

2019

## Institutionalized Religion and Ambivalence in Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre

Abdulla Dagamseh

*Department of English Language and Literature, Yarmouk University, Irbid, Jordan.*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.aaru.edu.jo/aauja>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Dagamseh, Abdulla (2019) "Institutionalized Religion and Ambivalence in Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre," *Association of Arab Universities Journal for Arts* **مجلة اتحاد الجامعات العربية للآداب**: Vol. 16: Iss. 2, Article 15.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.aaru.edu.jo/aauja/vol16/iss2/15>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Arab Journals Platform. It has been accepted for inclusion in Association of Arab Universities Journal for Arts **مجلة اتحاد الجامعات العربية للآداب** by an authorized editor. The journal is hosted on [Digital Commons](#), an Elsevier platform. For more information, please contact [rakan@aarj.edu.jo](mailto:rakan@aarj.edu.jo), [marah@aarj.edu.jo](mailto:marah@aarj.edu.jo), [u.murad@aarj.edu.jo](mailto:u.murad@aarj.edu.jo).

## Institutionalized Religion and Ambivalence in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*

Abdulla M. Dagamseh\*

Date of Submission: May 1, 2019

Date of Acceptance: July 11, 2019

<https://doi.org/10.51405/16.2.15>

### Abstract

In Charlotte Brontë's novel, *Jane Eyre*, the protagonist, Jane Eyre, cannot avoid the trap of empire, which represents the British colonial domination in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Through close reading of the text and using Postcolonial and Marxist theory, I claim that Jane Eyre develops an ambivalent attitude towards oppression. That is to say, she, at one point, is very critical of using religion to oppress her own people. On the other hand, she keeps silent when the same discourse of institutionalized religion is used to justify colonizing and oppressing other people and nations. This ambivalent attitude shows that the unquestioned ideology of British colonial domination contaminates and even handcuffs Jane Eyre. Thus, the mainstream ideology of the British empire shapes Jane Eyre and informs the novel, which seems to celebrate the prevailing Eurocentric attitudes in Britain back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when people believed that Europe in general and Britain in particular had an obligation to "civilize" and "enlighten" the "less civilized" people and nations.

**Keywords:** Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, institutionalized religion, ambivalence, empire, colonialism

### 1. Introduction

At this point, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* has been called upon to represent any number of Marxist, Feminist and Postcolonial themes, concepts, among many other ideas in various discourses.<sup>1</sup> Critics have noted multiple interpretations of this novel. Saying anything new about this novel seems to be quite a challenge to any literary critic. Yet, a re-reading of the novel contributes to demonstrating the effect of colonial discourse and experience<sup>2</sup> dominating

---

© Copyright 2019 by The Society of Arab Universities Faculties of Arts, All rights reserved

\* Department of English Language and Literature, Yarmouk University, Irbid, Jordan.

Dagamsch

Great Britain in the 19<sup>th</sup> century on the people living there back then. This kind of analysis is not nearly as often discussed. My “contrapuntal reading”<sup>3</sup> seems to be a different way of approaching the novel, especially the main character, Jane Eyre. In other words, my reading explicates the submerged presence of Empire in Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* and Jane Eyre’s adoption of the Empire’s discourse. My analysis aims to reveal how the unquestioned ideology of British colonial domination back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century contaminated and even handcuffed those who stood up against certain repressive apparatuses the state used to subjugate its members. Moreover, this article attempts to demonstrate that the mainstream ideology of the British Empire shapes *Jane Eyre* and informs the novel, which seems to celebrate the prevailing Eurocentric attitudes in Britain in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when people believed that Europe in general and Britain in particular had an obligation to “civilize” and “enlighten” the “less civilized” people and nations.

In this paper, I claim that *Jane Eyre* as a product of her socio-economic, cultural environment is an ambivalent character. And *Jane Eyre*’s ambivalence shows the trace of Empire in her. In other words, she is critical of using religion to oppress her own people, especially women. She, in fact, “recounts the plight of so many women” throughout the novel (Fain 2014, p. 148). On the other hand, she keeps silent when the same discourse of institutionalized religion is used to justify colonizing and oppressing other people and nations. In order to explore the representation of institutionalized religion in *Jane Eyre*, my analysis is based on close reading of the novel, and it is informed by Postcolonial and Marxist theory. To develop this argument, it will be necessary to divide it into three sections along with a conclusion. The first will give a brief review of related literature. The second will analyze how institutionalized religion is challenged and criticized, especially when religion is used to domesticate women (and here the novel is critical of patriarchy). The final section will examine how *Jane Eyre* keeps silent when institutionalized religion is used as a tool to justify colonizing another nation, and thus *Jane Eyre* approves of imperialism and Eurocentricism, seeing imperialism as a civilizing mission rather than a colonizing, hegemonic one.

## 2. Review of Related Literature

In his seminal book, *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Edward Said explains that “allusions to facts of empire” abound in “nineteenth– and early-twentieth-century British and French culture,” especially “in the British novel” (p.248). He refers to many 19<sup>th</sup> century British novels where there are allusions and references to colonialism. Even though he does not elaborate on Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, Said demonstrates how such texts create what he refers to

as “a structure of attitude and reference” (1993, p.248). Taking a cue from Edward Said, I will re-read Charlotte Brontë's novel, *Jane Eyre* (1847), to explore the protagonist's attitude toward oppression through her critique of one of the oppressive ideologies: institutionalized religion. Jane Eyre's critique exposes, first, her ambivalent personality and, second, her implicit acceptance of the colonial discourse on the uncivilized, savage, and backward “other.”

As for the idea of institutionalized religion as an ideology, some critics such as Marx, Althusser, Foucault, Mary Wollstonecraft among many others claim that institutionalized religion is used to promote repressive practices to keep the poor satisfied with their lot and to maintain the status quo or to keep those in power in power. It is what people do in the name of God/religion to maintain their power and domination. Moreover, institutionalized religion is one of the ideological state apparatuses Althusser refers to when discussing how oppression and domination are practiced over the poor and the marginalized. Such ideological apparatuses contribute to reproducing “the dominant system by creating subjects who are ideologically conditioned to accept the values of the system” (Loomba, 1998, p.33). Similarly, Michel Foucault implies that such an environment, where institutionalized religion is practiced, is self-policing:

For the Catholic Church ... confinement represents, in the form of an authoritarian model, the myth of social happiness: a police whose order will be entirely transparent to the principles of religion, and a religion whose requirements will be satisfied, without restrictions, by the regulations of the police and the constraints with which it can be armed. There is, in these institutions, an attempt of a kind to demonstrate that order may be adequate to virtue. In this sense, “confinement” conceals both metaphysics of government and a politics of religion; it is situated, as an effort of tyrannical synthesis, in the vast space separating the garden of God and the cities which men, driven from paradise, have built with their own hands. (1965, pp.100-101)

Furthermore, Mary Wollstonecraft argues that religion is manipulated by men in a way that they prove that women are weak, and thus “they [women] are not in a capacity to judge for themselves, they ought to abide by the decision of their fathers and husbands as confidently as by that of the church” (1792, p.110).

There is much written on *Jane Eyre*, especially the idea of religious discourse and colonial motif in the novel,<sup>4</sup> but little attention has been paid to the protagonist of the novel as she internalizes the colonial discourse dominating Great Britain back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and she develops ambivalent attitudes toward religious discourse. One of the famous critics who explores Brontë's

Dagamsch

*Jane Eyre* is Gayatri Spivak. In her article, “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism,” Spivak examines three works by women: Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and Mary Shelly’s *Frankenstein*. She argues that it is impossible to approach a 19<sup>th</sup> century British literature “without remembering that imperialism, understood as England’s social mission, was a crucial part of the cultural representation of England to the English” (1985, p.243). She explains how Bertha Mason, as the white Jamaican Creole character in the novel, is produced by the rise of imperialism and is described by both Jane and Rochester on the frontier between the human and the animal (1985, p.247). Even though Spivak reads Brontë’s novel as an imperialist text, she does not show how Jane’s attitudes towards institutionalized religion fluctuate as I will demonstrate in this article.

In his article, “The Merging of Spiritualities: *Jane Eyre* as Missionary of Love,” J. Jeffrey Franklin explains that there are various “overlapping discourses of spirituality within the text” and “the primary spiritual discourse in *Jane Eyre* is ... Christian” (1995, p.457). He shows how Brontë engages with different spiritual discourses dominating Britain back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, stating that the novel “is quite representative of its time in showing a multiplicity of competing spiritual discourses within Christianity ... in another sense the novel troubles Christianity itself by introducing spiritual discourses from outside orthodox doctrines” (1995, pp.459-460). Even though Franklin explores various Christian discourses as represented in the novel, he neither relates such religious discourses to imperialism nor explains why *Jane Eyre* is ambivalent when it comes to religious discourse. And this is where I attempt to fill the gaps.

Thomas Tracy’s “‘Reader, I Buried Him’: Apocalypse and Empire in *Jane Eyre*” tackles the idea of Empire and colonial discourse in Brontë’s novel. Even though Tracy asserts that the imperial project is highlighted, especially at the end of the novel, he claims that the novel “does not offer evidence of hostility towards colonized peoples, nor does it appropriate the image of slavery merely to figure the oppression of white women” (2004, p. 60). He even refutes the idea that the novel affirms “St. John’s evangelizing mission” (2004, p.59). He typologically reads the novel “as a Bildungsroman in which her hero, Jane, attains spiritual enlightenment in the Christian tradition ...and the novel’s ending not only references but replicates the Revelation, a work which is central to *Jane Eyre*’s signifying system” (2004, p. 60). My reading, however, is going to oppose Thomas Tracy’s analysis by claiming that the novel, in fact, approves and reinforces St. John’s colonial mission. On the other hand, Tracy does not show why *Jane Eyre* is ambivalent throughout the novel. My analysis will thoroughly address this issue.

760

### 3. Discussion

#### 3.1. Challenging Repressive Institutionalized Religion

In *Jane Eyre*, religion is used to domesticate women and to keep them satisfied with their lot and never to think of revolution against their oppressive situations. In this regard, Jane Eyre is critical of this kind of religion, and, as Sandro Jung explains, she is considered to be a self-assertive woman, who challenges “societal expectations” and fights “for equality” throughout the novel (2007, 21-22). There are different characters in the novel that are considered tools of the repressive religious discourse. For example, once Jane is taken to the red room, one of the servants, Miss Abbot, uses frightening images of religious discourse. Miss Abbot says, “God will punish her [little Jane]: He might strike her dead in the midst of her tantrums ... Say your prayers, Miss Eyre, when you are by yourself; for if you don't repent, something bad might be permitted to come down the chimney and fetch you away” (1847, p.16). One might say that the Jane is critical of this kind of frightening religious discourse since little Jane does nothing wrong to repent. It is Mrs. Reed and her son, John, who do wrong to little Jane and who need to repent. Also, this kind of religious discourse is used to subjugate any kind of objection or rebellion Jane might even think of. On the other hand, the servant, who is already oppressed, internalizes the oppressive religious discourse and turns into an oppressor, using the same tool oppressors use to domesticate the lower class.<sup>5</sup>

Another character who uses religious discourse as an oppressive tool is Mr. Brocklehurst, a clergyman who owns and overlooks a charitable institution that Jane becomes a part of. In fact, Mr. Brocklehurst uses religion and frightening religious discourse to subvert and domesticate people. Just as Miss Abbot uses scary and threatening religious discourse to keep little Jane silent and submissive, Mr. Brocklehurst uses threatening and scary religious images when visiting Mrs. Reed's house where he meets ten-year-old Jane. In his conversation with little Jane, Mr. Brocklehurst asks her about prayers, about psalms, and about her reading of the Bible. When her answers do not please what he expects, he immediately calls her “wicked” and the wicked “go to hell ... A pit full of fire ... to be burning there forever” (1847, p.39). Moreover, he accuses her that she has a “wicked heart” that she needs “pray to God to change it: to give [her] a new and clean one: to take away [her] heart of stone and give [her] a heart of flesh” (1847, p.40). Another frightening image Mr. Brocklehurst uses when conversing with little Jane is the association of falsehood with hell. When Mrs. Reed tells him that little Jane has “a tendency to deceit” (1847, p.41), he says “[d]eceit is ... a sad fault in a child ... it is akin to falsehood, and all liars will have their portion in the lake burning with fire and brimstone” (1847, p.41). The last scary image Mr. Brocklehurst uses in this episode is when he asks little Jane

Dagamsch

to read a book which he describes as ““an account of the awfully sudden death of Martha G—, a naughty child, addicted to falsehood and deceit”” (1847, p.42).

It is, thus, clear that the novel serves to criticize these scary images Mr. Brocklehurst uses. First, Mr. Brocklehurst supports Mrs. Reed’s oppression by using this frightening religious discourse. Here, religion becomes a tool of oppression, and it collides with social oppression. Second, he never even asks Mrs. Reed or little Jane why she (Jane) has a tendency to deceit and lying. Instead, he immediately refers to scary religious discourse which contributes to domesticating and subverting Jane; in fact, this kind of discourse helps reinforce social oppression practiced by Mrs. Reed and her son, John. In her essay, “Unaccommodated Woman and the Poetics of Property in *Jane Eyre*,” Parama Roy (1989) asserts that “Mrs. Reed finds a willing ally and advocate in the Rev. Brocklehurst, who bears Jane away to his charity school, Lowood Institution. He is a particularly vociferous advocate for the structures of power and exploitation adumbrated in the Gateshead section” (1989, pp.715-716). So, this religious man, who is supposed to refute social oppression, justifies and contributes to social oppression and even legitimizes it by using religious discourse.

Furthermore, Mr. Brocklehurst is a hypocritical person who never does what he preaches. At Lowood Institution, which is supposed to be a place of mercy, love, peace, and affection, Mr. Brocklehurst turns this place into a kind of hell for Jane and other girl students. For example, he objects to serving bread and cheese to students since this is a kind of “luxury and indulgence.” He refers to biblical texts to prove that girls should be “hardy, patient, and self-denying” and thus justifies their suffering. He says:

A brief address on those occasions would take the opportunity of referring to the sufferings of the primitive Christians; to the torments of martyrs: to the exhortations of our blessed Lord Himself, calling upon His disciples to take up their cross and follow Him; to His warnings that man shall not live by bread alone, but by very word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God; to His divine consolations, ‘if ye suffer hunger or thirst for my sake, happy are ye.’ Oh, madam, when you put bread and cheese, instead of burnt porridge, into these children’s mouths, you may indeed feed their vile bodies, but you little think how you starve their immortal souls! (1847, p.75).

Here Mr. Brocklehurst denies the girls’ right to enjoy life or to lead a normal life, using religious discourse to prove what he is preaching. In the same context, he orders to cut off Julia Severn’s naturally curly hair “to be arranged closely, modestly, and plainly” (1847, p.76). Again, he refers to biblical texts to justify

his commands and hence his oppressing religious discourse: "I have a Master to serve whose kingdom is not of this world: my mission is to mortify in these girls the lusts of the flesh, to teach them to clothe themselves with shamefacedness and sobriety, not with braided hair and costly apparel..." (1847, p.76). Jane completely refuses Mr. Brocklehurst to be an ideal figure for her and for the girls, or, as Alison Searle puts it, "Jane's commonsense and clear-headedness instantly dismis(s) such idolatry" (2006, p. 45).

How is Mr. Brocklehurst a hypocrite and how does the narrative serve to criticize his religious discourse? In fact, his hypocrisy is a kind of criticism of Mr. Brocklehurst and his preaching and conduct. After his long sermon about how the girls should be purged of pride and luxury in order to "render them hardy, patient, [and] self-denying" (1847, p.75), his wife and two daughters enter the room, where he is preaching. They are luxuriously dressed up and "splendidly attired in velvet, silk, and furs" (1847, p.77). His wife has on "a false front of French curls" (1847, p.77). This episode clearly criticizes Mr. Brocklehurst who uses religious discourse to subvert and oppress the young girls, while, at the same time, he and his luxuriously wealthy family lead a very luxurious life. Moreover, the contrast between the luxurious life he leads and the poor, miserable, and unhealthy life the girls lead at Lowood school is also a kind of critique. The girls barely have enough food to eat and enough blankets to protect themselves from harsh coldness at Lowood school. As a result of such poor and unhealthy conditions, a typhus epidemic sweeps the school. Moreover, Mr. Brocklehurst justifies Mrs. Reed's harsh treatment of little Jane and thus supports social oppression. Even worse, he highly speaks of her while she is so harsh and unfair with Jane. As Jeffery Franklin points out, both Mr. Brocklehurst and Mrs. Reed are represented "as cruel, greedy, and hypocritical" (1847, p.464). Thus, these examples show that the narrative, as narrated by Jane Eyre, criticizes Mr. Brocklehurst who uses religious discourse to domesticate the girls and to keep their behavior within strictly defined standards. In other words, this kind of religious discourse, as Jane conveys in her narration, serves to justify and legitimize social oppression.

This oppressive religious discourse is internalized by Helen Burns, who is a product of Mr. Brocklehurst's institutionalized religion. In fact, Helen is a foil to Mr. Brocklehurst to some extent. In other words, if Mr. Brocklehurst represents a domesticating and hypocritical figure, Helen represents a domesticated and honest figure. In his essay, "The Merging of Spiritualities: Jane Eyre as Missionary of Love," Jeffrey Franklin (1995) argues that Helen "represents an ideal within the Christian discourse of the novel" (1995, p.465). Even though Helen is an honest figure who does what she preaches, and she is "the novel's Christian paragon" (Franklin, 1995, p. 466), she is not excluded from Jane's



Dagamsch

criticism. Although Jane “[sees] the power of love and forgiveness from ... Helen Burns” (Zeng, 2014, p.7), who “provides Jane with decisive guidance and affirmation” (Nestor 2008, p. 44), Jane criticizes her friend’s docility and submission. First, Helen is a domesticated figure who internalizes the oppressive ideologies of those who are in power, especially Mr. Brocklehurst and Miss Scatcherd. Helen is well programmed in a way that she passively and patiently endures the cruel treatment of her teachers and accepts suffering as something normal or as if it were a God’s decision. For example, Miss Scatcherd always treats Helen as an object and severely punishes her physically and verbally. Even though Helen answers all questions Miss Scatcherd asks, Miss Scatcherd, instead, severely hectors and berates Helen: “[y]ou dirty, disagreeable girl! you have never cleaned your nails this morning” (1847, p.64). Then, Miss Scatcherd physically punishes Helen: “the teacher instantly and sharply inflicted on her neck a dozen strokes with the bunch of twigs” (1847, p.65). In both cases, Helen never objects to a such brutal treatment, thinking, or programmed to think, that she follows God’s orders.

Why Helen does not object to such brutality and cruelty is due to institutionalized religion that programs her in a way that she believes that if she objects to such brutality she goes against God and His will. Helen tells Jane that if one objects to punishment, “Mr. Brocklehurst would expel [her] from the school” (1847, p.66). This is a religious school, which is supposed to represent peace, mercy, and tolerance. However, this school becomes a tool to domesticate and oppress the young girls. Moreover, Helen is so domesticated that she cannot see punishment as an act of cruelty or brutality. When Jane tells Helen that she has to object to Miss Scatcherd’s cruelty, Helen replies: “Cruel? Not at all! She is severe; she dislikes my faults” (1847, p.66). Furthermore, Helen justifies her silence by saying that “the Bible bids us return good for evil” (1847, p.66). Here, Helen, by using this religious discourse becomes “Brocklehurst’s model female student” (Roy, 1989, p.716) since she completely internalizes the oppressive ideology of institutionalized religion and his domesticating teachings.

Not only is Helen a domesticated figure, but she also intends to be a domesticating figure. Using religious discourse, Helen tries to domesticate Jane by advising her to tolerate other people’s violence and cruelty. She tells Jane, who objects to her silence:

Heathens and savage tribes hold that doctrine [resisting punishment]; but Christians and civilized nations disown it ... Read the New Testament, and observe what Christ says, and how He acts; make His word your rule, and His conduct your example ...[Christ says] ‘Love your enemies; bless them

that curse you; do good to them that hate you and despitefully use you.' (1847, p.69)

This passage echoes Mr. Brocklehurst's discourse in a way that Helen's and Mr. Brocklehurst's discourse emphasizes submission, subservience, domestication, and self-denial. Moreover, Helen becomes an instrument of a such oppressive ideology that, in fact, oppresses and domesticates her. Here, Helen achieves what Mr. Brocklehurst and those who are in power aim at: keeping the poor satisfied with their lot, keeping those in power in power, and not questioning authority. In this regard, Mary Wollstonecraft states that "with respect to religion, she [any woman] never presumed to judge for herself; but conformed, as a dependent creature should, to the ceremonies of the church which she was brought up in, piously believing that wiser heads than her own have settled that business: - and not to doubt is her point of perfection" (1792, p.65).

In fact, the narrative serves to criticize Helen's internalization of oppressive religious discourse. First, once Helen is punished by Miss Scatcherd because her nails are dirty, she never defends herself, believing that authority should not be questioned and challenged. Jane questions Helen's silence and wonders "[w]hy ... does she not explain that she could neither clean her nails nor wash her face, as the water was frozen?" (1847, p.64). However, Helen never questions authority, and even worse, not only does she admit that she is wrong and Miss Scatcherd is right, but she also justifies oppression in one way or another. Second, both Jane and Helen live in a place where rage, disobedience and resistance are the only result of brutal treatment and bitter conditions. That is to say, Lowood school, where orphaned girls study, is like a bleak prison, full of disease, punishment, toughness, torture, hunger and pain. In fact, the school is a physical as well as a psychological punishment for girls. Physical punishment lies in a lack of sufficient clothing, covers, and boots for the girls, the "scanty supply of food" (1847, p.71), and "walk[ing] "two miles to Brocklebridge Church" in the cold weather (1847, p.72). Psychological punishment lies in the toughness and strictness of the school regulations, rules, and tasks. Jane says "[t]he fear of failure in these points harassed me worse than the physical hardships of my lot. . ." (1847, p.71).

How one can be silent and non-violent in such a place is a question Jane tries to pose. Moreover, Jane tells Helen:

[Y]ou are good to those who are good to you. It is all I ever desire to be. If people were kind and obedient to those who are cruel and unjust, the wicked people would have it all their own way; they would never feel afraid, and so they would never alter, but would grow worse and worse. When we are

Dagamsch

struck at without a reason, we should strike back again very hard; I am sure we should – so hard as to teach the person who struck us never to do it again. (1847, p.68)

However, Helen resorts to religious discourse to justify her passive meekness. Helen refers to another “state” after death where people find peace and comfort. This is the ideology that Marxists<sup>6</sup> critique most: religious discourse programs the poor in a way that they believe that if they remain non-violent and obedient to authority, God will reward them in heaven. Also, Mary Wollstonecraft (1792) critiques women who “boast of submitting to the Will of God blindly” (1792, p.228). This is the result of the institutionalized religion practiced by Mr. Brocklehurst and his people: creating passive meekness and hence domesticated figures, who later become domesticating ones.

The last figure that Jane criticizes for using religious discourse in domesticating women is St. John Rivers. Unlike Mr. Brocklehurst, St. John is represented in a way that he seems to be honest, ambitious, and dedicated. However, like Mr. Brocklehurst, St. John uses religion and religious discourse to domesticate Jane in a way she must denounce domestic life, give up her emotions, and fulfill her religious duties: getting married to him and being a wife of a missionary. His discourse and his behavior make Jane restless and unstable. For example, as Jane is so delighted because Christmas is approaching and she has relatives now, St. John tries to spoil her excitement. He tells Jane that “this world is not the scene of fruition; do not attempt to make it so: not of rest; do not turn slothful” (1847, p.451). When Jane wonders why he tries to make her restless, he resorts to religious discourse to justify what he is saying and doing:

‘To the end of turning to profit the talents which God has committed to your keeping; and of which He will surely one day demand a strict account. Jane, I shall watch you closely and anxiously – I warn you of that. And try to restrain the disproportionate fervour with which you throw yourself into commonplace home pleasures. Don’t cling tenaciously to ties of the flesh; save your constancy and ardour for an adequate cause; forbear to waste them on trite transient objects. Do you hear, Jane?’ (1847, p.451).

It is as if St. John wanted to resonate Mr. Brocklehurst’s statement, “my mission is to mortify the lusts of the flesh,” to assert that a body should be punished to save the soul. Here one can conclude that both St. John and Mr. Brocklehurst use religious discourse to perpetuate subservience, submission, and conformity.

Moreover, using religious discourse, St. John orders Jane to give up her emotions and fulfill her religious duties. St. John asks Jane to go to India with him and to be his wife. When Jane refuses to be his wife since they are not in

love, he gets angry and tells her: “God and nature intended you for a missionary’s wife ... A missionary’s wife you must – shall be. You shall be mine: I claim you – not for my pleasure, but for my Sovereign’s service” (1847, p.464). Jane agrees to go to India as his sister or as a free missionary, but not as his wife. He refuses this idea and insists on marrying her. He even goes too far when he tells her that if she refuses to marry him, she refuses and denies God. He tells Jane: “[r]efuse to be my wife, and you limit yourself for ever to a track of selfish ease and barren obscurity. Tremble lest in that case you should be numbered with those who have denied the faith, and are worse than infidels” (1847, p.471). Then, he uses threatening and frightening images of hell by referring to certain Biblical texts when he does some evening reading before prayers with Jane and his sisters. He says: “[h]e that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But ... the fearful, the unbelieving ... shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (1847, p.480). The last two quotes are important since they show how St. John uses religious allusions and religious discourse to frighten and domesticate Jane. Moreover, the second quote resonates Miss Abbot’s and Mr. Brocklehurst’s religious discourse about hell, which is used to domesticate little Jane. Now, St. John’s religious discourse is used to domesticate adult Jane. Furthermore, the former quote demonstrates his pompous nature even though he claims that he is humble. That is to say, he associates himself with God and he even implies that he is equal to God, especially when he states that if Jane denies him, she denies God. Moreover, he pompously claims Jane’s refusal to marry him means denying faith and hence being an infidel.

In fact, Jane criticizes St. John for using religious discourse to domesticate her. Jane always complains that St. John makes her restless and uncomfortable, especially when she is happy. She once tells him that “you are almost wicked to talk so. I am disposed to be as content as a queen, and you try to stir me up to restlessness” (1847, p.451). Moreover, Jane refuses his religious discourse when he uses it to convince her to marry him. She states that “I could decide if I were but certain ... were I but convinced that it is God’s will I should marry you, I could vow to marry you here and now ...” (1847, p.482). This indicates that she does not believe in what he tells her that it is God’s will that she should marry him. Furthermore, Jane realizes that St. John would not be a good husband for he is so “hard and cold.” She says, “he would hardly make a good husband: that it would be a trying thing to be his wife” (1847, p.453). In fact, the more she talks with him, the more she feels that she “abandons” or gives up herself (1847, pp.460, 466). Also, Jane criticizes him for his patriarchalism. That is to say, he believes that a woman should be docile, subservient, and tamed; otherwise, she

Dagamsch

is not feminine. When Jane gets so angry and tells him that she cannot marry him “because [he] did not love [her]” and “if [she] were to marry [him], [he] would kill [her],” he accuses her of being “violent, unfeminine, and untrue” and her violent words “betray an unfortunate state of mind: they merit severe reproof: they would seem inexcusable, but that it is the duty of man to forgive his fellow even until seventy-and-seven times” (1847, p.475). What Jane does to be reproofed for is that she challenges the patriarchal authority and she is accused of being unfeminine for doing that. Finally, St. John considers Jane a tool rather than a partner. Jane tells her cousin, Diana, that St. John’s “idea in proposing to [her] is to procure a fitting fellow-laborer in his Indian toils,” and thus she wonders how she could “be chained to a man who regarded one but as a useful tool” (1847, pp.478-479). Finally, Jane refuses what Wollstonecraft called “legal prostitution” since she feels that she would be a tool and a slave rather than a wife and a partner.

### **3.2. Applauding Repressive Institutionalized Religion: Ambivalent Attitudes**

Even though Jane criticizes St. John for his patriarchalism and his religious discourse that is used to domesticate her, she not only keeps silent when St. John uses the same discourse to colonize another nation, India, but she also approves and welcomes this kind of discourse. Criticizing institutionalized religion used as a domesticating tool while applauding religious discourse used to colonize another nation makes Jane ambivalent. In this regard, Paroma Roy asserts that Brontë and Jane denounce “patriarchalism at home,” but “they most heartily applaud patriarchalism abroad, in the shape of religious and political empire-building” (1989, p.723). One can say that they not only “applaud patriarchalism” but they also approve imperialism and Eurocentricism; in other words, they buy into the logic of imperialism that is a civilizing mission rather than a colonizing, dominating one.<sup>7</sup>

St. John is depicted in a way that he seems to be a good and benevolent man with a minor fault that Jane criticizes. Except for this fault – being a patriarchal, hard and cold man – St. John is like an angelic figure. He is ready to give up his life to help the poor and sick wherever they are (1847, pp.455-56). Moreover, St. John has a great influence on Jane to the extent that she is about to marry him against her will. Jane says, “he acquired a certain influence over me that took away my liberty of mind .... I fell under a freezing spell. When he said ‘go,’ I went; ‘come,’ I came; ‘do this,’ I did it” (1847, p.459). Later, she admits that “I can do what he wants me to do: I am forced to see and acknowledge that” (1847, p.466). Furthermore, Jane is so impressed by some of his evening readings from the Bible. In this regard, Jane says:

768

For the evening reading before prayers, he selected the twenty-first chapter of Revelation. It was at all times pleasant to listen while from his lips fell the words of the Bible: never did his fine voice sound at once so sweet and full – never did his manner become so impressive in its noble simplicity, as when he delivered the oracles of God: and to-night that voice took a more solemn tone – that manner a more thrilling meaning – as he sat in the midst of his household circle . . . . (1847, p.480)

All these quotes show that St. John has a great influence on Jane who almost becomes his disciple in his missionary ambitions. Brontë depicts St. John in a way that he seems an ideal, loyal and dedicated Christian except for his patriarchalism.

Jane almost becomes his disciple because she buys into his imperialist and missionary goals and ambitions. First, Jane asserts that St. John “is right to choose a missionary’s career” (1847, p.454) even though earlier in the novel St. John announces his missionary ambitions and goals: “my vocation? My great work? ... My hopes of being numbered in the band who have merged all ambitions in the glorious one of bettering their race – of carrying knowledge into the realms of ignorance – of substituting peace for war, freedom for bondage, religion for superstition, the hope of heaven for the fear of hell?” (1847, p.431). She never objects to such discourse; on the contrary, she agrees with him to the extent that she blesses his work and accepts to join him in his missionary enterprise. When he tells her that he is going to India as a missionary, she says “God will protect you; for *you have undertaken His work*” (1847, p.463 my emphasis). Here, Jane approves and applauds St. John’s missionary work which includes colonizing and hegemonizing another culture because, as she claims, it is God’s work. Not only does she applaud his missionary work, but she also agrees to accompany him to India to be a missionary. She tells him: “I am ready to go to India, if I may go free” (1847, p.467). In other words, she accepts to be his “fellow-missionary” and hence she accepts the whole religious discourse he uses to justify his missionary project. Moreover, Jane never objects to or even comments on St. John’s reference to India as a place of “ignorance” and “superstition” (1847, p.431) and his reference to Indians as “savage tribes” (1847, p.470). All these examples show that Jane never even thinks that what St. John thinks of and plans for is something that has to do with colonizing and oppressing other people and another nation; on the contrary, she feels that what is thinking of and planning for is a divine mission sealed, approved and blessed by God. This makes her an ambivalent figure who denounces religious discourse employed to domesticate and oppress women while at the same time she approves the same discourse employed to colonize and oppress other people and another culture. The idea that she approves imperialist goals is enhanced by her

Dagamsch

acceptance of her uncle's fortune originating in the West Indies, "a colony whose economy was . . . based on slave labor" (Roy, 1989, p.723).

Not only does Jane approve St. John's imperialist project, but she also applauds his imperialist project and ambition. In her essay, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," Gayatri Spivak asserts that "[t]he concluding passage of *Jane Eyre* places St. John Rivers within the fold of *Pilgrim's Progress*" (1985, p.249). Moreover, one can say that the last part of the novel is dedicated to praising St. John's imperialist ambitions and to mourning his "heroic" death. The last part establishes that *Jane Eyre* is an imperialist text and Jane as an ambivalent character:

Firm, faithful, and devoted, full of energy, and zeal, and truth, he labours for his race; he clears their painful way to improvement; he hews down like a giant the prejudices of creed and caste that encumber it. He may be stern; he may be exacting; he may be ambitious yet; but his is the sternness of the warrior Great heart, who guards his pilgrim convoy from the onslaught of Apollyon. His is the exaction of the apostle, who speaks but for Christ, when he says, 'Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.' His is the ambition of the high master-spirit, which aims to fill a place in the first rank of those who are redeemed from the earth – who stand without fault before the throne of God, who share the last mighty victories of the Lamb, who are called, and chosen, and faithful. (1847, pp. 520-21)

This long quote is full of Biblical allusions that emphasize the religious sacrifice St. John did in going to India as a missionary. Furthermore, the quote demonstrates how Jane is ambivalent since it is the same religious discourse, employed to oppress and domesticate women, that she is critical of throughout the novel. Moreover, Jane criticizes religious discourse when it is employed to assert self-denial; however, she herself promotes this doctrine here in this passage. Also, Jane seems to make St. John a Christ or a martyr who sacrifices himself for the improvement of others' lives. Later, Jane is sure that St. John will be rewarded in heaven since he dies for God's mission. Again, this is a clear example that Jane seems to be part of the colonial project dominating Great Britain back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

#### 4. Conclusion

Even though Brian Wilks, a Brontë scholar, reads *Jane Eyre* as a story that “adds weight to the argument that all people, however humble their origins, have rights,” (2016, p. 299), I demonstrated that Jane’s ambivalence proved that the novel didn’t promote equal rights for all people. Following Edward Said’s argument that “literature and culture” are never “politically” or “historically innocent,” (*Orientalism* 1978, 27), I critically read *Jane Eyre* as a contaminated character, shaped by her own imperial culture back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. *Jane Eyre*, an influential Victorian novel, tackles the idea of institutionalized religion and, at one point, challenges religious authority represented by those in power. *Jane Eyre* as the protagonist of the novel challenges and criticizes institutionalized religion since it is employed and manipulated to oppress and domesticate people, especially women. Jane is able to challenge and criticize all characters, whether domesticating figures or domesticated ones, who employ religion as a tool of oppression and domestication. In this regard, she criticizes Miss Abbot and Mr. Brocklehurst who use religion to support social oppression practiced on Jane by Mrs. Reed. Also, Mr. Brocklehurst’s hypocrisy is a target of criticism since he does not do what he preaches. Moreover, Jane criticizes Helen for internalizing the oppressive ideologies represented by institutionalized religion. In fact, Helen herself becomes a tool of institutionalized religion and hence a tool of oppression. The last figure who is criticized for using religion to domesticate Jane is St. John. In fact, St. John goes too far when he appoints himself as God since he claims that if Jane refuses to marry him, she refuses God Himself. St. John is criticized for employing religious discourse to domesticate Jane; however, Jane keeps silent when St. John uses religious discourse to invade, colonize, and oppress other people and other nations. Similarly, Jane praises him, and she is sure that he will be rewarded in heaven for his missionary work since it is God’s mission. Ambivalence lies in the fact that the religious discourse Jane criticizes throughout the novel is celebrated at the end of the novel. In fact, Jane is able to resist and challenge one aspect of repressive institutionalized religion, but she completely ignores or fails to resist and challenge the other aspect of repressive institutionalized religion which justifies invading and colonizing other people and other nations. Also, she utterly adopts and even celebrates the prevailing attitudes in Great Britain during the early and late nineteenth century, when people believed that Great Britain had an obligation to “civilize” and “enlighten” the “savage and less civilized” people. Thus, Jane’s ambivalence demonstrates that Jane cannot avoid the logic of Empire.



Dagamsch

## الدين المؤسسي والازدواجية في رواية جين آير لتشارلوت برونتي

عبد الله دقاسمة، قسم اللغة الإنجليزية وآدابها، جامعة اليرموك، إربد، الأردن.

### ملخص

في رواية تشارلوت برونتي، لم تستطع بطلا الرواية، جين آير، من تجنب فخ الإمبريالية التي تمثلها الهيمنة الاستعمارية البريطانية في القرن التاسع عشر. من خلال قراءة معمقة للنص الروائي واستخدام نظرية ما بعد الاستعمار والنظرية الماركسية، سأشرح كيف أن جين آير تعيش حالة من الازدواجية تجاه الظلم. بمعنى آخر، نجد أن بطلا الرواية تشجب وتنتقد استخدام الدين كوسيلة لممارسة الظلم، ولكننا نجدها في مواقف أخرى تصمت على استخدام الدين للتقليل من الآخرين وتبرير استعمارهم. تدل هذه الازدواجية على أن إيديولوجية الاستعمار المتغلغلة في المجتمع البريطاني آنذاك تلوث وتقيد جين آير، وكذلك فإن هذه الإيديولوجية شكلت الرواية التي تبدو أنها تحتفل بتوجهات وفكر أوروبا الاستعمارية في القرن التاسع عشر، عندما كان الناس يعتقدون أن على أوروبا على وجه العموم، وبريطانيا على وجه الخصوص، مهمة "تطوير" و"تنوير" الشعوب والأمم "الأقل تحضرا".

الكلمات المفتاحية: تشارلوت برونتي، جين آير، الدين المؤسسي، الازدواجية، الإمبراطورية، الاستعمار.

### Note

- 1- For more information on various readings of the novel (from a Marxist and Feminist perspective), please see Terry Eagleton, *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës* (1975) in which he reads *Jane Eyre* as a conservative text ending and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979). Carol Ohmann and Igor Web, on the other hand, engage with issue of gender and class rampant in the novel.
- 2- The prevailing attitude in England at that time was that expansion of England all over the world was "good" for everybody. England was believed that it had an obligation to "enlighten" and "civilize" the "savage and the less civilized." Institutionalized religion was used to prove that the English had a divine mission as a "chosen people."

- 3- See Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism*, where he defines "contrapuntal reading" as "reading a text with an understanding of what is involved when an author shows ... that a colonial sugar plantation is seen as important to the process of maintaining a particular style of life in England" (261).
- 4- For more details on the religious discourse in *Jane Eyre*, please see Barbara Hardy's *The Appropriate Form: An Essay on the Novel* and Thomas Vargish's *The providential Aesthetic in Victorian Fiction*. For more information on Colonial discourse in *Jane Eyre*, please see Firdouz Azim's *The Colonial Rise of the Novel* and Susan Meyer's *Imperialism at Home: Race and Victorian Women's Fiction*.
- 5- Here, see Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in which he explains the relationship between the oppressors and the oppressed and how "the oppressed want at any cost to resemble the oppressors, to imitate them, to follow them" (62).
- 6- Here see Karl Marx's book, *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right'* in which Marx criticizes institutionalized religion as an illusion whose objective is to provide justifications and reasons to keep society satisfied with their lot. He refers to this kind of religion as "the opium of the people" (131).
- 7- Albert Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized* is important to understand colonial discourse used in *Jane Eyre*. Moreover, Memmi refers to the colonizer who accepts colonial discourse as "colonialist" who asserts his/her cultural superiority, legitimacy, and validity. So here, St. John and Jane can be described as "the colonizers who accept" to use Memmi's term.

## References

- Althusser, Louis. (1970). "From Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." In *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, 3<sup>rd</sup>. ed., edited by David H. Richter, 1264-72. New York: Bedford.
- Brontë, Charlotte. (1847). *Jane Eyre*. London: Penguin.
- Eagleton, Terry. (1975). *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës*. London: Macmillan Press.
- Fain, Margaret. (2014). "Narrating the Queen in *Jane Eyre*." *The Journal of Brontë Society*. 39 (2), 141-152.
- Foucault, Michel. (1965). *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. Trans Richard Howard. New York: Pantheon.
- Franklin, Jeffrey. (1995). The Merging of Spiritualities: *Jane Eyre* as Missionary of Love. *Nineteenth-Century Literature*. 49 (4), 456-482.
- Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. (1970). New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc.

Dagamsch

- Gilbert, Sandra and Susan Gubar. (1979). *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Jung, Sandro. (2007). Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, the Female Detective and the 'Crime' of Female Selfhood. *Brontë Studies* 32 (1), 21-30.
- Loomba, Ania. (1998). *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. New York: Routledge.
- Memmi, Albert. (1956). *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. London: The Orion Press.
- Nestor, Pauline. (2008). Female Friendships in Mid-Victorian England: New Patterns and Possibilities. *Literature & History*, 17(1), 36-47.
- Ohmann Carol. (1977). Historical Reality and 'Divine Appointment' in Charlotte Brontë's Fiction. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. 2 (4), 757-778.
- Roy, Parama. (1989). Unaccommodated Woman and the Poetics of Property in *Jane Eyre*. *SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*. (29) 4, 713-727.
- Said, Edward. (1993). *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage.
- Said, Edward. (1978). *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*. New York: Penguin.
- Searle, Alison. (2006). An Idolatrous Imagination? Biblical Theology and Romanticism in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. *Christianity and Literature*. 56 (1), 35-61.
- Spivak, Gayatri. (1985). Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism. *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1), 243-261.
- Tracy, Thomas. (2004). 'Reader, I Buried Him': Apocalypse and Empire in *Jane Eyre*. *Critical Survey*, 16(2), 59-77.
- Webb, Igor. (1981). *From Custom to Capital: The English Novel and the Industrial Revolution*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Wilks, Brian. (2016). *Jane Eyre Revisited*. *Brontë Studies*. 41 (4), 283-299.
- Wollstonecraft, Mary (1792). *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. London: Penguin.
- Zeng, Lijuan. (2014). The Harmonious Fusion of Literary Spirit and Religious Feelings of *Jane Eyre*. *Studies in Literature and Language*. 8 (2), 6-10.