

Women's Liberation in *Jane Eyre*

YU Qing, ZHOU Tao, GAO Cheng

School of Management, University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai 200093, China

Email: yuqingshelley@163.com

Abstract –*Jane Eyre* becomes the representative of women's literature, because the theme highlights the thought of women's liberation. The female consciousness conveys the desire and pursuit of women. It emphasizes the value of woman. Undoubtedly, the performance of Charlotte Bronte's feminist consciousness is to go beyond that era, but also has brought resounding answer to the era of female emancipation. In this paper, a new woman image of *Jane Eyre* as the axis expresses the awakening of female consciousness and makes female independence through self-struggle and fight for dignity. It shows the concerns and consideration about the liberation of women. The paper reexamines *Jane Eyre* in the clear-cut feminist consciousness from different angles, highlighting the significance of women's emancipation.

Keywords –women's liberation; women's image; human dignity; independence; social status

1. Introduction

Charlotte Bronte (April 21, 1816 – March 31, 1855) was an English novelist. *Jane Eyre* is a biography of the writer, and tells an orphan resistance, struggle, self-improvement story. *Jane Eyre* ranks as one of the greatest and most popular works of English fiction. Although the poor but plucky heroine is outwardly of plain appearance, she possesses an indomitable spirit, a sharp wit and great courage. She is forced to battle against the exigencies of a cruel guardian, a harsh employer and a rigid social order.

2. The Theme of Women's Liberation

There are multiple themes in *Jane Eyre*, like family, religion, social position, gender inequality, and external beauty versus internal beauty. One of the main themes is women's liberation. The following is the present research of the thought of women's liberation. The emancipation of women, their liberation from religious, legal, economic, and sexual oppression, their access to higher education, and their escape from narrow gender roles are not easily achieved. The struggle for sexual equality has a long history and is likely to continue for some time. Even if it should soon be won in the industrial nations, it may well rage on in many underdeveloped countries.

In traditional patriarchal society, any improvement in the status of women has far-reaching consequences and produces fundamental political changes. Therefore it is always resisted by the established powers. However, it seems certain that they will ultimately have to relent, because the emancipation of women is both necessary and desirable. It will provide for a greater degree of social justice and thus benefit everyone. Indeed, from the beginning, the great feminists or champions of women's rights have always insisted that they worked in the interest of the whole human race. Feminism ranges from

culture to law. Feminist activists have campaigned for women's legal rights including the rights of contract, property, voting and against other forms of discrimination.

3. The Characteristics of Female Characters in the Novel

Charlotte Bronte molded three female characters successfully who are *Jane Eyre*, Helen Burns and Bertha. They play different roles in the women's liberation. Their characteristics are completely different.

3.1 Characteristic of Jane Eyre

Jane Eyre is a poor but aspiring, small in body but huge in soul, obscure but self-respecting girl. *Jane Eyre*, a marvelous figure, has left the reader so much to recall and to think. *Jane* pursues justice, self-respect and the clear situation on equality. In her opinion, everyone is the same at the God's feet. Though there are differences in status, in property and also in appearance, but all the human being are equal in personality.

Actually, she wasn't pretty, and of course, the ordinary appearance didn't make others feel good of her, even her own aunt felt disgusted with it. And some others even thought that she was easy to look down on and to tease, so when Miss Ingram met *Jane Eyre*, she seemed quite contemptuous, for that she was obviously much prettier than the plain and ugly governess. But as the little governess had said: "Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong!"^[4] This is the idea of equality in *Jane Eyre's* mind. God hadn't given her beauty and wealth, but instead, God gave her a kind mind and a thinking brain. Her idea of equality and self-respect impress us so much and let the reader feel the power inside her body.

Jane Eyre is such to attract the reader, not because of her beauty, but because she is unique and charismatic. Therefore, Jane Eyre is a good example of women's liberation.

3.2 Characteristic of Helen Burns

Helen Burns is Jane's spiritual and intellectual friend at Lowood. Helen maintains her poise, partially through her loving friendship with Miss Temple. From Helen, Jane learns tolerance and peace, but Jane can't accept Helen's rejection of the material world. Helen is impressive intellectual attainments inspire Jane to work hard at school. Dying in Jane's arms, Helen looks forward to peace in heaven and eventual reunion with Jane. Bronte wanted to commemorate Helen Maria and shaped the image. Just as she puts it, in this character who is not the slightest exaggeration to her sister. Helen is very clever. She seems to have the entire contents of text recorded in her mind. Her thirst for knowledge and longing for fresh ideas make her read a lot of books and use her own eyes to judge things. Her French is quite good. A 14-year-old girl have so broad, so vibrant mind. In the author's eyes, a truly unique qualities and extraordinary ability of people do not only have a wealth of knowledge but also have unique ideas in Helen. Helen is impressive intellectual attainments inspire Jane to work hard at school. Dying in Jane's arms, Helen looks forward to peace in heaven and eventual reunion with Jane. Bronte wanted to commemorate Helen Maria and shaped the image. Just as she puts it, in this character who is not the slightest exaggeration to her sister. Helen is very clever. She seems to have the entire contents of text recorded in her mind. Helen is kind, but to some extent, she is also weak. She is used to tolerating in her life and do not dare to resist. In the process of the women's liberation, Helen is a representative of most of women. In other words, she is the beginning and object of women's emancipation. Women should guard their rights bravely rather than tolerate silently.

3.3 Characteristic of Bertha Mason

Bertha Mason is the insane wife of Rochester. In precise contrast to the angelic Helen, Bertha is as big as Rochester, corpulent, florid, and violent. After ten years of imprisonment, Bertha has become a caged beast. Bertha can be seen as Jane's darkest double, as her ferocious secret self, who appears whenever an experience of anger or fear arises on Jane's part that must again be repressed. Acting for and like Jane, she enacts the violence. Jane would like to but can't express, especially in respect to marriage. She also articulates Jane's fears and desires about her own mortality. Bertha was a wealthy family of girls, beautiful elegant, lively and cheerful, and if people say that Jane is a pearl, shining a warm color, then Bertha Mason can be described as a dazzling gem with a dazzling sheen. Bertha Mason was born in the West Indies plantation owner wealthy families. On the contrary, their families, with £30,000 price of her sell to the distinguished lineage of Rochester. As they have no emotional foundation and exchange rather unhappy married life. Temperament

becomes more and more irritable, and Rochester is also deeply disappointed by their indifference to his wife. From then on she can only be holed up in an isolated coffins, the suppression of years is bound to the formation of irritable character. Although Bertha Mason has a congenital mental illness, easily agitated, or irritable, but that cannot be disguised in Rochester, abandoned his wife's excuses and justification. Bertha Mason in the four years of marriage to get along entirely without realizing that marriage brought her joy. She brings a combination of Rochester, but her depressed all day long without repudiation.

Bertha Mason's retaliatory behavior before and after the four appearances told the mania that she did not completely fall into the madness, at least she was well aware that her behavior could result in a kind of damage and consequence. As her revengeful behavior fights against male-dominated culture, she is considered as a madwoman. It also expresses the cruel oppression under male society. As a matter of fact, Bertha is also a defender of women's liberation. What is more, her resistance are more directly and bolder than Jane.

4. Women's Liberation Showed in the Novel

The novel of the 19th century was the female era, which emerged a number of brilliant women writers whose works gave voice to the feelings and aspirations of the educated women of their age. Charlotte Bronte is one of the greatest women writers and Jane Eyre is undoubtedly an outstanding women's declaration of independence and love. It is Jane Eyre's female consciousness that awakens women and voices women's aspiration for liberation. Jane Eyre's female consciousness is far beyond Victorian times. In the 19th century, women did not have any status. They were discriminated against and conceived of as people inferior to men. At that time, almost only occupation open to women of good families was teaching as school mistress or more likely serving as governess in a private family. The Victorian moral code for women was that they should remain ignorant and uneducated. So, novels about young girls who went out alone into the world, suffered various trials, miseries and temptation, and emerged chaste and triumphant had been popular in England for over a century. Charlotte Bronte and her Jane Eyre challenged the old commandment and traditional discrimination to women. However, the praise of Jane Eyre by far outweighs criticism. Most people regarded this book as one of the greatest novels of that time. It was Jane's rebelliousness, her dislike of servility, her insistence on equality with her master and her claim that she had a right to feelings and passions that gave the book its uniqueness and force, shocked many of its early readers and earned popularity among most women. The book also encouraged women to be independent and to fight for their own rights.

It is Jane Eyre's female consciousness that awakens women and voices women's aspiration for liberation. Jane Eyre's female consciousness is far beyond Victorian times. In the 19th century, women did not have any status. They were discriminated against and conceived of

as people inferior to men. Charlotte Bronte and her *Jane Eyre* challenged the old commandment and traditional discrimination to women. Jane Eyre's female consciousness, which runs through the whole story, can be viewed in two aspects. One is the exposure and denunciation of man's oppression. The other is the portrayal of Jane Eyre's outstanding character. Jane Eyre's stories take place in different stages of her life can be seen as connected to men's oppression to her. In the work, Jane Eyre struggles to maintain the dignity of the civilian population. Jane Eyre stirs the oppressors of women to men, protests and calls for gender equality.

First, it is her resistance in childhood. Jane Eyre's childhood is spent in lonely tragic circumstances. The orphan Jane Eyre often abused for no reason by the aunt and cousin. Marx and Engels pointed out that the "person's character is caused by the environment." In the fourth chapter, "Jane Eyre bluntly accused Mrs. Reed of other people think you are a good woman, but you bad, you are relentless heart." Mrs. Reed actually felt fear. Later she was sent to Lowood schools, suffering from hunger, but also punished. Station beaten and other penalties, but these harsh external conditions had no change in Jane Eyre's personality. Jane said: "If everyone were the same for the brutal and gas, blindly compliance, it may be bad, from all of the abuses patiently." She had said to Helen: "When we missed beaten for no reason, we should be bitter fight back, I am sure we should return to hit --- fiercely fought back." This is Jane Eyre severely hit back with a spirit of resistance. She told Helen "Some people no matter how I discuss they like it, they still hate me, then I cannot help but hate them, some people unfair treatment to me, then I cannot resist, this is a very natural thing, If some people love me, and I love him, or felt that the penalty in time."^[5] All the description of those directly or indirectly, have demonstrated the fate of Jane Eyre and the environment are not similar compromise, Jane Eyre arrives at the first high --- bitter fight back the oppressor, defend their human rights: by moral, spiritual, intellectual pursuit to realize her values.

Second, it is arduous exploration of the moral pursuit of love --- the female independence. Jane refused the marriage with John which reflected her unconventional spirit. Thus, Jane Eyre and Rochester's love is far from the general's sons and daughters transcended the stereotypes of love, the noble struggle to the realm of serious, such as the lightning in the sky gives a thunderous tremor of the soul.

Third, Jane insists on being financially independent. Any attempt to achieve the liberation must rely on its economic base to survive. There is no such foundation, and the liberation of woman can only be an empty. So Charlotte Bronte went through difficult life well versed in the philosophy of them. In this work, she flashes forward to the hero of Jane Eyre a clear sense of economic independence.

Fourth, Jane challenges male-centered society --- the teacher's career of Jane Eyre. Although the author had mentioned little about this, she did give a clear pursuit of career for Jane Eyre, making it the western literature of feminist pioneer.

The work through the image of Helen and Bertha for the success of Jane Eyre has provided an opportunity to

shape and act as a foil. At a different angle, it renders the theme of female emancipation. Author focuses on shaping Jane Eyre is in a sharp contrast to believe in bear philosophy of the Helen's image. One has hard-edged, highly personality; one was submissive, disillusioned with the society. Through the comparison of these two figures, not only those who live that kind of negative criticism made in good faith, but also further underscored the spiritual world of Jane Eyre. Helen Burns faced the oppression with thinking toleration as an obligation. Jane Eyre has shown a relentless resistance posture, and constantly subject to abuse and oppression. This is exactly the kind of traditional women at that time to put up an angel of the character in stark contrast.

Jane Eyre cannot bear scolding and flogging like a docile lamb. She said to Helen: "If people are blind to the cruelty and gas, blindly obedient, that bad is going on by the sexual abuses of children, they will never have any scruples, and they will never change, but will get worse."^[6] Clever Helen Burns also became a victim of the school.

Bertha is concerned with the world's literature, where the image of women is a tragic figure in the crowd. Her presence is of great significance for Jane Eyre. It goes without saying that in the course of Jane's character position, in terms of contrast, set the rhetorical point or from the context of the technique point, Bertha's contribution cannot be ignored. Bertha has not only served as a good and beautiful Jane's an excellent foil, but also a dangerous move for her heroine has created a valuable opportunity to show charisma. Bertha is angry for the first time, though it makes Jane feel afraid, she still overcomes the ambivalence into the master's room, helped him escape death, so that for the first time Rochester is well aware that Jane is his lucky star. Soon, Bertha has manufactured a homicide and then to highlight the heroine, perseverance, courage, dare, calm. Until Bertha's appearance before the crowd, in order to create a mutation in the fate of Jane, the Jane asked the spirit of equality. Jane's inner conflict manifests in the debate between passion and reason. Jane has determined that she would not use to be independent for any non-corporeal belongings. She tolerated the tremendous inner pain, resolutely left Thornfield. Bertha's second arson ruined Thornfield Manor. Rochester was no longer rich and became disabled, while in Jane's eyes, she still loved him.

In short, through the personality of the full text, the writer discerns to put Jane into violent unruly behavior by Bertha created by the context, let her have more opportunities to shine from different aspects of personality glory.

Bertha has always been haunted by a mysterious, frightening atmosphere, which caused a strong suspense, and effectively adds the work more attractive. Bertha image is stirring in the works of the intense spices. At this point, Bertha is an obstacle to love of others, but also the only way to eliminate all obstacles to the messenger. Bertha's move is to promote the Jane Eyre to carry out the plot. Although she is crazy, she is not willing to tolerate in silence. Bertha also resists in her crazy way.

5. Conclusions

Charlotte Bronte did use a distinct awareness of women to mold Jane Eyre as an independent woman. People see a new image of women: self-esteem, self-respect, self-reliance, self-improvement, courageous and firm. Jane Eyre has become an ideal, a pursuit, if a woman wants a real self-realization she must adhere to the ideals and aspirations. Jane's declaration to Mr. Rochester of her equality with him is really a declaration of the women of middle class and all classes. After reading the whole book, one can hardly help from wondering about the plain novelty of its unconventional heroine with her strong sense of dignity and equality, her wide embracing sympathy and high intelligence. For all her obscurity and inferiority, she stands out as one of the most remarkable fictional heroines of the time. It is Jane's rebelliousness, her dislike of servility, her insistence on equality with her master that give the book its force.

By the women's own analysis of the understanding of the inherent dignity of women, the value of its significance lies in the construction of new women's dignity and personality. Women's assessments of their values are achieved by no means a measure of the success of the social role of women, but make a truly free choice in the spiritual world of women and create their own meaningful life. Because women's pre-trip guide is not the benchmark set by men, but rather the removal of the rigid mask, the vigorous growth of the female ego. If only the significance of women's emancipation is to subvert the male-centered culture of restraint, then the women's self-positioning would lead to a closed circle.

Contemporary western feminist movement holds highly the "new feminism" flag, trying to complete subversion and deconstruction of the order of men and

women, but toward an extreme state. As a matter of fact, women seek their own fundamental liberation that requires the removal of long-term permeate minds. Please listen to women's the truest inner voice.

References

- [1] High, Peter B. *An Outline of American Literature*. London: Longman, 1986.
- [2] Elizabeth Arden. *The English Literature*. New York: Prentice Hall, 1991, p.120~123.
- [3] John Christopher. *The Story of Jane Eyre*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1962, p.21.
- [4] Charlotte Bronte. *Jane Eyre*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 1990, p.56.
- [5] Charlotte Bronte. *Jane Eyre*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 1990, p.87~89.
- [6] Charlotte Bronte. *Jane Eyre*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 1990, p.101.
- [7] Bronte, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 1990.
- [8] Javad Mohammad Janpour Literary Texts and Critical Thinking [J]. *Advances in English Linguistics*, 2012(2), 30-36
- [9] Praveen agarwal. On New Unified Integrals involving Appell Series [J]. *Advances in Mechanical Engineering and its Applications*, 2012(2), 115-120
- [10] Behrouz Fathi-Vajargah, Ateyeh Jahanbin Approximation theory of matrices based on its low ranking and stochastic computation [J] *Advances in Computer Science and its Applications*. 2012 (2), 270-280