

Similarities in Genre and Theme: A Comparative Study of *The Professor* and *Jane Eyre*

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Abstract: As a remarkable Victorian novelist, Charlotte Bronte wrote four impressive novels including *Jane Eyre* and *The Professor*. *Jane Eyre* proves to be a typical Victorian book, fascinating and enduring, whereas *The Professor*, the first complete novel that Charlotte Bronte wrote has always been considered as minor and ill-conceived. Despite the totally different judgments of the two novels, there exists many similarities between *Jane Eyre* and *The Professor*. This paper aims at helping readers have a better understanding of *The Professor* by comparing with *Jane Eyre* from two aspects: genre and theme, and try to find out the similarities of *Jane Eyre* and *The Professor*, thus we can have a further understanding of Charlotte Bronte.

Keywords: Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre*, *The Professor*, genre, theme, similarities.

INTRODUCTION

Charlotte Bronte is an impressive presence on the literary scene of the Victorian period. Though born in a poor clergyman's family, she was gifted artistically and managed to leave an imprint on literary history. Charlotte Bronte's first novel, *The Professor*, was rejected by several publishers, and was not published until 1857. *Jane Eyre* was published in 1847 and achieved immediate success. Some critics have expressed gratitude for *The Professor*'s failure, which spurs Charlotte Bronte to write *Jane Eyre* for which she is renowned.

Over the past years, many scholars and critics have studied and commented on *Jane Eyre*, whereas there are a little researches and studies made on *The Professor*, even little studies on the comparative study of the two novels. Though *The Professor* is not as famous as *Jane Eyre*, there are still some similarities between them and it's very necessary for us to make a comparative study of the two novels, thus to learn more about Charlotte Bronte. In genre, both *Jane Eyre* and *The Professor* can be regarded as autobiographical novels as well as Bildungsroman novels. In theme, *Jane Eyre* and *The Professor* are representative works of English critical realism. The most important thing is that the two novels are mostly based on the life experience of Charlotte Bronte herself, and reflect the attitude and spirit of Charlotte Bronte. This paper will make a detailed analysis of genre and theme between *Jane Eyre* and *The Professor* thus to have a better understanding of Charlotte Bronte.

LITERATURE REVIEW OF JANE EYRE AND THE PROFESSOR

Since the publication of *Jane Eyre* and *The Professor*, there exists a total difference in researches

and studies of the two novels. That is, *Jane Eyre* is more welcomed than *The Professor* among scholars and critics. And when refer to the comparative study of the two novels, there are few references on it.

Jane Eyre, as a renowned literary work, received great popularity since it was published. The studies of *Jane Eyre* mainly focus on text, the character, the feminism and so on. Jerome Beaty [1] in *Jane Eyre Cubed: The Three Dimensions of the Text* analyzes *Jane Eyre* from three dimensions: narrative, rhetoric, and ontology. He points out that *Jane Eyre* begins with rebellion ends with martyrdom. The story of the proud, saucy, self-reliant orphan Jane Eyre ends with the chastened, religious, privileged and satisfied wife Jane Rochester. Ashe, Frederick L [2] in *Jane Eyre: The Quest for Optimism* analyzes *Jane Eyre* from psychology and shows that *Jane Eyre* can be seen as the intricate fantasy of an author whose own pessimism and suffering proved insurmountable. McKee, Patricia [3] in *Racial Strategies in Jane Eyre's discussion* mainly focuses on *Jane Eyre*'s use of race to further another political project, a revision of social ranks and of her own position within a class hierarchy and how Jane's

authoritative middle-class subject emerges. LeFavour, Cree [4] in “*Jane Eyre*” *Fever: Deciphering the Astonishing Popular Success of Charlotte Bronte in Antebellum America* points out that the popularity and reception of *Jane Eyre*, Jane Eyre and Charlotte Bronte taken together demonstrate an Anglo-American world of reading and books that is far more complicated, and far more richer, than a narrowly national consideration would have it. *Jane Eyre* helps us to complete the picture of this period’s American literary history, placing both British and American books in a more accurate perspective as elements of a materially grounded literary culture. Kees, Lara Freeburg [5] in “*Sympathy*” in *Jane Eyre* .” argues that though the language of *Jane Eyre* is most often read in postcolonial or imperialist terms, he thinks that it may instead constitute Bronte’s attempt to find a replacement for both religious faith and the morality founded thereon. Bronte’s novel pierces to the heart of a world divided against itself, struggling to understand changing social structures, what exactly “races” are, and most fundamentally, what it meant to be human in such a world. Paris, Bernard J [6] in *Imagined Human Beings-A Psychological Approach to Character and Conflict in Literature* defines *Jane Eyre* as typical in novels of vindication and uses Horneyan approach to see Jane more clearly, to appreciate her motives for telling her story, and to do justice to the brilliance of Bronte’s mimetic characterization. Gettelman, Debra [7] in “*Making out*” *Jane Eyre* argues that what *Jane Eyre*, the most successful of Victorian novels reveals is an effort on the part of its author to limit the powerful dreaming that the novel itself creates. *Jane Eyre* exhibits a paradoxical desire to break out of the very thing that made for its success with readers. In contrast, there are little articles about *The Professor*. Federico, Annette R [8] in *The Other Case: Gender and Narration in Charlotte Bronte’s The Professor* focuses on gender and narration and holds the view that Bronte is confidently masculine, objectifying and *The Professor* deals not with how to obtain power, but how to outgrow the need for power. Ruth, Jennifer [9] in *Between Labor and Capital: Charlotte Bronte’s Professional Professor* mainly studies the novel from *The Professor* the relative invisibility of certain kinds of work as value-able labor threatened to shut its producers out of the marketplace and helps correct the balance of critical studies of professionalism. Cohen, William A [10] in *Material Interiority in Charlotte Bronte’s The Professor* uses the term material interiority mean to designate this literary depiction of ethereal inner qualities in a language of tangible objects, a practice that collapses dualistic conceptions of mind and body (or body and soul) by making subjective inwardness and bodily innards stand for each other.

SIMILARITIES IN GENRE

From specific analysis of two principal protagonists William Crimsworth and Jane, *Jane Eyre* and *The Professor* can be generally regarded as Bildungsroman novels as well as autobiographical novels.

***Jane Eyre* and *The Professor* can be regarded as Bildungsroman novels.**

Bildungsroman, the novel of initiation, is a genre of literature that focuses on intellectual, psychological and moral development of a principal protagonist from youth to adulthood. *Jane Eyre* and *The Professor* are typical Bildungsroman in terms of its protagonists. The two protagonists, William Crimsworth and Jane, both have a miserable childhood, neither of them can enjoy the warmth and happiness of family. So they have to leave the place where they detest and to seek a real life of themselves. They grow up both physically and psychologically, especially in psychology.

In *The Professor*, the protagonist William Crimsworth is an orphan. After losing his parents, he is adopted by his uncle while gets terrible treatment. Eventually, Crimsworth cannot stand the cruel treatment from his uncle and break up with him. The break-up with his heartless uncle can be regarded as the first step to grow up in mental. Crimsworth has a brother named Edward who is an owner of an industrial mill also regards Crimsworth as a burden and shows no affections to him. At the point when Crimsworth reaches the threshold of tolerance for his brother’s insults, and realizing the coldness and ugliness of his brother, Crimsworth chooses to leave his brother stoutly and goes to Belgium alone where he is employed as a teacher. The road of life is never smooth. In Belgium, Crimsworth soon finds himself threatened again, but he doesn’t fear instead brave enough to seek the happiness of himself. After many ups and downs in life, Crimsworth finally grows up to be a “real” man with decency and dignity.

In *Jane Eyre*, the heroine Jane has the same suffering as Crimsworth. Jane, who is an orphan, lives with her aunt Mrs. Reed and her three cousins at Gates head Hall where she is abused and neglected. When her brutish cousin John bullies her, she resists bravely against him. It is the first time that she shows people the bud of her self-consciousness. It is can be regarded as the first step to grow up, not physically but mentally. Then Jane is sent to Lowood school as a result of rebelling against her cold-hearted aunt and cousins. In Lowood, Jane is consciously enough to struggle against unreasonable treatment. When she grows up and becomes a governess in Thornfield Hall and tries her best to live an independent and decent life. From Gateshead Hall to Lowood School, then to Thornfield Hall, Jane is becoming more and stronger. After having

gone through much hardship, Jane finally obtains her happiness and self-esteem.

From child to adult, William Crimsworth and Jane have gone through many obstacles and suffered a lot of tortures. They grow up with pains and tears but still with hopes and wishes for a better life of themselves.

***Jane Eyre* and *The Professor* can be regarded as autobiographical novels**

Charlotte Bronte is a subjective writer. The term "subjective" refers to those writers who tend to write about themselves and to recreate a world of their life and experience, and those works often convey a subjective impression or picture where everything and everybody is seen through the eyes of the author. Charlotte Bronte quotes her own life experience faithfully and thus most of her works are basically autobiographical. The involvement of Charlotte in her novels is obvious. *The Professor* and *Jane Eyre* are such works that reflect most of the life experience of Charlotte Bronte to readers.

The Professor is based on the life experience of Charlotte Bronte when she lives in Brussels. Frances Henri, the heroine in *The Professor*, has many similarities with Charlotte Bronte. Frances Henri's father is a teacher, so is Charlotte Bronte's father. Frances Henri used to be a teacher in a boarding school, Charlotte Bronte also used to be teacher in a charity school. Frances Henri loved his teacher William Crimsworth and Charlotte Bronte also loved his French teacher who was excellent and warm-hearted in real life. At last, Frances Henri and William Crimsworth set up a school which is also the wish of Charlotte Bronte. However, the wish to set up a school was disillusioned in real life, but in *The Professor*, the wish came true. *Jane Eyre* is also a representative autobiographical work of Charlotte Bronte. In this novel, Charlotte Bronte wrote about the awful experience in boarding school, the bitterness of job hunting and the secret affections. Both Charlotte Bronte and Jane lived in boarding school once and were impressed with bitterness. Both of them worked as governesses and were treated unfairly. Both Jane and Charlotte Bronte are "so little, so pale and had features so irregular and so marked", but they are full of passions. Charlotte Bronte may have created the character of Jane as a means of coming to terms with elements of her own life.

Charlotte Bronte depicts the two heroines who can be regarded as the mirror of herself. There is no doubt that *Jane Eyre* and *The Professor* can be regarded as autobiographical novels.

SIMILARITIES IN THEME

Critical realism is a main trend of 19th English literature. Its social criticism is found in its vivid description of life of a poor orphan left dependent on some selfish, cold-hearted people and his hard struggle to retain his dignity as a human being. Charlotte Bronte presents a vivid realistic picture of the bourgeoisie society in her novels. By writing from an individual point of view, she projects herself into her leading characters and allows her innermost feelings, the dominant energies and sympathies on the side of the poor. *The Professor* and *Jane Eyre* are such representative works of English critical realism.

Criticisms of hypocrisy and viciousness of the emerging bourgeoisie in *The Professor* and *Jane Eyre*

In *The Professor*, the criticism of hypocrisy and viciousness is vividly revealed in the relationship between Crimsworth and his brother Edward. Edward, a representative of the emerging bourgeoisie is hypocritical and snobbish. He employs Crimsworth to do laborious work for him but give Crimsworth little salary. He even warn Crimsworth not to reveal the true relationship between them and always keep away from him. When Crimsworth find nowhere to live, Edward even refuse to let Crimsworth live in his splendid house. Besides, Edward is so jealous of William's talent, erudition and hardworking. He is afraid of that someday William would be successful, even beyond him. For this reason, he does everything to hurt William and set many obstacles for him.

In *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Bronte also severely criticizes hypocrisy and viciousness of the bourgeoisie class. Jane is a poor orphan have to live with her aunt Mrs. Reed and three cousins at Gateshead Hall. However at that place, Jane is abused and tortured and is always insulted by her aunt and cousins. When she rebels against the unfair treatment from her cousins, Jane is locked in a dark and cold room and later sent to an appalling and horrible boarding school at a low price. All these vile deeds reveal the hypocrisy and viciousness of the bourgeoisie class.

Severe attacks of the darkness of bourgeoisie educational system in *The Professor* and *Jane Eyre*

Charlotte Bronte severely attacks the brutality and hypocrisy of the English unreasonable bourgeoisie educational system in both of the two novels. In *The Professor*, students are sophisticated and arrogant. The atmosphere of the school is repressive and revolting. The relationship between students and teachers is tense and impure. Everyone is chasing after the benefits of themselves, lying and cheating become a normal thing in life. Just as Charlotte Bronte wrote in this novel. "An eager pursuit by each individual of her own interest and convenience, and a coarse indifference to the interest and convenience of everyone else. Most of them could

lie with audacity when it appeared advantages to do so” [11].

Similarly in *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Bronte points out the darkness and inhumanity of boarding school. Lowood School is a typical one. There children live an inhumane life. They are exposed to unbearable harsh conditions, unreasonable rigid disciplines and are trained to be humble slaves only. The boarding school provides a little food for children to eat every day. In winter, it is so cold that even in room, water will be frozen. Most children are sick or dying without medical caring. However, the family of the schoolmaster lives in bright warm rooms and wears luxurious clothes. It is obviously that Charlotte Bronte gives a strong criticism to the darkness of the bourgeoisie society and its inhumane educational system.

CONCLUSION

From the comparative study of *The Professor* and *Jane Eyre*, we can find that there exists many similarities in genre and theme. The most important thing to notice is that no matter *Jane Eyre* or *The Professor*, they are both reflections of Charlotte Bronte's life and spirit, thus worth our reading and studying.

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