

# Unveiling *Jane Eyre*: Space Escape and the Construction of Subjectivity through a Foucauldian Lens

**Zhixing Nie**

<https://orcid.org/0009-0005-5334-7512>  
Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia  
gs65852@student.upm.edu.my

**Hardev Kaur**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6979-8370>  
Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia  
hardevkaur@upm.edu.my

**Manimangai Mani**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6938-3749>  
Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia  
manimangai@upm.edu.my

## Abstract

This paper reexamines Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* through a Foucauldian lens, focusing on how traditional societal structures and the rise of capitalism impact women in 19th-century Britain, as observed by literary critic Sandra M. Gilbert and Gayatri C. Spivak. It analyses Jane's journey through oppressive environments such as Gateshead Hall, Lowood School, Thornfield Hall, and Marsh End, culminating in her retreat to Ferndean Manor. These settings are interpreted as sites of power that impose disciplinary measures on Jane, both physically and mentally, with windows symbolising possible escape routes. The study argues that Jane represents a female rebel challenging patriarchal constraints and seeking personal freedom and equality. Despite her attempts to transcend societal and economic confines, her ultimate settlement at Ferndean Manor highlights the persistent influence of the old societal order, illustrating the novel's realism and the complex, inescapable nature of reality. This interpretation enriches the ongoing scholarly discussion about *Jane Eyre* in light of its relevance to discussions of gender, power dynamics, and societal change.

**Keywords:** Charlotte Brontë; *Jane Eyre*; Michel Foucault; space escape; subjectivity

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## Introduction

The Victorian era saw the rise of “Victorianism,” a worldview that intertwined closely with the British way of life, impacting universal suffrage and technological progress (Roberts et al., 2016). Moran (2006, 35) notes that Victorian attitudes towards women were complex: they were simultaneously idealised, protected, and oppressed, sparking widespread debate about their societal roles. Literary figures like Robert Southey dismissed women’s literary ambitions, as seen in his critique of Charlotte Brontë (Gaskell 2009, 121). In this context, Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* emerges as a revolutionary character. Brontë challenges the era’s restrictive norms through her character in the autobiographical novel, using *Jane Eyre* to carve out a space for female expression and agency.

The portrayal of Jane Eyre as a prototypical female rebel has ignited debate among certain critics. Some argue that *Jane Eyre* (1847) challenges traditional notions and tramples on traditional customs (Anonymous 1847, 360-389). Critics even condemn the novel’s intention to subvert established social, cultural, and political orders (Bossche 2005; Peters 2004; London 1991; Talairach-Vielmas 2009; Plasa 2013). Richard (1971, 464) suggests that Charlotte Brontë, in *Jane Eyre*, advocates for the fair treatment of governesses and argues for women’s equal rights, making it undoubtedly a feminist manifesto. Gilbert and Gubar (2020, 165) further assert that Jane’s rejection of societal norms and standards demonstrates her rebellious feminist tendencies against the powers inherent within them. Indeed, in the 1960s and 1970s, feminists see *Jane Eyre* as a triumph of women’s resistance against paternalistic oppression (Loh 2015; Bruce and Smits 2015; O’Malley 2018). However, in the 1980s, feminists began to question the anti-traditional nature of *Jane Eyre*, suggesting that the novel upholds the patriarchal system. Contemporary scholars like Spivak (2014, 243-261) even argue that the character’s pursuit of “companionate love” and John Rivers’ sacrifice for a “social mission” distinctly reflect the preservation of Victorian-era ideological systems.

Jin et al. (2022, 25-39) also highlight that Jane Eyre actively challenges 19th-century patriarchal norms and the era’s rising capitalist influences while still engaging cooperatively with men. In doing so, she leverages her unique strengths as a woman to advocate for gender equality. Jane’s dual approach of resistance and cooperation moves beyond traditional binary oppositions in culture, showcasing a more pluralistic way of being. Thus, Jane Eyre represents more than just a female character; she embodies a transformative model for constructing subjectivity. A close reading of the novel reveals that Jane Eyre develops her sense of self by creating feminine discourse spaces within various settings: Gateshead Hall, Lowood School, Thornfield Manor, Marsh End, and Ferndean Manor. Throughout these transitions, the power dynamics within each space shape Jane’s psyche and physicality, influencing her journey of self-construction.

According to Michel Foucault, society is perceived as a field of power where individuals’ psyches and bodies are subjected to and participate in surveillance (Piro 2008, 30-46). In *Jane Eyre*, Jane’s journey from Gateshead Hall to Ferndean Manor

reveals a pattern: each escape is intertwined with the pervasive constraints imposed by patriarchal society. These constraints permeate society at various levels through surveillance (Manokha 2018, 219). From the societal realm of Lowood School to the intimate domains of the attic, windows, and drawers, spaces are imbued with meanings related to discipline and surveillance. Furthermore, Foucault suggests that control over discourse extends beyond internal and external realms, including control over speaking subjects. Foucault states, “We all know very well that we cannot freely say anything, and when we are happy at a certain time or place, we cannot just say anything we want. In the end, not everyone can say anything they want” (Gao 2005, 130). Sometimes, speaking subjects are even prohibited from entering certain discursive domains. This mechanism of discourse control is also evident throughout the plot of *Jane Eyre*, highlighting society’s restrictions on freedom of speech and the individual’s struggle for freedom through discourse. As a speaking subject prohibited from entering the male discourse domain, Jane seeks discourse space through “I must speak” and constructs discourse space through “we talk all day.” Foucault’s power theory offers a profound perspective for understanding the dual constraints, self-isolation, and metaphorical freedom depicted in *Jane Eyre*. By exploring societal power structures and discourse control, we better understand Jane’s journey of resistance and pursuit of freedom in the novel.

## Michel Foucault’s Theory

As Loonate (2023, 4) argues, Foucault’s ideas in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1995) revolve around key concepts: Torture, Punishment, Prison, and Discipline, each representing the state’s mechanisms of power over individuals. Foucault contends that power does not reside in a singular subject, contrary to the traditional model where power emanates from a centralised source (Taylor 2017, 8). Understanding power, according to Foucault (1982, 777-795), entails grasping the mechanisms through which it operates, including strategies, technologies, and implementation methods. Surveillance, as emphasised by Foucault, serves as a tool for enforcing disciplinary practices (Wood 2016, 245-263), increasingly evident in public institutions like hospitals, asylums, prisons, and schools over time and in societal development.

Foucault further introduces the term ‘docile bodies’ to illustrate the amalgamation of both analysable and manipulable bodies, acting as sources of ‘power-knowledge.’ While power has historically targeted the body as an object, this new carceral regime stands out for its exceptional distinctiveness due to (1) its meticulous and subtle scale of control, emphasising individualised rather than mass-oriented approaches; (2) its reliance on forces rather than signs for exerting control; (3) its technique based on uninterrupted and constant supervision implemented through a ‘codification that partitions time, space, movement’ as closely as possible (Foucault 1977, 137). The disciplines enabling such control have become ‘general formulas of domination,’

differing from previous forms like slavery or vassalage, representing a form of ‘political anatomy’ applied to maximise utility and docility within individual bodies.

As Han (2023, 9) notes, Foucault’s power and discourse theory elucidates the intricate relationship between power, knowledge, and discourse. Foucault’s discourse theory underscores discourse as a practical activity and posits that its study should focus on its practical nature. Foucault (1980, 67) argues that discourse generation is foundational to power establishment, serving as the medium for power’s exercise and constant reflection. Thus, discourse plays a pivotal role in constructing power, and its loss can significantly impact power dynamics (Han 2023, 3). Within Foucault’s framework, discourse practice extends beyond linguistic behaviour to encompass a means of power exertion. Power institutions can influence and shape individuals’ cognition, behaviour, and identity by controlling and moulding discourse.

## The Dual Confinement under the Panopticons

In *Jane Eyre* (1847), The character’s journey unfolds across diverse settings, including Gateshead Hall, Lowood School, Thornfield Manor, Marsh End, and Ferndean Manor, all narrated from a first-person perspective. These formative experiences profoundly shape Jane Eyre’s character and reflect the author’s stance on mental and physical discipline strategies. Leveraging Foucault’s assertion that discipline is a key tool of modern power techniques implemented within specific enclosed spaces (Piro 2008, 30-46), this article argues that locations like the Red Room in Gateshead Hall and Lowood School epitomise ideal disciplinary spaces. In these settings, Jane finds herself ‘imprisoned literally as well as figuratively,’ echoing the sentiments expressed by Gilbert and Gubar (2020, 340).

According to Foucault,

The Panopticon may even provide an apparatus for supervising its mechanisms. In this central tower, the director may spy on all the employees that he has under his orders: nurses, doctors, supervisors, teachers, and warders; he will be able to judge them continuously, alter their behaviour, impose upon them the methods he thinks best; and it will even be possible to observe the director himself [...] enclosed as he is in the middle of this architectural mechanism. (1977, 204)

In *Jane Eyre*, Gateshead Hall emerges as a panopticon-like environment where Jane Eyre, around the age of 8, reluctantly resides with her aunt. Here, there are stark differences in subjectivity between Jane and her cousin, aunt, and Bessie, encompassing values, thought processes, cognitive methods, and behavioural patterns. As Tryniecka (2023, 31-48) emphasises, the Reed family embodies the dominant natural economic lifestyle and emerging capitalist values of British society at the time. They internalise traditional economic principles and capitalist ideals into their cognitive framework, viewing them as standards of behaviour and spiritual belonging. Following Mr. Reed’s death, Mrs. Reed and John Reed assume leadership within the family. The young and

greedy John adeptly navigates the internal rules between traditional economic and capitalist lifestyles, asserting authority over possessions with statements like, “Now, I will teach you to rummage my bookshelves; for they are mine; all the house belongs to me or will do in a few years” (Brontë 2008, 34). As Jane Eyre’s guardians, her aunt and cousin provide for her needs, expecting gratitude and obedience in return.

Indeed, Jane Eyre’s upbringing leaves her lacking in social exposure and assimilation into the prevailing value system due to the premature loss of her parents. Consequently, she navigates a chaotic world, allowing her childhood nature to flourish freely. With little understanding of the rules governing Gateshead Hall, this ‘panopticon,’ the young and inexperienced Jane Eyre engages only in children’s competitive games and protests perceived injustices. She keenly perceives the discord between herself and Gateshead Hall, lamenting, “I was a discord in Gateshead Hall; I was like nobody there; I had nothing in harmony with Mrs. Reed, her children, or her chosen vassalage” (38). Despite this, Bessie endeavours to guide Jane Eyre, asserting:

Moreover, you ought not to consider equality with Mrs. Reed and Master Reed because Mrs. kindly allows you to be brought up with them. They will have a great deal of money, and you will have none; it is your place to be humble and to try to make yourself agreeable to them. (36)

Bessie continues in a gentle voice, “You should try to be useful and pleasant, then perhaps you would have a home here; but if you become passionate and rude, Mrs. will send you away, I am sure” (36). Jane Eyre, valuing her nature and individuality, neither comprehends nor internalises the inherent rules of societal norms prevalent in the 19th century, which blend remnants of older social structures and emerging capitalist values. She refuses to conform to her soul and body behaviour to fulfil the personal value expectations of her aunt, cousin, and Bessie. Despite their expectations of Jane’s gratitude for their provision, she does not grasp the nature of monetary authority. Notably, Bessie, a servant who perceives her inferior economic status, attempts to guide Jane. Both find themselves in similarly subordinate positions.

The oppressive atmosphere of cold winds, gloomy clouds, and biting rain mirrors the confined state of little Jane Eyre in the Reed family, enveloping her in a sombre environment. Despite seeming integration into the family, Jane remains perpetually ostracised, momentarily forgotten only when concealed behind the ripple-patterned scarlet curtains. However, when her secret refuge is uncovered, her cousin John resorts to physical violence, pushing Jane to her breaking point. Trapped in the prison-like Gateshead Hall, the clashes in values between Jane Eyre and her aunt, cousin, and Bessie gradually escalate into interpersonal tensions and resistance. Despite their attempts to subdue her through verbal coercion, isolation, and deprivation, Jane’s resilience prevents her from succumbing to their dictates. In a culmination of frustration, her aunt locks Jane in the Red Room, symbolising her complete “imprisonment literally as well as figuratively” (Gilbert and Gubar 2020, 340):

The bedroom was a spare chamber, very seldom slept in [...] A bed, supported on massive mahogany pillars, hung with curtains of deep red damask [...] This room was chill because it seldom had a fire; it was silent because it was remote from the nursery and kitchens; solemn because it was known to be so seldom entered [...] and a miniature of her deceased husband; and in those last words lies the secret of the red-room-the spell which kept it so lonely in spite of its grandeur. (Brontë 2008, 37)

The room, once occupied by Mr. Reed until his passing nine years prior, retains an eerie ambience reminiscent of his patriarchal authority. Despite Mr. Reed's death, the presence of a concealed miniature portrait serves as a haunting reminder of male dominance. This spectral influence subtly manipulates Jane and Mrs. Reed, instilling an intangible sense of intimidation. During moments of confrontation, Jane inadvertently invokes the spectre of her late Uncle Reed, declaring, "My Uncle Reed is in heaven and can see all you do and think, and so can Papa and Mamma; they know how you shut me up all day long, and how you wish me dead" (47). Through this assertion, Jane challenges Mrs. Reed, leveraging the imagined surveillance of her deceased uncle to confront her oppressor. This oppressive dynamic within the room resonates with Foucault's exploration of punishment and surveillance, particularly his concept of the Panopticon. The notion that Mr. Reed's ghost is ever-present, observing Jane's every action, mirrors the panoptic gaze, where individuals internalise surveillance and discipline mechanisms, even without physical oversight. Thus, the room becomes a metaphorical panopticon, where Jane feels constantly monitored and confined by the spectre of patriarchal authority.

Despite Mrs. Reed's outward appearance of decisiveness within her family, her reaction to Jane's words reveals her unchecked apprehension. Subsequently, she harshly disciplines Jane, as described: "Mrs Reed soon rallied her spirits: she shook me most soundly; she boxed both my ears and then left me without a word" (47-48). Reflecting on a decade of unfair treatment and humiliation, Jane is consumed by anger and a rebellious spirit. After enduring a painful mental struggle, she resolves to "achieve escape from insupportable oppression" (38). However, the Red Room serves as a reminder of painful memories and fears, its crimson hue haunting her throughout her life.

The second place resembling the 'panopticon' is Lowood School, an institution that emphasises standardisation and its pervasive atmosphere of control and disciplinary power. As Foucault notes,

Discipline may be identified neither with an institution nor with an apparatus; it is a type of power, a modality for its exercise, comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, and targets; it is a 'physics' or an 'anatomy' of power, a technology. (1977, 215)

By employing professional terminology and technical means, Lowood School epitomises the value system of the dominant class within its specific society. The school

aims to mould students into the most obedient bodies and the most qualified subjects recognised by the dominant class, leaving no room for rebellious individuals. As Foucault observes:

Implementing disciplinary methods is now decentralized from a single power like royalty to the ‘apparatuses of production,’ such as factories and institutions responsible for transmitting knowledge and suppression, such as schools, hospitals, and prisons. Civilians are attached to these institutions, with their time and subject to production. (Li 2022, 24)

Similarly, the organised space of Lowood School employs various systems to regulate the minds and bodies of its students. As a charitable institution, Lowood reflects the evolving concepts of charity and education in its contemporary context, as well as the burgeoning capitalist lifestyle in British society at the time. Brocklehurst, the head of the boarding school, claims to save souls through physical punishment while leveraging his managerial authority to amass wealth. As depicted in the text, the description of the enclosed garden at Lowood School underscores the physical confinement and restriction imposed upon the students: “The garden was a wide enclosure, surrounded with walls so high as to exclude every glimpse of prospect” (Brontë 2008, 61). The high walls surrounding the garden symbolise the isolation and limited perspective enforced upon the students, aligning with the theme of controlling and disciplining individuals within organised spaces.

Moreover, the environment at Lowood School is depicted as almost isolated from the outside world. Girls are provided with thin clothing, and authorities withhold meals, resulting in inadequate nutrition and the spread of epidemics. Internally, students endure insufficient meals and unsanitary living conditions:

Discipline prevails in five minutes, the confused throng is resolved into order, and comparative silence quells the Babel clamour of tongues [...] and destines to serve the purpose of a workbag; all, too, wearing woollen stockings and country-made shoes fastened with brass buckles. Above twenty of those clad in this costume are full-grown girls or young women; it suits them ill and gives an air of oddity even to the prettiest. (60)

Notably, Lowood School is not a charitable institution but resembles a place of extreme hardship for its inhabitants. Foucault argues that disciplined societies rely on surveillance means to thoroughly monitor at all levels around the clock (Wu 2008, 112). At Lowood School, Jane Eyre and her peers endure soul-crushing discipline. Jane’s good friend Helen Burns experiences magnified consequences for small mistakes. However, in the face of unjust criticism and punishment, Helen responds with kindness, believing that “life is so soon over, and death is so certain an entrance to happiness” (Brontë 2008,76). Though their time together is brief, Helen assumes a pivotal role as a mentor in Jane’s life, profoundly shaping her personal growth. Specifically, Helen encourages Jane to embrace forgiveness, compassion, and resilience in the face of

adversity, fostering a transformation in her character towards greater empathy and inner strength.

Jane Eyre consciously finds herself in a passive position where she must accept and adhere to the values imposed by the school authorities, notably represented by Mr. Brocklehurst and others. However, Jane consistently fails to align with these values, escalating conflict between her and the school management. The school director, Brocklehurst, reinforces control and surveillance over Jane's behaviour by falsely accusing her of dishonesty. Confronting this discipline, however, Jane expresses her resistance during a conversation with Helen Burns, asserting, "When we are struck at without reason, we should strike back again very hard; I am sure we should—so hard as to teach the person who struck us never to do it again" (67). This statement reflects Jane's refusal to accept unjust treatment passively and her determination to assert herself in the face of oppression. During the eight tranquil years at Lowood School, Jane formed meaningful connections with Helen Burns and Miss Temple while receiving a quality education. Through their guidance, she makes significant progress in knowledge and character, learning emotional control, harmonious thinking, and the art of self-discipline. However, Jane's restlessness resurfaces after Helen's death and Miss Temple's departure. Overwhelmed with despair, she cries out, "Grant me, at least, a new servitude!" (86), marking the beginning of her second journey of escape in life against this backdrop.

### A Self-enclosed Cell in the Panopticon

Thornfield Hall serves as the third location that bears a resemblance to the Panopticon. Through its architectural layout and power dynamics within its walls, Thornfield Hall mirrors the surveillance and control mechanisms characteristic of the Panopticon:

The steps and bannisters were of oak; the staircase window was high and latticed; both it and the long gallery into which the bedroom doors opened looked like they belonged to a church rather than a house. A very chill and vault-like air pervaded the stairs and gallery, suggesting cheerless ideas of space and solitude. (Brontë 2008, 95)

Upon her arrival, Jane is given a guided tour of Thornfield Hall, a grand mansion exhibiting a Gothic style characterised by wooden staircases, towering lattice windows, and long, dimly lit corridors. According to Klotz (2005, 13), Jane's perception of the rooms reflects her emotional state. Initially, she momentarily envisions the drawing room as an enchanting realm but swiftly dismisses it as "merely a very pretty drawing room" (99). This shift in Jane's perspective reminds her that she is solely Mr. Rochester's employee and should not allow herself to yearn for anything beyond that (Klotz 2005, 15).

The Gothic elements of Thornfield Hall and Jane's emotional responses are intricately tied to the novel's exploration of surveillance, control, and the quest for personal freedom. The mansion's Gothic architecture, with its grandeur and mystery, mirrors



panoptic surveillance mechanisms in several ways. Firstly, the towering lattice windows suggest visibility and exposure, like constant surveillance. While allowing light to penetrate the dark interiors, these windows also symbolise how visibility can be a form of surveillance—Jane is seen. However, she also sees, and in this mutual visibility, a form of control is exerted. Secondly, the long, dimly lit corridors of Thornfield Hall can be seen as physical representations of the psychological corridors of confinement and surveillance that Jane navigates. These corridors, connecting various rooms and spaces within the mansion, symbolise the pathways of surveillance that Jane must tread carefully, representing the thin line between her private self and the self subject to the gaze and judgment of others, especially Mr. Rochester, and the broader societal expectations of her role as a governess.

Jane quickly adapts to this new environment and spends a peaceful night without any disturbances. She begins embracing an entirely new phase of life. During the daytime, Thornfield Manor seems even more mysterious and peculiar than at night:

I, by dint of groping, found the outlet from the attic and proceeded to descend the narrow garret staircase. I lingered in the long passage to which this led, separating the front and back rooms of the third story, narrow, low, and dim, with only one little window at the far end.... (Brontë 2008, 100)

Upon their first encounter, Mr. Rochester leaves Jane with the impression of being domineering and unapproachable. His dark cheeks, stern features, and the presence of a large, lion-like dog all symbolise the essence of the “patriarchal death chamber” (Gilbert and Gubar 2020, 340). Jane instinctively senses that Mr Rochester has no “sympathy with anything in me [her]” (Brontë 2008, 105). Rochester’s gaze conveys his needs and cultural expectations to her, influencing Jane’s perception of herself, and her identity is influenced by how she interprets and responds to Rochester’s cultural norms, expectations, and society.

As Gilead (1987, 302-322) argues, while on the surface of consciousness, there exist ideas of equality, freedom, and philanthropy – bourgeois thoughts that Rochester seems to endorse regarding Jane’s equality, deep within the individual unconscious, ingrained traditional thoughts persist, reflecting the societal norms and values prevalent in the 19th-century setting of *Jane Eyre*. In the 19th century, women were expected to conform to specific roles and behaviours dictated by a patriarchal society, with marriage often viewed as the goal, providing security and social status. Despite her desire for love and autonomy, Jane is not immune to these societal pressures, as her upbringing and surroundings instilled in her the belief that marriage is a means of achieving stability and respectability.

It can be argued that Jane’s aspiration to marry Mr. Rochester and become the mistress of Thornfield Hall represents a dream she sets for herself. However, the mansion Mr. Rochester envisions for Jane can be likened to what Foucault describes as a Panopticon, effectively imprisoning Jane. The Panopticon is not merely a confined space but a power

structure, serving as a means of controlling and disciplining individuals (Bloch and Olivares-Pelayo, 2024). As Foucault notes,

The Panopticon must not be understood as a dream building: it is the diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form; its functioning, abstracted from any obstacle, resistance, or friction, must be represented as a purely architectural optical system: it is a figure of political technology that may and must be detached from any specific use [my emphasis]. (1977, 205)

In Jane's case, Rochester's control and discipline over her are evident not only in his emotional manipulation but also in his control over her social status and economic independence. While Jane initially approaches Rochester out of a need for employment, her expectations far exceed that. She yearns to find a partner who understands, respects, and treats her equally. While Rochester may fit this image in some respects, in terms of power and control, he ensnares her in a state of dependency and passivity. Rochester's actions infuriate Jane. She feels deprived, akin to a favoured slave of a sultan, and angrily exclaims:

Do you think I can stay and become nothing to you? Do you think I am an automaton? A machine without feelings? And can I bear to have my morsel of bread snatched from my lips and my drop of living water dashed from my cup? Do you think because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong! I have as much soul as you and full as much heart! And if God had gifted me with some beauty and much wealth, I should have made it as hard for you to leave me as it is now for me to leave you. (Brontë 2008, 199)

There exists a contradiction in values between Jane Eyre and Mr Rochester. Jane desires equal love and detests being "dressed up like a doll," opposing being called an "angel" (Berman 2000, 328-352). When she is referred to as "Mrs. Rochester," Jane feels a sense of "panic." Faced with economic vulnerability and attempting to maintain financial independence, Jane asserts that she still earns her living through teaching before marriage.

Love eventually blossoms between them after overcoming pride and prejudice. However, on the eve of their wedding, Bertha interrupts the ceremony, revealing herself as Rochester's wife. Jane's desperation for their love grows upon learning this truth. After the revelation of Rochester's marriage to Bertha, Jane faces a significant dilemma: whether to become Rochester's mistress or maintain her independence. Drawing inspiration from Helen Burns's example, Jane's strong self-awareness leads her to choose the latter. She prefers to remain a 'free and honest country governess' in a remote village rather than compromise and become dependent on someone else.

Gilbert and Gubar (2020, 348) argue that Rochester's secret wife represents Jane's suppressed self. In their love affair, Jane's dissatisfaction with her unequal status due to poverty and weakness hinders their happiness. The attic, where Bertha is confined, is a

metaphor for female isolation, confinement, loneliness, and punishment (Goodwin, 1998; Dios González, 2015; Poitras, 2020; Urteaga, 2023). It symbolises Rochester's male-dominated suppression and serves as a space for Bertha and Jane to contemplate their self-survival. During a Thornfield party, Jane sits in a dimly lit seat by the window, symbolising "a place of deterrence due to its intimidating position" (Pietrzak-Franger 2012, 268–273). As moonlight pours through the window, symbolising motherhood, Jane feels compelled to leave Thornfield and Rochester behind. Thus, on that moonlit night, Jane flees Thornfield, embarking on another tumultuous journey.

## The Marsh End under the Panopticon

Although there may not be a traditional power dynamic akin to a prison in Marsh End, there is a subtler form of surveillance and control, particularly evident in Jane's interactions with her cousin St. John. As a religious figure, St. John assumes a role like a prison warden, attempting to shape Jane's behaviour and decisions through moral and religious norms while imposing a sense of duty and obligation upon her. Thus, while Marsh End may not exhibit overt surveillance, St. John and his influence over Jane introduce monitoring and constraint elements within the narrative.

After losing her job and finding herself penniless, Jane ends up in Marsh End, becoming the fourth place in her tumultuous life. One evening, while looking out the window, Jane sees a heartwarming scene: two elegant young ladies and an older woman sitting around a fireplace, sharing stories. According to Bachelard (2014, 66), the lamp in the window is the house's eye, and, in the kingdom of the imagination, it is never lit out-of-doors but is enclosed light, which can only filter to the outside. The motif of light runs through the novel, symbolising both home and warmth and the enduring theme of prolonged waiting. Guided by the soft, dim glow, Jane cautiously approaches a small house, later confirmed as her cousins' residence. After being taken in by the family, she no longer feels like an "outcast, vagrant, and disowned by the wide world" (Brontë 2008, 256). Once again, she experiences the warmth brought by family.

In Marsh End, Jane's joy is short-lived as St. John coerces her into marrying him and accompanying him to India for missionary work, dedicating her life to the service of the faithful Lord and forever imprisoning her free-spirited soul. This St. John, assuming the role of replacing God for the benefit of all, eventually becomes akin to Brocklehurst, serving as an agent of patriarchal authority. As Ardener et al. (2021, xix) contend, missionaries are seen as carriers of thoughts and cultural tools. St. John, ruthless and cold, claims his divine duty is to go to India for missionary work, hoping to use "God's will" as an excuse to force Jane into marriage and join him in India. I argue that by compelling Jane to marry him and participate in missionary work through manipulation and coercion, St. John perpetuates the subjugation of women and reinforces established social hierarchies.

Jane's steadfast dedication to preserving her autonomy and agency delves into a broader thematic exploration of personal identity and self-determination. Through her actions, the novel offers a nuanced examination of the challenges inherent in navigating societal expectations while staying true to one's core beliefs. In expressing her resolve, Jane articulates:

I never in my life have known any medium in my dealings with positive complex characters, antagonistic to my own, between absolute submission and determined revolt. I have always faithfully observed the one, up to the very moment of bursting, sometimes with volcanic vehemence, into the other. (Brontë 2008, 300).

Brocklehurst's intervention removes Jane from the oppressive environment of Gateshead Hall, only to thrust her into the harsh realities of Lowood School, where she endures deprivation and illness. Rochester's entrance into her life introduces forbidden desires and complicates her path further. Lastly, St. John, under the guise of divine duty, seeks to confine Jane's spirit indefinitely, culminating in a series of adversities that define her tumultuous journey:

All this was torture to me-refined, lingering torture. It kept up a slow fire of indignation and a trembling trouble of grief, which harassed and crushed me altogether. I felt how, if I were his wife, this good man, pure as the deep sunless source, could soon kill me without drawing from my veins a single drop of blood or receiving on his crystal conscience the faintest stain of crime. I especially felt this when I made any attempt to propitiate him. (350)

As the moonlight bathes the room again, Jane Eyre stands firm in her refusal to succumb to a loveless union. In the quiet of the night, she senses a mystical beckoning, urging her to turn away from St. John's proposal and follow her path:

What have you heard? What do you see? Asked St. John. I saw nothing, but I heard a voice somewhere cry. Jane! Jane! Jane! Nothing more [...] I am coming! I cried. Wait for me! Oh, I will come!. (357-358)

## Jane Eyre's Quest for Autonomy: Constructing Space for Women's Discourse

Foucault (2005, 26) points out that "We are not free to just say anything," which means that power accompanies discourse. It is recognised that 'where there are power relations, there is the possibility of resistance' (Lilja et al. 2017, 40-54). As Han (2023, 20) underscores, discourse often operates under the control and selection of dominant groups, granting discursive power to those in authority. While women under patriarchal rule may appear confined by established authorities, their resistance is not passive; instead, they actively construct spaces for female discourse within their restricted spheres, challenging male dominance and affirming the worth of women (Foster 2012; Haskell 2016). Wang (2002, 154) delves into the dual nature of discourse, observing

that while certain discourses are open to all, others remain exclusive to specific speakers, with access restricted at times. This concept finds resonance in the narrative of *Jane Eyre*, a female speaker prohibited from entering male discourse domains. In her quest for a discursive space, Jane boldly declares, ‘I must speak,’ employing the phrase ‘we talk all day’ to carve out her domain for expression.

In the quest for discursive space, speech emerges as the primary dimension. The narrative unfolds at Gateshead Hall, where Jane finds solace on the windowsill immersed in “Bewick’s History of British Birds” (Brontë 2008, 15), relishing her moments of happiness until disrupted by John Reed’s taunts of “Boh! Madam Mope!” (16). Throughout her eight years at Lowood School, Jane undergoes a profound internal metamorphosis under the yoke of stringent discipline. However, the confines of Lowood fail to fulfil her longing for an ideal existence, and the rigidity of discipline proves insufficient in quelling her yearning for freedom:

I went to my window, opened it, and looked out [...] My eye passed all other objects to rest on those most remote, the blue peaks; it was those I longed to surmount; all within their boundary of rock and heath seemed prison-ground, exile limits [...] how I longed to follow it further [...] I desired liberty; for liberty, I gasped; for liberty, I uttered a prayer; it seemed scattered on the wind then faintly blowing. (86)

A vast expanse of physical space unfolds outside the window, framed by majestic mountains. However, within the confines of the window, Lowood’s social space is saturated with discipline and authority. When confronted with pivotal choices, Jane instinctively positions herself before the window, drawing strength from the boundless vista beyond. Within this expansive psychological realm, she transcends the limitations imposed by rules and hierarchy, soaring above the imposing walls of Lowood and navigating the overlapping peaks of the distant mountains through flights of imagination. During the gathering at Thornfield, Jane, dressed modestly, occupies a dimly lit seat beside the window, quietly observing the elegant upper-class ladies and misses. Her presence starkly contrasts the dazzling figures of the Ingrams and others illuminated by the room’s lights, symbolising her position on the periphery of their world.

As Hetherington (1998, 183-199) suggests, the windowsill, precisely because it is ‘on the edge,’ dimly lit, and inconspicuous, possesses a position endowed with deterrent power. In this concealed corner, Jane can discreetly observe everyone without being noticed. Every nuance of their clothing, posture, voices, features, and wrinkles is bare before Jane’s discerning eyes. From this vantage point, Jane seizes the initiative in her marginalised position. By observing others without being observed, Jane gains knowledge and understanding of the dynamics in the room. This knowledge empowers her to navigate social interactions more effectively, anticipate others’ actions, and make informed decisions. Despite her marginalised status, the windowsill gives Jane control over her environment. From this vantage point, she can choose when to engage with

others and withdraw, allowing her to assert agency in situations where she might otherwise feel powerless.

‘I must say it,’ Jane thinks, steeling herself, ‘I must speak my truth.’ Moreover, with resolve, she confronts Mrs. Reed, her voice trembling but firm:

I am not deceitful: if I were, I should say I loved you; but I declare I do not love you: I dislike you the worst of anybody in the world except John Reed; and this book about the Liar, you may give to your girl, Georgiana, for it is she who tells lies, and not I. (Brontë 2008, 48)

The phrase ‘I must say’ echoes throughout Jane’s journey, a testament to her determination to assert herself and speak her truth. When faced with Rochester’s proposal of a loveless relationship, Jane resolves to leave him and start anew, declaring, “I would leave you in the old world and betake myself to the new” (281). Refusing to become Rochester’s mistress, she reinforces her resolve, stating, “That man had nearly made me his mistress: I must be ice and rock to him, and ice and rock you will accordingly become” (355). Similarly, when St. John proposes a loveless marriage for missionary work, Jane firmly rejects the idea, asserting, “I cannot marry you and become part of you” (481).

Critics argue that Jane’s insistence on speaking stems from others’ neglect or suppression of her words (Kreilkamp 2005, 124). The Reed family’s neglect of her voice and St. John’s attempt to suppress her with his loveless proposal are seen as repetitions of Rochester’s attempts to control her with his words. However, Jane refuses to be silenced, breaking free from the discourse patterns established by these men and asserting her voice with ‘I must say.’

The second aspect involves constructing a space for discourse through speaking. At every stage of Jane’s development, scenes of her freely conversing with others repeat after experiencing the confinement of the Red Room at Gateshead Hall; Jane encounters her first sympathetic listener: the family doctor, Mr. Lloyd. Though unsure how to articulate her thoughts precisely, she knows this is the “first and only” opportunity (Brontë 2008, 33) to narrate her experiences. At Lowood School, Mr. Brocklehurst publicly accuses Jane of being a “liar,” but Miss Temple and Miss Scatcherd provide Jane with a rational opportunity to tell her own story. Miss Temple acknowledges her, “Jane, in my view, you are now acquitted” (64).

During her early days at Thornfield Hall, alongside her interactions with Mrs Fairfax and the student Adele, Jane still hopes to encounter a wider variety of personalities. This desire is fulfilled through her interactions with Rochester. Jane feels his accent is familiar, stating, “His accent was like the speech of my own tongue” (190). At Moor House, Jane finds new joy in her interactions with the sisters, particularly Diana. They share a “perfect congeniality of tastes, sentiments, and principles” (413). “Thought fitted thought; opinion met opinion: we coincided, in short, perfectly” (414). At

Ferndean Manor, Jane and Rochester reunite, and talk becomes a way of reconnecting and bonding between them: “We talk, I believe, all day long: to talk to each other is but a more animated and an audible thinking” (532).

In this repetition, continuous communication with others not only serves as Jane’s way of narrating her own story but also becomes her way of existing. Through dialogue with others, she can share her thoughts, feelings, and experiences while also gaining insight into the perspectives and lives of others. This exchange enriches her life experiences and helps her establish deeper connections with others. By actively participating in conversations and expressing herself freely, she asserts her agency and autonomy, ultimately empowering herself to redefine her sense of self and assert her place in the world.

## Conclusion

As Lloyd (2002, 1-18) contends, the Western mode of thinking has historically perpetuated binary divisions, such as male and female, rational and non-rational, reason and impulse, profoundly influencing both social structures and the formation of individual subjectivities. Despite ongoing efforts, achieving a genuinely equal and harmonious coexistence of genders and fostering genuine harmony among individual beings and lifestyles remains an elusive goal. According to Mohamad and Ng (2006, 2-8), feminists in the Western world have endeavoured to reconstruct society and culture on new foundations, especially following the upheaval caused by World War II, which dismantled entrenched patriarchal orders and male-centric cultural norms.

Wyatt (1985, 199-216) argues that, to a considerable extent, *Jane Eyre* mirrors women’s survival and marital conditions within the patriarchal society of the Victorian era. The various spaces depicted in the novel symbolise the confinement of women by patriarchal norms and their gradual marginalisation in their pursuit of liberation from male oppression. Gilbert and Gubar elaborate on Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, stating that:

The character’s story, serving as a prototype for numerous others, is notably a narrative of enclosure and escape. It stands out as a distinctly female Bildungsroman, wherein the challenges faced by the character in her journey from the constraints of her childhood towards the daunting goal of mature freedom resonate with the struggles every woman encounters in a patriarchal society: oppression (at Gateshead), starvation (at Lowood), madness (at Thornfield), and coldness (at Marsh End). (2020, 399)

As Susan Lanser (1992, 176-193) points out, due to Charlotte’s own social and cultural identity limitations, Jane is a middle-class, Christian-educated white woman, and her discourse space carries ideological factors. In *Jane Eyre* (1847), the narrative reveals gender inequality and male dominance. However, the text reflects Charlotte’s contemplation on female “silence” against the notion of “Victorianism.” I contend that if Jane disrupts male discourse authority with her unique voice, the construction of female discourse space emancipates women from the symbolic shaping of public

discourse. Just as Jane constructs a female discourse space through speaking, Charlotte enters the public discourse realm through writing.

*Jane Eyre* (1847) defies stereotypes by offering nuanced and diverse portrayals of female characters through meticulous characterisations. The character, Jane Eyre, emerges as resilient, independent, and determined, challenging societal norms throughout the novel. Despite facing constraints, she demonstrates resilience and unique characteristics. The window, symbolising a powerful space where Jane can freely imagine and resist male dominance, becomes crucial in her journey. Continuously fighting oppression and striving for equal status, Jane's eventual union with Rochester in the idyllic Ferndean Manor suggests a certain level of accommodation with societal norms. Her lifelong struggle against the societal order culminates in a final escape with Rochester, underscoring the harsh reality that she perceives no fitting place within the existing world and emphasising the novel's realism.

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