

Passion and Reason in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Irigarayan Feminine Divine

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Abstract. This paper examines Charlotte Brontë's masterpiece *Jane Eyre* (1848) through Irigaray's notion of feminine divine in order to argue how Charlotte Brontë's main characters achieve their autonomous gendered identity by expressing their erotic desire. It discusses the resistance of Charlotte Brontë's female protagonist, Jane Eyre, to the dichotomies of active subject/passive object, self/other, body/mind, passion/intellect, and the domination/submission through her ethical and intersubjective relationship with Rochester, her counterpart, rather than being an object of his desire. It is argued how Jane challenges these dualities of patriarchal society and the logic of the same by expressing her erotic nature. Where the patriarchal society tries to confine women in the patriarchal culture, Brontë develops Jane within and against those confines and allows her to experience her female desire by exploring the internal and external nature. Jane's liberation from the dualities can be read through the lens of Irigaray's feminine divine which focuses on women's autonomous gendered identity and creates a balance between their passion and reason. Charlotte Brontë indicates how women are able to achieve individuality, social standing, and subjective identity by expressing their female desire.

Charlotte Brontë, "a social revolutionary of her time in the realm of English fiction" and "the pioneer of the novel of emancipation" (Singh, 1987, 4), revolts against sexual repression. According to Nestor, she asserts that "women not only experience sexual desire but have a right to expect sexual fulfillment" (qtd. in Nestor, 1987, 34). She believes in the triumph of love for women: "Love was the breath of life to Charlotte Brontë; the be-all and end-all of human life" (Rickett, 1978, 521). Unlike most of her predecessors such as Jane Austen and William Makepeace Thackeray, who stress the necessity of chastising and controlling women's desire, Charlotte Brontë shapes the love relationship of her main characters, Jane and Rochester, within a romantic context beyond social limitations and restrictions of Victorian society, and beyond the traditional marriage and binaries of passion and reason by endowing her main characters with overwhelmingly passionate desire.

Some scholars have worked on Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* through social and feminist studies. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1976) explain the concept of 'angel in the house' and the dangers of passionate desire of Bertha Mason in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* who is called mad in the Victorian restrictive society. They read "Bertha as Jane's truest and darkest double.... The ferocious secret self Jane has been trying to repress" (360). Harold Bloom in *Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre* describes how the madwoman secreted in the attic made *Jane Eyre* a sample of Gothic Literature. Judith Mitchell in *The Stone and the Scorpion: The Female Subject of Desire in the Novels of Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, and Thomas Hardy* delineates female characters of the selected Victorian novels who are passionate in their erotic heterosexual relationship. She concludes *Jane Eyre* (1847) is "the most erotic English novel written in the nineteenth century" (44) because it "leaves intact the basic structure of male domination and female submission" (44). De Groot in *Equal We Are – Jane Eyre Versus the Victorian Woman* describes Charlotte Brontë's adherence to the morality of her time in *Jane Eyre* and displays the status of women during the Victorian age through some feminist elements. Elizabeth Imlay in *Charlotte Brontë and the Mysteries of Love* addresses the mythical stories and their relation to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*.

Among the feminist scholarly works which have been done on Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Stockton's *God Between Their Lips: Desire Between Women in Irigaray, Brontë, and Eliot* gave me more insight into how to read Irigaray in relation to the Victorian women writers. Stockton in her book explores the desire between women as a form of 'spiritual materialism' (1) in writings by Luce Irigaray, Charlotte Brontë, and George Eliot. Reaching to these relations, Stockton brings poststructuralist feminists, in particular Irigaray, and Victorians together, and discusses Irigaray's idea of spiritualizing material relations to elaborate desire without being bound to the lack that denies the pleasure. One important aspect of relations between Irigaray and these Victorian women writers is spiritual discourse and the figuration of god as the invisible and unseen body of women as well as desire between women. Irigaray in her earlier writings on desire between women powerfully exposes the Victorian fixation of women's mirrored relations. She clarifies these mirror relations as a result of self-love, as 'god' between their lips. The link between Irigaray, Charlotte Brontë, and George Eliot is thus to cast god (lacking) as a form of pleasure. Through a shared cultural heritage - Evangelicalism - the selected Victorian women writers explain the versions of 'god' that Irigaray's theories imply. Stockton's review of Victorian women writers' view of female characters' desire and their resistance to conventional norms and loves in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* and George Eliot's *Middlemarch* gave me the idea to bring into the light the female protagonist's individuality and her female desire in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* by examining Irigaray's feminine divine.

Although many critics and scholars have worked on Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* through feminist studies, none of them address the issue of female desire through Irigarayan feminine divine to show how Charlotte Brontë rejects the hierarchical and traditional binary oppositions of body and mind. Charlotte Brontë creates a free space and a new gender identity for her female character at the expense of traditional womankind. Her attempt to invert the male discourse is nowhere more powerfully evoked than in her female character's expression of her desire by writing her own life-history.

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* offers a struggle and violation against socially prescribed conventional roles and dualities, as she allows her heroine, Jane, to express her feelings through her writing and narration. Brontë describes Jane's quest for the liberation and autonomous identity through self-expression and love, just as Irigaray depicts women's becoming-for-themselves and their subjectivity to free women from the symbolic order in which "female sexuality has always been conceptualized on the basis of masculine parameters" (Irigaray, 1985a, 23). Brontë posits women in equality with men. She has Jane Eyre tell us that:

Women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; [...] and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex. (Brontë, 117)

Brontë introduces Jane Eyre as a passionate figure, and tries to free her from being "the angel of the house" by giving free rein to her feminine desires. Helen Moglen in *Charlotte Brontë: the Self Conceived* and Gilbert and Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic* show how Charlotte Brontë exposes women's desire through their love relationship. Nudd introduces *Jane Eyre* as "one of the most passionate of romantic novels" (1993, 140). Jane challenges the externally imposed "definitions of the self and establishes her own" (Noble, 1983, 199).

Throughout the novel, Jane struggles with dualities to liberate herself from social restrictions, displacement, and repression within the patriarchal social context of the Victorian age when women were dominated, mainly confined to their homes, forbidden to express their feelings and sexual desires, and regarded as "inferior to men and were therefore to be submissive" (Mitchell, 1981, 17). Jane becomes able to express her desire and to reject the labels imposed on her by men like John Reed and Mr. Brocklehurst, who insist on her sacrifice, submission and obedience and endeavor to master her in accordance with Victorian norms. She turns against her aunt, who has been trying to

control her in the light of Victorian norms, and finds freedom in doing so: “Ere I had finished this reply, my soul began to expand, to exult, with the strangest sense of freedom, of triumph, I ever felt. It seemed as if an invisible bond had burst, and that I had struggled out into un hoped-for liberty” (Brontë, 237). Jane tries to free herself from the restrictions of erotic desire in creating a balance between her passion and spirit. She also resists complying with the expectations of passionate Edward Rochester, and escapes from the rational domination of St. John Rivers. She resists accepting externally imposed perceptions by maintaining “the authority of her own perceptions, feelings, and experiences, an essentially Romantic authority” (Lanser, 1992, 183). Jane’s self-development is begun in her second engagement and love relation with Rochester, in opposition to the strict Christian beliefs of Puritanical desire which mortify the body for the sake of the spirit, as Brocklehurst, Helen Burns and St. John Rivers recommend. Finally Jane is able to create a balance between her passion and reason and express her female desire in relation to Rochester in the same way that Irigaray explains female power.

Jane Eyre’s self-realization happens throughout the different stages of her life - early childhood, adolescence, and adulthood - in relation to family, friends, and lovers. “Jane undergoes a voyage of self-discovery, retains some of her initial characteristics from her early childhood; she also develops further by acquiring characteristics as an adolescent and young adult which transfigure her into a new person” (Bloom, 2006, 28-29). In these stages, Jane attempts to free herself from mastery and oppression within the confines of Gateshead, Lowood, Thornfield and Moor House (Santos, 2002, 1). In her childhood at Gateshead, Jane lives in a household that represses candid expression of her desire. At this stage, she describes herself as an alien and isolated being who has not come to terms with herself, her environment, or society in general:

I was a discord in Gateshead-hall: I was like nobody there: I had nothing in harmony with Mrs. Reed or her children, or her chosen vassalage. If they did not love me, in fact, as little did I love them. They were not bound to regard with affection a thing that could not sympathize with one amongst them, a heterogeneous thing, opposed to them in temperament, in capacity, in propensities; a useless thing, incapable of serving their interest, or adding to their pleasure; a noxious thing, cherishing the germs of indignation at their treatment, of contempt of their judgment. (Brontë, 16)

At this stage, Jane does not behave in the way society expects of her in the restrictive Victorian age, to be ‘an angel in the house’. Rather, she feels the need to experience and express love. She replies to Mrs. Reed: “You think I have no feelings, and that I can do without one bit of love or kindness; but I cannot live so” (63). She is punished for her rebellious stubborn behavior and then is placed in the red-room. Brontë displays an internal conflict within Jane in the red-room, as Irigaray in *An Ethics* refers to women’s entrapment in patriarchal society:

[She lacks] the power to clothe herself [...] in something that would speak her jouissance, her sexuate body, and would offer her the clothing and protection *outside* of that home which she is *inside*. Tradition places her within the home, sheltered in the home. But that home [...] places her in *internal exile*. (1993, 65)

In the red-room, the two sides of Jane’s psyche, her passion and reason, are in conflict; thus she suffers a kind of “internal exile”, unsure of who she is. The shock of imprisonment in the red-room teaches her to come to terms with what she must do in her quest for self-actualization, to control her rebellious behavior and passionate desire, and to discover her true self, while her reason makes her aware of unjust and insupportable oppression in red room: “‘Unjust!—unjust!’ said my reason, forced by the agonizing stimulus into precocious though transitory power: and Resolve, equally wrought up, instigated some strange expedient to achieve escape from insupportable oppression—as running away” (Brontë, 23). Jane articulates “her rational desire for liberty” and her “passionate drive toward freedom” (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979, 348, 342).

In the first passage from Gateshead to Lowood School, Jane tries to free herself from the restrictions and loneliness of her cruel aunt’s house. Learning from Helen, she changes her attitude to life. However, she moves from the darkness and the spiritual unconsciousness of Lowood to

Thornfield, and from dependence and obedience to independence and self-knowledge, only when she enters into a love relationship with Rochester. She is forced to leave Rochester when he begins to threaten her self-development, in order to resolve the tension she has experienced throughout her relationship with him. She escapes from Rochester's extreme passionate desire in Thornfield, from patriarchal society, through meditation in nature, towards self-realization, taking "a road which led from the sun" (Brontë, 373). Jane tries to find her identity through nature; this can be connected to Irigaray's ideas about "the particular female interaction with nature" which "empower[s] women instead of perpetuating the relegation of women to the subordinate sphere in the culture/nature binary" (Irigaray and Green, 2008, 3).

Jane's move from Thornfield to Moor House and her encounter with St. John help her to discover herself and her true love and to feel real freedom. Her journey of self-discovery through leaving the passionate Rochester and living at Marsh End is an internal experience. It is a connection between her nature, her feelings, perceptions and passions, and the culture in which she lives. In her quest for self-awareness, Jane distances herself from her sensual pursuits, and goes through the different stages of identification like intellectual awareness and meditation. She describes her inner journey as follows:

I can live alone, if self-respect and circumstances require me so to do. I need not sell my soul to buy bliss. I have an inward treasure born with me, which can keep me alive if all extraneous delights should be withheld, or offered only at a price I cannot afford to give. (Brontë, 277)

Jane escapes from Rochester's possessive love through her meditation in loneliness to reach a level of awareness. She discovers her deep inner relationship with nature and being in tune with the natural elements. She looks for solace through "the universal mother" within her inner self. She "seeks her breast and asks repose" (163). Jane seeks the path of spiritual consciousness and self-love through embracing "Mighty Mother" (223), just as Irigaray refers to women's relationship to the mother, to origin, offering female desire in contrast to the universalizing single sex model of the Christian masculinity: "[Woman] remains within oneself... to communicate with the soul of the world... and afterwards to return to the solitude and silence of her soul" (2004, 167). Charlotte Brontë describes the role of "Mighty Spirit" (Brontë, 262) in shaping Jane's identity and self-awareness in a way strikingly similar to the way in which Irigaray addresses feminine divine as a potential female transcendental relation and a total identification with Her. For Irigaray, women's prolonged and unresolved bond with the mother is essential in establishing their relational sense of identity, while Brontë sees this female power as a "sympathetic extension . . . of the personality" (Moglen, 1976, 131). Jane leaves Rochester by drawing upon an "inward power" (Brontë, 266), a universal feminine divine energy, a source of her feminine spiritual strength and fulfillment. Jane hears the whispers of the universal Mother, "My daughter, flee temptation," and she replies, "Mother, I will" (281). Nancy Pell has claimed that Brontë is articulating an alternate religious system: "She is replacing God the father with the universal mother, Nature" (1977, 402). Heilman in "Charlotte Brontë, Reason, and the Moon" (283-302) interprets the goddess as an emblem of intuitive or imaginative aspects of the universe. Brontë intentionally locates divine power internally as an "inward sensation" in "the Nature-Imagination-God" through Jane's transition from patriarchal "God" to "Mighty Spirit" (Brontë, 262).

During her three days of rambling in an unsocialized setting, the center of the universe shifts to Nature which allows Jane to love herself, when she looks at the pure sky and feels how "the dew fell with propitious softness" (163). She expresses her love of Nature when she says: "Nature seemed to me benign and good; I thought she loved me, outcast as I was; and I, who from man could anticipate only mistrust, rejection, insult, clung to her with filial fondness. To-night, at least, I would be her guest, as I was her child: my mother would lodge me without money and without price" (163). Jane's desire of nature and her self-love are fundamental to her love relation; as Irigaray points out "it would be desirable that personal becoming, accompany the becoming of the other" (2004, 188). The fundamental relationship of Jane with Mother Nature as the female genealogy and the lost sense of touch is rediscovered, revalued, and reaches its fullest expression in this part of the novel. Jane's

knowledge of her inner self as a result of divine assistance “in the open air” (Brontë, 268) helps her to return to Rochester when she hears his voice crying “Jane” three times, asking her to come back to him. “I recalled the voice that I had heard ... It seemed in me—not in the external world” (266). Jane says to herself: “[I]t is the work of nature. She was roused, and did - no miracle - but her best” (262). It is as if another part of her is reminding her of what she really needs. Jane describes this intense awareness of her self as follows:

My heart beat fast and thick: I heard its throb. Suddenly it stood still to an inexpressible feeling that thrilled it through, and pressed at once to my head and extremities... it acted on my senses... they were now summoned, and forced to wake. They rose expectant: Eye and ear awaited while the flesh quivered on my bones. (Brontë, 369)

Nature allows Jane to achieve self-awareness and self-knowledge and to cultivate her imagination, her private fantasies for the encounter with Rochester. Jane says:

[Nature] allow my mind’s eye to dwell on whatever bright visions rose before it—and, certainly, they were many and glowing ... and best of all, to open my inward ear to a tale that was never ended—a tale my imagination created, and narrated continuously; quickened with all of incident, life, fire, feeling, that I desired and had not in my actual existence. (269)

Jane’s self-identification by resisting the duality of feeling and reason directs her toward her lover, Rochester. “Jane’s imagination takes her beyond the limits of her present knowledge” (Glen, 1999, 130). The seeds of Jane and Rochester’s love flourish in their isolation, through the appreciation of nature. Jane’s self-knowledge is awakened when she experiences a direct relation with nature, as she prays in solitude of nature: “I desired liberty; for liberty I gasped; for liberty I uttered a prayer ... then I cried,..., grant me at least a new servitude! (Brontë, 374). Abrahams says, “Nature tends towards celebrating the divinity of humanity rather than reaffirming an otherworldly deity” (qtd. in LaMonaca, 1999, 40).

Charlotte Brontë brings to light a new way of looking at the natural world, in contrast to patriarchal society which tries to usurp and dominate Nature and define it as the Other to masculine world. In this novel, Nature is internalized and is considered a part of the feminine Self. Her heroine tries to maintain harmony with nature and to subvert patriarchal definitions of womanhood. Brontë creates a connection between women and Nature, and proves that society’s expectations of woman as Nature have to be rethought and reworked, and that a close relationship with the natural world empowers women and femininity more than was previously thought and believed. Brontë shows Jane’s resistance to the accepted norm of society through expressing her passionate feeling in the exploration of Nature and her female nature. “Brontë was a woman whom we know from her writing was full of passionate desires and impulses” (Fraser, 2012, 186). Santos points out, “[Jane Eyre] presents a series of oppressive situations in which continue a dynamic process that embodies the struggle for identity” (2002, 1). It is with this self-knowledge that Jane decides to marry Rochester when she is able to differentiate the true love of Rochester from St. John’s passionless love. Jane describes the integration of her thought and imagination as follows:

I looked into my heart, examined its thoughts and feelings, and endeavored to bring back with a strict hand such as had been straying through imagination’s boundless and trackless waste, into the safe fold of common sense. (Brontë, 140)

Brontë reconciles the polarities of the spiritual and the sexual to free Jane from the symbolic roles which confine her to nurturing and physical motherhood and womanhood and channel her desires into fulfilling male ends. She proposes Jane’s feminine desire in a society where religion plays a role to suppress feminine sexuality and the patriarchy is dominant. She gives Jane the freedom of voice to express her feelings, as Irigaray offers “becoming the woman” as an alternative to “completely masculine” ideal of becoming: “becoming God” (2002, 92). Jane rejects both elements of passion and spirit in their extremities and manages to find a balance between the dualities to develop her individual identity. She finds the union of what at first appears to be opposites. She finds

an outlet for her passionate intensity in imagination which carries her beyond the constraints of physical sensation.

In contrast to Jane who tries to manage her desires, Brontë portrays Bertha Mason, with her strong passionate desire, as a “goblin” and “demon” (280), to suggest how passionate sexual instinct taken to an extreme is horrifying and the manifestation of madness; thus, she shows the forbidden potentials of human instinct. Bertha’s madness is represented by her extreme passionate desire which must be controlled to be a good Victorian woman: “Bertha is the suppressed self which all women writers experience” (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979, 223). She shows the danger of giving free rein to passion with balance. Rochester suggests that it is Bertha’s “excess” of sexuality and passion that develops “the germs of insanity” (Brontë, 270) and her insanity originates in a tendency to be “intemperate and unchaste” (270). Noticeably, Rochester’s accusations are intended to deny Bertha as a proper wife. Rochester does not accept an “infernal union with her” (268) and calls her female passionate desire a “crime” (268). Bertha’s madness is offered as a consequence of uncontrolled and unchanneled fiery energy, and is associated with the strong sexual appetite of the unruly flesh which leads to “moral insanity” (Showalter, 1977, 120). Showalter creates “the connection between madness and the body, fiery emotions, and sexual passion in Victorian ideology” (113). She proposes two extreme elements of the mind and the body in *Jane Eyre* in spiritual and angelic Helen Burns and passionate Bertha Mason. Jane refuses to conform to the self-denying image of Helen Burns, and resists following Bertha’s passionate desire which leads to her madness and exclusion from society.

Bertha is a distorted mirror-image of Jane, a kind of warning to Jane to control her passionate desire. She becomes the agent of freeing Jane from the taboo of passion and sexuality, representing the projections of the suppressed or totally unconscious tendencies of the psyche itself. Jane sympathizes with Bertha as “that unfortunate lady” and criticizes Rochester’s behavior with Bertha. Bertha is a victim of patriarchal imprisonment, yet she in turn becomes the agent of the fall of patriarchy. While Rochester views Jane as a good woman in the conventional images of patriarchy, “a fairy, an elf, a sprite”, and an angel (Brontë, 241), Bertha represents the antithesis of this conventional feminine image.

Bertha’s condemnation to madness and her psychological conflict in confronting patriarchal norms is comparable to Irigaray’s interpretation of women’s madness and hysteria, and the corporeal suffering of female insanity as the effect of women’s incorporation within a symbolic order. For Irigaray, “women’s madness and hysteria, is the effect of women’s subjection to a symbolic order which is alien to the female flesh” (Mulder, 2006, 3). These women suffer in their bodies, because they lack the symbolic means to express and channel their desire. This interpretation implies, however, that Irigaray sees this suffering as an indication of a desire which cannot be recognized in the dominant symbolic order. She indicates how society cannot eliminate the innate disruptive, revolutionary desire force of the female, and therefore labels mad any woman who tries to express her feminine desire. Irigaray accepts the figure of the madwoman as liberating and redemptive. She changes the symbolic thought of corporeal suffering of mad and hysterical women by constructing a divine female, a feminine social position, and by defining a gendered identity for women. Irigaray says:

Thus [...] woman remains the place for the inscription of repressions. All of which demands that, without knowing it, she should provide a basis for such fantasies as the amputation of her sex organ, and that the ‘anatomy’ of her body should put up the security for reality. [...] She will therefore be despoiled, without recourse, of all valid, valuable images of her sex/organs, her body. She is condemned to ‘psychosis,’ or at best, ‘hysteria,’ for lack—censorship, foreclosure, repression—of a valid signifier for her ‘first’ desire and for her sex/organs. (1985b, 55)

As Irigaray offers the balance of dualities, Brontë attempts to show the balance of conflicting extremities and dualities of passion and reason in Jane’s feelings and experiences. Jane’s inner struggle between dualities of sense and sensibilities, and passion and reason is clearly visible in the way she controls her feeling in these following extracts:

Sense would resist delirium: judgment would warn passion. (Brontë, 133)

I was actually permitting myself to experience a sickening sense of disappointment; but rallying my wits, and recollecting my principles, I at once called my sensations to order. (141)

Ere long, I had reason to congratulate myself on the course of wholesome discipline to which I had thus forced my feelings to submit. (141)

Jane struggles with the traditional dualities and extremities of passionate desire and rationality since her early rebellious nature has taught her to resist the dominant passion. As a result, she learns to manage her body and mind as Irigaray emphasizes the balance between dualities. The study displayed that Charlotte Brontë, like Irigaray, proposed feminine desire for expressing women's feelings and their self-knowledge, and endowed her heroine with desire and passion. While patriarchy reduced desire between sexes to procreation, Brontë overcame social conventions, traditional dualities, and religious barriers by introducing Jane as a passionate as well as rational girl.

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