

DESCRIPTION OF SOCIAL ATTITUDES IN THE NOVEL “SHIRLEY” BY CHARLOTTE BRONTE

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Abstract : This article is dedicated to Bronte’s most distinctive novel – “Shirley”. The novel stands out from the work of Charlotte Bronte especially due to its differences from her other novels – it differs significantly in the structure, narrative style, setting, characters and general tone. It is also the only novel explicitly touching upon the political issues of the times and is therefore often categorized as a social novel. At the same time, readers may still find some of the themes so typical for the work of Bronte. Bronte’s primary aim was to portray lives of different individuals in context of social attitudes and social forces and how these social elements affect and control their lives in various ways. Social attitudes, political issues of the times are outlined in this article as well.

Key words: political issues, context, social attitudes, social force, portray, responsibility, narrative style, political view. moral and social duty.

INTRODUCTION

Literature represents the culture and tradition of a language or a people. Development of literature, art and culture is an important factor in increasing the spirituality of people. In our country, along with all spheres and industries, great attention is paid to the development of culture, art and literature and the mass media. [1]

In other words, literature is the mirror of life, so it clearly reflects people’s reality, dreams, attitudes, etc. It's not a matter of words and fantasy. It should have relation with human's life though.

Works of literature, at their best, provide a kind of blueprint of human society. From the writings of ancient civilizations such as Egypt and China to Greek philosophy and poetry, from the epics of Homer to the plays of William Shakespeare, from Jane Austen and Charlotte Bronte to Maya Angelou works of literature give insight and context to all the world's societies.

Charlotte Bronte was an English novelist and poet, the eldest of the three Bronte sisters who survived into adulthood and whose novels became classics of English Literature. She wrote during the Victorian Age of British literature, which lasted from 1833-1901, named in connection with the reign of Queen Victoria.

Bronte was also born in times of Romanticism when famous poets and novelists such as Byron, Keats, or Scott were still producing their works that greatly influenced Victorian literature.

This article is dedicated to Bronte's most distinctive novel – "Shirley". The novel stands out from the work of Charlotte Bronte especially due to its differences from her other novels – it differs significantly in the structure, narrative style, setting, characters and general tone. It is also the only novel explicitly touching upon the political issues of the times and is therefore often categorized as a social novel. At the same time, readers may still find some of the themes so typical for the work of Bronte. For all these reasons, Shirley provides an interesting insight of the development of Charlotte Bronte as a writer. Bronte started to work on her next novel, titled Shirley, immediately after her previous novel Jane Eyre got published in 1847. [2] Originally, she meant to convince her publishers to accept a new, revised version of her *The Professor* but as she failed to do so, she began working on a new novel – Shirley.

THE MAIN PART.

In today's literary criticism, the scope of creativity of writers is different – it requires a special approach to each of them. Here it is important to study the creative activity of each writer, literary world. Charlotte Bronte's literary world is also unique.

Aim of research – comparative, typological and evaluative study of the works of Charlotte Bronte, through various analyses distinguish the historical establishment of the role of women in the society and the way of their transference in literature.

Object of the research is English and other poets' and writers' viewpoints. Subject of the Research are the works of Charlotte Bronte, particularly main accent was drawn into "Shirley".

Literary world of Bronte is revealed by the reading list she made up for her friend Ellen Nosey in a letter dated July 4, 1837. The authors Bronte endorses include nineteenth-century writers such as Scott, Southey, Wordsworth, and, with some apologetics, Byron, but not a single woman writer. Her discussion of writers indicates that she did not perceive women to be part of the great literary tradition which concentrated on poets and was exclusively male.

The joy from the success of *Jane Eyre* was, however, soon interrupted – first by the death of her brother Branwell, then by the deaths of both her sisters Emily and Anne. The first volume out of three was almost completed when Branwell died, however, as Emily fell ill soon after, Charlotte interrupted her writing – this was in autumn 1848. [3]. Bronte did not come back to her novel until spring of the following year, after the death of her last surviving sister Anne, well aware that continuing to write after such a long break filled with tragic events would be difficult – she expressed her worries in a letter sent to her publishers. Despite her fears, Bronte was determined to get back to writing as she believed it to be the best cure for her grief.

When she resumed her writing, however, the tone of the novel changed – beginning with satire it, in the course of the story, changed into a dark and

depressing excursion into the lives and minds of the heroes – especially Caroline Helstone and Shirley Keeldar. The pain the author transformed into the novel is most evident in chapter ‘Valley of the Shadow of Death’ in the second half of the novel. In this part of the book, readers can also notice the author shifts her focus to the character of Shirley Keeldar, who was in fact based on Emily Bronte.

At the same time, Bronte felt the pressure from the public – after the success of *Jane Eyre*, there was a wild discussion about these mysterious authors as well as great expectations for the next books produced by the now famous writer. Her true identity was also slowly breaking through and in Haworth, people soon started to realize Currier Bell was in fact Charlotte Bronte. Though *Jane Eyre* became a best-seller, it was not spare of criticism of its excessive use of romance and fairy-tale inspired story. On one hand, Bronte dismissed such criticism and defended her novel but at the same time wanted her work and herself to be accepted and took some of the criticism to her heart when writing *Shirley*.

Bronte then worked hard and succeeded in completing the novel which was published in October 1849. When *Shirley* first appeared, it was received quite well by the readers but not so well by the contemporary critics and her social-novel experiment was perceived as ‘ill-considered misdirecting of its author’s talents’ due to the fact Bronte paid more attention to political and historical questions than in her previous novel, when her talents laid her ability to explore human psychology and relationships. It does not mean, however, these areas are not included in *Shirley* at all – on the contrary, Bronte gives significant space to diving into the minds of her characters, only the circumstances, setting and narrative style differ greatly from her remaining works.

The structure of the novel seems at first somewhat confusing. Owing to the fact the writing of the novel was interrupted for a considerable time and Bronte fell in a significantly different state of mind, the novel’s structure lacks unity. The introductory part suggests the slow and conversational pace of the novel and its focus on the ‘state of England issues’, the tone is very satirical and critical.

Yet, though Bronte gives considerable attention to politics and history in the novel, it is definitely not without romance, passion or melodrama – these are, in fact, one of the central elements of the novel. [4]. This all suggests that Bronte changed her mind during the writing process – or, as Judith and Andrew Hook suggests in their introduction for the novel, Charlotte never really made up her mind as to what she wanted to write about and what should be the primary focus of the novel as she wanders between describing social aspects, Luddite movement, characters' psychology and love story. It is true that the central topic often changes and the flow of the novel is very inconsistent, however, the transition from the 'social to personal', though not too smooth, is not as clumsy as Hooks suggest. Bronte shifts her attention from general to more specific and eventually, she manages to put these two approaches in context when the historical and social points supplement the personal stories of the characters whose actions are thus made more understandable.

In Shirley, Bronte portrayed love stories in an entirely unromantic environment. This may have been Bronte's intention from the very beginning and the introduction may only serve as a satirical standing point of the narrator. Nestor even argues that these shortcomings which may at first seem to degrade the quality of the novel, in fact, make Shirley the most thought-provoking novel and reveal the development of Charlotte Bronte both as a writer and as a woman.

Shirley first presents the character of Caroline Helstone as the unifying point of the story and the central dominating character. However, in the second half of the novel, this role is transferred to the character of Shirley, who is an entirely different person in terms of basically everything – social status, personality and opinions. When in Jane Eyre or Vilette the opposing characteristics were merged in one character of Jane or Lucy respectively, showing the clash of morals and passion, in Shirley we get two separate characters. [5] This shift from one character to another happened, as previously mentioned, when Bronte returned to writing after her three siblings died. At this point, the attention is considerably shifted to

the character of Shirley, who was based on her deceased sister Emily. Though this change caused some narrative inconsistencies, it also made it possible for Bronte to explicitly contrast two entirely different characters and to explore these differences caused mainly by their different social status in a greater detail.

As hinted above, the narrative style of the novel is entirely different from that of any other book published by Charlotte Bronte. The first-person narrator is replaced by an omniscient third-person narrator who is, per Edwards, hard to be distinguished from the author herself as it voices her political opinions. In the novel, Bronte ventured to detach her emotional self from the story and her aim was to create something different from a woman's autobiography.

The results of the research can be implemented in carrying out the research in world literature, the history of literature and English literature. The thesis determines the future trend of science to certain extent, that is in future research on the topic "The Role of Women in Society" and "Modern Literature" can be carried out. The practical importance of the thesis can be identified by the use of its conclusion in teaching "World Literature", "The History of Literature" and "English Literature" and conducting special courses.

In Shirley, Bronte revisits some of the themes she previously explored in Jane Eyre and The Professor. Some of these include the gender issue, getting on in the world, family issues or loneliness. However, in her second published novel, Bronte introduces some new themes exclusive only to Shirley. As she tries to take on a more political view through the third person narrator, Charlotte Bronte ventures on to explore themes like the state of church and religion, state of England in the times of the Luddite movement and the hardships connected with it. From the novel, readers may get a better idea of what were Bronte's views of society in a broader sense. Though she was later criticized for changing her style in favor of such themes while turning away from the personal issues she so masterfully portrayed in her other novels, Shirley is a valuable source for identifying Bronte's development in both professional and personal way [6]. It is also true that the

question of gender issues rose previously in *Jane Eyre* and *The Professor* is even more prominent in *Shirley* owing to Brontë's more general view of the problem in Victorian society in addition to exploration of her heroines' inner struggles.

CONCLUSION

The analyses of Charlotte Brontë's works indicate that her works represent her reality and soul which undervalued in the society of her presence.

The thematic outline of the novel is just as inconsistent as its structure – there are many incoherent themes and it is not so clear on the first sight what was author's message. Reading more thoroughly and knowing Brontë's other work, it may be argued that her primary aim was **to portray lives of different individuals in context of social attitudes and social forces and how these social elements affect and control their lives in various ways**. Judith and Andrew Hook state that what Brontë in fact attempted to do in *Shirley* is very similar to her goals in her remaining work – she wanted to “bring together the world of romantic hope and fulfillment, of passionate feeling and love, and the real world of pain and suffering, moral and social duty and responsibility” [7]. In that respect, the ultimate theme of the novel is not that different from *Jane Eyre*, *The Professor* or *Villette* – however, the means Brontë tried to achieve to fulfill this theme is not the same as the ‘world of pain and suffering’ in her third written novel is more connected to the history and general social issues through which Brontë attempted to provide a better context for understanding her characters.

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