

THE IMAGE OF VICTORIAN WOMEN AS DEPICTED IN JANE EYRE BY CHARLOTTE BRONTE

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ABSTRACT: *This paper attempts to explore how successful Charlotte Bronte is in creating for her novel Jane Eyre a heroine of her age, dramatizing her own autobiography, including social problems that she encountered as a woman during the Victorian era. And how she can tackle and address many nineteenth century Victorian social problems such as class and gender inequality, race prejudice, and religious beliefs. The research uses the descriptive analytical method, and in it is revealed that Bronte has deliberately created Jane, the main character along with other female characters to refute Victorian inherited conventions that treated women unfairly, many critics and writers think and confirm that women were oppressed during Victorian era. Bronte made an innovation by raising a powerful, passionate, female character who can articulate her thought, and fight for her rights. This portrayal contracts with the real women images of Victorian time, who were oppressed and marginalized by men. It is sum up that Charlotte Bronte revolts against the inequality between men and women during the nineteenth century, she portrays this rejection in the Jane Eyre's resistant behavior.*

KEYWORDS: passionate, inferior, response, image, representation.

INTRODUCTION

Charlotte Bronte (1816-1855) is an English novelist and is best known for her passionate novel Jane Eyre, which was published in 1847. She was the third of Patrick Bronte's six children. Charlotte was only five when her mother, Maria, died in 1821. Four years later, her two older sisters died as a result of the harsh conditions at the Clergy Daughters' School at Cowan Bridge in Lancashire. Charlotte's school experience influenced her portrayal of Jane Eyre's life at Lowood School. Patrick and Maria's sister Elizabeth gave the children at home a stimulating and wide-ranging education after the death of the two oldest Bronte sisters. Charlotte, and her two younger sisters Anne and Emily Bronte, and Branwell, their brilliant, unstable brother, invented complex imaginary worlds. Charlotte worked as a governess and spent several years teaching at a Brussels boarding school. It was Jane Eyre's passion and rebellion that earned her fame.

Jane Eyre was originally published as Jane Eyre: An Autobiography was written on 16 October 1847 by Charlotte Bronte, under the pen name "Currer Bell." The novel revolutionized prose fiction by being the first to concentrate on the moral and spiritual growth of its protagonist through a personal narrative of the first person in which acts and

events take place. Charlotte Bronte was called the "first private consciousness historian" and the literary ancestor of writers such as Proust and Joyce.

The book contains elements of social criticism, with a strong sense of Christian morality at its core, and many consider it to be ahead of its time due to the individualistic character of Jane and how the novel approaches class topics, sexuality, religion, and feminism.

The ideal Victorian woman's life revolved around her family's domestic sphere and home during the Victorian era. Women of the middle class are brought up to "be pure and innocent, gentle and sexually undemanding, submissive and obedient. A woman did not have her own rights and was supposed to get married and become a servant to her husband. However, few occupations other than a governess was open to the time-educated women who needed a means of supporting themselves. Women were considered to have been wasted higher education because they were considered mentally inferior to men and, moreover, work was believed to make them ill. Women's education was about learning to sing, dance and play the piano, drawing, reading, writing, some arithmetic.

In fact, girls were taught to be presented as ornaments. Women were not expected to express their opinions outside a very limited range of subjects, and certainly not to be in search of their own identity and aim to become independent as the protagonist in Jane Eyre's Charlotte Bronte. She used a pseudonym when Charlotte Bronte wrote Jane Eyre which did not reveal the author's gender. The reviews were positive and a bestseller became the novel. There was a lot of speculations about who was behind Currer Bell's name, and some more negative reviews began to come when it became known that behind the name there was a female author. For some critics, writing such a passionate novel and having some knowledge of sexuality was inappropriate for a female writer. Charlotte Bronte wrote to defend her novel against the critics in the preface of the second edition "Conventionality is not morality." It is possible to see the protagonist Jane Eyre as an unorthodox woman of the time, she is passionate and strongly urged to fight injustice. At the time, passion and a hot temper in a woman were not adequate and had to be suppressed.

Objectives of the Study

In this paper, it is attempted to explore to what extent Charlotte Bronte is succeeded to create female characters in her novel, Jane Eyre to stand against Victorian traditional society, and how successful she is in dramatizing her own life events, and problems, and portrays them in the novels, and using imagination as well. However, it is attempted to expound the aims of Bronte and messages that she wants to send in presenting historical Victorian images of women.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Charlotte, and her two other siblings received a good education at their home and began writing stories. Their stories were influenced by the Romantic poetry of Byron and classic tales like The Arabian Night. She and her brother Branwell created and an imaginary world named Angria, and they used it as a setting for their fictional stories that based on their

interest in politics and romance. Charlotte continues writing, and she extremely wanted to become a paid writer like male writers. Margaret (2007) points that Charlotte once wrote to Robert Southey, England's poet laureate, asking for advice. Charlotte was dismayed by Southey's response, as it says:

“literature cannot be the business of a woman's life: and it out not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure she will have for it, even as an accomplished and recreation. To those duties you have not yet been called, and when you are you will be less eager for celebrity.”

She lost determination by this response, but she valued the advice and stopped writing for a while. However, the years that she abstained writing has extremely influenced her future works. Literature, according to Southey and many other members of Victorian societies is the business of man's life only. The response was not supportive. However, Charlotte Bronte insisted on challenging till literature became a business of women and allowed them to dominate the fiction market. In spite of a lack of support from the people around the globe, she was highly motivated and got sufficient enthusiasm from her sisters to become a successful writer and author.

Regarding Robert Southey's reply to Charlotte, concerning women's writing, a lot of critics support Southey and agreed with him, that literature is the business of men only. One of them is George Lewes. Reef (2012) states that George Lewes asks: “Does it never strike these delightful creatures that their little fingers were meant to be kissed, not to be inked.” George Lewes is considerably supporting the Victorian opinion that a woman is an angel in the house. So, he means to say that the hands of these charming creatures (women) must be kissed instead of being inked. The Victorian society was against women in all the fields of life. It was dominated by men even those educated critics were patriarchal in their behavior. Patriarchy was not only social but also literary. Charlotte Bronte, Jane Austen, George Eliot and many other female writers fought against the oppression of women in a society which was mainly male-dominated. Such novelists were the harbingers of the feminist movement which flourished during the twentieth century.

On the other hand, some other male critics and writers in the world of fiction like William Thackeray and Elizabeth Gaskell assisted Charlotte Bronte works positively, and she admired them and appreciated them through her fiction. Smith (1995) confirms that Bronte dictated Jane Eyre to appreciate Thackeray by saying:

“There is a man in our own days whose words are not famed to tickle ears; who, to my thinking, come before the great ones of society. She adds - I feel honoured in being approved by Mr. Thackeray because I approve Mr. Thackeray. One good word from such a man is worth pages of praise from ordinary judges”.

Charlotte Bronte is extremely happy to find someone, mainly a male, who is able to appreciate the value of her works. Thackeray, in contrast to other nineteenth century critics, positively valued the works of Charlotte Bronte. So, she felt that a good word from

a man Like Thackeray is worth pages of praise from ordinary judges. She was disappointed by George Lewes and Robert Southey that literature is only the business of men. Thackeray in a letter to Smith, the publisher of Charlotte Bronte, expressed his praise of Jane Eyre saying that the novel “interested me so much that I have lost a whole day in reading it... Give my respect and thanks to the author whose novel is the first English one.” Charlotte Bronte informed her publisher that she was particularly pleased by Thackeray’s comment because she found that Thackeray was able to distinguish the dross from ore, the real from the counterfeit.

In the literary career of Charlotte Bronte, weaver (1883), points that Bronte as a novelist rejects the Victorian concept of the ideal woman who had no intrinsic worth:

“The woman is the priestess of the home, and she put herself into it and its affairs, and conditions. Her talents and tastes have given her natural ordination to this holy office. She is most herself and most satisfied, and useful when the affairs of her home occupy chiefly her mind and heart.”

Victorian societies were making clear boundaries and divided work that should be doing by men, and those should be done by female. A man has to earn money and make it available to his wife, mother, daughters and sisters. Women’s tasks on the other hand, are responsible for children’s education, and taking care for their children, shopping, organizing the household and by providing tranquility in a peaceful and comfortable home. Burstyn(1980)states that inside the shelter building, a woman's work is performed: it is religious and educational because it consists of teaching good morals and moral values by her tenderness the woman is to be the social protector of society.

It is found that all the heroines including Jane Eyre who were created by Bronte have never followed the traditional model of the Victorian life in which women are oppressed by men. Instead, she removes her heroines from home just to give them a kind of autonomy from men’s dominance. She wants to give them more power than those in the home considered as the ‘Angel of the House’. She revolts against the decorum of the ‘Angel of the House’. This is because it limits the liberty of woman kept in the boundaries of the man and left as an architect of the house. Thus, all the heroines of Charlotte Bronte ran away from home to prove themselves. It is true to say, they are another copy of Bronte’s life, and reflect her autobiography and ideas as well.

METHOD OF RESEARCH

In this research paper, the descriptive analytical method is used. It traced the heroine’s autobiography and problems that faced her along the way and how her character has developed. However, a comparison between the new characteristics of the heroine, presented by Charlotte Bronte, and those of real Victorian women’s images and characteristics is made.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

It's obvious that Charlotte Bronte, in her novel Jane Eyre has deliberately created the heroine Jane Eyre, to refute the traditional Victorian inherited views on women and attempts to convey her own views about women, and their rights. Her new views, and vision on women are considered by some scholars as feminist. Feminism is a range of social movements, political movements, and ideologies that share a common goal: to define, establish, and achieve the political, economical, personal, and social equality of the sexes. Cambel and Sarah have state that: Feminism represents the idea that societies favor the male point of view and that women in those cultures are treated unfairly. Efforts to change that include combating gender stereotypes and seeking to provide women with equal educational and professional opportunities for men.

In her novel Jane Eye, Bronte creates female characters to send her messages and conveys her point of views on Victorian conventions of women, she uses a first person narrative to help readers see the characters and listen to their real and true problems. During the time that Jane Eyre was published in 1840th, it was conventional in Victorian societies and in every social class that women were inferior to men and were mistreated, and they don't have right to vote or to express their opinions.

Bronte gives her readers a heroine, Jane, who's strong, passionate and she is capable of expressing her thoughts and fighting for her rights. Her characteristics are completely different from those of real Victorian women, who were oppressed by men. She shows a lot of things that are done by Jane and were not allowed for Victorian women to do them. The conventional notion displays women as dependent, weak, and sullen; Jane is totally opposite of those traits and images. She is a strong, and a passionate woman, she has already left a strong impression on readers when they first seen her at the beginning of the story when she was a child. In the opening of the story she had a fight with her cousin. Here is the dialogue between Jane and the maid:

“What shocking conduct, Miss Eyre, to strike a young gentleman, your
Benefactress' son! Your young master.”
“Master! How is he my master? Am I a servant?”

Readers can learn and see how a strong, straightforward, and passionate Jane is. Through Jane, Charlotte Bronte revolts against the inequality between men and women during the nineteenth century. She portrays this rejection in the Jane Eyre's resistant behaviour. Instead of resisting the male dominance at the Gateshead and being enslaved by John Reeds and calling him a master, she calls him Nero, the Roman dictator.

However, Jane's first an expecting meeting with Rochester is significant in the relationship between Rochester as a symbol for a Victorian male character, and Jane as a new disobedient female character. After she came to Thornfield, one evening, she is alone watching the moon rise. She sees a horse approaching with a rider. The horse is slipping

on an ice patch, and the rider is falling down to the ground. Jane helps him get up. He asks her for help by saying:

‘Necessity compels me to make you useful’. He laid a heavy hand on my [Jane] shoulder, and leaning on me with some stress, limped to his horse. Having once caught the bridle, he mastered it directly, and sprang to his saddle; grimacing grimly as he made the effort, for it wrenched his sprain. Jane Eyre (p.98)

From the words that are used by Rochester as shown by the average above and from the tone of his speech, the first things readers learned is, his superiority towards all people, because of his position as the master of Thornfield. However, Rochester’s fall from the back of the horse is remarkable and symbolical. His fall means the collapse of traditional Victorian status of men, and their oppressions to women. Jane’s help and Rochester’s leaning on her shoulder are symbolically significant. She's his saver from all of life's drops. Rochester is portrayed as vulnerable in the first encounter, so, it is desperation that pushes him to get a woman's support. Jane is portrayed as a clear offer of assistance to a strange man. Jane, not Rochester, provides assistance at their first meeting. Charlotte Bronte introduces powerful Jane Eyre to indicate that the man needs the woman's support.

In addition, Bertha, the madwoman in the attic whose state resembles Jane’s in the red room, is the dark side in the life of Rochester and the Victorian man. Readers strongly believe that Charlotte Bronte presents the character of Bertha as a symbol of the Victorian woman, who is considered as a “lesser” member of society, without rights of their own, that is to say, Victorian women were literary locked up from participating in a society which is dominated by men. Thus, she created this character to critique the bad treatment of the patriarchal man during the Victorian period to woman. She is put inside the attic of Rochester’s house. She is locked in a room for ten years. She goes crazy like ‘some wild animal’. She is mad, and she wants to destroy everything in the house of Rochester. Jane first sees Bertha when the madwoman tears her veil before the wedding day. Jane Eyre describes Bertha as “It was a discolored face—it was a savage face. I wish I could forget the roll of the red eyes, and the fearful blackened inflation of the lineaments”, Jane Eyre (p.242).

Bertha becomes the icon of the Victorian rebellious woman who refuses the inherited dominant of the Victorian man in the society. The following lines describe the real situation of the Victorian woman in the form of Bertha kept in her room. Jane Eyre depicts the scene saying: “In the deep shade, at the farther end of the room, a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing, and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face”. Jane Eyre (p.250).

Specifically, in the Victorian period, the madwoman in the attic becomes a prominent figure of resistance to patriarchy and onward periods in general. She is Jane Eyre's mirror

to reflect her future's concerns if she agrees to marry patriarchal Rochester. At Thornfield, Rochester feels superior to Jane and others. Rochester is superior to Jane, not just because he's her boss.

Charlotte Bronte reveals the shallowness of the Victorian men's hierarchy. The terror of Victorian hegemonic masculinity against women is portrayed by Bertha Mason. Bertha, the madwoman in the attic, was able to portray Victorian wifedom's slavery and cruel elements. It appears that marriage's lack of autonomy and equality scares women, undermining their mental, and emotional healing. Jane Eyre plays an essential role in the creating the masculinity of Rochester. She has been playing a major role in the reshaping of Rochester's character from the first meeting. She initiates helping the falling man. Charlotte Bronte in Jane's eyes portrays Rochester as helpless. Jane is able to offer assistance to Rochester. So, from the starts she has been strong.

Within Jane Eyre's quest for self-realization as a feminist, however, looking and demanding for equality and justice is another important theme. People in Victorian age have the idea that people are not born alike, high-ranking people despise low-ranking people, and men are superior to women. As a result, in every field, women like Jane are treated unequally. When Jane realizes the wrong situation, she is constantly rebelling.

The most important thing about Charlotte Bronte's modern masculinity creation is the just ice of both Rochester and Jane's gender roles. Jane Eyre is fighting for equality. He states this:

Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrowminded in their more privileged fellow creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex. Jane Eyre (p.93)

The text presents Jane Eyre's thoughts as Charlotte Bronte's mouthpiece on the definitions of both men and women's masculinity and femininity and sex roles. The nineteenth-century women were supposed to be calm and confined themselves to pudding and knitting stockings, playing on the piano, and embroidering bags that were the domestic sphere's roles. Jane Eyre wants to change the stereotypical roles given to women. Women are equal to men; nevertheless, they need to use their faculties. Charlotte Bronte challenges her society and proves her feminine identity.

On the basis of such equality Jane wants to have a lover. She refuses to marry Rochester as an unequal like a mistress. She proclaims to Rochester that:

I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, nor even of mortal flesh—it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God’s feet, equal,—as we are!. Jane Eyre (p.216)

Charlotte Bronte describes the relationship between her love and M. Heger is similar to Jane Eyre's love relationship with Rochester. Charlotte Bronte wants equality and justice based love. Nevertheless, she was unable to find true love in a patriarchal society.

Finally, Jane Eyre is becoming strong. Her relationship with others is changed according to the new identity that she has achieved, especially after the financial independence. She's no longer a ruler. She's a good member of the society. She's overcome all her life's odds. The last strange thing is her opposition to marrying St. John Rivers. She responds to Rochester's supernatural cries to go back. She knew the final story of Rochester that he is a blind man with crippled hand. The final chapter starts with “Reader, I married him”, Jane Eyre (p.382). The syntactic structure of this sentence shows us that Jane is the subject and the object is Rochester. She is the doer of the action. This indicates that Jane Eyre becomes fully mature. Rather than announcing ‘Reader, we got married’ which would indicate their equality in defiance of gender roles, she declares ‘Reader, I married him’.

Charlotte Bronte encourages her protagonist to marry Rochester after a certain change in gender roles in which Jane becomes socially and economically fully mature. When she is fair to him, she agrees to marry him. She is also conscious of his physical and mental transition. He's the best man in her life. Rochester shifts to be completely different from all of her life's male characters. Charlotte Bronte constructs a new version of masculinity where there is no marginalization of the identity of woman. This masculinity sees woman as an equal partner in life. Charlotte Bronte has destroyed all the barriers between men and women that were common during the nineteenth century. Moreover, as in Jane Eyre, she has belittled the powers of man. She could think this is the best way to make man dwindle into her position. She destroyed the concept of the woman's domestic sphere. Jane Eyre is not part of the domestic sphere. In a patriarchal society, this patriarchy is the product of her writings. Her novel Jane Eyre shaken the Victorian period's social structure especially after it was written under the name of Currer Bell. It was praised by critics as a man-written novel.

True love is also the main theme in the novel. The search of true love is an essential reflection of her quest for self-realization in all of Jane Eyre's life. Love in the understanding of Jane Eyre is pure, divine, and can't be measured by status, power, or property, etc. She is seeking more than a consolable true love after having experienced a helpless childhood and a traumatic adolescence.

Nevertheless, in her novel Jane Eyre, Charlotte Bronte explores Religion's theme by using several characters as symbols, including Jane, Helen Burns, St. John Rivers, Mrs. Reed, and Mr. Brocklehurst. Religion and spirituality are key factors in the development of characters in the novel. Jane matures in part because she learns to follow the lessons of

Christianity and to resist temptation. Helen Burns introduces Jane to the New Testament, which in her life becomes a moral guide for Jane. While Jane strengthens her relationship with God, Mr. Rochester also needs to reform his ego, learn to pray, and humble himself. Bronte depicts various forms of religion: Helen trusts in salvation; Eliza Reed becomes a Catholic nun from France; and St. John preaches a dark Calvinist faith. The novel is trying to guide a middle path. Bronte sketches in Jane a noble faith that does not consume the personality of her woman. Jane is spiritual and self-respecting, but she also practices her right of affection and thought. Helen Burns becomes a kind of spiritual mother to Jane, though only a few years older than Jane. Helen is well-read, intellectual, and religious deeply. She advises Jane to learn to control her impulses whenever she is tempted to give in to temptation by holding long-term goals in mind. The story of Helen encourages Jane to persevere and prosper in Lowood. Helen Burns is the first example of correct application of religion to produce a positive effect. Helen tells Jane,

“Make His word your rule, and His conduct your example...love your enemies; bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you and despitefully use you”(69). Years later, as Mrs. Reed lies dying, Jane takes use of this advice: she forgives Mrs. Reed absolutely.

On the other hand, it is true to claim that some characters presented religion negatively for example, Some of Jane's ambivalence towards religion can be traced to the life of its author, Charlotte, the daughter of a priest in the church of England, Charlotte herself was devout but also fierce critic of religious hypocrisy. In respond to her cries of ant-religious work against Jane, she summarized her views in the preface of the second edition of her novel, she says, “Conventionality is not morality. Self-righteousness is not religion.” Bronte embraces the idea that through the traditional appearances of Mrs. Reed, Mr. Brocklehurst, and St. John Rivers, standard acts are not always moral.

Jane is committed, despite the fact that her childhood abusers employ religion to justify their behavior. For examples, Servants in her aunt's house predict that “God will punish her,” or “strike her dead.” At Lowood school, where Jane is sent by her aunt Reed, the school's brutal director, Mr. Brocklehurst, uses religion as instrument of power. Let's sum up by asking, is Jane opposed religion? Not at all, but she wants religion that treats men and women fairly and equally, she never abandons religion, but she is searching for middle ground.

CONCLUSION

It can be inferred and concluded that Charlotte Bronte has succeeded in creating a passionate, confident, ambitious heroine of her novel Jane Eyre, who battles for her freedom, and refutes the traditional model of Victorian life in which men oppress women. In all the fields of life, the Victorian culture was against women. Professions were dominated by men, there were few other professions than a governess on a list for women. Women were thought to have been wasted higher education because they were considered

mentally inferior to men and, moreover, work was thought to make them sick. Women's education consisted of learning to sing, dance, play the piano, draw, read, write, and some arithmetic. Charlotte Bronte, Jane Austen, George Eliot and many other female writers battled in a team against men's exploitation.

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