

Feminism through the dual voice of charlotte bronte and jane eyre

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



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Eyre is a critique of gender roles, during the early Victorian era. Bront clearly reveals her feminist voice before the first wave of the feminist movement, which took place in the late 19th century. Bront critiques gender roles with the binary appeal of the female and male main and secondary characters, throughout this work.

During the early Victorian Era, the world was starting to change at an exponential rate. Traditional values, while still intact, became more flexible and education was slowly being integrated into the landscape of society, as a whole. England was moving forward with women taking on additional roles, in life. More and more, were they taking jobs outside of the home and increasing their literacy rates. The first wave of the feminist movement didn't occur in England, until the late 19th century, however the aforementioned factors served as small cracks in the glass ceiling, that propelled the idea forward.

Charlotte Bront, wrote in a time when female writers were not taken seriously, much less published. In 1847, under the pseudonym, Currer Bell, Jane Eyre was publicly released, depicting a downtrodden girl, who becomes a heroine, of her own life. Orphaned, beaten, despised, and suppressed, Jane develops a grit that allows her to triumph, through adversity. She is a character who presents a vast amount of complex understanding, at too young an age to comprehend, which forces us to look at the voice of the author, who is speaking through Jane to present a different and stronger picture of what it means, to be a woman. There is a feeling that Bront is very much trying to reach out to her audience, with a feminist agenda. Many

times, she calls out the reader in a surprising manner, as if she is speaking, to the audience, directly. For example, she writes, Reader, though I look comfortably accommodated, I am not very tranquil in my mind. Also, You are not to suppose, reader, that Adele has all this time been sitting motionless on the stool at my feet and Reader, I forgave him at the moment and on the spot. Throughout the text Brontë calls us out and reminds us that she is the voice. Jane Eyre and Charlotte Brontë are the same person. Although the storyline is fictitious, the grit and gumption are seamless, between author and character. Charlotte Brontë, by her perseverance in publishing her work in a male dominated industry and world was a fighter, just like Jane Eyre.

Charlotte Brontë goes even further, by inserting the idea that her work, is an autobiography, even though Jane Eyre is fictitious. There is a psychological strategy to this purposeful act. As opposed to fiction, readers naturally associate autobiographies with reality and have a greater ability to relate to the content. They humanize its characters and apply aspects of the storyline, to their own world. Brontë's goal was to elevate the role of women in regular society, giving them more meaning and dimension, by writing a work that was unlike many before. Unlike the expectation for women to fit a certain mold, Jane Eyre is neither polite, docile, nor gentle. It is revealing, abrupt, scandalous, and strong.

As we delve into Jane Eyre's character, she proves to be an unusually strong willed and independent individual. She is very introspective and thoughtful in a way that is unexpected, especially, as a 9 year old child. After her time in the red room, Jane laments, Children can feel, but they cannot analyze their

feelings; and if the analysis is partially effected in thought, they know not how to express the result of the process in words. This is a complex cognitive and emotional observation, too mature for Jane, but not for Brontë. It may also have been an uncommon idea among society. Not until more modern times, have we gained the knowledge and personal power to explore emotional intelligence, of this nature. It is quite surprising and refreshing to see when this idea is pondered during a time of propriety and survival.

From the beginning of the novel she has a penchant for fighting back and not mincing words. When cousin John attacks her in the library, Jane shouts Wicked and cruel boy! You are like a murderer – you are like a slave-driver – you are like the Roman emperors! Her words are cutting and conjures images of a fascist oppressor or a predator, lurking in the dark. It also gives us an idea of the treachery, that is indicative of John Reed. Not only is his patriarchal and abusive attitude evident, but even more important, is Jane's refusal to cower to the idea. Further, she is intent on not being a victim, 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 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. This is important because Jane, lived 9 years, in an abusive home, where the spiteful matriarch makes a point of excluding and demeaning her. Jane has no allies at Gateshead, other than Bessie, who displays a degree of compassion for her, but does not have the status to advocate on her behalf.

The circumstances at Gateshead, would naturally break Janes spirit. When an infant, who becomes a child, is deprived of loving care and support, it should produce an insecure and feckless character. Janes ability to rise above these dismal circumstances, gives us a picture of her resolve and non-conforming attitude, in a situation where the odds are against her.

The cruelty suffered at the hands of the Reeds is seldom met with passivity. Jane contemplates, A ridge of lighted heath, alive, glancing, devouring, would have been a meet emblem of my mind when I accused and menaced Mrs. Reed: the same ridge black and blasted after the flames are dead, would have represented as meetly my subsequent condition. This is a powerful idea of the rage and anger that Bront represents in a series of adjectives describing Janes state of mind. Like a dragon that is alighted and ready to contend with its enemy, burning her down to a crisp. All that is left are blackened, charred remains. It is a quick and glorious attack, however, the effects are bleak and exhausting. There was some satisfaction to be had, but the price for Janes passion, is moot. It does not change her relationship with her aunt, but rather justifies to Mrs. Reed, her treatment of Jane.

Regardless, Jane speaks up against Mrs. Reed again, after being mischaracterized to Mr. Brocklehurst, I am glad you are no relation of mine: I will never call you aunt for as long as I live. I will never come see you when I am grown up; and if anyone asks me how I liked you, and how you treated me, I will say the very thought of you makes me sick, and that you treated me with miserable cruelty People think you a good woman, but you are bad, hard-hearted. You are deceitful! There are no reparations to be had in this

relationship, but Jane confirms to Mrs. Reed that her behavior is not acceptable. This passage is more contentious to Mrs. Reed, as she expresses some fear in the potential of her reputation tarnished, if Jane actually repeats this to anyone in good society.

Most of the women in this work, with the exception of the Reeds, are on the protagonistic side of the spectrum, falling in line with Brontës pro-woman agenda. Bertha Mason, although a dark figure in the storyline, is an anomaly. As a natural antagonist, if only a vehicle to portray Rochesters deceitfulness, is depicted as a character of strength. Her physical stature is comparable to that of Rochesters, so much that handling her is a challenge. She was a big woman, in stature almost equalizing her husband, and corpulent besides: she showed virile force in the contest – more than once she almost throttled him, athletic as he was. Bertha is not a little secret to be hidden in the tower. She is a brawny, menacing character, who has the ability to damage men, as she almost kills Rochester and her own brother, Richard Mason. It is presumed that Bertha escapes and causes the final fire, that incinerates Thornfield Hall and critically wounds, Rochester. The message comes across that a woman, is not be silenced and hidden away. She will be heard, regardless, of what a man tries to do, to ignore her existence. The undertones of Brontës female characters more often depict strength whether in mind or body. Examples include Helen Burns, Miss Temple, Celine Varens, Diana Rivers, and Mary Rivers. Helen Burns, the intelligent, pious friend who plays a key role in Janes stay at Lowood School, possesses a stoic resolve that allows her to endure the circumstances of her environment and

meanness displayed towards her, by Mrs. Scratcherd. Miss Temple, the compassionate head mistress, who makes a strong effort to undermine Mr. Brockelhursts charge, to deprive the girls of any compassion and comfort. Celine Varens, although, her morals are tenuous, displays the characteristics of an aggressor who takes advantage of Rochester. Women being duplicitous, existed, however it wasnt always acknowledged due to the negative connotation for men. Diana and Mary Rivers, educated, benevolent women resonate with Janes intellect. The remainder of the tertiary female characters, such as Blanche Ingram, Mrs. Fairfax, Grace Poole, and Adele Varens, although not all together instrumental, are benign, at best.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, the male characters of Jane Eyre are overall, unlikeable. Bront presents these characters in such a way that uplifts the female, in comparison, in readers eyes. She starts with John Reed, whose attitude towards his family, is very patriarchal, spoiled and entitled. Ultimately, this is presented only to be overcome by Jane, in the immediate, when she stands up to him, striking him and later, through his untimely death from living a life of excess, destroying his mother and the familys wealth. Although, Jane has no direct hand in his death, the trajectory of his storyline displays the insignificance of his existence and the degradation of his end.

Edward Rochester, Janes love interest, is ambivalent and rude. He does not endear himself, while constantly mentioning Janes subordinate position and size, at times referring to her as an elf. While she is an employee, she did not have the inclination that Rochester was her better. In fact, she was and

viewed herself as his intellectual equal. Throughout the text, Bront counters Rochesters perception of Janes intellect and size. I could still meet him his argument without fear or uneasy restraint, this suited both him and me. When the couple interacts, it is on a level field. For example she says, I was honoured by the cordiality of reception that made me feel I really possessed the power to amuse him, and that these evening conferences were sought as much for his pleasure as for my benefit. Also, I felt as if he was my relation rather than my master: yet he was imperious somethings still; but I did not mind that; I saw it was his way. Jane is his employee, subordinate, yet she describes his ways as imperious; superiority that is unjustified. Finally, the famous line that captures readers, encompasses Janes feeling and strength, Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and 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 now for me to leave you. Jane Eyre is human and full of emotion and complexity. She is more than a governess to Rochesters ward. This declaration serves a dual purpose. First, it is a climax in the dialogue between Jane and Rochester, before he reveals that she is the one he wants, not Blanche Ingram. Secondly, it gives the reader the notion that Jane Eyre is a multi dimensional human being, as are women in general. This is indicative of the dual levels of communication throughout this work, what we see on the surface to advance the plot and the deeper inferences about gender, that can be taken away.

St. John Rivers, encountered during Jane's destitution, could be viewed as a benevolent savior, who rescues her from the brink of death. As the story progresses, he becomes manipulative, annoying and selfish. He believes that the only way for Jane to become anything worthwhile, is through him. When he is attempting to gain her approval to marry, he says, Through my means, He opens to you a noble career; as my wife only can you enter up on it. Refuse to be my wife, and you limit yourself for ever to a track of selfish ease and barren obscurity. Not only in this instance, but the banter occurs multiple times where he will not allow her to go on his mission on her terms, only his. When she continues to refuse his marriage proposal, he becomes passive aggressive and manipulating. For example, I read well in his iron silence all he felt towards me: the disappointment of an austere and despotic nature, which has met resistance where it expected submission – the disapprobation of a cool, inflexible judgement, which has detected in another feelings and views which it has not power to sympathize: in short, as a man, he would have wished to coerce me into obedience. It is quite effective, as Jane is troubled by this behavior and feels very cast off. It is understandable with her history of abuse, to desire to be in a position to please St. John and remain among people who love and care for her. She has never had a real family prior to this and is desperate to fall in with a group of people, who can reciprocate her kindness and compassion. His cold and stoic punishment is very damaging to Jane. She laments, when St. John ignores her and would not acknowledge her with a good night kiss, I – who, though I had no love, had much friendship for him – was hurt by the marked omission: so much hurt that tears started to my eyes. He is emotionally void, which is very

hurtful to Jane, who is quite passionate in nature. No happy reconciliation was to be had with him – no cheering smile or generous word: but still the Christian was patient and placid; and when I asked him if he forgave me, he answered that he was not in the habit of cherishing the remembrance of vexation; that he had nothing to forgive, not having been offended. And with that answer he left me. I would much rather he had knocked me down. St. John is terribly rigid, non compassionate and immature. The constant dialogue about his proposal is frustrating and exhausting to the reader, as he is unrelenting about forcing Jane in to a situation, for which she has no heart.

The architecture of Charlotte Brontë's complete cast of characters, clearly shows the female influence as superior to that of its counterpart. Ultimately, Jane finally finds happiness when Rochester is in a compromised situation, blind and maimed. This seems to be Brontë's final strike down of a male character, in particular, one who has a tendency of conceit and pride. It may have been more generous of her to allow Jane and Rochester to continue their relationship on equal footing, as was the case, before Jane left Thornfield Hall. Instead, Jane, upon returning, is truly independent, with a fortune of her own. Brontë brings a new sense of humility, changing the dynamic between the two, as Rochester is now, the dependent. It is more than a role reversal, it is a statement. In order to make the strongest pro-woman statement, Jane has to be the heroine of her own life, completely independent of Rochester. He deceived and compromised her honor, for which he receives the ultimate punishment, by Brontë's pen. Although Jane goes to him, it is by her free will and he has no hold, financial, emotional or

otherwise that could be leveraged, to return her to a subordinate position. Brontë makes this very clear.

Charlotte Brontë wanted a voice, where she did not have one, without Currer Bell. We continually see authors, poets, musicians, and philosophers, who bring forth ideas that are launched forward into society, as evidenced by the resonance of their work. These are the critical thinkers of our world, who plant ideas, evoking emotion, thought and understanding. Art, literary or otherwise, is the seed of our humanity, our avenue for exploring meaning and connection. Charlotte Brontë connected with Victorian society and communicated the notion of outdated and oftentimes, unfair gender roles. It continues to resonate today. After all, writers write, to challenge society to read, listen, think, and perhaps change. In 1847, *Jane Eyre*, made a crack in the glass ceiling that has culminated with so many others, into the fight that women continue to endure, today. The feminist ideal persists and will sustain, as long as there is gender inequality and injustice. In our current political environment that we find ourselves, I hope women will continue to stand up and follow *Jane Eyre's* example, to strike back at the proverbial murderers, slave drivers and Roman Emperors, especially when they come in the form of an orange apparition and its deplorable. God knows, we need to do the legacy of Charlotte Brontë justice and light it up, burn down the house, like a chapter out of *Bertha Mason's* playbook.