

The use of heroes and character types in jane eyre

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OUTLINE

The Ant-Hero

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The Use of Heroes and Character Types in Jane Eyre

The literary use of traditional character types is a way that authors are able to demonstrate certain moral and social traditions that their audience can easily identify. Certain characters must act certain ways in order for the main character to mature and grow as a person.

Through the use of classic Victorian heroes and character types such as: the heroine, the tragic hero, the anti-hero, and the double; Charlotte Brontë is able to demonstrate Jane's growth as woman who is able to take her rightful place in Victorian society.

The Victorian Heroine

A woman in the Victorian era was expected to moral and chaste and in order to considered socially successful she must be married to a wealthy man. The heroine in the Victorian novel must go through a series of stages in order to mature as a woman and reach her ultimate goal. Often, the heroine comes from a poor background and must climb the social ladder on her own. Along the way, she is often tempted by corrupt people or ideas which would derail

her progress but the successful Victorian heroine triumphs over these adversities and remains morally good and chaste.

Jane Eyre represents the classic Victorian heroine. Born to a socially upstanding but poor father, Jane is soon orphaned and must make her own way in the world. She is sent to the Reeds house, a family that has good social standing but is morally corrupt. Jane fights against what she considers the unjust treatment she receives there and is sent away to Lowood. At Lowood, Jane's belligerent spirit is broken and she is taught to be a calm well-bred young woman.

Since there were very few jobs in the Victorian era which were considered respectable, Jane becomes a governess. This proved that she was intelligent and capable in the womanly art of raising a child. When she first met Rochester, she was tempted by his charm, wealth, and dark good looks but fled when she found out he was married. This proved that Jane was morally chaste. Only after Rochester was a free man (and properly punished for his digression), Jane is able to marry him and take her rightful place in society.

Women were expected to stay within the standards set by society while being given few opportunities to succeed on their own. Bronte uses Jane's character to demonstrate a woman's ability to rise on her own free will and become a mature successful woman. Whether or not Bronte believes in a woman's place in the Victorian world is questioned in the character of Bertha, but she uses the expected societal norms in the character of Jane.

The Tragic Hero

The character of the tragic hero was often used in Victorian literature to represent the moral growth necessary in a novel's characters. The tragic hero is often a male who is attractive yet mysterious with several character flaws. At first, he may be reluctant to change but after he falls in love with the Victorian heroine, he grows morally, often through the help of the heroine, and becomes the accepted model of the Victorian hero.

In Jane Eyre, Rochester is the classic Victorian tragic hero. At first, Jane is attracted to him but feels that she is socially inferior thus ineligible for his attentions. However, they soon connect on an intellectual level and fall in love. However, through no fault of his own, Rochester is unable to marry Jane, even though he tries. Rochester is viewed as the tragic hero because he must be saved by Jane before he can qualify as a Victorian hero. Hesse writes,

The supposed "hero" of Jane Eyre, Mr. Rochester, does not follow the Victorian ideal. His appearance is not heroic in any way, he has an illicit past that we soon find out about, and he keeps secrets that, while adding to his mystery, subtract from his honesty and forthrightness. When Rochester is introduced he is definitely not the white knight riding in to save the day. In fact, Jane has to rescue her hero and rather than being inspired or awed by him, she finds him unremarkable.

Rochester was lied to by Bertha's family, thus it was not his fault that he had a crazy wife in the attic. However, he transgressed society's morals by trying to marry Jane while he was still married. As the tragic hero, Rochester must first endure hardships before he is able to attract and keep the love of the heroine.

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Because Rochester attempted to marry the young innocent Jane while he had his crazy wife hidden in the attic, he made himself socially unacceptable thus unworthy to marry the Victorian heroine. After Bertha dies in the fire, Rochester is single however he must be punished somehow to pay for his sins, thus he is blinded. After he is morally redeemed through fire, Rochester is able to marry the heroine.

The Antihero

The antihero is necessary in Victorian literature to demonstrate the moral superiority of the main character. In order to be accepted, the main character must be a morally good person who does the right thing no matter what the consequences. In the novel, Jane must demonstrate her superior nature over that of the Reeds to show how she has grown and matured as a woman.

Mrs. Reed and her children serve as the antihero in contrast to Jane's hero. Jane is a young orphaned girl when she is sent to live with the Reed, thus she is dependent on them and has no social standing of her own. Mrs. Reed and her children make sure that Jane realizes that she is inferior, Godfrey writes, "Though Jane for a time is raised among the middle class with the Reeds, they make her different social position clear. John Reed informs young Jane: "' you are a dependant, mama says; you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg, and not to live here with gentlemen's children like us, and eat the same meals we do, and wear clothes at our mama's expense.'"

The Reeds base their superiority over Jane on the fact that they have money and social standing while she has nothing. In Victorian times, women who were born to nothing found it almost impossible to rise in the social rank.

Even though the Reeds are actually morally inferior to Jane, Bronte uses them to represent how dependent women are on social standing. When Jane is a child, she lashes out at their behavior which she feels is unjust. Jane is then sent to Lowood for demonstrating bad moral character. When Jane returns as a woman to nurse the ailing Mrs. Reed, her devoted caring of her former enemy demonstrates her maturity as a woman. This is one more step towards Jane's climb up the Victorian social ladder.

The Double

Doubles were often used in Victorian literature as a way to present things that may not be appropriate for the main characters to do; like evil deeds or passion. This was especially true for women. In Victorian times, women had to be passion-less and virginal in order to be acceptable. Wildness and sexual feelings were strictly for bad or evil women. In Jane Eyre, Bronte used the character of Bertha to represent Jane's evil side.

Bertha is Rochester's crazy wife, who has been hidden in the attic for years. She is passionate and uncontrollable, the two things that Victorian women were not supposed to be. When Bertha is revealed, society rejects Rochester for harboring a passionate woman and Jane has to reject him as a husband. When Bertha dies, Jane comes back as a respectable woman and marries her hero.

Bronte had to use Bertha as Jane's "Double" in order to demonstrate women's hidden passionate nature while at the same time presenting Jane as a respectable Victorian woman. Regarding the use of the "Double" in Jane Eyre, Warhol writes:

Doubleness is figured as both feminine and feminist, as a strategy for negotiating differences between and within male and female, center and margin, inside and outside, public and private, realism and romance. To be "double" is to resist categorization as one thing or the other; to invoke "doubleness" is to address binary oppositions without resting comfortably in either of the two terms being opposed. As Frances L. Restuccia puts it, "[F]eminism has no choice but doubleness."

Bronte has no choice but to use Bertha as Jane's double to show the hidden wild side of women while at the same time making Jane seem like the socially acceptable good girl. Since women during that time were not allowed to express themselves passionately, Bronte had to use Bertha to demonstrate Jane's hidden passions. After Bertha is destroyed, Jane becomes socially acceptable and is able to marry Rochester. Being married to a wealthy man is the highest a woman can go in the Victorian world.

Bertha also represents the tragic hero's downfall. Rochester was lied to by Bertha's family in regards to her insanity. Through no fault of his own, he becomes socially unacceptable and must pay for his sins. He harbors his secret from the world until his love for the heroine brings all of his skeletons out of the closet. Once Bertha is destroyed, Rochester is able to be saved by the heroine and become a good moral man. Bertha serves both as a

representation of women's secret passions and as a foil to the moral salvation of the two main characters.

Charlotte Bronte uses classic Victorian heroes and characters to show Jane's journey to emotional and social success. Jane is a poor orphan girl born to an improvised but morally upstanding family. As a child she is willful and independent. Bronte uses the antihero characterization of the Reeds to bring out the flaws in Jane's character. After Jane is taught to be a respectful mild-mannered woman at Lowood, she becomes a governess which demonstrates her gradual growth into womanhood. Bronte then uses the tragic hero, Rochester, to show Jane's moral maturity and restrained passions.

To drive this point home, Bronte then brings out Jane's opposite to represent Jane's hidden passions. Once Bertha is destroyed, Jane is able to become a respectable Victorian woman. She is then able to forgive Rochester thus absolving him of his moral transgressions. Once both main characters have been shown to be morally respectable, they are able to fulfill their destinies and become married.

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