Women Empowerment in Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre*

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts in Anglo-American Studies

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Candidate Declaration Form

I, SENOSSI Khouloud
candidate of Master at the Department of English, Larbi Ben M’hidi University, do hereby
declare that the dissertation entitled Women Empowerment in Charlotte Bronte’s Jane
Eyre in partial fulfillment of Master Degree in Anglo-American Studies is my own original
work, and it has not previously, in its entirety or in part, been submitted at any university.

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Dedication:

In the Name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

I dedicate this work to:

My precious parents for their love, care, and for their patience.

My wonderful sister and brothers.

A special dedication to the one who made my enjoyment during moments of sadness.

And a particular dedication to my friends and colleagues without exception

“Thank you for being by my side”
Praise to Allah, the light of the heavens and the earth, who has guided me all the way and has given me the strength to accomplish this work.

I address my deepest gratitude to my supervisor Mrs. HAFSA Naima whose encouragement, guidance and support from the initial to the final level enabled me to develop, and understand this work. Thank you for your precious advice, suggestions, understanding and encouragement.

I hereby thank and appreciate the examiner’s comments and positive criticism.
Abstract

Most women in the Victorian age were molded into the frame of dependent domestic creatures. In this paper a new image of empowered Victorian woman is conducted through Charlotte Bronte’s selected novel *Jane Eyre*. The basic aim of this Mémoire is to find the role of social class issues, and Victorian gender prejudices in oppressing women and heading the protagonist Jane to maintain her socio-economic empowerment. To achieve the aforementioned aim, this research employs the Feminist Marxism and Postcolonial approaches to exhibit the patriarchal and gender barriers that most Victorian women had to cross over in order to achieve their selfhood. Ergo, it explores the Victorian Era’s social conditions focusing on the Industrial Revolution’s impact. Secondly, it examines the patriarchal traits and gender codes which oppressed Victorian women, and brought them into madness just because of their attempts to reach the freedom men had always enjoyed. Finally, it represents the Victorian woman in her struggle to finally reach her autonomy. In this regard, this research is helpful to convey the different ways through which a woman can overcome the oppressive and sexist societal norms. Importantly, it concludes that Victorian females can make themselves heard and influential by participating in social issues and challenging male’s authority in the Victorian society.

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

La plupart des femmes de l'époque victorienne étaient des créatures contraintes, soumises à des schémas qui les obligeaient à appartenir uniquement au domaine familial. Cette étude traite une nouvelle image des femmes victoriennes dont leur pouvoir et leur libération du pouvoir masculin à travers le roman de Charlotte Brönte Jane Eyre. À cet égard, cette recherche vise à étudier le rôle des classes sociales et les questions de préjugés sexistes dans la persécution et la marginalisation des femmes d’une part, ainsi que dans l'autonomisation économique et sociale de l'héroïne Jane d’une autre part.

Pour atteindre les objectifs de cette étude, cette recherche est basée sur les théories Féminisme Marxiste et la théorie Postcoloniale pour exposer les barrières patriarcales et de genre que la plupart des femmes victoriennes ont dû traverser afin de réaliser leur individualité. Cette étude explore les conditions sociales de l’ère victorienne en se concentrant sur l'impact de la révolution industrielle. Aussi, elle examine les traits patriarcaux et les codes de genre qui ont opprimé les femmes victoriennes, et les a amenés à la folie juste à cause de leurs tentatives pour atteindre la liberté dont les hommes avaient toujours joui. Enfin, elle représente la femme victorienne dans sa résistance pour finalement atteindre son autonomie. À cet égard, la recherche est utile pour transmettre les différentes façons par lesquelles une femme peut surmonter les normes sociétales oppressives et sexistes. Assez important, elle conclut que les femmes victoriennes peuvent se faire entendre et influencer en participant à des questions sociales et en défiant l'autorité masculine dans la société victorienne.

Mots-clés: Femmes victoriennes, autonomisation sociale et économique, préjugés sexistes, féminisme marxiste, postcoloniale.
معظم نساء الحقيقة الفيكتورية كانن مخلوقات مفيدة، خاضعت لأنماط تصويرية أجبرتهم الانتقاء إلى النطاق النسائي فقط.

هناك دراسة تتعلق بالصورة الجديدة للمرأة الفيكتورية في قوتها وتحررها من السلطة الذكورية من خلال رواية شارلوت بروتني جين إبر. في هذا الصدد، يهدف هذا البحث أساساً إلى تجري قضايا الطبقات الاجتماعية والتحيز الجنسي في اضطهاد وتمييز النساء من جهة، وكذا في تمكين بطلة الرواية جين إقتصادية وإجتماعية من جهة أخرى.

لتحقيق الهدف الذي تم ذكره سابقاً، يركز هذا البحث على نظريتين هما النسوية الماركسية ونظرية ما بعد الكولونيالية، للكشف عن المبادئ الذكورية المضطهدة التي اضطرت معظم نساء العصر الفيكتوري إلى تجاوزها من أجل تحقيق تمكينهم.

تقوم هذه الدراسة باستكشاف الظروف الاجتماعية للعصر الفيكتوري من خلال التركيز على تأثير الثورة الصناعية. أيضا، تقوم بفحص دور قضايا الطبقات الاجتماعية والتحيز الجنسي في اضطهاد النساء، والتي قادت البعض إلى الجهن بسبب محاولات لتحقيق الحرية التي لم تتم بها الرجال. وكذا، هذا البحث يمثل المرأة الفيكتورية في مواقفها لتحقيق استقلالها الذاتي.

بعد هذا البحث مفيداً لدوره في نقل الطرق المختلفة التي يمكن من خلالها للمرأة التغلب على الأعراف الاجتماعية القمعية والجنسية. الأهم من ذلك أنه يخلص إلى أن المرأة الفيكتورية يمكن أن تجعل من نفسها مسموعة وأن تؤثر في المجتمع من خلال المشاركة في القضايا الاجتماعية وتحدي السلطة الذكورية في المجتمع الفيكتوري.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المرأة الفيكتورية، التمكين الاجتماعي والاقتصادي، التحيز الجنساني، النسوية الماركسية، ما بعد الكولونيالية.
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General Introduction

The Victorian era was an age of dramatic transition ruled by Queen Victoria (1837-1901). Britain at that time, had experienced massive changes in many fields: politics, economy, religion, philosophy and literature. The impact of the industrial revolution on the English social structure and on the lives of people opened the debate among writers and philosophers over these social issues, including the conflict between social classes and the women question. Brontë was one of the famous writers of the time who wrote the social novel with a special concern for the women question and Victorian classes.

Charlotte Bronte tries to shed light on the circumstances, and principles prone to females. She represents the position of women who were subject to prejudice and stereotypes throughout Jane Eyre. Jane Eyre is a novel based on Bronte’s autobiography and created during the Victorian era. It was published in London on October 16th 1847 under the male pseudonym Currer Bell. The novel represents the image of women in Victorian England which was based on the assumption that men’s and women’s tasks are naturally different. A man was expected to earn money, make it available to his wife, mother, daughters and sisters. Women’s tasks, on the other hand, were overseeing the education and care of their children, organising the household and providing tranquility. In order for the Victorian woman to fit in her society, she has to undergo changes to fit in the suit that society tailored for her.

In her Jane Eyre, Charlotte Bronte represents the patriarchal high society which oppresses women. This oppression is based on the biological differences between men and women, and stems from the social class status of the characters in the novel. Despite the fact that Jane Eyre was written in the Victorian age, the writer portrays the evolution of a radical feminist orphan with no voice, no money and no good looks to an independent, rich and powerful Victorian woman. This portrayal’s main objective was to pave the way for all other
women to break through the Victorian era's traditional gender roles and find their sources of socio-economic empowerment.

In fact, Charlotte Brontë has been unique and original in her writing because she treated delicate issues which are women oppression, the breaking of the Victorian traditional gender roles and the issues of social classes, all of which she used to suffer from. Hence, this study aims at highlighting the ways in which female characters of *Jane Eyre* were oppressed. It also shows that the female characters of *Jane Eyre* can manage to make themselves heard and influential by participating in social issues and challenging male’s authority in the Victorian society. The most important thing to be underlined is that woman can also be an active subject. This means that the woman, especially a wife, can also become the one who supports her family economically. The present study serves to answer the following questions:

- In what ways female characters in Jane Eyre are oppressed?
- How do the issues of social classes lead Jane to maintain her independence?
- How does Bronte present her heroine’s struggle to achieve selfhood in the Victorian society?
- In what ways do the main characters of the novel challenge the established Victorian gender roles?

Relying on what have been already said, this work develops from a socio-economic perspective concerning women’s self-realization, esteem and oppression struggles to find their social empowerment. It helps the readers to realise the importance of women’s independence and to fight for their basic rights as human beings. Furthermore, this research calls for integrating women’s issues in the general cultural discussions.

Since its publication, *Jane Eyre* has been extensively analyzed through various different perspectives; religious, psychoanalytic, poststructuralist...etc. This work is based on a socio-economic perspective. Thus, in terms of methodology, the Marxist Feminist and
Postcolonial approaches are the best to examine power relations and patriarchal traits. It depends on the views and opinions of many writers who served the subject of women's oppression and empowerment.

In his book, *Literary Theory of Feminism*, Wang Guofu\(^1\) finds out that *Jane Eyre* is a break with the Victorian standards. He believes that Charlotte Bronte’s portrayal of women’s roles was unique, especially, her writing under the male pseudonym Currer Bell. She gave a new and different view of women, and in a certain way she alerted her society’s perception of females in terms of sexuality. He says that “Jane Eyre embodies a new conception of women as heroines of vital strength and passionate feelings” (225-29).

On her part, Ann Heilmann\(^2\), argues in her book *Anti-feminism and the Victorian Novel* that *Jane Eyre* has nothing to do with empowerment. She claims that Bronte’s creation of the female characters in the novel does not signify the liberation of Victorian women, and that the novel’s purpose is to deceive women to maintain their oppressed status as good women and devoted mothers and wives (433). In contrast, this study perceives the achievements of Bronte’s protagonist as a representation of female autonomy and liberation. Certainly, the novel does not support male chauvinism but rather shows it and draws a strategy for fighting it.

This work is divided into three chapters. The first one, “Victorian England: Historical and Literary Background”, sketches the general social and historical background of the Victorian period. It deals with the Victorian society’s perception of gender roles, its

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division into upper, middle and working classes, and how it was shaped by the industrial revolution. Also, it represents the Victorian women’s status and their participation in the field of literature to portray the prejudices against them. Additionally, it represents Charlotte Bronte’s life (1816-1855), works and her reflection in *Jane Eyre*. The chapter discusses the theories to be used for the research study which are the Marxist Feminist and Postcolonial theories and why they seem to be the best choice for examining power relations and social issues. The aim of this chapter is to spot the light on the life of women and their struggle to get rid of oppression, get their rights and improve their conditions during the Victorian age.

The second chapter, entitled “The Oppressive Patriarchy in *Jane Eyre*”, discusses Charlotte Bronte’s depiction of females’ oppression. Throughout the novel, females live under the forces of patriarchy. They are oppressed and marginalized because of the established social codes of class and gender in the Victorian society. The aim behind this chapter is to find out the relationship between gender and class issues and women oppression. It also, shows how oppression results in turning females, particularly, wives into mad women.

The last chapter, “A Journey to Economic Liberation”, focuses on Jane’s evolution throughout her five journeys: from Gateshead to Lowood, to Thornfield, to Marsh End, and finally to Ferndean Manor--from a socially dependent character to a powerful independent woman. It discusses Jane’s attempts to break through the Victorian society’s gender prejudices in order to fulfill her social independence. The aim behind this chapter is to figure out how Charlotte Bronte creates a contrasting image to the Victorian cultural norms; i.e. the shift from a culturally oppressed female character to a culturally empowered one.
Chapter one:

Victorian England: Historical and Literary Background

The Victorian age was the most important period in Great Britain's history. This age knew a great wave in industry which was accompanied by many social, political and economic problems that were the interest of all people; importantly, the woman question which discussed the fundamental roles of women and men. Hence, women were molded into the frame of servile domestic creatures who had to blend and accept the subservient character to please their husbands, as well as their society.

The stereotype of marginalising women highly existed during the Victorian era. This phenomenon was a source of discontent of almost all women. Since there was no gender equality, women were seen as inferior, angels staying at home taking care of their children and husbands. The woman’s ideal place was home where she’s dedicated to serve and please her husband by cleaning, providing the hot dinners and creating the atmosphere of comfort and protection.

Regrettably, the Victorian men often regarded women as passive objects that could not support themselves or survive on their own. They “were subjected to their men’s authority in many ways” (Fletcher 108). However, change came mainly from the intellectuals; many of them saw it was their duty to protest against the injustices done to women and to free them from the abuses of men. In addition, many female leaders worked hard to change the world by fighting for their rights and affirming their identity and dignity, like the British Suffragist
“Millicent Fawcett” (1847-1929) who campaigned for women to have the vote and to improve their access to higher education.

During the Victorian age, many women writers wrote different types of literature both as means of entertainment and for the cause of women's emancipation. These efforts constituted the early seeds of women’s search for social and economic empowerment. Hence, in order to study a vivid example of this literature and to investigate these early seeds of women empowerment, it is required to take into consideration the general historical and social background where the work was created and the writer lived.

So, this chapter mainly investigates the major historical and social backgrounds that led the Victorian women to search for a change. It sketches the general social and economic conditions of the Victorian period, and how it was shaped by the industrial revolution. Also, it represents the Victorian women’s status and their participation in the field of literature to portray the prejudices against them. Additionally, it represents Charlotte Bronte’s life (1816-1855), works, and her reflection in Jane Eyre. Finally, yet importantly, this chapter discusses the theories to be used for the research study which are the Feminist Marxist theory, the Post colonial theory and how they successfully examine power relations and social issues in Jane Eyre.

1- The Impact of the Industrial Revolution on the Victorian Society:

The Victorian age was the period from 1837 to 1901. It was the years through which Queen Victoria ruled Britain for the longest period in England’s history. The Victorian age was the greatest era and the most remarkable one which brought radical changes in people’s life, it is the age of the prominent transformation in all fields: cultural, political and economic. It was the time of social and technological developments and scientific achievements, in addition to the
development in the medical, and transportation fields. Actually, the era was called “Pax
Britannica”\(^2\) which means a great and powerful empire (6).

According to Midlebrook Grebanier and Watt Thompson\(^3\) (1949), some historians
think that the beginning of this period can be set with the “First Reform Bill” in 1832; then,
the whole period can be divided into three main sub-periods which are “Early Victorian
Period” (1830-1848) (Settlement), “Mid-Victorian Period” (1848-1870) (Expansionism), and
finally, “The Later Victorian Period” (1870-1901) (The Decay). The last period is also known
as the “Nineties” but the detail explanation only focuses on the mid Victorian period (78).

The transformation of the period between 1760 and 1850 was due to significant
reasons that come to revolutionise Britain’s industry: money, labour, class, the greater
demand for goods and better transport which changed Britain from life of countryside to the
life of cities and inventions like the spinning machine by James Hargreaves in 1767, and the
steam engine by James Watt. It reduced the use of human power and replaced it by the power
of machines and this led to an increase in the productivity of that time. However, the
Industrial Revolution had a great impact on the way in which people were thinking of labour
productivity, and it affected their daily life by giving them the enough materials of prosperity.

New orders in Britain’s social life were created thanks to the industrial revolution. Therefore, the rise of the middle class which consisted of merchants and business people
increased rapidly. The impact of the Industrial Revolution was less on the “middle” and
“upper” classes who were landowners and their income was based on rents which augmented
by the extension of cities, industries and railways on the size of their estates. In contrast, the
poor people were living under hard conditions. They could not live a regular life or benefit
from the nation’s success. Most workers were replaced in factories by machines. Power,
wealth, education’s level and the parliamentary influence were the points on which the
relationship between classes was based (Hobsbawn 58)\(^4\).
Bronte lived at a time when great political, economic, and social changes in England were brought up by the industrial revolution. At that time, many people moved from the south to the north to get accommodation and jobs in the factories of industrial towns such as Manchester, Birmingham, and Liverpool. From the 1760’s to the 1830’s, Britain witnessed a great economic development and progress, and from 1846 onward, the economy grew steadily because of free trade and the industries which became more competitive in term of exports. The coal mining, iron foundry and the cotton industries were the basis of this growth.

Despite the fact that the Industrial revolution had known a tremendous development and growth on a large scale, this change brought also hardship, trouble and struggle between capitalists and workers over wages and working conditions. In November 1847, laborers at Preston were fighting against their masters for different reasons. The most apparent reasons were wages and working conditions that led to a violent strike. According to the workers, “the mill owners had promised a general ten percent rise in wages with the return of prosperity in 1847, but when the prosperity returned, wages did not increase. When workers insisted on their masters to give them a raise, the threatened masters closed down their mills leaving thousands of workers unemployed”.  

As a social consequence of the rising of the industrial revolution, England’s economic center shifted from agricultural towards industrial capitalism, and three fundamental classes emerged. Classicism was an extremely controversial concern in the Victorian age when wealth possession and social prestige were the most important matters than anything else. In addition to that The Victorian era was characterised by what was known as “Social Awareness” by which more and more people became widely conscious that the industrial revolution had transformed the social structures and the social relations and brought about a completely different social system based on conflicting identities and classes in the form of the working and middle classes (Cannadine 57).
The organisation of the traditional English society was replaced by three social
classes: upper, middle, and lower. In this sense, Karl Marx claims that all societies (except the
primitive ones) had been divided in terms of two essential classes: the secondary class (poor)
and the dominant one (rich). While the poor class is composed of those who produce goods
and services, the rich class lives by exploiting and taking the products of the labour. The
relationship between these classes is determined by the potential of the forces of production.
However, the change from feudalism to capitalism needed a new class that was the
bourgeoisie or as Marx called is the capitalist class. The role of the latter was to take control
of the economy by imposing new relations of production that allowed the realisation of the
most productive economy that was present in the most advanced technology. Marx asserts
that “capital was not a thing , but a social relation between persons , property in money , means
of subsistence , machinery, and other means of production, do not yet stamp a man as a
capitalist if there be wanting the correlative—the wage –worker”(88).7

Moreover, Benjamin Disraeli also speaks about the issue of class division and he
deplored the division of the English society into classes that he observed in Manchester in his
novel The Two Nations (1845) by asking “[h]ow are manners to influence men if they are
divided into classes—if the population of a country becomes a body of sections, a group of
hostile garrisons”(75).8 He assured the existence of both the rich and the poor, gave a
powerful picture of the conditions of the deprived groups, and emphasised on the need for
reform, by reconciling the two nations: the poor and the rich.

Unlike Disraeli, Friedrich Engels in his work The Condition of the Working Class in
England (1885), greets the conflict between classes and he thought that the workers in
Manchester had found their ways to liberation when they had shifted from the countryside to
live in big cities (Briggs 96).9 Engels visited and saw the factories that made up ‘the great
towns’ of industrial England and he showed comparison for the suffering workers in his *Condition of the Working Class in England* when he said:

I found a man who seemed to be about sixty years of age living in a cow-shed. He had constructed a sort of chimney for his square–shaped hovel, which had no floor-boards, no plaster on the walls and no windows. He had installed a bedstead and here he lived although the rain came through the decaying roof. The man was too old for regular work, but he earned a living by removing manure and garbage with his handcart. Pools of fifth lay close to his shed. (68)\(^\text{10}\)

Therefore, Engels sympathized with the poor and he described the economic and the psychological oppression of the working class. The examples given above demonstrate the bad and hard conditions that the English people of the lower class had been suffering from because of the impact of the Industrial Revolution and the widening gap between the classes.

Moreover, by the spread of industrialisation there was no need for workers in factories. The mechanisation extended, and employees were replaced by machines. Workers experienced hard times, and lived under bad conditions. The majority of them lost their families, jobs, and they found no way to survive. For that reason the government opposed intervention to improve their poor living conditions along with the working class ‘calls for the extended reforms, including the secret ballot, and annual elections. In addition to the Public Health Act of 1875, and the Education Act of 1870.

As confirmed by Plumb, the industrial revolution had negatively affected the British society, especially on the working class. The results of these severe alterations appeared through some social illnesses such as abject poverty, class structure, and bad living conditions.
Profound changes in the economic life of the country must necessary disturb its whole social structure, and the Industrial Revolution was no exception. Naturally, too, it bred a new attitude of mind to the old problems of society, poverty, crime, debt, disorder, and waste, of course, a critical attitude to the an efficient constitutional machinery which bore so little relation to the needs of society, satire of self satisfaction, the common responses of the Augustan age, were replaced by analysis and constructive criticism. But the most dominant note is a growing moral imperative, an insistence that human virtue can be measured only by its immediate social value, an attitude of mind which could justify both reform and repression. (Plumb 84)

In fact, Aristocracy was in the top of the Victorian society. The majority of them were landowners, they owned lands but rented them to others to work and then they receive their amount of profit. One of their significant qualities was that they did not have to work whenever their income came from owning and renting out land, nor they mix themselves with the ordinariness people (Plumb 85).  

The parliament was monopolised by the upper class, they created what they called “lobby groups” within the British government. This situation offered them the way to hold total and “exclusive political way” (Marx 3). And according to their vested interests they exercised a huge influence on institution by imposing direct law to serve their own benefits. They were for the existing government with the principal of “monopolized and unreformed parliament” (Lerner95). Actually, they were holding conservative and orthodox traditions, and they did not support reforms either social or political. Controlling parliament alone was not sufficient, the upper class should take control over the church too. In addition to the local administration and justice, the army and the civil service, all for the target to preserve and
secure their position. During that time, the aristocracy exercised a total influence, control and authority in many domains of life thanks to the lands they owned. The impact of this class had grown, and as a result, the society depended on materials and the “spirit” of the society seemed absolutely materialistic (Gilmour4)\textsuperscript{13}.

Hence, a new type of class emerged in the Victorian society: it was the middle class which consisted of those who were well educated and performed clean, and they were a result of the reforming spirit of the age. They saw that the upper class gained much power in the society, so they resisted and decreased their power. They saw that the idea of joblessness was a vice while they supported and believed that only the hard work could be a virtue. The middle class claimed that the new industrial society needs new and diversion reforms to create a balance in the society like the reform bill of 1832 (Hobsbawm 85).

For centuries, people mostly accepted being a member of a class they were naturally born into, and there was approximately no probability of moving up into an advanced class. However the transformation from agricultural to industrial community offered the chance of social mobility or what the English called “removable inequality” (Cody 14).

What the Industrial Revolution did is that it worsened the situation of the poor by putting the possession of wealth in the hands of the few and through the exploitation of the workers. The latter were not treated as humans but rather reduced to mere machines and considered as their owners ‘property’ to be managed as they desired. The industrial Revolution also introduced new issues such as the exploitation of children and women who were “a main source of labour in the factories” as Briggs illustrates (125). The masters privileged women since they were less demanding and more obedient.
2-The Status of Women in the Victorian Age:

The political and economic changes that took place during the nineteenth century brought a significant differentiation between genders whereby a man seemed to possess virtue, courtesy, morality, reason and independence whereas women were supposed to be passive, weak, domestic, and obedient. Obviously, the nineteenth century women lived in an age characterised by gender inequality as they were dominated by men and their rights were completely denied. David Damrosch said about the woman question that “women were physically and intellectually inferior, a weaker sex that would buckle under the weight of strong passion, thought, or vigorous exercise, only in their much vaunted 'womanliness' did women have an edge, as nurtures of children and men's better instincts”(Damrosch 46).

Since women were said to be destined for domestic life, they were discouraged to seek amusement outside their home, and “[t]heatre, the music hall, the pleasure gardens were dubious localities for the respectable married woman and her daughters. [...] Entertainment, other than that of the dinner party or the ‘At Home’ or the ball, is either a lower-class or a masculine need” (Calder 134).

Other than just being an obedient wife and a mother, the Victorian woman was barred from owning a property and her inheritance would directly be shifted to her husband’s hands after marriage. Besides, she was not allowed in higher education simply because job opportunities were limited to her. In law she could not sue or be sued and in case an assault is committed against her, it’s her husband who should prosecute. Also, her children were in the possession of her husband and the grounds of divorce were not the same for both sexes. In her study of Victorian Women, Joan Perkins argues:

[The] wife and children were expected to be obedient and submissive to…[her husband’s] rules. By marriage, husband and wife became one
person in law—and that person was he. He had almost complete control over her body, and their Children belonged to him. Unless a marriage settlement arranged things differently, the husband was entitled to all his wife’s property, and he could claim any money she earned (73).

Therefore, marriage played a significant role in the life of the Victorian women since it was only through marriage that women could have a social status and position. The majority of women did not have the option not to marry simply because it was a necessity for survival and society prevented women from making their own living. Subsequently, once women got married, they would lose all their right, including the right to own property and even custody of their children. John Stuart Mill was one of the great thinkers of the Victorian Era. In “The Subjection of Women”16, he tells how few privileges women had and that they were slaves to their husbands. He also says that women are their own people and should be free (44-45).

In the mid-1880's, women used to marry at a very young age and this contributed to the weakness of women who were dominated by their husbands and were dependent on them. In her Autobiography, Harriet Martineau, the first sociologist woman, stats that “the older I have grown the more serious and irremediable have seemed to me the evils and disadvantages of married life” (215)17. The author clearly expresses her agony, sees marriage as evil, and shows the suffering of married women during the Victorian age.

Marriage was the only refuge for the majority of women who were usually protected by their fathers. And once they got married, they came under the authority of their husbands as it is observed by Joan Perkin: “[a] woman normally passed, either before or soon after the age of majority, from the protection of her father to that of her husband” (1). Moreover, Perkin quoted William Blackstone saying in his commentaries on the laws of England, “by marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law that is very being or legal existence of a woman is suspended during marriage or at least incorporated and consolidated into that of
husband under whose wing, protection and cover she performs everything” (qtd. in Perkin 2). Therefore, marriage was a vital element in the Victorian women's lives.

The issue of social class is an indispensable role in Victorian marriages. Couples were expected to come from the same social class. However, stricter social exclusiveness was confined to upper-middle class and families of aristocratic background; they were not allowed to marry from a lower class, concerning this issue Thompson clarifies that “the middle-class image of marriage was clearly one of a union between social equals, with a penchant for welcoming the good fortune of the occasional lucky alliance with a social superior and to be unforgiving if a son or daughter became entangled with an inferior” (Thompson 99)18.

In her novel *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Bronte said that “women were supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel as men feel; they need exercise for the faculties and a field of their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer” (111-112). It was affirmed that a woman had nothing to do with political or economical matters and instead it should be oriented towards spheres that were more appropriate for them like domestic duties. Among the dominant ideas is that a woman’s brain was too weak to bear the learning of difficult subjects like science and physics. A woman’s place was her house; her duties were to take care of her beauty, her children as well as entertain and obey her husband.

All women experienced a series of changes during the Victorian era. Wives, mothers, widows, divorced women, spinsters, their rights and social status were in the centre of attention of a significant number of people. Therefore, the representation of women and all the social changes concerning them appeared in all genres of popular fiction, including the Victorian novel.
3-Women and Victorian literature:

The Victorian era witnessed a victory at the level of education with the emerging new female figures who did mark history in the field of Literature. In fact, the denial of the Victorian society and the misogynist attitudes pushed women to create their own proper world and a flourishing body of literature. In addition to its function of entertainment, literature during the Victorian era can be described as an art associated with the social movements of the time that treated subjects related to the reality of life in the British society, and more particularly that of women like in the works of the Bronte sisters, Jane Austen, George Eliot and many others.

In parallel with political and social changes, a variety of reading among all classes emerged. People became more self-conscious, and knowledgeable. Rappaport Helen strongly insists on Queen Victoria’s role in influencing the literary Victorian age, because she loved reading, thus she encouraged reading among all population. She also granted free books to children, and she established schools for lower classes. Moreover, the Queen invited famous Victorian age authors to read to her in Buckingham Palace in all privately such as Lord Tennyson, and Charles Dickens (Packard 59).

Fortunately, literature played a significant role and helped greatly to transform the traditional ideas by paving the way for those who fought for the cause of women’s emancipation. Therefore, writing became for many feminist writers and activists a means of spreading awareness of the situation of women and changing people’s view about them to achieve equal rights with men. Starting from the second half of the eighteenth century, the Industrial Revolution gave rise to a newly dynamic industrial economy. It changed Britain from a rural society to a manufacturing one with a sweeping economic boom never witnessed before in Britain.
However, no one can deny the negative impact of the Industrial Revolution on society, and especially on the life of women. So, many intellectuals saw it as their duty to speak out against the injustices, gloomy and frightening world of Industrialisation. Indeed, they criticised the systematic abuses in the industrial world of the Victorian era, and they saw the industrial revolution as a process of exploitation and stripping people of their humanity. Many novelists found it necessary to write about the stereotypes of the Victorian age in order to transmit their messages like Charles Dickens’ *Hard Times*, Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights*, and Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Mary Barton*.

The Victorian era was the great age of the English novel, and according to feminist critics, feminism in Victorian literature was the movement in which feminists described and interpreted women’s experience through the novel (25). At that time, many women writers emerged attempting to change the status of women and urging them to think and act against the cruel system of the Victorian age. For their activism for the cause of women, these women writers were labeled feminists.

Feminists in the nineteenth century were debating a “patriarchal” society which accrued in the Victorian age. Likewise, the word “feminine” is more associated to women’s writings to put barriers between “men” and “women” (45). The nineteenth century women writers created their own world in their own terms to express their feelings, and among these well-known writers: Jane Austen, the Bronte sisters, and Mary Ann Evans who changed her name to George Eliot due to the circumstances of the Victorian age.

Many feminist writers spoke out for the whole women in order to free them from the abuses of the Victorian system. We notice also that women writers wrote mainly for women and their main characters were female. Moreover, women writers treated such problems as marriage, love and sexuality, for instance, Jane Austen says in the first line of her novel *Pride
and Prejudice (1813) that “[I]t is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be want of a wife” (423).

However, other women writers often concentrated on other aspects of women’s life like their feelings and their relationship with men, the concept of philanthropy and the outside world as opposed to the domestic one. For example, in Charlotte Bronte’s Jane Eyre (1847) and Villette (1853), the protagonists are women, but they have relationships with men with considerable attention paid to work and education as both protagonists are interested in teaching and art. Women writers like Emily Bronte, George Eliot, and Jane Austen wrote about love and passion, but the physical love was neglected because the topic was a taboo in that conservative society. However, contemporary male writers and especially early modernists like D.H Lawrence, and James Joyce produced such works of sexual openness that showed that women and men writers were not allowed the same liberty in writing.

As a result, Women writers were gradually engaged in many other literary genres such as the Gothic novel and the social novel which treated the social and political issues of that time. The major social and political issues of the nineteenth century were the effects of industrialisation on the fabric of society and more particularly on women workers. Thus, the feminist novel has known a great success with the works of Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, and George Eliot in an era when very few women could support themselves. Margaret Oliphant (1828–1897), a prolific novelist, was able to declare the age “quite distinctly the age of female novelists”. She adds: “The vexed questions of social morality, the grand problems of women experience, are seldom so summarily discussed and settled as in the novels of this day which are written by women”(82-83)24.

Anthony Trollope, one of the greatest novelists of the Victorian epoch stated in 1870 that “novels are in the hands of us all, from the prime minister down to the last –appointed scullery maid. We have them in our library, our drawing-rooms, our bed-rooms, our kitchens
and in our nurseries” (qtd. in Deirdre 1). So, Victorian literature is usually seen as a bridge between great eras: the medieval era, romantic era, the Georgian and literature of the industrialised new world of the nineteenth and twentieth century.

Almost all literature written by feminists in any historical period reflects the contemporary social and political situation and the place of women in society. Many women novelists chose to address directly the pressing social problems of their time such as middle class working conditions, poverty and the issue of women’s place in the world. All these issues were discussed in the social novel of the Victorian age written by Charlotte Brontë.

4- Charlotte Bronte’s Biography:

Charlotte Brontë (1816-1855) is one of the most famous figures in the Victorian nineteenth century literature. She wrote many novels that earned her great fame and made her admired by many readers. She grew up in the small mill town of Haworth on the edge of the rugged moors of West Yorkshire, in northeastern England. She is the third daughter of Patrick Brontë, a clergyman of Irish descent and Maria Barnwell. In 1820 they moved to Haworth where Patrick was appointed perpetual curate. After the death of Charlotte’s mother in 1821, her mother’s sister, Elizabeth, came to take care of the five daughters and one son who were left with a solitary father.

Because the family was not well off, the Brontë girls (Charlotte, Maria, Elizabeth, Emily, and Anne) were sent to a boarding school in 1824 where they could prepare for their future employment as governesses. At the school, discipline was harsh, the food inadequate, and living conditions unhealthy. Students often became ill. Both Maria and Elizabeth Brontë died because of tuberculosis at the school in 1825. After this tragedy, Mr. Brontë himself educated the children at Haworth.
To acquire further qualifications, Charlotte, Emily, and Anne decided to travel to Brussels to enroll in a Pensionnat governed by Constantine Heger, and his wife (Bronte 94). Looking for tuition, Charlotte taught English and Emily taught music. Their time at the Pensionnat was cut when their aunt, who joined the family after the death of their mother, died in October 1842. In January 1843, Charlotte returned to Brussels to take a teaching post at the Pensionnat. She was not happy, lonely, and homesick. Then, after a year, she returned to Haworth (Gaskell 85)26.

In 1846, the sisters Charlotte Emily and Anne dedicated themselves to writing. Under male pseudonyms they published a joint collection of poems. Soon afterward, each sister completed a first novel. Emily’s *Wuthering Heights* was published, as was Anne’s novel. But Charlotte’s Professor, a story loosely based on her experiences in Belgium, was rejected. Charlotte’s second novel was an immediate success. *Jane Eyre*, the compelling story of a self-reliant young governess, was published in 1847.

After Charlotte’s siblings had died (Branwell on September 1848, Emily on December 1848, and Anne on May 1849), she and her father were left alone. In view of the success of *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte was convinced by her publisher to visit London where she revealed her original name and the true identity, becoming friend with Elizabeth Gaskell, William Makepeace and she continued writing and never left Haworth.

Finally, a year before her death, she married a family friend, Arthur Nicholls, but their marriage lasted for nine months later. After a few weeks of her pregnancy, she became ill with pneumonia. She died about weeks later in March 31, 1855.

In most of her works, Charlotte dealt with many themes and subjects especially the subjection of women and issues related to them. She derived materials from her own life to write famous novels in the history of literature. Charlotte’s novel *Jane Eyre* (1847) takes the
form of an autobiographical narrative. In so doing, Bronte takes readers into Jane’s inner life, a world of intense feeling and vigorous thought. At the time when the novel was published, such exploration of characters and motives was new in English literature.

Moreover, when reading Jane Eyre, we can notice the parallels between Charlotte’s biography and Jane, and this is due to Charlotte’s attempts to represent the real Victorian life through her novels. Simply, it can be said that Jane Eyre mirrors Charlotte Bronte’s life.

Along with Jane Eyre, Charlotte Bronte published other famous works such as Shirley (1849) which pictures the working conditions and struggles between the workers and the masters. Her Villette (1853) also deals with a woman’s willing for her love to be fulfilled.

5- Feminist Marxism and Post Colonialism:

Feminist Marxism is a combination of two broad theories: “Marxism” and “Feminism”. Feminist Marxist literary theory considers both gender, and class to be components of literary analysis. As stated by Maggie Humm, the aim behind Feminist Marxism is to describe the material basis of women’s subjugation, the relationship between the modes of production and women’s status. Also, to apply theories of women and class to the role of the family (7-8).27

Feminist Marxism mainly originates from Karl Marx’s beliefs, during the women’s liberation movement, which are centered less on the material aspects of life than on the social ones. Feminist Marxists28 state that women’s oppression in the social and economic context arises out from economic inequality, dependence, political confusion and ultimately unhealthy social relations between men and women. They believe that the fundamental conflict is between classes and that the issues of gender roles are part of that struggle. This idea was laid by Engels 29(1884) in The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State in which he
argues that women’s empowerment is bound up with the struggle against capitalism because women oppression serves the interests of the ruling class.

Feminist Marxists see women especially “housewives” as vital to capitalism, because their unpaid work in the home maintains masters and future bosses. If a woman works for her family in the home, she has to be supported, and so she is economically dependent on the man of the house, like her children. If she works outside the home, she is still expected to fulfill her domestic duties, and so she ends up working twice as hard as a man, and usually for a lot less pay. Engels argued that marriage is a social institution that has nothing to do with love and everything to do with private property (8). He writes that if women are to be truly emancipated from men, they must be economically independent.

Feminist Marxists focus on the concerns of working women. They relate the institution of family to capitalism; and basically how women are considered to be victims of their families as the main source for their oppression. Feminist Marxists are more interested in making links with women in the labour movement and work on issues such as welfare rights. Feminist Marxists see every element of a social whole as an effect of production. Hence, “women's oppression is necessarily either invisible or inevitable: it must either be reduced to its "truth" as a reflection of class quite material and real, as correlated with but not exhaustively implied by the relations of production” (qtd. in Patricia 75).30

In the novel, Feminist Marxism is relevant to the plot and to the meaning of all what Jane overcame in her life to achieve her socio-economic empowerment. Jane does not live an easy life but was hindered deeply by her “masters”. Jane stands up for herself, and resists to attain her financial independence. Through her challenge to the established Victorian rules of class and gender roles she progresses from a marginalised orphan to an independent wealthy woman. Even in her relationship with Mr. Rochester, she always tries not to depend on him. She often argues with Mr. Rochester in order to deliver her opinion and will. It can be shown in the following quotation:
I drew out my purse; a meager thing it was. “Five shillings, sir.” He took the purse, poured the hoard into his palm and chuckled over it as if its scantiness please him. Soon he produced his pocket-book: “Here, said he, offering me a note: it was fifty pounds, and he owned me but fifteen. I told him I had no change. “I don’t want the change: you know that, take your wages (242).

It shows that Jane does not want to depend on Mr. Rochester. She tries to refuse all things which are given to her freely. She even attempts to have argument in order to defend her principle.

The postcolonial approach allows us to learn some facts that would change our impression of the “wild animal” at Thornfield. Bertha’s imprisonment in Thornfield's attic represents the oppression of a racial inferior Creole woman. In the nineteenth century, “a European cultural tradition of ‘Orientalism’ can be identified. This implies that East was seen as the inferior ‘other’, as a sort of surrogate and even underground self’ in contrast to the powerful west” (Barry,186). In this sense, when referring to Bertha MR.Rochester always insists that India as the East is a place of mischievous and lustful creatures who trick the rational and pious westerners. Therefore, Bertha represents the oppressed figure or the “other”, whereas MR. Rochester, the wealthy merchant, represents the oppressor. This theory serves at showing that Bertha’s racial lineage was exploited to bring her to madness.

To sum up, this chapter explores the Victorian Era’s social conditions with reference to the impact of the Industrial Revolution which opened the door for many intellectuals to picture the social issues of that time with a special concern for the woman question. Nevertheless, during the late Victorian age, women began to enjoy greater political and cultural independence especially in literature. Women writers lived an age of discovery, and imagination through the novel, and they acted independently for the sake of women's emancipation. These developments and advances that were archived throughout the 19th
century brought to the front successful women, and helped them in their struggle for the women cause. In so doing, this chapter helps the reader to have a background concerning the conducted research.

To conclude with, it can be said that the ideas and conditions of the Victorian society influenced Bronte’s successful achievements for the women question through her literary works, particularly *Jane Eyre*. In the second chapter, the circumstances under which Victorian females were oppressed will be investigated with a special concern on gender and class issues.
Works Cited of the First Chapter


Chapter Two

Oppressive Patriarchy in Jane Eyre

Charlotte Bronte was a canonical writer of her time who struggled to portray the hellish life of the Victorian females under patriarchal institutions within the Victorian high society. During the nineteenth century, women’s roles were limited to the domestic sphere. They were forced to stay under males’ control whether their fathers, brothers or husbands, and if they acted beyond the realm of domestic life they would be labeled as demonic, insane, and thrown in mental asylums from which they would come out spiritually dead.

As a way to keep women as secondary individuals, patriarchal societies impose some social standards and rules to distinguish between females and males’ roles. This distinction is based on the biological nature of men and women, making certain that men always have the dominant or masculine roles and women always have the subordinate or feminine ones. Besides, these patriarchal social relations are controlled by class issues. Based on these concepts women are considered as naturally inferior creatures to men. So, they are oppressed twice: for being females, and for being second-class citizens.

Jane, the insane Bertha Mason, Mrs Reed and her daughters along with other female characters in Jane Eyre mirror the hardships and misery they went through. Chapter two entitled Oppressive Patriarchy in Jane Eyre, concerns itself with the way women’s identity is marginalised in the novel reflecting the author’s times. With the use of the Feminist Marxism and Post colonial theories it also demonstrates the agitated psyches of the oppressed Victorian females in Jane Eyre.
I- Class Oppression:

Like many females in Victorian England, women in Jane Eyre, are socially and economically devalued, mainly because of their gender, but also because of their social class status. Through her masterpiece Jane Eyre, Bronte suggests that women’s oppression and class issues are inseparable (Taylor¹, 83-93). Thus, women’s oppression is further strengthened and enforced by the domination of the exploited ruling class.

As declared by Purchase Sean² Jane Eyre is “a novel very much grounded in the ‘realities’ of class oppression” (186). The novel opens with ten-year-old Jane living in the home of her aunt Mrs. Reed, where she is abused by her aunt, and her cousins. Living in the Reed’s upper class family has always been challenging for the orphan Jane. From the very beginning of the novel, Jane stands in a low social class. While the Reed family represents the upper class, they use her social standing as a reason to neglect her, and poorly treat her. They gather around the fireside in the drawing-room, while she is alone, and is seen as friendless and status-less orphan, without any property:

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

Despite Jane’s living with the Reed family, she is neither considered as a Reed member nor as a working class servant. This is due to her indefinable class status, Jane’s parents were socially ambiguous, and this ambiguity is a part of their legacy to Jane. Her
mother was a middle class woman, and her father was from the poor class. Thus, when Jane was born her social status was obscure, and became more ambiguous after her parents’ death. This fact helped in Jane’s oppression and imprisonment. As claimed by Bihagen Erik3 “The oppression of women is the main result of their class ambiguity” (85).

Members of the lower class were often dehumanized because of their social position, as Jane's spoiled cousin “John Reed” who illustrates this attitude. He always punishes, and mistreats her, “he is large and stout for his age, with a dingy and unwholesome skin and heavy limbs and large extremities” (9). He does not respect Jane as well as his mother and sisters.

John Reed’s oppressive regimes made Jane admits that she desires to please and receive favor “Why was I always suffering, always browbeaten, always accused, forever condemned? Why could I never please? Why was it useless to try to win any one's favour?” (11). She also questions the reasons behind her ill-treatment and injustice at John Reed’s hands inspite of her good behavior comparing to him who is never punished for his bad deeds “John, no one thwarted, much less punished; though he twisted the necks of the pigeons, killed the little pea-chicks, set the dogs at the sheep, stripped the hothouse vines of their fruit, and broke the buds off the choicest plants in the conservatory: he called his mother “old girl,” too” (12).

Additionally, John Reed always reminds Jane of her inferiority, difference from the Reed family, and that he is her master because of his wealth, “You have no business to take our books; you are dependant, mama says; you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg, and not live here with gentleman’s children like us and eat the same meals as we do, and wear clothes at our mama’s expense” (6). The passage shows how Jane was looked upon by the members of the Reed family, even though she was supposed to be their equal. The words dependant, no money, none and beg are all associated with being a part of the
economic dependent lower class. According to Rich Andrienne⁴, this reveals the power relations in society, both from an economical, and female perspective, as well as the relations in the household of Gateshead (31).

Furthermore, Jane is forced to submit to even greater oppression by Mrs. Reed; she is banished to the red-room like an animal. The red room reflects Jane’s oppressed state, and the prison she was locked in (Brennan 36). In the red room, Jane thinks of herself as a revolted slave, unjustly punished and thus isolated as a discord in the family (15). As Brennan Zoe⁵ describes the room “Decorated claustrophobically in fiery shades with a red carpet and ‘crimson cloth’ covering the bed, the red room mirrors Jane’s acute oppression and injustice” (36). Jane’s imprisonment characterizes the way inferior class women were treated, and restricted by the class conditions of the Victorian era.

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

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

In Thornfield, Jane is considered to have a lower social status than Mr. Rochester because she is only a governess who works for him, and supported by him. As a governess, she is situated in an ambiguous point in the social structure: she is servant, but an “upper” servant, equipped with sound school education and professional sophistication (Eagleton16). Mr. Rochester treatment to Jane is basically bound on being her Master. He abuses Jane emotionally despite the fact that he is married to Bertha Mason. He even uses Miss Ingram as a pawn to make Jane jealous, and reveal her emotions about him, and chooses not to be the beginner to express his feelings. Here it is clear that Mr Rochester is using his power, and upper class position to control Jane. He causes Jane to question her class especially with the coming of Miss Ingram, and her family.

Even Blanche Ingram oppresses Jane after seeing her in the corner of the drawing room. Blanche Ingram, her mother, and sister begin to mock governesses particularly “Jane”. She describes Jane as a disease because of her class inferiority, she tells Mr. Rochester:

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

In fact, Jane is incomparable to Blanche who is everything Jane is not. Ingram is
wealthy and beautiful, yet Jane is none of these. Blanche Ingram who belongs to a wealthy family comes to “sing and play” (158). She is “magnificently dressed … brilliant as her jewels … dressed in pure white; she [wears] an amber-coloured flower, too, in her hair” (159). On the other hand, Jane as a governess has “[a] trunk – the same [she has] brought with [her] eight years ago from Gateshead … bonnet [and] gloves” (91) and she always puts on a “shawl … and slippers” (316). This indicates a clear perspective on the reality of social classes and the mental oppression that poor class members face.

The issue of women’s class oppression brings to mind the conflicts faced by Victorian females in *Jane Eyre*. Class difference greatly helped in oppressing females by the upper class which placed many limits upon females’ progression and independence. Victorian class-based society was the source of women’s oppression especially poor ones who were almost cut by society for no reason, but just for they were poor. Besides this class oppression, females in the novel face another way of their submission that is gender oppression.

**II- Gender Oppression:**

From the very beginning of Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre*, patriarchal authority can be noticed through the male characters in the novel. Sylvia Walby defines patriarchy as “a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (214). Hence, the arrogant John Reed, the wealthy Rochester, Mr Brocklehurst and St John represent male’s powerful patriarch under which female characters were oppressed.

Gender issues largely reigned social interactions in Gateshead. John emerges as the dominant male figure. His gender power among the female family members unfolds from being the only man in the Reed family. He physically and verbally persecute his sisters, servants and surely his dependant cousin Jane. He insists that Jane concedes and serves him at all times, threatens her with mental and physical abuse. John, sees Jane as bestial, a “bad
animal” (3). Jane, therefore, identifies John as her oppressor and tyrant who provokes her anger (5). Here it can be noticed that John is playing the role of the Victorian father in the house.

In this regard, Allan Johnson asserts that the Victorian “father has the authority to rule females in his family as they are subordinate to him. Man’s superiority is because of his ability to exert force and violence is his main weapon. Woman is biologically weak, it is the male privilege to rule over woman and define her in terms of other” (85-87). John evidently shows this male authority when he physically attacks Jane, “the volume was flung, it hit me, and I fell, striking my head against the door and cutting it” (6).

John Reed blatantly showed his dominance over Jane who said that she was “habitually obedient” to him, and “every nerve [she] had feared him, and every morsel of flesh in [her] bones shrank when he came near” (10). Jane shows her consciousness of the fact that being male gives cruel John all rights in all terms in spite of his young age. She best realises that when John physically attacked her “head still ached and bled with the blow and fall I had received: no one had reproved John for wantonly striking me; and because I had turned against him to avert farther irrational violence, I was loaded with general opprobrium” (16).

Even Mrs. Reed is “herself bound by this hard-wrung pledge” (11). Her own son John oppresses her with remarks of “old girl [and] . . . sometimes revile[s] her for her dark skin . . . bluntly disregard[s] her wishes” (9). Regardless of his abuse, Mrs. Reed submits to John and continues to treat him as her “own darling” (10). Mrs Reed’s submission towards her son is considred as the key driving for male’s superiority. As Andrea Barnes explains, “it contributes to the culture of gender passivity which encourages women’s oppressive exploitation and acceptance of males’ authority in their society” (334).
Like Mrs. Reed the servants in the house are also submitted to their master John, even when Jane tries to defend herself they ban her and this shows their total submission to the male dominance and enforces their oppression. In this regard, Martha Nussbaum\(^9\) asserts that “When women come to accept the legitimacy of the inequality of the gender system, they become accomplices, allowing it to survive” (75). This also shows that the servants’ submission is also due to their total conviction of their inferiority as they are biologically oppressive creatures because of their gender.

Just as in Gateshead, gender oppression again appears in Lowood school. John is replaced by Mr. Brocklehurst who exercises male authority over Jane and the girls in school. Mr. Brocklehurst appears to Jane as “a black pillar […] a sable clad shape standing erect on the rug: the grim face at the top was like a carved mask, placed above the shaft by way of capital” (25). Mr. Brocklehurst represents a new male authority where he demonstrates his superiority; he is described as a giant phallus symbol (Gilbert et al 343-44\(^{10}\)). He rules over Lowood Institution; a school for girls funded by donations. He is aggressive towards Jane Eyre telling teachers of the Lowood School: “you must watch her: keep your eyes on her movements, weigh well her words, scrutinise her actions, punish her body to save her soul” (56).

Brocklehurst’s male sexuality is a threatening to the female sexuality. His gender role in the school is an oppressor of female sexuality. This is clear in his speeches at the school. He says:

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

He uses his power to oppress the girls and repress their individuality and identity. He verbally punishes Jane for her mistakes and calls her a liar while she is not. However, Jane’s consciousness of his gender superiority and girls’ submission to him make her certain that all girls will believe him and that nobody will care to hear her version. He even uses religion as a male oppressive way to threaten girls and “to teach them to know their place in society and repress their individuality and identity” (Andersson 811). This masculinity which is based on religion oppresses the females in the school and put Jane in another red room.

In Thornfield, Jane feels herself a bird trapped in a golden cage owned by an upper-class patriarch. She exemplifies the gender discrimination between men and women in the Victorian society “women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do” (101). Her expressions confirm that Victorian “[w]omen were living in misogynist world and under male dominance” (Muda 12, 78). The strongest dominant sex in Thornfield can be seen in the character of Mr. Rochester, as he represents the worst of an oppressive man. His masculinity is typical of the one of men in the Victorian society.

From the very beginning of Jane and her master’s relationship, Rochester was trying to frighten Jane into respecting and obeying him. He believed in his authority and superiority. He described Jane as an aerial figure, an elf, and an angel. All these images indicated that women were oppressed and treated as objects. He is shown ordering Jane around, “bring me my horse” (135) as most women were obliged to serve men because they were the higher authority in society. Jane is aware that Rochester can both physically and emotionally harm her, he even intends to do her harm if she will not submit. Rochester states:
Jane, I am not a gentle-tempered man—you forget that: I am not longenduring; I am not cool and dispassionate. Out of pity to me and yourself, put your fingers on my pulse, feel how it throbs, and—beware!’ He bared his wrist, and offered it to me: the blood was forsaking his cheek and lips, they were growing livid; I was distressed on all hands. To agitate him thus deeply, by a resistance he so abhorred, was cruel: to yield was out of the question. I did what human beings do instinctively when they are driven to utter extremity—looked for aid to one higher than man: the words 'God help me!' burst involuntarily from my lips. (268)

Clearly, Rochester is threatening to use violence. His desire to crush Jane and own her “spirit-with will and energy, and virtue and purity” (280-281).

Jane also figures out that Mr. Rochester’s daughter, for whom she is employed, is also imprisoned by the walls of Mr. Rochester’s house that stands for patriarchy. Not allowed to explore the life outside, she is observed to be confined to the house learning sewing, drawing and French. Her father’s masculinity attributes her role as “angel in the house” (246). And through his proposal to Jane he wants to define Jane’s role as an angel too. In this regard, Jane claims that “I am not an angel…and I will not be one till I die: I will be myself” (247). She refuses to be the domestic angel to Mr. Rochester whose proposal’s sole purpose is to preserve his masculine authority and control.

St. John Rivers’ male oppression does not differ from the one of both Brocklehurst and Rochester. St. John is a religious dominating man who tries to suppress Jane’s personality. He does not have a wife, but he does have two sisters who live with him, and over whom he exercises his patriarchal powers over. He is also in a position of patriarchal dominance and power over Jane. He behaves as if he is her master. Jane realises that “He
acquired a certain influence over me that took away my liberty of mind: ...I could no longer talk or laugh freely” (352). His patriarchal dominance is an expected norm, as a man, regardless of whether he is middle or lower class. (Tosh, Manliness and Masculinities13 51).

Just as Rochester’s proposal, John Rivers proposal to Jane is a way to enforce his control over her. According to Herbert Sussman14, “[St. John Rivers is] the embodiment of the male patriarchal oppression” (60). He considers Jane more as a commodity to be of use to him as a missionary's wife, and as Jane confirms, “He will never love me...he asks me to be his wife, and has no more of a husband's heart for me than...a rock...He prizes me as a soldier would a good weapon; and that is all” (345).

Highlighting social aspects that pervaded Victorian society, Charlotte Brontë pictures gender oppression exercised on Victorian women. According to the Victorian mentality, the woman can only stay at home, do household and please males in her society. It is due to the patriarchal traditions that the father, brother or husband has higher status than women in their families. Their superiority lies not in their being reasonable but in their being males. It is they who have the power of decision-making. Facing this gender oppression, female characters in Jane Eyre react differently. Jane for instance, stands up against class barriers, challenges them, and does not remain silent when males oppress her. By contrast, servants choose to be subjected to this authority. Correspondingly, Bertha can no longer cope with the ideals of “the Angel in the House” which render her an oppressed mad wife.

III- Madness as a Result of the Victorian Oppressive Marriage:

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

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

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

“Strange wild animal” (425), this is how Bertha is perceived by Rochester. Women in the 19th century are considered as savage and wild creatures; hence, they are treated in the cruelest ways. Bertha Mason acts as the embodiment of this phenomenon. For the sake of a shared profit between Mr. Rochester’s father and Bertha Mason’s family, she was to spend most of her adult life hidden from view in the attic at Thornfield Hall. She is barred from any contact with human beings except for Grace Poole. Under such conditions, no wonder that she would turn more savage, sending dreadful signals at nights through her roaming voice and laughters.

Accordingly, oppression in marriage was prevailing at that time; actually, many married women became mad because of these oppressive marriages. Mad women were common figures in Victorian society. Elaine Showalter observes in her *Introduction to The Female Malady* ‘Madness is a female malady because it is experienced by more women than
men. . . [And by] the middle of the nineteenth century, records showed that married women had become the majority of patients in public lunatic asylums’’ (45).

The image of the genteel femininity is totally distorted in Bertha Mason. Mr. Rochester states that no ‘‘servant would bear the continued outbreaks of her violent and unreasonable temper, or the vexations of her absurd, contradictory, exacting orders--even then I restrained myself: I eschewed upbraiding, I curtailed remonstrance; I tried to devour my repentance and disgust in secret; I repressed the deep antipathy I felt’’(333).

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

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

Bertha Mason was married to Mr. Rochester from abroad, she comes from a British colony in the West Indies, Jamaica. Thus, her insanity is closely associated with her Jamaican heritage as claimed by her husband. She is introduced as the daughter of Jonas Mason, a west India planter and merchant and Antoinetta Mason who is identified as a Creole. According to Mr. Rochester’s account of her madness, “the germs of insanity” (380) run in her family and they are passed on by her Creole mother. Besides, Mr. Rochester acknowledges that Bertha’s
family wished him to marry Bertha because of his racial ‘superiority’. “Her family wished to secure me because I was of good race, and so did she” (384). The colonial blood inside Mr. Rochester is, therefore, undeniable and this could be clearly seen in his severe treatment of her, acting as a slave master.

Bertha Mason’s madness is seen as a product of her Jamaican race. In Mr. Rochester and Bertha Mason’s relation, the colonial attitudes towards the Creoles are evidently felt. The word Creole is defined in the Encyclopaedia Brittanica: Or, A Dictionary of Arts, Sciences and Miscellaneous Literature (1823) as follows:

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

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

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

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

The Victorian female is pure, obedient and submissive to her husband. She is meant
to cope with and obey the angelic ideals of the time to survive. Because of the fact that Bertha
was introduced by Mr. Rochester, it is difficult to explore her angelic side. Hence, Bertha
Mason falls victim of her society as well as her racial lineage. She serves as a critique to a
society where passionate women are referred to as madwomen.

It is important to see how Bertha’s Angelic image has been distorted once she
reached Thornfield. Charlotte Bronte offers a figurative representation of slavery in her novel;
she applies the metaphor of slavery through the character of Bertha to depict the oppression of
the Victorian female. In creating Bertha Mason, a Jamaican Creole, Bronte manages to
demonstrate the domestic oppression British women of the time had to face. Bertha Mason
has been brought from her native mainland only to be jailed by her slave master for ten years
in the attic which is seemingly equivalent to a mental asylum. In referring to Ann Goldberg¹⁶,
in the following quote, the hellish conditions inside mental asylums can be extremely sensed:

> Such and such strength of dungeon, so much length of chain, such and such
> allowance of straw, of bread and of water; and there was an end of it. If the
> poor wretch raged, they tortured him; if he pined, he might if it pleased him,
> pine to death. The asylum was like that place of horror over the door of
> which the Italian poet wrote that those who entered were to abandon even
The inmates of these asylums were legally tortured. Once confined those people could no longer taste liberty. They were put under the care of “alienists” (a term used to describe those in charge who alienate people from the outside world). Under such conditions they lose any semblance of the free will they once had. Thornfield Hall serves as a mental asylum to Bertha Mason who is put under the charge of Mr. Rochester.

Bronte, thus, used the character of Bertha Mason to demonstrate the repression of a patriarchal society. In this regard, parallels can be drawn between life at asylums and Bertha’s life at Thornfield: “When she attempts to strangle Rochester, Grace Poole gave him a cord, and he pinioned them behind her: with more rope, which was at hand, he bound her to a chair” (361). The asylums’ walls just like Thornfield’s hide tormented souls, whose roaming voices and cries show the hunger for breath and liberty. In sum, Bertha Mason’s angelic image turned to be monstrous once oppressed and locked up in the attic losing any hope of free will.

Through her Jane Eyre (1847), Bronte represented the patriarchal high society where rigid class and gender issues oppressed females, confined them to the domestic activities, and prevented them from being equal to men in all aspects of life. Through this chapter the reasons behind women oppression have been explored. Mainly, the domination of the ruling class greatly helped in oppressing females especially the ones of the lower class. Likewise, the biological distinction between “males” and “females” in the novel suppresses women’s identities and enforces male authority upon them. However, reactions against this oppression differ from one character to another. Like Jane who is such a heroic character who tries to challenge the established patriarchal code. In the coming chapter, we discover the Victorian woman in her journey to affirm her economic independence, and rights through Charlotte Bronte and her heroine Jane Eyre.
Works Cited of the Second Chapter:


Chapter Three

A Journey to Economic Liberation

Victorian writers were mostly concerned with their society’s issues especially the woman question. *Jane Eyre* as a literary work strongly focuses on females’ revolution against the traditional view of Victorian women. Thus, it is the most suitable form to describe women’s struggle for identity and autonomy in the Victorian social context of female oppression, and the best to call for independence, selfhood and gender equality.

Regrettably, Victorian women enjoyed very few of the legal, social, and political rights in their society. Their vocation was extremely limited to the domestic sphere. In contrast to this view, Charlotte’s *Jane Eyre* represents unorthodox aspects of Victorian women’s desire for autonomy, especially of being economically independent. Through following the five settings where Jane lives: Gateshead, Lowood, Thornfield, Moor House, and Ferndean, Charlotte Bronte represents Jane’s continual quest for economic independence. With the protagonist’s challenge of the Victorian class issues, she reaches her economic standing. Additionally, each destination represents an image of Jane’s protest for financial belonging. Not to mention the role of the destructive class conflicts which face *Jane Eyre*’s dependent characters and the power of the upper class social standing which ultimately bring an end to their dependency.

This chapter attempts to discuss Jane’s journey towards economic empowerment. With reference to the Feminist Marxism theory, it represents the subject of class structure, and
how an individual moves from an ambiguous class status to an upper one for the sake of economic empowerment.

1- In Gateshead:

Women’s economic empowerment represented through the work of Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* is basically bound with the struggle between classes. As claimed by Sargent Lydia “The key driving force for women’s empowered economic status is based on the change in the class structure” (85) \(^1\). Thus, the changing in the economic base exemplified through the character of Jane is dependent on her challenge of the class issues, and mainly on her standing against the upper class’ domination.

As have been showed in the previous chapter the female characters in the novel, mainly Jane, suffer from class oppression. The domination of the upper class serves in oppressing and neglecting them. As declared by Terry Eagleton and Drew Milne \(^2\), “women can reach their economic liberation if they reject, and resist the oppression exercised by the upper class” (340). From this perspective, Jane is the best to picture the resistance towards her cousin’s harsh treatment, despite that she is relying on him, and expected to be grateful for being fed and clothed; “If Victorian women could get neither job nor marriage, they were obliged to be dependent on the mercy relatives to feed, and clothe, and shelter them” (24) \(^3\).

When he attacks her physically, she stands up calling him “a murderer”, “a slave-driver”, and compares him to “the Roman emperors”. However, when she tries to defend herself she is accused of flying at Master John (9). Miss Abbot, the maid at Gateshead, tells Jane: “What shocking conduct, Miss Eyre, to strike a young gentleman, your benefactress’s son! Your young master!” (12), however Jane responds, “Master! How is he my master?” (12).

Also, when Jane leaves Gateshead later, the servant Abbot confesses that Mrs. Reed “was…glad enough to get rid of such a tiresome, ill-conditioned child, who always looked as if she were watching everybody, and scheming plots underhand” (21). Furthermore, this
shows the servants’ dependence, and submission to the upper class ruling, in contrast to Jane who resists, and defends herself.

Jane’s resistance continues to empower her, and she keeps challenging the class structure that alienates her because of her low social class. “Unjust, unjust” (11), these are Jane’s words when locked in the red room by her aunt Mrs. Reed. She realises that her aunt’s mistreatment is not because of her behaviour but rather because of her early awareness that she is equal to them, despite her class background. Jane affirms her independent spirit, she displays a keen sense of her need for justice, recognition and equality, she frankly expresses her true feelings towards her aunt:

I’m glad you are no relation of mine: I will never call you aunt again as long as I live. I will never come to see you when I am grown up; and if anyone asks me how I liked you, and how you treated me, I will say the very thought of you makes me sick, and that you treated me with miserable cruelty. How dare I, Mrs. Reed? How dare I? Because it is the truth. You think I have no feelings, and that I can do without one bit of love or kindness; but I cannot live so: and you have no pity. I shall remember how you thrust me back—roughly and violently thrust me back—into the red-room, and locked me up there, to my dying day; though I was in agony; though I cried out, while suffocating with distress, “Have mercy! Have Mercy, aunt Reed!” And that punishment you made me suffer because your wicked boy struck me—knocked me down for nothing. I will tell anybody who asks me questions this exact tale. People think you are a good woman, but you are bad; hard-hearted. You are deceitful! (30)
Jane’s imprisonment is considered as the starting point where her progress towards economic independence seems to begin, and disobedience against the Victorian class rules which restrict her from moving towards economic liberation.

Jane’s economic liberty need unfolds from the Reeds rejection of her. Her relationship with them “is hostile and because of her childhood dependence on the Reeds for food and shelter, consequently, Jane disowns them and resolves to start a life relying on her abilities” (Adetunji 4). Gateshead marks Jane’s first steps towards economic liberation as a response to the oppression exercised by the members of the Victorian upper class, along with the members of the working class who are submissive to them. However, she is still seen as an economically dependent character “If I had anywhere else to go, I should be glad to leave it; but I can never get away from Gateshead till I am a woman” (24). Afterward, Jane’s voyage continues to Lowood.

2- In Lowood:

Due to Jane’s disobedient behaviour, she is sent by Mrs. Reed to Lowood School, a boarding school for orphaned girls funded by donations “to be trained in conformity to her position and prospects as a lower class woman” (34). Out of Gateshead, Jane realises that she is just experiencing another kind of prison, by contrast to what she has expected when leaving. As Shirley Foster infers “The Lowood School where Jane is sent by her aunt is the penitentiary for which the red room was the tribunal. Lowood represents sexual diminishment and sensual discipline where the girls are systematically starved and deprived of all sensory gratification” (11).

In Lowood, the upper class’ oppression is still present as an obstacle facing Jane’s economic progression. Mr. Brocklehurst, a hypocritical clergyman, and the head of Lowood institution, represents an even crueler version of the Reeds, “a black pillar […] a sable clad
shape standing erect on the rug: the grim face at the top was like a carved mask, placed above the shaft by way of capital” (25). When leaving Gateshead Jane does not get what she has been expecting simply because of her descendants, she is treated the same way other low class girls get. Upon her arrival Jane remarks the oddity of their appearance:

A quaint assemblage they appeared, all with plain locks combed from their faces, not a curl visible; in brown dresses, made high and surrounded by a narrow tucker about the throat, with little pockets of holland …tied in front of their frocks, and destined to serve the purpose of a work-bag: all, too, wearing woollen stockings and country-made shoes, fastened with brass buckles. Above twenty of those clad in this costume were full-grown girls, or rather young women; it suited them ill, and gave an air of oddity even to the prettiest. (45)

The oppression executed by Mr. Brocklehurst, and the bad conditions in Lowood keep inspiring Jane to gain her economic liberation.

Though Mr. Brocklehurst is supposedly a charitable gentleman, he refuses to help Jane and the other girls. When seeing the school girls his daughter says: “Oh, dear papa, how quiet and plain all the girls at Lowood look, with their hair combed behind their ears, and their long pinafores, and those little holland pockets outside their frocks—they are almost like poor people’s children…they looked at my dress and mama’s, as if they had never seen a silk gown before” (31). Like John Reed, Mr. Brocklehurst asserts his dominance by towering over the girls, and threatening them using his wealth and power. He humiliates Jane in front of the whole school, calling her a “liar”. His acts of humiliating girls are obviously an upper class social imposition to force gender ambiguity onto the girls in an attempt to keep them separated from upper class society. Additionally, he describes Mrs. Reed in relation to Jane to highlight the distinction that is created within the Victorian class system. Mr. Brocklehurst
uses positive compliments such as ‘charitable’, ‘kindness’ to portray Mrs. Reed because she is upper class, and contrasts this by characterizing Jane, who is of lower class, as ‘dreadful’ and ‘bad’. He also identifies the girls with their lower class family status. However, Jane then fights against any negativity because of her class.

In relating women economic independence with men’s control Engels Frederick believes that “if women are to be economically independent, they must be truly emancipated from men” (75). In Jane’s first attempt to be away from Mr. Brocklehurst control she resists his misbehaviour, and has no fear to express her feeling towards him, along with the support of Miss Temple (the superintendent of Lowood School) and Helen Burns (Jane’s friend at Lowood School who submits to cruelty from her teacher) “I disliked Mr. Brocklehurst; and I was not alone in the feeling. He is a harsh man; at once pompous and meddling he cut off our hair; and for economy’s sake bought us bad needles and thread, with which we could hardly sew” (77). But the power structure of the school under Mr. Brocklehurst does not fully allow girls like Jane to maintain economic autonomy. Jane is still stuck in the economic dependency circle, even if she does not show submission to the upper class’ ruling as much as the other girls do.

Helen and the other girls do not act freely as Jane does, and stands. When Jane observes Helen punished for her behaviour, she expects Helen to defend herself by against her unfair punishments. She thinks: “If people were always kind and obedient to those who are cruel and unjust, the wicked people would have it all their own way: they would never feel afraid, and so they would never alter, but would grow worse and worse” (65). However, Helen endures her suffering, and chooses to be submissive to the upper class control, and opposes Jane’s thinking, “But I feel this, Helen: I must dislike those who, whatever I do to please them, persist in liking me; I must resist those who punish me unjustly (57).
Hence, it seems that Jane’s character at Lowood matches the Feminist Marxism norms to reach economic liberation. Also, her education level plays an important role in enhancing her social mobility, especially that it is associated with the aristocrats, and that it eventually qualifies her to become a teacher for two years in Lowood School. As shown by Rosemarie Tong, women’s empowered economic role in society is shaped by their education’s consciousness, which offers them collective resistance to the oppressive exploitation in a class based society. The needs in the economic sphere which engage women into work are associated with their education’s fulfillment (167). Jane progresses from being at the bottom of the Victorian social classes, and she has a position as an educated woman and her class ambiguity starts to vanish.

After spending six years as a student in Lowood, Jane becomes a teacher, and makes a class progress along with enhancing her economic stability comparing to her position of dependency in Gateshead. She tells: “In a few weeks I was promoted to a higher class; in less than two months I was allowed to commence French and drawing. I learned the first two tenses of the verb être, and sketched my first cottage…I would not now have exchanged Lowood with all its privations, for Gateshead and its daily luxuries” (87). Thereby, she begins to enjoy becoming a middle class educated girl, however her sense of economic independence is not totally fulfilled. According to Jane, life at Lowood was too limited to satisfy her social and economic independence. It is true that she was living in a secure and peaceful environment, but, at the same time, she comes to believe that she no longer needs to be tranquil, so, she accepts a new work as a governess at Thornfield Hall:

I tired of the routine of eight years in one afternoon. I desired economic liberty; for liberty I gasped; for liberty I uttered a prayer; it seemed scattered on the wind then faintly blowing. I abandoned it and framed a humbler supplication; for change, stimulus: that petition, too, seemed swept off into
vague space: ‘Then, I cried, half desperate, grant me at least a new
servitude! (73)

Lowood School is continuity to Jane’s journey at Gateshead, in fact both are similar
to each other from the perspective of submissive, and repressive treatment exercised by
members of the upper class. However, Jane shows more standing, resistance towards these
treatments, and truly realises her emancipation from men’s control, and particularly from the
domination of the upper class as a step towards economic empowerment. Even though
Lowood gives Jane more freedom, she is still enclosed, and longs for more empowerment
especially of getting a better work, and payment. Thus, she journeys to Thornfield Hall, where
she has taken a position as governess to a young girl Adele, the daughter of Mr. Rochester’s
mistress.

3- From Thornfield Hall to Ferndean:

At the age of eighteen Jane leaves Lowood. She takes the position of a governess for
a young French girl, and begins to accrue a small amount of wages. The position of a
Victorian governess is difficult; not belonging to either family or servants made it an
ambiguous and possibly lonely position (Gilbert et al 349). However, when heading to
Thornfield Jane is excited, she considers herself free, liberated as she is no longer depending
on the Reeds or Lowood rich donors, and that she is eligible to support herself economically
through teaching, “[a] phase of my life was closing tonight, a new one opening tomorrow”
(91).

On her way to Thornfield Jane supposes that the owner of Thornfield Hall is Mrs.
Fairfax, but when she meets Mrs. Fairfax she discovers that she is not the owner of Thornfield
Hall nor Adèle Varens is her daughter. Here, it can be noticed that Jane’s way of thinking is
freed concerning Victorian women’s economic rights because they were not allowed to own properties, however Jane thinks differently.

When discussing with Mrs. Fairfax Jane’s quest for independence seems to be nourished, “The equality between her and me was real; […] my position was all the freer” (87). Even though there were people from the upper class in the house, she believes that she is not at the bottom of the social class. Glen\(^9\) indicates that “Jane is seeking economic independence and movement, and by physically moving from Lowood to Thornfield she has changed her social class and gained both a little freedom and economic independence in contrast to her life at Lowood” (161). Her moving to Thornfield is her class shift: from the lower class as a poor orphan, then a teacher at Lowood to the middle class as a governess at the age of eighteen. With this thought of equality Jane supposes that class issues are not hindering her economic progression as before, however, she comes across many thorns at Thornfield where she suffers much from afterwards.

In fact, Jane believes that she is now a totally freed woman, however, she loses what she had previously thought of as her private workspace at the arrival of her Master “Mr Rochester”. According to Engels women lose power when private property owners come into existence. Men’s control of private property changes the family form to a patriarchal one where women, and often slaves, become the property of the Master (394-395). At Thornfield Mr. Rochester is the master, and thereby at the top of the social hierarchy. His relationship with Jane is that of the master-employed one, as his mistress, her identity defines her duty of following her master’s orders, however she shows her strength by standing up to Rochester: “I do not think, sir that you have a right to command me, merely because you are older than I, or because you are superior than me” (117).

Jane progresses to show her autonomy, and independence through defending the working class. She emphasises the humanity of the working class through her words to Mr.
Rochester, “Do you think because I am poor, obscure, plain and little, I am soulless and heartless?” (256). According to Bihagen Erik10, “women’s attempt to achieve the economic liberation must rely itself on the standing against the capital owners, if there is no such foundation, the liberation of woman cannot be achieved” (256-257). It can be seen that Jane’s standing is achieved, however she is not considered as a fully independent because she is still under the master’s authority.

Though, Blanche Ingram is an upper class woman she shows her financial dependency through her interest in Mr.Rochester’s money by contrast to Jane’s only ambition which is “to save money enough out of my earnings to set up a school some day in a little house rented by myself” (173). She is attracted to Mr.Rochester because of his wealth and high social position.

Mr. Rochester controls Jane’s access to money by forcing her to accept the expensive clothes, and jewelry he buys. Rochester confirms that he will himself “put the diamond chain round your neck, and the cirlet on your forehead… and I will clasp the bracelets on these fine wrists, and load these fairylike fingers with rings” (241). Nevertheless, she thinks that “…if I had ever so small independency; I never can bear being dressed like a doll by Mr. Rochester…” (236). This quotation indicates, that Jane is still under the master’s control though she stands up ,and refuses to become the object that Mr. Rochester possesses.

Additionally, when Jane lives Thornfield for the first time to visit her aunt Reed he offers her access to money more than she asked, so she refuses to accept in order to avoid putting him in a higher position, because she believes in their equality.

Well, you must have some money; you can’t travel without money, and I dare say you have not much: I have given you no salary yet. How much have you in the world, Jane?’ he asked, smiling. I drew out my purse; a
meager thing it was. Five shillings sir. He took the purse, poured the hoard into his palm and chuckled over it as if its scantiness pleased him. Soon he produced his pocket book: ‘Here,’ said he, offering me a note: it was fifty pounds, and he owed me but fifteen. I told him I had no change. I don’t want change: you know that. Take your wages. I declined accepting more than was my due. He scowled at first; then, as if recollecting something, he said: —Right, right. Better not give you all now: you would, perhaps, stay away three months if you had fifty pounds. There are ten: is it not plenty? (191)

Because Rochester pays Jane’s wages, he has direct power over her, but she also knows her stated worth, and refuses to take more or less than she deserves. He is her master and she is his employee, but in this conversation she has the final say over how much money she receives. She neither takes advantage of him nor accepts less than she owes. When leaving Thornfield after receiving her wages, Jane realises her financial independence. Traveling to Gateshead necessitates money, and Jane pays for her own journey, because she has the ability to support herself as a working woman.

After Mr. Rochester’s proposal, Jane mocks herself for believing that she could ever be good enough for Mr. Rochester. She describes herself as "fool"," idiot", “How could a woman of low class and no status, be worthy enough to engage with a man of such high stature and worth? (215). She refuses to marry him because of her fear to end like his mad wife Bertha Mason who was an economically independent lady before marriage, and ended up as a dependent wife after Mr. Rochester taking her wealth. She also sees that marrying him will keep him her Master, and that she will not be able to reach her economic liberation, “I am no bird; and no net ensnares me: I am a free human being with an independent will; which
I now exert to leave you” (216). Jane frees herself from Rochester’s embrace and “stands erect before him” (216).

Jane's arrival at Thornfield Hall marks her turning point towards independence, it is where she acquires a job, turns into an empowered woman in the sense that she is no longer economically dependent on the Reeds or Lowood’s affluent benefactors, and being able to economically support herself through teaching. Her challenge to the upper class master, and refusal to be his mistress celebrate her economic independence along with her social liberation. Jane continues her journey away from Thornfield, and reaches Marsh End.

Jane meets St. John, and his two sisters, however, she does not reveal her true identity for the Rivers aiming for a new beginning where her past is not there. Leghorn Lisa and Katherine Parker have argued that incorporating women in different modes of production and working life is key to attaining their stable social status, and particularly economic standing (85).

Jane does not want to be dependent on the Rivers. So, the first thing she asks is to show her “how to work, or how to seek work: that is all I now ask; then let me go, if it be but to the meanest cottage” (297). Jane’s unexpected request of independency shocked St. John Rivers who felt puzzled and very surprised but she frankly responded that she has already said so (308). Jane shows that she is still in search for economic autonomy, and that she needs movement in her life. She desires a work that provides her with independence; an economic independence she has been longing for ever since her days at Gateshead.

With reference to Sanday Peggy, women can be economically liberated if only organized them against male domination, and low class workers against upper class domination (85). Thereby, when Jane asks the Rivers to grant her a job, she wants to work for her own, and gets rid of the Master’s domination. St. Rivers offers Jane a position of being a
mistress of a school for girls in Morton, where he has his parsonage. For the first time, Jane is
to some extent her own master, and the master of others as the schoolmistress. Eagleton writes
that this also shows that Jane is ambiguous, on one hand she stands up for the not privileged
since being one of them, but on the other hand she looks down on them feeling that she
belongs to the one of the upper class (28).

Jane thinks over the employment her cousin St. John Rivers has offered her. She
muses “in truth it was humble, but then it was sheltered, and I wanted a safe asylum: it was
plodding, but then, compared with that of a governess in a rich house, it was independent; and
the fear of servitude with strangers entered my soul like iron: it was not ignoble, not
unworthy, not mentally degrading, I made my decision” (303). Jane considers work as an
important part in maintaining economic liberation, she prefers being her own mistress on
being dependant on a man. Jane knows that working as a schoolmistress would make her
neither rich nor a lady but despite that she works hard, feeling happy about the independence
her work brought her.

During her stay at Marsh End Jane finds out that she has inherited a large sum of
money after her uncle in Madeira. That “was wealth indeed! Wealth to the heart! It was a
legacy of life, hope, enjoyment” (341). She considers this legacy important to finally consider
herself a truly upper class woman, it is enough for her economic independence. It also gives
her the opportunity to economically support Diane and Mary Rivers who are employed as
governesses. Both of them are regarded only as “ humble dependents and the families they
work for neither knew nor sought one of their innate excellences, and appreciated only their
acquired accomplishments as they appreciated the skill of their cook or the taste of their
waiting-woman”( 355).

Regardless of how Jane’s status is, St. John’s desires to control her through his
marriage proposal, “God and nature intended you for a missionary’s wife. It is not
personal but mental endowments they have given you; you are formed for labor, not for
love. A missionary’s wife you must—shall be. You shall be mine; I claim you—not for
my pleasure, but for my Sovereign’s service” (356). However, Jane refuses because she
thinks that she would never fulfill her independency. Instead she would always be St.
John’s object, “I broke from St. John…it was my time to assume ascendency. My powers
were in play and in force” (400).

When Jane’s pilgrimage towards economic independence reaches the Moor
House, the protagonist ends up as an empowered Victorian woman. Jane is no longer
dominated by the upper class control. Her emancipation from males, and oppression
standing are the key driving points for her economic empowerment. Importantly, her
inheritance of a fortune implemented her financial independence, and helped in her shift
from a working class Victorian woman to an upper class one. For this reason, she decides
to go back to Mr. Rochester, because class barriers between them no longer exist.

Jane has now reached her final destination: Ferndean, where Mr. Rochester is.
However, this time the positions are reversed. At Ferndean they meet for the first time as
equals and there is nothing that stands in their way (Gilbert, 490). Jane discovers that Mr.
Rochester has gone blind, he is “now helpless, indeed – blind and cripple” (380). Mr.
Rochester is now the dependent one, totally depending on the help of others while Jane is
independent and strong. She freely expresses her independence and self-realisation when
talking with MR.Rochester “I told you I am independent, sir, as well as rich: I am my own
mistress” (385). As declared by Rosemarie Tong the empowered economic standing of
women comes into existence with women holding upper positions than men in society (377).
Now, Jane proves that she is not dependent on Rochester financially or physically, she is the
dominant power with a total economic independence, which allows her to marry Mr.
Rochester, and be the one who supports him economically, “I can build a house of my own close up your door” (410).

The protagonist Jane starts her life as a lower-class orphan at Gateshead, moving to Lowood, then ascends to the middle class as a governess at Thornfield, and at last ends up as an upper-class woman with a total economic empowerment. In this respect, she climbs the Victorian class ladder from the bottom to the top, and challenges the issues constructed by the Victorian class division to finally reach her financial empowerment.

With reference to the theory that has been used, the protagonist follows the needed stages to fulfill her sense of economic empowerment. Basically through her resistance, and rejection of the oppression opposed by higher class members, she truly finds her source of economic empowerment. And she became a symbol of courage and a defender of women’s liberation.
Works Cited of the Third Chapter:


The Victorian age is considered as an era of dramatic change. Despite the fact that it affected the society positively, it also had numerous negativities; especially on the Victorian social structure. Charlotte Bronte is one of the Victorian female writers who tried to transfer the real image of the age to her readers with a special concern on women question. Her novel *Jane Eyre* depicts the place of Victorian women in their society, and the struggles they face for survival.

Bronte reflected in her novel the male oppression of women and the stereotypes placed upon them. Women in the novel were brought up to life only to serve in the domestic sphere. They were perceived as “Angels in the House”. Class and gender defined their status as oppressed females in opposition to males who were oppressors. Importantly, Bronte changed this image of oppressed women and pictured them as powerful females in their search of independence. Some women in the novel proved their power in confronting the hardships coming in their way, despite of their sex as females, from the oppressive patriarchy to the shallow class issues. They attempted hardly to break with the tradition (domestic sphere) as a way of expressing their rejection to the careless oppressing social codes and conventions which banned their progression.

Reading the novel and understanding it would help in applying the needed theories on this novel. Thus, this study aims at showing the struggle of Victorian females to maintain their socio-economic liberation. Dealing with this study one would obviously answer the previous inquiries that were provoked. For our concern three main points are reached. As it responds to the way Bronte presented women who were oppressed in the novel through the deep analysis provided in chapter two. It also answers the inquiry concerning the way
Victorian women struggle to achieve selfhood in the novel, through the analysis in chapter three. The study also responds upon the question of the way women break with the traditions of the Victorian time to achieve their liberation through the analysis provided in chapter three as well.
Bibliography

1- Primary Source:


2- Secondary Sources:


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