

Show the importance of four women to Jane Eyre's development

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The four people who played a significant part in Jane Eyre's early life whilst also influencing the development of her character, were Mrs. Reed, Bessie, Miss Temple and Helen Burns. All four of these women had strong beliefs about how women should behave, in addition to possessing a deep rooted passion for their own religious beliefs. This essay will discuss how each of these women shaped the person that Jane Eyre became. Initially, I will be looking at Mrs Reed who is Jane's aunt through marriage and discussing how significant she was to Jane's early life. Mrs. Reed had responsibility for Jane, as sole carer, a role that neither Jane nor Mrs. Reed were happy with.

Their relationship was one of hatred and general dislike on both parts.

Indeed, Mrs. Reed so disliked Jane, even from a young age that she treated her worse than one of the servants of the house. It was not that she did not like children, as she had several of her own to whom she showed great love and affection. However, so acute was the resentment that she held for Jane that she frequently separated her from the activities planned for her own children, declaring that they were; "intended only for contented, happy little children".

Unfortunately, exclusion such as this only succeeded in embittering Jane and causing a larger rift between herself and her aunt. Additionally, these actions also succeeded in Jane developing a general dislike for her cousins, in particular Master John Reed, who behaved as equally disgracefully towards Jane, following the example laid down by his mother. He treated her like a "rat" whose actual existence was insignificant. In fact, the relationship

between the two deteriorated to such a degree that it resulted in a physical argument which ended up with Jane being imprisoned in the Red Room.

Although the intention had been to punish Jane, the Red Room actually assisted Jane in becoming a stronger person, which in turn resulted in Mrs. Reed becoming fearful of her unwanted niece. Jane had time to reflect and realise the weapons that would most offend her aunt, that is, to turn her aunt's religious convictions back upon herself, as can be seen when she relates in the mind of the mature Jane. " But I ought to forgive you, for you knew not what you did: While rending my heart-strings, you thought you were only uprooting my bad propensities".

Not only does she blasphemously incorporate the dying words of Christ upon the cross in her speech, but she also professes forgiveness, which follows the word of the Lord. Mrs. Reed had expected bitterness, hatred and spite as a response to her punishment, but instead is faced with an apparent religious conviction, which undermines her actions and leaves her nervous as to future responses. Jane had grown strong through her abuse and would in future enjoy the opportunity to un-nerve her tormentors. This speech is a prelude to the personality of the 'new Jane' that is to come.

Another example of this change is witnessed by Mrs. Reed after attempting to ruin Jane's prospects of attending Lowood School when she provided ill-intended advice to Mr. Brocklehurst. However, on this occasion Jane does not use faith to un-nerve Mrs. Reed but explodes with the rage of a ten year old when she says; I dislike you the worst of anybody in the world except John

Reed", and then continues in her tirade with, " I am glad you are no relation of mine. I will never call you aunt again as long as I live, I will never come to see you when I am grown up; and if anyone asks me how I liked you,...

I will say the very thought of you makes me sick". This speech leaves its recipient wanting rid of its orator more than ever and hence Jane succeeds in her plan to be rid of her aunt and her wretched cousins, as she leaves to attend the school Mr Lloyd had suggested she attended after the Red room incident. However, she again leaves the aunt feeling un-nerved as the rest of her angry outburst had told of how her uncle would seek revenge on the wicked aunt for her poor treatment of his niece.

Although it can be clearly seen that the two never liked each other, it is apparent that Jane learnt a lot from her aunt, including what is expected of a young lady, how people should be treated in order to prosper in life and she learnt about the church and religion. This brings us to the next significant influence in Jane Eyre's life. Bessie was a servant at Mrs. Reed's house in Gateshead Hall and was the first person who showed Jane real love and friendship. She was prone to giving Jane treats and creating songs about her, such as; " Poor Miss Jane is to be pitied".

On the night that Jane was locked in the Red Room having her " species fit", it was Bessie who was at her side, making sure that the young girl was alright and ensuring that she had something " to drink, or eat", taking care of her needs. For Bessie was of the opinion that Mrs Reed was far too hard on the young girl and thus had great sympathy for Miss Eyre. This can be seen

when Bessie helps to prepare Jane for her departure to attend school at Lowood. Bessie has tea with the young Miss. Eyre in the absence of Mrs. Reed and the children, grabbing the opportunity to tell Jane that she was fonder of her " than all the others".

Despite that fact that Bessie was only a servant, she teaches Jane to become a strong woman who should not settle for anything less than honesty and commitment. It is also through Bessie's eyes that Jane sees the purer side of God's love, as Bessie was also a strong Christian who tried to let Jane see that she lived her life according to his word, which is what brought her inner peace. The third person who played a significant role in Jane Eyre's life was her teacher at Lowood School, Miss. Temple, who was superintendent in charge of Jane's daily life at school. However, unlike Mrs. Reed, Jane admired this woman with " the sense of admiring awe", as it was Miss. Temple who had cleared Jane's blackened name. After Mrs. Reed had spoken to Mr. Brocklehurst about what a bad child Jane was, and how she resembled the devil in her actions, he had taken this information and publicly humiliated Jane with it. However, Miss. Temple managed to re-address this malicious rumour and restore Jane's good name, whilst also helping Jane to see that she no-longer had to be the outsider, as the other girls at the school were happy to be her friends.

In short, Miss. Temple, with her healthy, truthful smile, offers Jane opportunities in life, something that had previously been denied to her. She showed Jane care, from the young girls first day at Lowood, trying to make her feel comfortable and included. She also recognised a child in need of

love and thus showed her some affection, giving hugs, something only one other person had done for Jane before.

Hence, Jane felt indebted to Miss. Temple and declares; " To her instruction I owed the best part of my acquirement". So strong an influence was this person on Jane's life that when Miss. Temple left the school and got married, Jane felt that Lowood was no-longer a home. Arguably therefore, she too, like the other significant factors in Jane's life, had an impact on the woman that Jane became. Miss. Temple also held deep religious convictions and as Jane's teacher, influenced Jane to live her life as a young religious woman who obeyed the word of the Lord. Nevertheless, of all the religious influences in Jane Eyre's early life, perhaps the most influential of all was her one and only true young friend, Helen Burns.

Her love of Helen is evident in the following speech; nor ever ceased to cherish for her a sentiment of attachment as strong, tender and respectful as any that ever animated my heart". The two girls' first meeting illustrates an instant connection, as Helen was reading a book, and Jane was a keen reader, who loved nothing more than to be lost in stories, which were a means to escape her dreadful reality with Mrs. Reed and her cousins. Helen is an intelligent, knowledgeable and dutiful young lady, which leads to the two girls sharing many an opposing discussion about forbearance and religious beliefs.

One such discussion centres on love and Jane's desire for it; " If others don't love me, I would rather die than live - I cannot bare to be solitary and hated".

However, Helen conveys that for her, the love of the Lord is the greatest love of all and in knowing that he is watching over her, it is enough for her to be happy and confident in who she is. For as she states, this love is more meaningful than that temporary love of "human beings", as it lasts forever. Indeed, many of their conversations ultimately referred back to God in some way or another, no-matter from where the discussion had originated.

Jane rarely argued with Helen's religious convictions as she was in fact in complete awe of her; "I was struck with wonder". Even when discussing death, Helen had "an impression of woe". Helen's deeply rooted religious beliefs made her unafraid of the inevitable, as she knew that the end of this life on earth was not the end of the story. Helen firmly believed in an eternal afterlife in Heaven which was difficult for Jane to understand and come to terms with. Jane knew that when her friend died, she would mourn her loss as she loved her so much, but she knew that Helen would not have wanted this, as it was against God's will.

Nonetheless, the conflict within religion, supplied by the major influences in Jane's early life, shaped the woman who she became. The vengeful and fearful 'Almighty', espoused by Mrs. Reed, was to be rejected but the more caring, loving and forgiving God that was evident in Bessie, Miss. Temple and Helen certainly played a part in a blossoming Jane Eyre, who grew to be a bright, outspoken, and bold woman. Although not filled with religious conviction herself, Jane admitted to the significant influence that these women who did believe, had played in shaping who she had grown to be in adulthood.