

GENDER INEQUALITY IN CHARLOTTE BRONTE'S *JANE EYRE*

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Abstract: This study aims to reveal gender inequality in Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*. The writer employs a qualitative method in conducting this research. About collecting the data, the writer collected uses primary sources: which is the work of Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, while secondary sources were references such as journals, books, or internet sources that are related and relevant to the research. Regarding of data analysis, the writer uses the feminist approach was used to analyze inequality in gender. The study shows that *Jane Eyre's* life as the main character has experiences inequality which she has to face in her life such as mistreatment from society and men in the novel. She can finally feel happy living with someone she loves. And she no longer felt that she had to be distinguished from the degree of the man who lives with her. The writer wishes that in this research, the reader can learn not to assume that gender inequality is a trivial thing. Because actually, all women have the right to live their lives.

Keyword: *Gender Inequality, Feminist Approach, Jane Eyre*

INTRODUCTION

Language is one of the most important things in human life. Humans use language to communicate with one another, using either formal or informal sentences. Language is essential in literature. The types of literature are drama, poetry, and novels. According to Wellek and Warren, literary works are a creative activity of artwork. Everything that is written and printed is considered literature. Literature is also an

imaginative effort that aims to provide readers with a deeper knowledge of works of fiction (Wellek and Warren 1956 : 3-4). Therefore, literary works are created from an imagination that is reflected from various experiences and then poured into literary works in writing and print.

“Novel is decidedly not mean to be read at a single setting, it is an invented story in prose, long enough to fill a complete book” (Kenny William 1996 : 105). It means, the novel is one of the literary works there are longer and more complex than the short story, because of the variety of characters and settings of the novel and it is can be described in quite a long time. In general, novels tell about human activities and describe what happens around them.

Jane Eyre is a novel that tells the story of a young orphan who grows up to become an independent woman. She has to endure conflict such as being treated unfairly by the Reeds, being harassed at school, losing her best friend, and even giving up feelings of love for her pride. But despite everything that Jane’s been through, she is brilliant and lucky that she can finally live with her true love. Charlotte Bronte created the *Jane Eyre* character as a picture of herself. She wrote to *Jane Eyre* to send messages, support, and deliver ideas to women, that women must have strong morals and principles in their lives.

The writer is interested in analyzing the topic, because *Jane Eyre* is a novel that raises the issues of the condition of female characters who experience gender inequality. The problem of gender inequality depicted in the novel is that men perceive the status of women as weak. It caused different treatment, opportunities, roles, and right between men and women in social life. A woman’s right to gender equality is easily corrupted by men because women are looked upon as weak.

In this research, gender inequality is interesting to draw out to see why women experience gender inequality the most. It is expected to have a critical analysis regarding the topic of Gender Inequality in Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre*. In this novel, there are many problems to be analyzed. Taking on a background in the Victorian era, Charlotte

Bronte expressed her protest against the situation at that time. Because women in the era had not given the freedom to choose what they can be but they must follow every rule that is applied by the government. *Jane Eyre* wants to stand by herself and be independent.

This research is more directed at gender inequality in *Jane Eyre* is experienced by the female main character, described as an orphan who is weak in terms of wealth and power. Even though she was poor and orphaned, *Jane* received an education and grew up having great intelligence and courage. With the education that she got, she would rather not be ruled and demanded even to follow a man's feelings. *Jane* searches for equality and liberty in her life about women's rights and spaces participation in society. Gender inequality is not good to be done and is not supposed to appear in social life. Women's rights must be equal to men's so that there is no conflict of equality, but the peace and prosperity of life can be reached to gain a better life.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

In carrying out this research, there are statements by gender criticism that have a system to look out the root of the inequitable relationship and thus attack the social exploitation of women. There is a group that consciously strives to organize in relation to the system of education, the roles men and women play in the culture and the division of labor in a society (Dobie, 2012: 112).

In doing this research, the writer used a qualitative method. Bodgan and Biklen, claim that because the data are collected in the form of words rather than numbers, qualitative research is descriptive (Bodgan and Biklen 2007 : 30). As the result, the writer will employ this strategy to obtain facts more simply and in the form of words rather than statistics.

The responsibility of researchers in qualitative research is very complicated. They are at the same time planners, implementers, data collectors, data analyzers, and data interpreters, and ultimately report the results of their research. They become everything in the whole research process (Meleong, 2000: 132).

Based on the statement of Meleong, the writer is a planner, executor, collector, or eventually, a pioneer of the writer. So, the writer can give reasons and information.

Data Collecting

In collecting the data, firstly, the writer pays attention to the first source, namely the novel of Charlotte Bronte *Jane Eyre*, which is regarded as the primary source and is also enriched by references from other relevant sources. The relevant sources are categorized as secondary sources. Both primary and secondary are mostly selected through library research and all the data is taken from quotes from the novel, other books, or other related documents in the form of sentences or words. Some connected sources are gained from internet browsing.

Data Analysis

In terms of data analysis, the writer applies a feminist approach using feminist theory from Betty Friedan.

“Women through their hard work will be able to match men. However, women do not need to sacrifice their marriage and motherhood just for a career. No matter how high a woman’s career is, it does not mean that she should refuse to love and be loved by men or refuse to raise her children. A normal woman is a moral woman, who can put her marriage and her role as a mother above her career.” (Friedan, 2010 : 274)

Based on the statement above, every woman wants to be a normal woman who can do various work in their career without being required to stay at home taking care of work as a housewife.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Reflections of Gender Inequality in Jane Eyre

In *Jane Eyre*, each played a part in putting Jane in subjection to the men, using Jane so that she could not express her thoughts and feelings.

“Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts, as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex” (Bronte 2011: 109)

Charlotte Bronte shows her struggle of *Jane* for equality and overcoming repression. In addition to class differences, she had to struggle with gender inequality, against those who believed that women were inferior to men. Central figure men who threatened his desire for equality were Mr. Rochester, St. John Rivers, and Mr. Brocklehurst.

Mistreatment

“In the Victorian era, there were layers of social class. The first is the upper class, the second one is the middle class, and the third is the lower class. This classism happens in capitalist society. The classification was based on their social and economical background.” (Charcer and Watkins 2006 : 81).

Therefore, this class division society has a profound effect on women as well as gender inequality on women. Everything is decided by

the government and they don't have the freedom to choose who they will marry.

Mistreatment by Society

Mrs. Reed constantly views *Jane Eyre* as a burden and lower than maid, and she treats her like a doll to demonstrate her hypocritical charity. Little *Jane* eventually got into a fight with her cousin and was punished one day. *Jane* became ill after spending a night imprisoned in a room, and that is when her early feminism emerged.

"I'm not deceitful. If I were, I should say I loved you, but I declare, I don't love you. I dislike you the worst of anybody in the world except John Reed, and this book the liar, you may give to your girl, Georgiana, for it is she who tells lies, and not I". (Bronte 2011 : 62)

From the quotation above, *Jane Eyre* expressed what she has felt the unequal treatment by her aunt is not something that she should be tolerated fully. Even *Jane* was treated awfully and blamed for everything happened in the house, she has her own thought that she must do something.

Leaving her aunt home, Jane studies in the Lowood school. While at the Lowood school, the school was devoted to girls being given an education. *Jane* who went to school there could not be separated from the bad treatment by the teachers.

"Let her stand half-an-hour longer on that stool, and let no one speak to her during the remainder of the day." There was I, then, mounted aloft; I, who had said I could not bear the shame of standing on my natural feet in the middle of the room, was now exposed to general view on a pedestal of infamy. What my sensations were no language can describe; but just as they all rose, stifling my breath and constricting my throat, a girl came up and passed me: in passing, she lifted her eyes. What a strange light

inspired them! What an extraordinary sensation that ray sent through me! How the new feeling bore me up! It was as if a martyr, a hero, had passed a slave or victim, and imparted strength in the transit. I mastered the rising hysteria, lifted up my head, and took a firm stand on the stool. (Bronte 2011 : 123-124)

In this part, *Jane Eyre* is described as a strong-willed girl. Despite being innocent when Mr. Brocklehurst accused her of crime, she was punished, and as a result, she learned to be patient. She overcame her emotions and accepted the penalty as part of her accountability.

My world had for some years been in Lowood: my experience had been of 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 dared to go forth into its expanse, to seek real knowledge of life amidst its perils. (Bronte 2011 : 124)

It looks like how long Jane was in Lowood and how hard she had been to get a great education for herself.

When the typhus fever had fulfilled its mission of devastation at Lowood, it gradually disappeared from thence; but not till its virulence and the number of its victims had drawn public attention on the school. Inquiry was made into the origin of the scourge, and by degrees various facts came out which excited public indignation in a high degree. The unhealthy nature of the site; the quantity and quality of the children's food; the brackish, fetid water used in its preparation; the pupils' wretched clothing and accommodations—all these things were discovered, and the discovery produced a result mortifying to Mr. Brocklehurst, but beneficial to the institution. (Bronte 2011 : 63)

Jane and the other students get bad treatment from the school principal when a pandemic occurs at Lowood school. The students at

Lowood school were not well cared for, even when some of them started getting sick. Due to the greed of Mr. Brocklehurst, many students at the school died including his best friend Hellen Burns.

Mistreatment by Men

The beginning of the novel demonstrates how John Reed continually irritated *Jane Eyre* by criticizing her. He talked about his family's generosity while disparaging her parents and their children.

"You have no business to take our books; you are a dependent, mama says; you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg, and not to live here with gentlemen's children like us, and eat the same meals we do, and wear clothes at our mama's expense. Now, I'll teach you to rummage my bookshelves: for they are mine; all the house belongs to me, or will do in a few years. Go and stand by the door, out of the way of the mirror and the windows." I did so, not at first aware what was his intention; (Bronte 2011 : 14)

The above shows how high John's power can take the book that *Jane's* reading. He shows his pride that everything in Gateshead belongs to the Reed and *Jane* has no right to touch or even own all of it, including getting knowledge from the books *Jane* reads.

I saw him lift and poise the book and stand in act to hurl it, I instinctively started aside with a cry of alarm: not soon enough, however; the volume was flung, it hit me, and I fell, striking my head against the door and cutting it. The cut bled, the pain was sharp: my terror had passed its climax; other feelings succeeded. "Wicked and cruel boy!" I said. "You are like a murderer you are like a slave driver--" (Bronte 2011 : 14)

In this passage, John Reed is shown making fun of *Jane*, and his remarks about her parents made her feel offended. Although it hurts to

hear him bring up her low social standing, *Jane* does nothing to stop John Reed. Even more so, she complied when told to stand near the window.

Bronte explained that *Jane Eyre* lived a life like a slave. There was a word of rebellion against the pressure Jane felt. In this case, the patriarchy would rule in its home so Jane was hired as a slave who had no freedom over her.

I resisted all the way: a new thing for me, and a circumstance which greatly strengthened the bad opinion Bessie and Miss Abbot were disposed to entertain of me. The fact is, I was a trifle beside myself: or rather out of myself, as the French would say: I was conscious that a moment's mutiny had already rendered me liable to strange penalties, and like any other rebel slave, I felt resolved, in desperation, to go all lengths. (Bronte 2011 : 5)

Bad treatment was also experienced by Bertha Mason, who was the legal wife of Mr. Rochester. Due to Bertha's mental illness, she wasn't even treated like a patient, but worse than imagined.

He lifted the hangings from the wall, uncovering the second door: this too, he opened. In a room without a window, there burnt a fire guarded by a high and strong fender, and a lamp suspended from the ceiling by a chain. Grace Poole bent over the fire, apparently cooking something in a saucepan. In the deep shade, at the farther end of the room, a figure ran backward and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it groveled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing, and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face.

(Bronte 2011 : 225-226)

Mr. Rochester concealed her from view out of embarrassment as if he still could not comprehend what had happened to Bertha. Grace Poole is keeping watch over her as she is imprisoned in a hidden room on the third floor of Thornfield. Formerly gorgeous and wealthy ladies who had turned insane, violent, and dangerous were described by Bertha Mason.

Stereotype Creation

Every woman has a different character and thought but has a weakness in the emotional. This happens to every woman in terms of the environment in which they live. According to Mister Maru, the image or stereotype of women is depicted through the study of the pattern of prescribed characteristics entailing the existence of women in their society (Maru, Mister 2014 : 3).

Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts, as much as their brothers do. (Bronte 2011 : 109)

The nature of patriarchal societies, which have predominated frequently as shown in the aforementioned remark, has had an impact on how men and women are portrayed in society. Women have historically been viewed as inferior beings due to biological distinctions that are interpreted in traditional ways, as evidenced by the statement "Women are supposed to be very calm generally". There is no questioning the importance of women as spouses and mothers, but education can help change attitudes by preparing people to make decisions based on their knowledge and skills. Women and men must therefore have equal access to opportunities and status in order to realize their human rights and potential, as *Jane* stated when she noted that "they need exercise for their faculties and a field for their efforts".

Again I reflected: I scarcely knew what school was: Bessie sometimes spoke of it as a place where young ladies sat in the stocks, wore backboards, and were expected to be exceedingly

genteel and precise: John Reed hated his school and abused his master; but John Reed's tastes were no rule for mine. (Bronte 2011 : 41)

From the aforementioned remark, *Jane* describes how equal education was at the time she received Bessie's depiction of education. She contrasted John Reed's portrayal of a man with good degree, who had proper ranking. Women are not worthy of demonstrating their aptitude, capacity, and empowerment by not receiving an equal education to men, as implied by the phrase "sat in the stocks wore backboards."

... dared to go forth into its expanse, to seek real knowledge of life amidst its perils. (Bronte 2011 : 129).

In order to see the wider world and the equality of rights between men and women at the time, *Jane* ventured to push her inquisitive soul. Because women's freedom was generally undervalued at the time, *Jane* tried to live a life that reflected her status as an educated middle-class lady.

The Impact of Gender Inequality on the Main Female Character in Jane Eyre

Negative Impact

Love Relationship

Relationships, especially those between men and women, and gender have a connection. The partnership can be unbalanced at times. According to Sears, Jonathan, and Anne, a connection exists when two people have an autonomous and reciprocal influence on one another (1985 : 229). It implies that a relationship is a link between two people who have an impact on one another.

"And if I had loved him less I should have thought his accent and look of exultation savage; but... I thought only of the bliss given me to drink in so abundant a flow. Again and again and again I answered, "Yes." After which he murmured, 'It will atone—it will atone. Have I not found her friendless, and cold, and comfortless?.. it will expiate at God's tribunal. I know my Maker sanctions what I do. For the world's judgment—I wash my hands thereof. For man's opinion—defy it.'" (Bronte 2011 : 487)

Mr. Rochester is the owner of Thornfield Hall. Because of what he does to his wife to keep her in the attic, he is somewhat of a jerk. He, and not some conceited person, was the one who initially made *Jane* fall in love. When *Jane Eyre* finds out that Mr. Rochester had a wife, she feels betrayed, and this sets off the struggle. For the benefit of his marriage, she encourages him. Mr. Rochester first intrigues *Jane*. She requests further information about him from Mrs. Fairfax the morning after his arrival. Even though he is frequently abrupt with her and, some readers contend, abusive, she grows more attracted to him. The focus of Rochester changes *Jane*.

"So happy, so gratified did I become with this new interest added to life, that I ceased to pine after kindred; my thin crescent-destiny seemed to anlarge; the blanks of existence were filled up; my bodily health improved, I gathered flesh and strength" (Bronte 2011 : 149)

Jane felt that her heart was filled with someone she wanted. But, in reality she as a woman can not choose the path of life, including a partner. So, *Jane* keeps her feelings for Mr. Rochester.

She is finally so in love with him that he displaces God and becomes "an idol" for her (Bronte 2011 : 279)

From here, it can be seen that *Jane* is a sincere girl. She does not choose a man based on his attractiveness. She is sensible girl who would rather forget her love than end a marriage.

I have now been married ten years. I know what it is to live entirely for and with what I love best on earth..---- No woman was ever nearer to her mate than I am: ever more absolutely bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. I know no weariness of my Edward's society: he knows none of mine, any more than we each do of the pulsation of the heart that beats in our separate bosoms; consequently, we are ever together. To be together is for us to be at once as free as in solitude,..
(Bronte 2011 : 348)

In the story, Mr. Rochester became blind and so he relied on *Jane* to be his prop and guide. They live as if there is no difference in the equality of women and men.

Social Status

Even though *Jane Eyre* is educated and has been supporting herself through teaching, she discovers that her opportunities are limited when she attempts to find work near the town of Mortain after leaving Thornfield Hall. Bronte's decision to use a first-person female narrator allows readers to understand what it was like to be a woman in Britain in the early to mid-19th century. While on shopping trip with Mr. Rochester during their engagement, *Jane Eyre* begins to realize that marriage comes with a certain loss of independence in becoming a wife of the time when women were restricted to domestic life as a protagonist. In fact, she has a degree more independence than even an upper-class married woman. Because she is poor but not working-class, *Jane Eyre* is the ideal character for Bronte to use to examine the consequences of class roles on people's lives.

That then I longed for a power of vision which might overpass that limit; which might reach the busy world, towns, regions full of life I had heard of but never seen—that then I desired more of practical experience than I possessed. (Bronte 2011 : 205)

Jane tries to begin a new journey where fresh air comes from Thornfield after opting to leave Lowood. Because *Jane* was an orphan and had nothing, people scarcely even noticed her, forcing her to grow up to be an independent woman. Her intuitive, instinctual, spiritual, or-called feminine side must be into balanced with her logical, intellectual, thinking, or so-called masculine side.

I reflected. Poverty looks grim to grown people; still more so to children: they have not much idea of industrious, working, respectable poverty; they think of the word only as connected with ragged clothes, scanty food, fireless grates, rude manners, and debasing vices: poverty for me was synonymous with degradation. (Bronte 2011 : 14)

Britain had an extremely rigorous class system during time the book is set, and it comprised more than just the elite, middle, and lower classes. In addition, the royal family was there. People typically remained in the social class they were born into during the 19th century, which was ruled by social class.

I married him. A quiet wedding we had: he and I, the parson and clerk, were alone present. (Bronte 2011 : 347)

Based on the statement above, it can be seen that Bronte shows terms the position of the woman who marries the man she loves. Through the sentence "I married him.", *Jane Eyre* stated that she was the one who married Mr. Rochester. That is, *Jane's* actions are outside the tradition of the patriarchal system, where it is usually a man who marries a woman. *Jane* as a woman dared to declare that she married her husband without having to get anyone's approval.

Positive Impact

Becoming a Strong Woman and Having a High Self-Control

According to Ratna Megawangi (1999: 228) there's no difference between women and men. So they must be granted the same rights as men. Even though not all equality must be applied among men and women, but still there are several different exceptions for women can't do at all. The logical reason for the exception for women is their reproductive to bring the logical consequence in society.

I was a discord in Gateshead Hall: I was like nobody there; I had nothing in harmony with Mrs. Reed or her children, or her chosen vassalage. If they did not love me, in fact, as little did I love them. They were not bound to regard with affection thing that could not sympathize with one amongst them; a heterogeneous thing, opposed to them in temperament, in capacity, in propensities; a useless thing
(Bronte 2011 : 7)

Jane Eyre is brave enough to face the truth. *Jane Eyre* struggles to be free from her frustrating moment. She realizes that she must fight her right in order be released from for her shackle.

I remembered descending that hill at twilight; an age seemed to have elapsed since the day which brought me first to Lowood, and I had never quitted it since. My vacations had all been spent at school: Mrs. Reed had never sent for me to Gateshead; neither she nor any of her family had ever been to visit me. I had no communication by letter or message with the outer world. (Bronte 2011 : 64)

Jane has to live and fend for herself while at Lowood school without any support that cares for her. But she kept fighting until she finished

school and even became a teacher at Lowood. This proves that *Jane* is an independent woman.

“Accustomed to John Reed’s abuse, I never had an idea of replying to it, my care was how to endure the blow which would certainly follow the insult.” (Bronte 2011 : 24-26)

From this part, Bronte shows the concept of liberation feminism. *Jane Eyre* who always gets mistreatment builds a strong character to survive the mistreatment and shows how she wants equality for good treatment as a daughter.

“But where are you going to, Helen? Can you see? Do you know?”

“I believe; I have faith: I am going to God.”

“Where is God? What is God?”

“My maker and yours, who will never destroy what He created. I rely implicitly on His power, and confide wholly in His goodness: I count the hours till that eventful one arrives which shall restore me to Him, reveal Him to me.”

“You are sure, then, Helen, that there is such a place as heaven, and that our souls can get to it when we die?”

“I am sure there is a future state; I believe God is good; I can resign my immortal part to Him without any misgiving. God is my father; God is my friend: I love Him; I believe He loves me.”

(Bronte 2011 : 61)

Helen teaches *Jane Eyre* that having faith in a higher power can enable her to tolerate humiliation without becoming aggressive. She also supported self-control as a means of avoiding punishment and embarrassing relatives. *Jane Eyre* finds Helen’s understanding of Christianity appealing, but she is not totally convinced. The interpretation has a spiritual foundation, but *Jane’s* is grounded in nature.

CONCLUSION

After finishing analyzing the *Gender Inequality in Jane Eyre*, it is then necessary to conclude the result of the analysis. It comes to the final activity or conclusion of the analysis. By using a feminist approach to *Jane Eyre* novel, the writer hopes that readers can feel what Jane went through to demand gender equality rights.

The writer found that Jane finally managed to let go of her selfish personality and become more patient, in her struggle as a woman who stood firm for equality. What is expected especially her relationship with Mr. Rochester ends happily and their lives depend on each other without any barriers in social status and inequality.

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