

The Portrayal of Feminism in the Main Characters of Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*

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Abstract

Since the 19th century, feminism has become one of the most important and popular topics. According to Fakhri (1996) at the beginning, the movement of feminism is the assumption that women basically are oppressed and exploited and also an effort to completely remove the oppression and exploitation. However, there are still differences in opinion among the feminists about what, why, and how those oppression and exploitation happen. However, they share the same view that the essential struggle of feminists is for equality, status, and also the freedom of controlling their life, both outside and inside the house.

Charlotte Bronte creates *Jane Eyre*'s characters as a poor, obscure, plain, and little person, but she is an independent woman. Furthermore, she also creates Jane as a victim in every place where she lives. She also turns Jane into a heroine. Jane has to struggle against the old traditions to search for her freedom and liberty in her life and society.

There are three objectives presented in this paper. The first objective is to find out the personalities of Jane Eyre as the main character. The second is to find out the feminism of Jane Eyre's characters. The third is to find out how feminism in Jane Eyre's characters reveals the challenge toward the class structure of British society. The method of this paper is a library research to answer the problems and also used the Sociocultural Historical approach to explain more about British condition and society in the novel.

The results of these analyses are firstly, Jane Eyre, as the main character in this novel, is a round character. Her character develops in several phases. Secondly, Jane Eyre is a Liberal Feminist. Jane challenges the old tradition, the males' domination, and subordination of women. In challenging the old tradition, Jane challenges the patriarchal system, where males dominate in society so that women become subordinate. Thirdly, Jane challenges the class structure of British society with her education.

Keywords:

Characters, feminism

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of Study

We can get many useful things by reading novels. They are pleasure, the nature of reality, the understanding of human life that can enrich our knowledge. We can

also learn many human characters, social structures, and the condition of the setting when the novels were written. Furthermore, analyzing a novel is very useful. It can enrich the literary knowledge, challenge the skill in interpreting the literary work, and add the experience to this world.

Charlotte Bronte describes Jane Eyre's character in convenient ways. She creates *Jane Eyre's* characters as a poor, obscure, plain, and little person, but she is an independent woman. In addition, Bronte also makes *Jane* as a victim in every place where she lives in and also turns *her* into a heroine. *Jane Eyre* has to struggle against the old traditions to search for her freedom and liberty in her life and society. This is supported by Milton's statement (1984) that Bronte presents Jane Eyre as a heroine who is not beautiful, just as we assume that a high fashion model will be slander and glamorous. However, Jane Eyre is described as a small and plain, rather mousy-looking young woman who will never be transformed into femme fatale or romantic beauty. This story also tells the condition at the time that most women have the same right as men and Bronte also influences and expresses it in this novel.

1.2 Problem Formulation

In this paper, there are three problems that are highlighted: (1) How is Jane Eyre characterized in this novel? (2) How is feminism portrayed in the character of Jane Eyre? (3) How does feminism in this novel reveal the challenge toward the class structure of British society?

1.3 Objective of Study

In this paper, there are two objectives, first to analyze a clear idea about feminism which is reflected in the characterization of Jane Eyre, and second how feminism in this novel reveals the challenge of the class structure of British society.

2. Theoretical Review

2.1 Theories of Character

In reading a fiction, some people want to interpret the story easily in order to enjoy it. If we can understand the story, we can get what the author in the story

describes too. It can be the source of our reflection in our life. The writer has a big contribution to make the reader satisfied. They can make stories easier to interpret, but it is not easy task for them.

As said by Perrine (1974) characters in an escape fiction are easier to be known by the readers. The author plans that reader will enjoy the fiction easily, so that they will get satisfaction in reading en escape fictions. Reading for characters is more difficult than for plot, because characters are much more complex, variable, and ambiguous. Anyone can retell the action of the characters in the story easier but we need a certain skill to describe what a person is. He also mentions that round character is complex and many sided. Round characters live by their roundness; by many points and which they touch the life.

Fosters (1974: 46) divides the character into flat character and round characters. Flat characters are sometimes called stock typed, or caricatures. In theirs purest form, they are shaped of single idea or quality. One advantage of flat characters is that they are easily recognized whenever their comings are unrecognized by readers' emotional eye. They are remembered since they never change in various circumstances.

Round Characters have the opposite qualities. They are more dynamic and open to say any psychic development. The test of round character is whether it is capable of surprising in a convincing way. If it never surprised, it is flat. If it does not convinced, it is flat pretending to be round (Foster, 1974).

Perrine also says that character may be classifies as static or developing. The static characters are the same sort of person at the end of the story as he was at the beginning. The developing or dynamic character undergoes a permanent change in some aspect of his character, personality, or outlook. The change may be larger or smaller; it may be for better or for worst; but it is something important and basic. It is more that change in condition or a minor change in opinion.

2.2 Theories of Characterization

Characterization is also important part of the novel that creates the existence of character in a novel. Rorhberger (1971)says that characterization is the way the author create the characters. Therefore characterization should be conveyed in to

good way so as to create a clear image to the reader perception. He also divides ways an author can characterize. He can use **direct**, to describe physical appearance, or he can use **dramatic** means and place her situation to show what she is by the way she behaves or speaks.

Underscoring what Rohrberger statement that the character can be conducted into two different ways, those are direct and indirect. Each of them shows the reader the quality of the character told by the author physically or psychologically. This quality will bring to the readers an image of the character that the author creates. Therefore the reader will have a figure of character in his mind.

Perrine (1969) says the method of direct presentation has the advantage of being clear and economical, but it has never been used alone. The characters must act. If there is to be a story; when they do not act, the story will become an essay. It will give us not a character but an explanation. If we are really to believe in the selfness of a character we must see him acting selfishly. The successful writer must therefore rely mainly upon indirect presentation and may use it entirely. To be convincing, characterization must also observe three other principles. First, the characters must be consistent reasons for what they do. or not immediately at least by end of the story. They must behave one way one occasion and different way on other useless there is a clearly sufficient reason for the change. Second, the characters must be clearly motivated in whatever they do, especially when there is any any change in their behavior. We must be able to understand the reason for what they do. Third, the character must be plausible or life like. They must be neither paragons or virtue nor monsters or evil nor an impossible combination of contradictory traits.

Both character and characterization are the backbone of the story that presents person or people in it. They hold important role in building the story and they also create conflict that makes the story so interesting and pleasurable to read.

2.3 Theories of Feminism

According to Decard (1975) the Liberal Feminists, also known the first-wave feminists, takes its main inspiration liberalism philosophy, i.e. everyone is born equal right and opportunity for the philosophy, which bases the movement, this group makes its priority in the achievement of the equal opportunity and rights between men and women. It is the oldest movement.

Liberal Feminist thinks that the patriarchal system can be abolished by promoting the awareness among women about their rights and the unjust structure. Which inhibits them to grow as full human beings. With the growing awareness on their rights, women are expected to change their attitude ad pattern of relationship with men. These move expected to raise new understanding on the part of movement which eventually will accelerate the change of system and the improvement of women status.

To achieve their goal third Radical Feminists use psychological approach, i.e. through the enhancement of awareness among women about their rights. This done through group discussion. The other effort launching a campaign and petition for how reforms which gives more benefits for women. So far, Liberal Feminist movement is proper to a little success. The growing awareness among women about the rights is not which turn wakens the spirit of member. The striking reach of this failure is that Liberal Feminist movement does pay attention on the socio –economic factors in their program. Liberal Feminist movement only request, ‘allow us to enter your are’, i.e. the men’s area where they enjoy their privilege. In other words, Liberal Feminists only ask assuming the generosity and goodwill on the part of men, which likely nonsense. Montagu (1953) also adds women are superior to men. The feeling of superiority can make women realizing their power against men.

3. The Methodology

3.1 Data

The data is Charlotte Bronte’s Jane Eyre. It was published in 1847 by Pocket Book Inc. It consists of 517 pages and it is divided into 38 chapters.

3.2 The Method

The method is library research. It is used many data to make the research understandable. It is divided into two: (1) primary datum is taken from the novel itself, (2) secondary data are taken from history and literature-author's biography, criticisms and theories of feminism.

Then it is used sociocultural historical approach. The data are taken from books of history and society related to The industrial Revolution and Victorian Period that were *A History of Western Society* by John P. Mackay, Bennet GD. Hill. John Bukler, *Britain Yesterday 19.30 to The Present* by Walter I. Arnstein, and *Victorian Age Prose, Poetry ,and Drama* by John Wilson Bowyer and John Lee Brooks.

4. Analysis

4.1 The Characters of *Jane Eyre*

Jane Eyre is a round character. It shows in her developments through the story. Her development changes into five phases. First when Jane Eyre is a child. This phase is in chapter one until chapter four. This phase happens in Gateshead Hall. For the first time, Jane Eyre is quiet and lonely girl because violence occurs to Jane Eyre every day. All the members of e Reeds do not like her very much. Mrs. Reeds tells the positions of Jane in her family that Jane is not equal with the, so the children ways treats Jane badly. Her aunt also tells bad things to her children. The worst violence is Jane is locked up in the red-room where Mr. Reed died. At the end, she is a strong woman. She can handle the problems around her. She can handle and accept all the violence that she gets from The Reeds. Even though she is lonely she feels free and happy freedom by reading lot of books. She gets lot of benefits by reading the books, she has her own world there. She also creates her imagination through those books.

Second phase happens in Lowood School. She is still emotional girl looking at her friend treated badly. Then she learns to be patient submissive and wise girl. She learns from her friend-Hellen. She learns to love and bless her

enemies from her. She is also very curious to learn everything especially to learn French and draw a painting.

Third phase happens in Thorfield. It is in chapter eleventh through chapter twenty eighth. She is happy person. She has a job and enjoy her new life. Since she is a governess, she should keep her feeling into her employer. As time goes by, she dares to express her feeling even though she is only a governess. Again, Jane's personality changes again from introvert person changes into extrovert person. She expresses her feeling to Rochester.

When her aunt, Mrs. Reed is sick, she pays a visit to her aunt after she gets a n invitation letter from Mrs.Redd. When she finds out her aunt is dying, she feels sorry to her aunt. She remembered the way her aunt treat her badly. Seeing her aunt dying, she forgives all Mrs. Reed had done to her. For this moment, her personality changes from hatred girl into forgiver girl.

The fourth phases happens in Moor House. It is in chapter twenty nine through chapter thirty six. She is unhappy person because she must leave Thorfield. She leaves her love-Mr. Rochester when she know that he has already a wife-lunatic and madness. She is broken heart. Having new life and meeting new people makes Jane happy. At this point, Jane personality changes again from unhappy woman into After having inheritance from his late uncle, Jane owns her own school -Morton school. From this event, her personality changes again from dependant girl, who works as governess and teacher into independent woman. She becomes the principal in Morton School.

She is also a brave woman when she refuses St. John proposal. At that time it is rarely for woman to refuse man's proposal. The reason of refusing the proposal is that she does not love St. John. She still loves Rochester. She thinks that she as right to have her own decision.

The fifth phase is in Ferndean. It is in chapter thirty seven through chapter thirty eight. She becomes happy person. She finds and marries Rochester even though Rochester is blind and crippled and poor.

4.2 Feminism Portrayed in Jane Eyre Character

Woolf mentions that “women are simultaneously victims of men and are upholders of society by acting mirror to men. Women are regarded as “The Other “by men. Nevertheless, Jane breaks down those stereotypes. Jane’s characters portray the feminism in her era. She believes that she can change it because she has power to do it. This is also supported by Montagu’s (1983) statement previously that women are superior to men. The feeling of superiority can make women realizing their power against men. Based on this statement, Jane wants to be treated equal with men. It is showed from her struggles toward male domination in every place where she lives in. She dares to challenge the customs in her society- patriarchal society where males are more dominate than women.

4.2.1 Male Domination Among Jane Eyre’s life

The patriarchal system makes men dominate women in the society. They have more power those women. There are five men domination in Jane’s life. They force their authority toward Jane but she breaks down the, in smooth way but directly come to the targets. They are John Reed, Mr Brocklehurst, Rochester, and St. John. First, John Reed, her cousin treats her badly and abuses her when she lives in. Gateshead. Second, Mr. Brocklehurst. He is a treasurer in Lowood School. In implementing his principles, Jane becomes his victim of his principles. He does fierce things to Jane. Third, Rochester betrays Jane by keeping his secret that he has already a lunatic wife. Five, St, John offers a marriage in the name of God. It is John’s ego that uses God’s name to have what he wants, to marry Jane as his wife, and to force Jane to accept the proposal.

4.2.2 Jane Eyre’s Struggle against Male Domination

Based on Montagu (1983), women are better in handling the bad conditions which they face in their life, like starvation, exposure, like starvation, exposure fatigue, shock, illness. Women also know their power and use them for good deeds. It can conclude that women are more realistic effectively controlling their feeling and they can use their power for good purposes. Therefore, Jane is a strong woman

because she can handle the entire problem in her life, especially relating on her freedom and rights.

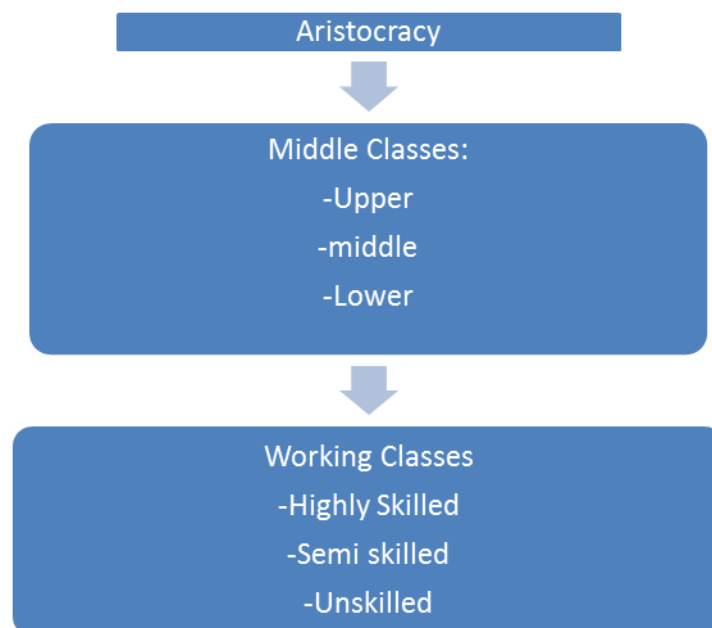
First, Jane's struggle is against John Reed. Jane is able to prove that she is better than John. It is shown when she comes back to Gateshead to fulfill her aunt's invitation. She hears that John died because of too much drinking alcohol, gambling and also having a debt. The other is a proof that she is wealthy. She is rich and has her own school. Second, Jane's struggle is against Mr. Brocklehurst. After eight years at Lowood School Jane can show all the students, teachers and him that she is not one of bad influence among students. It shows from Jane's attitude that she tries to adapt herself at Lowood School and works hard at her study. She becomes the best student at Lowood School. Furthermore, she even is asked to be a teacher for two years after her graduation. Third, Jane's struggle is against Rochester, Jane refuses his second marriage. She thinks that Rochester wants to control over Jane's life by marrying her in a quiet ceremony at France. The marriage itself is a kind of obligation for Jane to obey Rochester's request. She thinks that Rochester cannot divorce his wife. Therefore, she decides to refuse directly Rochester's proposal because she does not agree about bigamous marriage. She knows that it is hard for her to refuse Rochester because she respects the law and herself. Fourth Jane's struggle is against St. John. He is like Mr. Brocklehurst. He is using Christian's principle that is "Humanity." Both of them use this principle to force Jane to be a good person in the eyes of God by obeying their order and to enjoy seeing Jane's suffering. Nevertheless, Jane refuses St. John's proposal. His reason to marry her only for God's service is not the real reason. Jane sees that St. John will not be happy until he has completed controlling over her life. She does not want to marry him because she does not love him as much as he loves Rochester so that she refuses him although her choice is against Christian principle. Refusing Rochester and St. John's proposal, Jane dares to be a free woman who is different from other women at that time. Other women probably will accept their proposal. Yet, Jane does not do it. She does not allow them to control over her life. She chooses her freedom rather than sacrifices her life for them. She chooses her right to get what she wants-freedom.

Seeing all of Jane action, Jane is a feminist. Jane dares to challenge the domination of males and a woman who forces their authority and supports the idea of a patriarchal system-that males who are more powerful than women. Jane can prove to them that she can be success in wealth position, family and love.

Jane is a Liberal Feminist. She always wants to be treated equally with men. She wants to have the same opportunity as men. Jane realizes about her rights. She does not like male's dominations through her life because she can decide what she wants to do in her life so that she disagrees with them. Jane can prove to John Reed, Mr. Brocklehurst, Rochester, St. John that can be successful woman.

4.3 Feminism: the Challenge toward the Class Structure of British Society

According to Mckay (1983) in the 19th century people in Britain were divided into:



The aristocracy consisted of the queen, the king, and princes, while the upper middle classes are businessmen. Semiskilled workers are factory workers from banking and industry and large-scale commerce. Middle-middle classes are industrial and merchants. Lower-middle classes are shopkeepers, small traders,

and tiny manufactures. The highly skilled are labors. The unskilled workers are longshoreman, wagon-driver, and every kind of helpers.

Feminism portrayed on Jane's character reveals the challenge toward the class structure of British society. Jane knows that she is a woman that puts her into the unskilled working class and her life depends on Mrs. Reed because she is an orphan. Thinking of her dependency, Jane asks her aunt to send her to school. She knows that going to school is completely a change for her life to get better life in her future. Jane realizes that she has nothing in this world so that she decides to go to school in order to get a lot of knowledge and experience and to change her life better.

Through education, Jane challenges the class structure of British society. The first proof is that Jane can show to the Reeds, especially Mrs. Reed and John Reed, that she is successful woman. She breaks Reeds' opinion as stated in "It is the Reeds who say that she is nothing and depends on them (pg.8). As result, Jane herself realizes on her disability as stated in (pg.11). All this opinion disappears when she can have better job as governess in Thornfield.

Jane sees her triumph through the Reeds when she comes back again at Gateshead Hall. She sees the ruin of the Reeds. John Reed dies because of too much drinking alcohol, gambling, and having debt. Mrs. Reed is dying. Eliza is busy with religious activity. Georgina does not do anything only sitting in the sofa. In addition, the Reeds are not rich anymore, because they should pay John's debt to mortgagee.

Jane is successful to be free woman. Jane changes her personalities and attitudes to become like lady and educated woman. Then, she has a good job as a schoolmistress and the owner of Morton school, which makes her independent woman. Jane increases her stratification. She is rich and marries her true mate-Edward Rochester.

The second proof is that Jane breaks down Mr. Brocklehurst's principle. He tells to the students that Jane is one of example of bad influence for them and calls her liar. However, Jane proves to Mr. Brocklehurst that she is not a bad influence for students. She tries to adapt and to change her behavior and to study hard. Then, she becomes the best student among pupils. Later, Jane is asked to be a

teacher. She can show to Mr. Brocleturst that she can be a good example among students. Jane 's position goes up. It is shown that she comes from the unskilled class and she is able to turn up into lower middle class where teacher position takes places. It is also because she becomes a teacher at Lowood School.

The third proof is that Jane gets a job as a governess at Thornfield. She gets a jobs because Jane's qualification (having good English, French education, and music)) fits in the positions of governess. By her education, Jane is treated equally by Rochester, her employer. Rochester, then puts her in the same positions as his position although Rochester is from upper middle class and Jane is from lower middle class.

The fourth is Jane is offered a job as a schoolmistress at Morton School. St.John offers this job because Jane has capability. She is very excited to be a teacher at Morton School. She teaches well there and become the favorite teacher. In Morton School, Jane's status goes up. Her status goes up from governess which dependant on the salary into a schoolmistress. After she has inheritance form her late uncle, she owns this school. She becomes independent woman. This moment proves, her status goes up again into upper middle class.

The fifth proof, Jane refuses both Rochester and St. John's proposal. Education makes Jane opens her mind. It changes the way of her thinking about her right, which she has right to decide what she wants to do. Realizing her rights, Jane thinks that both Rochester and St. John force her to accept their proposal. She does like their authority controlling over her life. Besides, Rochester has a wife already and St. John does not truly loves her-only for God's service.

5. Conclusion

It can be concluded that Jane is a round character. Jane's personalities develops and changes in fives phases. Those are when she lived in Gatedshed, Lowod School. Thornfield, Moor House and Ferndean. Jane is a liberal feminist. She breaks all male domination in her life. Finally, with her education, Jane breaks the class structure of British society at that time. Her status goes up from lower working class into upper middle class.

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