Cixous' theories on binary oppositions between the male and the female which state that men are considered intelligent and logical, whilst women are labelled sensitive and emotional. Under patriarchy, Cixous claims, "the male is always the victor". She continues, "[e]ither woman is passive or she doesn't exist" (cf. Moi 1986: 210-211). Based on such views, men were considered suited for the tainted, public sphere, and women were considered best suited to the predictable, domestic sphere. Women's job was to counterbalance the public sphere in which their husbands laboured all day, in addition to preparing the next generation to carry on this well-established way of life.

These cultural and social norms were deeply embedded in Victorian society, and are still largely relevant today. In *Sex, Gender and the Body – The student edition of What is a Woman?*

(2010), Toril Moi makes a point of this by referring to Mary Anne Case's contemporary analysis of gender. Case lists adjectives that psychologists and other researchers regularly consider coded masculine and feminine. Adjectives describing men or masculinity are, "ambitious", "analytical", "dominant", "forceful", "independent", "self-sufficient" and "strong". Adjectives for women, or femininity, are "cheerful", "childlike", "gullible", "loyal", "sympathetic" and "tender" (Moi 2010: 103). These same descriptions, contradicting and often mutually exclusive, are strikingly similar to those specified by Cixous' on men and women during the twentieth century. Case believes that "things seen as masculine are often more highly valued than those seen as feminine, at least in part because the latter are associated with women" (Case 1995: 6). Historically, the character of woman and femininity has ignited discussion, and it is still a highly relevant topic. Case concludes, "[t]here can be, I would contend, a world of difference between being female and being feminine" (Moi 2010: 103-104). My thesis focuses on the Victorian women who could not live up to the stereotypical descriptions of the perfect woman, as set by patriarchy.

Even though we have seen great changes on issues concerning women's position in society since the nineteenth century, my research could also prove relevant for contemporary female figures. Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones* is a literary character that strives to live up to the expectations of women and femininity in the twenty-first century. Bridget Jones is on one hand strong and independent, and on the other hand concerned that she will end up alone. In *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996), the first thing the protagonist reveals is her worries about her appearance, her lifestyle and her taste in men. Bridget gives a colourful description of her dilemmas by revealing her resolutions. She intends to "[s]top smoking", "[d]rink no more than fourteen alcohol units per day", "[i]mprove career and find new job with potential", "[g]o to gym three times a week not merely to buy sandwich" and "[f]orm functional relationship with responsible adult" (Fielding 1996: 3).

Fielding has dedicated a trilogy to Bridget Jones who struggles to fit the current ideals of feminine beauty as well as living up to other people's expectations of her. Bridget has a tendency not to reach her goals, and she feels guilty about it. Where the Brontës use rage to emphasize their opinions concerning Victorian woman, Fielding uses humour to emphasize Bridget's present-day dilemmas. Caitlin Moran also uses humour when discussing what it means to be a woman in today's society. In her novel *How To Be a Woman* (2012), she addresses subjects like puberty, sexuality, abortion, modern beauty rituals, childbirth and sexism. In an amusing manner,

Moran reveals the burden of being a woman when reminiscing over her thirteenth Birthday party and claiming, “there is no crueller or more inappropriate present to give a child than oestrogen and a big pair of tits. Had anyone asked me in advance of my birthday, I think I would have requested a book token or maybe a voucher for C&A, instead” (C. Moran 2012: 9).

2.2 The *unwoman*

I have borrowed the term *unwoman* from Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* (2010). In the novel, the term categorizes women who cannot fulfil society’s expectations of their gender. *Unwomen* are for example women who are not able to have children, widows, lesbians and politically rebellious women. In Atwood’s book, the term is used on a feminist woman. This type of women are dangerous in the eyes of patriarchy, and end up being exiled from society (Atwood 2010: 128-129). In the *OED*, “un-” prefixes adjectives to express negation. To place the prefix in front of “woman” therefore indicates the absence of womanly characteristics (OED 2016b). The *OED* also gives a blunt definition of the verb “unwoman” to mean “[t]o unsex (a woman)”. The *OED* here refers to *Lancet* (1823) which uses “unwoman” to explain “[t]aking away the ovaries altogether […] would unwoman her” (OED 2016c). This definition indicates a woman was only a woman if she had ovaries and could produce children. The various definitions only recognize women if they are able to reproduce, they do not focus on women as individuals or as valuable contributors in other aspects of society. The three governesses that I discuss in my thesis challenge the established ideal of femininity and womanhood. If these women show any signs of rebelliousness or madness, they can easily become *unwomen*, and as the governess highlights issues that concern all Victorian women, that signals that all women are potential *unwomen*.

Traditionally, aristocratic families employed a governess to live in their home and educate their daughters. During the nineteenth century, as the newly rich middle-classes did their best to imitate aristocratic lifestyles, having a governess educate middle-class girls became a new trend. The governess clearly indicated the precariousness of the unmarried middle-class woman’s status in Victorian England (cf. Greenblatt 2006: 1898). No middle-class woman would work unless circumstances compelled her to do so. It was equivalent to social suicide. Moran (2006) agrees that patriarchal, social pressure was to blame for the limited choices open to single women. She

states that society “restricted middle-class to domestic, ‘nurturing’ employment, such as teaching and the hated governess work described in Agnes Grey” (M. Moran 2006: 36).

A very small amount of first-hand documentation exists on the life of a governess. Ruth Brandon explains in her book *Governess - The Lives and Times of the Real Jane Eyres* (2008), that governesses were poor and insignificant, and their possessions were of little interest and rarely kept (cf. Brandon 2008: 1-2). Therefore, direct testimonies, like letters and journals, are lacking. However, many authors portrayed governesses in their novels. Some, as we will see, wrote from own experience. These were unmarried women, who saw themselves as having failed their mission to secure a husband and have children. Forced to work for a living, the only respectable profession for a middle-class woman was to become a governess. The governess could expect no security of employment, minimal wages and an ambiguous status, somewhere between servant and family member. Her unclear role isolated her within the household. Brandon claims that virtually everyone who wrote about governessing portrayed it as hateful (Brandon 2008: 4). The concept of a working middle-class woman was disconcerting to Victorians. The transition from a genteel lady to an employee meant that the governess’ femininity was no longer intact.

My three novels present different portrayals of the governess as potential *unwoman*. In *Agnes Grey*, the protagonist expresses her frustration in a subdued but realistic manner, whereas *Jane Eyre* and *The Turn of The Screw* depict both passionate and complex protagonists as well as characters who exemplify *unwomen*. In literature, the *unwoman*, or madwoman, is usually impulsive, passionate and uncontrollable, all unwanted qualities in a woman. Gilbert and Gubar (2000) express that in exploring nineteenth-century literature, the madwoman emerges over and over again, mirroring women writers’ need to “destroy all the patriarchal structures” which both their authors and their authors’ submissive heroines seem to accept as inevitable” (Gilbert and Gubar 2000: 77-78). The madwoman frequented Victorian novels where she displayed the rage felt by many women in many different ways. Anne and Charlotte Brontë give us an opportunity to find the female perspective on the *other*. *Jane Eyre* has received the most focus on the subject of the madwoman. In the novel, the character of Bertha Mason appears to be Jane’s counterpart. With her passion, sexuality and frustration, Bertha contrasts Jane’s placid morality. Gilbert and Gubar (2000) propose another reading of these two characters. They present Bertha as Jane’s döppelganger. Bertha’s unfeminine traits are all manifestations of Jane’s inner turmoil. Simply by

being born female, my protagonists and two of their creators threatened the stability of the traditional social structures.

Toril Moi (2010) advocates Simone de Beauvoir's opinion that people with female bodies do not have to fulfil any special requirements to be considered women. Beauvoir "refuses to hand the concept of 'woman' over to the opposition" (Moi 2010: 77). That is however, what women had to do during the Victorian era. Both the real and the literary governess were seen as threats to society simply by being present in her employer's home. Her lack of recognizable class, and her labelled unfemininity, made her a character of unpleasantness. By working, she blurred the strict division of the public and domestic spheres and the distinctions of patriarchal masculinity and femininity. Thus, the governess was liable to be labelled *unwoman* or an *other*. The terms *other* and *otherness* are more frequently used in literature than my chosen term, *unwoman*. While *unwoman* is a gendered term, the *OED* defines *otherness* as "[t]he quality or fact of being other", a "difference, especially from an expected norm", "separateness from or oppositeness to a specified thing" (OED 2016g). Beauvoir claims that for traditional male philosophers "[h]umanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being" (Moi 2010: 224). Subsequently, all women are *others*, and as will be argued in this thesis, the governess serves to highlight female degradation.

Literature portrays *unwomen* as "monsters" or "madwomen". She is a contrasting figure to the angel in the house. *Unwomen* appeared both in real life and in fiction. Unruly female writers fit into the category of madwomen in real life. They represented a threat to the patriarchal society. Gilbert and Gubar (2000) confirm that nineteenth-century texts by women project what they refer to as "their rebellious impulses" into the "mad or monstrous women" as a reaction to "the structures of patriarchal society" (Gilbert and Gubar 2000: 78). Female writers were also potential *unwomen*. They had to be careful with their narratives and their choice of topics, and often met critical voices amongst readers and critics. A woman could write, but only on topics suitable for her realm. Gilbert and Gubar explain,

> […] 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.
>
> (Gilbert and Gubar 2000: 64)

To camouflage what they knew society would disapprove of, many female writers, the Brontës included, “concealed their troublesome femaleness” behind male “masks”, using pseudonyms. The Brontë’s “masks” were Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell. Gilbert and Gubar argue that this was a “practical-seeming refuge from those claustrophobic double binds of ‘femininity’ which had given so much pain to writers” (Gilbert and Gubar 2000: 65). Female authors found their own way of demonstrating their pain.

According to Elaine Showalter, women had adopted a variety of popular genres (Showalter 2014b: 16). The novel was a preferred genre. Women’s topics, however, had to demonstrate womanliness and be suitable for their area of expertise, the domestic sphere. Showalter refers to Inga-Stina Ewbank’s claims that “the central preoccupation… is with the woman as an influence on others within her domestic and social circle” (Showalter 2014b: 16). Anne and Charlotte Brontë’s novels certainly challenged the patriarchal social norms. As long as a woman followed the rules set by men, she had the possibility to contribute to literature.

Showalter (2014b) divides the history of women's writing into three phases, starting in the Victorian era and ending up at the present. The first movement, from 1840s to 1880, she calls “the Feminine phase”. This is a period when women generally imitated male writes, and often used male pseudonyms. “Victorians expected women’s novels to reflect the feminine values they exalted, although obviously the woman novelist herself had outgrown the constraining feminine role” (Showalter 2014b: 6). The Brontës wrote during this phase. Their progressive writing, however, seems to correspond more with the following period, “the Feminist phase”. During this period, from 1880 until 1920, women writers offered a separate position to men. They insisted on exploring and defining womanhood. “The Female phase” that took over in 1920 is ongoing. This phase includes women’s “courageous self-exploration” and a psychological focus rather than a social one (cf. Showalter 2014b: 3-30).

2.3 The Victorian novel

The Victorian era lasted roughly twice as long as the era prior to it, the Romantic period. The relatively short Romantic period saw great variations of literary characteristics, so it is logical that the much longer Victorian period includes even more variety. Greenblatt states that fiction, particularly the novel, replaced poetry as the most influential and popular literary form. The fact that it dealt with matters concerning everyday life was part of the appeal. Most plots in Victorian novels focus on a protagonist seeking to define his or her place in society. Greenblatt elaborates by claiming that the novel "constructs a tension between surrounding social conditions and the aspiration of the hero or heroine". Therefore, the novel became the natural form for "portraying woman's struggles for self-realization" in a society full of constraints imposed on her. Greenblatt argues, "the novel was both a principal form of entertainment and a spur to social sympathy" (cf. Greenblatt 2006: 1901-1902).

The Brontës and James certainly fit into this category as they emblematize the human condition through their protagonists. Their novels portray women's struggles for position both within the family and in society as a whole. These struggles become even more complicated for the governess than for married women, as her position is unclear and diffuse to those around her. The governess as a literary figure was interesting to Victorian authors and readers alike. The governess had to leave home and make her own way in the world. She was brought up as a lady, but the fact that she had to work, meant that she lost her status as the ideal, genteel woman. According to Kathryn Hughes (1993), the complicated social status of the governess gave novelists the freedom to portray her as they wished (Hughes 1993: xiii).

Victorian readers appreciated one novel genre in particular, namely "life writing" and the two subgenres autobiography and bildungsroman. The portrayal of the life of a governess was part of the category life writing. In *The Victorians* (2002), Philip Davis gives reason for the interest in this type of written work. He claims that Britain's great domestic changes and expansions abroad led to an increased need for knowledge about human life. Victorians showed great interest in exploring human development (cf. Davis 2002: 404-407). Thus, life writing on the governess became a popular genre through which to explore women's psyche and role in society. The character of the governess intrigued Victorians, including authors, so these women

were well documented in Victorian literature. Even though an exciting plot and specific style helped intrigue the readers, a realistic narrative was crucial.

According to Timothy Peltason in *A Companion to Victorian Literature & Culture* (2006), Victorian novelists found ways of using life writing in their fiction by borrowing the forms of both biography and autobiography (Peltason 2006: 356). Many writers also achieved a believable literary power through autobiographical writing. According to Davis (2002), this genre often represented the "lost or neglected voices" (Davis 2002: 426). Presenting novels as autobiographies suggests authenticity of the events. In addition to a credible narrative, the retelling of events needs a reliable structure. By using these narratives, authors left behind a written record of their lives. They offered instruction, bore witness or offered information about important social struggles (cf. Peltason 2006: 356). The opening line in *Agnes Grey* argues, "[a]ll true histories contain instruction", and the writer hopes "it might prove useful to some" (A. Brontë 2010: 5). Anne Brontë's aim is to teach and instruct, and the moral she means to impart is that women have choices to make regardless of how limited they might appear. Agnes', or Anne's, statement reveals that her story intends not only to entertain, but also instruct. By using a seemingly autobiographical narrative, Brontë claims truth to her novel, and states her intentions that it will be educative for the reader. Peltason (2006) reveals that Victorian novelists who engaged in life writing by blending elements of autobiography and biography into their fiction, created what critics have called by the name bildungsroman (cf. Peltason 2006: 361-362).

According to *The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms* (2006), the bildungsroman applies to fiction detailing personal development or educational maturation. Childs and Fowler (2006) describe it as a literary genre that originated in Germany towards the end of the eighteenth century. They argue that it involves the balancing of social role with individual fulfilment. In addition, it is crucial to the genre that the educative journey that the hero undergoes, the completion through enlightenment, is a cornerstone of the bildungsroman. In Britain, the bildungsroman became synonymous with a certain sense of social dislocation. (Childs and Fowler 2006: 18-19). The genre, literally "the novel of formation", includes all three of my chosen novels. *Agnes Grey*, *Jane Eyre* and *The Turn of the Screw* all have governess protagonists who undertake personal journeys. The three novels all typify the Victorian embracing of a character who experiences change throughout the story. The novels present women as "the models of psychological growth whose development involves the fulfilment of a sexualized

subjectivity, a self-realization that flies in the face of social convention" (cf. Childs and Fowler 2006: 18-19).

In her close examination of Anne Brontë, *Anne Brontë - The Other One* (1989), Elizabeth Langland (1989) classifies *Agnes Grey* as a female version of the bildungsroman (Langland 1989: 96). While Agnes cannot go freely out and experience the world like a male hero, she nonetheless has "a vague and secret wish to see a little more of the world" (A. Brontë 2010: 6). She wishes to "go out into the world", "to enter upon a new life" and to act for herself (A. Brontë 2010: 12). A man would have a number of possibilities to go out and see the world. Agnes' only chance is through education. She becomes a governess whose role is to educate her charges. Jane Eyre follows the same path. Both Agnes and Jane meet obstacles, fight through them and experience personal growth. The governess in *The Turn of the Screw* feels the duty to intervene in her charges' development in order to help them on their way to adulthood. In this sense, the role of the governess places *The Turn of the Screw* close to a bildungsroman. For the governess herself, however, the novel is a bildungsroman in reverse. Instead of experiencing a path towards self-realization, the governess becomes more irrational as the story develops. The focus in these novels is on protagonists whose efforts to define their place in society is the main concern of the plot. The novels therefore constructs a tension between surrounding social conditions and the aspiration of a heroine, whether it be for love, social position, or a life adequate to her imagination. This tension makes the novel the natural form to use in portraying women's struggles for self-realization in the context of the constraints imposed upon her (cf. Greenblatt 2006: 1901).

2.4 My novels and their authors

"Whether written by women or men, the Victorian novel was extraordinarily various", claims Stephen Greenblatt (Greenblatt 2006: 1901). The Brontë sisters published their novels in 1847, in the early Victorian period, when character types of earlier romance fiction was still recognizable but plots were often extreme. James published his in 1898, at the end of the era, when psychological realism began to dominate (M. Moran 2006: 80-81).

Agnes Grey (1847) does not only tell a story of female development, the novel also depicts the precarious position of a governess in a realistic narrative. According to Sally Shuttleworth in her introduction to *Agnes Grey* (2010), we should not read the novel as an autobiography even though Brontë wrote it with an autobiographical narrative. The intensity of personal experience, she adds, contributed to the passion of a novel that dealt with the plight of the governess, a topic that received sympathetic attention in the press at the time of publication (cf. Shuttleworth 2010: x). The plot of the novel revolves around Agnes Grey, the daughter of a clergyman. When her father makes an unfortunate investment, which leaves the family ruined, she is eager to help them financially by becoming a governess. Anne appears very naïve in entering her new life as governess. She leaves home full of expectations, but soon experiences the effects of social barriers. Both employers and servants hold her in low regard, and yet she must keep quiet and not speak back to her oppressors (Shuttleworth 2010: x-xi).

Shuttleworth (2010) expresses that Anne Brontë's novel since its first publication has been inferior to Charlotte and Emily's novels. As a story about a governess, it mistakenly appeared to be following *Jane Eyre*, but "without any of the sensational drama of that tale". It is important to remember that Anne wrote *Agnes Grey* before Charlotte wrote *Jane Eyre*, therefore we can assume that textual parallels could have started with Anne been adopted by Charlotte. Regardless, *Agnes Grey* has drawn very little critical attention at all. The small amount of attention it received shortly after publication was mainly negative praise. It suffered descriptions like "colourless", "lacking power and originality" or "leaving no impression at all" (cf. Shuttleworth 2010: xxvii). Only a few critics deemed *Agnes Grey* an important work of Victorian realism. Shuttleworth (2010) explains that the hardest critic was Charlotte, who after Anne's death became her biographer and reviewer. Charlotte severely damaged her little sister's reputation as she portrayed her unfavourably in the "Biographical Notice" which prefaced the second edition of *Agnes Grey* and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (cf. Shuttleworth 2010: xxvii-xxviii).

Apart from her two novels, only a few letters and papers documented Anne's life. Therefore, many relied unconditionally on Charlotte's statements about her sister. Readers and critics never questioned Charlotte's assessments of Anne's literary abilities. Today, *Agnes Grey* is slowly receiving more interest and acclaim. The novel's lack of appreciation is however still evident. The *International Movie Data Base* (IMDB) reveals a search result of thirty-five

televised and filmatized versions of *Jane Eyre* (IMDB 2016a). *Agnes Grey* however does not show any search results (IMDB 2016b). Out of my three chosen novels, then, *Agnes Grey* has received the smallest amount of interest and critical acclaim. It is, however, the most realistic out of the three novels, and its detailed portrayal of the daily life of a governess is of great interest to my thesis.

Charlotte Brontë also completed her first novel, *Jane Eyre*, in 1847, the same year her sister published *Agnes Grey*. Pauline Nestor (1987) notes that *Jane Eyre* became an instant bestseller and the publishers enthusiastically ran two editions in the first year of publication (Nestor 1987: 15). The novel has remained popular, and is today one of the great classics in British literature. Like her sister Anne, Charlotte presented her novel as an autobiography and under a pseudonym, hers being Currer Bell. The novel, or bildungsroman, tells the story of an orphaned girl who receives her formal education at a charitable school, and who later becomes the governess to the ward of mysterious Rochester. The protagonist, Jane Eyre, has some similarities to Agnes Grey. One example is in Jane's famous call for equality between the sexes as she states that "[w]omen 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" (C. Brontë 2001: 93). It is obvious that Charlotte was among the authors who reacted negatively to women's limited rights, social roles and education. *Jane Eyre* "rankles against the limitations of female education and constrained roles for women (Harrison 2006: 31). Gilbert and Gubar describe Jane Eyre's struggles "from the imprisonment of her childhood towards an almost unthinkable goal of mature freedom" (Gilbert and Gubar 2000: 339). She experiences unfair treatment, starvation, madness and coldness in a patriarchal society.

Many readers felt Jane deserved these horrifying experiences. Gilbert and Gubar (2000) express that Victorians found Jane's pride horrific. They detested that she did not submit to her social destiny. Refusing to accept her rank was a trait that gave them the impression that she was ungrateful, and ungratefulness was a greater sin than "the coarseness and sexuality of *Jane Eyre*" (cf. Gilbert and Gubar 2000: 338). Victorians found Jane's anger a threat to the order of society. Charlotte Brontë's portrayal of Jane's anger reflects the rage felt by many women, however, both Anne and Charlotte's narratives permit the once powerless to speak out. Charlotte Brontë was aware that she enraged readers. Showalter quotes one of Charlotte's letters: "I cannot, when I

write, think always of myself and what is elegant and charming in femininity; it is not on these terms, or with such ideas, that I ever took pen in hand" (Showalter 2014b: 6-7).

The Brontë sisters give voice to the governess in their fiction in order to improve her working conditions. Nevertheless, they do have very different methods in their calls for change. In *Agnes Grey*, Anne depicts the everyday life of the governess. To instigate reform, she illustrates experiences recognizable to governesses themselves and, more importantly, to their employers. This is in order to show them the errors of their ways and subsequently initiate change. Charlotte, through *Jane Eyre*, puts focus on the governess herself. She displays how the governess could fight for herself and for her working conditions by breaking free from her submissive and obedient behaviour. At a time when female workers, including female authors, were becoming more involved in public discussions about their rights, the Brontës' portrayals of the governess' conditions represented different approaches for how change might be achieved.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the governess had been a character in every literary form imaginable. However, she continued to turn up as late as in 1898, when she appeared in Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw*. During James' life, *The Turn of the Screw* was published in five authorized forms. The first publication was as a serial in in the American magazine *Collier's Weekly*, early in 1898. After that, it was published in separate English and American book collections towards the end of the Victorian era (Esch and Warren 1999: 87). Late Victorian psychologists, all male, were occupied with studying mental activity and abnormal behaviour in women. They claimed that disruptive female attitudes were not linked to frustrations of cultural oppression, as suggested by earlier Victorians, the Brontë sisters included. Instead, they suggested that female maladies were symptoms of medical diagnoses such as hysteria or neurasthenia, conditions arising from gynaecological and nervous ailments (M. Moran 2006: 59). This new scientific approach to mental phenomena appealed to the literary imagination, and heavily influenced late Victorian literature. As James wrote his novel at the time these scientists presented their theories, it is fair to assume that their theories influenced his novel. *The Turn of the Screw* is one of the best-known examples of psychological ghost fiction. It features mental disturbance and unconscious impulse (cf. M. Moran 2006: 92).

The plot of James' novel revolves around an unnamed, young, innocent daughter of a country parson. She takes employment as the governess to the niece and nephew of a wealthy bachelor. The two beautiful children, Miles and Flora, appear well behaved, though Miles' school

has expelled him without offering an explanation. In the course of the story, the governess observes a man in the house, and later finds out that it is the ghost of the master's former valet, Peter Quint. She also witnesses the mysterious appearance of the previous governess, Miss Jessel. Mrs. Grose, the housekeeper, explains to the governess that Peter Quint and Miss Jessel are dead. When they were alive, they had intimate relations, which labelled them both “infamous”. Their indecent conduct was believed to have “corrupted the children” (James 1999: 31). The governess concludes that these evil spirits have arisen from the dead and are on a mission to seize the children. The governess makes Mrs. Grose, now her accomplice, leave the country house with Flora in order to protect the child from the evil visitors. The governess stays behind with Miles who ends up dead in her arms in the presence of Peter Quint.

Victorian readers found the story horrifying. In the preface of my edition of the novel, editors Esch and Warren (1999) write that since its publication in 1898, *The Turn of the Screw* has generated a range of earnest critical responses, most of which revolves around the issue of the narrator's reliability. Critics’ impulse to understand the narrative is the key feature of the vast secondary literature tied to the novel. To this day critics continue to examine whether the governess is a trustworthy narrator, or whether she is insane, making the alleged visits by the ghosts merely products of her corrupted imagination. As previously mentioned, James himself makes no effort in explaining or contributing to understanding the actions of the governess. While this provokes some critics, others applaud him for it. One critic, Henry Harland, expresses that in order to understand the enigmas of the novel, “one must appreciate the nature of the puzzle” (cf. Esch and Warren 1999: xi-xiii). Victorians certainly appreciated the intensity of the story. One critic called it “distinctly repulsive”, another “hopelessly evil” (Esch and Warren 1999: 198).

According to Shoshana Felman in her study *Henry James: Madness and the Risks of Practice (Turning the Screw of Interpretation)* (2012), the effects that James’ novel had on readers, astounded even the author. In the 1908 New York preface of *The Turn of the Screw*, James expressed amazement at the many “interpretations”, “exegetic passions” and “energetic controversies” his text had inspired (Felman 2012: 143). Not only James’ contemporaries reacted to the story. Felman claims that the novel received new attention in 1934, as Edmund Wilson published a psychoanalytical reading of *The Turn of the Screw*. Wilson presented a theory that the novel was not merely a ghost story, but a story about madness. Wilson diagnosed the

governess with a case of neurosis. The ghosts were not real, he professed, merely “figments of the governess’s sick imagination, mere hallucinations and projections symptomatic to the frustration of her repressed sexual desires” (Felman 2012: 144). Wilson’s article created new debate on James’ novel, and on the psyche of the governess, a discussion that still maintains readers’ interest. James’ female characters, the present governess and the former, Miss Jessel, mirror the women of the Victorian era. Towards the end of the period, the *fin de siècle*, women gained more rights, and women with a profession had become more accepted. James’ novel presents important social changes regarding women, work and sexuality in the decades that followed the publication of the Brontë’s novels.

Anne Brontë’s *Agnes Grey*, Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* and Henry James’ *The Turn of the Screw* depict very different protagonists. All three governesses, and two of them in particular, have become some of the most memorable characters in nineteenth-century fiction. Brandon (2008) expresses that “the governess’ career might have been expressly designed for fiction”. She was “a heaven-sent gift” to novelists as single woman who triggered Victorian society’s “guilts, resentments, fears and taboos”. Her fall from middle-class comfort, and her journey towards eventual restitution provided a dramatic structure and plenty of potential plots and outcomes. Through the countless novels she inhabits, the governess’ life and struggles have become part of our shared cultural consciousness (cf. Brandon 2008: 7).

2.5 Theory

Before the Brontës emerged on the literary scene, other women, and one in particular, had paved the way for advocating equality of the sexes. Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) highlights women’s fight for equality. In 1792, the term “feminism” did not yet exist, and women’s rights were not established. Even so, according to *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (2010), Wollstonecraft’s attack on a society promoting male privilege is one of the first treaties of modern feminism (cf. Leitch 2010: 493). Today, feminists celebrate her early advocacy of women’s equality and for “arguing against the degradation and subjugation of women” (Leitch 2010: 495). During Wollstonecraft’s time, the late eighteenth century, women had little protection under the law. Single women were dependent on men to support them, and

married women lost their legal identity. Thus, they had no legal rights, they could not vote, sign contracts or inherit property. Wollstonecraft analyses the relation between the sexes, and fiercely attacks "hereditary privilege of all sorts – birth, wealth, rank, *and* gender" (Leitch 2010: 493).

Wollstonecraft demands that society transforms entirely in order to accommodate women's roles as citizens. She argues that women are not inferior to men intellectually, but appear so because patriarchy has denied them education (cf. Wollstonecraft [1792] 2010: 499). Greenblatt offers additional knowledge about Wollstonecraft. He insists that she received hard criticism from contemporary critics for expressing her thoughts on gender stratification (cf. Greenblatt 2006: 1457). While many early women writers refused to deal with a professional role, or had a negative orientation towards it, Wollstonecraft claimed full equality for women with her passionate and aggressive voice. Not only the Brontë sisters agreed with Wollstonecraft, one of their most famous contemporaries also fought the same battle.

Florence Nightingale (1820-1910) certainly agreed with Wollstonecraft and her views on society's oppression of women. The world knows Nightingale as the founder of nursing as an acceptable profession for women. Few are aware that Nightingale had her own struggles in the quest to free herself from the suffocating restrictions of her middle-class Victorian family. Through her essay *Cassandra*, we witness her strong detest towards women being "protectively" enclosed in the home and subordinated to male figures. Furthermore, even within their "natural" environment women lacked rights (M. Moran 2006: 36). Since its publication, *Cassandra* has maintained its position as a principal feminist text, an important documentary link between women's earlier struggles and the continuing fight for emancipation. Both Wollstonecraft and Nightingale's tough testimonies became important in women's fight for equality, and both are still considered essential feminist discourses.

Historically, feminism has been linked to women simply because it promotes women's rights. As a result, many believe feminism and the feminine are intertwined. Is that a fair assumption? Toril Moi points out that the word "feminist" or "feminism" are political labels that indicate support for the new women's movement that emerged in the late 1960s. She therefore suggests that "feminist criticism" is a specific type of political discourse, a theoretical practice committed to the struggle against patriarchy (Moi 1986: 204). Moi claims that many confuse feminist with feminine. She stresses that there is not necessarily a link between female and feminist. She upholds that not all books written by women are anti-patriarchal, and states that it is

naïve to believe that common female experience gives rise to a feminist analysis of women's situation. She points out that it is important to separate female from femininity as well (Moi 1986: 206-207). Being female is a matter of biology, while being feminine is a cultural construction, the result of society giving you a specific set of characteristics expected for your gender. Female characteristics developed by patriarchy are, amongst others sweetness, modesty, subservience and humility (cf. Moi 1986: 204-210). What decided your role in society during the Victorian era was simply your biological gender.

The Brontës made a point of criticizing society's degradation of women through the experiences of their female characters. Half a century later, Henry James published *The Turn of the Screw.* James had another agenda. Showalter states in *The Female Malady* (2014) that male dominated Victorian psychology linked femininity and insanity. Female malady included any deviation from accepted social behaviour, such as being loud or sexually promiscuous. Essentially, men considered women to be suffering from psychological problems simply by nature of their femininity (cf. Showalter 2014a: 3-4). Male authors, Henry James included, incorporated modern psychology into their writing. They had their own versions of the *unwoman*, or the madwoman. Athena Vrettos attests to this in her text "Victorian Psychology" in *A Companion to The Victorian Novel* (2007). She claims James' novel can be read as a traditional ghost story, or as a disturbing exploration of sexual repression, hallucination, and psychology (Brantlinger and Thesing 2007: 82).

By 1898, the year of *The Turn of the Screw's* publication, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) had revolutionized the field of psychology. *The Turn of the Screw* can be read as a psychological tale of an unmarried, and for Freudian readers, repressed and possibly unbalanced young governess. The unnamed governess protagonist stumbles into a terrifying, ambiguous situation involving her perceptions of the ghosts of a deceased couple, her predecessor, Miss Jessel, and Miss Jessel's lover, the former valet Peter Quint. James' novel explores the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud. Freud's analysis have had great impact on literary theory, virtually influencing every twentieth century critic (Leitch 2010: 812).

Freud's theory on "The Uncanny" (1919) is of particular interest. His concept of the uncanny has influenced philosophy, cultural studies and literature. According to Bennett and Royle, "[t]he uncanny has to do with a sense of strangeness, mystery or eeriness" (Bennett and Royle 2014: 35). Based on this assessment, the uncanny is highly relevant in ghost fiction and

supernatural stories. The unexplainable phenomenon of uncanniness strikes the reader because something unexplainable occurs. In addition to representing something spooky, it "has to do more specifically with a disturbance of the familiar" (Bennett and Royle 2014: 35). In his essay, Freud argues, "what is 'uncanny' is frightening precisely because it is *not* known and familiar" (Freud [1919] 2010: 826).

The uncanny is a psychological term, however, it can also relate to literature as it affects the reader's emotions in ways that are difficult to explain. Bennett and Royle (2014) claim that "[t]he uncanny has to do with making things uncertain: it has to do with the sense that things are not as they have come to appear through habit and familiarity, that they may challenge all rationality and logic" (Bennett and Royle 2014: 36). Bennett and Royle discuss the uncanny in relation to literature, and they present thirteen forms that the uncanny can take. These characteristics correspond remarkably well to elements in *The Turn of the Screw*.

3. Agnes Grey

During the mid-nineteenth century, liberal thinkers began to challenge the established view of women and fight for strengthening their rights. In *A Companion to Victorian Literature & Culture* (2006), Anthony H. Harrison explains that there were several reasons for this development. Many were tired of a society that deprived women of legal, economic and political power. Until this period, Harrison voices, married women of the middle and upper classes had been legally defined as objects rather than subjects with rights. A husband was responsible for his wife's actions, and he controlled her property. In addition, because women outnumbered men in the population, many had no spouse to support them, making them redundant. By mid-century, however, a number of men and women had begun the effort to remove obstacles to women's equality and advancement (cf. Harrison 2006: 30-31). Many authors were among the challengers of gender stratification. Florence Nightingale was clear in her statements on women and their limited roles in society, and was particularly concerned with women's education.

In this chapter, I investigate the subjects of formal and personal education in addition to analyse the impact this has on an individual. First, I examine formal schooling in Victorian society and in Anne Brontë's novel *Agnes Grey* (1847). The focus is on the education that the protagonist receives and the education that she provides in her work as governess. For girls, preparation for womanhood and marriage was the only "formal education" provided during the Victorian period, thus this is also a topic for discussion. Second, I research the personal education of Agnes throughout the novel. I analyse what Agnes learns about herself and other people as she enters the public sphere in her work as a governess. She has several female role models from different social classes who contribute to her education in life. These women are part of Agnes' personal education as they demonstrate contrasting aspects of womanhood in a patriarchal civilization. Finally, I explore the re-percussions of Agnes role as an outsider or an *other* in society. Her demonstrations of anger and rage as she experiences disrespect and cruel treatment by others are of great significance here.

Elizabeth Langland (1989) agree that Anne Brontë's novel "is foremost a novel dealing with education; it is a novel of education (Agnes's) and about education (her attempts as governess to educate her charges) whose goal is to bring about an education in the reader"

(Langland 1989: 97). To understand Anne Brontë's contribution to the situation of women, it is useful to look at her own background.

Anne Brontë's father, Patrick Brontë, was a poor clergyman who had married Maria Branwell, a woman from a wealthy family. They lived in Haworth, a small town in Yorkshire. The couple had one son, Branwell, and five daughters, Maria, Elizabeth, Charlotte, Emily and Anne. Only Charlotte, Emily and Anne survived to adulthood, and Anne was the youngest of the siblings. Maria died a year after Anne's birth, so their aunt, Elizabeth Branwell, raised them (Shuttleworth 2010: xxxiv-xxxxxxvii). According to Nestor (1987), Elizabeth provided the Brontë girls with a model of a "forceful woman, independent of mind and financially self-sufficient". Elizabeth had led a privileged and comfortable life. She never married, neither did she encourage the Brontë girls to see marriage as an option. The girls grew up expecting that they would need to earn their own living. Accordingly, they were committed to self-improvement, and their father provided them with organized education at the school Roe Head (Nestor 1987: 3). The Brontës were not wealthy. They lived a frugal life, and their financial future was uncertain. This was probably why Elizabeth Branwell and Mr. Brontë decided to prepare the girls for self-sufficiency. Sending them to school indicated their disbelief that the girls would have an opportunity to enter the marriage market. They knew that society's only acceptable alternative for unmarried middle-class women was to become governesses.

At fifteen years old, Anne Brontë had to leave Roe Head due to illness. Two years later, in 1839, she took a position as governess with the Ingram family at Blake Hall. Her experiences here made a big impression on her sister Charlotte. In the introduction to *Agnes Grey*, Shuttleworth (2010) shares a letter written by Charlotte Brontë to her good friend Ellen Nussey. Ellen was contemplating becoming a governess, and Charlotte warned her of the difficulties she might face, and the challenging children she might encounter. She refers to Anne's employers as an "unruly violent family". According to Charlotte, the parents treat their children with "admiring indulgence, and pandering to their whims, rather than keeping them firmly in line" (cf. Shuttleworth 2010: ix). Anne's experiences, which were worse than Charlotte's own short-lived tenure as governess that year, weighed heavily on her older sister who concludes by stating, "I am miserable when I allow myself to dwell on the necessity of spending my life as a governess". Charlotte only had one short period of being governess after that, but Anne went on to find a new situation in 1840, with the Robinson family at Thorpe Green near York, where she would, by lack

of other options, remain for more than five years (cf. Shuttleworth 2010: ix). Anne reveals her own negative experiences working as a governess in *Agnes Grey.* This makes it a confessional novel. The narrator confesses her story to the reader. In her confession, Agnes not only exposes the wrongful treatment of the governess, she also shares her own experience and education.

As a bildungsroman, *Agnes Grey* follows two paths of development. First, it gives insight into the young protagonist's personal education through an autobiographical narrative. The novel follows Agnes from young adulthood living a sheltered life with her family to entering the world seeking adventure and self-sufficiency. She struggles through obstacles and challenges, and finally gains her independence. Second, through Agnes' work as a governess, Anne Brontë identifies weaknesses in the formal educational system.

3.1 Formal education

Formal education emerges in different fashions in *Agnes Grey*. In this section, I will first discuss Agnes and her sister's formal education in the Parsonage. Mary and Agnes receive different tasks, which prepares them for different roles in society. Second, I will compare the formal schooling of middle and upper class boys and girls with focus on the Bloomfield children. When addressing the education of the girls, I examine the fallout of Agnes' own limited education and her challenges as a teacher. Finally, I discuss the education of young women, which prepares them for marriage, and consider the women who did not fulfil the patriarchal expectations of womanhood.

In *Agnes Grey*, the protagonist introduces herself as the youngest daughter of Richard Grey, a respected country parson. Agnes is eighteen years old, and lives with her family in the Parsonage. She has a sister, Mary, who is five or six years older (A. Brontë 2010: 6). Mrs. Grey displays her non-traditional resourcefulness when her husband's failed investment leaves the family destitute. Agnes' mother proves herself capable, and becomes "an active manging housewife with hands and head continually occupied with household labours and household economy" (A. Brontë 2010: 9). Inspired by their mother, Agnes and Mary offer to help, but their mother initially dismisses the offers. This reaction could be a result of their mother's upbringing and pride. Middle-class girls were not suited for or prepared to work.

After a while, however, Mrs. Grey suggests that Mary sells some of her drawings. Revealing Mary's artwork seems a safe choice, as needlework, drawing and painting were activities that society encouraged middle-class women to master. These skills were part of girl's education towards the ultimate goal of marriage. Therefore, these activities would promote Mary as an attractive wife. By showing skills in so-called "fancy work", she would prove a credit to a potential husband. Mary exemplifies what Nightingale challenges in *Cassandra*. She suspects that women secretly dream of and want more from life besides "singing Schubert" or being "busy embroidering" (Nightingale [1852] 1979: 27). Nightingale's thoughts are parallel to those expressed by Anne Brontë's Agnes. Agnes wishes to work as governess, and her choice of profession proves challenging to her family.

The world, or sphere, that Agnes seeks to enter, society has reserved for men. In *The Politics of Gender in Victorian Britain* (2012), Ben Griffin emphasises that historically, feminism has been concerned with "ideas about femininity and the proper place of women" and "describing, explaining and changing the behaviour of men" (Griffin 2012: 8). Anne Brontë certainly challenges these established rules both by portraying a young woman who wishes to challenge herself and contribute to society.

According to Gilbert and Gubar, women like the Brontës were "imprisoned in their homes, their father's houses". They elaborate that "almost all nineteenth-century women were in some sense imprisoned in men's houses" (Gilbert and Gubar 2000: 83). To clarify how Victorians justified the long tradition of women's confinement in the home, Gilbert and Gubar refer to a letter written by Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889). Hopkins states "writing, reading, and thinking are not only alien, but also inimical to 'female' characteristics" (Gilbert and Gubar 2000: 8). This reveals essentialist assumptions about women and their nature. Maureen Moran (2006) comments on Victorians gender ideology, and explains that they regarded women as best equipped for the domestic realm, and men as biologically suited to the active, aggressive and intellectual domains of public life. In this ideology, biological difference, together with assumptions of the contrasting psyche of women and men, fixed social expectations. Theories about women's bodies, innocence, emotional (rather than rational) temperament and maternal self-sacrificing instincts underpinned the concept of the Victorian female (cf. M. Moran 2006: 35). Toril Moi claims, "[e]ssentialism (the belief in a given female nature) in the end always plays into the hands of those who want women to conform to predefined patterns of femininity"

(Moi 1986: 209). She believes that "[e]ssentialists make "no distinction between male (sex) and masculine (gender) or between female and feminine". Moi expects all feminists to oppose to this "pervasive picture of sex" (Moi 2010: 20-21). According to Langland (1989),

> Anne Brontë seems to have been largely oblivious of any feminist or ideological agenda, her commitment to women's activity and influence in the world and her suspicion of men as providers led her to promulgate a feminist thesis: that women must look to their self-provision.
>
> (Langland 1989: 98)

Through Agnes, Anne Brontë echoes the yearning of Victorian women for independence and greater challenges. The protagonist seeks to become educated and knowledgeable, a trait she seems to have inherited from her mother who educated her daughters and represented a hard-working woman. Mrs. Grey has proved her rebelliousness in releasing herself from the rule of her father and denying him control over her existence. By making this choice, she has lost wealth and privilege, but also gained an opportunity to make meaningful contributions to her own family.

In *Agnes Grey,* we witness how middle and upper class families send their boys away to school for formal education, whereas girls stay at home and receive education by governesses and tutors. Thus, already from childhood, girls learn that all they need is within the walls of the home, whereas boys can exit this domain and enter a much larger arena. The quality of education provided to boys and girls is also an issue. Through Agnes' character and actions, Brontë examines the common condescension of the governess, and discusses how this affects her teaching in a negative way. Langland describes Agnes as "a self-determining individual", who, in displaying her own education, also brings new knowledge to the reader (Langland 1989: 97).

Unlike other governess novels, *Agnes Grey* portrays a governess who does not succeed in her task as educator. Neither *Jane Eyre* nor *The Turn of the Screw* address the quality of the governess' teaching. Agnes turns out to be an inadequate teacher who has little influence on her charges. Mr. and Mrs. Murray ship their sons off to a school after Agnes has taught them for a year. According to Agnes, they leave in states of "disgraceful ignorance". Agnes expresses feelings of failure as the Masters Murray show "scandalous ignorance as to Latin" and that "this, doubtless, would all be laid to the account of his education having been intrusted to an ignorant

female teacher" (A. Brontë 2010: 60). Highly educated male teachers provide the boys in formal schools with their knowledge. The quality of the girl's education depends on the skills of the individual governess. It is important to note that employers often seemed reluctant to accept that their offspring "lacked talent or application, preferring instead to lay the blame at their governess' door" (Hughes 1993: 77). Nevertheless, Agnes does not succeed in tutoring the girls either. She is a good example of governess who is not able to teach girls what their parents think they ought to know. She does not possess the experience or knowledge needed in the job. Her lack of relevant education is evident.

Mrs. Grey has proved a progressive female model for Mary and Agnes, but her personal choices also have had a negative effect on her daughters' prospects. By marrying the poor Richard Grey, Mrs. Grey breaks with her own family and rejects multiple opportunities for herself and her daughters. Their mother's choice excludes Mary and Agnes from any associations with upper class life, except when it comes to learning languages. As the girls "never even went to school", Mrs. Grey has schooled her daughters herself (A. Brontë 2010: 6). Mary is more accomplished in "fancy work" than Agnes is, as the latter never gets an opportunity to help with sewing or other practical tasks. Agnes has not been educated in subjects and tasks needed for governess work, and she struggles with the tasks needed in her profession. The fact is that Agnes cannot even sew, an ability expected in any female. Agnes states, "I had not been taught to cut out a single garment" as her parents "both asserted, that it was far easier to do the work themselves, than to prepare it for me; and besides they liked better to see me prosecuting my studies, or amusing myself" (A. Brontë 2010: 10). Both Mary and Agnes are encouraged to work in the garden or take walks instead of helping out in the home (A. Brontë 2010: 10). Because Mrs. Grey prefers to do the jobs herself, she "was not gifted with very active daughters" (A. Brontë 2010: 9). Agnes expresses her frustrations on this matter by stating that "I can conceive few situations more harassing than that wherein, however you may long for success, however you may labour to fulfil your duty, your efforts are baffled and set at naught by those beneath you, and unjustly censured and misjudged by those above" (A. Brontë 2010: 33).

It seems that Anne Brontë deliberately shows Agnes' incompetence in her work in order to criticise the Victorian educational system indirectly. By presenting a flawed protagonist, Brontë manages to highlight the difficult situation of governesses. The author did not provide her protagonist with abilities or characteristics that made her excel in her occupation. Instead, she

uses the opportunity to take a stand on issues concerning all women. These are matters such as degrading treatment by society as a whole and their limited possibilities to gain independence through education and work. By identifying women's lack of preparation for contributing in the public sphere, Anne Brontë partook in the contemporary debate on female education.

3.1.1 The Victorian woman and love

Terry Eagleton (2013) explains that all three Brontë sisters were "wedged […] between male and female, patrician and plebeian, Irish and English, metropolis and province, deference and rebellion" (Eagleton 2013: 129). I find that they were also wedged between patriarchy and rebellion. The fact that most of their novels end with happy marriages testifies to this. The Brontës had an "extraordinary combination of gushing Romantic fantasy and astute rationality, quivering sensitivity and bluff common sense" (Eagleton 2013: 129). Anne and Charlotte's novels certainly followed this pattern. The most famous quote from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is the opening line of the novel's conclusion, "Reader, I married him" (C. Brontë 2001: 382). The statement presents a conventional Victorian ending comparable to the one found in *Agnes Grey*. Both writers were aware that society distrusted all unmarried women. Even though both their protagonists had achieved personal success, society would not accept them until they were married. This was possibly the reason why both Brontës eventually embraced patriarchal society's fundamental value of marriage as the most important and stable institution.

According to Kathryn Hughes (1993), a middle or upper class girl educated herself to become a wife and "a status symbol". In addition to becoming "a site for the display of financial wealth, the female body also became the place where unruly desires of all kinds were contained and subdued". Young women were to have no interest in sexual intercourse, however, a wife's duty was to allow her body "to be used as the ever-available recipient of her husband's sperm". Doctors and moralists promoted motherhood as the most important and pleasurable part of female existence. Women who did not live up to these standards were "unnatural". Women who expressed sexual desire or "signs of courage and independence" swiftly became "dangerous lunatics". Therefore, the price to pay for not becoming a wife and mother was high (Hughes

1993: 14-15). The need for women to find a husband, and the fear of not accomplishing said task manifests itself in the Brontës' novels.

Agnes Grey does not revolve around a grand love story. Love is, however, an important theme in the novel. For the Grey sisters, the prospect of marriage seems unthinkable in the beginning of the novel. Their mother's choice of husband has limited her daughters' possibilities when it comes to marriage. Had their mother not acted against the wishes of her father, the girls' marriage prospects would have been promising. They have lost the opportunity marry into wealth. Their father exclaims, "*Them* married - poor penniless things! […], who will take them I wonder!" (A. Brontë 2010: 48). In the midst of Agnes' spiral of negativity working for the Murrays, it is apparent to the reader that she is falling in love with Mr. Weston. Agnes describes Mr. Weston, in detail, as a man of "human excellence", "not handsome, or even what is called agreeable, in outward respect", but "a man of strong sense, firm faith" and "gentle, considerate kindness" (A. Brontë 2010: 88-89).

At Nancy Brown's Agnes learns more about the curate of Horton. She even meets him there by chance on a few occasions (A. Brontë 2010: 90-91). As time goes, the possibility of meeting Mr. Weston here is also a motive for visiting. Agnes and the curate share this arena as both have it in their natures to help those in need. Mr. Weston is not a typical Victorian literary hero. The ideal male character was the Byronic hero. The *OED* defines Byronic as "[c]haracteristic of, or after the manner of Byron or his poetry" (OED, 2016d). The famous nineteenth-century English Romantic poet Lord Byron first presented this type of character. The Byronic hero is dark, handsome and brooding. In contrast to the typical Romantic hero, the Byronic hero usually possesses psychological and emotional complexity. He appears in countless novels, *Jane Eyre* and *The Turn of the Screw* amongst them. Anne Brontë has chosen not to include him, and Mr. Weston does not inhabit any Byronic traits. Agnes portrays Mr. Weston stating, "[i]n stature, he was a little - a very little - above the middle size" and "the outline of his face would be pronounced too square for beauty" (A. Brontë 2010: 88). Anne's choice of hero is a good, Christian man who is charitable, uncomplicated, kind and a great contrast to the Byronic hero.

Mr. Weston is Agnes' soulmate, and the only candidate to become Agnes' husband. One important reason is the fact that they are socially compatible. According to Hughes, "[p]opular myth paired off the governess with the curate precisely because he was one of the few men of

similar social standing with whom she came into regular contact" (Hughes 1993: 140-141). Agnes and Edward are clearly suited for each other, but given both their positions in society, the relationship cannot be as passionate or dramatic as the love story in *Jane Eyre*. The reader has to be as patient as Agnes is when waiting for the two to be given a chance to act on their feelings. Always surrounded by judgmental and condescending people, this proves difficult. Their conversations reflect this, as they are always serious. Agnes' feelings toward Mr. Weston are pure, and strikingly different from Rosalie's feelings for her male suitors.

Rosalie is engaged to Sir Thomas Ashby, but she still encourages Mr. Hatfield, Mr. Weston, Harry Meltham and Mr. Green in flirtation. Rosalie is in love with Mr. Hatfield, a "poor" man, and this is clearly an inconvenience to her as she utters that "[t]o think that I could be such a fool as to fall in *love*! It is quite beneath the dignity of a woman to do such a thing. Love!" (A. Brontë 2010: 103). Rosalie's feelings are in strong contrast to those of Mrs. Grey who rebelliously embraced love. Rosalie fulfils her parent's wishes, and marries Thomas Ashby for wealth and status (A. Brontë 2010: 131). Rosalie's mission is to win the heart of every man in the village, Mr. Weston included. Therefore, Agnes, who is always aware of her place, must step aside. Through Rosalie and Agnes' romantic interests in Mr. Weston, Brontë invites comparison between the two. Rosalie and her flirtatious behaviour is in extreme contrast to Agnes' modest romantic thoughts. Sally Shuttleworth (2010) notes that the usual restrictions on a Victorian heroine being able to speak out are rendered even more intense because of Agnes' social position. Social barriers further complicate Agnes' ability to express her feelings. One example of this is when Rosalie choses that Agnes cannot see Mr. Weston for two months (cf. Shuttleworth 2010: xxi). Her social standing reduces Agnes' interaction with the curate to mere glances and chance encounters. They never speak aloud of their feelings towards each other as long as Agnes lives in Horton Lodge.

After Rosalie is married, Agnes terminates her employment with the Murray family, and joins her now widowed mother to help in running their own newly established school for girls in a seaside resort (A. Brontë 2010: 147). Suddenly Agnes experiences freedom, while Rosalie has entered a position of many limitations. Nightingale's *Cassandra* points to this very situation: "Some few sacrifice marriage, because they must sacrifice all other life if they accept that" (Nightingale [1852] 1979: 40). Through Rosalie's fate in the institution of marriage, Anne Brontë exemplifies how many Victorian women felt. She notes that Rosalie's determination to be

mistress of Ashby Park overshadows her feelings of “detest” towards her husband (A. Brontë 2010: 160). Rosalie’s choice ultimately comes back to haunt her. She lives in the great house, but feels imprisoned by her husband who distrusts her flirtatious personality and is fearful of scandal (A. Brontë 2010: 161). In marrying Lord Ashby, the once “lively, light-hearted” (A. Brontë 2010: 57) Lady Ashby “must be a prisoner and a slave” (A. Brontë 2010: 161). The sentiments on female limitation expressed by Anne Brontë corresponds with Nightingale’s feelings uttered in *Cassandra*, “it is not only the unmarried woman who dreams. The married woman also holds long imaginary conversations but too often” (Nightingale [1852] 1979: 52).

Anne Brontë’s interest in the role of women is clear from the beginning of the novel. Her protagonist’s mother chooses love over a privileged life. Brontë seems to promote marrying for love as she illustrates that all problems become less burdensome if you share them with someone you love. The love story between Agnes Grey and the curate exemplify this. They differ from the people surrounding them, as they possess Christian virtues of morals, compassion and charity. In their visits to the cottager Nancy Brown, both Mr. Weston and Agnes demonstrate the ability care and empathize with others and to do what they can to help. Theirs is a relationship based on a higher purpose. Their love for each other rooted in selfless love for fellow human beings. Mr. Weston and Agnes' marriage serves as a quiet, rather than glorious conclusion to the novel. Even though she does not offer more than a page on Agnes’ life after marriage, Anne nonetheless presents the reader with a traditional happy conclusion. Moran explains that Victorian writers, like their Romantic predecessors, were concerned with traditional manners and etiquette. Therefore, the endings in Victorian fiction usually endorsed mainstream values. Regardless of the writers’ intentions, they ultimately sanctioned the ideals of femininity, masculinity and the importance of the family unit (cf. M. Moran 2006: 94).

The novel ending in marriage signals a disconnection from Anne Brontë’s aim of educating the reader. It is important to remember that Anne executed her writing under a patriarchal lens, therefore she must have felt the pressure to deliver a narrative that society could accept. It is my theory that the last paragraphs of the novel indicates Anne surrendering to patriarchal pressures. The novel could have ended with Agnes reaching a state of independence and autonomy. She is working with her mother at their school, and for the first time in her life, she answers to no one. Instead, she yearns for Mr. Weston and pines after romantic love. Professional freedom is not enough to make her life complete. Agnes reunites with the curate,

and on the very last page she declares, “A few weeks after that, when my mother had supplied herself with an assistant, I became the wife of Edward Weston, and never have found cause to repent it, and am certain that I never shall” (A. Brontë 2010: 174). The novel ends with Agnes revealing that her marriage is a happy one, and that they are blessed with three children.

3.2 Personal education

In this section on personal education, I will examine Agnes’ personal development, from leaving her home and family, through two positions of governessing and finally reaching a point of personal fulfilment. Along the way, she encounters several women who have an impact on her life. I will research how they influence and affect the protagonist. Finally, I will explore the personal frustration and anger that Agnes demonstrates.

3.2.1 The personal education of Agnes

Agnes insists on becoming a governess, and there are two reasons for this. Firstly, she wishes to contribute to her family’s financial situation. Secondly, and more importantly, is her personal need for independence and responsibility. By becoming a governess, she would have to leave her family and a safe environment. Agnes’ family never state why they are reluctant to Agnes’ choice of occupation, however, they clearly reflect society’s view on middle-class women and work. As Hughes expresses that a middle-class woman usually became governess in order to avoid “a total loss of caste”. She received payment for educating other women’s children, a position which opened for many “emotional and social tensions”. The governess, herself childless, became a “surrogate mother”. In addition, her marriage prospects were restricted, and she was often mistaken for a servant (Hughes 1993: xvi).

The reactions that Agnes’ family demonstrates reflect the unpredictable role of the governess. Like all Victorian families, Agnes’ family knew how employers and society viewed governesses, therefore there was no need to explain their reluctance towards their daughter taking up the occupation. Anne Brontë did not see a reason to explain in detail the difficulties Agnes

might face as a governess. Instead, the writer takes the reader through her experiences as they occur. Agnes soon realises that her prospects are less attractive than she anticipated.

With her family's reluctant consent, Agnes becomes a governess. She is overjoyed, as her "vague and secret wish to see a little more of the world" is finally approved (A. Brontë 2010: 6). In leaving the domestic realm, Victorians would say Agnes shows signs of masculine nature, which undermines her femininity. By removing Agnes from a group believed to be in "complete agreement among members", Victorian identity politics weakens her femininity (Leitch 2010: 2538). Agnes rebels against the Victorian norms, and is about to suffer the consequences. Her first position is with the Bloomfield family at Wellwood House, where she is to care for three children. Agnes describes her charges as "mischievous, turbulent rebels" (A. Brontë 2010: 33). In her interaction with them, she soon realizes her own insignificance and lack of power. Agnes exclaims, "[…] I found they had no notion of going with *me;* I must go with *them* wherever they chose to lead me" (A. Brontë 2010: 23). This description corresponds with how patriarchal society treated women in Victorian England. Agnes does not stay within the limits of female identity put upon her by society, thus she becomes a social outsider. She continues: "The name of governess, I soon found, was a mere mockery as applied to me". She struggles with the children having no "notion of obedience" and "refusing to be ruled" (A. Brontë 2010: 26). Agnes has little authority. The children realize she is powerless, and use this to their own advantage.

The humiliation and social isolation of Agnes is particularly apparent when attending church services with the family on Sundays. In the carriage, she is "crushed into the corner farthest from the open window, and with my back to the horses, a position which invariably made me sick" (A. Brontë 2010: 62). In addition to this physical discomfort, Agnes experiences emotional manipulation from the Murrays and their peers. On their way home from church, by foot, she is ignored by the upper class men and women walking with her. Agnes expresses the awkwardness she feels when none of the ladies and gentlemen ever notice her, and how "it was disagreeable to walk beside them, as if listening to what they said, or wishing to be thought one of them" while they "talked over me" (A. Brontë 2010: 94). These feelings parallel with those of Victorian women in general. They felt isolated and repressed in a world with strict social rules for both men and women. Nightingale's *Cassandra* echoes these haunting sentiments of isolation: "While one alone, awake and prematurely alive to it, must wander out in silence and solitude - such an one has awakened too early, has risen up too soon, has rejected the companionship of the

race, unlinked to any human being" (Nightingale [1852] 1979: 25). Working as governess, Agnes' feelings of solitude are even more apparent. She does not have her family close, and is neither part of the family she works for or the servant staff in the household.

Agnes reflects on her situation, admitting that it was "by my own will that I had got the place, I had brought all this tribulation on myself", and she "was determined to bear it" (A. Brontë 2010: 32). Like her mother's unconventional choice to marry her father, Agnes' own unconventional choice is taking up an occupation, and she has her mother's determination to stand by her decision even through difficult times. She "hoped, in time, both to benefit the children, and to gain the approbation of their parents; and also to convince my friends at home I was not so wanting in skill and prudence as they supposed" (A. Brontë 2010: 27). Not only Agnes' family has its concerns about her entering this profession. Her friends also express doubts about her competence. Agnes is determined to prove them wrong. This is testament to her independent and determined character, and an important aspect in her personal development.

Agnes' arrival at the Murrays marks a change in her character. Her feelings towards entering a new position is far from her positive attitude when leaving home for her first work experience. She now has a "joyless kind of curiosity" concerning her new situation. She joins her new pupils with "no remarkable eagerness" (A. Brontë 2010: 54). Reality has caught up with Agnes. The ambiguous role of the governess is apparent to her now.

After her father's death, a challenge and an opportunity arises for Agnes. The Grey women are now in a position where they must care for themselves. When her mother reveals her plans to "look out for a small house" where she wishes to "take a few young ladies to board and to educate", Agnes willingly leaves the Murrays to join her. She even invests her self-earned money into their new school (A. Brontë 2010: 139-140). Agnes' opportunity to open a school mirrors the Brontë sisters' own dream. The Brontës never managed to fulfil their dream, but in her fiction, Anne Brontë's protagonist succeeds. In the novel, Agnes states that "there was, indeed, a considerable difference between working with my mother in a school of our own, and working as a hireling among strangers, despised and trampled upon by old and young" (A. Brontë 2010: 147). Agnes could now, as Hughes (1993) voices about those who worked for themselves as opposed to working for someone else, "enjoy autonomy" and "keep her own family together (Hughes 1993: 166). Without Agnes' capital, the Grey women's future would be uncertain. Agnes has provided a hopeful future for herself and her mother.

Agnes’ work as governess has been strenuous. However, money earned has led to the possibility of her opening a school with her mother. Her reward is independence and the opportunity to “live in the light of intellect”, a way of life that society, in Nightingale’s opinion, forbade women (Nightingale [1852] 1979: 37). At this time, Agnes “is no longer in the situation of governess, with its humiliating position of dependency, but an independent woman, who jointly runs a school” (Shuttleworth 2010: xxiv). The reader finds that Mr. Weston has taken a position near Agnes’ home. Finally, the curate professes his love for her, and proposes. Shuttleworth acknowledges that Agnes enters the role of wife when she has grown “from a young girl who wished to prove herself to a mature woman assured in her own judgements and perspective on life” (Shuttleworth 2010: xxiv). Through her work, Agnes has gained some experience and wisdom. She has learned that empathy is not internalized in all human beings, and is now aware of the darker sides of human nature. She has been treated as an inferior, even a nonentity in her position as governess. In addition, she has learnt that society favours boys over girls, and that the workforce, herself included, can expect little or no respect from their superiors.

3.2.2 Influential women

Five different women influence Agnes’ life and shape her personality. The biggest influence on Agnes is her mother. Mrs. Grey is a woman who makes untraditional choices. Agnes reveals that her mother is a squire’s daughter who, against her family and friend’s wishes, married below her social standing. She married for love, well knowing she would have to give up her fortune and luxuries, including “a carriage and a lady’s-maid” (A. Brontë 2010: 5). According to Chris R. Vanden Bossche in *A Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture* (2006), marrying for love during the Victorian era was only accepted for members of the working class. Marrying for social or economic benefits was key for the middle and upper classes. The husband’s opportunities were decisive when marriage was concerned (cf. Vanden Bossche 2006: 89).

Anne Brontë has created a female character in Mrs. Grey who comes close to filling the role of the angel in the house. She is an asset to her husband, and manages their household admirably. Agnes reveals how her mother helps her father when he is “completely overwhelmed by the calamity” of losing their money. She “thought only of consoling my father”, “strove to

cheer him up", and performed the duties with "willingness". Agnes admires her mother's "kindness which withheld her from imputing the smallest blame" to her father (A. Brontë 2010: 8-9). Nevertheless, Mrs. Grey's untraditional life choices overshadow her angelic characteristics. She is independent, more interested in love than in wealth and status, and more importantly, she goes against the wishes of her father, and thus challenges the principals of patriarchy. These traits disqualify her from inhabiting the angelic character. She contrasts the female ideals of the Victorian middle-class, therefore, she is no angel. In addition, her choice not to educate Agnes in the proper subjects that are reserved for women, she proves a failure as a mother by Victorian standards. Still, Mrs. Grey's mistakes in motherhood does not abolish her warm and caring nature. Agnes soon realises she cannot take such traits for granted.

When approaching the home of her first employers, the Bloomfield family, Agnes is hopeful that Mrs. Bloomfield will prove a "kind, motherly woman". She soon realises that she is rather "chilly in her manner", however, speaking with "frigid formality" (A. Brontë 2010: 16-17). Mrs. Bloomfield instructs Agnes on how to educate her children. She insists on Agnes informing her and no one else on the children's "defects" (A. Brontë 2010: 21-22). Agnes' tasks are challenging, as she is to care for her charges' education as well as keeping them in check. After her first day of work, Agnes concludes that Mrs. Bloomfield is "cold, grave and forbidding – the very opposite of the kind, warm-hearted matron" that she had hoped for. Mrs. Bloomfield's coldness seem to stem from her own position in the household. Ruth Brandon (2008) explains this type of coldness as an employer's reaction towards an employee who once belonged to their social class. They felt the need to maintain "a proper distinction between employer and employee" which "led to stiffness, embarrassment and an exaggerated emphasis on almost imperceptible niceties of status" (Brandon 2008: 161).

Not only is there tension between the Bloomfields and Agnes, there is also a strained tone of conversation between Mr. and Mrs. Bloomfield. Brandon explains the reason for this dynamic by stating, "men's absolute power over their wives […] poisoned the relations between the sexes" (Brandon 2008: 177). Agnes is witness to their unpleasant discussions at the dinner table. Mr. Bloomfield criticizes his wife's housekeeping skills in front of Agnes, and Mrs. Bloomfield replies with spite. The hostility between the two makes it clear that Mrs. Bloomfield does not fulfil the role of angel in the house. She does however, fit into the category of woman as she is

married, has produced children, exhibits “due politeness” and attempts to maintain the home (A. Brontë 2010: 17).

The Bloomfields frequently criticize Agnes’ abilities as governess, and undermine her efforts to discipline their children. Mrs. Bloomfield believes that her children can do no wrong. They never blame themselves if their children disappoint them in any way. Agnes is responsible for every failure. It is crucial for Agnes that her employers are satisfied with her work. Her future with the family, or a future position with any other family, depends on their satisfaction with her work. Agnes does not fulfil the Bloomfields’ expectations of teaching their children manners and controlling their tempers, therefore they let her go. It seems that Agnes’ task was unattainable from the very beginning, and her failure was inevitable.

Agnes soon gets a new, suitable position. She relocates to the Murray family at Horton Lodge, a family of higher social class than the Bloomfields. Here, Agnes becomes the chaperon and teacher to two young women, Rosalie and her younger sister Matilda, while the girls’ brothers receive formal education at a school away from the home. The Murray girls show little interest in schooling. The youngest daughter is preoccupied with horses and riding. The eldest is like her mother. Agnes describes Mrs. Murray as “a handsome, dashing lady” […] whose chief enjoyments [are] […] in giving or frequenting parties, and in dressing at the very top of the fashion” (A. Brontë 2010: 55). These shallow interests are in keeping with what society expected of women. Mrs. Murray therefore exemplifies a product of her class and a follower of patriarchal norms.

Similar to Mrs. Bloomfield, Mrs. Murray instructs Agnes on how to deal with her daughters. She is obviously aware that the governess has a difficult task ahead, but does not help with the matter other than by offering shallow instructions. She rather strips Agnes from any authority by refusing her to discipline her children. She claims, “*I* can speak to them more plainly than it would be proper for you to do” (A. Brontë 2010: 57). Mrs. Murray puts Agnes in her place by demonstrating the hierarchy of the household. Agnes must find her rightful place in the ranks, and it is definitely below the mother in the family.

Mrs. Murray appears to be attentive to her own children, however, she shows little concern for Agnes and her challenging situation. Instead, Mrs. Murray proves to be unsympathetic when Agnes needs compassion. When Mr. Grey falls ill, Agnes wishes to travel home. Mrs. Murray states that there is “no need to be in such agitation about the matter” and that

"we must all die sometime". She finishes the conversation by pointing out how lucky Agnes is to have "influential friends" who are "ready to continue their patronage, and to show [her] every consideration" (A. Brontë 2010: 137-138). Instead of offering comfort in a difficult time, Mrs. Murray uses the opportunity to remind Agnes of her inferiority. When Rosalie marries Lord Ashby, she proves she has adopted her mother's values. Mrs. Murray is pleased with her daughter for marrying a wealthy man and carrying on the tradition of social advancement in the upper classes. The fact that Lord Ashby is rumoured not to be a very nice man seems trivial.

On the surface, Rosalie acts as a counterpart to Agnes. On a deeper level, however, she represents an image of what Agnes' own life could have been like had her father's business endeavours succeeded. To some extent, Rosalie represents the ideal of Victorian middle and upper class womanhood. Her beauty is apparent. Agnes describes her as "positively beautiful", "tall and slender", "perfectly formed" and "exquisitely fair". Talking about her intellect, however, Agnes voices, "I wish I could say as much for her mind and disposition as I can for her form and face". She portrays Rosalie's personality as "very agreeable with those who did not cross her will". Rosalie delights in flirtation with local, respectable men, with her tantalising beauty and winning ways (A. Brontë 2010: 57). This behaviour reveals that Rosalie is no angel by patriarchal standards. Rather, she fits Agnes' portrayal of a woman "whose angel form conceals a vicious heart" (A. Brontë 2010: 122-123). The complex relationship between Agnes and Rosalie is evident from the beginning.

Initially, Rosalie is "cold" towards Agnes, but she gradually becomes as "deeply attached" to her as is "possible for *her* to be to one of my character and position". Rosalie never lets Agnes forget that she is merely "a hireling, and a poor curate's daughter" (A. Brontë 2010: 57). Rosalie frequently points out that Agnes is her social inferior. This constant push on Agnes' self-worth and self-esteem leads to an even stronger feeling of insecurity. Agnes feels her "intellect deteriorating", her "heart petrifying" and "soul contracting in fear of her "moral perceptions should become deadened", her "distinctions of right and wrong confounded" and her "better faculties be sunk" under the influence of the Murray daughters. Agnes has lost faith in her own capacities. She could initially compare herself to Rosalie as their upbringing has been similar and they are close in age. Nevertheless, because of her family's economic downfall and Agnes' subsequent need to work, the two girls can no longer be compared. Feeling distressed,

Agnes welcomes any opportunity to leave the house. There were few possibilities for a woman to venture out on her own, however, one means of escape presented itself to Agnes.

With her employers occupied elsewhere, Agnes visits one of the Murrays' beneficiaries, the old widow Nancy Brown. In Nancy, Agnes finds a rare friendship. The two women find themselves in similar situations, both dependents in their own way. Nancy is completely dependent on her superiors. She must rely on the Murrays for housing and food, and on the clergy for her spiritual happiness. In addition, she can no longer read herself as her eyesight is failing, so Agnes and Mr. Weston visit her in order to read to her. Agnes is financially dependent on the Murrays. There is a mutual understanding between them, and in each other's company, they can be themselves. The conversations between the widow and the governess are calm and natural. It is clear that the two women take great pleasure in each other's company. Agnes claims the visits make her "nearly as happy" as Nancy herself (A. Brontë 2010: 86). It is however clear that the visits also benefit Agnes in her want of companionship. Besides her rare trips home to her own family, the visits to Nancy are Agnes' only opportunities for diversion.

3.2.3 Agnes' anger

Part of Agnes' personal education manifests itself through her reactions in challenging situations. Gilbert and Gubar (2000) argue that "[d]ramatizations of imprisonment and escape are so all-pervasive in nineteenth-century literature by women that we believe they represent a uniquely female tradition in this period" (Gilbert and Gubar 2000: 85). What Gilbert and Gubar refer to here are women writers' use of a mad double for expressing and venting the protagonist's feelings of isolation. They claim that through a madwoman, the female writer expresses her own feelings of "destructiveness of anger repressed until it can no longer be contained" (Gilbert and Gubar 2000: 85). Anne Brontë has not used this method in *Agnes Grey*. In keeping with the realistic narrative in Anne Brontë's novel, the protagonist expresses her own rage. It is part of Agnes' character, and not a separate part of her personality. Agnes owns her anger, and reveals her darker sides through honest disclosure of episodes in her everyday life. The furious part of Agnes represents itself when she is alone with the Bloomfield children.

Agnes works under difficult conditions at both in the Bloomfield home and with the Murrays. She has become an *other*, an unsettling figure who disturbs the private sphere. She has to cope with her employers' scrutiny and their doubt in her abilities. Agnes' disillusions in entering the role as governess is a fundamental part of her own education, and that of the reader. She expresses,

> […] either the children were so incorrigible, the parents so unreasonable, or myself so mistaken in my views, or so unable to carry them out, that my best intentions and most strenuous efforts seemed productive of no better result, than sport to the children, dissatisfaction to their parents, and torment to myself.
>
> (Brontë 2010: 27)

The mothers transfer the care of their daughters to the governess, but are rarely satisfied with the results. The governess, a potential *unwoman*, has entered the mother's domain as "a surrogate" to her children. Hughes explains that Victorians viewed prostitutes and governesses as two categories of women who "were defined in terms of their distance from the ideal role of wife and mother" (Hughes 1993: 119). Hughes' claim amplifies the ambiguity of the governess' role in other people's households. They wanted her there to take charge of their daughters' education, yet distrusted her abilities and character.

Her employers and their extended family and friends frequently remind Agnes of her station. They regularly point out that she is their inferior. Mr. Bloomfield, in agreement with his wife, reports his dissatisfaction with Agnes by stating, "I thought when we got them a governess they'd improve; but, instead of that, they get worse and worse". Agnes understands this all points to her lack of skills, and the humiliation affects her deeply. Her initial reaction tells her to "speak in my own defence", but she finds it wise to "subdue every resentful impulse, suppress every sensitive shrinking, and go on perseveringly doing my best" (A. Brontë 2010: 31-32). Agnes represses her negative feelings, however, these emotions need an outlet.

Mr. and Mrs. Bloomfield occasionally bribe their children into behaving, but Agnes has "no rewards to offer". The Bloomfield children are difficult to handle as Agnes lacks the authority to discipline them verbally. She needs an outlet for her frustrations, and she finds it in the classroom. Agnes takes her rage out on her charges physically. Today, society would view

her behaviour as highly blameworthy. When speaking about one of her charges, Tom, she explains how she will occasionally “throw him on his back, and hold his hands and feet” until he behaved. Talking about all three charges, she often has to “drag them to the table”, and “forcibly” hold them there. When Tom’s sister, Mary Ann, misbehaves, Agnes will sometimes “shake her violently by the shoulders, or pull her long hair” (A. Brontë 2010: 26-29). These desperate acts of violence are obvious signs of Agnes’ pressured and frustrating situation, they are however not the reason for her dismissal.

The incident that advances Agnes’ termination is when she kills some baby sparrows only to prevent Tom from torturing them. Mrs. Bloomfield is upset that Agnes has denied her boy the pleasure of playing with the birds. Thus, Mrs. Bloomfield punishes Agnes for disciplining her child, an act that demonstrates her power as mistress of the house. Still, the explanation she gives Agnes is that her services are no longer required because her children’s “manners were uncultivated, and their tempers unruly”, and this was “attributed to a want of sufficient firmness and diligent” on Agnes’ part. Indignant, Agnes leaves Wellwood House and returns home to her family (A. Brontë 2010: 45-46).

When Agnes takes up her new position at Horton Lodge, the new charges are already young adults. She cannot use physical punishment to vent her resentment towards them. The Murray girls, both close to Agnes in age, make sure their governess understands she is their subordinate. Agnes’ position at the Murrays is very unpredictable. The girls, Rosalie in particular, gladly speak to Agnes when they are alone. When they are among their equals, however, they either completely ignore the governess, or treat her with contempt. In their class-oriented environment, the governess has an unclear role. She sometimes feels like an ally, and other times as an enemy. In this social hierarchy, not only is Agnes unequal to her employers, she cannot associate with the servants either. Therefore, she is doomed to a lonely existence just as she experienced at the Bloomfields.

Agnes’ duty to the Murrays always come first. Though it gives her great pleasure, she can only visit Nancy Brown as frequently as the Murrays allow her. The governess has very little time to herself. She is at Rosalie and Matilda’s constant disposal, and the girls have “no order or regularity”, so Agnes must be prepared to assist them at all hours. It would be a “grave and inexcusable offence” by not only her pupils and their mother, but also by “the very servant who came in breathless haste” to call her if the girls were “WAITING!!” Agnes describes an event

like this as a “climax of horror! actually waiting for their governess!!” (A. Brontë 2010: 90). Not only is Agnes concerned she is burden to her employers. She is also worried about being a nuisance to the servants. This is a good description of the governess’ unsettled role in the household. She is in limbo between servants and employers, a role that isolates her within the domestic sphere as well as in the sphere where all women were overlooked, outside of the home.

Agnes feels helpless and frustrated. Her saviour at Horton Lodge comes in the form of the curate, Mr. Weston. He treats Agnes with kindness and courtesy every time he meets her. Agnes depicts how he appears “like the morning star in my horizon” (A. Brontë 2010: 88). His positive impact on Agnes’ life seems to counterbalance the negative incidents up to a certain point. When she has left Horton, and is working with her mother, she reveals that she is not yet at peace with her situation. Agnes has achieved professional fulfilment. Her income through governessing has made this possible. Nonetheless, she does not appear to be satisfied. She does not tell the reader about her students or her teaching, only about her desperate longing for Mr. Weston.

Agnes desires “to taste the joys of love”, and even states that she would “be glad to rest, God willing” (A. Brontë 2010: 149). Agnes longs for death, and Victorian readers saw this as indication that she wanted to commit suicide. This was a forbidden act, forbidden by law and by the church. Sally Shuttleworth (2010) affirms that Agnes’ revelations shocked and scandalized readers at the time of publication. Revealing the depth of her passion went against Christianity and implied that “her religion cannot sustain her” (Shuttleworth 2010: xxiii). Shuttleworth emphasizes that “Agnes is rescued from a potentially fatal decline, not by Mr. Weston, but by her own self-will, aided by her religious faith, and strong sense of her duty in life” (Shuttleworth 2010:xxiv). Thus, Anne Brontë has made another point in her portrayal of Agnes’ independent nature.

Anne Brontë’s novel is not only a story revealing the difficulties of a governess’ life, though she certainly reprimanded her former employers through her tale. Her main concern is to create a thought-provoking story about self-realization, independence, the importance of love and the need to live a fulfilling life. Anne has depicted female maturation and emphasized individualism through a character who challenges herself and society’s expectations of her.

4. Jane Eyre

Elaine Showalter (2014b) claims that women who began their literary careers in the 1840s were seeking both professional role models and fictional ideals. She explains that while male writers had a multitude of arenas where they could “collaborate” and “study their craft”, women “were barred from universities, isolated in their own homes, chaperoned in [public]” and “restricted in friendship”. The Brontë sisters had an advantage, as they at least were able to support each other (cf. Showalter 2014b: 82-83). As sisters and authors, Charlotte, Emily and Anne Brontë could share their ideas and give each other feedback and support. Nestor (1987) argues that Charlotte’s development as a writer blossomed during her “intense and enthusiastic collaboration” with her siblings (Nestor 1987: 4).

Charlotte Brontë lived to see three of her four novels published, specifically *Jane Eyre* (1847), *Shirley* (1849) and *Villette* (1853). Her last novel *The Professor* (1857) was published posthumously. Brontë’s contemporary readers and critics celebrated *Jane Eyre*, and she became one of the female authors who came to dominate their period. The novel is to this day one of the most popular works of English fiction. Ever since its debut, both *Jane Eyre* and its author have been thoroughly analysed.

In this chapter, I will first discuss what made *Jane Eyre* such a great and durable success, followed by an examination of Charlotte Brontë’s narrative techniques. The structure of *Jane Eyre* places the protagonist in five different locations with varying atmospheres, each representing a new stage in her development. I will examine Jane’s education on both a formal and a personal level in each of these places. On her educational journey, Jane Eyre encounters characters who present themselves as either positive role models or antagonists. These personalities embody traits varying from ignorance, prejudice, resentment and even danger, to empathy, generosity and integrity. Mrs. Reed and John Reed at Gateshead, Mr. Brocklehurst, Miss Temple and Helen Burns at Lowood, Rochester, Blanche Ingram and her mother at Thornfield and the Rivers siblings at Marsh End all take part in Jane’s pilgrimage. She compares herself to the women, and moulds her identity under the influence of the men, thus they all contribute in her personal development. I will explore these characters’ impact on the protagonist

at their various locations. Rochester's mad wife Bertha Mason is of particular interest, therefore I will study her connection to Jane in a separate segment.

4.1 The power and passion of Jane Eyre

Jane Eyre has maintained readers' interest ever since its initial publication. Pauline Nestor (1987) asserts that the first reviews of *Jane Eyre* applauded Brontë's portrayal of "rebellion, liberation, self-respect and power" in addition to depicting a "passion and intuition" that captured their imagination (Nestor 1987: 100). However, not everyone saw Charlotte Brontë's input on these themes as inspirational. Some interpreted the novel as a threat to the status quo, and others went even further by calling it an offence against the "good taste, proper reticence and moral tone of the times". Jane Eyre's independent nature and opposition to marry for any other reason than love, threatened traditional values in British society. Nevertheless, even the detractors recognized "the power and influence" of *Jane Eyre* (cf. Nestor 1987: 101). Gilbert and Gubar (2000) add that the novel had a "revolutionary" influence on Victorian writers and their heroines. They claim heroines following Jane Eyre were "plain, rebellious, and passionate", "likely to be [governesses]" and narrators of their own stories (Gilbert and Gubar 2000: 101).

Nestor expresses about Brontë that her "most powerful contributions to the cause of women emerged in her fiction" where she demonstrated "her deepest awareness of the social, intellectual and sexual inequities faced by women of her time" (Nestor 1987: 24). Brontë's protagonist, Jane Eyre, satisfied Victorian women's need for a forceful female character who combined "strength and intelligence with tenderness and tact (Showalter 2014b: 82). Through Jane, Brontë expresses her opinion that society should provide women with opportunities in education and professionalization. Similar to *Agnes Grey*, *Jane Eyre* is overflowing with representations on the subject of female education. Jane is self-taught in the beginning of the book, and she moves forward with formal schooling at Lowood Institution. After several years as a pupil at Lowood, she becomes a teacher there. Her work experience gives her the opportunity to seek a position as a private governess. At Thornfield Hall, Jane is able to exercise her faculties as governess to Miss Adèle. At a later stage in the novel, Jane teaches poor children in a new school for girls in Morton, a village close to March End. *Jane Eyre* gives a thorough portrayal of formal

Victorian educational and class system through Jane's various teaching positions and experiences.

As Brontë intrigued her contemporaries, "the Brontë legend" soon received cult status (Showalter 2014b: 87). The fascination with the creative and talented family is still very evident today. On average, 70 000 visitors make pilgrimages to the Brontë's home, now "The Brontë Parsonage Museum", in Haworth every year (Robinson 2015). The Brontë Society is one of the world's oldest, most respected literary societies. They work to maintain the legacy of the girls whose novels remain as popular today as when they were first published (The Brontë Society 2016). The enduring interest in the Brontës is evident, a fact made visible by events in the near future. This year marks the 200th anniversary for Charlotte's birth, and there are plans of numerous celebrations worldwide. A touring exhibition "Celebrating Charlotte" will be at the National Portrait Gallery in London, followed by the Morgan Library in New York. Northern Ballet is presenting the world premiere of a new version of *Jane Eyre* in May and Sally Wainwright's television drama "To Walk Invisible" airs in the autumn. The bicentenary of Branwell Brontë will be celebrated in 2017, with further events for Emily in 2018 and Anne in 2020 (cf. BBC 2016). Of all the interest in the Brontës' work, *Jane Eyre* has had the greatest success. The novel is part of the classic literary canon as one of the most read and discussed novels of the Western world.

4.2 Jane Eyre's narrative

Charlotte Brontë gives her protagonist control over her own life story by allowing Jane Eyre to present her "autobiographic" narrative. Brontë's narrative follows the protagonist's discourse through five phases in five physical settings. Terry Eagleton (2013) claims Brontë's narratives tend to unfold in "a straightforward linear way", following the progress and development of the protagonist (Eagleton 2013: 136). This pattern is recognizable in *Jane Eyre*. Her childhood years are at Gateshead Hall, and her education takes place at Lowood School. She then becomes governess to Adèle Varens at Thornfield Hall, where she meets Rochester and eventually his "mad wife", Bertha Mason. Later, the Rivers family takes her in at Moor House, also called Marsh End. Finally, she reunites with Rochester at Ferndean Manor. The names of each place has

special meaning, and they all indicate stages of Jane's development. The atmosphere of each setting is important as it reflects Jane's mental state and situation at a certain point in her pilgrimage.

Brontë's protagonist delivers a realistic narrative and a voice of reason that gives her story a feeling of truth and authenticity. In the novel's conclusion, the reader learns that ten years have passed since Jane's story ended. At that point, she has taken the reader through the most important and dramatic experiences of her life leading up to her happy and settled life as Rochester's wife and as mother to a son. Jane's life writing is in the form of a confessional letter, thus it becomes a very personal and intimate narrative. She tells the reader that her story "is not to be a regular autobiography" as she only wishes to include episodes that "possess some degree of interest" (C. Brontë 2001: 70).

Charlotte Brontë gives the reader "direct access to a single, controlling consciousness" (Eagleton 2013: 136). Jane's "autobiographical" narrative chronicles her childhood and her journey into adulthood. Her pilgrimage begins as a neglected orphan who later becomes a governess struggling to find her way in a patriarchal society with a stern social order. She presents her experiences from her perspective, giving the story a sense of authenticity. Not only does the reader follow Jane's interactions with other characters, her first person narrative also reveals her inner self, her thoughts and feelings. Eagleton argues that Charlotte Brontë is an authoritative narrator who steers the reader's responses and cues their judgements. He insists that her strong voice leaves the reader with no doubt as to which characters she means to present as villainous and who are meant to be virtuous (Eagleton 2013: 135-136). Jane's frank approach induces a trustful relationship between narrator and reader.

Jane goes far in her quest to involve her audience as she regularly addresses the reader directly. One example is when she has found that Rochester is already married to Bertha, and he begs her forgiveness. She proclaims, "[r]eader! – I forgave him at the moment, and on the spot" (C. Brontë 2001: 255). On occasions like this, when Jane confesses her innermost thoughts and feelings to the reader, it enforces sympathy with Jane and faith in her story. The reader is not a passive recipient of her narrative, but becomes engaged in the story.

The older and more experienced Jane looks back on her earlier life and shares her lessons in life and her experiences. She shares life lessons that she received as a girl and a young woman. Looking back on her time at Gateshead, Jane's mature rendition of her traumatic experiences

reveal that these are not thoughts she had at the time of the events, but rather reflections made at a later point in her life. After defending herself against Mrs. Reed's accusations during their first meeting with Mr. Brocklehurst, Jane shares with the reader a mixed feeling of victory and fear. She assesses, "[s]omething of vengeance I had tasted for the first time; as aromatic wine it seemed, on swallowing, warm and racy: its after-flour, metallic and corroding, gave me a sensation as if I had been poisoned" (C. Brontë 2001: 31). These are not words common for a ten-year-old, but clearly a statement by a much older and more experienced woman. Jane continues to explain and justify her past behaviour throughout the novel.

In contrast to the thoroughly realistic narrative of *Agnes Grey*, Charlotte Brontë's novel is more dramatic as it contains elements of the romance and the gothic genre. The gothic part of the novel addresses the horrific and the obscure. Brontë is not content with simply portraying the dreary life of a governess, she also wants to present mysterious plots in order to shock and surprise her readers. Her use of gothic, supernatural and psychologically challenging elements makes it clear that she, in addition to contributing in the political debate on gender roles, also wishes to entertain. Brontë is careful not to overdo the supernatural parts of *Jane Eyre*. She always explains the mysterious and terrifying elements in her novel.

All the places that Jane Eyre inhabits throughout the novel are remote and have a gothic feel to them. Gateshead and Thornfield in particular, offer atmospheres of fright and terror. At Gateshead, when Jane awakes after collapsing of fear in the red room, she sees "a terrible red glare, crossed with thick black bars" and experiences that a "terror confus[es] [her] faculties" (C. Brontë 2001: 14-15). At Thornfield, she hears a "curious laugh" and witnesses other mysterious incidents (C. Brontë 2001: 91). However, Charlotte Brontë makes sure the reader gets an explanation for all these eerie episodes. The red glare at Gateshead turns out to be the nursery fire, and the laughter at Thornfield belongs to Rochester's incarcerated wife, Bertha. To make sure their contemporaries do not take offence by their narratives, the Brontës have to present realistic and rational stories. They have to be cautious in order to avoid a scenario where the public labels them madwomen.

Jane Eyre does not only stand out because of its gothic elements. Charlotte Brontë also "expresses her heroine's consciousness through an extraordinary range of narrative devices". She uses imagery in the forms of dreams, hallucinations and visions to focus on "[p]sychological development and the dramas of inner life" (Showalter 2014b: 93). In *Agnes Grey*, Anne Brontë

also portrays the protagonist's personal and psychological development as she searches for fulfilment and a position in society. She does however not rely heavily on symbolism in order to tell her story and communicate her political agenda. By using people and elements that represent more than they first appear, Charlotte Brontë creates a far more complex narrative than Anne Brontë does. In *Jane Eyre*, buildings and rooms, the colour red, contrasts like fire and ice as well as certain characters give depth to her narration. These "symbols" represent both aspects of Victorian society and phases of Jane's psychological evolution. Mr. Brocklehurst, with his stern and suppressive nature, is a symbol of Victorian patriarchy. Rochester's mad wife, Bertha Mason, represents an *unwoman*, an outcast from normal society. She is a symbolic representation of the confined Victorian wife who has no outlet for her frustration and anxiety, and who exemplifies a chilling example of what Jane can become.

4.3 Gateshead

Gateshead Hall is the setting for Jane Eyre's troubled childhood, and where her story begins. In this section of the chapter, I will study the atmosphere of Gateshead, as well as the lessons Jane learns here both on formal and personal levels. Eventually, I will discuss the influence that other characters in the household have on Jane's development, including the climate in a household without an acting patriarch.

4.3.1 The Gateshead atmosphere

In the beginning of the novel, Jane is ten years old. Her life at Gateshead is challenging, and traumatic experiences she has here follow her throughout her story. The atmosphere in the mansion can be described as passionate, yet cold, exemplifying the "opposed properties of fire and ice" that Charlotte Brontë uses to characterize Jane's experiences (Gilbert and Gubar 2000: 339). The "fire" symbolises Jane's passion and rage, and the "ice" is the uninviting atmosphere of the household, the coldness of the Reeds and Jane's isolation and fear. These images follow Jane

throughout her story, as the fiery, passionate Jane encounters physical and spiritual isolation at various locations.

Gateshead had been the childhood home of Jane's mother, and later the home of her uncle, Mr. Reed. After the deaths of her parents, and later the death of her uncle, Jane now lives here with her aunt Mrs. Reed and her three cousins, Eliza, John and Georgiana. Mrs. Reed sees Jane as a burden, and cares little for her well-being. Consequently, Jane keeps to herself to avoid harassment, especially from her cousin John. Jane's confrontations with John lead to her incarceration in the red-room, a ghostly and frightening chamber, and setting for one of the most traumatic experiences in Jane's life. The room is a "spare chamber, very seldom slept in", with "curtains of deep red damask" and a red carpet. Jane describes the room as "chill", "silent" and "solemn". Further, it is the room where Mr. Reed "breathed his last". The room bears resemblance to hell, as it is red like flames, associated with death and impossible to escape. Incarcerated and alone in the chamber, Jane's mood varies from rage and fear to feelings of "humiliation, self-doubt" and "forlorn depression" (C. Brontë 2001: 10-11). This emotional rollercoaster not only symbolises Jane's confinement at Gateshead, but also a personal transition from child to young woman.

When Jane awakes in her bed after collapsing in the red-room, she has changed. She experiences feelings of "inexpressible relief" and "a soothing conviction of protection and security" (C. Brontë 2001: 15). Jane has survived a traumatic experience, and the experience has made her stronger. Gilbert and Gubar claim Jane chose to escape the red-room "through madness". During the nineteenth and twentieth century, women writers commonly portrayed their female characters' escapes from "insupportable oppression" as "[e]scape through flight, or escape through starvation" (Gilbert and Gubar 2000:341). In their opinion, Jane's means of escape is far more terrifying. Passion was not a quality that Victorians appreciated in girls or women.

At Gateshead Hall, Jane's position and reactions clearly make her an *other*. She will always be an outsider, never a part of the family. Her confinement in the Reed household mirrors all Victorian women's imprisonment in the home. John's maltreatment of her reflects how Victorian patriarchal society confined women to the domestic sphere. Jane learns that her outburst is not accepted, and she receives punishment for her tantrum .Not only her aunt and cousin react negatively, other members of the household also condemn her behaviour. The servants find her behaviour inappropriate and deem her a nuisance. Jane finds no support or

understanding for her natural reactions and she is considered a problem. The main reason for Jane's isolation and rejection is expressed by her aunt when she states, "you are passionate, Jane, that you must allow" (C. Brontë 2001: 31). Jane's passion and rebelliousness as a child leads to her isolation and rejection at Gateshead. Her seclusion and hard punishment leads to changes in her reaction pattern that becomes visible at later stages in her journey.

4.3.2 Formal and personal education at Gateshead

Jane Eyre's roots bear striking resemblances to those of Agnes Grey. Jane's mother was a Reed, and her wealthy family did not appreciate her choice of a clergyman husband. The Reeds disapproved of her marrying below her social class, and Jane's grandfather "cut her off without a shilling". Here, the two novels take different paths. Agnes Grey's parents live to give their daughters a safe childhood, whereas only a year after they were married, Jane's mother and father dies from typhus fever, making Jane an orphan (C. Brontë 2001:21). Jane being an orphan makes her position in society even more vulnerable than that of Agnes Grey. Jane has no financial security, and on a personal level, she has no one to care for her or protect her. She is completely dependent on the charity of a family that does not tolerate her presence. Early in the novel, Jane is made aware that she is dependent on Mrs. Reed, and her only alternative is living in the poorhouse (C. Brontë 2001: 10). In the social hierarchy of Gateshead, Jane is "less than a servant", therefore no one in the household have any obligation to treat her respectfully (C. Brontë 2001: 9). Jane's *otherness* is apparent in the Reed household.

Jane's aunt and cousins regularly point out that Jane is not a Reed. John reminds her she is "a dependent" as her father left her with "no money" (C. Brontë 2001:8). There are mainly two reasons for Jane's inferiority at Gateshead. First, she has no sense of belonging, as those who cared for her are dead. Second, her plainness works against her, a fact demonstrated by not only the Reeds, but also the servants. Miss Abbot, a servant, comments on Jane's looks, "if she were a nice, pretty child, one might compassionate her forlornness; but one really cannot care for a little toad as that". She claims that Jane would get more compassion had she been as beautiful as Miss Georgiana is "with her long curls and blue eyes, and such a sweet colour" (C. Brontë 2001: 21). Jane's lack of beauty makes her less worthy and less condonable. When she challenges Mrs.

Reed's bad treatment of her, it only helps in strengthening their case against the "troublesome, careless child" (C. Brontë 2001: 25).

Jane's substitution for social interaction are the books she finds in the library at Gateshead. From the very first page, Jane's love for books is evident. Through reading, Jane seeks adventure and development. She hides in a window seat, behind red curtains to get a glimpse of the world that is beyond her reach. Reading is part of Jane's process of self-education. She expresses her love for reading, revealing that "[she] was then happy: happy at least in [her] way" (C. Brontë 2001: 5-7). Jane affirms historic accuracy because she, "like most women […] depended on literature and the […] library to provide the sense of connectedness" (Showalter 2014b: 83). Reading provides Jane with an escape from a miserable domestic situation. She finds comfort in reading and studying pictures, it seems reading is therapeutic to her. Jane expresses that "the word *book* [acts] as a transient stimulus" as she dives into the narratives of alternative and fictional worlds (C. Brontë 2001: 17). Jane's lively and vivid descriptions of the books she reads reflects her appreciation of the written word. In addition, Bessie proves a great contributor to the development of Jane's imagination. Bessie has "a remarkable knack of narrative", and her nursery tales make great impressions on Jane, for better or worse (C. Brontë 2001: 24). Her stories spark Jane's imagination, and are partly to blame for her visions and her frenzy in the red-room.

The red-room incident is the climax of Jane's story at Gateshead. Soon after, Jane receives an opportunity to leave her childhood home. Similar to Agnes Grey, Jane is eager to leave, though their motivation for leaving is different. Agnes' home is a safe environment, and her parents take good care of her. Nevertheless, they protect her too much. Her father's respond to Agnes' request to become a governess is a tearful, "my darling, we could not spare you" (A. Brontë 2010: 12). Agnes has to pursue the topic as she has a strong need to discover her own abilities away from her childhood home. Jane, on the other hand, does not feel protected or included in the Reed household. She does not possess the same positive excitement in venturing out into the world as Agnes does. Leaving for school is simply her best alternative for escaping the terrors at Gateshead. She demonstratively expresses to her aunt, "send me to school soon, Mrs. Reed, for I hate to live here" (C. Brontë 2001: 31).

Jane leaves for Lowood, and she does not encounter the Reeds again until she receives an invitation to visit her dying aunt later in the novel. At that point, Jane is a young woman working

as a governess. She receives word that John Reed has killed himself, and that her aunt Reed has had a stroke. On her deathbed, her aunt has sent a request for Jane’s presence, thus Jane leaves Thornfield and Rochester to see her. She finds Mrs. Reed is still a hostile and bitter woman, therefore the visit serves mainly as a reminder of her difficult past. Mrs. Reed gives Jane a letter from her uncle John Eyre, dated three years back. He writes that he wishes to adopt Jane and make her his heir. Mrs. Reed admits she neglected to forward the letter to Jane, as she “disliked” her and did not want to assist in “lifting [her] to prosperity” (C. Brontë 2001: 203). In a generous state of mind, Jane tries to make peace with Mrs. Reed, but her aunt refuses, and later that night, she dies. Brontë makes sure that Janes revisit to Gateshead gives her closure. While Jane has changed and appears to be a forgiving and mature woman, her aunt stays hard until her death. Jane appears calmer after her visit to Gateshead. It seems the reminders of her childhood years have made her even more appreciative of her new life.

4.3.3 Questionable friends and antagonists at Gateshead

The closest character to resemble a friend to Jane at Gateshead is Bessie, the servant. Jane prefers her to anyone else at Gateshead, and asserts, “[w]hen thus gentle, Bessie seemed to me the best, prettiest, kindest being in the world” (C. Brontë 2001: 24). The servant is the character at Gateshead who has the closest resemblance to a motherly figure to Jane. She is, however, not a reliable character as she is abiding to the social hierarchy of the household, and takes her orders from the Reeds. Bessie has “a capricious and hasty temper”, and she is not a trustworthy ally to Jane (C. Brontë 2001: 24). This becomes clear as Jane overhears Bessie gossiping with Miss Abbot, agreeing with her judgemental portrayal of Jane (C. Brontë 2001: 21). She also partakes in the physical punishment of Jane, and in her incarceration in the red-room. Nevertheless, Jane appreciates Bessie’s kindness, unpredictable as it may be, and she expresses her fondness of the servant throughout the novel. Besides Bessie, Jane has no other friends at Gateshead. She does however have two antagonists in the household, her aunt, Mrs. Reed, and her cousin John.

On his deathbed, Jane’s uncle Reed had asked his wife to care for his niece as one of her own children. Jane expresses that her aunt has cared for her “as well as her nature would permit her”. She thinks her aunt finds it difficult to care for “a strange child she could not love” (C.

Brontë 2001:13). Mrs. Reed makes sure Jane understands that she is an outsider. She does not manage to be a motherly figure to Jane. The grown up Jane looks back on her childhood and can clearly see that she "was a discord in Gateshead Hall; I was like nobody there; I had nothing in harmony with Mrs. Reed and her children, or her chosen vassalage" (C. Brontë 2001: 12). While Mrs. Reed dotes on her own children, she excludes Jane from her family's activities and celebrations. She allows her son, the "substitute patriarch", to harass Jane (Gilbert and Gubar 2000: 342).

John, who "tyrannizes over the household", is particularly cruel and hard towards Jane (Gilbert and Gubar 2000: 342). He frequently seeks her out in order to torment her, and it intimidates her. There is a reason why Jane hides behind heavy, red curtains at Gateshead. She knows her sanctuary is not safe, and that she can be interrupted without notice. On a whim, her cousin John discontinues her reading and announces, "[y]ou have no business to take our books". As patriarch of the household, John takes seize of the book and asserts, "I'll teach you to rummage my book-shelves: for they *are* mine; all the house belongs to me, or will do in a few years" (C. Brontë 2001: 8). This demonstration of power is a clear reference to a society where men had complete authority over women. The boy is in his full right to harass and punish Jane, and she, an orphan and a girl, can do nothing to prevent it. When he throws a heavy book at her head, she reacts with rage and fights back verbally. She tells him he is "like a murderer", "like a slave-driver" and "like the Roman emperors" (C. Brontë 2001:8). Jane fights to protect herself, an act that Gilbert and Gubar (2000) calls "rebellious against the hierarchy that oppresses her" (Gilbert and Gubar 2000:342). Her rebellion is shocking to the observers. John calls her "Rat! rat!" and the servants call her "a picture of passion" and "a mad cat" (C. Brontë 2001: 9). The oppression that Jane experiences illustrates the patriarchal domination that existed at the time. With no chance of explaining herself, Jane receives punishment, whereas no one accuses John of any wrongdoing.

Jane's reaction to her violent treatment is considered unacceptable. Her attitude seems justified to the reader, however, Victorians would not approve of such disrespectful and unfeminine behaviour. Toril Moi (2010) discusses this very point as she claims that the reason why girls or women cannot explain their actions is the fact that their opinions do not matter. I find that Moi's thoughts apply very well to Jane when she argues, "it is the specific fact of her being a [girl] that is mobilized to undercut her arguments" (Moi 2010: 215). It is pointless for

Jane to speak in self-defence, and she learns this lesson the hard way, therefore she proclaims, "[u]njust! – unjust!" (C. Brontë 2001: 12). It is as if Moi discusses *Jane Eyre* when she asserts,

> in a situation where the woman is defined as deviant in relation to an absolute, any reminders that his interlocutor actually is female will make the man experience what she says as relative, insignificant, and untrue.
>
> (Moi 2010: 215)

After Mr. Reed's death, there is a patriarchal vacuum at Gateshead. Mrs. Reed and John share the patriarchal power. She has the right age, whereas he has the right gender for the position. However, neither have absolute authority. John is a patriarch in training. He is very aware of his power, and supported by his mother and the servants, he seeks out Jane to exercise his dominance. Mrs. Reed assists by sacrificing her feminine role in order to show some authority. Jane exemplifies this as she depicts her aunt who abruptly thrusts her into the red-room and locks her in (C. Brontë 2001: 14). The "foolish and wicked 'stepmother'" does not condone Jane standing up for herself, and she seizes the opportunity to rid herself of her burden by enrolling Jane in the charity school of Lowood (cf. Gilbert and Gubar 2000: 342-343). In doing so, Mrs. Reed seeks assistance from a "personification of the Victorian super-ego" (Gilbert and Gubar 2000: 343). Unable to solve her problems with Jane herself, and to relieve herself permanently of the burden that is Jane, she has to call a real patriarchal figure for assistance. Consequently, Mr. Brocklehurst enters Jane's life.

4.4 Lowood

Lowood Institution, a school for orphan girls, is, as the name implies, a low point in Jane's life. In entering the institution, Jane soon learns that she has left one strict patriarchal institution only to enter a new one. At Lowood, Jane encounters two friends, fellow pupil Helen Burns and her teacher, Miss Temple. They both contribute to Jane's formal and personal education, and their lessons stay with her till the end. I will focus on Jane's interaction with Mr. Brocklehurst, Miss Temple and Helen Burns in order to assess her development in this stage of her journey.

4.4.1 Formal and personal education through antagonists and friends

The atmosphere at Lowood is cold, hard and suffocating, reflecting the suppression of the young girls studying there. The living conditions are poor, and the antagonistic Mr. Brocklehurst oversees the school. He indoctrinates the young women with religious and social convention, and his goal with the pupils is “to render them hardy, patient and self-denying” (C. Brontë 2001: 53). Both pupils and teachers must answer to Brocklehurst who is “not a god: nor […] even a great and admired man” (C. Brontë 2001: 58). Like Gateshead, Lowood is a physically and emotionally cold place. Here, Jane learns to repress her emotions to avoid confrontation with the patriarchal power. Lowood does not only offer Jane coldness and melancholy, it also introduces her to true friendships and gives her an opportunity to both receive and to offer education.

Jane’s formal education begins, and her personal education continues at Lowood. The school has a diverse staff, from the aforementioned, stern and barbarous Mr. Brocklehurst to the mild, empathetic Miss Temple. Mr. Brocklehurst is the patriarchal force that the pupils and teachers must obey. He demonstrates his power by organizing a school, “where orphan girls are starved or frozen into proper Christian submission” (Gilbert and Gubar 2000: 344). Brocklehurst’s weapon of choice is his religion, which he misuses in order to threaten and oppress the girls. His aim is to make them understand their inferior position in society, and to suppress any tendencies to independence and individuality. Jane proves her practical and no doubt provoking mind-set when answering Mr. Brocklehurst’s question on how she will avoid going to hell. “I must keep in good health and not die”, is her answer (C. Brontë 2001:27). This surprising logic suggests strength and independence, and a realization that Jane does not submit to patriarchal control. Her physical strength is also confirmed when many girls at Lowood die of consumption, and Jane survives. Had it not been for the support of two friends at Lowood, Jane’s stay here would render even more excruciating.

Jane encounters two potential angels in the house, namely her teacher Miss Temple and her first true friend, Helen Burns. Miss Temple becomes a motherly figure to Jane, and Helen her ally. As Jane observes and struggles with daily injustices at Lowood, Miss Temple proves there are also fair and non-judgmental people in the world. When Mr. Brocklehurst labels Jane as “wicked”, Miss Temple assures her that “when a criminal is accused, he is always allowed to speak in his own defence”, and “[c]ontinue to act as a good girl, and you will satisfy me” (C.

Brontë 2001: 60). This act of decency and humanity is uncommon to Jane, and it results in her experiencing great appreciation for another human being.

Miss Temple is Jane's first positive role model. Physically, she is "tall, fair and shapely" with "a complexion, if pale, clear" and "a stately air and carriage" (C. Brontë 2001: 39-40). Helen describes her personality as "full of goodness" (C. Brontë 2001: 47). Gilbert and Gubar refer to Miss Temple as "a shrine of ladylike virtues: magnanimity, cultivation, courtesy - and repression" (Gilbert and Gubar 2000: 344). They believe Miss Temple in many ways personifies Coventry Patmore's "The Angel in the House", however they recognize that her presence also functions as a "balance" to the "bad pillar Mr. Brocklehurst". Miss Temple embodies "a 'sewer' of concealed resentment". She is "plainly angered by Mr. Brocklehurst's sanctimonious stinginess", yet she "listens to his sermonizing in ladylike silence". Rather than verbally protesting Mr. Brocklehurst, Miss Temple's body language reveals her concerns as she "look[s] down", "her mouth closes "as if it would have required a sculptor's chisel to open it" and her "brow settled gradually into petrified severity" (C. Brontë 2001: 53). These subdued reactions to the injustices she observes are contrasting to Jane's passionate outbursts towards unfair treatment.

Helen contributes positively to Jane's life with her calm and caring nature and strong, religious faith. She amazes Jane by displaying a high level of dignity under the harassment she experiences at Lowood. The far more rebellious and expressive Jane learns from Helen's claims, "revenge never worries my heart, degradation never too deeply disgusts me, injustice never crushes me too low: I live in calm, looking to the end" (C. Brontë 2001:50). Helen provides Jane with valuable lessons. She demonstrates restraint as she endures public humiliation at Lowood. After a teacher has beaten Helen severely, Jane observes, "[n]ot a tear rose to Burns' eye" and "not a feature of her pensive face altered its ordinary expression" (C. Brontë 2001: 45).

According to Elaine Showalter, Helen Burns is "[t]he Angel of Lowood". She represents "the perfect victim and the representation of the feminine spirit in its most disembodied form" (Showalter 2014b: 97). Showalter insists Charlotte Brontë created Helen Burns as an "extreme [component] of mind and body". Helen is "the Angel" who combats "the devil" (Showalter 2014b: 93). She has complete faith in God, and professes, "the Bible bids us return good for evil". This "doctrine of endurance" is inconceivable to Jane (C. Brontë 2001: 47). Jane's religious influences have so far been complex. She has had two religious influences, the indoctrinating Mr. Brocklehurst and the patient and submissive Helen. Neither religious approach has appealed to

Jane, as she is too rebellious to accept Mr. Brocklehurst's strict concept and too passionate to be as tolerant as Helen.

Under the influence of Helen, Jane does not demonstrate her anger the way she did at Gateshead. She does, however, reveal that she still has a temper by confessing to her friend who has just received undeserved punishment that had it been herself who was punished, "I should get [the rod] from her hand; I should break it under her nose" (C. Brontë 2001: 46). The angelic Helen demonstrates characteristics that Jane finds hard to adopt. Gilbert and Gubar agree with Showalter, however, they also point to Helen's likeness to Miss Temple, as she demonstrates the same strategy of concealing her anger. They conclude, "Helen is carried off by her own fever for liberty". Helen's repressed anger manifests itself in her illness, and leads to her death (Gilbert and Gubar 2001: 346). Based on Gilbert and Gubar's theory, both Miss Temple and Helen conceal their rebelliousness beneath their "angelic exterior[s]", therefore they cannot exemplify Patmore's angels (cf. Gilbert and Gubar 2000: 345).

After a rough introduction to the school, and several tragic incidents, Jane moves her narrative ahead by eight years. The school has gone through a complete reorganization, and Jane explains that her stay there during this period has been "uniform: but not unhappy, because it was not inactive". She has thrived on "excellent education", "[a] fondness for [her] studies" and "a desire to excel in it all" (C. Brontë 2001: 70-71). Her academic success and recognition by teachers has strengthened Jane's self-worth. The last two years she has filled the position of teacher at Lowood, however, this is a position she is ready to leave behind. Her education and experience working as teacher has provided her with the possibility of entering the work market and making a living. Jane is now in the same position as Agnes Grey, when she teaches young girls in the school she established with her mother. Like Agnes, Jane could choose to remain in this position, and build a life here. However, neither protagonist experiences fulfilment solely through professionalization. Agnes longs for love, and Jane desires "liberty", "change" and "stimulus" (C. Brontë 2001: 72).

Nestor (1987) confirms that there are "indication[s] of Jane having internalised something of Helen's 'doctrine and endurance'" (Nestor 1987: 56). She never displays her rage physically or verbally. Surprisingly, Jane learns to subdue her anger and practice self-control under these difficult circumstances, a trait she unquestionably learned from her role models Miss Temple and Helen. Jane acknowledges that Miss Temple has bestowed upon her "more

harmonious thoughts: what seemed better-regulated feelings", "allegiance to duty and order" and "a disciplined and subdued character" (C. Brontë 2001: 71). Showalter agrees that Jane "severely represse[s]" her aggression while at Lowood. Nevertheless, she believes these muffled feelings reassert themselves "in [their] most irredeemably bestial and terrifying form" when she becomes a governess at Thornfield (Showalter 2014b: 97-98).

4.5 Thornfield

The story that unfolds at Thornfield is by far the most intriguing and dramatic part of the novel. Jane's development at Thornfield expands through her encounters with friends and antagonists. I will study both her formal and her personal education through these relationships. As Bertha Mason's connection to Jane is of particular interest, she will undergo an in-depth exploration.

4.5.1 The Thornfield atmosphere

Jane's liberation from Lowood comes in the form of a position as governess for Adèle Varens at Thornfield Hall. Jane enters a new role at Thornfield, that of governess. In addition to familiarizing herself with her new identity, this is also the setting for Jane and Rochester's romance. Thornfield can be described as a "gloomy mansion" (Gilbert and Gubar 2000: 347). The atmosphere is rather gothic, but has an intimate and personal feel to it. Jane finds a sense of belonging here, a feeling she reveals when coming back from visiting her dying aunt Reed. Jane tells Rochester, "I am strangely glad to get back again to you; wherever you are is my home - my only home" (C. Brontë 2001: 209). This is the first time Jane feels a sense of true belonging, a feeling she has never experienced before.

Thornfield mansion represents a place of emotional comfort and warmth, but also a feeling of eeriness. Jane has a feeling that something supernatural inhabits the place. This unexplained feeling, followed by terrifying events, creates a gothic atmosphere. Events that take place at Thornfield become more dramatic as they are full of imagery and symbolism. The narrative at Thornfield varies, from the now familiar seriousness of the novel to a new, cheerful

and humorous tone. The dialogue between Jane and Rochester is unexpectedly witty, and the reader familiarises with the protagonist on a new level.

In addition to meeting her love interest at Thornfield, Jane also encounters negative role models in the forms of Blanche Ingram and her mother. These women highlight the ambivalent position of the governess. In addition, Blanche is Jane's romantic rival, and therefore becomes a character to whom Jane compares herself. A great part of Jane's personal development happens through her blossoming romance with Rochester, and in relation to the exposure of his mad wife incarcerated in the attic of Thornfield.

4.5.2 Formal and personal education at Thornfield

Mrs. Fairfax is the woman who answers Jane's job advertisement, therefore Jane believes she is her new employer. Before arriving Thornfield, Jane worries that Mrs. Fairfax is "a second Mrs. Reed" (C. Brontë 2001: 80). Jane's concerns are very much like Agnes Grey's apprehensions before entering her second governess position with the Murrays. Both governesses have personal experience with upper class mothers' animosity towards outsiders, and governesses in particular held exposed positions. Jane does not yet have governess experience like Agnes. She does, however know their reputation, and have formed her expectations based on this knowledge. When she meets Mrs. Fairfax, she is relieved to find her warm and welcoming. Jane expresses, "I anticipated only coldness and stiffness: this is not like what I have heard of the treatment of governesses" (C. Brontë 2001: 82).

Mrs. Fairfax turns out to be "merely a *housekeeper*" at Thornfield, although Gilbert and Gubar refer to her as "the surrogate of an absent master" (Gilbert and Gubar 2000: 348). She is "a little elderly woman" with a mild temper (C. Brontë 2001: 81). Unlike the servants working for the same families as Agnes Grey, the staff at Thornfield and Mrs. Fairfax in particular, include Jane in their conversations. Mrs. Fairfax and Jane have a pleasant tone of conversation, and they develop a friendly relationship.

Unlike Agnes Grey who must obey the mothers in her respective employers' houses, Jane has complete authority over Adèle, whose mother is dead. She can therefore execute her teaching without interference. Jane has landed a position that other governesses would envy. Kathryn

Hughes (1993) confirms, “[i]t is no wonder that situations in motherless families were particular popular amongst governesses” (Hughes 1993: 67). In addition, Jane’s education at Lowood has prepared for her work as an educator contradictory to Agnes who had few accomplishments when she embarked upon governessing. Agnes’ mother asserts to her daughter, “you have not learnt to take care of *yourself* yet” (A. Brontë 2010: 11). Both Jane and Agnes, however, find purpose in their work. While both women can at times view labour as a burden, they want and choose to work to support themselves. Jane enjoys her work at Thornfield, as her pupil proves “obedient and teachable” (C. Brontë 2001:92).

On a personal level, however, Jane feels isolated as she reflects, “[w]omen 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” (C. Brontë 2001: 93). Through Jane’s reflections, Charlotte Brontë demonstrates her opinion on the subordination of women. Jane, an educated woman, cannot find complete satisfaction within the domestic sphere. Brontë argues for the capacity of women, claiming they too have a need for intellectual stimuli. She advocates for the education of women by signalling that women’s intellectual capacity exceeds simple tasks in the home. Brontë insists that society underestimates women and suppresses their needs. She further certifies her concerns on this topic by stating,

> 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.
> (C. Brontë 2001: 93)

4.5.3 Jane and Rochester

When Mr. Rochester, arrives at Thornfield on horseback, he very much exemplifies a Byronic hero. Jane describes, “the frown, the roughness” of Rochester, and his face “masculine; and, […] dark, strong, and stern” (Brontë 2001: 97-99). According to Gilbert and Gubar, Rochester “appears the very essence of patriarchal energy”, an image that “suggest[s] [a] universe of male

sexuality” (Gilbert and Gubar 2000: 351). By patriarchal standards, Rochester is not a suitable partner to Jane. She is neither wealthy nor pretty enough for a man of his social standing. The strong chemistry between the two is nonetheless undeniable. They turn out to be far more suited for each other than first anticipated.

Rochester recognizes an *otherness* in Jane the very first time he sees her. He sees “a quiet little figure sitting by itself”, a “[c]hildish and slender creature” who resembles “a linnet” or an “elf”. He reveals his fascination with her “unusual” and “perfectly new character” (C. Brontë 2001: 266-267). Rochester finds himself drawn to Jane because he can see that she accepts him and his personality. He describes himself as a “grim and cross master”, and is happy that Jane feels sympathy for him (C. Brontë 2001: 267-268). Jane clearly recognises an *otherness* in Rochester too, therefore they are drawn to each other. In Jane, Rochester finds a person who can save him from his own lonely existence and from his “hideous demon” (C. Brontë 2001: 269). He considers Jane his saviour, his “sympathy”, his “better self” and his “good angel” (C. Brontë 2001: 269). Their positions as social outsiders make them a good match, but other complications block a possible union.

From a romantic point of view, Jane and Rochester are an exciting and complicated pairing. Jane’s position makes her financially dependent on her romantic interest. The strict social norms in the Victorian era made a marriage between the two an event unlikely to happen. Kathryn Hughes (1993) explains,

> [i]n real life governesses did not marry Mr Rochester and not just because there was something nasty in the attic. On the whole they chose their male equivalents, marginal men whose occupation as curate or teacher could offer them no fairy-tale ending.
>
> (Hughes 1993: 143)

In *Agnes Grey*, Anne Brontë stayed true to her realistic narrative in following this Victorian etiquette. The suitor to her protagonist Agnes was the anti-Byronic curate, Mr. Weston. Victorian readers could appreciate their romantic match, as they were equal in the social hierarchy. In comparison, Charlotte Brontë’s choice of companion to her protagonist is a version of Byronic hero. Jane describes Rochester as “athletic”, “broad-chested”, “thin-flanked”, “neither tall nor graceful”, with “grim mouth, chin and jaw” (C. Brontë 2001: 102). While he is not handsome in a

conventional sense, he is nonetheless a man of sensual character and "of better tendencies, higher principles, and purer tastes" than most people (C. Brontë 2001: 125). Rochester's social standing makes him an unlikely partner for Jane. Gilbert and Gubar reveal that Victorian critics disliked the "coarseness and sexuality of *Jane Eyre*". What truly shocked them, however, was Jane's "refusal to accept the forms, customs and standards of society – in short, its rebellious feminism" (Gilbert and Gubar 2000: 338). Jane's refusal to accept her social position was offensive to Victorian readers. As both woman and governess, she ought to know and accept her social rank, and the social immobility those positions entailed.

Jane accepts Rochester's proposal of marriage as he can offer her partnership and love in a home where she has lived "a full and delightful life", where she has "not been trampled on", "not been petrified", "not been buried with inferior minds" nor "excluded from every glimpse of communion" (C. Brontë 2001:215). These strong, honest utterances reflect Jane's troubled past at Gateshead and Lowood, and serve as a reminder to the reader that she has been through a lot to get to this point. Gilbert and Gubar recognize Jane's transformation from a "[p]oor, plain and little" child to a woman who is in the process of reaching an unbelievable end for a governess, namely marrying up in the social hierarchy. The two theorists see Jane's progress from "[t]he smallest, weakest, and plainest child in the house, [who] embarks on her pilgrim's process as a sullen Cinderella […], immorally rebellious against the hierarchy that oppresses her" (Gilbert and Gubar 2000: 342). The "immorality" they refer to, is Jane breaking with social protocol by prioritizing her own happiness. Jane is now within reach of a Victorian fairy-tale ending.

Before Rochester and Jane are able to marry however, the secret is revealed that Rochester already has a wife, "the madwoman" imprisoned in the attic of Thornfield. Rochester had, unaware of her inherited madness, and encouraged by her relatives and his own father and brother, married the "tall, dark, and majestic" Bertha Mason. She had later displayed signs of "insanity" through "outbreaks of her violent and unreasonable temper". Rochester therefore resolved to imprison her in the "third-storey room" of Thornfield (cf. C. Brontë 2001: 260-264).

Upon discovering Bertha, Jane loses her storybook ending. Rochester proposes she becomes his mistress and moves with him to the south of France (C. Brontë 2001: 259). Jane is unwilling to compromise her morals, therefore she decides to flee Rochester and Thornfield. In running away, Jane leaves the only place she has felt true love and value as a human being. Nevertheless, she realizes that staying would imprison her morally and physically. Jane has

always longed for independence and autonomy. Marrying Rochester would tie her down both physically and mentally. Jane's escape from Thornfield is therefore also an escape from confinement and submission to Rochester. As his mistress, she would cement her position as his inferior.

4.5.4 Friends and antagonists at Thornfield

From Jane's arrival at Thornfield, Mrs. Fairfax has been a good friend to Jane. However, as the romance between Jane and Rochester unfolds, she finds it difficult to support the union. *Agnes Grey* and *Jane Eyre* has clearly demonstrated the values and attitudes of the upper social classes. Now, Mrs. Fairfax proves that fidelity to a value system also exists among lower-class members. Instead of showing support and loyalty to Jane, she rather displays loyalty to her station by identifying accepted from unaccepted social behaviour. On the surface, Jane and Rochester are unequal in very many ways. Jane is twenty years younger and much less experienced. Her social standing is lower, and she is his employee. These inequalities were major barriers at the time, and for this reason, Mrs. Fairfax reacts with bewilderment when learning that they intend to cross social class lines by marrying. She disappoints Jane by expressing her concerns regarding their union. She states, "[e]quality of position and fortune is often advisable in such cases", and hurts Jane by asking, "[i]s it really for love he is going to marry you?" (C. Brontë 2001:225). Her questions confirm the deviation from social etiquette that Rochester and Jane's merger present. Mrs. Fairfax, therefore, serve as both a friend and a critic for Jane. Gilbert and Gubar claim "[t]he equivocal pleasantness" of Mrs. Fairfax mirror Jane's former experiences (Gilbert and Gubar 2000: 348). Although Mrs. Fairfax' judgement troubles Jane, other women at Thornfield cause her more pain.

In her role as governess, Jane encounters demeaning treatment similar to Agnes Grey. Two well-born women, Blanche Ingram and her mother, Lady Ingram, cause Jane grief by demonstrating their aversion to governesses. Blanche brings up the topic by sharing her family's experiences. In the presence of Jane and members of her own class, she asserts, "You should hear mamma on the chapter of governesses. Mary and I have had, I should think, a dozen at least in our day; half of them detestable and the rest ridiculous" (C. Brontë 2001: 150). These attitudes

towards governesses represent those of many members of the middle and upper classes. Lady Ingram supports her daughter's claims, complaining that just talking about governesses "makes [her] nervous" (C. Brontë 2001: 150). Blanche's insults continue as she labels her former governesses with stereotypical traits. One had been "low-spirited", another "coarse and insensible", a third displayed "raging passions", and "the whole tribe" had been "a nuisance" (C. Brontë 2001: 150-151).

Hughes (1993) argues, "the governess' presence in a wealthy [...] household unsettled the assumed relationship between genteel femininity and a life of leisure". Hughes claims the governess' position as a working woman confirmed that not all ladies were leisured, and that again suggested that not all leisured women were necessarily ladies (Hughes 1993: 25). Jane is part of this "tribe" that challenges the very ideals of femininity by working, thus she threatens the pride in non-productivity preserved by ladies like the Ingrams. The Ingrams intend for Jane to hear their insults, as her feelings are of no concern to them. They are within their full rights to shame a woman who works for a living.

Jane quietly listens to their hard criticism, and escapes the room at the first opportunity. Eagleton (2013) insists that "[t]he self's lonely integrity must be defended by silence, prudence and cunning, yet involves a self-lacerating mutilation of one's spontaneous being" (Eagleton 2013: 130). Jane finds herself in a state of uncertainty, struggling to repress her anger and still maintaining her dignity and self-worth. Without the lessons given by Helen, Jane would possibly have felt the need to speak out in defence of herself and her profession. Rather, we now witness a more subdued and restrained Jane. The effect of Jane's submission becomes very apparent when comparing her restricted personality with her former rebelliousness. Jane struggles to accept the pressures of the social hierarchy, and tries to control her passion.

In addition to acting as critic to Jane's profession, Blanche is also Jane's romantic rival. Initially, Jane seems to have met impossibly strong competition, as Blanche is a highly suitable wife for Rochester by patriarchal standards. She is "an accomplished lady of rank" (C. Brontë 2001: 137). Blanche exceeds in all accomplishments that Victorian patriarchal society prioritized for young, highborn women. She sings, plays the piano and proves an excellent equestrian. Blanche is beautiful, "moulded like a Dian" (C. Brontë 2001: 146), and she plays to this strength in her quest to marry Rochester for his wealth. Miss Ingram is Rochester's equal socially, though not intellectually. Jane reflects, "she was not original: she used to repeat sounding phrases from

books: she never offered, nor had, an opinion of her own" (Brontë 2001: 158). Gilbert and Gubar call Blanche one of Jane's "important negative 'role-models'" as she represent "Jane's classically wicked stepsister". They claim Blanche is one of the "problems" Jane must overcome in order to reach her goal of independence (Gilbert and Gubar 2000: 350).

Jane points out the significant difference between Blanche and herself. Jane and Rochester are more suited intellectually. Rochester acknowledges that they have a "cord of communion" and that Jane is his "equal" and "likeness" before proposing to her (C. Brontë 2001: 215-217). He confesses he did not intend to marry Blanche Ingram, as he has no love for her. He reveals he "caused a rumour" that his fortune "was not a third of what was supposed", after which both Miss Ingram and her mother turned cold towards him (C. Brontë 2001: 217). I find it curious that Rochester felt the need to test Blanche's motifs, as the upper class customarily arranged marriages that secured their social and economic prosperity, and had little concern for love. Rochester proves a non-traditional Victorian gentleman by prioritizing a marriage based on respect and love, a marriage that defies status and social class.

4.5.5 Bertha Mason - Antagonist or ally?

For a long time, Jane accepts the explanation that Grace Poole is the unstable person responsible for all distressing incidents at Thornfield. After the interrupted wedding ceremony, however, Jane finds out that Bertha Mason is behind the ghostly voices and visions in the mansion. Bertha is Rochester's mad wife who he has incarcerated in the attic room guarded by Grace Poole. Rochester tells Jane that Bertha's "insanity" existed even before they met, and some years into their marriage, doctors confirmed her diagnosis. She had since proved a heavy burden, and Rochester decided to "[p]lace her in safety and comfort: shelter her degradation with secrecy, and leave her". He stowed her away in the attic in order to "[l]et her identity, her connection with [him], be buried in oblivion" (cf. C. Brontë 2001: 260-263). Rochester, the patriarch of Bertha, claims he locked her up in order to "shelter" her, and to protect his own reputation. He was in his full right to do so, however, it is worth questioning whether her incarceration has made her condition even worse. That would suggest that stripping a woman of her free will, could lead to madness. Based on this theory, Bertha is the victim of the novel, and Rochester the villain. The

facts are clear, as he incarcerates his ailing wife, and places a guard at her door, in addition to lying and attempting bigamy. Bertha, on the other hand, is simply misunderstood, treated with contempt and dehumanized, who would not go mad under the same circumstances?

The reader's first impression of Bertha is Jane's terrifying description of her. Bertha appears to be unhuman as Jane illustrates,

> [i]n the deep shade, at the further end of the room, a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing; and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face.
>
> (C. Brontë 2001: 250)

According to Elaine Showalter (2014b), Brontë followed developments in Victorian psychiatric theory. The author herself attributed Bertha's behaviour to "moral madness". This diagnosis entailed "a morbid perversion of the natural feelings, affections, inclinations, temper, habits, moral dispositions, and natural impulses". Women were believed to be more susceptible than men were, and sexual appetite was a chief symptom (Showalter 2014b: 98-99).

Showalter claims the animalistic portrayals of Bertha equal the names that John Reed calls Jane at Gateshead. John addresses her "mad cat" and "bad animal". This serves the purpose of dehumanizing them (Showalter 2014b:95). The same applies for Bertha, whose description is more like an animal than a human being. These grotesque portrayals served to shock and disgust Victorians with "the incarnation of the flesh, of female sexuality in its most irredeemably bestial and terrifying form" (Showalter 2014b: 98).

There is sexual tension between Jane and Rochester, though they never act on it with the exception of kissing each other once they are engaged. Rochester is dark, mysterious and sexual. To Jane, he confesses many adventures and numerous mistresses. He has to censor himself when speaking to Jane, "[g]ood-night, my - ", then stops, bites his lip and abruptly leaves her (C. Brontë 2001: 154). He expresses strong feelings without explicitly saying anything. Although Jane also suppresses her sexuality, Gilbert and Gubar insist she demonstrates her passions through Bertha.

Bertha is a masculine force, and a classic example of the *unwoman*. Jane describes her as "a big woman, in stature almost equalling her husband, and corpulent besides", "athletic" who wails "the fiercest yells" (C. Brontë 2001: 250). Gilbert and Gubar claim Bertha "provide[s] the governess with an example of how not to act" (Gilbert and Gubar 2000: 361). I believe Brontë shares a message that male-dominated society extends to all women. As Nina Auerbach asserts in her study on *Woman and the Demon - The Life of a Victorian Myth* (1982), "the only woman worthy of worship was a monument of selflessness, with no existence beyond the loving influence she exuded as daughter, wife, and mother" (Auerbach 1982: 185). Bertha inhabits completely opposite characteristics of this Victorian model of womanhood. Her appearance is grotesque, she is violent, uncontrollable and promiscuous.

Auerbach quotes anti-feminist Eliza Lynn Linton's claims on womanliness from 1883. Linton declares, a lady is womanly "when she asserts her own dignity", "when her highest pride is the sweetest humility, the tenderest self-suppression", "when she protects the weaker" and "submits to the stronger" (Auerbach 1982: 186-187). Bertha does not embody any of these traits. Rather she is the counter-representation of the Victorian feminine, an *other*. Bertha is neither selfless, modest nor angelic. Rather, she is a diabolical representation of womanhood. She violently attacks her own brother, Richard Mason, on his visit to Thornfield. She bites him and sucks his blood (C. Brontë 2001: 181). The animalistic and vampire-like imagery highlights Bertha's character as *unwoman*.

Bennett and Royle (2014) argue that Bertha's otherness is the reason why she is an invisible individual in the novel. Rochester hides the *unwoman* in the attic mainly because she "embodies the very idea of difference" (Bennett and Royle 2014: 237). To Rochester, it is clearly important to point out the differences between Jane and Bertha, "look at the difference! Compare these clear eyes with the red balls yonder", "this face with that mask", "this form with that bulk" (C. Brontë 2001: 251). Bennett and Royle insist that Rochester's aim in comparing the two women is to mark Bertha as the *other* of Jane. However, when Rochester compares them, he points out that they are comparable, thus he unintentionally suggests there must be similarities between them. Gilbert and Gubar go even further, claiming Bertha represents the repressed and angry part of Jane.

Imprisoned and isolated, Bertha has come to represent all women living under patriarchal control. Gilbert and Gubar argue that she functions as "Jane's dark double *throughout* the

governess's stay at Thornfield" (C. Brontë 2001: 360). The rage that Jane demonstrated in the red-room reappear in "the madwoman attic" of Thornfield. The attic "soon becomes a complex focal point where Jane's own rationality (what she has learned from Miss Temple) and her irrationality (her 'hunger, rebellion and rage') intersect" (Gilbert and Gubar 2000: 348). Bertha acts out Jane's suppressed anger.

Gilbert and Gubar believe that Bertha is a manifestation of Jane's restricted aggression and fear. Showalter claims Bertha represents the opposite of angelic Helen Burns, thus she is "the devil in the flesh" (Showalter 2014b: 93). Helen and Bertha personify Jane's inner conflict of repression and passion. On the surface, Helen has controlled Jane's rage however, Bertha has acted out her passions. Jane never voices her anger while at Thornfield, because Bertha does that for her. First, Jane's feelings of solitude before Rochester's arrival at Thornfield "were accompanied by Bertha's 'low, slow ha! ha! and 'eccentric murmurs'". Second, the sexual tension between Rochester and Jane is "followed by Bertha's attempt to incinerate the master in his bed". Third, Jane's worries before marrying Rochester is "objectified by the image of Bertha in a 'white and straight' dress" the night she destroys Jane's veil. Finally, Bertha acts out Jane's need to destroy Thornfield, "the symbol of Rochester's mastery and of her own servitude", by "burn[ing] down the house and destroy[ing] *herself* in the process" (cf. Gilbert and Gubar 2000: 360).

Bertha is passionate, and she acts out Jane's darkest desires. During the weeks leading up to Jane and Rochester's wedding, there is tension at Thornfield. Jane feels "giddy", but she also has an unsettled feeling "stronger than was consistent with joy". When Rochester calls her by her soon-to-be name, Jane Rochester, she feels surprisingly fearful. Rochester wants to pamper Jane by giving her expensive "heir-looms for the ladies of Thornfield", buying her dresses and planning trips abroad. As he claims he wants to "put the diamond chain round [her] neck", Jane realizes he is trying to turn her into something she is not. Gilbert and Gubar argue that Rochester, "having secured Jane's love, almost reflexively begins to treat her as an inferior, a plaything, a virginal possession" (Gilbert and Gubar 2000: 355). She pleads, "[d]on't address me as if I were a beauty; I am your plain, Quakerish governess" (C. Brontë 2001: 220). She refuses Rochester's attempt to mould her into a persona more suitable for her new social position. The fear she indicates is fear of losing her identity and independence. Eagleton insists Jane's Quakerish demeanour, her contrast to the flashy Blanche Ingram, is what Rochester finds attractive in the

first place (Eagleton 2013: 131). I extend this to Bertha, as Jane's countenance is just as contrasting to her as to Blanche. Having resisted male dominance at Gateshead and Lowood, Jane now tries to remain true to herself under the influence of Rochester. Even though she longs for love and kinship, she chooses to stand up for herself, and chooses to leave Thornfield.

4.6 Marsh End

When Jane escapes Thornfield and Rochester, she roams the moors, searches for work, begs for food and struggles to stay alive. Eventually, she breaks collapses, and the Rivers siblings at Marsh End take her in and nurse her back to health. Under the influence of St. John and his sisters, Jane forms a new identity and tries to put her past behind her.

4.6.1 Formal and personal education through antagonists and friends

The atmosphere of Marsh End is similar to Lowood, mainly because Jane again choses to suppress her identity, both figuratively and symbolically. She hides her real identity and enters a new position in order to escape her past. At Moor House, Jane enters a new location filled with both warmth and coldness. The two sisters, Mary and Diana are kind-hearted characters. Their brother, St. John is charitable and self-sacrificing, but also unemotional and stern.

Jane leaves Thornfield with no money or possessions. Jane has resisted becoming Rochester's "slave of passion", however, her dignity and morals come at a cost. She is on her own again, and finds herself completely dependent on help from strangers. As luck has it, Jane finds her guardian angels in Mary, Diana and St. John Rivers at Marsh End. Jane's stay with the Rivers siblings proves she can achieve autonomy even after a great setback. The sombre clergyman St. John Rivers proves "pure-lived, conscientious, zealous", hence a contrasting figure to the charismatic Edward Rochester (C. Brontë 2001: 300). At Marsh End, Jane discovers that her wealthy uncle has left her a significant inheritance, and that the Reed siblings are her actual cousins. She decides to share her wealth with her cousins. Once poor, isolated and lonely, Jane is now a woman of fortune and, more importantly, part of a family.

At March End, Diana and Mary Rivers prove good role models to Jane. They both nurture Jane physically and mentally after her arduous escape from Thornfield. In the Rivers sisters, Jane finds fellow governesses. The three women quickly bond, and Jane discovers their common interests as she asserts, "I liked to read what they liked to read: what they enjoyed, delighted me; what they approved, I reverenced". For the second time in her life, Jane finds her equals. Not since working with Miss Temple has she been on the same social level as anyone. Jane's narrative is at its most cheerful during this period. She joyfully expresses, "we agreed equally well", "it was full satisfaction to discuss with them", "opinion met opinion" and "we coincided, in short, perfectly" (C. Brontë 2001: 298). The friendship between the three women proves meaningful enough to last until the very end of Jane's story.

The Rivers siblings soon realize that Jane is "not an uneducated person". They can tell by her "manner of speaking", her "quite pure" accent and "fine" clothes (C. Brontë 2001: 289). St. John offers Jane the position of teacher at a school he is to open. Her pupils, he warns her, will be daughters of the poor cottagers and farmers in the village of Morton. St. John seems embarrassed to deliver this poor proposal, as he is aware that Jane is overqualified for the job. Jane reflects on the offer, thinking the work will be independent and not unworthy or degrading (C. Brontë 2001: 302-303). Primarily relieved that she once again can have independence and autonomy, she accepts. A significant reason for her gratefulness is that it presents an opportunity once again, to have a meaningful role in society. Jane has managed to escape a very vulnerable position. Her risk in fleeing Thornfield seems even more climactic in retrospect. Had she not met the empathetic Rivers family, her story could have been a lot shorter.

Jane welcomes twenty pupils, and soon maps out their lack of basic skills such as reading and writing. Further, some are also "unmannered" and "rough" (C. Brontë 2001: 306). After her first day as their mistress, Jane admits she does not feel "gleeful, settled, content", but rather "degraded" in her position. Jane, a penniless orphan and former governess is elevated in status compared to the poor cottagers. The sole reason is her education and work experience. Jane reminds herself that she had other options, becoming Rochester's mistress or governessing in a new household. She has chosen to take a step down the social ladder, to teach the poor, in order to keep her self-respect and independence.

Jane does not conceal her condescending attitude towards her poor pupils, because she has ambitions to "develop these germs" (C. Brontë 2001: 306). When talking to St. John, Jane claims

she is content in her position, although the reader senses she harbours the same feelings of dissatisfaction as she did before leaving Lowood. Terry Eagleton (2013) argues that Jane, like all of Charlotte Brontë's heroines, is "outwardly demure yet inwardly passionate, full of an erotic and imaginative hungering which must be locked back upon itself in meekness, self-sacrifice and stoical endurance" (Eagleton 2013: 129). Jane's endurance pays off as she once again experiences success as a teacher. As a teacher, Jane is powerful. She is in control in an educational setting, and has full authority. After only a few months at Morton, Jane's students have grown significantly in number. She now teaches sixty of the most "decent, respectable, modest and well-informed young women as could be found in the ranks of the British peasantry" (C. Brontë 2001:331). St. John recognises Jane's good work, and makes her admit to have "done some real good in [her] day and generation". Her work with Adele as well as the girls at Morton signals that Jane is clearly an accomplished pedagogue. The initially challenging students at Morton have improved and given Jane "a place in their unsophisticated hearts" (C. Brontë 2001:331).

Her newly discovered cousin, St. John, wants to travel to India as a missionary, and he wants Jane to join him as his wife. St. John believes Jane would be a good partner in his missionary work, and accepting his offer would give her an opportunity to contribute to the greater good. For Jane, however, the thought of marrying for convenience and not for love, "such a martyrdom would be monstrous" (C. Brontë 2001:345). Thus, she declines his proposal, as a life with him would not be more fulfilling than becoming Rochester's mistress. In marrying St. John, Jane would not sacrifice her morals, but rather her spirit. A life without passion would imprison her emotionally. St. John is relentless as he continues to pressure Jane into changing her mind and subdue to moral duty. She almost succumbs under to the pressure, however she hears the voice of Edward Fairfax Rochester speak to her in pain (C. Brontë 2001: 357). This supernatural experience leads Jane to break away from St. John, and return to Thornfield. Jane has rejected marriages to both Mr. Rochester and St. John because marrying either would mean the end of her autonomy and independence.

Jane's experience involving St. John has been enlightening. She now appreciates Rochester's earlier offer, admitting she prefers a loving union rather than a convenient one. The former governess has changed a lot since leaving Rochester. Her inheritance has closed the gap between her and Rochester social standing, hence made her a more suitable match to him. Having

achieved financial independence, Jane now allows herself to return to Mr. Rochester and become his companion. She has overcome the social constraints of her positions as girl, orphan and governess.

4.7 Ferndean

Ferndean is the setting for the conclusion of Jane's story. Here, she settles down with Rochester and finds a new sense of belonging and peace.

4.7.1 Formal and personal education at Ferndean

When Jane finds Thornfield in ruins, she learns that Bertha set fire to the mansion before throwing herself off the roof. In an attempt to rescue Bertha and his staff from the flames, Rochester was severely injured. He became blind in one eye, and had to amputate an arm. Jane learns he has taken up residence in his manor of Ferndean, and travels there to find him (cf. C. Brontë 2001: 365-366). Ferndean represents a new beginning for Jane. This is where her story ends, but also where her settled life with Rochester starts.

Before Jane can find peace at Ferndean, all ties to Thornfield and Bertha Mason must be cut. Showalter (2014b) claims that Bertha's death "must precede any successful union between Rochester and Jane (Showalter 2014b: 100). Both Bertha, wife of Rochester, and Bertha, the dark and angry side of Jane, must expire before Jane and Rochester can become husband and wife. Eventually, Bertha sets fire to her prison, Thornfield, escapes to the roof and jumps to her death (C. Brontë 2001: 365). The description of Bertha's death is dreadful, as "she lay smashed on the pavement" and "her brains and blood were shattered". These violently graphic portrayals strengthen Charlotte Brontë's message to the reader, that women were willing to sacrifice a lot to achieve autonomy. Bertha chooses to die rather than continue to live a meaningless life. Victorian women were, like Bertha, trapped in a society that did not accept aggressive and rebellious women. Even more intimidating were the women who expressed their wishes to escape the confinement of their homes in order to participate in meaningful work in the public sphere.

The rage that has been part of Jane since childhood dies with Bertha, as do the hinders for a romantic union with Rochester. Eagleton (2013) claims Bertha's death is a convenient disposal for Jane. Her death allows Jane to fulfil her erotic desires and all her aspirations without having to degrade herself to committing bigamy (Eagleton 2013: 130). Jane has refused to violate social conventions by becoming Rochester's mistress. She has also declined St. John's offer of a dreary, self-sacrificing life as a missionary's wife, thus avoided "spiritual suicide" (Eagleton 2013: 131). She has escaped a life without personal fulfilment, and can now reap the rewards for her bold choices by marrying Rochester and settling down at Ferndean.

Throughout the novel, Jane has fought against pressures to take positions of inferiority by the Reeds, Mr. Brocklehurst, Rochester and St. John. At the point of Bertha's death, Jane has found family members and a sense of belonging, as well as individual and financial freedom. Similar to Agnes Grey, she has become a true individual through her role as governess and teacher. Jane has become strong enough to make choices based on her own needs, and not on other people's expectations, and she has a stable foundation on which to build her new life. By sacrificing her rage, Jane takes on a new identity, one that involves love, family and true friendships. Thus, Charlotte Brontë has proved herself and her heroine as "innovators who would provide role-models for future generations" (Showalter 2014b: 82).

In the novel's conclusion, Jane reveals that she has been married to Rochester for ten years. At this stage, Rochester has regained some of his eyesight, nevertheless his injuries still restrict him. Jane supports him as well as she can, proving her as the more powerful of the two. Charlotte Brontë could have made a point of Rochester's dependence on Jane. Instead, Jane professes, "I am my husband's life as fully as he is mine" (C. Brontë 2001: 384). Jane considers her and Rochester as equals although their individual roles, one strong and one vulnerable, have shifted.

Similar to Agnes Grey, Jane Eyre only feels completely fulfilled after becoming a wife, indicating that getting married is the only way for women to find contentment. Like Agnes, Jane has chosen love over autonomy and independence. *Jane Eyre* further strengthens this point by verifying that both Mary and Diana Rivers have married good men who "love their wives, and are loved by them". As a clear contrast, the self-sacrificing St. John has not married, and Jane believes he never will as "his glorious sun hastens to its setting" (C. Brontë 2001: 385). Brontë insinuates that a life based solely on self-sacrifice leads to destruction and death, or in the words

of Gilbert and Gubar, "a crucifying denial of the self" (Gilbert and Gubar 2000: 370). Throughout the novel, Jane has had an inner battle, struggling to stay independent and to have a meaningful existence. Eventually, Brontë allows her protagonist and those who deserve it to reap the rewards. Those who have proved moral and empathetic are rewarded with happy marriages.

Both Agnes Grey and Jane Eyre become true individuals in their own rights through working as governesses and teachers. Even after revealing that she married Rochester, Jane confesses that she considered taking up governessing again at one point. Jane shares the story of her visiting Adèle at school. She found her pale, thin and unhappy as "the rules of the establishment were too strict, its course of study too severe". Therefore, Jane decided to bring her home to Ferndean. She considered becoming her governess again, but her duties as wife prevented her from executing the task. She therefore chose to move Adèle to a school "conducted on a more indulgent system". Adèle has later become "a pleasing and obliging companion" to Jane (C. Brontë 2001: 383). Working as governess is clearly not compatible with the role of wife. Jane ultimately had to make a choice, and she prioritized her duties as wife and caretaker of her husband. Jane confirms Florence Nightingale's fear that a woman who marries "must annihilate herself, must be only [her husband's] complement". Nightingale continues by stating, "[a] woman dedicates herself to the vocation of her husband; she fills up and performs the subordinate parts of it" (Nightingale [1852] 1979: 40).

Jane has lost part of the identity she has struggled to develop in order to fulfil her role as wife. She has lost her position as educator only to enter a more important role, at least by patriarchal standards, the role of wife. Nightingale felt strongly against women offering this type of sacrifice. For Brontë's novel, the information about Jane's choice between role as wife and role of governess had little meaning for the story itself. It did however, have deep meaning as a political statement. Brontë echoes Nightingale's view by demonstrating Jane's sacrifice in her conclusion. When Jane returns to Rochester a financially independent woman, and with Bertha dead, she is free to marry Rochester solely for romantic reasons. The two are equal as they enter what Gilbert and Gubar call a "marriage of true minds". This ending of "optimistic imagining" was an unorthodox conclusion by Victorian patriarchal standards, one that Charlotte Brontë was never to repeat in later works (Gilbert and Gubar 2000: 371).

5. The Turn of the Screw

After Charlotte Brontë's success with *Jane Eyre*, many authors used the governess as main character in their writing. Towards the end of the Victorian era, however, this trend subsided with the exception of Henry James' novel *The Turn of the Screw* (1898). There are clear similarities between James' governess, Agnes Grey and Jane Eyre. Like Agnes, the anonymous narrator of James' novel is a young parson's daughter. Like Jane, she takes a position as governess in a remote English country house. While Agnes Grey experiences fear caused by other people's cruel treatment of her, James' governess experiences horror due to the threatening presence of ghosts. This gothic element of The Turn of the Screw corresponds with the eerie atmosphere portrayed in *Jane Eyre*.

Henry James published his novel in 1898, fifty years after the Brontës' novels. There had been development and significant changes both in society and in literature during these years. The early Victorian period, that is the 1830s and 1840s, was considered a "Time of Troubles". The reason was the effects that industrialization had on society. Factories drew people to the cities, people experienced bad working conditions and the gap between the rich and the poor became wider. Literature published during this period mainly focused on the conditions of the poor in urban England (cf. Greenblatt et al. n.d.).

The mid-Victorian era, the 1850s and 1860s, had been a more positive period. Though there was still great poverty, many also enjoyed great prosperity. The industrial revolution led to expansion of the British Empire, which again resulted in a prosperous and growing middle-class. The last decade of the Victorian period marked a peak both in English industry, in imperial control. This period of optimism changed towards the end of the century when people worried that the prosperity soon would end. During the 1890s, *fin de siècle* writers found themselves challenging the effects of industry and imperialism. They were in a transitional phase between the optimistic mid-Victorian period and the more scientifically focused and critical Modern period (cf. Greenblatt et al. n.d.).

The term *fin de siècle* literally means, "end of the century". Maureen Moran confirms that literature from this decade is associated with feelings of cultural anxiety and ambivalence (M. Moran 2006: 144). *The Turn of the Screw* first appeared in sequential instalments in Collier's

Weekly early in 1898. Later the same year, the tale emerged in book form as one of two stories in a volume entitled "The Two Magics" (Esch and Warren 1999: 88). The ghostly genre had attracted readers for nearly a century, and was still proving a popular and evolving genre. Early Victorian writers like Charles Dickens used ghost fiction to highlight social concerns like poverty, crime, unemployment and starvation in urban Britain. The focus shifted in the *fin de siècle*, however, when the attention no longer attached itself solely to social concerns, but rather to the uncertain nature of human beings. Late Victorian authors incorporated into their fiction theories of evolution and psychology that were emerging at the time. Novels became more melodramatic and focused on psychological realism. The individual's personal interpretation of events became focus. The late Victorian novel balanced the external "reality" of social situations with the interior "reality" of conscious impressions (cf. M. Moran 2006: 81).

According to Moran, works such as *The Turn of the Screw* and Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) are "the best-known examples of psychological ghost fiction, using familiar generic conventions to consider the power of mental disturbance and unconscious impulse". Stephenson uses a döppelganger to suggest a divided and unstable character, and James uses the single consciousness of the governess to highlight the "frustration, insecurity and uncertainty" of the modern mind (M. Moran 2006: 92). Andrew Smith (2013) confirms the new focus on psychology in late-nineteenth century novels by arguing, "one of the most telling characteristics of the Gothic from the 1790s to the 1890s concerns the progressive internalisation of 'evil'" (Smith 2013: 87). Rapid scientific and technological advancements inspired stories of the superficial and the occult, and the public welcomed the new form of narrative.

The Turn of the Screw is a ghost story about a young woman seeking employment as governess. A handsome bachelor hires her to care for his orphaned nephew and niece at his country estate of Bly. Her employer demands that the governess assumes "supreme authority" for the two children, meaning she takes full responsibility for them, and does not involve him in any way (James 1999: 5). The governess soon finds that the girl, Flora, is "the most beautiful child" with "a wonderful appeal" (James 1999: 7). Mrs. Grose, the housekeeper at Bly, tells the governess that Miles is also a "*most* remarkable" boy (James 1999:8). The assignment that first seem so appealing soon becomes a burden. The governess receives a letter stating that Miles is expelled from school. The note does not contain an explanation for his dismissal, it only declares

that he is not welcome back. This makes the governess question Miles' innocence. In addition, she encounters what she believes are two ghosts at Bly. Mrs. Grose identifies the spirits as the former governess, Miss Jessel and the former valet Peter Quint. The governess learns that the two former employees had an inappropriate, intimate relationship, and that the children might have been corrupted by their indecent behaviour. The governess becomes convinced that the apparitions have come back to further demoralize the children. She makes it her mission to save Miles and Flora from this fate, and believes the way to do so is to make the children confess to conspiring with the ghost. The governess becomes increasingly aggressive in her pursuit of the truth, and the children begin to resent her. Flora leaves Bly with Mrs. Grose, and the governess stays with Miles to complete what she believes to be her mission, to save the children. The novel ends disastrously with a struggle between the governess and what she believes is Quint's spirit. The governess holds Miles passionately in her arms and he dies.

An instant success, *The Turn of the Screw* received favourable criticism both in England and in America. *The New York Times* labelled the novel "a deliberate, powerful, and horribly successful study of the magic of evil" and *New York Tribune* called it "[a] masterpiece". Other, mainly favourable, reviews followed. Even reviewers who expressed they were shocked or disgusted by James' story could not dismiss it entirely. *The Outlook* claimed it was "distinctly repulsive", but also "on a higher plane both of conception and art" than ordinary ghost stories (Esch and Warren 1999: 149-151). James' novel was an early psychological thriller that shocked and amazed readers with both its disturbing plot line and its original, but carefully planned narrative.

The reliability of the governess is a matter that critics have debated intensively. Felman (2012) identifies two groups of analytical readers to James' text. The first group is "the 'metaphysical', religious, or moral camp". These readers sees the governess as a saintly, moral person struggling to protect the children from the evil ghosts. The other group is "the 'psychoanalytical' camp", consisting of readers who commit to the Freudian reading of James' novel (Felman 2012: 145). The latter is introduced by Henry Wilson's essay "The Ambiguity of Henry James" (1934). The OED displays "Freudian" as an adjective that signals someone "pertaining to Freud or his teaching" (OED 2016e). Felman reveals that one typical characteristic for Freudian reading is "its insistence on the crucial place and role of sexuality in the text" (Felman 2012: 150). Wilson's reading fits this characterization. The psychoanalytical reading of

the novel labels governess a clinical neurotic whose fantasies deceive her and consequently puts her charges in danger. Thus, the ghost story becomes a madness story, a case of neurosis (cf. Felman 2012: 144-145).

In this chapter, I will examine the new governess as portrayed by Henry James. On one hand, the governess appears to be a caring person, an ambitious young woman who struggles to protect her charges from supernatural forces. On the other hand, we can read her as an inexperienced woman whose hopeless passion for her employer results in psychosis and hallucinations that threaten those around her. Henry James' text is complex and highly ambiguous. The author presents it as a ghost story, but then expects us to believe it is a true story. Henry James introduces topics in his novel that shocked Victorians. How could he be so much bolder than the Brontës? In addition to exploring that, I will analyse how he chooses to portray his female protagonist, and compare his governess with Agnes Grey and Jane Eyre. The ambiguity of James' text opens for a Freudian reading. James' novel is full of uncanniness. Based on Bennett and Royle's theories on "The Uncanny" (1919) by Sigmund Freud, I will discuss this phenomenon in *The Turn of the Screw*.

5.1 The new governess

Henry James portrays a governess who possesses different characteristics than those portrayed by Anne and Charlotte Brontë. Agnes Grey and Jane Eyre become governesses mainly because they have no other ways to access the public sphere. They both enter their positions to earn a livelihood and to serve a purpose in society. As the first two novels have demonstrated, the governess was victim of gossip as people questioned her reputation and respectability, and often treated her harshly. The governess suffered public shaming and degradation because she needed to support herself and possibly other family members financially. A respectable woman who worked for a living was a contradicting concept to the Victorians. When James published The Turn of the Screw, fifty years had passed since the Brontës published *Agnes Grey* and *Jane Eyre*, and British society had changed significantly.

In half a century, women had gained more rights, and certain professions were far more acceptable for women. According to Hughes (1993), the campaigns of the 1860s and 1870s had

seen a change in the relationship between middle-class women and waged work. Even though there was a rethinking of the relationship between gender, class and economy, home education for girls remained the choice for the privileged classes (Hughes 1993: 180). In fact, home schooling for girls remained the preferred choice for the upper classes throughout the second half of the century. This signals the remarkably enduring opinions regarding femininity, education and employment (Hughes 1993: 200). Governessing continued to present the most natural solution for a woman whose main qualification was her social and moral identity. As the century ended, however, economic pressure on the middle-classes led to the dismissal of many governesses. This caused competition in the governess market, thus leading young girls to seek formal training in schools and colleges (cf. Hughes 1993: 203). As the threat and mystery of the governess began to evaporate, she also disappeared from the literary world. Henry James was among the last authors to use the governess as protagonist. He made a logical choice as the main plot takes place forty years earlier. He takes advantage of the shady reputation of the stereotypical governess when delivering his narrative. While the Brontës fight to reduce the governess' *otherness* and are concerned with building up her reputation, James choses to portray the governess as an untrustworthy character.

5.1.1 James' portrayal of the governess

The three governess protagonists in my thesis come from simple backgrounds, all being daughters of clergymen. Ruth Brandon (2008) claims the authors' choices are based on historical facts, and that for poor, yet respectable daughters of the clergy, "governessing did not come as a shock", "[i]f they did not marry, it was their almost inevitable fate" (Brandon 2008: 25). This signals that the authors have chosen stereotypical Victorian protagonists. Agnes Grey is the one who has the most stable and secure background. She is well taken care of by her immediate family, even after her father's ill investment brings them down a few steps on the social ladder. As we have seen, Jane Eyre never experiences emotional security as a child. She experiences exclusion from social interactions, and is told on a regular basis that she is a burden to the Reeds. However, the family supports her with the bare necessities, like housing, clothes and food. The family of the governess in *The Turn of the Screw* is a step lower on the social ladder than both

Agnes Grey and Jane Eyre. Douglas reveals that she is "the youngest daughter of a poor country parson" (James 1999: 4).

James plays on the general public opinion of the governess as an uneducated and unexperienced governess in his novel. By entrusting her with a lot of responsibility at Bly, James signals that she is a capable young woman. As the story develops, however, the governess becomes more and more irrational, and the reader questions her sanity. James portrays her as both as heroic and villainous. He uses the governess' unwomanly status, her shady reputation and her stereotypical traits against her. He presents his governess' narrative in a rational manner, but her story is outrageous. By demonstrating this great ambiguity regarding his protagonist, James problematizes the role of the governess.

In *The Turn of the Screw*, women taking part in the work force is not the shocking aspect. Late Victorian readers found themselves in the midst of public discussions regarding the forceful and able New Woman who could be both self-sufficient and educated. Henry James portrays the stories of two governesses in his novel, that of the protagonist, and that of Miss Jessel. The narrator of James' story tells us that the events took place forty years ago. That means that the setting for James' two governesses is the early Victorian period, the same as for Agnes Grey and Jane Eyre. Not only does James make the mid-nineteenth century the setting for his narrative, he also choses a stereotypical early Victorian character to forefront his novel. James' choice to portray two governesses in his novel is no coincidence. He plays on their shady reputation and makes the reader question their morals, their psyche and their characters. James is more direct and daring than the Brontës in his portrayal of the governess as both a neurotic and a sexual being. In addition, he does not conceal the fact that his governess is a pragmatic human being.

In contrast to Anne and Charlotte Brontë, James dares to portray his governess as an ambitious woman. In *Agnes Grey* and *Jane Eyre,* governess salaries are mentioned only in passing, signalling the inappropriateness of associating wages with women in the Early Victorian period. Agnes reveals that her first employer, Mr. Bloomfield, "could not be prevailed upon to give a greater salary than twenty-five pounds to the instructress of his children". This is not a lot, and though Agnes herself is glad to accept the position regardless, her parents are more reluctant on their daughter's behalf (A. Brontë 2010: 13). Thus, Anne Brontë gives a balanced view on the subject of salary by portraying a protagonist who is not concerned about the matter, but still making a point by revealing that her parents are not impressed.

Jane Eyre's salary at Lowood is fifteen pounds per annum, therefore she appears happy when announcing her "prospect of getting a new situation where the salary [is] double what [she] now receive[s]" (C. Brontë 2001: 75). In this scenario, Charlotte Brontë highlights the bad conditions of Lowood, and simultaneously signals that Jane is entering a better position as governess at Thornfield. Jane, like Agnes, is not concerned about her modest salary. She demonstrates this further in a humorous conversation with Rochester as she is about to leave for a visit to her dying aunt Reed. Rochester gives Jane fifty pounds, and she refuses to accept the money, as he only owes her fifteen. He then gives her ten, and asks if that is sufficient. She responds, "[y]es, sir, but now you owe me five" to which he responds "[c]ome back for it then" (C. Brontë 2001: 191). This flirty banter proves the subject does not distress Jane. Rochester is furthermore the one who brings up the subject of money, not Jane herself. Charlotte Brontë in this manner safeguards Jane's femininity.

James' protagonist, on the other hand, has another attitude towards payment for her services. She deems the governess position at Bly as "slightly grim" with "serious duties and little company" and "of really great loneliness", therefore, she takes a few days to consider the proposal. After a few days, when she finally accepts the position, it is because "the salary offered much exceeded her modest measure" (James 1999: 5). The governess clearly demonstrates that money is the driving force behind her decision to take the position. Henry James does not try to conceal the fact that his female protagonist dares to expose what many readers will conclude are masculine qualities. The governess does not accept the job because she wishes to escape her family's "ceaseless kindness to make [her] too helpless and dependent" like Agnes Grey (A. Brontë 2010: 6). Neither is it because she seeks a change after she has lost "every settled feeling" like Jane Eyre (C. Brontë 2001: 71). Her ultimate reason for taking the job is not even a strong wish to care for the orphaned children, but rather a shallow, material reason. James' governess challenges our reading of the governess as a purely sympathetic figure by portraying her as ambitious.

Because of their discredited profession and ambiguous position within the class system, Agnes Grey and Jane Eyre feel uncomfortable or overlooked in social settings. Agnes' family highly value her presence, therefore she is shocked to find that others do not appreciate her in the same way. In returning to her first employers after a short Christmas break with her family, Agnes evaluates her position and confesses her efforts are "set at naught by those beneath [her],

and unjustly censured and misjudges by those above" (A. Brontë 2010: 32). Before Rochester's arrival at Thornfield, Jane Eyre also confesses to similar feelings of loneliness. She is not alone, but with only her charge and the housekeeper for company, she misses inspiring and challenging conversations. Jane confides her desires for "more of intercourse with [her] kind, of acquaintance with variety of character, than [is] […] within [her] reach" (C. Brontë 2001: 93).

In *The Turn of the Screw*, the governess' employer warns her that she may also experience solitude at Bly. She is young and inexperienced, facts that suggest that she may have taken on too much responsibility in taking full responsibility for Miles and Flora and administrating the household. She never asks for assistance, choosing instead to handle all concerns and problems herself. The cause of her isolation can be traced back to her employer who refuses to take any responsibility for his nephew and niece. He gives the governess full authority over the children and his country estate, and expresses that she cannot contact him for any reason whatsoever. To please the master, she accepts a challenge she eventually fails. Her crusade to rescue the children leads to disaster as Flora becomes ill and leaves Bly with Mrs. Grose, and Miles dies in the governess' arms. Regardless of whether the children are actually haunted or not, her attempt to solve the problems herself proves disastrous.

5.1.2 The governess as *other*

Critics have studied James' novel in order to determine if the ghosts really exist or are figments of a deranged woman's imagination. A pre-Freudian reading of the *The Turn of the Screw* opens the discussion on whether restriction is causing the governess to hallucinate and see ghosts. The modern critics examined oppression in a psychological sense rather than a physical, social or intellectual sense as portrayed in *Agnes Grey* and *Jane Eyre*. Harold C. Goddard's critical essay "A Pre-Freudian Reading of The Turn of the Screw" (1957) was published posthumously. Goddard wrote it in the 1920s, therefore it is credited as the first essay to put forward the theory that James' governess suffers hallucinations because of oppression (Goddard [1957] 1999: 161).

Goddard believes the governess is not the only one who suffers because of her mental issues. He claims her irrational behaviour also corrupts Mrs. Grose and the innocent children. He argues that because they are "children and an ignorant and superstitious woman", they cannot

comprehend her insanity (Goddard [1957] 1999: 167). The governess is convinced that the two ghosts "keep up the work of demons" and "want to get to [the children]", believing they "can destroy them" (James 1999: 47). Goddard understands that the children become conscious of their governess' strange behaviour, and although they cannot comprehend her nervousness or recognise insanity, "they sense it and grow afraid", not of the ghosts, but of the governess herself (Goddard [1957] 1999: 166). Goddard's interpretation of the governess as an insane person resembles the Victorian condemnation of the *unwoman*. She is a threatening character who is out to destroy innocent minds. Wilson (1934) agrees with Goddard as he observes that James does not offer evidence of anyone but the governess seeing the ghosts (170). The governess insists that the children see them, but the reader never receives proof of that.

There is but one example that leaves the Freudian reader uncertain of the governess' mental unbalance. After observing Quint for the first time, she gives a true and concrete description of him to Mrs. Grose, which leads to the housekeeper identifying him as the former valet. The governess depicts the man as having "red hair", "a pale face" and "straight good features" (James 1999: 23). How could the governess be so specific in her portrayal if she did not actually see the ghost? Wilson insists that answer lies in "a double interpretation" (Wilson [1934] 1999: 171). He explains that the governess has not heard about the valet, but claims the housekeeper misunderstands the governess and creates confusion in one of their earliest conversations. Referring to the master's preferences in governesses by stating, "[h]e seems to like us young and pretty!" Mrs. Grose answers, "[o]h, he did! […] it was the way he liked everyone" (James 1999: 12). The housekeeper answers in the past tense, indicating she refers to a person who is no longer there, or even in existence. Mrs. Grose very clearly re-phrases and points out that she is talking about the master. This puzzles the governess, who follows up by asking "[b]ut of whom did you speak at first?" Thus, the housekeeper has provided the governess with grounds for doubt and suspicion. Wilson believes the governess is actually describing the master, having learnt from Mrs. Grose's earlier confusion that Quint has an appearance similar to the master's look.

Wilson demonstrates he can disprove any involvement from other characters than the governess in the superstitious ongoing at Bly. Initially, the governess cherishes the two beautiful children. However, this admiration quickly turns to suspicion that they are conspiring with the spirits. This shift reflects the first impression of the governess as a woman who is "easily carried

away” (James 1999: 8). Wilson argues that the governess “believes that the children get up at night to meet [the ghosts], though they are able to give plausible explanations of their behaviour” (Wilson [1934] 1999: 171). Wilson concludes that the governess is insane, and proves a threat to the children she is hired to look after. The children begin to resent the governess, and the narrative becomes “a study in morbid psychology” (Wilson [1934] 1999: 171-172).

The ambiguity of the governess’ narrative makes it difficult to decide whether the governess relationship with the children is harmless or inappropriate. Douglas, the second narrator, vouches for the governess’ character, insisting she is “a most charming” and “most agreeable woman”. However, he admits he “liked her extremely”, thus giving the reader reason to distrust his judgement as his testimony of her character may be tainted (James 1999: 2). Nevertheless, claims as uncompromising as Wilsons are bound to receive backlash. Robert B. Heilman provides just that in his essay “The Freudian Reading of *The Turn of the Screw*” (1947). Heilman believes that James’ ghosts are “to be taken as symbolic”, as images of the conflict between good and evil (Heilman [1947] 1999: 182).

Heilman argues that Wilson’s reading of *The Turn of the Screw* “does violence […] to the story” (Heilman [1947] 1999: 177). Heilman denounces Wilson’s theory that the main cause of the governess’ psychopathic state is her repressed passion for the master. The governess’ feelings are never repressed, claims Heilman, because they “are wholly in the open and are joyously talked about” (Heilman [1947] 1999: 178). With this assertion, Heilman crushes the foundation on which Wilson bases his theory. In addition, Heilman finds Wilson’s “incredible hypothesis” of Mrs. Grose’s slip of the tongue when confusing Quint for the master to be an insult to James. The author would not degrade himself to a mere “coincidence” (Heilman [1947] 1999: 179). Heilman believes Wilson’s suggestion that the valet and the master have similar features is unfounded. He claims, “it can hardly be supposed that Mrs. Grose, who in such matters is very observant, would not at some time comment upon the strange resemblance of master and man” (Heilman [1947] 1999: 179).

On Wilson’s evaluation of the children as victims of the governess’ neurosis, Heilman also finds faults. He does not believe that the children are capable of giving what Wilson claims are “plausible explanations” of their behaviour. Based on psychoanalysis, Heilman states that children of Miles and Flora’s ages are “not wide awake, imaginatively alert, and capable of strategic maneuvering” (Heilman [1947] 1999: 181). Heilman insists Wilson’s “ambiguous”

theory is a result of James' narrative technique, "his indirection, his refusal, in his fear of anti-climax, to define the evil".

5.2 Female sexuality

As we have seen, Victorian society was organized to sustain male power. Thus, the public judged Victorian women by their reputations. Social customs, especially in matters concerning sexual conduct, did not permit deviation (M. Moran 2006: 37). James has decided to portray Miss Jessel as promiscuous, a shocking female character trait. Even though the nature of the relationship between Miss Jessel and Quint is never stated in clear terms, the protagonist insinuates that it is of a shocking nature, as she fears that the children have seen inappropriate behaviour. Mrs. Grose tells her that Miles was always with Quint and Flora was always with Miss Jessel, and that "[i]t suited them all" (James 1999: 36). James signals that the group of four had an intimate bond, a relationship the governess suspects is ongoing. She wonders, even though she never says so, if the ghosts are still involving the children in their relationship. James' hesitation to express clearly the nature of the ghosts' relationship fuels the readers' imagination and sparks creative thinking.

Fifty years earlier, Anne Brontë was not as daring, since her protagonist Agnes is pure and innocent. *Agnes Grey* distances itself from the subject of immoral, female sexuality. Charlotte Brontë is far more fearless. She does not directly equip her governess with a transparently sexual nature. She is nevertheless far more courageous when portraying Bertha Mason who embodies female desire. Those who support Gilbert and Gubar's assessment of Bertha as Jane's double will recognise that Bertha's obvious sexuality mirrors Jane's repressed feelings. If Bertha mirroring Jane was Charlotte Brontë's intention, she was far more risky than her younger sister. Rochester tells Jane about Bertha's improper and sexual behaviour, calling her "intemperate and unchaste" (C. Brontë 2001: 261). If Bertha expresses Jane's inner desires, she is far more passionate than her demure appearance signals.

Goddard argues that the "excessively nervous and emotional" governess in *The Turn of the Screw* instantly falls in love with her employer, and, because of their different social standings, she realises her love is hopeless (Goddard [1957] 1999: 161). According to Goddard, the root to the governess' growing disillusions stem from her infatuation with the master. Her

passion for him, and her reluctance to disappoint him, is the reason why she takes full responsibility for the two children at Bly (Goddard [1957] 1999: 161-162). Goddard presents a bold theory on women and sexuality, claiming that,

> [w]hen a young person, especially a young woman, falls in love and circumstances forbid the normal growth and confession of passion, the emotion, dammed up, overflows in a psychical experience, a daydream, or internal drama, which the mind creates in lieu of the thwarted realization in the objective world.
>
> (Goddard [1957] 1999: 162)

Goddard admires James' daring narrative, primarily for his boldness in introducing the governess' psychological symptoms of insanity, and secondly, for covering them up so well.

Edmund Wilson's Freudian reading of *The Turn of the Screw* shares Goddard's perspective on many points. In his essay, Wilson is even more daring in his interpretation of the governess as a sexually frustrated woman. By basing his theories on psychoanalytic research, Wilson portrays the governess psychotic and dangerous. He considers the governess a sexually frustrated woman, and claims her neurosis is a result of her repressed feelings. He points to the governess' "interest in the little girl's pieces of wood" and "the fact that the male apparition first appears on a tower and the female apparition on a lake" (Wilson [1934] 1999: 171). He argues that, from a Freudian point of view, these phallic symbols are significant as they symbolise erotic nature. Felman (2012) agrees, stating "[t]the one characteristic by which a "Freudian Reading" is generally recognized is its insistence on the crucial place and role of sexuality in the text" (Felman 2012: 151).

James' portrayal of a sexually active woman is progressive even for a late Victorian author. However, his decision to kill her off signals that public opinion does concern him. Moran claims that the New Woman's story frequently end tragically, a plot outcome that suggests the unyielding power of society in determining women's destiny. Miss Jessel pays the prize for her indecency by being "destroyed" (M. Moran 2006: 146).

5.3 Whose authority?

The Brontës had a careful approach on their mission to change patriarchal gender norms and ideologies that oppressed women. Anne Brontë avoided daring topics altogether, and Charlotte Brontë hid Jane Eyre's rage and sexuality behind the mask of a madwoman. In this section, I will examine why the Brontës had such a conservative approach in their fight for female empowerment, and why Henry James could be far more bold and direct when discussing shocking themes like female sexuality, social mobility and death.

5.3.1 Author authority

As a male author, Henry James had many advantages over the Brontë sisters. He could present a far more daring narrative than the Brontës could. In addition, he had a longer range and more artistic freedom than the Brontës could ever dream of having. Anne and Charlotte Brontë used their male pseudonyms, Acton and Currer Bell, to gain the same authority as their male counterparts. Eagleton (2013) claims, "[a]uthor suggests authority, a capacity to speak commandingly in one's own voice" (Eagleton 2013: 125). As women, the Brontës had limited opportunities to speak their minds, therefore they concealed their gender behind pseudonyms, hoping it would broaden their audience and help them gain more respect as authors. The Brontës had to be more rational than James did because there was more at stake for them. Eagleton states that for many Victorians, "it was bad enough having to read about bigamy, social climbing, grotesque physical violence […] without the additional outrage of knowing that a woman's delicate mind lay behind these scandalous subjects" (Eagleton 2013: 126). Even towards the end of the nineteenth century, science supported the belief that men were superior to women.

Toril Moi (2010) refers to late nineteenth-century biological scientist William K. Brooks (1848-1908). The biologist claimed that the physiological differences between men and women were the main reasons for all social differences. Supported by biological studies, Brooks argued that men's brains enabled them to grasp new knowledge, understand science and new discoveries and comprehend artistic and philosophical expressions. Women's brains could only deal with

repetitive issues, the known and the ordinary. They could be trusted to "keep track of traditions and social customs; in short, take care of everything that requires 'rational action without reflection'" (cf. Moi 2010: 15-1). Male authors even had science on their side, and could therefore "rightfully" claim dominance of the literary world.

James had a possibility of exploring his artistic freedom in *The Turn of the Screw*. The author's creativity was important to him, a fact that he discusses in his essay, "The Art of Fiction" (1884). James argues that freedom is just what the author needs when attempting to write a good novel. He claims, "[t]he advantage, the luxury, as well as the torment and responsibility of the novelist, is that there is no limit to […] his possible experiments, efforts, discoveries, successes" (James [1884] 2010: 748). James' choice of literary genre also gave him another type of freedom that the Brontës did not have. The Encyclopædia Britannica explains the ghost genre as "a tale about ghosts" which refers to "a tale based on imagination rather than fact" (Encyclopædia Britannica 2016). Eagleton (2013) claims James' fiction is "much preoccupied with voids, absences, hidden horrors, unspeakable secrets" (Eagleton 2013: 216). James use of the ghost genre gives him an opportunity to present a bolder narrative than Anne and Charlotte Brontë did in their realist novels. James use of the ghost genre lays the foundation for a far more creative narrative with a surprise twist. First, he introduces the perfect setting for a ghost story, with a group of friends celebrating Christmas Eve in an old house. They are gathered "round the fire", telling each other ghost stories (James 1999: 1). This setting invites fantastic stories that no one would expect to be true. James, however, decides to confuse his readers by presenting story "of uncanny ugliness and horror and pain" that is true (James 1999: 2). Anne Brontë's novel is as realistic as they come. She does not play with her choice of genre or take any narrative risks. As a woman, she needs to be taken seriously, and has to avoid being too creative or too bold with her ideas, thus risking a tainted reputation herself.

James' introduction is another example where the reader can explore his artistic experimentation. His multiple narrators all tell the story at different stages of the timeline. This technique gives an effect on the reader that Bennett and Royle (2014) refer to as "dissolving our sense of any one, true, narrative of events" (Bennett and Royle 2014: 58). They argue that this form of narrative opens for "different readings", "different narrative perspectives" and shifting senses of place and time" (Bennett and Royle 2014: 58). James' originality is clear from the beginning of the novel, when he presents multiple narrators.

Shoshana Felman (2012) identifies three narrators. First, there is the governess herself, the original first person narrator. Douglas is the second narrator, he who many years earlier reads the governess' story to his circle of friends, including our narrator. The third and final narrator is our "general narrator", the "I", or the first person narrative who tells the story to us readers (cf. Felman 2012: 167). By constructing the narrative chain, James confuses the reader as to who has authority over the story. The governess is supposed to be the principal narrator, but she does not tell the story to the reader, a man does, and that man received the tale from another man, the intermediary Douglas. James' passes on the authority of the story to two men, giving them the opportunity to tell a woman's life story from their point of view. Even though *The Turn of the Screw* presents the governess' "autobiographical" narrative, we know that it is not only her voice that we hear when reading the story.

The governess wrote down her story before passing it on, possibly in an attempt to preserve her original version as far as possible. She handed it over to her friend, Douglas, who again handed it on to his friend, our narrator. Both men are at different points in possession of the original manuscript. The governess cannot defend herself, therefore her fate and credibility of her story is in the hands of Douglas and the "general narrator". Did James feel that his protagonists' story would gain more acceptance when narrated by a man? He handed the authority of the text to men, and gave them the possibility to add their voices to the story. The original story is therefore tainted. The male narrators take control of the governess' "life" and have an opportunity to add their feelings to the narrative. Contrastingly, the Brontës made sure the readers heard their stories directly from their governess protagonists themselves.

Agnes Grey and *Jane Eyre* both present first person narrators who tell their own life stories directly to the reader. Anne Brontë signals the truthfulness of her protagonist's story by having Agnes state that she "will candidly lay before the public what [she] would not disclose to the most intimate friend" (A. Brontë 2010: 5). The reader gets a feeling that he or she is about to read something important and meaningful. Agnes involves the reader in her story, making us feel privileged to be able to read it. Charlotte Brontë goes even further in conveying her governess' story directly to the reader. Jane Eyre calls for her readers' attention several times throughout the novel, an effect that reminds us who has authority over the story. The most famous words that Jane utters directly to the reader is the first line in the novel's conclusion when she confesses, "[r]eader, I married him" (C. Brontë 2001: 382). Anne and Charlotte Brontë never let the readers

forget that they are reading a story narrated to them by the original source. In contrast to James' novel, there is never any doubt that the governesses in the Brontës' novels have complete authority over their own stories. Similar to how men controlled all women during the Victorian era, James lets men take control of his protagonist's story.

Agnes Grey and *Jane Eyre* never leaves the reader in doubt of who is telling the story, or who has authority. As women, Anne and Charlotte Brontë had to be thoroughly rational when promoting their opinions and addressing serious topics. In giving their female protagonists authority over their text, they had to make sure the public could accept their narrative. One explanation for why they had to be careful was purely commercial, they could not risk infuriating their readers, they had to be able to sell books and make a living. More importantly, however, they could not risk being labelled madwomen themselves. Gilbert and Gubar (2000) argue that Charlotte had to be "evasi[ve] of her own rebellious impulses" in an attempt to "allay the anxieties of female authorship" (Gilbert and Gubar 2000: 316). James did not need to be as careful with his narrative. Who has authority over James' novel is hard to answer. His narrative strategy creates confusion and uncertainty.

James bases the main part of his narrative on anonymity. He never reveals the name of the "general narrator" who shares the story with the reader, nor does he reveal the name of his main narrator, the governess. James only discloses one link in his narrative chain, the middle link, Douglas. James naming Douglas seems a practical choice as three unnamed narrators could create confusion for the reader. Yet, we do not know if Douglas is a first name or a surname, thus James also protects his identity. The anonymity of the characters adds to the mystery of James' novel. On a character level, the anonymity serves as protection of the original source, and opens for a discussion on the authenticity of the story told. Not being able to trace the sources, leads the character listeners and the novel's readers to distrust the narrative. Not even Douglas, who had a personal relationship with the governess, reveals her name. To strengthen this mystery even further, James does not even identity the gentleman in Harley Street who employs the governess in the first place. This adds to the anonymity and cover-up of the original narrator. Douglas is the only one who can vouch for the validity of the governess herself as well as her story. For the author, the secret names help to maintain the unsolvable mystery of his tale.

Anne Brontë's novel does not address any radical or "dangerous" topics. Anne discreetly encourages the public to see women, and the governess in particular, in a more positive light.

Charlotte does the same, however, she dares to incorporate more drama into her narrative by adding an uncanny, gothic atmosphere and a more passionate romantic plotline than her sister does. Charlotte Brontë was a bigger risk-taker than her little sister was. While Anne left out dramatic, supernatural and sexual elements, Charlotte dared to incorporate them carefully in her novel. Jane Eyre fears that there are ghosts at Thornfield, but it turns out that Rochester's mad wife Bertha is behind all horrific events. To save herself from being labelled a madwoman herself, Charlotte gives reasonable explanations for every uncanny event in the book. In contrast to the Brontës, James did not need to worry about public opinion on his risky novel. He insinuates that the former governess has a sexual relationship with a man of lower status. In addition, he portrays the protagonist as a woman who is "rather easily carried away", revealing herself that she "was carried away in London" (James 1999: 8). When meeting the master in Harley Street, she instantly falls in love with him. In contrast to Miss Jessel who shockingly involved herself with a man of lower rank, the governess also flirts with the idea of social mobility, falling for man who is far higher on the social ladder. Both governesses involve themselves in scenarios that shock Victorian readers.

Even more shocking than suggesting a torrid sexual affair is James' choice of ending for his novel, with the death of Miles. Bennett and Royle argue that death is in one sense familiar, and in another sense "completely unfamiliar, unthinkable, unimaginable" (Bennett and Royle 2014: 39). James' takes the liberty of playing on these complex feelings, as death is unexplainable and still unavoidable. Few events create more tension and fear than death, and James' creates even more horror to the event by portraying the death of a child. There is a lot of mystery tied up to the death of Miles. Does Quint cause his death, or is the governess fully responsible? In contrast to *Jane Eyre*, the reader is left to solve the puzzle without ever receiving a clear answer.

5.4 James' *uncanny* novel

The concept of the uncanny is common in gothic narratives, and *The Turn of the Screw* is no exception. The OED presents a definition of uncanny as, "[p]artaking of a supernatural character; mysterious, weird, uncomfortably strange or unfamiliar" (OED 2016f). Sigmund Freud's

celebrated essay on “The ‘Uncanny’” (1919), originally “Das Unheimliche”, investigates the “the qualities of feeling” (Freud [1919] 2010: 824). “Unheimliche” is a German word that negates the word “Heimlich”, meaning “homely”, therefore referring to something unfamiliar or unsafe.

The uncanny is a merger of psychoanalysis and aesthetics. The subject of aesthetics has generally focused on feelings of a positive nature, on what is “beautiful, attractive and sublime”, and neglected studying the negative aspects of aesthetics, like feelings of “repulsion and distress” (Freud [1919] 2010: 825). According to Bennett and Royle, defining the uncanny is a difficult task. They claim, “[a]n uncanny feeling or experience is intimately bound up with language”. The uncanny is not only about what feelings we get from language, but also a “sense of something *beyond language*, unnameable” (Bennett and Royle 2014: 40). The two theorists argue that the uncanny is “an experience” even though it has to do with “the unthinkable or unimaginable”, and that it most of all has to do with “effects of reading” and the “experience of the reader” (Bennett and Royle 2014: 42). James’ text presents some of the traits that challenge the reader’s rationality and logic. Bennett and Royle identify thirteen forms that the uncanny can take, and James’ text presents six of them.

5.4.1 Repetition

Bennett and Royle disclose different types of repetition, that of “a feeling, situation, event or character” (Bennett and Royle 2014: 36). In *The Turn of the Screw*, the governess herself represents a repetitive character. She follows Miss Jessel, another “young and pretty” governess (James 1999: 12). The two governesses have more in common than their good looks. On one hand, they embody the essence of the Victorian working woman, and on the other, they represent unwanted qualities in women. Miss Jessel and the new governess are both passionate women. Victorian readers were shocked by with their choices of love interests.

Mrs. Grose reveals to the new governess that Quint and Miss Jessel “were both infamous” (James 1999: 31). The housekeeper maintains that “[t]here was everything” between the two, and that Quint “did what he wished”, indicating that the two employees had an inappropriate, sexual relationship (James 1999: 31-32). Though the sexual relationship in itself is shocking, what is even more disgraceful, however, is the fact that her sexual partner is a man well below her social

class. Mrs. Grose demonstrates this view by declaring her disapproval of how "a lady" could interact with someone "so dreadfully below" (James 1999:31-32). In contrast to Jane Eyre who readers criticized for planning to marry someone above her in rank, Miss Jessel receives criticism for having relations with a servant, a member of lower social status. The only governess to find a mate of acceptable rank is Agnes Grey who marries a man of the clergy.

Another repetition in *The Turn of the Screw* is the appearance of the ghosts, and the governess' attempt to describe the feelings the visions awake in her. After seeing Quint for the first time on the rooftop of Bly, she asserts, "I could arrive at no account whatever of the visitor with whom I had been so inexplicably and yet […] so intimately concerned" (James 1999: 17-18). There is something familiar with the ghost. The governess first expects it to be the master, but soon realizes it is not. She cannot make sense of her vision, but concludes that they have been "subject to an intrusion" (James 1999: 18). Soon after, the governess has a new scary encounter with Quint, as he looks in through a window. She recognizes him at once, and claims, "it was as if I had been looking at him for years and had known him always" (James 1999: 20). Bennett and Royle refers to this as an "experience of *déjà vu* (the sense that something has happened before)", proving a textbook example of repetition as uncanny (Bennett and Royle 2014: 36).

5.4.2 Automatism

The second recognizable form of the uncanny in *The Turn of the Screw* is automatism, a term describing human traits as merely mechanical. Bennett and Royle identify madness as one type of automatism (Bennett and Royle 2014: 37). Many readers of James' novel find that his protagonist is mad, therefore she falls under this category. As the narrative of *The Turn of the Screw* develops, the governess becomes increasingly suspicious that the ghosts have come for the children, and that the children are under their spell.

The first time the governess suspects Flora of being aware of the spirits is when she observes Miss Jessel for the first time. The governess and Flora are by the lake when the guardian realizes they are not alone. She spots a figure she identifies as Miss Jessel. The governess turns her attention to Flora, and awaits a reaction. When she gets no sign of alarm from the girl, she immediately thinks the girl is concealing her knowledge of the terrifying spirit. Later, the

governess reveals to Mrs. Grose that "Flora *saw*!" The governess startles the housekeeper with this declaration, and Mrs. Grose asks if Flora admitted to seeing Miss Jessel. The governess responds, "[n]ot a word – that's the horror. She kept it to herself" (James 1999: 29). The governess has similar conversations with both Flora and Miles throughout the novel, however, they never admit to sharing the visions of their guardian. If the governess is indeed mad, the children are victims of horrible terror. The governess repeatedly pressures them to confess to their involvement with the spirits. She believes that a confession will free them from their ties to the ghosts. Flora demonstrates her fear of her guardian, as she demands to leave the "cruel" governess. The governess, shocked to hear these "stabbing little words" suggests that Mrs. Grose takes her away from Bly (James 1999: 70-73).

To complete her mission to defeat the spirits, the governess stays behind with Miles. In the final sequence of the novel, Quint appears before the governess, and she tries to convince Miles that the apparition is there. In a frenzy, Miles falls, and the governess catches him and holds him with "a passion". In the last sentence, the governess discloses that Miles' "little heart, dispossessed, [has] stopped" (James 1999: 85). This final act is the climax of the novel. The governess' insanity causes the death of a young, innocent boy, and the novel has a tragic conclusion.

5.4.3 Death

Death is constantly present in *The Turn of the Screw*. The reader would never hear the tale had not the governess passed it on before dying. Originally, she had written her story, and sent it to Douglas as she lay on her deathbed. After keeping it a secret for twenty years, Douglas revealed it to his circle of friends, including our "general narrator". We are also told that before dying, Douglas committed the manuscript to our current narrator. Several years later still, this narrator reveals to us, the readers, what Douglas had told him and the others that Christmas night. Death is the trigging event that creates the narrative chain. The original narrator, the governess, adds seriousness to her story by not revealing it before she is about to die. Douglas strengthens this sincerity by also waiting to pass it on until he is dying. The general narrator, now in possession of the manuscript, reveals its content to the reader.

Death is not only the factor that instigates the forwarding of the governess' story. It is also the cause for the horrible end of the novel. The death of Miles is the most shocking part of James' novel. *Agnes Grey* and *Jane Eyre* please their readers by ending their novels on a positive note. Their protagonists achieve personal victories by first claiming independence, and later by marrying the men they love. James' novel, on the other hand, ends with disaster. The reader receives no explanation or comfort regarding the tragic event. Only the preface gives us clues to what might have happened after Miles' death. The governess has not likely been found guilty of any crime, as Douglas reveals she was later his sister's governess.

5.4.4 Ghosts

Miss Jessel and Peter Quint represent uncanny characters in James' novel. Bennett and Royle claim ghosts are "the uncanny par excellence" because they muddle "all distinctions between being alive and being dead, the real and the unreal, the familiar and the unfamiliar" (Bennett and Royle 2014: 39). James' ghosts left quite an impression on Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) who states,

> Henry James's ghosts have nothing in common with the violent old ghosts - the blood-stained sea captains, the white horses, the headless ladies of dark lanes and windy commons. They have their origin within us. They are present whenever the significant overflows our powers of expressing it; whenever the ordinary appears ringed by the strange. The baffling things that are left over, the frightening ones that persist - these are the emotions that he takes, embodies, makes consoling and companionable.
>
> (Woolf [1921] 1999: 159)

The emergence of psychology and psychoanalysis is reflected in nineteenth-century literature, and *The Turn of the Screw* is a classic example of a psychological novel. Bennett and Royle explain that psychoanalysis has provided new ways of thinking about ghosts (Bennett and Royle 2014: 163). Henry James explores ghostliness in unsettling ways. Woolf clearly recognises the uncanniness that arises from experiencing both familiar and the unfamiliar aspects of the

apparitions. Miss Jessel and Quint appear in the form of human beings, but we still know that they are not. The ghosts play with our minds and make us question ourselves. Bennett and Royle confirm that James' story illustrates "a sense of ghostliness of the ego (or "I") itself (Bennett and Royle 2014: 163).

5.4.5 Silence

Silence is a prominent form of uncanny in *The Turn of the Screw*. All of the governess' encounters with the ghosts are remarkably silent. Woolf comments on James' narrative technique, stating, "[p]erhaps it is the silence that first impresses us" (Woolf [1921] 1999: 159). She finds it both fascinating and scary that everything at Bly is so quiet, asserting that, "[s]ome unutterable obscenity has come to the surface" (Woolf [1921] 1999: 160). James uses silence to signal a change of atmosphere in the story, and to indicate the presence of the ghosts. Felman states, "the ghosts […] are essentially figures of silence" (Felman 2012: 193). When Quint first appears on the top of the tower looking at the governess, she hears "the intense hush in which the sounds of everything dropp[s]" (James 1999: 16). The silence is striking just before the governess' notices the figure of Quinn. The unnatural quietness signals that something abnormal is happening. Even though this episode takes place during the day, the setting becomes eerie and the atmosphere is frightful.

James' descriptions of the governess' feelings as Quint is watching her, has a great effect on the text. Woolf realises this, and asserts, "[w]e know that the man who stands on the tower staring down at the governess beneath is evil" (Woolf [1921] 1999:160). Even though the governess does not know that he is a ghost yet, she can tell that he does not belong there. She struggles to find an explanation for his presence, but fails to do so. First believes it is the master, but quickly realises it is not. She then inquires if someone from the village has come, but gets a negative response. She searches for answers, but finds none.

The governess' third encounter with Quint is on the staircase one early morning. Even before she sees him, she knows he is present. Similar to the build-up to their first encounter, the stillness is unmistakeable. Their nonverbal communication continues, as they only stare at each other. Even without exchanging words, the governess interprets Quint to be "a living, detestable

dangerous presence" (James 1999: 39). The lack of conversation between the governess and the ghosts creates a gruesome atmosphere. James clearly knows the haunting effect that silence has, and demonstrates this even more clearly when the governess meets Miss Jessel in the schoolroom. She exclaims to Miss Jessel, "[y]ou terrible miserable woman!", and her "vile predecessor" says nothing in return (James 1999: 57). Even though the late governess does not verbally answer her wild cry, the governess senses, or gets an "extraordinary chill of a feeling", that it is herself who is the intruder, and not the ghost (James 1999: 57). Rather than producing detailed conversations between the governess and the ghosts, James leaves it up to the reader's imagination to interpret and make sense of their encounters.

The issue of silence also concerns the children, as they are silent on the issue of the spirits. Even when the governess pressures them, they refuse to admit to seeing Miss Jessel and Quint. The governess believes that breaking the silence will save the children from the hold that the spirits have over them, therefore she becomes increasingly frustrated when Miles and Flora do not reveal any knowledge about the ghosts. Silence becomes an important factor in the governess' increasing madness. The governess believes that breaking the silence can salvage the children. The silence is therefore an important force in the power struggle between the governess and the ghosts.

5.4.6 Language

Bennett and Royle (2014) argue that uncanniness "has to do with how we read and interpret" (Bennett and Royle 2014: 42). While the Brontës' characters use clear and direct forms of communication to convey their opinions, James' characters communicate in vague and suggestive ways. The lack of clear communication in *The Turn of the Screw* leaves the reader wondering and searching for explanations. One example is his use of letters as a form of communication. His whole novel has its base in a letter, the letter containing the governess' story. As we have seen, the governess does not have sole authority over her story as her letter is passed on after her death. Another example is the letter that the governess receives from Miles' school telling her that the boy is "dismissed his school" (James 1999: 10). The letter creates a lot of tension as the governess starts to question Miles' personality. She asks Mrs. Grose "is he really

bad?" (James 1999: 10). As the letter from the headmaster does not explain his dismissal, it leaves the governess, and consequently the reader, wondering what Miles has done to deserve such a harsh punishment. Is he "an injury to the others" at school? (James 1999: 10). James never gives a clear answer. Goddard argues that a more sensible person would follow up, make inquiries and demand an explanation. The fact that she does not handle the situation in a practical manner, leads Goddard to conclude that complication is exactly what the governess wants, thus she seeks no explanation (Goddard [1957] 1999: 162).

The master gives the governess complete authority at Bly, and he refuses any involvement in Miles and Flora's lives. The governess therefore withholds from sending him a letter explaining the horrific occurrences at Bly. One reason for not contacting him could be the fact that she does not want to fail the task he has entrusted in her. Another reason is that writing down the inconceivable happenings would make it impossible to deny what she believes is going on. The master would possess a letter that proves the governess' madness. The governess does eventually write the letter, but she waits until she is dying to reveal the story we are reading. She entrusts the letter to Douglas, a man she knows is fond of her and who is likely to portray her in positive terms. Douglas is likely to persuade the listeners that the governess' story is true and that she is not mad. The current narrator, however, does not have a personal relationship to the governess, so he cannot vouch for her sanity to the same degree as Douglas could. The consistent ambiguity of James' novel reveals itself in letters that are vague, tainted or interfered with. James successfully obstructs the reader's capacity to determine the authenticity of both the characters and the events of the story.

6. Conclusion

> If the world were ours too, if we believed we could get away with it, we *would* ask for more love, more sex, more money, more commitment to children, more food, more care. These sexual, emotional, and physical demands *would* begin to extend to social demands: payment for care of the elderly, parental leave, childcare, etc. The force of female desire would be so great that society would truly have to reckon with what women want, in bed and in the world.
>
> (Wolf 1991: 145)

This thesis has been a study of the Victorian governess, and through her, an examination of the Victorian middle-class woman. We have seen that during the nineteenth century, women yearned to do more with their lives other than filling the role of wife and mother. The Brontës and Henry James portray women who are either subdued by their patriarchal oppressors, or on the brink of becoming *unwomen*. The Brontës' protagonists express their shortcomings and their lack of freedom and rights through frustration and rage. Gilbert and Gubar (2000) claim female writers "come to terms with their own uniquely female feelings of fragmentation, their own keen sense of the discrepancies between what they are and what they are supposed to be" (Gilbert and Gubar 2000: 78). Contemporary literature also deals with issues concerning women's ongoing struggles for gender equality and rights.

After three waves of feminism, the situation for women today have improved immensely when looking at the extremely limited possibilities offered to Victorian women. Women have fought many battles in order to have an existence with more freedom and room for individual development. Feminists and scholars have divided the feminist movement's history into three periods or "waves". The first wave commonly refers to the nineteenth and early twentieth century when women primarily fought for political power, like the right to vote and freedom to enter a wider range of professions. Through the second wave, which took place in the late 1960s and early 1970s, women gained more legal and social rights. This period focused on issues concerning sexual liberation, family and reproductive rights. The third wave, which began in the 1990s, focuses on gender equality in the workplace, protecting the reproductive rights of women,

ending violence against women and fighting the new backlash against feminism which has been "unfairly associated with ladies in hoop skirts and ringlet curls, then followed by butch, man-hating women" (cf. Dorey-Stein 2015).

Caitlin Moran (2012) contributes in the plan to rehabilitate public opinion about women's fight for inclusion and acceptance in society. She wants to reclaim the word feminism, which she calls "the liberation of women" (C. Moran 2012: 85). Moran reflects on the importance of fighting for women's emancipation by arguing further that it is "impossible for a woman to argue against feminism. Without feminism, you wouldn't be allowed to have a debate on women's place in society. You'd be too busy giving birth on the kitchen floor - biting down on a wooden spoon, so as not to disturb the men's card game" (C. Moran 2012: 80).

As Moran indicates, the campaign for women's rights regarding political, social, and economic equality to men is ongoing. Women still struggle to find their rightful place in society. Although the image and ideal of womanhood is different today than it was during the Victorian era, modern society still presents challenges and limitations for women. Women today also live in a culture where social conventions dictate what it means to be a woman. Similar to the female population of the Victorian period, modern women are also pressured to conform to certain ideals. Moran recognizes this as she echoes sentiments similar to those expressed by Wollstonecraft, Nightingale and the Brontës. She champions the modern woman by declaring, "I want CHOICE. I want VARIETY. I want MORE. I want WOMEN. I want woman to have more of the world, not just because it would be fairer, but because it would be better. More exciting. Reordered. Reinvented" (C. Moran 2012: 309). Moran recognizes women's continuing needs for acceptance, freedom and self-empowerment. She is not the only contemporary author who identifies the incompatibility between what women want for themselves and what society expects of them.

Helen Fielding also believes that women still experience conflicts of identity when trying to balance personal needs with the expectations of society. This is exemplified in her latest Bridget Jones book, *Bridget Jones - Mad About the Boy* (2013), where Fielding's protagonist has become a widow. Now a single mother trying to balance childcare with work and dating, Bridget demonstrates many women's inner conflicts when expressing guilt and feelings of incompetence in striving to satisfy both her own and other's needs. Bridget's friend Talitha argues, "[a] woman has her needs" before asking, "[w]hat good is a mother to her poor children if she's suffering

from low self-esteem and sexual frustration? […] you will shrivel. And you will become bitter" (Fielding 2013: 34). Bridget's dilemmas bear striking similarities to issues explored in *Agnes Grey*, *Jane Eyre* and *The Turn of the Screw,* where the governesses compromise to survive within a system of rules that they did not choose. Helen Fielding believes "many of today's young women are left bewildered as they struggle to live up to an idealistic society". She recognizes that women "feel they should be getting up at six in the morning and going to the gym, then doing a full day's work and coming back late and have to feed 12 people for dinner" (Wardrop 2009).

Throughout this thesis, I have discussed how patriarchy, with its fundamental hierarchal structure, presented strict rules for women to follow. It has to be said that men were also restricted in this ideology. Bell Hooks (2004) argues that patriarchy has created great limitations not only for women, but also for men. She seeks "commitment to ending patriarchal domination of women and men, girls and boys", and further claims, "[l]ove cannot exist in any relationship that is based on domination and coercion. Males cannot love themselves in patriarchal culture if their very self-definition relies on submission to patriarchal rules" (Hooks 2004: 123). In addition, patriarch rules affected all social classes. Nevertheless, my focus has been on Victorian middle-class women and their call for gender equality. While I have aimed my attention at the obsolete figure of the governess placed in a Victorian context, I recognize that the issues that Victorian women struggled with are comparable to challenges that women face today.

During the Victorian era, the fight for gender equality was not organized. People who saw a need for change found their own ways of contributing to the cause, and as we have seen, the Brontës contributed through their writing. Today, equal opportunities are on official agendas, demonstrating the continued relevance of the issue. UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) (2010) presents a manifesto aiming to secure gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women. In their declaration, they establish their aim to,

> work for and envision the day in which women and men are supported by a range of services to lead mutually respectful lives with proportionate shares of domestic responsibilities and rewarding labour; a day in which children witness women and men alike achieve self-realization through continuing education and participation in public life and democratic leadership; a day in which both girls and boys recognize and claim their

equal right to similar wellbeing, fulfillment and contribution to national development, securing the foundations of civil and political liberties down the generations.

(UNICEF 2010)

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