

Gender in jane eyre

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



“ All your home comes from me, or will perform in a couple of years”. Go over the significance of gender in Bronte’s representation of the kid characters in Jane Eyre. Through my research study of Charlotte Bronte’s Jane Eyre, I was quick to discover that the novel is a product of its time, however likewise depicts revolutionary ideas about female autonomy and the right to equality for all. Jane Eyre was composed in 1847, a time where a woman’s social standing and significance was substantially less to that of her male counterpart.

A female’s primary goal was to discover a husband and calm down. Little was made of a lady’s profession options or opportunities as it was thought about daft to believe a low born lady could mature to be anything more than a governess. (Murphy, 2013) Merry E. Weisner states that “ Individuals did talk less formally about a woman’s life, nevertheless, and when they did it was her sexual status and relationship to a male that mattered most.

/ A female was a virgin, spouse or widow, or at the same time a daughter, wife or mother” (Weisner, 1993, p51-52). Gender is an extremely important theme throughout Jane Eyre and can be noted especially well through a research study of the novel’s kid characters.

John Reed is a prime example of how class and gender conformities seep through the very permeable age barrier at a young age. John Reed is not your typical high born Victorian gentleman and this can be noted first through his image, “ John Reed was a schoolboy of fourteen years old/ large and stout for his age, with a dingy and unwholesome skin; thick lineaments in a spacious visage, heavy limbs and large extremities. He gorged himself

habitually at table, which made him bilious and gave him a dim and bleared eye and flabby cheeks” (Bronte, p4). We see him bully Jane unrelentingly at the start of the novel and this can be deducted to a number of reasons. John is indulged by his mother and thus has a feeling of self-importance and superiority. To some degree he probably takes a lead from her (who also dislikes Jane). As the only ‘man of the house’ John believes he is head and shoulders above a lowly orphan girl. He does not believe that she is worthy of what he, (by way of birth right), provides for her, and thus takes it upon himself to punish her accordingly, “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”(Bronte, 6)

As the only high born male in the house he feels that he has the authority to dish out verbal and physical abuse as he sees appropriate. So strong is his sense of self importance that he never feels as though he is on the losing end of an argument. A young Jane is aware of this and as a female in ‘his’ household, feels like she has to do what he says, even though she knows it will not end well. We see this when she allows him to throw a book at her after she takes one to read behind the curtain, “the volume was flung, it hit me, and I fell, striking my head against the door and cutting it.” (Bronte, 6). Although it is from this incident that Jane first finds her voice against an oppressive male figure, it’s still an insight into the psyche of a young boy in the early 1800’s, and one that certainly portrays how gender could shape a society in the early 19th century. (Hesse, 2013, 1) Helen Burns is a girl who suffers greatly from the wrath of Mr Brocklehurst and Mrs Scatcherd.

Brocklehurst believes that all girls are intrinsically born indulgent and that they want the luxuries of life that only men can offer them and thus aims to humble the girls of Lowood through food deprivation and the cutting of their hair, i. e., taking away their femininity. (Capes, 2013, 1)

The conflict between Brocklehurst and Helen can on the surface, seem like a religious one, but as you delve deeper into the mind of Brontë at the time of writing, you soon find out that it has a lot more to do with gender than you might have thought. In the early 1800's, it was men who had all the power in the church and women were expected to serve the clergymen and on occasion help out at Sunday school. The history of Christianity is full of male martyrs who upon death are given hero status. Helen Burns serves as paradox to this idea. Helen dies of consumption, which is largely down to poor conditions she has to put up with as a result of Brocklehurst's pious, self-righteous quest to humble the girls of Lowood. She is the epitome of good Christian values. Her 'turn the other cheek' outlook on life is what defines her in the novel and ultimately what Jane finds most interesting about her. Her death is beautiful, and shows a deep, sophisticated insight into what it meant to be a good Christian in the early 1800's. Ironically, Brocklehurst's pious crusade sees Helen, the better Christian, die.

Helen is the martyr character in Jane Eyre. She is there to portray that it doesn't matter how good a Christian you are, women will always be subordinate to their male counterparts. Even her name 'Burns' signifies both the hellish life she has suffered, and also how she was damned from the start. (Creelman, 2005) Brontë uses her to show the gender conflict at the

time of her writing and also as a way in which to progress Jane's character. Jane is an average looking, intelligent, and brutally honest girl. She has been an orphan from a young age and as a lowly born, orphan female, she has faced oppression all her life. Although she has faced oppression and threats to her autonomy, she continually succeeds in showing she can be a free thinking, independent female (Murphy, 2013) The first time we see Jane stand up to male authority is through an outburst she directs towards John after he throws the book at her, " Wicked and cruel boy!" I said. " You are like a murderer-you are like a slave-driver-you are like the Roman emperors!" (Bronte, p6) It is after this she gets sent to the red room and we truly see the nature of how unfairly she is treated.

Later we see her rebuke Mrs Reed's claim that she is deceitful and should be brought up in a manner which best suits her prospects. " I am not deceitful: if I were, I should say I loved you; but I declare I do not 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, Georgiana, for it is she who tells lies, not I" (Bronte, 1847). It is through these comments that we see Jane's first verbal victory against an oppressor and it marks an important point in Jane's discovery for autonomy. Mr Brocklehurst forms an opinion about Jane because of the fact that she is a lowly female girl and also because of the account he received from Mrs Reed. Jane is someone looking to break the mould. She has her own ideas of autonomy and gender inequality. Along the way she has gained inspiration from women who have managed to succeed in one way or another. Mrs Fairfax is the authority of Lowood when Mr Brocklehurst isn't around. She is a powerful woman, a person Jane can look

up to. Not only is she powerful but she is also kind, and makes a good impression on Jane. Other examples of this include Miss Temple and Helen Burns.

On a more extreme level, Celine Varens is a woman who is at the mercy of men, but can manipulate her lovers into indulging her. She treats them badly as a result. (crossref-it. info) A young Jane soon finds out that although she is female, as long as she keeps her morals, she can succeed. Overall Jane Eyre offers us valuable insight into gender roles in the early 1800's. Whether it's the patriarchal way in which a 14 year old John Reed finds power, the submissive way in which a young Christian girl 'turns the other cheek' in the face of oppression, or how one little girl with revolutionary self-worth gains autonomy in a male dominated world, Jane Eyre remains a classic novel, and one which will remain so for many years to come.

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