

## A Feminist Interpretation of the Novel Jane Eyre by Author Charlotte Brontë



Ahmed Riyadh Majeed Al-Dabool

Al-Muthanna university, College of agriculture, samawa ,iraq

**ABSTRACT:** This study aims at showing the importance of nature and the surrounding society in Jane Eyre written by Charlotte Bronte. In this paper, there is an attempt to project the notion on “nature” as an element of presenting the social classes and genders that play a prominent role in setting the social standards and principles. The paper attempts to draw a connection between the society and the external environments and the description of the characters’ inner feelings which sets up the heroine’s consciousness at the center of the story. In order to study this, ecofeminism was referred to as the background theory and then the data were analyzed to show how the characters of Jane Eyre along with the settings represent a part of the environmental aspects. The results showed that during the main character’s contemplation regarding her surrounding environment present romanticized elucidations of social and natural aspects, her the ecological realization are presented within the lines to affect social classifications.

**KEYWORDS:** Charlotte Bronte, nature, society, eco-feminism, equality

### INTRODUCTION

Jane Eyre, Charlotte Brontë’s Masterpiece

Charlotte Brontë, a 19th-century novelist, was deeply influenced by her experiences in Yorkshire, particularly its natural elements. Her masterpiece, Jane Eyre, has captivated both general readers and critics, often seen as a reflection of Brontë’s own life. The novel’s originality and emotional depth have made it a timeless classic, appealing to a diverse audience and translated into many languages, including Chinese. The novel’s success is attributed to its intricate plot and well-developed characters.

Jane Eyre’s Summary

Jane Eyre, written in 1847, follows the life of Jane, a tutor who endures many hardships. Raised by a cruel aunt, Jane finds solace in Bessie, the maid. After a traumatic childhood, she attends Lowood School, where she faces further cruelty but also forms a meaningful friendship with Helen Burns. After eight years as a student and two as a teacher, Jane becomes a tutor at Thornfield, where she meets the enigmatic Mr. Rochester. Despite initial misunderstandings, they fall in love, but their wedding is interrupted by the revelation that Mr. Rochester is already married to the mad Bertha Mason. Jane leaves Thornfield, experiencing poverty before finding refuge with the Rivers siblings. She inherits a fortune from her uncle and shares it with her newfound cousins. Eventually, Jane returns to Mr. Rochester, now blind and living in Ferndean, and they marry. Two years later, Mr. Rochester regains his sight.

A Close Look at Jane Eyre as a Literary Work

Jane Eyre reveals various messages, particularly the correlation between nature and females, and the oppression faced by both. This reciprocal relationship is developed throughout the novel, raising women’s voices and advocating for gender equality. The novel challenges traditional customs, unarranged marriages, and religious practices, embedding women’s rights within its plot.

The novel tackles themes like romance, realism, and self-identity, reflecting the Victorian era’s social and economic crises. During this period, laws like the “law of corn” and “the law of intimidation” led to social upheaval, influencing Brontë’s work.

Statement of Problem

Charlotte Brontë (1816-1855) often focused on ecology in her novels, drawing from her experiences in Yorkshire. Jane Eyre is considered a Bildungsroman, depicting Jane’s growth through life’s challenges. The novel has been analyzed through various critical lenses, including psychoanalytical and psychological readings by Elaine Showalter and Virginia Woolf, respectively.

Despite its age, Jane Eyre remains relevant, with ongoing research into its themes of ecofeminism and ecocriticism. The novel explores complex human-nature relationships and the oppression of both women and nature. This study aims to fill the gap in understanding these themes, highlighting the importance of an interdisciplinary approach to ecocriticism and literature.

Research Questions

The study aims to answer the following questions:

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How does Charlotte Bronte depict nature and environmental aspects in Jane Eyre?

What is the relationship between Jane Eyre and ecofeminism, and how is ecofeminism projected in the novel?

3. How does Charlotte Bronte pursue equality and liberty in Jane Eyre?

Purpose of the Study

Using Karren Warren's (2000) theory of ecofeminism, this thesis explores the environmental settings in Jane Eyre. It examines the connection between external environments and the characters' inner feelings, highlighting the dualistic relationships between humans and nature, and placing the heroine's consciousness at the center of the story.

Significance of the Study

This study is the first to highlight the significant role of the environment in the main character's life and how her connection to nature is intertwined with her relationships with men. It demonstrates the strong connection between nature and women, aiming to represent this relationship through dualistic struggles, self and environmental challenges, and personal emotions, which have not been thoroughly analyzed in previous studies.

Aim of the Study

Jane Eyre has captivated readers with its portrayal of a rebellious female consciousness. Since its publication, it has attracted attention for its unique rebellious spirit, which was uncommon in literature at the time. Charlotte Bronte's work deserves detailed literary analysis due to its complexity and evolving critical perspectives over time.

Jane Eyre is a timeless novel that exemplifies the bildungsroman genre (Marvel, 2019). Modern critics focus on feminism and the exploitation of nature, viewing the novel through an ecofeminist lens. This study aims to explore the strong connection between women and nature, addressing themes of environmental and gender oppression. It seeks to reveal Bronte's efforts to promote gender equality and stimulate women's consciousness in a patriarchal society.

Definition of Terms

Nature in Literary Works

Nature, in everyday terms, refers to the physical matter of the earth. In literature, however, nature is often used to draw comparisons to real-life aspects. Writers may compare nature's beauty to a woman's beauty, as seen in Shakespeare's comparison of women to summer days. Nature can also symbolize emotions, such as rage being likened to a stormy sea. Different literary traditions use nature to convey various themes; for example, Puritans often depicted wilderness as evil, while some Native Americans viewed nature as a means of salvation (Bookworm, 2012).

Society

According to the Cambridge Dictionary (2022), a society is a large group of individuals who live in a specific way governed by certain rules and principles. They collectively make decisions about how things should be done and how work can be accomplished. People belonging to a particular country can be considered a society.

Equality

Equality involves providing everyone with opportunities to develop their skills and potentials. It is the belief that no one should have fewer life opportunities due to their origin, race, or abilities. Historically, equality has been compromised when groups are categorized based on appearances, sex, and race rather than their potentials (Perry, 2018).

Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism is a movement that connects nature to women, emerging in the late 1900s among environmentalists and feminists. The first series of ecofeminism meetings was held in 1980 at Amherst. Ecofeminism views both nature and women as oppressed and undervalued. The movement addresses human actions towards nature and societal exploitation of women, aiming to amplify women's voices and challenge their oppression (Menu, 2018).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Ever since Jane Eyre was published during the Victorian age in October 1847, it has garnered significant interest from critics, educators, and readers. Most critiques have been favorable, considering it one of the best novels in English literature history. Even Queen Victoria admired it (Moglen, 1976). English critics like George Lewes praised it, calling it a charming book that deserves to be read (Lewes, 1975). The novel, presented as an autobiography, allowed Charlotte Bronte to narrate in the first person, adding authenticity and realism. It reflects the social hierarchy, unfairness, and sexism of its era, highlighting gender inequality and the silencing of women's voices due to patriarchy.

Western Studies of Jane Eyre

Women's rights movements, especially during and after the 19th century, aimed to provide women with independence and equal rights. These movements sought to break the stereotypical image of conventional marriages and promote gender equality (Chary, 2016). However, there was often a conflict between women's aspirations and the religious beliefs of the time (Lang, 2009).

The widespread translation of Jane Eyre led to global critical attention. Sara Gilbert and Susan Gubar's "The Madwoman in the Attic" analyzed female authors' works through a social and historical lens (Mortimore, 1994). They suggested that Bertha Mason,

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the madwoman in the attic, symbolized Jane Eyre's repressed desires. This interpretation, though controversial, has been influential in feminist literary criticism.

Critics like Gubar viewed *Jane Eyre* as a fable, with characters serving as symbols to address social issues (Bhavar, 2021). They argued that Charlotte Brontë used the character of Bertha to reveal the oppression of women. Bertha's screams symbolize the self-awareness and struggle for recognition that women seek (Locy, 2002).

During the late 20th century, women made several attempts to challenge norms and traditions regarding their rights and ambitions. The Madwoman in the Attic had significant influence in the West, revealing Jane Eyre's subconscious and the concealed anger within her, symbolized by Bertha's fire. This analysis suggests that Bertha represents Jane's second self, using nature to convey Charlotte Brontë's message.

Numerous articles and books have critiqued *Jane Eyre* since its publication. Gaitskell analyzed Charlotte's life events and ideas, focusing on women's power and freedom, elevating the critique (Dillon, 2016). Wallace's *Immortal Wheat* presents Charlotte Brontë similarly to Jane Eyre (Wallace, 2007). Virginia Woolf, in *Ordinary Books*, depicted Jane as struggling for liberty, seeking an unconventional marriage, and fighting against social norms that silence women (Atlas, 2020).

### Chinese Studies of *Jane Eyre*

The translation of *Jane Eyre* into Chinese led to increased critical attention. Chinese critics examined the novel through the lens of feminism and women's liberation.

### Jane's Decision to Leave Thornfield Hall

Jane's departure from Thornfield symbolizes her inner strength and desire for independence (Wu & Huang, 2011). She sought the respect she always wished for.

### Rochester as the Unjust Male Figure

Despite Rochester's suffering, his revealed secrets do not absolve him. Critics argue that he represents oppression and injustice, portraying male superiority in the 19th and 20th centuries (Kan, 2017).

### Novel's Resolutions

While critics agree on the novel's feminist themes, some view the ending as disappointing. Jane's surrender to masculinity contradicts her dynamic character, suggesting that the resolution does not fully align with the feminist message (Chen & Miao, 2012).

### New Realms for Chinese Literature

The widespread popularity of *Jane Eyre* in China sparked interest in themes of women's liberation and consciousness. Charlotte Brontë's bold approach to women's rights encouraged female readers to voice their struggles for equality, justice, and freedom (Wei, 2020). Before *Jane Eyre*, few works challenged conventions like arranged marriages and impossible love affairs. The novel's portrayal of a love-based marriage prompted audiences to reconsider traditional behaviors, fostering women's confidence and self-appreciation.

Charlotte Brontë also depicted women as financially independent, with Jane Eyre working as a tutor to support herself (Tillotson, 1995). The novel's deep emotions and feminist perspective, supported by nature elements, solidify its place in feminist literature. Chen (2022) notes that Brontë's consciousness guided the events, creating a strong, independent character in Jane. This portrayal was groundbreaking, as women in the 19th century were often seen as objects controlled by men. Chen concludes that women's social status can change when they assert their voices and power.

### The Impact of the Madwoman in the Attic on Other Critics

The Madwoman in the Attic inspired many critics to explore *Jane Eyre* further. Critics based their analyses on the book's portrayal of Bertha as Mr. Rochester's victim (Charlotte, 2010). Both Bertha and Jane are oppressed by Rochester; Bertha is locked away and exploited, while Jane faces his lack of compassion and mysterious behavior. Despite their different expressions, Bertha and Jane represent two sides of the same coin, highlighting the oppression of women (Fulton, 2007).

### Ecofeminism as a theoretical framework

Ecofeminism originated in the late 1970s, emerging as a socially and politically guided movement that sought to connect environmentalism and feminism (Patil, 2019). It argues that women and nature both occupy marginalized positions in hierarchical systems. Ecofeminism suggests a "twinned oppression," viewing the suppression of women and nature as intertwined in cultural and traditional practices. Scholars like Haraway and Barad emphasize an interdependent relationship between human and nonhuman entities, challenging traditional boundaries and promoting material feminist theory as a response to patriarchal norms (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008).

### Introduction to Ecofeminism

The goal of ecofeminism is to recognize the integral roles of women and nature in society and advocate for their liberation through gender equality and environmental health (Gifford, 2022). Dissatisfaction with Western ideologies and environmental neglect led to the movement's emergence in the 1970s (Lauwers, 2017). Ecofeminism is interdisciplinary, encompassing environmental, political, and social aspects and advocating for women's and nature's rights by examining their shared neglect and oppression (Young & Taylor, 2015).

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### Literary Criticism and Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism has extended into literary criticism, where the symbolic connections between women and nature are explored. Literature often associates nature with femininity, and ecofeminist criticism analyzes texts that depict the cultural and social oppression of women and nature (Bedford, 2018). This branch of ecofeminism critiques patriarchal structures in literature and investigates how authors portray women's roles in ecology and society.

#### *Symbolic Connections between Nature and Women*

In literature, women and nature are often presented symbolically, with natural elements like trees and lakes depicted as feminine. Terms such as "rape of nature" or "virgin forest" reflect how both are seen through a lens of male dominance, reinforcing gendered oppression in literary symbolism (Mandello, 2022).

#### *Status Connections between Nature and Women*

Ecofeminist literary criticism also examines how women and nature are depicted as "the others." In traditional literature, women are often portrayed in supportive roles to male protagonists, reinforcing an androcentric narrative. Such portrayals emphasize the need for ecofeminism to challenge cultural and societal hierarchies (Bareket & Snabel, 2019).

### Jane Eyre and feminism

This analysis of Jane Eyre highlights its proto-feminist elements, showing how Jane's emotional openness and independence contrast with Victorian ideals. Although Victorian women were expected to conceal their emotions except within family circles, Jane openly expresses her passion, especially in her relationship with Mr. Rochester. Jane's assertion of spiritual equality, telling Mr. Rochester that her spirit meets his as equals at God's feet, underscores a feminist perspective on gender equality. Her behavior would have been provocative to a Victorian audience, yet they admired her courage and individuality. Jane's unique balance between sensibility and dignity further sets her apart. Although she loves Mr. Rochester, she refuses his offer to live as his mistress in Europe, showing her commitment to self-respect and propriety, aligning with both Victorian and feminist values (Gao, 2013).

Another aspect of feminism appears through Bertha, the "madwoman" confined in Thornfield. Bertha's situation reflects the poor treatment of mentally ill women and critiques the biases against them. During the era, mental illness in women was often attributed to reproductive issues, leading to stigmatization. Mothers, specifically, were blamed for passing mental illnesses to their children, a concept Brontë subtly challenges by presenting Bertha as a victim of societal cruelty and misunderstanding. Mr. Rochester's selfish choice to keep Bertha hidden instead of seeking proper care reveals the disregard for women's rights and autonomy, casting a critical light on Victorian attitudes toward mental illness and gender (Bick & Showalter, 1986).

Furthermore, Brontë incorporates Gothic elements, such as Bertha's eerie laughter and Rochester's distant voice, adding supernatural intrigue. These Gothic touches enrich the novel's depth and appeal while also enhancing its feminist themes, showing Brontë's distinctive style and literary innovation.

## METHODOLOGY

This research, which is qualitative in nature, employs the ecofeminism theory. This section will create the link between the ecofeminism theory, which was discussed in the previous chapter, and Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre.

### Research Design

My study will benefit from a qualitative approach with thematic analysis as the primary method to interpret and understand the text's ecofeminist themes. This approach will allow me to explore textual nuances related to ecofeminism, nature symbolism, and gender equality as they appear in Jane Eyre.

### Theoretical Framework

Using eco-feminist theory based on Karen Warren's (2000) ecofeminism model, my analysis will focus on:

Dualistic Oppression: The parallel between the treatment of women and nature.

Interconnectedness: The representation of Jane's inner consciousness in relation to her natural surroundings, social standing, and gender dynamics.

Symbolic and Status Connections: The depiction of nature and women as marginalized entities.

This framework will help analyze how Brontë uses nature and social hierarchies to reflect and challenge patriarchal norms.

### Data Collection

Since my study centers on a single novel, the data will consist of textual excerpts from Jane Eyre:

Select passages that describe natural settings, character reflections in nature, and Jane's emotional states in relation to her surroundings.

Identify dialogues and narrative descriptions that reveal social dynamics, particularly those relating to gender and class oppression.

### Data Analysis

Thematic Analysis: Use thematic coding to categorize the selected text based on recurring themes related to ecofeminism. Suggested codes include:

Nature as Reflection of Emotions: Passages where nature mirrors Jane's emotional journey.

Oppression of Nature and Women: Instances that parallel the treatment of female characters with environmental descriptions.

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Social Hierarchy and Class: Descriptions of class dynamics that reinforce gender or social oppression.

Interpretive Analysis: Analyze how Brontë's language choice, setting descriptions, and character introspections support an ecofeminist reading. Pay close attention to the dual oppression of women and nature.

Addressing Research Questions

To structure the analysis effectively, I map each of my research questions to specific analytical objectives:

For depicting nature and environmental aspects, examine the symbolism of natural elements that reflect social issues or emotions.

For exploring eco-feminism, identify how Jane's interactions with her environment echo ecofeminist themes.

For analyzing equality and liberty, focus on Jane's evolving self-perception and autonomy within patriarchal structures.

Ethical Considerations

Since the study relies on literary analysis, ethical considerations are minimal but ensure:

Proper citation of secondary sources and prior critical works.

Adherence to academic standards for interpreting and attributing Brontë's work and existing critiques.

Limitations

Acknowledge the potential limitations of analyzing a single text, as broader ecofeminist themes may not fully apply across different literary contexts. However, as *Jane Eyre* is rich in relevant themes, it remains a suitable primary source.

## DISCUSSION

This chapter highlights *Jane Eyre*'s connection with nature and femininity, portraying ecofeminist themes. Charlotte Brontë uses landscapes and natural elements to reflect Victorian society's strict gender norms, drawing parallels between social hierarchies and nature's role. Jane's meditation on the oppressive social structures is often conveyed through images of nature, showing her desire for equality and freedom from male dominance. The first section examines Jane's bond with the environment, while the second explores her feminist consciousness, intertwining ecology and feminism to establish *Jane Eyre* as an ecofeminist work.

The Emergence of *Jane Eyre*'s Female Consciousness

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* intricately weaves themes of women's struggles with nature, establishing a reflective connection between the two. Jane's childhood at Gateshead is depicted amid harsh winter landscapes, echoing the bleakness of her maltreatment by her aunt, Mrs. Reed, and cousin (Chapter 1). Isolated and subjected to physical and emotional abuse, Jane finds solace in nature, which reflects her inner turmoil, particularly through storms and bleak weather (Chapters 1-3). After each harsh encounter, she views nature as a refuge, although her suffering remains overwhelming, symbolizing the restrictive male dominance of the era.

At Gateshead, Jane's rebellious spirit grows, marking a transition as she prepares to leave for Lowood. Her last conversation with Mrs. Reed solidifies her independence, depicted through nature as a quiet, frost-laden environment mirroring her stoic resolve (Chapter 4). Lowood provides further adversities under a strict headmaster, with Jane drawing comfort from budding friendships and nature's beauty, which offers brief respite, like the blooming garden and spring greenery (Chapters 6-9).

Despite the dreary conditions, figures like Miss Temple and her friend Helen instill hope, with nature gradually evolving from a hostile presence to one offering light and new beginnings. Jane's sense of belonging and autonomy flourishes as she endures harsh winters and lonely nights, intertwined with the solace she finds gazing out at the expansive landscape (Chapters 8-10).

When Jane secures a teaching position and leaves Lowood, her journey continues, with nature accompanying her every significant transition, like her elation during a rainy walk to her new job. The imagery of the valley and steam echo Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, suggesting mystery and foreshadowing the experiences awaiting her (Chapter 10).

Jane's mature consciousness as a female

In *Jane Eyre*, Jane's time at Thornfield significantly influences her character development, as her rebellious spirit matures and she experiences love for the first time. Unlike the revolutionary character of her childhood, which stemmed from solitude and maltreatment, her current rebelliousness is tempered by consciousness and love. Her mistreatment as a child had fostered a rebellious nature, as she faced injustice without wealth or security. Yet Jane held onto her dignity, defending herself regardless of wealth or status.

Upon arriving at Thornfield, Jane describes the misty roads and solitary atmosphere, as well as Mrs. Fairfax's warm reception (Chapter 11). Her new role as a tutor reveals her composed and modest nature, which attracts Mr. Rochester's attention more than any wealth or appearance. Unlike the upper-class women he disdains, Jane is calm, sensible, and unpretentious, further contrasting her from characters like Miss Ingram. Her connection to nature deepens; the thorny grass and trees at Thornfield reflect her evolving relationship with her environment and independence (Chapter 11). Nature's vastness inspires Jane, mirroring her strength and self-reliance in a male-dominated society.

Jane enjoys solitude, and Brontë describes her emotions through nature, as when Jane runs on empty roads, observing the stillness (Chapter 12). Upon meeting Mr. Rochester, she feels that nature's calm is disrupted by his presence. The oak trees and clouds seem solidified, illustrating her apprehension towards his authority. Despite her disappointment in his arrogance, Jane's strength impresses him. He is drawn to her for her inner strength rather than beauty or wealth, which sets her apart from Miss Ingram, whose affection for Rochester is based on wealth alone.



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Jane's feelings are often expressed through nature, such as her joy on a windy day when she feels "on cloud nine" (Chapter 24). Nature appears to celebrate with her, and she feels transformed from the solitary girl to a joyful woman, seeing herself as beautiful for the first time. She describes herself with rosy cheeks, a dimpled smile, and hazel eyes, finding beauty in her happiness (Chapter 24). Though in love with Rochester, she's aware of her lower social and financial status. Rochester becomes her "whole world," and she sees him as her hope for paradise, yet remains cautious of losing her identity for love (Chapter 24).

On their wedding day, the revelation of the woman in the attic shatters Jane's dreams. Nature again mirrors her emotions: she compares herself to a winter flake melting in summer, and her happiness turns to despair. Her once-flourishing garden now appears lifeless, the vivid colors replaced by sorrowful decay (Chapter 26). Nature's imagery throughout Jane's journey demonstrates her inner world, embodying her growth, love, and heartbreak.

Jane's emotions are conflicted as she grapples with her love for Mr. Rochester and her desire for independence. Seeking guidance, she turns to nature, which symbolically calls her "My daughter" and urges her to "flee temptation" (Chapter 27). This connection to nature strengthens her resolve and supports her growth into a mature, conscious woman. Jane faces a profound ideological struggle upon discovering Rochester's secret wife, Bertha, which prevents their union. Rejecting the role of a mistress, she leaves Thornfield, preserving her dignity and virginity. Her departure reflects her commitment to her principles, highlighting the strength of her character in a society dominated by male authority.

Seeking resilience against male power

During Charlotte Brontë's era, industrialization began to dominate, overtaking lands and mines and causing destruction to nature. When Jane Eyre traveled to White Cross seeking work, she encountered workers employed by Mr. Oliver, who owned a needle industry (Chapter 28). She expressed her need for work, noting that the roles available were considered "men's work." Jane observed that industrialization had destroyed her natural refuge. White Cross, a remote area with moors, heather, and mountains, reflected Yorkshire, Brontë's home. Despite the area's gloom, the blooming heathers brought hope and strength to Jane, symbolizing resilience and empowerment in the novel.

Arriving at White Cross fatigued and hungry, Jane found comfort in nature. The warm, clear sky and the sight of heathers boosted her confidence, instilling hope for the future despite her hardships. She felt nature's mutual love and, after resting, declared the day perfect, feeling embraced by the golden moors under the sun's glow (Chapter 28). Nature provided Jane with the strength to pursue equality and resilience against male dominance.

When a dead body appeared in the turbulent sea, Jane described it with imagery suggesting women's beauty but also inferiority, as symbolized by a cormorant carrying a golden bracelet (Chapter 13). This depiction hinted at her dissatisfaction with the era's gender dynamics, portraying men as predatory. The cormorant, known as a fierce bird, represented male superiority over women, who, like Miss Ingram, often submitted to wealthy men like Mr. Rochester. This scene deepened Jane's awareness of gender inequality, helping her consciousness mature further.

Seeking love and liberty

In the Victorian era, men largely controlled relationships, politics, and social structures, while women's roles were defined by their male counterparts. Nature, associated with the submissive, represented the societal position of women, supporting ecofeminism by symbolizing the bond between women and nature.

Mr. Rochester, an athletic and arrogant man, initially engaged Jane to alleviate his boredom, without genuine respect. However, he became enamored with her unique character. Their vows took place under a chestnut tree, with nature as the witness to Jane's joy (Chapter 23). Yet, the tree was later struck by thunder, splitting it but leaving its roots intact, which Jane saw as a reflection of resilience and loyalty to life (Chapter 25).

Jane's near-engagement to Rochester would have been illegitimate, but the experience heightened her female consciousness. She compared herself to the enduring chestnut, weathering hardships but retaining inner strength. When the moon appeared briefly, Jane noted her incomplete happiness, expressing her wish to be hidden by the clouds (Chapter 25).

The jewelry scene illustrated male dominance. Rochester offered Jane gifts symbolizing control, but she declined them, valuing her independence over material wealth (Chapter 24). Her stance made Rochester respect her more, as she resisted the financial dependence expected of women, preferring her role as a tutor. Jane's independence defied societal norms, further emphasized when she refused the lavish Turkish silk, declaring her wish to represent freedom and equality, rejecting subservience (Chapter 24).

Jane's relationship with Rochester was mirrored by nature, which expressed her emotions and strengthened her self-awareness. Both nature and Jane embodied dignity and independence, supporting eco-critical perspectives on the link between women and nature and their shared resistance to male dominance.

Jane later met her cousin, St. John, a young vicar with a Greek-like face. Though he loved her and proposed marriage, Jane declined. He then requested her companionship on a mission to India as his assistant, but she also refused, noting his desire for her as a laborer rather than a romantic partner (Chapter 34). Jane felt nature's support in her decision, sensing the valley and hills expressing her inner strength. She compared herself to Antaeus, drawing power from the heathers and rejecting St. John's proposal while leaning against a rock (Chapter 34).

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Meanwhile, Bertha set Mr. Rochester's mansion on fire, symbolizing the destruction of male dominance. This fire brought down Mr. Rochester's status and leveled social hierarchy, allowing Jane to love him freely without feeling financially inferior. With obstacles removed, Jane felt ready to return to Thornfield, prompted by a whispering wind urging her back to Mr. Rochester (Chapter 37).

When she reunited with him, Jane was no longer a poor governess but a financially independent woman, returning to a now vulnerable Rochester, who was blind and in need of support. Jane decided to be his sole caregiver. Upon her return, nature appeared green and vibrant, symbolizing renewal and the equal foundation of their love. She described the fresh flowers and blue sky to Mr. Rochester, embodying the harmony they now shared (Chapter 37).

### **Jane Eyre and the Environment**

Nature serves as a source of strength for Jane, providing refuge and solace throughout Jane Eyre. When she arrives at Thornfield, she marvels at its luxurious surroundings and "bright little place" with sunlight streaming through the curtains, symbolizing hope (Page 95). This reflects both human creativity in beautifying natural elements and Jane's optimistic mood upon arriving.

Jane contrasts the environments of Lowood and Thornfield, associating Thornfield's sophistication with the privileged class, unlike Lowood's impoverished setting. Nature comforts Jane, especially at Thornfield, where she dresses beautifully to feel aligned with natural beauty, not to satisfy societal expectations. This act underscores her inner beauty, rejecting the male-defined standards imposed on women, and striving to bridge the natural and human worlds.

Jane's connection to nature offers both power and freedom, reflected in storms that mirror her emotions and landscapes that embody her liberty. Nature also mirrors her calm beauty, drawing people's attention in a way similar to natural landscapes. While she longs to be more attractive, she understands that her beauty, reflected from nature, is inner rather than socially imposed. She grapples with restrictive Victorian beauty standards but gains confidence from nature.

Nature serves as Jane's escape from social and gender confines, as seen from the novel's start when she seeks refuge in reading about nature amid her struggles. This connection deepens at Lowood, where she finds solace with Helen Burns and gains strength through time spent in nature. During the typhus outbreak, time in nature further strengthens this bond, reinforcing Jane's reliance on nature as a source of peace and resilience.

At Thornfield, Jane finds even more access to nature, with moors and gardens that enhance her consciousness as a woman. Nature fortifies her resolve as a governess, embodying the freedom she desires. Jane realizes the need for balance between liberty and the societal constraints imposed on her, showing that she values both freedom and protection.

This sensitivity to nature also shapes her empathy and willingness to help others. Jane's paintings, with their detailed depictions of invisible elements like wind, demonstrate her connection to nature and the inner strength it provides. Her art reflects her aspiration for peace, protection, and power, fueling her desire to assist those in need. This is shown when she helps Mr. Rochester's injured brother-in-law and later cares for the now-blind Rochester.

Jane's inner peace links her closely with nature, making her distinct from traditional Victorian women. She relies on nature to ease her pain, but this peace falters when she leaves Thornfield after learning about Bertha. Alone in the moors, Jane questions her bond with nature and feels utterly lost, experiencing a moment of solitude and self-reflection. However, she soon finds comfort in nature again, likening it to a mother offering unconditional solace. This maternal view of nature, nurturing and supportive, mirrors Jane's own maturation and resilience, emphasizing Charlotte Brontë's feminization of nature.

Jane's development throughout Jane Eyre is tied to her connection with nature, which provides strength during moments of hardship. At Gateshead, her growth is hindered by isolation and maltreatment. Her maturation progresses at Lowood, where nature provides her with solace amid neglect and cruelty. By the time Jane reaches Thornfield, her maturity is ready for new experiences. Her decision to flee rather than compromise her dignity demonstrates her deepened consciousness. She leans on nature, feeling it "whisper to her heart," giving her courage to eventually return to the man she loves.

This bond between Jane, embodying femininity, and the nurturing aspect of nature highlights the ecofeminist themes woven throughout Jane Eyre. The connection between Jane and nature permeates the novel, illustrating Brontë's emphasis on both ecological and feminine empowerment.

### **Jane Eyre and the feminist aspect**

In Jane Eyre, Charlotte Brontë examines the suppression of Victorian women under male dominance, highlighting Jane's pursuit of independence and equality. Brontë critiques the period's societal view that treated women as subordinate and valued mainly for nurturing roles, much like nature, which is often depicted as a resource for men. Through Jane, Brontë challenges this notion by illustrating a journey to self-sufficiency in a world where women's voices are dismissed, especially in education and personal autonomy.

#### **Independence**

Jane's quest for independence begins early on, shaped by her experiences in oppressive environments. At Gateshead, she endures bullying by her cousin John, symbolizing male privilege, and resists his abuse (Chapter 1). Her struggle continues at Lowood, where Mr. Brocklehurst's sermon on women's limited societal roles reveals his attempt to manipulate and control them, reinforcing their inferiority (Chapter 4). However, Jane refuses to conform, demonstrating her independence through acts of compassion and support

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toward others without relying on male authority. When she encounters Mr. Rochester, she assists him independently after his fall, showing strength and autonomy, and even challenges him by declaring he has no right to order her around despite their age difference (Chapter 13, p.117).

As she matures, Jane's independence is also evident in her decision to flee Thornfield rather than become Rochester's secret lover. This act exemplifies her commitment to self-respect and personal agency over subjugation. Only after achieving financial independence through her inheritance does she return, accepting his proposal on her own terms.

### **Equality**

Jane's desire for equality, particularly with Mr. Rochester, is another prominent theme. She feels intellectually equal to him, but the disparity in their social classes complicates her sense of self-worth. Jane refuses the luxurious gifts he offers her, viewing them as a reminder of her lower status and potential dependence (Chapter 13). Her sense of equality is further tested when she learns of Bertha Mason, Rochester's hidden wife, on her wedding day (Chapter 26). Despite her love for Rochester, she leaves him to avoid becoming his mistress, determined to retain her dignity and autonomy. Only after inheriting money from her uncle and achieving financial security does Jane feel equal to Rochester and free to reunite with him.

In these ways, Jane Eyre reflects Brontë's critique of gender and social hierarchy, presenting Jane as a character who defies traditional expectations of women and demands both independence and equality.

## **CONCLUSION**

### **Summary**

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* serves as a profound exploration of ecofeminism, intertwining themes of ecology and feminism to produce a revolutionary literary masterpiece. Through the character of Jane, Brontë portrays women as natural allies of the environment, suggesting a deep, almost sacred connection between women and nature. In the context of 19th-century England, the rise of capitalism exacerbated class divides and heightened the social tensions between laborers and capitalists. Within this environment, women's awareness of their status and aspirations for equality began to surface—an awakening that Brontë reflects through Jane's journey and her yearning for equality with men.

The publication of *Jane Eyre* was a significant milestone in 19th-century European literature, symbolizing the intellectual, social, and financial advancement of women. It marked an era of progressive thought for women, who were moving slowly but persistently towards liberty, despite the obstacles in their path. Brontë mirrors the Victorian age through Jane's experiences, underscoring the beauty shared by women and nature alike. Both exhibit grace, resilience, and emotional depth, traits that bind them in a unique, almost mystical relationship.

In *Jane Eyre*, nature is more than a backdrop; it is a refuge where Jane finds solace, strength, and clarity. It fuels her resilience, teaching her the value of independence and becoming her shield against life's adversities. Nature's role as a sanctuary reinforces the complementary bond between women and the natural world. When elated or sorrowful, Jane turns to nature, which reciprocates by offering her peace and power.

Brontë's narrative sheds light on the gender inequality of the Victorian era, portraying male domination and society's restrictive norms. Despite the feminization of nature, Victorian society often overlooked the inherent power and independence that nature provided to women. For Brontë, the interconnectedness of women and nature underscores the necessity for gender equality. She implies that harmony between the sexes is essential for a balanced life, while simultaneously advocating for the dismantling of patriarchy and the end of female oppression. Though nature and women can stand alone, Brontë emphasizes that male-centered authority must be reformed to allow genuine equality.

In conclusion, ecofeminism is a fundamental aspect of *Jane Eyre*, making it a timeless work of art. Though written two centuries ago, the novel's themes remain strikingly relevant. From its revolutionary stance in literature to its embodiment of women's voices, *Jane Eyre* endures as an essential reference point for understanding themes that resonate with the struggles and aspirations of women in both the Victorian and modern eras. This masterpiece continues to inspire readers and offers valuable insights into contemporary issues.

### **Research Questions Answers**

The following research questions were posed earlier in this paper. The research helped answer these research questions that are briefly mentioned below.

#### **Research Question 1 answer**

How does Charlotte Brontë depict nature and environment aspects in *Jane Eyre*?

There are different pieces of evidence that show the prominence of nature and environment in *Jane Eyre*. Right from the beginning of the novel, the reader can spot natural picturesque. Gateshead was drawn amazingly by Charlotte Brontë who described it in a well-knit way. After that, at Lowood school, Charlotte Brontë describes the place as seen by Jane. This nature was well-described by Jane as it was her refuge whenever feeling isolated. Later on at Thornfield, and immediately at Jane's arrival at Thornfield, a deliberate description of nature accompanied the chapter. And what makes nature seen perfectly by the reader's eyes is Jane's description to the heathers which she admired. The scene of the split tree cannot but add more beauty to nature's depiction.



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Even the fire that was ignited by Bertha, the mad woman, added to the natural aspect to the novel. Thus, throughout the novel's chapter, nature has always been there.

### Research Question 2 Answer

What is the relationship between Jane Eyre and ecofeminism, and how is ecofeminism projected in Jane Eyre?

Ecofeminism was greatly alluded to in Jane Eyre. The relationship between women and nature was highly depicted in the novel. Nature has always been Jane's haven throughout the novel. Ever since she was young at Gateshead, Jane used to flee the verbal and the physical violence practiced on her by her aunt and cousin through reading books about nature. She also verbally rejected the abuse she received as a revolutionary act ecofeminists reveal. After that, at Lowood School, she used to draw nature images. She successfully painted wind which is invisible. She also loved it when she and her inmate girls were allowed to go to the garden to have fun. It is then when Jane could get rid of the toxic reality she lived in after the unfair practices of the principal whom she expressed her refusal to his deeds which is an act of ecofeminism. In addition to that, Jane used to refer to nature at Thornfield. She used to spend much time in nature where she grasped all of the energy to fight against social classing and genderism. Heathers were her favorite, and they were the nature items that fueled her with hope. Furthermore, the split tree is probably a kind of communication between Jane and nature. The tree's roots were illustrated as united as a symbol of having a shallow split of a relationship yet a strong bond from within. Moreover, running away from Thornfield to avoid being a mistress and finding herself in the wilderness among the moors and the heathers also depicted Jane as independent and strong. Add to these descriptions the fire that started in Mr. Rochester's mansion which symbolizes nature's power in destroying everything in a blink of an eye making all of the people equal in a glance.

### Research Question Answer 3

How does Charlotte Bronte pursue equality and liberty in Jane Eyre?

The pursuit of equality and liberty were sought by Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre. Jane always felt male's domination starting from her cousin who violently abused her just because he was a male moving to the lectures given by Lowood School's principal who always reminded the girls of their inferiority. After that, at Thornfield, Jane was not well-treated at first by Mr. Rochester who always alluded to his superiority due to his domination as a man. Even the treatment of the mad woman, Bertha, showed that man did not respect women even when being mentally ill. The woman was locked and medically ignored by her own husband. This also made Jane feel that such a male domination must come to an end and liberty should be the destiny of females whose voice is to be heard and taken into consideration.

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