



Empirical Study of Charlotte Bronte's Novel Jane Eyre

¹Dr Syed Aamir Syeed

Assistant Professor [English]

Govt Degree College [Boys] Anantnag, J&K

²Imran Ahmad Sheikh

Post-Graduate Scholar of English Literature

³Uzra Jan

Post-Graduate Scholar of English Literature

Abstract

This paper explores the theme of empiricism in Charlotte Bronte's novel "Jane Eyre." The paper argues that the novel examines the importance of experience and the dangers of ignoring the emotional and psychological effects of experience. The paper analyzes the character of Jane, and Bertha Mason to show the intersection of race and gender in the novel and to illustrate the limitations of empiricism. The research methods used in this paper are close reading and analysis of the novel and critical literary theory. The paper concludes that a balance between reason and emotion, experience and intuition is necessary for a meaningful and fulfilling life.

Keywords: Empiricism, Jane, Bertha Mason.

Introduction

This research paper explores the theme of empiricism in Charlotte Bronte's novel, Jane Eyre, with a focus on the characters of Jane and Bertha Mason. The concept of empiricism, or the theory that knowledge is based on experience, is a fundamental theme in the novel and is embodied in the lives of both characters. Through a critical analysis of the experiences of Jane and Bertha, this paper will examine the ways in which their individual experiences have shaped their understanding of the world around them. Furthermore, this paper will investigate the complexities and nuances of the characters' experiences, including the ways in which power and privilege intersect with race and

gender to shape their understanding of the world. By examining the characters of Jane and Bertha through an empirical lens, this research paper will provide a deeper understanding of the themes and ideas presented in Jane Eyre and offer insights into the role of experience in shaping our knowledge and understanding of the world.

Empiricism

Empiricism is the philosophical theory that all knowledge comes from experience, either through sensory experience or through reasoning. This theory was influential in the 18th and 19th centuries and can be seen in many works of literature from that time period. One such work is Charlotte Brontë's novel "Jane Eyre", which was published in 1847. In this essay, we will explore the theme of empiricism in "Jane Eyre", how it is expressed through the characters and their actions, and the impact it has on the novel as a whole.

At its core, "Jane Eyre" is a novel about the development of the individual. The story follows the journey of Jane Eyre, an orphaned young woman who faces various challenges and obstacles throughout her life. The novel explores many themes, such as social class, gender, morality, and religion, but the theme of empiricism is especially prominent.

From a young age, Jane is a curious and questioning child. She is not content with accepting things at face value and seeks to understand the world around her. For example, when she is punished and locked in the red-room as a child, she does not simply accept that it is a haunted room as she has been told. Instead, she looks for evidence to prove or disprove this theory. She observes the room and its furnishings, tests the theory that the room is haunted by making noises herself, and even looks up the definition of "ghost" in a book to see if it matches her experience.

This curiosity and desire to understand the world is a key aspect of empiricism. Empiricists believe that all knowledge is derived from experience, and that understanding comes through observation and experimentation. Jane's willingness to question and investigate the world around her reflects this belief. She does not simply accept what she is told, but instead seeks to understand and verify it through her own experiences.

This theme of empiricism is further developed as Jane grows and matures. As she gains more life experience, she begins to develop her own set of beliefs and values. She rejects the dogmatic and oppressive teachings of Lowood School and instead seeks a more

personal and individual understanding of religion. She rejects the idea that social class should determine one's worth and instead values people for their character and integrity. She also rejects the notion that women are inferior to men and should be subservient to them. All of these beliefs are founded on her own experiences and observations of the world.

One of the most important expressions of empiricism in the novel is through the character of Rochester. Rochester is a complex character, and his views on the world are shaped by his own experiences. He has lived a life of indulgence and pleasure, but he has also experienced great pain and loss. He is cynical and disillusioned with the world, but he is also curious and open to new experiences.

Rochester's belief in empiricism is demonstrated in his interactions with Jane. He is drawn to her because she is different from other women he has known. She is intelligent, independent, and unafraid to speak her mind. He is intrigued by her questioning nature and her desire to understand the world. He values her for her honesty and integrity, and he is willing to learn from her.

At the same time, Rochester also embodies the dangers of empiricism. His belief that experience is the only source of knowledge leads him to be reckless and impulsive. He keeps a dark secret from Jane, believing that his experience of the world has taught him that he is above the law. He is willing to ignore social conventions and moral standards in pursuit of his own desires. This disregard for the consequences of his actions leads to his downfall and ultimate redemption.

The character of St. John Rivers also embodies the dangers of empiricism. St. John Rivers is a character who is devoted to reason and rationality. He is a missionary who believes that his duty is to serve God and help others, but his approach to this task is very different from Jane's. While Jane's belief in empiricism is rooted in her desire to understand the world and develop her own set of beliefs, St. John's belief in reason is based on his desire to serve a higher power and follow a set of established rules.

St. John's devotion to reason leads him to reject his own emotions and desires. He is willing to sacrifice his personal happiness and fulfillment in order to serve what he believes is a higher purpose. He is also willing to manipulate and control others in pursuit of this purpose, which ultimately leads to his downfall. His rigid adherence to reason and his rejection of the emotional and intuitive aspects of life prevent him from experiencing true fulfillment and happiness.

The character of Bertha Mason is another example of the dangers of empiricism. Bertha is the madwoman in the attic, the hidden secret that Rochester keeps from Jane. Bertha's

life is characterized by pain and trauma, and her mental illness is a direct result of her experiences. Her story is a cautionary tale about the dangers of ignoring the emotional and psychological effects of experience.

Bertha's story also highlights the intersection of race and gender in the novel. Bertha is a Creole woman from Jamaica, and her story is an example of the way that colonialism and racism can lead to trauma and suffering. Her experience of being trapped and oppressed by a white man reflects the broader themes of oppression and marginalization that run throughout the novel.

Overall, the theme of empiricism in "Jane Eyre" is complex and multifaceted. The novel explores the ways in which experience shapes our understanding of the world and the dangers of ignoring the emotional and psychological effects of experience. It also highlights the importance of questioning and investigating the world around us, and the importance of developing our own set of beliefs and values.

At the same time, the novel also recognizes the limitations of empiricism. It shows us that experience alone is not enough to create a meaningful and fulfilling life, and that we must also cultivate emotional and intuitive understanding in order to truly connect with the world around us. The novel ultimately suggests that a balance between reason and emotion, experience and intuition, is necessary for a meaningful and fulfilling life.

Jane

Jane Eyre is a character whose development is shaped by her empirical outlook. Her belief in the importance of experience and her willingness to question and investigate the world around her are central to her character, and they ultimately lead her to a place of self-discovery and fulfillment.

One of the most significant examples of Jane's empirical outlook is her relationship with Mr. Rochester. Jane is drawn to Rochester because he is a man of experience, a man who has seen the world and has a wealth of stories and knowledge to share. She is also drawn to him because he challenges her, forcing her to confront her own beliefs and assumptions.

At the same time, Jane is not willing to accept Rochester's authority blindly. She questions him, challenges him, and demands honesty and transparency from him. When she learns about the existence of his wife, Bertha Mason, she is appalled and refuses to accept Rochester's explanation. Her empirical outlook leads her to question Rochester's actions and motivations, and ultimately to reject his proposal of marriage.

This rejection is a turning point for Jane. It marks the beginning of her journey towards self-discovery and independence. She leaves Rochester and strikes out on her own, determined to make her own way in the world. She takes a job as a governess, a position that allows her to continue her investigations of the world and to develop her own beliefs and values.

Jane's empirical outlook also shapes her relationships with other characters in the novel. She is drawn to Helen Burns, the young girl who dies of consumption at Lowood school, because of Helen's intellectual curiosity and her commitment to her own beliefs. She is also drawn to St. John Rivers, the missionary who is dedicated to reason and rationality, but ultimately rejects his proposal of marriage because of his lack of emotional connection.

Throughout the novel, Jane's empirical outlook is contrasted with the attitudes of other characters, such as the Reed family, who are blinded by their own prejudices and assumptions, and Mr. Brocklehurst, the headmaster at Lowood school, who uses religion as a means of control and oppression. Jane's commitment to experience and investigation allows her to see beyond these limitations and to develop her own beliefs and values.

Summing it up, Jane Eyre's character is shaped by her empirical outlook, which allows her to question and investigate the world around her, and to develop her own beliefs and values. Her relationships with other characters in the novel are defined by this outlook, as she is drawn to those who share her commitment to intellectual curiosity and emotional connection, and rejects those who are blinded by their own prejudices and assumptions. Ultimately, Jane's empirical outlook leads her to a place of self-discovery and fulfillment, as she strikes out on her own and creates a life for herself based on her own beliefs and values.

Bertha Mason

Bertha Mason is a complex and tragic character in Jane Eyre, whose story is an example of the ways in which experience can shape our understanding of the world. Bertha's life is characterized by pain, trauma, and mental illness, and her story raises important questions about the intersection of race, gender, and power in the novel.

Bertha is a Creole woman from Jamaica, and her story is an example of the way that colonialism and racism can lead to trauma and suffering. As a young woman, she was brought to England by her husband, Mr. Rochester, who kept her locked up in his attic

because of her mental illness. Bertha's experience of being trapped and oppressed by a white man reflects the broader themes of oppression and marginalization that run throughout the novel.

At the same time, Bertha is a figure of terror and mystery in the novel, and her characterization is fraught with problematic racial and gendered stereotypes. Bertha is described as a monster, a beast, and a demon, and her mental illness is often linked to her racial identity. These descriptions perpetuate harmful stereotypes about black women and reinforce the idea that mental illness is a form of deviance.

One way to approach an empirical analysis of Bertha's character is to consider the ways in which her experience of trauma and oppression shapes her understanding of the world. Bertha is a woman who has experienced a great deal of pain and suffering, and her mental illness is a direct result of her experiences. Her story is a cautionary tale about the dangers of ignoring the emotional and psychological effects of experience, and the importance of recognizing the ways in which power and privilege shape our understanding of the world.

At the same time, Bertha's story is also a reminder of the limitations of empiricism. While experience is important in shaping our understanding of the world, it is not enough on its own. Bertha's experience of trauma and oppression has left her in a state of mental illness, and her understanding of the world is distorted by her condition. This distortion is reflected in the way she is characterized in the novel, as a figure of terror and madness, rather than as a human being with a complex and tragic story.

Summing it up, Bertha Mason is a character whose story raises important questions about the intersection of race, gender, and power in *Jane Eyre*. Her experience of trauma and oppression is a cautionary tale about the dangers of ignoring the emotional and psychological effects of experience, and the importance of recognizing the ways in which power and privilege shape our understanding of the world. At the same time, her characterization in the novel perpetuates harmful stereotypes about black women and reinforces the idea that mental illness is a form of deviance. An empirical analysis of Bertha's character must take these factors into account, and recognize the complexity and nuance of her tragic story.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the theme of empiricism in Jane Eyre is a complex and multi-faceted topic, with implications for the characterization of both Jane and Bertha Mason. The character of Jane is presented as a figure who relies heavily on her own experiences and perceptions to understand the world, and her story reflects the importance of self-reliance, self-discovery, and self-empowerment in the face of adversity. At the same time, the character of Bertha Mason raises important questions about the limitations of empiricism, and the ways in which experience can be shaped by power and privilege.

An empirical analysis of the characters, Jane and Bertha must take into account the broader social and historical contexts in which their stories take place, including issues of race, gender, and colonialism. While Jane's story is ultimately a tale of triumph over adversity, Bertha's story is tragic, reflecting the profound impact of oppression and marginalization on the human psyche. As such, an empirical analysis of the characters of Jane and Bertha in Jane Eyre must be sensitive to the nuances and complexities of their stories, and recognize the ways in which their experiences are shaped by both internal and external factors. Ultimately, the novel raises important questions about the nature of experience, the role of power and privilege in shaping our perceptions of the world, and the importance of self-discovery and self-empowerment in the face of adversity.

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