

Varied Aspects of Relationships in the Novels of Charlotte Bronte

¹Sayar Ahmad Mirand²Aasif Rashid Wani

¹Research Scholar School of Languages, Dept. of English DAVV Indore M.P (India)

Email: sayarmir033@gmail.com

Sanchi University of Buddhist-Indic Studies Barla, Raisen M.P (India)

Email: wani.asif119@gmail.com

Abstract

Relationship is an emotional connection that exists between two or more people. The word 'relationship' is common and has been used to mean many different things both within and outside of the psychological disciplines. We should begin to use more specific words. What we mean by relationships by asking first: What kinds of relationships lead to the perm development of the people in them? Charlotte had her firm background of her life which became the pivotal force to writings especially in presenting the issues of relationships.

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Family is considered to be the basic cell of society, having a great impact on its welfare. Naturally therefore, family is

influenced by different events that a nation goes through to such an extent that even the relationships within it change. So, the domestic ideal varies from one historical period to another. As members of the society, writers describe it more or less realistically. It happens very often that literary works reveal the peculiarities of the period in which they were written, as is indeed the case of Charlotte Brontë's novel Jane Eyre. Special emphasis is placed in this paper on the link between the protagonist, Jane Eyre, and her aunt, as a representation of the way orphans could be treated by their stepparents at the time and of the impact of the education that the latter performed on the children's life and on society in general. For the purpose of better understanding how Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre mirrors certain aspects of life in the Victorian society, the issue of the literary genre that it belongs to needs to be taken into consideration. As

Timothy Roberts suggests, “Jane Eyre, along with Austen’s Pride and Prejudice, is one of the most famous romance novels of all time”¹ and also Debra Teachman declares that: “Jane Eyre takes the form of both a fictional autobiography and a bildungsroman. As an autobiography, it presents the story of Jane’s life from her own adult perspective and in her own words. As a bildungsroman, it is the story of the education of an individual, both through formal education and by growing into maturity”²

The protagonist ‘learns about herself and the world she lives in’ even from her childhood, when she lives in her aunt’s house. This period marks the beginning of the desire to be independent and not to be at someone else’s mercy while, at the same time, it offers Brontë the perfect opening for her story of personal becoming. Interweaving features pertaining to literary genres associated with the realistic mode of writing, Jane Eyre remains structurally coherent and persuasively verisimilar, serving as a documentary source that sheds light on the society of the period and on its values, thus carrying a moralizing value. If one were to consider Bloom’s affirmation

according to which “the narrative is related in the first person by Jane Eyre herself, who is very much an overt surrogate for Charlotte Brontë.”³ as well as Cecil’s remarks on the writer’s protagonists, who “are all the same person; and that is Charlotte Brontë”⁴ then one has the right to say that Mrs. Reed is the prototype of Aunt Branwell, “a strict and forbidding woman” who was invited by Patrick Brontë “to help care for his orphaned family” and who “lived with the Brontë’s until her death”⁵ Of course, on the road from life to fiction, several modifications regarding childhood have been operated: for instance, Jane Eyre had lost both parents, not only one; Elizabeth Branwell lived with the Brontë’s and not vice-versa; Charlotte was not mistreated by anyone in comparison with Jane, who was abused by her cousin. But what should be pointed out is that Charlotte Brontë’s work represents the Victorian ‘transnormative’ family and the way adopted children were treated within such families. Elizabeth Thiel pertinently explains the term: “transnormative family’ identifies those family units headed by single parents, step-parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents, siblings or the statenthat exists

in opposition to the ‘natural’ and ‘complete’ family of husband, wife and children. These are not merely extended family units. They may incorporate kin, but the transnormative family is identified primarily by the temporary or permanent absence of a natural parent or parents, often by the presence of a surrogate mother or father, who may or may not be related to the child, and, frequently, by the relocation of the child to an environment outside the ‘natural’ family home.’⁶

From the times immemorial, men and women have been living together as Wollstonecraft states: “During primitive world, both man and woman were gatherers. Woman somehow shared equal footing with men during those days. The society changed with the time, and men began to suppress their companions as men got involved in more outdoor gears. The sons and brothers turned to be oppressor and repressor of sisters and their own mothers. Thus, the woman’s world was narrowed to the four walls. Their freedom and their world is owned by what is referred by Mary Wollstonecraft as a ‘supreme being’⁷ The society became patriarchal, and women are, though born equal, made unequal and inferior by the

society they lived in. Women are brought up in lowly state. They lived in a society where the state laws are pronounced by man. Woman is, then not considered as the other half of the humanity. The ownership of resources is meant for man. Woman lived by vocation. They were restricted from profession, and if woman happens to practice profession they were given lowly paid professions. Girls received less education than boys, were barred from university and could obtain lowly paid jobs.” The only option for women in the Victorian society is marriage, but marriage is not freedom for them. Their marriage only allowed women to change the ownership of the properties inherited by them in the names of their husbands. They are trapped in the traps set by men. Women are, but slave of the slaves and are made one. Charlotte Bronte’s Jane Eyre is a typical novel attacking the man-woman conventionalism of the contemporary society. Jane Eyre, the protagonist in the novel is in constant search for independence, freedom and woman’s autonomy. A woman has been treated weak and meek. This societal concept of woman provides platform for woman to have lowly education under strict supervision of man.

At Lowood School, girls are devoid of mere pleasures and passions of life. Hypocritical headmaster of the school, Mr. Brocklehurst keeps girls under constant torture poor meal, frequent punishment and poor living condition. Mr. Brocklehurst believed that shaving head will not give growth to curly hair. Julia has curly hair and her curly hair is natural. However, Mr. Brocklehurst wants Julia's head to be shaved in order to have straightened hair. The women have already been bitterly and totally re-pressed sexually, The sexual repression of woman by man starts from the early phase of woman's life. Hypocritical Mr. Brocklehurst holds that:

“You [Miss Temple] are aware that my plans in bringing up these girls is not to accustom them to the habit of luxury and indulgence, but to render them hardy, patient, self-denying Oh, Madam, when you put breads and cheese instead of burnt porridge into these children's mouth, you may feed their vile bodily but you little think how you starve their immortal souls.”⁸

Jane does not want to be the ‘automaton object’ or ‘pet’ that operates

under the will and commands of the owner. She desires to be an individual treated equally by other human beings. However, as the time passes Jane found herself inclined to Mr. Rochester, not in terms of his physical appearances and wealth but his intellectual openness. Jane holds:

“The ease of his manner freed me from painful re-straint; the friendly frankness, as correct as cordial, with which he treated me, drew me to him. I felt at times as if he were my relation rather than my master: yet he was imperious sometimes still; but I did not mind that; I saw it was his way I become with this new interest added to life, that I ceased to pine after kindred the blanks of existence were filled up, my bodily health improved; I gathered flesh and strength.”⁹

The four novels differ with respect to the number and attributes of fictional characters associated with actual people. The information therefore is reported separately for each novel. The Professor was completed in 1846 but not published until two years after the author's death in 1855.

Jane Eyre was completed and published in 1847. Shirley was completed and published in 1849. Villette was completed and published in 1853. For each novel, separate lists show the two sources of association between an actual person and a fictional character. The pairs of names identify the actual person followed by the associated fictional character. Each list begins with the actual person who was most important to Charlotte Bronte. The progressively diminishing importance ends with the least important person. Family members are generally regarded as more important than people who are not relatives. People early in the author's life are generally regarded as more important than people she met in adulthood. Friends are generally regarded as more important than colleagues and antagonists. In The Professor, all three pairs of an actual person and fictional character are males, In Jane Eyre, most of the pairs are females, Three fictional characters were given the first or middle name of a very important actual person. The actual Emily Jane Bronte was the sister with whom Charlotte Bronte had the closest and most prolonged affiliation. The middle name, Jane, was the first name of an aunt and other

members of the mother's family. The actual or fictional school was an important adverse experience for both the sister Emily Jane and the fictional Jane. The actual Elizabeth Bronte was an older sister of Charlotte Bronte. She died while a child but all four sisters and the brother were very important to the author. The same first name was shared by Miss Elizabeth Branwell, maternal aunt and foster mother for Charlotte after the death of her mother. This older actual Elizabeth may have been a reason why the fictional Elizabeth Rochester was an ancestor of Edward Rochester.

Charlotte Bronte was a highly emotional person. She had strong attachments to her sisters. She became the main caretaker of her father. She had close friendships with several women. She fell passionately in love with Constantin Heger in Brussels. She subsequently formed strong attachments with her publisher and other men. She eventually married Arthur Bell Nicholls in spite of an aversion to becoming the wife of a clergyman. An important basis for Charlotte Bronte's strong attachments to other people was a craving for dependency. Barry, Barry and Lindemann (1965) described intense dependency of psychiatric

patients who were less than seven years old when their mother died. Charlotte was five years old when her mother died. The effect of the mother's death on her five daughters and one son is described by Gerin: "Throughout life, strangers who met them—even at home— remarked on the clinging nature of their love for each other: 'clinging' in the real physical sense of holding tight together when confronted by an intruder."¹⁰

The principal fictional characters in Charlotte Bronte's novels reproduced the author's loss of her mother at an early age. In The Professor the narrator and hero is William Crimsworth. His mother died soon after his birth, and his father had died before his birth. In Jane Eyre, the title character and heroine is an orphan, raised by the hostile sister of her mother. In Shirley, the two principal characters are Caroline Helstone and Shirley Keeldar. Caroline was raised by her father's brother. Her father had died and her mother had disappeared. Shirley Keeldar at the age of 21 years is a rich heiress following the death of her father. Shirley Keeldar's principal childhood affiliation appears to have been with her governess, Mrs. Agnes Pryor, who is subsequently

revealed to have been the wife of Caroline Helstone's father when their daughter Caroline Helstone was born. In Villette, the narrator and heroine, Lucy Snowe, is an orphan.

Fictional characters were associated with the first names of the author and each of her sisters.

Her mother shared the first name of her oldest sister. No fictional character was associated with the first name of the author's father, Patrick, nor with the middle name Bramwell of her brother,

Patrick Bramwell Bronte. The author developed strong although not fully recognized adverse feelings toward her father and brother. In the last three novels, the principal and most admirable characters were females. Her closest and most enduring friends were women. Her passionate dependency on men was not reciprocated. She generally felt disappointed by the men in her family as a child, outside her family as an adult, and in her novels.

Conclusion:

So it is Bronte who has fictionalized the deep issues regarding relationships for which she is somewhere linked to her own

life. It is obvious that she has beautifully presented such issues in which she has fully succeeded. Bronte is a kind of novelist who herself has passed through these issues, hence it has positively influenced her readers.

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