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Love, Trauma and Emotional Abuse in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*

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BA Degree Project

Literature

Fall 2022

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## ABSTRACT

Despite various studies regarding love in Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre*, little is known about true affection. Early research indicates that Jane's romantic feelings for Rochester are a result of patriarchy and childhood trauma. However, these scholars have been influenced by an older view of affection that indicates that in love, cruelty and destructiveness cannot exist. This study builds on previous research; however, it adds a new philosophical aspect to demonstrate that it is ontological rootedness that defines love rather than benevolence and altruism. The primary source for this study is Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre*.

Psychological theories have been incorporated to illustrate that Jane has endured childhood trauma which results in her being vulnerable to Rochester's emotional abuse. However, the analysis also integrates a philosophical aspect of what love is that demonstrates that despite Jane's childhood trauma and Rochester's manipulation, Jane still has genuine affection for Rochester. In other words, this study shows that Rochester is emotionally abusive towards Jane but that love in the novel is not defined by kindness and selflessness. Thus, it is true love that Jane feels for Rochester.

**Keywords:** Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, psychology, childhood trauma, emotional abuse, manipulation, love, Simon May, philosophy.

## INTRODUCTION

Love is not always achieved through benevolence and altruism. Nor is it always effortless and without obstacles. The trajectory to love is complex and to truly understand it, one must appreciate the factors of psychological and philosophical importance. Based on this framework, theories that emerge may be met with opposition due to the dominant perception of what love is. Consciously or not, the author Charlotte Brontë succeeds in illustrating the complex trajectory of love in her novel *Jane Eyre*. The novel has been widely appreciated and loved by the public. It has both been seen as a bildungsroman and a classic romance novel. Brontë published the novel in 1847 and titled it first as '*Jane Eyre: an Autobiography*. Edited by Currer Bell' (Tillotson 1954, 291). Brontë used the pseudonym 'Currer Bell' to avoid revealing that she was a woman due to prejudice towards female writers. The novel is classified as a bildungsroman because it depicts the protagonist's Jane Eyre's personal progress by dividing Jane's life in different phases in various locations to demonstrate Jane acquiring different life lessons that support her psychological maturation. It is also considered as a romance novel because the novel follows the trajectory of Jane and her master Rochester's romance, demonstrating hardships and obstacles that are eventually overcome. This essay explores Jane's affection for Rochester, asking whether it is genuine or, as some critics have argued, a result of Jane's childhood trauma. In order to do that, psychological theories of childhood trauma and a philosophical take on love will be integrated.

The novel suggests that Jane is meant to end up with Rochester and that it is "by nature" that she does so. This is implied by the supernatural element that Brontë has incorporated in the story. This is illustrated when St. John Rivers is insisting that Jane should marry him and as Jane is close to agreeing with him, she experiences an "inexpressible feeling" and hears Rochester shout her name "Jane! Jane! Jane!" (Brontë 2012, 507). Jane, herself, rejects the idea that this is "superstition", "deception" or "witchcraft" but rather thinks that "it is the work of the nature" (Brontë 2012, 507). In other words, Brontë has demonstrated that the connection between Jane and Rochester is a work of nature and that two lovers destined by nature will, no matter obstacles, be united.

Critics have argued that *Jane Eyre* should not be recognized as a romantic novel by nature, but rather that it contains multiple different factors that contribute to Jane and Rochester's love trajectory. Jean Wyatt argues that Jane and Rochester's romantic love derives from a father-daughter relation (1985, 206). Wyatt advances this statement by illustrating that romantic love in the Western world is a reflection of a family structure where women

undertake a subordinate role and men a superior (1985, 202). Wyatt explains that the “father’s role is to shape his daughter’s sexuality (without getting too involved in it)” (Chodorow cited in Wyatt 1985, 204). To exemplify this, Wyatt illustrates to the readers that Rochester “enacts the same baffling behaviour” (1985, 204) by trying to attain Jane’s affection and attention but simultaneously putting her off with the scheme of marrying Blanche Ingram. To put it differently, according to this framework, it is both accepted and expected of Rochester to be manipulative and even emotionally abuse Jane because it displays a father-daughter relationship. Furthermore, Wyatt explains that due to Western love being a reflection of a father-daughter relationship, it contributes to the patriarchy. In other words, Wyatt argues that the romantic love Jane has for Rochester is “grounded in traditional patterns of relationship between fathers and daughters” (1985, 200); thus leading to reproduction of gender norms. A father-daughter relationship is dependent on the asymmetrical power structure which entails that ‘the daughter’/woman should accept the difference in power. This leads to expectations that the woman can and should accept acts of discourtesy as an expression of power as demonstrated with Rochester’s scheme including Blanche Ingram (Wyatt 1985, 201).

Another critic whose theories fall in line with Wyatt is Bonnie Zare. Zare also argues that the relationship between Jane and Rochester is patriarchal in nature (1993, 205). Zare demonstrates that *Jane Eyre* seems “to encourage opposing aims” (1993, 205) by having Jane concurrently long for love and independence, which are two contradictions. She further illustrates this point by clarifying that in order for Jane to achieve love, she has to give up her autonomy, which Jane does in the end. Zare expresses that the ending is “excruciating” because in Jane’s culmination of independence, she still returns to Rochester even “after being taken advantage of” by his “abusive tricks” (1993, 205). Zare exemplifies Rochester’s tricks by including several events that showcase the abusive nature such as when Rochester dresses up as a female fortune teller and plays with Jane “as a cat plays with the mouse” or when he makes her believe that he will be marrying Blanche Ingram from which he “obtains satisfaction” from Jane’s suffering (1993, 207). Zare states that the “mental torment which Jane experiences is severe” (1993, 207). In other words, it has been argued that Jane’s affection for Rochester is shaped by the patriarchal system which entails Rochester’s manipulative and emotionally abusive behaviour.

Other critics analyze *Jane Eyre* through a psychological lens, focusing on Jane’s childhood and the effects of it. Bernard J. Paris notes that Jane Eyre, due to her “miserable childhood” and being abused and neglected by the Reed family, “develops intense feelings of insecurity, vulnerability, and hopelessness” (1997, 145). Paris argues that of all the terrible

childhoods in Victorian fiction, Jane's is "one of the worst" (1997, 145) because she is isolated "without one bit of love or kindness" (Brontë cited in Paris 1997, 146). Very early in the book, Brontë has already highlighted one fundamental aspect of Jane's character and that is her need for love. Paris further illustrates how various abusive events in Jane's early childhood have had an effect on Jane in adulthood. To exemplify, Paris demonstrates how Jane needs to "prove she is not bad, worthless, inferior to people like the Reeds" (1997, 148) which she does by behaving accordingly at all costs at Lowood because she wants to be "good" and "make so many friends, to earn respect and win affection" (Brontë 2012, 77). Furthermore, Jane vindicates her feelings of worthlessness and insecurity when she is reunited with Rochester, who is now disabled, and tells him that she can love him "better now" that she "can really be useful" to him (Brontë cited in Paris 1997, 163). To further this, Kathleen Tillotson suggests that Brontë's intention with *Jane Eyre* is "to show the pressures of childhood experience in the full-grown character" (1954, 290). In other words, Brontë is trying to illustrate how events occurring during childhood still affect the individual in adulthood. This becomes apparent in how Brontë associates Jane's childhood trauma and horrors with imagery and symbolism presented in Jane's adulthood.

This essay builds on previous research arguing that Rochester is manipulative and emotionally abusive towards Jane. The study also includes further indications on Jane's childhood trauma and how it affected her as a child and in addition, an adult. The psychological perspective will be implemented to fully understand how Jane's childhood trauma cultivates into Jane being vulnerable to Rochester's emotional abuse. Furthermore, the general perspective on romantic love in *Jane Eyre* in previous studies has shown that the love is a result of patriarchy and childhood trauma. Jean Wyatt even suggests that the novel is a "patriarchal love fantasy" (1985, 200). However, only analyzing the novel through a psychological and a feminist perspective, I argue is a disservice. I agree with the basic idea of their study but would like to add a new aspect to illustrate that love can still be genuine even though it has not been achieved through kindness and benevolence. In this essay I will integrate a philosophical aspect of what love is, in order to attain a clear definition of it and to illustrate that love is not defined by kindness and selflessness. For this purpose, I will first establish that Jane has sustained trauma and put it into context of Rochester's manipulation and emotional abuse to illustrate that it is a part of their trajectory to love. In order to do that, the following section of the essay will analyze Jane's childhood trauma and Rochester's emotional abuse through a psychological framework. The psychological framework will be based on theories from various psychologists such as Judith Lewis Herman and Denise Winn.

Other psychologist's theories will also be presented in the paper in order to provide us with an understanding of childhood trauma and emotional abuse. Finally, the philosopher Simon May's conception of love will provide a basis for discussing whether Jane's affection for Rochester is genuine. Furthermore, to strengthen the proposition of my study, I will also analyze symbolism and imagery in the novel. It is important to note that whilst a definition of love will be made in order to be able to provide knowledge, the definition will be of modern time due to the chosen work. Research regarding love in *Jane Eyre* has been analyzed through an old view of love and it provides us with a perspective that Jane and Rochester's love cannot be genuine because love is supposed to be selfless and kind. In other words, these researchers have been influenced by the view of love that was dominating during their time. I have chosen May's conception of love because his theories provide us with a new and complex understanding of what love is. Furthermore, it provides us with a framework that makes it possible to oppose the general idea of love in *Jane Eyre* whose theories are anchored in a past understanding of love.

## JANE'S CHILDHOOD TRAUMA AND HOW SHE BECOMES VULNERABLE

Jane experiences neglect, emotional and even physical abuse in her childhood, more specifically at her residency with the Reed family. Herman (1992, 33) describes trauma as a threat to the person's physical existence, experience of security and social identity. According to this framework, it is apparent that Jane has suffered from trauma because of her experience with the Reed family, particularly, the 'Red Room' incident. John Reed, son of Mrs. Reed, throws a book at Jane as a way of punishing her for reading a book that belongs to the Reed family and tells her that she is "a dependent, mama says; you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg, and not to live here with gentlemen's children like us" (Brontë 2012, 5). Jane resists the violence and tells him that he is a "Wicked and cruel boy! . . . You are like a murderer—you are like a slave-driver—you are like the Roman emperors!" (Brontë 2012, 6). It is interesting to note that Brontë puts John Reed's bullying into a bigger context; that of human oppressor, "Roman emperors", to illustrate to the reader John's character and Jane's oppression. As a result of Jane's resistance, she gets locked in the red room, the same room which her uncle Mr. Reed had "breathed his last" (Brontë 2012, 9). Herman (1992, 86) argues that a consequence of trauma is that one can lose a sense of self, that is not recognizing yourself anymore. This is clear with Jane when she is locked in the red room and sees herself

in the “looking-glass” and describes her reflection as “the strange little figure there gazing at me, with a white face and arms specking the gloom, and glittering eyes of fear moving” (Brontë 2012, 10). Brontë illustrates the notion of loss of identity by describing Jane’s own reflection as ‘strange’.

The psychologist Arnon Bentovim (2010, 23) articulates that trauma entails an absence “of a protector, or potential protectors are neutralized”, that the trauma can make the victim feel responsible and that any action from the victim as a result of the abuse will justify further abuse thus leading the victim feel entrapped and that there is no escape. Mrs. Reed, who should be Jane’s protector because she is her caregiver, is “blind and deaf” on the subject that John is abusing Jane (Brontë 2012, 4). Jane gets told that she “should try to be useful and pleasant” and even though she “dared commit no fault” and “strove to fulfil every duty” she was still “termed naughty and tiresome” (Brontë 2012, 8, 11). In other words, no matter what Jane does, she still feels responsible for the abuse she receives even though she feels it is unfair: “Unjust!—unjust!” (Brontë 2012, 11). This damages Jane’s self-perception as she says, “Why was I always suffering, always browbeaten, always accused, for ever condemned? Why could I never please?” (Brontë 2012, 10). This illustrates that Jane feels like she is accountable because she is accusing herself of never being able to please and therefore justifying that she is getting abused.

When Jane thinks she sees a ghost in the red room, she screams and begs to come out of the red room. However, as a response to Jane’s response to the abuse Mrs. Reed locks her in for another hour and will only let her out on the condition of “perfect submission and stillness” (Brontë 2012, 14). Jane is being punished for reacting to the abuse, allowing Mrs. Reed to feel justification to further abuse as she interprets Jane’s reaction as “artifice” (Brontë 2012, 14). Herman argues that repeated trauma can lead to post-traumatic stress (1992, 2). Post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD, is a mental condition as a result from multiple trauma and the symptoms are triggered by various events. The symptoms include anxiety, dreams and flashbacks. The psychiatrist Dr. Avinash De Sousa (2011, 1) demonstrates that Sigmund Freud has argued that the human mind consists of the ‘conscious’, ‘unconscious’ and the ‘preconscious’. For this study, only information regarding the conscious and unconscious mind will be presented due to its necessity. The conscious mind refers to when the individual is awake and fully aware of his or her surroundings and their feelings, thoughts, urges and thoughts are accessible to them. The unconscious refers to feelings, thoughts, memories and urges that are outside of our conscious awareness (De Sousa 2011, 2). Freud explains that these thoughts, feelings and memories are unconscious because they are unpleasant to the

human being because they cause pain, anxiety and conflict (De Sousa 2011, 5). From a psychological perspective, it is possible to conclude that Jane suffers from PTSD as she has endured multiple traumas, leading her to be “Accustomed to John Reed’s abuse” (Brontë 2012, 5).

Jane’s symptoms of PTSD express themselves in forms of dreams; she either dreams of the red room or of children. She dreams of the red room the night before she flees from Thornfield: “I dreamt I lay in the red-room at Gateshead; that the night was dark, and my mind impressed with strange fears. The light that long ago had struck me into syncope, recalled in this vision, seemed glidingly to mount the wall, and tremblingly to pause in the centre of the obscured ceiling” (Brontë 2012, 384). That Jane is dreaming of the incident in the red room when she is experiencing feelings of wanting to escape is rational from a psychological aspect. As earlier mentioned, memories and feelings can occur in dreams because they are too painful for the individual to cope with. In that sense, the fact that Jane is dreaming of the red room when she is experiencing the same feelings of wanting to escape is logical. When Jane is feeling anxious towards her marriage with Rochester, she has two dreams: “During all my first sleep, I was following the windings of an unknown road; total obscurity environed me; rain pelted me; I was burdened with the charge of a little child: a very small creature, too young and feeble to walk, and which shivered in my cold arms, and wailed piteously in my ear” (Brontë 2012, 338). In her second dream, the child is still present: “Wrapped up in a shawl, I still carried the unknown little child: I might not lay it down anywhere, however tired were my arms—however much its weigh... the child clung round my neck in terror, and almost strangled me” (Brontë 2012, 339). In the first dream, Jane is dreaming of holding a weak and young child that is crying in her cold arms; this can be interpreted as the child symbolizing Jane’s younger self and the child’s inability to walk can also indicate Jane’s feelings of hopelessness and weakness she experienced in the Reed family. In her second dream, the child might represent her commitment to Rochester and that it is a burden thus leading the child to almost strangle her. What is interesting about these two dreams is that they both include a child in an anxious setting, which reflects her childhood trauma, and Jane is having these two dreams whilst feeling anxious. It is possible to argue that Brontë herself was aware of the symbolism of the children in Jane’s dreams and Jane’s upbringing because she writes that Bessie Leaven says, “and that to dream of children was a sure sign of trouble, either to one’s self or one’s kin” (Brontë 2012, 263).

As earlier implied, Jane feels responsible for the abuse and makes it clear when she reflects back to her time with the Reeds and says “I know that had I been a sanguine, brilliant,



careless, exacting, handsome, romping child . . . Mrs. Reed would have endured my presence more complacently” (Brontë 2012, 11). This reveals to us that Jane is insecure about her character and that she is likely to alter who she is in order to be loved. Winn (1983, 44) demonstrates that children form their identity based on what is most valued and appreciated in order to gain love. This is noticeable with Jane as she is blaming herself for Mrs. Reed’s actions. It is also clear as she embodies Miss Temple’s personality: “my mind had put off all it had borrowed of Miss Temple — or rather that she had taken with her the serene atmosphere I had been breathing in her vicinity” (Brontë 2012, 98). Winn articulates that the insecure person “needs to please because he wants to be liked” (1983, 55), leading the person to accept being in distressed situations if it means that they will receive love. Jane is insecure; she makes this visible various times in the novel. For instance, she tells Helen that “if others don’t love me I would rather die than live” and “to gain some real affection from you . . . or any other whom I truly love, I would willingly submit to have the bone of my arm broken, or to let a bull toss me, or to stand behind a kicking horse, and let it dash its hoof at my chest—” (Brontë 2012, 78-79). Darius Cikanavicius, a certified mental health coach who specialises in childhood trauma, illustrates that children that grows up in a neglected and abusive household with a caregiver who is not emotionally available, will result in the child developing low self-esteem and their perception of love will be that of pain (2018, 208). In other words, the child will believe that if a loved one causes feelings of pain, sadness and anxiety it means that they love them. Jane’s insecurities strengthen her desire to be loved so much that she states that she will endure physical pain in order to receive it and this reflects the abuse she had to endure with the Reeds. This indicates that Jane’s perception of love has been affected by her childhood trauma which will cultivate in her being receptive to Rochester's emotional abuse. Jane’s insecurities are revealed to us multiple times in the novel. For instance, when Jane believes that Rochester has developed feelings for her, she immediately turns those thoughts down and tells herself: “*You . . . a favourite with Mr. Rochester? You gifted with the power of pleasing him? You of importance to him in any way? Go! your folly sickens me . . . How dared you? Poor stupid dupe!*” (Brontë 2012, 190). In another instance when Mrs. Fairfax finds out that Jane and Rochester are engaged and questions their relationship due to the age difference, Jane answers, “*Why?—am I a monster? . . . is it impossible that Mr. Rochester should have a sincere affection for me?*” (Brontë 2012, 317). These two quotes illustrate Jane’s low self-esteem and the effects of it. The first quote demonstrates that Jane does not believe she is worthy of Rochester’s affection, thus leading her to doubt and underestimate herself. The second quote highlights Jane’s low self-esteem by Jane immediately assuming

that Mrs. Fairfax is indicating that her doubt regarding their relationship stems from Jane being ‘a monster’ and that it would not be sensible that Rochester actually loves her.

Winn demonstrates that an insecure individual is most likely to want to please others in order to gain affection even though it makes them feel apprehensive (1983, 55). To demonstrate that Jane is insecure, Jane agrees to learn Hindostanee instead of German because St. John Rivers demands it. Even though Jane is uncomfortable with this, she “wished more to please him” although she “felt daily more and more that I must disown half my nature” (Brontë 2012, 480-481). It is therefore valid to reason that Jane’s attitude towards love and her identity is related to her childhood trauma, thus making it possible for Rochester to manipulate her.

## ROCHESTER’S MANIPULATION AND EMOTIONAL ABUSE TOWARDS JANE

In order to understand Rochester’s manipulation, one must first obtain knowledge of the said term. According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2022), manipulation means “to control or play upon by artful, unfair, or insidious means especially to one's own advantage”. Adelyn Birch, a registered nurse, explains that manipulators use various tactics that “are underhanded methods of control” (2015, 5) in order to achieve control over the individual. In order to be successful, the manipulator utilizes the person’s vulnerability to gain control. These vulnerabilities can express themselves in feelings such as doubt, fear, shame and love (Birch 2015, 6). Manipulators also operate “under the level of your conscious awareness” (Birch 2015, 5), therefore leading to the victim of the manipulation not being able to detect that they are being manipulated. Amongst the many effects of being exposed to a manipulator, a few of them are that they damage the individual’s perception of themselves, their self-worth and confidence (Birch 2015, 6). Rochester wants to control Jane. It becomes apparent when he tells her “I will myself put the diamond chain round your neck” (Brontë 2012, 310). What is interesting to note is the diction “chain”. To refer to the jewelry as a chain rather than a necklace, reveals the controlling nature that is present in Rochester. Also, the jewelry being referred to as a ‘chain’ takes on implications of imprisonment. In other words, Rochester is trying to control Jane and the “diamond chain” symbolizes this. Furthermore, Rochester manipulates Jane in various ways. He uses different methods to control her such as triangulation, pity-play or self-pity, crazy-making and gaslighting.

Triangulation refers to the manipulator involving a third person for the purpose of making the first person insecure (Birch 2015, 21). Furthermore, the intention is to make the individual feel anxious about losing the manipulator, leading them to be “more eager to please the manipulator” (Birch 2015, 21). Events that reflect Rochester’s use of triangulation as manipulation is his relation with Blanche Ingram. Rochester has invited some visitors to stay at Thornfield Hall and has given Jane the impression that he intends to marry Blanche Ingram. One night, when Rochester and Blanche are performing music, Jane feels tormented and flees the room. Rochester follows her and tells her she has been “getting a good deal paler” (Brontë 2012, 214). He also tells her that she is “a little depressed” and he desires to know “What about? Tell me” (Brontë 2012, 214). Rochester has utilized his relationship with Blanche Ingram as an intention to torment Jane and awaken any feelings of jealousy. He does not take into consideration how this affects Jane, even though he notices that she is “so much depressed that a few more words would bring tears” to her eyes (Brontë 2012, 214). His scheme of involving Blanche Ingram stems from selfish reasons; he wants to be assured of Jane’s feelings for him, despite it being at Jane’s expense. The next night, the guests are playing charades and Rochester and Blanche Ingram are on a team together and Jane is watching the performance:

Then appeared the magnificent figure of Miss Ingram, clad in white, a long veil on her head, and a wreath of roses round her brow; by her side walked Mr. Rochester, and together they drew near the table . . . A ceremony followed, in dumb show, in which it was easy to recognise the pantomime of a marriage. (Brontë 2012, 217)

Jane has been led to understand by Rochester that he intends to marry Blanche Ingram, both ‘in real life’ and in the charade. Because of Jane’s affection for Rochester, she perceives both the show and their actual marriage as a “dumb show” and a “pantomime of a marriage” (Brontë 2012, 217). In other words, Jane believes that if they were to get married, their marriage would be exactly as the charade, a mere act and not genuine. This should be interpreted as an expression of Jane’s jealousy. Even though Rochester got his confirmation that Jane has feelings for him the night before, he still insists on emotionally torturing her with the charade of marriage.

It is clear that he wants Jane to verbally confess her affection for him and thus, in another attempt, he dresses up as a female fortune teller to “gain Jane’s confidence” (Zare 1993, 207). Dressed as the fortune teller, Rochester tries to retrieve information from Jane: “Is there not one face you study? one figure whose movements you follow with at least curiosity?” and “You have seen love: have you not?—and, looking forward, you have seen him married, and beheld his bride happy?” (Brontë 2012, 237-238). Jane does not reveal her

feelings to the fortune teller and when she finds out that it was actually Rochester, she tells him that what he has done “was not right” (Brontë 2012, 241). Zare demonstrates how Jane has changed upon meeting Rochester: “Before she meets Rochester, Jane never accepts dishonesty” (1993, 207). Rochester is being dishonest when he lies to Jane about planning to marry Blanche Ingram and dressing up as a fortune-teller to deceive her. Even though Jane recognizes that what he has done is ‘not right’, Rochester does not get any consequences for his actions. Birch states that manipulators utilize deceitful tactics to “change your behavior and perceptions” (2015, 5), which is clearly what Rochester has been successful in doing.

Baffled by the possibility that Rochester and Blanche Ingram might marry, Jane articulates:

I was growing very lenient to my master: I was forgetting all his faults, for which I had once kept a sharp look-out. It had formerly been my endeavour to study all sides of his character: to take the bad with the good; and from the just weighing of both, to form an equitable judgment. Now I saw no bad. (Brontë 2012, 223)

Rochester has succeeded, by his torment, to put Jane in a position where she has become vulnerable to his influence. Furthermore, Rochester’s tactics with involving Blanche Ingram has also culminated in Jane feeling insecure about herself:

“*You*,” I said, “a favourite with Mr. Rochester? *You* gifted with the power of pleasing him? *You* of importance to him in any way? Go! your folly sickens me . . . It does good to no woman to be flattered by her superior . . . draw in chalk your own picture, faithfully, without softening one defect; omit no harsh line, smooth away no displeasing irregularity; write under it, ‘Portrait of a Governess, disconnected, poor, and plain.’” (Brontë 2012, 190)

Although Jane has referred to herself as “plain” multiple times in the novel, she has not put it into this insecure, harsh context. Jane’s perception of herself has changed; she argues that she has become ‘disconnected’ due to thinking that she could be of any worth to Rochester, her superior. This further proves that Rochester’s actions have affected Jane’s self-perception.

In an effort to draw out Jane’s feelings for him, Rochester becomes disappointed. For the purpose of protecting his self-perception, Rochester projects his insecurities onto Jane to make herself feel like the ‘crazy one’:

You are cold, because you are alone: no contact strikes the fire from you that is in you. You are sick; because the best of feelings, the highest and the sweetest given to man, keeps far away from you. You are silly, because, suffer as you may, you will not beckon it to approach, nor will you stir one step to meet it where it waits you. (Brontë 2012, 234)

Rochester accuses Jane of being responsible for her suffering and loneliness. This leads to Jane feeling uncertain in her own judgement. Given the situation Jane is in, feeling affection for her master, Rochester is also indicating that Jane will continue to feel “sick” if she does not surrender to her feelings. Birch calls such manipulation ‘crazymaking’ and explains that it

makes the person doubt themselves and their reality, thus making them feel like they are crazy (2015, 30).

Rochester also utilises the method gaslighting in order to make Jane doubt her own reality; by suggesting that Jane is to blame for her loneliness, Rochester is implicitly indicating to Jane that he is the solution. Gaslighting refers to manipulating, lying and denying one's reality and it has the same effect as 'crazymaking'; it results in the victim distorting and undermining their reality (Birch 2015, 31). The purpose of exploiting this method is to gain control over the individual and to be able to "exercise total domination" (Birch 2015, 31). By implying to Jane that he is the solution for her 'sickness', Rochester is putting Jane in a position where he will have complete control over her because she will be scared of losing him due to the fear of being alone and 'sick'. Another instance where Rochester is gaslighting Jane is when she finds out about Bertha being locked up in the attic and confronts him:

"you are inexorable for that unfortunate lady: you speak of her with hate—with vindictive antipathy. It is cruel—she cannot help being mad." "Jane, my little darling (so I will call you, for so you are), you don't know what you are talking about; you misjudge me again: it is not because she is mad I hate her. If you were mad, do you think I should hate you?" "I do indeed, sir." "Then you are mistaken, and you know nothing about me, and nothing about the sort of love of which I am capable." (Brontë 2012, 362-363)

Rochester is trying to shift focus from his wrongdoings onto Jane's inexperience with love. Instead of acknowledging what he has done, he is trying to gaslight Jane into thinking that she doesn't understand love and therefore cannot fathom his reasonings. This is a form of gaslight because he is denying her reality, which is her conception of love in this sense, hoping that it will distort her perception and make her adopt his view. This is not the first time that Rochester tries to gaslight Jane: "You never felt jealousy did you, Miss Eyre? Of course not: I need not ask you; because you never felt love" (Brontë 2012, 168). This reveals to us that Rochester is trying to undermine Jane's life experiences by speaking for her and telling her what she has and has not felt. Even though the readers are aware that Jane has not felt romantic love, she has still experienced jealousy. To demonstrate this, Jane feels jealous when she compares herself with Mrs. Reed's children and how even though Eliza is "selfish", Georgiana has a "spoiled temper" and John "bluntly disregarded [Mrs. Reed's] wishes; not unfrequently tore and spoiled her silk attire", he was still her "own darling" (Brontë 2012, 10-11). But no matter what Jane did she was still "termed naughty and tiresome, sullen and sneaking, from morning to noon, and from noon to night" (Brontë 2012, 11).

Rochester is trying to guilt Jane into not leaving him when she finds out about Bertha. Jane is consumed by Rochester's manipulation and emotional abuse that she hesitates before she leaves because she is worried about him and feels the need to be his savior:

Think of his misery; think of his danger—look at his state when left alone; remember his headlong nature; consider the recklessness following on despair— soothe him; save him; love him; tell him you love him and will be his. Who in the world cares for you? or who will be injured by what you do? (Brontë 2012, 382)

Jane feels conflicted regarding leaving Rochester which is an indication of Rochester's emotional manipulation. Rochester is participating in what Birch terms 'the pity play' or what Courtney Humeney, a psychologist, calls 'self-pity'. The pity play is a method that is utilized by the manipulator to act as a helpless victim to guilt the individual into staying with them (Birch 2015, 46). Humeney explains that guilt-trips do not actually change the victim's behaviour but "Rather, victims felt obligated to change their behaviors against their will" (2014, 3). This is noticeable with Jane's thoughts and feelings about leaving Rochester. She wants to leave, however she is experiencing shame for her thoughts. Maria Miceli and Christiano Castelfranchi who are associate researchers at the Institute of Psychology in Italy, demonstrate that shame and guilt are correlated and that they have an impact on one's self-image (2018, 711). They argue that when feeling guilty, "one may generalize one's negative evaluation to the self" and that it leads to thoughts such as "Because I did something bad, I am bad" (Miceli & Castelfranchi 2018, 716). Jane does not value herself highly when thinking of leaving Rochester. She is belittling herself as she tells herself, "Who in the world cares for you? or who will be injured by what you do?" (Brontë 2012, 382). In other words, Jane's self-image has been affected by Rochester's self-pity.

When Jane states that she will leave Rochester, he immediately transforms into a helpless person. This leads to Jane feeling responsible for his well-being and happiness, thus making her hesitate for a while. However, it does not seem to have the effect that Rochester is hoping for and when Jane insists on leaving, he tells her:

You will not be my comforter, my rescuer? My deep love, my wild woe, my frantic prayer, are all nothing to you? . . . but remember, you leave me here in anguish. Go up to your own room; think over all I have said, and, Jane, cast a glance on my sufferings—think of me. (Brontë 2012, 383)

Here, Rochester is trying to guilt Jane into staying. He even distinctly utters the words "my rescuer" to make Jane believe that without her, he won't be able to make it. By placing the role of a rescuer on Jane, Rochester is signifying that if she does not embrace this role, she is then playing a part in his suffering. Furthermore, he is also indicating that she is insensitive by implying that his affection for her is "all nothing to you" (Brontë 2012, 383). Rochester

further this by telling Jane, “you don’t love me, then? It was only my station, and the rank of my wife, that you valued?” (Brontë 2012, 365). Even though it is arguable that Rochester is aware that Jane is not yearning for social capital, he is still hoping that Jane will oppose this idea by changing her mind and staying. In other words, Rochester is trying to manipulate Jane into thinking she is insensitive and vain for the purpose of making her stay.

## IS IT TRUE LOVE AFTER ALL? A PHILOSOPHICAL ASPECT

To be able to determine if Jane’s love for Rochester is genuine, the meaning of love must first be identified. A historical understanding of the idea of love is helpful. The perception of true love, in the Western World, is that it is unconditional and altruistic (May 2011, 2). However, May illustrates in *Love: A History* that this understanding of love can be traced back to the secularization of *agape* (2011, 22). May explains that *agape* is “unconditional, altruistic, obedient, humble selflessness” and that it is associated with ‘Christian love’ (2011, 22). In other words, the word has progressed to a synonym to ‘Christian love’. In the 18th century, as the world became more objective and scientific, the period of ‘death of God’ began and the tremendous emotional support that human beings received from the idea that God loves us unconditionally began to decay (May 2011, 1). However, human beings still desired that emotional support, leading to the transformation of ‘God is love’ to ‘Love is God’. To put it differently, the idea of loving someone the way God intended to love us is still present but without the religious framework thus leading us to believe that ideal human love is unconditional. It is this idea that ‘Love is God’ that May disagrees with because nothing human is unconditional and to believe that is to “reach beyond our humanity” (2011, 5).

May argues that the need human beings have for love can be explained by the need for ‘ontological rootedness’. Jane is aware of human beings' need for love as she utters as a child: “To this crib I always took my doll; human beings must love something” (Brontë 2012, 27). May illustrates that human beings need for love “is because we all need to feel at home in the world: to root our life in the here and now; to give our existence solidity and validity; to deepen the sensation of being; to enable us to experience the reality of our life as indestructible” (2011, 6). Based on this framework, it is logical that Jane develops a need for love which will later cultivate in her choosing Rochester over Rivers.

May furthers the idea of love by explaining that the one we will find rootedness in will most likely be like us in values, attitudes, and principles (2019, 8). That is, someone we can recognize ourselves in. This becomes clear in *Jane Eyre* when Jane is observing Rochester’s

female guests interact with him and she expresses, “‘He is not to them what he is to me,’ I thought: ‘he is not of their kind. I believe he is of mine;—I am sure he is—I feel akin to him’” (Brontë 2012, 208). Jane acknowledges Rochester as one of her own, that is one she can see herself in. Even Rochester identifies this as he communicates to Jane when he asks her to marry him: “‘My bride is here,’ he said, again drawing me to him, ‘because my equal is here, and my likeness. Jane, will you marry me?’” (Brontë 2012, 304). Both Jane and Rochester admit that they are equal, which May argues is a significant factor in true love.

May complicates the idea of love in his book *Love: A New Understanding of an Ancient Emotion* by explaining that the idea of love fostering “true goodness” and one should “desire what is good” to be “*made virtuous* by doing so”, does not survive in the realistic world (2019, 79). May advances this by arguing that it is possible to love someone and to find the promise of ontological rootedness in someone who is destructive, cruel or even rejecting us (2019, 82). He explains that it is possible because he rejects the idea of to love each other the way God is intended to love us. Therefore, qualities such as benevolence and altruism, which are seen as synonyms to ‘Christian love’, are not realistic because they do not necessarily coincide with love’s real promise of home (2019, 82). In other words, it does not matter if someone is kind and selfless, if there does not exist a promise of home. This is an important factor to understand in order to realize that Jane’s love for Rochester is genuine. As earlier demonstrated in this essay, Rochester is emotionally abusive towards Jane. However, according to the philosophical aspect of love, one does not need to be altruistic and benevolent in order to achieve love. May demonstrates that “If our loved ones ground us, but also turn away scornfully and cruelly, or are unjust, ungrateful, destructive, and resentful toward us, we will, as often as not, still love them” (2019, 89). Love is therefore not to be recognized as something dichotomic as it can both hurt and be ecstatic at the same time. As May emphasized it is the promise of home that acknowledges love. Jane identifies this as she expresses to Rochester after a visit to her aunt: “I am strangely glad to get back again to you: and wherever you are is my home—my only home” (Brontë 2012, 294). This quote reveals to us that Rochester is a symbol of home for Jane, her ontological rootedness. It is with him that Jane feels at home.

In order to fully appreciate the promise of rootedness, one must be uprooted (May 2019, 99). May illustrates that “the pain of exile . . . is the most powerful motivation to love (and be loved). At the same time . . . to glimpse a promise of home is to become more aware of our distance from it—and of the pain of that distance” (2019, 99). To put it differently, the trajectory of love can be a return to love after an exile from it. In addition, it could also be a



forward-looking motion in the sense that to be in a distance of love, the individual gains clarity of where their actual home is. Jane experiences exile when she decides to leave Rochester after she finds out that he is married to Bertha. She flees to Whitcross where she will be homeless and beg for food until she, by accident, finds the home of her cousins. Her cousin St. John Rivers wants Jane to marry him because he believes she will be a good missionary's wife. However, Jane rejects his proposal because he is not proposing out of love. She reflects that she will be nothing but a "soldier with a good weapon" to him and tells him that they do not "love each other as man and woman should and therefore we ought not to be married" (Brontë 2012, 489-490). John's perception of love is merely a tool to achieve high moral duty and for this Jane tells John that she "scorns [his] idea of love" (Brontë 2012, 493). Jane's ordeal with Rivers illustrates that one cannot escape from their actual home. When Jane is tempted to accept Rivers' proposal and he hugs her she utters, "he surrounded me with his arm, almost as if he loved me (I say almost—I knew the difference—for I had felt what it was to be loved" (Brontë 2012, 506). Jane is aware that if she were to marry Rivers, it would only be for duty and not for love because he does not love her. In Jane's culmination of temptation, she pleads to God to "Show me, show me the path!" (Brontë 2012, 506). This is when she hears Rochester's voice calling out "Jane! Jane! Jane!" and she recognizes the voice of "a known, loved, well-remembered voice—that of Edward Fairfax Rochester" (Brontë 2012, 507). Jane answers: "I am coming!" . . . Wait for me! Oh, I will come!" (Brontë 2012, 507). Jane's exile provided her with a challenge, to find out if she can live without genuine romantic love. In the end, it is apparent that she cannot. She cannot live without love because she has already "felt what it was to be loved" (Brontë 2012, 506). This revelation is what motivates Jane to return to Rochester. In other words, the exile provided Jane clarity of where her actual home is; with Rochester.

## CONCLUSION

To summarize, this study has demonstrated that love in *Jane Eyre* should not be acknowledged as dichotomic; that if it derives from destructiveness, it is not genuine. As May illustrated, this view of love has been developed from the Christian religion and how God is destined to love us. Therefore qualities such as benevolence and altruism were appreciated in the aspect of love. In other words, if an individual is not expressing those qualities, the conclusion would be that true love does not exist. May opposes this theory and argues that humans cannot love the way God loves, thus qualities such as cruelty, selfishness and

destructiveness can exist in the spectrum of love. This study has also added to previous research that claims that Rochester is emotionally abusive towards Jane. This has been done by integrating psychological theories of childhood trauma and emotional abuse. However, the psychological theories have been incorporated to demonstrate their trajectory to love, rather than to establish that their love is not genuine due to Rochester's manipulation. As demonstrated in this paper, Jane has experienced trauma in her childhood which has led her to be vulnerable to Rochester's manipulation. Rochester is cruel, manipulative and even emotionally abusive towards Jane. Nevertheless, Rochester is Jane's home. As May states "love is grounded in a promise of 'ontological rootedness,' a promise of home in the world" (2019, 13), and Jane expresses to Rochester "you are . . . my only home" (Bronte 2012, 294). To put it differently, by including a philosophical aspect of what love is in this paper, I have been able to dispute previous research that claims that Jane's affection for Rochester is only a result of patriarchy and childhood trauma.

By implementing a new aspect to previous research, it has resulted in a new and complex understanding of love in *Jane Eyre*. This study can be utilized in new research regarding love in *Jane Eyre* such as reading the novel through the perspective of an older view of love and comparing to identify differences to conclude how our society has evolved. This study can also be referenced in new research that argues that it is possible to deepen the understanding of a novel by analyzing it through multiple perspectives.

As earlier mentioned in the introduction, the trajectory to love is not always effortless and without obstacles, nevertheless it still can culminate in genuine love. To put it differently, love is not to be viewed as something that can only be achieved through benevolence and altruism. Nor is love supposed to be painless, it is rather whom you feel at home with, which defines true love.

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