

## A POSTCOLONIAL CRITICISM IN JANE EYRE

Ria Hendriani<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universitas Qamarul Huda Badaruddin, Jl H. Badaruddin, Lombok Tengan Nusa Tenggara Barat, Indonesia  
Email: [ria.hendriani@yahoo.com](mailto:ria.hendriani@yahoo.com)

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**Abstract.** Jane Eyre was first published in 1847. It is a novel that in the 19th century contributed hugely to the colonial discourse and the depiction of the colonized other in terms of physical representation, stereotypes, and female agency. It was created during the age of the British colonial expansion at the time when Britain shifted its interest from the West Indies to the East. This paper aims at analyzing colonial issues included by Bronte in the novel. The paper will focus on analysis of the colonialist ideology, sexism, freedom, ethnicity, and injustice of Jane Eyre in the context of colonial discourse. And finally, a study of the colonial wealth and inheritance will be conducted. To do this, a historical and literary analysis of the text will be needed.

**Keywords:** Postcolonial Criticism

**Abstrak.** Jane Eyre pertama kali diterbitkan pada tahun 1847. Ini adalah novel yang pada abad ke-19 memberikan kontribusi besar terhadap wacana kolonial dan penggambaran orang-orang terjajah dalam hal representasi fisik, stereotip, dan agensi perempuan. Ia diciptakan pada masa ekspansi kolonial Inggris ketika Inggris mengalihkan kepentingannya dari Hindia Barat ke Hindia Timur. Tulisan ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis isu-isu kolonial yang dicantumkan Bronte dalam novel tersebut. Makalah ini akan fokus pada analisis ideologi kolonial, seksisme, kebebasan, etnisitas, dan ketidakadilan Jane Eyre dalam konteks wacana kolonial. Dan yang terakhir akan dilakukan kajian terhadap kekayaan dan warisan kolonial. Untuk melakukan hal ini, diperlukan analisis sejarah dan sastra terhadap teks tersebut.

**Kata Kunci:** Postcolonial Criticism

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### INTRODUCTION

Postcolonial criticism is particularly effective at helping us to see connections among all the domains of our experience (the psychological, ideological, social, political, intellectual, and aesthetic) in ways that show us just how inseparable these categories are in our lived experience of ourselves and our world. Post colonialism asks readers to consider the way colonialist and anti-colonialist messages are presented in literary texts.

One of the colonialist goals of this novel is to create a prototype of the proper English woman, someone like Jane who is frank, sincere, and lacking in personal vanity. This ideal is created by Jane's attempt to contrast herself with the foreign women in the novel. For example,

both Celine Varens and her daughter are constantly criticized in the novel for their supposed superficiality and materialism. According to Rochester, Celine Varens charmed the "English gold" out of his "British breeches," a comment that emphasizes his supposedly British innocence and her wily French ways. Supporting this idea, Jane comments that Adele has a superficiality of character, "hardly congenial to an English mind." Jane's final ethnocentric comments in relation to little Adele are significant: "a sound English education corrected in a great measure her French defects." Only through a good English lifestyle has Adele avoided her mother's tragic flaws: materialism and sensuality, characteristics the novel specifically associates with foreign women. Jane's comments imply that the English, unlike their French neighbors, are deep rather than superficial, spiritual rather than materialistic.

### **Colonialist Ideology**

Colonialism can be defined as the act of invasion and control of other people's countries and cultures. However, it is not "merely the expansion of various European powers into Asia, Africa or the Americas from the sixteenth century onwards; it has been a recurrent and widespread feature of human history". Colonialism did more than extracting wealth and property from the colonized countries; they made a complex relationship between the colonized nations and their own. In the process of colonization, the dominant country makes an interference with the cultural and political structures of the colonized nation.

Jane Eyre, written at the height of British colonialism, has multiple references to the oppressed people of India and Jamaica, countries that had been taken over by England. Brontë equates the subjugation of dark-skinned colonials with the domination of women and the lower-middle-class whites in England. Bertha, the madwoman in the attic, is symbolic of colonialism's victims. Her imprisonment in the attic is an example of colonialist tyranny. Jane refers to her own job as governess as being a slave, deprived of equality and independence. Jane also presents Bertha as a kind of double who can express Jane's own inner rage against the restraints of gender. After Jane's aborted wedding, slavery as Rochester's mistress looms over her. Bertha is the ultimate colonial revolutionary who cleans away social oppression with fire. Ironically, however, Jane gains her independence through English colonialism.

Jane's position is more conflicted than Rochester's. As a woman she is also a member of a colonized group, but as a specifically British woman, she is a colonizer. When she claims Rochester gives her a smile such as a sultan would "bestow on a slave his gold and gems had enriched," she emphasizes the colonized status of all women. Insisting that he prefers his "one little English girl" to the "Grand Turk's whole seraglio," Rochester points to Jane's

powerlessness, her reduction to sex slave. Rather than becoming slave, Jane insists she will become a missionary, preaching liberty to women enslaved in harems. Her comments show the dual position of European women: both colonized and colonizers. While Rochester reduces her to a colonized "doll" or "performing ape," her comments show her Eurocentric understanding of Eastern culture: She implies that she'll be the enlightened English woman coming to the rescue of poor, abused Turkish women. All women are enslaved by male despotism, but the British woman claims a moral and spiritual superiority over her Eastern sisters.

This difference becomes intense in Jane's representation of Bertha Mason. Bertha's vampire appearance suggests she is sucking the lifeblood away from the innocent Rochester, who tells Jane he was as innocent as she is until he turned twenty-one and was married to Bertha: His goodness was taken by this savage woman. An insane Creole woman, Bertha represents British fears of both foreigners and women. The "blood-red" moon, a symbol of women's menstrual cycles, is reflected in her eyes, suggesting her feminine, sexual potency. Unlike Jane, Bertha refuses to be controlled; a woman whose stature almost equals her husband's, she fights with him, displaying a "virile" force that almost masters Rochester.

Post-colonial critics argue that Bertha, the foreign woman, is sacrificed so that British Jane can achieve self-identity. Their arguments suggest Rochester isn't as innocent as he claims; as a colonialist, he was in the West Indies to make money and to overpower colonized men and women. Notice how both Jane and Rochester emphasize his ability to control Bertha's brother, Richard. Much of Rochester's critique of Bertha hinges on her sexuality and exotic excess. When he first met her, Rochester's senses were aroused by her dazzle, splendor, and lusciousness. But he later found her debauchery to be his "Indian Messalina's attribute." Thus, the characteristics that first attract her to him, her sensual excesses, soon repulse him.

The representation of Bertha presents native peoples in the colonies as coarse, lascivious, and ignorant, thus justifying St. John's missionary role: Bertha is a foreign "savage" in need of British guidance and enlightenment. Just as Jane retrains the minds of her lower-class students in England, St. John will reform the values of the pagans in India. Both characters perpetuate a belief in British, Christian-based moral and spiritual superiority. But St. John's inability to "renounce his wide field of mission warfare" shows that his colonialist impulse isn't based on compassion or mutual understanding, but on violence — violating the minds of native peoples, if not their bodies.

For twenty-first-century readers, St. John's missionary zeal is morally suspect, because it shows his participation in the colonialist project, which resulted in violence against and violation of native peoples. St. John's cold-heartedness suggests the brutality and self-serving

function of colonialism. Jane claims St. John "forgets, pitilessly, the feelings and claims of little people, in pursuing his own large views"; imagine the damage he will inflict on any native people who resist him. Like Jane, they will be repressed by his merciless egotism. St. John spends the rest of his life laboring for "his race" in India. A great warrior, St. John sternly clears the "painful way to improvement" for the natives, slaying their prejudices of "creed and caste," though obviously not his own. In his zealous Christianity, he sees the Indians as an inferior race and hopes to implant British values in their supposedly deficient minds.

The British Empire is significant in reading *Jane Eyre*. Bertha Mason is born out of the ideology of imperialist axiomatic. When living in the colony in Jamaica, Rochester's torment and emotional 'storm' is calmed by the reassuring, civilizing European wind:

'A fresh wind from Europe blew over the ocean and rushed through the open casement: the storm broke, streamed thundered, blazed, and the air grew pure. I then framed and fixed a resolution' ... 'the sweet wind from Europe was still whispering in the refreshed leaves.' (Bronte, 325)

This shows that the colonies were wild, mad places, but the sanity of Europe can reach Rochester. The use of natural imagery to describe extreme emotion pervades the novel. Bertha's blazing rebellion to the slave uprisings in the West Indies and finds in this an oppression shared by white women and black people. Jane, as a child she describes herself as like 'any other rebel slave' and when Rochester buys her gifts she feels like a degraded slave. Racial representation is significant as slavery and oppression serve as an allegory for women's dependence on men.

### **Sexism**

In this novel, women were still regarded as second-class hierarchy. However some outstanding women appeared, such as famous women writers Bronte sisters. They were great English realists of the time. They created pictures of bourgeois civilization, showing the misery and suffering of the common people. Although capitalist has appeared, old convention and prejudice remained dominant. At this time, women were employed as cheap labor and were forced to do very hard jobs, and they did not get the vote. A feminist movement started fighting for women's equality and freedom, and for their educational and employment opportunities. The primary feminist position in the novel is quite radical, even up to the present day: women are creatures with sexual desires, rather than objects of desire only.

Women are traditionally described as “dependent” and “Self-pitying”, whilst masculinity holds connotations of “strength” and “self-reliance”. For the majority of *Jane Eyre* this is true of the male and female protagonists, Jane, and Mr. Rochester. Rochester is wealthy, independent and both physically and mentally strong, “My master’s colorless, olive face, square, massive brow, broad and jetty eyebrows, deep eyes, strong features, firm, grim mouth, - all energy, decision, will, were full of an interest, an influence that quite mastered me”. Here words like “square”, “broad” and “firm” connotes an appearance of physical and mental strength which also contribute to Rochester’s masculinity, making him appear attractive to the reader, although Jane comments that he is “ugly” and “not beautiful”. Her use of the word “mastered” also shows the power that Rochester holds over her, demonstrating that he is her “master”, emotionally as well as in her occupation as a “plain, Quakerish governess” in his house. She repeatedly calls him her “master” and talks about “serving”, demonstrating the unequal power balance in their relationship, also her dependence on him as her master.

Jane’s description of Rochester is not just a focus on his physical attributes, but she also talks about his “energy, decision, will”, something which she respects about him. With Rochester being unattractive in Jane’s eyes, and Jane describing herself as “plain”, they appear to be equal in appearance, and her respect for his sense (decision) shows that they are also equal on an intellectual level. However, Victorian society would have disapproved of a relationship between a wealthy man of standing in society and his governess. As a working woman, Jane would be expected to remain unmarried, or leave her job if she did decide to marry and marry a man of a similar social status to herself, such as a clergyman like St John Rivers. One of Jane’s problems with her relationship with Rochester is this inequality and this is one of the reasons she refuses to marry him.

## **Freedom**

This first sense, of going towards freedom, thus converts into another sense that can be heard in the word’s freedom bound, which is that freedom is bound, freedom is tied up, chained up, enslaved. Freedom has been bound; there is a lack of freedom caused by the presence of some kind of chains or bonds. Jane Eyre’s life is full of tears, misery, and starvation, but she constantly strives to become stronger and has the courage to fight continuously for freedom and equality. She becomes strong-minded and persistent in struggling against her fate. From Jane’s journey of life, we have learned that she was exposed to a hostile environment but continuously and fearlessly struggles for her ideal life. The story can be interpreted as a symbol

of the independent spirit. When Jane lives in Gates head for ten years, little Jane suffers with hard work, mistreatment, and unchanging hatred, so Jane has no one to rely on.

Jane struggles continually to achieve equality and to overcome oppressions. In addition to social hierarchy, she must fight against patriarchal domination. In Gates head, because John Reed beats Jane, Jane strikes back, the servants at here cry ‘for sham! for Sham! What shocking conduct, Miss Eyre, to strike young master.’ Jane is surprised to say “Master! How is he, my master? Am I a servant?” In Jane’s mind they are equal which is different from other servants who think that they are inferior that that upper class. At Lowood Institution, the school headmaster is a very serve and hard-hearted, especially very arbitrary, which make another person yield to him, but Jane is unwilling to obey him, because Jane thinks that they are equal in mind.

Jane’s search for independence from the men in her life is a continuing theme in the novel. Mr. Brocklehurst, who “buys all our food and clothes”, is domineering and attempts to make the girls at the Lowood school “humble” through the means of food deprivation, cutting off their hair, and allowing them no luxuries or comforts: “You are aware that my plan in bringing up these girls is, not to accustom them to habits of luxury and indulgence, but to render them hardy, patient, self-denying”.

Jane’s life is full of passion, but she is reason as well. In her childhood, Jane struggles for freedom and independence with passion. When Jane hears, that Rochester will get married with a noble beautiful Miss Blanche Ingram, Jane cannot help crying to Rochester “do you think I can stay here and become nothing to you? Do you think because I am poor, humble, and plain? I am soulless and heartless. You think wrong!” when Jane knows they love each other sincerely and deeply. Jane also arranges her life like before as a governess, keeping her dignity and independence. When Jane knows Rochester has married and his wife is alive, Jane is passion in her heart. Jane stays in a room lonely think much, finally says, “I must go that I perceived well” (Chapter 26).

However, another important theme is the voice of women. Jane is willing to express her needs and opinions in a society that values women who are submissive and accommodating. This leads to frequent punishment in her early life and seems much less attractive than her childhood friend Helen's more gentle style. In the end, though, Jane develops a strong sense of herself and continues to rise. Her sense of independence allows her to reject school master Mr. Brocklehurst's hypocritical self-righteousness and later, a loveless marriage to St. John Rivers. It also makes her much more attractive to Mr. Rochester, the real love of her life.

## Ethnicity

Jane Eyre allows an ethnocentric viewpoint that varies in its representation of race and, in consequence, significance. The two most obvious representations of race are through Bertha Mason and St John Rivers, but Charlotte Brontë also uses subtle language to connote racial stereotypes. It has been suggested that Charlotte Brontë uses representation of race as a metaphor for class and gender inequality. It is also important to note the significance of the representation of race on the nineteenth-century novel's readership, predominately white middle class women, to our own contemporary post-colonial ideas of race and British imperialism.

Jane Eyre represents race as negative, but it is important to consider nineteenth century ideology and culture that was exceptionally scared of racial differences; imperialism often only reinforced these anxieties. Charlotte Brontë reveals her ethnocentricity in the novel when it is read today, this would have varied significantly to her contemporary audience in a time when imperialism was not seen as a stain on British history as it often is today. Brontë also uses race ironically to highlight snobbery and class prejudice in Victorian England. The representation and significance of race in Jane Eyre help to show some the inequalities that existed in nineteenth century England and some of the struggles to break away from them.

The racial representations of Bertha Mason are significant as the reader sees her through Jane's eyes before we hear her story. The images are strong and animalistic. 'a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it groveled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched growled like some strange, wild animal: but it was covered with clothing, and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a man, has its head and face.' (Brontë, 446). Jane's meeting with Bertha Mason is loaded with animalistic imagery as Bertha Mason 'gazed wildly' (Brontë, 447) at Jane and biting of her husband is an animalistic act. Jane is dehumanizing Bertha with the description turning her into something 'wild' and 'grizzled' and then is more sinister with 'goblin' and 'vampire', clearly signaling the Gothic. The reader then identifies this as the 'discolored', 'savage face' that tears Jane's veil, 'the fearful blackened inflation of the lineaments! ... the lips were swelled and dark; the brow furrowed: the black eyebrows widely raised.' (Brontë, 299).

Brontë's representations of race here show Bertha Mason as non-white and conform to racist 19<sup>th</sup> century stereotypes. However, the representation of Bertha Mason's ethnicity becomes more ambiguous as Rochester reveals their story. She is described as a Creole, which at the time could have meant black or white. As her father was an 'old acquaintance' of

Rochester's father and as she is white enough to marry a wealthy English man the reader can assume she is predominately white.

Although ambiguous as a 'Creole' Bertha Mason does become blacker as her sanity declines; she is compared by Rochester to Blanche Ingram as 'tall, dark, and majestic' when they first met; (Bronte, 321) this contrasts starkly with the animalistic image of Bertha Mason in the attic. The representation of Bertha Mason's mother 'the Creole, was both a madwoman and a drunkard' was also significant to the 19<sup>th</sup> century audience.

The thing is, should we consider it a coincidence that Bertha Mason is a Creole women described in the following manner: "Bertha Mason is mad: and she came of a mad family; idiots and maniacs through three generations! Her mother, the Creole, was both a madwoman and a drunkard! – as I found out after I had wed the daughter" (Bronte, 445). The racial representation of Bertha Mason is compounded by the juxtaposition with Jane Eyre. Jane is often described as pale and small, in contrast to the tall and dark 'Indian Messalina' (Bronte, 328), and often described by Rochester as his 'English girl'. As well as represented racially different from Jane, Bertha is also the emotional opposite to Jane; Jane is composed and modest whereas Bertha is 'intemperate and unchaste' (Bronte, 323) The representation of Bertha Mason reinforced the fear of racial difference and of women that didn't fit the cultural British norm. The representation of race implies the non-white are insane, sexually provocative, and dangerous. The representation of the race of Bertha Mason is significant as a contrast to Jane. The use of the Gothic, and patterns of imagery in Jane's ordeal in the red room, could be said to link Jane and Bertha on a psychological level in terms of struggle against social oppression with Jane's internal struggles with rebellion and control. From a post-colonial perspective, Bertha represents the negative effects of English colonialism. As a West-Indian-Creole, Bertha has been brought to England against her will and introduced to a culture that she is not accustomed to. According to this post-colonial reading, Bertha Mason is locked away due to her cultural differences.

Race is also used in *Jane Eyre* with irony to highlight class snobbery and prejudice in British, nineteenth century society. Mrs Dent's criticism of Jane portrays her as a snob 'it was a reminder that one of the anathematized races was present ... "I see all the faults of her class"' (Bronte, 183) Here, Bronte is using race ironically to satirise class and gender inequality. Middle-class women were at the mercy of judgements their fathers made and in consequence would end up in the 'slavery' of governessing. Women's reliance on men often left them with no money or inheritance. The image of a lonely middle-class governess suggests promiscuity, madness, and a challenge to the domestic stability. This also links to the depiction of Bertha.

## **Injustice of Jane Eyre**

One of the most important themes may be the injustice of a rigid class structure. Because Jane is an orphan, her life choices are far more limited than those of many of her relatives and peers, even though she is mostly more intelligent, capable, and hard-working than they are. This becomes especially clear when she and Rochester fall in love. They clearly share an authentic intimacy that should have been celebrated from its inception, but Jane is reluctant to express her feelings or let others know about their bond because of the difference in their social status. Jane suffers with injustice throughout her lifetime, from Mrs. Reed's abuse to Mr. Brocklehurst's false accusations. She finds it hard to ignore it and always wants to take revenge. Although Helen also suffers from injustice in Lowood, she does not act because she believes that justice will be found in G-d's ultimate judgment. Miss Temple, a teacher at Lowood, is a great role model to the girls at Lowood. If injustice is done to her students, she will stand in their defense and only look at the good. Jane, Helen, and Miss Temple all respond to injustices in different ways at different times.

Jane is a person, who desperately struggles to attain her identity in the mist of temptation, isolation, and impossible odds. Although she possesses a strong soul, she must fight against others wills constantly impose on her. She is a character full of resistance, the resistance between rebellion and convention, and that of self-respect and self-contempt. She is a character of complexity, which lies in her being neither holy good nor hellish evil. In essence, her character is a direct assault on Victorian morality, which is a challenge to the traditional role of women, religion, and mortality in the Victorian society.

The child less than ten years old cries for liberation from the injustice and despotic custody of her only aunt. In one day, the pampered and atrocious John Reed is unprovoked to strike Jane. However, there is limit to Jane's tolerance, so she starts to fight back. Little Jane denounces him "wicked and cruel boy! You are like a murderer—you are like a slave—driver—you are like the Roman emperors." Then Jane is doomed to be locked in the Reed room by her aunt Mrs. Reed, which is a square chamber, very seldom sleep in it. It is the largest one in the mansion but is chilly. All its arrangements like a pale throne. What's more, her uncle is dead in just the room. In Jane's inner heart, a kind of bitter vigor still braces her likely mood of the revolted slave. Jane loses control of her feelings and cries, "unjust! unjust!" (Bronte, 19).

In Lowood School, Mr. Brocklehurst, the headmaster of the school, embodies an evangelical form of religion that seeks to strip others of their excessive pride or of their ability to take pleasure in worldly things. The representative Mr. Brocklehurst and other teachers in the school is hypocritical Christian. They possess charity but uses religion as a justification for

punish the orphans. For example, Helen, who represents a model of Christianity that stresses tolerance and acceptance, she ascetically trusts her own faith and turns the other cheek to Lowood's harsh policies. Although Helen has certain strength and intellectual maturity, her character involves self-negation rather than self-assertion and Helen's submissive and ascetic nature highlight Jane's strong-mindedness. Like Jane, Helen is an orphan who longs for a home, but Helen believes that she will find his home in Heaven rather than Northern England.

In addition, while Helen is not oblivious to the justices the girls suffer at Lowood, she believes that justice will be found in God's ultimate judgment. By contrast, Jane is so rebellious for the hypocritical religion and injustices, when Jane sees that a woman teacher strikes a dozen blows on Helen Burns, she thinks if she were in her place and if she struck her. She would take the stick from the teacher's hand and break it under her nose. Once, Jane encounters Miss. Scatcherd one of the teacher's reprimands Helen sharply and pins half dozens of untidily folded articles pin on her shoulder. Helen says to Jane that it scares indeed in shameful disorder. The next day, the teacher writes "Slattern" on a piece of pasteboard and put it on Helen's forehead until evening. Helen gets it patiently, without complaint. However, Jane resents the spectacle of Helen's resignation; there is intolerable pain in Jane's heart. Jane on the other hand, is unable to have such blind faith. Her quest is for love and happiness in the world, as well as fighting against the harsh environment, the unfair life and the conventional concept, which explore a new way for the people in a strictly hierarchal society. It is Jane's humanism under the faith of religion.

He is described as sallow and sickly, stocky, and gluttonous. He has an obviously overbearing presence, at least for Jane and, as we soon learn, for his mother and sisters too. He is domineering and bullies Jane simply because she is an orphan and not worthy of him or what "he" (by way of his future inheritance) believes he provides for her. He is indulged in this behavior by his mother who caters to his every whim and feels that he is the wronged party in any dispute. Jane is very aware of this indulgence and how it affects her. She is obedient to John even though she knows she will come to harm. For example, when he tells her to go stand by the window she does, and the following happens.

"I did so, not at first aware what was his intention; but when I saw him lift and poise the book and stand in act to hurl it, I instinctively started aside with a cry of alarm: not soon enough, however; the volume was flung, it hit me, and I fell, striking my head against the door and cutting it. The cut bled, the pain was sharp: my terror had passed its climax and other feelings succeeded" (Bronte, 12).

These feelings Jane talks about turn out to be rage and a feeling of injustice. She strikes back at John with her only available weapon, words. For her outburst, she is sent to the red-room, and, after this experience, Jane feels true indignation for the first time. She knows the way she is treated in the Reed household is not what she deserves, and she looks for a way out. This first dominant male character gives Jane an understanding of her own self-worth and an understanding of justice in general that she may not have had if she had been treated kindly by Master John. John, in his turn, sees an end that fits his life. He dies in disgrace of alcoholism and indulgence with many debts owed and nothing real to show for his life.

## CONCLUSION

The aspects of *Jane Eyre* that would be susceptible to a post-colonial approach are its connection with the West Indies, with the island of Madeira and with India: Rochester is sent to the West Indies as a young man and is tricked into marrying Bertha Mason. There is a sense that her madness is somehow related to her birthplace, which is thus represented as wild and barbaric. The reader is given almost no impression of what life might be like in Madeira. Its only function in the novel is a source of wealth, accumulated by Jane Eyre and passed on to his niece Jane. India is St John Rivers' intended destination, where he hopes to bring the light of Christianity to a heathen country. Its need of such enlightenment is insisted upon in the novel and so too are its dangers for English people, it seems to be regarded as almost inevitable that Jane would soon die if she went there, and the same fate seems to await St John at the end of the novel.

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