

The English Novel: Interdisciplinary Approaches

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Lecture - 23

***Jane Eyre*: Textual Analysis**

Hello student, today we are here to discuss *Jane Eyre*. with the subtitle Textual Analysis. We have already discussed in detail about *Jane Eyre*. But it is very important to know the textual analysis. And as I repeatedly said that this is one of the classical novels, written by Charlotte Brontë during Victorian era. The novel *Jane Eyre* reflects some of the tensions around social change during the Victorian era, such as gradual shifts in the structure of the social classes, gender roles, and the impact of the Industrial Revolution, contrasted with the comparatively conservative religious, social and sexual norms of the period. The conflicts in the novel around education, marriage and women's employment reflect both poles of these tensions. Though a work of fiction, it draws on the social realities of the Victorian era.

Charlotte Brontë drew from her experiences with her sisters at Cowan Bridge, a school for daughters of clergymen, in her depiction of conditions at Lowood School in the novel. Some of the larger social dynamics of the Victorian era, such as the impact of the Industrial Revolution, class hierarchy, and gender roles are reflected in the novel. Yet, there also are fictional elements and even passages of fantasy. The novel *Jane Eyre* can be analyzed from multiple points of view and with the help of different approaches.

This talk aims to examine six major types of analysis to evaluate which of them is most appropriate and applicable to the reading of the novel. They are:

1. Formalism
2. Deconstruction
3. Feminism
4. Marxist
5. Psychoanalytical
6. Cultural

The formalist approach implies an analysis of the text that targets components of the text without covering other aspects that could potentially influence its creation. That is, personal, cultural, political and historical view of the novel. If the formalist theory is applied to *Jane Eyre*, the main point of such analysis would be the form of the novel, first-person narrative, its structure, length of the volumes and chapters, and imagery literary devices. From a formalist point of view, the first-person narrative is dynamic and authentic as it ensures that the reader feels as if he or she were experiencing the events described in the book together with the author. The authenticity of the narration is reflected through the author's descriptions that directly target and focus on her feelings and emotions. "No, I know I should think well of myself, but that is not enough; if others don't love me, I would rather die than living..." Quotation from the text *Jane Eyre*. Another interesting feature of the novel from a formalistic point of view is the narrator's communication with the reader. It remains unclear, however, whether it is the character or the author who communicates with the reader since the subtitle of the book is 'An Autobiography'. Despite the fact that the structure of the novel, the bigger number of chapters in the first volume compared to the other two, and the imagery used to reflect the characters, mood, emotions, and for other symbolic purposes, are important for a comprehensive analysis, the formalist approach still does not address the complexity of the multi-layered narration in *Jane Eyre*.

Deconstruction is a theory developed by Jacques Derrida. It is characterized by its critical analysis of binary or hierarchical oppositions. There are multiple hierarchical oppositions seen in the text. That is man/woman, passion/reason, St. John and Rochester, master and servant, John Reed and Jane, Jane's dependence/independence. However, it could be said that Brontë takes the deconstruction approach to this opposition by making the main protagonist a rebel, who demonstrates through her actions that she does not aim to remain in the established paradigm. As Edholm points out, "pride and passion are what causes Jane to transgress the binary oppositions; She leaves the expected role of a dependent woman", thus destroying or at least undermining the discussed oppositions. The problem of the deconstruction is that it also focuses on features inherent to the text, by making an attempt to deconstruct them, leaving out other potential points of view.

The feminist analysis is frequently utilized in research and literature and address problems presented in *Jane Eyre*. Brontë demonstrates the pursuit of the character and, assumingly, her own, toward equality and independence in Jane's rebellion against Mrs. Reed and John. Her pursuit for esteem is reflected through her decision to leave

Rochester when she finds out about Bertha Mason, as well as her latter choice to be with and support Rochester when his wealth and health are lost. Jane's unwillingness to comply with expectations and act without accordance with her desires and her wish to find a true love reflects her need for equal and mutually respectful marriage or relationship which can also be seen as a feminist view. On a grander level, the book itself is an example of a feminist act, as female authors were unpopular and overlooked in the Victorian era, which led to the development of the stereotype that literature written for and by women is inferior to that written by men.

The political ideas expressed in the novel can be seen through Marxist point of view. According to it, the socio-economic class factor is the one that should be analysed in a literary work. Brontë's critique of the class system in England is evident as she emphasizes it using the relationship between Rochester and Jane. Jane's inferiority to Rochester is translated through her own vision of herself as a poor and plain woman, who will not be able to become equal to Rochester due to his different, 'higher' socio-economic status. From a Marxist point of view, religion also acts as a negative agent in the book since it influences the perception of the lower classes. For example, Helen's unwillingness and inability to object to an unjust teacher's attitude in Lowood is an example of Christian endurance and obedience, which in turn prevents lower classes from realizing why and how they are mistreated. Thus, religion is depicted as the factor that only further deepens the inequality between different classes. It should be noted that the upper class is also presented in the book as one that needs transformation. This transformation is shown through Rochester, who at first serves as an example of promiscuity, but later becomes a faithful husband who acknowledges his wife's wisdom and intelligence. Jane as a representative of the lower class, is the one who is able to overcome the inequality and misunderstanding between the classes by refusing to follow the prescribed rule.

The psychoanalytical approach relies on the theories developed by Sigmund Freud, who examined the father-daughter relationships within the frames of the Oedipus complex. It can be suggested that the relationship between Rochester and Jane reflects the twisted or even sadomasochistic relationships between fathers and daughters in the patriarchal society. The prohibited erotic love for the parent, the father, common for the Oedipus complex, is represented through Jane's anxieties before the wedding. For example, in Jane's dream about the child, Rochester finds this child disgraceful, possibly because the offspring is an outcome of the relationship similar to incest between him and Jane. The

dark double, Bertha, can also be seen as a symbol of the Oedipal connection between Rochester and Jane. After all, it is Bertha who is tearing Jane's veil apart. Thus, she becomes a character who represents Jane's fears linked to the connection she has to Rochester. If Bertha is Jane's double, her decision to put Rochester's bed on fire could also be interpreted as Jane's dark desire to destroy the relationship. However, while feminist and Marxist theories are politically biased, the psychoanalytical theory heavily relies on the interpretation of the imagery and symbols hidden or evident in the text. In this case, themes and motives become the foreground of the analysis. But little attention is paid to the actual structure of the novel. Its style and the form of narration.

The cultural analysis of *Jane Eyre* would reflect the Victorian values and their representation in the novel. Although being an orphan, Jane's transformation from a poor woman to an exemplary English lady is an overarching theme in the novel. Bertha, Rochester's wife is a good representation of the colonialist culture, namely the fear of the 'other'. It can be suggested that Bertha is the orientalist 'other'. Compared to Jane, she is huge and corporal. Despite her master's (Rochester) attempts to tame her, she refuses to become a servant and also does not accept the life in the prison (attic) as she decides to burn the house down. Jane's perception of Bertha's appearance as vampiric only increases the alienation of the figure making her a background or a comparison to frank, wise and pure Jane. Ironically, Bertha is perceived by Jane as an obstacle to her happiness. But little attention is paid to Bertha as a character who has suffered from Rochester's actions. As Venugopal points out, Bertha has to throw away her life in order that the white woman, Jane, may have happiness and fulfillment. Despite Jane's rebelling spirit and unwillingness to comply with societal rules, she appears to be obedient and docile compared to Bertha. Thus, Jane still translates Victorian ideals of a woman pure, mild-mannered, moral, loyal, which further deepens the difference between the local, the English in this case, and the other. When Jane is sent away to Lowood school, it seems that she has escaped, a terrible situation only to be thrown into one more dire. Though she finds friendship at Lowood, the conditions are harsh, and when things come apart, Jane forges for herself another escape, this time to be governess at Thornfield Hall. Her master there is Mr. Edward Rochester, a dark brooding man. Though Mr. Rochester pursues another lady, Blanche Ingram, a beauty with whom Jane's plain features cannot compete, a bond develops between master and governess. Eventually, Mr. Rochester's affections turn to Jane and he proposes marriage. But all is not well at Thornfield, a fact that Jane will soon discover, as secrets are revealed. Jane is forced from the house and it seems that there can be no union between her and the man she loves.

At its most basic level, *Jane Eyre* is a love story between the orphaned and trapped heroine and her Byronic partner. All the Brontës seem able to tap into a visceral, wild passion that still stirs readers almost two centuries after their writing was first led on the page. Doubtless it is this, coupled with the gripping unfolding of Jane's love story, which forms the greatest reason for *Jane Eyre's* longevity. But *Jane Eyre*, though it considers the different kinds of love, and indeed the absence of love, is much more than a romance. It is clearly a petition for the equal rights of women, even if it is a wholly complicated text, full of contrast. Its rebellious elements are counterbalanced with its conformist ones.

Throughout the novel, Jane has her voice quieted and her agency restricted, yet she refuses to accept her own lack of independence and insists on her strict sense of self as an individual. She develops this strength of character through a series of experiences, reminiscent structurally of John Bunyan's *A Pilgrim's Progress*. It is Rochester's eventual acknowledgement of Jane as an intelligent, genuinely caring person that allows her to fall for him. This too goes some way to navigating the difficult dynamic of their early relationship, that of master and servant.

Increasingly, *Jane Eyre* has been read as a feminist tract. But this central dynamic somehow reminiscent of the one between Pamela Andrews and Mr. B. in Samuel Richardson's less progressive novel *Pamela*, creates a potential problem for a feminist reading. Jane and Rochester's relationship evolves from a typically patriarchal affair to something approaching a palatable equality allows room for the relationship to be read as a transformative one rather than an oppressive one. With her sharpness of mind and a stubborn individuality, Jane is set apart from her literary predecessors like Pamela Andrews and Fanny Price by her strong sense of self.

Equally, unlike heroines of manorial fiction past, she does not seek to assimilate into the culture of a state, but remains apart from it, and it is this sense of otherness that allows a more sympathetic reading of the conformist aspect of Jane's personality. *Jane Eyre* is very much the product of the specific time and place in which it was written, an environment in which a woman, especially an economically disadvantaged one, has to struggle greatly so that she might speak of her own vision of reality. According to the critic Maggie Berg, *Jane Eyre* reflects the contradictory nature of Victorian society, a society that was in transition and one in which people were forced to discover new ways of finding and defining identity.

The world that Charlotte Brontë inhabited was rife with dichotomies. While some women agitated for greater rights, society as a whole exalted the image of the saintly, self-sacrificing woman happily confined to the home. While laws were passed to elevate some of the appalling conditions to which many people, especially women and children, were subjected to in factories, poverty remained rife even among certain people, such as clergymen and governesses, who were engaged in professions that require a fair amount of education. That these social contradictions manifested themselves in the author's own life has long been known. That much of her work is at least partly autobiographical is also known. That these truisms are part of the Brontë myth. Although it would be a mistake to assume, as did one early critic, Mrs. Humphrey Ward, who says, "Charlotte Brontë is Jane Eyre; you cannot think of her apart from what she has written." It is logical to assume that experience is essential to the creation of fiction and that Brontë's work is no exception. It is quite a supportable proposition that extraordinary, though the specific events of Jane Eyre's story may be, the emotional reality of oppression and the struggle for identity that her story depicts is representative of the emotional reality of many Victorian women's lives. Virginia Woolf believes Brontë's work was decisively influenced by her experience as a 19th century woman appears to be true, even if her assertion that this influence was highly negative because her "imagination swerved from indignation."

Jane Eyre, like many women in her time, is economically devalued and socially marginalized, largely because of her gender, but also because of her lack of an independent source of wealth. Living in a society in which she has few options for earning a living when she is obliged to do so, and in which women are considered inferior to men, she faces a considerable struggle to survive physically and psychologically. She faces perhaps an even greater struggle to be acknowledged as an equal by men and by persons of both sexes whose social status is above hers. Moreover, as a member of an oppressed class of persons, she faces a culture that does not generally reflect or even acknowledge her experience.

Rosemarie Bodenheimer suggests that, while at Gateshead, Jane uses her voice to defend herself against the oppression and cruelty of the Reeds. She struggles to assert the "truth of her character" and verbally attacks Mrs. Reed as a means of self-defense. There is more, however, to Jane's use of her voice than this. Although, she is too young to articulate or even understand the full ramification of her situation, her verbal outbursts are more than the efforts of a child to protest or fend off cruel treatment. They also

represent the use of truth as a weapon that the weak and disempowered can employ against their oppressors. Throughout the novel, speaking the truth is often Jane's only form of defense. When Jane writes, "I dared commit no fault; I strove to fulfill every duty; and I was termed naughty and tiresome, sullen and sneaky." She is describing a situation in which those with power over her are in control of what is recognized as "the truth of her character" and her circumstances. It is to this situation that she must respond by asserting the truth as she knows it. This pattern is repeated at Thornfield. Charlotte Brontë uses literary technique in her novel, *Shirley*, to characterize the phase of leaving childhood and entering adulthood. "Elf-land lies behind us, the shores of reality rises in front", is a quote from *Shirley*, a literary device used to show how the age of 18 is, where Caroline Helstone is leaving childhood. She uses metaphors, personification and imagery to foreshadow what it will be like to enter adulthood once becoming 18. "The school of experience is to be entered" is used as a literary technique that refers to needing experience and getting experience once hitting the threshold of 18. The feeling of being trapped can be one of the most terrifying feelings a human being can experience. This is especially true if the possibility of escaping is slim and unlikely. Whether it is being physically trapped or emotionally trapped, the feeling can cause major changes to one's character. The character Jane in the novel was feeling trapped with a small possibility of escaping. In order to demonstrate her feelings, Brontë uses symbolism and motifs. By using these literary elements, Brontë develops Jane's character by connecting them to her, which ultimately supports the deeper message of liberation. With her relationship with Rochester, she was trapped as a woman. She was treated like a slave by Rochester. She was not valued and was seen as a commodity rather than a partner. When the storm formed, before being proposed to, it was a compilation of Jane's entrapments. Whether it was being physically trapped, like how she was in the Red Room, or emotionally trapped, like her relationship with Rochester, that storm symbolized Jane feeling trapped. Jane has no way out of escaping this feeling of entrapment. It would take a colossal force to liberate Jane. So when the tree was struck by lightning, it symbolized Jane being liberated. Thus, Jane Eyre is born into a world where she is left alone.

Bereft of the love of parents, family or friends, but instead surrounded by hateful relatives, she resolves to attend school to begin her quest for independence. During the era when Jane lived, it was thought to be selfish for women to show desire. Women were expected to control and keep quiet. To perform one's duty to society was thought to be respectful and should be put before anything else. Duty, in contrast, is a moral obligation to something that somebody is obliged to do for moral, legal or religious reasons, which

is thought to be selfless. The decisions made regarding these emotions are significant throughout *Jane Eyre*. Charlotte Brontë shows us Jane's integrity helps her finding the balance between duty to herself and desire to stay.

The novel *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë consists of continuous journey through Jane's life towards her final happiness and freedom. Jane's physical journeys contribute significantly to plot, development and to the idea and the novel is a journey through Jane's life. Each journey causes her to experience new emotions and an eventual change of some kind. This actual journey help Jane on her own major figurative journey As each one allows her to reflect and grow. Jane makes her journey from Gateshead to Lowood at the age of 10. Finally, freeing her from her restrictive life with her aunt, who hates her. Jane's aunt sees Jane as inferior, who is less than a servant. Jane is glad to be leaving her cruel aunt and of having the chance of going to school. As Jane grows up and passes the age of 18, she advertises herself as a governess and is hired to a place called Thornfield. Although journeying into the completely unknown, Jane does not look back, only forward to her new life and her freedom at Thornfield. This particular journey marks a huge change in Jane's life. It is a fresh start for her. Jane does not experience a typical family life throughout the novel. Her various living arrangements led her through different households, yet none were a representation of the norm of family life in the 19th century.

Through research of familiar in the 19th century, it is clear that Jane's life does not follow with the stereotypical family made up of a patriarchal father and nurturing mother, both whose primary focus was in raising their children. Jane's life was void of this true family experience so common during the 19th century. Yet, Jane is surrounded by men, who in giving an accurate portrayal of fathers and masculinity in the 19th century, fulfill on one hand the father role that had never been present in her life, and on the other hand the husband portrait that Jane seeks out throughout the novel.

Thus, we see that the main quest in *Jane Eyre* is Jane's search for family, for a sense of belonging and love. However, this search is constantly tempered by Jane's need for independence. She begins the novel as an unloved orphan, who is almost obsessed with finding love as a way to establish her own identity and achieve happiness. Although she does not receive any parental love from Mrs. Reed, Jane finds surrogate maternal figures throughout the rest of the novel.

With this, I conclude the discussion and in the next lecture we shall explain the novel from the intertextual references. Till then, thank you.