

Oppression in Charlotte Brontë's - "Jane Eyre"

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Abstract:

Most women in the Victorian era were formed within the framework of subservient livestock. In this article, a new image of the empowered Victorian woman is told through Charlotte Brontë's novel of choice, *Jane Eyre*. The basic purpose of this memoir is to explore the role of social class issues and Victorian gender biases in the oppression of women and the leadership of protagonist Jane in maintaining socioeconomic empowerment. To achieve this, this study uses feminist Marxist and postcolonial approaches to break down the patriarchal and gender barriers that most Victorian women had to overcome to achieve independence. We therefore examine social conditions during the Victorian era, with a focus on the effects of the Industrial Revolution. Second, it examines the patriarchal traits and gender codes that oppressed Victorian women and drove them insane simply by trying to achieve the freedom men had always enjoyed. It represents a Victorian woman struggling to achieve independence. In this regard, this research helps inform the different avenues by which women can transcend oppressive and sexist social norms. It concludes that challenging the authority of men in morning society allows one's voice to be heard and influenced.

Key Words: Victorian women, Socio-Economic Empowerment, Class issues, Gender prejudices- Feminist Marxism- Post colonialism.

Oppression in *Jane Eyre*:

Charlotte Brontë was a canonical writer of her time who struggled within Victorian high society to portray the hellish lives of Victorian women under patriarchy. 19th century, women's role was limited to the home. They are forced to remain under the control of men, be they fathers, brothers or husbands, and if they act outside the realm of family life they are labeled demonic and insane and thrown into mental asylums.

In order to maintain women as second-class individuals, patriarchal societies impose a number of social standards and rules to distinguish the roles of women and men. This distinction is based on the biological nature of males and females and ensures that males always have dominant or masculine roles and females always have subordinate or feminine roles. Moreover, these patriarchal social relationships are dominated by class issues. Based on these concepts, women are viewed as inherently inferior creatures to men. Therefore, they are twice oppressed by her; for being a woman and for being a second class citizen.

Jane, the crazed Bertha Mason, Mrs. Reed and her daughters, and other female characters in *Jane Eyre* reflect the hardships and misery they endure. Chapter two, titled *Jane Eyre's Oppressive Patriarchy*, deals with the ways in which women's identities are marginalized in the novel, reflecting the author's time. Using feminist Marxism and postcolonial theory, it also shows *Jane Eyre's* disturbed psyche of repressed Victorian women.

I- Oppression due to Class difference:

Like many females in Victorian England, women in *Jane Eyre*, are socially and economically devalued, mainly because of their gender, but also because of their social class status. Through her masterpiece *Jane Eyre*, Brontë suggests that women's oppression and class issues are inseparable (Taylor, 83-93). Thus, women's oppression is further strengthened and enforced by the domination of the exploited ruling class.

As declared by Brontë, *Jane Eyre* is "a novel very much grounded in the 'realities' of class oppression" (186). The novel opens with ten-year-old Jane living in the home of her aunt Mrs. Reed where she is abused by her aunt and cousin. Life in the upper-class Reed family has always been challenging for orphan Jane. From the beginning of the novel, Jane is of low social class. The Reed family represents the upper classes, but they neglect and abuse them because of their social status. While she is alone they gather around the fireplace in the drawing room and are considered orphans with no friends or possessions:

I was a discord in Gateshead Hall: I was like nobody there; I had nothing in a harmony with Mrs. Reed, her children, or her chosen vassalage. They were not a bound to regard with affection thing that couldn't sympathise with one amongst them; heterogeneous thing, opposed to them in temperament; incapable of serving their interest, or adding to their pleasure; noxious, cherishing the germs of indignation at their treatment, contempt of their judgment. (14)

Although Jane lives in the Reed family, she is neither a member of Reed nor considered a working-class servant. This is because Jane's class status cannot be defined, Jane's parents are socially ambiguous, and this ambiguity is part of her legacy to Jane. Her mother is a middle-class woman. And her father was from a poor class. Thus, her social status was unclear when Jane was born and became obscure after the death of her parents, a fact that contributed to Jane's repression and her imprisonment. As Bihagen Erik³ argues, "the oppression of women is a major consequence of class ambiguity" (85).

Lower-class people are often dehumanized because of their social status, and Jane's spoiled cousin "John Reed" exemplifies this attitude. He punishes and abuses them over and over again. He disrespects not only Jane, but her mother and her sisters.

With her oppressive regime of John Reed, Jane admitted her desire to please herself and gain her favor. "Why have I always suffered, always been threatened, always blamed and blamed? why am I never happy? Why was it futile to try to win someone's favor?" (11). She also questions the reasons for the abuse and injustice at the hands of John Reed. He strangled the pigeons, killed the chicks of the little peas, put the dogs on the sheep, robbed the vines of the greenhouse of fruit, and snapped the buds from the best plants of the greenhouse, but in the Mothers "old." Girls too" (12).

Her also John Reed keeps reminding Jane that he is her master because of her inferiority complex, her differences from the Reed family, and his wealth. You are dependent, Mom says. you have no money Your father left you nothing. Live here with noble children like us, eat the same food as we do, and don't wear clothes at our mother's expense" (6). This passage shows how Jane was viewed by members of the Reed family when she was supposed to be their equal. The words "dependent," "no money," "no," and "beggar" all suggest being part of the economically dependent lower class. According to Rich Andrienne⁴, this reveals the balance of power in society, both in terms of economy and women, and in the Gateshead family (31).

Furthermore, Jane is forced to submit to even greater repression at the hands of Mrs. Reed. She is banished to the Red Room like an animal. The Red Room reflects Jane's oppressive state and the prison in which she was imprisoned (Brennan 36). In the Red Room, Jane sees herself as an outraged slave, unfairly punished and thereby isolated as family discord (15). Brennan Zoe⁵ describes this room as is, "The Red Room, claustrophobically decorated in fiery tones with a red carpet and 'crimson sheets' covering the bed, reflects Jane's intense repression and injustice" (36). Jane's imprisonment illustrates the way inferior-class women were treated and constrained by class conditions in the Victorian era.

In Gateshead, not only the Reeds, but also the servants in the house, all act as if they are masters over Jane Eyre, who is supposed to be treated equally with John, Eliza, and Georgiana Reed according to the wishes of her uncle, Mr. Reed. The servants' words clearly define Jane's oppressed position in the house:

You ought to be aware, Miss, that you are under obligations to Mrs. Reed: she keeps you: if she were to turn you off, you would have to go to the poorhouse. I had nothing to say to these words: they were not new to me: my very first recollections of existence included hints of the same kind. This reproach of my dependence had become a vague sing-song in my ear: very painful and crushing, but only half intelligible. Miss Abbot joined in. And you ought not to think yourself on equality with the Misses Reed and Master Reed, because Missis kindly allows you to be brought up with them. They will have a great deal of money, and you will have none: it is your place to be humble, and to try to make yourself agreeable to them. (8)

At Thornfield, Jane has a lower social status than Mr. Rochester because she works for Mr. Rochester and is only a tutor supported by him.

She is a servant, but a "top" servant with a solid education and professional sophistication (Eagleton¹⁶). Mr. Rochester's treatment of Jane is fundamentally tied to being her master. He is emotionally abusive to Jane despite being married to Bertha Mason. He uses Miss Ingram as a pawn to make Jane jealous and reveal her feelings about him, choosing not to be the newbie to express his feelings. Here it is clear that Mr. Rochester is using his power and position in the upper class to control Jane. He has Jane question her class, especially in light of the arrival of Miss Ingram and her family. Even Blanche Ingram repressed her after seeing Jane in the corner of her drawing room. Blanche Ingram, her mother, and her sister were tutors, especially Starts mocking "Jane". She explained that Jane had fallen ill because she was inferior in rank to her, and she told Mr. Rochester:

You should hear mama on the chapter of governesses: Mary and I have had, I should think, a dozen at least in our day; half of them detestable and the rest ridiculous, and all incubi – were they not, mama? . . . My dearest, don't mention governesses; the word makes me nervous. I have suffered martyrdom from their incompetency and caprice. I thank Heaven I have now done with them! . . . I noticed her on seeing Jane; I am a judge of physiognomy, and in hers I see all the faults of her class. I have just one word to say of the whole tribe; they are a nuisance. (154–155)

In fact, Jane is no match for Blanche. Blanche has everything Jane doesn't. Ingram says she's and she's rich and beautiful, but Jane isn't one of those girlfriends. Branch Ingram, who belongs to a wealthy family, comes to "sing and play" (158). She said, "She's brilliantly dressed...shining like her jewels...she's dressed all in white. She also wears amber flowers in her hair." (159). Meanwhile, as a tutor, Jane has "[a] suitcase - the

same one [she] brought from Gateshead eight years ago...a bonnet [and] gloves" (91), and she always "Shawls ... and slippers" (316). It provides a clear perspective on the realities of social classes and the psychological oppression suffered by members of the poorer classes.

The issue of female class oppression recalls the conflict faced by Victorian women in *Jane Eyre*. Class differences contributed significantly to the oppression of women by the upper class and imposed many restrictions on women's progress and independence. Victorian class society was a source of oppression for women, especially the poor. In addition to this class oppression, women in the novel face another form of submission: gender oppression.

II- Oppression on the basis of Gender:

From the outset, in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, patriarchal authority is evident through the novel's male characters. system" (214). Thus, arrogant John Reed, wealthy Rochester, Mr. Brocklehurst, and St. John represent powerful male patriarchs with female characters suppressed. At Gateshead, gender issues dominated social interaction. John has emerged as a dominant male figure. His gender power within a female family is demonstrated by being the only male within the Reed family. Sneak up on Jane who is. He insisted that Jane always yield and serve him, and threatened her with mental and physical abuse. John sees Jane as a wild beast, a "bad beast" (3). Jane thus identifies John as the oppressor and tyrant who causes her wrath (5). It's worth noting here that John plays the role of a Victorian father in the house.

In this connection, Alan Johnson 7 notes that in the Victorian era "fathers have the power to control the women of the family. It is man's chief weapon: women are biologically weak, they dominate, and it is the prerogative of men to define women in relation to others" (85-87). When John physically attacks Jane, he clearly demonstrates this masculine authority.

John Reed unashamedly demonstrates superiority over Jane, saying that Jane is "habitually submissive" to him and that "[she] fears him with every nerve, and as he approaches [her] bones all the pieces of flesh shrank" (10). Jane shows her realization that being a man, despite his young age, gives the cruel John every right. My head was still aching and bleeding from the blows and falls I had received. (16).

Even Mrs. Reed is "bound by a forced promise" (11). Her own son John said, "Old girls [and]...sometimes they scold her for her dark skin. bluntly disregard their wishes" (9). Despite his abuse, Mrs. Reed continues to submit to John and treat him as her "beloved one" (10). considered to be a factor. As Andrea Barnes 8 explains, "It contributes to a culture of gender passivity that fosters the oppressive exploitation of women and the acceptance of male authority in society" (334).

Like Mrs. Reed, her house servants submit to Sir John, and they forbid her, even when her Jane tries to defend herself. In this context, Martha Nussbaum 9 argues that: This also shows that the conquest of Servants is based entirely on their belief in their inferiority complex, as they are biologically oppressive beings due to their gender. Just like Gateshead, gender oppression occurs at Lowood School. John is replaced by Mr. Brocklehurst in and exercises male authority over Jane and the girls at school. Mr. Brocklehurst said that Jane had "a black pillar . (Gilbert et al. 343-4410) He controls the Lowood Institute, a girls' school run on donations. He was aggressive towards Jane Eyre, telling the teachers at the Lowood School:

"You must watch her:

Watch her movements and watch her words.

Brocklehurst's male sexuality is a threat to female sexuality. His gender role at school is the suppression of female sexuality. This is evident in his speeches at school. He says:

I have a master to serve whose kingdom is not of this world: my mission is to mortify in these girls the lusts of the flesh; to teach them to clothe themselves with shamefacedness and sobriety, not with braided hair and costly apparel; and each of the young persons before us has a string of hair twisted in plaits which vanity itself might have woven: these, I repeat, must be cut off; think of the time wasted of. (54)

He uses his powers to oppress the girls and suppress their individuality and identity. He punished Jane for her mistakes verbally and called her a liar when she didn't. However, due to Jane's awareness of his gender superiority and the fact that the girls submit to him, all the girls believe him and no one cares to hear her version. He threatens girls with religion as a means of oppressing men, "teaching them to know their place in society and to suppress their individuality and identity" (Andersson 811). This religiously-based masculinity oppresses women at school and puts Jane in another red room. In *Thornfield*, Jane feels like a bird trapped in a gold cage owned by an upper-class matriarch. She exemplifies the sexism between men and women in Victorian society. They, like their brothers, need practice and effort to hone their skills. Her comments confirm that Victorians "[women] lived in a misogynistic world, under male dominance" (Muda 12, 78). The strongest dominant gender in *Thornfield* can be seen in Mr. Rochester's character, portraying the worst oppressive male. His masculinity is typical of the male of Victorian society.

From the beginning of Jane's relationship with her master, Rochester used his fears to make Jane respect and obey him. He believed in his authority and superiority. He described Jane as an aerial image, an elf, and an angel. All these images showed women being oppressed and objectified. He is shown ordering Jane to "bring me my horse" (135). This was because most women were obliged to serve men. Jane is aware that Rochester can harm her both physically and mentally, and even intends to harm Rochester if she disobeys. Rochester:

Jane, I am not a gentle-tempered man—you forget that: I am not long-enduring; I am not cool and dispassionate. Out of pity to me and yourself, put your fingers on my pulse, feel how it throbs, and—beware!’ He bared his wrist, and offered it to me: the blood was forsaking his cheek and lips, they were growing livid; I was distressed on all hands. To agitate him thus deeply, by a resistance he so abhorred, was cruel: to yield was out of the question. I did what human beings do instinctively when they are driven to utter extremity—looked for aid to one higher than man: the words 'God help me!' burst involuntarily from my lips. (268)

Apparently, Rochester is violent. His desire to destroy Jane and possess her "spirit with will, energy, virtue and purity" (280-281). Her Jane also learns that the daughter of Mr. Rochester, where she is employed, is also imprisoned in the walls of Mr. Rochester's house, representing her patriarchy. She is not allowed to explore her life outside, and has been observed confined to her home where she is learning to sew, paint, and speak French. Her father's masculinity indicates that she takes on the role of "angel in the house" (246). Also, by proposing to Jane, he wants to define Jane's role as an angel. In this context Jane affirms: She refuses to become Mr. Rochester's domestic angel whose sole purpose is to maintain authority and control over men.

The oppression of men in St. John Rivers is no different than that of Brocklehurst and Rochester. Saint John is a religiously dominant man who tries to suppress Jane's character. He has no wife, but two sisters who live with him and exercise patriarchal powers. He is also in a position of patriarchal control and power over Jane. He acts as if he is her master. Jane said, "He gave me a certain influence that robbed me of my intellectual freedom. His patriarchal dominance is the norm expected of a man, whether middle or lower class." (Tosh, *Masculinity and Masculinity* 13 51).

Similar to Rochester's proposal, John River's proposal to Jane is a way to consolidate his control over Jane. According to Herbert Sussman¹⁴, "[St. John Rivers is the embodiment of the patriarchal oppression of men" (60), Rather, he sees Jane as a serviceable commodity as a missionary's wife, and as Jane affirms, "He will never love me... He asked me to be his wife, and I I have no more husband's heart for '...more than a stone...he cares for me like a soldier cares for a good weapon. That's all'" (345).

Charlotte Brontë highlights the social dimensions that permeate Victorian society and portrays the gender oppression of Victorian women. According to Victorian thinking, women can only stay at home, do household chores, and please the men in their company. It is because of the patriarchal tradition that the father, brother or husband has a higher status than the woman in the family. Their advantage is not that they are rational, but that they are men. It is they who have the power to decide. Faced with this gender oppression, Jane Eyre's female characters react differently. For example, Jane stands up to class barriers, challenges them, and does not remain silent when men oppress her. By contrast, the servant chooses to submit to her authority. Berta is therefore no longer up to her ideal of an "angel in the house" that makes her a repressed and mad woman.

III-Oppressive Marriage:

Bertha Mason functions as the embodiment of the oppressed Victorian woman in oppressive marriage. Bertha's insanity may not be hereditary but acquired after ten years of imprisonment in the attic, hidden from view. Despite being a white upper-class member, Bertha is considered as a slave and treated on this basis. After having her money in hand, Mr. Rochester locks her up in the attic where she is to spend most of her adult life.

Bertha Mason's life in the attic characterises oppression under which most Victorian females were living. She is portrayed in a monstrous image, feared, unnoticed and of course no one wills to fit with her environment. Bertha Mason got locked up in the attic once physicians declared her insane. That was certainly the appropriate solution to cast away such 'demonized creatures' as they were perceived. Bertha Mason came to represent the oppression of the Victorian marriage, she is portrayed as a madwoman and a monster:

In the deep shade, at the farther end of the room, a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing, and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face. (259)

"Strange wild animal" (425), this is how Bertha is perceived by Rochester. Women in the 19th century, they were considered wild and ferocious creatures. Therefore, they are treated in the most cruel way. Bertha Mason serves as the embodiment of this phenomenon. Common interests between Mr. Rochester's father and Bertha Mason's family led her to spend most of her adult life in hiding in the attic of Thornfield Hall. She is forbidden from contacting anyone other than Grace Poole. Under such circumstances, it was no wonder that she became more fierce, and at night she sent terrifying cues with her wandering voices and laughter.

Therefore, in those days there was an oppression in marriage. In fact, many married women have gone insane because of these oppressive marriages. Mad women were common in Victorian society, as Elaine Showalter¹⁵ notes in her preface to *The Female Malady*: . . . [And by then] mid-nineteenth-century records showed that married women made up the majority of patients in public psychiatric hospitals" (45).

Bertha Mason's image of a noble woman is completely distorted. Mr Rochester declares: I tried to swallow my regret and my disgust. I suppressed the deep antipathy I felt" (333).

Madness was seen as a state of degradation and bestiality, this perception is strengthened in referring to Bertha Mason as "it" and comparing her to a "vampyre". In the novel little is known about her origins and this only serves in increasing her negativities. Moreover, the reader comes to learn about her through Mr. Rochester's account which lacks any semblance of sympathy:

Bertha Mason is mad . . . she came of a mad family; --idiots and maniacs through three generations! Her mother, the Creole, was both a mad woman and a drunkard!--as I found out after I had wed the daughter: for they were silent on family secrets before. Bertha, like a dutiful child, copied her parent in both points . . . Oh! my experience has been heavenly, if you only knew it! (249)

Bertha Mason was married to Mr. Rochester from abroad, she comes from a British colony in the West Indies, Jamaica. Thus, her insanity is closely associated with her Jamaican heritage as claimed by her husband. She is introduced as the daughter of Jonas Mason, a West India planter and merchant and Antoinetta Mason who is identified as a Creole. According to Mr. Rochester's account of her madness, "the germs of insanity" (380) run in her family and they are passed on by her Creole mother. Besides, Mr. Rochester acknowledges that Bertha's family wished him to marry Bertha because of his racial 'superiority'. "Her family wished to secure me because I was of good race, and so did she" (384). The colonial blood inside Mr. Rochester is, therefore, undeniable and this could be clearly seen in his severe treatment of her, acting as a slave master. Bertha Mason's madness is seen as a product of her Jamaican race. In Mr. Rochester and Bertha Mason's relation, the colonial attitudes towards the Creoles are evidently felt. The word Creole is defined in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica: Or, A Dictionary of Arts, Sciences and Miscellaneous Literature* (1823) as follows:

CREOLES, a name originally given to the families descended from the Spaniards who first settled at Mexico in America. These are much more numerous than the Spaniards properly so called, and the Mullattoes, which two other species of inhabitants they distinguish; and are excluded from all considerable employments. It is now used in a more extensive sense, and applied to all natives of the West Indies.(734)

The oppression under which Bertha lives could be equally paralleled with slavery. Her presentation in the novel gives the impression that all people of the colonies are savage and barbaric in their attitudes towards the colonizer. In this respect, she comes to represent the British inner fears of foreigners as well as of women. Her relation to Mr. Rochester portrays a mixture of British racism and fear of violence and madness of the natives in the colonies.

The link between madness and racial lineage becomes so apparent in this regard. As long as Bertha descends from Jamaican blood, she is fated to be alien, savage and to live a life of total seclusion and isolation. Mr. Rochester, during his sojourn in Jamaica, says that the West Indies climate was the trigger for madness, and thus he states:

It was a fiery West Indian night, one of the descriptions that frequently precede the hurricanes of those climates. Being unable to sleep in bed, I got up and opened the window. The air was like sulphur steams- I could find no refreshment anywhere. Mosquitos came buzzing in and humming sullenly round the room, the sea which I could hear from thence, rumbled dull like an earthquake-black clouds were casting up over it, the moon was setting waves, broad and red like a hot cannon ball, she threw her last bloody glance over a world quivering with the ferment tempest. I was physically influenced by the atmosphere and scene.(371)

Victorian women are pure, submissive and obedient to their husbands. In, she is to endure and follow the ideals of the angels of the time for her survival. Due to the fact that Bertha was introduced by Mr. Rochester, it is difficult to explore her angelic side. It serves as a critique of a society that labels passionate women as crazy.

It is important to see how the image of Bertha's angel was distorted when she reached Thornfield. Charlotte Brontë depicts slavery in her paintings in her novels. She uses the tropes of slavery through her Bertha character to portray the oppression of Victorian women. By creating Bertha Mason, a Jamaican Creole, she successfully demonstrated the domestic oppression of British women at the time. Bertha Mason was brought from her hometown and had her locked up in her attic for ten years by her slave master in what looked like a psychiatric hospital. Referencing Ann Goldberg¹⁶ in the following quote makes the insane asylum hellish conditions feel extreme: and it was over. When the poor man was enraged, they tortured him. If he consumed himself, he was willing to burn himself to death. Asylum is like a place of terror, and an Italian poet wrote that anyone who entered it should give up even his hopes. (463)

Inmates in these institutions were legally tortured. Once imprisoned, these people could no longer taste freedom. They were put under the control of "alienists" (a term used to describe those responsible for keeping people away from the outside world). Under such circumstances, they lose the sort of free will they once had. Thornfield Hall serves as his Mason's psychiatric hospital, where Bertha reports to Mr. Rochester.

Brontë thus used the character of Bertha Mason to show the oppression of a patriarchal society. At this point, a parallel can be drawn between life in an asylum and Bertha's life in Thornfield: "When she tried to strangle Rochester, Grace Poole gave him a leash. Giving, he tied her behind:

With more rope than went to hand, he tied her to a chair' (361). hidden as well as the tormented souls of Thornfield, who exhibit a desire for In summary, Bertha Mason's angelic image became monstrous and lost all hope of free will when she was suppressed and trapped in an attic.

Through *Jane Eyre* (1847), Brontë represented a patriarchal high society in which rigid class and gender issues held women back, restricted them to domestic activities, and made them equal to men in all aspects of life as preventing women from becoming Independent. This chapter examined the reasons for the oppression of women. Primarily, the dominance of the ruling class did a great deal to oppress women, especially those of the lower classes. Similarly, the biological distinction between "male" and "female" in the novel suppresses female identity and imposes male authority on women. However, each character reacts differently to this suppression. Like Jane, a heroic character who seeks to challenge the established patriarchal codes. In the next chapter, Charlotte Brontë and her heroine, *Jane Eyre*, will explore financial independence and entitlement. Discover a Victorian woman trying to make a statement.

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