

Charlotte Bronte and Her Works: A Narrative Representation

Shobha Rani¹

PhD Scholar, Galgotias University

Dr. Amrita Tyagi²

Professor, Division of English

Galgotias University

Abstract

The belief that women should have equal rights and opportunities, people should organize activities on behalf of women to protect the rights and interests. In “Jane Eyre”, author Charlotte Bronte portrays a patriarchal society in which women are oppressed and gender issues play a part in every aspect of the character’s productions. He wants to tell that masculinity is more powerful than femininity. In “Jane Eyre”, author Charlotte Bronte wants to tell that woman are not to get married they also want to set their identity and her freedom in a male governed society.

This paper attempts to represent how Charlotte Bronte is exaggerating her own autobiography by portraying Jane Eyre a heroine of her age in the novel together with the social problems she faced as a woman in Victorian era and how to handle the issues of gender and class differences, racism including the religious beliefs during her time. Through analytical method, this research tried to reveal that how Bronte in the portray of Jane and other main characters including females counters the inbuilt conventions of Victorians who suppressed and treated the women of that age dishonorably.

Keywords: Masculinity, Feminism, Biological, Gender roles, Patriarchy, Stereotypes, archetype, Manifests, Aggression.

Novels of Charlotte Bronte

The career of Charlotte Bronte began as a poetess and then wafted to novel writing. In succession, she wrote four novels. Her famous novels are Jane Eyre, Shirley, Vilette and The Professor. They are her lasting contribution to English Fiction. “There is emphatically a recurring pattern in Charlotte’s literary carpet. As regard their matter: Yorkshire and

Brussels, and governess, the tutor and the school are often repeated, interwoven with the cleric millowner. In manner a similar recurrence exists, for in all and the novels except Shirley, the story is told in the first person, and a deeper unity is achieved by the consistent theme, which is always the conflict between high integrity and worldliness.”

Jane Eyre (1847)

Jane Eyre was published under the name of Currer Bell, and the name of the author posed a problem of the public. Who is the Currer Bell? Man or woman? It was later on Shirley that the identity of the author was revealed. Jane Eyre is a veiled autobiography and reveals the love story of Charlotte. The love story of the plain, but very vital heroine is unfolded with a frank truthfulness and a depth of understanding that are new in English fiction. It is a powerful and fascinating study of elemental love and hate, reminding us vaguely of one of Marlowe's tragedies. It is a Lyric poem, the kind of poem written only in adolescence, when excess is all and restraint is felt to be a self-betrayal. The story is extremely interesting and delightful.

Jane Eyre, the heroine, is a penniless orphan. She has been left to the care of her aunt Mrs. Reed by her parents. She is cruelly and unsympathetically treated by her aunt with the result that she decides to leave her patronage and seek her livelihood elsewhere. She joins a charitable institution, the Lowwood Asylum where after some miserable year she becomes a teacher. From here she goes out as governess at Thornfield Hall to a little girl, the daughter of Mr. Rochester, a man of grim aspect and sardonic temper. Rochester is attracted by Jane Eyre's wit and bourgeois spirit. He falls in love with her, and Jane Eyre responds to his advances in a favourable manner. Their marriage is settled and to be celebrated in a day or two, when it comes to the knowledge of Jane Eyre that Rochester is a married man and his wife is a lunatic living in seclusion at Thornfield Hall. This revelation staggers Jane and instead of marrying Rochester she escapes from Thornfield Hall to loiter on the moors, from where she is picked up by Rev. St. John Rivers who acts as her benefactor. Under the influence of the stirring personality of Mr. Rivers, Jane nearly consents (in spite of her undiminished love for Rochester) to marry him and accompany him to India. Jane starts for Thornfield Hall to reconcile herself to Rochester. Before arriving at Thornfield Hall, she learns that the place has been burnt down, and “that Rochester, vainly trying to save his wife from the flames that has been blinded and maimed. She finds him in utter dejection, becomes his wife and restores him to happiness.”

Jane Eyre represents a beautiful combination of realism and romanticism. Realistic and romantic elements are happily blended in this novel. Jane's life at Lowwood Asylum is her own life at Cawan Bride School of which she had an unhappy experience. After that the story plunges into romance, and Thornfield Hall, and Rochester are born of desire and imagination. It is the special virtue of Charlotte Bronte that out of her extremely limited material she made a novel intensely romantic and profoundly real. The realism in this novel is not like that of Jane Austen, and the romance has little affinity to Scott. "It is the realism, not of quiet English country mansion, but to a land stretching close up to the gates of the region wherein the scene of Wuthering Heights is laid. It is the romance, not of the knight in armour, with stronger hand and high heart, and the crown for valour, but of elemental human nature." In Jane Eyre there is a display of passion, particularly female passion. The inner life of a female with the burning intensity of a passionate heart has been vividly presented in this novel.

The other factor which wings the book aloft is its superb characterisation. The character of Jane Eyre is Charlotte Bronte's finest achievement. Rochester has been drawn with force, and in spite of certain weakness in his character, is Charlotte's ideal male character.

Jane Eyre has been considered by some critics as a novel of escape and a wish-fulfilment story, ending usually in the marriage of Jane Eyre and Rochester. Phyllis Bentley in her admirable work *The Brontes* does not agree that Jane Eyre is an escape literature. One of the factors which saves Jane Eyre from being an escape literature is the ending of the story. Escape literature always allows the character who represents the fixation of the author's desire to triumph in the end. Now in the end Jane does not triumph in the worldly sense; she is married to a semiblind mutilated man, a man with an inconvenient illegitimate daughter, a man who had earned the just reward of the world and is living in a narrow retirement. If Charlotte had allowed Rochester to recover his sight and Adele to die off, if the book had closed with Jane appearing in white satin at a ball and being hailed as a dashing beauty Jane Eyre would have been merely a very well written specimen.

Shirley (1849)

Shirley is Charlotte's third great work. It is extremely realistic and in character. In Shirley Charlotte wrote a novel in the somewhat random style of memoirs, dealing with the people around her or the house where she had lived as a governess, her personal friends of horrible acquaintances, those people above all who had impressed themselves on her imagination. The book is full of portraits.

Villette (1853)

Villette is the last fruit of Charlotte. Villette has not been able to achieve that popularity which Jane Eyre enjoyed. Its scene is not English, and to the critics, it's an mechanism appears to be crude and amateurish. The story of Villette is based on the personal experience of the authoress and deals with the life of an English girl Lucy Snowe without beauty, money, or friends, who works as a teacher in a girl's school at Brussels. She wins the respect of the unscrupulous headmistress, Madame Beck, and falls in love with English doctor of the school. The love in Villette is, in fact, based upon Charlotte's passionate affection for M. Heger

As a story it is more diffuse, less concentrated than Jane Eyre. The fire burns over a large area, and involves more people but the extension of its province tends to the dissipation of its energy. The emotion here is not so zealous as in Jane Eyre but its more delicate. While in Jane Eyre we find a magnificent sweep, zest and during many pages of Villette are written with a cool, clear grace. The emotion in the hearts of Jane and Rochester in Jane Eyre is something hot and intense; M. Paul's emotions may be hot but that is not their specific quality, they are relatively swift.

As a work of art Villette is not altogether satisfactory. It bristles with glaring improbabilities, is unequal in conception and shows signs of inevitable emotional overstrain. Memories of Mrs. Radcliffe and The Terror School are looked at every turn and yet flashes of imaginative brilliance are revealed.

The Professor (1857)

The Professor, her earliest work, failed to find a publisher, and only appeared in 1857 after her death. In this novel Charlotte reveals her impression of her own personal acquaintance. An Englishman plays M. Heger's part and a continental lady plays her own, "telling the story of pupil-governess but from the master's point view." The professor, William Grimsworth, is the narrator of the tale. He recounts his life from the time he quarrelled with his aristocratic maternal uncle and decided to engage in trade to the days he became a professor in Pelet's boys' school and to his love with Zoraide, which could not succeed because the lady was secretly engaged to the insinuating Pelet. Professor Grimsworth concludes the story by pointing out how he married Frances Evans Henri, the half Swiss, half English pupil who came to take English lessons at his school, though the marriage was sought to be disturbed by Zoraide. "Master and pupil love each other, Zoraide tries to keep them apart, but eventually

they marry, set up school together, achieve a competency and a child and return to Yorkshire to enjoy them.” Heger, the lover of Charlotte, plays that part of the professor, and her own role is presented by Frances Evens Henri.

This first work of Charlotte is extremely realistic in character. She was determined that her story should be as far removed from the land of the genii and as near to real life as it could possibly be. The characters, in her view were required to be emphatically sons of Adam not of Northanger land. “According there is realism, an anti-romanticism in *The Professor*, which gives it a saturnine colour. The characters of the novel are drawn in the most determinedly prosaic terms.” “The love scenes and the marriage, for which Charlotte then lacked experience, are less satisfying in content and less powerful in impression. The whole is somewhat deficient in incident, and (as we fell) rather to determinedly drab to be either absolutely interesting or absolutely truthful. But as a first novel it is a singularly original and powerful production.”

The work failed primarily because of its extra dose of realism. The publishers found the unimagined realism of the *Professor* too strong a draught for their Victorian gullets. ‘Charlotte realised that it was not a realism and a realistic tale of romance that the business men were after. They really needed in her opinion, something wild and thrilling, even harrowing.

As a Novelist

Charlotte Bronte broke a new ground in the history of English novel. The novelist following the example of Jane Austen had chosen to portray the manners and way of social life. Hitherto the novelist had undergone no revolution of mind and soul. They were still faithful to the eighteenth century, still engrossed by the outward spectacles, fascinated by life’s multitudinous variety, exhilarated by its humorous if not unendurably touched by its pathos, but as yet unawake to the call of deeper imagination unaccustomed to look within, unable, as Carlyle said of Scott, to go beneath the skin and get to the heart. Charlotte was dissatisfied with the work of those novelist who made no attempt to probe inner recess of the heart and the soul. She replaced the literature and the novel of manners by the novel of spirit and the inner life of the soul. “A literature of manner was to give place to a literature of the spirit,” says Baker, in the novels of Charlotte Bronte. In her novels the soul was at last awake to its own existence and its relations to a complex and perhaps inscrutable universe. She looked into her heart and wrote of things she had intimately known. “At any rate, her significance in the course of action is that she delineated the intense moods of the race. In *Jane Eyre* and

Villette photography of manners has passed into the inner photograph which Trollope lamented as an art beyond his power of vision." Bronte was primarily concerned with the bearing of the human soul in its nakedness and for the first time, we get a peep in the inner life of women's spirit in Jane Eyre and Villette. This method was carried forward by George Eliot, when she dealt with states of conscience and feeling psychologically, arranging and defining them with an attempt at scientific precision.

A Novelist of Passion and Intense Life

Charlotte Bronte was essentially the novelist of passion's form and intense. Her comment on Jane Austen's novels exhibits her dissatisfaction with a passionless life. She remarked, "She (Jane Austen) ruffles her reader by nothing vehement, disturbs him by nothing profound. The passions are perfectly known to her; she rejects even a speaking acquaintance with that stormy sisterhood." What Jane Austen lacked was supplied by Charlotte Bronte. She awoke 'the stormy sisterhood of passion', and turned the drift of fiction into the unexplored regions and channels of tragedy. She traded of love and passion with a new angle. "Before her the treatment of the sexual love had been of two kinds as a scarcely tempestuous affection between man and wife on the one hand and as a healthy animal sensuality, such as we find in Tom Jones, on the other hand. But passion as the romantic poets expressed it something transcending sensuality because of blending of the spiritual with the physical was unknown. Where love between man and woman is concerned what is new in Charlotte Bronte is precisely such a passage as this from Jane Eyre.

"No sooner did I see his attention was riveted on them (some ladies), and that I might gaze without being observed, than my eyes were drawn involuntarily to his face: I could not keep their lids under control; they would rise and their lids would fix upon him. I looked, and had an acute pleasure in looking a precious, yet poignant pleasure pure gold with steely point of agony: a pleasure like what the thirst-perishing man might feel who knows the well to which he has crept is poisoned, yet stoops and drinks divine draughts nevertheless."

In such a phrase as 'poignant pleasure; pure gold, with a steely point of agony we find the same grappling with languages to express feeling normally inexpressible in prose that we meet seventy years later in D.H. Lawrence. And as with Lawrence, the passionate response is not to sex alone but to all experiences, to the whole living world. What Charlotte Bronte is really concerned with in *The Professor*, *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, is one thing only: the depiction of the isolated, naked soul responding to the experience of life with a maximum of

intensity. The pleasantness or otherwise of the revelation is immaterial: the nakedness is everything: this means that, different though her experience was from theirs, in the last analysis Charlotte Bronte belongs to the same tiny group of novelists as Dostoevsky and D.H. Lawrence.

Limited Range of her Novels

In one respect Charlotte Bronte resemble Jane Austen. It was in the limited range of their experience and their knowledge of life. Charlotte Bronte's novel are not rich in presenting a wide view of life such as Henry Fielding had presented in his works. The same matter is repeated by her in Jane Eyre and Villette. There is a family likeness in all the novels of Charlotte Bronte. There is emphatically a recurring pattern in Charlotte's literary carpet. As regard their matter: Yorkshire and Brussels, the governess, the tutor and the school are often repeated, interwoven with the cleric and the millowner. In manner a similar recurrence occurs for in all the novels except Shirley the story is told in the first person. A deeper unity is achieved by the consistent theme, there is always the conflict between high integrity and worldliness.

The novels of Charlotte are autobiographical in character. They are fragments from her personal life. They are free transcripts of what she herself went through or witnessed at very close range-autobiography of the introspective and self-revealing kind. Charlotte maintained that she had described reality in her novels, but as Baker says, "the one reality she thoroughly knew was herself and her little world. She tried to reach what might be called the stations of the soul, for these were the only sensations that interested her."

Plot-Construction

Charlotte Bronte was deficient in the art of plot-construction. She was a desultory reader, and her plots are to rambling and discursive. They cure in and out, some time running, some time sauntering. She was altogether clever but knew nothing 'systematically'. It is the logical faculty which make Wuthering Heights inspite of all defects, a more compact storythan Jane Eyre, Shirley and Villette.

Characterisation

Charlotte Bronte presented 'characters' rather than 'character'. She was primarily interested in diving dep in human character. She presents Adam's sons and Eve's daughter and was particularly dexterous in revealing a women's heart and soul. There could not have been a better study of Jane Eyre and Shirley. Charlotte understood woman better than men, and the

portraits that she has drawn of women are more convincing than her pictures of male life. She presented a new conception of heroine, vigorous and active, energetic and full of verve and zest for life. Once Charlotte told Anne and Emily that they were 'morally wrong' in adopting the conventional heroine, and said to them, "I will show you a heroine as plain and small as myself, who shall be interesting in any of yours. "That heroine was Jane Eyre, a new heroine in English Fiction.

Her Imaginative Poetry and Painting Ability

Charlotte Bronte's work is a project of imagination and emotion as of the intellect, and her works are rich in poetic flights and pictorial paintings. Her Novels are charged with the paintings. The description of natural scenery betrays the hand of poet and a painter. Scenes of tempest glitter in her pages with a flash of diamonds. A special manifestation of this power maybe found in her description in Jane Eyre of imaginary pictures, which show that she had a spirit, though not the technical spirit of the greatest of painters."

Lack of Humours

Charlotte Bronte lacked humour and wit. Her humour emerges only in moments of stress and then it usually plays the part of a saving common sense preserving the story in a perilous land of passion and excitement. "Charlotte Bronte's greatest defect, the want of humour, must be put down to the account of nature rather than circumstance. She is always desperately in earnest, she has no lightness of touch, she cannot believe that there are occasions when a smile is more effective than a sermon and a zest more crushing than a blow. This lack of humour affords a ground more grave than other for doubting the permanence of her fame. With few exceptions with whom the world has chosen to remember have been gifted with it, but Milton is among the exceptions.

Coarseness in her Novels

It has been pointed out that Charlotte Bronte's novels are coarse, rough and brutal. This charge of coarseness has been ably refuted by Hugh Walker in The Literature of the Victorian Era in the following words, "The charge of coarseness which were freely brought against Charlotte Bronte by contemporaries seem to us now exaggerated and stained. It is true, her characters do not all wear kid gloves, eat with silver forks or act with the grace and speak with the decorum of the caste of Vere de Vere. She was unflinchingly sincere and whatever of coarseness there may be in her works comes from her photographic fidelity to the life she

knew, and was no part of fiber of her mind. Among the men and women of her acquaintance it was the custom to speak plainly and to call a spade a spade. The display of uncurbed passion was familiar to her; and hence she frequently depicted her characters as saying words and doing deeds which to some of her readers seemed unnecessarily coarse, brutal and cruel.”

Lack of Moral Teaching

In Charlotte Bronte’s novel there is little of preaching or moral teaching. In this respect she stood contrasted from George Eliot. Charlotte Bronte inculcated no doctrines. Miss Taylor wrote of Jane Eyre, “It is impossible to squeeze a moral out of your production.” “To teach,” she said, “is not my vocation. What I am, it is useless to say. Those whom it concerns feel and find it out. I cannot write a book for its moral.”

Style

Charlotte Bronte wrote with a skill of an artist in prose. She never wrote down a sentence till she had completely rehearsed it in her own mind. “When her fingers are controlled to firmness, she achieves something exquisite and unique. We may get a metaphor sustained through half a paragraph as where she compares Jane’s disillusion to the glories of a shattered summer. There is often a probing sharpness in her phrases. Her best phrases are not exquisite when segregated. To appreciate them we must light upon them in the midst of a printed page. To pull phrases is like pulling petals off a flower and exhibiting them as representatives of its beauty, while the charm has evaporated even the very fragrance is diminished.”

“It is not a thinker or poet or social reformer that Charlotte Bronte should be judged. She is essentially a novelist She merits the warmest praise. She tells a story and it is always an original story, quite her own, in such a way as to fascinate the reader and convey to him a conviction of its absolute truth. She is fertile in incident, vigorous in narration, vivid in scene. Her prose files to its mark with an arrow’s beautiful impetus and precision. Her dialogue is occasionally tedious when her characters intend to be clever, but thoroughly natural and racy when they speak from the heart. Her characterisation has great emotional intensity and is sometimes subtle, often strong, always original, always entirely her own. She has created in Rochester and Jane, two figures of such universally admitted reality that their names now indicate types, recognised categories of human beings. AN ardent integrity, an intense scorn for what is base, animates every sentence she wrote. The fire of life strongly on her works.”

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