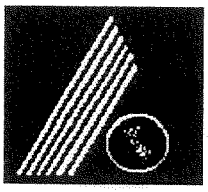

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THE INTEGRATION OF A SELF- ASSERTIVE WOMAN: A FEMINIST READING OF JANE EYRE BY CHARLOTTE BRONTË

by

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ABSTRACT

The present thesis is a feminist analysis of Jane Eyre, a classic Victorian novel which has a female character as a protagonist. It will discuss the connection of plot and theme to ideology and the way in which the novel half challenges and half integrates into the patriarchal ideology of the above mentioned country and culture.

My reading, after considering the unfolding of the plot, the Bildungsroman and the resolution of the conflict, argues for the placement of Jane Eyre within the theoretical boundaries of liberal feminism (depicted as such in the writings of Woolstonecraft and Mill) as opposed to other interpretations which were keen on emphasizing the radical feminist tendency of the novel. Moreover, in the present interpretation, the liberal feminist debut and claims made by the protagonist are counterbalanced by a conservative ending, since the heroine final choice ascribes her to the traditional domestic roles envisaged by the Victorian period. In the view of those mentioned before, what the main character achieves during the journey into and for socialization is the final re-appropriation of the self while navigating through the realms of given discourses, and the preservation and promotion of a personal voice.

I concentrated my analysis on the issues of ideology, education, surrogate families, romance, marriage and sexuality, in an attempt to demonstrate that after and because of living these crucial experiences in a personal and self-assertive manner, Jane Eyre, the protagonist of the novel, gains recognition and status in a usually restrictive and limiting society like the one represented by the patriarchal Victorian England.

ÖZET

Bu tezde baş karakteri kadın olan klasik Victoria dönemi romanlarından Jane Eyre'in feminist bakış açısı ile analizinin yapılması amaçlanmıştır. Kurgu ve temanın dönemin idelojisi ile bağlantıları, romanın dönemin ve kültürün yansıttığı ataerkil toplum düzeni ile uyuşan ve çelişen yönleri tartışılmıştır.

Kurgu, eserin Bildungsroman olarak taşıdığı özellikler ve romanda yaratılan çatışmaların nasil çözümlendiği incelendiğinde romanin baş karakteri olan Jane Eyre'in haklarını almak için çok çaba harcadığı, şansın ve olayların da yardımıyla bu haklardan bazılarına sahip olabildiğini, ancak romanın sonunda dönemine göre son derece muhafazakar bir evlilik yapmayı tercih görülür. Bu sebeple söz konusu eser radikal feminist yerine, liberal feminist bir roman olarak değerlendirilmelidir.

Bu çalışmada dönemin ideolojisi, eğitim sistemi, gerçek bir aileye sahip olamayan çocukların gerçek ailelerinin yerine geçecek bir aile yaratma istekleri, romans, evlilik ve cinsellik meseleleri üzerinde durulmuştur. Romanin baş karakterinin dönemin temayüllerine uygun son derece muhafazakar bir evlilik yapmış olmasına rağmen haklarını elde etmek için çabalaması ve döneminin temayüllerine ters duşecek bir şekilde kısmen de olsa bağımsız bir karakter olarak incelenmesi yapılmak istenmiştir.

1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis concentrates on the analysis of a classic Victorian novel, Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre. It focuses on a female character as the protagonist and it uses as a background the notion of ideology and the manner in which theme and plot are connected to it. Jane Eyre will be depicted in the present work as half integrating and half challenging the patriarchal ideology of the above-mentioned country and culture.

Furthermore, as my initial readings suggest, I will concentrate on the strong relationship between life and history, represented by means of successive stages, ideology of the day and author/authorship dimension projected against these ideology. Jane Eyre has to experience different stages that complete and fold into each other in the final version of her becoming. The novel starts with the protagonist's childhood, followed by adolescence, the two of them connected by education whose role will be discussed in detail.

As a continuation, the present work is going to concentrate on the relevance of *family* or, better said, on the absence of it from the character's life. As I consider this aspect the most important one, determining the others and concluding Jane Eyre's "growth", a considerable part on the thesis will be dedicated to it. I am going to argue whether and in what ways *the family* is the most essential in the character formation, and especially essential to the shift to a problematic womanhood, formed under both internal and external pressures that reinforce the burden and the duty of being a woman.

Along with the family issue, the present thesis will also discuss marriage, romance and sexuality presenting them as deriving from and completing the "Surrogate Family" chapter. It is a common truth nowadays that no Victorian novel analysis can be conceived outside the discussion of the societal restrictions, which required that a hero (even more so, a heroine) should marry and thus safely integrate in the pre-existent order. Nonetheless, it is less usual that sexuality or the expose to it influence the female character's decisions and alter the course of her life. The present thesis allocates the same chapter to apparently different but strongly interrelated issues, such as romance, marriage and sexuality, because of the crucial effect this interrelation had on the heroine's formation, particularly in the context of Victorian society.

As a research method I employed the Anglo-American trend of feminist criticism, therefore concentrating on the minute analysis of the literary text, better known as close-reading. Furthermore, within the realms of Anglo-American feminist criticism, I adopted the model created by Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar, Patricia Meyer Spacks and Elaine Showalter. Consequently, as a practitioner of what Showalter used to refer to as "gynocriticism[1]", in the present thesis I have studied the writing of one of those women (Charlotte Brontë) who, against all odds, produced what the same critic will call "a literature of their own".

The setting of Victorian England reserved women a particular role against the background of the so-called patriarchal order. My aim is to demonstrate that within this pre-established, rarely and insufficiently challenged social environment the voice of a woman could acquire identity and shape destiny. The protagonist of the novel does not attempt to shake the very foundation of patriarchal order, nor does she suggests a revolutionary alternative to it. Jane Eyre simply demands the right to have a *voice* and to be acknowledged as an individual, without being praised and without having to excuse herself for the act of talking.

The writer's feminism, far from defiant - at least in my understanding - argues for the fact that the femininity and identity of the female protagonist as possible behavioral model exist *within* given discourses and ideologies, after conjecturally being shaped *outside* them. In this respect, I perceive that the writer's feminism commences in a liberal tone to end in a conservative one, since nowadays it is an axiom the fact that the nineteenth century incipient drive to female emancipation, while fuelled by revolutionary energy, had an ultimately conservative aim – successful integration into existing social structures. The following will offer a short historical outlook on the theory of liberal feminism accompanied by a starting point of debate, as to the correspondence theory-work of fiction.

Liberal feminism pleads for the equality of rights between men and women. The most important achievements of the first feminist wave had the liberal movement as a background. The debut of the liberal movement can be met within the context of the

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[1] "In the early phase of the Anglo-American feminist literary theory primarily 'the images of women' in male texts were analysed" (Göbenli 1). Showalter shifted the focus onto the study of women's writing and named

feminist theories at the end of the eighteenth century with Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill as important political and theoretical representatives. The basis of the liberal movement consists of the following: the faculty of Reason is the same for both sexes, women, as much as men, are able to follow their own interests, to self-govern themselves, women, as much as men, are autonomous beings.

Therefore, there is no reason, excepting the artificial obstacles imposed by the traditional (and patriarchal) society for which women cannot opt to unfold their existence in other domains than the domesticity of a household. Consequently, society is the one which imposes that women be ascribed the role of creator of private sphere only and depend on men as protectors. To alter this oppressive reality it is necessary that women benefit from autonomy, the right to property, the same divorce rights, equal rights to education and work, political representation and vote.

In her book A Vindication for the Rights of Woman (1792), Wollstonecraft makes many demands meant to improve the lot of women. Thus, in her opinion, women must be treated as "human creatures, who, in common with men, are placed on this earth to unfold their faculties" (8); hence, instead of being taught to obey and please men with "gentleness, docility and a spaniel-like affection" (34) commonly "supposed to be the sexual characteristics of the weaker vessel", women must be educated to foster the "strength, both of mind and body" that will make them "respectable members of society" (9).

Nonetheless, Wollstonecraft supported this position with contradictory arguments that suggest the difficulties of ever conceiving a revolutionary feminism. On the one hand, she attacked "tyrants" who "*force* all women, by denying them civil and political rights, to remain immured in their families" (5), and she argued that a woman should be "prepared by education to become the companion of man" (4). On the other hand, she concluded that such an education would make women "more observant daughters, more affectionate sisters, more faithful wives, more reasonable mothers – in a word, better citizens" (150). This is a complicated and ambivalent argument, since Woolstonecraft was indeed concerned with the improvement of women's position as members of society and citizens, but she also saw this position as rooted in the traditional domestic roles. It is true that in

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this new point of interest 'gynocritiitics'.

1792 educating a woman to be her husband's companion and friend, rather than "play-thing" (24), "humble dependent" (29), or "upper servant" (40) was still a revolutionary aim, but nonetheless Woolstonecraft's argument tended to define women not as "human creatures" but by their domestic relations to men.

John Stuart Mill adds to Woolstonecraft's writings the idea of sexual division of labor. In his opinion, domestic activities are naturally women's responsibilities, but they must have a free choice between professional competition and the role of mothers and wives. This free choice obviously represents a progress compared to the universal conservatory view that preceded it, which ascribed women only domestic roles. The most important in this respect and the best-known is Rousseau's claim according to which women could and should be contented only with being mothers and wives in order to maintain the link between men and nature, as expressed in Emile or about Education (Dragomir 125-126).

In the view of the liberal feminist theory briefly framed above and its sometimes contradictory claims, the present thesis intends to answer the question whether Jane Eyre can use this frame as a whole or partially, and if so, to what extent. For, whereas it is obvious that the heroine *does* work outside the house, it should not be forgotten that in nineteenth century fiction, very few women and fictional women work for a living, unless driven by dire necessity (and Jane Eyre is such a woman). Instead, as the present novel demonstrates, the focus of interest is on the heroine's choice of marriage partner, on the constitution of a family, which will decide her ultimate position and exclusively determine her happiness and fulfillment in life, or her lack of these.

In this respect, the evolution of the protagonist from a promoter of equal opportunities, similar expectations for men and women, is tamed into a refusal of a male model, obsessed with the public sphere, a martyr of action, that does not comprehend the women's need for intimacy, family and children. Gender-equality in terms of destiny fulfillment is not the answer that the novel provides, since gender-*sameness* is but utopia. Jane Eyre, at the end of her peregrinations, reaches to the conclusion that a woman, regardless of how suffocating and oppressing her condition may be, created as such to serve patriarchy, should nevertheless be able not to discard her female behavior, in exchange for a male one. In her case, to join her zealot cousin on a civilizing mission to the

faraway India would not mean *liberation* but *genocide*, and the noun defines more than merely a harsh climatic reality.

What the main character achieves during the journey into and for socialization, albeit one conceived and directed by male dominance is the final re-appropriation of the self while navigating through the realms of given discourses, and the maintenance, undisputable promotion of a personal voice. The author employs autobiographical method to shape the identity of the character, the diary that flows into novel, Charlotte Brontë allowing her protagonist to grow by ascribing her to the rites of passages, journeys which comprise a life history.

2 IDEOLOGY

2.1 Introduction

The following chapter aims at depicting the background in which a masterpiece like Jane Eyre found the reasons and inspiration for its existence. One cannot fully grasp the value of the novel if one does not comprehend the expectations of all kinds that any literary work had to fulfill. Furthermore, Charlotte Brontë, in her double capacity as a woman and as a writer was subjected to and influenced by the dominant ideology of the time. Therefore, her work is the historical product of the period that saw its creation; the issues that it discussed, the manner in which these issues were approached, will constitute part of the following chapter.

Nowadays, we are still *involved* in the world that the Victorians built and we have strong individual opinions about its architects. When reading Jane Eyre, nevertheless, we should bear in mind not only *ideology* as a purely theoretical concept, concerned with the trend of ideas that shaped social, political, cultural ideas at the same time, but also with the *gender* dimension of the concept. In this respect, it should be mentioned that in spite of all its ideals, the Victorian age was a curiously puritanical age: it was easily shocked, and subjects like sex were taboo. It was an age of conventional morality, of large families with the father as a godlike head, and the mother as a submissive creature like Milton's Eve. The strict morality, the holiness of family-life often incarcerated women and crushed their other than domestic ideals. Few women succeeded in escaping the roles imposed by patriarchy and Charlotte Brontë was one of them. Nevertheless, her fight against the oppressive ideology brought the victory of merely altering it, adding new dimensions to it, more self-fulfilling in gender terms, not, as my reading is going to argue, destroying it.

The arguments for not attempting a devastating critique and erasure of the contemporary ideology can be found in the fact that generally speaking, with the exception of Jane Eyre, better defined in its ending, the other novels written by Charlotte Brontë and their:

> [. . .] indecisive endings [. . .] suggest that she herself was unable clearly to envision viable solutions to the problems of patriarchal oppression. [. . .] Perhaps because no one of her

> contemporaries, not even a Wollstonecraft or a Mill, could adequately describe a society so drastically altered that the matured Jane and Rochester could live in (Gilbert 371-372).

2.2 Victorian England – Angel in the House Ideology

In order to define and analyze Jane Eyre within the realms of a particular ideology and assess whether the book respects its pattern or, on the contrary, creates its own ideology, the "Angel in the House" concept is a central point of discussion.

The "Angel in the House" ideology seems to have had its originating point in the Middle Ages when the "mankind's great teacher of purity was the Virgin Mother", the saint figure of mercy, salvation and celestial goodness (Gilbert 20). She was a figure that provided a great source of inspiration for male writers, who dreamed of embodying the woman as angel-like, perfect, soothing, generous and caring. Male writers of indisputable reputation, such as Dante, Milton, Goethe created their heroines as symbols of everlasting purity and thus, "condemned" women to a questionable (from a feminist point of view) sanctity that will also be promoted by the patriarchal Victorian England.

Feminist readers today have little difficulty in understanding and deciphering the complexity and the derivatives of the male writers' choice of a model for their female heroines. On the one hand, Virgin Mary had been for centuries the celebrated, glorified Mother of Jesus, the shrine of all virtues, respected and adulated for her martyrdom of love. Men, women and children alike worshipped her and visualized her as the ultimate realm of hope that would never turn down those in distress that would provide everlasting comfort after the hard trials of life.

On the other hand, to aim at creating a world populated with earthly replicas of Virgin Mother, to assimilate *all* women to this saintly image, was both unrealistic and oppressive. Unrealistic, because a symbol should remain a symbol and not be deteriorated by multiplication, and oppressive because it tended to discredit woman who could not, or *would* not conform to this image. The alternative was monstrous, since all those who deprived themselves of this glorious comparison, for reasons that were never completely understood and accepted by a patriarchal society, had to be devils, temptresses, prostitutes, messengers of damnation in a woman's shape, the very opposite of sainthood embodied by the Mother of Jesus.

How was a woman expected to live and even consider to define herself, trapped in between these two equally terrifying opposites and how was she to deal with any of the two labels, either angel or demon, unequivocally attached to her? Especially in the nineteenth century-England this female existential question acquired almost tragic accents, with the birth of the so-called Angel in the house. The concept seemed to plead for terrestrial attributes of women, kindness and selflessness in terms of space – in the house -, but the subliminal implications remained the same: docility, passivity, submission, existence with and *for* the others, reticence, compliancy.

Therefore, the Angel in the House is the coded name for the typical ideology of domesticity to which the Victorian society reduced and by means of which it represented women. As Gilbert pointed out, "the eternal type of feminine purity was represented not by a Madonna in Heaven but by an angel in the house" (20). In other words, the concept endorses the basic assumption according to which women belonged in the house, where they were expected to provide a civilizing influence over men. Consequently, any other activity that women could consider taking over, outside the safe confines of the house, becomes almost blasphemous and harmful to the proper development of society. For, if society was built upon the family, which in turn depended upon a particular role for woman, to change that role was to threaten the whole structure of society.

In order to avoid this threat, newspapers editorials, scholarly book, medical professionals, preachers, lawmakers assumed as a saintly mission the production of reasons why it was in women's and civilization best interest to keep middle and upper-class women uneducated and unemployed. This corresponded to certain roles ascribed to man who were expected to protect and care for women, ensure their comfort, which equated, as we see it today to safely imprison them. In this respect, Bonnie G. Smith argues that since "the Victorian household was ideally a nonproductive center, the perfect woman should adopt an image of repose and idleness" (83) that would create the balance between the peace inside and the world outside, seen as a locus of chaos, offering but perils to the delicate, unprotected ones. Accordingly, from "initially a character trait", delicacy dictated a behavioral model which:

> [. . .] aroused concern for some whenever physical activity was suggested [. . .] .nervousness and fainting were commonly accepted as manifestations of women's

> weakness, in contrast to men's strength. Bad or even disagreeable news, shocking sights or poor manners could cause fainting [. . .] a range of factors – physical, social and ideological – went toward creating the languishing woman as both an ideal and a reality (83).

Weakness, frailty and sensitivity best characterized the image of women in society. The lack of political power, the physically debilitating dress of the times, and the health problems involved with childbirth, all contributed to this idea of the delicate woman who needed permanent care and sheltering. Naturally, the house was the most suitable shelter, the sphere of safety, and the husband, the father or the brother (sometimes all of them), the perfect protectors. Goethe's heroine, Makarie Wilhelm Meister's Travels and the manner in which male critics read her today, is significant and relevant to the comprehension of the "suitable" patriarchal frame in which a woman had to function and whose limits she sometimes chose to trespass:

> She [. . .] leads a life of almost pure contemplation...in considerable isolation on a country estate [. . .] a life without external events – a life whose story cannot be told as there is no story. Her existence is not useless. On the contrary, [. . .] she shines like a beacon in the dark world, like a motionless lighthouse by which others, the travellers whose lives do have a story, can set their course. When those involved in feeling and in action turn to her in their need, they are never dismissed without advice and consolation. She is an ideal, a model of selflessness and of purity of heart (Eichner 620).

Obviously, this is the description of a woman without a voice, a shadow always at service, background for the heroic deeds of the others. She is expected to listen, support, nurture, caress, and advise, all in perfectly contented attitude, all for the sake and everlasting benefit of those around her. Coventry Patmore extended these attributes and after endowing his beloved with all possible virtues, such as charm, tenderness, simplicity, emphasizes her greatest virtue to be the fact that her "virtue makes her man 'great'". (Gilbert 22). Coventry Patmore's "Angel in the House" may be said to rely and fictionally define the common opinion of the time regarding the feminine function of society. According to this, the woman is passive, domestic, energy-storing vessel, as opposed to the masculine active, worldly, energy-expending vessel and consequently, what a woman could to in order to make herself a destiny was to find a man to whom she could dedicate herself.

Obviously, the "Angel in the house" endorses an enormous social, economical and cultural weight, an incredible burden for women. Because of its tyrannizing image, it becomes an authoritative and inescapable center for discourse, premises to which not only women novelists but also women generally had to conform. Such a woman, one of the many forced to compel to stereotype images, was Charlotte Brontë, the author of Jane Eyre. No one can affirm for sure that she consciously assimilated herself with the overpowering image of the angel of the house, like many other contemporary female novelists, frightened by their public recognition; however, if a natural reserve of Charlotte Brontë's impeded such a self-characterization, another woman, Elizabeth Gaskell, did it for her. The latter re-created the author of Jane Eyre in such a way that the appeal of "Charlotte Brontë" rested as much on her symbolic value as on her identity as a real, historical person.

So strong were the limitations imposed on women in Victorian England, especially on literary women, that Elizabeth Gaskell, in order to exonerate Charlotte Brontë from the accusation of "coarseness" after the publication of Jane Eyre, felt the need to build a myth whose force haunts the reader even today. Harriet Martineau, well-known for her condemnation of Jane Eyre's dark and somehow unorthodox display of passionate feelings, after reading The Life of Charlotte Brontë by Elizabeth Gaskell, reversed her tone so as to almost sanctify the author. Martineau claimed that "little as Charlotte Brontë knew it, she was earning for herself a better title than many a St. Catherine, or St. Bridget, for a place among the noble ones whose virtues are carved out of rock and will endure to the end" (qtd. in Miller 80).

As it provided the readers with a comfortable image of Charlotte Brontë, the thoughtful, loving, noble daughter, sister and ultimately, though for a short time, wife, most critics approved and praised this initiative to concentrate on the woman rather than on the author. The dichotomy Currer Bell the author, and Charlotte Brontë the woman was perceived by Victorian critics and not only, as favoring the latter at the expense of the former and this perception had to be the right one. Charlotte Brontë became and remained for a considerable amount of time, a model, an icon of exemplary womanhood, a spiritual heroine, invariably rooted in the spirituality of her age.

In the mid-nineteenth century, "authorship", with its connotations of masculine authority, did not go along well with "womanliness", a term whose moral implications far exceeded those of mere gender. In a very influential book, Woman's Mission, Sarah Lewis invites her female readers to "leave to men the grimy life of intellect and action"; at the same time generously asserting that, "the moral world is ours". (qtd. in Fraser 333).

The general tendency was to place exaggerated importance on women's moral role and to create a certain distinction and separation between the private and the public sphere. The first one belonged to women, the second one to men, and only rarely, with considerable efforts could the two co-exist. This "golden rule of Victorianism" placed novelists like Charlotte Brontë in a contradictory, not at all enviable position. As a woman, she was supposed to remain attached to the private sphere, acting angel-like, content with fulfilling her duties as nurturer for her family, but the publication of a book, certainly meant accession into the public sphere. The compromise that the Victorians reached in order to reconcile these opposing spheres translated into contrasting roles for women, seems to us now, naïve yet revolting, diminishing the potential of a woman to make a name for herself outside the sacred kitchen realms:

The author of Stories of the Lives of Noble Women (1867) attempted to resolve the problem by deciding to "fix upon women who have not been less distinguished by their domestic than by their public virtues", prefacing his work with the warning that girls must not forget that "their true happiness will always lie in the home circle." (qtd in Miller 83-84). One may wonder why the male authors of such exemplary lives of women anthologies took so much trouble to convince everyone, readers and critics alike, that a woman's place is in the home. A possible explanation might lie in the fact that feminist ideas were already seen as representing a threat, obscure but definite menace to society's stability. Yet, a subtle counter-attack came to convince women that heroism was not only a man's share, but women had their own heroic battle to fight, on a daily basis. Authors referred to the so-called "fireside heroism", "the exercise of self-denial" (qtd. in Miller 84), and praised these inherent female values as some kind of moral compensation for the passivity and uniformity of domestic existence.

Charlotte Brontë herself, thus assimilated within the lot of millions of women that were supposed to be content with their humble, anonymous lives and strive for the eternal

glory of domesticity, ironically became a "spokesman for the ideology" (Miller 87) that she had questioned in Shirley. Caroline Helstone, the imprisoned heroine in her uncle's house, exasperated at the monotony, shallowness of the domestic duties never to end, somehow desperately expresses her opinions:

> Is there not a terrible hollowness, mockery, want, craving, in that existence which is given away to others, for want of something of your own to bestow it on? I suspect there is. Does virtue lie in abnegation of self? I do not believe it (qtd in Barker 39).

It is as if Victorian interpreters of her work could not comprise the magnanimity of such a literary phenomenon and safely attempted to reduce Currer Bell, the author, to Charlotte Brontë, the woman. Not only once the immense artistic value of her writings was overlooked and replaced by domestic abilities and thoughtfulness. Gaskell, though probably in honesty, informed the readers about Charlotte's frequent trips to the kitchen to see to the potatoes which Tabby, the old and short-sighted servant, could not peel properly. A trivial account, but one that heavily even if subtly, influences the young girls and women in search for a model of femininity: "Write thy books but do not forget to mind thy potatoes!"

The poet Robert Southey advised and "wisely" recommended other spheres of activity for Charlotte Brontë and renunciation to any literary ambitions, which surpassed "poetry for its own sake" and aimed at public recognition.

> The daydreams in which you habitually indulge are likely to induce a distempered state of mind; and in proportion as well as the ordinary uses of the world seem to you flat and unprofitable, you will be unfitted for them without becoming fitted for anything else. *Literature cannot be the business of a woman' s life, and it ought nor to be* [emphasis added]. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure will she have for it, even as an accomplishment and a recreation. (qtd. in Gaskell 173).

One can easily comprehend when analyzing the above mentioned critical opinions on the author and the novel that women re-created Charlotte Brontë posthumously and mythologized her as the angel in the house, to make general amends for the brutal honesty of her writings, whereas men attempted to silence her literary enthusiasm and level her creativity to occasional jottings. In her own manner, Charlotte Brontë refused to condescend to slaughtering her literary talent in order to conform to the masculine view; or

protect female "delicacy"; instead she waited for her gifts to ripen and eventually she started publishing her novels. In so doing, she, very much like her heroine, demonstrated that she did have a voice and could present a viable alternative to gender-stereotyped roles.

Nevertheless, it is very significant to keep in mind the detail that, along with her sisters, she used a male pseudonym in order to have her book accepted, read and published by a publishing house in London. This literary disguise, for Victorian England, was not a feminine caprice, but a mere matter of authorship necessity. As a man, she could publish, as a woman, even for her closest friends she chose to remain incognito which proves to us, today, the burden of gender limitations and expectations. When finally, the identity of Currer Bell, the author of Jane Eyre, became public knowledge, the attacks on the "morality", "religiosity", "propriety" of the book knew no limits.

Matthew Arnold, for example, presented the author as a woman whose "mind contains nothing, but hunger, rebellion, and rage" (qtd. in Gilbert 337). Although he referred to "Villette", the critique may have very well been employed to describe Jane Eyre; Charlotte Brontë, if one considers this one singular opinion of a Victorian male critic, must have scandalized by means of openness and straightforwardness. Hunger, rebellion and rage were merely passion, refusal to conform and frustration at the impossibility of a genuine, radical change as far as gender hierarchies and restrictions were concerned. The extreme tone, usually employed to describe the games of imagination in a Gothic novel, for example, condemns the right to a deep, profound female psychological life, like the one of Jane Eyre and almost labels the author as menacing and destabilizing.

Surprisingly and sadly, the most important attacks came from women writers, either critics, or novelists, or both. Thus, Elizabeth Rigby wrote that Jane Eyre is the work of an "unregenerate and undisciplined spirit", similar to the one that "has fostered Chartism and rebellion" (337). Anne Mozley, in 1853 affirmed that Currer Bell, as an authorial voice seemed "soured, coarse and grumbling; an alien... from society and amenable to none of its laws." (337). Furthermore, Mrs. Oliphant, in 1855 emphasized the literary and moral shock that Jane Eyre gave its Victorian readers, challenging canons and prophesizing a new era for women's writing:

> Ten years ago we professed an orthodox system of novel-making. Our lovers were humble and devoted . . . and the only true love worth having was that... chivalrous true love which

> consecrated all womankind. . . when suddenly, without warning, *Jane Eyre* stole upon the scene, and the most alarming revolution of modern times has followed the invasion of *Jane Eyre* (337).

According to Gilbert, what shocked most Victorian readers and critics about Jane Eyre was its declared anger and rage, the "anti-Christian" refusal "to accept the forms, customs and standards of society – in short, its rebellious feminism" (328). Naturally, Jane is an improper Victorian heroine, dissatisfied with her destiny, revolting, even as a child, against restrictions, ceaselessly striving to voice her passion, questioning and challenging everything on her way. In her Bildungsroman rage plays a very important role, as it is rage the feeling that pushes her into the world, it is rage the flood that carries her away most of the times in her successive departures.

Somehow paradoxically, Jane is also the heroine wise enough or astute enough to fit into the pattern of a pre-established patriarchal world and mould her personality so as to avoid annihilation. What singularizes her is the ability to question this world and see it for what it is: limiting for women, oppressive on their selfhood, content with their submission. Moreover, by means of her social adventures, she acknowledges the fact that she must awake from an infantile unconscious Jane. If she is to grow, she must also be able to suffer and the heroine never rejects suffering: In Showalter's opinion "experiencing frustration and discontent to its fullest, suffering all its pangs, is the price of adulthood, a 'privilege' that may lead to action" (Female 65). Jane's actions are but steps towards socialization and not as it has been suggested by the Victorian contemporaries, stages of feminine insanity and refusal to accept conventions. After experiencing different types of moral and physical evils the heroine reaches a superior understanding, though somehow self-diminishing, and she does not hold any illusions about a possibility of a radical transformation of the gender prison. Her aim is merely Cartesian, in the sense that she wishes to announce the male characters that she *exists, and even dares to think.*

Yet, this is as far as she goes, for after the announcement is made on repeated occasions, she leaves the arena of gender struggle and retires, literally and figuratively at the same time, in the woods, at Ferndean. There, however, she is not alone, but next to a man, her husband, equal, and partner. This is a strategic retreat that becomes a life-philosophy in female reading, promoting and sustaining the same conventional institution

of marriage, between a man and a woman who discovered herself and consciously said "Yes, I do!".

In the view of those stated above, considering the multiplicity of gender verdicts given to the work and the assessment of the author's enterprise, one conclusion seems to impose itself. It consists of the fact that although Jane Eyre criticizes the negative aspects of a patriarchal society, it does not suggest its extinction. The achieved aim is to have merely offered a more empowering model for women's behavior and self-construction in the same way in which Charlotte Brontë herself survived and asserted a point of view in an ideologically limiting-society for the female representatives.

3 EDUCATION AND SCHOOLING

3.1 Introduction

Education played an important role in the formation of the protagonist, enabling her to make later on choices, observe or, on the contrary, sanction rules imposed by a patriarchal society and taught in its schools. It is the means through which in the narrative the protagonist meets two of the most important female figures to become role models for her, in the characters of Mrs. Temple and Helen Burns, and acquires the social taming of the wild animal that was once locked in the famous Red Room.

Moreover, far from only offering curricula and commenting on the character's exceptional intellectual qualities, the ability to read, speak or write fluently, in foreign languages and represent reality in the shape of pictures, education is the instrument for social integration, financial auto-support and finally affective victory. It is because of benefiting from education that Jane, the plain, poor and obscure governess ultimately wins the unwavering affection and support of her employer, the proud Mr. Rochester and lives happily ever after in the secure confines of a home and a family.

Nevertheless, all the positive effects and great achievements mediated by education, also mean, at the age of the actual studying and later on in life, dealing with harsh conditions, learning to be cold and hungry and accepting it, sustaining humiliation and resisting it, but also defying norms and acting as an individual and not as one of the many. As Moretti expressed it, when referring to Victorian novels:

> Youth acts as a sort of symbolic concentrate of the uncertainities and tensions of an entire cultural system, and the hero's growth becomes the narrative convention or fictio that permits the exploration of conflicting values. (105).

School, in Jane's opinion is a means for her very existence to be acknowledged by those who even then, at a very early stage, she perceived as models worthy to be copied: "Bessie sometimes spoke of it as a place where young ladies sat in the stocks, wore backboards, and were expected to be exceedingly genteel and precise" (Brontë 57). Being "genteel and precise" are, of course the Victorian ideals of what an effective woman and

lady at the same time should be, and this is what Jane, not so much in a declarative manner but rather subconsciously will strive to become throughout all her life.

Moreover, school appears as a reason for voyage, journey, admission into a new existence, presumably with more opportunities to offer and less struggle in order to be accepted by the world she lives in: "Besides, school would be a complete change; it implied a long journey, an entire separation from Gateshead, an entrance into a new life" (57). The idea of diminished struggle in order to be accepted will nevertheless be proven false during the novel's successive stages covering instances of passage. The main character, far from remaining passive and quietly acquiescing, will strive to gain status and preserve it. Nonetheless, it is worth mentioning the initial impulse of the heroine towards socialization and not the socially demolishing urge, since she envisages a "new life" and not a martyr-like renunciation of it.

3.2 The Lowood Stage - Accumulating Knowledge

Lowood, Jane's school is a literary replica of Cowan Bridge, the place where the author and her sisters were sent to complete their education. In spite of Charlotte Brontë's constant denial of ever conceiving strong similarities between these two places, it is easy, when reading Elizabeth's Gaskell Life of Charlotte Brontë to discover an almost identity. In my reading of the novel as well, Jane Eyre's voice when depicting her early educational experiences is identical to the voice that Charlotte Brontë employed under similar circumstances. The reticence that the author demonstrated when others emphasized the merging point between life and fiction can be read only as the apprehension of shocking the conservative Victorian audience and reluctance to admit that women could have such experiences in schools run by men, allegedly their protectors.

Furthermore, the author's sister, Maria, who died of consumption at an early age provides the living model for Helen Burns and the relationship that Jane Eyre and the before mentioned character is similar to the one existing between Charlotte Brontë and her sister. Thus, both Maria and Helen Burns die at a very young age, helpless victims of cold, insufficient and badly prepare food, scarce hygiene, evils of Victorian charity schools.

Lowood's terrifying attributes are rain, cold and darkness and life here is but a routine of alternating physical sufferings. Its routine varies between cold and hunger with

occasional flogging and mechanical repetitions as the educational method employed. At the beginning, education, therefore, appears to Jane almost always fearful, even agonizing a reflection of the Brontës' own traumatic experiences at the Clergy Daughters' School and elsewhere. Nevertheless, as Gilbert commented:

> [. . .] It may also reflect in a more general way the repressiveness with which the nineteenth century educated all its young ladies until [. . .] they must have felt, like the inhabitants of Kafka's penal colony that the morals and maxims of patriarchy were being embroidered on their own skins [. . .] (275).

It is significant that the person who grants Jane's access into this restrictive and sometimes annihilating world - -its inhabitants are going to be decimated by typhus- - is a person whose physical aspect is unpleasant and common, the unceremonious announcer of a life of hard work and everlasting restrictions. Brontē briefly depicts this somewhat pitiful female Cerberus performing her duties as a person "more ordinary; ruddy in complexion, though of a careworn countenance: hurried in gait and action like one who had always a multiplicity of tasks on hand" (76).

Architecturally speaking, Lowood gives the impression of chaos, disorganization, with "large and irregular rooms" (76), with a garden as a "wide enclosure, surrounded with walls so high as to exclude every glimpse of prospect" (80), the very reflection of a world in search of a guide. The general impression of confusion appears to be due to the lack of any male authority; the only exception, Brocklerhurst, can hardly be taken for an organizer, he is much more evocative of a prison guard.

The girls' uniforms are identical, regardless of age. It is obvious that this uniformity is but an attempt to destroy the natural development of personality, or, even worse, to create a strange type of mass individuality, where homogeneity becomes the only desirable quality. Very much like Panopticon, Lowood, a Victorian locus of women limitation and restrictions also does the work of a "naturalist" and "could be used as a machine to carry out experiments, to alter behavior, to train or correct individuals" It "may even provide an apparatus (male surveillance, Brocklerhurst, insertion mine) for supervising its own mechanisms" (Foucault, Discipline 203). In order for the experiments to be carried out human beings such as the little girls of Lowood are often objectified. As

Brontë explains in a powerfully grotesque image, sometimes "overpowered with sleep" they "would fall down" and need to be "propped up with the monitors' high stools" (93).

Very significantly, since this is a universe of women at different ages, Lowood is also connected with feminine sexuality. One might also say that the common guilt that the pupils share is the formidable one of allowing themselves to ripen into femininity. Their femininity, however, is not a characteristic to be encouraged and nurtured. Orphan, inexorably destitute, devoid of any social opportunities, what use could they possibly make of grace, beauty and charm, Brocklerhurst, the sinister pastor seems to ask himself. As if to fully answer this problematic issue, the character seems to have acted to later on fully justify Showalter's critical approach to the chapter. "As an institution, Lowood disciplines its inmates by attempting to destroy their individuality at the same time that it punishes and starves their sexuality" (Showalter, Literature 117); the Victorian terror of flesh, the determination to stifle female personality appears to have been cultivated in the instruction institutions of the time, having been dictated and imposed by male authority.

In this insane attempt to uniformity, not only the poor Lowoodian orphans are subject to leveling and standardizing; Nature herself can be tamed and subdued if her creation contradicts norms of simplicity and plainness. When Brocklerhurst asks that Julia Severn's hair be cut he serves, in his opinion, a higher instance that dictates humbleness and he fights against dangerous frivolity. With a fervor suitable for a loftier cause and a hypocrisy that will be revealed as soon as his wife and daughters majestically dressed make quite an entrance, Brocklerhurst claims that his mission does not imply conformation to nature. Therefore, he proceeds to give absurd orders and stain beauty and freshness in the name of morality: "He scrutinized the reverse of these living medals some five minutes, then pronounced sentence. These words fell like the knell of doom –'All these top-knots must be cut off'" (Brontë 96).

In terms of class distinctions, Lowood also serves its purpose. It is conceived as a space which produces the humbleness necessary for orphans and people of modest means in order to become teachers and governesses, then the only honorable professions for daughters of middle class. In describing this harsh social reality, Bonnie Smith affirms that "the governess in the nineteenth century is now known to have lived a life of intense misery", and probably was "the most unfortunate individual, the simple, middle class

woman who had to earn her own living. The psychological situation of the governess, her decentered subjectivity split between a servant and a family member made her position unenviable." (123). Moreover, the critic adds "she could expect no security of employment, minimal wages and an ambiguity of status that isolated her within the household" (123). Lowood is such a "green house" of governesses, and in this respect, Mrs. and Misses Brocklerhurst can be said to patronize over an entire school of future dependent human beings.

In Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre, the protagonist easily obtains a position as a governess. So easily that the fairy-tale like dimension of the character is almost crushed, nevertheless in a way that emphasizes the modernity of the novel. As Angela Carter puts it, even if Jane Eyre can be read as some sort of Beauty or wife of Bluebeard, who reaches "an old, dark house, whose ugly, fanciful master nourishes a fatal secret", this arrival is not "the result of marriage or magic", but "the result of an advertisement she herself had placed in a newspaper", dictated by her desire to "earn her own living" (162). Rather disparagingly or utterly realistically, Carter further on ponders on the heroine's cunningness, her wish to survive and escape patriarchal boundaries in a man-like fashion, employing manly techniques of social ascension. Thus, Jane Eyre is encapsulated as a character that: "is only pretending to be a heroine of romance or fairy tale. She is not a romance figure at all, but a precursor of the rootless urban intelligentsia" (163).

Placing an advertisement in a local paper, after completing her education, she receives an acceptable and respectable, even if subservient position as a governess, based on her training and teaching education at Lowood. Punch, the famous magazine of satire and humour, mockingly proposed formal training for governesses which describes Lowood almost perfectly.

> [. . .]'There ought to be the establishment of a school to prepare young ladies to be governesses... but as the social position of a governess is a particular one, being, as a novelty, rather uncomfortable, though, like a certain process to which eels are subjected, nothing when anyone is used to it'" (qtd. in Constable, Emily. Punch and Brontë on Training the Ideal Governess. December 1993. The Victorian Web literature, history and culture in the age of victoria. 27 October 2002 <http://65.107.211.206/Brontë/cBrontë/61brnt15.html>).

The "Governesses' Benevolent Institution", as Punch suggests the establishment to be called, would involve the following lesson: "[. . .]'The novices, during leisure hours, are to sit in separate apartments accessible to all of the servants [. . .]" who nevertheless will not be allowed to serve, and who will refuse to supplement the scarcity of the food. This lesson reminds the readers of Jane's first contact with Lowood, when she realized, to her great shock ands surprise that the food there was not going to be either good or plentiful: (qtd. in Constable)

> Ravenous and now very faint, I devoured a spoonful or two of my portion without thinking of its taste; but the first edge of hunger blunted, I perceived I had got in hand a nauseous mess: burnt porridge is almost as bad as rotten potatoes; famine itself soon sickens over it (Brontë 78).

It seems that the purpose of Brocklerhurst in starving the "vile bodies" (Brontë 95) is to create the intensely spiritualized creature that Victorians use to worship as the Angel in the House. According to Alexander Welsh's suggestion in "The City of Dickens", this obsessively employed concept in Victorian era was but a sexless creature, a reminder of the inexorable, that is, death, final annihilation as the inescapable destiny. To become such an angel, to assume such an identity, the heroine is forced to learn survival in a place where decent food is but a rarity, and in most cases it is disgusting, impossible to eat. Strangely enough, the inhabitants of this terrifying school-convent, do not rebel, their only reaction consists of "whispered words" (92); Rights, Decency, Compassion are whispered; too assertive a voice would disturb the harmony of the poor.

In Lowood discipline prevails, the painful discipline imposed on girls by women seemingly lacking any kind of empathy, or deliberately restraining it. "The Babel clamour of tongues" (79) and the diversity inherent in such a concept are silenced and leveled. One should consider the Byblical reference and its relevance here to articulate a general state of helplessness, symbolic for Lowood inhabitants in particular and women, in general. Humans aimed too high and they were punished for their presumptuousness. The issue that can be raised here is whether Brontë uses this symbolism in its proper sense, implying that a similar community of women cannot organize itself and function in the absence of and against patriarchal indications, or, on the contrary, in an ironic manner. The irony appears to prevail, since under the circumstances of cold, hunger, and various corporal

punishments, the Lowood girls may be believed to aim at merely reaching tomorrow, not Heaven, at least not the one shouted about by Brocklerhurst.

Similarly, when Reverend Carus Wilson from Cowan Bridge, Charlotte Brontë and her sisters' school, hears about complaints regarding the scarcity of food, its bad quality and the effects that they might have on the pupils' health", "his reply was to the effect that the children were to be trained up to regard higher things than dainty pampering of the appetite" (Gaskell 103). Furthermore, this Brocklerhurst's historical counterpart apparently took great pains and efforts to blame them for "the sin of caring over much for carnal things" (103). In the view of those mentioned above, when reading and interpreting Jane Eyre, one can place oneself at the center of the melting point between life and fiction. In Charlotte Brontë's novel, fiction itself acquires authenticity and realism when its background lies in factual life events and places.

Returning to the Benevolent Institution lessons (a journalistic almost replica of Lowood), it should also be mentioned that they involved learning how to behave in society, especially those social gatherings that reunited people belonging to the superior class in front of whose representatives' governesses had to behave in perennial submission. At Thornfield, Jane will find herself in such a position and then the Lowood lessons will be applied. As again it is stated in Punch:

> [. . .]'Evening parties will be given occasionally in the schoolroom, and to them will be invited a number of agreeable men, that the 'young persons' may know how to behave in society; that is, hold their tongues and sit still. For the due enforcement of these properties, one of the ladies aforesaid will also be present, accompanied of her daughters, whom the scholars are to be studiously snubbed, by way of a lesson to them in meekness' (qtd. in Constable, Emily. Punch and Brontë on Training the Ideal Governess. December 1993. The Victorian Web literature, history and culture in the age of victoria, 27 October 2002 <http://65.107.211.206/Brontë/cBrontë/61brnt15.html>).

The girls at Lowood were certainly snubbed by Mrs. and Misses Brocklerhurst, but, ironically the lesson about the appropriate behavior when pleasant young gentlemen are around lacks from the school curriculum. In spite of this most notable absence, once she becomes a governess, Jane "behaves herself" in a gathering at Rochester's house. Although she is invited to join the group, she sits alone in a corner, does not speak to anyone and generally acts as if ashamed to exist. Nonetheless, she thinks, analyzes, inwardly but

sharply criticizes and even has the audacity to fall in love with her employer. In so doing, Jane clearly breaks the limits and stereotypes of her inferior rank and rises far above the lessons taught by Lowood and the Governesses' Benevolent Institution. The article in Punch merely states the problem in a comical style, but Brontë creates a realistic portrait of a young woman subjected to all the injustices mentioned by Punch magazine but successful in leaving behind the hypocritical discourse of the pastor Brocklerhurst as the representative of the ideology of the day.

Nevertheless, after the devastating effects of epidemics, even Lowood changes, improves and, according to Jane Eyre, it becomes a "truly useful and noble institution of value and importance" (Brontë 115). A new building is erected and new regulations, milder, replace the absurdity of the previous ones. Therefore, in the end, the main character does acknowledge education and its advantages even if it has been acquired in an unhealthy climate, the same way in which "Charlotte's earnest vigorous mind saw, at an unusually early age, the immense importance of education, as furnishing her with the tools which she had the strength and the will to wield" (Gaskell 105).

In addition, and as a reminder of her own life credo, expectations, but also financial pressures, Charlotte Brontë entrusts her protagonist with the mission of putting education to a test outside the narrow school confinements and earning her own living by means of instructing others.

3.3 The Morton Stage - Making a Living by Means of Education

After leaving Thornfield like a thief, feeling stigmatized and guilty for a guilt which, nevertheless, is not hers, the female protagonist once again has to use Lowood lessons in order to make a living. Jane re-starts teaching, this time in a humble village and inhabiting a modest house, as simple and humble as her existence seems to announce itself from now on. As her male protector, St. John, is himself a man of modest means, Jane must reconcile herself with climbing down the social scale. Therefore, passion inside, talents and natural dispositions will be again restricted, subdued. In this respect, Morton bears similarities with Lowood, with the difference that Jane is now in command of her little, modest school, in her capacity as a teacher and not controlled by male dictators as the Brocklerhurst of her childhood years.

The chapter describing her experience as a teacher of many and not as a governess of one, displays the strong class prejudices, always there, latent, but having become more poignant at Thornfield. So close to accession to the gentry nobility class by marriage to Rochester, the protagonist sees herself now reduced to the condition of anonymity and boredom that her new position require. Instead of accession into a higher class, instead of the voyages that would have enriched her own knowledge and perceptions of the world, the heroine will have to *give* continuously to her pupils and suspect that the gift of knowledge cannot be fully appreciated.

Even so, she has already exerted herself for others, opening with twenty pupils: "But three of the number can read: none write or cipher. Several knit, and a few sew a little. They speak with the broadest accent of the district. At present, they and I have a difficulty in understanding each other's language" (Brontë 385). Class voice is heard again, since these girls are described as "unmannered, rough, intractable" (385); it takes patience for her to be able to deal with this lower station and what may be called as a suicide of her abilities. The heroine deplores her present and feels "degraded": "I doubted that I had taken a step which sank instead of raising me in the scale of social existence" (385).

This class voice is the same voice that doubted the benefits of living with her kin if these kin were poor that we could hear at the beginning of the novel. There is no doubt that Jane wishes to climb the social scale as she always felt that she rightfully belongs with the rich. At Lowood and Thornfield, hers was an assumed modesty, not an authentic one; as a governess she could bear her condition because in reality she was never treated like one by her employer. Outsiders did not matter, they were mere visitors, perhaps that explains why she was never seriously affected by the Ingrams' irreverent remarks.

In Morton the heroine's changing dispositions and moods explain the alternation of almost physical sickness at the sight of some of her pupils with the hope that "in a few months, it is possible, the happiness of seeing progress and change for the better in my scholars may substitute gratification for disgust" (386). Nevertheless, Jane, probably as the result of living quietly and respectably in a new environment of work and isolation, is able to distinguish and appreciate the difference between what she might have been had she surrendered to Rochester's charm, powerful passion and her actual humble position as a

country teacher. The distinction is rendered in terms of climate and space, demonstrating the author's many times confessed patriotism, and sometimes even nationalism:

> Whether is it better, I ask, to be a slave in a fool's paradise at Marseilles-fevered with delusive bliss one hour-suffocating with the bitterest tears of remorse and shame the next- or to be a village schoolmistress, free and honest in a breezy mountain hook in the healthy heart of England? (386).

Home is better, safer, cleaner, and benign, as opposed to abroad, visualized as richer, but dangerous, malignant in its luxury of objects and feelings. Ironically, we can almost hear Jane glorifying Brocklerhurst's pathetic lectures on humbleness, modesty, flagging of the flesh to gain the immortality of the soul, but, this time the choice is made by the protagonist and not dictated by an authoritative and hypocritical male figure. Furthermore, when Jane discusses her actual position with St. John, she once again summarizes her social struggle and her will to conform and live by the rules of modesty. An outcast, a vagrant, an asocial human being, Jane is now, thanks to education and the dedicated manner in which she apprehended its benefits, perfectly even if unceremoniously fit to live with and for the other members of society.

At a later stage, Jane's avatars as a teacher in a remote village, the initial dissatisfaction at the spectacle of uniform dullness that her pupils offered, dissolve, as she learns to discover quality and potential for improvement under unpolished and uninviting even repulsive masks. The character condescends to grant the "heavy-looking gaping rustics" (392) she is supposed to educate, the ability to improve, the admission serving to emphasize her own adaptability to new and challenging circumstances.

Teaching them is equally rewarding for them as it is for Jane and she continues applying Lowood rules, even Mrs. Scatcherd's rules, but, of course, in a diluted, gentler way. Her pupils feel a real pleasure in taking care of their appearance, keeping their belongings in order and neatness, learning the rules of "quiet and orderly manners" (392). In Morton, Jane's pedagogical system aims at creating subjects in he own image --perhaps not that refined--, that is, in the mould in which Jane herself had been formed and trained. Her lessons started in Lowood and their echo is still particularly strong, in the light of the advantages derived from the education she received there:

> I had the means of an excellent education placed within my reach: a fondness for some of my studies, and a desire to excel in all, together with great delight in pleasing my teachers, especially such as I loved, urged me on. I availed myself freely of the advantages offered me (115).

In Jane's case education served to make her a person who can be proud of "harmonious thoughts", "better regulated feelings" and "disciplined and subdued character" (116), but if it had stopped after reaching that goal, it would have represented an incomplete process. The second stage that needs to naturally develop from this first one, "is to inject a similar training into other women, bringing them into the familiar world of 'civilized', middle class, European norms" (Azim 182). The fact that the heroine will choose *not* to educate faraway Indian women as she will refuse to join St. John on his civilizing mission, is but a detail. Jane will simply substitute English peasants for the more exotic pupils she might have had, nevertheless her mission as a teacher remains unchallenged and is fulfilled to her best.

As a recognition of this minute, self-toiling process, her pupils' parents welcome the teacher converted in some sort of an apostle, whose mission is to enlighten the poor, save the masses and lead them to a better understanding of life. Of course, it is difficult to say how refined education is going to concretely help those rustic women and impede their early undertaking of endless domestic chores once they start a family and even as girls, at home, but this is a much more delicate issue that Charlotte Brontë does not even consider necessary to mention. Nevertheless, the inappropriateness of too extended an education for the simple minds must have preoccupied her, since she only allows the protagonist to continue with her French, German, drawing and painting while Jane's pupils do not seem to experience the need to develop their faculties with such pursuits.

By the time Jane closes the school for Christmas, the number of her pupils increased to sixty and she even managed to attract a superior echelon to enrich the previously modest category of the cottagers' children. The farmers' daughters have joined the courses and to those she has been able to teach history, geography, grammar and the finer kinds of needlework. Eventually, for Jane Eyre education becomes a means for a double-standard socialization; her own, started in the cold Lowood, as well as her pupils' in Morton. Lowood lessons may have been painful to acquire but they demonstrated their

undeniable utility in the voyage to integration that the heroine undertook in the first pages of the novel.

4 SURROGATE FAMILIES

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is the core of my thesis, which explains its length, as compared to the other ones. The most important characters in the novel and their tremendous influence over the main character populate the following chapter and argue for its relevance.

The present novel is not an exception to the general tradition of the Victorian novels, which are usually based on the conflicts arising because of the absence of a nuclear family. At the beginning of her journey, Jane Eyre is a double orphan; as a child, and as a female child. Consequently, not only does she have to learn to live without the parental protection, but, later on, she also has to accept the condition of subordination in a male dominated world. The successive lessons of survival in spite of the affective, social and material obstacles are taught by the many family members substitutes with whom the protagonist's existence will come into contact.

Consequently, Jane Eyre employs the literal and figurative use of the central image of the family as the context through with the identity of the protagonist is defined. Accordingly, the dynamics of the narrative will concentrate on the crumbling (occurred prior to the narrative period) and the reconstitution of the family. The novel is initiated and pushed forward with the idea of a loss; of non-existent parents for Jane Eyre, her continuous search for surrogate mother and father figures, and with her own attempts to adopt (*almost* substitute daughter Adele, pupils). Naturally, the protagonist will not be exposed to benefic influence only, and sometimes she will have to learn the harsh life lessons from apparently evil-like or deeply immoral characters (Bertha Mason), but eventually she will be able to incorporate these negative examples and grow into a final positive and convincing identity.

The closure of the novel is made possible by the creation of the main character's real family. Thus, the last united family appears in opposition with the fragmented original family with which the book begins. The difference between the initial image of a family and the final, real one emphasizes precisely the personal and the societal growth of the character.

4.2 Jane's Family in Gateshead

The unmistakable, most painful condition for a child, that of an orphan, is introduced to the readers of Jane Eyre in the very first pages, by means of the sufferings inflicted on the protagonist by a substitute family. The physical inferiority and debility compared to the robust appearance and appetite of her cousins Reed and their mother, the wicked aunt Reed, singularizes the main character in an alien universe, a house where she is barely tolerated and cordially hated as an intruder.

> There was no chance of taking a walk that day...I was glad of it; I never liked long walks, especially on chilly afternoons: dreadful to me was the coming home in the raw twilight, with nipped fingers and toes, and a heart saddened by the chidings of Bessie, the nurse, and humbled by the consciousness of my physical inferiority to Eliza, John, and Georgiana Reed (Brontë 39).

Gateshead is the place where Jane spends her very first childhood years, until the age of nine, but it is also the place where she sees herself compelled to become embittered, frustrated and wild, as the result of the lack of affection coming from a real, affectionate family. The protagonist's surrogate family in Gateshead, consists of Bessie Leaven, a paid nurse for the Reed children, an unwilling one for Jane, the three Reed offsprings, and Mrs. Reed, their mother and at the same time, Jane's evil figure of a stepmother.

4.2.1 Bessie Leaven – a domestic's perspective

Bessie Leaven, the servant, is the instrument of Jane's early exposure to the world of fairy tales and ballads, which will influence the heroine throughout all the rites of her passage. Her early teachings constitute the basis for the creation of fantasies, dreams and desire, which together with the sense of social reality will build the narrative voice of Jane Eyre, spinning the tale. Oddly enough, Bessie's stories and songs are not cheerful ones, meant to comfort the poor orphan, but pungent reminders of this condition. Myths and ballads will structure Jane's voyage and her reactions to different events, much more than they will affect the other three children in the house, who, nevertheless, live in their own myth of comfort: a pleasant, rich house, a caring mother and gratifying servants.

The nurse represents much more than a reservoir of folklore jewels; she is at the same time pragmatic and down-to-earth and, in a way she can be said to continuously and somehow mercilessly obstruct any attempt of the orphan to forget her condition. "You

aught to be aware, miss, that you are under obligations to Mrs. Reed: she keeps you: if she were to turn you off you would have to go to the poorhouse." (44). Such a remark accompanied by Abbot's, according to which Jane is "less than a servant" (44), since she does not work for a living, comprise the protagonist's slightly premature lessons in economics and finance, painful at the age when they were taught, amazingly helpful at a later age of confrontation with male financial superiority.

Hasty, superficial and often cynical in her remarks, Bessie Leaven is nevertheless the only one sympathetic figure toward Jane, in the Reeds' house. Shallow as her rare comfort is, this rather careless, disinterested and simple-minded watcher of Jane's process of growing-up and metamorphosing into a rebel, still provides the protagonist with dreams of being and acting lady-like, fighting to ascend on a social scale and finally have her own place in a gentleman's house.

4.2.2 Stepmother, stepbrother and stepsisters

The three vicious Reed children are the facets of the same selfish, cruel personality. Instinctively but also directed by their mother, they dislike the heroine and reject her company, taking great pleasure in making her feel the "Other", the kept one, intolerable burden and unspeakably unpleasant presence.

If the girls, Eliza and Georgiana are simply malicious, mean and vain, perfect prototypes of Cinderella's sisters, John Reed, the young "master", will play a considerably more significant role in depicting Jane's relationship with the Gateshead's hostile world. Thus, he is a miniature of a patriarchal presence, a forerunner of Brocklerhurst in Gateshead, equally harassing and bulying. Of course, he is a miniature only in terms of age, because otherwise he reminds one of an ogre's progeny, at least in comparison with little Jane:

> John Reed was a schoolboy of fourteen years old; four years older than I, for I was but ten; large and stout for his age, with a dingy and unwholesome skin; thick lineaments in a spacious visage, heavy limbs and large extremities. He gorged himself habitually at table, which made him bilious, and gave him a dim and bleared eye with flabby cheeks (41).

The first chapter physical confrontation between Jane and John Reed makes the former fully aware of her *body*, revolting with rage, fear and disgust at the sight of her

cousin. After the usual series of scornful remarks concerning her humiliating, subaltern position in their house, expressed from the perspective of his superiority, John Reeds hurts Jane by throwing a book at her. This attack is highly ironical. He throws a book, not just any other object, but the hidden message is that in spite of his being the *owner* of those books, Jane is their *reader*. Nonetheless, at the same time, his gesture is emblematic for the protagonist's rejection from class and patriarchy that *is* class, as the books are his, and the whole house will belong to him in a few years. As Boumelha states it,

> All, then – family, class, inheritance – hinges upon patrilineage. That culture, too has a double role in the house of the master, that books have the power to hurt as well as to enlarge horizons, is also apparent when the very book she has found 'profoundly interesting' (p. 41), however mysterious, is flung at her head and cuts it open (65).

This is the moment of struggle represented in the dichotomy male-culture versus female-nature in which Jane, the plain, small and feeble makes use of her mind and body to punish, to contradict and, as a matter of fact, to assert *her* own truth, in perfect opposition with *his*. The analogy she makes between his cruel behaviour and the equally cruel one of Roman emperors, is extremely suggestive if one considers the historic collapse of the Roman Empire, brought about by madness, vice, and lust. Here Jane becomes an enraged Cassandra, shouting the inexorability of the Fall of the House of Reeds, for indeed, her childhood's penitentiary will collapse, too. As a continuation of the confrontation sequence, not only does Jane scream, but she reinforces her verbal outburst by the power of her small, enraged hands, shockingly effective, since John, the master, paradoxically is going to need the women of the house to rescue him.

Consequently, sisters, mother and women servants will rush to help, exile Jane into the famous Red Room and symbolically lock the door behind her innocence because clearly, the person emerging from that room will be a completely different one. Even before experiencing Gothic terror and revelation in that enclosed space, Jane refuses to be tied down by the garters which belong to another woman (Abbott), and firmly announces that she will not move: "*I* attached *myself* to *my* seat by *my* hands" [emphasis added] (44), in a gesture that suggest that she accepts restrictions if they are self-imposed.

The Red Room was comparatively associated to Jane's "vision of the society in which she is trapped, an uneasy and elfin dependent" (Gilbert 340) and a "paradigm of

female inner space" (Showalter, Literature 114). My argument here, without fully embracing any of the two terms of comparison at the expense of the other, honestly admits their validity, but extends it to the *only* space in which Jane is allowed to exist, at least at an early stage, and definitely until she fully comprehends the rules of the society in which she has to live. The trauma caused by this temporary enclosure is visible and text discernible beyond any doubt, the trauma experienced by Every Girl when faced with the challenge of assuming womanhood, especially a restrictive Victorian womanhood. In this respect, the Red Room, as space of enclosure also becomes the place that later on will prompt socialization, as the character's nature is that of a final integrative kind and not defeated or insanely rejecting.

When Jane sees her reflection in the mirror, she does not recognize the image, but perceives a spirit-like figure. Many times afterwards, Rochester will compare her to fairies, spirits, elves, but her own perception is much more frightening than a man's debatable choice of compliments. Jane, the child, is not only temporarily isolated, cut off from the others, but from her own self, as if announcing the fate she will have to bear until the moment she is able to overcome fears, stare at the glassy surface and see a human being, upright and dignified in her actions.

Therefore, when the "mood of the revolted slave" (46) is gradually wearing off, a very sound interior monologue follows, the heroine comparing herself to the others, acknowledging her lack of personal charms, and especially wondering at the perfect failure of all her attempts to please everyone. In other words, one can say that Jane operates a minute soul-dissection to solve the puzzle of the antagonistic behavior of the Gateshead inhabitants towards her. This is, again, one of Brontë's confirmation and at the same time critique of the condition of women in her times. If something goes wrong, a girl, a woman is led into assuming the blame for the world to plunge into full motion again. The more lonely, desperate, hopeless and helpless the feminine presence, the stronger her self-destroying, self-blaming drive will function, up to the point where she envisages physical disappearance, either by means of escape or, by self-starvation. "Why was I always suffering, always browbeaten, always accused, forever condemned?" (46). Because, one might answer, Jane tries too much to be liked, approved of, appreciated and integrated. Her natural dispositions, she learned to mute, and accordingly, the result of this permanent

toiling, appears most disagreeable and unnatural, attracting antipathy and alienating at the same time. In this respect, Jane's voyage towards self-discovery and self-assertion starts, very much like the affirmation of her femininity, in the symbolically Red Room, reservoir of blood-like selfhood.

The space of enclosure is also the room where the master of the house, now deceased, had spent his very last days. Terrifying piece of knowledge for a child but, at the same time, precocious and precious recognition of the world in which she has to exist, since Jane doubted not -- never doubted -- that if "Mr. Reed had been alive" (48) her life would have taken a different, happier course. It is obvious the fact that the heroine, even before she starts her voyage, carries with her the absolute conviction that the power lies with men, be they present or not. In her mind, Mr. Reed's influence still haunts and defines Gateshead, and, once out of the Red Room she will use this to reproach and astonish Mrs. Reed: "What would Uncle Reed say to you, if he were alive?" (60).

In A Literature of their Own, Elaine Showalter remarked that Jane Eyre, in terms of family, is virtually peopled with surrogate female figures, never successful in making up for the absence of powerful males. However, the only one who acknowledges and in a way deplores, invokes the absence, seeing it as disadvantageous to her, in the sense that her rights are not granted by substitutes, is Jane Eyre. It is she who "takes on the unique power of invoking (not, of course, uttering) the very words of this absentee lord of patriarchal ideology" (Boumelha 66). Therefore, Jane started her pilgrimage in a self-preservation attempt to bring Uncle Reed's spirit back to life, and thus ensure her own safety, disputed by his wife, as the representative of male authority.

Initially exiled by this hostile surrogate family, Jane Eyre's presence will be required by her stepmother and stepsisters once again; summoned, she will return to Gateshead. Her stay in Thornfield and her growing attachment to Rochester will be unexpectedly perturbed by a messenger from Gateshead, delivering the misfortunes of a family. The theme that the responsibility to one's family takes priority over one's desires is hereby present. Jane's position as a governess and her friendship with Rochester must both be left when her Aunt Reed becomes seriously ill. A few words from her aunt, "Bring Jane – fetch Jane Eyre: I want to speak with her" (Brontë 195), place her entire life on hold. Jane leaves her own emotions by the wayside in order to minister to her family,

overlooking, in so doing, the animosity that surrounded her in the early childhood and maintained by the same very family that she is now asked to comfort.

The theme that repression of one's feelings must accompany family responsibility seems to merely manifest a much larger repression or "silence". Jane's sacrificing of her own emotion to perform family (even wicked, as hers) duties, appears as a reflection of the societal situation of the time. Women worked in factories, wrote as authors, and yet contemporary literature (even that which had women as heroines) barely and rather disparagingly discussed these alternative female roles, not-centered on nurturing and rejecting perennial self-sacrifice.

Even before her return to Gateshead, Jane learns that "Master John", the same bully that had tortured her sensitivity as a child, inflicting her with the painful feeling of inferiority and alienation, has grown into a problematic adult, a truthful match to the cruel child. His existence had unfolded between numerous debts, incarceration, and in spite of his mother's unconditional help, ended in a suspect death, probably suicide. This destiny seems to be an example of extremely wishful thinking on Jane's part, employed by Brontë to support the argument that Jane is still consumed with destructiveness when the members of the Reeds' family are concerned.

In spite of this rather forced sample of divine justice, the return to her childhood house is an opportunity for recollection, with a grown up Jane who remembers the rage and the bitterness that drove her away from Gateshead, and with the same Melmothian feeling of a "wanderer on the face of the earth" (256). She will be misplaced until she fulfils her destiny of a woman, so far only her intellectual abilities have been put to a test. Nevertheless, Lowood has endowed her with the stubbornness to resist and in this new mood, she re-enters the departing point of her life-story.

Her two cousins- stepsisters "welcome" her in the same cold, impersonal way they had always treated her, but the heroine seems to have grown immune to their behavior. Furthermore, their childhood fortune, good-disposition towards each other and cruel complicity directed against the common enemy (Jane) has vanished into either puritanical isolation (Eliza) or utter boredom (Georgiana).

Encountering the dying Mrs. Reed means encountering the evil witch of childhood, the female authority who has always hated her; yet, illuminated and elevated by Miss Temple and Helen Burn's influence, Jane calls her "dear aunt" and kisses her affectionately (259). One wonders whether Jane would display the same affection if she were still under her aunt's power; it seems highly improbable, but now Jane can allow herself to be generous. Her childhood insecurity related to the Reeds has disappeared, as she has other reasons for which to feel anxious, and they are all connected to Rochester.

As for her aunt, nothing has changed. She still hates Jane because she is used to behaving like this, the hatred of the girl who had been the Other in the house inhabited by her own flesh and blood grew until it became a second nature. Delirious, Mrs. Reed recalls baby Jane as a "burden to be left on my hands" (260) and even extends hatred and rejection to the point where she regrets that Jane had survived the fever that killed so many other girls in Lowood. Reduced once again to the dimension of a "creature", Jane feels "pain" and then "ire" followed by the "determination to subdue her" (260), which indicates the fact that her emotions are as strong as ever and reinforced by a overpowering wish to rule, to impose, to dictate, even in terms of feelings. The governess hopelessly in love in Thornfield returns to soothe but her rather recently acquired Christian meekness and solicitude give way to frustration and anger when confronted with rejection.

Besides the social intercourse with her dying aunt, an instance that acquires powerful psychological and affective implications, Jane's stay in Gateshead facilitates the proximity to her childhood stepsisters, Eliza and Georgiana. They represent two negative female models for Jane, since their lives are, albeit in a different manner, subjected to the Unnatural, at least in the understanding of Victorian female gender expectation.

Eliza embodies the nun in the house. She is industrious, meticulous, punctual, obsessed with details, an authentic dry soul. Brontë almost depicts her as the religious extremist, at the same time clearly emphasizing the fact that more than spirit, soul or mind, her *habits* belong to religious formalism. Her life philosophy resides in the reign of effectiveness and although this obsession with employment might safe her from boredom (Georgiana's destiny), it certainly ensures an empty existence, devoid of any affection, tenderness and care. There is no dependence on the others in Eliza's world, but there is no one inhabiting it, either.

Her sister, Georgiana is the equally unhappy alternative. Vain, self-complacent and obviously confused when she cannot exercise her powers of seduction in the select London circles, due to the financial difficulties of the family, Georgiana cares for herself only and despises everyone else. Her life aim is to get married in a rich family, in order to buy a comfortable destiny, even if based on affective deception. Witnessing these two different yet evenly unpleasant alternative embodiments of femininity, the heroine instinctively perceives the failures they represent and rejects them:

> True, generous feeling is made small account by some; but here were two natures rendered, the one intolerably acrid, the other despicably savourless, for the want of it. Feeling without judgement is a washy draught indeed; but judgement untempered by feeling is too bitter and husky a morsel for human deglution (265).

The fashionable beauty (Georgiana) marries for convenience, for a man to provide for her, the spinster by nature (Eliza) finds in the ritual of Church Anglicanism a substitute for life and ends, logically, in a convent. They both represent extremes and, Brontë seems to suggest, they both sell themselves to powers alien to them; man and religion, without so much of a weak attempt to discover their true essence and challenge pre-ordained life expectancies.

The two sisters are so inexorably anchored in their petty preoccupations that even the filial duties towards their dying mother are taken over by Jane. The final encounter between niece and aunt or between wicked stepmother and oppressed stepdaughter does nothing to reconcile them. The aunt dies without giving "any sign of amity" (268) and Jane realizes that people do not have a change of heart, as Mr. Brocklerhurst's religion required. Before dying nevertheless, Mrs. Reed admits to willingly having deprived Jane of the opportunity of a better life by means of concealing news of her to the uncle from Madera. This is a second punishment for Jane, after the Lowood sentence, and what better way to achieve castigation than to prevent her from living a decent, even rich life, what better match to the Reed's own more and more insecure financial position? Her aunt, in her obviously embittered and obtuse femininity managed to keep Jane from fully growing because becoming an adult also means achieving property and financial independence. She consciously encircled Jane in dependency and precariousness, and postponed emancipation.

Consequently, after the frustrating encounters with the antagonistic female members, the heroine will be once again reconfirmed in her choice and preference for male authority as opposed to either female wickedness or impotence. Leaving Gateshead, a household of alien and repugnant female models, Jane will return to Thornfield and glorify, albeit in self-deception, the masculine presence it contains.

4.3 Jane Eyre's Lowood Family

In Lowood the protagonist apart from acquiring education, also meets the first feminine role models, the characters that will offer a social alternative to the wild animal that needed to be incarcerated in the Red Room. Thus, she will be acquainted to the beneficial, soothing influence of Maria Temple, the school's headmistress and Helen Burns, a prototype of Christian endurance under harsh, hypocritical male dominance represented by the pastor Brocklerhurst. Nevertheless, this family whose members are Jane, Miss Temple and Helen Burns is depicted by Spivak as a doomed "counter-family that falls short because it is only a community of women" (801). In spite of the transitory character of the family with only female members, in Lowood Jane learns from Miss Temple and Helen Burns how to behave in society, how to environmentally moderate the fierceness that in the past, when literally a prisoner at the Reeds' residence, made her almost ventriloquise strange, terrifying outbursts of rage and frustration that nearly destroyed the innocence of her childhood.

4.3.1 Maria Temple – a beneficent, yet deserting mother

The headmistress of Lowood school is the embodiment of dignity, beauty, and calm, combined with thorough knowledge and feminine grace. Lady-like in whatever she does, majestic and comfortingly imposing, Maria Temple is the figure of the mother that Jane undoubtedly would have liked, if she had had the option of choosing one.

Nevertheless, this is a temporary quality of Miss Temple for the child Jane to glimpse into simple, yet powerful motherly affection, because the headmistress herself will eventually tire of playing a surrogate mother to the Lowood pupils and consequently chooses to marry and leaves the school. Thus, she is a convincing endorsement of Victorian ideology and its expectations for women. Those who refuse to, or are prevented from dedicating their lives to men as husbands by exterior factors, such as Eliza Reed and

Helen Burns, will either die or bury themselves in a convent, thus denying their womanhood. Jane herself will finally get married; in this respect, her odyssey serves to make her worthy of such a destiny.

However, even this unspeakable grace and perfect model of a real Victorian lady that is Maria Temple, is compelled to experience her own ordeal at the hands of the ruthless, aggressive, male dominant figure in charge of the women's universe of Lowood. What she teaches Jane and adds to her personality is merely "grace under pressure", one of the very first rules of "sisterhood", lesson of survival which an older, more experienced woman shares with the young neophyte. To the others, especially to young Jane, still unaccustomed to Lowood Syberian climate, Maria Temple is an awesome model of optimism and courage:

> I can remember Miss Temple walking slightly and rapidly along our dropping line, her plaid cloak, which the frosty wind fluttered, gathered close about her, and encouraging us, by precept and example, to keep up our spirits, and march forward, as she said, 'like stalwart soldiers' (Brontë 92).

At the same time, even this truthfully nurturing figure is perhaps too much of a soldier of duty, discipline and endless reservoir of knowledge, under any circumstances, embodying an ideologically imposed model of femininity. Thus, although she realizes that Helen Burns is seriously sick, consumed with tuberculosis, Latin practice is seen as vital in the scene where the sickly girl is made to stand the language test. In this particular sequence Miss Temple merely announces the difficulties and demands that a child on her way to womanhood is expected to meet and fulfill. No wonder Helen could not survive, considering that the very person all the pupils adore as if she were a mother-figure, still teaches her to endure and ignores or overlooks physical incapacities.

Another key episode for the depiction of the character of Miss Temple is the one of the confrontation between the schoolmistress and Brocklerhurst. His attack, although merely verbal, coming from an authoritarian, yet pathetic male figure, can almost be perceived as a physical one. Brontë exercises her vivid description gifts in a Brocklerhurst overpowering Miss Temple with words in an image of verbal rape. She tries to resist, argue, explain, and justify herself for the incommensurable sin of supplementing the interns' food with one slice of bread. The pastor's reaction, although apparently concerning

religion, sounds more like a rapist's didactic discourse, keen on persuading his victim of the social and moral usefulness of the rape:

> Oh, madam, when you put bread and cheese, instead of burnt porridge, into these children's mouth, you may indeed feed their vile bodies, but you little know how you starve their immortal souls (95).

In direct opposition with Brocklerhurst, who is presented as a black pillar of severity, aggressiveness and absurdity, Miss Temple, although also described in terms of architectural imagery, "sculptor's chisel", "pale as marble", "coldness", "fixity", "petrified severity" (93) clearly embodies the frailty of the female. Therefore, as a woman, she cannot fight back the avalanche of reproaches, almost devilish outbursts disguised under the mask of piety. However, the "surrender" is not that of a human body, warm and alive, but that of a cold piece of marble. One understands that the scene is emblematic for the passivity that is normally attributed to women but this passivity seems a surface one only, for who knows what is really going on in "the personal room of Miss Temple"? Gilbert emphasizes the behavioral elegance of the character and state that "Miss Temple will never allow 'something' to speak through her, no wings will rush in her head, no fantasies of fiery heath disturb her equanimity, but she will feel sympathetic anger" (345).

In Jane Eyre Miss Temple embodies all the roles that a woman should play for another human being, especially children. Accordingly, she is alternatively a mother, a teacher, and a perfect companion. Jane benefits from all these different hypostases, but in the end, it is a man in front of whom and for whose personal benefit, Miss Temple decides to play her best and last role – that of a wife and presumably mother.

4.3.2 Helen Burns – the image of renunciation

The other major influence on Jane's personality that she meets at Lowood is the figure of Helen Burns, as the very surname indicates, a character of passionate and eventually lethal Christian submission.

> Helen Burns is as exact a transcript of Maria Brontë as Charlotte's wonderful power of reproducing character could give [. . .] Not a word of that part of Jane Eyre but is a literal repetition of scenes between the pupil and the teacher (Gaskell 104).

In Lowood Helen Burns is Jane's spiritual double, some sort of sister of endurance. The older girl is a strong believer in Christian humanism, a fulfiller of moral responsibilities in spite of her young age. It is hardly accidental the fact that she is introduced to the reader while reading Rasselas, Johnson's moving account of the futility of human endeavour. The book here comprises a double, equally important relevance: on the one hand, the argument of that impressive book is that only a resigned stoicism will enable human beings, here, women, to bear up against the harsh conditions of life, on the other hand the book offers "recipes" for survival. In time, this will also become Jane's book (although undeclared as such), since in Rasselas the main characters, the prince and his sister, also talk, discuss, express their opinion freely. Jane herself will break down conventions of the age that required silence only on women's part.

Rasselas offers Companionship and Communal Reassurance as solutions for a satisfactory life, the same solutions that will later on guide the protagonist. Jane will learn how to feel pleased when performing her duty at Thornfield - at least sometimes -, so will she while working as a village teacher and those around will acknowledge the quality and the results of her work as an instructor.

Helen Burns also teaches Jane how to endure, even physical, unjust punishments. It is memorable the sequence in which she calmly submits her body to humiliation and flogging (used then as an ordinary educational method), but secretly allows her mind to reach higher realms than the pure "educational" ones that the punctilious and cruel Miss Scatcherd thought she was serving. During the lesson of English history, Helen Burns is constantly humiliated by rather displaced, trivial remarks, since they do not focus on knowledge, but on domesticity. One can wonder why the lesson has to be interrupted with critics about Helen's position, instead of praises regarding her unusual intellectual abilities and good memory:

> Burns (such it seems was her name: the girls were all called by their surnames, as boys are elsewhere), Burns, you are standing on the side of your shoe, turn your toes out immediately. Burns, you poke your chin most unpleasantly; draw it in. Burns, I insist on your holding your head up; I will not have you before me in that attitude (Brontë 86-87).

These annoying remarks will culminate with offences, such as "dirty, disagreeable" (88) merited by Helen for the sin of not having cleaned her nails in the morning. It is a

challenge in itself to attempt comprehending what Brontë meant by depicting such a dragon teacher, who is also a woman. Naturally, at first sight, Miss Scatcherd's depiction is homage to the sufferings endured by the author's sister, at the hands of a real Miss Scatcherd, in Cowan Bridge:

> Just then Miss Scatcherd issued from her room, and, without asking for a word of explanation from the sick and frightened girl, she took her by the arm, on the side to which the blister had been applied, and by one vigorous movement, whirled her out into the middle of the floor, abusing her all the time for dirty and untidy habits (Gaskell 105).

Nevertheless, the character seems to be emblematic for more, that is, what was considered then and sustained by means of "scientific" arguments, the women's incapacity to concentrate, their attention always in danger to be distracted by details. After all, Miss Scatcherd is the one who cannot follow the logic flow of the lesson she is teaching, and stops every now and then to criticize irrelevant details. Moreover, it appears evident that in the teacher's opinion, *to know* – the way Helen does - equals danger, it is unnatural and unwomanly, whereas to be clean –even if, or precisely because in Lowood cleanness means the usage of frozen water – is proper, normal, a woman's profession.

Helen's definitely masochistic repression, her almost complicity with the one inflicting physical pain, is but premonitory; resigned to the abuse of her body by absurd teachers, it is as if she consented to transforming the same body into the perfect host for consumption. This incredibly mature girl is both pragmatic and idealistic. On the one hand, she is perfectly able to see the benefits of education in Lowood, on the other hand, she absurdly copes with drastic behaviour, submits to and thus encourages abuse, preaches a most peculiar non-resistance to the pathetic dimension of evil embodied by Miss Scatcherd. Nevertheless, Helen Burn's choice of an idol makes one wonder whether this apparently pure and somewhat naïve Christian conduct that imposes saintly resignation to evil is authentic or, a perfect disguise for a harmless, passive rebel. Thus, it is a paradox the fact that Helen's idol is the figure of Charles the First; strictly historically speaking, he embodied the rebel, dissolved the Third Parliament and had to pay with this own life for this incredible audacity. The fact that Helen, the martyr, preaching the doctrine of endurance and Charles, the insurgent, preaching the doctrine of disobedience and revolt are depicted as having similar destiny in terms of premature death, seems to make Helen herself a rebel, at least at heart.

Therefore, Charles the First's figure may be said to symbolize feminine rebellion and even the meek, subservient and docile characters such as the saintly Helen are influenced by the concept of struggle against the pre-established, restrictive patriarchal world. In a different way though, Jane will also share the same fate with Charles the First, as she will too surrender to her own Parliament (male power embodied by Rochester), but this is a crippled Parliament and her surrender is, in fact, victory in terms of equality.

In Jane Eyre. Brontë often juxtaposes Jane with characters that espouse strikingly different religious beliefs. A permanently searching and questioning Jane is depicted in opposition with other characters who hold strongly to one or another form of Protestantism, the religion that Helen Burns espouses. The Evangelicals stressed the reality of the inner life, insisted on the total depravity of humanity (a consequence of the Fall), and on the importance of the individual's personal relationship with God and Savior. On her deathbed, Helen shares with Jane her views on both her "depravity" and her deep affinity with God:

> By dying young, I shall escape great sufferings. I had not qualities or talents to make my way very well in the world: I should have been continually at fault.
>
> But where are you going to, Helen? Can you see? Do you know?
>
> I believe; I have faith: I am going to God.
>
> Where is God? What is God?
>
> My maker and yours, who will never destroy what He created. I rely implicitly on His power, and confide wholly in His goodness: I count the hours till that eventful one arrives which shall restore me to Him, reveal Him to me.
>
> You are sure, then, Helen, that there is such a place as Heaven; and that our souls can get to it when we die? (Brontë 113)

Brocklerhurst's religious doctrine is easy to condemn, but from Helen Burns, in an oblique manner, Jane learns that she should question absolute and self-abnegating religious beliefs. Helen and later on, St. John Rivers seek happiness in Heaven; Jane is determined to find hers here on Earth. In this respect, the character of Helen Burns serves to inspire the protagonist with the force and the disposition to avoid the extremes (even if they are in

accordance with Victorian expectancies for women's lot) and mould rebellion and submission into personality.

4.4 Jane's Family in Thornfield

The Lowood mother (Miss Temple) and the sister (Helen Burns) deserted the place of desolation in their own different ways. With these departures, the heroine is once again left alone and prey to her rebellious, forever dissatisfied feelings. Jane's restlessness requires now "a new servitude" (117) –a way of compromising with life that she acquired from Miss Temple and Helen Burns, since until that particular stage, Jane could not discern that there may exist more in a woman's destiny than different types of servitude. Before reaching full, personal fulfillment, the heroine must live the Thornfield experience, "where, biblically, she is to be crowned with thorns, she is to be cast out into a desolate field, and, most important, she is to confront the demon of rage who has haunted her since the afternoon in the red room" (Gilbert 347).

Consequently, Jane's attempt to go beyond the Lowood limits associated with the desire to put to a test what she had already accumulated in terms of education, will determine temporary incorporation into another surrogate family, this time centered around a live patriarch, Mr. Rochester, the owner of Thornfield Hall. This Gothic mansion – Charlotte Brontë's concession to the request of the editors, since Gothic was then very fashionable and almost omnipresent, is, in a way, a space of ripening into a troublesome femininity, with its corridors, vaults, and especially attic. Jane must explore it in detail, decipher its mystery, assume it almost at the cost of her innocence, and surpass it in the end.

Unfortunately, Mrs. Fairfax, the person who welcomes Jane to this yet another place of self-discovery, is, very much like Miss Temple at the hands of the spiteful Brocklerhurst, a subordinate, a servant to an episodic presence of a man. As she does not have to learn to live with someone hierarchically superior, this revelation pleases Jane who can afford to talk freely, ask, inquire and shape a new life, in a new place. At the same time, it secretly reinforces her convictions about patriarchal domination and probably justifies Weissman in stating that: "[...]the end of the book reveals the first half for what it

is – not the rage of the Romantic radical who wants justice, but the rage of the outsider who just wants to get in" (84).

Therefore, in Thornfield, Jane meets another gallery of women, either negative examples – from the miniature Adele Varens to the gigantic Bertha Mason, or mere subordinates, surrogates and agents of male authority – such as Mrs. Fairfax and Grace Poole. All of them deserve attention as all of them show Jane how *not* to react, what to accept, how much to demand in order to achieve her own status and have it recognized by the male power.

4.4.1 Adele Varens –not quite a surrogate daughter

Adele Varens, Jane's pupil and illegitimate child of the mansion's master, Frenchified outcome of English and male licentiousness is depicted as a charming, yet superficial little girl, with a "redundancy of hair falling in curls to her waist" (Brontë 132), talkative, friendly and, overall eager to prove her incipient femininity. As she was taught the art of seduction by her mother, an opera singer of dubious reputation, Adele, at the very first encounter with Jane will sing to entertain. The choice of the piece is relevant for the protagonist's first impression on the one she is expected to educate.

From the very beginning, the unnatural display of charms, unnatural in such a young girl, will puzzle and at the same time warn. The aria is about a woman abandoned by her lover who, nevertheless, decides to call pride to her help, and adorn herself with jewels and strikingly rich clothes, in a desperate attempt to demonstrate that betrayal has not hurt her. The choice of the topic and the affectation of the interpretation deliver a very clear message to Jane, one of which she is unaware then, but employ later, when she will meet Rochester. Theatrical behavior, over-emphasized passion can but alienate the heart of a man and only serve to ridicule the feelings of a woman:

> The subject seemed strangely chosen for an infant singer; but I supposed the point of the exhibition lay in hearing the notes of love and jealousy warbled with the lisp of childhood, and in very bad taste that point was – at least I thought so (134).

Involuntarily, the little girl, Adele will become Jane's instructor in the art of wrongly behaving towards the opposite sex. It is a detail of great significance, employed by the author to emphasize the isolation in which the protagonist spent eight years of her

life, since even a little girl can surpass Jane in social skills, although artificially and superficially. Lowood, definitely offered education but, at the same time, confined the heroine to a social prison where no contact with the opposite sex was possible, and out of which a slip of a girl seems more experienced. Not only does Adele display artificial and premature femininity, but also, by her very condition as an illegitimate child, warns Jane of the perils lying in a virtual surrender to Rochester's virile charm and attraction. Thus, when Jane will eventually decide to leave Rochester after the dark revelation of his marriage, Adele and her image in the master's eyes will serve as an escape impulse, reinforcing the heroine's decision to flee towards respectability.

Adele is at the same time, giver and receiver of knowledge. She shares with Jane the secrets of gender knowledge about illegitimacy and the burden of it in a woman's life, but at the same time, she benefits from the effects of solid English education imparted by her governess. Jane sees as a duty to de-Frenchify Adele and prepare her to adapt to insular realities rather than use continental teachings to mould a private sphere. Instinctively, the plain, shabby-looking protagonist, realizes the limits imposed to women by a Victorian patriarchal world and, while trying herself to survive without being crushed, almost unwillingly protects and guides those who are weaker, like Adele. However generous this protection might seem, it should be emphasized that it also springs out of a nationalist attitude that the heroine shared with her creator, Charlotte Brontë, who was well-known for her Englishness and praise of it. As Gaskell expressed it "whenever the Brontës could be national they were so, with the same tenacity of attachment which made them suffer as they did whenever they left Haworth" (239). The author's dislike of foreigners, especially those along whom she is supposed to complete her education or those that she has to educate is even more harshly rendered in a letter sent from Brussels, in 1842:

> If the national character of the Belgians is to be measured by the characters of most of the girls in this school, is a character singularly cold, selfish, animal and inferior. They are very mutinous and difficult for the teachers to manage; and their principles are rotten to the core (240).

Considering such radical views, one can but appreciate the "softness" of Jane towards Adele and appreciate the author's maturity at the time of writing the novel. The protagonist is not inimical towards her educational material, merely self-sufficient and

superficial, ironically the very failures she thought she was able to perceive in Adele's character.

Therefore, not surprisingly, the relationship between Adele and her governess is not a warm one, affectionate, nor can Jane be visualized as some sort of surrogate mother for the little girl. This lack of affection may be explained by the rigidity of Lowood education, which did not encourage emotionality and the simple, unpretentious yet profound human affection, but hard, strict work, or, it may have other reasons, such as the figure of Rochester polarizing and exhausting Jane's affective potential. Therefore, Jane treats Adele in a rather conceited manner, constantly although not openly disapproving of the little girl's defects, rarely encouraging her.

> She had no great talents, no marked traits of character, no peculiar development of feeling or taste, which raised her one inch above the ordinary level of childhood; but neither had she any deficiency or vice which sunk her below it (Brontë 140).

Of course, Jane will never stoop to becoming a Thornfield Miss Scatcherd, but she will see her pupil as mere material to form and mould into healthy English educational pattern; in this respect, Jane is, naturally after Lowood, but sadly, an affective snob. One almost has the feeling that indulging in closeness with Adele might jeopardize the heroine's self-respect or, such a closeness might blind Jane into a permanently damaged reputation and a life of sin. As Gilbert expressed it "how is a poor, plain governess to contend with a society that rewards beauty and style? May not Adele, the daughter of a 'fallen woman', be a model female in a world of prostitutes?" (350).

It is also interesting to remark that Jane somehow borrows Rochester's opinion and feelings where Adele is concerned, thus reinforcing her own, towards a more pronounced dislike. The master of the house vilifies the daughter for the mother's sins and unequivocally dismisses Adele from his affections, overlooking his own moral blame instrumented by education, gender, and class. Unfortunately, Jane's increasing affective chilliness appears to have been pre-fabricated via the master's opinions, according to which:

> My Spring is gone, however, but it has left me that French floweret on my hands, which, in some moods, I would fain be rid of. Not valuing now the root whence it sprang; having

> found that that is was of a sort which nothing but gold dust could manure, I have a half of liking to the blossom, especially when it looks so artificial as just now (Brontë 171).

If the protagonist does never adopt Adele mentally, and affectively, this is also due to the fact that, at least at Thornfield all her attention is focused towards Rochester and the possibility of long-lasting love that marriage only can create, in Victorians' opinion. Jane never *needs* Adele as a receiver or giver of affection, since her interest lies elsewhere. Nevertheless, there are two scenes in the book when the sentimental barrier between Jane and Adele melts. These scenes are connected to the heroine's feelings of panic at the prospect of marriage and therefore, entire submission to male power. Then only, the young woman perceives a strange sort of sisterhood or even motherhood bond between herself and her pupil.

The first scene refers to Rochester's refusal to allow Adele to accompany them to Millcotte on a present-buying trip. The sternness that Jane discerns in her future husband's behaviour when he expresses his refusal revives her most hidden fears of men and marriage, and this first despotic inclination serves to create some kind of empathy for Adele. In insisting that the little girl join them, Jane, in fact, tests her partner's magnanimity and manages to change his mind:

> He was quite peremptory, both in look and in voice. The chill of Mrs. Fairfax's warnings, and the damp of her doubts were upon me: something of unsubstantiality and uncertainty had beset my hopes. I half lost the sense of power over him [. . .]
>
> 'After all, a single morning's interruption will not matter much', said he, 'when I mean shortly to claim you – your thoughts, conversation and company – for life (294).

The second scene unexpectedly increases the little girl's role in a key-moment for the protagonist's evolution. Thus, although generally overlooked or politely attended to, Adele reaches an incredible high status for both Rochester and Jane, before the wedding. Her innocence, her childhood purity now are of use, since the master suggests Jane to share Adele' little bed in order to overcome her fears and in order to protect her from Bertha's possible attacks. Significantly, this even physical closeness, takes place the night before what was supposed to be their final, successful union as if training Jane to mother-like nurturing and at the same time benefiting from the power of innocence.

> With little Adele in my arms, I watched the slumber of childhood – so tranquil, so passionless, so innocent – and waited for the coming day: all my life was awake and astir in my frame [. . .] I remember I kissed her as I loosened her little hands from my neck; and I cried over her with strange emotion [. . .](313- 314).

Here, childhood, even the one of an illegitimate child serves as a means to exonerate the master from his sins (embodied by Bertha, her actions and his previous marriage to her), and to soothe the protagonist's fears, preparing accession into a new life.

Another strong argument sustaining the idea that Jane does not envisage being more than just a mere educator to Adele Varens, resides in the fact that when she decides to leave Thornfield she does not consider the little girl and her possible sorrow at finding herself deprived of her instructor. The heroine obviously disregards the fact that her pupil might feel lonely, abandoned, deserted, by "sa petite maman Anglaise" (274) the way she had been deserted before by Celine Varens, her biological mother, when the latter died.

This thoughtlessness can be attributed to the fact that Jane is in each and every way a conventional, yet not necessarily Victorian, woman, who does not allow herself to feel the joy and responsibilities of motherhood, or the surrogate motherhood, before she gets married and has her own children. Certainly, such considerations somehow spoil the spotless image of Victorian female prototype promulgated by the literature of the time, according to which

> Much more congenial to the highest attributes of woman's character are inquiries such as these: How shall I endeavor through this day to turn the time, the health, and the means permitted me to enjoy, to the best account? Is anyone sick? I must visit their chamber without delay...Is any one about to set off a journey? I must see that the early meal is spread (qtd in Gilbert 30).

At the same time, in not showing a too pronounced affection for Adele, the fruit of an illegitimate affair, Jane conforms to the rigid principles of Victorian morality that dictated respectability of thought and action. The heroine does, at a certain point, challenge and reproach Rochester's assumptions of changed behavior towards Adele, now, that he revealed the secret of her birth:

> I have a regard for her; and now that I know she is, in a sense, parentless – forsaken by her mother and disowned by you, sir – I shall cling closer to her than before. How could I

> possibly prefer the spoilt pet of a wealthy family, who would hate her governess as a nuisance, to a lonely, little orphan who leans towards her as a friend? (Brontë 176).

However, the defense of innocence and loneliness of orphanhood regardless of the morality of the orphan's parents, is accompanied by self-defense and self-guarding of Jane's interests. Indeed, Jane, who has not been able to define her own position at Thornfield and elsewhere, who feels threatened by patterns and restrictions of a world not particularly benevolent to her, is now keen on clinging to Adele's even less enviable position and claim compassion.

Jane's real "reconciliation" with Adele -- although they were never enemies, but mere acquaintances --, her real interest in Adele's well-being comes at a late stage, when the protagonist managed to reconcile herself with life, womanhood, marriage. In this respect, Jane is able to act on Adele's behalf and to what she considers her real interests, only when she, the former governess, has already established a new existence, next to Rochester, the man of her life. Then and only then, will Jane be willing to assume responsibilities towards the girl, find a good school for her, less restrictive, and witness, in self-satisfaction, the progresses made by the Parisian daughter in becoming an appropriate English woman:

> As she grew up, a sound English education corrected in a great measure her French defects; and when she left school, I found her in a pleasing, and obliging companion – docile, good-tempered, and well-principled (475).

The affective failure of the relationship between Jane and Adele endorses the Victorian belief that a woman should become a wife, have children of her own and reject surrogate affections. Adele cannot be a daughter to Jane, nor can Jane a mother to Adele, not simply because the insignificant age difference between them prevents it, but also because Rochester, the man and master, requires absolute attention and submission.

4.4.2 Bertha Mason- an unconventional, maddened mother

> If the speaking woman sees other women as her mother, sees herself but not her mother as a woman, then she can see her mother (other women) only as men or monsters (Baym 165).

Bertha Mason's character is so powerful that other writers, long after Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre, even made her the protagonist of their novels. Jean Rhys in Wide

Sargasso Sea rescues her from the universally-acknowleged assimilation to madness and provides her with a voice to tell the story of her life. Thus, madness becomes an effect and not a cause, the cause lying with a man, and not just any man, but Rochester, the one who legally, as a husband and affectively, as a fellow human being, was supposed to prevent and fight insanity.

Charlotte Brontë does not bother herself with the possible causes of Bertha's madness, a fault for which she was heavily criticized by post-colonialists, because her interests focus on a different direction. She, as an author, embraced only Jane as a daughter, and was concerned with her trials only, overlooking the sufferings of other women. Nevertheless, my reading of Bertha Mason sustains the idea of a mother-daughter link between Rochester's first wife and Jane, his wife to be. More than the angelic Miss Temple and the martyr Helen Burns, promoters of social compromise, and gender-biased submission, Bertha teaches her daughter *to be aware* of the annihilating effects of total submission to a man's power.

> Who. after all, might Bertha Mason be – she to whom Rochester *is already married*? 'Jane Eyre' is replete with images of ferocious female power and Jane turns to Rochester, at first, as to a refuge. The refuge is sullied by the presence in the nest of another woman, who is made repulsive and ridiculous, so that the reader must reject her; and is killed before the narrative is out, so that the daughter can replace her. (Baym 165).

Bertha Mason is "the mysterious lunatic" (Brontë 320), Rochester's first wife, imprisoned in the attic, a place of terror from which she escapes every now and then and tries to inflict death to those around her. Husband and brother are in permanent danger, and the attacks against them are often ferocious, but Jane is never a target, until the night before her so-called wedding, when the veil is torn into two. Here, Bertha does not attempt to harm Jane, her destructive gesture is directed against an object, the veil, deeply hated symbol of marriage, and consequently disempowerment. One can see in this positive "discrimination" that places Jane, the person, outside the sphere of physical harm, a wish to protect and a burning desire to warn a young, completely inexperienced daughter about the consequences of unconditional trust and love. They may lead to madness and incarceration with occasional, illicit flights towards a murderous liberty.

Bertha is a woman imprisoned by a man's power, but Charlotte Brontë justifies this isolation. Thus, the character's pathologized and exotified nature of madness and primitive physicality drive Rochester, her husband, to degrading agonies in attempts to keep her secret. Medically speaking, in her family "idiots and maniacs through three generations" have built a case of irreversibility (320). By presenting the history of a family burdened with madness, patriarchy as such (embodied by Rochester) is justified and exonerated from guilt. In other words, Bertha is inexorably doomed because of her blood, not because of social confinement. Charlotte Brontë could not have openly accused the man for the misfortunes of a woman, because, a presumption of Rochester's extreme cruelty towards his wife would have annihilated Jane's happiness next to such a husband, irredeemable in his sin. Thus, the heroine does not even question the justice of a woman losing control of her possessions upon marriage (Berth's case), despite repeatedly asserting that a woman may have different expectations than submit to a male's power and assume an existence of docility. Nonetheless, to a careful reader, Rochester is the despotic master who keeps his wife captive. In this respect, though, he is hardly a singular case, since most Victorian husbands, daughters or brothers burdened with a mad female presence chose to confine her in their own homes rather than entrust her to public care.

> The portrait of Bertha Mason depicts a time before moral management, when it was common for crazy women to be kept hidden in homes (there were numerous legends of such women in Brontë's native Yorkshire), or to behave and be treated like wild beasts in cruel asylums (Showalter, Female 67).

Economics, nationality and gender status are thus, all part of a male dominance that shatters Bertha's destiny and almost, Jane's. In addition to this, the madwoman is also depicted as the Other, with a double status of inferiority. Not only she is a woman, she is also a Creole woman from the colonies. As a woman and a colonized subject, her rights are non-existent and she is only granted the advantage of living imprisoned, instead of dying in Ferndean, a cold, unhealthy place, where Rochester has a property.

Jane and Bertha share striking similarities in terms of social becoming. The same childhood isolation, lack of orthodox parents, and inexperience with men led to alienation from society, thus establishing the premises for falling under, ironically, the same man's power. In Thornfield, some sort of replica of Bluebeard's castle, maddened mother (Bertha) and possible victim to madness daughter (Jane) intersect their paths but,

unfortunately, they *never communicate* in a conventional way. They have to develop an alternative language through which they attempt to reach mutual understanding. Bertha merely offers her gestures of ferocity for her daughter to decipher the code of gender power whose holder is Rochester and Jane acts accordingly in leaving Thornfield and its false paradise.

> Bertha Mason and Jane Eyre first meet through a mirror, as Jane looks into the mirror to see Bertha's image reflected back to her. This incident is portrayed in a relation of events to Rochester, so that the man remains the mediator between the two women: 'oh, sir, I never saw a face like it! It was a discoloured face - it was a savage face' (Brontë 321) (Azim 176).

This mirror image seems to be the echo of another mirror image, in which little Jane, imprisoned in the Red Room realized that in Gateshead, she is but a "heterogeneous" thing. This deformed perception may be read as symbolic for the condition of the female narrator because the heroine must learn to speak and see herself as part of the world, instead of permanent outcast. In other words, in leaving Gateshead, Jane reaches for the power of articulating herself as an autonomous female subject. In Lowood, not only did she learn to speak, she also learnt *how* to speak, and articulate herself as a social member in her full rights. One must not forget, though, that Lowood was a universe of women, designed for women, with laws and rules taught by women.

Thornfield represents a different stage, valuable because it provides the encounter, later one to become the confrontation, with the ruling gender. There, Lowood civilized, smooth discourse, credible in its simplicity becomes mad laughter and mysterious, frightening murmurs at the time of horrors, in the middle of the night. Obviously, it is the only alternative, because there female voices are centered on male authority, occupied in restraining one (Bertha) and deceiving the other (Jane). The relationship between Jane and Bertha is, as mentioned above, never a direct one. Always between the two, the readers and the critics alike, have the male mediator embodied by Rochester, "white, English and male" (Azim 178). He is the one who divides femininity and opposes Jane to Bertha when *his* sin of attempted bigamy cannot be concealed any longer.

On the wedding day, the mad mother (Bertha) is introduced to her bewildered daughter (Jane), and the comparison between the two serves to justify Rochester's actions

and his decision to become bigamous. "Compare those clear eyes with the red balls yonder – this face with that mask – this form with that bulk" (Brontë 322). The fact that the comparison favors Jane is irrelevant, since both women are objectified by a less than impartial male auctioneer. In other words, since the two women are incapable to represent themselves, Bertha having lost the ability to speak and Jane shocked at the collapse of her dreams, they will be represented by Rochester, the man in control now, as always, of their destinies. Bertha's eyes, now mere "red balls", were probably closed at the time of *her* marrying Rochester, as for the "mask", it probably disguises a whole range of powerful emotions culminating in hopeless rage against her guard.

It is highly improbable that Brontë imagined such a reading of Bertha Mason's madness and her connection to the protagonist. As a woman writer in the Victorian era, inevitably she was a bearer of bourgeois, expansionist ideology of the time that presupposed the eradication of the colonial subjects (like Bertha) to glorify Englishness represented in the novel by Jane Eyre. As Gayatri Spivak expressed it: "I must read this as an allegory of the general epistemic of imperialism, the construction of a self-imolating colonial subject for the glorification of the social mission of the colonizer" (Warhol 804).

The most common Victorian interpretation of the mad wife is that of a one-dimensional figure whose significance in Jane Eyre is to contribute to the Gothic atmosphere of Thornfield Hall. Thus reduced to a plot device, she does nothing but uncomfortably delay the happy marriage and put the love of the two partners to a test. Her madness itself is, according to this interpretation, assumed by Rochester, unchallenged by Jane and safely attributed to heredity. This is a crippled reading though, favoring even Jane's becoming in terms of a fairy tale, deliberately overlooking social and moral implications of the text, and minimizing to the point of extinction the gender network and its relevance.

A more recent and perhaps the best-known reading of the character of Bertha Mason is the one provided by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their monumental Madwoman in the Attic. In their feminist study, Bertha is depicted as Jane's alter-ego, her dark, unleashed double, never even close to a "social taming" like the one offered by Miss Temple, but totally exposed to a man's power and need to straitjacket her. In this respect,

the daughter Jane is better prepared by her Lowood education years and the benefic though submissive influences met there, to cope with male supremacy.

To this reading as a *dark* double for Jane, Elaine Showalter adds a Bertha Mason whose "madness is also linked to female sexuality and the periodicity of the menstrual cycle" (Female 67). Thus, the peak of her attacks correspond to a "blood-red" or "broad and red" moon.(Brontë chapters 25 and 27). At such moments, her rage takes over completely, and she is malefic in her manifestations, though there are periods when she is calm and lucid. In other words, it is her sexual desires that cause the "moral insanity". In the same way in which Lowwod girls are punished from the enormous fault of allowing herself to ripen into femininity, Bertha Mason is imprisoned by her husband for her determination to retain her condition of a woman, which includes *sexuality*. The fact that sexuality is distorted and becomes terrifying because of long captivity is the responsibility of her guard, Rochester, who steals her language and animalizes her.

> In the deep shade, at the farther end of the room, a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight tell: it groveled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing, and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face (321).

This image completely alienates Jane from her predecessor in Rochester's affection. Never does she conceive pity, not even for an instance, does she question the origins of madness, she simply listens to Rochester's version and forever castigates Bertha. The author herself murders the character in order to allow the heroine to fulfill her destiny. Charlotte Brontë disposes of Bertha, as she is a mere obstacle in the protagonist's way, and even the author who wrote Bertha's story, Jean Rhys, consented to the glorification of the same pattern of "suttee" for the first wife (or mother to Jane, in my own reading) and left the canon unchallenged in terms of the ending.

As a conclusion, the lesson that Bertha Mason teaches Jane – ironically, not in so many words - is to resist subordination and to preserve her *language*. As she probably never agreed to playing Friday for Robinson Crusoe, Bertha was severely deprived of the power of language and reduced to nightmare-like actions, attacks, stabbings and

incineration in a complete de-socialization procedure dictated and imposed by her husband Rochester. Nonetheless, one can but notice the fact that:

> A mimetic relationship is set up between the two women. This process of mimesis is as much doubling as opposition and serves to destabilize, as well as to secure, Jane's identity. If Bertha Mason is Jane's antithesis, the distinction between them can only be secured by a type of initiation or rite of passage in which, momentarily, they are the *same*.(Azim 179).

Bertha and Jane are the *same* in Thornfield, and this is the reason why Jane, witnessing the distressing falling from humanity, has to flee the place and continue her *language* course, far from restrictive teachers like Rochester. On her way, she will experience something similar to Bertha's dehumanization, when, hungry, penniless and hopeless, she will find herself outcast from her fellow beings. It is the moment when Bertha's ravings will take over Jane who is now, free from Rochester, but also, free from the patriarchal "protection" that he had provided so far.

> As to my own will or conscience, impassioned grief had trampled one and stifled the other. I was weeping wildly as I walked along my solitary way: fast, fast I went like one delirious...I had some fear – or hope – that here I should die; but I was soon up, crawling forwards on my hands and knees, and then again raise to my feet – as eager and as determined as ever to reach the road. (Brontë 348).

Unlike Bertha, completely at the mercy of the male Rochester, and devoid of any previous teachings that might have provided support and compromise with the ruthlessness of her guard, Jane can act determinedly in order to survive, as she had not completely metamorphosed into a non-manageable beast, similar to the one incarcerated in the Red Room. Therefore, the mother-daughter dyad (Bertha-Jane) is dissolved in a way that will enable the daughter to achieve identity in an oppressive world, while the mother will be forever crushed in her isolation, from which the only escape is physical self-destruction.

4.4.3 Blanche Ingram – an unfortunate rival

Along with Georgiana and Eliza, Blanche Ingram is a typical stepsister to Jane Eyre. Unlike Georgiana and Eliza, though, who represent no real, personal danger to Jane and whose examples of anti-femininity are a mere anecdote, "dismissed to stereotypical facts, Blanche's history teaches Jane ominous lessons" (Gilbert 350).

Blanche is everything Jane is not. Her physical appearance is an asset in itself but it becomes even more so when it is accompanied by a respectable position in society, financial security and aristocratic descent. This tall, majestic woman, a reminder of Oriental beauty and charm is also the daughter of "Baroness Ingram of Ingram Park" and all these qualities added together make her Jane's most dangerous competitor (or so she thinks) in the struggle for winning Rochester's heart and his everlasting affection. Nevertheless, very much like Adele Varens, Blanche is an artificial female presence without benefiting from the innocence of childhood that excuses Adele. Blanche is scheming, daring and determined to become even richer by means of marrying Rochester, and she employs her personal charms in this gender battle. Jane witnesses the futility of her efforts and sanctions her behavior, at the same time fearing the social burden and restrictions that might determine Rochester to prefer her, once again painfully acquiescing her own position of inferiority.

> Surely she cannot truly like him, or not like him with true affection! If she did, she need not coin her smiles so lavishly, flash her glances so unremtttingly, manufacture airs so elaborate, graces so multitudinous [. . .] but the longer I considered the position, education, &c., of the parties, the less I felt justified in judging and blaming either him or Miss Ingram for acting in conformity to ideas and principles instilled into them, doubtless, from their childhood. All their class held these principles: I supposed, then, they had reasons for holding them, such as I could not fathom (Brontë 216).

Everything that Blanche says or does is severely criticized by Jane who can perceive the artificiality and the vain, imitative homage to the fashion of the day. Thus, Miss Ingram in her admiration for Corsairs, Italian bandits, highwaymen, and Levantine pirates (an obvious affectation), is the young lady of the age, unrealistically sympathizing a Byronic type of man and hero. This artificiality condemns Blanche in Rochester's eyes and teaches Jane that a natural behavior, true feelings are vital for winning and preserving a man's affection.

Although Jane gradually comes to terms with what she considers Rochester's decision to marry Blanche, consequently accepting the exclusion from their future domestic circle, the events will prove that even the rich daughter of an aristocratic family is not immune to male scheming. She is but a mere instrument in Rochester's hands who decides to use her, in a most unscrupulous manner, and build a false identity for her. She

becomes, in other words, Jane's rival, her perfection and wordliness contrasting painfully with the governess's humble, insignificant position. Thus, he creates the prototype of a goddess, ruling absolutely over his affections and inspiring him with unconditional love although secretly he tears her apart, her failures dissected to the point of total annihilation:

> What love have I for Miss Ingram? What love has she for me? None: as I have taken pain to prove: I caused a rumour to reach her that my fortune was not a third of what was supposed, and after that I presented myself to see the result; it was coldness both from her and her mother (Brontë 283).

Blanche Ingram is another example of femininity rejected by Jane, because, besides being superficial, vain, devoid of any deep feelings and sympathies, divorced from any genuine affection and dedicated only to the determinate pursue of financial comfort, she also envisages herself as much more than just a partner to her potential husband. Thus, she pictures herself as the undisputed queen of her husband's heart and, equally important, of his earthly possessions, this display of self-conceitedness and mercantilism annoying and troubling Jane and her opinions on perfect equality and partnership in a marriage. Moreover, as a reinforcement to her claims she emphasizes the criterion of beauty and thus attempts to sustain her claims by invoking it:

> 'Whenever I marry', she continued after a pause which no one interrupted, 'I am resolved my husband shall not be a rival, but a foil to me. I will suffer no competitor near the throne; I shall exact an undivided homage; his devotion shall not be shared between me and the shape he sees in his mirror. Mr. Rochester, now sing and I will play for you (208).

Blanche Ingram offers Jane another model of *how not to behave* if she wants to secure the affection as well as the admiration of the opposite sex. Moreover, in spite of her behavior, origin, social status, Blanche is as vulnerable and as much of a pray to a man's manipulations, as Jane, the plain, modest governess. In a different way than Bertha, but bearing the same message, the two women are transformed into opponents, rivals for a debatable prize that might not be what it seems to be, if one considers the master of Thornfield's dark secret. The person who prompts this yet another confrontation between women, is Rochester led by his intentions related to Jane.

The protagonist uses her own art to emphasize the difference between herself and Blanche Ingram, thus trying to "bring back with a strict hand such (emotions) as had been

straying through imagination's boundless and tractless waste, into the safe fold of common sense" (192). Jane, involved in a painting exercise representing herself and Blanche Ingram, in fact performs an act of self-discipline and depicts social hierarchical position through the creation of concrete images. The protagonist paints two portraits, one of herself, to which she dedicates two hours and entitles "Portrait of a Governess disconnected, poor and plain". To counterbalance this, she makes an imaginary portrait of Blanche Ingram, requiring a fortnight's work, with raven ringlets and Oriental eyes. The opposition between the real and the ideal is imaged, suggesting and reinforcing the distance between desire and reality. Art itself, in this instance, serves differentiation, division between women and thus becomes an instrument used by a woman at the veiled suggestion of a man. For, would the protagonist have underlined her painful, humble condition in the world, had she not, even if in an imaginary way, competed with Blanche Ingram, *for* Rochester's affection?

The fact that even Blanche Ingram is sardonically deceived by Rochester serves to remind Jane that in the gender struggle, social position, wealth, patrician origin do not always ensure success. Assets they may be, but in the end the victory escapes a woman's will and is usually adjudicated by a man.

4.5 Jane's Family in Marsh End

After being almost on the edge of death from starvation (her de-socialization, deprivation now that she left Thornfield are complete), Jane will finally meet her kin and re-integrate affectively and financially by means of a miraculous, remote family reunion.

This coming to terms with her rightful position in society is announced by the very appearance of those who are her blood relatives and her equals, in this respect Jane's constant conservative attitude refusing assimilation into a lower class finding a new confirmation. The house at Marsh End, the first glimpse that Jane has of what is going to be, in a certain manner, her *almost* home, is inhabited by two pleasant looking ladies engaged in intellectual pursuits and watched by "an elderly rustic woman, somewhat rough-looking" (358). Although the two sisters, Mary and Diana are displaying what seems to be a purely intellectual interest, the conversation that Jane overhears proves that, in spite of their lady like appearance, they have to study hard in order to improve their working

opportunities. In other words, they belong to that obsolete category of women, the educated but penniless female breadwinners, a category that somehow contradicts Victorian views on femininity confined to a domestic sphere only. Moreover, they are governesses, and in this capacity Jane's professional twins.

Mary, Diana and Jane are the triad that depicts the portrait of the Victorian intellectual woman, forced by circumstances to make a living and placed, at least temporarily, outside the boundaries and comforts of a powerful patriarchal protection. Jane escaped her golden cage and left material comfort behind, Mary and Diana have a religious zealot for a brother, St. John, in a state of financial impotence, consumed by ideals that ironically seem to disregard the bare necessities of daily living.

Nevertheless, obscure country priest as he is, unable to ensure the comfort of his sisters, he is the one who mediates Jane's reconcilement with the hostile world, since *he* opens the door of his house to a desperate protagonist, driven to chaotic nightmares of displacement, starvation, humiliation and abandonment. His disembodied voice, heard by Jane when she is crushed by the state of belonging-nowhere, grants access to a *household of women* in front of which Jane had almost collapsed, another instance that reinforces the protagonist's respectful opinion on male authority and power.

Once admitted into the house and hunger appeased (although in a rational, medical-like manner, imposed by the patriarch St. John), Jane gives herself a new name, in a first process of self-estrangement, one of the many she will experience at the demands of her cousin's domineering personality. It is interesting to remark the aspect that the social and affective integration, the self-assertiveness that the main character experiences in Marsh End is accompanied by an equal alienation in terms of her nature. Thus, Jane will learn a difficult language, like Hindi, almost agree to travel seas away and *almost* marry without love. It is through this duality of experiences that the heroine will learn to reach the interior balance leading to the final, full affirmation of her personality, expressed in her decision to return to Thornfield.

The first three days that Jane spends at her cousins' house can be compared to a Lazarus-like state, in the sense that the afterwards rising heroine will once again strive to exist and fight. At the same time, though, she experiences a paralysis of the senses,

metaphorically evocative of a woman's helplessness in a male world. Jane is able to see, hear, recognize but all these fragmented connections to the outside world do not overcome the impossibility to react.

> The recollection of about three days and nights succeeding this is very dim in my mind. I can recall some sensations felt in that interval; but few thoughts framed and no actions performed [. . .] I observed when any one entered or left the apartment: I could even tell who they were; I could understand what was said when the speaker stood near me; but I could not answer; to open my lips or move my limbs was equally impossible (365).

During the ordeal, St. John, the self-invested authority in the house passes medical, aesthetic and character judgments on her, monitories Jane's presence and speculates on her present state, approving of sensibility, and manifesting disconcert at the sight of "the lines of force in her face" (366). Those lines of force are confessing strength and an uncompromising nature, tamable (if ever), with great difficulty, male characteristics, awkward and challenging traits in an apparently powerless woman. Bartky supports this argument by stating that "the face of the ideally feminine woman must never display the marks of character, wisdom and experience that we so much admire in men" (70). The disconcert that St. John experiences when analyzing Jane's physiognomy announces his attempts at molding her personality so as to suit his questionably lofty enterprise of civilizing the Indian natives by means of spreading the teachings of English Protestantism.

Driven by an imperious ambition, slave to his adventurous impulses disguised under the mask of a meek Christian, St. John is in fact Eliza's masculine counterpart. His is a contradictory nature, and Charlotte Brontë creates in the figure of St. John a paradoxical character. On the one hand, he is a zealous and industrious man, on the other this perennial preoccupation does not annihilate restlessness and dissatisfaction. Even during the Christmas week, enjoyed by everybody else, he suffers as he cannot express himself, his ambition and drive for action tempered by the natural religious rest. As he is not asked to perform anything extraordinary and his faculties are confined to an unwanted (by him) repose, St. John desperately manufactures different employments for himself to escape the martyrdom of inactivity. Jane thoroughly analyses and later on employs her observations as a foundation for the refusal of his marriage proposal.

> I am afraid the whole of the ensuing week tried his patience. It was Christmas week: we took no settled employment, but spent it in a sort of merry domestic dissipation [. . .] St. John did not rebuke our vivacity; but he escaped from it: he was seldom in the house; his parish was large, the population scattered, and he found daily business in visiting the sick and poor in its different districts (Brontë 421).

As he is unable to simply celebrate, to enjoy without the pangs of remorse for not "saving the world" by means of heroic deeds, he cannot be a suitable partner for Jane, who is now keen on simple, natural domestic pleasures. Here the conservatory dimension of the view on the destiny of a woman contradicts his obsession for action and disregard for domesticity, its naïve pleasures, "the humanities and amenities of life" (420).

Therefore, in this chapter, the authoress depicts male aspirations and female necessities at war, the gender struggle almost jeopardizing Jane's attempts to live in a man's world nevertheless *as* a woman. Misionary-ness certainly does not appeal to the heroine as her aspirations, now that she can afford to be herself (financially she is free from any restrictions as the result of the legacy left by her uncle), are concentrated on constructing a purely feminine sphere as the most proper frame for her existence. This sphere, along with intellectual preoccupations such as the learning of new languages, drawing, writing, also includes tidying, ordering, cleaning, cooking and, as a coronation of the efforts, the ability to enjoy all these in the company of relatives and friends.

St. John, in contrast with these aspirations, decided to renounce *manhood* and focus his life on *priesthood.* Although he still plans to marry, he visualizes this sacred union as a spiritual one only, flesh is tolerated (because of his scrupulosity in duty), but not invited. With this image in mind, he displays a conceited attitude at the sight of Jane's efforts towards domesticity and labels them as diminishing and perilous for her true nature and qualities. Therefore, once again the heroine is placed under male surveillance, and the man aspires at canalizing her energies so as to match his desires:

> To begin with, men do not simply look; their gaze carries with it the power of action and of possession, which is lacking in the female gaze. Women receive and return a gaze but cannot act upon it (Kaplan 31).

However, the novelty of Jane Eyre is that the heroine *can* act upon the male gaze, not by annihilating its purpose and determination but by fragmenting it in an almost

scientific manner. It is but a passive resistance, nevertheless it testifies for a fuller shaped Jane Eyre as her odyssey is almost coming to an end. Socially, the heroine has achieved completeness, work, respectability and fortune having established her as a powerful individual, but personally she is as destitute as ever, still begging for real love.

This yearning for genuine feelings and the capacity to distinguish surrogate ones empowers the protagonist with a sharp sense of analysis, but, until the ultimate refusal of St. John's proposal, done in an unequivocal albeit not very sophisticated manner, Jane cannot escape experiencing a certain alienation of her own nature and submission. However, even in the midst of submission, the protagonist does not lose the ability to name it as such and, in full honesty admits of having become subject to a manipulative personality as that of St. John. As an excuse, the heroine comments on her nature always prone to excess:

> I know no medium: I never in my life have known any medium in my dealings with positive, hard characters, antagonistic to my own, between absolute submission and determined revolt. I have always faithfully observed the one, up to the very moment of bursting, sometimes with volcanic vehemence into the other (Brontë 426).

Jane's *socialization* lies between the extremes of "slave" and "rebel" and it is Marsh End the place where, in charge of one dimension of her life, the financial one, she is abler to tame the wild animal of the Red Room and re-define herself as belonging to an intermediary cathegory. The character can oppose in all firmness St. John's somehow bullying nature as she now has "a room of her own" to defend, that is her newly discovered independence and autonomy that money creates. The two hypostases, that of a "slave" and that of a "rebel" are opposed, nevertheless this opposition is a feminine thought (Charlotte Brontë's), moreover censored by the historical circumstances of the restrictive Victorianism. Later on, Nietzsche will oppose "slave" to "tyrant", as the two labels applicable to feminine personality, and he refers to the incapacity of a woman to embody the necessary qualities for friendship, for example.

> Are you a slave? Then you cannot be a friend. Are you a tyrant? Then you cannot have friends. All too long have a slave and a tyrant been concealed in woman. Therefore woman is not yet capable of friendship: she knows only love (qtd in Vasseleu 82).

Jane Eyre, at a certain instant almost yields to her cousin's proposal but her affirmative answer alters the essence of acceptance. The heroine contradicts, by means of her counter-offer the above-mentioned assumption regarding the inability of women to nourish any other feeling except love. She will offer St. John precisely a different kind of human bonding, a logical alternative, even if still masochistic and perilous:

> I repeat I freely consent to go with you as your fellow- missionary, but not as your wife; I cannot marry you and become part of you.
>
> I have a woman's heart, but not where you are concerned; for you I have only a comrade's constancy; a fellow soldier's frankness, fidelity, fraternity, if you like; a neophyte's respect and submission to his hierophant: nothing more – don't fear (Brontë 433).

At his repeated attempts, nevertheless, Jane employs in rejection the same passion that described her discourse when blaming Rochester for what she had thought was going to be the action of *making a marriage* with Blanche, the inferior woman, and not creating *a union of equals*: "I scorn your idea of love...I scorn the counterfeit sentiment you offer: yes, St. John, and I scorn you when you offer it" (Brontë 433). In spite of her strong religious feelings, tolerance and understanding, Jane is firstly and ultimately a woman. Therefore, the marriage picture that St. John depicts to justify his choice of a partner does not appeal to the passionate heroine. Although she can fully comprehend the value of other feelings than love, ultimately Jane Eyre will crown her femininity *by* means of love and return to Thornfield for it. Her decision is best explained by Boumelha:

> This story of passion, ambition and power continually restates and challenges the contradiction between feminine and heroic character ideals, self-abnegation and self-assertion, so common in Victorian novels, centring upon a growing woman (76).

At Marsh End, the last location of substitutes in terms of family (in spite of its benevolent members), the confrontation between Jane Eyre and St. John will bring the heroine's ultimate victory. This will be the final stage of becoming a fully developed personality, not seeking to knee the others, not allowing imposed silencing, simply stating her own existence and using her acquired voice to affirm her *own* will.

5 ROMANCE, MARRIAGE AND SEXUALITY

5.1 Introduction

As Jane Eyre dedicates an important amount of the literary text to the affective encounters between the heroine and the man who, at the end, will become her husband, the following chapter will focus on the impact of the affective life on the heroine's finally achieved self. Marriage, as a conclusion will provide the means through which the protagonist's real family comes into being, leaving behind the substitutes and establishing the normally accepted status for a woman as a wife and mother.

Nonetheless, the novel presents a very atypical male hero and a rather unusual development of the romance, which in itself serves to reinforce the heroine's final becoming, as dutiful, loving wife, but, at the same time, as a woman who experienced life outside the sacred realms of the institution of marriage. This does not signify that the protagonist ever even considered discovering sexuality and living a less than chaste life, it merely highlights the fact that along her journey to maturity, she was exposed to *sexuality*, the others', and could assess its dangers as well as its temptations. It is important to ponder about the fact that the novel develops against the background of a particularly conservative society, since Victorian England is reputed for having outcast females acknowledging sexuality outside marriage. As it was stated by Foucault:

> Sexuality was carefully confined; it moved into the home. The conjugal family took custody of it and absorbed it into the serious function of reproduction. ...A single locus of sexuality was acknowledged in social space as well as the heart of every household, but it was a utilitarian and fertile one: the parents' bedroom (Foucault, History 3).

Jane Eyre does not represent an escape from the taboo that operated on the issue of sexuality in the Victorian age. However, some instances revealing the important role of sexuality outside marriage outraged the contemporaries and shocked the famous Victorian puritanical views. As a matter of fact, it should be mentioned that the knowledge, the power derived from mastering the secrets and the experience of sexuality lies with the man in the couple, and not with the innocent heroine. He is the one who passes this knowledge to his female counterpart, first as a theoretical exposition (Rochester's adventures with his continental mistresses), and then, within the frame of marriage.

The heroine, along her journeys, encounters temptations and moral perils, and although she does not reject the existence of those, in a naïve, non-realistic manner, she does not yield to illicit love-affairs, nor does she approve of them in her chosen partner. Intransigence fluctuates from gender to gender, as the heroine chooses not to submit to the presupposed sexual liberty of her male counterpart and demands purity of thought and action. As soon as she learns that trust with which she invested her partner has been betrayed, she proves a rather unfeminine disability to compromise and flees towards different, sometimes even more dangerous experiences.

However, the novel ends with the supreme achievement of domestic felicity within the consecrated limits of marriage, which argues for the preservation of strictly feminine attributions and delivers the message of acceptance of those attributions. Jane Eyre's marriage will be, in a sense, perfect, because, in the long run, her male counterpart will become perfect and be exonerated from his sins. Thus, the novel does not only depict a strong yet pure female character with a voice heard and rightly acknowledged by her partner, but also a male character who undergoes the redemption of his sins and reaches a similar purity. Therefore, the former inter-gender relationship that demanded a strict, one-way elevation, from male to female, is reversed in Jane Eyre. The female character mediates for the redemption of her husband to be, achieving an impressive moral victory for the times in which the novel was written.

5.2 Jane Eyre and Rochester, or the Beauty and the Beast

Although the first encounter between Jane and Rochester takes place in a dream-like world, breathing romanticism and promising undisturbed, pure happiness, their love-story will contradict the premises and develop tumultuously to end calmly and somehow autumnally. Charlotte Brontë's eloquent use of diction transforms reality into a fantastic world for this first meeting, and builds a fairytale gender interaction witnessed by elements of nature, equally loaded with mysterious qualities:

> [. . .] a lion-like creature with long hair and a huge head: it passed me, however, quietly enough; not staying to look up, with strange, pretecarnine eyes, in my face, as I half expected it would. The horse followed, - a tall steed, and on its back a rider. The man, the human being, broke the spell at once (Brontë 144).

In this scene a young girl encounters an older man falling of a horse, hardly the premises for inspiring romantic love; nevertheless, at the same time, the proud man humbles himself to the girl and gains her sympathy. The sequence exemplifies an atypical relationship between a man and a woman that contrasts with the stereotype of the Victorian gentleman as well as with the classical beauty represented by a Victorian lady. Brontë demonstrates how the humbling of a man makes him more desirable for women as this very first fall is but an announcer of a deeper fall that will allow the final reunion of the protagonists on basis of equality.

Rochester appears here as a somber character, and his constant questioning reveals his hostile nature while his command over his dog and his obstinate efforts to stand on his injured foot are suggestive of power and force. Jane describes him as having a "dark face, with stern features and a heavy brow" (144). Clearly, Rochester does not conform to the ideal of the model Victorian gentleman that is supposed to show patience, tenderness and concern towards the others, but he seems to embody "the very essence of patriarchal energy, Cinderella's prince as a middle-aged warrior" (Gilbert 351).

As a result of the interrogatory, Rochester learns that Jane is hierarchically and financially dependent on him, in her capacity as a governess, but the information is not reciprocated. The master will decide when to reveal his position and by this concealment of the truth, Rochester demonstrates that he is already playing a game of power and seduction. His presence alters to the best the atmosphere of Thornfield Hall. The master is back and the influx of masculine energy revives the former solitude, calm and apathy. It is a most welcome change for Jane who had been longing for life, action, movement, all those privileges of men who on occasion are generous enough to share them with women.

> I discerned in the course of the morning that Thornfield Hall was a changed place. No longer silent as a church, it echoed every hour or two to a knock at the door or a clang of the bell. Steps, too, often traversed the hall and new voices spoke in different keys below. A rill from the outer world was flowing through it. It had a master; for my part, I liked better (Brontë 150).

As the episode unfolds, Rochester, in his double capacity as a man and as Jane's employee, initiates their conversation, which is, nevertheless, based on *his* interrogation of *her*. During these initial instants of mutual assessment, Jane as a Lowood educational

product maintains the limits of modesty, cautiousness, and correctness. She primarily answers questions, without any pretense to impress him, but with an obvious concern to be as plain in her answers as her physical appearance is.

However, the dialogue reveals Jane's powers acknowledged by a man who is also her master. She passed the Lowood test of resistance, very much like Ulysses who survived his voyage through the kingdom of Hades, and she seems to possess strange spiritual powers. Rochester accuses her of having bewitching his horse and although she calmly and skeptically dismisses the idea, the thought disguised in the shape of a fantastic hypothesis induces the concept of possible equality between them because they are both powerful, even if differently:

> When you came on me in Hay Lane last night, I thought unaccountably of fairy tales, and had half a mind to demand whether you had bewitched my horse: I am not sure yet.
>
> Did I break one of your rings, that you spread that damned ice on the causeway?
>
> I shook my head. 'The men in green all forsook England a hundred years ago', said I, speaking as seriously as he had done. 'And not even in Hay Lane, or the fields about it, could you find a trace of them (Brontë 154-155).

From the very beginning, Rochester takes an exploratory trip through the recesses and the mysteries of Jane's mind, thus initiating the setting for a romance. The instruments that facilitate his journey are the three paintings that Jane made in her spare time, while she was still a pupil (or a teacher) in Lowood. The male protagonist notices an "elfishness" of mind at work "but I daresay you did exist in a kind of artist's dream-land while you blent and arranged these strange tints" (155).

This world of imagination appears as a visionary and unreal land of dreams, and the artist, as a human being struggling to bridge the gaps between the abstract (emotions, thoughts, ideas) and the concrete (speech, painting as representational form). The struggle thus becomes symbolic for the condition of Jane, the woman, and the attempts to express herself as an autonomous, independent being. It is remarkable the fact that although the protagonist, during childhood always struggled with words and discourses, strived to reach the understanding of the addressee, as an adult, the process is even deeper and more laborious, *and* it is suggested, prompted by the male counterpart. The development of

speech aims at a perfect blend, where concepts and their expression form a complete union; when and if this union is realized, the female heroine will be able to live, as she had always wished, with the others, in perfect harmony and not as a subordinate.

> The romance in Jane Eyre is used to provide this site of perfect speech, but, given the power positions in the romance – its Gothic undertones, its evocation of the Other – the autonomy of the female subject is constantly jeopardized (Azim 192).

Not only the autonomy, but also the innocence of the female subject is endangered in the social intercourse with Rochester, also by means of discourse. This aspect of Jane Eyre attracted many critiques, and the confessional mood that Rochester inevitably experienced in Jane's company, was considered inappropriate and ominous.

> The chief thing [. . .] that distressed the candid and as yet unaccostumed reader in 'Jane Eyre' [. . .] was the character of Rochester's confidences to the girl whom he loved [. . .] that he should have talked to a girl so evidently innocent of his amour and his mistresses (Oliphant 19).

Rochester conducts the social intercourse with Jane in a twofold manner, first interrogating and eliciting information from her, then, casting her in the role of the auditor. In both hypostases, the female character is passive, submissive and evidently repeatedly tested by the male character. At the same time, though, his stories about a dissipated youth, misguided and desperately searching for a mate soul, able to understand, forgive, soothe and finally decide to become one with him, invest her with a certain type of authority. She *deserves* to learn his life-story and she *is worthy of* his trust. Ironically, though, Jane will benefit from these first-hand-experiences in a way unforeseen by the one imparting them, and decide to leave Thornfield when her respectability is placed under menace. Jane's famous declaration of equality and independence is, as her creator intentioned, a form of protest against a male-centered discourse, meant to guide and control her. Her declaration is a desperate attempt to establish her own voice, not necessarily contradicting his, but able to, if and when needed:

> Do you think I am an automaton? – a machine without feelings? [. . .] Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong! – and if God had gifted me with some beauty and much wealth, I should have made it as hard for you to leave me as it is now for me to leave you. I am not talking to you now through the medium of customs, conventionalities, nor even of mortal flesh: it is my spirit

> that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the medium of custom, conventionalities, nor even of mortal flesh: it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave and we stood at God's feet, equal – as we are! (Brontë 281).

After this outburst, and after Jane making use of her language, that is heightened above that of everyday intercourse, reaching the absolute of feeling, and passion mixed with practical and social considerations, the protagonists' union seems possible. The man acknowledges her rights to equality and proposes a marriage under the same terms. But even as she contemplates the joy of such a union, darkness falls, the wind roars, the giant chestnut- tree which is "circled at the base by a seat" (285) (lives united by marriage) groans as the storm breaks and the newly declared lovers are drenched with rain.

Thus, this moment, which seems to mark an important triumph of the female subject; is brutally interrupted. The splitting of the great horse-chestnut tree by lightning is a device used by the author to symbolize the separation and the difference-the impossibility of union-in the position of Jane Eyre and Rochester. The female heroine is at the middle of her journey towards socialization and she has to pass the test of becoming worthy of love without violating her own nature and morality. In a similar way, Rochester must improve himself before deserving Jane. The characters' passionate selves must mature without getting tempered. The solution to this dilemma means for Jane and Rochester to learn sympathy, and to practice humbleness, the human emotion and values, which will lead them to virtue.

In order to live a life of domestic felicity and morality next to the man she loves, the protagonist must learn how to tame her passion and muffle her sexuality, dangerous and derogatory quality in women during Victorian times. Novels and periodicals, widely read at the time, offered a good medium in which to debate the "women's question", since the fate attributed to characters could reflect opinions on their behavior. Social, personal and religious integrity often depended upon the (generally male) choice between female sensuality and morality.

Before meeting Jane, Rochester was confronted with this dilemma and failed, a failure that became obvious in time and that was, paradoxically, repeated by subsequent choices. In the portrait that he made Bertha Mason, he admits that he "was not sure of the

existence of one virtue in her nature" (333), that he "had remarked neither benevolence, nor candour, nor refinement in her mind or manners" (333), but he married her because his "senses were excited" (332). He recognized too late that Bertha's sensuality, exciting before marriage, is immoral, nevertheless his naivety and the family pressures do not absolve him of the responsibility of his choice. His marriage and his subsequent liaisons are ultimately unsatisfactory, because their base is sexual gratification only; none of the women *he* chose for a company offer the morality and the stability necessary for true happiness. In this respect, Jane Eyre's passion appears as wicked. The spirit of the passionate heroine desperately trying to reconcile her desire for love and acceptance with the religious and social doctrines of the Victorian era is depicted in by means of a profuse fire imagery.

> I was experiencing an ordeal: a hand of fiery iron grasped my vitals. Terrible moment: full of struggle, blackness burning! Not a human being that ever lived could wish to be loved better than I was loved, and him who thus loved me I absolutely worshipped: and I must renounce love and idol. One dread word comprised my intolerable duty – Depart! (342)

The relation of these facets to contemporary religious standards creates a compelling picture of feminine growth and morality. Although Brontë attempts to show Jane's passionate nature as wicked, it is Jane's passion that creates her vivid and commanding personality. As a child in Gateshead, the protagonist displayed a strong, unyielding constitution and an emotional nature. As she grows into an adolescent, the same deep and conflicting emotions seize her. Vivid metaphors and rich fire imagery illustrate a complex mixture of feelings that should be subsided but not completely eliminated. Visions of fire and their relevance to depict unleashed female sexuality also connect Jane with Bertha. Both characters are described by means of, or involved with "fire", especially in regards to the male character, Rochester, relating either to an internal fiery passion or through the physical setting of a fire.

Fire imagery permeates the triad Bertha-Rochester-Jane in the tale about the early days of his marriage, in the bedroom blaze from which Jane saved Rochester, in the language that both Rochester and Jane employ to describe the intensity of their emotions toward each other, and in the final fire that destroyed Thornfield Hall, crippled Rochester and killed Bertha. Obviously, the image of fire stands here for sinfulness than rebirth; sinfulness, as the passionate love Rochester-Jane contradicted morality laws (here fire and

burning *are* Hell), rebirth as their love, purified in the end by death and destruction will find a new realm in Ferndean.

After Jane leaves Thornfield, and her burning desire for Rochester is somehow subdued and sublimated, the next and final fire image occurs. In the fire that destroyed Thornfield, Rochester performed a self-redeeming act by attempting to save Bertha from the blaze and in doing this, he also proved that he was worthy of Jane's love. The act indicated that he had tempered his burning passions regarding Jane and Bertha and atoned for the wrongs that he had perpetrated on women all his life.

Another important element for the depiction of the relationship between Jane and Rochester, besides the fire imagery standing for the potential destructive force of eroticism, is the identification process, again initiated by the male character. Rochester, from the very first instance of their meeting, calls Jane in different ways, identifies her with either supernatural beings or birds. All these names prove the difficulties that the male character has in coming to terms with her real nature and individuality, that of a woman. Thus, she is alternatively, "a wild frantic bird" (282), "a strange...almost unearthly thing" (283), a "pale little elf" (287), a "mustard-seed" (287), a "girl-bride" (287) walking with a "sylph's foot" (288), a "fairy" (296), and an "angel" (288). Although all these names trouble and annoy the heroine, it is the last one that she rejects most. A woman, Charlotte Brontë tells us with Jane Eyre's voice is *not* an angel, nor does she have to attempt at being one. The female gender's attributes go far beyond those of an angel, or, at least, are of a different nature, not subservient, not *always* comforting and definitely, not self-sacrificing.

> 'I am not an angel', I asserted; 'and I will not be one till I die: I will be myself. Mr. Rochester, you must neither expect, nor exact anything celestial of me – for you will not get it, any more than I shall get it from you: which I do not at all anticipate' (288).

One can clearly grasp in this self-assertive declaration the rejection of the ideology of the day, which ascribed women to certain roles that in most cases imposed the obliteration of their real nature and self, and the molding of these, in order to satisfy patriarchal demands. Rochester, although impressed and pleased by Jane's liberty of spirit, originality and sophisticated mixture of conventionality and unconventionality, still secretly, or not so secretly, if one considers the repeated attempts at renaming her, expects

her to conform to pre-determined female roles and act as his "very angel" and "comforter" (288).

She will refuse to act as such, demonstrating unusual self-determination and self-respect. Thus, when Rochester's dark secret is revealed and Bertha's identity as his living though insane wife, is established, Jane starts again on her pilgrimage and leaves behind the love that had offered her moments of supreme happiness and painful agonies. This is a gesture of self-preservation on her part, and not, as it had been suggested, unnecessary cruelty to her and her possible partner. And because, unlike Bertha, completely lost in madness and entrapped in the attic, Jane had benefited from the lessons of rationality, steady moral concepts taught in Lowood, she will escape "through deliberation" (Gilbert 363), in order not to become another Celine Varens, or Clara, or Giacinta. The same deliberation, reinforced by a secure financial status (passed on to her by a fairy-tale uncle from Madera), and by the family feeling (the three Rivers cousins), will take her back to Rochester, and their union now will know no impediments. It is relevant to mention, in the context of Jane's return to Thornfield, that she was summoned by Rochester's disembodied call, in other words, the man and master is the one who summons Jane to fulfill what she acknowledges as her rightful destiny:

> I saw nothing, but I heard a voice somewhere cry – Jane! Jane! Jane! – nothing more...it did not come out of the air, nor from under the earth, nor from overhead. I had heard it – where, or whence, for ever impossible to know! And it was the voice of a human being – a known, loved, well-remembered voice – that of Edward Fairfax Rochester; and it spoke in pain and woe, wildly, eerily, urgently (444 – 445).

This supernatural telepathic communication was read by many as a Gothic device demanded by Brontë's editors to ensure the book's circulation by satisfying a taste then very much en vogue. However, this device may go far beyond the sensational taste of the epoch; Brontë and through her, Jane, may be plumbing the psyche, but she does it in order to state a cause, that of a woman's self-fulfillment within the generous boundaries of marriage of equals. Because, more than anything else, the powerful patriarch and the humble governess have become *equals*, in Brontë's opinion, the premise for a happy marriage. Now Jane can allow herself to call Rochester "my dear Master" (439), but this is an intimate and voluntary submission, and not a social barrier, because the two partners are not any longer Cinderella and the Prince, if anything, they have come to resemble more the

Beauty and the Beast. Jane, of course, has not become fair away from Thornfield, her newly-found beauty resides in economical independence and affective recognition. Rochester, on the other hand, lost many of his masculine powers and attractions, his wealth not the least important. Moreover, he is half-blind, and he cannot use his right arm.

Deprived on one of his primary senses, he is now dependent on Jane, a Brontëan way of empowering the female. Nonetheless, when one reflects that deaf are cut off from the communication with the others, that source of almost all that is wise and good, that want of language creates lack of knowledge, his blindness chastisement seems to have the function of preserving equality, mutually rewarding partnership, this time in terms of *discourse*. Jane and Rochester's love is founded on the words they exchange. A blind Rochester is able to greater appreciate the language he shares with Jane, as his blindness enables him to concentrate more fully on words, without being distracted by his vision; not to mention the fact that Jane is plain. In blinding Rochester, Brontë may have attempted to save her female protagonist from the humiliation of being looked at every day, and, sooner or later, due to the lack of personal charm, becoming disliked.

Consequently, Rochester's blindness serves a multiplicity of purposes: to castigate him for mistreating the many female presences in his life, to level his pride into an equality marriage, to sharpen his language capabilities and to allow him to become closer to Jane than any two people, independent of one another, could become:

> Mr. Rochester continued blind in the first two years of our union: perhaps it was that circumstance that drew us so very near – that knit us so very close for I was then his vision, as I am still his right hand. Literally, I was (what he often called me) the apple of his eye. He saw nature – he saw books through me; and never did I weary of gazing for his behalf, and of putting into words the effect of field, tree, town, river, cloud, sunbeam – of the landscape before us; of the weather round us – and impressing by sound on his ear what light could no longer stamp on his eye (476).

As a conclusion of the love-story, there remains to be considered whether in this male-female gender struggle, Jane's voice is triumphant and her happiness is true or, the best a woman could have hoped for, in those times. Ferndean, the space where the couple is allowed to exist, is hardly an idyllic spot. It is rather a disenchanted, unromantic place to which Jane, performing an act of faith comes as a penitent and accepts to serve as neophyte and supreme priest at the same time. Rochester will still be the one to initiate her in the

secrets of flesh, but she will lead him around with the clairvoyance of a priestess, since she can see for him and touch for him.

> As a dramatic setting, moreover, Ferndean is notably stripped and asocial, so that the physical isolation of the lovers suggests their spiritual isolation in a world where such egalitarian marriages as theirs are rare, if not impossible. True minds, Charlotte Brontë seems to be saying, must withdraw into a remote forest, a wilderness even, in order to circumvent the strictures of a hierarchical society (Gilbert 369).

In Ferndean Jane's female power, her self-assertion, otherwise a potentially destructive force is tamed into a compromise. She becomes the wife of a much older man, half-blind and poor, and the satisfaction of togetherness is a rather virtual one. Thus, the family structure of which she is now a part produced its descendants, maybe easier to reconcile themselves with oppressive realities: "When his first born was put into his arms, he could see that the boy had inherited his own eyes, as they were once – large, brilliant and black" (477).

Consequently, one cannot emphasize a feminist celebratory tendency regarding the implications of the novel's ending. In my opinion, a so-called triumphant voice of Jane should be censored by the sad realism of her victory. After all, she *does* marry a much older man, a crippled one, too and she *does* choose to live in isolation, next to him only. The heroine's voice, no matter how assertive and confident it may be, will be heard by the husband only, the sole interlocutor and witness of her completeness as an individual. This ensures a limited socialization, a newly gained feminine force that is better not put to a test; Ferndean is, in fact, an ivory tower, encapsulating a pair of lovers with too precocious claims for the hostile outside world.

6 CONCLUSION

Ideologically speaking, Jane Eyre equally integrates in and challenges the main current of the Victorian age that envisage women as dutiful wives, happy in their maternity and isolated from the male world, in the confines of their homes. This ambivalence, the impossibility to assimilate the novel to either total acceptance or rejection of the "Angel in the House" ideology argues for and reinforces the moral dilemma that consumed the feminine consciousness shaped by patriarchal demands. I am referring here to the Victorian woman's dilemma "love without work or work without love" as expressed by Penny Boumelha in her book Charlotte Brontë.

The novel integrates in the main ideological current in terms of gender distribution, in the sense that Jane's quests end next to the man she loves and to whom she chooses to dedicate her life. In fact, her choice is more than merely an approval of the woman's mission, more than voluntary self-subjection, because she offers all her capacities and abilities to a less than perfect man, who had become, at least in my reading, almost her inferior. While it is true that Rochester was morally elevated by means of his altruistic behaviour expressed in the attempt to rescue his mad wife from the blaze, it is impossible to overlook the fact that he lost many of his social and material assets that had made him a desirable husband. In the final decision that the heroine gives regarding her marriage, she reaches extraordinary levels of the ability of self-sacrifice, almost *surpassing* the most fervent promoters of female self-renunciation and abnegation.

However, the novel also challenges the "Angel in the House" ideology, in the sense that to the ordinary romance plot, the plot of female Bildungsroman is added. In this respect, the protagonist has the audacity to pray for "incident, fire, feeling", extravagant claims made by a woman, and sustained by the utmost astuteness. Therefore, she leaves the safety and security of Lowood school, where she worked as a teacher, not because of destitution, simply because, a restless and dissatisfied nature like hers, cannot and *will not* submit to routine, and will refuse to incorporate a monotonous destiny. From then on, the heroine will start to fabricate her own story and affirm herself as a presence in the social world, outside the Lowood confines.

As far as the education issue is concerned, undoubtedly the novel preaches and demonstrates its exceptional relevance to the formation of a complete, autonomous individual. The role of the education is even more emphasized, as the protagonist is a woman character, theoretically (Victorian *male* theory), less prone to acknowledging the life long lasting effects and impact of instruction. Moreover, since at the beginning of her education, when she was still in Gateshead, she had been made to feel inferior because she was plain, dependent, morose and bad, as she had been repeatedly told that "one cannot really care for such a little toad as that" (Brontë 21) Jane must achieve perfection in a different area. She can never be a beauty or the cynosure of society, but she determines to shine in another sphere. In this sense, the heroine refuses to conform to a mediocre performance and attempts to accumulate the very depths of knowledge, her Lowoodian results arguing for brilliance. The message that the author, Charlotte Brontë, conveys by the analysis of her protagonist's instruction process is embodied in the successful tests of accumulated knowledge outside the precincts of Lowood.

Thus, education enables the heroine to direct her goals of self-assertiveness and function socially, as well as gain Rochester's intellectual and affective recognition. In Thornfield, she supervises Adele and, by means of a favorable coincidence chain, she encounters the man that after many obstacles will become her lifelong partner. In Morton, she surpasses the difficulties of a temporary destitution state and supports herself by working as a village teacher. Moreover, in Marsh End, she has the option to alter the course of her finally domestic destiny and head for the heroic enterprise that her cousin, St. John, recommends her. All these shifts and change in the character's evolution are mediated by and because of education and the full understanding of its role with which Charlotte Brontë empowered her heroine.

The family and the formation of a family is definitely the most important dimension in the protagonist's Bildungsroman. Jane Eyre, from the very beginning of her odyssey, is traumatically affected by the absence of parents and brothers, and this state of *orphanhood* may be seen as determinant for her destiny. Rage, fury, frustration, all the negative feelings that consumed her during the early years of her childhood and led to the incarceration in the famous Red Room and subsequent exile to Lowood, can be flawlessly explained and safely attributed to the *absence* of a protective family around her. The

irreplaceable and painful absence determines her self-perception as the too much hated "Other" (she is not like the Reeds), not only in terms of affection, but also in terms of *class*. Had her parents been alive, books and the pleasures of reading would have been naturally granted to her, Christmas parties would have also included her, and certainly none of the domestics would have dared to comment on her subordinate position and lack of physical beauty.

It is because of the very absence of a family, that the heroine craves to assert herself, often defying the conventions and restrictions of the Victorian age, and initiating even a gender struggle against the male characters. It is memorable the scene in which she challenges her suitor, Rochester, and his male assumptions (even if not yet expressed) that she can live happily outside a domestic circle and without affection offered by those around her: "Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless?" (281). Obscurity, poverty are almost depicted (again, subtextually) as the maddening effects of the absence of family feeling that Jane never experienced, an absence that burdened her path through life.

Furthermore, it is significant the fact that in Marsh End, a Jane suddenly transformed into a rich heiress, proceeds to divide the inheritance between herself and her cousins, arguably only from a sense of justice, rather more because of her desperate need of kin around her, people with whom she can claim she belongs. In enriching the others, she may be said to buy a family for herself, to negotiate affection, as all the more affection she will receive form her cousins because of the unutterable generosity she has manifested. Thus, in view of the analysis provided in the present thesis and the above examples provided as a reinforcement of those already discussed, my argument clearly sustains here the idea that at least for nineteenth century fictional heroines and heroes, family, its absence or its arguable presence shape the entire evolution of a character and clearly define a lifelong quest.

The fourth chapter of my analysis concentrated on romance, marriage and sexuality and their relevance to the formation of the character. The first two, romance and marriage are common aspects to be discussed and whose influence dictated many Victorian plots. Especially for a female character's growing and development, their absence is unconceivable. The third one, sexuality, is innovatory and adds a new dimension to the

feminine profile that shapes itself taking into consideration the flesh matters, until then stifled and labeled as unwomanly.

Nevertheless, this present analysis led to the conclusion that Charlotte Brontë depicted conventional issues in an unconventional way, thus breaking the restrictions and at times, scandalizing the inner traditionalism of a patriarchal society. She did so, as she promoted different values and interpretation of a gender-union, thus redefining the power balance formerly accepted as standard and inalterable. In presenting the female character's opinion on the institute of marriage, as a "union of equals", in endowing the male character with a similarly liberal (then revolutionary) view, Charlotte Brontë initiated a tradition of *equality* in marriage, from then on impossible to disregard. The most feministic claim that the novel can make resides precisely in this leveling of gender expectations, no longer based on submission on one part and dominance on the other.

Not only does Charlotte Brontë herald male-female egalitarianism, she also minutely describes *how* it can be achieved. The present thesis argues for the essence of *experience sharing* that the two characters employ in order to attain their final union. Nothing is left unuttered in Rochester's speech that theoretically instructs the heroine in the secrets of the flesh, at the same time confessing their harmful potential, but, on the other hand, nothing is omitted from the list of his ordeals. The loss, the *male* loss, unequivocally empowers the female and re-designs hierarchies in a far more profitable way for the heroine.

Nevertheless, as again my thesis argued, the novel's ending does not surpass the limits of domesticity. Jane Eyre is an artist, in the sense that she fabricated her own destiny inside patriarchy, conforming, even if from a stronger position, to the universal role of woman as carer, nurturer, ultimately wife and mother; however, her artistry does not discover and serve other vocations than the strictly feminine ones. What the heroine has achieved, once her peregrinations and her quest for self-definition ended, is the right to choose the continuation of her life, when she could have had any other choice. Materially comfortably-situated, living in the same house with cousins-almost sisters and enjoying a sense of belonging, Jane Eyre employs her newly gained independence to care and love a husband.

In this renunciation of selfhood, or rather, the reshaping of selfhood next to a patriarchal figure, Jane Eyre demonstrates her primordial femininity that cannot be altered by fortunate exterior circumstances. Her untold story of potentially altered endings may not have been, and *was* not, the concern of the nineteenth century novelist, writing and living in the puritanical, strongly conventional Victorian age.

My thesis, nevertheless, argued for the *voice* of the female character that could be heard when criticizing, blaming, condescending or joyfully approving of the events of her life. The final choice -that of returning to Rochester- in a way reconfirmed the *free will* of a feminine voice, choosing the conventional *after* testing its limits. There are instances when too assertive a voice, Jane's voice, seems to threaten to expand to the whole universe, but this fantasized female power is, as my, thesis sought to demonstrate, continuously composed in and tamed by the ramifications of the patriarchal society. The authoress herself experienced repression and consequently rejected several aspects of patriarchy that were undoubtedly promoting the silencing of female voices, but she understood that, at least for that time being, attempting to escape patriarchy would have meant condescending to become Bertha Mason. As the voice of the author, Jane Eyre also confirms to patriarchy and yields to its rules. Nevertheless, the submission derives from understanding the futility of resistance and is accompanied by as much self-assertiveness as imaginable for those times. As Penny Boumelha stated:

> It is the tension between the two – sometimes seen as an opposition between Gothic and realist elements, or fairy-tale and novel – that gives this novel its peculiar intensity and force, acting out as it does at the very level of form the mutual dependencies and incompatibilities of desire and restraint (77).

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