
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

From Rags to Riches: A Symbolic Depiction of Jane's Journeys to Self-Discovery in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*

SEKONGO Ouana Alassane

Research scholar, Université Alassane Ouattara, Bouaké, Côte d'Ivoire

Corresponding Author: SEKONGO Ouana Alassane, **E-mail:** ouanaalassane@gmail.com

| ABSTRACT

This paper addresses Jane's quest for a new identity in Victorian patriarchal culture as portrayed in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Going on a pilgrimage to self-discovery, Jane challenges the societal norms of the time and changes her social status through strong subversive acts. Though Victorian women could make few choices as far as their living conditions were concerned, it is seen that Jane's symbolic journeys in this novel help her overthrow these social constraints and create a brighter future for herself, especially thanks to the education and job opportunities she benefits from along the process to her self-realisation at the time. Relying on Judith Butler's gender performativity theory, this study demonstrates how Jane significantly acts in the novel and takes charge of her destiny against societal expectations of the time. In addition to the aforementioned theoretical perspective, textual analysis also served as a method used to select salient passages from the novel in order to illustrate the heroine Jane's journeys to self-discovery in her patriarchal society. The study finally revealed that Jane has created a new personality thanks to her significant travels undertaken in quest for a better life. It has also been found that Jane has gained both financial and emotional security through her pilgrimage to self-fulfilment in the gender-biased society in which she lives.

Cet article aborde la quête de Jane pour une identité dans la culture patriarcale victorienne telle que décrite dans *Jane Eyre* de Charlotte Brontë. Partant en pèlerinage à la découverte de soi, Jane remet en question les normes sociétales de l'époque et change son statut social à travers des actes forts et subversifs. Bien que les femmes aient pu faire peu de choix en ce qui concerne leurs conditions de vie, on voit que les voyages symboliques de Jane dans ce roman l'aident à renverser ces contraintes sociales et à se créer un avenir meilleur notamment grâce à l'éducation et aux opportunités d'emploi dont elle bénéficie jusqu'à sa réalisation de soi à cette époque. En s'appuyant sur la théorie de la performativité de genre de Judith Butler, cette étude démontre comment Jane agit de manière significative dans le roman et prend en main son destin à l'encontre des attentes sociétales de l'époque. En plus de la perspective théorique susmentionnée, l'analyse textuelle a également servi de méthode pour sélectionner des passages saillants du roman afin d'illustrer le pèlerinage de Jane vers la découverte de soi dans sa société patriarcale. L'étude a finalement révélé que Jane s'est créée une nouvelle personnalité grâce à ses nombreux voyages entrepris en quête d'une vie meilleure. Il a également été découvert que Jane a acquis une sécurité financière et émotionnelle grâce à son pèlerinage pour son épanouissement personnel dans la société sexiste dans laquelle elle vit.

| KEYWORDS

Identity, Victorian patriarchal culture, self-discovery, journeys, gender performativity

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1. Introduction

Women's quest for new identities in society is a central preoccupation for scholars in general but more specifically in literature. For instance, during the Victorian age, women were not allowed to work outside the private sphere

because they were considered irrational, emotional, and weak compared to their male counterparts as G. Francis (2015, p. 19) accurately notes, "During the Victorian age, women were considered inferior to men: they were not entitled to vote or study at university, and there were few occupations open to them. Once they were married, all their wealth became their husband's, and they had no rights over their children or property." Yet, in order to fight against gender inequality and give strength and voice to the powerless female individuals in society, women writers like Charlotte Bronte shape fascinating narrators in their novels which strongly claim their rights and social inclusion as L. S. Mary (1944, p. 176) remarkably attests that:

Victorian feminists strongly denounced the presumption that a husband had the right to control his wife's body. They appealed to the respect for individual autonomy upon which British law presumably rested when they insisted that while marriage obligations which restricted the freedom of both husbands and wives, these obligations had to be mutual and reciprocal and could not be taken to include the right to physically control, chastise or coerce one's spouse.

Generally, men are perceived as the most powerful and creative individuals to the detriment of women in society. Nevertheless, in *Jane Eyre* novel, Charlotte Bronte provides us with a witty female narrator, namely Jane, who goes against all forms of discrimination and shapes her own destiny. In this light, the following interrogation is worthwhile: in what ways does the protagonist, Jane, challenge Victorian social norms and change her identity? How does she achieve self-fulfilment in her gender-based society? This study claims that women can change their destinies when they strongly rise against social injustice and struggle for equality with men. It specifically aims to show how the unusual narrator, Jane, boldly breaks down the chains of patriarchy in Victorian society and creates conditions in which she succeeds in improving her social status at the time.

Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* is a bildungsroman¹ that deals with the life of the eponymous narrator, Jane, who moves from a helpless position to a famous status in Victorian culture. As an orphan in the opening of the novel, Jane is neglected and brutalised by her stepfamily, the Reeds, namely John Reed and Mrs Reed at Gateshead. Yet her positive mind and fighting spirits help her resist injustice and focus on her dreams to achieve self-realisation in her gender-based society. Going on a pilgrimage (from Gateshead to Moor House) to self-discovery, Jane faces several challenges and overcomes them to survive in life. This proves that she is a powerful woman because she never shivers in front of figures of authority. Because of her boldness, she has been able to achieve her dreams in society; that is, she moved from the lower class to the upper class thanks to the wealth she had achieved throughout her journeys to independence.

This paper is concerned with the struggle of the heroine, Jane, for social justice and equality with men in Victorian society. It demonstrates how Jane bravely counters gender stereotypes and changes her destiny against Victorian societal expectations. There have been several critical studies on *Jane Eyre* novel in the last decades. While most of these studies tend to focus on the sufferings of the orphaned narrator Jane in Victorian culture, this study seeks to shed new light on the novel by showing how Jane questions the customs and patriarchal systems of the time, resulting in her growth and emancipation. For instance, in her article entitled "Jane Eyre, from Governess to Girl Bride", G. Esther (2005, p. 856) has shown that "Though Jane Eyre for a time is raised among the middle class with the Reeds, they make her different social class position clear". Going along with Godfrey, P. Nancy (1977, p. 400), in her work entitled "Resistance, Rebellion, and Marriage: The Economics of Jane Eyre", has declared that "The immediate origin of Jane's oppression is young John Reed, who spells out for her the basis for the contempt in which she is held". In a similar fashion, in her article entitled "Charlotte Bronte's Circumvention of Patriarchy: Gender, Labour and Financial Agency in Jane Eyre", O. Lauren (2013, p. 54) has added that "Jane's ultimate marriage and pregnancy seemingly diminish her desire for independence and her resistance to socially constructed norms of appropriate femininity." Though all these findings are illuminating, it should not be neglected that Jane is a young woman who yearns for full independence in her oppressive Victorian culture which mainly privileges men over women. Thus, it seems appropriate to align with S. Kagal's (2014, p. 24) argument that:

¹ A 'bildungsroman' is a coming-of-age novel in which the protagonist usually moves from nothing to achieve fame, especially through overcoming obstacles along his or her journeys to self-fulfilment. This type of novel first developed out of the nineteenth century to the present era and it is now most common with female writers of all time.

Jane Eyre, as a story depicts a heartfelt journey of a girl, who craves for freedom and identity, struggles hard to find it and in the end accomplishes her real identity, freedom and fortitude. Jane's movement from Gateshead to Lowood and from Thornfield to Morton, are testing grounds for her individual assertion. She is left on her own resources, devoid of status and money, to fend for herself. It is by this way, that a new woman comes up and shines.

In light of this, the purpose of this study is to demonstrate the ways in which the heroine, Jane, manages to shatter Victorian class structure and give meaning to her life regardless of the laws that restrict women's activism at the time. It especially attempts to show that despite being a minority character, the protagonist Jane bravely works hard and shapes a new identity for herself by raising from the lower social class to integrate the upper one against all societal restrictions placed upon women during the Victorian age.

This study employs Judith Butler's gender performativity theory to examine the protagonist, Jane's activism against the oppressive Victorian social systems. In her essay entitled "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory", Butler claims that "the body becomes its gender through a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time [. . .] one might try to reconceive the gendered body as the legacy of sedimented acts rather than a predetermined or foreclosed structure, essence or fact, whether natural, cultural or linguistic." This signifies that a person becomes what he or she decides to be in society and that a person's acts should never be pre-determined by others. Most remarkably, in his work entitled "Judith Butler's Theory of Performativity", S. Manju (2022, p. 1981) re-interprets Butler's theory of gender performativity by declaring that "being born male or female does not determine behaviour [. . .] people learn to behave in particular ways to fit into society. The idea of gender is an act or performance. This act is the way a person walks, talks, dresses, and behaves [. . .] what society regards as a person's gender is just a performance made to please social expectations and not a true expression of the person's gender identity." Going from this premise, it can be assumed that all individuals are the authors of their own existence. Thus, it can then be understood why the heroine, Jane, challenges Victorian gender norms and re-invents herself in a culture in which people from lower classes, especially women, are thrown upon by members of the upper classes. This study consists of two sections. The first section is concerned with the disruption of Victorian social norms: A token of the heroine's quest for space, and the second one explores the Victorian ideal of femininity versus Jane's desire for growth.

2. Disruption of Victorian Social Norms: A Token of the Heroine's Quest for Space

2.1 Rejecting the Angelic Role: Jane's Search for Freedom

Right in the opening of the novel, it can be discovered that though Jane is ostensibly portrayed as a misfortunate child, she refuses to be treated as an inferior by the upper class members of the Reed family. Several times through the Gateshead episode, the Reeds remind her that "[she is] a dependent, [she has] no money, [her] father left [her] none; [she] ought to beg, and not to live here with gentlemen's children" (Jane Eyre, 3)². Yet through her resistance to this ill-treatment, she seems to prove that one can move from nothing to reach the top in life. Her belief is subsequently materialised by her constant desire for "reading" (JE, 3) books. Her act of reading not only serves as a source of refuge but also an occasion for her to escape domestic chores at Gateshead Hall. Through the act of reading books from her aristocratic stepfamily's bookcase, Jane acquires knowledge, which allows her to grow and improve her social condition as C. Dayal (2017, p. 80) persuasively advances that:

Strong-willed protagonist, Jane decides to drive her journey in her own way. She does not agree to be stereotyped herself with the traditional stigma of 'angel in the house'. In this process of development, she has to confront numerous ordeals in every phase of life. She fights against all the trials and tribulations of life which the patriarchal society set on her way to ensnare her in their net of domination [. . .] she has her independent will to fly.

Additionally, it is arguable that Jane attains a sense of growth and fulfilment in the Lowood episode because it is through this space that she reveals her full potential to the world. Clearly, had she remained at Gateshead, where

² Hereafter, any quotations from Jane Eyre novel will be presented by this acronym 'JE' followed by the page numbers.

she has been beaten and humiliated by her aristocratic stepfamily, she may not have acted upon her dreams. It is certainly the new young women that Jane meets at Lowood school that inspire her to develop hope and confidence in herself for working hard to change her status. Throughout this episode, it is noticed that though the school atmosphere is unfavourable due to the cruelty of the patriarchal figure Mr Brocklehurst, Jane still remains focused on her purpose to succeed in life. By acknowledging her own efforts, the narrator Jane herself affirms that:

I [. . .] set to work afresh, resolved to pioneer my way through every difficulty: I tailored hard, and my success was proportionate to my efforts; my memory, not naturally tenacious, improved with practice; exercise sharpened my wits; in a few weeks I was promoted to a higher class; in less than two months I was allowed to commence French and drawing. I learned the first two tenses of the verb *Etre*, and sketched my first cottage. (JE, 41)

This excerpt throws light on Jane's ability to train hard in order to succeed in life. As an orphan child, she seems to understand that there is no other way for her to support herself than working hard. This explains why she puts her heart into what she does to move forward. This is in accordance with E. G. Emma's (2016, p. 8) observation that:

The significance of Jane's formal education is enormous in that it instils in her an unshakable sense of work. Her academic accomplishments are Jane's first encounter with her innate capabilities and, by extension, her innate humanity. Secure in this knowledge, Jane is able to resist the influences of others and her 'inner education' on her own terms, trusting that the lessons that she learns and the beliefs that she forms will be right for her.

2.2 Representation of Jane as a Passionate Female Figure

In this novel, it can be found that the heroine, Jane, is a woman who fights against injustice and discrimination in her community. For her, all individuals deserve equal treatment in the society. For instance, when she arrives at Lowood, she instantly becomes infuriated with the way her fellow schoolgirls are brutalised there. To change this dreadful condition in which it is hard for young pupils to learn and grow, Jane thus stimulates her faithful friend Helen Burns to fight wicked people through the following famous announcement:

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 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. (JE, 31)

This passage clearly delineates Jane's search for a fair community in which people can all work and look for their well-being. Most remarkably, Jane's strong feminist ideologies help her disrupt Victorian gender roles' expectations and improve her life. Accordingly, A. A. Hayfaa and A. F. Nadia (2022, p. 1880) admit that "Through this novel, Charlotte wanted to create a 'new woman' to be strong; courageous to defend herself, fight for her right, and to be independent."

What is more, in this narrative, Jane's strong desire for happiness seems to be emphasised. As a matter of fact, when she graduates from Lowood school and begins serving there as a teacher, she subsequently realises that she is underpaid by the crook director, Mr Brocklehurst. Under such circumstances, she thus decides to work elsewhere in order to possibly increase her monthly income. She declares that, "Any one may serve: I have served here eight years; now all I want is to serve elsewhere. Can I not get so much of my own will? Is not the thing feasible? Yes—the end is not so difficult; if I had only a brain active enough to ferret out the means of attaining it" (JE, 49). This denotes her great passion for fame at a time when women were pushed backward by Victorian laws and customs. In doing so, she thus bridges the gap between the lower and upper classes as G. Esther (2005, p. 857) underlines that "Jane's advancement from her position as a teacher at Lowood to private governess signifies an

important development in the text's subversion of gender since governesses served as a hole in the invisible wall between working-class and middle-class gender identities."

2.3 Resisting Victorian Rigid Class Structure: A Symbol of Jane's Empowerment

In this bildungsroman narrative, what mostly seems to be striking about the protagonist, Jane, is her ability to challenge figures of authority and make her decisions prevail. Throughout the story, there are several scenes in which she defies the major male characters ranking in the upper class and achieves her goals. For instance, in Thornfield episode, she emphasises that she is not Edward Rochester's slave but rather his equal. She vehemently tells him that:

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. I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, nor even of mortal flesh;—it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God's feet, equal,—as we are! (JE, 150)

This excerpt best illustrates why when the aristocratic figure, Mr Rochester, once attempts to violate Jane's rights and use her in his guise, she rebels and demands respect from him despite the fact that she has been employed by him. Once again, this proves how she seeks to escape her inferior status in Victorian culture as she claims equality with upper class figures like Mr Rochester. Without a doubt, her numerous journeys, from Gateshead to Lowood and from Lowood to Moor House through Thornfield Hall, surely provided her with more experience and knowledge to navigate her own life, notwithstanding the fact that very few women of the age could dare challenge the Byronic³ figure Rochester. Through this bold central female character, Charlotte Bronte possibly seeks to break down social inequalities between men and women and make both genders stand on an equal footing. In this respect, R. Poonguzhali and T. Tara (2020, p. 47) observe that "Jane surpasses the entire nobleman in the novel to become the character with the truest individuality. The talent to deal with any situation is obtainable to her with elegance and distinction. She becomes a heroine in the true sense that she not only saves herself multiple times, but she saves her hero from a life of distressed solitude."

Furthermore, it is remarkable that Jane's outstanding knowledge allows her to enjoy her rights to inheritance and property, which were long denied to most women in Victorian society. In fact, in the Moor House episode, St John Rivers, one of the most powerful male characters in the novel, is aware that he cannot vie with Jane in terms of intelligence. This compels him to grant her the right to inherit her deceased uncle Eyre from Madeira, who has left her twenty pounds. Undoubtedly, if Jane had been an uneducated woman, St John might surely try to rob her of her legal property; yet her sense of awareness of social issues drives him to relinquish her due. Through the following passage, St John Rivers explains Jane's entitlement to the legacy:

My mother's name was Eyre; she had two brothers; one a clergyman, who married Miss Jane Reed, of Gateshead; the other, John Eyre, Esq., merchant, late of Funchal, Madeira. Mr Briggs, being Mr. Eyre's solicitor, wrote to us last August to inform us of our uncle's death, and to say that he had left his property to his brother the clergyman's orphan daughter, overlooking us, in consequence of a quarrel, never forgiven, between him and my father. He wrote again a few weeks since, to intimate that the heiress was lost, and asking if we knew anything of her. A name casually written on a slip of paper has enabled me to find her out. You know the rest. (JE, 229)

No doubt, with her inheritance, Jane is no longer seen as a poor and helpless orphaned girl but as a wealthy woman. This allows her to rank herself in the upper class; that is, she ultimately gets full independence and equality

³ In the glossary of his study guide on *Jane Eyre*, G. Francis (2015, p. 57) explains the term Byronic thus "Like Lord Byron; i.e. romantic, passionate, immoral, sexually promiscuous in some contexts."

with her former employer, Edward Rochester. Under such circumstances, it can, therefore, be inferred that the protagonist, Jane, valuably moves from rags-to-riches because of her outstanding wealth achieved through both her hardworking and inheritance. This accounts for O. Lauren's (2013, p. 54) observation that:

Jane's inheritance, a necessary rhetorical implementation on Charlotte Bronte's part, provides her with the luxury to negotiate her own interpretation of the social conventions of marriage and motherhood. Financial autonomy allows Jane to view romantic involvement as a potentially equitable partnership rather than as an opportunity for social and monetary security; in order to grant Jane a truly egalitarian relationship with Rochester, Charlotte Bronte simultaneously relieves Rochester of his corporeal masculinity, effectively elevating Jane to the position of head of the household.

3. Victorian Ideal of Femininity versus Jane's Desire for Growth

3.1 Jane's Lust for Profession over Marriage: A Token of Gender Roles Subversion

At the opening of the novel, Jane is shown willingly choosing to be a schoolgirl rather than a servant or housewife. This is materialised by the fact that when the wicked Reed family marginalises her and puts her aside, she cleverly resorts to reading. When discovered through her act of reading books, she is punished and prevented by the cruel and heartless boy John Reed, who tells her that:

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 how 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. (JE, 3)

Despite being warned, Jane perseveres in the process of working to achieve her goals. Her bravery soon results in her expulsion from Gateshead to Lowood school, where she happens to sharpen her knowledge and begin to support herself financially. She reveals that "The school, thus improved, became a truly useful and noble institution in time. I remained an inmate of its walls, after its regeneration, for eight years: six as a pupil, and two as a teacher; and in both capacities, I bear my testimony to its value and importance" (JE, 48). Thus, about Jane's restlessness and unsettlement for growth, B. Trish (2017) explains that while each stop on the protagonist's journey provides a locus for personal growth, her persistent mobility reinforces and extends her agency throughout the novel, allowing her to challenge class and gender expectations and repeatedly improve her circumstances.

Additionally, it is striking that through the Moor House episode, Jane boldly refuses to be St John's wife because she realises that she may actually lose her power in such an enterprise. As she is accustomed to working hard, she is looking for a position as a schoolmistress to meet her own needs instead of relying on the Rivers' provisions. Plainly, St John does not truly love Jane. All he wants is to use her as a tool to achieve his evangelical mission in India. He tells her that "God and nature intended you for missionary's wife. It is not personal but mental endowments they have given you: you are formed for labour, not for love. A missionary's wife you must—shall be. You shall be mine: I claim you—not for my pleasure, but for my Sovereign's service" (JE, 240); yet, on this occasion, Jane happens to uncover his evil intention, causing her to be aware of him as she responds that "I scorn your idea of love, I could not help saying, as I rose up and stood before him, leaning my back against the rock. I scorn the counterfeit sentiment you offer: yes, St John, and I scorn you when you offer it" (JE, 244). From this passage, it is conspicuous that Jane senses the danger that lies in marrying St John. To her, marrying St John Rivers amounts to giving up on her personal ambitions, dreams, or professional goals since she will have to remain in the house, thereby relinquishing the public sphere as R. Poonguzhali and T. Tara (2020, p. 47) uphold that:

Jane knows to herself to consign herself to fate that does not agree with her physically or spiritually. Jane knows her abilities and she is able to see St John for who he truly is. Her past encounters with pretenders

and liars and her experience with equality give her strong missiles with which she can defend herself and her honor against any man who might try to suppress her. St John will not be successful because he is not truthful and Jane, it seems, despises hypocrisy more than something else.

3.2 Travelling as a Representation of Jane's Self-Actualisation

In this novel, it is seen that the protagonist, Jane, acts as an independent woman. She is, throughout the story, dynamic; that is, she is not static like most of the female characters. Remarkably, it appears that the more she changes environments in the story, the more opportunities or chances she creates for herself. An instance is that when she arrives at Lowood, she benefits from a formal education that few women of the Victorian era could get as she acknowledges that:

During [. . .] eight years [at Lowood] my life was uniform: but not unhappy, because it was not inactive. I had the means of an excellent education placed within my reach; a fondness for some of my studies, and a desire to excel in all, together with a great delight in pleasing my teachers, especially such as I loved, urged me on: I availed myself fully of the advantages offered me. In time I rose to be the first girl of the rest of the class; then I was invested with the office of teacher; which I discharged with zeal for two years: but at the end of that time I altered. (JE, 48)

The passage clearly sheds light on the wide range of possibilities that Jane's journeys offer her. The more she wanders around, the more enlightened she becomes, and it becomes quite difficult for male oppressors like Mr Brocklehurst to obstruct her path to self-realisation as F. Anette (2020, p. 77) argues that:

Jane's travels are caused by stringent necessity rather than the prospect of social enjoyments at public assemblies, dinner parties and balls. Neither Gateshead Hall, which is her aunt's house, and where she lives the first ten years of her life, or Lowood are especially kind to young Jane. Jane cannot lean on trusting and loving companions [. . .] This is why her journeys are motivated either by despair or by the necessity of a change.

In addition, Jane behaves more like a diplomatic woman than functioning as a domestic figure; a role which she abhors throughout the novel as she claims right at the opening of the story that "I could not see how poor people had the means of being kind; and then to learn to speak like them, to adopt their manners, to be uneducated, to grow like one of the poor women I saw sometimes nursing their children or washing their clothes at the cottage doors of the village of Gateshead: no I was not heroic enough to purchase liberty at the price of caste" (JE, 11). This declaration incisively shows that Jane is an ambitious woman. Unlike many women of the time, she has big dreams to achieve instead of pleasing others through blind obedience. She seems to uphold the view that all human beings are equal and, as such, they should be free to explore the world. This internal belief surely plays a vital role in her capacity to struggle for change. It is not surprising that she is, throughout the story, presented as a person who desires a more respectable position in society just as men. Throughout her life, Jane always yearns for more, and this attitude seems to have helped her transcend the social boundaries in such a way that she is able to decide on her lot against social expectations or norms of the time as A. Nayef (2018, p. 45) remarks that "She [Jane] realizes that her options are limited and sets out compensating for her poverty with hard work, serious resolve and trying her best to maintain and protect her dignity. She understands that poverty is a disabling force that prevents people from fulfilling their potential."

3.3 From Lower to Upper Class: A Symbol of Jane's Transcendence

In this coming-of-age narrative, it is noticeable that the heroine, Jane, seems to climb the social ladder through her hard work. In fact, unlike most of the female characters portrayed in the novel, Jane appears to be a businesswoman because she is keen to undertake activities to guarantee her well-being rather than serving men in the private sphere. This certainly explains why she is unsettled. Throughout the novel, she develops as a nomadic person in a quest for wealth, happiness, justice, and prosperity. Through Lowood scene, she declares that:

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 had courage to go forth into its expanse, to seek real knowledge of life amidst its perils [. . .] I desired liberty; for liberty I gasped; for liberty I uttered a prayer. (JE, 49)

In this regard, Jane seems to have reached her goals in the end, as she practically serves as a teacher, governess, and schoolmistress. These non-traditional roles played by the heroine surely bounce her from the lower class to the upper one. Unlike most Victorian women who were only condemned to get married and serve their husbands in the private sphere, Jane is cast out differently because she is both a passionate and ambitious woman as G. Esther (2005, pp. 857-858) convincingly puts it that:

As a governess, Jane bridges the gap between the dangerous androgyny of working-class homogeneity and the fragile stability of middle-class separate spheres [. . .] Jane is painfully aware of her poor circumstances and the tremendous improvement a situation as a governess would be over her position at Lowood, a step that doubles her salary and raises her social rank considerably.

Furthermore, it is of utmost importance to underline that in this novel, the protagonist, Jane, also functions as an exceptional woman. Contrary to most women of the age, Jane prospects her marriage with an upper class man named Edward Rochester. This demonstrates the level of freedom she enjoys over men at this age since women cannot freely choose their life-partners. Besides, this has perhaps been something she has achieved because of her economic empowerment. With her self-made money and inheritance, it is clear that Jane can make such choices since people with financial power usually rule the world. Remarkably, because of her financial empowerment, Jane is able to fix up her wedding day rather than leaving this task for the man Rochester to perform as she states, "Reader, I married him" (JE, 270). This sentence denotes Mr Rochester's powerlessness before Jane. After being burnt by the fire lit by his first wife, Bertha Mason, Rochester becomes crippled and is unable to guide himself. This condition surely leads him to be dependent on Jane, and they both stand as equals. The fact that Jane marries an upper class man lifts her from the lower class to the upper one. Initially, as a lower class woman, she might be expected to find a suitor corresponding to her status when considering Victorian marriage laws of the time; yet both her passionate nature, hardworking and her legacy help her subvert the gender norms and climb the social ladder as O. Lauren (2013, p. 55) asserts that:

After receiving her inheritance, Jane [. . .] is no longer dependent on the provisions of men and is able to seek creative and intellectual fulfillment outside the watchful eye of her provider. By eliminating Jane's financial need, Charlotte is able to create a female character whose personal enterprise is translated into consummate awareness of identity, romantic agency, and literary autonomy.

4. Conclusion

In this study, it has been proven that the protagonist, Jane, is a young woman who brilliantly educates herself and travels around to fight against injustice and discrimination between men and women in Victorian society. Though she originates from a lower class family, she works hard to improve her social position, thus proving to the world that any individual is responsible for his or her destiny in society. This confirms Judith Butler's view that gender is not static but changes over time through the repetition of individual acts or performances. Throughout her pilgrimage to self-discovery, Jane faces several setbacks, but she manages to overcome them in order to achieve her dreams of education and independence. After defying the aristocratic family members at the opening of the novel, Jane embarks on her symbolic journeys, which ultimately result in her happiness and growth at Moor House since she becomes a wealthy woman. Under such circumstances, she thus rises from the lower class to the upper one. Besides, it has also been discovered that she gets married to her own chosen man; an act which was not obvious for women at the time because marriage, as an institution, was mostly forced upon most of them. Thus, it should be emphasised that through the representation of the heroine Jane's bravery against illegal laws of Victorian society, Charlotte Bronte surely projects seeds of hope, happiness, and the possibility for women to fend for

themselves alongside their male counterparts. It can, therefore, be maintained that the protagonist, Jane, epitomises the prototype of the new woman; that is, the fully emancipated female figure in her society. The limitation of this study lies in the fact that it has only focused on the experiences of an individual female character's struggle for self-discovery in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, while there are several other female characters in the novel, such as Miss Temple, Diana, and Mary Rivers whose actions are also representative of female empowerment in the society. Thus, in an attempt to build on this study, future research might explore the question of female leadership by delving deeply into Brontë's portrayal of a myriad of dynamic female characters in her novel.

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