

Jane Eyre -A Novel about the Growing up of an Independent Woman

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Abstract: *Jane Eyre* is a novel with the theme of initiation. It is widely acclaimed by the public since it is published. The impact of temporal and spatial changes on the portrayal of the female protagonist, and the interpretation of the main theme "growing up" will be analyzed through examples based on the two fiction elements, characters and themes.

Keywords: Character; Characterization; Theme; Initiation

1. Introduction

A series of academic studies have emerged since the novel *Jane Eyre* is published^[1]. Kovaleva analyzed the theme of happiness as portrayed in *Jane Eyre* and discovered that the theme of happiness permeates the entire structure of this novel^[2]. Sawitri analyzed the methods of characterization used in *Jane Eyre* and explored the three-dimensional aspects of the main character of it^[3]. Widiatmi analyzed the portrayal of feminism in *Jane Eyre*, which is reflected in the characterization of one of the seven fiction elements - plot, character and characterization, point of view, style, tone and irony, symbols and allegory, and theme^[4]. By using the method of library research, Widiatmi concluded that Jane is a round character, her personality develops and changes in five phases, and Jane breaks the class structure of British society at that time with her education^[5]. Jiang centered his discussions on the initiation theme, delving into Jane Eyre's growth process. Through depicting Jane Eyre's personal growth, knowledge acquisition, and independent pursuit, he revealed her spiritual growth and self-realization in the process of pursuing freedom, quality, and independence^[6].

Different authors have interpreted the novel *Jane Eyre* from different perspectives from the above analysis. However, as far as we know, seldom do they combine the fiction elements and the theme of initiation together. This article will focus on the analysis of the author's efforts in shaping the character image of Jane Eyre's growth process, and use examples to prove how the two elements - character and theme of the novel are embodied.

2. Character and Characterization of Jane Eyre

There is no denying that Jane Eyre serves as the protagonist of the story. The novel stunningly presents readers with the process of growth of an independent woman who dares to resist and pursue freedom and love. There are four demarcation points in the story, which all contribute to the development of her character. Therefore in this sense, she is also a round or dynamic character. How does the author portray Jane in the story and how does her personality develop in different locations according to chronological order will be analyzed by using the examples.

2.1 Gateshead Hall

The young Jane Eyre suffers from the cruelty and injustice of human kindness and both mental and physical torture from her aunt and cousins in Gateshead. From the first example of habitual John's abuse to the second example of fearlessly expressing hatred towards her aunt perfectly "show" the transformation in her character.

e.g.1

"Accustomed to John Reed's abuse, I never had an idea of replying to it, my care was how to endure the blow which would certainly follow the insult."

e.g.2

"Speak I must: I had been trodden on severely, and must turn: but how? What strength had I to dart retaliation at my antagonist? I gathered my energies and launched them in this blunt sentence---

'I am not deceitful, if I were, I should say I loved you, but I declare I do not 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, Georgiana, for it is she who tells lies, and not I.'"^[1]

Other than “showing” Jane’s characteristics, Bronte also used an array of examples to “tell” them. For instance, before her departure for Lowood, Bessie the servant comes to say goodbye. As shown in e.g. 3, the author “tell” the reader about Jane’s personality - strange, roving and solitary from their conversation.

e.g.3

“ *You are a strange child, Miss Jane, ” she said, as she looked down at me,“ a little roving, solitary thing; and you are going to school, I suppose?* ”⁽¹⁾

2.2 Lowood Institution

In Lowood institution, Jane Eyre wrongly think that she can start a new and better life in a new environment, free from scolding, humiliation and oppression. However, Mr. Brocklehurst withheld funds and brutalized the students under the banner of “punishing the flesh to save the soul”. Therefore, the rebellious spirit that Jane Eyre brought with her from her aunt’s house is further reflected here.

e.g.4

“ *‘Cruel? Not at all! She is severe: she dislikes my faults.’* (Helen)

‘And if I were in your place I should dislike her; I should resist her. If she struck me with that rod, I should get it from her hand; I should break it under her nose.’ (Jane)

‘Yet it would be your duty to bear it, if you could not avoid it: it is weak and silly to say you cannot bear what it is your fate to be required to bear.’ (Helen)

I heard her with wonder: I could not comprehend this doctrine of endurance; and still less could I understand or sympathise with the forbearance she expressed for her chastiser. (Jane)

‘A great deal: you are good to those who are good to you. It is all I ever desire to be. If people were always kind and obedient to those who are cruel and unjust, the wicked people would have it all their own way: they would never feel afraid, and so they would never alter, but would grow worse and worse. When we are struck at without a reason, we should strike back again very hard; I am sure we should --- so hard as to teach the person who struck us never to do it again.’ (Jane)

‘You will change your mind, I hope, when you grow older: as yet you are but a little untaught girl.’ (Helen)

‘But I feel this, Helen; I must dislike those who, whatever I do to please them, persist in disliking me; I must resist those who punish me unjustly. It is as natural as that I should love those who show me affection, or submit to punishment when I feel it is deserved.’ ” (Jane)⁽¹⁾

When Jane Eyre sees her friend Helen being punished again, her sense of rebellion flared up again and told her that if she continued to tolerate and submit to such brutality, they would end up with worse and worse behavior. However, Jane Eyre’s persuasion does not change Helen’s long-standing personal mindset of submission and abuse at school. The two contrasts the author uses here “show” the strong character of Jane Eyre who dares to resist and pursue freedom and equality, so that the image of Jane Eyre once again appears vividly before us. In this process, Jane Eyre’s character undergoes a major transformation. She gradually aspires to a life of freedom and equality and hopes to use the power of knowledge to open up the wide world outside.

2.3 Thornfield Hall

Jane Eyre’s independence and sense of autonomy are not only expressed in her unconcealed hatred, but also in her boldness in confessing her love. Jane Eyre boldly confesses her love to Mr. Rochester, even when she mistakenly believed that he is going to marry Miss Ingram. She cries and tells him about her self-proclaimed hopeless love. She could not calm her inner feelings, and she is so excited about her fate that *‘And if God had gifted me with some beauty and much wealth, I should have made it as hard for you to leave me, as it is now for me to leave you.’*⁽¹⁾

e.g.5

“ *Some time in the afternoon I raised my head, and looking round and seeing the western sun gilding the sign of its decline on the wall, I asked, ‘What am I to do?’*

But the answer my mind gave ‘Leave Thornfield at once’-- was so prompt, so dread, that I stopped my ears. I said I could not bear such words now. ‘That I am not Edward Rochester’s bride is the least part of my woe, ’ I alleged: ‘that I have wakened out of most glorious dreams, and found them all void and vain, is a horror could bear and master; but that I must leave him decidedly, instantly, entirely, is intolerable. I cannot do it.’ ”⁽¹⁾

The lawyer appears at the wedding and unlocked Mr. Rochester’s innermost secrets - his mad wife Bertha Mason. The emergence of the mad woman not only propel the development of the plot but also lay the foundation for a richer and more complete portrayal of Jane Eyre. Before the appearance of the mad woman, readers are deeply impressed by the rebelliousness, self-respect and independence that she shows in Mrs. Reed’s house. However, this characterization is too homogeneous and generalized, and does not reflect the complexity of people in society. This complexity needs to be expressed at the right time, and the appearance of the mad woman fulfills this purpose. The final appearance

of Mason's character poses a direct problem for Jane Eyre, as the love she had hoped for is suddenly lost and replaced by a deception. And the above example is a true reflection of her complex inner workings.

2.4 Moorland

e.g.6

" Yet if I know nothing about you or your history, I cannot help you, " he said." And you need help, do you not?"

" I need it, and I seek it so far, sir, that some true philanthropist will put me in the way of getting work which I can do, and the remuneration for which will keep me, if but in the barest necessities of life. " [1]

When John's family takes her in their house, Jane Eyre once again know herself and has a new attitude toward life. She finds herself at times completely at the mercy of other people and circumstances, and so at this time, she is no longer appeared to be "independent" and willing to accept help and comfort of John's family. But, Jane Eyre realized that economic independence is the foundation of spiritual independence. Even though she has to accept Rivers' help, she does not want to depend on them chronically. Therefore, she continues to teach and live independently.

2.5 Ferndean

e.g.7

" Which are none, sir, to me. I love you better now, when I can really be useful to you, than I did in your state of proud independence, when you disdained every part but that of the giver and protector. " [1]

Jane Eyre's quest for equality is expressed more in her marriage and love. Her emotional conflicts with Rochester and St. John are due to the deliberate pursuit of equality between the two parties in love, which must be based on economic and spiritual independence, that is, on the premise of independent personality.

Jane inherits her uncle's fortune, rejects John's proposal in pursuit of her true love and returns to Rochester, who has nothing and is blind. Therefore, the character of Jane Eyre gets the final sublimation and moral perfection.

3. Theme --- Initiation

Jane Eyre is a coming-of-age novel in terms of structure and intent. The author's use of the paragraph structure and first-person narrative perspective places the protagonist at the center of the novel's narrative and reflects her character, temperament, and growth through the unfolding of her story. All the other characters become characters in the work because of her. They are all around Jane Eyre as the circumstances of her upbringing and the stages of her life that influence her actions and the person she becomes. Charlotte Brontë intend this work to be a history of Jane Eyre's emotional and spiritual life, so that this apparently loosely structured novel has a curious internal unity. The five successive scenes mark the five stages of Jane Eyre's life, her trials and tribulations, her inner conflicts, and her choices at the crossroads of her life. Her character, emotions, and spirit develop accordingly.

4. Conclusion

Jane Eyre successfully shaping the image of a progressive woman who is independent, eager for freedom and equality, uncomfortable with the status quo, and daring to fight against fate. The novel begins with Jane Eyre's life in Gateshead Hall as a parasite, to the difficult conditions in Lowood Institution, to Thornfield Hall where she meets Edward Rochester, to the Moorland where she arrives in distress, and finally to reunion with Rochester at Ferndean, each change of scene not only subtly makes the plot more twisted, but also promote the growth of Jane, making her image dynamic more fleshed out. The main theme "initiation" is also embedded in the plot. The plot is the basis for the formation of the characters' images, and the characters' images are completed and reflected in the advancement and changes of the plot, while the theme of the work will be gradually revealed with the development of the plot.

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