

Quest for Recognition and Freedom in Jane Eyre

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Abstract: Jane Eyre is a reflection of the time and location in which it was published, a setting in which a girl, especially one who is considered vulnerable, must strive greatly in order to speak of her own vision of truth. A classic novel by Charlotte Bronte, presents a compelling view of Victorian period to its audience. Jane, the protagonist, grows from a child to adult, demonstrating the contrast between Victorian society life, which requires her to disregard all of her emotions, and her own private life, in which her sentiments cannot be suppressed so firmly. As she progresses through the novel, the tension between society's laws and her inner feelings becomes increasingly apparent, culminating in an outcome at the end in which she has found both a welcoming home and status while maintaining her own inner fire, a vital factor for everyone despite the time period or economic status.

This paper aims to explore how Jane's personality evolves while seeking individuality and independence and how the relations of the male characters influence her identity through a thorough reading of the novel. Although Jane longs for affection, she resists masculine dominance and remains true to herself. The feminist critique is used in the novel to study patriarchal characteristics and female identity.

Keywords: Victorian Society, Identity, Patriarchal Oppression, Freedom, Individuality

LITERATURE REVIEW

- [1] Searching for Identity and Independence in Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre- Jyoti Naresh, MIT International Journal of English Language & Literature. (This paper explains how Charlotte Bronte became known as one of the first modern female authors of her period. The creation of the character of Jane is the development of a slight woman who is simple, humble, fundamentally strong, and wise in all aspects. Jane's solitude, like the author's, established her persona, empowering her with the requisite survival skills.)
- [2] Finding One's Self in Mid-Victorian Female Gothic: "Jane Eyre", "Villette" and "Wuthering Heights"- Sandra Bollenbacher, Catalog of English Language and Literature Studies. (This paper explores the novel's main character's identity, as well as a deeper understanding of what is required of the individuals on a narrative level. It is about the protagonist Jane Eyre's personality and quest for belongingness.)
- [3] Conflict between Emotion and Passion in Jane Eyre and Through the Looking Glass- Jane Sorenson, Victorian Web. (This article examines how Jane Eyre and St. John Rivers of Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre value emotion and purpose differently. When St. John asked Jane to get married, their opposing viewpoints clash dramatically. It exemplifies the two conflicting dimensions of emotion and rationality through these individuals.)
- [4] A Journey of Reason in Jane Eyre- Vrennie, Hunni AP Blogs. (This write-up talks about how a little girl of ten, starts the journey of life trying to find her calling and 'reason', putting her needs before the satisfaction of what others want. And eventually becoming a role model for generations to come.)
- [5] Social Rejection and Final Success of Jane- Issa Alsulami, ResearchGate. (This paper goes on the lines of the social dynamics of the Victorian society and how Bronte herself, was a victim of the same. Yet she created such a powerful character – Jane, who was resilient enough to stand up to whatever obstacles came in her way to being self- sufficient and successful.)

- [6] Jane Eyre's Struggle for finding her Conscience- Kimber Trivett. (This essay talks about how one can be caged within one's own thoughts making it difficult to look out for love and emotions, which exactly happens with Jane and how she internally fights to strike a balance between things.)

INTRODUCTION

SOCIAL DYNAMICS IN THE VICTORIAN ERA

The nineteenth century saw a rigid separation of social roles between males and females, which was enforced by a slew of prejudices, laws, and religious practices. Women were marginalised and mistreated. They were not permitted to exercise their rights and were forced to obey rules already set. The country was divided into many races, categories, and other social factors; women had no freedom to voice their thoughts and ideas in public and were bound by the standards and values established by their forefathers. Women were not permitted to work independently without the approval of their husbands and fathers and were completely reliant on their spouses.

JANE'S JOURNEY THROUGH LIFE

The fight was a vital part of the early life of Jane and can be seen as the root of her struggle for freedom. Her phase of adolescence is full of challenging experiences and circumstances that both make her suffer and inspire her to fight. Being an orphan since infancy she lacks parental love and care, as well as parental security and authority, which causes real hardships for her. As a result, her spiritual struggle is an essential part of developing her personality. In several respects, she is representative of women in that culture at the time, living in poor and thrifty situations.

GATESHEAD HALL

Jane is frequently reminded that she is not a member of the Reed family while staying at Gateshead Hall. She does not match the ideal image of a little girl at the time; she has a strong moral compass and asks too many questions, qualities that are inappropriate for a little Victorian girl who was meant to be a beautiful decoration. Jane is continually abused by her older cousin, who claims the house and all that is in to be his sole property since he is the only man in the household. John also has influence over his mother, who is biased in his favour. Before she was knocked to the ground by a book thrown at her by John, she had wanted to ignore and tolerate his violence, but her rage and frustration caused her to retaliate back and engage in a verbal brawl. "I am glad you are no relation of mine. I will never call you aunt again as long as I live. I will never come to visit you when I am grown up; and if anyone asks me how I liked you, and how you treated me, I will say the very thought of you makes me sick, and that you treated me with miserable cruelty." (Bronte) Her confinement in the Red Room can be seen as a journey through the unconscious. Jane discovered she is seen as "another" by the family at Gateshead Hall, identical to the solitary characters of the moor in Bessie's tales. She knew that no matter how hard she tried to do the right thing and fulfil her responsibilities, she will not be accepted by the family. She has only herself to rely on; a terrifying conclusion for a girl of nine, but one that allowed her to be responsible overnight. Jane had confronted her feelings of superstitious beliefs as well as being totally isolated.

LOWOOD INSTITUTION

She encounters Miss Temple at Lowood institution, who becomes her mother figure. Miss Temple demonstrates to Jane, who has realized that life in Gateshead is unfair, that justice is achievable. As Mr Brocklehurst belittles Jane in front of everyone in the institution by labeling her a cheat, she is convinced that everyone will believe him, that her life at Lowood is over, and no one will bother to hear her interpretation. Miss Temple comforts Jane that she as well as the other faculty and students will remember her as the person she shows herself to be. Miss Temple said "When a criminal is accused, he is always allowed to speak in his defense. You have been charged with falsehood; defend yourself to me as

well as you can. Say whatever your memory suggests as true; but add nothing and exaggerate nothing.” (Bronte) Jane is finally motivated to do well in class and pursue her academic goals. Helen Burns is the polar opposite of Jane, but she becomes a dear friend. She is depicted as a pitiful woman who never stands up for herself and sees it as her responsibility to suffer life's injustices, hoping that she will find justice in afterlife. Jane is defiant, and her indignation needs to be expressed when she sees discrimination, such as when Helen is hit for not washing her hands as the water was freezing. “In a sense Helen is like a mother figure for Jane because she comforts her, counsels her, feeds her and embraces her.” (Suliman) Helen, though, is not a possible ideal for Jane due to her habit of giving up almost always.

THORNFIELD

Jane remained at Lowood as an educator for a few years after she finished her education. As Miss Temple departed, taking "the calm atmosphere" with her, Jane is "left in her earlier prime, starting to feel the awakening of early memories." She wished to see more of the environment outside of the walls of Lowood. (Bronte) “The position of a Victorian governess was difficult; not belonging to either family or servants and receiving conflicting messages regarding their status in the household made it an ambiguous and possibly lonely position.” (Sandra Gilbert) Mr Rochester arrives in Jane's life as a knight from a fairy tale, making a dramatic appearance in the story. Jane becomes fascinated and influenced by the Master of Thornfield shortly after knowing who he is and getting to know him; she feels they had instantly clicked. Rochester brings intellectual stimulation to her life by their evening sessions, which were previously missing. “At first, it seems as if nothing can break the tranquility of her new life. But in fact, this is where the real tests for Jane begin.” (Alsulami) Jane's relationship with Rochester is challenged by a power disparity and is unequal in various parameters. Even though Rochester explicitly states that he is older and wiser than Jane, she nevertheless challenges his authority over her during their interactions. Rochester puts Jane to the check by making up a story that he will marry Blanche Ingram, making Jane feel insecure about her appearance. She was conscious of how society and males judged women in terms of how attractive they were, and never valued simple and sober women more. Splendour, in the Victorian era was admired more than intelligence in a lady. Rochester's desire to marry Jane despite the fact that he already had a spouse and was unable to be in another lawful marriage was somewhere an attempt to deceive her. During the wedding arrangements, Jane became aware of the significant social gap and declined a nice lifestyle as Rochester's mistress. It was because, as much as she loved him and desired to be with him, she knew she would be reliant on him and, in a way, confined as a servant. And Jane valued her freedom, and she was unable to jeopardise her reputation and prestige. “As Jane grows throughout the book, one of the most important things she learns is to rule her heart with her mind. When a child at Gateshead she becomes entirely swept up in an emotional tantrum, which proves to be the most painful memory of her childhood. At the pivotal point in the plot when Jane decides to leave Rochester, she puts her love for him second to the knowledge that she cannot ethically remain with him.” (Brownell) Bertha, Rochester's insane wife, is another female character introduced. She is a hindrance to Jane's happiness because she not only reflects suppressed fury; but also prevents Jane and Rochester from marrying. To be freed, she must be dead, which occurs after Jane had left Thornfield and found the peace, connection with family and identity she had long desired and sought.

MARSH END

Jane discovers her relatives and realises she is actually part of a family. Jane is displaced and without belongings after fleeing Thornfield. She wanders alone, cold, and starving. She represents “the nameless, placeless and contingent status of women in a patriarchal society.” (Sandra Gilbert) St. John is a third character that draws forth Jane's romantic side and demonstrates her commitment to seeking a relationship that allows her to both offer and gain unfiltered love. Bronte's character exemplifies the need for fame and consciousness that some people have at the risk of genuine emotion. “As his curate, his

comrade, all would be right ... But as his wife – at his side always, and always restrained, and always checked – forced to keep the fire of my nature continually low, to compel it to burn inwardly and never utter a cry, though the imprisoned flame consumed vital after vital – this would be unendurable.” (Bronte) While Jane has made a bunch of good friends in St. John's sisters, she also sees herself falling victim to St. John's rational consideration. His wedding proposal urges Jane to sacrifice her feelings in order to satisfy her moral obligation as established by Victorian culture, but this way of life was certainly not meant for her. “St. John feels that the proposed union would be logical; he reasons that Jane would be the perfect fit as a missionary wife and entreats her to simplify her various [feelings and thoughts]. ... After listening to her adamant statement, St. John shows little emotion, except for a pair of compressed lips, and once again responds very calmly by reasoning why he did not deserve that statement” (Sorenson) . St John continued to insist that she is meant to be a missionary's wife and this is what God also wants to happen. “His arguments of duty and service called by God are difficult to object to for Jane, conditioned by her years at Lowood where religion had an important role to educate the girls to obey patriarchal leaders.” (Andersson) Jane was on the edge of succumbing to St. John's insistence when she hears Rochester's call for her. His call, which she envisions she hears, is nothing more than her subconscious preventing her from making the tragic mistake of entering a loveless relationship and eventually dying while living itself. As she re-unites with Rochester, she is self-sufficient, and the power dynamic between them has changed. Jane discovers during her visit at Marsh End that she has inherited a significant amount of capital from her uncle in Portugal. When Jane re-joins Rochester, she is economically secure, and Bertha is no longer alive. Another aspect that makes her feel equal is the fact that she now has family, since she is not really alone. Rochester got injured in the flames while trying to save Bertha, and he required Jane to be his vision and to look after him. Jane and Rochester actually marry as equals, which was significantly revolutionary at the time. Jane was finally successful in finding the love and familial relations she desired without losing her own personality or freedom. “No woman was ever nearer to her mate than I am ... To be together is for us to be at once as free as in solitude, as gay as in company” (Bronte)

CONCLUSION

Jane remains true to herself in her search for identity and liberation. The terrifying night in the Red Room causes her to mature almost immediately, and having faced true horror, she was no longer afraid to speak up against the conservative order for herself. Miss Temple showed her how to control her anger. She got liberated from the male stereotype of femininity; the angel and the devil, owing to the deaths of Helen and Bertha. Jane encounters and overcomes exploitation by the Reed family and Mr. Brocklehurst, misery at Lowood and injustice during her entire journey until reaching Marsh End, insanity in the Red Room and at Thornfield, and weariness due to being solitary and the way St. John perceived her, in order to free herself from the unrealistic expectations of the Victorian society in that period of time. Despite her yearning for affection, she does not allow Rochester or St. John to take undue advantage of her, and so in the end, she finds the equitable partnership she desired. “Bronte's novels, according to Sadoff, not only involve submission to fathers, father-figures, and women "who stand in for a chastising father" (but "portray as well the concomitant urge to avenge the wrong".” (Murfin)

NOTE ABOUT THE AUTHOR

By publishing Jane Eyre, Charlotte Bronte made a significant contribution to women's emancipation. Despite the fact that this work was written hundreds of years before Western feminist movements began, it is still viewed as a crucial feminist masterpiece, a text that exemplifies female freedom, vitality, character resilience, and revolution. Bronte depicts Jane's spirit and principles, as well as her intellect and etiquette, setting an example for herself and her community, of a lady who could excel amidst

numerous obstacles. Jane achieves success through the convergence of inner power, rejection of social expectations, and a desire for grace, humility, and compassion.

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