

On Nature Imagery and the Heroine's Growth in *Jane Eyre*

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Abstract

Jane Eyre is a masterpiece written by Charlotte Bronte. It is an autobiographical work. The novel takes the life of the orphan Jane Eyre as the main line, shows the rough life experience of the heroine Jane Eyre, and successfully portrays brave female imagery who dares to fight, love and hate. It expresses the dissatisfaction and struggle of the author as a woman against the social phenomenon that women have always been in a subordinate position in society at that time. When the author created *Jane Eyre*, the wave of the Industrial Revolution made Britain one of the world's leading industrial powers. With the development of heavy industry, the natural environment has been destroyed. At the same time, women could do fewer and fewer jobs, and they had to rely on men economically. This paper tries to explain the critical role played by natural imagery in *Jane Eyre* in the process of the heroine's growth. This paper is composed of four sections: the first section introduces the writing intention of the thesis, the background of *Jane Eyre* and the significance of the research; The second section expounds on the research achievements of the novel at home and abroad; The third section discusses the natural imagery in the novel, and discusses the influence of Nature imagery on the growth of the heroine Jane Eyre; The forthsection is the conclusion, which summarizes the previous chapters and emphasizes the practical significance of this article again, especially the importance of correctly establishing harmony between man and nature, men and women..

Keywords

Jane Eyre, Nature imagery, Growth.

1. Introduction

Jane Eyre (1847) is Charlotte Bronte's most famous novel. It is a realistic novel with romantic overtones. Researchers from various countries have interpreted the book from multiple angles and themes, such as Characters, lyrical language features, women's emancipation thoughts, and so on. In April 2020, China's Ministry of Education also included *Jane Eyre* in the primary and secondary school reading guide. *Jane Eyre* was created after the first industrial Revolution. When England was at the height of the Industrial revolution and a golden age of economic culture, with an economy that accounted for 70% of the world, during this period, the UK was one of the world's leading industrial powerhouses, However, British women's status has not changed. Still subordinate and dependent. At that time, women who worked as writers were considered to have violated proper femininity and were fiercely attacked by men. Therefore, the works of Charlotte's three sisters were all published under masculine pseudonyms, which shows what kind of dilemma female writers faced at that time. Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* was written in this context. The theme discussed by *Jane Eyre* is profound and thought-provoking, and its influence is cross-border. Charlotte Bronte, who is good at observing human society, pays close attention to the relationship between women and nature and women themselves.

More importantly, ecological feminism theory provides readers different perspectives to understand Jane Eyre. This paper explains the important role of natural imagery in Jane Eyre in the process of the heroine's female consciousness growth.

2. Literature Review

Since its publication, *Jane Eyre* has been hotly discussed by many scholars at home and abroad. To begin with, in 1974, the French scholar Francois d' Eaubonne (1974, p. 10) wrote the book *Le Feminisme ou la mort*. In this book, she first put forward the term "eco-feminism". The word feminism in the book combined with the expression of socialist thought, mainly to reveal a close relationship between nature and women and to express the rule of women and nature in history, experience, theory, and symbolism. There is an important connection. Ecofeminists believe that men oppress women and nature in a male-dominated world, and there is a close connection and closeness between women and nature. In the world of sexism, men regard society as a hunting ground, and all kinds of resources in nature are the prey they long for. Women do not think so. They believe they should live in harmony with nature and protect nature to form a harmonious atmosphere. Feminist ecologism, it is strongly opposed to the views of male supremacy, women and nature being inferior, and men dominating women and nature. In the view of feminists, there is no hierarchy between men, women, and nature, but they are equal and friendly to each other. They are opposed to male oppression, the bondage of women and nature, the idea of male supremacy, and anthropocentrism. They hope to build a harmonious world of equality and friendly coexistence between men and women, men and nature, and women and nature.

Secondly, Mika Mericle (1993, p. 47) pointed out Jane Eyre displayed important feminist themes and Jane Eyre's feminism is inseparable from the background of the Victorian era. In the Victorian age, Britain was moving relentlessly toward the heading of getting to be Europe's most steady and affluent nation. Amid the mechanical insurgency, the railway's age, steam motors were utilized in mines, manufacturing plants, and ships. Little towns were starting to swell into smoky centers of the fabricating industry. All this was taking put beneath a government and governing body that was still barely confined to the advantaged few, who were well off by birth or getting to be well off in commerce. Laborers were being unreasonably treated without change; ladies laborers were moreover ill-treated and come up short on, whereas children were regularly exhausted in terrible conditions. Jane Eyre, as typical of the Victorian, embodies the characteristics of the Times.

Thirdly, Margaret McFadden (1996, p. 44) believed that in the era of Jane Austen, lady's social status was very low and they couldn't reach economical independent. Women feel dissatisfied with their current lives but lack the ability to fight. This was intensified by infectious diseases caused by environmental pollution. In the novel, faced with an outbreak of infectious disease, early Victorian Britain lacked the means to respond and the measures to prevent it. The orphans at Lowood were malnourished and unfit to cope with infectious diseases. At the same time, crowded classrooms and dormitories are more conducive to developing infectious diseases, so in a short period, the whole school turned into a hospital.

To sum up, industrialization in Victorian Britain is like a double-edged sword, promoting social development and economic progress and producing a series of environmental pollution problems. In the face of these problems, the British government changed from the original "laissez-faire" to intervention and governance. It issued a series of decrees and regulations, thus raising the whole society's attention.

3. Nature Imagery and the Heroine's Growth in Jane Eyre

3.1. Overview of Nature Imagery

"Landscape and nature have many meanings, sometimes even opposing meanings. Landscape can be seen as a symbolic form that can evoke and reshape meaning, used to express meaning and value" (Henson, 2001, p.1). The so-called nature imagery mainly refers to the primitive natural phenomena formed by natural creation. In this world, objects and life that have not been artificially carved and naturally generated are the nature imagery in literary works.

"The Earth is alive, and the entire universe is also alive" (Margaret & Lacy, 1991, p. 44). Nature imagery comprise several significant categories, including astronomy, geography, plants, and animals. Specific subcategories of several significant types form different natural environments and spaces. Have an impact on people, groups, and ethnic groups who reside and engage in activities. As the saying goes, "One side of soil and water nourishes one side of people. People living in different regions have different looks and personality traits."

"Bildungsromans depict the changes that young protagonists experience after experiencing some kind of superficial pain, either changing their original worldview, changing their own personality, or both; This change freed him from his childhood innocence and ultimately led him towards a real and complex adult world" (Marcus, 1969, p. 22). Charlotte Brontë's hometown and childhood experiences have influenced her personality. She had an unfortunate childhood. When she was five years old, her mother died of cancer. My father's income is minimal, and the entire family lives a difficult life. Fortunately, his father graduated from St. John's College in Cambridge with extensive knowledge. He often teaches children how to read, guides them, and tells them stories. Because of this, the Brontë sisters had a strong interest in literature and painting since childhood. Therefore, in her autobiographical novel *Jane Eyre*, there will be many observations and descriptions of the natural landscape, and the word of the heroine Jane Eyre on nature is also the author's sensitivity to the environment. As John Burke wrote in his book "we are never looking at something, but at the connection between things and ourselves" (Berger, 1972, p. 39).

3.2. Nature Imagery and Jane's Life at Gateshead Hall

"The cold winter wind had brought with it clouds so sombre, and a rain so penetrating, that further outdoor exercise was now out of question" (Brontë, 2008, p. 1). The environmental description at the novel's beginning reveals that Jane Eyre's life at her aunt's house is not good. When Jane Eyre lived in her aunt's house, she encountered discrimination and abuse due to her poverty and gender. Her cousin John Reed mercilessly rejected Jane Eyre, an "outsider," bossed her around, and said to Jane Eyre proudly, "You are less than a servant, for you do nothing for your keep. There, sit down, and think over your wickedness" (Brontë, 2008, p. 9).

Jane Eyre is an orphan. She was born into a poor pastor family, and soon her parents died one after another. The young Jane Eyre was fostered in her uncle's house — Gateshead. After the death of her uncle Mr. Reed, Jane Eyre lived a life of discrimination and abuse for ten years. Mrs. Reed, her aunt, regarded her as an eyesore and separated her from her children. After being bullied by her son John Reed again, she broke out, made a scene, and was punished in the red-room. It is not difficult to read the materials. At the same time, the shadow of Jane Eyre's childhood has been imprinted in her heart. Her childhood experience is also the reason for her from inferiority to self-improvement. Jane's inferiority complex in love has always haunted her mind. The long-term inferiority complex made Jane understand that the only way to make others look up to her is to change her status through her efforts. Her childhood experience tells Jane it is difficult for her to gain others' recognition through flattery, and excessive flattery will make others despise her even more. When Jane Eyre realized this, she no longer sacrificed her interests to please anyone. She bravely fought against her aunt and brothers, who bullied her

to maintain her dignity. Although the result of the confrontation was finally locked in the red house, Jane Eyre does not succumb to it, but when she was locked up, she more clearly showed her attitude to her aunt and family.

Ecofeminists claim that there is a deeper connection between the abuse of natural resources and the abuse of women (Vijayaraj, 2017, p. 71). At this time, Jane Eyre's female consciousness is still asleep and in its infancy.

I opened the glass-door in the breakfast-room:the shrubbery was quite still: the black frost reigned,unbroken by sun or breeze, through the grounds... I stood, a wretched child enough,whispering to myself over and over again, What shall I do? what shall I do?" (Brontë, 2008, p. 49)

This is a winter morning. The sky is about to snow, and it is chaotic. On the one hand, the environmental description here vividly shows the despair and confusion of young Jane Eyre at that time. She wanted to resist, but she was too young and weak. Like plants in the storm, there is no way to escape the destruction of natural forces, and young Jane Eyre cannot escape the destruction of her aunt. She is eager to escape the Gateshead family as soon as possible. At this time, Jane Eyre's female consciousness is still sleeping and in infancy.

On the other hand, the frost, the silent forest, the fallen fir trees, the gray grass, and other natural scenery in the article all show the destruction of nature by human beings. Here, the author uses "fog" instead of haze to describe that nature is silently suffering from the plunder of human beings. At this time, Jane Eyre is very similar to the fate of nature. Regarding physiology, she is just a young girl who is not yet mature. In terms of the economy, she can only rely on her aunt's family to survive. She is lonely and helpless. Even if she performs well, she will be oppressed by the patriarchal system represented by Aunt Reed. She does not know where to go. At this moment, Jane Eyre's female consciousness was still sleeping and not awakening, just like the animals and plants hibernating in winter.

3.3. Nature Imagery and Jane's Life at Lowood School

Under the social background of patriarchy, men are often in a dominant position. The thinking mode of patriarchy is dualistic, hierarchical thinking, which believes there is a hierarchy in all things in the world, while men are at the highest level and women are below it. Under the guidance of such thinking, women are regarded as objects without independent consciousness in men's conversation and trading. Men limit and hinder women's creativity and prevent women from contacting many fields of social knowledge and cultural achievements. This has formed the social family model of "women in charge, men in charge" for thousands of years. Under such a social background, women's survival dilemmas and tragic fates are inevitable.

When Jane Eyre was sent to the Lowood institution, although she escaped from her aunt's life and could learn the courses she was interested in and make new friends, her life was not so satisfactory. Jane Eyre's female consciousness also began to wake up from this time.

The lowood institution is located in a valley with dense forests. The geographical environment is remote, the sanitary conditions are poor, and the management system is rigorous. Naomi Brocklehurst is the ruler of this institution and the typical representative and symbol of male power in the novels of this period. On the surface, he is a kind philanthropist, but he is ruthless. He treated the students and teachers in this institution as if they were working hard. He only provided them with rotten food and did not let them eat enough.

Moreover, he wantonly insulted the students and trampled on their self-esteem. He did not allow the girls to have curly hair and asked them to wear plain clothes, killing the girls' love of beauty. Brockhurst's male chauvinism dominates every corner of the Lowood institution.

The garden was a wide enclosure, surrounded with walls so high as to exclude every glimpse of the prospect; a covered veranda ran down one side, and broad walks

bordered a middle space divided into scores of little beds; these beds were assigned as gardens for the pupils to cultivate, and each bed had an owner (Brontë, 2008, p. 64).

The imagery of “walls” and “garden” symbolize the closed and depressed Lowood institution and the girls living here. The walls block all the scenery outside, which means that under the oppression of male power, girls live very depressed at the same age as flowers. At the same time, this imagery also symbolizes the deepening opposition and exploitation relationship between humans and nature after the Industrial Revolution. These flowers planted in Lowood institution are an accurate portrayal of the life of girls and the plunder and exploitation of nature by human beings, reflecting the inequality of status between men and women and between human beings and nature.

“When full of flowers they would doubtless look pretty, but now, at the latter end of January, all was wintry blight and brown decay” (Brontë, 2008, p. 64). After describing the walls and flower beds of the enclosure, Jane began to imagine the scene here when spring came and flowers bloomed, expressing Jane Eyre’s yearning for the location of flowers blooming in March and April. No winter will not pass, and no spring will not come; even if it is a scene of withering and withering now, it will become the most beautiful scenery. This description implies that the reader will recover from nature, and Jane’s female consciousness will awaken.

It is precise because of the oppression and exploitation of male chauvinism that Jane Eyre’s rebellious consciousness is shown so strongly for the first time. She said to her friend Helen when she was unfairly treated at the Lowood institution: “If I were in your place, I should dislike her; I should resist her; if she struck me with that rod, I should get it from her hand; I should break it under her nose.”

“Spring drew on—she was indeed already come; the frosts of winter had ceased: its snows were melted, its cutting winds ameliorated... On Thursday afternoons (half-holidays) we now took walks, and found still sweeter flowers opening by the wayside under the hedges” (Brontë, 2008, p. 106). The thawed nature has brought Jane Eyre spiritual pleasure and provided direction for her awakening of female consciousness. After the arrival of spring, the author used almost one chapter to describe the scenery of spring. The recovery from nature has brought Jane sensory pleasure and alleviated her body and mind pain. The changes in her body and mind indicate that she has grown up to have the ability to sympathize with nature. Jane’s female consciousness is gradually budding when spring comes.

After the large-scale outbreak of typhus fever, the Lowood institution attracted wide public attention. This exposure made Brocklehurst’s rights in the Lowood institution decline, and many good philanthropists began to donate money to the school. Jane Eyre’s life in the Lowood institution was not as bad as before. But at this time, she was tired of living a life that had remained unchanged for eight years. She is not satisfied with this.

“I went to my Window, opened it, and looked out... How I longed to follow it farther!” (Brontë, 2008, p. 121) The natural force in the distance attracts Jane Eyre, and the mountain leads her to a broader world, seeking adventure and the true meaning of life. She wants to escape from the shackles of patriarchy. It also paves the way for Jane Eyre to enter Thornfield, the next stage of her life. With the arrival of spring, Jane’s feminine consciousness gradually awakened like flowers in a flower garden.

3.4. Nature Imagery and Jane’s Life at Thornfield

It is worth mentioning that when Jane Eyre first met Rochester, Rochester asked Jane Eyre to show him her previous paintings. Rochester picked out three of them for careful appreciation. The first one is a cormorant perching on a hollow mast, with a woman’s body about to be drowned next to it; The second one is a Venus personified as a woman; The last one is set in the North Pole. The theme of the painting is a vast head representing death. It is not difficult to find that the painting style of Jane Eyre’s images is extraordinary, like dreams. These fantastic

paintings of Jane Eyre indicate the development of the plot and reflect her inner turmoil and wisdom. "These pictures were in watercolors. The first represented clouds low and livid, rolling over a swollen sea... a fair arm was the only limb visible, whence the bracelet had been washed or torn" (Brontë, 2008, p. 182).

In Eastern culture, cormorants symbolize marriage, but in ancient Western culture, especially in John Milton's *paradise lost*, giant birds like cormorants represent greed. In Jane Eyre's painting, the cormorant pecks the gold bracelet from a woman's body, which reflects her greedy nature. This painting alludes to Rochester and Miss Rivers's marriage - a money marriage without love. This is also the epitome of countless weddings in British society then. The choppy sea was the social environment at that time. The cormorant symbolized tens of thousands of men, and the sinking body was a group of mercilessly exploited women.

The second picture contained for foreground only the dim peak of a hill, with grass and some leaves slanting as if by a breeze... the same faint lustre touched the train of thin clouds from which rose and bowed this vision of the Evening Star. (Brontë, 2008, p. 182-183)

The figure in the second painting is very tall and is a personified Venus. She stretches her body among the mountains, plants, and trees. She is a symbol of natural power. The characters in the painting echo the guidance of the natural forces in the novel to Jane Eyre: when Jane Eyre is sad, nature comforts her; when Jane Eyre is confused, nature guides her. The characters in this painting are like mother nature, who silently guard Jane Eyre.

The third showed the pinnacle of an iceberg piercing a polar winter sky: a muster of northern lights reared their dim lances, close serried, along the horizon. Throwing these into the distance rose, in the foreground, a head — a colossal head, inclined towards the iceberg, and resting against it... This pale crescent was "the likeness of a kingly crown"; what it diademed was "the shape which shape had none" (Brontë, 2008, p. 183).

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in *The Madwoman in the Attic* in 1979, believe that Jane Eyre's painting is closely connected with lines 666 and 673 in Chapter 2 of Milton's *paradise lost*, "which is a paternal phantom, echoing the imagery of the evil god of death in Milton's works." So the third picture symbolizes the status quo of British society under patriarchy. Patriarchy suppresses human nature, represses women, and exploits nature. So that women and nature cannot resist in such a horrible atmosphere.

Jane Eyre's three paintings are all-natural scenes. Jane Eyre's paintings not only reflect her life experience but also show her suffering and inner depression under patriarchal rule. This is actually the resonance between nature and her and the guidance of nature to her. Feminism has planted a fire in her heart and may break out anytime.

Subsequently, Jane Eyre fell in love with Rochester. Although Rochester hired her to work, she did not think Rochester was her master. Jane Eyre thinks that she and Rochester are equal. Even if she finds that she has fallen in love with Rochester, she still stays awake: "He is not of your order: keep to your caste, and be too self-respecting to lavish the love of the whole heart, soul, and strength, where such a gift is not wanted and would be despised."

At this time, Jane Eyre's female consciousness was more prominent. Under the care of nature, Jane Eyre completed her transformation and became an independent woman. On the day before her marriage to Rochester, the chestnut tree in the yard was split in two. This is a reminder from nature to Jane Eyre, suggesting that her relationship with Rochester will break. As expected, Jane Eyre finds out that Rochester has married another woman, and she resolutely leaves Rochester and Thornfield.

3.5. Nature Imagery and Jane's Life at Moor House

When Jane Eyre decides to leave Thornfield, the moonlight warms her like a mother, helping her maintain her marriage's dignity and purity.

"I lifted my head to look: the roof resolved to clouds, high and dim... It gazed and gazed on me. It spoke to my spirit: immeasurably distant was the tone, yet so near, it whispered in my heart."

"My daughter, flee temptation."

"Mother, I will." (Brontë, 2008, p. 472)

The moon is an objective existence in the universe. It and the sun are in charge of night and day, rising and falling, and human beings are inseparable from it. The moon itself has a hazy feeling, more representative of a reality in the West. The moon represents beautiful nature, the symbol of beautiful and noble women, and the symbol of the victory of feminism. In David Herbert Lawrence's novel, all independent women who can control their destiny and try to control men are always accompanied by the moon god. The moon symbolizes the mighty goddess of the moon. It has the symbolic significance of raising the female subject consciousness and defeating the male in the context of the new era.

American transcendentalist writer Thoreau once declared, "Only in the wilderness can this world be preserved (Glick, 1982, p.15). Jane Eyre's full awakening of female consciousness and self-consciousness is reflected in her choice to leave Rochester under the guidance of the moon mother. First of all, the moon appears in Jane Eyre's dream, indicating that the guidance of nature also reflects Jane Eyre's thoughts. Although there is an emotional basis with Rochester, Mr. Rochester's deliberate concealment of his marital status makes Jane Eyre have to choose between love and reality. Secondly, nature here appears in the imagery of the mother, which once again shows the closer relationship between women and nature. At the same time, it also indicates that in Jane Eyre's subconscious, her relationship with nature is very close, and nature is her dear and respectable mother.

The "black cloud" in the material symbolizes darkness. In industrialization, people's take of nature has caused air pollution, making clouds turn dark black. The black clouds cover the moon, but the moon has rushed out of the shadows. The white human form forms a sharp contrast with the black clouds. The white represents purity, and the black represents the infinite desire of humanity. The struggle between black and white symbolizes that nature is fighting against the uncontrolled demands of human beings and shows the mighty power of nature.

In this way, Jane Eyre left Thornfield. At this time, she was independent and free but also confused. When she did not know where to go, nature healed her again: "I again nestled to the breast of the hill; and ere long in sleep forgot sorrow", and with the comfort of nature, she set out again to find the direction of her life and started a long journey after leaving Sanfield and walked hard in the wild:

I struck straight into the heath; I held on to a hollow I saw deeply furrowing the brown moorside; I waded knee-deep in its dark growth; I turned with its turnings, and finding a moss-blackened granite crag in a hidden angle, I sat down under it. High banks of moor were about me; the crag protected my head: the sky was over that. (Brontë, 2008, p. 477)

The text describes the scene of Jane Eyre walking in the wasteland. From Jane walking into the wasteland, we can see that only nature is the best place for her to heal when she is injured. It shows that Jane Eyre has left Rochester's shackles on her marriage, economy, and personality. Although the natural images such as "granite" and "wasteland" in the text look cold and hard, they provide Jane with the most solid protection to keep her moving forward. The close relationship between Jane Eyre and nature shows the independent consciousness of women, expresses the thought of ecological feminism, and accumulates strength for the final victory of Jane Eyre's female consciousness.

Then Jane Eyre met her cousin John, who is a zealous Christian. Actually, he is selfish and indifferent, with only doctrines in his heart. He keeps brainwashing Jane Eyre, asking Jane Eyre

to go to India with him as his assistant and marry him. At this time, after so many experiences, Jane Eyre's female consciousness has been robust. She refused John without hesitation and broke away from her cousin's control.

During this period, Thornfield was burned down by Rochester's ex-wife. In this novel, Rochester's ex-wife Mason is also a typical symbol of resistance to male rights. She ignores the rule of the patriarchal society. To vent her dissatisfaction, she dares fire the manor symbolizing Rochester's rights and status. She challenges the authority of the patriarchal ruler with her actions. However, the love between Jane Eyre and Rochester is finally achieved because of Mason's brave resistance. In the past, Jane Eyre could not be compared with Rochester regarding status, status, or wealth. They could not achieve absolute equality. Mason set a fire and burned the estrangement and inequality between them.

He saw nature—he saw books through me, and never did I weary of gazing for his behalf and of putting into words the effect of field, tree, town, river, cloud, sunbeam—of the landscape before us; of the weather around us and impressing by sound on his ear what light could no longer stamp on his eye. Never did I weary of reading to him; never did I tire of conducting him where he wished to go: doing what he wished to be done for him. (Brontë, 2008, p. 669)

Finally, Jane Eyre returned to Thornfield after inheriting much of her uncle's inheritance. At this time, Rochester was seriously injured and blind, and Thornfield was turned into a ruin. Rochester became a weak person, and Jane Eyre became a strong person. However, Jane Eyre resolutely married Rochester, who had nothing. They returned to their homes in the forest and lived happy life, thus realizing the harmony between men and women, nature and human beings.

4. Conclusion

Jane Eyre describes the heroine's pursuit of freedom and love and her resistance to fate from the perspective of ecological women. It reveals that by emancipating women and nature, the author enables women to have independent consciousness and status and creates a survival mode in which men and women are completely equal and human beings live in harmony with nature. In the novel, nature is compared to an adult mother, and it is believed that there is a biological connection between women and nature. Nature gave Jane Eyre the power to pursue self-awareness of independence, so she resisted male authority with extraordinary courage and composed a female hymn against male chauvinism.

Feminism is not only a social movement, a set of value systems, but also an ideology. The emergence of feminist literary works has changed the writing strategy of Western literary history. Charlotte Brontë successfully created Jane Eyre, a brave, persistent, and independent female imagery, criticized the patriarchal world in traditional philosophy, embodied women's courageous resistance and struggle for their rights, and embodied the author's pursuit of harmony and equality between men and women, man and nature. Eco-feminism is participating in globalization in a diverse, complex, and differentiated form. It believes that the liberation of women and the restoration of ecological nature are the trend of historical development and strives to build a harmonious society in which human beings live in harmony with nature and have sustainable development.

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