Jane Eyre Essay, Research Paper

Jane Eyre: Role of Male Dominance

Somewhere, The Dark Sheds Light

“Never, never, never quit…” -Winston Churchill

If women on this Earth had given up, they would be where they were in the time of Charlotte Bront?.

Jane Eyre, by Charlotte Bront?, tells the story of a woman on a lifetime journey, progressing on the path of acceptance, in searching of sympathy. Throughout her journey, Jane encounters many obstacles to her intelligence. Jane lives in a world and in a time where society thought women were too fragile to ponder too much at once. Women at the time had barely any rights at all, and women were not allowed prominent positions. Male dominance proves to be the biggest obstruction at each stop of Jane’s journey through Gateshead Hall, Lowood Institution, Thornfield Manor, Moor House, and Ferndean Manor. As she grows, however, as she is her own shoulder to lean on in her times of need, Jane slowly learns how to understand and control repression.

Jane’s journey begins at Gateshead Hall. Mrs. Reed, Jane’s aunt and guardian, serves as the biased arbitrator of the rivalries that constantly occur between Jane and John Reed. John emerges as the dominant male figure at Gateshead. He insists that Jane concedes to him and serve him at all times, threatening her with mental and physical abuse. Mrs. Reed condones John’s conduct and sees him as the victim. Jane’s rebellion against Mrs. Reed represents a realization that she does not deserve the unjust treatment. Jane refuses to be treated as a subordinate and finally speaks out against her oppressors. Her reactions to Mrs. Reed’s hate appear raw and uncensored, and foreshadow possible future responses to restraints. This rebellion also initiates the next phase of her journey.

Lowood Institution represents the next step in Jane’s progression. Her obstacle here appears in the form of Mr. Brocklehurst, the operator of the “respectable” institution. He made his first appearance at Gateshead Hall in order to examine Jane and verify her evil qualities (according to Mrs. Reed). “I looked up at- a black pillar!” (24) Jane introduces Mr. Brocklehurst in such a way that we can predict the nature of their relationship, dark. Once Jane and Mr. Brocklehurst go into conversation, he explains to Jane how bad little children go to hell. When asked how to prevent going to hell, Jane gives a roundabout answer. Jane knows Mr. Brocklehurst wants to hear that she will pray to become a better child, but instead Jane replies: “I must keep in good health, and not die.” (26). Jane further references his appearance in chapter four: “What a face…!” thinks Jane, “what a great nose! and what a mouth! and what large prominent teeth!” This sounds more like the Big, Bad Wolf luring Little Red Ridinghood into his trap. At Lowood, Mr. Brocklehurst exemplifies the perfect hypocrite. He constantly preached for the denial of “luxury and indulgence” (55), though his values conflict with these ideas. His wife and daughters personify the meanings of luxury and indulgence in that “they were splendidly attired in velvet, silk, and furs” (57). He extends his hypocrisy in quoting bible passages to support his preachings, though these preachings and passages do not apply to his own life. He says, ” I have a master to serve whose kingdom is not of this world: my mission is to mortify in these girls the lusts of the flesh, to teach them to clothe themselves with shame and sobriety, not with braided hair and costly apparel…” (57). Although she must learn to deal with Brocklehurst’s complete dominance, Jane changes a lot during her years at Lowood, due mainly to the teachings of Helen Burns and Miss. Temple. Through their instruction, Jane learns how to control her anger over Mr. Brocklehurst’s false accusations and understand her feelings without yielding to a vocal rebellion like the one prompted by Mrs. Reed at Gateshead.

Jane’s journey next brings her to Thornfield Manor. Mr. Rochester becomes the dominant male figure at this juncture. While in residence at Thornfield, Rochester demands undivided attention from the servants, Jane included. He insists on dominance in every aspect of his life, and he needs recognition for his superiority. Jane somehow resolves to accept his control and she concedes to him by calling him “sir,” even after beginning their intimate relationship. She even goes so far as to excuse herself for thinking. She says, “I was thinking, sir (you will excuse the idea; it was involuntary), I was thinking of Hercules and Samson with their charmers-” (247). Jane’s irony suggests displeasure at Rochester’s complete dominance of their relationship. Jane’s reference to religion also becomes associated with the idea of a dominant sex, particularly the male gender. For Jane, Rochester embodies the idea of love which has so long been denied to her. She still must continue her pilgrimage when she finds Rochester’s physical and material love unacceptable.

Jane’s next lesson comes at Moor House. Here, she must answer to St. John, her cousin (though in name only). He portrays the ultimate sacrificer, willing to do anything for others, no matter how undesirable. St. John also expects this of Jane, and she must decide whether to answer to his call. By this point in her journey, Jane understands that her search for sympathy can not be realized without real love. She denies St. John’s marriage proposal by saying, “I have a woman’s heart, but not where you are concerned; for you I only have a comrade’s constancy; a fellow-soldier’s frankness, fidelity, fraternity. . .nothing more. . .” (390). She knows real love can not be given to her by St. John and she must continue still in her journey.

Ferndean Manor emerges as the final stop in Jane’s journey. Once again, Rochester appears as the dominant figure, although his superior air becomes greatly reduced in light of his ailments and complete dependency on those around him. A new man results in this change, and in him, Jane finds her real, spiritual and physical love. She says, “All my heart is yours, sir: it belongs to you; and with you it would remain, were fate to exile the rest of me from your presence forever” (425). Rochester no longer demands a subservient being to boost his ego; he demands an equal partner. He does not try to contain Jane; he sets her free. He says, “Miss Eyre, I repeat it, you can leave me” (424). She does not leave him though. In him, Jane finds her sympathy. Rochester embodies the perfect balance between the physical and the spiritual, the natural and graceful, intellectual and physical beauty, and love and servitude. Rather than being ruled, Jane realizes her true abilities and she finds her balance.

Jane Eyre makes many stops on her pilgrimage for happiness and equality. Each stop helps her understand and realize qualities in herself and others. With each new experience and trial, she learns how to rationally confront the repression, which leads to her progression. At Gateshead, Jane refuses to be treated as a subordinate and finally speaks out against her oppressors. At Lowood, Mr. Brocklehurst exemplifies the perfect hypocrite, but a simple letter from Mr. Lloyd gets the best of Mr. Brocklehurst. With Mr. Rochester at Thornfield, Jane somehow resolves to accept his control and she concedes to him by calling him “sir,” even after beginning their intimate relationship, no doubt, she will do anything or change any of her ways for him. With a bit of a twist at Moor House, Jane begins to understand that her search for sympathy can not be realized without real love, where a man, St. John, treats her as a goddess. Finally at Ferndean Rochester appears as the dominant figure once more, but his superiority waters down in light of his ailments and complete dependency on those around him, primarily Jane. Understanding dominance, though not yielding to it, becomes the key for Jane to achieve success. After all, both Jane Eyre and Charlotte Bront? stood up for their rights in a time where society said they couldn’t. Reader, if you have a problem, speak up.

New thang

Charlotte Bronte was a strong-willed woman with extreme beliefs in self-awareness and individuality, a viewpoint that was tacitly condemned in those times. Throughout her novels Charlotte never failed to collide the main character with the discovery of her true worth. Jane Eyre was Charlotte’s most popular novels and happens to beautifully demonstrate the main character gradually becoming in touch with her true self through life lessons.

The journey of Miss Jane Eyre begins at Gateshead where she is in the care of her cruel aunt who treats her like someone off the streets. In the words of Maggie Berg, a critic who wrote Jane Eyre: A Companion to the Novel, Jane sees herself as a “rebellious slave” and “hungerstricken”. She is clearly the “scapegoat of the nursery” (pg. 47). In the eyes of her wicked aunt she was a “precocious actress” and was therefor regularly locked up like a dog. According to Berg the effect of these accounts drew attention to her self-dramatization. From the very moment Jane was able to read she was constantly attracted by the disguised portraits that she make for herself in books, ballads, and dolls. The recurring theme of self-awareness I saw in Jane Eyre started from the first time Jane saw herself in the mirror which consequentially gave her a fresh awareness of her own identity. When John “throws the book” at Jane Charlotte Bronte’s attempt was to both literally and metaphorically symbolize the deprivation he was instigating of any sense of herself and her rights.

According to Jacques Lacan, the first identity of oneself in a mirror is the most decisive stage in human development. It provides the “awareness of oneself as an object of knowledge”.

I had to cross before the looking glass; my fascinated glance involuntarily explored the depth it revealed. All looked colder and darker in that visionary hollow than in reality: and the strange little figure there gazing at me with a white face and arms specking the gloom, and glittering eyes of fear moving where all else was still, had the effect of a real spirit: I thought it like one of the tiny phantoms, half fairy, half imp, Bessies’s evening stories represented as coming out of lone, ferny dells in moors, and appearing before the eyes of belated travelers. (46)

Throughout her childhood at Gateshead Jane was treated in the most unjust manner, but never until she was locked up it the notorious “Red Room” had she ever admitted to hating her family. When she finally did get her hatred off her chest it yielded much relief, but was followed by intense guilt because such behavior is one that she was grown up not to condone within herself. Her guilt is what I believe to be her first lesson in her self-awareness. Every time she seemed to release herself, something I’ve always found to be healthy, she suppressed them with her guilt. Throughout the novel, like Berg commented, Jane projects her emotions of intense resentment that she doesn’t condone in herself and doesn’t like to admit. The crisis in the Red Room was a major lesson of self-awareness for Jane in the sense that it caused her to “fall from childhood innocence into recognition of her own potential evil.”

The Red Room crisis is recounted by Jane four times; each time differently as a result of the unexpected non-sympathetic attitudes she received from the listener of the previous account. The first account was most impassioned.

I shall remember how you thrust me back-roughly and violently thrust me back-into the red-room, and locked me up there, to my dying day, though I was in agony, though I cried out, whole suffocating with distress, “Have mercy! Have mercy Aunt Reed!”…I will tell anybody who asks me questions this exact tale. (68-69)

The second account was to the apothecary who didn’t yield too much sympathy, but the third, to Helen Burns was one of no tolerance or sympathy in the least bit. Helen firmly says, “Would you not be happier if you tried to forget her severity, together with the passionate emotions it excited? Life appears to me too short to be spent in nursing animosity or registering wrongs” (90). This turns out to be a lesson about herself that Jane chooses to take with her for the future progression of her identity. We know that she has progressed by examining the account of the same incident to Mrs. Temple for the fourth time.

I resolved in the depth of my heart, that I would be most moderate-most correct; and, having reflected a few minutes in order to arrange coherently what I had to say, I told her all the story of my sad childhood. Exhausted by emotion, my language was more subdued than it generally was when it developed that sad theme; and mindful of Helen’s warnings against the indulgence of resentment, I infused into the narrative far less of gall and wormwood than ordinary. Thus restrained and simplified, it sounded more credible: I felt I went on that Miss Temple fully believed me. (102-3)

At Gateshead Jane undergoes a physical and spiritual transition away from her inner confinement. She is very strong-willed and decisive from what I’ve seen. For example when she explored beyond the gates at Thornfield she is unwilling to return to the “gloomy house…. the gray hollow” (148). She sees all this through glass doors.

The Loowood School is Jane’s greatest transition. She confronts the harsh reality of physical survival and gets a sense of her own worth. The journey to the school begins in cold and darkness before dawn in the first month of the year, which symbolized a new birth for her. She is about to physically change her life, but she will also discover much about herself, helping to mold her self-identification. At the school she also becomes more adventurous.

Her discovery of herself at Loowood begins when Helen Burns tells her that she is too dependent on the approval of others. By always keeping this in mind throughout the story Jane is able to ignore the disapproval of others and live life the way she wants. In that respect she becomes a stronger person. The punishment Jane receives by Mr. Brocklehurst is a major visual presentation of herself. She had a superior position on the stool and all the “ladies” underneath her looked ridiculous. Berg commented that Jane’s…

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