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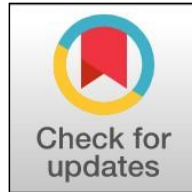
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JANE EYRE AND WIDE SARGASSO SEA'S TREATMENT OF FEMINISM AND ITS REFLECTION IN CHARACTER ANALYSIS

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“Jane Eyre” and “Wide Sargasso Sea” are regarded as the masterpieces that vividly express the elements of feminism. Before analyzing and proving this idea, it is necessary to determine and define the concept of feminism. One of the best works was Charlotte Brontë’s “Jane Eyre”. At that time, for Jane, as a member of the lowest class, she is always looked down upon by those potentates with money and power. For people like her, they have no dignity; the rich can treat them at random and need not bother to give them any esteem. But Jane Eyre never surrenders to those snobbish people who despise the poor and the weak parochially and ruthlessly. In her whole life, she plunges herself into struggling for esteem which in her mind is deserved by any human being rather than a privilege for the wealthy people. She puts all her strength to get the respect and admiration from people around. In those days of Britain, a female, like the noble Miss Ingram, is expected to seek a decent life through marriage and a wealthy husband. However, undoubtedly, it is based on the status and fortune of her family. For Jane, a plain and poor girl, how can she change her destiny and gain happiness? “Feminist once been raised: women’s status in society is defined by some special society and culture power that can be challenged and changed”. In every relationship, Jane rises from inferiority to superiority, and finally gains full independence through continuous struggle.

Jane lost her parents when she was young, and thanks to her uncle Jane could live a good life, but unfortunately her uncle died after a few years. Her aunt, Mrs. Sarah Reed, regarded Jane as a curse and her three children (John, Eliza and Georgiana) neglect and abuse Jane. They dislike Jane’s plain looks and quiet yet passionate character. These only relatives of Jane Eyre do not show any sympathy or care to this pitiful little girl, instead they always criticize and bully her. Cold and disparaging, Aunt Reed always treats Jane Eyre as an encumbrance inferior to a maid and takes her as a doll to show her hypocritical generosity. Eventually one day, little Jane had an argument with her cousin and was beaten. After being locked in a room for a night, Jane was ill and at that time, her early feminism came out. In the face of Mrs. Reed, Jane refuses to be treated as an inferior being and finally speaks out against discriminations to her with sharp and cold exposure. When Mrs. Reed reproaches Jane for telling a lie out of all reason, Jane defends herself perversely: “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 about the liar, you may give to your girl, Georgiana, for it is she who tells lies, and not I”. In other people’s opinion, Jane should be great thankful to her aunt rather than being rude. When Jane is about to leave Gateshead to the charity school, Mrs. Reed thinks she can make Jane frightened by her status and decides to give a hypocritical and sanctimonious talk to guide Jane to express gratitude in front of Mr. Lloyd, the apothecary. But Jane refuses to be this rich lady’s doll, being treated as unemotional and shameless. She retorts back straightly and powerfully: “How dare I, Mrs. Reed? How dare I? Because it is the truth. You think I had no feelings, and that I can do without one bit of love or kindness, but I can’t live so, and you have no pity. I shall remember how you push me back-roughly and violently pushed me back into the red room, and locked me up there-to my dying day. Though I was in pain, though I cried out, have mercy! Have mercy, Aunt Reed!”. Jane’s rebellion against Mrs. Reed and John represents her feminist consciousness in getting esteem from other people as a decent and respectable person. Then

little Jane was sent to Lowood boarding school where she learnt a lot and became much stronger and independence. During Jane Eyre's staying in the orphanage of Lowood, which is a benevolent institution in name, but a hell in fact, her understanding of esteem becomes deeper. She is aware of a fact that, even in the face of powerful and authoritative people like the chief inspector of this charity school, Brocklehurst, as long as her esteem and dignity hurt ruthlessly, she will never submit but rebel against it decidedly.

The wholetime spending in Thornfield is the most splendid part of the whole book. Meeting with Rochester and fell in love with him reflected the feminism in Jane and her new thoughts. Jane loves Rochester with all her heart and Rochester's status and wealth make him so high above for Jane to approach, yet she never feels herself inferior to Rochester though she is a humble family teacher. She believes they are fair and should respect each other. In fact, it is her uprightness, loftiness and sincerity that touch Rochester. Rochester feels from the bottom of his heart that Jane is the spiritual partner he always longs for. When the heroine is moved by his whole-heartedness, they fall in love deeply. But at the time of their wedding, she finds the fact that Rochester has had a legal wife. Jane feels heartbreaking on this news, and it makes her trapped in a dilemma whether to stay or to leave. She says to Rochester: "I care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself. I will keep the law given by God, sanctioned by man. I will hold to the principles received by men when I was sane, and not mad as I am now, laws and principles are not for the times when there is no temptation, they are for such moments as this when body and soul rise in mutiny against their rigor, stringent are they, inviolate they shall be." Although she had a deep affection for Rochester, she could not stand any compromise in her marriage. She is the whole one and cannot be laughed or argued by others in this aspect. She wouldn't give up her independence and self-respect. So she chose to leave her beloved one and wanted to make a new life. As the end is known to all, Jane returns to Ferndean Manor and marries Rochester. Mr. Rochester then loses sight of both eyes and disabled. But in this circumstance, Jane Eyre comes back to Mr. Rochester caring for nothing but this man. She says: "I find you lonely, I will be your companion, to read to you, to walk with you, to sit with you, to wait on you, to be eyes and hands to you. Cease to look so melancholy, my dear master; you shall not be left desolate, so long as I live". Jane Eyre does not think that she is making a sacrifice. She says: "I love the people I love is that to make a sacrifice? If so, then certainly I delight in sacrifice". In most people's eyes, nobody would like to marry a man who loses his sight and most of his wealth. But as to Jane, she is different. In her mind, pure love is the meeting of hearts and minds of two people. Jane Eyre is unique in Victorian period. As a feminist woman, she represents the insurgent women eager for esteem. Without esteem from other people, women like Jane can not get the real emancipation. The pursuit of true love is an important representation of her struggle for self-realization. Love in Jane Eyre's understanding is pure, divine and it cannot be measured by status, power or property and so on. Having experienced a helpless childhood and a miserable adolescence, she expects more than a consolable true love. She suffers a lot in her pursuit of true love. Meanwhile, she obtains it through her long and hard pursuit. During this period, Jane covered her name and wanted to make a new living. Being a teacher in a small village, she made friends with John and his sisters. Though John is a handsome guy and he proposed to Jane, she cannot accept him. This is the reflection of her iron determination in pursuing true love. In a word, she does not want an affectionless love. A decent and handsome man as John is, Jane Eyre cannot accept him because his love would be "one of duty, not of passion". She knows clearly that humiliated marriage is not true love. He makes an offer of marriage to Jane only because he thinks that Jane Eyre is a good choice for a missionary's wife. He finds Jane Eyre docile, firm and tenacious. Because he just needs this kind of assistant. Jane says if she joins St. John, she is abandoning half herself and if she goes to India, she is going to premature death. Jane Eyre insists that true love should be based on equality, mutual understanding and respect. Thus, she refuses John's proposal. Jane is in great unconformity with the social environment at that

time. She dares to fight against the conventional marriage ideas, which well reflects all feminists' voice and wish for a true love. Maybe Jane's choices are considered something shocking, but it really gives a blow to the Victorian society.

Jean Rhys' "Wide Sargasso Sea" displays many of the same feminist themes as "Jane Eyre": its emphasis on female characters, the refusal to conform, and new ideas about the woman's position in society. But "Wide Sargasso Sea" also distinguishes itself as a uniquely feminist text through its objections to Jane Eyre. Rhys gives a voice to the otherwise silent character of Bertha Rochester or Antoinette as she is called in the novel. In doing so, Wide Sargasso Sea becomes a representation of the unvoiced women throughout history. Rhys also alters the portrayal of the character of Rochester, Antoinette's husband and Jane's love interest, which is an important feminist statement. In the novel, Rochester is manipulative and controlling, and forms an opposite to Bertha's free and unrestricted nature. In other words, unlike "Jane Eyre", "Wide Sargasso Sea" presents a more post-modern form of feminism which takes into account the complexity of male-female interaction to find that efforts to transcend deep-set gender norms are nearly hopeless.

The idea of the happy romantic ending is rejected within Jean Rhys' "Wide Sargasso Sea" (1966) and Charlotte Bronte's "Jane Eyre" (1847). Each novel approaches this feminist issue in differing ways; Rhys reflects the changing status of woman and portrays Antoinette's struggle for identity within herself and within the confines of a patriarchal society, leaving her constrained and ultimately jumping to her death. Bronte, on the other hand portrays Jane as rising above societal challenges with autonomy, primarily due to her sense of faith and spirituality. This research work will look at how the protagonists, Antoinette and Jane experience life through their interactions with the world and how this contributes to the very different outcomes, both of which subvert the happy ending ideal. The primary texts as well as contemporary feminist essays will support the discussion.

Antoinette in "Wide Sargasso Sea" experiences a childhood like Jane of isolation and segregation from those around her. A strong element of competition and little value for money is visible from early on in the novel when Tia, a friend of Antoinette's challenges her to a somersault under water, "Then she bet me three of the pennies that I couldn't turn a somersault under water 'like you say you can'". When Antoinette doesn't achieve the task and comes up choking "Tia laughed and told me that it certainly look like I drown dead that time. Then she picked up the money." (Rhys, 9). As we see here, from the beginning of the novel the reader is introduced to the insecurity Antoinette feels both in herself and within life. Antoinette's isolation, rejection from others and a disregard for the value of money lays the foundation for her character to unfold; she shrugs her shoulders to Tia and says "I can get more if I want to. Antoinette's sensitivity to others and an anger which she does not know how to manage are arguably aspects learnt from her childhood that reflect her subsequent relationship.

Antoinette's relationship with her mother who is unavailable and emotionally distant create a profound sense of sadness within the little girl which in turn lead to the patterns of abandonment and vague, indirect and ambiguous communication Antoinette has with her husband: "I am not used to happiness, ' she said. 'It makes me afraid.' " Antoinette's dreamlike speak signifies her lost character and fragmented life. She keeps information from her husband which creates suspicion and incites anger in him, he questions her: - 'Is your mother alive?' - 'No, she is dead, she died.' - 'When?' - 'Not long ago.' - 'Then why did you tell me that she died when you were a child?' - 'Because they told me to say so and because it is true. She did die when I was a child. There are only two deaths, the real one and the one people know about.' The ambiguous nature of Antoinette's speech indicates that she is unsure of truth, or perhaps more accurately, untrusting of it. The space or differentiation between reality and memory is and a dependent sense of keeping everyone happy creates great confusion for herself and within the relationship. By portraying the insecure and needy side of female nature within relationships Rhys provides ground for the reader to feel both emphatic and angered by her perceived inability to be direct and to the point. Antoinette's plea for guidance from

Christophine who advises her to leave is met with a lack of courage along with some sense of security in the institution of marriage mixed with an obligation of duty, “But I cannot go. He is my husband after all”. Antoinette’s dishonesty is telling of her character and of the relationship that unfolds. Her dishonesty is mirrored by the Rochester character, who also keeps quiet and isolated, away from answering direct questions from his wife. He ponders at one point “How old was I when I learnt to hide what I felt? A very small boy”. The Rochester character also mirrors his wife’s sense of duty and obligation; when Christophine suggests him to leave Antoinette with her his anger, resentments and suspicion of her (reflecting the racist and colonial Victorian views of the time) prevent him from doing so and so he returns to England with Antoinette. The suspicions and feelings of rising resentment on both sides of the relationship are inherent in the demise of both Antoinette and the happy ending to the novel which could quite easily have played the typical romantic tale in paradise. On their return to England, Antoinette is kept in a room with Grace Poole and after the third recurring dream she jumps to her death, locked in her mind, the past and fantasy.

In sharp contrast to this, Jane in Charlotte Bronte’s “Jane Eyre” portrays Jane as clear, concise and direct. Although she has had a childhood not dissimilar to Antoinette’s she rises above life’s challenges and conducts herself with autonomy and self –assuredness. She even directly addresses the reader when deeply impassioned, “Reader! – I forgave him at the moment, and on the spot. There was such deep remorse in his eye, such true pity in his tone, such manly energy in his manner;”. Such bold speech would never cross Antoinette’s lips and reflects the characters journeys. Even when Jane is in distress and doubts her path, the marriage proposal and request to travel to India from John Rivers, she calls upon Heaven for guidance “Shew me, shew me the path!”. Jane’s trust and faith is significant to her progression through life and is reflected in her courage to follow inner guidance when against all the odds. Antoinette, in contrast is suspicious of the spiritual path and lacks any connection with God, which is shown as inhibiting her path in contrast to Jane. These two feminist novels reject the traditional happy ending and, through doing so show the reader that life is not a fairy tale. The concept that life will bring desires of love, career and family (and are ultimately what life is about) does indeed occur for Jane and a primary reason for this is portrayed in the use of her own agency, not from a lack of hard work. Jane’s connection with God, not of the religious but of her being centred and connected is referred to continually throughout the novel and is reflected by Rochester at the end; “He put me off his knee, rose, and reverently lifting his hat from his brow, and bending his sightless eyes to the earth, he stood in mute devotion “.Jane and Mr. Rochester’s mirroring faith portrays a higher love, one of mystical attributes as when Jane intuitively hears him calling to her.

Antoinette also differs from Jane Eyre who was happy to dress modestly and to not stand out in social occasions. In addition to this, Jane found no pleasure in dresses and other forms of self-adornment. Antoinette, on the other hand, finds pleasure in beauty and she relishes in the hedonic power that it brings her. Unfortunately, this also plays a part in her downfall. Unlike Jane who rejected hedonic power and was uncomfortable with Rochester’s attempts to clothe her in expensive dresses and jewels, Antoinette enjoys adorning herself: “She seemed pleased when I complimented her on her dress and told me she had it made in St Pierre, Martinique. “They call this fashion à la Josephine.” “You talk of St Pierre as though it were Paris,” I said. “But it is the Paris of the West Indies.”. Antoinette is not only pleased that Rochester complimented her but she is also aware of fashion trends and has her dresses made in the Paris of the West Indies.

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