

IBDP-EE

International Baccalaureate Diploma Program – English B Extended Essay

Research Question: *How does Bronte use interaction between characters in different settings of Jane Eyre to convey the effects of patriarchy on the protagonist Jane?*

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1- Introduction

In this essay, I will explore how patriarchy has affected Jane's personal growth, within her interaction with certain characters in different settings. This will be examined chronologically as Jane proceeds to meet new characters and enter new settings, which will allow the reader to understand that the effects of the characters and settings on how patriarchy falls in Jane's way. Bronte structured the novel to bind the characters to the settings which become an almost symbolic vessel bringing the characters into Jane's life, so this structure is not a coincidence. Without examining both the settings and the character interactions, the research question won't be addressed thoroughly.

2- Background Research

2.1 - The Obstruction of Freedom and the Oppression of the Society

Society and its values are a major factor in providing boundaries, suggesting what should be desirable or punished, indicating the morally rights and wrongs. Ideally in life, these values should not affect basic human rights, like freedom or independence. This, however, has never been the situation, and societies have always had a standard every individual had to adapt to. From Western Europe to Victorian England, from medieval times to today's world, society has always been a burden on women who are fighting for their independence and freedom. The former makes the latter achievable, and the latter makes life worth living. At times, women were seen as only potential mothers, they were threats to politics and the world of diplomacy. For example, voting, serving in the jury were not possible. Also, a woman's 'legal standing' was based on their marriage as they didn't have any individual standing in any court. So, they couldn't have any control over their identities without any man with them or control her 'biological reproduction'. (Chattopadhyay, Amrita. "Women in Victorian Society as Depicted in Thomas Hardy's Novels.")

There has always been a double standard, also with men. They had to be strong and unbreakable according to the standards or they were weak and unworthy. The system has standards for everyone. Although these standards are very different, they all come down to, the obstruction of the freedom of choice and the oppression of the society. (Hughes, Kathryn. "Gender Roles in the 19th Century.")

2.2 - The Victorian Society and *Jane Eyre*

The novel, *Jane Eyre* takes place in the Victorian England. The novel's society is created very similar to the society of the Victorian era which is approximately between 1820 and 1914 and it is named after the Queen Victoria. The specific feature of the Victorian England is it being a very class-based society where every value of every person in this society was set according to these classes that were determined by certain standards. England in this time was powerful in many ways because the industrial world was expanding, the country was rich on culture and its economy was powerful and stable. Even though the country was in growth, more than half of the people had no money, was making up the working class, and had serious difficulties adapting to the life standards. In the Victorian society, women were weak and vulnerable whereas men were strong and dominant. Women were only needed for reproduction and men were expected to see sex as pleasure only. ("Victorian Era." Encyclopædia Britannica) An important interpretation is, that women were mostly dependent to independent men. In *Jane Eyre*, Jane is trying to circumvent this problem. She is trying to get independent in a society, that has set the standards accordingly to women's dependency on men.

2.3 - Charlotte Bronte and Women

Charlotte Bronte wrote *Jane Eyre* as a voice for women and their independency. Writers often write from the characters perspective and speak with the character as it allows the writer to

control the level of interaction to the reader. Bronte did this with the character Jane. Jane reflects the thoughts that contradicted with the society's patriarchal values and the double standards, in the novel, that in reality, Bronte has. The society that she lived in was very similar with the society she created and criticized in the novel. Bronte believed that women were much more useful and meaningful than the standards that were set for them. She believed that, if a woman is independent and free from the oppression of this society, then they can do what a man does. Getting rid of those double standards in her thoughts and seeing an alternative society, Bronte has conveyed these thoughts to the reader with her own words in *Jane Eyre*. She said in a quote that women shouldn't be seen as a thing that is "ensnared" with a barrier, like a "bird". Women should be seen as a free person, with an "independent will", referring to herself. ("Charlotte Brontë's Greatest Quotes Ever." The Guardian) The reason behind these contradictive thoughts can be Bronte's own life and her own participation in the Victorian society. ("Charlotte Brontë." Encyclopædia Britannica, Encyclopædia Britannica)

2.4 - Setting and Characters in Character Development

A study by Roberts and Mroczek, states that certain life experiences including other people and environments affect individual growth. "In terms of individual differences in personality change, people demonstrate unique patterns of development at all stages of the life course, and these patterns appear to be the result of specific life experiences that pertain to a person's stage of life." (Roberts, Brent W, and Daniel Mroczek. "Personality Trait Change in Adulthood.") Bronte uses setting to enhance the factor that these elements of her life were contradicting with her beliefs and thoughts on freedom. The correlation between the Victorian society and the society in the novel reinforces the effects of patriarchal values on Jane's character development, and the reader can see the constantly changing vision that is affected by the turning points in Jane's life clearly.

People shape their identities according to the turning points in their life to survive the conditions they are in. In a study on quantitative and qualitative analyses based on certain events' effects on individual growth, it is stated that, a turning point in life can "represent a positive change in an individual's life" (Wethington, 2003). Turning points as opportunities for psychological growth) Hence, in a way, the turning points in Jane's life influence how patriarchy impacts her development as a woman, and as a person. She is the kind of character that changes those effects to be useful to her own personal growth without having the outside effects of her current society, manipulate her ideology. Jane, being the protagonist in the novel, succeeds to overpower the patriarchal thoughts that is reflected to her and continues to survive while also improving her individuality, personality, and ideology.

3 – Body

3.1 – Life at Gateshead

The setting, Gateshead, is the vessel that is used by Bronte to emphasize the patriarchy. The name reflects a meaning of 'gateway' as in a beginning and transition point in Jane's life, where adulthood comes next after her leave of Gateshead, which is used to create an environment for the first turning point in her journey. The use of setting in the narrative helps Bronte to highlight Jane's memories better and the effects of characters like John clearly.

John displays an early version and is an embodiment of how society oppresses a patriarchy to women in the Victorian England. John has an enormous effect on Jane's teenage years. With him representing the bully, the reader can have access to the effects of bullying on Jane's growth as an individual. Childhood bullying and going through that experience in early adolescence years can lead to mental and physical trauma for both the bully and the victim. In the novel, John leans

towards destructive habits, that represent negative repercussions, like alcohol abuse and gambling, which are great examples of how that trauma negatively affects bullies.

As for the effects on the victim, Jane uses the trauma the bullying created, as a vessel to improve herself more, resulting in the formation of her sense of independence and her need of rebellion... These are outcomes of John's embodiment of the Victorian patriarchy representing the early stages of the society's patriarchal effects.

Furthermore, fight between Jane and John takes place, leading to the latter's throwing a book at Jane, who then calls him "*a murderer- you are like a slave-driver*" (15). Here, Jane is introduced to patriarchal violence. Her words show that she feels excluded like an outcast. Additionally, her punishment in the red room makes her understand, in this unequal society, as the lower class, she and her equals are going to be punished and treated poorly without no coherent reason, if they don't fight against the patriarchal values. To quote John Reed, "*Say, 'What do you want, Master Reed?'*" (14). It is clear John sees himself superior to Jane... Jane's brave and self-confident refusal of the word "Master" and its relation to John is the proof of Jane's rebellious and independent character. The idea that was instilled by John and Mrs. Reed was always "*you are a dependent*" (15). Jane's reaction and thoughts against this oppression was revolving around the word "*unjust*" (20), which shows the reader that her vision won't be affected negatively, and her interpretation of 'dependence' will stay negative. In these pages of the novel the themes gender roles and social class are highly criticized. We don't see Jane bowing down to the early stages of the patriarchal values that John represents and in the next stages of the novel, using the values oppressed against her as use for growth. This is related again with Bronte's rare and unique characterization of Jane, and her vision of her, the representative of all women and their rebellion against the Victorian England's patriarchal society.

Here, Bronte uses this setting and characters like John Reed and Mrs. Reed as a preparatory stage to the upcoming stages. She foreshadows the next events that will take place in Jane's life. The quote of a song that is Bronte's creation in the novel, "*Soon will the twilight close moonless and dreary, Over the path of the poor orphan child*" (27) states the obstacles of life, that mostly features inequality. In the later stages of the novel, it can be clearly seen that these stages of her life and the interactions of her, John and Mrs. Reed have allowed her to build up certain characteristics that form her personality.

3.2 - Life at Lowood School

Lowood School and its surroundings are presented to the reader as an unpleasant setting. "*the country changed; great grey hills heaved up round the horizon: as twilight deepened*" (49), describes the school's surroundings with a darker tone. It is run with a very strict system that was formed for orphans and for kids that didn't have a proper family. As another turning point in Jane's life, Lowood School represents the harsh standards in society that Jane must survive in and is a strong symbolic representative for predecessor of individuality and disposition. The school is inspired from the "Clergy Daughters School" that Bronte and her sister went in their childhood, which was also an unpleasant setting as the system of hierarchy and patriarchy showed its existence. ("Charlotte Brontë." Encyclopædia Britannica, Encyclopædia Britannica) The reader can understand that here Bronte includes her own experiences to Jane and explains her own development too as an addition to Jane's. The school is where Jane spends an important time of her life while early teenage years are very important for individual growth. The setting introduces the reader with the characters, Mr. Brocklehurst, and Helen.

In every new setting, there is a patriarchal power Jane must overcome. Mr. Brocklehurst is the essence of the patriarchal system that exists in Lowood School, a plot device to continue the

patriarchal oppression John started. Brocklehurst enjoys the power he holds over the girls that attend the school and aims that the school presents his cruel judgements about the girls and the domination he creates over them. He symbolically is characterized by Bronte as the excessive and destructive borders and limits the patriarchal society sets for women. The way Brocklehurst warns others about Jane is an example of these: *“You must be on your guard against her; you must shun her example; if necessary, avoid her company, exclude her from your sports, and shut her out from your converse”* (74). He isolates her from the rest of the girls also constantly leaving her hungry, because Jane is not what he wants her to be: coherent and submissive. Brocklehurst is a symbol used to demonstrate how women were treated if they were not fitting the standards set by patriarchy. *“I have swallowed the remainder with an accompaniment of secret tears, forced from me by the exigency of hunger”* (68).

In this setting, Jane also meets Helen, who suppresses the effects that Mr. Brocklehurst has on Jane, offering her guidance to be more confident in her thoughts and teaching her stand against. The ideologies of independence that Jane sustains in the next chapters of the novel, start forming with the meeting point with Helen. To quote Jane’s viewing of Helen, *“What my sensations were, no language can describe; [...] a girl came up and passed me; in passing, she lifted her eyes. What a strange light inspired them!”* (75) explains how Jane sees Helen as a character and how Bronte created her. The values of self-confidence and self-dependency are introduced to Jane from an external point of view for the first time. The individual growth and character development is processed into the novel more when Helen stimulates Jane’s *“unavailing and impotent anger”* (61) for being treated unjustly. The importance of believing in her own thoughts and values while solely being Jane’s accomplishment, are supported by Helen’s values and beliefs. Bronte created the character Helen as a reflection of the ‘good’ while aiming for her to be a supporting character and

a turning point that will eventually improve Jane's individual growth. The quote, "*It is not violence that best overcomes hate – nor vengeance that most certainly heals injury*" (65), reflects how Helen focuses on loving even her enemies and treating good to everyone.

3.3 - Life at Thornfield

The setting, Thornfield increases Jane's individual development upon facing further inequality from men, along with romance appearing in her journey. This setting also holds some secrets that will be eventually revealed and this affects Jane's ideology as she meets yet more obstacles "*I lingered in the long passageway to which this led, separating the front and back rooms of the third story: narrow, low, and dim, with only one little window at the far end, and looking, with its two rows of small black doors all shut, like a corridor in some Bluebeard's castle*" (117). reflects. Thornfield provides Jane with ample opportunities of self-growth, to guard herself with to fights against the manipulative effects of patriarchy.

Thornfield introduces Mr. Rochester, and Bertha, both representing the contrasting sides of Victorian patriarchy, i.e., the oppressor and the oppressed. Jane's relationship with the former is very complicated. Bronte characterized him in a way so that he could represent the Victorian Societies' view of a "man", which was based on double standards. A man must be strong, smart, rich, and emotionally unavailable. Edward is socially and economically at a higher stance than Jane and embodies the patriarchal influence on Jane that started with John and continued with Mr. Brocklehurst.

In her first interaction with Mr. Rochester, where he was disabled from falling off his horse, Jane helps him and makes a description of him that highlights his "grim" looks and his lack of heroism. "*I recognized his decisive nose, more remarkable for character than beauty, his full nostrils, denoting, I thought, cholera; his grim mouth, chin, and jaw—yes, all three were very grim,*

and no mistake...” (130). In this scene Bronte foreshadows these two characters’ equal future and Edward’s future dependence on Jane.

Jane’s refusal of the marriage proposal from Rochester is the proof of Jane’s want for independence. As patriarchy is systematically built to make women dependent, Rochester is the representative of that. Jane’s character development reaches a climax here while she is faced with an important decision, becoming Rochester’s mistress, being a vessel for his happiness, losing her dignity, being dependent to him and not resist to the patriarchy clearly presented here or, be independent, choose the option that is rebellious against the patriarchal values and keep her dignity. These chapters put Jane in an indecisive situation where she must use the interaction between her and Rochester in her character development. She understands that choosing to be Rochester’s mistress and choosing to be in a relationship where her husband will always be the superior and has the moral availability to manipulate her vision, is not the best way to gain her independence, which was her aim in the past, is her aim in these scenes and will be her aim later in the novel.

Although Rochester is a representative for the patriarchy’s perfect standard for a man, he allows himself to be vulnerable when he is with Jane. *“This was cowardly; I should have appealed to your nobleness and magnanimity at first”* (338). This proves his motive of love and eventually is what brings back Jane to him at the end of the novel. So, this quote carries great importance in Jane’s understanding of her own feelings hence, her ultimate freedom.

Secondly, in this setting, Bertha represents rebellion and Jane’s suppressed rebellious thoughts against the patriarchal values of the Victorian society. She gained these thoughts in Lowood School but lost them while working as a governess in Rochester’s house, slowly gaining affection to him and from him. Bertha by her existence does Jane a favor by reminding her these

rebellious thoughts. Bertha's madness reflects how women in the Victorian England were treated as mentally unstable when they didn't want to suit the standards that society sets for women because the thought of women wanting to be independent, seemed as madness in these times. *"This was a demoniac laugh – low, suppressed, and deep – utter, as it seemed, at the very keyhole of my chamber-door. The head of my bed was near the door and, I thought at first the goblin-laughter stood at my bedside"* (160). Bertha helps Jane realize that she is too naïve to be in a relationship and that she needs to settle her individuality, character, and personality as a woman first. Through Bertha, she is once again reminded that intelligence and dignity is important in developing her character, strength, and independence. Jane is finally in the same level as Rochester morally as she leaves the house on a path to find herself after escaping the patriarchal values of the Victorian society represented by Rochester.

3.4 - Life at Moor house

The Moor House is the setting that represents closure and peace as the journey of Jane's character development reaches its final turning point that is reflected in the novel. This setting is an emphasizes the lack of patriarchal impact in this setting, so it is equally important to Jane's developing ideology as the other settings as it reflects the developing ideas of Jane. Here values like economic independence and self-worth are introduced to her. The moors are symbolically used in the novel and are an ecosystem that is formed by simple organisms like trees and grass, which is a way simpler and more peaceful environment than Jane's past environments. The concept of peace and loneliness that the Moors represent are created to attract the attention of the reader to one specific thing: Jane's growth in her inside world and character. By designing a setting that is reflecting the values of loneliness and emptiness, Bronte created an environment that allows Jane to show her character growth to the reader and herself. She describes nature as the home that

allows her to stay even without paying anything. She feels as if the nature is "benign and good," and that is where she finds her spiritual self.

The Moor House sets the chapters where Jane meets St. John, another male character that has a great impact on her vision. Finding out that she has an economic independence that leads back to her uncle's death, and the money he left her, makes Jane improve and gain a lot of progress in the means of independence. Her relationship with St. John changes drastically after she becomes wealthy and his aim changes into the desire to marry her. In the quote by St. John, "*Refuse to be my wife, and you limit yourself forever to a track of selfish ease and barren obscurity*" (437), his threats against Jane and again the society's patriarchal values are represented. His reaction after a refusal highlights the stereotype and standards set for St John. This quote also makes Jane realize that Rochester is the man she wants and her refusal to his desires is yet again another turning point in Jane's life as she realizes, love is also an important value in life, and attaining the love that she wants must come with her own independent will. This way her choice of going back to Rochester is solely her own independent will. The only thing that Jane was missing so that she could be Rochester's equal was economic stability. With the setting, Moor house and the character that it brought, St. Johns, she enters a new development stage that is related to love and spirituality. Now she has the money, morals, vision, and education that she always desired from the beginning of her journey. Even though being a woman sets her back from Rochester, she now sees herself in the same level and finally finds her independence.

In the Victorian times, women couldn't decide for themselves, and society forced roles that were formed based on patriarchy and the double standard. ("Victorian Era." Encyclopædia Britannica) Jane represents the rebellion made against these values. Her whole journey is

represented as a process, and she is now at the final points of it. When proposing, St. John tells Jane if she refuses, she refuses God. This also represents the values that were used to oppress women. Finding her own desires and needs romantically, Jane has a new and clear mission. She wants to find Rochester.

Conclusion

The novel has a classic, happy, ending. With the characters dividing into two, bad and good. The characters that effected Jane, either affect her positively or negatively. Bronte did this so that her development could be given clearer. Jane ends up in a perfect marriage with Rochester that seems without fault. Many people argue that the end of the novel doesn't do Jane any justice because she should have been alone and not with any man. That wasn't the point of independence and rebellion that Bronte included in the novel. The aim of Jane's process of growth through the characterization of Bronte was, to make sure these values helped Jane to get to know herself, be courageous enough so that she could make decisions that altered her life and be enough for herself. Independence is not being alone and not being left out of Society or love. The novel solely defends that independence is a right for women and it is crucial for survival. Intelligence and education alongside with dignity is what gave Jane her independence. She fought for these values for a long time and that process is what's given as her character development. "Intelligence and proper education ill give you independence of spirit." -Charlotte Bronte. ("Charlotte Bronte Quote.") This work has allowed me to understand the Victorian England and Charlotte Bronte. The effects of settings and characters on a novel and the protagonist became clearer and the process of analysis taught me how to analyze fictional texts from an academic perspective. In further investigations, it can be suggested that more sociological and psychological investigations to be added. The correlation being formed according to more extensive studies can make the research more focused.

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