

Discord in Thornfield Hall:
Critical Postcolonial Intersectionality in *Jane Eyre*

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Jane Eyre has been hailed as one of the first truly feminist novels. James Eli Adams declares in his overview of Victorian Literature that “in all of Victorian literature, *Jane Eyre* offers perhaps the most vivid example of the reconfiguring of social authority through gender” (J. Adams 118). While this is accurate, it seems to neglect the fact that Jane and Bertha’s “reconfiguration” does not happen solely because of their gender. While their femininity plays a major part in their release from the oppressive patriarchal structure of their society, Jane and Bertha’s financial status, race, and social status play an equally important role in the plot. Brontë’s use of intersectionality in the novel highlights not only the privileges of the characters but their limits as well. By focusing more closely on the factors that bring this intersectionality to light we can begin to piece together how Brontë’s initial use of intersectionality exposes cracks in the initial understanding of *Jane Eyre* as an intersectional feminist novel. Borrowing from Jill Bennett and her book *Empathetic Vision*, the term “crude intersectionality” works to describe what Brontë does with Jane and Bertha. Bennett describes “crude empathy” as “feeling for another based on the assimilation of the other’s experience to the self” (10); if we apply this language to intersectionality, then “crude intersectionality” would be to only recognize another’s intersectionality in relation to their understanding of their own struggles. Jane and Bertha, as I argue in the first section of this paper, are only able to destroy their bond with Rochester through the recognition of the other as being oppressed by him in relation to herself and her own struggles. While it still benefits both Bertha and Jane by the end of the novel, their intersectionality does not fully consider the experiences of the other woman. Ideally, their intersectionality would be, as Jill Bennett discusses, “critical”: “critical empathy” is “not grounded in affinity...but on a *feeling for* another that entails an encounter with something irreducible and different...” (10). Again, if we are to transform this phrase for intersectionality,

we can begin to think about how we might use Brontë's initial intersectionality as a stepping stone to a more critical understanding of Jane and Bertha's situation as women. By applying the lenses of postcolonial and trauma theory to the novel, we can begin to develop an understanding of how Jane and Bertha can become critically intersectional characters. Each of these lenses illuminates the clear struggle that each woman faces within a tightly structured Victorian society, and their means of navigating it result in their processing of emotions on a deeper level. I argue that while on the surface it appears that Jane and Bertha are each recognizing the other, they do so only on the most basic level because each only sees it in relation to her own self rather than on a more widespread level. Throughout this thesis, I argue that by exposing the crudeness of this original intersectionality, as well as the privileges gained and lost through the patriarchal structure of Victorian society and empire, Brontë's initial creation of crude intersectional characters can evolve into a deeper level of understanding of one another, or what I am calling critical postcolonial intersectionality.

Reader, We're Free of Him: Intersectionality and Gothic Oppression in *Jane Eyre*

Jane Eyre is a novel principally about women: at its center lies the stories of two women whose experiences inextricably link them throughout the novel and call attention to the ways in which their oppression within Thornfield Hall is not a singular experience. Although the term "intersectionality" was first used in 1989 ("intersectionality" OED), the way in which Charlotte Brontë has created Jane Eyre and Bertha Mason-Rochester means that, by 21st century standards, they are intersectional characters. By closely examining the ways in which Brontë illuminates the inequalities of gender, race, and class in Victorian England, we can begin to understand how Jane becomes more than just the typical Victorian Gothic heroine and Bertha becomes more than the typical trapped Gothic woman. If we are to consider *Jane Eyre* as an intersectional feminist novel, then, we must understand how the oppression of Jane, a middle-

class white woman, and the oppression of Bertha, an imprisoned, mentally-ill woman of (possibly) mixed race, can act as mirror to each other's experiences. According to Kimberle Crenshaw, the creator of the term "intersectional feminism", it is "basically a lens, a prism, for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other" (Steinmetz). It is clear that Jane and Bertha's race, class, and mental illness are what give them incredibly similar experiences in Thornfield and act as a way for their class and race to present a means of understanding the other's experiences. Jane and Bertha are both arguably intersectional characters: both are subject to abuse from their families, both are literally locked into a relationship with Rochester, and both are 'othered' from society in a very clear way. Because of this overlap in these women's experiences, we must look at this novel through an intersectional feminist lens. Although their gender plays a large role in the treatment of both Jane and Bertha by Rochester, Brontë makes it clear that they are more than just women. Their past experiences, as well as their shared ones in Thornfield, culminate in their ability to separate themselves from their oppressor. In essence, neither Jane nor Bertha can become free without the other. By focusing these different inequalities through the same intersectional prism, we may come to understand that Jane and Bertha are functioning in a world that they cannot leave without the acknowledgement of the experiences of the other, and thus they must acknowledge their intersectionality.

In order to understand the ways in which Jane's and Bertha's experiences within the walls of Thornfield intersect, we must understand the ways in which their pasts put them in the correct environment to be oppressed by Rochester. Jane, an orphan taken in by her extended family, is abused both physically and verbally, and is constantly told how the inferiority of her birth results in her inferior status in the household. She is told that she is "less than a servant, for you do nothing for your keep" (Brontë 14), a statement which places her outside of the middle-

class, and yet also outside of the working-class. In Victorian England's social system, which was so highly reliant on class, the ambiguity of Jane's situation becomes a threat to that system. She exists outside of the order of things, and therefore exists outside of the order of the Reed's household ("I was a discord in Gateshead Hall; I was like nobody there" (Brontë 17)). This fear of her ambiguous class status, then, is manifested through her aunt's treatment of her: Jane is not welcomed into the family unit yet neither is she dismissed into the servant's unit. She exists in a kind of limbo, outside of the normal bounds of the household, and must be punished for her lack of work and lack of involvement in the family unit. Therefore, Jane becomes literally trapped in the "red-room", the room where her beloved uncle has passed away, a place where the sense of imprisonment she feels within Gateshead becomes physically real. It is here, in a frenzied state of anxiety and fear, that Jane finds herself both physically trapped and mentally trapped: "but then, prepared as my mind was for horror, shaken as my nerves were by agitation, I thought the swift-darting beam was a herald of some coming vision from another world. My heart beat thick, my head grew hot; a sound filled my ears....I was oppressed, suffocated..." (Brontë 19). Jane literally recognizes her oppression and suffocation at the hands of her family, and manifests it into a real traumatic experience.

This is important, especially since at this period in Victorian history, England was beginning to consider the plight of the child in society. As Marah Gubar explores this in her essay "The Victorian Child" many early nineteenth century activists were aiming to legally protect the interests of children in all aspects of life, including the home. She explains that "this activism was motivated in part by a growing acceptance of the Romantic idea that children are innocent creatures that should be shielded from the adult world and allowed to enjoy their childhood" (Gubar). As *Jane Eyre* was published right at the height of this activism in 1847, this treatment of child Jane directly flouts this idea. By reminding Jane of her place within the strict

Victorian class system and as well as causing her mental and physical pain, Jane's treatment at the hands of her family would have been shocking even for readers used to seeing children begging for money on London streets. While this scene helps to evoke sympathy from the reader, it also provides a key point of trauma in Jane's life that allows her to remain oppressed within the Rochester household.

Similarly, there is a key point in Bertha's past that also results in her oppression being sustained within Thornfield. Bertha is an important character within the pages of *Jane Eyre*, both as a figure of race and as a means of parallel between Jane's experience and her own. Yet the explanation of her marriage to Rochester brings about key points which seem to overlap with Jane's past treatment. Bertha, who is described by her husband as "the disgusting secret" (Brontë 292), has been poorly treated and entrapped by her family in Jamaica. She has been forced to keep the family "secret" of madness quiet (Brontë 292) in order to land herself a rich white English husband and subsequently a ticket into English society (Brontë 305). However, while Rochester is courting Bertha, he admits that her family "...showed her to me in parties, splendidly dressed. I seldom saw her alone, and had very little private conversation with her" (Brontë 305). It is here that Bertha's imprisonment is made apparent: Bertha has been forced to act a certain way in order to guarantee the success of a marriage that she most likely does not want. She is paraded through Rochester's life quickly and quietly, presumably told by her family to act as charming as she can in order to help the family name. She is forced to stifle her feelings, emotions, or opinions and becomes useful only in what she can bring to the betterment of her family. She is trapped in a societal prison, psychologically oppressed, and cannot admit who she truly is for fear of losing a good marriage and a good connection for her racially ambiguous family.

It is clear that Bertha's race also plays a large role in the psychological oppression she experiences prior to her marriage to Rochester. Although Bertha's character remains ethnically ambiguous, we are told that her mother was a Creole (Brontë 292), but the color of Bertha's skin is never actually described. In his explanation of his marriage to Jane, Rochester describes Bertha as "the boast of Spanish Town for her beauty...I found her in the style of Blanche Ingram: tall, dark, and majestic" (Brontë 305), which seems to imply that while her coloring is darker, she appears to be white-passing; additionally, she is able to be married to a white, aristocratic Englishman. However, elsewhere in the novel, Bertha is described by Jane as having "a discoloured face" that was "purple: the lips were swelled and dark..." (Brontë 284), which implies a Victorian representation of African features. The distinction of Bertha's race is important, not only because of her treatment within the Rochester household and her identity as intersectional, but also because it allows another way for her to be psychologically oppressed. Due to her ambiguous race, Bertha can be placed in categories that provide her with other means of psychological entrapment; she fits in neither the English upper-class society nor a West Indian slave society. Like Jane, she exists outside of the bounds of what society allows. By not giving her a fixed race Brontë has given Jane and Bertha a shared experience of ambiguity within Thornfield and English society, one which effectively alienates them and forces them to remain on the outskirts of "polite" English society.

However, unlike Jane's ability to exist outside of class boundaries, Bertha's race presents more of a problem for the English. At this point in the Victorian era, scientists were beginning to try to categorize what made races different through the study of ethnography. This pseudoscientific practice was a means of categorizing different racial traits with the intention of "the moral and intellectual improvement of non-Western peoples" (Aguirre 55). In her essay "Monstrous 'Others': The Legacy of Race, Hybridity, and Intersectionality in the Nineteenth-

Century Novel”, Valerie Beth Oualline outlines the use of these pseudoscientific classifications for race in the nineteenth century. She explains that “throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, several key factors, including the expansion of colonization and global trade as well as Enlightenment efforts to classify and define, lead to stereotyping and fear surrounding the cultural and racial ‘Other’” (3). Bertha, who is racially ambiguous and therefore a kind of hybrid, still becomes “othered” through Victorian society. However, Oualline continues by writing that

Despite the ambiguity of her race, all of Bertha’s negative behaviors are inherited from her mother, from the Creole. No matter the racial origin, *Creole* is clearly a negative marker inherited from the mother, a code that signifies ‘Otherness’; therefore, *Creole* becomes a kind of stand-in for any muddled impurity that sullies the preferable whiteness associated with Englishness" (17).

This, then, is the key way in which Bertha’s race psychologically traps her. Her identity as a racially ambiguous woman does not allow her to move as freely within English society as a purely English woman does, but neither does it give her the shackles of slavery that being born a Black West Indian woman would have. Instead, she lives knowing that she does not belong within the society her family spent so much time trying to place her in, but neither will she be accepted by those in the West Indies.

Jane and Bertha’s racial and class ambiguity is what presents the greatest opportunity for Rochester’s domination of each woman upon her arrival at Thornfield. Their already vulnerable position in society, or their inability to culturally fit in, is what allows Rochester to wield his power over them so easily. Jane’s role as a governess in the household places her on a lower class than Rochester, but on a higher class level than the servants, just as she was in the Reed’s household ten years before. As a working woman from a semi-respectable family and with an education from a respectable school, she balances on the edge of two different worlds. Again, as

in the Reed's house, this ambiguity inspires fear and hatred from her upper-class peers. Blanche Ingram makes this clear when she expounds on her feelings for governesses: she asserts, "I have just one word to say of the whole tribe; they are a nuisance" (Brontë 177) and adds that she finds "...half of them detestable and the rest ridiculous, and all incubi..." (Brontë 176). Blanche is clearly disgusted by Jane's need to have a career, despite the fact that women like Jane were the ones who would have taught her how to become a proper lady in society. As governesses were often "the unmarried daughters of clergymen, military officers, or even impoverished gentry" (Hunt 180), they might have lacked the proper schooling to teach academics to girls, but were employed to teach with an "emphasis on social skills and accomplishments..." (Hunt 180). Therefore, governesses were often gentlewomen who had fallen on tough financial times (Hunt 180), and were considered "neither a servant nor a member of the family" (Hunt 180). This is almost exactly how Jane was described as a child in her aunt's home, and thus her status in the Rochester home begins to echo her treatment in Gateshead. Once again, Jane remains outside of the social boundaries of class, belonging neither to the wealthy, genteel class of Rochester and Blanche yet neither does she completely belong to the working-class like Mrs. Fairfax or Grace Poole do. Instead, Jane is constantly reminded by both parties that she does not belong to either class and is doomed to remain ostracized by both.

Clearly, it is the inequalities presented that gives Rochester the leverage he needs to oppress Bertha and Jane within his home; their mutual history of familial abuse causes them to be particularly susceptible to patriarchal control. This results most noticeably in Jane referring to Rochester as "master" throughout the novel, such as when she says, "I and Adèle went to the table; but the master did not leave his couch" (Brontë 122). This casual use of the term for Rochester seems to solidify the role Rochester plays in Thornfield, which as Susan Meyer illustrates in her article "Colonialism and the Figurative Strategy in *Jane Eyre*" is one more akin

to a slave master than an employer or husband. She references his past work in the West Indies, reminding us that “a wealthy white man living in Jamaica before emancipation would undoubtedly have slaves to wait upon him, and his Jamaican fortune would of course be the product of slave labor...When he compares his relationships with women to keeping slaves, the parallel is given a shocking vividness by his own history as a slave master” (259). Rochester’s relationship with the women in Thornfield then allows him to become a kind of slave master in his home, resulting in a continuation of Jane and Bertha’s oppression. Rochester’s complete physical control over Bertha appears to be for her own safety due to her illness, but also helps to remind Bertha of her place within the household. Not only does Rochester hold her in a small room under the constant watch of a white woman, but he holds Bertha in a place that constantly reminds her of her status in England as a racially ambiguous, mentally ill woman. Thus, her imprisonment can be seen as a direct comparison to the treatment slaves felt in the British West Indies. As the National Museums Liverpool discovered, the location of slaves’ villages “were usually close enough to the main house and plantation works that they could be seen from the house. This allowed the owner or manager to keep an eye on his enslaved workforce, while also reinforcing the inferior social status of the enslaved” (Handler and Tuite). This is strikingly similar to the location of Bertha’s room on the third floor: she is kept close enough to Rochester that he can make sure of her imprisonment but this also ensures that she is constantly reminded of her place within English society and as a wife. As Rochester reveals, his wife is kept “in a room without a window” in which “burnt a fire, guarded by a high and strong fender, and a lamp suspended from the ceiling by a chain” (Brontë 293). This room, without a view or any ventilation, keeps Bertha in a constant state of reminder of her imprisonment in an ancestral English home, far, far away from her own. She has been stolen from her people, much like a slave, and trapped within a marriage she did not want. In this way, Bertha is now physically

trapped within the confines of the English landscape and aristocracy, much like she was once psychological trapped within her own family.

As for Jane, Rochester's complete control over her psyche in terms of her finances and social interactions acts as the same type of reminder. Jane is socially inferior to her employer; much like Bertha's room on the third floor, Jane's role as governess in Thornfield acts a way of echoing her past treatment with her family. Because "Jane's governing at Thornfield Hall becomes like slavery to her only when Rochester arrives with his ruling-class friends and she experiences the dehumanizing regard of her class superiors" (Meyer 257); suddenly she becomes reminded of her treatment in Gateshead by the tyrannical Reeds. Her movement within the house is restricted upon the arrival of Rochester's guests; she is told she must be invited by Rochester to enter areas that were once open to her and that she must literally exist on the outskirts of the group. Rochester demands that Jane "must go into the drawing-room while it is still empty, before the ladies leave the dinner-table; choose your seat in any quiet nook you like" (Brontë 169). Mrs. Fairfax also makes it clear that Jane must appear so that Rochester knows she has done as she has been ordered: "...just let Mr. Rochester see you are there and then slip away" (Brontë 169). Additionally, Jane's status as governess places her in a position to be dependent on Rochester financially. This dependency means that Jane does not have the freedom to leave Thornfield when she wishes and must ask for money in order to go visit her family. When Jane does ask, she is given more than she has earned, so that she must come back in order to return the change she owes to Rochester (Brontë 224). The control over her movement and finances, in addition to the verbal abuse she suffers from of his aristocratic guests, creates an (almost) metaphorical prison that is further exacerbated by her impending marriage to the man that already controls so much of her life.

This marriage, however, becomes the catalyst for Jane and Bertha to escape Rochester's patriarchal control. When faced with the bonds of marriage, both Jane and Bertha seemed to become awakened to what they see as a truly oppressive household. It is only because of their experiences of trauma, both past and present, that allows them to acknowledge their mistake in entering into this union. Brontë has Jane awaken to the figure of Bertha standing before her mirror, trying on her wedding veil: "But presently she took my veil from its place: she held it up, gazed at it long, and then she threw it over her own head, and turned to the mirror...it removed my veil from its gaunt head, rent it in two parts, and flinging both on the floor, trampled on them" (Brontë 284). Here, Jane and Bertha recognize and acknowledge the way in which their traumas have become intertwined. Although Jane does not know who Bertha is at this point, she sees the omen signified through Bertha's destruction. As Susan Meyer writes, "This central passage, in which Jane glimpses Bertha's black face under the wedding veil, reflected in her own mirror, and then watches Bertha tear the veil in half, epitomizes the other form of slavery that Bertha embodies for Jane and then enables her to avoid" (Meyer 258). This form of slavery, of oppression, is bringing back that haunting of memory that has been circling Jane and Bertha since they entered Thornfield. Bertha, seeing the veil and recognizing it as the way in which she came to be physically confined within Thornfield and England, destroys it in an action that can only be interpreted as an acknowledgement of her oppression. Jane, on the other hand, sees the figure which she imagines as a demon or frightful hallucination, and recognizes the omen it presents towards her coming marriage.

This omen allows Jane to begin to realize her own psychological confinement within Thornfield. Just as Bertha has recognized that she has been confined by her marriage, Jane also begins to reevaluate her relationship to Rochester. This episode with Bertha recalls the moments in her aunt's home in which she believes she sees a ghost in the "red-room". The veil scene, hot

on the heels of her trip back home to see her dying aunt, echoes some of the same language that Jane uses as a child: “On waking, a gleam dazzled my eyes; I thought - oh, it is daylight! But I was mistaken...I had risen up from bed, I bent forward: first surprise, then bewilderment, came over me; and then my blood crept cold through my veins” (Brontë 283). Much like her terror in the red-room, Jane is dazzled by a light, thinks she sees a figure, and then feels her body react with terror. This seems to awaken within her the understanding that Thornfield is a place just like Gateshead. This realization manifests itself into the understanding that her marriage may become just like her childhood, which leads to her eventual freedom from Thornfield. In the same way that Bertha’s realization that marriage is what led her into Rochester’s bondage, Jane realizes that her future marriage would keep her trapped in a house that echoes her abuse as a child. That Bertha and Jane’s combined realization of their oppression happens in the same space, looking in the mirror at one another, in the presence of Jane’s wedding clothes is important. Their shared experiences, not only within Thornfield, but also in their past, come together at this moment to act as a means of enacting their freedom from Rochester.

Ultimately, Jane and Bertha’s intersectionality is not only what allows them to become free from oppression under Rochester but it is what also illuminates how fear of ambiguity within a strict Victorian society can allow oppression like theirs to happen. Although their societal ambiguity allows them to be the intersectional and powerful women characters that stand the test of time within the novel they work to draw attention to the problems present within the Victorian world. The abuse of Jane as a child shines light on the tough lives children still faced despite work towards the betterment of their treatment; Bertha’s being forced by her family to mask her mental illness and “infiltrate” white English society with her racial ambiguity showcases the fear that England had toward the possible degeneration of their people; Jane’s status as governess highlights the hypocrisy present in the Victorian class system; and, finally,

Jane and Bertha's flip of their entrapments showcase the ease with which female trauma could be used to manipulate their situations in life. Therefore, *Jane Eyre's* intersectional characters are able to help themselves, but they are also able to help others. By drawing attention to a myriad of experiences that trap Jane and Bertha *outside* of their gender, Brontë presents her readers with an opportunity to recognize their own intersectionality and how it might become a useful tool for change. However, through highlighting this intersectionality we also see how the privileges of each character begin to expose the cracks in how they might work within this system. Jane and Bertha lead very different lives and each one allowed very different privileges based on her own ability to navigate and benefit from the patriarchal scaffolding of the Victorian world. Because of this, we see the ways in which Jane and Bertha's status as intersectional individuals, although incredibly helpful for their contemporaries, exposes the ways in which colonialism and patriarchy wind their way into the text. These themes give us the opportunity to recognize the clear guilt and hypocrisies present in the novel that give more liberties and privileges to certain characters rather than to others. Clearly, Jane and Rochester have been afforded certain privileges that Bertha does not because of their social status and race; it is these privileges that uncover the ways in which *Jane Eyre* can, at first, to only be seen to have developed a crude intersectionality. This, exposed through Brontë's inclusion of imperial British ideals and constant patriarchal framework throughout the novel, illuminates the ways in which their intersectionality is based on the discrepancies of their relative privileges.

A(nother) Postcolonial Reading of *Jane Eyre*: Privileges and the Limits They Present to Intersectionality

One of the major themes driving *Jane Eyre* is the West Indian slave trade and the money and privileges that it affords its main characters. The notion of British colonialism haunts the novel, lurking behind the money that Rochester and Jane receive and lies hidden in the shadows

of Bertha's attic room. Colonialism is the thread that holds together the relationships at the central point of the novel: Rochester and Bertha, Bertha and Jane, Jane and her family. Winding its way throughout the text, empire and colonialism act as a way of grounding the plot of the novel in a tangible way. In Sue Thomas's book *Imperialism, Reform, and the Making of Englishness in Jane Eyre*, she explores the idea of "worlding" *Jane Eyre*, in which she "works to locate and situate the historical consciousness of the [author]... Worlding draws out the worldliness of texts in their originary historical moments" (2). Worlding, then, places the contemporary sources of Brontë's time in context with modern readings of the novel. By doing this, Thomas sheds light on the intricacies of the slave revolts and surrounding dialogue in Brontë's time, giving important context to the shadow of imperialism that lurks throughout the novel. Through her "worlding" of *Jane Eyre* we become aware of the complex social networks that contributed to Brontë's ability to compare Jane and Bertha to those marginalized by the spread of the British empire. As Thomas explains, her worlding "recognized in *Jane Eyre* a very precise allusion to a particular moment in the history of slave rebellion in Jamaica...and began to examine more closely the novel's internal chronology" (3). By thinking critically about the novel's contemporary allusions to slavery as well as the chronological timeline that Brontë establishes, it becomes clear that the events in this novel must be looked at within the context of how they benefit (or do not benefit) the lives of the characters.

For while this novel can be considered one of empire, the novel's actions take place years before the emancipation of slaves in the West Indies. As Susan Meyer explains in "Colonialism and the Figurative Strategy in *Jane Eyre*,"

Brontë finished writing *Jane Eyre* in 1846, eight years after the full emancipation of the British West Indian slaves in 1838. But the novel itself is definitely set before emancipation...it is clear that even at the latest possible dates, events in the

novel occur well before emancipation, which was declared in 1834 but only fulfilled in 1838. Brontë may have meant for the events of the novel to occur in the 1820s and '30s...during the years in which, due to the economic decline of the British sugar colonies in the West Indies, planters imposed increasing hardship on the slaves and increasingly feared revolt (9-10).

Contextually, Meyer's timeline presents a novel that is aware of the guilt, hardship, and horrors that go into the British slave trade, while still firmly allowing its main characters, Jane and Rochester, to gain increasing privileges from British colonialism. The text's overwhelming imperialistic and colonial subtext and influences complicate things, adding to the already intense events taking place. The possible timeline of the novel that Meyers postulates indicates that the West Indian slave trade was at an unstable point, making the relationships within the text an interesting foil for what could have been happening in the West Indies at the time. Meyers continues by asking "but why would Brontë write a novel suggesting the possibility of a slave uprising in 1846, after the emancipation of the British...slaves had already taken place?" (255). It is clear that Brontë hoped to link the sufferings of exploited people to the sufferings of her main female characters, but, as Meyer points out, "while the novel's use of colonialism is overtly figurative, nonetheless it in part does engage colonialism on a non-figurative level" (255). The figurative level, which manifests itself in the text as the continuously appearing metaphor of slavery and exploitation of Jane, helps to illuminate the non-figurative level. Through the use of this slavery metaphor, Brontë's novel calls attention to the privileges imperialism gives to *Jane Eyre's* main characters.

The "overt figurative strategies" (Meyer) of *Jane Eyre*, found in her explicit use of the backdrop of the exploitation of West Indian slaves, lay the groundwork for the more subtle complexities that unfold throughout the rest of the novel. These strategies take the form of a

consistently running metaphor of slavery and exploitation between Jane and eventually Rochester. The metaphor is most often used to relate Jane's experiences in the novel to slavery and works to further illuminate the exploitation and abuse that Jane faces throughout her life. It is introduced early on when Jane refers to her cousin John Reed as horrible as a slave-driver (Brontë 13), placing Jane in the metaphorical role as slave. Later in the same scene, when she is locked away inside the red room, Jane relates herself to the rebellious slave: "my blood was still warm; the mood of the revolted slave was still bracing me with its bitter vigour" (Brontë 16). This comparison to Jane rebelling against her abusive family to the struggles of those slaves who possibly (if we are to use Meyer's timeline of the novel) would have been rebelling against the cruel planters of the West Indies. It introduces the idea of Jane not only as an exploited individual, but also as an exploited and oppressed individual who has the capacity for immense strength. Through this initial metaphorical characterization as rebellious slave, the slavery trope places Jane at the center of the catalyst for revolt later in the novel, setting the stage for the revolt that she and Bertha will later have over the "master" of Thornfield. This revolt clearly mimics the slave revolts that were happening in the West Indies at the time Meyers places the events of the novel taking place. But Jane as "slave" also plays a central role in the establishment of her inferiority and oppression in Thornfield Hall.

As arguably the most important use of this metaphor, the comparison works to perpetuate the traditional white patriarchal society within Thornfield Hall by relating Rochester's treatment of the women in his home to his overall privileges gained from the West Indian slave trade. Jane refers once again to herself as "slave", but this time in the context of her servitude to Rochester: "He smiled; and I thought his smile was such as a sultan might, in a blissful and fond moment, bestow upon a slave his gold and gems..." (Brontë 267). Earlier on the same page, Jane had referred to Rochester as her "master and her lover" (267), further perpetuating the sense of

Rochester's complete and total control over her. That she sees him as master first rather than lover indicates the control he holds over her as an employer rather than as the man she loves; this terrible connection, bordering on Stockholm Syndrome, places Jane in a vulnerable position. She is "enslaved" to Rochester first by her employment to him rather than by her love for him.

Brontë here seems to suggest that this is meant to compare her once again to the oppressed and exploited slaves that worked throughout the British empire. While the scene that follows does go on to indicate that Jane does wish to revolt against this power structure, Jane is playing into the slave narrative. Her status as exploited governess, as working-class, is partly what, as stated earlier, makes Jane an intersectional character, but it is also what binds her to her "master". Jane is told later by Rochester to "give up your governessing slavery at once" (Brontë 270) after they have solidified their intention to marry. It is clear that Rochester is aware of and recognizes the role he plays in Jane as comparison to a slave, as well as the role he plays in her exploitation. By his own recognition of governessing as slavery, Rochester is providing a clear link between his exploitation of Jane as a working-class woman and the exploitation of those toiling in the horrific conditions in the West Indies.

In her article, "The (Slave) Narrative of *Jane Eyre*", Julia Sun-Joo Lee argues that *Jane Eyre* was influenced by the American slave narrative, which rose to prominence right around the time Brontë was writing the novel (317). Lee explains that "from 183 to 1846...the British public was increasingly exposed to the plight of American slaves through the efforts of the British and Foreign Antislavery Society, the publication of slave narratives, and the lecture tours of American fugitive slaves" (317), which would have been right around the time Brontë would have been writing *Jane Eyre*. If Brontë was indeed influenced by these popular slave narratives emerging at this time in Britain (and Lee suggest that she might have been (318)), then the

inclusion of the slavery metaphor as a method of illuminating Jane's abuses and exploitation fits more into the novel. This makes sense, especially as Lee states that

the evidence that Brontë was influenced by American slave narratives is neither biological nor historical, but textual. With its emphasis on literacy, its teleological journey from slavery to freedom, its Biblical allusions to Egypt..., and Beulah (the Promised Land), and its ethics of resistance over submission, *Jane Eyre* borrows many of the generic features of the slave narrative (318).

If we are to look at the novel as a "borrowing" from the popular slave narrative of the time, then the slave metaphor that Brontë employs presents an even more interesting way of looking at the non-figurative strategy (Meyer) of colonialism. By repeatedly comparing, and even arguably setting up the narrative in a way that mirrors the American slave narrative, *Jane Eyre* provides its readers with even more connection between Jane as enslaved within the walls of Thornfield. As she continues refer to her role in the house as one of slavery, Jane continues to present herself in comparison to those who were used to build up the Rochester fortune: plantation slaves and Bertha Mason. The connection between the slave narrative and Jane's own "autobiographical" telling of her story brings an even deeper level of metaphor to the novel.

The relative privileges of Jane in relation to Bertha is incredible. Jane's status as governess, as a member (even satellite) of a relatively wealthy family, and her time spent educated enough to teach speaks volumes over the privileges that Bertha's limited life supplies. Additionally, Jane inherits almost as much money as Bertha, albeit later on in the text. Although Bertha Mason's money and racial ambiguity may afford her the privilege of marrying into a "proper" English family, it does not allow her to remain in good standing with the rest of the British societal elite. Yet it is Bertha's money that drives much of the plot of the novel once Jane arrives at Thornfield, and, as Thomas Tracy establishes in his essay "Reader, I Buried Him:

Apocalypse and Empire in *Jane Eyre*”, “the wealth appropriated from the colonies materially sustains the society with which the novel concerns itself” (59). Bertha’s money, and subsequently Jane’s money, is what allows the story to unfold in the ways in which it does. Without the money being provided through the slave trade, the events in the novel would not be able to take place. Because of this, the thread of comparison of Jane to exploited slave seems to stand out within the text and complicates the way we think about Jane’s liberal use of comparison to slavery’s oppression and exploitation. This becomes especially clear through the comparison of Rochester’s freedom to Jane’s and Jane’s in comparison to Bertha’s. Each character’s relative freedoms hinge on their privileges, exposing where and when each character is able to use others to their advantage. In the cases of Rochester and Jane, they rely not only on those around them in lower social standings but also come to rely upon the benefits to be gained from the British empire and colonialism. Bertha, who arguably benefits from this system as well, does not end up in the same social, economic, or emotional place of privilege as the other two; instead, her opportunity for privilege is stolen in a way that replicates European colonial greed. But this is not to imply that Bertha is free from the chains of imperialism; rather, it is clear that she could definitely have gained more in life if Rochester had not taken advantage of her mental and physical state of imbalance.

We must begin with the most clear and obvious example of privilege in the novel: Edward Rochester. His privilege is based on the traditional model of patriarchal British colonialism. His role as the “master” of Thornfield Hall and his domination of the women whom he marries (or attempts to marry) clearly fit this idea. Rochester’s own position of power, both financially and with the women in his life, comes directly from the imperialist rhetoric of the Victorian colonial era. He explicitly tells Jane that the reason he marries Bertha is for her inheritance: “I must be provided for by a wealthy marriage. He sought me a partner betimes.

Mr. Mason, a West India planter and merchant, was his old acquaintance. He was certain his possessions were real and vast...Mr. Mason, he found, had a son and daughter, and he learned from him that he could and would give the latter a fortune of thirty thousand pounds..." (Brontë 305). The key point here is that Mason is referred to as a "planter", which makes it clear, then, that Mason's fortune was earned on the backs of slaves; thus, Rochester knowingly allowed his own pockets to become lined with money gained from slavery. By acquiring Bertha's fortune and then effectively negating his wife from the picture, Rochester manages to completely erase her from a path that might have led to her own privilege in the West Indies. Instead, Rochester gains that privilege from Bertha's loss and, through the death of his father, Rochester gains land, power, and even more wealth, which allows him to have complete control over the entirety of his household in England. Effectively Rochester's seat of power was gained solely by the privilege of being a white, aristocratic man. As Susan Meyer reminds us, "Rochester acquired a West Indian fortune by marrying a Jamaican wife and subsequently living in Jamaica for four years. A wealthy white man living in Jamaica before emancipation would undoubtedly have had slaves to wait upon him, and his Jamaican fortune would have of course been the product of slave labor..." (259). Considering that Rochester's wealth and power was gained almost exclusively off of the exploitation of others, the metaphor of slave master that appears so prominently in the text brings new meaning to his privileges.

By gaining his privileges almost exclusively from the exploitation of Black bodies and West Indian resources, Rochester is the only principle character in the novel who profits *willingly* from the slave trade in the West Indies. By his own admission, he only returns to England when Bertha's mental illness will not prove to be a burden upon his social life: "For ten long years I roved about, living first in one capital, then another; sometimes in St Petersburg, oftener in Paris; occasionally in Rome, Naples, and Florence. Provided with plenty of money and

the passport of an old name, I could choose my own society; no circles were closed against me” (Brontë 311). Rochester, unlike Jane or Bertha, has the right to roam free throughout the great cities of Europe - he has no obligations or need to work in order to survive and he is not barred from society due to his racial background or his mental health. Instead, he uses the money he has stolen from Bertha to fund a (pleasure) trip around the Continent under the guise of trying to escape his “maniac” wife (Brontë 300). Without remorse, Rochester locks away his Jamaican wife, the wife who has allowed him to go on the subsequent trip and to buy his mistresses, and considers himself the victim. He later tells Jane that “hiring a mistress is the next worse thing to buying a slave: both are often by nature, and always by position, inferior; and to live familiarly with inferiors is degrading” (Brontë 312). Rochester clearly does not care for the feelings of others but only for what they can provide him with. His privilege is unavoidably obvious in his relation of his “troubled life” after his marriage: Rochester lived a life of relative luxury in the laps of beautiful foreign women whom he bankrolled through the money gained from his loveless arranged marriage to a slave-master’s “mad” daughter. It is his knowledge of and lack of care for the fact that he has gained almost all he has off of the exploitation of others (or “Others”) that cements Rochester’s role as the paradigm of white patriarchal greed.

Jane’s privilege in relation to Rochester’s, on the other hand, is related with a bit more subtlety. Although Brontë’s use of the slave metaphor throughout *Jane Eyre* couples Jane with the plight of the oppressed and constantly reminds the reader of her status of inferiority to Rochester (and thus the “traditional” patriarchal Victorian society), it also helps to call attention to the fact that Jane herself is a privileged individual. While Rochester’s privilege is based on the more visible and outright exploitation and pillaging of Black bodies and resources, Jane’s privileges gained through the West Indian slave trade exists on a smaller scale and is infused with much more guilt. But this is not to say that Jane is not complicit in the same types of

imperialistic privileges as Rochester: quite the opposite. Carine Mardorossian discusses this in her article “Unsuspecting Storyteller and Suspect Listener: A Postcolonial Reading of Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*,” arguing that Jane’s “development repeats Rochester’s trajectory from a penniless younger son to the owner of Thornfield (and of Bertha’s 30,000 pounds) and her articulation of imperialism is seen as serving - if not replicating - his” (2-3). Although Mardorossian does go on to argue that it is Jane’s intersectionality that allows Jane to be more than “a collaborator in the discursive enterprise of empire” (3), the similarities between Rochester and Jane’s rise to privilege cannot be ignored. Mardorossian’s point rings true throughout the novel, especially concerning Jane’s own privileges, because, as she writes, “Jane Eyre’s progress...does not blindly reproduce colonial discourses; rather, more troublingly, it depends on the same kind of imperialist rhetoric that the male colonial discourse propounds” (4). Jane’s path from poor, orphaned relation to heiress of her uncle’s money replicates Rochester’s trajectory almost exactly. It is only because, unlike Rochester, we as readers have come to rely upon Jane as a reliable narrator - we are able to see her story filled with hardship, abuse, trauma, and struggle play out before we see her gain her wealth and power.

Additionally, and again, unlike Rochester, Jane does not go out seeking money; her wealth comes to her by chance. Her goal in the beginning of her journey to independence is not to gain material wealth; rather, it seems that Jane’s main goal in leaving Lowood and getting a position is so that she may have menial comforts: Jane’s sudden ascent from penniless governess to rich single woman seems a shock to her: “Here was a new card turned up! It is a fine thing, reader, to be lifted in a moment from indigence to wealth - a very fine thing; but not a matter one can comprehend, or consequently enjoy, all at once” (Brontë 383). It is clear that gaining wealth and power was never a priority for Jane - it was not even something that she aspired to. She was perfectly happy in Thornfield to remain in the background - even in the

weeks leading up to her wedding to a very rich man, she tells Rochester: “I will not be your English Céline Varens. I will continue to act as Adèle’s governess; by that I shall earn my boarding and lodging, and thirty pounds a year besides” (Brontë 270). It is clear from her speech here that she does not want to marry Rochester in order to gain his money and his privilege like he did with Bertha. Instead, she intends to gain her own freedom - as Julia Sun-Joo Lee explains, Jane clearly saw her time at Thornfield Hall as a step towards her own personal freedom: “Governessing, though a means to escape the ‘rules and systems’ of Lowood, becomes only an intermediate step in her pursuit of self-emancipation” (323).

Yet it is Jane’s access to the ability to take this step towards freedom that showcases just how much privilege Jane has. Although she has to ask for it from Rochester, Jane is being paid a livable wage to work at Thornfield. When she asks for permission to take time off to visit her aunt, she turns down his attempt to give her more than her earnings: “‘Here,’ said he, offering me a note; it was fifty pounds, and he owed me but fifteen. I told him I had no change. ‘I don’t want change; you know that. Take your wages.’ I declined accepting more than was my due” (Brontë 224). Although it is clear from what comes after this exchange that what Rochester wants here is to control Jane with money (“‘Better not give you all now; you would perhaps, stay away three months’... ‘Come back for it, then; I am your banker for forty pounds’” (Brontë 224)), what Jane is making clear is that is something that will not be possible. She does not have a want for flashy things or for great wealth, something that she makes clear later when Rochester takes her shopping for her wedding wardrobe (Brontë 268). Jane’s comfort in her status as a working woman, as a woman with the privilege and authority to decline that extra money from her employer, reveals just how much freedom she has. We must remember that Jane was in a profession that “allowed [her] to retain [her] genteel status” (Hunt 180), meaning that she was able to continue to lead a relatively well-off lifestyle within the house she worked in. Although

as a governess she may have existed in limbo of social standing, she remained relatively well-off compared to others that may have been employed in the house. And, considering her treatment in both the Reed's home and Lowood, this probably would not have bothered Jane so much as it would have other governesses. So, again, we must see this as Jane's privilege - she has the ability to walk away from a situation that was, in a sense, comfortable (despite the triggers and oppression she faced within the walls of Thornfield) for her. But her real privilege comes later, when she comes into the money from her long-lost uncle. Jane acquires twenty thousand pounds (only ten thousand pounds less than Bertha Mason) from her uncle's estate and her first thought is that the wealth she has suddenly come into is a burden: "at hearing one has got a fortune, one begins to consider responsibilities and to ponder business..." (Brontë 383). However, learning that the Rivers are her cousins, her worries are instantly alleviated: "the independence, the affluence which was mine, might be theirs too. Were we not four? Twenty thousand pounds shared equally, would be five thousand pounds each...Now the wealth did not weigh on me: now it was not a mere bequest of coin - it was a legacy of life, hope, enjoyment" (Brontë 386).

Jane clearly equates large amounts of wealth with guilt, something which possibly has to do with the terrible things that she has seen associated with large sums of money in both the Reed household and Thornfield. But this guilt may also stem from the fact that Jane's money was almost definitely earned on the backs of slaves; John Eyre was speculated to have been a wine merchant from Madeira (Brontë 94), which was a booming industry at the time of the setting of the novel. "The Madeira wine trade flourished in the eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century...; therefore John Eyre would have been a Funchal wine merchant during a particularly profitable period in the trade's history - he amasses twenty thousand pounds in less than ten years' time" (Valint 321). Alexandra Valint discusses Jane's inheritance in her article "Madeira and *Jane Eyre's* Colonial Inheritance", explaining that "what complicates the

inheritance is the money's specific origin in the slave-tainted economy of Madeira... Madeira's seemingly providential location between Europe and the New World transformed the once uninhabited island into the perfect gateway to the Caribbean and into a trading hotspot" (322). Jane's inheritance from her uncle becomes the "perfect gateway" for her to enter into a world of privilege - it allows her to become free completely to do what she wants for the rest of the novel. But this notion of complete freedom comes with a catch - the freedom was earned by exploiting enslaved peoples. Jane must have known this because "Britain's expansion in the West Indies heavily contributed to the rise of the Madeira wine trade" (Valint 322); Jane clearly is hesitant to tie herself to the money because of its stained reputation. But it is also what allows her to finally find happiness with Rochester in the penultimate chapters of the novel As Meyers points out, "even if Rochester's tainted colonial wealth has been burned away, the wealth Jane brings him, [enables] her to meet him on equal terms..." (Meyer 267). Suddenly Jane has the financial means to go back to Rochester and not be controlled by her need for his wealth and support. Although, as mentioned before, Jane does not strive to become wealthy, having the money gives her the power to have real, complete independence. She is no longer beholden to any one, especially St. John or Rochester; she has become an established part of society in her own right. In this way, Jane has now, despite her seemingly best efforts, profited off of the slave trade. She has become complicit in the oppression of people whom she so openly compared her own situations of oppression to.

Yet it is also interesting to explore the ways in which Bertha, arguably, has privilege. While in comparison to Jane and Rochester Bertha has almost no privileges, she did have the possibility of gaining them at one point in her life. As mentioned earlier, Bertha inherited a large amount of money from her father, which was later subsumed into the Rochester fortune. But the Mason inheritance did bring Bertha privileges within the West Indies. Jean Rhys's *Wide*

Sargasso Sea fills in the gaps of what Bertha's life in Jamaica would have been like. As a white-passing individual in Jamaica, Bertha grew up with more opportunities than many other women would have in her position on the island. In Rhys's novel, Mr. Mason, Bertha's step-father, is described as a "very wealthy man who could take his pick of all the girls in the West Indies" (24), and Mason's marriage to Bertha's mother elevates her and her mother's financial and social status. Bertha's own rank as a heiress situates her at an advantage to others in Jamaica, a place still rife with slavery and slave revolts. As Rochester explains to Jane in the narrative of his marriage, "Miss Mason was the boast of Spanish Town for her beauty...I found her a fine woman...She flattered me, and lavishly displayed for my pleasure her charms and accomplishments. All the men in her circle seemed to admire her and envy me" (Brontë 305). She clearly had the beauty and the power to secure a wealthy Englishman and that within itself appears to be a privilege within this social circle. Her status as heiress and her "charms and accomplishments" were enough to, it seems, secure plenty of interested parties in her hand for marriage.

Additionally, her position as a "white creole" in Jamaica also seems to provide a strange kind of privilege. Although Brontë leaves Bertha's race ambiguous in the novel, "before 1850, four meanings of Creole were in circulation in Britain" including "white people of European descent naturalized by birth in the West Indies" (Thomas 32). So, with this definition of "creole" it is possible that Bertha could have been either a white-passing individual or of European descent - regardless, she and her family clearly have a higher social standing than others on the island. And, as she was picked by Rochester's family as a suitable bride for their son (despite the clear financial gain the marriage attained), it is clear that she must have been a well-educated and "well-bred" woman. Her ability to be considered a suitable match implies that she had all of the similar characteristics as a rich English wife would have had in order to attract a family like the

Rochesters. As a West Indian-born woman her privilege of being able to snag a well-born English husband is a big deal. Although, as Sue Thomas explores in her chapter on the exoticism of Bertha Mason, “the boundaries of genteel femininity are blurred in Bertha...Intemperance, cursing, and unchastity mark insubordination to Rochester’s model of genteel femininity and prematurely ripen the ‘germs of insanity’ in Bertha” (39), it’s clear that this was not on display when she was paraded in front of Edward Rochester. She made enough of an impression on the Rochester family with her grace, charms, and beauty that she was considered good enough to marry him. She manages to get a rich husband with a good family, and also manages to get herself out of Jamaica, although, of course, not in an ideal way. Because of this, it is clear that Bertha, despite being the least privileged of the main characters in the novel, still manages to have a certain level of advantage over others on the island of Jamaica.

But, interestingly enough, we also must think about the ways in which Rochester and Bertha’s families have used their children for the families’ overall elevation. The Rochester/Mason union secured by the two younger children of each family acts as a means to an end for both families, placing both Bertha and Rochester at the center of a twisted game of advancement. Although the financial gain of Rochester has already been touched upon, it’s interesting to consider the ways in which his marriage to Bertha helped the rest of his family. Rochester tells Jane explicitly that his father was “an avaricious, grasping man” who “could not bear the idea of dividing his estate and leaving me a fair portion: all, he resolved, should go to my brother, Rowland. Yet as little could he endure that a son of his should be a poor man” (Brontë 305). Rather than providing for his second son through his own estate, Rochester’s father would rather, in essence, pimp his son out in order to gain money for him. By marrying Rochester off for financial gain, Rochester’s marriage to Bertha begins to seem much more like the ways in which women were often married off for the advancement of a family. This is a flip

on the typical Victorian ideal of marriage where “a young man needed to be able to show that he earned enough money to support a wife and any future children before the girl’s father would give his permission” (Hughes “Gender Roles in the 19th Century”). This is clear from the way in which Rochester himself describes the means of his marriage that he was being used to strengthen his family’s wealth: “When I left college, I was sent out to Jamaica, to espouse a bride already courted for me” (Brontë 305). Much in the way a daughter would be married off in order to secure financial and social advancement for her family, Rochester, as the second son, has been similarly exploited by his family: “Rhys makes it clear that he is a victim of the patriarchal inheritance law of entailment rather than of a father’s preference for the firstborn: in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rochester’s situation is clearly that of a younger son dispatched to the colonies to buy an heiress” (Spivak 373).

By using him as a means to procure an heiress, the Rochesters have used their second son much in the same way that Bertha has been used by hers. Additionally, Rochester has been used by Bertha’s family as a means of elevating their own social status. As we see in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, although the Mason family were rich, white landowners, their status in Jamaica remained lower than their counterparts in Europe:

They hated us. They called us white cockroaches...One day a little girl followed me singing, ‘Go away white cockroach, go away, go away.’ I walked fast, but she walked faster. ‘White cockroach, go away, go away. Nobody want you. Go away (Rhys 20).

When Rochester explains to Jane how his family arranged his marriage to Bertha, he mentions that: “Her family wished to secure me, because I was of a good race; and so she did” (Brontë 305). The word “race” here could imply two things, both of which probably would have been the goal of the Mason family: first, the actual ethnic “race” of the Rochester clan as white

Englishmen, and second, the social standing of the Rochester family in England. We see, then, that the Masons saw Bertha's marriage to a rich English family as a ticket to making their familial line more "acceptable". It would be assumed that they had hoped that Rochester would bring their daughter over to England and bring respectability and "purity" to the offspring they were expected to have. So, in a way, Edward Rochester's ascent to patriarchal power is rooted in the exploitation of *his own body* as well as the bodies of the enslaved West Indian people. In this way, their marriage becomes a "reflection of the British Empire's cultural and commercial exploitation of colonial countries" (Yurdakul 64). Both of the families are using their children as a means to personal gain. Although their marriage clearly does not work out, the plan that their families had for it does; the Rochesters gain a vast fortune from the Mason family and the Mason family managed to get their daughter over to England, albeit definitely not in the way that they wanted. This marriage is a catalyst for the colonial privilege present in the rest of the novel, and it begins by rooting itself intrinsically in these values by exploiting Rochester and Bertha's bodies as a means to financial gain, elevation of social status, and racial "purity". However, the difference between the way his body was used for exploitation versus the ways in which Black bodies were used is that he was, in the end, able to profit from it.

Reading *Jane Eyre* through a colonial lens presents a way of understanding the situations and privileges of those who inhabit the world that Brontë has created. Rochester, Jane, and even Bertha have profited and from the exploitation and pillaging of resources gained from the slave trade in the West Indies. Brontë's use of this subplot turned subtext within her novel suggests that "we must remind ourselves that it should not be possible, in principle, to read nineteenth-century British literature without remembering that imperialism, understood as England's social mission, was a crucial part of the cultural representation of England to the English" (Spivak 366). Brontë's use of figurative language, in the form of her slavery metaphors, connecting Jane's

experiences to the oppression of slaves, and her non-figurative use of the actual privileges that the characters' gain from the West Indies illuminates the differences between those who have certain privileges in the novel. By using a timeline that implies slave revolts and rebellion, as well as continuously referring to slavery and oppression, *Jane Eyre* establishes the privileges of its main characters within the limits of their intersectionality. These qualities are both what allow Rochester, Bertha, and Jane to be exploited and to benefit from the exploitation of others. Because of Brontë's constant reminder of the oppression of those in the West Indies, her white characters' relative privileges become more prominent than ever. The use of British imperialism as a backdrop, however, does compliment the ways in which Brontë employs critiques about gender, class, and mental illness, but also invites the reader to consider the ways in which the novel itself also exploits the West Indian slaves. When Brontë uses the plights of slaves to ground the experiences of her privileged characters, as well as conveniently sets her novel amidst slave revolts and rebellion, she (intentionally or unintentionally) becomes implicated within the British imperial structure. But, of course, one "should hasten to add here that just as readings such as this one do not necessarily accuse Charlotte Brontë of the named individual of harboring imperialist sentiments" (Spivak 378) but only that her novel exposes the ways in which she uses the horrific traumas of slavery as a means of metaphor.

By exposing the privileges through a colonial reading of *Jane Eyre*, we can begin to develop a way of making these privileges something that, once again, binds Jane and Bertha together. By highlighting the absolute lack of guilt Rochester feels towards his usurpation of Bertha's own possible privileges and the ways in which Jane's privileges give her the freedom to finally destroy the patriarchal control they find in Thornfield Hall, it becomes clear that the principal characters' privileges are what begin to present limits to their intersectionality. By looking at those novel through a postcolonial lens, we can begin to see the stirrings of how these

limits might present us with an ability to look deeper at the trauma and horror that the patriarchal colonist rhetoric of a strict Victorian society places on these women whose lives are both privileged and limited by British colonialism.

Trauma (Of Confinement); Or, A More Compelling Intersection

Despite E. Ann Kaplan's bold claim that "it all began with Freud, of course" (25), trauma theory did not simply spring out of thin air. While Freud's practice and publications did greatly advance the world of psychological and trauma studies, and brought with it the language with which to begin to acknowledge and understand these fields, work in realizing the impact of trauma-based responses and experiences has been clearly discussed in novels for quite some time. By claiming that the exploration of trauma began with Freud is to negate the experiences of trauma that become so prevalent in Victorian novels written by women. Although, as Jill Matus explores in her work *Shock, Memory and the Unconscious in Victorian Fiction*, "our use of the term 'trauma' to mean psychic injury was quite unknown to Brontë or Dickens and their contemporaries" (3), it did not mean that they did not have an understanding of what a traumatic experiences was. For, as Matus details, the lives of the Victorians were rife with psychologically shocking events: the invention and popularization of train travel came with horrifying accidents and the rise of industrial factories caused an upswing in horrific bodily injury. The ways in which Victorians reacted to the frequency and immediacy of these kinds of events, then, was "less dependent on external cataclysm and more closely related to private, individual disruptions of consciousness and composure" (Matus, *Shock, Memory and the Unconscious in Victorian Fiction* 20). The notion of trauma, then, despite being unnamed, clearly was a part of the Victorian social psyche: although Victorians did not have such specific terms related to trauma and psychological injury, they "were...capable of supporting a theory of mental injury in which powerful emotions could produce trance-like effects, disrupt memory, and disturb affect

regulation” (Matus, “Psychological Trauma Victorian Style: From Perpetrator to Victim” 410). By understanding an overflow of “powerful emotions” as a way of presenting and considering the psychological state of Victorians, we can begin to theorize ways in which the novels of the time handled the language and experiences of their subjects in order to communicate similar kinds of recognition of trauma responses as Freud would later find in his work. Victorian Gothic novels, especially those written by women, explored issues of repressed memory, solitary confinement (both physically and psychologically), and abuse in tandem with a kind of societal, collective trauma as Matus describes. In her short article on the psychology of the Victorian era and its effect on authors, Matus acknowledges the ways in which cultural traumas such as railway accidents and widespread industrial injuries connected to the literature produced by Victorian authors, stating that if we “read alongside shifts in 19th-century medicine and psychology, literature of the period has a part to play in how we understand the development of ideas about trauma and the cultural climate that enabled it” (411). Additionally, Matus reminds us that “authors like Dickens, Charlotte Brontë, and George Eliot created characters who responded to shock with disruptions in consciousness and memory...” (“Psychological Trauma Victorian Style: From Perpetrators to Victims” 411). Through her connections to the literary scene in the Victorian era, it’s understood that even while authors might not have had the language to scientifically describe situations of trauma in their works, they clearly were thinking about how this kind of “shock” affected their characters’ wellbeing.

In order to better understand the traumatic experiences of subjects living prior to the formulation of a descriptive medical pathology, we as readers must begin to see how authors like Charlotte Brontë handle these kinds of unnamed emotionally traumatic experiences within their novels. Charlotte Brontë, by creating her novel about women literally and figuratively confined through the systems that work both as a means of privilege and as oppression, has presented a

novel not only about empire, but one that synthesizes the ordeals of Bertha and Jane into a uniquely female ordeal. The trauma found in *Jane Eyre*, while not necessarily universal, explores a particularly Victorian understanding of the feminine experience. In his thesis on trauma represented in the Victorian era, Terry Adams begins his paper with the differences in trauma theories that have occurred since the Victorians. While Adams acknowledges the advancements in language and acceptance of psychology Freud's theories led to, he argues that we should consider "Freudian psychoanalysis as not something that originated in a vacuum but rather as the product of a Victorian culture that was both coping with widespread trauma and equally fascinated by it" (8). This fascination is clear in the novels of women telling the stories of other women and, by juxtaposing the theories of Freud, which were driven so heavily by the masculine experience of World War I, against the much more "female" experiences of trauma in the 19th century, Adams highlights the ways in which trauma in Victorian literature has the possibility to become a uniquely female experience. Adams writes that

the trauma women experience not only connects the Victorian and contemporary periods in significant ways and plays a key role in designating both respective periods as trauma cultures, but that this trauma in particular demonstrates the complex ways that trauma itself becomes culturally constructed, implemented, and understood (12).

By beginning to recognize the role that literature of the Victorian era plays within the development of Victorian "trauma culture", we can begin to understand just how ingrained trauma becomes in Gothic novels written by women. Adams argues that the era of Victorian literature is a helpful place to think about trauma because it marked a shift in the conceptualization of trauma, especially concerning the female body, in which trauma was no longer solely concerned with outside injuries, but rather "trauma was imagined to be in and of

itself feminine; to be female was to be inherently traumatized, the female being constructed and scripted by men as a traumatized figure” (T. Adams 13). However, when read through the eyes of a female author, someone who might have witnessed and/or experienced this notion of her own body first hand, novels written by Victorian women seem to flip this “scripted trauma”. Instead, we are met with women who have been traumatized *because* of men, men who then turn and blame the woman’s inheritance. As we see in *Jane Eyre*, Bertha’s madness, the cause of her confinement, is inherited from her mother, and Jane’s violence and “wicked” behavior seem to stem from her mother’s own turn from the Reed family. Thus, from this, we can see how women writing in this era might begin to think about the idea of the female body for the locus of trauma and rework this belief to fit their own understanding of their era’s trauma culture.

This becomes clear when we learn about Charlotte Brontë’s own personal experience surrounding trauma and the medical understanding of the female body. In her book *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology*, Sally Shuttleworth explores the ways in which Brontë’s own experiences with mental health and the language of psychology affected her writing. Shuttleworth examines letters from Brontë and support characters in her life that directly relate to her own mental health. Through these letters, Shuttleworth argues, it can become clear just how the subjects of Brontë’s fiction became so heavily connected with the sphere of mental health. Shuttleworth explains that “the constant presence of illness in the Brontë family ensured that the medicine man held a dominating, authoritative position in their household” (27), which seems to foreshadow the patriarchal overtones that influence Jane and Bertha’s treatment at the hands of men. Additionally, it is mentioned that Patrick Brontë, her father, became deeply involved in medical texts and the theory surrounding medicine at the time, noting that his daughter’s facial tic may have arisen less from “physical than to mental causes, aligning it with hysteria and insanity. The words, he notes, signify a ‘convulsive fit’” (Shuttleworth 27). We then can begin to

see ways in which the author's life was constantly bombarded with the language and ideas of psychological maladies, especially in relation to her own body. Shuttleworth also details that Charlotte Brontë was sent by her father to a physician who was experimenting with the "anesthetizing powers of chloroform" and it was thought that her father's obsession with chloroform and "other ethers" and how these could shut down all understanding of what was happening to the body itself (Shuttleworth 28). Indeed, Shuttleworth explains that, "Patrick's interest focuses on the separation between mind and body, on the possibility of acting upon, controlling, and even performing amputation on the body of another without their knowledge" (Shuttleworth 28).

Here again, we see Brontë's father involving himself directly in the regulation and experimentation happening on his daughter's body, and his interest in this science directly implies the patriarchal control that influenced the Brontë household. This is also interesting considering that experimentation in anesthetics and ethers "heightened the existing Victorian interest in dreams and hallucinations, and the unconscious movements of the mind, reinforcing the belief in a concealed realm of interiority where true selfhood lay" (Shuttleworth 29). Brontë's own experimentation in chloroform implies that she was involved in a field, whether willingly or not, that was considering the effects of the unconscious mind and the psychological realm. This kind of experience is reminiscent of the women in *Jane Eyre*, especially considering the ways in which Jane's unconscious plays tricks on her in the red-room and both Bertha's husband and father take control of her physical and mental body. If "medical authority received the full weight of patriarchal endorsement within the Brontë household" (Shuttleworth 30) then it only makes sense that Brontë would see the medical field as one that exploited the patriarchal system. Brontë calls attention to this in her work, making it clear that the lives of women, even down to

their mental health, the interiority of their own person, was a place where the patriarchal control of society could penetrate and influence their own understanding of themselves.

From Brontë's own life, then, we can see had awareness of the effects of the issues of mental confinement and medical control, and we also see a resistance against them. Indeed, Jane and Bertha's individual experiences within their lives does seem to suggest this connection, for as Adams writes, "female trauma is filtered through patriarchal ideologies that reinterpret these experiences not as being traumatic but rather as simply *being* female, instead prioritizing the male experience and using this position in the construction of meaning" (18). This singularly Victorian notion of inherent feminine trauma becomes negated by the way Brontë's novel portrays Jane and Bertha. Both of these women are presented as the victims of a system that does not allow them the freedom to speak unless it is through their own personal violence. By making the aggressors of the abuse come from the hands of both violently patriarchal men and women who help to uphold the system through their complicity (such as Mrs. Reed or Grace Poole), Brontë showcases the ways in which Jane and Bertha's experiences mirror one another in the same way they do as characters. Bertha and Jane are traumatized by the same systemic forces, which in turn becomes a metaphor for the larger, more general reasons for the oppression of a Victorian woman: gender, race, and class.

Jane and Bertha have clearly been traumatized in their pasts through their experiences in their childhood and adolescence which only have been exacerbated through the trauma that they experience in Thornfield Hall. For, as mentioned earlier, their overlapping and shared experiences present them with the opportunity to escape from their terrible lifestyles in Thornfield, so do their shared experiences give Bertha and Jane a way of recognizing their trauma as a product of a system of patriarchal oppression and victimization. By presenting Bertha as a parallel to Jane's experience we can see how their experiences essentially derive

from similar experiences and situations, we become aware of how their traumatic experiences manifest within the novel to call attention to the explicitly patriarchal victimization of women's bodies and mental expression. By placing her characters within bounds to be traumatized by those in positions of power within those systems, Brontë points a clear finger at the systemic abusers of a patriarchal society and British Imperialism. Brontë puts her female characters through ordeals and "powerfully emotional" situations that clearly originate from situations and people complicit in the patriarchal and imperialist systems of England. Through this, Brontë highlights the ways in which Jane's life and Bertha's lives have been touched in similar traumatic ways. Brontë replicates patriarchal systems in both Gateshead and Thornfield by having abusive male figures head households in which women are literally imprisoned.

Jane's trauma begins with her time spent living with the Reeds. Indeed, she begins by describing herself as "humbled by the consciousness of my physical inferiority to Eliza, John, and Georgiana Reed" (Brontë 9). From the very beginning of the novel, Jane makes it clear that her cousin, John Reed, is a constant tormentor and abuser by the third page of the novel: "He bullied and punished me; not two or three times in the week, nor once or twice in a day, but continually: every nerve I had feared him, and every morsel of flesh on my bones shrank when he came near" (Brontë 12). This language, written by an older and more experienced Jane, reflects the true nature of the horrors inflicted upon Jane at the hands of her cousin. She still uses language which invokes the idea of pure and utter terror in the reader, signaling that this time spent at Gateshead still occupies almost all of her thoughts of childhood. Indeed, this episode is so ingrained in Jane's psyche that even as an adult reflecting back on her life this singular experience with John is where she chooses to start her story. To be a grown adult still speaking about her childhood with such clarity and emotion makes it clear that her experiences with John Reed were much more than petty fights with a relative. Instead, by beginning her story with a

narrative of intense cruelty against her, Jane has signaled to the reader that this is a core memory in her life, a traumatic event embedded in her psyche.

She continues this memory, relating to the reader that she was “habitually obedient to John” directly relating to the reader that it is definitely a common occurrence in her life. Her use of the word “obedience”, especially in connection to the male power in her household, foreshadows her later relationship with Rochester and her habit of referring to him as her “master” and signals the possibility of Jane’s ability to slip into this habit with the other men in her life. Yet Jane also “knew he would soon strike, and while dreading the blow, I mused on the disgusting and ugly appearance of him who would presently deal it. I wonder if he read that notion in my face; for, all at once, without speaking, he struck suddenly and strongly” (Brontë 12). Jane’s emphasis on her own inner thoughts of her cousin’s ugliness showcases her early instances of defiance. She allows herself one instant of push-back against John, albeit it a secret and silent one, in which Jane shows us just how much she truly hates her cousin. This is an “encouraging sign of her ability to cope with adversity” (Morris 159), one that again, foreshadows her time in Thornfield, alerting readers towards the defiance we will later see after faced with the horrifying confinement of Bertha in Thornfield, so intensely similar to Jane’s time spent in Gateshead. But this tiny act of personal defiance also shows just how often this kind of scene occurs: Jane knows the action that John will take upon her spending time contemplating his face and expects his violent reaction.

Clearly, “Jane’s life at Gateshead exemplifies the characteristics of severe child abuse. She is constantly tormented and brutalized and wracked with fear. She could not tell the servants, however, as she knew that they could not risk offending their employer” (Morris 158). Despite her small and personal rebellion against John, Jane literally has no ally in Gateshead. Again, as this entire scene takes place at the very opening of the novel, it establishes it as a defining

moment in Jane's mind. She is an isolated individual in a place where she has no ability to find happiness or childhood. Through giving Jane a scene that establishes her inferiority in Gateshead right at the beginning of the novel, Brontë gives it prominence and solidifies Jane's status as a victim of child abuse. However, this does seem to, interestingly, fall under the umbrella of a particularly Victorian way of looking at trauma, for while "our contemporary Western culture is...a 'victim culture'...Victoria's age was by contrast predominantly a 'blame culture.' Discussions of accident and aftermath tended to focus on the question of responsibility. Who did it? What do they owe? And how should they be punished?" (Matus, "Psychological Trauma Victorian Style: From Perpetrators to Victims" 411) Brontë takes away all questions of who is responsible for Jane's abuse: John Reed and his mother. By placing the blame front and center, and by beginning the entirety of her life story with this incident, Brontë has given Jane a clear person to blame, as well as a clear system, one that will inevitably be recreated within the walls of Thornfield Hall.

Brontë, from the start of the novel, places female characters within a broken system introduced through the relationship Jane has with her Aunt Reed. As Wood notices, Mrs. Reed is completely complicit within the violent patriarchal system in place at Gateshead. Mrs. Reed keeps Jane at a distance, isolating her from the family unit and thus the company of any children her own age, referring to this as a "privilege" (Brontë 9). Jane is forced to exist on the fringe of those who are meant to care for, essentially abandoned by the only mother-figure in her life. Jane's isolation is furthered by Mrs. Reed by establishing her as inferior to the servants, forcing her to refer to her cousin as "Master Reed" and reminding the servants that Jane is lesser than them because she does not contribute in any way to the household (Brontë 14). Additionally, as Woods notes, Mrs. Reed is complicit in the physical violence inflicted on Jane in the home. Not only is she "blind and deaf on the subject" of her son's abuse to Jane, "she never saw him strike

or heard him abuse me, though he did both now and then in her very presence” (Brontë 12). Jane’s aunt is not only gaslighting her niece but she is literally feeding into the violent patriarchal set-up of her home. She allows her son to beat Jane and insists that her employees emotionally abuse her. Because of this treatment, Jane’s understanding of the family unit and her expectations for her life outside of Gateshead becomes intensely warped. Because “the one person in the house with the authority to control John’s behavior condones, by her inaction, the abuse of Jane” (Morris 158), Mrs. Reed has made it clear to Jane that this is the treatment she (for some reason) deserves.

Yet while the physical and emotional abuse that Jane suffers at the hands of her family clearly remains prominent in her psyche, the truly harrowing and traumatic experience is the red-room incident. This incident and its following scenes sets the metaphorical stage for many of Jane’s future relationships with and understanding of men. After her “brawl” with John, Jane is taken and locked away in the red-room, which Jane describes as “chill, because it seldom has a fire; it was silent, because remote from the nursery and kitchens; solemn, because it was known to be so seldom entered” (Brontë 15). Again, Jane is able to describe this room and its contents with remarkable clarity. The red-room is a trigger for her, a place forever imprinted into her memory for what happened to her here, and, like the episode leading up to it, gives her the ability to completely recreate the scene in stunning detail even as an adult. Patrick Morris makes the point in his article “The Depiction of Trauma and Its Effect on Character Development in Brontë Fiction” that here “Jane is kept in solitary confinement...As solitary confinement is known to produce severe depression in adults, this form of punishment for a child of Jane’s age is unusually cruel” (158). Here, in the red-room, where Jane’s uncle died nine years ago (Brontë 16), Jane falls victim to a manipulated reality brought on by fear: “All looked colder and darker in that visionary hollow than in reality: and the strange little figure there gazing at me, with a

white face and arms speckling the gloom, and glittering eyes of fear moving where all else was still, had the effect of a real spirit” (Brontë 16). Jane suddenly begins to see an altered version of her reality, reminiscent of Jill Matus’s statement that Victorians were well aware of an altered mental state brought on by “powerful emotions” (410). For a child, this intense amount of emotion and violence is harsh, only made more so by the fact that this is a common and continual way of life for Jane at Gateshead. Thus, this scene becomes the locus for much of Jane’s issues during her time at Thornfield.

This episode of literal imprisonment becomes a defining moment in Jane’s relationships throughout the rest of the novel, especially men. Madeleine Wood argues in her article “Jane Eyre in the Red-Room”, that

In the red-room, the ambivalence of the father-daughter relationship is established, providing Jane with the model for her relationships with all the male characters whom she encounters throughout the novel. The red-room is constructed as a symbolic encounter of paternity, where the ghostly presence of Jane’s uncle is, in reality, an absence, contrasting with John Reed’s excessive physical presence in chapter 1 (2).

By setting up the idea of Jane’s time in the red-room as a metaphor for patriarchy, Wood creates an interesting reading for the rest of the novel. Brontë places this scene at the very forefront of Jane’s story, as well as her introduction of herself to the readers, indicating that it is a key moment in the establishment of her as a character. Establishing the men in her childhood as frighteningly absent and yet horrifyingly violent sets the stage for Jane to understand all other men in this way, including, and most importantly, Rochester. Jane’s time in the red-room causes her to, “as a direct result of the paternal absence... achieve a certain sense of identity, but it is one that has a complex relationship with male authority” (Wood 3). For while Jane has “never

doubted...that if Mr. Reed had been alive he would have treated me kindly” (Brontë 18), without his presence she “was a discord in Gateshead Hall; I was like nobody there; I had nothing in harmony with Mrs. Reed or her children, or her chosen vassalage” (Brontë 17). The red-room clearly establishes the connection between Jane’s time spent in solitary confinement brought upon by the patriarchal overtones present in the Reed household and the way in which she allows herself to be used in Thornfield by Rochester. Rochester is clearly the patriarchal head of the household, and women like Mrs. Fairfax and Adèle accept this position with little question, much like Mrs. Reed and the dynamic established with her son. This establishing experience in the red-room becomes a catalyst for Jane as a psychologically injured individual, one who has been victimized by the patriarchal system placed on her and one which she carried throughout the rest of her experiences within the novel.

Bertha is also a victim of the patriarchal and imperial aspects of the novel. She is kept up on the third floor of Thornfield, which as Jane describes it, “a shrine of memory” (Brontë 107), and Bertha is kept tightly locked behind two doors (Brontë 293). The image of Rochester entering into her chamber with Richard Mason evokes the idea of repressed memory, implying to the reader that Bertha is meant to be kept hidden and enshrined within the memory of the past: “the low, black door, opened to a tapestried room...He lifted the hangings from the wall, uncovering the second door...” (Brontë 293). Bertha becomes, before she is even officially introduced to the reader, a metaphor for repressed trauma. Yet, despite all of this effort, she still manages to escape and infiltrate the landscape of the bottom floors. Bertha Mason is literally kept within the confines of the language of trauma. But Bertha’s mental illness is the first step in considering her place as a victim of patriarchal trauma. As Elisabeth Cawthorn describes in her article on Victorian era asylums, women were often committed to asylums and mad-houses based on little to no grounds completely against their will (92). Bertha Mason was most certainly

one of these cases. Rochester describes Bertha by saying “Bertha Mason is mad; and she came from a mad family, idiots and maniacs through three generations!” (Brontë 292). Rochester’s language here raises a major question as to the actual authenticity of her mental illness; is she “mad” in reality, or does he simply believe her to be because he believes that her mother was once. When his first marriage comes to light in the novel, he reveals the way he speaks about and to her: ““You shall see what sort of being I was cheated into espousing, and judge whether or not I had a right to break the compact, and seek sympathy with something at least human”” (Brontë 293). He is clearly used to verbally abusing her, referring to her as This kind of language from her husband, a man who she is meant, ideally, to trust, echoes Jane’s experience with John Reed at Gateshead. Additionally, we must once again think back to Jane’s episode in the red-room, as Bertha’s entrapment in Thornfield clearly mirrors Jane’s childhood experience. As Madeline Wood connects, “lying at the center of the novel is Bertha’s attack on Richard Mason. It explodes into the narrative, once more resuscitating the red-room’s primal encounter, except now it is Bertha who is physically confined and not Jane” (2). Recognizing Bertha’s placement as a mirror to Jane in this instance, not only calls back the encounter Jane has at Gateshead, but also recalls the truly traumatic experience Jane has at the hands of the patriarchal head of her family.

As Patrick Morris makes clear, solitary confinement for the amount of time Jane spent in the red-room is considered a rather cruel punishment (158). Bertha Mason has been kept in solitary confinement for years. Rochester tells Jane, “Glad was I when I at last got her to Thornfield, and saw her safely lodged in that third-story room, of whose secret inner cabinet she has now for ten years made a wild beast’s den - a goblin’s den” (Brontë 309). Not only is she kept alone, but she is given little to no comforts like Jane receives during her imprisonment: she is kept “in the deep shade” and in a confined area. She is described as being ill-taken care of: “it grovelled, 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” (Brontë 293). She is clearly being mistreated and is reminiscent of the treatment she might have received in an asylum, possibly even worse. As Elisabeth Cawthon explains in her article “Asylums”, “the mad were compared to rabid animals, especially when they resisted being restrained, while the managers of madhouses, or lunatic asylums, were known as keepers” (91) and treatment at these establishments was so bad that those who could afford it simply kept their mentally ill loved-ones at home (91). But Bertha’s treatment is no better: she is kept in a glorified cage and is watched not by a doctor, but by an untrained woman with what appears to be little to no medical knowledge. The only terms used to describe her appearance and actions are completely animalistic and Grace Poole is her keeper (she is later referred to as exactly that on page 310). And Rochester does in fact restrain her: “At last he mastered her arms; Grace Poole gave him a cord, and he pinioned them behind her; with more rope, which was at hand, he bound her to a chair” (Brontë 294). Considering that Rochester indeed has the financial power to give Bertha actual medical care or to place her within another home where she might be more comfortable, this horrifying treatment seems to be comparable to what she would have received in an asylum. Interestingly, what Brontë writes directly after this only helps to enforce the idea: “Mr. Rochester then turned to the spectators: he looked at them with a smile both acrid and desolate” (294). This word, spectators, is key, as it implies that Bertha’s torment is a spectacle being witnessed by Rochester’s guest. It calls attention to, once again, how much the third floor of Thornfield Hall is indeed a private asylum for Bertha, for many asylums were indeed toured by people who were fascinated by the strange and horrifying behavior of the inmates (Cawthon 91). By referring to Jane and Richard Mason as “spectators”, Brontë directly alludes to this situation and calls attention to just how much Bertha is confined within Thornfield.

Grace Poole, like Mrs. Reed, works within the systemic patriarchy that causes so much trauma to Bertha. Both of these women completely ignore the treatment of Bertha going on by Rochester. Grace Poole, more than anyone, is complicit in this blatant mistreatment of Bertha. Rochester is more concerned with the image her presence and her mental state would give to the Rochester family. Rochester selects Grace because he feels she will be discrete and because she comes from Grimsby Retreat (Brontë 310). Despite not being a real place, Grimsby Retreat seems to imply that she worked at an asylum, possibly one of the improved ones that Cawthorn discusses in her article. She details that “efforts on behalf of the mentally ill who had been institutionalized went hand in hand with more general reforms such as England’s abolition of slavery in 1807” and that in the “early and middle years of the nineteenth century, new asylums were constructed all over England” (91). Grace’s experience in working in mental asylums would indicate that she would have some understanding of what went into caring for someone with mental illness. But Rochester hires her not chiefly because of her experience, but firstly for her discretion, as he needed to “select one on whose fidelity dependence could be placed” (Brontë 310). Rather than considering her qualifications as a doctor or nurse, Rochester solely wants her for the fact that she can keep a secret. Grace, by remaining within the employ of Rochester and keeping Bertha a secret, only helps the patriarchal control brought on by the decades-long confinement of Bertha. Although Rochester refers to her as having “on the whole, proved a good keeper” (Brontë 310), she does nothing but keep Bertha hidden away in the third floor room. She becomes just as complicit in creating traumatic experiences as Mrs. Reed does in Gateshead with Jane.

Critical postcolonial intersectionality, then, only evolves by looking at the novel through the major themes of colonialism and trauma. These two issues are so deeply intertwined within the lives of Jane and Bertha that once noticed, it becomes increasingly impossible to not look at

each character within those terms. Jane and Bertha's connections to the colonial slave trade, as well as the advantages (and disadvantages) that are provided through it, reveal the ways in which they as women have become entrenched within the patriarchal system of British colonialism. A postcolonial reading of *Jane Eyre* reveals major discrepancies in the experiences Jane and Bertha have in Thornfield and effectively call their surface similarities into question. However, as I have argued, opening the characters up to closer inspection in their privileges has given us the opportunity to see the ways in which they have been effectively traumatized by similar forces within Thornfield. A critical postcolonial intersectional reading of *Jane Eyre* only becomes possible when we look past the crude intersectionality present on the surface of the novel and look at Jane and Bertha as deeply traumatized individuals whose similarities outweigh their relative differences. Critical postcolonial intersectionality, then, exposes and recognizes the ways in which Jane's situation might be more privileged than Bertha's, but also exposes and recognizes how Bertha and Jane's plight within Thornfield surpass these privileges to provide a stronger connection for these two women. By looking at Jane and Bertha's situations through the lenses of postcolonial and trauma theory, it is clear that the novel has developed characters that are deeply intersectional. Because the initial inequalities which Jane and Bertha have become enhanced through a deeper understanding of the overarching systems that work against them, their intersectionality becomes deeper as well. Jane and Bertha transform from characters with intersectional features that function as little more than plot points into characters whose class, race, mental illness, and trauma create well-rounded and deeply personal characters; in this way, *Jane Eyre* becomes a *truly* feminist novel.

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