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Dismantling Dualisms: Jane's Liminal Agency in Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre

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Dedication

To my parents for their unyielding support; to my brothers for their unbridled encouragement; to Holly for her unwavering enthusiasm; and to Tim for his unrelenting love during this adventure.

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Abstract

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is a complex and, at times, seemingly paradoxical novel. Through Jane's journey, I argue that Charlotte Brontë offers possibilities that can be explained and understood through Val Plumwood's ecofeminist lens of dismantling or escaping dualisms in order to make these crucial changes and rewrite the traditional story. Jane's liminality throughout the novel empowers her, offers her access to alternative modalities, and allows her to notice the oppressive dualistic structures governing all aspects of life. Due to her unique liminal positioning, Jane is aligned with nature and fights against oppressive dualisms to shape her life in a way that suits her. Through the multi-dimensional exertions of nature, Jane can have it all by remaking existing norms and tempering them with what she wants in life: being a complete human in an equal relationship with Rochester, backed by a selective spirituality and unrestrained by dualisms.

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Introduction

In Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Jane Eyre contends with being an outsider by fostering a profound relationship with nature. Jane's connection with nature as both a reflection of her life and a place of refuge is a significant factor in her rich interior and a revaluing of her societal displacement. From their first meeting, Mr. Rochester – Jane's employer, love interest, and eventual husband – is fascinated by Jane, and this fascination results in a relationship that challenges the social dichotomy of not only class but gender. This thesis seeks to read Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* with an ecofeminist lens by examining the significant role nature plays in Jane's navigation, subversion, and ultimately escape from socially constructed male/female and society/nature dualisms. Val Plumwood argues in her ecofeminist critical theory book, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, "Forms of oppression from both the present and the past have left their traces in western culture as a network of dualisms, and the logical structure of dualism forms a major basis for the connection between forms of oppression" (2). The male/female and society/nature dualisms Plumwood highlights expand on the traditional philosophy of mind/body dualism, all which Brontë brings to center focus and challenges with *Jane Eyre*. In conjunction with Jane's liminality, Brontë employs a blend of storytelling elements, such as a focus on concerns of the feminine: nature, superstitions, and fairy tales, that can also be arranged to challenge and subvert the traditional dualisms that would otherwise reinforce aspects of the masculine: society, Christianity, and related traditional values. Ultimately, Jane and Rochester's eventual union as equals is made possible through Jane's affiliation with nature and her weaponized liminality. Concurrently, Rochester's humbling from his original status and his ascendancy as Jane's equal through his acceptance of nature reinforces the inextricable part of them both being humans on the same footing before anything else.

Brontë weaves a complex tale to chronicle Jane's assertion of her humanness, employing a variety of storytelling frameworks. Robert K. Martin supports this observation as he captures Brontë's multi-layered approach to telling a delicately subversive story: “One of the characteristics that most fully defines the Romantic tradition as Charlotte Brontë inherited is the convention of the fairy tale, with its archetypal hero or heroine, its paradigmatic journey and its archetypal division of the world into good and evil” (Martin 85-86). Categorizing *Jane Eyre* as a Romantic novel is an excellent starting point for understanding Brontë's construction of the story, albeit incomplete. While considered a Romantic novel, *Jane Eyre* can also be considered a Gothic novel. Tom J. Hillard explores the relationship between the Gothic and ecocriticism: “An investigation of Gothic nature requires some understanding of how “the Gothic” has functioned in literature. On the most basic level, claims Fred Botting, the “Gothic signifies a writing of excess an exploration of physical, psychological, and social limits and boundaries (Botting 1)” (qtd in Hillard 689-690). As Jane traverses from place to place, these boundaries are challenged, and extreme events such as periods of isolation, deaths, and brushes with the supernatural pepper her existence, often in the form of her natural surroundings. This Gothic description agrees with Martin in the sense that as applied to both Brontë and Jane: “Living where she did and as she did, she was aware of the world superstition and magic of the Old Religion which had survived in rural England among the less educated and which kept alive a tradition totally alien to the ideals of progressive, industrial, and patriarchal society” (Martin 86). The coexistence of such disparate elements creates a medium for which to challenge convention. Hillard further explicates that “[t]he Gothic mode has always been a means for confronting (safely) that which is threatening, frightful, and culturally or socially reprehensible” (690-691) and “[s]ince the Gothic inevitably finds its source in cultural contradictions, where Gothic nature exists so too can be found

competing perceptions of what that “nature” signifies” (694). Brontë's compilation of these contradictions in *Jane Eyre* reflects the competing systems inherent in the dualisms Jane faces and centers the crucial role of nature.

The amorphous categorization becomes a loud indicator of liminality shared within the plot, protagonist, and genre. In her examination of outsiders in *Jane Eyre,* Sarah Gilead discusses the power Jane gains through her liminality and how that liminal state contributes to Brontë's storytelling by borrowing from everything available:

> *Jane Eyre* is perhaps the paradigmatic liminal novel of the Victorian period. The overt multiplicity of the textual sources that nourish *Jane Eyre* fulfills the Carlylean project of inventing a new mythos out of the shards of the old. The multiplicity is neither discordant nor fragmentary: the Bible, fairy and folk tales (such as “Cinderella,” “Bluebeard,” “Little Red Riding Hood”), Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, the gothic novel, picaresque romance, Swiftian satire, Austenian Bildungsroman, Dickensian orphan tale, and romantic poetry (especially Byron's) together produce a narrative once strikingly original and familiar, a narrative that implies that its textual heritage, though diverse, is rich and still fruitful. The free use of romantic imagery and motifs, the universalization of Christian symbols and plots, and feminist iconoclasm enable *Jane Eyre* to avoid mere conventionality of plot and to retain the liminal novel's requisite critical force. (303-304)

This liminality is reflected in Jane's change of roles due to time and circumstance; and, by extension, nature's shifting roles that run parallel with her life and wishes. Jane's ability to remake the elements of the culture with which she disagrees, which I have identified as a system of dualisms, is empowered by her ability to slip into the various modes that best suit her story and best suit her quest to become and be recognized as a full and realized human.

Furthermore, in *Charlotte Brontë at the Anthropocene*, Shawna Ross observes Jane's struggle to reconcile herself and nature with what it means to live and be part of society, questioning her essential humanness: “Uncertain of her own humanity, Jane must repeatedly rediscover and reassert it. Along Jane's journey to secure her rights as a human being, the novel investigates this mysterious category, Anthropos. Who qualifies as a human being? Why should one want to be human? What are the operative differences separating humans from animals, plants, rocks?” (112). Moreover, once Jane finds answers through the trials of her life, Jane cannot help but also question the dualism of men and women as well as other divisive and exclusive cultural and social structures. As she floats through each circumstance, she finds herself met with new challenges. Ross adds, “There is something interesting in the fact that Jane must survive over and over: it suggests that “fitness” is an ongoing process, not a wholly static or inherited condition, during the Anthropocene” (148). Whether trying to survive Aunt Reed's abuse, Lowood's pestilence, Mr. Rochester's betrayal, or starvation as she runs away and wanders the moor for days, Ross argues that “Jane shows how difficult it is to locate and gain entry into spaces that seem less toxic—and how temptingly at-hand are anthropocentric definitions of the human that underpin her resolve to survive” (148). Jane meets these challenges, and nature in its many forms escorts her through each stage to aid in her full realization as a human. Sometimes nature serves as a friend, neutral party, or foe—directly to Jane or working in Jane's favor, but it is always inescapable.

It is no surprise that Charlotte Brontë had a special connection with nature herself, which undoubtedly influenced the role of nature in her novels. Ross indicates Brontë’s interest and knowledge of the natural world played a significant role in her portrayal of it in her writing: “Charlotte Brontë read, or was familiar with, many key texts of Victorian Science” (38).

Furthermore, “The early reception of Charlotte Brontë's works acknowledged the accuracy of her descriptions of nature and affirmed their value as accounts of regional flora and fauna that acquainted a broader audience with Yorkshire topography” and “earn[ed] praise for *Jane Eyre's* comparisons of the geological features of Yorkshire and Derbyshire” (Ross 39). Brontë's interest and connection to the natural world is significant as it underscores the importance of Brontë's choices to incorporate nature as an integral force in her stories. In *Jane Eyre*, Brontë's use of nature is intentional, and her authentic and accurate descriptions highlight not only nature's power in the novel but also Jane's special relationship with it.

Such intimate knowledge and interest in the natural world extended to Charlotte Brontë’s family and, respectively, to their works as well. In discussion of commonalities in the Brontë sisters’ writings, Hilary Newman brings to light that “Animal imagery is probably the largest single group of images in the Brontës' novels” (188). Newman also cites a study conducted by Rebecca Chesney, which found ‘“the Brontës used the weather to underline key points in their storylines; to foreshadow events to come; and as an outward expression of internal emotions. Chesney found that the Brontës used eighteen different categories of weather types: ‘From drizzle and mist, storms and gales, thunder and lightning, to sunshine and rain’” (qtd in Newman 196). Nature is intimately integrated into the Brontës’ literary works as much as it was part of their everyday lives.

In both big and small ways, the Brontës interacted with the natural world–even from a young age. Walking near their home in Haworth, the Brontës witnessed The Crow Hill bog burst of 1824, which was a rare geological movement in which “the pressurized bog waters underneath the walkers' feet were released with such a violence the Brontës barely escaped being drawn into a seven-foot-high flood of water, peat, and rocks gushing down the Worth Valley below” (Ross

53). This natural disaster inspired poetry by Charlotte's sister, Emily, and their father, Patrick as they tried to make sense of the major ecological event they survived (Ross 101). Though Charlotte was absent from the phenomenon, “she works through her own multiple and changing answers about how to witness, survive, respond to, and write about anthropogenic devastation in ways that are both ethically and aesthetically productive” (Ross 111). Undoubtedly this and many other natural phenomena were discussed and analyzed with her family. Yet Justine Pizzo offers context about the Victorian interpretations of weather and how it reflects on the environment at large and its relationship with humanity:

> It is not that Brontë's novel reveals to us the devastating effects of the Anthropocene—the permanent traces of the human race on its geological age. Instead, it enables us to discover the ways in which a character and an author studied as often as Jane Eyre and Charlotte Brontë—both central to our feminist critical history—occupied what we might call a subversive Atmoscene: an epoch that foregrounds the rise of meteorology as a way of apprehending the indelible imprint of air on literary representations of the human. (97)

Pizzo correctly identifies the link between Jane and the weather/atmosphere, but I disagree with the narrow scope that it ignores the significance of the Anthropocene. The sheer complexity allows for the possibility of both. Critical frameworks, such as ecocriticism, exist to examine the larger relationship of humans to the environment and natural world, which is more all-encompassing and reflective of larger patterns I will discuss in later chapters.

Considering the Victorian relationships with weather as detailed by Ross and Pizzo as well as the Brontës’ familiarity with nature and natural sciences, ecocriticism is a useful approach for understanding *Jane Eyre* and Brontë’s implementation of the natural world in the novel and how it is a key element of the story. It is notable that “the UK version of ecocriticism,

or green studies, takes its bearings from the British Romanticism of the 1790s rather than the American transcendentalism of the 1840s" (Barry 162). Lawrence Buell goes on to describe the waves of ecocriticism in "Ecocriticism: Some Emerging Trends" and highlights the growing and uncertain scope ecocriticism encompasses. Although initially referenced in the 1970s, "As a self-conscious critical practice calling itself such, ecocriticism began around 1990 as an initiative within literary studies, specifically within English and American literature, from two semi coordinated and interpenetrating epicenters: British romanticism…and U.S. nature writing" (88-89). He emphasizes the many iterations of the critical theory: "Ursula Heise rightly observes that "ecocriticism has imposed itself as convenient shorthand for what some critics prefer to call *environmental criticism*, [or] *literary-environmental studies*, [or] *literary ecology*, [or] *literary environmentalism*, [or] *green cultural studies*"' (Buell 88). However, most pertinently, Buell underscores that despite various angles, "the most cited definition, by Cheryll Glotfelty in the introduction to the *Ecocriticism Reader*, characterizes ecocriticism simply as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment"' (88). This definition gives both interpretations of the Brontës' connections with nature footing for understanding landscapes inside and outside of their stories. Buell acknowledges, "The expansion of understanding of the rightful ecocritical canon to encompass nothing less than all the literatures of the world, with critics throughout the world understood as having a rightful stake in ecocritical practice is clearly still in its early stages" (92). Buell's book, *Environmental Imagination*, elaborates his vision for the critical theory, albeit with a focus on American transcendentalism, which is not directly relevant for this thesis. However, what is useful to note is that ecocriticism continues to evolve in different branches to better understand the relationship between humans and the natural world in the past, present, and future.

A specific facet of ecocriticism: ecological feminism or ecofeminism, is an ideal lens for *Jane Eyre* as the framework guides the rest of the story and brings the broader concerns of ecocriticism into a sharper focus pertaining directly to the female protagonist. Even narrowing the scope to ecofeminism requires more definite parameters. Greta Gaard argues that ecofeminism has not been given the proper attention or credit in the development in the field and warns in "New Directions for Ecofeminism":

> These omissions in ecocritical scholarship are not merely a bibliographic matter of failing to cite feminist scholarship, but signify a more profound conceptual failure to grapple with the issues being raised by that scholarship as feminist, a failure made more egregious when the same ideas are later celebrated when presented via non-feminist sources. (645)

Gaard emphasizes the importance of a feminist lens to be fully recognized and attached to ecocritical scholarship rather than in other frameworks. The creation of so many potential ecofeminist critical frameworks is due to the ever-evolving understanding and interpretation of the relationship between humans (and specific subsets of humans) and the natural world. Due to failing to establish a standard criterion, many directions and interpretations of ecofeminism exist and continue to be born. However, this thesis will focus primarily on applying the thinking of ecofeminist scholar Val Plumwood because she not only offers the best framework to understand the dualisms present in *Jane Eyre* but also provides a roadmap of how to dismantle these dualisms, which can be applied to elucidate further Jane's path towards becoming a human on equal footing. Furthermore, I will use this lens to explain the significant role of nature in Jane's life and the alternate modalities Brontë employs for Jane to adopt in order to challenge the status quo in both station and romance, thus achieving the seemingly impossible by subverting

oppressive dualisms, while also securing a happy and equitable marriage without compromising herself.

In *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, Plumwood posits, "For women, the real task of liberation is not equal participation or absorption in such a male dominant culture, but rather subversion, resistance and replacement" (30). In her book, Plumwood offers an examination of the relationships between women and nature and the rest of society. By explaining historical ideals and beliefs regarding women and nature, Plumwood traces the birth and evolution of the oppressive social structures – known as dualisms – governing Western society. After identifying the dualisms, Plumwood offers a blueprint to how nature can be used as a way to overcome and dismantle them. I argue that *Jane Eyre* executes Plumwood's vision: Jane's and nature's mirrored ability to take on different roles becomes a way to navigate the rigidity set before her in the form of dualistic structures. To understand how Jane and Rochester's relationship develops to follow the blueprint of dismantling dualisms, understanding Plumwood's definition of dualisms is essential:

> A dualism is an intense, established and developed cultural expression of such a hierarchical relationship, constructing central cultural concepts and identities so as to make equality and mutuality literally unthinkable. Dualism is a relation of separation and domination inscribed and naturalised in culture and characterised by radical exclusion, distancing and opposition between orders constructed as systematically higher and lower, as inferior and superior, as ruler and ruled, which treats the division as part of the natures of beings construed not merely as different but as belonging to radically different orders or kinds, and hence as not open to change. (47-48)

Jane Eyre showcases and Jane herself challenges the dualisms existing between male and female as well human and nature. Considering that "The line of fracture between reason and nature runs deeply through the key concepts of western culture" (Plumwood 44), this is all but a Sisyphean task. Jane pushes against the confinements of such dualisms, but it is a challenge to reform them and a framework she will navigate over and over again. Plumwood notes:

> The set of interrelated and mutually reinforcing dualisms which permeate western culture forms a fault-line which runs through its entire conceptual system. While the human/nature contrast is one of the more recent of these dualisms, like the others, it can be fully understood only as part of the interrelated set. Each of them has crucial connections to other elements, and has a common structure with other members of the set. They should be seen as forming a system, an interlocking structure.
>
> Key elements in the dualistic structure in western thought are the following sets of contrasting pairs:

culture	/	nature
reason	/	nature
male	/	female
mind	/	body (nature)
master	/	slave
reason	/	matter (physicality)
rationality	/	animality (nature)
reason	/	emotion
mind, spirit	/	nature
freedom	/	necessity (nature)

universal	/	particular
human	/	nature (non-human)
civilised	/	primitive (nature)
production	/	reproduction (nature)
public	/	private
subject	/	object
self	/	other

> I do not claim completeness for this list. Indeed completeness is impossible, since any distinction can in principle be treated as a dualism. But these dualisms are key ones for western thought, and reflect the major forms of oppression in western culture. (42-43)

Nature is associated with many of the categories on the right either directly or indirectly. This prevalence is significant and indicative of the association of female with nature in multiple dimensions. Both of which have suffered oppression from many of the categories on the left. I have chosen to include the entire table as found in Plumwood's book as it is important to understand how intertwined these dualisms are with all aspects of life in Brontë's time and portrayed in the novel to understand the magnitude of what Jane is up against in the story. Even Plumwood acknowledges that more dualisms exist beyond the list; but it is at least a baseline to begin understanding the immensity and pervasiveness of the dualistic structures in all systems and thought. I will demonstrate that understanding these interlinking dualisms is a key entry point in explaining Jane's subjection to, challenge of, and ultimately subversion of systematic oppression and Brontë's chronicling of it.

That being said, these aforementioned dualisms were present long before and during Charlotte Brontë's time. Unsurprisingly, "the conservative voices of the era felt that if gender

categories were not maintained as binary oppositions, catastrophic chaos would ensue" (Gill 109). This worldview all but ensured systematic oppression of women and associated contrasts. After all, the long-held mindset has been that "Nature, as the excluded and devalued contrast of reason, includes the emotions, the body, the passions, animality, the primitive or uncivilised, the non-human world, matter, physicality and sense of experience, as well as the sphere of irrationality, of faith and madness. In other words, nature includes everything reason excludes" (Plumwood 19-20), and from Plumwood's chart, everything nature is aligned with female. And yet, Jane challenges this set of dualisms by asserting herself both within and outside of her developing relationship with Rochester. By the end of the novel, Rochester also challenges these dualistic structures by his eventual retreat to Ferndean precipitated by forces of nature at work: the fire resulting in loss of sight and limb. Though Jane and Rochester reconcile by the end of the novel, the dualisms present when they first meet are still harmful forces. Parama Roy observes how the relationship between land and class factor into power dynamics as "Jane and Rochester are both victims of the conventions of the English landed class—he by virtue of being an insider, and she (as we have seen) by virtue of being an outsider" (719). It is only when they can overcome it through nature that they can build their own refuge.

Mr. Rochester's secondary home, the secluded and nature-enveloped Ferndean helps to achieve that refuge in which they can thrive in an unrestricted space of dismantled dualisms. By the end of the novel, Jane rises in the sphere of society after inheriting a small fortune; while conversely, Rochester finds himself humbled by nature when he loses Thornfield and is disfigured in the fire set by his first wife. These mutual transformations are one component of their development as individuals that will ultimately secure their reunion and marriage. Ferndean becomes the sanctuary of their relationship, and here Rochester finally sees Jane as human and

nature-humbled Rochester is finally ready for Jane. Nature and forces of nature secure a happy ending and a marriage unlike any other: Jane is home; she belongs. As notable *Jane Eyre* scholars, Gilbert and Gubar, highlight, "*This,* she says--this marriage of true minds in Ferndean--this is the way. Qualified and isolated as her way may be, it is at least an emblem of hope" (389). In Jane's remade world, one truth stands above all else: with nature all things are possible.

In order for Jane and Rochester to reach their happy end, first we must understand the underpinnings of their journey. Chapter one will introduce this framework of Plumwood's ecofeminism and dualistic structures and examine the established dualistic structures in the novel and how Charlotte Brontë blends dualisms and alternative modalities in her craft. By employing nature in such an intimate and dynamic way, she sets the stage for Jane to nurture her self as well as disrupt the dualisms she encounters.

Chapter two will trace Jane's early kinship with nature and how nature and forces of nature mirror Jane's abilities to take on different roles. Linked to this are the development of Jane's interior (inspired by nature) and her quest for true equality both as an individual in the world (idealistically) and with Rochester (tangibly). This chapter will also examine Jane's liminality both imposed on her through the names others bestow on her—especially Rochester's use of fairy, sylph, witch, and other otherworldly monikers in an attempt to understand her, though it does the opposite. I will also examine Jane's liminality as well as the fluidity between spaces granted to her through her alliance with nature and her social status as an orphan. I will explain how this liminality inspires Jane to navigate between the power structures dualisms create and empower her sense of self. Not only is this in reference to a direct alliance with nature, but also with forces of nature. Recurring feminized nature symbols such as the moon and

fire support Jane's profound connection to nature and either enrich Jane's agency or support her spoken or unspoken desires.

Chapter three will focus on the communities of women in the novel that Jane encounters at various points in her life who serve as pillars of guidance and support, have a deep connection to Jane, and function as an extension of nature. This list includes a variety of significant women Jane encounters at each place she goes. Helen Burns and Miss Temple are key figures at Lowood whose relationships are important and impactful to Jane as a child. As an adult, Jane's kinship with Diana and Mary Rivers at Moor House is significant in further cultivating Jane's personhood. Even at Thornfield Hall, Bertha Mason fulfills a crucial role in Jane's life and destiny. Here, it is important to acknowledge Sandra M. Gilbert's and Susan Gubar's seminal work on madness and women in 19th century Victorian literature, which asserts Bertha as Jane's "dark double": "Specifically, every one of Bertha's appearances--or more accurately, her manifestations--has been associated with an experience (or repression) of anger on Jane's part" (377). Following this logic, if Jane is inextricably tied to nature, then as her dark double, Bertha acts as an extension of this connection to nature as she exerts destructive forces including the ultimate torching of Thornfield and humbling of Rochester through injuries sustained by her fire. This is parallel to how nature and weather have functioned in tandem with Jane's emotional moments in her earlier life. I argue that more than just a dark double, Bertha serves as an ally to Jane and a natural force of change. Furthermore, nature itself acts as another double, manifesting Jane's will just as it reflects her emotional state and through aligned parties such as Bertha. This chapter will also examine Bertha's role in the novel as presented by Brontë in order to understand why Rochester, though intrigued with Jane from the beginning, navigates her poorly at first despite their inherent connection in his initial bid for matrimony. I will also examine how

Jane is (eventually) successful in conquering Rochester, whereas he conquers Bertha until she becomes a destructive force of nature who aids in securing Jane's victory.

The fourth and final chapter will reconcile how nature and forces of nature are defining factors and central agents in Jane and Rochester's ultimate reunification. This chapter will also explain why Jane rejects civilization after achieving status with inherited wealth and why she rejects the icy marriage/religious missionary proposal of St. John. I will explain why she instead answers the supernatural call of nature and the reformed and humbled Rochester, ultimately bringing her permanently to Ferndean. It is at Ferndean that Jane and Rochester can build their relationship anew, uncomplicated by dualisms. In this sacred space, Jane is able to accept and reject aspects of conventional or unconventional modalities to define her life and her and Rochester's relationship. Rochester supports this operation and finally understands Jane as the human that she is as he undergoes a rehumanization himself after suffering losses at the hand of the feminine holy trinity: Jane, Bertha, and nature.

By focusing on nature's multiple roles: a space of refuge; a source of material for Jane's interior; a protector; a harbinger; and finally an equalizer, this thesis demonstrates how nature is a medium in which dualisms can be shaped. I turn again to Plumwood to reinforce this notion of nature being a vehicle to navigate and understand dualisms, and to illustrate how dismantling dualisms can be achieved in a very tangible and inclusive way:

> [A]n adequate account of the ecological self must be able to recognise both the otherness of nature and its continuity with the human self. In ecological selfhood the thriving of nature and of earth others is treated as not instrumentally but essentially related to our own thriving. We include the flourishing of earth others as others among our own

> primary or intrinsic ends and desires. But this project does not require any sort of identity, merger, or loss of boundaries between self and other. (160)

If we use Plumwood's project to view the novel, nature provides Jane with the space and medium to make these corrections as they suit her vision for her life. The direct impact of nature on Mr. Rochester cannot be overstated as nature shapes him and his circumstances to be the perfect match for Jane. Due to this arrangement, nothing is mandated or off limits unless the individual wants to define and incorporate them.

This is how Jane can be in all places at once if she chooses. Factoring in the human aspect of Jane's existence, Shawna Ross contends, "Jane's progress along the path of *Bildung* pivots around vivid confrontations during which Jane's desire to be a human being chafes her ability to perceive and critique the dense networks of harm binding humans and nonhumans together. Ultimately, her desire to be counted among *Anthropoi* wins out (Ross 192). However, by dismantling the system present with the dualistic structures, Jane does not have to choose. She selects all the options as possibilities and curates her life as she wishes. She can enjoy a lawful marriage with her beloved, bear their children, visit family, *and* enjoy equality uniquely forged by nature and their experiences—all protected by a natural space. Nature is the key component for Jane to have it all. It is the mechanism which will allow her to live in love, empowerment, and truth; and as an ambassador, she can take her beloved with her—defying the rigidity of the dualistic constraints to which outside society adheres.

Chapter One: Alternative Origins

Jane Eyre has stood as a significant novel in English literature for a long time. It is so relevant due to the many (at times paradoxical) elements Charlotte Brontë employs to tell her tale. By juxtaposing traditionally masculine language and Christianity with the supernatural and fairy tales, Brontë adds more nuance to her story. Sarah Gilead recognizes the uniqueness of the novel when she observes, "*Jane Eyre* succeeds as revised myth because it effaces its intentions and its status as fiction. Disguised as a simple personal memoir, it covertly presents a map of self-making within the context of cultural re-making" (312). While this can support the argument of *Jane Eyre* as a Bildungsroman, much more is happening in the novel. I argue that an ecofeminist reading can illumine the circumstances and factors that grow Jane out of her relegated feminine sphere and encourage her to follow the potential to enact change for herself, which ultimately challenges and dismantles the dualisms. Nature plays a significant role in achieving growth and liberation, but Brontë also uses various traditional and nontraditional modalities to tell Jane's subversive story. As Plumwood emphasizes, "Women must be treated as just as fully human and as fully part of human culture as men. But both men and women must challenge the dualised conception of human identity and develop an alternative culture which fully recognises human identity as continuous with, not alien from, nature" (36). In writing and publishing *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë attempts to challenge existing dualistic structures in practice and set up *Jane Eyre* in a juxtaposition of Christianity with the supernatural and fairytale, as well as through the adoption of masculine language and publicly perceived male authorship.

In fact, "The contemporary reactions to *Jane Eyre*'s publication under an androgynous pseudonym (Currer Bell) in 1847 reveal much about this novel's participation in the complicated

and evolving debates about gender and agency in the middle of the nineteenth century (Kirilloff et al. 822). In the introductory section of the 2006 Penguin Classics edition of the novel, Stevie Davies relates how the Brontë sisters "had adopted male-sounding pseudonyms because they were aware of the prevalent double standard of literary criticism," which "only inflamed the public to unmask the private self that had originated *Jane Eyre*. Was Currer Bell a man or woman or both?" (viii). Speculation and mixed reviews abounded both before and after Charlotte Brontë's authorship identity was revealed. While lauded by some, others were "appalled by its fierce unwomanly tone and incendiary message, repudiated its emotional nakedness, its power to seduce. The voice of *Jane Eyre* spoke of erotic passion, lower-caste aspiration and female rage, in a period where political radicalism was threatening the boundaries of stable order" (Davies viii). Much like Jane, Charlotte Brontë found issues with confining dualisms and offered challenge and subversion to those structures in her work as much as she could for the time.

Brontë, also like Jane, blurs the lines of some of the demarcated dualisms Plumwood highlights. The best example of this is Brontë's liminality as a female or perceived male author. The challenge comes first when the novel's subtitle indicates it is an autobiography, yet authored by Currer Bell. The boundary is uncertain, and although eventually Charlotte's identity is revealed as the true author, critics beforehand insisted vehemently that their hypotheses were correct with very valid reason. However, some turned out to be obviously incorrect. Curiously enough, in a 2018 study of language in nineteenth-century literature, Jockers and Kirilloff examined pronouns and verbs used by male and female characters and trained a classification model to sort and predict gender and pronouns:

> In many ways, this result corroborates previous scholarship on gender attribution; the fact that male and female characters behave differently in these novels seems to be a clear

> reflection of nineteenth-century notions of gender propriety. In particular, the types of verbs found to be associated with male and female characters support the idea that these novels reflect the codification of behavior into 'masculine' and 'feminine' actions in accordance with the 'gendered spheres' that Victorians saw emerging from 'the Woman Question'. For example, many verbs connoting physical motion, such as 'walked', are strongly associated with male pronouns, while many verbs connoting emotion, such as 'felt', are strongly associated with female pronouns, a result which brings to mind the nineteenth-century separation of public and domestic spheres. (821-822)

Unsurprisingly, nestled into language, an outward reflection of gender, status, and cultural norms of the time exists. This demarcation and set of parameters were astonishingly accurate, as "...only 6 of 3,329 (0.01%) novels featured both male and female characters behaving in ways that defy the overall trends seen in the corpus" (Kirilloff et al. 822). One of those six is *Jane Eyre*, which gives the novel another reason to stand out. The fact that both males and females use unexpected language in *Jane Eyre* helps to reinforce a push against the rigidity of dualisms. The study found that "females perform typically male actions far more often in *Jane Eyre* than in the corpus of nineteenth-century novels—and at a considerably higher rate" (Kirilloff et al. 824). Unsurprising as that may be for a novel focusing on the empowerment of its protagonist, that alone threatened the norms of the time. The article reinforces, "Many men (and women) believed that a woman who tried to cultivate her intellect and individuality beyond prescribed drawing-room accomplishments (sewing, singing, piano-playing) was violating the order of Nature and, consequently, of religious tradition" (Kirilloff et al. 823). The novel clearly challenges this boundary from the female side. This pattern adds an interesting dimension to the initial gender ambiguity of authorship of the novel and further solidifies Jane's agency and disruption of

dualisms. Perhaps Brontë's views were not so far off from Jane's reflection shortly after settling into her governess position at Thornfield:

> Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too 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 129-130)

It makes sense, then, for Jane to behave in these ways to assert an equality of station, defying the expected presentation of language as an assertion of her desired role. However, what is especially significant about this study and further brings *Jane Eyre* into focus in the context of this thesis is the fact that the male characters in the novel also demonstrate this inversion of expected gendered language: "males participate in typically female pronoun/verb constructions at nearly double the rate that they do so in the larger corpus" (Kirilloff et al. 824). Most of the notable men in the novel demonstrate this pattern, but the most interesting and important is that of Rochester. Kirilloff highlights examples:

> Rochester himself provides the best register of 'unexpected' behavior when we read his actions closely. For such a gruff, Byronic, and generally misanthropic character, Brontë (through Jane) describes his actions in typically feminine ways. He 'sat', 'sat down', 'went' (on several occasions), 'left', 'disclosed', 'stopped', 'bit his lip', 'checked himself', 'staggered', 'endured', 'forebore', and 'felt'." (824-825)

While it seems less strange for Jane to adopt more traditionally masculine language patterns as she faces hardships by adopting "characteristics of self-reliance, resourcefulness, and independence" (Kirilloff et al. 826), I argue that this shows a willingness from Rochester to bend typical male values and be receptive to the alternative framework of dismantled dualisms that Jane will eventually offer as he does not perfectly adhere to the pattern himself. Rochester may be less aware of dualisms at first (especially compared to Jane), as he is installed in the oppressive side of the dualisms from which he benefits. Until he is forced to come to terms with his role in perpetuating the dualisms, he will blindly reinforce it without a second thought[1].

Introspection is a favorite activity of Jane's, and this is one of many times she ruminates on her position in relation to the dualism she notices. She both inwardly and outwardly criticizes these constructs at various points in the novel. However, some discrepancy exists in her early musings compared to her eventual fate:

> [M]any believe that the novel's 'happy ending' exchanges the revolutionary fervor of her youth for the settled comfort of the Victorian wife. This adherence to conventional gender norms is further complicated by the fact that Charlotte Brontë was not a necessarily revolutionary person; she was a Tory and Anglican who held both traditional and progressive views about women. In this sense, the somewhat inconsistent data on character agency provide an index to some of the novel's internal (and external) contradictions that can only be measured by closer readings. (Kirilloff et al. 829)

One way to examine Jane's seemingly disparate behaviors is by reading the text through an ecofeminist lens, and I will again turn to Plumwood to explain how Jane reconciles these

[1] For this thesis, I am referring to traditional and heterosexual associations of male and female language patterns and behaviors. Queer ecologies as identified by Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands, Bruce Erickson, and Nicole Seymour offer an alternative ecocritical lens for deconstructing gender.

elements. First, on a broader scale, scholar Theda Wrede offers an explanation acknowledging the thinking of several ecofeminist theorists in Douglas A. Vakoch's book, *Feminist Ecocriticism: Environment, Women, and Literature* :

> Benjamin and Kolodny, along with Warren and Plumwood, believe in the possibility of change; they envision alternatives to social value binaries in attitudes of care, mutual recognition, and what Kolodny calls "reciprocity and communality" (1975a: 145). None of the theorists suggests that men and women are biologically predisposed to their social roles. But they agree that a significant change can only occur when our cultural values shift from individualism to community, from radical separation to relationality. (44)

It is easy to assume that Jane's push against the dualisms would mean she would seek the opposite of the expected outcome, but that would only lead to another set of dualisms over time. Instead, relationality is emphasized, which includes embracing and redefining the attitudes towards and understanding the once-dominated (women/nature) and the dominators (men/society). In those terms, Jane's life trajectory is not at odds with her thoughts. Jane does not need to tear down the fabric of society fraught with dualisms violently, but she can use tools to unravel and remake aspects to become more suitable to her. Through this approach, Jane's existence in an alternative interpretation of her role in society becomes more congruent with her beliefs, reaffirming her sense of individuality and equal personhood.

To further elucidate on this process Jane undergoes over the course of the novel, I will examine and apply Plumwood's five methods of understanding domination of nature (and, by extension, women): backgrounding (denial), radical exclusion (hyperseparation), incorporation (relational definition), instrumentalism (objectification), and homogenization (stereotyping) (47-55). Each of these can work separately or in combination to oppress and create oppressive

dualisms. Plumwood explains: “Dualism then imposes a conceptual framework which polarises and splits apart into two orders of being what can be conceptualised and treated in more integrated and unified ways. But dualism should not be seen as creating difference where none exists. Rather it tends to capitalise on existing patterns of difference, rendering these in ways which ground hierarchy” (55). With these systems established, dualisms are self-supporting and can only be overcome with a shift of perspective from those within, which is no easy task. Nevertheless, Plumwood provides a framework in which these elements can be reimagined:

> But this discussion of the structural features of dualism, expressed especially in classical otherness, clarifies some of the steps which need to be taken in overcoming dualised identity. Dismantling a dualism based on difference requires the reconstruction of relationship and identity in terms of a non-hierarchical concept of difference. An appropriate relationship of non-hierarchical difference will have the following specific features:
>
> > 1 Backgrounding (denial): a non-hierarchical concept of difference requires a move to systems of thought, accounting, perception, decision-making, which recognise the contribution of what has been backgrounded, and which acknowledge dependency.
> >
> > 2 Radical exclusion: a non-hierarchical concept of difference will affirm continuity, reconceive relata in more integrated ways, and break the false choice hyperseparation presents in reclaiming the denied area of overlap.
> >
> > 3 Incorporation (relational definition): a non-hierarchical concept of difference must review the identities of both underside and upperside. It can aim to

> rediscover a language and story for the underside, reclaim positive independent sources of identity and affirm resistance.
>
> 4 Instrumentalism: a non-hierarchical concept of difference implies recognising the other as a centre of needs, value and striving on its own account, a being whose ends and needs are independent of the self and to be respected.
>
> 5 Homogenisation: a non-hierarchical concept of difference involves recognising the complexity and diversity of the 'other nations' which have been homogenised and marginalised in their constitution as excluded other, as 'the rest.' (Plumwood 60)

Following this logic, Jane's role as Rochester's wife and mother of his children by the end of the novel does not erode her identity and sense of self but adds to it as a reconstruction of those values. Rochester respects Jane for the human and individual she is, and no instrumentalism or incorporation is plaguing their union. Jane relates the success of their happy ending to the reader in the final chapter:

> I have now been married ten years. I know what it is to live entirely for and with what I love best on earth. I hold myself supremely blest – blest beyond what language can express; because I am my husband's life as fully as he is mine… To be together is for us to be at once as free as in solitude, as gay as in company… All my confidence is bestowed on him, all his confidence is devoted to me; we are precisely suited in character – perfect concord is the result. (Brontë 519)

Jane is not suffocated by her role as wife and mother. Her marriage to Rochester feels complete not because he completes her but because they can be their full separate selves together while

integrating into their identities the roles they now perform. In her examination of the novel's conclusion and Jane's "mysterious summons" that leads her back to her love, Ruth Bernard Yeazell would affirm that "Jane and Rochester… eventually find a love which leads not toward mutual annihilation, but toward life" (133-134). The reunion is positive for them independently and together and alludes to growth. Adrienne Rich would agree with this shift when analyzing Jane's development and the trajectory of Jane's circumstances: "Coming to her husband in economic independence and by her free choice, Jane can become a wife without sacrificing a grain of her Jane Eyre-ity" (Rich 80). Plumwood acknowledges this as a desirable outcome when dismantling a dualism, as although social identities are "never unproblematic given the power relations which shape social identities generally and traditional gender identities in particular. But they are capable of liberatory or subversive reconstruction without total demolition and abandonment" (63). It is in this way that Jane can pursue her interpretation of the traditional female roles of wife and mother safely with Rochester, who serves in the newly interpreted traditional male roles of husband and father alongside her. By the end of the novel, Rochester undergoes a drastic transformation to arrive in this space, yet he is also not entirely erased. Important to his trajectory, I will expound upon Rochester's unique rehumanization later in chapter four.

Another interesting dimension in which Charlotte Brontë blends elements belonging to dualisms is her integration of culturally dominant Christianity and the more subversive elements of the supernatural, superstition, and fairy tales. Referencing these alternative modalities are crucial to our understanding of Jane's development as they are spaces outside of the mainstream for her to question and challenge the dominant narrative and framework. J. Jeffrey Franklin examines competing spiritualities both within, but primarily outside of Christianity and how the

variety empowers Jane to seek paradigms that suit her beliefs and integrate them into her life. By having access to a variety of worldviews, Jane can reconcile elements she agrees with and replace those she does not. Franklin observes, "One does not have to read beyond the first pages of *Jane Eyre* to find signs of conflict within the Christian discourse of the time and within Brontë 's own spiritual position" (459). As an example of Brontë showcasing the more traditional mind/body dualism, God is mentioned frequently in the text, and the novel even ends referencing St. John's missionary work, predicting soon the end of his life: "...his hope will be sure, his faith steadfast. His own words are a pledge of this – 'My Master,' he says, 'has forewarned me. Daily He announces more distinctly, 'Surely I come quickly!' and hourly I more eagerly respond, 'Amen; even so come, Lord Jesus!'''' (Brontë 521). Without hesitation, St. John is ready to abandon his earthly body and transcend to what he believes is the superior intangible realm of Heaven.

Regarding spiritualities, Jane's worldview is more expansive than her cousin's. In fact, "The supernatural is as pervasive in Jane Eyre as is the discourse of Christianity" (Franklin 469). For as much as she references God, Jesus, Lord, and prayer, Jane also speaks of fairies, gytrash, ignis fatuus, ghosts, and other supernatural beings. Jane dreams about ill omens and, at times, has a pagan-like reverence to nature and personifies the moon: "She broke forth as never moon yet burst from cloud: a hand first penetrated the sable folds and waved them away; then, not a moon, but a white human form shone in the azure, inclining a glorious brow earthward. It gazed and gazed on me. It spoke to my spirit" (Brontë 367). The intensity of Jane's interaction with the moon in this instance once again demonstrates Jane's affinity with nature and how much natural elements influence her life and choices. Giving such attention to this moment, Brontë is clearly elevating the moon and nature to forces to be revered—akin to a religion or another powerful and

transcendent force, which can be interpreted as a competing belief system to the cultural norm. Robert B. Heilman suggests, when analyzing *Jane Eyre* and the use of the moon and reason: "We can learn something about Charlotte Brontë's personality and her art by observing how deeply her novels are penetrated by the counterattractions of reason and whatever "superstition" or "intuition" or other impulses arise to oppose it" (283). This connection is especially relevant when looking at how other dualisms, such as male/female and human/nature, operate in the novel and both echo and reinforce the oppressive superior and inferior systems as the traditional mind/body dualism has done. Inherently, belief systems play an essential role in shaping society and also guide individuals to participate in existing and established dualistic structures.

Returning to Plumwood, I wish to emphasize how she helps to situate Christianity firmly on the male, reason, and civilization side of dualisms–opposite of women, nature, and other mysticisms. Starting at the dawn of western thought, Plumwood explains the historical trajectory of such dualisms:

> The *Timaeus* is the main text in which Plato deals explicitly with nature. It not only anticipates major aspects of Christianity, but was doubtless a major influence in forming it… It is this account which later rationalists, including Christian rationalists, build on, together with Plato's earlier form of reason/nature dualism. It reaches its fullest development and distinctively modern form in the thought of Descartes and his successors. (88-89)

That being said, non-Christian beliefs were not completely eradicated and co-existed with dominant Christianity. Franklin relates just how prevalent other modes of belief – especially non-Christian – were at the time–especially in lower and laboring classes: "James Obelkevich shows that superstitions existed widely both in Christian sects (he concentrates on Evangelical

Methodists) and in the "pagan" practices that were prevalent on a generalized cultural basis. …belief in the supernatural was an integral part of "popular religion"; "superstition was real, as real as Christianity – perhaps more" (470). This divergence of beliefs and spiritualities from the mainstream is especially significant, as non-dominant religious or spiritual modalities offer a more female-accessible alternative to male-centered Christianity. To be clear, women in *Jane Eyre* do ascribe to Christianity, but Brontë uses Jane's character to explore a selective Christianity that incorporates aspects agreeable to her while also leaving room for nontraditional spiritualities to connect with Jane's life and guide her decision-making in synergy with aspects of the dominant Christian beliefs.

This blend makes sense, as Jane receives information about Christianity and these nontraditional spiritualities in her formative years. While Jane was raised Christian and continues her education at Christian-based Lowood School, most of Jane's knowledge of supernatural entities and superstitions stems from what she has heard from servants as a child. Bessie Leaven is a prominent character in Jane's childhood. A servant in the Reed household, Bessie is one of the few individuals who treats Jane kindly and often adopts a mother-like role to young Jane. Bessie spends significant time telling her stories and sharing superstitions more commonly known by the servant class. Bessie's words and tales have a formative impact on Jane, as she often recalls them, even in her adulthood. An example of this is when she first meets Rochester: "As this horse approached, and as I watched for it to appear through the dusk, I remembered certain of Bessie's tales, wherein figured a North-of-England spirit, called a 'Gytrash'; which, in the form of horse, mule, or large dog, haunted solitary ways, and sometimes came upon belated travellers, as this horse was now coming upon me" (Brontë 132). Obviously, this does not turn out to

be true, but that does not dissuade Jane from turning to Bessie's imparted wisdom in other circumstances.

Another example of Jane relying on these old tales and superstitions is when Jane wakes from her nightmare about a child before hearing news of Aunt Reed's failing health. Jane recalls a parallel circumstance: "When I was a little girl, only six years old, I one night heard Bessie Leaven say to Martha Abbot that she had been dreaming about a little child; and that to dream of children was a sure sign of trouble, either to one's self or one's kin… The next day Bessie was sent for home to the death-bed of her little sister" (Brontë 254). Martin argues that Bessie fits into the role of "archetypal because she always represents the source of the tale in womanly knowledge. But, in the world of the patriarchy, the older system of knowledge and religion must go underground, as Christianity prevails and suppresses nature" (86). Bessie and other servants serve as that underground and pass along their wisdom to Jane. These stories stick with Jane and continue impacting her worldview, though she has also been otherwise educated. She reveals her thoughts on the matter before relating to the reader her dream[2]:

> Presentiments are strange things! and so are sympathies; and so are signs; and the three combined make one mystery to which humanity has not yet found the key. I never laughed at presentiments in my life, because I have had strange ones of my own. Sympathies, I believe, exist (for instance, between far-distant, long-absent, wholly estranged relatives asserting, notwithstanding their alienation, the unity of the source to which each traces his origin) whose workings baffle mortal comprehension. And signs, for aught we know, may be but the sympathies of Nature with man. (Brontë 254)

[2] "Obelkevich notes that during the mid nineteenth century in England dreams were considered a form of contact with the supernatural: "Dreams thus made possible a nightly encounter with the supernatural for which there was no counterpart in Christianity" (Franklin 473).

Making the direct connection of man to nature (and capitalizing it) in this context is especially significant as Brontë and Jane indicate here that nature is a legitimate, though mysterious, force and that humans can and should be receptive to its messages, thus bridging across and disrupting the dualisms. This reflection not only shows Jane's predilection for the supernatural but also establishes why she gives credence to the mysterious "sympathy" she receives from Rochester during St. John's marriage and missionary proposal miles away:

> 'What have you heard? What do you see?' asked St. John. I saw nothing, but I heard a voice somewhere cry –
>
> 'Jane! Jane! Jane!' – nothing more.
>
> 'O God! what is it?' I gasped.
>
> I might have said, 'Where is it?' for it did not seem in the room, nor in the house, nor in the garden; it did not come out of the air, nor from under the earth, nor from overhead. I had heard it – where, or whence, for ever impossible to know! And it was the voice of a human being – a known, loved, well-remembered voice – that of Edward Fairfax Rochester; and it spoke in pain and woe, wildly, eerily, urgently. (Brontë 483)

This occurrence is a turning point for Jane and brings about the conclusion of the novel. Jane makes her decision about her future. As Franklin notes," Jane is empowered, then, through what first must be read as a contact with the supernatural. In effect, the supernatural saves Jane from a sacrificial marriage to a masculine Evangelical God" (476). This critical moment upholds Plumwood's notion of "subversive reconstruction" (63) mentioned earlier: "The culmination will be a spiritual love with Rochester that is heightened by its passage through the supernatural and its affinity with the divine love of Jane's revised Christianity" (Franklin 475). Jane's curated

spiritualities deconstruct dualisms as she replaces oppressive aspects of Christianity with freer ones from alternate frameworks.

Naturally, society and the dominant culture of the time frowned upon these undercurrents in *Jane Eyre*. Initial reception reflects this tension: “Though the large majority of the early reviews of Jane Eyre were favorable, a January 1848 review in *The Christian Remembrancer* charged the author with setting out to show "that all Christian profession is bigotry and all Christian practice is hypocrisy’” (Franklin 458). Blinded by the domination drive of “homogenization” (Plumwood 60), they, unfortunately, misunderstood the nuances of Brontë's work and how Christianity still fits into the larger picture. Micael M. Clarke explains the blending of traditions in the novel and its impact:

> The structure of *Jane Eyre* is a complex fusion of classical mythology, Christian allegory, and fairy tale, resulting finally in a feminist allegory, a woman's Pilgrim's Progress, in which those elements of Christianity that demean women's intelligence, will, desire, and integrity are assessed and found wanting. Brontë's is a Christianity reclaimed by the (re)insertion of a maternalist respect for women's work… And it is the insertion into the novel of the Grimm Brothers' Cinderella, with its resonances of the supernatural and the mythic, that conveys this feminist ethic. (708)

In other words, because Brontë engages with a wide range of belief systems and storytelling traditions in *Jane Eyre*, she can revise the dominant narrative of Christianity not by abolishing it but by revising oppressive parts. By incorporating more female-friendly elements from alternative belief systems, Brontë can guide Jane to the equality she seeks in a non-threatening and relatively more accepted way (though not entirely non-controversial for some 19th-century readers), as the elements she employs have been longstanding, though marginalized. In a similar

vein of thought, the inclusion of fairy tales into this mix is another significant dimension to understanding the framework Charlotte Brontë establishes for *Jane Eyre* to subvert, challenge, and dismantle dualisms. Martin adds some context to Brontë's decision:

> In the nineteenth century it was only in the fairy tale that Charlotte Brontë was likely to find traces of a non-patriarchal world. The divided world of her fiction has yet one more division, that between the women's world of fairy tale, and the men's world of Christianity. Most women have chosen to align themselves with the victorious latter world, but Charlotte Brontë seems clearly to have remained faithful to the earlier. It was the way she saw. (94)

Fairy tales provide an alternate structure for Brontë to tell her story and to make the story more female-centered. Brontë's work stands out: "*Jane Eyre*, however, differs from most other novels of the period, in that the author has not contented herself with allusions to fairy tale motifs, but has in fact woven them into the fabric of the novel" (Martin 86). She accomplishes this implicitly and explicitly–from Cinderella to Bluebeard, and others. In conjunction with everything else, Clarke supports this addition, asserting that "fairy tale enables Brontë to reach beyond the moral and ethical constraints that Christianity sometimes enjoins upon women and to convey an alternative religious vision" (696). Not confined to the rigid constraints of the dominant mode of belief, Brontë enriches her novel, sets up her beloved protagonist for success, and offers a portrait of a more fulfilled and complete human by breaking down the dualistic structures of male/female and society/nature that confine women to a limiting and unfulfilling existence.

Chapter Two: The Exterior Feeds the Interior: Jane's Close Relationship with Nature, Weaponized Liminality, and Symbols

Nature features prominently throughout *Jane Eyre* and is a crucial component in understanding Jane's motivations, desires, and overall growth trajectory in the novel. Here, I find it helpful to utilize Plumwood's thinking to explain Jane's profound relationship with nature and nature's role in ultimately dismantling the dualisms of male/female and society/nature. Plumwood states, "What is wilderness in the terms of the master identity is to these others a home" (163). With dualisms in play, that master identity relegates wilderness and nature to be associated with female identity and exploitation for the oppressor's own gain. In this case, the master identity refers to the oppressing forces of the dualisms: the masculine, society, and reason against the feminine, nature, and emotion, which is why an ecofeminist lens can be useful to enhance understanding. Plumwood warns, "It is both tempting and common therefore for feminists to view the traditional connection between women and nature as no more than an instrument of oppression…it is perilous for feminism to ignore the issue because it has an important bearing on the model of humanity into which women will be fitted and within which they will claim equality" (20-21). In other words, while the female/nature connection *can* be used to instrumentalize and exploit, it is also the greatest alliance women can have in order to propagate the changes necessary to redefine roles and effectively dismantle the oppressive facets of the patriarchal dualistic systems subjugating them.

As previously mentioned, it is more powerful for women to reclaim roles they are already performing with "subversive reconstruction" (Plumwood 63). Embracing and reinterpreting allow women to have the best of both worlds. Celebrating what is good and altering what is unacceptable will yield the best results and retain the unique and powerful relationship between women and nature. Likewise, it would require those on the male/reason side to reevaluate their

relationship with women/nature as well. This can prove difficult as early Western thinkers have historically placed such a negative value on the relationship between men and nature/women. For example, I would like to call attention to Plumwood's early history of the negative and oppressive dynamic of this dualism: "Where Plato depicts internal nature as a prison and as a recalcitrant animal—both images of struggle—for Descartes the guiding images of external nature are those of the wax—passive and easily moulded—and the machine… A machine is made to be controlled, and knowledge of its operation is the means to power over it" (Plumwood 109). Centuries of thought entrenched in this mindset have solidified the governing dualistic structures. However, in *Jane Eyre*, Jane refuses to be placed into this Cartesian dualistic standard. Once Rochester tells Jane about the new governess arrangement he has procured for her – for when he presumably marries Blanche Ingram, Jane reacts emotionally to the inevitable separation. Noticing this, he suggests she stay after all, yet still has not shown his hand about his true feelings for her. Jane replies with vitriol and educates him about a fact she was confident he was aware of:

> 'I tell you I must go!' I retorted, roused to something like passion. 'Do you think I can stay to become nothing to you? Do you think I am an automaton? – a machine without feelings? and can bear to have my morsel of bread snatched from my lips, and my drop of living water dashed from my cup? Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong! – I have as much soul as you – and full as much heart! (Brontë 292)

Later, Jane discovers the truth behind Rochester's insistence and how he was purposefully trying to elicit a reaction from her. While Rochester does not evoke in Jane the outward jealousy he had hoped, he is observant of Jane's emotional reactions, mirroring nature: '"even although I should

make you a little indignant, Jane – and I have seen what a fire-spirit you can be when you are indignant. You glowed in the cool moonlight last night, when you mutinied against fate, and claimed your rank as my equal. Janet, by the bye, it was you who made me the offer"' (Brontë 303). As Jane is aligned with nature in reference to both fire and the moon, this moment personifies fighting back against the imposed dualisms and demonstrating the vibrancy of life and Jane's agency. Jane's retort: "'Of course I did"' (Brontë 303), further cements how normal and natural it is for her to embody those natural elements which can challenge the limitations dualistic structures impose. The relationship Jane has and continues to have with nature is directly connected with her agency in the past, present, and future.

Jane's significant relationship with nature from childhood to adulthood serves as a reflection, refuge, and ally for her. The connection between weather and nature is very apparent in Charlotte Brontë's works: "In *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, the natural convulsions of tempests mark significant emotional moments in the lives of the heroines" (Newman 196). Jane's emotional state and fate reflects directly with the weather and natural conditions she consistently points out.

Upon arrival at Lowood as a child, the windstorm excites her: "I wished the wind to howl more wildly, the gloom to deepen to darkness, and the confusion to rise to clamour" (Brontë 65). This tumultuous transition of leaving the only place she has known excites her more than it terrifies her, as shown in her reaction to the storm. Justine Pizzo explains how "the novel engages with contemporary popular discourse, scientific study, and medical belief to represent the female body's affirmative sensual alliance with the surrounding air and this alliance's connection to a masterful authorial power" (87). Once she settles into school life, Jane reflects in the spring: "And now vegetation matured with vigour; Lowood shook loose its tresses; it became

all green, all flowery; its great elm, ash, and oak skeletons were restored to majestic life… All this I enjoyed often and fully, free, unwatched, and almost alone" (Brontë 91). Out of the oppressive control of Mrs. Reed, Jane blossoms in her new environment. In an article focusing on nature in *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea,* Gail Fincham recognizes possibilities abound in Brontë's work: "Jane rejoices in the Spring landscape. Her depiction of a prelaspsarian Eden where she can create, through her own choice and agency, a new life at Lowood" (Fincham 17). Compared to dreary and oppressive Gateshead, Jane finds new life and inspiration in Lowood.

Jane flourishes in the school environment as time passes, and her deep connection to nature remains. As an adult, Jane is aware of her emotional connection to nature and often comments on it, such as when Mr. Rochester calms her nerves the night before their initial, thwarted wedding: "The night is serene, sir; and so am I" (Brontë 329) and also earlier in the novel when Jane is radiant with joy the morning after the proposal: "Nature must be gladsome when I was so happy" (Brontë 297). These are both examples of how the weather and Jane's emotions are synchronized even as an adult. Pizzo postulates that "Jane's capacity to know the world by knowing its weather informs her transition from the predominantly female kinship structures in the early portion of her Bildung to the heterosexual desire that motivates her affiliation with Rochester in the novel's latter half" (90). Nature's endorsed shift is important as it shepherds Jane to the next evolution of her personhood and dimension of a romantic relationship. Nature serves as a continuous series of signposts for Jane, guiding her about each situation in her life and especially later in her romance. As Jane and Rochester's relationship blossoms, weather and nature phenomena serve as a mirror and as a harbinger.

The entire proposal chapter is littered with weather and nature references that indicate not only Jane's mood, but her ultimate future. The chapter opens up: "A splendid Midsummer shone

over England: skies so pure, suns so radiant as were ever seen in long succession, seldom favor, even singly, over wave-girt land" (Brontë 286). Because of Jane's connection with nature, this will be a special day, which is revealed soon enough with the engagement of Mr. Rochester to Jane rather than Blanche Ingram. However, the change in the weather and the destructively stormy night that develops is a bad omen: "as the wind blew, near and deep the thunder crashed, fierce and frequent as lightning gleamed…the great horse-chestnut at the bottom of the orchard had been struck by lightning in the night and half had been split away" (Brontë 296). This event foreshadows the obstacle preventing Jane and Rochester's marriage and their eventual separation. That being said, Ian Emberson recognizes in his work about broken trees in literature, "In nature it is not uncommon to find a tree that has been split in two by wind or lightning, where both halves survive… Furthermore, it is not an accurate symbol for the final working of the plot. By the time Jane reaches Ferndean, metaphorically, the split in the broken tree has miraculously healed; the two halves may have been battered by storms, but they are finally united" (341-342). This fact is an interesting observation; weather and nature are fluid and continuous, much like Jane's life and situation. At the start of the next chapter, there is again a change: "…a brilliant June morning had succeeded to the tempest of the night; and to feel, through the open glass door, the breathing of a fresh and fragrant breeze" (Brontë 297). This tone is much more predictive of the novel's conclusion, as Jane and Rochester ultimately reunite after a tempestuous parting with a much stronger relationship and a dynamic that pleases both Rochester and Jane in ways that would not have been possible had the first attempt succeeded. Since they have not achieved the status of equals at this point in the novel, even if Bertha was not an obstacle, Jane and Rochester's first attempt at a relationship would have continued to support existing dualistic structures and be unsatisfying to Jane. Through the destruction of the tree after the proposal due

to the storm, nature serves as a harbinger of what is to develop over the course of the story. It indicates that destruction at the hand of nature can lead to positive growth. The lightning striking the tree is a strong parallel to Rochester's eventual fate with his injuries and blindness due to fire and the rekindling of his and Jane's relationship at the end of the novel that succeeds in being equal due to Rochester's humbling by nature, which grants him further understanding and growth.

It is also worth noting that at the junction of the initially failed relationship with Rochester, Jane calls on nature as a refuge and a protector for herself as an adult. Nature demonstrates its allyship more strongly when Jane needs it most—in a moment of crisis in her adulthood. Namely, nature being a refuge for Jane is significant once the first wedding with Rochester is called off and Jane runs away. Here, "Separated from Rochester and Thornfield, Jane wanders on the moors in the unaccommodated desolation until her serendipitous discovery of family and inheritance at Moor House" (Roy 723). In the interim of connecting with her long-lost cousins, the Rivers, Jane seeks solace in the only thing that cannot disappoint and abandon her: nature.

Jane reflects on her situation: "Nature seemed to me benign and good; I thought she loved me, outcast as I was; and I who from man could anticipate only mistrust, rejection, insult, clung to her with filial fondness. To-night at least, I would be her guest, as I was her child: my mother would lodge me without money and without price" (Brontë 372). This observation also pushes against the dualisms of society and nature as nature gives lodging to Jane for free without obligation or compensation; without money or connection, Jane cannot obtain lodging in civilization. While she is rejected by society, she finds solace and reprieve in nature. As Ross observes, when Jane is wandering the moors after fleeing newly inhospitable Thornfield,

"Having declined to identify with bees and lizards, Jane (who learns these tales from Gateshead Hall servants) sees the moors as potentially full of fairies and elves, grappling imaginatively with a landscape constructed by folklore rather than a biodiverse mire constructed atop rocks and decaying organisms" (166-167). We see this transition point as she extracts herself from the embrace of nature and transitions to the supernatural and back into civilization, escaping death: "The moor recedes; the wild *ignis fatuus* becomes a candle, and Mother Nature a servant knitting. A tree becomes a dresser, ore becomes plate, and *Sphagnum* becomes orderly blocks of fuel. The moor's Gothic properties are tamed as the foreboding folktales of evil elves and catastrophe-causing fairies are replaced by quotidian images of domestic order and comfort" (Ross 169). Jane's ability to exist in both the human and nonhuman worlds—an ally of nature—allows her to experience respite from the pressures of civilization—a place she is not sure she ever has or ever will fully belong. Unless Jane alters the rules and expectations imposed on her by dualistic structures, the oppressions will be upheld. Luckily, Jane can challenge and subvert these dualisms in part because she can notice them in the first place.

Weaponized Liminality: Jane (and Nature) Fight Back!

Due to her fringe existence for much of her life by belonging nowhere, Jane has a unique vantage point where she can recognize male/female and society/nature dualisms and how they impact her life. Though Jane does not recognize the oppressive and restrictive conditions as "dualisms," I am using Plumwood's language to describe the distinct sense of unfairness and limitation Jane feels in many aspects of her life. As a child, this encompasses her years at Gateshead, enduring Aunt Reed's refusal to raise Jane as her own and the cruel treatment of being isolated and thrown into the red room. Although school improves Jane's life overall, living

under Lowood's hypocritical Christianity via Mr. Brocklehurst is included in the category. As an adult, Jane finds herself continuing to be in situations evoking a similar feeling, such as being invited by Rochester to spend the evening with him and his upper-class guests, believing Rochester is going to marry another woman (Blanche Ingram) only to find out he is married to another (Bertha Mason), and fleeing Thornfield Hall after the jilted marriage attempt with no destination established. During these instances and many more, Jane dwells in indeterminate spaces, and that time spent there opens her eyes and enables her to use her liminality to remake her world.

Liminality is "[a] term that derives from the disciplines of psychology and anthropology (especially in the work of Victor Turner), liminality indicates spaces and conditions of transition, in-between spaces where identities are not fully formed" (Nayar 98-99). For much of the novel, Jane exists in various states of liminality. Whether it is due to family structure (or lack thereof), social standing, or gender, it all plays a significant role in Jane's life intellectually, emotionally, or physically. It serves as an impetus for her to "fight back" and demand a reformation and change.

One of the most significant and earliest factors originating her liminality is her status as an orphan. As an orphan, Jane does not have anyone who is required to take responsibility for her, so she must find strength in herself. For example, her cousin, John Reed, dehumanizes young Jane. She condemns his actions after he repeatedly calls her 'rat' and then physically harms her with the book she had been reading: '"Wicked and cruel boy!' I said. 'You are like a murderer – you are like a slave-driver – you are like the Roman emperors!'" (Brontë 13). Jane admits this is the first time she has verbalized what she has been thinking about her cousin and of the larger, oppressive grouping he represents. As an orphan, Jane is excluded and antagonized by

her cousins and aunt in the Reed household. However, the treatment contradicts Jane's uncle's dying wish, and Jane is very aware of the injustice of her situation. Understanding Jane's status as an orphan is integral to her history and later helps explain why she challenges and questions practices that are harmful and their places as a cultural norm. Sarah Gilead elaborates on the topic of orphans to explain the significance of Jane's start:

> Nina Auerbach has argued that the symbolic orphans of the Victorian novel act as sociocultural transformers, as destroyers of the old houses of civilization. One might further argue that the orphan has a double function. Hungry and abandoned, the orphan is the modern Victorian betrayed by history itself, especially by the consoling faiths in secular progress and in Christian providence. But at the same time, the orphan normally generates a success story cum Bildungsroman. (302)

In other words, occupying a liminal space outside of traditional family structure, orphans gain access to alternative frameworks of which they can use to ensure their success story. By existing outside of the mainstream and not relying on or being able to rely on dominant institutions for help, orphans in a Victorian novel triumph because of their relegation to the edges of society. While Jane's hunger and abandonment are more in the abstract (intellectual stimulation, love, acceptance), and the betrayal comes from institutions reinforcing dualisms, such as male/female interactions in childhood with her cousin, John Reed, Christianity, and traditional marriage, this is a fairly accurate interpretation of her status of an orphan in the novel and pushes her to question the status quo. From the very first pages, "The multiple negations of her ordeal at the Reeds ostracism, physical injury, humiliation, terror, fainting are liminal not only in the sense of functioning as symbolic events in Jane's passage to adulthood but because they begin transforming the novel into a tool for interrogating and reimagining social values and power

arrangements" (Gilead 306). During these experiences, Jane is marginalized and begins to call into question the legitimacy of the dualistic structures that have wronged her. She then begins pursuing alternative frameworks that are better suited for her. The origin of this is undoubtedly Jane's traumatic and unjust punishment of being locked in the red room at Gateshead. In the red room, before she faints, ten-year-old Jane Eyre contemplates her plight: "All John Reed's violent tyrannies, all his sisters' proud indifference, all his mother's aversion, all the servants' partiality turned in in my disturbed mind like a dark deposit in a turbid well. Why was I always suffering, always browbeaten, always accused, for ever condemned?" (Brontë 18). Even as a child, Jane feels the elements of oppression in her life and in identifying it, she embarks on the journey to reconcile it.

This pattern that emerges in the novel and in Jane's life is supported by Plumwood's "subversive reconstruction" (63) and also asserts "Women must be treated as just as fully human and as fully part of human culture as men. But both men and women must challenge the dualised conception of human identity and develop an alternative culture which fully recognises human identity as continuous with, not alien from, nature" (Plumwood 36). Jane's liminality becomes a reconstructive force as she encounters difficulties in her journey. Gilead emphasizes this power:

> Each crisis demonstrates the inadequacies of particular features of social structure, but each also allows Jane to act out, and the reader to postulate a response to such felt inadequacies. The narrative dynamic, to borrow Victor Turner's terminology, is that of structure and antistructure, or structure and liminality. Repeatedly, Jane inhabits a literal or metaphorical structure, a house, a geographic setting, a social situation, and flees it. Yet she does not abandon it entirely, for despite the initial rejection or escape she

> eventually returns either literally or symbolically, to transform the inadequate structure into a freshly hypothesized, revisionary one. (304-305)

As Jane finds herself outside of the mainstream, she examines it and questions it, speculating about what might be instead. An early example of this is at Lowood school when she is talking to her friend, Helen Burns, about a punishment Helen receives earlier in the day. Jane opens the conversation:

> 'But that teacher, Miss Scatcherd, is so cruel to you?'
>
> 'Cruel? Not at all! She is severe; she dislikes my faults.'
>
> 'And if I were in your place I should dislike her; I should resist her; if she struck me with that rod, I should get it from her hand; I should break it under her nose.'
>
> 'Probably you would do nothing of the sort: but if you did, Mr Brocklehurst would expel you from the school: that would be a great grief to your relations.' (Brontë 66)

Here, Jane is baffled by Helen's passivity to what Jane passionately feels is an unjust situation. Jane's proposed solution, though unlikely that she would act on it at this point in time, demonstrates Jane's continued unwillingness to accept oppression and injustice from those in power over the powerless. Notable scholar, Adrienne Rich, highlights the catalyst these early conflicts at Gateshead and Lowood create for Jane: "She is, even so, conscious that it could be otherwise; she imagines alternatives, though desperate ones. It is at this moment that the germ of a person known as Jane Eyre is born: a person determined to live, and to choose life with dignity, integrity, and pride" (78). In adopting the values that are most important to her, Jane simultaneously rejects the unhelpful and hindering systems that are obstacles in her life.

Nature is a key component for Jane to navigate the obstacles she encounters throughout the entirety of the novel and establish her own values derived from her rich interior. During and in between challenging moments in both childhood (unfair treatment by family at Gateshead, Christian hypocrisy at Lowood, and Helen's death) and later adulthood (falling in love with unattainable Rochester, having her heart broken by falsely attainable Rochester, and deciding if she should accompany St. John to India), Jane often turns to her favorite solace: nature. Nature is her preferred background whether she is walking, thinking, painting, or reflecting. We first meet Jane as Richard J. Dunn describes in his analysis of *Jane Eyre's* romanticism in which he argues Jane's romanticism is a product of her longing for something beyond her current state. Even as a child, Dunn recognizes Jane's proclivity to lean into her imagination: "Shut away in the Gateshead window seat, fascinated by Bewick's history of British birds, she is suspended between the life of the house and the chilly garden but is stimulated imaginatively by the naturalist's scenes of desolation and icy grandeur" (198-199). Given the dispositions of her cousins and aunt, Jane prefers to keep her own company at Gateshead and, in that solitude, leans into nature when she can. Going further, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak examines the phenomenon of marginalization through 'worlding' in novels with an imperial social context, such as *Jane Eyre*. Spivak offers a perspective on this early introduction of Jane and how it informs the trajectory of her character:

> Here in Jane's self-marginalized uniqueness, the reader becomes her accomplice: the reader and Jane are united – both are reading. Yet Jane still preserves her odd privilege, for she continues never quite doing the proper thing in its proper place. She cares little for reading what is meant to be read: the "letter-press." She reads the pictures. The power of this singular hermeneutics is precisely that it can make the outside inside. (246)

Jane's preference as a child directly reflects her choices as an adult. Due to her birth and social status, Jane's default is on the edges, so often, she elects to begin there herself. On the outskirts, she can develop a rich world for herself. Not only does nature captivate her, but also her artistic eye and budding interior. An example of this continuing into adulthood is when Jane returns to Gateshead per Aunt Reed's dying wish. Not caring to engage with her cousins Eliza or Georgiana, Jane brings her art supplies:

> Provided with a case of pencils, and some sheets of paper, I used to take a seat apart from them, near the window, and busy myself in sketching fancy vignettes, representing any scene that happened momentarily to shape itself in the ever-shifting kaleidoscope of imagination: a glimpse of sea between two rocks; the rising moon, and a ship crossing its disc; a group of reeds and water-flags, and a naiad's head, crowned with lotus-flowers, rising out of them; an elf sitting in a hedge-sparrow's nest, under a wreath of hawthorn bloom. (Brontë 268)

Jane's imagination is abundant with beauty, and in capturing her fascination with nature and other exotic ideas in art, Jane achieves solace and self-enrichment whenever she desires.

In society and as an adult, Jane's affinity with nature furnishes her rich interior and allows her to cope with the difficulties and liminal moments in her life. In this way, both externally and internally, nature impacts the story: "By changing representational modes to suit her transient symbolic needs, Jane treats nature as standing reserve, equally available for poetic conventions and feminist interventions" (Ross 181). Jane's inwardness and nature-inspired rich interior mind cultivated from time alone as another form of refuge are also responsible for pushing against convention and breaking the division of what is viewed as acceptable for females and males. In other areas, she may be powerless, but "By contrast, Jane indiscriminately masters

nature through representation, painting, and word-painting to signal milestones along her path of Bildung. Perhaps Jane is unnatural, after all" (Ross 143). In this way, Jane's affinity with nature is reinforced in her ability to replicate it so accurately. Pizzo explains, "Jane can paint the wind because, in a sense, she perceives it. As an exceptional individual attuned to the authoritative powers of air and moon, she is able to absorb and represent the atmosphere's spatiotemporal reach. Consequently, she need not see Latmos with her bodily eye in order to envision it, as Rochester rightly, if disconcertedly, surmises" (96-97). Jane's cultivated interior richness mirrors the lush plentitude nature offers, though not everyone is able to see it or exploit it. Focusing on the optics of the novel and Jane, Chih-Ping Chen recognizes, "For Jane, the possible power lies in the ability to see without being seen. Her private gallery becomes a sheltered space in which she asserts her visual power, assuming the role of a host who displays the re-imagined vignettes for her own viewing, forming her interpretation without being seen and judged" (374). However, Jane wants to be seen and valued by someone who can understand and meet her in the space she has carved for herself. This is another instance of a dualism deconstructed as Jane seeks to be the subject rather than the object. Rich posits about Jane's desires when Jane, "stands on the roof of Thornfield or walks across its field longing for a wider, more expansive life, she is not longing for a man" (Rich 79). Instead, she wants the same opportunities to widen her experiences as a man inherently has in the current dualistic society.

Jane understands the uniqueness of her thoughts, but still, she muses: "Women are supposed to be very calm generally, but women feel just as men feel; they need to exercise their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute stagnation, precisely as men would suffer" (Brontë 130). Jane is very

aware of how isolating these sentiments are, which is something she mostly bears alone until she connects with Mr. Rochester.

Before that, to ameliorate these feelings and exist in society, much like Jane turns outward to nature, she also turns inward to herself: "Her vivid imagination is fed by others', and her own, drawings and stories. They create a world she can escape at will when threatened. Both refuge and weapon, this world is strongly modelled on nature on which in turn she hones her identity" (Fincham 16). The result of this intrigues Mr. Rochester and sparks an attraction to her and her mind. A great example of this is when he inquires about her art, which is a true reflection of her mind and interior:

> "Where did you get your copies?"
>
> "Out of my head."
>
> "That head I see now on your shoulders?"
>
> "Yes, sir."
>
> "Has it other furniture of the same kind within?"
>
> "I should think it may have: I should hope—better." (Brontë 146)

Through this exchange, we see that Rochester is willing to step outside the traditional dualistic structures that Plumwood discusses. Linda Gill argues in her examination of art and gender in the novel that "In short, Rochester makes it transparently obvious that his appreciation and attraction to Jane's art and her has nothing to do with her status as an object of desire or an art object" (122). This is significant in showing how the two characters fall outside of the dualistic norm as well as informing each other about their respective interiors. In fact, "he evaluates her art in terms of its originality; that is, he values her art based on the extent to which it is her own creation" (Gill 121-122). The exchange gives Jane recognition and credit for her mental and

creative faculties—favoring the internal over the pulchritude. In this moment, it is apparent that "Both Jane and Rochester, who are plain to the detached eye, value beauty highly. But they both discover that conventionally beautiful exteriors are often lacking in emotional, moral and intellectual beauty" (Newman 200). Both prefer what is inside, and that is what catalyzes their relationship. "Thus, if patriarchally defined narratives identified the woman as an object of desire whose value is determined by the patriarchal representative who wants to possess her, the fact that Jane has value despite her specified plainness insists that a woman's value is not to be found in her external beauty (or lack of it) but in her character, the self which is defined by her interiority" (Gill 118). The discovered kinship empowers Jane to assert herself as Rochester's equal, and nature supports this assertion. Later in the novel, nature protects Jane when she flees from an illegal and unequal union and humbles Rochester into equality with debilitating fire. But before those events transpire, the groundwork must be laid out: Jane and Rochester must verbalize the feelings that will eventually lead them there.

Continuing the very emotional discussion of Mr. Rochester's false engagement to Blanche Ingram, Jane declares to him: "I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, nor even mortal flesh; —it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God's feet, equal—as we are!" (Brontë 292). Rochester agrees with Jane that they are equals and then surprises Jane by proposing marriage. This pivotal conversation results in a heart-to-heart conversation and ends with Mr. Rochester and Jane engaged, as Mr. Rochester interprets this as confirmation that they are indeed akin. However, he fails to fully embrace Jane for who she is in that moment—immediately falling into the dualistic structure society lays out as the idea and institution of marriage as he moves to acquire her. Rochester beckons, "'Come to me – come to me entirely now' said he;

and added in his deepest tone, speaking in my ear as his cheek was laid on mine, 'Make my happiness – I will make yours"' (Brontë 295). The problem is that in order to make Rochester happy at that point in time, Jane will need to give up herself and her values, which she is unwilling to do. Despite their connection and despite his words, Rochester cannot accept and cannot understand who Jane is in her entirety, and is therefore not yet ready for the type of relationship Jane envisions.

Nature's Signposts: Moon and Fire

In the novel, the two most prevalent feminine nature symbols are the moon and fire. Both play a significant role in Jane's journey and nearly every chapter has a reference to one or both. The frequent occurrence coincides with important moments or figures in Jane's life and are signposts signaling to Jane if she should trust someone, stay at a location, or leave a location. Symbols of the moon and fire provide guidance to Jane in a capacity that others may find in traditional institutions, such as a Christian church, instead. Clarke explains, "Again and again, Brontë uses these symbols – the hearth and the moon – to represent a heavenly mother and virgin moon-goddess, offering Jane Eyre a spiritual integrity lacking in the version of Christianity represented by Brocklehurst and St. John Rivers" (702). This distinction is relevant, as it reinforces Jane seeking alternatives and attempting to overcome the dualisms in Christianity outlined previously.

While both symbols are significant, the moon holds a particularly special role in Jane's female empowerment. Even Gilbert and Gubar note that "As always at major moments in Jane's life, the room is filled with moonlight, as if to remind her that powerful forces are still at work both without and within her" (371). Acting as a guide, a feminine source of strength, or a witness

in Jane's life, the moon is always present. In the first proposal scene with Rochester, Jane bids the moon to help her ascertain if he is being sincere: '"Mr. Rochester, let me look at your face: turn to the moonlight"' (Brontë 294). This interaction demonstrates Jane's trust in the feminine body of the moon and adds further credibility to the personified moon, encouraging Jane's departure in the middle of the night after the thwarted first wedding. Another instance of the moon's direct involvement with Jane is when St. John is pressuring Jane to accept his proposal, and before Jane hears Rochester's voice, she describes, "The one candle was dying out: the room was full of moonlight" (Brontë 483). The dying candle is representative of Jane stepping away from the man-made and the society that St. John offers; and instead, Jane leans into her own desires and feminine support from the moon as she receives shortly thereafter the life-altering "sympathy" from Rochester. These two examples are only a few of many instances in which Jane mentions the moon during a critical point in the novel. Justine Pizzo explains the Victorian fascination with lunarism, like the weather wisdom mentioned previously:

> Lunarism held that the cycles of the moon controlled atmospheric tides much as they controlled oceanic currents. Although some meteorologists dismissed these practices outright, many others considered the sensual authority of the atmospherically responsive body and the feminine agency of the moon to fit squarely within the rubric of quantitative science. Hence, Jane Eyre's prophetic responses to the air and her psychic affinity with lunar events bespeak a sophisticated capacity for rational thought and embodied knowledge that Victorian climate science implicitly upheld. (86)

Through the pervasive use of the moon, Brontë asserts an authority beyond the masculine God of Christianity and traditionally interpreted masculine reason. Nature and natural phenomena offer valid information about the world, and Jane is inextricably attuned to it.

As we know, the Brontës were very cognizant of the natural world, so it is not surprising that Charlotte Brontë would integrate the moon and this contemporary science into her novel. Heilman remarks on its versatility as well: "[I]n Jane Eyre the moon is an aesthetic staple, at times a scenic element inherently charming to the writer, at times almost a character; at its most interesting it reveals an author groping for a cosmic symbolization of reality, or toward a reality beyond the confines of everyday actuality, toward an interplay of private consciousness and mysterious forces in the universe" (292). Due to the power Brontë imbues in the moon – inspired by contemporary science and moon symbolism in the novel – the moon represents feminine agency and offers Jane external affirmation of her internal inclinations.

One of the most interesting and mysterious moments is when Jane dreams of the moon after having a final conversation with Rochester when all is revealed about his existing marriage. She is roused and compelled to flee bigamous Rochester and inhospitable Thornfield:

> I lifted up my head to look: the roof resolved to clouds, high and dim; the gleam was such as the moon imparts to vapours she is about to sever. I watched her come – watched with the strangest anticipation; as though some word of doom were to be written on her disc. She broke forth as never moon yet burst from cloud: a hand first penetrated the sable folds and waved them away; then, not a moon, but a white human form shone in the azure, inclining a glorious brow earthward. It gazed and gazed on me. It spoke to my spirit: immeasurably distant was the tone, yet so near, it whispered in my heart—
>
> 'My daughter, flee temptation.'
>
> 'Mother, I will.'
>
> So I answered after I had waked from the trance-like dream. (Brontë 367-368)

Jane chooses to exit human society at this impetus and surrounds herself completely in nature. Even when she re-enters human society, after she meets her cousins and acquires a fortune that grants her access to society, she eventually returns home to nature in the form of Ferndean to a revised Rochester. Pizzo argues this crucial moment in the novel, "affirms the confluence between the iconic maternal body (suggestive here of Jane's deceased mother) and the guiding authorial and climatological influence of the moon" (93). However, this is not the first time the moon has been a significant part of Jane's life.

Brontë includes such potent moon symbolism intentionally. Heilman observes, "The moon visions always partake of the revelatory of human possibility or human actuality, or of the quality of mind of those who have the visions. When Charlotte wants to make a quick plunge into the rare essence of a character, she instinctively demands the presence of the lunar muse" (292), and "In Jane's life every crucial event has its special lunar display" (293). The moon is a powerful symbol throughout the entirety of the novel. At the beginning, Jane as a child receives the moon's blessing with her association with Helen Burns and Miss Temple:

> Resting my head on Helen's shoulder, I put my arms round her waist; she drew me to her, and we reposed in silence. We had not sat long thus, when another person came in. Some heavy clouds, swept from the sky by a rising wind, had left the moon bare; and her light, streaming in through a window near, shone full both on us and on the approaching figure, which we at once recognised as Miss Temple. (Brontë 83)

The moonlight guides young Jane in this instance to women she can trust and grow from. Helen Burns becomes a friend and sister to Jane, and Miss Temple becomes a role model and mentor.

Later, when Jane meets and develops a relationship with her cousins Mary and Diana, the latter's name invokes the Roman goddess of the moon. This is no coincidence, as it reinforces

the pattern begun in Jane's youth and once again signals the establishment of another safe female community for Jane. Above all, the purpose the moon serves in the context of ecofeminism to provide a female-centered alternative in relation to male-centric Christianity. Jane adopts facets of both without overwriting the other. Heilman explains after Jane rejects St. John as her final answer to his proposal and hears Rochester's cry from miles away:

> Charlotte might have described the cosmic imperative by such an abstraction as "Divine Law." That she did otherwise shows the working of a fine aesthetic sensibility: for the simple naming of authority she substitutes a symbolic presence concrete, pictorially exciting, stimulatingly rich in its undefinedness and in its undeniable suggestion of independent animistic forces and indeed of the pagan. And in the symbolization of an interplay between private feeling and cosmic order, as well as between minds physically far apart, there is an unresolved mystery that takes us far beyond any everyday rationale of things and events (299).

This choice by Brontë is emblematic of Jane operating outside of prescribed dualisms and thereby challenging them. The moon offers Jane yet another alternative framework.

Similarly, Brontë elects to incorporate fire as a symbol to also challenge dualisms. Similar to the moon symbolism, fire symbolism is pervasive in the novel: "David Lodge points out that *Jane Eyre* "contains about eighty-five references to domestic fires" as well as some dozen references to hearths, about forty-three figurative and ten literal references to fire, and four to hell-fire" (Clarke 700). Much like the moon, the presence of fire represents the feminine sphere. Clarke elaborates on what this message might mean:

> In the larger pattern of the novel, at the hearths of Miss Temple, Bessie, Mrs. Fairfax, and Mary and Diana Rivers, domesticity is associated with resistance to the life-denying

> principles of a tainted social system and with a spirituality that is not anti-Christian, but that seeks to reintegrate ancient maternalist principles into the Christianity that Brontë's father and his curates preached. Had the hearthkeepers more power, Brontë seems to say, the Jane Eyres of the world could fulfill their ambitions and their desire for freedom. (706)

The feminine symbolism associated with fire in the novel once again not only challenges accepted dualisms, but also calls into question the relegation of duties by the separate spheres determined by gender. The double-edge of the fire symbol is something that Brontë seeks to communicate throughout the novel and especially at the end when Bertha, as an extension of Jane and the power of nature, burns down Thornfield and blinds and maims Rochester: "Thus, hearthfire in *Jane Eyre* represents all that is needful, desired, and inspiring, but also that which has a terrifying potential for devastation and destruction" (Clarke 701). Through this awesome power, Jane can assert her will through nature and transform Rochester to be compatible with her. Jane does not use fire as a humbling agent directly; rather, Jane achieves this indirectly through her alignment with Bertha Mason as her "dark double," as Gilbert and Gubar observe. Both by acting out Jane's secret anger and serving from afar as a sister or an ally on the female/nature side of dualisms, Bertha works in solidarity largely and symbolically with fire to humble the masculine and, in this specific case, Rochester.

Chapter Three: Communities and Clashes of Women

Throughout the novel, Jane experiences interactions with both men and women. The focus on studying the novel is so often centered around her relationship with Rochester (and later St. John) that I would like to give adequate attention to the women in Jane's life that have positive and negative impacts (or both) before bringing the men into the equation. In light of ecofeminism, "The backgrounding and instrumentalisation of nature and that of women run closely parallel. For women, their backgrounded and instrumental status as nature does not usually need to be explicit, for it structures their major roles in both public and private spheres" (Plumwood 21). Jane experiences backgrounding in many ways, as do other women in the novel. Due to this marginalization, a certain sisterhood is formed between those with sympathies for Jane and her situation and a perpetuation of otherness with those who do not. Jane also engages in the latter with Bertha. However, due to their complex relationship, Bertha ironically ends up helping Jane secure a more equitable marriage with Rochester by functioning as an extension of nature.

Jane's initial interactions with women are not incredibly positive. The overbearing and unjust Aunt Reed and her female cousins Eliza and Georgiana are less than kind or outright cold to Jane in her first ten years of life. Even when Jane returns at Mrs. Reed's dying request, nearly a decade later, not much has changed. As Jane awaits her aunt's summons and eventual death, Jane realizes, " A sneer, however, whether covert or open, had now no longer that power over me it once possessed: as I sat between my cousins, I was surprised to find how easy I felt under the total neglect of the one and the semi-sarcastic attentions of the other – Eliza did not mortify, nor Georgiana ruffle me" (Brontë 264). At that point, a lot has changed for Jane. As Adrienne Rich explains, "Jane Eyre, motherless and economically powerless, undergoes certain traditional

female temptations, and finds that each temptation presents itself along with an alternative–the image of a nurturing or principled or spirited woman on whom she can model herself, or to who she can look for support" (Rich 78). While those at Gateshead were of no help, leaving Gateshead opens Jane's world and brings her into the company of those who support her, validate her, and make her feel alive; Jane returns to her cousins a changed woman.

Lowood is Jane's first experience with a positive female society. J. Jeffrey Franklin observes at Lowood: "it is through Helen and Miss Temple that Jane has her first taste of the combined intellectual and emotional "communion" with women – what Sarah Gilead aptly calls the "feminist counterworld" in the novel – for which she will hunger until she finds Diana and Mary Rivers" (465). These four women play significant roles in Jane's development and sense of self. Rich describes, "Helen Burns is strong of will, awkward and blundering in the practical world yet intellectually and spiritually mature beyond her years. Severe, mystical, convinced of the transitory and insignificant nature of earthly life, she still responds to Jane's hunger for contact with a humane and sisterly concern" (78). Both Jane and Helen are invited into Miss Temple's room for snacks and conversation; Jane observes,

> …we sat one on each side of her, and now a conversation followed between her and Helen, which it was indeed a privilege to be admitted to hear.
>
> 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; and such was my feeling now: but as to Helen Burns, I was struck with wonder. (Brontë 86)

Jane does not understand Helen completely, but she admires her. Their bond is short but close from when Jane meets her shortly after arriving at Lowood until Helen's death from consumption. Yet, Helen is not the only feminine presence who will positively impact young Jane Eyre: "In contrast to Helen, the director Miss Temple's rebellious mind and will facilitate Jane's transformation. As the subversive mediator between the patriarchal Brocklehurst and the oppressed Lowood girls, Miss Temple has been quietly disobeying Brocklehurst' s regulations to better provide for the Lowood girls in food and clothes" (Chen 375). Miss Temple's kindness to Jane, Helen, and the other Lowood girls leaves an indelible mark on Jane and serves as a motherly figure to Jane. This continues until Miss Temple's departure from her position at the school when she marries. Rich reflects that regarding Jane's school years, "The discipline at Lowood and the moral and intellectual force of Helen and Miss Temple combine to give young Jane a sense of her own worth and ethical choice… Yet her separation from these two women enables Jane to move forward in a wider realm of experience" (79), which is also something Jane seeks. Bolstered by these positive relationships, Jane outgrows Lowood.

It will not be until the last part of the novel, when Jane meets Mary and Diana Rivers, that she will feel "a reviving pleasure in this intercourse, of a kind now tasted by me for the first time – the pleasure arising from perfect congeniality of tastes, sentiments, and principles. I liked to read what they liked to read: what they enjoyed, delighted me; what they approved I reverenced" (Brontë 402). Now that Jane has further developed her personhood, she feels she can partake – unlike only being an observer (though included) of Helen Burns and Miss Temple. This dynamic is very satisfying for Jane and symbolic of her progress not only as a woman but also as human.

On a smaller scale, though also helpful, Bessie and Mrs. Fairfax also support Jane on her journey. After the incident in the red room at Gateshead and Jane's burgeoning conflict with Mrs. Reed, leading to placement at Lowood, Bessie takes Jane under her wing: "Bessie stooped; we mutually embraced, and I followed her into the house quite comforted. That afternoon lapsed in peace and harmony; and in the evening Bessie told me some of her most enchaining stories, and sang me some of her sweetest songs. Even for me life had its gleams of sunshine" (Brontë 48). Although Bessie is not given the blessing of the moon and feminine agency, the sun is also a nature symbol indicating Bessie's support and goodwill toward Jane.

Mrs. Fairfax fulfills a similar role at Thornfield. Often seated by the hearth in the evenings, she is pleasant enough company to adult Jane and looks after her in a way parallel to Bessie. After Mrs. Fairfax witnesses Jane and Rochester's affection and discovers their engagement, she warns Jane in a gesture of concern: "'I hope all will be right in the end,' she said: 'but, believe me, you cannot be too careful. Try and keep Mr Rochester at a distance: distrust yourself as well as him. Gentlemen in his station are not accustomed to marry their governesses'" (Brontë 306). Jane takes her advice to heart almost immediately when Rochester initially excludes Adèle from their excursion that same morning:

> The chill of Mrs Fairfax's warnings, and the damp of her doubts were upon me: something of unsubstantiality and uncertainty had beset my hopes. I half lost the sense of power over him. I was about mechanically to obey him, without further remonstrance; but as he helped me into the carriage, he looked at my face.
>
> 'What is the matter?' he asked; 'all the sunshine is gone. Do you really wish the bairn to go? Will it annoy you if she is left behind?'
>
> 'I would far rather she went, sir.'

> ‘Then off for your bonnet, and back like a flash of lightning!’ cried he to Adèle. (Brontë 306)

This is a significant moment, as Jane momentarily becomes the “automaton” (Brontë 292), she declared she was not when she thought Rochester was going to marry Blanche Ingram. Without Mrs. Fairfax’s warning, Jane may not have had as much restraint or have not recognized danger as soon. Taking up the practice of keeping Rochester on a “season of probation” (Brontë 315), Jane acknowledges “my task was not an easy one; often I would rather have pleased than teased him. My future husband was becoming to me my whole world; and more than the world: almost my hope of heaven” (Brontë 316). Caught up in the fervor, Jane is about to be blindsided, but Mrs. Fairfax attempts to help buffer her situation and protect Jane from harm.

That being said, Jane also encounters women who have an antagonistic intent, such as Blanche Ingram[3]. Plumwood recognizes, “Women do not necessarily treat other women as sisters or the earth as a mother; women are capable of conflict, of domination and even, in the right circumstances, of violence” (Plumwood 9). This reflects not only the complexity of women as humans first and foremost (not ascribing to any notion about women being exclusively nurturers), but also otherness due to class and perceived status and value. While Blanche and Jane and Bertha are all female, they have differences beyond that commonality that influence their interactions.

For example, Blanche Ingram thinks less about Jane Eyre (if she even recalls or knows her name) than Jane thinks about her. Melodie Monahan argues in her work on reading Jane’s journey as a quest: “By discounting lateral bond between governesses and tutors, the Ingrams are

[3] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue Adéle Varens and Grace Poole should be in this category of “negative “role-models”’(353-355), but I would categorize them as more marginal and less of a direct impact for Jane in this context–except perhaps for mirroring Jane’s isolation at times as a child and adult.

predictably blind to any potential relationship between Jane and Rochester" (597). Due to this, Jane can sit mostly unnoticed in the drawing room. This outcome is her preferred situation if Rochester insists on her presence. Here, Jane not only feels like an outsider but also, she is treated like one. Mrs. Ingram and Blanche converse with other guests about governesses in general after privately discussing the topic with each other. They do not make the discussion secret and speak of Jane's physiognomy as if their subject (Jane) is not present at all. Blanche says in response about governesses: "'I have just one word to say of the whole tribe; they are a nuisance. Not that I ever suffered much from them; I took care to turn the tables. What tricks Theodore and I used to play on our Miss Wilsons, and Mrs Greys, and Madame Jouberts!" (Brontë 205-206). Plumwood would say this is an example of homogenization, which is a strategy to create a dualistic identity: "The natural world is homogenised and defined negatively and in relation to humans as 'the environment'. 'If you've seen one redwood you've seen 'em all' expresses a common kind of insensitivity to the incredible diversity and richness of nature, treating beings in nature as all alike in their defectiveness, their lack of human qualities" (Plumwood 70). In this way, although both Jane and Blanche are female, Blanche Ingram has no problem exerting her privilege and using dualistic structures to other and minimize Jane.

Because of this behavior and Jane's observations of Blanche Ingram and Rochester, Jane does not believe Blanche and Rochester would be a good match. It is apparent that Miss Ingram does not value or understand the depths of character and instead mantles the viewpoint of otherness society grants her as she views a member of a lower class. Plumwood elaborates, "The relations of radical exclusion has special characteristics. For distinctness, for non-identity or otherness, there need be only a single characteristic which is different, possessed by the one but not the other, in order to guarantee distinctness according to the usual treatment of identity" (49).

Since this is a perspective reinforced by the dominant dualism, Blanche's motivations are in line with that thinking. Monahan contrasts the women: "Blanche aspires to marry Rochester because his status and money identify him as aristocratic, while Jane envisions him as kindred despite those economic assets which put him in a class above her" (Monahan 597). Later, Jane's inheritance from her uncle will remediate this discrepancy in status, which will empower Jane further to seek Rochester's love on a more equal footing.

Bertha

Interestingly enough, Bertha takes on multiple roles in relation to Jane, so she cannot easily be placed in any aforementioned singular category. However, her most significant role is her existence as an extension of nature, ultimately shaping Jane's future. Rich highlights the significance of the escalation of these women who help Jane: "[I]t may be said, the terrible figure of Bertha has come between Jane and a marriage which was not yet ripe, which would have made her simply the dependent adjunct of Mr. Rochester instead of his equal. Individual women have helped Jane Eyre to the point of her severest trial; at that point she is in relation to the Great Mother herself" (Rich 80). The direct connection of positive female forces and feminine symbols all serve as signposts to Jane that her decision is correct—especially with such a spiritual endorsement of the moon.

The unveiling of Bertha and, thereby, the unveiling of Mr. Rochester's secret is a significant turning point in the novel and for Jane's development. Even before Jane is aware of Bertha, the first Mrs. Rochester's actions are atmospheric and are akin to the weather patterns Jane's emotions seem to reflect. Gilbert and Gubar propose that Bertha serves as "Jane's truest and darkest double" (363), and I would like to add to that by also equating Bertha to be an

extension of nature itself. The fight against the exploitation by Rochester is done not only to herself as Bertha Mason, but also through his attempt to marry Jane for the first time. In this sense, Jane and Bertha are in communion with each other. This alliance will ultimately humble Rochester and grant him the opportunity at another chance for love on much more equitable terms with Jane Eyre.

However, Rochester must deprogram from the dualistic structures that have always governed his life. As mentioned, for both Bertha Mason and his first attempt at wooing Jane Eyre, Rochester is guilty of instrumentalizing them both by misunderstanding who they are and trying to impose his interpretation of them on them. Nature to Rochester is not the same nature as it is to Bertha or Jane. Plumwood explains this notion:

> To be defined as 'nature' in this context is to be defined as passive, as non-agent and non-subject, as the 'environment' or invisible background conditions against which the 'foreground' achievements of reason or culture (provided typically by the white, western, male expert or entrepreneur) take place. It is to be defined as a *terra nullius,* a resource empty of its own purposes or meanings, and hence available to be annexed for the purposes of those supposedly identified with reason or intellect, and to be conceived and moulded in relation to these purposes. (4)

Due to his placement in society as an English male of wealth, Rochester sits comfortably within the dominating system of dualisms, which subsequently inform his perceptions and interactions with nature and by extension, women.

Although some scholars like Parama Roy prefer to leave Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* out of the equation when analyzing Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (720), there is value in taking some aspects of Jean Rhys's literary interpretation of characters inspired by the original to foster

an extra dimension of analysis and understanding using ecofeminism as a framework. With that logic, I will compare the character interpreted as Rochester's reprehensible instrumentalizing behavior of renaming. This practice reinforces oppression from dualisms from his imagined time with Bertha Mason/Antoinette Cosway in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and compares with similar behaviors targeting Jane Eyre in *Jane Eyre*. Although the focus of this thesis is Charlotte Brontë's novel, Rhys's extrapolation of characters in her *Jane Eyre*-inspired novel can illumine the depth of the original work.

In *Wide Sargasso Sea,* Jean Rhys creates an alternate identity for whom we know as Bertha Mason Rochester in *Jane Eyre*. Her original name is presented as Antoinette Cosway. She receives "Mason" as a surname due to her mother's second marriage, but "Bertha" is the character interpreted as Rochester's creation. Antoinette complains to Christophine: "When he passes my door he says, "Goodnight, Bertha." He never calls me Antoinette now. He has found out it was my mother's name. "I hope you sleep well, Bertha" – it cannot be worse" (Rhys 103). She is both frustrated by this development and by his lack of love for her. Rochester continues this behavior and several times throughout the novel, Antoinette asks him to cease using that name to no avail:

> 'Don't laugh like that, Bertha'
>
> 'My name is not Bertha; why do you call me Bertha?'
>
> 'Because it is a name I'm particularly fond of. I think of you as Bertha.'
>
> 'It doesn't matter,' she said. (Rhys 122)

> 'Not Bertha tonight,' she said
>
> 'Of course, on this of all nights, you must be Bertha.' (Rhys 123)

> ‘Bertha is not my name. You are trying to make me into someone else, calling me by another name. I know that’s obeah too.’ (Rhys 133)

This renaming is problematic, and an erasure of Antoinette’s identity for the character interpreted as Rochester’s peace of mind or attempt to reform her into what he wants. Spivak analyzes, “In the figure of Antoinette, whom in *Wide Sargasso Sea* Rochester violently renames Bertha, Rhys suggests that so intimate a thing as personal and human identity might be determined by the politics of imperialism” (249-250). After all, this is supported in Plumwood’s discussion of erasure of an individual through incorporation:

> The colonising self does not interact with or encounter the other as independent other, but only in the image of its own desires or needs, which it imposes upon them. An example of this process is Columbus’ imposition of names on the land he first sights, names which rarely record any of its features or any real encounter with it, but merely register its conquest, its incorporation into the empire of same. (Turner 1986:131) (qtd in Plumwood 158).

Bertha remains out of the character interpreted as Rochester’s comprehension because he does not attempt to understand Antoinette. Instead, the character interpreted as Rochester, attempts to incorporate his wife into his dominant culture by forcing a new name on her to which he feels he can better connect. Through the action of renaming Antoinette to Bertha, the character interpreted as Rochester moves away from being able to understand her and instead instrumentalizes her for his own comfort.

Similarly, Rochester in *Jane Eyre* instrumentalizes Jane by imposing incorrect names and labels that make her uncomfortable or are diminutive and link her to the non-human. The morning after their engagement, Rochester greets his fiancée:

> ‘Jane, you look blooming, and smiling, and pretty,’ said he: ‘truly pretty this morning. Is this my pale little elf? Is this my mustard-seed? This little sunny-faced girl with the dimpled cheek and rosy lips; the satin-smooth hazel hair, and the radiant hazel eyes?’ (I had green eyes, reader; but you must excuse the mistake: for him they were new-dyed, I suppose.)
>
> ‘It is Jane Eyre, sir.’
>
> ‘Soon to be Jane Rochester,’ he added: ‘in four weeks, Janet; not a day more. Do you hear that?’
>
> I did, and I could not quite comprehend it: it made me giddy. The feeling, the announcement sent through me, was something stronger than was consistent with joy – something that smote and stunned: it was, I think, almost fear.
>
> ‘You blushed, and now you are white, Jane: what is that for?’
>
> ‘Because you gave me a new name – Jane Rochester; and it seems so strange.’
>
> (Brontë 298).

On the surface, this might seem like a normal conversation, but it is problematic. First, Rochester incorrectly labeling Jane’s eye color is representative of him not interpreting her with full understanding. Jane dismisses this as part of his excitement over their upcoming nuptials; however, it is because he has secured her, so to speak, he is at liberty to define her, albeit incorrectly, much like he felt license to do with Antoinette/Bertha.

Secondly, although he does not supplant her first name[4] as he did before with Bertha in Rhys’s interpretation, he introduces the name Jane Rochester, removing Eyre. Although it is standard practice in England at this time period for a wife to take her husband’s last name upon

[4] Although at times he calls her the Jane-related name ‘Janet’

marriage, Jane is startled by it when it is spoken. A month later, on the eve of their original wedding day, Jane still has not reconciled with the prospect of her name change when she is looking at her new luggage tags: "I could not persuade myself to affix them, or to have them affixed. Mrs Rochester! She did not exist…" (Brontë 317). Jane's discomfort is reflective of her distress with the shift in their relationship and the way he objectifies her. Adrienne Rich offers, "Throughout the courtship there is a tension between her growing passion for him and her dislike of and uneasiness with the *style* of his lovemaking. It is not Rochester's sensuality that brings her up short, but his tendency to make her his object, his creature, to want to dress her up, lavish jewels on her, remake her into another image" (79). Jane protests despite his persistence, "'And then you won't know me, sir; and I shall not be your Jane Eyre any longer, but an ape in a harlequin's jacket – a jay in borrowed plumes" (Brontë 299) and "'Not at all, sir; I ask only this: don't send for the jewels, and don't crown me with roses: you might as well put a border of gold lace round that plain pocket-handkerchief you have there'" (Brontë 301). It is here that Jane fears her objectification. The mental connection they share that has transcended everything else begins to be overshadowed by material ornaments. Jane has no interest in being decorated in items or words—especially if bequeathed by Rochester.

Although drawn to Jane almost instantly, Rochester struggles with who she is and how to handle her in the context of the Western dualistic structures, and he instrumentalizes her in another way pertaining to names. Plumwood explains,

> Instrumentalism is a mode of use which does not respect the other's independence or fullness of being or acknowledge their agency. Its aim is to subsume the other maximally within the sphere of the user's own agency. It recognises no residue or autonomy in the

> instrumentalised other and strives to deny or negate that other as a limit on the self and as a centre of resistance. (142)

Rochester describes his first meeting with Jane: "When you came on me in Hay Lane last night, I thought unaccountably of fairy tales, and had half a mind to demand whether you had bewitched my horse" (Brontë 143). This instance is only the beginning of what will become a long-standing pattern. In analyzing the use of fairy tales in the novel, Jessica Campbell argues this is revealing because "When Rochester calls Jane a fairy, he does not just mean to praise her for being adorably petite. He is testifying to her strangeness, her ability to bewitch him, her alternation between granting and withholding physical affection, her seeming to stand for something that he desperately desires but doubts he can truly possess" (Campbell 241). In fact, many of his references are an attempt to define the intangible or to idolize her. For "Even though he loves Jane, he clearly believes in the traditional role of woman as idol. In order to worship Jane, however, he must first make her other than mere mortal. By calling her "angel" and "fairy," he separates her from other people and lifts her onto a pedestal" (Peters 63). Naturally, Jane pushes against this, being accustomed to the othering language used on her growing up and as an adult. At any stage in her life, Jane rightfully feels non-consensual renaming is dehumanizing.

Regardless of positive or negative connotations, "These labels consistently depict Jane as non-human. Others call her "angel," "cat," "sprite," "imp," "thing," "rat," and "fairy"—to name just a few. In fact, such terms appear nearly a hundred times in the novel, and given the sheer frequency alone, they are more than merely incidental" (Peters 59). As an adult, she is able to challenge these dehumanizing labels, though it is not immediately addressed. John G. Peters asserts part of Jane's marginalization is achieved through labeling and that "Jane wishes to be neither sub-human nor super-human" (63). Jane pushes back many times against labels. Another

apt example is when "Rochester tries to type Jane as a bird, but she rejects this label and insists on human status. He likes Jane's fiery strength, but for him Jane is a "bird" or a "fairy" at those times. If he were to think of her as a woman asserting her independence, then his position as sole master would be threatened" (Peters 64). Jane recognizes how this label effaces her personhood and once more asserts her independence. She states, demonstrating her power: "I am no bird; and no net ensnares me; I am a free human being with independent will, which I now exert to leave you" (Brontë 293). While Rochester adores Jane, Jane's bid for humanity and simultaneous desire to be viewed as an equal is beyond his comprehension.

Once again connected to Jane, Bertha is also relegated to non-human labels, albeit with a more negative connotation. Roy highlights that Bertha "is consistently denominated by various pejorative appellations which link her to the non-human: she is a "goblin," a "demon," and a "Vampyre" with a fearful ability to detect Jane's love for Rochester and to fulfil the conditions of her dreams" (720). When Jane meets her for the first time when Rochester's secret is told, she describes her in a very animalized way: "What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing, and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face… the clothed hyena rose up, and stood tall on its hind-feet" (Brontë 338). Though negative, it is yet another thread that connects Jane, Bertha, and nature. Plumwood explains the connection of western thought with Plato's early ideas: "Animals, like women, are created after and as adjuncts to men, and are at the bottom of the hierarchy and farthest from divinity in the theory of transmigration of souls. Animals, especially wild animals, are constantly used as metaphors for the morally doubtful sides of the human self, such as irrational appetite, and for distance from logos. (Republic 439B; Timaeus 71)" (qtd in Plumwood

95). By assigning Bertha non-human descriptors, even Jane is practicing othering. As an English white woman, Jane still has power inherent in society over Bertha from the West Indies. The fact that Jane engages in a degree of oppression (though she does show sympathy later when she censures Rochester: "'you are inexorable for that unfortunate lady: you speak of her with hate – with vindictive antipathy. It is cruel – she cannot help being mad'" (Brontë 347)) is reflective of the time period and also an indicator that dismantling every dualism is incredibly difficult and imperfect–even for someone as forward-thinking as Jane and Charlotte Brontë due to being captives of their time. Because of how poorly Rochester speaks of his wife, Jane becomes concerned that she also could be interchanged in Bertha's place and that is very dangerous–especially without legal standing as a wife. Jane notices that Rochester also instrumentalizes other women in a continuing pattern.

Before she is aware of Bertha's existence, Jane is concerned about what happens to Blanche Ingram. Chen explains Rochester's actions:

> Pretending to be a suitor, he orchestrates the whole courtship only to see it fail. He curates Blanche as an instrumental display. He lets her play out all her tempting acts and induces her rejection by creating a rumor about his fortune. More the host than the player of the courtship, Rochester' s real interest is in monitoring Blanche' s performance and surveying its impact on Jane, the spectator. (379)

When Jane inquires about it, Rochester asks if she was jealous (his desired outcome) and Jane replies, quite appalled: "'Never mind, Mr Rochester: it is in no way interesting to you to know that. Answer me truly once more. Do you think Miss Ingram will not suffer from your dishonest coquetry? Won't she feel forsaken and deserted?'" (Brontë 303). Rochester dismisses Jane's

concern and justifies it in a way that satisfies him, but not her. Once again, Jane wonders if she, too, could be treated so disrespectfully by him.

In relating his true background and marriage to Bertha Mason to Jane, Rochester does not hesitate to relate to Jane the many European mistresses he had relationships with after leaving Bertha behind at Thornfield under Grace Poole's care. After revealing his full story, Rochester goes as far as propositioning Jane to become his mistress since they cannot legally marry. Jane is horrified by this request as she reflects, " I felt the truth of these words; and I drew from them the certain inference, that if I were so far to forget myself and all the teaching that had ever been instilled into me, as – under any pretext – with any justification – through any temptation – to become the successor of these poor girls, he would one day regard me with the same feeling which now in his mind desecrated their memory" (Brontë 359). We can use Plumwood to recognize Jane's fear and explains, "The interchangeability of others as means enables denial of dependence on any particular other, so that others are encountered as homogenised, as members of an already instrumentalised class or category. The transactions of the dualised self with the world are attempts to use others in order to get satisfaction for predetermined private interests" (145). In other words, following this logic and his previous patterns, Jane could become merely his next conquest until he became bored or found the next woman who interests him. The prospect of such a fragile relationship with her beloved undermines Jane's sense of her specialness to Rochester and causes her to reevaluate based on the values she has adopted for herself. Jane realizes at this moment that Rochester is not ready to have a relationship of equals as she previously had thought. It cannot happen not only due to legal reasons, but also because of continued abuse of privilege stemming from his participation in the dominance evoked in systems of dualisms.

Because of Jane's epiphany and Mr. Rochester's prior commitment to Bertha Mason and the institution of legally binding marriage, the relationship with Jane ends. He pleads with her to become his mistress but Peters argues in his work concerning marginalization in the novel that "Jane spurns Rochester's offer to live with him as his mistress not because she does not love him but because she will not give up her values and her self in order to belong" (66). And thus, this becomes a non-negotiable situation for Jane. In her analysis of law and emotion in *Jane Eyre*, Shannon O'Byrne claims, "Jane comes to her senses and faces Rochester down, responding to his entreaties by engaging some of the values associated with law including reason, rectitude, resoluteness, and orthodoxy" (46). The gender dualism is breached, but most importantly, Jane does not change herself, but strengthens herself due to this breakdown. Yeazell supports this analysis and observes how Jane is able to enact the values of her mind to the external world: "The laws and principles to which Jane clings keep her sane, for they provide that continuity by which the self is defined; Jane "plants her foot" on what she has "always believed" because it is only thus that she can resist the chaos which threatens to engulf her" (136). Jane has already determined the values she accepts or rejects. When Rochester's behavior and desires contradict what Jane has determined as right and true, she no longer can envision a future with him. The decision to part is painful, but Jane will not compromise herself. In the end, it will be Rochester who forcibly concedes part of himself both physically and mentally to meet Jane where she is.

Jane's extension of self and ally, nature, will use the hand of Bertha to accomplish this task in the final act of female sisterhood and help. Gilbert and Gubar explain how "Jane's profound desire to destroy Thornfield, the symbol of Rochester's mastery and of her own servitude, will be acted out by Bertha, who burns down the house and destroys herself in the process as if she were an agent of Jane's desire as well as her own" (364). Jane's frustration for the system of

dualisms Rochester represents is shared by Bertha and is symbolically destroyed through the burning down of Thornfield Hall. Jane dreams of this outcome the night before the first attempted wedding day and relates it to Rochester: "'I dreamt another dream, sir: that Thornfield Hall was a dreary ruin, the retreat of bats and owls. I thought that of all the stately front nothing remained but a shell-like wall, very high and very fragile-looking. I wandered, on a moonlight night, through the grass-grown inclosure within: here I stumbled over a marble hearth, and there over a fallen fragment of cornice" (Brontë 325). Interestingly enough, after Jane recounts this dream to Rochester, she also speaks of the stranger (later known to be Bertha) visiting her room and tearing Jane's wedding veil–another destructive and prescient act.

When Jane later returns to Thornfield at the end of the novel, she is startled by her discovery: "I looked with timorous joy towards a stately house; I saw a blackened ruin… (Brontë 489). Her nightmare from before has become a reality. Jane surveys the area, trying to make sense of it: "And there was the silence of death about it, the solitude of a lonesome wild…The grim blackness of the stones told by what fate the Hall had fallen – by conflagration. But how kindled? What story belonged to this disaster?" (Brontë 490). The force of nature, as facilitated by Bertha, brings down the great house, which is also representative of nature's awesome power over civilization and challenges the system of dualisms the manor represents. Most importantly, Jane notices:

> In wandering round the shattered walls and through the devastated interior, I gathered evidence that the calamity was not of late occurrence. Winter snows, I thought, had drifted through that void arch, winter rains beaten in at those hollow casements; for, amidst the drenched piles of rubbish, spring had cherished vegetation: grass and weed grew here and there between the stones and fallen rafters. (Brontë 490)

Life and nature still triumph, and once Jane learns Rochester is alive, she rushes to a future impossible to wield without the aid of Bertha. After destruction, there is always hope of new growth—literally as with Rochester and Thornfield Hall or symbolically as with the dismantling of the long-standing dualisms to an arrangement more equal and palatable to Jane.

Chapter Four: St. John's Lofty Aims and Rochester Rehumanized

As Ruth Bernard Yeazell observes, "The dialectic of Jane Eyre allows for no authentic love which is not first grounded on the equality and integrity of two independent selves" (137). This value is crucial for Jane, and she will not compromise it. She will not become something she is not, and she will not have a new identity imposed upon her. This view falls squarely into Plumwood's dualism framework of incorporation, which means "defining the other only in relation to the self, or the self's needs and desires. Because the other is defined and perceived in relation to the master, he or she is not encountered fully as an independent other, and the qualities attributed or perceived are those which reflect the master's desires, needs and lacks" (52). In other words, Jane will not settle and become incorporated into the identity of a man; she does not settle for Rochester during his dishonest first bid to marry her, and she will not settle for St. John Rivers, whose unwavering commitment to traditional patriarchal Christian values are non-negotiable.

From the beginning, St. John's marriage aspiration with Jane is doomed. John G. Peters notes that "Jane rejects St. John's proposal not because she rejects the value of missionary work but because she would have to surrender her self in so doing" (66). In the case of St. John, Jane is very aware of herself, and how much it would clash with him and the expectations inherent in the life he is offering her:

> There would be recesses in my mind which would be only mine, to which he never came; and sentiments growing their fresh and sheltered, which his austerity could never blight, nor his warrior-march trample down. But as his wife—at his side always, and always restrained, and always checked—forced to keep the fire of my nature continually low, to

> compel to burn inwardly and never utter a cry, though the imprisoned flame consumed vital after vital—*this* would be unendurable. (Brontë 470)

Jane is very aware at this moment that "Rivers would exploit her as a tool, but never perceive her inner beauty as Rochester had" (Newman 200). Although Rochester has his faults and own modes of objectification, Rochester values Jane's mind, which is fulfilling to her in a way she knows she will never experience with St. John. As Monahan highlights, "To be "useful" in patriarchy is to accept objectivity in place of selfhood" (594). As with Rochester, Jane will not compromise her self in order to fit within a system or arrangement with which she disagrees. Diana Rivers supports Jane and her sentiments on the topic when Jane reveals to her the underlying motivation behind St. John's proposal:

> 'You should hear himself on the subject. He has again and again explained that it is not himself, but his office, he wishes to mate. He has told me I am formed for labour – not for love: which is true, no doubt. But, in my opinion, if I am not formed for love, it follows that I am not formed for marriage. Would it not be strange, Die, to be chained for life to a man who regarded one but as a useful tool?'
>
> 'Insupportable – unnatural – out of the question!' (Brontë 479)

As a member of Jane's newest community of supportive women, Diana supports Jane's refusal—especially after mistaking that her brother's intent was to settle down and give up chasing his missionary aspirations.

In an attempt to redefine the restrictions St. John is imposing with his proposal, Jane makes a counteroffer to him, agreeing to join him on the missionary trip to India, but only as a sister, not a wife. He rejects this alternative, and Jane mentally recoils at the prospect of St. John's explanation when he insists: "'I want a wife: the sole helpmeet I can influence efficiently

in life, and retain absolutely till death.' I shuddered as he spoke: I felt his influence in my marrow – his hold on my limbs" (Brontë 468). Jane cannot tolerate being in a loveless marriage– especially after experiencing warm love with Rochester, though legally they could not actualize it. Now St. John, available for marriage, sees it as a means to an end to support his missionary endeavors. O'Byrne observes, "Having rejected extreme emotion both in herself and others, Jane also has to come to reject extreme reason—as symbolized by St. John Rivers. Though religious, he is not warmly compassionate. He is rigid, controlling, emotionally austere, and obsessed with the singularity of his own ideas" (50). St. John's convictions and worldview also represent the system of dualisms Jane rejects. Jane explains to Diana: "'He is a good and a great man; but he forgets, pitilessly, the feelings and claims of little people, in pursuing his own large views. It is better, therefore, for the insignificant to keep out of his way, lest, in his progress, he should trample them down" (Brontë 479). Jane recognizes St. John's unwavering adherence to his values as something admirable but wishes not to be taken down by it.

When Jane won't budge on her refusal to accompany him to India as his wife, St. John is ready to arrange a situation for her with a friend's wife to serve as an assistant on a different missionary trip. Jane is horrified by this assumption:

> 'With you I would have ventured much, because I admire, confide in, and, as a sister, I love you; but I am convinced that, go when and with whom I would, I should not live long in that climate.'
>
> 'Ah! you are afraid of yourself,' he said, curling his lip.
>
> 'I am. God did not give me my life to throw away; and to do as you wish me

> would, I begin to think, be almost equivalent to committing suicide. Moreover, before I definitively resolve on quitting England, I will know for certain whether I cannot be of greater use by remaining in it than by leaving it.' (Brontë 477)

This is an important moment where we see Jane once again push up against the traditional mind/body dualism. Not only is St. John trying to exploit her as a resource, but also reveals his deeply ingrained view of the lesser earthly world in comparison to the superior spiritual realm: "[F]or most of the history of Christianity the tendency to view the material world as alienated, as evil, or as having at best meaning and significance as an instrument to a separate higher spiritual realm, has triumphed" (Plumwood 106). As aforementioned, Christianity is firmly installed in the male and reason system of dualisms, whereas material aspects would be aligned with female and nature.

When St. John guesses part of Jane's motivation to refuse is her unfinished business with Rochester, he scolds, "The interest you cherish is lawless and unconsecrated. Long since you ought to have crushed it: now you should blush to allude to it" (Brontë 477). St. John cannot understand why Jane would possibly still entertain any sentiment so sinful and so of earth and of personal and material interest. Franklin further explains, "What Jane requires, however, and what Charlotte Brontë demands of and for her main characters, is a merging of spiritualities that admits a whole self, one that includes but supersedes the body as it includes and supersedes Christianity. Thus, Jane's reluctance to be a missionary of one sort reflects a consciousness that a truer calling may lie in England" (Franklin 480-481). In other words, Jane's true desire is to serve herself and to pursue the pleasures of the world of which she has carved her own way of belonging. This earthly path means with or without Rochester, and Jane must be assured of his

well-being regardless of previous circumstances due to their special connection and her own desires.

On the contrary, St. John has already quashed his requited affection for Rosamond Oliver to pursue his early entrance into the kingdom of heaven via his missionary work abroad in inhospitable India. By the end of the novel, Jane intimates after a decade of service, she is likely reading St. John's last letter: "I know that a stranger's hand will write to me next, to say that the good and faithful servant has been called at length into the joy of his Lord. And why weep for this? No fear of death will darken St. John's last hour: his mind will be unclouded, his heart will be undaunted, his hope will be sure, his faith steadfast" (Brontë 521). While it is the right choice for St. John to pursue this life, it is not the right choice for Jane. I again bring in Plumwood to explain life and death in relation to the mind/body dualism inherent in Christianity:

> Its meaning is that the decay of the body is of no significance (a theme given added emphasis in the Christian doctrine of the resurrection), for the human essence is not tied to the body or to the world of changes, but is embedded in a transcendent spiritual order which persists. Death so understood expresses continuity with this spiritual order, but it also expresses the opposition of the human essence to the contrasting order of nature. It teaches us that as natural beings we die, and that only as rational, cultural beings in opposition to nature (and hence to the basic conditions of our lives) do we live. (101)

For St. John, a man seeking this spiritual transcendence, death is a desirable outcome. It is the next stage and in alignment with the order of his universe. However, for someone like Jane, a woman of the earth and akin to nature, life is the goal and the glory.

This difference in worldview is why when St. John asks Jane again to reconsider and Jane's internal "'Show me, show me the path!' I entreated of Heaven" (Brontë 483) is met with

the supernatural event of Rochester's voice exclaiming, "'Jane! Jane! Jane!'" (Brontë 483). The supernatural occurrence of this "sympathy" changes everything and is a pivotal moment in the novel and Jane's destiny. As Yeazell explains, "The transformation of the outer world reflects a transformation in Jane herself. Jane hears Rochester's cry because the process which she undergoes before this point prepares her to do so. She is ready now, as she has not been before, to respond to love's call, and the mysterious summons is an outward sign of that inner readiness" (129). At this point, Jane knows what path she must pursue as the shackles holding her prisoner within dualisms become lighter. Yeazell remarks, "The mysterious summons which, like so many crucial events in *Jane Eyre*, is at once external circumstance and psychological phenomenon, signals Jane's final assertion of independence" (140). At this moment, Jane makes the decision for herself to pursue what is calling her and accept this spiritual alternative and integrate it into her own interpretation of Christianity, which wholly rejects St. John's interpretations and reimagines the mind/body dualism. The supernatural communion with Rochester confirms Jane's path. Knowing what she wants, she is empowered to defy anything standing in her way:

> I broke from St. John, who had followed, and would have detained me. It was my time to assume ascendancy. My powers were in play and in force. I told him to forbear question or remark; I desired him to leave me: I must and would be alone. He obeyed at once. Where there is energy to command well enough, obedience never fails. I mounted to my chamber; locked myself in; fell on my knees; and prayed in my way – a different way to St. John's, but effective in its own fashion. I seemed to penetrate very near a Mighty Spirit; and my soul rushed out in gratitude at His feet. I rose from the thanksgiving – took

> a resolve – and lay down, unscared, enlightened – eager but for the daylight. (Brontë 484)

Jane trusts this answer as divine, but not in the way St. John would interpret it. At this critical juncture, “It is the fellow feeling, mutual respect, and equality of love shared by Jane and Rochester (according to the discourses of the time) that allow their "spirits" to communicate” (Franklin 466). At this crossroads Jane embraces her desires and who she is–blending her spirituality with that of Christianity rather than ascribing to the stringent interpretation offered by St. John and the dualism he represents.

In both proposal rejection instances with St. John as well as with Rochester’s bid for Jane to become his mistress, Jane advocates for the preservation of her self. Because of her unwavering resolve, “Jane’s strength of character and will along with her refusal to be forced in a submissive position seem very masculine” (Peters 64). By challenging these norms of society and questioning dualistic structures, Jane risks further alienation. However, “both the dominant tradition of men as reason and women as nature, and the more recent conflicting one of men as forceful and wild and women as tamed and domestic, have had the effect of confirming masculine power” (Plumwood 20). This role reversal is a dealbreaker for St. John, who chides Jane’s language when she declines his proposal: ‘“Your words are such as should not be used: violent, unfeminine, and untrue”’ (Brontë 475), but not for Mr. Rochester. After all, Rochester has roots in defying norms: “His openness concerning his continental affairs, his willingness to engage in bigamy, and his desire to marry a woman so far below his social standing all show that Rochester rejects many of the social conventions of his day, and his willingness to move outside the social mores explains why his relationship becomes possible” (Peters 64). In other words,

although Rochester does benefit and act according to his position, his viewpoint is malleable. Yet, it is not instant and requires a transformation.

It is not until later at their reunion at Ferndean at the end of the novel do Jane and Rochester come to a full understanding. Without nature's intercession, such a joyful reunion would not be possible. Jane adopts his language by stating, "I find you quite alarming, when I examine you close at hand: you talk of my being a fairy, but I am sure, you are more like a brownie" (Brontë 505). This interaction calling attention to naming is significant in both the mending of their relationship and understanding of each other. The roles are reversed from their first meeting and Jane is aligning Rochester with the fairy realm, which by association, indicates that Rochester has a welcome place in nature, though he is male. Most importantly, Rochester finally gives Jane a proper and equal acknowledgement: "You are altogether a human being, Jane? You are certain of that?" and she replies in confirmation, "I conscientiously believe so, Mr. Rochester" (Brontë 504). This shift in naming demonstrates that Rochester has not only learned to view and treat Jane as an equal human but that he has achieved the understanding by venturing into her realm, thus departing from the dualisms that were previously harmful to Jane and their relationship. Reaching that point, however, comes with a price.

For Rochester, that price is the dismantling of dualistic structures embodied in his estate at Thornfield and a retreat to the opposite, though welcoming Ferndean, which exemplifies nature. Parama Roy emphasizes, "Not only is there a physical similitude between the landed gentleman and his country house; his destiny is intimately wedded to that house, and this affinity is validated by the apocalyptic event in which fire destroys the one and maims the other" (Roy 719). When Jane arrives and observes Rochester, she notices the transformation of his exterior, undoubtedly in harmony with his new interior facilitated by and mirroring nature: "But in his

countenance I saw a change: that looked desperate and brooding—that reminded me of some wronged and fettered wild beast or bird, dangerous to approach in his sullen woe. The caged eagle, whose gold-ringed eyes cruelty has extinguished, might look as looked the sightless Samson" (Brontë 497-498). These direct associations with nature confirm Rochester's time spent in the natural realm and is proof of his transformation. Nevertheless, Caroline Koegler mentions, in her posthumanist analysis, that this moment has a double standard:

> As these expressions of heartfelt, intuitive care suggest, Jane easily relates to Rochester's 'animality' whilst Bertha is entirely forgotten—lost to darkness and distance like a bad dream. As such, the consequences of the three characters' animalisation could not be any more different: Bertha is loathed, dreaded, abjected. When she dies she is not mourned. Jane and Rochester, by contrast, fuss over each other's animalness as they also do over each other's injuries. Under Jane's fond care, Rochester quickly recovers: is quickly 'rehumanised'. (25)

What is a descriptor of otherness for Jane when describing Bertha, now becomes a descriptor of familiarity for Jane describing Rochester. Jane compares her human self to animal-like Bertha and employs the human/nature dualism; however, with Rochester in Ferndean, Jane redefines the dualism by acknowledging the human and animal attributes in herself and Rochester both existing in harmony rather than establishing an otherness. Bertha is no longer human or animal, but a reactive and transformative force as an extension of a wronged Jane and exploited nature.

Rochester's view of Jane has also transformed. Yeazell posits, "Since the vision of love which informs Brontë's novel is grounded on the fundamental separateness and equality of two persons, Jane Eyre must become her own mistress before she can become Rochester's" (141).

Rochester then must also acknowledge Jane's individuality. Plumwood underscores the importance of this level of respect:

> As in the account of the relational self, the individual conceived in terms of mutuality is formed by, bound to and in interaction with others through a rich set of relationships which are essential to and not incidental to his or her projects. Nevertheless he or she can and must remain a distinct individual, separated but not hyperseparated. He or she is not simply at the mercy of these relationships, dissolved, passive and defined by others (as some holistic claims about relational selves suggest), but is an active participant in them and determinant of them. (156)

Because Rochester now understands the framework by which Jane operates, he better understands Jane. While he has always loved her, his love for her previously was contaminated by his programmed adherence to dualistic structures. Gilbert and Gubar recognize Jane's knowledge that Rochester "had married Bertha Mason for status, for sex, for money, for everything but love and equality" (359). This relationship model is not an outcome that Jane desires for herself, and she knows for certain at the end of the novel when she agrees to Rochester's second proposal that this time is truly different. Campbell explains Jane's confidence in the matter:

> But two events have occurred by that time that distinguish Jane from Rochester's wife and mistresses. One is the episode of the "mysterious summons," in which Jane and Rochester somehow communicate with each other over a great distance at a time of need. This uncanny communication is clearly a once-in-a-lifetime experience; Jane can safely assume that Rochester never had such a moment with any of his continental paramours. Second, Jane differs from the other lovers because she left Rochester rather than give in.

> She has distinguished herself by establishing a life apart from him, achieving professional, financial, and domestic stability along the way. (243)

Likewise, Jane dabbles in society Rochester is more accustomed to after inheriting her uncle's wealth, further equalizing them. This is a pivotal moment in their relationship and understanding of each other, and the shift of the setting to Ferndean provides a solid and equitable foundation for their union to thrive. Here, "Brontë endeavors to repair this by drawing attention to the ways in which the opposition between Architecture and Nature, between the corrupt great house and the pleasantness of the natural world, that has continued throughout the novel is dissolved; for Ferndean is more an outgrowth of the woods than a manmade space" (Roy 725). It is a place for Jane and Rochester to live freely. Gilbert and Gubar also note that "Ferndean is notably stripped and asocial, so that the physical isolation of the lovers suggests their spiritual isolation in a world where such egalitarian marriages as theirs are rare, if not impossible. True minds, Charlotte Brontë seems to be saying, must withdraw into a remote forest, a wilderness even, in order to circumvent the strictures of a hierarchal society" (373). Since dualistic structures tend to reinforce each other, redefined dualisms can only be supported by those who agree to the rewritten interpretations. The fewer people involved and the more removed from traditional society a place is, the chances for success increase. Since Western values are so entrenched in dualisms, any major changes happen only when individuals choose to remake what has been long upheld. Jane and Rochester's individual experiences of liminality and loss make them aware and receptive of the traditional power arrangement and with the aid of nature, both commit to altering it.

Resuming their relationship is natural with this new understanding and more compatible environment. After all, "Ferndean, that place in the woods where the oppositions between "nature" and manmade spaces no longer exist" (Roy 714) is a place where "they realize they are

different, and they both become inhabitants of the non-human world, a world where their relationship finally comes to fruition" (Peters 65). Jane returns to be with Rochester and does not give up her self. Instead, "Her sense of inherent kinship with him alleviates potential problems; instead of stepping out of herself and into a new role, she is returning to something deep-seated" (Campbell 246), and so is he.

As Plumwood argues, as a path towards dismantling and escaping dualisms: "We can instead recognise in the myriad forms of nature other beings—earth others—whose needs, goals and purposes must, like our own, be acknowledged and respected" (137). Rochester acknowledges and respects Jane's fullness of being and gains new appreciation for Ferndean and nature in a way he was unable to access previously, which directly mirrors his deepening bond with Jane. Jane echoes the durability and progression of their bond as she relates in the final pages of the novel:

> Mr Rochester continued blind the first two years of our union: perhaps it was that circumstance that drew us so very near – that knit us so very close: for I was then his vision, as I am still his right hand. Literally, I was (what he often called me) the apple of his eye. He saw nature – he saw books through me; and never did I weary of gazing for his behalf, and of putting into words, the effect of field, tree, town, river, cloud, sunbeam – of the landscape before us; of weather round us – and impressing by sound on his ear what light could no longer stamp his eye. (Brontë 519)

Due to Rochester's blindness, Jane literally becomes his eyes to access the world, but symbolically it demonstrates Rochester finally being able to see the world in Jane's way. Once the full understanding of experience is achieved for Rochester and the dualisms are dismantled, his sight is returned, as if it were a reward from a mythic deity. Jane explains, "the sky is no

longer a blank to him – the earth no longer a void. When his first-born was put into his arms, he could see the boy had inherited his own eyes, as they once were –large, brilliant, and black. On that occasion, he again, with a full heart, acknowledged that God had tempered judgment with mercy" (Brontë 520). Ascribing to a form of Christianity that suits them, Jane and Rochester are thankful to share this sacred space and participate in a family structure – creating new life, but on their terms.

Jane's reflection, refuge, and alliance with nature become mixed with her attachment to Rochester and Ferndean. Intrigued and attracted, yet unable to fully grasp Jane as a human due to reinforcing systems of dualisms, Rochester undergoes a transformation that expands his understanding and his heart just as Jane's experiences widen hers. "Just as the master of Thornfield can tame and domesticate the menace of the natural world, so at Ferndean Jane and Rochester can harness the fertility of nature to advance their union. As the individual story of Jane's evolving selfhood, so also in her romantic liaison with Rochester: nature is the key to human mastery that both Jane and Rochester desire" (Fincham 18). Through their own transformative experiences and the machinations of nature, they can be themselves together, creating a home outside the jurisdiction of restrictive systems of dualisms and inside the welcoming folds of nature.

Conclusion: An Eden of Their Own Making: Jane Eyre Rochester, Ecofeminist

Jane Eyre has long been regarded as an exemplar of the individual voice and storytelling journey. Charlotte Brontë achieves this through the development of the novel and brings *Jane Eyre* to life. By using Plumwood's ecofeminism as a lens to read the novel, I have demonstrated that *Jane Eyre* stands out as offering an alternative to the oppressive system of dualisms.

Brontë draws inspiration from many models of thought and storytelling in order to weave her tale. Gilead observes Brontë's masterful blending of these elements to create Jane:

> She brings together a potent collocation of images and allusions which invoke familiar tales from myth, fairy tale, and Christian conversion narrative. Her self-inflicted martyrdom renovates both conventional sexual morality and the Christian concept of self-sacrifice, making them vehicles for protesting coercive gender and social arrangements and for revealing the nexus between internal psychological conflict and social power cleavages. (Gilead 307-308)

The primary power cleavages are those borne of dualisms, which Jane fights against—dualisms such as male/society/reason/human as opposed to female/nature/emotion/non-human. As Plumwood asserts, "Virtually, the whole set of dualisms can be mobilised for the purpose of inferiorising the sphere of nature and those human-beings who may be counted as part of nature, providing a powerful and all-pervasive model of rational meritocracy which is confirmed and mirrored at every turn" (47). However, Plumwood also has a vision of overcoming the dualisms of male/female and society/nature:

> But we can conceive mind as more bodily and body as more mindlike, and we can also conceive their relationship in friendlier and more co-operative terms. For subject/object, mind/nature and human/nature dualism, a non-reductive resolution requires both that we

> reconceive ourselves as more animal and embodied, more 'natural', and that we reconceive nature as more mindlike than in the Cartesian conception. This is a condition for remaking our relations with nature, and beings in nature, on the basis of recognising them not as things but as creative, self-directed, originative others. (124)

Jane shows this capacity in herself, and Rochester meets her challenge; though first, he must undergo trials of his own at the hands of nature. As if he had some prescience of what nature and Jane would do to him, he remarks during one of his and Jane's first conversations:

> 'I am hard and tough as an India-rubber ball; pervious, though, through a chink or two still, and with one sentient point in the middle of the lump. Yes: does that leave hope for me?'
>
> 'Hope of what, sir?'
>
> 'Of my final re-transformation from India-rubber back to flesh?'
>
> 'Decidedly he has had too much wine,' I thought; and I did not know what answer to make to his queer question: how could I tell whether he was capable of being re-transformed? (Brontë 155)

Indeed, the humanizing transformation of Rochester is the outcome of the novel and representative of oppressive dualisms being dismantled. Forged at the hands of industry and dualistic structures, Rochester sees himself as a product of his woes and enforcement of these dualisms (though he is unaware of it at the time). Jane (and nature, by extension, via Bertha) humbles him from his place of male superiority and transforms him to ascend and be welcomed into Jane's world. Jane comments during their reunion at Ferndean, "It is time someone under-took to rehumanise you,' said I, parting his thick and long uncut locks; 'for I see you are being metamorphosed into a lion, or something of that sort" (Brontë 503), and so Rochester returns to

flesh. The transformation is complete, and he does not ascribe to the previous system of dualisms that governed his life.

The change in mindset is apparent in Jane's and Rochester's interactions with each other at Ferndean. When they speak of marriage, it is not constructed as any game or ruse but communicated freely. Rochester even says, "Never mind fine clothes and jewels, now: all that is not worth a fillip" (Brontë 514), showing he will no longer instrumentalize her and that he has changed. He relates to Jane how "In spirit, I believe, we must have met" (Brontë 516), as he tells her about his cry and the response he heard in Jane's voice. This confirms what Jane experiences as she spoke to St. John, and yet Brontë chooses for Jane to keep the acknowledgment to herself. Yeazell observes, "If the central obsession of *Wuthering Heights* is, in Dorothy Van Ghent's words, "the passion to lose the self in some 'otherness,' whether in complete identification with another person . . . or by absorption into 'nature,' then *Jane Eyre* moves in the opposite direction-toward a love which must first acknowledge the integrity and separateness of the individuals involved" (133). This omission is not harmful and is another way for Jane to keep her independence. She and Rochester can be two separate and fully respected individuals together. Reflecting on the culmination of the story and its diverse elements, Adrienne Rich acknowledges, "The beauty and depth of the novel lie in part in its depiction of alternatives–to convention and traditional piety, yes, but also to social and cultural reflexes internalized within the female psyche" (80). Jane can process these alternatives and reinterpret oppressive dualisms to build a life agreeable to her values. Rochester follows her after being humbled by nature outwardly, and more importantly, inwardly.

Adopting such a paradigm change, Jane and Rochester make their home in Eden-like Ferndean. Gilead posits about Ferndean's role at the end of the novel: "[I]t remains hypothetical,

showing that socioideological transformations are still necessary, though they are possible given the mythopoetic capacity of the popular serious novel to "read" and thus rewrite the meaning-laden tales of folk culture, Christian mythology, and literary narratives" (Gilead 311). It is only through applying Plumwood's subversive reconstruction (63) that such a space can be made. By weaving in such a gallimaufry of elements inherent in western literature, religion, and thought, Charlotte Brontë offers up an alternative to the strict system of dualisms society adheres to upholding. It is through nature and being true to her self that Jane is able to overcome the oppressive dualisms and reconnect with Rochester in a way that suits them both. Nature is the reason Jane can have it all.

This novel can be read as a framework not to replace existing thought with the opposite, but to embrace all the aspects that make individuals different and to respect nature as a valued entity rather than something merely to dominate and exert influence over without care. Through Jane's journey, I argue that Charlotte Brontë offers possibilities that can be explained and understood through Plumwood's ecofeminist lens of dismantling or escaping dualisms in order to make these crucial changes and rewrite the traditional story. As demonstrated in the novel's conclusion, Gilead helps to build my claim:

> Jane's return allows her to extend and perfect her hard-won ability to remake significant order. When Jane the character is conflated with Jane the narrator, she emerges as a symbolic double for the liminal fiction writer, the mythmaker who makes a teleological history imaginable even in a modern, secular, culturally deprived age. Jane's final transformation asserts confidence in the powers of narrative itself to reinvent culture. (Gilead 311)

Jane's profound and dynamic relationship with nature makes the reinvention a successful endeavor. Instead of there being "no possibility of taking a walk that day" (Brontë 9), with Jane powerless and alone, Jane becomes empowered and answers her beloved in the affirmative: "It is a bright and sunny morning, sir… The rain is over and gone, and there is a tender shining over it: you shall have a walk soon" (Brontë 506). Accompanied with Rochester, now flesh and now equally human: "We entered the wood, and wended homeward" (Brontë 516). Unrestrained by dualistic structures, Jane and Rochester can live together in natural and secluded Ferndean in a way that suits them both. Jane is no longer an alienated other and invites Rochester—now an equal to her by the transformative powers of nature, to explore the newly established space. Revitalized, they discuss the soon-ending rain and the prospect of a walk together into an unhindered and fecund future. This thesis shows that with traditional Western restrictive dualisms dismantled, Brontë offers the possibility of an alternative narrative: Jane and Rochester on equal footing—freely walking, living, and loving in an Eden of their own making.

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