



Metamorphosis of the concept of heroine in Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*.

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Abstract

Literature has witnessed the roles of women evolving through ages. Most of the published writers were men and the portrayal of women in literature was without doubt biased. According to author Anita Nair, literature has always been ambivalent in its representation of women. Good women are the one who accepts social norms and she is rewarded. From Elizabethan age, the theme of misogamy and superiority of man was predominant. Women were not looked as a person but were considered a mere necessity for the pro-creation process.

During the Victorian era, there was an unending debate over the roles of women. Women were treated in literature as angelic figures, innocent, physically weaker and nothing less than house hold commodity. Alfred Lord Tennyson in his poem 'The Princes' states:

"Man for the field and women for the heart

Man for the sword and for the needle she

Man with the head and women with heart

Man to command and women to obey"

So it is evident that women during the Victorian age were in a subjugated role. The Portrayal of Jane in *Jane Eyre* metamorphosis the concept the heroine. Jane appears as rebellious, self-respected, spirited, courageous, unconventional, outspoken girl and later on self-dependent women in the journey of her life from Gateshead hall to Moor House. Her unconventional traits of personality is exhibited by Charlotte in her dealing with Mrs. Reed, Mr. Brocklehurst, Ms. Scatchered, Mr. Rochester and Mr. Rivers.

The research paper tries to show the journey of Jane as a docile girl to a mature self-respected lady of Mr. Rochester. Charlotte shows the metamorphosis of Jane from enslavement to empowerment and thereby change the concept of the heroine.

In a world where women are judged primarily by physical appearance, clothing and social standing, being docile, Charlotte Bronte changed the whole concept of heroine in her novels and especially in *Jane Eyre* as she presented poor, plain, outspoken young women with nothing but her native intelligence. When Charlotte Bronte decided to write the novel *Jane Eyre*, she was determined to create a main character who challenged the notion of the ideal Victorian women. Charlotte told her first biographer, Elizabeth Gaskell that she had disagreed with her sisters Emily and Anne when they argued that heroines of novels always had to be beautiful. She on the contrary said, "I will show you a heroine as plain and as small as myself, who shall be as interesting as any of yours". It was a bold decision so the inequality that Charlotte experienced most sharply was that of the sexes brought home, literally by the different treatment. At home, she noted that her

brother Branwell was given education opportunities which was denied to her sisters. Sisters were not encouraged for developing skills but to earn money.

Key words: *Jane Eyre*, Metamorphosis, Victorian literature, Women protagonist

Jane Eyre was published under the pseudonym Currer Bell and it received both praise and criticism. The conservative Lady Eastlake suggested that if the book was by a woman, 'she had long forfeited the society of her own sex.' Due to lack of femininity, she considered it a spirit of rebellion so Charlotte Bronte broke the tradition of Victorian woman and presented Jane who refused to blend into the traditional female position of subservience and stands up for her beliefs. It narrates Jane's journey to empowerment through five main location of her life:

1. Jane as Young Girl at Gateshead Hall.
 2. Jane as a Student at Lowood Institute
 3. Jane as a governess at Thornfield Hall
 4. Jane as a teacher at Moor Park
 5. Jane Rochester's wife at Ferndean
- Jane as Young Girl at Gateshead Hall.

From the beginning of the Charlotte exhibits Jane's revolutionary spirit. As a small girl she exhibits the spirit of the revolt and self-esteem girl. She was living with her aunt as an orphan and according to Victorian norms of a girl she should be great full to her maternal aunt for providing her shelter. no doubt she bore all the injustice and rudeness of her maternal cousins. She suffers alienation but when she is mercilessly bitten up by her maternal cousin John as she was reading his book. He scolds her and throws her down and she was hurt and her rage comes out and she calls John 'a wicked and cruel boy.' She said "you are like a murderer; you are like a slave driver." For the first time she realized that she should not be passive but should fight her fate and express her feelings. Her maternal aunt Mrs. Reed became angry and locked up her in a red room.

Mrs. Reed in order to get rid of little Jane enrolled her in the orphanage school. When the manager of the Lowood institute Mr. Brocklehurst visited her at home, Mrs. Reed introduced her as a "liar girl". This was a cruel blow for Jane and she was filled with anger. She becomes bold and she says to Mrs. Reed that she is a liar she says, "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 grownup 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." So in her anger and passion Jane is far removed from the conventional model of the Victorian child who should be "seen and not heard." Instead she is part of new emerging more sympathetic attitude to childhood which shows that adults should pay attention to the suffering and emotional and psychological needs of children.

- Jane as a Student at Lowood Institute

Her revolt and bold spirit to speak truth is also presented as Lowood –the Orphanage school which is benevolent institution in name but a hell in fact. Jane is not as oppressed at Lowood as at Gateshead but she still is not allowed to do as she pleases. Brocklehurst makes Jane stood on a stool in front of the class and orders her classmate to shun her because she is liar. The main idea behind this harsh treatment was that if the body was punished, the soul could be shaved but through *Jane Eyre* Charlotte Bronte challenges these notions and offers a sympathetic description of rebellious child which helps to transform Victorian attitude. Jane develops friendship with Helen Burns who tries to convince her to be submissive but for Jane it was difficult. She doesn't like Miss Scatchered who abuses Helen for dirty nails and ill manners. Jane criticizes the hypocrisy of Mr. Brocklehurst who advices Miss Temple that hostel girls

should not have curly hair and Jane observes that his own daughters were in fashionable dress and short curly hair. Brocklehurst Christian philosophy regarding “original sin” was also satirized by Bronte by Jane’s critical views. Little Jane is against all the operation. When her favourite teacher leaves Lowood after marriage Jane feels restless and does not wish to submit to the world of Lowood. She rebels by advertising on her own for the position of governess and leaving the school to work at Thornfield.

- Jane as a governess at Thornfield Hall

At Thornfield Jane doesn’t face any serious operation but mature young girl Jane is not ready to reveal her inner most feelings to her master Mr. Rochester. Jane falls in love with her master Mr. Rochester and decides to get married to him but it is due to love she is marrying him and not for money. When Mr. Rochester bestows riches and jewellery she puts her foot down and says, “O sir! Never mind the jewels!” and rejects to accept them. After the mystery of Bertha Mason, the wife of Rochester, Jane is emotionally shattered but very soon she regains her composure. When Mr. Rochester asks him to stay with him as his mistress in another part of the world she rejects it and decides to leave Mr. Rochester. She says, “I am no bird, and no net ensnares me, I am a free human being with an independent will.” This statement resembles Karl Marx’s revolutionary manifesto. Jane upholds her principles, her morals and her independence. If she had accepted Mr. Rochester’s proposal she would not be a self-esteeming girl.

- Jane as a teacher at Moor Park/ Marsh End.

After leaving Thornfield, Jane looks for work but finds nothing within a matter of hours she is reduced to begging for food. Her innate pride and delicacy is severely tested. After three days of destitute life, she reaches to the Moor House in a nervous collapse. She is tenderly nursed by Diana & Mary Rivers. She gradually regains strength. She hides the story of her previous life and her name. She assumes the name Jane Eliot. She continues to delight in the company of Diana & Mary and St. John Rivers. Jane asks him for employment. Jane finds him fiercely religious. His church sermons distress her because they are so fervent. He tells her that he needs someone to set up a small school for girls in the nearby village. Jane accepts the job of teacher. She settles in her new life well. She finds satisfaction with the new life but is still tormented regularly by the dreams of Rochester. Amazingly, Jane receives the fortune of 20,000 by her uncle. She also finds out St. John, Diana & Mary as her family- first cousin and she splits her fortune in four ways. She says, “it could never be mine in justice, though it might be in law.”

St. John Rivers asks her to come with him as missionary in India. He also wants to marry her. But again Charlotte shows Jane bold woman who rejects St. John as she still loves Rochester. She says, “I scorn your idea of love.” I scorn the counterfeit sentiment your after yes, St. John and I scorn you when you offer it.”

St. John Rivers tries to control her. She is very passive with him and submits to his wish. But she does not yield to his proposal of marriage. She rebels against it, though it is difficult for her.

- Jane as Rochester’s wife at Ferdean Manor.

After the Rivers incident, Jane becomes totally independent woman as she inherits her uncle’s inheritance. She is charged with emotions, she hears Rochester’s voids calling her desperately. She prepares to return to Thornfield. She goes back to Thornfield and is shocked and is dismayed to find it a “blackened ruin.” She learns about the fire and Bertha’s death. Jane’s first sight of Rochester evokes pain and pity as he is a changed man scarred both physically and emotionally. He cannot believe that she is back, so many times he has dreamt of her return that he feels that it is a dream. He repeats his proposal to her. She accepts to reunite with him without hesitation. This time this is lawful and pleasing to Jane. Here Jane exercises not rebel nor submission to Rochester as now she has her own independence and is in control of herself.

So, the journey of Jane shows the journey of modern woman, when Rochester calls her an angel, she responds with, "I am not an angel, I asserted and I will not be one till I die, I will be myself Mr. Rochester. You must neither expect, nor exact anything celestial of me..."

By accepting the idea of being an angel she would be sacrificing her identity to cater to Rochester's desire. Jane refuses to become Rochester's mistress because becoming his mistress would not allow her to be his equal and would make her a lesser person than who she was destined to be. St. John's offer of marriage would bring her financial security yet domesticity. St. John tries to alter her identity to "an ape in a harelquin's jacket" feminists ideals are shown when she chooses to value her identity and independence over materialism. So her rejection of St. John and acceptance of Mr. Rochester convey a strong message of female independence. The prominent message that women should value their independence thinking and equality rather than subjecting to male control. To Jane marriage is a trap that would make her lose her independence. She refuses to be ideal domesticated wife of St. John. He became angry and announces Victorian thinking, "If you reject it, it is not me you deny, but God. Through my means He opens to you a noble career as my wife only can you enter upon it. Refuse to be my wife, you limit forever to a track of selfish ease..."

So the way *Jane Eyre* puts her values of freedom and self-fulfilment before these options shows feminist ideas of female empowerment. She says, "I am no bird and no net ensnares me, I am a free human being with an independent will."

So, *Jane Eyre* places her values of freedom and self-fulfilment before conformity. The novel was written in 1800, it conveys messages of individual empowerment and equality that are applicable to modern society. Jane begins as an undeveloped orphan, neglected plain, small despised girl. she becomes a school-mistress almost a missionary but finally she is a beloved wife and mother. So Charlotte Brontë's story of plain orphan girl whose superior qualities are finally acknowledged and she gets the rewards of love and becomes the modern version Cinderella tale. Jane not only wins her Prince charming but does so by asserting her independence and her values.

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