

The Application Of Symbolism To Represent Jane's Life Status In *Jane Eyre*

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Abstract

Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre incorporates many literary devices to help illustrate meaning and themes. Of the most prominent device used throughout this novel is symbolism. The symbols used in this novel contribute greatly to the development of characters, strengthen thematic detail and foretell the plots. One of the most effective applications of symbolism in Jane Eyre represents different stages in Jane's life.

Key Words: symbolism, symbol, Jane Eyre, life

1. Introduction

Jane Eyre, a novel by Charlotte Bronte, is published in 1847. This novel still enjoys great fame and influences great people abroad and at home after being published for centuries. Through the experience of the heroine, the author tells the reader that ladies should not hope to get their security and confidence only through marriages but from their own dependence and progress. Charlotte Bronte applied many writing devices to realize her aim and symbolism is the most shining one among them. The author employed successfully the literary device of symbolism to foretell the plots and represent the different stages in Jane's life. Symbols are objects, character, figures or colors used to represent abstract ideas or concepts. C · Bronte

created many symbols in this novel such as: chair, stool, curtain, and moon, on which this present paper analyses Jane Eyre's situations, status, thoughts and the relationships between her and others in her different stages of life as well as her progress.

In Bronte's time, writers would often employ the technique of symbolism in their writing. In *Jane Eyre*, our appreciation of the characters, plots, and themes is enriched by the symbolism inherent in such narrative elements as dreams, versions, landscapes, chair, stool, place names, colors, fires, moon and so on, and the repetition of certain symbols in this novel also is conducive to its poetic quality. As a rhetorical device, symbolism contributes much to the success of *Jane Eyre*, and it also plays a fatal role in most literature works.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The definition of symbol and symbolism

Symbol is an arbitrary sign (written or printed) that has gained a great significance. According to Charters, a symbol is "anything in a story's setting, plot, or characterization that suggests an abstract meaning to the reader in addition to its literal significance"(1993). Writers often employ symbols to forecast events, suggest relationships and serve interpretation in their writing.

The emergence of symbolism came from an artistic movement in the late 19th century which tried to present abstract or mystical ideas or thoughts through the symbolic use of images (an artistic movement - a group of artists who share general principles or a specific common philosophy or aim). Symbolism, according to the Columbia encyclopedia, has the following meanings:

1. The act of symbolizing, or the state of being symbolized; as, symbolism in Christian art is the representation of truth, virtues, vices, etc., by emblematic colors, signs, and forms.
2. A system of symbols or representations.
3. The practice of using symbols, or the system of notation developed thereby.
4. A combining together of parts or ingredients.
5. The science of creeds: symbolics. (2001)

While, according to the definition from Webster, symbolism, as a unique artistic technique, has two important meanings: the first one is to interpret invisible things by applying visible symbols; the second is the connection and relation between symbols and meanings. Hence symbolism employed in literature aims to express the hidden meaning and thoughts under phenomena (1993).

2.2 The function of symbolism in literature

To understand the function of symbolism in literature, it is first helpful to comprehend the author who uses rhetoric and the art of persuasion. It is every author's job to persuade readers toward some points. Perhaps his/her job is to convince readers that his/her subject matter is authentic or that it is a more real world than fiction. In order to attract the reader's attention, writers often employ symbolism into their writing. For example, Bronte's symbolic use of curtain in her *Jane Eyre* immediately arouses readers' attention and curiosity. The readers will attempt to find out why there are so many settings of curtain occurring in the fiction and what are the meaning of the curtain and object of the writer, therefore, the writer's purpose is fully realized.

According to Griffith, “symbolism is offering the reader a concrete object that actually has a broader, more abstract meaning to the story or novel”(1992). Readers can find the laws of writers’ application of symbols to represent certain group of meanings. For examples, symbols as light, is often used to represent qualities such as purity and goodness; darkness will be employed to express evil and evil doings; specific colors, will be used to represent a multitude of emotions from love to hate; and locations are good tools to express good or bad dependent upon the author’s description of the settings.

3. The Symbols in *Jane Eyre* Representing Different Stages in Jane Eyre’s Life

3.1. The symbolic use of chair in Mrs. Reed’s home(showing discrimination) and in Thonfield (showing comfortable)

The author applies symbols in small items in the settings of Jane's life. The chair, stool and curtain play important roles in representing a progression in Jane's life from being an oppressed subordinate to being a comforter and becoming more in control. In Jane's early life, the chair does not serve as a delightful symbol for events in her life. The two instances in which this situation is most irrefutable evidence are when Jane is summoned as a subordinate by John Reed and later by Mr. Brocklehurst. In her confrontation with John, Jane says that “habitually obedient to John, I came up to his chair” and after being struck she tries to move away (Bronte, 8). During her conversation with Mr. Brocklehurst, in which he informs her that she would be sent to hell if she were to die at this moment, Jane thinks to herself that she was "wishing herself far enough away" (Bronte, 22). As Jane's life progresses, she finds herself in more comfortable situations, and the change is shown with the use of her chair. Instead of wanting to hide herself in a chair so as to avoid communicating with others, she begins to talk to others. Jane perceives in her conversation with Mrs. Fairfax when she moved her "chair a little nearer to her" (Bronte, 88). Later at Thornfield the movement of the chair symbolizes how Rochester wants to get closer to Jane. After instructing Jane not to move her chair any further from him, Rochester tells Jane to "draw your chair still a little farther forward" (Bronte, 114). Later in her stay at Thornfield, Jane is waiting for Rochester to return from a trip. During this stage of the story, Jane makes note of how the sight of the "empty chair" is unbearable (Bronte, 247). The empty chair is the symbol of how she cannot deal with life without Rochester. After finally fleeing Thornfield and arriving at her relatives' home, Jane faints but is caught by a chair placed under her (Bronte, 296). At this moment, Jane is also not strong enough to support herself but need someone’s help. And her relative supports Jane very much as the chair does when she fall. By the time Jane is reunited with Rochester, she has progressed from being a dependency to a woman in control. The progression is best symbolized by Rochester providing a chair for Jane when Jane is ill and needs care, which has changed to Jane now taking care of crippled Rochester while he waits in a chair (Bronte, 386). Jane is no longer a sheepish girl but a comforter and succor then. The application of the symbol chair perfectly shows the readers the change of Jane Eyre.

3.2 The symbolic use of stool in Lowood school (showing punishment) and in Thonfield (showing relaxation)

The stool serves practically the same purpose as the chair by showing a symbolic progression in Jane's life. Charlotte Bronte uses the stool at one point during the novel to illustrate Jane's unimportant status in the Mrs. Reed’s home by comparing the height of two stools. It is mentioned that "Georgiana sat on a high stool."

(Bronte, 25) and later in the novel it is noted that "Jane was sitting on a low stool" (Bronte, 30) while in the presence of Mrs. Reed. It also shows that Jane is inferior to the Reed family in Mrs. Reed's heart. Jane's early oppression is symbolized by the use of a stool for punishment. Bessie and Abbot station Jane on a stool by herself in the Red Room for her punishment. "And had thrust me up a stool"(Bronte, 9). Jane is once again humiliated upon a stool when Mr. Brocklehurst makes her out to be a wicked child in front of the teachers and children of Lowood. "Let her stand half an hour longer on that stool and let no one speak to her during the remainder of that day"(Bronte, 57). Eventually, the stool shows Jane's new-found comfort at Thornfield. After rescuing Rochester from the fire in his room, Jane is comforted by Rochester when he allows her to somewhat relax and rest her feet upon the stool he has provided for her. "Now place your feet on the stool, to keep them out of the wet" (Bronte, 139). So the stool shows us Jane's life procession to us clearly.

3.3 The symbolic use of curtain in Mrs. Reed's home (showing isolation and insecurity) and in Thonfield (showing security)

The curtain also shows a symbolic procession in Jane's life. C. Bronte uses the curtain to show Jane's isolation and lacking of insecurity in the early stage of her life and Jane's mature as well as gaining strength in her later stage of life. "It is well I draw the curtain, thought I, and I wished fervently he might not discover my hiding place" (Bronte,3). Jane thinks the curtain to be a safe place where she can avoid the compression. But the curtain is not safe. "She is in the window seat, to be sure, jack"(Bronte, 3). Jane is immediately caught by John Reed, which is the cause of her being driven to the red room. Our little Jane wants to find a shelter in the curtain but in vain. After year's learning in Lowood School, Jane grows mature physically and mentally. Although she also has the habit of sitting under the curtain "the crimson curtain hung before the arch" (Bronte,158), Jane goes to observe the outside world, but no longer to find a hiding place. "lady Lynn was a large and stout personage of about forty, very erect; Mrs. Colonel Rebl was less showy, but, I thought, more lady like, may had a milder and more open countenance than Blanche, softer features too"(Bronte, 161). Jane, sitting under the curtain, observes every body and comes to her own thoughts and judgment and she also works out the way to protect herself. She even predicts and evaluates Miss. Ingram and Mr. Rochester's engagement according to her careful observation under the curtain. The curtain in Thornfield, not only offers Jane a safety place but also helps her to observe the outside world. At this moment, the readers will find out that Jane Eyre is no longer the timid weak girl who always need help and protection, but a strong and confident woman who knows how to employ tools to protect herself and also communicate with the rest world. The symbolic use of the chair, stool and curtain in the novel of *Jane Eyre* successfully illustrates Jane's different stages of life and situations.

3.4 The buildings in *Jane Eyre* being used to set the stage for a certain period of Jane Eyre's life

The buildings themselves are also used to set the stage for a certain period of Jane's life. Furthermore, Jane's movement from one place of setting to another also represents a change in her way of life. Jane 's imprisonment in the red room is as a punishment given by Mrs. Reed, so the red room symbolizes Jane's futile fighting against Mrs. Reed and she could only choose to leave. But the red room can also be viewed as a symbol of what Jane must overcome in her struggles to find freedom, happiness and a sense of belonging.

In the red room Jane's position of exile and imprisonment first become clear. Although Jane is eventually freed from the room, she continues to be socially ostracized, financially trapped and excluded from love; her sense of independence and her freedom of self-expression are constantly threatened. Thus she recalls the room when she is humiliated at Lowood. She also thinks of the room in the night that she decides to leave Thornfield after Rochester has tried to persuade her to become an undignified mistress. Only when Jane gets completely financially and physically independent, could she forget the red room. When Jane stays at Lowood, she is confined to a certain way of living and not given much freedom. The high walls of Lowood enclose her and serve to confine her from the outside world as the others at Lowood restrict her. Their learning, food, clothes, haircut and behaviors are restrictedly controlled and the cost of violating the rules is heavy punishment. As Jane furthers her education, she is given more privileges and is allowed to go outside the walls in the same way that she breaks the walls of her former oppression. Jane refuses the offer of being a teacher in Lowood School any more, but wants to see the outside world and to get more freedom. Jane eventually leaves Lowood for the wide-open spaces of Thornfield. There are no walls to restrict her, as she now lives in a place that puts few restrictions upon her because Rochester gives her much freedom and room to fully develop her talents. Later in the novel, Jane finally leaves Thornfield. Rochester refers to Thornfield as a "narrow stone hell" after Jane is gone, and the description foreshadows the situation of Thornfield and its eventual burning. In Rochester's heart, Jane is like an angel while himself is a devil, so he must bear the suffering like the burning phoenix could he reunion with Jane. According to Harris, when Jane returns to Thornfield, she discovers that both the building and Mrs. Rochester were destroyed in the fire. Harris also notes the walls of the building that were keeping Jane and Rochester apart are no more. Just as the walls are no longer separating Jane and Rochester, Bertha is also gone and cannot keep them apart. The setting is not the only outlet for symbolism in Jane's life, for nature plays a part also.

3.5 The symbolic use of weather and events occurring in nature to illustrate Jane's life

Both the weather and events occurring in nature are used to illustrate Jane's life. Weather commonly coincides with the situation. The bad weather in Gateshead predicates Jane's life here: without love and bad treatment. "But since the dinner the cold winter wind had brought with its clouds so somber and a rain so penetrative that further outdoor exercise that day was out of question" (Bronte, 1). Just later in that day, Jane is punished by Mrs. Reed and imprisoned in the red room. During her first night stay at Lowood, Jane notes that the water kept in pitchers for washing had frozen from the cold wind that had come from the change in weather. The change of harsh weather is much like the change to the cold reception she began her first day at Lowood, and predicts her further life here will just be like living in the cold hell. When Jane's stay at Thornfield was at its merriest, she noted the beautiful spring weather. Wells notes that at the acceptance of Rochester's proposal, the "foul weather" contradicts the current mood of the characters (2001). The harsh symbols from nature, such as the storms and lightening, are somewhat used as warnings to Jane about accepting Rochester's proposal. Since Rochester is already married, the splitting of the chestnut tree is a foreshadowing of how they will be separated later at their wedding.

The moon also plays a part in symbolizing Jane and her relationship with Rochester. During her stay at Thornfield, the moon is not around, for she still feels lonely at this time; however, when Rochester arrives and meets Jane, the moon appears and shines brightly. They are in the procession of falling in love with each

other .The moon brings light to the sky in the same way that Rochester eventually brings happiness to Jane's life. After Jane accepts Rochester's marriage proposal, she notes that "the moon had not yet set, and we were all in shadow; I could scarcely see my master's face, near as I was" (Bronte, 225). The moon's shadow on Rochester's face is symbolic of how he prevents Jane from seeing the secret of his marriage to Bertha. When Jane finally goes on a trip to find Rochester, she describes the evening as having "characteristics of a sad sky, cold gale, and continued, small penetrating rain" (Bronte, 378). This type of weather helps describe how she feels during her life journey without Rochester until, this moment, when she finds him. All those weather and events happened in nature vividly illustrates Jane Eyre' life procession to the readers.

4. Conclusion

Symbolism, subtly but also obviously, can be found throughout the entire novel. Though the meaning of the symbols may not be noticed and understood upon the first reading, they remain a fatal aspect of this novel. Learning how the symbols represent the different stages of Jane's life helps a reader better understand how her life progresses. The continuous use of the same symbols provides a consistency that can help a reader notice how changes progress and it also helps the reader to understand Jane's status and thoughts in every stages of her life, which help the readers to comprehend what the writer really wants to convince in this novel. The author attempts to interpret the readers only when you become an independent being can you enjoy the fair status in a romantic relationship. The symbols such as fire, moon and rain also contribute to the poetic quality of the novel. Without symbolism and its complexity, the novel, *Jane Eyre*, would suffer an eclipse just as Jane Eyre without her noble spirit.

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