

## Breaking the Chains: Feminist Struggles and Triumphs in Jane Eyre

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### **Abstract:**

This study examines the feminist struggles and victories within the novel Jane Eyre by Charlotte Brontë. It delves into a deep study of the quest for identity independence, morality, and equality of one character within the backdrop of high-pitched Victorian patriarchal society. The research work takes into account how Brontë's innovative use of the first-person narration gives deep psychological insights into Jane's character, thus making this novel seminal in any bibliography on feminist literature. The key themes of social class, gender inequality, and critique of patriarchal power structures are looked at in context with feminist literary theory. It is also noted the way in which Jane Eyre remains a text that is both inspirational for further feminist discussion and influential for feminist literature.

**Key words:** Feminist Literary Criticism, Victorian Society, Gender Inequality, Social Class

### **1.1 Introduction**

Jane Eyre is a novel written by Charlotte Brontë, under the pseudonym Currer Bell, and published in 1847. It is one of the greatest classics of English literature. A young girl, orphaned, is ill-treated by her aunt and then at Lowood School, where she suffers another series of abuses. As Jane matured, she became a governess in Thornfield Hall, where she met the enigmatic Mr. Rochester, the plot following her journey through

trials and tribulations, including a complex romantic entanglement with Rochester and a struggle for personal independence and moral integrity.

The value of this novel, however, lies not only in the compelling storyline or rich characterization but in innovative use of first-person that gives very deep psychological insights into the character of Jane. This introspective approach has been groundbreaking for its time and truly casts its influence on so many subsequent works. Moreover, *Jane Eyre* is a book that delves into so many issues like social class, sexuality, religion, and feminism that it has become multidimensional in offering an insightful view of the human condition and societal norms within the period of the Victorian age (Gilbert & Gubar, 2000; Showalter, 1977).

Feminist literary criticism has taken center stage since the late 1960s and early 1970s, and it examines how literature works on or with social constructions of gender and power relations. In this regard, the approach delves into the interpretation of women in the literature, roles, and freedom of female characters, as well as the way texts could probably contest or reinforce patriarchal normality. Key areas of concern for feminist literary criticism include the unmasking of the implicit bias in literature, which promotes sexual gender insubordination, and the texts that provide alternative outlooks on women's experiences and identities (Plain & Sellers, 2007).

*Jane Eyre* has been interesting to the feminist critics as a novel of the strong, independent heroine rebelling against the gender constrictions of the patriarchal society. Therefore, Jane's struggle for independence and self-esteem in a male-dominated world connects easily with feminism ideals. The novel does indeed revolve around the themes of female independence, resistance to patriarchal power, and the search for self-identity, and thus is marked in the feminist text. Critics such as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have both been cited lauding *Jane Eyre* for its multifaceted and multilayered nature in consideration to a woman's struggle for self-definition and independence. Commenting on the magnitude of the book within feminist literary criticism (Gilbert & Gubar, 2000).

Brontë's portrayal of Jane, a character who never wavers in maintaining her moral and intellectual independence, serves to challenge the Victorian ideal of the submissive, passive woman. The novel's constructions of Jane's relations, most notably her relations with the male characters, Mr. Rochester and St. John Rivers, are created in the context of power relations and gendered justice within which a patriarchal structure is questioned. The enduring relevance of the novel and its effect on subsequent feminist literature underline the importance of this work as a text that reflects and criticizes gender norms.

## **1.2 Purpose of the study**

This paper will predominantly analyze the feminist struggles and victories voiced in Jane Eyre. By examining all the different ways that the novel portrays the problems of its female character, as well as her victories, we want to provide a deeper understanding of the feminist themes presented in this book. For this reason, the merit of this research is to add to the body of knowledge of feminist literature by portraying Jane Eyre as a pioneering work relevant to any issue or empowerment of women.

## **1.3 Thesis Statement**

The thesis statement for this study is that Jane Eyre is a landmark feminist text that mirrors its female protagonist's struggles and triumphs in her quest for independence, dignity, and equality. Through a close reading of themes, characters, and narration within the text, this paper endeavors to show that Charlotte Brontë's work reflects and critiques Victorian gender norms, situating Jane Eyre as an indispensable contribution to the field of feminist literature.

## **2. Theoretical Background**

### **2.1 Feminist Literary Theory**

Feminist literary theory, whose prominence had risen in the late 1960s and early 1970s, is a theoretical and critical lens through which one can view literature through a feminist perspective. The theory works to understand how literature reflects and perpetuates gender inequalities and patriarchal ideologies. One of the basic concepts of feminist literary theory is the idea that gender is a social construct rather than an inherent biological characteristic. The argument was best stated by scholars such as Judith Butler, who argued that gender roles and identities are not inborn but rather products created by culture and society through a set of norms. This is what makes literature very central in the creation and reiteration of the gender norm; therefore, it is an important area of focus for feminist critics (Butler, 1990).

Another important aspect of feminist literary theory is a concentration on the female experience. Historically, the voice and perspective of women have been minoritized or silenced in literary discourse. A key concern of feminist critics is to discover these instances and bring them to the fore to reiterate the importance of the narrations and opinions of women. In this context, works such as Jane Eyre are explored

with regard to the female experience, which portrays the travails and hopes of women in an overwhelmingly patriarchal society (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000).

The primary subject of feminist literary criticism is the critique of patriarchy's enforcements, which are systemic men's dominance socially and politically in all spheres of life. Feminist critics consider how literature not only reflects but also challenges these patriarchal power structures. They analyze the ways in which texts depict the oppression of women and the resistance against such oppression. For instance, in *Jane Eyre*, the insubordination of the heroine to male authority figures and her search for a realm of personal autonomy have been interpreted as a criticism of Victorian patriarchal society (Moi, 1985).

Representation and stereotypes also form the broader areas upon which feminist literary criticism focuses. They focus on how women are represented in literature and challenge the stereotypes that have been grounded firmly as part of the genders. This is the examination of roles, narratives, and themes of characters towards discerning the same traditional gender roles that were fulfilled or counterfeited. As a character, *Jane Eyre's* role was characterized by her complexity and depth, delineating the conventional stereotypes of portraying women as passive and submissive creatures (Showalter, 1985).

The other major building block in feminist literary theory is intersectionality. Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term "intersectionality" to bring out the interrelations between different social categories such as race, class, and gender. These systems set up intersections that work together to produce different forms of discrimination or disadvantage. In the literary text, an intersectional method would hence mean considering how the several filaments of a woman's life intertwine and affect her experiences and representations. The analytical framework avails one the opportunity to have an appreciable diversity in different experiences of women in literature. According to Crenshaw (1989), this will bring the real picture of diversity in the many difference experiences of women in literature alive.

## **2.2 How feminist theory applies to the analysis of literary texts?**

Feminist theory is used in the analysis of literary texts in several ways. At one level, there is textual analysis: close reading to identify how gender and power are constructed and represented in texts. Critics, therefore, find instances of male dominance and female subjugation through looking for moments of resistance and empowerment. For example, in *Jane Eyre*, textual analysis would consider the interaction of Jane with the male characters and her expression of independence that eventually leads to her fight against patriarchal bondage.

An important element in feminist criticism is knowledge about the historical situation and social context of literary work. Placing texts within their specific historical and societal contexts helps critics have an improved understanding of how the text reflects or challenges gender norms that are prevalent during that time. For example, with *Jane Eyre*, knowledge of the gender roles in the Victorian era and what was expected of society helps us understand a lot about the novel's feminist themes (Showalter, 1977).

Knowledge of the life and intentions of the author will further show the personal experiences and societal context that influenced his portrayal of gender. The life of Charlotte Brontë as a woman in the 19th century was representative of feminist ideas in *Jane Eyre*. Her own life battles of gender inequity and desire for liberation and self-worth are captured in Jane's character, which could further give more depth to the novel's feminist critique (Gaskell, 1997).

Another critical feature of feminist criticism is measuring the reception and effect of the literary piece for its longevity. This deals with the reception, interpretation, and influence a text has on its audiences, critics, and future feminist literature. *Jane Eyre* too has been subject to numerous feminist readings over time, due to the changing of times in the opinions concerning gender and power. In this regard, the novel's perpetual relatability and enduring capacity to inform feminist discourse become reflective of a certain significance of the text itself, which, in its own turn, problematizes the gender norms of its own time of conception (Gilbert & Gubar, 2000).

A comparative approach is also applied in feminist literary criticism. In the comparison of texts between various authors, periods, or cultures, feminist critics highlight ways that are alike and different in the treatment of gender and power. This approach allows the identification of wider patterns and distinctive insights within the feminist literary canon and thereby contributes to further enrichment in the analysis of works such as *Jane Eyre* (Plain & Sellers, 2007).

Broadly, a comprehensive theoretical approach for feminist literary criticism includes analyzing literature through the critical viewpoints of gender and power. Through this theoretical approach, *Jane Eyre* can be drawn upon to explicate—broadly—Jane's fight and success in the quest for independence and equality in a male-dominated society. This research tries to reveal how themes in the novel and other structural concerns indicate that Charlotte Brontë's work was able to support and criticize Victorian gender constructions, hence making *Jane Eyre* a seminal work in the annals of feminist literature.

### 3. Literature Review

#### 3.1 Previous Studies on Jane Eyre

Jane Eyre has, since 1847, been analyzed and criticized by multiple literary critiques, with one of the most powerful studies being Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, (1979). Gilbert and Gubar believe that Jane Eyre communicates the boundaries and limitations under which a woman has to suffer living in a patriarchal society. They look upon Bertha Mason as a figurative expression of Jane's buried rage and passion, with the madness and life imprisonment of Bertha indicating in society the repression of desire and independence of a woman.

Elaine Showalter, in *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing* (1977), places Jane Eyre in the wider perspective of female literature of the nineteenth century. Showalter brings forward the novel's innovative narrative style, especially regarding the way it uses a first-person perspective for deep psychological investigation of the protagonist. Showalter throws emphasis on the fact that through Brontë's portrayal of the inner life and struggles of Jane Eyre, she was in great deviations from the Victorian mold of literature and helped to create female literary tradition.

Patsy Stoneman (1996), in *Jane Eyre: The Novels of Charlotte Brontë*, follows a vivid analysis of themes, characters, and socio-cultural background of the novel. Stoneman explains the way Jane Eyre works with the issues of class, gender, and sexuality, where we follow Jane from no self-respect and independence to a different person. She also analyzes the gothic elements in the novel but tries to make some sense of them as signs of Jane's inner emotional and psychological turbulence. And it is in this background that Stoneman does, through her drawing, that Jane Eyre emerges critically upon social and gender hierarchies at its time.

Similarly, Adrienne Rich's essay *Jane Eyre: The Temptations of a Motherless Woman* (1979), provides a psychological insight into the protagonist, bringing out the impact of Jane's orphanhood and the search for motherly figures characterizing the novel. According to Rich, the main thematic preoccupation is female relationships and support networks that are crucial for Jane's development and empowerment.

In the book *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology*, critic Sally Shuttleworth (1996) reviews Jane Eyre with a look through the prism of modern psychological theories. Indeed, Shuttleworth's study provides adequate support for the opinion that Brontë inscribed in the characterizations of Jane and other characters in the novel

aspects of the contemporary Victorian psychological discourse that do enrich the understanding of the reader as to the portrayed motivations and behaviors.

### 3.2 Summary of Major Themes and Interpretations

The critical literature of Jane Eyre proves some major themes and interpretations from which understanding of the novel is shaped. A prominent theme identified by scholars is that of feminism and female empowerment. In fact, many critics, including Gilbert and Gubar (1979), appreciate the novel as a demonstration of a strong, independent female protagonist defying the constrictive norms of gender in her time. Central to Jane Eyre is a message of feminism, one which permeates throughout the themes—personal autonomy, moral and intellectual integrity, and resistance to patriarchal authority. This reading epitomizes how the novel goes against typicality of roles and expectations on women by showing Jane as a model of female agency and durability.

The other major theme running through literature is social class and inequality. It is very clear in the rawness of Jane Eyre, with the hard set class structures and barriers within Victorian society. The challenges and constraints posed by social class are evident in Jane's experiences as an orphan, governess, and later as an independent woman. Scholars such as Stoneman (1996) have analyzed how the novel critiques these social hierarchies and at the same time argues for greater social mobility and equality. The novel shows the interactions and conflict between characters of different social backgrounds, which presents a nuanced critique of the class system.

As already underlined, even the Gothic elements included in Jane Eyre have been an area of very intense focus in scholarship. The novel abounds with Gothic motifs, where the role of the mysterious Thornfield Hall and the figure of Bertha Mason, indeed supernatural occurrences, has also been considered versions of Jane's innermost fears and desires. For critics like Shuttleworth (1996), these elements do much to externalize Jane's emotional and psychological struggles, adding to the rich symbolic layer in the narrative. The Gothic elements in the novel play a big role in heightening the themes of madness, confinement, and the unknown; they add to the psychological depth of the book.

Another important theme concerning Jane Eyre is the religious and moral questions. The novel partakes in complex questions of faith, morality, and individual conscience. The struggles of Jane's spiritual life, moral dilemmas, and interaction with different characters—like Mr. Brocklehurst, Helen Burns, and St. John Rivers—add a aspect to the novel: religious themes. Critics analyze how Brontë mediates such tensions

as those between duty and desire, faith and reason, and between societal expectations and one's personal integrity. In this manner, therefore, such a moral and spiritual dimension would do much toward the further enrichment of the thematic perspective of the book.

Similarly, narrative technique and point of view of the novel *Jane Eyre* have been considered both innovative and deep. The utilization of first-person narration permits the readers to make a very close acquaintance with Jane's thoughts and feelings, which is employed powerfully to explore identity and self-discovery. Showalter (1977) has noted that such a narrative approach allows room for the articulation of Jane's inner life and experience, hence rendering her a realistic and compelling character. The introspective narrative style the novel employs is part of the reason it has had such staying power and importance in literary history.

Extensive scholarship on *Jane Eyre* points to the wealth of themes presented and the importance of this work in the history of literature. These are some of the reasons the novel remains so important today: its resonance in the redolent exploration of feminism, social class, depth of psychology, religious and moral questions, and innovation in narrative that reverberates with readers and scholars alike, making it key in studies of nineteenth-century literature and feminist literary criticism.

### **3.3 Feminist Criticism and Jane Eyre**

The feminist critical perspective toward *Jane Eyre* is very contributive to deep understanding of the novel with regards to gender and power relations, and also one of the main reasons why it had become a cornerstone in this field of feminist literary analysis. Various scholars over the years have given different views on how Charlotte Brontë's work challenges the patriarchal norms of the Victorian era and portrays the struggles and triumphs of its female protagonist, Jane Eyre.

*Jane Eyre* is one of the prime texts for feminist literary criticism and, therefore, inspired various interpretations and analyses from different feminist standpoints. The first one was written by Adrienne Rich in her essay, *Jane Eyre: The Temptations of a Motherless Woman* (1973). Rich explores the psychological implications of Jane's orphanhood and her quest for female/maternal surrogates, identifying these relationships as critical to Jane's journey of self-possession.

Another work that is very key to this discussion is Elaine Showalter's *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980* (1985). Elaine Showalter discusses *Jane Eyre* specifically within the context of women and Victorian medical doctrines regarding mental constitutions of women. She discusses the novel's treatment

of gender and madness, largely as embodied by Bertha Mason, and rebukes the patriarchal monopoly of the woman's body and mind.

In *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (1987), Nancy Armstrong provides a socio-political interpretation of *Jane Eyre*, pointing out how it describes and denies in some terms, the domestic ideologies of the 19th century. Armstrong's work elaborates on how Jane's resistance to conforming to traditional gender stereotypes and her journey toward individual independence were in direct opposition to the social expectations of women at that time.

Michele A. Barrett in *Women's Oppression Today: The Marxist/Feminist Encounter* (1980) applies a Marxist feminist approach in analyzing the novel *Jane Eyre*. For Barrett, her scrupulous social portrayal of Jane would identify economic and class dimensions to the struggles being fought; the struggle for independence is not only one of anti-gender oppression but also one of anti-class exploitation. These dimensions enrich the feminist analysis by understanding the intersectionality behind Jane's challenges.

#### **4. Analysis**

##### **4.1 Feminist Struggles in *Jane Eyre***

The novel *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë gives a clear, incisive illustration of the societal and class struggles of her heroine, Jane Eyre, during the course of her life. Almost from the first page, Jane is very much aware of her low social class and what she is able and not able to do because of that. She was an orphaned child, living with her cruel aunt Mrs. Reed, who treated her worse than her own children. Jane's early experiences at Gateshead highlight how inflexible the class structures of Victorian society were and the discrimination which the low-status person always faced.

For example, Jane's sense of being an outcast and resentment for the same is best expressed in her own words: "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 any one 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" (Brontë, 1847, p. 45). This passage does not only show Jane's early recognition of injustice but her determination to assert her identity in spite of her being in a secondary position.

This class struggle is there with her when she is sent to Lowood School, an institution for orphaned girls. The miserable conditions at Lowood and the tyrannical leadership of Mr. Brocklehurst further exemplify the exploitation and oppression of the

lower classes. The hypocrisy of Mr. Brocklehurst's sermonizing and the poor treatment of the girls is shown in how he states, "You are aware that my plan in bringing up these girls is, not to accustom them to habits of luxury and indulgence, but to render them hardy, patient, self-denying" (Brontë, 1847, p. 81). The great difference between Mr. Brocklehurst's wealth and the girls strongly highlights the class difference and misuse of power.

Jane found herself placed in an ambiguous social state, as a governess at Thornfield Hall—neither a servant nor one of the gentry. This in-between place exposes her to social isolation and condescension. Jane's thoughts about her position indicate an acute class-consciousness: "I was not heroic enough to purchase liberty at the price of caste" (Brontë, 1847, p. 196). What the book really talks about is her struggle in holding on to her dignity and asserting her worth in a society where social rank is regarded higher than individual merit.

Jane's confrontation with this system of repression, through social and class oppression, is also part of larger problems on the feminist agenda: women's autonomy and position in society. The book critiques these rigid class hierarchies and opportunities that were rarely open to females without wealth or family connections. Jane's steadiness and firmness in trying to break through these barriers come across as consistent with feminist ideals of self-reliance and equality.

It is to the point that the feminist critique of social class within Jane Eyre can almost be seen within those relationships that Jane has with those characters. The exchanges and dealings that she has with the Reed family, Mr. Brocklehurst, and even Mr. Rochester highlight, through and through, how class and gender expectations have permeated the novel. But all this adversity apart, Jane goes on and pursues her quest for self-respect and independence. She writes, "I am no bird; and no net ensnares me: I am a free human being with an independent will" (Brontë, 1847, p. 279). This is her declaration of refusal to be confined under somebody else's rules and her demand for equality.

However, Jane's ultimate decision to go away from Mr. Rochester, whom she dearly loves, underscores her loyalty to principles and stance against subjugation. When the fact of Mr. Rochester's actual marriage to Bertha Mason came out, she kept on asserting her moral and personal autonomy: "I care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself" (Brontë,

1847, p. 375). This powerful statement reflects the feminist theme of dignity and integrity toward oneself amid pressures from society and relationships.

Jane Eyre by Charlotte Bronte is a novel that gives an intense critique of gender disparities quite commonplace in Victorian society. In this novel, several instances show that Jane Eyre's gender was going to work against her, as it throws her into a world run by males who possessed both power and influence.

One of the most striking examples of gender inequality in the novel is Jane's position as a governess. Jane occupies a somewhat unique but always subordinate position in the household as an educated woman but in a domestic role. She is neither servant nor family, which positions her in a liminal space in which her value tends to be underestimated because she is female. Thus, Jane reflects on her position as a governess: "A governess, disconnected, poor, and plain, is one of the most depressing beings in existence" (Brontë, 1847, p. 127). The sentence underlines that such women belonging to professions that keep them lowered in society are almost nobody and are treated with no respect.

The interview of Jane by Mr. Rochester also provides a good illustration of gender inequalities of the time. The love that is budding in them is, at the same time, so hopelessly dominated by this reminder of the ever-present imbalance of power between them. Mr. Rochester's constantly recurring efforts to get one over on Jane, whether in his patronizing manner or intention to take her as his lover, resonate with all the norms of his society that encourage men to assert their power over women. All this awareness of power relations prompts Jane to affirm the need for equality by saying, "I am not an angel," I asserted; "and I will not be one till I die: I will be myself. Mr. Rochester, you must neither expect nor exact anything celestial of me—for you will not get it, any more than I shall get it of you: which I do not at all anticipate" (Brontë, 1847, p. 271). Jane's demand to treat each other equally in the relationship underlines how she is resisting that traditional place attributed to her on the basis of sex.

The power relations between men and women in Jane Eyre are complicated, hence a microcosm of the social designs at the time. Men in the novel always try to exhibit some degree of control over Jane, but she, in equal measures, keeps on fighting this oppression in order to protect her dignity. Mr. Brocklehurst, who is the head of the Lowood School, represents the character of male chauvinism and double standards. His is a regimen that is steeped in discipline and tyranny, meant to break the spirits of female students. The way he treats Jane and the other girls in Lowood perfectly reflects Victorian society's quest for the subjugation of women. This is perhaps most clearly illustrated in his statement that, "You are aware that my plan in bringing up these girls is

not to accustom them to habits of luxury and indulgence, but to render them hardy, patient, and self-denying" (Brontë, 1847, p. 81), which shows his wish to knock all thoughts of pride out of them in his quest for humility and submission, as was expected by society at large of the female sex.

Mr. Rochester, being a more sympathetic character, also has definite patriarchal traits. He is repeatedly trying to subjugate and control Jane, testing her loyalty and independence. During the proposal scene, Rochester tries to overpower Jane with his will to make her agree, but she fiercely asserts her freedom: "Do you think I am an automaton? —a machine without feelings? Do you think because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong! —I have as much soul as you, —and full as much heart!" (Brontë, 1847, p. 252). Jane's declaration here is a strong rejection of Rochester's attempts at domination over her and is illustrative of her assertion of her humanity and equality.

Another telling example of power play in the novel is the relationship that Jane shares with St. John Rivers. While St. John represents a different kind of patriarchal control that is cloaked in religious zeal and a sense of duty, he urges Jane to marry him and go to India as a missionary, not for his love but because of religious obligation. St. John's coercive proposal highlights gendered expectations—where duty precedes all other desires—for women. Jane's refusing to accept the proposal was another assertion of independence: "I am ready to go to India, if I may go free" (Brontë, 1847, p. 432). In every line of this excerpt, the will for freedom and the total refusal to accept any sort of coercive control emanate from Jane.

#### **4.2 Triumphs of Feminism in Jane Eyre**

Jane Eyre is replete with the instances where personal victory of the heroine, Jane, takes place through determination by which she would not be called from the principles and insistence on sovereignty in a world that tries to restrict her. One such significant moment happens when Jane decides to leave Thornfield after learning about Mr. Rochester's marriage to Bertha Mason. This is an act of departure that takes place even though she loves Rochester, but this also is a mark of extremely ideal moral integrity and self-respect. Jane reflected and seemed to be considering some kind of strength in her decision: "I will keep the law given by God; sanctioned by man. I will hold to the principles received by me when I was sane, and not mad—as I am now" (Brontë, 1847, p. 365). As such, it represents Jane's never-dying self-belief to adhere to her principles and ethics even while suffering unbearable personal pain.

The other moment of personal triumph, perhaps more related to the social and economic status of the individual, is when Jane is bequeathed a fortune from her uncle. This move critically paints Jane as financially stable and independent. Her reaction to the news of her wealth shows her sense of empowerment: "I am an independent woman now" (Brontë, 1847, p. 396). It is a moment in Jane's life when she will not have to rely on anybody else anymore for her livelihood, and that will give her the opportunity to decide her life according to what she wants and values.

Such pivotal moments in the story add a lot to the empowerment of Jane's character and confirm her freedom and worth. If anything, leaving Thornfield proved that Jane had self-control and that one could put principles before feelings; it was indeed an act of strength and independence. This act not only saves her integrity but also supports her self-belief in her own sense of morality; it is a very powerful example of self-determination for a woman. The effect of this inheritance on Jane is further empowerment through financial independence, which was necessary for any kind of autonomy in the Victorian period. With her own resources, Jane is no longer bound by economic necessity and can assert her will without fear of destitution. This newfound independence allows her to return to Mr. Rochester as an equal, no longer a governess nor dependent but as his partner.

Jane's relationship with Mr. Rochester undergoes a lot of development throughout the novel, and gets quite a bit more equal. This relationship started out with power imbalances well noted. Rochester was the Master of Thornfield, and held social, economic, and gendered power over Jane. Despite that, Jane preserves a kind of self-respect that shows her equality in some subtle ways. For instance, she calls for frank communication and emotional openness: "I do not 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" (Brontë, 1847, p. 167).

The dynamics of power are dramatically transformed once Jane receives her fortune. When she reunites with Rochester, who is now physically dependent and humble due to the fire at Thornfield, they stand on more equal footing. Jane describes this reversal of her fortune, "Reader, I married him. I am my husband's life as fully as he is mine. The quote from a book as Jane speaks—'No woman was ever nearer to her mate than I am: ever more absolutely bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh' (Brontë, 1847, p. 521)—illustrates mutual respect and equality that now define their relationship, underpinning the novel's feminist themes: partnership and balance.

The equaling of the Jane-Rochester equation is basically part and parcel of the novel's feministic message. While at first she depends on Rochester and there is quite an apparent difference in their social and economic levels, the broader differences between men and women are exposed. Once Jane becomes financially independent and Rochester transforms into someone vulnerable, these disparities are set aside for a more balanced, equal relationship between the two. There is an equality of two empowered subjects interacting with each other. This shift is significant as it questions traditional patriarchal time norms, presenting a vision of marriage based on mutual respect and partnership rather than that of dominance and submission.

## 5. Conclusion

This study has examined the feminist struggles and victories presented by Charlotte Brontë in *Jane Eyre*, emphasizing this novel's criticism of the state of gender powerlessness, power imbalances, and growth into the personal empowerment of the novel's protagonist. The description and analysis of the societal suppression, class walls, emotional and psychological turmoils, and individual victories of Jane prove that *Jane Eyre* is a novel of criticism on the limited feminine gender roles and the social structures of the Victorian age. Key moments of Jane's assertion of independence, an ever-developing relationship with Mr. Rochester, and eventual financial independence were revelations of one's resilience and determination to come at a level of equality and self-respect. The fact that it remains a seminal work in feminist literature ensures its place as an influential text, which will both shape and be shaped by the reading practices of audiences in the future.

In conclusion, it is confirmed that this study is indeed a confirmatory study, and *Jane Eyre* continues to be a very pivotal text in the literary feminist canon. The conception of *Jane Eyre* by Brontë as a forceful, self-willed woman who could successfully transcend the expectations of her age and negotiate through very complex emotional and psychological landscapes had created a paradigm for many follow-up feminist stories. As such, the novel is one of critique of patriarchal power structures and a celebration of women's autonomy and will continue to be so through history into contemporary feminist ideals. This research demonstrates how classic literature should be seen from a feminist angle to find how these texts either subvert or conform to norms.

The implications are vast for future research in feminist literature. While *Jane Eyre* has been analyzed to the hilt, it remains open to new readings and examinations, in particular from the vantage points of intersectionality, postcolonialism, and queer theory. Future studies could explore how Jane's identity and struggles cut across issues of race, colonialism, and sexuality, thereby creating a more complex account of her

character and novelistic social critique. It further delves into the discourse of feminist literature with these lesser-known works by female authors that move beyond the Victorian times. Jane Eyre, therefore, is a seminal text that continues to provide lessons of the struggle for the feminist right to independence, equality, and respect. Its influence on feminist literature is profound, and ongoing research will continue to reveal its relevance and significance in new and meaningful ways.

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