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**The Development of Jane Eyre's Personality
as a Consequence of Charlotte Brontë's Life
Experience**

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To the women in my life: my dearest friends, Jimena, Victoria, Cristina and Lucía; and to Josefa, M^a Trinidad, M^a José and M^a del Carmen, the strongest women I know.

For always encouraging me to achieve my goals and for being in the front row applauding when I do.

You all are my Helen Burns.

Abstract

Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre* is one of the most distinguished works of all time. This dissertation analyzes the personal development that its protagonist, Jane Eyre, experienced throughout the course of her life. In order to achieve that, the analysis is divided into five sections, which are framed according to the five locations she lived in, each one of them corresponding to a different stage of the protagonist's life. Among these, the most transcendental moments from Jane's life will be analyzed in order to establish the influence they had over her future behavior and character and to describe how most of those core moments and Jane's learning are a reflection of Charlotte Brontë's own development.

Keywords: Charlotte Brontë, Jane Eyre, development, experience, character.

Resumen

Jane Eyre, de Charlotte Brontë, es una de las obras más destacadas de todos los tiempos. Este Trabajo de Fin de Grado analiza el desarrollo personal que la protagonista, Jane Eyre, experimentó a lo largo de su vida. Para ello, el análisis se divide en cinco secciones, que se enmarcan según los cinco lugares en los que vivió, correspondiendo cada uno de ellos a una etapa diferente de la vida de la protagonista. Respecto a estas, se estudiarán los momentos más trascendentales de la vida de Jane con el fin de establecer la influencia que tuvieron sobre su comportamiento y carácter futuros y de describir cómo la mayoría de esos momentos centrales y el aprendizaje de Jane son un reflejo del propio desarrollo de Charlotte Brontë.

Palabras clave: Charlotte Brontë, Jane Eyre, desarrollo, experiencia, carácter.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Jane Eyre is one of the most widely known novels of all time, especially during the years of its publication in the nineteenth century. Ever since I read the novel for the first time, I became engrossed in the ahead-of-its-time character traits of the protagonist. However, what interested me more than anything were the triggers and root causes behind Jane Eyre's desire for independence and agency. This is why I chose to work on how her experiences and relationships (especially those which took place during her childhood) determined her further decision-making process, and how this led her to achieve her desired autonomy, in spite of the different obstacles she encountered.

Charlotte Brontë originally published the novel in 1847 as *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography*, under the pseudonym of "Currer Bell". Written in the 1st person, it narrates events that represent actual experiences of the life of the author, thus establishing this novel in the field of Autobiographical Fiction. It tells the story of the courageous Jane Eyre and how she overcame the different struggles that life presented to her. She had to live through the mistreatment suffered at the hands of her Aunt Reed, the cruel and harsh years in Lowood School, and the difficulties of her romantic relationship with Edward Rochester. Nevertheless, she managed to overcome those difficulties and use them as a catalyst to become the independent woman she had always aspired to be. *Jane Eyre* is the story of growth and self-betterment of a woman who did not always have the odds in her favor. Thus, the undaunted, determined, and self-aware character of the protagonist made this novel a very controversial one during its time of publication, seeing as it was published during the Victorian Era, which was characterized by strict and orthodox moral codes (especially when it came to women).

In order to contextualize and understand what *Jane Eyre* entailed at the time, the aforementioned epoch needs to be briefly explained. The Victorian era is a distinguished period of time whose name owes to the reign of Queen Victoria (in England) and which started in 1837 and ended in 1901. It was a time of changes, both political, economical and, consequently, social. As stated by Walter E. Houghton in his work "*The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870*", "it was the medieval tradition from which they had irrevocably broken - Christian orthodoxy under the rule of the church and civil government under the rule of king and nobility, the social structure of fixed classes, each with its recognized rights and duties; and the economic organization of village agriculture

and town guilds” (2). These changes triggered consequent transformations in people’s mindsets, which is what leads me to elaborate why *Jane Eyre* was such a transcendental novel. As a contrast from the preceding Romantic Movement, characterized by the tendency towards the expression of feelings as a route of escape from the negative effects on the Industrial Revolution, The Victorian Era was distinguished by a pungent realism. This characteristic emerged due to the need to plasm everything as it was, because the constant change led the contemporaries to be in a state of confusion with reality and universal truths. Hence, Charlotte Brontë’s novel was so relevant and controversial; on the one hand it was fitting for the time (it is an autobiography), but, on the other hand, the social standards imposed on women at the time did not allow everyone to have an open mind about a woman fulfilling her desired independence.

Marta Vicinus tackled the topic of the Victorian social standards for women in her introductory essay ‘*Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age*’, stating that the purpose of educating women was “to bring out her “natural” submission to authority and innate maternal instinct” (X) but more importantly, for them “to have no opinions lest they seem too formed and too definite for a young man’s taste, and thereby unmarketable as a commodity” (X). *Jane Eyre*’s controversy mostly owes to the fact that the protagonist embodies the opposite of these two ideas.

Many writers of that time are proof of the polarity of opinions this novel generated, some of them actually holding the novel and the tenacity of the protagonist in high regard, but completely disagreeing with her character and course of action. Elizabeth Eastlake’s statement in *The Quarterly Review* in 1848 is an instance of this:

We acknowledge her firmness – we respect her determination – we feel for her struggles; but for all that, and setting aside higher considerations, the impression she leaves on our mind is that of a decidedly vulgar-minded woman – one whom we should not care for as an acquaintance, whom we should not seek as a friend, whom we should not desire as a relation, and who we should scrupulously avoid as a governess. (173-174)

1.1 Contextualization of the author

Taking into account the fact that the novel is an autobiography, some parallels between Charlotte Brontë's life and the events in the novel can be established. Thus, the landmark moments of the author's life need to be explained, in order to understand how they essentially built her into the woman she is and clearly influenced the course of the novel. In this way, establishing the context of her life will also help to better understand the woman behind the novel and her origins, her values and her religious beliefs.

Charlotte Brontë was born on the 21st of April of 1816 and died on the 31st of March of 1855. When she was 5 years old, her mother and older sisters (Mary and Elizabeth) died, and her father, Patrick Brontë, was left alone to take care of the family. He asked for the help of his late wife's sister, Elizabeth Branwell, who was, according to Cándido Pérez Gállego, "a harsh woman, with rigid religious customs, who did not know how to transmit to her nephews and nieces the affection they needed" (9-10). All of this is vividly portrayed in *Jane Eyre*, seeing as orphanage is one of the central points of the story, especially at the beginning. Charlotte's strict aunt is portrayed through Aunt Reed, who shares the same characteristics as her, with the only difference being the fact that, in the novel, Jane's aunt is Jane's father's sister, whereas in Charlotte's life, her aunt belongs to her mother's side. Elizabeth Branwell raised her children and niece following the "Methodist idea of sin and all that this entails: doubts about the possibility of atonement, ideas of predestination, personal inability to attain eternal salvation." (Pérez Gállego 10). This is also reflected in the novel, because Jane Eyre's religious beliefs follow the same line of thought.

Later on, from 1831 to 1832 she studied in Miss Wooler school in Roc Head and, years later, she worked as a teacher there, and then in Brussels as well. She decided to become a teacher because she wanted to use her skills to encourage and make a dent in other people. In July 1848, her siblings Branwell and Emily passed away and, shortly after, in May 1849, her sister Anne died too, leaving her and her father as the only members of the family. However, these tragic events did not stop her from publishing *Shirley* in 1849, and *Villette* in 1853. In 1854, she married A.B. Nicholls (which gave place to a short and unhappy marriage) and, the following year, she died "leaving us with the memory of an exciting life, in which above all we perceive a continuous desire to find a place in the difficult society of Victorian England" (Pérez Gállego 12).

Charlotte Brontë's life is thoroughly influenced by religion and faith. According to Heather Glen's *Charlotte Brontë: The Imagination in History*: "a major social and cultural fact of early nineteenth-century England, which she herself had known in an especially extreme manifestation: that distinctive pedagogy which had developed out of the evangelical revival of the eighteenth century and [...] which had become, indeed, in more or less modified form, probably the most powerful ideology of child-rearing in early Victorian England" (68). Religion was so ingrained in the author's life and her development that she will also reflect that in the novel.

Considering the aforementioned key moments from Charlotte Brontë's life, some of the crucial passages and ways of thinking of the main character can be associated with the real life experiences of the author. With this in mind, and taking into account the fact that the novel is autobiographical, the development of Jane Eyre's personality through the course of the novel can also be associated with that of Brontë.

1.2 State of the issue

Charlotte Brontë's novel has always caught the eye of those who read it, as the essayist and literary critic Cándido Pérez Gállego states: "The circumstances and achievements of her life and those of her family have fascinated readers of all generations. Jane Eyre's popularity has never waned, and it is a passionate expression of female concerns and difficulties" (5). For that reason, the fact that *Jane Eyre* is so widely known makes it a novel whose readership offers a wide range of approaches and viewpoints. Among these, I observed that some of the most common ones are the feminist approach, the autobiographical approach, the analysis of the role of social classes, the analysis of the role of the Catholic religion, the analysis of the gothic elements in the novel, and the analysis of the evolution of the protagonist's personality.

First and foremost, the feminist approach is the most frequently tackled, maybe owing to the nature of the novel, since feminism is an intrinsic trait in Jane Eyre's development. For a woman to become independent, especially during the Victorian Era with its strict moral codes, she needs to overcome different obstacles imposed by the patriarchal society. This idea is portrayed and analyzed by Haiyan Gao, of the School of Foreign Languages of He Ze City, in China. In her dissertation "*Reflection on Feminism in Jane Eyre*" (2013), she states that "Jane Eyre proves to the world of the 1800s that a

woman beating the odds to become independent and successful on her own was not as far-fetched as it may have seemed.” (930)

The analysis of the autobiographical traits of the novel is also a recurrent theme among the different fields of analysis. One example of this field of analysis can be observed in Lourdes Villalón Criado’s dissertation “*Autofiction and Autobiography in Jane Eyre by Charlotte Brontë*” (2018). The pupil of English Studies from the University of Valladolid analyzed Jane Eyre’s childhood in order to establish a middle ground between her early years and Brontë’s and consequently find the similarities between the fictional events of the novel and the author’s real life.

Additionally, several contemporaries have also studied the role that social class plays in the story. Some of them have extrapolated it to Charlotte Brontë’s social status, and others, such as Mirella Musan, student of the Faculty of Art and Social Science in Karlstad, Sweden, have focused on analyzing how class ideology affects the perception certain characters have of the others. In her degree project, *What Class Does to the Mind. Class and social standing in Jane Eyre* (2021), she argues that social class is such a determinant factor that Jane Eyre would never be able to be treated in the same way as someone of a higher status as long as she belonged to the lower class.

The imprint that the Catholic religion left in the protagonist’s upbringing and further development is a recurrent topic of analysis as well. Most of the works related to this topic analyze the novel through the lens of the England of the Victorian era, when women’s identity was largely narrowed down to their Christianity. Such is the case of “*Jane’s Crown of Thorns: Feminism and Christianity in “Jane Eyre”*” (2002), a dissertation written by Maria Lamonaca and published in the Johns Hopkins University Press. In her paper, she examines the aforementioned idea, but also contrasting it with the fact that narrowing women’s Christianity to their identity made them afraid of jeopardizing their spiritual and moral integrity.

The analysis of the gothic elements of the novel also appears among the most-commonly-chosen subjects of study. The complexity and meaning of these elements have proven to sparkle the interest of many readers, maybe due to the fact that *Jane Eyre* does not seem to be a gothic novel on the surface. Among this field of analysis, the student Therese Gambring from Karlstad University wrote a compelling dissertation on this topic. In *An examination of the complexity and function of the gothic features in Charlotte*

Brontë's Jane Eyre (2014), she states that the different gothic elements that appear in the story not only have the function of frightening the reader, but also of contributing to the protagonist's personal development as well as portraying Jane's true desires.

Lastly, the analysis of the development of Jane Eyre's personality throughout the course of her life has been analyzed by many contemporaries as well. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's book *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979) offers a wide insight on this topic, seeing as it analyzes different literary texts whose writers were women from the Victorian age. Among these women, Gilbert and Gubar dedicate a chapter to Charlotte Brontë and some of her novels, among which they study Jane Eyre's development.

Taking these analysis into account, the study that I will carry out in this paper deals with the latter idea. For that reason, I intend to analyze how Jane's behavior and the decisions she makes as an adult are determined by her prior experiences and relationships.

Hence, in order to explore this issue, I will analyze the protagonist by classifying her main life events in a chronological order. For that purpose, I will focus on the different places where she lived, seeing as each one represents a particular life lesson in her life and, consequently, a different (and progressively higher) level of self-awareness and knowledge. These locations are Gateshead, Lowood School, Thornfield Hall, Moor House and Ferndean. Taking all of this into account, my approach consists in extracting the key moments from Jane Eyre's life and analyzing the piece of knowledge and introspection she obtained from them. With that in mind, I will establish in what further situations in her life she has implemented that knowledge and how she has eventually evolved. Lastly, I will proceed to analyze, taking into account the previous contextualization of Charlotte Brontë's life, how Jane's development reflects Brontë's.

2. ANALYSIS OF JANE EYRE'S PERSONALITY

As was stated above, in order to analyze Jane Eyre's character and her development, I will divide this section into 5 subsections, each one corresponding to the different locations where she lived. The first subsection will deal with Gateshead, and it will be followed by Lowood School, Thornfield Hall, Moor House and Ferndean.

2.1. Gateshead

The first four chapters of the novel narrate Jane Eyre's experiences in Gateshead, the house where she spent the first years of her life. She lived with her aunt Reed, her children (John, Georgiana and Eliza) and Bessie Lee, the housemaid. The different behaviors of these characters towards the protagonist were some of the most determining factors for her further development, and that is what will be analyzed in this subsection.

From the first pages of the novel, Jane Eyre is depicted as a curious young girl, as can be seen in the passage where the protagonist is engulfed in Thomas Bewick's *A History of British Birds*. Here, her cousin John hit her with the book she was reading, and his sisters blamed it on her, to which her aunt Reed, as punishment, made the decision of locking her up in what they called "the red room". This passage is the first instance of the humiliation and punishment the protagonist suffered every time she showed her true personality and desires (which, in this case, was reading about something that interested her). Furthermore, the period of isolation in the red room is one of the most detrimental moments in the story, seeing as it is one of the most traumatic events for Jane Eyre. She frequently mentions it throughout the course of the novel, which is proof of the psychological damage she suffered there. In fact, Jane even transmits how she believes that the confinement against her will produced in her a permanent psychological damage: "No severe or prolonged bodily illness followed this incident of the red-room: it only gave my nerves a shock, of which I feel the reverberation to this day." (Brontë 18).

Her imprisonment in the red room left such a mark on Jane Eyre that it can be considered a turning point in her attitude towards authority. There is a vast difference between her submissive character at the beginning of the novel and the more rebellious attitude she begins to display from the moment she leaves the red room. The mentioned submissive character is vividly portrayed in the stoic manner in which she tolerates John's

misbehavior towards her: “Accustomed to John Reed's abuse, I never had an idea of replying to it ; my care was how to endure the blow which would certainly follow the insult” (Brontë, 10).

Contrary to that, an instance of her subversive attitude can be seen in Jane's almost-instinctive response to being wrongfully accused of having “a tendency to deceit” (Brontë 29) in front of the headmaster of the school she would be sent to. Her response to her aunt Reed's accusation was “I am not deceitful: if I were, I should say I loved you; but I declare I do not love you: I dislike you the worst of anybody in the world except John Reed; and this book about the Liar you may give to your girl, Georgiana, for it is she who tells lies, and not I” (Brontë 31-32). In *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979), Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue that “the event that inspires little Jane's final fiery words to Mrs. Reed is her first encounter with that merciless and hypocritical patriarch Mr. Brocklehurst” (343). While agreeing with their idea, I would also add that the reason behind Jane's outburst could be the fact that the visit from Mr. Brocklehurst (the headmaster of the school she would be sent to) was a symbol of a new beginning for the protagonist. Thus, seeing the strict headmaster form a negative opinion about her might have been her breaking point, since she had a very complaisant character and probably wanted to make a good impression.

Additionally, I would also say that the main reason behind her sudden change of heart does not just owe to the fact that she was locked up against her will or to the presence of Mr. Brocklehurst, but to the fact that, during those moments, she began her path towards introspection. According to Gilbert and Gubar:

Her experience in the red-room, probably the most metaphorically vibrant of all her experiences, forces her deeply into herself. For the red-room, stately, chilly swathed in rich crimson, with a great white bed and an easy chair “like a pale throne” looming out of the scarlet darkness, perfectly represents her vision of the society in which she is trapped, an uneasy and elfin dependent. (340)

Her inherent curiosity led her to question many traits about her personality and the way people treated her, and it was at that moment that her attitude started to change. In her inner dialogue, she asked herself: “Why was I always suffering, always browbeaten, always accused, forever condemned? Why could I never please? Why was

it useless to try to win any one's favour?" (Brontë 13). After that, she also compared the treatment her "headstrong and selfish" (Brontë 13) cousins receive with how she is treated and realizes that, even though she is always putting in an effort to "commit no fault" and "fulfill every duty" (Brontë 14), she is still perceived as an unruly girl. I believe this realization was the last straw for her to "rebel" and stand up for herself from then on. Considering the relevance this event had in the protagonist's change of mindset, this critical moment will serve as a point of reference in further sections of my analysis.

2.2. Lowood School

The second location where Jane lived is called Lowood School, an institution dedicated to the moral and pedagogical education of young orphaned girls. She stayed there for the following 9 years of her life, the first seven years as a student, and the last two as a teacher.

Her time in the institution was not completely enjoyable either; she lived through very harsh conditions, as well as through an equally severe treatment from the headmaster of the school, Mr Brocklehurst. Seeing as his objective as headmaster was to indoctrinate the girls into a passive and conformist character, he forced them to live among scarcity and privation from basic necessities. These ranged from neglect of their physical wellbeing: "Before the long hour and a half of prayers and Bible reading was over, I felt ready to perish with cold" (Brontë 45), to malnourishment: "Should any little accidental disappointment of the appetite occur, such as the spoiling of a meal, the under or the over dressing of a dish, the incident ought not to be neutralised by replacing with something more delicate the comfort lost" (Brontë 45). According to the headmaster, doing that would mean "pampering the body and obviating the aim of this institution" (Brontë 54).

Undoubtedly, the privation and harshness Mr. Brocklehurst imposed on the girls went beyond the institution's scarcity itself; even the girls' physical aspect went under strict observation. The following words of Mr. Brocklehurst regarding their appearance are an accurate reflection of this: "the laundress tells me some of the girls have two clean tuckers in a week: it is too much; the rules limit them to one." (Brontë 53). According to him, even something as natural as the girls' hair had to follow certain rules: "I wish these girls to be the children of Grace: and why that abundance? I have again and again

intimated that I desire the hair to be arranged closely, modestly, plainly. Miss Temple, that girl's hair must be cut off entirely” (Brontë 55).

Of these different forms of constant scrutiny and stricture, the common denominator is the traditionalist Evangelical faith the headmaster preaches (but does not practice, seeing as his own family is wealthy thanks to his position at Lowood). Heather Glenn explores this topic in *Charlotte Brontë: The Imagination in History*, where she argues that “ ‘Vigilance’ such as this was to the evangelicals merely an earthly reminder of the unceasing scrutiny of the all-seeing, eye of God” (70). Furthermore, this Evangelical discipline also involves punishment and repentance when one sins, and it was “directed most particularly at the sins of vanity and of lying” (Glenn, 71). Indeed, Mr Brocklehurst also subjected the girls to different forms of punishment (specially humiliation) in those cases where, according to his religious beliefs, they had erred. One instance of this takes place when the slate Jane was holding fell down, and the headmaster punished her by forcing her to stand on a stool for an hour and forbidding her partners from talking to her for the rest of the day (Brontë 56-57).

Nevertheless, even though Lowood was yet another low point in her childhood in some aspects, Jane was able to experience, for the first time, what it meant to be loved and respected. So much so that she even stated: “ ‘Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.” I would not now have exchanged Lowood with all its privations for Gateshead and its daily luxuries.” (Brontë 64). Her contentment owes to the fact that, during her years in the school, she met Helen Burns (one of her partners) and Miss Temple (one of the teachers), both of whom became a great support for her, and whose advice Jane would remember and cherish throughout the course of her life. They served as inspiration for the protagonist, who delighted in listening to them talking about history, books and new languages (Brontë 63). This proves that not every experience that molded Jane was necessarily traumatic; some of the people she met actually had a positive impact on her.

Furthermore, the tragic event of Helen’s death was the first moment in which Jane’s mind “made its first earnest effort to comprehend what had been infused into it concerning heaven and hell” (Brontë 67). I believe this owes to the fact that Helen, who was a firm believer of God’s will and eternal salvation, often referred to death as “a full reward” (Brontë 60) and “an entrance to happiness to glory” (Brontë 60). Be that as it may, Jane rejected and questioned this form of faith, even though her experience in

Lowood did influence her, seeing as she would end up believing in a Christian God, salvation and merit (as will be seen in further sections, while she grows up). Emily Griesinger, in her essay *Charlotte Brontë's Religion: Faith, Feminism, and "Jane Eyre"*, explains how Jane's (and, therefore, Brontë's) questioning of the evangelical Christianity is even presaged during her time in Gateshead, where "she learns that it's not enough to be passive and sulk behind the window blinds reading books, as she does before Master John attacks her. No. In the face of injustice, she must take a stand" (47). She also verbalized this idea to Helen, stating that she "must dislike those who, what I do to please them, persist in disliking me ; I must resist those who punish me unjustly" (Brontë 49-50), but the latter expresses her passive attitude towards unfairness. It is true that Jane remains immovable in her stance with respect to mistreatment, but Helen Burns does make a dent on Jane and reveals to her a new form of faith to reflect on.

As I mentioned before, many of the transcendental moments of crisis that the protagonist experienced had such an impact on her that she kept recalling them throughout the novel. One of the most evoked events is her isolation in Gateshead's red room of Gateshead, perhaps due to the psychological damage it inflicted on her. One of the passages where this moment is evoked took place when Mr. Brocklehurst punished her by standing on the stool and accused her of being a liar and a servant of "the Evil One" (Brontë 57). In this case, the reminiscence of the memory stems from two main factors: the fact that it was her aunt Reed who made the headmaster believe she was a misbehaved girl, and the fact that the humiliation and helplessness she felt evoked the same negative feelings she experienced during her stay in the red room: "I never forgot the, to me, frightful episode of the red-room; in detailing which, my excitement was sure, in some degree, to break bounds" (Brontë 61). Her trauma was so eminent that, as Jane stated, "nothing could soften in my recollection the spasm of agony which clutched my heart when Mrs. Reed spurned my wild supplication for pardon, and locked me a second time in the dark and haunted chamber" (Brontë 61).

The period of time Jane spent in Lowood greatly contributed to the development of her personality, a change that begins to be hinted at when she questions the religious beliefs she had been taught previously. Nevertheless, a more tangible development will be unmistakably observed in the following section, when she starts to fend for herself in her loneliness.

Her years in Lowood ended after she had worked two years as a teacher and decided to leave for Thornfield. She started contemplating the idea of moving away when she realized that, during all those years, she had not been anywhere further than Gateshead or Lowood. Hence, she longed for the “hopes and fears”(Brontë 72) that would be awaiting outside her habitual routine, and it was during that moment that she felt that her current life “was not enough” (Brontë 73), which is why she “desired liberty” (Brontë 73) and “a new servitude” (Brontë 73). She truly felt the need to walk her own path in life, which is proof of the evolution of her character.

2.3. Thornfield Hall

The third section of my analysis and, consequently, the third location where Jane Eyre lives is a manor called Thornfield Hall. She went there because she desired to leave Lowood and was offered a governess position in the manor, where she would be teaching Adèle, a young French girl who would eventually learn both school subjects and life lessons thanks to Jane. In the manor, Jane also lived with Mrs. Fairfax (the housekeeper), the servants, and the obnoxious Edward Rochester (the owner of the place and the man who hired her). He is also the man whom Jane would eventually fall in love with and the main source of the events that contribute to her personal development during that period of time.

Going back to the first section of this analysis, where I talked about Jane Eyre’s inquisitive character, I would argue that this trait of hers is part of what led her to always aspire for more and try to improve herself. In her own words: “I could not help it; the restlessness was in my nature ; it agitated me to pain sometimes. Then my sole relief was [...] to open my inward ear to a tale that was never ended - a tale my imagination created, and narrated continuously; quickened with all of incident, life, fire, feeling, that I desired and had not in my actual existence.” (Brontë 93). This aspect of Jane’s personality is what moved her to make the decision of working in Thornfield Hall and what would eventually help her introspect and evolve.

During this chapter of her life, I would say that Jane was experiencing, for the first time, what it meant to live a peaceful life (in spite of the love deception she suffered later on). That serenity fueled her curiosity, which is a factor that contributed to her seeing her

new life in Thornfield as “an existence whose very privileges of security and ease I was becoming incapable of appreciating.” (Brontë 99).

Further on, Jane met Edward Rochester, a man who changed her perception of Thornfield Hall. With him there, instead of becoming bored of her routine, she started enjoying it, since she saw his presence in the house as if “A rill from the outer world was flowing through it.” (Brontë 100). Notwithstanding, as I previously mentioned, Mr. Rochester was an obnoxious man who was quite disrespectful towards Jane, adopting a patronizing stance when referring to her. An example of his insolence can be observed when Adèle shows Mr. Rochester Jane’s drawings and he says: “I don't know whether they were entirely of your doing: probably a master aided you” (Brontë 105). This devaluation of her abilities would have probably wounded her were it not for the development of self-esteem that blossomed in her after going through the aforementioned traumatic experiences. It is during this moment that another gist of her self-confidence can be observed: “His changes of mood did not offend me, because I saw that I had nothing to do with their alternation; the ebb and flow depended on causes quite disconnected with me” (Brontë 109). This statement proves that she had learned from the previous mistreatment she suffered and began to understand that, as opposed to what Aunt Reed, John Reed and Mr. Brocklehurst tried to infuse her with, she is not at fault for every wrong deed that is done to her.

Further to this, and even though Rochester was not always in his best behavior, Jane and him seemed to share a sort of intellectual connection, developed in the process of spending their evenings together. Nevertheless, that bond they shared was lopsided; he represents a figure of power over her because she is a woman, she is twenty years younger than him, she is poor (and consequently belongs to a different social status), and she is working in his employ. Mr. Rochester is aware of their differences and, on several occasions, tries to use them to his advantage:

Then, in the first place, do you agree with me that I have a right to be a little masterful, abrupt; perhaps exacting, sometimes, on the grounds I stated: namely, that I am old enough to be your father, and that I have battled through a varied experience with many men of many nations, and roamed over half the globe, while you have lived quietly with one set of people in one house.” (Brontë 113-114)

All the same, Jane does not submit to his manipulation and tells him that he does not have the right to mistreat her just because he stands in that position of “power” over her (Brontë 114).

Nevertheless, in spite of the major change that can be appreciated between Jane’s behavior when she was in Lowood and Gateshead and her more mature demeanor in Thornfield, she still came across many difficulties regarding the proper achievement of her desired independence. Some scholars, such as Judith Leggatt and Christopher Parkes, compare Thornfield with the physical and psychological imprisonment she previously suffered. In their dissertation *From the Red Room to Rochester's Haircut: Mind Control in Jane Eyre*, they expound how: “Thornfield Hall is not part of England’s larger web of commercial activity. [...] She is just as removed from society as she was at Gateshead and just as owned by Rochester as she was by Mrs Reed.” (181). I found their statement a very precise comparison, seeing as I do believe that, whereas she left those places in order to be on her own, she was not downright independent. The alienated location Thornfield is at (and even more so if we take into account the fact that the means of transportation of the time were carriages), combined with her being economically (and, as it will be analyzed in the following paragraph, emotionally) dependent on Mr. Rochester definitely conditioned her development and her true sense of agency and autonomy.

Going further into the analysis of Jane and Rochester’s relationship, it can be seen how, as time went by, her feelings developed into something stronger; she became infatuated, and that affection altered her perception of him. Before being romantically interested in Mr. Rochester, she analyzed his character and, comparing his virtues and his flaws, “formed an equitable judgment” (Brontë 158). On the contrary, after becoming aware of her love for him, she realized she “was forgetting all his faults” (Brontë 158). Nevertheless, she was familiar with his bad temperament. Hence, her infatuation and the previously mentioned inequalities that existed between them made her harbor conflicted feelings. This confusion increased when she realized Rochester was planning on marrying Blanche Ingram out of “interest and connections” (Brontë 158), seeing as she did not see him as a man who would look for “motives so commonplace in his choice of a wife” (Brontë 158).

On another note (although I will resume my analysis of her dynamic with Mr. Rochester after this), Jane experienced yet another pivotal event for her development. In

this brief passage, Jane narrates the moment she went back to Gateshead to visit her Aunt Reed, who was ill. I believe the greatest sign of Jane's growth so far is observed in that visit; the fact that, despite all the psychological harm they inflicted on her, she still went to Gateshead, is quite revealing of her personality and development. It can be observed how, on the one hand, she still conserves her altruistic tendency to look out for her "loved ones" (represented in the act of going back to Gateshead to take care of her aunt), but on the other hand she does not let her past torment her when she goes back to the Reeds' house and has to tolerate her aunt and cousins' disrespect. In Jane's own words: "A sneer, however, whether covert or open, had now no longer that power over me it once possessed : as I sat between my cousins, I was surprised to find how easy I felt under the total neglect of the one and the semi-sarcastic attentions of the other - Eliza did not mortify, nor Georgiana ruffle me" (Brontë 193). Her calm stance in the presence of those people who had and still tried to belittle her is not something that she simply acquired through time. Learning from her past experiences with other figures of authority (Mr. Brocklehurst and Rochester) shaped her current self-respect and eliminated her fear of oppression and built-up resentment towards them.

Taking into account Jane's evolution up until then, the time came to act upon her principles and values, and it took place after Mr. Rochester proposed to her; a marriage that, as the protagonist eventually realized, was not a bed of roses. He started treating Jane as one of his possessions, as someone who had to live at his mercy and was not permitted to make any decision regarding herself nor their relationship: " "when once I have fairly seized you, to have and to hold. I'll just - figuratively speaking - attach you to a chain like this" (touching his watch-guard.) "Yes, bonny wee thing, I'll wear you in my bosom, lest my jewel I should tyne." " (Brontë 228). The fact that he wants to keep her to himself and not let her evolve is indicative of the little regard he has for her and her needs and desires. He does not respect her enough to see her as an equal who has a separate life (despite being in a relationship), but as somebody who has to be molded according to his own wishes. In sum, marrying her is just a means to boost his ego. Jane, however, always expressed her denial to being changed or "crowned with roses" (Brontë 220) in the several occasions Mr. Rochester tried to mold her into something she was not. These fearless acts of drawing her limits contributed, once again, to Jane's personal development.

Regarding their marriage, it was not followed through, since it was revealed that Rochester was already married to Bertha Mason, a woman he kept locked up in the attic for being allegedly insane. After learning this, Jane decided, in a final act of self-confidence and development, to leave Thornfield. This decision stems from the fact that, as E. Margaret Fulton rightly states in *Jane Eyre: The Development of a Female Consciousness*, their marriage agreement had become “an offence to the moral integrity of each. Rochester knows he has lied and deceived Jane, while she vaguely senses that she has lost the very “independent will” she has sought so valiantly to develop” (438). I would also add that a comparison between their potential marriage and the Red Room can be established. Rochester was trying so hard to fit her into a mold that their marriage would probably have become a psychological prison for her, had she not stopped it. This psychological imprisonment exerted by him, added to the previously analyzed idea of Thornfield being a sort of prison, and to Jane’s own imprisonment in the Red Room are, from my point of view, characteristics that make Jane resemble Bertha.

Thus, by juxtaposing Bertha’s lonely and mistreated character with Jane’s, I came to the conclusion that the former is a foreshadowing of what would have happened to the latter had she not left Mr. Rochester. Some authors, such as Molly Beck, majored student in English in the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, coincide on this idea. In her dissertation *Autonomy, Identity, and Doubles in Jane Eyre (Rock Creek Review)*, she argues that the fact that “Bertha’s character can be attributed in part to her dependence and her lack of development of her own identity” reveals how “Jane’s forming of her own identity and gaining of personal freedom is of the utmost importance lest she become animalistic as well” (12,13).

2.4. Moor House

The fourth location where Jane lived is called Moor House, the home of St. John Rivers (the local priest) and his sisters, Mary and Diana. Finding that house was not an easy task for Jane at first: the coach left her in Whitcross, where she had to fend for herself for two days; she was penniless and had to beg for sustenance and money, but she eventually came across Moor House, where she stayed for over a year.

Jane's journey to Whitcross was filled with introspection and rumination about whether she was acting right by leaving Rochester in order to do right by herself. She was perfectly aware of the fact that she had no sense of direction at the moment, both physically and psychologically: "Not one thought was to be given either to the past or the future. [...] The last was an awful blank : something like the world when the deluge was gone" (Brontë 270). In addition, she also had mixed feelings regarding her departure: on the one hand, she knew she had made the right decision by prioritizing her values and moral principles, but on the other hand, that decision was not pleasant at all, because she was leaving behind the man she loved. This confusion can be seen when she was in the coach and she asked herself: "What was I? In the midst of my pain of heart, and frantic effort of principle, I abhorred myself. I had no solace from self-approbation : none even from self-respect. I had injured-wounded-left my master. I was hateful in my own eyes. Still I could not turn, nor retrace one" (Brontë 270).

Despite her initial doubts about this new journey she was embarking herself on, Jane ended up realizing that the rational (although painful) decision she had made was leading her on the right track:

Whether is it better, I ask, to be a slave in a fool's paradise at Marseilles fevered with delusive bliss one hour suffocating with the bitterest tears of remorse and shame the next or to be a village-schoolmistress, free and honest, in a breezy mountain nook in the healthy heart of England? Yes ; I feel now that I was right when I adhered to principle and law, and scorned and crushed the insane promptings of a frenzied moment. (Brontë 302)

This passage holds a lot of meaning because it resembles the epiphany she had in the Red Room, where she began to ask herself the reasons behind the Reeds' displays of disrespect towards her. However, in this case, she did not have to ask herself those questions anymore, because she already had enough self-confidence to know that she was not at fault for how other people behaved. Instead, she embarked herself in another episode of introspection with respect to her own decisions.

I would say that the passage of the Red Room and this one are the two main points of inflection in Jane's life, since they both symbolize core moments where a change of mindset can be appreciated in her. I would also add that, the fact that she is alone on both occasions (both physically and psychologically) contributed to giving free rein to her

inquisitive character and, consequently, to learning more about herself. Her inquisitiveness, added to her open-to-change attitude and the absence of her previous emotional dependence on Rochester, are the ultimate reasons behind Jane's development. Gilbert and Gubar state that, thanks to leaving Rochester behind, "Jane has now gained the strength to begin to discover her real place in the world" (Brontë 364).

Furthermore, during her year in Moor House, Jane befriended and enjoyed Mary, Diana, and John's company, and it is safe to state that she was content with her life, as can be seen in the following passage: "To live amidst general regard [...] is like "sitting in sunshine, calm and sweet:" serene inward feelings bud and bloom under the ray. At this period of my life, my heart far oftener swelled with thankfulness than sank with dejection" (Brontë 308). This sense of serenity and comfortability with them led Jane to create a special bond with them, specially with St. John.

Nevertheless, John Rivers' cold and detached attitude should be pointed out, since it definitely affected Jane. An instance of his behavior can be observed in this passage, where he tries to downplay Jane's usual passion for life's simplicities: "try to restrain the disproportionate fervour with which you throw yourself into commonplace home-pleasures. Don't cling so tenaciously to ties of the flesh ; save your constancy and ardour for an adequate cause; forbear to waste them on trite transient objects." (Brontë 329). This sort of remarks from him entailed a change of demeanor in Jane, who held him in such high regard that she ended up being dependent on his opinion:

I daily wished more to please him: but to do so, I felt daily more and more that I must disown half my nature, stifle half my faculties, wrest my tastes from their original bent, force myself to the adoption of pursuits for which I had no natural vocation. He wanted to train me to an elevation I could never reach: it racked me hourly to aspire to the standard he uplifted. (Brontë 335)

Some time later, he asked her to marry him and accompany him to India (as missionaries), but she realized that doing that would mean to be "forced to keep the fire of my nature continually low, to compel it to burn inwardly and never utter a cry, though the imprisoned flame consumed vital after vital" (Brontë 343). Hence, she told him she would not do it and, in her refusal, she was, once again, standing up for herself and forging her own path towards her development and her desired independence. Gilbert and Gubar define her rejection as "a measure of how far she has traveled in her pilgrimage toward

maturity” (366) because “she escapes from his fetters more easily than she had escaped from either Brocklehurst or Rochester” (366).

Regarding Jane’s potential marriage with St. John and her earlier potential marriage with Mr. Rochester, a comparison can be established between them. Both of them symbolize the abandonment of part of her values, which is the reason behind her rejections. In the case of the former, Jane would experience the serenity of marrying a man who respected her, at the expense of sacrificing her desire for true love and passion. In the case of the latter, she would experience passion and love, at the expense of marrying someone who would treat her as one of his possessions, as I stated in the previous section.

Moreover, it is clear that St. John’s stern behavior and perception of life stem from following the religious doctrine of Calvinism. In order to contextualize, the term “Calvinism” should be defined. Calvinism is a religious doctrine that, according to John Calvin’s *“Analysis of the Institutes of the Christian Religion”* predicates on the fact that “to be Christians under the law of grace does not mean to wander unbridled outside the law, but to be engrafted in Christ, by whose grace we are free from the curse of the law, and by whose spirit we have the law engraved upon our hearts” (30). Knowing this, and taking into account how St. John’s believes in putting God above anything else (even above his love for Rosamond Oliver, whom he rejects in exchange for going to India), we could establish that he is the embodiment of this doctrine in the novel. It is true that Jane does not end up preaching this religious doctrine, but having experienced what it is to coexist with it, it definitely influenced her in terms of acquiring knowledge.

In this way, the repercussion of the different religious doctrines that were presented to her throughout the course of her life is quite evident because, even though she did not practice any of those, she ceased being superstitious from the moment she set foot outside Thornfield Hall: “God directed me to a correct choice: I thank His providence for the guidance!” (Brontë 302). As John Hagan, Professor Emeritus of English at Binghamton University, rightly states in his thesis *“Enemies of Freedom in “Jane Eyre”*”: “In spite of Helen Burns’s religious teachings, it is not until Jane has repudiated Rochester’s sinful proposal that she become his mistress and freed herself from his home that we see superstition decisively replaced in her mind by faith and trust in God”. Hence, having acquired all that religious knowledge throughout the course of her life guided her when she felt lost after leaving Rochester.

2.5. Ferndean

Jane's story culminates with her going back to Thornfield Hall, right after receiving a copious amount of money from her uncle John Eyre's inheritance (which she also shared with St. John, Mary and Diana, who are revealed to be her cousins). Nevertheless, when she arrived there, she found out that the manor had been destroyed as a consequence of a fire allegedly provoked by Bertha Mason, who died in the midst of it. She also found out that Mr. Rochester lost his eyesight in the fire and that he had relocated to Ferndean manor after the fire.

The act of receiving that inheritance money can be considered another turning point in Jane Eyre's life, seeing as it signified stability and true independence. As a (poor) woman of the Victorian Era, she always had to depend on someone to fulfill her wishes, which was a significant obstacle for the achievement of her desired independence. With that obstacle out of the question, she became independent and rich; she was her "own mistress" (Brontë 367) and was indisputably able to do whatever she wanted to do or go wherever she wanted to go. According to Ronald Thomas, in *The Advertisement of Jane Eyre*, "Jane's story of becoming her own mistress consistently links psychological independence and financial success. The literal accumulation of wealth becomes a metaphor for Jane's psychic development" (49).

Thus, she decided to pay a visit to Mr. Rochester but, once she found out what had happened in Thornfield, she resolved to stay with him indefinitely and keep him company, which he was in much need of. It seems that Jane's absence changed something in him and made him truly value Jane as a person, as can be seen in their reencounter, when he says: "all the sunshine I can feel is in her presence" (Brontë 371). Furthermore, Bertha's death establishes the final turning point in their relationship, since it meant that Mr. Rochester

has been freed from what was for him the burden of Thornfield, though at the same time he appears to have been fettered by the injuries he received in attempting to rescue Jane's mad double from the flames devouring his house. That his "fetters" pose no impediment to a new marriage, that he and Jane are now, in reality, equals, is the thesis of the Ferndean section." (Gilbert & Gubar 368)

Having learnt from the pain he caused Jane when he deceived her by not telling her he was married to Bertha, Rochester seemed to have placed himself in a position of equality with Jane; at least in what comes to their mutual love and respect. Hence, she ended up achieving her most primal desires: to be loved, cherished and respected, and to be independent. Because of that, their relationship went from being a psychological imprisonment to a place where “to be together is for us to be at once as free as in solitude, as gay as in company” (Brontë 381).

3. CONCLUSION

In this final section, I will give an answer to my proposed question of how Jane Eyre's life experience (especially in her early years) paved her path towards personal development. Seeing as her life story can be divided according to the different places she lived in, I will also describe how each location and the people she surrounded herself with influenced her growth. Furthermore, and taking into account the fact that the novel is Charlotte Brontë's autobiography, I will establish the common points between the novel and its author, as well as compare Jane's development to that of the author.

The first key moment in Jane Eyre's life is her imprisonment in the Red Room in Gateshead, which constitutes a turning point in Jane's attitude towards authority. At the beginning of the novel, it can be seen how she always tried to meet everybody's expectations of her while, from the moment she was let out of the Red Room, she became more incomppliant. This event was so detrimental that Jane evoked it in other episodes of her life, such as the one when Mr. Brocklehurst humiliates her.

Furthermore, in Lowood, Jane had to endure Mr. Brocklehurst's constant scrutiny, censure and humiliation, fruit of his evangelical devotion. Her time there was yet another turning point for her, especially because it is during that time that she started questioning her previous religious background as a result of befriending Helen Burns, who is another great influence to her and opens her eyes to a different form of faith.

Years later, when she went to Thornfield Hall and met the (at first) obnoxious Mr. Rochester, she ended up sharing a romantic bond with him. A bond that would not last long, seeing as she realized he did not respect her opinions and her values, which, added to the fact that she found out he was already married to Bertha (whom he kept locked up in the attic), made her leave Thornfield. Thus, Gateshead, Lowood School and Thornfield symbolize the physical and psychological imprisonment she suffers throughout her life, and it is not until she learns about Bertha that she fully makes use of her agency to make her own decisions and leave. The act of leaving can be considered the reflection of her increased self-respect and development, seeing as she realized she was being treated poorly and decided to act on it, something she had to learn throughout her past encounters with disrespect. On another note, Rochester's first wife is also important in a sense, because, in my opinion, she represents Jane's *alter ego*: what she would have been had she not left Thornfield.

During her year in Moor House, she had to carry out the arduous task of processing her recent detachment from Mr. Rochester, which contributed to her self-improvement, seeing as he had been very important but also very destructive for her. St. John proposed to her but, even though that marriage would give her the tranquility of being respected by him, she refused to do so, seeing as she would be forfeiting her true desire to feel love and passion (which would make her waste all her effort towards achieving personal development). Furthermore, St. John's calvinist doctrine influenced her, because, even though she did not preach it, she was not as superstitious as before.

Lastly, the inheritance money Jane received changed her life as well, because it meant she would have the economic stability and freedom she could not have before. Knowing this, she finally went back to Rochester, who also seemed to see her in another light due to her absence.

Knowing these facts, I conclude that Jane Eyre's life experience, although painful in some stages, cemented the basis for her evolution and the creation of the undaunted and confident woman she turns out to be. Hence, and taking into account Charlotte Brontë's aforementioned trajectory of life (especially how she also had a rigid aunt who treated poorly, how she also lived in an institution similar to Lowood, and how she was also extensively intrigued by religion), I would say that the narration of those experiences that shaped Jane's personality are the means by which Charlotte Brontë expressed her own personal change and development as well.

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