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Literary version of Victorian charitability

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Annotation

The thesis is concerned with the Victorian era and its values. The main aim of the paper is the analysis of *The Children's Book* by A. S. Byatt, which depicts the Victorian era, lifestyle, and values. The analysis is focused on the children of the story, the impact of society on their lives, and the approach of Victorian people towards charity.

Key words

Victorian values, charity, historical novel, A. S. Byatt, children

Anotace

Tato práce je věnována viktoriánskému období a hodnotám. Hlavním cílem této práce je analýza románu autorky A. S. Byattové, *The Children's Book*, který se zabývá viktoriánskou érou, životním stylem a hodnotami Viktoriánů. Analýza díla je zaměřena na děti a vliv společnosti na jejich životy, ale také na viktoriánský přístup k dobročinnosti.

Klíčová slova

viktoriánské hodnoty, dobročinnost, historický román, A. S. Byatt, děti

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Introduction

The Victorian era is a frequently discussed period of British history, with an almost impossible strict time boundary. Victorianism was affected by the time preceding and was affecting people long after Queen Victoria's death. It is known as a time of great progress, revolutions, and changes. One example for all is the Industrial Revolution, which brought acquisitions into multiple spheres of life. Although it was a product of the progress in the fields of industry and science, it also caused other phenomena such as class distinction, urbanisation, or the depression of agriculture. These changes were crucial, thus, society had to conform to them. As a result, British society experienced a revolution. Contrastingly to other European countries, however, the revolution was mainly in the matter of progressive approaches towards industry, science, and knowledge. Moreover, the system of social classes, not as significantly distinguished until then, developed. Both the middle and working-class became direct results of industrialisation and urbanisation, as well as important attributes of the Victorian era.

The period is defined by typical Victorian features and values, that were of great importance. The previously mentioned social classes shaped the overall form of Victorianism. The formation of Victorian values has its origins in the middle class. The values are namely morality, responsibility, focus on work and success, respectability, and lastly, charitability. All the values were connected, as the acceptance of one lead to the acceptance of the others. The whole society, considered respectable, followed the values. Responsibility was achieved by an individual's success, often understood as success in the sphere of career. Once the responsible and successful Victorian reached the expectations of society, he was able to focus on the issues of the whole society, for instance, poverty. Thus, charitability was on top of Victorian values. However, the Victorian era was neither black nor white. Although Victorian society seemed flawless, it was not true entirely. Contrary to the commendable characteristics, there was hypocrisy. Hypocrisy was another significant attribute of nineteenth-century Britain. As the main aim of the thesis is charitability and its disinterestedness, hypocrisy is of great importance and will be introduced. Victorian charitability was not about the abolition of poverty only, but also about the change of attitudes and morality of the poor. The middle and upper classes were trying to protect themselves from the consequences of poverty, hiding it within their moral responsibility and duty. Thus, their behaviour could be explained as hypocritical.

During the Victorian era, the standards of living were rising and, despite being divided, the industrial society was prospering. The working class gained new privileges and was reaching

the standards of the classes above. The middle class was in charge of the Industrial Revolution and the provision of services. The aristocracy experienced slight depression, only to be the most privileged and respected class once again later. However, an enormous number of people lived in awful conditions, which countervailed progress. Poverty was one of the main issues of Victorian times. In contrast to the development there were people surviving in the streets of London, working for minimal wages, or making living through criminal activities. The rest of the pauper lived in workhouses, in conditions of the lowest quality. Another problem was poor children destined to end up in insufficient care provided by charities or the Church, as the social welfare provided by the state was only in its beginnings. Although knowledge and education were important, the poor did not gain much of it. The reason was simple, as the poor were easier to handle if they were illiterate and uneducated.

The practical part of the paper is the analysis of *The Children's Book* by A. S. Byatt. The literary work is an example of a historical novel, often considered to be difficult to define as there are multiple interpretations of its meaning. *The Children's Book* is a reflection of Victorian values and issues as well. Through the main characters, Byatt precisely exhibits Victorian attitudes. She contrasts the typical spheres of interests, desires, and issues of the middle and working classes. She also explains the situation of Victorian children. The main aim of the paper is the disinterestedness of Victorian charitability. Thus, hypocrisy and its significance for the story are pointed out as well as charitability. Charitability is represented in multiple forms, directly as well as indirectly. Byatt ponders about the issue of poverty, problems of children, differences in their upbringing among social classes, or the problematic of women and their position within the society.

The paper is divided into two parts. The first part is a theoretical definition of the Victorian period and its society. Moreover, characteristic values of the Victorians are introduced. The issue of poverty and children are further examined, followed by the definition of a historical novel and a short introduction of the author of *The Children's Book*, A. S. Byatt. The second part is an analysis of the novel, focused mainly on Victorian values, approaches towards charitability and its disinterestedness, as well as the influence of Victorianism on children and the whole society.

The following chapter introduces the Victorian era.

1. Historical and cultural characterisation of the Victorian period

The characteristic of the Victorian era is crucial for the paper as the period was principal for the development of humankind. When studying the Victorians and their values, it is rather difficult to decide whether the Victorian society could be more distant from the society of today. Yet, it could be argued whether society has changed at all. The Victorian era is probably one of the most idealised and also the most damned periods of British history. The conclusion is dependent on a viewpoint. As a proofed source of these prejudices, or praises, might be considered literature, presenting the era in both ways. There are romanticised works of the English countryside as well as stories of the decadent society.

The main focus of this chapter is the characteristics of the Victorian era, which is considered a bordered period beginning in the mid-nineteenth and ending at the start of the twentieth century. Concretely, the years delimiting the era are from 1837 to 1901. Yet, this is a time strictly defined by historians, and the Victorian period could label a longer period of British history. L. C. B. Seaman explains the term Victorian is not sternly defined, and the definition is dependent upon the society acting according to the Victorian values. A person is mostly affected by the time he lived through.¹ Thus, a man born before the year 1837, living in the period of Victorian England, might not have been considered a Victorian. His values had been formed before the period, therefore, they might have differed from the values considered Victorian. Vice versa, a man born in the 1890s could have lived according to the Victorian values in the times of WWII. The beginnings of the Victorian era and the British empire are often associated with Queen Victoria. However, Britain already was the world-leading country by the time Victoria became a Queen. Anthony Wood's quote: "Victorianism in some ways, preceded Victoria," summarises the thought brilliantly. However, during Victorian times, the British Empire expanded over one-fourth of the planet Earth.² Not because of Victoria only, but also because of the imperialistic and capitalistic approaches of the British government. Thus, the connection of Victorianism and the British Empire with Victoria is obvious.

Queen Victoria was the symbol of Victorian England. She was not supposed to become a Queen. Moreover, she became a ruler at a young age. Victoria was considered charismatic and favourable, however, G.M. Young claims at first she was not popular.³ As she gained

¹ L.C.B. Seaman, *Victorian England: Aspects of English and Imperial History 1837-1901* (Routledge: London, 1990), 4.

² Clarice Swisher, "Introduction: Victorian England," in *Victorian England: Turning Points in World History*, ed. Clarice Swisher (San Diego, California: Greenhaven Press, 2000), 11.

³ G.M. Young, *Portrait of an Age* (Phoenix Press: London, 2002), 15.

experience and self-awareness, the acceptance of her subjects changed. The most probable reasons for her popularity were the similarities of behaviour with the common people. According to Briggs, Victoria shared many of the people's limitations and qualities. She was a combination of a wife who was dutiful towards her country and believed in puritanism and an emancipated woman.⁴ The presence of human nature and her attitudes were what people loved about their queen.

The focus of Victorian society was on development, progress, and industrialisation. Polišíenský claims industrialisation had initiated in the early eighteenth century when Britain experienced structural changes crucial for the commencement of industrialisation, and the Industrial Revolution.⁵ The changes were visible in the field of the industry but affected also agriculture and people's lifestyle. Before industrialisation, Britain was agriculturally oriented and people were used to a lifestyle in correspondence with nature. However, such a lifestyle was possible in the agriculturally oriented areas only. The depression in agriculture, caused by the industrialisation of work processes and the establishment of great agricultural complexes, brought a crisis. Farmers were leaving the countryside and moving to cities. According to W.J. Reader, people rather chose life in unhealthy cities, dissatisfaction in factories, and overall horrors of towns.⁶ The shifts of workers initiated another significant social process of the Victorian period, urbanisation. Young claims: "Victorian belief in progress was buttressed in the complacency which comes of steadily rising incomes and steadily improving security."⁷ To conclude, Victorians believed in the advantages which industrialisation enabled. However, this applied to the prosperous part of Victorian society only, as not all of it benefited from the revolution since its beginning.

Society was based on hierarchy, however, the shifts among the social classes were less complicated than before. According to Hopkinson, the aristocracy was now a working aristocracy. The middle class became more distant from the working class, which was too widely spread to take care of itself.⁸ Although the society was divided, the differences were less visible when individuals were examined. The differences were clear only when the society was

⁴ Asa Briggs, "The Reign Of Queen Victoria", in *Victorian England: Turning Points in World History*, ed. Clarice Swisher (San Diego, Greenhaven Press, 2000), 39.

⁵ Josef Polišíenský, *Dějiny Británie* (Svoboda: Praha, 1982), 126.

⁶ W.J. Reader, "Daily life in Victorian England," in *Victorian England: Turning Points in World History*, ed. Clarice Swisher (San Diego, Greenhaven Press, 2000), 103.

⁷ Young, *Portrait of an Age*, 6.

⁸ David Hopkinson, "Class," in *Victorian England: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Sally Mitchell (New York: Garland, 1988), 167–169.

looked upon as a whole. British society became 'The Workshop of the world', and as the first in the world, created the working class. Harvie and Matthew characterise the working class as a mass of people with only a limited amount of information about it. They suggest the non-preservation of records was caused by the lack of observance of the class.⁹ The working class was noticeable only when the society was grasped as a whole. The individuals were distinguished uneasily, thus, a proper description was difficult to create. Usually, the members of the working-class lived in insufficient conditions. Their lives were divided into work and leisure time, with the work time prevailing. According to Young, the working hours were perceived as an escape, compared to the conditions of the households.¹⁰ The differences between the classes were of great significance, and the number of the members of the poorest was not negligible, which led to the formation of protest movements. One of the most significant was Chartism. According to P. T. Smith, its main purpose was the enforcement of a petition that would later escalate into law the working class would benefit from.¹¹ However, the protests were usually suppressed by the government. The issues of the poor and their living conditions are discussed later.

Characterising Victorian society, the middle class must be mentioned. According to Hilary and Mary Evans, both the working and middle classes are considered successes of the Victorian period. The middle class was not the greatest in number, but the strongest and most influential.¹² It enabled progress and the Industrial Revolution. On the other hand, another effect of their approaches were the drawbacks the industrial progress caused. Harvie and Matthew contrast the upper and middle classes. They explain the upper class was the least influenced by Victorianism, while the middle class was the main source of Victorian values and spread of charitability. Moreover, they state the middle class was furtherly divided into the lower and upper middle class. The upper middle class held respectable positions, such as doctors or lawyers. Their joint attribute was the education in public or boarding schools. In contrast, the lower middle class worked in the service sector, in the new system of education, shops, or offices. They followed the example of the upper middle class and sent their children to boarding schools, rather than educating them at home. The usual focus on education in industrial subjects

⁹ Christopher Harvie, H. C. G. Matthew, *Nineteenth-century Britain: A Very Short Introduction*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 95.

¹⁰ Young, *Portrait of an Age*, 22.

¹¹ P. T. Smith, "Chartism," in *Victorian England: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Sally Mitchell (New York: Garland, 1988), 131.

¹² Hilary Evans, Mary Evans, "The Rise of a Strong Middle Class," in *Victorian England: Turning Points in World History*, ed. Clarice Swisher (San Diego, Greenhaven Press, 2000), 52.

or the field of the family's business was neglected.¹³ This brought consequences, as children did not want to return to a family tradition of manufacturing. However, the hope for improvement in the social hierarchy was stronger. Both levels of the middle class influenced each other. The lower wanted to countervail the upper by following their examples and therefore influenced the upper middle class.

The upper class maintained its reputation as conservatives with limited changes only. Nevertheless, the influence of the development reached them as well. Contrary to Harvie and Matthew, Hopkinson claims Victorianism influenced the upper class mainly in their occupation, as the aristocracy became a working aristocracy.¹⁴ Both the ideas are true. The upper class needed self-maintenance, reachable only through the adaptation to the new social expectations. Besides the main stratification, Victorian society consisted of various societies.

In *The Children's Book*, The Fabians, Anarchists, Apostles, and the Women's suffrage movements were often mentioned, therefore, they are to be discussed briefly. According to Rose, The Fabians was a socialist group of middle-class members whose aim was the abolition of poverty. This should be realized not by a revolution but through reforms.¹⁵ They were a mild form of social protest against the norms of the capitalistic society. To contrast, there were anarchists. According to Boos, British anarchism started to appear in the late 1870s. She connects them to communists, yet the British anarchists focused on the success of an individual reached by the right choice.¹⁶ British anarchism was similar to communism, however, it promoted different ways of achieving their aims. Contrastingly, the Apostles were an intellectual, rather than political association. Houghton mentions they were associated with the Cambridge University. They believed in poets that were seen as the ones capable of the truthful interpretation of the world.¹⁷ Lastly, suffrage was a great Victorian issue. Harvie and Matthew claim the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies promoted a calm manner, while The Women's Social and Political Union used violence or self-imprisonments.¹⁸ Byatt introduces the issue with Hedda, who became a part of the radical part of the Women's suffrage movement. Mentioning these associations is relevant for the right comprehension of British society. Britain

¹³ Harvie, Matthew, *Nineteenth-century Britain: A Very Short Introduction*, 94–98.

¹⁴ Hopkinson, "Class," 167–169.

¹⁵ Johnathan Rose, "Fabian Society," in *Victorian Britain: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Sally Mitchell (New York: Garland, 1988), 278–279.

¹⁶ Florence S. Boos, "Wilson Charlotte," in *Victorian Britain: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Sally Mitchell (New York: Garland, 1988), 862–863.

¹⁷ Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind: 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1976), 153.

¹⁸ Harvie, Matthew, *Nineteenth-century Britain: A Very Short Introduction*, 140–141.

was not separated from the rest of Europe, thus the influences of the European political convictions are reflected here as well. Compared to the other European countries, the British managed to preserve typical society with changes leading to progress. Despite the numerous opinions, Victorian society was able to function with no relevant obstacles such as national revolutions.

Religion was essential for Victorians. Studying the Victorian values and comparing them to the evangelical Church, its influence is obvious. Seaman says the period was marked by a religious revival, in the second half of the nineteenth century, in particular. He mentions the morality had its origins in the Catholic church. Although later in the nineteenth century the influence of the Church decreased, it was preserved within the Victorian values.¹⁹ Despite the strong role of the Church, everyday life stopped being dependent upon it. In contrast to the spread of knowledge and science, religion was still significant. However, Young is in opposition. He claims knowledge and rationalism were the reasons for the turn of the Victorians of great cities from religion.²⁰ Following up on the statement of religious decrease, it was not typical for the whole period. Christianity went through a period of decline, only to become stronger later. Harvie and Matthew discuss the period of decline by the working class:

...the Churches failed to reach the majority of those born in towns, despite the indirect allurements of charitable hand-outs and the provision of education in Sunday Schools, and the direct approach of missions, revival crusades, and the Salvation and Church armies.²¹

The irreligiousness did not denote the damnation of the faith. However, in contrast to the previous years, people were not attending the church routinely, which was interpreted as a decrease in members of the religious population. Besides religion, education was also significant.

In the nineteenth century, education experienced crucial changes. Correlated to the other European states, the British educational system was insufficient. School attendance was not compulsory until the late nineteenth century. Harvie and Matthew state the education became a subject of governmental care in the 1860s when the government admitted the provision by the Church was insufficient. Compulsory attendance was declared in 1880, with an education fee being required.²² Once education became compulsory, it was legally accessible for all social

¹⁹ Seaman, *Victorian England: Aspects of English and Imperial History, 1837–1901*, 6.

²⁰ Young, *Portrait of an Age*, 72.

²¹ Harvie, Matthew, *Nineteenth-century Britain: A Very Short Introduction*, 92.

²² Harvie, Matthew, *Nineteenth-century Britain: A Very Short Introduction*, 105.

classes and both genders, however, for the working class, it was often unreachable since the fees were expensive. Yet, Knickerbocker says education accessible for the majority of society erased at least some of the class differences.²³ With the overall development, improvements in the sphere of education were not an exception. According to Young, they exceeded any expectations. The first phase, based upon the private initiatives providing education, evolved into the next phase earlier than planned.²⁴ Britain was evolving, and the need for education grew stronger. According to Harvie and Matthew, universities provided education in traditional subjects only. The lack of education in the technical fields initiated the establishment of universities focusing on technological and practical education.²⁵ The University of London is a perfect example. The Church influenced the classical universities. Moreover, Young states the importance of religion at universities was so significant that it was impossible to graduate if the student was not of the religion supported by the school. Nevertheless, the newly formed universities did not support such discrimination.²⁶ Although legally accessible to anyone, the students were usually of wealthy families as their parents were able to support them financially. Moreover, university education was a typical attribute of the upper class. Therefore, the strict boundaries for applicants were not surprising.

In closing, the Victorian era was a period of many changes and an era of great progress. Industrialisation did not affect only the industrial sphere of the country, but also the whole society, and the whole world.

The next chapter will discuss Victorian values and issues.

²³ William S. Knickerbocker, "Educating Women and the Working Class," in *Victorian England: Turning Points in World History*, ed. Clarice Swisher (San Diego, Greenhaven Press, 2000), 167.

²⁴ Young, *Portrait of an Age*, 61.

²⁵ Harvie, Matthew, *Nineteenth-century Britain: A Very Short Introduction*, 106.

²⁶ Young, *Portrait of an Age*, 98.

2. Victorian Values and Issues

This chapter examines the values of Victorian people. Typical features of Victorian society were intercepted in their values, which later defined the whole period. L. C. B. Seaman states: “If, however, one looks for the most enduring and distinctive characteristic of the Victorian age, one finds it in its high sense of moral responsibility.” He continues the society consisted of individuals of contradictory characters.²⁷ Developing, the reputable Victorian values were responsibility and morality. Acting upon the established values was respected by all of the society, yet behaving in contrast to the majority was common, although well-hidden. Thus, Victorian society was represented by contrasting qualities. Contrary to morality and responsibility was hypocrisy and self-interest. Houghton says the typical feature of Victorians was pretending to be better.²⁸ Victorians had strictly set moral norms, based upon the right manners. Everyone was expected to accept them and also further spread. Therefore, the pressure of society was enormous and hypocrisy found a place in all of the social classes. The motive for all individuals, whether respectable or not, was acting upon their belief in the right choice. Morality and responsibility were the base principles for the reputable, and hypocrisy and self-interest for the others.

A typical Victorian could be described as a member of the middle or upper class, working in business or the industrial sphere of economics. Paraphrasing Seaman, two values characterised a Victorian. These are sexual self-indulgence and the concentration on work and industrial progress. At first, these might seem unrelated, however, Seaman explains: “the sexually self-indulgent were prodigal of time and money, two factors essential to industrial and commercial enterprise.”²⁹ Thus, the connection between the values is obvious. The question is whether the emphasis on morality, work, and progress was not the reason for the growth of hypocrisy and the decadence of Victorians. The work resulted in success, considered a Victorian value as well. Houghton claims respectability and wealth were two parts of the same thing, and success was seen as a strength of character: “Men who reached the top by their own dogged persistence and concentrated effort could readily attribute the failure of other men to weakness of character.”³⁰ Put differently, a proper Victorian was financially stable and successful at work. Otherwise, he was considered a failure. The accent on work and profitability was rooted deep inside Victorian

²⁷ Seaman, *Victorian England: Aspects of English and Imperial History, 1837–1901*, 6.

²⁸ Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830-1870*, 395.

²⁹ Seaman, *Victorian England: Aspects of English and Imperial History 1837 – 1901*, 7.

³⁰ Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830-1870*, 184–192.

people. The middle class connected respectability with finances, associated with a position in the society. Once financially stable, one held a respectable position and was able to develop the respectability of his character. Respectability could be obtained by contributing money to charities or helping the poor differently. Such deeds were synonymous with the value of morality. The overall changes in society initiated also the changes in manners. The newly established Victorian values affected the approaches towards common social phenomena, such as criminality or charitability. Both those phenomena were in contrast, which reflected Victorian society equally.

According to Harvie and Matthew, the change in manners brought a decrease in illegal activities. Moreover, Victorians relied on voluntariness, herewith the provision of help, for instance, via charities, became popular.³¹ However, the belief in morality and good manners changed the perception of society. The focus was rather on it as a whole than on individuals. Houghton claims the theological interests were shifting to the works of charity and philanthropy, which was based on religious attitudes and thus tied to the Church, which supported them.³² As the main provider of help, the Church's impact was important. The charities aimed to help not only materialistically, but also morally. However, the help provided by the non-state organizations stopped being fully efficient. With the increasing poverty, the establishment of state welfare was necessary, as is explained later.

As foreshadowed above, the growing poverty became a matter of state interventions. Once embraced as a problem of the whole society, the melioration in the provision of social services by the state was initiated. The solutions required to be of long-term validity, thus the repercussions of the philanthropic activities were reflected by reforms. According to Karen I. Halbersleben, poverty was accepted as a responsibility of the whole society in the middle of the nineteenth century. Until then, philanthropic activities were organized by private charities. The whole system was insufficient, therefore, the state reacted by laws regarding the living conditions of the poor. The repercussions of philanthropic activities were reflected in reforms of two categories – social and moral. The moral reforms were concerned with the decay of people, while the social reforms focused on the persistent problems of Victorian society. The most significant were the legislations prioritising education, factories, or the Poor Laws.³³ Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 established the workhouse test. Seaman furtherly explains it was

³¹ Harvie, Matthew, *Nineteenth-Century Britain: A Very Short Introduction*, 105.

³² Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830-1870*, 125.

³³ Karen I. Halbersleben, "Philanthropy," in *Victorian Britain: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Sally Mitchell (New York: Garland, 1988), 595–597.

a method that: “served the fundamental moral purpose of deterring the feckless and protecting the respectable [...] all men felt under attack, the rich because of their wealth, the poor because of their poverty.”³⁴ Following upon the statement of the charitability being a pleasant way of protecting the middle and upper classes, the approach of the rich could be understood as an attack on the poor. Philanthropy was not as much about financial, economic, or moral help. Inconspicuously, it transformed the whole society of Victorian Britain.

Halbersleben describes Victorian charities as cautious, yet charitable. Organised and established by the middle class, charities reflected its values. Many charities had a representative of the upper class, providing it with financial support. If a charity was not founded by a middle-class member, it was organised by the Church. Those charities intensively influenced the morality of the poor. Its issue was, however, in the uneven division of the poor to the undeserving and the deserving.³⁵ Affected by the social standards of the middle class, the organisations acted upon morality based on the virtue of an individual, not the whole society. Thus, charitability was not always motivated by a moral duty only, but also by the fear of the consequences of poverty. The involvement of the upper class could be questionable as well. The focus on philanthropy and charitability was accepted as a respectable deed. The individual’s support could be an act of selflessness and moral duty. Contrastingly, he could benefit from it, as it meant the general public’s respect. Nevertheless, the needs of the poor were not morally, but materialistically oriented. The efforts in helping the poor by submitting them right manners were not sufficient. According to Young, charities were the domain of women, as they were usually trained for the tasks connected to charitable help.³⁶ Therefore, women were an inherent part of charities. Mentioning the idea of women’s and men’s spheres leads to another problem of Victorian society, and that is the overall distribution of activities and interests determined for women and men, later evolving into the question of women’s rights.

Victorian society experienced many issues, one of them being sexuality which was understood in two manners. Either, it was in correspondence to the values, thus morally acceptable, or it was something unacceptable. Homosexuality and prostitution were not unusual for the Victorian era. According to Seaman, sexual self-indulgence often caused immorality, infidelity, and prostitution. He furtherly explains those were more typical for the poor, rather than the upper classes. Their presence was not suppressed in any way and the issue was solved by

³⁴ Seaman, *Victorian England: Aspects of English and Imperial History 1837 – 1901*, 7–9.

³⁵ Halbersleben, “Philanthropy”, 595–597.

³⁶ Young, *Portrait of an Age*, (London: Phoenix Press, 2002), 93.

pretending it did not occur at all.³⁷ Solving problems by pretending their non-existence was usual.

On the other hand, Houghton says love was the initial condition for family life, which was significant for Victorians. A woman's role was strongly influenced by the importance of the role of a wife.³⁸ Upon the statement, the issue of the strictly distributed roles of men and women is emerging again. Career was meant for men, and women were expected to create home. The typical characteristic of a middle-class woman was 'the angel in the house'. As Priestley explains, women could choose between two roles. One of them was a pure, sexually completely undemanding woman, whose mind was always occupied by domestic duties. Such a woman was devoted to her husband, upon whom she was dependent. Such expectations sometimes lead to doubled parts for women. Quoting Priestley directly: "...there might be a woman so lost to decency she could play both roles, submitting in her own house and enjoying herself under another roof...", however, such cases were unique.³⁹ Rephrasing, the women were associated with the unacceptable grasp of sexuality, as well as its morally acceptable understanding. Moreover, women took a rather secondary role in Victorian society, as men were the ones in charge of career or home. Later, these presumptions and role distribution lead to the Women's rights and suffrage movements.

Finally, the whole period is connected with typical attributes and values. Both those were significant for the final appearance of the whole era, as well as for the people. Although the first the Victorians seem like people of high morality, the reality was often dissimilar.

Another significant Victorian issue was poverty, which will be examined in the following chapter.

³⁷ Seaman, *Victorian England: Aspects of English and Imperial History, 1837 – 1901*, 15.

³⁸ Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830-1870*, 341–348.

³⁹ J. B. Priestley, "Double Standards in Middle-Class Sexual Morality", in *Victorian England: Turning Points in World History*, ed. Clarice Swisher (San Diego, Greenhaven Press, 2000), 212 – 213.

3. Children and the poor

This chapter discusses the situation of children and the poor, as they are in the concern of *The Children's Book*. The primary Victorian notion of childhood was that it was a time of no distresses. Quoting Houghton: "The home became the place where one had been at peace and childhood a blessed time when the truth was certain and doubt with its divisive effects unknown."⁴⁰ Yet, the reality was often distinct, and especially the lives of the poor children were burdensome. Young contrasts the population growth, caused by the overall development, with the mortality of very young children.⁴¹ Child mortality was not unusual. Besides, the death of parents, often due to the work conditions explored below, was the usual cause of child parishes orphanage. For such children, the only options were the workhouse or charitable help. On the other hand, as Byatt explores, the situation in the wealthy families was not enviable as well.

The overall accent on knowledge required education of the whole society. Nevertheless, Knickerbocker says the education of the poor was unorganized. The Charity schools were inefficient and focused on basic skills. The main provider of education was the Church, which aimed to affect the morality of the poor. The primary thought was to educate them so they could further develop their knowledge. Moreover, an enhanced morality was expected. However, once literate, the poor enjoyed reading anything, thus the primary idea of religious education was lost.⁴² Once the poor could read, they became familiar with publications disapproved by the respectable Victorian society. An outcome emerging from the education, originally meant to manipulate the working class and the poor, was the opposite. The newly gained skills were used inappropriately, thus the advantages of educating the poor were outweighed by its disadvantages. Seamen says, one of the problems connected to educating poor children was the conflict of social needs and finances.⁴³ The need for education was strong, yet the state was unwilling to release the required finances. Taking the educational fees into consideration, there is no surprise the children of the poorer families were sent to work rather than to school.

Child labour was not a product of the Victorian era. Smith states it was always a part of the British society, mostly in the spheres of agricultural or domestic work.⁴⁴ Thus the involvement

⁴⁰ Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830-1870*, 344.

⁴¹ Young, *Portrait of an Age*, 19.

⁴² Knickerbrocker, "Educating Women and the Working Class," 167.

⁴³ Seamen, *Victorian England Victorian England: Aspects of English and Imperial History 1837 – 1901*, 192.

⁴⁴ W. John Smith, "Child Labor," in *Victorian Britain: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Sally Mitchell, (New York: Garland 1988), 136–137.

of children in the work processes was accepted. In opposition to Smith is Swisher, who points out the child labour in mines and factories. The older children worked as putters and the younger were sent to the smallest spaces of coal mines or used as trappers. The luckier children worked in pottery factories, 12 hours a day in extremely high temperatures, lacking adequate pauses for food and other human needs. The terrible conditions had affected the overall health of the workers.⁴⁵ According to Smith, the possibility of injury, disease, or death was not unusual. Moreover, child labourers were highly productive and required low wages. Children of the youngest ages worked over twelve hours for a wage of a few shillings.⁴⁶ Their productivity was greatly significant, besides, they worked for minimal wages. Thus, the financial benefits were too tempting. Being a child of the poor or working-class meant a significant part of the childhood was spent either working or surviving in the workhouses. The enormous differences and remoteness of the social classes were obvious.

According to Young, the differences were also in priorities. The people of villages lacked purpose in the urban society. In the countryside, they were always occupied, either by job or other aspects of life. There was the local church with a parson, a school, or other entertainment. However, in cities, these were accessible with difficulties.⁴⁷ Thus, the possibilities of leisure time activities for the poor were only very limited, and people entertained themselves with alcohol and other improper activities. Most obvious were the differences in people's lifestyle. The wealthy lived in spacious houses, while the workmen and their families lived in tight rooms and the poorest in the workhouses. Swisher describes the housing of the poor like: "...usually buildings crowded together, with inadequate water supplies and without any sewer system or lightning."⁴⁸ A change was possible half a century later. Mitchell assumes the dissimilarities were caused by the decrease in the cost of living for the middle class and generous benefits for the aristocracy. However, working people were experiencing their worst times in the first half of the 19th century. A change came once the higher classes became aware of the problematic and the redistribution of the wealth was administered differently.⁴⁹ Afterwards, the living conditions enhanced and the standards of living started to increase. The improvements were in hygiene, housing, accessibility of education, but also in the newly gained leisure time. According to Harvie and Matthew, the diet improved, the quality of housing was upgraded, and

⁴⁵ Swisher, "Introduction: Victorian England," 11.

⁴⁶ Smith, "Child Labor," 136–137.

⁴⁷ Young, *Portrait of an Age*, 22.

⁴⁸ Swisher, "Introduction: Victorian England," 14–16.

⁴⁹ Dennis J. Mitchell, "Cost of living," in *Victorian Britain: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Sally Mitchell, (New York: Garland 1988), 194.

the most significant was the accessibility of the soap. In addition, the benefits of Trade unions were widely enjoyed, and leisure time activities such as sports or travelling were popular.⁵⁰ Put differently, the prosperous part of the working class reached the standards of the lower middle class.

As foreshadowed previously, the working class was furtherly divided, with deep differences among the groups. The prosperous part possessed many privileges, for instance, leisure time or membership in the Trade Unions, the poorer could not reach. The workmen gained steady income, thus they could afford expenditures on more than the basic needs only. A typical prosperous working-class man could be characterised as a worker who enjoyed his free time by doing sports, or travelling on trips when off work. Howsoever progressive or positive these statements seem the described lifestyle was accessible for a part of the working class only. Being a member of the Trade Union was beneficial for the prosperous yet useless for those in need. Supported by the statement of Harvie and Matthew: “Still less did it assist those more permanently disadvantaged, save for the ultimate safety net of the workhouse.”⁵¹ The poorest labourers had no changes for reaching the benefits, as the membership in Trade Unions was suspended under strict conditions. Enjoying leisure time and having enough finances to spend was not authentic for everyone. Although the overall standard of living was rising, masses of people were unable to secure basic needs. The enormous number of the poor was crucial for the development of the charitability in the Victorian era.

With poverty it is useful to mention the Poor law and its amendment of 1834. Its main aim was to relieve the paupers, yet, its accomplishments caused the opposite. According to Newman, the Poor law had advantages as well as disadvantages. It helped to employ those unable of a proper occupation. Nevertheless, it deepened the animosity in society. He continues, its main outcome was the establishment of workhouses, where people unable to support themselves worked in exchange for minimal support. The workhouses were meant to stop the unemployment, spread of illnesses, or decrease premarital pregnancy. Yet, its inhabitants were often the old, sick, and child paupers, unguilty of their doing and its consequences.⁵² Moreover, the living standards in the workhouses were lower than the standards of the poorest outside.⁵³ In the majority of cases, people searched for a different solution. Young mentions the

⁵⁰ Harvie, Matthew, *Nineteenth-century Britain: A Very Short Introduction*, 86–89.

⁵¹ Harvie, Matthew, *Nineteenth-century Britain: A Very Short Introduction*, 88.

⁵² Mark Neuman, “Poor Law,” in *Victorian Britain: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Sally Mitchell, (New York: Garland 1988), 612 – 613.

⁵³ Mark Neuman, “Workhouses,” in *Victorian Britain: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Sally Mitchell, (New York: Garland 1988), 872.

administration of the workhouses and the Poor law act was a failure. "...administration suddenly applied to a people with no idea of administration at all, the brutality that went on in some workhouses and the gorging in others..."⁵⁴ The rations in the workhouses were terrifying. As is mentioned above, the real inmates were different than expected, therefore, the deterration was insufficient, and the main purpose was not fulfilled.

In short, life in the Victorian period could be both comfortable and arduous as well. The living conditions differed enormously, in regard to the social position of the individual. Moreover, children did not experience an easy start to life.

The next chapter will introduce the historical novel and A. S. Byatt.

⁵⁴ Young, *Portrait of and age*, 52.

4. Historical novel

The definition of the term ‘historical novel’ is essential for this paper. The term is often seen as complicated, and each of the mentioned sources defines it differently. A. S. Byatt herself proclaimed:

‘I start a novel in 1961 [The Virgin in the Garden], which turned out to be the first of a quartet. I had a naïve idea of describing modern life as I was living it, day by day. Since I thought I would finish it in 1971, and in fact finished in 2001 [with a Whistling Woman], it became, willy – nilly, a historical novel.’⁵⁵

The quote proves the difficulty of the term definition and also how the author can think of the novel as a work of contemporary fiction that in time becomes a historical one.

The United States-based Historical Novel Society claims a historical novel is a publication depicting events happening more than fifty years prior to its publication. As the definition is limited, they broadened it. The label “historical novel” might be used for works of historical fiction such as alternate histories, pseudo-histories, time-slip novels, historical fantasies, and multiple-time novels as well.⁵⁶ As the first part of the definition is limiting for the author, as it means the era described must be real and set in times he does not remember, the broader definition was introduced. Thus, if the author wants to create a fictional reality based on historical facts, set not as far as fifty years ago, the label might be used. *The Children’s Book* by A. S. Byatt is an example of historical fiction, as it contains several of its attributes. However, the United-States-based Historical Novel Society is not the only source defining the historical novel.

According to Harry E. Shaw, it is not in the compositional technique, the emotional effect on the reader nor the time it was published that differentiates historical novels from the others. The main aspect is the representation of atmosphere, location, or condition. Moreover, Shaw mentions fictional probability - the actions of the character require probability adequate to the historical period of the setting. It is amplified by the usage of historical characters, events, the state of society, or the political situation. He also points out there are no limits to the number of

⁵⁵ Jonathan Walker, “An Interview with A. S. Byatt and Lawrence Norfolk,” *Contemporary Literature* 47, no. 3 (Autumn 2006): 342, accessed December 10, 2020, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4489165>.

⁵⁶ Grant Rodwell, “Defining the Historical Novel,” in *Whose History?: Engaging History Students through Historical Fiction* (South Australia: University of Adelaide Press, 2013), 47, accessed November 25, 2020, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.20851/j.ctt1t304sf.9>.

historical facts.⁵⁷ However, that would mean only limited usage of historical facts can shift a novel to the genre of a historical novel. Simply the usage of historical characters makes it historical. Nevertheless, other attributes, such as the grasp of culture or society, are often presented as well.

The origins of the historical novel date to the 19th century when they were first published. According to Barbara Foley, the historical novel developed from documentary fiction to become a subgenre later.⁵⁸ The reason for its detachment was the content of fiction. The usage of imagination is its significant attribute, and the historical facts are used only to support the credibility of the fiction. Moreover, the author was not alive during the time setting of the novel, therefore, the present culture or social climate is probably included. Quoting Lawrence Norfolk: “The history you're writing about has to have some relevance to the present; at the same time, it has to be different.”⁵⁹ Besides, the nineteenth century was an age of changes, not only in the social or economic spheres but in literature as well. Foley claims these changes influenced the authors’ interpretation of history. The characters received more focus than the historical facts, used mainly to create the context for the fictional story.⁶⁰ The idea supports the statement of history not being the most important aspect of a historical novel. The historical novel was developing afterwards as well.

The first historical novels, published during the nineteenth century, had the aspects of classical novels. According to Georg Lukács, the early historical novels were classified as common novels. The only difference was the significance of history.⁶¹ Based on the suggestion, historical novels as such did not exist. The main distinction between the ‘standard historical novel’ and the works published nowadays is the publishing time. Therefore, it is impossible to interpret them upon the same principles. Grant Rodwell claims the interpretation of the novels has to consider the present state of society and the developments it encountered.⁶² Thus, the most significant difference is the author’s time of living. A writer of the nineteenth century would create a dissimilar story than a writer of the 20th century. The attribute common for both the

⁵⁷ Harry E Shaw, “An Approach to the Historical Novel,” in *The Forms of Historical Fiction: Sir Walter Scott and His Successors* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1983), 19-22, accessed November 26, 2020, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctt207g768.5>.

⁵⁸ Barbara Foley, “The Historical Novel,” in *Telling the Truth: The Theory and Practice of Documentary Fiction* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1986), 143, accessed December 8, 2020, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctt207g5pj.9>.

⁵⁹ Walker, “An Interview with A. S. Byatt and Lawrence Norfolk,” 335.

⁶⁰ Foley, “The Historical Novel,” 144.

⁶¹ Shaw, “An Approach to the Historical Novel,” 23.

⁶² Rodwell, “The Increase of History as a Subject for Novels: Memory and the Context of Interpretation,” 55-70.

'categories' is the favourability by the wide public. Historical novels are often the main source of historical knowledge, which only amplifies its importance. Such attributes in the analysed book will be introduced later in the paper. Instead, A. S. Byatt is mentioned.

Byatt is a novelist, essayist, poet, and author of short stories. As Aller and Edwards de Campos mention, Byatt is a novelist but a critic as well. In her first work of criticism, she studied Iris Murdoch who focuses on topics typical for Byatt as well. They continue, Byatt also studied the beginnings of romanticism and its similarities with mid-twentieth-century literature. Moreover, they describe Byatt's style as 'critical storytelling'.⁶³ To contrast, another source categorises Byatt's style as "...an uneasy blend of pastiche, myth, fabulism, modernist aestheticism and academic commentary..."⁶⁴ Considering this, the topic of *The Children's Book* is not surprising. For the context of Byatt's fictional writing, her specialisation in historical novels, often set in the nineteenth or the twentieth century, is important to mention. *The Children's Book* is a typical example of Byatt's style. Yet, Byatt also writes about times more recent, for instance, the mid-20th century. As Erica Rex mentions: "Her subjects have ranged from portrayals of modern women set in struggles familiar to anyone who came of age in the 1960s and 1970s, to science, art, Victorian ghost stories, and Norse fairy tales."⁶⁵ To conclude, A. S. Byatt cannot be classified as a historical novelist only, as she is also a literature critic and writer of other genres. Byatt's historical works have common characteristics. For example, *Critical storytelling* states there are: "...illuminating parallels between *The Children's book* and several of Byatt's slightly earlier fictions..." It explains the fictional novels are also un-novelistic works representing human types.⁶⁶ All these characteristics can be well applied to the later analysed text.

In conclusion, historical novel as a genre is very complicated, which is, in fact, typical for the author of *The Children's Book* as well.

This chapter concludes the theoretical part, and the next chapter will analyse *The Children's Book* and the presentation of the Victorian charity, and the Victorian era as such.

⁶³ Alexa Alfer, Amy J. Edwards De Campos, *A.S. Byatt: Critical Storytelling* (Manchester University Press, 2010), 3, accessed December 10, 2020, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt155jh0n>.

⁶⁴ Sue Sorensen, "Something of the Eternal: A.S. Byatt and Vincent Van Gogh," *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 37, no. 1 (March 2004): 65, accessed February 23, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44030061>.

⁶⁵ Erica Rex, "The Abundant Realm: A Profile Of A.S. Byatt," *Poets & Writers* 32, no. 4, (Jul/Aug, 2004): 36, accessed February 23, 2021, <https://www.proquest.com/magazines/abundant-realm-profile-s-byatt/docview/203578159/se-2?accountid=17239>.

⁶⁶ Alfer, Edwards De Campos. *A.S. Byatt: Critical Storytelling*, 8.

5. The Victorian era in The Children's Book

The main aim of the thesis is the analysis of *The Children's Book* by A. S. Byatt. Therefore, the practical part, consisting of the following chapters, is devoted to the reflection of Victorian society in the novel. The first chapter classifies *The Children's Book* among historical novels, hence the occurrence of its attributes is examined. Moreover, it discusses Victorian values and society. The following chapter examines society's effect on the children Byatt created for her story. The practical part then continues with the diverse representation of charity A. S. Byatt incorporated into the fictional story.

Debating *The Children's book*, it is useful to think about its classification in the category of historical novels. Throughout the storyline, Byatt mentions public characters famous at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Surely, this is not the only aspect of a historical novel. As foreshadowed above, *The Children's Book* represents the genre of a historical novel, which describes a certain time era with real-time events and specific attributes of the time the story is set in. One of its characteristic features is the appearance of real characters the chosen era is typical or famous for. In *The Children's Book*, several real characters appear throughout the story, either directly or by being mentioned. Byatt introduces characters of the artistic sphere of occupation mainly, for instance, Oscar Wilde, James Barrie, Virginia Woolf, Bernard Palissy or Emmeline Pankhurst. Thus, she connects reality with her fictional story: “‘By God’, said Steying, ‘that is Wilde. I’ve heard he sits in the cafés here and takes tea from Algerian boys.’”⁶⁷ In addition, several real historical events are mentioned during the storyline, for example, the opening of the Peter Pan play. Besides, the end of *The Children's Book* is set in the horrors of WWI: “‘On July 31st Germany sent an ultimatum to Russia, and declared a *Kriegsgefahr*, danger of war, and began to mobilise its men.’”⁶⁸ As mentioned earlier in the paper, the usage of historical facts only supports the credibility of the fictional story.

Another aspect of a historical novel is the time setting of the story at least 50 years prior to the author's life. *The Children's Book* is dated in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, more specifically, it begins in the year 1895 and ends in the year 1919. In contrast, A. S. Byatt is a contemporary writer; thus, this requirement for the indication as a historical novel is fulfilled as well. Moreover, historical novels are determined by the characters' behaviour, which is

⁶⁷ Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 270.

⁶⁸ Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 577.

influenced by social approaches and values of the time setting. *The Children's Book* describes Victorian people and their values in detail. Morality, accent on education and work, or focus on family are all presented. Besides the values, Byatt confronts the reader with many situations, resolved in a manner only a Victorian would approve of. The social class presentation, or the method the issue of poverty and the attempts to abolish it are dealt with, are great examples. Byatt shows a decent number of Victorian ideals, values, and explains their process of thinking. The reputed Victorian 'frame of thinking' is explained. Thus, *The Children's Book* could be eventually regarded as a detailed study of the Victorian era, its people, and their characteristics as well. Moreover, as all the necessary attributes are included, *The Children's Book* can be categorised as a historical novel.

As foreshadowed above, the story is set in the final years of the Victorian era. The lives of numerous characters are observed throughout the story, and Victorian society is the main concern of the book. The focus is primarily on the upper middle class which is represented by the main characters, yet the working class is also greatly significant. The upper class is introduced via historical characters in the sub context of the storyline; therefore, it is not as important for the overall message of the book. The members of the upper class are usually members of the aristocracy as well: "In 1911 King George V was crowned in Westminster Abbey on June 22nd in the middle of the longest hottest summer the country had known."⁶⁹ As pointed out above in the theoretical part, the upper class was significant for the maintenance of the traditional stratification of the society, as well as for the monarchy. Thus, Byatt's choice for introducing it in the explained manner is understandable. She is, however, the most fascinated by the strongest and the most plentiful class, the middle class. At least, her characters are mostly of this class.

The middle class is depicted by the main characters. Those are four families and a few others, all connected through complicated relationships - they are either friends, neighbours, lovers, colleagues, or tutors. The Wellwood, the Cain, and the Fludd families are members of the upper middle class. They are secured enough with their finances, thus they can take care of their families and often grandeur housing: "Todefright was an old Kentish farmhouse, built of stone and timber. It had meadows and a river before it, woods rising uphill behind it..."⁷⁰ Another attribute of the middle class is in their professions. These characters work either in the sphere

⁶⁹ Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 557.

⁷⁰ Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 17.

of art or services. As previously stated, the upper middle class usually exercised more respectable professions. Writers, artists, or bankers could be well-classified among these jobs. Olive and Humphry Wellwood are a perfect example: “Olive Wellwood was the wife of Humphry Wellwood, who worked in the Bank of England, and was an active member of the Fabian Society. She was the author of a great many tales, for children and adults...”⁷¹ Other characters are artists as well, The Fludds, are potters, Augustus Steying works in a theatre, and Major Cain in a museum: “Julian Cain was at home in the South Kensington Museum. His father, Major Prosper Cain, was Special Keeper of Precious Metals.”⁷² The spectre of occupations indicates different priorities among the social classes. The members of the upper and middle classes did not lack necessities. Therefore, their energy could be spent on other activities, including art, education, and other services. Moreover, the relations among people of the same interests could be analysed as another Victorian characteristic. The profuse establishment of societies and unions was typical for Victorians, as is explained earlier. *The Children’s Book* refers to the Fabians, but also Anarchists, the Women’s suffrage movements, or the Anti-Vivisection movement: “The year 1881 was a year of beginnings. A number of idealists, millenarian projects and groups were founded. There were the Democratic federation, the Society for Physical research, the Theosophical Society, the Anti-Vivisection movement.”⁷³ Thus, the membership of the characters in such societies or communities is not surprising. The working class has its place in Byatt’s novel as well.

In contrast to the middle class, the working class appears. Their issues and interests are reflected either by the Warren siblings, who are children of factory workers, or the profuse discussion of the already mentioned characters about poverty, or relations among the workers and their employers. The story of the Warren siblings is more thoroughly described in the following chapter. However, the whole class is mentioned in the sub context of *The Children’s Book* more, similarly to the upper class. Byatt focuses on the class differences, however, her characters are often of the middle class. Thus, the contemplations about the class differences, as well as the Victorian issues are presented in the viewpoint of the wealthier members of the society. Often, Byatt depicts the living conditions as seen by the main characters. Therefore, their opinions are that such a state is dreadful:

Much had been done, much that was valuable, by those who had gone out amongst the starving and the derelict and had reported on crowded rooms in unsanitary

⁷¹ Byatt, *The Children’s Book*, 10.

⁷² Byatt, *The Children’s Book*, 3.

⁷³ Byatt, *The Children’s Book*, 33.

buildings, dead and dying crowded together, the sickness of sweat-shop and lucifer workers. He read out a description of the appalling, rapid descent into penury and death of a good worker who injured his back.⁷⁴

The quote only supports the idea of the working class being observed as the lowest point of society, and the workers being fully dependent upon their employers. The whole topic of class differences is closed at the end of the book.

Charles Wellwood, an anarchist and a socialist, is interested in the working class and fascinated by Carl Marx and the idea of socialism and communism. Thus, he deals with hatred towards his social class. In fact, he considers the newly appearing strikes of the workmen as a national crisis: “He found it perilously easy to hate the whole of his own class – his mind was full of visions of over-bread chows and borzois, Cochin fowl with useless feet and nattering voices.”⁷⁵ Concluding upon the quote, part of the Victorian society saw the members of the middle and the upper classes as useless people. Contrastingly, the working men were celebrated as the ones who allowed the development and progress of the country. However, the disparity of the social classes was not the only issue of the Victorian Era, as Byatt is well aware of. Besides the class differences, a significant part of the book examines Victorian values together with the issues of the Victorian era.

The whole grasp of Victorianism in *The Children's Book* could be introduced by a quote Byatt incorporated in the story: “The Victorians were earnest, even about being merry, said the Edwardian young man.”⁷⁶ Aside from the overall image of serious Victorianism, Byatt also contemplates the more specific values of morality, respectability, or charitability. Contrary to the creditable values, she also frequently refers to the hypocrisy, self-interest, or the decrease in the previously mentioned values in individuals. Throughout the novel, the Victorian values reflect in all of the characters. One of the most praised Victorian values is the accent on the importance of life purpose, often seen in education, work, and success: “Olive and Humphry had both already completed their writing stints, around dawn, before breakfast.”⁷⁷ Victorians could be labelled as workaholics. In *The Children's Book*, the accent on a purposeful future is rather apparent, moreover, a significant part of Byatt's work was concerned with the development of an individual's self. Sometimes, work prevails the family life, even for women. Olive Wellwood, for instance, is a respected and favoured author. She focuses on her writing

⁷⁴ Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 437.

⁷⁵ Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 559.

⁷⁶ Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 340.

⁷⁷ Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 36.

to such an extent, she transfers the care of her children to her sister Violet: “Whilst Olive wrote her stories, Violet instructed the smaller children on the lawn.”⁷⁸ Besides the work there is the self-development, also reached through studies. All the children of the middle class are expected to acquire respectable job positions, or at least maintain their position in society. The suitable manner for them to choose when aspiring to fulfil these expectations is the already mentioned education. In fact, education is a significant part of *The Children's Book*. Furthermore, its importance in connection to a job or a position in society is hugely emphasised. The characters are tutors, teachers at universities, or lecturers educating the public about Victorian issues: “Miss Dace proposed a lecture on prostitution and the injustice in the differing ways which women and men were treated...”⁷⁹ The education of children differs based on their social status and family background.

In conclusion of the chapter, Byatt presents all the attributes of Victorian society, as well as incorporated many of the characteristics of a historical novel. She accents the importance of Victorian values but also mentions the presence of self-interest and hypocrisy, typical for the Victorian era as well.

The children of the story are the concern of another chapter, followed by the introduction of Byatt's depiction of Victorian issues in the analysed book.

⁷⁸ Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 91.

⁷⁹ Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 119.

6. The effect of Victorianism on children

The concern of the sixth chapter is the impact of Victorian values and attributes on the children of the era, as depicted by Byatt in her novel. Firstly, the middle-class children are examined, followed by the mentioning of the poorer children.

The wealthier children of the Wellwood family, the Fludd siblings, or the children of Major Cain are of the middle class, thus their education is a priority. They are sent either to boarding schools or educated at home, regarding their age: “He [Tom] lived at home and was home-tutored, though Basil and Humphry were planning for him to do the Marlow scholarship exams next spring.”⁸⁰ Another condition for acquiring education, be it for the middle- or upper-class child, was often the gender, which was another precondition for the accessibility of studies. Similarly, to the overall distribution of roles in society, the possibilities in education for boys and girls differed. The expected fields of studies were divided according to it. The girls in *The Children’s Book* are expected to study literature, humanistic subjects, embroidery even. However, Dorothy wants to become a surgeon: “‘Can women be doctors?’ ‘There are some. It’s hard, I think, to get the training.’ She paused. ‘People don’t think women should work.’ Philip wanted to say, ‘My mum works, she has to.’”⁸¹ The fact Dorothy managed to reach the desired training is supporting the increase in acceptance of women’s rights, discussed regularly in the Victorian era. The situation for boys appeared much more unchallenging. They could decide upon their focus of studies voluntarily, and in the majority of cases gained huge support. Yet, the drawbacks occurred once a boy was not overly enthusiastic about the education or was not a study type at all. Other complications often appeared in the boarding schools, where the relations were not in accordance with the Victorian values of morality or respectability.

Following up on the previous thought, Byatt considers the popularity of the boarding schools: “In September 1896 Tom put on his spanking new uniform and got into the train at King’s Cross, with crowds of other Marlowe boys.”⁸² The relations in the boarding schools were another issue of the Victorian era. Although respectability and cultivated manners were highly praised, they were not typical features of the young men attending these schools. *The Children’s Book* explains it through Thomas Wellwood, a handsome young man interested in nature, rather than education. Nevertheless, he is sent to a boarding school, where he experiences physical

⁸⁰ Byatt, *The Children’s Book*, 47.

⁸¹ Byatt, *The Children’s Book*, 63.

⁸² Byatt, *The Children’s Book*, 195.

and mental abuse. Byatt describes the relations in detail: “...what must you say when they beat you? Say thank you, because it’s good for you, or we’ll beat you a lot more.”⁸³ Though the boarding schools aimed to tutor well-behaved men, the reality was the exact opposite. Thus, the presence of hypocrisy in Victorian society is proved once again.

Continuing with the situation of these children and the impact of Victorianism on their lives, it was not evitable, despite appearing preferable to those of the poorer children, introduced later. The main barrier for those children is the predestination of their lives. Although they are encouraged to decide upon their future independently, their possibilities are limited. Quoting *The Children’s Book*: “...the elders began asking the young what they meant to do with their lives, and to project futures for them.”⁸⁴ The expected answer from a boy is to study and then get a respectable job position. Girls are often visualised as wives or housekeepers, ‘angles in the house’ should be the term used, although studies are also possible. Moreover, the pressure on an individual could be overly forceful and lead to desperate decisions, as Byatt manifests through the story of Thomas Wellwood, as well as some others. Thomas’s interests and plans differ from the expectations of his parents. He loves nature and wants to work in the woods, which was unsuitable for a man of his social class. Therefore, he is unwell in his position and commits suicide later: “He was still walking, in his socks, on the pebbles, soaked to the skin, when he slipped, and the wave threw him into the current. He didn’t fight.”⁸⁵ The pressure of society and strict rules supported by Victorian values were of great impact on anyone of different beliefs. The differences in the situation of the working-class children are introduced by the Warren siblings.

Inversely to the social expectations, the concern of the working-class children, or children of the poor, was child labour followed by insufficient life conditions and other consequences of poverty, such as orphanacy, illnesses, or death. Byatt mentions the children working in households or factories, rather than the more frequent work of children in mines. Elsie and Phillip Warren, prior to their mother’s death, both experienced the horrors of working in a pottery factory:

‘I come from Burslem. I work in t’potteries.’ A long pause. ‘I run off, that’s it, I ran away.’ His face was solid. ‘Your parents work in the potteries?’ ‘Me dad’s dead.

⁸³ Byatt, *The Children’s Book*, 196.

⁸⁴ Byatt, *The Children’s Book*, 52.

⁸⁵ Byatt, *The Children’s Book*, 533.

He were a saggar-maker. Me mum works in th' paint-shop. All of us work there, one way or another. I loaded kilns.'⁸⁶

Their mother died of poor health caused by the awful environment in the potteries, as described earlier in the paper. Her job and skills, on the other hand, enabled Phillip to develop his art of pottery and become a successful potter, which aided him and his sister Elsie with improving their living conditions. However, work was not the life fulfilment to all the children of the poorer class. A not negligible amount of such children attended school as well, as is depicted in *The Children's Book*, eventually.

Gaining education and thus a finer future was significantly easier for the children of the middle or upper class than for the children of the working-class families. As pointed out earlier, the education fee was abolished no sooner than in the 1890s. Although it was compulsory, not every family could afford a proper education. If the poor children acquired some education, it was not of first-rate quality. Byatt comments on the issue by the Warren siblings. They are not well-educated. Phillip can barely read: “‘Philip said he was afraid that would be no use. His reading was not up to it. He added, reddening, ‘It’s not up to much, to tell the truth. I can make out simple words, that’s all.’”⁸⁷ Based upon the quote, for the lower-class education was not a priority. The children were sent to work to help with the family budget, rather than gaining an education.

As mentioned earlier, Victorianism did not appear exactly when the Queen ascended to the throne, nor ended with the Queen’s death. The values were evolving long before as well as after that. Victorianism was not based on time, but on people therefore, distinctions in opinions are expectable. Slowly, the opinions of the children are distinguished from their parents’. The approaches and priorities of the generation of children are incredibly different from their parents. In fact, at the beginning of *The Children's Book*, Byatt states those children must have been different, as the way of their upbringing was not the same:

Children in these families, at the end of the nineteenth century, were different from children before or after. They were neither dolls nor miniature adults. They were not hidden away in nurseries, but present at family meals, where their developing characters were taken seriously and rationally discussed, over supper or during long country walks. And yet, at the same time, the children in this world had their own separate, largely independent lives, as children. ⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 13.

⁸⁷ Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 132.

⁸⁸ Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 29.

The different representation of values or attributes is concluded with the ending of the story when the children reach adulthood. For example, Hedda Wellwood becomes a suffragette: “Hedda Wellwood, who had sat up late at night embroidering and hemming the banners, marched with the women, and turned a white face, full of contempt, towards the hecklers.”⁸⁹ As the story is set at the end of the Victorian era, the Victorian values weaken. Moreover, the strict attempts for maintaining these values caused the drawbacks of the Victorian era. As is mentioned in the theoretical part, hypocrisy, as well as the other decadent aspects, were huge disbenefits of Victorian society. Besides these, society was confronted with several other problems as well.

Byatt ponders about the issues of immorality on multiple occasions: “‘Take your pick, Philip,’ said Benedict Fludd. ‘They can teach you a thing or two. They are good girls. I know them well.’”⁹⁰ As obvious from the quote, one of them is the problematic of sexuality. The influence of morality and the importance of work and education were restraining individualistic freedom, which might be the cause for people acting oppositely to the set norms. Prostitution, infidelity, or homosexuality, also mentioned in *The Children’s Book*, were not uncommon:

Julian’s imaginings were sexual, not political. He considered Susskind’s hay-coloured moustache and did not think it would be pleasant to be kissed by him. He considered Charles’s sharp blonde slimness, and decided that Susskind was probably in love with Charles, as teachers tended to be in love with self-assured, eager boys.⁹¹

Expressing sexuality and intimacy was not supported by the public, as it was seen as self-indulgence. Jointly with morality, religiousness, and responsibility, despising the physical activities was obvious. Moreover, Byatt mentions differences in women’s and men’s sexuality as well as their rights. As stated in the theoretical part of the paper, an upper-, or middle-class woman was the ‘angle in the house’ and thus she was supposed to be pure with no sexual desire. This image is represented as well: “He [Herbert Methley] said that until recently it had suited men to suppose that women felt little or no desire, were pure creatures or milch cows, that men treated as property.”⁹² Yet, later it is explained how the perception of women is changing, they are gaining more rights and are less dependent on their husbands.

⁸⁹ Byatt, *The Children’s Book*, 567.

⁹⁰ Byatt, *The Children’s Book*, 273.

⁹¹ Byatt, *The Children’s Book*, 249.

⁹² Byatt, *The Children’s Book*, 212.

As the main focus of the novel is aimed at children, sexuality is also influencing their lives, often in opposition to the morally acceptable manner. Byatt indirectly refers to child abuse, not only mental but also physical and sexual. For instance, in the Fludd house, a pantry full of naked representations of Pomona's and Imogen's body parts is found:

The pots were obscene chimaeras, half vessels, half human. They had a purity and clarity of line, and were contorted into every shape of human sexual display and congress. [...] There were pairs of figures, in strenuous possible and impossible embraces, gentle, terrible. Some of them had Imogen's long face and drooping shoulders: some of them were plump Pomona.⁹³

Moreover, Byatt also draws attention to the boarding schools, dealt both with sexual as well as mental abuse. Yet, the boarding school relations were introduced earlier. Another phenomenon was premarital children. Byatt is mentioning the problem on several occasions, as more characters are dealing with the issue.

The issue of children of unmarried pairs is, apart from Elsie Warren who is accented in this case, also connected with Florence Cain, Olive, or Humphry: "I'm Violet's daughter. Someone – not me – had been listening into things.' 'Well someone had been garbling 'things'. You're not Violet's child. Phyllis is. And Florian. You're Olive's daughter. But not mine.'"⁹⁴ Despite the morals and rather exaggerative levels of chastity, typical for the Victorians, the affairs were not unusual in *The Children's Book*. Being a married couple with children did not mean all the children had the same parents. One example for all is Herbert Methley, husband to the previously mentioned Phoebe Methley. Although he is married and lectures about sexuality, he is the one to seduce Elsie Warren. In conclusion, the relations of the characters are complicated. Based on the quotes, the question of love and sexuality, in relation to Victorian values, was in strong contrast.

Byatt also devotes a significant part of the story to the issue of poverty. The prosperous characters are aware of it and they are disgusted with the living conditions of the poor: "He described the three million people swarming in the fetid wilderness beyond the Bank, without food or clothes to keep them in health, or beds to sleep in."⁹⁵ Based on the quote, Victorians were rather thoughtful people. The members of the upper and middle classes surely wanted to abolish poverty, yet, financial or materialistic help was overbalanced by ideas, laws, and reforms. They discuss and study poverty, rather than solve it. Quoting Byatt: "And what do

⁹³ Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 279.

⁹⁴ Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 345.

⁹⁵ Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 58.

you want to know?’ asked Skinner, Socratic. ‘Things about life. Why are the poor poor? What is wrong with us?’”⁹⁶ Victorians wanted to abolish poverty by scientific approaches and efforts in changing the morality of the poor.

To conclude, the children were influenced by the Victorian period hugely. The issues were reflecting in their lives, and the hypocrisy of the Victorian people was significant in their upbringing. The question of resolving the problem of poverty, in connection to education, is debated. Studying the poor and attempting to increase their morality was just another attribute of the Victorians and their love for knowledge.

Nevertheless, the whole topic of charities and Victorian charitability, as presented in *The Children’s Book*, is in the concern of the next chapter.

⁹⁶ Byatt, *The Children’s Book*, 168.

7. Charitability in The Children's Book

In Byatt's work, the question of the Victorian selflessness, abolishment of poverty, and the overall approach towards help to the poor or experiencing difficulties in securing their necessities are all severely polemised upon. She introduces the charitability in a great spectrum of samples, for instance, through straightforward financial help, but also via support, which is only very subtle at first. Furthermore, Byatt considers the attempts for the change in moral aspects the charities aimed for.

In connection to charitability, the members of the upper and middle classes were motivated by a higher moral authority to provide help for those in need and supply them with basic living and social needs. Financial contributions to charities were not unique, and those not struggling with a lack of money often send sums to charitable associations. Such acts were usually reckoned as respectability in practice. Yet, Byatt reflects on the fact the wealth of some and the poverty of many was often criticised: "Think, said Humphry provocatively, tilting his champagne glass at his brother, how much of what you regard as personal necessities can be purchased for £12 os od. Basil did not feel able to mention the considerable moneys he disbursed to charities."⁹⁷ Extrapolating from the quote, the differences in the approaches of the Victorians are well explained. On one side, there were those aware of the uneven contribution of materialistic property and wealth but unwilling to donate some of their property. On the other side, many individuals, as well as organisations, were helping those in need, both materialistically and financially. Taking the Victorian values of morality and respectability into consideration, the primary intentions behind charitable help were selflessness and the urge to help. However, the severally mentioned hypocrisy was rooted deep inside the society. People might have been in sought of a better appearance in the public's eye as well. However, this was a matter of an individual, rather than the whole society. The hypocrisy and pretending to be better were characteristic of the Victorian period. Though some parts of the society tried to abolish anything improper, the others behaved oppositely. In other words, there was a great amount of insincerity and hypocrisy towards the values and each other.

However, the charitability is presented not only in the manner of helping with the financial issues. Byatt decided to show its importance while resolving other issues of Victorianism as well. Thus, charitability is also taking participation in the approach towards the issue of children

⁹⁷ Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 58.

of unmarried couples or sexuality as such. As mentioned in the previous chapter, sexuality was a commonly discussed issue of the Victorian Era. Then, besides other aid, charities aimed to increase the morality of the poor. As charities were generally established upon religious values, their approach towards sexuality is not surprising. Byatt depicted the topic brilliantly. In fact, a considerable amount of *The Children's Book* is focused on the problematic of women and their rights. However, the women's right and role of a Victorian woman was examined earlier. Apart from these, Byatt mentions the premarital children, or children of unmarried couples, and connects them with charitability.

One of them is Elsie Warren: "She was going to have a baby. [...] She would have, she said, in a steely way, to find one of those places for Fallen Women..."⁹⁸ Nevertheless, she is helped out by women who support women's rights – Miss Dace, Phoebe Methley, and Mrs Oakeshott. They help her to avoid the place for 'fallen women' and offer her an alternative in a nursing home, where they protect women in her situation: "She said that she and the Sister in charge of the Forget-me-not Home had together arranged several successful adoptions, quite quietly."⁹⁹ This way, Byatt represents charitability. The main provider of the charitable help was The Church, as is mentioned earlier. The method Elsie's issue is dealt with, however, is untypical for the period. In reality, a woman expecting a child, while not married or engaged was often sent to workhouses or Charity houses. The story of Elsie Warren, and thus of her brother, Phillip is interesting in other viewpoints as well.

Both the siblings are children of working-class parents, and therefore they do not have many chances for improving their lives. Both are destined to work in a factory, as their parents and other siblings do, to earn minimal wages for covering their necessities. Elsie's prospects are even more limited than Phillip's. The poor women in the Victorian era could decide whether to become a part of the decadent side of the Victorian society and provide sexual services, marry a wealthy man, which was not usual, or work in a factory or a workhouse. Quoting *The Children's Book* directly:

What other ways of earning their bread did most women have, other than selling their bodies, Goldman asked. How could you blame a woman who was a servant kept to herself a cellar, or a labourer at a factory bench, for wanting human warmth

⁹⁸ Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 317.

⁹⁹ Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 318.

and better nourishment, yes, and pretty clothes. Wages were so low that married women sold themselves too.”¹⁰⁰

Often, there was no other option for securing a livelihood, however, the situation of Victorian poor women was explained above. In the case of Phillip, he had not much to choose from, yet being a man places him in a higher social position. However, the inequality in rights of women and men was already examined. Returning to the topic of charitability, Byatt uses historical facts, more specifically the Victorian value of charitability, and in her story, she introduces another approach towards charitable help.

Phillip was saved by Thomas Wellwood and Julian Cane, who found him in a museum. He was hiding as he escaped from the pottery factory. ““You must come and explain yourself to my father.’ ‘Oh, your *father*. Who’s he then? ’He’s Special Keeper of Precious Metals.’ Oh, I see.’ ‘You must come along with us.’ ‘I see I must.’”¹⁰¹ By taking Phillip home, discovering his art skills and pottery talent, they provide him with a better future. He stays, and with Benedict Fludd, he learns and improves his pottery skills: “There came a day when Fludd invited him to sit at the wheel and throw a pot. Fludd centred the ball of clay for him, and Philip put his wet square hands on it, and depressed the centre.”¹⁰² His previous life is not furtherly mentioned until his sister appears. Once the mother of the Warren siblings dies, Elsie decides to find her brother, Phillip. Thus, once Elsie locates Phillip, it is obvious she will not leave. Although she acquires the role of a housekeeper, she still has a better predisposition for her future life, rather than she would have in the pottery factory. The idea of children choosing the way of improving their lives through hard work might be understood as a Victorian value. Yet, the chapter is dealing with charitability, and now the charitability in this part of the story will be explained. In this case, the fact a wealthy family does not hesitate to help children, orphans in fact, of the working class is a method of assistance. They offer them a job, a purpose, and provide them with a home. Outcoming from the idea, Byatt once again presents an aid that is not in the matter of finances. In other words, it is proved that charitability was present in the whole of Victorian society and was dependent rather on individuals and their approaches, than on the society as a whole.

Following up on the idea foreshadowed in the previous paragraph and reacting to the aim of the paper, the Victorian charitability and its selflessness, as presented in *The Children’s Book*, is

¹⁰⁰ Byatt, *The Children’s Book*, 258.

¹⁰¹ Byatt, *The Children’s Book*, 7.

¹⁰² Byatt, *The Children’s Book*, 128.

now debated. Surely, a majority of the characters do represent the rather moral and respectable approach towards the provision of help, yet, acting oppositely is also indicated. Byatt reflects on the fear of poverty and its consequences, be it the spread of illnesses due to poor hygiene, or criminal activity caused by insufficient wages: "...it was absurd for the middle classes to live in fear, as they did, of the dirty and desperate armies in the sinks of their towns."¹⁰³ In *The Children's Book*, she confronts the reader with the thoughts of the middle-class characters:

He [Charles] had been moving amongst those who believed that only a revolution of the underdogs would bring about any change in the gruesome system. Everyone bothered about the poor. His parents' friends truly held the belief that the undeserving poor should be sequestered in concentration camps and reformed, reconstructed or even – in the case of imbeciles and madmen – charitably put to death.¹⁰⁴

Based upon the quote, the middle class's belief in its right choice is proved. Moreover, as the poor do not respond to the image of proper and respectable Victorians, the wealthy are afraid of its possible consequences. The solution, surely, is radical. Besides, Byatt presents the self-interest, hidden behind the creditable acts of charity. On the other hand, self-interest was not represented by fear only but also based on a certain level of pretending to care. As mentioned severely, the numerous discussions about the issue of poverty, and the need for the redistribution of wealth, signalled the desire for the praiseworthiness of the individual and the better appearance in the public. Contrastingly, the creditable approaches towards charity and its disinterestedness are also visible in *The Children's Book*, and its concrete examples are in fact presented in the previous paragraphs of this chapter.

To finish the practical part of the paper, *The Children's Book* is a complex study of the ending Victorian era and its society, with the main focus on children and social issues. The ideal preconditions for a child are discussed but not determined. On one hand, there are children of the upper class with pre-planned lives, on the other, the children of the poor, having only a little chance for improving their lives. Besides, the Victorian values and approaches were of great influence on the lives of all the children. Moreover, Byatt also studies Victorian values, focusing on charity, women, and class differences the most. The charity is examined in relation to its disinterestedness, but also in relation to the self-interest behind charitable acts.

¹⁰³ Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 438.

¹⁰⁴ Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 437.

8. Conclusion

The thesis was aimed at the analysis of *The Children's Book* by A. S. Byatt. Its main focus was on children, Victorian values, and issues of the era. The impact of Victorian values on children, as well as charitability, and insincerity in charitable actions are discussed thoroughly. The analysis is based upon the academic research provided in the theoretical part of the thesis and delivers a conclusion in accordance with the discussed attributes and approaches of Victorian society. The outcome of the paper is the Victorian society being hugely affected by hypocrisy and pretending to be finer from reality.

Firstly, the overall characterisation of the Victorian era is commented on, with all the aspects influencing its final form. It mentions significant events and people, but also the development and progress characteristic of the Victorian era. Although Victorianism is associated with progress, the paper proves the circumstances allowing Britain to become a world power were evident long before. Then, Victorian society is introduced. The British society in the Victorian era was fragmented, concluding upon its division into classes and establishment of numerous societies. The individualistic groups were influencing each other, as well as the whole Victorian society and its values. The working class was necessary for the development of the factories and the consecutive increases in production, the middle class was needed for the management of workers, new professions, or in the sphere of charities. Finally, Britain is commonly associated with a strong belief in traditions, and therefore, the existence of the upper class or aristocracy was hugely important.

Secondly, Victorian values are presented. Their origin and importance for social development are explained. As the Victorians valued work and productivity, the effects of development on the industry, but also on the people, are obvious. Combined with the values of morality, respectability, and charitability, they created an image of a flawless society with no downsides. However, such a society still had individuals behaving in opposition to the established values. Deducting from this, hypocrisy and insincerity were both greatly significant for Victorian society. Moreover, the Victorian era is known for a number of major issues, often arising from the Victorian approaches. These issues were usually overlooked as there was no interest in solving them. The pretending of the non-existence of prostitution and the late resolutions for the problems of education or social welfare are notable examples.

The next chapter discusses the situation of the working class and the Victorian children as Byatt's novel focuses on the differences between classes and their children. Their living conditions, stratifications of the working class, and the changes it went through during the nineteenth century are presented. Moreover, the state of education and future possibilities for the poor, as well as the wealthier, are discussed. The popularity of child labour in Victorian times is also mentioned.

The theoretical part is closed with the definition of the term historical novel. Its problematic is explained and further examined, as well as its origins and current situation. Afterwards, the author of the analysed book, A. S. Byatt is introduced. *The Children's book* is categorised in the context of Byatt's work, and similarities to her other novels or literary works are explained.

The practical part of the paper is the analysis of *The Children's Book*. Byatt deliberates many problems and topics, starting with poverty and ending with the post-war depression and the Lost Generation. However, the main focus is on Victorian values, society, and children. The story provides the reader with a detailed and comprehensive study of Victorian society, mainly the middle and the working class. As the book is dealing with multiple topics, there is not only one outcome. The topics are discussed via children, who deal with the expectation of society, their family background, and the limitation of life choices. Moreover, the influence of Victorianism on their lives is examined. Their opinions differ from their parents', therefore, their choices are often misunderstood. Not only the generational disagreements but also the hypocrisy is affecting them. The urge to appear better is often presented, and the children grow up surrounded by people acting contrary to their values. The bullying, infidelity, abuse, and hypocrisy are only the tip of the iceberg, all of them being proof of the drawbacks of Victorian society. Through the stories of the working-class children, Byatt discusses the possibility for a better life and the shift in the social position via work. Moreover, she presents the differences between the social classes and also points out the significance of charities. The last practical chapter deals with another idea emerging from the story, which is the selflessness within charitable organisations. Its diverse presentation within the book proves there was not only one form of it. Besides, the real reasons for supporting charities were often not morally and selflessly motivated, but based on the fear of the wealthier.

The analysis was concluded by the deduction that hypocrisy was rooted deep inside the Victorian people, and Victorian society was not as selfless, especially in charitability, but also in other aspects of their life.

Resumé

Tato práce byla zaměřena především na analýzu díla autorky A. S. Byattové *The Children's Book*. Byattová je významná britská autorka historických románů, která se dále vedle již zmíněných historických románů věnuje autorství básní, pohádek a také práci literární kritičky. Svá díla nejčastěji zasazuje do vzdálenější historie, nicméně často píše i o 20. století, kdy prožila své mládí. Ani v případě *The Children's Book* tomu není jinak. V jednom z jejích nejúspěšnějších děl se Byattová zabývá problematikou stratifikace viktoriánské společnosti. Zkoumá v něm viktoriánské hodnoty, vztah k dobročinnosti, ale také osudy dětí, a vliv této společnosti na jejich životy. Viktoriánská éra by se dala charakterizovat především jako doba neuvěřitelného pokroku. Hlavním motorem společnosti byla bezpochyby průmyslová revoluce. Ačkoli se nejvíce projevila právě v průmyslu, kde změnila výrobní postupy a zvýšila celkovou produktivitu, měla průmyslová revoluce vliv na konečnou podobu celé viktoriánské společnosti.

Vedlejšími důsledky průmyslové revoluce byly mimo jiné rozdělení společnosti, krize v zemědělství a následně i urbanizace. Zemědělství v tomto období procházelo úpadkem, který byl způsoben mechanizací výrobních procesů. Mnoho farmářů a rolníků přišlo o práci, a tak byli nuceni hledat způsob obživy ve městech, která se rozvíjela neuvěřitelnou rychlostí. Mobilita lidí směrem do měst měla mnohé dopady. Vedle již zmíněné urbanizace to byl vznik společenských tříd. Střední a dělnická třída jsou považovány za největší úspěchy průmyslové revoluce. Obě tyto třídy představovaly většinovou společnost Británie v 19. století. Zatímco střední třída by se dala považovat za tu, která v době vlády královny Viktorie nejvíce prosperovala, u dělnické třídy už byla situace poněkud odlišná. Jelikož byla střední třída produktem průmyslové revoluce, měla největší vliv na průmysl. Tito lidé získali své postavení především díky svým karierním úspěchům. Angažovali se ve výrobních procesech, kdy řídili různé továrny či výroby, ale také v oblasti služeb, například v obchodech, financích, umění či vzdělávání. Všechny tyto sféry zažívaly v 19. století rozmach. Mimo to byla střední třída také udavatelem společenských hodnot, názorů a očekávání viktoriánské doby. Naproti tomu dělnická třída se v takto dobré situaci nenacházela. I uvnitř této společenské třídy byli patrně rozdíly mezi více a méně prosperujícími jedinci. Byli zde ti, kteří dosahovali na vybraná privilegia střední třídy, ale také ti, kteří přežívali v otřesných podmínkách londýnských slumů či útulcích pro chudé.

Jak již bylo nastíněno, viktoriánské hodnoty byly založeny na vlastnostech charakteristických pro střední třídu. Přístupy a názory těchto lidí formovaly celou společnost, tudíž je možné

prohlásit střední třídu za tu s největším vlivem, alespoň ve sféře viktoriánských hodnot a přístupů. Hodnoty, které byli nejvíce akcentované, byli mravnost, zodpovědnost, pracovitost, dobročinnost či váženost. Váženost byla často dosažena právě skrze tvrdou práci. Tu pak mohla následovat dobročinnost. Jakmile byl člověk kariérně úspěšný a finančně zajištěný, mohl se věnovat charitativní činnosti, což byl další ze způsobů, jak dosáhnout váženosti. Ačkoli všechny tyto vlastnosti působí jako charakteristiky bezchybné společnosti, i viktoriánská éra měla své stinné stránky.

Viktoriáni jsou často považováni za pokrytce, kteří se vykreslovali v mnohem lepším světle, než byla skutečnost. Pravým důvodem pro neúnavnou pracovitost, příkladnou morálku či pomoc chudším byla právě ona vysněná váženost. Ti, kteří se angažovali v charitativních činnostech, často nekonali úplně nezištně. Jedním z cílů charit bývala, kromě materiální a finanční pomoci, také snaha o ovlivňování a manipulaci chudiny. To mohlo být důvodem pro potlačení chudoby jako takové či zabránění jejímu dalšímu šíření. Jak je ale patrné z románu *The Children's Book*, šlo i o jistou formu ochrany před tou částí společnosti, kterou vážené obyvatelstvo opovrhovalo, a zároveň jej děsila. Tyto snahy jsou patrné například v poskytování vzdělání. Vzdělání bylo poskytováno charitami či církví a nedosahovalo dostatečných kvalit. Jelikož s těmi, kteří jsou nevzdělaní či negramotní se lépe manipuluje a jsou snadno ovladatelní, vzdělání dětí chudiny se nepřikládala až taková důležitost. Kromě toho, i mezi situacemi, ve kterých se ocitaly děti, byly značné rozdíly.

Děti bohatších Viktoriánů měly často předem rozhodnuté životní osudy. Očekávalo se, že jakmile to bude možné odejdou za studii, aby v dospělosti mohli působit na důležitých pracovních místech. Takový osud byl přiřazován hlavně chlapcům. I když dívky studovat mohly, jejich životní poslání spočívalo spíše v zajištění výhodného manželství a následné péči o domov a potomstvo. Odlišný problém měly děti z dělnické třídy. Jejich rodiče si často nemohli dovolit jejich vzdělání, a tak od útlého věku pracovaly, často v otřesných podmínkách, které se projevily na jejich zdraví. Šance na zlepšení společenského postavení tak byly pouze minimální. Naproti tomu, že bylo vzdělání ve Viktoriánských dobách značně podporováno, ne každému se ho dostalo v požadovaném rozsahu. Důvody podpory vzdělanosti lze najít v hodnotách, které jsou uvedeny výše. Kvalitní vzdělání často znamenalo možnost dosažení významné pozice, a to jak v kariéře, tak i ve společnosti. Oblast školství však byla až do konce 19. století často opomíjena, a vzdělání bylo poskytováno především charitativními organizacemi či církví, které nedokázaly zajistit dostatečnou kvalitu. Mimo to, povinná školní docházka byla zavedena až v 80. letech 19. století, a i poté bylo požadováno školné. Výsledkem

bylo, že na vzdělání dosáhly pouze děti majetnějšího obyvatelstva. Rodiny, které už tak pouze s obtížemi zajistili základní životní potřeby, často místo toho posílaly děti do práce. To šance na lepší postavení samozřejmě nezvýšilo, a tak děti nejhudší vrstvy čekal podobný osud jako jejich rodiče.

Viktoriánské období se ale nevypořádávalo pouze s problematikou chudoby či dětskou prací. V souvislosti s již zmiňovaným pokrytectvím nelze nezmínit stinné stránky společnosti. Navenek dokonale působící společnost nevypadá jako společnost, pro kterou by bylo možné použít označení dekadentní. Nicméně, tento přívlastek je s Viktoriány často spojován. Vedle již zmíněných problémů se tak společnost musela vypořádávat i s potlačovanou sexualitou. Kromě obvyklých aférek a nespočtu nemanželských dětí byla častá i prostituce a homosexualita. Tato témata byla považována za tabu, jelikož byla v přímém rozporu s tolik váženými viktoriánskými hodnotami. I z tohoto lze vyvodit, že viktoriánská společnost byla význačná pokrytectvím.

Poslední teoretická část této práce se zabývá problematikou historických románů. Je zde nastíněno, že jedna definice platná pro všechna tato díla v podstatě neexistuje, což je způsobeno především obrovskou diverzitou a množstvím děl spadajících do této kategorie. Poslední teoretická kapitola také krátce představuje autorku *The Children's Book* A. S. Byattovou. Navíc je zde ve zkratce rozepsán rozsah její činnosti a analyzovaný román je zařazen do kontextu jejího rozsáhlého díla.

V praktické části této práce je analyzován již zmíněný román *The Children's Book*, jelikož hlavní cíl práce je právě analýza tohoto románu. Zaměřuje se především na to, jak autorka prezentuje dobročinnost a její nezištnost. Dále je rozebrána role dětí ve viktoriánské společnosti, protože celá dějová linka se věnuje především osudům dětí a rozdíly v jejich výchově způsobené příslušností ke společenské třídě. Z tohoto důvodu jsou také rozebrány hlavní charakteristické hodnoty viktoriánské společnosti, spolu s problémy, kterými se lidé tohoto období museli zabývat. Je nutné podotknout, že román sleduje příběhy mnohých postav, které jsou rozdílné, řeší rozdílné problémy a mají odlišně nastavené hodnoty. Ačkoli se povětšinou řídí stanovenými hodnotami společnosti, jejich změny v průběhu času jsou jasně zřetelné. Generace rodičů se v mnohém s názory svých dětí neshodne a naopak. Tudiž by se dílo Byattové dalo pokládat za podrobný obraz viktoriánské společnosti se všemi jejími klady i zápory.

Mimo to, že se Byattová podrobně věnuje popisu dospívání několika dětí najednou, způsobem jejich výchovy a jejich předpoklady pro budoucí život, také popisuje, jaký vliv na toto období jejich života měla celá společnost. Autorka v průběhu celého příběhu zdůrazňuje důležitost již zmiňovaných hodnot a charakteristik. Kromě velké tlaku společnosti, ale i blízkého okolí, na každé dítě v oblasti vzdělání a zajištění určitého postavení, zmiňuje Byattová také to, jak byli děti využívány i zneužívány. V *The Children's Book* se tak čtenář dozvídá i o tom, že docházelo k častému psychickému, ale i fyzickému, a dokonce sexuálnímu zneužívání dětí. A to jak ze strany rodinných příslušníků, tak například i v systému vzdělávání. To je dokázáno na popisu poměrů v internátních školách.

Dobročinnost je zobrazena hned několika způsoby. Jelikož většina postav je členy střední třídy, patří do skupiny, která by měla usilovat o pomoc. Jak již bylo zmíněno, jejich hlavní pomoc spočívá spíše v nápravě mravů a změně v hodnotách chudých, než v materialistické či finanční podpoře. Tudíž přímé přispívání charitám není tak časté jako cílené debaty a přemítání nad řešením problémů. Dále je dobročinnost patrná v případě Elsie Warrenové. Té je nabídnuta pomoc v situaci, kdy čeká nemanželské dítě a jejím jediným východiskem se zdá domov pro svobodné matky. Díky kontaktům s výše postavenými ženami je jí však umožněno dítě si ponechat a pokračovat ve svém zaměstnání. Pomocí příběhu sourozenců Warrenových Byattová také vykresluje rozdíly mezi společenskými třídami. Navzdory předpokladům se však Elsie a Philipovi podařilo vymanit z dělnické třídy.

Výsledkem analýzy je, že Byattová vytvořila obraz viktoriánské společnosti, kde se zabývá mnohými problémy. Tolik zmiňovaná dobročinnost, kladné hodnoty a morálními přístupy Viktoriánů ve výsledku nebyly až tak příkladné, a to především právě pro důvody jednání, které se neshodovaly s původním posláním charitativní pomoci. Pokrytectví bylo podstatnou částí Viktoriánů, kteří předstírali být lepšími, než ve skutečnosti byli. Kromě toho, Byattová také představila problematiku chudoby, situaci dětí, nerovnoprávnost mezi pohlavími a rozdíly mezi jednotlivými společenskými vrstvami.

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