

**"Not fit to associate with me": Contradictions of race, class, and gender in
Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre***

by

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This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

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For the Major Program

For the Graduate College

To my grandfather, Shri. B. D. Gandha
and
my parents, Vatsala and Satish Kumar Parashar
who encouraged me to read.

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ABSTRACT

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is upheld by feminist critics as a revolutionary tract that expresses strong sympathy for the powerless and condemns the brutality of colonialism, the harmfulness of upper-class exploitation, and the suppression of women within the Victorian patriarchal home. It is viewed as Brontë's attempt to liberate women from the Victorian patriarchal *bourgeois* ideology that enslaved and repressed their basic flesh and blood character, silencing them into asexual, passive, and domestic "Angels in the House." The assertion of women's right to work, intellectual freedom, and economic independence through the ethics of education, hard work, and autonomy and an eschewal of high-class idleness are said to lie at the heart of this inspiring tale. And finally, Jane's behavior is viewed as a classic instance of the revolted slave bursting her bonds of oppression and taking the dangerous position of celebrating individual freedom from the point of view of women, the working class, and slaves. However, if these were Brontë's original intentions, they get subverted through the course of the narrative, and Jane's movement from feminine anger to feminine acceptance of the masculine order, from low-class sympathy to low-class repudiation, and from black to white seems conclusive. Thus, despite feminist assertions, *Jane Eyre* concludes with the reaffirmation of white, upper-class, Christian male ideology within the Victorian British home, society, and Empire making it vulnerable to criticisms of racism, classism, and sexism.

CHAPTER 1
***JANE EYRE*—A REVOLUTIONARY TEXT?**

She [Charlotte Brontë] once told her sisters that they were wrong—even morally wrong—in making their heroines beautiful as a matter of course. They replied that it was impossible to make a heroine interesting in any other terms. Her answer was, “I will prove to you that you are wrong; I will show you a heroine as plain and as small as myself, who shall be as interesting as yours” (Gaskell 215-216).

Charlotte Brontë proved her sisters, Emily and Anne, wrong by creating Jane Eyre, who did not have “Georgina’s...beauty, her pink cheeks, and golden curls” (Brontë 7), but who has become a “paradigmatic figure” “almost larger than life” (Gilbert and Gubar 231). Interestingly, contradictory responses were roused since the book’s first publication in 1847. Jane was deeply valorized by Queen Victoria, the ruling matriarch:

Finished *Jane Eyre*, which is really a wonderful book, very peculiar in parts, but so powerfully and admirably written, such a fine tone in it, such fine religious feeling, and such beautiful writings. The description of the mysterious maniac’s nightly appearances awfully thrilling. Mr. Rochester’s character a very remarkable one, and Jane Eyre’s herself a beautiful one. The end is very touching (Diary entry, 23 November 1880, qtd. in Myer 107).

But Jane's rebellious feminism, “anti-Christian” refusal to accept the forms, customs, and standards of society, and insubordinate “murmuring against the comforts of the rich” also shocked Victorian readers, critics, and social commentators (Myer 23). Evident *within* the text is also Jane’s assertion that her “undeveloped understanding and imperfect feeling” during puberty made her “reflections” then “too undefined and fragmentary to merit record” (Brontë 3, 27). But to sensitive readers who identify with Jane’s privations, triumphs, and ultimate fate, her girlhood, with its rich description of detail, “powerful” rendering of diverse emotions of rebellion, anger, oppression, and happiness, and life-like characters that inspire sympathy and hatred makes the narrative truly unforgettable.

Jane is a poor, unloved, unbeautiful, rebellious, and dependent orphan child, living in an extreme situation of oppressive deprivation without prospects and without a hopeful future. On a superficial level, Gilbert and Gubar have perceived her story as a female *bildungsroman* of the ubiquitous color-less and race-less “Everywoman,” who struggles from the immurement of childhood and repression of passion toward an unthinkable adult goal of freedom, expression of passion, and individuality, achieving “as full and healthy a womanhood” as the feminist novelist could conceive (Showalter 123). Like other novels about women, *Jane Eyre* “traces the competing and possibly irreconcilable needs for perpetual love and perpetual autonomy” (Adams 182), but through the bourgeois ethics of self-help, self-improvement, hard work, and education, Jane surmounts all obstacles in her path of upward social mobility, autonomy, and economic independence (Rich 90, Chase 31). And finally, Jane’s rebellion against an oppressive patriarchal system, arising from her “physically inferior” position as a “slave” of men and capitalists, is perceived as an instance of gender and class conscientization, assertion, and empowerment. Thus, according to most feminist critics, *Jane Eyre* “energize[s] a reader’s revolutionary passion” because it addresses the frustrations of growing up “female in a [social] structure skewed by the unequal distribution of power and mobility along gender lines, thereby appealing to a deep level of anger against existing family structures” (Wyatt 200).

However, there are some readers like me who have read this “paradigmatic” text through the colored lenses of race, class, and gender, and who are disturbed by many contradictions present in it. Standing at the crossroad intersecting race, class, and gender lanes, hugging my “nice” brown colored skin, wearing my post-colonial spectacles that are glazed over by a sense of nationalistic pride (after all, St. Rivers goes to India to civilize the

heathens kneeling before Lord Brahma and Lord Jagannath), and consciously aware of my marginalized, “Other” position in the land of opportunities (or for that matter, any Western country), I wonder how I should read a canonical feminist text like *Jane Eyre*. Back home in India, in my un-decolonized state of mind and with my upper-middle-class position, I would have identified with Jane’s *feminine* struggles, seen her likeness in the patriarchally oppressed me, and casually dismissed the narrative as a “thrilling” love story. That’s what I had done with Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn* anyway. For me, it was a boyish adventure story, and like Bertha Mason and Grace Poole, Jim remained a nonentity in the background because of my lack of identification with race and working-class issues.

But now that I have become an “other” in the U.S., my “superior” Indian class position overwritten by my “inferior” racial appearance, and my social status temporarily demoted to the level of the working class, some questions and observations disturb me. For example, on a specific level, why are white, middle-class (female) experiences assumed to be “universal,” especially in critical responses to *Jane Eyre*? What about the “millions [of colored women and slaves, Third World women and men, and working class people] who are in revolt” against their lot but who have been denied a voice, an identity (Brontë 64)? Is there truly a sense of “international” sisterhood that cuts across boundaries of race, class, and gender? *Who* are Bertha Mason and Grace Poole, and if, according to feminist critics, Jane is fighting for their right to exist and express, then why are they silent through the course of the narrative? How do we explain Bertha’s gruesome death and Grace Poole’s disappearance in the narrative? Even though feminist critics have valorized Jane for her dreams of independence and autonomy, why have they glossed over her constraining and “insalubrious”

domestic role at the end of the novel? Can that be viewed as a consolidation of conventional gender roles and the monogamous family unit that is so necessary for capitalism?

On a more general level, *who* decides the power agenda and perpetuates politics in society, denying *whom* the ability to know, speak, and act? *When* does race overwrite class and gender, and can class ever overwrite race and gender? *What* methods of physical and ideological coercion can be employed to contain the simmering and rebellious masses of humanity? *What* is the role of imperialism and religion in the construction of ideological superiority among colonizers? *What* is the relationship between feminism and imperialism, and can feminism transfigure into imperialism? Finally, can white middle-class women derive feelings of empowerment and a sense of superior individualism from the oppression of, or denial of rights to, marginalized groups like working-class populace, slaves, and Third World women? If so, then under what socio-political, economic, and cultural circumstances? The questions seem unending and the answers elusive, but they form the backbone of my research interests and my thesis.

At a theoretical level, socio-historical studies reveal that the emergence of feminist thought *and* the early canon of British women's literature suffered from a white middle-class bias because of their race and class exclusiveness. According to bell hooks, feminist thought arose from those who could as early as the 1800s take advantage of their dominant and superior social status to express themselves, whether freely or covertly:

It was a mark of race and class privilege, as well as the expression of freedom from the many constraints sexism places on working class [and colored] women, that middle-class white women were able to make their interest the primary focus of feminist movement and employ a rhetoric of commonality that made their condition synonymous with "oppression" (6).

Given this white middle-class advantage, these women, including Brontë, developed a construct of themselves as distinct from “others,” who were defined as colored women or members of other marginalized groups that were not only different from the dominant group, but were also not as important. This racism and classism are deeply woven into the feminist movement even to the present day. Thus, feminist scholarship has not viewed nonwhite experiences or existence as important and has excluded marginalized women from the experience of sisterhood; however, this not only extends to *women* from marginalized groups, but also *to the marginalized groups themselves*. This is especially evident in *Jane Eyre* and in the feminist criticisms regarding *Jane Eyre* that have denied Bertha, the racial “other,” and working-class women like Grace and Hannah, a voice, an identity, and an existence, thereby revealing an overpowering sense of racial supremacy, class elitism, and gender consolidation that is disturbing in its subtlety, and yet, openness.

Traditional criticism of *Jane Eyre* has often been class- or race-blind, resulting in a certain shortsightedness in feminist, Marxist, and other ideological interpretations. Though influential feminist texts like Showalter’s *A Literature of Their Own*, Moer’s *Literary Women*, Spacks’ *The Female Imagination*, and Gilbert and Gubar’s *A Madwoman in the Attic* uphold Jane as a “paradigmatic” voice of feminism, issues of class, race, and historicity are curiously absent. In fact, Gilbert and Gubar take their title from *Jane Eyre* because its imagery of enclosure and escape and its doubling of the female self into the good Jane and the criminally passionate Bertha Mason reflect the experiences of *women living under patriarchy* who are “emblem[s] of a passionate, barely disguised rebelliousness” (Gilbert and Gubar 232). This has led critics to view Bertha as merely the white, sexually depraved, oppressed, and insane upper-class wife of Rochester, the prototype for several generations of

women characters tyrannized by patriarchy, ranging from Charlotte Perkins' *The Yellow Wallpaper*, to Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* to Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife*. Thus, Bertha is seen as an embodiment of unrestrained sexual license, a symbol of Rochester's misspent youth, or even the female in himself that he must kill or cure. Terry Eagleton views her partly as a projection of Jane's psyche, yet "since Bertha is masculine, black-visaged, and almost the same height as her husband, she appears also as a repulsive symbol of Rochester's sexual drive" (34). Helen Moglen describes Bertha as "an androgynous figure...also the violent lover who destroys the integrity of the self; who offers the corruption of sexual knowledge and power—essentially male in its opposition to purity and innocence" (41). Interestingly, none of these critics take into account or offer an explanation about Bertha's behavior, coloring and race, and therefore, her "dark" metaphorical presence in the narrative is smoldering in its very absence. One had to wait for Jean Rhys' *The Wide Sargasso Sea* to hear and experience Bertha's version of the story.

Rich perceives Jane's "manifesto" on the battlements of Thornfield as a celebration of sisterhood among women like Jane and her alter ego, Bertha Mason, who are bonded together by their common experiences of patriarchal oppression (93). However, Gilbert and Gubar take a different stance and view Bertha, Adele, Blanche, and Grace as "important negative 'role-models'" for Jane, who suggest obstacles that Jane "must overcome before she can reach the independent maturity which is the goal of her pilgrimage" (231). Showalter asserts that *Jane Eyre* is Brontë's attempt to liberate the all-inclusive category of *women* from the representations in which patriarchal Victorian ideology held them, namely the image of the asexual, passive, and domestic "Angel in the House." It "formulates the deadly combat between the Angel in the House [Helen Burns] and the devil in the flesh [Bertha

Mason]...to make way for the full strength and development of the central consciousness, for the integration of the spirit and the body” in Jane (1978, 68). Thus, through her frank and open relationship with Rochester, Jane upholds women’s unashamed assertion of their passions, sexuality, and individuality, and presents marriage as a union of spiritual equals in a world ruled by “slavedrivers,” “sultans,” and “despots.”

Feminists have also perceived Jane as the “first defiantly intellectual heroine in English literature holding out the hope that intellectual tastes would not disqualify readers—particularly female readers--from emotional and [spiritual] fulfillment” (Myer 31). Thus, *Jane Eyre* is an “epic of determination” documenting “the painful acquisition of identity” and independence (Boumelha 130) that has been “the mesmerising focus of the ‘subject-constitution’ of the female individualist” (Spivak 245). Jane’s rejection of the constraining womanly sphere and her bid towards independence through work and autonomy are upheld as an instance of empowerment in the text; this is supported by Chase who feels that “*Jane Eyre* is a feminist tract, an argument for the social betterment of governesses and equal rights for women” (31). Jane's efforts are characterized by two ambivalent needs: to love and be loved, and to be a woman of achievement and integrity with an outlet for her energies in the world, and feminist critics have lauded her, and Brontë, for striking a fine balance between the two needs. In a nutshell, according to feminist critics, *Jane Eyre* “questions the institution of marriage and inheritance.... It proclaims the equality of the governess and a gentleman. It flouts contemporary sexual propriety,” making the narrative revolutionary in its basic characters and ideology (Hallett v).

On the other hand, Marxist criticism has been as gender- and race-blind as traditional feminist criticism has been unhistorical, class- or race-blind. Terry Eagleton asserts that the

internal contradictions in *Jane Eyre* mirror those of the social, psychological, and economic discourse of the Victorian age because of the presence of, and struggle between, two ambiguous, internally divided sets of values that are embedded in Brontë's work. On the one hand are "the [middle-class] values of rationality, coolness, shrewd self-seeking, energetic individualism, radical protest and rebellion; on the other hand lie [upper-class] habits of piety, submission, culture, tradition, conservatism" (34). But then, is it just a matter of *being caught* between two sets of class values? What happens to issues of gender and race? How does it explain conservative gender consolidation within the text, as well as the contradictions regarding Jane's initial ambivalent identification with, and consequent repudiation of, Bertha Mason--marginalized groups who should ideally be supported by the liberal middle class, if not the upper class, and by middle-class women, *if not* middle-class men? After all, middle-class men have long oppressed women, slaves, and working-class people at some stage and through some institution.

However, in recent years, there have been strides towards recognition of the interrelation of class and gender, leading critics to extol *Jane Eyre* for its radical class and gender politics, its preoccupation with sexual and economic oppression, and its defiant rebelliousness transformed into a deep revolutionary impulse. As a progressive reformist text that "calls basic institutions into question" (Pell 398), Tillotson hears *Jane Eyre* "as a voice from the dangerous north and the dangerous class of oppressed or 'out-lawed' women" (qtd. in Pell 398). Webb ascribes to Jane an "exhilarating spirit of individualism" who takes the dangerous position of celebrating individual freedom from the point of view of women and the working class and who struggles against inequality of gender and class, ideas that were later echoed by Ohmann (104). Both Webb and Ohmann assert that Brontë is caught

between her conservatism and her radicalism, and she offers a solution to oppression only at an individual level, but according to Ohmann, “in the very rendering of Jane Eyre’s longing for fulfillment, Brontë conveys a moral imperative with broadly social implications” (762). Myers feels that *Jane Eyre* is a “brave attack on perverted religiosity” and “defence of natural human ‘passion’ within the moral law” because of its satirical portrayal of Brocklehurst and St. John Rivers. This text satirized prevalent conventional pieties and ideologies through the bleak picture of Lowood, and was viewed as an instance of gender and class insubordination through its treatment of religion.

Until recently, slavery and colonialism have not been as integral critical foci even though race is present as a complex metaphor in Brontë’s major novels, especially *Jane Eyre*. The slave analogy was often used by feminists in nineteenth-century discourse to describe conflicting gender relations and the oppression of women, governesses, wives, and mistresses within society, while members of the working class publicized the existence of “white slavery” in English factories. In an interesting reading of the race dynamics in *Jane Eyre*, Meyer suggests that when Jane becomes isolated, orphaned, uprooted, and poor, and more *vulnerable* and *sympathetic*, she is transformed into a black child, and her apparent blackness suggests her social disenfranchisement due to her gender, age and social class (98). However, even though Rochester likens Bertha Mason to a West Indian when he describes her, his words are not shot through with sympathy and understanding. The social groups that identified themselves *as* slaves did not necessarily identify *with* black slaves, and the analogy between race relations in the West Indies and class and gender relations in England did nothing but empty slavery of its racial significance, and Bertha of her identity. Thus, according to Meyer, “Brontë uses black slavery in *Jane Eyre* as a metaphor for economic

oppression,” and “to represent various configurations of power in British society: female subordination in sexual relationships, female insurrection and rage against male domination, and the oppressive class position of the female without family ties and a middle-class income” (97). No one refers to the cruel slave trade, symbolized by Bertha Mason, upon which the fortunes of Rochester and Jane are based, and ironically, it is this “stained wealth” that paves the way for Jane’s marriage with Rochester, her supposed achievement of autonomy and economic independence, and her assertion of “I-self.”

Thus, to an uninformed and un-decolonized reader, it would seem as if race, class, and the institutions of slavery and colonialism never existed in the framework of *Jane Eyre* or were mutually exclusive of one another. But in Victorian society, these issues were too all-pervasive to be dismissed; racism and class prejudice not only served as agents of political power, but also served as buffers between groups that seemed to be getting too close to each other for psychological comfort. So, if we adjust our focus to include issues like British colonialism in the West Indies and India, which is synonymous with capitalism in England, the connection between Christianity, imperialism, and the social mission of white women in taming the natives, the social reproduction of inequality, Bertha’s threateningly “dark” Creoleness, her physical and behavioral identification with Africans, her overt sexuality, and her perceived rebelliousness (translated into slave and working-class uprisings which the Victorians feared deeply), then a new story emerges that reveals the hidden politics implicit in *Jane Eyre*. The “domestic” is reformulated and re-tested by its definition through, and in opposition to, the “external,” the “foreign,” and the “other” (Perera 8). Then, the re-reading of *Jane Eyre* presents Jane as a conservative “displaced spiritual aristocrat,” a self-

appointed and patronizingly superior guardian of the colonial natives, who grows from “revolted marginality to quiescent socialisation” (Politi 78).

In Jane’s narrative of self-improvement and “transition of an outcast figure from a position of social marginality to confirmed membership of the [white] gentry” (Shuttleworth 148), other women’s (and groups’) narratives are displaced by hers’ because of the “apparently blithe predication of the liberty and happiness of a few upon the confinement and suffering of the many” (Boumelha 133). For though Jane may sometimes be economically and socially dependent on others, she is always patronizing in her dealings with all those who fall beneath her perception of herself in terms of class or English-ness. And, what stands out in the narrative is a lack of universal sisterhood—Jane, the white, middle-class governess, is always in opposition to the racially colored Bertha, the economically oppressed Grace Poole, the schoolgirls at Morton. This is further supported by Spivak who argues that “the unquestioned ideology of imperialist axiomatics” informs Brontë’s narrative and enables the individualistic social progress of Jane that has been celebrated by “U.S. mainstream feminists” (244). However, the ideology of individual freedom that brought the bourgeoisie to power has to be repressed once dominance is achieved because it is impossible for the bourgeois class to apply its own ideas of freedom to the proletariat (Lukács 9). Thus, the white Jane receives her individuality and independence at the expense of the “native” Bertha, showing middle-class feminism, caught in a conflict between sympathy for the oppressed and a hostile sense of white racial supremacy, to be complicitous with imperialism.

This is also supported by Brontë’s use of physiognomy, phrenology, and craniology to describe and delimit the characters, especially women who are presented in two flat groups of the white “Angels in the House” and the “dark” “Devils in the Flesh.” These pseudo-

sciences, whose hey-day was between 1820-1850, offer a reading of character that is “immediate and interchangeable” (Boumelha 139). That an individual’s physical and, by extension, moral, intellectual, and social development, could be determined by and seen in his/her physiognomy, particularly the color of the skin and eyes, jaw structure and frontal forehead was a main point of these pseudo-sciences. Thus, the prognathous (protruding) jaw became a sign of lower development and of a closer relationship to *apes* or primitive man, while men of genius like the English were orthognathous and closer to the *angels*; this biased differentiation also became the basis of much racial stereotyping of the Irish, Welsh, Africans, etc. However, in Victorian society, race and class were often collapsed into one group and the very poor and the pauper class, condemned because of their unabashed sexuality and their low and immoral natures, were placed at the farthest fringes of society so that they appeared as a separate race. Hence, phrenologists argued that the working classes were more prognathous than the upper classes. Brontë employs this technique to moralize physical features while coloring women in *Jane Eyre*, and this is clearly evident in her presentation of Bertha Mason and other unpleasant characters. Because of her physical appearance and behavior, the white upper-class Bertha possesses the habits and flagrant sexuality which exist in females from other races and lower classes. This un-British, and hence inferior, sexuality must be destroyed or controlled so that society, with its monogamous family unit, can be stabilized and the true “Angel” can rule over the family hearth and England.

But the question is, as an “Angel” does Jane become independent and individual, or does she suffocate within the “insalubrious” and dense overgrowth of Ferndean? As evident from the Preface and in certain passages where she consciously voices her ideology, Brontë

set out to situate herself in opposition to the “warped system of things” plucking “the mask from the face of the Pharisee who may not like to see these ideas dissevered, for it has been accustomed to blend them” (Brontë 1). For the world “may hate him who dares to scrutinize and expose, to raise the gilding and show base metal under it, to penetrate the sepulchre and reveal carnal relics,” and Brontë attempts to do this unmasking even at the risk of incurring the reader’s hatred (Brontë 1). However, she does it in such a way that the novel’s movement is not towards liberation but towards a consolidation of social positions and social structure. Thus, through my reading of *Jane Eyre*, I want to show that Jane’s rebelliousness against the patriarchal system gives way to a sense of complicity, and her wish for paid work and wide horizons is overtaken by “domestic endearments and household joys” that are “the best things the world has” (Brontë 231).

The development of my ideological stance has been quite similar to the process of interpreting a stereogram: at face value, it is just a paper with some colorful patterns that give it a two-dimensional picture, but once I unfocus my eyes and look beyond the apparent reality, a three-dimensional picture emerges. Similarly, my flat picture of gender and class in India has given way to a three-dimensional model of race, class, and gender experienced and lived by me in England and the United States. Thus, in my view, the ending of *Jane Eyre* reaffirms the ideology of patriarchy, capitalism, and imperialism because the plot trajectory takes Jane from “physical inferiority” to a “lady,” from the receiver of alms to the giver of alms, and from an outcast of the family structure to the restorer of patriarchy. From being a motherless girl-orphan, Jane becomes the mother of “the boy” who “inherited” Rochester’s eyes and his wealth, permitting social hierarchies to fall back into place in interesting and illuminating ways.

CHAPTER 2 KILLING THE “OTHER” DEVIL IN THE FLESH

“Ungoverned passion breaks all the bonds of human society and peace... violates all the sacred ties of religion.... But when these vehement powers of nature are reduced to the obedience of reason: it renders our conduct amiable and useful to our fellow creatures...the soul which governs its affections by the sacred dictates of reason and religion...is better prepared to part with all earthly comforts at the call of providence. Such a happy temper of mind will enable us...to enter gloriously upon...the diviner joys that await us in the upper world (Watt 38, *The Doctrine of Passion*, qtd. in Myer 51).¹

In order to liberate women from the Victorian patriarchal *bourgeois* ideology that enslaved and repressed their basic flesh and blood character, silencing them into asexual, passive, and domestic “Angels in the House,” Charlotte Brontë constructed a new female prototype in *Jane Eyre* who embodied “the integration of the spirit and the body” (Showalter 1978, 68). Thus, Jane obtains self-fulfillment through her rebellious will, her passionate relationship with the powerfully sensuous Rochester, and her victory over the “Devil in the Flesh,” Bertha Mason, leading feminist critics to uphold *Jane Eyre* as a revolutionary tract that reaffirms passion, sexuality, and women's social, economic, and biological rights.²

However, to restrict the aim of Brontë’s social critique in *Jane Eyre* to merely the sexual repression of middle-class women is to “box the novel into gender without race, gender without social class” (David 96), which makes it difficult for marginalized readers like me to understand the social construction of Bertha Mason whose “unmanageable

¹ Watt's book was found at Brontë's residence, and was a long and extensive treatise on the nature and types of passion. Though Myer asserts that Brontë rebelled against Watt's teachings and attempted to subvert them by presenting Jane as a passionate woman, one might also be tempted to say that probably, Watt's ideology was congenial to Brontë because of the parallels between some of the ideas in this book and *Jane Eyre*.

² According to Watt, the word “passion” is traditionally used to describe any painful suffering of soul and body, the passion of Christ. However, it had other meanings too, and besides signifying anger or sudden resentment, was also Brontë’s euphemism for sexuality (Rigney 23) and sexual repression in the Victorian “Innocent femina sensualis” (Vicinus 172).

sexuality is the most threatening sign of both racial and female otherness” (Perera 93). Thus, in order to distinguish Jane from both extremes of Victorian womanhood, the “Angel in the House,” represented by the spiritual Helen Burns, and the “Devil in the Flesh,” represented by the fleshy Bertha Mason, Brontë portrays women as “Angels” or “Devils” not only through their actions and characters, but also through complex intersections of class, race, and physiognomic details, especially the color of skin and eyes and the structure of the face and the body. Nineteenth-century believers in physiognomy were of the opinion that there was an art to find the “mind’s construction in the face,” and that “most of the passions have some effects on the colour or features of the countenance, and especially on the eyes” (Watt 24). However, though Brontë tells readers in the Preface that “[A]pppearance should not be mistaken for truth,” and Helen advises Jane “not to judge by appearances,” Jane moralizes physical features while coloring women in *Jane Eyre* (Brontë 1, 33). Since she is the sole authority furnishing the details, often these portrayals seem biased, and this is especially evident in the “flat “ figures that emerge—asexual, passive and disempowered middle-class women (or governesses) as benevolent, white, and “British,” and depraved, oppressive, and dominating upper-class women as malevolent, dark, and “Other.”

Though analysts of nineteenth-century icons of female sexuality associate the central white female figure with an “other” black female in such a way as to imply their sexual similarity, Perera asserts that *Jane Eyre* “outlines a landscape of ‘antipodean’ moral alternatives between England and the “other” empire” (101). Hence, the potential “Angels” represented by the *bourgeois* Helen Burns, Miss Temple, Diana Rivers, Mary Rivers, and Jane herself, have “fair,” “pale,” “bloodless” skin and “benignant” eyes that reveal “gentility” in their demeanor, “serenity” in their air, and “refined propriety” in their language “which

precluded deviation from the ardent, the excited, the eager” (Brontë 26). While Miss Temple is “tall, fair, and shapely,” Diana and Mary Rivers, like Jane herself, are “fair complexioned and slenderly made” (Brontë 201). Through their wholesome British domestic values of “self-discipline, immense patience, and willingness to endure physical and emotional deprivation,” and their “social and cultural superiority to the native” woman, they will redeem England’s “tainted” men from their sexually contaminated past and their depraved “Other” mistresses and wives, thereby assisting in colonial governance (David 97, 79).

On the other hand, the “*topoi* of racial ‘otherness’” is evident in unpleasant characters like Mrs. Reed, Blanche Ingram, Lady Ingram, and Bertha Mason, who possess “dark,” “swarthy,” “olive” skins and “bloodshot” “imperious” eyes, “inflated” with pride, willfulness, and arrogance (Meyer 83). Mrs. Reed’s “somewhat large face, the under jaw being much developed and very solid,” “low” brow, “large and prominent” chin,” “square-shouldered and strong-limbed...robust frame” are similar to the Negroid features of African people (Brontë 19). Similarly, Lady Ingram and Blanche Ingram have “lofty” statures, and while the former has a “double chin,” disappearing into her throat like a pillar,” Blanche is a “real strapper...big, brown, and buxom” (Brontë 101). Their imposing size and dark passions, coupled with Bertha’s genetic contamination (madness, cannibalism) and monstrous sexual appetite are a brutal allusion to their “racial” difference that excludes them from genuine affinity with “white” British women. These women can never fit into the mold of the “Angel,” and Brontë paints them as inefficient and over-indulgent mothers, dominating and greedy lovers, and an “intemperate and unchaste” wife; interestingly, the physical characteristics of all these women seem to coalesce into one another until they are almost

indistinguishable.³ This subtle attempt at physical differentiation, combined with the fact that Jane fits into the socially prescribed mold of the saintly “Angel” at the end, reveals the race and gender politics of *Jane Eyre* making it vulnerable to contradictions regarding gender, as well as criticisms of racist, classist, and nationalist ideologies.

The opening scene of *Jane Eyre* takes us into the core of a Victorian “family group” that has been denied to Jane because of her socially unacceptable “physical inferiority” and “passionate” behavior (Brontë 2).⁴ Perceived as being dominated by the processes of the body rather than the mind, violent passions rather than rational control, Jane tries to conform to social expectations, but earns further disapprobation when her attempts to please introduce elements of unnaturalness in her conduct. Until Jane can speak “pleasantly” and “acquire a more sociable and *childlike disposition*, a more attractive and sprightly manner--something lighter, franker, more *natural*,” she is ordered to be sit somewhere and “remain silent” (Brontë 2, 20, *emphasis added*).⁵ Mrs. Reed, while preserving the social distance, is “simply voicing the ideological representation constituting the bourgeois ‘natural’ for little girls,” and Jane must cast herself into this stereotype before she can join the family hearth (Politi 58). Thus, at the very onset, her deviation from, and defiance of, the traditional image of the “Angel” is highlighted and enforced in terms of her appearance and behavior.

³ Lady Ingram has “a fierce and a hard eye; it reminded me of Mrs. Reed’s” (Brontë 101).

⁴ However, Jane’s passion was an issue that was widely discussed in Victorian psychological discourse--whereas Locke argued that passion could only be the outcome of extensive experience, and thus was an attribute solely of adult life, Combe suggested that it could be experienced with equal force by children. Thus, the sacred idea of hierarchy and linear progression was now under threat, and children had now been granted the same unruly energies as undisciplined adults (Shuttleworth 151).

⁵ Africans, and other supposedly inferior groups, such as Irishmen, Indians, Maoris, women, and the working class, all displayed, popular literature held, impulsive, childlike qualities. This emphasis upon the childlike qualities of supposedly lower races certainly parallels the frequent references one comes across to the immature working classes. Repeatedly one reads that they had no thoughts for the future, that they wallowed in instant gratification, and that they were irresponsible, impulsive, and self-indulgent. Contemporaries similarly remarked on the irreligiosity of the working classes, particularly their “rude idea of the Creator” (Webb 172).

However, Jane's tightly reined passion breaks loose when John Reed brutalizes her, and in behavior that is described as "too passionate and rude," she physically attacks him. Infuriated by this blatant rejection of prescribed norms, John calls Jane a "mad cat," a "bad animal," and a "rat" (Brontë 4, 5)--derogatory bestial epithets used in prevalent discourse to describe the behavior of insane women, rebellious girls, disreputable working-class populace who infiltrated filthy sewers, and African slaves during the Jamaican uprising—inferior categories that resided on the outermost fringes of Victorian society (David 167). Covert racist and classist overtones can be detected in the affirmation that a high degree of passion in childhood leads to indecent sexuality in adulthood that is otherwise a trait of blacks and the lower classes. The phenomenal increase in working-class illegitimacy during the Industrial Revolution, coupled with the high birth rate among the colonial slaves and the English working class was seen as a by-product of an animal-like sexuality, a surrender to bodily appetites that indicated their ancestry among *animals* rather than *angels*. This was further "driven by the myth [and fear] of races made excitable by a [hot] tropical climate" or passions (David 103). Thus, to the nineteenth-century audience, portraying Jane as a vulgar "picture of passion" is an instant mnemonic of sexual, class, and racial contamination, and by crossing the thin line separating natural from unnatural, sanity from insanity, "us" from "them," and "Angel" from "Devil," Jane threatens the stability of the family unit.

Mrs. Reed severely punishes Jane for her infractions by ordering her to be locked up in the red room, and though Jane "resisted all the way" she is not set free. It is only when Bessie and Abbot, "incredulous of [her] *sanity*," threaten to tie her up that Jane controls herself; she is told that "it is only on conditions of *perfect submission and stillness*" that she

will be liberated (Brontë 9, emphasis added).⁶ Like Bertha's attic in Thornfield, the red room at Gateshead where Jane is incarcerated can be viewed as a physical manifestation of female passion and sexuality, a "spatialized configuration of Victorian notions of female interiority," for Victorian "experts" who viewed women (and other marginalized people) as aggressively sexual beings whose excessive reproductive energy interfered with their sexual, emotional, and rational control, potentially leading to insanity (Lorber 23). Showalter associates Jane's "warm blood," "glittering eyes," and the visual redness of the room to the onset of puberty which was considered to be one of the most psychologically dangerous periods in a female's life cycle (1985, 81). According to Victorian discourse, this pent up reproductive energy had to be completely utilized "without transgressing the fine line of regulatory social control... but the very energies that fuelled their women's essential role of reproduction were also deemed to be dangerously at odds with their required domestic role" (Shuttleworth 151). If suppressed within the physical system, this energy led to madness, but if openly released within the social system, it was construed as unbridled sexual depravity and the maddened "animal" was removed from public society, restrained by barbaric accoutrements like chains, straps, and manacles, and cast from the ranks of humanity (Showalter 82, 1978).⁷

This contradictory response to (female) energy and passion results in a constant vacillation between defiant self-assertion and hesitant self-doubt, often leading to thoughts of self-immolation as a means of escape (Reynolds 14). Thus, Jane's internally fragmented and

⁶ In a letter found at Haworth, Mrs. Chapone warns about the dangers of passion and the social expectations regarding female behavior and decorum. She asserts, "[I]t is as unbecoming to [a young woman's character] to be betrayed into ill behaviour by passion as by intoxication...gentleness, meekness, and patience are her peculiar distinctions; and an enraged woman is one of the most disgusting sights in nature" (Myer 32).

⁷ Middle-class people regarded public asylums as a disgrace and called them "Bluebeard's cupboard of the neighbourhood," and interestingly, Jane compares the third storey of Thornfield to Bluebeard's castle (Showalter 1985, 47).

fevered mind wants to rebel and find escape from this “insupportable oppression” by running away, or if that could not be achieved, by “never eating, or drinking,” and letting herself wither away (Brontë 7). She realizes that she must learn to “subdue her passions, in line with the societal strictures she has internalised” (Reynolds 14), and control “the madness of [her] conduct” if she is to “stay healthy and not die”; Jane’s “white face and arms” make her look like a “half fairy, half imp,” revealing her own attempt at repressing her passions (Brontë 21). Traumatized by her “divided consciousness” she faints, and twenty years later, still feels the “reverberation” of the “shock” deeply. Fearful recollections of the red room act as premonitions for Jane when she is overcome by passion in two crucial incidents in the text, her humiliation by Brocklehurst at Lowood (when she experiences extreme anger) and on the night she leaves Thornfield (when she experiences intense sexual temptation). Thus, the “small drama in the red room is a paradigm of the larger drama” in *Jane Eyre*: “passion vented leads to imprisonment,” racial and class demotion and disenfranchisement, social death, and a living hell—“a pit full of fire”—in which the alien and sexually uncontrollable Bertha ultimately burns (Bodenheimer 99).

Lowood, where Jane is exiled after her tantrums, is a charity school where poor genteel women, destined to become governesses or the “intensely spiritualized and idealized Angels in the House,” are instructed in the high British morals that they will need for their future roles as wives, mothers, nurses, governesses, and teachers of the colonizers and as reformers of the colonized (Showalter 142, 1978). It is managed by the hypocritical Reverend Brocklehurst, who uses Christianity, nationalistic chauvinism, and paternalistic techniques to reinforce conventional gender roles, starve and constrain the young women's sexuality and sensuality, and rechannel their reproductive energies into the sphere of rational

control so that individuals are saved for society and the British Empire. He tries to accomplish his grand "mission" by mortifying in the young women and girls "the lusts of the flesh...we are not to conform to nature... the world so openly," and so, the inmates are outfitted in unattractive and unfashionable brown stuff dresses that shroud their womanliness, while their hair, "the last sign of their femininity," is cut off (Brontë 77). Brocklehurst's desexualizing ideology fully succeeds with Jane who later rejects Rochester's "rich silk of the most brilliant amethyst" and "a superb pink satin," dresses Adele, the French child-coquette, in brown stuff frocks even though the child, like Jane herself, loves brilliant colors and expensive materials, and denies Grace Poole her own sexuality by highlighting the woman's flat figure through her Quakerish brown stuff dress.

Even Miss Temple, the governing "Angel" of Lowood and the role model for Helen and Jane, has a frozen, "clear, pale as marble" face and "brown eyes with a benignant light in their irids," which reflect her own compliance with prescribed cultural expectations (Brontë, 26). In her external appearance and her position at the apex of the racial scale, she is similar to St. John Rivers, who appears like a marble "statue instead of a man" and whose forehead, "colourless as ivory," betrays his own repressed passion. But Miss Temple is a pale shadow of the "bloodless" Helen Burns, the self-sacrificing "celestial" being who would make a perfect bride for St. John because of her all-consuming religious creed of self-denial and masochism. Interestingly, the strong resemblance between all three of these "white" characters lends further support to the Victorian notion of the interconnection between passions and racial supremacy, which is further validated by St. John's rejection of his sexuality, his inspiring imperialistic missionary exhortations, and his courageous death at the end, taming the heathens in India and teaching them the politics of bodily control.

Helen, the spiritual “Angel in the House,” submits completely to the hypocritical laws of Lowood, enduring her punishments patiently, and her “total subjugation before cultural laws” angers Jane (Bronfen 31), making her declare vehemently, “I was no Helen Burns” (Brontë 32). Jane’s savagely controlled passions affect Helen and she exhorts Jane to be peaceful because to be violent is to be like a heathen. Jane realizes the truth in Helen’s words after her public humiliation by Brocklehurst and resolves to “be most moderate: most correct” and preclude “deviation from the ardent, the excited, the eager” (Brontë 26). Interestingly, in a different context, Rochester also makes a similar comparison lending strength to Brontë’s racist and nationalistic ideology. He tells Jane:

Reason sits firm and holds the reins, and she will not let the feelings burst away and hurry her to wild chasms. The *passions may rage furiously, like true heathens, as they are*; and the desires may imagine all sorts of vain things; but judgement shall still have the last word in every argument, and the casting vote in every decision (Brontë 134).

While reason is “white,” passion is “heathen,” “savage,” and black, finding fullest expression in Rochester’s white Creole wife, Bertha Mason.

However, besides being a martyr, a Christ-like figure, Helen is also a living “flesh and blood” woman, and Brontë creates a situation of disease and death at Lowood to expose the negative consequence of restraining female passions. While the other girls die of typhus, a contagious infection, Helen, the quintessential and asexual “Angel,” dies from consumption which is linked in Victorian medical texts with a repression of sexuality (Shuttleworth 152). Thus, repression of passions leads to death, but expression leads to imprisonment and social ostracism, and Jane has to find a middle ground where she can “keep in good health, and not die.” Hence, she conforms to the sexually enervating decrees of Lowood that control her

features, muffle her voice, and restrict her limbs, and assumes the “willed nature of...female sexual ignorance” upheld by Victorian moralists like William Cobbett:

“It is not enough that a young woman abstain from everything approaching indecorum in her behaviour towards men...she ought to *appear* not to understand it, and to receive from it no more impression than if she was a post” (Reynolds 13, emphasis added).

Due to her apparent resocialization, Jane “*appeared* a disciplined and subdued character” even though she isn’t one, and even on Mrs. Reed’s deathbed, she asserts her freedom to feel and experience by crying out, “I am passionate *but not vindictive*” (Brontë 10, 142, emphasis added). However, through the narrative, Jane devotes much of her energies to avoiding the extreme dangers posed by passions and sexuality because the idea of passion as dangerous and alien is one that we receive most strongly, not from outside forces but from Jane’s fear of her *own* passions (Brontë 43). Interestingly, “all the teaching that had ever been instilled” in her resurfaces and reasserts itself when she comes face to face with Bertha Mason, the alien “Devil in the Flesh” (Brontë 169).

Bertha appears only once in corporeal form, but the horror and disgust generated by her appearance and behavior leave an indelible mark on readers and characters alike. Initially, the madwoman is imagined by Jane to be a “mocking demon” and a “carrion-seeking bird of prey,” and after she is publicly exposed to Jane’s horrified English eyes, Bertha is described as a “maniac,” a “clothed hyena” who “bellowed,” a “creature” big, “corpulent,” and virile, with “bloated features,” and a “grizzled mane” of hair like an animal’s (Brontë 168). According to post-colonial critics like Spivak, Perera, and David, Bertha is an insane white woman from the West Indies figuratively described as having the obscene propensities of a black woman. She is “robust framed, square-shouldered and

strong-limbed” like Mrs. Reed, and was once “tall, dark, and majestic...in the style of Blanche Ingram” (Brontë 181). However, now her former magnificence has degenerated into a “savage face,” “red eyes and the fearful blackened inflation of the lineaments,” “swelled and dark” lips, “black eyebrows wildly raised,” black hair, and sanguine coloring (Brontë 168). Along with her physical appearance, Bertha's loud hyena-like laughter, tremendous bodily strength, and predilection for destruction and drunkenness, conform to Victorian myths of the overtly sexual black slaves, and the working-class people (Brontë 168).

Though Brontë equivocates in her presentation of Bertha, never fully indicating whether she is inherently soulless or is made so by Rochester's treatment of her, Bertha, like Jane, is celebrated as a “paradigmatic figure” of female repression and desire by feminist critics like Gilbert and Gubar, Showalter, and Rich. On close examination, some similarities emerge between Jane's and Bertha's temperaments, behaviors, and life situations which are often ascribed to “an international sisterhood of suffering...of a wider female oppression” (Perera 82). Both women are ostracized from the “family group” because of their apparent insanity, bestiality, and “racial” inferiority--young Jane is a “*mad cat...bad animal*” while Bertha is a “*lunatic...a strange wild animal*” in two scenes of extreme violence in the text (Brontë 4, 168, emphasis added). As a child of ten, Jane attacks her cousin, John, and is locked up in the surreal red room; similarly, Bertha is imprisoned “in a room without a window” where a burning fire spread a reddish glow around it, and after an uneasy silence of ten years, she attacks her brother, Richard Mason (Brontë 174). While young Jane “received [John] in frantic sort” and caused him to bellow aloud, Bertha “grappled” with Rochester “amidst the fiercest yells and the most convulsive plunges” (Brontë 3, 174). Both are threatened or actually tied up after their extreme display of passion, but while Jane realizes

the ignominy of the situation and controls herself, Bertha is maddened past realization and is “bound to a chair” (Brontë 7, 174).

Jane and Bertha are also described in comparable—or nearly comparable—socially and racially charged terms that reveal their demotion in the eyes of the people who set the agenda: Mrs. Reed looked upon the young Jane as an “interloper not of her *race*,” “an uncongenial *alien*, and “a compound of *virulent passions, mean spirit, and dangerous duplicity*,” possessing “*artifice*” and “*bad propensities*” that needed to be uprooted (Brontë 8, 9, emphasis added). Similarly, Bertha marries Rochester because he “was of good *race*,” even though her “nature [is] wholly *alien*” to his; she possesses “a *violent and unreasonable temper*,” “a nature the *most gross, impure, depraved*,” “*cunning*” and *malignant...craft*” and “*giant propensities*” that could not be corrected (Brontë 181, emphasis added). Whenever the adult Jane feels claustrophobic in Thornfield and longs for a glowing “bright vision,” she relieves her tension, anger, and frustration by walking “backwards and forwards...along the corridor of the third storey” (Brontë 63). Similarly, Jane’s first view of Bertha is of “a figure [that] ran backwards and forwards” and who attacks her prison wardens (or colonizers), Rochester and Mason, probably to express her rage (Brontë 174). Jane mirrors Bertha’s animal posture of groveling “on all fours...like some strange wild animal” when she flees from Thornfield. “Crawling forward on my hands and knees” on the moors, Jane is reduced to a social condition less than that of a dog. Finally, and ironically, Jane calls Bertha a “foul German spectre, a Vampyr,” and later, she herself is called a “a mere spectre” when she faints at the doorstep of Marsh End; the only difference is that while Jane uses folklore descriptions of the vampire, St. John refers to traditional German descriptions (Brontë 152, 200). However, given the apparent kinship between Jane and Bertha, why do Jane’s

tantrums at the beginning of the novel elicit sympathy for her, while Bertha's appearance generates a "shudder...[an] expression of disgust, horror, hatred, warped...almost to distortion" (Brontë 125)? Why does Brontë paint Bertha Mason in such ambivalent light, an ambivalence that is reproduced in the contradictory critical responses to this figure? How does one explain her racial "Otherness" and the cultural significance of her representation?

One way to explain this contradiction would be to posit that Jane distinguishes herself from Bertha and other unpleasant women through *external manifestations of the passions* making them *appear* racially inferior. However, what makes Bertha more horrifying than Mrs. Reed, Blanche Ingram, and Lady Ingram is that despite her *white* West Indian French Creole descent, she *behaves* like a maddened and demonic West Indian *black* woman with an inordinate sexual appetite, "confined for her own good" by a master who later appropriates her wealth and her body; the other women have not lowered themselves to Bertha's level as yet, but the possibility remains. Bertha's "blackened" facial features with rolling, red eyes that Brontë associated with drunk Africans since her childhood, and her nocturnal activities, reminiscent of uprisings in the British West Indies ("What mystery, that broke out, now in fire and now in blood, at the deadliest hours of the night") approximate to those of slaves. Thus, she is symbolic of "black" and "low class" sexuality and depravity that must be repressed in white, middle-class women if they have to administer the British domestic home, morally transform the colonial wilderness, and lead the Empire to rational stability.

This is contrary to feminist critics' belief that Bertha Mason is a "paradigmatic figure" of sexual repression and rebellion. Instead, evident now is the fact that Bertha's "portrayal through the use of traditional figures of female deviance like a 'Vampyr,' 'a demon,' 'a hag,' 'an Indian Messalina,' and 'a witch' expresses a cultural, [racial], as well as

a religious, attitude toward female passion and overt sexuality as a dangerous force that must be punished and confined”; this sexuality is now transfigured into black and alien. This is clearly supported by the backbone of Protestant literary culture (the Bible, Shakespeare, Bunyan, Milton) that Brontë possessed with its insistence that sex outside marriage was wicked and degrading—a sentiment voiced by repressed and celibate male clergy (1978, 123). In a letter to W.S. Williams, Brontë herself comments on Bertha’s immoral, overt, and depraved sexuality, and the language of her reference is unsympathetic,

"I agree...that the character is shocking, but I know that it is but too natural. There is a phase of insanity which may be called moral madness, in which all that is good or human seems to disappear from the mind, and a fiend-nature replaces it. ...all seem demonised. It is true that profound pity ought to be the only sentiment elicited...I have erred in making horror too predominant. Mrs. Rochester, indeed, lived a sinful life before she was insane, but sin is itself a species of insanity (Brontë, 4 January 1848, *Letters*, Shorter, 269).

Brontë makes Bertha's sexuality more apparent and threatening through three literary allusions in the text that have been ignored or glossed over by feminist critics.

Early in the text, Jane compares Rochester with Samson and Hercules which are ironical analogies for a man who is physically, emotionally, and sexually destroyed by his wife. According to the Book of Judges, Samson is ruled by passion due to which he married Delilah who attenuated his strength by cutting off his locks, but he is granted redemption after he destroys the Philistine temple. Though feminist critics have compared Jane’s cutting of Rochester’s Nebuchadnezzar-like locks to those of Samsons’s by Delilah, the source from which Brontë takes this episode, Milton’s *Samson Agonistes*, clearly points to Bertha as Delilah’s analogue. The Chorus explains how Samson [like Rochester] has been prompted

To seek in marriage that fallacious Bride,
Unclean, unchaste (*Samson Agonistes* II, 320-321).

When Delilah arrives, Samson screams, “Out, out, hyaena,” and this corresponds with Rochester's description of Bertha as “intemperate, unchaste,” and Jane's comparison of Bertha's laugh to that of a “hyaena” (Brontë 182). Thus, Bertha, like Delilah, is the alien “fallacious Bride” who threatens Rochester and, on a grander scale, England and the British Empire through her inexhaustible, uncontrollable, and potentially draining sexuality.

Jane's reference to Hercules is also ironic because of the manner of his death, and because of the presence of centaurs in the narrative, who are hideously negative images of wild, drunken, and amorous female sexuality and passion. The poisonous blood of Centaur Nessus kills Hercules when he tries to leave Deianeira for Iole in the same manner as the half-crazed “animal” Bertha tries to kill Rochester when he attempts to marry Jane. The revulsion from excessive female sexuality is also articulated through the final literary allusion, Swift's travelogue of alien lands, *Gulliver's Travels*, which is evoked in two violently passionate scenes in the text. Though Gulliver seems “a most desolate wanderer in most dread and dangerous regions” to Jane after the red room incident, while Lilliput, Brobdingnag, and the Yahoos are shadowy places and un-British beings on the globe, they assume a concrete reality in Bertha who possesses a Lilliputian “pigmy intellect,” Brobdingnanian “giant propensities,” and a Yahooan sexual appetite that is grossly “intemperate and unchaste” (Brontë 182). To Jane's biased eyes, Gulliver transforms into the “worldly, dissipated, restless” Rochester, who comes home to England to be rejuvenated by her “fresh, healthy,” “good and bright” bourgeois British qualities that are in absolute contrast to those “of Lewdness, Coquetry, Censure, and Scandal placed by instinct” (Swift, Part IV: 8) in the black Yahooan Bertha who has temporarily usurped the domestic space of the household angel (Brontë 129).

As an outcast in English upper-class culture, her class position overwritten by her “racial” appearance and behavior, Bertha represents a menacing conjunction between high moral breeding and horrifying alien sexuality. Her home in the “bottomless pit of Jamaica” anesthetizes the supposedly “ignorant, raw, and inexperienced” Rochester into gratification of his sensual desires and passions, but he soon finds Bertha’s native tropical sexuality “odious.” On a “fiery West Indian night,” when “the air was like sulphur-streams,” the sea “rumbled dull like an earthquake,” the mosquitoes “hummed sullenly,” and the moon was “broad and red, like a hot cannon ball,” Rochester, his ears “filled with the curses the maniac still shrieked out,” decides to shoot himself. However, he is saved miraculously from self-destruction by the “fresh wind from Europe” with its “glorious liberty” and “pure” air, and he decides to “go home to God” and England with his “filthy burden” “from an invaded colony who becomes a counterinvasive figure transported to the metropolitan center of empire” (David 108). Thus, the spiritually emaciating colonies with their blood, fire, and threatening sexuality become the symbolic landscape of horror, and are the antithesis to the goodness of the British domestic home. Bertha is the exotic yet threatening “other” who, refusing to recognize the barriers of race, class, or geographical space, has staked her own territorial claim in the “healthy heart of England” (Brontë 203).

However, Rochester does not “go home to God” but instead embarks on a bigamous search for “the antipodes of the Creole,” which he ultimately finds in Jane; he acknowledges the glaring difference between the native demon and the English angel in an unflattering comparison, placing special emphasis on their physical appearance: “That is my wife,...and this is what I wished to have...this young girl, who stands so grave and quiet at the mouth of hell, looking collectedly at the gambols of a demon ...Compare those *clear eyes* with the *red*

balls yonder—this face with that mask—this form with that bulk" (Brontë 174).⁸ Bertha's dress is unfashionable and far removed from the self-grooming that Jane, despite her meager wardrobe, is scrupulous to observe. The "demon" also has her "grizzled mane" down, which represents an improper sensuality, while Jane is particular that "no speck of the dirt, no trace of the disorder I so hated, and which seemed so to degrade me" soils her (Brontë 202). Thus, Rochester's implications are clear: natural against unnatural, "defined form set against the shapelessness of sheer excess, open transparency against the practices of concealment," rational control against violent passion, sanity against insanity, asexuality against overt sexuality, British against French Creole, England and Thornfield against the West Indies and India, British women against native women, and finally, and most importantly, white against black (Shuttleworth 154). Jane has now become more "natural" and recrossed the boundaries of social behavior that she had once transgressed at Gateshead.

Rochester admits of Bertha, "I was not sure of the existence of one virtue in her nature: I had marked neither modesty, nor benevolence, nor candour, nor refinement in her mind or manners," but he married her because "[his] senses were excited" (Brontë 181). However, given his eagerness to tell Jane all the details of his previous "bitter and base associations," "heartless, sensual pleasures," and multiple mistresses, he is curiously evasive and silent in his account of Bertha's early deeds. By giving two basic reasons for Bertha's insanity--her inheritance of the disease from her mother, "the Creole," who was "both a mad woman and a drunkard" and Bertha's own "excesses" which "prematurely developed the

⁸ Nineteenth century phrenologists asserted that concealment and deception were the very attributes that the insane seemed to lack, while the capacity for concealment was a fundamental pre-condition for a state of sanity and civilized humanity. So Bertha was doing what was "natural" for her, and therein lies another contradiction in *Jane Eyre*.

germs of insanity”—Rochester associates her with two of the most common stereotypes associated with blacks and working-class people in the nineteenth century—excessive drunkenness and madness (Brontë 134). This is further complicated by Bertha as a sinister product of an interracial union. Finally, she is plagued by excessive bodily passion and sexual heat associated with the menstrual flow—maybe Bertha might have displayed too avid a sexual appetite towards Rochester himself, or maybe her sexual depravity manifested itself in her behavior towards other men (Showalter 145). Thus, Rochester's reactions are based on a social reality: "the nineteenth-century loose woman might have passion and sexual feelings, but the nineteenth-century wife did not and *must not*" (Rich 113).

Rochester recognizes too late that Bertha's sensuality, exciting before their marriage, is afterwards immoral, and this, coupled with an image of hideous physical strength and improper household management, results in the breakdown of the treasured family institution. His subsequent liaisons too are ultimately unsatisfactory because they are based on sexual gratification; none of the women offer the stability and morality necessary for true happiness. Consequently, Rochester "wants to find in Jane the very opposite of that aggressive sexuality, that uncontrollable passionate will that has its form in Bertha," and so he confines her appearance and thoughts to worlds that exclude human sexuality—worlds of fantasy and religion, inanimate objects, and children (Moglen 73). Jane is his "pale little elf...[his] little angel...with a sylph's foot...a sprite... a changeling... [his] mustard seed." Later, he calls her "a provoking puppet..."[his] pet lamb...Rochester's girl-bride...a little sunny-faced girl with...dimpled cheeks and rosy lips," "this one little English girl, childish and slender...shy...quaintly dressed...absolutely unused to society" who is "an inexhaustible source of pure refreshment" to him, and who will restore him to a "peace of mind...a memory

without blot or contamination” (Brontë 145-174). Rochester wants Jane to become his angel who “in time, “will *learn* to be more *natural*,” to which Jane protests vehemently, “I am no angel”--just as she had protested many years ago, “I was no Helen Burns” (Brontë 32, 79-80, 154). For Rochester, to be “natural” is to be expressive of one’s passions and sexuality (to which Jane gradually succumbs), to indulge in sexually charged conversations (which he and Jane often do), and to discuss one’s sexual adventures (which Rochester does freely). However, if Jane has to fit the angel role, then she has to literally destroy her smoldering sexuality and passions, and Brontë will have to destroy Bertha Mason, collapsing Jane’s connection with Bertha into one of confrontation rather than affiliation.

Consequently, one also wonders why the normally controlled and grave Jane “look[s] almost sick” when Rochester narrates the story of his marriage with Bertha to her (Brontë 172). Could we hypothesize that Jane recognizes Bertha Mason’s excessive passion and destructive impulses of hatred and vengeance as a “monstrous equivalent” to her own “deep ire and desperate revolt” (Brontë)? Is Jane reminded of Cobbett’s words that “chastity, perfect modesty, in word, deed, and even thought, is so essential, that without it, no female is fit to be a wife”--advice that she has disregarded ever since she met Rochester (Reynolds 13). Does it suggest the fragility of the social demarcations that separate animal from human, black from white, sexual from asexual, and Bertha from Jane? Could we extrapolate that Jane’s latent, but simmering, “defiance of [sexual] cultural laws” can lead to a fate and an appearance as disgusting and horrifying as Bertha Mason’s? If left uncontrolled, can Jane coalesce into Bertha and become racially and socially inferior? Does Brontë imply that the woman who looks after the family hearth should be socially perceived as “white” and asexual and possess fine British middle-class qualities? Finally, can we say that through her use of

racial metaphors, Brontë suggests that the "crime incarnate" in the white Bertha was excessive sexuality that has now debased her to the level of black savage slaves, working-class people, grotesque vampires, and the insane--anathematized groups that haunted the Victorian imagination?

Feminist critics have lauded the healthy ground that Jane creates for herself at the end of the novel--the fine balance between body and spirit, between Bertha and Helen—but close readings of *Jane Eyre* prove to the contrary. Ironically, though the denial of one's sexuality, repression of one's passions, and submission to the prevalent authority means surrender to a hypocritical social order, the novel uneasily acknowledges this, and it seems to uphold those who repress rather than those who express. Jane's vehement declaration, "I was no Helen Burns," and her rejection of the "doctrine[s] of endurance," "forbearance," and self-abnegation exemplified by the very English and racially chauvinistic Helen, Brocklehurst, and St. John, are contradicted when she traces a wavering path to Helen's grave fifteen years later and replaces the unmarked grassy mound of Helen's grave with a "grey marble tablet" bearing Helen's name and the word "Resurgam"--"I shall rise again." Jane also ends her own narrative by paying due homage to St. John Rivers (Brontë 32). Now "the perfect representation of woman as Christ figure," she uses the memory of both martyrs to understand subsequent deaths, notably that of Mrs. Reed, and in a very Helen Burns-like manner, addresses Mrs. Reed through Christ's language of forgiveness: "I ought to forgive you, for you knew not what you did" (Brontë 10). When the "topos of martyrdom serves as a model for the narrative, then the death of the innocent, virtuous woman [and man, in St. John's case]... appears inculpatory as well as edifying and soothing to the spectators, who undertake a pilgrimage to the dying body" (Bronfen 197).

Jane's enclosure in the red room and her vicarious experience in the alien and colonial attic at Thornfield decide for her which aspect of womanhood will allow her to "be [socially] healthy and not die," and she grows from passion of the body to passion of the soul, from Bertha to Helen, and from the "fiend" to Christ. This is further strengthened by her acceptance of Brocklehurst's mission of desexualization, making her the perfect epitome of white British womanhood who is rewarded for her rejection of alien and "other" passions with acceptance into England and the British hearth. By the end of her story, Jane has become Rochester's "fairy," "a mediator and intercessor for men's soiled and tainted souls," a governess of the empire, and the anti-woman to the French/Creole coquette; Jane will "rehumanize" the repentant Rochester and protect the English male from falling into lascivious French/"other" ways through her morally superior British culture of female sacrifice and discipline (Dijkstra 33). Read in another way, "*Jane Eyre* clears a space for a new female subjectivity, the domestic individual, but it does so by grounding 'woman's mission' in the moral and racial superiority of the colonialist as civilizer" (Sharpe 28).

Thus, the figurative use of race, class, and physiognomic detail in *Jane Eyre* reveals a hostile sense of racial supremacy, nationalistic pride, and feminist orientalism. The novel begins with John Reed, with his "dark skin," "thick lips," and brutal passions, and concludes with St. John Rivers' "Greek face, very pure in outline...colourless as ivory...quite an Athenian mouth and chin," burning with passion for God (Brontë 210). It inches towards a violent but recuperative regulation to bring order to chaos and a rejection of "alien," savage, working-class sexuality through the amputation of the "other" devil in the flesh. Rochester tells John Mason that he "need not think of her [Bertha] at all" because in the world of *Jane Eyre*, disturbing colonial presences are maintained in the social order only as a "dead and

buried” bodies, only to be finally expelled (Brontë 126). However, like Helen and St. John Rivers, Bertha is not allowed to be consumed metaphorically by purifying fire; instead, she chars as an alien and repugnant “suttee” in fires that figuratively consume her; metaphorically Bertha burns in hell, “a pit full of fire,” and literally she smashes down on the pavements of Thornfield, “dead as the stones on which her brains and blood were scattered” (Brontë 254). Though Donaldson asserts that “the suicide of a rebellious woman serves as a powerful condemnation—and potential transformation—of that system,” it is contradicted in *Jane Eyre* through the perpetuation of the repressive social system (213). Each woman is rewarded for her character and deeds, and an acceptable resolution and closure are achieved by removing the black “other” “Devil” from the family hearth, leaving room for the white, loving and nurturing “Angel.” Hence, instead of subverting the existing patriarchal *bourgeois* representation of women, *Jane Eyre* ends with a reaffirmation of the passive and asexual “Angel in the House”—through “pale” Helen Burns’ triumphant “Resurgam” and the “dark” “Indian Messalina,” Bertha Mason’s grotesque “suttee.”

CHAPTER 3 THE “WIFELY” VOCATION OF “AN INDEPENDENT WOMAN”

I often wish to say something about the ‘condition of women’ question, but it is one respecting which so much ‘cant’ has been talked, that one feels a sort of repugnance to approach it. It is true enough that the present market for female labour is quite overstocked, but where or how could another be opened? Many say that the professions now filled only by men should be open to women also; but are not there present occupants and candidates more than numerous enough to answer every demand?...When a woman has a little family to rear and educate...her hands are full, her vocation is evident (Brontë to W. S. Williams, 20 April 1848, from *Letters*, Shorter, 216).

Jane “saw nothing about fairies...[or] genii” in *Rasselas*; it “looked dull” to her “trifling tastes” when compared to her favorite book, *The Arabian Tales*, which was lavishly sprinkled with harems, sultans and slaves, romance, and adventure (Brontë 28). However, Samuel Johnson’s *Rasselas* also has a harem where:

the diversions of the women...were only childish play, by which the mind accustomed to stronger operations could not be kept busy.... They had no ideas but of the few things that were within their view, and had hardly names for anything but their clothes and their food” (57).

According to Brontë’s subtle implications, the harem inmate’s empty and wearisome lives, resulting from the limitations of their existence, parallel those led by upper- and middle-class Western women, represented by Georgiana Reed in *Jane Eyre*.¹ Georgiana’s frivolous mindlessness, “languishing blue eyes,” “feeble minded wailings and selfish lamentations” indicate the boredom and triviality of her existence and her lack of intellectual capabilities or occupation (Brontë 142). As a child, she prefers domestic interests like “dressing her hair,” “interweaving her curls with artificial flowers and faded feathers,” and playing with “tiny

¹ Jane meets Helen at Lowood when the latter is reading *Rasselas*, an expose of the oppressiveness of the harem and a defense of women’s rights to intellectual development.

chairs and mirrors, fairy plates and cups” instead of reading books (Brontë 16). Later, Georgiana’s adult existence is centered on admiration, courtship, flattery, “music, dancing and society” (Brontë 139). Eliza reacts to Georgiana’s indolence and “complaints” by calling her “a vain and absurd *animal*” who makes “no use of life” and her reasoning capacities, and urges Georgiana “to devise a system which will make you *independent of all efforts, and all wills, but your own*...you have to live as *an independent being ought to live*” (Brontë 139, emphasis added).²

Ironically, even though these words emanate from the mouth of a negatively portrayed character in the novel, they ring a bell of truth because, according to feminist critics, the assertion of a woman’s right to work, intellectual freedom, and economic independence lies at the heart of *Jane Eyre*. Brontë’s use of the popular orphan motif is symbolic because, as a condition, it operates to highlight dependency (which, to the Victorian mind, connoted femaleness), and also makes it imperative and necessary for the orphan to become independent; for her, action is not only possible, it is positively necessary (Reynolds 28). In addition, because of her lack of patriarchal ties, an orphan who is shown making her own decisions, negotiating the world, and exploring paths traditionally barred to middle-class girls, is less likely to meet resistance or hostility, making her more plausibly a voice of

² Georgiana is not fettered within a traditional patriarchal family since she does not have a father, brothers, or a husband to suppress her desires and aspirations. Yet, she is the only woman in the novel who is constantly “craving, whining, idling.” Ironically, words of independence come from Eliza who, though painted in an unmerciful light by Jane as “cold, impassive, and assiduously industrious,” is the only woman in *Jane Eyre* who is economically independent through her own efforts. Even though she sounds like St. John Rivers in her extreme religiosity and self-denial, her words sound more empowering than Jane’s—she wants to be free from oppression, free from dependency on others through self-help and self-improvement. Interestingly, Eliza’s words to Georgiana are echoed by St. John’s words to Jane, “[Y]ou give it up very gleefully....I don’t quite understand your light-heartedness, because I cannot tell what employment you propose to yourself as a substitute for the one you are relinquishing. What aim, what purpose, what ambition in life have you now? (Brontë 232).

feminism. Perceived in this light, Jane's orphan status and her socioeconomic hardships make her fiercely independent; she wants money of her own, she wants work and travel for her imagination and intellect, and most importantly, she wants to be herself. Hence, Richard Chase calls *Jane Eyre* “a feminist tract, an argument for the social betterment of governesses and equal rights for women” (31), while Newton asserts that it is a tale that celebrates the ethics of education, hard work, and autonomy through an eschewal of high-class idleness and an emulation of the *bourgeois* ethics of self-help and education. Thus, it is Brontë’s creation of a female character who is as “intellectually vigorous, as morally subtle and as emotionally alive as any man in fiction that makes *Jane Eyre* so remarkable” (Hallett xx).

This *bildungsroman* of autonomy begins with Jane's realization of her humiliating dependence on others, and her consequent rejection of Mrs. Reed’s “paternalist” benefaction because to have “a benefactress [like Mrs. Reed] is a disagreeable thing” (Brontë 18). Bessie’s enumeration of various accomplishments attained by her previous wards impresses Jane immensely, and she elects to go to school instead of living with her poor working-class relatives. Her rejection of her working-class relatives, besides being a reflection of her own class-consciousness, is also fuelled by her desire for upward mobility. Jane does not want “to learn to speak like them [the working-class people], to adopt their manners, to be uneducated, to grow up like one of the poor women I saw sometimes nursing their children or washing their clothes at the cottage doors of Gateshead” (Brontë 13). Instead, “the beautiful paintings of landscapes and flowers executed” by Bessie’s previous wards, “the songs they could sing and pieces they could play...purses they could net...French books they could translate” seem more attractive and move Jane to admiration and emulation (Brontë 13). Interestingly,

women use these accomplishments for a dual purpose—to earn a living as a governess or a schoolteacher and to win a husband--and Jane does both during the course of the novel.

At Lowood, the isolation and limited occupational mobility of socially under-privileged women are symbolically revealed through the garden, a wide enclosure, “surrounded with...high and spike-guarded...walls to exclude every glimpse of prospect” and to prohibit freedom of movement of the inmates (Brontë 27). In this physically claustrophobic and spiritually stultifying “prison-ground,” Jane bleakly faces the meager prospects of life and employment available to her (Brontë 49). As a woman from a “respectable” background who wished to retain her social position, she has only three underpaid and overcrowded vocations available to her: a governess (or a schoolteacher), a paid companion, or a seamstress.³ Other unspoken options include being a prostitute, “a pining outcast amongst strangers,” or getting married and joining the “wifely vocation,” but while the former profession is socially unacceptable to Jane, she is socially unacceptable for the other alternative because of her paucity of social ties, wealth, and beauty (Brontë 259).⁴

Within these constraining circumstances, Jane wishes for an autonomous outlet for her talents, education, and energies. She yearns to move beyond the limitations of her status and place and burst through the confining service at Lowood. She hungers “to go where there was life and movement,” to “be up and out in the active world of towns and the larger and

³ An issue of the *Quarterly Review* described the governess as “a being who is our equal in birth, manners, and education, but our inferior in worldly wealth” (Vicinus 254). This was a kindly way of depicting her, since the typical governess was the spinster daughter of a poor clergyman, of little education, and of means so slender that she would work for a pittance. Jane’s father was a clergyman who died months after she was born, while Diana and Mary Rivers took “places as governesses...as he [their father] was not rich enough to give them fortunes” (Brontë 204).

⁴ However, Jane's interaction with Miss Temple, who stands “in the stead of mother, governess, and latterly, companion,” has endowed the young orphan with symbolic capital like refinement, personal care, and restraint that “Angels” need to have in order to gain acceptance into a man’s heart and the household hearth (Brontë 48).

more exciting world out there," to reach "regions full of life" she had read about in books, to gain "practical experience," and to have "acquaintance with variety of character" (Brontë 51, 63-64). Looking out into the wide horizon, Jane tells us:

"I desired liberty; for liberty I gasped; for liberty I uttered a prayer; it seemed scattered on the wind then faintly blowing. I abandoned it and framed a humbler supplication. For change stimulus. That petition, too, seemed swept off into vague space. "Then," I cried, half desperate, "grant me at least a new servitude!" (Brontë 50).

Jane's passionate "prayer" for "liberty" from school teaching is unfulfilled because as a poor and unattached middle-class woman she has no family or husband to support her, while her humble "supplication" for "change," for "stimulus" is swept off due to the unalterable and stagnant tedium of the profession. However, her desperate bid for a "new servitude" is accepted, and Jane joins the "overstocked" class of governesses, "that anathematized race," when she goes to Thornfield to teach Rochester's ward, Adele Varens (Brontë 104).

But can an independent and adventurous woman like Jane, longing for upward social mobility and a limitless "power of vision," be satisfied with a declassed, low-paying, and mentally stagnating governessing position?⁵ Can it satiate her urge to be free and to travel the world like her favorite character, Gulliver, and fulfill her need for intellectual, financial, and romantic stimulation? At Thornfield, Jane finds her vocation tedious and her "existence all [too] passive" because she does not possess "an idolatrous devotion" for children, and teaching Adele involves slipping over Jane's own "faculties the viewless fetters of a uniform and too still existence" (Brontë 63, 68).

⁵ Lady Eastlake made an apt assessment of a governess' situation: "the real discomfort of a governess's position in a private family arises from that fact that it is undefined. She is not a relation, not a guest, not a mistress, not a servant—but something made up of all. No one knows exactly how to treat her" (Poovey 191).

Examining her entrapped condition, and taking independence, autonomy and action in the real world as her fundamental theme, Jane delivers a powerful feminist manifesto on the battlements of Thornfield in which she cries out against the enslavement of women at home and the “absolute stagnation” they suffer from. She asserts that women “need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do,” and that they should be allowed to participate in the given socioeconomic and political order in a more definitive manner (Brontë 64). “[I]t is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures” to confine women to mundane domestic activities like “making puddings and knitting stockings...playing on the piano and embroidering bags,” because it destroys their individuality and dulls their mental faculties, resulting in an “animal”-like existence (like Georgiana Reed’s). Unnatural restrictions cause anguish and frustrations, and the resultant “thwarted energy and suppressed happiness lead to incessant day-dreaming, the narcotic addiction of women” (Small 78). Jane asserts defiantly that women “must have action; and they will make it if they cannot find it.... It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex” (Brontë 64). Brontë thus presents an important theme in *Jane Eyre*—a defense of women’s rights to intellectual and economic development and independence through the *bourgeois* ethic of self-help, self-improvement and education.

It is coincidental that this “manifesto” occurs immediately before Rochester’s emergence on the scene, following which Jane’s argument for work and independence is never heard again. Then, reentering the threshold of Thornfield will no longer be like returning to stagnation for “[Thornfield now]...had a master: for my part, I liked it better....

So happy, so gratified did I become with this new interest added to life, that I *ceased to pine after kindred*" (Brontë 69, 86). Ironically, Jane never mentions her (need for) "kindred" in the whole novel except in her conversation with Mr. Lloyd at Gateshead when she speculates that they might be a "beggarly set," and since she "should not like to go a-begging," she does not want to stay with them (Brontë 13). This contradiction is slightly disconcerting, and a closer examination of the text reveals further inconsistencies in Jane's thoughts, actions, and conversations that make her narrative open to speculation, and her declaration for independence vacuous.

When Rochester questions Jane about her reading habits, she severely downplays them and says, "Only such books as came in my way; and they have not been numerous or very learned" (Brontë 72). However, the "serious or substantial" Goldsmith's *History of Rome* and Bewick's *History of British Birds* can hardly be called "frivolous and childish" reading (Brontë 28). Neither can Jane's correlation between John Reed's tyrannies and Roman slavery be casually dismissed as residuals of an "undeveloped understanding and imperfect feeling" since it is based on deep thought and intensive reading (Brontë 3, 28). Later, while expressing her insecurity about Rochester's transient passion, Jane says, "I suppose your love will effervesce in six months, or less. I have observed *in books written by men*, that period assigned as the farthest to which a husband's ardour extends" (Brontë 154, emphasis added). For a person whose reading habits are centered on books that "come in her way," and who vehemently denounces "the monotonous theme...the catastrophe—marriage" when questioned by Rochester ("I don't care about it: it is nothing to me"), Jane has

examined an immense amount of literature on men and matrimony (Brontë 117). One wonders: with what reason or intent?

Though Jane “could not then distinctly say it to herself,” she has “a reason, and a *logical, natural reason*” to read books on connubial matters and to regret her plain looks—she wants to be attractive to men, both physically and through her perceived character, and to achieve “liberty” from work through matrimony (Brontë 57). So, why the reversal in ideas, why the contradiction in language and thought process? One possible explanation for Jane’s “divided consciousness” could be that since women were “motherless children in patriarchal society,” as socially and economically dependent on men as children are on women, they can succeed in patriarchy only by “pleasing and attaching themselves to powerful or economically viable men” (Rich 143). In Jane’s own limited experience, this has been accomplished by Miss Temple, who stood Jane “in the stead of mother, governess, and latterly, companion,” and who leaves Lowood after marrying a clergyman (Brontë 48).

Yet another contradiction in the text arises when Jane, despite knowing that Rochester is interested in an “intellectual” partner, keeps her mental flame low in front of him, and their conversations lack any profound intelligent discussions and queries. Instead, interactions are one-sided and centered around Rochester ordering Jane to play the piano, perusing and commenting on her paintings, indulging in sexually charged conversations, and discussing unashamedly his sexual adventures with his many mistresses. Jane’s willed sexual ignorance and silence seem to be in keeping with the prevalent nineteenth-century belief that an open show of sexual knowledge and academic learning among women could render them unmarriageable, and that no man wished his wife or companion to be his intellectual equal

(Renton 29). This is further supported by Swift, another underlying source in *Jane Eyre*, who, in one of his tracts, advised young women about the dangers of losing “credit” through becoming vocal and conceited about their knowledge (Renton 31). Hence, we can posit that Jane consciously tries to attract Rochester so that she can “avoid the awful passage of further suffering” laid out before her if she remains single in the world (Brontë 175-176).

Though Jane does not openly defy Rochester, she does not meekly obey him, and the tactic most commonly employed by her to attract him is the “conversion of submissive conventionalism itself from a mode of self-preservation to a mode of conscious or unconscious self-advancement” (Politi 58). Jane discerns perceptively that “a lamb-like submission and turtle-dove sensibility, while fostering his despotism more,” would tire him, and during the initial part of their relationship, she combines “flashes of flirtatious self-assertion with her habitual meek passivity” that conceals “the ardent, the excited, the eager” (Brontë 162). Jane will not captivate Rochester if she is dull; after all, one of his former mistresses, Clara, though “honest and quiet,” was “heavy, mindless, and unimpressible” (Brontë 185). Neither will she attract him if she is “unprincipled and violent” like Giacinta, sexually depraved like Celine, or proud like Blanche (Brontë 185). Jane must reveal enough “fire-spirit” beneath her “plain, Quakerish” demeanor to provoke him, which, if carried too far, would seriously undermine her credibility as a character (Brontë 192). Therefore, employing immense tactfulness, Jane uses her self-sufficient independence of Rochester as a way of keeping him tied to her, and so, paradoxically, of staying tied to him (Politi 59). The sexually experienced Rochester perceives Jane’s disguised intentions, and teasing her about her “wild, sly, provoking smiles” says, “Jane, you please me, and you master me—you seem

to submit, and I like the sense of pliancy you impart; and while I am twining the soft, silken skein round my finger, it sends a thrill up my arm to my heart. I am influenced—conquered” (Brontë 154). One wonders where the eighteen-year-old, socially and sexually inexperienced Jane learnt the subtle nuances of this sophisticated love game and for what reason?

Consequently, Jane’s readiness to relinquish her autonomy, individuality, and independence for marriage with Rochester contradicts hers’, and in effect Brontë’s, feminist manifesto that was presented on the battlements. It also subverts a vital aspect of the orphan-convention that was appropriated by Brontë—the orphan’s freedom to work in paths and occupations traditionally barred to middle-class women living under normal patriarchal familial conditions (Reynolds 29). Jane’s aspirations for freedom and economic independence are now transformed into a “wifely vocation” more suitable and socially acceptable for a woman. She relinquishes her desire for “liberty,” “a bright vision,” and explorations of the great world to be of useful service to Rochester (“Can I help you, sir?—I’d give my life to serve you”), and a “new sphere” of domestic experiences reserved only for the “Angel” (Brontë 120). Jane is not “apprehensive” of marriage because it offers her “brighter hopes and keener enjoyments,” it offers her a vast material change from the “stuff gown” which she “thought” she would wear “for the last time” (Brontë 92, 166, 175). Thus, *Jane Eyre* traces the competing and contradictory need for marriage and autonomy in Jane’s quest to be independent, to love and be loved, to be of service to others and to be free; therein lies a contradiction in this narrative that feminist critics have not dealt with.

Having discarded her occupation, her independence, and her autonomy for Rochester, Jane faces him as a “penniless, dependent woman who could bring her husband neither

fortune, beauty, nor connections,” and now the socioeconomic inequality between them as man and woman comes out powerfully (Brontë 167). Throughout the courtship, she is disturbed by her increasing passion for Rochester, of whom she has “made an idol,” and by the arrogant and masterful style of his lovemaking (Brontë 163). Though he offers Jane romance, security, and the means to fulfill her desires and aspirations to travel, Rochester also controls her, and Jane feels that she has “half-lost the sense of power over him...[and] mechanically obey[s] him, without further remonstrations” (Brontë 157). In a striking Orientalist comparison, Jane calls Rochester a sultan and herself a “slave, his gold and gems had enriched” (Brontë 159), and realizes that as his dependent wife, she would be little better than a mistress, a kept woman, without any independent social status. In time, she will become the tiresome successor of Celine, Giacinta, Clara, and Bertha of whom Rochester voluntarily acknowledges, “[H]iring a mistress is the next worst thing to buying a slave: both are often by nature, and always by position, inferior: and to live familiarly with inferiors is degrading” (Brontë 184).

At this stage of her relationship, and with all these financial insecurities shrouding her, Jane wants to be rich and economically independent, but now she does not want to earn independence for her own empowerment and through her hard work. She wants wealth because she “never can bear being dressed like a doll by Mr. Rochester,...if I had but a prospect of one day bringing Mr. Rochester an accession of fortune, I could better endure to be kept by him now” (Brontë 159).⁶ It is not Rochester’s masculine tyranny and chauvinism

⁶ At this crucial turning point in the novel Jane puts forward an important question: can spiritual equality be realized in marriage without social equality? The novel seems to argue that spiritual equality can be realized only under the conditions of social and economic equality.

that nettles her; it is his economic rank of the “giver and protector” that incenses her, and Jane wishes a fortune not for her own economic empowerment and self-fulfillment, but to restrain Rochester’s proud and supercilious attitude towards her. Ironically, Jane now wants to be financially independent through means that she had earlier denounced—paternalistic inheritance--and not through the bourgeois process of education and hard work. But she is saved from further ignominy by Bertha's timely revelation, and in light of Jane’s contradictions through the course of the narrative, it is easier to explain Rochester’s bitterly sad protest, “It was only my station, and the rank of my wife, that you valued” when she decides to leave him after Bertha’s public exposure (Brontë 180).

Even at Morton, Jane’s assertion, “I will be a dressmaker; I will be a plain-workwoman; I will be a servant, a nurse-girl, if I can be no better,” gives way to a deep sense of class-infiltrated degradation and dismay at the “monotonous labor wholly void of stimulus” and “the ignorance, the poverty, the coarseness” of the students that she has to teach (Brontë 208, 212, 214). Ironically, this is despite the fact that Jane’s ultimate hope in life is “to set up a school some day in a little house rented by me” (Brontë 117). Later, by declining St. John's offer to accompany him to India, Jane rejects an exciting and challenging “life amidst its perils” because she feels that “[I]f I go to India, I go to premature death.... God did not give me my life to throw away” (Brontë 49, 241). Once she receives her colonial inheritance, she gives up teaching for “commonplace home pleasures,” and now wants to perform the same activities that she had denounced earlier on the battlements of Thornfield.

My first aim will be to clean down Moor House from chamber to cellar...my next to rub it with bees-wax, oil, and an indefinite number of cloths, till it glitters again; my third to arrange every chair, table, bed, carpet, with mathematical precision; afterwards...two days...will be devoted to such a beating of eggs, sorting of currants, grating of spices, compounding of Christmas cakes, chopping up of materials for mince-pies, and solemnising of other culinary rites (Brontë 232).

But this time there are no feminist commentaries or manifestos: the voice of domesticity is clear and unequivocal. Economic independence has given Jane new confidence and authority, and she is now "disposed to be as content as a queen"; she does not want St. John Rivers to "stir" up the "restlessness" that she had experienced during her times of penury.

As an "independent woman...rich...my own mistress," Jane proceeds to redefine the term when she comes back to the enfeebled, blind, and poor Rochester. Now that her "habits have been what the world called refined," her "tastes lean to the ideal," her society has at "least been amongst the educated," and she is independent, she can go back to the hearth and to Rochester, despite its boredom and his despotism (Brontë 241). The concept of benefaction that she had vehemently rejected earlier in the novel now makes her the economic equal of Rochester, and also makes possible her reunion with him. Thus, Jane's earlier vision of adventure and independence is swept away by the ideology of domestic love that floods the last chapter which begins with the triumphant, "Reader, I married him!" Ironically, Jane's powerful argument about self-help and autonomy is wiped out by her passionate endorsement of bliss promised by romantic love, dependence, and her "disproportionate fervour" about idyllic domestic management: if a "budding woodbine" can drape herself around a burnt chestnut tree's strength, she can live happily ever after and not stand on her own two feet. Even now, Jane's primary concern is to be "useful" to Rochester,

and hence, the plot of inappropriate independence coalesces into the plot of proper “wifely vocation”: to shoulder the weight of the self-sacrificing womanly pursuit of ministering and nurturing made possible through Rochester’s maiming and blinding.

Feminists have lauded the satisfactory punishment handed out to Rochester by Brontë, who seems to have shaped her conclusion to appease feminine anger towards patriarchal authority. Bertha’s revenge reduces Rochester to a position of female weakness: “humbled,” “dependent,” “powerless,” and confined by blindness to the house. But it is not Rochester who has been sacrificed, it is Jane herself. Rather than Jane expanding into the wide field of endeavor that she earlier claimed as the prerogative of a talented and independent woman, she shrinks to fit the womanly vocation of nurturance, domestic management, and reproduction. Rather than equality developing through a woman’s entry into the world of work, it comes through Jane’s permanent, and Rochester’s temporary, loss of mobility and ambition; after all, Rochester regains his despotic sight after a few years. But, what about Jane?

Rich asserts that marriage in *Jane Eyre* “is not patriarchal marriage in the sense of a marriage that stunts and diminishes the woman; but a continuation of this woman’s creation of herself” (155). But once married, Jane does not work because “my husband needed all my time and care”; she has servants to take care of household management, nursemaids and governesses to raise her children, and a boarding school to train Adele (Brontë 268). Jane seems to talk “glibly on behalf of her husband; her repeated assertions that they are one have the effect of making Rochester disappear” (Tromly 59).

I have now been married ten years. I know what it is to live entirely for and with what I love best on earth. I hold myself supremely blest—blest beyond what language can express: because I am my husband's life as fully as he is mine. No woman was ever nearer to her mate that I am; ever more absolutely bone to his bone, and flesh to his flesh. I know no weariness of my Edward's society: he knows none of mine, any more than we each do of the pulsation of the heart that beats in our separate bosoms; consequently, we are ever together. To be together is for us to be at once as free as in solitude, as gay as in company. We talk, I believe, all day long: to talk to each other is but a more animated and an audible thinking. All my confidence is bestowed on him, all his confidence is devoted to me; we are precisely suited in character—perfect concord is the result (Brontë 268).

Feminist critics insist that the tone of the above passage is not that of “romantic love or romantic marriage,” pointing to the terms of equality that Jane's economic independence and freedom of choice impose on her marriage to Rochester (154). However, what she, and Brontë, forget to mention is that after marriage, Jane's socioeconomic status is totally dependent on her husband; he will control her inheritance just as he controlled Bertha's colonial wealth before, and even after, she went mad. But “perfect concord” should not be violated, and merged with Rochester, “literally the apple of his eye,” his vision, and his right hand, Jane cannot move away to pursue any autonomous activity whatever.

Though she asserts that she will remain as “active” as she was before she received her inheritance, Jane's “aim... purpose...and ambition in life” have now changed to fit the idle pursuits performed by leisurely upper-class women (Brontë 231). This is obvious in the casual manner in which Jane talks about her travels in Europe and a comparison of British peasantry with their European counterparts:

“the British peasantry are the best taught, best mannered, most self-respecting of any in Europe: since those days I have seen paysannes and Bauerinnen; and the best of them seemed to me ignorant, coarse, and besotted, compared with my Morton girls” (Brontë 232).

A woman need not work to fulfill her ambitions and desires to travel; she can marry and fulfill them. Interestingly, though feminist critics have celebrated Jane's "rebellion against Rochester's arrogance," and her determination to leave him and assert her "independence," they have lightly glossed over her hurried decision to relinquish her work and look after the hearth (Rich 152). Such a glaring oversight seems awkward in a text whose power lies in its clamor against social injustice, in its desire to subvert social prescriptions of femininity or women's status, and in its assertion of intellectual and economic independence for women.

However, *Jane Eyre* does not end with a celebration of Jane's romantic or maternal role, and there is "a quiet autumnal quality" about Ferndean that seems to indicate the price dictated by romantic love and domestic bliss (Brontë 256). Instead, final place is given to St. John Rivers, "who had courage...to seek real knowledge of life amidst its perils" (Brontë 49). Employing the *bourgeois* ideology of "endurance, perseverance, industry, talent to...achieve great ends and mount to lofty eminence," this "warrior Greatheart" embarks on an imperial mission to India, laying "his genius out to wither, and his strength to waste, under a tropical sun" (Brontë 221, 223, 271). Jane concludes her narrative by paying tribute to her saintly cousin in extremely fervent prose: "[F]ull of energy and zeal, and truth, he [St. John Rivers] labours for his race: he clears their painful way to improvement; he hews down like a giant the prejudices of creed and caste that encumber it" (Brontë 270). The final vision of St. John violently hewing down external barriers undercuts Jane's claims to have achieved harmonious union, and though Jane has moved into a position of social power, she has achieved this only after vanquishing her own aspirations, ambitions, and independence.

Consequently, Tromly asserts that “despite Jane’s self-proclaimed sense of fulfillment, the final paragraphs of the novel reveal that her psychic equipoise is tentative.... Something within her compares the epic scale of Rivers’ mission with her pedestrian existence at Ferndean and an abyss of uncertainty opens before her—despite her protestations on the contrary” (58). This reading implies that Jane’s happiness is a delusion and that Brontë knows it. For, one is reminded of St. John Rivers’ piercing observation that Jane “cannot long be content to pass [her] leisure in solitude” (Brontë 212).

The superficial political fantasy of redistributed power covers underlying images of symbiosis with a strong oak of a man. Jane and, vicariously, her readers, get it all then—except autonomy since the avenues open for making her own way in the world impose restrictions upon her nature, whether as governess for Rochester’s ward, as teacher among the poor children at Morton village, or as St. John’s missionary wife or co-worker (Wyatt 123).

Again, though Rich asserts that Jane “has become a wife without sacrificing a grain of her Jane Eyre-ity,” one is tempted to argue that the passionate Jane, following the conventional orphan motif of resolution and closure, immerses herself in the flow of Rochester’s life, assimilates into domesticity, and loses herself in her husband’s mansion till she is indistinguishable from him (154). But the question is: what has become of the dream of autonomy and adventure in the wide world that Jane used to hold dear?

Thus, in *Jane Eyre*, “independence” is a thoroughly ambiguous word—at the beginning it means gaining autonomy through work, self-help, education, and freedom of spirit, and gaining a precarious gentility through observation of social nuances. But later, the meaning collapses into economic independence gained through a paternalistic benefaction, being “lifted from indigence to wealth, independence...affluence,” and from “governessing slavery” to a leisurely upper-class life without work. In the Preface, Brontë calls Thackeray

“the first social regenerator of the day” who “would restore to rectitude the warped system of things” (2). Consequently, one would believe that the novel politicizes readers about the pathetic state of existence of under-privileged middle-class women, especially governesses, and paves the way towards positive social change as far as employment and economic independence of women are concerned. Jane’s own struggle for survival makes clear the integral relationship between wealth, employment, and sustenance, and though her conscious plan was to celebrate the ethics of work and show how it is through education and work that she wins her liberation from class and male subordination, the plot gets diverted.

Suddenly, Jane recognizes that hard work and education—particularly in the case of governesses—are not enough for upward social mobility and happiness. Instead, her providential colonial inheritance and her marriage to Rochester bring about a sudden and miraculous rise in her social status and save her relationship from becoming a socially unacceptable transgression. These patriarchal institutions also free Jane from the obligation of salaried work and the constraining “servitude” that she actually abhors. As long as Diana Rivers, Mary Rivers, and Jane herself escape from “that governessing slavery,” Jane shows no concern for those left to toil behind. It is a problem that Jane chooses not to address, and Brontë chooses not to resolve, even though both women have involved themselves in another “overstocked” profession—authorship and writing. Thus, Brontë shows no sign of agitating for better treatment of governesses, or for new professions for women in *Jane Eyre*; instead, she wants women to have enough money, a family, and a “wifely vocation,” so that they are *not* forced to be governesses or village school teachers.

According to Hughes-Hallett, “[I]t is only when maturity, augmented social status, moral self-respect, . . . and, not least, money, have given her the power to assert, ‘I am an independent woman now. I am my own mistress now’ that Jane is ready for happiness” (xi). Or, is Jane really ready for happiness? Once married, she steps into a light blue dress, probably like the one Georgiana wore when Jane met her for the second time at Gateshead, and spends her entire day talking leisurely with her husband, “we talk, I believe, all day long,” while income from colonial investments pours in. Ironically, Jane’s marital match is quite similar to Georgiana’s “advantageous match with a wealthy, worn-out man of fashion,” and one wonders if both cousins will experience a similar, “animal”-like fate (Brontë 143). Will Jane, who according to St. John Rivers, is “formed for labour—not for love,” now fit into the mold of Mrs. Fairfax that she had visualized earlier? (Brontë 248):

“A snug small room; a round table by a cheerful fire; an arm-chair high-backed and old-fashioned, . . . the neatest imaginable little elderly lady, in widow’s cap, black silk gown, and snowy muslin apron; . . . occupied in knitting; a large cat . . . demurely at her feet; . . . the beau-ideal of domestic comfort” (Brontë 55).

Or will it be an image of “a curious sort of bird . . . a vivid, restless, resolute captive . . . were it but free, it would soar cloud-high” far off from its “ineligible and insalubrious” prison home (Brontë 80)?

CHAPTER 4
“MASTER”ING THE POLITICS OF CONTROL

I conceive that when patience has done its utmost and industry its best, whether in the case of women or operatives, and when both are baffled, and pain and want triumph, the sufferer is free, is entitled, at last to send up to Heaven any piercing cry for relief, if by that cry he can hope to obtain succour (Brontë to W. S. Williams, 20 April 1848, from *Letters*, Shorter, 216).

Victimized by the unjustness of the prevalent social order, represented by the upper-class Reeds, Jane cries out passionately at Lowood, “If people were always kind and obedient to those who were cruel and unjust, the wicked people would have it all their own way: they would never feel afraid, and so they would never alter, but would grow worse and worse” (Brontë 33). Jane’s impotent anger and frustrations can find only one release--violent retaliation--and she defiantly asserts that, “I must resist those who punish me unjustly... When we are struck at without a reason, we *should strike back again very hard*” (Brontë 33, emphasis added). Her “resistance to the abuse of power...clearly places Jane among the regicides” (Pell 406), and was one reason for Elizabeth Rigby's opinion that the novel flouted the prevalent social order in terms of Chartism and insubordination:

There is throughout [the book] a murmuring against the comforts of the rich and against the privations of the poor, which, as far as each individual is concerned, is a murmuring against God’s appointment...the tone of mind and thought which has overthrown authority and violated every code human and divine abroad, and fostered Chartism and rebellion at home, is the same which has also written *Jane Eyre*” (174).

Thus, according to feminist critics, Brontë expresses strong sympathy for the powerless in *Jane Eyre*, and condemns the brutality of colonialism, the harmfulness of upper-class exploitation, and the suppression of women within the Victorian patriarchal home.

However, close readings of the text reveal a strong endorsement of class, racial, and male elitism and supremacy that undermine revisionist assertions about the revolutionary nature and universal appeal of *Jane Eyre*. After Jane's outburst, Helen attempts to calm the distraught "little untaught girl," and using Brocklehurst- or St. John-like rhetoric, asserts that the concepts of vengeance, anger, and rebellion are unacceptable among "Christians" and in (Western) "civilized nations" because "heathens and savage tribes hold that doctrine" (Brontë 33). Urging Jane to make Christ's "word" her rule, and "His conduct" her example, Helen preaches the doctrine of passive acceptance and non-violence, "Love your enemies; bless them that curse you"--words that are echoed by St. John Rivers at the end of the novel, as he meets his heroic death in India, trying to civilize the "plague-cursed" dark-skinned Hindu natives (Brontë 33, 234). Thus, *Jane Eyre* begins with Jane's passionate anger and rebellion against an unjust patriarchal and oppressive human order, exemplified by "Master John Reed," and concludes with St. John's obeisance to the paternalistic and suppressive divine order, "My Master... Lord Jesus" (Brontë 270). Taken as a crux of the whole novel, the gradual movement from feminine anger to feminine acceptance of the masculine order seems conclusive, and the reaffirmation of white, upper-class, Christian male ideology within the Victorian British home, society, and Empire can be perceived as one of the major contradictions in *Jane Eyre*.

As a "physically inferior" relative, a desexualized charity schoolgirl, and an "anathematized" lower middle-class governess, Jane is subject to the whims of many "masters" or agents of oppression, who possess a "conscious or subconscious desire to render her an object...something less than a human being" (Rigney 17). Brontë sets the mood of

inequality and subordination at Gateshead where Jane, aware of and humiliated by her “physical inferiority” and her dependence, lives a life of marginality. Due to her ambiguous *petit bourgeois* position, Jane can neither be placed in the slot of the working class, nor can she be considered a part of Mrs. Reed’s clique since she is property-less. Thus, rejection occurs from below as well as from above, “you are less than a servant, for you do nothing for your keep,” says the maid Abbot crushingly, “And you ought not to think yourself on an equality with the Misses Reed and Master Reed.... They will have a great deal of money” (Brontë 5, 6, emphasis added). John Reed physically brutalizes Jane when he finds her reading “*our* books,” but his shared sense of superior class position gives way to a recognition of distinct masculine power, endowed to him by patriarchal laws of inheritance and denied to Jane, “[books from] *my* bookshelves, for they are *mine*; all the house belongs to *me*...and you have no money; your *father* left you none” (Brontë 4, emphasis added).

Assuming his combined elevated male and class position, John orders Jane to call him “Master Reed,” and on her refusal to do so, strikes her hard thus precipitating a minor revolution. Jane rouses herself against him “like any rebel slave” and calls him a “wicked and cruel boy...a murderer...a *slave driver*...like the Roman emperors...Nero and Caligula...a tyrant” (Brontë 5, emphasis added). Through subtle analogies, Jane’s “*parallels in silence*, which I never thought thus to have declared aloud” (Brontë 5, emphasis added), evoke the history of British slaveholding, rigid class division, and “insupportable [gender] oppression” in Victorian society in a “safely remote history of Roman acts of enslavement” (Meyer 95). Jane’s “brain was in tumult and all [her] heart in insurrection,” and in this

“mood of the revolted slave,” she gives us a glimpse of the hidden injuries of gender, race, and class in the text (Brontë 7).

Control of the “revolted slave” is accomplished through threats of incarceration, “[I]t is only on conditions of *perfect submission and stillness that I shall liberate you*” and exile to the dreaded poorhouse (Brontë 9). Jane is told by the servants that since the Reeds are wealthy, upper class gentry, “it is [her] place to be humble, and to make [herself] agreeable to them” (Brontë 6). Mrs. Reed also tells Brocklehurst that she wishes Jane, “an interloper not of her [Mrs. Reed’s] *race, and unconnected* with her,” to be brought up in a manner suiting her [low and limited] prospects” so that Jane assumes the “Christian grace” of “humility” (Brontë 6, 19, emphasis added). Evident in this conversation is the subtle understanding that religion as an ideology justifies and maintains the status quo, supported by Mrs. Reed, Brocklehurst, and later, St. John Rivers, revealing the strong intersections between class and religion. Brontë seems to imply that Christian preaching of humility and non-violence rationalizes existing inequities of the socially, economically, and politically oppressed people, and encourages them to accept constraints in this life, “fortitude under temporary privation,” since their suffering will be compensated in the next, thereby inhibiting further protest and revolution (Brontë 36). Thus, Jane’s initial defiance of Brocklehurst’s repressive Christian ideology is viewed as an immoral attack on religion and as an instance of insubordination that were definite characteristics of colonial slaves and the working-class populace (Myer 40).

Consequently, Abbot's comments about Jane’s behavior are crucial for our perception of Jane. For someone so young, Abbot says, Jane is “an underhand little thing...with so

much cover...watching everybody, and scheming plots underhand...like some infantine Guy Fawkes" (Brontë 13). Mrs. Reed concurs with this observation and gazes disparagingly at Jane "as if she really didn't know if I was a child or a fiend" (Brontë 14). In her aunt's eyes, Jane's greatest crime is her suppression of the germs of rebellion, social disturbance, and concealment that erupted suddenly like a latent, but smoldering, volcano on Mrs. Reed in "one of the great anti-authoritarian moments in the novel" (Politi 58). After that incident, Jane's "soul began to expand, to exult, with the strangest sense of freedom, of triumph I ever felt. It seemed as if an invisible bond had burst, and that I had *struggled out into unhoped-for liberty*" (Brontë 20, emphasis added). Even on her deathbed, Mrs. Reed expresses her bewilderment as to "how for nine years you could be *patient* and *quiescent* under any treatment, and in the tenth *break out all fire and violence*" (Brontë 140, emphasis added).

According to many feminist critics, Jane's behavior identifies her with slaves and working-class people who were constantly suspected of rebellion because of their sudden eruption after years of quiescence, and whose lives were discussed through images of secrecy, resistance, and fire (Shuttleworth 152). Brontë supports this observation by using the language of slave insurrection to describe Bertha's movements at night, "[W]hat *mystery*, that broke out, now in *fire* and now in *blood*, at the *deadliest hours of night*" (124, emphasis added). And this is paralleled by what Sir Shuttleworth, a close acquaintance of Brontë, warns about the working class and the dangers of "the turbulent riots of the people--of machine breaking--of the *secret* and *sullen* organizations which has suddenly *lit the torch of*

incendiarism" (Shuttleworth 152).¹ Thus, Webb views Jane's confrontation with Mrs. Reed as a classic instance of the revolted slave bursting her bonds of oppression, "embodying the exhilarating spirit of individualism," and taking the dangerous position of celebrating individual freedom from the point of view of women, the working class, and slaves (104).

However, though Jane's rebellion against the Reeds employs certain egalitarian feelings, her smoldering hatred of their snobbery is also shot through with a sense of class-consciousness and shared class-assumptions about the poor—how can they treat her like a servant when she isn't one? Jane articulates these notions aloud when Mr. Lloyd, the physician at Gateshead, presents her with a choice of either joining her working-class relatives, "a beggarly set," or going to school (Brontë 13).² To the young child, the "alternative to her insufferable condition in the Reed household is even more insufferable: joining the working class means deprivation of the bourgeois, material comforts and of the possibility for social advancement" which she is not prepared to exchange even for kindness and love (Politi 58).

No; I should not like to belong to poor people...to learn to speak like them, to adopt their manners, to be uneducated, to grow up like one of the poor women I saw sometimes nursing their children or washing their clothes at the cottage doors of Gateshead: no, I was not heroic enough to purchase liberty at the price of caste (Brontë 13).

¹ Throughout *Jane Eyre*, Brontë doesn't make any direct reference to the working class. An oblique reference comes up when young Jane reads *Gulliver's Travels* after the red room incident. The book has lost its charm now because of the absence of elves in England, "they were all gone out of England to some savage country where the woods were wilder and thicker, and the population more scant" (Brontë 10). Even Jane's parents had died after catching the typhus fever in some "manufacturing town."

² Later, Mrs. Fairfax echoes similar sentiments when she asserts snobbishly about servants, "one can't converse with them on terms of equality...for fear of losing one's authority" (Brontë 57).

Yet, Brontë does intend her heroine to be “heroic,” and while most feminist interpretations of *Jane Eyre* tend to view Jane’s determination to be upwardly mobile as “heroic,” they tend to gloss over her hypocritical class feelings and subtly condescending attitude regarding society’s destitute members who are “not fit to associate with” her (Brontë 14).

Throughout the narrative, Jane’s superior class- and race-consciousness endows her with “a theoretical reverence and homage for beauty, elegance, gallantry, fascination,” and the ability to “read” physical appearances and distinguish between upper-, middle-, and working-class women; for her, class is written legibly on the body. Thus, Rich’s observation that “in *Jane Eyre*, we find an alternative to the *stereotypical rivalry of women*; we see *women in real and supportive relationship to one another*, not simply as points on a triangle or as temporary substitutes for men” (132, emphasis added) seems hollow because of Jane’s hostile sense of alienation, rivalry, and snobbery towards most women in the text. Jane has practically no friends or confidants, except for Helen Burns and Miss Temple, quite unusual for a person who has stayed in a charity institution and met women in similar oppressed conditions. Additionally, readers do not find any sense of sisterhood with working-class women like Grace Poole, Bessie, Abbot, Leah, and Hannah, even though these women are presented as conscientious workers, embodying ethics of self-help, and are vividly painted through their physiognomic details. Without substantiating her opinions, Jane ascribes to Bessie “a capricious and hasty temper, and indifferent ideas of principle or justice,” Miss Miller is *simply* an “under-teacher” because she looked “ordinary” and had a “ruddy complexion,” Grace Poole’s appearance acts as a damper... hard-featured and staid, she had no point to which interest could attach,” while Diana and Mary could not be daughters of the

“elderly...somewhat rough-looking” Hannah, “for she [Hannah] looked like a rustic, and they were all delicacy and cultivation” (Brontë 15, 24, 64, 197).³

Later, Jane’s revulsion is reserved, not for the idea of a sexual union between Rochester and “that unfortunate *lady*,” Bertha Mason, but for the “hateful notion” of a connection between him and the low-class Grace Poole: “it disgusted me. I compared myself with her, and found we were quite different. Bessie Leaven had said I was quite a *lady*; and she spoke truth: I was a *lady*” (Brontë 132). The adult Jane has not changed much from the young child who was not “heroic enough to purchase liberty at the price of caste”; even in her raging sexuality and racial otherness, Bertha is a “lady” like Jane—standing “on the same side of the class divide, in opposition to the servant Grace” (Shuttleworth 168). Thus, Jane, the *petit-bourgeois* orphan, wants to distinguish herself from these low-class women, and through Miss Temple and Helen Burns, she learns that restraint on speech and behavior confined within an socially acceptable framework “endow her with a spiritual capital which, though it does not raise her like real capital to the freedoms and frivolities of the upper class, yet serves to distinguish her from the crassness of the working class” (Politi 58).

Jane is subsequently sent to Lowood to be made “humble,” and this charity school is Brontë’s attempt to create a microcosm of the prevalent Victorian society where women and the poor are oppressed by the “hollow, Pharisaical male figure of Mr. Brocklehurst” who is “the embodiment of class and sexual double-standards and of the hypocrisy of the powerful, using religion, charity, and morality to keep the poor in their place” (Rich 146). Judging

³ The only women who impress us with their delicacy and refinement of character and manners are Helen Burns, Miss Temple, Mary Rivers, Diana Rivers, and Jane herself—disempowered lower-middle-class women caught within the chains of “governessing slavery,” school-teaching, or religious service.

through his parochial Evangelical mind-frame, Brocklehurst calls Jane “a liar,” who, despite being a “native of a Christian land,” is “worse than many a little heathen who says its prayers to Brahma and kneels before Juggernaut” (Brontë 38). Interestingly, both Brahma and Jagannath—modified in chauvinistic imperial literature to “Juggernaut,” or a notion or institution to which people blindly sacrifice themselves or others—are supreme Indian gods. Though Jane defies the Pharisaical teachings of Brocklehurst and St. John through the course of the narrative, her final endorsement of St. John’s imperialistic missionary activity in India, laboring “for his race,” hewing down the “prejudices of caste and creed” to which Hindus sacrifice themselves, and replacing Brahma and Jagananth with the all-redeeming creed of Christ, reveals her own collusion in the religious suppression of Indian natives, and contradicts the very dynamics of the text (Brontë 269).

The Brocklehurst Institution is also brutal in the physical and spiritual treatment of its inmates whose living conditions, like Jane’s at the Reed household, have become unbearable; but, unlike Jane, these dependent women are unable to assert themselves against their oppressors. After Jane has been publicly humiliated by Brocklehurst, and extrapolating from Jane’s defiant behavior at Gateshead, one would assume that rebellion and revolution would be the result. However, organized religion as a means of controlling women is reflected in the text through Helen Burns’ submission to a doctrine of chastisement and also through Eliza Reed’s immurement in a convent. Hence, Jane’s rebellious thoughts are crushed by Helen’s Christ-like advice that triumph won with weapons of the oppressor is soon corroded, and since Jane is “too impulsive, too vehement,” she should be “most moderate: most correct” if she is to be victorious (Brontë 40). In fact Helen’s self-abnegating belief, “[I]t is far better to

endure patiently a smart which nobody feels but yourself, than to commit a hasty action whose evil consequences will extend to all connected with you,” guides Jane through her rugged path in life (Brontë 31). Helen’s ideology is further supported by Miss Temple who, echoing Brocklehurst’s earlier question to Jane about whether she “is a good child,” tells Jane to continue “to act *as a good girl*, and you will satisfy *us*” (Brontë 41). Thus, Jane represses her anger and tries to be good, which in the ten-year-old orphan’s conservative vocabulary, means being passive and obeisant to superiors in power, it means averting “further irrational violence” by not retaliating, and it means not being “wicked” and “naughty” (Brontë 7). But a question lingers: who is Miss Temple’s “us?” Does it also include Mr. Brocklehurst?

But before a revolution could be precipitated by the brutalized inmates, the Brocklehurst Institution is put under a philanthropic and benevolent Governorship that erected a “more convenient building in a new situation,” made “new regulations,” and introduced “improvements in diet and clothing” (Brontë 48). Though Jane mentions that the new upper-class managers of the Orphan Asylum “knew how to combine reason with strictness, comfort with economy, compassion with uprightness,” one is conscious of a feeling of hollowness and defeat in this transformation (Brontë 48). For ideological coercion replaces physical coercion, the existing social structure and relations do not alter, and change does not occur through conscientization, empowerment, and revolution. Instead, like the rustic girls at Morton, the Lowood inmates are provided with liberal material comforts and “symbolic capital” that imprisons them in gratitude, and dispossesses them of the revolutionary impulse that could alter their lives under similar future circumstances.

But, the “embers” of “decaying ire” have not extinguished themselves in Jane, and they find expression a few years later on the battlements of Thornfield where Jane, referring to the pathetic plight of the oppressed humanity thereby embodying the “international sisterhood of suffering” (Perera 82), cries out passionately that “millions are in *silent revolt* against their lot” (Brontë 64, emphasis added). Transitioning to a more particular level, she rebels against the enslaving domestic life led by women within the patriarchal home who “suffer from *too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation*” (Brontë 64, emphasis added). Feminists have often identified Jane’s soliloquy as Brontë’s “feminist manifesto” because at a superficial level, it argues for the empowerment of women who, like men, should be allowed to exercise their faculties to the fullest. “Women are *supposed* to be *very calm* generally,” but their seeming “tranquility” and “calm” existence belie their internal dissatisfaction because they “feel just as men” (Brontë 64). Thus, the demand is not for “radical change, but rather that women should be allowed to participate in the given social order in a more decisive fashion” (Shuttleworth 151).

Jane’s fiery upheaval on the battlements of Thornfield, which, to her fervid imagination, ironically resembles Bluebeard’s hostage castle that oppressed women, concludes with an ominous note that women “*must have* action, and they *will make it* if they cannot find it” (Brontë 64, emphasis added). Against this progressive feminist reading can be placed the subtle implicit linking of the position of women, workers, and slaves in society, and a vision of a seemingly quiescent, but decidedly seething revolt, simply waiting to erupt. The focal point of Jane’s declaration of independence is on the impossibility of restraint and the inevitability of rebellion when “patience has done its utmost and industry its best....and

when both are baffled, and pain and want triumph” (Shorter 216). Bertha’s “low,” “slow,” and “mirthless laugh” can be heard distinctly in the background, as if in agreement, and it is this image of shared oppression and “immurement that haunts *Jane Eyre* and shapes its very structure” (Zonana 606).

Jane’s repetitive apologies that attend her outburst at Thornfield are interesting because they reflect keenly her ambivalent shifting between the politics of control and the inevitability of rebellion.⁴ This ambivalence is also in keeping with her internal divisions, “her lack of a unifying, controlling centre of self,” and her earlier mutinies, “like them regretted after the fact, and like them undermined by her desperate need to be loved and accepted” (Shuttleworth 155). Jane starts with the defiant “anybody may blame me who likes” and concludes with the unsure and self-effacing “[W]ho blames me? Many, no doubt;...*I could not help it: the restlessness was in my nature*” (Brontë 64, emphasis added). The various strategies by which Brontë undermines Jane’s incipient conscientization and “absolves [her heroine] of responsibility for her rebellious thoughts” suggests the author’s uneasiness with her own feminist and political assertions (Shuttleworth 161).

In *Jane Eyre*, Thornfield is the perfect embodiment of race, class, and male supremacy; this is evident in Rochester’s relationship with Jane, the white, British, lower-middle-class governess, and Bertha, the black, “embruted,” “Creole”/Oriental slave/harem-inmate who is confined by her husband in a “wild beast’s den,” a seraglio (Brontë 131).

⁴ Writing in the era of Chartism, and at a time when political revolution was about to explode in the whole of Europe, Brontë’s preoccupation with political rebellions shows significant ambivalence, and this is reflected in her letters to W.S. Williams.

Following the tradition of Western feminists ranging from Wollstonecraft to Nightingale, Brontë attempts to expose the oppressiveness of the patriarchal home and the tyranny of men through stereotypical “images of oriental life—especially the ‘Mahometan’ or ‘Arabian’ harem” and oriental misogyny (Zonana 594). Thus, Jane's first meeting with Rochester is heavy with despotic Eastern allusions—through physical impressions and character analogies. Rochester has “a dark face, with stern features and a heavy brow,” he refers to himself as “Mahomet,” and later dresses “in shawls, with a turban on his head” for a game of charades, in “the very model of an eastern emir” (Brontë 108). Jane seems to imply that Rochester’s association with the outsider, Bertha, has deformed him into a polygamous, sensual sultan, and she displaces the blame for his oppressive Eastern tendencies on the intrusion of this “alien” woman into his life, thus revealing her own racially, and nationalistically, chauvinistic ideology.

While riding with Rochester after the shopping trip at Millcote, Jane notes: “[H]e smiled; and I thought his smile was such as a *sultan* might, in a blissful and fond moment, bestow on a *slave* his gold and gems had enriched” (Brontë 159, emphasis added). Referring directly to oppressed oriental womanhood by calling Rochester a “sultan” and herself a “slave,” Jane provides the readers with a culturally acceptable simile that unequivocally identifies him as a polygamous sultan or patriarchal despot, lording over a harem of women and robbing them of an independent existence (Zonana 607). She feels offended by Rochester’s sultan-like look, and she asks him to stop looking at her “in that way.” Interestingly, though she does not tell him that she is mentally comparing him to a sultan, Rochester is perceptive enough to understand Jane’s unspoken “despotic” reference and he

exclaims triumphantly, “Oh, it is rich to see and hear her!...I would not exchange this one little English girl for the Grand Turk’s whole seraglio—gazelle eyes, houri forms, and all” (Brontë 159). Jane is angered and insulted by this “Eastern allusion” and the oriental despotism implicit in it, and since she will not be a part of Rochester’s harem, she vows to “go out as a missionary” to “Stanboul” (Brontë 159). Like St. John’s imperialistic, nationalistic and religious mission to India, Jane now intends to go to the bazaars of Istanbul, “produce a global charter of female emancipation that will curb her suitor’s sexual despotism” (Perera 80), rehumanize the "savages and heathens" through the medium of Christianity, teach them reason till they lose their oppressive tendencies, and mold them into the cast of educated and enlightened Westerners. She is the *Western* woman who possess the power to “reclaim and renovate the wilderness,” but little does Jane realize that after marriage, she will herself become an inmate in the harem-like patriarchal home that she had denounced through the course of the narrative.

Though feminists have lauded Jane’s resistance to Rochester’s perverted forces of tyranny, evident in the text are instances where Jane can also be implicated in the act of artful submission. In a very striking comparison, Rochester identifies himself with the Persian King Ahasuerus who banishes his wife, Vashti, because she refuses to parade around at one of his drunken feasts, and “vows to give her royal estate unto another that is better than she”-- Esther (Esther 1:12). Ahasuerus passes a decree—“written among *the laws of the Persians and the Medes, that it not be altered,*” that “every man should bear rule in his own home” so that the queen’s refusal to be commanded may not “come abroad unto all women” (Esther 1.17). Similarly, Rochester’s “*law, unalterable as that of the Medes and Persians,*” is to

replace Bertha's sullied memory with Jane's fresh presence, and his decision to banish Bertha and marry Jane is like Ahasuerus's replacement of Vashti by Esther. For, despite his fierce mastery, Rochester is Jane's "beloved Master," and the tone of its pronouncement changes from defiance and revolt against "Master John Reed" to feminine submissiveness and idolatry because now Jane is free to choose her own master, instead of being forced to accept one. Thus, like the inmates of Lowood, Jane does not have any reason to revolt against the domination or subordination of her master and the social structure because Rochester provides her with liberal material benefits and "symbolic capital" that makes her life bearable and saves her from the "awful passage of suffering laid out" in front of her if she remained in her lower-middle-class position (Brontë 101).

Revisionist critics have also asserted that *Jane Eyre* "make[s] an indictment of British imperialism in the West Indies and the stained wealth that comes from its oppressive rule" through the figure of the white/black Bertha Mason, Rochester's other harem-inmate and wife (Meyer 101). Rochester himself describes Thornfield as a "tent of Achan," alluding to Joshua 7, in which Achan takes spoils wrongfully from another people and buries it under his tent, thus bringing down a curse upon all the children of Israel. The third floor of Thornfield stands as a "material embodiment of the history of the English ruling class as represented by the Rochesters" and is heavy with the repressed crimes committed by a "violent race" (Meyer 102). Thus, Bertha "embodies the desire for revenge on the part of colonized people," and her periodic nightly visitations of "fire" and "mystery" are symbolic of the revolts and rebellions that haunted the minds of British colonists (Meyer 102).

But Jane's quiet complicity and acceptance of Rochester's mastery make her an accomplice in the destruction of Bertha and perpetuate the oppressive patriarchal structure that she had denounced through the course of the novel. Interestingly, though Jane denounces the "other" Bertha, nowhere does she actively denounce the empire and Bertha's colonial wealth—in fact, Jane's colonial inheritance is her means to upward social mobility and marriage with Rochester, while Rochester himself derives his status, which Jane readily assumes, from unnamed West Indian holdings. Similarly, though Brontë's language suggests that Bertha's revenge and slave rebellions are warranted, she treats Bertha unsympathetically and finally silences her through an alien and gruesome "suttee"—a "Juggernaut" institution that St. John will attempt to "hew" down through Christianity, when he embarks on his mission to India. Spivak reads *Jane Eyre* as "an allegory of the general epistemic violence of imperialism, the construction of a self-immolating colonial subject for the glorification of the social mission of the colonizer" (251). Thus, what begins as identification with the oppressed and an implicit critique of British imperialism and capitalism collapses into merely an appropriation of the imagery of slavery, revealing the complicity between religion, imperialism within the colonies, and capitalism within the mother country.

Though feminist critics have upheld the fact that Jane's doctrine of equality stems from her own oppressed experience, close readings reveal that Jane has to fight hard against the discriminations cultivated into her, whether of class, race, or gender. Despite being called a text that argues for the rights of working-class people and their personal freedom, nowhere does the novel present working-class life except in brief at the Marsh End episode. Even stark and harsh socioeconomic realities of country living are not depicted in grave detail in

Jane Eyre, except for Jane's early days at Lowood, until she begins teaching in a small school at Morton, a village in Northern England. Since Jane's quest is not a struggle against social injustice, but is aimed towards an elevation of her own social standing, her response to her life and pupils is double-edged. She feels degraded by her role as schoolteacher because she finds her students' manners and appearance distasteful, thereby undermining the social ethic of equality that she hypocritically invokes throughout the novel. "[M]uch enjoyment I do not expect in the life opening before me.... I felt desolate to a degree. I felt, yes, idiot that I am—I felt degraded. I doubted I had taken a step which sank instead of raising me in the scale of social existence. I was weakly dismayed at the ignorance, the poverty, the coarseness of all I heard and saw around me" (Brontë 214). Ironically, this hearkens back to Gateshead and young Jane's description of poverty that she had rejected for the price of caste.

Poverty looks grim to grown people; still more so to children: they have not much idea of industrious, working, respectable poverty; they think of the word only as connected with ragged clothes, scanty food, fireless grates, rude manners, and debasing vices: poverty for me was synonymous with degradation (Brontë 13).

But though Jane guiltily rejects her feeling as "idiotic," this contradiction illustrates the *petit bourgeois* consciousness that tends to cling to real class distinctions, despite rejecting them in theory. Jane's vision of poverty has not changed, and her tone—"inspiring in its compassion, disturbing in its traces of elitism--reflects a striking contradiction in the intellectual and moral sensibility of nineteenth-century British society" (Eagleton 13).⁵

⁵ According to Eagleton, "[W]here Charlotte Brontë differs from Emily is in this impulse to negotiate passionate self-fulfillment on terms that preserve the social and moral conventions intact, and so preserve intact the submissive, enduring, everyday self that adheres to them" (14).

Oppression is again evoked through St. John Rivers--the seemingly disinterested missionary whose purposes in life are to help the uncivilized Indians abandon their blind worship of Brahma and "Juggernaut," to choose for them the true and only Master, either Jesus Christ or himself, and to die in the service "of patriarchal religion: self-denying, stern, prideful, and ascetic" (Rich 153). Ironically, St. John admits that under his "curate's surplice" beat "the heart of a politician, of a soldier, of a votary of glory, a lover of renown, a luster after power" while the boundless plain of "the East" is his active arena of conquest, revealing the subtle complicity of the Church with imperialism. His despotic rule over Mary, Diana, Jane, and Hannah is an arrogant assumption of the voice of patriarchy and God, and in this context he "resembles the other self-righteous minister to whom Jane has been like a Hindu: the Reverend Brocklehurst" (Meyer 119). St. John offers Jane marriage because she is "docile, diligent, disinterested, faithful, constant, and courageous: very gentle and very heroic" and would serve his imperialistic purpose well, but she draws back in repulsion. The thought of being "at his side always, and always restrained, and always checked—forced to keep the fire of my nature continually low, to compel it to burn inwardly and never utter a cry" was unbearable; however, one wonders what kind of a marriage she has with Rochester, after she is imprisoned in the "insalubrious" Ferndean (Brontë 253). "Raving in perpetual restlessness and transplanting the bourgeois ideology of self-improvement into an imperial exercise in control" St. John is transfigured into the noble "warrior Greatheart," taming the aliens and quelling potential revolutions (David 112). His triumph at the end of the novel vindicates "the ambition of the high master spirit, which aims to fill a place in the first rank of those who are redeemed from the earth" (Brontë 270), a "beautification which cannot

conceal the earthly and chauvinistic dimensions of his achievements” (Perera 85).

Jane’s path to upward mobility is not only effected by her refusal to marry St. John, but also through the colonial legacy that she receives from her uncle in Madeira, symbolically derived from Bertha’s gruesome death and from the slave trade that Jane had denounced earlier; it also makes possible her permanent reunion with Rochester. Though Rochester now needs Jane as much as she needs him--she is his “guide” as well as his “prop,” “leading” him as well as “waiting on” him-- yet on the personal level Rochester still embodies undiminished patriarchal strength, represented through his physical appearance: “His form was of the same strong and stalwart contour *as ever*: his port was *still erect*, his hair was *still* raven black...not in one year’s space, by any sorrow, could his *athletic strength* be quelled, or his *vigorous prime* blighted” (Brontë 261). He is still a commanding and masterful “sultan” despite the metamorphoses and the absence of a harem.

In a very telling metaphor, Rochester asks Jane, “a budding woodbine,” to twine around him, “the old lightning-struck...[burnt] chestnut-tree in Thornfield orchard” and “cover its decay with freshness” (Brontë 265). Jane agrees and reassures Rochester that he is still a healthy tree, “green and vigorous. Plants will grow about your roots...they will lean towards you, and wind around you, because your strength offers them so safe a prop” (Brontë 265). Meyer asserts that at the end of the novel, “Brontë has created the world she can imagine free of...inequalities of gender and economic injustice,” but the image of a “budding woodbine” twining around a “burnt chestnut tree” “belies the reassuring surface fantasy of a new balance of power and recreates the pattern of female or class subordination and dependence on a man (especially on the father figure within the patriarchal family) or upper

class respectively" (Wyatt 62).⁶ Thus, stability with Jane overwrites Rochester's tumultuous marriage with Bertha, resulting in the emergence of a stable monogamous home unit that is appropriate to capitalism. Once Jane and Rochester have found each other, they withdraw from society and have a son who will inherit their combined wealth and estates; thus, *Jane Eyre* concludes with the reproduction and maintenance of wealth, social relationships, and social values.

Feminist critics like Rich have viewed Jane's visit by the moon, "symbol of the matriarchal spirit and the 'Great Mother of the Night Sky,'" as evidence of Jane's turning to and learning from mother figures (151). However, it is a defeatist venture in which Jane tests the limits of a matriarchal world and religion, and turns back to "a Mighty Spirit" and the patriarchal establishments of kinship, inheritance, and marriage due to which "my soul rushed out in gratitude at His feet" (Brontë 241). To validate this is the final vision of St. John Rivers, "[F]ull of energy and zeal, and truth, he labours for his race: he clears their painful way to improvement; he hews down like a giant the prejudices of creed and caste that encumber it" (Brontë 269). Thus, the novel does not end with "Mother Nature" but concludes with "My Master...Lord Jesus," and the "movement from feminine to masculine pronoun is decisive" (Qualls 65, qtd. in Myer 51). Mastery is reaffirmed and the human "Master John Reed" of the first chapter coalesces into "My Master," the sightless Rochester, who assuming control over Jane starts sounding like Brocklehurst and takes care of women and the working class within the "healthy heart of England." The imperial territory of "the

⁶ According to Adams, romantic love exerts a pull toward traditional feminine passivity and dependence by promoting happiness to her that waits patiently for the right man to sweep her away to the heights of passion.

Himalayan ridge, or Caffre bush, even the plague-cursed Guinea Coast swamp” is managed by the “stern... exacting...ambitious” St. John Rivers, who pays obeisance to the “Divine Master” and assumes control over the “untaught” Indian natives, trying to become their “Master” one day (Brontë 234).

Lukács argues that the ideology of individual freedom that brought the bourgeoisie to power has to be repressed once dominance is achieved because it is impossible for the bourgeois class to apply its own ideas of freedom to the proletariat (15). Potential rebellion is quenched by leading the oppressed and the suppressed towards a path of non-violence and passive acceptance, and by bestowing them with Mephistophelean comforts that incarcerate their souls and voices. Thus, despite conscious intentions, Jane grows from “revolted marginality to quiescent socialization,” and *Jane Eyre* moves towards the consolidation of race, class, and gender positions by perpetuating a rigidly conservative system of social relations (Politi 56). The *petit bourgeois* orphan rediscovers her original position in the upper class, gains the right to “rehumanize” it, and joins the ranks of the leisurely who, “I believe, talk all day” (Brontë 268). Jane gives up her “humility,” the birthright of the poor and the down-trodden, and assumes the first person “I”—“Reader, I married him.”

Thus revolution is bent to capitulation, and once Jane assumes her high social status, her actions make her unpleasantly similar to the detested Mrs. Reed. She stifles and reforms little Adele’s speech and mannerisms by sending her away from the family home until Adele, like the young Jane, acquires a more de-Frenchified, “docile, good-tempered, and well-principled” disposition. As a school teacher in Morton, Jane refines the “heavy-looking, gaping rustics” making them “obliging,” “amiable,” and accepting of their class and gender

subordination. Jane also becomes an “adept discursive participant in Victorian justification of the British control, education, and reformation of subjugated peoples” and endorses St. John’s imperialistic mission in India where “he labors for his race, he clears their painful way to improvement” so that his religious teachings, which she hated earlier, can avert potential revolutions and Jane’s colonial investments can keep pouring into her coffers (Brontë 269). Thus, Brontë’s argument seems to uphold the patriarchal system that she had vehemently denounced earlier, and the text triumphantly confirms Mrs. Reed’s remark to Jane in the red room, “It is only on conditions of *perfect submission and stillness that I shall liberate you*” (Brontë 6). Ironically, what Elizabeth Rigby failed to see in 1847 was that the tone of mind and thought which has preserved authority, maintained every code human and divine abroad, and suppressed Chartism and rebellion at home, was the same that had also written *Jane Eyre*, through God’s appointment.

CHAPTER 5
“PERFECT CONCORD”—AN INCONCLUSIVE CONCLUSION

We shall not cease from exploration
 And the end of our exploring
 Will be to arrive where we started
 And know the place for the first time.
 (T.S. Eliot, *Little Gidding*, 242-245)

In the world of *Jane Eyre*, destabilizing and alien concepts like revolution and overt sexuality that threaten the existing social structure are locked up in the attic of Gateshead and closely guarded by Grace Poole, the working-class woman who will sell her soul for money and drink. Though revolution is precipitated, it is crushed by those in power, and by the end of the novel, the status quo remains unchanged, the murmuring voices have been silenced, and Jane, having found her ideal vocation, is content in her powerful, white upper-class position. Thus, *Jane Eyre* does not move towards liberation of the oppressed, but reblends “the contradictions which it initially exposed, thus securing its survival through the convention of a ‘happy ending’” which resolves some issues but sweeps others under the carpet (Politi 56).

My interpretation of *Jane Eyre* is based on my “other” experiences as a brown, Third World woman from India, participating in the academic environment of a white, First World country, as well as my lack of identification U.S. mainstream feminist criticism. However, it is not my intention to deny this canonical text its position as a paradigmatic “woman’s novel” or negate the pleasure and inspiration it has given readers, especially women all over the world. Neither do I want to break the idol of the Great Tradition of literature, *at least for the present*, because there is still a great deal of value to be learnt in the chosen works. This is beside the fact that after Shakespearean texts, Victorian literature happens to be the most

familiar, the most discussed, and the most cherished—an observation supported by my own experiences.

My point is that contemporary feminist criticism and literature *must not* reproduce the silences and exclusiveness of nineteenth-century English culture in allowing the white, middle-class woman to stand as the “paradigmatic woman.” In addition, given the refusal of much modern scholarship to acknowledge, let alone confront, the underlying connections between Victorian intellectual life and Victorian imperial ideology, which is synonymous with capitalism, the details of such suppressed relations need to be confronted and dealt with; this extends to present-day interpretations of literature that have also been silent on sensitive issues of race, class, and gender. Consequently, though we should honor what can be honored in Jane and her creator, we should also recognize and address the hidden power relations of the novel, the foremost being: *who* are Bertha Mason and Grace Poole and the nameless, faceless, and placeless people whose labor, blood, and sweat have made possible Jane’s and Rochester’s wealth and social status? After all, one cannot ignore the question of “history” because, according to Benita Perry, literature’s “subtext is both a product and a projection of ‘context’ as well as a textual construction” (qt. in Perera 12).

Thus, one could adopt an interesting strategy to interpret literature, put forward by Mineke Schipper, that appends a series of negative questions to a model proposed by Mieke Bal: “Who is *not* speaking? Who has *no* right to speak? Who does *not* see? Whose view is *not* expressed? Who does *not* act? Who has been deprived of the right to act? Who is powerless to act?...What is the speaker saying?...What does he consider worth including in his story? And again, what is not included?” (qtd. in Perera 14). Thus, counter questions, which are powerful tools of empowerment, can infuse readers with the strength to fight

against the existing patriarchal mansion ideally leading to a vision of an alternate domestic structure organized according to more egalitarian principles. It can also afford them the extra pleasure of releasing the energy buried in old restrictive fantasy patterns and rechanneling it into new, potentially liberating ones.

In a society like the United States, racial and ethnic diversity, along with class divisions and sexual differences, has made it imperative that issues of multiculturalism be addressed at all levels, especially within the school curriculum. One is also made aware of the fact that in order to be more inclusive of all social groups and experiences, to avoid conflict and silences, and to make re-reading of canonical texts a rich and learning experience, the process of reading should be noncollusive. Keeping the above questions in mind, canonical white middle-class texts like *Jane Eyre*, and literature by the dead white men, can be read by marginalized readers in a manner that is congruent with their cultures so that they can critically analyze the power dynamics within a text's subtext, make connections with their world, and better understand and situate their position in society. This process could be the first step towards giving readers a sense of ownership without casually dismissing the classics.

However, this is not to mean that literature written by people of color should not be included within the school curriculum. Instead, a healthy combination of "canonical" literature, as well as literature written by women and people of color, can be used in a culturally congruent way to make the experience of reading a rich one for readers of all backgrounds. Thus, reading *Jane Eyre* along with Perkins' *The Yellow Wallpaper*, Rhys' *The Wide Sargasso Sea*, and Mukherjee's *Wife* can be an interesting experiment of character development and perception through different cultures and times. It can raise questions

about the status and economics of female dependence in marriage, the limited options available to women as an outlet for their education and energies, and “other” women and their experiences. Similarly, a study of the different film versions of *Jane Eyre* can be useful in revealing the subtle racism and sexism present in contemporary popular discourse. The constructive alternatives are unlimited because *Jane Eyre* is like the Russian *Babushka* dolls that lie tucked one inside another, with layers of meaning being revealed slowly and gradually, each layer giving rise to more and more questions, each layer being perceived differently by readers of different races, colors, nations, sexualities, and classes, making it a truly unforgettable, intense, and inspiring experience.

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