



**THE STATUS OF WOMEN DESCRIBED IN THE NOVEL “JANE EYRE”
BY CHARLOTTE BRONTE**

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Abstract:

Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* presents a powerful challenge to the patriarchal norms of Victorian society. Through the journey of Jane, Brontë emphasizes women’s struggle for identity, autonomy, and equality. This article explores the position of women as depicted in the novel using analysis, synthesis, induction, comparison, synecdoche, and empirical observation. By examining various female characters and their experiences, the paper highlights the social inequalities of the time and demonstrates how *Jane Eyre* remains a critical feminist text, relevant even in contemporary discussions of gender.

Keywords: Jane Eyre, feminism, Victorian society, women’s rights, gender roles, equality, identity

Introduction

During the Victorian era, women were expected to remain passive, obedient, and confined to the domestic sphere. As Virginia Woolf pointed out in her essay “Professions for Women¹,” women had to overcome not only physical limitations but also the psychological barriers imposed by a male-dominated society. Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* serves as a critical examination of these limitations. Jane, as a protagonist, represents resistance to gender norms and challenges the patriarchal framework. This article aims to explore the depiction of women’s status in the novel using several literary and analytical methods.

1. Woolf, Virginia. “Professions for Women.” In Beth Newman (Ed.), *Jane Eyre: Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism*. Bedford/St. Martin's Press, 1996. p.9.

Brontë constructs Jane as a character who grows emotionally and intellectually through struggle and experience. As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue, Jane’s



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journey is a “dialogue of self and soul²,” a confrontation between inner desires and external expectations. Through synthesis of her moral values and emotional instincts, Jane refuses to compromise her integrity for the sake of love or security. By inductively examining Jane’s decisions—such as rejecting St. John’s proposal and leaving Rochester—we observe a clear rebellion against traditional gender roles.

Comparing Jane to other female characters further reveals the diversity of women’s experiences:

- **Helen Burns** accepts suffering with religious patience, embodying the ideal of Christian virtue.
- **Bertha Mason**, described by Adrienne Rich as “the madwoman in the attic³,” symbolizes the repressed and silenced female, a victim of both colonialism and patriarchy.
- **Blanche Ingram** performs femininity for social gain, showing how beauty and class affect a woman’s options.

These women differ in behavior and fate, but all are shaped by rigid gender expectations. Jane stands apart as someone who fights to define her own identity.

Jane’s life symbolizes the broader condition of Victorian women. Her struggle is not only personal but universal, representing many women who sought education, dignity, and emotional freedom. As R.B. Martin notes, “Jane’s insistence on her own worth... is the novel’s central act of persuasion⁴”. Through her, Brontë voices the unheard frustrations of a whole gender.

2. Gilbert, Sandra M., & Gubar, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, Second Edition. Yale University, 2000. pp.345–346.

3. Rich, Adrienne. “Jane Eyre: The Temptations of a Motherless Woman.” In *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966–1978*. New York: Norton, 1979. p.95.

4. Martin, R.B. *Charlotte Brontë’s Novels: The Accents of Persuasion*. Norton, 1966.



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Empirical Observation

- **Observation 1:** When Jane refuses Rochester's proposal while he is still married, she says, "I care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself." This moment reflects moral agency and personal dignity.
- **Observation 2:** In a famous feminist passage, Jane says, "Women feel just as men feel... it is thoughtless to condemn them if they seek to do more." This directly criticizes the Victorian ideal of the passive woman.
- **Observation 3:** Jane's decision to return to Rochester only after achieving economic independence highlights her demand for an equal relationship.

These events are not only narrative milestones but serve as empirical reflections of the feminist struggle for recognition and rights.

Conclusion

Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is not merely a love story; it is a feminist declaration. By creating a heroine who values her principles over societal pressures, Brontë redefined what it meant to be a woman in the 19th century. The novel critiques the unequal treatment of women and challenges the ideals of femininity and marriage. As Barbara Thaden points out, Brontë presents a new kind of heroine — "one who draws the boundaries of her life according to her own values⁵". Through analysis, synthesis, comparison, synecdoche, and empirical observations, it becomes clear that *Jane Eyre* continues to inspire feminist thought and remains relevant in modern discussions about gender and equality.

5. Thaden, Barbara Z. "Jane Eyre (1847)." In *Student Companion to Charlotte & Emily Brontë*. Greenwood Press, 1997.



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5. Thaden, Barbara Z. "Jane Eyre (1847)." In *Student Companion to Charlotte & Emily Brontë*. Greenwood Press, 1997.
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