

The English Novel: Interdisciplinary Approaches
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Lecture - 22
Jane Eyre: Scholarly Approaches

Hello, student. I'm here once again, Professor Smita Jha, to discuss *Jane Eyre* with scholarly debates. As we have already discussed the themes, the form, structure. *Jane Eyre* as a classical novel is the high time to know about scholarly debates because this is one of the best novels written by Charlotte Brontë during Victorian time. So let us see that what are the debates that make this novel very, very meaningful.

Charlotte Brontë began her literary career in 1846 when she and her sisters published a book of their poems. From its first printing in 1847, *Jane Eyre* was highly controversial, attracting the attention of readers and critics whose opinions on the novel were divided. During the Victorian era, the ideal woman's life revolved around the domestic sphere of her family and the home. Middle class women were brought up to be pure and innocent, tender and sexually undemanding, submissive and obedient, to fit the glorified 'angel in the house', the Madonna image of the time. A woman had no rights of her own and she was expected to marry and become the servant of her husband. Few professions other than that of a governess were open to educated women of the time who needed a means to support themselves. Higher education was considered wasted on women because they were considered mentally inferior to men and moreover, work was believed to make them ill.

Jane goes against the expected type by refusing subversions, disagreeing with a superior, standing up for her rights and venturing creative thoughts. She is not only successful in terms of wealth and position but more importantly in terms of family and love. These two needs that have evaded Jane for so long are finally hers. Adding to her victory is her ability to enjoy both without losing her hard-won independence. Everybody has the rights to pursue happiness, to pursue the true spirit of life. which can be seen from Jane Eyre's struggle for Independence and equality. The novel can be seen as a journey of Jane finding her true self. She fights convention by resisting the male dominance on her quest for identity and independence. She remains true to herself by putting herself first and caring for her own well-being, even though she is longing for love and kinship.

There are many parallels between the author, Charlotte Brontë, and her protagonist, Jane Eyre, of which some are used for the psychoanalytical analysis in the essay. Using some

of Freud's theories for the psychoanalytical criticism with the aim to examine the conscious and unconscious may highlight the psychological condition of the protagonist. Though several essays written on *Jane Eyre* but criticism have been employed by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their book entitled *The Madwoman in the Attic*, 1979. It compares and argues the findings as well as psychoanalysis used by Lucile Dooley on Charlotte Brontë. Originally, the novel was published in three parts and it is a logical way to divide it accordingly. The theories applied for the analysis are a combination of feminist and psychoanalytical criticism. The psychoanalytical criticism applied is from a Freudian perspective which can seem to stand in opposition to feminist criticism. Freud's theories have, by some feminists, been condemned as a source of the patriarchal attitude that must be fought. Freud's theory of women being castrated has been interpreted by Gilbert and Gubar as social castration signifying lack of social power.

The feminist literary criticism sprung from the women's movement of the 60s and has evolved into different versions. There are some ideas that are common among the different versions such as that the oppression of women is a fact of life. From the start, the movement looked at how women were portrayed in literature. Jane is in great unconformity with the social environment at that time. She dares to fight against the conventional marriage ideas which well reflects all feminists' voice and wish for a true love. Maybe Jane's choices are considered something shocking, but it really gives a blow to the Victorian society. Charlotte Brontë depicts Jane Eyre's image through three steps. The first step is her feminism thought. It starts to sprout from her fighting to her poor child life. The second step is her feminist thought, shapes from the miserable experiences in boarding school where she comes to understand that the survival of the fittest. The impressive part is the third stage of her pursuit for true love, independence and equality where the feminism thought grows to mature. The growth of Jane Eyre mirrors the growing up of Charlotte Brontë. Jane Eyre's story tells us that in a man-dominated society, a woman should strive for a decency and dignity in face of hardship in life, the courageous woman should be brave enough to battle against it. Self-esteem is the primary element to protect and the feminism taught how to defend ourselves. Whenever we are helpless in the bad condition, we should try to survive the life.

Psychoanalytical literary criticism is based on theories developed by Sigmund Freud on how the mind, the instincts and the sexuality work. Important concepts of Freud's theories are the two-part psyche, the ego and the id, or the conscious and the unconscious. Later he suggested his theory to include the ego, the superego and the id or the conscious, the

unconscious and the conscience. So, the three part *Jane Eyre* has received somewhat of a cult status in women's studies. There is a substantial amount of essays and analysis written on both the novel and the author.

"A Dialogue of Self and Soul: Plain Jane's Progress" is written by Gilbert and Gubar, which is published in their book *Madwoman in the Attic*. They argue that Jane, like every woman in a patriarchal society, must meet and overcome oppression, starvation, madness and coldness. That is all there in the novel. Gilbert and Gubar see the confrontation with Rochester's madwife, Bertha, as central and argue that it symbolizes Jane's confrontation with her own imprisoned hunger, rebellion and rage, rather than with her own sexuality. On contrary, other critics have argued that Bertha symbolizes Jane and Rochester's repressed sexuality.

Some critics also suggest that Bertha symbolizes the Victorian woman locked into her house. It's true that a Victorian woman such as Jane was trapped in a society that did not accept angry, rebellious women who wished to escape the confines of the drawing room to a more self-fulfillment life with more action. While there is nothing explicit in Brontë's text on the point, some critics have suggested that race might be another theme related to gender and class as it too is a social construct. These critics have interpreted Bertha Mason as being of mixed race. For example, Bertha's parents are said to have desired her marriage to Rochester because he was of a good race, meaning that he was white. There are also references to her black hair and dark complexion and Jane typically sees her at night and in shadow. Her portrayal as a figure of uncontrolled passion could reflect this reading. Many British felt superior towards people of colour around the world. This reading adds association to Bertha's character but may not reflect that strongly on the theme of class. Bertha is presumably kept on the third floor because she is mad. Not because she is of mixed race. When Mr. Mason, her brother, appears, no mention is made of him having any mixed race characteristics and other characters interact with him in perfectly normal ways, suggesting no race-based prejudices.

Jane as a child is lonely, without a sense of belonging and longing for kinship. While living at Gateshead Hall, she is constantly reminded that she is not part of the Reed family. She is excluded from the activities of Mrs. Reed and her children, even though Mrs. Reed had promised her husband, Jane's uncle, on his deathbed to bring Jane up as one of her own children. According to Mrs. Reed, Jane was to be excluded until, "she was endeavouring in good earnest to acquire a more sociable and childlike disposition, a more attractive and sprightly manner - something lighter, franker, more natural." Jane

does not fit the ideal picture of a small girl at the time. She has a strong sense of justice and she questions too much traits not suitable in a little Victorian girl who was supposed to be a pretty ornament. Jane is not a petty little girl and well aware of it she is as her name suggests "invisible as air, the heir to nothing, secretly choking with ire". Even though Jane is like air invisible on the outside. She is like fire on the inside, which will be the fuel for her quest for identity and independence.

According to Freud's Oedipus Complex, the son wants to take over the father's place in the family. And because John's father is dead, he considered himself the head of the family. Dooley argues that Charlotte Brontë's brother Bramwell was given special attention, and he was the pride and hope of the Brontë's family. The author's envy of her brother Bramwell's male dominance could be projected in the resistance Jane displays against John Reed. Until Jane is knocked down by a book thrown at her by John Reed, she has tried to hide and endure his abuse, but The anger and fear causes her to finally stand up to him, verbally calling him a murderer, a slave driver, and comparing him to the Roman emperors. However, because ideology is always being produced in time, we should see the novel as producing, not merely reproducing ideology. If Jane's rebellion ends when she learns to tell her story with less of gall and wormwood, then the remainder of her story from the time of her arrival at Lowood until its conclusion would indeed represent submission to established cultural institution. Yet, she continues to rebel against being labelled a liar by Brocklehurst against the tedium of her career as governess, against being made a mistress by Rochester, against being sacrificed to St. John Rivers's ambition.

As Lisa Sternlieb points out the fact that Jane feels compelled to write this narrative ten years after marrying Rochester, suggests that the events narrated therein do not bring her to a state of conscience in which she has nothing more to say. That there is still some gall left over at its conclusion. The question is not whether the novel supports or subverts class ideology, but rather how it deploys the languages of class in order to confront a series of social situations, each of which threatens to delimit Jane Eyre's social agency. Jane Eyre repeatedly shifts positions within class discourse. Not in order to move towards a final class identity, but in response to economic dependence, social exclusion, personal isolation and other circumstances. It is not that she abandons the one achievement, the economic autonomy of the school teacher in order to obtain the other, that is, the social relationship of marriage. Instead, she shifts to one or another position depending on the needs of the particular social situation. In order to do so, she employs two distinct strands

of class discourse. First, she draws on the triadic model of class in which the aristocracy and middle class each represent themselves as better able than the other to govern and protect the interest of the working class. However, rather than identifying exclusively with one or the other of these potential ruling classes, Jane strategically alternate between them. Moreover, she critiques both by setting them against one another. Second, she draws on a dichotomous model in which the lower class demands the right of social inclusion from the upper classes that exclude them from access to power. The now familiar argument that literary texts such as *Jane Eyre* both support and subvert ideology follow from a conception of ideology as a self-contained, synchronic, discursive field that exists outside of and prior to particular speech, acts or written text.

Since the rise of New Historicism and post-structuralism, criticism has rightly insisted that literature has an ideological function and does not belong to an autonomous realm of cultures, separate from the social. However, saying that texts have an ideological function is not the same as saying that they contain a pre-existing ideology. The conception of ideology as normative discursive field arises from the long-standing tradition of understanding the relationship between the social and cultural in terms of the model of base and superstructure, which, as Raymond Williams has pointed out, tends to get translated into a temporal relation of cause and effect. A two-stage model in which there is first material social life and then at some temporal or spatial distance consciousness and its products including the novel. As Williams further argues, this economist's notion has the unintended effect of treating the cultural as autonomous from the social because it makes the cultural not only secondary but also a false or illusory masking of social reality. Such a conception tends to confine agency to the realm of production, the social or economic, and to foreclose agency in the realm of culture, which it regards merely as the reproduction of the economic sphere. If, however, we understand ideology not merely in terms of synchronic discursive fields but also as a diachronic process or actively we can then distinguish between the normative discursive field often referred to as ideology and the ideological processes that deploy them. Ideology is a historical process of positioning signifiers in system of meaning that relate the social and cultural to one another. As Frederic Jameson puts it, "ideology is not something that informs or invests symbolic production; rather the aesthetic act is itself ideological and the production of aesthetic or narrative form is to be seen as an ideological act in its own right." Literary production as an ideological act is a dialogic process that inevitably sets a multiplicity of discursivities, conception of the social, against one another, meaning that identity must always be under construction.

Now, this view of ideology applies to 'readerly interpellation' as well as to the text itself. Even in so far as texts draw upon normative ideology discourse, their ambition to interpolate a particular subject must always be frustrated. As Foucault argues by the fact that discourse has no single cause and therefore no single set of effect. While some of its effect will serve a useful function, that is, they will succeed in interpellating a particular subject, there will always be a surplus of effects that do not achieve their aim, aporias that open up possibilities for a variety of response from the reader. As Paul Smith has pointed out, there is always a difference between the subject interpellated by the text, its implied reader, and the human agent who engages with it. "What always stands between the text's potential and preferred effect of its actualized effect is the reader who has a history of his/her own in this context." We might usefully adopt some of the methodologies developed in studies of reading practices such as James Secord's *Victorian Sensation*. Michel de Chartus, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, and J.K. Rankier, *Night of Labor*, all of which, though in quite different ways, demonstrate how readers appropriate text and activate their meanings in relation to their particular historical circumstances. Interpellation has been described through a range of overlapping metaphors that envision the cultural managing the social through concealment, naturalization, mystification, masking and so on, a conception that is particularly germane to discussions of *Jane Eyre*. These metaphors suggest that ideological discourse installs itself in a place of the social, rendering the latter invisible to the interpellated subject, thus foreclosing the possibility of agency or resistance because the subject cannot recognize the authentic domain of the social and is unable to change it. What tends to get lost in this model of ideology is the strain involved in making the discourse seem to be natural, the fact that in order to be, as Bakhtin puts it, "internally persuasive", discourse must incorporate, in order to supplant, opposing internally persuasive discourse. Just as the literary critic observed, the discursive operations through which the novel makes its narrative appear natural, so too could the Victorian reader actively engage in the production of the novel's meaning.

The subject interpellated by discourse has been understood as a class subject. The assumption being that ideology serves the interest of a dominant class which benefits from a particular relation to a production and therefore desire to reproduce that relation. Like ideology, class is understood to arise from and to be determined by the economic, which thus defines and delimits forms of identity. Other markers of identity and as gender or ethnicity become merely cultural. The ideological effects of class identity, which alone arises within the social. Ideologies of gender, for example, have been treated as serving primarily as a means of reproducing a particular mode of production. The

separation of spheres authorizing the transfer of production from the home where women participate in it to the factory. Where it becomes a male domain, in short, gender ideology mask class reality.

These studies of class demonstrate that instead of reducing all other forms of social identity to class, in effect essentializing class, we should see class as one in a repertoire of discursive formation available for the production of social or political identity. Given the ambiguity and plasticity of class Patrick Joyce argues, "it may be misleading to employ the term identity in the singular for instance in the case of class gender or people as unified categories of description." Rather, he concludes one ought to delineate the differences between categories while seeing that such categories are not unitary. Rather than understanding the history of the 19th century as being driven by class interest, we can see class, especially the narrative of the rise of the middle class as one of the chief discursive formation through which the 19th century conducted political debate and sought to understand, manage and come to terms with a diverse series of social conditions.

Carla Kaplan, Janet Freeman, and Edgar Shannon's work, as far as seen from the title, are obviously concerned with the narrative of this novel. Shannon's view on the change of the narrative tense offers a direct analysis concerning the narrative characteristics and how it works to help Jane Eyre express herself. He argues that because their stories have lost their freshness when it is told after so many years of occurrence, the present tense is occasionally used. However, Charlotte Brontë reduces the handicap inherent in her method by pertinent shift from the past to the present tense. Carla Kaplan introduces a new term -- the "erotics of talk". In the definition of this term, she suggests that the competing topos is the search not for a voice, but for a listener capable of hearing that voice and responding appropriately to it. Within many individual texts, this topos, text, the form of a repeated and a structuring metaphor, a performative trope. She argues that traditionally, Jane Eyre's power of using her speech to gain control in the fictional patriarchal society is a successful demonstration of the politics of voice. How Jane Eyre uses her voice to overpower the voices of the male figures. However, from the description of her marriage life in the last chapter, one would trace Jane's actual desire of finding a companion to carry out a conversation, an erotics of talk, which means an ideal listener.

Janet Freeman's argument touched more upon the issue of *Jane Eyre's* reader by analysing the importance of Jane Eyre's speech and silence in different situations in this

novel. The reader that Freeman refers to is not an invisible figure. Instead, she refers the reader to us, the actual volume holders, and analyses that Jane intends to convey to us. "What else are we to make of the thirty times Jane Eyre for all her concentrate vision-- turns away from her story and addresses us directly?" Brontë 's sensitivity to the reception of this female narration thus allows her fictitious self to have a silent reader that she is able to address who would never negative comment towards this story.

Well, here I wind up, wrap up the discussion in terms of the scholarly debates, though there is everlasting debates on *Jane Eyre*. As I said, this is one of the best classical novels written by Charlotte Brontë in Victorian times. But then due to the time constraint, we have to limit ourselves. Thank you very much.