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A Longing for Love and Self-Fulfilment- A Study of Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre

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Abstract:

Charlotte Bronte does not occupy the highest position in the genre of fiction but she is a well known novelist with a thin oeuvre. Charlotte was extremely intelligent and is widely known for the art of characterisation, especially eccentric types. Charlotte Bronte reflected on the injustice done to women. Hence, with the pseudonym of Currer Bell she conveyed her new thoughts regarding the role of women in the nineteenth Century. She tried to convey her views that the society she is living in would never accept any change readily. Hence she made fiction a vehicle for propagating her views regarding the enlightenment of women. During the Victorian age, the position of women in society was low and they were regarded inferior to men. They were deprived of all their rights; whether legal, political, economic, educational or professional. The average Victorian woman was treated not as a person but as an object or piece of property. This research article chronicles Jane Eyre's quest for love and her attempts at achieving the sense of self-fulfilment that seem to be her primary goal-posts in the whole gossamer of the novel.

Martha Vicinus in her Introduction to *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age* conveys her thoughts thus:

The unmarried woman was an important source of humour in music halls and in operettas. Society trained women for one function, marriage, and then mocked those who sought this idyllic state after having reached maturity. No longer innocent and ignorant, it was obscene and comic in performances that a middle-aged woman should still want marriage — or that any man would want her. (Pxii)

Charlotte Bronte born in a middle class family raised her voice against the primitive mindset of her society and Jane Eyre reflected her rebellious thoughts very well. It was impossible for a low-status woman to lead a decent life or get married. Women were discriminated in the patriarchal society. The only way to demand their rights and privileges was through writing novels and Jane Eyre was a representative novel. Charlotte's novels brought to light the difficulties faced by women. Her novels Jane Eyre, Shirley, Villette and The Professor show the struggle for self-assertion. These novels present the negligence and sufferings of a juvenile woman yearning for love and care. Almost all these novels throw light on the pain and distress of young girls entangled in love. Nearly all her novels contain her feminist views.

Charlotte Bronte's iconic novel of 1847, Jane Eyre is subtitled 'An Autobiography'. It is an example of Bildungsroman: a work that reflects on education and development of its heroine and her life history. It was the first novel of the Bronte's to be published. Wuthering Heights, Agnes Grey and The Professor were all written earlier; but the publisher who had accepted the first two of these books delayed, while The Professor didn't find a publisher until after Charlotte Bronte's death. Charlotte Bronte through her novel Jane Eyre, very well described the miserable state of women in her age. She is in fact the first feminist writer in English literature. Besides the theme of love, her novels also have many feminist elements. Her heroines demand their rights and privileges. Bronte's heroines are independent minded and reject the role of weak women in an aristocratic world. Jane Eyre is a woman who strives for decency and dignity. In a male dominated society she is courageous and faces all opposition. She is feminist who knows how to defend herself. Jane Eyre is proud despite being poor and sticks to personal principles and values. Her story teaches a lesson to all modern people that only through determination to be equal one can acquire a prosperous relationship. Jane Eyre is not domineering but seeks equality.

Most of the characters in the novel try to marginalize Jane, in order to reduce her influence on society. They try to exclude her from society by labelling her as an outcast. Throughout the novel, Jane appears as a threat to the other characters, either because she is an intruder from a different community or because she is an enigma regarding threatening ideas and hence John Reed says to Jane:

You have no business to take our books: you are a dependant, mama says; you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg and not to live here with gentlemen's children like us, and eat the same meals we do, and wear clothes at our mama's expense. Now I'll teach you to rummage my book-shelves: for they are mine; the entire house belongs to me, or will do in a few years. Go and stand by the door, out of the way of the mirror and the windows. (p 13)

This shows the clear discrimination between Miss Reed's own children and Jane Eyre by comparing Jane with the servants
No you are less than a servant, for you do nothing for your keep. There, sit down and think over your wickedness.(p14)

She tries to relegate Jane. Jane recalls,
[S]ince my illness she (miss reed) had drawn a more marked line of separation than ever between me and her own children; appointing me a small closet to sleep in by myself, condemning me to take my meals alone, and pass all my time in the nursery while my cousins were constantly in the drawing-room. (p29)

Jane is mistreated, deprived of dignity and tortured for she is penniless and an outcast as she says,
He (john reed) bullied and punished me: not two or three times in the week, nor once or twice in the day, but continually: every nerve I had feared him, and every morsel of flesh on my bones shrank when he came near. (p12)
She silently bears all the hardships. Later on she rebels against all oppression. She speaks with grit and courage against Miss Read:
I am not deceitful: if I were, I should say I loved you; but I declare ,I don't love you: I dislike you the worst of anybody in the world except john reed; and this book about the liar, you may give to your girl, Georgina, for it is she who tells lies and not I.(p39,40)

Jane without any fear further tells Mrs. Reed:
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 see 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. (p40)

Jane Eyre is ardent, free-willed, with a man's vigorous mind and a woman's heart. She proves that a woman like her, with little or no connections, very few to look after and sympathize with her, could make her way into a hostile world and dominate it. Jane neglects the thinking that women should be confined within the four walls of the house. She wants them to be co-sharers in the enjoyment of the masculine world and the general business of life. Mrs Reed tries to have ultimate authority over Jane. Her punishment of locking Jane in the red room nurtures a central characteristic in the young girl: the desire for independence. Jane calls it an injustice and she cannot live in this unnatural environment. She says her soul begins,
to expand, to exult, with the strangest sense of freedom, of triumph, I ever felt....as if an invisible bond had burst and that I had struggled out into un hoped- for liberty. (p40)

Many characters in the novel give Jane derogatory names, by doing so they marginalise Jane. At Gateshead she is labelled as 'imp', 'a rat', 'mad cat' etc. By equating her with animals they want to place her outside human sphere. This symbolic use of names shows the physical and spiritual solitary confinement to which the Reeds relegate her. Jane being a brave and vigorous person hits back with intellectual and imaginative resourcefulness. She says to John Reed:

Wicked and cruel boy: You are like a murderer—You are like a slave-driver—You are like the Roman Emperors! (P13)

Jane herself explains why she was neglected and considered as an outcast in the Reed family,
...., but that until she heard from Bessie, and could discover by her own observation that I was endeavouring in good earnest to acquire a more sociable and childlike disposition, a more attractive and sprightly manner....She really must exclude me from privileges intended only for contended, happy little children. (p9)

Jane's rebellion against Mrs. Reed and John represents her feminist consciousness in getting better response from others as a decent and respectable person.

Lowood School is also an unfortunate place for Jane; she just exists there. Brocklehurst attempts to exclude Jane from the society of the school, he remarks that Jane:

Is a little castaway; not a member of the true flock, but evidently an interloper and an alien. (p71)

He then advises:

You must be on your guard against her; you must shun her example: if necessary, avoid her company exclude her from your sports, and shut her out from your converse. (p71)

Brocklehurst is not only domineering but also a man who hates women, who are not subordinate, simple and docile. Jane again shows her courageous defiance. She tries her utmost to resist Mr. Brocklehurst. At her first interview with Mr Broklehurst she gives him such blunt and objectionable answers as to make the old man quite amazed. He inquires of her as to what she would do to avoid going to hell and Jane replies that she would keep in good health and not die:

What must you do to avoid it?

I must keep in good health, and not die. (p36)

As the time moves on in Lowood, Jane Eyre begins to grow more and more conscious of the world outside the school, the qualities of the New Woman were taking root in her. She confesses to Helen that her heart hungered for affection and regard from others. She wants to gain respect and not always to be an object of hatred and indifference. To gain all those things she was even ready to have the bone of her arm broken or to let a bull toss her and to do what she was capable of doing:

Helen look here; to gain some real affection from you, or Miss Temple, or any other whom I truly love, I would willingly submit to have the bone of my arm broken, or to let a bull toss me, or to stand behind a kicking horse, and let it dash its hoof at my chest.(p74)

Jane tries her utmost in the novel to reveal her true self whatever social group in which she finds herself and to love and to be loved. She was eager to make progress in life. When it was decided that she should go to school, she was excited. She was sure it would give her an opportunity to enter into a new world. Jane makes a passionate plea for women to be allowed to use their talents and not to be confined to the home:

Making pudding and knitting stocking, playing on the piano and embroidering bags. (p117)

Pat Macpherson says,

By desiring to do more than simple housework, Jane rejects the logic that all women were meant to perform only this type of work; she insists that women are capable of more, just as men are. (p19)

At Lowood School Jane toils hard to prove her worth and to contend forcefully, she says,

I... set to work afresh, resolved to pioneer my way through every difficulty: I toiled hard, and my success was proportionate to my efforts.(p80)

Jane in the novel tries to elevate the status of women. She was of the opinion that women are skilful as men and men can't surpass them in their potentiality:

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 narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making pudding and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thought less to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex. (p117)

Here Jane questions the traditional role assigned to women, asserting equality based on character. Finally Jane leaves Lowood as a grown up and mature woman.

Charlotte Bronte's writing is a powerful agent in her effect; she managed to infuse her personality into it. When she went to her second boarding school in 1831, aged fifteen, it was noted that she never played and could not play when the girls invited her to join in their games. Lawood institution is partly based on the school at Cowan Bridge. An earlier, unhappy experience of school at a religious foundation provided the material for the Lawood section of Jane Eyre, from this school the nine-year old Charlotte was withdrawn after the deaths of her elder sisters, also pupil there. Helen's death because of consumption is based on the death of Maria and Elizabeth, who also died when there was an outbreak of typhus at Cowan Bridge. The dominating Mr. Brocklehurst was partly based on the evangelical clergy man, the reverend Carus Wilso, who ran Cowan Bridge. Phyllis Bentley in his book 'The Brontes' says:

Jane is a version of Charlotte herself, her suffering at Lawood are a version of Charlotte's suffering at Cowan Bridge school, Jane's friend Helen Burns is a version of Charlotte's elder sister Maria Bronte. Jane's miseries during the luxurious house-party at Thornfield are a version of Charlotte's while governessing, and Mr. Rochester is another version of M. Hager, the strong, stern, sophisticated, dominating master-type. (p65)

When Jane Eyre was published under a pseudonym Currer Bell in October 1847, it attracted a great deal of attention. Thackeray described it as, the 'masterwork of great genius'. Throughout her lifetime, Charlotte was known for the three books Jane Eyre, Shirley and Villete. Jane Eyre brought Charlotte overnight success as a novelist. Jane Eyre became a subject of discussion in literary circles and also a target of attack regarding a few improprieties but Villete was another landmark in her success. Jane Eyre is a story of wish-fulfilment, expressing the Writers unconscious desire, with which the reader also identifies himself, for a world where such things happen, where they happen, indeed to her. David Cecil is of the opinion:

Charlotte's technical ability is akin to the rest of her genius. In certain ways she is hardly a craftsman at all. As we have seen, she can't construct a plausible or even a coherent plot; the fabric of her books is woven with irrelevancies, frayed with loose threads. But she was a born story-teller; continuously from her first sentence to her last sentence she engages our interest. It is partly because of an exceptional mastery of the art of awaking suspense. Jane Eyre out walking finds a gentleman in trouble with his horse. It is not for ten pages that we find he is her employer, Mr Rochester. (p110)

Jane Eyre contains a truth which is kept hidden by respectable authors; a truth which brought to the surface women's frustrations, rebellions, passions etc. It was something remarkable. And when the news came out that Currer Bell the author of Jane Eyre was in fact a female, the readers were quite amazed. It was incredible that any woman could indulge in such self-revelation and write boldly of what was concealed.

Jane is covetous and has a desire to change her life style. As an orphan coming from a respectable family, Jane's only option, in order to maintain herself is to become a governess for it was the only profession suitable for the Victorian middle class women besides prostitution. Jane became the governess of a French girl Adele living in Thornfield Hall. But she remains dependant there and yet she is better than the other servants. The way Blanche Ingram makes some derogatory remarks about Jane clearly shows that she has no place in the social sphere at Thornfield. Blanche Ingram's comment about governesses is as follows:

I have just one word to say of the whole tribe: they are nuisance. (p190)

Even Blanche's mother says:

[D]on't mention governesses: the word makes me nervous. I have suffered martyrdom from their incompetency and caprice: I thank heaven I have now done with them. (p190)

Charlotte Bronte herself had worked as a governess and a teacher and she had very bitter experience. She thinks that governesses can never be happy in life. Kathryn Hughes in her article 'The Figure of Governess' says:

Life was full of social and emotional tensions for the governess since she didn't quite fit anywhere. She was a surrogate mother who had no children of her own, a family member who was sometimes mistaken for a servant.

The plight of a governess moved her and she wrote *Jane Eyre*. This profession was considered respectable for a middle class woman who had no family to support her. She was neither a servant nor a family member, and was often condemned by all. The governess's status is perhaps best described by Jeanne Peterson who writes thus:

at best unenvied and at worst the object of mild scorn, and all she sought was survival in genteel obscurity. (P4)

While talking about the condition of governesses during Victorian age Jeanne Peterson says,

The availability of "ladies" to teach the children of the middle

Classes depended on the one exception to the rule that a well-bred

Woman did not earn her own living - if a woman of birth and education found herself in financial distress, and had no relatives who could support her or give her a home, she was justified in seeking the only employment that would not cause her to lose her status. She could find work as a governess. (p 6)

Jane is a diligent but unsophisticated governess whose worthiness and self-respect enables her to ignore the gap of status and marry a man above her class. Though a governess yet Jane seeks to satisfy her passion, emotions and indulges in resentment like upper class women. She broods over her unhappy childhood, dislikes patronage, prefers independence, mocks at her betters, is fascinated by her master, tolerates Rochester's immoral past, vanquishes her beautiful rival and maintains her integrity. Jane the embodiment of feminism seeks to gain social equality. She reflects on the concept of a New Woman who is bold, outspoken, self-willed, independent and courageous on all occasions.

Charlotte Bronte through the relationship of Jane and Rochester lays emphasis on the mutual need in which the woman is not idealised but is an active contributor- fearless, unashamed of passionate feelings and determined to have her rights acknowledged. Charlotte Bronte was one who created new 'feminine' possibilities. Through the medium of the novel she reflects on woman's proper sphere and her perfect image in the face of dominant ideology. Bronte's feminism derived from her persistent effort to define the proper place of women in society and responds to the powerful demands of her personality. Charlotte Bronte creates an ordinary, unmarried, poor woman in her novels and the confusions faced by her in the search for identity. Independence is a keynote in her own life and the life of all unmarried women; it is also central theme in all her novels. She revised the patriarchal plots and genres to emphasize the identity of the female protagonist.

At Thornfield Hall Jane falls in love with Rochester and Charlotte Bronte presents this concept of love from a woman's point of view. This awareness regarding feminism was a new landmark in Victorian era, which was a male dominated society. David Cecil says:

Charlotte is most characteristically concerned to describe frustrated love: Jane Eyre's love for Rochester, so hopelessly as it would seem, out of her reach, Lucy Snowe's for Dr John absorbed already in Ginevra Franshawe. But the fact that she is frustrated does not make the love of Charlotte heroines less intense. Indeed it makes it more of an obsession. Moreover Charlotte can describe happy love equally well, if her story gives her a chance. As a matter of fact love is the occasion of her few successful flights of humour. Jane Eyre teasing Rochester, Lucy Snowe sparring with Paul Emanuel, in these she achieves real comedy.(p108)

Charlotte Bronte in her novels reflects the desire of female characters to express their tender feelings of love. Jane Eyre knows her lower social position compared to Rochester but she enjoys intellectual closeness with him. It is the same yearning for love and passion that she has been seeking ever since her childhood. She wants to love and be loved. True love is the basic theme of the novel. Jane Eyre's pursuit of true love is an important factor in her struggle for self-realization. Jane Eyre's love is an understanding of the soul and is not subdued by status, power and wealth. Having spent a lonely childhood and miserable adolescence, she yearns for love. She suffers a great deal in her pursuit of true love.

Rochester uses many eulogistic terms, for he also wishes like others to marginalize Jane. By calling her 'angel' and 'fairy', he tries to elevate her but Jane fully aware of her position rejects Rochester's attempts to turn her into an ideal being for example when Rochester calls Jane an 'angel' she says, 'I am not an angel' (p277). On another occasion when Rochester tells her:

I will myself put the diamond chain round your neck, and the cirlet on your forehead, - which it will become: for nature, at least, has stamped her patent of nobility on this brow, Jane; and I will clasp the bracelets on these fine wrists, and load these fairy-like fingers with rings. (p276)

Jane replies simply:

No, no, sir! Think of other subjects, and speak of other things; and in another strain. Don't address me as if I were a beauty: I am your plain, Quakerish governess. (p276)

Jane is a plain and simple girl. She does not care for the jewels offered to her by her future husband. She only wants his love and attention to lead a peaceful life at his side on an equal footing. She says thus:

Oh, sir! - never mind jewels! I don't like to hear them spoken of. Jewels for Jane Eyre sounds unnatural and strange: I would rather not have them.(276)

Here Jane appears as a true feminist. She is ready to work hard to support herself, without depending on men for she believes that men and women are equal. As a wife she feels that she should help her husband and that they should work together to attain happiness. She does not want any gifts from Rochester. It degrades her and she wishes to repay everything when she is well-off. In the end when Jane and Mr. Rochester are married, things change for the better and she becomes a wealthy woman and Rochester loses physical strength which made him strong earlier. Then Jane feels that she can contribute something to make their marriage end successfully.

Charlotte Bronte through Jane Eyre wanted to highlight the plight of women during Victorian age. She can be considered as one of the first feminist writers in English literature. Besides concentrating on the theme of love her novels contain many feminist elements as well. Her heroines were seeking their rights and privileges. David Cecil is of the view:

Every page of Charlotte Bronte's novels burns and breathes with vitality. Out of her improbabilities and her absurdities, she constructed an original vision of life; from the scattered, distorted fragments of experience which managed to penetrate her huge self-absorption, she created a world. (p114)

Like Bernard Shaw Charlotte's main objective was to elevate the position of women and make them pursue their objective in life and end all injustice done to them. Her main aim was to expose the entire Victorian society and their snobbish behaviour and oppression of women. All his heroines including Candida were independent in spirit, self confident, courageous and well controlled. The Bronte sisters were too much spirited and energetic. They opened the doors of modern novel for the feminist writers to display their talents for a special cause. They set the example for unmarried women without the support of males to plunge into the sea of life and enjoy themselves and relieve others who were in a state of agony and fear.

Jane's strength of character and will along with her refusal to be forced into a submissive position appears rather masculine. Rochester says:

Jane, be still; don't struggle so, like a wild, frantic bird that is rending its own plumage in its desperation.

Jane replies thus:

I am no bird; and no net ensnares me: I am a free human being with an independent will; which I now exert to leave you.(p271)

Sangeeta Dutta is of the opinion that:

Jane Eyre examines polarisation with the context of true dialectical process. Dialectical energy infuses Jane's personality and makes her the study of personal development- a story of enclosure and escape. Jane is subject to all the divisions which split her world apart- yet she is able to synthesise order and outburst- within the mythic quest-plot the protagonist becomes aware of female realities within her and around her- homelessness, orphaned, threats of madness, fragmentation- and she reacts with barely disguised rebelliousness. Jane tests the limits of social, moral and psychological possibility discovering the kinds of power available to a woman.

Jane Eyre, a story of wish fulfilment, expresses the writer's deep desire, with which the reader identifies herself, for a world where such things happen to her. Jane's wish was to be independent. While Mr. Rochester claims to be superior on the pretext that he was old enough to be her father, had seen the world and gained experience of a varied kind while she had been confined to the sequestered atmosphere at Lowood,

Then, in the first place, do you agree with me that I have a right to be a little masterful, abrupt; perhaps exacting, sometimes, on the grounds I stated: namely that I am old enough to be your father, and that I have battled through a varied experience with many men of many nations, and roamed over half the globe while you have lived quietly with one set of people in one house.

Jane's reply was abrupt but thoughtful:

I don't think sir you have a right to command me, merely because you are older than I, or because you have seen more of the world than I have- your claim to superiority depends on the use you have made of your time and experience.(p142)

Jane Eyre is the New Woman who protests and emerges from bondage to freedom, from indecision to self-assertion, and from weakness to strength. Jane believes in the equality of the sexes. She faces every hardship with great determination. She endures a lot of suffering throughout the novel. She underwent cruel treatment at Lowood, she suffers due to her failure to marry her dear Rochester. In fact Jane's relationship with Mr. Rochester is a continuous struggle to retain her identity. Although an orphan; she remains independent and her moral integrity and strength of will sustain her throughout. Jane rejects the Victorian concept of an ideal woman who was supposed to be passive and obedient, giving her love and attention to her husband and family. Jane, however, does not come up to that ideal. From the beginning she is passionate and independent minded. Pat Macpherson is of the opinion that:

Jane defies the current view of the woman in Victorian England by the way her character and choices in life differ from the 'ideal woman', but that is not all she does. She also defies this view by voicing her opinions and commenting on the inequality she

experiences as a woman. Simply by expressing her views, she breaks the rules, for that was only for men to do. She dares to desire learning, experience and power, which was not meant for women at all. (p17-18)

She reads, paints and engages herself in logical argumentation and displays wit and wisdom. In a word, she is the modern emancipated woman. Even Rochester is aware of Jane's resolute determination and audacity. When she is asked by Rochester to go to Ireland Jane replies thus:

It is a long way off sir.

Rochester in turn says:

No matter a girl of your sense will not object to the voyage or the distance. (p268)

When Jane learns that Rochester is a married man she is shocked but remains firm and resolute. Whatever situation Jane is involved in, she always manages to take care of herself. She is self-reliant and rejects Rochester's offer to live with him as his mistress. Though she loves him but does not want to give up her values and belong to him. Jane's decision to leave Rochester shows her determination to live by herself without letting this man maintain his grip on her heart. While asserting her identity she speaks thus:

I tell you I must go. Do you think I can stay to become nothing to you? Do you think I am an automaton? – a machine without feelings? And can bear to have my morsel of bread snatched from my lips and my drop of living water dashed from my cup? Do you think because I am poor, obscure, plain, little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong? – I have as much soul as you, - and full as much heart: and if God had gifted me with some beauty and much wealth, I should have made it as hard for you to leave me. It is my spirit that addressed your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave and we stood at God's feet equal as we are. (p270)

Jane is a 'resolute, wild free thing', a 'soul made of fire, a character that bends but does not break'. When begged to become Rochester's mistress, Jane reflects thus:

I care for myself! the more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself. (p340)

Struggle for independence and freedom does not end for her. It is evident right from her childhood at Gateshead hall till the end of the story. Even in Morton Jane is treated as an outsider. She begs for food but is not a beggar. When she offers to trade for food, they rebuff her. When she seeks employment, they refuse. She is deprived from all requirements of life until St John finally takes her to the River's home. Rochester's betrayal is a great setback, but she tells St John that she could be perfectly happy as a simple teacher with her own school and few pupils. Jane agrees to be Rivers' helpmate because she was aware of the fact that in that case her body would face hardships but her heart and mind would remain free of all bondage. Rivers was confident that he would subdue her but her firm, vigorous spirit, and her strong power of judgement made her resist and refuse to yield. She rejects St John's proposal not because she dislikes missionary work but because she would not surrender herself in doing so. Jane receives two proposals of marriage. She resists Rochester's and St John's attempts to possess her spirit and her body. She did not want to become a wife like others. She refuses to marry in both cases for the sake of money and security. The idea of never getting married does not bother for which all Victorian women strive earnestly. She would rather live by herself rather than live with a man that she does not love or a man that does not respond well and is indifferent to her feelings. She rejects the Victorian belief that a woman should always get married if she had a suitor as Helen Roberts says:

The belief in marriage was so complete in this period that the Victorians could not even imagine a suitor being rejected. (p52)

Jane Eyre's intelligence and self-reliance enables her to marry a man above her class and gain recognition in this regard. Ultimately Jane marries Rochester because it is her vocation – the Divine call that only she can hear. She sacrificed herself by serving a blind man and thus Brontë shows here the superiority of Jane over Rochester, who is almost dependant on her and needs her help and protection. She had always been loving and giving. Jane wishes to retain her independence after marriage as she declares in front of Rochester:

I shall continue to act as Adele's governess by that I shall earn my board and lodging, and thirty pounds a year besides I shall furnish my own wardrobe out of that money and you shall give me nothing but your regard and if I give you mine in return, that debt shall be quite. (288)

Rochester's crippled state at the end shows that he is now almost equal or less than equal to Jane. When Jane and Rochester are together at the end he says:

And you do not lie dead in some ditch under some stream? And you are not a pining outcast amongst strangers?

Jane replies,

No, sir; I am an independent woman now. (p463)

This Feminist attitude is a reflection of Miss Temple's influence on Jane. Miss Temple has an independent spirit. She is a successful teacher, forward-looking, unmarried and ambitious. Similarly Diana and Marry inspire Jane in their respective ways. Diana urges Jane not to go to India, which may indicate she shares Jane's independence of mind and character:

He is a good and a greater man: but he forgets, pitilessly, the feelings and claims of little people, in pursuing his own large views. It is better, therefore for the insignificant to keep out of his way; lest, in his progress, he should trample them down. (p444)

There are many other occasions in the novel where Jane shows her superiority over other characters. We see there is a contrast between Jane and Bessie Lee, a maid at Gateshead, Bessie marries Robert Leaven, a coachman who belongs to her own social class and is therefore confined to that class whereas Jane dared to marry a man above her class.

Jane is unlike a typical Victorian woman for she is independent with her own opinions, which she boldly expresses. She believes that women should have the same opportunities as men do, for she thinks that women are qualified and hence are equal to men, and she fights against inequality and refuses to go along with the rules men have set for her by voicing her opinions. Jane's imposing character, and her ability to take decisions are what make her a feminist. It is through these deeds that she reflects feminism: critiquing the inequality of the sexes in the Victorian period.

Jane Eyre's uncompromising pursuit of her goal in life makes her respectable in the eyes of the reader. She struggles for equality in matters of economy and marriage. Her love is based on equality and independence for she cares not for status, power or property. She is not tempted by money and does not want to be a mistress of Rochester for the sake of money. It is true love which is steadfast. Jane Eyre aspires for love and she overcomes all the obstacles in the process of attaining true love. Nobody would like to marry a man who loses his eye sight and his wealth. But Jane is different. To her pure love is the marriage of true minds. At the end she succeeds to live happily with her lover. Jane Eyre's struggle for self-realization makes one aware that whatever difficulties one encounters in life, one should never quit life. Jane Eyre proves to everyone in her age that a woman who acquires independence and success on her own is not a dreamer but a realist.

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