

JANE EYRE: A FOUCAULDIAN STUDY OF POWER AND RESISTANCE

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Abstract

This study aims at investigating the Foucauldian shades of power and resistance through the test case of Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre. It contemplates the dynamic mechanism of power and resistance as both these are the intimate terms in the work of Foucault working in a social relation. Power is seen everywhere in society, and its mechanism can only be replaced or changed through the process of resistance. Foucault's power does not have a negative connotation to exercise against someone to take the life of people. His power has resistance in itself. This study emphasizes on the resistance of Jane Eyre in Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre. Despite her nonconformist thinking, actions, and attitude, and bold character, she seems to resist the power of patriarchy and religion. She finally gets success in proving that Jane resistance is more powerful than the power that lies in society everywhere. This study adopts the textual analysis of the novel and has the much scope to find out the impact of resistance in the character of Jane Eyre from a Foucauldian point of views.

Keywords: Power, Resistance, Nonconformity, Jane Eyre, Patriarchy

Introduction

The nature of power and connection of resistance to power excellently explained by Foucault in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969) and *The History of Sexuality* (1976). Foucault uses the term resistance for the struggle against powerful groups or individuals and opposes them. Resistance is consistently present in literature or in its genres (Bhat, 2019). Checchi (2014) in his article, *Spotting the Primacy of Resistance in the Virtual Encounter of Foucault and Deleuze* states that resistance is shown as a creative and positive force, inciting reactions and obliging power to change. Unlike Marx who sees power only in institutions, power according to Foucault is present everywhere because it has the quality of resistance. Resistance permeates all the social movements, and upheavals whereas, power always triggers resistance. Whenever power is exercised, resistance will occur (James, 2018).

Moreover, Foucault mentioned that modern power is diffused, all over and flowing, accentuates the trouble of resistance. The perspective on power as productive and creative changes Foucault's previous concentration upon the individuals who are underestimated or avoided. Hence, power does not work through such negative systems instead, it drives forces and even individuals. Therefore, the essential knowledge of power fundamental for viable resistance should be more concerned about productiveness (Pickett, 2013). In addition, gender specified roles are based on power relations in the society. When there comes power, there must be resistance which highlights the social struggle of people. Recently, many studies have been conducted on the objectification of women in Brontë's Jane Eyre however, very little literature is found on the power relations that regulates in Victorian society. Therefore, the present study is an attempt to trace the relationship between power and resistance in the society through the selected character of Jane Eyre with the help of Foucauldian theory.

Objectives of the Study

- To explore the elements of resistance to the patriarchal power in Jane Eyre from the perspective of Foucault.
- To examine the source of power that helps her to achieve her self-esteem in an unfavorable and challenging situation.
- To evaluate the primacy of resistance that empowered Jane to maintain her independence in social relations.

Literature Review

Jane Eyre is one of the masterpieces that has ever been produced in literature gives chance to analyze and examine it from different perspectives such as religion, one of the most dominate themes of the novel; psychoanalytic and poststructuralist...etc. The current study is based on a power relation in the novel Jane which is to investigate from Foucauldian perspective. The essence of power is omnipresent and it is one of his most provocative view of power. Contrary to some theorists and their analysis of power, he believes that the privilege of power does not only limit to upper classes who are powerful and influential but for the exercise of power dominate groups are not necessary because the effect of the power can feel everywhere in the society in any relationships for the reason that power is not static but moving and circulating the in society in all direction and thus functions in the form of a chain. Power is a multifaceted set of systems in which at the degree of knowledge power raises specific discourse and knowledge builds up power. Notwithstanding, the activity of power constantly makes knowledge and knowledge then again, all the while incites impacts of power (Abera, 2019).

There are many works presents on the novel Jane Eyre focused mainly the plight of women characters interpreting them either as an oppressed or fighter. However, some of the readers belonged to 19th seem shocked to see Bronte use of biblical text in the novel Jane Eyre. For this purpose, Pearson (2012) claims that the three men characters: Mr. Brocklehurst, Mr. Rochester and St John Rivers have been characterized biblically. Bronte portrays Mr. Brocklehurst, as an antichrist, and who is the first coming man. For his second coming, Jane apprehensively and fearfully anticipates after she has initiated her studies at Lowood School. It is summarized that Charlotte Bronte rebels against the disparity among people during the nineteenth century, she depicts this dismissal in Jane Eyre's safe conduct. This portrayal contracts with the authentic ladies' pictures of Victorian time, who were abused and belittled by men. It is summing up that Charlotte Bronte opposes the dissimilarity among individuals during the nineteenth century, she portrays this excusal in the Jane Eyre's protected direct (Abaker, 2019).

Sexton (2014) states that it is undoubtable that *Jane Eyre* becomes the epitome of female resistance to patriarchal power. Her character has the elements of romance and gothic which writer artistically depicts through words on page by showing that it is coming-age-story. The story that starts with young poor and helpless orphan girl, revolves around her, and ends with a happily and joyful woman. Their characterization is immaculately impressive by appearing and giving power qualities to women living in center of male centric society (Lili Lu, 2015). Suliman (2015) reveals the fact about Jane's true belonging and her journey towards self-recognition. It seems to us by reading the paper that the major work of the writer in this paper is to examine two critical things: Jane's consistent efforts to have a sense of self recognition; and the moral attitude of Jane to accomplish this objective. Awaliah (2017) aims to discover gender matters mirrored in Jane Eyre written by Charlotte Bronte. Jane Eyre facilities women who are considered someone who has a secondary place in the society and are supposed to be

a second sex under the supremacy of men. Woman's independence is a component of gender problems which becomes an apprehension for feminists.

Correspondingly, Ioannou (2018) throws light upon the portraits of Rosamond Oliver and Blanche Ingram in the novel *Jane Eyre*. The article aims to reason about the theme of sexual love in the novel and how a portrait contributes to the 19th-century dialogue about women. It has been shown in the case of a miniature of Rosamond and that it comes at a point where Jane has determined to select a sexual unification rather than an unhappy and loveless marriage. Grace (2017) claims that the struggle of *Jane Eyre* has the only aim and that is to build epistemological power in her own life which is formed by three key documents: The letter which is received from her uncle; the testimony of Richard and the signature of her own — which are offered to her at climactic moments in her journey. These three stages that Jane meets have a lasting impact on her life and identity. In such a manner, the documents are Gothicized and deciphering their parts in the novel presents a chance for investigating how characters in the present, particularly Jane, can make good knowledge that gives them power over their own lives.

Methodology

This research is descriptive-qualitative and it is based on qualitative data which is taken from the novel *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte. Data contains the original text of novel *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Foucault's books: *The History of Sexuality volume One: The Introduction* (1978), *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1966), and *On Discourse and Power* (2014). The study is conducted on the impacts of power and resistance on the character of *Jane Eyre*. This is the inductive study which draws upon the theory of power and resistance in the light of Michael Foucault for analyzing and understanding the actions, behavior of the characters in the novel. Foucault's assumption can be composed into following points which are highly vital for this research and which are taken from his book:

1. Power comes and shapes through knowledge.
2. Power always incites resistance.
3. Resistance is not something that lies outside the power rather it emerges from within.
4. Power is ubiquitous, diffuse, and static and so is the resistance, but resistance is dynamic.
5. Without resistance, there will be no power relation.
6. The more persuasive of exercise of power is, the greater the resistance will be.
7. The primacy of resistance is greater than the power.
8. Power should not be admonished or avoided whenever it is formed. The way of exercising power might deserve criticism.

Analysis and Discussion

Undoubtedly, gender inequality was at its peak in 19th-century society, as it was male-centered and dominated by them, blurred women's rights to the extent of an invisible state. Damrosch (2003) expresses his opinion about the status of women by questioning that: Women were physically and intellectually inferior, weaker sex that would buckle under the weight of strong passion thought, or vigorous exercise, only in their much-vaunted 'womanliness'; did women have an edge, as nurtures of children and men's better instincts.

Marital Power Politics

Marriage was a crucial component in Victorian women's lives. The exercise of power over women's life forced them to resist the robust structure of the society that the male created.

Some of the Victorian writers like Brontë observed all the conditions and witnessed the unfavorable situation of women in that society which made her start writing and developing the characters that will advocate women.

To the women of the Victorian era, new dawn arose when some female writers avoided society's consciousness at large because they discovered their ability and the true essence of their life. The women writers came forth and advocated women's plea by depicting characters who were not only women but powerful in every aspect that could subdue the male's hegemony before them and lived a life of their own. Among all the novelists of such type, Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë, Mary Gaskell are given a prominent place in the literary world. According to Buzwell (2014), women of 19th century was the embodiment of the New Woman: Shew as free-spirited and independent, educated and uninterested in marriage and children.

Power Connection between Jane and Reed's Family at Gateshead

The instance of power can be vivid from the very beginning of the story when at a very young age, Jane loses her parent and taking the responsibility of her brought up, her uncle Reed tries to give her a good life; however, fortune, once again, devastates her when her uncle dies. Victim of fate, her aunt, Mrs. Sarah Reed considers Jane as a burden and advises her three children to disregard and abuse Jane. They disdain her simple looks and her passionate personality. Reed's family, who are the only relatives of Jane, has no accordance or sympathy for her complete isolation and despises her because she is a girl who does not like them. Neither do they have any pity for this small girl, nor do they miss any opportunity to criticize and bully her. Her weak situation incites their wrath making her subservient. The elements of the Foucauldian power can be traced at every point in the novel but the relationship between Jane and her aunt Mrs. Reed is vivid from the very beginning. She considers Jane submissive and being dependent on them:

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 (Brontë, 1847, p. 11).

Cold and criticizing, Aunt Reed consistently regards Jane as an encumbrance of a mediocre compared to a house cleaner and accepts her like a breathless object. The need for the exercise of power is essential for its existence because there is constant resistance to the power from Jane's side. Deprived of love and compassion, she has her 'self' to love to so as to face the cruelty of curled society instead breaking down to before powering her resistance gives her courage to defiance.

You think I have no feelings and that I can live without one ...but I cannot live so to my dying day, though I was in agony...People think you are a good woman, but you are bad—hard-hearted. (Brontë, 1847, p. 38)

Possession of Self

The aspiration of revolt is unanticipated by society in general, for Jane is achieving the personal freedom and subjectivity of making her own choices without the intervention of anyone as in Feminism and Liberalism Revisited: Has Martha Nussbaum got it Right? By Arnold A. Markley states that 19th century was when women's dreams were controlled and very little freedom of making personal or public choices. They had very few opportunities and options accessible to assist and back themselves. This general thought is likewise voiced by Phillips, who details us to comprehend women as the most important, as human focuses of decision and opportunity (Anne, 2001).

Nussbaum improves on the issue when she requests that we consider whether we need a world where women carry on with their daily routines or carry on with lives as directed by others (Anne, 2001). If the same were asked from Jane, she would have selected the primary choice, for example, to carry on with her own life with complete independence since she was not happy with the transcriptions of others like Mrs. Reed at Gateshead, Mr. Brocklehurst at Lowood, Mr. Rochester at Thornfield, and St. John at Fields House. She has a very high sense of freedom, and she considers it right to fight or voice for freedom. She is conscious of her rights, ability, and talent which are denied by society. She states that:

Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties...as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint to absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer... It is thoughtless to condemn them...(Bronte, 1847, p. 109)

By her defiant nature, Jane shatters the long male-dominant tradition of perceiving women as inferior. She demands that her voice be heard, and occasionally, she accepts something if it meets her wishes and desires; otherwise, she has the power of rejecting it bluntly without thinking of its consequences much.

Nonconformist Attitude of Jane Eyre

The resistance of Jane once again is seen vividly when she looks determined to decide for herself, not thinking what society thinks. In most people's eyes, not a single person would adore getting hitched with a man who drops his sight and most of his affluence. However, then as to Jane, she is unique. In her mind, genuine love is the reunion of the hearts and thoughts of two people. She seems not entirely against the institutions that are part of society. However, she wants to stop the prejudiced attitude of society against women by demanding education, respect, and status. Michel Foucault says in *The History of Sexuality Volume One: The Introduction* that power is the phenomenon that is diffused in society. There is no single place where power exists without resistance. During her dismissal of Rochester, she states:

I care for myself. The more solitary, friendless, and unstained I am, the more I will respect myself. I will keep the law given by God, sanctioned by man. I will hold to the principles I received when I was sane and not mad... inviolate they shall be. (Bronte, 1847, p. 368).

The selection of lines expresses exclusively Jane's solid character, and her focus which is entirely on herself. The accentuation Jane puts on herself shows the conduct of a woman not worried about satisfying others, yet one who is worried about making the right decision for herself. This ability of self-awareness is worth picking instead to focus on the 'storybook' finishing of the novel when Jane eventually chooses to wed Rochester following his wife's death. Equally important to add the point that it seems beyond imagination, but it is true to say that not only is the control of a woman's life in the man's hands but also, man has the license to shatter down the feelings and emotions into a piece and inflict even her soul to death; however, it is only Jane's resistance that teaches woman not to comprise on self-respect and self-esteem.

Conclusion

The present study opens up a new horizon for the females to unchain the shackle of slavery under male's dominance and raise voices against society's stereotypes. It shows the journey of a woman Jane and her resistance to achieve a life of respect. Freedom forces the mechanism of power presented in different forms: patriarchy, religion, learning institutions, class systems, marriage. Her resistance earns her a new identity for herself. The patriarchal system symbolizes the strong connection of power that only aims to oppress women.

Struggling to manage her self-respect in adverse circumstances empowers her to seek her true identity. Jane is the epitome of independence that is achieved only through her power of resistance. Jane Eyre's character can be perceived in three ways: The first step is her spirited, independent thought that begins to grow from battling and resisting to her helpless kid life. The second phase encompasses all her miserable conditions and experiences in Lowood. However, the third stage in which her pursuit for true freedom, quest for love, and fight for equality seems her a belief in herself. Not only this novel offers a case study for female freedom but also can make a good case through psychoanalysis how profitable it is for woman to explore her talent and serve the society in a positive manner.

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