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Praxis

**A Peer-Reviewed Journal of
The Department of English
University of Rajshahi**

Editor

Dr. Md. Sakhawat Hossain

Associate Editors

Dr. Mahbuba Hasina

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Editorial Preface

Praxis: Journal of the Department of English, University of Rajshahi is committed to maintaining rigorous academic and ethical standards in the publication of scholarly research in the English language, linguistics, and literature. As a double-blind peer-reviewed journal, *Praxis* ensures that all submitted manuscripts undergo an impartial and thorough evaluation process, safeguarding both academic integrity and intellectual merit.

The journal adheres strictly to a policy of originality. Submissions are unpublished and not be under consideration for publication elsewhere. Any form of plagiarism, including self-plagiarism, is considered a serious breach of academic ethics and results in immediate rejection. Authors are responsible for ensuring the authenticity of their work and for properly acknowledging all sources in accordance with recognized citation standards.

To maintain disciplinary coherence while encouraging intellectual diversity, *Praxis* accepts contributions primarily within the fields of English studies, linguistics and English Language Teaching. Interdisciplinary work is welcomed, provided it demonstrates a clear and substantive engagement with these core areas. All manuscripts are written in English and follow either the MLA (9th edition) or the APA (7th edition) style, depending on the disciplinary orientation of the paper.

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The editorial board reserves the right to make necessary revisions for clarity, coherence, and consistency without altering the substantive argument of the work. Final decisions regarding publication rest solely with the editorial board, based on reviewers' recommendations and the journal's standards. Individual authors, and not the Editorial Board, are responsible for the views expressed in their writing.

Through these policies, *Praxis* seeks to uphold excellence, transparency, and fairness in academic publishing, fostering a scholarly environment that values critical inquiry, methodological rigor, and intellectual responsibility.

In Memoriam: Professor Dr. Idris Ahmed Md. Sakhawat Hossain

I had the privilege of being a direct student of Professor Dr. Idris Ahmed, and the memory of his classroom remains one of the most formative experiences of my intellectual life. He was not a teacher of abundance in number, but of precision and distinction; he took relatively few classes, yet each one bore the mark of rare excellence. His lectures were events that were often animated, lucid, and deeply engaging, without ever obscuring the depth of his scholarship.

What set him apart most strikingly was his method. He had the remarkable ability to render even the most extended and complex texts into something graspable without diminishing their intellectual weight. With a lightness of touch and a finely tuned sense of humour, he guided students into the depths of a text as if it were the most natural of movements. His wit was never ornamental; it was pedagogical and it was an instrument through which difficulty dissolved and insight emerged. Many of his students would testify that his classes were filled with mirth, yet never lost their seriousness of purpose.

In demeanour, he was at once formal and disarmingly intimate. His English was impeccable, measured, and refined, reflecting a deep command of language and tradition. Yet he was not bound by rigidity; at moments, he would slip into Bangla, often to delightful effect, using humour to draw students closer into the discussion. He had a characteristic habit of addressing students as “thou,” a gesture that seemed to collapse distance while invoking an older, almost Shakespearean intimacy. Standing before the class, he maintained an alert and penetrating gaze so that no student could afford inattentiveness, yet none felt excluded or disengaged. His presence commanded attention without coercion.

His intellectual range was formidable. He possessed a sharp and integrated knowledge of English literature, history, philosophy, and the broader Christian and Western intellectual traditions. Yet his scholarly vision was not confined within conventional disciplinary boundaries. His doctoral work on the literary techniques of *Surah Yasin* remains a landmark contribution that demonstrates his courageous attempt to bring Islamic textuality into the sphere of literary criticism. In doing so, he opened a space for dialogue between traditions that are too often kept apart.

Born on 31 December 1938, Professor Dr. Idris Ahmed completed his MA in English from the Department of English, University of Rajshahi, in 1960, and qualified in the then Special East Pakistan Civil Service (EPCS) examination. He joined the Department of English at the University of Rajshahi on 10 March 1973 and served there with distinction until his retirement as Professor on 30 December 2004. He passed away on 16 May 2022, leaving behind a legacy of intellectual brilliance, pedagogical excellence, and humane values.

Dedication



Professor Dr. Idris Ahmed
(31 December 1938-16 May 2022)

This Volume is dedicated to the cherished memory of Professor Dr. Idris Ahmed—a teacher of rare brilliance, a scholar of profound humanity.

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Gothic Fiction and the Racist Binary: Reevaluating the Feminist Aspects of *Jane Eyre* from a Postcolonial Lens

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the manifestation of gothic elements in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), examines the connection between the gothic and the novel's feminism, and analyzes the author's use of women of "color" to induce horror/terror and symbolize violence. Considering the details of the dark-skinned Bertha Mason and others contributing to the gothic theme of the novel, this research questions Brontë's stance on racism. To what extent is the gothic differentiated from the black-white binary in *Jane Eyre*? How essential is having a distinct idea and consciousness about the knowledge of other types of binaries when an author attempts to write a feminist text? A qualitative content analysis method follows Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Mask* (1952), Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), and the Black feminist theory to review the justification of such a binary in advocating women's empowerment. The findings indicate that the racism in *Jane Eyre* is merely another kind of sexism. To sum up, the novel is an example of feminine resistance, only to women who share the whiteness of the protagonist, Jane, and it is not an ideal feminist text because of its discriminating and dehumanizing way of looking at people of color.

Keywords: Binary, Feminism, Gothic, Racism, Resistance

Introduction

Gothic literature, first introduced in the Western literary culture at the hands of Horace Walpole through his medieval novel *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), is a genre primarily known for its popularity among female readership due to the delicate blend of romance and horror/terror contained in the stories. After Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* was published in 1818, the gothic theme got a whole new dimension in certain Victorian novels such as Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) and more. In *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë associated this theme of the gothic with feminism. The text functioned as a voice, an agency for women of her age, and a spokesperson for gender equality. Through the portrayal of the protagonist Jane Eyre, the main character, and her strong and independent personality, which was unique at that time, the author suggested to her readers (who were mostly females) a way of protest, resistance, and rebellion against the male subjugation and domination over women. Brontë turned the journey of Jane's search for identity into a traditional Victorian gothic romance by adding dark and mysterious details to the environment of the abusive and dehumanizing household of Jane's aunt and the haunted and decaying Thornfield Hall owned by Mr. Rochester, by presenting 'disturbing' characters like Mrs. Reed and Bertha Mason, by suggesting forbidden knowledge, untold truths, and dark secrets. However, to infuse horror and terror in her novel, she used a variety of literary and sociocultural elements that are associated with the concept of light

and dark, which, in another way, can be identified as a racist binary because the fear of darkness among the Victorian European readers was not merely limited to a dark environment or dark humor. Instead, this unwelcoming feeling was also prominent in them toward dark skin. Bertha Mason, the key 'element' of gothic in the novel, was the Jamaican Creole wife of Edward Fairfax Rochester, not pure English, nor even of another European race. So why would an author need to depict something dark and shady (reminding us of the color black, as opposed to white) to express negativity? This paper argues that from the perspective of postcolonial studies, such dichotomy between colors makes *Jane Eyre* an exclusive narrative meant for white European (or of European ancestry) readers only and that the purpose of reading the novel as a feminist text is not fully accomplished for others, instead they feel inferior because the dark-skinned readers are triggered by the racial discrimination imposed in the book through different remarks and character details.

Jane Eyre has been "translated into at least 57 languages, at least 593 times," and it is taught at many schools and higher education levels, not only as a classic that provides details of Victorian society from a historical point of view but also as a revolutionary feminist text, for its focus on women's empowerment (Reynolds). Bell Hooks, the American author, theorist, and critic, says, "feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression," and another American feminist writer and activist, Kate Millett, defines sexism as "a system of oppression that privileges men at the expense of women" (Hooks 26) (Kate Millett 20). So, both feminism and sexism speak against male domination and oppression against women in association with the concept of the binary of inferiority and superiority. Racism is a belief based on such assumptions as well. Nevertheless, binary is visibly created among different races, instead of genders, in this novel. According to the American anthropologist Ruth Benedict, racism is "the dogma that one ethnic group is condemned by nature to congenital inferiority and another group is destined to congenital superiority" (Benedict 98). Now, suppose an author speaks for awareness and equality of one kind. In that case, he/she should be aware of every other type of discrimination, inequality, and injustice practiced on people or any living being to show respect and sincerity to the victims. However, in *Jane Eyre*, not only was Brontë indifferent to the racial discrimination of the white against the non-white, but she also used some racist notions through her gothic elements to strengthen her voice for gender equality, whether consciously or unconsciously. From the postcolonial reader's point of view, we question the success of *Jane Eyre* as a feminist text.

Literature Review

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is well recognized as a novel with female agency and gothic elements. This review examines a place where gothic, feminist, and postcolonial scholarship meet in the unexplored connection between gothic conventions, such as the light-dark binary, and the text's racial constructs.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar influenced the early talk with "The Madwoman in the Attic" (1979) in which they read Bertha Mason as Jane's "dark double", an embodiment of stifled rage. Their review of the "rebellious feminism" of the novel continues to be very influential (Plasa 353). On the other hand, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's 1985 essay, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism", argued that this reading ignored "the novel's complicity with the imperial history encrypted in its margins" and that it repeated the text's "conspiracy of silence around the colonial truth" (Plasa 353). Recent scholarship sees the text in a mixed way; it shows "a genuine protest against patriarchal society," but it is also "perceived as a pre-feminist work" (Vyrupeva 52).

The gothic elements of the novel, such as “terror, horror, and the uncanny,” are usually interpreted in the context of the Romantic Victorian traditions (Tine 245). The ‘uncanny’ is an important tool in analysing race (Akman 41-46). Brontë’s light-dark binary replicates imperialist ideologies of racial others as dangerous (Griesinger 29). Scholarship is aware of the “interplay of dark and light binary” and the ways in which Bertha’s madness is a result of a “cultural narrative of representation” (Sinha 111), relating colonial motifs to intersectional gender and race relations (Mandal et al. 192-201).

Creative adaptations are more explicit in their approach to these dynamics than the academic ones. Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) discusses “connections between race and gender” (Pollanen 9), and Lauren Blackwood’s *Within These Wicked Walls* (2021) offers “an explicitly Black and anti-racist rewriting of the Victorian novel” (Dobbins 198). Yet, there is still a gap when it comes to the intersection of gothic conventions and race in terms of the original text in terms of non-European readers’ responses towards the text’s feminist politics (Gao 45). Bertha is still at the heart of these readings, where the “gendering of madness” reveals the objectification of Bertha by gothic elements (Sinha 111-112). The gothic structure reveals the legacies of violent colonialism (Rudd 71), which presents a challenge to its feminist label when gothic elements racialize the ‘Other’. Reimagining *Jane Eyre* through racist binaries fills this important gap in the scholarship.

Research Objectives and Questions

This research has two objectives–

1. To review Brontë’s use of the gothic in light of the binary opposition of black and white.
2. To evaluate the importance of awareness of binary and discrimination in different forms for an author as an advocate for feminism.
Following the objective of the research, our study seeks answers to two questions, which are–
 1. To what extent is the gothic differentiated from the black-white binary in *Jane Eyre*?
 2. How essential is having a distinct idea and consciousness about the knowledge of other types of binaries when an author attempts to write a feminist text?

Theoretical Framework

Frantz Fanon, by birth a French Afro-Caribbean, wrote about his observations on his Black patients, the effects on their psychology of racism and colonialism, in his professional life as a psychiatrist in the book *Black Skin, White Mask* (1952). There, he discussed the impact of racism on the psychology of a person of color, their desire for whiteness (white partner), the “othering” process where the white European men are “Self” and anyone else, including non-white European men, men of color, any women, animals are “Other”, etc. We applied these concepts in this paper to explain how racism works intentionally or unintentionally in a writer and how a reader of an inferior race decodes and feels about the messages he/she may receive from literature.

In his foundational text in postcolonial studies, *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said became a critic of Western writers’ portrayal of the East. Although *Jane Eyre* does not have many Eastern characters, North American Jamaica, a British colony in that period, and home to Bertha Mason, was a land of “color”. So, following Fanon’s definition of the superior Self and the inferior Other, Said’s Orientalist theory is applicable in analyzing the representation of darkness in the novel.

Black feminist theory, which, according to Sherie Randolph, in her book *Florynce “Flo” Kennedy: The Life of a Black Feminist Radical*, challenges assumptions and norms at the intersection of sexism and racism, will be a crucial cornerstone in building a framework for the biased feminism in *Jane Eyre*.

A key methodological tool derived from Edward Said’s work is the concept of contrapuntal reading. Said argues that texts from the imperial era should be read not just for their primary narrative but also with an awareness of the suppressed or silenced histories of colonialism that are intertwined with them. This method involves analyzing the “dominant melody” of the metropolitan story alongside the “counterpoint” of the colonial experience it depends upon but often obscures. In a novel like *Jane Eyre*, a contrapuntal reading shows how the celebrated narrative of the English heroine’s self-realization is inextricably linked to the colonial exploitation and dehumanization represented by Bertha Mason. It exposes how the freedom and prosperity of the imperial “Self” are built upon the subjugation of the colonial “Other,” revealing them as two parts of a single, interconnected history.

Research Design and Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach, utilizing content analysis to explore the feminist and postcolonial dimensions in *Jane Eyre*. The analysis focuses on key quotes from the novel, comparing them with similar gothic and contemporary literary works. It also reviews academic articles and papers on *Jane Eyre* to identify postcolonial critiques and feminist interpretations. By rereading the text and examining the intersection of race and gender within the narrative, this research reevaluates how the novel engages with these issues. The methodology ensures a comprehensive understanding of the text from a feminist and postcolonial perspective.

Findings and Analysis

The Interplay between Light and Darkness

In *Jane Eyre*, Jane’s image as a protagonist is the antithesis of gothic. This bildungsroman novel shows Jane’s growth at different stages. It starts with her life at Gateshead Hall, her uncle’s house, where she was brought after her parents’ death. There, her aunt, Mrs. Reed, frequently punished her by keeping her locked in the “Red Room”, after Mr. Reed’s death (Brontë 76). It was a small room with no window, dark red wallpaper, and even darker curtains. In Jane’s description, the Red Room “looked colder and darker in that visionary hollow than in reality” (Brontë 16). Such fashion aimed to induce fear in the person locked up inside. Now, where does the fear of darkness come from? Historically, it is connected to our ancestry, when human beings still had not learned the use of fire and were almost entirely helpless in front of the danger of predators in the utter darkness of night. However, this darkness has become symbolic now. We fear the dark and give it a negative connotation. On the other hand, we celebrate light. Dark is evil, light is angelic. Dark symbolizes the medieval period because this period lacked advancement. Light is the classical era, the Renaissance, because of the renewal of progress. The problem is, when we are introduced to one darkness as terrible and unacceptable, we cannot overlook this mentality in other cases. Intentionally or not, we usually see dark skin as awful and inferior. Even in non-white communities, people try to name the colors in their skin as “yellow”, “tan”, “golden”, “brown”, etc., but not black. However, in the eyes of a Victorian white European, every shade would be the same: dark and ‘not white’. People of color are not beyond racism themselves. So, when an author uses darkness (the gothic) to induce horror and terror, it automatically gains a racist dimension.

The Lowood Institution, where Jane was sent away, had a reference to the scripture, “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works” (Brontë 53). This message not only highlights the angelic light, but the statement itself is almost ironic because the boarding school, in reality, gives instead a very dark and disturbed image, unlike its inspirational verse. So, the light-dark contrast is two-fold here. Wherever Jane went, it would be murky, disturbing, and distorting. The environments were always suspenseful and mysterious, often suggesting something supernatural. She stood out in those places because she had that spirit, confidence, and charming personality, all coming straight from the positivity of her heart and her “Englishness”.

Jane met Bertha Mason, Mr. Rochester’s first wife and the key figure of the novel, at Thornfield Hall. The manor’s name alone can make someone feel uneasy, as if the place is ominous. Who names his precious home after such a gloomy image? However, metaphorically, that place was like a field of thorns to Jane because she met her one true love there, and she also felt betrayed, disgraced, and humiliated at the same place by that true love. Everything about the manor was ‘not fascinating’ (if not gothic)— its appearance, history, and the people dwelling in it. It appeared like the whole architecture was wrapped in a sheet of darkness. Jane described the features of the house as “the silent hall”, “the darksome staircase”, etc. (Brontë 123). The most gothic of them all was the attic where Bertha was locked up.

“the long passageway to which this led, separating the front and back rooms of the third story: narrow, low, and dim, with only one little window at the far end, and looking, with its two rows of small black doors all shut, like a corridor in some Bluebeard’s castle.” (Brontë 113)

Besides comparing the place with Bluebeard’s castle (a character from French folklore notoriously known for his habit of marrying, confining, and murdering his wives, the allusion foretelling the presence of Bertha Mason in the attic), another gothic element, the author used three words from Jane’s point of view to describe Bertha’s living space in the manor, “narrow, low, and dim” (Brontë 109). As much as they can be the most random words to describe a dark and gloomy place, these words are also perfect for generalizing a non-European man or a whole society— a lowly lifestyle, a narrowed culture/mentality, and a dim wit. This is how light and darkness contrast against each other, light being the ‘best culture’ (Arnold 17) and darkness the symbol of the savage, respectively. Besides, we must remember that ‘gothic’ was first used to address a barbaric German group who ruined the classic Roman culture (Heather 623). So, the word already has a negative connotation.

Self, and the Otherization Process

We can replace the binary opposition of light and dark with Fanon’s concept of ‘self’ and ‘other’. Let us reread Jane’s point of view about the appearance of Bertha when Mr. Briggs had just exposed that Mr. Rochester’s first wife, Bertha, was still alive and not divorced from her husband yet, and as a consequence, Mr. Rochester had to show the wedding guests (of Jane and Mr. Rochester) the actual condition of his mad wife.

“In the deep shade, at the farther end of the room, a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing, and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face.” (Brontë 305)

Here, not only is the description of the woman “unwomanly”, but she is also animalized, following the concept of self (European men) and other (in this case, non-human creatures) (17-18). It also

suggests that Bertha Mason had been possessed by a demon (“dark” entity) for which she was acting like a savage, mad animal.

Bertha Mason’s race (the binary “other”) and her mental illness are not a coincidence either. About Thomas Day’s “Five Years in the West Indies”, Keunjung Cho says, “Day’s pseudo-scientific analysis of ‘Negro inferiority,’ like statements by the later Social Darwinists, attributes this supposed inferiority to both genetic and environmental conditions” (Cho). Mr. Rochester said, “Bertha Mason is mad; and she came of a mad family; idiots and maniacs through the generations!” (Brontë 304). Gilbert and Gubar already doubt whether Bertha was confined because she was mad or lost her sanity due to prolonged confinement. Also, in Jean Rhys’s novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), which is a prequel to the story of Bertha, we can find the tale of Antoinette Cosway (the author of this novel changed Bertha’s name). This novel retells Bertha Mason’s life, but it explains how she descended into madness (due to neglect, alienation, etc.) instead of suggesting she inherited it from her black ancestors. In short, Bertha’s Creole heritage, a gene that contains mental illness (as believed by the Victorian English society), as well as her other family members’ medical history, urged Mr. Rochester to think that his wife had the same properties. Later, he confined her to the attic, maybe after receiving the faintest, unusual reaction from her, because he was already somewhat convinced Bertha would turn mad someday.

Confronting the Partial Representation of Feminism

Brontë depicts Jane as a feminist thinker who believed in women’s social and economic independence. Her stance is repeatedly revealed in her words dedicated to Mr. Rochester. For example, she told him, “I can live alone, if self-respect, and circumstances require me so to do. I need not sell my soul to buy bliss.” (Brontë 210). This speech demonstrates her determination to prioritize her dignity over the happiness she would have to sacrifice her freedom for. According to Virginia Woolf, a woman must possess her own money and room if she wants to write fiction (Woolf 4). Here, writing fiction is symbolic of the liberty of autonomy and creativity. As a voice for the dignity of women, Jane would not compromise her liberty to live a luxurious life and be a submissive mistress. This is why she prioritized what she had and could have had on her own over the privilege Mr. Rochester would offer. Her attitude is the epitome of Victorian feminism, a movement which promoted “women’s emancipation” and influenced educational reform in England (Schwartz 669). As Jane also claimed her sovereignty saying, “I am no bird; and no net ensnares me: I am a free human being with an independent will.” (Brontë 264) and “I am independent, sir, as well as rich: I am my own mistress.” (Brontë 453) to Mr. Rochester, if there were only the two of them in the picture, her words would be admirably bold and inspiring in securing women’s rights and dignity. However, these expressed thoughts hint that she could be comparing herself to Bertha Mason, desperately trying to prove to herself that she was not Bertha’s substitute in Mr. Rochester’s life, in Thornfield Hall, that she was better than being confined in a cage. This is where Brontë fails to portray the character of true feminism. As Jane did not know the story of Bertha, she should not have judged the locked woman based on her appearance and the current situation. Jane said Bertha was “fearful and ghastly to me...It was a discoloured face—it was a savage face...the foul German spectre—the Vampyre” (Brontë 295). Jane could quickly compare Bertha to a German vampire, but it did not cross her mind once that there might have been a reason behind Bertha’s insane behavior. Again, Jane could easily draw the conclusion that Bertha willingly submitted herself to Mr. Rochester for the materialistic comfort he had to offer her. Jane barely had any sympathy for Bertha because Bertha was not a refined British lady to suit the aristocracy of Thornfield Hall, although, after what Jane experienced in confinement in the Red Room, she should have been the first person to understand the violation

of Bertha's human rights and its possible circumstances. Instead, Jane accepted Mr. Rochester's description of Bertha as a "clothed hyena" (Brontë 305).

Brontë sketched Jane as sensible, emotional, and compassionate in the novel. She became one of a kind for her kindness to every good soul around her. So, why was she so harsh with Bertha? When she first saw Bertha, she did not even know who that woman was, so jealousy must not be the primary reason behind her arrogance. Bertha Mason, who gained her Creole heritage from her mother's side (as assumed), had dark hair and a discolored complexion, and became purple instead of pale white due to being locked up for so long in the attic, was not a blonde woman. Jane is not described as very pretty in the novel either. Interestingly, Bertha Mason was once known for her unique beauty, although the question remains as to whether the author could imagine Bertha Mason as a beautiful lady only because she was still half English, whereas Jane had very plain features. Jane once addressed Mr. Rochester's ignorant attitude towards her (Brontë 264). It was Brontë's way of pointing out the disrespect, neglect, and indifference women in that era would receive from the patriarchal society. Ironically, Bertha Mason received similar disregarding treatment from the author herself. Could Bertha Mason be only a mindless, soulless beast, but not a woman as powerful, as capable of speaking against inequality and protesting the biases as Jane, because Bertha's impure Englishness did not qualify her to be a standard? As Jane lacked beauty and wealth, Bertha's inferiority in 19th-century England was her sociocultural identity. The feminist in Brontë could sketch the former as a rebellion against set standards but missed the opportunity for the latter. In Payette's opinion, *Jane Eyre* as a bildungsroman is not very strong in terms of compatibility for women with distinct racial and cultural identities (Payette 1). This is how Brontë's feminism fails to be a haven for any woman regardless of her colour, origin, or background.

Was Brontë consciously being racist? In response to Tyrese L. Coleman's "Reading *Jane Eyre* While Black", Cathy Young says that if Brontë were indeed a racist, she would not portray her male protagonist with 'Arabic' features (Young). Mr. Rochester had a swarthy (dusky) complexion, and "he looked the very model of an Eastern emir" (Brontë 191). Not only that, according to Young, despite looking exotic, there is no concrete proof that Bertha was of mixed race. Young explains, "Historically, the term Creole was used in the West Indies and Spanish America for all locally born people of European descent" (Young). However, whether Bertha was a full White or not, it does not change the fact that Brontë associates the concept of horror and evil with the darkness of physical appearance. It can be the embedded racism; Brontë's writings can be influenced by the system and structure of her time. However, these examples of white feminism weaken the feminist stance of the author and her text because of the exclusivity.

Discussion

From a Postcolonial Reader Perspective

Almost every text undergoes the process of postcolonial criticism because it "asks readers to consider the way colonialist and anti-colonialist messages are presented in literary texts", the domains being human psychology, ideology, society, politics, intellect, and aesthetics (Hendriani 880). Therefore, a postcolonial reading of *Jane Eyre* is crucial in understanding the colonialist goals of the novel. As mentioned before, female-authored novels like *Jane Eyre*, Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Emma* (1815), etc., are usually meant for female readers. In her paper, Sun explains how crucial the role of a reader is in "engagement and interpretation" (Sun 100). So, consciously or unconsciously, when an author portrays her characters in these novels, she creates a standard for her readers. In the case of *Jane*

Eyre, the details of the main characters, both male and female, are interpreted as the standards for ideal personalities of a reader and their partner. A character like Jane, who is white and, although not very attractive, is strong, intelligent, sincere, and compassionate, will become the idol, the inspiration of a young female reader. The reader will cherish developing herself like Jane to achieve an outstanding personality amid the ordinary. However, suppose the same reader is non-white. In that case, there is a fair possibility she will feel insecure and inferior because, in most Eastern countries, white skin is the first condition to call a woman “pretty”.

“It is probably easier to compartmentalize language like this if you are not of the cultural make-up Brontë describes in such abhorrent terms: if you are white. But when reading *Jane Eyre* as a person of color, these accusations segregate the black and white lines of the page; they become bold and glaring; they point a finger at you.” (Coleman)

Although Brontë never described Jane as “white”, by the absence of her racial details (unlike Bertha), readers can assume her whiteness; omitting explicit detailing for one colour (what is usual) while feeling the need to mention the other for the purpose of the reader’s understanding is another kind of racist discrimination that Brontë did in her novel. Brownlee explains this perspective with the example of the design of stationery products (Brownlee). Generally, right-handed people do not notice that desks, notebooks, scissors, etc., are mostly designed for right-handed people. They do not think about it because that is what is usual to them, so they do not realize the need to point it out for left-handed people. In the same way, white people sometimes do not mention their whiteness in conversation, which they would do for black people because, to them, their colour is not unusual enough to voice.

Besides colour, the idea of ‘cultured’ differs greatly in Eastern countries. There, girls do not learn various arts or get appreciation for their good communication and storytelling skills. Society expects them to be good cooks for their husbands; they cannot even choose on their own most of the time. On the contrary, having skills in the mentioned arts was so crucial in Victorian England that even Adele Varens, Jane’s spoiled pupil from France, and her mother Celine Varens, who claimed that Adele was Mr. Rochester’s daughter, were not civil enough; Adele needed an English education to correct her “French defect” in Jane and others’ eyes. About reading *Pride and Prejudice*, Sun says, “The feminist elements in the text interact with the reader’s gender consciousness, cultural background, and emotional responses to create a rich reading experience, enabling this classic novel to continue to stimulate discussion and reflection on feminism (Sun 103). However, for the interaction, readers have to resonate with the text first, which is almost impossible when the culture, norms, and values vastly differ between the textual characters and real-life readers.

However, to contradict, Ria Hendriani says, “Brontë equates the subjugation of dark-skinned colonials with the domination of women and the lower-middle-class whites in England” (Hendriani 881). According to her, through Bertha and other oppressed people of India and Jamaica mentioned in the novel, Brontë criticized the British Empire as a colonialist tyrant and implied that non-higher-class English people like Jane were just as victimized as the colonized ones. Nicole A. Diederich claims Jane to be Bertha’s alter ego, a doppelganger, where even if it was Bertha who was Jane’s “dark double”, her “postcolonial other”, the climax and the conclusion would remain the same (“Diederich”).

Some postcolonial female authors addressed the gap in universality and incorporated it in their writings. About *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Payette says, “Rhys’s novel not only succeeds as a ‘reply’ to Brontë’s silencing of Bertha Rochester, but it also uses its innovative structure to create a

brilliant critique of the English imperialist mission in the West Indies” (Payette 27). The author describes how *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys, *No Telephone to Heaven* by Michelle Cliff, and *Lucy* by Jamaica Kincaid are more appropriate as bildungsroman for women with colour instead of *Jane Eyre*, as they mention the role of colour in the discrimination and inequality towards women.

A Contrapuntal Reading of *Jane Eyre*

Applying a contrapuntal reading to *Jane Eyre* allows us to move beyond simply labeling Bertha Mason as a racist caricature and instead see her as part of an intertwined, yet unequal, narrative with Jane. The novel presents two distinct but inseparable stories: Jane’s story of feminist self-realization and Bertha’s story of colonial dehumanization.

The dominant melody is, without question, Jane’s. It is a powerful narrative of a poor, plain, but fiercely intelligent Englishwoman’s struggle for agency and love in a restrictive patriarchal society. The novel charts her moral and spiritual growth, culminating in a marriage of equals, a union made possible by her newfound financial independence. This is the narrative celebrated by feminist criticism, the story of a woman who achieves selfhood independently.

However, playing simultaneously is a suppressed, subaltern melody: the story of Bertha Mason. This narrative is almost entirely silenced, relayed only through the biased accounts of Mr. Rochester. Bertha was the Creole heiress from Jamaica, a figure whose colonial origins are the source of her “tainted” bloodline and, crucially, her immense wealth. It was her fortune (£30,000) that first enticed Mr. Rochester and sustained his lifestyle as a gentleman at Thornfield Hall. Her story was of displacement, confinement, and a descent into what the text labels ‘madness’. She was not a character but a plot device, an obstacle to be overcome so that the primary narrative could reach its happy conclusion.

Contrapuntal reading makes us recognize that these two melodies are not independent. Bertha’s captivity purchased Jane’s freedom. The space of Thornfield Hall, where Jane began to find love and a sense of belonging, was made possible by colonial exploitation, funded by Bertha’s dowry from the West Indies. The ultimate resolution of the novel depended entirely on this colonial figure: Bertha must be violently erased so that Jane can return and marry Mr. Rochester. Furthermore, the inheritance that granted Jane the independence to return to Mr. Rochester as his ‘equal’ also came from the colonies, via her uncle in Madeira (Bronte 453).

Thus, the ‘feminist’ triumph of the novel is revealed to be a specifically imperial feminism. It champions the freedom and empowerment of the white Englishwoman while standing on the foundation of the wealth, subjugation, and ultimate destruction of the colonized woman of color. Reading contrapuntally, we see that Bertha was not just Jane’s ‘dark double’; she was the silenced economic and racial counterpart whose tragedy is necessary for Jane’s success. This exposes the profound limits of Brontë’s vision, demonstrating that the celebrated feminist narrative is so deeply intertwined with the racist, imperialist one that they are, in fact, two parts of the same, unsettling song.

There is another layer to the silencing of Bertha Mason by Brontë. The reputation of Bertha’s beauty among the White male community of Jamaica can be compared with Edward Said’s interpretation of the portrayal of Kuchuk Hanem, the Egyptian dancer and courtesan, in the writings of the French novelist Gustave Flaubert, in *Orientalism* (Said 6). Gustave Flaubert was a European narrator, and Kuchuk Hanem was the Oriental woman in his narratives. Said pointed out

how the woman was silenced in her representation, and only Flaubert spoke for her the entire time. Similarly, Bertha was a marginalized exotic woman in *Jane Eyre*, whom the author silenced, too. Bertha had her own history, but it is a matter of sorrow that readers can never learn about her point of view on the whole situation. Only the central characters, specifically the White characters, could speak about what happened to Bertha before and how she was doing in Thornfield Hall.

Following Fanon's theory, men exoticized Bertha's beauty, and Mr. Rochester fell for the charm and popularity (Fanon 200). Later, after marrying Bertha, his initial attraction and curiosity for Bertha gradually faded, and finally, he started seeing his wife as a monster, like anyone else. "Concealing the mad-woman's neighbourhood from you, however, was something like covering a child with a cloak and laying it down near a upas-tree: that demon's vicinage is poisoned, and always was" (Brontë 313) was Mr. Rochester's comment on his once beloved wife, whom he thought he loved but was wrong.

The 'madwoman in the attic' burned down Thornfield Hall, tried to ruin the potential happy ending of Jane and Mr. Rochester, and died a pathetic death in her own arson while the main characters still managed to reunite and find happiness with each other in the end (Gilbert and Gubar 425-534). So, Bertha, and women with a colonial identity like her will be the side characters, a Kuchuk Hanem, in the Western eyes. Like the darkness in their portrayals, they will live in the shadows of the protagonists without a voice.

Conclusion

Would *Jane Eyre* still be *Jane Eyre* without its gothic? Brontë's association of dark and light as images for gothic and its opposite, bright and positive, is the first sign of binary in the literary elements in her novel. Moreover, the consciousness of "us and others" is also evident in the description of events by the protagonist, Jane. Finally, the feminism in the novel is biased towards the white, towards the English, to be more specific. Therefore, the high tension between binaries of colour and ethnic identity makes the "othered" readers anxious instead of empowered. Especially, the contrapuntal reading of the novel highlights how the coloured identity of Bertha Mason actually paved the way for Jane's unexpected accomplishment in getting the love of her life.

Our argument comes to a decision that Jane could stand out as one of a kind because of the contrast Charlotte Brontë created by portraying her as the light to the darkness of all the gothic elements used in the novel. For this very kind of portrayal, neither Jane had to feel guilty about her emotional barrenness for Bertha Mason, nor did the readers consider Jane a harsh, arrogant woman who lacked remorse. The author's purpose was to insist that Bertha Mason deserved what she got; her own actions led to her tragic downfall, and we do not have to pity her. In this way, no one blames Jane for stealing the husband of a helpless woman, someone who lost the ability to speak, to raise her voice against the injustice caused to her. Such racism in *Jane Eyre* is merely another kind of sexism, the novel being a failed attempt to become an inclusive feminist text. Therefore, the text is an example of feminine resistance, only to women who share the whiteness of the protagonist, Jane. Overall, the feminism in the novel is questionable because of its discriminatory and dehumanizing way of looking at people of color.

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