

Jane Eyre: A Dehysterization of Women's Bodies

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"I know that you will be irritated when you read this letter. You will say once more that I am hysterical (or neurotic)—that I have black thoughts, etc. So be it, monsieur, I do not seek to justify myself; I submit to every sort of reproach. All I know is, that I cannot, that I will not, resign myself to lose wholly the friendship of my master. I would rather suffer the greatest physical pain than always have my heart lacerated by smarting regrets. If my master withdraws his friendship from me entirely I shall be altogether without hope!" (Bronte's letter to the beloved Monsieur Heger, qtd. in Rigney 19).

In this "hysterical" letter begging for "friendship" from her beloved master Heger, Charlotte Bronte pronounces herself as a female voice of Victorian passion. Under the Victorian Puritanical codes of female bodies, hysteria as an emotional imbalance in medical discourse embodies a vibrant female sexual urge. To hysterize female sexual impulse becomes a powerful discourse to debase—and to humiliate—any female desire. Parallel to Bronte's personal outcry for "friendship," her fictional work *Jane Eyre* offers a full portrayal of sexual struggles or "hysterical" outcry of a passionate Victorian woman.

Not likely to be silenced in sexual repression, Jane Eyre has long been hallowed as a symbol of Victorian female passion in the eyes of many critics. In *Charlotte Bronte and Sexuality*, John

Maynard calls the life experience of Jane Eyre “a sexual *Bildung* or prolonged rite of initiation” (116). According to Maynard, Jane is led from “the desolation and Electra trauma of her youth . . . into an emotionally intense and sexually charged relationship with an experienced and somewhat obsessive older man with all the glamour of worldly prosperity” (117). The narratives, the plot structures and presentations of characters and images all provide an orientation toward sexual values and experiences involved in Jane’s initiation. The author’s main purpose is to explore deeply and thoroughly “the awakening of a girl and young woman into love and sexual life” (Maynard 95).

In *Repression in Victorian Fiction*, John Kucich also discusses *Jane Eyre* as a novel of passion, in which the rebellious and the passionate emerge as powerful subversive forces, warring against the novel’s official surface of acquiescence (37). Desire or passion can be defined as “a kind of double movement—on the one hand, toward a secretive, even embattled self-concentration; on the other, toward the continual disruption of this concentrated self by an internal power greater than selfhood” (Kucich 51). There exists an impersonal power that shatters psychic stability to generate and exercise desire with self. In this case the power to suppress desire coexists with the power to generate it. Sara M. Putzell-Korab in “Passion between Women in the Victorian Novel” urges the reader to understand Bronte’s novel in a view of passion between women. In *Seduction and Betrayals: Women and Literature*, Elizabeth Hardwick also argues that Jane Eyre’s moral superiority is accompanied by “a superiority of passion, a devotion that is highly sexual” (25).

As these critics contend in their studies, sexual passions and desire are dominating the life experience of the heroine in Bronte’s novel. However, is this sexual experience progressing positively and rebelling against the Victorian Puritan culture of

suppression? Barbara Hill Rigney believes that there are symptoms of psychosis, a kind of "collusive madness" in its sexual politics (16). In her argument for a complicated picture of Victorian passion stories, Rigney identifies sexual passions of dominance and submission in the Victorian age: Male power was affirmed through an egoistic, aggressive, even violent sexuality; female sexuality was passive and self-denying. This male/violent vs female/passive sexual pattern certainly becomes a nightmare to haunt the sexual experience in the life of Brontë's heroine Jane Eyre. Thus, Jane's progressive sexual yearnings are struggling within Victorian dominant sexual patterns throughout the whole discourse. The conflicting result is hysteria or madness; passion goes hand in hand with madness. Even Jane recognizes a state of hysteria in her relationship with Rochester: "[I]t is madness in all women to let a secret love kindle within them, which, if unreturned and unknown, must devour the life that feeds it; and if discovered and responded to, must lead *ignis fatauus*-like, into miry wilds, whence there is no extrication" (*JE* 141)¹. Harvick believes that symptoms of hysteria or madness stand for "the hidden wishes of an intolerable life" (30).

The hysterization of female bodies or sexual desires, as Foucault indicates, starts as a medical discourse yet ends as a cultural and moral form to delineate the negative image of women's sexual impulse. By a hysterization of women's bodies, Foucault finds a threefold process involved: First, the feminine body is analyzed as being thoroughly saturated with sexuality; secondly, the body is integrated into organic communication with the social body, the family space, and the life of children. Within this hysterization process, "the mother . . . constituted the most visible form of this hysterization" (104).

Hysterical affliction, in Victorian medical discourse, is a result of "increased reflex excitability of the nerves of the female

generative organs" (Brown 11). Evelyne Ender in *Sexing the Mind: Nineteenth-Century Fiction of Hysteria* quotes George Sand's notion of hysteria by stating that "hysteria is the expression of a suffering bound up with the transgression of the imagination or desire . . . and is a construct of desire and thought around some impossible *jouissance*" (29). Hysteria becomes a conflicting emotional expression between desire and repression, thus reverberating throughout the novel, notably in the figure of Bertha Mason, the madwoman in the attic.

With her focus on female sexuality and its expression, Bronte no doubt seeks to envision a contradictory and conflicting framework within which Victorian female and male sexualities are operating. Throughout the novel, she makes constant play of a shifting dynamic of male-dominated sexual discourse and female-rebellious sexual expression. On one hand, male characters, such as Brocklehurst and Mr. Rochester, have their way of ordering and disciplining female bodies; yet on the other hand, female characters, such as Helen Burns and Jane Eyre, frequently refer themselves to the superiority of power over the male sexual system. Though hysteria is a birthmark attributed to sexually energetic women, Jane Eyre attempts to debunk the myth of the hysterical woman in her struggles to be independent. She controls the story and thus controls the discourse on forming her sexuality. The Victorian patriarchal power to control and regulate female bodies does not "set boundaries for sexuality; it extended the various forms of sexuality, pursuing them according to lines of indefinite penetration" (Foucault 47). The hysterization of female bodies in male-dominated discourse coexists with Jane's efforts to de-hysterize them. It is this de-hysterization process that constitutes Jane's discourse of female sex and sexuality.

Jane Eyre's sexual growth happens within various social organizations which are shaped by social forces illustrated by

Jeffrey Weeks in his *Sexuality*: (1) kinship and family system; (2) economic and social organization; (3) social regulation (4) political interventions; and (5) cultures of resistance (27-29). These social organizations of sexuality include the Reed Household, Lowood School, Mr. Rochester's household, the Rivers family and the Utopian Ferndean. Some of them are within kinship and family systems; some of them, the interaction of social regulation and economic organization; some of them, the nurturing cradle for "cultures of resistance" (Weeks 27-31).

Jane's first moment of passion comes when she is isolated in a hostile kinsman environment, Gatshead Hall, with her aunt Mrs. Reed surrounded by three children, John, Eliza and Georgina. As a child, Jane has already shown "a picture of passion" (*JE* 9) when she is aroused into a fight with John Reed, her cousin: "She's like a mad cat" (*JE* 9). In her repulsive violence, the young Jane appears to Mrs. Reed as "a compound of virulent passions, mean spirit and dangerous duplicity" (Nestor 60).

Yet, Jane first learns about female powerless passion from John Reed, "the sole male in a female community, the members of which accept the role of self-abnegation deemed rational for women by society, and accordingly pamper and indulge their relative" (Rigney 17). At the very beginning, Jane is ready to act like the other females in this patriarchal society: "*Habitually* (my italics) obedient to John, I came up to his chair. . . . I know he would soon strike" (*JE* 8). But Jane is "irrational" and "rebellious" as a child of passion, retaliating against such obvious sexual threats; she fights back: "Wicked and cruel boy! . . . You are like a murderer—you are like a slave-driver—you are like the Roman emperors!" (*JE* 8). Reluctant to be physically and sexually abused like Roman slaves, she bloodies John's nose and is thus punished to be confined as a "mad cat" in the red room, a color associated with passion and a place associated with her uncle.

Jane's female power and passion against the Victorian male power system, however, falls into the moment of hysteria. She is losing control when she begins to experience fear and regression in the sexually hilarious red room as a young adult. Bronte allows Jane to describe the room with a languid fullness of details that renders the passage almost hypnotic as she is entering a state of sub-consciousness:

[I]t was one of the largest and stateliest chambers in the mansion. A bed supported on massive pillars of mahogany, hung with curtains of deep red damask, stood out like a tabernacle in the centre; the two large windows, with their blinds always drawn down, were half shrouded in festoons and falls of similar drapery; the carpet was red. (*JE* 10)

Looking at a great glass, she starts to reflect upon her miserable condition as a "heterogeneous thing" (*JE* 12). She is eager to embrace kindness and love from the late uncle Reed. John Maynard gives us a very illuminating explanation of this red room scene:

By the heavy symbolism of the red room and the bold outlining of her emotional breakdown, Bronte shows us what Jane only partly understands: in her deprived state Jane almost necessarily responds to the possibility of warm relations at the most primitive level, as a threat of too strong emotions in the Electra attraction of father and daughter. The uncle/father figure ought to be an attractive support to her; but she experiences him only as a danger. Strong feelings of anger threaten to be overwhelmed by, or transformed into, too strong feelings of attraction. Jane feels intense emotion (heartbeat and hot head), then a traumatic sense of oppression and suffocation. Jane faints, as strong inner repression succeeds excessively aroused

feeling. (*Charlotte Bronte and Sexuality* 107)

The moment of hysteria, in Maynard's view, is inevitable when the passionate female body expresses an intense emotion, which is supposed to be suffocated and stifled in the male sexual discourse. In this stage, Jane has to succumb to a male ideology of hysteria, a psychological state assigned to a sexually frenzied woman. In the Victorian kinsman and family systems, female sex and sexuality are doomed to be hysterized. Jane's surrender to her passion and sexual emotional leads to her vulnerability to others in these systems. They all misinterpret her exposed feelings to humiliate her in public. More seriously, she is surrendering herself up to the discourse by others: she feels guilty about her acts: "All said I was wicked, and perhaps I might be so" (*JE* 13). Intensive feeling is always subjected to social control and suppression. To stay "sane," the female body has to be under the condition of perfect submission and stillness. The power mechanism in the male discourse is working in this kinsman system to monitor and even to subvert female sexuality.

However, the reflection she also sees in the great looking glass in the red room becomes deeply embedded in her concept of herself and in her conflicting struggle with her sexual identity. It is an image too often reinforced by the society, which she confronts beyond kinsman and family systems: "the strange little figure . . . with a white face and arms specking the gloom . . . like one of the tiny phantoms, half fairy, half imp" (*JE* 11). She is an anomaly (Federico 30). A vital aspect of her sexual development is to grow out of ideas of herself as a repressed hysterical girl, to fight against the power mechanisms in the male-dominated society, or to see rightly a self-image in her superiority as a girl, capable of loving physically and spiritually. The pleasure to evade this power in the patriarchal power, "to flee from it," or even "to travesty it," is also beginning to show in the rebellious

young Jane. Confrontation and mutual reinforcement in young Jane's sexual expression in Gateshead Hall become a Foucaultian game of power and pleasure.²

To manifest Jane as a female figure with sexual potentials, Bronte portrays two other female characters in the Reed household, Eliza and Georgina. When Jane returns to Gateshead at Mrs. Reed's death, she observes these two young women as adult divagations, one of sexual excess and one of sexual suppression. Eliza has become tightly constrained, thin, sallow and severe. Like a nun, she consumes her life in rituals and prayers. Georgina is her contrast, becoming a "full-blown, very plump damsel" (*JE* 200). She looks languishing and sensual, with her thoughts on balls and marriages (Maynard 106). It is through these two female characters that both Jane and readers are able to recognize two extreme developments of female sexuality in the Victorian culture of suppression. We're expecting Jane, a passionate yet intellectual female, to grow out of these two extremities and out of her hysteria, to exert her power in the construction of her sexual identity.

The second phase in Jane's sexual education occurs in a boarding school, Lowood, a social organization where sex and sexuality are defined and regulated in the discourses of medicine, education, psychology, social work, and welfare practice (Weeks 29). Reverend Broklehurst again plays a lone male oppressor in this female society, Lowood Institution. Like a male sadist, he poses as a "black pillar . . . a straight, narrow, sable-clad shape standing erect on the rug: the grim face at the tip was like a carved mask, placed above the shaft by way of capital" (*JE* 26). He enjoys punishing and humiliating passionate little girls in public. This male sexuality, hidden in Broklehurst's religious mask, is associated by Jane with cruelty and sadism.

But this time, Jane is not alone. Sisterhood in Lowood helps her to survive this male sadistic and suppressive power

mechanism. Jane finds herself in an emotional attachment to Helen Burns and the teacher Miss Temple. Helen, her classmate, is a portrait of "transcendent self-negation" (Kucich 70). Her self-sacrifices continually insist that her desire requires no love from outside. She represents "bourgeois values of self-denial, passivity, Christian forbearance, and masochism wrought to a dangerous degree" (Hoeveler 119). When Jane tells Helen, "I know I should think well of myself; but that is not enough; if others don't love me, I would rather die than live, I can't bear to be solitary and hated, Helen," Helen counters, "Hush, Jane! You think too much of the love of human beings" (*JE* 60).

Helen's transcendent self-denial and internalized discipline, however, do not satisfy Jane, though she is strangely attractive to Jane. For Jane, Helen's religious discourse is an evading power mechanism to flee away from the suppressive system enforced by Broklehurst; she talks to Jane:

. . . you are too impulsive, too vehement; the sovereign hand that created your frame, and put life into it, has provided you with other resources than your feeble self, or than creatures feeble as you. Besides this earth, and besides the race of men, there is an invisible world and a kingdom of spirits: that world is round us, for it is everywhere; and those spirits watch us, for they are commissioned to guard us; and if we are dying in pain and shame, if scorn smote us on all sides, and hatred crushed us, angels see our tortures, recognize our innocence . . . , and God waits only the separation of spirit from flesh to crown us with a full reward. (60-61)

But Jane is not Helen Burns. She cannot let her feelings die away as Helen does in her physical death. However, she does learn something of this self-transcendence or evading power mechanism from Helen. When punished unjustly by Mr. Broklehurst, she absorbs some of Helen's euphoric attitude

toward suffering:

What my sensations were, no language can describe: but just as they all rose, stifling my breath and constricting my throat, a girl came up and passed me: in passing, she lifted her eyes. What a strange light inspired them! What an extraordinary sensation that ray sent through me! How the new feeling bore me up! It was as if a martyr, a hero, had passed a slave for victim, and imparted strength in the transit. I mastered the rising hysteria, lifted up my head, and took a firm stand on the stool. (*JE* 58).

Her hysteria, unlike that in Reed's household, is diverted and transformed into a sense of control. She can transcend as a hero or a martyr, in face of the suppressive discourse employed by the sadistic Broklehurst.

Jane's relationship with Helen is a strange one, a puzzling and ambiguous one in the eyes of many critics. Some, like Hoeveler, argue that she is the opposite of Jane's sexual self; others regard her as a protective and spiritual angel to Jane. Though with no sexual identity attached to her, Helen Burns in Jane's sexual discourse poses as an object she is greatly attached to. Jane ever admits, "I never tired of Helen Burns" (*JE* 68). She is attractive to Jane because she represents what Jane is in lack of—a power to transcend the Victorian discourse of sexual hysteria. It is through Helen that she "forgot my sorrows" (*JE* 61).

Though it is arguably possible to treat Jane's sensual tie with Helen as female homosexual, the passions between them are vividly and purposely exposed by Bronte herself.³ She narrates their physical contact: "Resting my hand on Helen's shoulder, I put my arms round her waist, she drew me to her, and we reposed in silence" (*JE* 61). Though masked unconsciously as sisterhood in the Victorian age, this sisterly

passion as demonstrated in the alliance of Helen and Jane is becoming a forceful discourse, empowering the fight against any physical abuse from the Victorian patriarchal power system represented by Broklehurst.

Jane extends this sisterly passion to her teacher Miss Temple, in whom she recognizes an ideal female body (the body as temple). Unlike Helen's self-negation and spiritual escape, Miss Temple's humane strategy to defy male authority and discourse inspires Jane. She admires her complex, self-contained strength and calmness: "Miss Temple had always something of serenity in her air, of state in her mien, of refined propriety in her language, which precluded deviation into the ardent, the excited, the eager: something which chastened the pleasure of those who looked on her and listened to her, by a controlling sense of awe" (*JE* 63). Miss Temple's refined serenity strikes a balance between Jane's sexual hysteria and Helen's repression and evasion. However, at this moment, Jane is too young, too impulsive to follow either asexual Helen or self-disciplined Miss Temple. She chooses her own path, "a journey into accepting her body and its needs. She meets Rochester" (Hoeveler 120).

Turning away from death and barrenness at Lowood after Helen Burns dies and Miss Temple leaves for marriage, Jane arrives at Thornfield in winter, a season waiting for a promise of rejuvenation. A beautiful description of nature in winter on the first evening Jane meets Rochester indeed, according to Maynard, "implies a scene of fruition—'of wild summer rose, of autumn nuts and blackberries'—in the dried place and seed of winter, an obvious but moving cognate with sexual promise in the two future lovers" (*Charlotte Bronte and Sexuality* 115). Natural scenes do move with the progress of the love (or sexual) adventures between Jane and Rochester. When Jane returns from her visit to Gateshead, she finds Rochester in a rich warm

world of summer roses and hay-making.

Jane's awareness of her female body and her passion for an open and free development are thus emerging in this richly thriving country: "I . . . looked out afar over sequestered field and hill, and along dim sky-line—that then I longed for a power of vision which might overpass that limit; which might reach the busy world, towns, regions full of life I had heard of but never seen: that then I desired more of practical experience than I possessed" (*JE* 95). Under the moon, in a state of sexual emotion, she meets the dark, Byronic figure of Rochester (Maynard 115).

In a way, Rochester looms as a tyrannical seducer with full sexual passions in his feverish courtship of Jane at the very beginning. In attempts to provoke Jane's jealousy and femininity, he is fully in control of Jane's body. Maynard illustrated his sexual power by analyzing him in a mythical structure:

. . . most allusions or images applied to him, perhaps that of the horse itself, convey not only masculine power, but conjointly, masculine sexual force. He is the Zeus of the Danae myth, literally showering gold into Jane's lap, figuratively able to rain his sexual abundance upon her. (*Charlotte Bronte and Sexuality* 111)

He admits he lives in restless passion and cannot live without any female companionship: "Yet I could not live alone; so I tried the companionship of mistresses" (*JE* 274). He is seen as a fire-like force that "threatens to blaze into full sexual flare" (Maynard 112).

Jane's longing or passion for love has, since her childhood, been always intense. In an encounter with such a passionate and seducing masculine force, she is profoundly tempted to "surrender her feminine self to the magnetism, the sexuality, the male Chrisma that is Rochester" (Rigney 18). She becomes and

feels most womanly when she is in the first flesh of love for Rochester, experiencing the sensuousness and feminine thriving. She feels a sensation of her physical body: "I was a lady. And now I looked much better than I did when Bessie saw me: I had more color and more flesh; more life, more vivacity; because I had brighter hopes and keener enjoyments" (*JE* 137). This direct reference to her own female physical development is indirectly linked to a growing sense of her sexual passion. However, as the Victorian discourse on women's bodies goes, it involves a danger of "madness" in women's sexual excess.

As Kucich deontes, passionate expression is "a mark of estrangement and distance" (41). Behind Rochester's sensuous flirtation and Jane's sexual awakening looms the maddening intervention of Bertha Mason, the demented and abandoned Mrs. Rochester. Bertha's language of hysteria seems to parallel Jane's growing and blocking fears in her sexual slavery to Rochester. Before the first wedding ceremony, Jane was visited by Bertha with "the roll of the red eyes and the fearful blackened inflation of the lineaments" (*JE* 249). Her dreams of the rain and a weak baby also intensify all the anxiety and restlessness in her journey to a passionate union with her sensuous master:

I was following the windings of unknown road; total obscurity environed me; rain pelted me; I was burdened with the charge of a little child: a very small creature, too young and feeble to walk, and which shivered in my cold arms and wailed piteously in my ear. I thought, sir, that you were on the road a long way before me; and I strained every nerve to overtake you, and made effort on effort to utter your name and entreat you to stop—but my movements were fettered; and my voice still died away inarticulate; while you, I felt, withdrew farther and farther every moment. (*JE* 247-48)

Maynard's statement is quite illuminating about the appearance of the Bertha's apparition and the dreams:

The dream naturally yields to the fuller symbolic presentation of Jane's inner state. We have already seen how Bertha's savage appearance in Jane's mirror, the ripping of the veil, and her glaring face next to Jane's re-enact Jane's terror in the red-room and suggest a revival of the incest prohibition originally unleashed in that experience. Similarly, the wedding veil, ripped and trampled upon by the sex-crazed madwoman is a sufficiently clear emblem of the dangers of the sexual awakening to the emotionally overwrought Jane. (*Charlotte Bronte and Sexuality* 126)

Bronte's restrained undertone to state the danger of the sexual awakening for Jane Eyre reflects part of the Victorian discourse of hysteria in women's bodies. Yielding to the excessive indulgence in male-dominated sexual play, a sex-crazed woman will take a risk of becoming Bertha Mason, a hysterical madwoman in the attic.

However, Jane is not Bertha, not another Mrs. Rochester, who is supposed to be sexually enslaved again by a brutal male sexual force. Throughout her stay in Thornfield, Jane, though with passion and female sexuality awakened, attempts hard to find her path and discourse in justifying her sexuality. In this power game between submission to the male sexual power mechanism and the upholding of her sexual independence, Jane repeatedly reveals her transcending power acquired from Helen Burns and Miss Temple at Lowood. Jane's power to fight against the authoritative and seducing discourse by Rochester lies in self-integrity—this is a belief in her own distancing and in her being inaccessible like Helen Burns. She keeps a distance from Rochester, relating her own discourse on female sexuality;

she tells Rochester,

you may fume and fidget as you please: but this is the best plan to pursue with you, I am certain. I like you more than I can say; but I'll not sink into a bathos of sentiment: and with this needle of repartee I'll keep you from the edge of the gulf too; and, moreover, maintain by its pungent aid that distance between you and myself most conducive to your real mutual advantage. (*JE* 240)

This gulf and distance will help her to maintain her own course when she is confronted by Rochester's furious sexual threat: "I care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself. I will keep the law given by God; sanctioned by man. I will hold to the principles received by me when I was sane, and not mad—as I am now" (*JE* 279). In such a sexual world on the brink of insanity, one means of survival lies in being inaccessible or transcendent; and chastity is a form of transcendence. Even feeling "powerless as stubble exposed to the draught and glow of a furnace [Rochester's sexual violence], Jane still "possessed [her] soul" (*JE* 279). Later, in her own reflection, she celebrates her psychological and spiritual victory in this power game against the masculine sexual dominion: "Meantime, let me ask myself one question—Which is better?—To have surrendered to temptation; listened to passion; made no painful effort—no struggle;—but to have sunk down in the silken snare; fallen asleep on the flowers covering it; . . . Yes; I feel now that I was right when I adhered to principle and law, and scorned and crushed the insane promptings of a frenzied moment" (*JE* 316). Though not fully rejecting the Victorian discourse on the female sexual hysteria, Jane develops the virtues of chastity and self-integrity, a kind of power mechanism, to flee from and to evade the male controlling power.

To flee from the richly sexual yet chaotic world of Thornfield, Jane flings herself into the embrace of mother nature, a world away from any social discourse and a world she can regulate her own codes: "What a golden desert this spreading moor! . . . I might have found fitting nutriment, permanent shelter here" (*JE* 286). Yet she "was a human being, and had a human being's want: I must not linger where there was nothing to supply them" (*JE* 286). She has to return to *any* social organizations to construct her destiny and to re-fabricate her female sexuality.

This time, she enters the suppressed and barren world of the religious John Rivers. Though connected to her as a cousin, John Rivers poses more as a symbol of the Victorian religious discourse on sex and sexuality. Totally deprived of any physical pleasure and vulgar excitement, John commands Jane to reincarnate herself into a total asexual identity. Jane decries, ". . . as his wife—at his side always, and always restrained, and always checked—and forced to keep the fire of my nature continually low, to compel it burn inwardly and never utter a cry, though the imprisoned flame consume vital after vital—*this* would be unendurable" (*JE* 359). With her "fire of nature" already released, Jane cannot be confined to the religious dogmas on female sexuality. To her, John Rivers represents Victorian religious missions imposed upon women and their bodies.

Repression signifies John Rivers's religious discourse on sex and sexuality. However, repression is often read as the sign of passion itself and "as an idealized remote site of energy and fulfillment" (Kucich 49). In *History of Sexuality*, Foucault argues, "we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies" (100). In other words, the religious discourse

represented by John Rivers, on one hand, helps to repress women's sexual urges, regulating women's bodies into asexual identities. On the other hand, it initiates a woman's awareness of her own passion by distorting and appropriating it in its pleasure mechanisms, as in the case of Jane Eyre and John Rivers. It is under John Rivers's repression principle that Jane begins to re-invoke "the fire of her nature." Only through John Rivers's suppressed voice of passion can Jane hear the passionate call from the remote Rochester, her sexual partner. Within this religious organization emerges a "culture of resistance." According to Weeks, accompanying a history of control in sexuality is "a history of opposition and resistance to moral codes. Forms of moral regulation give rise to cultures of resistance" (*Sexuality* 30). A prime example of this is provided by sexual Jane, reinvigorated in the moral and religious discourse of John Rivers.

Bronte's portrayal of John Rivers, however, is not purely a religious one. There exist multiple and even contradictory discourses about his life and image. His name St. John and his reticence often tell readers of his religious abstraction and coldness. But the image applied to him is sexually associated with a masculine or a phallic figure (Maynard 109). Posing like a statue, he is

young—perhaps from twenty-right to thirty—tall, slender; his face riveted the eye; it was like a Greek face, very pure in outline; quite a straight, classic nose; quite an Athenian mouth and chin. It is seldom, indeed, an English face comes so near the antique models as did his. . . . Quiescent as he now sat, there was something about his nostril, his mouth, his brow, which, to my perceptions, indicated elements within either restless, or hard, or eager. (*JE* 303-04).

To Jane, St. John appears as "an image not of sexless rationality

but of sexuality distorted into something dangerous and harmful. Like Bertha at the other extreme, he has a kind of insanity, though 'a very cold and collected insanity' (Maynard 109).

St. John's repression in this religious household, however, rekindles the "culture of resistance," Jane's dormant urge to embrace her sexual shadow again. A mystic cry in the night from Rochester signifies Jane's eroticized eagerness to regain mutual union with Rochester in suffering: "I recalled that inward sensation I had experienced: for I could recall it, with all its unspeakable strangeness" (*JE* 371). This "sensation" drives her to "grope an outlet from this cloud of doubt, and find the open day of certainty" (*JE* 370).

Jane's re-entering into Rochester's vicinity begins with a superiority of her visual power. She sees a blackened ruin in "the silence of death" (*JE* 374). Rochester's stately and sensuous dome with the sex-crazed woman in it is dilapidated. So is the sexually tyrannical master, who becomes maimed and blind, losing his gazing power upon once-weaker female bodies, Jane Eyre especially. When she arrives at Ferndean, Jane waits outside the garden as Rochester emerges: "I stayed my step, almost my breath, and stood to watch him—to examine him, myself unseen, and also! to him invisible" (*JE* 379). Rochester becomes a "caged eagle, whose gold-ringed eyes cruelty has extinguished, might look as looked that sightless Samson" (*JE* 379). Symbolically and psychologically, he is castrated in Jane's eyes by depriving his previous sexual and visual power (Sadoff 147-48). His "castration" is ironically caused by a sexual insanity of his hysterical wife, Bertha. While Rochester at Ferndean has become "powerless" and dependent, Jane has grown into an "independent" woman: she says, "I love you better now, when I can really be useful to you" (*JE* 392).

Though Rochester loses his former sexual brutality, his virility does not perish. His sexual emotions seem to be

disciplined and regulated under Jane's feminine nourishment. Jane tells Rochester about a vigorous rebirth: "You are no ruin, sir--no lightning-struck tree: you are green and vigorous. Plants will grown about your roots, whether you ask them or not, because they take delight in your bountiful shadow; and as they grow they will lean toward you, and wind round you, because your strength offers them so safe a prop" (*JE* 391). Rochester, who was close to destruction under his sexual insanity, is now re-growing in the cradle of Jane's passion.

There is a sexual dimension in this final reunion scene at Ferndean (Ronald 183). Changing from "the wet and wild wood into some cheerful fields," Ferndean becomes lush and "brilliantly green" (*JE* 387) and invites readers to think of fertility and virility. It is becoming a place of rich, sensuous and sexual fulfillment with a deeply enchanted couple living in it. Bronte does not create a chastened household for the passionate man and wife. Instead, she subverts the Victorian discourse of the domestic household, conceiving a lush and richly sexual Eden.

Sexual passions do survive in this ideal Miltonic garden. Yet they are viable only when the reversibility of power relations between man and woman is achieved. There is a dramatic change in the relations of dominance between Jane and Rochester at the end of the novel, a change that subverts the Victorian medical discourse of the hysterization of women's bodies. Rochester's dominant discourse on women's sexuality is overthrown; Jane's mastery of body is ascertained: "He groped; I arrested his wandering hand, and prisoned it in both mine" (*JE* 381). The reversible polarities of mastery and slavery in Rochester and Jane manifests an ambiguous attempt by Bronte in this novel, an attempt to justify women's passionate and sexual emotions in the patriarchal Victorian society. Though passionately and sexually aroused, Jane does not become either the hysterical Bertha or an asexual angel in the house as

the Victorian dominant discourse expects her to be. Instead, she defeats John Rivers by being faithful to her own passions and conquers Rochester by sticking to her training at Lowood—to transcend and to distance. Female sexuality, potentially anarchic and threatening to the social order as demonstrated in the case of Bertha, can be re-channeled into a fruitful result in Jane Eyre, who claims to become “bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh” (*JE* 397). Male sexuality, so disabling to women’s autonomy and contributing to the hysterization of women’s bodies, has to be tamed in Rochester, who is punished and disabled for his sexual excess and indiscretion.

Hysteria and chastity occupy two of the polarities in Victorian discourse of women’s sex. Sexually crazed women with physical strengths like Bertha become maddened easily while inexperienced and naive women are expected to remain chaste. Social regulation in the power mechanisms of the Victorian middle class (especially middle-class male) defines women’s sexual identities. This is why Rochester in *Jane Eyre* hates his wife Bertha. In his article entitled “*Jane Eyre*: Temptations of a Motherless Woman,” Adrienne Rich provides an explanation:

The 19th Century loose woman might have sexual feelings, but the 19th century wife did not and must not. Rochester’s loathing of Bertha is described repeatedly in terms of her physical strength and her violent will—both unacceptable qualities in the 19th century female, raised to the nth degree and embodied in a monster. (qtd. in Rigney 23)

In this Victorian sexual framework, Rochester seduces the naive and virgin Jane sexually while condemning his sexually-active wife. The madwoman Bertha apparently constitutes the most visible form of this hysterization: “the mother, with her negative image of ‘nervous woman’” (Foucault 104). She is the

monster of excess. As Maynard argues, "In some sense she was conceived from Bronte's own awareness of the interconnections between sexual excess and the suppressive forces it can call up" (106). According to Rochester's accounts of their married life in Spanish town, Bertha lures Rochester into the marriage by the sensual charms. Once married, he finds that she has "giant propensities" of a sexual nature. She seems conceived by Rochester after the Victorian idea of woman "falling into complete sensuality" (Maynard 107). Thus, Bertha must die in Bronte's discourse. The maddening or hysterical image must be destroyed and reconstructed. Her sexual madness causes an end to her life and at the same time crumbles the Victorian male discourse of women's sexuality.

To Jane, Bertha functions as part of anxiety in her sexual experience and also a blocking obstacle in Bronte's discourse of her woman's sexual identity. In her article "The Frenzied Moment: Sex and Insanity in *Jane Eyre*," Rigney explains the madness in terms of Victorian power and social operations:

Bertha embodies the moral example which is the core of Bronte's novel—in a society which itself exhibits a form of psychosis in its oppression of women, the price paid for love and sexual commitment is insanity and death, the loss of self. Female ontological security and psychological survival in a patriarchal Victorian age, Bronte maintains, can be achieved only through a strong feminist consciousness and the affirmation of such interdependent values as chastity and independence.

(16)

The disfigured and animal-like Bertha has thus haunted many Victorian women, including Jane Eyre and Charlotte Bronte herself. Against this cultural ghost, however, Bronte leads her heroine through a "de-hysterization" process in such a brutally

sexual world dominated by John Rivers and Rochester. Her heroine survives and transcends.

As a controlling voice of the narrative, Jane knows well her game, playing an upper hand in this discourse war. The power mechanism she employs is a tricky one: to transcend and to distance herself from the male-established power of the Victorian masculine system: to defy, to love, to flee from and finally to conquer Rochester. Maynard's judgement is quite inspiring when he accolades Bronte's contribution to a complex discourse:

. . . Bronte makes major artistic use of new insights about sexuality. Her art creates a world in which there is an important and extensive web of sexual relations, ranging from pre-Freudian versions of family relations to complicated visions of developing adult love. She successfully reimagines the concept of character and the development of character within the modern notion of a central sexual component in human nature. She makes a major art out of a complex discourse on sexuality. . . . (*Charlotte Bronte and Sexuality* viii-ix)

Though unable to totally re-write the Victorian discourse of the hysterization of women's bodies, Bronte attempts to divert her readers' attention to a new discourse—to affirm the validity of women's sexuality. To her, a woman's life is not a life experience controlled by the Victorian discourse; rather it is a process of de-hysterization of women's sexual urges.

Notes

¹ Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre*, New York: Norton, 1971, 141. Hereafter all the quotes of the novel are from this edition marked

with *JE* and page numbers in parentheses.

² In an elaborate review of Victorian discourse on sex in *History of Sexuality*, Foucault states, "Not only were the boundaries of what one could say about sex enlarged, and men compelled to hear it said; but more important, discourse was connected to sex by a complex organization with varying effects, by a deployment that can't be adequately explained merely by referring it to a law of prohibition. A censorship of sex? There was installed rather an apparatus for producing an even greater quantity of discourse about sex, capable of functioning and taking effect in its very economy" (23). In this framework, according to Foucault, power and pleasure mechanisms are introduced to operate within this sexual discourse. Not a political one but a dynamic relation between individuals and between communities, power "operated as a mechanism of attraction; it drew out those peculiarities over which it kept watch. Pleasure spread to the power that harried it; power anchored the pleasure it uncovered" (45). All the Victorian discourses on sex, such as medical examination, the psychiatric investigation, the pedagogical report and family control, functioned as mechanisms for dealing with sex with a double impetus: pleasure and power. Foucault elaborates these double operations in the following passage: "The pleasure that comes of exercising a power that questions, monitors, watches, spies, searches out, palpates, brings to light; and on the other hand, the pleasure that kindles at having to evade this power, flee from it, fool it, or travesty it. The power that lets itself be invaded by the pleasure it is pursuing; and opposite it, power asserting itself in the pleasure of showing off, scandalizing, or resisting. Capture and seduction, confrontation and mutual reinforcement: parents and children, adults and adolescents, educator and students, doctors and patients, and the psychiatrist with his hysteric and his perverts, all have played this game continually since the nineteenth century. These attractions, these evasions, these circular incitements have

traced around bodies and sexes, not boundaries not to be crossed, but *perpetual spirals of power and pleasure*" (45). Trapped in these "perpetual spirals of power and pleasure," the subject who exerts power in his discourse also employs the pleasure of monitoring, watching and spying on his subordinates. On the other hand, pleasure is also involved in the controlled subject who manages to "evade this power, flee from it, fool it or travesty it." In a word, power mechanism, in Foucault's scheme, plays with pleasure principles in the discourse of sex and sexuality.

³ Sara M. Putzell-Korab once stated, "If any Victorian author might have been conscious of passion between women and have accordingly alluded to it in her fiction, it is Charlotte Bronte" (186). In *Sex Variant Women in Literature*, Jeannette H. Foster quotes some of Bronte's letters and biographical data to prove that Charlotte Bronte had experienced some homosexual moments with her classmate, Ellen Nussey (130).

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