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Jane Eyre: Growing Up in Resistance

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Abstract: *Jane Eyre* is a famous work by British female writer Charlotte Brontë, and it is also an autobiographical work. The heroine Jane Eyre, has grown into an independent, self-respecting woman in constant resistances. Jane Eyre's strong and unyielding spirit of resistance reflects her invincible inner personality charm. She has a unique thinking about women's destiny, value, status, a rational understanding to their own thoughts and personality, and a firm pursuit of their own happiness and emotion. From all of these we can see Jane Eyre also represents the new image of today's women. This dissertation intends to start with Jane Eyre's three struggles, analyze the character image of Jane Eyre, and explore the feminist thoughts behind it.

Keywords: *Jane Eyre*; Growth; Resistance; Feminism

1. Introduction

1.1 A Brief Introduction to Charlotte Brontë and *Jane Eyre*

Charlotte Brontë, a famous British woman writer, was born in 1816 in a rural priest's family in Howorth, North Yorkshire, England. "*Jane Eyre*, one of Charlotte Brontë's most famous and successful novels, described a process in which a woman strived to seek independence, love and equality in an era when women were generally considered to be accessories of men. This novel tells the story in a unique first-person, allowing readers to follow the heroine's experience and better appreciate her growth ^[1].

1.2 Women's Social Status in Victorian Britain

This novel was produced in the Victorian era. At that age, women's life was difficult and their social status at the time was very low. The greatest value of a woman was to be a good wife and nurture children. If a woman had her own independent career, she would be regarded as a violation of public order and customs, and would be attacked by society. This kind of social atmosphere is the main reason why The Brontë Sisters adopted a male pseudonym in their literary creation, and it is also the writing background of *Jane Eyre*. However, at the same time, the feminist ideology of equality and freedom gradually emerged, and more and more women entered job market after the industrial revolution. Women's social status became improved gradually ^[2].

2. Jane Eyre's Three Defections and Return

2.1 Jane Eyre in Gateshead Hall

When Jane Eyre was very young, her parents died and she became an orphan. She was adopted by her uncle, Mr. Reed, and came to live in Gateshead Hall. But Uncle Reed died soon after, Jane Eyre had been ridiculed by her aunt and bullied by her cousin since she was a child. Not only did she treat Jane Eyre like her servant, she also asked her children to do so, and even the maid at home looked down on Jane Eyre. During her time at her uncle's, the servants had instilled in her the idea that, although she had grown up with her cousins, she was not in the same position as the others, and she was still poor and had to please others somehow. Gradually Jane Eyre built up a self-consciousness and equality consciousness within herself, which is mainly embodied in her yearning for equality. When her cousin treated her as a servant, she has a strong desire to talk back and tell him that such behavior is unfair. It is precisely because of being treated in this way that Jane Eyre hopes to be treated equally, which is why she confronted her cousin's insult and resisted and beat him ^[3]. She just wanted to get a fair treatment in the family, whether it was to make Mrs. Reed aware of her mistake or to leave this family who saw her as a trouble, it was all to achieve this. Because of her aunt's harsh treatments to her, Jane Eyre was unwilling to compromise since she was a child and developed the courage to defend her rights.

2.2 Thornfield Hall: Falling in and out of love

After leaving Lowood Boarding School, Jane Eyre came to Thornfield Hall as a tutor. The owner of the Thornfield Hall, Mr. Rochester, in his forties, was a mature and successful upper-class man, but fell in love with Jane Eyre who was rebellious regarded by him. This plot runs counter to the prevailing social concepts at the time. And the author Charlotte Bronte believes that women's inner qualities are more important than beautiful appearances. Jane Eyre's declaration of love reveals her feminist ideas to the fullest, she thinks she and Rochester are equal. Contemporary women should be able to analyze their situation objectively and calmly, and think rationally^[4].

This kind of rational thinking ability is particularly useful, especially in love, where people are most likely to lose their minds and forget their original intentions because of love. This is not the case for Jane Eyre. She has always tried to maintain her rationality. When Rochester's secrets were revealed, his wedding to Jane Eyre was also cancelled. But when faced with Rochester's repeated retention and pleading, Jane Eyre refused him without any hesitation. Although she has no relatives, no friends, she still cares about herself and respects herself. She must abide by the law and stick to her own principles, because she believes that laws and principles cannot be violated ^[5]. Therefore, Jane Eyre was determined to leave Thornfield Hall, and walk toward an unknown life.

2.3 Leaving and Refusing to Compromise

At the wedding ceremony, Jane Eyre was shocked to know that Rochester had been married and his wife was still alive, she was that mad woman in the attic. This heavy blow not only brought great grief to Jane Eyre, but also filled her heart with contradictions: to leave or stay? Leaving Rochester would bring great pain to both of them, but Jane could maintain her dignity. After fierce inner conflict and struggling, on a stormy night, Jane Eyre left Thornfield Hall. After she left Rochester, Jane Eyre met St. John, a missionary. He calmly pointed out Jane Eyre's idea of wanting to live an independent life, and treated her equally from beginning to end, introducing her the job as a female elementary school teacher ^[6]. Later on, St. John proposes to Jane Eyre. Faced with St. John's proposal, the confused Jane Eyre suspected that it was God's will. However, Jane Eyre also considered whether to compromise with the world and be a good girl and wife in the eyes of the public. But when she woke up, she finally chose to refuse, because love and equality are indispensable for Jane Eyre. Jane Eyre was very

clear from the beginning: St. John didn't really love her, but because she could be a suitable wife for a missionary. Jane Eyre believed that marriage should be established on the basis of love and mutual understanding. Marriage without love was like hell on earth. Because of their disagreement on love, she rejected St. John's marriage proposal. She resolutely rejected marriage without love and maintained her independent personality ^[7].

2.4 Inner Struggle and Choosing to return

After she refused St. John's proposal, Jane Eyre seemed to feel Rochester's call. So she resolutely returned to Thornfield Hall. A fire from Thornfield Hall and a huge inheritance left by Jane Eyre's uncle who she had never met before overturned the inequality between Rochester and Jane Eyre. The accident came to destroy Rochester's physical advantage. He was not that "charming" Rochester anymore, and his blindness deprived him of the right to stare at Jane. He could manage to regain his poor eyesight for he was carefully taken care of by Jane after their getting married. The health and self-esteem that Rochester had lost since then could only be supplemented by Jane. At the same time, the five thousand pounds that flowed in made Jane promoted to the property-owning class and became evenly matched with the financially weakened Rochester. From then on, she stood on her opposite side and became the alms-giver she had feared. Jane Eyre's happiness is entirely based on her self-esteem, self-improvement and self-confidence. Only if you have the courage to calmly deal with difficulties and accept yourself in the past can you be able to face any challenges in the future. Man's greatest enemy is himself, and only by defeating himself can he become invincible ^[8].

3. Significance of Jane Eyre's Resistance

Although Jane Eyre's rebellion against the patriarchal society has received wide attention from feminist critics. However, a profound rebellion was formed between its fierce resistance method and the weak resistance effect, which relegated cultural resistance to a slogan of vain and exuberant propaganda, and its narcissistic fantasy in the fields of philosophy and politics is even more ridiculous. Jane's metaphorical marriage is like a French-style revolution, like a hurricane, "to save all cleansing", to achieve the lofty ideal of gender equality, to eliminate opponents by cruel and decisive means, but it has not shaken sexism and gender ^[9]. That has been the vigorous struggle of the feminist pioneers since the 19th century, "Everything is a means, and dialogue is the goal.....Two voices are the lowest condition of life, the lowest condition of survival." (Bathkin, 1998) In a world full of male discourse, women have been repressed, condemned, and they even self-doubted to identify with each other for a long time. The world began to interweave with two voices, and since then a dialogue has formed. Your and my values converge and merge in the pursuit. The basic attribute of men and women is "people", so both of them have the rights shared by "people". The goal of feminism is not to obtain the same rights as men, let alone eliminate the other sex and eventually take its place. Rather, it is to establish the rights of women as human beings. Only by affirming the essence of equality, that is, equality of value, can we find the solution to seeking equal rights between the sexes from the root ^[10].

Conclusion

Jane Eyre is not a bird in a cage. She is never at ease with the status quo and refuses to be a vassal of the patriarchy. Whether or not to stay is determined by free will. When faced with her aunt's abuse and unequal treatment, Jane Eyre chose to resist and leave. When she realized that the holy marriage was unfair, and her former lover Rochester longed to force her to give up her independent personality and dignity in the name of love, Jane Eyre chose to resist and flee. When the missionary St. John used the banner of God and faith to intimidate her to sacrifice emotion, authenticity and self-esteem, she did not compromise and ushered in another new life. Jane Eyre always chose to follow the call of the heart, listen to the mission of reason and emotion, and accept the test of fate's declaration of love. She actively fights to break the external constraints, challenge marching to the unknown forbidden land with both geographical significance and spiritual level, and finally had the

control of her own destiny.

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