

THE REPRESENTATION OF PATRIARCHAL IDEOLOGY AND GENDER ROLES IN CHARLOTTE BRONTE'S LITERATURE

Darvishova Gulchehra Kenjabayevna

The University of Public Safety of the Republic of Uzbekistan

ABSTRACT

This article examines Charlotte Brontë's exploration of Victorian female stereotypes and her advocacy for a new paradigm of womanhood across her novels. Bronte challenges traditional gender roles and the patriarchal gaze, particularly through the narratives of "Jane Eyre," "Shirley," "Villette," and "The Professor." Her works serve as a critique of societal constraints on female identity and subjectivity, offering a psychological portrayal of her heroines' journeys towards self-definition against societal norms. Bronte's nuanced portrayal of the female psyche reveals the complexities of navigating patriarchal ideals, emphasizing the internal struggle and potential instability inherent in conforming to gendered expectations.

Keywords: *Charlotte Bronte, Victorian stereotypes, female empowerment, patriarchal gaze, gender roles.*

As we know literature is a medium that endeavors and explores the condition of human life and society. Since the literature is recognized as a tool which discovers new, unknown traits of mankind and the society he or she lives the purpose of literature becomes evident. We can say that recent years the interest in literature and its members has increased in the widest sense of this word. Women writers of English literature had a great influence upon the development of world literature. English novelists the Bronte sisters left great artistic heritage in literature. Charlotte Bronte was one of the most significant and a great English novelist.

Bronte uses various themes, narrative techniques and careful choices of phrase to great effect, raising awareness of how patriarchal ideologies oppress women through her novels, and contributing greatly to the debate surrounding the "woman question". The "woman question" refers to the great Victorian debate concerning the character and responsibilities of women. Patriarchy's essentialist gender construction of femininity was founded on the idea that women's "natural" maternal instincts fitted them for the role of guardian of the home and guardian of societal morality while the masculine gender construct was deemed to be fitted for the struggles of the workplace. Man was believed to represent rationality, leadership, and civilization while woman

embodied the irrational, the passionate, and the natural world with all its vagaries. Men thus asserted that the faculty for thought and accomplishment was theirs alone, and they attempted to consign women to the realm of feeling.

The fact that women were viewed primarily as wives and mothers reveals how women as a group were only ever thought of in terms of their relationship and service to men. Bronte portrays gender as a performance born out of interaction with others who share a mutual understanding of gender-based codes. Bronte sought to discredit patriarchal ideologies through stressing the primacy and integrity of subjectivity over socially prescribed gender models.

Further, she portrays her male and female characters as being held to ransom by society; viewed as incompetent and persecuted if they do not adequately perform the gender roles assigned to them. Thus Crimsworth is presented as less than a man through his many typically feminine traits and features, as well as through comparisons between him and his more physically imposing and powerful elder brother, who persecutes him for his perceived inferiorities, along with many of the other characters, throughout *The Professor*.

Bronte's novels support this argument, given their strong social criticism, their subversion of patriarchal ideology and gender constructs and Bronte's attempts to redefine the feminine ideal through her heroines. These factors confound a straightforward reading of the Victorian era in which the novels are set. The complexity and ambiguity which characterize Bronte's works could more accurately be said to reflect both the private and the public, the hegemonic and the personal, in the Victorian era. Bronte's depictions of her heroes' and heroines' struggles between their desires and patriarchal prescripts.

Through *Jane Eyre* we examine Bronte's treatment of female Victorian stereotypes and her attempt to create a new model of womanhood. Shirley will provide the departure point from which to view Bronte's ambiguous depiction of identity, ideology and stereotype, as well as her attempt to create a counter culture of female empowerment. By way of *Villette* we consider Bronte's study of and challenge to traditional power relations, and the power of the masculine gaze. Bronte's first completed novel and arguably the blueprint for her later works, *The Professor*, to explore her representation of gender, sex and sense of self. Critics, particularly feminist critics often see female novelists as voicing their "sense of dualities" in clandestine ways as they felt unable to directly express their true feelings and ideas unfiltered in public. Bronte is typically seen as a "paradigm" for such novelists by these critics who believe the architecture and ambiguities of her novels both form and disguise her social criticism.

Bronte's novels offer a psychological depiction of her heroines' attempts to carve their own path in life, counter to that which society had laid out for them. Bronte breaks with ideological and literary norms by illustrating how one's subjectivity is constrained by society and its discriminatory ideologies, and how one is constantly evolving through one's desires, effectively broadening and redefining the female psyche. This expanded female psyche, and its accompanying fierce discourse of feeling, illustrates how female self-definition can be based on socially-prescribed "inexpressively". Here, attempts to acknowledge and voice intimate thoughts and emotions end in self-loathing for failure to conform inwardly to patriarchy's female ideal.

Thus, while Jane is presented to us as a typical, the challenges she faces in the novel are emblematic of those faced by many woman in Victorian society. Bronte recognizes that identities are formed through contraposition, necessitating the repression of ambiguities so as to produce the illusion of a stable, socially-accepted identity. However, Bronte goes further by stressing that the repressed elements and desires remain and form an ever-present threat to the coherence and stability of self. This is clearly evident in Jane's discordant nature.

In conclusion, most notably in Bronte's novels, psychological struggle appears as self-repression, accompanied by the threat of madness, his is evident in Jane's symbolic ties with Bertha, whose confinement is a symptom and cause of her instability. In this way, Bronte suggests the undesirability and fundamental unsustainability of patriarchal ideology's constructions of gendered identity.

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