

# A feminist approach to jane eyre: struggling for self realization

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



Jane Eyre's story tells us that in a man dominated society, a woman should strive for decency and dignity. In face of such hardships in life, a courageous woman should be brave enough to battle against it and self-esteem is the primary element to protect. And the feminism taught how to defend ourselves. Whenever we are helpless in the bad conditions, we should try to survive the life. As to a happy marriage, a certain amount of fortune is necessary. While as to the lover, independence and equality as a human is the first task. A marriage without love is lifeless therefore a perfect match is based on love, equality in status and a good fortune. Jane goes against the expected type by refusing subservience, disagreeing with her superiors, standing up for her rights and venturing thoughts. She is not only successful in terms of wealth and position but more importantly in terms of family and love. Charlotte Bronte depicts Jane Eyre's image in three steps.

The first step is her feminism thought starts to sprout from her fighting to her poor child life and the second step is her feminism thought shapes from the miserable experiences in the boarding school. The impressive part is the third step of her pursuit of true love, independence, and equality, where the feminist thought grows to mature. Jane's major aim is not to get married, but to preserve her identity and freedom in a male governed society. That's the reason which makes Jane, courageous to stand up, to defy the rules of her society and to speak out each time when she feels that she is being treated unfairly, it does not matter to her whether if it is her aunt, her bullying cousin, the cruel headmaster of the school, or even the man she is in love with. Jane faces great unconformity with the social environment at that time.

Though she dares to fight against the conventional marriage ideas, which well reflects all feminists voice and wish for a true love.

During this period Jane covered her name, she wanted to make a new living. While being a teacher in a small village she made friends with John and his sisters. Though John appears to be a handsome guy and he proposed to Jane, she cannot accept him this is the reflection of her iron determination in pursuing love. She does not want an affectionless love. A decent and handsome man as John is, Jane Eyre, cannot accept him because his love would be "one of duty, not of passion." She knows very well that humiliated marriage is not a true love. He makes an offer of marriage to Jane because he thinks that Jane is a good choice for a missionary's wife. He finds her docile, firm and tenacious. Because John just needs this kind of assistant. Jane says that if she joins St. John she is abandoning half herself and if she goes to India, she is going to premature death. She insists that true love should be based on equality, mutual understanding, and respect. So she refuses John's proposal. In Jane's life, the pursuit of true love is an important representation of her struggle for self-realization. For her love is pure as well as divine, it cannot be measured by status, power, or property.

Having experienced a helpless childhood and a miserable adolescence, she expects more than a consolable true love. She suffers a lot in her pursuit of true love. Though, she obtains it through her long and hard pursuit. As a feminist woman, she represents the insurgent women eager for esteem and without esteem women like Jane cannot get the real emancipation. In most of the people's eyes, nobody would like to marry a man who loses his sight

and most all his wealth. But as to Jane, she is different. In her mind, pure love is the meant to be a meeting of hearts and minds of two people. Jane does not think that she is making a sacrifice. She says: “ I love the people if love is that to make a sacrifice? If so, then certainly I delight in sacrifice.” By the end of the novel, Jane returns to Ferndean Manor and marries Rochester. By that time Mr. Rochester loses sight of both eyes and disabled. In this circumstance, Jane comes back to Mr. Rochester caring for nothing but this man. She says: “ I find you lonely, I will be your companion, to read to you, to walk with you, to sit with you, to wait on you, to be eyes and hands to you. Cease to look so melancholy, my dear master; you shall not be left desolate, so long as I live.”(Bronte 618) She wants recognition that both sexes are equal in terms of heart and spirit. Jane Eyre defines herself as a spiritual human being, the proof of her free spirit and feminist ideals is her relation with Rochester.

Though she is a governess she does not consider herself inferior to him. Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain and little, I am soulless or 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, as it is for me to leave you. I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, nor even of mortal flesh: it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God’s feet, equal-as we are! (Bronte 356) Jane’s relationship with Mr. Rochester is a constant struggle for her to maintain her own individual identity; she plays the role of servant yet

makes it perfectly clear to him that she does not consider herself below him in terms of spiritual qualities. She insists she is more than her social status, saying: Jane's leaving of Mr. Rochester exhibits her courage. By this deed, she both defies the Victorian expectation of submitting man's will and shows that she can break from the emotional power that Mr. Rochester wields over her. Jane's refusal to become a mistress shows that she has maintained a certain dignity. Though she had a deep affection for Rochester, she could not stand any compromise in her marriage. She is the whole one and cannot be laughed or argued by others in this aspect, she wouldn't give up her independence and self-respect. So she decided to leave her beloved one Rochester and wanted to make a new life. I care for myself.

The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself. I will keep the law given by God, sanctioned by man. I will hold to the principles received by men when I was sane, and not mad as I am now, laws and principles are not for the times when there is no temptation, they are for such moments as this when body and soul rise in mutiny against their rigor, stringent are they, inviolate they shall be. (Bronte 447) The time Jane spends, in the Thornfield hall is the most splendid part of the whole book. Meeting Rochester and falling in love with him reflected the feminism in Jane and her new thoughts. She loves Rochester with all her heart but Rochester's wealth and status make him so high above for Jane to approach, though she never feels inferior to Rochester. She is a humble family teacher. She believes that they are fair and should respect each other, it is her uprightness, loftiness, and sincerity that touch Rochester. He feels

from the bottom of his heart that Jane is the spiritual partner that he longs for. When the heroine is moved by his wholeheartedness, they fall in love deeply. But at the time of the wedding, she finds out the fact that Rochester has had a legal wife. Jane feels heartbreaking on this news and it makes her trapped in a dilemma about whether she should stay or leave. She says to Rochester: Jane Eyre's rebellion against Mrs.

Reed and John represents her feminist consciousness in getting esteem from other people as a decent and respectable person. Little Jane was sent to Lowood boarding school where she learned a lot and became much stronger and independent. During Jane Eyre's stay at the orphanage of Lowood, she is aware of a fact that even in the face of powerful and authoritative people like the chief inspector of the charity school, Brocklehurst, as long as her esteem and dignity hurt ruthlessly she will never submit but rebel against it decidedly. How dare I, Mrs. Reed? How dare I? Because it is the truth. You think I had no feelings, and that I can do without one bit of love or kindness, but I can't live so, and you have no pity. I shall remember how you push me back roughly and violently pushed me back into the red room, and locked me up there-to my dying day. Though I was in pain, though I cried out, have mercy! Have mercy, Aunt Reed! (Bronte44) Jane must be thankful to her aunt Reed rather than being rude. When Jane was about to leave Gateshead to the charity school. Mrs. Reed thinks she can make Jane frightened by her status and decides to give a hypocritical and sanctimonious talk to guide Jane to express gratitude in front of Mr. Lloyd. But Jane Eyre refuses to be this rich lady's doll being treated as unemotional and shameless. She retorts

back straightly and powerfully: Jane was very young when she lost her parents, unfortunately, her uncle Mr. Reed also dies after a few years, Jane could live a good life if his uncle would be alive. Her aunt Mrs. Reed regarded Jane as a jinx and let her children John, Eliza and Georgina neglect and abuse Jane. They dislike Jane's plain look. These only relatives of Jane do not show sympathy or care to this pitiful girl, they always criticize and bully her. Aunt Reed always treats Jane as an encumbrance inferior to a maid.

Eventually one day little Jane had an argument with her cousin and was beaten. Being locked in a room for a night, Jane was ill at that time her early feminism came out. In the face of Mrs. Reed Jane refuses to be treated as an inferior being and speaks out against discriminations to her with cold and sharp exposure. When Mrs. Reed reproaches Jane for telling a lie out of all reason, Jane defends herself: " I'm 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." (Bronte43) Jane Eyre did not take to the streets with her feminist ideals, but she expressed her view of women's equality in a subconscious way, through word and deed. Jane, however, is an orphan with no fortune, and repeatedly is described by her author as unattractive, but she is still able to break the conventions of her age. She faces hardships with great determination.

Firstly raised by Mrs. Reed, a cruel aunt, then afterward she is sent to Lowood a bleak charity school run by the tyrannical Mr. Brocklehurst, where she endures a lonely and sad life. Jane faces the prospects of a young

woman lacking the social advantages of family, money, and beauty. She endures so much suffering throughout the novel. She suffers through the cruel treatment of Lowood because her aunt Mrs. Reed wants to punish her for her rebelliousness, she suffers heartbreak for her attempt to marry beloved Rochester and suffers an estrangement from St. John when she chooses to uphold her belief that marriages should be for love and not for the convenience. Despite the pain that her choices bring her, she manages to maintain her independence in the face of the overwhelming powers over her. And despite the happy ending when she is reunited with Mr. Rochester, it is not loved but the courage that defines her character. Her kindness, intelligence, and independence attract the hero. She loved Mr. Rochester but she proves to have even stronger command over her dignity than her emotions. The purpose of writing this paper is to analyze the novel Jane Eyre from a feminist perspective, given its significant statements about issues central to women and their lives in the Victorian society.

During the mid-nineteenth century, the women were supposed to carry the burden of “staying in her place”. In other words, a woman was a subject to generally accept the standards and roles that the society had placed upon her which did not necessarily provide her with liberty, dignity or independence. In the Victorian period, the society is man controlled and man dominated, and women are subject to the voice of men. It is impossible for a low-status woman to have a decent life or a good marriage. Women are discriminated against in the patriarch society, in this period the female



writers take the pens to speak for the oppressed women and Jane Eyre comes to be the most influential novel.

Jane Eyre is clearly a critique of assumptions about both gender and social class. It contains a strong feminist stance. Jane Eyre is an epitome of femininity, a young independent individual steadfast in her morals and has strong Christian virtues, dominant, assertive and principled.