

## **Ecofeminist Reading of Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre**

**By**

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### **Abstract**

Using Ecofeminism as a lens, the article examines Charlotte Bronte's novel, *Jane Eyre*, which explores the relationship between women and nature, exposing the tragedy that results when women and the environment are repressed and exploited by men. Using the term "proto-ecofeminist text" in the article, the argument is that Bronte's work is an early example of an ecofeminist text. This article explains how Ecofeminism as a theory connects the erosion of women's identities to the exploitation of the environment. It also demonstrates Charlotte Bronte's aim of creating an equitable and harmonious society for men and women, liberating women and nature, and fostering women's self-consciousness.

**Keywords:** Ecofeminism; Jane Eyre; Charlotte Bronte; woman; environment.

### **Introduction: Ecofeminism**

In the 1970s, Ecofeminism emerged as an academic and political movement that argued that women's oppression is linked to exploiting the natural environment (Wright, 3). It attempts to alter the world via critical theory, philosophy, and an ecologically oriented worldview known as Ecofeminism. Understanding and changing the existing system of dominance and violence brings together two emerging political ideas and practices critical of patriarchy and the overexploitation of natural resources and their repercussions on society, bodies, and the environment.

Regarding systemic alternatives, Ecofeminism's immense relevance stems from the fact that it catalyzes a conversation between suggestions arising from various social conflicts and political philosophy during the last century. Movements that have envisioned an alternative society by questioning the primary economic and cultural underpinnings of oppression and modernity's crises might interact with one other, human dominion over nature and patriarchal violence against women (Beltrán 104).

Ecofeminism is a social/political movement that emphasizes the significant overlap between ecology and feminism. It evolved in the 1970s and 1980s due to the intersection of several feminist, environmental, and activist ideologies and movements. Françoise D'Eubonne used the phrase 'Eco feminism' in her book *La Féminisme ou la Mort* (Feminism or Death?) (1974). Some would position it inside the third wave of feminism, while others would include it within the broader concept of deep ecology, thereby combining deep ecology and feminism (Prathibha 14).

A society whose primary paradigm of connection is one of dominance does neither liberate women nor does it provide a solution to environmental problems or crises, says Reuther in *New Woman, New Earth*. Ecological and women's movements need to work together to imagine a fundamental restructuring of modern industrial society's socioeconomic connections

and values. Ecofeminism asserts that the patriarchal system's oppression is felt by the earth and other non-humans on the planet and women (77).

On the other hand, Ecofeminism proposes a social change plan to acknowledge interdependencies between people and the natural world. This plan encourages complete social transformation. According to this view, all living things are interconnected and reliant on the environment for their well-being if they are to live. Then there's the fact that we all need the best possible care to live a "life worth living." (Herrero 278). Ecofeminism proposes a fundamental shift in the way we think about maintenance and sustainability by underlining the material foundations of these concepts and rejecting the pillars of the capitalist system of dominance. One of the essential anchors is the invisibility and devaluation of women's contributions to society. Without these anchors, we would not have the ability to survive and reproduce culture and civilization, and we would not have the ability to sustain ourselves (Shiva 90).

Both political activity and academic critique are part of Ecofeminism's mission. According to ecofeminists, women's oppression and environmental degradation are linked to patriarchy and capitalism Ecofeminism. Efforts to advance gender equality must not come at the price of environmental protection. The reverse must also be true: environmental gains must not come at the expense of gender equality. Ecology advocates that society and the environment thrive only by reversing present values, such as placing greater importance on caring for others over more aggressive and dominating actions (Wright 4).

During the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), when women's environmental organizations pushed for women's and environmental rights to be acknowledged jointly, ecofeminist theory had its first significant practical impact. For the first time, during this conference and the 4th Women's Conference in Beijing in 1995, it was decided that women's rights and the environment could not be separated. Unfortunately, it seemed like Ecofeminism was running out of steam, although UN efforts have shown it to be a powerful force in promoting women's rights (Ibid 5).

Ecofeminism's literary legacy is examined in this research. Considers its link to and possibilities for enhancing other feminist and environmental approaches, especially those concerned with feminist political ecology and environmental justice. According to the article's conclusion, Ecofeminism is prominent in Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*.

### ***Charlotte Bronte***

She was the eldest surviving child of a Yorkshire minister, Patrick Bronte, born in Thornton, Yorkshire, England. Children at Haworth were inspired to begin writing after moving there in 1820 and creating their fancy worlds in the rectory. In the aftermath of her mother's death at the age of five, she was sent to a boarding school, where she suffered long-term health consequences. Her two sisters, Maria and Elizabeth, both passed away. Charlotte returned to her old school in 1835, where she worked as a teacher for several years (Glen 14).

All three family members perished within a few months from TB (consumption), aggravated by frequent drinking and a vibrant lifestyle, including Branwell, the family's only son. Charlotte and her father were now the only ones in the room. Nevertheless, *Jane Eyre*'s immense popularity convinced Charlotte to travel to London, where she disclosed her actual name and entered a more exclusive social circle in the wake of the book's triumph. Charlotte married a clergyman, Arthur Bell Nicholls, in 1854. Currer Bell was the pseudonym used by

Charlotte and her sisters, Anne and Emily, to publish a volume of poems in 1846. They had two children in England's Haworth Church of St. Michael and All Angels (Ibid 15).

### *Jane Eyre*

In *Jane Eyre*, Brontë expands her analysis of how ideological forces of class, gender, and economy are played out in the domain of subjectivity. Conventional interpretations of the novel, which see it as a psychological drama in which society is cast as a backdrop, miss the fact that psychology in this book itself is politicized. While celebrating Brontë for her portrayal of sexual rebelliousness, many feminists neglect to consider the novel's context within Victorian psychological discourses. Medicinal writings focused on the same three issues as Brontë's novel: the mechanics of self-control, the feminine body and sexuality, and the resurgence of insaneness (Shuttleworth 8).

Brontë constructed a narrative with the authority of myth in *Jane Eyre*, her most famous work. The book's emotional substance contains everything that profoundly impacted her. Deprivation at home and in the Clergy Daughters School influenced her early life. Her mother died at a young age. Her refusal to accept any external authority made Jane defy the conventions of her time: she was impoverished, plain, and a heroine. Displacement also allows the novel to delve into common sentiments of rejection, persecution, and loneliness: Cousins, not siblings, are responsible for the hostile behaviour of the children and the terrible adult. Rochester's inexplicable strength as a lover is rooted in Brontë's 20-year love for the duke of Zamora, Rochester, who is the source of Rochester's irresistible force. After being constantly subjected to male-dominated environments, Jane continues to fight back. At the end of the story, she transforms from Cinderella to Prince Charming, becoming the heroine who rescues the imprisoned sleeper from the brambles. Because of the closeness of the relationship between Jane and the reader, Jane's reflections about her younger self are often overlooked by Brontë's readers.

Jane's direct addresses the reader when emotions grow too powerful. The book's structure is determined by where it is located in other books. Eventful times in Gateshead and Lowood shape Jane's character; a quick coda in Ferndean offers the ending. Male dominance over women is depicted in the works of characters like Brocklehurst, Rochester, and St. John Rivers. They all show how males exert power through physical force, the patriarchal family, religious organizations, and sexual desire (moral and spiritual authority). Using fainting, sickness, and flight, Jane initially defends herself from St. John Rivers. Then she confronts him head-on, rejecting him. Finally, she learns to rely on her instincts and rationality as she is forced to take care of herself due to her circumstances (Mambrol).

There are several intertwined reverberations sent by various symbols and imagery in this novel, which makes it a powerful read for the reader. Every page of this book references the red room, which symbolizes irrational aggression and entrapment, resistance, and the gory chamber of female sexuality. Everything from Jane's paintings and architecture to the landscape and topography has a purpose. As well as being characters in the narrative, Helen Burns (the intellect) and Bertha Mason (the body) are also parts of Jane. The imagery of ice and fire, which frequently appear, conveys the threat of death outside and the burning inferno within. As a result of Jane's participation, Rochester's sexuality is the most dangerous and perplexing aspect of his authority. As the wedding day approaches, she is haunted by thoughts of drowning, abyss, and loss of consciousness. Not because of the practical and moral risks (which she knows), but rather because she dreamed of becoming Rochester's mistress and turning him into a deity. She flees to avoid being reliant on others (Edwards 55).

After deciding to take control of her destiny, Jane becomes less dependent on others. She is free to seek out Rochester after finding a family, inheriting money, and being independent. Meanwhile, he's gotten less powerful, which might be a code for the demise of patriarchal authority. Although the romance and emotional troubles are finally put to rest, it also presents a happy and contented woman's picture of liberation infused with love (Ibid 56).

By employing a variety of characters, Charlotte Bronte establishes a dynamic tension between the two. There is a solid argument that the different characters in Bronte's novels are all parts of Jane, her principal character. Therefore, her internal conflict between these two qualities may be said to be solely internal. Through her characters, Bronte can dramatize the struggle of a woman to find a sense of equilibrium in her Nature (Johnson para. 1).

### **Ecofeminism in *Jane Eyre***

Two images of nature and women are prevalent in *Jane Eyre's* core theme: Nature vs woman. At the beginning of the book, the reader is shown a magnificent winter scene from Jane's childhood in Gates. After losing her parents as a kid, Jane was taken in by her aunt. At the outset of the tale, Jane describes the harsh cold at Gateshead Hall, where she grew up. Jane explains the process in detail "the cold winter wind had brought clouds so sombre, and a rain so penetrating, that further out-door exercise was now out of the question" (Brontë 7). Jane has a strong sense of the environment that permeates the Northern English climate she was reared in. One of Jane Eyre's most well-known examples of foreshadowing or prediction is Jane's vision of Thornfield Hall being demolished by Bertha Mason. Jane paints a gloomy picture of a bleak landscape "On sleeping I continued in dreams the idea of a dark and gusty night...I dreamt...that Thornfield Hall was a dreary ruin" (264)

It appeared as though she lived in a deplorable environment throughout her upbringing. Based on the part she investigated by reading the pages of her book alone, it was expected that something terrible would happen sooner or later. Jane's aunt and cousin were uninterested in her well-being, and she had a lonely and helpless childhood. In the crimson room, she was able to hear these words, "the rain still beats continuously on the staircase window, and the wind howling in the grove behind the hall." (Bronte 20) A chilling wind and rain transported her chilling experience to the red-room, where she sat alone and became as cold as stone. Jane's feelings mirrored nature's fury, which she conveyed through the stormy weather (Shuhe 29).

Because of my previous existence of constant reprimands and ungrateful fagging, this condition of affairs should have been an oasis of tranquillity for me. Still, my tortured nerves were in such a static state that no quiet could soothe and no pleasure could thrill them agreeably. At a period when she was being mistreated, she sought solace in nature to soothe her frayed nerves. The character of Jane's psychological actions exposed her deep heart's unhappiness and powerlessness toward the masculine power of authority. In such a gloomy setting, Jane Eyre's thoughts were increasingly jumbled. After she was born, she began to reason, and she decided to continue resisting. The seed of Jane's rebellion had sprouted and broken the stone on her up to this point. There's little doubt that the rebel persona was born into such a harsh environment. When tiny Jane and her aunt had their first tumultuous encounter after the initial rebellion between them, she wished to improve her communication skills instead of relying on harsh language, "the black frost reigned, unbroken by sun or breeze, through the grounds." (Bronte 55) She became metallic and racy because of her vengeance for the wine she enjoyed. Away from the bustle of the city, she strolled through a forest of motionless trees, congealed relics of autumn, and russet leaves that had been carried away by the wind.

In the natural world, there was nothing that brought her joy. Neither nature nor the girl could tell us what to do, so we were left to our own devices. Afterwards, tiny Jane stepped out of the carriage, "I was stiff with long sitting and bewildered with the noise and movement of the coach." Rain, wind, and darkness filled the air;" (Bronte 62). Logwood's situation is dire, and the town's chief gentleman is overly harsh and obstinate. Jane was a newcomer and had yet to speak to anyone or be seen in the garden, where girls were permitted to go and appear attractive when covered in flowers. She was used to feeling isolated, and it didn't bother her. Gateshead and her past seemed to have sailed out into the vastness of time and space, "darkened by a drizzling yellow fog". (Bronte 71) Jane's current existence in Logwood was unfamiliar to her, and she had no idea what the future might hold. As the northeast wind whistled through our bedroom windows all night, we were awakened by the sound.

On the first night at Logwood, the weather was chilly, and nature expressed her displeasure with the state of the apartments. Because of her aunt's isolation, Jane was likely to have lamented her recent departure from her loving parents at this exact moment. Jane and nature had been communicating through the wind, though, at the moment. They needed more screams, she thought. She wanted to hear more howling, more darkness, and more bewilderment. In the end, it was better for Jane to appreciate nature than for her detested teacher. As a result of her punishment by Mr. Brocklehurst, Jane's life at Lowood deteriorated to despair. Nevertheless, nature and Jane's hearts are alive with vitality. When Jane saw the Rec, she tried her best to accept her fate. Mr. Nasmyth separated Miss Temple and Mr. Nasmyth. "I watched the chaise mount the hill and disappear beyond its brow; then retired to my room, and there spent in solitude the most significant part of the half-holiday granted in honour of the occasion (Bronte 128).

As a long-time resident of Lowood, she's well-versed in its rules and customs. As a result, she was looking for a new life and ready to welcome a new life into the world at that time. As soon as Ms. Temple had left, Jane opened the window and glanced out at the skyscrapers. "my eyes passed all other objects to rest on those most remote, the blue peaks; it was those I longed to surmount; all within their boundary of rock and heath seemed prison-ground, exile limits" (Bronte 129) There were many things on Jane's mind as she contemplated moving into a new life and achieving her dreams in a world of endless hope and failure. First, Jane sought employment on her own to publicize herself. Then, when it came time to declare her candidacy, Jane had a bright moment of inspiration.

Jane is also affected by the effects of the Moon on the atmosphere, which conjures up images of the Moon as a mother figure. Jane is instructed to leave Thornfield Hall by a mysterious voice once she discovers Mr. Rochester's horrible secret of imprisoning Bertha Mason. Jane observes, "a hand first penetrated the sable folds and waved them away; then, not a moon, but a white human form shone in the azure...It spoke to my spirit: 'My daughter, flee temptation!' 'Mother, I will'" (298).

According to Jane's encounter with this otherworldly being, her heightened sense of awareness of the surroundings may have supernatural roots. This, however, is not the case, as Pizzo explains. As a result of Pizzo's research, Jane's weather-related sensitivities should be examined using Victorian climatological science. The findings supported the hypothesis that women were more sensitive to the weather than men. During the early days of meteorology, the assumption that lunar cycles influenced air tides in the same way they impacted ocean currents was not well-established. Instead of adhering to a typical supernatural alignment between women and nature, the story displays the feminine body's positive sensuous alliance with the surrounding air and its link to a magnificent authorial force (87). When it comes to



Victorian-era superstitions, Pizzo cites a flurry of debates on whether or not they were empirically scientifically correct. Consequently, even though they appear to be supernatural, Jane Eyre's atmospheric occurrences align with scientific opinion. A link between the feminine and the environment is made by putting Jane's femininity in biological harmony with the atmosphere.

Because of the prevalent Victorian divide between humans and nature, the alignment between women and the environment is noteworthy. With the help of Jane's womanhood, Bronte bridges the gap between humanity and the natural world. The oikeios concept of human-nature unity is fascinating in this light. The link between a plant species and its surroundings" was coined by the Greek philosopher Theophrastus (Moore 2). As Moore puts it, oikeios' framework of the study is the "patterned history of power, capital, and nature, all dialectically interrelated." Regarding (Moore 8), Moore considered the oikeios to establish a connection between people and the natural world through its use as a bridge. "Rather than presuming mankind's isolation in the recent or distant past, the oikeios assumes that humankind has always been in a flow of flows with the rest of nature," Moore contends.

In what ways does humanity, such as civilizations, adapt to the natural world? (12). Bronte's description of Jane's connection to Nature in Jane Eyre implies a link to Moore's theory. According to Bronte and Moore, industrialization has never really separated humans from nature. Moore uses dialectics to eliminate the capitalist world dualities. Ecology's Bronte utilizes Jane's femininity and connection to the environment to demonstrate the intrinsic and timeless relationship between nature and womanhood. Humanity's relationship to the natural world is not stable, and both situations challenge the anthropocentric claim that we are somehow divorced from nature. Now, let's get back to the novel's resource extraction relationship.

The narrative focuses on two extractions in which resources are exploited. Trees for the production of mahogany furniture and slave labour in the Caribbean colonies are the sources of these extractions. For example, allusions to mahogany furniture in the story suggest that natural resources are being extracted. Jane remembers the "red room's" luxury when staying at Gateshead Hall.

According to Freedgood, the "old mahogany" cited by Bronte was "in the early decades of the nineteenth century, furniture created during the mahogany heyday, 1720-1760." "When this wood and furniture produced from it were still being imported in massive numbers from those islands" (Freedgood, 32). Indeed, Madeira and the Caribbean had extensive slave plantations that relied on deforestation and natural resource exploitation to generate revenue. Clearly, "those" islands were Madeira and the Caribbean. Mr. Rochester's wealth is primarily derived from Madeira and Jamaica. As Freedgood points out, Jane's surroundings are strewn with evidence of Atlantic commerce's ill-gotten wealth. Deforestation and cash crop cultivation enabled Jane Eyre to equip her world with the source of her wealth—mahogany furniture.

It was raining heavily when she returned, yet she had a lifted spirit despite the hardships. But "toward the end of a bright fall day, I was afoot on the road to Lowton." (Bronte 133). Unfortunately, unrealistic feelings in the narrative misled the readers who had come to associate Jane's plight with her sad position. The stunning beauty and the brutality of the situation did not mix well. Despite this, Jane hopped into the van that would whisk her away to a new career and a new life in Millstone's foreign environs.

We gain a new perspective on present concerns by reinterpreting *Jane Eyre* as a proto-ecofeminist text. As long as people continue to be a geological force on our planet, environmental concerns will push us to constrain our liberties in the name of sustainability. Just as nature's forces compel Jane to choose courses contrary to her heart's desires, our rights may have to be curtailed if we are to save our race and the planet we inhabit. Charlotte Brontë's story's environment serves as a reminder that we are perpetually at the whim of nature, despite our efforts to control it. Ecofeminist study of the novel amply proves this and contextualizes it for our understanding of the path to a sustainable future (Knoll).

## Conclusion

*Jane Eyre* is an excellent example when it comes to nature and women. Nature has done a remarkable job of capturing the beauty and characteristics of women and the emotions they experience, as seen in the analysis above. Nature has always been a refuge for women. Nature serves as a safe sanctuary where they may rest and recuperate for women. As a result, women are concerned with the environment, care for nature, and rely on others for comfort and support. This story clearly shows and expresses nature and women through the following analysis. Criticizing the male dominance culture's gender inequity, *Jane Eyre* sought to promote peaceful connections between individuals. This novel embodied the concept that emancipation of the female and nature was a natural progression of history. The ecofeminist looking for help with their definition of Ecofeminism will find these analyses helpful.

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