

Theme of happiness in Ch. Brontë's novel 'Jane Eyre'

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Abstract. The purpose of the study is to trace the development of the theme of happiness in relation to the development of the protagonist in the novel "Jane Eyre" by the English Victorian writer Charlotte Brontë. It is discovered that the pursuit of happiness becomes an internal impetus driving the plot of the novel, ensuring the development of the protagonist's image and promoting such leitmotifs as creativity, love, freedom, naturalness, and fight for one's life. Particular emphasis is placed on the search for individual components of the internal and external life that comprise the plotline of the protagonist's pursuit of personal happiness. At the same time, it is noted that the heroine's ideas of happiness, while essentially remaining unchanged, obtain different undertones at various stages of growing up. It is also noted that the protagonist's ideas of happiness sharply differ from some other characters' ideas of happiness (for example, Helen Burns). It is argued that the protagonist in Charlotte Brontë's novel is led along the arduous journey to happiness by her natural tenacity and the model of the responsible and naturally creative behavior based on the feeling of love which is formed in the protagonist – with the development of her character – already in her childhood. The academic prerequisites for the study are numerous works on the image of the protagonist, the features of psychologism and realism in Charlotte Brontë's work, on the one hand, and the increased interest in the problem of happiness in academia, on the other hand. The study of the image of childhood and the place that the pursuit of happiness holds in it carried out by the authors in a previous work is also an important prerequisite for this study. The novelty of this work consists in analyzing the content features of the theme of happiness in Charlotte Brontë's famous novel.

Keywords: theme of happiness, Victorian literature, education novel, Charlotte Brontë

1 Introduction

Personal happiness is one of the central themes, and the pursuit of happiness is the most important impetus driving the plot in Charlotte Brontë's works.

The novel "Jane Eyre" is the most famous among Brontë's books. As it is known, the image of the protagonist, like many other images of the novel, is autobiographical. At an early age, Charlotte Brontë experienced the bitterness of loss – her mother's death. For a long

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time, the girls were raised by their aunt, a deeply religious woman. Later, Brontë's father, who had no time to look after the children, sent them to the school for the daughters of the clergy in Cowan Bridge – a severe place. Charlotte and her sisters were deprived of their carefree childhood happiness.

All these facts are clearly reflected in the key image created in the novel: the main character of the novel, Jane, becomes an orphan in childhood, feels deprived of family warmth, and goes through cruel tests of loneliness, harsh conditions of education in a boarding school but does not lose faith in happiness.

2 Methods

The analysis of the artistic world and poetics of the novel assumed reliance on the methodology of historical poetics. At the same time, the systematic identification of methods for the development of the happiness theme in the novel made it necessary to turn to such general humanities methods as the problem-logical method (through which the problem field of research was determined) and the systemic method (through which all elements of poetics and the artistic world of the novel were analyzed in their systemic connection with the theme of happiness).

3 Results and discussion

In the work, the storyline of the heroine's pursuit of personal happiness is formed meticulously, from separate careful details of internal and external life. The novel begins with an episode in which the loneliness and the unjust exile of the little protagonist and her attempts to find happiness in communication with books are depicted. For her, reading books becomes a saving escape from a cruel world into an exciting, and therefore happy, world [1: 2]. One of the few things that affect Jane's emotional state is the doll. The toy helps Jane to learn care and love [1: 2].

The pursuit of happiness – the leitmotif of the novel – turns out to be conjugated already in this initial episode with the motif of fantasy, imagination, and creativity. At the same time, the pursuit of happiness is associated with the eternal trial and test for endurance for Jane's young childish character. At this moment, the girl is only 10 years old and there is no information about her life "before". Therefore, this is a turning point in her personal development. However, later the reader learns about the heroine's early childhood – the serenely happy period of her life. Indeed, the first year of Jane's life which she spent first with her loving and caring parents and then with her loving uncle can be called happy – almost serene. This "almost" is because Jane's mother, as it becomes clear from the narrator's words, married a poor pastor, disobeying her parents because of their great love, so the parents disowned her. Thus, the image of even the happy period of the protagonist's early childhood includes alarming motives of poverty, illness, and renunciation of love. The only close relative who loves and supports Mrs. Eyre is her brother, Mr. Reed. Therefore, when Jane's parents die, Mr. Reed takes her into his family and raises her as his own daughter. Thanks to him, Jane feels loved and protected even after the death of both parents. Very quickly, however, Mr. Reed also dies, and for a long nine years, Jane lives in the family of his widow, her aunt, to the eternal accompaniment of reproaches of freeloading.

As noted before, the ability to learn and reading books become for Jane that lifeline thanks to which the girl gets a chance to escape from the oppressive world to a new, still unknown world with the confidence that at least creativity and learning will be a joy for her. Thus, in an episode of little Jane's conversation with Mr. Lloyd, Jane recalls the scenes being treated cruelly and repeats, "I am unhappy", "I am very unhappy" [1: 5]. From the episode, it is clear

that at school Jane hopes not only to gain the necessary knowledge and skills but find a happier life in a creative and, possibly, emotional sense.

However, the difficult life trials for the little heroine continue at school. Mrs. Reed chooses the harshest institution with strict rules for her niece: Lowood Girls' School. Moreover, in the end, Mrs. Reed gives Jane an extremely negative character reference that one of the trustees of the shelter relays to all the students and teachers, which exposes Jane's character to new tests and arouses feelings of sincere hatred in the child's soul. The voice of the adult protagonist-narrator at the same time seems to sum up Jane's life with the Reeds and, thus, states the main reason for the child's unhappy life – rejection by the only relatives: “Well might I dread, well might I dislike Mrs. Reed <...> never was I happy in her presence” [1: 7].

Publicly humiliated, Jane withdraws into herself even more. The girl's loneliness is aggravated by “official” and “unofficial” rejection: the headmaster orders the students not to communicate with Jane, and the students avoid her. The girl is again left alone with herself, with her thoughts, experiences, and the inability to feel true happiness. Suddenly and irrationally, at this moment, Jane gets special inner strength – as instinctive as her reaction to John's beatings described in the opening episode of the novel. The fight for life, for a place in this world, the instinct of self-preservation, and disobedience to fate make the girl work hard to prove that she deserves happiness.

The instinct of self-preservation, hard work, rationality in decisions and assessments – these are the “three pillars” that lead Jane to success, that is, to gaining knowledge, a certain amount of respect from others, inner confidence, and self-sufficiency. From this, and even from her friendship with Helen Burns, her first – not at all complete, but relatively stable – experience of happiness is formed.

Helen Burns is the same age as Jane and her only friend. The girls have a lot in common: Helen and Jane are both serious, dreamy, withdrawn, and “strange” in their addiction to reading. Moreover, the girls' fates are also similar: their relatives, after the death of one or both parents, “crossed” them “out” from their lives instead of caring for and raising them. Helen's mother died when the girl was still little. The father sent his daughter to the Lowood orphanage and remarried. Helen, like Jane, at an early age was left alone with the world, without the protection of close adults. However, thanks to the humility developed under the attitudes associated with Catholicism, Helen achieves a sense of happiness. Dying, Helen does not blame anyone, but seemingly renounces life, agreeing to leave the world. A few hours before her death, Helen opens up to her friend, “I am very happy, Jane; and when you hear that I am dead, you must be sure and not grieve: there is nothing to grieve about” [1: 6]. There are two opposite patterns of behavior here: the injustice, the teachers' bias which causes anger and desire to fight in Jane, Helen experiences, restraining emotions and resigning herself to her fate, while Jane, in the spirit of Protestantism, is set for a long struggle and hard work because the girl feels in her rejection not divine providence but social injustice and simple human cruelty. Therefore, Helen leaves this world having made peace with its hardships but achieving true, in her opinion, happiness, and Jane continues to struggle with the hardships of life in an attempt to find her destiny, a place in the world, and personal happiness. It is tenacity in these attempts that gives the protagonist the strength to withstand the difficult conditions of an orphanage, and then, already in adulthood, win Mr. Rochester's respect and love.

Jane spends eight years in Lowood and, despite all the difficulties of living in the orphanage, her heart does not harden. A heart open to compassion and subtle feelings is another achievement of Jane during her time at Lowood School. This, however, Jane owes not to herself but to the headmistress Maria Temple, who became for the girl a caring and loving adult, an example to follow, and then a real friend. Thus, the circle of loneliness and rejection of the heroine-girl is broken in Lowood's chronotope at least twice: through her

relationship with Helene and her relationship with Maria Temple. From this perspective, as well as from the perspective of the growing up process (internal, spiritual growth), carefully traced in the novel's narrative, Jane finds in Lowood more stable (albeit severely limited) opportunities for happiness than the girl had in Mrs. Reed's family.

The second part of the novel is dedicated to the story of Jane's stay in Mr. Rochester's house and the new pursuit of happiness as an adult heroine. Working as a governess and staying at Mr. Rochester's house, Jane is still trying to achieve happiness. One of the most important components of happiness now, as before, is creativity, but in Jane's adult life, it turns from passive (as was, for example, her co-creation with writers whose books she read in childhood) into active. It is no coincidence that Mr. Reed himself notes the personality and talent in the landscapes painted by Jane. Jane's answers to his questions about the inner state while painting contain a direct indication of happiness, "... yes, and I was happy. To paint them, in short, was to enjoy one of the keenest pleasures I have ever known" [1: 8]. Creativity becomes not only an important component of the protagonist's happiness but a way of revealing Jane Eyre's character in the novel, and the way of forming a close relationship with Mr. Rochester.

Dedicating more and more time to each other and gradually opening up, Jane and Mr. Rochester grow closer. The word "happiness" and its characteristic epithets are beginning to appear in the novel increasingly often. Happiness not only changes the state of mind of the protagonist but also transforms everything around her, "a brilliant June morning had succeeded to the tempest of the night; and to feel, through the open glass door, the breathing of a fresh and fragrant breeze. Nature must be gladsome when I was so happy" [1: 1].

The motives of loneliness and rejection seem to leave Jane forever. However, even in moments of greatest happiness, the premonition of an impending storm hangs on to her. Accustomed to the feeling of loneliness and unhappiness, on the eve of the wedding, Jane reflects on whether she is worthy of everything that happens to her. Then, a new trial and test of strength do not seem to come as a surprise to her: revealing the deception of her chosen one, the protagonist leaves Thornfield.

This twist brings loneliness back to the novel. Telling her story, Jane notes, "Miserable I am, and must be for a time" [1: 9]. However, the early finding of relatives brings Jane back to life and gives her, although not all-encompassing, a feeling of joy and peace in her soul. At the end of the novel, having reunited with Mr. Rochester, having found a family and family happiness, the protagonist realizes that the previous tests were worth going through.

4 Conclusion

All in all, the theme of happiness permeates the entire structure of the novel "Jane Eyre". The pursuit of happiness becomes an internal impetus driving the plot of the novel, ensuring the development of the protagonist's image and determining such leitmotifs of the work as creativity, love, freedom, naturalness, and fight for one's life. On the difficult path to happiness, the heroine in the novel by Charlotte Brontë is led along the arduous journey to happiness by her natural tenacity and the model of the responsible and naturally creative behavior based on the feeling of love which is formed in the protagonist – with the development of her character – already in her childhood.

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