

## **THE PORTRAYAL OF LIBERAL FEMINISM THROUGH THE MAIN CHARACTER OF CHARLOTTE BRONTE'S *JANE EYRE* NOVEL**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This research discusses about the portrayal of liberal feminism experienced by the main character in the *Jane Eyre* novel. In conducting this research, the researcher used the theory of liberal feminism and the theory of characterization by Reaske. The researcher used qualitative research as the method and mimetic as the approach of this research. The findings of this research showed that there are two aspects of liberal feminism that are portrayed in the novel; namely equal education and equal liberty. Those aspects are portrayed through Jane Eyre's character when she struggled to get her freedom by being intelligent and progressive to get well education, and being independent and courageous to get her freedom.

**Key words:** Feminism, Liberal feminism, Characterization

### **ABSTRAK**

*Penelitian ini membahas tentang gambaran liberal feminisme yang dialami oleh tokoh utama pada novel Jane Eyre. Dalam melakukan penelitian ini, peneliti menggunakan teori liberal feminis dan teori karakterisasi oleh Reaske. Peneliti menggunakan penelitian kualitatif sebagai metode dan mimesis sebagai pendekatan pada penelitian ini. Hasil pada penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa ada dua aspek liberal feminis yang digambarkan di novel; yaitu kesetaraan dalam pendidikan, dan kesetaraan dalam kebebasan. Aspek-aspek tersebut digambarkan melalui karakter Jane Eyre ketika dia berjuang untuk mendapatkan kebebasannya dengan menjadi seseorang yang cerdas dan progresif untuk mendapatkan pendidikan yang baik, dan karakternya yang mandiri dan berani untuk mendapatkan kebebasannya.*

**Kata kunci:** *Feminisme, Liberal feminisme, Karakterisasi*

## **A. INTRODUCTION**

By seeing the development of women's movements today, it can be seen that most women have got their rights. They declared to become independent women. On the other side, most women who live in the rural area, and women who live as a minority in their area still get unequal treatment from superior which is men. They cannot get well education like men, cannot get better work like men, and have no rights like men. While in the city, women also get oppression as the cause of the patriarchal system, especially women from the low and middle classes. Furthermore, to maintain their right equality, women have to be smart, independent, confident, courageous, and so on, which make them can compete with men.

Related to those cases, there is a movement developed by women to get equality like men, and the movement is called feminism. Feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression (Hooks 1). Moreover, feminism is not just about a form of women's movement in reality, but feminism is also poured into literature. According to Klarer, literature is referred to as the entirety of written expression with the restriction that not every written document can be categorized as literature in the more exact sense of the word (1).

*Jane Eyre* novel by Charlotte Bronte was published in 1847. Bronte is one of classic English writers who fight for feminism in 18<sup>th</sup> century. Her novel is kind of her struggle for feminism. She tries to prove that woman be treated equally as men in terms of education and rights to express themselves in literature. Indeed, the story in *Jane Eyre* novel is taken from some experiences of Bronte who struggle to be an independent woman. The story in the novel tells about a white English woman named Jane Eyre who struggles to fight against the oppression, and male-dominance to get her freedom.

To analyze this research, the researcher used the theory of liberal feminism. According to Lorber, liberal feminism is a study about the social movement of women that fights to get the same right, education, and work opportunities as men (9). Liberal feminists claim that movement just fights for white women from the middle class (Krolokke, Charlotte, and Sorenson 3). Then, the researcher used the theory of character and characterization by Reaske to support the analysis of the main character.

The researcher chooses the theory of liberal feminism because this theory consists of some aspects of women's rights such as they struggle to get equal rights in education, work opportunities, and others. This theory also fights for white women from the middle class, and it is related to the main female character in this novel. Furthermore, the reason why the researcher chooses *Jane Eyre* novel as her object is because this novel was published in 1847 at the same time when feminists start their movement in that century. In addition, the story in the novel illustrates a white woman from a low class who struggles to be independent and have freedom.

Based on the explanation above, the researcher wants to analyze the portrayal of liberal feminism through the main character in the novel. The researcher applied the theory of liberal feminism, and the theory of character and characterization. The objective of this thesis is to describe how liberal feminism is portrayed through the main character in the *Jane Eyre* Novel.

## **B. RELATED LITERATURE**

### **1. Novel**

According to Taylor and Richard (46), a novel is normally a prose work of quite some length and complexity which attempts to reflect and express something of the quality or value of the human experience of conduct. The novel's elements are categorized into two types: intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Because all of the data are contained within the books, this research is strongly tied to the intrinsic aspects, which can be simply analyzed. It describes people, plots, places, moral themes, and so on, which will be discussed in greater detail in a factual structure. In this research, the researcher used some of the intrinsic elements which are character and characterization.

## **2. Character**

Abrams (32) said that characters are people represented in dramatic or narrative work, which are interpreted by the reader as being endowed with particular moral, intellectual, and emotional qualities by inferences from what the persons say that their distinctive ways of saying it – the dialogue – and from what they do – the action. The ground in a character's temperament, desires, and moral nature for his speech and action are called their motivation.

## **3. Characterization**

According to Gill, characterization is how a character is created. It means characterization is a device to describe the character in the story (127). Furthermore, Reaske said that there are six devices of characterization with the following section below (46-48):

### **a. The appearance of the character**

The physical appearance is described by the playwright in the stage direction to give the first understanding.

### **b. Asides and soliloquies**

The character is described as he or she speaks, we will understand the characters best when they speak in short asides or long soliloquies.

### **c. Dialogue between characters**

The characteristic of a character is described through the way he or she talks to the other characters. His language when speaking to others also shed a great idea of light on his personality.

### **d. Hidden narration**

The character is described in a way where another character narrates something about that character.

### **e. Language**

The personality of a character is described through the use of language and expression when he or she talks to another character.

### **f. Character in action**

The character is depicted through the way he or she acts in the play to give a better insight into his or her personality.

## **4. Feminism**

According to Hooks, feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression (1). From Hooks's statement, it can be seen that feminism is not anti-male. Feminist is struggling for equality between men and women. As it happened, cases of sexism still occur around people unnoticed. Men or women can be the victims of gender oppression.

Moreover, about the oppression, this term consists of oppression in society, politics, education, economy, social class, and so on. To sum up, feminism is a women's movement to get equality and the same rights as men. Feminist aims to create equality between men and women.

## **5. Liberal feminism**

Lorber stated that liberal feminism is concerned about the women's movement to demand the same right as men specifically in education and work opportunities (9). The root of liberal feminism is the discrimination towards gender inequality. So far, society holds the false belief that women are, by nature, less intellectually and physically capable than men, it tends to discriminate against women in the academy, the forum, and the marketplace (Tong 2). Furthermore, liberal feminism has a big history from the 18th century until the 20th century and they fight for equal education, equal liberty, suffrage, and equal rights. Based on Tong's book, there are four aspects about the history and the development of liberal feminism:

### **a. Equal education**

In this aspect, feminist concerns how women fight to obtain proper education just like men. Marry Wollstonecraft is the leader of this movement who fought for equal education in the 18th century. Wollstonecraft said that basically men and women have the same ability (qtd. in Tong 14). But, at that time the development of rationality was the most important educational goal for boys, not for girls. The stereotypes of men are required to be courageous, temperance, justice, and fortitude, whereas women are required to be patient, docility, humorous, and flexible. Thus, Wollstonecraft struggled to fight against the stereotype and proved that woman also can be equal like men in some ways.

### **b. Equal liberty**

This movement was led by John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor Mill. They fight for equal work opportunities and women's rights in marriage and divorce. At that time, Taylor wrote about the enfranchisement of women. She struggles for her rights to take care of her children because she has a divorce from her first husband named John Taylor (Tong 17). She accepted the traditional view that maternal ties are stronger than paternal ties. She assumed that the mother would be the one rear to children to adulthood in the event of divorce.

In contrast, Mill wrote about the subjection of women, he argued that couples should marry late, have children late, and live extended families to minimize divorce disrupting effects on children's lives. Even if a woman is educated and liberal, Mill stated that the majority of them choose to remain in their private realm, where their primary role is to embellish and beautify rather than sustain life. In the meantime, Taylor maintained that women needed to do more than just read books; they needed to be partners with men in the work, gains, risk, and remunerations of productive environment (qtd. in Tong 17).

Therefore, if women want to be equal with their husbands, they should have income from outside. In other words, women will be victims of oppression if they are being dependent women, so that is why they should be independent women.

**c. The Suffrage**

Liberal feminist also fights for women to get suffrage. Mill and Taylor stated that women needed suffrage in order to be treated equally to men. They argue that voting empowers people not only to express their political views, but also to change the systems, structures, and attitudes that contribute to their oppression and that of others (qtd. in Tong 21).

**d. Equal Rights**

In the 20th century, the feminist movement would be the reality of the liberated women's movement, in order to be fully liberated women. Women need economic opportunities, and sexual freedoms as well as civil liberties (Tong 23). Liberal feminist in that era is struggling for women's civil rights. Even though their efforts, however, discrimination against women did not end, largely because the importance of women's rights had not yet been impressed on the consciousness of the bulk of the United State population.

At that time, the movement was led by Betty Friedan (Tong 25), she is one of the founders and first president of NOW (National Organization for Women). Friedan believes that a women's civil rights movement is unavoidable. As a result, the feminist movement of the time aimed to combat inequality in all areas of life, including social, political, economic, and personal (qtd. in Tong 25).

**C. RESEARCH METHOD**

**1. Research Design**

Qualitative research is a type of research that collects and works with non-numerical data and that seeks to interpret meaning from these data that help us understand social life through the study of targeted populations or places (Ashley 1). This method focused on words, speeches, opinions of others to be able to interpret or describe a meaning. Moreover, the researcher used mimetic research as the approach. Potolsky said that mimesis describes things, such as artworks, as well as actions, such as imitating another person (1).

**2. Research Instrument**

According to Bogdan and Biklen, the researcher is the most effective instrument in qualitative research (qtd. in Semi 24). As a result, the researcher is the research instrument used to observe and discuss the research topics.

**3. Data and Data Source**

The researcher used the object of Charlotte Bronte's novel *Jane Eyre* as a source of data for this research. Then, the researcher retrieved the data in the form of sentences, utterances, words, phrases, and clauses of the character in this novel which related to the research problem.

**4. Data Collection**

To answer the research question and to collect the data, the researcher did some steps. First, the researcher read *Jane Eyre* novel couple of times. Second, the researcher collected the

data by taking notes or marking the data. Last, the researcher took a concern on the part that contains liberal feminism and the main character's traits in the novel.

## 5. Data Analysis

In this research, the researcher used the data analysis techniques from Miles and Huberman to analyze the data such are; data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (10-11).

### a. Data Reduction

Data reduction refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data that appear in written up field notes or transcriptions. In this step, the researcher reduced the data that are not related to the theory and focused on classifying the data that related to liberal feminism.

### b. Data Display

Miles and Huberman limit the "presentation" as a set of structured information that gives a possibility of drawing conclusions and taking action. In this step, the researcher showed the data that have been organized. She analyzed it using the theory of liberal feminism and the theory of character and characterization.

### c. Conclusion Drawing/ Verification

From the beginning of data collection, a qualitative analysis began to look for the meaning of things, record order, explanation, possible configurations, causal paths, and propositions. In this step, the researcher drew up the conclusion based on the analysis to answer the research questions.

## D. FINDINGS

In this section, the researcher presents the findings of the portrayal of liberal feminism through the main female character in *Jane Eyre* novel.

### 1. Equal Education

Wollstonecraft stated that equal education is seen from how women fight to obtain proper education just like men. She also argues that men and women have the same ability (qtd. in Tong 14). But, at the time, men's education is more prioritized than women's. Then, most women do not prioritize their education because they are influenced by the stereotype that women are better off at home, taking care of their homes and their families. This is what makes women more often underestimated and demeaned.

#### (Data 1)

Thus relieved of a grievous load, I from that hour set to work afresh, resolved to pioneer my way through every difficulty: **I toiled hard, and my success was proportionate to my efforts. My memory not actually tenacious, improved with practice; exercise sharpened my wits; in a few weeks I was promoted to a higher class;** in less than two months I was allowed to commence French and drawing. (Bronte 114)

Based on the data above, Jane's character is defined as a progressive woman in terms of asides and soliloquies. The situation started when she is in Lowood School, struggled for her right to get an excellent education, and how the school's leader told all students and teachers



that she is a liar who deserved to be hatred. On the other hand, Jane did not become weak of Mr. Brocklehurst's approach and words, but she did what she was supposed to do to be a well-educated woman by studying diligently. Mr. Brocklehurst despised Jane so much that he humiliated her in front of Lowood's students and teachers. Despite the pressure from her school authorities, Jane did not become a weak, downcast, or protracted lady in her grief. These experiences, however, strengthened her commitment to being a more responsible adolescent.

Afterwards, Jane's struggle against that oppression did not stop from becoming a diligent person. She kept exercising her capability by becoming a progressive person. It is apparent from her statement when she said "I toiled hard, and my success was proportionate to my efforts. My memory not actually tenacious, improved with practice; exercise sharpened my wits; in a few weeks I was promoted to a higher class" this statement showed that she would work hard and proved that she deserved an excellent education. Then, proved to Mr. Brocklehurst and John Reed, that she also can get excellent education like them.

Related to liberal feminism, Jane's character portrayed that as a woman who is against oppression, she has to be a progressive person to improve herself better and prove that women also can get equal education as men.

Then, there is another similar case of equal education aspect that happened when Jane struggled as a teacher who wanted to make her student become educated students, and it will be explained in the following data:

## **(Data 2)**

**I must forget that these coarsely-clad little pleasant are of flesh and blood as good as the scions of gentlest genealogy; and that the germs of native excellence, refinement, intelligence, kind feeling, are as likely to exist in their hearts as in those of the best-born. My duty will be to develop these germs: surely I shall find some happiness in discharging that office.**

Was I very gleeful, settled, content, during the hours I passed in yonder bare, humble schoolroom this morning and afternoon? Not to deceive myself, I must reply – no: I felt desolate to a degree. I felt – yes, idiot that I am – I felt degraded. I doubted I had taken a step which sank instead of raising me in the scale of social existence. **I was weakly dismayed at the ignorance, the poverty, the coariness of all I heard and saw round me.** (Bronte 595-596)

Based on the data above, Jane's character appeared as asides and soliloquies. She is the kind of critical person. This point also showed in the bold sentence when she said "I must forget that these coarsely-clad little pleasant are of flesh and blood as good as the scions of gentlest genealogy; and that the germs of native excellence, refinement, intelligence, kind feeling, are as likely to exist in their hearts as in those of the best-born. My duty will be to develop these germs". Jane was thinking that basically women and men have the same ability, but because of their different backgrounds and status, the opportunities to exercise their ability

are hard, and it caused an inequality treatment. Based on her thinking, she wants to motivate her student to be great students and educated. She did that because remembering her life, being a woman with poorness and foolishness just brought misery to her life. It is can be seen when she said “I was weakly dismayed at the ignorance, the poverty, the coariness of all I heard and saw around me” and she just does not want those things to happen to others’ life.

Related to liberal feminism, Jane’s character as a critical person portrayed her struggle against poorness and foolishness, it is with the purpose that there is no more unequal treatment because of that inequality, especially for women and it started from being a good teacher and producing educated student.

## **2. Equal Liberty**

Equal liberty is one of the aspects of liberal feminism who fights for the equality in economy, work opportunities. Liberal feminist tend to want to have free life, be independent, and have freedom in life. In Bronte’s novel, equal liberty portrayed when Jane struggled to be an independent woman. Here are the examples of equal liberty that experienced by Jane in the *Jane Eyre* novel:

### **(Data 3)**

John: You have no business to take our books; you are a dependent, mama says; you have no money, your father left you none. Now I’ll teach you to rummage my bookshelves: for they are mine; all the house belongs to me, or will do in a few years.

The volume was flung, it hit me, and I fell, streaking my head against the door and cutting it.

Jane: **“Wicked and cruel boy!”**

He ran headlong at me: I felt him grasp my hair and my shoulder: he had closed with a desperate thing. I really saw in him a tyrant, a murderer. I felt a drop or two of blood from my head trickle down my neck, and was sensible of somewhat pungent suffering: **these sensations for the time predominated over fear, and I received him in frantic sort. I don’t very well know what I did with my hands,** but he called me “Rat! Rat!” and bellowed out loud. (Bronte 7-8)

Based on the situation above, Jane’s character is represented by the form of the language she speaks, which indicates that she is a courageous person. It is apparent when Jane courageously fights against John when she is bullied whether physically or mentally. As the data showed, John is the kind of person who has power in that house, the way he tears down the book, which he owns alongside his sister, represents the family’s power. Eliza and Georgiana Reed, John Reed’s two sisters, were powerless to stop or stop their brother’s acts because they believed their brother was entitled to more of what was in the house. This is further backed by the term John Reed on the entire house belonging to him, which denotes that males are the sole proprietors of the family since they govern it.



Then, Jane as a woman who got that oppression felt like it is not fair, and she has to against that oppression, it is showed in the bold sentence when she said “wicked and cruel boy!” Jane decided to say it because she wanted John to know that she was not frightened of him, and she dared to fight back at John when he went mad and hit Jane. It is portrayed in the form of character in action, when she fought back at John Reed, for that violence. It can be seen in the bold sentence “these sensations for the time predominated over fear, and I received him in frantic sort. I don’t very well know what I did with my hands”.

Related to liberal feminism, the portrayal of Jane’s character in this data is portrayed of a woman who is against male dominance, and she does not let anyone oppresses her whether physically or mentally. She expressed her freedom by expressing herself as a woman who does not remain silent when she got oppressed or violent.

Then, another case of liberal feminism in the equal aspect happened when Jane struggles to not depend on St. John by becoming a hard worker. It will be explained in the following data:

#### **(Data 10)**

Jane : **I do: I have already said so. Show me how to work, or how to seek work: that is all I now ask; then let me go, if it be but to the meanest cottage;** but till then, allow me to stay here: I dread another essay of the horrors of homeless destitution. (Bronte 578)

From the data above, it is illustrated that Jane’s character is an independent woman based on the language she speaks to St. John. This showed on the bold line when she said “I do: I have already said so. Show me how to work, or how to seek work: that is all I now ask; then let me go, if it be but to the meanest cottage”, Jane’s character showed that she did not want to depend on men. She tried to do everything to get what she wants by being hard worker. Where she decided to be free in deciding everything in her life, became an independent woman, and be brave enough to take the risk and face it. Jane portrayed as a liberal feminists in the equal liberty aspect, she showed her struggled to be independent woman who not relied on men, and proved that woman also can lived independent as men.

Following the analysis, the researcher found out two aspect of liberal feminism that is presented in the novel; those are equal education and equal liberty. The data of equal education were portrayed by Jane Eyre. It is found that the data contained some cases of Jane’s struggles to be an educated-woman in order to be equal with men which are John Reed and to prove to Mr. Brocklehursts that she is a good girl by becoming a progressive and critical person. Her characters showed when she keeps going to do something more to improve herself to be better. Then, when she tried to think about her students critically, and how to make them become great student with good attitude and educated.

The second aspect of liberal feminism emerged in the findings is equal liberty, which consists of some cases when Jane struggled to be an independent woman by becoming a

courageous person, progressive, ambitious, critical, emphatic, and hard worker. Her characters showed in some cases such as when she was against male-dominance in Gateshead. Jane did not let John Reed oppressed her whether physically or mentally. Then, when she curious about how is the liberty out there, and she wanted to try something new that she never knows, she imagined how if she has a freedom life, and so on. Next, character is ambitious, Jane has a strong desire when she wants something, and it made her to think more to do her best. Furthermore, Jane's character is a smart and critical person, Jane is a kind of a smart woman because there is a case when she criticized that actually women and men have the same ability.

Moreover, character of Jane Eyre is independent. Her independence showed in some cases, such as when she emphatically expressed herself that she did not want to be ruled by man, also when she has argued with Mr. Rochester and she said that she is a human being, not a bird and no one can stop her to do something that she wants. Another case also when Jane talked to Mr. Rochester that she is just human, not an angel, and she did not let Mr. Rochester put high expectations on her. Afterward, she had to leave Thornfield and Mr. Rochester without bringing anything, without friends or family unless herself. She started her new life to be an independent woman by being hard-worker and doing everything that could make her be better more until she got what she wants. Finally, she got what she wants and became a rich woman, have a school, and start to look for her love which is Mr. Rochester. Her independence also showed when she refused St. John's proposal because she did not love him and she knew that St. John also did not love her.

The last character of Jane Eyre is a hard worker. Her hard work showed when she was willing to do everything that she never tried before; such as being a dressmaker, servant, nurse-girl, or a plain work-woman. She did that to be an independent woman and not depend on others.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

The question of this research is about how liberal feminism is portrayed through the main character of *Jane Eyre* Novel. This question was analyzed based on Wollstonecraft and Mills's theory about liberal feminism and the aspects, and also Reaske's theory about the characterization.

In this research, the researcher finds out that there are two aspects of liberal feminism experienced by the main character namely equal education and equal liberty. In equal education aspect, Jane portrays any acts of her struggle to be well-educated woman like men by being a progressive and critical person. Her character shows when she against the oppression of John Reed and Mr. Brocklehursts who said that Jane is a bad girl, liar, stupid. She rejects the bad assumption by studying hard, and improves herself to be nice girl who has a good-manner and becoming a smart student in her school. Then, she critically thinks that she has to struggle against poverty and ignorance around her to reduce the oppression, especially for women by becoming a great teacher and producing educated student.

Furthermore, in the equal liberty aspect, Jane is portrayed as an independent woman, courageous, ambitious, emphatic, intelligent, critical, and progressive person. She is a woman who wants to do everything by herself and does not depend on someone else like when she was in St. John's house, she is willing to do any work in order not to depend on St. John. Then, she decides everything related to her life in the future by herself, such as when she is leaving Lowood to find her freedom. At other times, she also left Mr. Rochester because she feels betrayed, so she decides to leave everything in Thornfield. Last, she refuses St. John's proposal and leave him because she does not love him, and she does not want to sacrifice her life. She is a confident woman who always takes risk and faces everything.

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