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**Literary Image of Late-19th Century American Women in Selected Works
of Fiction**

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Z á s a d y p r o v y p r a c o v á n í :

Studentka ve své práci bude nejprve věnovat otázce genderové identity, vysvětlí základní terminologii a tuto vloží do kontextu teorie identit. Dále zmapuje vývoj feministického hnutí v 19. století, které bude analyzovat na pozadí historických událostí a kulturních aspektů dané doby. Pro svou analýzu si studentka zvolila díla Charlotte Perkins Gilman a Lousiy May Alcott. Obě autorky budou zasazeny do dobového literárního kontextu a jejich díla konfrontována s poznatky prezentovanými v teoretické části práce.

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ANNOTATION

The bachelor thesis aims to analyse the position of women in the 19th century America. The first part of the thesis provides the essential knowledge of American society together with prominent feminist movements of the century. The second part of the thesis focuses on applying this knowledge to the works of two American feminist writers, Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Louisa May Alcott.

KEY WORDS

feminism, 19th century, American literature, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Louisa May Alcott

NÁZEV

Literární obraz žen v 19. století ve vybraných dílech fikce

ANOTACE

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá analýzou postavení žen v devatenáctém století v Americe. V první části je představena americká společnost a její vztah k ženám společně s představením předních feministických hnutí daného století. Ve druhé části práce je provedena detailní analýza postavení žen ve fikci od dvou amerických feministických autorek, Charlotte Perkins Gilman a Louisa May Alcott.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

feminismus, 19. století, americká literatura, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Louisa May Alcott

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Introduction

This bachelor thesis deals with the question of feminism in the 19th century America. The main aim of the paper is to analyse the position of women in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* and Louisa May Alcott's *A Long Fatal Love Chase*.

The thesis is divided into two main parts. In the first chapter of the theoretical part, the question of gender identity is discussed along with the definition of feminism and suffragism. The overall historical context of how women were treated by men and society in the nineteenth century is provided together with feminist movements that led to many accomplishments and social reforms. Then the chapter provides a timeline of the 19th century American literature important for contextualization of the authors.

The second chapter of the theoretical part is devoted to the life of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, specifically events, that led her to write her most known short story *The Yellow Wallpaper*. This chapter also provides an insight to Gilman's feministic ideas.

The last chapter of the theoretical part is dedicated to providing a brief biography of Louisa May Alcott and her experience with travelling through Europe that led to writing *A Long Fatal Love Chase*.

The first of the chapters from the practical part analyses *The Yellow Wallpaper*, a horror short story first published in 1892. This autobiographical short story is seen as Gilman's protest towards the nineteenth century popular rest cure, which she received after the birth of her first child. An analysis of feminist elements of the story, as well as the oppression of the narrator, which essentially drove her insane, is presented.

The next practical chapter provides an analysis of a sensational novel *A Long Fatal Love Chase* first written in 1866. The novel was written under a pseudonym A.M. Barnard mainly to be published in Alcott's contemporary newspaper; however, it had been rejected by the editor and described as too sensational and therefore remained unpublished until 1995.

1. Feminism in the 19th century America

This paper will focus mainly on the female struggle for rights and freedom in the works of two significant American feminists. This chapter will provide information important for understanding further details of feminist movements and other concepts of feminism in America, questions of gender identity and what feminism is, need to be answered. This chapter will also portray the 19th century historical and literary development.

The problematics of feminism also include the issues of sex and gender. Gardner has defined these two terms as follows: “the sex of an individual was seen as determined by a set of fixed biological characteristics, whereas gender was seen a set of mutable social characteristics that were the result of socialization”¹. This definition implies that the way someone is born will have a direct impact on how he or she will be treated by society and therefore develop his or her gender identity, although specialists argue. Encyclopaedia Britannica says:

So-called essentialists hold that gender identity is fixed at birth by genetic or other biological factors. Social constructivists argue that gender identity, or the manner in which gender identity is expressed, is ‘socially constructed’- i.e., determined by social and cultural influences.”²

Given the description of differences between sex and gender by Gardner, the idea that gender identity is socially constructed seems more appropriate rather than ideas of essentialists. Their definition describes more sex than gender although these two terms are very closely related to each other since gender is preset by sex and later developed by social activities.

Social activities that contribute to the development of gender are called gender roles. To understand the concept of feminism, the concept of gender roles needs to be focused on first. In the simplest way, gender roles can be explained as a stereotypical set of behaviours that are expected or considered appropriate for a certain sex, feminine to women and masculine to men. Matthew Jockers and Gabi Kirilloff in their article describe the 19th century gender conventions with examples of ideas of critics and authors of academic texts. They mention Barbara Walter and her idea that 19th century women were submissive and passive, while men were the doers of an action. Then they mention Stefanie Markovits’s

¹ Andrea Bohatová, “Feminist Issues and Gender Roles in the Wonder Woman Comics” (MA, University of Pardubice, 2019), 18.

² “Gender identity”, Encyclopaedia Britannica, accessed March 28, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/gender-identity>.

similar idea of “women’s limited sphere of action”³ supported by E.S. Dallas’s claim that “the life of women cannot well be described as a life of action”⁴. Lastly Jocker and Kirilloff focus on Gilbert and Gubar’s study *The Madwoman in the Attic* in which they refer to females as angels or monsters depending on how passive and submissive specific woman was. Also, they point out that, especially in literature, not only female’s behaviour is being standardized, but also male’s as well and that passiveness is seen as feminization.⁵

Gardner describes the gender role as following:

The ideology that dictates appropriate gender behavior for women through a system of rules (such as those that govern personal appearance), roles (such as the role of wife), and socially valued traits (such as nurturance and empathy). The ultimate purpose of the ideal of femininity is to make women pleasing to men.⁶

Gardner also describes male gender role as “the primary wage earner”⁷ and states that both ideas of femininity and masculinity “serve to oppress women”⁸. This described oppression or even discrimination served as a “feeding ground” for female’s dissatisfaction with their position in the society and the creation of feminism, which calls for equality of sexes.

Feminism as a whole is an intricate question to answer. The term itself has many variations and such complexity because of its historical development. Its origins lay in France in 1890, however since then its meaning had changed with a new era, philosopher or thinker and the idea from 1890 differs from the contemporary viewpoint.⁹

According to Rosalind Delmar:

Feminism may exist only in the form of an intellectual tendency with or without the benefit of a social movement. However, many feminist writers do not accept a conception of feminism as simply a set of ideas existing in the absence of a movement.¹⁰

³ Mathew Jockers, Gabi Kirilloff, “Understanding Gender and Character Agency in the 19th Century Novel”, *Journal of Cultural Analysis*, (December, 2016): 3.

⁴ Jockers, Kirilloff, “Understanding Gender”, 3.

⁵ Jockers, Kirilloff, “Understanding Gender”, 3-4.

⁶ Bohatová, “Feminist Issues and Gender Roles in the Wonder Woman Comics”, 17.

⁷ Bohatová, “Feminist Issues and Gender Roles in the Wonder Woman Comics”, 18.

⁸ Bohatová, “Feminist Issues and Gender Roles in the Wonder Woman Comics”, 18.

⁹ Chris Beasley, *What Is Feminism?: An Introduction To Feminist Theory* (London: Sage Publications, 1999), xiii.

¹⁰ Beasley, *What Is Feminism?*, xiii.

Delmar's concept of feminism without social movements may work nowadays, but not in the 19th century where women did not have any rights and were desperate for a change in social conventions. Although Delmar says that "there is no set 'ideal' or vision in feminism"¹¹, it is recognised by most of the publications as a fight for gender equality or political movement of women to gain rights. Encyclopaedia Britannica describes feminism as a "belief in equality of the sexes"¹² in every aspect of life such as political, economic and social. It is performed by institutions worldwide, which engaged in "activity on behalf of women's rights and interests"¹³.

In the 19th century in the United States; there was an influence of individualist feminism. It was an idea of "absolute equality of women under just law, without privileges or sanctions based on gender."¹⁴ The idea of individualist feminism has its basics in natural law theory, which believes that individuals have full rights of their own body and no other individual can violate or decide about it, without any punishment. The natural law says that in front of the law, there should be no difference between individuals and only one criterion and that is humanity.¹⁵ Wendy McElroy in her study *Individualist feminism of the nineteenth century* describes that "the law should neither grant privileges nor impose restrictions that are based on secondary characteristics such as race, gender, or religion."¹⁶ Discrimination in the 19th century can be seen not only towards women, but towards religious groups and people with different coloured skin as well. In the 19th century, jurisdiction was formed by men. Therefore, law issues were the most problematic area where women felt most suppressed.

The government classified women in second-class, they were restricted from professions, they could not vote, woman in marriage lost right for their wage or property and could not even have knowledge about their own body.¹⁷

The ultimate goal of individualist feminism is a society that reflects equal respect for the natural rights of all individuals, male or female. The greatest enemy is a

¹¹ Beasley, What Is Feminism?, xiii.

¹² "Feminism", Encyclopaedia Britannica, last modified March 5, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/feminism>.

¹³ Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Feminism".

¹⁴ Wendy McElroy, *Individualist feminism of the nineteenth century: Collected writings and Biographical profiles* (McFarland, 2001), 1.

¹⁵ McElroy, *Individualist feminism of the nineteenth century*, 1

¹⁶ McElroy, *Individualist feminism of the nineteenth century*, 1

¹⁷ McElroy, *Individualist feminism of the nineteenth century*, 1

government, which has historically legislated privileges or restrictions based on gender. Indeed, without the vehicle of government and law, men could not have oppressed women historically except on an individual basis.¹⁸

To this manner, there is one question – why? Why women had to be oppressed in any way or aspect of their life, such as political inequality or economic inequality, professional or sexual? What makes men so much better than women in the eyes of the government in the 19th century? Why were women supposed to stay at home, not having any rights? The idea of natural law asks the same questions and offers a solution, which was not accepted at that time.

The feminist movement started to form when women began to realize that they have to come together and fight for the rights that are being denied to them due to their sex.¹⁹

Individualist feminism advocated equal treatment of all human being under natural law. As a movement, it demanded that the law be blind to the secondary characteristics of sex and treat women according to their primary characteristic of being a human, on the same level as men.²⁰

There is one term closely related to feminism. It is suffragism. Feminism called for equal position of woman in all aspects of life, while suffragism is more cohered to the fight for the right to vote. “The women’s right movement had its roots in the campaign to end slavery illustrated by the events of Wednesday, February 21, 1838.”²¹ One woman, the leader of woman abolitionist movement and the representative of thousands of women who signed the petition to end the slavery, stood up and held historically significant speech, where she expressed her fury about neglecting women from public issues and how women should be equal citizens to men.²² Her speech started almost a decade long series of events which eventually led to passing of the 19th amendment which gave all American women the right to vote.

The concept of feminism truly changed throughout the centuries. The current idea of feminism that young women have is very different from the idea that was common in 19th

¹⁸ McElroy, Individualist feminism of the nineteenth century, 2

¹⁹ McElroy, Individualist feminism of the nineteenth century, 1

²⁰ McElroy, Individualist feminism of the nineteenth century, 1

²¹ Kathryn Cullen-DuPont, Elizabeth Frost-Knappman, Women’s Suffrage in America (New York: Facts On File, 2005), 21.

²² Frost-Knappman, Cullen-DuPont, Women’s Suffrage in America, 21

century. Nowadays women are free, have the right to vote, are allowed to divorce or to have their own business and, what is more, they are equal to men. Women consider themselves strong and independent, not needing men – that is the general idea of feminism today. While women nowadays can do everything, women in 19th century were as limited as slaves during 17th century in America. They were completely dependent on men. Furthermore, they were considered something less than men.

W.L. George's publication *The intelligence of woman* says:

Woman has a place in the state, a place under, but still a place. Man has recognized her value without coming to understand her much better, and so we are faced with a paradox: while man accords woman an improved social position, he continues to describe her as illogical, petty, jealous, vain, untruthful, disloyal to her own sex.²³

Although men considered women as something less, illogical and untruthful, they notified that without a woman, there is no such thing as home. Women in the 19th century were seen as “the center of the family”²⁴ they were expected to find a husband, have children and then stay at home and take care of them. Gender defined roles of men and women became even more significant throughout the urbanisation and industrialization, when single white women were working in factories and married woman stayed at home.²⁵

As a result of industrialization of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the home was no longer the center of all economic activity, and the daily experiences and work lives of men and women were increasingly separated. This created what historians have termed ‘separate spheres’ of activity between the public world of men and the private world of women, each “sphere” with its own specific roles based on gender.²⁶

House labour was constantly dropping due to the industrialization, as well as the demand on big families. Women started to have less children and started to focus more on child's upbringing, her role as a mother rapidly increased. It seems that the role of women became worse with the industrialization, women were less and less. The domestic role, as

²³Walter Lionel George, *The intelligence of woman*. (Boston little, Brown, and company, 1916), 1-2.

²⁴ Tiffany K. Wayne, *Women's Roles in Nineteenth-century America* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2007), 1.

²⁵ Wayne, *Women's Roles in Nineteenth-century America*, 2

²⁶ Wayne, *Women's Roles in Nineteenth-century America*, 2

well as the legal position of woman, did not improve. “As woman changed from home-based producers to consumers, their status declined.”²⁷

Another aspect in the life of a woman was marriage. Married woman in the 19th century did not have any freedom, rights over her belongings, children or even her own body.

A married woman gave up all rights of person and property to her husband. A husband owned his wife’s wages and labour. Her clothing, household goods, dowry, and inheritance were all his. A husband could sell, lend, mortgage, or give away his wife’s material possessions as he chose.²⁸

While all of the woman’s property became a property of the husband and he could deal with it as he pleased, nothing of the property of the husband became hers. To put it simply, when a woman got married, she lost everything she had.

Education for women was another problematic issue. Since men had very low opinions about women, they thought women did not need any education, that they were “not bright enough for mathematical or scientific study”²⁹. Women were not able to attend school and get a proper education as men did.

In 1791 in an “Oration upon Female Education...” a Boston speaker explained that as sons were cultivating their minds, preparing them for important employments ahead, daughters should try to become amiable sisters, virtuous children, and mothers. Daughters of the wealthy learned only the arts of sewing, painting, and singing.³⁰

The society believed that “men were born with an equal right to be elected to the highest office, women, to be the wife of the most eminent men.”³¹ This statement closely relates to the fact that the most important role of a woman in the society was a wife and a mother. “There were no advanced educational opportunities for women until Emma Hart Willard opened a seminary for girls in Troy, New York, in 1821.”³²

²⁷ Frost-Knappman, Cullen-DuPont, *Women’s Suffrage in America*, 1

²⁸ Frost-Knappman, Cullen-DuPont, *Women’s Suffrage in America*, 2

²⁹ Frost-Knappman, Cullen-DuPont, *Women’s Suffrage in America*, 3

³⁰ Frost-Knappman, Cullen-DuPont, *Women’s Suffrage in America*, 3

³¹ Frost-Knappman, Cullen-DuPont, *Women’s Suffrage in America*, 3

³² Frost-Knappman, Cullen-DuPont, *Women’s Suffrage in America*, 3

There was a certain group of women in the society that fully accepted the woman's role as the center of the family and believed that it was suitable for them. They were so-called the Cult of True Womanhood.

The attributes of True Womanhood, by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbors and society could be divided into four cardinal virtues – piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. Put them all together and they spelled mother, daughter, sister, wife – woman. Without them, no matter whether there was fame, achievement or wealth, all was ashes. With them she was promised happiness and power.³³

As Welter's article describes, the most important of women's virtues was piety or religion because it was a "source of her strength"³⁴ in the naughty world of men. Religion is something needed by women otherwise she cannot be happy, and also it did not interfere with her domestic functioning. When young girls were taught about the True Womanhood, they were warned not to read any other books than Bible or educate themselves in other ways, since then they would lose their interest in God and irreligious woman could not be considered True Woman.³⁵

The same magnitude as piety was the virtue of purity and "its absence was unnatural and unfeminine"³⁶, moreover impure woman could be no longer considered a woman. Welter states that "the loss of purity brought tears, to be guilty of such a crime, in the woman's magazines at least, brought madness or death"³⁷.

Virtues of submissiveness and domesticity are closely related to each other. Women were supposed to obey their husbands and feel the need to be protected and taken care of by them as well as take no interest in other than domestic affairs.³⁸

Generally, the life of an American woman in the nineteenth century was not pleasant in any way. All they knew was suppression and social anticipations which they had to fulfil for some reason. Women that argued with the ideas of the Cult of True Womanhood and

³³Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820 – 1860", *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (Summer 1966): 152.

³⁴ Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood", 152

³⁵ Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood", 153-154

³⁶ Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood", 154

³⁷ Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood", 154

³⁸ Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood", 159- 162

were not contented with their role as only mother, wife and nurse soon understood that they need to fight for their freedom and rights.

19th century is considered to be the first wave of feminism in America. It ended in 1920 with an adoption of the Nineteenth Amendment and enfranchising of American women. There are some historical events, that led to this victory and are worth mentioning.

It was not the American Revolution, but the religious revival that followed it, the so-called ‘Second Great Awakening’, that provided middle-class American women with the opportunity to recover lost ground. The American churches were democratised, by this revival, and ministers and parishioners converted to an active gospel of moral regeneration and social reform.³⁹

There were large numbers of voluntary organisations with the aim of social reform and moral regeneration. Women took a great part in these organisations and communities such as labour unions or “the Shakers”, which challenged male prerogatives by advocating female celibacy”.⁴⁰ Many women became public speakers at prayers and were able to emancipate from being forbidden from these public activities. Women were able to participate not only in religious activities, but political as well. At the end of the Second Great Awakening, in the middle of the 1830’s, the slavery abolition movement began with World’s Anti-Slavery Convention. One could say that it was the beginning of the women’s rights movement as well, since these two movements were closely related to each other.

Anti-slavery petitions invariably contained large numbers of female signatures, and soon women were also participating in canvassing and organising their own societies in support of the petitions.⁴¹

Although women played a fairly big part in the anti-slavery movement, by the time the petitions were over, women were excluded from political participation at World’s Anti-slavery Convention in London and after that, their focus shifted “to more direct concern”⁴².

In 1848 a Married Woman’s Property Act became law. Up until this point married woman did not have any rights over possessions, but this act allowed women to own real and personal property. In the same year, the Women’s Rights Convention at Seneca Falls

³⁹ Richard J. Evans, *The Feminists: Woman’s Emancipation Movements in Europe, America and Australasia 1840-1920* Volume 16. (Routledge, 1977), 45.

⁴⁰ Frost-Knappman, Cullen-DuPont, *Women’s Suffrage in America*, 27

⁴¹ Evans, *The Feminists*, 45

⁴² Evans, *The Feminists*, 46

was held, where the Declaration of Sentiments was passed. This document had its structure adopted from the Declaration of Independence, it included 18 injustices experienced by women and resolutions they wanted.⁴³

The first three items in this list referred briefly to women's lack of voting rights. The next seven items, considerably longer and more detailed, criticised women's subjection and lack of property rights in civil law, their economic subordination and their exclusion from advanced education and from Church office. Finally, there were some general statements about the moral aspects of discrimination against women.⁴⁴

The resolutions demanded that women are able to speak in public and called for equality between men and women under the law, in marriage and other aspects of life such as profession and commerce. The Women's Rights Convention at Seneca Falls is regarded to be the start of women's fight for their rights, since there were series of conventions held up until 1860, even though no lasting organisation was formed. Women now concentrated on petitioning and their economical state rather than political, even though one of the demands in the first petition written by Susan B. Anthony was the right to vote. The other two were possession of their earnings and their children after a divorce. On behalf of this petition, a law was passed in 1860 in New York giving women "the right to collect their own wages, to sue in court, and to inherit their husbands' property"⁴⁵.

In 1861 feminist activities were interrupted due to the start of the Civil War. Members of women's movement decided to focus on proving themselves as citizens that deserve the right to vote. The Women's Central Association of Relief was formed in order to help take care of wounded soldiers.

American women were heroic in the war. Whether sewing for soldiers while raising children and crops alone, serving as nurses, spies, or soldiers, working as fund-raisers or teachers, planning military campaigns or relief for the suddenly free, or petitioning Congress for total emancipation, these women sacrificed and triumphed. Individual women certainly believed their contributions were important, and their leadership certainly believed women's efforts would be rewarded.⁴⁶

⁴³ Frost-Knappman, Cullen-DuPont, *Women's Suffrage in America*, 72

⁴⁴ Evans, *The Feminists*, 46

⁴⁵ Evans, *The Feminists*, 47

⁴⁶ Evans, *The Feminists*, 48

While women believed that their virtues and support of the Union in the Civil War would be rewarded, they were disappointed again, since New York legislature had changed the Married Woman's Property Act and married women who lost their husbands in the war now lost the right "to equal custody of her children and her right to use a deceased husband's estate for the benefit of her children"⁴⁷ as well. The situation for women was about to get even worse with The Fourteenth amendment that had been discussed by the Congress. The amendment was introduced to the Constitution in 1866 and it "explicitly denied the vote to women by insisting that only freed male slaves should be granted the suffrage"⁴⁸. Women thought that they will receive support from anti-slavery movement, but its leader Frederick Douglass thought that it was more important to give men the right to vote and that "the Amendment should not be endangered by adding to it another controversial measure such as votes for women"⁴⁹. The leaders of women's rights convention Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony then realised that they will not be supported by any male and decided to form the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA) right after the Fourteenth amendment was passed. There was also the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA) formed at the same time, led by Lucy Stone and Henry Blackwell. Meanwhile NWSA was more radical, anti-clerical, individualist, wanted women to be as independent as they can be and cared about the situation of working-class women, the AWSA was not as radical, it was not anti-clerical, concentrated more on achieving the vote rather than enhancement of life of working-class women and what is more important they supported the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendment because they believed that "they would earn the gratitude of abolitionist and black leaders and thus induce them to lend their support to female suffrage later on"⁵⁰. Although women did not win the suffrage yet and they suffered many defeats, they have won a lot as well. One example could be the increased educational opportunities for women. Many women's colleges had been opened and many male colleges and even the best universities in the country such as Harvard and Cornell had opened their door to women to take medical degrees. Admitting women to medical professions was one of the main goals of feminism not only in America but also in Europe. Women were also accepted for other professions or ministry of numerous religious denominations and in 1868 the first professional women's club was founded.

⁴⁷ Frost-Knappman, Cullen-DuPont, *Women's Suffrage in America*, 142

⁴⁸ Evans, *The Feminists*, 48

⁴⁹ Evans, *The Feminists*, 48

⁵⁰ Evans, *The Feminists*, 50

In 1890 the National American Woman Suffrage Association was formed, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton was named its first president. The NAWSA was formed because “many women were unhappy with the split in the suffrage movement”⁵¹ and “the desire for grater unity”⁵² and the organisation became the biggest female suffrage organisation in the world.

With a beginning of the new century, there were only one goal that women were not able to achieve – the vote. Women of the nineteenth century had made truly significant progress.

Their goals for women included an acknowledgment of the rights to speak in public, testify in court, and preach from the pulpit, access to equal education, the continuation of civil existence after marriage, control of personal wages and property, legal custody of children, entrance into the professions, and suffrage. At that time no state granted any one of these rights to women. In 1900, 52 years later, not one state denied them all.⁵³

All of these achievements meant a significant change in the position of women in American society. Women were no longer seen just as mothers, unable of logical thinking, but now they could attend schools, be employed and have control of their earnings. As previously mentioned, the only thing that was missing was the right to suffrage. But that fact was about to change in 1920 by passing the Nineteenth Amendment giving full suffrage to women and women of the United States are enfranchised after 72 years of battles.

During the first wave of feminism in America, women had written many literary texts and works regarding their economic, political or psychological oppression. All of them cannot be mentioned, but the most significant are Margaret Fuller’s *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, Catharine Beecher’s *The American Woman’s Home* or *The Duty of Women to Their Country*, Lydia Maria Child’s *Brief History of the Condition of Women in Various Ages and Nations* and *Brief History of the Condition of Women: in Various Ages and Nations, Volume 2*, Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Lucy Stone’s *Marriage of Lucy Stone Under Protest*, Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s *The Destructive Male*, Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* or *A Long Fatal Love Chase* and Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *The yellow Wallpaper*.

⁵¹ Frost-Knappman, Cullen-DuPont, *Women’s Suffrage in America*, 240

⁵² Frost-Knappman, Cullen-DuPont, *Women’s Suffrage in America*, 240

⁵³ Frost-Knappman, Cullen-DuPont, *Women’s Suffrage in America*, 266

For the purpose of this thesis, it is important to mention not only historical development in America in the nineteenth century, but also cultural, specifically literary. The following part of the chapter will focus on the main literary periods that are important for contextualisation of Gilman and Alcott and their works. Since American literary development is complex, this part will include only those periods relevant to the purpose of this thesis. Not all sources are consistent with the dating of these periods, however they agree on the division of the 19th century into two main periods. One starting roughly in the 1820s and ending with the Civil War, being the American Renaissance and the other one beginning after the Civil War continuing to 1914, being influenced by realism and naturalism.

At the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, literature in America was greatly shaped by the influence of Great Britain. However, after the United States declared their independence, a new era of literature began, and Americans started writing native literature.⁵⁴

By the first decades of the 19th century, a truly American literature started to emerge. Though still derived from British literary tradition, the short stories and novels published from 1800 through the 1820s began to depict American society and explore American landscape in an unprecedented manner.⁵⁵

In the early 19th century, the most prominent writers who set off the era were Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper and Edgar Allan Poe. Poe is especially important for the time, and purpose of this thesis, regarding his gothic stories and the fact that his detective story *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* “historians credited at the first of the genre”⁵⁶.

The first period of the 19th century literature dates roughly from the 1820s to the Civil War is so-called the American Renaissance or the Romantic period.

Romanticism has its roots in Europe, where it was prominent at the end of the eighteenth century. It is described as “a way of thinking that values the individual over the group, the subjective over the objective, and a person’s emotional experience over reason. It

⁵⁴ “Periods of American literature”, Encyclopaedia Britannica, accessed March 12, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/list/periods-of-american-literature>.

⁵⁵ Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Periods of American literature”.

⁵⁶ “American literature”, Encyclopaedia Britannica, accessed March 12, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/art/American-literature/American-Renaissance#ref42259>.

also values wildness of nature over human made order.”⁵⁷ By 1820s it had been spread through most of the Europe and started to influence writers overseas.⁵⁸

Although Romanticism has its origins in England, *An Outline of History of American Literature* mentions Matthiessen’s publication, where he “exaggerates the separateness of the English and American literary tradition”⁵⁹. Then *An Outline of History of American Literature* describes the nationalistic literature as a symbol of independence from Britain. The literature of 1820s regarded ordinary people and represented American culture. The expansion of the country as well as the growth of population had a direct impact on literature, since the first half of nineteenth century saw a great expansion of printing materials market, therefore more books and journals could be published.⁶⁰

Within the movement of Romanticism, several groups of intellectuals started to form, the most prominent one being the transcendentalists. *The Review of Politics* states: “Led by Ralph Waldo Emerson, the New England transcendentalists mounted an attack on the social, intellectual, religious and political beliefs which their fathers, not to mention contemporaries, had blandly held to represent the ultimate of human wisdom”⁶¹. Other representatives of the movement were Theodore Parker, Amos Bronson Alcott, Orestes Brownson, Margaret Fuller or Henry David Thoreau who represented “the first outcry of the heart against the materialistic pressures of a business civilization”⁶².

Emerson’s ideas concerned the power of imagination and social roles of individuals. His ideas had an impact on other authors, such as Whitman, Fuller, Hawthorne or Melville, who started to implant them into their works and begin to write about people such as slaves or poor immigrants evoking sympathy within the reader.⁶³

The period between the 1820s and the Civil War can be described as also the period of the need for social reform. It is the period where women started fight for their rights and “wrote about the right to vote for women and the need for greater legal equality between men and women”⁶⁴ and the expansion of antislavery literature. The most prominent works

⁵⁷ Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Periods of American literature”.

⁵⁸ “Romanticism”, Encyclopaedia Britannica, last modified March 27, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/art/Romanticism>.

⁵⁹ Masoud Abadi, Iman Kiaee, “An outline of History of American Literature”, Norton Online: 15.

⁶⁰ Abadi, Kiaee, “An Outline of History of American Literature”, 15.

⁶¹ Duane E. Smith, “Romanticism in America: The Transcendentalists”, *The review of politics* 35, no. 3 (1973): 302.

⁶² Smith, “Romanticism in America”, 303.

⁶³ Abadi, Kiaee, “An Outline of History of American Literature”, 16.

⁶⁴ Abadi, Kiaee, “An Outline of History of American Literature”, 16.

are Margaret Fuller's *The Great Lawsuit*, Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or Thoreau's *Slavery in Massachusetts*.

General Romantic themes include the supernatural or weird, the horrible, connection between dreams and reality, fascination with nature or nature religion. Romanticism "places emphasis on spontaneity in both the sphere of thought and action, individuality and the power of imagination."⁶⁵ Major element is a romantic hero, displaying the author, who is in contradiction with social conventions. The hero is usually in love that never reaches its happy ending.⁶⁶

Although there are specific features of Romanticism, it cannot be described universally. Edgar Allan Poe, for example, is considered to be the representative of dark Romanticism, the equivalent to transcendentalism. He contradicted Emerson's idea and stated that truth rules out beauty and declared that his idea of beauty is best described by a melancholy and sadness, therefore his most frequent topic was death of a beautiful woman. Given this description of Poe's work and ideas, he also represents an extension of Romanticism – the Gothic.⁶⁷

Similarly to Romanticism, Gothic originated in Britain, however "a distinctive tradition of the gothic developed in the United States as a vital expression of a continuing fascination in American society with horror and violence, moral ambiguity and the disintegration of personal identity and social cohesion."⁶⁸ This is a perfect overall definition of the Gothic genre and its literature, which is based on the portrayal of terrifying situations, violent behaviour, despondent characters, overwhelming emotions, villainy, evil, mystery, personal demons, madness, ghosts, monsters and many others. The typical setting of such American literature would be medieval, something dark, unknown, such as castle or dungeon. Typical plot for gothic fiction is a woman afflicted by a villain. The reader is supposed to be scared and feel frightened. That also why Poe's fiction was so short, since he claimed that the reader is supposed to read the whole story at once to enjoy it properly.

A crucial feature of gothic is the villain-hero, whose 'temptation and suffering, the beauty and terror of his bondage to evil are amongst its major themes.' This figure is

⁶⁵ Lenka Jírová, "Gothic Elements in the New World: Weiland by Charles Brockden Brown" (BA, University of Pardubice, 2018), 15.

⁶⁶ Jírová, "Gothic Elements in the New World", 15.

⁶⁷ Jírová, "Gothic Elements in the New World", 16.

⁶⁸ Christoph Grunenberg, "American Gothic Art" in *American Gothic Culture: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. Faflak Joel, Haslam Jason (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 147.

typically a male which might be seen as a consequence of the patriarchal society. Hence, the villain-hero jeopardizes the sexual purity of the female heroine, who is traditionally an ideal virtuous woman.⁶⁹

Other Gothic authors besides Poe are Nathaniel Hawthorne, William Faulkner or Washington Irving.

This period is important to mention not only because Louisa May Alcott grew up under the influence of transcendentalist ideas of her father, Emerson and Thoreau, which shaped on her work, but because both *The Yellow Wallpaper* and *A Long Fatal Love Chase* represent gothic themes such as which will be tackled later in this chapter.

The other important period of American literature started after the Civil War when a new era of Realism and Naturalism began. Encyclopaedia Britannica describes the Civil War as a turning point in American history and literature. Authors that have lived through the horrors of the war started to produce literature that described the world the way it was, which was the core of realism and its intensification – naturalism.⁷⁰

Realism is a style that portrays society the way it was without any use of the author's imagination. It also portrays the life of ordinary people, "realistic depictions of actual Americans"⁷¹. Among prominent American realistic authors are for example Mark Twain and his *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn* or William Dean Howells and his *The Wedding Journey*.

Even though naturalism is depicting the reality as well as realism, naturalism does not focus on Americans. Naturalism portrays the life of the "non-Anglo, ethnically marked inhabitants of the American growing cities, many of them immigrants and most belonging to a class-spectrum ranging from the destitute to the lower-middle class."⁷² It also does not believe in the notion of free will, remains objective tone with pessimistic connotation and ends with surprising twist.⁷³ American naturalism is represented by Theodore Dreiser and his work *An American Tragedy*, Stephen Crane and his *McTeague*, Paul Lawrence Dunbar and *We Wear the Mask* or Henry James and his novel *The Portrait of a Lady*.

⁶⁹ J6rov6, "Gothic Elements in the New World", 19.

⁷⁰ Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Periods of American literature".

⁷¹ Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Periods of American literature".

⁷² Xiaofen Zhang, "On the Influence of Naturalism on American Literature", English Language Teaching 3, no. 2 (June 2010): 197.

⁷³ Zhang, "On the Influence of Naturalism", 195-196.

After the Civil War, America became an imperial nation and faced tremendous expansion in territory, population and industry. The transcontinental railroad opened, the telegraph, the telephone and the electricity network were implemented and “allowed a burst of economic prosperity and industrialization”⁷⁴. However, it has also brought a huge number of immigrants which interfered mainly with The Native American population. The Natives had been forced out of their farms to established reservations causing their customs to disappear.⁷⁵

The literature of this period appears in the context of the dramatic diversification of American experience, both ethnic and regional, and the small but insistent movement among authors to combat the social inequities arising from too-rapid growth. Immigration from Europe and Asia resulted in a newly heterogeneous American population, now no longer mainly of New England descent, and now more diverse in terms of class and ethnic backgrounds.⁷⁶

An Outline of History of American Literature states that this diversity of the population created cultural problems that pitted people against each other and resulted in emerging of a generation of writers who “spoke out against social, economic, and political injustices in newspapers and magazines”⁷⁷. This generation included journalists, such as Hamlin Garland or Lincoln Steffens, but also authors who called out for reform of the society on multiple levels. These are for example Helen Hunt Jackson, Thorstein Veblen, Booker T. Washington or W.E.B Du Bois.⁷⁸ It is important to mention this generation, since among these writers was also Charlotte Perkins Gilman. In this period, she wrote *Women and Economics* which deals with women’s rights and financial issues.

To sum up, this chapter aims to answer intricate questions of gender roles and feminism. It also portrays the feminist movements and its achievements that shaped American society. Moreover, the chapter gives an insight to popular literary genres of the era. The provided information of the nineteenth century historical and literary development serves as a background for contextualization and better understanding of the analysis of *The Yellow Wallpaper* and *A Long Fatal Love Chase*.

⁷⁴ Abadi, Kiaee, “An Outline of History of American Literature”, 21.

⁷⁵ Abadi, Kiaee, “An Outline of History of American Literature”, 21-22.

⁷⁶ Abadi, Kiaee, “An Outline of History of American Literature”, 22.

⁷⁷ Abadi, Kiaee, “An Outline of History of American Literature”, 23.

⁷⁸ Abadi, Kiaee, “An Outline of History of American Literature”, 23.

2. The life of Charlotte Perkins Gilman

This chapter will focus on aspects of Gilman's life that made her write *The Yellow Wallpaper*.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman was an important American humanist, feminist, writer of short stories, novels and poetry, an activist and social reform lecturer. She was born July 3, 1860 in Hartford, Connecticut to Mary Fitch Westcott and Frederick Beecher Perkins, which made her the great-niece of the famous Harriet Beecher Stowe. Charlotte had a rough childhood. In the early 1870's, after her father had abandoned the family when Charlotte and her brother Thomas were young, her parents got divorced leaving Mary to take care of the children herself. From that point Charlotte referred to her father as: "an occasional visitor, a writer of infrequent but always amusing letters with deliciously funny drawings, a sender of books, catalogues of books, lists of books to read, and also a purchaser of books with money sadly needed by his family"⁷⁹. Charlotte believed that her mother was the reason she had unhappy childhood. Her mother banned her from having any sort of relationship, she banned her from having any friends and was convinced that her daughter will be safer later on in life, spared from being heartbroken, if she did not know any kind of affection, therefore Mary did not express any kind of love to her children. Gilman describes this situation in her autobiography:

‘I used to put away your little hand from my cheek when you were a nursing baby’ she told me in later years; ‘I did not want you to suffer as I had suffered.’ She would not let me caress her, and would not caress me, unless I was asleep. This I discovered at last and did my best to keep awake till she came to bed, even using pins to prevent from dropping off, and sometimes succeeding. Then how carefully I pretended to be sound asleep, and how rapturously I enjoyed being gathered into her arms, held close and kissed.⁸⁰

Charlotte was compensating her lack of friends and social interactions with novels or narrative poems that her father sent her or suggested. Mary was not fond of her daughters' interest and wanted her to give up books, especially novels.

⁷⁹ Alexandra Pokorná, "Depiction of Mental Illness in *The Yellow Wallpaper*", (BA, University of Pardubice, 2013), 19.

⁸⁰ Ann J. Lane, *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman: An Autobiography* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, (D. Appleton-Century Company, 1935), 10-11.

Charlotte had remarkable curiosity about the world and growing ambition. She suffered, however, from inconsistent formal education. Her mother was her earliest teacher, giving her a good start, but over the course of her childhood and its many changes of address, she went to seven schools, on and off for a total of only four years. At age of fourteen she was able to attend private school for roughly a year, but her secondary education ended when she was fifteen.⁸¹

Charlotte quickly learned how to support herself and despite her mother's lack of interest in her daughter's education, she managed to attend the Rhode Island School of Design and become an art teacher and designer of greeting cards.

Charlotte wanted to live her life away from her mother as a strong-minded independent woman who is in control of her own faith, developing her own values and following her own dreams. She felt as she did not need any man or children in her life and she saw marriage only as "domestic confinement"⁸² and stated that "in not marrying a man she would repress the feminine and maternal side of herself with its associated "irrepressible instincts"⁸³. Despite of her very strong opinions and reluctance to marry, she did become a wife of an artist Charles Stetson at age 24.

After they married, Charlotte started feeling under the weather and eventually suffered from a post-partum depression after their first child was born. Her condition made her seek the medical help from Dr. Stilas Weir Mitchel, who in her own words, "sent me home with the solemn advice to 'live as domestic life as possible' to 'have but two hours intellectual life a day', and 'never touch pen, brush, or pencil again' as long as I lived."⁸⁴ Gilman followed his advice for the prescribed rest cure for a while, nevertheless it was not successful. She stated in her autobiography that she "came perilously near to losing my mind. The mental agony grew so unbearable that I would sit blankly moving my head from side to side – to get out from under the pain."⁸⁵ She had abandoned the rest cure that Mitchel had prescribed and eventually started writing again.⁸⁶

⁸¹ Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Wild Unrest: Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the making of "The Yellow Wallpaper"* (Oxford University Press, 2010), 9.

⁸² Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Wild Unrest*, 14.

⁸³ Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Wild Unrest*, 15.

⁸⁴ Kelly J. Mays, *The Norton Introduction to Literature*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2016), 316.

⁸⁵ Martha J. Cutter, "The Writer as a Doctor: New Models of Medical Discourse in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Later Fiction", *Literature and Medicine* 20, no. 2 (Fall 2001): 151.

⁸⁶ Pokorná, "Depiction of Mental Illness in *The Yellow Wallpaper*", 21.

All of these, sometimes unfortunate, aspects of her life as a woman mentioned above had a substantial leverage on Gilman's mental health, writing and social activities. Her father made her fall in love with books, the lonely childhood, her mother was mainly responsible for, made Charlotte fall for books even more, and her unhappy marriage to Charles Stetson and the birth of their first child deepened her depression. Especially this period of Gilman's life inspired her to write her best-known short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" which can be perceived as a sort of protestation against the treatment Gilman received or a message to men how not to treat women.

3. The life of Louisa May Alcott

This chapter of the thesis will focus on the chapters of the life of Louisa May Alcott and provide background information of what made Alcott write the sensational work of fiction *A Long Fatal Love Chase*.

Louisa May Alcott was an important American novelist, author of short stories and poems, known for her children's books. She was born November 29, 1832 in Germantown, Pennsylvania to Bronson Alcott and Abigail May Alcott. Encyclopaedia Britannica says that Louisa was growing up among important transcendentalist intellectuals of that time such as Henry David Thoreau, Theodore Parker or Nathaniel Hawthorne. Her father was a transcendentalist and an educator, who provided education for all of their four daughters.⁸⁷ There are mentions in Louisa's journal, describing her father's home school and the time when she had first realized her love for books:

I never liked arithmetic nor grammar, and dodged those branches on all occasions; but reading, writing, composition, history, and geography I enjoyed, as well as the stories read to us with a skill peculiarly his own.

'Pilgrim's Progress,' Krummacher's 'Parables,' Miss Edgeworth, and the best of the dear old fairy tales made the reading hour the pleasantest of our day.⁸⁸

Louisa early in life decided to help with providing for her family and take the financial burden, therefore she started teaching, working as a house servant such as her sisters and, what is the most important, writing. After the Civil War came, Alcott started to function as a nurse and took care of wounded troops, however her service took only six weeks when Louisa fell ill and had to leave. Although this period of her life had brought the first success in literary sphere, since her letters were published as a book *Hospital Sketches*, she continued to write stories for local papers for only a little of money. As her biography describes, some of the stories were rejected by the publisher, but Louisa continued to write since the money she earned helped her family's financial situation. Louisa started to suffer from depression and her work has not brought her any gratification.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ "Louisa May Alcott", Encyclopaedia Britannica, last modified March 2, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Louisa-May-Alcott>.

⁸⁸ Louisa May Alcott, *Life, Letters, and Journals*, ed. Ednah D. Cheney (Boston: Little Brown and company, 1898), 29.

⁸⁹ Alcott, *Life, Letters, and Journals*, 157.

Another part of her biography delineates how the service in the hospital as a nurse, as well as death in her family and marriage separation had rather negative effect on Alcott's mental health. She became dissatisfied with her life and work and wanted some kind of life changing experience. Therefore, when an opportunity to travel to Europe, as a caretaker for an invalid lady, appeared, she was more than happy to take her savings and leave.⁹⁰

She travelled to Valrosa, visited Wiesbaden, cruised the Rhine and went to many more places as a companion. Despite Louisa's caring and nursing personality, taking care of an invalid became very challenging for her as the lady became more demanding. She decided to quit the job and travel the rest of the journey to Paris and England on her own.⁹¹

When Louisa arrived back to America and found out about the financial despair of her family, she immediately began to write. When James R. Elliot, a Boston publisher, requested a sensational novel exciting for the reader, Louisa started rapidly writing *A Long Fatal Love Chase*. Her journey through Europe served as a tremendous inspiration.⁹²

Louisa's need to address her recent emotional experiences in Europe no doubt played a major role in shaping both the plot and characters of the novel. The creation of a strong, independent, spirited heroine who would do anything for her freedom served as a healthy antidote for the frustrations experienced at home and abroad in matters of money and interpersonal relations.⁹³

To sum up, this chapter provided a background knowledge of the life of Louisa May Alcott and her inspiration for her work *A Long Fatal Love Chase* which is based on the experience she gained on her journey through Europe.

⁹⁰ Alcott, *Life, Letters, and Journals*, 171.

⁹¹ Louisa May Alcott, *A long Fatal Love Chase* (New York: Random House, 1995), 347.

⁹² Alcott, *A Long Fatal Love chase*, 348.

⁹³ Alcott, *A Long Fatal Love chase*, 348.

4. The Yellow Wallpaper

With the information provided in the theoretical part of the thesis, this chapter will aim to analyse feminist features of the horror short story *The Yellow Wallpaper* written by Charlotte Perkins Gilman as a protest for the rest cure she had received to treat the post-partum depression she suffered from.

The story of *The Yellow Wallpaper* is set in desolated mansion and takes place over the course of three months in life of the unnamed narrator and her husband John. Although she is completely forbidden to write or to work by John, she does it anyway and the story is written in a form of several diary entries. John is a physician, who has put his wife under a rest cure after her suffering from a nervous depression. On top of that she is being forced to occupy this bedroom strongly reminiscent of a mental asylum room, with barred windows, the bedstead nailed down to the floor and the worst of all – the wallpaper of dirty yellow colour which the narrator describes as “repellant, almost revolting”⁹⁴ at first, but as the story progresses, she becomes more and more possessed with it. She starts to hide important facts from her husband, becomes more quiet than usual and starts to spend her days examining the paper, in which she started to see this woman behind bars. The woman seems to get out by daylight creeping in the garden, by moonlight shaking the paper desperate to free herself from her confinement. As the story is coming to an end the narrator is determined to help the woman in the paper escape, so she peels most of the paper of the walls and as the woman gets out, the narrator becomes insane.

This autobiographical story shows many feminist elements, the most eminent one is the relationship to her husband John, which can be perceived as the symbol of contemporary American society which repressed women and described them as irrational and illogical, to the point where they need to be held in rooms that look like mental asylum or prison.⁹⁵ The narrator is portrayed so untrustworthy that her husband nor her family believes that she is sick.

If a physician of high standing, and one’s own husband, assures friends and relatives that there is really nothing the matter with one but temporary nervous depression – a slight hysterical tendency – what is one to do?

⁹⁴ Mays, “The Norton Introduction to Literature”, 318.

⁹⁵ Azra Ghandeharion, Milad Mazari, “Women Entrapment and Flight in Gilman’s ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’”, *Alicante Journal of English Studies* 29 (2016): 114.

My brother is also a physician, and also of high standing, and he says the same thing.⁹⁶

The patriarchal society where women “were supposed to stay innocent, utterly helpless, and calm”⁹⁷ and where their “only source of connection to the outside world was through their husbands because they were ruling everything, while women were obliged to follow them without question”⁹⁸, can be well seen through the character of John, as he controls every aspect of the narrator’s life, uses his education and profession to try and convince her that he knows the best, does not allow her to do certain things such as have companions. When she asks to visit her family, he states that he “would as soon put fireworks in my pillow-case as to let me have those stimulating people about now”⁹⁹ and prescribes her a rest-cure so that she is forbidden to write. The narrator feels helpless as she cannot do anything about her situation, not even say something because John would not listen and call her suffering “a false and foolish fancy”¹⁰⁰ and even laugh at her when she suggests that there is something not right about the house or when she expresses her anxiety about the paper. As the story progresses, and the narrator gets quieter as she is slowly losing her mind, her husband sees it as an improvement because that is exactly how women in the nineteenth century were supposed to behave.

Delashmit and Long in their article describe John as “overbearing and unknowingly cruel to the point of deserving censure” and “authoritative father figure to the narrator”¹⁰¹. The article also compares *The Yellow Wallpaper* to Charlotte Brönte’s *Jane Eyre*, stating that Gilman must have identified with Brönte, and describes similarities between these works of fiction. The first one being the resemblance in rooms with massive beds and changing wall colour with lighting, both presumably haunted. Another similarity is the resemblance in structure of prominent male characters of the stories, both named John, both acting against the female’s will. In the article they are described as “domineering males”¹⁰² that are feared by the narrators. But in reality, the fear is camouflaging the anger that the narrators feel with the men because they are “warring against their very beings, their unique selves”¹⁰³ by

⁹⁶ Mays, “The Norton Introduction to Literature”, 317.

⁹⁷ Chalak Ghafoor Raouf, Helan Sherko Ali, “The Helpless Angel in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *The Yellow Wallpaper*”, *International Journal of English Language & Translation Studies* 6, no. 3 (2018): 131.

⁹⁸ Ghafoor Raouf, Sherko Ali, “The Helpless Angel”, 131.

⁹⁹ Mays, “The Norton Introduction to Literature”, 320.

¹⁰⁰ Mays, “The Norton Introduction to Literature”, 324.

¹⁰¹ Margaret Delashmit, Charles Long, “Gilman’s *the Yellow wallpaper*”, *The Explicator* 50, no. 1 (July 2010): 32.

¹⁰² Delashmit, Long, “Gilman’s *the Yellow wallpaper*”, 32.

¹⁰³ Delashmit, Long, “Gilman’s *the Yellow wallpaper*”, 32.

repressing them. Next similarity the article examines, is the fact that both authors used common names such as Jane and John suggesting average people living ordinary life.¹⁰⁴ The last paragraph of the article says:

The names 'John' and 'Jane', as well as each narrator's repressed anger, the 'father-daughter' relationship between each narrator and John, the 'haunted' colored rooms, the use of light to transmogrify that color, the nurseries, the isolation that each room imposes upon its occupant, the mirror images, the escape through madness, the gothic elements – all suggest the possibility of a closer correspondence between these two works than has been previously noted.¹⁰⁵

Although these works are notably similar, there are no known resources that Gilman identified with Brönte or read her novel. Features such as male dominance, women oppression or intersexual relationships can be found in almost every feminist work. These characteristics are general for the feminist literature, therefore, almost any two works can be put in comparison and still have similar features. Consequently, the agreement of names of the main characters or the fact that they are being held in rooms of specific colours could be seen only as a coincidence rather than inspiration or identification.

At the beginning of the story, the narrator tries to fit in those social expectations and obey her husband commands, despite the fact that she is writing a secret diary where she can complain to a "dead paper"¹⁰⁶ about her life locked up in a mansion. But otherwise, she takes phosphates and tonics prescribed by her husband, she sticks to the "schedule prescription for each hour of the day"¹⁰⁷ that John had prepared for her and dissembles in front of him so that he does not know how she really suffers. The confinement, lack of social interactions and the overall restrictions soon start to have a negative effect on the narrator's mind and reality perception. Barbara Suess states that her reading of the story "represents patriarchy, or specifically the arrogant abuse of patriarchal authority, as the primary source of the protagonist's ultimately complete inability to separate fantasy from reality"¹⁰⁸ and describes the narrator's mental disorder as "normal function, or, in any case, a predictable consequence – of the social order."¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ Delashmit, Long, "Gilman's the Yellow wallpaper", 32-33.

¹⁰⁵ Delashmit, Long, "Gilman's the Yellow wallpaper", 33.

¹⁰⁶ Mays, "The Norton Introduction to Literature", 317.

¹⁰⁷ Mays, "The Norton Introduction to Literature", 318.

¹⁰⁸ Barbara Suess, "The Writing s on the Wall: Symbolic Orders in The Yellow Wallpaper", *Women's Studies: An inter-disciplinary journal* 32, no. 1 (October 2010):, 81.

¹⁰⁹ Suess, "The Writing s on the Wall", 82.

The first signs of severe mental disorder get apparent one night when she starts to have hallucinations. She is talking to John about her feelings and he laughs at her, so she goes back to bed “trying to decide whether that front pattern and the back pattern really did move together or separately”¹¹⁰. Soon after the narrator starts to recognize bars in the outside pattern and a woman figure in the sub-pattern, it is clear that her psychosis is getting worse and she starts to be afraid of John as he is forcing her to rest after each meal. In this constrained rest time, she begins to resist her husband and instead of sleeping she is studying the paper even more. Although John seems loving, caring and full of good intentions of helping his wife, the desolation and loneliness, that he keeps her in, makes her only dive deeper into her madness.

Towards the end of the story the narrator becomes obsessed with the paper and determined to free this trapped woman by taking it down. At this point in the story, there is a shift in the narrator’s personality. She begins to see herself as the woman from the paper that had just escaped so she “can creep smoothly on the floor”¹¹¹ or, in other words, to be free from the social expectations and repressions. Suess states that in that final act of pulling down the paper she “creates a new self-identity and sense of communality through her connection with and ultimately her transformation into the women/woman in the wallpaper.”¹¹²

Another aspect of the story that symbolizes the American society is the yellow wallpaper itself. Even before the narrator begins to have hallucinations, she can recognize “a broken neck”¹¹³, “two bulbous eyes”¹¹⁴ and “unblinking eyes everywhere”¹¹⁵ in the pattern of this startling wallpaper. After a while of being left nothing else to occupy her mind with, she starts to see this “strange, provoking, formless sort of figure”¹¹⁶ which shortly after appears to be sometimes a single creeping woman and sometimes many more of them. Not only does the paper look horrid, but the narrator describes also its smell, “a yellow smell”¹¹⁷, that keeps following her around the house.

¹¹⁰ Mays, “The Norton Introduction to Literature”, 324.

¹¹¹ Mays, “The Norton Introduction to Literature”, 329.

¹¹² Suess, “The Writing s on the Wall”, 92.

¹¹³ Mays, “The Norton Introduction to Literature”, 320.

¹¹⁴ Mays, “The Norton Introduction to Literature”, 320.

¹¹⁵ Mays, “The Norton Introduction to Literature”, 320.

¹¹⁶ Mays, “The Norton Introduction to Literature”, 321.

¹¹⁷ Mays, “The Norton Introduction to Literature”, 326.

What makes the paper represent the contemporary American society is the fact that the narrator can see bars by moonlight that keeps the woman stuck and imprisoned in the paper exactly how the society imprisoned women by not giving them any chance to speak for themselves and making them be so reliant on their husbands with no control over their lives, leaving them with only one purpose in life – to be a wife and a mother. The bars symbolize the freedom taken from her, the woman in the pattern with who the narrator identifies in the end, symbolizes her immurement and the smell of the paper following her everywhere is a constant reminder of her misery which she cannot possibly escape. By the act of stripping down the wallpaper from the bedroom walls and the woman getting loose, the narrator completely lost her mind in order to be free. It becomes apparent, that this whole time the creeping woman resembles the narrator and she had been seeing herself trapped in the paper. There is evident sense of victory in the narrators last words of the story: “I’ve got out at last,” said I, “in spite of you and Jane. And I’ve pulled off most of the paper so you can’t put me back!”¹¹⁸ By giving up her sanity, she had escaped those social expectations and rebelled against the society so she can no longer be told what to do. According to Beverly Hume, the yellow wallpaper is “the central symbol of this triumphantly suffocating domesticity”¹¹⁹.

There are at least two possible explanations of the closing passage of the story. One is mentioned above – the narrator through madness breaks free from social expectations and victoriously conquers the patriarchal society. The other explanation is given by Hume in her article *Managing Madness in Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper”*:

“The Yellow Wallpaper” not only rejects, as Gilman intended, the gender-biased rest cure of the nineteenth-century, but also indicts, less successfully, gender-biased definitions of mental illness. Despite her triumphant unmasking of medical (predominantly male) gender bias in this tale, Gilman’s narrator falls apart so completely in the end that she tends, unfortunately, to reinforce the common nineteenth-century gender stereotype of the emotionally and physically frail nineteenth-century woman.¹²⁰

The story can be regarded as a gothic fiction, since it deals with themes typical for gothic literature. The first one is its setting in the desolated mansion, which is presumably

¹¹⁸ Mays, “The Norton Introduction to Literature”, 330.

¹¹⁹ Beverly A. Hume, “Managing Madness in Gilman’s ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’”, *Studies in American fiction* 30, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 14.

¹²⁰ Hume, “Managing Madness”, 12.

haunted. Another one is the motif of heroine disturbed by a powerful male. And the final one is the overall feeling of horror while reading the story.

To summarize, this chapter analysed the feminist tendencies portrayed in the story *The Yellow Wallpaper* together with analysis of symbols delineating the contemporary American society and its destroying oppressiveness and patriarchal ideals.

5. A Long Fatal Love Chase

This chapter will analyse the novel *A Long Fatal Love Chase* and its too sensational topics of breaking the stereotypical ideal of gender roles or an abusive relationship.

The novel describes the life of a Rosamond Vivian who lives on an English island with her bitter grandfather, who does not really love her or care for her. Rosamond feels imprisoned in this mansion of his since she would “gladly sell my soul to Satan for a year of freedom”¹²¹. She is bored and longing for freedom or adventure and therefore, when Philip Tempest comes to visit her grandfather, she becomes almost immediately in love with this Mephistopheles-resembling man, although he describes himself as “dangerous society”¹²². They spend some time together and what appears to be the day of Tempest’s leaving, he invites her to his yacht, basically kidnaps her and then asks her to marry him. At first, she is rather reluctant to accept his proposal, but then she remembers all those long boring days at the island and how much fun she has with Tempest and all those adventures that awaits. She accepts and for a year, she is truly happy.

After a year of what seemed as a happy marriage, things started to change. When the couple and Tempest’s servants Ippolito and Baptiste stayed at Nice, Tempest got angry with Lito one day, for receiving a letter, calls him a “little traitor”¹²³ and threatens to kill him. Tempest sent Rosamond away and that evening returned home alone, without the boy, claiming he had sent him away because of his behaviour. Later Rosamond discovered a fresh dug up grave in the garden and an ornament she had made for Lito’s clothes and feared that Tempest’s words to kill the boy were not just empty threats but sad reality, although she was too scared to confront him about it. After her falling ill, Tempest wanted to cheer her up, by taking her to the theatre, where Rosamond felt like they were being followed by someone. Few days later, just before their departure to Sicily, Rosamond woke up in the middle of the night to find Phillip talking to a strange woman. She decided to secretly listen to the conversation only to discover the horrible truth that her marriage was a fraud and this woman visiting Valrosa at night was Tempest’s wife wanting to claim their son Lito. Although Phillip declared to love Rosamond, she could not endure the truth. Therefore, she decided to seize little of her belongings and escape from this man who had done her so wrong. That is where the chase began.

¹²¹ Alcott, *A Long Fatal Love chase*, 1.

¹²² Alcott, *A Long Fatal Love chase*, 6.

¹²³ Alcott, *A Long Fatal Love chase*, 98.

Throughout the story, Rosamond tries to escape from Tempest any possible way. She travels to Paris, where she goes by name Ruth and works for an old woman, seeks an asylum at Mademoiselle Honorine's house, where she comes across Ippolito, the boy whom she loved, and thought was dead. Lito is travelling to England trying to find his mother and offers Rosamond to go with him, but she refuses and hides in the Convent of St. Annunciata, where she claimed to be Sister Agatha and befriended Father Ignatius, who is secretly in love with her. Then she travels to Germany as a company of Comte, whom she agrees to marry, but after Tempest convinced him that Rosamond was mad, Comte cancelled the wedding and she tried to commit suicide. After recovery, she managed to escape the hospital and Tempest's several attempts to claim her. She meets again with Father Ignatius who travels with her and protects her on the way back to England where they stay with Ippolito and Mrs. Tempest who kindly offers them a shelter.

Rosamond is convinced that Tempest will hunt her down and find her anywhere she goes, and she was right. Every time she tried to settle and forget about him, he always appeared claiming that he will divorce his real wife and win her heart back so they can be together, although Rosamond kept refusing and escaping. The story as well as the chase comes to an end when Rosamond and Ignatius travel to visit Rosamond's grandfather. Tempest tries to kill Ignatius by overturning the boat he is supposedly in, however when he arrives to the grandfather's island, the one who is dead is Rosamond.

The story portrays many controversial topics for its time, such as strong-minded fearless heroine, stalker-like behaviour or an abusive relationship.

Rosamond, the heroine of the novel, is at the beginning portrayed as bored naive child longing for happiness and being "free as air, to see the world, to know what ease and pleasure are, to have many friends and to be dearly loved"¹²⁴. Although Tempest had the appearance of Mephistopheles and warned her about his reluctance for attachment in any way, she still fell in love with him and did not want him to leave her. At the beginning of the story she is also treated as some kind of an object and not a human being since he grandfather had lost a game in which she was at the stake, therefore Tempest could take her away even without her knowing. In her naivety, she pleads Tempest to marry her so that they can live a long happy life together. However, she finally breaks through her naivety one night, when she finds out that the marriage was a lie and decides to run away from Tempest.

¹²⁴ Alcott, *A Long Fatal Love chase*, 9.

When the chilly wind and falling dew at length aroused her, the first thought that came into her bewildered mind was escape. Not another day or hour would she remain, no help was possible, no atonement could retrieve the past, no love or pity, pardon or excuse should soften the sharp pang of reparation for the guilty man.¹²⁵

At this point in the story, Rosamond changes her attitude towards Tempest, stating that she will never come back to him alive and from now on is portrayed obdurate and firm about her decision. Since nineteenth century society believed that women should obey their husbands, to portray a woman as strong-minded and independent as Rosamond, who believes in her own free will, fights against submission and saying about her “husband” that she “detest, despise, hate and discard this man forever”¹²⁶, was contradictory to social beliefs in every way. Holly Blackford in her article described Rosamond as “simultaneously a swashbuckling woman of the world, donning disguises and even faking her own death, and whiny child pleading for protection from various characters, such as Mrs. Tempest.”¹²⁷

Jean Siers provides depiction of Rosamond’s character as following:

Rosamond, bless her hearth, never wastes her time pining for the past. She knows, she was miserable non the island with her grandfather and shows no trace of Dorothy from the Wizard of Oz, wishing to go home. Instead, she develops inner strength from her travails. What began as pure innocence and love of adventure grows into compassion, kindness and generosity of spirit.¹²⁸

Although this claim is correct, throughout the novel, Rosamond never mentions that she would rather stay with her grandfather at the island, Tempest made her long wanted adventure more miserable that she ever was and the only way how to escape her misery is through death. At the end of the novel, she feels “feverishly eager now to be at home.”¹²⁹

Alcott was her whole life surrounded by outstanding transcendentalists of the 19th century. The influence of this movement can be well seen in her work *A Long Fatal Love Chase* through the character of Rosamond. Transcendentalists believed in freedom, independence and the “essential unity of all creation, the innate goodness of humanity and the supremacy of insight over logic and experience for the revelation of the deepest

¹²⁵ Alcott, *A Long Fatal Love chase*, 129-130.

¹²⁶ Alcott, *A Long Fatal Love chase*, 278.

¹²⁷ Holly Blackford, “Chasing Amy: Mephistopheles, the Laurence Boy, and Louisa May Alcott’s Punishment of Female Ambition”, *A Journal of Women Studies* 32, no. 3 (2011): 5.

¹²⁸ Jean Blish Siers, “A Handsome Priest, A Deceitful Lover”, *Daily Press* Retrieved (October 1995).

¹²⁹ Alcott, *A Long Fatal Love chase*, 337.

truths”¹³⁰. The same way they believed in the goodness of people, Rosamond in the beginning believed in Tempest’s good nature even despite his efforts to convince her otherwise. What makes the character of Rosamond transcendentalist is a desire to be free and not to depend on men.

Alcott delineated the character of Phillip Tempest as a mysterious, manipulative, wicked oppressor with stalker tendencies and the need to control and have things his way. At the beginning he seems almost incapable of love, but as the story unfolds, he falls in love with Rosamond, becomes over possessive of her and does not abandon the idea of them being together despite Rosamond’s constant resistance. He claims to “like the chase, it is exciting, novel and absorbing”¹³¹ and continues to ignore her wishes to be left alone so she could lead normal life without a fear of him emerging everywhere she goes. Polak in her article described Tempest’s “obsession to conquest”¹³² and stated that “for Tempest, there is no aphrodisiac like rejection. Thwarted in his attempts at reconciliation, his pursuit becomes increasingly reckless. In the name of love, he forces Rosamond into an asylum and is even willing to sacrifice his own son.”¹³³

In an article written by Elena Sottilotta Tempest is portrayed as dark and ruthless, and “not only does he bear a most striking resemblance to Mephistopheles, but he is often addressed (and even addresses himself) as the ‘Evil One’, ‘Satan’, a wicked creature that ‘lead[s] the life of the Wandering Jew”¹³⁴. Then she refers to Tempest’s manipulation and his ability to track Rosamond everywhere, and makes an interesting point that his sudden appearances occur every time that Rosamond thinks about him. However Alcott disclaimed Tempest having supernatural powers and provided “a plausible explanation for them, referring to the real vicissitudes that lead Tempest to make those fortuitous appearances.”¹³⁵ Sottilotta then states: “In other words, despite Alcott’s constant allusions to Tempest’s manipulative, sinister, wicked nature, she ultimately presents the ‘Faustian motif’ by suggestion only”¹³⁶ and continues by describing Tempest as “simply a man without conscience”¹³⁷.

¹³⁰ “Transcendentalism”, Encyclopaedia Britannica, accessed April 17, 2020.

¹³¹ Alcott, *A Long Fatal Love Chase*, 194.

¹³² Monique Polak, “Resurrected Alcott novel was too racy for its time”, *The Gazette* (September 2009).

¹³³ Polak, “Resurrected Alcott novel”.

¹³⁴ Elena Emma Sottilotta, “Diabolical Crossings: Generic Transitions Between the Gothic and the Sensational in Dacre and Alcott”, *The Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies*, no. 14 (Summer 2015).

¹³⁵ Sottilotta, “Diabolical Crossings”.

¹³⁶ Sottilotta, “Diabolical Crossings”.

¹³⁷ Sottilotta, “Diabolical Crossings”.

Lynne Van Luven describes *A Long Fatal Love Chase* as “a pot-boilerish cautionary tale: this is what happens when women are totally dependent upon men for their identity and substance.”¹³⁸ In this novel where “Alcott explores psychological obsession and the destruction of love”¹³⁹, “classic gender roles are reversed and the domineering man is subjugated by a strong, sensible woman”¹⁴⁰

Alcott in her novel does not only portray the theme of obsession and oppression, but also comes across other topics such as divorce, bigamy, suicide and murder, which were considered controversial in the nineteenth century.

As mentioned in the introduction of the thesis, the story was rejected by Alcott’s publisher for being too sensational. The novel was revised by pundits in order to make it less sensational and to remove some of its themes. The novel remained unpublished until 1995.¹⁴¹

To summarize, this chapter provided the analysis of the story’s main theme of the break of the classic ideal of gender roles and the dangers of obsessive love.

¹³⁸ Lynne Van Luven, “Alcott indulges in full-blown romantic melodrama”, *Edmonton Journal* (January 1996).

¹³⁹ Polak, “Resurrected Alcott novel”.

¹⁴⁰ Polak, “Resurrected Alcott novel”.

¹⁴¹ Alcott, *A Long Fatal Love chase*, 350.

Conclusion

The objective of this thesis was to illustrate the position of women in the 19th century America in works of two American writers - Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Louisa May Alcott - and provide an analysis of the main feminist features present in these stories.

The basic principle of gender roles is stereotypical division of masculine and feminine behaviour, feminine being the passive and masculine the active. Women were considered weak, untruthful and their only role was to be mothers and wives. They also did not have any rights for education, over their possessions or children. The principle of feminism is defined by disapproval of these stereotypes and called for women's equality to men in every aspect of life. The nineteenth century is seen as the first wave of American feminism, when women resisted the patriarchal society and fought for their emancipation. The period ends with women gaining the right to vote.

Women throughout the nineteenth century started producing so called feminist literature that regarded themes such as their miserable state of oppression by males, attitudes towards women in the society, intersexual relationships or women empowerment. The literature often infringed the general principle of gender roles by reversing them, as portrayed in *A Long Fatal Love Chase*, where the independent individual is the female and the male character is portrayed as a stalker who cannot live without her.

Feminist literature also draws attention to mistreating of women, which is depicted in both works of fiction. In *The Yellow Wallpaper*, the narrator is mistreated by her husband John who is confining her in every aspect of her life. She is forbidden to write, to see her family or to leave the house. The only possible escape of this imprisonment is through madness. In *A Long Fatal Love Chase*, the most prominent mistreatment of Rosamond's naive and trusting nature is the false marriage that Tempest had set up only to fulfil his desire of owning her. Similarly to the narrator in *The Yellow Wallpaper*, Rosamond cannot possibly run away from Tempest unharmed. Therefore, at the end of the novel, she manages the escape from him through death.

Both works can be classified as gothic fiction with themes of a deranged heroine, in *The Yellow Wallpaper* being the narrator, in *A Long Fatal Love Chase* Rosamond and a powerful tyrant represented by John in Gilman's work and Tempest in Alcott's. Both male

characters have the ability to control, manipulate and oppress the heroines to the point where it ends tragically for both of them. Another one of the gothic themes, the stories share, is their setting. *The Yellow Wallpaper* is set in desolated mansion which the narrator refers to as haunted. *A Long Fatal Love Chase* has multiple settings, the remoted island, the one that sets of the novel, can be described as gothic.

The first chapter of this thesis provides a brief comparison of the ideas of contemporary feminism with the ideas present in the nineteenth century. It would be interesting to see this approach portrayed in the works of fiction from two completely different centuries and explore the differences and similarities between them.

In conclusion, the thesis achieved its main goal to portray the position of women in the nineteenth century. It showed how they were mistreated and oppressed by the patriarchal American society, in-depth analyses of the works of fiction were provided with the emphasis on their feminist features.

Resumé

Tato bakalářská práce se věnuje feminismu v devatenáctém století v Americe. Hlavním záměrem práce je zobrazení postavení žen v dílech dvou amerických feministických autorek té doby – Charlotte Perkins Gilman a Louisa May Alcott.

Práce je rozdělena do dvou hlavních částí, první, teoretická část se zabývá otázkou genderové identity, feminismu a historicko-literárního kontextu daného století; druhá, praktická část analyzuje díla autorek na pozadí informací z teoretické části.

První kapitola teoretické části popisuje základní principy genderové identity a feminismu, feministická hnutí a rozvoj literatury v devatenáctém století. Abychom pochopili podstatu feminismu, musíme nejdříve vysvětlit otázku genderové identity, která spočívá ve stereotypním rozdělení znaků mužského a ženského chování. Zatímco muži jsou ti aktivní, ženy jsou pasivní. V americké patriarchální společnosti v devatenáctém století si nelze nepovšimnout přetrvávající nerovnosti mezi muži a ženami. Ženy byly vnímány jako slabší, nelogická stvoření jejichž jediná podstata byla mít děti a starat se o domácnost, zatímco muži budovali kariéru a účastnili se sociálního života. Ženy v devatenáctém století také neměly žádná práva na vzdělání, majetek nebo vlastní děti. Podstatou feminismu je genderová rovnost neboli rovnocenné postavení obou pohlaví. Feminismus odmítá takové rozdělení sfér života a sociálního postavení. Ženy chtěly této rovnosti dosáhnout především díky formováním feministických hnutí. Některá byla více radikální než jiná, všechna si ale kladla za cíl získání práv a rovnocenného postavení žen vůči mužům v americké společnosti. Toto období se považuje za první vlnu feminismu v Americe, jejíž vrchol bylo udělení volebního práva ženám.

Součástí této kapitoly je také zobrazení literárního vývoje. Americká literatura byla v devatenáctém století ovlivněna romantismem, gotikou, realismem a naturalismem. Především romantika a gotika je důležitá pro tuto práci, zvláště z důvodu, že úzce souvisí s tématy zobrazenými v analyzovaných dílech a také, že přímo ovlivnila život jedné z autorek Louisy Alcottové.

Další dvě kapitoly pojednávají o událostech ze života autorek, které sloužily jako podnět k napsání jejich děl. Charlotte Gilmanová trpěla poporodními depresemi, na které jí byla předepsána tehdy populární „léčba klidem“, která pacientům vysloveně zakazovala jakoukoli aktivitu, především tu psychickou. Tato metoda Gilmanové jen přitížila, rozhodla

se tedy v léčbě nepokračovat a na protest napsala autobiografické literární dílo *Žlutá tapeta*. Stejně jako Charlotte Gilmanová i Louisa Alcottová trpěla depresemi a po hrůzách, které viděla jako sestra v nemocnici za Občanské války, uvítala pozvánku na cestu do Evropy jako ošetřovatelka pro invalidní slečnu. Po návratu do Ameriky ale zjistila, že je její rodina ve finančních nesnázích. Kvůli potřebě výdělku začala tedy přispívat do novin povídkami a romány. *A Long Fatal Love Chase* je jedním z těchto románů, bohužel byl ale tehdejší vydavatelem odmítnut a zůstal nepublikován až do roku 1995.

První kapitola praktické části práce obsahuje analýzu *Žluté tapety*, jejíž děj se odehrává v odlehlém venkovském sídle. Hlavní hrdinkou příběhu je nejmenovaná mladá žena, která trpí poporodními depresemi stejně jako autorka této krátké povídky. Její manžel John pracuje jako psychiatr a nařídil své ženě tehdy populární "léčbu klidem". Hlavní roli v tomto příběhu hraje podkrovní ložnice, která vzhledem připomíná vězení nebo pokoj v ústavu pro duševně choré. Postel je přibitá k zemi, v oknech jsou mříže a na stěnách žlutá tapeta, která zprvu přijde vypravěčce, hrdince příběhu, odporná. Jak se ale příběh vyvíjí, vypravěčka příběhu je tapetou víc a víc posedlá a v jejích vzorech začne brzy vídat objekty, které tam ve skutečnosti nejsou. Tato kapitola analyzuje feministické prvky povídky symbolizující tehdejší americkou společnost, zobrazené skrze postavu Johna nebo samotnou žlutou tapetu.

Postava Johna je typickým představitelem americké patriarchální společnosti devatenáctého století, který ignoruje přání a obavy své manželky, znehodnocuje její úsudek a přesvědčuje jí, že není nemocná. John ovládá každý aspekt života své manželky, která se musí bezmocně podřídit. Johnovy manipulace mají negativní efekt na hrdinky vnímání reality a schopnost rozeznání, co je skutečné a co iluze. Hrdinka začne rozeznávat v tapetě uvězněnou ženu, kterou se na konci povídky rozhodne osvobodit tím, že ze stěn tapetu strhá. Tímto činem sice ženu osvobodí, ale sama přijde o rozum. Je zjevné, že celou tu dobu tapeta symbolizovala americkou společnost utiskující ženy. Tím, že ji hrdinka strhla, stala se ženou z tapety a přišla o rozum, se osvobodila od sociálních konvencí a očekávání té doby.

Druhá kapitola praktické části analyzuje dílo *A Long Fatal Love Chase*. Hlavní hrdinkou románu je Rosamond Vivian, která žije se svým dědečkem na odlehlém anglickém ostrově, kde se nudí a prahne po dobrodružství. Jednoho dne je navštíví Phillip Tempest a Rosamond se do něj bezhlavě zamiluje. Nakonec Tempest souhlasí se sňatkem a rok žijí spokojené manželství. Jednoho večera ale Rosamond zaslechne mluvit s jeho skutečnou manželkou, zjistí že jejich sňatek byl podvod a rozhodne se od Phillipa utéct. Jemu se ale

pokaždé podaří ji dohnat, kamkoliv se snaží uniknout. Postava Rosamond představuje velmi silnou a nezávislou ženu, zatímco postava Phillipa je vyobrazena jako zákeřná a manipulativní. Vzhledem ke kontroverzním motivům, které v tomto románu Alcottová zobrazila, jako je například sebevražda, mnohoženství, rozvod anebo vražda, byl román odmítnut vydavatelem a nepublikován, jak bylo již dříve zmíněno.

V závěru práce jsou zmíněny principy feministické literatury a zobrazeny gotické prvky obou děl. Práce splňuje svůj prvotní účel – zobrazení žen na pozadí událostí devatenáctého století v Americe.

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