Representations of Fear and the Construction of Text in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*

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ABSTRACT

This thesis closely analyses the emotion of fear in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*. The hypothesis that underpins my study is that fear is fundamental to the shaping and orienting of the text. Specifically, I argue that Jane’s fear of sexual subjugation understood as bodily and sexual possession and subordination and her responses to this fear provide a thematic arc out of which Brontë develops the form and structure of the narrative. My study follows the trajectory of the thematic arc from the beginning of the narrative to the novel’s last pages.

As a reading of *Jane Eyre* through the lens of fear my thesis offers new interpretations of key aspects of the novel. In particular, it explores Jane’s fear of sexual subjugation, analysing the ways Brontë channels this fear through the deployment of the much neglected tropes and motifs of ‘The Turk’ from the novel’s first pages. My third and fourth chapters engage in some detail with these Oriental tropes in which sexuality and female domination are implicit. Chapter Three establishes the centrality of the Turkish tropes to the red room set-piece in generating the thematic arc and the foregrounding of Jane’s fear of sexual subjugation. Chapter Four explores the ‘Oriental subtext’ that furnishes Brontë with a means of expressing the intense eroticism of Jane and Rochester’s relationship and Jane’s fear of sexual domination. In doing so, my thesis offers a reconsideration of Brontë’s ‘slavery’ metaphors and a re-engagement with the figure of Bertha Mason Rochester, both of which flow from this approach. The thesis provides strong historical and cultural evidence in support of my argument that the slavery of the novel refers to white, Ottoman slavery, rather than West Indian or Caribbean slavery.
The final chapters of the thesis encapsulate Jane’s sojourn with the Rivers family at Morton and Moor House and pay particular attention to her relationship with St John Rivers as a catalyst to her overcoming fear. Jane’s ultimate return to Rochester at Ferndean, the dissolution of her fear and her happy marriage complete the trajectory of the thematic arc to the final pages of the novel.

In my thesis Jane is figured as a timid, fearful child who, as a mature woman, overcomes fear and rebels against oppressive societal structures. This contrasts with depictions of Jane Eyre as a feisty, rebellious child who, as an adult, subsides into a patriarchal marriage. This alternative perspective provides a reading of the novel’s conclusion as more aesthetically satisfactory and unified than many previous scholars have proposed.
STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

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INTRODUCTION

This study grew out of my interest in Patrick Colm Hogan’s (2011a) contention that systems of emotion are fundamental in the shaping and orienting of narrative and that the most distinctive aspects of stories are, essentially, created by emotion. He argues that while emotion systems play a part in the development of the protagonist’s goals, their function goes beyond the development of goal trajectories and determines the entirety of story construction. In other words, he claims that emotions provide the organising structure for narratives.

Reading *Jane Eyre* with Hogan’s arguments in mind I perceived from the first pages that fear and its nuances—terror, dread, fright, panic, anxiety—occupy a central place in the development of the novel’s theme, playing a fundamental role in the formation of character, providing motivation, and propelling plot development. The awareness of the centrality of fear, its emphatic placement in the early, paradigmatic chapters of the narrative and its numerous iterations throughout the text, led me to the broad hypothesis that the impacts of and responses to fear and its various nuances as well as the interplay of ‘fear emotions’ with other important emotions create significant trajectories of motivation, action, and plot and signpost further narrative and rhetorical shifts. My thesis is an extended analysis of *Jane Eyre* that aims to validate this hypothesis, essentially seeking to respond to the question: how are fear and its nuances represented by Charlotte Brontë (1816-1855) in *Jane Eyre* and how do they function in the shaping and orienting of the narrative?
Specifically, I argue that fear and responses to fear both of Jane and of other characters provide a thematic arc out of which Brontë develops the form and structure of the narrative. In reading *Jane Eyre* through the lens of fear Brontë’s eponymous protagonist emerges from the beginning as a fearful, anxious child, bullied, abused and unloved, yet with a desperation to prevail and a fierce sense of personal justice. I argue that Jane’s specific fear of sexual subjugation, understood as bodily and sexual possession and subordination, with a concomitant loss of identity and ipseity, is symbolised by her terror at her incarceration in the red room. It is the development of this theme and the resolution of Jane’s fears that are at the heart of the novel. Focusing on the single novel, *Jane Eyre*, permits a detailed analysis of Brontë’s intricately crafted layering of the emotion of fear and its multiple symbolic representations in characterisation and motivation, together with the influence of fear on the construction of plot and narrative. Fear is woven seamlessly through the fabric of the text and my study follows the symmetry of the thematic arc along its trajectory to its apex, tracing the slowly building influence of fear, then moving to the incrementally wrought and nuanced changes of the descending arc where fear wanes and is ultimately overcome and the protagonist, Jane, is free of fear. In following the thematic trajectory from the beginning to the end of the novel the aesthetic unity of Brontë’s structuring emerges. In particular, this approach offers a reading that creates unity between the beginning and the ending of the novel. This contrasts with some scholarship that perceives a dissonance between the early chapters of the novel in which Jane is viewed as ‘rebellious’ and the seemingly mild, marital conformity of the ending.¹

¹Penny Boumelha for example has paid attention to this dissonance which is, as she says ‘the
The first four chapters of *Jane Eyre*, which essentially encapsulate the events of the single day referred to in the novel’s opening sentence ‘There was no chance of taking a walk that day’ (5), are peppered with images of fear. Brontë works with fear as a motivational force and, with it, she builds and manipulates her characters. Her plot rides on fear. Its first appearance in the narrative leads to the incarceration of Jane in the red room and then, as a consequence, propels her to school at Lowood. After her Lowood servitude fear fades sufficiently to set her on the road to Thornfield. At Thornfield, although fear is initially remote, it hovers on the edge of Jane’s consciousness in the sound of the uncanny ‘preternatural’ laugh that emerges from the third floor, backgrounding her hopes and aspirations. Fear haunts Jane’s growing passion for Rochester and when their betrothal highlights Rochester’s despotic ‘Turkishness’ it emerges into Jane’s awareness, manifesting fully into consciousness with Mrs. Rochester’s trespass into Jane’s room only days before the planned wedding. Ultimately, it is fear that drives Jane from Thornfield to the next part of her journey to Moor House. Here she begins the transformation that will free her from fear and take her back to Rochester and the fulfillment of her desire. In examining the play of fear in the construction of text my study tracks the mechanisms deployed by Brontë from the first pages. Among these are Brontë’s narrative strategies that engage with fear, such as her use of the Gothic form to heighten fear and influence motivation. The heightening of Jane’s fear is explored through an examination of the interplay of her vulnerabilities just as the movement away from those

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2Charlotte Brontë (1848), & Richard Dunn, (ed.) 2001, *Jane Eyre* 3rd *Edn: an authoritative text, backgrounds, criticism*, 3rd *Edn*, Norton, New York, p. 5. Subsequent references to the novel will be to this edition and page numbers will be cited parenthetically in the text.
vulnerabilities is deployed by Brontë as a means of overcoming fear. Further, the thesis analyses Jane’s engagement with the ‘objects’ of fear, their power and influence, and the reshaping of those objects and their meaning to enable Jane’s fear to be diminished and overcome. These are incremental processes of first building fear and then extinguishing it. In attending to these processes the thesis focuses on the way in which they generate specific directions in the narrative via character and plot development.

My argument pivots on philosophical and psychological theories of emotion that consider fear to be motivational, anticipatory, uncertain, and requiring an object which is necessarily situational and based on cultural and historical antecedents. Fear is influential, powerful and political, moral and amoral, and responses to fear and its expression are revelatory aspects of self and identity. From the perspective of the construction of text fearful situations including situations where fear’s various nuances are represented are generative of story—plot and theme—as well as character development. In other words, fear functions as the foundation on which the narrative is constructed.

Theoretical approaches to emotion and, specifically, fear, provide insights into the workings of Brontë’s carefully crafted construction both of fear itself and the role of fear in the construction of text. My reading of *Jane Eyre* aims to illuminate these mechanisms and engage with the new interpretative possibilities they bring forth. These include modifications to some feminist and postcolonial readings of the novel and, as noted above, a more positive account of its ending. In order to provide a preliminary sense of what is involved in speaking of fear, in particular Jane’s very specific fear of sexual subjugation, Chapter Two of the thesis is devoted to outlining some relevant theoretical and philosophical
underpinnings and understandings of fear accompanied by some brief examples of how these figure in the development of the narrative.

My thesis offers a new reading of an old text. It aims to provide a detailed and convincing ‘case study’ of the subtle and complex ways fear functions in the generation and development of the narrative of *Jane Eyre*, from its opening to its conclusion. Reading the novel through the lens of fear opens a realm of fresh alternative interpretative possibilities. Considering fear—particularly fear of female sexual subjugation—as the core of the novel not only provides new insights but inevitably challenges several dominant readings. For example, it repudiates the notion that Jane is an inherently rebellious and feisty young girl and woman first promulgated by Elizabeth Rigby in her 1848 review of the novel and echoed in the influential work by Susan Gilbert and Sandra Gubar in 1979 in their *Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, ‘A Dialogue of Self and Soul: Plain Jane’s Progress’, (1984, pp. 336-370). Instead, I read Jane as a timid child and a fearful young woman who only finds the strength to rebel against her society’s injunctions once she has overcome fear. My study aims to break new ground by decentring rage and female rebelliousness and repositioning the interpretative focus onto fear and its objects, vulnerabilities, and uncertainties and in the process reconfiguring notions of authority and female power in the text. Rather than *Jane Eyre* being a paradigmatic story of everywoman’s rage and rebellion against patriarchal oppression, in my reading Jane’s singular journey is born of fear and it is fear that must be overcome in order for her to progress from victimhood to being the

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3Throughout the thesis page references for Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s *Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979) are for the 2nd Edition, 1984. The title is abbreviated to ‘*Madwoman*’ and the authors referred to as ‘Gilbert and Gubar’.
agent of her own moral, spiritual, and sexual fulfilment. Challenging the rage-based nexus between Jane Eyre and Bertha Mason first argued by Gilbert and Gubar in *Madwoman* leads me to alternative interpretations of several aspects of the novel. These include realigning Brontë’s ‘slavery’ metaphors from West Indian to Ottoman slavery. Engaging with the eroticism implicit in Brontë’s Turkish motifs and tropes opens new possibilities for construing female sexuality in *Jane Eyre and* provokes a challenge to some previous feminist approaches that have flowed from perspectives of what may be considered ‘good’ or ‘appropriate’ sex for women. Issues of subjection and domination, female sexual pleasure and the striving for equality in relationships between men and women—all of which are highlighted and examined in my reading of the novel—are of immense relevance to today’s feminist thought.

Although not its principal focus this study also contributes to emotion studies with particular reference to the history of emotions. Asking questions of a mid-Victorian text in order to incorporate fear into a new understanding of the novel has, in turn, necessitated asking questions about the meaning of fear and its various nuances at the time. This has brought forth an examination of fear within the relationships, actions, and identity formation of characters, together with the interaction of fear and other emotions as reflected within the novel’s textuality. Focusing on the textual function of fear in this way as distinct from the important scholarship already undertaken on the affective dimensions of inter-character and text-reader relations, could be a fruitful area of study with regard to other nineteenth-century novels and other emotions. As Hogan points out, literature is a valuable site for a study of emotion that integrates psychology, sociology and neuroscience and other interdisciplinary approaches that are
relevant to and able to contextualise nuanced and complex depictions of human emotional experience, ‘specifically, depictions that have had deep and enduring emotional impact across time periods and cultures’ (2011a, p. 6). In this sense a study of emotion in a canonical text such as *Jane Eyre* may not only add to our understanding of the novel but invites a deeper, more profound psychological resonance with emotion itself.

My thesis is the product of a close reading of *Jane Eyre*. In other words it is a series of observations and reflections resulting from a careful, sustained, and intense study of the text. It is also an examination of the narrative that aims to consider its construction and the mechanisms involved in its creation or, as Barbara Herrnstein Smith puts it, ‘an exercise in reverse engineering’ (2016, p. 61). Mine is not a reading ‘against the grain’. I share this position with Marianne Thormählen who finds so much richness ‘in the grain’ of Brontë novels that she has no wish to read ‘against’ it (2004, p. 5). I have paid a good deal of respect to Brontë’s semantics in my approach to meaning. Reading Brontë’s *devoirs* written during her Brussels sojourn under the tutelage of Constantin Héger illuminates the almost obsessive attention she pays to word choice. Elizabeth Gaskell says of Brontë that ‘She never wrote down a sentence until she clearly understood what she wanted to say, had deliberately chosen the words and arranged them in their right order’ (1857, p. 464). With this in mind I have paid attention in my reading to the sense that every word in the text is carefully weighed. This is not a ‘hostile’ reading, setting out to challenge the text’s coherence or taking an adversarial stance but, rather, one that fits with Felski’s description of a restorative reading seeking ‘to restore and recollect meaning’ (2011, p. 221). My reading is interpretative, one in which I take into consideration that this is an old text,
enmeshed in a particular historical and social context and I bring my subjectivity, that is, my embeddedness in my own history and beliefs, to this close reading. In this regard my approach may be considered hermeneutical. In general my interpretive choices have their basis in what I consider to be a ‘stable norm’ without which K.M. Newton argues a valid choice between two possible interpretations cannot be made (1989, p. 125). The ‘stable norm’ of my study is, of course, fear and its influence.

The study is informed by biographical readings of Charlotte Brontë and the Brontë family and ideas from the discourses of Feminism, New Historicism, studies of Gothic literature and Post-Colonial criticism, as well as theoretical and philosophical perspectives on fear. I am very much aware of the fluidity within the broad field that is feminist literary criticism and with this in mind I have found that some ideas from Queer Theory are also compatible with my approach, particularly the work of Melissa Sanchez (2012) and her studies of non-egalitarian and non-nurturing heterosexual relationships in early modern literature. Reflecting on the objects of fear within a gendered, historical and cultural context aligns my approach with both feminist and new-historicist approaches that consider gender within the social and historical meanings and epistemology of the text. I have also paid considerable attention to the contemporaneous ideas and attitudes within which Brontë worked. Thus, for example, my reading has been informed by contemporary notions of ‘the Turk’ which permeate Jane Eyre and which challenge the accounts of sexuality and slavery advanced by a number of previous feminist and postcolonial studies. Similarly my approach is guided by reference to both contemporaneous and modern works on insanity which suggest new ways of reading Bertha’s madness. While approaching the text from both
feminist and narrative perspectives my concern differs from those feminist scholars working with narrative and emotion who have primarily focused attention on readers’ affect. For instance Robyn Warhol, working within feminist narratology, pays attention to developing understandings of the aspects of gender in narrative and their emotional resonance with readers, while another prominent scholar, Suzanne Keen, considers the manner in which emotion in narrative influences the emotional and/or moral responses of readers. My approach differs from these valuable perspectives in that I am working with the influence of gender and affect on Brontë’s narrative strategies and the construction of text.

The first chapter of my study outlines the scholarly framework within which the thesis is structured, while the second chapter considers some theoretical aspects of fear. The remaining chapters are mapped across the thematic arc, tracing the novel’s engagement with fear from the first page to the final chapter. Chapters Three, Four, and Five are concerned with the development and intensification of fear in its relationship to the trajectory of the thematic arc and the movement of the narrative. This ‘arc’ reaches an apex at the close of Chapter Five of the thesis, focusing on the moment in the novel when the influence of fear is at its most intense: the emergence of Bertha Rochester into Jane’s bedroom and what follows—the aborted wedding and its aftermath. Chapters Six and Seven continue the arc through the waning and gradual overcoming of fear to its conclusion. Both chapters are concerned with Brontë’s strategies in overcoming Jane’s fear. Chapter Six concentrates on Jane’s sojourn at Morton and Moor House and her interaction with St John Rivers and Chapter
Seven focuses on Jane’s return to Rochester and her married ‘bliss’, concluding with an analysis of the final words of *Jane Eyre*.

Each chapter, in turn, engages with a body of scholarship that has been generated by particular aspects of *Jane Eyre*. Reading through the lens of fear and from detailed historical and contextual research my study engages with a number of dominant readings and offers several new perspectives on Brontë’s novel. The focus on imperialism that has been the subject of a great deal of postcolonial *Jane Eyre* criticism also challenged by my ‘Turkish’ reading, which presents alternative meanings of slavery and of female sexuality. This, in turn, complicates issues of sexual autonomy, independence and freedom for women within heterosexual relationships, all which exist within *Jane Eyre’s* proto-feminism. Still within the realm of female sexuality my reading challenges the theme of female confinement and entrapment within the home or the domestic world that has been posited by scholars of Female Gothic such as Eugenia DeLamotte (1990) and Donna Heiland (2004) and, instead, proposes that the source of female Gothic fear in *Jane Eyre* is Jane’s entrapment within her own female body.

The first chapter situates my thesis within a conceptual framework, beginning with a review of relevant literature. It discusses feminist scholarship, particularly relating to the notion that rage rather than fear is the primary emotion of the *Jane Eyre*, along with aspects of postcolonial scholarship centred on Bertha Rochester and Brontë’s ‘slavery’ metaphors. I then review some of the scholarship that relates to Brontë’s deployment of Oriental tropes and motifs and their inherent eroticism. Reflecting on the notion of sexual submission and domination introduced in Brontë’s sultan/slave and ‘Turkish’ metaphors, leads me to consider some of the recent scholarship dealing with female sexuality. My
review concludes with reflections of some studies related to St John Rivers, his missionary ventures and his suppression of sexual passion and Jane’s confrontation with him during her sojourn at Moor House which, I argue, is a catalyst for her overcoming fear.

In Chapter Two I briefly outline some theoretical aspects of fear. The structuring of this section combines elements of the theoretical approaches to fear with related examples of Brontë’s application of fear in various scenarios throughout the novel. In providing this approach to theories of fear my aim is to set my reading of *Jane Eyre* within a context that makes clear the mechanisms at work in Brontë’s deployment of fear in her construction of the text. I provide an overview of the biological basis of fear, paying particular attention to the ‘fight or flight’ fear response, and touch on psychological and philosophical approaches to subjective experiences of fear. To provide understandings of fear that are contemporaneous with *Jane Eyre* I draw on the ideas of the nineteenth-century Scottish philosopher Alexander Bain. Although Bain’s monumental work on the emotions was published a decade after *Jane Eyre* it offers a broad mid-Victorian perspective within which Brontë’s work can be located. The particular fears that pertain to the nineteenth-century middle-class female body are dealt with in some detail with the aim of establishing the historical basis for the gendered fear that is pivotal to my study. Concluding this ‘fear’ section of my contextual review I consider some recent studies of Female Gothic literature and the question of whether *Jane Eyre* can be considered a work of ‘Female Gothic’ in line with Ellen Moers (1974) definition of the term—women’s sexually related anxieties and fears and female bodily entrapment.
My third chapter focuses on the paradigmatic first four chapters of the novel. I examine how, in these early chapters, Brontë uses fear to develop character and plot and introduces the thematic arc on which the novel is scaffolded. Brontë begins her construction of the character of Jane Eyre with the intrusion of fear into ten year old Jane's perusal of Thomas Bewick's *A History of British Birds* (1797-1804), depicting her as a timid, fearful child. Brontë builds on this fear in Jane's confrontation with John Reed in the first pages, intensifying the child's fear into terror in the red room set-piece. I argue that the red room is a metaphorical representation of female sexuality. Here I begin a discussion of Brontë's deployment of Oriental motifs in the opulent red room. This Turkish rhetoric, which I take up comprehensively in Chapter Four, informs the menarcheal symbolism of Jane's terrifying incarceration and suffuses the red room with a first hint of transgressive sensuality. I discuss the significant role played by Brontë's deployment of *Turquerie* in her establishment of the formation of the thematic arc: Jane's fear of sexual enslavement/domination, understood here as the patriarchal possession and subjugation of the female body and sexuality, commencing at menarche and prevailing throughout life. Brontë's segue into elements of Gothic fiction in the red-room weaving together sex and fear, I suggest, heightens the atmosphere of terror she has already generated. It is in the red room that the thematic arc is established. Rather than viewing the red room as a site of rage and (possibly) madness as numerous critics have contended, I argue in this chapter that it is a site of fear, specifically Jane's fear of the appropriation and subordination of her sexuality. It is this fear Brontë uses to generate theme and plot which my thesis tracks across the thematic arc of the novel. This third chapter moves beyond Jane's incarceration in the red room to an
examination of the aftermath of her trauma: her choice of an education rather than a life with (what she assumes are) her poor relations, her introduction to the Reverend Brocklehurst, her display of anger toward her aunt and its dissipation and, finally, her departure from Gateshead for Lowood Institution and the next phase of her journey.

In Chapter Four I continue the discussion of Brontë's Oriental rhetoric I took up in Chapter Three, arguing that Brontë’s use of the slavery metaphor in *Jane Eyre* is not related to Caribbean slavery but references the slavery of the Ottoman Empire. Proponents of the view that Brontë’s references to slavery belong to the West Indies have presented extensive arguments in support of this view and thus, to underpin my opposing perspective, I begin this chapter by setting out a detailed historical, political, and cultural rationale for my position, examining the particular resonance Oriental slavery would have held for Brontë herself. In this rationale I discuss historical antecedents for my view, consulting the history of Turkish white slavery, including the enslavement of Britons over centuries of Ottoman privateers at sea and along the southern coast of England. One aspect I consider to be of particular importance is the centuries-long climate of fear among the citizens of Cornwall (the home county of Brontë’s maternal line, the Branwells) that arose from repeated incursions by Turkish corsairs. I review the representations of sexuality prominent in early to mid-nineteenth-century art of the ‘Oriental’ or ‘Harem’ genre and the sexualised representations of ‘the Turk’ in popular British culture and pornography and I also draw on known literary and personal influences that mark Brontë’s fascination with Turkey and the Orient. I then explore the ways Brontë incorporates her Oriental rhetoric into the text of *Jane Eyre*, its manifestation at Lowood in the person of
the despotic Reverend Brocklehurst and its palimpsestic presence in Helen Burns’
copy of Samuel Johnson’s (1759) *The History of Rasselas Prince of Abissinia*. I
discuss my ‘Turkish’ reading in the context of the fear, eroticism and sensuality
present in Jane’s passionate relationship with Rochester and the transgressive
sexuality such a reading illuminates. In concluding my discussion at the close of
this chapter I argue that Jane Eyre’s flight from Thornfield not so much
exemplifies Jane’s fear of the act of sexual intercourse itself (with its concomitant
fear of pregnancy and childbirth) as some have suggested,⁴ or notions of
Christian duty but exemplifies her fear of sexual domination and enslavement
made all the more real by the ‘temptation’ of her passionate sexual desire for
Rochester.

In the fifth chapter I focus on Rochester’s West Indian creole wife Bertha,
the furious madwoman of so many critical studies. Moving beyond a reading of
Bertha as Jane’s rage-filled avatar and her dark double creates numerous
unexplored possibilities for interrogating Brontë’s depiction of this character. In
this chapter I demonstrate some of those alternative ways of reading Bertha,
particularly her correspondence with fear and how this plays out in the narrative
and its influence on Jane. By considering the utility of engaging with Bertha via
the discourse of xenophobia, I aim to illuminate the relationships between Bertha
and other characters in the novel that have not been examined previously such as
Rochester’s mistresses and the affinity between John Reed and Bertha present in
Brontë’s Roman references. My discussion of Bertha’s race and colour also shifts
the focus to madness, specifically James Cowles Prichard’s (1835) descriptors of

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⁴Chase, Richard 1947, “The Brontës, or, Myth Domesticated”, in O’Connor, William Van (ed.)
1964, *Forms of Modern Fiction: Essays collected in honor of Joseph Warren Beach*, Indiana
University Press, Bloomington, pp. 102-109
mania and the resonance of these within Brontë’s representations of Bertha’s appearance and behaviour. This discussion of madness inevitably moves toward a consideration of the incompatibility of madness with rebellion and the implications that has for a reading of Bertha and, of course, for the entirety of Jane Eyre.

The focus of Chapter Six concerns the movement from the apex of the thematic arc, the point in the novel where Jane’s fear is at its most intense: the aborted wedding, its aftermath and the flight from Thornfield, which will take her ultimately across the descending arc to the point in the narrative where fear is overcome. The fear that Brontë has incrementally insinuated into the novel from the first pages is dissipated in similar increments and these are explored in this chapter. This process is mapped through Bronte’s strategy of humbling Jane during the three-day ordeal that takes her from the coach-stop at Whitcross, her time ‘in nature’ and her begging in and near the township of Morton, to her eventual journey to Moor House, the home of her Rivers cousins.

As Jane progresses from Whitcross to Morton she begins the process of overcoming fear. More than this, the journey serves to strip away the old, fearful Jane, enabling her to establish a new identity under a new name at Morton. During her time in Morton Jane will face specific fears and overcome them. Although some scholars for instance, Gilbert and Gubar, consider Jane’s encounter with Bertha Rochester to be the most significant confrontation in the novel I argue that St John’s relationship with Jane is even more significant. One of the aims of this chapter is to demonstrate that Jane’s confrontation with St John is the catalyst for the development that will bring her to empowerment and enable her to overcome fear and return to Rochester. Here I discuss Jane’s
encounters with St John and her struggle against his dominance, the deepening of her personal strengths and the recognition of her own desires. As in other chapters, a focus on fear in the text draws out and highlights issues to which scant attention has been paid previously. Female sacrifice in marriage is one such topic that emerges in this chapter. In viewing female sacrifice as an ‘object of fear’ it becomes clear that it is sacrifice, not marriage itself, that is feared by Jane and this is something Brontë articulates in her repeated use of the metaphor of suttee.

This nuanced way of understanding sacrifice in marriage is further discussed in Chapter Seven, when Rochester mirrors St John’s observation that Jane must ‘love’ sacrifice. In this final chapter I examine the ways in which Brontë gradually eliminates Jane’s vulnerabilities to fear and removes the obstacles standing between her and Rochester, thus facilitating her journey back to Thornfield, then to Ferndean, no longer fearful of the possibility of physical and sexual domination and subjugation in marriage. Moving from a discussion of Brontë’s necessary conditions for Jane in overcoming fear I consider the final object of fear Jane must confront, Rochester himself, and the sacrifice and redemption that are necessary for his transformation and preparedness for reconciliation. The thematic arc of fear that provides the aesthetic and narrative unity of the novel ends with the moment at Ferndean in which Rochester partially regains his sight and is able to ‘see’ Jane again. The final section of this chapter is devoted to the last words of the novel: the intrusion of the dying St John into Jane’s blissful domestic reverie which has been perplexing to so many scholars.

Fear is a powerful and universal emotion that inevitably leads to drama and tension yet, despite the recent scholarly developments in affect theory and
the history of the emotions, fear has been relatively neglected. Brontë’s vivid signposting of the significance of fear from the first pages of *Jane Eyre* invites attention. This thesis explores Brontë’s deployment of the ‘thematic arc’ of fear from its first pages to its final passages, observing the way in which fear provides motivation and plot and moulds identity and how, in Brontë’s hands, fear and overcoming fear become a vehicle with which to contemplate the furthest reaches of the self.
CHAPTER ONE

Literature Review

As I outlined in the Introduction, this thesis concentrates on the role of fear and its various representations and nuances in generating the narrative that is *Jane Eyre*. This chapter is concerned with the thematic strands of *Jane Eyre* scholarship which intersect most emphatically with my thesis. These are broadly, first sexuality and second slavery viewed from the perspectives of feminist and postcolonial scholarship with a particular focus on the figure of Bertha Mason Rochester. Scholarship that is concerned with theories of fear is dealt with separately in Chapter Two.

From the first pages of *Jane Eyre* Brontë injects fear into the narrative. It propels action, bewilders and disorients, causes the heart to beat ‘thickly’, places iron hands of burning dread on vital organs, shrinks flesh on the bones and more than once closes a scene of terror with unconsciousness. Yet for all this it is not fear but rage that has received the lion’s share of attention from *Jane Eyre* scholars. Cora Kaplan (2007), tracing the critical engagement with *Jane Eyre* from Virginia Woolf’s (1916) condescending review with its hints of jealousy and envy of Charlotte Brontë, pays particular attention to the emotions aroused by what she refers to as the ‘proto-feminist’ (p. 16) sentiments expressed by Brontë in the novel. She argues that critics, themselves embedded in culture and history and influenced by their own time and place, have read ‘anger’ in *Jane Eyre* according to their own positions. She suggests that the anger identified in the novel by (mostly) American feminist scholars in the 1970s became the genesis for a
‘feminist aesthetics of anger’ (p. 24) and this, in turn, valorised anger as an indicator of both aesthetic excellence and emotional health.

In their influential work of feminist criticism *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979) Gilbert and Gubar were overwhelmingly successful in arguing the case for rage as the primary emotional force of *Jane Eyre*. Amplifying this notion they contended that Rochester’s mad wife, Bertha, was Jane’s ‘truest and darkest double’ (1984, p. 360), the two women inextricably linked by their mutually experienced rage at women’s containment within patriarchal structures and enacted with incendiary power by Bertha to bring about the destruction of Thornfield Hall, the ‘centre of [Rochester’s] mastery’ (1984, p. 360).

Following *Madwoman* with its central depiction of Bertha Rochester the field of *Jane Eyre* scholarship has been dominated by feminist approaches and, according to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, the novel soon acquired the mantle of ‘a cult text of feminism’ (1985, p. 244). As a result substantial interest has since been paid to Bertha with three major strands of scholarship converging on the ‘madwoman’: Bertha as Jane’s rageful avatar, Bertha as an example of depraved, rapacious, female sexuality and Bertha as a colonial subject (Laurence Lerner, 1989). I will engage with each of these in turn.

Conceptualising Bertha as Jane’s mad double posits her homicidal, destructive behaviour as the enactment of Jane’s displaced rage at what is viewed as Rochester’s patriarchal despotism including his efforts at bigamy and seduction. At various times this rage takes the form of Bertha setting Rochester’s bed alight, savagely attacking her own brother Richard, and finally destroying Thornfield itself by fire, maiming and blinding Rochester and flinging herself to a
gory death in the process (Gilbert and Gubar, 1984). Despite the complaint that Bertha is effaced from full humanity when she is read merely as a facet of Jane’s personality or emotion and positioned as a stand-in for Jane’s homicidality (Spivak 1985), this view has not only retained its currency but has been widely supported by numerous scholars including Nina Baym (1984), Jean Wyatt (1985), Mary Poovey (1989), Susan Snaider Lanser (1992), Carl Plasa (2004), Donna Heiland (2004) and Madeline Wood (2009).

Bertha is also read as the incarnation of bestial female sexuality (Showalter 1977), the monstrous image of conjugal sexuality (Boumelha, 1990) and ‘the spectre of appetite run wild’ (Nestor, 1992, p. 59). Diane Long Hoeveler (1998) argues that Bertha has lost her sanity along with her humanity as a result of enjoying sex with her husband rather too well (despite there being no sense that Rochester has anything but intense loathing for his wife), and Nina Baym posits Bertha as a ferocious maternal figure who ‘has stolen Jane’s man’ (1984, p. 48). Another structuring of Bertha is that of an authorial device intended to ruin the narrative of Rochester’s life and sabotage Jane’s potential for happiness (Lerner, 1989). Nestor (1982) proposes that Bertha embodies anxieties which have been present in Jane from earlier in the novel but she does not enlarge upon or follow up this potentially fruitful contention. Christine Alexander offers a significant exception to the general reading by arguing that as much as she embodies various other calibrations of fear the mad and terrifying Bertha is a reflection of Jane’s unconscious fears of the possibility of ‘personal domination’ (1993, pp. 435-6). Others conceptualise Bertha as a Gothic doubling of British Imperialism (Smith et al 2004), a political reading that complicates the feminist readings of Bertha as Jane’s doppelgänger (Heiland, 2004).
Regardless of their varied readings of Bertha what many of these scholars have in common is their acceptance of Gilbert and Gubar’s premise that Jane Eyre is a rage-filled, rebellious child, growing into a rageful adult whose suppressed anger and desire for vengeance are enacted through the figure of Bertha Mason. The concept of Jane’s rebellious ‘delinquency’ is challenged, however, by Bette London (1991) arguing that Jane’s defiance of Mrs. Reed and her self-assertiveness with Rochester and St John Rivers is not rebelliousness but the product of a position of silent submission that has been too long held and which ultimately erupts. London also posits that Jane Eyre’s rebelliousness speaks to the desire of ‘certain feminist critics’ (p. 204) more than it reflects Brontë’s cultural and narrative strategies. Ken Hilton (2016) is more pessimistic. He holds that for women in Jane’s society there can be no possibility of rebellion in a world where women are utterly dominated by men. The framework of rage and rebellion posited by feminist critics is something I also challenge in my study.

Despite the dominance of Madwoman within the field of Jane Eyre studies not all feminist criticism has been supportive of Gilbert and Gubar’s approach. Cora Kaplan (2007) argues persuasively that all literary criticism (as all literature) is embedded within its cultural and historical sites. She raises the possibility that American scholars reading Jane Eyre may emphasise and pursue aspects of the text that are not the same as those that are compelling to British scholars. In fact Gilbert (1998) acknowledges that her analysis of Jane Eyre in Madwoman is a product of the historical and political moment of seventies feminism in the United States. Further, for several decades a great deal of feminist scholarship has essentially been engaged in qualifying many of the contentions of Madwoman (Felski, 2003). Wood (2009) for instance, in a psychoanalytic reading of Jane Eyre
suggests that fear of male power is the primary affective problem in the novel, while nevertheless positioning it alongside rage in its significance. Valerie Beattie (1996) endeavours to continue the positioning of female madness as subversiveness by exploring representations of madness present throughout the text in characters other than Bertha, while disability activists such as Bradley Lewis (2013) are vehemently opposed to the disempowerment they consider is intrinsic to any psychiatric diagnosis of mental illness, all of which are condemned as a tool of social control. Elizabeth Donaldson argues that the fusion of madness, rage and rebelliousness underpinning Gilbert and Gubar’s reading of Bertha in particular and the novel in general, is unsustainable (2002). She views Madwoman as incorrectly conflating socially constructed psychosomatic disorders, for example ‘hysteria’, with serious mental illnesses such as those Brontë attributes to Bertha Mason. An example of the social construction of Bertha’s madness is found in Jean Rhys’s Wide Sargasso Sea (1982) which relates Bertha’s early history (given the name ‘Antoinette Cosway’ by Rhys) and configures her descent into madness as an artefact of the patriarchal constraints of marriage. In this regard Lerner argues that Rhys’s novel has had such significant interpretative consequences for Jane Eyre that her text has become a criticism in its own right (1989)

Drawing on disability studies, scholars arguing against the concept of the madwoman as a metaphor for women’s rebelliousness note that Madwoman ignores the fact that Brontë drew on contemporary discourses of madness in her depiction of Bertha Rochester (Marta Caminero-Santangelo 1998). Formulated by physician James Cowles Prichard in an effort to classify and categorise behaviours that were recognisedly insane, A Treatise on Insanity and Other Disorders
Affecting the Mind (18351) provides significant contemporary material from which Brontë is likely to have drawn the descriptions of the behaviour and appearance of her madwoman (Charlotte Brontë, 1848, pp. 173-74). Prichard's descriptions of mania, monomania and dementia, reflect Bertha's symptomatology with remarkable accuracy and are now recognised as strikingly similar to those of schizophrenia (Marlene Arieno 1989, p. 89). This 'diagnosis' of Bertha was borne out by Dinesh Bhugra, President of the World Psychiatry Association (Parry, 2010). This strand of scholarship supports my argument that Bertha is not a rebellious avatar of Jane.

In his treatise on the hyena in myth, art and English Literature, Allan Bewell (2014) identifies the symbolic characterisation of Bertha as 'the hyena' in Jane Eyre. Noting a poem from her juvenilia and a further mention of 'the hyena' in Villette Bewell wryly speculates that, as Charlotte Brontë would have been six years old when the discovery of 'the Yorkshire hyena' was made, this perhaps sparked her interest in hyenas. When Bertha 'the clothed hyena' (250) rises to her feet in her third floor den at Thornfield and meets Jane's gaze, the distinctions between human and animal collapse (Bewell, 2014). Given Brontë's crafting of Bertha's incremental elimination from humanity via her non-lingual status, her preternatural laugh, her loss of personal agency as 'the madwoman', and finally her emergence as the 'clothed hyena' it is difficult to sustain the notion that Brontë intended Bertha as a fully delineated character in her own right. However, such de-humanisation and manner of death of Bertha is anathema to feminist critics (Baym, 1984). What is viewed as the sacrifice of one woman for the fulfillment and happiness of another (Boumelha, 1990) has been deeply unsettling and a source of conflict for feminist scholars since Spivak drew
attention to what she called the ‘abject script’ of imperialism from which, she argues, Brontë drew the narrative of *Jane Eyre* (1985, p. 244). Curiously, Spivak goes beyond the text when she refers to Bertha’s suicide as ‘self-immolation’ rather than a leap from the Thornfield battlements, confounding the parallel of this action with the Indian practice of widow suttee and complicating Spivak’s own denunciation of Brontë’s colonialism (1985, p. 260).

Following Spivak’s admonition that the imperialist ideology she claims is present in *Jane Eyre* was ‘unquestioned’ by critics, particularly feminist scholars and, especially Gilbert and Gubar (1985, p. 248), it has no longer been ignored but questioned strenuously. In fact the novel has become the most widely discussed of the Victorian novels by postcolonial scholars and is now viewed not only as a feminist ‘cult text’ but as a ‘paradigmatic’ postcolonial text (Mardorossian, 2006, p. 1). Indeed, as Cora Kaplan reminds us, *Jane Eyre’s* iconic Western feminist status is now somewhat tarnished due to the exposure of its ‘imperialist agenda’ by postcolonial scholars (2007, p. 26).

Commencing with Spivak who designated Bertha as both ‘native’ (p. 245) and ‘white’ (p. 247) postcolonial critics have directed their attention to the racial ambiguity inherent in Bertha’s creole background. Sue Thomas (1999) puts forward a convincing argument that Bertha Mason is the white daughter of a member of the plantocracy, her father a degenerate, English/Jamaican slave owner. A similar position is taken by Sandra Gilbert (1998) who considers Bertha is most likely white and of French/Spanish creole descent. Whether Bertha has

\[\text{1 Spivak: ‘it seems particularly unfortunate when the emergent perspective of feminist criticism reproduces the axioms of imperialism’ (p. 243) and: Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, on the other hand, have seen Bertha Mason only in psychological terms, as Jane’s dark double’ (p. 248).}\]
white parentage and is thus one of the oppressors or is a descendant of black
slaves and therefore aligned with the oppressed, remains unresolved and is
something I discuss in Chapter Five of my thesis.

Susan L Meyer (1990, 1996) is arguably one of the most prominent of the
postcolonial scholars who have sought to uncover either Brontë’s so-called
‘ideology of imperialist axioms’ (Spivak 1985, p. 248) present in Jane Eyre or to
relieve Brontë from the charge of racism. Focusing on Jamaican and, more
generally, Caribbean slavery Meyer develops the theme of racial ambiguity in the
context of what she deems Brontë’s figurative or metaphoric use of ‘slavery’.
Meyer reads Bertha as a white woman who ‘becomes black’ as she manifests
madness and argues that Brontë’s metaphors of slavery in the novel are intended
as parallels between Caribbean slaves and white, middle-class women in England,
similarly oppressed by Western men. However, Rochester himself, as the
foremost of Brontë’s ‘dark’ characters, cannot be accounted for by Meyer’s
analysis and differing perspectives on Bertha, Caribbean slavery and madness
have emerged from the anomaly that exists in Meyer’s (1990) reading. Beverley
Taylor (2016) raises the possibility that while Brontë metaphorises slavery in Jane
Eyre her concern is not with race per se but with manifestations of oppression. In
the novel Brontë aligns dark skinned characters (who are racially white) with
what is unworthy, morally flawed and degenerate. This perspective is persuasive
given that Meyer (1990), despite her detailed engagement with Jane Eyre’s
metaphors of slavery, is unable to account satisfactorily for her reading of Bertha
as a representative of Jamaican black slaves signifying her as the oppressed, and
simultaneously identifying her as a signifier of white oppression who ultimately
destroys herself. Meyer’s problematic reading of Jane Eyre as Brontë’s critique of
racist imperialism leads her to conclude that the novel is not entirely successful in depicting resistance to the ideology of colonial domination. Nevertheless she raises a useful question: ‘why would Brontë write a novel suggesting the possibility of a slave uprising in 1846, after the emancipation of the British (though not the U.S or French slaves) had already taken place?’ (1990, p. 255).

Julia Sun-Joo Lee (2008) suggests that the answer to this question is that Brontë is referring to an American slave narrative. However, I proffer another answer to Meyer. In my study I argue that Brontë’s slave rhetoric is not a signifier of British imperialism but, writing *Jane Eyre* in 1846 at the time of the closure of the slave market in Constantinople, she is referring to the slavery and imperialism of the **Ottoman** Empire.

Spivak (1985) steered the *Jane Eyre* conversation toward Bertha, Caribbean slavery and British imperialism yet, of the ten references to slavery in *Jane Eyre*, not one refers to Caribbean slavery (Boumelha, 1990). This is assumed by postcolonial scholars to be a deliberate evasion of the text’s colonial aspects on the part of Brontë. They argue unequivocally that Brontë’s use of ‘slavery’ metaphors alludes solely to West Indian or Jamaican black slavery and historical West Indian slave rebellions (Boumelha 1990, Thomas 2008, Murdoch 2002, Plasa 2000).

While postcolonial scholars such as Sue Thomas (2007) assert that Brontë has occluded West Indian slavery, studies through the lens of post colonialism have tended to occlude the actual references in *Jane Eyre* to the white slavery of the Ottoman Empire. The concentrated attention paid by postcolonial scholars to Caribbean slavery has all but closed down the possibility of alternative readings of the many references to harem slavery and ‘Turkish’ allusions in the novel. Both
Sue Thomas (2007) and Jenny Sharpe (1993) for example, ignore Ottoman slavery altogether, overlooking the possibility of the white Circassian slave women of the Turkish Sultan’s seraglio and identifying the harem women of the text as Asian, presumably confusing them with the Indian women of St John’s imagined mission for Jane. Nevertheless, without mentioning Ottoman slavery specifically Elaine Freedgood concedes that Brontë ‘dares’ to bring ‘the particulars of a very recent form of slavery’ into ‘scandalous analogy with the workings of domination and submission’ in the relationship of Rochester and Jane (2006, pp. 48-49). Patsy Stoneman does, however, confront the sultan and slave metaphors that Brontë deploys during Jane’s engagement to Rochester figuring them as derived from oriental sexual slavery rather than from plantation life (2013, p. 42).

By 1846 the abolition of the Ottoman white slave trade, especially the trade in Circassian women for sex, had become an issue for the British government. According to the Turkish scholar Mehmet Yavuz Erler (2000), in 1847 in a move to appease British demands for the abolition of slavery the Turkish Government introduced a code of laws regulating the abolition of slavery within the Ottoman Empire. However, these laws were never enforced and the trading of slaves continued until the fall of the Ottomans at the end of the First World War. White women slaves comprised the majority of the slave market; a very lucrative trade that was difficult to suppress. With the abolition of slavery in Britain and Europe the Ottomans acquiesced only to the abolition of black slavery and the trade in white women continued both in legal administration and in practice (Erler, 2000).

The Ottomans traded in white slaves from the fall of Constantinople in 1492 and tens of thousands of English, Scots, and Irish were enslaved over the
centuries by the Barbary pirates or Corsairs, the naval vanguard of the Ottoman Empire (Davis, 2003). Brontë herself had good reason to be aware of this aspect of the slave trade as among the slaves was Thomas Pellow of Penryn in Cornwall, a relative of the Brontës from their maternal, Branwell line. Pellow who was kidnapped at sea at the age of eleven and spent twenty three years as a slave in North Africa, escaped and eventually returned to his family in Cornwall. He wrote an account of his enslavement and escape which was initially published in 1740 and went to a third edition (Pellow 1890). I discuss the ‘Pellow connection’ in more detail in Chapter Four.

There are numerous references, both oblique and overt, to the Turkish motifs deployed by Brontë throughout Jane Eyre. However, with the exception of Joyce Zonana (1993) scant attention has been paid to Brontë’s Turquerie in Jane Eyre. Zonana proposes that the novel is an example of what she terms ‘feminist orientalism’ (p. 593) an essentially racist rhetorical strategy adopted by Western feminists to position the Orient as a means of criticising middle-class western men and their relationships to women. Patrick Brantlinger (2013) on the other hand argues that the British attitude toward the Turks was based on both fear and envy and the sometimes playful and often ribald incorporation of the Orient into the nineteenth-century British imagination and popular culture (including Brontë’s use of Turkish motifs) was not based on racism but on xenophobic impulses arising from a grudging admiration and fear of the power and illusory magnificence of the Ottoman Empire.

Sexuality is an important strand of Jane Eyre scholarship with which I engage in my study. Substantial attention has been paid to both Bertha’s sexuality and to Rochester’s especially from feminist scholars. Nevertheless, there has not
been a great deal of scholarly consideration given to Jane’s sexuality and this is an area on which a significant portion of my study will focus. Kaplan’s (2007) observation that critiques of *Jane Eyre* are produced by scholars whose work reflects their own cultural mores and history is certainly true of reflections of Jane’s sexuality and desire in the text. Thus it is perhaps not at all surprising that early reviews did not directly mention the novel’s intense sexuality. Instead, critics referred obliquely and euphemistically to *Jane Eyre’s* female eroticism in terms that would have been understood by the reading public. From the first reviews only months after its publication in 1847 what was referred to as the ‘intense emotion’ and ‘power’ of the novel was critically acknowledged. An anonymous reviewer in *The Spectator* (1847) grudgingly admired the emotional force present in the text despite condemning its numerous flaws of plot and character, while Elizabeth Rigby’s (1848) disparagement of what she perceived as *Jane Eyre’s* (and ‘Currer Bell’s) unseemly coarseness and vulgarity is notorious

However, Margaret Oliphant, a great admirer of Charlotte Brontë and *Jane Eyre*, in her unsigned 1855 essay in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* written shortly after the death of Charlotte Brontë, singled out Jane Eyre’s passionate, sexual relationship with Rochester and what she termed their ‘furious lovemaking’ (p. 557) as the core features of the novel. This, she argued, was ‘a wild declaration of the ‘Rights of Women’ in a new aspect’ (p. 557). Nevertheless, her enthusiasm did not endure and forty two years after her initial review she wrote somewhat disapprovingly of what she now perceived to be the major theme of the novel—Jane Eyre’s unseemly longing for a man’s love. She made no further mention of the ‘furious lovemaking’ of her earlier writing (Oliphant 1897).
More recent critics have engaged a little more directly with aspects of Jane’s sexuality and psychoanalytic perspectives have proved to be fertile ground for dealing with Brontë’s work. Baym (1984), however, complains that psychoanalytic critics, particularly feminist psychoanalytic critics, tend to over-emphasise neurosis and masochism as female elements of sexuality. From a psychoanalytic perspective outside feminism John Maynard (1984) reads Jane’s sexuality as that of a young innocent’s gentle awakening to sexual desire within the workings of anxieties and sexual suppressions and repressions, leading her ultimately to sexual growth and fulfilment. He places the more experienced Rochester at the centre of sexuality and Jane at its periphery. Perhaps, in having overlooked the play of gender in the text, he assumes that Jane’s naivety indicates a milder passion than Rochester’s and he underemphasises the passionate sexuality emerging in Jane’s reflections, dreams and fantasies.

Female sexuality has been a contested area for feminists since the 1970s (Linda LeMoncheck 1997) and, as Gilbert admits, her analysis of Jane Eyre in Madwoman is a reflection of the culture and issues of its time and place. In other words, it is a view through the lens of seventies feminism and as ‘seventies feminism was uneasy in the presence of the erotic’ (Gilbert 1998, p. 354) the eroticism of Jane Eyre was overlooked entirely by Gilbert and Gubar, their only mention of sexuality being what they viewed as Rochester’s shameful and guilty male sexual experience. It has been argued that the so-called feminist ‘sex wars’ of the 1980s between (broadly) pro-sex and anti-sex forces within the feminist movement have been responsible for the feminist reticence in addressing the novel’s sensuality and eroticism (Davis, 2016). Consequently sexuality—which I argue is central to any understanding of the novel—has been relegated to the
margins of criticism, with scholars such as Nestor (1992) considering Jane’s passion mirrored in the bestial figure of Bertha as an unexamined source of fear, guilt and disgust.

The conflicted feminist approaches to sexuality negotiate a territory which eludes and denies the possibilities that sensual pleasure could inhere in submission to male dominance and seek to move beyond the pleasures and dangers inherent in the erotic for women (LeMonchek, 1997). However, I argue that Jane’s desire erupts in a multitude of expressions in Jane Eyre: in her lustful gaze, in the heated longing of absence when Rochester leaves Thornfield, in verbal exchanges between the couple, in the powerful eroticism of Jane's dreams and fantasies during their separation, and in the violence of her revulsion toward St John’s proposal of marriage and the potential of its sexual form. All these contemplations of desire multiply its power in the novel and heighten eroticism.

Brontë’s acute awareness of the conflicted nature of Jane Eyre’s passion for Rochester is heightened by the erotic arousal existing between submission and desire—the play of object and subject and master and slave metaphorised in the Oriental tropes and motifs in which Brontë situates desire. Brontë’s use of the eroticly infused motifs of Turkish sexual slavery complicates the feminist rhetoric that considers Western male sexual domination aberrant to female sexual pleasure, at the same time denying the dynamic complexity of female sensual desires and pleasures that may derive from that.

Even a reading of Brontë’s Oriental rhetoric, such as that by Zonana (1993) avoids engaging with the infusion of the erotic into Brontë’s Turkish tropes, an undercurrent always present in the British nineteenth-century stereotype of the ‘lustful Turk’ (Brantlinger 2013, p. 209). This stereotype and the sexual fantasy of
the Oriental harem/seraglio were aspects of allusions to the Orient well known to the British public at the time of *Jane Eyre*'s publication in 1847 (Zilfi 2010). The eroticism of the fantasy harem was sensually appealing to men with its images of multiple pleasures (DelPlato 2002) and was also believed to arouse the lust of women (Yeazell 2000). Even *Turquerie*, the opulent representation of the material culture of the Ottoman Empire manifested in British interiors and fashion was imbued with a sense of the erotic (Williams 2014). Turkish tropes are deployed by Brontë to great erotic effect throughout *Jane Eyre*, with particular emphasis in the red room and Thornfield house party set-pieces.

Writing from a 'sex-radical' feminist position and (what is now called) Queer Theory Melissa Sanchez identifies in early English literature a female sexuality that exists outside the nurturing and egalitarian relationships that have traditionally been viewed by feminists as the optimum sex for women (2012,495). Jane's passion for Rochester contained as it is within the bounds of dominance and submission and the novel's expressions of thesexual pleasures of sultan/master and slave, the heightening of sexual desire and arousal through submission and domination (evident in Jane and Rochester's combative bantering), jealousy, suppression, and graphically depicted fantasies and dreams of fulfillment could be described in this way. The master/slave relationship of abjection and oppression is difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile with the proto-feminist quest for independence and equality that have been the chief focus of feminist readings of the novel (Sanchez, 2012). Freedgood argues that it is through Jane's struggles against the oppression metaphorised by Brontë's Oriental tropes that she attains personal power. She suggests that these 'symbols of female abjection' are used by Brontë to build Jane's mastery and control over
oppression, yet she omits any mention of the instantiation of erotic pleasures within these symbols of abjection (2006, p. 47). As Sanchez points out ‘any erotization of power’ is incompatible with a certain strand of feminism (2002, p. 493) yet the relationship between power and eroticism and my study’s theme of female fear of sexual subjugation address this issue.

In discussing the ‘erotics of power’ present in Jane’s and Rochester’s relationship Mary Ann Davis (2016) acknowledges the inherent shifting power relations and argues not, as she says, for a naïve celebration of transgressive sexuality but for mutuality rather than equality. Robert Heilman’s contention that Jane ‘instinctively’ evokes Rochester’s passion (1958, p. 122) speaks of unknowingness and the evasion of conscious awareness whereas Davis reads a carefully strategised and knowing Jane Eyre, deploying teasing repartee as a means of negotiating power and mastery between herself and Rochester. For Davis the relationship between Jane and Rochester, situated at the nexus of submission and dominance, aligns with Sandra Lee Bartky’s definition of sadomasochism as ‘any sexual practice that involves the eroticization of relations of dominance and submission’ (1984, p. 323), as distinct from one which involves sadism as deriving pleasure from inflicting pain and masochism as deriving sexual pleasure from pain. This approach is quite different from John Kucich’s argument that the combative banter between Jane and Rochester heightens desire but at the same time acts as a distancing mechanism. For Kucich, emotional repression (a form of suppression that Kucich stresses differs from the Freudian concept of repression as denial) in Jane Eyre is defined as the ‘smothering of authentic feeling’ that is both combative and aggressive (1987, p. 35). He further argues that Bertha’s rage springs from the combative nature of ‘all
amorous desire’ and this rage cannot be dispelled, existing in Jane even beyond Bertha’s death (p. 100). This reading overlooks considerations of nineteenth-century sanctions on women’s expressions of sexual desire, whether in literature or in person. Instead he maintains that Brontë’s ‘refusal of self-expression appears to us as a martyrdom of creative potential, a regrettable psychic compromise, a fall into self-conflict rather than a sign of artistic growth’ (p. 35).

Kucich’s contention that repression (suppression) heightens and increases passion cannot be said for St John Rivers and his unrelenting prohibition of desire for Rosamond Oliver. St John’s cold suppression of passion plays an important role in Jane’s understanding of her own desire and, as such, makes a significant contribution to her struggle to overcome fear. For St John sexual passion is a ‘weakness’, ‘a mere fever of the flesh’ (319) that must be overcome. If his suppression of desire were to increase his passion for Rosamond Oliver it would necessarily increase his overweening triumph at subduing it. While the confrontation between Bertha and Jane is viewed by critics such as Gilbert and Gubar as the primary conflict in the novel, a strong case for the dominant role played by St John in the novel is argued by Marianne Thormählen (2004) who contends that after Jane and Rochester St John is the most important person in the narrative. As Thormählen points out St John is without love for his fellow man and, lacking the loving virtue of his Divine namesake, is a deeply flawed representative of Calvinistic doctrine. Jane learns to identify her own desire by observing St John’s suppression of his lust for Rosamond and his severance from passion (Mitchell, 2011). Jane’s loss of the desire and sexual passion she knew with Rochester is made acute by St John’s insipid declaration of love and its reminder of Rochester: ‘I knew the difference’ (357). This absence of passion resonates
within her emotionally violent reflection of the unendurable, pallid sexuality that marriage to St John would entail.

St John’s freezing denial of sensuality and his devaluing of human love and life on earth in preference to the life hereafter make it all the more remarkable that the novel appears to end not with Jane’s beloved Rochester and her child but with the coming death of St John (Qualls, 1982). That the last words of the novel appear to have been relinquished by Jane to St John is an ongoing source of puzzlement (DeLamotte 1990, Charmian Knight 1998, Thormählen 1999). For numerous feminist scholars (for example: Politi 1982, Boumelha 1990, Lamonaca 2002) there is also a disquieting sense that the conventional happy ending of the novel is at odds with what they configure as Brontë’s depiction of Jane’s rebelliousness in the early chapters and their dissatisfaction that ‘in the end, the narrative moves toward the patriarchal rhetoric it was presumed to have rejected’ (Williams 1989, p. 60).

This chapter has articulated the chief strands of Jane Eyre scholarship which have informed my thesis and has indicated broadly where in relation to these my study is located. The main concern of my study, however, is fear and its work in the novel, which I have not discussed in this chapter. One of the reasons for this omission is my observation that the role of fear in Jane Eyre has received only the briefest of attention from scholars and in general has been treated as a self-evident component of Jane’s circumstances and one which has had little impact on theme, plot, or characterisation. Because of this lack of attention to fear in Jane Eyre scholarship I hold that a brief consideration of the nature of fear is relevant and, due to its centrality in my study, it warrants a separate, targeted chapter. In the following chapter I discuss some theories of fear and outline a
brief taxonomy of fear. I consider it also apposite to provide some observations of
the appearance and influence of specific aspects of fear in the text of *Jane Eyre*.
My thesis argues that fear resides at the intersection of desire and power,
inextricably woven into the fabric of the novel by Brontë’s Oriental tropes and
her use of the Gothic form, particularly that strand of Gothic literature authored
by women which has been termed ‘Female Gothic’ (Moers 1974). In the following
chapter, in addition to my discussion of aspects of fear, I will briefly engage with
some approaches to Female Gothic and its possibilities in amplifying the
meanings and the intent in Brontë’s construction of fear in the novel.
CHAPTER TWO

Fear

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 on my bones shrank when he came near. (8)

The aim of this chapter is to provide some insights into the nature of fear with the intention of illuminating the narrative mechanisms at work in Brontë’s careful crafting of fear and its influence throughout *Jane Eyre*. In order to set up the detailed analysis of fear in the novel this chapter is structured around an exploration of some theoretical components and processes of fear from both psychological and philosophical perspectives, with the inclusion of some brief examples from the novel. Here I also pay attention to some of the nineteenth century contexts for fear that have relevance to Brontë’s narrative, with specific reference to some of the fears and anxieties that are related exclusively to the lives of middle-class English girls and women in the first half of the nineteenth century.

In story terms fear in *Jane Eyre* matters a great deal. I argue that it is the primary defining aspect of the protagonist’s journey and, as a trigger for action, it is fundamental to the motivation for Jane’s transformation on which the narrative is centred. Brontë’s rhetoric in the novel creates an atmosphere that ranges across various nuances and correlates of fear: apprehension, terror, anxiety, dread, and fright. She also describes responses to these nuanced representations of fear. These include avoidance, passivity, anger, violent resistance, flight, visceral sensation, trembling and pallor, even to loss of consciousness. She locates these within a range of cognitive processes that lead inexorably to psychological states:
despair, hallucinatory visions, depression, helplessness, and dissociation. Most importantly the manifestations of fear and the avoidance of vulnerability motivate action and generate plot and character development across the narrative. In the following section I focus on the nature of fear and its nuances, setting out a brief ‘taxonomy’ of various aspects of fear and describing some mechanisms of fear. Among these I include an outline of the ‘fight or flight’ fear response, the appraisal and meaning-making processes of people and events to establish threat, and the interplay of aspects of the self and individual experience that create vulnerability to fear.

It is generally accepted that fear is a natural part of life: a universal emotional/psychological state common to all whenever they are confronted with a potential threat (Bain 1865, Robert Gordon 1980, Wayne Davis 1987, Jacek Debiec and Joseph LeDoux, 2004.). Subjective fear can only be experienced by animals with the capacity for self-awareness. ‘Fear...is the feeling that results when the defense system is active in a brain that has the capacity for self-awareness’ (Debiec and LeDoux 2004, p. 808). Implicit in that statement is the notion that for something to be feared involves processes of appraisal and the ability to make a judgment about whether threat exists.

Fear is nuanced, it manifests in various forms most intensely represented in terror, horror, fright, and dread (Davis, 1987) and is also present in other emotions such as shyness and jealousy. Terror is an intense form of fear, an extremely painful, even unbearable, state (Sartre 1948). Ann Radcliffe distinguishes between terror and horror, describing the experience of terror as that which ‘first expands the soul and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life’ and horror, which ‘freezes and nearly annihilates them’ (1826). She
distinguishes terror from horror in an important way however. Terror is anticipatory of something to be greatly feared—great uncertainty inheres in terror—whereas horror is the actualisation of what is terrifying. Fright has the same sense of suddenness and lack of preparedness as horror but is less intense. Dread is an anticipatory sense of threat to come, existing in the space between fearing that something is the case and the experience of actual fear itself (Gordon, 1980, Davis, 1987). This brief ‘taxonomy’ of fear is useful in understanding the various representations of the power of fear as an influence in motivation and plot in the text as they range from dread, to fright, to terror so intense it causes Jane to lose consciousness on two occasions. The ‘dread’ (33) Jane experiences at the prospect of meeting new people after leaving Gateshead is very different from the fear she experiences outside the drawing room before her first meeting with the Reverend Brocklehurst (26). Rochester’s response of terror when he becomes aware that Richard Mason has come to Thornfield differs significantly from Mason’s experience of horror after he is attacked by Bertha, where he becomes ‘paralysed’ ‘either from fear of death of or something else’ (171). Both terror and horror are experienced by Jane when she is confronted by Bertha in her bedroom two nights before the blighted wedding. These varied gradations or nuances of fear call forth differing responses and physical actions.

‘Fear’ thus exists in the form of several different but related states: being afraid of or frightened by something (reactive fear), being afraid that something will happen (propositional fear), or simply being fearful (experiential fear) (Davis, 1987). Brontë deploys each of these fears in *Jane Eyre*: Jane’s fear of John Reed is reactive fear, her fear in the red room is propositional and her own childhood timidity and fearfulness is experiential fear. Experiential fear has no specific
object but is associated with thoughts that something bad will happen (Davis, 1987). Jane’s childish experience of the world is that it is a solitary, frightening place and Brontë paints the ten-year old child not as rebellious, impertinent, or saucy but as ‘a queer, frightened, shy, little thing’ (32), beleaguered by just this kind of experiential fear.

A small number of threats are thought to be genetically programmed through evolution (for instance the rustling in the grass that might signal the presence of a snake) but most of what is feared is learned from experience in life and what comes to be feared is based on the knowledge gained from that experience. This ‘judgment’ approach to fear posits that whether we experience fear or not stems from the meaning we make from an appraisal of an object or event and, flowing from that meaning, we subsequently make at least one guiding judgment (Solomon, 2004) The appraisal of vulnerability to the feared object (which includes the assessment of the individual’s ability to fight or flee) is a significant component of the judgment process.

Martha Nussbaum’s ‘neo-stoic’ accounting for emotion holds that emotions are judgments but, contrary to a Stoic view of emotions as unreasoning, she argues that emotions are not only reasoned but are judgments of value. As Nussbaum says ‘what inspires fear is the thought of damages impending that cut to the heart of my own cherished relationships and projects’ (2001, p. 31). It is straightforward enough for a reader to recognise the fear posed by Bertha’s nocturnal visit to Jane’s bedroom, as an uninvited nighttime intruder to one’s bedroom poses a readily evaluated threat. But why does Jane fear meeting

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Rochester’s eye the morning after she has ‘baptized’ (127) his bed? The reason for this fear is to be found in Jane’s interior world, in other words it resides in the meaning she makes of the emotions she feels toward Rochester. This process of meaning-making facilitates her recognition of the peril that falling in love with her employer places her and what results from this appraisal is fear. Brontë makes this clear:

\[ \textit{it is madness in all women to let a secret love kindle within them, which, if unreturned and unknown, must devour the life that feeds it; and if discovered and responded to, must lead, ignus-fatuus-like, into miry wilds, whence there is no extrication.} (136-7) \]

A further example of the meaning-making and appraisal of threat that induces fear is Jane’s belief in Rochester’s pretence that he intends to marry Miss Ingram. The meaning of that belief in an impending marriage (a belief which Rochester sustains) is that Jane will be banished from Thornfield and from Rochester. The terror this prospect arouses ultimately overwhelms her resistance leading her to the fear-driven proclamation of passion that exposes the intensity her feelings and her love for him:

\[ \text{... it strikes me with terror and anguish to feel I absolutely must be torn from you for ever. I see the necessity of departure; and it is like looking on the necessity of death.} \ (215) \]

Fear is, necessarily, future-directed and anticipatory and it must always have an object. That is fear is intentional and the object of fear (whether it is an anticipated event, or the presence of a person, animal, or supernatural being or, in the case of experiential fear, the unknowable ‘bad’ future event) must be perceived and interpreted in a particular fear-evoking way by the person who confronts it. Deciding what is to be feared depends on the way it is perceived and appraised more than on the nature of the object itself. Fear is anticipatory and is
evoked when a threatening event is imminent. Thus the objects of fear are what are imagined will cause harm in the near future according to the meaning given them, and that meaning includes how likely it is that an event will occur and how soon it may occur. Events that are remote or distant in time become the source of dread. The object of fear—what is feared—is personal and intimately concerned with notions of self and identity.

Alexander Bain, a contemporary of Brontë, provides a useful reckoning of fear’s objects. He identifies the unreasoning fear provoked by superstition and the manner in which superstition works on the imagination to imbue nondescript objects or events with the possibility of evil. 'Ghosts, hobgoblins, evil genii, imps and fairies' may all generate terror. In Brontë’s novel some of these ‘Creatures of darkness’ (1865, p. 62) lurk among the seemingly benign pages of Thomas Bewick’s *A History of British Birds*: ‘the fiend’ (6) and the ‘black horned thing’ (6) are ‘objects of terror’ (6) to young Jane at Gateshead which she quickly passes by. These form part of the atmosphere of fear Brontë constructs to prepare her readers for the Gothic terrors soon to materialise in the red room. At Thornfield, descriptors such as ‘Vampyre’ (242), ‘goblin’ (264), ‘monster’ (264), and ‘demon’ (262) ensure Brontë intends Bertha to be understood as a ‘Fearful and ghastly’ (242) figure.

While there are many fears and terrors facing Jane, the overarching fear with which Brontë confronts her is the fear of sexual and bodily subjugation. Each of the male ‘objects of fear’ encountered by Jane functions as a conduit for this fear. Her confrontation with these representatives of her fear and her struggle to find the strength and courage to overcome the fear they represent provide the narrative scaffolding for *Jane Eyre*. The first of these feared objects is,
of course, John Reed, the adolescent tyrant at Gateshead, at Lowood Institution it is the Reverend Brocklehurst, and at Thornfield it is Edward Fairfax Rochester. Rochester, at first Jane’s ‘love object’, becomes an object of fear following her acceptance of his marriage proposal, expressed metaphorically by Brontë as the despotic sultan who attempts to dominate her. Finally at Morton and Moor House Jane confronts the coercive power of the charismatic St John Rivers, another object of fear, to which she very nearly succumbs.

Jane’s fear of sexual domination is introduced symbolically by Brontë in the red room scene at Gateshead and, as such, is present in the several red room iterations throughout the novel. This is wholly in keeping with the persistent character of fear memories. When an individual is presented with a situation previously associated with threat the fear returns spontaneously, ‘dreadful events remain a part of our selfhood’ and past traumas experienced by individuals play a significant role in influencing current and future social interactions (Debiec and LeDoux 2004, p. 814).

Fear draws on personal learning history that includes personal experience and the beliefs that accrue from that and, importantly, an assessment of vulnerability. As with other emotions, fear, its objects and influences and vulnerability are reflections of selfhood and interaction with the world. Brontë highlights Jane’s vulnerability to John Reed. She is younger, smaller, and weaker than Reed and physically defenseless against him. She has no one to stand with her or defend her, he is favoured and she is reviled, her position at Gateshead is marginal while he is the future ‘master’ of the estate. As she says, ‘I had no appeal whatever against either his menaces or his inflictions’ (8). Her vulnerability plays a major part in developing and heightening her fear of Reed. Throughout Jane
Eyre Brontë demonstrates Jane’s vulnerabilities to the various fears and terrors that beset her. Not least of these is the passion she holds for Rochester that intensifies both her vulnerability to his seduction and her fear of sexual subjugation. As Pauline Nestor remarks: ‘Ironically what compounds her fear immeasurably is her desire’ (1992 p. 64). Surrender to emotional and/or sexual passion (whether with Mrs Reed, Rev. Brockett, Rochester or St John Rivers) is directly linked to Jane’s vulnerability to others (Kucich 1987, p. 49). These are summed up by Brontë in the captioning of the self-portrait Jane creates as a comparison to her painting of Blanche Ingram: ‘Portrait of a Governess, disconnected, poor, and plain’ (137). This brief statement underlines Jane’s knowledge of what makes her vulnerable—her lowly social status as a governess, her aloneness in the world as an orphan, her poverty and dependence, and her lack of beauty.

Arising from the psychological experience of fear is an involuntary bodily arousal, or ‘upheaval’ (Nussbaum, 2001). This consists of hormonal cascades that bring about rapid heartbeat, increased blood pressure, interference with digestion, perspiration, speeding up of respiration, and so on—the body’s preparation to fight with or flee from the feared object—in other words, the ‘fear response’ (LeDoux 2003). Jane’s bodily responses to fear and her attempt to flee from the red room at Gateshead are systematically detailed by Brontë:

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. (14)

Bain (1865) conceptualised embodied fear as a redeployment of ‘bodily energy to focus on the object of fear followed by a corresponding appropriate
physical response’ (p. 60). This fear response pattern is termed ‘fight or flight’ (Cannon 1915). While the processes of appraisal are intrinsic to almost all occasions of fear, when an individual is repeatedly exposed (habituated) and becomes conditioned to the same fearful event it is possible for the response pattern to occur without engaging the processes of appraisal and judgment. Experiments with rats conditioned to fear over several learning trials have isolated a neurological pathway leading to the ‘fight or flight’ response that does not involve conscious thought (LeDoux, 2003). Fear conditioning occurs quickly and once acquired it will be elicited for a lifetime when the same or similar stimuli are presented (LeDoux, 2003). While LeDoux makes no claims that he is illuminating the subjective human experience of fear he comments that while rats are not humans what is true for rats in this regard is likely to be true for humans.

Just such a process of fear conditioning and unthinking response is made visible in the first pages of Jane Eyre when Jane fights back in reaction to John Reed’s violence. Reed’s habitual abuse has conditioned her to respond with immediate fear on his approach:

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 on my bones shrank when he came near. (8)

Brontë captures the explosive power of the ‘fight’ response to fear when Jane, unable to flee from Reed’s violence, fights back. Fear transforms her into the very creature the bellowing Reed names her: the cornered ‘Rat!’ (9). Almost oblivious to her actions she becomes ‘a desperate thing’ (9):

The cornering of an animal when in the headlong flight of fear may suddenly turn the fear to fury and the flight to a fighting in
which all the strength of desperation is displayed (Cannon 1915, p. 275).

I argue that Jane’s attack on Reed is not generated by rage or a naturally rebellious nature but by defensive fear. Some recent observations of the ‘fight or flight’ response argue for an initial ‘freeze’ in the sequence of responses, followed by an unsuccessful attempt at flight and finally, fight. (Bracha et al., 2004). This mirrors almost precisely Brontë’s description of Jane’s reaction to her brutal cousin’s assault.

A necessary condition of all fear is uncertainty (Gordon, 1980) or, as Bain maintains, ‘uncertainty with a tinge of probable evil is to the generality of men the most disquieting emotion’ (1865, p. 60). Indeed, Philip Fisher maintains that uncertainty at times can be taken as the ‘proxy’ for human fear (1998, p. 43). Uncertainty amplifies vulnerability and impinges on decision making, curtailing choices and confusing efforts to find and take the best path to combat whatever is threatening. Uncertainty endows the imagination with the freedom to toy with the worst of all possibilities, contaminating the processes of meaning-making until that worst possibility becomes the anticipated reality. Brontë deploys the tenuousness of Jane’s belief that Rochester could love her to develop and then intensify her fear when she falls in love with him. Brontë plays on Jane’s vulnerabilities: her lowly position as governess at Thornfield and her lack of beauty, to create the corrosive uncertainty she feels about the enduring nature of Rochester’s love. This fear plays into her susceptibility to believe his pretence that it is Blanche Ingram he intends to choose for his wife and complicates Jane’s responses to the pressure of St John Rivers’ proposal of marriage. The uncertainty
inherent in each of these situations increases Jane’s vulnerability, making her an easy prey to fear as well as emotions such as despair and hopelessness.

Fear influences actions by motivating avoidance of the possible feared object and, similarly, the avoidance of vulnerability (Gordon, 1980). Shyness arising from the fear of being scorned by society shapes individual social behaviour. Bain singles out the special fear that ‘being Abashed before a strange face or a new company’ elicits, citing a child’s shyness attending a new school and experiencing the common fear of the loss of others’ good opinion. This fear is a great source of pain, persisting until ‘a certain tremulous circumspection of manner in general society’ enables the newcomer to settle in and feel at ease within the company (1865, p. 64-65). Of course Jane’s earliest experiences at Lowood Institution express this intensely held fear and motivate her efforts to conformity. Her shyness influences her actions and self-presentation at other points throughout the narrative, for example during the Thornfield house party. This is something Rochester becomes aware of and remarks on in the course of one of his conversations with Jane at Thornfield (118).

For Bain fear is ‘the engine of domination, temporal and spiritual’ and it controls and shapes behaviour (p. 56). As he puts it ‘The Religious Sentiment might be introduced here as being a compound of which fear is a principal ingredient’ (p. 67). Coupled with fear, spirituality in the guise of religion has the ability to control and dominate its followers via conformity to dogma and commandments, enabled by an all-seeing all-knowing God that is not merely a witness to every action and every sin but also privy to wicked thoughts. Michel Foucault’s metaphorical appropriation of Jeremy Bentham’s design for a model prison is useful in understanding the ways in which members of society keep
their own behaviour under continuous surveillance with an insidious sense of always being observed, with fear as its basis (1977, Plate 3) At Morton and Moor House St John's power resides in the intensity of his will and his manipulation of Jane’s natural submissiveness, her spirituality, and her keen sense of duty. He attempts to dominate her with fear of God and threats of eternal damnation. Brontë has St John using the spiritual fear of God in an effort to bring Jane under his own earthly control.

Charlotte Brontë was born and grew to maturity in the first half of the nineteenth century. Whether this period was a more fear-filled time than any other era in English history is moot but, as Boyd Hilton reminds us, the years from 1800 to 1850 were dominated by ‘a constant sensation of fear: fear of revolution, of the masses, of crime, famine and poverty, of disorder and instability and for many people fear even of pleasure’ (2006, p. 31). Adding to this uneasy mix were the influential predictions made by Thomas Robert Malthus of widespread famine, premature death, mob violence, and a society consumed by despair resulting from overpopulation. His predictions were first made in An Essay on the Principle of Population initially published in 1798 but repeatedly revised and republished up to the Sixth Edition in 1826. In the parsonage at Haworth the Brontës were not quarantined from these fears. The Reverend Patrick Brontë, fearing possible social disorder, voiced this fear in a response to the new Poor Law. Calling on participants at a vestry meeting in 1822 to resist the law he urged them to be aware of the dangers ‘for if dear times and general distress should come on, starvation, deprived of relief, would break into open rebellion’ (Shuttleworth 1996, p. 21). Given this backdrop to the creation of Jane
Eyre it is not surprising that fear and responses to fear—both Jane’s and those of others—are key themes out of which Brontë constructs the narrative.

There were specific fears abroad during Brontë’s life that resonate within Jane Eyre and it is worth mentioning them here. Not least of these was the development of a brooding distrust of the ‘other’—the alien, the foreign—all those of nationalities other than British (Tromp, Bachman and Kaufman 2013). This xenophobia is evident in Brontë’s treatment of the French child Adèle and her mother Céline Varens, Rochester’s Italian and German mistresses and, most of all, the creole of French/Spanish descent Bertha Mason Rochester. Certainly in the first half of the nineteenth century fear was a constant throughout the rural towns and villages of England and the suspicion of ‘others’ was endemic. The pervasive sense of impending chaos had far reaching effects on the population, manifesting in fear of the very appearance of ‘travellers’ or gypsies (David Mayall 1988) and in the fear of beggars (Kelly S. Johnson 2007), both groups being inextricably linked with potential crime (Mayall 1988, Johnson 2007). These firmly held beliefs enable Brontë to enhance Rochester’s gypsy disguise at Thornfield with a measure of fear and sensation. She demonstrates Jane’s unconcern and lack of anticipated fear when she goes to meet with Rochester-cum-Gypsy: ‘I am not in the least afraid’ she tells the servant, Sam, (166), who, expecting Jane to be afraid, offers to remain with her for safety. This Rochester, in disguise, is not an object of fear.

When Brontë reduces Jane to the status of mendicant in the town of Morton she deploys the established nineteenth-century fear and disgust of beggars to ensure the townsfolk refuse Jane’s pleas for help, prolonging her ordeal until she has been sufficiently shamed and humbled and her pride
stripped away. This play on fear is two-directional. On one hand the townsfolk fear Jane as a beggar, doubly so as she is well dressed and not sufficiently ‘beggarly’ in appearance, ‘an ordinary beggar is frequently an object of suspicion, a well-dressed beggar inevitably so’ (288). As Hannah the servant at Moor House makes clear, there is a fine line between begging and robbery. On the other hand Jane is immersed in her own fears as a beggar. On the margin of existence, she is cold, hungry, sick, and alone without possessions and stripped of any possibility of self-determination. In this set-piece Brontë also draws on the influential condemnation of beggars by Malthus to absolve the Morton townsfolk and Hannah from the accusation of heartlessness. At Moor House this withholding of aid because of Hannah’s fear highlights St John’s performance of his ‘duty’ as a member of the Anglican clergy.

By virtue of biology, women throughout history have had a special relationship with fear. This was certainly the case for middle-class women in mid-nineteenth century Britain, when menstruation was parsed as a disease of the feminine and its ultimate ‘cure’ deemed to be childbirth with all its attendant perils and horrors and death as a very real possibility. The red room is the menarche literalised (Monahan 1988, p. 590), an adolescent female site of sexuality and fear (Showalter 1977, p. 125). This room and Jane’s terrified incarceration within it symbolise her entry into sexual maturity. Helen Moglen calls the red room ‘a terrifying womb-world’, a space in which Jane enters a new state of being (1976, p. 111). These scholars recognise the crucial importance of this scene in Jane Eyre. At the time of Brontë’s writing of Jane Eyre there were very specific terrors associated with that ‘womb-world’. Menarche heralded the onset of a lifetime plagued by the imminent possibility of insanity, illness and fragility.
(Étienne Esquirol 1838). Menstruation was considered an illness, rendering women mentally unstable and physically weak. There was an overriding interest in and scrutiny of menstruation. As Sally Shuttleworth (1998) explains, the unimpeded flow of menses was considered a significant indicator of female physical and mental health. Marriage, sexual intercourse and pregnancy were viewed as the ideal remedies for this ‘malady’ (Esquirol 1838). Although childbirth was advocated as a cure for the ‘diseases’ of menstruation it was frequently the case of the cure being far worse than the disease. Estimates of the number of maternal deaths in childbirth in nineteenth-century England suggest five per cent of women died during or within approximately four weeks of giving birth. The average number of five or six births per woman meant that the probability of death rose incrementally with each successive confinement (Loudon, 1992). Puerperal fever ‘a word of fear’ also known as ‘childbed fever’, an excruciating death, accounted for around eighty percent of all maternal deaths during the first half of the nineteenth century (Loudon, 1992). Unsurprisingly, for women in the nineteenth century sexual maturity, marriage and childbirth were objects of fear.

The attitudes that ascribed mental instability and weakness to women were responsible for ensuring that middle-class women were denied any opportunity to be involved in the wider world of business or work outside the home and spent their lives confined to the domestic realm. These circumstances reinforced the subordination of women to men and the valorisation of marriage as the perfect future for a woman (Poovey, 1988). A middle-class girl grew to young womanhood in her father’s house and, as such, she was her father’s property. Upon marriage, as property, she was ‘given’ by her father to her husband. Exchanging her father’s surname for that of her husband she was
subsumed into his identity both legally and metaphorically. Within marriage she
had no legal or financial rights. As a married woman she ‘ceased to exist legally’
(Poovey, 1988 p. 52). With no right to refuse her husband’s demands for sexual
intercourse, rape in marriage was not uncommon (Joanna Bourke, 2008). It is
reasonable to consider that young girls attempted to delay menarche by
starvation as Jane contemplates when she is incarcerated in the red room, ‘never
eating or drinking more’ (12). I also suggest that the starvation of the Lowood
girls might be seen as part of the overall control of their sexuality by the
Reverend Brocklehurst. Anorexia, an illness caused by voluntary starvation, has
been documented at least since the middle ages but was particularly prevalent in
the nineteenth century among adolescent girls. It was widely thought to result
from the pubescent girl’s terror of moving through adolescence to sexual
maturity. In fact, some psychiatrists still contend that one of the motivations of
anorexic girls is to ‘turn off’ their sexuality (Risch, 2003 p. 73). Chlorosis (also
called ‘Virgins’ Disease and ‘Green Sickness’) was a mysterious malady involving
refusal of food suffered by middle-class young women, common in the
nineteenth century but unknown from the early twentieth century. Medical
historians have speculated that this little-understood illness was psychosomatic
and directly related to the condition of women during that time. It is generally
believed that chlorosis came about due to the fear of sexual maturity (Figlio,
1978).

This chapter’s discussion has focused on fear and its mechanisms and the
ways in which these have been deployed by Brontë in the text of Jane Eyre.
Among Brontë’s ‘mechanisms of fear’ is her use of the Female Gothic literary form
as a narrative strategy to create an atmosphere in which she explores aspects of
female sexuality and ventures into the realm of the unconscious, with layers of symbolism unavailable at the level of ‘realism’. The association of the Gothic genre with specific, gendered fears was identified by Ellen Moers (1974). Exploring the Gothic elements in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818), Moers argued that the terrors associated with Shelley’s monster spring from that author’s own unhappy experiences of pregnancy, birth, and the deaths of children. Moers considered that Gothic novels written by women were specifically associated with the fears and anxieties associated with childbirth and the sexuality of the female body and this literary form she termed ‘Female Gothic’.

*Jane Eyre* is considered a work of Gothic fiction by virtue of Brontë’s deployment of traditional Gothic tropes. Among these are strange ghostly occurrences, an old mansion with a dark and mysterious third floor, unaccountable laughter, and mysterious and dangerous nocturnal events coloured by a general sense of the uncanny (Punter 1996). Alexander (1993) reminds us of the long standing penchant for the macabre evident throughout Brontë’s juvenilia and the Gothic influence of the many periodicals and annuals read so avidly by the young Brontës. The traditional Gothic tropes manifested in *Jane Eyre* are what Robert B. Heilman refers to as ‘Old Gothic’ (1958, p. 120). However he maintains that Brontë frequently uses humour to undermine the potential for terror contained within these familiar motifs and this undercutting of the traditional Gothic he refers to as ‘Anti-Gothic’ (p. 120). He argues that what distinguishes Brontë’s use of the Gothic form is her exploration of intense human feeling and the injection of passionately felt personal emotion into the traditional Gothic form. This he describes as Brontë’s ‘New Gothic’ (p. 118). While Heilman
acknowledges the power of Brontë’s depiction of emotion and her use of symbolism to modify the stereotypical Gothic tropes, he nevertheless pays little attention to the work of fear in *Jane Eyre*.

Heilman (1958) is one of the earliest critics to empty fear from discussions of the Gothic aspects of *Jane Eyre*. Although fear is the organising structure of Gothic fiction, a form referred to by David Punter as ‘The Literature of Terror’ (1996), the assumed presence of female sexual fears and anxieties in texts identified by Moers as characteristic of the Female Gothic genre are rarely afforded more than a cursory consideration in discussions of Brontë’s deployment of Female Gothic in *Jane Eyre*. Female Gothic has moved away from Moers’ focus on the fears and anxieties of female sexuality and is refocusing more broadly on feminist ideology. Diane Wallace and Andrew Smith (2009) noted the politically subversive nature of contemporary work in the genre that now articulates female fears of confinement within patriarchal societal structures and immurement within the domestic world.

Hoeveler, for instance, arguing that Female Gothic has given birth to ‘victim feminism’, a mode of passive aggressive manipulation, situates the function of Female Gothic literature as an oblique or encoded criticism of public institutions oppressive to women (1998, Preface, Para. 3, 7). She fails altogether to mention the instantiation of sexual anxieties or, indeed, fear itself, in either the female Gothic novel or *Jane Eyre*. Eugenia DeLamotte similarly overlooks these female oriented fears in her discussion of ‘the perils of the night’. While the notion of fearfulness is implicit in DeLamotte’s assertion that ‘true meaning of women’s Gothic’ resides in the horror of women’s entrapment in the mundane pursuits of housekeeping and domestic life (1990, p. 199) she does not engage
with the possible influence of sexual fears that may be present in the ubiquitous
Gothic trope of the confined woman in the domestic home. Donna Heiland
acknowledges that ‘Gothic novels are above all about the creation of fear’ (2004, p. 5) yet she scarcely engages with fear in her feminist exploration of the sublime and the uncanny in *Jane Eyre*. My study argues that Brontë deploys the tropes of ‘female’ and ‘new’ Gothic forms to explore Jane’s fear of female sexual maturity and the subjugation and possession of the female body that accompanies this, and that she follows this theme throughout the novel.

While this chapter has focused on fear and some of its intrusions into the text of *Jane Eyre*, Jane’s task is to dispel fear and live a life free of fear. Nussbaum (2001) remarks that emotions fit the world as it is, so unless a change is made in the world and/or the beliefs and the prerequisites for fearfulness are altered, fear will persist. Removing the elements that create vulnerability, or belief in vulnerability, helps to dispel fear (Nussbaum, 2001). What Brontë needs to achieve in *Jane Eyre* then, is to make changes to what Jane perceives as threatening, that is, to alter the objects of fear so as to render them less fearful and to ensure that Jane develops and grows in ways that eliminate her vulnerabilities. In other words, to ensure Jane’s appraisal, meaning-making and judgment of people and events no longer generate fear. The conditions for being afraid must undergo change because the nature of fear itself will always remain the same.
CHAPTER THREE

A Miserable Poltroon

What a miserable little poltroon had fear, engendered of unjust punishment, made of me in those days! (26)

The first four chapters of *Jane Eyre* encapsulating only two and a half months of ten-year old Jane Eyre’s life at Gateshead, the home of her Aunt Reed and cousins John, Georgina, and Eliza, have been accepted as paradigmatic of the novel as a whole. As Gilbert and Gubar famously noted ‘the little drama enacted on that day which opens *Jane Eyre* is in itself a paradigm of the larger drama that occupies the entire book’ (1984, p. 341). The first sentence of the novel ‘There was no possibility of taking a walk that day’ (5) sets in motion a sequence of dramatic set-pieces that enable Brontë to develop the theme, plot and stylistic patterns of the novel and provide the genesis of the character of her eponymous protagonist.

The focus of this present chapter is a close analysis of these early pages of the novel with the aim of demonstrating the ways in which Brontë establishes fear as the primary emotion in the text. I also examine how in these early chapters she uses fear to develop character and plot and introduces what I have referred to as ‘the thematic arc’ which provides the scaffolding for the narrative: Jane’s struggle against the patriarchal dominance of her sexual being and her efforts to become an active creative agent in the fulfilment of her own sexual destiny.

From the outset Brontë crafts a tenebrous landscape of foreboding and dread, beginning her novel with oppressive images of turbulent weather: dark clouds blown by a cold winter wind and ceaseless, penetrating rain: ‘a pale blank of mist and cloud’ (6), ‘wet lawn’, and ‘storm beat shrub’ (6). Into the opening
passages in which dread swirls as freely as the forces of weather and imagination, she weaves ‘The Turk’, introducing another elemental force into the sombre winter day—that of sexuality.¹

The first of Brontë’s Oriental images in *Jane Eyre* is Jane’s Aunt Reed ‘reclined on a sofa by the fireside’ (11) in the drawing-room at Gateshead surrounded by her ‘darlings’ (5),² Jane’s cousins. Brontë’s choice of the word ‘reclined’ ironically associates the figure of Mrs Reed with the multitude of reclining odalisques, houris, dancing girls, and female slaves so ubiquitous in representations of the harem and fetishised in French and British art of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Mrs Reed, described as ‘a woman of robust frame ... though stout, not obese’ (29), is surely kin to the semi-reclining ‘extremely well-fed’ Cleopatrain the painting of that name observed disapprovingly by Lucy Snow in the art exhibition in Brontë’s *Villette*. Lucy’s comment that ‘She had no business to lounge away the noon on a sofa’ (1977, p. 180) could just as easily have been made of Mrs Reed by the older Jane-the-narrator as she relates the events of ‘that day’.

The second image, juxtaposed with the first, is that of the child, Jane, excluded from the drawing-room family tableau, enfolded by scarlet moreen drapery in the breakfast-room, seated in the window seat ‘cross-legged, like a Turk’ (5). Here Brontë conjures something beyond a visual image requiring familiarity with a certain style of sitting. Contrasting the upright energy of the Turk-like Jane with the passivity of her reclining aunt, she metonymically endows Jane with the stereotypical qualities of the Turk: sensuality, power, and, of course,

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¹Brontë’s Oriental imagery in *Jane Eyre* is discussed in detail in Chapter Four.
²Brontë reiterates this tableau when Jane is first introduced to Rochester by the drawing-room fireside at Thornfield ‘half reclined on a couch ... his foot supported by the cushion’ (102) with Adèle and his dog, Pilot, beside him.
‘otherness’. With this compelling Oriental image Brontë foregrounds the immanent personality traits that are in direct contrast with Jane’s timidity, modesty, and powerlessness: her ‘otherness’ and her overriding need to belong, coupled with a fierce assertiveness and the potential for great sexual passion. These ‘Turkish’ traits will generate tension in the incidents and interactions that flow from them.

Through the association and metonymy of these two Oriental ‘glimpses’ Brontë inscribes the text with a frisson of extravagant sensuality that she absorbs into the fearful mood enclosing Jane, and there is no doubt Brontë was well aware of the potent connotations of images of ‘the Turk’. In one of her Angrian tales Caroline Vernon (1839), she introduces the lecherous image of the Turk into a scene in which the rapacious Count of Zamorna proceeds with his seduction of Caroline:

Miss Vernon sat speechless. She darkly saw, or rather felt, the end to which all this tended but all was fever and delirium round her. The duke spoke again, in a single blunt and almost coarse sentence compressing what yet remained to be said.

‘If I were a bearded Turk, Caroline, I would take you to my harem.’

His deep voice as he uttered this, his high featured face and dark large eye, burning bright with a spark from the depths of Gehenna, struck Caroline Vernon with a thrill of nameless dread.

(Brontë 1839, pp. 432-433)

Caroline’s response to the Count’s sexually explicit remark is one of fear

The harem and the Turk were sometimes viewed as emblematic of British middle class women’s domestic enslavement in the nineteenth century (Zonana, 1993) but in this study I argue that in Jane Eyre, Brontë’s concern is the enslavement of female sexuality. As Brantlinger remarks, in the Victorian era
‘things Ottoman or Turkish mainly represented gross sensuality and decadence’ (2013, p. 220). Brontë’s Oriental allusions are situated at the intersection of enslaved and gendered sexuality and fear and with them she begins building the theme she will develop within the red room and fully realise throughout the novel: Jane’s fear of sexual domination and subjection.

Banished from the comfort of family affection and fireside warmth, with only Bewick’s *A History of British Birds* (1804) for company, Jane cuts a solitary, vulnerable figure in her window seat despite her ‘Turkishness’. As the rain and mist swirl outside rather than being diverted by charming illustrations of linnets and nightingales Jane’s attention is claimed by the vignettes of rural life she finds in Bewick. These tiny engravings appear throughout his book filling in gaps in pages at the end of species descriptions, usually depicting a scene with a moral at its heart. Gazing at the miniscule illustrations Jane’s imagination is drawn to even darker and colder realms than Gateshead. ‘Solitary rocks’ (6), ‘bleak shores’ (6), ‘the vast sweep of the Arctic Zone’ (6), ‘forlorn regions of dreary space’ (6) and ‘death-white realms’ (6) absorb her interest. Fascinated, she ponders over the deathly images portrayed in the book. The ‘churchyard’, a place of the dead, Jane finds unfathomable:

> I cannot tell what sentiment haunted the quite solitary churchyard, with its inscribed headstone; its gate, its two trees, its low horizon, girdled by a broken wall, and its newly-risen crescent, attesting the hour of eventide. (6)

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3 Rochester likens Jane to a linnet (266) and the ‘nightingale singing in the wood’ (215) is the serenade to his proposal.

4 Brontë was writing *Jane Eyre* a year after the ill-fated Arctic expedition to find the North West Passage led by Sir John Franklin had sailed into those ‘death-white realms’ (6).

5 For the original reference see Thomas Bewick, (1804) Tailpiece to Razor-Bill, *History of British Birds*, Beilby and Bewick, Newcastle upon Tyne, p. 166.
The inscribed headstone and the image of the prophetic ‘crescent’ moon (a palimpsest of Turkey, whose national symbol is the crescent moon and the star) are not only representations of death but symbols of change: the death of the old and the beginning of a new way of life. The inscription on the headstone in the illustration (not mentioned by Brontë) reads ‘Good Times Bad Times and all Times get over’ (Bewick 1804, p. 166). This epitaph suggests not only the end of life but the dynamic process of constant change and movement through the various stages of life. Change and a new phase of her life are moving toward Jane, prefigured by this deathly image.

She hastily passes over an illustration of what she terms ‘marine phantoms’ (6), ‘two ships becalmed in a torpid sea’ (6) but she designates the images that follow as ‘object[s] of terror’ (6). The first of these depicts a man shouldering a burden as he heads toward a gate seemingly unaware that a winged, horned creature with a forked tail, bird-like legs and feet is gleefully restraining him with a pitchfork thrust into his load. She describes this as ‘The fiend pinning down the thief’s pack behind him’ (6). The second engraving depicts a similarly gleeful demonic figure perched on a rock smoking a pipe as he eyes a distant gallows where a crowd is gathered, presumably an audience to a public hanging. This she describes as ‘the black, horned thing seated aloof on a rock, surveying a distant crowd surrounding a gallows’ (6). Appearing mysterious and dreadful to Jane, these two images signal the fearful events soon to overtake her. The first image depicting a thief being held back by a ‘fiend’ represents thwarted escape and the gallows in the second image symbolises not

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7 See Artist Unknown, 1797, The Devil and a Hanged Man’s Pipe, in Thomas Bewick, History of British Birds Volume 2, The Land Birds, Beilby and Bewick, Newcastle upon Tyne, p. 129.
only repressive punishment in its harshest form but public humiliation and
disgrace. These images heighten the atmospheric dread in which Brontë has
situated her heroine. Brontë also uses them to foreshadow Jane’s thwarted escape
from her cousin John Reed, her ‘punishment’ in the red room, and the
overwhelming change to Jane’s life journey that will flow from it. In placing her
protagonist, the orphaned ten-year old, at the epicentre of the elemental forces of
the storm from which she is ‘protected but not separated’ (6) and conjuring
images of ‘death-white realms’ (6) Brontë builds and heightens the child’s
vulnerability, suggesting that it will not be long before Jane herself is taken up
and swept ‘wildly before a long and lamentable blast’ (12) to an uncertain fate.

Even though Jane views them as objects of terror Bewick’s images have no
material power. Flicked away with the turn of a page they are incapable of doing
her any harm and are as ‘interesting as the tales Bessie sometimes narrated on
winter evenings’ (13) such as Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded*
(1740), (*Pamela* is, of course, the story of a young girl importuned sexually by an
older, powerful man of higher class). Again Brontë juxtaposes fearful images with
allusions to sexuality, this time foreshadowing Rochester’s proposition that Jane
become his mistress. That all these images and imaginative tales are mere
phantasmagoria with no facility for physical harm emphasises the overbearing
and terrifying corporeality of Jane’s cousin John Reed, the chief source of fear at
this point in Jane’s life. While she claims that with her treasured Bewick on her
knee she is ‘happy; happy at least in my way’ (7), she fears the inevitable

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8Public Hangings, the last of which took place in 1868, were still being carried out in England at the
time Brontë was writing. Both Thackeray and Dickens wrote on the subject of public
execution but, rather than condemning the practice itself, their opprobrium was directed at the
behaviour of the crowds. See William Makepeace Thackeray, (1885) ‘Going to see a Man
interruption Reed brings to her brief interlude of contentment. The first ‘master’ Jane will encounter over the course of the novel, Reed is a brutish fourteen-year-old: greedy, fat, coarse featured, dull-witted and lazy, an exemplar of masculine power at its most violent and irrational. Within the Gateshead household he is a junior despot with the attributes of a sociopath whose relentless cruelty and abuse toward Jane go largely unremarked and unchecked. Utterly vulnerable to this brute, the diminutive Jane lives moment-to-moment in fear:

every nerve I had feared him, and every morsel of flesh on my bones shrank when he came near. There were moments when I was bewildered by the terror he inspired, because I had no appeal whatever against his menaces or his inflictions. (8)

When he summons her from the refuge of the window-seat the scene is set for another episode of abuse. Jane freezes, waiting for and fearful of his anticipated blow. He strikes her and when initially she does not react he hurls the cherished volume of Bewick’s *Birds* at her. She stumbles, cutting her head and causing it to bleed. On ‘that day’ instead of her customary passivity in the face of Reed’s bullying, fear now incites Jane to fight back. She denounces him as a ‘murderer’ (8) and a ‘slave-driver’ (8) mentally likening him to the more monstrous of the Roman emperors Caligula and Nero (9) and herself to a ‘rebel slave’ (9). This is the first mention of Mediterranean slavery in the novel. Unable to flee Jane fights. Bleeding, she turns on her tormentor in a fierce attack, ‘I don’t very well know what I did with my hands but he called me ‘Rat! Rat! And bellowed out loud’ (9). Jane is likened to a cornered rat by Reed and later, by the nursery maid Bessie to a ‘mad cat’ (9). The rat and the cat are two animals within the domestic sphere that are not prone to unprovoked attack, yet, will fight with great ferocity—exactly as Jane does—when there is no possibility of flight.
In this set-piece Brontë enlists fear as a dynamic, subversive force shaping Jane’s reaction to her cousin’s violence. The carefully delineated progression of these passages forms a virtual textbook description of the fear response of ‘fight or flight’. The sequence is founded on Reed’s habitual abuse of Jane which she ‘never had an idea of replying to’ (8) and the child’s resultant long standing anxiety. Reed’s cruelty and Jane’s habituated response parallel the learning trials carried out and documented by LeDoux (2003) in inducing fear in his laboratory rats. Reacting to her cousin’s barbarity Jane demonstrates the characteristic ‘fight or flight’ reactions: anticipatory freezing at the prospect of attack, the acceptance of an initial attack, the recognition that ‘flight’ is not possible, and the activation of the embodied fear response leading to ‘fight’ behaviour, which in Jane’s case is an angry verbal outburst and a fierce physical response. Prevented from escape Jane fights back and what remains when the rush of adrenalin ebbs and energy subsides are exhaustion, a vestige of anger, and terror.

The internal logic of the event is made possible by Brontë’s strategic use of fear. Previously John Reed’s behaviour was ignored by the family and the Gateshead staff and submitted to by Jane but now, embedded within the fear response, it makes good sense psychologically for her to turn on Reed. Nevertheless, his power prevails. The domination and subjugation of Jane to ‘master’ John Reed and the fear aroused by his habitual abuse resonates through her consciousness so that the experience of his violence is not one that is empathic or metaphorical but that of an actual slave, owned by a volatile and cruel master. Punished with incarceration in the red room Jane becomes the chastised ‘rebel slave’ (9).
This incarceration is a pivotal event both emotionally and physically and fundamental to all the plot developments which flow from it to the conclusion of the novel. Jane’s emotional and physical resistance to John Reed’s violence is the first step in her long journey to free herself from fear which begins with her departure from Gateshead for Lowood School.

The response to her physical attack on her cousin is quick and sharp. Under orders from Aunt Reed, Jane is dragged resisting—‘a new thing’ (9) for her—by Bessie and Miss Abbott the lady’s-maid, into the red room. Incarceration there is her penalty for the crime of attacking her attacker. To underline the symbolic meaning of Jane’s incarceration in the red room Brontë has Abbot make one last threat with which to terrify Jane into repentance for her resistance: ‘God will punish her’ (19) she tells Bessie before they lock Jane inside the red room. Yet is not the ‘bad’ (20) thing that might descend from the chimney that awaits Jane in the ‘womb-world’ (Moglen 1976, p. 111), of the red room but God’s ‘curse’ inflicted on all women for Eve’s transgression in the Garden of Eden, to be borne out in suffering through their biology in menstruation and childbirth. Jane’s ‘mutiny’ (9) is unprecedented and she is almost as shocked by her behaviour as are the Reeds and the rest of the household, save for Abbott. Her opinion of Jane is that the child is naturally deceitful ‘I never saw a girl her age with so much cover’ (10) she tells Bessie, with a note of satisfaction underlining her own perspicacity.

At the surface level this statement refers to Jane’s apparent tendency toward secrecy and deceit and the notion of the lady’s-maid that beneath Jane’s demure and submissive appearance lurk hitherto unrevealed depths of something dark and decidedly unpleasant. The ‘cover’ referred to in the text as being a part
of Jane’s personality blends with the older Jane’s narrative, enlivening the possibility that the ‘cover’ attributed to the young Jane lives on in the mature Jane. This hint of ‘cover’ unsettles the narrative voice, hinting that the full truth is not being conveyed even by the mature narrator, suggesting the text is a hiding place for a darker discourse, one that is forbidden and even dangerous. I argue throughout the thesis that Brontë’s use of ‘Turkish’ tropes and motifs constructs such a darker discourse. It is a subtext that enables her to create an otherwise forbidden female-centric discourse that focuses on eroticism and female sexuality and, specifically in terms of the events of the red room, the move from girlhood to the beginning of sexual maturity at menarche. The events or situations being recalled and narrated have veracity in terms of their relationship to events and characters in the narrative so that, in one sense, the red room incident can be accepted as ‘realism’. This is something attempted by the narrating, mature Jane in her explanation that the mysterious light that terrifies the young Jane, is most likely only a lamp’s reflection. However, there are other meanings to be revealed in the symbols and metaphors of the narrator’s elegantly constructed ‘cover’. In the red room it is mystery and surrealism working in concert with fear—in other words, the Gothic literary form—that Brontë enlists to provide her ‘cover’.

Fear is the master manipulator of Gothic fiction and its raison d’être. Without terror at its core there would be no Gothic and, as previously considered, ‘female Gothic’ springs from female fears and anxieties concerned with menstruation, sexuality and childbirth (Moers, 1974). Brontë has situated her protagonist in a place where fear is manifest and unrestrained and here she seamlessly segues across the threshold of the red room into the heightened emotions and sexuality of female Gothic fiction. With overwrought emotions at
play the domesticity of the red room—in actuality a bedroom—is subverted from a site of pleasurable sexual play, rest, and comfort to a site of death and terror. Consequently under the ‘cover’ of the Gothic form Brontë is able to articulate a tabooed discourse centred on female sexuality. As Peter Grudin puts it, Gothic is a ‘privileged form’ (1977, p. 145), one that endowed eighteenth- and nineteenth-century authors with the freedom to depict erotic subjects and to slip past the cultural surveillance of the day that was ever present and ever alert for improprieties

...the longevity and power of Gothic fiction unquestionably stem from the way it helps us address and disguise some of the most important desires, quandaries and sources of anxiety, from the most internal and mental to the widely social and cultural, throughout the history of western culture since the eighteenth century. (Jerrod E. Hogle 2003, p. 4)

In Brontë’s hands the female Gothic trope of the woman trapped in the haunted house is transposed to become the woman entrapped, not within the house but within her own embodied sexuality. Such a woman, Helen Moglen asserts, is inescapably powerless (1976, p. 105). Jane’s Gothic terror emerges as the fear of her own femaleness. As Claire Kahane argues, the object of female Gothic fear is femaleness itself, an ‘imprisoning biological destiny that denies the autonomy of the self’, fragmenting identity and ‘obliterating the very boundaries of the self’ (1985, p. 59)

In Jane’s case the red room is also haunted, not by the ghostly presence of her late uncle, ‘it was in this chamber he breathed his last’ ... ‘here he lay in state’ (11), but by the presence of her master-to-come Edward Fairfax Rochester evoked by the ‘vacant majesty’ (11) of the bed with the empty ‘pale throne’ waiting beside it. Far from being Jane’s ‘vision of the society in which she is trapped’ as posited
by Gilbert and Gubar (1984, p. 340) the red room symbolises various physical and psychological manifestations of female sexuality, parlaying the fears and anxieties of many middle class, nineteenth-century British women into the experience of the incarcerated child, Jane Eyre. In generating this vision of female bodily entrapment which is at once terrifying and suffocatingly intimate Brontë lays a trail of ‘signs’, ‘presentiments’ and ‘sympathies’ (187) that takes us into and through the profoundly symbolic red room. The mature narrating Jane has great respect for these mysterious phenomena as she informs us years later at Thornfield:

I never laughed at presentiments in my life; because I have had strange ones of my own. Sympathies, I believe, exist: (for instance, between far-distant, long-absent, wholly estranged relatives; asserting, notwithstanding their alienation, the unity of the source to which each traces his origin) whose workings baffle mortal comprehensions. And signs, for aught we know, may be but the sympathies of Nature with man. (187)

Brontë relocates the object of Jane’s fear from her cousin John Reed and his abuse to the red room and all that it symbolises. Elaine Showalter notes that in Jane Eyre ‘the sexual experiences of the female body are expressed spatially through elaborate and rhythmically recurring images of rooms and houses’ (1977, p. 113) and none of these is more sexually charged or more potently realised than the red room. On Jane’s entry into the red room the ‘object of fear’ is imagined as the maturing female body itself. The true force of the narrative comes from the theme of Jane’s fear of sexual subjugation symbolised by and always present in Brontë’s Eastern allusions. This theme originates with the following red room scene at Gateshead and is played out as part of the unifying thematic arc in the four future iterations of the red room in the novel: the visit by Bertha to Jane’s bedroom at Thornfield, the maternal voice that urges Jane to flee from Rochester,
a scene of sexual fantasy at Morton, and Jane's new 'red room' at Moor House. All of these will be discussed in later chapters of this study.

Festooned in red drapery and 'carpeted in red' (10) Brontë’s red room is a boudoir Turc, reminiscent of the lavish spaces representing the harem—a traditionally female space—that were recreated in several country houses in France and Britain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as a symbolic portrayal of female sexuality represented by fanciful images of Oriental opulence.9 Its connotations of sexuality are illuminated by Brontë’s Oriental motifs, something that would have been familiar Brontë’s contemporary readers (Zilfi, 2010). The creation of Turkish rooms, particularly bedrooms, in English country houses was fashionable in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when the passion for Turquerie was its height, and Brontë decorates this 'large and stately chamber' (10) in just such a manner.10 The red room is both womb-like, ‘half shrouded’ (10) in festoons of red drapery carpeted in red, and vaginal, ‘the walls were a soft fawn colour with a blush of pink in it’ (10). At its centre is the great bed ‘like a tabernacle’ (10), a place of worship but also a place of sacrifice, supported on phallic ‘pillars of mahogany (10), ‘piled-up’ (11) with pillows and mattresses in the manner of the voluptuous fantasies of harem representations in Oriental and Turquerie paintings. Spread across this decadent bed is a virginal ‘snowy Marseilles counterpane’ (11). The bed is hung with ‘deep

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9 One well known ‘boudoir Turc’ was created for the mistress of Louis IV, Madame de Pompadour in her private home in Bellevue. Represented in Sultane (1747) a painting by Charles-André van Loo (1705-1765), the room is draped in red and Pompadour is depicted seated ‘cross-legged like a Turk’ in a window seat surrounded by crimson curtains.

10 Haydn Williams in his Turquerie describes one such Turkish room in a Wiltshire country house: ‘The whole room is hung round with ample curtains of the richest orange satin, with deep fringes of silk and gold. Between the folds of this drapery, mirrors of uncommon size appear as openings leading to other apartments. The carpet, of reddish Etruscan brown contrasts admirably with the tones of the hangings. The windows are screened by blinds of orange silk’ (2014, p. 159). The room is furnished with Ottoman sofas, candelabra, ‘and piles of cushions’ (p. 159).
red damask’ (10) a fabric originating in the Ottoman Empire, its name derived from ‘Damascus’. The dye producing the deep red of the festooned draperies, the hangings on the bed, the carpet, and the cloth covering the table at the foot of the bed is ‘Turkey Red’, the only dye capable of producing such a colour at that time. Turkey Red was a popular ‘new’ red originating in Turkey but reproduced in Britain only in Scotland in the late eighteenth century (Nenadic and Tuckett, 2015). Highlighting the Oriental subtext of the (Turkey) red room, Brontë has the terrified Jane ‘riveted to a low ottoman near the marble chimney-piece with the bed rising above her’ (11) (my emphasis). The secret spell of this ‘silent’ (11), ‘remote’ (11), ‘solemn’ (11), and surreal depiction of female sexuality is that it is a man’s chamber, guarded from intrusion by a ‘dreary sense of consecration’ (11).

Importantly, the room with all its oriental symbolism of female sexual enslavement is terrifying to Jane and still acting in the persona of ‘slave’ she resists it with a desperation born of fear.

The sexuality conveyed by Brontë’s ‘Oriental’ red room infiltrates the significant scenes in Jane Eyre in which the red room is reimagined. In this way the theme of Jane’s fear of sexual and bodily dominance established by the red room scene unifies the narrative as Jane journeys to maturity. Significantly the red room is a site of fear. Jane’s terror as she is hauled bleeding into the red room, her physical resistance, and her self-likening to a ‘revolted slave’ (21) symbolise the girl-child’s dread of the menarche: the female rite of passage marking the emergence of sexual maturity. In creating a trail of bloody signs in Jane’s wake Brontë introduces allusions to menstrual blood that add symbolic force to the metaphorical menarche. When Jane falls and cuts her head she bleeds, ‘The cut bled, the pain was sharp’ (16), when she enters the red room she bleeds, ‘I felt a
drop or two of blood from my head trickle down my neck’ (16), later, alone and abandoned amid the terrors of the red room she bleeds, ‘My head still ached and bled with the blow and fall’ (22) and before she succumbs to the powers of superstition and yet retains a vestige of the ‘bitter vigour’ (21) of her earlier rebellion, her ‘blood is still warm’ (21). Despite all this blood and bleeding there is never a mention of it being staunched, or wiped away, or the wound being attended to, bandaged, or dressed. Jane simply bleeds.

Jane has good reason to dread sexual maturity. In nineteenth-century Britain middle class female children were able to lead a relatively androgynous life scarcely differentiated in play or proclivity from their male counterparts, until this relatively carefree existence ended abruptly as the girl achieved puberty. According to the medical men of the day, menarche heralded the beginning of a lifetime plagued by the imminent possibility of insanity, illness, fragility, and confinement with the home. In Paris in 1845 the influential French Physician Étienne Esquirol in his *Treatise on Insanity* declared—with all the weight of scientific *gravitas* behind him—that there was a strong likelihood a hitherto ‘sane’ young girl would develop severe symptoms of madness at the time of her first menstrual period. When Jane, astonished at her own newfound resistance, admits she is ‘a trifle beside myself’ (18) she adds with some irony ‘or rather out of myself, as the French would say’ (18). Further, when she remarks that Bessie and Abbot both look at her askance ‘as incredulous of my sanity’ (19) the suggestion of sudden madness reinforces the association between menarche and the red room (19). Feminist scholars such as Gilbert and Gubar (1984) and Valerie Beattie (1996) have put forward arguments for Jane, herself, to be considered mad. One example of this is Beattie’s (1996) contention that the madness of Bertha
Rochester is a projection of Jane’s own madness. This may be so but I would argue that the hint of madness referred to during Jane’s imprisonment in the red room is yet another of Brontë’s ‘signs’ that serves to strengthen the metaphoric representation of the onset of menstruation and, concomitantly, Jane’s fear of her own sexual maturity. At the time Brontë was writing *Jane Eyre* the only detailed knowledge of women’s sexuality resided with medical men who viewed women’s bodies as the site of mental instability, illness and ‘excitability’. Pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, and menopause, were taken as proof that women should be contained within the sphere of domesticity, unfit to attempt any other ‘activities’ (Michie, 1993).

The red room has long been viewed as womb-like and representative of female sexuality (Moglen, 1976). Melodie Monahan, for example, acknowledges it as the ‘literalized stage of the onset of menses’ (1988, p. 590), while Williams recognises the ‘whole range of uterine analogies’ (1989, p. 71) in the maternal symbolism of the red room. Michie (1993) views Jane’s confinement in the red room as an allusion to the manner in which medical (mis)understandings of menstruation were utilised within nineteenth-century middle-class society to confine or limit women’s lives. I argue, further, that the bloody symbolism of the red room, its representation of menstruation and menarche, and Jane's captivity there are symbolic of the child’s movement into sexual maturity and that the richly symbolic red room—the property of a man—engenders what I maintain is the emergence of the thematic arc: Jane’s fear of bodily and sexual subjugation. This thematic arc is represented in Jane’s terror of the initial object of fear, the room itself. What is symbolised by the blood, the crimson colour, the virginal white, and the Oriental imagery is menarche and the movement from childhood
to sexual maturity or the movement of child to woman. That the room is specifically that of a man—with the new ‘master’ still to come as attested by the ‘vacant majesty of the bed’ (11) and the readiness of the empty ‘pale throne’ (11)—reinforces the bleak and pessimistic vision of the red room: that the deepest, most secret spaces of the female body, the defining core of female sexuality, have been appropriated by men. This is the ‘largely unspoken shadow side of the Victorian woman’s life’ with its attendant ‘dread and anxiety’ that Heather Glen (2002, p. 94) discusses. Glen reads these early chapters of Jane Eyre’s story as ‘one of objectification and powerlessness, of vertiginous insecurity, of disconfirmation and dread’ (p. 94). She argues that far from depicting a journey of individual agency Brontë’s novel depicts ‘the prescriptive, self-abnegating, death-shadowed world’ (p. 94) of early nineteenth century English women and that is what these early chapters of the novel speak of. As Glen puts it Jane Eyre’s world holds ‘a sense of life as a constant threat of obliteration, of the world as a place of awful danger, of the self as a relative creature, of power residing elsewhere’ (p. 91). I argue that with the red room Brontë articulates the omnipresent dangers experienced by women in the early nineteenth century on reaching sexual maturity, both to their physical autonomy and integrity and to their emotional and psychological autonomy. It is Jane’s fear of the potential realisation of just such a vision as expressed by Glen (2002), with its bodily and emotional subjugation, which Jane will eventually overcome, that creates the thematic arc.

After checking the red room door and finding it locked Jane resigns herself to her incarceration, ‘no jail was ever more secure’ (11). Drawn to the ‘great looking-glass’ (11) between the bed and the windows where the reflections there
'repeated the vacant majesty of the bed and room' (11) Jane gazes searchingly into the mirror:

the strange little figure there gazing at me, with a white face and arms specking the gloom, and glittering eyes of fear moving where all else was still, had the effect of a real spirit: I thought it like one of the tiny phantoms, half fairy, half imp, Bessie's evening stories represented as coming out of lone, ferny dells in moors, and appearing before the eyes of belated travellers. (11)

The frightened, alien, little creature, that Jane sees reflected appears as something unreal and the reflection of the room in which she is situated appears far bleaker than its actuality, ‘All looked colder and darker in that visionary hollow than in reality’ (11). The identity that exists in the mirror is not a reflection of Jane the child but a view of herself as Rochester will see her for the first time as she appears to him on the road to Thornfield: a fairy or elf-like figure, scarcely real, insubstantial, and fragile. Years later, entreating Jane to stay within him after the debacle of their aborted wedding he courts her compassion with a description of their first meeting, attributing her with an other-worldly quality that reinvigorates him:

When once I had pressed the frail shoulder, something new—a fresh sap and sense—stole into my frame. It was well I had learnt that this elf must return to me—that it belonged to my house down below—or I could not have felt it pass away from under my hand, and seen it vanish behind the dim hedge, without singular regret. (266-7)

An evocation of the future Jane seen through Rochester’s eyes is one of Brontë’s ‘sympathies’ expressed as an almost hallucinatory vision suggestive of a level of dissociation in the child, who sees mirrored something ‘other’ than the reflection of the familiar self. The ‘fairy tale’ mirror image is doubly layered with alienation, both from the present Jane and from the future ‘self’ that exists in Rochester’s eyes. This is a view of Jane’s ‘self’ that does not exist independently of
a man and one that is alien to her. While Jane’s dissociation of herself from the mirror image has been viewed as a confusion of identity (Kahane, 1985) and, at the same time, a refusal of self-mastery and identity (Wolstenholme, 1993), I read Jane’s refusal or mis-recognition of herself in the mirror image as her rejection of the insubstantial and fairy-like identity that Rochester will later claim for her. Throughout the narrative Rochester uses this ‘fairy’ or ‘elfin’ image of Jane, ‘my pale little elf’ (220), ‘my mustard seed’ (220) as he calls her, to infantilise and dominate her, most noticeably after the couple’s betrothal when he vows to ‘load those fairy-like fingers with rings’ (220), a gesture which Jane strenuously resists. When he insists that ‘Mademoiselle is a fairy’ (228) who will fly to the moon to live with only Rochester for company Adèle, as Jane’s proxy, disavows this perspective of Jane in a common-sense rebuttal of Rochester’s intent. It is only when the transformed Jane, now free from fear, confronts Rochester at Ferndean that she becomes substantial and Rochester at last acknowledges ‘You are altogether a human being Jane’ (372).

The bleak specular vision of her future self with which Jane is presented is marked by fear rather than by any prospect of joyful anticipation and is indicative of the anxiety surrounding her entry into maturity and a possible future involving marriage and children. In the first half of the nineteenth century marriage was the ultimate site of male privilege and domination. On marriage women took on the submissive role of a non-person. Exchanging her father’s surname for that of her husband she was subsumed into his identity, both legally and metaphorically to become ‘one person’ with no legal or financial rights (Poovey 1989). As Helen Moglen (1976) points out:
the woman is caught in a double bind. Her femininity and therefore her powerlessness are largely inescapable. She can...develop her intellectual and personal capacities. Still, her potential 'as a woman' will be realized only within the strictures of a conventional marriage which maintains her in a position of infantile dependence and subordination. (Moglen, p. 105)

The rejected self-image is reiterated on the morning of the aborted wedding when Jane, in her wedding clothes, gazes at the reflection of the 'robed and veiled figure, so unlike my usual self that it seemed almost the image of a stranger' (244).

Rochester is again evoked later that night in the fragmented whispering between the two maids, Sarah and Bessie, when Jane overhears them speaking of a strange figure ‘—A great black dog behind him—’(28). In this instance, however, what is represented is the image of what Wood describes as ‘Rochester’s own dramatic appearance’ (2009, p. 101). At their first meeting at Thornfield, as Rochester approaches through the twilight with his great black dog ‘Pilot’ Jane recalls another of Bessie’s tales

wherein figures a North-of-England spirit called a ‘Gytrash’, which, in the form of horse, mule, or large dog, haunted solitary ways, and sometimes came upon belated travelers, as this horse was now coming upon me. (95)

The first meeting between Jane and Rochester is prefigured in Bessie’s tales and presaged in the events of ‘that day’, both inextricably linked to the symbolism of the red room.

Jane considers the unfairness of her punishment and the favouring of the odious John Reed over her:

My head still ached and bled with the blow and fall I had received: no one had reproved John for wantonly striking me; and because I had turned against him to avert further irrational violence, I was loaded with general opprobrium. (12)
Her anguished cry: ‘Unjust! Unjust!’ (12) would likely have been echoed by many thousands of pubescent girls as they absorbed the unpalatable realisation of their own supposed inferiority and compared their biology to that of their male peers. Reflecting on the ‘insupportable oppression’ (12) of her situation Jane contemplates the possibility of escape by running away and by starving herself. Kathleen Renk (2008) argues that in presenting the possibility of starvation Brontë is aligning Jane with medieval female saints who starved themselves in protest against injustice. She posits that Jane’s threat to starve herself is a protest against the Reed’s cruelty. Although this may appear to be apposite it seems doubtful that Brontë would consider aligning her protagonist with Catholic saints. Further, Jane’s thoughts of foregoing food are very specifically aimed at escaping her situation. Starvation, as noted earlier, has long been recognised as delaying menarche and causing the cessation of menses in women already established in menstruation. The mysterious malady Chlorosis afflicting middle-class adolescent girls which involved avoidance of food and amenorrhea and was believed to be uterine in origin, was so common in the nineteenth century that it constituted an epidemic (Potter, Bartrop and Touz 2009, p. 381). It was widely thought to result from the pubescent girl’s terror of moving through adolescence to sexual maturity. Rose Risch, who studied the connection between female body-fat and fertility for over fifty years, had this to say about adolescent girls, menarche and fear of sexual maturity:

As has been known since the mid-nineteenth century [their] drastic dieting and excessive exercise, which results in extreme weight loss, delay menarche or stop their menstrual cycles. In fact some psychiatrists think that one of the motivations of anorexic girls is to ‘turn off’ their sexuality. (2003, p. 73)
As the temporary effects of ‘fight or flight’ wear off and the adrenaline ebbs, Jane’s anger and courage subside in tune with the falling temperature in the red room. Her ‘habitual mood of humiliation, self-doubt’ and ‘forlorn depression’ returns. In this emotionally and physically exhausted state Jane becomes prey to the terrors of the red-room. Terror overtakes her imagination. ‘I thought Mr Reed’s spirit, harassed by the wrongs of his sister’s child, might quit its abode’ (13) ‘and rise before me in this chamber’ (13). She sees a light and anticipating a ghostly ‘horror’ (13) she is convinced this is a supernatural vision. Brontë describes the child’s consuming terror:

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.(14)

Jane’s scream brings Bessie and Abbot presumably to her aid but, regardless of her terror and frantic pleas for release, her aunt commands that there is to be no escape from the red room. Alone and trapped, Jane faints from terror—‘a species of fit’ (14)—and Brontë brings the red room set-piece to a close.

On waking from her ‘fit’ Jane is plunged again into the same fear she experienced in the red room. She sees an image that reiterates the experience of imprisonment and the menarcheal symbolism of the red room ‘a terrible red glare, crossed with thick black bars’ (14-15) and once again ‘an all-predominating sense of terror confused [her] faculties’ (15). But rather than being drawn back into that ‘frightful nightmare’ (15) she gradually becomes aware that she is being gently tended and is safe in her own bed. The red glare is the benign and comforting nursery fire. Here she meets Mr Lloyd the apothecary, who Mrs. Reed calls on when the Gateshead servants are ill. The apothecary is an occupation of
less importance, knowledge and skill, than that of the physician Mrs Reed
engages to attend herself and her children, a circumstance that underlines Jane’s
lowly status within the household.

In the aftermath of Jane’s traumatic experience in the red room the
menarche is signalled by a psychological change, the loss of joy and delight in
what was previously experienced as pleasurable, ‘my racked nerves were now in
such a state that no calm could soothe and no pleasure excite them agreeably’
(16). Brontë first demonstrates this change in another glimpse of Turquerie when
Bessie offers a depressed Jane a pastry:

a tart on a certain brightly painted china plate, whose bird of
paradise, nestling in a wreath of convolvuli and rosebuds, had
been wont to stir in me a most enthusiastic sense of admiration;
and which plate I had often petitioned to be allowed to take in
my hand in order to examine it more closely but had always
hitherto been deemed unworthy of such a privilege. This
precious vessel was now placed on my knee, and I was cordially
invited to eat the circlet of delicate pastry upon it. Vain favour!
coming, like most other favours long deferred and often wished
for, too late! I could not eat the tart: and the plumage of the bird,
the tints of the flowers, seemed strangely faded: I put both plate
and tart away’. (16-17)

Signposting Jane’s changed state her appetite is gone and the once admired plate
with its formerly bright plumage and flowers has lost its lustre. In his Notes on a
Journey from Cornhill to Cairo (1846) Thackeray described the slaves of the
Turkish harem as ‘birds of Paradise’ ‘confined to the interior of the cage’ (p. 124).
Jane’s response to the bird of paradise plate reinforces the red room symbolism
and her unhappiness at her captivity in the ‘cage’ of mature female sexuality. The
song of carefree times in the past which Bessie sings and which Jane had always
been delighted by now brings sadness, the refrain taking the cadence of a ‘funeral
Similarly, the delights she had previously experienced from a favourite book, ‘Gulliver’s Travels’, no longer bring her pleasure:

when this cherished volume was now placed in my hand—when I turned over its leaves, and sought in its marvellous pictures the charm I had, till now, never failed to find—all was eerie and dreary; the giants were gaunt goblins, the pygmies malevolent and fearful imps, Gulliver a most desolate wanderer in most dread and dangerous regions. I closed the book, which I dared no longer peruse, and put it on the table, beside the untasted tart.

In the glimpses of malevolent pygmies, fearful imps, and gaunt goblins we see hints and intimations of Bertha Rochester: her ‘pygmy intellect’ (261), ‘her goblin’s cell’ (264), and Rochester’s ‘wanderings as wild as those of the March-spirit’ are surely evoked in Gulliver’s wanderings ‘in most dread and dangerous regions’ (17).

Apart from another visit from Mr Lloyd during which she is offered and rejects a possible future with her ‘poor’ relatives preferring the opportunity to leave Gateshead for school, Jane is virtually shunned by the Reed family. Her exclusion from the Gateshead household, her ostracism (her banishment from the family circle and from the drawing-room fireside) can be read as yet another of Brontë’s allusions to menarche. Elaine Showalter (1977) suggests that Jane’s exclusion from the household has an anthropological affinity with the customs and rituals that surround menarche in other cultures such as those of some Eskimo and South Sea Islander tribes. However, this injunction can be found much closer to home in the Christian Bible. The separation of menstruating women from community is an established part of biblical lore as Leviticus 15:19 decrees: ‘And if a woman have an issue and her issue in her flesh be blood, she
shall be put apart seven days: and whosoever toucheth her shall be unclean until the even’.

After the red room incident life at Gateshead, although always miserable for Jane, becomes unbearable. Lonely, unloved, neglected, and shunned she counts down the days waiting for change. ‘November, December, and half of January pass[ed] away’ (23) in this state of wretchedness before she is finally summoned to Mrs Reed’s presence in the breakfast-room. Fearful of entering the room (after all, this was the scene of her ‘crime’ against John Reed), she waits outside the door in dread:

I now stood in the empty hall; before me was the breakfast-room door, and I stopped, intimidated and trembling. What a miserable little poltroon had fear, engendered of unjust punishment, made of me in those days! I feared to return to the nursery, and feared to go forward to the parlour; ten minutes I stood in agitated hesitation: the vehement ringing of the breakfast-room bell decided me; I must enter. (26)

What confronts the child when she plucks up sufficient courage to enter the room is that formidable object of fear, Mr. Brocklehurst, the grim-faced ‘black pillar’ (26) with the terrifying appearance of Red Riding Hood’s wolf, ‘What a great nose! and what a mouth! and what large prominent teeth!’ (26). Clearly, the presence of this ‘wolf’ portends nothing but misery and danger for little girls. His first question to Jane ‘are you a good child?’ she finds impossible to answer in the affirmative. So successfully has she been inculcated into the belief of her wickedness that when asked how she might avoid the ‘pit full of fire’ (27) that is hell, her only response is inevitably ‘objectionable: “I must keep in good health and not die”’ (27). This terrified child bears no resemblance to Jerome Beaty’s ‘saucy’ Jane Eyre (1996, p. 74) who impertinently provokes Mr Brocklehurst. Neither does her reply resemble a ‘tart’ response that can be taken for ‘an early
example of ... insurgency’ as Monahan (1988, p. 590) argues. Indeed, Jane’s
certainty that she is headed for that fiery pit merely (ironically) makes her err by
answering with the truth to this clerical hypocrite’s question rather than lie by
providing what he wishes her to say. Jane’s response brings forth a harangue from
the Reverend on his theme of the death of bad children who disobey or lie. He
sees proof of her ‘wicked heart’ (27) in the fact she finds the Psalms of little
interest and his comment to this effect gives Mrs Reed the opportunity to provide
him with a monologue outlining Jane’s many faults, particularly, her ‘tendency to
deceit’ (28). Arrangements are made for Jane’s move to Lowood school but,
before his departure, Brocklehurst presents Jane with one more terrifying and
deathly object of coercion, a pamphlet: the “Child’s Guide” (29), which draws
particular attention to the “account of the awfully sudden death of Martha G——
, a naughty child addicted to falsehood and deceit” (29).

Jane muses despairingly on her aunt’s unjust accusations aware that Mrs
Reed ‘was sowing aversion and unkindness along my future path’ (28) and
consequently that Jane will be viewed as ‘an artful noxious child’ (28) by
Brocklehurst. Once again, following an experience of intense fear, she erupts in ‘a
passion of resentment’ (30)’Speak I must. I had been trodden on severely and
must turn: but how? What strength had I to dart retaliation at my antagonist? I
gathered my energies’ (30). Adrenaline flows and Jane summons the energy to
give voice to her true disgust and anger at the oppression she has suffered at
Gateshead. At first she rejoices in the triumphant feeling and the sense of
freedom that comes from speaking her mind at last but as the adrenaline ebbs
this is replaced by a sickening ‘pang of remorse and the chill of reaction’ (31),
experienced physically as well as emotionally:
Something of vengeance I had tasted for the first time, as aromatic wine it seemed, on swallowing, warm and racy, its after-flavour metallic and corroding, gave me a sensation as if I had been poisoned (31).

It is worth noting that a metallic taste and an impression of burning in the mouth are recognised as phenomena associated with intense fear and anxiety (Davies et al 2016).

These passages provide insight into a frightened and abused child’s bleak vision of life. It is a life without compassion or gentleness, save for the occasional kind words from Bessie Leaven the nursemaid, and dominated by a religion that proffers death for disobedience. This is what Heather Glen (2002) describes as the ‘persecutory, death-dominated world presented to the evangelical child’ (p. 94). The Reverend Brocklehurst proposes that should she not obey their adult will then death will likely follow, a sentiment presumably averred to by Jane’s aunt. This view is one that is based on fear both of death and the constant threat of ‘unjust’ punishment and, certainly, fear of a punishing God. This is the world where something bad lies in wait for the unwary child and it is the world in which Jane lives with both ‘reactive fear’ and ‘experiential fear’, fear of punishment and fear of a world in which ‘bad’ is more likely than ‘good’. With Jane’s words ‘what a miserable little poltroon had fear, engendered of unjust punishment, made me’ (26) Brontë demonstrates the manner in which fear is capable of shaping character. Jane is, as Bessie tells her, ‘such a queer, frightened, shy, little thing’ (32) for very good reason.

Pauline Nestor (1992) points out that much of Jane’s craving for love stems from Mrs Reed’s inability to provide maternal affection or nurturing to Jane and, instead, cruelly mistreats and neglects her and rather than loving, detests her. It
is only years later that her aunt reveals to the mature Jane that her detestation of
Jane from infancy springs from a deep fear and jealousy of the love bestowed on
Jane by Mrs. Reed’s husband and the fact that, in her eyes, Jane was favoured
more than her own children. Nevertheless, Nestor argues, this ‘wicked
stepmother’ (p. 40) is the means by which Jane moves from Gateshead to Lowood
on the first leg of her journey.

Where Mrs Reed utterly fails to provide any maternal nurturing
notwithstanding her role as guardian and surrogate mother Jane finds some
solace and a trace of motherly affection in the nurse, Bessie Leaven, regardless of
her frequent scolding. However, despite Jane’s fondness for her nursemaid, even
a simple gesture of spontaneous affection taxes Jane’s courage:

I was not disposed to care much for the nursemaid’s transitory
anger; and I was disposed to bask in her youthful lightness of
heart. I just put my two arms around her, and said, ‘Come,
Bessie! don’t scold.’
The action was more frank and fearless than any I was
habituated to indulge in’ (32).

Bessie recognises Jane’s fearfulness and is also aware of the impact of her
generally timid and fearful demeanour (Jane’s ‘experiential’ fear) on those around
her. When Jane tells her that upon leaving Gateshead she will ‘soon have another
set of people to dread’ (33) Bessie admonishes her, ‘If you dread them, they’ll
dislike you’ (33). She advises ‘you should be bolder’ (32) but Jane’s response
‘What! To get more knocks!’ is despairingly pessimistic, a view of the world that
springs from powerlessness, hopelessness and fear. Some feminist critics (for
instance, Gilbert and Gubar) claim that these opening chapters of Jane Eyre are a
triumph of rebellion and escape from oppression (in line with the notion that
Jane Eyre is a story of confinement and escape) but Jane’s occurrences of defiance
are artefacts of fear, not a bold and feisty child’s feminist assertion against society, and the escape—if Jane’s move from Gateshead to Lowood can be seen as ‘escape’—is merely the movement from one area of harshness and confinement to another as Mrs Reed divests herself of Jane and passes her to Brocklehurst for further ill treatment. Jane’s ‘rebellion’ in these early chapters of *Jane Eyre* is born of fear. The first moment of defiance is a reaction to John Reed’s habitual abuse when, unable to flee from his attack, she fights back. As a consequence of that defiance she is punished with incarceration in the red room. Her angry outburst toward Mrs Reed follows a similar pattern. Jane is intensely fearful before and during her meeting with Mrs Reed and Mr Brocklehurst. When her character is impugned by Mrs. Reed Jane, recognising that her aunt’s words are likely to jeopardise her future at school, fights, this time not with physical violence but with violent words. Jenny Sharpe reminds us that in *Jane Eyre* ‘the assertions of a rebellious feminism are enacted through the figure of a rebel slave’ (1993, p. 39), and, as Brontë makes clear, Jane is not rebellious by nature but when pushed too severely, she will revolt:

I know no medium: I never in my life have known any medium in my dealings with positive hard characters, antagonistic to my own, between absolute submission and determined revolt. I have always faithfully observed the one, up to the very moment of bursting, sometimes with volcanic vehemence, into the other. (341)

Within the symbolism of the red room Brontë introduces the thematic arc, Jane’s fear of the subordination of her sexuality to male proprietary rights. I argue that this is not a neurotic fear of sexual intercourse *per se* as some critics such as Nestor (1992) have contended but a justified fear of the perils of sexual subjugation and patriarchal dominance that almost inevitably followed from a
middle-class, mid nineteenth-century English young woman's arrival at sexual maturity, signalled by menarche. The circumstances and characteristics that make Jane vulnerable to this fear—her orphan status, her poverty and dependence, her lack of physical presence and beauty, her desperate longing for love and acceptance, and her experiential fear—are emergent in this early section of the novel. On the first page Jane expresses her anguish over what she perceives is her ‘physical inferiority’ (5) and later she overhears Bessie and Abbott remarking on her lack of beauty ‘one really cannot care for such a little toad as that’ (21). An orphan, with no one to ‘stand with her’ Jane is vulnerable. Her parents’ unhappy story: a marriage disapproved of, a grandfather who disowned his daughter, and ‘cut her off without a shilling’ (21) their premature deaths and, the death of her uncle, the single source of nurture in her young life, condemn Jane to a dependence on her Aunt Reed’s charity and a lowly social status, despite her genteel birth. Her utter helplessness in the face of John Reed’s assault on her and his sense of entitlement to his control of her makes her vulnerability clear:

you are a dependent, mamma says; you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg and not live here with gentlemen’s children like us and eat the same meals we do and wear clothes at our mamma’s expense. Now, I’ll teach you to rummage my book-shelves: for they are mine; all the house belongs to me, or will do in a few years. Go and stand by the door, out of the way of the mirror and the windows. (8)

In this climate of neglect and cruelty Jane’s only solace and source of love is her shabby little doll, used by Brontë to demonstrate and signpost the vulnerability created by the child’s desperate need for love, ‘[H]uman beings must love something and in the dearth of worthier objects of affection, I contrived to find a
pleasure in loving and cherishing a faded graven image’. Over the course of the novel Jane’s vulnerabilities will emerge more fully, influencing the sequence of events and making her prey to fear until they are incrementally removed or modified, bringing Jane to a place within her self where fear is overcome.

These paradigmatic first chapters of Jane Eyre are crowded with the ‘signs’ and ‘portents’ with which Brontë establishes the novel’s theme and foreshadows significant elements of plot. I argue that configured within the potent symbolism of the red room Brontë constructs what I call the ‘thematic arc’ of her novel—Jane’s fear of the sexual and physical subjugation of her self. The Turkish motifs Brontë uses to describe the room establish the perception of a sensual, lavish, female space, the opulence of which is countered with the coldness and remoteness conveying its ownership by an ‘absent’ master. Layering these early pages with the enslaved sexuality inherent in her Turquerie enables Brontë to develop the subtext of eroticism and female confinement which informs the novel. The thematic arc is established in the red room where fear, sexual coming of age, and subjugation intersect. This thematic arc will continue to inform the novel until the final chapter. The major plot events to come are evoked in these chapters with palimpsests of the mature Jane as she will be seen through Rochester's eyes at their first meeting and the allusion by the servants to the figure with the ‘great black dog’ (16) behind him, that conjures the image of Rochester as he will appear to Jane at their initial encounter. The ‘gaunt goblins’ (17) of Jane's Gulliver’s Travels touch this early section of the book with an unsettling foreshadow of the demonic Bertha Mason Rochester, while John Reed, the ‘slave-driver’ (8) and Jane's association of him with the worst of the Roman

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11 In time, Jane will come to love another ‘idol’, Edward Rochester.
emperors, Caligula and Nero, coalesces into the fear of the potential ‘despots’ Jane will encounter on her journey.
CHAPTE R FO UR

T he Turk

‘Twas the hour when rites unholy
Called each Paynim voice to prayer,
And the star that faded slowly
Left to dews the freshened air

Day her sultry fires had wasted,
Calm and sweet the moonlight rose;
Even a captive’s spirit tasted
Half oblivion of his woes

Thomas Campbell (1830) JE (211)

It has been well noted that while Brontë makes no explicit reference to West Indian slavery in Jane Eyre (for instance Boumelha, 1990, Meyer, 1990, Plasa, 2000, Thomas, 2007) there are numerous specific allusions to ‘slavery’ within the text. Penny Boumelha’s (1990) reckoning is ten such allusions and I have not attempted to count beyond this. The West Indies figures as an aspect of the novel’s plot and relates to the creole ethnicity of Bertha Mason and her family’s membership of Jamaican plantocracy as well as Rochester’s four years in Jamaica after their marriage.¹ Because of this West Indian register in the novel Brontë’s use of the metaphor of ‘slavery’ has been assumed by most postcolonial scholars to be a reference to Caribbean, black slavery. In particular, Meyer (1990, 1996), Adlai Murdoch (2002), Plasa (2000, 2004, 2006), and Thomas (2007, 2008) read the novel this way. What is common to these scholars is that in assuming a relationship between Bronte’s ‘slavery’ metaphors and black West Indian slaves they have failed to recognise—or have occluded—the possibility that, rather than referring to the West Indies, ‘slavery’ is, in fact, only one of the many ‘Turkish’ tropes and motifs deployed by Brontë in her novel. In this chapter, I argue that

¹The issue of Bertha’s ethnicity and references to West Indian slavery are not the concern of the present chapter and will be discussed in Chapter Five.
Brontë’s use of the metaphor of slavery in *Jane Eyre* does not refer to Caribbean slavery but to the slavery of the Ottoman Empire, the slavery of Barbary corsairs, and the slavery of the seraglio and that this is concerned with gendered and eroticised ‘white’ slavery. In the previous chapter I argued that Jane’s fear of sexual enslavement and the intersection of fear and its nuances with other emotions form an important thematic arc central to the construction of the narrative and that Jane’s journey and quest to overcome this fear are at the core of the novel. Here I explore the way in which Brontë creates a rhetorical strategy that enables her to engage with and articulate this theme by means of her use of Oriental tropes and motifs. This includes the subtle deployment of images of *Turquerie*, the European passion for the lavish material culture of the Ottoman Empire appearing in art, fashion, interior decoration, the decorative arts, and architecture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in France and Britain. Brontë deploys *Turquerie* as a type of ‘set decoration’ or backdrop, introducing an erotic note to a conversation or situation, or layering with sensuality a set-piece such as the red room and the house party at Thornfield.

Maryanne Ward (2002) noting the autobiographical nature of Brontë’s writing contends that nineteenth-century British abolition discourse focused on (black) slavery would have influenced Brontë’s imagination in the direction of Caribbean slavery. In support of this argument she points to the association of the abolitionist William Wilberforce with the Cowan Bridge School which Brontë attended and his acquaintance with Patrick Brontë at Cambridge University.

Without questioning either Brontë’s abhorrence of slavery or her support of

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2 According to Catherine Styer (2011) historians have been reluctant to accept the capture, trade and enslavement of white Christians, as ‘slavery’. She suggests that this reluctance stems from the notion that only the enslavement of black Africans can be termed ‘slavery’ and the term ‘captives’ has frequently been used euphemistically.
emancipation and with Ward’s exposition in mind before exploring Brontë’s Turkish tropes in *Jane Eyre* I provide a brief historical and cultural background to the white slavery of the Ottomans. This includes the emergence in British literature and culture of a substantial Turkish influence, its importance to the British people and their Government, and its relevance to British nineteenth-century abolitionist discourse I argue that it is this context—which also includes several of Brontë’s personal and family associations—that is the inspiration for Brontë’s ‘Turkish’ tropes and motifs in *Jane Eyre*.

White slavery was integral to the cultural and commercial life of the Ottoman Empire from the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottoman sultans in 1453. In the east raids by Crimean Mongols captured white Circassian women for the Sultan’s seraglio, in the west the corsairs, mostly inhabitants of the North African Ottoman regencies of Tunis, Algeria, and Morocco, were the maritime vanguard of the Ottomans. As such, the corsairs, often referred to as the ‘Barbary pirates’, were not pirates but privateers, legally authorised by the Ottoman Sultan to whom they paid a share of their profits. The corsairs prowled the waters and coastal villages of the Mediterranean, the British Isles and beyond, even as far as Iceland, capturing vessels at sea and raiding ashore, taking prisoners to be sold as slaves. In Britain not only were the Barbary corsairs feared for their raiding and kidnapping they reflected the advancing power of the Ottoman Empire and the ever-present possibility of its expansion into British territory. In addition, the disruption to trade caused by the Corsairs hampered Britain’s own imperialist efforts (Jamieson 2012).

As Robert Davis (2003) has demonstrated, one aspect of the Ottoman slave trade had particular significance for the English, Irish and Scots: the enslavement
of more than 25,000 Britons by the Barbary corsairs from the sixteenth century to
the first half of the nineteenth century. Michael Guasco (2014) argues that in the
sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the fate of the British slaves of the Ottomans
was better known and a more emotional issue than African slavery because the
public was called on at parish level to raise ransom money for the slaves. This
extract from a petition to the King in 1640 provides a glimpse of the slaves’
suffering:

rowing in galleys, drawing in carp, grinding in mills; with divers
such unchristian like works, most lamentable to express and
most burdensome to undergo, withal suffering much hunger and
many blows on their bare bodies, by which cruelty many not
being able to undergo it, have been forced to turn
Mohamedans. (Diggens 1896, Archive 9)

Due to their location the coastal counties of southern England,
particularly Cornwall the home of the Brontës’ maternal line, were the hardest hit
by the corsairs. For more than two hundred and fifty years the people of Cornwall
lived in terror of the ‘Turkish’ raiders (also known as Rovers of Sallee, named for
the town of Salé in Morocco) and ‘the whole coast was in continual apprehension
of piracy’ (Diggens 1896, Archive 9). In a letter written in 1656 to the Lord
Lieutenant of Cornwall the justices of Cornwall cite the loss of over one thousand
Cornish mariners in one year and in the town of Looe eighty men were taken in
the ten day period before the letter was written (Diggens, Archive 9). Diggens
also recounts many references to Barbary pirates on the Cornish coast, sometimes
in full view of Penzance. In one report there were sixty ‘Turkish men-of-war’
visible from the coast and, in another, sixty men, women, and children were
taken from around Penzance. Well into the eighteenth century the coast of
Cornwall was still menaced by the Rovers of Sallee.
Davies Gilbert, in his history of Cornwall gives an account of a 1760 corsair incursion that went awry. Due to the captain mistaking Mount’s Bay for the open sea a corsair, heavily armed with 24 guns, ran aground near Penzance. The 172 privateers (who each came ashore brandishing a ‘scymetar’ and pistol) were captured by a company of local volunteers and imprisoned in the town until it was decided to repatriate them to Algeria. These exotic strangers aroused the curiosity of the entire neighbourhood:

Their Asiatic dress, long beards and mustachios, with turbans, the absence of all covering from their feet and legs, the dark complexion and harsh features of a piratical band, made them objects of terror and of surprise. (Gilbert 1838, p. 98)

Melissa Hardie-Budden (personal communication, 8 August, 2016) researching the Brontës’ maternal line, contends that even though these events occurred when the Brontë maternal grandparents, Thomas Branwell and Ann Carne, were in their teens ‘such an invasion of strangers from exotic places, would linger long in their minds and conversations’. She suggests that both Maria (1783-1821) and Elizabeth (1776-1842) Branwell would have known the story from their parents and could hardly have been unaware of the pervasive ‘apprehension of piracy’ that existed in Cornwall for centuries. Hardie-Budden also suggests that such tales of Cornwall would have been related to the little Brontës in the Parsonage at Haworth by their Aunt Branwell. Indeed, there seems little doubt the Brontë children—certainly Charlotte and Branwell—were aware of the North African enslavement of British captives. In Daniel Defoe’s ... *Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719) referenced by Charlotte in a letter to her sister Emily on 29 May, 1843 (Smith, 2000, p. 320) Crusoe is captured by ‘A Turkish Rover of Sallee’ (Defoe 1719, p. 20) and enslaved for two years in Morocco before escaping. In
Branwell Brontë’s *The Pirate A Tale by Captain John Flower* his protagonist is kidnapped from Great Glass Town and taken to sea by the piratical Rougue. Fearing he will be sold into slavery his distress mirrors the experience of many captured and enslaved by the Corsairs:

> I could scarcely credit my senses, in the space of a few minutes, had been dragged from my quiet home through half the city at the command of a merciless and cruel man and, without the slightest show of reason, thrown bound on board of this unknown and suspicious vessel—probably a pirate or privateer—there perhaps [to] die a violent death or be carried and sold in foreign lands. (Branwell Brontë 1833 in Alexander, 2002, p. 333)

Regardless of the terror experienced by Britons at the hands of the Barbary corsairs the British dependence on Algiers and Morocco to supply their Mediterranean garrisons resulted in reluctance on the part of the Government to antagonise the Barbary rulers. Consequently the British government deliberately overlooked the enslavement of British subjects throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Davis, 2003). Nevertheless, with the passing of ‘An Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade’ in 1807 the British began to apply diplomatic pressure on other European states and the Ottoman states to end not only African slavery and the Atlantic trade but white slavery in the Ottoman Empire. With the end of the Peninsula Wars and the defeat of Napoleon in 1815 the Barbary regencies ceased to be useful and the British could no longer ignore the problem of the Ottomans’ North African slave trade and their thousands of white Christian slaves (Löwenheim 2013). This was at a time when Britain had assumed the mantle of ‘the world’s most moral nation’ and portrayed itself as an abolitionist state (Löwenheim 2013, p. 42).

Due chiefly to the efforts of the British Admiral Sir William Sidney Smith, from the early part of the nineteenth century black and white slavery became
inextricably entwined in abolitionist discourse (Klose 2016). Following the Congress of Vienna in 1814 Smith attempted to bring the attention of abolitionists to the problem of white slavery in the corsair states of North Africa. He called on the British Government to take military intervention against the Ottomans in the same way that British naval intervention was being used against French, Spanish, and Portuguese vessels in a determined effort to bring an end to the Atlantic slave trade (Rodriguez, 2011). Smith prevailed upon William Wilberforce, the leading black slavery abolitionist, for assistance in bringing Government attention to the Barbary white slave trade but Wilberforce ignored him. Despite this, Smith gained support from the British Government by drawing a likeness between the enslaved Christians in the Ottoman Empire and the fate of African slaves. In exposing the atrocities of the corsairs Smith ‘created a new British interest’ in white slavery (Löwenheim 2003, p. 41). At the same time, the continuing focus of British foreign policy on the fight against the transatlantic slave trade drew increasing domestic and European attention to British inaction in respect of the Christian slaves in North Africa, with the result that their failure to adequately deal with this problem became a serious test of Britain’s moral credibility (Klose 2016). In 1816, in an effort to maintain the legitimacy of their call to abolish African slavery, the British Government recognised they were morally bound to actively oppose the corsairs’ slave practices and a fleet under the command of Admiral Sir Edward Pellew was sent to the Barbary states to negotiate the release of white slaves and put an end to the corsair slave trade. While Tunis and Tripoli agreed to release their slaves and end the trade, the Dey of Algiers refused. After Pellew returned to Britain following his partly successful mission he was again ordered to Algiers, this time to negotiate ‘only through the mouth of the gun and render the pirates incapable of kidnapping Christians into slavery and
raiding European vessels and shores’ (Löwenheim p. 31). Pellew’s fleet consisted of 27 ships, including five ships of the line and six Dutch frigates. The bombardment of Algiers took place on 26th August, 1816 and at the end of the day the entire Algerian fleet was destroyed and the coastal fortifications and much of the city of Algiers were in ruins. The Dey capitulated. He released over a thousand white slaves and signed a treaty with the British in which he agreed there would be no further enslavement of white Christians (Taylor 2012). The battle achieved both a moral and a Christian victory for Britain and Pellew was greatly lauded both at home and in Europe for his success. His official dispatch which was widely cited in British newspapers declared:

To have been one of the humble instruments, in the hands of Divine Providence for bringing to reason a ferocious Government and destroying for ever the insufferable and horrid system of Christian slavery, can never cease to be a source of delight and heartfelt comfort to every individual happy enough to be employed in it. (The London Gazette Extraordinary, The Times, September 16 1816, p.3)

Edward Pellew was made a baronet in 1796, a baron in 1814, and was created 1st Viscount of Exmouth and Cantoneign in December, 1816 in honour of his service in Algiers (Taylor, 2012). He was honoured in Europe and he and his men became popular heroes, their exploits in Barbary the subject of numerous newspaper articles, operas, stage plays and popular pamphlets, all of which demonstrated the British public perception of the Algiers operation as ‘a just cause, a moral war and a face-saving operation’ (Löwenheim, 2003, p. 43). The bombardment of Algiers came to be viewed as one of the most brilliant victories in the classic age of British naval history (Taylor, p. 294).

Although born in Devon Edward Pellew spent his boyhood in Penzance and, as Taylor (2012) suggests, would have undoubtedly been aware of the Barbary
corsairs’ history of terror on the coast of Cornwall and the many Cornish fishermen and seamen enslaved in the Barbary regencies. He would certainly have been aware of the enslavement of Captain John Pellow and his young nephew, Pellew’s second cousin, Thomas Pellow (1704-1747), of Penryn in Cornwall (all three men were descendants of Captain George Pellow R.N.), who died a decade before Edward Pellew was born. Thomas Pellow was eleven years old when, along with his uncle, he was kidnapped by corsairs and enslaved for twenty three years in Barbary before escaping. On his return to Cornwall he wrote a memoir of his years of enslavement, the first edition of which was published in 1739. Pellow’s was among numerous narratives written by escaped slaves from Barbary, more than twenty of which were published by the mid-eighteenth century (Owens 2013). Pellow’s story provided great detail of everyday life as a slave in the Barbary regencies, his contact with the ruler of Morocco and his soldiers, and Pellow’s own life and experiences including his time as a soldier. For Exmouth preparing for his attack on Algiers both his Cornish upbringing and his relationship to Thomas Pellow brought a personal element to Britain’s moral mission.

What makes Exmouth’s mission and Thomas Pellow’s enslavement of particular relevance to this study goes beyond the significance of both men’s stories in terms of British awareness of the white slavery of the Ottomans. It is reasonable to assume that through their family connections they would both be inscribed in the Brontë family’s consciousness and undoubtedly played a role in Charlotte’s fascination with ‘the Turk’ and with white, gendered slavery. Some evidence to support this comes from a letter from Charlotte to Ellen Nussey on 14 August 1840,

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3There are numerous variants for the name: Pellew, Pellow and Pellowe, to name only three. Family historian Dr E.F. Pellowe (1964) points out that at Mylor where the 14 children of Humphrey Pellew were baptised there are seven different spellings among the 14 children.
where Charlotte relates a visit of ‘cousin’ John Branwell Williams, his wife and
daughter to the Parsonage:

The freshest news in our house is that we had about a fortnight
ago – a visit from some of our South of England relations. John
Branwell Williams and his Wife and daughter – they have been
staying above a month with Uncle Fennel at Crosstone – They
reckon to be very grand folks indeed – and talk largely – I
thought assumingly I cannot say I admired them – To my eyes
there seemed to be an attempt to play the great Mogul down in
Yorkshire – Mr Williams himself was much less assuming than
the womenites – he seemed a frank, sagacious kind of man – very
tall and vigorous with a keen active look – the moment he saw
me he exclaimed that I was the very image of my Aunt Charlotte.
(Smith, 1995, p. 224-5)

Williams was not only second cousin to the Brontë children via his maternal
grandmother Alice Branwell he was also a descendent of Captain George Pellow
and closely related to both Thomas Pellow and Lord Exmouth through his
paternal grandmother Grace Pellow. At the same time he was part of the wider
extended Branwell/Pellew family with other relatives in Yorkshire, including his
connections to the Brontës (Maria and Elizabeth Branwell were his first cousins
and the Brontë children his second cousins) and other Cornwall relatives such as
the Fennels. Although Brontë informs Ellen in this letter she is no admirer of her
‘South of England relations’ it is clear she is aware of their ‘grand’ status and that,
from her viewpoint they may be inclined ‘play the great mogul’. It would be
highly unlikely that Brontë was not aware of these direct family connections with
the white slave trade because not only was Lord Exmouth (whose death had
occurred only seven years prior to Williams’ visit to the Parsonage) considered a
great British hero on a par with Wellington and Nelson (Taylor 2012) and
attributed with the destruction of the Barbary white slave trade but the slave
narrative of Thomas Pellow was also famous. If nothing else Aunt Elizabeth
Branwell would have ensured that this part of their mother’s family history would have been well known to the Brontës.

Despite the initial success of Exmouth’s mission, the succeeding Dey of Algiers wasted no time in rebuilding his fleet and Algerian acts of piracy and kidnapping continued sporadically until the final French conquest of Algiers in 1842. Nevertheless, throughout the 1840s the Anti-Slavery Society maintained its pressure on the government and in 1846 (at the time Brontë was writing *Jane Eyre*) when the goal changed from the total prohibition of slavery to ending the Ottoman trade in slaves a modicum of success was achieved with the closure of the Constantinople slave market. Although the trade in black slaves was officially abolished by the Ottomans in 1847 in deference to British demands, the lucrative trade in white women slaves continued until the fall of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War (Erler, 2000).

It is not surprising, then, that the minutiae of Ottoman political, religious, cultural, and social life was a source of fascination to the British and from the sixteenth century well informed and accurate information about the Ottoman Empire flowed into Britain and regularly entered public discourse (MacLean, 2007). The first half of the nineteenth century saw thousands of references to the ‘Ottoman Empire’, ‘the Porte’, ‘Turkey’, ‘the Sultan’, ‘Seraglios’ and ‘Slave Markets’ in articles appearing in British newspapers and magazines on an almost daily basis. Charles White’s *Three Years in Constantinople or Domestic Manners of the Turks in 1844* (1846) provides an exhaustively detailed account of Turkish domestic life and particularly, life in the harem: ‘The Sultan’s Harem–Kadina, how presented or purchased–Ceremonies while bathing–Night Toilet–What occurs on rising–Numbers and classification of Imperial slaves–Their Occupation,
Diversions and Punishments’ (1846, p. 1). An enormous body of English writing was inspired by the Ottomans from the Renaissance onwards (MacLean 2007), including Samuel Johnson’s (1759) *The Story of Rasselas Prince of Abissinia* and several English translations of *The Arabian Nights*. Both *Rasselas* and *The Arabian Nights* make an appearance in *Jane Eyre*. Brontë’s liking for Byron and *The Arabian Nights* is well known (see Mardorossian, 2006 and Llewellyn, 2012). However, for Brontë, arguably the most influential writing about the Orient would have been that of the storyteller and traveller John Carne (1789-1844) cousin of Elizabeth, Maria and their siblings with whom they grew up in Penzance. Carne in his *Letters from the East* (1826) and *Recollections of Travels from the East* (1830) provides detailed accounts of Turkish life, and it is difficult to imagine that the Brontë children would not have been familiar with his writings. He published in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Journal* which was subscribed to for a number of years by Elizabeth Branwell and read avidly by the young Brontës. Hardie-Budden (personal communication 8 August 2016) contends that, like Sir Humphry Davy, John Carne was one of the people Aunt Branwell closely followed, as both men were heroes from Cornwall.

Images and tales of the harem influenced not only the Brontës’ imagination but that of a wider British audience. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries French and British artists produced a profusion of works

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4 Including Mary Wollstonecraft, Lady Mary Montague, and Florence Nightingale who had each visited a harem and written of their experiences.

5 Carne began his travels in 1821. ‘He visited Constantinople, Greece, the Levant, Egypt and Palestine. In Palestine, while returning from St Catherine’s Monastery on Mount Sinai, he was imprisoned for a few days by Bedouin. ‘Letters from the East’ was initially published in the *New Monthly Magazine* and in 1826 was published in a volume dedicated to Sir Walter Scott, which went to a third edition. This work and his talents for society brought him into the company of Scott, Southey, Campbell, Lockhart, Jerdan and other men of letters. His friends rated him more as a story-teller than as a writer and he often captivated audiences by his tales.’ Boase & Baigent (2006).
depicting scenes of inspired sensual fantasy. Harem slaves, almost always white, were displayed in eroticised situations: naked, semi-naked, for sale in imagined slave markets, languidly placed on cushions and sofas, bathing alone or with other women, often depicted clustered beside their ‘master’, The Turk. Brontë’s awareness of at least one of these Oriental fantasies is evidenced in her ironic description of the painting *Cleopatra* in *Villette* (1977, p. 180). The inspiration for *Cleopatra* is assumed to be Édouard Bièfret’s painting of a half-naked, reclining Egyptian dancer, *Une Almeh*, exhibited in the *Salon de Bruxelles* Triennial Exhibition of 1842, visited by Brontë (Charlier, 1955).

Unsurprisingly these erotic fantasies of ‘the Turk’ and the harem Seraglio with its ‘multiple wives, multiple pleasures’ (DelPlato, 2002) also entered the realm of pornography. Written anonymously in 1828 *The Lustful Turk: or Scenes in the Harum of an Eastern Potentate* which was, according to Steven Marcus (1969), the most popular novel of the pornographic ‘harem’ genre, relates in the first person the (mis)adventures of a young Englishwoman, Emily Barlow. Captured by Corsairs Emily becomes a harem slave to Ali, the Dey of Algiers who—eschewing seduction for rape—relieves Emily of her virginity without delay. However, her initial intense distress speedily transforms into ‘voluptuous delight’ (*Lustful* 53) as her ardour is aroused by the repeated application of Ali’s ‘pillar of ivory’ (*Lustful* 17). *The Lustful Turk* posits a view of virtuous female sexuality, awakened to pleasure only after—necessary—fierce resistance. As Ruth Bernard Yeazell points out: ‘the pornographic imagination turns the erotic despotism of the harem into a kind of benign discipline to instruct Western virgins in the mysteries of love’ (2000, p. 116).
Representations of the ‘harem’ and ‘the seraglio’ proliferated throughout popular culture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and were the frequent subject of plays and pantomimes, one instance being the ballet entitled ‘The Slave Market’ staged in London at the Princess Theatre in October 1844 (Times 1844, 8 October). On the heels of the corsairs’ demise they, too, became the subject of music hall type entertainment, evidenced by the ‘Corsair song’ Blanche Ingram instructs Rochester to sing ‘con spirito’ (153) at the Thornfield house party.

In short, the motifs of the Turk, the sultan, the corsair, the seraglio, and the slave—all heavily inscribed with eroticism—emerged from the reality of centuries of white slavery within the Ottoman Empire. The enslaved women of the harem in combination with the idea of the lascivious ‘Terrible Turk’ were transformed in the British imagination by the myriad of sensual images depicting ‘realistic’ scenes from fantasised harems widely available and accessible to the public. By the time of Jane Eyre’s publication in 1847 the metonymy of the harem with sex and female domination was entrenched in the British imagination. Madeline Zilfi (2010) and Reina Lewis (2004) comment that Brontë’s Oriental tropes and their association with female sexual enslavement, lust and eroticism, would have been well known to readers of the novel and the harem readily identified as a site of sexual pleasure for both master and slave

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6 Yeazell (2000) points to the difference between a harem which was a space for women within an Ottoman family home and the harem Seraglio which was the compound within the Ottoman Sultan’s Constantinople palace, Topkapi, where wives, slaves and concubines lived. As was often the case in the nineteenth century the two terms were conflated with ‘harem’. My use of the term ‘harem’ in this study generally refers to the harem Seraglio as Brontë has Jane mention in the novel.

7 For instance, for the three year period from 1843 Blackwood’s Online Search Engine yields 208 references for ‘Sultan’, 36 for ‘Harem’, and 23 for ‘Seraglio’.

8 In 1855, only a few years after the publication of Jane Eyre came the entertainment of Gilbert and Sullivan’s comic opera The Pirates of Penzance.
Joyce Zonana views Brontë’s use of Oriental tropes and motifs in *Jane Eyre* as an example of what she terms ‘feminist Orientalism’ a politically motivated rhetorical strategy employed by British eighteenth and nineteenth-century feminist writers in order to criticise the British patriarchy (1993, p. 71). Zonana maintains that ‘feminist Orientalism’ is inherently racist because, as is the case with Orientalism, it rests on the belief that the West is superior to the East, and displaces the despotism of western men towards women into an Oriental context. In this context she argues that feminist-and-racist *Jane Eyre* is ‘the drama of a Western woman oppressed by Eastern beliefs and practices’ (Zonana 1993, p. 602). On the other hand, I contend that Jane is oppressed by English middle-class attitudes and practices. Rochester is, after all, an exemplar of Occidental beliefs and practices and it is these ‘despotic’ beliefs and practices that Brontë brings into sharp relief with her utilisation of Oriental images and metaphors. Importantly, as Brantlinger (2013) maintains, these Oriental tropes, so familiar to the British in the first half of the nineteenth century, were born of British fear, fascination, and envy at the magnificence of the Ottomans and the reach of their Empire, in other words from xenophobia (or even, at times, xenophilia) and not from the innate sense of superiority that breeds racism. The point here is that if Brontë is protesting, her protest is against the oppressive nature of both Western and Eastern attitudes toward women and if there is a political message to be found within Brontë’s Turkish tropes it is not, as Zonana concludes, ‘a vision of the Occidentalisation of the Orient’ (p. 615) but a need to re-vision both Occidental and Oriental beliefs and practices.

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9 As noted in Jane’s musing on Rochester’s revelation of his ‘grande passion’ for Céline Varens: ‘a wealthy Englishman’s passion for a French dancer and her treachery to him, were everyday matters enough’ (149).
My reading proposes that Brontë’s deployment of Oriental tropes and motifs is at once more ambiguous and singularly focused than a political protest against the patriarchal dominance of middle-class Englishwomen. While Jane’s fears could be readily extrapolated to the wider community of women, I argue that the centre of Brontë’s concern is with the particularity of her protagonist, the unfolding of the thematic arc of Jane’s fear of sexual domination, and the ways in which the play of emotions within this contextual framework drive the narrative. Brontë’s Turkish rhetoric provides a sanctioned discourse with which she explores Jane Eyre’s ambivalence toward the intensity of her own sexual desire and her fear of and fascination with Rochester and his sexuality.

As noted earlier, Brontë brings this strategy to bear in the first page of the novel when she introduces the reclining Mrs Reed. With this image she aligns a representation of a typical English gentry household with the images of passively reclining harem slaves portrayed in the ubiquitous nineteenth century paintings and reproductions of the ‘harem genre’. While Mrs Reed certainly behaves oppressively and cruelly toward Jane and appears to have the requisite attributes of a despot she is, in actuality, enslaved to her son John. Mrs Reed is an example of a subjugated woman in charge of other women in a household under the domination of a ‘master’—a circumstance which recurs in other households throughout the narrative.¹⁰ This figure equates readily with the older woman, usually the senior wife of a sultan who keeps order (including the control of

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¹⁰The domination of women by other women on behalf of men in Jane Eyre is a circumstance that is also noted by Showalter (1977, p. 117) and Hilton, (2016, p. 323) who considers the ‘domestication’ of women by other women as a furtherance of patriarchal domination and which includes Jane Eyre herself in her ‘domesticating’ of the girls at Morton school and of Adèle Varens.
sexuality) on his behalf among the women of the seraglio." Mrs Reed acts as a proxy tyrant on behalf of her son and is 'blind and deaf' (8) to his habitual abuse and physical violence toward Jane and Jane's fear of him. She is, in turn, subject to John Reed's controlling, verbal abuse: 'he called his mother 'old girl' too; sometimes reviled her for her dark skin, similar to his own; bluntly disregarded her wishes; not unfrequently tore and spoiled her silk attire; and he was still 'her own darling' (12).

Ultimately, the adult John Reed will bring his mother to the brink of penury and when he commits suicide news of his death will cause the stroke which leads to her death. It is not until she is close to death that Jane's hate-filled Aunt Reed confesses to the reason for her vilification of and sadistic behaviour toward the child, Jane, her corrosive jealousy and hatred of Jane's mother, John Reed's unfortunate sister, 'I had a dislike to her mother always; for she was my husband's only sister and a great favourite with him' (197). That loathing was perpetuated in her feeling toward the infant Jane: 'I hated it the first time I set my eyes on it' (197). If there can be no pity for the dead Mrs Reed—'only a grating anguish for her woes' (p. 205)—Brontë, building on her initial Oriental imagery, facilitates insight and understanding of this pivotal character whose hatred and fear launch Jane on her long journey. Brontë evokes a complex, conflicted,

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"Madeline Zilfi (2004,p. 17–18) describes the role of senior women in the harem that parallels that of Mrs Reed at Gateshead. ‘... adult men were not alone in profiting from the system [the institutionalization of female disadvantage]. Senior women—senior by virtue of status, wealth, or age—were helpmeets and in some cases coarchitects of gendered disadvantage. In more general terms, women usually came into their own as figures of authority with childbearing and with advanced age. As they grew older, especially on the marriage of a son, they might be able to collect further on the 'patriarchal bargain' that promised (though did not always deliver) male protection and financial support in return for female submission. Even if a son did not abide by patrilocal norms if he was unable or unwilling to dwell with wife and child under the paternal roof, his mother presided over the younger and otherwise junior women of the family, including servants, slaves, daughters and young female relatives. The power of most senior women derived from their relationship to senior males."
woman, consumed by jealousy, fearful that another woman’s child may displace her own offspring, whose needs and wishes are subordinated to those of her husband and son to her own detriment and that of the child in her care.

The flow of events from Jane’s response to John Reed’s violence will see her travel to school at Lowood Institution and take her place among the ‘congregation of girls of every age’ (36) confined within its forbidding walls. This is a household of sequestered young females subjugated by a handful of senior women on behalf of yet another tyrannical master, the insupportably harsh Reverend Brocklehurst. These senior women are the teachers of Lowood, women of negligible independent agency who ‘must answer to him for all [they] do’ (42).

Here, amid the biting cold and the convent-like atmosphere an unlikely allusion to the Orient is introduced by Helen Burns reading *Rasselas* (41) with its references to the East and captive women in the harem of an Arab chief. The Oriental allusions intrude again in a scene in the classroom as Brocklehurst attends to ‘the mortification’ (54) of the girls’ ‘lusts of the flesh’ (54) by insisting their hair be cut off. Just as Brocklehurst is in full flight with a sanctimonious diatribe about his God given mission to ‘teach them to clothe themselves with shamefacedness and sobriety’ (54) he is interrupted by the entrance of three ladies of his ‘harem’ in their ‘velvet, silk, and furs’ (54). The elder lady, Mrs Brocklehurst perhaps, with ‘a false front of French curls’ wears ‘a costly velvet shawl, trimmed with ermine’ (55). Aside from the irony of the elaborate curls, the velvet shawl and its ermine trim are examples of *Turquerie*. In the eighteenth century Ottoman merchants and artisans were prevented by law, from wearing Turkish ermine, as the fur was to be worn only by the Sultan. The ‘costly velvet’ also evokes the Ottomans, who introduced the art of velvet weaving during the
rule of the Caliph Harun al Rashid. This Caliph also appears in *The Arabian Nights*—which both Brontë and Jane Eyre had on their bookshelves. The Caliph’s chief Eunuch is ‘Mesrour’, the name of Rochester’s ‘spirited’ (98) black horse, whose fall brings Jane and Rochester together. In these examples *Turquerie* and allusions to the Orient deepen the implicit understanding of the girls’ physical and sexual subjugation to the sadistic Brocklehurst.

On Jane’s first meeting with Helen Burns the girl is reading Samuel Johnson’s *Rasselas* (41), whose full title is *The History of Rasselas Prince of Abissinia A Tale by Samuel Johnson* (1759). Although Brontë makes it clear the novel holds no interest for Jane, reference is made to *Rasselas* on a further two occasions (43, 46). Reading *Jane Eyre* through an Oriental lens suggests that Brontë’s reiteration of *Rasselas* signposts its potential significance in *Jane Eyre* and calls for a closer examination of the text of *Rasselas*. Briefly, Johnson’s novel relates the story of Prince Rasselas of Abyssinia, his sister Nekayah, her maid Pekuah, and their escape from an idyllic but confined existence in ‘Happy Valley’. Brontë’s subtle introduction of the Oriental *Rasselas* into the text of *Jane Eyre* implicitly strengthens the harem-like qualities of Lowood, its community of women under the control of a despotic male, and their immurement within its walls. In doing so once again the status of ‘slave’ is conferred on Jane. The association with *Rasselas* with its themes of restlessness and striving for freedom foregrounds these same thematic elements in *Jane Eyre* and, importantly, furnishes Brontë with a model of female suffering with which to explore the theme of Jane’s fear of sexual enslavement and her need for love, expanding the emotional force of the novel.
When Brocklehurst forces Jane to stand on a stool for hours in shame before the women of his retinue, her teachers, and schoolmates, accused of the ‘sin’ of mendacity (the consequence of Mrs Reed’s earlier lie), Jane’s courage is restored by Helen’s acceptance and kindness with a look and a smile ‘as if a martyr, a hero, had passed a slave or victim and imparted strength in the transit.’ (57). The deeper cause of Jane’s grief, however, is the fear of being unloved:

...if others don’t love me, I would rather die than live—I cannot bear to be solitary and hated, Helen. Look here; to gain some real affection from you, or Miss Temple, or any other whom I truly love, I would willingly submit to have the bone of my arm broken, or to let a bull toss me, or to stand behind a kicking horse, and let it dash its hoof at my chest. (58-59)

As this passage demonstrates, Jane is as much enslaved by this intensely felt need to be loved and the equally intense fear of being unloved as she is metaphorically enslaved to Brocklehurst at Lowood. This overriding need for love will be the lever that Brontë employs to heighten Jane’s fear of sexual enslavement when she falls in love with Rochester.

Despite the pleasures of the ‘valley of happiness’ (Johnson 1759, p. 21) Rasselas frets for wider horizons and to depart his world of ‘tasteless tranquillity’ (p. 68) to gain the world beyond the valley ‘to place himself in various conditions; to be entangled in imaginary difficulties and to be engaged in wild adventures (p. 17). With irony Brontë affords Helen Burns ownership of the book and has Jane dismiss it out of hand for, indeed, Rasselas’s plaintive yearning for freedom is anomalous to Helen’s quiet resignation. Rather, it is the future Jane, gazing from her window after her eight years at Lowood, whose divine discontent with her ‘prison-ground’ (72) mirrors the sentiments expressed by Rasselas. Jane’s
awareness that ‘the reason for tranquillity is no more’ springs from the loss of her mentor, Miss Temple:

My world had for some years been in Lowood: my experience had been of its rules and systems, now I remembered that the real world was wide and that a varied field of hopes and fears, of sensations and excitements, awaited those who had courage to go forth into its expanse, to seek real knowledge of life amidst its perils. (72)

These passages from *Rasselas* thicken the theme of confinement/escape that informs the structural scaffolding of Brontë’s narrative. Nonetheless, I argue that what is of greater significance and more purposeful in Brontë’s sleight of hand references to *Rasselas* and what Jessica Richard (2003) refers to as its ‘dangerous discourse of liberty’ (p. 338) is the tale-within-a-tale of the abduction of Pekuah, the companion of Princess Nekayah. Pekuah and her servants are held as captives for seven months by an Arab chief (Johnson 1759, p. 73). When it becomes clear to ‘the Arab’ that Pekuah is worthy of ransom she is imprisoned with the women of his harem (meanwhile she notes with relief that rape is unlikely as ‘his predominant passion was desire for money’ (p. 161)). The tediousness of the harem women’s pursuits is abhorrent to the ‘educated’ Pekuah and she speaks disparagingly of them after her rescue:

...they ran from room to room as a bird hops from wire to wire in his cage. They danced for the sake of motion, as lambs frisk in a meadow. One sometimes pretended to be hurt that the rest might be alarmed, or hid her that another might seek her ... Their business was only needlework ...nor was much satisfaction from their conversation to be hoped, for of what could they be expected to talk? They had seen nothing; for they had lived from early youth in that narrow spot: of what they had not seen they could have no knowledge for they could not read. They had no ideas but of the few things that were within their view and had hardly names but for their clothes and food. (Johnson 1759, p. 168).
Here Johnson depicts a domain in which captive women live in ignorance of the world outside the harem, occupying themselves only with diversions that are described as ‘childish play’ (p. 168). The pitiful, deprived existence he conjures is one of excruciating ennui, devoid of intellectual stimulation and with little or no possibility of attenuation. It is precisely images of this kind that resonate through Jane’s inner monologue when she visits the leads at Thornfield:

> Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer. (93)

But for all the harem women’s stagnation what carries the greatest emotional charge and resonates most forcefully throughout *Jane Eyre* is Pekuah’s revelation that these women—despite their beauty—are not loved by their master. In fact their very enslavement ensures his disdain: ‘to a man like the Arab such beauty was only a flower casually plucked and carelessly thrown away’ (p. 140). Brontë is unequivocal in figuring Rochester as ‘a man like the Arab’ with all the connotations of despotism, cruelty, and licentiousness inherent in that image. His features are ‘Paynim’ (156), he is variously likened to a ‘sultan’ (229), ‘an Eastern Emir; an agent or a victim of the bowstring’ (156), the Grand Turk (229), a three-tailed bashaw (230), a Levantine pirate (157), and King Ahasuerus (223). He talks ‘like a Sphinx’ (118), he rides a black horse ‘Mesrour’ (161) that shares a name with the chief eunuch of Caliph Aroun Raschid of the *Arabian Nights*, and references himself to King Darius the Persian (118). He dons Eastern garb for charades, masquerades as a Gypsy, sings a ‘Corsair-song’ (153) with Blanche Ingram, and wears a pearl necklace around his ‘bronze scrag’ (380). Brontë’s
Turkish tropes invite us to contemplate Rochester as a lascivious man associated with the careless sexual domination of women, whose plans for Jane are likely to include seduction, adultery, bigamy or concubinage. Highlighting the Oriental female enslavement Johnson depicts in *Rasselas* throws into relief Rochester’s contemptuous dismissal of his former mistresses when he echoes Johnson’s ‘Arab’, ‘What was their beauty to me in a few weeks?’ (265-66), ‘Hiring a mistress is the next worst thing to buying a slave: both are often by nature and always by position, inferior: and to live familiarly with inferiors is degrading (266). This disclosure intensifies the conflict between Jane’s love and sexual desire for Rochester and her fear that if she becomes his ‘slave’ she will be as unloved and discarded as are his former mistresses:

I felt the truth of these words; and I drew from them the certain inference, that if I were so far to forget myself and all the teaching that had ever been instilled into me as—under any pretext—with any justification—through any temptation—to become the successor of these poor girls; he would one day regard me with the same feeling which now in his mind desecrated their memory. I did not give utterance to this conviction: it was enough to feel it. I impressed it on my heart, that it might remain there to serve me as aid in the time of trial. (266)

I argue that this conflict is the key influence on Jane’s decision to leave Thornfield. Viewing the relationship plot through this ‘Turkish’ lens highlights Rochester’s calculated efforts at seduction and his sense of entitlement to Jane. It underlines Jane’s initial passivity and gradual sexual arousal: at first, with an unquestioning acceptance of Rochester’s aggressive masculine power but with a spirited resistance when she becomes aware that ‘the dread but adored type of [her] unknown future self’ (244) is the ‘sultan’ (229) who will enslave her.
The following final section of this chapter is based on my reading of the development of the relationship plot through this Oriental lens where Rochester is ‘the Turk’ and Jane vacillates between resistance to her own desire, her wish to be Rochester’s equal, and being his ‘slave’. Rochester’s calculated efforts at seduction and his sense of entitlement to Jane are juxtaposed with her initial naivety and passivity, her gradual sexual arousal, her avoidance of the erotic pull she feels toward Rochester, and finally her attempts at resistance when she becomes aware of his despotism.

From the outset Brontë makes it clear that Rochester embodies the dangerous qualities of the ‘The Turk’. At his first meeting with Jane after he has fallen from Mesrour and Jane is unable to bring the horse to him, he says wryly ‘the mountain will never be brought to Mahomet, so all you can do is to aid Mahomet to go to the mountain’ (98). Jane’s naive inability to recognise the implicit sexuality of this Oriental metaphor (which would have been clear to Brontë’s contemporary readers) heightens her susceptibility to Rochester’s seduction. Despite Rochester’s ready identification here with ‘The Turk’, Jane has ‘no fear’ (97) of him. From her inexperienced perspective Rochester does not have the appearance of a potential lover. His ill-humour, ‘stern features’ (96) and ‘ireful and thwarted’ (96) expression obscure the threat to her sexuality posed by this ‘sultan’. Were he ‘handsome’ (97) or ‘heroic-looking’ (97) she would have ‘shunned’ him ‘as one would fire, lightning, or anything else that is bright but antipathetic’ (97) but ‘the frown, the roughness of the traveller, set me at my ease’ (97).

As the intimacy between Jane and Rochester unfolds Brontë places his virile masculinity at centre stage and Jane begins to physically desire him:
...he rose from his chair, and stood, leaning his arm on the marble mantelpiece: in that attitude his shape was seen plainly as well as his face; his unusual breadth of chest, disproportionate almost to his length of limb. I am sure most people would have thought him an ugly man; yet there was so much unconscious pride in his port; so much ease in his demeanour; such a look of complete indifference to his own external appearance; so haughty a reliance on the power of other qualities, intrinsic or adventitious, to atone for the lack of mere personal attractiveness, that, in looking at him, one inevitably shared the indifference, and, even in a blind, imperfect sense, put faith in the confidence. (113)

Rochester’s seduction of Jane proceeds. He speaks to her of his regret for his former misdirected life and his determination to take a new path—one in which Jane is unaware he will ruthlessly involve her. She tells him his pursuit of pleasure will cause him to “degenerate still more” (116) but he protests “...why should I, if I can get sweet, fresh pleasure? And I may get it as sweet and fresh as the wild honey the bee gathers on the moor” (116). When she expresses doubt “It will sting—it will taste bitter, sir” (116) he refers to her lack of sexual experience: “How do you know?—you never tried it?” (116) he argues “you neophyte, that have not passed the porch of life, and are absolutely unacquainted with its mysteries” (117). Not comprehending that what he is referring to is the pleasure he will take in her sexual initiation Jane listens as Rochester speaks aloud his conviction that his intentions and motivations are morally right: “I know what my aim is, what my motives are and at this moment I pass a law, unalterable as that of the Medes and Persians, that both are right” (118). These words and Rochester’s association of himself with another Oriental despot, King Darius, are his attempts to justify his action to himself. Here he displays an arrogant sense of entitlement that fits wholly within his persona of the Turk. The words sound a warning that Jane, now utterly baffled by the conversation, is unable to heed, ‘...I
rose, deeming it useless to continue a discourse which was all darkness to me; and, besides, sensible that the character of my interlocutor was beyond my penetration’ (118).

At this moment in the narrative the development of the plot depends on Jane remaining oblivious to Rochester's seductive intentions toward her. Should she become aware that Rochester has seduction on his mind, fear would put an end to the courtship before her tentative stirring of sexual desire can be nurtured into the all-consuming passion that will sustain the narrative—and Jane—to the novel’s conclusion. Brontë must ensure that the worldly-wise Rochester plays a canny game of manipulation to ensure that Jane does not come to fear him. To this end, as Jane readies herself to leave the conversation he gives voice to this concern with a challenge—and another Oriental reference: “You are afraid of me because I talk like a Sphinx” (118). Jane, despite being quite confused by his ‘enigmatical’ language, denies that she fears him. “You are afraid” he insists, “your self-love dreads a blunder” (118) but Jane again denies any apprehension, not wishing to ‘talk nonsense’ (118). Having established that Jane is not consciously fearful of him, only the sphinx-like riddles he poses, Rochester observes the inhibiting influence of fear on her personality “you fear in the presence of a man and a brother—father, or master, or what you will—to smile too gaily, speak too freely, or move too quickly” (118). Foreshadowing Jane’s return to him at Ferndean, he theorises that she might, in a future relationship with him “learn to be natural with him” (119) as he is with her and then, free of fear, her “looks and movements will have more vivacity and variety than they dare offer now” (119).
Pursuing his seduction Rochester sexualises his relationship with Jane by relating the story of the infidelity of his French mistress, the opera-dancer Céline Varens. Céline is the mother of Jane’s pupil Adèle who may—or may not—be Rochester’s daughter (that very possibility foregrounds his sexual relationship with Céline). He lists the extravagant gifts of Turquerie: jewels, lingerie, lace and Turkish cashmeres he has lavished on Céline—a sultan’s gifts to his odalisque. Brontë spices Rochester’s storytelling with the rhetoric of intimate sensuality. It is a warm Paris night and the heady scents of flowers and “sprinkled essences” fill the air. His heart is beating fast as he waits impatiently for his mistress on the moonlit balcony outside her boudoir, crunching lustily on chocolate candies. He inhales Céline’s intimate aroma, the Turkish perfume of “musk and amber” as he says. He tells Jane of his mistress’s admiration of his body—his “taille d’athlète” and his own familiarity with Céline’s body: “I knew her instantly by her little foot, seen peeping from the skirt of her dress.” Even the description of the fleeting jealousy he feels as he spies Céline with her younger lover is cloyingly sensual with its metaphorical Oriental reference to ‘snake charmers’:

When I saw my charmer thus come in accompanied by a cavalier, I seemed to hear a hiss and the green snake of jealousy, rising on undulating coils from the moonlit balcony, glided within my waistcoat and ate its way in two minutes to my heart’s core.

12Céline’s occupation as an ‘opera-dancer’ references the Orient. The opéra-ballet La Caravane du Caire (The Cairo Fair) which relates the story of a generous Turk and a noble Frenchman brought the opéra-comique and ballet together for the first time in January 1784. By 1829 it had been performed almost five hundred times. A toile furnishing fabric depicting oriental scenes from the opéra was named after it. (Haydn Williams, p. 85).
To underline the illicit force of this scene, as Rochester speaks of himself taking out a cigar—that potent symbol of male sexuality—he mirrors this in the present and, as the ‘Havannah incense’ (120) drifts into the cold air of Thornfield, the discourse between Rochester and Jane merges with the sensuality of the moonlit balcony in Paris. In this scene Brontë’s *Turquerie* heightens sensuality, simultaneously emphasising the subordination of Céline Varens to Rochester while his sexual jealousy foregrounds his status as ‘owner’ of his mistress. Rochester is well aware of the inappropriateness of this eroticised tale-telling: “Strange that I should choose you for the confidant of all this, young lady” (122) he says, rationalising this transgression with flattery and reassuring Jane that his confidences will not affect her, “While I cannot blight you, you may refresh me” (122) he reassures her. Nevertheless, as Brontë leaves us without any doubt, Jane will be affected and aroused by Rochester’s confidences.

Reviewing the day’s events Jane convinces herself that Rochester’s ‘ownership of a mistress’ and his provocatively sexualised conversation are commonplace, ‘a wealthy Englishman’s passion for a French dancer and her treachery to him, were everyday matters’ (124). She obsesses over her relationship with him and its actualisation in her gains in ‘bodily health’ and ‘flesh and strength’ (125). She thinks of her ‘thin crescent-destiny’ (125), another of Brontë’s Oriental metaphors that places Rochester, ‘the Turk’, at the core of Jane’s future and stamps Jane’s thoughts with eroticism. Although she does not acknowledge it as such, it is clear that Jane is falling in love and the mysterious shadow of Thornfield, its lugubrious murmurs and preternatural laughter, is the dark backdrop to her emotions.
Later, when she discovers Rochester’s bed on fire she dowses the literal (but not the symbolic) fire and becomes in his eyes a good genie, an Oriental reference to an imprisoned spirit forced to grant its master’s every whim. This is, of course, another reference to the potential subjugation of Jane’s sexuality that is implicit in Brontë’s Turkish tropes. In expressing his gratitude, Rochester is all but overcome with passion, ‘He paused; gazed at me: words almost visible trembled on his lips,—but his voice was checked’ (129). The erotic tension Brontë has obliquely developed in the earlier interaction between Jane and Rochester becomes palpable in this scene. Aroused by the raw sexuality of the ‘Strange energy’ (129) in his voice and the ‘strange fire in his look’ (129) Jane spends the night riven with desire and the frantic hope of a future with Rochester—articulated in a dream:

I was tossed on a buoyant but unquiet sea, where billows of trouble rolled under surges of joy. I thought sometimes I saw beyond its wild waters a shore, sweet as the hills of Beulah; and now and then a freshening gale wakened by hope, bore my spirit triumphantly towards the bourne; but I could not reach it, even in fancy,—a counteracting breeze blew off land and continually drove me back. (129-30)

Here Brontë uses an Oriental biblical image prophetically, the Old Testament reference in Isaiah 62.4 to Beulah: ‘marriage’ and the Promised Land offered by God to the Israelites as reward for their renunciation of idolatry. Jane will come to idolise Rochester and the ‘counteracting breeze’ embodied in Rochester’s ‘wife now living’ (247) will drive her from that dream of marriage. This strangely prophetic dream hints at and warns of Jane’s need to renounce her sexual worship, or ‘idolatry’, of Rochester before her hope of marriage can be realised.

The following morning Rochester abruptly departs leaving Jane hot and trembling or, as Adèle remarks ‘“Vos doigts tremblent comme la feuille, et vos
joues sont rouges: mais, rouges comme des cerises!” (133). This is a crucial point in the narrative. Rochester has all but declared himself and Jane is now fully aware of her feelings for him. But with that awareness comes fear ‘I both wished and feared to see Mr. Rochester on the day which followed this sleepless night. I wanted to hear his voice again, yet feared to meet his eye’ (130) but Rochester is nowhere to be found. In order to fan the flames of Jane’s passion while simultaneously keeping her fear in check and maintaining her ignorance of Rochester’s ‘Turkish’ intentions, Brontë uses the narrative strategy of distancing. She builds Jane’s sexual tension as Rochester absents himself from Thornfield and her fear abates temporarily. ‘I feared the meeting in the morning’ Jane admits but as the day wears on that fear dissolves ‘now I desire it, because expectation has been so long baffled that it is grown impatient’ (133). The couple will be kept apart; at first physically, when Rochester is at the Leas estate, then emotionally, as he distances himself from Jane at his own house party. As they draw closer following Bertha’s attack on Richard Mason, Brontë will again physically distance them with Jane’s departure from Thornfield to visit the dying Mrs Reed. The power of distance to put a check to Jane’s emotion is amplified both by Jane’s belief that her love is hopelessly unrequited and the introduction of a rival for Rochester’s affection, the beautiful, Oriental-eyed Blanche Ingram ‘tall ..olive complexion ..noble features’ (135) and, ominously, unmarried. Jane attempts to resist her growing passion for Rochester by a comparison with the imagined Miss Ingram. She paints ‘Blanche an accomplished lady of rank’ (137) and compares the work with a rough sketch of her own portrait. As jealousy gnaws Jane agonises over Blanche Ingram’s desirability, calling on common sense to assist her in killing off the fledgling ‘hopes, wishes, sentiments [she] had been cherishing
since last night’ (135). She is well aware of the danger of falling in love with her employer:

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-fatuus-like, into miry wilds, when there is no extrication. (137)

Brontë saturates Thornfield with Turquerie, adding an erotic undercurrent to all the happenings of the house party. The visiting ladies are like ‘a flock of plumpy birds’ (146) languishing in ‘half-reclining positions’ (146) on the scattered ‘crimson couches and ottomans’ (89). In the room hangs a ‘Tyrian-dyed curtain’ (88), on the floor is a ‘Turkey carpet’ (88). Female guests wear turbans, feathered plumes and ‘crimson velvet’ (88). Blanche ‘doat[s] on Corsairs’ (153) and commands Rochester to sing a Corsair-song with her ‘con spirito’ (153). The Turkish backdrop suffuses a conversation or situation with eroticism, introducing or emphasising an existing tone of sensuality and, importantly, amplifying the sexual tension simmering between Jane and Rochester. When Blanche and Rochester ‘play the Turk’ (Williams, 2014, p.63) donning Oriental costume for charades with Rochester appearing as ‘the very model of an Eastern Emir’ (156) Brontë colours his sham relationship with Blanche with an eroticism that brings Jane’s jealousy to the fore.

Joining his guests after dinner Rochester pays no attention to Jane who observes him from yet another window seat. Brontë’s atmosphere ‘ture’ underlines the sultan/slave power dynamic between Jane and Rochester as he (seemingly) ignores Jane, while the sheer physicality of Jane’s attraction as she gazes lustfully at him from across the room is laid bare by Brontë. The following
passage conveys the fierce intensity and pain of erotic yearning that Jane is by now powerless to resist:

I looked and had an acute pleasure in looking,—a precious, yet poignant pleasure; pure gold, with a steely point of agony: a pleasure like what the thirst-perishing man might feel who knows the well to which he has crept is poisoned, yet stoops and dinks divine draughts nevertheless. (149)

She is profoundly aware of Rochester's erotic dominance even though he does not return her gaze. He 'has an influence that quite mastered me,—that took my feelings from my own power and fettered them in his ..He made me love him without looking at me’ (149).

These scenes are layered with the sensuality of Brontë's Turkish allusions. In depicting Rochester through this Oriental lens Brontë elevates him beyond the banal 'everyday matter[s]' (124) of an Englishman with a French mistress to the 'sultan'; a man of fierce passion and a sense of erotic entitlement so intense that he considers bigamy an acceptable means of taking possession of the object of his desire. Introducing Jane as 'like a Turk' on the first page of the novel Brontë layers the naive young governess with the heat of lust and passionate desire, leading her to an 'heathen' idolisation of Rochester that hints at the sacrilegious. Nevertheless, despite the erotic power of these scenes, the true force of the narrative comes from the theme of Jane's fear of sexual subjugation symbolised by and always present in Brontë's Eastern allusions.

Rochester torments Jane by encouraging her belief that he will marry Blanche, until just as he intends, her terror and anguish at the possibility of leaving him bring her to make the passionate declaration of love he has been angling for all along. That Rochester's plan of marriage to Blanche is nothing
more than another of his charades is revealed and he too declares his love, and
the couple agree to marry.

From her arrival at Thornfield Jane has maintained a sense of herself as an
independent woman but now, betrothed, the intensely felt emotions she holds
for Rochester endanger that sense of independence and have the potential to
plunge her again into the ‘slave’ role, dominated and objectified. She believes
herself to be Rochester’s equal but the day following her betrothal sparks a
foreboding that for Rochester ‘equality’ may simply mean ‘complying
unquestioningly with my wishes’, and Jane’s fear is reinvigorated.

On this ‘brilliant’ (219) first morning of betrothal Jane’s ‘blissful mood’
(219) is disrupted by Rochester’s comment that she is soon to become ‘Jane
Rochester’ (220). “In four weeks, Janet, not a day more. Do you hear that?” Jane
does, indeed, ‘hear that’ and, once again, Brontë foregrounds fear:

    I did and I could not quite comprehend it: it made me giddy. The
    feeling, the announcement sent through me, was something
    stronger than was consistent with joy—something that smote
    and stunned: it was, I think, almost fear. (220)

Secure in Jane’s pledge to marry him Rochester’s belief in his ownership
and his entitlement to her body and her sexuality become apparent. He has
already written to his London banker to send “…certain jewels” (220) to bestow
on her the heirloom jewels of the “ladies of Thornfield” (220). Jane immediately
protests but he insists, “I will myself put the diamond chain round your neck and
the circlet on your forehead” (221). Jane protests again and once more he ignores
her. They continue in this vein with Jane protesting and Rochester insisting, ‘He
pursued his theme, however, without noticing my deprecation.’ (221) says Jane, a
portent of his despotism to come.
Combining fear and the metaphors of the Turk Brontë throws into relief the perils posed to Jane’s sovereignty over her self, her identity and her sexuality in her coming marriage to Rochester. Within an Oriental context jewellery contains several meanings, all of which pertain to sexuality and dominance. As Joan Del Plato points out ‘jewels are a means by which the material values of the outside world infiltrate the domestic world of love and sex within the harem’ (2002, p. 146). The jewels exoticise and sexualise the wearer and they directly indicate the ownership of the harem woman by the Sultan ‘we are reminded of who owns whom’ (p.146). Contextualised by Brontë’s Turkish tropes Rochester’s insistence on bestowing Jane with jewellery and adorning her body with jewels against her wishes becomes an exercise of the dominance of his sexual power and the subjugation of Jane’s. Beyond the motif of ownership and domination, however, the acquisition of jewellery is also ascribed to the venality of women exemplified in the following passage by John Carne (1830) describing a ‘woman purchased by a Turkish merchant’:

> what she prized most of all a profusion of ornaments to adorn her ears, wrists and ankles. With the true spirit of a woman, with whom the desire of being fine had conquered the love of home, of friends, parents and all and she would shake her head, when asked if she longed to return to her wild home, where she roamed as free and almost as naked as the antelope of her deserts. At such times, her bright and cunning eye would glance on her bracelets and necklace. (p. 230)

The couple’s excursion to Millcote later that day provides another example of Rochester’s overtly Oriental assertion of his ‘ownership’ of Jane’s body. This time she is under his ‘orders’ (228) to purchase ‘half a dozen’ silk dresses. Jane resists, ‘By dint of entreaties expressed in energetic whispers I reduced the half-dozen to two’ (228) but Rochester himself makes the selection of these ‘harem
silks’ in ‘rich silk; of the most brilliant amethyst dye and a superb pink satin’ that Jane considers unsuitable and which she vows ‘in a series of whispers... that [she] should certainly never venture to wear his choice’ (228). Jane is determined not to be overwhelmed by Rochester’s power and she triumphs—at least for the moment:

With infinite difficulty, for he was stubborn as a stone, I persuaded him to make an exchange in favour of a sober black satin and pearl-grey silk. ‘It might pass for the present,’ he said; ‘but he would yet see me glittering like a parterre’. (229)

Rochester’s intransigence at this point and her fear of his growing despotism have Jane recall the possibility of a legacy from John Eyre, her Uncle in Madeira. She determines to write to him without delay and once written this letter will set in train the events leading to her abortive first wedding to Rochester and the inheritance that will subsequently play a significant role in her decision to return to Rochester from Morton. Again Brontë ties pivotal events in the plot to Jane’s fear of sexual enslavement.

In the carriage returning to Thornfield Jane meets Rochester’s eye and the smile he gives her triggers significant meaning. Now at last she recognises what the novel’s readers have been aware of all along—that Rochester is the ‘sultan’ who will enslave her if he has his way. She contemplates his despotism ‘His smile was such as a sultan might, in blissful and fond moment, bestow on a slave his gold and gems had enriched’ (229). An amused Rochester compares Jane with the Turkish Sultan’s concubines, intimating she will satisfy him sexually, “I would not exchange this one little English girl for the grand Turk’s whole seraglio; gazelle-eyes, houri forms and all!” (229). Angered by his overt efforts to dominate her Jane rejects his ‘Eastern allusion’ (229) and suggests he “lay out in
extensive slave-purchases some of that spare cash you seem at a loss to spend satisfactorily” (229). When Rochester questions what she will do while he is purchasing slaves, her reply subverts his dominance with a threat to “preach liberty” and mutiny to the harem inmates

and you, three-tailed bashaw as you are sir, shall in a trice find yourself fettered amongst our hands: nor will I, for one, consent to cut your bonds till you have signed a charter, the most liberal that despot ever yet conferred. (230)

Although Jane is ‘preaching liberty’ she imagines Rochester enslaved and in bondage to her; she will demand what she wishes from him, her sexuality will dominate and his fetters will not be released until her conditions are met. She will not be his English Céline Varens she tells him, reminding him of the “diamonds and cashmeres he gave [Céline]” (230) and vows to maintain her independence by continuing to earn her board and lodging as Adèle’s governess (although conveniently overlooking the fact that it is Rochester who will be paying her thirty pounds a year for what he, not Jane, refers to as her “governessing slavery” (230)). Nevertheless, this illusory dominance can only be short lived as Rochester, coolly aware of the power that will be vested in him once they marry, reminds her on their return to Thornfield “It is your time now, little tyrant but it will be mine presently” (231).

For the remainder of the ‘month of courtship’ (234) Jane struggles to discourage Rochester’s sexual advances, watched over by an approving Mrs Fairfax. She rebuffs him with a ‘needle of repartee’ and her ‘flinty’ manner (234) whenever he attempts a move toward anything ‘tender’ (234), keeping him in ‘reasonable check’ (234) to maintain her sexual integrity. While Rochester (no doubt suffering from sexual frustration) grows ever more ‘cross and crusty’
(234)vowing vengeance ‘at some period fast coming’ (234). Jane recognises she maintains power over Rochester by keeping him (and herself) teetering on “the edge of the gulf” (233) of passion. As Davis (2016) points out, these ‘erotics of power’ heighten sexual desire but, ultimately, as Kucich (1987) maintains, Jane’s ‘flinty’ banter is a distancing strategy. Yet I argue it is fear that motivates her. Although Rochester seems unaware of it, for Jane these manoeuvres to protect her virginity do not come easily. What she is doing is stifling and distancing herself from her own desire for Rochester in an effort to conform to the feared societal constraints that would condemn the expression of her sexuality—and the inherent danger the violation of these constraints pose to a governess ‘slave’ who succumbs to sexual pleasure and seduction by her ‘master’:

I would rather have pleased than teased him. My future husband was becoming to me my whole world; and more than the world almost my hope of heaven. He stood between me and every thought of religion, as an eclipse intervenes between man and the broad sun. I could not, in those days, see God for his creature: of whom I had made an idol. (234)

As Jane’s words indicate the passion she feels for Rochester is close to overwhelming. Her idolisation will seal off any possibility beyond complete surrender to his dictates once he has the rights of conjugality. It is clear that after her marriage she will have neither the will nor the power to continue her denial of Rochester’s ardour and what she fears will come to pass: as ‘Jane Rochester’ her material being will be subjugated to the demands of her husband—her ‘master’. With that subjugation will come the dissolution of her independent identity.

Unsurprisingly, as the wedding day dawns Jane is overcome with ‘strange emotion’ (244). She cries over little Adèle who seems to her emblematic of her past life and Rochester her future, ‘he, I was now to array myself to meet, the
dread but adored, type of my unknown future day’ (244). Gazing at herself in her wedding clothes she sees an Oriental image, a robed and veiled figure ‘so unlike my usual self that it seemed almost the image of a stranger’ (244), a woman who will very soon be enslaved in marriage to a despotic ‘sultan’. Despite Jane’s anxieties ‘there is no putting off the day that advanced’ (234) and she is hurried to the ‘grey old house of God’ (245) beside a grim-faced and determined Rochester. A symbolic black bird circles the church steeple and in the churchyard two strangers are reading the ‘mementoes’ carved on the ‘mossy headstones’ (246). This dismal scene alludes to Jane’s childhood imaginings in the window seat at Gateshead as she studied Bewick’s engraving of the ‘quite solitary churchyard, with its inscribed headstone’ (6). It invokes the ‘object of terror’ (6) from ‘that day’ and the prophetic words: ‘Good Times Bad Times and All Times Get Over’ (6). Once more Jane is facing change foreshadowed by fearful imagery.

These are unhappy omens for a wedding day. The bride has not overcome her fear, Jane is not ready for marriage, she is fearful of being outmatched by Rochester’s despotism. Brontë must find a way to delay the marriage until a future time when Jane is free of fear and she and Rochester may meet as equals. The revelation of the existence of Bertha, Rochester’s insane wife incarcerated at Thornfield, is the ideal means by which a despotic Englishman intent on bigamy may have his marriage plans thwarted.

As argued by Joanna De Groot the use of Oriental tropes in eighteenth and nineteenth century literature, with their elements of fantasy and disguise, enabled the expression of complex issues of sexual dominance and subordination between men and women that would have been impossible ‘at the level of realism’ (2000, p. 53). Brontë’s ‘Turkish’ tropes allow her to develop a discourse
that presents her female protagonist as a woman attempting to forge a sexual identity that goes beyond inferiority, submission and subordination. In this chapter I have aimed to demonstrate the gradual evolution of Jane’s passion for Rochester. Initially as a naïve young woman who meets Rochester without fear, she is susceptible to his efforts at seduction but she gradually becomes aware of and attempts to resist the erotic pull toward her ‘master’, realising the danger this poses to her and the pain her resistance brings. Betrothed, she recognises Rochester’s power and her fear ultimately motivates her to flee from him. Rochester is a man who, although adopting a dominant ‘despotic’ role is also vulnerable, desiring, and wholeheartedly seeking a woman with whom he can bond on emotional and intellectual levels. This he reveals to Jane when relating to her the story of his wild, empty wanderings on the Continent, ‘My fixed desire was to seek and find a good and intelligent woman whom I could love’ (264). Brontë ‘channels Jane and Rochester’s passion through her Turkish tropes, enabling her to engage with the complex interplay and changing roles they fulfil and their oscillation between the roles of ‘master’ and ‘slave’ that range across despotism, resistance, submission, accommodation and searing loss for them both.
CHAPTER FIVE

Bertha

What crime was this, that lived incarnate in this sequestered mansion, and could neither be expelled not subdued by the owner?—What mystery, that broke out, now in fire and now in blood, at the deadest hours of night? What creature was it, that, masked in an ordinary woman’s face and shape, uttered the voice, now of a mocking demon, and anon of a carrion-seeking bird of prey? (179)

These are the questions bedevilling Jane as she guards the savaged and bleeding Richard Mason (179) at Thornfield after he has been attacked by his sister, Bertha. On this bloody night Jane sits watching and listening ‘with a murderess hardly separated’ from her by a ‘single door’, terrified of the ‘the wild beast or the fiend’ (179) inside the room.

That ‘mystery at Thornfield’ (140), the ‘mystery of mysteries’ (173) invites and compels unravelling. Of course Rochester’s ‘mad’ wife, ‘Bertha Antoinetta Mason Rochester’, residing on the third floor of Thornfield Hall will ultimately be revealed as the answer to Jane’s questions. Although denied speech or interiority by Brontë the enigmatic figure of Bertha has, over recent decades, generated an enormous body of scholarly interpretation. These myriad interpretations can be divided loosely into discernible categories. There are those critics who view her as monstrous or depraved. This first category includes Richard Chase, for whom Bertha is a crazed ‘suffragette’ intent on stealing what he termed the male ‘élan’ (1947, p. 108), or essence, of masculinity, Terry Eagleton’s Bertha, who represents both Jane’s ‘sexually tormented subconscious’ and a ‘repulsive symbol of Rochester’s sexual drive’ (2005p. 32), early feminist critics such as Adrienne Rich,
for whom Bertha is both ‘Jane’s alter ego’ (p. 475) and ‘a monster’ (1979, p. 477) and Elaine Showalter who has Bertha representing the ‘animal aspects of womanhood’ (1977, p. 118). Another category includes those who view Bertha as a sympathetic character. Among these are Maynard (1984) who envisages Bertha as an almost benign monitory figure whose role is to warn Jane of the dangers of sex and Shuttleworth (1996), who considers Bertha's incarceration to have resulted not from madness but from the waning of Rochester's sexual interest in her. Perhaps the most influential scholars, however, have been Gilbert and Gubar who, in their seminal feminist critique of the novel, conceptualise Bertha as Jane's ‘truest and darkest double’ (1984, p. 360) rebelliously acting out Jane’s suppressed fury at the structures of nineteenth-century patriarchal society, embodied in Rochester and symbolised by Thornfield Hall.

In the wake of Spivak’s admonition to feminist critics of Jane Eyre that their focus on the individualist, female, metropolitan subject and their neglect of the colonial subject was a perpetuation of the axiomatics of British Imperialism (1985), postcolonial critics have generally positioned the West Indian Bertha at the centre of the novel. A great deal of attention has been paid to her racial background and her ethnicity. By virtue of her creole antecedents and the perceived slipperiness of the term ‘creole’, critics have viewed her as variously white, black, or ambiguously white and/or black, each of these racial categories generating somewhat conflicting interpretations. For example, on one hand Bertha has been viewed by scholars such as Sue Thomas (1999) as a white Jamaican creole: a member of the white slave-owning plantocracy and thus a

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1 Apparently aimed at Gilbert and Gubar
2 Carolyn Berman notes that the term ‘creole’ refers to the offspring of European settlers and the offspring of slaves born in the ‘slave-and-settler colonies’ (2006 p. 3).
representation of imperial oppression. On the other hand a number of critics view Bertha as black. For instance Adlai Murdoch (2002) and Carl Plasa (2000) view her as an symbol of oppressed black slavery, while Susan L. Meyer (1990) has her initially white but turning black, and Spivak (1985) who considers her to be both white and native.

Notwithstanding the perceived ambiguity of Bertha’s ethnicity the one aspect of Brontë’s enigmatic creation agreed upon by scholars is that Bertha is ‘mad’. Throughout the text she is described variously as ‘the maniac’ (250, 262), ‘the lunatic’ (250), ‘mad, bad and embruted’ (249) and, to add verisimilitude, ‘the medical men [had] pronounced her mad’ (262). What is at issue and is a matter of some contention is the nature and aetiology of her madness. Simply put, if Bertha is suffering from a psychosomatic illness such as hysteria (Showalter 1980) or ‘melancholy mania’ as Carolyn Berman (2006) argues, her madness can be viewed as socially constructed and one way or another Rochester has driven her mad. Conversely if Bertha is suffering from congenital madness such as mania then her insanity cannot be laid at Rochester’s door and, as Lerner points out, ‘Rochester can obviously be cleared of responsibility for the failure of the marriage’ (1989, p. 299).

In this chapter I intend to argue that Bertha is racially white and that her madness is the product of heredity. I shall also argue that Bertha’s ethnicity and the nature of her insanity contribute to and intensify the emotional and psychological force of Jane Eyre, ineluctably binding Bertha to the dark, thematic arc of Jane’s fear. My approach to reading Bertha is informed by the discourse of xenophobia. In their introduction to Fear, Loathing and Victorian Xenophobia (2013) Marlene Tromp, Maria Bachman
and Heidi Kaufman make the case for a study of xenophobia that offers an alternative reading to that of postcolonial and imperial studies which, as the ‘dominant critical lens’ (Tromp et al 2013, p. 2), has occluded wider interpretative possibilities. ‘Fear and loathing’ of the foreigner are the defining features of xenophobia and it is, essentially, this fear that delineates xenophobia from racism. From the perspective of this study’s focus on representations of fear in Jane Eyre this approach is apposite. Reading the novel through the lens of xenophobia amplifies the interpretative possibilities of the figure of Bertha and makes accessible a more nuanced understanding of her relationship with other characters in the novel—not available to either a feminist approach that foregrounds Bertha’s gender and neglects her ethnicity, or that of imperialist or postcolonial studies which do not adequately reflect the xenophobic impulse present in Jane Eyre.

As I briefly mentioned earlier a great deal of postcolonial criticism of Jane Eyre pivots on Bertha’s creole identity. Indeed, the specific mention by Brontë of Bertha’s ethnicity and Rochester’s reference to Bertha’s mother as ‘the Creole’ (249) rather than, simply, ‘a Creole’, suggest that Brontë weights Bertha’s racial background with a measure of significance. Referring to the descendants of French, Spanish, or Portuguese settlers in the West Indies the term ‘Creole’ was originally used in the sixteenth century (Caver and Williams 2016) but by the nineteenth century the term was much more fluid. The definition of ‘Creole’ given in the Sixth edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica in 1823 (current until at least the 1850s) states that while the term first referred to descendants of Spanish settlers in Mexico, ‘it is now used in a more extensive sense and applied to all natives of the West Indies’, (Vol. VI, p.734). This ambiguity has provoked
speculation as to whether Bertha has African slave ancestry. Nevertheless, those
of mixed white and African race were referred to in Jamaica as ‘mulattos’ rather
than ‘creoles’ in the parlance of the early nineteenth century. For example, in his
*History Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies Vol. II*
(1793) Bryan Edwards goes into considerable detail describing the activities and
general appearance of the West Indian creoles. He does not specifically denote
them as ‘white’ but simply takes it for granted. Those of mixed race he discusses
under the rubric ‘mulatto’ and, further, he comments that: ‘no white man of
decent appearance, unless urged by the temptation of a considerable fortune, will
condescend to give his hand in marriage to a mulatto! The very idea is shocking!’
(Book IV, p. 22). Although a large sum of money is at stake given that Brontë has
Rochester unaware of the ‘considerable fortune’ to be garnered from his marriage
to Bertha it seems most improbable that Bertha was intended as a ‘mulatto’.
Given this contemporary distinction in the terms ‘creole’ and ‘mulatto’ and the
contemporary remarks from Edwards (1798) I share the view of those scholars
who consider Bertha to be racially white

Bertha’s full name before her marriage was Bertha Antoinetta Mason (my
emphasis) and she is the ‘daughter of Jonas Mason, merchant, and of Antoinetta
his wife’ (247). The name ‘Antoinetta’ appears to be a combination of the Spanish
name *Antonetta* and the French *Antoinette*, and with that in mind I argue that
this nomenclature suggests it is likely that Brontë has endowed Bertha with
Spanish/French ancestry. That the marriage took place in ‘Spanish Town,

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3 I could find no reference beyond *Jane Eyre* to an actual name with the spelling ‘Antoinetta’ and
have concluded the name is a construction of Brontë’s.

4 Another creole woman of French descent was Napoleon Bonaparte’s adulterous first wife
Josèphine, born Marie Joséphe Rose de Tascher de la Pagerie in Martinique in 1763. Brontë, with
her great affection for and interest in Napoleon would hardly have been unaware of this.
Jamaica’ (247) amplifies the Spanish reference as does Rochester’s remarking on the physical similarity between the ‘dark as a Spaniard’ (147) Blanche Ingram and the young Bertha: ‘I found her a fine woman in the style of Blanche Ingram’ (260) he tells Jane. I consider Brontë has figured Bertha’s mother, Antoinetta Mason, as either a Spanish creole or of mixed Spanish-French creole background and that she was most likely born in Saint Domingo (now Haiti) and was one of the thousands of wealthy creoles of Spanish and French descent who fled to Jamaica during the diaspora of the white plantocracy from St. Domingo prior to and during the Haitian slave revolution which ended in 1804.

Rochester’s comment to Jane that the Mason family approved his marriage to Bertha because ‘I was of good race’ (260) meaning, ‘of good family’ has been taken by some critics, such as Meyer (1990) to suggest that Bertha’s ‘race’ was inferior to Rochester’s, ostensibly adding further evidence to the notion of Bertha’s mixed black/white parentage. Such a reading fails to take into account the longstanding association between Rochester’s father and Bertha’s family: ‘Mr. Mason, a West Indian planter and merchant, was his old acquaintance’ (260) Rochester explains. If nothing else this connection suggests Bertha and Rochester share a similar social status, a suggestion strengthened by Richard Mason’s ready

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5 This reference also brings Blanche into Bertha’s ambit as another ‘dark’ character.
6 In *Wide Sargasso Sea* Jean Rhys (1966), depicts Antoinette Cosway as the daughter of a French creole woman: ‘a Martinique girl’ (p 9).
7 The western part of the island which Columbus had called Hispaniola was occupied by the French colony of Saint Domingue, now Haiti and the eastern part by the Spanish colony of Santo Domingo, now the Dominican Republic. The British applied the name Saint Domingo to the whole island, (Geggus, 1981).
8 David Geggus (1981) on the arrival of refugees from Saint Domingo in Kingston in 1791: ‘A great deal of money was transferred there for safekeeping. By April 1792, after a sudden influx from western Saint Domingue there were as many French in the Island as British’ p. 228.
9 Brontë uses the term ‘race’ to denote family lineage When the narrating Jane speculates as to Mrs Reed’s aversion to the child Jane, she asks ‘how could she really like an interloper not of her race and unconnected with her’ (13), meaning that although Jane is ‘family’ by marriage, she is not a blood relative of Mrs Reed. At Thornfield, Mrs Fairfax tells Jane ‘The Rochesters have been rather a violent than a quiet race’ (90).
acceptance by the snobbish house party guests at Thornfield. In early nineteenth-century Jamaica the ‘pool’ of potential marriage partners for those of the upper classes was extremely limited, because elite Englishmen in the Caribbean held marriage in ‘low esteem’ (Burnard, 2006, pp. 190). Because of this, as Burnard points out, there was the concomitant problem of an excess of unmarried women, ‘more spinsters ... in this small community, than in most other parts of His Majesty's dominions’ (2006, p. 190). Thus a marriage between a Jamaican creole woman of good family and an Englishman her social equal would be well favoured. In the case of the Mason family the worth of Bertha’s union with Rochester amounted to a ‘dowry’ of thirty thousand pounds. Critics intent on demonising Rochester as a fortune hunter, such as Berman, who describes Rochester as a ‘fortune seeking husband’ (2006, p. 142), have also overlooked his comment that he married because he fancied himself to be in love with Bertha: ‘I thought I loved her’ (260) he confesses to Jane, claiming he was oblivious to the financial transaction involved: ‘my father told me nothing about the money’ (260). The importance of class and family background makes it highly unlikely that Brontë would have Rochester marry a woman with slave antecedents. It is equally unlikely that there would be no mention of it in the text if this were the case, where Brontë’s use of the term ‘mulatto’ rather than ‘creole’ would have made this intention clear.

Bertha Antoinetta Rochester, a hybrid French/Spanish/English woman, born and raised in a British colony, married to an Englishman, living in England, English but not-English, epitomises what Tromp, Bachman and Kaufman (2013) argue gave rise to Victorian xenophobia: the foreign ‘other’, merging with and dissolving the boundaries between the English-self and ‘other’. As they say:
We see Victorian xenophobia as a way of interpreting the perceived foreignness of people, objects and locations as a threat to English culture and identity. It is the possibilities—the contingencies—that drive this vision and its attendant fears and that ultimately reflect Victorian anxieties about its own identity in a moment when it was being reshaped by powerful new forces. Thus, the image of the foreigner often grew out of concerns over changing identities, or of the fear that self and other/foreigner could or might merge. It is the possibility of merging that gives rise to intense anxieties and antipathies that define Victorian xenophobia. (p. 2)

As a white woman of Spanish/French descent—the foreign ‘other’—Bertha is the antecedent of Rochester’s European mistresses and here the discourse of xenophobia creates a framework, unavailable to an imperialist or colonialist interrogation, within which the interrelationship between Bertha and these three European women can be discussed. What distinguishes Bertha from Rochester’s ‘concubines’ is her dowry of thirty-thousand pounds and her legal status as his wife. All three mistresses are disparaged alike in xenophobic terms that are stereotypically nationalistic. Mirrored in the pre-mad Bertha these are the qualities that Rochester also finds so distasteful in his wife. The Italian, Giacinta: ‘unprincipled and violent’ (266), reflects Bertha’s ‘violent, unreasonable temper’ (261), both Bertha and the unfaithful, promiscuous, French Céline, torment Rochester with their ‘unchaste’ (261) behaviour, and Clara, the German woman with her ‘heavy, mindless, unimpressible’ (264) intellect echoes Bertha’s ‘common, low, narrow and singularly incapable of being led to anything higher’ ‘cast of mind’ (261). Despite their detested characteristics it is the three women’s inferior status as his mistresses that the Englishman, Rochester, considers ‘degrading’ (266) even while describing his relationship with Bertha as having contaminated him ‘with grimy dishonour’ (262). With Rochester’s belief that he is sullied and tainted by association with these ‘impure’ foreign women, Brontë
articulates what Tromp, Bachman and Kaufman argue is the ‘fear of foreign
corruption and dissolution of Englishness, even by the English themselves’
(2013,p. 4).

These women—the mistresses who have ‘sold’ their bodies for Rochester’s
sexual pleasure and the wife whose body was once lusted after by Rochester but is
now the means of her obliteration—incarnate Jane’s fears of sexual enslavement.
After Jane’s departure from Thornfield the shadow of these beautiful, sensual
women with their erotic ties to Rochester, not direct rivals now but women who
were desirous of and desired by the object of Jane’s own sexual desire, looms in
Jane’s ‘worst fears’ (324). She imagines Rochester returning in ‘reckless
desperation to some former haunt on the Continent’ (324), seeking an ‘object for
his strong passions’ (324). When viewed through the lens of xenophobic
discourse Jane’s fear and loathing of these women is thrown into relief. Each of
them has been possessed by Rochester and each has been the subject of his
passionate sexuality. As such, each woman has experienced what Jane fears but
also intensely desires. Nevertheless they are viewed by Jane as ‘less than’ herself,
expressed in her scorn for the ‘meretricious arts and calculated manoeuvres’ (159)
of ‘Spanish’ Blanche Ingram, that other likeness of Bertha and once the imagined
rival for Rochester’s desire, and in the similarity of little Adèle to her French
mother. It is worth noting the observation by Anne Longmuir that ‘a conflict
between British and Continental, especially French, values dominates Brontë’s
fiction’(2009, p. 165).This conflict is clearly articulated in the figure of the child,
Adèle, ‘A French dancer’s bastard’ (257). Brontë makes visible Céline Varens in
her description of her daughter precociously and coquettishly singing and
preening for Rochester (as do both Bertha and Blanche Ingram). By the end of the
novel, however, Adèle Varens has evolved from ‘French’ to mere ‘foreign other’:
the hybrid figure crossing boundaries to merge with an English identity. An
English education corrects her ‘French defects’ (383) and she becomes almost-
English ‘docile, good-tempered and well-principled (383). The Italian and the
German mistresses are simply dismissed as ‘these poor girls’ (267), whose fate
Jane fears and is absolutely committed to avoiding.

While some critics have viewed Rochester as having bought himself a wife
in Jamaica, Meyer, for example, supposes Rochester to have taken a ‘dark wife as
a ‘slave’(1996, p. 263), it is Rochester who is the commodified partner in his
marriage to Bertha and, potentially, in his relationship to Blanche, a fact which
does not escape Jane’s notice. Bertha has brought to her marriage with
Rochester a considerable fortune as her ‘dowry’ and this sets her apart from the
‘slave’ mistresses who have been bought—and discarded—by Rochester. It is
Bertha’s dowry of thirty thousand pounds that ‘buys’ Rochester in a marriage that
confers on Bertha the title of ‘wife’ and, as she descends into madness, ensures
that she cannot be discarded. As in the Ottoman seraglio it is the Sultan’s bride-
to-be who brings a ‘dowry’ that sets her apart from the enslaved concubines by
purchasing her legitimacy in the role of ‘wife’ (Zilfi 2010). Jane’s lack of fortune
heightens her vulnerability to her old fear of sexual subordination, not merely as
an issue of economic class but as one which metonymically positions her as
potentially beyond-the-pale, relegated to the role of ‘concubine’. While this
discourse illuminates the connection between Bertha and these three European

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*I have not said anything condemnatory of Mr. Rochester’s project of marrying for interest and
connexions’ the narrating Jane remarks, ‘It surprised me when I first discovered that such was
his intention. I had thought him a man unlikely to be influenced by motives so commonplace in
his choice of a wife’ (159-160).*
women, the meaning of Jane’s absence of fortune contextualised within Brontë’s harem symbolism highlights the relationship between Jane’s fears of sexual enslavement and her financial dependence on Rochester, reinforcing her desperate determination to distance herself from the possibility of becoming another ‘mistress’.

Viewing Bertha as a manifestation of British xenophobia, that is, the ‘foreign other’ rather than the ‘racial other’ allows a path to be tracked between Bertha and the ‘fear and loathing’ of the inherent foreignness of the other ‘dark’ characters of the novel all of whom, I argue, manifest elements of Jane’s fears. These inimical characters are: the dark-skinned John Reed and his mother at Gateshead, at Lowood ‘the black pillar’ (26) the Reverend Brocklehurst and ‘the little black one’ (43) Miss Scatcherd, at Thornfield the dark-skinned, dark-eyed, dark-haired Blanche Ingram and her mother Lady Ingram with her ‘inflated and darkened’ features and her ‘fierce and hard eye’ (146) reminiscent of Mrs Reed’s and, of course, Rochester himself, the ‘Paynim’ (156). Theirs is a spiritual darkness signifying injustice, tyranny and bodily subjection evident not only in the violence and unjust punishments of Gateshead and Lowood but also in the class oppression of the ‘governessing slavery’ so denigrated by the Ingrams at Thornfield, and in Rochester’s despotism toward Jane once she accepts his proposal of marriage. I agree with Beverley Taylor’s argument that skin colour is an evocation of Charlotte Brontë’s xenophobic impulse and is not aligned with race but, as she contends, is ‘linked to a more amorphous symbolic system stemming from traditional representations of good as white and evil as black’ (2016, p. 340). Although St John Rivers’ emotionally abusive and coercive behaviour toward Jane somewhat confounds this formulaic reading of black and
white in *Jane Eyre*, he is nevertheless beyond reproach in terms of sexual morality, and despite the many elements of hypocrisy he displays perhaps his ‘pure Christian’ persona (350) earns him his ironic ‘whiteness’ distinction.

Bertha’s facial appearance, described in some detail by Jane in the passage relating the story of Bertha’s nocturnal intrusion into her room, has been taken as evidence by postcolonial scholars in support of the argument that Bertha is ‘an actual Jamaican black woman’ (Meyer 1990, p. 250) or as initially white but emerging throughout the narrative as ‘Bertha-become-black’ (p. 254). Here I propose an alternative to the contention that the face Jane sees in the mirror is a reflection of the ‘topoi of racial otherness’ (p. 253). I argue, instead, that Jane’s description of Bertha’s facial features demonstrates the *topoi* of madness—specifically ‘mania’—as described by the ethnographer and physician James Cowles Prichard (1786-18488) in *A Treatise on Insanity and Other Disorders Affecting the Mind* (1837). Following is an extract from the relevant passage of Brontë’s text juxtaposed with extracts from what Prichard terms the ‘bold, menacing aspect’ of ‘the maniac who becomes the subject of violent excitement’ ‘in a state of extreme agitation’ (1837, p. 64). I have italicised Prichard’s words to distinguish them from Brontë’s.

When Jane tells Rochester she had ‘distinctly’ seen the intruder’s ‘visage and features’ mirrored in the ‘oblong glass’ in her room, he responds with the question: “And how were they?” (242). The passage continues:

“‘It was a discoloured face—it was a savage face’” (242) says Jane. ‘the appearance is wild and menacing’ (p. 64).

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11 Carl Plasa views Bertha’s ‘savage face’ (2000, p. 242) as evidence of her link to Jamaican black slavery.
—“I wish I could forget the roll of the red eyes” (242) ‘In certain cases a sudden reddening of the eyes... give[s] presage of a speedy explosion of violent madness and the urgent necessity of a strict seclusion’. (p. 63)

“and the fearful blackened inflation of the lineaments”. (242) ‘the skin becomes of a slaty colour’ (p. 64)

“Ghosts are usually pale, Jane” (242)
“This, sir, was purple: the lips were swelled and dark; the brow furrowed; the black eyebrows widely raised over the bloodshot eyes...” (242)
‘the forehead contracted; the eyebrows drawn up; the hair bristled; the breathing hurried; the countenance begins to glow; the eyes become fiery and sparkling... the eyelids are by turns drawn widely open and closely shut’. (p. 64)

The similarity of the passages is striking, even to Brontë’s detail of “‘black eyebrows widely raised!” (242) and Prichard’s ‘the eyebrows drawn up’ (p. 64). Nevertheless, the most significant words of Brontë’s passage from the point of view of Bertha’s race are those referring to the ‘discoloured’ face, yet the matched passage from Pritchard indicates ‘a slaty colour’ of the skin which means ‘black’ or at least very dark grey. Following Prichard then, I argue that the darkened complexion of the maniac is not any indicator of race but a mark of insanity.

Writing his Treatise in an effort to account for, classify and categorise a range of observable ‘mad’ behaviours, Prichard created three categories with considerable overlap: Monomania, Moral Insanity, and Mania—also referred to as ‘Raving Madness’ (1837, p. 61). In a letter from Charlotte Brontë to W.S. Williams, reader for her publisher in 1848, Brontë refers to ‘a phase of insanity

12Brontë uses similar language in her descriptions of teachers at Lowood school: ‘Miss Miller, poor thing! Looked purple’ (39). Miss Scatcherd whose sadistic torment of Helen Burns infuriates Jane and causes her ‘intolerable pain at the heart’ (63) is referred to as ‘the little black one’ (43).
13Drawing on the work of French physician Philippe Pinel, Prichard was the first to use the term ‘Moral Insanity’ He describes it as ‘consisting in a morbid perversion of the feelings, affections and active powers, without any illusion or erroneous conviction impressed upon the understanding: it sometimes co-exists with an apparently unimpaired state of the intellectual faculties’ (Prichard 1837, p. 12).
which may be called moral madness’ in accounting for the ‘shocking’ character of Bertha.\footnote{14}{Letter from Charlotte Brontë to W.S. Williams, January 4, 1848. ‘Miss Kavanagh’s view of the Maniac coincides with Leigh Hunt’s. I agree with them that the character is shocking but I know that it is but too natural. There is a phase of insanity which may be called moral madness, in which all that is good or even human seems to disappear from the mind and a fiend-nature replaces it. The sole aim and desire of the being thus possessed is to exasperate, to molest, to destroy and preternatural ingenuity and energy are often exercised to that dreadful end. The aspect in such cases, assimilates with the disposition; all seems demonized. It is true that profound pity ought to be the only sentiment elicited by the view of such degradation and equally true is it that I have not sufficiently dwelt on that feeling; I have erred in making horror too predominant. Mrs. Rochester indeed lived a sinful life before she was insane but sin is itself a species of insanity: the truly good behold and compassionate it as such.’ (Wise and Symington 1980, 2: 173-74.)} Given her use of Prichard’s term ‘moral madness’ it has been generally accepted that Brontë had read his Treatise on Insanity and referred to his classifications in building the character of Bertha.\footnote{15}{Peter Grudin for example, asserts that ‘Bertha’s pathology is clearly modelled on a then recent theory, the notion of ‘moral madness’ propounded in the thirties by the psychologist James Cowles Prichard’ (1977, p. 147).} It is worth noting, however, that despite Brontë’s mention of ‘moral madness’ what she describes as Bertha’s ‘aspect’ is, in fact, a better match with Prichard’s description of Mania than with his ‘Moral Insanity’. As the following demonstrates, Brontë has endowed her red-eyed, foul mouthed, homicidal lunatic in her filthy den with qualities seemingly drawn directly from the description of established or ‘Second Stage’ Mania outlined in great detail in Prichard’s Treatise and summarised thus:

In the second stage, anger, violence and the loss of reason manifest themselves in their greatest intensity; shrieking, roaring, raging, abusive expressions and conduct towards the dearest friends and the nearest relations who are now looked upon as the bitterest enemies. The patient tears his clothes to tatters, destroys, breaks in pieces whatever comes in his way... whoever touches the patient is abused or struck by him. Strange confused ideas, absurd prejudices occupy the mind. Stillness soon follows, or a murmuring sound, as if the patient were alone: on the other hand, when he is alone, talking and gesticulating as if he were in company.\footnote{16}{Today, patients suffering from Schizophrenia displaying these psychotic behaviours are conceptualised as responding to auditory hallucinations or ‘hearing voices’.}

They pass sleepless nights and cannot even lie in their beds...The nearest relatives and the most affectionate friends of the lunatic
are now among the objects of his most vehement displeasure. Some imprecate curses upon those who surround them and restrain their violent efforts (p. 60). Others talk in the most obscene and violent manner (p. 62). Many individuals abandon in their own persons all regard to cleanliness and decency and become filthy and disgusting in the extreme.’ (p. 62)

Jean Rhys’s (1966) novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*, centred on the imagined early life of Bertha (renamed by Rhys as Antoinette Cosway) in the West Indies minimises the notion of Bertha’s hereditary madness, focusing instead on her social and family circumstances and particularly her marriage to Rochester as the chief causes of her insanity. This novel has been influential in the realm of *Jane Eyre* criticism that paints Bertha/Antoinette as victim and Rochester as her oppressor. Feminist critics such as Elaine Showalter (1980) have posited Bertha’s madness as being in the realm of the psychosomatic, that is, as socially constructed, the main culprit being Rochester himself and, particularly, the ten years of incarceration he has ‘inflicted’ on his wife, unnecessarily some suggest. Shuttleworth says of Bertha that she was ‘locked away in an attic as soon as she ceased to please her husband sexually’ (1996, p. 168). Her condemnation of Rochester and her minimisation of Bertha’s violence and homicidality are supported by a great deal of feminist criticism suggesting that the ‘fiend’ in Thornfield is Rochester himself (Shuttleworth 1996, p. 169). Rebecca Fraser, for

\[17\] Shuttleworth’s interpretation of Rochester’s ‘perverted, self-destructive’ sexuality (1996, p. 169) is underpinned by the differentiation of ‘debauchery’ from ‘dissipation’. Rochester tells Jane that ‘I tried dissipation, never debauchery: that I hated and hate. That was my Indian Messalina’s attribute: rooted disgust at it and her restrained me much, even in pleasure’ (265). Shuttleworth interprets this as ‘The despised debauchery assumes a frank enjoyment of sex, whilst dissipation is always constrained by a feeling of disgust.’ (p. 169). My reading of ‘debauched’ in this context is much the same as Yeazell’s (2000) consideration that debauchery refers to having several or many sexual partners at the same time I read Rochester’s description of Bertha as ‘unchaste’, in this context meaning promiscuous and argue that Rochester’s use of the term ‘my Indian Messalina’ (265) provides the clue to Brontë’s meaning, hence debauchery. I read the meaning of ‘dissipated’ as a squandering or ‘wasting’ of resources as the way in which Rochester views his having had sex with women he does not love and comes to despise.
instance, claims definitively that ‘In Bertha Mason’s case, Mr Rochester turns her mad’ (2015, p. 317).

Despite the proliferation of critical interpretation to the contrary the text of *Jane Eyre* does not support the notion that the aetiology of Berta’s madness is socially constructed. In fact, Brontë is unequivocal in providing Bertha with hereditary insanity—in Rochester’s words: ‘Bertha Mason is mad; and she came of a mad family; —idiots and maniacs through three generations! Her mother, the Creole, was both a mad woman and a drunkard!’ (249). There is an insane younger brother also in Bertha’s family, described by Rochester as a ‘complete dumb idiot’ (261) and a suggestion that Richard Mason ‘will probably be in the same state one day’ (261). These remarks counter any suggestion that the madness in Bertha’s family is suffered only by its female members. Prichard notes the condition of a ‘congenital predisposition’ in patients suffering from mania but, he goes on: ‘for the development of insanity’ (my emphasis) ‘among the physical agents which give rise to madness, there is none more influential than intemperance’ (1837, p. 121) and, unsurprisingly, ‘sensual vices’ (Prichard 1837, p. 155). I contend that Bertha’s inherited predisposition to mania, ‘the ‘germs of insanity’ (261), prematurely developed by the excessive nature of her ‘intemperate and unchaste’ ‘giant propensities’ (261) and the ‘story’ of her progression into madness are, in Brontë’s narrative, a vivid realisation of Prichard’s detailed behavioural observations of the insane, and the symptoms and aetiology of mania.

In the present day, Prichard’s three overlapping categories: Monomania; Moral Insanity; and Mania Madness’ (p. 61) are all considered under the rubric ‘Schizophrenia’. Although our current understanding of schizophrenia may seem
inappropriate in the context of a mid nineteenth-century novel, it is useful to keep in mind that it is only the term ‘schizophrenia’ that is anachronistic,\textsuperscript{18} and the symptoms described in Prichard’s Treatise are remarkably true to the behavioural descriptions that led to the naming of this severe mental illness. Participating in a 2010 BBC Radio discussion of literary heroines and madness Dinesh Bhugra, then President of the Royal Psychiatric Association, perceived a clear description of schizophrenia in Brontë’s representation of Bertha. According to Bhugra ‘You can rule out manic depression (otherwise: melancholy mania) as there is no evidence of a mood disorder, just a chronic deteriorating condition’ (Parry 2010). Nevertheless, a diagnosis of ‘hysteria’ has proved irresistible to feminist critics who imagine Bertha as a woman constrained because she is sexually aggressive and does not conform to society’s demands for submissive, womanly behaviour (Showalter, 1980). Again, there is no textual evidence to support this view. Typical symptoms of hysteria include weakness, fainting, seizures, paralysis, and dumbness (Caldwell, 2012), none of which Brontë ascribes to Bertha.

When it comes to the question of Bertha’s intentionality that is, her personal agency and her empowerment, considering Bertha’s mental illness as schizophrenia throws into relief one of the dusty, neglected corners in Jane Eyre: Rochester’s assertion that Bertha’s behaviour is other-directed, that is, she is by no means acting under her own agency. In the aftermath of the failed wedding, attempting to convince Jane she must remain with him Rochester promises to close up Thornfield and leave Bertha in the hands of Grace Poole:

\textsuperscript{18}The Swiss psychiatrist, Paul Eugene Bleuler, coined the term ‘schizophrenia’ in 1911 but the constellation of symptoms included under this rubric had been recognised and documented since ancient times. According to Neel Burton (2012) the oldest available description of an illness closely resembling schizophrenia dates back to approximately 1550 BC Egypt.
Grace will do much for money and she shall have her son, the keeper at Grimsby Retreat, to bear her company and be at hand to give her aid in the paroxysms when my wife is prompted by her familiar to burn people in their beds at night, to stab them, to bite their flesh from their bones and so on—. (257)

This comment of Rochester’s is thick with meaning. His attribution of Bertha’s violent behaviour to promptings by a ‘familiar’ suggests not only that Bertha herself is witch-like but she is in thrall to hallucinations that direct her actions. These are most likely in auditory form—the insistent, demanding internal voices that are a signature characteristic of schizophrenic psychosis. Brontë’s revelation here that Bertha’s personal agency is absent leads to the question of ‘selfhood’ and intentionality. The absence of ipseity resulting from the schizophrenic patient’s auditory hallucinations—the perceived direction from ‘another’—has been described as a ‘lack of myness’ (Cutting 2015, p. 135) or a sense that thoughts and actions are not my own, that the person is detached from their experience as if it were another’s, expressed as ‘tactile experience is not mine, thoughts are hijacked by someone else, thoughts are simply not my own’ (p.135). The only reference to Bertha’s possible interiority is Grace Poole’s observation of Bertha that she is ‘so cunning: it is not in mortal discretion to fathom her craft’ (p. 250) (‘craft’ referring, again, to witchcraft). Notwithstanding Bertha’s ‘cunning’, as a ‘madwoman’ in the mid-nineteenth century according to the strongly held belief of the inability of the insane to judge their actions as right or wrong she would not have been considered morally or legally responsible for any crime she might commit. If she were tried and found guilty the probable outcome would have been incarceration in an asylum for the criminally insane.  

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19 This legal situation stemmed from the 1843 trial of Daniel McNaghten who shot and killed the secretary to the British Prime Minister mistaking him for the Prime Minister. McNaghten was
Recently, the influential notion that Bertha’s madness is a means of nineteenth-century feminist rebellion as argued by Gilbert and Gubar, has lost currency. Feminist scholars such as Marta Camino-Santangelo (1996) and Elizabeth Donaldson (2002) argue that it is a gross mistake to view madness as an engine of women’s power, claiming that madness can only be an inevitable disqualification of the ‘self’. This position supports my reading of Brontë’s madwoman—that madness has led to the obliteration of her ipseity rendering her inarticulate and incapable of responsibility for her actions at Thornfield. Interpretations of Bertha Rochester which assign forethought and accountability to her actions are not compatible with the text. For example Diane Hoeveler posits that Bertha sets fire to Rochester’s bed ‘just to make her point’ (Hoeveler 1998, Chapter 5, Section 3, Para. 23) yet there is no mention in Jane Eyre of any motivation for Bertha’s behaviour save for Rochester’s remark that she is ‘prompted by her familiar’ and his reflection when he learns that Jane’s wedding veil has been torn that it ‘perhaps brought back vague reminiscences of her own bridal days’ (264). To construe Bertha’s madness and her mad actions as deliberate and intentional, whether as a form of feminist rebellion or otherwise, seems to me to be a misreading.

A further critical explanation for Bertha’s madness is the notion that the ten years of incarceration at Thornfield have exacerbated or even caused her madness. Shuttleworth (1996) is one who has espoused Bertha’s incarceration in

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diagnosed as ‘insane’ and, as such, could not be held responsible under law (The Times 1843, p. 5). This was a famous case. Subsequent application of this ruling is known as ‘McNaghten’s Rules’.

Elizabeth Donaldson views Gilbert and Gubar’s interpretation of Bertha as a reflection of the ideology of 1970s feminism, declaring that Bertha is not Jane Eyre’s ‘dark double’ but ‘the maddened double’ of second-wave feminist criticism (2002 p 99). My reading of Bertha also brings me to this conclusion.
terms of causality. Berman discusses at length the ‘mismanagement’ of the insane and the relevance of this to *Jane Eyre*. Berman’s view combines both biological and social aetiologies for Bertha’s madness. She argues that Bertha Rochester’s ‘malady’ has been aggravated by her husband having ignored mid-nineteenth century advances in the care of the insane available within asylums such as Bethlem and, instead, locked up his wife in the ‘attic’ at Thornfield (2006, p.127). Once again Rochester is accorded blame for Bertha’s madness or, at the very least, its exacerbation. Scholars taking this position consider Bertha’s actual location at Thornfield to be irrelevant in terms of plot. However, such readings fail to take into consideration the germaneness to the narrative of Bertha’s living presence within Thornfield itself. The madwoman’s numerous ‘Gothic’ appearances, representing and intensifying the undercurrent of sexual fear within Brontë’s plot, hold deep psychological resonance crucial to the narrative.

Aspects of Bertha have been present since ten-year old Jane’s encounter with John Reed and her subsequent incarceration in the red room at Gateshead. On ‘that day’ (5) when Jane—imagining Nero and Caligula—accuses John Reed of being ‘like a murderer... a slave driver’ (8) Brontë makes it clear she is familiar with Oliver Goldsmith’s *History of Rome* (8) and is drawing parallels between John Reed and two of the most infamous of Roman emperors. In his *History* Goldsmith comments that in addition to Caligula’s many vices: ‘vanity and pride’ ‘capricious cruelty’ ‘unnatural lusts’ and ‘lewdness’, ‘his prodigality was the most remarkable’ (1820, pp. 148,150). Of Nero he says the ‘natural depravity’ of the Emperor Nero created an ‘inhuman monster’; a murderer, whose torment of his mother, beginning with ‘petty cruelty’ (p. 200) ended in her being put to death on his orders. These likenesses and parallels provide useful insight into the adult
character to emerge from the indulged and capriciously cruel adolescent John Reed and foreshadow the circumstances of Reed’s profligacy, debt, and eventual ugly demise.

Years later at Thornfield, in another allusion to the Roman Empire, Rochester will refer to his wife as ‘my Indian Messalina’ (265). This, too, provides useful interpretative insight. Valeria Messalina, the third wife of the Roman Emperor Claudius, was notorious for her sexual profligacy, ruthlessness and extreme cruelty. Goldsmith has this to say about her: ‘Messalina, whose name is almost become a common appellation to women of abandoned character. She was not less remarkable for her cruelties than her lusts’... ‘her debaucheries became every day more notorious and exceeded what had ever been in Rome’ (1820, p. 178). Ultimately Messalina was executed with her lover and, according to Goldsmith, this was because of her treacherous plotting against her husband and—ironically, in the context of Jane Eyre—her bigamy

These Roman allusions are valuable adjuncts to characterisation but of greater significance is their aligning of Bertha Rochester with John Reed. Messalina was cousin to both Caligula and Nero and her daughter, Octavia, was one of Nero’s wives, so the link between these characters exists within the allusion and even at a realistic level within the text. For example, John Reed shares several characteristics with Bertha: his ‘dark’ skin (12) and his ‘disgusting and ugly’ appearance, his unwarranted violence directed both at Jane and at the world around him, and his madness. As the mature Jane narrates: ‘John, no one thwarted, much less punished; though he 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.’ (12).
This description of John Reed fits well with Prichard’s description of ‘Moral Insanity’. It is not difficult to imagine Brontë drawing Reed’s character from the following extract of one of Pinel’s case studies of Moral Insanity quoted in Prichard’s *Treatise*:

An only son of a weak and indulgent mother gave himself up habitually to the gratification of every caprice and passion of which an untutored and violent temper was susceptible. The impetuosity of his disposition increased with his years. The money with which he was lavishly supplied removed every obstacle to the indulgence of his wild desires. Every instance of opposition or resistance aroused him to acts of fury. He assaulted his adversary with the audacity of a savage, sought to reign by force and was perpetually embroiled in disputes or quarrels. If a dog, a horse, or any other animal offended him he instantly put it to death. (1837, p. 22)

Of course, beyond their alignment with Roman infamy and their shared madness, Brontë draws a further parallel between Bertha and John Reed: they both meet a violent death through suicide.

With the association of these characters Brontë draws a through line in the structure of *Jane Eyre*, situating Bertha with the Reeds, with Gateshead and thus with the symbolism of the red room. In this she incorporates Jane’s fear of sexual subjugation, first exposited in the novel’s early Gateshead scenes, into the antagonistic force of madness and chaos represented by Bertha. Those fears become a haunting accompaniment to Jane’s thoughts and the events to follow at Thornfield from the moment the ‘curious laugh; distinct, formal, mirthless,’ (91) echoes through the dark, third floor. The ‘clothed hyena’ (250) is emblematic of Bertha and what Jane hears is the ‘preternatural and tragic’ (91) laugh of the hyena. It is not only the absent-presence of Bertha that is signalled by the laugh but the synecdoche of the hyena-laugh subtly references the looming manifestation of Jane’s fears.
On first hearing the ‘clamorous peal’ (91)\(^2\) Jane rejects any fear for the sensible reason that ‘it was high noon and...no circumstances of ghostliness accompanied the curious cachination’ (91). Nor does she experience fear, merely curiosity, on hearing the laugh during her frequent solo visits to the leads where she dreams wistfully into the distant possibilities of a life lived more fully. However, as Jane’s desire for Rochester quickens, Bertha’s presence and Jane’s fears become manifest. The first incident in which Bertha sets Rochester’s bed alight comes on the heels of Rochester’s eroticisation of his contact with Jane in the telling of his story of the unfaithful Céline Varens. This time the mocking ‘goblin-laughter’ seems to be located—significantly—at Jane’s bedside, ‘or rather, crouched by my pillow’ (126) and what follows after Jane douses Rochester’s bed is an interlude in which sexual desire throbs between the two, leaving Jane aroused and unable to sleep. Now, as Jane falls in love and lust with Rochester, the fears emerge more fully into her consciousness. ‘I both wished and feared to see Mr Rochester on the day which followed this sleepless night’ Jane recounts ‘I wanted to hear his voice again, yet feared to meet his eye.’ (130).

Her next encounter with the ‘goblin ha! ha!’ (178) comes as she guards the savaged Richard Mason. This night-time assault is part of the aftermath of the strangely erotic interlude in which Rochester in his ‘gypsy’ guise attempts to illuminate Jane’s innermost desires. Rochester’s shock and dismay at Mason’s arrival at Thornfield elicits a declaration of unstinting devotion from Jane. This devotion and her courage are soon to be tested as, terrified, she keeps watch...

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\(^2\)Writing to her father from London, 4 June 1850 Charlotte described a visit to the London Zoo: ‘The most ferocious and deadly looking things in the place were... a laughing hyena which every now and then uttered a hideous peal of peal of laughter such as a score of maniacs might produce.’ cited by Valerie Grosvenor Myer (1988, p. 318)
outside the ‘fiend’[s]’ (179) door. Once Mason has been safely removed Jane and Rochester walk together in the garden. It becomes apparent he is thinking of marriage, although still maintaining to Jane that the object of his marital intentions is Blanche Ingram. Bertha’s savagery has brought Jane and Rochester closer and Rochester to the brink of a marriage proposal. But now comes the unexpected news that Jane has been called back to Gateshead by the dying Mrs Reed and, once again, Brontë disrupts the narrative by distancing the couple from each other.

Jane first departs from Gateshead a fearful child driven out by the Reeds’ oppression. Having endured the trials of Lowood, making her way independently in the new world of Thornfield and fallen in love, she returns to Gateshead as a young woman able to confront the Reeds with equanimity. She now supposes herself to have moved beyond her childhood fears: ‘I experienced — firmer trust in myself and my own powers and less withering dread of oppression.’ (194) she tells herself. The deaths of the Reeds—mother and son—symbolise Jane’s belief that she has overcome the fears that have stalked her from ‘that day’. After one month at Gateshead she returns to Thornfield with the strength to withstand Rochester’s manipulation of her emotions into a declaration of love and, finally, the confidence to accept his proposal.

Once Jane agrees to marry Rochester, during the ‘month of courtship’ (234), her fears manifest into the full light of consciousness, culminating in a dramatic fusion of the symbolic with the realistic acted out in Bertha’s intrusion into Jane’s room at Thornfield two nights before the planned wedding. This bedroom scene shares several elements with the first Gothic episode in the red room at Gateshead. The mysterious gleam of light which so terrifies Jane in the
red room is paralleled by the gleam from Bertha’s candle which dazzles the waking Jane’s eyes in her room at Thornfield. Bertha’s tearing in two of Rochester’s unwanted gift to Jane—the extravagant, embroidered wedding veil—signifies the hymenal rupture and the loss of virginity, another female sexual rite of passage which symbolically aligns this episode with the menarcheal imagery of the red room. That this act is performed by Bertha and what is torn is the wedding veil purchased at Rochester’s insistence and not the ‘plain square of blond’ (244) of Jane’s choosing, throws into relief Jane’s fear of the subjection of her body and her sexuality to male proprietary rights. Instead of the ‘haloed face’ bending over her with ‘strange pity’ (13) anticipated so fearfully by Jane in the red room, it is Bertha’s ‘lurid-visage’ (242) that ‘flames’ over her. Jane loses consciousness, ‘for the second time in my life—only the second time—I became insensible from terror.’ (242) The first time, of course, is in the red room. The explicit paralleling of events between the red room and Jane’s pre-wedding visit from Bertha create a direct link between the Gateshead and Thornfield passages.

Jane’s final contact with Bertha follows the thwarted wedding when Rochester, bidding for sympathy, invites all those present in the church to meet ‘my wife’ (249). Now, in the third floor room at Thornfield, Brontë draws Bertha at her most debased and non-human in her incarnation as the hyena:

In the deep shade, at the further 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. (250)

Brontë furnishes Bertha with several of the qualities thought of as typical of the hyena in the nineteenth century. In Volume II of Oliver Goldsmith’s A History of
the Earth and Animated Nature (1823), known to have been read by Brontë, the ‘hyaena’ was seen as savage, permanently rageful, sexually voracious, ‘an obscene and solitary animal’ (p. 362), and in describing Bertha’s appearance Brontë borrows from Goldsmith’s physical description of the hyena ‘Its hair is of a dirty grayish, marked with black, disposed in waves down its body’ (p. 362). But, as Goldsmith remarks, ‘no words can give an adequate idea of this animal’s figure, deformity and fierceness’ (p. 362). Just as Rochester’s comparison of Bertha with Messalina metaphorises the unchaste, treacherous and debauched wife, Brontë engages again with ‘wicked wife’ symbolism in the emblematic figure of the hyena. In Milton’s Samson Agonistes (1671) Samson furiously spurns Dalila, the wife who brought about his blindness and loss of power:

Out, out Hyaena; these are thy wonted arts,
   And arts of every woman false like thee,
   To break all faith, all vows, deceive, betray
   (Lines 748-50)

Brontë doubly damns Rochester’s ‘gross, impure, depraved’ (261) wife, by metonymically associating her with the infamy of Messalina and Dalila, two women whose behaviour was far more excessive than that of any sexually aroused, masturbatory, nineteenth-century wife with ‘too avid a sexual appetite’ as Shuttleworth (1996 p.167) would have it. Instead, Brontë shades the character

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22 In a letter to Ellen Nussey when she was eighteen Charlotte advised reading Goldsmith ‘for natural history’ (Smith, vol. I, p. 131).
23 Foreshadowing the melancholic and despairing man Rochester will become, Brontë directly references him three times to Samson in Jane Eyre. First, when he muses on Jane’s power over him, Jane smiles, ‘...thinking of Hercules and Samson with their charmers—’ (222) Second, exasperated at Jane’s intention to leave him, he wishes he could rid himself of his passion for her: ‘By God! I long to exert a fraction of Samson’s strength and break the entanglement like tow!’ (258). Third, at Ferndean when Jane refers to him as ‘that sightless Samson’ (367). Ironically the ‘Dalila’ who will be the cause of his ‘dark, dreary, hopeless life’ (372) will not be Bertha—despite his maiming and blindness from her arson at Thornfield—but Jane, whose loss brings him ‘ceaseless sorrow’ (372).
of Bertha with lies, treachery, savage cruelty and the ‘crime’ of adultery with multiple partners.\textsuperscript{24}

Here, then, is Bertha, ‘mad, bad and embruted’ (249), violent, dangerous, homicidal, foreign ‘other’, once a promiscuous drunkard, now a grovelling maniac, suspended on the margin between human and beast. Realistically, Bertha is a woman utterly trapped by the unruliness of her mind and her sexuality. Figuratively, she is the nightmarish embodiment of Jane’s long-held fear of the subjugation of her female body—her femaleness—to the patriarchal structures of the society in which she lives. For Jane’s fears are represented in and representative of the female body; the exclusively female biology represented ‘sometimes in fire and sometimes in blood’ (179) in Brontë’s narrative. Bertha, the foreign ‘other’ is doubly ‘othered’ by her madness. Less than human, Bertha is a gambolling, demonic, antagonistic force. Silenced and dehumanized, her very selfhood obliterated she is variously described as ‘Vampyre’ (242), a ‘wild beast’ (264), ‘goblin’ (264), ‘monster’ (264), a ‘Fury’ (264). As the emblematic representation of Jane’s fears Bertha is, at first, no more than a chilling, haunting presence intruding into the periphery of Jane’s consciousness. Slowly materialising she becomes dangerously unknowable, unpredictable, uncontainable, and ultimately, the compelling stimulus for Jane’s flight from Thornfield and what she most desires.

At both realistic and figurative levels Bertha’s primary function in the plot is simply to prevent the marriage of Jane and Rochester and to separate the lovers. As Adrienne Rich says

\textsuperscript{24}Adultery was a civil crime in Britain until 1857, a sound reason for Brontë to have Rochester fleeing to The Continent after his return to Thornfield from Jamaica and the planned honeymoon with Jane after the aborted wedding.
...the terrible figure of Bertha has come between Jane and a marriage which was not yet ripe, which would have made her simply the dependent adjunct of Mr. Rochester instead of his equal. (1979p. 479)

As the wedding day dawns after ‘the month of courtship had wasted’ (234) Brontë makes it clear that the prospect of marriage to Rochester fills Jane with fear. Although insisting to Rochester the night before the planned wedding that she is not ‘troubled by any haunting fears’ (239), she greets the day with dread. As she and Rochester enter the Thornfield church her face betrays her fear: ‘my face, from which the blood had, I daresay, momentarily fled: for I felt my forehead dewy and my cheeks and lips cold’ (246). Here, the narrative reaches the apex of the thematic arc—the point at which Jane’s fears of sexual subjugation are at their most intense and Jane is at her most vulnerable. It is something close to reprieve when the signs and portents that Brontë has imposed throughout the previous chapters coalesce and the ‘distinct and near voice’ (246) speaks the words: ‘The marriage cannot go on’ (246). Jane will not become ‘Jane Rochester’ for Rochester ‘has a wife now living’ (247). The ‘insuperable impediment’ to Jane’s wedding to Rochester exists in the form of ‘Bertha Antoinetta Mason, daughter of Jonas Mason, merchant, and of Antoinetta his wife, a Creole’ whose marriage to Rochester took place fifteen years before, in Spanish Town, Jamaica’ (247).

While this revelation of Rochester’s prior marriage to Bertha prevents the wedding from taking place, it is fear that compels Jane to leave Thornfield and Rochester. When she departed from Gateshead on the first leg of her long journey her task was made clear by Bessie—to ‘be bolder’ (32): to overcome fear. Now with her fears on the ascendant Jane must leave Thornfield in order to undertake and complete that task.
Spivak’s insistence that ‘Bertha’s function in *Jane Eyre* is to render indeterminate the boundary between human and animal and thereby to weaken her entitlement under the spirit if not the letter of the law. (1985, p. 249) offers too narrow a reading. Indeed, although Rochester attempts to justify his intended bigamy by describing his ‘horrible life’ (270) with the ‘hideous demon’ (269) he is tied to in matrimony, there is more at stake in Brontë’s depiction of Bertha. Her systematic obliteration of Bertha’s humanity and her demonization represents the dwindling of the literal until it is all but subsumed by the figurative. As the death of the Reeds symbolised Jane’s belief in the death of her fears, so the shattering of Bertha’s body and mind on the stones at Thornfield—her spilled blood and brains—becomes the powerful symbol of the death of Jane’s fears. Bertha’s suicide is merely the end point in the inexorable progress toward her annihilation.

According to my reading, there is nothing to suggest that Brontë created Bertha Rochester as a sympathetic figure. Instead, I argue, Bertha is depicted as both an object of fear and the symbolic representation of fear itself. At a realistic level Bertha is only tenuously depicted. Even in Rochester’s recollections of his marriage he does not grant speech to his wife or refer to her by name. In her two brief, physical appearances in the novel she is depicted in monstrous and terrifying form, represented by symbols of fear: the ‘foul spectre—the German Vampyre’ (242), a ‘demon’ (251) and the ‘hyena’ (250). She exists merely in the reference to Rochester’s ‘living wife’ and the ‘impediment’ to his bigamous marriage. The sense that Brontë does not intend Bertha to be more than a figure and is lacking full humanity is strengthened by her granting Bertha no interiority, no personal agency except the influence of a ‘familiar’ (257), and no speech apart
from ‘eccentric murmurs’ (93), ‘a fierce cry’ and fierce yells’ (260), ‘wolfish cries’ (262), and a ‘preternatural’ laugh (91). Joyce Carol Oates describes the aesthetic reproduction of fear as ‘an artful simulation of what is crude, inchoate, nerve-driven and ungovernable in life ... unpredictable and always imminent’ (1998, p. 176). This is what Brontë achieves with her creation of the figure of Bertha: a creature without ipseity, disqualified from personhood, representing a dark destructive force, dangerous and unknowable, uncontrolled in its destructiveness—the embodiment of fear. The unconscious presence of fear, signified by the ‘hyena’ laugh at Thornfield, intrudes at first only into the periphery of Jane’s awareness. As her passion for Rochester intensifies the fear represented by Bertha becomes more intrusive, manifesting fully into consciousness two nights before the planned wedding with Bertha’s trespass into Jane’s bedroom. The symbolic rending of the hymen, performed by Bertha tearing the wedding veil bought at Rochester’s insistence, takes place in another reimagining of the sexually significant red room. Jane’s terror is a further forceful indication that she is not ready for marriage and it is this fear that drives her from Rochester. In this way I read Bertha as an authorial device, necessary to prevent a marriage for which Jane is not ready and figuratively as fear itself. Bertha’s death symbolises the death of Jane’s fear, in the same way the deaths of John Reed and his mother symbolised the death of Jane’s childhood fears.
Although *Jane Eyre* has received extensive critical attention, the lion’s share of that attention has been directed toward the Gateshead and Lowood settings of the novel and the romance plot at Thornfield Hall. In contrast, the fourth ‘act’, encompassing Jane’s desolate wanderings in the village of Morton in search of sustenance after she flees Thornfield, her sojourn across the moors to Marsh End, and her time with the Rivers family at Morton and Moor House, has attracted only cursory interest from the majority of *Jane Eyre* scholars. In *Madwoman*, for instance, Gilbert and Gubar deal with this section of the novel only briefly, viewing Jane’s so-called ‘wanderings’ (1984, p. 363) as a symbol of the peripheral place accorded women in a patriarchal society. The time spent with her ‘good relatives’ the Rivers (p. 364) they consider an antidote to her ‘wicked stepfamily’ (p. 364) the Reeds. Moor House and Morton are viewed as simply the opportunity for Jane to recuperate from her wounded ‘self’—a time of respite in which to recover sufficient physical and moral strength to return to Rochester and her true place in the (domestic) world. Postcolonial scholars have, unsurprisingly, been drawn to St John Rivers’ ambitions to undertake his ‘wild field of mission warfare’ (313) in India. For others such as Maria Lamonaca (2002), Alison Searle (2006), Sue Thomas (2007), and Emily Griesinger (2008), the belief systems of Calvinism and Evangelical Protestantism and the providential turn in the novel as well as Jane’s own Christian moral theology are the chief focus. As for the character of St John himself and his relationship with Jane, Maynard
and numerous others consider him as merely a foil for Rochester, allowing a comparison of the two men to facilitate Jane's choice between the polarities of sexual openness represented by the passionate, flawed, Rochester and sexual suppression embodied in the icy presence of St John.

While these approaches may be apposite, I argue that the central concern of this fourth act of Jane Eyre is Jane's gradual shedding of her long-held fears and her emergence from the insidious but powerful influence of fear. As such, this section of the novel is crucial to the meaning, structure, and unity of the narrative. Before the novel's conclusion and her reconciliation with Rochester Jane must overcome her fears and from this standpoint the current chapter focuses on the narrative strategies Brontë deploys to eliminate or overcome Jane's fear. In particular it will examine the way in which the playing out of Jane's relationship with St John Rivers functions as the catalyst for her transformation into fearlessness.

As discussed in Chapter Two being afraid has several prerequisites: fear requires an object and the vulnerability of a subject to the feared object. A key component of fearfulness is uncertainty, as Alexander Bain makes clear in The Emotions and the Will (1865p. 53). The absence of fear, then, rests on three possibilities. One possibility is the alteration or elimination of the qualities that render the fearful subject vulnerable. The second is the removal or the changing of the object of fear itself. The third, of course, is the dissolving of uncertainty. In short, Brontë must engage her narrative with both the object of Jane's fears and her vulnerability in order to alter or to eliminate the emotional barrier standing between Jane and the sexual and emotional fulfilment that is the desired outcome of her journey.
Throughout the novel Jane has been stalked by the fear of bodily and emotional subjugation with its concomitant loss of identity and independence of thought and emotion and the loss of sovereignty over her own body. These fears are generated and sustained by her society’s patriarchal legal and medical structures and are maintained and reinforced by societal attitudes toward girls and women, especially in relation to their sexuality.¹ In earlier chapters Brontë presents—and summarily despatches—two dominating male characters in her depictions of Master John Reed at Gateshead and the Reverend Brocklehurst at Lowood Institution. Each of these men is a tyrant in his own domain and each of them is an object of the immature Jane’s fear. At Thornfield the adult Jane’s fear of subjugation is centred on the figure of Rochester. Now, having fled from Rochester, she is confronted by another ‘object of fear’, Brontë’s exemplar of patriarchal dominance St John Eyre Rivers

Brontë’s task in constructing a narrative in which fear is overcome involves undermining what makes Jane vulnerable to her fears. Jane’s vulnerability is threefold: physical, material and psychological. Physically her femaleness makes her vulnerable as does her lack of conventional ‘prettiness’ and presence in a society which valorises female beauty. Materially she is made vulnerable by lack of money or property and her consequent lowly status as orphan dependent, magnified by the absence in her life of the security offered by family and home. Her psychological vulnerability stems from her strength of personality, her passion and sensuality and her overriding need for love. What creates a dangerous vulnerability to Rochester as an object of fear is Jane’s passionate love and intensely felt sexual desire for him and her uncertainty that his love for her

¹As discussed in Chapters Two and Three.
will endure. Jane’s vulnerability to St John Rivers centres on her overriding need for love, kinship, and home. Notions of the importance of female duty and submission complicate her relationship with what she fears, intensifying her vulnerability.

Before Jane can transform—as she must, in order to undermine fear—the ‘self’ that contains and sustains her fear must be dismantled. To do so, Brontë places Jane in extremis. Here the attachments to her previous self and her pride together with the rules and mores of her old world will be challenged and effaced in the process of her preparation for change.

Jane’s journey from Thornfield on a road ‘never travelled but often noticed’ (273) takes her to ‘a place called Whitcross’ (275), a place that is no town but a white-washed stone pillar marking intersecting crossroads somewhere in the north of England. Not only does Whitcross foreshadow St John Rivers, that ‘cold, cumbrous column’ (335) with his ‘lofty forehead, still and pale as a white stone’ of (334), it symbolises Jane’s entry into a liminal space. Jane’s period in a place that is ‘betwixt and between’ is much more than simply ‘picaresque wanderings’ (Maynard 1984, p. 131). This liminal zone represents a transition between two states of being, the previous self who ‘could not see God for his creature’ (234)— Rochester—and the Jane of new possibilities. Suzanne Keen (1998) refers to Jane’s wanderings from Whitcross to Morton as a ‘narrative annex’, a literary device where events and actions may occur outside the time and space of a novel’s plot trajectory which would not otherwise exist within the scope of the narrative. While she suggests that this ‘narrative annex’ is where Jane is transformed I argue that Jane Eyre’s suspension in this liminal space for two days and three nights as she roams between Whitcross and Moor House is
constructed by Brontë to enable the shedding of Jane’s old beliefs and attachments. Rather than it being a place of transformation as Keen (1998) argues, I contend it is a place of preparation for change. Jane’s transformation from fearful to unafraid evolves in the next stage of her journey at Moor House and Morton with the Rivers family.

Departing from the coach at Whitcross Jane forgets the little package containing ‘some linen, a locket, a ring’ (272), the symbolic remnants of her life at Thornfield. Her money spent, all that remains of her worldly possessions is the clothing she wears. Adrift in this lonely place she seeks refuge in ‘benign and good’ nature ‘My mother would lodge me without money and without price’ (276). As night falls she feels the ‘might and strength of God’ (276) and prays for Rochester’s safekeeping. It is not without irony that Jane’s prayers for the safety of Rochester, her ‘broken idol’ (300) are to the God he once obscured. Content that ‘Mr Rochester was safe: he was God’s and by God would be guarded’ (276) she curls foetus-like in the heather and sleeps. At this point Jane is both figuratively and literally outside the rules of society, sleeping rough, turning to nature, her ‘mother’ (276), for succour, firmly aware of the presence of God her church is not in the village but the ‘unclouded night sky’ (276). When she wakes, despite the beauty of the natural world surrounding her, she must seek other ways of meeting her human demands for bodily sustenance and shelter. A church bell leads her away from the sun to the hamlet of Morton where, descending into a netherworld of humiliation, despair, physical pain, hunger, cold, and illness she has no recourse but to beg; at first for work and ultimately, for food. Despite her desperate need there is no respite.
In the first chapter of *Jane Eyre* John Reed stings Jane with the cruel taunt that she has no rights in his family. He tells her ‘you are a dependent mamma says; you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg’ (8). The child Jane is disgusted by poverty and for her to be poor is ‘synonymous with degradation’ (20). When Mr Lloyd the apothecary offers the possibility of contact with her relations, convinced by her aunt they are a ‘beggarly set’ (20), she chooses to be sent away to school in preference to a life of ‘ragged clothes, scanty food, fireless grates, rude manners and debasing vices’ (20). At the root of her loathing of poverty are snobbery, prejudice, and pride. Even in her loneliness and misery at Gateshead and despite her desperate need to belong she dismisses the idea of seeking her relatives

‘I should not like to belong to poor people,’ was my reply.
‘Not even if they were kind to you?’
I shook my head: I could not see how poor people had the means of being kind; and then to learn to speak like them, to adopt their manners, to be uneducated, to grow up like one of the poor women I saw sometimes nursing their children or washing their clothes at the cottage doors of the village of Gateshead: no, I was not heroic enough to purchase liberty at the price of caste. (20)

Employing fear of and disgust toward beggars Brontë suspends Jane in her liminal space without aid (Hannah provides an example of this fear when Jane pleads for entry into Moor House and the old housekeeper denies her entry: ‘I’m fear’d you have some ill plans agate’ (286)). Jane cannot move beyond the township to find succour and commence the rebuilding of identity and self until all that remains of the old prideful self is abraded.

Morton is not a village of heartless souls but one in which the sentiments propounded by Thomas Malthus in the 1803 version of his *Essay on the Principle of Population* ‘no person has any claim or right on society for subsistence’ (p. 532)
are brought to bear in the villagers’ response to this suspiciously well-dressed beggar. Jane’s outsider position is maintained by the village women, the keepers and reinforcers of the ‘rules’ of society. Her appeals for work, attempts at bartering, and begging for food are repeatedly refused and, except for a slice of bread from a farmer who Jane assumes has mistaken her for an ‘eccentric sort of lady’ (280), and a bowl of pig swill, she is left to starve. Nevertheless, despite hunger and growing desperation Jane’s sympathies lie not with those who beg but with those refusing her. She holds no rancour toward them, ‘I blame none of those who repulsed me. To be sure what I begged was employment: but whose business was it to provide employment?’ (280). Eventually, after fruitless wanderings through the village she acknowledges her ‘consciousness of having no claim to ask—no right to expect interest in my isolated lot’ (279). Her words echo those of Malthus: ‘if the society do not want his labour, he has no claim of right to the smallest portion of food and, in fact, has no business to be where he is’ (1803, p. 531)

Now degraded, homeless, and destitute Jane has become what she despised. She isa beggar despite her avowals to the contrary. Pride and her idolisation of a ‘false god’ in Rochester have been dissolved and all that remains of her former identity is the untouched core self of refinement, morality, and delicate sensibilities—her strongly-held certainty that she is a ‘lady’. After three hungry days and two nights of wanderings, humbled and spurned by society, she is ready for the emergence of the new Jane and to meet the relations she so was so quick to disdain at Gateshead. Having re-established her connection with God she calls on Providence, ‘sustain me a little longer! Aid—direct me!’ (282) until at last ‘far in among the marshes and the ridges, a light sprang up’ (282). Her
arduous journey following this ‘forlorn hope’ (282) is reminiscent of John Henry Newman’s hymn *Lead Kindly Light Amid the Encircling Gloom* (1833) that speaks of a misguided soul returning to the leadership of a protective and ‘kindly’ God:

‘Lead, Kindly Light, amidst th’encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on!
The night is dark and I am far from home,
Lead Thou me on!
Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene; one step enough for me.

I was not ever thus, nor prayed that Thou
Shouldst lead me on;
I loved to choose and see my path; but now
Lead Thou me on!
I loved the garish day and, spite of fears,
Pride ruled my will. Remember not past years!

So long Thy power hath blest me, sure it still
Will lead me on.
O’er moor and fen, o’er crag and torrent, till
The night is gone,
And with the morn those angel faces smile,
Which I have loved long since and lost awhile!

The providential light guides her to Moor House where fear and suspicion prevent Hannah, the housekeeper and threshold guardian, from admitting a woman she considers ‘a vagrant’ (285), even one as exhausted and close to death as Jane. Instead it is St John Rivers, a man who views himself not as empathic or compassionate but hard and cold, one of God’s chosen, who will do his ‘duty’ as a Christian and a member of the clergy in offering Jane shelter. ‘You have done your duty in excluding, now let me do mine in admitting her’ (286) he says to Hannah. St John may be outside society’s injunctions in offering sanctuary to a beggar but he is following the rules of that other pillar of patriarchal power, the Church of England, that requires the clergy to provide succour as part of the Church’s Sanctity of Life ethic.
Entering Moor House Jane at once begins to experience herself differently:

now that I had once crossed the threshold of this house, and
once was brought face to face with its owners, I felt no longer
outcast, vagrant, and disowned by the wide world. I dared to put
off the mendicant—to resume my natural manner and character.
I began once more to know myself. (287)

Crossing the threshold of Moor House and confronting the three members of the
Rivers family severs Jane from the liminal space she has been occupying and
positions her for a new role, free from the degraded outcast she had perceived
herself to be. This movement into a world of new possibilities is signalled by
Brontë as Jane resuming her ‘natural manner and character’ and, in that sense,
she is being reborn, returning to the earliest time of her life—her natural self; the
Jane who existed before that self was shaped by the lack of love and the abuse
and fear she suffered at Gateshead. To do so she employs an alias, ‘Jane Elliot’.

In coming to ‘know’ herself again she has the opportunity to reconstruct
herself, free from fear. It is significant, of course, (although as yet unknown to
either Jane, or to Brontë’s readers) that the inhabitants of Moor House are Jane’s
‘poor relatives’ and residing in them is a thread that takes her back to the parents
she has never known. Symbolically this thread also ties her to her own infant,
‘natural’ self and although that natural self will again be subdued by a dominating
male she will resist. As Rochester has told her ‘You are not naturally austere, any
more than I am naturally vicious. ‘The Lowood constraint still clings to you
somewhat; controlling your features, muffling your voice and restricting your
limbs’ (118) and ‘I think you will learn to be natural with me’ (118). ‘The ‘natural’
Jane that Rochester glimpses ‘at intervals’ is ‘a curious sort of bird through the
close set bars of a cage’ … echoing Thackeray’s caged harem slaves, the ‘Birds of
Paradise’ …‘a vivid, restless, resolute captive is there; were it but free, it would soar cloud-high’ (118-119). Under her new identity she makes peace with Hannah and is well pleased by the plain, clean, neat and ‘humble’ house and the ‘delicacy and cultivation’ (283) of its two female occupants, Mary and Diana Rivers. Their brother, St John, is another matter.

The character of St John is overdetermined. As the embodiment of the societal, moral, and spiritual constraints placed on English middle-class married women he is an object of fear to Jane and a point of opposition. Resisting St John will compel her to greater self-awareness and a profound assessment of her beliefs and desires in order to forge the transformed identity that will enable her to return to Rochester. Subduing his ‘fever of the flesh’ (319) with ‘duty’ that masks his controlling behaviour and his insatiable ambition, St John mirrors the mask of duty with which Jane has suppressed the fear of her own sensuality and erotic desire. At the same time he is a foil for Rochester, enabling Jane through her comparisons of the two men to recognise the emotional ‘sympathies’ that draw her to Rochester and are lacking in St John. As a member of the Clergy espousing the doctrines of Calvinism—and his glaring examples of hypocrisy—he brings Jane to a direct personal relationship with a protective God who responds to her prayers, in contrast to the grim, sacrifice-demanding God of the Old Testament worshipped by St John. When she prays it is in ‘a different way to St John’s but effective in its own fashion’ (358).

Jane’s musings on first encountering the stern-faced Rochester on the road to Thornfield not only foreshadow St John but give insight into her foreknowledge that he could never love her.
I had hardly ever seen a handsome youth; never in my life spoken to one. I had a theoretical reverence and homage for beauty, elegance, gallantry, fascination; but had I met those qualities incarnate in masculine shape, I should have known instinctively that they neither had nor could have sympathy with anything in me, and should have shunned them as one would fire, lightning, or anything else that is bright but antipathetic.

Despite his physical beauty, his ‘Greek face’, his blue eye, his ‘ivory’ skin and fair hair (294) St John cuts a cold, daunting figure and Jane views him dispassionately without any feeling of attraction. From the outset he keeps her under constant scrutiny. As he says: ‘I have watched you ever since we first met: I have made you my study for ten months’ (343). Nevertheless just as St John scrutinises Jane, she observes him. Hearing him preach she recognises his ‘strange bitterness’ and his ‘stern allusions to Calvinistic doctrines—election, predestination, reprobation’ (300). Belief in these doctrines is not shared by Jane yet in St John, who tells her he ‘almost rave[s] in my restlessness’ (304), she recognises a likeness to her own dissatisfaction and her longing for Rochester, the ‘concealed and racking regrets for my broken idol and lost elysium’ ‘which possessed me and tyrannised over me ruthlessly’ (300). St John has no vocation for the ministry. He has, in his own words to Jane, the heart of a ‘lover of renown, a luster after power’ (308). His lust for power and the urgency with which he longs to carry out what he perceives as God’s errand to take up life as a missionary far outweigh his lust for the ‘perfect beauty’ (309) of heiress Rosamond Oliver or, as he tells Jane, ‘conflict with human weakness, in which I know I shall overcome’ (309).

Taking up St John’s offer of the position of mistress of the small school for children of the poor run with Miss Oliver’s charity Jane relocates to a cottage at Morton. Her austere little cottage with its two white-washed rooms and sparse
furnishing is the antithesis of Oriental luxury. Nevertheless, it provides Brontë with a setting for two scenes of ‘Turkish’ fantasy, contrasting the eroticism implicit in Jane’s love for Rochester, with St John’s deliberate suppression of his passion for Rosamond Oliver.

The first of these scenes comes as Jane compares the degradation and desolation of her humble life with her imagined life as Rochester’s mistress ‘in a southern clime, amongst the luxuries of a pleasure villa’ (306) where she visualises herself as the English harem slave to Rochester’s Sultan, having ‘surrendered to temptation; listened to passion ... to have sunk down in the silken snare; fallen asleep in the flowers covering it’, ‘fevered with delusive bliss’ and ‘delirious with his love’ (306). This extraordinarily erotic passage conveys a sense of sexual pleasure worthy of the ‘delirious fever’ of The Lustful Turk’s Emily Barlow (Lustful 44). Punctuating this scene are the ‘bitterest tears of remorse and shame’ (306) which throw into sharp relief Jane’s ambivalence and the depth of her dilemma as she broods over the forlorn thought that Rochester ‘would have loved me well for a while’ (306). Despite her passionate love and yearning for ‘surrender’ to passion she is haunted by the fear of his fading love and the abandonment that would cast her permanently adrift from society. ‘Is it better’ Jane questions, ‘to be a slave in a fool’s paradise at Marseilles’ ...‘or to be a village schoolmistress, free and honest, in a breezy mountain nook in the healthy heart of England?’ (306) As Rochester has never told Jane where in the south of France his villa is located, her self-description as a slave in ‘Marseilles’ harks back to the ‘snowy Marseilles counterpane’ (11)² on the great bed in the red room, layering Jane’s erotic imaginings with the sense of fear and resistance to sexual maturity.

²These are the only mentions of ‘Marseilles’ in the text.
she experienced there as a pubescent girl. The question is asked in the present tense by the tearful young Jane but ambivalence undercuts the answer from the narrating Jane with the hindsight of ten years: ‘Yes, I feel now that I was right when I adhered to principle and law, and scorned and crushed the insane promptings of a frenzied moment’ (307) (my emphasis). Here Brontë underlines the ambiguity inherent in Jane’s ‘harem’ fantasy. Jane yearns for the ‘bliss’ of the slave’s sensual pleasure but her fear of submission and subordination prevent her from surrendering to the erotic pleasures she craves with Rochester.

When Jane meets Miss Rosamond Oliver, the benefactor of her little school, she recognises the obvious mutual passion flaring between St John and the beautiful young woman, ‘I saw his solemn eye melt with sudden fire, and flicker with resistless emotion’ (310). Brontë elucidates the intensity of St John’s desire in Jane’s observations of his physical manifestations of lust: his trembling and flushing, his breathing fast and low (319), his glowing cheek and burning eye and the minute relaxation of his features, ‘expressive of a repressed fervor, stronger than working muscle or darting glance could indicate’ (313). Jane also observes the efforts St John makes to suppress his responses ‘as a resolute rider would curb a rearing steed’ (311) and she recognises that for St John, nothing—even earthly passion—would be permitted to jeopardise his future as a missionary: ‘he would not give one chance of Heaven; nor relinquish, for the elysium of her love, one hope of the true, eternal Paradise’ (313) for an ‘ignoble fever of the flesh (319). Jane has relinquished her ‘elysium’ as St John relinquishes his, both in the name of Christian duty. Nevertheless, Jane challenges St John, advocating a marriage between him and Rosamond, and watches as he allows himself fifteen minutes of the ‘indulgence’ (319) of sexual fantasy, evoking the
Orient as he imagines himself ‘stretched on an ottoman’ at Rosamond’s feet, his ‘heart full of delight’ his senses ‘entranced’ (318). Mirroring the language of Jane’s fantasy he gives himself ‘to delirium and delusion’ ... ‘I rested my temples on the breast of temptation, and put my neck voluntarily under her yoke of flowers’ (318). However, his fantasising holds none of Jane’s ambivalence. Rosamond, lacking sympathy with St John’s ‘aspirations’, is of no use to him as a wife and will be rejected.

There are similarities between Jane and St John, remarked upon both by Rosamond (314) and Jane’s own recognition of herself in St John’s ‘turbid dregs of disappointment’ (300). St John is a ‘cold, hard’ (319) man who masks ambition with duty. ‘Reason, and not Feeling, is my guide: my ambition is unlimited; my desire to rise higher, to do more than others, insatiable’ (320) he tells Jane. Similarly, Jane is a ‘cold, solitary girl’ (252) masking her own overriding fear of loss of love, with duty. Each of them suppresses their desire in the name of duty. Yet despite the likeness between them, Brontë’s two Oriental scenes provoke the emergence of essential differences between these two.

Regardless of the intensity of his ‘first passion’ (318) St John acknowledges the lack of ‘sympathy’ between Rosamond and himself and, echoing what Jane fears of Rochester, he assures her ‘that to twelve months’ rapture would succeed a lifetime of regret’ (318). However, there is a key difference between St John and Rosamond’s mismatch and Jane’s relationship with Rochester. Sympathy, understood as an intuitive—even metaphysical—connection is at the core of Jane and Rochester’s relationship, whereas it is lacking between St John and Rosamond.
Rebecca Mitchell (2011) contends that Jane’s observation of St John’s rejection of Rosamond assists her in identifying her own desire and serves as a model for Jane’s later rejection of St John. Certainly, Brontë’s two pivotal scenes of sexual fantasy afford Jane the opportunity to recognise and accept her need for erotic love, underlining her yearning for Rochester and what is, for her, the abhorrent nature of a loveless marriage where passion is suppressed and sex is no more than a conjugal duty. However, of equal importance in my view is St John’s professed absence of sympathy between himself and Rosamond. I argue that it is Jane’s understanding that sympathy does not exist between her and St John, despite their kinship, which is at the heart of her rejection of St John’s proposal. Brontë demonstrates that, to Jane, emotional sympathy is the very essence of enduring erotic love. This realisation plays an important role in Jane recognising and understanding the nature of her relationship with Rochester and the centrality of ‘sympathy’ to that relationship. It will undermine the uncertainty inherent in her love for him and ultimately lead her to overcome her fear that his love will fade, and guide her decision to return to him.

When Brontë has Jane simultaneously receiving word of an inheritance of twenty thousand pounds from her unknown Uncle John Eyre in Madeira and discovering that Mary, Diana, and St John Rivers are her cousins, she overcomes two elements of the powerlessness rendering Jane vulnerable to the various forms of patriarchal subjugation that are foundational to her fear. These are her orphan status and the isolation, insecurity, and longing for love that flow from it, and her poverty. The familial connection to the Rivers effects a change of status from orphan ‘interloper’ (13): a poor dependent, ‘less than a servant’ (9), to family member. ‘I had nobody’ she tells St John ‘and now three relations’ (328). The
connection with family brings about a strengthening of her own identity. Through the kinship ties with her own history and in her identification with the intelligence and delicacy of the sensibilities of the Rivers sisters, she sees herself more clearly. As St John tells her: ‘You too have principle and mind: your tastes and habits resemble Diana’s and Mary’s’ . ‘I can easily and naturally make room in my heart for you, as my third and youngest sister.’ (331). Kinship means she is no longer alone in the world and has family and a home to which she may turn should she need protection and sanctuary.  

Escape from poverty and access to a level of financial power inhere in the money left to Jane by John Eyre. However, the inheritance has significance beyond actual material wealth. To Jane ‘it was not a mere bequest of coin,—it was a legacy of life, hope, enjoyment’ (329). Though not a great fortune, the five thousand pounds Jane acquires is adequate to confer on her a degree of independence as a single woman. However, under the oppressive legal doctrine of ‘couverture’ should she marry she would have no right to the money and it would be absorbed into her husband’s estate. Nevertheless it holds great significance. At the time of Rochester’s ‘call’ and her return to Thornfield, Jane is ignorant of the knowledge that Bertha Rochester is dead and the threat that Rochester might make her his mistress no longer exists. The inheritance symbolically provides Jane with a dowry, conferring the legitimacy accorded the ‘sultan’s wife’, setting her apart from and rendering her now unquestionably of a

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3 Jane’s changed family and financial status is not one of class. Jane has always been of Rochester’s ‘gentry’ class as demonstrated by her relationship to the Reeds of Gateshead who move in Rochester’s London social circle, John Eyre of Madeira and his connection with the Mason family of Jamaica and the Rivers family who are an ‘ancient family’, (292). Bessie, speaking of Jane’s ‘Eyre’ relations when she informs Jane of the visit to Gateshead of Jane’s Uncle John from Madeira: ‘They may be poor; but I believe they are as much gentry as the Reeds are;’ (78). Jane is not ‘lower-middle class’ or ‘working class’ as many have assumed (for example, Sue Thomas: ‘The Tropical Extravagance of Bertha Mason’ (1999 p. 133); Esther Godfrey: ‘Jane Eyre from Governess to Girl Bride’ (2005) Terry Eagleton and numerous others).
higher rank than Rochester’s previous mistresses. Symbolically, married or otherwise, financial independence frees her from the economic and psychological subjugation of concubinage.

Now an ‘independent woman’ (370) Jane’s refurbishing and re-ordering of Moor House to her liking is an expression of her growing confidence. She is becoming a woman who is capable of taking charge of her life on her own terms. Her desire to ‘clean down’ (332) Moor House and the enigmatic question she asks ‘(do you comprehend the full force of the expression?)’ (332) metaphorises the ‘cleaning away’ of the timid, fearful girl she once was. As Joan Perkin puts it, many middle-class English women ‘relished’ their roles as domestic managers and, she adds, ‘cleaning their homes was a symbol of cleaning up lives and the nation’s spirit’ (1988, p. 247). These household tasks were not without considerable difficulties in an era without running water or water-closets (Perkin, 1988).

A palimpsest of Turquerie appears in Jane Eyre when Jane, busy ‘cleaning down’ (332) and refurbishing Moor House creates a new red room. ‘A spare parlour and bedroom I refurnished entirely with old mahogany and crimson upholstery’ (334). Unlike the red room at Gateshead, this is the feminine “boudoir turc”: a woman’s creation, not a man’s room, representing Jane’s independent choices and her pleasures. This new red room symbolises the free expression of Jane’s sensuality and the empowerment of her sexuality outside of male domination and signals her move away from the fear of sexual subjugation. With this reiteration of the red room in a new form Brontë signals that Jane will not tolerate the suppression of her sensuality by St John and that, by implication as a
consequence of the acceptance of her sensuality, if she returns to Rochester it will be without fear of bodily possession or subjugation.

When she first encounters St John at the entrance to Moor House in her mendicant status Jane has deviated far from her society’s rules of acceptable behaviour. However, once she is thoroughly incorporated by kinship into the Rivers family St John begins to coerce her into a form of marriage which would situate her wholly within the English, Christian, middle-class social and moral conventions that would demand lifelong subjugation to his will. The marriage proposal appals Jane and her conflicted interactions with St John, arising from her refusal of the proposal, facilitate Brontë’s interrogation of notions of religious hypocrisy, female power and sexuality, love and, above all, ideas of marriage and notions of women’s duty and sacrifice.

Jane’s insistence on dividing the inheritance between herself and her Rivers cousins, coupled with her ready compliance with his demand that she relinquish her study of German in favour of Hindustanee, encourage St John to believe that Jane has the quality he most desires in a wife—the willingness to duty and sacrifice:

In the resolute readiness with which you cut your wealth into four shares, keeping but one to yourself, and relinquishing the three others to the claim of abstract justice, I recognised a soul that revelled in the flame and excitement of sacrifice. In the tractability with which, at my wish, you forsook a study in which you were interested, and adopted another because it interested me; in the untiring assiduity with which you have since persevered in it—in the unflagging energy and unshaken temper with which you have met its difficulties—I acknowledge the complement of the qualities I seek. Jane, you are docile, diligent, disinterested, faithful, constant, and courageous; very gentle, and very heroic. (344)
Implicit in his notion of sacrifice is the relinquishing of Jane’s individual will and the surrender to his; to be ‘owned’ by him bodily and spiritually, to be the ‘sole helpmeet’ he can ‘influence efficiently in life and retain absolutely till death’ (346). The dual notions of duty and sacrifice, the societal tools of female subjugation, are what St John uses, under the guise of ‘Christian virtues’ (343), to press Jane most heavily after his initial marriage proposal is rejected. When Jane offers to accompany him to India, unmarried, he is outraged: ‘Do you think God will be satisfied with half an oblation? Will He accept a mutilated sacrifice?’ (346). The duty to sacrifice encapsulates what is feared by Jane within the sphere of marriage, her bodily and spiritual subjugation to a man.

For the middle-class Englishwoman in the mid nineteenth century the ideal marriage was considered to be a life of willing sacrifice and ‘respectability’ which included self-control, self-discipline, and self-restraint and, above all, the sublimation of sensual satisfaction (Perkin, 1998). That sacrifice should be the ultimate meaning of marriage for women, that woman’s role should be that of helpmeet for her husband, that she should know God only indirectly through her husband, was women’s duty, only achievable by following the ‘ennobling’ path of self-sacrifice:

Duty was a meaningful concept, duty to God, duty to one’s husband, children, family and friends. There was even a certain pleasure in martyrdom, in placing the needs of others above one’s own. Self-indulgence was something base, something to be treated with contempt. (Perkin p. 238)

Intrinsic to the idea of duty was the notion that there was a higher principle than the mere satisfaction of the self to be strived for, a sentiment Brontë has St John expressing after he chides Jane for her enjoyment in refurbishing Moor House with her inherited money: ‘Don’t cling so tenaciously to ties of the flesh; save
your constancy and ardour for an adequate cause; forbear to waste them on trite transient objects.’ (333). But Jane, declaring the ‘common-place’, ‘domestic endearments’ and ‘household joys’ held in contempt by St John are ‘The best things the world has’ (333), is stung once again by his rebuke of her earthly values: ‘No, Jane, no: this world is not the scene of fruition; do not attempt to make it so: nor of rest; do not turn slothful’ (333). Brontë, however, makes it clear that Jane’s ‘sacrifice’ should she submit to St John would be more than a symbolic sacrifice, for it would be total: ‘If I do make the sacrifice he urges, I will make it absolutely: I will throw all on the altar—heart vitals, the entire victim’ (345).

Marrying St John would entail more than the loss of Jane’s ‘liberty of mind’ (339) but would lead to her literal death. As she says: ‘mine is not the existence to be long protracted under an Indian sun’ (344), ‘if I go to India, I go to premature death’ (345) and, from Diana, ‘You would not live three months there, I am certain’ (353).

During the period of Jane’s engagement, the ‘season of probation’ (234) Rochester sang a sentimental ditty of enduring blissful love. Jane baulked at the words: ‘My love has sworn, with sealing kiss, With me to live-to die’ (233). Eschewing sacrifice, she declares she’ll “not be hurried away in a suttee” (233) and asks ‘what did he mean by such a pagan idea?’ (233). In Brontë’s Brussels devoir of 17 April, 1842, ‘The Sacrifice of an Indian Widow’, she renders the woman’s voluntary sacrifice to suttee as ‘an agonizing struggle between bodily weakness and spiritual power’, approved of by a watching crowd and the woman’s family (1994, p. 6). In essence, Brontë presents the sacrifice of the woman’s life as the triumph of a combination of the compelling nature of spiritual beliefs and the constraints of her society’s culture and tradition. She uses the metaphor of suttee
in describing the suppression of Jane’s ‘natural unenslaved feelings’ that would be
required should she marry St John

At his side always and always restrained and always checked—forced to keep the fire of my nature continually low, to compel it
to burn inwardly and never utter a cry, the imprisoned flame
consumed vital after vital. (347)

This is reiterated in Diana’s comment: ‘You are much too pretty, as well as too
good, to be grilled alive in Calcutta’ (354). Brontë conflates the metaphor of
suttee, a ‘pagan idea’ (233) of female sacrifice, with the sacrifice expected of
middle-class Englishwomen in Christian marriage and with St John’s notion of
sacrifice that insists on an earthly life dedicated to the promise of a life hereafter.
All of these notions of sacrifice are soundly repudiated by Jane.

Incorporating the motif of suttee, what Carl Plasa refers to as ‘these
ghostly echoes of sati’(2004, p. 50), into the discourse around marriage in Jane
Eyre Brontë makes an emphatic statement about the destructive nature of female
sacrifice in marriage. This is something Jane has been aware of all her life, as she
is the orphaned child of a woman who sacrificed her life as a helpmeet to the man
she loved. Various mother figures appear in Jane Eyre each of whom influence
Jane’s journey to a greater or lesser extent. Among them are Jane’s aunt, Mrs
Reed, Bessie Leaven the nurse at Gateshead, at Lowood the teacher and mentor
Miss Temple, the Thornfield housekeeper Mrs Fairfax, even mad Bertha
Rochester, the ‘maternal’ full moon which bids Jane to ‘flee temptation’ (272) and
leave Thornfield and Rochester and even nature, the ‘mother’ who cannot
provide the nurture Jane requires. While all these have received scholarly
interest,\textsuperscript{4} Jane’s \textit{biological} mother and her fate and that of Jane’s father, have been largely overlooked.

There are two versions of Jane’s parents’ story.\textsuperscript{5} The first of these Jane hears as a child at Gateshead from the nurse, Bessie:

\begin{quote}
my father had been a poor clergyman; that my mother had married him against the wishes of her friends, who considered the match beneath her; that my grandfather Reed was so irritated at her disobedience, he cut her off without a shilling; that after my mother and father had been married a year, the latter caught the typhus fever while visiting among the poor of a large manufacturing town where his curacy was situated, and where that disease was then prevalent; that my mother took the infection from him, and both died within a month of each other.’
\end{quote}

(21)

The second version she hears at Morton when St John relates this story before revealing the details of Jane’s inheritance:

\begin{quote}
Twenty years ago a poor curate—never mind his name at this moment—fell in love with a rich man’s daughter, she fell in love with him, and married him, against the advice of all her friends; who consequently disowned her immediately after the wedding. Before two years passed the rash pair were both dead, and laid quietly side by side under one slab. (I have seen their grave; it formed part of the pavement of a huge churchyard surrounding the grim, soot-black old cathedral of an overgrown manufacturing town in——shire. They left a daughter. (323)
\end{quote}

Jane’s journey from Gateshead to Thornfield and then to the north parallels that of her mother. Just as twenty years before, Miss Jane Reed of Gateshead travelled north, met and married a poor curate becoming, by marriage, ‘Jane Eyre’ and accompanied her husband as helpmeet in his ministry to the sick and poor, so Miss Jane Eyre of Gateshead travels north and meets a poor curate who wishes her to marry him and accompany him as helpmeet in his mission to the poor of

\textsuperscript{5}Jane’s journey north and that of her mother, Jane Reed, also parallel the journey of Maria Branwell, Brontë’s mother. The daughter of a wealthy merchant, Maria Branwell travelled from Penzance to Yorkshire, where she met and married another poor curate, Patrick Brontë, and moved north to live with him.
India. What is revealed by Bessie but omitted by St John is that Jane’s mother accompanied her husband into a typhus-ridden area where illness and death were the outcome for both. This is what Jane fears will be her fate should she accompany St John to India as his wife, tied to him for life in a loveless marriage. ‘God did not give me my life to throw away;’ she reproaches, ‘and to do as you wish me would, I begin to think, be almost equivalent to committing suicide.’ (352).

In flouting convention and marrying the man she loves there is a resemblance between Jane and her mother, that other ‘Jane Eyre’ (Marsh, 2004). Yet in following her husband to a dangerously unhealthy place Jane’s mother failed to defy the societal expectations that she should live a life of willing sacrifice and, being infected with typhus by her dying husband, she too died, leaving their infant daughter orphaned. Jane has lived with the consequences of this tragic, sacrificial union all her life and knows only too well its futility and its cost. The paralleling of Jane’s journey with that of her mother and the incestuous symmetry of St John, the son of Miss Eyre and Mr Rivers now demanding marriage to another Miss Eyre, enfolds Jane within a pattern of family couplings that lend a sense of inexorability to Jane’s acquiescence to St John. Theirs would be a symbolic recreation of the marriage of Jane’s parents, requiring of Jane the same status as her mother: ‘the sole helpmeet’ St John can ‘retain absolutely till death’ (346), and the replication of her mother’s death. With these parallels and symmetry and in the death of Jane’s mother, Brontë casts deathly sacrifice as a tangible symbol of marriage.

When Jane says of St John ‘I like a fool never thought of resisting him—I could not resist him’ (340) she is metonymically speaking of her inability to also
resist societal expectations of female obedience to male will. But Jane has learned
the lesson bequeathed to her by her mother's sacrifice and resists St John. As she
gains strength in her struggle she identifies St John's strategies of manipulation.
She rejects the grandiose sophistry of his insistence that her sacrifice is to God,
importuning her with the claim he advocates on behalf of God, proclaiming 'It is
the cause of God I advocate: it is under His standard I enlist you.' (346). With
this, his hypocrisy and ambition are exposed. Threatening Jane with God's
displeasure to achieve his ends illuminates St John's struggle between the 'patient
Christian' he strives to be and the 'hard man' of 'steely ire' (353) and 'inexorable'
will (304) Jane confronts. She sees clearly the weakness and inadequacy fuelling
his need for the support of a 'helpmeet' over whom he wields absolute control,
and recognises the flawed, weak man who, unable to love, refuses to engage with
life but lives for 'the true eternal Paradise' (313).

I had silently feared St John till now, because I had not
understood him. He had held me in awe, because he had held me
in doubt. How much of him was saint, how much mortal, I could
not heretofore tell: but revelations were being made in this
conference: the analysis of his nature was proceeding before my
eyes. I saw his fallibilities. I comprehended them. I understood
that sitting there where I did, on the bank of heath, and with
that handsome form before me, I sat at the feet of a man, erring
as I. The veil fell from his hardness and despotism. Having felt in
him the presence of these qualities, I felt his imperfection and
took courage. I was with an equal—one with whom I might
argue—one whom, if I saw good, I might resist. (346)

Once 'his fallibilities' (346) and his 'imperfections' (346) are illuminated
Jane becomes aware she is St John's equal and, as such, has a right to argue with
him and resist his attempts to make her obey. In overcoming her fear of St John
she is overcoming her fear of society's constraints and now, when disagreeing,
has the agency to resist them. Her rejection of St John's proposal is more than a
rejection of the impetus to sacrifice but the symbolic rejection of submission to her society’s rules and expectations surrounding women’s role in marriage.

No longer afraid of St John, Jane scorns the ‘counterfeit’ (348) love he offers and recognises the suppressed fury he obscures with his mask of devout Christianity, ‘He looked at me fixedly: compressing his well-cut lips while he did so. Whether he was incensed or surprised, or what, it was not easy to tell: he could command his countenance thoroughly’ (348). Jane sees the ‘austere and despotic nature’ he hides beneath the demeanour of the sincere Christian who patiently attempts to wear down her ‘perversity’ (349). Using the tools of emotional abuse he withdraws affection and warmth from her and quietly manipulates the vulnerability of her need for love and friendship. He ‘tortures’ her with ‘refined, lingering torture’ (350)—and enjoys it:

I fear the corrupt man within him had a pleasure unimparted to, and unshared by, the pure Christian, in evincing with what skill he could, while acting and speaking apparently just as usual, extract from every deed and every phrase the spirit of interest and approval which had formerly communicated a certain austere charm to his language and manner. To me, he was in reality become no longer flesh, but marble; his eye was a cold bright, blue gem; his tongue a speaking instrument—nothing more. (350)

Her response to his sadistic coldness: ‘I would rather he had knocked me down’ (349), echoes the childish sentiments she expressed at Lowood under the control of another religious hypocrite, the Reverend Brocklehurst. As she confessed to Helen Burns, she would submit to physical injury ‘if others don’t love me’ (58)She understands the grim observance St John would pay to his sexual duty and the sacrifice this would mean for her ‘at his side always and always restrained and always checked—*this* would be unendurable’ (347).
Nevertheless, she is awed by St John’s powerful reading from *The Book of Revelations*. The sincerity of his religious purpose is affecting and while not sharing his Calvinistic ideas of predestination and recognising herself as ‘reprobate’, she feels ‘veneration’ for the man:

> Veneration so strong that its impetus thrust me at once to the point I had so long shunned. I was tempted to cease struggling with him—to rush down the torrent of his will into the gulf of his existence, and there lose my own. (356)

Jerome Beaty (1996) posits that a devout reader might incline toward St John rather than Rochester but Brontë paints such a comprehensive picture of St John’s sadism, hypocrisy, lovelessness, and ruthless ambition it is difficult to imagine how he could be preferred, man of God though he professes to be, and notwithstanding Rochester’s many flaws. In Jane’s words:

> I felt how, if I were his wife, this good man, pure as the deep sunless source, could soon kill me: without drawing from my veins a single drop of blood, or receiving on his own crystal conscience the faintest stain of crime.’ (350)

The superficial contrasts between St John and Rochester are clear. Physically the two men are polar opposites: Rochester is neither tall nor graceful; broad-chested and powerful, dark haired, dark eyed and square featured. He is ‘not beautiful according to the rule’ but to Jane he is ‘more than beautiful’ (149). St John, tall and fair, blue-eyed, with his ‘Greek’ features, is physically the antithesis of Rochester yet not physically appealing to Jane, who recognises the iciness masked by his handsome features. Both men present Jane with different values that represent vastly different ways of living. Rochester is a rule-breaker, St John is a stickler for maintaining the morals and conventions of society. Rochester has been an irreligious seducer of women, while St John has subdued
and suppressed his ‘mere fever of the flesh’ (339) in the name of Christian duty. As he tells Jane, he is ‘a cold, hard man’. (339) and the thought of remaining by St John’s side generates the same visceral dread Jane experiences as she contemplates leaving Rochester. Jane’s experiential understanding of St John’s proposal of marriage is metaphorised by Brontë as an ‘iron shroud’ (344) contracting around her—constricting, stifling and crushing the very life from her. This image is contrasted with the ‘hand of fiery iron’ crushing Jane’s ‘vitals’ at the prospect of renouncing Rochester and her ‘intolerable duty’ to depart (269). Jane’s fear of St John’s disapproval shapes her behaviour, ‘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’ (339). In an eerie presentiment of her ‘brother’ St John, Rochester recognises that Jane is afraid ‘in the presence of a man and a brother to smile too gaily, speak too freely, or move too quickly’ (118). Unlike St John, Rochester longs for the day when Jane’s ‘looks and movements will have more vivacity and variety than they dare offer now’ (118) and she can be fully herself in his company.

Each man presents Jane with a different view of herself. To Rochester Jane is his ‘sunny-faced girl’ (220), his ‘treasure’ (242), ‘good, gifted, lovely’ (269), with a ‘clear eye’ an ‘eloquent tongue’ a ‘soul made of fire’ and a ‘character that bends but does not break’ (222) and he loves her with ‘truth, fervour, constancy’ (222). To St John she is ‘made for labour, not for love’ (343, 354), a mere ‘tool’ (354) to serve his ambition and she is well aware that ‘he prizes [her] as a good soldier

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6John Hagan (1971) points out that Jane is translating one of Schiller’s works in which is found the ‘iron shroud’ of doom when St John demands that she replace the study of German with that of Hindustanee
would a good weapon; and that is all’ (345). As she tells his sister, ‘his sole idea in proposing to me is to procure a fitting fellow-labourer in his Indian toils’ (353).

St John is spiritually and materially confining while Rochester is liberating. St John considers it his duty to demand Jane’s ‘sacrifice’ to facilitate his ambition, ‘To do all things to the glory of God’ (356) so that he may take his rightful place in Heaven, yet what he demands of Jane would not only mean premature death but the extinguishing of Jane’s essential nature. However, Rochester—in his gypsy guise—disavows sacrifice. He tells Jane:

I do not want sacrifice, sorrow, dissolution—such is not my taste. I wish to foster, not to blight—to earn gratitude, not to wring tears of blood—no, nor of brine: my harvest must be in smiles, in endearments, in sweet— (172)

Jane’s suggestion that she accompany St John to India as his ‘sister’ is met with the utter resistance of a man tightly fettered by his society’s ideas of morality. He insists that even unmarried cousins travelling together would be outside the bounds of propriety and would ‘fasten injurious suspicions on us both.’ (347). This is, of course, in glaring contrast to Rochester who, caring not a jot for the rules of propriety, implored Jane to travel unmarried with him to the South of France. Brontë’s text hints that by suggesting she travel with St John, unmarried, Jane’s moral compass has shifted. This raises the possibility that she may decide to place herself ‘outside the bounds of propriety’ and return to Rochester, ignorant of Bertha’s death. St John makes clear what is, in his eyes, the immorality of Jane’s intention to search for Rochester: ‘The interest you cherish is lawless and unconsecrated.’ (353) he warns her.

Both men press Jane hard for acceptance. Rochester using the leverage of his love and need for redemption to persuade Jane to his cause, St John coercing her to
his cause with icy disapproval, withdrawal of affection and threats of eternal damnation. Describing St John’s intensity, the narrating Jane compares him to Rochester, recalling that

I was almost as hard beset by him now as I had been once before, in a different way, by another. I was a fool both times. To have yielded then would have been an error of principle; to have yielded now would have been an error of judgment. So I think at this hour, when I look back to the crisis through the quiet medium of time: I was unconscious of folly at the instant. (356)

Looking back, the mature Jane recognises the errors she would have made in accepting either man at the time they beset her with their proposals. She has changed and the men must change also. St John, ‘inexorable as death’ (304) will never be diverted from his chosen path. As his tells his sister Diana, his plans are ‘Unchanged and unchangeable.’ (336). Nevertheless, for Jane to accept Rochester he too must change so that she will not be making ‘an error of principle’ in returning to him. Teetering on the brink of accepting St John she remains unsure of the path she should take, ‘were I but convinced that it is God’s will I should marry you, I could vow to marry you here and now ... ’ (357). St John, sensing triumph, declares ‘My prayers are heard!’ But in claiming Jane he conjures thoughts of his rival, even though Jane had relinquished hope of ever seeing Rochester again

He surrounded me with his arm, almost as if he loved me (I say almost—I knew the difference—for I had felt what it was to be loved but, like him, I had now put love out of the question and thought only of duty). (357)

She entreats Heaven to show her the direction she must take. ‘I was excited more than I had ever been’ (357). Her ‘heart beat thick and fast’ (357), as it had so many years before in the red room but this time it is not from fear but excitement. St
John and Jane are supplicants each believing their prayers will be answered by God. But God is silent and St John’s prayers are not answered. When it comes, the answer to Jane’s entreaty to God is

the voice of a human being—a known, loved, well-remembered voice—that of Edward Fairfax Rochester; and it spoke in pain and woe wildly, eerily, urgently.’ calling Jane! Jane! Jane! (336)

This direct response to Jane’s prayer is an example of the rejection of clerical intercession between human being and God, doubly significant in this scene because St John is himself a representative of the clergy. Thormählen (2004) notes that the rejection of intercession is expressed strongly in Charlotte Brontë’s fiction and, I argue in the following chapter, is something that is present in the closing lines of the novel.

Rochester’s mysterious call to Jane has been viewed both as God’s ‘supernatural summons’ (Thormählen 2004, p.79) and dismissed as ‘a thumping piece of Gothic claptrap’ (Joseph Prescott 1960, p. 90, in Yeazell, 1974) but what stands out as most significant about the call is that it comes from within Jane herself (Yeazell, 1974). In terms of my argument, Jane’s transformation and her freedom from fear now enable her to ‘hear’ Rochester’s despairing plea and to answer him. Duty is forgotten, the passionate love that had been supposedly set aside triumphs after all. In the contest between Rochester and St John it is Rochester who prevails: ‘Wait for me! Oh I will come!’ Jane cries out in reply. Her longing to seek out Rochester, condemned by St John as ‘lawless and unconsecrated’ (353) has been ordained. Although the exact genesis of the call is never definitively established it is assumed to have been a direct intercession to
Jane by a ‘Mighty Spirit’ (358). The other-worldly call sets Jane free to finally search for Rochester.

Financial independence and the reinstatement of family have despatched Jane’s former vulnerability as a solitary, poor dependent. She has acknowledged the sensuality of her nature, her need for Rochester, and has gained the understanding of the nature of the sympathies they share that are foundational to the longevity of their relationship. St John, no longer an object of fear has been exposed as a hypocrite: a weak man, ‘who regarded one but as a useful tool’ who Jane no longer fears but considers her equal. Empowered, she claims her personal authority:

I broke from St John, who had followed, and would have detained me. It was my time to assume ascendancy. My powers were in play, and in force. I told him to forbear question or remark; I desired him to leave me: I must, and would be alone. He obeyed at once. Where there is energy to command well enough, obedience never fails. (358)

Jane’s spirited assertiveness and her disobedience to St John are achieved only with great inner struggle. In refusing St John, she defies the societal expectations of a middle-class woman, and the weapons of coercion with which she is ‘beset’ by him: submission to duty and sacrifice, obedience to both man and husband and to God. Jane also fears his wrath and the sadism of his attempts to manipulate her with emotional abuse and the fear that entails. As she observes, ‘what terror those cold people can put into the ice of their questions?’ (351).

Understanding that St John is ‘an equal’ (346) her fear dissolves and she gains the strength to resist him. What Brontë demonstrates here is that Jane will no longer fear what she believes to be wrong even when St John promulgates it as ‘right’. St John and the society he exemplifies now hold no fear for Jane and
sacrifice and duty are no longer weapons of conformity. The dismissal of St John is also the repudiation of his valorisation of duty and sacrifice, his rigid morality, his adherence to a demanding religiosity and his suppression of sensuality and eroticism. In other words, in rejecting St John Jane also rejects what he incarnates: the societal conventions and mores that inflict bodily and spiritual subjugation on women.

Returning to her room she prays in gratitude for the ‘pathway’ she has been shown. Then, resolved and eager for the day to come she lies in her bed ‘unscared’ (358), ready to face her final challenge. The following day she will commence her long journey back to Thornfield and her remaining ‘object of fear’, Edward Fairfax Rochester.
Commentary

The three brief concluding chapters of *Jane Eyre* covering Jane’s departure from Moor House, her reunion with Rochester at Ferndean, and their marriage, bring what is at first glance a satisfying end to the novel: ‘Reader, I married him’ (382). Nevertheless, as Penny Boumelha (1990) points out, for numerous critics there is ‘a not uncommon sneaking dissatisfaction with the last chapters’ (p. 63). In Boumelha’s view (and, as she says, numerous critics hold similar views) what is problematic is the relationship of the beginning of *Jane Eyre* to its ending. That is to say, for many critics there is a dissonance arising from Jane’s perceived failure to live up to her assumed rebellious, feminist ideals. Gilbert and Gubar, for example, question whether Jane’s marriage and withdrawal from society into the remoteness of Ferndean seriously compromise those ideals. They ask ‘Has Jane exorcised the rage of orphanhood only to retreat from the responsibilities her own principles implied?’ (1984p. 369) Jerome Beaty, while not a feminist critic, arguing for the providential in *Jane Eyre* nevertheless holds to a similar perspective. As he puts it, ‘The story of the proud, saucy, self-reliant orphan Jane Eyre ends with the chastened, religious, privileged and satisfied wife and mother Jane Rochester’ (1996 p. 74).

Essentially, the ‘problematic’ ending stems from the underlying premise that what is viewed as Jane’s feisty rebelliousness in the novel’s first chapter is an

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1Boumelha quotes Jina Politi, Lee R Edwards and Judith Weissman and ‘others’
enduring character trait which guides her actions throughout the novel. Building a view of the novel on this premise inevitably leads to the dissonance expressed by so many critics when Jane’s assumed rebelliousness fizzles into what is perceived as mild, marital conformity at Ferndean. As my previous chapters have demonstrated, however, her defiance at Gateshead is an artefact of fear and it is the thematic arc of fear rather than that of rebellion that provides the structural scaffolding and aesthetic unity of the narrative. In this chapter I intend to explore my reading of the final chapters of *Jane Eyre* through the lens of fear and, based on this reading, I will argue for a unified relationship between the first scenes at Gateshead and the final scenes at Ferndean. Gilbert and Gubar consider these scenes ‘an essential epilogue to that pilgrimage toward selfhood which had in other ways concluded at Marsh End’ (1984 p. 367). I argue instead that, rather than an epilogue, these chapters are an essential continuation of Jane’s transformative journey in which her fear of sexual subjugation is finally defeated.

By the time Jane departs Moor House on her mission to locate Rochester Brontë has successfully eliminated much of what makes Jane vulnerable to sexual subjugation and hence her vulnerability to the accompanying fear of loss of identity and the loss of autonomy of ‘self’. She is no longer an impoverished, solitary, friendless, orphan but a woman in possession of a small fortune and the protection afforded by kinship. She has demonstrated her capability to take charge of her own affairs. Her success and popularity as a teacher, her efforts to divide her inheritance and share it equally with her Rivers cousins and her management of the refurbishing of Moor House have shown the strength of her willpower and her tenacity. Moreover, her encounter with St John and, specifically, her steadfast rejection of his marriage proposal, have wrought a
mature awareness of her own desire and sexual yearning and, importantly, the
confidence to defy and rebel against society’s injunctions when she believes them
to be wrong.

To disobey St John’s persuasiveness and incur his rage in doing so has
taken great moral and spiritual courage on Jane’s part. As she says, St John is
terrifying in his anger at her disobedience:

Reader, do you know, as I do, what terror those cold people can put into the ice of their questions? How much of the fall of the avalanche is in their anger? Of the breaking up of the frozen sea in their displeasure?

‘No, St John, I will not marry you. I adhere to my resolution.’
The avalanche had shaken and slid a little forward; but it did not yet crash down.

‘Once more, why this refusal?’ he asked.

‘Formerly,’ I answered, ‘because you did not love me; now, I reply, because you almost hate me. If I were to marry you, you would kill me. You are killing me now’. (351)

In rejecting St John’s proposal Jane defies a powerful and dominant man coercing her with fear, using specious appeals to God’s will and threatening her with his own terrible displeasure. Understanding that St John is her equal—a flawed, restless, unsatisfied, creature, just as she is—dissipates Jane’s fear of him as I discussed in the previous chapter. With the loss of that fear his power over her is dispelled. Once she has overcome her fear of St John, even though his emotional cruelty and his demands for sacrifice and duty on God’s behalf still inflict emotional pain, they are no longer effective as weapons of control. Jane is courageous and sure enough of her own moral and spiritual core to rebel against his power and the demands made by society’s expectations of her womanly sacrifice to his will. As his sister Diana, fully aware of the strength behind Jane’s rejection of St John, puts it: ‘I am astonished you found courage to refuse his hand’ (354). What Brontë demonstrates with Jane’s rejection of St John is that,
unlike the rebellion of the ten-year old Jane whose short-lived defiance of the authority figures in her life arose from fear, mature rebellion only becomes possible when fear loses its influence.

What still exists of Jane’s vulnerability as she travels back to Thornfield is her undimmed passion and yearning for the ‘object of fear’, the despot whose passion threatened to overwhelm her and, importantly, her uncertainty that his love is lasting. Her doubt that Rochester could return her love has been present from her first stirrings of love for him. She soundly castigates herself for the ‘folly’ (136) of entertaining for a moment the notion that Rochester could return her feelings and she is well aware of the danger she places herself in by harbouring such a ‘foolish’ (136) and senseless idea:

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-fatuus-like, into miry wilds, whence there is no extrication. (136-137)

Even after Rochester’s declaration of love and their betrothal Jane remains uncertain that his love will endure, and she confronts him with her fear that after a short time he ‘will turn cool’ (221) and his love will fade to mere liking ‘I suppose your love will effervesce in six months, or less. I have observed in books written by men, that period assigned as the farthest to which a husband’s ardour extends’ (221).

At the core of her uncertainty is the perception that she lacks conventional beauty. According to the frequently quoted remarks from Harriet Martineau’s obituary of Charlotte Brontë concerning the necessity or otherwise of a heroine’s beauty, Brontë reputedly told her sisters: ‘I will show you a heroine as plain and
as small as myself who shall be as interesting as any of yours’ (cited in Gaskell 1997, p. 235). In writing *Jane Eyre* Brontë eschewed the common practice of endowing her protagonist with beauty. Throughout the novel Jane’s ‘plainness’ is emphasised and comparisons are made between her and the ‘beauties’ she encounters, each of whom is found wanting in a particular way either morally or intellectually or both. In creating a protagonist who is decidedly not beautiful Brontë interrogates internal and external notions of beauty: the valorising by society of outward appearance, the power and influence of beauty as an evaluative concept for women in the marriage market and its concomitant emphasis on beauty as a component of sexual desire (Scruton, 2008).

Brontë’s narrative challenges the traditional pairing of virtue and beauty and the notion that ‘physical appearance is the first measure of female worth’ (Monahan 1988p. 592). As Jen Cadwallader (2009) points out, the emphasis placed on the appearance of the beautiful women in *Jane Eyre*—Georgiana Reed, Blanche Ingram, Bertha Mason and Rosamond Oliver—is in direct relation to the neglect of their characters. Ten-year old Jane observes that her cousin Georgiana’s ‘beauty, her pink cheeks and golden curls’ (12) give her indemnity and her faults are overlooked. As a woman, however, despite her ‘languishing blue eyes and ringleted yellow hair’ (195) and voluptuous body, Georgiana is, in the words of her sister Eliza, ‘a fat, weak, puffy, useless thing’ (201). Jane’s purported rival, Blanche Ingram, a dark and dramatic beauty ‘greatly admired’ (135), who demands ‘an undivided homage’ (153) from her would-be suitors is exposed as haughty, brash, avaricious, and insincere. Bertha Mason, who dazzled the young Rochester with her ‘charms and accomplishments’ (260) and who was once ‘the boast of Spanish town for her beauty’ (260), is a promiscuous drunkard
who very soon after marriage becomes insane and, ultimately, bestial. Even the exquisite and charming Rosamond Oliver with her face of ‘perfect beauty’ (313) is nevertheless petulant, childish, and ‘not profoundly interesting or thoroughly impressive’ (313). As for the men, St John for all his features of sculptured Greek perfection is a deeply flawed ‘cold, hard, ambitious man’ (319), and Bertha Rochester’s brother Richard the ‘beautiful man’ (162), repels Jane with his weakness.

Jane, lacking physical attractiveness, is assumed to have none of these execrable characteristics but instead is endowed with admirable, sterling qualities. To Rochester she is, of course, a nonpareil of goodness (despite her wicked teasing) ‘with will and energy, and virtue and purity’ (271), while St John Rivers values her for the qualities that would render her useful in his missionary work: her tractability and docility, perseverance, diligence and capacity for ‘uncongenial’ (343) labour.

Despite the contrivance that equates outer beauty with inner ugliness and, conversely, Jane’s outward plainness denoting an inner beauty, her lack of physical beauty is painted by Brontë as a source of deep emotional conflict. From childhood Jane’s lack of prettiness marginalises her, placing her outside the bounds of lovability. She learns this lesson when she overhears a conversation between the Gateshead servants, Miss Abbot and Bessie, concerning her orphan status:

‘if she were a nice, pretty child, one might compassionate her forlornness; but one really cannot care for such a little toad as that.’
‘Not a great deal, to be sure,’ agreed Bessie: ‘at any rate, a beauty like Miss Georgiana would be more moving in the same condition’. (21)
She articulates a wistful longing for beauty on her first morning at Thornfield:

I sometimes wished to have rosy cheeks, a straight nose, and a small cherry mouth; I desired to be tall, stately, and finely developed in figure; I felt it a misfortune that I was so little, so pale, and had features so irregular and so marked. (84).

When she falls in love with Rochester the belief in her physical unattractiveness and her consequent exclusion from love is distilled, initially, into the haunting uncertainty that he could not love her and, later, that his love will not endure. At Thornfield Jane's jealousy is aroused by the possibility of a romantic history between Rochester and the ‘uncomely’ (133) Grace Poole. Recollecting the woman's 'flat figure and dry, even coarse face' (133) she dismisses the idea that Rochester could be drawn to such a unattractive woman but is confused by her own nagging doubt that 'you are not beautiful either, and perhaps Mr. Rochester approves you' (133). Fearful of her stirring passion for Rochester she paints a miniature of Blanche Ingram giving her 'the loveliest face you can imagine' (137), and one of herself. On her own portrait she writes ‘Portrait of a Governess, disconnected, poor, and plain’ (137), a succinct statement of her vulnerabilities and why she fears her own feelings toward Rochester. By comparing her appearance with what is counted as beauty she attempts to disavow the ‘sickening’ (136) folly (with its accompanying fear) that she might be pleasing to Rochester:

Whenever, in future, you should chance to fancy Mr. Rochester thinks well of you, take out these two pictures and compare them: say "Mr. Rochester might probably win that noble lady's love, if he chose to strive for it; is it likely he would waste a serious thought on this indigent and insignificant plebian?" (137)

Even after their betrothal when Rochester has declared his love, Jane is afraid that his sexual desire for her—his ‘ardour’— will be short lived:
you will turn cool; and then you will be capricious; and then you will be stern, and I shall have much ado to please you: but when you get well used to me, you will perhaps like me again—like me, I say, not love me. I suppose your love will effervesce in six months, or less. I have observed in books written by men, that period assigned as the farthest to which a husband’s ardour extends. (221)

Jane’s encounter with St John only serves to reinforce the vulnerability inhering in her belief that she is not physically attractive to a man. At Morton, Jane recognises and understands the intensity of St John’s passion for Rosamond Oliver and she is incredulous as he suppresses and denigrates his desire as ‘weakness’ (319) and ‘ignoble’ (319). This abnegation of passion for the beautiful woman he desires but will not marry throws into relief his crushing dismissal of Jane’s femininity. Jane is well aware that the absence (in his eyes) of her physical desirability heightens her suitability as a wife, as he has no place for the distraction of a ‘mere fever of the flesh’ (319) and no requirement for her ‘woman’s heart’ (348). He tells her that she is ‘formed for labour, not for love’ (343) and ruthlessly emphasising his physical disinterest in her adds: ‘I claim you—not for my pleasure but for my Sovereign’s service.’ (343).

For all this, Brontë endows Jane with a good deal more than inner beauty. Jane herself acknowledges this on the morning after her betrothal:

While arranging my hair, I looked at my face in the glass, and felt it was no longer plain: there was hope in its aspect, and life in its colour; and my eyes seemed as if they had beheld the fount of fruition, and borrowed beams from the lustrous ripple. (219)

Nevertheless, on her return to Rochester at Ferndean Jane’s prettiness, or otherwise, is no longer of consequence for the blinded Rochester cannot make out her features clearly. Even when he partially regains sight ‘he cannot see now very distinctly’ (384). Meyer describes this as ‘liberating’ for Jane as ‘it takes from
him any power of male visual evaluation of her’ (1990p. 92). Jane will remain forever as Rochester saw her on the morning after their betrothal, ‘blooming and smiling and pretty’, his ‘little sunny faced girl with the dimpled cheek and rosy lips; the satin-smooth hazel hair, and the radiant hazel eyes’ (220), perhaps to remain always oblivious to the fact that Jane’s eyes are green. To Rochester Jane has always been beautiful even when Jane herself disputed this, as he tells her ‘You are a beauty, in my eyes; and a beauty just after the desire of my heart,—delicate and aërial’ (220). As the servants Mary and John remark to each other after Jane gives them the news of her marriage to Rochester—not quite out of Jane’s hearing:

‘She’ll happen do better for him nor ony o’ t’ grand ladies.’ And again, ‘If she ben’t one o’ th’ handsomest, she’s noan faål and vary good-natured; and i’ his een she’s fair beautiful, onybody may see that.’ (383)

Any vulnerability to fear and uncertainty that Jane is unworthy of love because of her unlovely appearance is no longer sustainable. Ironically, Brontë demonstrates that rather than not being loved because she lacks physical beauty the inverse is true: that in being loved, Jane becomes beautiful. Brontë has not remained wholly true to her vow to create a heroine who is plain, for Jane is perceived as beautiful by Rochester. Ultimately, Brontë portrays the perception of beauty as one that is, after all, intrinsic to the idea of love.

Overcoming fear, that is, to reach a place within the self where what was once feared is no longer fearsome, is only possible when the transformation of either or both the object of fear itself, or the one who fears, occurs. Transforming the one who fears (in this case, Jane) requires the development or heightening of specific physical, spiritual, or emotional capacities that nullify the previously held
fear. Transforming fear’s object (at this stage of the novel, Rochester) requires the removal or alteration of the qualities which have formerly been the inspiration of fear in the fearful one. Previously I considered the strategies Brontë employed to develop and strengthen Jane’s material, spiritual, and emotional capacities and the consequent undermining of a great deal of her vulnerability to the fear of sexual dominance and subjugation. I intend now to pay attention to Brontë’s engagement with the transformation of Rochester, the ‘object’ of fear: the final impediment to Jane’s liberation from the fear that has haunted her since the experience of childhood terror in the red room at Gateshead.

Using dreams Brontë foreshadows the passion of Jane’s reunion with Rochester:

I used to rush into strange dreams at night: dreams many coloured, agitated, full of the ideal, the stirring, the stormy—dreams where, amidst unusual scenes, charged with adventure, with agitating risk and romantic chance, I still again and again met Mr Rochester, always at some exciting crisis; and then the sense of being in his arms, hearing his voice, meeting his eye, touching his hand and cheek, loving him, being loved by him—the hope of passing a lifetime at his side, would be renewed, with all its first force and fire. Then I awoke. Then I recalled where I was and how situated. Then I rose up on my curtainless bed, trembling and quivering; and then the still dark night witnessed the convulsion of despair and heard the burst of passion.’ (312)

This sensual—even orgasmic—passage undercuts Jane’s understated, almost unemotional response, on meeting Rochester again. In the reunion scene at Ferndean Brontë foregrounds Rochester’s fierce joy as he realises Jane is beside him: ‘What sweet madness has seized me?’ (369). In contrast, Jane’s reaction is limited to a tray that shakes in her hand and water that spills and a heart that beats ‘loud and fast’ (368). This apparently subdued response on Jane’s part may have suggested the fading of intensity within the sexual passion of the
relationship to some or perhaps encouraged psychoanalytic critics to argue that Rochester’s maiming is a symbolic castration—what Marianne Thormählen refers to as ‘the ‘castration school’ in Jane Eyre criticism’ (1999p. 242n). Richard Chase, for example, maintains that ‘Rochester’s injuries are, I should think, a symbolic castration’ and, in his view, the couple settle down to a ‘mild married life’ (1947 p. 108-9). An earlier critic, the Freudian analyst Kate Freidlander, argues that ‘Apparently, Brontë perceived the woman as castrating towards the man. Then, when the man became dependent upon the woman, their union was perfect’ (1943 in Randall 1971 p.57). However, comments such as these, arguing for a desexualising of Jane and Rochester’s relationship are not supported by the text.

At Ferndean Jane claims a confident equality of authority with the blind and maimed Rochester that is both personal and sexual. She kisses him freely, returns his embrace, and perches ‘pertinaciously’ (377) on his knee. Understanding immediately that he fears the loss of his sexual potency when he bemoans his ‘seared vision’ (378) and his ‘crippled strength’ (378) Jane wastes no time reassuring him of his virility:

‘You are no ruin, sir—no lightning-struck tree: you are green and vigorous. Plants will grow about your roots, whether you ask them or not, because they take delight in your bountiful shadow; and as they grow they will lean towards you, and wind round you, because your strength offers them so safe a prop’. (378-79)

He has not lost his sexual mastery. “Ah! Jane!” (379) he says, dismissing the idea he could be in need of friend, “I want a wife” (379). When he proclaims “we must become one flesh without delay” (380) the implicit sexuality in his demand leaves no doubt his masculine energy is as vigorous as ever.² Moreover, it seems

² The sexual connotation of ‘one flesh’ is explicit in Corinthians VI: 16 ‘Know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? For two saith he, shall be one flesh.’
improbable that Brontë intends that Jane after rejecting St John’s passionless marriage and making her way back to Rochester could be satisfied with a sexually impotent man. As Lerner, referring to Rochester, puts it, ‘he is after all one of the most virile lovers in nineteenth-century fiction’ (1989p. 288).

Nevertheless, Helen Moglen, recognising the nature of power in the gendered dictates of Jane Eyre’s society, contends that neither Jane’s fortune nor her confidence and ‘self-awareness’ are sufficient to overcome the dangerous ‘masculine’ role assigned to Rochester (1976 p. 143). She asserts that in order to protect Jane’s ‘emergent self’ both the couple’s retreat from society and the diminution of Rochester’s virility are necessary (p. 143). This perspective overlooks Brontë’s careful crafting of the aspects of personal power that provide Jane with the means to disobey St John Rivers and rebel against her society’s expectations of female sacrifice in marriage. I argue that the incrementally wrought changes occurring in Jane’s life during the time spent apart from Rochester have bestowed on her a confidence in her sexuality and a certainty that ensures she no longer fears his despotism. Brontë illuminates this in an address to ‘the reader’ as Jane approaches Ferndean for the longed-for reunion:

And, reader, do you think I feared him in his blind ferocity?—if you do, you little know me. A soft hope blent with my sorrow that soon I would dare to drop a kiss on that brow of rock, and on those lips, so sternly sealed beneath it: but not yet. I would not accost him yet. (367)

In this aside Brontë not only affirms Jane’s lack of fear of Rochester but the newfound assertiveness of her sexuality. Jane speaks of herself taking the sexual initiative with Rochester, it is she who will ‘dare’ to kiss his brow and his lips and she will do so on her terms.
Contrary to Moglen’s position I maintain is it is not the reduction of Rochester’s virility that is necessary but the renunciation of his ‘sultan’ role and the recasting of him as a ‘good’ man. As Jane has transformed from a fearful, timid, child to the confident and courageous woman who finds her way to him at Ferndean, Rochester must also transform. The dissipation of his past life, his ‘sowing of wild oats’ and his numerous mistresses, may not be of particular concern; as John Tosh points out ‘well-born’ young men’s ‘libertinage’ was culturally accepted well into the nineteenth-century (2005 p. 61). Indeed, Jane herself views Rochester’s ‘passion’ (124) for his French mistress as an ‘everyday’ (124) matter. However, Rochester’s behaviour in attempting a bigamous marriage has moved him from the ranks of the ‘trite, commonplace, sinner’ (116) to one who has flouted the laws of both God and man. Rochester’s dissipation must be expunged and this ‘irreligious dog’ (380) must reconcile with God and attain Redemption.

In his sexual relations with his mistresses, with Bertha, and even his interactions with Jane after their betrothal, Rochester is portrayed as the embodiment of male patriarchal dominance. Nevertheless, Brontë provides an alternative representation of him as altruistic, generous and protective, the ‘benevolent’ patriarch. This aspect of Rochester is first made apparent when Jane, asks Mrs. Fairfax about the owner of Thornfield: ‘do you like him? Is he liked for himself?’ (89) and Mrs Fairfax replies: ‘I have no cause to do otherwise than like him; and I believe he is considered a just and liberal landlord by his tenants’ (89) When Jane, enquiring after the ruins of Thornfield meets with the garrulous innkeeper at Millcote who has known Rochester since boyhood she is provided with a further perspective. He recalls Rochester as an estimable man:
a more spirited, bolder, keener gentleman than he was before that midge of a governess crossed him, you never saw, ma’am. He was not a man given to wine, or cards, or racing, as some are, and he was not so very handsome; but he had a courage and a will of his own, if ever man had. (364)

In constructing this other view of Rochester, countering the autocratic tyrant evident in his earlier dealings with women, Brontë illuminates the paradox at the heart of middle class nineteenth-century male and female relationships. Rochester, benign and benevolent in his dealings with others outside his intimate relationships, is, nevertheless, a tyrant with his female lovers. This is the ‘dangerous masculine role’ afforded by society that Moglen (1976) refers to. Nevertheless, when Jane returns to him at Ferndean Rochester, remorsefully aware of his transgressions, reveals he would not have misused his power over her:

he would never have forced me to be his mistress. Violent as he had seemed in his despair, he, in truth, loved me far too well and too tenderly to constitute himself my tyrant: he would have given me half his fortune, without demanding so much as a kiss in return. (375)

He wastes no time discarding the trappings of his former despotism. He gives Jane the watch with the chain that would have bound her to him and unhesitatingly dismisses the fine clothes and jewels that formerly symbolised her enslavement: ‘Never mind fine clothes and jewels now: all that is not worth a fillip’ (380). However, these new ways of being are not so much a transformation but the emergence of qualities Jane has always been sensible of despite his former ‘proud, sardonic’ (125) and ‘harsh’ (125) persona. As she says

I believed he was naturally a man of better tendencies, higher principles, and purer tastes than such as circumstances had developed, education instilled, or destiny encouraged. I thought there were excellent materials in him; though for the present they hung together somewhat spoiled and tangled. (125)
Rochester’s maiming is immediately obvious as a physical transformation to the once powerful, dominant and independent man but, despite this, the virile masculinity of his appearance is unchanged. As Jane observes

His form was of the same strong and stalwart contour as ever: his port was still erect, his hair was still raven-black; nor were his features altered or sunk: not in one year’s space, by any sorrow, could his athletic strength be quelled, or his vigorous prime blighted. (367)

But he has been brought low not only by the mutilation of his body in the fire but by the loss of Jane and the redemption he believed her love would bring. As she tells him, ‘a sinner’s reformation should never depend on a fellow-creature’ (186).

Jane recognises that his alteration, as much psychological and spiritual as it is physical, is manifested in his bearing:

a change: that looked desperate and brooding—that reminded me of some wronged and fettered wild beast or bird, dangerous to approach in his sullen woe. The caged eagle, whose gold-ringed eyes cruelty has extinguished, might look as looked that sightless Samson. (367)

Configuring Rochester’s maiming as a symbolic castration or even, as Thormählen asserts, ‘a Divine chastisement’ (1992, p. 80), underestimates the powerful redemptive force borne by Rochester’s terrible injuries. The crushing and subsequent amputation of his left forearm, the destruction of his left eye and the blinding of his right eye manifest the belief that redemption can only be gained through sacrifice; the blood sacrifice of the Old Testament, the ritual that is essential to purification and redemption. The story related to Jane by the elderly Millcote innkeeper is one of sacrifice in which Rochester risks his life in

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3 As Jerome Beaty (2001, p. 424) reminds us ‘In Jane Eyre the line between Christian and heathen becomes oddly porous’. Marianne Thormählen (1999) also points out that it is St John Rivers, not Jane, who follows Jesus.
the inferno of Thornfield Hall to save others; rescuing his servants and vainly attempting to save his wife

“... he went up to the attics when all was burning above and below, and got the servants out of their beds and helped them down himself—and went back to get his mad wife out of her cell”. (364-5)

“he wouldn’t leave the house till everyone else was out before him”. (365)

Rochester’s preparedness to sacrifice himself to retrieve Bertha from the blaze\(^4\) displays a sense of mercy and a selfless duty of care to his ‘living’ (247) wife. After all, this is the woman who, in her madness, has almost brought about his death and that of her brother Richard. Her very existence destroyed Rochester’s past hopes for happiness with Jane and, alive, she continues to rob him of a future. His moral choice to sacrifice himself in order to save her is made because, as he says, his conscience would not permit “‘indirect assassination, even of what I most hate”’ (256).

At a more profoundly conflicted level Rochester’s endeavours to save Bertha’s life perhaps symbolise a desire on his part to keep intact Jane’s fears, emblematised as they are by Bertha and embodied in the power of his despotic masculine energy. The simultaneity of Rochester’s redemptive sacrifice and the death of Bertha Rochester—the symbolic death of Jane’s fear—represent the transformations Jane and Rochester each must undergo. At the moment of Bertha’s death and Rochester’s maiming, the entwined threads of tyranny (represented in Rochester) and fear (represented in Bertha) are broken, freeing both Jane and Rochester and clearing the path to their fulfilment in marriage.

\(^4\) Rochester’s voluntary sacrifice in fire echoes Brontë’s play on the Indian practice of suttee.
Although once he considered 'right' (118) his defiance of the laws of society and of God in attempting a bigamous marriage he now understands that, as Jane had once told him, 'The human and fallible should not arrogate a power with which the divine and perfect alone can be safely entrusted' (118). He recognises the 'Divine justice' (380) of his suffering and no longer proud and arrogant but remorseful and repentant he seeks 'reconcilement to [his] Maker' (380). Believing Jane’s return is the work of Providence he thanks God for his purification and redemption,\(^5\) ‘I thank my Maker that in the midst of judgment He has remembered mercy’ (382). Rochester’s true transformation is his humbling and his acceptance of God: his purification and redemption wrought through personal blood sacrifice and genuine repentance.

Without Rochester’s disablement and humility Jane could not achieve the mutuality of authority she craves. As she says, she loves him ‘better’ (379) now she can be useful to him, when previously he ‘disdained every part but that of giver and protector’ (379). Formerly, Rochester’s independence was a reflection of his pride. Now he is able to contemplate Jane’s authority. As he says:

‘Hitherto I have hated to be helped—to be led: henceforth, I feel, I shall hate it no more. I did not like to put my hand into a hireling’s but it is pleasant to feel it circled by Jane’s little fingers. I preferred utter loneliness to the constant attendance of servants; but Jane’s soft ministry will be a perpetual joy. (379)

Brontë demonstrates that Jane’s life with Rochester is free of fear.

Previously, during their time together at Thornfield before Rochester’s attempted

\(^5\)Barry Qualls asserts that Brontë has faltered in her depiction of Rochester’s redemption, arguing that Rochester’s impassioned call to Jane which he describes as ‘the Alpha and Omega of my heart’s wishes’ (381) hints that in using the words that are also representative of God in this way Rochester is ‘idolising’ Jane (1982, p. 66). However, given the emphasis Brontë places on Rochester’s sacrifice and redemption I consider the use of the term is in keeping with its non-religious meaning and Rochester is simply expressing the intensity of his feeling and his overriding need for the one who is the totality of his heart’s earthly desires.
bigamy he expressed an awareness of Jane’s restraint and recognised the inhibiting effects of fear on her interactions with him. He tells her ‘you fear in the presence of a man and a brother—to smile too gaily, speak too freely, or move too quickly’ but adds that, ‘in time, I think you will learn to be natural with me’ (118). Here, Brontë refers to ‘natural’ as a state of being that is free of the restraints of fear. Rochester goes on:

‘then your looks and movement will have more vivacity and variety than they dare offer now I see at intervals the glance of a curious sort of bird through the close-set bars of a cage; a vivid, restless, resolute captive is there; were it but free, it would soar cloud-high.’ (118-9).

Now at Ferndean, no longer handicapped by fear, Jane lives out Rochester’s prediction. There is ‘no harassing restraint, no repressing of glee and vivacity with him; for with him I was at perfect ease’ (372). No longer the captive ‘bird of paradise’ Jane is at last able to be ‘natural’ with him. As she says, being in his company ‘brought to life and light my whole nature: in his presence I thoroughly lived’ (372). This sense of freedom and ‘naturalness’ echoes her sense of herself returning to Rochester as instinctively as ‘the messenger-pigeon flying home’ (360).

Jane proclaims her happiness to Rochester, ‘To be your wife is, for me, to be as happy as I can be on earth’ (379) and her ‘Reader, I married him’ (382) brings the marriage plot to what seems its logical conclusion. But Brontë writes beyond this. Providing a glimpse of Jane’s ten years of marriage, Brontë is able to presume the shape and substance of what a marriage of equal authority could be and what life between a woman and a man could be when their interactions are
shaped by mutuality and not by fear and female sexual subordination. This, according to Brontë, is the perfect union of man and woman—husband and wife:

I know no weariness of my Edward’s society: he knows none of mine, any more than we each do of the pulsation of the heart that beats in our separate bosoms; consequently, we are ever together. To be together is for us to be at once as free as in solitude, as gay as in company. We talk, I believe, all day long: to talk to each other is but a more animated and an audible thinking. All my confidence is bestowed on him; all his confidence is devoted to me; we are precisely suited in character—perfect concord is the result. (384)

This ‘perfect concord’ and Jane’s equality of authority would not be possible without Rochester being, to some extent, physically dependent on Jane and his independence curtailed.

After Jane’s and Rochester’s mutual authority has been settled and two years have passed Brontë signposts Jane’s freedom from fear of sexual subjugation with the moment Rochester realises his sight is returning. He asks ‘Jane, have you a glittering ornament round your neck?’ (384). This ‘ornament’ is the gold watch chain with which he threatened to keep her captive during the time of their betrothal:

... “when once I have fairly seized you, to have and to hold, I’ll just—figuratively speaking—attach you to a chain like this” (touching his watch-guard). “Yes, bonny wee thing. I’ll wear you in my bosom, lest my jewel I should tyne.” (231).

What once symbolised Rochester’s dominance and despotism and Jane’s enslavement she now wears freely, symbolising her liberation from that enslavement and from her fear. The transformed Rochester who was blind is now able to ‘see’ the transformed Jane who meets him with true mutuality of authority and absence of fear. The healing of Rochester’s sight represents the return to
balance in their relationship, as now Rochester will no longer be ‘tied’ to Jane but has, with the return of his vision, regained a measure of independence:

He cannot now see very distinctly: he cannot read or write much; but he can find his way without being led by the hand: the sky is no longer a blank to him—the earth no longer a void. When his firstborn was put into his arms, he could see that the boy had inherited his own eyes, as they once were—large, brilliant and black. On that occasion he again, with a full heart, acknowledged that God had tempered judgment with mercy. (384-5)

This portrait of perfect marital harmony and equality with its moment of ‘seeing’ brings the thematic arc of fear to its end and Brontë moves the novel toward its closure, tying off her various narrative threads with ‘one brief glance at the fortunes of those whose names have most frequently recurred in this narrative’ (383). Adèle, her ‘French defects’ (383) corrected, has become a ‘pleasing and obliging companion’ (383) and Diana and Mary Rivers have each found happiness with suitable husbands Finally, Brontë gives an accounting of St John’s missionary ventures.

The last paragraphs of *Jane Eyre* have been extensively discussed and, while the critical responses differ widely in their interpretations, what does seem to have consensus is that these paragraphs are concerned with St John and not with Jane. Charmian Knight (1998) referring to the final two paragraphs of *Jane Eyre* comments on what most critics have considered to be the focal point:

They centre not on the heroine, nor on her beloved husband but on the man she did not marry. This ‘disconcerting shift’ as if from major to minor some choose to ignore. (Knight p. 28)

Maria Lamonaca refers to the closing passage of *Jane Eyre* as ‘perhaps the most perplexing ending of any Victorian novel!’ (2002 p. 245) and Marianne
Thornmählen adds, ‘The shift from the happy domesticity of the Rochesters to the
dying missionary has puzzled readers for generations’ (1999 p. 217).

My reading differs somewhat from the consensual viewpoint that the
conclusion to *Jane Eyre* centres on St John Rivers. I argue that the final paragraph
of the novel is of far greater significance to Jane and her ‘rebellious’ marriage than
is its concern with St John. While it may be that the perceived shift of attention
to St John Rivers could seem disconcerting to some, from my reading Brontë’s
description of St John in these closing paragraphs hardly differs in emphasis from
Jane’s brief summary paragraph concerning the lives of Diana and Mary Rivers:
they marry, their husbands love them, they love their husbands and they are
happy. Similarly it takes one paragraph to recount St John’s ten years as a
missionary:

As to St John Rivers, he left England: he went to India. He
entered on the path he had marked for himself; he pursues it
still. A more resolute, indefatigable pioneer never wrought
amidst rocks and dangers. Firm, faithful, and devoted; full of
energy, and zeal, and ruth, he labours for his race: he clears their
painful way to improvement: he hews down like a giant the
prejudices of creed and caste that encumber it. He may be stern;
he may be exacting; he may be ambitious yet; but his is the
sternness of the warrior Greatheart, who guards his pilgrim
convoy from the onslaught of Apollyon. His 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.’ His is the ambition of the high master-spirit,
which aims to fill a place in the first rank of those who are
redeemed from the earth—who stand without fault before the
throne of God; who share the last mighty victories of the Lamb;
who are called, and chosen, and faithful. (385)

Despite the flurry of hyperbole in this exposition Brontë’s rhetoric is
unsentimental and matter of fact. Nevertheless, there is considerable irony in her
words. For instance, ‘the path’ St John ‘had marked for himself’ leading to his
‘mansion in heaven’ (319) was one of single-minded, cold ambition, ‘inexorable as death’ (304) and one which ‘pitilessly’ overlooked the “‘feelings and claims of little people’” (354). Ironic, too, is the quotation from Mark 8:34 ‘...let him deny himself ... ’ In following his missionary pathway, yearning ‘after the hour which should admit him to the city to which the kings of the earth bring their glory and honour’ St John has denied himself nothing and—unlike Rochester—made no sacrifice. Of course, what Jane is describing of her happy married life with Rochester is what St John may appear to have relinquished for ‘a mansion in heaven’ (319). Yet, as Jane realised at Moor House, there was never a place by the calm, domestic fireside for St John: ‘the humanities and amenities of life had no attraction for him’ (335). Even the woman he passionately desired was relinquished to another man with little more than a self-congratulatory sense of triumph at his ability to crush feeling with reason. In his icy ambition he eschewed earthly love, unable to fulfil Christ’s words from The Gospel According to St John (St John’s namesake) 15:12: ‘This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you’. Brontë describes a man merely following his long held ambition with no thought of or love for others. His character has not undergone any transformation; instead, at the end of his life he has followed to the letter the ‘unchanged and unchangeable’ (336) plan he propounded to Jane at Moor House.

What is of greater significance, however, is Jane’s opening sentence in the final paragraph of the novel:

St John is unmarried: he will never marry now. Himself has hitherto sufficed to the toil; and the toil draws near its close: his glorious sun hastens to its setting. (385)
As these words demonstrate, Jane is aware that St John ‘the good and faithful servant’ has come to the end of his life and his ‘great end’ has been secured without the assistance of a wife. The sacrifice of Jane’s life prematurely and the erasure of her identity demanded by St John with all his charismatic power was not, after all, a requirement for the realisation of his ‘sure reward, his incorruptible crown’. Pressing Jane to accept his marriage proposal St John resorted to spiritual intimidation. Importuning Jane to submit to him he bullied and coerced her in the ‘cause of God’ (343), insisting that God intended her to be his wife: ‘God and nature intended you for a missionary’s wife’ (343). In St John’s eyes she was ‘formed for labour, not for love’ (343) and without her labour his ambition could not succeed. He insisted Jane was provided by God to supply him ‘the means to the end’ (343), supplementing what he believed was his own inadequacy to the task. He schemed for the marriage believing it would bestow on him the ‘useful tool’ (354) crucial to his own salvation. ‘It is a long-cherished scheme’ he assured Jane when she begged him to abandon his idea of marriage, ‘and the only one that can secure my great end’ (348), the ‘sure reward’ of ‘his incorruptible crown’ awaiting him in the next life. Most brutally of all, he threatened Jane would be cut off from God and punished with spiritual ruination—even damnation—if his offer of marriage was rejected.

if you reject it, it is not me you deny but God. Through my means, He opens to you a noble career; as my wife only can you enter upon it. Refuse to be my wife, and you limit yourself for ever to a track of selfish ease and barren obscurity. Tremble lest in that case you should be numbered with those who have denied the faith, and are worse than infidels!’ (348)
These are hard words from a ‘cold, hard, ambitious man’ (319).¹

The acknowledgment by Jane that St John ‘will never marry now’ reveals his mendacity and vindicates her rejection of his proposal. She is released at once from his cruel malediction— that in her rejection of him she separated herself from her God. Jane’s disobedience to St John’s demands was not a rebellion against God as he claimed, and this revelation brings her absolution. Jane will shed no tears for St John. As she says ‘why weep for this?’ (385). St John has ‘No fear of death’ (385) as he goes eagerly with ‘steadfast’ (385) faith ‘into the joy of his Lord’ (385). Jane’s ‘human tears’ and her heart filled with ‘Divine Joy’ (385) on receiving St John’s last letter are not a homage to St John. They symbolise the reaffirmation of her connection to and her personal communication with God. When Jane speaks of ‘Divine Joy’ she is speaking of the joy arising from direct spiritual communion with God.² Just as Rochester’s ‘call’ appeared to be a personal answer to Jane’s prayer: ‘Show me, show me the path’ (357), this is Jane’s experience of God directly without the spiritual mediation of a man, despite the

¹ Carolyn Williams notes: ‘God’s will mediated through St John still feels like St John’s will. God’s voice mediated through St John sounds like St John’s voice’ (1989 p. 77).

² This is Divine Joy in Christ’s words, conveyed in The Gospel According to St John 15:11: ‘These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you and that your joy might be full’.

³ Maria Lamonaca argues that both Rochester and St John in putting forth their proposals to Jane asserted this was God’s will, ‘In resisting Rochester and especially the pious clergyman St John, Jane confronts a cherished Evangelical model of female piety – one based directly on Milton’s portrayal of Adam and Eve in Paradise Lost – that often represented women as incapable of discerning God’s will for themselves. “For softness she and sweet attractive grace;/He for God only, she for God in him”’. (2002, p. 247). Emily Griesinger shares Lamonaca’s perspective, considering that both Jane’s prayer for direction before she hears Rochester’s ‘call’ and ‘Jane’s rejection of St John’s proposal can be viewed as a remarkable (for Brontë’s day) assertion of women’s spiritual authority and an equally memorable rejection of the idea prominent among Victorians and still dominant in many conservative evangelical churches, that women must always be “under” the spiritual authority of men’ (2008, p. 53)
predominant Victorian Evangelical view that denied this to women. I argue that this is, essentially, a rebellious notion.

It is possible to read the final paragraph of *Jane Eyre* as a blessing for St John. For instance Pauline Nestor conceives the ending as a ‘funereal benediction from St John’ (1992, p. 94). However, in my reading, the absolution of Jane from her rejection of St John also brings a benediction to her life and love for Rochester. I argue that Brontë, in closing her novel with the Bible’s penultimate verse: Revelation 22.20 ‘Amen; even so come, Lord Jesus!’ evokes the last verse of the Bible: Revelation 22.21 ‘The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen’. This is the ultimate benediction; not only for Jane and her family but for the rebellion that enabled her to disobey St John and defy society’s expectations and marry the man she loves. As she says: ‘I hold myself supremely blest—blest beyond what language can express; because I am my husband’s life as fully as he is mine’ (384).

As Griesinger asserts ‘it is part of Jane’s triumph (and Brontë’s) to show how women’s sexual passion and fulfilment are legitimate within the Christian context’ (2008, p. 54). Jane is now a woman, free of fear, with confidence and strength in a loving marriage of mutually shared authority that is consecrated and blessed.

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9 Brontë inserted an exclamation mark (!) after the word ‘Jesus’, which is not in my copy of *The King James Bible*. 
CONCLUSION
My tale draws to its close (383)

The aim of this thesis has been to examine and analyse the function of fear and its nuances in the construction of text in Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre*. My study is based on the hypothesis that fear in *Jane Eyre* is the basis for significant trajectories of motivation, action, and plot and for the formulation of character. It has focused specifically on the manner in which fear—particularly Jane’s fear of sexual subjugation—provides a thematic arc across the novel from which Brontë develops the form and structure of the narrative. In my thesis I have traced the trajectory of this thematic arc from the beginning of the novel to its conclusion. Fear drives the plot from its appearance in the first pages of the novel when the ten-year old Jane describes the terror inspired by the abuse she experiences at the hands of her brutish cousin, John Reed, ‘every nerve I had feared him’ (8). It appears again as a subversive force that drives her fierce reaction to Reed’s violence leading to her incarceration in the red room, where fear expands and intensifies. This fear is also apparent at school at Lowood where the girls’ nascent sexuality is controlled and dominated by the Reverend Brocklehurst. It stalks Jane at Thornfield, manifesting in the hyena laugh of Bertha Rochester, and intrudes into her interactions with Rochester. It quickens in response to his apparent despotism after their betrothal. Fear reaches its greatest intensity during Bertha’s nocturnal manifestation in Jane’s bedroom two nights before Rochester’s attempted bigamous marriage.

When Jane flees Rochester and Thornfield she is driven by fear. At the village of Morton, starving and begging for food, she is shunned by the women
she encounters themselves afraid of the well-dressed beggar. When at last Jane finds her way to the home of her Rivers relatives she is exhausted, ill, and close to death. Stripped of pride, humiliated and humbled, she begins to refashion her identity. At Morton and Moor House Jane gradually overcomes her vulnerabilities and here Brontë begins the movement away from fear—the descending ‘other side’ of the thematic arc. Jane recovers family in St John, Diana, and Mary Rivers and is no longer alone, an orphan with no-one to ‘stand for her’. She inherits a modest fortune from her Uncle John Eyre in Madeira and sheds the status of poor relation that made her ‘less than a servant’ (9) at Gateshead and a dependent at Thornfield. No longer the ‘governess, disconnected, poor and plain’ (137) she is woman of independent means and ‘her ‘own mistress’ (370). Significantly, St John’s proposal of marriage enables her to embrace her own sensual nature and become aware of the impossibility of a marriage without sexual passion. As her fear of St John wanes so does his power over her. Once she recognises him as her ‘equal’ (346) she is empowered to resist his proposal of marriage with its requirement she ‘sacrifice’ herself in assisting his missionary work in India. Ultimately, when Jane makes her way back to the blind and broken Rochester, Brontë makes it clear in Jane’s address to the ‘reader’ that she has no fear of him, ‘reader, do you think I feared him in his blind ferocity?—if you do, you little know me’ (367).

The passage in Jane Eyre that most surely encapsulates my study is the scene at Ferndean when, two years into the ‘perfect concord’ of Jane and Rochester’s marriage, he reveals that his blindness is easing. ‘Jane, have you a glittering ornament round your neck?’ he asks. ‘I had a gold watch-chain: I answered, “Yes” (384). The gold watch chain Jane is wearing once symbolised the
(then) despotic Rochester’s intention to dominate and subjugate her. During their betrothal he made no bones about his aim to attach her ‘figuratively speaking’ (232) ... ‘—to a chain like this (touching his watch-guard)’ (231) once he had ‘fairly seized [her], to have and to hold’ (231). Now the watch-chain and its companion watch belong to Jane and the chain—transformed from a symbol of subjugation to a simple piece of jewellery—no longer represents Jane’s fear of the shackles of domination. It is timely that Rochester returns to ‘seeing’ and what he sees is a woman who is no longer fearful of domination, who regards her husband with mutual authority and equality of humanity. In this revelatory, symbolic movement away from fear, the long trajectory of the thematic arc of Jane’s fear of sexual subjugation, on which Brontë scaffolded her novel, reaches its conclusion.

Throughout the study, I have argued that the foremost of Brontë’s ‘mechanisms of fear’ is the fusion of the tropes of female Gothic—especially fear and its relationship to menarcheal, uterine, and vaginal symbolism—with her ‘Turkish’ tropes and motifs in which female sexual enslavement is implicit. This fusion is first represented during Jane’s incarceration in the red room at Gateshead and echoed throughout *Jane Eyre*. In the red room Brontë builds on the Oriental imagery she has presented on the first pages of the novel to create a sensual, female space, the *boudoir Turc*. Despite its opulence this space, symbolising female sexual maturity, is cold, solemn, and lonely and within it the child, Jane, is trapped and terrified. The red room, however, is not a woman’s room. It is the property of a man. The intersection of terror with images of female sexual maturity and the motifs of female enslavement is heightened by Brontë’s deployment of traditional Gothic tropes: a cold, deathly chamber, a mysterious light emerging from the dark night and the possibility of a ghostly manifestation.
Eventually, satisfied that ‘no jail was ever more secure’ (11) and overwhelmed with terror, Jane escapes from the red room into unconsciousness. With this symbolic set-piece I argue that Brontë establishes her theme—Jane’s fear of sexual subjugation—and begins the trajectory that traces this fear from the red room to the novel’s conclusion. The red room with its thematic elements of female sexual subjugation is re-imagined and the theme reiterated in several scenes throughout the narrative. At Thornfield in Bertha Mason’s nocturnal intrusion into Jane’s bedroom the red room is evoked as Jane faints ‘for only the second time’ (242) in her life. It is evoked again after the aborted wedding when Jane dreams of the maternal moon shining into the red room bidding her ‘flee from temptation’ (271). At Morton, the red room’s potent intersection of sensuality and female slavery is conjured in Jane’s fantasy of ‘delusive bliss’ with Rochester in ‘Marseilles’ (306). Referencing the red room layers each of these scenes with Jane’s fear of sexual subjugation initially established in the red room. In the movement away from fear at Moor House, liberated by her inheritance, Jane recreates her own red room. This new red room comes about through her own choices of what pleases her and those choices are made free from fear and from domination. This red room symbolises the empowerment of her sexuality outside of male domination. This is also a signifier that she is preparing to return to Rochester.

Another of the ‘mechanisms of fear’ Brontë deploys is that of distancing. She separates the couple in order to sustain the delicate balance between Jane’s growing feelings for Rochester and the fear of being possessed by him. In the Thornfield passages Brontë negotiates between Jane’s growing passion for Rochester after she puts out the fire in his bed and the possibility of fear driving
them apart once Jane becomes fully aware of the fragility of her position as a
governess ‘slave’ in love with her master. In order to balance the growth of
passion without the disruption that fear will cause, Brontë promotes physical
distance, briefly sending Rochester away from Thornfield to the Leas. This hiatus
provides Jane with an opportunity to resist the emotions that would lead her
inextricably ‘into miry wilds’ (137). Brontë physically distances the two at the
house party and creates emotional distance with the ploy of Rochester’s sham
intention of marriage to Blanche Ingram. While never dissipating the force of
Jane’s passion, the narrative strategy of distancing enables Jane to observe
Rochester with the painful yearning of unrequited love and, at the same time, his
apparent disregard keeps her from those ever threatening ‘miry wilds’. This
strategy creates jealousy—heightening Jane’s passion— while keeping the
possibility of fear of possession and domination at arm’s length. Later, after
Richard Mason has been injured by Bertha and a moment passes between Jane
and Rochester that has Rochester on the brink of declaring his feelings, Jane is
called to Gateshead to attend the dying Mrs. Reed. Brontë’s distancing
‘mechanism’ again prolongs and deepens Jane’s desire for Rochester and, at the
same time, delays an encounter with Rochester’s despotic ways. Once they are
betrothed, however, Jane becomes aware that Rochester is the despotic ‘sultan’
and that, as such, he threatens her independent identity, reigniting the old fear of
sexual subjugation. Ultimately, the revelation of Rochester’s intended bigamy
brings about the major separation that provides the necessary space for Jane to
overcome fear and to bring about the changes in Rochester that enable their
marriage to take place.
My reading of Bertha Mason Rochester makes space for the discourse of xenophobia and its emergence in Brontë’s treatment of the ‘decadent’ European women, who were Rochester’s mistresses and the French/Spanish Bertha. This is something that is neglected in other readings of Jane Eyre where the focus remains on the West Indian register within the novel. The issue first raised by Spivak (1985) that Brontë reproduces the axioms of imperialism in the negation of Bertha Rochester as the ‘Other’, a subaltern woman, at the expense of Jane, the white, imperialist metropolitan woman, has been viewed as problematic for feminist critics (Baym 1984.) However, my reading from the perspective of xenophobia shifts the emphasis from the ‘othering’ of Bertha by virtue of her racial (perhaps African/slave) origins, to an alignment of her with Rochester’s European mistresses and with the French (and possibly French/English) child Adèle Varens. In my reading, Jane's successful story in which she overcomes fear to live in happy mutuality with Rochester, does, indeed, come at the expense of the foreign ‘others’. With the exception of Adèle, the foreign women—French Céline, Italian Giacinta, German Clara and French/Spanish/English Bertha Antoinetta, even ‘dark as a Spaniard’ (147) Blanche Ingram, all of whom are contemptible in Rochester’s eyes, are necessarily negated in order for Brontë to contrive Jane's happy conclusion. Brontë makes it clear that although these women may be beautiful they are lacking in the qualities of character and intellect that, in Jane, are beloved by Rochester. For Adèle, although she is banished from the family home, it is merely her ‘French defects’ (383) that are negated and she becomes sufficiently ‘English’—‘docile, good-tempered and well-principled’ (383). This reading creates possibilities for some future engagement with Brontë’s xenophobia in the novel, potentially providing a new direction for
the Jane Eyre scholarship that has been concentrated on British imperialism since Spivak’s (1985) criticism.

Brontë uses the significant male characters in the novel: John Reed, The Reverend Brocklehurst, Edward Fairfax Rochester, and St John Eyre Rivers, in the construction and re-construction of Jane’s identity at the intersection of sexuality, gender and fear. These characters are presented as not only possessing deeply flawed personalities but each of them serves to embody differing forms of fear-based domination and control. In the case of John Reed, Jane’s subjective experience of fear is provoked by his domination of her with abuse and violence. Leaving Gateshead she escapes the threat he poses and when she returns after his death, she no longer holds any fear for either Reed or his dying mother. At Gateshead and at Lowood the contemptible Brocklehurst uses the fear of death in God’s name and the manipulation of shame, again in the name of God, in an effort to create obedience and docility in Jane and the other females in his charge. At Lowood, using shame, the fear of God and fear of Brocklehurst himself he dominates and controls the girls’ nascent sexuality ‘my mission is to mortify in these girls the lusts of the flesh’ (54). His hubris and neglect lead to his downfall but not before terrible damage has been done and the ‘typhus fever had fulfilled its mission of devastation at Lowood’ (70). Rochester dominates Jane through the manipulation of her emotions and sensual passion, until her terror at the possibility of losing what she adores brings her under his direct control. St John Rivers uses fear of God in an effort to control Jane and force her to submit to his demands and failing that, he brings emotional abuse to bear. His psychological cruelty toward Jane plays into her long held fear of not being loved. Of these ‘objects of fear’ it is only Rochester who undergoes transformation with his
change from a despotic ‘sultan’, redeemed by sacrifice, to a man capable of sharing authority with the woman he loves.

Brontë’s male ‘objects of fear’ are offset by men she depicts as kindly but weak or even ineffectual. First of these is, of course, her mother’s brother, the dead Uncle John Reed, whose attempt to care for the infant Jane incited jealousy and spite in his wife and led to her cruelty to the child after his death. At Gateshead, the kindly apothecary, Mr. Lloyd, is depicted as a good man but nevertheless he lacks the status and power afforded to a medical doctor. He does, at least, facilitate Jane’s departure from Gateshead and help clear her name when she is at Lowood. Jane’s other ‘Uncle John’, her father’s brother, although failing to support her in childhood is instrumental in preventing the bigamous marriage and providing the inheritance that grants her financial independence. John Reed, perhaps the most directly tyrannical and dangerous male character in the novel meets an ugly death by suicide, a negation as dramatic as Bertha’s plunge from the battlements at Thornfield. The power and domination of the other despotic males in the narrative are similarly (but not quite so painfully) negated. Brocklehurst is shamed and removed from power. St John labours in India without the helpmeet he believed was his by God’s will and dies a premature death, believing in the glory to come. No longer the powerful despotic ‘sultan’ but, maimed and partially blind, Rochester leads a godly life as Jane’s perfectly attuned companion—although Brontë leaves no doubt that his sexual potency and his appeal to Jane are still intact. Jane fears the subsumption of her ‘self’ and her identity to male power but, nevertheless, she is consumed by the erotic female pleasure aroused by the dominant man. Brontë is able to reconcile these
two—conflicting—female needs but only at the expense of Rochester’s physical impairment.

Asher heroine prevails against fear Brontë reverses some of her earlier symbols of fear and subjugation. With the creation of her own red room at Moor House Jane symbolically claims her sexuality without fear of subjugation. This is demonstrated by Brontë when Jane, returning to Rochester, has sufficient confidence to imagine herself daring to ‘accost him’ (367) and ‘to drop a kiss on that brow of rock and on those lips so sternly sealed beneath it’ (367). At Ferndean Brontë ceases to figure Rochester as the ‘sultan’ and the Turkish motifs are nowhere in evidence. Ashe tells her ‘Never mind fine clothes and jewels now: all that is not worth a fillip’ (380), demonstrating he is no longer concerned with dressing Jane in the silks and jewels that previously signified his ‘sultan’s’ ownership.

At various moments throughout the narrative Jane talks of being ‘natural’ and I argue that what is meant by this, is ‘as one is meant to be’, something only possible when there is freedom from fear. This is articulated by Rochester to Jane at Thornfield when he recognises her restraint: ‘you fear, in the presence of a man and a brother—or father, or master, or what you will—to speak too freely, or move too quickly’ (118). Imagining a future Jane who is unrestrained by fear he tells her, ‘I think you will learn to be natural with me’ (118). At Ferndean the ‘natural’ Jane is at last without fear and this is expressed as Rochester predicted. Being with him Jane is no longer a caged bird but soars high as Rochester’s ‘sky-lark’ (374), who talks freely, without the ‘harassing restraint’ (372) imposed by fear. She is at ‘perfect ease’ (372) and with him her ‘whole nature’ (372) comes to ‘life and light’.
What I have expanded upon in my thesis is a through line from the child’s fear in the first pages of the novel to the ending where Jane, a mature married woman, lives a life with the man she loves without fear of sexual subjugation. Throughout the narrative Brontë has negotiated different aspects of fear and different engagements of her heroine with fear. Brontë’s depiction of Jane as a fearful and timid child whose only defiance is borne of fear creates a tension with feminist notions of Jane as naturally rebellious, even though at one point Brontë lays out Jane’s position as someone who will only rebel when pressed too hard:

I know no medium: I never in my life have known any medium in my dealings with positive, hard characters, antagonistic to my own, between absolute submission and determined revolt. I have always faithfully observed the one, up to the very moment of bursting, sometimes with volcanic vehemence, into the other. (341)

I argue that throughout the novel it is Jane’s movement from fear and timid submissiveness to courage and an absence of fear, which drives the plot and unifies the narrative, creating an ending to the novel that is congruent with its beginning. My reading of Jane Eyre, is not the journey of a ‘saucy, rebellious girl’ who becomes a submissive wife. Instead, in my reading, Jane’s identity evolves from that of a timid, unloved, subjugated child who, in overcoming the restraining influence of fear, becomes a woman with the confidence and strength to step away from the rules of her patriarchal society into a loving marriage of mutually shared authority.

In Jane Eyre fear and rebellion are closely aligned. Just as Jane’s juvenile defiance of Mrs. Reed at Gateshead is a product of fear and her flight from Thornfield is driven by fear, so her adult rebellion is predicated on her freedom from fear. Once she overcomes her fear of St John and Rochester, Jane’s
numerous acts of rebellion and defiance emerge from her burgeoning fearlessness. Her first true rebellious act is her refusal of St John’s marriage proposal, entwined as it is within the powerful structures of religion and society. Her return to Thornfield is a rebellious act that is ‘lawless and unconsecrated’ (353) according to St John. Rebellious, too, are her fervent acknowledgment and honouring of her own need for sexual passion. Her retreat to Ferndean with Rochester is another form of rebellion, symbolically and materially positioning herself and her family outside the rules of her society—and the societal and religious demands of wifely self-sacrifice—that she defied in her striving for a marriage of mutual authority. Finally, at the close of the novel, in her experience of ‘Divine joy’ (385) and God’s blessing for her choice in marriage to ‘the reprobate’ Edward Fairfax Rochester, rather than the ‘chosen’ St John Rivers, Brontë demonstrates that Jane has the courage to rebel against the Evangelical teachings which would deny women the possibility of unmediated communion with their God.

Fear in *Jane Eyre* is compelling. First because Brontë so clearly and vividly signposts its significance from her first pages and second, because fear is a powerful, universal emotion that almost inevitably leads to drama and tension. Fear expands human consciousness and responses to fear inevitably mould and discover identity. It is not only Jane’s fear that Brontë deploys to create motivation and plot but that of other characters also. For instance, the Malthusian fear of beggars that Jane encounters in her ‘wanderings’ at Morton is deployed by Brontë as a way of maintaining Jane’s liminal state until she has been sufficiently humbled to begin the process of rebuilding her identity and self at Moor House and in the little school at Morton. Rochester, too, is ruled by the fear that his
pernicious secret, the mad wife he has hidden at Thornfield, will be revealed. This fear involves the quite reasonable concern that no governess would stay at Thornfield to educate Adèle ‘if she knew with what inmate she was housed’ (356).

More significant, of course, is his deception of Jane, guided by the fear she will reject him once the truth is revealed:

I was wrong to attempt to deceive you; but I feared a stubbornness that exists in your character. I feared early instilled prejudice: I wanted to have you safe before hazarding confidences. This was cowardly. (269)

Brontë seamlessly brings fear into play in the crafting of her narrative. She incorporates fear’s mechanisms from the outset to build plot, to formulate and develop and to signpost various aspects of character through action and motivation constructed on fear and its various nuanced representations. Importantly, she also demonstrates an understanding of the qualities that are necessary for an individual to dispel fear and live a ‘natural’ life, not ruled or governed by fear. What is revealed is Brontë’s extensive understanding of the workings of fear in human life, its genesis, its structure, its influence and its unequalled power to subjugate and control. Brontë also identifies fear in its physical manifestations: pallor and trembling, the fast beating heart, the faintness, the ‘convulsive grip’ (173) and the smile that freezes on the lips. She also represents fear in symbolic images such as the graveyard image reiterated in the churchyard at Thornfield before the wedding debacle.

Finally, my study with its focus of the centrality of fear in *Jane Eyre* has illuminated some aspects of the novel that have been under-studied previously, offering a reconsideration of the sexuality of the novel through an assessment of its engagement with Orientalism, which addresses an omission in the field of
Brontë scholarship. Her deployment of ‘Turkish’ motifs with their implicit eroticism facilitates a discussion of white slavery—specifically white female sexual enslavement—and complicates some feminist readings of sexuality and desire in *Jane Eyre*. My reading of Brontë’s Oriental tropes also questions postcolonial readings of *Jane Eyre* that assume Brontë’s ‘slavery’ metaphors are related solely to black, Caribbean slavery. Contained within my argument that fear is the primary emotion of the novel is a challenge to the commonly held focality of rage and rebellion assumed to be Jane’s inherent character traits and which are drivers of the narrative. In short positing fear as the primary emotion of the novel unravels the rage-based nexus between Jane and Bertha Mason and this, in turn, leads me to several alternative interpretations. For instance, departing from the notion that Bertha is Jane’s avatar opens up an alignment of Bertha with other European women and allows for an engagement with the previously under-studied discourse of xenophobia at work in the novel.

My thesis demonstrates that fear shapes the narrative and influences the construction of text in *Jane Eyre and* that fear is deployed by Brontë to create an internally coherent and consistent structure around which she organises her narrative. My study has articulated this cohesive structuring through the metaphor of a ‘thematic arc’ of fear spanning the novel from its first pages to its conclusion. In my tracing of this ‘arc’ the nuanced and complex mechanisms with which Brontë has layered the narrative with fear and the interplay of fear with trajectories of motivation, character development and plot, have become visible. The resolution of the narrative that emerges from this engagement with fear reveals a deeper and more unified structure to the novel than has been previously imagined by scholars.
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