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Source: *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, Mar., 1977, Vol. 31, No. 4 (Mar., 1977), pp. 397-420

Published by: University of California Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2933083>

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Resistance, Rebellion, and Marriage: The Economics of *Jane Eyre*

NANCY PELL

TOWARD THE END OF *Jane Eyre*, Jane and Rochester meet once more at Ferndean. Rochester cannot believe that Jane has come to him at last and must exorcise his worst fears about her fate.

“And you do not lie dead in some ditch, under some stream? And you are not a pining outcast amongst strangers?”

“No, sir; I am an independent woman now.”

“Independent! What do you mean, Jane?”

“My uncle in Madeira is dead, and he left me five thousand pounds.”

“Ah, this is practical—this is real!” he cried: “I should never dream that.”¹

Their dialogue outlines a central problem in the work of Charlotte Brontë, the conflict between the practical and the dream. “The truth is,” as Robert B. Heilman puts it, “that few artists can have been so beset as she was by the competing claims of the rational and the nonrational upon art and life.”² The nonrational, dream or imagination, was attractive and dangerous precisely because Charlotte was so familiar with it. Her whole youth had been spent on the adventures of Angria and Gondal, and she was

¹ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, ed. Jane Jack and Margaret Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 556. Hereafter all page references to this edition are placed in parentheses within the text.

² “Charlotte Brontë, Reason, and the Moon,” *NCF*, 14 (1960), 283.

twenty-four when she reluctantly wrote her “Farewell to Angria” and committed herself—in Christopher Caudwell’s phrase—to the socialization of the psyche.³

A large number of critics insist that the dream qualities of Charlotte Brontë’s writing comprise its highest, if not its only merits. Heilman, among them, asserts that in the struggle between imagination’s trackless waste and the safe fold of common sense, “imagination’s trackless waste turns out to be exactly the route to Jane’s well-being.”⁴ Kathleen Tillotson says of *Jane Eyre* that “such social commentary as it may offer is oblique, limited, incidental. It is both in purpose and effect primarily a novel of the inner life, not of man in his social relations; it maps a private world.” Yet her view is qualified, if not contradicted, when she calls attention to contemporary attacks on *Jane Eyre* that “testify indirectly to its timeliness [in 1847], hearing it as a voice from the dangerous north and the dangerous class of oppressed or ‘out-lawed’ women.”⁵

Elizabeth Rigby, later Lady Eastlake, censured the novel anonymously in the *Quarterly Review* a year after its publication. She anathematized Charlotte Brontë for the “highest moral offence a novel writer can commit, that of making an unworthy character interesting in the eyes of the reader.” Rigby’s indictment is political as well as moral:

³ Christopher Caudwell, *Illusion and Reality* (New York: International Publishers, 1937), p. 163. The literary evidence of this process has been collected and evaluated by Winifred Gérin; see Charlotte Brontë, *Five Novelettes: Passing Events, Julia, Mina Laury, Captain Henry Hastings, Caroline Vernon*, transcr. and ed. Winifred Gérin (London: Folio Society, 1971), pp. 16–22.

⁴ Heilman, p. 285. According to Walter Allen in *The English Novel: A Short Critical History* (New York: Dutton, 1954), pp. 217–18, the “intense, intransigent subjectivity” of *Jane Eyre* saves the novel from incoherence; false to “observed reality,” the book is true to Charlotte Brontë’s “shaping dream.” Similarly, in *Early Victorian Novelists: Essays in Reevaluation* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1935), p. 136, David Cecil writes that the world of the novel is almost exclusively imaginary, derived from the “character and energy” of its author’s personality rather than from the world she purports to describe. Charles Burkhart, “Another Key Word for *Jane Eyre*,” *NCF*, 16 (1961), 177–78, concludes that her work is dominated by a Rousseauistic belief in nature and is “largely an unconscious art.” Nonsocial interpretations of her gothicism belong also to this kind of criticism; see Robert B. Heilman’s “Charlotte Brontë’s ‘New’ Gothic,” in *From Jane Austen to Joseph Conrad*, ed. Robert C. Rathburn and Martin Steinmann, Jr. (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1958), pp. 118–32.

⁵ *Novels of the Eighteen-Forties* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), pp. 257, 259.

There is throughout it a murmuring against the comforts of the rich and against the privations of the poor, which . . . is a murmuring against God's appointment—there is a proud and perpetual assertion of the rights of man . . . there is that pervading tone of ungodly discontent which is at once the most prominent and the most subtle evil which the law and the pulpit, which all civilized society in fact has at the present day to contend with. We do not hesitate to say that the tone of mind and thought which has overthrown authority and violated every code human and divine abroad, and fostered Chartism and rebellion at home, is the same which has also written *Jane Eyre*.⁶

Charlotte Brontë, who thought of herself as the meekest of Christian Tories, was deeply hurt by the disapprobation of the *Quarterly Review*; she defended herself, among other ways, in the following passage from *Shirley*:

“Nobody in particular is to blame, that I can see, for the state in which things are; and I cannot tell . . . how they are to be altered for the better; but I feel there is something wrong somewhere. I believe single women should have more to do—better chances of interesting and profitable occupation than they possess now. And when I speak thus, I have no impression that I displease God by my words; that I am either impious or impatient, irreligious or sacrilegious.”⁷

Yet Charlotte Brontë never fully recognized the extent to which her first published novel calls basic institutions into question in ways more concrete than the “murmuring” or “pervading tone of mind” that so offended Elizabeth Rigby.

In *Jane Eyre* Charlotte Brontë's romantic individualism and rebellion of feeling are controlled and structured by an underlying social and economic critique of bourgeois patriarchal authority. Although this does not describe the entire scope of the novel, which includes countercurrents and qualifications as well, the formal and dramatic elements of a social critique are manifest in Jane's resistance to the illegitimate power of John Reed, Mr.

⁶ Untitled composite review of *Vanity Fair*, *Jane Eyre*, and the *Governesses' Benevolent Institution—Report for 1847*, in the *Quarterly Review*, 84 (1848–49), 166; 173–74. Excerpts from this review are reprinted in the Norton Critical Edition of *Jane Eyre*, ed. Richard J. Dunn (New York: Norton, 1971), pp. 449–53.

⁷ *Shirley*, ed. Andrew and Judith Hook (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1974), pp. 376–77.

Brocklehurst, and St. John Rivers; allusions to actual historical incidents involving regicide and rebellion; and, finally, the dynamics of Rochester's two marriages—both his marriage to Jane and his earlier marriage to Bertha Mason.



The dramatic presentation of Jane Eyre's struggles at Gateshead Hall involves the reader not only in the child's awareness of her oppression but also in the analysis of its source. She describes her habitual mood as "humiliation, self-doubt, forlorn depression"; accustomed as she is "to a life of ceaseless reprimand and thankless fagging," there are especially terrible moments of "unutterable wretchedness of mind" which reduce her to silent tears. "Children can feel, but they cannot analyze their feelings," the narrator observes; "and if the analysis is partially effected in thought, they know not how to express the result of the process in words" (14, 19, 23). Nevertheless Jane possesses a lively understanding of her position in the Reed family. After fainting during her punishment in the red room she tells Dr. Lloyd that she cries because she is miserable. "I have no father or mother, brothers or sisters. . . . It is not my house, sir; and Abbot says I have less right to be here than a servant" (23, 24).

The immediate origin of Jane's oppression is young John Reed, who spells out for her the basis for the contempt in which she is held.

"You are a dependant, mama says; you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg, and not to live here with gentlemen's children like us, and eat the same meals we do, and wear clothes at our mama's expense. Now, I'll teach you to rummage my book-shelves: for they *are* mine; all the house belongs to me, or will do in a few years." (7-8)

John Reed's position as sole male heir gives him an absolute power to harass his dependent female cousin. Jane is helpless against the silent complicity of the household; Mrs. Reed, Eliza, and Georgiana side with John, and Jane adds, "the servants did not like to offend their young master by taking my part against him" (7). Not unknowingly Jane tells him, "You are like a murderer . . . a slave-driver . . . like the Roman emperors!" (8). Her verbal and

physical resistance to John Reed is largely instinctive: “fury,” “frantic,” “deep ire and desperate revolt” describe her feelings at this time; her tongue seems to pronounce words without her will “consenting to their utterance” (8, 27, 28). But instinct is not all. Roman emperor and rebel slave are intellectual terms, and Jane is perfectly able to grasp the injustice of her punishment for defending herself: “no one had reproved John for wantonly striking me; and because I had turned against him to avert farther irrational violence, I was loaded with general opprobrium” (13). Through the child Jane’s interpretation of her suffering at Gateshead, Charlotte Brontë introduces the solid affairs “of the actual world” (487) in terms of which the novel is to develop.

Further dimensions of Jane’s conflict are revealed by the narrator’s interjections, the voice of the adult woman writing at a distance of some twenty years. She tells us that Jane was opposed to her aunt and cousins in temperament, capacity, and propensities and was therefore “a useless thing, incapable of serving their interest, or adding to their pleasure” (14). According to the narrator, Mrs. Reed was “bound by a hard-wrung pledge” to her dying husband to care for his sister’s orphaned child and thus obligated through no choice of her own “to see an uncongenial alien permanently intruded on her own family group” (14). W. A. Craik sees this passage as strengthening the moral poise of the narrative by establishing a sense of counterclaims as valid as Jane’s own, thus negating the criticism that in the early chapters characters are presented only as they appear to the eyes of “the embittered little charity-child.”⁸

Obviously, the shaping consciousness is always Jane’s; the novel is subtitled “an autobiography” and is narrated as such. The device of an adult woman presenting the drama of her childhood, however, has more than one consistent effect. When the adult voice is overtly obtrusive, as in the first example—“a useless thing, incapable of serving their interests”—it sounds like an ironic gesture toward fairness that deliberately fails to convince. The reader has just been led, moment by moment, through the vivid drama of Jane’s violent and tyrannical mistreatment, which takes up again

⁸ The phrase is from Q. D. Leavis’s Introduction to *Jane Eyre* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1966), p. 12; see also W. A. Craik, *The Brontë Novels* (London: Methuen, 1968), pp. 75–79; and Earl A. Knies, “The ‘I’ of *Jane Eyre*,” *College English*, 27 (1966), 546–56.

immediately after the “mature” voice stops. Elsewhere this mature voice has a more indirect and validating function. When Mrs. Reed shuts Jane up in the red room she tells the child, “This violence is all most repulsive. . . . It is only on condition of perfect submission and stillness that I shall liberate you.” We receive her words not as immediately transcribed by the child, but as the experience remembered, selected, and redramatized by the adult woman. The older narrator seems to be endorsing the child’s experience. “She sincerely looked on me,” Jane reflects on her aunt, “as a compound of virulent passions, mean spirit, and dangerous duplicity” (16). In a dryer comparison, Abbot is felt to have given Jane credit “for being a sort of infantine Guy Fawkes’”; the servant stipulates, “if she were a nice, pretty child, one might compassionate her forlornness; but one really cannot care for such a little toad as that” (26). The conditions on which the adults in Jane’s world would have approved of her are drawn in terms of such extravagant prejudices or demands for subjection that the author leads us to give our sympathy and encouragement to the child who resists and defies them.

The Reverend Robert Brocklehurst, the “straight, narrow, sable-clad” minister (33), personifies the religious aspect of self-suppression and constraint that Jane will meet again in Helen Burns and St. John Rivers. Charlotte Brontë’s picture of established spiritual authority in *Jane Eyre* is devastating, as the reviewer Elizabeth Rigby discerned. Brontë goes beyond obvious anticlericalism to articulate an alternate religious system; she replaces the “mighty universal parent,” the father God whom Helen Burns trusts and St. John presumes to represent, with “the universal mother, Nature” (412), symbolized most often by the moon and its light. It is Nature’s voice that urges Jane to flee temptation at Thornfield (407), as well as to return when she has come into her inheritance (536). Unlike “man,” from whom in her wandering on the moors Jane anticipates only rejection and insult, Nature, whose guest and child she feels herself to be, “would lodge me without money and without price” (413). The phrase is from Isaiah 55.1. Charlotte Brontë’s use of biblical phrases and echoes, freely applied to Nature, Jane’s mother, seems to me to point toward a matriarchal appropriation of traditionally patriarchal religious language.

In the first interview with Brocklehurst we see Jane moving beyond her largely instinctive responses to John Reed toward a more developed intellectual resistance to the threat the minister represents. Asked whether she is a good child, Jane finds it impossible to respond. Brocklehurst reminds her that naughty children are apt to die and go to hell. "And should you like to fall into that pit and to be burning there for ever?" he asks her. "No, sir," Jane replies. "What must you do to avoid it?" Brocklehurst then insists. After a moment's deliberation Jane declares lucidly, "I must keep in good health, and not die" (34). This simple reply may be taken as a rubric for the rest of the novel. Jane is candidly committed to her own survival; but, more than that, she plans as well to keep in good health.

Jane's healthy impulses lead her to refuse to deny herself the good things that are presently available to her. When Dr. Lloyd asks if she would like to go to live with some relatives on her father's side of the family who, though poor, might be kind to her, Jane says no: "I could not see how poor people had the means of being kind." She knows that the Reed's servants literally cannot afford to be kind, and they are the only poor people whom she has known at first hand. Young Jane's sense of poverty is concrete rather than abstract: "to be uneducated, to grow up like one of the poor women I saw sometimes nursing their children or washing their clothes at the cottage doors of the village of Gateshead: no, I was not heroic enough to purchase liberty at the price of caste" (24). The irony of the last clause seems unmistakable, but at least the mystifying concept of the noble poor has not obscured Jane's vision.

That same admirably concrete vision is turned to more affirmative account when Jane describes her satisfaction with her increasingly active life at Lowood. "In a few weeks I was promoted to a higher class; in less than two months I was allowed to commence French and drawing. I learned the first two tenses of the verb *Etre*, and sketched my first cottage. . . . I would not now have exchanged Lowood with all its privations, for Gateshead and its daily luxuries" (87). Her comforting fantasies have changed from food to creative cultural achievement. The same spirit that motivates Jane's refusal to embrace the supposed love of her poor relatives animates her healthy and vigorous ability to draw sustenance

—without subscribing to Helen Burns’s asceticism—from the plainness and rigor of Lowood school. When Jane later says to Rochester, “*I care for myself*” (404), we recognize that the basis for this passionate commitment to her own welfare has its roots in her early decision to “keep in good health, and not die.”

Jane’s commitment to life is so strong that we are likely to forget how thoroughly this novel is pervaded by death. Those impetuous young lovers, Jane’s parents, are dead before the opening of the story. Half of the girls at Lowood die of typhoid fever, and Helen Burns dies there, in Jane’s arms, of consumption. Both Mrs. Reed and her son John die while Jane is employed at Thornfield Hall, John, a probable suicide. Jane herself almost dies of hunger and exhaustion between Thornfield and Moor House, where she lies comatose for three days. When she recovers she learns that the father of Diana, Mary, and St. John Rivers has recently been buried, and soon after a letter arrives announcing the death of their uncle in Madeira. Bertha Rochester is killed—“smashed on the pavement”—when Thornfield burns, and the novel closes with the letter from St. John, which describes his daily, hourly, meditation on his approaching death in an Indian mission. It is against the background of the very real possibility of death, emphasized by both the novel’s plot and its imagery, that we see Jane’s strategies for life being worked out.

Refusal to accept her death at the hands of others is Jane’s chief motive for resisting St. John’s commanding proposals of marriage. “You are formed for labour, not for love,” he tells her, “I claim you—not for my pleasure, but for my Sovereign’s service” (514). His plan for Jane to conduct Indian schools feels to Jane like an iron shroud contracting around her (515), and his sister Diana imagines Jane “grilled alive in Calcutta” (530). The argument about whether or not she will marry St. John is carried out in such images of death. It is a sacrificial death that Jane expects when she almost decides to accept his definition of her duty: “if I *do* make the sacrifice he urges, I will make it absolutely: I will throw all on the altar—heart, vitals, the entire victim” (517).

During their struggle, Jane describes St. John both as “superior to the mean gratification of vengeance” and also capable of a “refined, lingering torture. . . which harassed and crushed me altogether” (525). Regarding his cold, loose handshake after their

quarrel, she says, “I would much rather he had knocked me down” (523), recalling her much earlier conflict with John Reed. St. John’s resemblance to John Reed is impressive; their names alone reflect a similarity between them. St. John is the only person besides young Reed who causes Jane to fear for her life. “If I were to marry you,” she says to him, “you would kill me. You are killing me now.” St. John objects that her words are “violent, unfeminine, and untrue” (526–27); but Jane insists, “God did not give me my life to throw away; and to do as you wish me, would, I begin to think, be almost equivalent to committing suicide” (528). Both men, in fact, do die as suicides of a sort; John Reed is rumored to have killed himself over gambling debts, and St. John Rivers, as he expected, succumbs to the climate of India in the service of his Sovereign.



Two allusions in the novel to actual rebellions in English history suggest Charlotte Brontë’s awareness that Jane’s struggle for a wider life has significant historical implications. First, after a lesson at Lowood school on tonnage and poundage in the early reign of Charles I,⁹ Helen Burns confesses her admiration for the Stuart king.

“I was wondering how a man who wished to do right could act so unjustly and unwisely as Charles the First sometimes did . . . what a pity it was that, with his integrity and conscientiousness, he could see no farther than the prerogatives of the crown. . . . Still, I like Charles—I respect him—I pity him, poor, murdered king! Yes, his enemies were the worst: they shed blood they had no right to shed. How dared they kill him!” (64–65)

⁹ “The lesson had comprised part of the reign of Charles I.,” specifically, “sundry questions about tonnage and poundage, and ship-money” (p. 60). The time is the year 1625, when Charles I began to lose control of his realm, and the tonnage and poundage traditionally granted to the king for life was restricted to just one year at a time. See Christopher Hill, *The Century of Revolution, 1603–1714* (1961; rpt. New York: Norton, 1966), p. 49; see also p. 55 for an explanation of the significance of parliamentary control of ship money. In George Eliot’s essay on the 1856 Oxford edition of *Antigone* she uses the example, “resist the payment of ship-money, you bring on civil war” (“The Antigone and Its Moral,” *The Leader*, 29 Mar. 1856, p. 306; rpt. in *Essays of George Eliot*, ed. Thomas Pinney [London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963], p. 264). Terry Eagleton, “Class, Power and Charlotte Brontë,” *Critical Quarterly*, 14 (1972), 225, offers a symbolic interpretation of Helen’s point of view.

Jane criticizes Helen, both for her visionary passivity and for her royalist sympathies. "If people were always kind and obedient to those who are cruel and unjust," Jane objects, "the wicked people would have it all their own way: they would never feel afraid, and so they would never alter, but would grow worse and worse" (65). Her resistance to the abuse of power, even the Stuart prerogatives, here clearly places Jane among the regicides. Helen tells her that the theory of retribution she has just described is held only by heathens and savage tribes, but Jane's experience dismisses Helen's received doctrine. To her, loving one's enemies means that "I should love Mrs. Reed, which I cannot do; I should bless her son John, which is impossible" (66). Eventually Jane comes to comprehend the value of self-restraint through the example of Miss Temple, director of Lowood, whose quiet resistance to Mr. Brocklehurst's policies of deprivation has nothing to do with axiomatic stoicism. Jane modifies Helen's quietism with Miss Temple's nurturing concern for body and mind and emerges from her childhood, as Q. D. Leavis points out, with an appreciation for self-discipline as a strategy of psychological warfare.¹⁰

The second reference to historical revolutionary antecedents is both more subtle and more powerful in its implications. Early in the novel the servant Abbot suspects that young Jane is "a sort of infantine Guy Fawkes"; the passage is echoed later on when Jane has become a school mistress in the village of Morton. She receives a visit from St. John on the occasion of a holiday from her duties on the fifth of November. Although the day is not named, it is the traditional British Guy Fawkes Day.¹¹ The date is not without ambiguities however. In addition to marking the discovery of the Catholic plot to blow up the Houses of Parliament in 1605, it is also the anniversary of the landing of William and Mary at Torbay in the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688. Thus both violent and bloodless rebellions are juxtaposed on the occasion of Jane's passing from the dispossessed to the possessing class. For during his brief visit, St. John—who knows Jane only as Jane Elliott—looks

¹⁰ Leavis, Introduction to *Jane Eyre*, p. 16.

¹¹ Jane Jack and Margaret Smith, "The Chronology of *Jane Eyre*" (Appendix I), in *Jane Eyre* (Clarendon edition), suggest that Jane Eyre's "autobiography" may begin on Guy Fawkes Day: "The action begins after dinner on a 'drear November day' (p. 4), probably early in the month" (p. 611).

at a sketch that she has drawn and discovers her true name, Jane Eyre, written on the portrait cover. This disclosure leads to the rediscovery of lost connections between Jane and the Rivers family and establishes her possession of the legacy of twenty thousand pounds from her uncle John Eyre. The repeated image of Guy Fawkes and the ambiguous historical allusions to the Fifth of November thus accompany the moment that unites Jane's past and her future.



Throughout *Jane Eyre* Charlotte Brontë presents marriage in the context of equality between the partners. "Equality," for Jane, always has an active social definition which is first made explicit, apart from marriage, when she meets Alice Fairfax on her arrival at Thornfield Hall. Jane has expected to be treated with coldness and stiffness, in short, like a governess. She is greatly surprised by the friendly conversation of her supposed employer and superior, especially when Mrs. Fairfax confides her loneliness, adding that "one can't converse with [the servants] on terms of equality . . . for fear of losing one's authority" (116). The misunderstanding is soon cleared up; Mrs. Fairfax is only the housekeeper, the manager of Thornfield, not its proprietor. Jane's thoughts reflect her feelings of relief and identification:

this affable and kind little widow was no great dame, but a dependent like myself. I did not like her the worse for that; on the contrary, I felt better pleased than ever. The equality between her and me was real; not the mere result of condescension on her part: so much the better—my position was all the freer. (121)

Both Jane and Mrs. Fairfax are aware of fine distinctions of class and custom among servants as well as between servants and gentry. The presence of Mrs. Fairfax serves as a continuing reminder of the social inequality of Jane and Rochester. The housekeeper is astonished when she learns that they are to be married, not because she thinks it impossible that Rochester could sincerely love Jane, but because she has known the family for many years and is convinced that "gentlemen in his station are not accustomed to marry their governesses" (334).

Jane's clarity about equality and inequality between herself and Rochester has several aspects. In their first meetings, on the icy Millcote road and later in the library at Thornfield, they recognize each other's physical and psychological similarities; neither is conventionally attractive or socially graceful. Rochester claims advantage over Jane, however, on the basis of his wider experience of the world; Jane disagrees, reminding him primly that "your claim to superiority depends on the use you have made of your time and experience" (164). Although Jane does not realize it, her remark touches the heart of the matter—Rochester's acquiescence in the marriage that his father and elder brother arranged for him in order to secure Bertha Mason's dowry of thirty thousand pounds. His ten years of searching on the continent for a woman who would restore his lost innocence parallels Jane's ten years at Lowood, where she has grown from the child who flew at John Reed in furious rages to a young woman who competently supports herself in a society about which she has few illusions. Jane's caution about the use Rochester has made of his experience, therefore, is central to the way we understand the basis of their equality when they are reunited after the fire in which Bertha is killed.

Jane's view of herself in their first conversation is that she is Rochester's "paid subordinate" at thirty pounds a year. "I had forgotten the salary," Rochester replies, suggesting, however, that "on that mercenary ground" she should agree to let him hector her a little. Jane objects that she "should never mistake informality for insolence: one I rather like, the other nothing free-born would submit to, even for a salary." Rochester replies angrily that this is humbug: "Most things free-born will submit to anything for a salary; therefore, keep to yourself and don't venture on generalities of which you are intensely ignorant" (164, 165).

In spite of Jane's sensitivity to being Rochester's employee, she is perfectly aware that she has grown to love him and rejects the Pamela-role of fleeing from him whenever he approaches her.¹²

¹² Jane's knowledge of *Pamela* was drawn from Bessie's nursery stories (p. 5). Rigby, pp. 162–63, refers to Jane as "merely another Pamela." Janet Spens's essay, "Charlotte Brontë," in Vol. 14 of *Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association*, collected by H. W. Garrod (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929), pp. 54–70, details many similarities between *Jane Eyre* and Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*, but Spens does not take their many crucial differences into consideration. Tillotson, p. 149, notes the similar qualities of nightmare and concentration on the isolated heroine in the two authors.

Their most famous encounter takes place at the foot of Thornfield's ancient chestnut tree. Rochester tells Jane that he is soon to be married to Blanche Ingram and that he will help Jane to secure a new position in Ireland. The ocean suddenly seems very wide to Jane, but wider still the ocean of wealth, caste, and custom which separates her from Rochester (316). When she admits that it will grieve her to leave Thornfield, Rochester suddenly asks her to stay on. Jane, almost in anticipation of her refusal to become his mistress, rejects what she understands as an offer to remain and become nothing but a servant.

"Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? . . . I have as much soul as you,—and full as much heart! And if God had gifted me with some beauty, and much wealth, I should have made it as hard for you to leave me, as it is now for me to leave you. I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, nor even of mortal flesh:—it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God's feet, equal,—as we are!" (318)

In this passage intensity of feeling transcends inequities of social position, and, indeed, in the halcyon days that follow, Jane almost accepts this as the whole truth. The revelation that Rochester already has a wife living, however, changes Jane's prospects, although not her love itself, and reminds her of the power that social position exerts over even the most passionate devotion.

When Rochester tries to persuade her to go away with him to the south of France, Jane tells him that she stands by "preconceived opinions, foregone determinations" (405), "the law given by God; sanctioned by man" (404), and is determined to leave him. Her real strength, however, lies not in her verbal arguments but in a silent conviction, "impressed . . . on my heart . . . to serve me as aid in the time of trial." She remembers Rochester's bitter memories of his other mistresses: "Hiring a mistress is the next worse thing to buying a slave," he has told her, "both are often by nature, and always by position, inferior; and to live familiarly with inferiors is degrading" (397–98). The warning implicit in these words is that Rochester's own sense of degradation is inevitably projected onto the women with whom he lives intimately. Knowing that she can earn thirty pounds a year as a governess, Jane re-

jects being hired as a mistress or bought as a slave. Once again she resolves to keep in good health and not die.

Few critics have paid much attention to Rochester's wife, Bertha Mason; the rest politely avert their eyes, tactfully disregarding a lapse of good taste, an unfortunate Gothic regression. When she is noticed, by Richard Chase, for example, it is as an inherent possibility of sensual abandonment within Jane herself, which she must reject as she rejects its opposite polarity, the total repression of physical desire represented by St. John Rivers. According to Chase, "Bertha represents the woman who has given herself blindly and uncompromisingly to the principle of sex and intellect." He concludes that Jane seems to be asking herself, "May not Bertha . . . be a living example of what happens to the woman who gives herself to the Romantic Hero, who in her insane suffragettism tries herself to play the Hero, to be the fleshly vessel of the *élan*?"¹³ Aside from the absence of evidence for Bertha's "suffragettism," insane or otherwise, the repeated expression of Bertha's "giving herself" is a telling one. It is Chase's way of ignoring the economics of Bertha's marriage to Rochester, the fact that, far from "giving herself," she was traded by her father, Jonas Mason, along with her dowry, to cover the Mason family's taints of insanity and Creole blood with the honor and protection of the Rochester name.

Failure to analyze Bertha's situation and her function in the plot of *Jane Eyre* leads to Chase's inaccurate reading of the end of the novel. If there is revenge in the catastrophe at Thornfield it seems to be the revenge of the marriage object, the woman who was traded fifteen years before. For Chase, however, Jane somehow becomes Charlotte Brontë herself and the plot is resolved—in art as in life—by "positive action" on her part.

The universe conspiring against Jane Eyre, like the circumstances which so often conspired against the sisters, must be chastened by an assertion of will, catastrophic if necessary. And so Charlotte sends

¹³ "The Brontës, or Myth Domesticated," in *Forms of Modern Fiction*, ed. William Van O'Connor (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1959), p. 107. See also Martin S. Day, "Central Concepts of *Jane Eyre*," *The Personalist*, 41 (1960), 503. It seems to me unnecessary to create a figure to embody Jane's allegedly split-off sexual feelings. She is never less than forthright about her love for Rochester, and, further, she finds repellent St. John's admission that it is the missionary he wishes to mate, not "the mere man" (pp. 518–19).

Rochester's house up in flames and makes him lose his eyesight and his left hand in a vain attempt to save Bertha. Rochester's injuries are, I should think, a symbolic castration. . . . It is as if the masterless universe had been subdued by being lopped, blinded, and burned. . . . The tempo and energy of the universe can be quelled, we see, by a patient, practical woman.¹⁴

It is not the "patient, practical woman" that lops and blinds either the "universe" or even Rochester, but a mad raging woman who has been under forcible restraint for over ten years. Bertha has once again escaped from her cell on the third floor while Grace Poole sleeps off her gin. Bertha starts the fire at Thornfield in the room where the erstwhile governess once slept, and goes screaming to the rooftop as she was wont to do in Spanish Town. And it is in an attempt to save her that Rochester loses his hand and his sight when he is struck by a falling beam.¹⁵

There is indeed a grim justice in the fact that Rochester's only instance of open, public involvement with Bertha comes at the moment of his physical crippling. Their secret has all along crippled his life socially and psychologically. He has been determined to deny this throughout the past fifteen years; his marriage and all that has followed from it are his experiences-of-the-world on which he claimed superiority to Jane. Jane challenges this claim during their first conversation in the library, and it seems to me that Bertha is the psychological symbol, not of Charlotte Brontë's repressed hostility against the male universe, but of Edward Rochester's repressed awareness of his true social situation.

Rochester's understanding of his father's bargain with Jonas Mason¹⁶ is worth quoting at length. It was the resolution of the

¹⁴ Chase, pp. 108-9.

¹⁵ G. Armour Craig also absolutizes Jane's "vision" as the single agent of violence in the novel. See Craig's "The Unpoetic Compromise: On the Relation between Private Vision and Social Order in Nineteenth-Century English Fiction," in *Society and Self in the Novel*, ed. Mark Schorer, English Institute Essays, 1955 (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1956), pp. 40-41.

¹⁶ Tillotson, pp. 286-87, recognizes that the arrangements made in Spanish Town comprise the "nodal situation" of the story. Following Fannie Ratchford, she notes that this material has its origin in Charlotte Brontë's Angrian fantasies and comments that its subordination in the novel is "a triumph of structure and emphasis." However, in so limiting her focus to the formal aspects of the material, Tillotson does not consider that the transformation of these early elements is a result of their development from the fantastic dimension to the economic. The only other writer that I know of who has commented on this "nodal situation" is Jean Rhys, whose novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (New York: Norton, 1966) provides a brilliant counterpoint to traditional interpretations of *Jane Eyre*.

senior Rochester, and his legal obligation as head of an ancient landed line,

“to keep the property together; he 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. I must be provided for by a wealthy marriage. . . . Mr. Mason, a West India planter and merchant, was his old acquaintance. He was certain his possessions were real and vast: he made inquiries. 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: that sufficed.” (388–89)

Jane is not repelled by the truth about Rochester; ultimately she has great sympathy for his situation. As Arnold Shapiro puts it, “she who has been so aware of the horrors committed in the name of society, certainly can realize that Rochester is not fully to blame for his terrible marriage.”¹⁷ The point is that while Rochester acknowledges that he was plotted against and cheated into his marriage by his “avaricious and grasping” father, he refuses to acknowledge that he, like Jane, is a social victim. He continues to play the role of master not only with his household servants but toward all men and women. The contradiction between his inward suffering and his outward dominance makes his position essentially false. No social privilege has been surrendered: “Provided with plenty of money, and the passport of an old name, I could choose my own society: no circles were closed against me” (396). He was able to keep his marriage a secret from acquaintances in England because when Bertha’s conduct was made known, the father became as anxious as his son to conceal the connection. During the four years Rochester actually lived with Bertha in Jamaica, his elder brother and his father had died, and the estate, consolidated at so great a cost to the younger son, now belonged to him alone.

Rochester’s bitterness against society is thus personally cynical rather than socially perceptive like Jane’s. He describes himself at the time of their meeting as in “a harsh, bitter frame of mind . . . corroded with disappointment, sourly disposed against all man- and especially against all *womankind* (for I began to regard the notion of an intellectual, faithful, loving woman as a mere

¹⁷ “In Defense of Jane Eyre,” *Studies in English Literature*, 8 (1968), 691–92.

dream)" (398). He indulges in the luxury of scorn for Blanche Ingram. He has no sympathy for one who, like himself in his youth, is compromised in her choice of a mate by an elder brother's precedence in the family economy and who is, in addition, excluded because of her sex from ever inheriting entailed family land (200).

Rather than his father or elder brother, however, the primary object of Rochester's rage is Bertha, who is actually his fellow victim in their arranged marriage. Jane is critical of this, saying that he is "inexorable for that unfortunate lady: you speak of her with hate—with vindictive antipathy. It is cruel—she cannot help being mad" (384). Bertha Mason has become such a monster to Rochester because she receives a doubly displaced resentment, more correctly directed against the economics of primogeniture and Rochester's own compromised self.¹⁸ Adrienne Rich makes the precise observation that in agreeing to marry Bertha "Rochester makes no pretense that he was not acting out of lust. Yet he repeatedly asserts *her* coarseness, 'at once intemperate and unchaste,' as the central fact of his loathing for her."¹⁹ He says that he continues to care for Bertha because he is disinclined "to indirect assassination, even of what I most hate" (383). How much more complex than this his involvement with her is, in fact, appears when twice in the novel Rochester deliberately identifies himself with symbolic Berthas—women who are social outcasts and yet possess peculiar powers over other people. First, he speaks to Jane about "arranging a point with [his] destiny":

"She stood there, by that beech-trunk—a hag like one of those who appeared to Macbeth on the heath of Forres. 'You like Thornfield?' she said, lifting her finger; and then she wrote in the air a memento, which ran in lurid hieroglyphics all along the house-front, between the upper and lower row of windows. 'Like it if you can! Like it if you dare!' " (175)

Like Macbeth, Rochester suffers his destiny appearing to him in

¹⁸ "A marriage was achieved almost before I knew where I was. Oh—I have no respect for myself when I think of that act!—an agony of inward contempt masters me," Rochester declares (p. 389).

¹⁹ "Jane Eyre: The Temptations of a Motherless Woman," *Ms.*, Oct. 1973, p. 98. Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (New York: Avon Books, 1969), pp. 51–52, describes as one of the agents of control under patriarchy the attribution to the female alone of "the dangers and evils it imputes to sexuality," thus "the male identity is preserved as a human, rather than a sexual one."

the form of witches; like Macbeth, he has a wife who went mad. The second incident is dramatic rather than metaphoric: during the house party Rochester successfully disguises himself—even from Jane at first—as an old gypsy woman come to the great house “to tell the gentry their fortunes” (240). Rochester’s inability to acknowledge his past seems to compel him to fantasies of the future under the control of Bertha’s image.²⁰

To free himself from this image, Rochester rationalizes, he spent ten dissipated years in Europe searching for her opposite, the woman of his dreams who would rescue and restore him through the powers he attributes to Jane, “peace of mind. . . a memory without blot or contamination . . . an inexhaustible source of pure refreshment” (166). His demand for mastery and dependence upon such a woman recalls Hegel’s description of the relationship between master and slave.²¹ The master is trapped in a role that stifles human development; his “truth” is the slave’s work. As one commentator on Hegel writes, “slavery in contrast reveals itself as ‘the source of all human, social, historical progress.’ ”²² Rochester, as master, is unable to change, but Jane, as slave, is forced into change by the painfulness of the role she is forced to play. During

²⁰ In another connection Joseph Prescott remarks on the physical similarity between Bertha and Blanche Ingram, whom Rochester publicly appears to be courting. See Prescott’s “*Jane Eyre: A Romantic Exemplum with a Difference*,” in *Twelve Original Essays on Great English Novels*, ed. Charles Shapiro (Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1960), pp. 87–88.

²¹ Simone de Beauvoir writes in *The Second Sex*, trans. and ed. H. M. Parshley (1953; rpt. New York: Bantam Books, 1961), p. 59, “Certain passages in the argument employed by Hegel in defining the relation of master to slave apply much better to the relation of man to woman.”

²² See Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to a Reading of Hegel*, ed. Allan Bloom, trans. James H. Nichols, Jr. (New York: Basic Books, 1969), pp. 20–22, 23. Kojève continues: “The future and History hence belong not to the warlike Master, who either dies or preserves himself indefinitely in identity to himself, but to the working Slave. The Slave, in transforming the given World by [her] work, transcends the given and what is given by that given in [herself]; hence, [she] goes beyond [herself], and also goes beyond the Master who is tied to the given which, not working, he leaves intact.” Jane’s transforming work can be seen not only in her relationship with Rochester but also with St. John Rivers; with both men her sense of equality makes action, mutual influence, and personal dialectic possible. Just as she refuses to be draped with jewels and fine dresses out of Rochester’s loving condescension, she also refuses to be subservient to St. John’s spiritual pretensions. Jane realizes that he too is her equal—hitherto she has felt her intellectual ability and spiritual courage inferior to his—when she sees the emotional paralysis that he hides behind his devotion to duty. Recognizing St. John’s imperfections, she takes courage: “I was with an equal—one with whom I might argue—one whom, if I saw good, I might resist” (p. 519).

their engagement, Jane continues to refer to him as her dear master; Rochester, however, loses sight of his “plain, Quakerish governess” and calls her his little elf, delicate and aerial, a sylph, an angel, a sprite or salamander. He insists on sending to London for heirloom jewels, which he will pour in her lap, and selects dresses for her of amethyst silk and pink satin. Jane finds his behavior peremptory, stubborn, and somewhat harassing. “The more he bought me, the more my cheek burned with a sense of annoyance and degradation. . . . He smiled; and I thought his smile was such as a sultan might . . . bestow on a slave his gold and gems had enriched” (338–39). In this feverish atmosphere Jane becomes desperate to secure some independence from her future husband; she decides to continue as Adele’s governess at thirty pounds a year and to write her uncle John Eyre to determine the prospects of any future inheritance.

The legacy that Jane receives from her uncle in Madeira makes possible her reunion with Rochester and also significantly redefines her relationship to patriarchal structures. “An independent woman now,” Jane proceeds to redefine the term. Previously she has rejected the independence exemplified in Helen and St. John, who despise the natural and human realms of life. She has refused as well the mockery of independence found in Eliza Reed’s advice to her sister Georgiana.

“Take one day; share it into sections; to each section apportion its task: leave no stray unemployed quarters of an hour, ten minutes, five minutes,—include all; do each piece of business in its turn with method, with rigid regularity. The day will close almost before you are aware it has begun; and you are indebted to no one for helping you to get rid of one vacant moment: you have had to seek no one’s company, conversation, sympathy, forbearance; you have lived, in short, as an independent being ought to do.” (295–96)

Similarly, Jane turns down the role of heiress, which St. John urges upon her, and prefers a competency to a fortune.

Jane’s legacy was built by her uncle on English trade with the West Indian colonies and on slavery, on the same base, in short, as Bertha Mason’s attractive dowry.²³ Jane accepts this inheritance, now invested in English funds, but she contradicts St. John’s prin-

²³ Eagleton, p. 233.

cipld, capitalist argument in favor of her retaining the entire amount, which, she feels could never be hers “in justice, though it might in law” (493). She chooses instead to divide the money equally with her three cousins.²⁴ St. John admits that he does see “a certain justice,” but he objects that Jane’s dividing her inheritance “is contrary to all custom. Besides,” he continues, “the entire fortune is your right: my uncle gained it by his own efforts; he was free to leave it to whom he would: he left it to you. After all, justice permits you to keep it: you may, with a clear conscience, consider it absolutely your own” (494).

Their disagreement seems typical; St. John argues for that absolute possession of property that legal justice permits, Jane for the human justice of sharing with those she loves, whose needs she has experienced, by whose labors she has benefited. When the money first comes to Jane, in her isolation, she feels that “independence would be glorious”; but the “ponderous gift of gold” is transformed into a “legacy of life, hope, enjoyment” when she conceives the plan of dividing it with St. John, Diana, and Mary (488, 491, 492). Her experience of the accession of wealth becomes joy only when the personal reality of interdependence becomes economically possible.

“An independent woman now,” Jane reappears at Thornfield. She has refused to be Rochester’s mistress or St. John’s mistress of Indian schools; now she is her own mistress and her proposal to Rochester is striking. “If you won’t let me live with you, I can build a house of my own close up to your door. . . . I will be your neighbour, your nurse, your housekeeper. . . . I will be your companion. . . . you shall not be left desolate, so long as I live” (556). Even their marriage can hardly be considered typically Victorian.²⁵ Jane possesses a great deal of money in her own right, and although

²⁴ Leavis, in her notes on the text of *Jane Eyre*, p. 489, believes that Jane’s division of her inheritance argues against the realism of the novel in the following way: “She inherited in her twentieth year, as far as one can make out, and after sharing out the fortune she goes off next year to find and marry Mr. Rochester, still under twenty-one, though of course she could not legally have done anything so serious and irrevocable as distributing three-quarters of her property till she was of age.” Jane admits that her task was difficult, but that her cousins agreed to arbitration judged by Mr. Oliver and an able lawyer, who agreed with Jane’s intentions (pp. 495–96). See also the note to the Clarendon edition which points out the necessity for Rochester’s consent to Jane’s gifts to her cousins (p. 605).

²⁵ Margot Peters, *Charlotte Brontë: Style in the Novel* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1973), p. 148.

Rochester is far from the helpless wreck he is sometimes taken to be,²⁶ he is dependent upon Jane “to be helped—to be led” until he regains his sight. He is troubled by what he calls his infirmities and deficiencies, but Jane, in lines that recall her recognition of equality with Mrs. Fairfax, declares “I love you better now, when I can really be useful to you, than I did in your state of proud independence, when you disdained every part but that of the giver and protector” (570). Here, as earlier, equality must be real for Jane, not merely the result of condescension.

Rochester has not simply been humbled by divine retribution; he no longer acts the role of master exclusively because he has learned something about the limits of his own power. Jane likens him to “Nebuchadnezzar in the fields” (558, 608), referring to the biblical account (Dan. 4.33) of a king’s loss of both power and sanity. His injuries also recall Jacob’s wrestling with the angel (Gen. 32.25–32), an additional biblical precedent that associates crippling with understanding. The structural analysis by Lévi-Strauss of similar mythic material in the Oedipus legends is seen by Fredric Jameson as the assimilation of the Monstrous to the Deformed, “which permits us . . . to correlate the slaying of the monsters (as a triumph of man over the dark forces) with that physical deformation of life which marks a partial defeat at their hands.”²⁷ Since all along Bertha has represented Rochester’s attempt to deny his origins, it seems appropriate that even in her death the persistence of denial remains with him in the form of bodily injury. Rochester says that his injuries are punishments for his intended sexual aggression toward Jane—“I would have sullied my innocent flower.” But the association of these injuries with Bertha, rather than Jane, points to the circumstances of his

²⁶ Chase’s influential view of Rochester’s symbolic castration was preceded by the observation of Kate Friedlaender, M.D., “Children’s Books and their Function in Latency and Prepuberty,” *American Imago*, 3 (1942), 141. Following the theory of Otto Fenichel (1936), Friedlaender writes that “the penis is stolen and the little insignificant woman herself becomes the penis, without which the man cannot exist. Jane is Rochester’s sole link with the outside world; through her he sees and receives his impressions, without her he is helpless. Only after Jane has a child, hereby obtaining the penis by other means, does he, to a certain extent, recover his sight.” Dr. Friedlaender herself renders Rochester still more helpless by asserting that he loses his right hand instead of his left. An inconsistency in the novel is noted in the Clarendon edition, p. 602.

²⁷ “Metacommentary,” *PMLA*, 86 (1971), 14. See also Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1967), pp. 209–13.

first marriage—and its aggression against both Bertha *and* Rochester—as the “crime” of which the diminishing of his power is the outward and visible sign. Social and psychological suffering denied have become physically inescapable, and, recognized as such, neither proves as unbearable nor as isolating as before.

Jane’s affirmation of interdependence rather than of autonomy helps to explain the genuineness of her acceptance of Rochester, but it also points to the problem of their reabsorption into the system of inheritance and primogeniture that has made their earlier lives so difficult. Jane’s division of her legacy among her cousins to secure each a competency is an important gesture, as I have indicated, but the larger society remains unaltered. Both Rochester and Jane have acquired their wealth in untimely or arbitrary ways through the deaths of their predecessors in the line of inheritance. Together they have a son, who, in his turn, doubtless will inherit their combined estates.

Once they have found each other they withdraw from society altogether: “I am my husband’s life as fully as he is mine,” says Jane. “We talk, I believe, all day long” (576). If they do not pander to house parties with neighbors like the Ingrams, neither do they travel beyond Rochester’s property to “the busy world, towns, regions full of life . . . acquaintance with variety of character” (132), for which Jane had longed at Thornfield. Ten years after their marriage Jane and Rochester are still sequestered at Ferndean Manor, always a place of dubious healthfulness and damp walls, seeing only the servants and, once a year, Diana and Mary Rivers and their husbands.

‘There is, at the conclusion, what Raymond Williams identifies as the grasping at magic solutions that marks a number of novels of social protest in the 1840’s.²⁸ Even though it is rooted in economic realities and social relationships, the practical and the real, Jane Eyre’s resistance and rebellion are a private struggle. A. L. Morton describes the specific problem of the Brontës as their isolation—in terms of class as well as geography—on the border: “neither workers, nor, in a real sense, gentlefolk, the fight is al-

²⁸ *The Long Revolution* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1961), p. 68; cited by Arnold Shapiro, p. 698. In *Culture and Society, 1780–1950*, Harper Torchbooks ed. (1958; rpt. New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 92, Williams elaborates on the device of the legacy, “money from elsewhere . . . which solved so many otherwise insoluble problems in the world of the Victorian novel.”

ways an individual fight for personal and isolated ends, for a place in society, to preserve their integrity, for the rights of the heart.”²⁹

Yet the struggle is not utterly isolated. In the central feminist assertion of the novel Jane looks out from the rooftop of Thornfield Hall and confesses to feeling discontented and restless. At this moment her strivings are more than simply the effort for individual survival; there is a sense of comradeship with other women of her class.

Millions are condemned to a stiller doom than mine, and millions are in silent revolt against their lot. Nobody knows how many rebellions besides political rebellions ferment in the masses of life which people earth. Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer. . . . It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex. (132–33)

Directly following this, Jane remarks, “When thus alone, I not unfrequently heard Grace Poole’s laugh.” Virginia Woolf felt this an awkward break, a jarring change. “It is upsetting to come upon Grace Poole all of a sudden,” she wrote, “the continuity is disturbed.”³⁰ The indignation, the rage of Charlotte Brontë, marred her genius irretrievably for Virginia Woolf.

But it is not Grace Poole whose unexpected presence creates discontinuity. We know why Charlotte juxtaposed that laugh to her portrait of millions of women under too rigid a restraint. Here at the center of a novel about one woman’s struggle for independence and love is a woman who is utterly restrained and considered socially dead, who, nevertheless, breaks through her restraints and occasionally wreaks havoc in the house of which she is the hidden, titular mistress: burning her husband in his bed; tearing Jane’s wedding veil; and finally burning Thornfield to the ground. Woman under too rigid a restraint—a woman offered as an object in a marriage settlement—displays in perverse ways the power that she is continually denied.

²⁹ *The Matter of Britain* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1966), p. 127.

³⁰ *A Room of One’s Own* (1929; rpt. New York: Harcourt, 1965), p. 72.

Elizabeth Hardwick sees the mad wife hidden in the attic as one of the “gaping flaws” in Charlotte Brontë’s construction of *Jane Eyre*: one of the representations “of the life she could not face,” Bertha stands for “the hidden wishes of an intolerable life.”³¹ I have tried to show that, on the contrary, Bertha represents the beginning of an effort to analyze “the state in which things are,” which troubled Charlotte Brontë. “I cannot tell . . . how they are to be altered for the better,” she writes in *Shirley*, but in *Jane Eyre* we see the practical effort to make life tolerable, to attempt the possible rather than, like Emily, the apocalyptic. We see, in short, a woman’s struggle to “keep in good health, and not die.”

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³¹ *Seduction and Betrayal: Women and Literature* (New York: Random House, 1974), p. 29.