

Comparative Analysis of Narratives and Characterization in Jane Eyre and Madame Bovary

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Abstract

This study examined the narrative structures and characterization in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. The objectives were to analyze the narrative technique, to analyze the characterization, and to compare the narrative techniques and characterization in the literature of *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë and *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert. Gérard Genette's theories on narrative time and perspective formed the framework, which was then expanded upon. An examination was carried out on how the narrative perspectives in *Jane Eyre* and *Madame Bovary* impacted reader engagement with characters. Additionally, it explored how the settings influenced characters, referencing Tahir Woods' concepts along with Mark Currie's insights on narrative's effects on readers' perception of time. The research concluded with a discussion on how these novels depict character growth and human behavior complexities, underscoring the role of narrative techniques in reader immersion.

Keywords: character development, narrative techniques, temporal complexity

Introduction

Jane Eyre and *Madame Bovary* have complicated plots that use both literal and figurative language to show the difference in the characters' lives are and how different the societies are where they live. These novels offer an extensive framework for examining these themes, examining inner conflicts and personal growth, and delivering a critical evaluation of societal limitations. The incorporation of dual perspectives enhances the significance of these novels in examining narrative techniques for exploring themes connected with individual freedom and societal critique. Furthermore, these stories can be used to explore the psychological and social aspects further. Authors like Charlotte Brontë and Gustave Flaubert use story structures that put meaning in its proper context, allowing readers to consider a wide range of interpretations. By looking at the novels in the context of 19th-century literature, this study attempts to highlight their continued relevance today in helping us grasp the essence of storytelling. This can be done by looking at important parts of the narrative, such as the progression of time, shifts in perspective, and the development of characters.

Research Objectives

This objectives of this research are the following:

1. To analyze the narrative techniques in the literature of *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë and *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert.
2. To analyze the characterization in the literature of *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë and *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert.

3. To compare the narrative techniques and characterization in the literature of *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë and *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert.

Theoretical Framework

This study examined the complex relationship between narrative devices and the social and psychological analysis of the protagonists in Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* within the framework of nineteenth-century society. The study focused on how Brontë and Flaubert explore character psychology and social criticism through the use of narrative techniques as artistic mediums. Through the use of a combination of first-person and alternating narrative perspectives, the authors explored the lives of their characters and established a close relationship with the reader.

Gérard Genette's concepts on narrative time and viewpoint form the backbone of this framework elaborating on how Brontë creates a connection with readers through *Jane Eyre*'s first-person narrative enabling them to understand Jane's experiences, with heightened empathy and emotional depth. Concurrently, by employing an omniscient narrator rather than a first-person one to give *Madame Bovary* a sense of detachment, Flaubert provides a deeper examination of the limitations that were placed on people during that time period, particularly women.

Drawing from Paul Ricoeur's ideas on narrative structure and temporality the study examined how these narratives skillfully use time to enhance the readers understanding of characters psychological growth. Ricoeur suggests that narrative does not merely recount events but rather engages with deeper temporal dimensions, intertwining characters' pasts, presents, and futures to reveal the complexities of their identities and decisions. Additionally, by considering Mark Curries analysis of time

perception in storytelling this research explored how narratives shape readers perceptions of past, present and future influencing their engagement with the text. Building on this concept Mieke Bal investigated how character development and flashbacks enlighten audiences about truths and social justice concerns through sequencing and event chronology.

This research also incorporates the theories of fate and coincidence proposed by Hilary Dannenburg and Seymour Chatman in order to contribute to the theme study of societal constraints and coincidences. Through use of narrative techniques the mentioned framework shows how *Jane Eyre* and *Madame Bovary* surpasses storytelling limitations captivating readers with their profound examinations of social critique, character psychology and human experiences.

Methodology

This research uses a qualitative methodology, starting with a thorough analysis of primary sources from literary works like *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë and *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert. Additionally, theories and concepts concerning narrative and character development will be examined to analyse and contrast the narratives. The secondary sources to be examined consisted of pertinent documents and research that cover theories on narrative and character progression. These sources provide a structure for analyzing literature and related studies. The data will be collected through documentary research.

Results

Brontë uses first-person narration to invite readers into Jane's inner world, revealing her emotions through a series of flashbacks and direct comments. Readers

depend on her not only to progress through the novel, but also to recount her aspirations, reflections, and emotions. According to Gérard Genette (1980), the use of first-person narrative allows the narrator to hint at future events quietly through acts in the present, building significant suspense for readers. For example, Jane opens the book recounting an event that happened to her when she was a little girl living at Gateshead Hall. She's reading a book while perched at the breakfast room window seat. The introductory paragraphs convey Jane's seclusion from her family members and her aversion to social interaction. The reader acquires sufficient context by the conclusion of the initial chapter to understand her constraints at Gateshead Hall. The protagonist engages in dialogue with the reader when experiencing internal conflicts, as exemplified by her admission under distressing circumstances as a governess and her act of forgiving Mr. Rochester in spite of his betrayal. An illustration of this can be seen in the passage, "Reader, though I look comfortably accommodated, I am not very tranquil in my mind" (p. 94). Additionally, this is demonstrated when she declares her love for Mr. Rochester: "Reader, [...] I had learned to love Mr. Rochester" (p. 187); when he begs for forgiveness upon learning that he is legally married and when she weds him in the end. This direct engagement with the reader allows for a deeper emotional connection and facilitates a sense of empathy towards Jane and her experiences. However, Genette's emphasis on anticipation could overshadow the complexities of Jane's character development. Jane's direct addresses to the reader, particularly in intense scenes, foster empathy. However, one might argue that this technique, while engaging, risks reducing the narrative to a series of emotional appeals, potentially obscuring deeper thematic explorations.

Madame Bovary employs a different narrative technique from *Jane Eyre*'s personal, first-person account to give a wider, more impartial picture of the lives and

struggles of the characters. Flaubert starts off in the first person but quickly switches to an omniscient third person point of view. The book has a conventional plot structure and attempts to present reality as it is. *Madame Bovary*'s narrator purposefully withholds her personal opinions from the reader in order to maintain objectivity toward the characters. Despite being named after Emma, it's interesting to see that Charles is the main character from the outset of the narrative. The story ends with Homais winning a major distinction rather than Emma or Charles dying. It is difficult for readers to empathize with Charles because of the exclusion of his early life and character growth. Moreover, the first-person narrator of *Madame Bovary* disappears after just three pages, setting the scene with the opening line, "We were in study hall when the headmaster and a new boy not wearing a school uniform entered the room." Following this brief introduction, the first-person perspective vanishes, and the narrative shift serves to further emphasize the novel's realistic tone.

Hayden White contends that the significance of narratives lies in their ability to "represent real events," creating an illusion of life that is, in reality, a construct of imagination (White, 1981, p. 23). In *Madame Bovary*, the narrator's detailed account of Yonville-l'Abbaye in the opening chapter of part two illustrates this concept, as it meticulously describes the town's buildings, roads, landscape, and architectural history across four pages. Jonathan Culler (2007) reinforces this idea, noting that the novel offers a 'realistic portrayal of our world,' where discussions on topics like marriage and adultery are subject to critique (p. 686).

While aligning with Hayden White's idea of narrative as a "representation of real events," it could be criticized for its potential lack of emotional depth. The narrative's focus on Emma rather than Charles raises questions about narrative bias

and its impact on reader empathy. The novel's conclusion, focusing on Homais rather than the central characters, further complicates our understanding of Flaubert's narrative intentions. This detachment, while aiming for impartiality, might inadvertently lead to a skewed portrayal of the characters' complexities.

Both novels are named after their main characters implies a connection to autobiographical storytelling. *Jane Eyre* creates the impression that the protagonist is recounting her own experiences, whereas in *Madame Bovary*, the third-person narrator ensures the story is conveyed with impartiality and accuracy. The use of third-person narration in *Madame Bovary* allows Flaubert to maintain a distance from the characters and their actions, similar to the way *Jane Eyre* narrates her own story in first person.

Having explored the narrative of both novels, it is essential to contextualize these observations within the broader theoretical frameworks of Ricoeur and others, who provide a deeper understanding of the temporal and psychological layers in narrative storytelling. Paul Ricoeur (1980) considers narrative to not only reflect the historical background but also engage in "deeper levels of temporality, (p. 175), capturing the essence of time and its manifold intricacies. This temporal exquisiteness in narratives not only mirrors the authentic structure of time but also aligns with the various temporal categories that frame it (p. 175). He suggests that narratives do not just present events in order; they engage with deeper aspects of time. This view challenges the simple idea of narratives as mere timelines. Instead, Ricoeur (1980) emphasizes their ability to capture the complexities of time. Stories have the ability to blend events, present moments and potential futures seamlessly. This mixing of time adds depth to the story making it a central focus in the study of literature. Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity offers insight into how a characters

past experiences influence their selves. The narrative techniques used in both *Jane Eyre* and *Madame Bovary* effectively draw readers into the characters' lives subtly guiding their perception of time within the narrative. The manipulation of time is an essential component in storytelling, as it influences the reader's progression through the tale. Mark Currie (2010) further explains this concept emphasizing how narratives can evoke a feeling of being present, in the moment when set in events.

The manipulation of time perception, can be found by the first-person narration in *Jane Eyre* and the shifting perspectives in *Madame Bovary*. Currie explains that although readers may perceive the story as a present event when reading it in fiction, it is actually set in the past. The narrative unfolds in what is actually the narrator's present, though it is conveyed using the past tense. Currie suggests that traditional temporal narratives lead readers to subconsciously accept "naturalization," embedding within us a specific perception of time as it exists in our world (Currie, 2010, p. 4). Furthermore, Currie highlights that narrative fiction encourages readers to perceive the past as though it were present and the present as something that will one day be past (p. 5).

By presenting narratives in the past tense, authors create the illusion of a fixed and completed past while leaving the future open and uncertain. This manipulation of time allows readers to experience the story as if it were happening in the present, blurring the line between fiction and reality. Through the use of past-tense narratives, authors have the power to transport readers into a world that feels both familiar and unpredictable. As readers become engrossed in the story, they unwittingly embrace the idea that time remains fixed and unchangeable. This subtle manipulation of time in literature not only blurs the boundaries between fiction and reality but also influences our perception of the world.

Mieke Bal (2009, p. 104) further elucidates this concept by examining the sequencing of events and their impact on narrative progression. As readers engage with the characters' pasts through flashbacks, they are able to see how their experiences shape their decisions and their personalities. For example, in *Emma*, the flashbacks to *Emma*'s childhood and her relationship with her governess provide insight into her need for control and her desire for companionship. By allowing readers to witness the characters' growth and transformation, the authors emphasize the importance of self-reflection and the power of one's past in shaping their present and future. In *Emma*'s case, her need for control stems from a childhood where she had little agency or autonomy. This explains her tendency to meddle in the lives of others and manipulate situations to suit her own desires. Likewise, Jane's abusive upbringing at Gateshead Hall instilled in her a fierce independence and resilience, driving her to seek a life where she is valued and loved.

However, it is equally crucial to contemplate the convergence of unexpected events and mystical phenomena with the protagonists' lives, which contributes an additional layer of complexity to the story. These works, while firmly rooted in realism, have mystical elements that propel the plot and generate crucial moments for the characters. The interaction of these aspects with the organized chronology additionally perplexes the readers' encounter, obscuring the boundaries between reality and fabrication. This technique not only shows the inherent uncertainty of life but also emphasizes the significance of fate and destiny in the characters' journeys. Although both novels are characterized as realistic, they also integrate supernatural components.

Seymour Chatman (1978) concurs, noting that in the absence of guidance from the narrator, readers will perpetually seek out correlative structure and form

assumptions (p. 45). Jane's major coincidence begins when, upon learning that Mr. Rochester is already married, she flees Thornfield Hall. She flees aimlessly, pondering, "What was my purpose?" Which way to proceed? "Are those intolerable inquiries when I am powerless and have nowhere to go?" (p.328) and frequently contradicting her own reasoning regarding Mr. Rochester's return. She came to the realization at that moment that she was at her breaking point and "could not proceed any further." She becomes preoccupied with death and hope, stating, "I should pass away before dawn." Furthermore, what is it that I find so difficult to accept as a possibility the event of my demise? (p. Just before she gives up, she begs Providence to "sustenance me for a short while longer!" Assist me—Guide me!" (p. 334) She is rescued by the house's occupants when she fears that death is approaching. Jane subsequently learns that Mary and Diana are her cousins. Jane, overcome with awe, prematurely ceased speaking and embraced her newly formed family with unbridled tears of joy. Jane gained a renewed sense of optimism and a sense of belonging upon the reunion of her long-lost relatives.

Susanna Lee (2006) suggests that when characters uncover each other's true identities, it opens a path for them to explore their own self-discovery. Lee views Jane's reconnection with a relative as a cosmic sign meant to protect the protagonist. Another significant moment occurs when Jane hears a voice calling her name, which she recognizes as Mr. Rochester's. The voice, filled with distress, unsettles her and convinces her that something is wrong at Thornfield Hall, prompting her to investigate the following day. Without hearing his cries, Jane might not have sensed the trouble awaiting her at Thornfield. In contrast, *Madame Bovary* does not rely heavily on coincidences like *Jane Eyre* does. Instead, the novel uses the unpredictability of chance to shape Emma's experiences, leading her to believe in the

possibility of a better life. According to Lee (2006), the narrative of *Madame Bovary* is grounded in the flow of time, yet the despair it depicts transcends time and place. Dissatisfied with her life with Charles, Emma is unhappy in her marriage and fantasizes about being with someone else. She muses about how her life might have been different if she had met another man under different circumstances, imagining the possibilities of an alternate life with an unknown husband. Emma's existence is driven by the hope that these imagined possibilities might someday come true.

Emma Bovary does not think is the creator of her own destiny. This is evident when she immerses herself in a women's magazine and acquires a map of Paris. She becomes immersed in the articles detailing the latest fashions, allowing herself to be consumed by the fantasy of Paris, and thereby neglecting the realities of her provincial life. This obsession leads her to view her mundane existence with disdain, perceiving the monotonous countryside, the unimaginative bourgeoisie, and the mediocrity of her daily routine as aberrations—a dull life she believes she has inadvertently fallen into, rather than a life she actively shapes.

Emma's discontent is another instance, but Charles appears oblivious to the daily irritation caused by his attire and manners. Emma never found fulfillment. "She was eagerly anticipating the occurrence of something from the depths of her souls" (p. 61). On a daily basis, she eagerly anticipates the realization that "someone will take action." Furthermore, the occurrence of falsified chance is also present. Following the Bovarys as they entered the Croix-Rouge inn, Leon Dupois commenced formulating a strategy. When he entered the inn the following day, a servant informed him that Charles had not been there. Emma apologized to him for not having informed him of her whereabouts; she believed Leon had just learned about her, when in fact he had followed them. Emma readily accepts Leon's

explanation that he was guided "by chance, by instinct," which he attributed to divinity.

While *Madame Bovary* uses the notion of chance and its impact on Emma's life choices, a more encompassing element in literature should be considered: the profound influence of the environment on a character's development. According to Woods (2011), characters serve as a mediator between the worlds of the author and the reader. He argues that the social environment of a character has no discernible impact on them. In *Jane Eyre*, Jane's environment is not just a backdrop; it is integral to her identity and the story's progression. Jane's surroundings shape her character, as her social status and gender heavily dictate her opportunities and treatment in the world she is born into. The opening chapter introduces Jane to a neglected environment. Her aunt Reed disregards her, and her cousin John bullies her. Her experiences at Gateshead, Lowood School, Thornfield Hall, and Moor House are not mere settings but are instrumental in creating her character. This approach to character development aligns with Woods' view that the surrounding environment forms the basis for character creation. Jane's resilience, moral compass, and quest for independence and equality are responses to the social constraints and injustices she encounters. Likewise, had Charles not been captivated by the youthful and attractive Emma, she would not have surfaced in the scenario and established an attraction with him, which ultimately resulted in their romantic involvement. In both cases, the environment plays a significant role in shaping the characters' stories. Jane's neglected environment serves as the catalyst for her resilience and determination to break free from her oppressive circumstances. Woods' emphasis on the environmental factors shaping characters resonates strongly in both *Jane Eyre* and *Madame Bovary*. It becomes evident how their social environments, burdened with

societal norms and expectations, have carved distinct paths for them, influencing their identities and life choices.

Emma's introduction as a young and beautiful lady is the result of her favorable environment, which attracts Charles. Without this initial attraction, Emma's story would have taken a different path, and her relationship with Charles may never have emerged. Thus, the environment not only influences the characters' development but also sets the stage for their future relationships and trajectories. For example, *Jane Eyre*'s time at Lowood Institution exposed her to oppressive conditions and cruelty by her aunt and cousin, shaping her resilience and determination to seek independence. If she had grown up in a loving and supportive environment, Jane's character might have turned out differently, perhaps lacking the strength to navigate the challenges she faces.

Similarly, in *Madame Bovary*, Emma's privileged upbringing and beauty create an atmosphere that attracts Charles, leading to their eventual romantic relationship. Without this favourable environment, Charles may not have been drawn to Emma and their relationship may not have blossomed. The setting and circumstances in which characters are raised significantly shape their personalities and influence the paths they take in life. These factors can either hinder or enhance their abilities to overcome obstacles and form meaningful connections with others. Ultimately, the environments in which characters find themselves can greatly impact the trajectories of their lives and the relationships they form along the way.

Both characters have constrained social standing, despite their different motivations. Both Jane and Emma diverged from established societal conventions on a macro level. During that period, they fail to conform to the preconceived notion of the ideal woman. Each woman believes that the world has not bestowed upon her

what she ought to have received, and both possess a robust sense of autonomy and vision. Emma believes that she is repressed from marrying Charles, whereas Jane is repressed from her time at Gateshead Hall and from Mr. Brucklehurst at Lowood Institution. Jane exemplifies her limited position in society in *Jane Eyre* when she becomes a governess and constantly faces reminders of her social status and lack of wealth. Despite this, she remains independent and determined to defy societal expectations. Similarly, in Emma, the character of Emma Woodhouse feels trapped by her wealth and societal status, as it hinders her from pursuing love and finding true happiness. Both Jane and Emma demonstrate a relentless pursuit for personal fulfillment and happiness, even in the face of societal constraints. Their determination to live life on their own terms serves as an inspiration to readers, as they challenge the limitations imposed upon them by society and seek their own happiness.

Moreover, Jane possesses a multidimensional character; while her resilient nature remains unaltered, her experiences in various environments have endowed her with distinct perspectives from various social classes. Jane's complex personality is key to her development throughout the novel. Despite the constancy of her strong personality, her experiences in different settings allow her to grow and evolve. This aspect of her character aligns with the Bildungsroman genre, which focuses on the psychological and moral growth of the protagonist from youth to adulthood. Her interactions with various social classes and environments mark Jane's journey from an orphaned child to a self-assured, married woman, contributing to her understanding of the world and herself. For instance, Jane had the opportunity to witness the behavior and attitudes of the upper class. She realized that Mr. Rochester's primary reason for considering marriage was driven by social interests

and connections. Jane found it difficult to connect with the values of the upper class, acknowledging that they held certain beliefs she could not fully comprehend. Her early decision to deliberately isolate herself in the story hints at her growing independence and her ability to resist the authority of others. Jane's observations of different social classes, especially the upper class, provide a vehicle for Charlotte Brontë to critique Victorian society. Jane's inability to fathom the motives and standards of the upper class, as seen during her time at Thornfield Hall, highlights the disconnect and class tensions of the era. These observations serve as a critique of the superficiality and materialism prevalent in the upper class, contrasting sharply with Jane's values of integrity and moral fortitude. Nonetheless, there are a few subsequent events that contributed to her development during her youth. Jane's identity gradually becomes more apparent during her time at Lowood. In the chapter in which she is dispatched to Lowood and provides a description of Miss Temple, Jane addresses the reader.

"Let the reader add [...] refined features; a complexion, if pale, clear; and a stately air and carriage, and he will have [...] a correct idea of the exterior of Miss Temple—" (p.48).

By showing how the self can be a barrier, Brontë's stories help readers stop being skeptical and feel sorry for Jane. Earl Knies (1966) also says that most of the novel's characters are formed through interactions between characters (p.553). An important part of Jane's subjectiveness toward other people is how well they can communicate with her. Positive subjectivity describes Jane's opinion of Bessie Lee, which can be seen in the way she acts and writes.

“Bessie Lee must, I think, have been a girl of good natural capacity, for she was smart in all she did, and had a remarkable knack of narrative; ...I preferred her to any one else at Gateshead Hall.” (p. 29)

Brontë crafts a multi-layered character by depicting her in many social contexts and illustrating her ability to uphold her fundamental personality features while adjusting and acquiring knowledge. Brontë's thorough portrayal of diverse social environments and social strata enhances the novel's realism. The author enhances the credibility and relatability of the world depicted in *Jane Eyre* for the reader by including the details of many social environments.

Discussion

Emma's experiences in *Madame Bovary* highlight the challenges faced by women in pursuing their aspirations and desires within norms. Her dissatisfaction arising from the disparity between her mundane life with Charles and the romantic illusions inspired by her reading materials is vividly portrayed by Flaubert. Not does she find herself discontent in her marriage but she also struggles against societal expectations that confine her to traditional roles of wife and mother stifling any opportunities for personal development or satisfaction. Emma's tragic fate serves as a reminder of the consequences when women are compelled to conform to subservient roles in a male dominated society suppressing their individuality. Her relentless quest for love and purpose beyond confines reflects her defiance, against these restrictive social conventions even though it leads to her downfall. Flaubert underscores the importance of challenging norms that limit women's autonomy and highlights the harmful impact such constraints can have on individuals lives.

In contrast, *Jane Eyre* presents a narrative of self-discovery and resilience within a similarly rigid social framework. Brontë uses Jane's perspective to skillfully explore her protagonist's quest for independence and self-respect within the gender norms and societal hierarchy of Victorian England. Jane's transformation from a mistreated orphan to an independent woman who stands up for her beliefs and emotional wellbeing is a touching tale of self-discovery and defiance against societal conventions. Despite her feelings for Mr. Rochester, her refusal to compromise her values by becoming his mistress demonstrates her commitment to equality and dignity in a relationship challenging the norms of the era.

Furthermore, Brontë and Flaubert's novels provide deep insights into human psychology. The significant contrast between these two situations highlights the importance of individual choice and the social systems in which these characters function, providing a thoughtful examination of the possible consequences of questioning societal conventions.

In conclusion, this comparative analysis of *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë and *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert, it is crucial to highlight the subtle depiction of narrative techniques that shape our comprehension of the main characters. Both authors adeptly employ narrative techniques to mirror the internal conflicts and societal pressures experienced by their characters. The transformation of Jane, from a confined orphan to a confident individual, and the tragic decline of Emma, demonstrate the significant influence of societal expectations on personal development. This provides readers with a better understanding of their intricate inner thoughts and choices. Jane and Emma's identities and life choices are influenced by the oppressive environments they encounter, which reflect the authors' criticisms of the unchanging social systems prevalent during their eras. Brontë and

Flaubert explore themes of resistance and conformity, freedom and fate, through the characters of Jane and Emma. These themes have a strong impact on modern readers. These novels are not just historical objects, but rather complex texts that still resonate with the challenges of self-discovery within societal constraints.

Recommendations

Implications

The research emphasizes the relevance of classic literature in contemporary discussions on gender roles, societal expectations, and individual psychology. Educators can incorporate comparative analyses into their teaching to promote a more profound literary appreciation and enhance critical thinking skills among students.

Further Studies

Further research should explore narratives and characterizations across genres and time periods to understand their evolution and cultural significance. Empirical studies on reader engagement and integrating literary analysis with psychology, sociology, and cultural studies can provide more insights.

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