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**DON'T CROWN ME WITH ROSES**  
"The Moral Understanding of Beauty in Jane Eyre"

# ABSTRACT

Julia Sonninen: Don't Crown Me with Roses: The Moral Understanding of Beauty in *Jane Eyre*  
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This thesis examines the different understandings of beauty that are present in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. The novel's protagonist Jane Eyre grows up as a poor orphan and as an adult, she is a governess who falls in love with her employer Mr. Rochester. She observes peoples' appearances and personalities as a child in a Christian institution and as a governess at the mansion.

This thesis focuses on the understandings of beauty Jane's observations reveal and beauty's connection to British society's discourse at the time. The 1840's Britain's societal changes caused by industrialisation were studied for context. The different understandings of beauty present in *Jane Eyre* had been established in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by philosophers. The aesthetic theories of the Earl of Shaftesbury, Burke and Kant provide the basis for the analysis of beauty in *Jane Eyre*. The social importance beauty and aesthetic theories' influence on society shapes the analysis further.

*Jane Eyre* prefers a moral understanding of beauty and criticises other understandings of beauty. Lack of consideration of morality and appreciation of beauty is shown to have detrimental effects on people. *Jane Eyre* aims to strengthen the morality of British society by using imperialism and orientalism to indicate and criticise immoral beauty. *Jane Eyre* has the problematic belief that British society is and should be superior.

Keywords: Jane Eyre, beauty, morality, aesthetic theories, class, race, gender, luxury, imperialism, orientalism

The originality of this thesis has been checked using the Turnitin OriginalityCheck service.

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## 1 Introduction

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847, London) tells the story of an orphaned child "of no beauty" who is sent to a Christian Institution and grows up to be a young governess at a mysterious mansion in early 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain (*Jane Eyre*, p. 106, later *JE*). The "poor, obscure, plain, and little" protagonist Jane Eyre observes high class people at the mansion's luxurious party and struggles with feelings of inadequacy as she falls in love with the mansion's owner, Mr Rochester (*JE*, p. 303). Jane eventually marries Mr Rochester when they have become genuinely equal in status and wealth. As numerous critics and studies have discussed extensively, *Jane Eyre* showcases and criticizes gender and class issues while also including implicit references to colonialism. Such studies have been written by Gilbert and Gubar, Zonana, Godfrey and Bossche to name just a few. Additionally, *Jane Eyre* has received critical attention for its elusive use of art, portraits and characters' appearances (Wootton, pp. 1-23). This thesis focuses on the different understandings of beauty that can be detected in *Jane Eyre* and how the criticism of beauty connects to British society's discourse. This thesis argues that *Jane Eyre* criticises superficial appreciation of beauty and promotes an understanding of beauty that sees beauty as an inner quality and a result of moral life. *Jane Eyre's* critique of superficial appreciation of beauty is influenced by different ideologies, specifically the patriarchal gender system, classism and imperialism. The different understandings of beauty in *Jane Eyre* are affected not only by the social and material reality of 1840's Britain, but also by the aesthetic theories of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. While striving for the contrary, *Jane Eyre* reinforces racial, classist and patriarchal thinking and the image of superiority of white Europeans.

## 2 The 1840's British society

*Jane Eyre* was written in the 1840's when British society was experiencing many changes in its structures because of the Industrialisation Revolution (Mann, p. 9). The increase of middle-class people changed the class system as well as economic and social structures. New changes in society caused fear and uncertainty especially to the higher classes. (Rose, pp. 198-202; Godfrey, pp. 854-57) Industrialisation affected the gender system that had

expected women to work at home and be under the supervision of a man (Rose, pp. 198-99). With the increase of mines and factories that hired women, working-class women had more freedom and economic opportunities (Rose, pp. 198-99). However, people of higher classes feared that working-class women would become immoral, overly sexual and androgynous and influence the members of higher classes. To prevent any “degrading” influences, people of higher classes attempted to keep economic classes and genders apart with critical writings of factory work’s negative effects on women. (Rose, pp. 198-202; Godfrey, p. 854-56) The discourse influenced legislators and debates of laws that would restrict women right to work (Rose, pp. 200-07). The higher classes’ anxiety had its source in the society’s expectations for women. In 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft criticised how society treated women as inferior and as mere objects of desire. She claimed that high-class women have “the strongest claim to pity” because their priority was to secure a marriage. In order to marry, high-class women had to be beautiful or outwardly obedient and agreeable. Wollstonecraft believed that women suffered from the lack of expectations beyond marrying; they had no skills, they became weak, vain and cunning. (Wollstonecraft, pp. 30-62) In 1869, Mill objected against the Western patriarchal gender system in similar ways. He called the gender system a “legal subordination” of women (p. 4). Women were expected to act submissively, show no self-will and yield to the control of others. Submissiveness was framed as a woman’s duty, an ideal state of being and “an essential part of sexual attractiveness,” implying social consequences to women if they resisted the norms. (Mill, p. 29) Wives’ economic dependence on husbands tied into the problem. (Mill, pp. 28-29) The expectation that high-class women should not work outside of home added an economic pressure to be beautiful and submissive to secure a marriage.

Besides internal changes, the British society experienced challenges because the vast British Empire was in constant contact with other nations and peoples. Ideologies such as imperialism and orientalism served to assure the beliefs and secure the self-image of the British Empire. Imperialism is defined by Said as “the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory” that exists in “a kind of general cultural sphere as well as in specific political, ideological, economic, and social practices” (p. 9). Imperialism attempted to secure the European societies’

dominating status by constructing European white people as superior in knowledge, civility and morality. Orientalism is a discourse that served the same intention by othering and portraying the people framed as oriental as exotic, vain and morally deplorable. The Orient was a negative version of European culture. (Said, pp. 11-12) European societies displaced their responsibility for immoral behaviour by accusing the Orient and other races of influencing Western societies and people negatively (Rogers, pp. 330-35; Zonana, pp. 593-615). The manner of blaming Orient's influences for immorality influenced general culture and the understanding of beauty, which shows in the decrease of the appreciation of oriental luxuries (Berg, p. 26). The notion of beauty and its value in society is impacted by ideologies, but this also exposes many of British society's anxieties over class, race, gender, self-image and morality.

The notion of beauty was not a blank canvas before it was discussed in the British society in the 1840's and it was not a unified understanding either. Beauty has always been connected to societies' values and worldviews. Different understandings of beauty carry the effects of history and previous definitions of beauty. For this reason, it is crucial to be aware of the major aesthetic theories of the 18<sup>th</sup> century philosophers who established the European understanding of beauty. The main problems that were contemplated in the 18<sup>th</sup> century were beauty's connection to moral goodness, requirement of utility for objects to be beautiful, improvement of self and what were the determining qualities of beauty (Eco, pp. 256, 264-67). Some of the most notable thinkers of the issues of beauty were the Earl of Shaftesbury, Burke and Kant.

### 3 Aesthetic Theories of the 18<sup>th</sup> century

An 18<sup>th</sup> century theory of beauty that was the most concerned with morals was undoubtedly Shaftesbury's. Bernstein explains how the third Earl of Shaftesbury connected morality with beauty and optimistically believed in the improvement of human morals and happiness through the perception of God's harmonious creation of universe in beauty (pp. 306-312). According to Bernstein, central to Shaftesbury's thinking is "that

what is truly beautiful is what *ought* to please after the fashion of a moral form, and that what is morally good provides the highest and truest forms of pleasure and satisfaction” (p. 306). Beauty that was not moral was assumed to first provide pleasure and then ultimately lead to more suffering as pleasure would rise and fall in intervals. This would cause the pleasure to be mixed with pain and be lesser than pure beauty that exists in the steady enjoyment of moral beauty. (Bernstein, p. 317) In Shaftesbury’s thinking, Taste was a learned ability to correctly judge what is moral as beautiful. Taste was seen as an innate human quality yet distortion in the judgements of beauty would happen when passions would interfere. To counter this distortion, Taste as a skill should be polished with continued effort. (Bernstein, pp. 307, 310) Shaftesbury’s interpretation about Taste is simple - it claimed that Taste is able to change and should be cultivated to be a universal moral Taste. How Taste works philosophically was secondary to the importance to how it should work in real life when beauty is assessed. Shaftesbury’s theory of beauty as moral can be critiqued for not providing any concrete means to distinguish between beauty that is immoral, amoral or moral. If beauty is associated with morality, it is possible to perform beauty and claim that the beauty comes from being moral. Even the concept of Taste is left quite vague and does not really help with determining the morality of beauty. The theory’s strength is how it combines moral goodness with the promise of pure pleasure from beauty, which appeals to those who are concerned with morality and incentivises the improvement of Taste.

Edmund Burke approached the question of the nature of beauty from a different angle. His renowned works discuss the distinctions between what is Beautiful and what is Sublime. In contrast to Shaftesbury’s thinking, Burke did not agree with the notion that Beauty is harmonious by its own nature. Burke defined beauty as an objective feature of bodies that affects via senses and listed smallness, smoothness and purity as some of the defining elements of beauty. Sublime, on the other hand, is described as large, rough and dark. Sublime creates feelings of fear, loss and grandness when experienced at a safe distance. (Eco, p. 290) Burke’s definition of Beauty is a bit questionable, as it is easy to conclude that not all that is considered beautiful is either small or smooth, not to mention that purity can be hard to define. Nevertheless, Burke seems confident in his estimation of

Beauty as he considers that Taste has to have universal standards since all senses are the same for all humans. Burke sees that senses are the foundation of imagination, which is an essential part of Taste: "For since the imagination is only the representation of the senses, it can only be pleased or displeased with the images, from the same principle on which the sense is pleased or displeased with the realities; and consequently there must be just as close an agreement in the imaginations as in the senses of men" (Burke, p.11)

Nevertheless, his theory does note that the standard Taste may be deviated from with time and repetition. (Burke, pp. 6-8) Burke's definition of beauty and Taste seems to be based on the idea that all humans are biologically very similar and therefore Taste and beauty must be universal (Burke, pp. 3-10). His theory understands some degree of variation of Taste between people, but it does not seem to be capable of explaining how and why different societies can have different beauty standards.

Kant's aesthetic theory was partly formulated in response to other theories on the notion of beauty and the question whether utility is an essential prerequisite feature to consider an object beautiful. Kant's theory distinguishes two separate kinds of beauty which he calls "free beauty" and "adherent beauty". Adherent beauty is a conditioned beauty which can be seen in objects that people would assume to be useful and will be disappointed in if they aren't useful. These objects could go beyond being simply useful with beauty, but this is not necessary. Kant did not define what features would make useful things more beautiful. (Guyer pp. 445-52) Regarding pure beauty, Kant claims in *The Critique of Judgement* that beauty can be regarded as the purpose of an Object since it can rouse feelings of pleasure. This pleasure from beauty means that beauty does not need to improve people morally. Rather, beauty's purpose is in the feeling of pleasure when Judgement deems that an Object is harmonious with a universal law of beauty. Kant's theory of Taste follows that one must assume the universality of Judgement of beauty precedingly so that individual empirical findings of beauty can be found in harmonious Objects. (Kant, pp. 1-35). Furthermore, Kant adds that beauty cannot have objective rules or definitions (p. 85). Kant's definition of beauty seems to aim to defend the value of beauty in itself. The theory deflects critique by claiming that beauty is subjective, instinctive and the universality of beauty must be presumed to correctly judge objects as



beautiful. The same is true for his view that Taste is universal yet subjective and beauty cannot be defined in any way. These features of Kant's theory create a problem that society's impact on the evaluation of beauty cannot be acknowledged or observed and any general standards or assessments of beauty cannot be criticised. The aesthetic theories were not merely philosophical discussions; they affected general discourse and culture. Aesthetic theories were also applied to other philosophical questions such as studies of race.

#### 4 Beauty and Race

18<sup>th</sup> century beauty discourse was also interested in the nature of blackness as it was connected to the judgement of beauty. The discourse reveals some beliefs these thinkers had about darkness and black people. Darkness and blackness was generally associated with evil and fear (Gilman, p. 375). In contrast, light had been associated with goodness for a long time (Eco, pp. 102 -29). The philosophical writings generally had the underlying assumption that white Europeans would fear black people. The assumption was not questioned but the function and reason for the fear were debated. (Gilman, pp. 375-79) Burke agreed that darkness is terrifying, but he characterized black people as "melancholy" and a dominating natural force which can create the Sublime (Gilman, p. 377). Burke added that people would grow accustomed to the sight of blackness with repetition (Gilman, p. 376-77). Disagreeing with Burke's theory, Lessing (in 1766) and Mendelssohn argued that blackness is ugly and disgusting, listing bodily features stereotypically associated with black people such as "a flattened nose with prominent nostrils" (Gilman, p. 380). Lessing used the listed features ironically in literature as a comical effect. (Gilman, pp. 380-82) In 1775, Kant published an essay which claimed that native Americans and black people are not as intelligent as white people (Gilman, p. 387). In his understanding of race, the environment which people inhabit affects their capabilities. Damp, warm climate was mainly seen as detrimental, a cause of laziness and frivolousness. (Gilman, 388). Kant's argument framed black people in a negative way, yet Kant's later essays on race in 1785 and 1790 show no signs of negative judgements about

black people. Kant denied the existence of any objective criteria for Taste and concluded that every race must have its own normative beauty and Taste. (Gilman, pp. 376-90) In the 18<sup>th</sup> century discourse black people served the purpose of contemplating beauty in philosophical debates. The white Europeans reaction to black people was not examined critically and instead the reaction of fear defined black people in the debate until 1760's (Gilman, p. 379. 384-87). The philosophical debate influenced and reinforced how black people were viewed in culture.

## 5 Luxury and the Utility of Beauty

The philosophical debate of aesthetics considered many aspects of beauty, but the theories do not investigate the value of beauty in society. However, society clearly affects how beauty is understood and performed. This effect can be recognized when definitions and standards of beauty change over time. One example of changing beauty standards is the history of how the appreciation of luxuries emerged and utilised. Eco notes that a religious understanding of light affected beauty and luxury. Light has been associated with both goodness and beauty since at least the Middle Ages. Specifically in 13<sup>th</sup> century scholasticism, the source of light was believed to be God. During this era, light was considered the most harmonious and therefore beautiful. In other theories light was seen as an essential part of bodies and a source of pleasure. The association of light with beauty and goodness led to the luxurious performance of wealth with gold, jewels and colourful clothes. (Eco, pp. 102 -29) In Britain, the display of luxury was controlled with sumptuary laws until the eighteenth century. Sumptuary laws were an exertion of control over lower classes and reserved luxury items such as certain fabrics and colours to higher classes. Sumptuary laws were seen as necessary to the stability of social classes and society. In eighteenth century, the industrialisation brought such a great volume of items to market that sumptuary laws were no longer a viable option to restrict the ownership of luxurious items. (Berg, pp. 25, 29)

The association of luxury with goodness experienced a shift with the discard of sumptuary laws. Industrialisation of 18<sup>th</sup> century and the growth of the middle class meant that more people could increasingly afford to purchase new industrial semi-luxury or luxury items for delight and to project a sense of individuality through their choices. For some, luxurious items could even help gain access to better societies and change people's social status. (Berg, pp. 1-8, 15-16, 19-29) The changes in society enabled the newly emerged middle-class people to utilise beauty in class relations. Because material possessions were valued more, the work culture also altered when workers would work more to save and purchase semi-luxurious or luxurious items. In contemporary societal discourse, new modern British semi-luxuries were considered as markers of good manners and civility whereas old foreign luxuries were seen negatively: "A key point about these objects, especially as they were perceived by the emergent middling classes of the period, was their modernity. They were not the luxuries of ostentation and excess associated with oriental despots, but those of novelty, fashion, and ingenuity." (Berg, p. 26) Still, Eastern luxury products such as silks and ornamental porcelain were actively imitated, modified and then new, morally appropriate versions of luxury were produced in the West. Items produced in Britain were used to construct a sense of British identity; semi-luxurious items were used to prove that the British were a better race, nation and had a better quality of life. (Berg, pp. 8, 19-20, 23-25)

This all is to say that the understandings of beauty were affected not only by philosophical debates but also by history and the social and material realities. The evolution of the definitions and associations of luxuries exemplifies how the notion of beauty is flexible and changing. When society's significance on beauty is addressed, 18<sup>th</sup> century's aesthetic theories can be re-examined; it seems that Shaftesbury's understanding of Taste may be close to how some people judge beauty. After all, a partial reason why people were interested in the modern semi-luxuries was because of the impression that old luxuries were enjoyed by corrupt higher classes. Even though Kant's theory disagrees, Taste can be a moral and intelligent evaluation of beauty. Questions about the utility of beauty can also be seen from different angle. Beauty is inherently useful when it is performed to ascend

one's status in society. Then objects need no concrete use beyond being a status symbol and the distinction between utility and beauty is irrelevant.

## 6 Analysis

*Jane Eyre* shows that the different understandings of beauty are connected to society, its structures and ideologies. Descriptions of beauty in *Jane Eyre* repeatedly revolve around themes of morality, luxury and the utility of beauty. The social utility of beauty is visible in a luxurious performance of beauty that maintains class structures. The luxurious performance of beauty guides the novel's discussion of morality, reflects the tension of the changing British society and proceeds to reveal how imperialism, orientalism and classism were perceived at the time. The ideologies also tie into the criticism of beauty in *Jane Eyre*. Moral understanding of beauty is preferred in the novel and is implied to have benefits.

## 7 Class and Luxury's Utility

*Jane Eyre's* description of high-class women demonstrates how society's understanding of beauty ties into class relations, appreciation of luxury and the utility of beauty that shows in the performance of beauty. Jane sees high-class women for the first time in her life when high-class people are invited to Mr. Rochester's a party at the mansion, where Jane works as a governess. Jane's social status as a governess is between the working class and middle class (Godfrey, p. 857). Initially, high-class women are described as luxuriously beautiful when Jane sees them from a distance: "fair tenants ... each with dress that gleamed lustrous through the dusk" and "[t]heir collective appearance had left on me an impression of high-born elegance, such as I had never before received" (*JE*, p. 198). The beauty of high-class women is accentuated with descriptions relating to light: "fair", "gleamed lustrous" and "a bright mist". The depiction of the high-class women as light gives the impression of goodness and beauty while the display of luxurious beauty

establishes the difference in class status between Jane and the observed women. The high-class women's status is further emphasized when they are described as "a bright mist [that] rolls down a hill" which makes them seem untouchable and distant to people of lower classes (*JE*, p.198).

The passages seem to imply that the privileges of "high-born elegance" is inherently tied to one's social status, yet this is also contradicted. "[H]igh-born elegance" denotes beauty is innate to high-born people, but the acknowledgement of clothes which make these women beautiful "dress that gleamed lustrous" shows that this elegance is not independent from a performance of beauty. The performance of "high-born elegance" via beautiful dresses affirms that beauty is then not innate but rather a matter of economic possibilities. Godfrey notes that in *Jane Eyre* "gendered acts become acts that are increasingly tied to material wealth, and the text suggests that only the middle and upper classes can afford the costly performance of gender" (p. 856). The economical restrictions of beauty suggest that the performance of beauty by high-class women is meant to promote their social and material superiority.

During the industrialization period, the higher classes generally felt threatened by the changes in the British society that did not necessarily benefit the elites (Rose, pp. 198-202). The middle class and successful capitalists were gaining more influence and ascending in the society, simultaneously threatening higher classes status. The high-class women admit their deep distrust of "liaisons" between working-class governesses and tutors: "... distraction and consequent neglect of duty on the part of the attached - mutual alliance and reliance; confidence thence resulting - insolence accompanying - mutiny and general distrust'" (*JE*, p. 211). The quote implies a fear that the working-class people would unite given a chance and eventually defy or even overthrow the higher classes. Hence, the performance of "high-born elegance" is most likely intended to reinforce the gender and class structures to deter any undesired and feared societal changes. The social utility of beauty enables statements of status and upholds social structures.

## 8 Critique of Beauty

*Jane Eyre* describes the high-class women's performance of luxurious beauty often critically and warns about the negative effects of excessive appreciation of outer beauty. The negative effects of beauty show in the personalities, behaviour and values of high-class characters. *Jane Eyre* challenges the assumption that beauty indicates good morals with "the three most distinguished" high-class women. The Dowager Lady Ingram's personality and appearance are intimidating: "her bearing and countenance" is haughty, "a fierce and a hard eye" and "her voice [...] pompous, very dogmatical – very intolerable, in short", Blanche is "self-conscious" and her behaviour "clever, but [...] not good-natured" and her sister Mary is "deficient in life" (*JE*, pp. 204, 224-25). The high-class women's values are criticised indirectly when Dowager Lady Ingram uses orientalist clothing: "[a] crimson velvet robe, and a shawl turban of some gold-wrought Indian fabric, invested her (I suppose she thought) with a truly imperial dignity" (pp 203-204). On the surface level, Dowager Lady Ingram's performance of beauty aims to demonstrate her grandness and wealth, but this reveals high-class women's egoistic values at the same time. Oriental luxuries were in the 18<sup>th</sup> century connected to aristocrats' excessive luxuries, immorality and corruption (Berg, p. 6, 19, 21, 26). *Jane Eyre's* use of high-class women that are corrupted, bad-mannered and spoiled despite being the most beautiful is in accordance with the general discourse of the era when orientalist discourse constructed the West as superior in contrast to the corrupt and morally dubious Orient.

The source of the negative effects of beauty is implied to be the adoration that families and society generally show towards beautiful people. When Jane's relative is a child, her beauty is adored excessively: "[Georgiana's] beauty, her pink cheeks and golden curls, seemed to give delight to all who looked at her, and to purchase indemnity for every fault" (*JE*, p.10). As an adult, Georgiana gives the impression of vanity and selfishness that is created in the contrast of how she fails to meet expectations for women to be caring when her mother is dying: "Her mind seemed wholly taken up with the reminiscences of

past gaiety, and aspirations after dissipations to come. She passed about five minutes in her mother's sickroom, and no more" (*JE*, p. 280). Because of the adoration of her beauty, Georgiana has grown up to have too much interest in parties which prevents her from being a compassionate person. Blanche's futile attempts to attract Mr. Rochester reveals another implicit reason why society's overvaluation of beauty has negative effects: "She was very showy, but she was not genuine: she had a fine person, many brilliant attainments; but her mind was poor, her heart barren by nature ..." (*JE*, p. 221). Women lack education and proper upbringing and are only taught to please men enough to find a suitable husband (Wollstonecraft, pp. 30-62). Because of this, women do not learn to value qualities of character or skills that are not needed for finding a husband.

*Jane Eyre's* depiction of the harms of beauty opposes Kant's definition of beauty that claims that beauty has value in itself even if it has no purpose beyond pleasure. In Kant's explanation of beauty, obligation for beauty to be useful or good means that beauty is no longer a matter of free determination of taste but rather morals require "manifesting the moral attitude of thought." A moral judgement of beauty merely values things that are "esteemed" meaning that they do not judge beauty based on taste. (Kant, pp. 53-55) Therefore, in Kant's understanding of beauty, requirement of utility or morality should not be allowed to intervene with the estimation of beauty. Instead, the novel contrasts or affirms the value attributed to appearance with inner qualities. The novel's way of estimating beauty is closer to Shaftesbury's theory's themes of morality and goodness. The novel is not strictly against beauty, what the novel criticises most of all is the underlying historical assumption that outer beauty means moral goodness. Similarly to Shaftesbury's theory, morality has been understood to cultivate beauty, yet the general culture has historically allowed that beauty can be performed to create an image of morality. What is more, since morals and beauty cannot be reliably distinguished, other ways of critiquing different kinds of beauty emerge to help with the distinction. In *Jane Eyre*, beauty is connected to orientalism and imperialism when beauty's harms are emphasised.

## 9 Imperialism's Function in the Critique of Beauty

Imperialism's changing reputation can be most prominently seen in the Jamaican Creole character Bertha, Rochester's mad wife hidden on the third floor of the Thornfield mansion. Creoles of West Indies were "the offspring of both settlers and slaves in the slave-and-settler colonies" (Berman, p. 3). Criticism of appreciation of outer beauty coincides with racism in Bertha, because she is characterised as a stereotypical Creole woman. The Creole women were described in common discourse as uncivilised, vain, lazy and beautiful at the expense of being useful in any form (Rogers, p. 329, 337-38). Bertha's character follows these common stereotypes: "[...] Miss Mason was the boast of Spanish Town for her beauty" described as "a fine woman" and "tall, dark, and majestic" (*JE*, p. 367). Her manners are initially pleasing as well: "She flattered me, and lavishly displayed for my pleasure her charms and accomplishments" (*JE*, pp. 367-68). Eventually, Bertha's true character is revealed: "[...] her tastes obnoxious to [Rochester], her cast of mind common, low, narrow, and singularly incapable of being led to anything higher [...]" (*JE*, p. 368). Mirroring the degradation of her personality from pleasant to unpleasant, over the 15 years of marriage Bertha's appearance changes from beautiful to a non-recognisable being: "What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight tell," further described as a "clothed hyena" with "purple face - those bloated features" (*JE*, p.352-53). Labeling Bertha "a clothed hyena" devalues her and suggests that she is like an animal, while "purple face" alludes to the ambiguousness of Bertha's race (Berman, p. 123). The novel accepts the stereotypical and racist image of a Creole woman as truth and condemns Bertha in order to warn of beauty's dangers and to criticise the appreciation of outer beauty with no regard to moral qualities.

Bertha's vanishing beauty might also be a metaphor for the attraction of Jamaica and its hidden, deplorable state that contaminated young British men who had been sent to gain money from slave trade by the previous generations. In 1840's, British people had a self-image crisis because of the West Indies, where Bertha was born in Jamaica. At the time, slavery in the West Indies had been revealed to be disgraceful to the British. (Rogers, pp.



330-31) To be liberated from the shameful reputation, discourse in Britain shifted to blame previous generations of their willing ignorance of the problems of the slavery in the West Indies. Additionally, a new type of claim emerged that the contemporary British society was responsible and morally good because they helped the nations which had suffered from the previous generations' actions. (Rogers, pp. 331-35) The discourse aimed to convince that the white race is still moral and even more so, since old mistakes are being corrected. Imperial attitudes towards other races changed to a discourse of moral responsibility of the white race towards other races, but the discourses implications remained the same – other races were seen as inferior, weak and less capable, whereas the white race was emphasized as a race of superior morality, benevolence and ability. The novel's attempt to criticise the contemporary beauty standards has a detrimental effect as well. The criticism directed at Bertha upholds the harmful stereotypes about the Creoles of the West Indies and at the same time idolizes the British empire, painting it as a benefactor without truly carrying any responsibility for the problems and suffering imperialism had and continued to cause.

## 10 Morality and Beauty

*Jane Eyre* promotes a moral understanding of beauty that is connected to socially accepted traits: wisdom, morality, Christianity, humility, good behaviour and an interest towards knowledge and learning. The female characters which embody the moral beauty are Helen Burns, Miss Temple, the Rivers sisters and, to some extent, Jane herself. The appreciation towards the character's personality traits is expressed via praise of beauty. Interestingly, this beauty comes from within and is sometimes only visible to those who appreciate their moral actions. Helen is perhaps the most notable of these women and is praised the most: "What a smile! I remember it now, and I know it was the effluence of fine intellect, of true courage; it lit up her marked lineaments, her thin face, her sunken gray eye, like a reflection from the aspects of an angel. [...] [E]yes like Miss Scatcherd's can only see those minute defects, and are blind to the full brightness of the orb" (*JE*, pp. 75-76). Moral beauty requires both the observed and the observer to be moral to perceive inner beauty.

Similarly, Shaftesbury in his understanding of beauty recognised beauty which has its source in inner qualities, mostly morality. Shaftesbury thought that beauty is objective and could be assessed rationally. In this case what is moral should be seen as beautiful and would even bring pleasure. (Bernstein, pp. 306-12) *Jane Eyre's* understanding of beauty of inner qualities shining beauty from within can be seen as the preferred one, follows Shaftesbury's definition of beauty. To be clear, Shaftesbury did not claim that moral actions or personality could make one beautiful, but rather as what is moral should be seen as beautiful (Bernstein, p. 306). Continuous effort improves Taste and allows one to enjoy moral beauty (Bernstein, p. 310). Jane's adoration towards Helen's moral behaviour seems to make Helen beautiful to her but not to others, which could mean that Jane's Taste is refined. Jane recognises and enjoys moral beauty unlike others.

Jane's moral understanding of beauty is emphasised when she is uncomfortable with Mr Rochester's attempts to make "the world acknowledge [her] a beauty" with luxuries "don't send for the jewels, and don't crown me with roses" because that would make her "an ape in a harlequin's jacket" (*JE*, p. 310, 313). Jane associates the performance of beauty with pretension and the higher classes luxurious, immoral understanding of beauty. It is also possible she does not want to suffer from the same consequences of beauty as high-class women who do not learn useful information, skills or inner qualities. Moral beauty has benefits: it beautifies Helen and encourages the development of inner qualities (*JE*, pp. 75-76).

## 11 Conclusions

In conclusion, *Jane Eyre* participates in the discourse of aesthetic theories by strongly advocating for a moral understanding of beauty that is close to Shaftesbury's aesthetic theory. *Jane Eyre's* moral understanding of beauty appreciates women's personality traits that align with the gender norms at the time and these traits are implied to create moral

beauty. Respectively, other understandings of beauty that emerge in the novel are disapproved for disregarding morality as a determining factor of beauty. Appreciation of outer beauty is warned against, arguing that it has damaging effects to women's development. Orientalism and imperialism serve as instruments for the criticism of beauty and imply that the performance of outer beauty is a disguise for immorality, bad values and unpleasant manners. The criticism of beauty *Jane Eyre* engages in places beauty in the discourse of social phenomena, social structures and ideologies. *Jane Eyre* advocates for the improvement of the British society's morality and resists class and gender constructions via criticism of beauty. While generous with its criticism of beauty, *Jane Eyre* fails to take into consideration its own influence and problematic beliefs regarding imperialism and orientalism.

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