

A feminist approach on jane eyre

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



As a young boy, I couldn't wait to explore the aisles at Toys R Us. I would wait patiently at home for my parents, daydreaming about the latest releases. In the aisle designated for boys, all the toys were action-oriented: Superman flaunted his strength, Hulk flexed his abnormally enormous biceps, and Nerf guns were filled with plastic bullets.

This was only true for one half of the store. On the other side of Toys R Us, the area was designated for girls. Girls had beauty-oriented and homemaking items, like an Easy-Bake Oven or an unnaturally slim Barbie doll. Both these areas were noticeably distinct with their segregated boys toys from girls toys and each seemed to have a not-so-subtle gender message: boys were expected to become strong courageous men while girls must be prepared to take on housekeeping duties. For centuries, these messages of the societal expectations based on gender have been established by numerous texts and films. Under the male pseudonym Currer Bell, Charlotte Brontë's novel, *Jane Eyre* revolves around the strong female protagonist, Jane Eyre. As a female writer living in Victorian England, where women writers were unspoken of, Brontë challenges her era's norm by creating a masterpiece with one of the most iconic female characters of all time. Throughout the novel, Jane develops relationships with prominent male figures, Edward Rochester and St. John Rivers, highlighting the stark contrasts between the roles females and males had. Despite her attempts to preserve her identity and freedom by refusing to submit to patriarchal powers, both Rochester and St. John constantly attempt to sway Jane away from her pro-feminist desires with their ideas of androcentrism.

Although Brontë attempts to give readers a glimpse of gender equality between Jane and her male counterparts, there are still many sexist undertones throughout the novel highlighting the demoralizing power dynamics men believed to be entitled to over women. After departing Thornfield, Jane is taken in by St. John Rivers, the patriarchal head of the Moor House. Due to his calm and ordinary life, St. John yearns to pursue adventure through missionary work in India. Fearing the judgemental eyes of society, he desires a wife with good character to accompany him on his voyage, prompting him to ask Jane for her hand in marriage. She refuses his proposal, to which he responds with endless attempts to persuade her otherwise. While trying to convince her, St. John uses condescending language to objectify her as a tool for his personal gain. God and nature intended you for a missionary's wife. It is not personal, but mental endowments they have given you: you are formed for labour, not love. A missionary's wife you must—shall be. You shall be mine. I claim you not for my pleasure, but for my sovereign service (Brontë 437). By demanding a marriage using religion, he condemns Jane for her audacity to not comply and stay independent. St. John ruthlessly declares ownership of her and acts as if she has an obligation to submit. Similarly, this toxic masculinity is shown in Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve's *Beauty and the Beast*. The premise of the fairy tale begins with the Beast capturing the Beauty's father for trespassing and ordering for one of his daughters in exchange for his freedom, essentially dehumanizing the value of a woman's life over a man by using the Beauty's life as an object to be bartered with. When Beauty arrives at the Beast's castle, she saluted him respectfully (Villeneuve 11) and

demonstrated obedience to which he responds with, I am pleased with you (Villeneuve 12). During her time in the castle, she dreams of her father guiding her to reward him [the Beast] by doing what he wishes, in spite of his ugliness (Villeneuve 22).

The lack of focus on the Beasts enchanted curse throughout the story causes readers to concentrate on Beauty's compliance towards his needs. Her outright servility is one that both hyper-masculine male figures expect from women. In addition, both St. John and the Beast get rejected by their respective female love interests. But their egotistical mindsets prompt them to continue on with their pursuit in a marriage regardless of what their female counterparts say. Both men use the fact that they are males to constantly berate women and coerce them into believing that a marriage with each of the men would eventually lead to a much improved life. St. John's persistence and determination to take Jane to India as his wife almost sways her into accepting his proposal. While debating what she should do, Jane hears Rochester's voice out of thin air calling her name and becomes eager to find out where he is. She begins her lengthy journey back to Thornfield only to find out that Rochester is blinded by a fire and has moved to Ferndean. After eventually meeting up with him and telling her story about her experience at the Moor House, both Rochester and Jane decide to get married. When Rochester worries that Jane would find it unpleasant to deal with his blindness, Jane responds, I love you better now, when I can really be useful to you, than I did in your state of proud independence (Brontë 485). The novel concludes with Jane finding peace and joy while having Rochester by her side: My Edward and I, then, are happy (Brontë 492).

Although some may view Jane as brave and independent for returning to Rochester on her free will, the ending certainly signifies something much more and different. The ending conveys to readers that Jane can only be satisfied with her life once she finds a man by her side to which she can be useful for. Jane's hardships and the happy ending mirrors the Grimm Brothers Cinderella. Cinderella's stepsisters desperately fight to fit the golden shoe in hopes of becoming the prince's bride, resulting in bloodshed. The girl sliced off a piece of her heel, forced her foot into the shoe, gritted her teeth, and went out to meet the prince (Grimm 121) shows how desperate the girls were to marry the prince. He notices that the shoe doesn't quite fit the stepsisters and instead, discovers the perfect match with Cinderella's foot. The damsel in distress, Cinderella, who faces extreme mistreatment from her family is magically swept off her feet by a handsome prince and is saved from a lifetime of poverty and abuse.

The story ends with her living happily ever after with a marriage to the prince all because of her foot fitting into a shoe. Jane Eyre and Cinderella share a multitude of resemblances, the most striking of all, the parallel endings in which a heroine finds her happy ending because of a man. Both endings emphasize the sexist notion that in order for women to have a happy life, they must wait until they find a male figure to rescue them from their tumultuous lives. 171 years later after the publication of Jane Eyre, the sexist boundaries and expectations that Brontë emphasizes in her novel remain present in today's society. We still experience drastic inequalities between males and females, from toy stores confining boys and girls to blue and pink bubbles to novels conveying how a woman's life should be played

out. In Jane Eyre, Jane refuses to be married off to various men in hopes of preserving her individuality and morality. However, she inevitably ends up with Rochester, a man to fulfill her desires and needs, illustrating to readers how women are destined to have a man by their side in order to be content with life.

By the end of the novel, we see Jane grow, mature, and eventually become stronger and stronger, yet even she can't escape the traditional happily ever after with a husband by her side. Time and time again, we see this conventional plot and ending in Cinderella, Beauty and the Beast, Jane Eyre, and countless other fairy tales, but what implications can this have on young children? In a 2004 study from Arizona State University and New York University, researchers described children as gender detectives who seek out information about the differences between girls and boys, attempt to draw inferences about gender and then apply their conclusions to themselves (Samakow). Therefore, any indications or hints that children can pick up through books and media can heavily influence the way kids view themselves. Books such as Jane Eyre and Disney princess movies can steer children to think in a certain sexist mindset, infusing a standard that men are always superior to women. When I read Jane Eyre, I found myself cheering Jane on to stand up for herself and make decisions based on her best interest, but the ending of the book was quite disappointing in that she ultimately confines herself to the societal standards of marrying a man to complete her life. For this novel to truly be a pro-feminist novel that demonstrates how capable women are, Jane should have found joy within

herself by expressing the importance of being independent and realizing that women do not need a man to have a happily ever after.