

GROUP 2

ENGLISH EXTENDED ESSAY

WORD COUNT: 3846

To what extent the romantic affairs of the main female characters in the novels “Jane Eyre” and “Villette” by Charlotte Bronte are similar to and different from each other.

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ABSTRACT

This essay focuses on the similarities and differences between the female protagonists' romantic affairs in the novels *Villette* and *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte. During this comparison and contrast process, the backgrounds of the characters, their environmental conditions and the impact of other characters in their lives were taken into consideration.

In the introduction part, brief information about Charlotte Bronte and the place of the women in social life in the time she lived in and some more information about the similarities and differences between the romantic affairs of the two protagonists in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* are given by focusing on such issues as how they met their lovers, the difficulties they faced until they reached their lovers, how these romantic affairs end and the psychological state of these two women in the course of their relationships.

In the main body, the above mentioned issues are analyzed individually and supported by references from the novels under the headings "similarities" and "differences" by focusing on the research question "To what extent the romantic affairs of the main female characters in the novels *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* by Charlotte Bronte are similar to and different from each other."

The conclusion part serves as a kind of summary of the main body, which sums up the similar and different points between the romantic affairs of the two protagonists, who, despite the differences have some outstanding similarities in their love affairs.

Word count: 238

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INTRODUCTION

Love is an irresistible issue in human life. Everybody has someone special and unforgettable for them in some part of their lives. Since this topic is so related with human, it is the most popular concept used in movies, music and literature. This topic attracts the attention of people. One of the most popular female authors of the English Literature, Charlotte Bronte, also focuses on this issue from her feminist point of view. Apart from being known as a successful author, the life she led and the conditions which made her a feminist woman are also issues that are as popular as her literary works.

Charlotte Bronte lived during the Victorian Era, whose social conditions made her stand up to the absolute power of man and the absolute weakness of woman. During these sixty-four years of the Victorian Era (1837-1901), woman was considered as an object without a brain. Women were obliged to wear loose gowns and learn everything about household and marriage until they got married. Apart from these, the women of that age had to be able to sing, speak a little French and play an instrument like the piano, in order to be classified as a gentlewoman. They also had to look weak, helpless and fragile. After marriage, the best life they could lead was staying at home, taking care of the children and maintaining a family atmosphere that would make the husband feel relaxed. Besides being so restricted by their husbands, the women did not have any beneficial rights. They were isolated from the society if they were married but having an affair with another man. However, this was not an extraordinary case when the person who was cheating his spouse was a man. The men were even taking the control of their wives' all properties, which she had inherited from her family. Women did not have a right to own something or have a property.

All these conditions caused Charlotte Bronte to be a feminist. Her feminist character is obvious in her literary works. Her most popular novel *Jane Eyre* and another novel that is published after *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley*, *Villette* have woman protagonists that lived in the Victorian Era. Both of these novels are based on the lives of female characters, who both have romantic affairs in some part of their lives. These affairs have some similarities and though less in number, some differences.

The most outstanding similarities are; both characters meet their lovers in their work places and start their relationships as friends, it is very difficult for them to meet their lovers and they both don't give up and stand up to the difficulties they face to unite with their lovers.

As for the differences, the first one is Jane loves only one man in her life and her romantic affair ends happily whereas Lucy has two romantic affairs and both end unhappily. The second difference is, in their relationships Jane is jealous of the women who are close to her beloved but Lucy never has such a feeling.

I. SIMILARITIES OF THE TWO WORKS OF CHARLOTTE BRONTE

The two protagonists, Jane and Lucy, lead a life in the Victorian Era and are affected by the social conditions. Not only themselves but also their romantic affairs are affected by the social rules and traditions of the Victorian Age. Both main female characters meet their lovers through their jobs since the whole life of a woman who lives in that age is confined to the house she lives in, so the only place for a woman to socialize is her work place. Another similarity is their suffering from not being able to see the lovers whenever they want. Besides, both of these main female characters start their relationship with their lovers as friends and this turns into a romantic affair after some time. The last similarity between these characters is imposed on them by the author. Since Charlotte Bronte is a feminist author she creates strong and dominant female characters. These characters also carry that property of symbolizing the strength of woman in the Victorian Age societies, which are composed of women who are weak and fragile. Hence, both of the main female characters show their strength by standing up against the difficulties they face to reach their lovers.

i. *JANE EYRE*

The main character of the novel *Jane Eyre*, Jane, is a girl whose mother and father had died when she was a little child. Thus, she was brought up by her aunt Mrs. Reed. Despite the fact that Mrs. Reed is her real aunt, she and her children always abuse Jane and in order to get rid of her existence at home, they send her to a school called Lowood Institution. After Jane finishes her education at Lowood, she finds a job at Thornfield Hall as the nanny of a little French girl named Adele. While she is working there, she has

lots of questions in mind. For example, she doesn't know who the owner of the house is. After some time, she meets the owner, Mr. Rochester, who will later be her lover.

i. a. MEETING THE LOVER THROUGH THE JOB & NOT BEING ABLE TO SEE HIM

Although Jane is always staying in the house of Mr. Rochester, she is not able to see him whenever she wants. Mr. Rochester is rarely at home because of the journeys he has for business. When he visits Thornfield Hall after the long journeys, which takes a couple of months, Jane is still not able to meet with him as he is always staying in his room, where Jane is not allowed to get in. The only chance for them to meet is the dinners. It is a ritual of the house to be at the dinner table with all the family members, including the governess, Mrs. Fairfax, and even the nanny of little Adele. However, this ritual is still not enough for Jane to have an intimacy with Mr. Rochester as she is too shy and Mr. Rochester is too cold and unaffectionate to have a conversation.

“For several subsequent days I saw little of Mr. Rochester... all my acquaintance with him was confined to an occasional rencontre in the hall, on the stairs, or in the gallery, when he would sometimes pass me haughtily and coldly, just acknowledging my presence by a distant nod or a cool glance, and sometimes bow and smile with gentlemanlike affability.”¹

Since having a conversation with Mr. Rochester is hard for Jane, she has problems to confess her interest on him even to herself. This problem is based on the gender inequality and social class distinctions. Firstly, it is not acceptable in the society for a woman to show affection to someone and reflect her feelings to him before the man she loves does so. This shows that the right to choose their lovers is a right that is given only to men. Another problem that lies beneath the situation of the Lucy is social class distinctions. As she is a governess in the house of Mr. Rochester, her social status is

¹P.112, Bronte, Jane Eyre, Wordsworth Classics, 1999.

lower than that of Mr. Rochester. An affair between people from different classes is also something that is not easily accepted by the society in the Victorian Era. Because of all these, the only way for the reader to know about Jane's feelings is analyzing her behaviors. For example, Jane sometimes watches Mr. Rochester secretly and checks him.

"He had been looking two minutes at the fire, and I had been looking the same length of time at him, when, turning suddenly, he caught my gaze fastened on his physiognomy.

'You examine me, Miss Eyre,' said he: 'do you think me handsome?' I should if I had deliberated, have replied to this question by something conventionally vague and polite; but the answer somehow slipped from my tongue before I was aware- 'No, sir.'"²

i. b. STARTING THE RELATIONSHIP AS FRIENDS

Despite the social class distinctions and gender inequalities their relationship suffered from, Jane and Mr. Rochester become friends. Thus the strong female character of Charlotte Bronte wins a battle against the patriarchal society she criticizes and removes the restrictions imposed on women in the society. Jane and Mr. Rochester start to have conversations and learn more about each other. They forget about the shyness and the disregard while Mr. Rochester thinks Jane is the only person that can be his companion in dialogues. They have talks even about love issues and Mr. Rochester tells Jane about his love affair with a French opera-dancer, Celine Varens, who is the mother of the little girl, Adele. Although Mr. Rochester and Jane Eyre become such close friends, it takes some more time for them to start a romantic affair as both of them do not reveal their real emotions to each other. The reader does not know much about Mr. Rochester's feelings but, since Jane is the narrator of the novel, the reader can learn about

² P. 114, Bronte, Jane Eyre, Wordsworth Classics, 1999.

her inner thoughts and confessions. Because of not getting any signal from each other in the way of affection, they go on hiding their emotions.

“My master’s colorless, olive face, square, massive brow, broad and jetty eyebrows, deep eyes, strong features, firm, grim mouth...were not beautiful, according to rule; but they were more than beautiful to me...I had not intended to love him; the reader knows I had wrought hard to extirpate from my soul the germs of love there detected; and now, at the first renewed view of him, they spontaneously arrived, green and strong! He made me love him without looking at me.”³

i. c. STANDING UP TO THE DIFFICULTIES IN THE WAY OF REACHING THE LOVER

In the end Mr. Rochester realizes that they are in a vicious cycle in which they always suppress their feelings and expect the first attempt from each other. Thus, he plays a game on Jane. Mr. Rochester’s aim is to create jealousy in Jane by flirting with young, charming and rich ladies in the presence of Jane in order to test her patience and make her reflect her emotions or at least, get a signal that she is sad when she sees him flirting with those ladies. However, this plan does not work out soon. Jane stays calm for a long time instead of explaining everything she feels. Although she seems indifferent she suffers from this situation. She becomes jealous of Blanche Ingram, the lady whom Mr. Rochester is most interested in. She even blames herself for being so stupid to fall in love with her master. On the other hand, as Mr. Rochester observes that Jane is still indifferent, he increases the degree of reality and harm of his game and proposes to Blanche Ingram. He even announces a wedding date with his future wife, Miss Ingram.

Nevertheless, Jane’s endurance level to sorrow is so high that she does not show a sign of giving up until the day before wedding. While Miss Ingram is not happy with her

³ P.153, Bronte, *Jane Eyre*, Wordsworth Classics, 1999.

presence near Mr. Rochester and her intimacy with him, she treats Jane cruelly and Jane is aware of Miss Ingram's dislike for her. For this reason, she decides to quit her job and leaves Thornfield Hall. She wants to tell it to Mr. Rochester on the night before the wedding day. Actually this is the case that Mr. Rochester wants to see. He confesses about the trick he played on her and tells his real emotions. Until she learns this, Jane suffers much. She sees her lover with a woman more qualified than herself, she witnesses how her lover cares for another woman and proposes to her. What's more the woman that her lover proposes is not happy with her and she treats Jane cruelly.

Unfortunately, this game played on her and the pain it causes is not the last heartache she would suffer from. This time misfortune comes on the day of her marriage to Mr. Rochester. She learns about the fact that Mr. Rochester is already married. He is married to the woman who is locked up in a room that is not visited by anyone except Grace Poole. Having another shock right after a real big one makes her so desperate about her love that Jane decides to end her relationship with Mr. Rochester, and leaves Mrs. Fairfax, Adele and Thornfield Hall. This last shock causes lack of trust and the only solution seems to be leaving all these people behind and start a new life although this would be very hard.

“Gentle reader, may you never feel what I felt! May your eyes never shed such stormy, scalding, heart-wrung tears as poured from mine. May you never appeal to Heaven in prayers so hopeless and so agonized as in that hour left my lips; for never may you, like me, dread to be the instrument of evil to what you wholly love.”⁴

⁴ P.284, Bronte, Jane Eyre, Wordsworth Classics, 1999.

ii. VILLETTE

The above mentioned aspects in Jane's life are significantly similar to those of Lucy Snowe's, the main character of the novel *Villette*. Lucy Snowe is a little girl who has been brought up by her godmother, Mrs. Bretton. There is not enough information about what had happened to the parents of Lucy. When she grows up, she leaves the house of her godmother and takes a job as a nurse in the house of Miss Marchmont. However, her job in this house does not last long and she moves to France in order to find a new job. Here she meets Madame Beck, the owner of a school. Then, Lucy starts to work in that school as an English teacher.

ii. a. MEETING WITH LOVER THROUGH THE JOB & NOT BEING ABLE TO SEE THE LOVER

Both Jane and Lucy have the same occupation, and like Jane, Lucy falls in love with the man that she meets through her job. Her first love, Dr. John is the doctor of the school. The relationship between Dr. John and Lucy is not as cold as Mr. Rochester's and Jane's relationship's at the beginning. They have conversations about the problems of students.

“For the first time, I fancy, he noticed that I spoke his language; hitherto he had always taken me for a foreigner, addressing me as ‘mademoiselle’ and giving in French the requisite directions about the children’s treatment. He seemed on the point of making a remark, but thinking better of it, held his tongue.”⁵

Although Dr. John and Lucy work for the same school, Lucy can not see him whenever she wants as Dr. John does not stay permanently at school. He visits the school when one of the students is ill and the teachers are not able to cure her. Being far away from each other and being not able to see each other are similar in both novels of Charlotte Bronte.

⁵ P.97, Bronte, *Villette*, Bantam Classics, 1986.

ii. b. STARTING THE RELATIONSHIP AS FRIENDS

Lucy Snowe's second romantic affair, with M. Paul, is an affair that starts blooming again in Lucy's work place, the school of Madame Beck. M. Paul is also a teacher in the same school. After being cold towards each other for some time, M. Paul and Lucy start to have a close friendship like Mr. Rochester and Jane.

“‘Come, we will not be rivals, we will be friends;’ he pursued... After all, you are solitary and stranger, and have your way to make and your bread to earn; it may be well that you should become known. We will be friends: do you agree?’

‘Out of my heart, monsieur. I am glad of a friend. I like that better than a triumph.’⁶

ii. c. STANDING UP TO THE DIFFICULTIES IN THE WAY OF REACHING THE LOVER

This might seem as if Lucy and M. Paul are having an ordinary and normal relationship but their happiness does not last long. Lucy faces a great obstacle that she has to deal with, like Jane, who deals with difficulties while reaching her beloved. The difficulty Lucy struggles with is based on the importance of the religion in the social life. Since Christianity consists of sects that are separated from each other with strict rules, and since the societies at that time are not open to innovations, a relationship between people who believe in different sects is not accepted. M. Paul is a religious Catholic. On the other hand, Lucy is a Protestant. M. Paul is not happy with that situation and wants Lucy to change her religious sect and become a Catholic. For M. Paul, it is hard and dangerous for them to be friends when they are on the opposite sides of Christianity. In order to inform Lucy more about the Catholicism, one day M. Paul puts a pamphlet on Lucy's desk. However, seeing that pamphlet on her desk does not make Lucy happy because she thinks that each person's relationship with God is one's own responsibility

⁶ P.148, Bronte, *Villette*, Bantam Classics, 1986.

and no one has a right to try changing it in the way they want. Nevertheless, M. Paul is so prejudiced about the Protestants that it takes long time for Lucy to convince him that she will not change her religious aspect.

“...but your terrible, proud, earnest Protestantism, there is the danger. It expresses itself by your eye at times; and again, it gives you certain tones and certain gestures that make my flesh creep. You are not demonstrative, and yet, just now- when you handled that tract- my God! I thought Lucifer smiled.”⁷

⁷ P. 401, Bronte, Villette, Bantam Classics, 1986.

II. DIFFERENCES OF THE TWO WORKS OF CHARLOTTE BRONTE

i. a. JANE EYRE, HAVING JUST MR. ROCHESTER AS A LOVER & HAVING AN HAPPY ENDING

The common points of the romantic affairs in the novels of Charlotte Bronte have been analyzed so far in this essay. However, these affairs also have points that are different. The most obvious difference between these affairs is the number of people the main character loves. In *Jane Eyre*, Jane falls in love with a man, Mr. Rochester, and he is the first and last love in her whole life. Even after she breaks up with him because of the thing she learns on the day of her wedding, she does not fall in love with another man, although her aim is to start a new life without Mr. Rochester. She can never forget everything about him. After she starts a new life, one day she decides to visit Thornfield Hall. However, she can not find it in the place it should be. She learns that Thornfield Hall was burnt a year ago by Bertha, Mr. Rochester's wife, who was locked up in a room and was staying there under the custody of Grace Poole. She also learns that all of the servants in the mansion and Mr. Rochester had run away from the house but Bertha had jumped down from the roof of the building. Then, she finds Mr. Rochester again in the place he was living. She realizes one more time that her never-ending love is not immutual when Mr. Rochester remembers his lover again despite the fact that he has become blind. They promise each other one more time that they will never break up.

“And you will stay with me?”

‘Certainly- unless you object. I will be your neighbor, your nurse, your housekeeper. I find you lonely: I will be your companion- to read to you, to walk with you, to sit with you, to wait on you, to be eyes and hands to you. Cease to look so melancholy, my dear master; you shall not be left desolate, so long as I live.’”⁸

⁸ P.385, Bronte, *Jane Eyre*, Wordsworth Classics, 1999.

After their promises, they start leading a happy life together and Mr. Rochester's vision improves day by day. Thus, the novel ends happily for Jane.

i. b. LUCY, HAVING TWO MEN AS LOVERS THROUGH HER ENTIRE LIFE & HAVING A SAD FINAL SCENE

Contrary to Jane, Lucy does not love just one man through her whole life. She falls in love with Dr. John but this romantic affair does not last long. Her other romantic affair is with M. Paul. This was the relationship that can be named as "Lucy's love of her life". Because, right after they cope with the problems they face, they start to name their relationship as "love". However, unfortunately, this romantic affair does not end as happily as Mr. Rochester's and Jane Eyre's relationship. M. Paul and Lucy never have a chance to get married. M. Paul goes on a business trip and promises Lucy that they will get married when he comes back. Nevertheless, he never comes back from that journey and the novel ends with this open ended situation.

ii. JEALOUSY AS AN ISSUE IN THE NOVELS

Besides the above mentioned differences, there is another difference that can not be underestimated. Jane is very jealous in her relationship with Mr. Rochester, so she suffers much when Mr. Rochester tests her patience. She can not stand the scenes she witnesses when Mr. Rochester is flirting with Miss Ingram. However, Lucy is not as jealous as Jane when she witnesses such situations. She knows that Madame Beck is in love with Dr. John but she does not show a bit of jealousy. Moreover, when Dr. John falls in love with Ginevra Fanshawe but does not get response to his feelings, Lucy stays near him and relieves him.

“Do not be sorrowful, do not grieve,’ I broke out. ‘If there is in Ginevra one spark of worthiness of your affection, she will- she must feel devotion

*in return. Be cheerful, be hopeful Dr. John. Who should hope if not you?''*⁹

CONCLUSION

The two popular novels of Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, have female main characters that experience hard times and must struggle to beat the obstacles they face while reaching their loved ones.

Jane Eyre is a novel of romance that is shaped with the life of Jane Eyre. Jane has an affair that she can never forget and suffers from her feelings for her lover both when she is near him and when she is away from him. There is no choice for Jane Eyre but leading a happy life with him in order to find the ultimate happiness.

Villette is the other novel that had been analyzed, with the female protagonist Lucy Snowe. She leads such an unfortunate life that she can never reach the man of her life. Even when she thinks that love is not far from her, fate takes happiness away from her.

Even though one main character reaches happy end and the other one leads her life in sorrow, their lives have common points in the process of reaching their lovers. They both have times when they are hurt, like being preferred for another woman and times that they are able to get along with their loved ones and become close friends.

In conclusion, Charlotte Bronte introduces us two characters that have some similarities and some differences in their romantic affairs. They sometimes get hurt in the same way and sometimes reach their aims in love in different ways.

⁹ P.144, Bronte, *Villette*, Bantam Classics, 1986.

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