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JANE EYRE

CHARLOTTE BRONTË was born at Thornton, Yorkshire in 1816, the third child of Patrick and Maria Brontë. Her father was perpetual curate of Haworth, Yorkshire, from 1820 until his death in 1861. Her mother died in 1821, leaving five daughters and a son. All of the girls except Anne were sent to a clergymen's daughters' boarding school (recalled as Lowood in *Jane Eyre*). The eldest sisters, Maria ('Helen Burns') and Elizabeth, became ill there, were taken home, and died soon after at Haworth. Charlotte was employed as a teacher from 1835 to 1838, was subsequently a governess, and in 1842 went with her sister Emily to study languages in Brussels, where during 1843 she again worked as a teacher. She returned to Haworth in the following year, and in 1846 there appeared *Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell*, the pseudonyms of Charlotte, Emily, and Anne. Charlotte's first novel, *The Professor*, was rejected by several publishers, and was not published until 1857. *Jane Eyre* was published (under the pseudonym Currer Bell) in 1847 and achieved immediate success. In 1848 Branwell Brontë died, as did Emily before the end of the same year, and Anne in the following summer, so that Charlotte alone survived of the six children. *Shirley* was published in 1849, and *Villette* in 1853, both pseudonymously. Charlotte married in 1854 the Revd A. B. Nicholls, her father's curate, but died in March 1855.

MARGARET SMITH is one of the editors of the Clarendon Editions of the novels of the Brontës: *Jane Eyre* (with Jane Jack, 1969; revised reprint, 1975), *Shirley* (1979), *Villette* (1984), and *The Professor* (1987), all with Herbert Rosengarten.

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M.S.

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S.S.

INTRODUCTION

WHEN *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography*, 'edited' by the unknown Currer Bell, was first published in October 1847 it caused a literary sensation. It was widely reviewed in the national and provincial press, with critics falling over one another to praise its freshness, vigour and reality. Nor was the religious press behindhand with its praise. Rather surprisingly, given Brontë's own vehement protestantism, the Roman Catholic organ, the *Tablet*, recommended the novel as a form of vigorous moral workout: 'The reading of such a book as this is a healthful exercise, and we sincerely hope may prove as attractive as it must be profitable'. Far from viewing the novel as an incitement to morbid emotional indulgence on the part of its readers, the *Tablet* saw its study of 'the recesses of the human heart' as a perfect exemplum of the moral 'profit' to be gained by guiding and training the mind's powers.¹

The dominant critical note was struck by G. H. Lewes in *Fraser's Magazine* who concluded that 'Reality—deep, significant reality, is the characteristic of the book'.² Such ready acclaim certainly attests to Brontë's powers as a novelist, but also to the ways in which her conceptions of psychological reality were thoroughly attuned to Victorian culture. She introduces to the novel forms of language and conceptualization of selfhood that were emerging in contemporary culture, but had yet to be fully assimilated into the sphere of fiction. Selfhood in *Jane Eyre* is defined primarily as a hidden interior space, rather than a process of social interaction and exchange. It is in the hidden 'recesses of the heart' that the real action takes place. This inner space is to be carefully guarded against intruders, whilst the play of the mind's powers is to be rigorously guided and controlled. In many ways one can see here emerging nineteenth-century notions of privacy and private property, intertwined with economic models

¹ The 3rd edn. of *Jane Eyre* carried a section on 'Opinions of the Press' with extracts from 25 favourable reviews, drawn from a very wide range of periodicals, magazines, and newspapers, including the *Tablet*. This is reprinted in the Appendix below. Longer selections from reviews can be found in Miriam Allott (ed.), *The Brontës: The Critical Heritage* (1974), 67–116.

² G. H. Lewes, unsigned review, *Fraser's Magazine*, 36 (Dec. 1847), 686–95, repr. Allott, 83–7 (p. 84).

of regulation and control. Yet the resulting picture of selfhood is not that of a carefully run psychic economy, but rather a battleground of conflicting energies, where passion must at last 'have vent'. Jane is constantly subjected to feelings and emotions she cannot control. The moral framework of the novel, where Jane's self-denial with regard to Rochester is finally rewarded, is at odds with the recurrent pattern of 'unprofitable' surges of unstoppable emotion.

In the midst of all the critical acclaim, the novel was not without its detractors, the 'carping few' to whom Brontë alludes in her trenchant Preface to the second edition of January 1848. The *Spectator* criticized the 'low tone of behaviour (rather than of morality) in the book'³ whilst the later April 1848 review in the *Christian Remembrancer* found that 'every page burns with moral Jacobinism'.⁴ This latter judgement was echoed in Elizabeth Rigby's infamous review in the *Quarterly* of December 1848, where she defined *Jane Eyre* as 'pre-eminently an anti-Christian composition':

We do not hesitate to say that the tone of the mind and thought which has overthrown authority and violated every code human and divine abroad, and fostered Chartism and rebellion at home, is the same which has also written *Jane Eyre*.⁵

At first sight this judgement seems odd for a book which contains no scenes of industrial unrest, and seems so narrowly focused, as the *Christian Remembrancer* notes, on the 'history of a woman's heart'.⁶ Yet Elizabeth Rigby correctly identified the 'spirit' of the novel: this drama of the human heart gives expression to some of the major social issues of the day. At its centre is a restless, questioning intelligence which moves quickly outwards from childhood anger to colonial uprisings, or from the narrowness of the female lot to working-class discontent.

Charlotte Brontë dedicated the second edition of her novel to William Makepeace Thackeray, whose novel *Vanity Fair* was at that time being published in parts. To Brontë he is 'the first social

³ Unsigned review, *Spectator*, 20 (6 Nov. 1847), 1074-5, repr. Allott, 74-7 (p. 75).

⁴ Unsigned review, *Christian Remembrancer*, 15 (Apr. 1848), 396-409, repr. Allott, 88-92 (p. 90).

⁵ Elizabeth Rigby (later Lady Eastlake), unsigned review, *Quarterly Review*, 84 (Dec. 1848), 153-85, repr. Allott, 105-12 (pp. 109-10).

⁶ Allott, 89.

regenerator of the day . . . the very master of that working corps who would restore to rectitude the warped system of things' (p. 4). As the Preface makes clear, Brontë similarly views her work as an act of social regeneration; she wishes to expose hypocrisies, to unveil or challenge those who find it 'convenient to make external show pass for sterling worth'. In the charged physical language which pervades the novel, she expresses her intention 'to penetrate the sepulchre, and reveal charnel relics.'

The very vehemence of the Preface suggests, however, that Brontë's tone and stance are utterly distinct from those employed by Thackeray. In place of the mocking, aloof puppet-master of *Vanity Fair* we have a first person narrator in *Jane Eyre* whose recollections are infused throughout with a passionate, highly personal, sense of injustice. The 'moral Jacobinism' identified by the *Christian Remembrancer* is evident in the judging intelligence which constantly assesses others and finds them wanting. The child Jane we first encounter is miserable in her social exclusion amidst the Reed household, yet we are left in no doubt that she views herself, personally and morally, as utterly superior. On hearing her aunt's instruction that her cousins are not to associate with her she cries out defiantly, 'They are not fit to associate with me' (p. 27). Later, as governess, excluded from the social party and forced to watch Rochester's courtship of Blanche Ingram, she disdains to feel jealousy; Blanche is 'too inferior to excite the feeling. . . her mind was poor, her heart barren by nature' (p. 185).

On her deathbed, Mrs Reed recalls with horror Jane's 'unchildlike look and voice' as she had poured out her anger: 'I felt fear, as if an animal that I had struck or pushed had looked up at me with human eyes and cursed me in a man's voice' (p. 239). As child, or lowly governess, presuming to speak out and judge her social superiors, Jane has violated the fragile boundaries which kept social hierarchies in place. Animal becomes human, child becomes adult, and social inferiority becomes an expression of moral superiority. Like Bertha at Thornfield, Jane is a 'discord in Gateshead Hall'; an 'uncongenial alien' and 'interloper not of [their] race' (pp. 15-16). She is racially, socially, and humanly 'other'. Less than a servant, 'for you do nothing for your keep' (p. 12), she is also a 'rat' (p. 11) or 'mad cat' (p. 12), and a form of 'infantine Guy Fawkes' (p. 25), threatening to demolish with fire the very foundations of the household.

Gateshead: Childhood Passions

Jane Eyre is a retrospective narrative, and yet, far from offering 'emotion recollected in tranquillity',⁷ it gives us a sense of absolute immediacy in its expressions of anger and anguish. Where the mature narrating voice does intrude, it can be almost blasphemous, as when Jane takes to herself the mantle of Christ, suggesting that she ought to forgive her aunt 'for you knew not what you did' (p. 20). There is no space, as in Thackeray, for ironic contemplation. Jane's narrative demands of its readers a passionate investment in a *child's* sense of the wrongs of childhood, or a *young woman's* sense of the privations of a governess's life.

As a child, Jane exhibits not only a powerful sense of her own rights, but also a rational, politicized sense of injustice: John Reed is a tyrant, a Caligula, and her own mood after her fit of passion is that of a 'revolted slave' (p. 14). Her 'insurrection' occurs when John Reed drags her out of her 'double retirement', her imaginative retreat in the world of Bewick's *History of British Birds*, claiming that even this domain is under his control for he owns the books. The beloved Bewick is turned from an agent of freedom into an instrument of violence, whilst imagination itself now turns torturer. Locked in the red room, Jane's sense of powerlessness transmutes into ill-defined terror. The rational gives way to the supernatural as the mirror, that 'visionary hollow' reveals a phantom, 'half fairy, half imp' (p. 14), and the fear of Mr Reed's spirit causes a paroxysm of terror at the flickering of a light on the wall.

Jane's account of her childhood, with its oscillation between paralyzing, irrational terror and a fiercely rational sense of injustice and a child's rights, finds an uncanny parallel in another female text of the period, Harriet Martineau's *Household Education* (1849), a form of manual for child-rearing based on Martineau's own recollections of childhood, which was part-serialized in the *People's Journal*, 1846-7. Martineau, one of the leading intellectual voices of the era who subsequently became a friend of Brontë, recounts in her *Autobiography* Brontë's observation that 'she read with astonishment those parts of "Household Education" which relate my own experience. It was like meeting her own fetch,—so precisely were the fears

⁷ Wordsworth's famous prescription for poetry in his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1802).

and miseries there described the same as her own, told or not told in “Jane Eyre”.⁸ Jane’s terror at the gleam of light in the red room is mirrored in Martineau’s account:

Some of my worst fears in infancy were from lights and shadows. The lamp-lighter’s torch on a winter’s afternoon, as he ran along the street, used to cast a gleam, and the shadows of the window-frames on the ceiling; and my blood ran cold at the sight, every day, even though I was on my father’s knee, or on the rug in the middle of the circle round the fire.⁹

Terror is not confined to the social outcast. Like Jane Eyre, Harriet Martineau inhabited an imaginative kingdom of shadows where the merest play of light could trigger feelings of anguish, desolation, and terror.

Jane’s fears are intensified by Miss Abbot’s parting shot that if she does not repent, ‘something bad might be permitted to come down the chimney, and fetch you away’ (p. 13). More benignly, Bessie’s nursery tales lie behind Jane’s adult tendency still to find the supernatural in the natural, as in her first encounter with Rochester’s dog, which she takes to be an embodiment of ‘Bessie’s Gytrash’ (p. 112). Martineau is severe in her strictures on the mother who allows an ‘ignorant’ person access to her child, ‘who will frighten it with goblin stories, or threats of the old black man . . . The instances are not few of idiocy or death from terror so caused.’¹⁰ The extremity of childhood terror, as experienced by Jane, was a phenomenon recognized in contemporary medical and social debate.¹¹ Jane does not die, as she fears, but suffers from a ‘species of fit’ (p. 18). She notes, in medically precise terms, that the incident ‘gave my nerves a shock;

⁸ *Harriet Martineau’s Autobiography*, with Memorials by Maria Weston Chapman, 3 vols. (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1877), 324. It is unclear whether Brontë might have read the early parts of *Household Education* before completing *Jane Eyre*. Certainly she would have read parts 9–15, including the crucial essay on childhood fear, in vol. 4 of the *People’s Journal*, for this volume, which contained an excellent review of *Jane Eyre*, was forwarded to her by her publisher’s literary editor, W. S. Williams, on 11 Nov. 1847. See *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë with a Selection of Letters by Family and Friends*, vol. i: 1829–1847, ed. Margaret Smith (1995) 563–4: letter to W. S. Williams, 13 Nov. 1847.

⁹ Harriet Martineau, *Household Education* (1849), 98.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 99.

¹¹ Medical handbooks of the time tended to look only at physical illnesses of childhood, with the exception of childhood terrors; a subject which frequently had chapters devoted to it. See, for example, J. Forsyth Meigs and William Pepper, *A Practical Treatise on the Diseases of Children*, 7th edn. (1883), ch. 14.

of which I feel the reverberation to this day' (p. 20). Like her body, Jane's narrative contains the continuing reverberations of this experience which resonate through her depictions of her adult life.

As mature narrator, Jane offers a rational account of the gleam in the red room; it was 'in all likelihood, a gleam from a lantern, carried by some one across the lawn' (p. 17). The sheer intensity of experience, however, can neither be explained nor contained in such rational terms. Rather, the scene in the red room defines a truth of emotional experience that must 'break bounds'. In its movement beyond the domain of the rational it also prepares for the subsequent breaking down in the novel of the boundaries between the natural and supernatural, whether in Rochester's vision of Jane as a spirit or elf, the eruptions of that second imprisoned female, Bertha, or the voice that finally summons Jane to Rochester's side.

Martineau's detailed account of childhood fear goes hand in hand with a fierce political sense of a child's rights. Using the same language of slavery as Jane Eyre, she declares in her opening essay that 'Every member of the household—children, servants, apprentices—every inmate of the dwelling, must have a share in the family plan; or those who make it are despots, and those who are excluded are slaves.'¹² Although written in the era of Chartism, this declaration goes well beyond the Chartists' own aims in its proposed extension of suffrage on the domestic front, to include not only male and female, but also adult and child.¹³ The same insurrectionary sense of a child's rights lies behind Jane's opposition to her aunt, and to that awesome black pillar of a man, Mr Brocklehurst. His 'threats of the old black man' (as Martineau called them) are met with Jane's defiantly logical reply to his question how she would avoid hell: 'I must keep in good health, and not die' (p. 32). Her aunt's blackening of her name as a liar calls forth a torrent of anger: 'People think you a good woman, but you are bad; hard-hearted. *You* are deceitful!' (p. 37). Jane feels, on uttering these words, 'the strangest sense of

¹² Martineau, *Household Education*, 2.

¹³ In 1838 the People's Charter had been drawn up, calling, as its main demand, for universal male suffrage. A petition was presented to parliament in 1839, and again in 1842, and finally in 1848, but was rejected each time. The movement formed a focus for working-class organization and agitation during this period, and Yorkshire levels of involvement were widely reported in the local newspapers. In 1842 there was a gathering of 10,000 Chartists, on Lees moor, close by Haworth (see Juliet Barker, *The Brontës* (1995), 401–2).

freedom, of triumph . . . as if an invisible bond had burst, and that I had struggled out into un hoped-for liberty'. As in a slave or class rebellion, she has challenged the masters' right to rule, to define the world and all within it. Her experience of victory is short-lived, however; the 'glancing, devouring' fire in her mind is quickly replaced by blackened embers as her internalized sense of social hierarchy once more reasserts itself and self-distrust sets in. Earlier she had glanced around the nursery to check that 'nothing worse than myself haunted the shadowy room' (p. 28). Now she fears 're-exciting every turbulent impulse of my nature' and the 'fiendish feeling' that lies therein (p. 38). Self-assertion gives way to self-fear, as she sees herself once more with her aunt's eyes, as a form of fiend, haunting Gateshead Hall.

Lowood: Mortifying the Flesh

Jane's open act of rebellion initiates the move into the second stage of her life as she leaves Gateshead for Lowood. Lowood Institution was based on Charlotte Brontë's own experiences at the Clergy Daughters' School, Cowan Bridge, which she attended for a year at the age of 8, together with Emily and her older sisters, Maria and Elizabeth. As in *Jane Eyre*, typhus broke out at the school, and although Maria and Elizabeth did not succumb, they both died within the year from consumption, which Brontë attributed directly to the conditions at the school. Brontë's own recollections obviously colour her fictional account of the school run by the dominating Mr Brocklehurst (a portrait of the original founder of the school, the Revd William Carus Wilson) whose mission is to 'mortify in these girls the lusts of the flesh' (p. 64). Injustice here is tempered by Jane's friendship with Helen Burns (who is based on Brontë's eldest sister, Maria) and the guidance of Miss Temple. Open rebellion is impossible, yet it is perhaps all the more potent for its inward nature. Jane can never adopt what she sees as Helen's 'sad resignation'. She seizes the 'slattern' label Helen has been forced to wear and thrusts it into the fire: 'the fury of which she [Helen] was incapable had been burning in my soul all day' (p. 74). Helen's other-worldly orientation, with its denial of the life of the body—'God waits only the separation of spirit from flesh to crown us with a full reward' (p. 69)—is only a more spiritualized version of Mr

Brocklehurst's creed. Whilst Jane had erupted as a child all in 'fire and violence', Helen turns that violence of response inward against herself. She dies not from the disfiguring disease of typhus, with all its negative associations of corrupting flesh, but rather from the self-consuming fires of consumption which 'purify' her out of existence.

Jane's history has often been read as a spiritual journey, with Jane acquiring new moral powers of insight and self-control at each stage. Yet, although Helen helps to temper her anger, and Miss Temple guides her into the role of useful and productive pupil for eight years, this façade is shattered in a day. With the marriage of Miss Temple, Jane ceases to be a 'disciplined and subdued character'. Left in her 'natural element' she begins to feel 'the stirring of old emotions' (p. 84). She is once more the rebellious child, and her desperate cry, 'Grant me at least a new servitude!' (p. 85), is uttered not in meek subservience, but, paradoxically, as an insurrectionary cry for liberty and freedom.

Thornfield: a 'new servitude'

Jane's desires carry her to Thornfield, but even here, in a pleasant job, where she is treated like an equal by Mrs Fairfax, her sense of discontent is not allayed. Twice we as readers are addressed to ask whether we blame her for her restless longings, as she gazes out from the roof top, and paces up and down the 'third story' narrating to her 'inward ear' a tale that had all the fire and feeling missing in her own life. There follows the most overtly political address to the reader in the book:

It is in vain to say human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquillity: they must have action; and they will make it if they cannot find it. Millions are condemned to a stiller doom than mine, and millions are in silent revolt against their lot. Nobody knows how many rebellions besides political rebellions ferment in the masses of life which people earth. (p. 109)

The language borrows the contemporary political rhetoric of the 'masses' to suggest an unstoppable, almost physical force 'fermenting' revolt. Writing in the era of Chartism, and on the eve of the revolutions which were to rock Europe in the early months of 1848,

Brontë was fully aware of the import of her words.¹⁴ Responding to the French and German revolutions the following year, Brontë writes to W. S. Williams that England too might well be under threat: 'earthquakes roll lower than the ocean, and we know neither the day nor the hour when the tremor and heat, passing beneath our island, may unsettle and dissolve its foundations.'¹⁵ The language is again of an unstoppable physical force, breaking out in 'tremor and heat' without warning. The child Jane had baffled Mrs Reed, who could not understand 'how for nine years you could be patient and quiescent under any treatment, and in the tenth break out all fire and violence' (pp. 239-40). Jane, as adult, is warning of a similar outbreak in both the political and domestic spheres. Silence does not necessarily indicate quiescence. Individual history becomes social prophecy as Jane's own inner state defines the contours of future social revolt.

Perhaps surprisingly, given Jane's fierce sense of injustice as a child, the grounds for this revolt do not lie primarily with social injustice—familial tyranny, grinding poverty, slavery, or the workings of class oppression. Jane's main target is a seemingly deeply unthreatening state: 'tranquillity'. As the passage continues it becomes clear that the real subject is not the generalized category 'human beings', but rather 'women', and even more specifically, middle-class women. The attack is directed at the domestic constraints placed on middle-class women's lives:

Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too

¹⁴ The primary revolution was that of France with the overthrow of Louis Philippe in February 1848, but there were also revolutions in Italy, the Austrian lands, Hungary, and the German lands. The *Leeds Mercury* (a paper taken by the Brontës) concluded in December 1848 that 'there is scarcely a year equally remarkable with 1848 for the rapidity and extent of the political changes it has witnessed . . . the shatterers of monarchies now were not foreign invaders, but sections of the hitherto despised masses of population in each of the convulsed states' (30 Dec. 1848). Brontë's own letters to W. S. Williams show a keen interest, and imaginative investment in, the continental upheavals, see particularly the letter of 28 Feb. 1848 on the abdication of Louis Philippe (Thomas J. Wise and J. Alexander Symington (eds.), *The Brontës: their Lives, Friendships and Correspondence*, 4 vols. (1933), ii. 193-5). The revolutions gave new life to the Chartist movement, there were local mass meetings followed by riots in April and May, and extra regiments were drafted into Bradford to help keep the peace (see Barker, *The Brontës*, 554-5).

¹⁵ Wise and Symington, ii. 201: to W. S. Williams, 29 March 1848.

absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. (p. 109)

In those final lines one hears Brontë's own utter contempt for the trivial collection of activities which made up the sum of the domestic woman's life. The passage anticipates Caroline Helstone's plea, in *Shirley* (1849), to the 'men of England' to give their daughters 'a field in which their faculties may be exercised and grow',¹⁶ and also the series of pictures in *Villette* (1853), 'cold and vapid as ghosts', which proclaim, in all their sterility that this 'is a woman's life'.¹⁷ Yet discontent in all of these novels remains without a firm social focus: restlessness is felt, but no alternate sphere of activity can be identified.

Charlotte Brontë's friend, Mary Taylor, who had escaped to the less constraining social climate of New Zealand, wrote to Brontë on reading *Shirley* to accuse her of being 'a coward and a traitor' for not making work central to her characters' lives.¹⁸ Brontë, however, was writing from within the midst of Victorian culture; enraged, but also entrapped by its ideologies and cultural formations. Her attitudes are significantly illuminated by her response to an article on 'The Emancipation of Women' in the *Westminster Review*, 1851. She concludes that the writer's head 'is very good, but I feel disposed to scorn his heart'.¹⁹ The judgement is perhaps the reverse of what one might expect: that Brontë would be in emotional agreement with the spirit of the arguments, but would feel unable to give her rational assent to such radical proposals. Instead she fully accepts the sensible nature of the arguments for female emancipation, but her heart recoils, as if she is convicting herself of unfeminine behaviour in even listening to such

¹⁶ Charlotte Brontë, *Shirley*, ed. H. Rosengarten and M. Smith, Clarendon edn. (1979), 443.

¹⁷ Charlotte Brontë, *Villette*, ed. H. Rosengarten, and M. Smith, Clarendon edn. (1984), 290.

¹⁸ Wise and Symington, iii. 104-5: from Mary Taylor, 25 Apr. 1850.

¹⁹ Ibid. 277-8: to Elizabeth Gaskell, 20 Sept. 1851. The writer was Harriet Taylor Mill, but Brontë mistakenly thought the article was written by John Stuart Mill. She notes, however, that she had initially assumed it was by a woman: 'When I first read this paper, I thought it was the work of a powerful, clear-headed woman, who had a hard, jealous heart, and nerves of bend leather; of a woman who longed for power and had never felt affection.'

ideas.²⁰ Her judgement is as severe as any we would find in a domestic manual of female etiquette: 'the writer forgets there is such a thing as self-sacrificing love and disinterested devotion.'²¹ This is clearly not the dominant spirit of *Jane Eyre*, yet it suggests the ways in which ideologies of Victorian femininity could wind themselves round the emotions, in despite of the intellect. It also suggests why Brontë was so upset when her novel was branded as 'unfeminine',²² and why the novel itself should express such rebellion at one level and such conformity at another.

Jane Eyre's plea for a greater sphere of activity for women ends with two kinds of laughter: men's laughter at women, and the seeming echoing laughter of Grace Poole:

It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex.

When thus alone, I not unfrequently heard Grace Poole's laugh: the same peal, the same low, slow ha! ha! which, when first heard, had thrilled me: I heard, too, her eccentric murmurs; stranger than her laugh.

Jane's own 'eccentric murmurs' find an external echo in the disembodied voice of the 'third story', whilst her fear of male mocking laughter is answered by that peal of laughter which 'thrilled' her, thus implicating her in its defiant tones.

Bertha Mason: 'an uncongenial alien'

The subject of the 'mad wife' has evoked extensive critical commentary. Many critics have been dismissive, regarding the episodes as an unwelcome intrusion of gothic style into a realist text, and others have merely shied away from it in embarrassment, or seen it as a legacy of the 'over-heated imagination' of Brontë's early writings.

²⁰ Harriet Taylor Mill had in fact sketched out the operations of this form of response by 'literary ladies' in her article. The arguments anticipate John Stuart Mill's later text, *The Subjection of Women* (1869), showing how women are taught to embrace their own social inferiority.

²¹ Wise and Symington, iii. 278: to Elizabeth Gaskell, 20 Sept. 1851

²² The review in the *Christian Remembrancer* found 'masculine hardness, coarseness, and freedom of expression' in the novel, while Elizabeth Rigby noted in the *Quarterly Review* that if it was by a woman she 'had long forfeited the society of her own sex' (Allott, 89, 111). Brontë insisted in her letters that she wished to be judged solely as author, and not according to her sex, but the criticisms clearly rankled, as her intention of responding to the *Quarterly* in a preface to *Shirley* suggests. See Wise and Symington iii. 11-12: letter to W. S. Williams, 16 Aug. 1849.