Jane Eyre
by
Charlotte Bronte

Janes journey through life.

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Abstract

The aim of this essay is to examine Jane's personal progress through the novel *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte. It addresses the issue of personal development in relation to social position in England during the nineteenth – century. The essay follows Jane's personal journey and quest for independence, equality, self worth and love from a Marxist perspective. In the essay close-reading is also applied as a complementary theory.

Keywords: Jane Eyre, Charlotte Bronte, personal progress, nineteenth-century.
"(…) Two roads diverged in a wood, and I – I took the one less travelled by, and that had made all the difference."

(Robert Frost, www.poets.org)

Life is like a walk on a road that sometimes turns and takes you places that you never imagined, this is what Charlotte Brontes novel *Jane Eyre* is about, a journey through life. The essay argues that Jane Eyre progresses throughout the novel, from the perspective of personal development and personal integrity in response to the pressures and expectations of the nineteenth-century social class system. It also argues that Jane’s progress is a circular journey in the sense that she begins her journey in the same social class as she ends up. The essay will examine Jane’s personal journey in the context of five major episodes in the novel. In the five episodes the names of the places are metaphors for stages in Jane’s personal journey. The five major episodes are Reed (Gateshead), Lowood, Thornfield, Marshs End and Ferndean. The personal journey is also a natural journey in the sense that each natural stage can be associated with a particular social position. The essay follows Jane’s personal journey and quest for independence, equality, self worth and love from a Marxist perspective. In the essay close-reading is also applied as a complementary theory.

The essay addresses the issue of personal development in relation to social position in England during the nineteenth-century, chronological and geographical setting of Bronte’s novel. During this century social position was of great importance, and the conventions of society were to be strictly followed. According to the social conventions of this time, men and women were evaluated; there were certain standards to abide by in order to be seen as a person of a certain class (Cannadine, 20).

The England that is portrayed in *Jane Eyre* reveals the social conventions of the society. There was a clear hierarchical structure within society and class distinctions were present in everyday life (Pool, 46). The upper-class being on top of the hierarchical order in society, also called the aristocracy. The middle-class was between the upper and lower-class. This social class also included the professional and business workers. The lower-class or the working-class was at the bottom of the hierarchy (The Oxford English Dictionary). The distinction, title and rank were of great importance during this period of time (Williams, 175, 1989).
When Jane arrives as Gateshead she forced to abide by the set standards of the household, her place within the household is the place of a ward, which means that she is depending on the good will of Mrs. Reed. When her uncle Mr. Reed, her mother’s brother past away, Mrs. Reed gave a promise to him that she would maintain Jane as one of her own children (Bronte, 11). That meant that Jane was to be looked upon as an equal to the rest of the family Reed, which entailed Mrs. Reed and her three children, Eliza, Georgiana and John. Even though this was the case, the real image of the family situation was quite different from the one acquired by the late Mr. Reed.

“You have no business to take our books; you are dependant, mama says; you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg, and not live here with gentleman’s children like us and eat the same meals as we do, and wear clothes at our mama’s expense.” (Bronte, 6). The passage shows how Jane was looked upon by the members of the Reed family, even though she was supposed to be their equal. The emphasis is on the words our, dependant, no money, none (nothing) and beg, all associated with being a part of the lower class within the hierarchical order in society. According to Rich this reveals the power relations in society, both from a economical and female perspective, as well as the relations in the household of Gateshead (471, 2001). She is made into a dependant even though she was supposed to be an equal. These power relations stem from the order of class which is the result of economics and differences in employment status (self-employed or employed by others) (Bihagen, 3). Jane is forced into the role of a stranger in the house where she lives; she is an individual that is put outside the family frame being forced to create her own frame of security. “The self is all one has (…)” (Eagleton, 24) implies that Jane after this social isolation relies only on herself and finds her strength from within.

This exclusion from the people of the household of Gateshead is also illustrated in a conversation between Jane and a servant at the house. This conversation takes place after a dispute between Jane and John Reed. The servant says: “What shocking conduct, Miss Eyre, to strike a young gentleman, your benefactresses’ son! Your young master!” Jane the replies: “Master! How is he my master? Am I a servant?” The servant says: “No; you are less than a servant, for you do nothing for your keep […]” (Bronte, 7). Through this conversation Jane becomes subordinate to both the family and the servants. She is her sole companion, the only one fighting for her right to be someone. Jane is now isolated from the social frame of the household and once more she realizes that her own self is all she has (Eagleton, 24).
Inequality and subordination was generally accepted in the British society during this period of time, the people accepted the position in society that they were born into (Cannadine, 1998). Even though this was not outspoken in the society the class system was to be respected and followed otherwise the society would perceive you as rebellious. Jane was not one to accept her role in the household of Gateshead, signalled by the conversation between her and the servant. She claimed her rights as a human being not as a young girl being entitled to advantages in society because of where she lived. Through the submissive treatment and the exclusion from the household of Gateshead and the privileges that was intended for her. Jane is slowly perceived as a rebellion against the Reeds because of the fact that she speaks her mind and shows an awareness concerning her self-worth (Bosshe, 47).

Jane expresses at one point that she did not wish to be in the company of Mrs. Reed and a room full of ladies because in the company of them she was rarely noticed (Bronte, 22). Jane is practicing the right to choose and by deciding not to be a part of the social company signals an awareness of her own worth, it is also signaling independence and personal growth. It is also rebelling against Mrs. Reed and the social conventions; by choosing not to be apart of the social charade and by not doing what is expected of a young girl in her position, Jane takes a stand against the social conventions (Rich, 472, 2001).

An important point when discussing the situation at Gateshead is the significant difference between social position and the position from a class perspective. The social position is the position one has within a social group of people, the social hierarchy that rules for example a household. While the position from a class perspective is about society, the class structure and what class you belong to (Glen, 2002). Even though Jane is an orphan she is supposed to be seen as an equal to the Reeds which means that she belongs to the same social class as they do. But this is not something that matters within the four walls of Gateshead, because there Jane is looked upon as a dependant who contributes less than the employees of the household. The social position is therefore not the same as the position from a class perspective.

Throughout this first episode of the novel Jane gets socially isolated from the both worlds of Gateshead; the Reed family and the employees of the household. A consequence of this exclusion is that Jane needs to rely on her own self, there is no one to support and defend her rights so she needs to do that all on her own. She is like the reed that bends in the wind but
stands strong and tall without breaking. The wind being the Reed family who through their submissive treatment tries to break her, but Jane raises above all that and shows them that she needs nothing but her own self to progress. Jane stands alone and outside during this episode in the novel, according to Eagleton she is “[…] stripped from the outset of significant ties of kin […]” (24, 2005). She is supposed to feel kinship with the Reeds but the relational ties to them are denied by the members of the family which leaves Jane with no one to lean on. One might say that she on one hand is dependant on Mrs. Reed and her good will because of the fact that she is an orphan but on the other hand she is only depending on her own will to progress. That will to progress and the right to her own opinion practiced by Jane even though one might think that she would not dare or want to express this. She expresses her desire for change when she is being asked if she would like to go to school, “an entire separation from Gateshead, an entrance into a new life.” (Bronte, 19).

This new life Jane is speaking of begins when she enters the school, Lowood, where all pupils are charity children who are depending on the good will of the rich people in society. This was one way of controlling the lower class and keeping these poor children in their place, Gateshead and Lowood are similar to each other from the perspective of submissive and repressive treatment (Rich, 2001, 472). Discipline and order was therefore of great importance at this institution for girls, hierarchical structure is very present in the daily life where the teachers are on top (Bronte, 37). The reader finds Jane at the bottom of this hierarchical structure and this is the first time in the novel where Jane realizes and accepts the fact that she is a dependant and a child dependent on charity just like the other girls at Lowood (Bronte, 41). Eagleton mentions the fact that Jane is “stripped from the near relations that she has (24, 2005) and at Lowood she is also stripped from the material benefits that she was used to at Gateshead. According to Fraiman the girls at Lowood learns that they are required to be thankful for the hunger, injustice and abuse because they are taken care of (102, 1993).

At Lowood, Jane meets Helen Burns, at first Jane only watches her and in some way admires her from a far. She watches when Helen is repressed, ill treated by the teachers at Lowood and when doing so Jane reflects concerning Helens ways of handling the ill treatment (Bronte, 45). Helen accepts the conditions at Lowood, keeps quiet and takes the punishments that are assigned to her. When Jane reflects concerning Helens ways of handling the repressive treatment she questions why Helen does not defend or stand up for herself. This signals that Jane is aware of her own worth, because she would never accept that someone would accuse
and punish her for something unjustly. Helen is a person in Jane’s life who reminds her of who she really is, not who she is in the eyes of Lowood. Fraiman writes that “Helen’s brief life serves arguably to steer Jane away from the shoals of submission […]” (1993, 103).

Jane learns how to survive and to some extent she adjusts to the living conditions at Lowood, her will to progress, her interest in learning and developing makes it easier for her than a lot of the other girls to survive the hardships at the institution. She progresses from being at the bottom of the hierarchy to becoming a teacher at the school; Jane now has a position as an educated woman (Bronte, 72). As the institutions name hints this is the lowest point in the novel, Lowood is a dark and strong place that draws her in and closes the door behind her. From one perspective this is where Jane reaches rock-bottom but from another perspective this is where Jane truly can develop from. She can let her roots spread, letting herself grow by using the education and opportunities offered as fertilization. Jane arrives at Lowood as an orphan that in some ways is badly mannered and after her eight years at this place her nurse at the Reeds describes her as “quite the lady” (Bronte, 79).

My world had for some years been at Lowood: my experience had been its rules and systems; now I remembered that the real world was wide, and that a varied field of hopes and fears, of sensations and excitements, awaited those who had courage to go forth into its expanse, to seek real knowledge of life amidst its perils (Bronte, 73).

The passage above signals that Jane Eyre is ready to go forth and that she desires to explore what life has in store for her. The emphasis is on “courage to go forth” because she takes matters into her own hands and the passage “seek real knowledge” signals that it is an active search led by Jane herself. She is no longer a passenger on the journey through life; she therefore sends an advertisement expressing that she wishes to serve as a governess to the Herald (Bronte, 74). At the end of this second episode of the novel Jane expresses that she awaits “a new life” (Bronte, 80), on the one hand this shows the reader that she has nothing that ties her to the old life and on the other hand it still feels as if she waits for her life to truly begin because she is progressing towards it (161, 2002, Glen).

Leaving Lowood for the new life at Thornfield is similar to the passage; “a new chapter in a novel is something like a new scene in a play […]” (Bronte, 80), the air is filled with expectations, nerve and the new adventures may begin. Jane waits for the carriage from
Thornfield to arrive, well inside the cabin she is alone with her thoughts about the people she will meet at Thornfield.

“[…]. I will do my best; it is a pity that doing one’s best does not always answer. At Lowood, indeed, I took the resolution, kept it, and succeeded in pleasing […] I pray God Mrs. Fairfax may not turn out a second Mrs. Reed; but if she does, I am not bound to stay with her! Let the worst come to the worst, I can advertise again” Bronte, 81)

The passage signals that Jane is determined to do her duties and what is assigned to her position as a governess, she also expresses that she wants to please her new employers. But at the same time she points out that she will not give up who she is, “I am not bound to stay with her” signals that she has increased her independence and integrity. To some extent it shows through the passage that Jane has matured, she has realized that there is nothing wrong with pleasing others and that pleasing others does not correlate with submission as long as you are true to your self. Eagleton writes that Bronte creates this self-reliant girl and through circumstance Jane is lead into new roles and relations (26, 2005).

Her quest for independence and equality is nourished when she meets Mrs. Fairfax, who is the housekeeper at Thornfield. “The equality between her and me was real; […] my position was all the freer.” (Bronte, 87). The feeling in the passage Jane expresses is that she has reached a point in her life where she is seen as someone, an equal. Even though there are people in the house who are above her from a class perspective she is not at the bottom of the hierarchy within the household of Thornfield. This gives her the feeling of freedom and with this newly found freedom there is opportunities, just as Glen writes Jane is seeking “freedom, independence and movement” (161, 2002). And by physically moving from Lowood to Thornfield she has changed her social position and gained both a little freedom and some independence in contrast to her life at Lowood.

Despite the fact that Jane now feels that she has found equality and freedom at Thornfield one cannot disregard the fact that she is still a dependant. Mr. Rochester is the master of the household and her employer which makes him her master as well. At Thornfield Mr. Rochester is the patriarch and thereby at the top of the social hierarchy (Glen, 159, 2002). Their relationship is that of the master-employed character, when speaking alone for the first time it is shown that they are not equals. “Miss Eyre, draw your chair still a little farther
forward: you are yet too far back; I cannot see you without disturbing my position in the comfortable chair, which I have no mind to do” (114, Bronte). It is evident that the position of Mr. Rochester is permanent and that the people around him, as Jane, needs to adapt and adjust their ways accordingly. Jane follows his orders and does what is expected of her, but through her comments and ways it is shown that she has integrity. Mr. Rochester tells her that “It would please me now to draw you out – to learn more of you – therefore speak. Instead of speaking, I smiled; and not a very complacent or submissive smile either.” (Bronte, 116). Again one can see that she aims to please Mr. Rochester, but not by force only by choice, Janes choice. The smile is as polite way of showing that she does not wish to speak, but at the same time it is important to Jane that it is not about submission, it is about her will. This is of course a way of rebelling against the superiority (47, Bossche). Jane shows Mr. Rochester that she is paid to take orders, which means that her taking orders have nothing to do with who she is, it is merely her job.

Even though Jane is a dependant the stay at Thornfield increased Jane’s integrity, self-worth and confidence in herself. “I was a lady. And now I looked much better than I did when Bessie saw me; I had more colour and more flesh, more life and more vivacity, because I had brighter hopes and keener enjoyments” (Bronte, 137). These self-reflecting thoughts show a personal progression and that Jane feels that she is someone, not only a dependant or an orphan girl, she is a lady. It also shows that she wants something for herself, she believes in the future and what it has in store for her. She is becoming a woman that “strikes out courageously and independently and forges her own career […] (Glen, 157, 2002). Jane expresses that she is a lady, lady as in someone separated from being a servant, she does not look upon herself as someone serving at the house. This shows that she has ambition and that she wants to move upwards in the class structure, it is of importance to Jane that she now can refer to herself as a lady. This also implies according to Eagleton that she has class-judgement concerning the people below herself, as in the servants working at Thornfield (27, 2005).

The belief in herself and the increasing feeling of equality towards Mr. Rochester on the spiritual level, Jane begins having feelings for the master of Thornfield. Even though she knows that he is out of her reach from a class perspective, Jane feels that they are the same kind (Eagleton, 29, 2005). “I do not mean that I have his force to influence, and his spell to attract; I mean only that I have certain tastes and feelings in common with him. I must, then, repeat continually that we are for ever sundered: - and yet, while I breathe and think, I must
love him” (Bronte, 153). This passage shows that Jane looks upon the relationship from a spiritual perspective; she looks upon two people as people with feelings not class. With influence and class well put aside Jane comes to the conclusion that she loves Mr. Rochester. But Mr. Rochester belonging to the upper-class he has his mind set on a woman with a family-name and connections, which is not the case with Jane.

This being the social conventions ruling society they were only supposed to be followed not questioned or challenged. Jane is being in the back-ground and almost made into a spectator of Mr. Rochester’s social life, an opinionated spectator. The woman being the object of Mr. Rochesters courting is disliked by Jane “She was not good; she was not original: she used to repeat sounding phrases from books: she never offered, nor had, an opinion of her own.” (Bronte, 162). This shows that Jane has a superior attitude towards this woman from an intellectual perspective, speaking of how she repeats phrases from books and never showing her own opinion (Fraiman, 108, 1993). Jane speaks of the woman having her own identity in mind, Jane is independent, speaks her mind and forms her own thoughts. By meeting the opposite of Jane her personal progression raises to the surface and her personality becomes clearer. But from a class perspective and according to social conventions the woman Mr. Rochester is courting has a superior position compared to Jane (Glen, 159, 2002).

Jane desires independence and has individual hopes which separate her from the 19th century woman in general, “The utmost I hope is, to save money enough out of my earnings to set up a school some day in a little house rented by myself” (Bronte, 173). The passage signals ambition, hopes and a plan to actually get what she wishes for, with emphasis on rented by myself signaling her continuous desire for independence. It also signals that she does not settle for what life serves, by wanting to move forward she is in a way rebelling against the life as governess and what is expected of her (Bossche, 47, 2005). But the newly found feelings for Mr. Rochester holds her back and clouds the mind so set on independence, “[…] wherever you are is my home – my only home. “ (Bronte, 216). The self that Jane has preserved and her personal progress is paused because of the expressed passage, there is stagnation in the progress that she before expressed a desire for. On one hand Jane is indeed in search of an independent life but on another hand she has her whole life being in search of a home which she found at Thornfield (Fraiman, 160, 2002). This displays the different sides of Jane, the strong independent woman and the fragile dependent girl who is Jane Eyre.
Because of the fact that Thornfield is the first place Jane calls home she grieves the fact that she needs to leave when Mr. Rochester awaits his new bride. She speaks of Thornfield as a place that has treated her with respect, she has had the chance to develop a sense of who she is. When discussing the arrival of the new bride and the departure of Jane the truth rises to the surface, Mr. Rochester has no bride arriving at Thornfield (Rich, 478, 2001). “I have as much soul as you, - and full as much heart! [....], and we stood at God’s feet, equal, - as we are.” (Bronte, 223). Again Jane is an independent woman who speaks her mind and stands up for herself and the desire for equality, the self that she so long has been fighting for. The passage also expresses the opinion Jane has concerning people, that if stripped from materialistic possessions there is nothing separating one person from another. According to Williams the conventions in society divides people in different categories and are terms for social relationships (Williams, 175, 1989). This is what Jane rebels against when she is departing from Thornfield, “I am no bird, and no net ensnares me. I am a free human being with an independent will, which I now exert to leave you” (Bronte, 223). The net being social convention, what is expected of her to accept because of her social position and to some extent Mr. Rochester. Him being the one that represents the patriarch and the upper class trying to control the lower class. The emphasis is also on free human being, free signals Jane’s desire for liberty not only in the physical sense but in the sense that she is entitle to her own mind and thoughts. The expression human being shows that gender and position is not of importance, the emphasis is on the fact that you are a person.

Mr. Rochester describes Jane as his equal and likeness, he asks Jane to marry him “[...] I must have you for my own – entirely my own. Will you be mine? Say yes quickly.” (Bronte, 224). The passage signals that Mr. Rochester wishes to possess Jane instead of loving her as his equal, with emphasis on have, my own, entirely. Despite the fact that Jane continuously tells him that she wants to be his equal and rebels against the conventions forced upon her, he still tries to be the net that ensnares her (Rich, 479, 2001). Even though Jane questions Mr. Rochester’s motif she answers “Then, sir, I will marry you” (Bronte, 225). Jane chooses to trust the man that she has fallen in love with, this is the first time that she lets go of herself and listens to her feelings not her sense and mind – they are spiritual equals (Eagleton, 29, 2005). But being the object of someone’s feelings and being the object that someone tries to possess is two different things, “[...] if I had ever so small independecy; I never can bear being dressed like a doll by Mr. Rochester [...]” (Bronte, 236). So instead of falling deeper into the role of the future Mrs. Rochester she awakens and continues on the path towards
independence. The passage above shows that Jane refuses to become the object that Mr. Rochester possesses and again it is a form of rebellion (Rich, 479, 2001).

The time had come for Jane Eyre to become Mrs. Rochester, at the church Jane is informed that “Mr. Rochester has a wife now living” (Bronte, 255). Saved from this holy matrimony by a lawyer employed by an unknown uncle of hers, showing her the real image of what Mr. Rochester so long has been trying to hide. According to Fraiman this gives Jane the opportunity to break lose from the net that is trying to ensnare her and makes her act on her strong desire for independence (110, 1993). “I asked, what am I to do? But the answer my mind gave – Leave Thornfield at once […]” (Bronte, 262). She is taking back her own self by leaving Thornfield and Mr. Rochester. Jane is again rebelling against Mr. Rochester’s arrogance, showing him that she is aware of her worth and that she has integrity. (Rich, 479, 2001). After discussing with herself she expresses “I must leave Adèle and Thornfield. I must part with you for my whole life; I must begin a new existence among strange faces and strange scenes” (Bronte, 268).

Jane is leaving being pricked by thorns, being pricked by love, pricked by the actions of Mr. Rochester. The circumstance forces her to acts of self-preservation, pushing her down and out and once again she is alone, poor and without future (Rich, 480, 2001). But it is this instinct for self-preservation that helps Jane to survive and progress even through hard times (Gilbert, 488, 2001). Walking away from Thornfield pricked by the thorns of life, Jane is walking away with independence, dignity and self-worth. “I care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself” (Bronte, 280).

Again a new episode takes off; Jane gives up her class position to the benefit of her self-worth and self-respect. In Jane’s previous life she distanced herself from the poor, the servants, looking upon herself as almost a lady (Fraiman, 112, 1993). On her flight from Thornfield, she leaves with only a small part of her belongings and no money to speak off, she is stripped from all the materialistics and she is at a degraded social-position, the one of a beggar. “Mother! She exclaimed, there is a woman wants me to give her these porridge. Well, lass, replied a voice within, give her if she is a beggar. T’ pig doesn’t want it.” (Bronte, 291) Jane is now someone that receives the food that the pig rejects, which is a long way from the fine parlors of Thornfield. Despite the change of social position Jane is in harmony with herself
because of the fact that she stayed true to her own hopes and believes. Once again, Jane’s will and courage is proven to be the key to her survival (Rich, 480, 2001).

Jane continues on her journey away from Thornfield even though she is famished and near starvation, the goal of her journey is not yet known. But on her way through the marsh there is a trace of white, which leads her to the light in the total darkness of her existence. The feeling of salvation is present, the light being a house where Jane again is forced to beg for food and shelter. She is pushed off away at a distance with a piece of bread, then Jane gives up, “I can but die. […] All men must die, said a voice quiet close at hand; but all are not condemned to meet a lingering and premature doom, such as yours would be if you perished here of want.” (Bronte, 296) Out of the light, a character appears saving Jane from the darkness and the lingering feeling of death that surrounds her (Rich, 480, 2001). Once more the feeling of salvation is present in this passage, lifting Jane from the ground and at the same time lifting her spirits. “Somehow, now that I had once crossed the threshold of this house, […] I felt no longer outcast, vagrant, and disowned by the wide world. I dared to put off the mendicant – to resume my natural manner and character. I began once more to know myself […]” (Bronte, 298) The passage shows that Jane had been socially excluded with emphasis on *outcast, vagrant, disowned*. But through the social inclusion at Marsh End (Bossche, 47) she took back what was taken from her – her character. Jane continues on her journey but not the physical one but the one inside of her, *I began once more to know myself.*

Feeling welcome at Marsh End Jane is afraid of discovery so when being asked her name she assumes an alias, Jane Elliot. Not speaking of who she is or where she comes from forces her new companion to assume things about her and her past life only by looking at her. The personal appearance being an important variable when placing people in the correct social class, and this was of great importance during the 19th century (Williams, 1989). The Rivers siblings who residences at Marsh End, consisting of two sisters, Diana and Mary, and one brother St.John, are curious about who Jane is and this forces Jane to reflect about her personal progress from Gateshead to Marsh End. As Glen writes “she strikes out courageously and independently and forges her own career […]” (157, 2002), the word independently and the desire for independence is not something Jane abandons even if she to some extent is depending on the Rivers siblings. St.John Rivers asks: “you desire to be independent of us?” Jane answers: “I do: I have already said so.” (Bronte, 308). This signals
that Jane is still in search for independence and that she needs movement in her life (Glen, 160, 2002).

She stands up for herself and her ambitions, despite the conventions of society telling women not to have such thoughts but to seek marriage. Instead of marriage Jane is determined to become independent and live life as she chooses to. Mr. Rivers offers Jane a position of being a mistress of a school for girls in Morton, where he has his parsonage. “[…] It was independent; […]” (Bronte, 314). For the first time, Jane is to some extent her own master, and the master of others as the schoolmistress. Being independent is also a matter of power and that is something that Jane is not afraid of. When leaving Thornfield she felt that she was degraded from almost-lady to a beggar (Fraiman, 112, 1993) and now when being offered a position as schoolmistress one might think that she rises a great deal from the social position of a beggar. “I had taken a step which sank instead of raising me in the scale of social existence” (Bronte, 317). Showing that Jane is well aware of who she is, what social rank she has and it also shows that she has aspirations to climb the social ladder. Eagleton writes that this also shows that Jane is ambiguous, on one hand she stands up for the not privileged since being one of them, but on the other she looks down on them feeling that she belongs to the one of the upper classes (28, 2005).

Jane knew that working as a schoolmistress would make her neither rich nor a lady but despite that she worked hard, feeling happy about the independence her work brought her. It is said that money makes the world go around and true that is, Jane inherits money from a colonial uncle and receives the news that the Rivers siblings are her cousins. “This was wealth indeed! – wealth to the heart! […] – it was a legacy of life, hope, enjoyment.” (Bronte, 341). Jane speaks of the inheritance both from a materialistic perspective as in the actual wealth but also from the perspective of what it will mean to her. With emphasis on the passage wealth to the heart, showing that the importance is not the coins – having a fortune. The importance lays what life offers, according to Eagleton the sizeable legacy is enough for Jane’s independence (29, 2005).

The independence that Jane so desired and longed for was still not fully in her reach, because at the house Mr. Rivers still looked upon himself as her master which of course held her back. “He acquired a certain influence over me that took away my liberty of mind: […] I could no longer talk or laugh freely […]” (Bronte, 352). This passage shows that Mr. Rivers through
his submissive treatment tries to control Jane. Her *liberty of mind, ability to talk or laugh freely* is taken from her. Once more independence is right before her eyes but still so far away and the feeling of being controlled by another. Through the novel this has repeated itself, the relatives of Jane have been the ones abusing and confining her (Armstrong, 386, 1998). Even though Mr. Rivers opposes Jane seeking other employment she went on doing so, “I wanted employment; my present life was too purposeless, I required an aim;” (Bronte, 354). The passage signals that Jane thinks about what she wants, she does not take into account what others might think. It also signals ambition and her will to progress.

Another step towards controlling Jane fully is to ask her for her hand in marriage, “A missionary’s wife you must – shall be. You shall be mine: I claim you (...)” (Bronte, 356). It is clear that Mr. Rivers looks upon Jane as an object, something that he can use as he pleases. As Rich writes Mr. Rivers wants Jane to accompany him to India, serving both him and God. He wants her to take on his career, cause, duty and make it her own, Jane’s ambition and identity is to be put aside (480, 2001). “If I join St.John, I abandon half myself: if I go to India, I go to premature death.” (Bronte, 358). With the emphasis on *abandon* it is clear that Jane, if she marries St.John Rivers, must be untrue to herself. The life Mr. Rivers offers Jane is a life that she sees as equal to dying. Because of the fact that the life Jane intended for herself would never become a reality, she would never become someone’s equal instead she would always be answering to a man and not to herself.

Instead of marrying a man who only looks upon Jane as a useful tool, she again sets out into the world, only this time she is moving both backwards and forward at the same time. She wishes to return to Thornfield, this time she arrives at the hall as an independent woman with her own fortune not depending on others. “I looked with timorous joy towards a stately house: I saw a blackened ruin.” (Bronte, 376). Thornfield did no longer exist; the stately house had through the flames of fire been turned into a ruin. The marriage between Mr. Rochester and his wife had also been turned into a ruin. Jane discovers that Bertha had died in the fire and that Mr. Rochester was forever maimed by the flames, he had gone blind. “He is now helpless, indeed – blind and cripple.” (Bronte, 380). The tables have turned, Mr. Rochester is now the dependent one, totally depending on the help of others while Jane is independent and strong.
Jane leaves behind both Thornfield and her experiences at Marsh End where she was bogged down. Marsh End being situated in the middle of a marsh, moor it surrounded her and pulled her in. Through the hospitality and welcoming arms of the Rivers siblings this was a place where Jane chose to stay, but beneath the surface St. John Rivers wanted to control Jane. By forcing her down he instead drove her away, gasping for air Jane breaks loose from Marsh End. Leaving Marsh End is not a forced decision it is an active choice made by Jane herself, once again Jane is by being independent and making independent decisions, rebelling against the society she lives in. The society that would expect her to say yes when being proposed to by Mr. Rivers, that would expect her to settle for what she is given. (Gilbert, 489, 2001). But Jane “required an aim” (Bronte, 354) and the aim was now to reunite with the man she loved dearly as an independent woman.

At the manor house of Ferndean Jane meets the man that she feel in love with, fled from and since that day had dreamt of. “I told you I am independent, sir, as well as rich: I am my own mistress.” (Bronte, 385). The passage signals a form of revenge not against Mr. Rochester but against the society and its conventions. Despite the fact that her whole life she has been looked upon as a dependant, she can now stand up telling the world that I am my own mistress. Jane did not rise to this position only by own force, even if independence was her aim in life the inheritance helped making her hopes reality (Bossche, 56, 2005). The water stood in my eyes to hear this avowal of his dependence: (…)” (Bronte, 389). The fact that Mr. Rochester had gone blind made it easier for the two meeting again, by Jane becoming independent and Mr. Rochester becoming dependent. At Ferndean they meet for the first time as equals and there is nothing that stands in their way (Gilbert, 490, 2001).

“I will at least choose – her I love best. Jane, will you marry me? Yes, sir. […] To be your wife is, for me, to be as happy as I can be on earth” (Bronte, 394). The passage signals that the question is put to Jane, not a demand or something taken for granted, it is up to her to answer as she pleases. The first time Mr. Rochester asked Jane to marry him it was a question of her being his and he demanded a rushed answer (Bronte, 224). She answers: Yes, sir, which implies that there is a social distinction between them even though they stand as equals before one another. Despite the social distinction they can be married as they are spiritual equals (Eagleton, 32, 2005).
“I have no been married ten years. [...] Because I am my husband’s life as fully as he is mine. No woman was ever nearer to her mate than I am: ever more absolutely bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh.” (Bronte, 399). In this marriage and at this outside manor they can focus on what is important, not taking the social conventions and restrictions into account (Gilbert, 490, 2001). They can develop in the company of each other being both true to each other and to themselves. Jane’s personal journey and progression has led her to a place of independence, throughout the novel Jane has expressed a desire and hopes to reach this place. One might call it a pilgrimage, moving towards a specific place but in Jane’s case the place is within her. At Ferndean, Jane is an heiress who knows her own worth and just like the fern she might look fragile but is very strong.

Jane’s circular journey through life starts out at the Reed’s where she is supposed to be looked upon as an equal but is denied this by the Reed family. She is made into a dependent and just like the reed she bends in the wind but never breaks. She is then sent to Lowood, where she is seen as an orphan with no rights. She is to be disciplined and she is to accept her place in life which is among the lower classes of society. As the name Lowood implies, this is the lowest and darkest point in Jane’s personal progression. But at the same time it implies that this is a place where she can grow despite the hardships at the institution this is where Jane finds out what she wants to become. After her eight years at the institution she is hired as a governess at Thornfield Hall, this is the first time that Jane is treated with respect and feels like an equal to the housekeeper of Thornfield. Jane has the growing feeling of independence even if there is a master at the house she is now free to seek elsewhere if this turns out wrong. When meeting her master she feels that they are spiritual equals because of the same tastes, even if there are social conventions separating them. Jane falls in love and is to be married to her master, but when finding out that the master already has a wife she runs away from Thornfield. Jane is now pricked by the love, finding out that it was all a lie she feels injured. Nature and society continues to prick her with thorns on her flight from Thornfield, she is now looked upon as a beggar instead of almost a lady. Almost like salvation Marsh End appears in the middle of the moor, meeting the River’s siblings she is saved from what could have been the end. They take her in and Jane’s desire for independence increases, when being asked to become schoolmistress she accepts the offer. She then inherits a fortune and at the same time discovers that the River’s siblings are her cousins. At this point Jane has become a strong woman, she knows her own self-worth, she has ambition and desire true independence. The inheritance makes it possible for Jane to experience this true independence, she is no longer
only independent in her mind but also in the eyes of society. As the name Marsh End she is bogged down, pulled into the moor – going down, but when Mr. Rivers pulls her further down claiming her as his, she goes down and out. Leaving Marsh End by choice as an independent heiress, who is no longer looked upon as a beggar but a lady. She returns to Thornfield only to find a blackened ruin, this first terrifies her because she believes that the man she loves is dead. He is alive but crippled by the fire because he had gone blind and his wife was dead, this turns out as a relief, they can now meet as free equals. At Ferndean they can live as equals, they can both stay true to themselves and to each other. Jane is just like the fern implies a fragile, petite woman on the outside but a strong woman on the inside. She has now returned to the social position she was meant to have in the beginning of the novel, as Grey writes in his introduction “Eyre, n.1. a journey in a circuit” (2004), Jane’s personal progress is displayed in as a circular journey.
Literature

Primary literature

Secondary literature

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