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Spirituality in Jane Eyre

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Introduction

According to Huges (par. 1) the Industrial Revolution and the expansion of the British Empire brought changes in the working place and clothing, among other transformations that paved the way for Victorian society to firmly demarcate female and male roles. As opposed to previous ages, in which both sexes used to work together in the family business, women's duties were relegated to the domestic sphere due to new men's employment conditions in factories, for example. Thus, the home became women's exclusive responsibility and this was considered respectable and adequate for them. Additionally, women's incapacity to work was supported by the crinoline dress, which made them look and act in too delicate a manner because the dome-shape like of this kind of dress made movement very difficult.

With this in mind, it was thought that each gender had inherent characteristics that made them fit for determined jobs. For example, women were relegated to the domestic sphere because they were thought too fragile and inept to work. On the other hand, they were supposed to be in charge of the moral education of their children. As a consequence, they were subjugated and economically dependent on their husbands. Moreover, women could not own property or have an income because all passed into their husbands' holdings (Huges par. 2).

As for women's education, they were trained at home by a governess or at some institution for girls. This kind of education is what Huges (par. 3) calls "accomplishments" as it gave women the attractiveness to look gracious before the eyes of men, and ultimately, help them to get married. Also, women were supposed to enchant with knowledge about music, drawing, singing, good manners, etc. without seeming to manage a wide understanding of these topics because they were not supposed to overshadow male's intelligence. Furthermore,

women who aspired to have studies outside of their traditional scope were considered unattractive. Consequently, their marriage ambitions were endangered.

Since women's financial status had to be resolved by marriage, writing for Victorian women was a means to express social problems. Many works were written to plead equal opportunities, economic independence, and education for women. Nevertheless, women were not supposed to have a literary career and were not thought to be able to express feelings as deeply as men, so many of them had to adopt male pseudonyms so as to avoid social pressure. Otherwise the only respectable job was the one as a governess. This job was miserably paid and occupied a place that was hard to manage because the governess was not considered a servant nor a member of the family (Shuttleworth 11).

According to Showalter (178), even though during the XIX century, women wrote novels that today are regarded as being one of the greatest works of literature, in those times there were still people who thought that female writers were not as talented as men. For this reason, women who pursued a literary career were believed to usurp male authors' place. Furthermore, "When the Victorians thought of the woman writer, they immediately thought of the female body and its presumed afflictions and liabilities" (Showalter 178). Since giving birth and writing imply the creation of something new, it was believed that these two experiences were not compatible.

As a way of illustration, Elaine Showalter describes in "The Double Critical Standard and the Feminine Novel," how females were scientifically qualified as inferior than males, and how intellectual activity threatened their own lives.

They [Victorian male doctors] maintained that, like the "lower races," women had smaller and less efficient brains, less complex nerve development, and more susceptibility to certain diseases, than did men. Any expenditure of mental energy by

women would divert the supply of blood and phosphates from the reproductive system to the brain, leading to dysmenorrhea, “ovarian neuralgia,” physical degeneracy, and sterility. Physicians estimated that “maternal functions diverted nearly 20 percent of women’s vital energies from potential brain activity.” (178)

Additionally, writing was regarded as an exclusive male activity. As a consequence, women who exposed themselves to this activity were unattractive since it was also believed that by writing, women adopted masculine physical characteristics (Showalter 178). Consequently, women who refused to follow their prescribed female roles and turned to writing, depicted, according to Sandra M. Gilbert, “a shared discomfort with houses” as “charismatic acts of defiance by all the heroines” (99).

Considering the above reasons, *Jane Eyre* challenges the social conventions of the Victorian times because this novel addresses the need of women for financial independence, education and job opportunities. Even though the protagonist consolidates her personal fulfilment in marriage, she develops a revolutionary ideal that places love and equality among men and women as a basic requirement for marriage. Jane, in her journey, shows, according to Sally Shuttleworth “ideological pressures of class, gender and economics [that] are played out in the domain of subjectivity.” Thus, “one finds depictions of internal struggle cast in terms of both racial and class conflict” (7). This is exemplified in the following quote from *Jane Eyre*.

Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. (136)

Since Victorian women were required to follow a prescribed female role, they had to find personal fulfilment in the domestic sphere. It was often that they privileged self-sacrifice and self-denial to become wives and mothers instead of finding their own voice and independence because these ideals were incompatible. For this reason, Jane feels compelled to express that women need to break free from the restraints of such rigid social standards.

As a consequence, what is behind *Jane Eyre* is not only a love story between Jane and Rochester. It is a story that shows the origins, development, and growth of Jane to signal female demands of the epoch. There can be found, for example, critiques to the patriarchal society and religious institutions that were ruled by male representatives, and oppressive social conventions that were imposed on women. For this reason, I argue that since *Jane Eyre* belongs to the bildungsroman genre, a novel that foregrounds the growth of the protagonist, and because of the social context and criticism that are embedded in the novel, Jane's spirituality is overlooked. I place the following questions to direct this project: How do different characters from *Jane Eyre* stand as anti-examples of Christian allegories that shape and lead Jane's spiritual growth? What elements are present in Jane's spirituality?

Relevance of the topic

The relevance of studying female Victorian literature has its roots on the fact that values such as social, political and legal rights have not always been granted for women. To know where they come from implies to trace a long struggle that makes possible today to have and make use of those rights. In other words, women from the Victorian times had to fight for their rights and make a social change to be considered equal to men. *Jane Eyre*, for example, emphasizes the growth of a female character that is confronted to a patriarchal and oppressive society. Nevertheless, Jane finds a way to have an education and to be independent, and demonstrates that a woman feels as deeply as a man and thus needs personal fulfilment. For this reason, the contribution that this project aims at is to raise awareness of the above way of thinking by analyzing not only Jane's struggles but also her spiritual growth.

Background of the topic

To trace the history of the genre of *Jane Eyre* as bildungsroman novel, first it is necessary to refer to Bakhtin's ideas. For instance, in the Middle Ages, the hero from the epic poem represented a national ideal. He was an extraordinary character throughout the story. In other words, his origins were unknown because what mattered was his solemnity. For this reason there was distance between his story and the public who read it, and because the culture portrayed was the official one (Bakhtin 394). On the other hand, the hero from the modern novel was considered an anti-hero because his origins were known. He is an individual with first and last name that represents the lives of ordinary people. This change of paradigm added elements of closeness, grotesqueness and humor to the novel because people could identify with the protagonist and find official and unofficial elements of his culture. This change also meant that the writing style went from verse to prose (Bakhtin 392).

In addition, after the romantic period, people started to demand more realistic writing that more accurately represented the social conditions of the epoch. The changes in society and the expansion of the British Empire revealed social discontent because the development and progress did not reach all sectors of the population. For this reason, authors turned to write using more realistic elements (Bomarito & Hunter 2:114). However, in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* there are not only elements from more realistic literature but there are also Gothic Romance elements such as Thornfield, Rochester's mansion; the supernatural episodes such as the red room, Jane and Rochester's first meeting, Rochester's mysterious summons; and Jane's dreams. This is explained by the fact that the author of *Jane Eyre* was not deeply influenced by the Victorian style of literature (Ostrov Weisser 83-84).

In this way, Charlotte Brontë manages to create a female heroine that could be considered an anti-hero since Jane is depicted as plain, little and obscure. Moreover, Jane Eyre's origins are known: she is an orphan child that is raised by her aunt and cousins until she is 10 years of age. Then she is sent to an orphanage, and by the age of 18 she is determined to look for independence and finds a job as a governess. Her story finishes after she is married and has a child. Ultimately, what the author does is, according to Susan Ostrov Weisser, to exhibit Jane's "enormous strength of her desire and imagination" (79).

Charlotte Brontë's religious influences

According to Emily Griesinger (40), since Charlotte Brontë's father was an Anglican clergyman of the Church of England, she had a strong evangelical influence. Her father, moreover, was in fluent contact with the first men that introduced Evangelicalism to Britain: John and Charles Wesley, George Whitefield, and William Grimshaw. On the other hand, Charlotte's mother, Maria Branwell was a Methodist. Even though she died when Charlotte was still a little child, she left her the book *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas a' Kempis. After her death, Charlotte's aunt dedicated herself to help Patrick Brontë take care of the Brontë children. She further exposed the children to religious influences since she read *The Methodist Magazine* (Griesinger 40).

The Evangelical ideology, according to Heather Glen, was to demonstrate that "life on earth was a mere preparation for the hereafter: death, therefore, was its climactic point—the moment of entry into bliss or perdition" (75). Consequently, it was Evangelicals' duty to prepare children for "salvation". By way of example, when Patrick Brontë asked her elder daughter, Maria: "what was the best mode of spending time," she answered: "By laying it out

in preparation for a happy eternity.” She was only 10 years old (Glen 75). Another example of Evangelical influence on children is given at the beginning of *Jane Eyre* when Mr. Brocklehurst, who is in charge of girls’ education at an orphanage, instructs Jane so that she can be saved: “[...] here is a book entitled the ‘Child’s Guide,’ read it with prayer, especially that part containing ‘An account of the awfully sudden death of Martha G— a naughty child addicted to falsehood and deceit’” (45). As a result, it is evident that Charlotte Brontë used her own religious influences to narrate some of the episodes and characters of *Jane Eyre*.

As for Charlottë’s personal spiritual ideas, she, according to Griesinger, “was thoroughly Anglican, governed by the rhythms and rituals of the prayer book” (40). Additionally, she imitated her father’s refusal of extreme Calvinism (portrayed in the characters of St. John and Mr. Brocklehurst) to give a more flexible perspective of spiritual salvation (Griesinger 40).

Biographical sketch

Charlotte's family background gave her the tools to write not only one novel but also to have a literary career that involved other works such as *The Professor*, *Villette*, *Shirley*, and *Emma*. Since Patrick Brontë, Charlotte's father, was an amateur writer, the Brontë children felt motivated to imitate him. And it was through writing that Mr. Brontë could advance in his religious career, leaving his job position in Ireland to become "a curate of the church of England" (Bock 44). Charlotte was the third of six children. Her elder sisters were called Maria and Elizabeth. Emily and Anne were the youngest, followed by Branwell, her brother. Her father after leaving Ireland, became a local vicar of Haworth on the Yorkshire moors. Unfortunately, when Charlotte was still a small child, her mother got sick and died. For this reason, she and her sisters were sent to a clergy school where the two elder sisters got sick. When their father brought them back home, it was too late, for the illness was incurable and they died. After this tragic episode, the rest of the children were educated at home by their father and aunt (Bomarito & Hunter 2:385-387).

According to Carol Bock, the Brontë children used to read extensively. Besides local newspapers from their time, the Brontë children were influenced by the following works:

the Bible and prayer books, John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Hannah More's *Moral Sketches*, Aesop's *Fables*, *The Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, *Gulliver's Travels*; major English writers such as Shakespeare and Milton; poetry by Wordsworth, Cowper, Scott, Byron, Moore, and others; standard educational texts including J. Goldsmith's *A Grammar of General Geography* and Rollin's *History*, the novels of Sir Walter Scott, and much more. (44)

It is said that to entertain themselves the children wrote miniature books about fantasy worlds, based on periodicals. There is also an anecdote about their childhood that tells how the Brontë children used to play with wooden soldiers to create imaginary worlds. Branwell and Charlotte were more interested in this kind of amusement though. Later, Charlotte left her family and started to work as a teacher. Then, she worked as a governess in Brussels, but she did not like her job and returned home. There, she and Emily tried to open a school, which was a failure because they did not get students to teach (Bock 35-36). When Charlotte Brontë started to write poetry, she, according to Kate Flin, asked the opinion of the famous Poet Laureate, Robert Southey. He advised Charlotte that “Literature cannot be the business of a woman’s life: & it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure will she have for it, even as an accomplishment & a recreation” (171).

However, in 1846, Charlotte, Emily and Anne published under male pseudonyms (Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell respectively) a selection of poems that was not well-received and sold only few copies. In spite of this failure, all of them continued writing, and by 1847 they all published a novel (again under their respective male pen names): Charlotte’s *Jane Eyre*, Emily’s *Wuthering Heights*, and Anne’s *Agnes Grey*. From these three novels, *Jane Eyre* was an immediate success even though it was too revolutionary for some critics. In the case of *Wuthering Heights*, it is said that Emily’s work was badly edited and took some time to turn into a success. *Agnes Grey* was also well-received. Due to Charlotte’s and Emily’s similar writing style, critics thought that those works had been written by the same author. Nevertheless, Charlotte Brontë used the third edition of *Jane Eyre* to clarify this issue. The following year, the sisters took care of their alcoholic brother, who inevitably died. Later that same year, Emily got consumption and also died. No sooner had this tragedy taken place than Anne got sick and died because of the same illness (Flin 170 ff.).

As for the format of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, it is possible to find biographical elements such as the following: Charlotte Brontë and her sisters attended a clergy school. She witnesses the death of two of her sisters because of tuberculosis. This is paralleled in the death of Helen Burns, Jane's friend at Lowood School. The depiction of this school, and of Mr. Brocklehurst, the director of the aforementioned school, are also based upon Charlotte's personal experience. Another element is that Charlotte as well as Jane were governesses (Stoneman 216 ff.). However, it is implied in one of Charlotte's letters that she did not like her job because she had to occupy an in-between status among servants and family members (Shuttleworth 11). But, Jane was more fortunate because she finds a good friend in Mrs. Fairfax, Mr. Rochester house keeper. Then she meets Adele, Mr. Rochester's child and is able to forge a caring bond. What breaks social norms in Jane's story, however, was that she and Rochester fall in love.

Even though *Jane Eyre* was an immediate success when first published, there was also negative criticism that attacked the novel and the author. The narrative of Jane's story was called "a pre-eminently anti-Christian composition" in Elizabeth Rigby's review of the novel. The reasons for the attacks are related to the fact that it was clearly difficult to see how the two concepts, Christianity and feminism, could coexist without cancelling each other, without hypocrisy and conserving human beings' dignity and equality. At that time, however, Jane's path towards spirituality was being condemned so badly as for the first time someone was challenging the long standing, exploited religion of the Victorian times (Peters 53 ff.).

Furthermore, in a surreptitious maneuver, what critics cared for at the time, was to hinder Jane's look for spirituality in such a convincing, accusatory manner that lay people may remain the same regarding traditional Christianity. This status quo context meant assurance for the rich to remain rich and the poor to remain poor which is exactly what *Jane Eyre* was, in a

way, blamed for supporting. However, Charlotte Brontë's unrelenting quest for genuine spirituality led her to purposely create a character that challenged the norms of behavior of women at the time, yet she did not characterize her protagonist as a moral metaphor found in other literary pieces of work of the time that sought to portray a person whose attitude was to be replicated. What made the author a hero and an avant-gardist for her time was that she used the format of a romance story to portray criticism of her times, and that she sketched an unattractive female protagonist, who was to become what pure ladies might have stealthily desired to imitate (Peters 53 ff.).

General Comments

Jane's odyssey to discover individual spiritual realization is portrayed from the very beginning of the story with her infant and orphan awakening into her own search for coherent thought, feeling and action while she transitions from a child to a young joyful wife. This statement is not taken into account by many critics who assert that the novel is mainly about women living in an unfair society which is controlled by men's decision making. Nonetheless, if Jane's coming of age at the Victorian times was thoroughly examined, it would have to be immediately noticed that the nature of this transition should not only be associated with the coming of sexual intercourse, submission to men's authority and expected orchestration for the moment of assuming typical women's chores after having married the best candidate. This transition in Jane Eyre's time came along with the concept of religious responsibility. By the same token, Victorian women were not expected to question traditional Christianity, faith, life after death, heaven and hell, tide, and above all, commands to women as portrayed in the Bible (Sexton 178 ff.).

Jane, no longer as a minor, has to account for her own spiritual growth and goes through various phases. For example, a first phase, relates to the time when she was reprimanded by Mrs. Reed, her aunt, and was sent to the "red room" with one clear message: girls who outburst might be struck dead for such inappropriate behavior and go to hell if repentance does not take place accordingly (12). At this time, Jane does not acknowledge the presence of an almighty God, nor does she possess any faith. However, she does show some curiosity about ghostly beings (Sexton 179): "Oh! I saw a light, and I thought a ghost would come" (25).

To further describe Jane's spiritual journey, she finds Calvinist hypocrisy when taken to school with Mr. Brocklehurst, the director of Lowood School. There she shows a bit more of her initial and low spirituality. This episode takes back to the moment when Jane Eyre is asked how to avoid hell, and she responds: "I must keep in good health and not die" (37). It was not until Jane meets Miss Temple that she has an initial chance towards spiritual nature because she gives the protagonist a possibility to defend herself from Mr. Brocklehurst ill-founded accusations:

"this girl, who might be one of God's own lambs, is a little castaway: not a member of the true flock, but evidently an interloper and an alien. You must be on your guard against her; you must shun her example; if necessary, avoid her company, exclude her from your sports, and shut her out from your converse. Teachers, you must watch her: keep your eyes on her movements, weigh well her words, scrutinise her actions, punish her body to save her soul: if, indeed, such salvation be possible, for (my tongue falters while I tell it) this girl, this child, the native of a Christian land, worse than many a little heathen who says its prayers to Brahma and kneels before Juggernaut—this girl is—a liar!" (80).

This female benevolence before an unfair public chastisement allowed Jane Eyre to "speak for herself without fear of retribution [...] exhibit[ing] some spiritual growth when she does not exaggerate her account to Miss Temple" (Sexton 180): "You have been charged with falsehood; defend yourself to me as well as you can. Say whatever your memory suggests is true; but add nothing and exaggerate nothing" (86).

This spiritual growth is later on refined by Helen Burns, a classmate who believes in the Bible as the source of women's rightful behavior as "Helen exemplifies the meekness that is described in the Gospel of St Mathew, and it is through her influence that Jane starts on her

path to spiritual enlightenment" (Sexton 180). Although this sincere classmate's attempt to educate Jane may have quoted the Bible, Helen's quest for individual spirituality appears complete when she mentions her altered Evangelical philosophy: "I hold another creed; which no one ever taught me [...] but in which I delight, and to which I cling; for it extends hope to all: it makes Eternity a rest -- a mighty home, not a terror and an abyss" (*JE* 49-50). In her personal path towards spirituality, Helen describes a God who does not appear as a merciless almighty being. On the contrary, she claims to have found light at the end of the tunnel as a notion for eternity. After Jane spends eight years at Lowood school, she finds new insights as to the true reasons why she had to go through such education: it had been God not anything else such as luck or coincidence (Sexton 181).

Another important process in the transition of Jane's spiritual insights, according to Sexton (183), is her first encounter with Edward Rochester's spiritual turmoil. This man becomes Jane's idol whilst he takes Jane as his personal redeemer. Having opted for an aloof attitude towards his own decision making, he turns over to hedonism. Jane cannot cope with the attraction she feels towards this man and realizes how controlled she is by idolatry. Thus, when it is known that Rochester was already married and that he kept his mad wife locked in the attic, he offers Jane the chance of staying with him as his mistress. However, she decides to keep her moral construct as developed before such carnal passion possessed her: "I will keep the law given by God; sanctioned by man. I will hold to the principles received by me when I was sane, and not mad-- as I am now" (259).

As a result, Jane leaves Rochester and after having wandered by an unfamiliar town, she starts a new life with the help of Maria, Diana and St. John, her cousins. As time goes by, Jane has a revelation: she did not leave the Lowood School and Mr. Rochester by her own decision making, but by an almighty hand that lay men will not see. This decision reflects the

realization and peace of mind she needed to obtain by morally detaching herself from a man she could not yet see the future with. When her thinking aligned with her feelings she could act right on, showing her spiritual maturity in full splendor. This move is not without distress, as her heart hurt for Edward Rochester and what her decision must have triggered in his spiritually unstable heart. This is a prominent example of Jane's already blossomed individual spirituality. Yet, it must be mentioned that such a process involves regression at times (Sexton 181 ff.).

When approaching the end of the novel, Jane goes through another man's enticement. And it is in this desperate moment of helplessness that only prayer can guide her and this is when she can finally hear Rochester's calling and through divine faith she reaches her own spiritual authority by taking charge of a no for an answer to St. John's marriage proposal. Her final decision is to go back to Edward Rochester who, "during their separation [...] is injured in a fire set by his insane wife Bertha. His hand is gone, as well as his eyesight, but his spiritual sight has been awakened. After a joyous reunion, he tells Jane of his prodigal return to God. He acknowledged that God judged him for his attempt to make her his mistress" (Sexton 185). This supernatural reunion is another alignment in Jane Eyre's spirituality quest. Now though "judged" by God has he become blameless and ready for Jane's intimacy.

Theoretical Framework

According to what Maria Lamonaca states in “Jane’s Crown of Thorns: Feminism and Christianity in *Jane Eyre*” (246 ff.), religion and feminism are not contradictory elements to read in this novel. By considering that all too often Victorian women were led to idolatry of husbands and family to achieve a respectable social standard, they endangered their own spirituality. By way of example, *Jane Eyre* shows the struggle to balance faith, social standards and female independence. For Victorian women, to try to reconcile all these aspects without contradictions was impossible because on the one hand, evangelical ideals of marriage led to idolatry, which undermines the place of God and at the same time it is considered a sin. And on the other hand, another important religious ideology, Calvinism, led to the loss of female independence due to the severe authoritative power given to men. In this way, if women did not submit to a patriarchal religious system, they were considered revolutionaries, sinners, and not respectable. As a result, Jane is forced to develop a spirituality that was coherent in all aspects of her life.

As opposed to the religious views on marriage, Jane challenges the belief, promoted on Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, that women are not able to determine God’s will by themselves. Thus, from this perspective, women are regarded as spiritually subordinate to their husbands. Unfortunately, the extent of Milton’s influence was so strong that many doctrines adopted his poem’s views. For example, in *The Golden Wedding* (1813) by John Clowes, an Anglican minister, he regards “husbands in the role of Supreme being, while wives represent ‘the lowest’ state” (as cited in Lamonaca 247). Consequently, Lamonaca (248) suggests that Charlotte Brontë, as the daughter of an Anglican clergyman, had not only been exposed to the

type of religious influences previously mentioned but also to another widely read novel: *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* (1808) by Hannah More. This novel

focuses on its hero's travels in search of the ideal Christian mate. Ultimately, Coelebs finds his ideal in Lucilla, a woman whose upbringing has been deliberately patterned on Milton's Eve. Lucilla is virtuous, quiet, and possesses no opinions independent of those she has been taught. She will, the novel assures us, be ideally suited for a Miltonic marriage, in which Coelebs lives 'for God alone, and [Lucilla] for God in him.' (Lamonaca 248)

As it can be understood from More's novel, this kind of marriage ideal implies not only subjugation for women but also the prominence of their husbands over God. With this in mind, according to Lamonaca (248), Charlotte Brontë writes *Jane Eyre* to signal the dangers of following the Miltonic example of marriage. On the other hand, Jane's spirituality implies that feminism is not contrary to true religious principles. On the contrary, by championing feminist conceptions, Jane is able not only to obey God but also to find happiness in marriage.

However, Jane's decision to leave and then come back to Rochester and marry him was not an easy one. In the narrative, there is an idolatrous feeling depicted that Jane has harbored before discovering that Rochester is already married and that he hides his mad wife in the attic.

My future husband was becoming to me my whole world; and more than the world: almost my hope of heaven. He stood between me and every thought of religion, as an eclipse intervenes between man and the broad sun. I could not, in those days, see God for His creature: of whom I had made an *idol*. (344 italics mine)

As if sent by God, Mr. Mason, Rochester's brother-in-law, interrupts the Jane's wedding and forces Rochester to tell the truth. This prevents Jane from becoming an

adulterous woman and helps her to end her idolatry to Rochester. This is, according to Lamonaca (249), one example of how the narrative presents Jane's "spiritual dependence" on Rochester. Yet, as the story progresses, there is an inversion of roles; for, it is Rochester who is "saved" by Jane: "I thank my Maker, that, in the midst of judgment, he has remembered mercy. I humbly entreat my *Redeemer* to give me strength to lead henceforth a purer life than I have done hitherto!" (565 italics mine).

Jane is troubled by both Rochester's and St. John's assertions of marriage since both equate their desire to possess her as God's will. Contrary to what one might expect, it is St. John, who, according to Lamonaca (250), comprises a bigger challenge to reject. This is not based on St. John's appearance, however. "He was young—perhaps from twenty-eight to thirty—tall, slender; his face riveted the eye; it was like a Greek face, very pure in outline: quite a straight, classic nose; quite an Athenian mouth and chin" (434). The fact that Jane was willing to accompany him as a sister proves that what Jane liked was St. John's Christian intentions to spread the Gospel in India. Yet, as a husband, she repudiated him: "'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'" (514). The reason why Jane feels this way in respect to him is that St. John represents "the soul made rigid by his own moral strengths" (Lamonaca 250). In other words, St. John has lost the "spirit" of religion, he is incapable of enjoyment of any kind. On the other hand, St. John is convinced that he can and must discern God's will by himself and guide Jane in the paths that he believes are designed by God. Since Jane rejects his marriage proposal, he warns Jane: "I shall be absent a fortnight—take that space of time to consider my offer: and do not forget that if you reject it, it is not me you deny, but God" (514).

Later, Jane understands that even though St. John felt very attracted to Rosamond, a beautiful girl from the town, she would never be the ideal wife for him because they are not equal. She is too superficial and St. John is enchanted by her beauty. Also, he is too ambitious for his divine plan that a girl like Rosamond could distract him from achieving his plans. As a result, what St. John does is to safeguard his Christian objective. In the middle of a moral turmoil, Jane determines God's will: "I could decide if I were but certain," I answered: 'were I but convinced that it is God's will I should marry you [St. John], I could vow to marry you here and now—come afterwards what would!'" (528). This is Jane's way to tell St. John that it is not God's will that they get married. Then, the true answer is revealed when Jane hears: "[...] a voice somewhere cry— 'Jane! Jane! Jane!'—nothing more." She immediately recognizes that "the voice of a human being—a known, loved, well-remembered voice—that of Edward Fairfax Rochester; and it spoke in pain and woe, wildly, eerily, urgently (528)."

At first, Jane believes that the voice she had heard was the "work of nature" (530). Nevertheless, after she comes back to Rochester, he tells her that he had summoned her, crying out her name in prayer. For this reason, she realizes that it was a divine call. But Jane's surprise does not end there. Rochester also confesses her that he had heard her voice answering: "where are you?" (529), which were the exact words Jane had uttered.

The coincidence struck me as too awful and inexplicable to be communicated or discussed. If I told anything, my tale would be such as must necessarily make a profound impression on the mind of my hearer: and that mind, yet from its sufferings too prone to gloom, needed not the deeper shade of the supernatural. I kept these things then, and pondered them in my heart. (540)

Thus, Rochester's mystic call is an assurance of God's intervention. And the supernatural elements are orchestrated to give Jane the possibility to discern God's will by

herself. On the other hand, Jane's reaction is, in Lamonaca's words (253), a common expression of female spirituality. In contrast to men, women teach their spirituality by performing without speaking. This is also found in Helen Burns, Jane's friend at Lowood School. She undertook many hardships, which kept them in her "heart." She preaches Jane to follow Christ's example, to love enemies, and ultimately, her doctrine prevents Jane from an idolatrous relationship. In St. John's case, for example there is the need to express his authority with words. This is why he does not enjoy nature. He does not look for silence. He needs to express the law of religion and to dominate by it.

In her spiritual development, Jane applied Helen's creed to understand St. John religious convictions. Hence, she is able to separate the rigid and oppressive authority from the true Christian values that St. John strives for. In this way, Jane can find the "spirit" of religion and apply it in her own conception of God, "a gentle, loving Creator" (254). Another model of female spirituality is given by Diana and Mary, St John's sisters. They not only represent an opposition to St. John's Calvinist doctrine, but they also represent an example of confronting male oppression. By way of illustration, when they know St. John's true motives to marry Jane (to work in India as missionaries), Diana responds: "Insupportable—unnatural—out of the question!" (495).

In the end, after having looked for redemption by leaving Rochester and after Bertha's death, Jane is allowed by God to come back and marry him. In other words, by suffering, Jane is enabled to forge her spiritual independence and self-respect. On the other hand, Rochester, like Jane, finds spiritual redemption in suffering. His redemption, however, is not willingly undertaken. He has been through the fire that his insane wife had set, and in his attempts to extinguish it and getting his servants and wife out of the house, he lost one of his hands and eyesight. He has "pass[ed] through the valley of the shadow of death" (535). As a

consequence, Rochester thinks that Jane feels compelled to marry him, for she “delights in sacrifice.” Jane answers: “Sacrifice! What do I sacrifice? Famine for food, expectation for content. To be privileged to put my arms round what I value—to press my lips to what I love—to repose on what I trust: is that to make a sacrifice? If so, then certainly I delight in sacrifice” (520). In this way, Jane demonstrates that her marriage is not based on self-renunciation but on love and gratification (Lamonaca 255 ff.).

All things considered, Rochester is, in Lamonaca’s opinion (257), the vehicle through which Jane can achieve her destiny. Accordingly, Jane and Rochester need each other not only to be happy but also to accomplish their divine destinies.

Methodology

In this final project, the analysis of the novel *Jane Eyre* has considered the religious influences of characters and how Jane develops her own spirituality by challenging the prescribed female role of the Victorian society. All these elements have a direct impact on the resolution of the story, which make Jane marry Rochester.

Final Analysis

As it was mentioned before, Jane develops her own spirituality. From the moment she loses her parents, she is forced to endure a difficult life as she has no protection against injustices committed by her own cousin and aunt, who are supposed to take care of her. Then, as a way of getting rid of a problem, she is sent to an orphanage. There she is exposed to religious influences not only as a subject that she must master but also as anti-examples that she can test and prove on her own. For example, Jane rejects Mr. Brocklehurst's spiritual doctrines because she is aware that he is a hypocrite character. He preaches about salvation, humbleness, and goodness, but he does not apply practice what he preaches. For this reason, Jane is well aware that he is an example that she cannot follow: "I disliked Mr. Brocklehurst; and I was not alone in the feeling. He is a harsh man; at once pompous and meddling; he cut off our hair; and for economy's sake bought us bad needles and thread, with which we could hardly sew" (151).

In spite of all privations that Jane endures at Lowood School, she can find two female models that try to influence her. The first model is provided in the character of Helen Burns, Jane's classmate and friend at Lowood School. Helen recommends Jane:

"Read the New Testament, and observe what Christ says, and how He acts; make His word your rule, and His conduct your example." "What does He say?" "Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you and despitefully use you." (68)

Since Jane is really disgusted by her aunt's injustices, she retells her experiences to Helen, who answers: "Life appears to me too short to be spent in nursing animosity or

registering wrongs” (68). In this way, Helen encourages Jane to forgive all what she had been through with her aunt. Moreover, she introduces Jane her own spirituality:

I hold another creed: which no one ever taught me, and which I seldom mention; but in which I delight, and to which I cling: for it extends hope to all: it makes Eternity a rest—a mighty home, not a terror and an abyss. Besides, with this creed, I can so clearly distinguish between the criminal and his crime; I can so sincerely forgive the first while I abhor the last: with this creed revenge never worries my heart, degradation never too deeply disgusts me, injustice never crushes me too low: I live in calm, looking to the end.” (69)

However, Jane does not agree with Helen’s creed. She realizes that Helen’s spirituality is based upon self-renunciation and self-sacrifice, things that Jane is not willing to tolerate because they imply submission and the acceptance of injustice without self-defense. Ultimately, what Jane does is to learn from Helen’s spirituality. Even though Jane rejects Helen’s self-sacrifice, she takes Helen’s example regarding forgiveness and applies it when she meets Mrs. Reed, her aunt, at her deathbed. Jane forgives her aunt mistreatment and later is able to “discriminate the Christian from the man: profoundly esteem the one, and freely forgive the other” (456).

The second female model found at Lowood School is Miss Temple. She is one of Jane’s teachers, who takes care of all girls with affection. For the first time, Jane Eyre is exposed to a mother image through this character. Nonetheless, Jane also rejects the example that is provided by Miss Temple because it implies feign submission. Since Miss Temple has to give an account of the orphanage before Mr. Brocklehurst, she has to manage how to explain the “excessive” cost for the girls’ food and clothes: “Oh, madam, when you put bread and cheese, instead of burnt porridge, into these children’s mouths, you may indeed feed their

vile bodies, but you little think how you starve their immortal souls!” (74). Even though Jane likes Miss Temple’s example of real affection, she rejects her feign submission. As a result, what Jane learns from Miss Temple is that she needs to demonstrate a coherent example between thinking, feeling, and acting.

Next, when Rochester’s lie about his wife is revealed, Jane is aware that she cannot be his mistress because she would not be his equal, she would be considered inferior by accepting a place that is equal to slaves: “Hiring a mistress is the next worse thing to buying a slave: both are often by nature, and always by position, inferior: and to live familiarly with inferiors is degrading” (350). Additionally, Jane rejects Rochester’s sinful past and idolatrous relationship based on the fact that Rochester equates his desire to possess Jane with God’s will.

After Jane leaves Rochester, she wanders from town to town with no food and no money until she accidentally finds her cousins. Then she starts to work at a local school for poor children and is able to determine that “God directed me to a correct choice: I thank His providence for the guidance” (401). Jane feels completely sure that her decision to leave Rochester was the correct one. Although she does not have the man she loves, she has spiritual serenity and the assurance that God is directing her.

Afterwards, St. John tries to convince Jane to marry him to go to spread the Gospel in India. As he is not in love with Jane, she answers to him: “I scorn your idea of love,” [...] “I scorn the counterfeit sentiment you offer: yes, St. John, and I scorn you when you offer it” (457). He, like Rochester believes that it is God’s will to marry Jane. However, Jane is already aware that St. John’s proposal is not her divine destiny.

The last model or example that gives Jane the strength to decline St. John are Diana and Mary, her cousins. They openly reject their brother's marriage proposal: "And again she [Diana] earnestly conjured me to give up all thoughts of going out with her brother" (463).

Finally, when Jane feels trapped by St. John's proposal, she hears: "[...] I heard a voice somewhere cry— "Jane! Jane! Jane!"—nothing more" (470). In that moment she is able to interpret voice and knows that it is Rochester that has summoned her. She decides to come back to him and discovers that his wife has died and he has suffered an accident and lost one hand and the eyesight. Rochester is free to marry Jane, and she determines that her divine destiny is to marry him.

In this way, Jane has developed her own spirituality not only based on anti-examples of the aforementioned male characters but also on some elements of female characters that are compatible with Jane's own way of thinking. She uses feminist and religious ideas to be faithful to God and achieve her glorious destiny with Rochester.

Final commentary based on the end of the novel

The last portrayal of St. John is considered unclear because in Lamonaca's view (254), at the end of the novel, Jane acknowledges St. John's death as a heroic ending because he is going to achieve his most desired spiritual objective: to go to heaven. Despite that, this character not only championed Calvinist principles but also a patriarchal system. As a result, this concluding scene contradicts the reading of the novel with a feminist bildungsroman perspective. However, what this ending suggests is that finally, St. John is going to receive the payment that he always strove for. He, like Helen Burns, sees death as a reunion with God and eternal heavenly dwelling. What distinguishes them, besides St. John's patriarchal ideology, is that while Helen dies in silence because of consumption, which was the result of a poor and unhealthy childhood at Lowood School, St. John dies after pursuing his glorious destiny in India. He has, in a way, obtained what he wanted (to die) by his own will, following his own commands and patriarchal principles. For this reason, Jane considers St. John's death as a triumph, but an ironic one since it is also implied in the novel that all people will die someday no matter what. As a consequence, what should have mattered the most to him was his life, the development of his spirituality, not his death because as it was mentioned before, all living beings will inexorably die someday. Thus, to read this ending as an ironic triumph does not oppose to the reading of *Jane Eyre* as a female bildungsroman. On the contrary, it supports the idea that what matters the most is the spiritual development under no oppressive principles.

Conclusion

Charlotte Brontë's background influenced her novel *Jane Eyre* in such an unexpected way that the Victorian reader must have begun examining their own value system. Given the rigid standards set for all young women at the time, it could have been assumed that the story was going to take a turn for Jane's final condemnation. This character as a liberated young woman was in contact with her spirituality and was faithful to it. Her journey of spiritual development could only take place through her unexpected irrevocable commitment of becoming one transparent being whose actions, thoughts and feelings spoke of a true Victorian feminist. Even though her character was repudiated for going against the strict standards of religion, Jane does not receive God's righteous punishments. Consequently, Brontë challenges the Victorian traditional conventions by devising the character of Jane Eyre since she represents the internal struggle of young women to overcome the fear of not fitting into society, to be coherent with themselves and find their way to personal fulfilment and spirituality. As a result of devising this feminist, rebellious young character, Brontë has materialized equality among men and women, in a world where the latter were not allowed to conceive of having their own voice or their own constructed spirituality.

On the other hand, because Jane Eyre is so earnest in everything she does and feels and has the courage to face hypocrisy, her efforts are finally rewarded by marrying a man that has undergone the necessary chastisement to redeem himself from his past errors. Therefore, it does not matter what Victorian values may be applied on this surprising outcome, as Jane complies with the values of equality and feminism. Subsequently, she finds the power to resist the typical submission that was expected of women of her age and social position, which leads her to God's divine will.

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