

## JANE EYRE: A PORTRAIT OF INDEPENDENCE AND STRENGTH

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*Abstract:*

This article explores the theme of independence in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, focusing on the protagonist's unwavering commitment to personal freedom and self-reliance. Jane Eyre's journey is marked by her resilience against societal pressures, her refusal to conform to gendered expectations, and her quest for equality and dignity in relationships.

*Key words:* Independence, Empowerment, Feminism, Self-reliance, Gender equality.

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Independence refers to the freedom of thought and action, the ability to stand by one's beliefs despite external pressures. An independent person can make decisions autonomously, even if these decisions are unpopular. Such individuals are free from stereotypes and respect the individuality of others.

In Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre*, the protagonist embodies an ideal of feminine beauty that goes beyond physical appearance. Her true beauty lies in her intellect, kindness, modesty, and most notably, her independence. Jane's independence is a recurring theme throughout the novel, beginning in the first chapter, where she stands up to her abusive cousin. Despite the punishment she faces—being sent to the dreaded red room—Jane's spirit remains unbroken. She feels utterly isolated in the red room but refuses to accept her treatment as just: "It's not fair, it's not fair!" she internally protests. This determination to resist unjust authority sparks thoughts of escape or even starvation as a means of reclaiming her autonomy [1, p. 18].

Jane Eyre's resilient character also helps her endure the hardships at Lowood School. The institution aims to instill humility and submission in its pupils, traits that conflict with Jane's nature. When Jane witnesses her friend, Helen Burns, accept an undeserved punishment with humility, Jane reacts with anger: "And if I were you, I would hate her; I would never submit." Her fiery response illustrates her inability to grasp Helen's philosophy of passive acceptance. The two characters are starkly different, with Jane asserting that cruelty should be met with defiance: "When we are beaten for no reason, we must respond with blow to blow." This quote highlights the independence and rebelliousness that define Jane's character, qualities that set her apart as an embodiment of feminine strength [1, p. 80].

The next significant phase of Jane's life unfolds when she becomes a governess at Thornfield Hall, employed to care for Adele, the ward of Mr. Rochester. Jane's independence, inner strength, and moral beauty quickly impress Rochester. He sees through the emotional restraint she developed at Lowood, recognizing her true vivacity. In one conversation, he observes that Jane's true self is constrained, like "an interesting bird between the narrow bars of the cage." He compares her to a "lively, restless and brave prisoner" whose potential is being stifled, yearning for freedom [1, p. 211].

Jane's independent spirit becomes even more evident in her conversations with Rochester. In Chapter 23, she decides she must leave Thornfield when she learns of Rochester's engagement to Miss Ingram. Despite Rochester's efforts to make her stay, Jane

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firmly asserts her autonomy: "I am not a bird, and no nets will hold me back, I am a free human being, with an independent will, which now demands that I leave you." Although she loves Rochester, she insists on maintaining her dignity and self-respect, traits that make her unwilling to settle for anything less than equality in their relationship. Jane values her inner worth over material wealth, resisting Rochester's attempts to lavish her with gifts, which she finds demeaning: "I can't stand Mr. Rochester dressing me up like a doll; I'm not going to be showered with golden rain." For Jane, her integrity and moral strength are more valuable than any riches [1, p. 414].

Later in the novel, Jane's independence also comes to the fore in her relationship with her cousin, St. John Rivers. He proposes to her, but Jane refuses, knowing that St. John views her only as a partner for his missionary work, not as a true life companion. She realizes that marrying him would mean losing her sense of self: "If I follow St. John, I will disown myself; if I go to India, I will condemn myself to an untimely death." Determined to stay true to her own heart, Jane chooses not to suppress her true self or sacrifice her own desires for someone else's ambitions.

Jane eventually returns to Rochester, who has been left blind by a fire, yet her love for him endures. With her newfound inheritance, she is financially independent and able to support both herself and Rochester. This final development solidifies Jane's status as an independent woman who, throughout her life, has fought for her own ideals, freedom, and happiness.

In conclusion, Jane Eyre exemplifies the ideal of an independent woman. Her strength lies in her commitment to her principles, her pursuit of freedom, and her unwavering sense of honor and dignity. For Jane, personal conscience is the most important trait a person can possess, and it is this moral integrity that makes her character so inspiring. Through her struggles and triumphs, Jane demonstrates that true independence means staying true to oneself, no matter the challenges faced.

### **References:**

[1]. Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. Edited by Margaret Smith. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.