

Abstract: JANE EYRE: A FEMINIST FAIRY TALE
Eman Karmouty

Jane Eyre is not only one of the most important classics of English literature but one of the earliest works of feminist writing. The figure of Jane Eyre may be petite in size but not in stature or effect. Standing high, she commands respect and admiration, even in our modern world which has allotted women many of their rights as full citizens. A poor orphan who defiantly refuses to submit to any form of coercion, she cherishes and defends her free spirit and independence.

In her valiant efforts of rebellion against imposing odds, Jane Eyre is strongly reminiscent of fairy tale heroines with her diminutive figure, courage, outspoken words, and sharp wit. Indeed, the entire novel reads like a bedtime story, complete with the suffering of the little heroine at the hands of her heartless tormenters; her meeting with Prince Charming; and after a series of time-consuming impediments, their happy reunion at the end.

Jane Eyre's Prince Charming is a little larger than most, in fact more of a wolf than a prince. He is the wild, untamed Rochester, who locks up his helplessly insane wife and sets his wolfish sights on the young, innocent governess, Jane, whom he has every intention to seduce under the auspices of a sham wedding.

The fairy tale of *Little Red Riding Hood* is re-enacted as a young woman, of little experience, sets out into the world. A Feminist re-reading of *Jane Eyre* and *Little Red Riding Hood* provides new venues of thought regarding the novel's genre. Jane Eyre is a feminist heroine, who escapes the hero's attempts to ravish her and asserts her independence by virtue of her mind, character and personality. Cynthia Carlton-Ford, the feminist critic, asserts that *Jane Eyre* is an emergent, new genre; a feminist fairy tale.

ملخص : جاين اير: حدوتة نسوية

ايمان القرموطي

رواية جاين اير ليست من اهم كلاسيقيات الأدب الانجليزي فحسب وانما تعد من الكتابات النسوية الاولى. قد تكون جاين اير صغيرة الحجم لكنها ذات مركز وتأثير عظيم يكتسب احترام و اعجاب الاخرين حتى في عالمنا المعاصر الذي منح النساء حقوقهن كمواطنين. فرغم كونها يتيمة فقيرة فهي ترفض كل انواع القهر مدافعة باعتزاز عن استقلالها.

محاولاتها الباسلة للتمرد على العقبات وحجمها الصغير وشجاعتها وذكائها وكلماتها الجريئة تذكرنا ببطلات قصص الأطفال بل ان رواية جاين اير باكملها مثل فصص الأطفال فهي تتلقى المعاناة على يد معذبيها كما تقابل امير احلامها الذي ترتبط به بعد عدة عكوسات. اما امير احلامها فهو مثل ذئب كبير اكثر من كونه امير. انه روشيستر الوحشي الذي يحبس زوجته المصابة بالجنون ويقرر الغرار بجاين مستخدما حيلة عقد زواج باطل.

يعاد تمثيل قصة الاطفال "ذات الرداء القرمزي" فتخرج جاين ذات الخبرة اقلية الى العالم. هذه القراءة النسوية لرواية جاين اير وقصة الاطفال "ذات الرداء القرمزي" تدعو للتأمل في نوعية الرواية حيث ان جاين اير بطلة نسائية تتمكن من الهروب من محاولات البطل للغرار بها وتؤكد استقلالها بقوة عقلها وشخصيتها. وتؤكد سينثيا كارلتون فورد، الناقدة النسائية، ان رواية جاين اير نوع جديد من الادب: قصة الأطفال النسائية.

JANE EYRE: A FEMINIST FAIRY TALE

Eman Karmouty

1. Introduction

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, first published in 1847, has been translated into over twenty languages and adapted for the stage and cinema. It was an immediate success with the Victorian reading public, and has been popular ever since, mainly for its spirited heroine:

Jane Eyre has deservedly been celebrated for offering an early example of feminist individualism. The novel presents a protagonist who, on account of her rebellious temperament, courage, moral strength and energy, overcomes all obstacles on her way, from poverty and repression to independence and happiness” (Müller 66).

Although the angry, rebellious heroine was initially criticized for her manners and attitude, considered coarse and un-ladylike then, she was applauded by large numbers of young women, who felt she advocated their cause and expressed their own sentiments. Modern feminist readings of *Jane Eyre* have conclusively determined that it is a female *Bildungsroman* or novel of female development.

The journey out into the world of the traditionally male protagonist is paralleled ... through a personal development similar in terms of plot and themes to that experienced by the male protagonist of the *Bildungsroman* ” (Ayres 32).

Gilbert and Gubar, in *The Mad Woman in the Attic*, described it as similar in some ways to Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*; an inward journey; a “secret dialogue of self and soul” (336).

One of the keys to the power of *Jane Eyre* is Brontë 's use of multiple genres; the *Bildungsroman*, gothic, and romantic. *Jane Eyre* incorporates all these forms, although to the present day its popularity is based on its recognition as a romance novel. Although romance novels have been criticized by some feminist scholars, many feminists are authors of romance novels and some feminist scholars defend the genre as reflecting and exploring feminist issues. The feminist critic, Cynthia Carlton-Ford, however, sees in *Jane Eyre* a new genre:

Brontë fuses two separate stories, the love story and a feminist statement, but the two are so tightly interwoven that the reader may read the whole novel seeking only one of them ... The emergent genre is an original one—the feminist fairytale” (qtd. in Regis 86).

2. *Jane Eyre* and Fairy Tales

Jane and Rochester form one of the most unforgettable couples in English literature. Their very first meeting reads like a fairy tale, mysterious, romantic and unearthly. Jane, out for a solitary walk, hearing Rochester’s horse approaching, remembers childhood tales: “Memories of nursery stories were there ... 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” (Brontë 116). Rochester’s horse stumbles and throws him to the ground as he passes her, concealed in the engulfing, protective fog. As she helps him up, he appraises her tiny figure, even tinier beside his huge, masculine figure. Later, he asks, half seriously, half jestingly if she is an elfish spirit. “You have rather the look of another world ... I thought unaccountably of fairy tales, and had half a mind to demand whether you had bewitched my horse” (Brontë 126).

Many have noted the affinity between *Jane Eyre* and fairy tales. This is not surprising as Charlotte, her brother, and four sisters, were left motherless at an early age. Two older sisters had died of illnesses and to assuage their grief and loneliness the Brontë children read voraciously and created an elaborate fantasy world. Charlotte, as her biographer Juliet Barker noted, remained attached throughout her life to the magical, mysterious and the supernatural. The fairy tale element in *Jane Eyre* allows Brontë to employ elements of magic and fantasy, thus escaping the restraining effects of realism. “The fairy tale ... is a sharp renunciation of the enlightened world, of the idealizing image-realism of classicism, and of the sentimental affairs of a middle class which strove for progress and economic security but lost its human face” (Thalman 14).

Cinderella is one of the fairy tales glimpsed in *Jane Eyre*; Jane’s childhood is reminiscent of *Cinderella*, where her aunt, Mrs. Reed, is cast in a role akin to that of the evil stepmother, and Jane is treated as an inferior, as Cinderella was, while her cousins are lazy, spoilt and vicious children, tormenting poor, little Jane. There are also allusions

to *Beauty and the Beast*; Rochester appears as a rather rough-looking man, with brusque manners, whom Jane gradually falls in love with, despite his fearsome exterior, much as Beauty grows to love the Beast in the fairy tale. And *Bluebeard's Castle* is evoked in the presentation of Rochester as a kind man, hiding his ugly reality and his first wife in the attic, just as Bluebeard concealed his former wives in a secret room in his castle.

3. *Jane Eyre*: A Feminist Fairy Tale

As far back as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries French women writers had recognized fairy tales' relation to issues of gender and sexuality and they themselves had experimented with gender constructions in their own tales. (Haase). Thus women story tellers and writers used fairy tales as a means of exploring, rewriting and subverting their socio-political situations for centuries. Early feminist criticism of fairy tales initially dealt with the genre's representation of passive females and the ensuing effect, maintaining that it construed psycho-sexual concepts and beliefs, as well as which behavior should be rewarded and which punished. Fairy tales were charged with enslavement of the female psycho-sexual self by feminists as Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan: "As a socializing force fairy tales are effective in curtailing the desires of young girls teaching them the damaging 'virtues' of self effacement and sexual restraint" (Code 191).

Other feminist scholars claimed that fairy tales were revolutionary sites enabling women's liberation through their portrayal of strong female protagonists. Feminist adaptations or re-readings used alternative stories or reversed plots and rearranged motifs, contributing to the emergence of feminist fairy tales, as the tales of Angela Carter that replaced the traditional romantic ideals and happy endings with female empowerment and self realization. "Both feminism and the study of fairy tales have emerged as growth industries and have become institutionalized ... fairy tale studies have developed into a coherent discipline that has been profoundly influenced by feminism" (Haase xiii).

Subsequently, feminist intervention into fairy tales reinforced the connection between feminism and fairy tale ideals of romance and love. Romance novels have much in common with fairy tales as both provide fantasy realms; present the meeting, separation and reunion of a romantic couple and end their narrative with a happy ending. Conceiving fairy tales as a key female genre allowed feminist writers to assimilate fairy

tales into their own literary works. “Brontë’s myth reflects those social limitations even as it attempts to define a new feminist freedom” (Moglen 143-144).

Romance novels draw on older narratives, including fairy tales, previously authored by women, whom, “male experts demoted to the status of mere informants. The male writer’s sentimental return to a myth of matriarchal origins was for the woman writer a colonization of one of the few literary spheres she was allowed to consider her own” (Auerbach & Knoepfmacher 7).

4. Jane Eyre and Little Red Riding Hood

The literary fairy tale largely came into existence by women at the French court, in the 17th century, who took part in it as a parlor game and employed it as a means of projecting ideal, imaginary lives for themselves: “Madame D’Aulnoy created a setting in her tales that placed women in greater control of their destinies than did fairy tales by men” (Zipes, *Myth* 26). The fairy tale of *Little Red Riding Hood* or *Little Red Cap* presents the male-female conflict and is “a story of triumph by man-hating women, ending with their victory” (Fromm 241). It is also basically the story of a girl’s coming of age; its moral theme is the danger of losing her virtue. It is also a cautionary tale for young girls, as well as children, not to stray from their path and to avoid hungry wolves.

There are several versions of *Little Red Riding Hood* or *Little Red Cap*, but perhaps the most popular are: the version presented by Charles Perrault in *Histoires ou Contes du Temps Passé*, 1697, and the version used by the Brothers Grimm in their *Grimm’s Fairy Tales*, a collection of German folk-fairy tales, in the nineteenth century. Charles Perrault, credited with the first printed version of *Little Red Riding Hood*, made some important changes to the tale, not all considered tasteful by some critics, but certainly of great effect, as introducing the red color of the hood or cap, in an attempt to give the tale a very clear moral symbol: “Most of the symbolism in this fairy tale can be understood without difficulty. The ‘little cap of red velvet’ is a symbol of menstruation. The little girl ... has become a mature woman and is now confronted with the problem of sex” (Fromm 240). *Little Red Riding Hood* is given a red cap or hood by her grandmother, and is so fond of it she wears it constantly, and comes to be known as *Little Red Riding Hood*. Her mother sends her to her grandmother, with cakes and butter, but

she is accosted on the way by the wolf, who learns from her of her grandmother's cottage, where he goes, devours the old lady and waits for Little Red Riding Hood.

In Perrault's version, the wolf tells Little Red Riding Hood to get into bed with him, which she does, amazed at his arms, which he answers are for embracing and when she finally comments on his big teeth, the wolf can restrain his lust no longer and devours her. "Perrault's story ends with the wolf victorious; thus it is devoid of escape, recovery and consolation; it is not—and was not intended by Perrault to be—a fairy tale, but a cautionary story" (Bettelheim 167).

Perrault also added to the tale a few lines of verse, warning young ladies to beware of suave, two-legged wolves, who would follow them into their homes and beds. Bruno Bettelheim finds fault with Charles Perrault for making the sexual parable in his version of the tale too explicit, transforming the wolf from a carnivorous animal into a human stalker. However, the word 'wolf' has come to be associated with any seducer of women. Because they are predators and stalkers, wolves are often symbolic of the male with questionable desires; the kind of men who seduce young, naïve girls.

Bettelheim also criticizes Little Red Riding Hood herself for succumbing obediently to the wolf's command to undress and get into bed with him. This, as he explains, reveals either her stupidity or her desire to be seduced. Jack Zipes, in *The Tribulations & Trials of Little Red Riding Hood*, suggests that the illustrations made by the artist, Gustave Doré, for the 1861 publication of Perrault's tales, portray this scene as a seduction or rape scene, in which Little Red Riding Hood seems to offer little resistance. Even the Brothers Grimm who, in their collection of fairy tales, gave the tale a happy ending, allowing the little girl to be swallowed whole then rescued later by a hunter, also seemed to hold her partially responsible for what happens to her. Little Red Riding Hood was warned by her mother, before she set off, not to stray from the path or talk to strangers, an addition the Brothers Grimm made in their version of the tale, and which is a clear reference to patriarchal law and the importance of observing it.

In *Jane Eyre*, Jane finds herself drawn to Rochester and, just as Little Red Riding Hood offers no resistance to the Big Bad Wolf, is tempted to yield to his advances in spite of his treachery and intention to seduce her, with the sham wedding he has

planned. “That I am not Edward Rochester’s bride is the least part of my woe ... but that I must leave him decidedly, instantly, entirely, is intolerable. I cannot do it” (Brontë 316). Hurrying to the sanctity of her room, Jane wrestles with her desires and her sexual arousal at the hands of a human wolf, who tries to cloud issues for her, suggesting they may find some far off place, where none will know he is already married. She is innocent, immature and inexperienced, like Little Red Riding Hood or Little Red Cap. “The name Little Red Cap indicates the key importance of this feature of the heroine in the story. It suggests that not only is the red cap little, but also the girl. “She is too little, not for wearing the cap, but for managing what this red cap symbolizes”(Bettelheim 173).

In the night the moon appears to Jane as a mother figure, prompting her to escape temptation. “It gazed and gazed on me. It spoke to my spirit ... ‘My daughter, flee temptation’” (Brontë 340). Jane obeys this command; not to stray from the path of chastity, but Bertha Mason, Rochester’s first wife, who is seen by some as a double for Jane, has yielded to her sexual instincts. The mad, Bertha, whom Rochester keeps locked up, is seen to be what Jane could easily become. Bertha is the little girl who forgot her mother’s instructions, and yielded to her sexual desires. Her punishment is becoming an insane, savage, repulsive creature, loathed by her husband. The aging victim now holds little appeal for the voracious wolf, who desires a young prey, whom he believes will be an easy conquest:

‘That is *my wife* ... And this is what I wished to have’ (laying his hand on my shoulder): ‘this young girl, who stands so grave and quiet at the mouth of hell, looking collectedly at the gambols of a demon ... Compare these clear eyes with the red balls yonder—this face with that mask—this form with that bulk’ (Brontë 312).

As such, the moralistic, cautionary note of *Little Red Riding Hood* is echoed in *Jane Eyre*: the sad fate of little girls who succumb to their sexual instincts. In the Brothers Grimm’s version of the fairy tale, Little Red Cap forgets her mother’s warning, but is later saved and promises she will never again disregard her mother’s instructions.

“Whatever her reputation or destiny, she has always been used as a warning to children,

particularly girls, a symbol and embodiment of what might happen if they are disobedient and careless. She epitomizes the good girl gone wrong” (Zipes, *Trials* 17).

Jean Rhys, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 1966, creates a prequel for *Jane Eyre*, in which Bertha Mason, Rochester’s mad wife, is the protagonist, allowing more insight into the emotions and ultimate, tragic fate of this exotic girl from the West Indies. Passionate, beautiful and innocent, she is captivated by Rochester, who soon loses all interest in her. The Victorian text of *Jane Eyre*, however, offers no defense for Bertha Mason, assuming a stolid silence as to the reasons which have led to her present state, locked up by Rochester and hidden from the eyes of society. Yet Bertha is viewed by many critics as a double for Jane, or what she could easily become, should she acquiesce to Rochester’s lustful advances.

As the two females of Rochester’s fancy are juxtaposed; the wife, who represents his foolhardy, avaricious, lustful past, and the young governess, who can offer a future of love and compensation, troubling similarities lurk beneath the surface; a subliminal text, read within Bertha’s eyes, red with fury and pain. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, , suggest that Bertha is used by Charlotte Brontë to outwardly express Jane’s anger, fear and rejection of Rochester’s patriarchal authority and control. “The relationship between Jane and Bertha is a monitory one: while acting out Jane’s secret fantasies, Bertha does (to say the least) provide the governess with an example of how not to act, teaching her a lesson” (361).

Jane’s fears of marriage and of losing her virginity, reminiscent of Little Red Riding Hood’s fear of the Big Bad Wolf, are dramatized in Jane’s dreams of a horrible, vampire creature that tears her wedding veil, none other than Bertha Mason.

But on a figurative and psychological level it seems suspiciously clear ... what Bertha now does, for instance, is what Jane wants to do. Bertha in other words is Jane’s truest and darkest double: she is the angry aspect of the orphan child, the ferocious secret self Jane has been trying to repress” (Gilbert & Gubar 359-60). Emotions mirroring Jane’s own rejection of patriarchal mores are dramatized by Bertha as she emits low laughs of bitter chagrin at having been duped into the confines of her prison in Thornfield; a restriction of her freedom and denial of her existence as a human.

The cruel laws of patriarchy are thus laid out; no redemption is possible for those who fail the test; females who dare to emulate male practices are fair game and must expect the worst.

Bertha is the victim of male sexual and economic exploitation; ravished by Rochester and stripped of her worldly possessions under the charge of lunacy and incompetence. Rochester claims that the curse of insanity runs deep in her family yet the only witnessed member of her family, her brother, Mason, seems even more rational than Rochester himself. He also evinces humane feelings and the deepest pity for his mentally depraved sister, unlike Rochester whose comments regarding Bertha are derogatory: “I found her nature wholly alien to mine, her tastes obnoxious to me, her cast of mind common, low, narrow, and singularly incapable of being led to anything higher” (Brontë 325). Jane reminds Rochester that Bertha is not to blame for her mad state; her words suggesting more than they state: “You speak of her with hate—with vindictive antipathy. It is cruel—she cannot help being mad” (Brontë 320).

The reasons that drove Bertha to her wild, bestial state and savage lunacy are not provided within the novel. Jean Rhys, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, provides a voice for Bertha, which answers many of the unuttered questions in *Jane Eyre*. Bertha, named Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, asks Grace if her dress makes her look “intemperate and unchaste”. It would seem that the intemperance is Rochester's, for the sight of the dress, as he confesses, makes him “breathless and savage with desire”, but after the lovemaking is over he turns from her “still without a word or a caress” (93).

Rhys' novel makes explicit what *Jane Eyre* suggests: Bertha's madness is the result of indulging in passionate, sexual desires; an act prohibited, by patriarchal authority, to all chaste, rational females; condoned only in males, even if viewed as sinful. Sexual double standards are applied to women and men. Little Red Riding Hood, submitting to the wolf's seduction, is devoured in Perrault's version of the fairy tale; *Grimm's Fairy Tales* presents a less ominous version of the little girl's fate; she is swallowed whole by the Big Bad Wolf. Even so, it is a terrifying experience:

Little Red Cap, when she fell in with the wolf's seduction to act on the basis of the pleasure principle ... returned to a more primitive, earlier form of existence.

In typical fairy-story fashion, her return to a more primitive level of life is impressively exaggerated as going all the way to the pre-birth existence in the womb” (Bettelheim 180).

Bertha, in *Jane Eyre*, having responded passionately to Rochester and now disdained by him, reverts into a child-like, animal state. Running about on all fours, growling and shouting, Brontë depicts her as an enraged, primitive being, wild in its vindictive desire for revenge. “A figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell; it groveled, seemingly on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange, wild animal” (Brontë 311). Yet this human beast retains enough memory and fury to attack the person responsible for her depravity and imprisonment, treated like a sub-human or form of lower life. “Mr. Rochester flung me behind him. The lunatic sprang and grappled his throat viciously ... they struggled. She was a big woman, in stature almost equaling her husband”(Brontë 312).

The cited lines are highly significant in being probably the only instance in the novel in which Bertha is described as a woman, and named as Rochester’s wife, by Jane the governess. It is at this point that Jane can discern the human, concealed beneath layers of neglect, injustice and rejection; a fellow female. In giving Bertha a physical figure equal to that of Rochester, Brontë implies that she is his equal, and his legal wife, as stated by the governess, and which Rochester has attempted to deny throughout the novel. Brief, under-toned and hardly noticed, this description of the married couple’s struggle condemns the biased codes of patriarchal society, represented by Rochester, that allow the physical and psychological extinguishing of a human life and spirit.

5. The Color ‘Red’ in *Jane Eyre* and *Little Red Riding Hood*

Dreams in *Jane Eyre* serve several functions. They serve to warn Jane of coming dangers, as well as projecting her repressed passions and furies. They also express Brontë’s sentiments, which she, as a female writer of the Victorian Period could not openly express. That Brontë concealed much of what she felt, sufficing to imply or suggest much of her convictions, is attested by the fact that she chose to adopt a male pseudonym, Currer Bell, a precaution taken also by other women writers against male criticism. Her condemnation of Rochester’s behaviour is enacted in her heroine’s

rejection of all the justifications he presents for his intolerable cruelty and malicious intent, both towards Bertha and herself.

Jane, as a child, is sent to the red-room, when she is wild and uncontrollable, as judged by Victorian criteria, which Brontë does not fail to criticize for its bias in favour of male supremacy. Little Jane is punished for physically defending herself against her cousin, John's attack, though "No one had reproved John for wantonly striking me; and because I had turned against him to avert farther irrational violence, I was loaded with opprobrium" (Brontë 1984: 10). Gender conflict is thus established at the beginning of the novel, as well as the protagonist's fury for society's bias, which she expressly condemns as "Unjust! –unjust!" (ibid). Jane refuses to conform to the level of obedience that would have been expected then of a female, striking a discordant note in an environment of male supremacy and female subjugation, where female excesses are severely punished.

The red-room, symbolic and significant, is employed throughout *Jane Eyre*, as an important motif. It is the room where Jane's uncle died, thereby reflecting a gothic setting, ingrained through the darkened atmosphere of heavily drawn curtains, and a large bed, "hung with curtains of deep red damask, stood out like a tabernacle ... the carpet was red; the table at the foot of the bed was covered with a crimson cloth" (Brontë 8). The splashing of red, the dominant theme of the red-room, is a motif used throughout the novel, symbolizing passion, anger, hatred, outrage and sexual desire. Bertha's eyes are red; the fire that consumes Thornfield is red. The color red is the main motif in *Little Red Cap* or *Little Red Riding Hood*. "All through *Little Red Cap*, in the title as in the girl's name, the emphasis is on the color red, which she openly wears. Red is the color symbolizing violent emotions, very much including sexual ones" (Bettelheim 173). Sexual implications and inferences are drawn due to the red color of the hood or cap worn by the little girl.

In *Jane Eyre* the red-room dramatizes the oppression experienced by both Bertha and Jane. Whenever Jane senses fear or humiliation, she remembers the terrible, horrific experience of her childhood, restrained in the red-room. At night, Jane dreams that she is back in her childhood home, Gateshead, in the red-room. Her dream reflects her

subliminal fears of Rochester; the male patriarchal authority whom she has already witnessed deform her double, Bertha, who serves to “warn as well as punish her more docile sister by standing as a living object lesson in the consequences of sexual excess and pain” (Hoeveler 216). The unforgettable memory of being locked up in the red-room, used as a connecting motif between Jane and Bertha, is a symbol of their fury against the oppression of patriarchal authority, restricting their freedom of expression.

The imprisoned Bertha, ‘running backwards and forwards’ on all fours in the attic, for instance, recalls not only Jane, the governess, whose only relief from mental pain was to pace ‘backwards and forwards’ ... but also that ‘bad animal’ who was ten-year-old Jane, imprisoned in the red-room, howling and mad (Gilbert & Gubar 361).

The color ‘red’ has important implications for both women; the blood of Mason, Bertha’s brother, flows freely with a red color that reveals her fury at one of the males who have contrived, willingly or not, towards her debasement as a human. Rochester is invariably depicted with the color ‘red’ in the background; surrounding imagery, as well as his dress. When he summons Jane for their first formal meeting, the fire shines on his face, and later in the novel, he pretends to be a gipsy woman and dons a red cloak. In this guise he attempts to elucidate from the innocent, yet wary Jane, a confession of her love for him. The fire lights his face as he reveals his identity:

“‘Well, Jane, do you know me?’ asked the familiar voice.”

“‘Only take off the red cloak, sir, and then--” (Brontë 213).

The similarity to the ploy used by the Big Bad Wolf in *Little Red Riding Hood*, when he dressed himself in the grandmother’s clothes to ravish the innocent, little girl, is too close for comfort. Rochester, also, puts on the garb of an old woman to deceive Jane and discover her true emotions, turning them to his own advantage.

6. *Jane Eyre* and the Big Bad Wolf

The Big Bad Wolf, dressed in the grandmother’s clothes, looks so odd, that Little Red Riding Hood cannot help wondering about his big eyes, arms and teeth. Jane, also, is intrigued, not only by Rochester’s gipsy guise, but by the strange gleam she perceives within his eyes at times, and his eagerness to wield his power over her, as when he

demands that she quit her governess duties and limit herself to those of wife of the Master of Thornfield. She adamantly rejects such dominance, financial or sexual. Jane realizes from Rochester's own confessions that he has had several mistresses, all of whom he regards with the greatest contempt, as Adele's mother, and does not wish to end up as one of them. However, Rochester is her first experience with the male sex, and as yet she is a young, innocent girl, starved for emotions of love which the dark, enigmatic Rochester seems to promise.

Brontë, through her protagonist, points repeatedly to the danger of submitting to the human wolf, Rochester. Even after Jane has accepted his proposal, she is still wary of his plans: "He rose and came towards me, and I saw his face all kindled, and his falcon eye flashing ... a weapon of defence must be prepared" (Brontë 1984: 289). Jane fears Rochester's sexual advances, though she loves him and is tempted to yield to her instincts. "The heroine is threatened on two sides. First, she is in danger of acceding to the hero's sexual allure, and, even more threateningly, to her own sexual response. (Cohn 168).

The sexual act in *Little Red Riding Hood* is dramatized as a cannibalistic act as the wolf devours Little Red Riding Hood, or in other words the male devours the female. This indicates the male's sexual drive employed as a form of subjugation. In the version of the Brothers Grimm, Little Red Cap swallowed by the wolf, is freed of his clutches when the hunter slits its belly open. Like Jonah, who was swallowed by the whale, then released unharmed, yet wiser for his experience, so Little Red Cap is reborn with a different outlook. "Her experience convinced her of the dangers of giving in to her oedipal desires ... to seduce or permit herself to be seduced by the as yet dangerous aspects of the male" (Bettelheim 181). The little heroine, imprisoned within the wolf's belly, experiences the restrictions of male domination; as Bertha, having yielded to Rochester, the human wolf in *Jane Eyre*, is imprisoned in the attic in Thornfield, and as little Jane, daring to oppose the male supremacy of her cousin, John, is locked in the red-room at Gateshead.

Jane Eyre is a romance novel, in which the male hero can also double as the villain, as Jayne Krentz explains in *Dangerous Men and Adventurous Women: Romance*

Writers on the Appeal of the Romance. As she defines him, the male hero-villain of the romance novel is: “the most dangerous creature on earth, the human male” (5). The male hero of the romance novel is then designated as a dangerous creature; a human predator. Moreover, Brontë’s portrayal of Rochester as possessing a dark alter-ego is in keeping with the feminist fairy tale genre, assigned by Carlton-Ford to *Jane Eyre* (cf. pp.1-2). In fairy tales such as *Beauty and the Beast* and *Blue-Beard*, the male hero invariably has an alternate, concealed personality which is revealed as the mystery behind his actions unfolds. The Beast, who initially looks horrible and repulsive, in *Beauty and the Beast*, is later transformed into a handsome prince, and Blue-Beard, the kind and generous husband, is transformed into a killer, who slays all his wives who discover his murderous nature. In the tale of *Little Red Cap*, the Big, Bad Wolf, initially seems so friendly and gentle. He suggests *Little Red Cap* should stop and enjoy the beauty of the forest: “Little Red Cap, just look at the pretty flowers that are growing all around you, and I don’t think you are listening to the song of the birds; you are posting along just as if you were going to school, and it is so delightful out here in the wood” (Grimm 133). This sly advice which conceals the message to leave the path of virtue and seek forbidden pleasures is echoed by Rochester, the Big, Bad Wolf in *Jane Eyre*, to the stern, young governess whom he has employed to instruct his little, ward, or perhaps his child out of wedlock, Adèle. “Come where there is some freshness, for a few moments’, said he, ‘that house is a mere dungeon ... The glamour of inexperience is over your eyes ... Now here’ (he pointed to the leafy enclosure we had entered) ‘all is real, sweet, and pure’” (Brontë 227). On several occasions, Rochester’s human mask slips and his wolfish features and tendencies are disclosed. Brontë depicts him with:

broad and jetty eyebrows; his square forehead, made squarer by the horizontal sweep of his black hair. I recognized his decisive nose, more remarkable for character than beauty; his full nostrils, denoting, I thought, choler; his grim mouth, chin, and jaw—yes, all three were very grim” (Brontë 124).

Rochester’s dark, stern, chiseled features, prominent nose and jaw are stressed throughout the novel, providing a figure more akin to a carnivorous creature than a fellow human. As the Big, Bad Wolf carefully plots the entrapment and slow and pleasurable ravishment of

Little Red Riding Hood, so also does Rochester gently entice young Jane to the charms and joys of love. He does not attempt to make her his mistress nor possess her through sheer brutal force, for as he himself acknowledges this would not produce the desired effect.

Whatever I do with its cage, I cannot get at it—the savage, beautiful creature! If I tear, if I rend the slight prison, my outrage will only let the captive loose.

Conqueror I might be of the house; but the inmate would escape to heaven before I could call myself possessor of its clay dwelling place. And it is you, spirit—with will and energy, and virtue and purity—that I want: not alone your brittle frame (Brontë 339).

It is thus clear that Rochester is fully aware that his savage assaults on previous victims, as Bertha, has tarnished their image and robbed them of all attraction for him. He seeks, as he himself admits, a pure and innocent companion, as wild and indomitable as himself, yet possessing the purity he has lost. The question as to why the Big Bad Wolf does not immediately devour Little Red Riding Hood instead of waiting for her, in her granny's cottage, has been raised time and again. Bettelheim, in *The Uses of Enchantment*, suggests that “Since in Perrault's story the wolf is all along a male seducer, it makes sense that an older man might be afraid to seduce a little girl in the sight and hearing of other men” (175). But in the Brothers Grimm's version of the tale, the wolf states, “You have to proceed carefully to catch both”, referring to Little Red Cap and her grandmother. Bettelheim finds this explanation unsatisfactory, simply because the Big Bad Wolf could have easily devoured Little Red Cap then and there, then he could have proceeded to eat her grandmother later, as he did. The delay, then, he suggests, is born out of a need to override desires repressed by the grandmother's presence, in other words, Little Red Cap's “unconscious desire to be seduced”. He goes on to explain that: “The wolf does not devour Little Red Cap immediately upon meeting her because he wants to get her into bed with him first: a sexual meeting of the two has to precede her being ‘eaten up’” (175).

Rochester is an older man, whom Jane estimates to be about thirty-five years of age, although he informs her that, “I have a right to be a little masterful, abrupt, perhaps

exacting, sometimes, on the grounds I stated, namely, that I am old enough to be your father” (Brontë 139). The role of mentor or instructor allots Rochester the advantage of seducing the innocent Jane, far younger than himself, while seeming to teach and advise her; a role that recalls similar scenes from Charlotte Brontë’s personal memoirs. As a young girl, she and her sister, Emily, were sent to Brussels, to study foreign languages. Constantin Heger, the director of the Belgian School in Brussels, was an older, married man, to whom Charlotte grew greatly attached. It is possible that Heger may have inspired the creation of Rochester, for as Juliet Barker, in *The Brontës*, so aptly remarks, one of his letters to another student of his, could easily be taken to be Rochester addressing Jane:

I sit down, smoking my cigar, and with a hearty will I evoke your image—and you come (without wishing to, I dare say) but I see you, I talk with you—you, with that little air, affectionate undoubtedly, but independent and resolute, firmly determined not to allow any opinion without being previously convinced, demanding to be convinced before allowing yourself to submit—in fact, just as I knew you ...and as I have esteemed and loved you (419).

Rochester, in planning to marry Jane, while still legally married to Bertha, is not only committing bigamy but much more: “There is no question that Rochester’s way of overcoming Jane’s scruples is in itself a kind of attempted rape” (Maynard 112). Even after his intentions are exposed, Rochester does not express any guilt or compunction for his actions, defending himself as fully justified in view of the fact that Bertha, his legal wife, is insane and a menace to society. As she is still the actual owner of his present wealth he cannot attempt to divorce her, as her brother, Mason, confirms.

Mason plays a role similar to that of the hunter who saves Little Red Riding Hood; he is Jane’s saviour from scandal and dishonour. He is sent by her uncle to save her from “the snare into which” she “had fallen” and is told “to lose no time in taking steps to prevent the false marriage” (Brontë 313). After the hunter saves Little Red Riding Hood, she comes out, from the darkness into the light, having gained a wisdom that, “... only the twice born can possess: those who do not only master an existential

crisis, but also become conscious that their own nature projected them into it ... she is reborn on a higher plane of existence” (Bettelheim 183).

7. The Happy Ending

Fairy tales usually have a happy ending as do most romantic novels. Yet Perrault chose to end his fairy tale with the devouring of Little Red Riding Hood as an exemplary of what befell bold females who attempted to exceed the bounds set by patriarchal law. The Brothers Grimm decided against following such a sinister outcome, replacing it with the temporary shock Little Red Cap receives upon being swallowed by the Big Bad Wolf, then being rescued by the Hunter; an indication of more lenient judgment. Charlotte Bronte ends her novel with the reunion of Jane and Rochester; a finale many feminists object to on the basis that it reveals a weakness on Jane’s part, loss of the independence she has gained, and an acceptance of the male domination she has resisted all along.

Jane realizes that it is the strong attraction she feels for Rochester, as well as her innocence, un-worldliness and lack of guiding spirits that has driven her into Rochester’s arms. His dark intentions, to which she turned a blind eye or failed to notice through sheer naiveté, are now fully revealed. His powers of seduction, however, remain unaffected by his scandalous actions, which he continues to justify as the only means rendered him to possess her. “In Rochester, Brontë adds the element of overt sexuality and with that sexuality the dark hero of romance becomes not simply a man with a moral flaw but a potential source of danger and terror” (Cohn 143). He persists in denying acknowledgement of his marital status and continues to plan a future for them together, selfishly ignoring the onslaught of society that would afflict Jane alone.

However, Jane has acquired a certain wisdom that enables her to see through Rochester’s wicked intentions; his desire to satisfy his needs regardless of the harm that may befall her. Little Red Riding Hood is saved by the hunter, but she must fend herself against future harm from the Big Bad Wolf, who after his belly is slit open is still alive. She places within his stomach heavy stones and when the Wolf tries to get up he falls because of the weight of the stones and dies. This is his punishment for his evil actions and Little Red Riding Hood’s safeguard from further attempts of ravishment. Rochester has been a Big Bad Wolf and must be punished too for his heartless plan of seducing an

innocent, young girl, as well as denying the existence of his wife, Bertha, locking her up in the attic. The second fire, started by Bertha, a burning rage of vengeance for her humiliation and dehumanization at the hands of Rochester, is meant to destroy him and all that he stands for; patriarchal domination and oppression. Rochester's seductive intentions towards Jane, and discarding of Bertha after he has satisfied his lust for her, call for what has been described by Richard Chase as a form of castration:

Rochester's injuries [sustained in his attempt to save Bertha from the fire] are, I should think, a symbolic castration. The faculty of vision, analysts have shown, is often identified in the unconscious with the energy of sex. When Rochester had tried to make love to Jane, she felt 'a fiery hand grasp at her vitals'; the hand, then, must be cut off (467).

Rochester is blinded in the fire and his right arm is crippled and lies useless by his side. This mutilation has been regarded as a form of penance for his sins and sexual excess. It recalls the Big Bad Wolf's mutilation; his belly cut up to release Little Red Riding Hood, and in other versions of the tale he is boiled to death by the little heroine and her grandmother. This painful outcome is in conflict with the traditional happy ending of the romance novel that readers expect and demand, yet according to Krentz this is true to form because "Romance novels invert the power structure of a patriarchal society because they show women exerting enormous power over men. The books also defy the masculine conventions of other forms of literature because they portray women as heroes" (5).

Some have argued that ultimately, in marrying Rochester, Jane abandons her rebelliousness and feminism, but on the other hand, it could be argued that Jane has undeniably emerged from her quest not only to a happy ending, but also to an independent, more empowered position. The end of love is not, or at least should not, be the end of life, and with this assertion Brontë reconfigures the stereotypical scene of the heroine at home waiting for the hero's return from the sea. Similarly, in describing Jane's marriage, while the author does draw the novel to a conventional end, she characteristically adapts and even subverts it, from the female point of view, as the statement "I married him" demonstrates.

8. Conclusion

Jane Eyre combines several genres presented in multiple layers that intersect and diverge. Through references to fairy tales, prophetic dreams, and mythic imagery, Brontë incorporates fantastic elements into a realistic, narrative structure, thereby revealing concealed, emotional subtexts in the novel. The use of the fantastic plays a major role in *Jane Eyre*, which is not merely a parable or morality tale, but a fairy tale as well: “Women writers of the Victorian era regarded the fairy tale as a dormant literature of their own” (Auerbach and Knoepfelmacher 11).

Jane Eyre's long-standing popularity stems from the figure of Jane Eyre herself. Tiny, defenseless and all alone in the world, she casts a figure reminiscent of fairy tale heroines. The dark, enigmatic Rochester, with his devious plans comprises a fascinating male counterpart. Enacting the tale of *Red Riding Hood* within the context of a romance novel enhances the multi-faceted potential of the feminist fairy tale. The moralistic, cautionary aspect strikes in the background, as the male-female conflict comes to the fore. Brontë's heroine triumphs through, “... virtue of her interiority: her qualities of mind, character and personality ... Charlotte Brontë' created the first *anti-heroine* : one who defied the conventions of both fiction and society” (Moglen 106).

Jane Eyre is also a *Bildungsroman*, whose protagonist must satisfy her emotional and spiritual needs. Jane's education is followed from childhood until she is a young woman who falls in love, but needs to assert her independence and freedom. The triumphant end is in accordance with both feminist and fairy tale genres, providing a happy ending in which Jane asserts female power, subverting the patriarchal version of female subordination. Jane is the hero of this feminist fairy tale; overcoming all obstacles and claiming her prize. She comes to the rescue of Rochester, saving him from a life of isolation and misery, re-enacting the role of ancient mother goddesses who once ruled supreme. The happy ending is consummated in Jane's triumph as a female, not in the marriage as such; a feminist heroine of a fairy tale-romance novel, thereby confirming Cynthia Carlton-Ford's definition of *Jane Eyre* as a 'feminist-fairy tale genre': “What is extraordinary is that this novel, born of repression and frustration, of limited experience

and less hope, should have offered an insight into psycho-sexual relationships that was visionary in its own time and remains active in ours” (Moglen 145).

Works Cited

- Allot, Miriam, ed. *The Brontës: The Critical Heritage*. London: Routledge and Keagan Paul, 1974. Print.
- Auerbach, Nina and U.C. Knoepfelmacher, eds. *Forbidden Journeys: Fairy Tales and Fantasies by Victorian Women Writers*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992. Print.
- Ayres, Brenda, ed. *Silent Voices: Forgotten Novels by Victorian Women Writers*. Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2003. Print.
- Barker, Juliet. *The Brontës*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994. Print.
- Bettelheim, Bruno. *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*. London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 1976. Print.
- Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. Essex: Longman Group Ltd., 1984. Print.
- Chase, Richard. "The Brontës, or Myth Domesticated" in *Jane Eyre*. Richard J. Dunn, ed. New York: Norton, 1971. Print.
- Code, Lorraine, ed. *Encyclopedia of Feminist Theories*. London and New York: Routledge, 2003. Print.
- Cohn, Jan. *Romance and the Erotics of Property: Mass-market Fiction for Women*. Edinister, Warren: Duke UP, 1988. Print.
- Eagleton, Terry. *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës*. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1975. Print.
- "Fairies and Feminism: Recurrent Patterns in Chaucer's 'The Wife of Bath's Tale' and Brontë's *Jane Eyre*" in *Modern Critical Interpretations: Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre*. Ed. Harold Bloom, New Delhi: Viva Books Private, Ltd., 2007. Print.
- Fromm, Erich. *The Forgotten Language: An Introduction to the Understanding of Dreams, Fairy Tales and Myths*. New York: Grove Press, 1951. Print.
- Gilbert, Sandra and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1979. Print.
- Glen, Heather. Ed. *Jane Eyre: New Casebook*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997. Print.
- Grimm, J.L.C., and W.C. *Grimm's Fairy Tales*. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions,

- Ltd.,1993. Print.
- Krentz, Jayne Ann. *Dangerous Men and Adventurous Women: Romance Writers on the Appeal of the Romance*. Ed. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1992.
- Maynard, John. *Charlotte Brontë and Sexuality*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984.
- Michie, Elsie B. Ed. *Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre: A Casebook*. Oxford & New York: Oxford UP, 2006. Print.
- Moglen, Helene. *Charlotte Brontë: The Self Conceived*. Wisconsin, U of Wisconsin P, 1984. Print.
- Müller, Wolfgang G. "The Intertextual Status of *Wide Sargasso Sea*" in *A Breath of Fresh Eyre: Intertextual and Intermedial Reworkings of Jane Eyre*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2007. Print.
- Regis, Pamela. *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2003. Print.
- Rhys, Jean. *Wide Sargasso Sea*. New York: Norton, 1966. Print.
- Rich, Adrienne. "Jane Eyre: The Temptations of a Motherless Woman." *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose, 1966—1978*, 89—106. New York: Norton, 1979. Print.
- Showalter, Elaine. *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1977. Print.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism." *Critical Inquiry* 8: 243—61, 1986. Print.
- Thalman, Marianne. *The Romantic Fairy Tale: Seeds of Surrealism*. Trans. Mary B. Corcoran. Michigan: U of Michigan P, 1964. Print.
- Zipes, Jack. Ed. *The Trials & Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood*. 2nd edition. New York: Routledge,1993. Print.
- . *Fairy Tale as Myth, Myth as Fairy Tale*. Kentucky: UP of Kentucky, 1994. Print.