

THE COLONIAL ETHOS OF JANE EYRE:

A FEMINIST RE-VISION

by

Colleen Heather Wood

B.A., Simon Fraser University, 1986

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF

THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department

of

ENGLISH

© Colleen Heather Wood 1997

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

February 1997

All rights reserved. This work may not be reproduced in whole or in part, by photocopy or other means, without permission of the author.



National Library
of Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Acquisitions et
services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-24273-0

Canada

APPROVAL

NAME: Colleen Heather Wood

DEGREE: Master of Arts (English)

TITLE OF THESIS: The Colonial Ethos of Jane Eyre:
A Feminist Revision

Examining Committee:

Chair: June Sturrock

Mason Harris
Senior Supervisor
Associate Professor of English

Andrea Lebowitz
Associate Professor of English

Marni Stanley
External Examiner
Instructor
Department of English and Women's Studies
Malaspina University College

Date Approved: _____

ABSTRACT

Jane Eyre is a colonial discourse that inevitably casts foreign culture as a dark, depraved, monitory image--the standard of evil against which Jane, the feminist heroine, must assert and reassert her Christian morals and British superiority in order to consolidate her sense of identity. To a significant extent, the progressive consolidation of Jane's sense of selfhood is linked to the regressive disintegration of her infamous "dark double," Bertha Mason. In my first chapter, I provide a critical overview of some of the more influential feminist analyses of the relationship between Jane and Bertha to argue that while "the madwoman in the attic" might function as a symbolic correlative of Jane's repressed anger against male authority, she also represents an aspect of colonialist ideology that promoted a hierarchical vision of racial domination and subordination in which all that was "English" was more precisely defined--and confirmed as superior--in contrast to all that was "foreign."

After providing a contextualized reading of several aspects of Jane Eyre that participate in the cultural politics of empire-building, I look closely at Bronte's figurative strategies for expressing her heroine's resistance against male sexual dominance. Significantly, it is in those scenes where Jane most urgently resists acquiescing to Rochester and St. John's masculine power that Bronte uses the polygamous custom of "the seraglio," the

sacrificial ritual of "suttee," and the image of a "noble savage" to emphasize the gravity of her heroine's predicament. In each of these three instances, Jane inscribes herself in the centre of a colonial metaphor in order to protect her sexuality and further consolidate her identity.

Jane's sense of selfhood is ultimately predicated on all that she is not: all that is non-white, non-British, and non-Christian. The undesirable character traits Bronte ascribes to non-British people, and her critical application of these same traits to the English characters who attempt to exclude her heroine from a legitimate sense of belonging, are an integral part of the narrative strategy to advance the protagonist's quest for increased autonomy within the confines of a systemically repressive, male dominated society.

DEDICATION

For my Daughter,

Dark Earth Willow-by-the-Brook

(Adrienne Gaea Witheford)

Re-Vision--the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction--is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. . . We need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us.

Adrienne Rich
"When We Dead Awaken:
Writing as Re-Vision"

Not many people doubted the rightness of Empire. . . The British knew that theirs was not a wicked nation, as nations went, and if they were insensitive to the hypocrisies, deceptions and brutalities of Empire, they believed genuinely in its civilizing mission. They had no doubt that British rule was best, especially for heathens or primitives, and they had faith in their own good intentions.

James Morris
Heaven's Command

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank Mason Harris for helping me negotiate the academic and bureaucratic intricacies of this project-- but mostly for understanding the realities of grad students who need to help their kids with geometry and pay last month's hydro bill. Thanks also to Andrea Lebowitz for several timely reality-checks.

My profound gratitude to Nick Witheford, companero of yesteryears, for survival--in every sense of the word.

To my medievalist mentors, Sheila Roberts and Mary Ann Stouck, thanks for helping me balance my humours--along with teaching, writing, and parenting crises.

To my comrades, Jim Tobler, Barb Brown, Wendy Plain, Michele Valiquette, Angus Cleghorn, Karolle Wall, Scott Yano and Darren Kitchen, Cheers! Without those regular debriefing sessions in "Darren's Office," I might have taken years to finish this.

Special thanks to my friends and neighbours at Mosquito Creek Housing Co-op: to Helga and Rolf Brauer, for the generous loan of their printer; to Joy Hayden, for the generous loan of her husband, Mark, who responded at all hours to my 911 computer-emergency calls.

And for appearing in my parking-lot at just the right time (the block between Chapter II and III), I thank my partner, Mike Grant, for inspiring me with laughter.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Approval	ii
Abstract	iii
Dedication	v
Quotation	vi
Acknowledgements	vii
Introduction	1
Chapter One	
English Governess/Colonial Madwoman: A Review of Feminist Readings of Jane/Bertha	9
Chapter Two	
The Colonial Ethos of <u>Jane Eyre</u> : Contextualizing the Early Victorian Colonialist Imagination	28
Chapter Three	
Literary Strategy I: Victorian Sexual Politics and the Sultan/Slave/Seraglio Triptych	61
Chapter Four	
Literary Strategy II: Sexual Politics, Widow Burning and Missionary Wives	83
Chapter Five	
Literary Strategy III: Twisting the Argument: Female Sexuality and the Noble Savage	110
Conclusion	122
Works Cited	132

Introduction

Jane Eyre occupies a position of prominence in the feminist literary establishment. The progressive struggle of a "disconnected, poor and plain" governess to assert her autonomy against the patriarchal authority embodied in John Reed, Brocklehurst, Rochester, and St. John Rivers is commonly regarded as a prototype for the development of a feminist consciousness, both on a personal and political level. Jane's tract on the roof of Thornfield Hall is applauded as the direct descendant of Mary Wollstonecraft's Vindication of the Rights of Woman:

. . . I climbed the three staircases, raised the trapdoor of the attic, and having reached the leads, looked out afar over sequestered field and hill, and along dim skyline--that then I longed for a power of vision which might overpass that limit; which might reach the busy world, towns, regions full of life I had heard of but never seen. . . It is in vain to say human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquility: they must have action; and they will make it if they cannot find it. Millions are condemned to a stiller doom than mine, and millions are in silent revolt against their lot. Nobody knows how many rebellions besides political rebellions ferment in the masses of life which people earth. Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel. . . (Bronte 140-141)

With this moving passage, Bronte's heroine establishes herself as a precursor of modern feminist revolt.

I read Jane Eyre as the struggle not of one but of two women--one an English governess; the other a West Indian wife--against patriarchal authority. But when I began to seriously consider the novel in its colonial context, it became apparent that at every turn of the plot the interests of one of these women are advanced at the expense of the

other. My thesis is that Jane Eyre is a colonial discourse that inevitably casts foreign culture as a dark, depraved, monitory image--the standard of evil against which Jane, the feminist heroine, must assert and reassert her Christian morals and British superiority in order to consolidate her sense of identity.

And by far the darkest monitory image that Jane confronts is Bertha Mason. Although she is technically a white Creole, we are emphatically led to believe that from the blood in her veins, to the swollen features of her face, to the dark colour of her hair, skin, and eyes, Bertha's racial and ethnic origins are distinctly inferior to the white Anglo-Saxon. Bertha is everything that Jane is not. She is large and dark; she is inarticulate; she has unmotivated outbursts of emotional and physical aggression; she is foreign-born; she is Rochester's legally bound wife. A large dark mass of snarling fury, Bertha is the polar opposite of the spritely, intelligent, and morally disciplined English governess. And this distinction is further advanced at the level of plot: whereas Jane, with remarkable acumen and resiliency of character, pursues and achieves a degree of autonomy within patriarchal society--largely realized through her egalitarian marriage to Rochester--Bertha, who is type-cast as genetically and therefore incurably insane, remains utterly dependent on the same man until she rather expediently leaps to her death from the roof of Thornfield Hall.

4

. . . She was on the roof, where she was standing, waving her arms above the battlements, and shouting out till they could hear a mile off. . . She was a big woman, and had long black hair: it [was] streaming against the flames as she stood. . . .[S]he yelled and gave a spring, and the next minute she lay smashed on the pavement. (453)

The story of Bertha Mason's violent demise is told through a second-hand account by the host of "The Rochester Arms." This distanced and disengaged perspective on Bertha's final silencing is in sharp contrast to Jane's inspirational speech about the confinement and silent rebellion of women-- a description of gender oppression that fits Bertha's predicament to a tee. But whereas Jane's eloquent first person expostulation piques our indignation and kindles our moral outrage at such uniform and widespread social injustice, Bertha's indecipherable screams and self-immolation from the same roof-top are presented as a recycled narrative of an event that took place over a year earlier. When Jane and Bertha's roof-top episodes are read against each other--one as an emotionally engaging call for social justice; the other as a remote and rather anti-climatic rendering of the most violent incident in the novel--it becomes apparent that Bronte's text posits an irreconcilably split perspective on these two female characters, and that this split is inscribed deeply within the novel's narrative structure.

When Jane Eyre is considered in its colonial context it becomes apparent that the interests of Jane, an English governess, are continually advanced at the expense of

Bertha, a colonial-born burden to her British husband--the man the novel's feminist heroine ultimately marries. Given the measures that Bronte takes to contrast and segregate Jane and Bertha--both literally and metaphorically--why is it that feminist readings, since the early 70's, have so often fused these two characters together, frequently defining Bertha as an innate aspect of Jane's psyche? In many cases, the lunatic Mrs. Rochester is read as embodying the rage that Jane struggles to repress in her encounters with gender oppression, particularly in terms of the restrictions inherent in the institution of marriage. The most influential work in this regard is Gilbert and Gubar's The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination. The authors call Bertha Jane's "truest and darkest double" and suggest that the madwoman even does what Jane wants to do (362). The argument that the psyches of these two characters are so inextricably bound that Bertha acts on behalf of Jane's subconscious desires pre-empts any effort to assess Bertha as a character in and of herself. The madwoman in the attic is thus not only an aspect of Jane's inner person, but also an extension of her will.

While Bertha Mason may well function as a dark monitory figure--an example of what happens to a woman who too freely expresses her anger and sexuality--there are serious implications in reading a Creole madwoman as an emotional subset of an English governess, particularly when the

current controversy about the historical complacency of the women's movement to confront the political imbalance between white women and women of colour is considered. That conventional feminist readings of Jane Eyre have tended to eclipse the cultural politics of Bertha's role as a representative of the dark colonial Other is an oversight that can be construed as evidence of such complacency. For feminists have tended to seize on the most dramatic aspect of Bertha's character, namely her madness, interpreting her insanity as a symbolic rage against patriarchal authority, frequently appropriating her anger as a symbolic correlative of Jane's psyche. But what seems to have gone relatively unnoticed is the fact that Bronte's madwoman is racially marked and repeatedly described as Jane's dark antithesis and inferior.

"Bertha" is the creative issue of a white, Anglo-Saxon, nineteenth century imagination and as such she is born out of a fundamentally racist set of values concerning the dark foreign Other. Readings that attempt to symbolically fuse the psyches of these two female characters together fail to register the significance of Bertha's racial markings, focusing instead on the progressive consolidation of the white feminist heroine's identity, while appropriating aspects of the not-quite-white woman's suffering, namely her madness, as a vehicle to discuss the white woman's struggle against male sexual dominance. While feminist readings may interpret Bronte's frequent juxtapositioning of Jane and

Bertha as a metaphorical fusion of these two characters' identities, this strategy of "fusion" reflects more of the values of late twentieth century feminisms which emphasize the universality of women's oppression than the historically different set of feminist assumptions, including the prevalent assumption of white Anglo-Saxon supremacy, that influenced Bronte's text.

The fusion of Jane and Bertha in some ways typifies a stage in the development of feminist ideology--at least in terms of white, middle-class feminist modes of thought. Over the last twenty-five years, many feminists have assumed the shared oppression of all women, universalizing the female experience of patriarchy through a seemingly monolithic Women's Movement. While the universalization of female oppression seems a benevolent enough gesture of solidarity, such a strategy in fact leaves little room for a critical perspective on difference and diversity among women themselves. And one of the key factors that the concept of a universally shared oppression frequently neglects to take into account is the issue of racial difference.

This thesis is about how "difference," in the form of the dark foreign Other, played a key role in consolidating the nineteenth-century definition of white female Selfhood by way of contrast, degradation, and erasure. It is about the creative process by which a nineteenth century white feminist constructs and individuates the indomitable voice of her heroine's Self. It is about a historical moment in

the development of a feminist consciousness that attempted to forge an identity for itself through a strategic and selective manipulation of the two dominant and intimately intertwined discourses of the day: Christianity and colonialism. But most of all, this thesis is about revision, a re-entering of a deeply cherished text from a new critical direction to more fully understand some of the assumptions that have influenced our ever transforming sense of ourselves as feminists. While I will go on to provide a contextualized reading of Jane Eyre, and then examine the strategic intersections between the novel's colonialist and feminist trajectories in some detail, let me first present a critical overview of feminist readings of the relationship between Jane and Bertha. For the political dynamic between these two female characters is fundamental to understanding how the colonial ethos of the novel contributes to the consolidation of Jane's identity, and complicates our historical sense of what it meant to be a feminist in the nineteenth-century.

Chapter One

English Governess/Colonial Madwoman:
A Review of Feminist Readings of Jane/Bertha

A quick scan of any annotated bibliography on Jane Eyre indicates that late twentieth century feminists have generated a considerable corpus of critical writing on Bronte's madwoman. And while there is an endless variety of creative and critically incisive approaches to Bertha's character and function in the novel, there also seems to be a general concensus that the madwoman is pivotal to Jane's progressive movement towards establishing a sense of her autonomous Self--a concensus with which I basically agree. However, the "madwoman in the attic" seems to have crystallized into a symbolic correlative of Jane's inner fears and frustrations about gender oppression. While the madwoman might well represent an aspect of Jane's repressed anger against male authority, she also represents an aspect of colonialist ideology that promoted a heirarchical vision of racial domination and subordination in which all that was "English" was more precisely defined--and confirmed as superior--in contrast to all that was "foreign."

Bronte's frequent juxtapositioning of Jane and Bertha readily lends itself to feminist analyses that metaphorically fuse the identities of these two female characters together, and transform Bertha's struggle with Rochester, to a greater or lesser extent, into an aspect of Jane's struggle to maintain her autonomy in a relationship with the same man. But the explicit racializing of the madwoman from the colonies also plays a key role in the overall consolidation of the feminist heroine's white Anglo-

Saxon Protestant identity and helps legitimate her claims to increased access to the privileges enjoyed by her male compatriots. In other words, there is a strategic link between the text's nineteenth-century feminist agenda and the inherently racist perspective of colonialist ideology.

While this thesis will go on to historically contextualize Bronte's strategic application of colonial discourse to further the cause of her heroine, this chapter will highlight some of the more influential twentieth century feminist analyses of the relationship between Jane and Bertha. For what an overview of these writings suggests is that the "madwoman in the attic" has not been adequately dealt with as a character in and of herself; that is, the particularities of Bertha's identity that Bronte so carefully crafts--such as her ambiguous racial origins, her racially-determined mental disorder, her affiliation with the decadence of the crumbling colonial aristocracy--seem to be of marginal importance compared to the highly generalized interest in her "rage" as a symbol of the feminist heroine's progression towards autonomous selfhood.

As to be expected, feminists have paid much attention to the inter-female relationships in Jane Eyre. In many cases, the women characters in the novel are seen as part of a larger, sisterly (or maternal) network of support from which Jane derives emotional sustenance. But while there has been a lot of discussion of the complementary and positive aspects of Bronte's depiction of female bonding, less notice

has been directed towards the various inequities and tensions inherent in the novel's female interactions--the most immediately pertinent one being the conflicting, perhaps even competing, needs of an English governess and a Creole madwoman. This oversight is at least partially due to two influential tendencies of feminist discourse in the 70s: the tendency to idealize female relationships in the name of "Sisterhood" (a universal antidote to the universal patriarchy), and the resistance against phallogocentric psychologizing about women's mental health and sexist standards of female 'normalcy.' Both of these trends found their way into feminist literary criticism, and they converge in a number of the most popular readings of the relationship between Jane and Bertha.

One very clear example of the idealization of the female bond in literary criticism is The Female Imagination, in which Patricia Meyer Spacks writes about Bronte's superior ability to depict non-competitive, politically unproblematic relationships between women. Citing the bond between Jane and Helen as an example, Spacks writes:

Charlotte Bronte also succeeds remarkably . . . in depicting noncompetitive relationships between women . . . In many ways [she] conveys her conviction that intimacy between women may be more profound, more balanced, than any union possible between the sexes. (Spacks' emphasis 71-72).

Spacks clearly implies that Jane and Helen's friendship encompasses a highly idealized perfect female bond--a bond in which "the problem of power in no way intrudes into the relationship" (71). While Spacks' analysis of the inherent

harmony in the relationship of Jane and Helen seems plausible enough, it is difficult to extend this approach much further. With the possible exception of Diana and Mary, Jane has ambivalent feelings about all of the other female characters in the novel--including her Aunt Reed, Georgina, Eliza, Miss Temple, Mrs. Fairfax, Adele, Grace Poole, Blanche Ingram, and, most dramatically, Bertha Mason. In fact, Jane's interactions with these characters are sometimes hostile and highly competitive. While Jane's relationships with her Reed cousins and Blanche Ingram are the most obvious examples of this, her early interactions with Mrs. Fairfax suggest a certain degree of tension among domestic servants--a reader might ask, for instance, does Jane, as governess, have an equal or superior position to Mrs. Fairfax, the senior housekeeper of Thornfield Hall? And certainly her initial encounter with Hannah, the rather narrow minded and simple servant at Moor House, emphasizes Jane's social superiority by virtue of her more genteel and diplomatic manner--behaviour indicative of the skills she acquired through her education and grooming as a governess. All of these examples suggest that there is an implicit tension in the majority of inter-female relationships in the novel.

In "Jane Eyre: Temptations of a Motherless Woman," Adrienne Rich emphasizes a sisterly networking between all the female figures in Jane Eyre, suggesting that even Bertha plays a supportive role in preventing Jane from marrying

Rochester. Rich argues that while Jane initially lacks maternal guidance--or "the image of a nurturing or principled or spirited woman on whom she can model herself"--she finds surrogate mothers through many of her encounters with other women. Rich writes:

Bessie, Miss Temple, Helen Burns, even at moments the gentle housekeeper Mrs. Fairfax, have acted as mediators for her along the way she has come thus far; even, it may be said, 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. Individual women have helped Jane Eyre to the point of her severest trial; at that point she is in relation to the Great Mother herself. (Rich 102).

However, if one looks closely at the novel, real female supportiveness goes only in one direction: towards Jane. Perhaps only in the case of Helen Burns, who dies in Jane's arms, can we see a substantial reciprocity in emotional support. Despite this, Rich posits an essential female bond between Jane and all of the other female characters--including Bertha--that miraculously transcends the fact that Rochester's incarcerated West Indian wife is shown next to no compassion for her particularly intense kind of suffering.

Rich's formulation of an ideal bond and natural emotional networking between the female figures in Jane Eyre prompted a number of feminist studies that also focused on the dynamics between Bronte's female characters. Emphasizing the importance of female communities and relationships, a number of feminists have regarded Bertha as an implicit part of Jane's network of support because the madwoman's rage

seems gender specific. For Bertha compulsively commits outrageous acts of violence against men--and only men. The madwoman's proclivity towards violence against men contrasts against her apparent disinterest in hurting women, which causes some feminists to read Bertha's attitude towards Jane as implicitly understanding and sympathetic. In "Bertha Mason and Jane Eyre: The True Mrs. Rochester" (1978), Karen Mann argues that Bertha's rage "is the outward expression of malevolence bred by a system which denies her a separate will and imprisons her in a marriage that is primarily a monetary bargain" (33), and that "there is a kind of sympathy in a situation between Jane and Bertha which, strangely enough, keeps the latter from harming the woman who will replace her as Mrs. Rochester" (33). This line of reasoning about Bertha as a sympathetic mother figure persists into the 80's with Pauline Nestor's Female Friendships and Communities: Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell (1985). More or less reiterating Rich's thesis, Nestor writes that Jane has an inner craving

. . . which is met by a nourishing, supportive maternal capacity in a series of female figures who populate her pilgrimage and, more broadly, in a prevailing female presence in the natural world. (108).

And, in "Once More to the Attic: Bertha Rochester and the Pattern of Redemption" (1986), Gail B. Griffin writes from what might best be described as a New Age feminist perspective:

Bertha is an Earth Mother figure, highly sexual and capable of the destruction that is inseparable from

creation and new birth. For Bertha's name also conspicuously contains the word "birth," more directly suggesting that she is another mother figure for the orphan Jane. Bertha is at once the angry orphan of Jane's past, imprisoned within the "disciplined and subdued character" that leaves Lowood, but also one of the maternal spirits creating Jane's future--helping Jane give birth to herself. (92).

While the fact that Bertha does not harm Jane may signify a sympathetic gesture, it is an anticipatory gesture that may also be a technical requirement of the plot and part of Bronte's strategy for building suspense. It seems imperative to me that Bertha's haunting presence be prolonged and felt in subtle gradations in order to preserve the overall gothic flavour of the narrative. For if Bertha were to attack Jane so early in the novel, the complexity and climax of the mystery in the room at the top of the stairs would be short-circuited.

While Spacks, Rich, Mann, Nestor and Griffin each have their own particular bent on Bertha's role in the novel, they all set a universally understood female bond of sisterly good will against the political corruption of a male dominated world. Feminist readings of Jane and Bertha have been deeply affected by this tendency to idealize female relationships to the point that the very particular personal histories Bronte crafts for these two characters are all but erased, and the possibility of seeing conflict, or a power imbalance, between an English governess and a Creole madwoman is virtually eclipsed in Bronte's text.

In addition to a marked tendency to idealize female relationships, the writers discussed above also introduce

another very important aspect of feminist ideology in the 70s: they attempt to redefine female rage as a form of political resistance against patriarchy. Feminists in the 70s focused critical attention on traditional psychological paradigms about female anger and discontent; the slogan "we're not mad, we're angry" encapsulated feminist concerns about the connection between a woman's mental health and her restricted and devalued social role. In Women and Madness (1972), Phyllis Chesler argues that psychologists define the 'normal' woman as a housewife content with a life of passivity and limited authenticity, and that psychotherapy reflects a socialization process that teaches women to devalue themselves and repress their anger. As Barbara Hill Rigney puts it in her book, Madness and Sexual Politics in the Feminist Novel: Studies in Bronte, Woolf, Lessing, and Atwood (1978), "that which is considered normal and desirable behaviour for men is thought to be neurotic or even psychotic for women" (3). More succinctly she states: "Most feminists see madness, first, as a political event" (6).

Re-defining female rage as a form of political resistance as opposed to a psychological abnormality prompted a surge of interest in Bronte's madwoman in feminist literary circles. While the most popularly acclaimed and influential study of Bertha's role is Gilbert and Gubar's The Madwoman in the Attic, there are a number of earlier works that, similar to Gilbert and Gubar, stress a

significant link between Jane's psyche and Bertha's rage. The common denominator in these writings is that the madwoman's rage becomes an aspect of Jane's inner self and a necessary component of her emerging feminist consciousness.

Claimed and celebrated as a vital part of raising feminist consciousness, Bertha's rage came to represent a powerful resistance to the sexist hierarchy that seeks to restrict women to a subordinate social position. The "madwoman in the attic" is a feminist metaphor not simply for the extreme psychological and physical torment that women suffer under patriarchy, but also for the implicit and omnipresent threat to the male hegemony that defines all-things-female as a degraded by-product of a phallogocentric universe. For Bertha's anger is understood as endemic not merely to Rochester's house, but to Everyman's house, to Everyman's marriage, and to Everyman's sexuality. Thus to read Bertha's rage from a feminist perspective focuses the issue of women and madness in terms of political resistance, and the madwoman's anger becomes an integral part of all women's struggle to maintain their personal autonomy in the face of patriarchal authority.

Yet the emphasis on "the madwoman in the attic" as a universal symbol of suffering and rebellion glosses over a particular aspect of her character that is far from incidental to her illness. While there is no doubt that Bertha's rage against the males who attempt to contain her is critical to a feminist reading of the text, the

madwoman's dis-ease with her patriarchal keepers (her husband and her brother) is explicitly rooted in her ambiguous racial origins--a genetic predisposition towards alcoholism, sexual promiscuity, and madness from which her Creole brother also suffers. Although the text offers a basic, biological explanation for Bertha's madness, many feminist readings have overlooked this point and interpreted her violent actions as a form of political resistance against male authority. While such interpretations are valid enough, they again fail to register the significance of the racial particularities Bronte accords Bertha's character. The text's racial marking of Bertha's madness is erased and subsumed by the ostensibly larger, more universally relevant, political struggle against the patriarchy.

The subsumation of Bertha's racial aspect by a feminist agenda is evident in the popular tendency to metaphorically fuse Jane and Bertha together, appropriating the madwoman's rage as an unconscious aspect of the protagonist's psyche. One of the first feminist literary critics to fuse Jane and Bertha in the context of women, madness, and Victorian sexual ideology was Elaine Showalter. In her book A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists From Bronte to Lessing (1977), Showalter explains that the Victorians were horrified by the spectre of the sexually impassioned woman, and she argues that Bronte externalizes the division of the Victorian female psyche into mind and body through the characters of Helen Burns and Bertha Mason, who on some

level represent the opposite poles of Jane's fragmented inner self (113). Whereas Helen signifies intellect and spirituality, the madwoman represents the irredeemable sins of the flesh. Accordingly, Bertha's death represents "the purging of the lusts of the flesh," and that "this must precede any successful union between Jane and Rochester" (122). Most importantly, Jane can only truly become her own person "when she destroys the dark passion of her own psyche" (122).

Another relatively more psychoanalytic approach to Jane/Bertha is Barbara Hill Rigney's Madness and Sexual Politics (1978). Similar to Showalter, Rigney pursues the connections between insanity and sexual politics, and she argues that "madness is, to a greater or lesser degree, connected to the female social condition" (Rigney 7). But Rigney makes the psychological link between Jane and Bertha even more directly than Showalter. In "The Frenzied Moment: Sex and Insanity in Jane Eyre" she writes:

. . . Bertha is as much a doppelganger for Jane as for Rochester: she serves as a distorted mirror image of Jane's own dangerous propensities toward "passion," Bronte's frequent euphemism for sexuality. Bertha embodies the moral example which is the core of Bronte's novel--in a society which itself exhibits a form of psychosis in its oppression of women, the price paid for love and sexual commitment is insanity and death, the loss of self. (Rigney 16)

Showalter and Rigney helped pave the way for Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's famous reading of Jane and Bertha in "A Dialogue of Self and Soul: Plain Jane's Progress" (The Madwoman in the Attic 1979), which presents the first fully

developed approach to the symbolic fusion of the governess and the madwoman. Gilbert and Gubar's central thesis is that the problems Jane encounters on her journey from childhood to maturity

. . . are symptomatic of difficulties Everywoman in a patriarchal society must meet and overcome. . . Most important, her confrontation, not with Rochester but with Rochester's mad wife Bertha, is the book's central confrontation, an encounter . . . not with her own sexuality but with her own imprisoned "hunger, rebellion, and rage," a secret dialogue of self and soul on whose outcome . . . the novel's plot, Rochester's fate, and Jane's coming-of-age all depend. (339).

Similar to Showalter, Gilbert and Gubar argue that "until the literal and symbolic death of Bertha," Jane cannot achieve a marriage of equality with Rochester, and she cannot be whole within herself (Gilbert and Gubar 362). That Bertha is Jane's "truest and darkest double" (360) has become an axiom of feminist literary theory.

While there has been some substantial criticism of Gilbert and Gubar's underlying methodology (Jacobus 517-522; Moi 57-69), they have nevertheless inspired countless other feminist academics to pursue studies in 19th century literature. In so far as it attempts to explicate a feminist aesthetic in the works of women writers, The Madwoman in the Attic also represents, as Pauline Nestor puts it, "a significant advance in theoretical sophistication for feminist literary criticism" (Charlotte Bronte's "Jane Eyre" 25). Although they do not agree with every aspect of Gilbert and Gubar's approach, high calibre scholars such as Margaret

Homans and Mary Poovey have been influenced by The Madwoman's analysis of Bertha Mason.

Instead of framing her discussion in the more conventional terms of Jane's individual maturation process, à la Gilbert and Gubar's "Plain Jane's Progress," Margaret Homans suggests that Bronte offers her protagonist no fixed or uncontradictory central 'Self'--one minute a wailing child in a dream, the next a governess "disconnected, poor and plain," the next a madwoman setting fire to her husband's bed, the next a lonely wanderer who confronts starvation and death through exposure to the elements, the next a fledgling missionary studying Hindustani--Jane's 'identity' is always provisional and fleeting ("Dreaming of Children: Literalization in Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights" [1983]). From Homan's perspective, Jane's deepest fears and most subversive wishes concretely manifest themselves in Bertha, the 'real' Mrs. Rochester, who represents the subject position that Jane will quite literally come to occupy herself. 'Bertha' is the "actualization of [Jane's] imagination," or the "literalization of one of her subjective states" (258). In this reading, Bertha does not exist as a distinct character: she is a purely formal construct, a contentless cipher lacking pith and humanity--an imaginary apparatus possessing no valency other than as a "literalization" of Jane's turbulent psyche.

To empty Bertha of all signification other than that which conforms to Jane's subjective needs is a very tenuous

theoretical perspective: for it entirely collapses the personal history Bronte so carefully crafts for Bertha into one of Jane's fragmentary "subjective states." Such a process erases the very features that Bronte so distinctly accentuates in the madwoman: her ethnicity and ambiguous racial origins. Once again, Bertha's mental illness is a type of "moral madness" (see Shorter The Brontes: Life and Letters 383-384) that Bronte very specifically roots in her Creole blood and background. While she certainly could never be a black Jamaican--for the obvious reason that marriage to a British subject such as Rochester would be utterly unthinkable--neither, by virtue of her affiliation with a foreign culture, could she ever be unequivocally white. Racist assumptions about moral laxity, such as a predisposition towards alcoholism and sexual promiscuity, in non-white peoples and non-British cultures was intrinsic to the colonial ethos that was gathering force and legitimacy in early Victorian England, and consideration of the colonial context of Jane Eyre is fundamental to understanding the complex psychological and political dynamic between Jane and Bertha. This seriously complicates feminist readings that eclipse Bronte's emphasis on racial and ethnic distinction and then appropriate the sufferings of a West Indian madwoman to dramatically enhance an English governess' personal success story.

While Homan's theory of literalization does take some notice of the social and economic dilemmas confronting

Victorian women, it is clear that her concerns are primarily literary, and that contextual analysis is not her priority. This is quite the opposite case in Mary Poovey's Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England (1988). In her chapter, "The Anathematized Race: The Governess and Jane Eyre," Poovey emphasizes the power imbalance and competitive nature of relations between women of different socio-economic classes in Victorian society. However, she does not appear to question the conventional feminist approach that 'forgets' Bertha's ethnicity and figures the madwoman as an aspect of Jane's repressed anger. After stating that Bertha is "Jane's surrogate by virtue of her relation to Rochester" (139), she argues that throughout Jane Eyre:

. . . anger and violence are transferred from one set of characters to another, revenge is displaced from Jane's character, and agency is dispersed into the text. (139)

And she further explains:

Because there was no permissible plot in the nineteenth century for a woman's anger, whenever Bronte explores this form of self-assertion the text splinters hysterically. . ." (141).

So "Bertha" would be an example of a hysterical splintering in the text. But what Poovey's analysis neglects to take into account is that while the expression of anger was culturally denied to middle-class British women, in the Victorian scheme of things female rage--and certainly female sexual appetite--could find a perfectly permissible plotline if the woman in question was from a foreign country and of

ambiguous racial descent. While the displacement of anger in Bronte's text may well be the result of the repressed frustrations of Victorian middle-class women, it is highly significant that this anger finds its 'voice' through the lunatic ravings of a Creole madwoman. In other words, female rage and rampant sexual desire is not displaced onto a politically neutral textual landscape, but fundamentally connected to a racist and ethnocentric portrayal of a non-white, at least not-quite-white, woman from the colonies.

While Poovey does remark on the racial distinction between Jane and Bertha, she problematizes "race" in Jane Eyre only in terms of Rochester's male perspective, and not as something inherent in Victorian colonial ideology and cultural politics. While she is quick to declare the degradingly racist comparisons that Rochester makes between English women and women from foreign cultures, she invests Jane with a morally superior clarity of vision that perceives an essential "likeness" between herself and women of diverse race and class backgrounds. Poovey observes that Rochester's strategic emphasis on the difference between Jane and his past sexual conquests does little to inspire Jane with confidence in his intentions:

. . . Jane immediately sees that if she assents to Rochester's proposal, she will become simply "the successor of these poor girls." She sees, in other words, the likeness that Rochester denies: any woman who is not a wife is automatically like a governess in being dependent, like a fallen woman in being "kept."
(146)

Poovey goes on to argue that Jane's recognition of the "likeness" between herself and "this series of aberrant women" (146) is subversive because it "highlights the dependence of all women" (146). But, as my following chapters will demonstrate, Jane cannot possibly see her relationship with non-British women with politically disinterested eyes. Instead she selectively appropriates and metaphorically reconstructs any semblance of likeness between herself and the dark foreign Other to advance her own self interests.

So contrary to many other feminist approaches to Bronte's text, my reading of the relationship between Jane and Bertha foregrounds the dissimilarities of these women to argue that Bertha is not an unmediated symbolic extension of Jane's true inner self, but more complexly functions as a projection of the dark foreign Other against which Jane can define her emerging sense of autonomy as still white, still British, and (perhaps above all else) still Christian. For when the relationship between these two women is placed in its colonial context it becomes apparent that Jane is Self and Bertha is Other. The boundaries of race are clearly delineated--indeed exaggerated--in the interests of Jane's self-definition. But, as this chapter has shown, in many feminist readings Bertha becomes an innate aspect of Jane's personality and the boundaries of race become blurred: the particularities of Bertha's race and ethnicity are collapsed into Jane's ostensibly more universal (qua valuable)

struggle for personal autonomy. My key point is this: to read Jane Eyre outside of its colonial context ironically overlooks--right along side of Bronte's 19th century heroine--that Bertha leaps to her death from the roof of Thornfield Hall, the very place from which her white counterpart had so passionately expounded on the subjugation of women.

Chapter Two

The Colonial Ethos of Jane Eyre: Contextualizing
the Early Victorian Colonialist Imagination

The main battle in imperialism is over land, of course; but when it came to who owned the land, who had the right to settle and work on it, who kept it going, who won it back, and who now plans its future--these issues were reflected, contested, and even for a time decided in narrative. As one critic has suggested, nations themselves are narrations. The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them. (Said Culture and Imperialism xii)

Nineteenth century colonialism was a political and economic project that required an investment of imagination--an investment which profoundly shaped British culture. Fundamentally Christian and highly moralistic, imperial culture spent much of its creative energy aestheticizing the harsh injustices endemic to the actual relations between the colonizer and the colonized. Frequently set against the exotic backdrop of foreign people and places, Victorian narratives both implicitly and explicitly espoused the cultural politics of Empire building. Literary representations of the dark foreign Other customarily inferred the comparative superiority of the British citizenry, the Christian faith, and England's ostensibly more advanced and enlightened educational, judicial, and governmental agencies. As a popular cultural medium, the novel contributed to the gradual consolidation of England's national identity as the Imperial centre of the civilized world. As Gayatri Spivak puts it:

It should not be possible to read nineteenth-century British literature without remembering that imperialism, understood as England's social mission, was a crucial part of the cultural representation of England to the English. The role of literature in the

production of cultural representation should not be ignored (243).

Yet while cultural representations of English colonial domination were manifestly apparent in the decade leading up to the publication of Jane Eyre (1847), the British were not consciously articulating a comprehensive program of colonial expansion. By Victoria's Diamond Jubilee (1897), England commanded an astounding Empire--one quarter of the earth's land, and one third of the global population--but just sixty years earlier a national sense of Self-as-Empire had not yet congealed (Morris 23-29). In Heaven's Command: An Imperial Progress, James Morris argues that when Victoria ascended the throne (1837), the British were not "thinking in imperial terms" (23-29); they were more immediately concerned with domestic turbulence and transformation apropos of the Reform Bill of 1832, and the rise of an increasingly organized and militant labour movement. Generally speaking, early Victorians were more engaged with the expansion of their railway than with the expansion of their colonial dominion.

Yet all of this domestic turbulence diverted national attention from the grim atrocities of the ongoing British annexation of foreign lands and people. Although slavery was technically abolished in 1834, it had supplemented the British economy for two hundred years. Eighteenth-Century cartographers

. . . divided West Africa quite naturally by commodities--the Gold Coast for minerals, the Ivory Coast for elephant tusks, the Slave Coast for human

beings (Morris 33).

Jamaica was one of the most important slave colonies; it had endured nearly two centuries of British appropriation of its natural resources and abuse of its people (Morris 34). After seven centuries of resistance, the Irish were still fighting against English political and economic domination; there were more well-tempered colonies in Canada, settlements in Australia, and outposts in Singapore and the Falkland Islands (Morris 34). For even in 1837

. . . there did exist a British Empire of sorts, an inchoate collection of territories acquired in bits and pieces over the generations, administered partly by the Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, partly by great chartered companies. It was an unsystematic affair, an empire in abeyance, possessing no unity of purpose or sense of whole. . . (Morris 26).

So while the British 'Empire' existed in excruciatingly real terms for its subjects abroad, it was in large part not realized by the English themselves. There was a dawning awareness or, as Morris calls it, a "vague sentiment" of Empire, which did not develop into a popular national conviction until the 1850's, and finally into a full blown British obsession in the 1870's.

Given this apparent lack of imperial consciousness, it may seem somewhat incongruous to discuss the colonial ethos of Jane Eyre--to argue that the cultural politics of Empire building constitute a compelling force behind the book. But it is also the case that while the British had not yet consciously articulated their mission as world colonizers, the insignia of their long history of piecemeal imperial

conquests was indelibly stamped on every facet of English life:

Beyond the Tower the East India and West India docks were thronged with masts and riggings; in the warehouses of the Hudson's Bay Company the beaver pelts and fox skins were piled in their lucrative thousands . . . Gatepost pineapples, Hindu cannons in the Tower of London, gilded domes upon a country house, an exotic grave in a country churchyard, an unpronounceable battle honour upon a regimental standard: such small encrustations upon the island fabric were symptoms of the imperial instinct that lay fallow there, momentarily subdued. . . (Morris 28-29).

Colonialism is no more a consciously articulated theme in Jane Eyre than it was in the cultural milieu of the early Victorians. Yet just as London's gatepost pineapples and exotic tombstones are cultural emblems of English forages into foreign territories, there are many levels of representation in Bronte's narrative where "symptoms of the imperial instinct. . . lay fallow." While my following chapters will establish critical connections between Jane's feminist struggle for personal autonomy and England's emergent sense of itself as Empire by closely examining Bronte's use of colonial metaphors in a bid to legitimate the claims of a nineteenth century feminist perspective, I will presently focus in some detail on the broader imperialist axiomatics of Bronte's text.

Jane Eyre is permeated with allusions to foreign places, people, and things. There are extensive references to India, Ireland, the Orient, North America, and the West Indies. Rochester's mistresses are from France, Italy, and Germany; indeed, as I will later discuss, much of what

Rochester must atone for is closely related to his intimate associations with foreign cultures. The inhospitably cold Canadian climate, a painting of the death of Wolfe, and fashion accessories such as the gray beaver bonnets with ostrich plumes worn by Brocklehurst's daughters--Jane herself wears a plain beaver bonnet--are mentioned in passing. Jane's inheritance from her uncle John comes largely from his wine industry in Madeira, but he was also the business correspondent of the Mason estate in Jamaica. In fact, the movement of capital throughout Jane Eyre is generated by the economics of colonialism. These are just some of the multitude of seemingly insignificant tiny details--the "gatepost pineapples"--that comprise the fabric of Jane Eyre, and show how quotidian the acquisition of foreign territories, and the absorption of exotic fragments from these cultures, had become to British society.

This commonplace fascination with foreign landscape and exotic culture is further emphasized in both the introduction and conclusion of Jane Eyre. The novel opens with Jane enveloped by "red moreen curtains", while sitting "cross-legged, like a Turk" in the window seat. She is contemplating pictures in Bewick's History of British Birds that suggest to her the bleak shores of Lapland, Siberia, Spitzbergen, Nova Zembla, Iceland, and Greenland. Jane reflects:

Of these death-white realms I formed an idea of my own: shadowy, like all the half-comprehended notions that float dim through children's brains, but strangely impressive. (Bronte 40)

Jane is clearly attracted to distant shores and foreign places; her imagination is sparked by the fantasy potential--the escapism--of the exotic. In a classically psychological sense, she projects her longing to escape her domestic situation at Gateshead onto foreign lands. These distant realms are blank sheets upon which she can imaginatively figure a way out of her predicament, and perhaps relieve some of her inner turmoil in the process. On one level, this seems a natural reflex of a young girl's troubled mind, but on another level parallels can be drawn between Jane's psychological projections onto the "death-white realms" and the larger colonial consciousness that inspired the real--and not simply metaphoric--annexation of foreign lands to fulfill not only the material needs of the English economy, but also to expand the cultural frontiers of Victorian fantasies.

While the novel opens with a young Jane metaphorically appropriating uncharted territories to ease her emotional burdens, it closes with a mature Jane consciously paying tribute to warrior Greatheart, aka St. John Rivers, and his holy mission expanding God's kingdom in India

As to St. John Rivers, he left England: he went to India. . . . Firm, faithful, and devoted, full of energy and zeal, and truth, 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. (Bronte 477)

What begins with relatively vague childhood fantasies about escape to foreign countries concludes with a clear affirmation of the role of the Christian missionary--the

revered figure who supplied the moral imperative for colonizing the 'savage heathens' and saving their souls. So in addition to the text's absorption of numerous exotic fragments from foreign cultures, Jane Eyre is framed--start and finish--by a significant attachment to the processes of Empire building.

While the cumulative effect of Bronte's in-passing allusions to foreign culture contributes to the ideological bent of the novel, on their own they are relatively minor and undeveloped. However, Bronte does pursue a far more complex colonial metaphor that figuratively reconstructs "slavery" as a practice wholly alien to British culture--a technique which aesthetically displaces the real relations between the colonizer and the colonized.

Throughout Jane Eyre the historical reality of slavery is systematically displaced in a long series of metaphors that represent some aspect of Jane's struggle towards personal autonomy and financial security. As a child, she compares her cousin John Reed to a murderer, a slave-driver, and a Roman emperor (Bronte 43), and she explicitly describes herself as a "rebel slave" (Bronte 44,46) and an "interloper," not of the "same race" as her relatives (Bronte 48). At Lowood, she is publically humiliated when Brocklehurst stands her on a stool in the centre of the room and instructs the other girls to ignore her. But when Helen walks past and looks up at her, Jane feels inspired:

"It was as if a martyr, a hero, had passed a slave or victim, and imparted strength in the transit" (Bronte

99).

Under the influence of Miss Temple, Jane learns to curb her tendency towards total revolt; she learns to control, or at least modify, her rage against those who restrain her. After two years of teaching, and after Miss Temple leaves Lowood, Jane feels very confined. While she starts to zealously gasp for Liberty, she tempers her passion and makes the more reasoned request for a "new servitude." This new servitude takes the form of governess at Thornfield Hall, a position that (at least before Rochester arrives) Jane soon finds numbingly dull and restricting. Indeed not long after her feminist manifesto, with its many allusions to revolts and rebellions, Jane describes the "viewless fetters" of her life at Thornfield.

Metaphors of slavery are particularly prevalent throughout Jane and Rochester's courtship. Shortly after their engagement, for example, Jane compares herself to a slave and Rochester to a sultan:

. . . I thought his smile was such as a sultan might, in a blissful and fond moment, bestow on a slave his gold and gems had enriched. . . (Bronte 297).

In the same scene, Rochester insists that Jane immediately give up her "governessing slavery." Yet only moments later he jokingly describes how once they are married he will-- just "figuratively speaking" of course--attach her to a chain, like the one on his watch (Bronte 299). Bronte's juxtapositioning of these references to slavery suggests

that if Jane marries Rochester she will merely exchange one kind of slavery for another.

Slavery is a figurative motif that primarily revolves around Jane's development: first as a child in an abusive step-family; second as a charity case in an oppressive institution; third as a woman trying to earn her keep as a governess; and finally as Rochester's wife, or rather his mistress--yet another position that Jane knows would make her a "slave in a fool's paradise"(Bronte 386). In "'And What Do the Women Do?': Jane Eyre, Jamaica and the Gentlemen's House," Penny Boumelha observes:

There are, I think, ten explicit references to slavery in Jane Eyre. They allude to slavery in Ancient Rome and in the seraglio, to the slaveries of paid work as a governess and of dependence as a mistress. None of them refers to the slave trade upon which the fortunes of all in the novel are based (113).

Although slavery was technically outlawed by the British in 1834, abolition was not realized in the West Indies until 1838--less than eight years before Bronte finished writing Jane Eyre. Even so, slavery was still a very topical issue in England. Vast sugar plantations, which had run on slave labour for centuries, were thrown into massive economic crisis, the repercussions of which were felt in Great Britain for some time. Moreover, it was still quite legal to own slaves in the French colonies as well as in the United States, which generated a good deal of controversy on both sides of the Atlantic. As Boumelha points out, the absence of comment on the fact of slavery in Bronte's text is

especially curious given the emphasis on Jane's

"Quakerishness":

Quakers, of course, had been among the first and most prominent opponents of English slavery, but Jane's own Quakerishness, so often commented upon, leads her only as far as a stern opposition to distant or metaphorical forms of enslavement (113).

In addition to what Boumelha identifies as Jane's purely figurative opposition to slavery, I would underline that Jane only 'opposes' slavery when she needs to advance her own self-interests.. For Jane continually inscribes herself in the centre of colonial metaphors, by assuming the stance of the victim of some far off foreign oppression, in order to articulate her feelings of personal powerlessness. And she does this without any acknowledgement of the English slave trade--the economic infrastructure that is the source of her financial security (her inheritance), her sense of personal independence, and enables her to marry and live happily ever after.

Although the abolition of English slavery was realized by the time Jane Eyre was published, the novel itself is set during the peak of violent slave rebellions in the West Indies (1820s and 30s). In "Colonialism and the Figurative Strategy of Jane Eyre," Susan L. Meyer argues that Bertha's "blackness" is associated with the Maroons, the black Jamaican antislavery rebels (252), and that the language used to describe her nocturnal rampages "strongly evokes that used to describe slave uprisings in the British West Indies" (254). While she sees Bertha as "symbollically

enacting precisely the sort of revolt feared by the British colonists in Jamaica," (255) Meyer also argues that the novel engages colonialism on a non-figurative level, that Bronte's analogies of slavery "implicitly acknowledge the oppressive situation of the non-white races subjected to the British Empire" (259).

From Meyer's perspective, the fact that Rochester brings his "filthy burden" home with him to England implies some recognition of guilt for the tremendous injustices committed by the British in the West Indian colonies; that is, the 'crime' that Rochester attempts to incarcerate in the attic is analogous to the historical crime of slavery. But the relationship between Bertha's nocturnal uprisings and actual slave rebellions in the West Indies is mediated by an even more insidious metaphoric displacement of English slavery. For although Rochester's colonial memories do periodically erupt and come back to haunt him, his efforts to 'lock away' or repress this history are ultimately rewarded if the trajectory of Bertha's life is followed to its grim conclusion. There can be no escaping the fact that Bertha's racially determined madness threatens the security of the Rochester estate, and that her 'revolution' ends by her own hand. As a representative of the old English gentry largely responsible for the foundation of slavery, Rochester is totally vindicated for his crime: his hand is healed, his vision restored, and he fathers a son--a symbolic guarantee of future prosperity.

The more incisive edge of Meyer's argument is that Jane Eyre demonstrates a conservative anti-colonial ideology that cautions against a "contaminating and self-destructive contact with the colonies" (Meyer 268)--a Victorian perspective deeply rooted in racist fears about the dark foreign Other. This racist anxiety is particularly apparent in the novel's figurative strategy of associating British class and gender oppression with the "intrinsic despotism of dark-skinned people" (Meyer 261). As Meyer reminds us, the Reeds and the Ingrams represent the worst possible aspects of the English ruling class; Bronte's portrayal of these two aristocratic families condemns the misuse of power that so frequently accompanies higher social status. But, surprisingly enough, the Reeds and the Ingrams are also metaphorically linked to what Meyer calls the racial "other." John Reed reviles his mother for "her dark skin, similar to his own"; Blanche Ingram is dark as a Spaniard and has a "low brow"--a physical attribute apparently regarded by Victorians as an emblem of racial inferiority (Meyer 260). According to Rochester, Blanche is "a real strapper. . . big, brown, and buxom; with hair just such as the ladies of Carthage must have had" (Bronte 248). This direct association of Blanche with Africa resonates with the narrative's description of Bertha (Meyer 260).

And of course the main proponent of gender oppression in the novel is also intimately associated with the "dark races." Citing the charade scene as an example, Meyer shows

how the master of Thornfield Hall is figuratively blackened and transformed into the "racial other" because of his association with the colonies:

The final scene, enacting the word "Bridewell," . . . symbolizes the effects of Rochester's contact with dark-skinned people in search of fortune. In this scene Rochester is himself fettered like a slave and his face is "begrimed" by a darkness that has rubbed off onto him (Meyer 261).

Rochester's guise as a "slave fettered in chains" is also an ironic inversion of the narrative's reality: for he is the "dark master" who holds a prisoner in his attic.

The association of Rochester with a dark-skinned tyrant becomes more explicit as he and Jane advance to the altar, most apparently in the sultan/slave episode. While I will discuss this scene as a part of the novel's larger seraglio motif in Chapter III, it is significant that while Jane associates Rochester with the tyranny of the Grand Turk, she figures herself as a Christian abolitionist who will "preach liberty" and "stir up mutiny" among the slaves of such a despot. But the context for discussing slavery has strategically shifted from the West Indian colonies, where abolitionists in fact "preached liberty" against their British compatriots, to the Middle East, where suddenly our "one little English girl" symbolizes the principles of freedom and equality that resist the innate despotism of the dark foreign Other--a particularly stunning figurative reconstruction of the real relationship between the white colonists and the "dark races" they so brutally exploited. Once again, the fact of English slave markets has been

metaphorically displaced onto the customs of non-white, non-British, and non-Christian peoples.

In addition to the figurative displacement of the English slave trade, Bronte's three main characters--Jane, Rochester, and St. John Rivers--demonstrate unique aspects of the "imperialist instinct." Jane Eyre is an exposé of the layers of illusions involved in the social construction of individual identity, particularly in terms of gender and class stereotyping. And no character more incisively challenges the injustice of this restrictive social casting than "plain Jane," the governess. From her fiery rebellion as an abused child to her determination to excel academically, to her dexterous moral calculations in her relationship with Rochester, to the strength, stamina, and resourcefulness she demonstrates when she moves out into the world alone, Bronte's complex development of Jane's character compels the reader to regard this governess as anything but plain. Perhaps the crowning irony of the novel, Jane's "plainness" cloaks her vastly superior moral and intellectual capacities with just the right proportion of modesty.

But, be it ever-so-humble, Jane's character also embodies a myriad of values and aspirations that are tacitly claimed and celebrated as "English." It is difficult to imagine a more quintessentially British figure than the governess, and, as odd as it may sound, the character of "plain Jane" signifies a chauvinistic sense of superiority;

that is, she represents and articulates the fundamentally ethnocentric perspective of the novel. As the moral custodian and educator of the children of the privileged classes, the governess must inculcate her charges with the appropriate set of values, ones that will affirm and consolidate the interests of the ruling elite, and, from a conservative point of view, will ensure the long term stability and prosperity of English society as a whole. Throughout Jane Eyre there is an implicit valorization of the critical social role that a governess in fact performs-- despite the tendency of the rich and powerful to marginalize and devalue her contribution towards maintaining the status quo.

Certainly Rochester believes in the educational merits of an English governess and the basic advantage of growing up in England. For he lifted "the poor thing" Adele

. . . out of the slime and mud of Paris, and transplanted it [Adele] here, to grow up clean in the wholesome soil of an English country garden. Mrs. Fairfax found you to train it . . . (Bronte 176).

Jane also places high value on English pedagogical methods. In her 'sympathetic' evaluation of her French pupil's intellectual potential, she refers to the superior faculties of the English mind. Jane takes Adele on her knee and permits her to

. . . prattle as she liked . . . not rebuking even some little freedoms and trivialities into which she was apt to stray when much noticed, and which betrayed in her a superficiality of character, inherited probably from her mother, hardly congenial to an English mind. (Bronte 176).

And although we are shown no evidence of any development in Adele's character, Jane informs us at the end of the novel that

. . . a sound English education corrected in a great measure her (Adele's) French defects: and when she left school, I found in her a pleasing and obliging companion--docile, good-tempered, and well-principled. (Bronte 475).

In contrast to her condescending attitude towards her French pupil, Jane's pedagogy embraces a particularly strong sense of duty to her English students. In fact, the obligation she feels towards her Morton girls is so intense that it even transcends class barriers. For despite her students' "coarsely clad exteriors," Jane firmly believes that these members of the British peasantry

. . . are of flesh and blood as good as the scions of gentlest genealogy; and that the germs of native excellence, refinement, intelligence, kind feeling, are as likely to exist in their hearts as in those of the best-born. My duty will be to develop these germs: surely I shall find some happiness in discharging that office. (Bronte 385)

This commitment to nurture the peasantry's "native excellence"--that is, their English predisposition towards refinement, intelligence, and kindness--contains traces of a traditional paternalism that casts the aristocracy as the moral exemplars of society. Not only are Jane's high opinions about the English lower classes paternalistic, they are also extremely ethnocentric:

. . . I stood with the key in my hand, exchanging a few words of special farewell with some half-dozen of my best scholars: as decent, respectable, modest, and well-informed young women as could be found in the ranks of the British peasantry. And that is saying a great deal; for, after all, the British peasantry are

the best taught, best mannered, most self-respecting of any in Europe: since those days I have seen paysannes and Bauerinnen; and the best of them seemed to me ignorant, coarse, and besotted, compared with my Morton girls. (Bronte 415)

As Terry Eagleton so succinctly puts it, Jane's

. . . egalitarian defence of the 'British peasantry' is based, ironically, on a dogma of chauvinistic superiority: they are at least preferable to their 'ignorant, coarse, and besotted' European counterparts (28).

The narrative's ethnocentric perspective is further emphasized by Rochester's attitude towards Jane not simply as a teacher, but also as a woman and romantic prospect. While he is clearly attracted to Jane because of her innocence and purity, he seems to claim these qualities as uniquely English when he repeatedly contrasts his betrothed to women from other cultures:

I would not exchange this one little English girl for the Grand Turk's whole seraglio--gazelle-eyes, houri forms, and all! (Bronte 297)

Rochester also claims to value Jane more than his past entourage of French, Italian, and German mistresses. While he calls Jane his equal and likeness (Bronte 280), he regards Celine, Giacinta, and Clara with utter contempt:

Hiring a mistress is the next worse thing to buying a slave: both are often by nature, and always by position, inferior: and to live familiarly with inferiors is degrading. I now hate the recollection of the time I passed with Celine, Giacinta, and Clara. (Bronte 339)

It could be argued that at this point the narrative is critically suspicious of Rochester, and so we should consider these lines in light of his tainted moral background. But it is also important to note that Jane's

immediate response to Rochester's words is to acknowledge to herself: "I felt the truth of these words" (Bronte 339). While Jane quite astutely recognizes the risk she runs of winding up in a position of inferiority similar to Celine, Giacinta, and Clara, the whole notion of what it means to be inferior is predicated not only on gender but also on foreignness. To some degree, Jane silently complies with the stereotype that moral laxity runs in the blood of foreign women--the genealogical flaw that both she and Rochester trust will be corrected in Adele by providing her with an English governess. Moreover, it is Jane, not Rochester, who takes the moral contrast between the English and French to the extreme when she clearly links freedom and honesty to England and sexual sin to France. When she is re-examining her decision to leave Thornfield, Jane asks the following rhetorical question:

Whether is it better, I ask, to be a slave in a fool's paradise at Marseilles--fevered with delusive bliss one hour--suffocating with the bitterest tears of remorse and shame the next--or to be a village schoolmistress, free and honest, in a breezy mountain nook in the healthy heart of England? (Bronte 386)

But to return to the issue of Rochester's frequent measuring of Jane against women from foreign cultures, the most significant contrast he feels compelled to make is, of course, the one between his little English girl and the West Indian wife he restrains in his attic:

. . . look at the difference! Compare these clear eyes with the red balls yonder--this face with that mask--this form with that bulk . . . (Bronte 322)

Together with Bronte's horrifyingly subhuman description of Bertha, Rochester's fear and loathing of his wife from Jamaica suggests a chauvinism so intense that it borders on xenophobia. Although Jane does not express the same intensity of disgust towards the dark foreign Other that her master does, she certainly demonstrates a strong tendency to affirm "the domestic" at the expense of "the foreign". Indeed the overall progression of her life can be described as a deep emotional quest for a safe, clean, domestic enclave--an idyllic enclave that besides including an egalitarian marriage and intimate family ties, must also be located on English soil.

While Jane articulates a chauvinistic attitude towards foreign values, and tacitly endorses stereotypes of non-British women, her romantic involvement with Rochester and St. John Rivers--who both offer her a life outside of England which she rejects--reinforces the ethnocentric orientation of the first person narrator, and helps legitimate the imperialist mission of subduing and saving the dark 'savages' in the colonies. As previously mentioned, much of what Rochester must atone for revolves around his intimate contact with the colonies, which is symbolized by the sexual gratification he seeks through marriage to a dark Creole beauty--a marriage which ultimately bears nothing but misery. But the problematic Bronte confronts does not merely concern Rochester's shortcomings as an individual who is seduced by a colonial femme fatale, but also the moral

vacuousness of the class values that he grew up with. A considerable degree of responsibility for this tragic colonial union lies with Rochester's father and brother for their conspiracy in setting up the marriage, and although Rochester is an extensively travelled, cosmopolitan fellow whose domestic surroundings articulate his taste for the exotic, all of his aristocratic associates display a similar fashionable flair for adorning their lives with foreign commodities. Thornfield's dining room is decorated with a "Turkey carpet" and Tyrian-dyed curtains, its drawing room boasts a "pale Parian mantelpiece" and a number of ruby red ornaments of "sparkling Bohemian glass" (Bronte 135), and we later learn that the manor's conservatory has a "large marble basin...surrounded by exotics, and tenanted by gold fish" (Bronte 212). Rochester's party guests also drape themselves with exotic merchandise. Mrs. Colonel Dent dresses in black satin with pearls and a "scarf of foreign lace," and the Dowager Lady Ingram wears:

A crimson velvet robe, and a shawl turban of some gold-wrought Indian fabric . . . (Bronte 201)

The evening's entertainment begins with a game of charades during which Rochester and Blanche perform a scene illustrating the aristocracy's playful attitude towards the Orient:

Mr. Rochester [was] costumed in shawls, with a turban on his head. His dark eyes and swarthy skin and Paynim features suited the costume exactly: he looked the very model of an Eastern emir, an agent or a victim of the bowstring. Presently advanced into view Miss Ingram. She, too, was attired in oriental fashion: a crimson scarf tied sash-like round the waist: an

embroidered handkerchief knotted about her temples: her beautifully-moulded arms bare, one of them upraised in the act of supporting a pitcher, poised gracefully on her head. (Bronte 213)

While the amusement begins with charades, it ends with a visit from a "shockingly ugly old creature...almost as black as a crock" (Bronte 221). A "gipsy vagabond" comes to tell the gentry their fortunes--a mysterious foreigner who is really Rochester in disguise. Everything about the master of Thornfield Hall exudes a dark exotic mysteriousness--the very quality Jane and most readers find most compelling about him.

Although Bronte undermines our feelings of attraction to Rochester by associating him with disguises, masks, and charades, it is important to recall that it is not only he who is involved with games and deceit. As the host of the dinner party, Rochester feeds a whole class of people who distinguish themselves largely by their ostentatious taste for luxuries extracted from the colonies. For no reason beyond personal gratification, the gentry dress themselves up in colonial riches--a game of charades that operates on a much larger scale than the one in Rochester's drawing room.

When Rochester's marriage to Bertha (his personal extraction of beauty and pleasure from the colonies) is considered in a class context it becomes apparent that the punishment he suffers is for something more complex than sexual sin. While his blindness and mutilated hand may well connote a symbolic castration, it seems to me that this is only a small part of a much larger picture. For Rochester's

tremendous sexual guilt is compounded by the fact that he is from the English upper class, but he only has intimate relations with relatively lower class women from foreign countries. More significantly, Rochester's flings with his Continental entourage seem far less troublesome and damnable than his legal marriage to a Creole madwoman. It appears that what is much more disturbing than illicit sex--that is, even more objectionable than multiple adulterous commonlaw relationships--is the horrorifying prospect of a sanctioned union with a colonial subject. Rochester is chastened not only for his crimes of sexual promiscuity, including his sinful attempt to initiate Jane into a bigamous marriage, but also his affiliation with a set of social values that Bronte exposes, largely through images and allusions to the decadence of colonial acquisitions, as morally vacuous and self-serving.

Whereas Rochester is criticized for his intimate associations with foreign cultures, St. John Rivers' role as a missionary in India is the apotheosis of the novel's spiritual and moral aspirations. It seems that while the text is critical of the English aristocracy for its dealings in the West Indies, the role of the Christian missionary in India is celebrated. However, Bronte does not initially offer us the image of a perfectly focused Christian vicar. St. John Rivers is engaged in a fundamental war between his human desires and his spiritual ideals, and Bronte uses oxymorons of hot and cold, fire and ice, to convey his inner

conflict. While his exterior is described as if he were cut from marble, and he is frequently associated with snow and ice, he is internally consumed with a fiery resolve to deny his human appetites. As his sister Diana puts it: "St. John looks quiet. . . but he hides a fever in his vitals" (Bronte 383). Rosamond Oliver, "Rose of the World," can be read as a sexually connotative emblem of the earthly pleasures that St. John must resist in the course of his development as a missionary. While he is opposed to passion of a worldly nature, St. John understands that the struggle against the sins of the flesh requires zealous self-denial and a passionate adherence to Christ's example:

Whosoever will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. (Bronte 477)

Although he is relatively successful at repressing his sexual desires, St. John confesses that beneath the strict religious discipline he represents lies his natural disposition--an innate part of himself that lusts after power. But he explains that religion had "pruned" and "trained" this particular character trait to shape him for the role of missionary. He says:

Of the ambition to win power and renown for my wretched self she (religion) formed the ambition to spread my Master's Kingdom, to achieve victories for the standard of the cross. (Bronte 401)

And somewhat earlier he explains to Jane that a good missionary combines all the best qualifications of soldier, statesman, and orator--three positions that revolve around an interest in power and renown (Bronte 388). The

psychological profile we are given of this Christian missionary combines strategies of repression and sublimation. For before he is ready to commence his mission St. John must come to terms with the two types of lust that plague him: he represses his sexual desires by translating his worldly passion into his spiritual passion, and he sublimates his lust for power and renown through his clerical vocation, translating his self-interests into God's interests.

The ideal missionary in Jane Eyre is clearly not rooted in the principles of Christian charity, but rather in an evangelical proselytism that seeks to devour indigenous cultures under the guise of "salvation." Combined with the torment he suffers in his struggle against the sins of the flesh, St. John's innate taste for power suggests a limited capacity for compassion, tolerance, and understanding the needs of others. Certainly Jane is intimidated by what she describes as his "austere and despotic nature" (Bronte 434), and she criticizes what she notices as his unmerciful egoism. She says to Diana:

He is a good and a great man; but he forgets, pitilessly, the feelings and claims of little people, in pursuing his own large views. It is better, therefore, for the insignificant to keep out of his way lest, in his progress, he should trample them down. (Bronte 441)

But despite Jane's unequivocal acknowledgement of this brutal aspect of St. John's character, there is no indication that he should not excel as a first rate missionary. Every level of the narrative endorses this as

St. John's true calling. Indeed Jane venerates St. John's religious devotion to such a degree that she decides to accept his proposal of marriage--saved only by a hair through a melodramatic intervention of Rochester calling her name--and she closes the novel with a pious tribute to his toils in India. It appears that while a harsh, unsympathetic nature is inappropriate in the vicar of a small parish in England, it is an essential component in the missionary who seeks to expand God's Kingdom beyond domestic borders.

Parallels can be drawn between St. John's spiritual vocation in Jane Eyre and the larger ideological function of the missionary in the British colonies. As representatives of Britain's moral authority, missionaries provided the perfect rationale for colonial expansionism, and helped clear the way for the interests of British capital. Armed with an extreme sense of righteousness, the missionaries fervently pursued their primary objective, which was to civilize the savage heathens and claim their souls for God. That the interests of the missionary evangelists were analogous to the interests of imperialism should be quite transparent. As Morris puts it in Heaven's Command: An Imperial Progress:

. . . for many Victorian Englishmen the instinct of empire was first rationalized as a call to Christian duty (37).

Implicit in this ostensibly altruistic devotion to saving heathens is an ethnocentrism--not to mention racism--that is similar to the contemptuous repulsion Rochester

demonstrates in relation to non-British women. Like other missionaries, St. John is profoundly drawn to India: he studiously applies himself to learn Hindustani, and in this regard he is determined to become more intimately involved with the Indian people. But there can be no doubt that his zealous repulsion against all forms of human appetite will be ruthlessly extended to the heathens he encounters. St. John's dedication to the moral and spiritual improvement of 'savages' is really an extension of his own frustrated self-denial and a way to satiate his taste for power.

The growth and consolidation of "plain Jane" as the quintessence of British moral enlightenment is concretely expressed in her funding of St. John's expansion of God's Kingdom into India--a country in which missionaries and their wives are likely to be "grilled alive" (Bronte 441). Diana's association of Calcutta with hell echoes Rochester's earlier description of the infernal atmosphere of Jamaica:

. . . it was a fiery West Indian night. . . The air was like sulphur-streams--I could find no refreshment anywhere. . . the sea. . . rumbled dull like an earthquake--black clouds were casting up over it; the moon was setting in the waves, broad and red, like a hot cannon-ball--she threw her last bloody glance over a world quivering with the ferment of tempest. . . my ears were filled with the curses the maniac still shrieked out: wherein she momentarily mingled my name with such a tone of demon-hate, with such language!. . . This life. . . is hell: this is the air--those are the sounds of the bottomless pit!
(Bronte 335)

It is significant that the most critical struggle in both Rochester's and St. John's lives revolves around subduing dark 'savages' who are the indigenous inhabitants of hell,

the kingdom of deadly sin. Throughout Jane Eyre "the foreign" is demonized in dark, sexual, monitory images-- images which provide the standard of Evil against which Jane must assert her Christian morals and British integrity. And so we return to the political conflict between an English governess and a Creole madwoman. For the figure of Bertha Mason is pivotal to the colonial ethos of the novel: she is the objectified dark Other against which Jane victoriously consolidates a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant definition of her Self.

Today's post-colonial theory provides an important critical perspective on Bronte's use of a colonial subject as a British citizen's contrasting image of the Other. Edward Said argues that the Orient is Europe's "deepest and most recurring image of the Other" (Orientalism 1), and that "the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience" (1-2). Bertha Mason is the repressed and rejected Other in the colonial discourse of Jane Eyre. She is the Other against which Jane defines herself--as a woman and potential wife-- and she is the object onto which all of the novel's socially unacceptable impulses are projected. Simultaneously described as beast and burden, Bertha is Chaos personified: a snarling mass of female fury whose only aim, in Bronte's words, is to "exasperate, molest, and destroy" (qtd. in Shorter 383-384). Contrasted to this rampant disorder is the quintessentially British figure of a governess who, while

sorely tempted to follow her passionate inclinations, manages finally to consolidate a very confident, highly ordered definition of her Self. Jane's efforts to assert her integrity stand always in diametric opposition to Bertha's random fits of what Bronte calls "moral madness" (qtd. in Shorter 383-384). Parallels can be drawn between the relationship of these two antithetical characters--one a British governess; the other a mad Creole wife--and the way in which the emergent British Empire consolidated its sense of Imperial Self in contrast to a degraded foreign Other. To adopt Said's terms, Jane has a powerful "positional superiority" over Bertha; that is, the English governess never loses "the relative upper hand" (Orientalism 7) over the Creole madwoman. The relationship between these two female characters is defined utterly by the first person narrator's controlling perspective, an ethnocentric authority which subtly reflects something of the larger political dynamics between the colonizer and the colonized.

While the stark contrast between Jane and Bertha is explicitly drawn during the course of the narrative, it is also implicit in the complex, recurring motif of the antithesis between the child and the fiend. Because of her small stature, Jane is frequently compared to a child, elf, or sprite, and she has several dreams about a child--a "baby phantom" (Bronte 249, 309, 310)--that are associated with the appearance of Bertha: Jane's dreams of a vulnerable infant directly prefigure Bertha's fiendish rampages. Yet

there are also occasions when Jane transgresses the boundaries of her child nature and assumes the aspect of the fiend. When she revolts at Gateshead and attacks her stepbrother she is described as a "mad cat" (Bronte 44). This parallels the "tigress" who later attacks her brother and "worries" the flesh on his shoulder (Bronte 241). On her deathbed, Aunt Reed remembers Jane's "unchildlike look and voice," and she bitterly complains:

I have had more trouble with that child than any one would believe. Such a burden to be left on my hands--and so much annoyance as she caused me dally and hourly, with her incomprehensible disposition and her sudden fits of temper, and her continual, unnatural watchings of one's movements! I declare she talked to me once like something mad, or like a fiend--no child ever spoke or looked as she did. . . (Bronte 260)

Just as the child (Jane) temporarily assumes the aspect of the fiend, the fiend (Bertha) is held in a protective custody not unlike the rebellious child at Gateshead. Jane's childhood rebellion and Bertha's unpredictable rage are thus to some extent analogous, and both Aunt Reed and Rochester act as parental authorities who must restrain their "hideous progeny" (Shelley, Frankenstein) from hurting themselves or others.

But whereas we are invited to sympathize with Jane, the child, as a victim of Aunt Reed's vicious repression--a sympathetic identification which lingers well beyond the walls of Gateshead--we are repelled by Bertha, the fiend, as an awful spectacle of depravity, and we at least partially accept that what Rochester does to her is for her own good. Bertha's bestial demonism signifies a subhuman consciousness

driven by the basest instincts. Yet the horror she generates is rooted in a discourse that constructs its portrait of subhumaness out of the specifically Creole features of a woman whose home in the colonies is equated with hell. Espousing the rhetoric of romantic individualism, Rochester asserts his right--as a British citizen--to extricate himself from this bottomless pit of hell and return to the purity of his homeland:

I have a right to deliver myself from it [West Indies/hell] if I can. . . let me break away, and go home to God!. . . A wind fresh from Europe blew over the ocean and rushed through the open casement: the storm broke, streamed, thundered, blazed, and the air grew pure. (Bronte 335)

Filled with contempt and bitterness, Rochester secretly brings his "filthy burden" to England, where he confines her/it with "due attendance and precautions" (Bronte 336) at Thornfield.

Although Rochester wants to "bury" Bertha's identity in "oblivion," he also wants to "place her in safety and comfort," and to "shelter her degradation with secrecy" (Bronte 336). Rochester's role as a parent who protects his child from its own degraded nature echoes an intrinsic aspect of colonial ideology that believes in the necessity of parental control over its offspring in the colonies. In The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism, Ashis Nandy identifies the "homology between childhood and the state of being colonized which a modern colonial system invariably uses" (11). Franz Fanon, noted for his psychiatric practice with victims of protracted

colonial repression, writes about the ostensibly protective sentiment of the colonial ethos:

On the unconscious plane, colonialism...did not seek to be considered by the native as a gentle loving mother who protects her child from a hostile environment, but rather as a mother who unceasingly restrains her fundamentally perverse offspring from managing to commit suicide and from giving free rein to its evil instincts. The colonial mother protects her child from itself, from its ego, and from its physiology, its biology and its own unhappiness which is its very essence (170).

Much of what we see Rochester do to Bertha is understood as for her own good. The restraint and isolation she endures through years of imprisonment are intended to save her from herself, and prevent the suicide someone "of her kind" would necessarily yearn to commit.

Although Jane transgresses the line between child and fiend in her youthful rebellion, she successfully matures and learns to control herself. Bertha, however, requires endless interventions from her keepers to suppress her spontaneous eruptions of emotionality. Jane outgrows the disruptive aspects of childhood, and yet maintains an innocence and purity that Rochester finds intensely attractive. Bertha only outgrows her youthful beauty, and regresses more deeply into the persona of a totally incorrigible child, or fiend. Jane's development, the progressive emergence of her autonomous Self, is largely achieved in contrast to the regressive disintegration of the dark foreign Other--her confrontation with Rochester's mad Creole wife being the catalyst behind the remainder of her journey.

Literary articulations of the dark, mysterious antithesis of what was understood as the British way-of-life helped cultivate England's growing sense of itself as a global civilizing influence--a sense of nationhood predicated on a self-image as the bearer of truth and light into the dark regions of the world. As Spivak and other post-colonial critics emphasize, although imperialism was literally confirmed as England's social mission through the influential discourses of the Christian missionaries and the advertisements of the East India Trading Company, nineteenth-century cultural representations of foreign contexts through the figurative languages of the literary and fine arts must not be ignored in terms of orienting public sentiment about England's role in the colonies. From the many in-passing allusions to foreign culture, to the pervasive metaphors of slavery, to the ethnocentric attitudes of the main characters, to the demonization of Bertha as Jane's "contrasting image of Otherness" Jane Eyre participates in the larger ideological project of colonialism--a project by which an Imperial national identity was gradually shaped. While this chapter has described the broader aspects of the novel's colonial ethos, the next three chapters will more specifically focus on Bronte's strategic manipulation of colonialist discourse to shape her feminist heroine's identity.

Chapter Three

Literary Strategy I: Victorian Sexual Politics and the Sultan/Slave/Seraglio Triptych

While the previous chapter provided an historical and cultural context for reading Jane Eyre as an imaginative discourse shaped by nineteenth century colonialist ideology, the next three chapters will look more specifically at the figurative strategies Bronte applies to express feminist resistance against male sexual dominance. My primary focus will be on a series of colonial metaphors that confront inequities intrinsic to Victorian sexual politics. Significantly, it is in those scenes where Jane most urgently resists acquiescing to Rochester and St. John's masculine power that Bronte uses the polygamous custom of the "seraglio" and the sacrificial ritual of "suttee" to emphasize the gravity of her heroine's predicament. And in the climactic episode where Jane rejects Rochester's proposal to live commonlaw in France, her emotional dilemma is described in terms of a North American Indian negotiating dangerous waters. In each of these three instances--seraglio, suttee, and the Indian--Jane inscribes herself in the centre of a colonial metaphor in order to protect her sexuality and consolidate her sense of selfhood.

While Jane's identification with the masculine image of the "noble savage" in his canoe will be dealt with as a significant exception, the text posits a number of figurative parallels between the feminist protagonist's struggle for autonomy and the oppression of women in non-Western cultures. Indeed, there is a frequent comparison between Jane's life and the lives of women who are somehow

racially marked. But while the text does suggest parallels between the white feminist heroine and a variety of foreign female Others, these invitations to compare Jane with her non-British counter-parts are also inevitably retracted. Ultimately, the text recoils from the possibility of similitude and reasserts an impenetrable wedge of difference, either through an immediate articulation of a marked contrast, or by allowing any comparative notions of similarity to silently disintegrate into an erasure of the significance of the female foreign Other.

The excision of foreign Otherness from the text is an important step in the overall consolidation of the white feminist heroine's identity, and it is through Bronte's figurative use of colonial imagery that the intersection between the text's feminist and colonialist trajectories becomes most apparent. This chapter, and the two that ensue, will attempt to come to terms with the alliance of these two political paradigms as they merge together at critical moments in Jane's development by closely examining Bronte's figurative strategy for voicing her concerns about sexual inequality.

Indeed, the very crux of the problem at hand is voice: for early nineteenth century feminists had limited access to a politically efficacious lexicon through which they could safely articulate their concerns about male sexual dominance. To discuss matters of an even slightly sexual nature, let alone openly criticize sexist dogmas such as the

connubial rights of husbands sanctioned through holy matrimony, was risky business for Victorian feminists, particularly for those who considered themselves devout Christians. But there is no doubt that there is a sexual component to Jane's relationships with Rochester and St. John, and that both of these men want to control her sexuality: the former through a fraudulent marriage scheme and subsequent proposition to live in sin in France; the latter through a legally sanctioned and socially acceptable marriage, but one that would require a substantial repression of Jane's physical, emotional, and spiritual needs in the service of his own.

Given the highly moralistic and sexually repressed climate of the Victorian era, Bronte's critique of the masculine authority Rochester and St. John attempt to impose on Jane's sexuality must conform to Christian principles--at least to some extent. While Jane Eyre in no way endorses the male sexual dominance conventional Christian dogma propagates, Bronte does appeal to a profound Christian sensibility that perceives the spiritual equality of the sexes in the eyes of God, if not in the eyes of man. And it is through the voice of romantic individualism that she advocates that spiritual autonomy is as much the fundamental right of women as it is of men.

That the novel's feminist orientation combines the rhetoric of romantic individualism with a Christian perspective on the spiritual equality of the sexes is

apparent throughout the narrative and most clearly articulated in Jane's inspirational roof-top manifesto. But just a few steps below this plea for liberté, égalité, fraternité resides the incarcerated Creole madwoman, which brings us back to the colonial ethos of the novel, the relationship between the text's feminist and colonialist trajectories, and Bronte's figurative strategy for dealing with male sexual dominance.

I have already discussed the Sultan/slave episode in terms of the figurative displacement of the long history of the English slave trade. But the metaphor of the seraglio permeates Jane Eyre even more deeply than this: it is an intrinsic part of the narrative structure. The novel is organized around several households where a cluster of women are accountable to a single man. As the pampered apple of his mother's eye, John Reed holds considerable sway over his female relations and the female staff at Gateshead; Brocklehurst controls the lives of the girls and women at Lowood; Rochester rules the (almost exclusively) women residents of Thornfield from any point on the globe; St. John Rivers is the voice of authority in the otherwise feminine environment of Moors End. As Joyce Zonana points out, in "The Sultan and the Slave: Feminist Orientalism and the Structure of Jane Eyre," every stage in Jane's development occurs within some sort of domestic enclosure that can be described as harem-like. While this structural resemblance between harem and home is most concretely

manifest at Thornfield--through Rochester's confinement of Bertha and his attempt to initiate Jane into a bigamous marriage--it is also more loosely apparent in Rochester's entourage of foreign mistresses.

Bronte uses the seraglio as a metaphor around which she organizes her critique of the sexual politics of the Victorian Englishmen who obstruct her heroine's quest for autonomy. Correlated with Jane's most urgent articulations of feminist revolt, the sultan/slave/seraglio triptych is consistently applied to chastize the behaviour of Englishmen towards Englishwomen. With the interesting exception of St. John Rivers--the fair-haired, marble-skinned, blue-eyed soldier of Christ whose death is celebrated as his life's fulfillment and ultimate reward--all of these men are figured as dark despots who are severely chastened and summarily dismissed from their offices of power. John Reed shames his family's name through gambling, sexual carousing, and ultimately drinking himself to death; Brocklehurst is publically humiliated after an inquiry into the deaths caused by the typhus, and he is forced to resign as director of Lowood; Rochester is reduced to a state of utter physical and emotional dependency. Even in the case of St. John, Bronte significantly shifts his dictatorial sphere of influence from "the healthy heart" of England, where he lords it over Jane's surrogate sisters, Diana and Mary, to Calcutta, where he is allowed to realize his ambition for power as Warrior Greatheart--but no longer at the expense of

Englishwomen. While dark tyrants are brought to their knees, the white one is sent to the colonies.

To evoke monitory images of oriental misogyny--such as the seraglio and suttee--was a relatively conventional rhetorical strategy used by a number of English feminists prior to Bronte. Gleaning the title phrase for her article, "'Fit Only for a Seraglio': The Discourse of Oriental Misogyny in Jane Eyre and Vanity Fair," from the introductory pages of Mary Wollstonecraft's Vindication of the Rights of Woman, Suvendrini Perera takes a critical look at the way certain discourses of Western feminism have historically used a "model of oppressed oriental womanhood" to discuss the social predicament of Western women. Also, Zonana offers specific examples in Wollstonecraft's Vindication where

. . . Wollstonecraft uncritically associates the East with despotism and tyranny. Her text is replete with images that link any abuse of power with "Eastern" ways . . . (Zonana 601).

Perera contextualizes this strategic application of oriental misogyny as a political manouver "fed by a Victorian ideology of empire," but also as a profoundly ambivalent response to Romanticism and Exoticism. For to early Victorians the seraglio was as morally repugnant as it was compulsively titilating. On the one hand, it was vociferously condemned, by feminists and Christians alike, as further evidence that "mahometan" society believed women were animals without souls (Zonana 600). The seraglio was regarded as an immoral display of excessive eroticism--not

merely because one man had sexual access to more than one woman, but also because of the horrifying potential for lesbian sex (Ahmed 524). From the Western perspective of the time, the seraglio symbolized luxury, indolence, and an overindulgence of the senses, and Zonana summarizes a long tradition of Western literary reconstructions of the harem as a metaphor to address Western issues concerning sexuality, ultimately to affirm Western social and religious values. On the other hand, British culture had inherited the artistic legacy of Romanticism, a movement that was especially fond of the harem as "an object of voyeuristic scrutiny and speculation" (Perera 95). While many a morally upstanding English citizen criticized the unChristian sexual slavery of women in the seraglio, Victorian culture was in fact rife with artistic and literary representations of the harem that precariously teetered on the brink of pornography. Perera observes that even though the seraglio was deplored as a source of oppression:

. . . both Byron's Don Juan and Scott's character in Peveril of the Peak (1823) manage to penetrate the harem, while Goldsmith, Johnson, and Boswell fantasize such acts in their private writings. In his Notes on a Journey from Cornhill to Grand Cairo, the account of a tour sponsored by the Peninsular and Oriental Company in 1844, Thackeray himself admits to a "strange feeling of curiosity" in "ill regulated minds" as his gaze probes the grated palace windows of Istanbul, longing "just to have one peep, one look at all those wondrous beauties . . . [and] gaudy black slaves. [1869] (Perera 96).

And as she further illustrates, it is with "a blend of horror and fascination" that the narrator of Vanity Fair peers:

. . . uncomfortably, one hand checking his beard for reassurance, into the women's quarters of Vanity Fair, at "the poor secret martyrs and victims . . . stretched out on racks in bedrooms and . . . into those dark places where torture is administered. (Perera 96).

What this rather contradictory cultural mindset suggests is that representations of the seraglio had more to do with English sexual fantasies and fears, more to do with negotiating the terms of sexual relations between Englishmen and Englishwomen, than with the social, political, and economic situation of non-Western women whose status was determined by a variety of different cultural practices and values.

And it should come as no surprise that Victorian men and women considered the seraglio from very different points of view. Bronte captures the essence of these differing perspectives in the erotic tension generated between Jane and Rochester in the Sultan/slave episode:

He smiled; and I thought his smile was such as a sultan might, in a blissful and fond moment, bestow on a slave his gold and gems had enriched: I crushed his hand, which was ever hunting mine, vigorously, and thrust it back to him red with the passionate pressure. (Bronte 297).

The scene continues to develop around a sustained session of flirtatious repartee. While Rochester appeals to the titillating exoticism of the stereotypical male harem fantasy, Jane adeptly deflects what from a Victorian woman's point of view would be her worst sexual nightmare: a husband who not only fancies multiple sex partners at his bidding,

but who, in reality, has had considerably more sexual experience than his young, virginal bride-to-be.

But despite Rochester's experience and sexual magnetism, Jane dexterously maintains control of her sexuality--not by rejecting his advances outright, but by pushing the seraglio metaphor even further, inscribing herself in the very centre of his harem, and then valiantly extricating herself as well as his other female slaves by inciting a revolt. Rochester chuckles and rubs his hands, still red, he notices, with passionate pressure:

Oh, it is rich to see and hear her! . . . Is she original? Is she piquant? I would not exchange this one little English girl for the Grand Turk's whole seraglio--gazelle-eyes, houri forms, and all! (Bronte 297).

Jane is "bitten" by the Eastern allusion, and the dialogue continues as follows:

I'll not stand you an inch in the stead of a seraglio . . . so don't consider me an equivalent for one. If you have a fancy for anything in that line, away with you, sir, to the bazaars of Stamboul, without delay, and lay out in extensive slave purchases some of that spare cash you seem at a loss to spend satisfactorily here.

And what will you do, Janet, while I am bargaining for so many tons of flesh and such an assortment of black eyes?

I'll be preparing myself to go out as a missionary to preach liberty to them that are enslaved--your harem inmates among the rest. I'll get admitted there, and I'll stir up mutiny; 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. (Bronte 297-298).

Significantly, Jane does not opt to challenge Rochester's evident comparison of her worth to that of his other sexual conquests through literal language--for to directly express her indignation in non-fanciful terms would give him the upper hand immediately; that is, he would have 'gotten to her' very early in the game of repartee. Instead, Jane sustains the volley of dialogue between them, strategically appropriating his male sexual fantasy, reconstructing and adapting it to her own needs. Rather than assuming a defensive position by being offended, she decisively takes the offensive to protect her sense of self worth. Jane's primary objective seems to be an assertion of her unique individuality, her strength of character, and her superior moral fibre; Bronte communicates this through the rhetoric of romantic individualism, with our "one little English girl" assuming the role of liberator of the oppressed, or the saviour of others.

Yet, equally important to this, Jane also manages to chastize Rochester for his obnoxious attitude towards women: the implication being that his behaviour is analogous to that of a foreign despot, and that he should know that while non-British women (such as Celine, Giacinta and Clara) might acquiesce to such sexual tyranny, Englishwomen, such as herself, will not. But while Jane quite legitimately wants to maintain her integrity, and quite rightfully challenges Rochester's objectionable attitude towards female sexuality, she also feels responsible for saving him from a kind of

"fall." Confident in her intelligence and rhetorical skill, Jane thinks to herself that with her "needle of repartee" she will keep Rochester "safe" from "the edge of the gulf;" that is, she will deflect his sexual advances until they are married to prevent a stumble into spiritual unwholesomeness.

Indeed, there are a number of other points in the novel where Jane saves her master from a fall: when they first meet she does this quite literally. Rochester's horse slips on a sheet of ice, he sprains his ankle, and Jane comes to his rescue--an obvious role reversal that challenges the stereotypical first meeting of the lovers in conventional romance novels. However, it is also significant that, right from the start, Rochester's Eastern aspect is highlighted: he refers to himself as Mahomet as he asks Jane for assistance:

"I see," he said; "the mountain will never be brought to Mahomet, so all you can do is to aid Mahomet to go to the mountain; I must beg of you to come here." (Bronte 144).

Even from the point of their first encounter, Bronte manipulates gender politics--but she does so by figuratively casting Rochester as powerful foreign figure who is rendered helpless and sorely in need of Jane's support and guidance.

That Rochester's punishment and salvation is the main impetus behind the development of Jane's relationship with him is most evident in their reunion at the end of the novel. Although Rochester consciously seeks redemption from his marriage to Bertha, he initially tries to do so at the expense of Jane's integrity--willfully and deceitfully

degrading her sexuality, first in an attempt to engage her in a fraudulent marriage, and second in a plea to live commonlaw in France. His loss of vision and amputated hand can be read as punishment for his earlier sexual exploits and just desert for attempting to degrade Jane. Rochester's physical debilitation is a direct assault on his masculinity and virility (Jane compares him to a sightless Samson)--an impotence that can only be healed through Jane's forgiveness. This very Christian process of redemption through contrition, penance and forgiveness is fully brought to fruition through the birth of their son.

In view of Jane's various literal and figurative efforts to save Rochester, the imagined gesture of support and solidarity she offers his other harem inmates loses some of its moral impetus. Ultimately, the genuine focus of the Eastern allusion is the redemption of the Englishman who has turned his back on his British heritage and Christian values; the symbolic liberation of the Sultan's female slaves silently slips into insignificance.

As Joyce Zonana's theory of "feminist orientalism" suggests, the Eastern Allusion is a good example of how Victorian feminists constructed foreign Otherness to their best political advantage. Feminist orientalism offers a pertinent revision of Said's earlier work (Orientalism 1978) in terms more particular to how and why feminists strategically appropriated aspects of colonialist discourse

to create a politically efficacious rhetorical device.

Zonana writes:

. . . feminist orientalism is a rhetorical strategy (and form of thought) by which a speaker or writer neutralizes the threat inherent in feminist demands and makes them palatable to an audience that wishes to affirm its occidental superiority. If the lives of women in England or France or the United States can be compared to the lives of women in "Arabia," then the Western feminist's desire to change the status quo can be represented not as a radical attempt to restructure the West but as a conservative effort to make the West more like itself. (Zonana 594).

While the text's allusions to the sultan's seraglio appeals to a shared sense of occidental superiority between Bronte's heroine and her Victorian readership in a bid to legitimate the claims of a nineteenth century feminist perspective, both Zonana and Perera also emphasize that the seraglio motif is perhaps the only way Bronte's "Jane" can articulate her fears of male sexual domination given the repressive climate of the Victorian era. While women wrote extensively in private journals, and high society ladies did have their letters published in journals regarding issues of moral and social propriety, the majority of them were still forced to use male pseudonyms if they wanted to be taken at all seriously in the realm of literary or political discourse. Of course, prior to Bronte there were a few exceptions to this rule, but it was still highly unlikely that a woman's work would be published at all, let alone if it contained anything remotely resembling a critique of sexual inequality. The only real option available to feminists was to work within the parameters of the dominant discourses

available to them, namely Christianity and colonialism, gently undermining what gender hypocrisies and double standards they could, while fashioning for themselves a fledgling feminist discourse that would not too strongly offend the growing social and political influence of British middle-class morality. The seraglio motif provided Bronte's readers with a "culturally acceptable simile by which to understand and combat the patriarchal 'despotism' central to Rochester's character" (Zonana 593) by supplying a "vocabulary for the sexual risks faced by the unattached Englishwoman" (Perera 81).

That it was very difficult for unattached women to take care of themselves in the nineteenth century almost goes without saying. If a middle class woman did not have the good fortune to possess family members who could/would financially support her, she was cast out into a job market with very limited options. Either she shamed herself and joined the ranks of working class women to become a textile worker or factory girl (many of whom were eventually forced to the streets), or she filled the ostensibly more respectable position of a governess in an upper class family. But as Mary Poovey points out, the role of the governess was charged with a social stigma that revolved around issues related to an unmarried woman's sexuality. There was considerable debate about the propriety of introducing an educated, middle class woman into the domestic heart of a gentryman's estate. It was one thing to

hire female servants to cook and clean, but quite another to allow them into the more private interstices of your home, to teach and, it was feared, negatively influence the values of your children. To some, the governess posed a significant threat to the role of the mother, who, it was argued, should naturally want to assume responsibility for the proper education of her children--free of charge. That relatively lower class women were being paid to provide this service generated a moralistic critique of the governess--a distrust riddled with sexual innuendoes about the contaminated values of working women, whose relative independence and assertive dispositions were equated with less ability to control their passions (Poovey 126-131).

Poovey further suggests that moral suspicions about the governess linked her to two closely related figures: the lunatic and the fallen woman; throughout the novel we see Jane struggling to distinguish herself from both of these negative stereotypes (Poovey 129). Indeed the sultan/slave episode can be seen as an acting out against nineteenth century, upper class attitudes that attempted to disparage the role of the governess. With its emphasis on a mercantile exchange for tons of eyes and flesh, the scene can be read as Rochester's attempt to initiate Jane into a kind of prostitution ring. Particularly after we discover his intentions to make her his mistress, Jane's instinctive distaste at his attempt to transform her from a middle class governess to an upper class lady by purchasing her a new

wardrobe becomes more than legitimate. When we cut through the figurative veneer of the sultan/slave episode, what we witness is a case of an upper class Englishman attempting to prey on the financial vulnerability of a middle class woman with no other family or friends to support her. Rather than dramatize such a situation directly, which would be unpalatable to her Victorian audience, Bronte uses the Eastern allusion to offer a critical response to the social stigma that associated the role of the governess with a form of prostitution. By casting Rochester as a representative of oriental misogyny, and by accentuating his dark and despotic nature in contrast to Jane's drive to defend the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity, Bronte subtly and safely puts forward her class defense--pre-empting potentially offensive reactions to Rochester's predacious sexuality by appealing to her audience's sense of their occidental superiority (Zonana 594).

The acting out of the text's critique of disparaging attitudes towards the governess is more explicitly evident in the charades scene, where, once again, Bronte strategically applies an Eastern motif to express her concerns about sexual politics and class discrimination. In contrast to the sultan/slave episode where Jane inscribes herself in the centre of the colonial metaphor, in this earlier scene (before she is engaged to Rochester) she is decisively cast as an outsider, perched on the sidelines, watching the dynamics between Rochester and his wealthy

peers. Although Rochester does invite Jane to participate, she declines and withdraws quietly to "her usual seat," not knowing what the game entails:

. . . they spoke of 'playing charades,' but in my ignorance I did not understand the term. (Bronte 211).

While her sense of alienation is partially due to the fact that she is relatively new at Thornfield, Lady Ingram's sarcastic and demeaning comments emphasize that a governess has no place in the inner circle of an aristocrat's parlour:

One of the gentlemen . . . seemed to propose that I should be asked to join them; but Lady Ingram instantly negated the notion. "No," I heard her say: "she looks too stupid for any game of the sort" (Bronte 212).

Propped on the margins, Jane incisively observes every detail of the aristocracy's game of charades. And of greatest interest to her is Rochester's interaction with Blanche Ingram--another potential initiate to his harem. Significantly, both Blanche and Rochester assume a foreign aspect in their attempt to act out "Bridewell." They begin with the obvious first step: they present themselves as a couple about to be wed, which, although a charade, is also a reflection of reality for rumours abound that Rochester intends to propose to Blanche. In their second scene, he plays the part of an "Eastern Emir," costumed in shawls with a turban on his head; she is an "Israelitish Princess" offering water from a well. Jane surmises that they fit their roles perfectly: "his dark eyes and swarthy skin and Paynim features suited the costume exactly," and "both her

cast of form and feature, her complexion and her general air" communicated precisely the character she represents. Indeed the text places considerable emphasis on Blanche's foreign demeanor: she has raven ringlets, an oriental eye, a Grecian neck, and the dark olive skin of a Spaniard. According to Rochester, she is "a real strapper . . . big, brown, and buxom; with hair just such as the ladies of Carthage must have had" (Bronte 248).

While the callous behaviour of upper class families (such as the Reeds and the Ingrams) towards Jane suggests a critique of aristocratic values, Bronte's portrayals of these characters are also rife with allusions to physical features Victorians associated with racial marks of inferiority. As previously discussed, Bronte tends to link British class oppression with "the intrinsic despotism of dark skinned people" (Meyer 261). This strategic application of racist imagery to forward a critique of the gentry is also applied to Rochester, particularly in regard to his dealings with women. After he and Blanche fail to prompt the correct response, the master of Thornfield assumes centre stage: his wrists in fetters, and his face blackened with soot. Once again, the charade mirrors reality--but this time very ironically: for, as we later discover, it is Rochester who chains a dark lunatic in his attic. In conjunction with an Eastern motif, the charades scene somewhat sardonically juxtaposes the institution of marriage with an institution for the criminally insane--an entirely consistent analogy

when the secret in Thornfield's attic is revealed. On one level, this demonstrates Bronte's literary skill in terms of ironic adumbration; on another level, the scene offers a complex critique of the corroded values and superficiality of the games played by the ruling class.

Both the charades and sultan/slave episodes cast Rochester as a representative of foreign power who is figuratively chastened with chains and fetters. And in both scenes we see Jane decisively distinguished from her master's 'other women'--a process of individuation which contributes to the overall consolidation of Jane's sense of integrity, of her Self, by way of contrast to female figures who are racially marked. Although the charades scene is framed with a gesture of self-abnegation with Jane claiming ignorance about the rules of the parlour game, she understands more of what is going on than anyone who is playing it. While it takes Colonel Dent and his team a full two minutes to consult on even the easiest part of the puzzle, Jane readily solves the riddle in her own head. In contrast to the gentry's flamboyant decadence and mean-spirited attitudes, we see plain Jane sitting on the periphery, quiet and polite, watching the parlour antics--with the piercing vision of a hawk. We also see her humble and unassuming personality in contrast to Blanche Ingram's, who is essentially cast as a spoiled, upper class bitch whose behaviour towards Rochester is wholly gratuitous. In view of Jane's growing affection for Rochester, Blanche is

the governess' tacit competition, but it is clear that Jane's integrity, as self-effacing as she may be, is far more refined than Miss Ingram's manipulative scheming to land herself a wealthy husband. And in the sultan/slave episode, Jane's integrity is likewise elevated: our one little English girl rises above the confines of the harem, refusing to allow her worth to be measured against the Grand Turk's whole seraglio--figuratively liberating Rochester's other female slaves and transforming him from a foreign despot (back) to an English liberal. While other women may well have submitted to Rochester's magnetism in the past, he should not expect to find the same kind of acquiescence and self-effacement in Jane.

When we consider Rochester's relationships with women in the novel, the seraglio motif works as a fitting analogy. Despite his marriage to Bertha, he pursues numerous liaisons with foreign women, and, although he claims to have had no intention of marrying Blanche, he certainly leads Miss Ingram (and Jane) to believe it might be so. But there is no ignoring the fact that he does try to involve Jane in a fraudulent, illegal marriage, which establishes his polygamous aspect beyond a shadow of a doubt.

While Jane's struggle to resist becoming yet another one of Rochester's harem inmates is the most fully developed instance of the seraglio motif in the novel, she also escapes the male tyranny intrinsic to the harem-like enclosures of Gateshead, Lowood, and Moors End. In contrast

to Jane's relative success, the women in Gateshead, Lowood, and Thornfield do not fare nearly as well: Mrs. Reed dies a lonely and bitter old woman, one of her daughters becomes a nun, and the other marries a "worn out man of fashion;" Helen Burns and Miss Temple's only avenues of escape are, respectively, death at a very young age, and a marriage based more on expediency than anything else; Blanche, Celine, Giacinta, and Clara are jilted and humiliated, and Bertha, after living many years in prison, kills herself. It is only the women from Moors End--Diana and Mary--who, along with Jane, find unmitigated happiness by the end of the novel.

Chapter Four

Literary Strategy II: Sexual Politics,
Widow Burning and Missionary Wives

The sultan/slave/seraglio triptych is a recurring motif that is used as both a structural device and a rhetorical strategy in Jane's pre-nuptial negotiations with Rochester. Yet there is another colonial metaphor that periodically surfaces in the novel: the Hindu ritual of a widow's self-immolation on her husband's funeral pyre, or "sati." But whereas the seraglio is applied in a highly consistent and upfront manner, sati functions as a more seemingly haphazard and submerged metaphor, one which is correlated with Jane's struggle for autonomy against both Rochester and St. John-- and with Bertha's suicide. While Bronte's allusions to sati implicitly articulate a nineteenth century feminist critique of patriarchy, the text figuratively links female self-immolation to the white feminist heroine (Jane) and to the "Indian Messalina" (Bertha) in a contradictory fashion. There is an underlying political irony in Jane's efforts to establish a more egalitarian relationship with Rochester through the metaphors of the seraglio and sati: for the man she wants to marry quite literally keeps another woman cloistered in his house--a colonial wife he did not personally bargain for, but to whom he was contracted vis a vis the financial finangling of his family. Moreover, this dark harem inmate quite literally leaps to her death in flames: the novel's most spectacular example of female self-immolation.

In the conclusion of her seminal article, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," Gayatri Spivak

writes that the most powerful suggestion in Jean Rhys' Wide Sargasso Sea is that Jane Eyre can be read as "the orchestration and staging of the self-immolation of Bertha Mason as 'good wife'" (Spivak 259). While Spivak does not delve into Bronte's other allusions to sati--particularly those associated with Jane--her analysis of feminist individualism and her final interrogative stance about Bertha as "sati" was a major catalyst for this study. Spivak reads Jane Eyre as a "cult text of feminism" (Spivak 244) that is grounded in "the unexamined and covert axiomatics of imperialism" (Spivak 257). She compares what she sees in Jane Eyre as an "uncritical absorption of imperialist presuppositions" with the text's primary native female, Bertha, figured as an insane animal who is sacrificed for her (white) sister's consolidation, to Rhys' novel where the inevitability of Bertha's demise is at least critically foregrounded. Spivak writes that in Wide Sargasso Sea Bertha

... must play out her role, act out the transformation of her "self" into that fictive Other, set fire to the house and kill herself, so that Jane Eyre can become the feminist individualist heroine of British fiction. I must read this as an allegory of the general epistemic violence of imperialism, the construction of a self-immolating colonial subject for the glorification of the social mission of the colonizer (Spivak 251).

So in Spivak's reading, the text's female native Other must be sacrificed in order for the white British heroine to individuate her Self--a gesture driven by the unquestioned "structural motors" of imperialism.

While I will discuss how Bertha's suicide might be read as an image of sati later in this chapter, it is important to establish that "widow burning" influenced Bronte's imagination in a more concrete way than Spivak's argument tends to demonstrate. Interestingly enough, the text does make a direct reference to sati, but one which is connected to Jane--not Bertha. The pre-nuptial love song Rochester sings to Jane is a lyrical rendition of a woman's promise not only to live with her lover, but to die with him as well. Jane's indignation is quickly sparked; she adamantly opposes the "pagan idea" she reads as the song's central theme:

. . . he had talked of his future wife dying with him. What did he mean by such a pagan idea? . . . I had as good a right to die when my time came as he had; but I should bide that time, and not be hurried away in a suttee (Bronte 301).

As in the seraglio episode, Jane invokes a representation of oriental misogyny to deflect Rochester's sexual advances and assert her integrity. For upon completion of his song, and just prior to her allusion to sati, Jane's anxiety about her master's sexual magnetism is apparent:

He rose and came towards me, and I saw his face all kindled, and his full, falcon-eye flashing, and tenderness and passion in every lineament. I quailed momentarily--then I rallied. Soft scene, daring demonstration, I would not have; and I stood in peril of both; a weapon of defence must be prepared--I whetted my tongue . . . (Bronte 301).

As Jane "whets her tongue" as a weapon, she is aware that her best defence is a verbal offence. And Bronte bolsters her heroine's position through a rhetoric that (once again)

combines the terms of romantic individualism with a Christian (ie. anti-pagan) assertion of the spiritual equality of the sexes: "I had as good a right to die when my time came as he had" The repartee continues to develop around the theme of sati, with Rochester responding as follows:

. . . any other woman would have been melted to marrow at hearing such stanzas crooned in her praise (Bronte 301).

As in the earlier allusion to the seraglio, Rochester is characterized as a man with potentially many female followers, a situation which compels Jane, once again, to assert her individuality, her strength of character, and her ability to prevail over her master's sexual tyranny:

I assured him I was naturally hard--very flinty, and that he would often find me so; and that moreover, I was determined to show him divers rugged points in my character before the ensuing four weeks elapsed: he should know fully what sort of a bargain he had made while there was yet time to rescind it (Bronte 301 [my emphasis]).

Significantly, the suicide-love song and the seraglio episodes are linked through Jane's clear distinction between herself and "any other woman," and through a mercantile equation between bargaining and marriage.

Besides this direct reference to "suttee" in the text, there are substantial contextual reasons to think that Bronte's novel was influenced by the sacrificial imagery of female self-immolation. Victorian culture was obsessed with the whole notion of sati. Yet similar to the contradictory cultural mindset of the Victorians towards the seraglio,

there was both a moral repugnance and voyeuristic fascination in regard to sati. In 1817, James Mills writes:

. . . of the modes adopted by Hindus of sacrificing themselves to divine powers, none . . . has more excited the attention of Europeans than the burning of wives upon the funeral piles of their husbands (qtd in Perera 91).

According to Perera, sati "had generated intense popular and literary interest" since the eighteenth century, and she summarizes a number of early nineteenth century writers (Southey, Byron, Scott) who allude to sati, suggesting that in Western discourse sati functioned as an ambiguous emblem that "enhanced and romanticized universal female suffering and the manufacture of an alien and exotic 'Orient'" (91). The spectacular moment of immolation also received considerable attention in English art; one famous visual representation of sati is James Atkinson's painting of a "bare breasted sati looking to heaven (and England) for deliverance," which was exhibited in 1841 (Perera 92). As Paul B. Courtright puts it, "the nineteenth century can be characterized as the era of 'the picturesque sati'" (qtd in Perera 92).

In "Cultural Theory, Colonial Texts: Reading Eyewitness Accounts of Widow Burning," Lata Mani provides a critical-- and often upsetting--analysis of the discourse generated by early nineteenth century English observers of sati, a number of these accounts being published by missionaries. Mani's research reveals two very disturbing tendencies: firstly, that despite substantial evidence to the contrary, the

British valorized what they constructed as the voluntary nature of the widows' martyrdom; secondly, that written reports, which influenced later fictional and artistic renditions of female self-immolation, inevitably accentuated and objectified the physical beauty of the widows as they awaited conflagration--with little or no acknowledgement of their pain and suffering.

While the British eventually monopolized the credit for abolishing sati in 1829, a politically expedient manoeuver to justify and consolidate their moral authority in India, the East India Trading Company had in fact previously legalized the practice (1813) with the proviso that the widow be no younger than sixteen, and that she consented to her death. Interviews with British officials were conducted, often on the site, to determine that coercion was not a factor; permission to proceed was either granted or denied on the basis of this one interview (Mani 396-399). According to British statistics of the time, between 1815-1828 just over 8,000 widows were burned, which suggests that the British legally assessed an imponderably high number of widow burnings as voluntary (Mani 406). However, Mani documents case after case where women struggled to escape, or died excruciatingly painful deaths after extricating themselves from the pyre. Still others survived, only to live as outcasts, severely mutilated, or having lost limbs to infection.

That coercion was often a factor is evidenced in the very reports that claim a sati was a voluntary event-- despite the general frequency of attempts to escape. What Mani's work incisively demonstrates is the proclivity of the colonialist imagination to reconstruct circumstances surrounding a cruel and inhumane event--one institutionally sanctioned by the British themselves. That the British were wholly fascinated with sati, insisting on its voluntary aspect, recording yet disregarding the evidence to the contrary, becomes even more apparent in the tendency to admire and objectify the sacrificial victim as an emblem of peculiar and unusual beauty:

I stood close to her, she observed me attentively She might be about twenty-four or five years of age, a time of life when the bloom of beauty had fled the cheek in India; but she still preserved a sufficient share to prove that she must have been handsome. Her figure was small, but elegantly turned; and the form of her hands and arms was peculiarly beautiful (qtd in Mani 400).

In the following case, the narrator does initially note that the widow was so intoxicated with drugs that she had to be lifted onto the pyre, but, as Mani points out, his sympathetic response is provoked not by the fact of coercion, but by her beauty:

She was twenty-one years of age, beautiful to my conception, by far the most so of any native female I have ever seen; combined with the beauty of face, the figure was perfect, which heightened the distress, if possible, in the minds of those who were witnesses of the sacrifice, and felt their inability to prevent it (qtd in Mani 400-401).

Mani critiques these sorts of descriptive narratives as "phallogocentric reveries," suggesting "the voyeuristic

pleasure of a specifically male gaze" that mystifies "coercion as the devotion and free will of the widow," and enacting "a discursive violence that is every bit as cruel and indefensible as the practice that is its referent" (Mani 400).

The vast majority of reports on sati accentuate and objectify the beauty of the widow, and there is "strikingly little description of suffering in most eyewitness accounts" (Mani 401). As the widow proceeds to her conflagration, details of pain and terror seem to vanish; as Mani puts it, it is as if "the widow herself evaporates" (Mani 401). If anguish is expressed after the death of the widow, it is usually articulated as horror, but a horror more concerned with emotionally distancing and morally justifying the position of the observer, more concerned with self-pity than with the tragic sufferings of the widow:

I would willingly endure a week's gout, rather than suffer again what I did on this day, in the vain hope of saving a life (qtd in Mani 402)

Although most accounts seem mesmerized by the youthful beauty of the widows, official British records show that over two-thirds of the women who burnt between 1815-1825 were over forty-five years of age. After the prohibition of sati in 1829, no further statistics were kept by British authorities (Mani 406-407).

Despite its ~~criminalization~~ and elision from the record books, sati continued to inspire the Victorian imagination's appetite for all things exotic, while it simultaneously

provided a moral imperative for the missionaries' fervent pursuit of their spiritual objectives. Popular adherence to the notion of voluntary sati persisted into the mid-nineteenth century, when widow burnings were read, on the one hand, as a tragically romantic symbol of wifely devotion, but, on the other hand, as a Christian register of the potency of worshipping false idols.

But besides providing evangelists and colonialists with a monitory image of the barbarous atrocities inherent in non-Western culture, sati also "functioned as an emblem of female oppression through which Western women represented their struggles" (Perera 91). As demonstrated in the suicide-love song episode, Bronte uses the colonial metaphor of sati to challenge the romanticized (and unChristian) notion of a woman so totally devoted to her husband that she would choose death over life without him, but she also develops an implicit and, as we will see, somewhat risky critique of the sacrificial role of the missionary wife--an utterly thankless job that, for the majority of Englishwomen, not only went unrecognized, but often culminated in premature death following a life of isolation and grueling hardship:

Missionary wives got none of the public praise which was heaped on their successful husbands in the heady years of the 1830s and 40s. The public funerals, the public meetings, the obituaries, the memorials and biographies were not for them If wives died before husbands, their daughters took on the task of providing help and support. (Hall 258)

And it is the impulse towards such extreme self-sacrifice that Jane must resist in her relationship with St. John, particularly in terms of embarking on a mission to India as his wife.

In contrast to the dark patriarchal despots governing Gateshead, Lowood, and Thornfield, St. John Rivers is cut from a decisively white Anglo-Saxon cloth, and, unlike the hypocritical charity extended to Jane by the Reeds and the Brocklehursts, St. John's rectory is built on fundamental Christian values. Although his severe aspect is apparent right from the start--he restrains Mary from giving Jane more milk and bread until the starving woman "gives an account of herself"--he at least stands by the letter of the law in terms of not turning the needy from your door. And whatever St. John lacks in emotional sensitivity is more than adequately fulfilled by his sisters, Diana and Mary, whose names allude to virginal protectresses of women and orphans. St. John may well be the supreme authority in decisive matters, but his austere disposition is unable to dampen the genuine warmth and empathy his sisters exude. While mindful of their brother's wishes, Diana and Mary do express a critical perspective on his behaviour, and their positive influence in the home is manifestly apparent.

And in contrast to her interactions with Rochester, Jane's central conflict with St. John focuses more on the issue of her spiritual autonomy than on the protection of her sexual identity per se. As I previously indicated, St.

John displays a morbidly repressed sexuality: any worldly passion he might possess is sublimated through his zeal for his clerical vocation. So in stark contrast to her erotic encounters with Rochester, Jane faces little if any sexual danger in the company of St. John. Although the seraglio was a fitting metaphorical device to use in the case of the master of Thornfield Hall, in view of the absence of any immediately obvious risk of sexual submission, the seraglio is not an appropriate analogy for Jane's anxieties about her relationship with the vicar of Moors End.

But while Jane need have no fear that St. John might attempt to coerce her into an inappropriate sexual liaison, she is quite legitimately disturbed by the prospect of a "loveless" marriage with him. Because of the vicar's repressed sexuality, the notion of a loveless marriage probably means that sex would be a perfunctory task, and Jane would be obligated to respect St. John's connubial rights in this regard. Although such a probability runs contrary to the kind of unbridled lust that Rochester represents, it also poses a significant threat to Jane's sexuality--for Jane has an intrinsically romantic side to her character as evidenced in her writing and her art. Marriage to St. John would require a drastic tempering of Jane's passionate inclinations; her emotional needs and her creative voice would be sacrificed in order to fulfill her wifely duties.

Like the power Rochester exercises over Jane through his intense sexual magnetism, the inherent threat of St. John's repressed sexuality is addressed metaphorically. "Fire" is conventionally used to represent both sexual passion and religious sacrifice; St. John is repeatedly associated with this ironic elemental symbol. However, St. John Rivers is a curious admixture of water and ice as well as fire--a blend of contradictory elements suggesting the inner turmoil of one afflicted with the struggle between the spirit and the flesh. While his surname has connotations of baptism, salvation, and the flow of never-ending life, he is also associated with ice and snow, or frozen waters. This is clearly consistent with his emotional and sexual frigidity, but perhaps also suggests that his calling to save souls is obstructed, or at least cannot be realized in the position he holds at Moors End. Fire destroys ice but can itself be destroyed by water, a circular conundrum which further reinforces the sense of competing forces within the vicar's psyche. And Bronte develops the fire metaphor further, emphasizing that the flame that sears St. John does so from within. As his sister Diana puts it: "St. John looks quiet, Jane; but he hides a fever in his vitals" (Bronte 383). Another image of sexual repression, the "fever" consuming St. John from within is channeled into preparing himself for missionary work in India--work that his sisters fear will be the death of him.

While the internal flames associated with St. John have connotations of sexual repression, "fire" is also a conventional symbol for religious sacrifice. And it is through a colonial motif of ritual sacrifice that Jane becomes intimately associated with fire as well. Focusing on her heroine's prospect of becoming a missionary's wife in India, Bronte obliquely alludes to another representation of oriental misogyny--the ritual of sati--to articulate Jane's fears of submission to St. John's male authority.

After surreptitiously testing Jane for ten months to see if she could endure the harsh conditions of mission life in India, St. John informs her that she had proven herself worthy of the task.

I have watched you ever since we first met: I have made you my study for ten months. I have proved in that time by sundry tests: and what have I seen and elicited? . . . I recognized a soul that revelled in the flame and excitement of sacrifice (Bronte 428-429).

The correlation between fire and sacrifice is developed further as Jane acknowledges that if she goes to India, she goes "to premature death:"

If I do go with him--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 (Bronte 430).

While Jane is apparently willing to sacrifice her life to God's mission, she resists the notion of dying in the service of her husband, which she quite rightfully suspects is St. John's expectation. That St. John wants Jane to sacrifice her life not only for God but for him is evident

when he responds to her counter-proposal of accompanying him not as his wife, but as his helpmate, or curate:

I want a wife: the sole helpmeet I can influence efficiently in life, and retain absolutely till death. . . . Do you think God will be satisfied with half an oblation? Will He accept a mutilated sacrifice? It is the cause of God I advocate: it is under His standard I enlist you. I cannot accept on His behalf a divided allegiance: it must be entire (Bronte 431).

While Jane seems prepared to throw herself--body and soul--onto a sacrificial fire to work God's will, she knows she could not bear the internal flames of emotional/sexual repression as St. John's wife:

But as his wife--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, though the imprisoned flame consumed vital after vital--this would be unendurable (Bronte 433).

In the context of a mission to India, the nexus of fire, sacrifice, and marriage suggests the ritual of sati: the self-immolation of a wife on her husband's funeral pyre. That Bronte is implicitly alluding to sati becomes more apparent when Jane confronts St. John and accuses him of trying to force her to commit suicide:

God did not give me my life to throw away; and to do as you wish me would, I begin to think, be almost equivalent to committing suicide (Bronte 439).

And, immediately following this exchange, Jane confides in Diana, telling her cousin of St. John's proposal. Diana's response is precise and to the point:

You are much too pretty, as well as too good, to be grilled alive in Calcutta (Bronte 441).

All of the images of fire and sacrifice that I have mentioned could easily be read as purely Christian metaphors of sacrifice, purification and salvation. To be sure, St. John's all-consuming religious zealousness would pose an ominous threat to Jane's spiritual autonomy whether they married and went to India or stayed in England. But the fact that she considers the extremely dangerous proposition of going all the way to India with him as his helpmate, but not as his wife, is crucial to the text's feminist agenda: for it suggests that while Jane is more than willing to risk her life and suffer the hardships of missionary work, she resists the role of "a good Christian wife"--a role which she suspects would condemn her to martyrdom not for God's sake, but for her husband's. The colonial context of a mission to India allows Bronte to demonstrate that although her heroine is skeptical of the Victorian ideal of the good Christian wife--an ideal epitomized by missionary wives--this did not mean that she could not be a true and devoted Christian unto herself, in possession of her own soul, and quite capable of making her own sacrifices in God's name. There is a distinct emphasis in the text on the fundamental difference between women who sacrifice themselves for their husbands and women who sacrifice themselves for God (a difference that even an educated man of the cloth such as St. John seems unable to discern). While the latter is evidently endorsed by the text, the former is an attitude that Bronte implicitly equates with the "pagan idea" of

"suttee," a heathen practice in which a woman sacrifices her life for the glory of her husband while condemning her own soul to hell. At the heart of the struggle between Jane and St. John is a theological dispute concerning the autonomy of a woman's soul and her personal relationship with God.

Besides the assertion of Jane's spiritual autonomy, there is also an important secular concern embedded in her prospect of becoming a missionary's wife--a very practical feminist concern which Bronte raises in various ways throughout Jane Eyre: the issue of women and employment. While St. John seems hard pressed to imagine a woman engaged in a meaningful occupation outside of the Victorian domestic ideal of matrimony, Bronte's concern with women and work--that is, her critique of the lack of viable options for female employment, as well as the lack of respect for women's contributions through the narrow range of positions they did fill--is evident throughout Jane Eyre, most apparently in her valorization of the role of governess/teacher. But in contrast to her evident critique of disparaging classist and sexist attitudes towards this post, her concern for the predicament of missionary wives is more subtly expressed because to suggest that these female labourers in the colonies suffered from exploitation and abuse inevitably poses a challenge to both the Victorian ideal of "the good Christian wife" and the integrity of the male-dominated mission administration.

Bronte definitely walks a thin line in this regard: on the one hand, the text applauds the larger spiritual objectives of the missionary project in India through Jane's willingness to participate in it (even after she reneges on going to India herself, she finances St. John's work through her inheritance); on the other hand, Jane's abhorrence in the face of St. John's marriage proposal and her repeated pleas to accompany him not as his wife, but as his helpmate, implies that the 'problem' is not with the mission itself, or even necessarily with the individual man himself, but rather with the rigidly prescribed role of "the missionary wife."

Jane's intuitive horror at the prospect of a loveless marriage to St. John, and her perception that to become a missionary's wife would be a sacrifice akin to committing suicide, can be contextualized historically. Catherine Hall, in "Missionary Stories: Gender and Ethnicity in England in the 1830s and 1840s," analyzes the role of the missionary wife, emphasizing that "in the discourse of evangelical Christianity there was plenty of space for imagination and adventure but little for the idea of romantic love as the key to marital choice," (252) and that "time and again in missionary biographies, their [missionary husbands'] marriages are seen as entirely secondary to their act of faith" (251). Not surprisingly, the situation was considerably different for women wanting to pursue their spiritual inclinations through missionary work. While a

woman's "act of faith" was undoubtedly as strong and genuine as her male counterpart's, marriage was the fulcrum upon which all of her spiritual aspirations, material commitments, and personal sacrifices were balanced. For the vast majority of Englishwomen who pursued work abroad, marriage was a compulsory condition of their service.

. . . those women who were seized with the missionary spirit could not themselves become preachers in the early nineteenth century. There was no question . . . of accepting women as trainees or of granting them equal access with men. Marriage, therefore, offered a possible route into the work for those women who wanted to do it. Similarly, accompanying an unmarried brother was occasionally possible, and by the 1830s a small number of women were going out as teachers (Hall 251).

Jane's negotiations with St. John echo the historical struggles of women aspiring to missionary service discussed in the above quotation. With the inner knowledge that "as his curate, his comrade, all would be right," Jane reiterates her conditions to St. John:

I repeat I freely consent to go with you as your fellow missionary, but not as your wife; I cannot marry you, and become a part of you (Bronte 433).

To which St. John replies:

How can I, a man, not yet thirty, take out with me to India a girl of nineteen, unless she be married to me? How can we be for ever together--sometimes in solitudes, sometimes amidst savage tribes--and unwed? (Bronte 433)

And Jane firmly stands her ground with:

Very well . . . under the circumstances, quite as well as if I were either your real sister, or a man and a clergyman like yourself (Bronte 433).

While Jane's feminist assertions are truly laudable, the equality she calls for in terms of women and missionary

service is highly unrealistic given the circumstances of the time. Hall documents a number of cases where young women write passionately of their desire to pursue missionary work either with family members, or occasionally as independent agents. However, the vast majority of these women ultimately accepted marriage proposals in order to fulfill their goals. And such is the case with Jane, who is finally persuaded to marry St. John, not in the face of continued pressure from his zealousness and rigid determination, but because he, in what Jane calls a "sublime moment," expresses tenderness and affection towards her:

I stood motionless under my hierophant's touch. My refusals were forgotten--my fears overcome--my wrestlings paralyzed. The Impossible--that is, my marriage with St. John--was fast becoming the Possible. All was changing utterly with a sudden sweep. . . . Oh, that gentleness! How far more potent is it than force! I could resist St. John's wrath: I grew pliant as a reed under his kindness (Bronte 444).

But of course Jane is pulled back from the abyss of such an apocalyptic decision. Through what seems a rather melodramatic intervention of Rochester's voice calling her name, Jane's salvation can be understood as her own inner voice reminding her that her motive for considering missionary work in the first place was somewhat disingenuous. For the reasoning behind Jane's interest in going to India is in fact quite spurious, revolving around her loss of her beloved master:

The case is very plain before me. In leaving England, I should leave a loved but empty land--Mr. Rochester is not there; and if he were, what is, what can that ever be to me? . . . I must seek another interest in life to replace the one lost: is not the

occupation he [St. John] now offers me truly the most glorious man can adopt or God assign? . . . I believe I must say yes . . . (Bronte 429-430).

What initially appears to be a genuine commitment to the larger missionary cause is ultimately a young woman's attempt to run away from a broken heart.

But despite Jane's personal extrication from the sacrificial fire of an ill-suited marriage to St. John, the submerged parallel between widow burning and the role of the missionary wife stands as an implicit critique of the exploitation of British female labourers in the colonies.

It was widely believed in early nineteenth century England that Western women owed their superior position to Christianity; it was Christianity which had raised society from its superstitions and freed women from the degradations associated in the English mind with heathenism, in particular the practice of "sati" in India (Hall 251).

In view of the above quotation, with its annunciation of the nineteenth century belief that Englishwomen were raised, through Christ, from the degradations suffered by heathen women, the paralleling of missionary wives with Indian widows in Jane Eyre is reinforced historically as a possible critique of gender hypocrisy within the male dominated missionary project. Bronte reconstructs the stereotypical image of voluntary sati, showing her heroine consciously and deliberately recoiling from the flames of a similar kind of religious self-sacrifice (becoming a missionary's wife), in order to chastize Englishmen for their treatment of Englishwomen through a tacit suggestion that such behaviour is not congenial to the English character. While Bronte is

undoubtedly genuinely concerned with the conditions suffered by missionary wives, she delivers her critique through an ethnocentric, cautionary reminder to her audience to recall the superiority of their Christian and, by extension, British values. Gently turning the self-professed superiority of Christian Englishmen against itself, Bronte equates the sacrifices and premature deaths of missionary wives with Indian women who commit sati not to extend a gesture of solidarity with women in heathendom, but rather to accentuate the need for reform in terms of the oppression of Christian women by Christian men. To use Zonana's terms, Bronte's feminist desire to change the status quo in terms of British gender oppression can be read simultaneously as "a conservative effort to make the West more like itself" (Zonana 594).

Yet in contrast to the parallel which is clearly drawn between Rochester and a sultan, the text does not explicitly connect St. John's offer of marriage to sati. Instead, the sati motif accrues significance obliquely, becoming apparent only when the colonial context of the novel is brought forward. However, it seems to me that in many ways Bronte's portrayal of St. John's hypocritical attitude towards women is a riskier endeavour than her critique of Rochester's objectionable, yet somehow less insidiously dangerous, behaviour. Whereas most of her Victorian readership would concur about Rochester's immoral propensities, nodding their heads in recognition of his sultan-like qualities, in the

face of St. John's moral authority--an authority that may ring hollow to many twentieth century readers, but sound quite legitimate to many Victorian readers--Bronte's approach is necessarily more tentative, her criticism more equivocal. By removing St. John from his English parish and displacing his frustrated ambitions for unmitigated power over others, including his own wife, to India, Bronte can criticize the Victorian domestic ideal of a suppliant wife at a distance, in an extraordinary context that, while recognizably Christian, is somewhat safely removed from the daily oppression of ordinary married women.

There is one final, spectacular image of female self-immolation in Jane Eyre:

. . . She was on the roof, where she was standing, waving her arms above the battlements, and shouting out till they could hear a mile off. . . . She was a big woman, and had long black hair: it [was] streaming against the flames as she stood . . . she yelled and gave a spring, and the next minute she lay smashed on the pavement. (Bronte 453)

As previously mentioned, Gayatri Spivak reads the demise of the colonial madwoman as a testimony to the epistemic violence of imperialism, and she suggests that the self-immolation of the text's primary native female can be seen as a sacrificial gesture that helps Jane further consolidate her individualist position as the novel's feminist heroine.

Laura Donaldson responds to Spivak's analysis of Bertha as 'sati' in Decolonizing Feminisms: Race, Gender, and Empire Building (1992) in a chapter titled "The Miranda Complex: Colonialism and the Question of Feminist Reading."

In the process of trying to salvage Bronte's classic depiction of female subjectivity as a valid form of feminist revolt, Donaldson argues that despite Jane's adoption of the "rhetoric of historical imperialism," she is nevertheless still on the margins of the colonialist project (28). But more pertinent to the issue of the relationship between Jane and Bertha, Donaldson also attempts to align these two characters through what she defines as their mutual acts of violent resistance:

It is in this context of resistance that one could argue for Jane and Bertha as oppressed rather than opposed sisters. Both are imprisoned by the textual figure who represents patriarchal imperialism (Jane psychologically, Bertha physically), and both resist their imprisonment with violent gestures (Jane symbolically crushes him and Bertha literally immolates his patronym) (Donaldson 31).

Directly disputing Spivak's point that Bertha is sacrificed for her sister's consolidation, Donaldson opts instead to valorize Bertha's suicide, transforming it into an act of revolutionary insurrection and a means towards self-empowerment. Donaldson further claims that "by characterizing Bertha only as victim," Spivak "fails to detect a far more subversive politics embedded within her (Bertha's) violent act" (Donaldson 29).

Basing her argument on Phyllis Chesler's Women and Madness (1972), Donaldson contends that although women attempt to commit suicide far more often than men, the men who do try to kill themselves are usually successful; therefore, Bertha's suicidal 'success' radically challenges

the feminine norm of passivity imposed by patriarchal conditioning:

According to Chesler, women who succeed at taking their own lives outwit and reject their "feminine" role at the only possible price: their deaths. We do not know what Bertha shouted at Rochester before she leaped from Thornfield's roof, but we can conjecture that her insistence upon the violent physical destruction of both Thornfield and herself constitutes an act of resistance not only to her status as a woman in a patriarchal culture but also as a colonized object. (Donaldson 30)

The expressed motive behind Donaldson's reading of Bertha's suicide as resistance rather than defeat is that she wants "to counter" the "invisibility imposed upon her [Bertha] . . . by Spivak's contention that she dies on the pyre of feminist individualism" (Donaldson 31). While I am not about to defend Spivak's position per se, I am certain that to expose the victimization of the madwoman from the colonies through a stark explication of her utter powerlessness, to accentuate her total paralysis as a functional human being within the textual parameters Bronte's feminist discourse offers, and to definitively foreground her suicide as a spectacular indicator of her expendability and absolute defeat does not constitute an occlusion of the tragic significance of Bertha's role. If anything, the attempt to transform the despair that erodes an individual's resistance to the point that they kill themselves into the glorification of an oppressed woman's 'final act of revolt' mystifies the culpability and power of the forces that conspired to bring her to the brink in the first place.

What Donaldson's argument neglects to take into account is how the text circumvents the issue of responsibility for the madwoman's death. There is an explicit distancing of the first person narrator from Bertha's suicide--Jane hears of this dramatic incident through the second-hand account of the innkeeper of "The Rochester Arms" over a year later. And while the description of Bertha's final moments generates a certain degree of detached horror, there is negligible sympathy extended towards her. Indeed the largest amount of sympathetic attention is reserved for Rochester, who is maimed and blinded because of his efforts to rescue his wife. With both Jane and Rochester exonerated from responsibility for Bertha's death--Jane through time and distance; Rochester through an uncharacteristic act of compassion and an apparent reawakening of his sense of duty--the path is cleared for their marriage.

But while neither Jane nor Rochester can be held accountable for Bertha's death, neither is it established that the madwoman is responsible for her own demise. The position Jane puts forward is that Bertha's destructive behaviour is involuntary because "she cannot help being mad" (328). In view of the biological 'fact' that Bertha's mental disorder is racially determined, Jane's position lends a sense of the inevitable to the madwoman's suicide. So Bertha's self-destruction is involuntary not because she is coerced into suicide from external pressures, such as the tyranny of an oppressive husband, but rather because of the

internal flaws and immoral propensities that run in her Creole blood.

That Bertha's self-immolation can be read as the novel's forgone conclusion of her entirely miserable essence as a person of an ambiguous racial mix contrasts markedly with Jane's conscious, valiant, and successful efforts to save herself from the flames of self-sacrifice to male domination. While Bronte applies the concept of female self-immolation to both Jane and Bertha, she does so from two contradictory perspectives. For while the text clearly and consistently demonstrates an abhorrence towards the notion of voluntary 'sati', in the case of the feminist heroine suicide is shown as running contrary both to her nature and the principles she represents, but in the case of the "Indian Messalina" this is part and parcel of the inexorable yearning for self-destruction that runs in her blood. Bronte's metaphorical appropriation of sati articulates and advances the interests of Western feminism while it simultaneously rationalizes and confirms the sufferings of the dark foreign Other as a race-related proclivity for madness and an inherited tendency towards self-destruction.

Chapter Five

Literary Strategy III: Twisting the Argument:
Female Sexuality and the Noble Savage

Throughout Jane Eyre, Bronte figuratively applies the seraglio and sati as representations of oriental misogyny in order to advance the interests of a nineteenth-century, Western feminist perspective. What might initially appear a sympathetic identification, a paralleling of circumstances, with non-white/not-quite-white women from foreign cultures, is a rhetorical ploy to chasten and redeem the Englishman who has abandoned what the text claims as the definitively British values of liberty, equality, fraternity--a discourse gleaned from the rhetoric of the French Revolution. But not only is the text's apparent gesture of solidarity with non-Western women revealed as self-serving and ethnocentric, it ultimately naturalizes the submission of these women to male dominance, rationalizing polygamy and widow-burning as practices symptomatic not of different social and religious institutions, but of the very blood in the veins of the racial Other. While the text clearly acknowledges the oppression of non-Western women, it does so through an imperialist and racist paranoia that regards dark-skinned males as intrinsically despotic, as evidenced in their treatment of women, and, hypocritically enough, through an imperialist and racist axiomatic that sees dark-skinned women as naturally inclined to submission and self-loathing. Rochester's "harem inmates" clearly lack the imagination, stamina, and principled convictions of "our one little English girl"; for them to mount their own gender revolution would be inconceivable. Bertha's inexorable yearning for

self-destruction is associated with her mixed blood and ambiguous racial origins--an ambiguity that effectively shields Rochester, and perhaps to some degree Jane, from assuming responsibility for the madwoman's suicide.

In every scene that I have examined that applies the seraglio and sati motifs, Jane's identity is more sharply defined and progressively consolidated in contrast to degraded foreign women. While there is some indication that Jane perceives a parallel between her own struggles against Rochester and St. John's attempts to undermine her autonomy and the oppression of non-British women, suggesting that it is not she who degrades Rochester's foreign mistresses (whether from his real or imaginary harems) and it is not she who blames his colonial femme fatale for her genetically determined psychoses, and it is not she who endorses the extreme submission of women who are the indigenous inhabitants of the colonies, Bronte's feminist heroine is nevertheless distinguished from the ranks of these female Others through an ethnocentric and fundamentally racist assertion of the natural proclivity of foreign women to fulfill the requirements of their degraded positions. Promiscuity runs in the blood of French women; moral laxity and madness is coded into the Creole's racial impurity. And suicide through self-immolation becomes the only imaginable solution to the tragedy of being born an "Indian Messalina." Ultimately, the oppression suffered by the text's foreign female characters is not the result of the patriarchal

structure of their respective societies, but rather a result of their biological deficiencies and natural inferiority in contrast to all the innately advanced aspects of the English character--male and female alike.

There is one final colonial metaphor Bronte uses in Jane Eyre which adds a curious twist to the argument at hand: she figuratively correlates Jane's climactic emotional confrontation with Rochester with a North American Indian paddling his canoe in dangerous waters. After the secret of the madwoman in the attic has been revealed, and in her final, passionate encounter with the master of Thornfield, Jane once again inscribes herself in the centre of a colonial metaphor that posits a likeness between herself and a foreign figure. Also, similar to the previously discussed strategic allusions to the foreign Other, Jane is in a vulnerable position where she must protect her integrity. For Rochester is dangerously out of control, threatening Jane with physical violence, perhaps even sexual assault:

"Jane! will you hear reason?" (he stooped and approached his lips to my ear); "because, if you won't, I'll try violence." His voice was hoarse; his look that of a man who is just about to burst an insufferable bond and plunge headlong into wild licence. I saw that in another moment, and with one impetus of frenzy more, I should be able to do nothing with him. The present--the passing second of time--was all I had in which to control and restrain him: a movement of repulsion, flight, fear would have sealed my doom--and his. (Bronte 330)

Despite the fact that this is the most dramatic and risky confrontation with a man that she faces in the novel, Jane

claims to have no fear. Immediately following the above quotation, she describes her inner feelings:

But I was not afraid: not in the least. I felt an inward power; a sense of influence, which supported me. The crisis was perilous; but not without its charm: such as the Indian, perhaps, feels when he slips over the rapid in his canoe. (Bronte 330)

The connotations of a 'noble savage' negotiating dangerous waters are very sexual. While Rochester is about to "plunge headlong into wild licence," Jane, it is suggested, stays above the rushing waters, manipulating the undulations of her canoe with considerable expertise. And not only is Jane unafraid of Rochester's volatile frustration, she finds the situation rather exhilarating and "not without its charm."

What is unique about Jane's identification with the sensations of an Indian negotiating dangerous waters is that she makes no apparent attempt to distinguish herself from the simile she suggests. Even more unique than this is that the dark foreign Other with whom Jane identifies is male. In contrast to the text's other representations of dark-skinned males, who are emasculated and subdued in fetters and chains, the Indian's virility appears to remain intact. Confident in his ability to control the forces rushing him down the river, he is emblematic of the individual in a raw state of freedom: proud and uninhibited in his natural environment.

Although the text initially appears to represent the Indian in his canoe in a relatively positive light, appealing to the romanticized stereotype of the 'noble

savage', what immediately follows this figurative allusion qualifies things to some extent. While Jane seems to identify with this quintessentially masculine figure, confident in her own skill and daring in handling such a precarious challenge, she actually assumes control by manipulating another kind of rushing waters: she bursts into tears.

I had been struggling with tears for some time: I had taken great pains to repress them, because I knew he would not like to see me weep. Now, however, I considered it well to let them flow freely and as long as they liked. If the flood annoyed him, so much the better. So I gave way and cried heartily. (Bronte 330)

In all of her previous encounters with Rochester, and in her confrontations with other intimidating men in the novel (namely, John Reed, Brocklehurst, and St. John), Jane demonstrates superior acumen, often putting her male opponents on guard with her innately advanced rhetorical skills. But, in this case, she adopts what appears a stereotypical feminine defence strategy: a calculated and timely torrent of tears, with the expressed purpose of "annoying" Rochester. The "inward sense of power" that Jane draws from her mental image of a 'noble savage' disintegrates into a flood of emotion; ironically enough, she achieves control of Rochester by ostensibly suggesting that she has lost control of herself.

The transformation of the masculine pride embodied in the 'noble savage' into a classic representation of feminine humility--or is it feminine wiles?--can be seen as another example of Jane strategically appropriating, reconstructing,

and adapting an icon of male sexuality to fit her needs. In the Sultan/slave episode, Rochester's egotistical male fantasy is censored and re-written; his libido is checked through a metaphor in which Jane forces him to his knees in irons. In the case of the North American Indian, the master of Thornfield is emotionally subdued by Jane's tears, tears that are figuratively linked to the dangerous waters navigated by 'savages', tears that Jane dexterously manipulates. But what is very different about the text's representation of the Grand Turk and his seraglio and the 'noble savage' is that in the former a dark-skinned male is figured as intrinsically despotic while in the latter a non-white man serves as an inspirational force in Jane's mind. That a small and spritely Victorian woman tacitly identifies with an emblem of masculine pride and virility is, to say the least, a curious travesty of gender role expectations.

Although the gender dynamics in the text's allusions to the seraglio, sati, and the 'noble savage' are similar in the sense that they all help Jane secure her sexual autonomy, the case of the Indian in his canoe, particularly in terms of the feminization of a masculine symbol, is very perplexing. To begin with, the scene is the most sexually provocative one in the novel. In her earlier erotic encounters with Rochester, Jane demonstrates self-confidence and remains firm in her moral convictions. But in this climactic scene her struggle is not merely a matter of chastizing Rochester and keeping him at bay--she comes very

close to abandoning her principles and accepting his proposal to live common-law. While Rochester is about to "plunge headlong into wild licence," Jane's libidinal energies are also aroused. As previously stated, she is not afraid of Rochester's aggression; in fact, she finds the perilous tension between herself and her lover rather exhilarating, and "not without its charm." To more explicitly suggest that a female character, particularly a novel's heroine, had active sexual desires would be considered risqué and in poor taste to most Victorian readers. So, rather than pursuing Jane's urge to yield to Rochester any further, Brontë projects her heroine's sexual impulses onto the Indian.

While such a strategy may initially seem strange from a feminist perspective, the objective in this scene is not so much to force Rochester into behaving properly (he has clearly gone past the point of no return anyway) as it is an attempt to help Jane come to terms with her own sexuality, to find a way to articulate her conflicting feelings about her sexual morality and her deep yearning to belong somewhere, to someone. Although Jane invokes an image of masculine sexuality--perhaps to momentarily detach herself from the intensity of her turmoil--she focuses not so much on the symbolic aspect of the 'noble savage' as she does on the sensations evoked by a canoe slipping over the rapids. I read this as a peculiarly Victorian female sexual fantasy: one conditioned by the larger colonialist imagination that

expressed its culturally repressed sexual impulses through exotic representations of the foreign Other, and one simultaneously constrained by sexist norms only capable of comprehending an active female sexuality as a submissive form of self-degradation. In other words, Bronte simply did not have at her disposal any 'safe' way to represent female sexual desire without herself compromising her heroine's dignity and autonomy--the very crime for which Rochester, and the text's other male authorities, are somehow punished.

The sexual negotiations depicted in this climactic scene would necessarily pose a tremendous double-bind for a Victorian woman writer who clearly wants to create a genuine story about all the forces confronting a woman attempting to discover her Self--a discovery which would naturally include an awakening of sexual desire--and where she belongs in relation to a 'man's world.' As we saw in Bronte's application of the seraglio motif, women who do engage in sexual relationships outside the socially acceptable parameters of Victorian England are degraded figures of submission, self-effacement, and, most acutely in the case of Bertha, self-loathing. With such a precedent firmly established, and with Jane already depicted as transcending the confines of the seraglio, her sexual desires are instead projected onto the only viable option: a masculine icon who is proud, uninhibited, and, perhaps most significantly, fits naturally in his environment. That the Indian is both at one with his surroundings and comfortable in his isolation pre-

figures Jane's epiphanic realization that becomes her saving grace. After Rochester rather nastily points out that she has no relatives or friends "to offend" (ie. care) if she lives with him, Jane discovers the indomitable voice of her autonomous Self:

I care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself. (Bronte 344)

Since her outburst in the Red Room, Jane has struggled long and hard to keep her passionate aspect under wraps. But her intense longing to fit in somewhere, to no longer be an outsider looking in, makes it extremely difficult for her to stand by her moral convictions and repress her need for intimate companionship. After her identification with the Indian slipping over the rapids, Jane's collapse into tears is a necessary release of the pent up frustration of a lifetime spent trying to keep herself together in the face of repeated rejection and feeling intensely unattractive and unloved. Yet what from a twentieth-century reader's point of view would be a more than understandable and healthy release of emotion is described by Bronte as a calculated device to tame Rochester's frenzy. What initially seems an instance of stereotypical feminine wiles acutally encapsulates the tragedy of being a Victorian woman indoctrinated by a repressed society: even the most legitimate tears must be rationalized and accorded at least the semblance of self-control.

Because of the repressive social and cultural climate of the Victorian era, the fundamentally racist and ethnocentric assumptions about English superiority, and the nascent political and economic hegemony of British colonialism, the issues of male sexual dominance and female sexuality in Jane Eyre are frequently mediated through metaphors degrading and objectifying the foreign Other. When the primary objective is to criticize male sexual dominance Bronte strategically applies a representation of oriental misogyny that sees dark-skinned males as intrinsically despotic. And when the focus shifts to Jane's sexuality, she too becomes associated with an image of foreign otherness, although in this case we see an idealized and relatively positive representation of a non-white male. Yet the romanticized image of the 'noble savage,' replete with all the sexual connotations of his half-naked, uninhibited rapport with nature, is nevertheless wholly disinterested in the Indian as anything other than an objectified projection of unwanted, anxiety-laden sexual impulses--impulses that for historical and cultural reasons cannot attach themselves to a Victorian lady, but somehow naturally accrue to a colonial 'savage'. But while Jane's sexuality, indeed her very gender identity, is imaginatively displaced and safely contained in a metaphor of masculine/individual control, all other allusions to female sexuality are made in reference to women who lack personal integrity--a fundamental absence of self-control that is inextricably linked to their racial and

ethnic origins. The most obvious instance of this is Bertha, but even minor female characters whose sexuality is relatively understated, such as Blanche Ingram's flirtatious attempt to snare Rochester, are somehow branded with a foreign aspect.

This repeated displacement of a cultural anxiety about sex onto an objectified foreign Other has significant implications for feminist readings of one of the founding canonical works in the feminist literary reserve. While Bronte articulates an unambiguously feminist position throughout the novel in terms of the substandard education, social degradation, and economic exploitation of white middle-class women, and she courageously criticizes the hypocritical double-standard applied to women in terms of their spiritual aspirations and devotion to God, sadly enough, when it comes to the critically important issue of female sexuality the text cannot consciously sustain its plea for the individual rights of women in terms of exploring and expressing themselves sexually. Whenever the issue of women and sex comes close to the surface, a metaphor invoking foreign otherness is used either as a monitory image of disastrous consequence, or, as in the case of the feminist heroine, as a means to displace and safely contain pent-up sexual energies. The most crucial aspect of a woman's identity, namely the evolving stages of her sexual development, cannot be articulated through the text's otherwise indomitable feminist voice.

Conclusion

In Jane Eyre, a white and a non-white woman share parallel, non-intersecting storylines. Jane and Bertha are repeatedly juxtaposed in a series of bizarre and violent coincidences; they even come to share the same identity through the name "Mrs. Rochester"--but only ostensibly. As I have argued throughout this thesis, the consolidation of Jane's identity is ultimately predicated on the negation of all that she is not: all that is non-white, non-British and non-Christian. As Jane's contrasting image of otherness, "Bertha" serves as a register against which the feminist heroine can more clearly define the parameters of her selfhood--parameters that must be firmly established before she can indeed become "Mrs. Rochester." In so far as they are both a part of Rochester's covert scheme for self-redemption, Jane and Bertha share the same surface narrative and gothic context. But the text does not really allow the trajectories of their lives to intersect. While there is a minimal mutual acknowledgement of each other's existence, this seems to occur primarily at the figurative level of dream and mirror imagery. When Jane and Bertha finally come face to face in the attic the contrast between them is never more absolute:

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

"That is my wife," said he [Rochester]. "Such is the sole conjugal embrace I am ever to know--such are

the endearments which are to solace my leisure hours! And this is what I wished to have . . . this young girl, who stands so grave and quiet at the mouth of hell, looking collectedly at the gambols of a demon . . . look at the difference! Compare these clear eyes with the red balls yonder--this face with that mask--this form with that bulk . . . [Bronte's emphasis] (321-322).

In my first chapter, I presented a critical overview of conventional feminist readings of the relationship between Jane and Bertha. Because of the close proximity and repeated juxtapositioning of these two female characters, many feminists interpret the madwoman's rage against the men who restrain her as an aspect of Jane's inner self that cannot literally be expressed because of the sexist repression of women endemic to the Victorian era. The madwoman functions as Jane's "dark double;" she is a projection of Jane's deepest misgivings about marriage and male sexual domination. As the dramatic catalyst behind Jane's journey to discover the indomitable voice of her Self, "Bertha" thus becomes a celebrated symbol of feminist resistance. While the text does project all of the undesirable traits a woman could possibly possess in the Victorian era onto the madwoman, the fact that Bertha is from the colonies and of ambiguous racial origin is far from incidental to this manner of projection. The ease with which feminist readings have claimed "Bertha" as an integral part of Jane's movement towards increased autonomy without also acknowledging both the explicit racializing of her "moral madness" and the unsympathetic and anti-climatic way she is excised from the

text is in some ways as disturbing as Bronte's nineteenth-century portrait of the other "Mrs. Rochester."

This failure to register the political significance of the marked contrast between an English governess and a Creole madwoman only becomes evident when the colonial context within which the novel was written is brought forward. In my second chapter, I provided a contextualized reading of several aspects of Jane Eyre that participate in the cultural politics of empire-building. From the numerous in-passing allusions to foreign people, places and things, to the more fully developed figurative displacement of the British slave trade, to the explicit equation of the dark foreign Other with demons who come from hell, it becomes increasingly apparent that all that "Bertha" represents cannot possibly be contained within the psyche of one disconnected, poor, and plain governess struggling to find herself in a harshly inequitable man's world. The black grizzled hair, rampant disorder, and libidinal impulses associated with the madwoman represent all that is alien to the ideology of Victorian England as a whole. In other words, "Bertha" is not an unmediated symbolic extension of Jane's inner anxieties about gender inequality, but she more complexly functions as a projection of the the dark foreign Other against which Jane can define her emerging sense of autonomy as still white, still British, and (perhaps above all else) still Christian.

The main thrust of Bronte's feminist discourse is towards the acceptance of her heroine's rightful place in Victorian society. Throughout the novel we see Jane struggling to maintain her integrity and self-confidence in the face of concerted efforts to exclude her from a legitimate sense of belonging. Her formative experience as a charity-case orphan and her occupation as a domestic servant contribute to her feelings of "otherness" in terms of class alienation; her more intimate relationships with Rochester and St. John emphasize the risk she faces of losing her selfhood if she were to submit to either of their proposals of marriage--whether commonlaw or church sanctioned. Yet despite these seemingly insurmountable barriers of exclusion, Jane is returned to the social fold from which her parents were alienated, and she finds love, security, and the respect of her husband in a relatively egalitarian marriage. The overall objective of Bronte's feminist discourse is not to further alienate Jane from the Victorian class system or the institution of marriage, but rather to permit her heroine entrance to these hallowed structures--with the indomitable voice of her narrator's Self intact.

And as my third and fourth chapters emphasize, Bronte's figurative strategy for voicing her concerns about male sexual dominance demonstrates that nineteenth-century feminists had no option but to work within the lexicons of the two dominant discourses of the day: Christianity and colonialism. By closely examining the recurring motifs of

the seraglio and suttee, I noticed that the text's feminist and colonialist trajectories merge together at precisely those points where Jane must most urgently resist acquiescing to Rochester and St. John's male power. Bronte repeatedly alludes to the polygamous custom of the seraglio and the sacrificial ritual of suttee in order to accentuate the gravity of her heroine's predicament; the text posits a number of figurative parallels between the feminist protagonist's struggle for autonomy and the oppression of women in non-Western cultures. But while parallels between the white feminist heroine and a variety of female foreign Others are suggested, these invitations to compare Jane with her non-British counterparts are also inevitably retracted, either through an immediate articulation of a marked contrast, or by allowing any notion of similitude to silently disintegrate into an erasure of the significance of these racialized female figures.

That Jane inscribes herself in the centre of colonial metaphors in order to protect her sexuality, advance her growing sense of autonomy, and consolidate her identity is the main thrust of my argument in chapters three and four. But while writing my final chapter on the North American Indian paddling his canoe in dangerous waters, I discovered a perplexing twist in Bronte's representation of the foreign Other that required a significant shift of my critical perspective. For in this scene Jane is in the most sexually vulnerable position she could possibly be, and yet she

claims to have no fear--in fact, she is rather exhilarated by Rochester's frenzied passion. Moreover, the image of power and control that Jane invokes for inspiration and guidance is a half-naked, native Indian male who is negotiating the rapids in his canoe. That a small and spritely Victorian woman tacitly identifies with an emblem of masculine pride and virility is a curious travesty of gender role expectations. But the scene also challenges the accumulation of negative representations of dark-skinned foreign despots applied at other points in Jane's struggles against male sexual domination. While such despots are inevitably chastened in fetters, or forced to sign liberal charters, in this case we see a relatively positive image of a non-white male who does not fit the established pattern of racialized male tyrants.

But in this one, very brief moment we also catch a glimpse of something that Bronte seems very reticent to suggest throughout the novel: the possibility that Jane herself has active sexual desires. Given the novel's firmly established precedent that women who engage in sexual relationships outside the socially acceptable parameters of Victorian England are degraded figures of submission and self-loathing, Bronte's options in terms of expressing even the slightest sexual interest on Jane's behalf are severely limited; she simply did not have at her disposal any 'safe' way to represent female sexual desire without herself compromising her heroine's dignity and sense of self-worth--

the very crime for which Rochester, and the text's other male authorities, are somehow punished. Consistent with the prevailing trend of the larger colonialist imagination to express its sexual impulses through representations of the foreign Other, Jane's split-second urge to yield to Rochester is projected onto an exotic, romanticized image of the "noble savage." It seems that when the primary objective is to criticize male sexual dominance Bronte strategically applies a representation of oriental misogyny that sees dark-skinned males as intrinsically despotic. But when the focus shifts to Jane's own sexuality a somewhat different image of male foreign otherness is invoked, one which ironically encapsulates a female fantasy of heightened self-awareness and self-control. But while Jane's sexuality is contained in the self-protective metaphor of the "noble savage," all other allusions to female sexuality in the text are made in reference to foreign women who suffer from some form of moral or spiritual degradation.

Despite the considerable emphasis I have placed on "foreign otherness" throughout this thesis, my primary focus has been on the cultural politics of constructing "whiteness" in a text that has come to be regarded as a canonical work in the feminist literary mainstream. By closely examining the creative process by which a nineteenth-century woman writer consolidates the identity of her heroine I have shown that the racial markings and undesirable character traits Bronte ascribes to non-British

people, and her critical application of these same traits to the English characters who attempt to exclude her heroine from a legitimate sense of belonging, are an integral part of the narrative strategy to advance the protagonist's quest for increased autonomy within the structures of a systemically repressive, male dominated society. By bringing Jane into close proximity with a series of racialized "others," Bronte more precisely individuates her heroine's identity, while simultaneously elevating Jane's social status and legitimizing her call for increased gender equality in the process.

Bronte's plea for increased gender equality is cloaked in the rhetoric of empire-building--a rhetoric which was itself increasingly preoccupied with the consolidation of a national sense of identity for England as the bearer of truth and light to the dark regions of the world. Literary and visual representations of the dark foreign Other invariably inferred the comparative superiority of the British citizenry, the Christian faith, and England's more advanced and enlightened educational, judicial, and governmental agencies. Whether blantly racist, or more benignly paternalistic (the "noble savage"), these representations provided a standard against which all that is "Englishness" could be more clearly understood by the English themselves--a strategy by which the inherently violent nature of the colonial ethos could be rationalized and endorsed as the nation's moral imperative to save the

world from darkness. Bronte articulates the indomitable voice of her heroine's Self, and advances her nineteenth-century feminist agenda, through a strategic manipulation of culturally acceptable ethnocentric metaphors that help bolster Jane's claim to the individual liberties which she feels are rightfully hers, not only as a woman, but as a citizen of the most enlightened nation in the world.

Works Cited

- Ahmed, Leila. "Western Ethnocentrism and Perceptions of the Harem." Feminist Studies 8(3) 1982.
- Boumelha, Penny. "And What do the Women do?: Jane Eyre, Jamaica and the Gentleman's House." Southern Review: Literary and Interdisciplinary Essays, South Australia 21 July 1988.
- Bronte, Charlotte. Jane Eyre. 1847. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1981.
- Chesler, Phyllis. Women and Madness. Garden City: Doubleday, 1972.
- Donaldson, Laura. "The Miranda Complex: Colonialism and the Question of Feminist Reading." Decolonizing Feminisms: Race, Gender, and Empire-Building. Chapel Hill: The University of Carolina Press, 1992.
- Eagleton, Terry. Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontes. Houndmills: MacMillan Press, 1975, 1988.
- Fanon, Franz. The Wretched of the Earth. New York: Grove Press, 1963.
- Gilbert, Sandra and Susan Gubar. The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979.
- Griffin, Gail B. "Once More to the Attic: Bertha Rochester and the Pattern of Redemption." Nineteenth-Century Women Writers of the English-Speaking World. Ed. Rhoda B. Nathan. New York: Greenwood Press, 1986.

- Hall, Catherine. "Missionary Stories: Gender and Ethnicity in England in the 1830s and 1840s." Cultural Studies. Ed. Lawrence Grossberg. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Homans, Margaret. "Dreaming of Children: Literalization in Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights." The Female Gothic. Ed. Juliann E. Fleenor. Montreal: Eden Press, 1983. Republished under the same title in her book Bearing the Word: Language and the Female Experience in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.
- Jacobus, Mary. "A Review of The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination." Signs, Spring 1981.
- Mani, Lata. "Cultural Theory, Colonial Texts: Reading Eyewitness Accounts of Widow Burning." Cultural Studies. Ed. Lawrence Grossberg. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Mann, Karen. "Bertha Mason and Jane Eyre: The True Mrs. Rochester." Ball State University Forum XIX.1 1978.
- Meyer, Susan L. "Colonialism and the Figurative Strategy of Jane Eyre." Victorian Studies Vol. 33 No. 2 Winter 1990.
- Moers, Ellen. Literary Women. Garden City: Doubleday, 1976.
- Moi, Toril. Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory. London: Methuen, 1985.
- Morris, James. Heaven's Command: An Imperial Progress.

London: Faber and Faber, 1973.

Nandy, Ashis. The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism. Dehli: Oxford University Press, 1983.

Nestor, Pauline. Charlotte Bronte's "Jane Eyre". Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992.

---. Female Friendships and Communities: Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985.

Perera, Suvendrini. "'Fit Only for a Seraglio': The Discourse of Oriental Misogyny in Jane Eyre and Vanity Fair." Reaches of Empire: The English Novel from Edgeworth to Dickens. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991.

Poovey, Mary. "The Anathematized Race: The Governess and Jane Eyre." Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.

Rich, Adrienne. "Jane Eyre: Temptations of a Motherless Woman." On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose, 1966-1978. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1979.

---. "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision." On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose, 1966-1978. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1979.

Rigney, Barbara Hill. Madness and Sexual Politics in the Feminist Novel: Studies in Bronte, Woolf, Lessing, and Atwood. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978.

- Said, Edward. Culture and Imperialism. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993.
- . Orientalism. New York: Vintage Books, 1978, 1979.
- Shorter, Clement. The Brontes: Life and Letters. Vol. I. New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1908, 1969.
- Showalter, Elaine. A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists From Bronte to Lessing. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977.
- Spacks, Patricia Meyer. The Female Imagination. New York: Knopf, 1975.
- Spivak, Gayatri. "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism." Critical Inquiry 12, 1985.
- Zonana, Joyce. "The Sultan and the Slave: Feminist Orientalism and the Structure of Jane Eyre." Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society. Vol. 18, 3, Spring 1993.