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Jane Eyre in Therapy: A Neo-Victorian Perspective on the Literary Classic in "The Mirror" by Francine Prose

Terapia *Jane Eyre*: Neowiktoriańska perspektywa wobec klasyka literatury w „The Mirror" Francine Prose

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Abstract. This paper aims to present Francine Prose's "The Mirror" (2016) as a neo-Victorian rewriting of *Jane Eyre* (1847/2014) that subverts the Victorian values and ideals concerning women while simultaneously embracing feminist approach to Charlotte Brontë's classic. The examination relies upon Gerard Genette's theory of hypertextuality (1982/1997). Prose's hypertext revises the "happy ending" of Brontë's novel, drawing attention to issues previously overlooked in the classic, particularly those involving the manipulation of women. "The Mirror" questions Victorian values and proposes different ones, highlighting the importance of mutual understanding among women and sisterhood.

Keywords: Francine Prose, *Jane Eyre*, Victorian values, neo-Victorianism, hypertextuality

Abstrakt. Artykuł ma na celu przedstawienie „The Mirror" Francine Prose (2016) jako neowiktoriańskiego przepisania *Jane Eyre* (1847/2014), które obala wiktoriańskie wartości i ideały dotyczące kobiet, jednocześnie przyjmując feministyczne podejście do klasyka Charlotte Brontë. Badanie opiera się na teorii hipertekstualności Gerarda Genette'a (1982/1997). Hipertekst Prose rewiduje „szczęśliwe

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zakończenie" powieści Brontë, zwracając uwagę na problemy wcześniej przemilczane w klasyku, dotyczące manipulacji kobietami. „The Mirror" kwestionuje wiktoriańskie wartości i proponuje inne – podkreśla znaczenie wzajemnego zrozumienia wśród kobiet oraz siostrzeństwa.

Słowa kluczowe: Francine Prose, *Jane Eyre*, wiktoriańskie wartości, neowiktorianizm, hipertekstualność

1. INTRODUCTION

While discussing Victorian literature, especially women's writing of that period, one cannot omit Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847/2014). The classic from the nineteenth century still remains relevant to contemporary readers and writers as it is frequently rewritten and discussed. One of its recent rewritings is a short story "The Mirror" by an American essayist and writer, Francine Prose, which was published in a 2016 anthology *Reader, I Married Him: Stories Inspired by Jane Eyre* edited by Tracy Chevalier. In the review of the collection, Sarah Powell (2016) praises Prose's story for its wittiness and wryness in revisioning the classic. Yet, so far, little attention from the literary scholars has been devoted to this interesting rewriting.

This paper aims to present Francine Prose's "The Mirror" (2016) as a neo-Victorian rewriting of *Jane Eyre* (1847/2014) that subverts the Victorian values and ideals concerning women while simultaneously embracing feminist approach to Charlotte Brontë's classic. The analysis shows how an intertextual dialogue with Brontë's literary classic is created and gives possible reasons for the motivation behind the creation of such a dialogue in the first place. The examination relies upon Gerard Genette's theory of hypertextuality (1982/1997) positioning "The Mirror" as a hypertext, and *Jane Eyre* as its hypotext.

2. NEO-VICTORIAN RETELLING

"The Mirror" delves into the lives of Jane and Edward Rochester, offering a disturbing, contemporary, and postmodern perspective on the "happy ending" presented in *Jane Eyre*. In this short story, Rochester asserts that his first wife was never confined in the secret room; in fact, he claims she was never at Thornfield Hall at all. He attributes the screams Jane heard from the attic to a parrot. When Jane expresses doubt about her husband's story, they begin attending couples therapy. During these sessions, both Rochester and the therapist imply that Jane might be suffering from delusions stemming from past traumas. However, since other people confirm that Bertha did indeed reside upstairs, it becomes apparent that Rochester may be deceiving Jane, attempting to convince her of her own insanity. Later, when

their son frequently cries, they seek advice from a highly respected child therapist, who finds the boy healthy but suggests that Mr. Rochester might be exhibiting signs of depression or trauma. Rochester disregards this suggestion and, in an attempt to resolve the crying issue, hires a new governess for their son – a woman whose life story eerily mirrors Jane's. The narrative hints at a cyclical pattern, suggesting that Jane may become the next "parrot" in the attic.

The fact that "The Mirror" is a retelling and should be read as one is clearly stated in the title of the collection – *Reader, I Married Him: Stories Inspired by Jane Eyre.* According to Genette's concept of transtextuality, the relationship between Brontë's and Prose's texts can be classified under the category of hypertextuality. This theory introduces the concepts of a hypertext and a hypotext: the former is a new text derived from an older pre-text, while the latter refers to the pre-text itself (Genette, 1982/1997, p. 5). Thus, the hypertextual nature of "The Mirror" is immediately apparent, as its existence is intrinsically linked to *Jane Eyre*. Prose mentions characters and places from Brontë's pre-text and refers to specific events from the classic. This text follows the narrative pattern of its hypotext – it is a first-person, autodiegetic narrative in the form of Jane's diary. The narrator is also self-conscious as she uses apostrophes to address the reader. In fact, the story starts with one – "Reader, I married him" (Prose, 2016, p. 109), which is also an opening line of *Jane Eyre*'s final chapter "Conclusion." Georges Letissier describes this short story as a "sequel that seems to preclude the possibility of any further sequel writing by looping the story back on itself" (2019, p. 180). While I agree with Letissier's observation of a looping mechanism, I prefer to avoid the term "sequel" for the sake of precision. Although this story could be viewed as a sequel, the term implies a continuation of Brontë's story, which I argue is not the central focus of "The Mirror." *Jane Eyre*'s sequels, such as Hilary Bailey's *Mrs. Rochester: A Sequel to Jane Eyre* (1997) or Elizabeth Newark's *Jane Eyre's Daughter* (2008), extend the events beyond those of Brontë's novel. In contrast, "The Mirror" concentrates on a specific part of the classic story. As the events from the final chapter of *Jane Eyre* (the birth of Jane's son and Rochester's regained vision) are depicted as current in Prose's text, I contend that "The Mirror" is intended as a rewriting of the last chapter of Brontë's classic. Recognizing this is crucial, as by choosing to rewrite this specific chapter, the American author may be offering a different conclusion to the classic story. She creates a parallel, alternative universe, in which Jane and Edward do not live happily-ever-after. The fact that this universe feels uncannily familiar and closely resembles contemporary reality makes the story even more intriguing and thought-provoking.

The mode which concerns itself precisely with rewritings of Victorian texts is commonly referred to as neo-Victorianism. Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn define it as texts that must "*be self-consciously engaged with the act of (re)interpretation,*

(re)discovery and (re)vision concerning the Victorians" (2010, p. 4, italics in the original). Dana Shiller, who coined the term "neo-Victorian," in her first definition states that neo-Victorian novels should be set in the 19th century (1997, p. 558); yet, this is not always the case – rather than the setting, the reference to the Victorian era is significant. Such texts can "take up Victorian themes, recreate Victorian figures (both real and fictitious), or use Victorian novels as intertexts" (Gołda-Derejczyk, 2009, p. 21). "The Mirror" uses all of the aforementioned examples of that reference – it challenges and reinterprets well-known characters, story, and values. Aleksandra Tryniecka highlights the importance of such a reinterpretation stating that "neo-Victorian texts reveal their palimpsestuous nature while drawing on the previous narratives in order to endow them with a new meaning and purpose" (Tryniecka, 2023, p. 183).

In the context of rewriting *Jane Eyre*, this new purpose often involves reimagining womanhood. As far as female Victorian writing is concerned, *Jane Eyre* is one of the most renowned novels of its time, famous for the exploration of women's world. Yet, the portrayal of women in *Jane Eyre* is rooted in Victorian norms. As Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue, most female characters in the novel conform to roles deemed acceptable within Victorian patriarchal society (1979, pp. 339–348). This stems from the fact that *Jane Eyre*, even though rebellious in some aspects, remains grounded in 19th-century values, such as ideals of women's submissiveness, purity, and courtesy. Although critics Elaine Showalter, Sandra Gilbert, and Susan Gubar highlighted *Jane Eyre'*s various motifs of women's independence,[1] Jane ultimately reaffirms Victorian beliefs about women's role. The novel endorses marriage as a woman's ultimate happy ending and accepts the Victorian ideal of necessary sacrifice, since Jane must forgive Rochester to achieve happiness. As Anita Allen succinctly observes, "the solution to Jane's profound sense of female oppression turns out to be money and a man" (1992, p. 176). In contrast, "The Mirror" reimagines this story, addressing the struggles of women that were left unspoken in the pre-text.

According to Alexandra Lewis, "neo-Victorian novels often draw upon the Brontëan legacy to invite particular readings of their central female characters as well as issues of gender, race and class" (2017, p. 198). This mode of writing frequently employs metafictional elements, as seen in *The Eyre Affair* (2001), which debates the ending of *Jane Eyre* and the status and literary value of the classic. Similarly, in Chevalier's anthology, many short stories challenge Victorian values and address contemporary issues, along with topics that would have been

[1] See *A Room of Their Own* (1977) by Elaine Showalter and *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar.

considered unworthy or scandalous in a Victorian novel. For instance, the anthology features: Audrey Niffenegger's "The Orphan Exchange" (2016), which depicts a homosexual relationship between Jane and Helen Burns; Helen Dunmore's "Grace Poole's Testimony" (2016), where Dunmore gives a voice to the previously silenced Grace Poole, a nursemaid who recounts her story about her and Rochester's illegitimate child; and Patricia Park's "The China from Buenos Aires" (2016), a contemporary retelling centered around an Argentine Korean immigrant woman struggling to adapt to her new life in New York City. The anthology offers "a kaleidoscope of the various possibilities afforded by a famous line used as a prompt, which delves into the processes of literary creation" (Letissier, 2019, p. 179). Yet, Chevalier identifies the complexity of marriage and relationships as a common theme throughout the collection. This is also the focus of Prose's short story, which examines the position of women within marriage and society.

3. QUESTIONING THE HAPPY ENDING

"The Mirror" confronts readers with the reality in which Jane has to question her happy ending, her husband's intentions, and even her sanity. When during their couples therapy Rochester informs Dr. Collins about Jane's traumatic past and vivid imagination, she starts to suspect her husband of trying to make her appear as a madwoman. Although this may seem an unexpected twist of events, Rochester's vision of Jane's insanity can be found in Brontë's pre-text. When Edward tried to persuade his would-be wife to stay with him despite the fact that he was already married to Bertha, he envisioned a reality with Jane as a madwoman. Irena Księżopolska notices that this "fantasy allows him to claim absolute control over her – she is no longer the mistress of her mind and he is fully and completely her master" (2014, p. 314). What Księżopolska calls a fantasy, in "The Mirror" proves to be Edward's evil plan for the reality. At the end of the short story, he wants to separate Jane from their son by hiring a governess. Judging by how the plot develops, Jane might soon expect to be put and locked in a room and later replaced by a new wife – just as Bertha was.

The concept of collecting wives was also addressed in *Jane Eyre,* when the titular character mentions Charles Perrault's story of Bluebeard, the infamous collector and killer of his wives. As John Sutherland rightly notices, "echoes of 'Bluebeard' in *Jane Eyre* are obvious. Rochester is a swarthy, middle-aged, rich country gentleman, with a wife locked up in a secret chamber in his house. He wants another wife – like Bluebeard, he is a man of voracious sexual appetite" (1997, p. 69). The fact that for a year he was traveling the world in search of a new woman,

as well as his relationship with "a French opera-dancer, […] towards whom he had once cherished […] a «grande passion»" (Brontë, 1847/2014, p. 140) are indicative of Rochester's aforementioned sexual appetite. Yet, the aspect that differentiates Perrault's character from Brontë's is their ending. The readers of *Jane Eyre* "are encouraged, in the last chapters, to feel sympathy for Bluebeard – a husband more sinned against than sinning. The locked-up wife is transformed into the villain of the piece" (Sutherland, 1997, p. 69). Since the anthology takes a feminist perspective on Jane's story, it is understandable that by rewriting the last chapter, Prose wants to expose Rochester's Bluebeard-like nature foreshadowed in the pre-text.

This rather anti-feminist resolution of the classic stems from the fact that in the Victorian era, the practice of deeming women insane was on the rise. Elaine Showalter writes that most of the patients in the Victorian asylums were female while the psychiatric profession was dominated by men. Moreover, the diagnosis for the so-called "female illnesses" of hysteria and neurasthenia became more frequent (1985, pp. 52–54). Because some physicians[2] claimed that there is a neurological connection between one's brain and her uterus, "it seemed a wonder that any woman could hope for a lifetime of sanity, and psychiatric experts often expressed their surprise that female insanity was not even more frequent" (1985, p. 56). This is a theme which Prose alludes to in her short story. During Jane and Edward's couples therapy, the doctor, who was previously selected by Edward, begins to discuss Jane's "life as a series of traumas that absolutely had to produce a severely damaged adult" (Prose, 2016, p. 115). The situation changes dramatically when they go to a different therapist – a woman. She finds Jane brave and resilient and thinks it is, in fact, Edward who may have mental problems. Yet, because of this assessment, they never visit her again. The indirect suggestion in the text is that the decision to stop seeing this female therapist was made by Edward alone. Thus, Prose seems to imply that Jane's agency (so cherished in the classic) is veritable only *prima facie*. In fact, it is Edward who decides for both of them and pulls the strings in their marriage.

The names of the two therapists do not seem to be meaningless. The first one, Dr. Collins, alludes to Wilkie Collins – a 19th-century novelist, known especially for *The Woman in White* (1860). The story of a titular woman was inspired by a real one of Louisa Nottidge, a woman who was unjustly confined in an asylum. Collins dedicated his text to Bryan Procter, Commissioner for Lunacy, who helped to release Louisa from the institution. The publicity of this case began a public debate "about the endemic spread of the enforced incarceration of women by their male relatives in British lunatic asylums" (Vale, 2018, "Hillington", para.

[2] See George Blandford *Insanity and Its Treatment* (1871), and George Burrows *Commentaries on the Causes, Forms, Symptoms, and Treatment, Moral and Medical, of Insanity* (1828).

2). Prose seems to draw attention to this unfair treatment deliberately choosing this name for her male doctor. On the other hand, the female therapist's name, Dr. Grey, quite strongly points at an eponymous protagonist of Anne Brontë's novel. *Agnes Grey* was published the same year as *Jane Eyre* – 1847; moreover, it also tells the story of a young governess and her life struggles. No wonder that Dr. Grey expresses compassion and respect towards Jane since she stands for a character who also has to face similar difficulties. She stands for a woman who understands another woman. Whereas Dr. Collins is a recurring reminder of the difficult past and injustice, Grey is hope that there is someone who has similar experience and can understand the situation.

4. ROCHESTER'S PARROTS

Besides the connection between Jane and Dr. Grey, "The Mirror" comments indirectly, but quite extensively, on the relationship between Jane and Bertha Mason. The latter is reduced by Rochester to a parrot in the attic. By calling Bertha a parrot, he dehumanizes and reduces her to a fully controllable "it." Edward did not remove the bird from the house because "it was pretty. But its cries drove the whole household mad, so they shut it up in the attic" (Prose, 2016, p. 110). Similarly, in *Jane Eyre*, Rochester describes Bertha as a beautiful woman, "the boast of Spanish Town for her beauty," whose company he was not fond of (Brontë, 1847/2014, pp. 302–303). Graham Huggan notes that parrots in the Caribbean writing serve as a metaphor of a colonial mimicry (1994, p. 643). Since Bertha was of Caribbean descent, she was exactly like a parrot to Edward – exotic, good-looking, yet, irritating and tiresome.

"The Mirror" is not the only text that applies a parrot metaphor to the character of Bertha Mason. By mentioning this bird and relating it to a late wife, Prose makes an intertextual reference to *Wide Sargasso Sea* (2000/1966) by Jean Rhys. It is a novel parallel to *Jane Eyre*, presenting Antoinette Cosway's (later renamed Bertha Mason) side of the story which had unfolded before she was imprisoned in the attic. Antoinette had a parrot named Coco, whose wings were clipped by an Englishman, Mr. Mason. Consequently, as the bird was trapped and could not fly, Coco died in the burning house. Jennifer Gilchrist notes that "Coco's death prefigures Antoinette's […] death"; moreover, "both parrot and the heroine are controlled and reduced by a metropolitan Englishman" (2012, p. 470). Since Cosway's and her parrot's lives are interconnected in *Wide Sargasso Sea,* Prose alludes to the novel's motif and uses it in her text.

Through parrot symbolism, Prose's text connects Brontë's and Rhys's stories, showing that their heroines' situations are nowhere near contrasting but, rather,

strikingly similar. Gilbert and Gubar, in their seminal 1979 discussion, argue that Bertha represents Jane's anxiety about marriage and a deep, destructive desire to obliterate Thornfield, which symbolizes Edward's power. They write: "Bertha […] is Jane's truest and darkest double: she is the angry aspect of the orphan child, the ferocious secret self Jane has been trying to repress ever since her days at Gateshead" (p. 360). Prose also explores the connection between Jane and Bertha as doubles, yet she places greater emphasis on the mirroring aspect, suggesting that Jane may ultimately share Bertha's fate. In *Jane Eyre*, when Rochester calls Jane a wild bird, she replies: "I am no bird; and no net ensnares me; I am a free human being, with an independent will; which I now exert to leave you" (Brontë, 1847/2014, p. 251). Thus, the heroine resists Edward's dehumanization and wants to claim her freedom. Nonetheless, she comes back to Rochester as if nothing has happened – as if he did not confine his mentally ill wife and try to become a bigamist. "The Mirror" takes his past into consideration and shows the ending which is not so fairy tale-like. It shows that living by Victorian values does not bring happiness but, on the contrary, it is a gradual process of losing freedom. Moreover, by adopting the submissive attitude, Jane makes that freedom unattainable for herself. At the end of the story, she realizes that there is already another young governess in whom Rochester is interested and Jane will become the next madwoman in the attic. Like Antoinette, Jane is yet another woman struggling for freedom. The story repeats itself – it parrots itself.

5. MIRRORING THE CONTEMPORARY

Discussing Prose's text, Letissier notes that "the parrot may be a hint at Julian Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot* as the story is caught up in a metafictional groove" (2019, p. 181). Recognizing this metafictional quality of the hypertext is essential for understanding its title. While the mirror in its literal sense is virtually absent from Prose's text, the practice of repetition and mirroring emerges on a metafictional level. Patricia Waugh describes metafictional writing as one that "self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" (1984, p. 2). This is evident in "The Mirror" as the narrator signalizes her awareness of being a fictional character, particularly when she explains why she married Rochester:

> possibly you are forgetting what he said to me in Chapter 27, the speech that goes on for pages and pages, during which he says everything that a poor orphan governess could possibly want to hear, everything that every woman wants to hear. (Prose, 2016, p. 111)

By referring to a specific chapter of the novel and situating her life event within this fictional chapter, the narrator recognizes the story's fictionality. Furthermore, this passage is followed by an extended quotation from Brontë's pre-text, cited in quotation marks, reinforcing the hypertext's acknowledgment of *Jane Eyre* as a novel.

If the narrator is aware of the story's fictionality, this mirrors a situation of the text's implied reader, who is also conscious of this fact. Taking that into account, the last sentence, and, simultaneously, the only one in the story in which the word "mirror" appears, is of significant importance: "I felt as if I were someone else: a visitor from the future, looking into a mirror" (Prose, 2016, p. 117). This line is Jane's response after hearing the new governess's life story, which closely resembles her own. Jane as "a visitor from the future" listening to the new governess's story mirrors the implied reader of *Jane Eyre* reading the novel. Just as Prose's Jane can relate to the governess's situation, in the same manner, the reader may find Brontë's Jane's story strangely similar to their own. According to Tara MacDonald and Joyce Goggin, this recognition of a mirroring mechanism on the part of the reader is characteristic of engaging with many neo-Victorian texts (2013, p. 7).

This implied reader is not just contemporary but also female. In a sense, Francine Prose in "The Mirror" suggests that modern women can still relate to the character from Brontë's classic. Jane's acting as a contemporary woman is highlighted on numerous occasions in the short story. She uses modern language (talking about "an updated Thornfield Hall"), mentions her husband's health insurance, and reminisces about going to a petting zoo, the first one of which was opened in the 1930s. Moreover, the fact that Rochester and Jane attend couples therapy and that a woman works as their son's therapist further distances the story from the reality of the 19th century. The world of "The Mirror" blends contemporary times with facts and events from the classic, creating a deliberate anachronism in the story.

Another fragment that reveals the anachronistic nature of "The Mirror" occurs when Jane compares her situation to a "film in which Charles Boyer does something similar to Ingrid Bergman" (Prose, 2016, p. 114). She refers to the 1944 film *Gaslight*, where a man manipulates his wife into believing she is insane to cover up a crime. The term "gaslighting," which describes a form of manipulation often encountered in abusive relationships, originates from this film. Gaslighting is evident in "The Mirror," to the extent that even Jane recognizes herself as a victim. This concept also appears in Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*: in the former, when Rochester ridicules Jane's account of Bertha tearing up her veil, and in the latter, when he manipulates Antoinette, has an affair with Amelie, and dismisses Antoinette's concerns about her loveless marriage as insanity (Tryniecka, 2023, pp. 185–186). Prose illustrates how the concept of gaslighting connects *Jane Eyre*, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, *Gaslight*, and "The Mirror," emphasizing the enduring

relevance of this issue throughout time. As Kate Abramson notes: "If everyone else thinks the woman who is pointing to sexism is crazy, she won't have the social standing to dispute the gaslighter's view, in the ordinary sense that no one will take her challenges seriously" (2014, p. 10).

Since Prose intentionally makes her text anachronistic, the dynamics among women in the story can be understood through the lens of contemporary society. Despite the pessimistic premise of Jane's unattainable happiness and an overall shallowness of the cliché happy ending, Prose seems to suggest that there is hope by drawing attention to values of feminism and sisterhood. She focuses on women's experience and the ability to understand one another – just as Dr. Grey understands Jane, Jane can understand Bertha, and the contemporary reader can sympathize with Brontë's and Prose's Jane. This portrayal of female dynamics challenges MacDonald and Goggin's assertion of an "absence of functioning feminist communities" in neo-Victorian media (2013, p. 7). Although this understanding among women in the short story does not necessarily lead to immediate action or a fight for change, and Jane may risk becoming another woman locked in the attic if she remains passive, she still has time to alter her circumstances. More importantly, she already has allies – other women.

The bond between Jane, Dr. Grey and Bertha (although the latter is presented only through intertextual connections) can be seen through the prism of sisterhood. This concept, initially representing solidarity among women, has over time been "viewed by some as naïve […] and dogmatic" (Zaytoun and Ezekiel, 2016, p. 195). The critique arises because the term has often implied a shared identity among all women, an identity that largely excluded and ignored the unique challenges faced by certain groups, such as women of color, whose experiences differ significantly from those of white women. Despite these critiques, sisterhood remains a crucial element of feminism. One might even question, as Kelli Zaytoun and Judith Ezekiel (2016) do, "whether feminism can exist without […] the deep bonding that 'sisterhood' was meant to represent" (p. 196). In her short story, Prose revives the hope that this bond can be achieved simply through understanding one another. She writes about women who empathize with each other, even though their statuses differ. Dr. Grey, as a therapist, represents a woman with a degree of independence, in contrast to Jane. Bertha, on the other hand, lacks a voice in the story and is not even mentioned by name, which underscores her lower status. The fact that she is a Creole woman is significant, highlighting how cultural and ethnic backgrounds also influence one's position. Despite their vastly different worlds, these characters are connected and capable of understanding each other's situations. The understanding is by no means a perfect one, yet Prose seems to suggest that there is a common ground, sometimes just difficult to notice.

Considering that Francine Prose is an American writer, the global and American contexts of sisterhood must be acknowledged. The unity and collectivity she portrays seem to allude to the ongoing fight against gender restrictions, a fight closely connected to feminist values that were discussed anew around the time of this text's publication. As Brittany Keegan observes, "feminist issues were central to the 2016 American presidential election. While the three major candidates, Hillary Clinton, Bernie Sanders, and Donald Trump, all addressed feminist issues to some extent, the way in which each candidate approached feminism varied" (2018, p. 106). Due to these different approaches to feminist values, such as sisterhood, the topic was highly prominent in the media at that time. The shared understanding among women that Prose depicts also found expression in the #MeToo movement, which seeks to raise awareness about sexual harassment, empower female victims through empathy, and encourage them to speak out. Although the movement does not exclude male victims, it has become a contemporary powerful symbol of women's solidarity (Dalley and Holzer, 2020, pp. 4–5). While the phrase "Me Too" had been used earlier in this context, the hashtag gained significant visibility on social media in 2017 after American actress Alyssa Milano posted a tweet encouraging other women to share their stories (Dalley and Holzer, 2020, p. 4). Since Prose's text was published a year before that, contemporary times eventually have become the story's continuation, in which women's unity can be seen through online action. However, as in "The Mirror," the problem remains unresolved – there are still cases of harassment and violence against women. This short story underscores the ongoing need for support among women and the importance of continued action against these persistent issues.

6. CONCLUSION

"The Mirror" by Francine Prose is a neo-Victorian text written to pay homage to the female precursor, Charlotte Brontë, and simultaneously, question Victorian values presented in *Jane Eyre*. Prose shows the true reflection of Jane's life situation – how she lost her freedom and happiness by accepting Victorian beliefs concerning women's proper behavior and place. Through textual and metafictional elements, "The Mirror" proposes different values – it highlights the importance of sisterhood and mutual understanding among women. The premise of their unity and understanding is connected with acknowledging that, even though everyone's life is unique and individual, there are certain shared female experiences that bond women as a group.

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