

## WOMAN'S FIGHT FOR EMANCIPATION AS REFLECTED IN CHARLOTTE BRONTE'S *JANE EYRE*

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**Abstract** : This study aims to analyze woman's fight for emancipation in *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte, a novel written in the Victorian era and first published in 1847. Woman emancipation refers to women's struggle to obtain rights that should be given in order for their potential to develop and function fully in certain aspects of life. In this study, the writers use qualitative research because the data are gathered in the form of words rather than numbers. The mimetic approach is also employed in order to investigate how a woman fights for a better life as reflected in Bronte's *Jane Eyre*. Two kinds of sources are used for this study, namely primary and secondary sources. The primary source is the novel itself, whereas the secondary sources are books and internet references. The result of the analysis depicts Jane Eyre's struggles for woman's emancipation. She has authority and freedom as a human being who is fully entitled to herself. Jane Eyre also shows how she chooses and decides her own path in life. By using the feminism theory of Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique*, it can be concluded that Jane Eyre is able to show her ability and become a female character who can be an excellent role model in the fight for emancipation.

**Keywords** : Woman, Emancipation, Feminism, Jane Eyre, Victorian Era.

### INTRODUCTION

*Jane Eyre* is included in the English classics and was published in 1847. Jane Eyre's persistent struggle to get the rights that should be given to women makes this work interesting to study. The involvement of women is one of the efforts in realizing equitable development. According to Arat as cited Stivachtis and Georgakis (2008) "emancipation is a significant step toward liberty." In *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Bronte clearly illustrates the injustices that occur for women related to social life in the current era even though in this day and age there are many struggle movements carried out in fighting for women's rights. "Women are bound to behave in certain natures and roles that fit the perception of the society," (Maru,

2014). In the current era, women are still victims of the stigma of the past, giving the many pros and cons of where women should be. Emancipation of women has become common nowadays; it is just that most women still do not understand how to implement it in real steps. This work can benefit women by showing them how women can develop and progress from time to time without losing their identity. As described by Wahyuningsih (2013), women must not only be skilled in the kitchen, but they must also be knowledgeable.

*Jane Eyre* which is the work of Charlotte Bronte is one of the leading works of English literature in the fight for women's rights. "Literature can be said to be successful because literature carries out

its mission as a generator of human consciousness,” (Dengah, et.al., 2021). This novel is one of many novels that tell about the situation of women in the Victorian period. Women do not have the status or rights to direct their own lives during the Victorian era. This struggle is an important topic in order to provide understanding and strength for women in the current era. This research focuses on the emancipation of women depicted by female characters in *Jane Eyre*, a novel that has never been studied by students of the Faculty of Languages and Arts UNIMA. Discussing how the emancipation of women in Jane Eyre's life to fight against the injustices that occur and get the rights she deserves makes this research different from previous studies.

### **Women in the Victorian Era**

The novel *Jane Eyre* is published in the nineteenth century. Therefore, Charlotte Bronte represents the culture and society of England during the Victorian era. The era in which men dominate can be described as a patriarchal society that places men above. According to Tasumbey (2018), “In England in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, women's life was different from men's. Women had very limited rights and also roles in society, while men had lots of them.” Women are often placed at a disadvantage. At that time, the most prominent is the portrayal of women as intelligent but unable to get out of the traditions of British society that adhere to a patriarchal system.

The position of women in society during the Victorian era is limited by instilling and teaching women only in domestic or household activities. “Woman's serfdom was sanctified by the Victorian conception of the female as a priestess dedicated to preserving the home

as a refuge from the abrasive outside world,” (Altick, 1974). The concept of the ideal figure of women that is formed in society during the Victorian era do not allow women to have the same rights as men. The only role of women in the Victorian era is to care for and maintain their body for men, as well as to do household chores to serve men.

According to Altick (1974), “The female brain was not equal to the demands of commerce or the professions, and women, simply by virtue of their sex, had no business mingling with men [...] There was something unpleasant, even alarming, about strong-willed women who insisted on using their minds.” It shows that women were viewed as the inferior compared to the men in terms of work at that time. Houghton also describes the role of women in the Victorian era as “to love, honor, obey—and amuse—her lord and master,” (Houghton, 1957). In other words, women's movements at that time are not broad or limited because women in the Victorian era are hampered by class and gender roles that are regulated by society in order to fulfill the ideal expectations of society.

### **Women Emancipation**

Women emancipation exists due to women's awareness of the demands and injustices they feel. According to Laclau (1996), “Emancipation arises because of social demands and domination of power in various aspects of life, as well as structured injustice.” Women's awareness of unfair treatments they receive is the root of the emergence of women emancipation because women are labeled as subordinate and weak. Paletschek & Pietrow-Ennker (2004) state that “women emancipation is understood as a struggle for self-determination and improvement of

women's legal, social, cultural, and political positions.” It means that women cannot change their condition in society if they do not strive to change their condition. According to Lolowang (2010), “women are considered as passive and submissive especially in the positioning.”

Women emancipation can be interpreted as a process of releasing women from the restraints that limit women from developing and progressing. Emancipation is not limited to the view of a large-scale struggle, but in fact every form of small resistance that frees itself from the shackles is the energy that powers the emancipation movement. According to Thomas as cited in McCabe & Holmes (2009) describes emancipation as “a process by individuals or groups who recognize and find new ways of meaning for limitations in thinking and acting.” Emancipation aims to get equal rights. Through the emancipation of women, equality of rights can be obtained by the struggles carried out by women who demand equality with men both in thinking and acting.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This research is categorized as qualitative research, which is descriptive. It means that the data are in the form of words rather than numbers (Bogdan, R. C. and Biklen, 1992). The data are taken from the novel *Jane Eyre* is regarded as the primary source, which is as enriched by references from other relevant sources. The relevant sources are categorized as secondary sources. The secondary sources such as books, articles, documents and internet are used to support the analysis.

Since this is a literary research, this study employs mimetic approach. This approach views literary works as presenting real-world life. Abrams (1971)

states that “the mimetic orientation—the explanation of art as essentially an imitation of aspects of the universe.” This study discusses woman’s fight for emancipation, so the writers also use the feminism theory of Betty Friedan in her book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) which emphasizes that women through their hard work will be able to match men.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Emancipation can be defined as the process of releasing women from the restraints that limit them to develop and move forward. According to Steel (2000), emancipation literally means freedom from the restraints, control, or power of others. Jane Eyre fights to break down boundaries so that she as a woman can get the rights that should be given to women. In the novel *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte, it is described that woman should be free to determine and do what they want as long as it does not harm the other party. After all, we are all equal human beings so we want the same rights as each other. Using the feminism theory of Betty Friedan in her book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), this chapter discusses Jane Eyre’s fight for emancipation, which is divided into several aspects, specifically being an independent woman, getting educational right, having ownership right, against inequality at work, male domination, and social tradition.

### Being an Independent Woman

In this novel, Jane is shown as a different figure. This is seen when she left Gateshead to go to study at Lowood which is about 80 kilometers away. For a child of Jane’s age of about 10, it was a huge responsibility and inappropriate for her to go it alone. Although Jane really wanted to go to school and get out of that house, she knew when she decided to get out of

that house, she could not go back to that house again, and she realized that when she had stepped out of Gateshead, then a new chapter and new life started. She will fend for herself in Lowood without her family, she will adapt to her surroundings, looking for friends and people she can trust. For a child her age, it was a heavy thing to bear alone. Nevertheless, this is where she shows her abilities, potential and independence to her uncle's family that without them Jane will still be successful, with her own efforts and hard work, she then appeared as an independent and free woman.

*"Is she going by herself?" asked the porter's wife'*

*'Yes.'*

*'And how far is it?'*

*'Fifty miles.'*

*'What a long way! I wonder Mrs. Reed is not afraid to trust her so far alone.'*" (Bronte, 2019, p. 37)

*"...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 had no communication by letter or message with the outer world"* (Bronte, 2019, p. 84)

The quotations above show how Jane had to live and fend for herself while at Lowood, with no help from her uncle's family, her only family, no family who cared about her. Nevertheless, she persevered until she graduated from high school and went on to teach at Lowood. This demonstrates that Jane is a self-sufficient woman who is capable of achieving success.

### **Getting Educational Right**

Jane continued to fight for her rights in education while she was at the Lowood School, how the Lowood school leader hated Jane telling all the children and teachers that Jane was a liar and deserved to be hated. Even so, Jane was not discouraged by Mr. Brocklehurst but she became a woman who progressed by studying hard.

*"My dear children, '...this girl, who might be one of God's own lambs, is a little castaway: not a member of the true flock, but evidently an interloper and an alien. You must be on your guard against her; you must shun her example; if necessary, avoid her company, exclude her from your sports, and shut her out from your converse... this girl, this child, the native of a Christian land, worse than many a little heathen who says its prayers to Brahma and kneels before Juggernaut—this girl is—a liar!'"* (Bronte, 2010, p. 64)

From the quotation above, it shows that Mr. Brocklehurst hates Jane so much that he even humiliated Jane in front of Lowood's students and teachers. Although Jane was under pressure from her school leader, Jane did not become a weak woman, slumped and lingered in her sadness. But with this incident, she made up her mind to become a more diligent child. She will work hard because she deserves a proper education. "...I had meant to be so good, and to do so much at Lowood: to make so many friends, to earn respect and win affection." (p. 66). By showing her enthusiasm for learning, Jane was finally able to speak French and draw well.

### **Having Ownership Right**

Ferndean house presents the achievement of women's emancipation as a real woman. Jane manifests herself as an independent human being both economically and socially without having

to be associated with men. She appears as the controller of the family, the organizer and owner of the family under her supervision. The man in this situation does not have any authority as Mr. Rochester was paralyzed and blind.

*"Mr. Rochester continued blind the first two years of our union; perhaps it was that circumstance that drew us so very near—that knit us so very close: for I was then his vision, as I am still his right hand. Literally, I was the apple of his eye. He saw nature—he saw books through me; and never did I weary of gazing for his behalf..."* (Bronte, 2010, p. 460)

*"I have now been married ten years. I know what it is to live entirely for and with what I love best on earth."* (Bronte, 2010, p. 460)

The quotation above shows that women's roles are extremely beneficial to both their own and men's lives. It shows in this situation that, while women have received education, it is an option for them to work and have a career outside the home. Even though, they have demonstrated their ability at work and their achievements on the outside. Women also have authority to choose the best way of life for themselves; she can prioritize whether she wants to be a career woman or a housewife after she gets married. And that decision must be appreciated as the best one for her. Jane chose to be a housewife after marrying because she knew her family needed her far more than public eye. This is a decision she made on her own, without any encouragement from anyone, because she understands and is aware of her role as a woman and wife, as (Friedan, 1963) states that a normal woman is a moral woman who can prioritize her marriage and her role as a mother over her career. This is the best choice for her.

### **Against Inequality at Work**

Thornfield's setting is one in which women are entering the workplace. Thornfield represents the opportunity for women to work, apply their knowledge and experience in the workplace, and also be free of economic and social status problems. In this novel, Charlotte Bronte introduced the character of Jane, who recognizes that women want to be treated equally with men; women require a place to hone their skills and work as much as men do. Women experience the same emotions as men. Women would also like to go forward and learn more in order to maximize their talents, have the freedom to pursue their passions and work in the public sector rather than just at home. They should be given the same opportunity to choose what they want, as Jane's statement below says:

*"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, 2010, p. 109)

With thoughts like this brought Jane to realize what women should do in society at that time thought that women were just silent and made women not think narrowly about themselves but think ahead as Jane felt when she was still at Lowood she felt that her life only revolves around that

portion. She wanted to be free to do what she liked.

### **Against Male Domination**

In this novel, Jane Eyre's life as the main character is described and how she reacts to the difficulties she faces in a society where at that time was dominated by men. As a child, Jane did not receive much love. After the death of her parents, Jane lives in Gateshead with her aunt and three cousins who hate her very much. This is where the situation begins where Jane is mistreated by men. Women are distinguished from men in terms of rights as individuals. Even in terms of ownership, men are seen as the sole heirs of the family who are entitled to all assets or family inheritance.

*"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 gentleme'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 book- shelves: for they are mine; all the house belongs to me, or will do in a few years."* (Bronte, 2010, p. 5)

The ban on taking and reading John Reed's books is a restraint on women to gain knowledge or get an education and do what they love. The way John Reed rummages through books, which are in fact shared with his sister, signifies male power in the family. John Reed's two sisters; Eliza and Georgiana could not prevent or forbid their brother's actions because they considered their brother more entitled to what was in the house. This is also supported by John Reed's statement "all the house belongs to me" (p. 5) indicating that the man is the sole owner of ownership in the family as he controls the family.

### **Against the Social Tradition**

Tradition in society that considers the low status of a servant who is serving her master, makes a servant unworthy to have feelings of love for her master and vice versa. People think that someone with a high status should marry someone of the same high status, so at that time, people looked for a partner based on material considerations rather than genuine feelings.

*"What love have I for Miss Ingram? None: and that you know. What love has she for me? None: as I have taken pains to prove: I caused a rumour to reach her that my fortune was not a third of what was supposed, and after that I presented myself to see the result; it was coldness both from her and her mother. I would not—I could not—marry Miss Ingram. You— you strange, you almost unearthly thing!—I love as my own flesh."* (Bronte, 2010, p 257).

The quotation above shows that no matter how wealthy Miss Ingram and Mr. Rochester were, they couldn't marry if they didn't have genuine feelings for each other. It can be concluded that with sincere love, a servant like Jane gets the love she expects, namely the love of her master, even though at that time it was not proper for a servant to love his master, but Jane appeared as a breaker of that tradition. "I know my Maker sanctions what I do. For the world's judgment—I wash my hands thereof. For man's opinion—I defy it." (p. 258). She knew when the Maker allowed her to do something, she did not become a woman who hesitated and knew that she had the right to love anyone, as long as it was not against religion.

## CONCLUSION

After having conducted this analysis, the writers find out Jane Eyre's fight for emancipation. The conclusion is to answer the purpose of the study. The result of the analysis shows that women in Jane Eyre achieve their freedom as human beings who are fully entitled to themselves. As explained in the previous chapter, it can be concluded that the woman represented by Jane Eyre is able to appear as an independent woman in several aspects, such as the world of education, work, freedom from oppression and male domination that puts her in a disadvantageous position, as well as existing social traditions. Jane Eyre's rights can also be seen in her freedom to make her own decisions; the decision to leave the figures that put her at a disadvantage and married Mr. Rochester who was no longer rich, blind and crippled. It does not matter whether it is a man or a woman, every human being is entitled to their rights and dreams, as long as there is determination and strong will, anything can come true.

Furthermore, the pattern of relationships between men and women is an equality relation. This means that women who have been appearing as objects of oppression have been able to appear as subjects who are free of themselves, and are able to create equal relationships with men, both are in a position of subordination. The relationship pattern of equality or the ability of women to appear as individuals who are equal in position to men is supported by their hard work, sacrifice, potential, intellect and personality. All of these are honed by women to develop their potential. Women will be able to match men in the public sphere with their efforts and hard work, but they do not need to sacrifice their

marriage and role as a mother for the sake of a career. Because Edward became blind and incapacitated, Jane chose to be a wife and mother to Edward and their child. She acknowledged that, even though she had achieved success in her career, her family needed her more. Without any coercion or interference from other parties, her decision to no longer be involved in the workplace was the right choice for her. She already had control in her life and had been able to determine the best path for herself. Finally, by using the feminism theory of Betty Friedan in her book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), it can be concluded that Jane Eyre in her day is able to show her ability and courage as a pioneer of women emancipation so that in the end women can appear as figures who play an important role in the society and their voices are taken into consideration.

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