

## EDUCATION IN SHARLOTTE BRONTE'S "JEYN EYRE"

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### ABSTRACT

*The Victorian age in English literature was rich in novels of "Bildungsroman", which illuminated the life of orphans. This article discusses the signs of the novels of formation and the issues of education in Sh.Bronte's work "Jane Eyre". It also analyses the social conditions of the orphan children.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Bildungsroman, Sh.Bronte, Novel, Education, Orphan Hero, Lowood School.*

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

In many English Bildungsromans, it is depicted that children are given to the girls' or boys' monastery, or in a special boarding schools. But in such novels, the image of children's parents is not fully embodied, as the main focus is to show the effect of education taken in those places in the lives of children. They usually grow up looking for fun and a cheerful life, because strict discipline is established in such educational institutions making the life hard them. Therefore, children living there always strive for freedom or try to experience different feelings in freedom. This is observed not only in English literature, but also in the literature of other nations.

In the middle of the XIX th century, an English writer Charlotte Brontë started the first female Bildungsroman with her work "Jane Eyre". As in many Bildungsromans Jane Eyre is described as a person who strives for independence from an early age, she was a lonely but proud girl able to stand against the oppression and injustice of the world in which she lived.<sup>1</sup> Jane's interest in learning and education is shown to the reader from the beginning of the work.

### 2. Main Part

Tired of family humiliations, Jane wants to go to Lowood, a school for poor and orphaned girls, and get an education there. She hopes to live a happier life, being away from injustice. From the conversations with Bessie, the housekeeper, she had found out that the young ladies were brought up to be "*exceedingly genteel and precise*".<sup>2</sup> So, Jane leaves for Lowood School, hoping to ease her sorrows. However, there the situation was even worse. The "*educational measures*" against Jane continue here after Mrs. Reed describes Jane to the headmaster, Mr. Brocklehurst, as a lying, ill-mannered, and disobedient girl.

The first days of Jane at school was described as follows: "*As yet I had spoken to no one, nor did anybody seem to take notice of me; I stood lonely enough: but to that feeling of isolation I was accustomed.*"<sup>3</sup> Here it can be seen that Jane's loneliness is not a new feeling for her, as she was

alone from the time she lost her parents and the same condition accompanied her in the new place.

During her school years, Jane realizes how difficult life is for the weak and alone children. Later she establishes a friendship with Helen Burns, an older girl. During one of the class activities, her new friend is criticized for her poor condition and dirty fingernails, and as a result she is beaten severely. The teachers treated very rudely to the girls as it can be seen in the following passage:

*“You dirty, disagreeable girl! You have never cleaned your nails this morning!”*

*Burns made no answer: I wondered at her silence. “Why,” thought I, “does she not explain that she could neither clean her nails nor wash her face, as the water was frozen?”<sup>4</sup>*

Later, Jane tells Helen that she can't bear such public humiliation and also shares her unpleasant experiences of how awful Mrs. Reed treated her, but Helen tells her that she could be happier if she didn't live with such anger.<sup>5</sup> From these words of Helen, it can be felt that girls are brought up in the school as submissive and quietly resigned to their fate. The author gives a vivid picture of the school and its conditions in the novel, and makes the reader understand that the situation in which orphan girls live is not enviable. The description of the school building can also tell a great more: *“I looked round the convent-like garden, and then up at the house—a large building, half of which seemed grey and old, the other half quite new. The new part, containing the schoolroom and dormitory, was lit by mullioned and latticed windows, which gave it a church-like aspect; ...”<sup>6</sup>*

In our opinion, the shape and colors of the building are used to express symbolic meanings. The “big building” symbolizes the life and world surrounding the main heroes, where they should fight to find their place. The half of this large building is grey and old, while the other half looks much newer, suggesting that a new future will grow out of the old life. Admittedly, there is a description of special bedrooms prepared for the girls living in these kinds of boarding – schools. Such bedrooms become the second home for the most girls, as they rarely leave this school and see other places. However, the conditions created for children were not always satisfactory. Likewise, the author also mentions a new building containing a study room and a dormitory. It was noted that the new building was lit by mullioned and latticed windows, which gave it a “church-like” appearance. These “church-like” descriptions were chosen by the writer to create the atmosphere of the gothic novels.

The image of the room, which served as a bedroom for all girls, is given as follows: *“Overpowered by this time with weariness, I scarcely noticed what sort of a place the bedroom was, except that, like the schoolroom, I saw it was very long.”<sup>7</sup>* As we can see, both the classroom and bedroom are depicted as a very long room making the reader understand that many girls lived and studied together in one room. Thus shared all their sorrows and pains with each other. Apparently, this long school dormitory was cold room where the girls were woken up early in the morning by the ringing of the bell. The girls, who woke up shivering from the cold, were reluctant to get washed, after which, they would line up and go to a cold and dimly lit classroom. Such images are not presented directly, but expressed through the experiences of the main character. For example, in the following sentence, Jane describes the waking and washing up process as follows: *“I too rose reluctantly; it was bitter cold, and I dressed as well as I could*

for shivering, and washed when there was a basin at liberty, which did not occur soon, as there was but one basin to six girls, on the stands down the middle of the room. Again, the bell rang: all formed in file, two and two, and in that order descended the stairs and entered the cold and dimly lit schoolroom.<sup>8</sup> From this passage; one can vividly imagine the conditions of the boarding school.

Jane describes her first months being very difficult, as she always lives with a fear not to make a mistake. Because there were many rules in the school, and it was very hard to follow them all. The following passage reflects what was going through her heart in that period: *“My first quarter at Lowood seemed an age; and not the golden age either; It comprised an irksome struggle with difficulties in habituating myself to new rules and unwonted tasks. The fear of failure in these points harassed me worse than the physical hardships of my lot”*.<sup>9</sup> Here we can feel the difficulties that all the girls were to overcome in order to survive in that place. It is not only the fear of Jane; it is the sufferings of hundreds of the young innocent girls living in Lowood.

From this passage it is clear that countless and absurd rules existed in the school, and girls who failed to obey them were punished severely, which made the school life even more difficult. Mr. Brocklehurst, a headmaster, visits the school rarely, however, having a very mean and vindictive personality, he enjoys the power he possesses, making girls tremble with fear in his presence, and using various punishments on the girls. Brocklehurst wants the pupils of Lowood School to be humble and pious and moreover, he cruelly limits their food rations. As a result, most of the time it becomes impossible to eat the awful food served to the girls. The following passage can be cited as proof of our point: *“Ravenous, and now very faint, I devoured a spoonful or two of my portion without thinking of its taste; but the first edge of hunger blunted, I perceived I had got in hand a nauseous mess; burnt porridge is almost as bad as rotten potatoes; famine itself soon sickens over it. The spoons were moved slowly: I saw each girl taste her food and try to swallow it; but in most cases the effort was soon relinquished. Breakfast was over, and none had breakfasted”*.<sup>10</sup>

One day, Mr. Brocklehurst visits the school and observes the discipline of girls. Jane accidentally drops the writing board on the floor, causing a loud noise and drawing everybody's attention. She is then forced to stand on a high chair in the middle of the room at the behest of Mr. Brocklehurst and is called a sinner and a liar. Having already received a negative comment about Jane by Mrs. Reed, Mr. Brocklehurst warns the girls and the teachers to stay far from the girl, stressing out that she may have bad influence on them: *“You must be on your guard against her; you must shun her example; if necessary, avoid her company, exclude her from your sports, and shut her out from your converse. Teachers, you must watch her: keep your eyes on her movements, weigh well her words, scrutinise her actions, punish her body to save her soul”*.<sup>11</sup>

In this passage, Mr. Brocklehurst urges everyone to beware of Jane, not to communicate with her. He intends to isolate her from everybody, emphasizing that the teachers have to constantly monitor her, pay attention to her actions and words, and if necessary, punish her body in order to educate her spirit.

Standing on a chair is shown as a common form of punishment, used to make the girls obedient by insulting them in front of others. They are often condemned to stand on the chair for a long time for even minor mistakes. In some cases, they had to stand on this chair outside in the cold

weather. Lowood School trained girls to become teachers and governesses under a strict regime, and girls were constantly reminded of their low social status.

Sundays in the winter would be especially tiring. The girls would walk two miles in the cold to Brocklebridge Church, the patron of the school. During the service there, the girls would become paralyzed from the cold. While coming back, they felt as if the cold was rubbing their skin. The writer describes their situation as follows: *“How we longed for the light and heat of a blazing fire when we got back! But, to the little ones at least, this was denied: each hearth in the schoolroom was immediately surrounded by a double row of great girls, and behind them the younger children crouched in groups, wrapping their starved arms in their pinafores”*.<sup>12</sup> In the work, it is also noted that schoolgirls who lived in difficult conditions in most cases fell ill, and were sent home in a very hard condition, and sometimes they died there: *“Many, already smitten, went home only to die: some died at the school, and were buried quietly and quickly, the nature of the malady forbidding delay”*.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, 80 schoolgirls living in Lowood suffered from cold rooms, poor food and unsuitable clothing. Therefore, many of them became seriously ill when the typhoid epidemic broke out. Jane's friend Helen also ruined her health and died in her arms.

However, Jane never gives up, she doesn't lose her hope for a better life, does not tire of fighting, at the end of the novel she finds her place in society and becomes a successful governess (a woman who is hired to educate and raise the children of a rich family and lives in their household). Although she is a poor orphan girl, she is a self-respecting character who can stand firm in her views.

*My world had for some years been in Lowood: my experience had been of its rules and systems; now I remembered that the real world was wide, and that a varied field of hopes and fears, of sensations and excitements, awaited those who had courage to go forth into its expanse, to seek real knowledge of life amidst its perils.*

At those times, many middle-class families sent their young daughters to boarding schools with such harsh conditions. In her book *“The Brontës and Education”*, Marianne Tormahlen brings the descriptions of the conditions in boarding schools: *“As the many tales of horror schools in nineteenth-century literature remind us, badly run schools posed dangers to children's physical and mental health, sometimes to their lives. It was hard for parents to ascertain just how well managed a school was”*.<sup>14</sup>

### 3. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, by reading about all the events that happen to Jane Eyre from the beginning to the end of the novel, that is, the heroine's sorrows and pains in this school, her difficulties, her struggles to survive and be happy, and of course, her strong will. It shows how hard life is for poor and weak girls, and how painful it is to get an education. In addition, we see in the work that the girl, whose appearance is not very attractive, won the love of her master with the lack of her inner world, the beauty of her behavior. The author deliberately creates the character in the image of a woman who is not beautiful. Through this, he draws the reader's attention to human qualities, which are more important than external beauty, to the image of an educated person.

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