Jane Eyre and Class

By: Emilia, Jane, Will
**Background**

Education and the right to vote were exclusive to the upper class. The right to vote and the ability to hold political office required ownership of property. The upper class was almost entirely exclusive and required being born into it. (Study.com)

- Many members of the middle class wanted to join the upper class and thought that acting “proper” was important in doing so.

- The drive for social advancement in the Victorian era frequently appeared in its literature in various forms.

- Later Victorian writing saw the start of rebellion against the proper code of conduct of the times.
Background

-By the early 19th century, the hereditary aristocratic families had taken interest in the industrial sector resulting in traditional upper-class families moving out and a combination of nobles/growing wealthy class moving into the upper class

-The upper class (rich people) could afford the best education, and well as other luxuries

-Working class conditions were not pretty, such as no money for food, child labor, bad living situations
Thesis

Charlotte Bronte’s Jane Eyre is a strong social commentary about Victorian England. She supports the class rules with some rebellion. As a passionate woman she strives to fit in but is constantly rejected by everyone she meets because she is superior to the servants and below the gentry. Her story creates a wonderful commentary on social class but does not enforce or declare any particular beliefs of change or disagreeance. Bronte herself seems to support to some extent the status quo through the character of Jane but not through the events in the book. Since Jane gains wealth in an unconventional manner, the status quo seems blurred but the dream of wealth is not denied.
Upholding or Subverting Class Rules

Growing up, Jane recognizes how class plays an important role in determining her fate. Jane does not really subvert class roles during this period of the book however she does uphold them and accepts it. She also believes beauty plays a role in class.
“Most true is it that ‘beauty is the eye the gazer. My master’s colorless, olivia face, deep eyes, strong features, firm, grim mouth, all energy, all so beautiful to me they were of interest, an influence that took my feeling from my own power and flattered them in his.”

“I had not intended to love him, my soul the germs of love there detected and now, at the first renewed view of him, he made me love him without looking at me.”

Chapter 17, pg 153
Arguments for Social Change

*Jane Eyre* is not really advocating social change, it is more of a social commentary based on imagining a storyline of what “could be”.

While the events of the novel are quite unusual for the Victorian England time period, the attitudes of the characters facing those events are not inclined towards changing the social structure. Although the feelings that they have towards what happens are strong, those feelings do not argue for anything. It may seem that social change is called to attention because of such heightened reactions towards (mostly) unfair events, but the characters in those moments are not specifically wishing for change and mostly give commentary through their reactions.
Quotes

“Some of them are unmannered, rough, intractable, as well as ignorant; but others are docile, have a wish to learn, and evince a disposition that pleases me.” (Bronte 342)

“Some say it was a just judgement on him for keeping his first marriage secret, and wanting to take another wife while he had one living: but I pity him, for my part.” (Bronte 410)

“...to clothe themselves in shamefacedness and sobriety ...Mr. Brocklehurst was here interrupted; three other visitors, ladies, now entered the room. They ought to have come a little sooner to have heard his lecture on dress, for they were splendidly attired in velvet, silk, and furs.” (Bronte 57)
Supporting the status quo

Charlotte Bronte herself seems to support the status quo and clearly fantasizes about wealth and power in the book. By the end of the book Jane does encounter wealth and marries showing a stereotypical and commonly desired ending that demonstrate support for the desire to be part of the upper class. Even though she encounters wealth in an unconventional way she still finds it easily.

Jane, on the other hand, is a passionate character with strong beliefs, especially when it comes to education. She strongly opposes both John Reed and Mrs. Reed and advocates for change in the school system through Lowood and through Adele.
Quotes

- “I am not deceitful: if I were, I would say I loved you; but I declare I do not love you...I am glad you are no relation of mine. I will never call you aunt again”(30).
- “My uncle I had heard was dead-my only relative ... And then this money came only to me... twenty thousand pounds”(365)
- “She looked pale and thin: she said she was not happy. I found the rules of the establishment were too strict, its course of study too severe, for a child of her age...I meant to become her governess once more, but I soon found this impracticable...so I sought out a school conducted on a more indulgent system”(431)
Conclusion

Jane Eyre is Charlotte Bronte fantasizing about the life trajectory of a lower-class female character during the Victorian England era. In order to give the story some drive and have an interesting main character, Bronte makes Jane uphold and subvert to class roles both personality and situation-wise. Perceiving the novel’s events through a lens that defies class roles may seem like a call to social change, but in this book it is merely just commentary and there is minimal argument advocating for it. Jane however by the end of the novel fits pretty well with the Victorian status quo as she comes to accept wealth and power like was generally desired in that era.
Work Cited

