

ISSN : 2395-4132

THE EXPRESSION

An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal

Bimonthly Refereed & Indexed Open Access e-Journal



Impact Factor 3.9

Vol. 6 Issue 1 February 2020

Editor-in-Chief : Dr. Bijender Singh

Email : editor@expressionjournal.com

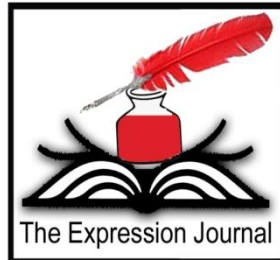
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THEME OF LOVE IN THE NOVELS OF CHARLOTTE BRONTE

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Abstract

The novel writing becomes a major preoccupation with the writers of the Victorian Age. But the novelists of the Victorian Age could not be as direct, frank and explicit as William Black, Keats, Shelly and Byron in their depiction of love. The Victorian beliefs about love, Romance and sexuality were quite oppressive. The theme which dominated the nineteenth century fiction was the rejection of stereotyped insipid image of Victorian Heroine, whose personality was founded on chastity and rejection of the general belief that woman can reach happiness through her relationships. The advocates of this theme were Mrs. Gaskell, the Bronte sisters, Thackeray in some moods, George Eliot and in part even Dickens. Out of these writers, Charlotte Bronte's women characters are the victim of the patriarchal hegemony. She lost her mother when she was merely one years old and after that she was much attached with her sisiters. She wrote only two novels and her novels are replete with the emotions and feelings of the women of the age in which they lived.

Keywords

Victorian Age, Love, Novels of Bronte, Women Characters.

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Introduction

Love is regarded as the noblest passion on earth. The 'theme of love' has been a major preoccupation with writers down the centuries, acquiring an archetypal significance as one can say the 'theme of death'. The poet traditionally conceive love as a very intimate, intense even ecstatic, but very private. Most of the love poems are lyrics, dealing with intense moments. On the other hand, in the novel, which is the most celebrated imaginative form, the novelist treats love which is the most private and intense thing.

The fiction of Victorian Age spring to the mind the names- Jane Austen, the Bronte sisters, Mrs Gaskell and George Eliot and the fact that they all were women authors and wrote about love. As far as literature of love is considered, women writers were subjected to a lot of ambiguity. As women are considered to be passionate beings, the theme of love is considered to be inherent in their nature.

Charlotte Bronte published her work under the pseudonyms name of Currer Bell. This certainly raised confusion in the mind of critics and readers regarding the nature of the sex of the author. Charlotte's personal experiences in love and marriage proposals she received are very important in influencing her works. Her first novel *The Professor* was published posthumously in 1857. She transformed her experiences at Brussels in fiction. Her second novel 'Jane Eyre' was published in 1847. The theme of romantic love met with a resounding success. Shirley published in 1949, combine the romantic and social themes. *Villette*, published in 1853, with the theme of romantic love kindled her reader's strongest interest and admiration.

Her women characters have the spirit of Charlotte in them. Like her, the heroines hardly found their plainness an obstacle to interesting men. The problem was rather in finding a man who would interest them and having accomplished this, to form a relationship acceptable to their moral judgment. Jane and Lucy both love men much older and more experienced than themselves.

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What the first readers found exciting as well as shocking in Charlotte's novels was the tone of uncontrollable passion and this passion was felt by a woman for a man. But when we read the narrative, we see controlled emotions. Charlotte takes care to provide her heroines so through that they are left rich and not dependents even if through miraculous legacies. She being a woman, made the heroines the mouthpieces of her sentiments. She established the conviction that women were naturally and habitually, morally superior to men. Above all, she laid emphasis on the intensity of feeling, commitment to passion, which was something new to the England novel.

Charlotte's Jane Eyre and Emily's Wuthering Heights were accepted by the critics alike and were considered as heralding a novel form of fictional-writing. Before the publication of Jane Eyre, the novels which were mostly written with a few expectations like Jane Austen's practiced an orthodox system of novel making. In such novels, the ladies were supposed to be beautiful and could be capricious; the lovers were generally believed to be humbled and devoted. The true love which was regarded as worth having been the reverent, chivalrous knightly love and which consecrated all womankind and served one with fervor and enthusiasm. There came upon the scene the women authors like Charlotte Bronte, Mrs Gaskell, George Eliot who belonged to the new generation and opened the door to make way for a new kind of love in their novels.

Charlotte Bronte's main intention is to project that the highest kind of bond that should exist between a man and a woman is that of love, the kind that exists between Shirley and Louis in the novel Shirley. The main incident of 'Shirley' is historical in nature, though it concludes on a romantic theme. Shirley is rather weak and thin love story. Even though it has very little romance, it has plenty of excitement. The main purpose of the author was to present a chronicle of times, to present a novel of social realism to her reader. Yet even in this social drama we can find plenty of romance which excites us.

Charlotte Bronte in *Villette* presents various facts of love: infatuation, frustrated love and romantic love itself in its various forms- as a fairy-tales romance and as courtly love. Infatuation, which is quite normal in a person in growing-up stage, does not allow it to end happily. But in another case, she gives it a fairy-tale ending, by providing the couple with all the happiness they deserve. Frustrated love of a widow is rightly rejected by her, for the widow is easily routed. Only the pure romantic feeling is approved by her.

Charlotte explores the psychology of passion and its suppression, passion not in sexual overtones but in terms of the intensity of feeling and in the end the triumph of love. The thing that strikes us from the very beginning in her novels is their autobiographical nature. Her novels are the sketches of her own relationships, in particular her love for her professor. Because of her own complex about her personal appearance, she made her heroines plain and poor but she compensates by giving them a fiery nature. Jane, Lucy and Frances are in no conventional sense beautiful and rich but their fiery nature and assertion for independence help them in retaining their dignity in love and marriage. However there is an exception that portrays Caroline Helstone in 'Shirley', who is a true picture of a Victorian woman pining for her unrequited love.

Her heroes too are not handsome, knightly chivalrous men. Charlotte Bronte endowed them with vice and the other evil things. She supported the conventional that the course of true

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love never runs smoothly. Her vision is often of her own experiences in Brussels and of the particular forces working against love. The reason that love does not run smooth and is most comfortable in its delineation and because of certain weakness in men which they cannot overcome. But she also asserts that if romantic love brings only pain and destruction, love itself is not denied or rejected. If rejection and loss exist, so does love. True love overcomes all barriers to end in a fruitful union.

Charlotte approves of passion in romantic love, but she does not approve of sexual love outside marriage. To her, sexual love is impure, corrupt and must be punished. Bertha and Rochester in *Jane Eyre*, who indulge in satisfaction of their sexual urges, are victims of the most hideous punishment. Charlotte being a nineteenth century woman and a person's daughter know her limitation and the bounds of conventionality.

Conclusion

From these novels we can conclude that the two themes central to Charlotte Bronte are: the need for love and an awareness of the difficulties of woman's lot. The need for love fits with the ease into well established literary convention leading to a kind of love story that invites the readers to identify with the protagonist and find emotional satisfaction in her fulfillment. Charlotte's women protagonists are all independent women. Through her protagonist, Charlotte typified the dilemmas of her own age: strong independent minded women like Shirley; self-supporting but intensely lonely women like Jane Eyre and Lucy Snow. Charlotte heroines are women with brain and a backbone and a pair of useful hands. Charlotte's women refuted the past depressing image of the governess which was impressed on the reader's mind. Thus we can say that Charlotte Bronte is a writer of romantic love with a touch of passion.

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