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The Development of Feminist Criticism of Charlotte Brontë's Novel *Jane Eyre:*

The Unusual Romance by the Parson's Daughter That Sparked the Literary Rebellion

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

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Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto bakalářskou práci vypracoval/a samostatně a pouze na základě uvedených pramenů a literatury.

V Praze dne 23. 1. 2009

(I declare that the following B.A. thesis is my own work for which I used only the sources and literature mentioned.

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Contents

1 Introduction

In the contemporary western literary culture Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre* occupies an important place as a timeless classic of female writing. However, its prominent position among literary critics is a result of only relatively recent development, as in the 1970s the novel was rediscovered by emerging feminist critics and consequently became a central text in the development of modern Anglo-American feminist criticism. Yet, this was not the first time for critics to notice the work's feminist traits. Both Victorian reviewers and modernist female critics discerned a certain rebellious potential inherent in the novel and while the first linked the book to the problem that the Victorian society knew as "the woman question", the latter saw in it echoes of feminism which arose as a tangible force at the turn of the 20th century. In this thesis I explore the fascinating history of the development of feminist criticism of Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre*. I attempt to reveal how the critical response to *Jane Eyre* changed through different periods, how its feminist agenda was received but also how various critics tended to interpret it in the light of their own ideology.

I am aware that a large body of critical work has been written about *Jane Eyre*; however, for the purpose of this thesis, I focus solely on the critical works best illustrating the development of feminist criticism of the novel and, except for the Victorian period, I examine criticism of only the most prominent female critics. I proceed in chronological order, from the earliest reviews of the novel to the most recent critical works.

The thesis is divided into six chapters. The second chapter summarizes the attitude toward Charlotte Brontë and *Jane Eyre* during the Victorian period. First the situation at the time of the first three editions of the novel in 1847 and 1848[1] is mapped and then I look at the significance of Brontë's first biography, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* by Elizabeth Gaskell published in 1857. I also briefly examine Victorian feminists and their relation to Brontë and her fiction.

Chapter three scrutinizes the modernist period in which *Jane Eyre* was commonly neglected by critics and seen as an example of social realism. Nevertheless, two influential female critics of the period, Virginia Woolf and Queenie D. Leavis, evaluated the novel and

[1] "Charlotte Brontë and Her Readers" qtd. in Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1987) 438.

both sensed in it something radical, even though in their critiques they focused primarily on formal aspect of the novel and other issues that concerned the critics of this era.

Chapter four is devoted to modern feminist criticism, starting with Adrienne Rich's influential study "*Jane Eyre*: The Temptations of a Motherless Woman" (1973), then looking at Ellen Moers's book *Literary Women* (1976) and Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) and finally exploring ideas from the groundbreaking book *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. Considerable attention is paid also to feminist postcolonial criticism, a stream of feminist criticism influential throughout the 1980s and 1990s. In this part I refer to two major works: an essay by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak called "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" (1985) and "'Indian Ink': Colonialism and Figurative Strategy of *Jane Eyre*" by Susan Meyer, published in her book *Imperialism at Home* (1996).

Chapter five introduces three recent critical works on the subject. Though differing in approach and topic, these works could be grouped together as examples of what I describe for the purpose of this thesis as post-feminist criticism of *Jane Eyre*, as the authors of these works perform a certain critical reflection on modern feminist criticism. The first important work that is discussed is Mary Poovey's study "The Anathematized Race: The Governess and *Jane Eyre*" from her book *Uneven Developments* (1996), which is an example of the new historicist approach. Another influential work is Carla Kaplan's essay "Girl Talk: *Jane Eyre* and the Romance of Women's Narration" (1996) which analyzes the communicative function of the novel. Finally, I look at *The Brontë Myth,* the most recent study published in 2001 by Lucasta Miller in which the author explores the unique socio-literary phenomenon which she calls "the Brontë myth", and in one of the chapters she closely analyzes the relationship between "the Brontë myth" and feminism.

2 *Jane Eyre* and the Victorians

Charlotte Brontë was born in 1816 (that means seventeen years before Queen Victoria ascended the British throne); however, she is well-known as a Victorian novelist, as she became active in literature and also gained her fame during the Victorian period. Her true identity was not publicly revealed until quite late in her life, as for a long time she was known only under the protective, gender-neutral pseudonym of Currer Bell. *Jane Eyre* was Charlotte's first published novel; yet, it was not her first written novel. *The Professor* had been written before and was sent to the publishers at the time when she was just working on her next novel, which came to be called *Jane Eyre*. In early August 1847 she received a response from the publishing house Smith, Elder &Co. in which they rejected publication of *The Professor* on the grounds of the novel being too short but at the same time they expressed interest in publishing any three-volume work by Currer Bell. Thus, Charlotte sent out her recently finished *Jane Eyre,* which was accepted with great enthusiasm and published within a few weeks, in October 1847.[2]

It is very interesting to observe how *Jane Eyre* was received by readers and critics during the time of its first three editions, and it is even more exciting to note how various external events influenced the reputation of the novel. As Gaskell writes in *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, the first reviews of the novel were rather "tardy" and "cautious", for many of the reviewers did not know how to react to the new author who had just appeared on the British literary scene.[3] However, regardless of the reviews, the book became an instant success, appealing to the reading public not only because of the novelty of the topic, a love story between the governess and her master, but also due to "its emotional passion and honesty"[4]. In a private letter send to Brontë's publisher W.S. Williams, William Thackeray, who was reputed one of the greatest novelists of the era, applauded the new author and praised *Jane Eyre* as "the first English [novel] that [he] had been able to read for many a day."[5] In the letter Thackeray even confided that his servant had caught him crying while he had been reading some love passages from the novel.

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[2] Lucasta Miller, *The Brontë Myth* (New York: Anchor Books, 2005) 16.
[3] Gaskell, Elizabeth, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (London: Dent, 1984) 226.
[4] Miller 16.
[5] "W.M. Thackeray to W.S. Williams" qtd. in Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1987) 430.

Also the famous contemporary critic G.H. Lewes wrote a generally favorable review of the novel published in the *Fraser's Magazine* in December 1847. Lewes was impressed by the realistic spirit of *Jane Eyre* and pointed out that the book "was an autobiography, - not perhaps in the naked facts and circumstances, but in actual suffering and experience".[6] He also coined the famous phrase, noting that the book was "soul speaking to soul"[7], which has become commonly cited in the writings about *Jane Eyre*. Yet, he also criticized the work for having "too much melodrama and improbability"[8], seeing especially the appearance of Rochester's mad wife and Jane's life after the escape from Thornfield as the least convincing, though well written parts of the novel. This observation of Lewes is very interesting, since, as we will see later, the character of Bertha and the act of Jane's escape and her resolution to lead an independent and honorable life have been the subjects of great importance for the modern feminist criticism.

However, as it has been suggested before, the attitude towards the novel dramatically changed after the second and third edition of *Jane Eyre*. The second edition excited the public, for the author dedicated the book to Thackeray and thus, not being aware of Thackeray's private life (he himself had a mad wife), offered grounding to the rumor that *Jane Eyre* was written by Thackeray's lover.[9] More importantly, in the book *The* Brontë *Myth*, Lucasta Miller attributed this radical shift of reputation to the fact that Emily's *Wuthering Heights* and Anne's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* were published at this time, both directing public attention to then very improper themes such as violence, passion and a woman's rebellion.[10] Anne's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* particularly enraged critics, as it portrayed the fates of a young woman who escapes from her violent, alcoholic husband and earns her own living by painting and thus, it addressed many silenced but crucial issues of the era, such as domestic violence, women's work and their right for revolt.[11]

Suddenly, the reviewers noticed that the very same issues were discussed also in *Jane Eyre* and the novel soon earned the reputation of a scandalous book, provoking lots of controversy. The reasons were multiple. The novel openly discussed the situation of a

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[6] G.H. Lewes, *Fraser's Magazine*, December 1847 qtd. in Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1987) 436.
[7] Lewes 436.
[8] Lewes 436.
[9] Miller 19.
[10] Miller 21.
[11] Miller 171.

single woman, 'the poor and plain governess', and moreover, what was totally unacceptable was Jane's rebellious, knowledge and experience-seeking spirit which was absolutely irreconcilable with the Victorian ideology of 'angel in the house' and the domestic sphere. Furthermore, the main male character in the novel, Edward Rochester, was condemned by the contemporary critics as an immoral and corrupt character unworthy of attention. To mention just one example of those fierce critiques, Mrs. Elizabeth Rigby's famous review in *The Quarterly Review* in December 1848 called *Jane Eyre* "an Anti-Christian composition".[12] Rigby viewed both Jane and Rochester as "singularly unattractive"[13] and was horrified by the popular taste of the reading public which was intrigued by the fates of these ugly and, even more importantly, extremely morally corrupt protagonists. Rigby was not so much enraged by Rochester's character (which could have been attributed to the then existent sexual double-standards), and she simply decided to proclaim his character to be "at all events impugnable".[14]

On the other hand, she was extremely disturbed by the nature of Jane, as she wrote:

> Jane Eyre is throughout the personification of an unregenerate and undisciplined spirit…No Christian grace is perceptible upon her. She has inherited in fullest measure the worst sin of our fallen nature – the sin of pride. Jane Eyre is proud, and therefore she is ungrateful too. It pleased God to make her an orphan, friendless, and penniless…[15]

In this passage Rigby attacked Jane's sense of Christianity; yet, what was really at stake was Jane's rebellion against the principles dictated by Christianity and the society at large. Jane refuses to quietly bear all injustice; she cries out into the whole world that her suffering is unfair and rebels. Moreover, as an aristocrat and protector of conservative values, Rigby, later Lady Eastlake, could hear in Jane's words also echoes of "the rights of man" and regarded its "tone of mind and thought" equally threatening and even identical with that "which has overthrown authority and violated every code human and divine abroad, and fostered Chartism and rebellion at home".[16] But Jane was not only poor, so

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[12] Elizabeth Rigby, *The Quarterly Review*, December 1848 qtd. in Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1987) 442.
[13] Rigby 440.
[14] Rigby 441.
[15] Rigby 442.
[16] Rigby 442.

much the worse because she was a woman. Rigby was enraged by both these aspects and called Jane's behavior, which we would now title rebellious feminism, "pride".[17]

In her review, Rigby also addressed another issue of great importance – that of authorship. Ever since the publication of *Jane Eyre*, there was a lot of discussion as to who was hidden behind the mysterious name of Currer Bell. Was it a woman or a man? This was a question that troubled Thackeray and also Lewes and became even more pressing after the publications of works by Emily and Anne, who as well as Charlotte used androgynous pennames Ellis and Acton Bell. Rigby was more convinced that the author was a man, though she neither fully rejected the possibility of a female author. Pondering about this variant, she concluded that only a woman who "for some sufficient reason, long forfeited the society of her own sex"[18] could have written such a book. We may only guess what Mrs. Rigby wanted to imply by that. Did she really have some fallen woman in mind?

With the ongoing crusade for the real identity of Currer Bell, Charlotte Brontë first revealed her identity as a woman to her publisher in the summer of 1848 when she and Anne embarked on a sudden trip to London to clear out a certain misunderstanding.[19] Yet, only after the death of her sisters, she became known as the author of *Jane Eyre* in the literary circles.[20] The final disclosure of her persona to the public came with the publication of *Shirley* in 1849, in which one Haworth native, then living in Liverpool, recognized the dialect and landscapes of Haworth and pronounced the daughter of the local clergyman, Charlotte, as the authoress hiding behind the name of Currer Bell. The rumor was soon confirmed as Charlotte became more known in London and was carried to Haworth, to the great surprise of the locals.[21]

Charlotte's reputation as a great author was immensely popularized by the publication of her biography called *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* which was written by her friend and contemporary, novelist Elizabeth Gaskell, and appeared in 1857, only two years after Charlotte's tragic death. Thus, the whole of England and also the US, where Charlotte's books were read with equal enthusiasm, could suddenly learn about the personal life of the long unknown and with mysteries surrounded author of *Jane Eyre.*

[17] Rigby 442.
[18] Rigby 443.
[19] Miller 19.
[20] Miller 20.
[21] Gaskell 284.

Gaskell was well aware that she had a powerful story to tell and her biography is very gripping, at some points reminding more of fiction than of a traditional biography.

For a long time this biography was perceived as an authoritative source for the Brontë scholarship. It is understandable, for in comparison to Charlotte's later biographers, Gaskell personally knew the author; she interviewed her family and even could study her large private correspondence before it was sold in parts to various collectors. However, though indisputably a source of indispensable information, the biography was also largely biased, producing a romantic, tragic image of Charlotte and her family that influenced the reading public well into the 20th century. Already Henry James complained about this fact in his public lectures in 1905[22]; yet, it was left up to modern biographers and critics to fully reveal the problem

Probably the most thorough analysis of Gaskell's bias is offered by Lucasta Miller in her book *The Brontë Myth* (2001). In this superbly written work, mixing biography and literary criticism, Miller explains how Gaskell set to rehabilitate Charlotte's reputation and through her biography accomplished a rather unexpected turn, as she made from Charlotte, who was to the contemporary public known as a 'coarse' and scandalous author, an icon of Victorian modesty and morality. According to Miller, in *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* Gaskell invented Charlotte's image of a dutiful daughter, "irreproachably sexless"[23], virtuous, made perfect by suffering, picturing her as plighted by a series of family tragedies, and so made her readers believe that she was nothing else but a real Victorian angel in the house.

This was accomplished by a careful selection of material and situations, as Gaskell focused mostly on Charlotte's private life and not her life as an author. As Miller notes, she cited excessively from her correspondence with Ellen Nussey, the ladylike friend "with whom Charlotte did not choose discuss her literary ambitions" but instead, their letters "were bound to reflect the feminine, domestic image [Gaskell] was hoping to create in the biography."[24] Gaskell also consciously avoided the discussion of Charlotte's books and did not include any literary analysis of them. This was because even though she admired Charlotte's literary talent, she saw her books as extremely dangerous and disagreed with

[22] Miller 62.
[23] Miller 69.
[24] Miller 66.

her on many points (for example, she allowed her eldest daughter to read *Jane Eyre* only when she turned twenty)[25].

The described approach is well evident also in chapter XVI of the biography in which Gaskell records the events of the year 1847, the year in which *Jane Eyre* was written and published. She begins the chapter on a rather cheerless note, writing that "[the year of 1847] opened with a spell of cold, dreary weather, which told severely on [Miss Brontë's] constitution already tried by anxiety and care,"[26] and then continues to narrate in great detail the particulars of Miss Brontë's state of health. Afterwards the flow of events is resumed as follows:

> The quiet sad, year stole on. The sisters were contemplating near at hand, and for a long time, the terrible effects of talent misused and faculties abused in the person of that brother once their fond darling and dearest pride. They had to cheer the poor old father, in whose heart all trials sank deeper, because of the silent stoicism of his endurance. They had to watch over his health, of which, whatever was its state, he seldom complained. They had to save as much as they could, the precious remnants of his sight. They had to order frugal household with increased care, so as to supply wants and expenditures utterly foreign to their self-denying natures. Though they shrank from overmuch contact with their fellow beings, for all whom they met they had kind words, if few; and when the kind actions were needed they were not spared, if the sisters at the Parsonage could render them. They visited the parish school duly; and often were Charlotte's rare and brief holidays of a visit from home shortened by her sense of the necessity of being in her place at the Sunday school.[27]

The cited passage well conveys the tragic tone that Gaskell adopts thought the work and vividly illustrates Miller's points. Charlotte and her sisters are portrayed within their domestic space as true self-less Victorian martyrs, taking care of their father and brother, coping with the uneasy material conditions and though having no reason for happiness, still kindly attending to their obligations in the parish and to the parishioners. After such an emotional description of the sisters' situation, Gaskell remarks that "in the intervals of such a life as this 'Jane Eyre' was making progress" and that "'The Professor' was passing slowly and heavily from publisher to publisher[28]; however, that is all we get about

[25] Miller 34.
[26] Gaskell 322.
[27] Gaskell 323-324.
[28] Gaskell 324.

Charlotte's literary efforts. The point is immediately abandoned, as once again in a highly emotional language Gaskell informs the reader about another catastrophe which stormed Charlotte's life — her friend Ellen Nussey was unable to come on a planned visit to the parsonage. Through the long description of that rather unimportant event, Gaskell makes Charlotte seem almost a silly, irrational creature, so that the reader might even wonder how the person of such a character could have actually written so profound a book as *Jane Eyre*.

Even though Gaskell altogether neglects the process of writing of *Jane Eyre*, the publication and reception of the novel are treated with utmost care. Gaskell describes in detail the difficulties Charlotte faced while trying to publish the book and also how she carefully awaited and scrutinized every new review of the novel. Yet, even in this part we can find many instances of Gaskell's bias. For example, she gives no overview of the novel and altogether shrinks from any criticism, as she declares, "I am not going to write an analysis of a book with which every one who reads this biography is sure to be acquainted; much less a criticism upon a work which the great flood of public opinion has lifted up from the obscurity in which it first appeared"; at the end of this statement, she only vaguely remarks, that the novel "[lies] high and safe on the everlasting hills of fame."[29]

In this chapter, Gaskell mentions also several early reactions of the critics to the novel but she gives almost no particulars of the reviews, usually merely stating whether they were positive or not. Similarly, her portrait of Charlotte as an author seems to be carefully constructed and even somehow manipulated. For instance, when she introduces several pieces of Charlotte's correspondence exchanged with her publisher shortly after the publication of *Jane Eyre*, she writes that the letters "show how timidly the idea of success was received by one [Charlotte] so unaccustomed to adopt the sanguine view of any subject in which she was individually concerned"[30]. Once again the Victorian ideal of a lady is mirrored in these lines; however, when we actually read the mentioned letters, Charlotte does not appear so humble and pessimistic but seems to be quite rational, persuaded about the merits of her novel.

As has been shown on the previous examples, Gaskell tried hard to contradict all that might have seemed improper or 'coarse' about Charlotte Brontë and she succeeded. Under the influence of her biography, Charlotte Brontë and her fiction lost much of its

[29] Gaskell 339.
[30] Gaskell 333.

original subversive qualities. Thus when early Victorian feminists, who appeared in the second half of the 19th century, sought discussions of "the woman question" in literature, they turned to different authors, for example, as Barbara Caine writes in her book *Victorian Feminist*, the popular works were Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "Aurora Leigh", George Eliot's *Felix Holt*, Lord Tennyson's "The Princess" and ironically, also Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth*. [31] In contrast, Brontë became associated with the very opposite stereotype, as she became a popular heroine of collective female biographies, for instance in *Women of Worth*, *Stories of the Lives of Noblewomen* or in *Lives of Good and Great Women*.[32] These works were aimed against emerging feminist ideas, arguing that women should be distinguished rather by their domestic virtues than by their public ones and that their proper place was at home.[33] As Miller points out, "in this context, Charlotte Brontë too was harnessed to an image of moral virtue within the home to such an extent that the fact that she had written books was almost forgotten."[34]

Millicent Fawcett, a leading feminist at the time, was responsible for a solitary attempt to picture Charlotte in a different light. In her book *Some Eminent Women of Our Times* (1889), she described both Charlotte and Emily as professional writers, seeing writing as their actual work,[35] and even "tried to rewrite Charlotte as a feminist pioneer".[36] However, it must be understood that Fawcett did so not for the sake of correcting

Charlotte's twisted image but like the others, she tried to fit her yet to another stereotype and so through her example to emphasize her own feminist ideology.

[31] Barbara Caine, *Victorian Feminists* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1992) 27, 28.
[32] Miller 90.
[33] Miller 92.
[34] Miller 92.
[35] Miller 106
[36] Miller 168.

3 Virginia Woolf and Q.D. Leavis: *Jane Eyre* and Modernity

Virginia Woolf and Queenie D. Leavis were the two great female critics in Britain in the first half of the 20th century. While the first was a novelist by craft, the second was a

genuine critic, as she received the PhD in English at Cambridge and later became a reviewer for *Scrutiny,* an acclaimed quarterly periodical.[37] Woolf and Leavis represented very much two opposite poles in British literary society. Woolf belonged to old, elitist circles and was one of the founding members of the so-called Bloomsbury group which was famous for its discussion of controversial themes and general open-mindedness. On the other hand, Leavis came from the middle-class Jewish background and made her way up through Cambridge where she became the wife of F.R Leavis, later an iconic figure in British literary criticism, the author of the famous *Great Tradition*. Around F.R and Queenie Leavis formed a group made up mostly of Cambridge intellectuals, who emphasized tradition and conservative values. Unlike the Bloomsbury group, they embraced the realist tradition of the 19th century and from the modernist novelists, they championed D.H. Lawrence rather than Woolf. Belonging to different camps, Woolf and Q.D. Leavis were divided also by a professional conflict, as Leavis responded with a fierce critique "Caterpillars of the Commonwealth Unite" (1938) to Woolf's problematic, feminist work *Three Guineas*.[38] In the light of all these facts it is interesting to study and compare the criticism of *Jane Eyre* by both Virginia Woolf and Q.D. Leavis.

In the early 20th century Charlotte Brontë and *Jane Eyre*, her most famous work, though still popularly read, enjoyed a very different reputation than at the time of it its first publication. Modernists viewed the old narrative techniques of realism as outdated and searched for new techniques better expressive of modern life and human experience. These new developments caused an interesting turn in regards to the Brontës. Emily, who had been misunderstood by the Victorians and her *Wuthering Heights* had been seen as obscure, was suddenly praised by modernist critics and her only novel was regarded as a work of a true genius, providing "[an] entry into a timeless world of mythic clashing egos".[39] On the other hand, Charlotte's reputation largely diminished, as *Jane Eyre* came to be viewed merely as an example of Victorian social realism.[40] Yet, this was not the only reason why the novel lost its popularity among the critics. Due to its melodramatic love story, it bore a

[37] "Life and Work", Q.D.Leavis, The Centre for Leavis Studies, 2004, 15 Nov. 2008 <http://mypages.surrey.ac.uk/eds1cj/qd-leavis-life-and-work.htm>
[38] "Life and Work"
[39] Miller 177.
[40] Miller 177.

resemblance to the new emerging genre of mass-market romantic fiction with which it soon came to be linked.[41]

Virginia Woolf was one of the most prominent proponents of new literary streams, heavily experimenting in almost all her novels; however, her modernist stand was apparent also from her critical works. Interestingly, she was known also as a feminist. Although she was never an active member of any such organization, her feminist ideas were scattered through most of her fiction and explicitly stated in two of her works: *A Room of One's Own* and the already mentioned radical *Three Guineas*. In her essays, commonly published in various English periodicals, she often tended to review works and lives of important female authors, and so she can be regarded as one of the first female critics who consciously sought to create the women's literary tradition. Woolf evaluated Brontë's *Jane Eyre* in two of her important books, *The Common Reader* (1925) and *A Room of One's Own (1929).*

Woolf first discussed *Jane Eyre* in an essay called "'Jane Eyre' and 'Wuthering Heights'", published in her famous essay anthology which she came to title *The Common Reader*. As the name of the essay suggests, Woolf compares Charlotte's celebrated novel to Emily's *Wuthering Heights.* Her account of *Jane Eyre* is not very favorable. Though Woolf starts with a sympathetic introduction and ponders on what might have happened had Charlotte lived longer and achieved greater literary fame, she then slips into a rather fierce criticism. She recognizes Charlotte's narrative talent and imagination but afterwards she greatly emphasizes her failures, reproaching Charlotte for her tendency to rush the reader through the novel and to force everything through Jane's eyes and to leave no room for one's imagination and contemplation.

Yet, her most severe criticism touches upon a very different subject – the very character of Jane Eyre:

> The drawbacks of being Jane Eyre are not far to seek. Always to be a governess and always to be in love is a serious limitation in a world which is full, after all, of people who are neither one nor the other. The characters of a Jane Austen or of Tolstoy have a million faces compared with these…. [Brontë] does not attempt to solve the problems of human life; she is unaware that such problems exist; all her force, and it is the more tremendous for being constricted, goes into assertion, 'I love', 'I hate', 'I suffer'…[42]

[41] Miller 177.

Woolf, though being usually right, is quite wrong in this argument and in the extremely influential essay "*Jane Eyre*: The Temptations of a Motherless Woman", which commences the beginning of modern feminist criticism, Adrienne Rich even asks, "Had Virginia Woolf really read this novel?"[43] Obviously, Woolf did read the novel but as a Modernist, she simply disagreed with Charlotte's insistence on extreme individualism and subjectivity, seeing Jane's overtly assertive behavior as a female version of Romantic titanism, which strongly contrasted with her own idea of human existence and she even implied Charlotte to be a "self-centered and self-limited"[44] author.

Despite all her previous comments, at the end Woolf praises Charlotte for what she defines as "poetry". Explaining this rather ambiguous term, she writes that 'poetry' is typical for authors of "overpowering personality",

> There is in them some untamed ferocity perpetually at war with the accepted order of things which makes them desire to create instantly rather than to observe patiently. This very ardour, rejecting half shades and other minor impediments, wings its way past the daily conduct of ordinary people and allies itself with their more inarticulate passions.[45]

Whatever we deduce from the cited sentences, Woolf calls Emily even a greater master of 'poetry' and sees her *Wuthering Heights* as a better achievement than *Jane Eyre*. Part of it is the fact that she is capable of capturing the cosmic and the universal in the world, as her "novel [is] – a struggle, half thwarted but of superb conviction, to say something through the mouths of her characters which is not merely 'I love' or 'I hate', but 'we, the whole human race'…"[46] Besides this, her characters seem to exist free from reality; nevertheless, they are, according to Woolf, some of the most "vivid" and "lovable" in British literature.[47]

A different approach to *Jane Eyre* can be seen in *A Room of One's Own.* In this extensive essay, it seems, Woolf partly revaluated her attitude towards Brontë's *Jane Eyre*

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[42] Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader: First Series*, Annotated Edition (New York: Harvest/HBJ Books, 2002) 159.
[43] Adrienne, Rich, "*Jane Eyre*: The Temptations of a Motherless Woman" qtd. in Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1987) 471.
[44] Woolf, *The Common Reader: First Series* 157.
[45] Woolf, *The Common Reader: First Series* 158.
[46] Woolf, *The Common Reader: First Series* 160.
[47] Woolf, *The Common Reader: First Series* 161.

and interestingly, there she was first to point to the most openly feminist passages of the novel. *A Room of One's Own* was originally written with the purpose of addressing the issue of women and fiction and it turned out to be the precursor text to the whole series of books discussing the distinctive women's literary tradition which started to appear in the 1970s. In the essay Woolf tried to answer the question why women were the weaker sex as far as literature was concerned, and came to the conclusion that the unequal situation was the result of women's traditional lack of education and wealth. Looking at important female authors from history, she showed how difficult it was for women to write. Moreover, she also voiced her famous assertion that a female writer in order to be able to write needs an independent income and 'a room of her own'.

However, Woolf also started to notice common themes recurring in writings of many of these female writers – all of them were somehow connected with the discontent with their lot as women. Many female authors complained of the fact that they were prevented by men from acquiring education, knowledge and worldly experience and moreover, that men thought them immoral and feeble when they attempted to write.

While exploring this problem, Woolf referred also to Charlotte Brontë and cited several passages from *Jane Eyre* as the instances of such discontent, the passages that later came to be celebrated by modern feminist critics as some of the most remarkable moments in the novel. The passages from the novel come from the scene in which Jane walks on the third floor in Thornfield and while looking over the horizon, very daring thoughts cross her mind. The passages from *Jane Eyre* quoted by Woolf are as follows:

> …then I longed for a power of vision which might overpass that limit; which might reach busy world, towns, regions full of life I had heard of but never seen: that then I desired more of practical experience than I possessed; more of intercourse with my kind, of acquaintance with variety of character than was here within my reach. I valued what was good in Mrs. Fairfax and what was good in Adele, but I believed in the existence of other and more vivid kinds of goodness, and what I believed in I wished to behold. [48]
>
> Who blames me? Many, no doubt, and I shall be called discontented. I could not help it: the restlessness was in my nature; it agitated me to pain sometimes… (Brontë, 95).

[48] Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions Ltd., 1999) 94, 95. Subsequent page references to this edition will be indicated within the text itself.

> It is vain to say human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquility: they must have action; and they will make it if they cannot find it. Millions are condemned to a stiller doom than mine, and millions are in silent revolt against their lot. Nobody knows how many rebellions ferment in the masses of life which people earth. 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 restrain, too 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. 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 (Brontë, 95).
>
> When thus alone I not unfrequently heard Grace Poole's laugh…(Brontë, 95). [49]

Woolf herself then writes, "That is an awkward break, I thought. It is upsetting to come upon Grace Poole all of a sudden. The continuity is disturbed."[50] When we now read these lines, they undeniably strike us as a very articulate feminist argument against all intellectual deprivations that most women had to suffer in19th century England. Yet, Woolf failed to recognize the extreme significance of these passages in *Jane Eyre* and she attributed them to Charlotte's own "indignation"[51] and "rage" [52]and even wrote that "in the passages I have quoted from Jane Eyre, it is clear that anger was tampering with the integrity of Charlotte Brontë the novelist."[53]

The key to this rather hostile comment of Woolf can be found in the image of the writing woman as Judith Shakespeare whom she invented in *A Room of One's Own*. An imaginary character, Judith is Shakespeare's sister. Like her brother, she is equally talented and eager to see the world but like any other woman in the 16th century would be, she is thwarted in her ambitions and doomed to domestic duties and marriage. She breaks free and runs away to London but instead of a bright career in a playhouse she ends up broken down with a child, taking her life on one gloomy winter night. This image of the writing woman, angered, ridiculed, misunderstood, having to overcome myriads of obstacles

[49] Grace Poole's laughter is actually the laughter of Bertha.
[50] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press: 2000) 90.
[51] Woolf, *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas 90.*
[52] Woolf, *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas 90.*
[53] Woolf, *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas* 95.

imposed by the patriarchal society, becomes a stereotype in Woolf, which has influenced many of the 20th century female critics. As a result of this, Woolf does not perceive Jane's emotional protest against the lot of women as an outpouring of Brontë's creative energy but rather as the violent shrieking of the woman who longed for more than she could have. She believes that this personal anger prevented Charlotte from writing freely and at the height of her powers, and so she did not achieve such independence and fullness of expression as in here eyes did only Jane Austen and Emily Brontë. According to Woolf, they alone wrote as true women should - without anger and deference to male values and standards.

It would be too startling had Woolf truly recognized the importance and broader implications of the quoted passage, since she only hinted at the fact that many female authors had been writing about these issues and did not continue to explore this particular matter. Overall, the significance of Virginia Woolf's criticisms of *Jane Eyre*, even though she in the major part misunderstood this novel, is the fact that Woolf was first to point out Jane's most openly feminist inner monologue and moreover, she was also puzzled by the strange appearance of Bertha, who became the object of fascination to the future generations of feminist critics of *Jane Eyre*.

Q.D. Leavis's criticism of *Jane Eyre* appeared in 1966 as an introduction to the Penguin books edition of the novel and so came a long time after Woolf's criticism. This curious gap of over forty years was due to the fact that Leavis was a bit younger than Woolf and continued to be literary active until late in her life and in addition, Woolf died at the age of only 59 years, as she committed suicide in 1941.[54] Nevertheless, these two critics belonged and were formed by the same world and society, and so should be presented and studied together as the best examples of female literary criticism in the former part of the 20th century. In my opinion, Leavis's critique is one of the best and most complex critiques of *Jane Eyre* ever written. Of course, part of this is due to the fact that it was written as an introduction and so is devoted not only to one set of problems but treats the novel as a whole. Despite this, the introduction contains a lot of valuable material relevant to the subject of this thesis, well illustrating changing perception of Brontë's feminist agenda.

[54]"Virginia Woolf", The Literature Network, 2000-2008, 15 Nov. 2 < http://www.online-literature.com/virginia_woolf/>

Leavis frames her study on the background of Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë*; however, she informs the reader of the author's limitations, such us that "her Victorian outlook and training made her excise and mollify a good deal" and that it is doubtful whether "she really understood in what the importance of *Jane Eyre* consists".[55] Talking about the meaning of the novel, Leavis writes that it were "Victorian attitudes about women" and "an assumption about the improving effects of filial duty, unhappiness, and deprivation, that made Charlotte write her novels, which all spring from the passionate need to demonstrate that a good life for a woman, no less than for a man, is a satisfied one".[56] Thus, already at the beginning of the introduction, the critic suggests Brontë's feminist stand in the novel. According to her, the theme of the novel is "how the embittered little charity-child finds the way to come to terms with life and society" and she further adds that,

> Part of the undertaking involved examining the assumptions that the age made with regard to women, to the relations between the sexes and between the young and those in authority; in additions conventions of social life and accepted religious attitudes come in for scrutiny.[57]

All this is very true; however, Leavis should make one correction and that to change "a charity child" for "a charity girl" and so to clearly notify that the novel, as she obviously hints in the previous lines, is concerned with the Victorian 'woman question'. This is confirmed also by her division of the story into four distinctive stages: Jane's childhood at Gateshead; girlhood in Lowood; adolescence at Thornfield; maturity at March End which "[winds up] in fulfillment in marriage at Ferdean".[58]

Like Woolf, Leavis too sees "poetry" as a characteristic feature of Brontë's writing, explaining that it is rooted in her admiration of Shakespeare and the Romantics.[59] Moreover, she repeatedly compares Charlotte's novelistic expression, her vision of love and of male-female relations to those of D.H. Lawrence. She even calls some of her attitudes "un-Victorian"; she particularly points out Rochester's courtship of Jane that

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[55] Q.D.Leavis, "Introduction to *Jane Eyre*" in Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966), 7.
[56]Leavis, "Introduction to *Jane Eyre*" 8.
[57] Leavis, "Introduction to *Jane Eyre*" 13.
[58] Leavis, "Introduction to *Jane Eyre*" 13.
[59] Leavis, "Introduction to *Jane Eyre*" 10.

breaks with the contemporary norm, as it is founded "on respect for individuality" and generally, "Charlotte sees the relation as one of mutual need in which the woman is not idealized but is recognized as an active contributor – fearless, unashamed of passionate feeling, and, while needing to serve, still determined to have her rights acknowledged".[60]

In all the stages of Jane's development, Leavis detects all major psychological turning points. The heroine's emancipation is initiated at Gateshead where she discovers her "moral courage" and experiences for the first time "triumph and sense of power" – over her aunt Mrs. Reed .[61] Later, she is able to resist Reverend Brocklehurst's religious doctrines, as she can fully accept neither Helen Burns's "ideal of Christian practice"[62] nor Miss Temple's "tradition of the lady".[63] Immediately after Miss Temple's departure from Lowood, Jane feels dissatisfaction with her life. This feeling persists even at the place of her new servitude, even though, as Leavis points out, "at Thornfield Jane acquires at once a function, dignity and affection"[64].

Curiously, Leavis seems to deliberately overlook the most explicit passage where Jane expresses her dissatisfaction, the famous inner monologue delivered on the third floor of Thornfield, first noticed by Woolf and later called by Rich "Brontë's feminist manifesto".[65] By omitting this part, Leavis avoids drawing any broader implications about the condition of women in general, which Brontë seems to make in this passage. Instead, she interprets Jane's dissatisfaction as a personal one, quoting from the novel, "I [Jane] believed in the existence of other and more vivid kinds of goodness" and later says that Jane's yearning for 'other and more vivid kinds of goodness' is fulfilled through "the experience of love and marriage" which Jane experiences after the appearance of Mr. Rochester in Thornfield.[66] Leavis classifies Rochester as "the ideal of masculine tenderness combined with a massively masculine strength of character", similar for example to Austen's Mr. Knightley in *Emma* but, as she laments, under Byron's influence, this type is rather "vulgarized" in Brontë's novel.[67]

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[60] Leavis, "Introduction to *Jane Eyre*" 17.
[61] Leavis, "Introduction to *Jane Eyre*" 15.
[62] Leavis, "Introduction to *Jane Eyre*" 15.
[63] Leavis, "Introduction to *Jane Eyre*" 16.
[64] Leavis, "Introduction to *Jane Eyre*" 16.
[65] Rich 468.
[66] Leavis, "Introduction to *Jane Eyre*" 16.
[67] Leavis, "Introduction to *Jane Eyre*" 17.

Interestingly, unlike other critics, Leavis interprets Jane's escape from Thornfield as a conflict between her upbringing and her nature, as she writes,

> The torment of self-reproach makes [Jane's] action in abandoning Mr. Rochester less unacceptable, but actually that is compulsive and not willed; she is outraging her nature by obeying her training. … Her artificially trained 'conscience' forces her to go, and the Lowood ideal of self-sacrifice and obedience to convention reasserts itself.[68]

Thus, Leavis sees Jane's decision not as a moment of answering her will and self- integrity but the very contrary of these, their denial and the sacrifice of her true self. The resolution of her dilemma whether to obey convention or her own nature is accomplished by St John Rivers, "the antithesis of Mr. Rochester"[69]. St John Rivers does not love Jane; nevertheless, he wants her to marry him and to accompany him on his mission to India. Abhorred by his idea of relationship as well as by his "despotic nature", Jane refuses him, as she tells him, "I scorn your idea of love" and further adds, "If I were to marry you, you would kill me. You are killing me now."[70] Leavis is the first and the only from the critics whom I study in this thesis to notice this extremely important psychological moment in the novel, understanding that this is the very point in which Jane fully articulates her emancipation and frees herself from the constraints of the society. As the critic furthermore explains, in this act, Charlotte fully rejected the idea of innocent, sexless relationship between brother and sister which in the Victorian novel was commonly given preference over that of husband and wife. As Leavis cleverly remarks, this was one of the reasons why her novel was to be called "coarse".[71] The other was Jane's passion, her knowing "difference between love and affection"[72]; after all, even Harriet Martineau, the well-known novelist and Brontë's friend, observed about *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, "I don't like the love, either the kind or the degree of it."[73]

Like Jane's decision to leave Rochester, also the very ending of the novel is viewed by Leavis in a quite different light than for example by all future critics I am to discuss.

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[68] Leavis, "Introduction to *Jane Eyre*" 21.
[69] Leavis, "Introduction to *Jane Eyre*" 23.
[70] Leavis, "Introduction to *Jane Eyre*" 24.
[71] Leavis, "Introduction to *Jane Eyre*" 23.
[72] Leavis, "Introduction to *Jane Eyre*" 24.
[73] Leavis, "Introduction to *Jane Eyre*" 23.

She declares that Jane's return to Rochester is "a mature decision of her whole self and she is not to be dissuaded by conventional arguments".[74] Through this statement, as she remarks, she answers the question of Leslie Stephen (ironically, Woolf's father and an esteemed Victorian critic) about what Jane would have done, had she discovered Bertha still alive. Curiously, Leavis does not trouble at all with the character of Bertha; she merely suggests two events in Charlotte's life that might have inspired this character but she does not ponder about any deeper meaning of this enigmatic character in the novel.

In the very end of the introduction, Q.D. Leavis discusses Charlotte Brontë's style of writing, placing her next to Jane Austen and George Eliot. She even states that through her novels, Charlotte had a significant impact on the development of the English novel, considerably influencing Dickens and also Eliot. In this conclusion, Q. D. Leavis seems to preserve an opinion independent from her husband, who in *the Great Tradition* wrote of Charlotte Brontë quite disapprovingly, "Charlotte, though claiming no part in the great line of English fiction (it is significant that she couldn't see why any value should be attached to Jane Austen) has a permanent interest of minor kind."[75] Queenie was much less critical. Already in her dissertation, an early analysis of popular literature, which was in 1932 published as *Fiction and the Reading Public* and so came to be her only independent book project, she remarked the similarity of *Jane Eyre* to the new emerging genre of popular romance but she saw this as no reason why to altogether belittle the qualities and standing of the novel.[76] Generally, the lasting influence of the Leavises to the 20th century culture has been seen in their distinction of low or 'mass', 'popular' literature and high- brow literature, made up of the true 'canon' or 'tradition', and in this respect Queenie seemed to be the less conservative from the two.[77]

Finally, let us examine in what the significance of "the Introduction to *Jane Eyre*" by Q.D. Leavis lies. First, writing in the latter part of the 1960s, Leavis directly precedes modern feminist criticism. Interestingly, she touches on many of the points that will interest also modern feminist critics, such as for example Jane and Rochester's relationship, which according to her is based on rather egalitarian terms (she fails to see his

[74] Leavis, "Introduction to *Jane Eyre*" 25
[75] F.R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1954) 41.
[76] Q.D. Leavis, Fic*tion and the Reading Public* (London: Pimlico, 2000) 62.
[77]Raman Selden and Peter Widdowson, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, third edition (Hemsptead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993) 22-23.

dominating tendencies) or Jane's resistance to Victorian convention, particularly to the ideals exemplified by Helen Burns or Miss Temple. Leavis indisputably reveals much of the novel's feminist agenda; however, she does not call it feminist (in fact, she never uses the word 'feminism' or 'feminist' throughout the whole text); instead, she interprets it on the general level as resistance against Victorian conventions. (But after all what else was feminism if not exactly a rebellion against the tradition?) Her hesitance to the word 'feminist' should be accounted to the fact that Leavis belonged to the old school and was brought up in the world in which gender roles were still very much given even though she herself managed to combine her career as a critic with her role of wife and mother. As far as the influence of this work for modern feminist critics is concerned, Elaine Showalter uses it as one of many source in her discussion of *Jane Eyre* and it seems probable that also Sandra Gilbert read the work, as her term "Lawrentian sexual tension"[78] by which she defines the relationship of Jane and Rochester curiously evokes the comparison of Brontë and Lawrence made by Leavis.

4 Modern Feminist Criticism: *Jane Eyre* as a Feminist Classic

As has been described in the previous chapter, *Jane Eyre* was commonly undervalued by modernist critics and its literary qualities were largely disputed. This situation was radically altered in the 1970s when feminist critics started to explore the distinctive female literary tradition and *Jane Eyre* was rediscovered as a classic work of female writing. These new radical developments in literary criticism were a consequence of the Women's Liberation Movement which swept the American society in the 1960s and became even more strongly heard in the 1970s. Within this movement, women fought for their equal rights with men; however, they also realized they had been marginalized not only in the society but also in its representations of women in history and literature. As a consequence, female historians and literary critics launched a new, far-reaching project -- they set to rediscover both women's history and women's literary history.

In this effort feminist literary criticism was born. Trying to reconstruct women's literary history, feminist critics looked up to their female literary predecessors and the issue

[78] Sandra Gilbert, and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1979) 356.

of gender once again emerged as the crucial one. Many of these critics started to rediscover the works of female authors, marginalized and even forgotten under the influence of traditional masculine literary standards, while others set to reinterpret the classic works of female writing from new, gender-oriented perspectives and thus attempted to uncover the distinctive female literary tradition. The first three extensive works which in various degree accomplished all those three aims and most importantly, collectively established the women's literary canon, are: Ellen Moer's *Literary Women* (1976), Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (1977) and the groundbreaking book *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar.

The authors of these three founding texts of the modern feminist criticism, all of them academics trained and teaching at the top American institutions, viewed patriarchal society as the major source of women's oppression and tried to reveal literary tactics and metaphors that female writers commonly used to convey and critique this oppression. Interestingly, the work which came to play a central role in the development of modern feminist criticism was Charlotte's Brontë novel *Jane Eyre*.

Even before these books appeared, the work which had commenced a new period in *Jane Eyre* criticism was Adrienne Rich's essay "*Jane Eyre*: The Temptations of a Motherless Woman" (1973), first published in *Ms.*, the feminist magazine extremely popular throughout the 1970s. Rich was a successful poet and active feminist involved in the Women's Liberation Movement and thus, it is fitting that she should be responsible for the revival of *Jane Eyre* and its appeal to modern women.

In her not very long essay, Rich offered a new and for the time revolutionary reading of *Jane Eyre,* which influenced feminist critics who were to come, particularly Gilbert and Gubar. The key argument of the essay is that Brontë's novel is a timeless feminist text, as it explores fundamental dilemmas of female experience and so provides women, regardless of their age and generation, with "some nourishment" and "survival value".[79] In several parts, Rich's argument is a direct response to Woolf's earlier criticism of *Jane Eyre*.

[79] Rich 462.

At the very beginning, Rich deals with the generally accepted critical view which ranked *Jane Eyre* much lower than the classic novels about female experience such as, for example *Middlemarch*, *Anna Karenina* or *Madame Bovary*. Rich argues that the novel is "not a *Bildungsroman*" in a traditional sense but "a tale" about "soul-making". [80]Jane Eyre is an exceptional female heroine because "she feels so unalterably herself" and on her journey to maturity, she is confronted with "traditional female temptations" and their alternatives.[81] Rich also criticizes the traditional double standards applied to literature, as she points out that while, for instance *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* by James Joyce has been commonly seen as a deep book discussing problems of human experience, *Jane Eyre*, though discussing the very same problems, would be considered much less universal because it is an autobiography of a woman.

Rich also emphasizes crucial and generally undervalued aspects of the novel. For her the fact that Jane is a penniless orphan and later a governess is important because Jane is thus a perfect example of a single woman on whom the oppressions of patriarchal society can be well seen. Rich describes various forms of oppression, such as violence, humiliation and cruelty, which Jane has to face at the Reeds and in Lowood and defines the temptations of "victimization"[82] and "religious asceticism"[83] as the alternatives available to her. Influenced by positive female figures, Jane starts to grow up into an independent young woman in her own right.

As with Woolf, the episode at Thornfield is seen by Rich as the central part of the novel. Yet, she denies that this passage is romantic. Quite on the contrary, she believes that here Jane must face the greatest female temptation – that of romantic love to a man, and here her feminist nature is established. Just like Woolf, Rich quotes the famous passage from the novel starting with "It is vain to say human being ought to be satisfied with tranquility…" (Brontë, 95)[84] and calls it "Charlotte Brontë's feminist manifesto"[85]. Edward Rochester is recognized as the romantic hero; yet, Rich also sees him as the embodiment of traditional patriarchal power and the real threat to Jane's integrity because of his controlling

[80] Rich 462,463.
[81] Rich 463.
[82] Rich464.
[83] Rich 466.
[84] The passage was cited at length on the pages 16-17.
[85] Rich 468.

tendencies. Moreover, Rochester is "sexual"[86], as is his mad wife Bertha. Rich devotes to Bertha the whole fifth part of the essay and she introduces a ground-breaking argument that Bertha is "Jane's alter ego"[87], which will be later taken up and developed by Gilbert and Gubar. Finally, Jane's escape from Rochester and her consequent life are interpreted as a necessary stage in her development towards independence and equality which, as Rich argues, is achieved in figurative terms at the end. Rochester is blind and disabled and thus, he is "symbolically castrated"[88]. This enables a very untraditional conclusion of the novel: it ends with marriage but the one that is enacted on Jane's own terms: "Jane can become a wife without sacrificing a grain of her Jane Eyre-ity"[89].

Only three years after the appearance of Rich's essay, Ellen Moers published *Literary Women*. Contemporary feminist criticism values this work as the first extensive account exploring the distinctive female literary tradition; yet, compared with two literary histories of female authors that appeared later in the 1970s, those by Elaine Showalter and by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, it lacks a focused and clearly structured argument. Moers introduces far too many female writers, English, French and American, and her study is burdened with too much biographical information, often at the expense of literary criticism. Referring to Charlotte Brontë, Moers calls her "the greatest woman novelist of the post-Austen nineteenth century"[90] and offers some interesting observations about *Jane Eyre*. Surprisingly, no influence of Rich's essay can be traced in her discussion of the novel. Generally, Moers seems rather isolated from other contemporary feminist critics, choosing a very different set of topics and altogether neglecting the character of Bertha. This might be caused also by her different agenda in regards to the novel, as she focuses on textual construction of Jane Eyre's subjectivity rather than on the social construction of the character.

Moers interprets the beginning of the novel, marked by the recurrent negatives and articulations of 'I', as an extremely important self-defining moment. She points out Jane's rebellious potential, emphasizing the issue of her "wrong style, in girlhood and in

[86] Rich 470.
[87] Rich 468.
[88] Rich 474.
[89] Rich 474.
[90] Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976) 16.

language"[91] at the beginning of the novel. She is struck by Brontë's numerous slave metaphors and relates them to a larger tendency of female authors to compare the inferior position of women in the patriarchal society to that of slaves. Moers also claims that in the first three chapters Jane is clearly oppressed by Mrs. Reed and her son and this experience culminates in the Red Room incident in which Jane suffers "the crisis of pre-pubic sexuality."[92] The sexual undertone later in the novel is conveyed through passion, which, as Moers explains, was an uncommon and rather shocking element in Victorian novels, and the contemporary readers tended to attribute passion in the novels of the Brontës to their heathen Celtic (Irish) origin. [93]Furthermore, Moers analyzes the language of passion that Brontë uses to describe Jane's central encounter with Rochester in the orchard, calling the scene "Currer Bell's garden of Eden" and viewing the cigar that Rochester smokes as a phallic symbol.[94]

Interestingly, Moers also talks about Brontë 's rather hostile depiction of beautiful women in *Jane Eyre*. She points out that in Brontë 's imagination, Blanche works as a prototype of a spoilt rich woman. She intuitively realizes that the issue of appearance is important in the novel but is unable to detect, like Showalter will do later, that through the character of Jane, Brontë defies the norm of female heroine at that time. Other significant points that deserve notice in Moers's reading are painting as Jane's creative activity and bird metaphors. Moers cites at full length the descriptions of the mysterious paintings that Jane presents to Rochester but is unable to see their deeper psychological meaning and instead perceives them as signs of Jane's creativity and imagination, making a vague connection between painting and female literary creativity.

Her analysis of bird metaphors is far more striking. Moers writes that an image of a singing bird is commonly used as a metaphor for a poet. Furthermore, because of their ability to fly, birds are associated with freedom. At the beginning of the novel Jane looks at the book of birds and this act signifies her own desire for freedom. She also notices that the bird metaphor is used in Rochester's proposal to Jane when he tells her "to be still" and not to "struggle so, like a frantic bird that is rending its own plumage in its desperation" (Brontë 223). To that Jane retorts, "I am no bird; and no net ensnares me; I am a free

[91] Moers 17.
[92] Moers 16.
[93] Moers 142.
[94] Moers 142.

human being with independent will, which I now exert to leave you."(Brontë 223) Moers comments that through this refusal of Jane to be seen as a caged, hopeless bird, Brontë communicates female aspiration for both "female freedom and moral freedom".[95] Interestingly, through the analysis of bird metaphors and also through the earlier slave metaphor, Moers gets closest to the feminist aspect of *Jane Eyre*. Overall her analysis should be seen as a precursor to the academic feminist criticism of Showalter and Gilbert and Gubar.

Only a year after Moers's *Literary Women,* Elaine Showalter, a literary critic and Professor of English at Princeton, published *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing*. According to *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Criticism*, Showalter is considered the most influential American critic of this period[96] and her book is recognized as a classic of modern feminist criticism. From her generation of feminist critics, she also best represents the continuity in the female critical tradition, as the title of her book is apparently inspired by Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. However, as Toril Moi claims in *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*, the title does not mean Showalter's acceptance of Woolf but on the contrary, through the subtle change of 'one's' to 'their', she denotes her departure from Woolf, expressing her own distance necessary for the study of female authors discussed in her book.[97]

Showalter claims that women's literature was evolving through three distinctive stages which she models on the stages distinguished in the literary subcultures. The first, so-called *feminine* stage includes the processes of imitation and internalization of the dominant culture and its models. The protest against it and its values, and advocacy for new values of the subculture are characteristic of the second, *feminist* phase. In the final, *female* stage the authors are freed from the standards and roles enhanced by the dominant culture, and thus they are able to turn towards self-discovery and a search for identity.

According to Showalter, Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot are two most distinctive authors of the *feminine* stage. While Brontë is generally perceived as the follower of the scandalous French novelist Sand, Eliot is seen as the author of the Austenian tradition. On the basis of the similarity of topics (young women growing up in Victorian England),

[95] Moers 251.
[96] Selden 219.
[97] Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London, New York: Routledge, 1990) 1.

Showalter compares two of their novels: Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* and calls Jane "the heroine of fulfillment" and Eliot's Maggie "the heroine of renunciation".[98] In this, she elaborates on the idea of Q.D. Leavis who was first to suggest the similarity of the two novels in her introduction. Showalter also repudiates the traditionally accepted tendency to class Eliot as a more successful writer than Brontë, as she writes that Brontë's intricate imagery in *Jane Eyre*, including a great variety of expressive means such as dreams and drawings 'has been misread and underrated by male-oriented twentieth-century criticism, and is only now beginning to be fully understood and appreciated."[99] In fact, Showalter herself significantly contributed to this process of exploration of the complexities of Brontë's imagery.

In her analysis of *Jane Eyre*, she describes Jane as a heroine caught between two aspects of "the Victorian female psyche": mind and body. The mind is represented by Helen Burns while the body by Bertha Mason. She views them as "two polar personalities" of Jane, and writes that Jane's "integration of the spirit and body" can be resolved only "by literary and metaphorically destroying [her] two polar personalities to make way for the full strength and development of [her] central consciousness." [100] However, these two figures also symbolize metaphorical images of Victorian women: "angel in the house" and "the devil in the flesh".[101]

Showalter is extremely fascinated by the sexual aspect of Jane's psyche which, as she shows, is a certain driving force of the narrative. She starts by pointing to the description of the Red Room and calls it "a paradigm of female inner space."[102] She relates the act of Jane's punishment and her confinement to the Red Room to the common Victorian practice of "sexual discipline"[103], which was usually administered by women on the behalf of men, and concludes that the Victorian world was "a world without female solidarity". Then Showalter provides an analysis of Helen Burns, calling her "the feminine spirit in its most disembodied form"; yet, this brief passage is totally disproportionate compared to the long and detailed analysis of Bertha, which Showalter carries at certain

[98] Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists From Brontë to Lessing* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977) 112.
[99] Showalter 112.
[100] Showalter 113.
[101] Showalter 113.
[102] Showalter 114.
[103] Showalter 116.

points to an extreme. First, she explores representations of madwoman in folklore and in literature, seeing both sources as important for Brontë's inspiration. Secondly, Showalter analyzes contemporary psychiatric theories which viewed female passion and sexuality as symptoms of insanity. At last, the author claims that there is a connection between Bertha's attack and her menstrual cycle, which is revealed through descriptions of nature and lunar phases. (Showalter's interest in Bertha's madness can be easily explained through the fact that when she was writing this book, she had been most probably already collecting material for her latter book called *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture* (1985)). Yet, most importantly, Showalter believes that Jane recognizes Bertha as her other, passionate and violent self and thus marriage to Rochester is possible only when Bertha is destroyed. Rochester must be punished, as being blind and a cripple he is forced to experience helplessness by which he himself long tortured his poor wife.

Another important point that Showalter introduced in her book is the impact that *Jane Eyre* had on characters in Victorian novels. Inspecting contemporary magazines and novels produced after *Jane Eyre*, she proclaims that the publication of *Jane Eyre* was the turning point that changed by then prevalent stereotypes of Victorian heroines and heroes. Using several examples, she proves that the female characters after *Jane Eyre* differed from the previous models both in appearance and in spirit, as they tended to be "plain, rebellious and passionate" but were also "more intellectual and more self-defining".[104] They simply became more like Jane herself.

A similar development could be observed in male figures. Showalter distinguishes between two types, the second being the so-called "women's men"[105]. These "brutes", as she calls them, are according to her, "collateral descendants of Scott's dark heroes and of Byron's corsair" but more importantly also "direct descendants of Edward Fairfax Rochester".[106] Showalter then writes that these new heroes were "not conventionally handsome"[107] and tended to have a rebellious nature, brimming with "sexuality and power".[108] She claims that female writers inclined toward this type of male heroes because contemporary novel conventions prevented them from attributing these qualities to women

[104] Showalter 122.
[105] Showalter 139.
[106] Showalter 139.
[107] Showalter 140.
[108] Showalter 143.

and so they compensated by projecting these characteristics onto male characters. Similarly, they projected into these new heroes their desire to be treated as equal and independent human beings, which is evident in Rochester's rather egalitarian conduct toward Jane.

Besides Brontë's impact on literature, Showalter also explores the role that Charlotte Brontë as the writing woman played and continues to play in the popular imagination. Like other critics before her, particularly Henry James and Q.D. Leavis, she emphasizes the romantic effect of Gaskell's biography and writes that "in *The Life of Charlotte* Brontë, Gaskell helped create the myth of the novelist as tragic heroine, a myth for which readers had been prepared by *Jane Eyre*".[109] Showalter describes the hysteria that surrounded the famous literary sisters during the Victorian period; she calls it "the Brontë legend" and observes that it soon "took on the psychic properties of a cult". She traces its beginnings in pilgrimages to the home of the Brontës in Haworth or in collecting Brontë relicts. She even mentions such bizarre acts as the American novelist Harriet Beecher Stowe claiming to have led a conversation with Charlotte's ghost[110] or in Showalter's own time the Harrods department store selling a special collection of Brontë products. In this brief account, Showalter anticipates the argument which will be fully developed by Lucasta Miller in her book *The Brontë Myth* almost 25 years later.

In their literary histories both Moers and Showalter highly value *Jane Eyre* but in none of these works the novel plays such a central role as in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, the groundbreaking book by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar published in 1979. As the authors outline in their introduction, since Moers and Showalter had already "skillfully traced the overall history of [female literary] community", they could move further and "focus closely on a number of nineteenth-century texts [they] considered crucial to that history".[111] They view *Jane Eyre* as the most important among those texts. That is implied also in the title of the book, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, which clearly refers to Rochester's mad wife, Bertha Mason.

However, Gilbert and Gubar chose this title also because it perfectly illustrates their central argument. They claim that the nineteenth-century female writers projected

[109] Showalter 106.
[110] Showalter 106.
[111] Gilbert xii.

constrictions that women had to face in the patriarchal society into their texts and filled their works with secret metaphorical language, which most of them shared, regardless of their geographical, historical or psychological location. Through this secret metaphorical language, female authors portrayed the physical and psychological limitations that the male-dominated society imposed on women which, as Gilbert and Gubar believe, are shown through the "images of enclosure and escape"[112] that female heroines constantly encounter. These images reflect women's confinement in patriarchal society and their deep-rooted desire to escape it.

Female authors use their metaphorical language also to redefine an indisputably sexist patriarchal literary tradition, its forms and genres. Through a large variety of textual examples, Gilbert and Gubar present a traditional belief that associates literary powers with masculine sexuality and show how, using this argument, women were for centuries prevented from writing. They also deconstruct the images of 'angel-in-the house' and 'monster' that male authors invented as the representations of women in literature. Gilbert and Gubar show that women attempted to alter these figures and often attributed them with "diseases like anorexia, agoraphobia, and claustrophobia"[113] or with other anomalies resulting from their inner discomfort. Discomfort as the tension between their social roles and their real selves is also mirrored through landscape metaphors, such as "frozen landscapes" or "fiery interiors".[114] Focusing on all these images, the critics also realized that in the works of the nineteenth-century female writers one rather unusual character tended to appear more often than the others – that of a madwoman. This leads them to a controversial conclusion that in the works of nineteenth-century authors the character of the madwoman functions as an alter-ego of the submissive, socially-acceptable heroine who, through this other self, outpours her own repressed anger and rebellion against the patriarchal society.

Of course, all these elements of the female secret metaphorical language, including a madwoman, can be found in Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre*. In the chapter called "A Dialogue of Self and Soul: Plain Jane's Progress", originally drafted by Gilbert, the critics provide a detailed analysis of these elements, which would serve as a key to works of other

[112] Gilbert xi.
[113] Gilbert xi.
[114] Gilbert xi

nineteenth century writers. Their first important contribution in regards to *Jane Eyre* is a claim that the novel is modeled on "Bunyan's male *Pilgrim's Progress*".[115] They see it as a female version of "the mythic quest plot"[116] in which Jane, a female alternative of Bunyan's Christian, embarks on a journey of self-discovery in which she is confronted with typical female realities: "oppression", "starvation", "madness" and "coldness".[117]

Surprisingly, Gilbert and Gubar write that Jane's "central confrontation"[118] is not that with Rochester but with his mad wife Bertha, who in fact is Jane's "truest and darkest double"[119]. They try to prove this daring supposition by showing that each act of Jane's rebellion or repression is accompanied by a certain manifestation of Bertha, starting with her violent cries, continuing with her attempts to murder Rochester, and culminating in her act of setting Thornfield Hall, the symbol of patriarchal power, on fire. Gilbert and Gubar claim that all these acts are Jane's secret desires which can be acted out only by her rebellious alter-ego, Bertha. They see Jane's wild dreams as justifications of her violent fantasies and the little child that continually reappears in her dreams is classed as Jane's "orphaned alter ego"[120], which has been repressed since her painful childhood at Gateshead. Moreover, they also show the similarity between Bertha's and Jane's movements, writing that she "not only acts for Jane [but] she also acts like Jane".[121] So, unlike Showalter who envisioned Bertha as a symbol of female sexuality, Gilbert and Gubar associate Bertha with female rage and rebellion.

Focusing on other elements of the metaphorical language, Gilbert and Gubar point out 'properties of ice and fire'. These images recur throughout the whole novel through their actual as well as symbolic representations. Jane experiences coldness both in Lowood and Gateshead, and she almost dies of cold in Marsh End. Similarly, the two men in her life, Rochester and St John, can be seen as two different entities, St John as ice and Rochester as fire. The images of entrapment are commonly repeated in *Jane Eyre*. In Red Room Gilbert and Gubar explore the double entrapment to which Jane is exposed: first that

[115] Gilbert 336.
[116] Gilbert 336.
[117] Gilbert 339.
[118] Gilbert 339.
[119] Gilbert 360.
[120] Gilbert 358.
[121] Gilbert 361.

of the "patriarchal death chamber"[122] and the second of her own image trapped in the mirror. Moreover, they see this incident "as a paradigm for the larger plot in [the] novel"[123], as in her future experiences Jane is always constricted in some way by the patriarchal society.

Gilbert and Gubar invest a lot of energy in exploring particular characters and analyzing the symbolic meaning of their names. Moreover, they try to approximate the role of particular characters to that of the stock fairy tale characters, claiming that patriarchal poetics is at work in fairytale narratives. Thus, at the beginning of her journey, Jane reminds the critics of "a sullen Cinderella" or "an angry ugly Duckling", who must fight against her odds.[124] At Gateshead Hall she is bullied by her evil step-family: the "wicked stepmother" Mrs. Reed, "two unpleasant, selfish 'stepsisters'" and the little patriarch, John Reed.[125] Already here Jane is capable of self-assertion, accusing Mrs. Reed of unfairness and cruelty, as if possessed by some supernatural spirit. Jane is punished for this rebellious act and sent by her beastly stepmother to Lowood. As Gilbert and Gubar remark, the name Lowood is reminiscent of a fairytale wood where poor children are sent while 'low' suggests the very nature of the place, which through its strict order and gloomy interiors makes its pupils fully submit to an extreme ascetic and religious ideal. Not surprisingly, the ruler of Lowood, the merciless tyrant Mr. Brocklehurst is compared to a wicked fairytale character that resides in woods - to "the wolf in 'Little Red Riding Hood'"[126] and the critics even find out some interesting facial features that evoke those of the wolf in the named fairy tale. In psychoanalytical terms, Gilbert and Gubar see Brocklehurst as"[the] personification of Victorian superego"[127] who is reborn later in the novel in the character of St John Rivers.

To balance these negative figures, Jane is protected by her "fairy godmothers"[128]: Bessie, Miss Temple and Helen Burns, who teach her how to survive in the harsh patriarchal world. Moreover, angelic Miss Temple and Helen also serve her as role models

[122] Gilbert 340.
[123] Gilbert 341.
[124] Gilbert 342.
[125] Gilbert 342.
[126] Gilbert 344.
[127] Gilbert 343.
[128] Gilbert 345.

but Jane cannot accept the ideals they propose, neither Miss Temple's "ladylike virtues"[129] nor Helen's "self-renunciation [and] all-consuming spirituality"[130]. Eventually, the skill she takes from them is their ability "to compromise".[131]

The central experience of Jane's progress takes place in Thornfield, in which, Gilbert and Gubar claim, Jane is metaphorically "crowned with thorns"[132]. The beginning of the Thornfield episode is marked by a great degree of romanticism. Jane's first encounter with Rochester in the moony, winter night has all features of "a fairytale meeting" and the authors notice that Rochester appears on his horse like a "prince as a middle-aged warrior".[133] Jane is attracted by his dark features and falls in love with him because he treats her as an equal; yet, later on Rochester also seeks various ways to deny their equality. Dressed up as an old gypsy, he enquires about her love life, and in the enacted charades he exhibits his male power, suggesting that marriage is "a prison" and "a game [in which] women are doomed to lose".[134]

Jane is also puzzled by women that surround Rochester and tries to understand their relationship to him. She dislikes Celine Varens and Blanche Ingram while Grace Poole remains for her an enigma, largely due to her unclear social status. Thus even when Jane wins Rochester's heart and their wedding day approaches, all these problematic relations as well as Rochester's inconsistent nature create in her a sense of anxiety. She senses something hidden in his character and can foresee "the inequalities and minor despotisms of marriage", so she decides "to keep him 'in reasonable check'".[135] Interestingly, Gilbert and Gubar see this stage of their relationship as "a kind of Lawrentian sexual tension"[136], for Rochester longs for equality but at the same moment he wants Jane to submit to his will.

As has been already suggested, Jane is worried by the union with Rochester, and her anxiety and rebellion come through in subconscious dream visions. When Bertha is revealed as an obstacle to their marriage, Jane's fear of her inequality with Rochester is confirmed and she decides to desert him forever. Her journey leads her to Marsh End, the

[129] Gilbert 344.
[130] Gilbert 346.
[131] Gilbert 347.
[132] Gilbert 347.
[133] Gilbert 351.
[134] Gilbert 350
[135] Gilbert 356.
[136] Gilbert 356.

name which signals "the end of her march towards selfhood".[137] And truly, here her development is completed under the influence of the three characters, all of which bear allegorical names. Analyzing the names of Mary and Diana Rivers, Gilbert and Gubar refer to Rich's original ideas of Virgin Mary and goddess Diana and on the other level they see these figures as "the ideals of female strength for which Jane has been searching".[138] Their brother St John Rivers plays an important role in Jane's development. His name is "blatantly patriarchal"[139], alluding to the saints St. John and St. John the Baptist. He also shares the saints' "contempt for the flesh" and so when he asks Jane to marry him, he offers her not love but "a life of principle, a path of thorns".[140] Thus, he subjects Jane to her final test. Should she marry St John or Rochester?

After a difficult internal battle, Jane refuses St. John. She inherits a fortune from an uncle in Madeira and discovers her kinship with the Rivers family. Finally, as all is changing for the better, she hears Rochester's desperate cry and the "telepathic communion"[141] between their spirits makes her come back to him. Returning to Thornfield, she learns about Bertha's death, which Gilbert and Gubar interpret as the signal of Jane's ultimate freedom. Jane and Rochester are finally equal and nothing stands in the way of their union. Yet, despite their egalitarian marriage that is enacted at the end, Gilbert and Gubar see the conclusion of the novel as problematic and not at all victorious. They point out the fact that the couple inhabits Rochester's dilapidated mansion in the dark wood far from civilization, and so "[this] physical isolation of the lovers suggests their spiritual isolation in a world where such egalitarian marriages as theirs are rare, if not impossible."[142] Thus, unlike previous critics, Gilbert and Gubar are much more skeptical about Brontë's ending of the novel, proposing that maybe she herself could not envision a fully radical conclusion, writing that instead of opening to Jane the whole world, she confined her and Rochester into "a natural paradise"[143] of woods.

Gilbert and Gubar's interpretation of *Jane Eyre* has been extremely influential and indisputably moved the thinking about *Jane Eyre* and about female writing in general to

[137] Gilbert 364.
[138] Gilbert 365.
[139] Gilbert 365.
[140] Gilbert 365.
[141] Gilbert 367.
[142] Gilbert 369.
[143] Gilbert 370.

new levels; yet, it also contains several shortcomings. Gilbert and Gubar try to enforce their theory that Bertha is Jane's alter ego to such an extent that they deny or lessen Jane's rationality which evidently surfaces at some of the key moments in the novel. For this reason, they omit from their study for example the famous passage described by Rich as "Brontë's feminist manifesto" or do not mention Jane's refusal of St John Rivers pointed out by Q.D. Leavis. Despite this, their analysis of the novel makes a great contribution to the feminist literary theory, as they acknowledge the great significance of the subconscious in the works of female writers. They believe that it is often Jane's subconscious that warns her of patriarchal power and safely guards her through the novel, both in her runaway to Rochester and later in her return to him. Moreover, they in great detail describe the complicated male-female relations and extensively analyze the character of Edward Rochester, perceiving him as a rather negative character which is attributed with many romantic features but full of domineering tendencies and dark character traits. Overall, it must be also pointed out that Gilbert and Gubar are also the first feminist critics who appear to be considerably influenced by Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which is evident in the centrality that the character of Bertha is given in their analysis.

4.1 Feminist Postcolonial Criticism: Arguments against *Jane Eyre*

The Women's Liberation Movement, which had created a favorable atmosphere for the development of modern feminist criticism in the 1970s, became extremely fragmented in the early 1980s. Voices of various minority and racial groups were growing stronger and suddenly, emancipation was no longer discussed only in relation to white, middle-class women. These developments were reflected also in feminist criticism. Scholars started to explore the relation existing between feminism, race and imperialism and this effort culminated in the formation of a new, independent stream of feminist criticism which came to be known as feminist postcolonial criticism.

Many texts of the feminist canon, including *Jane Eyre*, were reexamined in the light of this new critical line. The two prominent works that well reflect the feminist postcolonial approach to Brontë's novel are the essay by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak called "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" and the chapter on *Jane Eyre* called

"'Indian Ink': Colonialism and Figurative Strategy of *Jane Eyre*" by Susan Meyer, which comes from her book *Imperialism at Home*. It is interesting to note that Meyer's text was written as a response to Spivak's essay.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is a prominent literary critic and theorist of Indian origin, living and teaching in the US. When her essay "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" first appeared in 1985, it caused quite a stir within the literary community. In the very beginning of the essay, Spivak makes a radical argument by claiming that imperialism, "understood as England's social mission"[144] is reproduced in literature – not only British but of all great European colonizing cultures. If we studied its representations in literary history, we would discover what she terms as "the worlding"[145] of 'the Third World'. She further argues that also feminist criticism, which regards European and Anglo-American female literature "as the high feminist norm", enhances the described 'worlding' and thus "reproduces the axioms of imperialism".[146]

Having outlined these basic assertions, Spivak sets out to reveal how 'the worlding' of the Third World' works in *Jane Eyre*, which she calls "a cult text of feminism"[147]. In order to fully explain her theory, she uses two other novels: Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea,* a rewriting of *Jane Eyre* from a colonial perspective, and Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein* as an analysis of the mechanism of 'worlding'. Spivak proclaims that her aim is not to belittle the achievement of Charlotte Brontë as an artist but to excite "rage against the imperialist narrativization of history".[148]

Spivak remarks that unlike other American feminists at the time, she does not glorify the achievement of Jane's subjectivity in the novel but points out its problematic aspect. First, she defines on what terms Jane's emancipation is articulated:

> …what is at stake for feminist individualism in the age of imperialism, is precisely the making of human beings, the constitution and 'interpellation' of the subject not only as individual but as "individualist". This stake is represented on two registers: childbearing and soul making. The fist is domestic-society-through-sexual-reproduction cathected as

[144] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Three Women's Texts and Critique of Imperislism," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 12, No. 1. "Race", Writing, and Diference. (Autumn, 1985) 243.
[145] Spivak 243.
[146] Spivak 243.
[147] Spivak 244.
[148] Spivak 244.

> "companionate love"; the second is the imperialistic project cathected as civil-society-through-social-mission. [149]

Finally, she concludes that "the female individualist, not-quite/ not-male, articulates herself in shifting relationship to what is at stake, the "native female" as such...is excluded from any share in this emerging norm."[150] To simplify this difficult academic formulation, Spivak basically argues that while Jane achieves her emancipation and articulates herself as 'female individualist', Bertha, "the native female", does not do any of these, and in fact, Jane's emancipation is achieved at her expense.

To illustrate this process, Spivak shows how Jane moves through the course of the novel from the marginal position to the central position; that means from the position in the "counter-family" to the position in the "family- in-law".[151] At the beginning of the novel, Spivak shows through the detailed textual analysis that Jane belongs to a counter family, as she is excluded from her proper family, the Reeds. In Lowood, she becomes a part of another counter family, created by her, Miss Temple and Helen Burns as an opposition to the Brocklehursts. In Thornfield, Jane and Rochester form another counter family while the legal family is made up by him and his actual wife Mrs. Bertha Rochester. In the final part of the novel, Jane eventually shifts into the legal family structure, as she first discovers that she is a legitimate member of the Rivers family, and after the death of Bertha, she becomes a legal wife of Edward Rochester.

Spivak also explores how the character of Bertha is established in the novel and thus how Jane's movement from the 'counter family' to the 'family-in-law' is enabled. She claims that in *Jane Eyre* Bertha is always presented as "the other"[152]. Moreover, she is described both human and animal; however, "the human/animal frontier [is] acceptably indeterminate"[153] and so on this grounds she is actually stripped off her rights for individualism.

The critic also shows how Jean Rhys rewrites the character of Bertha as Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Rhys does not see her as a lunatic but as a woman outraged by the

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[149] Spivak 244.
[150] Spivak 244-245.
[151] Spivak 247.
[152] Spivak 247.
[153] Spivak 247.

fact that her rights, her personal decency, including her name, as well as her property were cruelly taken from her because of her colonial origin. Rochester who has done all these harms to her is not portrayed as a villain in *Wide Sargasso Sea* but rather as a victim of the patriarchal society that favored the first born sons and saw the colonial wealth as a solution for those born second. Interestingly, Spivak notices that the problematic character of the novel is Christophine, who in her opinion, "cannot be contained by a novel which rewrites a canonical English text within the European novelistic tradition in the interest of the white Creole rather than the native".[154] Through this Spivak criticizes the exclusive perspective of *Wide Sargasso Sea* that focuses on Antoinette.

Analyzing the ending of the novel, Spivak concludes that Rhys makes Antoinette recognize herself as the other and so she enacts the role that is expected from her: she burns down Thornfield and by killing herself, she makes way for Jane. As Spivak points out, Rhys models this conclusion on the proper ending of *Jane Eyre* which according to her opinion is "an allegory of the general epistemic violence of imperialism, the construction of self-immolating colonial subject for the glorification of the social mission of the colonizer."[155]

Earlier in the essay, Spivak has defined 'childbearing' as one of the registers for Jane's individualism. At the end of the novel, Jane becomes a mother while Bertha is excluded from this privilege. Spivak compares Bertha's situation to that of the monster in Shelly's *Frankenstein*. Like Bertha, the monster too represents "the other". As Spivak explains, it cannot be allowed to reproduce because through its reproduction it would pose a threat to the human race, as its offspring could be even more vengeful that the monster itself. The same rationale applies to Bertha. And thus, Spivak at the end of her essay suggest that "*Jane Eyre* can be read as the orchestration and staging of the self-immolation of Bertha Mason as 'good wife'".[156]

Another well-know feminist critic writing about gender and race is Susan Meyer, the Professor of English at Wellesley College. In her acclaimed book *Imperialism at Home (1996),* Meyer scrutinizes from this perspective the novels of great Victorian female authors such as Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* or George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*

[154] Spivak 253.
[155] Spivak 251.
[156] Spivak 259.

and *Daniel Deronda*. Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is analyzed in chapter two, titled "'Indian Ink': Colonialism and Figurative Strategy of *Jane Eyre*".

Meyer's study is the refutation of Spivak's argument that imperialism is an "unquestioned ideology"[157] in *Jane Eyre*. Quite on the contrary, she argues that it is "questioned"[158] and that Brontë employs various figurative strategies, often using slave and race metaphors, to achieve this end. To support her point, Meyer uses numerous textual examples, so that by the end of the essay it seems that no expression with racial connotations or undertone has escaped her quick analytical eye and that she fully grasped Brontë's conscious and subconscious use of race in the novel. Also, in comparison to Spivak, it seems that Meyer has a true interest in the novel and unlike Spivak, she does not use it merely to prove her own theory.

As I have suggested, Meyer produces rather complicated findings and for that purpose, I will attempt to sum up only those most relevant to this study. First, Meyer claims that Brontë often draws connection between the ideology of male domination and the ideology of racial domination, as she often compares women to people of non-white races and even to slaves. Sadly, as Meyer points out, this comparison is not done on the basis of "shared inferiority" between the two groups but on the basis of their "shared oppression".[159]

Meyer rejects Spivak's interpretation of Bertha as a tool of achieving Jane's individualism. Instead, she attributes Bertha with a completely new role in the novel, as she claims that "Bertha functions as the central locus of Brontë's anxieties about the presence of oppression in England, anxieties that motivate the plot and drive it to its conclusion. The conclusion of the novel then settles these anxieties, partly by eliminating the character who seems to embody them."[160] The critic also explores Bertha's ambiguous racial identity in *Jane Eyre*. Meyer analyzes various expressions in the novel by which Bertha is described and notices that all of them point out to her blackness; yet, she also cleverly remarks, that she must have been "imagined as white – or passing for white", otherwise the son from the good British family would not consider marrying her.[161] She also gives the reader a brief lecture on the West Indian history, explaining that in fact, the word 'creole' was used

[157]Susan Meyer, *Imperialism at Home* (Ithaca, N.Y. : Cornell University Press, 1996) 66.
[158] Meyer 66.
[159] Meyer 66.
[160] Meyer 66.
[161] Meyer 67.

without distinctive racial connotations and that it was used to refer both to whites and blacks born in the West Indies.

Importantly, Meyer also points out the serious mistake that Spivak commits in regards to Bertha is her study. In relation to Jane, she describes Bertha as "native", creating the opposition of 'imperial' and 'colonial', while in relation to her black servant Christophine, she defines Bertha as "not native" and "white".[162] Meyer writes that Spivak changes Bertha's identity as it suits her argument and this allows her "to criticize both *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* as manifestations of exclusive feminist individualism".[163]

Furthermore, Meyer notices that in *Jane Eyre* Brontë repeatedly compares Jane to various dark races and so she points out her social marginality and her "economic oppression"[164] within the British society. Oddly enough, Brontë uses the very same racial comparison also in the very opposite context, as she alludes in racial terms also to the so-called oppressors or the members of upper classes and so suggests both unjust division of property and power in England but also "the British involvement in the empire"[165]. This is most vividly demonstrated on the example of Blanche Ingram who is continuously described as dark and at one point a parallel is drawn between her and Bertha's appearance. Curiously, every time when Brontë tries to evoke the idea of oppression, she shows a form of oppression practiced by non-white races and so, as Meyer thinks, she apologetically tries to suggest that the idea of oppression is "foreign to the English". Trying to sum up this figurative strategy, the critic writes,

> The novel's anti-imperialist politics…are more self-interested than benevolent. The opposition to imperialism arises not primarily out of concern for the well-being of the people directly damaged by British imperialism – the African slaves in the West Indian colonies, the Indians whose economy was being destroyed under British rule - but out of concern for the British…[166]

In this spirit, Brontë concludes also the novel: Jane inherits money and marries Rochester with whom she lives on the terms of economic equality. Moreover, as Meyer

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[162] Meyer 65-66.
[163] Meyer 65.
[164] Meyer 72.
[165] Meyer 80.
[166] Meyer 81.

proposes, with Rochester being blind, Jane is also freed from pressure to make herself "a showy visual object, which has itself made her feel like a slave"[167]. Yet, the ending is not altogether as idyllic as it might seem. After all, Jane and Rochester live partly from the money that comes from the inheritance after Jane's uncle in Madeira. As Meyer explains, Madeira was one of the stops in the triangular route made by British slave traders and so eventually, also Jane's inheritance can origin in the slave trade.[168]

Meyer closes the essay by the statement that even though the novel does not include Brontë's direct condemnation of imperialism practiced by the British; it is nevertheless full of "uneasiness about the effects of empire on the social domestic relations in England".[169] Meyer shows that Brontë's consciousness was throughoutly permeated with the images of imperialism, the social mission which she regarded with discomfort and questioned throughout the whole novel, even though she did so by rather unusual and not always easily comprehensible metaphors.

As my analysis has shown, both Spivak and Meyer scrutinize *Jane Eyre* from the feminist postcolonial perspective; however, each of them arrives at the very different conclusions. Spivak produces the critique of the novel, claiming that it is inherently racist, for Jane, the white woman, asserts herself and achieves her individualism at the expense of Bertha, the native woman, who is dehumanized, marginalized and eventually must kill herself in order to enable Jane's victory. Meyer sees this interpretation as faulty one, pointing out that in the essay Spivak pragmatically views Bertha's identity either as 'native' or 'not native', so that it allows her criticism of both *Jane Eyre* and *Wise Sargasso Sea*. Meyer looks at issues of imperialism and race from a rather different viewpoint. She analyzes how Brontë actually represents imperialism in the novel and also how and to what ends she uses the racial metaphors. She discovers that even though Brontë does not explicitly condemn imperialism for the sake of the oppressed races, she nevertheless portrays it as something evil that for the sake of the British themselves should be done away with.

5 Post-feminist Criticism

[167] Meyer 92.
[168] Meyer 93.
[169] Meyer 95.

The fifth chapter of this thesis concerns with what for the purpose of this work, I choose to call post-feminist criticism of *Jane Eyre*. The term post-feminist has been applied to a large number of meanings, generally referring to critique of feminist theories produced by the second-wave feminism in the 1960s and 1970s. In this thesis, I use this term to label three recent works on *Jane Eyre,* which even though considerably differing in approach and topic, provide certain critical reflection on earlier modern feminist critiques of *Jane Eyre* and introduce new sets of problems into the feminist agenda. Of course, these works are only the examples of the large number of post-feminist works and studies that have been and continue to be written about *Jane Eyre*. Due to the limited space of this thesis, I chose just three works from this large body of critical work, believing that these pieces well illustrate the possible diverse directions of the post-feminist criticism of *Jane Eyre* and that they will best complement the studies already presented in this thesis.

In the first selected post-feminist work, Mary Poovey's "The Anathematized Race: the Governess and *Jane Eyre*", the author explores historical discourse of the novel, showing how the figures of mother, madwoman and prostitute were combined and problematized in the character of governess, and further elaborates on the psychoanalytical analysis of the novel, previously most strikingly performed by Gilbert and Gubar. In the second work, "Girl Talk: 'Jane Eyre' and the Romance of Narration", Carla Kaplan shows how Jane creates her female 'self' though the narrative process and finally, in *the Brontë Myth* Lucasta Miller explores the very development of the reputation of Charlotte Brontë and her books, proving that she was often misused for ideological purposes, oscillating between the extremes -- once as an idols of domesticity and later as a feminist forerunner.

Mary Poovey's study "The Anathematized Race: the Governess and *Jane Eyre*" from her book *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (1988) is an example of New Historicism, a critical stream influential throughout the 1980s and 1990s that arose as a reaction to New Criticism. Unlike the proponents of New Criticism, New Historicists believe that a literary work should be viewed as a product of the time, place, and circumstances of its composition, and thus, in their analysis, they tend to examine historical as well as cultural contexts of a literary work. In the essay

"The Anathematized Race: the Governess and *Jane Eyre*", Poovey discusses Jane Eyre as a novel which reflects a great and much publicized problem of Britain in the 1830s and 1840s, the so- called "governesses' plight"[170].

Poovey explores the problematic position of the governess in respect to class and gender, and explains that the problem of the governess was regarded mainly as an issue of domestic relations, as she was seen "as barrier against the erosion of middle-class assumptions and values"[171] in the hungry 1840s. Even though according to the census of 1851 there were only 25,000 governesses compared to 750,000 female domestic servants; "the plight of governesses" received far greater attention from the public.[172] The major reason was that governesses tended to come from the middle-class, and so middle-class members were naturally more concerned about the fates of women of the same rank than those belonging to the working-class. Moreover, middle-class members sympathizes with the governess also because she symbolized "the toll capitalist market relations could exact from society's less fortunate members"[173], for like men, she depended on the pay of her employer but at the same moment, her duties were very close to those of a middle-class mother.

Despite the fact that the governess was generally regarded as a middle-class member, her social position was rather complicated and even ambiguous. She was regarded somewhere in between a servant and a family member and her actual standing differed form family to family. Usually, governesses came from poorer middle class families but with the worsening economic situation in the 1830s also girls from working-class families started to enter this profession. This opened up a whole new set of problems. Governesses, who were responsible for education of young middle-class girls and thus future wives, were seen as protectors of middle-class values and morality. The Victorians believed that these values could be ensures only by governesses "with character"[174], that means by those coming from the middle-class, and thus the influx of working-class governesses was seen

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[170] Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1988) 127.
[171] Poovey 127.
[172] Poovey 127.
[173] Poovey 126.
[174] Poovey 129.

as the degradation of the very institution of governess as well as of middle-class values in general.

Sexually, the position of the governess was problematic. On one hand, she was in charge of girls whose major mission was to get married and to become mothers; yet, ironically, she herself was required to be seen as "sexually neutral".[175] Of course, there was much doubt about to what extent governesses were capable of such sexless behavior. It was generally believed that they were not fully in control of their own sexuality and were often linked to fallen women. Moreover, repression, not only sexual but also emotional, as well as the fear of the future, including the prospects of ending up in a poor house in old age, led many governesses to insanity. In fact, the largest number of women placed in lunatic asylums came from the ranks of governesses and so besides prostitutes, who commonly resorted to madness, also governesses came to be linked to lunatics.

Poovey claims that the character of Jane Eyre well reflects all these uncertainties. To illustrate this, she first analyzes the review of *Jane Eyre* by Mrs. Rigby, later called Lady Eastlake, which has been discussed already in chapter two. In the review Rigby, an orthodox Victorian, brings up several of the problematic issues connected with the position of governess. First, as Poovey notes, Rigby sees the social aspect addresses in the novel, for in one passage Jane expresses discontent with her own lot and also sympathizes with the poor working-class. Yet, Rigby is much more concerned with Jane's sexuality, using an expression "language and manners".[176] Rigby suggests that there is a great discrepancy between how Jane herself describes her behavior of a humble governess and how she really behaves. When Rochester tells her about his love affairs, she seems not shocked at all, calmly listening to his narrative which suggests that her mind is not as pure and innocent, as she claims it to be. Moreover, Rigby also interprets "restlessness" that Jane feels in Thornfield as her sexual desire.[177] Pointing out these aberrations from the proper conduct of a governess, Mrs. Rigby tries to prove that Jane is different from other women. Yet, ironically, she proves the very opposite because when Jane is asked to become Rochester's lover, she deserts him, and so, as Poovey remarks, she acts as "the guardian of sexual and class order rather than its weakest point."[178]

[175] Poovey 130.
[176] Poovey 135.
[177] Poovey 135.
[178] Poovey 136.

The fact that Jane, even though she is a governess, is like other women was a rather subversive idea in Victorian England. Socially, Jane's class is rather ambiguous. She has rich relations; nevertheless, she is a poor orphan unable to support herself otherwise than by working as a governess. Poovey suggests that Brontë rather downplays Jane's situation as a governess, for in Thornfield the terms of her servitude seem almost "luxurious"[179] and soon the narrative of Jane's economic necessity is substituted by that of love. Jane is raised above her class, Rochester falls in love with her for her personality and intelligence, and their spiritual kinship is emphasized. Before their marriage, the difference of their class status is first emphasized by governess anecdotes narrated by Blanche Ingram and later openly articulated by Mrs. Fairfax but besides these small incidents, there is nothing to prevent their union.

Interestingly, Jane's dreams of children foreshadow the disruption of her happiness with Rochester. Poovey claims that dreaming about children "is metonymically linked to a rage that remains at the level of character but materializes at the level of plot."[180] According to the social norms, Jane cannot voice her anger and rage at "dependence"[181] and "humiliation"[182] thus, her revenge is enacted on the basis of plot and consequently, Poovey calls Jane Eyre "a hysterical text".[183] After her first dreaming about a child, her despotic kin John and Mrs. Reed die and Poovey interprets their deaths as "symbolic murders".[184]

After Jane's first child dream, Rochester too commits unjust actions towards Jane, as he misuses his status of master, making Jane feel her dependence by denying to pay her money and then giving her less than originally agreed on. Similarly, after the second child dream vision, Jane's wedding veil is torn apart by Bertha and her marriage with Rochester is prevented. These occurrences on the level of plot are displaced representations of Jane's revenge towards Rochester, her spiritual kin, on whom she would be economically and socially dependent in her future. However, as Poovey points out, Jane is dependent not merely as a governess but as any middle-class woman at her time would be and so she is like them. Her likeness is also illustrated when Jane runs from Thornfield and suddenly, she

[179] Poovey 137.
[180] Poovey 141.
[181] Poovey 139.
[182] Poovey 139.
[183] Poovey 141.
[184] Poovey 139.

is not as seen sexually neutral, but rather she appears to be suspicious and is textually linked to both madwoman and fallen woman.

Analyzing the conclusion of *Jane Eyre*, Poovey remarks that here Brontë once again dismisses Jane's problematic position of a governess. By inheriting her uncle's fortune, Jane becomes socially acceptable for Rochester and they are married. Yet, Poovey also realizes that a single woman could win "autonomy and power" only by such a happy "coincidence".[185] The last issue that Poovey takes up is Brontë's supposition that women are like men. The author cites from the famous passage in *Jane Eyre* as follows:

> 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 restrain, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and 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. (Brontë, 95)

She interprets the quoted passage as Brontë's protest against the artificial dependence in which Victorian women were kept and writes, "The implications of this statement may not be drawn out consistently in this novel, but merely to assert that… women's dependence was customary, not natural, that their sphere were kept separate only by artificial means, and that women, like men, could grown through work outside the home."[186] Moreover, Poovey sees also Jane's decision to marry Rochester and not St John as a proof of Jane's likeness to men. After all, she chose "desire", an emotion attributed to men, instead of female "self-sacrifice". [187]

The next work, "Girl Talk: 'Jane Eyre' and the Romance of Narration" (1996) by Carla Kaplan, explores a matter altogether neglected by previous feminist critics — the very narrative process of the novel — and shows how in this process Jane's self is constituted. Kaplan focuses on the communicative function of *Jane Eyre* and argues that the novel is Jane's attempt to tell her own story and to find her "ideal listener"[188] who will

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[185] Poovey 142.
[186] Poovey 147.
[187] Poovey 147.
[188] Carla Kaplan, "Girl Talk: 'Jane Eyre' and the Romance of Women's Narration", *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, Vol. 30, No. 1. (Autumn, 1996), pp. 7, JSTOR, 25 November 2007 <www.jstor.com>

fulfill her "narrative desire for intimacy and recognition"[189]. As Kaplan believes, due to this specific communicative function, Brontë's work has earned a special place in the feminist canon and continues to be read by modern women.

She claims that Jane is not "a heroine of fulfillment"[190], as Elaine Showalter believes, for her ambition to tell her story is never truly fulfilled and she also struggles to find her ideal listener. As a girl, Jane retells her story thrice: to Mr. Lloyd, to Helen and to Miss Temple; but none of these attempts produces a desired effect of fulfillment. Also in Thornfield Jane craves for communication and her desire is answered first by Bertha's murmurs and later by the appearance of Rochester. He involves Jane in numerous conversations and the novel, built on the model of romance, thus becomes "the chronicle of seductive discourse".[191] Feminist criticism generally believes that Rochester fulfills Jane's narrative desire; Kaplan questions this supposition, observing that in Thornfield it is Rochester who narrates his story while Jane listens to it. Furthermore, Kaplan suggests that Jane's ideal listener must be a woman and that the novel functions as a "girl talk",

> *Jane Eyre*, like all good girl talk, covers a wide range of issues: psychological self-division, ambivalence about passion and sexuality, anger over suppression of female desires and ambition, the difficulties of self-assertion. And, like all good girl talk, *Jane Eyre* explores a range of potentially appealing - if not necessarily consistent- solutions and sources of satisfaction: reconstituted family, communal identity, changes in class and financial status, martyrdom, sexual liberation, adventure, social service, career (educational or artistic, of course) chastity, marriage, domesticity, and motherhood. [192]

Kaplan supports her claim that only a woman can constitute Jane's perfect interlocutor by showing that in the novel Jane finds perfect communicational concord only with Mary and Diana Rivers.

As every good romance, Jane's narrative is also concluded in traditional terms - by marriage. In the final chapter of the novel, Jane's emphasizes her and Rochester's harmonious communication in marriage and Kaplan suggests that a reversal of narrative roles has occurred in their relationship. That is because Rochester is crippled and blind;

[189] Kaplan 6.
[190] Kaplan 6.
[191] Kaplan 13.
[192] Kaplan 22.

Kaplan calls these "feminizing wounds" and writes that "this feminization of Rochester challenges (or compensates for) the differences of power and authority inscribed into gender inequality".[193] She goes even further and suggests that Rochester is not only feminized but becomes something as "a good sister" who can listen to Jane. Nevertheless, during his final reunion with Jane he refuses to listen to her story and so symbolically, through this failure Brontë conveys her belief that "patriarchal, Victorian, British culture cannot provide complete fulfillment or satisfaction for a woman such as Jane."[194]

Kaplan concludes the essay by a proposal that Jane's 'ideal listener' might be in fact her reader. Brontë uses only once explicit gender reference to her reader, identifying him as male, but even despite this sign, it is clear that the novel is written for women. After all, *Jane Eyre* is the woman's narrative calling for "intimacy, sisterhood,[and] recognition" which argues for "a change in [women's] gender and class position"[195] and so, as Kaplan recognizes, it contains a clear feminist subject.

The last work to be discussed is Lucasta Miller's *The Brontë Myth* (2001) which has been already mentioned in chapter two as an analysis of Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*. The book is an attempt to demythologize the popular image of the Brontës, the phenomenon that Miller terms 'the Brontë myth', and to set their life and works into their proper place. In the preface to the book, Miller explains that 'the Brontë Myth' has been created partly by the two most famous novels of the sisters, *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, which transgressed the boundaries of literature and found their way into the popular culture. However, more than this, Miller argues that 'the Brontë Myth' was born out of the mythical character that Charlotte, Emily and gradually all members of their family became as a consequence of Gaskell's biography.

In the book, the author first gives a brief overview of the life of the whole Brontë family and afterwards shows how Gaskell twisted it and adjusted to suit her own view. Miller also focuses on Charlotte's problematic relation with her literary female friends, Elisabeth Gaskell and Harriet Martineau, and recounts the differences in their opinions about what should be the role and agenda of a female author at their time. In the later part of the book, the author presents how as a consequence of Gaskell's biography, Charlotte

[193] Kaplan 18.
[194] Kaplan 20.
[195] Kaplan 27.

came to be regarded as an angel-in-the-house figure and how this image was partially disrupted in 1913 when her passionate letters to Constantin Heger, her married professor in Brussels, were discovered.[196]

The part of the book directly relevant to my study is chapter six called *Fiction and Feminism*. Here Miller explores how Charlotte Brontë's popular image, as produced by biographies, plays, novels and films, changed throughout the 20th century but also how the critical reception of her works evolved. This unusual approach allows Miller to show that the literary criticism is not an isolated discipline, as it is often though to be, but that there exists a direct link between literary history and the popular image of a particular writer.

As Miller notes, for the major part of the 20th century, the attitude of literary critics towards Charlotte Brontë's fiction was mild if not quite unfavorable. In the beginning of the century this was caused mostly by Gaskell's biography. However, one biography could hardly have such a lasting and resonant influence upon the reputation of the work of art. The truth is that it was not Gaskell's biography alone but many of semi-fictional biographies, the so-called "purple heather school"[197], that followed its example that truly changed Charlotte Brontë's perception. Miller writes that this type of biographies with little historical precision, often travestying the truth, was common well into the 1950s.[198] However, the Brontës were interpreted not only through biographies; they were also the popular heroines in play adaptations and various novels based, often only loosely, on their story.

In the 1940s the Brontës became attractive even to the Hollywood production. Both *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* were filmed; yet, the filmmakers preserved almost nothing of their original subversive qualities and instead, turned them into "the greatest love stories ever told".[199] For example, the 1944 film version of *Jane Eyre*, starring Joan Fontaine and Orson Welles, altogether lacks the spirit of the novel, as Jane is fitted into a meek type, largely influenced by "Charlotte's ladylike post-Gaskell persona", and shows no inner fire so typical for the character.[200] Besides the adaptations of their novels, Hollywood produced also two films based on the Brontës themselves. Unfortunately, the films were

[196] Miller 120.
[197] Miller 168.
[198] Miller 168.
[199] Miller 169.
[200] Miller 169.

far from the truth, usually paying little attention to the sisters' literary talents, and one of them even showed Charlotte as a flirt.

As Miller further notes, another thing that contributed negatively to the image of *Jane Eyre* at around this time was its association with mass market romances which became popular in the 1940s and 1950s,

> Jane Eyre has been often acknowledged as a forbearer of Mills and Boon[+] in terms of basic plotline: inexperienced girl meets difficult, richer older man—usually with smoldering, dark looks and a secret sorrow—and eventually wins his love after a series of trials and misunderstanding which may include the removal of a rival lover. Yet, if the simplified narrative structure of the novel- which also relates at a deeper lever to fairy tale – found its way into these fictions, the heroine's dynamism and self-validation fell by the wayside.
>
> A century after Jane's first appearance there was nothing subversive about the swooning Mills and Boons heroines who were her disempowered descendants. Indeed, it could have been argued that this type of mass-market romantic fiction, typically written by women for women, functioned as a sort of emotional narcotic to dull the boredom of frustrated housewives imprisoned in what Betty Friedan famously called "the feminine mystique". [201]

After the obvious decline in reputation of the novel, caused by its link to romance fiction, *Jane Eyre* was once again lifted to fame in the 1970s when it was hailed by feminist critics as a masterpiece of female writing, well capturing tensions that women had to face in the 19th century England. Yet, as Miller proclaims, "the rediscovery" of the book, particularly of its gender agenda, "would eventually be made possible not by modern feminists alone (which could sometimes lead to anachronistic misinterpretation) but by the gradual development of a more scholarly, historicized approach".[202] This new approach to Brontë's biography started in the 1960s and continues into the present. Miller discusses all influential biographies of Charlotte Brontë up to the 1990s and points out that the aim of this new generation of biographers was not only to provide historical and factual accuracy but they also tried to understand Charlotte's creative genius and to capture the cultural

[+] Mills and Boon is a British publishing company, specializing on romance novels, which later merged with the Harlequin Enterprise. The term "Mills and Boon" is often used to refer to the very genre of romance novels.

[201] Miller 170.

[202] Miller 168.

conflicts and inner struggles she had to face while becoming a writer. Miller sees this as crucial in regards to literary criticism because, as she notes, "reading Charlotte's story as a parable of victimhood made it more difficult to acknowledge her strength and determination and the conscious artistry she brought to her writing, which instead became a spontaneous cry of pain."[203]

Miller also analyzes the criticism of *Jane Eyre* by feminist critics in the 1970s. She sees *The Madwoman in the Attic* as the leading work of this period, noting that its interpretation of Bertha as Jane's alter ego was inspired by Jean Rhys's rewriting of the novel in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Miller suggest a widespread influence of this interpretation by Gilbert and Gubar, and as an example she uses the 1997 stage adaptation of *Jane Eyre* by Shared Experience theater company in which two actresses were used to play the character of Jane - one represented Jane's socially approved self and the other, dressed in red and wearing dreadlocks, her rebellious alter-ego.[204]

However, Miller makes it clear that not even feminist critics have achieved fully accurate and unbiased interpretations of the novel. She believes that they "often approached Charlotte's text through the veil of their own ideology" and with the emergence of more historically aware scholars, it became obvious that "the feminists of the 1970s tended to overstate Charlotte's sympathy for the madwoman and underrate the importance of reason as well as passion in the author's moral worldview."[205] This ideological accusation, she claims, is true also of postcolonial critics who championed Bertha as a "true heroine of the novel" and judged the book on moral grounds, condemning it for "the implicit racism of its Creole subplot".[206] At the end, Miller suggests that the criticism of the novel evolves in a positive direction, as under the influence of "post-feminist consciousness"[207], critics have ceased to see Charlotte merely as a victim of patriarchal society and a figure paralyzed by fatal tragedies and neuroses.

Overall, Miller's work nicely concludes my discussion of the development of feminist criticism of *Jane Eyre*. Not only does she attempt for a similar summation of the novel's criticism as I do in this thesis, but she also presents the problem from a new, fresh

[203] Miller 175.
[204] Miller 178.
[205] Miller 178.
[206] Miller 179.
[207] Miller 179.

perspective, as she shows how closely the reputation of Charlotte Brontë and her novels is linked to her changing portrait as an author created mainly through biographies. Moreover, her approach well suggests the tendencies of the new millennium, for she regards *Jane Eyre* not only as a written novel but as a work of art existing on various levels: as a play and also a film, and so understands that all these representations make up the identity of the popular work of art in the modern culture.

6 Conclusion

In 1847, when Charlotte Brontë was writing *Jane Eyre* in Haworth parsonage and secretly dreaming of her literary career, not even in her wildest dreams could she have imagined what a life and what a variety of meanings female critics would once give to her first novel, and that one day she would be even studied as one of the female writers who helped to spark the women's literary rebellion and her *Jane Eyre* would be celebrated as a feminist classic. After all, this is what the fascinating story of this unusual romance has turned out to be.

As my thesis has revealed, ever since its publication *Jane Eyre* has always drawn the attention of female critics. The first woman whose opinion about the novel was publicly heard was the Victorian reviewer Elisabeth Rigby. Interestingly, unlike female critics who came after her, she was not delighted by the appearance of this novel but on the contrary, she felt fully alarmed by it. She condemned it on both moral and religious grounds, disliking Jane's rebellion against the established order, as well as her sympathy towards the poor and the oppressed. Her opinion was nothing unusual concerning the fact that she was both a member of the upper class and a conservative. Yet, what was rather astounding was that as a woman allowed to write, she questioned the propriety of female writing and even proclaimed that only a woman of perverse qualities could write as immoral a book as *Jane Eyre* in her opinion was. Moreover, she also disputed whether it was proper for women to read, for *Jane Eyre* was popularly read and women constituted a considerable part of its readership.

Virginia Woolf and Q.D. Leavis, the modernist female critics who came after Rigby, both valued *Jane Eyre*, as they understood that in the novel Brontë battled against the patriarchal society and the limitations it imposed on women. They recognized Charlotte's unique style of prose, which they linked to poetry. In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf firmly established Charlotte's *Jane Eyre* as an important novel in the female literary tradition while Q.D. Leavis compared Brontë to greatest female novelists of 19th century Britain - to Jane Austen and George Eliot. Moreover, in her extensive introduction to the novel, Leavis revealed Brontë's profound desire for wider women rights and for an egalitarian relationship between man and woman. She also detected the most crucial psychological moments in the novel, most of which were further scrutinized by modern feminist critics. However, unlike

them, Leavis's criticism was grounded more on the common sense than on the complex literary theories accounting for the role of the subconscious; she saw Jane as a unified subject and attributed most of her key decisions to her rationality.

The modern feminist critics who appeared in the 1970s rediscovered *Jane Eyre* as the classical text of female writing and gave it another, significant attribute – that of the feminist classic. Drawing on the contemporary psychoanalytical theories, they tried to show that Brontë conveyed the feminist message of the novel not through the heroine's rationality but mostly through the subconscious levels of the heroine's psyche, such as dreams and visions, or even metaphorically through her doubles and other symbolic means.

The first critic who initiated this process was Adrienne Rich who in her essay "*Jane Eyre*: The Temptations of a Motherless Woman", challenged the notion that the novel is a "Bildungsroman in a traditional sense" but saw Jane made up of various disintegrated selves and defined Bertha as Jane's rebellious alter ego. Ellen Moers studied Jane's subjectivity mostly through the textual analysis while Elaine Showalter looked more on the social construction of Jane's subjectivity. She saw both Bertha and Helen Burns as two symbolic parts of Jane's psyche. This psychoanalytical theory was fully developed by Gilbert and Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, in which they deconstructed images of monster and angel-in-the-house and proclaimed Bertha as Jane's alter-ego. However, as is apparent in several parts of their critique, Gilbert and Gubar tried to prove their theory of the unconscious in such a committed way as to consciously omit some crucial moments of the novel in which Jane's rationality fully surfaces.

Despite their differences, all these modern feminist critics were interested in the discussion of gender and of various gender-related topics, and so the themes that dominate their studies are: the critique of patriarchal society; the social constructions; the female traditions; the portraits of female characters; as well as the issues of sexuality, rage and rebellion, which echo the most crucial themes of the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Furthermore, in comparison to Leavis, these critics also tend to view Rochester from a rather critical perspective, stressing his misuse of patriarchal powers as well as his governing tendencies. Importantly, modern feminist critics also significantly altered the ending of the novel, which before them had been generally regarded as a positive one. They

see Rochester's injury and loss of sight as the signs of symbolic revenge and thus interpret Jane's happy ending as a feminist victory.

While in the 1970s *Jane Eyre* was recognized by modern feminist critics as the consciousness-rising classic of the feminist canon, in the 1980s the standing of the novel was challenged by feminist postcolonial critics. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak took the lead in this protest, as she rejected the feminist nom established in the novel, claiming that it was achieved only for Jane, the white western woman, at the expense of her native counterpart, Bertha. Susan Meyer pointed out the problematic moments of Spivak's critique and scrutinized the issues of race and imperialism from a different perspective, focusing on textual analysis of the novel.

The introduction of the issues of race and imperialism into the feminist discourse was soon followed by the emergence of other important topics but also by the reevaluation of the established feminist stands. These new developments in the feminist literary criticism came to be called post-feminist. The New Historicist study of *Jane Eyre* by Mary Poovey is an example of this new approach; the work exhibits also traces of the influence of post-structuralist theories, importantly those of Lacan. Also Carla Kaplan seems to move in this direction, as she focuses on the narrative process in the novel and how Jane forms her self through this process. Finally, Lucasta Miller views feminism in *Jane Eyre* from a wholly new perspective, claiming that the critical evaluation of this novel at the various periods had been always closely connected to the popular image of Charlotte Brontë. She also believes that only move towards a more historically aware approach can give us a better understanding of the novel.

Overall, exploring the coming and going of different critical vogues has shown that *Jane Eyre* harbors much potential for soliciting different critical views. And, given the very recent turns and changes, it seems safe to assume that such multi-faceted, richly ambiguous literature like Brontë's text will continue to provide food for stimulating feminist thought in the third millennium.

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Summary

Vývoj feministickej kritiky románu Charlotte Brontëovej *Jana Eyrová*

Román Charlotte Brontëovej *Jana Eyrová* v anglo-americkej literárnej kultúre zaujíma výsostné postavenie ako jeden z klasických textov ženskej literárnej tradície. Neutíchajúci záujem kritikov pútal už krátko od svojho vydania v roku 1847, no skutočné literárne uznanie získal až v sedemdesiatych rokoch minulého storočia so vznikom modernej feministickej kritiky, ktorá dielo znovu objavila a odhalila jeho feministickú stránku, dovtedy zanedbávanú tradičnou literárnou kritikou, ktorej dominovali predovšetkým muži. Na radikálne prvky diela poukazovali však už predchádzajúce generácie kritikov. Viktoriánska spoločnosť, vrátane prísnej recenzentky Elizabeth Rigbyovej, vnímala dielo ako odraz vážneho problému vtedajšej doby, tzv. "ženskej otázky", zatiaľ čo ženské kritičky začiatku dvadsiateho storočia, Virginia Woolfová a Queenie D. Leavisová, videli v diele ozveny feminizmu, ideovej línie, ktorá vznikla na prelome storočí na podporu boja za ženské práva.

Predkladaná bakalárska práca je pokusom zmapovať vskutku nevšedný literárny príbeh – históriu vývoja feministickej kritiky románu Charlotte Brontëovej *Jana Eyrová*. Práca pozostáva z celkovo šiestich kapitol. Prvá, úvodná kapitola obsahuje definíciu tézy, popis zvolenej metódy, ako i stručný obsah nasledujúcich štyroch kapitol. Kapitoly dva až päť postupne opisujú štyri literárno-kritické obdobia, v ktorých sú prezentované štúdie románu od významných ženských kritičiek patriacich do jednotlivých období. Týmto spôsobom sa pokúšam ukázať, ako sa vyvíjala kritická recepcia románu, ako jednotlivé kritičky vnímali feministickú agendu románu a ako sa ju snažili interpretovať pod rúškom svojich vlastných ideológií. Vzhľadom na tému práce som sa rozhodla sústrediť výlučne na ženskú literárnu kritiku diela, s výnimkou Viktoriánskeho obdobia, v ktorom tento postup nebol možný. Kritiky a literárne štúdie analyzované v tejto práci boli vybrané z veľkého množstva literárnych textov venovaných problematike feminizmu v *Jane Eyrovej* a verím, že tieto texty najlepšie vystihujú tendencie vývoja feministickej kritiky románu. Závery vyplývajúce z tejto práce sú prezentované v poslednej, šiestej kapitole.

Druhá kapitola sa zaoberá kritikou *Jany Eyrovej* vo Viktoriánskom období a významom Charlottinej prvej biografie nazvanej *Život Charlotte Brontëovej* (1857), ktorú napísala jej priateľka a obľúbená autorka románov, Elizabeth Gaskellová. *Jana Eyrová* bola Brontëovej druhým románovým pokusom, ale prvým ktorý bol vydaný knižne, nie však pod

Brontëovej skutočným menom, ale pod genderovo neutrálnym pseudonymom Currer Bell. Už krátko po publikovaní si román získala veľkú obľubu u čitateľov; o jeho kvalitách sa v liste Charlottinmu vydavateľovi pochvalne zmienil dokonca aj William Thackeray, ktorý bol považovaný za najlepšieho románopisca tej doby. V čase prvých dvoch edícií si román vyslúžil všeobecne pozitívne kritiky. V recenzii pre magazín *Fraser's* známy kritik G.H. Lewes vyzdvihol realistický charakter diela, domnievajúc sa, že autor hojne čerpal zo svojich vlastných skúseností. Takisto poukázal na nesmiernu emocionálnu silu románu a dokonca sa vyslovil, že spôsob, akým kniha oslovuje čitateľa, pripomína „dušu prihovárajúcu sa duši".

Veľký vplyv na neskoršie kritiky Charlottinho románu malo publikovanie románov jej sestier , *Búrlivých výšin* od Emily a *Tajomnej pani Grahamovej* od Anne, ktoré sa objavili v tom istom období ako druhá edícia *Jany Eyrovej.* Oba romány nastoľovali neprípustné témy ako násilie, vášeň a práva žien, čím si vyslúžili od vtedajšej kritiky prívlastky ako hrubé a nemorálne. Podobný osud čakal aj *Janu Eyrovú*. Román sa zrazu dostal pod drobnohľad moralistov a kritici si začali všímať jeho kontroverzné momenty. Najhoršiu kritiku si vyslúžil od Elizabeth Rigbyovej, neskoršie Lady Eastlakovej, ktorá v *Quarterly Review* nazvala román „nekresťanskou kompozíciou" a vnímala Janinu nezlomnú vôľu a jej rovnostárske zmýšľanie ako „pýchu", ktorá hlboko odporovala vtedajšiemu morálnemu a kresťanskému svetonázoru. Rigbiová takisto verejne polemizovala o skutočnej identite autora. Verila, že autorom je muž, no nevylučovala možnosť, že román môže pochádzať aj z pera ženy. No podotkla, že iba padlá žena by bola schopná napísať také nemorálne dielo, akým podľa jej názoru *Jana Eyrová* nepochybne bola.

Postupne si tak Charlotta Brontëová a jej romány vyslúžili škandalóznu reputáciu. Tú sa takmer úplne poradilo odstrániť Elizabeth Gaskellovej, ktorá dva roky po Charlottinej tragickej smrti vydala prvý životopis autorky pod názvom *Život Charlotte Brontëovej*. Gaskellová stavala Charlottinu literárnu tvorbu do úzadia a sústreďovala sa predovšetkým na jej súkromný život v ústraní vidieckej fary. Prezentovala ju ako oddanú dcéru, vzornú gazdinku a ženu horko skúšanú rodinnými tragédiami, a tak sa jej podarilo spraviť z kontroverznej autorky modlu viktoriánskych cností. V súvislosti so Charlottinými literárnymi aktivitami Gaskellová popisovala najmä prekážky a ťažkosti, ktorým musela

ženská autorka čeliť v mužmi dominovanom literárnom svete tej doby. Vedome sa však vyhýbala analýze Charlottiných kníh, ktoré sama neveľmi schvaľovala. Ako dokazujú niekoľké úryvky z biografie, Gaskellová sa taktiež pokúšala umelo ovplyvniť Brontëovej imidž autorky, nakoľko sa ju snažila vtesať do roly skromnej a neistej ženskej spisovateľky, čo nie vždy bola pravda.

Gaskellovej vplyv na verejnú mienku ako i na ďalšie generácie čitateľov bol obrovský, až do takej miery, že Brontëová sa stala nesmierne obľúbenou populárnou hrdinkou a jej romány boli často vnímané iba ako romantické príbehy. Brontëová sa neraz vyskytovala aj ako postava vo vtedajších kolektívnych biografiách žien, ktoré obhajovali viktoriánsku ideológiu o postavení žien ako matiek a manželiek v domácnosti, bohužiaľ, skutočnosť, že písala knihy bola zvyčajne zamlčaná. V tomto období sa objavili aj prvé Viktoriánske feministky, no vďaka Gaskellovej nebola pre ne Charlotta radikálnym vzorom hodným nasledovania. Jediná Millicent Fawcett predstavovala Brontëovú ako „feministickú priekopníčku“ , no tento názor bol poplatný skôr jej vlastnej feministickej ideológií ako založený na pravde.

Tretia kapitola sa zaoberá postavením *Jany Eyrovej* v období modernizmu v prvej polovici dvadsiateho storočia a tým, ako dielo vnímali dve významné anglické kritičky tohto obdobia, Virginia Woolfová a Queenie D. Leavisová. Spomedzi diel sestier Brontëových modernistická kritika na rozdiel od viktoriáncov vyzdvihovala mýtické kvality Emiliných *Búrlivých výšin* zatiaľ čo *Janu Eyrovú* videla iba ako príklad vtedy podceňovaného viktoriánskeho sociálneho realizmu. Novému nelichotivému postaveniu románu nepomohol ani fakt, že vďaka svojej romantickej zápletke bol často spájaný s novo vznikajúcim žánrom harlekýnu alebo tzt. románmi červenej knižnice.

Woolfová bola známou spisovateľkou, no takisto pôsobila ako kritička. *Janu Eyrovú* rozoberala v dvoch svojich kritických dielach, najprv v knihe esejí publikovanej pod názvom *Prostý čitateľ* (1925) a neskôr v štúdií o ženskej literárnej tvorbe *Vlastná izbička* (1929). V prvom spomínanom diele Woolfová analyzovala román v rámci eseje *„Jana Eyrová* a *Búrlivé výšiny“*. Ako prezrádza názov, Woolfová porovnávala dva najznámejšie romány slávnych sestier a ako modernistka preferovala Emilino dielo. Charlotte vyčítala predovšetkým extrémny individualizmus, ktorým oplýva Janin charakter, ako i to, že čitateľovi vnucuje svoj vlastný autoritatívny pohľad a len málo ponecháva na jeho vlastnej

predstavivosti. Vo *Vlastnej izbičke* bola Woolfová o niečo zhovievavejšia. *Janu Eyrovú* vyzdvihla ako jeden z významných románov ženskej tradície. Takisto ako prvá otvorene poukázala na feministický potenciál diela, nakoľko v plnej dĺžke citovala pasáž románu, kde Jana ako guvernantka v Thornfiede hovorí o svojej túžbe vidieť šíry svet a búri sa voči tradíciám, ktoré upierali ženám právo na širšie vzdelanie a pôsobnosť ako tie, ktoré im boli dovolené ako manželkám, matkám a gazdinkám v domácnosti. Moderná feministická kritička Adrienne Richová v sedemdesiatych rokoch dvadsiateho storočia nazvala túto pasáž „Brontëovej feministickým manifestom". Woolfová ju však vnímala skôr ako prejav autorkiných vlastných krívd a nespokojnosti, a to i napriek tomu, že vo *Vlastnej izbičke* si všimla, že popri Brontëovej i ďalšie ženské autorky často rozoberali rovnaké témy a búrili sa voči zaužívaným konvenciám v oblasti ženských práv.

Queenie D. Leavisová získala doktorát na Cambridskej univerzite a dlhé roky pôsobila ako kritička v časopise *Scrutiny,* ktorý založil jej manžel, uznávaný kritik a profesor na Cambridgi, F.R. Leavis. Leavisoci a ich prívrženci z radov Cambridgských intelektuálov boli často vnímaní ako tradičnejšie orientovaný protipól ku modernistickej Bloomsburskej skupine, ktorej členkou bola aj Woolfová. Leavisovej kritika *Jany Eyrovej* vyšla ako úvod k edícií románu publikovanej v roku 1966 vydavateľstvom Pinguin books. Leavisová komplexne rozobrala všetky dôležité aspekty románu a pozoruhodne, mnohé z jej argumentov akoby predznačujú niektoré tézy a okruhy záujmov feministických kritičiek sedemdesiatych rokov. Leavisovú zaujímal psychologický vývoj hrdinky a skvele interpretovala mnohé kľúčové momenty román. V psychológii postavy dokonca videla určité podobnosti medzi štýlom Brontëovej a modernistickým ponímaním D.H. Lawrenca. Kritička ozrejmila i spoločenský kontext románu a definovala napríklad postavy Heleny Burnsovej a slečny Templovej ako prototypy ženského chovania, ktoré Jana odmieta. Leavisová vyzdvihovala vzťah Jany a Rochestra, ktorý podľa jej názoru bol založený na rovnosti partnerov, no ako poukázali neskoršie štúdie moderných feministických kritičiek, tento názor bol zidealizovaný a značne nekritický voči Rochestrovi. I keď Leavisová v celej práci ani raz nepoužila slovo feminizmus či feministický, jej dielo i napriek tomu jednoznačne dokazuje genderovú problematiku románu a ozrejmuje niektoré jeho feministické kvality.

Štvrtá kapitola je rozdelená na dve podkapitoly. Prvá sa zaoberá rozličnými náhľadmi moderných feministických kritičiek na dielo *Jana Eyrová* . Moderná feministická kritika

úzko súvisí zo vznikom Ženského oslobodeneckého hnutia, ktoré vzniklo v USA v šesťdesiatych rokov dvadsiateho storočia a požadovalo úplné zrovnoprávnenie žien. V sedemdesiatych rokoch literárna veda reagovala na tieto zmeny vznikom modernej feministickej kritiky, ktorá objavovala samostatnú ženskú literárnu tradíciu.

Štúdia, ktorá otvára modernú feministickú kritiku Brontëovej románu je esej „*Jane Eyre:* The Temptations of a Motherless Woman" od Adrienne Richovej z roku 1973. Kritička v nej prezentuje novú radikálnu tézu a tvrdí, že román je „nadčasovým feministickým textom, ktorý objavuje fundamentálne dilemy ženskej skúsenosti" a tým všetkým ženám, bez ohľadu na ich vek, či generáciu, poskytuje akúsi emocionálnu stravu a existenčné hodnoty. Autorka tiež vystupuje proti tradičným „dvojitým štandardom" aplikovaným v literárnej kritike a tvrdí, že román *Jana Eyrová* by nemal byť považovaný za menej univerzálny len preto, že zachytáva skúsenosť ženy, ani preto, že jeho autorkou je žena. Snáď najradikálnejšou tézou Richovej je tvrdenie, že postava Rochestrovej šialenej manželky, Bertha Masonová, je alter egom hrdinky Jany Eyrovej. Podobne kontroverzná je aj jej interpretácia záveru románu, ktorý vidí ako Janino feministické víťazstvo, zatiaľ čo jej slepý a zmrzačený manžel utrpel „symbolickú kastráciu".

V druhej polovici sedemdesiatych rokov dvadsiateho storočia sa objavili tri rozsiahle knihy zaoberajúce sa anglo-americkou ženskou literárnou tradíciou*: Literary Women* (1976) od Ellen Moersovej, *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) od Elaine Showalterovej a *The Madoman in the Attic* (1979) ako spoločný projekt Sandry Gilbertovej a Susan Gubárovej. Vo všetkých troch dielach sa autorky snažili odhaliť anglo-americkú ženskú literárnu tradíciu a identifikovať diela, ktoré patria do jej literárneho kánonu. Román *Jana Eyrová* si získal výsostné postavenie v tomto kánone a detailne ho analyzovali kritičky vo všetkých troch dielach. Ellen Moersová sa zaoberala predovšetkým otázkou subjektivity Jany Eyrovej a ako ju Brontëová „utvára" v texte. Elaine Showalterová nazvala Janu „hrdinkou naplnenia". Tvrdila, že Janino viktoriánske psyché je ovládané dvoma polárnymi aspektmi, dušou a telom. Janino vlastné Ja je oslobodené v závere románu, keď autorka zahubí metaforicky aj doslovne Helen Burnsovú aj Berthu Masonovú, teda hrdinky, ktoré symbolizujú aspekty duše a tela. Showalterová celkovo vnímala postavu Berthy Masonovej ako reprezentáciu ženskej sexuality.

Román *Jana Eyrová* si získal kľúčové postavenie v diele *The Madwoman in the Attic*. To signalizuje už i názov knihy (slovenský preklad názvu je „Bláznivá žena v podkroví"), v ktorom autorky evokujú postavu pomätenej Berty Masovovej. Kritičky venujú v knihe *Jane Eyrovej* celú jednu kapitolu, v ktorej predstavujú mnoho zaujímavých téz. Hlavným prínosom ich analýzy je tvrdenie, že Janin hnev a vzbura voči patriarchálnej spoločnosti nie sú demonštrované a uskutočnené prostredníctvom jej vlastných racionálnych vyjadrení a činov, ale metaforicky prostredníctvom snov a kresieb. Hlavným nástrojom jej pomsty voči patriarchálnej spoločnosti je však jej druhé ja, teda Bertha Masonová. Kitičky Gilbertová a Gubárová tak rozvíjajú tézu, ktorú prvá predstavila Adrienne Richová.

Druhá podkapitola štvrtej kapitoly sa zaoberá feministickou postkoloniálnou kritikou *Jany Eyrovej*. Štúdia, ktorá rozpútala tento smer feministickej kritiky, bola esej kritičky Indického pôvodu Gaiatri Chakravorty Spivakovej „Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" (1985). Spivaková vníma román *Jana Eyrová* ako prejav militantného individualizmu západnej bielej ženy. Poukazuje, že Jana získa na konci románu svoju emancipáciu, no tá je možná iba na úkor koloniálnej ženy, Berthy Masonovej, ktorá sa musí zabiť, a tak uvoľniť cestu Jane a umožniť jej šťastie s Rochestrom. Toto radikálne tvrdenie napadla v knihe *Imperialism at Home* (1996) Susan Meyerová. Meyerová poukazuje na nezrovnalosti, s akými Spivaková popisuje Berthu, raz ako čiernu a inokedy ako bielu, a tvrdí, že práve táto rozpornosť jej umožňuje odsudzovať skrytý rasizmus v *Jane Eyrovej*. V svojej vlastnej analýze románu Meyerová ukazuje na množstve textových analýz, ako Brontëová skutočne vykresľuje imperializmu v románe a ako pri tom používa rasové a iné metafory. Na záver Meyerová konštatuje, že Brontëová imperializmus vedome nepodporuje, ale ani nezatracuje.

Piata kapitola sa venuje tzv. post-feministickej kritike románu *Jana Eyrová*. Termín post-feminizmus označuje najnovšie smerovanie ženskej literárnej kritiky. Používa sa predovšetkým na označenie teórií, ktoré určitým spôsobom kritizujú feministické teórie šesťdesiatych a sedem-desiatych rokov minulého storočia. V tejto práci som použila tento termín na označenie najnovších štúdií, ktoré nielen kritickým spôsobom reflektujú skoršie feministické štúdie, ale takisto predstavujú nové témy a problematiky v oblasti feminizmu a literatúry. Prvým dielom je štúdia Mary Pooveyovej "The Anathematized Race: The Governess and *Jane Eyre*" , ktorá pochádza z jej knihy *Uneven Developments* (1996).

Štúdia je ukážkou nového historicizmu, smeru literárnej kritiky, ktorý sa rozvíjal v osemdesiatych a deväťdesiatych rokoch dvadsiateho storočia. Pooveyová v diele objasňuje historický kontext románu a tiež vysvetľuje rôzne dôvody, prečo bola guvernantka vo viktoriánskom období vnímaná ako veľmi problematická postava. V eseji "Girl Talk: *Jane Eyre* and the Romance of Women's Narration" (1996) kritička Carla Kaplanová analyzuje, ako prostredníctvom románu rozprávačka Jana Eyrová utvára svoju ženskú identitu. Kaplanová tiež tvrdí, že kniha je vlastne pokusom Jany vyrozprávať svoj vlastný príbeh, ktorý podáva formou tzv. „sesterského rozhovoru" medzi ňou a jej publikom, ideálne ženami. V poslednej štúdií, knihe *The Bront*ë *Myth*, Lucasta Millerová odhaľuje, ako sa sestry Brontëové a ich romány stali „modernými mýtami". Millerová sa snaží demystifikovať postavu Charlotty, a zároveň ukazuje, ako sa vyvíjala literárna kritika jej kníh, predovšetkým *Jany Eyrovej*. Takisto dokazuje, že kritiku jej najslávnejšieho románu ovplyvnili rôzne externé udalosti ako aj to, ako Charlottu vykresľovali jej rôzni životopisci.

Posledná, šiesta kapitola obsahuje stručný prehľad hlavných tendencií, ktoré sa postupne objavili v štyroch kapitolách popisujúcich štyri literárno-kritické obdobia, a tak jasne ukazuje vývoj feministickej kritiky románu Charlotty Brontëovej *Jana Eyrová.*