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***Jane Eyre: Victorian Women's Madness Maze***

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## Abstract

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Madness has always been a difficult concept to define as different sorts of behaviors have been considered madness in different times as well as different geographical, social and cultural contexts. In other words, the concept of mental illness is socially constructed. Madness is one of the main themes in *Jane Eyre* and appears throughout the novel. One character commits suicide, two characters go mad and Jane has her moments of madness. Jane's madness, however, is closely related to the social context of the novel. Hence this study of Charlotte Brontë's autobiographical novel aims to shed light on how mental illness as a social construct inappropriately and unjustly were applied to the protagonist of the novel by patriarchal familial, institutional, ideological and marital forces as a means of social control. This study provides proof that Jane's sanity and chastity was measured based on her conformity to the Victorian norms and her deviation from social norms was considered as insanity. The significance of this study lies chiefly on its comprehensive analysis of the protagonist's personality development throughout her Bildungsroman. This study is based on close reading of the novel which provides readers clear evidence of how social forces make Jane consciously suppress her feelings or unconsciously conform to the norms that she once abhorred which, consequently, results in her mental problems.

**Keywords:** Feminist Criticism, Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, Victorian psychiatry, women mental illnesses, patriarchy, social construction of madness, marginalization

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## 1. Introduction

One of the most debated literary works, in terms of depicting the condition of women in the Victorian era, is the novel *Jane Eyre*, written by Charlotte Brontë, under the masculine pseudonym 'Currer Bell'. *Jane Eyre* still today provides a good source of information about the social and historical context of Victorian England. Most studies conducted on Brontë's *Jane Eyre* have focused on the condition of women in the Victorian era, that is, the oppression of women in the patriarchal society of the Victorian era, especially women's issues such as gender inequality, class bias, ideological forces and mental illnesses. This focus is mainly due to *Jane Eyre* being a "Bildungsroman"<sup>1</sup> (i.e. a coming of age story) which depicts the main female character's struggles in the patriarchal society of the Victorian era in England.

Feminist scholars have meticulously explored each of the above-mentioned issues; studies on the novels of Victorian female writers conducted by feminist critics Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-century Literary Imagination* (1979), suggest that based on their "imprisonment and escape" theory, the major theme in Victorian women writers' novels is related to their oppression, both in life and art in a male-dominant society. They use the term "*palimpsestic*" for such concealed socio-literary criticism in novels like *Jane Eyre*. Their term includes the literary work whose "surface designs conceal or obscure deeper, less accessible (and less socially acceptable) levels of meaning" (73).

There has also been a growing interest among feminist scholars in the madness dimensions of the novel and its connection to the prevalent mental illnesses among women in the Victorian era. Similarly, the present paper focuses on this aspect of the novel and investigates how patriarchal Victorian society's gender norms, ideological forces and marital institution, either made the protagonist of the novel mad or labeled her natural feelings and rebelliousness as madness as a means of social control.

In my opinion, the evident concealment strategy in the Victorian women writers' literary works, that Gilbert and Gubar (1979) brilliantly proposed, is a part of these women's lives which is depicted in their protagonists' lives. In other words, Victorian women had to conceal their natural feelings and pretend to have different feelings, by wearing the "Angel in

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<sup>1</sup>

Twark defines Bildungsroman as, "[g]enre emerged out of the specific, repressive socio-political circumstances and fruitful philosophical and literary explorations of the late German Enlightenment period. Literary historian Karl Morgenstern, the first scholar to define the Bildungsroman at the beginning of the nineteenth century, attributes two main characteristics to the genre. First, a Bildungsroman illustrates the protagonist's growth (i.e., "Bildung") from youth to maturity or early manhood. Second, by depicting the protagonist's development, a Bildungsroman contributes also to the reader's growth more than any other novel type" (129).

the House”<sup>2</sup> mask to conform to the Victorian gender norms and escape patriarchal mental asylums or attics. In my view, by the same token, Jane Eyre, Brontë’s fictional character is pursuing two kinds of concealment strategy, in order to survive in the patriarchal society of the Victorian era. At the beginning of the novel, Jane as a child, pursues a physical concealment strategy to avoid problems, but later on as she grows older, she practices an emotional concealment strategy to conform to Victorian norms. My aim is to answer these questions; 1: How did Victorian familial, institutional, ideological, educational and marital forces affect rebellious Jane’s mental health? 2: What strategy does Jane pursue in dealing with Victorian forces, to be safe and to be considered sane? 3: How does pursuing these strategies affect her mental health? 4: Does she become emancipated from Victorian ideological fetters or does she conform to Victorian norms to avoid Victorian confinements (red room)? In order to be able to answer the above mentioned questions the socio-historical and psychological context of the novel should be considered, since the information provided by scholars’ studies in these areas illuminates both my claim and the mentioned concealment strategy.

Brontë’s depiction of madness in the female characters of the novel is closely related to the social context of the novel and Victorian women’s mental illnesses dilemma. In her book, *The Female Malady: Women Madness and English Culture 1830-1980* (1980), feminist critic Elaine Showalter, explores how cultural ideas about “appropriate” feminine behavior have shaped the definition and treatment of female insanity for 150 years. She points out that “biographies and letters of gifted women who suffered mental breakdowns have suggested that madness is the price women artists have had to pay for the exercise of their creativity in a male-dominated culture” (4). The reasons for women writers’ interest in depiction of madness in their texts, according to Goodman (1996), “has often been immediate and personal” (115).

Therefore, Brontë’s choice of her main character’s occupation as a governess (her own occupation), and Jane’s stumbling upon different characters throughout her Bildungsroman that push her towards the edge of insanity, is not coincidental and is closely related to the

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<sup>2</sup>Virginia Woolf describes the “Angel in the House” as a woman who “was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily” (*The Norton Anthology* 1218).

governess's ambiguous social status in the Victorian era that could cause them mental illnesses. Governesses, as Poovey (1989) observes, "According to both the author of the 1844 *Hints on the Modern Governess System*" and Lady Eastlake's 1847 review of the GBI<sup>3</sup>'s annual report, ...accounted for the single largest category of women in lunatic asylums" (130).

In her book, *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology* (1996), Shuttleworth points out that "social fears of an unstoppable rise in nervous disease were at their height in the mid-century [of the Victorian Era] ...and the question of how to draw the subtle dividing line between sanity and insanity received frequent press attention" (222). Moreover, Logan (1998) underlines how men in patriarchal society of the Victorian England with its patriarchal intuitions, "could deliberately invoke the masculine powers of Victorian medicine and law to disarm, discredit, and confine women who refused to suffer and be still" (149).

The link between patriarchal Victorian society and prevalent mental illnesses among Victorian women can be clarified by French philosopher Michel Foucault's definition of madness. In his book, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (1961), Foucault studies the history of "madness" in Western society. Foucault's investigation shows that different sorts of behavior have been considered madness at different times and in different societies. He also emphasizes the important role of the configurations of power, society or ideology in defining madness in a given time. In other words, madness is socially constructed; thus, in the patriarchal society of the Victorian era in which men are in power, they could define madness in general and madwomen, in particular, to establish their own sovereignty. Victorian women, being subjected to such marginalization pursued different kinds of strategies to avoid patriarchal oppressions and asylums.

While Gilbert and Gubar emphasize Victorian women writers' concealed socio-literary criticism in the Victorian era as the only escaping strategy from their confinements in patriarchal houses, other literary scholars such as Sally Shuttleworth draw our attention to yet another concealment strategy, but this time in these women's psychic realm, to escape patriarchal mental institutions. In her book, *Charlotte Brontë's Psychology* (1996), Shuttleworth draws our attention to the emergence of the new psychological theories in the nineteenth century with their emphasis on the "centrality of opposition as the defining category of selfhood" (173). She puts the emphasis on the psychological theory proposed by French psychiatrist, Jean-Étienne Dominique Esquirol.

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<sup>3</sup> The Governesses' Benevolent Institution's annual report.

According to Shuttleworth, Esquirol insists that “selfhood only emerges with the ability to conceal and in the phrenologists' grounding of self in the experience of conflict, both internal, between the faculties themselves, and external, between the self and the world” (173). Interestingly, Shuttleworth observes that “nowhere are these principles of opposition given more prominence than in a series of articles by James Ferrier<sup>4</sup> entitled 'An Introduction to the Philosophy of Consciousness', published in Brontë's favourite periodical, *Blackwood's*, 1838-9” (174). She suggests that Brontë probably read these articles and these emerging principles of nineteenth-century psychological thought could have influenced her writing. She points out that “like Esquirol, Ferrier situates selfhood and sanity in the act of masking” (174).

Considering the prevalent social fear of madness in the Victorian era in general, and the patriarchal definition of madness as female malady, in particular, it is possible to trace the influence of Esquirol's theory on Brontë's writings. Since Brontë as a woman, writer and governess in the Victorian era, belonged to the three major groups that were confined in the Victorian mental asylums, she probably also feared to be subjected to the masculine powers of the Victorian law and medicine that could define her as a madwoman and consequently, disarm and confine her. She might have come across Esquirol's theory and even practiced it herself; we are not aware of that, but in my opinion, Jane practices the mentioned concealment strategy.

Shuttleworth also suggests that Jane is concealing and suppressing her feelings, but she does not go through the details of when and why she starts to conceal her feelings, from whom she learns the mentioned concealment strategy and how pursuing this strategy affects Jane's love-life and mental health. For that reason, this essay will thoroughly discuss all these issues. I use feminist criticism in my essay (relying on studies conducted by Showalter(1996) and Gilbert & Gubar(1979) with their emphasis on gender bias depicted in the novel) as well as new-historicism (with its emphasis on historical context of the novel), relying on historical and psychological evidence provided by Shuttleworth's (1980) study of Victorian women's mental illnesses. I argue that, by being born a poor orphan girl in the Victorian era, Jane is susceptible to the Victorian madness maze. The madness maze is the symbolic term that I use to put emphasis on the patriarchal, familial, educational, institutional, ideological, educational and marital forces that cause Jane mental problems, by forcing her to conceal and/or suppress her feelings. In other words, if Jane wants to gain her autonomy, she has to overcome these

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<sup>4</sup> Scottish metaphysical writer (1808-1864).

forces and escape the madness maze by pursuing different strategies, but whether she successfully exits the Victorian madness maze or not is discussed in detail in my paper.

This essay is structured in five sections (not including introduction and conclusion), each one based on a vital stage of Jane's personality development. The first part of my paper investigates the familial forces of the Victorian era and their connection to Jane's rebelliousness and her madness in the red room at Gateshead. In this part, the physical concealment strategy of Jane is discussed. The second part of my paper explores the institutional and educational forces of the Victorian era and their connection to Jane's hysteria at Lowood institute. In this part, the cause and beginning of pursuing the emotional concealment strategy by the protagonist is discussed. The third part of my paper explores the role of class and gender bias as well as marital forces of Victorian England in connection to Jane's mental health at Thornfield. The fourth part of my paper investigates the role and impact of ideological forces acting upon the protagonist, which cause her mental distress at Moor House. The final part of my paper focuses on the reunion setting at Ferndean, where Jane, reaching the end of her Bildungsroman, should be able to exit the madness maze.

## 2. The Little Rebel's Physical Concealment Strategy at Gateshead

This chapter explores the impact and role of patriarchal and familial forces of the Victorian era in relation to Jane's mental illness. However, the focus of this chapter is mainly on Jane's relationship with her cruel aunt by marriage, Mrs. Reed, and her children at Gateshead. Moreover, Jane's physical concealment strategy to avoid problems is also discussed in detail in this chapter.

Jane's narration of her own life begins with the description of her exclusion from privileges "only intended for contented, happy little children" (Brontë 1), by her aunt Mrs. Reed. This exclusion doesn't end until her aunt:

could discover by her own observation, that [she] was endeavoring in good earnest to acquire a more sociable and childlike disposition, a more attractive and sprightly manner-- something lighter, franker, more natural. (Brontë 1)

What seems to exclude Jane from other children in the house is her lack of "sociable childlike disposition" and the "natural" expected behavior of children in the Victorian era (Brontë 1). Mrs. Reed mentions both the expected and unaccepted behavior of Jane:



Jane, I don't like cavillers or questioners; besides, there is something truly forbidding in a child taking up her elders in that manner. Be seated somewhere; and until you can speak pleasantly, remain silent. (Brontë 1)

The expected behavior, which Jane is unable to perform then, is to either speak pleasantly or be silent. Consequently, Jane has to choose between these two provided options, and she chooses to deal with her exclusion by mounting into the window-seat closing the curtains and being “shrined in double retirement” (Brontë 2), by reading a book in silence.

Thus, Jane's first strategy of dealing with problems as a child at Gateshead is to avoid them, by concealing herself to escape John's meanness (Brontë 2). However, this childish strategy works only momentarily and soon what Jane fears, that is, “interruption”, is caused by John Reed's entrance in the room (Brontë 3). John's sitting on the armchair intimating to Jane by gesture that she was to approach him, explicitly builds up a picture of a king or a tyrant, sitting on the throne ordering his slaves to come closer and receive their punishment (Brontë 4). Jane is clearly afraid of and oppressed by him:

He bullied and punished me; not two or three times in the week, nor once or twice in the day, but continually: every nerve I had feared him, and every morsel of flesh in my bones shrank when he came near. (Brontë 4)

Consequently, John has a vital impact on shaping the foundation of Jane's personality, as Jane is habitually obedient and “[a]ccustomed to John Reed's abuse, [she] never had an idea of replying to it” (Brontë 5). However, when John flung the volume and hit Jane, her “terror had passed its climax; other feelings succeeded” and she exclaims: “Wicked and cruel boy!... You are like a murderer--you are like a slave-driver--you are like the Roman emperors!” (Brontë 5-6). At this moment, Jane, due to two important reasons, rebels against John's tyranny. Firstly, she is still a child and has not yet fully adapted to the Victorian norms and convention. Therefore, she is not aware of the fact that deviating from society's norms results in her punishments. Secondly, Jane's forbearance of John's meanness for a long time has weakened her nerves and she is unable to control her rage anymore. Consequently, Jane for the first time, facing the first Victorian tyrant of her life, stands up for herself:

I really saw in him a tyrant, a murderer. I felt a drop or two of blood from my head trickle down my neck, and was sensible of somewhat pungent suffering: these sensations for the time predominated over fear, and I received him in frantic sort. (Brontë 6)

Jane's act on impulse in facing the tyranny based on Victorian norms and conventions is not tolerable by those around her. Hence, her natural reaction to John's abuse is considered by maids as “a picture of passion” (Brontë 6). Passion in this context is similar to madness and

has a negative connotation that is associated with “strong and barely controllable emotion”<sup>5</sup>. A passionate child then must be imprisoned. For Jane, the punishment is to be locked in the red room. The more she struggles to avoid the unjust punishment and gain her autonomy, the more she resembles a mad child. Dragging her to the red room, Bessie calls her “a mad cat” (Brontë 7). When maids thrust her upon a stool she says, “[m]y impulse was to rise from it like a spring; their two pair of hands arrested me instantly” (Brontë 7), but Bessie warns her “If you don't sit still, you must be tied down” (Brontë 7). Jane at this point is being treated exactly like a mental asylum's inmate so that her emancipation depends on her total submission.

Thus far, desperation and submission are the result of Jane's failed physical concealment strategy as well as her act on impulse. Therefore, she has to surrender when the maids want to tie her to a stool by their garters and she does so, by saying “Don't take them off...I will not stir” (Brontë 7). Noticeably, the maids who are clearly conforming to Victorian England pre-defined roles for women are not accustomed to such behavior as Jane's. Therefore, they begin to scrutinize her behavior: Miss Abbot is “incredulous of [Jane's] sanity” and, Bessie says, “She never did so before”, and Abigail replies “But it was always in her...I never saw a girl of her age with so much cover” (Brontë 8). In my opinion, Miss Abbot is doubtful about Jane's sanity, because Jane faced her fear of John and reacted to his abuse. Therefore, based on Miss Abbot's judgment, being sane equals passiveness toward injustices, at least for a girl like Jane. Abigail, though, claims that she always knew that Jane is a girl “with so much cover” (Brontë 8). What has been covered, however, is Jane's suppressed rage toward tyranny. Eventually, before the maids leave the room and lock Jane inside it they remind Jane of her inferiority to and obligation towards the Reed family. Moreover, they advise her to be more pleasant, not to be “passionate” and to “repent” if she wants to get out of, or not to end up, in the red room again (Brontë 8). The significance of the maid's advice to Jane chiefly lies behind their complicity in dictating the patriarchal ideology to Jane. In other words, if Jane wants to be considered sane and not to be imprisoned, she must act in a way that pleases the Reed family. Jane's inability to be silent in facing John's tyranny makes her a mad and passionate girl in the house members' viewpoint. On the other hand, John who “twisted the necks of the pigeons, killed the little pea-chicks, set the dogs at the sheep, stripped the hothouse vines of their fruit, and broke the buds off the choicest plants in the conservatory” is not considered as a mad child (Brontë 10-11).

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<sup>5</sup> *Online*. Oxford Dictionary University Press, June 2017. Web.

Imprisoned in the red room Jane reflects on these injustices. Moreover, her description of the red room, which once belonged to her deceased uncle, as a “chill room” which “seldom had fire” in it, “away from the nursery” where children belonged, and “kitchen” where women belonged (Brontë 9), builds up a picture of a patriarchal confinement that causes Jane’s hysteria. At this moment, the Victorian patriarchal oppressions push Jane towards the edge of madness: she says “Unjust! --unjust!”, and looks for a way in which she could “escape from insupportable oppression--as running away, or, if that could not be effected, never eating or drinking more, and letting myself die” (Brontë 11). Thus, the unjust punishment affects Jane’s mental health immensely and once the daylight begins to leave the red room, her rebelliousness completely gives way to fear and hysteria:

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, which I deemed the rushing of wings; something seemed near me; I was oppressed, suffocated: endurance broke down; I rushed to the door and shook the lock in desperate effort. (Brontë 13)

At this moment, Jane’s expression of her oppression, suffocation and mental break down, brings to mind Gilbert and Gubar’s (1979) Imprisonment theory. Their study of Victorian women artists suggests that “both in life and in art [the subjects of their study were] literally and figuratively confined” (xi). They suggest that the main theme of Victorian women writers’ literary works is about their “imprisonment” and “escape” (xi). They point out these literary women were “enclosed in the architecture of an overwhelmingly male-dominated society” (xi). Thus, Jane’s imprisonment in the red room, which signifies the Victorian patriarchal confinements, stands for all Victorian women’s oppressions. Jane, like Victorian women writers who channeled their anger into concealed literary criticism, needs to find another strategy to face injustices that does not stigmatize her as a mad child and/or result in her imprisonment. In reasoning with herself she says:

I would fain exercise some better faculty than that of fierce speaking; fain find nourishment for some less fiendish feeling than that of sombre indignation... whispering to myself over and over again, "What shall I do? --what shall I do? (Brontë 39)

Henceforth, Jane looks for the answer to this question which results in pursuing an emotional concealment strategy which is the focus of the next chapter.

### 3. “Little Untaught Girl”: Silence and Orders at Lowood Institute

In this chapter the disruptive role of the Victorian institutional forces in relation to Jane’s mental health is discussed. The Lowood institute, with its emphasis on inmates’ unquestioning obedience can be seen as an archetypal of all Victorian institutional forces. Jane and other inmates of Lowood have no other choice than to obey Mr. Brocklehurst’s Evangelical orders. Consequently, the more time they spend at Lowood institute the more its ideology becomes internalized in them. Therefore, Lowood institute’s oppressive orders make its inmates passive and forces them to either totally conform to its ideology or to conceal and suppress their feelings as a survival strategy which, consequently, may become the cause of mental problems. As mentioned in the previous chapter Jane knows that her rebelliousness and physical concealment strategy are not practical anymore, so she seeks to find a new and “less fiendish feeling than that of sombre indignation” (Brontë 39), which she learns at Lowood institute and is discussed in this chapter.

From the moment when Jane starts living at the institute, her description of its classroom and daily routines provides an overview of an oppressive institution:

Again the bell rang: all formed in file, two and two, and in that order descended the stairs and entered the cold and dimly lit schoolroom: here prayers were read by Miss Miller; afterwards she called out-- Form classes!..A great tumult succeeded for some minutes, during which Miss Miller repeatedly exclaimed, “Silence!” and “Order!” (Brontë 47)

Jane mentions the use of the words silence and order from the institute’s teachers frequently. While silence is a familiar word to Jane, since her aunt always demanded her to either be silent or behave pleasantly, here in the institute the silence is accompanied by Evangelical orders. Thus far, Jane has proved to be a rebellious girl unfit for the Reed family’s principles. However, now that she lives in the institute where the main purpose according to Mr. Brocklehurst is “best to mortify in [inmates] the worldly sentiment of pride” she is not able to rebel against tyranny once again (Brontë 34). Therefore, she has to find a new strategy to deal with problems. Helen Burns is Jane’s only friend in the institute and since she, unlike Jane, is able to tolerate injustices in silence, she has a significant influence on Jane’s choice of survival strategy. For instance, Jane observes that when Miss Scatcherd asks Helen to stand in the middle of the schoolroom as a punishment, she “neither wept nor blushed: composed, though grave, she stood, the central mark of all eyes” (Brontë 55). Although the punishment

seems to Jane “in a high degree ignominious, especially for so great a girl...” and she expects Helen to show “signs of great distress and shame, unexpectedly, she endures her punishment in silence” (Brontë 55). At this turning point in Jane’s life, Jane wonders “[h]ow can [Helen] bear it so quietly--so firmly?” (Brontë 56). Helen’s tolerance and silence in the face of injustice is the personal trait that Jane lacks, and she wonders why “Burns made no answer: I wondered at her silence” (Brontë 58). In my opinion, from this point on, Jane, under the influence of Helen “find[s] nourishment for some less fiendish feeling than that of sombre indignation” and learns to pursue her emotional concealment as a survival strategy. Therefore, she begins her conformity to the gender and religious norms of the Victorian era, dictated by the institution’s teachers (Brontë 39).

Helen is the manifestation of the “Angel in the House” and Evangelical unworldliness. The description of the “Angel in the House” by Virginia Woolf in her essay, *Professions for Women* (1931), perfectly suits her character’s traits:

She was utterly unselfish... She sacrificed herself daily...in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all--I need not say it--she was pure. Her purity was supposed to be her chief beauty--her blushes, her great grace. (*The Norton Anthology* 1218)

Such characteristics, for instance, are evident, when Jane expresses her disapproval of the institution’s silence and order policy to Helen, “I cannot bear to be subjected to systematic arrangements” (Brontë 61), and she replies “[y]ou will change your mind, I hope, when you grow older: as yet you are but a little untaught girl” (Brontë 63). Indeed, an untaught girl like Jane, at a Victorian institution like Lowood would eventually learn to conform to Victorian norms. However, at this stage where Jane is still a newcomer in the institute, she objects that “I must dislike those who, whatever I do to please them, persist in disliking me; I must resist those who punish me unjustly” (Brontë 63). But Helen has already been shaped by the school’s rigid orders replies “Heathens and savage tribes hold that doctrine, but Christians and civilised nations disown it” (Brontë 63).

Helen’s response, at this point, is very crucial to understanding the definition of madness in Victorian England as well as in the novel: the word savage throughout the novel is connected to rebelliousness. For instance, Bertha, Rochester’s wife is frequently called savage by Mr. Rochester throughout the novel, when he describes her deviation from accepted norms. Moreover, Jane also is called “the savage, beautiful creature!” by Rochester, when she refuses to stay at Thornfield and become his mistress (Brontë 383). Considering the mentioned usage of the word *savage* throughout the novel and its relationship to women’s

rebelliousness as well as Helen's emphasis that resisting and disliking those who punish Jane unjustly is the doctrine of savage tribes, one can speculate that Bertha's fate (who grew up in Spanish Town, not Victorian England) is also the result of her disobedience of Rochester and intolerance of injustice.

As a final point, as Helen mentioned growing up at Lowood institute, a manifestation of Victorian patriarchal institutional forces, changes Jane. Jane's new strategy in facing tyranny from this moment on is concealment of her natural feelings. She pursues this new strategy to avoid public humiliation and red rooms (or Victorian attics that Bertha, the savage inhabits). The evident proof of this new strategy can be observed when Jane encounters Mr. Brocklehurst in the institute and wants to avoid him. Interestingly, at first she tries to use her old strategy, her physical concealment, she says: "I had sat well back on the form, and while seeming to be busy with my sum, had held my slate in such a manner as to conceal my face: I might have escaped notice" (Brontë 73). However, when the treacherous slate falls from her hand (Brontë 73), her physical concealment strategy fails, and she has no other way than pursuing the emotional concealment strategy. At this crucial point, when Mr. Brocklehurst humiliates Jane in public, she, like Helen, endures the punishment in silence. However, unlike Helen, she still criticizes herself and says:

There was I, then, mounted aloft; I, who had said I could not bear the shame of standing on my natural feet in the middle of the room, was now exposed to general view on a pedestal of infamy... I mastered the rising hysteria, lifted up my head, and took a firm stand on the stool. (Brontë 76)

In conclusion, Lowood Institute's emphasis on silence and orders successfully mortifies the sentiment of pride in Jane and makes her conceal and suppress her rage which consequently causes the rising of hysteria, when she emphasizes that she was "again crushed and trodden on" and wonders if she could ever "rise more?" (Brontë 77). Whether rebellious Jane who is now unable to fight Victorian institutional forces endures tyranny in silence or will rise and rebel against tyranny again is the focus of the next chapter.

#### **4. Governess or Mad Bride-to-be at Thornfield Hall**

To further understand how Victorian cultural norms and conventions could define Jane's position in the society in general, and delimit her natural feelings and rebelliousness against tyranny as mental maladies in order to confine and marginalize her, in particular, this chapter explores the idea of how Victorian patriarchal marriage institution, as well as class and gender bias affect Jane's mental serenity. Building on from the idea that Jane learns to exercise the

emotional concealment strategy at Lowood institute, this chapter mainly focuses on Jane as a governess at Thornfield, where she tries to hide her feelings for Mr. Rochester to conform to Victorian women's gender and class norms. Moreover, Mr. Rochester's behavior towards Jane, his internalized patriarchal ideology and account of an ideal wife, which reveals the truth behind both Bertha's and Jane's mental dilemmas, is discussed in this chapter.

During the Victorian era in addition to industrialization and urban growth there was growth in mental disorders among Victorian women, especially governesses. According to Peterson (1972) the prevalence of mental illnesses among governesses was due to their "status incongruence" that is, their ambiguous social status (13). As a result, as Harriet Martineau points out, "governesses formed one of the largest single occupational groups to be found in insane asylums" (Peterson 13). Evidently, Jane as a governess also suffers from her ambiguous social status. For instance, when Jane meets Mr. Rochester for the first time, he cannot distinguish Jane's social class and occupation from her countenance:

He ran his eye over [Jane's] dress, which, as usual, was quite simple: a black merino cloak, a black beaver bonnet; neither of them half fine enough for a lady's-maid. He seemed puzzled to decide what [Jane] was. (Brontë 135)

At this point, *who* Jane is or as she states, *what* she is, subtly indicates a governess' ambiguous position in the Victorian society in England. The governess, as Poovey (1989) points out, bears two of the most significant Victorian representations of woman. The first is "the figure who epitomized the domestic ideal", and the second one, "the figure who threatened to destroy it" (127). She argues that "[t]he governess was like the middle-class mother in the work she performed", but at the same time like "both a working-class woman and man in the wages she received" (127). Interestingly, however, "the very figure who theoretically should have defended the naturalness of separate spheres threatened to collapse the difference between them" (127).

Jane at Thornfield suffers from the same ambiguous social status: she performs a middle class mother-like responsibility for little Adèle, while she is not a member of the family and belongs to the working-class. Therefore, most of Jane's mental anguish, her constant change of mood and concealment of her feelings at Thornfield Hall is the result of her undefined position in the Victorian society.

In addition to Jane's ambiguous social status, Lowood institute's rigid ideologies which to some extent have become internalized in her also exacerbate her mental distress. At Thornfield, she hides her feelings to conform to the governess' social class and gender norms and wonders if she could have a bright future with Mr. Rochester beyond the Victorian

cultural boundaries. For instance, at their first meeting at Thornfield Hall, Mr. Rochester knows that Jane is trying to hide something behind her pale face and rational answers, and is even eager to know what is hidden behind Jane's mask. Therefore, he asks Jane "not to draw her chair farther off" and to sit down exactly where he placed it in order to be able to read Jane's countenance (Brontë 153). As a result, Jane, who is now pursuing the concealment strategy, feels exposed and irritated and says "I did as I was bid, though I would much rather have remained somewhat in the shade" (Brontë 154).

Consequently, Mr. Rochester's curiosity about Jane's hidden feelings, on the one hand, and the fact that for the first time in Jane's life Rochester asks her "to consent to dispense with a great many conventional forms and phrases" (Brontë 159), and not to be silent and "speak" (Brontë 157), on the other hand, make Jane fall in love with him. However, the dichotomy between what the real world offers a working class governess and what she desires causes a perpetual battle between reason and desire in Jane's psyche:

Reason having come forward and told, in her own quiet way a plain, unvarnished tale, showing how I had rejected the real, and rabidly devoured the ideal;--I pronounced judgment to this effect:--( Brontë 190).

Interestingly, however, "reason"<sup>6</sup> which is a word that has long been associated with masculinity and attributed masculine qualities proclaims Victorian women's accepted gender norms and reminds Jane of her inferiority. The *reason* in this context embodies all do's and don'ts that defined a sane and virtuous Victorian woman. Jane is trapped between her feelings and pre-defined reasonable, sensible, natural and sane behavior of women in the Victorian era and regards her own feeling as "accursed senselessness" (Brontë 190). She even believes refusing to comply with this expected behavior is madness or results in being mad:

It does good to no woman to be flattered by her superior, who cannot possibly intend to marry her; and it is madness in all women to let a secret love kindle within them, which, if unreturned and unknown, must devour the life that feeds it; and, if discovered and responded to, must lead, *ignis-fatus*-like, into miry wilds whence there is no extrication. (Brontë 190)

As Shuttleworth (1996) points out, "[s]ocial conformity thus became an index of sanity; the only measure available to the individual fearful of his or her own normality would be a willing obedience to designated social roles" (35).

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<sup>6</sup> Touaf remarks, "The language learned reflects a binary logic that opposes such terms as active/passive, masculine/feminine, sun/moon, ... phallus/vagina, reason/emotion. Because this logic tends to group with masculinity such qualities as light, thought, and activity, French feminists said that the structure of language is phallogocentric: it privileges the phallus and, more generally, masculinity by associating them with things and values more appreciated by the (masculine-dominated) culture" (81).



Consequently, Jane's concealment of her feelings to conform to social norms leaves Mr. Rochester no solution other than to disguise as a gipsy woman in order to find out what is really going on under Jane's plain mask. While disguised in gipsy costume, Mr. Rochester tells Jane that "[y]ou are cold; you are sick; and you are silly" (Brontë 234), and Jane asks the gipsy to prove it. Interestingly, the gipsy's answer uncovers all aspects of Jane's character:

You are cold, because you are alone: no contact strikes the fire from you that is in you. You are sick; because the best of feelings, the highest and the sweetest given to man, keeps far away from you. You are silly, because, suffer as you may, you will not beckon it to approach, nor will you stir one step to meet it where it waits you. (Brontë 234)

Rochester cunningly alludes to the hidden fire of love within Jane. Moreover, he points to Jane's sickness, that is, her tendency to suffer but not to express her feelings and her silliness in concealing them. He also suggests a remedy for her sickness and says, "[i]t depends on yourself to stretch out your hand, and take it up; but whether you will do so, is the problem" (Brontë 238).

Thus, Jane's unmasking is a cure for her sickness: by reaching out and expressing her feelings towards Rochester, she heals. Interestingly, Rochester finishes his reading of Jane by saying: "Rise, Miss Eyre: leave me; the play is played out" (Brontë 240); hence, the play that Rochester refers to is Jane's concealment of her feelings like an actress. Rochester's reading of Jane's inward world is so true and detailed that Jane feels as if someone is speaking out her mind and considers it as "the speech of [her] own tongue" (Brontë 240).

Still, thus far, Rochester seems Byronically to encourage Jane to stop suppressing her emotion and remove her plain mask, but from the moment Jane consents to marry him, he begins to suppress Jane by his internalized patriarchal ideology, which clearly shows different dimensions of his character. This aspect of Rochester's character is evident when he, after a long period of mind-playing games, finally asks Jane to marry him and Jane asks him "are you not capricious, sir?" (Brontë 312), and he replies:

To women who please me only by their faces, I am the very devil when I find out they have neither souls nor hearts--when they open to me a perspective of flatness, triviality, and perhaps imbecility, coarseness, and ill-temper: but to the clear eye and eloquent tongue, to the soul made of fire, and the character that bends but does not break--at once supple and stable, tractable and consistent--I am ever tender and true. (Brontë 312)

At this point, Rochester's description of his ideal wife reveals the oppressive characteristic of the Victorian marriage institution, as well as Bertha's unfortunate fate. Rochester declares that he is "the very devil" to women, who are beautiful but not compassionate. He wants a wife

who bows to his desires, but not totally submits, whose soul is made of fire, but her language charming and calm. Therefore, Bertha does not fit his standards, because she was beautiful but coarse and was not able to charm Rochester by her language. Blanche also does not fit Rochester's standards, since she is beautiful but not compassionate.

Thus, by paying attention to these qualities of Rochester's ideal wife, which Jane calls Rochester's "difficult standard" (Brontë 312), one could assume Bertha is considered to be mad because she could not or preferred not to meet Rochester's difficult expectations, as Stein (1983) remarks, "The label of insanity has frequently been ascribed to women who fail to perform housewives' tasks, or who deviate from the 'average' norms of expected behavior" (125). Remarkably, the more Jane tries to claim her autonomy and not to yield to Rochester's sexual desires until their wedding day, the more his description of Jane resembles that of Bertha: while Bertha is "the savage witch", Jane is "the changeling" (Brontë 328).

Bertha, by her appearance in Jane's room before the wedding ceremony, tearing "the veil... from top to bottom in two halves!" tries to both warn and guide Jane (Brontë 342). Firstly, by standing in front of a mirror, where Jane is also able to see her own reflection, she warns Jane of what would become of her if she marries Mr. Rochester. Secondly, by tearing the bridal veil, she encourages Jane to remove her mask and stop pleasing Rochester and see his true color. However, her warnings are in vain, since when Jane describes Bertha's appearance in her room Rochester persuades her that it was "[t]he creature of [Jane's]over-stimulated brain" (Brontë 342). Interestingly, Rochester who accuses his first wife of being mad is now accusing her bride-to-be of having "mental terrors" (Brontë 342), to keep Bertha's existence as a secret.

Furthermore, Rochester's rationalization of Bertha's madness for Jane, when she finally gets to know about Bertha's existence, raises a question about whether Bertha is actually mad or became mad by marrying Rochester, "Bertha Mason is mad; and she came of a mad family; idiots and maniacs through three generations! Her mother, the Creole, was both a madwoman and a drunkard!" (Brontë 351). Rochester's emphasis on Bertha's being a Creole (otherness) and coming from a mad family can be clarified by the emergence of the Darwinian psychiatric theories of the heredity of madness which was dominant during the Victorian era, according to Showalter:

Following Darwin's theories of inheritance, evolution, and degeneration, an emerging psychiatric Darwinism viewed insanity as the product of organic defect, poor heredity, and an evil environment... The vigilance of these doctors extended not only to those tainted by class origins and moral weakness, but also to women. (18)

To sum up, Jane's internalized Lowood principles, her ambiguous social status and her forbidden love for Rochester, on the one hand, and Rochester's internalized Victorian tyranny, his account of an ideal wife and keeping his wife's existence as a secret, on the other hand, make Jane cling to "the law given by God; sanctioned by man" (Brontë 382), (Lowood's rigid principle) as a remedy to feel sane based on what sanity means in the Victorian era:

I will respect myself. I will keep the law given by God; sanctioned by man. I will hold to the principles received by me when I was sane, and not mad--as I am now...Laws and principles are not for the times when there is no temptation: They have a worth--so I have always believed; and if I cannot believe it now, it is because I am insane--quite insane. (Brontë 382)

At this moment Jane judging her own sanity based on Victorian norms and ideology, considers herself mad now because she has reached the border of Victorian norms, where she either has to cross the border and free herself or to suppress and conceal her feelings to conform to them. According to Griesinger (2008), Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is one of the key literary works that portrays women's "anger at being treated as sexual objects in the marriage market, and, paradoxically, their overwhelming desire to love and be loved by men with whom they can never be equal" (30). Similarly, Godfrey (2005) agrees that between the partners of the novel's marriage plot "Jane's roles as a governess and as girl bride associate her with complex and often contradictory notions of androgyny and femininity, sexuality and innocence" (854). Thus, Jane's marriage dilemma and her ambiguous social status as a governess, as well as Bertha's unfortunate fate explicitly show how the Victorian marriage institution, as well as social norms, cause the Jane mental distress and define her natural feelings as mental disorders to control and suppress her.

## **5. Missionary Wife or Heretic at Moor House**

This chapter explores the role and impact of religion and patriarchal ideology on Jane's mental health. Women's nature and femininity for long have been considered as what makes them liable to insanity and religion is considered to be the remedy for women's destructive desires. Eve is the stereotype of the fallen woman whose destructive desire resulted in her punishment, that is, her subordination and marginalization. The punishment of Eve based on Genesis (3:16) is:

Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; In sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; And thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over. (*The Book of Genesis* 4)

Hence, Eve's punishment proves how strongly entwined religion is with the discourse on women's nature and desire, which accordingly rationalizes the quashing of their natural desires by ideological forces.

In the same way, Victorian women's deviance from Victorian social norms could lead to them being labelled as madwomen or *heretics*, which consequently rationalizes their confinement and/or marginalization. Thus, the constant ambiguity between desire, guilt and sanity has always been present in Victorian women's lives. Jane, at Moor House, also experiences this ambiguous feeling. Jane is in doubt whether she should fulfill her desires (for Rochester) or suppress them and stop feeling guilty and this causes her mental anguish. Jane finds the remedy for her mental anguish in adhering to "the law given by God; sanctioned by man" (Brontë 382). Consequently, Jane, under the influence of St. John, who to some extent has similar, but more radical religious beliefs than Jane, becomes liable to completely lose her own identity and to become a religious fanatic like him. Yet, she experiences a moment of epiphany when she realizes how similar her own suppressive behavior is to St. John's that changes Jane's fate entirely, which is discussed thoroughly in this chapter.

From the day that Jane starts to live at Moor House, the more we learn about St. John's personality the more it resembles Jane's. Interestingly, St. John himself is the first one who observes these similarities, when he offers Jane a village-schoolmistress position and finds in Jane's nature "an alloy as detrimental to repose as that in [his], though of a different kind" (Brontë 428). Moreover, the same inner dichotomy between passion and reason, sense and sensibility and self-suppression and self-expression is evident in St. John's behavior. For instance, similar to Jane "[r]eason, and not feeling, is [his] guide" (Brontë 453). Therefore, St. John, like Jane, who admires her beloved Rochester, but decided to leave him for God and principle's sake, also suppresses his feelings for his beloved Rosamond whom he describes: "the eye is well managed: the colour, light, expression, are perfect. It smiles" (Brontë 449).

Jane observes St. John is "preparing some iron blow of contradiction, or forging a fresh chain to fetter [his] heart" (Brontë 450), and believes that St. John "with all his firmness and self-control, tasks himself too far: locks every feeling and pang within--expresses, confesses, and imparts nothing" (Brontë 448). However, Jane does not realize that her behavior is quite like St. John's who gives a little space "to delirium and delusion" (Brontë 451), and will not relinquish his missionary duties for Rosamond. Therefore, St. John's strategy of self-control quite clearly resembles Jane's strategy of self-control, where both tend to fetter their heart by suppressing their natural desire and clinging to religious principles as a remedy for their mental anguish. All these similarities, however, are apparent to the readers,

but not to Jane herself. More importantly, the above-mentioned personality traits of St. John make Jane fear him and she wonders “If he were insane, however, his was a very cool and collected insanity” (Brontë 456). However, the insane qualities that Jane sees in St. John’s character are her own which she is not aware of. Hence, these similarities and Jane’s tendency to suppress and conceal her desires by clinging to religion give St. John an opportunity to use the Evangelical ideology to influence and manipulate Jane’s mind for the missionary-wife plan that he has in mind for her, which threatens Jane’s autonomy and mental serenity:

By degrees, he acquired a certain influence over me that took away my liberty of mind: ... I could no longer talk or laugh freely when he was by, because a tiresomely importunate instinct reminded me that vivacity (at least in me) was distasteful to him. I fell under a freezing spell.

When he said “go,” I went; “come,” I came; “do this,” I did it. (Brontë 481)

Furthermore, another significant passage in the novel that shows how powerfully ideological forces could influence women’s mental and social condition is when St. John, disappointed by Jane’s rejection, explicitly uses a verse of a psalm to warn Jane, who is a zealous Christian, of her doomed fate if she refuses to become his missionary wife:

He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.

But... the fearful, the unbelieving shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death. (Brontë 504)

From this moment on, Jane actually becomes mesmerized by St. John’s prayer and says “I was touched by it, and at last awed. He felt the greatness and goodness of his purpose so sincerely: others who heard him plead for it, could not but feel it too” (Brontë 504). Significantly, Jane, who thus far kept rejecting St. John’s marriage proposal, is now liable to lose her own identity and “cease struggling with him--to rush down the torrent of his will into the gulf of his existence, and there lose [her] own” (Brontë 505).

Moreover, St. John even plays the heresy card to justify his plan for Jane and persuade her that if she does not consent to be his missionary wife she “should be numbered with those who have denied the faith, and are worse than infidels!” (Brontë 494). Consequently, under ideological force and rigid instructions, Jane feels as if “a cankering evil sat at [her] heart and drained [her] happiness at its source--the evil of suspense” (Brontë 482). Eventually, Jane by seeing the similarities between her own behavior and St. John’s suppressive and rigid behavior realizes her own character’s flaw. In other words, St. John like a mirror reflects the suppressive qualities in Jane’s behavior that she was not aware of until now:

I know no medium: I never in my life have known any medium in my dealings with positive, hard characters, antagonistic to my own, between absolute submission and determined revolt. (Brontë 484)

At this moment, Jane has an epiphany, when she realizes she was either too passive by hiding behind the concealment mask and repressing her feelings like St. John or too rebellious. As a result of this moment of epiphany, Jane's suppressed feelings find an outlet and she hears Mr. Rochester's voice crying "Jane, Jane, Jane" (Brontë 507), which brings Jane to her sense again, as if under the influence of St. John and his Evangelical tyranny, she was in the long state of trance, which made her passive, submissive and depressed. Jane calls this moment of epiphany "the work of nature" and it truly is, because as she says "it acted on my senses as if their utmost activity hitherto had been but torpor, from which they were now summoned and forced to wake" (Brontë 505). She declares that now "It was [her] time to assume ascendancy. [Her] powers were in play and in force", she demands St. John to "forbear question or remark; [she] desired him to leave [her]: ... [And] He obeyed at once" (Brontë 507). As soon as Jane stops her own suppression, she gains back her autonomy and says "[w]here there is energy to command well enough, obedience never fails" (Brontë 508).

To sum up, the missionary-wife qualities that St. John sees in Jane are the manifestation of Lowood institute's principles in her behavior; that is, her tendency to suppress the desire of the flesh by adhering to God's Law. Hence, by paying special attention to the depiction of the negative and positive impact of the Evangelical movement on Victorian women's lives in the novel, as Griesinger (2008) points out, "Jane Eyre raises awareness of the wrongs done to women when men of faith forget or fail to put into practice the liberating potential of the Christian gospel" (36). Evangelicalism in the Victorian period, according to Griesinger "had unique possibilities for liberating and empowering women [mainly due to its] emphasis on a private and independent, personal relationship with God and its belief that men and women were equally called and gifted for works of service and love in the kingdom of God" (36). In particular, Evangelical worships that, according to Griesinger, "evoked strong physical and emotional response in men as well as women, theoretically opened a way to get beyond gender stereotypes in the church and in society generally" (36). On the one hand, Evangelicalism as Hempton argues, "opened up new opportunities for women", but on the other hand, it "constructed ideologies to keep them in their place [at home as traditional housewives]" (197). Thus, Brontë's use of religious themes in the novel could be considered as an attempt to challenge the moral standards of patriarchal society of Victorian England,

when individuals use ideological power to manipulate and marginalize women, who refused to submit to tyranny, to achieve their own goal.

## 6. Mr. Rochester's Wife's Fate at Ferndean

This final chapter explores the idea of whether rebellious Jane, who now has a degree of mental clarity and emotional stability, is able to completely free herself from the Victorian ideological fetters, that all along her journey through the Victorian women's madness maze caused her mental anguish and emotional distress, and live happily ever after with Mr. Rochester.

During this final chapter of Jane's Bildungsroman, when Jane thinks of coming back to Thornfield Hall, she clearly shows some awareness of her suppressive behavior by mentioning the word "monitor" in the below passage:

Your master himself may be beyond the British Channel, for aught you know: and then, if he is at Thornfield Hall, towards which you hasten, who besides him is there? His lunatic wife: and you have nothing to do with him: you dare not speak to him or seek his presence. You have lost your labour--you had better go no farther, "urged the monitor." (Brontë 512)

However, my argument is that Jane's suppressive behavior will not change overnight and she is liable to relapse into her old suppressive habits. For instance, the monitor which is the remnants of her old repressive behavior still exists in her psyche. Although Jane is now aware of the monitor's existence and pursues her journey to Thornfield, the monitor's suggestion still seems "sensible" to her (Brontë 512). Moreover, from the very moment of her reunion with Rochester, it becomes clear how patriarchal ideology is internalized in Jane. For instance, when Rochester is not able to see Jane with his sightless eyes and hears her voice and says "[w]hat sweet madness has seized me?" Jane replies, "[n]o delusion--no madness: your mind, sir, is too strong for delusion, your health too sound for frenzy" (Brontë 525). Interestingly, Jane considers Rochester's mind "[t]oo strong for delusion" (Brontë 525), while Rochester frequently accused Jane of being mad and made her believe that she was delusional, when she saw Bertha in her room. Showalter (1980) argues madness in the Victorian era was considered to be a female malady:

Most significantly, in England the differences in the perception of madness as it appeared in men and women stand out with particular clarity. Alongside the English malady, nineteenth-century psychiatry described a female malady. Even when both men and women had similar symptoms of mental disorder, psychiatry differentiated between an English malady, associated with the intellectual and economic pressures on highly civilized men, and a female malady,

associated with the sexuality and essential nature of women. Women were believed to be more vulnerable to insanity than men, to experience it in specifically feminine ways, and to be differently affected by it in the conduct of their lives. (7)

By the same token, both Bertha and Jane are considered mad in the novel: Bertha's madness is associated with her excessive sexual desire and Jane's with excessive emotional outbursts whenever her nerves failed to endure Victorian tyranny, injustice and ideological forces.

Furthermore, Jane's contradictory description of St. John's personality also reveals the risk that Jane is prone to fall back to the same old repressive life pattern. While at Moor House, she emphasizes St. John's oppressive behavior that "took away [her] liberty of mind" (Brontë 481), at Ferndean, she describes him as a man who "talks little, what he does say is ever to the point. His brain is first-rate "and she considers his manners "calm, and gentlemanlike" (Brontë 534). Remarkably, Jane once abhorred St. John's first-mentioned character trait and now praises the latter one. In addition, her plans for little Adèle seem like Mrs. Reed, when she sends her, who now like Jane looks "pale and thin", to a new school where "a sound English education corrected in a great measure her French defects; and when she left school, [she] found in her a pleasing and obliging companion: docile, good-tempered, and well-principled" (Brontë 545). The above passage provides the evidence that Jane has actually relapsed into the same repressive behavioural pattern and mental state. Since she wants the English education system to turn Adèle into a docile, well-principled and pleasing girl who conforms to Victorian predefined rules for women, Jane's plan for Adèle quite resembles Mr. Brocklehurst's rigid plan for Lowood's inmates; that is, "to mortify in [inmates] the worldly sentiment of pride" (Brontë 34).

In my opinion, the fact that Rochester is getting his eyesight back also has an important role in Jane's relapse into her old behaviour, since it was his blindness which once "drew [them] so very near--that knit [them] so very close" (Brontë 546). Thus, by getting his eye-sight back, Rochester might start to behave in the same way that once made his first wife mad and he might as well make his second wife mad. This argument, though, does not seem so strong as Jane claims that she is happily married, but in my opinion Jane's narration of her feelings towards men in her life is not to be trusted; as I mentioned previously her description of her feelings towards St. John is quite ambiguous, which demands detailed investigations that is beyond the scope of this paper.

As a final point, the last lines of the novel also support my point that Jane is not fully emancipated, since the novel ends with self-denial rather than a description of a happy



husband and autonomous wife who live happily with their child, when Jane admires St. John's selflessness:

[St. John] is the exaction of the apostle, who speaks but for Christ, when he says—"Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me." (Brontë 548)

Hence, this ending suggests that Jane cannot free herself from Victorian ideological fetters since social forces in the Victorian era are much stronger than Jane's will. Moreover, these ideologies have become so internalized in Jane that although she momentarily becomes aware of them and changes her behaviour, she cannot help herself and falls back into the same repressive habits again.

## 7. Conclusion

In this paper I have focused on the psychological aspects of the Victorian women's lives depicted in *Jane Eyre* to show how socially constructed definitions of madness in the patriarchal society of Victorian England defines Jane's natural feelings and rebelliousness against tyranny as madness.

While literary scholars mostly have focused on the depiction of the emancipation of Jane, a rebellious orphan child in the Victorian era, my aim in writing this essay was to shed light on different aspects of the protagonist's life; that is, her tendency to suppress and conceal her feelings by performing her gender role as an attempt to be considered a sane and virtuous woman based on the social, ideological and marital norms of Victorian England. My analysis of Jane's journey through the Victorian madness maze answers my research questions concerning 1: How Victorian forces affected rebellious Jane's mental health. 2: The strategies Jane pursues in order to be safe and to be considered sane in dealing with Victorian forces. 3: How pursuing these strategies affect her mental health. 4: whether she is emancipated from Victorian ideological fetters or conforms to Victorian gender, ideological and marital norms.

Firstly, my analysis of Jane's childhood at Gateshead provides evidence that the familial and patriarchal forces of the Victorian era cause Jane, who does not know anything about Victorian predefined roles for a woman, hysteria during her punishment in the red room. Moreover, my analysis of Mrs. Reed's and the maids' attitude toward Jane shows how internalized patriarchal ideology makes Victorian women force the same degrading rules on other women, mostly from the lower social position, such as children and maids.

Secondly, my analysis provides evidence that Jane's sanity and chastity in the novel was measured based on her conformity to the Victorian familial, social, institutional and

ideological norm. Therefore, she had no other choice than pursuing concealment strategies or conformity in order to be considered a sane and virtuous woman in Victorian England which consequently jeopardizes her love-life and mental health.

Thirdly, my analysis of Rochester's mind-playing games and suppressive behavior as well as his description of a perfect Victorian wife reveals the oppressive role of the Victorian marriage institution. Bertha's deviation from the Victorian norms and her inability to perform housewives' tasks stigmatizes her as a madwoman in the novel. Jane, on the other hand, has no choice other than pursuing concealment strategies or clinging to rigid ideological beliefs (Lowood's institute principles) as a remedy for her mental anguish. As a result, she becomes liable to lose her own identity and autonomy under the influence of St. John's ideological forces which consequently results in her depression.

Finally, my analysis of the reunion setting at Ferndean and the ending of the novel shows that Jane has conformed to the Victorian norms. She even tries to make Adèle conform to the same degrading norms that caused her own hysteria. Moreover, the ending of the novel with Jane's admiration of self-denying proclamation of St. John proves that social and ideological forces of the Victorian era are more powerful than Jane's will. My research shows that these forces push Jane toward the edge of madness, make her believe that she is mad and finally turn her into a passive woman, the "Angel in the House". A further study of Jane's contradictory narration of her feeling might provide interesting insights into what the narrator of the novel claims does not necessarily provide readers solid information about her fate, but rather gives us an insight into her state of mind. Therefore, Jane's claim of being a happily married woman is not to be fully trusted and needs further investigation.

As a whole, the phenomenon which has historically come to be understood as mental illness has its roots in the troubles which women face in their lives and is closely related to patriarchy in different societies regardless of country and era, which is still evident in many countries and societies all over the world. Since literature is the mirror of society this paper aimed to emphasize the disruptive role of social bias in *Jane Eyre* to draw readers' attention to the existence of this phenomenon in their own societies and raise their awareness of the powerful role of social norms in their lives.

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