The Embodiment and Issues of Class in Jane Eyre

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Bronte's Criticism of Class

CHARLOTTE BRONTE, Jane Evre

"Old maids like the houseless and unemployed poor, should not ask for a place and an occupation in the world: the demand disturbs the happy and the rich."

"I don't think, sir, that you have a right to command me, merely because you are older than I, or because you have seen more of the world than I have; your claim to superiority depends on the use you have made of your time and experience."

"Prejudices, it is well known, are most difficult to eradicate from the heart whose soil has never been loosened or fertilised by education: they grow there, firm as weeds among stones."

"If people were always kind and obedient to those who are cruel and unjust; the wicked people would have it all their own way: they would never feel afraid, and so they would never alter, but would grow worse and worse. When we are struck at without a reason, we should strike back again very hard; I am sure we should — so hard as to teach the person who struck us never to do it again."

"I am no bird; and no net ensnares me: I am a free human being with an independent will."

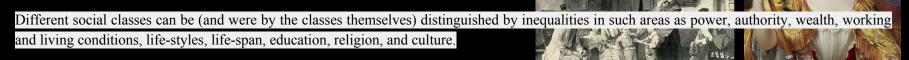
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Thesis

Through the stark imagery and densely contrasting natures of the characters in Jane Eyre, Charlotte Bronte creates a unique caricature of class in English Victorian society which sets the underlying irony of the plot, thus leading up to the ultimate insult of that era. Her technique is based in her way of constructing scenes in which the disturbing, almost disgusting distinction between the poor and the privileged is most vivid, and how this, by the novel end, is ultimately turned on its head. In this, Bronte attempts to dismantle and pervert the rigidly established socio-political and socio-economic hierarchy that kept disenfranchised Englishmen, specifically women lacking agency, in submission to a disconnected upper class for more than one thousand years.



The Hierarchy of Victorian English Society



Early in the nineteenth century the labels "working classes" and "middle classes" were already coming into common usage. The old hereditary aristocracy, reinforced by the new gentry who owed their success to commerce, industry, and the professions, evolved into an "upper class" (its consciousness formed in large part by the Public Schools and Universities) which tenaciously maintained control over the political system, depriving not only the working classes but the middle classes of a voice in the political process. ("Social Class." Social Class. N.p., n.d. Web. 24 Jan. 2017)

In the Victorian age, England was dominated by an ongoing system and structure of social and political rigidity. This structure evolved out of the long-gone, mostly disregarded medieval society that carried on until around the reign of King William III, with the introduction of the English Bill of Rights following the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Regardless, the hierarchies of British class still persisted into the 19th century by segregating and distinguishing citizens based on their birth and lineage. Englishmen were thus regarded as either an exalted elite belonging to the aristocracy, being made up of ancient noble families, wildly successful industry leaders, and the landed gentry of the bourgeosie, or as expendable commoners who owned small businesses, worked middle income jobs, performed hard labor, or went into servitude. Though some facets of British society, such as the Parliment, were democratic, equality among all subjects was an

abhorred and alien concept.

Corn Law and Poor law

Corn laws -- In 1830s, british parliament have passed law on restricting cheaper foreign import food products, corn especially. Food prices was kept a high level to favor food producers (landowners)

Poor laws -- British parliament pass poor law to stop spending tax money on poors. People who were stuck in poverty were considered as lazy.

Quote from chapter 10

When the typhus fever had fulfilled its mission of devastation at lowood, it gradually disappear from the thence; but not till it virulence and the number of its victim had drawn public attention on the school. (p75)

The social welfare program has canceled for the poors. The funding of lowood came from the donation of wealth individuals.

Lack of food

But the first edge of hunger blunted, I perceived I had got in hand a nauseous mess -- burnt porridge is almost as bad as rotten potatoes; famine itself soon sickens over it. (P.39)

Then the scanty supply of food was distressing: with the keen appetites of growing children, we had scarcely sufficient to keep alive a delicate invalid. (P52)

Chapter

Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong! - I have as much soul as you, - and full as much heart! And if God had gifted me with some beauty and much wealth, I should have made it as hard for you to leave me, as it is now for me to leave you.

Charlotte Bronte's Embodiment of Victorian English Society

Throughout the course of *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Bronte makes stark distinctions in situations among various characters that clearly expose the disgruntled nature of her society. She uses imagery to create a caricature reflective of the aspects of Victorian England that one may confer were derived from her own personal experiences and sentiments.

Among these are the people who wield power over the specific locations in which Jane lives out her life:

Gateshead- The Reeds

Lowood- Mr. Brocklehurst

Thornfield- Edward Rochester and the Gentry

Gateshead

- Jane is excluded from the Reeds' state of tranquility, specifically when she explains, "Me, she had dispensed from joining the group, saying, 'She regretted to be under the necessity of keeping me at a distance; but that until she heard from Bessie, and could discover by her own observation that I was endeavouring in good earnest to acquire a more sociable and childlike disposition, a more attractive and sprightly manner--something lighter, franker, more natural, as it were--she really must exclude me from privileges intended only for contented, happy little children" (Bronte, pg. 1).
- It is a reinforced assumption that due to Jane status as an orphan, she is troublesome, unworthy, scornful, and ultimately treacherous. Little does Mrs. Reed know that these stereotypes are what drives John Reed's hatred or disdain for Jane. Essentially, in order to fit into their understanding of the disenfranchised, the Reeds possibly unknowingly overlook Jane's innate goodness or innocence to demoralize her as this grubby, needy, parasitic leech with foul, moreso selfish intentions.
- Bronte caricatures the image of the Victorian wealthy practicing their privilege in this way, "John Reed-(...) large and stout for his age, with a dingy and unwholesome skin; thick lineaments in a spacious visage, heavy limbs and large extremities. He gorged himself habitually at table, which made him bilious, and gave him a dim and bleared eye with flabby cheeks" (Bronte, pg. 3).

 There were often depictions by liberal free-thinking dissenters of the Victorian era reflecting the image of the bloated, gluttonous, and greedy "fat cat" crony capitalist or aristocrat. This was a common demonization of the era's bourgebisie.





overview

- SOCIAL CLASS: Poor Vs Privileged Cognitive Dissonance
- Réjection/Identity:
- Gateshead No sense of identity, Blind to her own wealth, over looked
- Falling in love with a whorish man named Rochester (owner of thornfield)
- St.John >>>>

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