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INTERPRETATION OF WEALTH IN CHARLOTTE BRONTË'S NOVEL "JANE EYRE": THE GROWTH FROM MATERIAL NEED TO SPIRITUAL INDEPENDENCE

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Abstract. This article analyzes the economic and financial struggles faced by the English writer Charlotte Brontë, which served as a catalyst for writing her novel "Jane Eyre". It also examines the author's real-life need for money, her perspectives on material wealth, and the impact of the existing high and low social stratification on the educational process. Through this research, the direct connection between the novel's characters and the author, as well as the reasons for their selection, are explored. The study analyzes the episodes of the work regarding the views on material wealth and economic needs, as well as the impact of material scarcity or, conversely, wealth on the characters' moral values. The research demonstrates that the attitude of most characters toward wealth had a negative impact on their moral image. The purpose of this study is to further explore and reveal the core idea put forward through the work: "Spiritual freedom is superior to material dependence."

Keywords: Charlotte Brontë, "Jane Eyre", material wealth, economic maturity, moral image, ethical attitude, material inner experiences, poverty, personal values, educational process.

Аннотация. В данной статье анализируются экономические и материальные проблемы, с которыми столкнулась английская писательница Шарлотта Бронте и которые послужили толчком к написанию ее романа «Джейн Эйр». Также рассматриваются наблюдавшаяся в жизненном опыте писательницы потребность в деньгах, ее взгляды на материальные блага, а также влияние существующего в обществе расслоения на высшие и низшие слои на образовательный процесс. В ходе исследования изучается непосредственная связь персонажей романа с автором и причины их выбора. Анализируются эпизоды произведения, отражающие взгляды на материальное богатство и экономические потребности, а также влияние материального дефицита или, наоборот, богатства на духовные ценности героев. Исследование показывает, что отношение большинства персонажей к богатству оказало негативное влияние на их моральный облик. Цель исследования направлена на более глубокое изучение и раскрытие выдвинутой в произведении идеи: «Духовная свобода превыше материальной зависимости».

Ключевые слова: Шарлотта Бронте, «Джейн Эйр», материальные блага, экономическая зрелость, моральный облик, нравственное отношение, внутренние материальные переживания, бедность, личные ценности, образовательный процесс.

Charlotte Brontë, a prominent writer of 19th-century English literature, gained great worldwide fame through her novel "Jane Eyre". She was the most famous among the writer sisters Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Brontë. Due to the prevailing societal attitudes toward female writers during her era, Charlotte Brontë chose the pseudonym Currer Bell, which sounded like a male

author's name. Her novel, which carries an autobiographical spirit, was published in 1847 and received a warm reception from the literary community. Readers recognized the work as a "novel of education and maturation" (Bildungsroman). Teaching and working as a governess played a significant role in Charlotte's career. Consequently, the central character Jane Eyre's life as a governess, along with her arduous trials and professional struggles, is presented to the reader with precise details. According to the British Library, Charlotte's work experience provided her with the foundation to comprehensively portray women's limited employment opportunities, low wages, and the complex relationships between employers and employees through characters of various social statuses. In the first half of the 19th century, middle-class, well-educated, and knowledgeable women who did not belong to wealthy families had very few respectable career options. Therefore, the main problem facing such women was financial hardship, resulting in them being looked down upon by members of upper society. Experiencing such situations firsthand alongside society, Charlotte connected her career with educating girls and working as a governess. She taught both children of the high class and orphans and neglected girls at a charity school—similar to the "Lowood School" depicted in her novel. Based on this, we can say that Charlotte chose her own personality as the prototype for the character of Jane Eyre. Through this, the author was able to convey to the reader the main character's inner emotional experiences, psychological distress, suffering caused by financial hardships, and spiritual state in a realistic and deeply resonant manner. Through Jane's character and her progression throughout the narrative—from a financially dependent girl into a financially independent individual on the threshold of wealth and a spiritually mature personality—the reader is invited to experience every stage of this journey, potentially transforming their own views on material wealth.

The protagonist of "Jane Eyre" first appears as a frail 8-9-year-old girl under the care of a well-to-do family at Gateshead. Having been orphaned in infancy, Jane was taken under the wing of her uncle, Mr. Reed. Before passing away, Mr. Reed asked his wife, Sarah Reed, to care for Jane. Sarah Reed agreed to the request, yet she treated Jane with a cold, loveless attitude and constantly demeaned her with insults, calling her a "poor orphan belonging to the lower class, a pauper parasite." Through this character, the author reveals the general attitudes and prejudices held by the majority of wealthy aristocratic society toward the poor. The disrespect shown by Sarah Reed's three children—John Reed, Eliza Reed, and Georgiana Reed—especially the continuous physical and mental abuse inflicted by John Reed, makes Jane feel completely alien in that home. During this period, young Jane could not simply walk away from that house because the concept of poverty, formed under the influence of those around her, appeared to her as a terrifying and miserable condition. Jane herself admits: "For me, poverty was synonymous with ragged clothes, insufficient food, a cold hearth, rude treatment, and degradation. No, I did not want to belong to poor people. I did not want to go about begging."[1] Thus, Sarah Reed sends her to Lowood School. Jane quickly adapts to the harsh financial situation and the trials of hunger there, because she realizes that the sense of freedom she has achieved is superior to any material need or wealth. Charlotte strives to convey to the young women of her time this fundamental truth, which she herself realized through her life experiences and taught to each of her students, through her character Jane. For this reason, the work quickly found a deep place in the hearts of many readers. Due to economic and financial hardships in the society of that period, many women—otherwise independent individuals—frequently sought employment as servants in wealthy households out of necessity, consequently becoming trapped in lifelong financial dependency. Finding a solution to such situations became a central concern for Charlotte. As a result, from the beginning to the end of the novel, the author places Jane's personal freedom above all else, even when sensing that her choices and serious decisions in various situations might pose dangers for her future. For this reason, Jane spends eight years at Lowood School tirelessly working on herself, improving her

education and moral development, and demonstrating steadfast perseverance in acquiring knowledge despite financial scarcities. In her first six years, she masters skills and knowledge, even developing her talent for painting. In this way, Jane expresses her feelings and inner experiences through the artwork she creates during her favorite pursuit. These specific details in Jane's character help the author elevate her protagonist to an equal, or even superior, standing compared to the ladies of the noble class. While upper-class women spared no financial resources in trying to stand out in their social environments, Jane's innate abilities represented a true peak of refinement. The author imparts another lesson through these elements: "For a woman, the essential factors are not material wealth, but knowledge, diligence, capability, and relentless efforts toward self-improvement." Miss Temple, who genuinely helped Jane during those six years, guided her, and played a significant role in her spiritual growth, likely represents the personification of the devoted teachers who shaped Charlotte Brontë herself. Thus, the author implies that in every society—whether among the rich or the poor—there are figures like Miss Temple who radiate the light of enlightenment and illuminate the life paths of those around them. Furthermore, through the episodic character of Helen Burns, the author tempers Jane's impatience and rebellious streak against what she perceived as injustice. Helen Burns is depicted as a patient, submissive, and serene girl who always treats her teachers with deep respect. Jane learns from Helen Burns how to endure not only financial hardships and hunger, but also unfair treatment with fortitude, composure, and mutual respect. On October 28, 1847, Charlotte Brontë noted in a letter that the character of Helen Burns was an exact reflection of her real-life elder sister, Maria Brontë, and that the events connected to this character were in no way exaggerated.[2] It is also not accidental that this character dies during an epidemic at Lowood School. In February 1825, Maria Brontë fell gravely ill, was taken home from Cowan Bridge School by her father, and passed away from tuberculosis on May 6, 1825.[3] This was a devastating loss for Charlotte, and the most agonizing aspect for her was her sister Maria's refusal of medical treatments that might have aided her health, due to their family's insufficient financial income. Consequently, the author utilizes tuberculosis symptoms specifically, rather than just a generic epidemic illness, as a detail in Helen Burns's death. In shaping another favorite episode for Jane—the character of the nurse Bessie Lee—the author draws upon the traits of Tabby Aykroyd, who served faithfully in the Brontë household and looked after the children. Therefore, in many studies, the character of Bessie Lee is compared to Tabby Aykroyd, who left a significant mark on Charlotte's childhood memories. For instance, in John Malham-Dembleby's 1911 book titled 'The Key to the Brontë Works', the author advances the idea that Tabby and Bessie are interconnected, devoting Chapter V specifically to this topic. Another study notes that "along with Tabby, her sister Mrs. Branwell also served in the Brontë home; when Tabby broke her leg, Mrs. Branwell offered to care for her sister at her own home to avoid causing financial strain for the Brontës. However, members of the Brontë family refused to allow this."[4] The Brontës refused to abandon Tabby, who had served them devotedly for 30 years and was considered a member of the family, and chose to care for her despite their difficult circumstances. The author selects a woman so meaningful to her as a prototype for Bessie Lee. Through the relationship between Bessie Lee and Jane Eyre, she demonstrates that financial hardship could not undermine their mutual affection. Clearly, one of the crucial catalysts for the creation of "Jane Eyre" was the element of "material need," which caused many hardships and losses in Charlotte Brontë's life. The skillful writer not only recounted the fates of herself and her close ones in a single work, but also directly utilized their real prototypes. She managed to convey not only economic problems through Jane, but also how severely such financial constraints affected the lives of those close to her.

When Jane's six years as a student and two years as a teacher at Lowood School come to an end, she becomes a self-reliant, spiritually independent girl who, though not wealthy, holds a respected

place in society. She then begins work as a governess in the household of a wealthy gentleman named Mr. Rochester. Although Jane is an employee receiving a wage for her labor, she considers her intellectual and moral capacity entirely sufficient, never feeling inferior among members of the wealthy class. Although there appears to be an obvious social inequality from the outside in her developing relationship with Mr. Rochester, the characters understand each other deeply. A crucial factor in this is Rochester's character: he values a person not based on social origin or financial income, but on spiritual richness and moral values. Take their first meeting as an example—they become intrigued by each other during their very first conversation, a initial connection entirely detached from economic or material status. Through this character entering Jane's life, Charlotte demonstrates that material income and economic standing are not the sole concerns for all wealthy people, and that traits of humanity and generosity can belong to members of any social class. Rochester initially appears as a complex, reserved, self-contained, and stern individual who does not easily let anyone into his personal space. However, only in conversation with Jane does he shed his severity and engage openly, treating her not as an ordinary employee, but with the respect accorded to a woman of equal stature. Jane also feels spiritually free in her discussions with her employer, openly displaying qualities no less refined than those of noble ladies. Thus, despite the significant gap in age and social origin, both characters begin to feel a deep warmth toward each other. However, one day, Rochester announces his impending engagement to Blanche Ingram, a wealthy and high-society young woman. Everyone views this positively, confirming that they are a well-matched couple economically and materially. Jane suffers deeply. She grieves not because Rochester chose Blanche Ingram, but because she feels socially unequal to Rochester and distressed over her poor financial situation. Yet, Jane tries not to betray her feelings, instead agreeing with the social norm that "it is important for both parties to be materially equal to form a family in society."[5] Blanche Ingram visits Rochester's estate, and her host insists that Jane join their company. Through this, Jane meets Blanche, recognizing her genuinely flawless beauty and acknowledging that Rochester's choice seems logical. However, observing Blanche closely, Jane comes to realize a truth: no matter how beautiful and economically well-off Blanche may be, Jane sees that spiritually she is far inferior. Through this episode, the author shows that some upper-class women possess little noteworthy qualities beyond physical beauty and social standing. In Jane's words, Blanche is "intellectually impoverished" and possesses a "natively barren heart." In this situation, Jane finds herself in distress, realizing that her employer fails to see that she herself is far better suited to Rochester. She easily perceives that Blanche feels not a shred of genuine love for Rochester. She recognizes how deeply beloved Rochester has become to her. In reality, this was precisely what Rochester desired. He had already seen in Blanche all that Jane observed, and had long chosen Jane over Blanche. His true intention was to ignite Jane's jealousy and compel her to acknowledge her feelings for him. Furthermore, Rochester puts Blanche to the test by spreading rumors that his family is not immensely wealthy and that much of their estate has been lost. In doing so, he observes Blanche's attitude cool towards him, realizing that wealth is her primary requirement. At this point, the reader admires the author's skill, as she masterfully introduces a plot twist that was hoped for but seemed unlikely. Thus, the obstacles between Rochester and Jane appear to be removed. Rochester passionately declares his love to Jane and proposes marriage. Going beyond that, he promises her great wealth, infinite luxury, and magnificence. However, Jane accepts only his love and marriage proposal. She emphasizes that wealth and luxury are superfluous to her, and that Rochester and his love are more than enough. When Rochester offers to bestow expensive dresses and jewels upon her, Jane declines them without hesitation. She strives not to let herself be turned into a doll draped in luxury. Jane wants Rochester to love simple Jane Eyre the governess, desiring that her lack of fine attire and jewels should not affect his love. By highlighting this conflictual process, the author imparts her own desire for independence from material wealth. At the same time, by demonstrating that Jane views Rochester's wealth not as the

foundation of love, but as a factor that could disrupt equality between them, the author attempts to convey that true love must be built on equality between both parties, and that love built on financial dependency cannot be genuine. Our protagonist finally agrees to marry. Naturally, their decision seems astonishing to many. How could a rich man and a poor woman agree to marry in the eyes of a society that cannot comprehend it? Nevertheless, they set their wedding date. For a month, Jane tries to prepare herself for marriage with Rochester, compelling her fiancé to endure her various whims and keeping him at a distance. Rochester, ready for anything for Jane's sake, patiently seeks solutions to her every caprice. Yet Jane remains anxious. Even with just one day left before the wedding, her anxiety deepens. She struggles to understand the cause of her fear: she worries whether marrying Rochester means surrendering her spiritual freedom, or whether over time Rochester's love and interest will fade, leading him to expect gratitude from Jane for rescuing her from poverty and providing a comfortable life. For Jane, her current free and modest life was far preferable to such an existence. Revealing Jane's psychological state down to the smallest details, the author aims to influence the reader, implying that no decision should be made hastily and that material prosperity alone cannot guarantee peace of mind. Jane agrees to travel with her future husband, to explore the world Rochester once roamed alone, and to allow him to show her the world. The wedding ceremony is planned, and they set out at dawn. At this juncture, a dramatic turn occurs in the narrative. One of the guests objects to the marriage, declaring that Rochester is already married and cannot legally wed without a divorce. The wedding is halted, and everyone disperses. Devastated by shattered trust, lost love, and overall disappointment in society, Jane locks herself away for several hours. Eventually, she courageously confronts Rochester to seek clarity. Rochester openly confesses that his previous marriage was the greatest mistake of his life, arranged by his father and brother solely for immense financial gain, and that his wife is mentally ill, having been cared for secretly in his home for years. He begs Jane for forgiveness, admitting his guilt. He confesses his love for her, explaining that his previous marriage was built not on love but on material wealth, and that he wished to spend the rest of his life with Jane in love and beautiful emotions. He explains that due to his first wife's illness, he lived in sorrow for years, which was why he rarely visited his home and was constantly traveling. He tells her that guilt and remorse severely affected his spirit, that Jane entered his darkened life as a light, and that if Jane leaves him, it will be a devastating emotional blow. He implores Jane to stay by his side. Jane feels genuine compassion for Rochester, who has suffered such a bitter fate. However, sensing that remaining by his side no longer holds moral integrity, she leaves Rochester's estate in the middle of the night with nothing. Yet, left in extreme financial helplessness, suffering from hunger and thirst, and reduced to begging for a crust of bread, Jane's willpower remains unbroken. True, she initially feels regret for leaving Rochester's house. But she never regrets preserving her dignity and saving herself from becoming a slave to wealth by marrying a married man. That is, Jane feels regret not for the life she left behind, but solely for giving up her love for Rochester and out of pity toward him. During her wanderings, Jane arrives in a village where the inhabitants live in extreme poverty. The author depicts the lifestyle of the people there in a harsh and painful manner. Through this, Charlotte Brontë presents the reality of poor people's lives as she observed them. In a letter to Constantin Heger in January 1845, she wrote: "The poor stand in need of the bread crumbs that fall from the rich man's table."[6] This serves as an important source for understanding the author's personal views on need, dependence, and human necessity. Jane is saved from this dire situation with the help of St. John, Diana, and Mary Rivers, who later turn out to be her relatives. Although this family is not wealthy, they help Jane as much as they can. The daughters in this family, like Jane, are educated, know multiple languages, and possess noble manners and conduct; their brother works as a clergyman and considers helping those in distress his duty. Through this, Charlotte Brontë highlights kinship, human kindness, and spiritual support as crucial values alongside material wealth. St. John finds Jane a teaching position and a home.

The episode involving Rosamond Oliver, who sponsors them, stands out clearly here. Through the author's delicate and sincere depiction of Rosamond and St. John's relationship, the reader and Jane come to view them as a well-suited match. However, because St. John dedicates himself to missionary work, he gives up his love for this noble girl. A new turn occurs in Jane's life: she unexpectedly inherits a large fortune from a relative, and it comes to light that the family who helped her are actually her cousins. Jane decides to share this wealth equally with her relatives, rejects St. John Rivers's marriage proposal, and returns to Rochester's estate. By this time, a tragedy at the Rochester estate has left Rochester blind, living in a servant's cottage and holding onto the sole hope of Jane's return. Seeing that his wife died in the disaster and that Rochester is left alone in a tragic state, Jane feels deep compassion for him. She decides to become his eyes, marry him, and continue their lives together as envisioned in their sweet dreams.

Charlotte Brontë's "Jane Eyre" has thus captured readers' hearts as a hymn to humanity, loyalty, spiritual freedom, and dignity. She rejected St. John's loveless proposal—a life consisting solely of duty—not out of mere disloyalty, but because while duty was paramount for St. John, love, freedom, and a spiritually beautiful life were equally vital for Jane. The "Jane Eyre" created by Charlotte raised monumental ideas in society: "Wealth itself is not important; what matters is the wise utilization of the conditions it provides. True wealth lies not in being a slave to fortune, but in mastering it. From birth, a human being is endowed with the highest wealth of all—the blessing of 'freedom'—and this gift cannot be traded for any material gain." It is no exaggeration to say that Charlotte Brontë fully achieved one of the primary goals that inspired her to write the novel "Jane Eyre".

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