

Furious Flame of Bertha – following her resistance –

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Introduction

Bertha Mason was highlighted as a reflection of Jane's depth psyche by Sandra Gilbert and Gilbert Guber. Their interpretation is dramatic and dominant, was groundbreaking and influential by which Bertha is seen as Jane's expression of her inner desires, specifically that of her counter norm to the repressive social and gender standards. However, even though this interpretation regarded Bertha as somebody who has elements of New Woman, she is still imprisoned in Thornfield in Jane's mind

The reader learns of Bertha's past not by her own narrative but only through the descriptions of Edward Rochester and Jane Eyre. In this paper, I am going to examine their ways of portraiti Bertha and to expose their ethnocentric tendencies or racism. Moreover, I am going to pay a special attention to Bertha's actions and the moment of her death to clarify her way of resistance and that of liberation.

1. An ambivalence between favor and repugnance in Rochester toward Bertha

According to Rochester, Bertha was famous for her beauty and was the pride of the town in the local community. At first, Rochester fancies and even adores her as follows. However, he does not touch her inside, and it is only her good looks that he evaluates for her. This chapter mentions both his desire and his aversion to Bertha. What is the watershed?

My father said nothing about her money, but he told me Miss Mason was the boast of Spanish Town for her beauty—and this was no lie. I found her fine woman, in the style of Blanche Ingram—tall, dark and majestic. [...] I was dazzled, stimulated: my senses were excited . . . I thought I loved her. (302)

In this quote, Rochester is provoked by her dark and majestic exoticism. Here, we can see his sexual desires for her. However, after marrying her, he comes to hate her and her family line all.

Bertha Mason is **mad**; and she came of a mad family! – idiots and maniacs through three generations! Her mother, the **Creole**, was both a **mad** woman and **drunkard**—as I found out after I had wed the daughter, for they were silent

on family secrets before. Bertha, like a dutiful child, copied her parent in both points. I had a charming partner—pure, wise, modest—you can fancy that I was a happy man. (289)

He shows that Bertha presents a clearly opposite ideal of a women in England, which is pure, wise, modest. He says that “I longed only for what suited me—for the antipodes of the Creole [. . .].” Why does her attitude bring out his xenophobia? From my point of view, it is caused by English ideal; “moderation”. He clearly changes his attitude toward Bertha, pointed out her lack of elements of English female decency. According to , “Respectable” women were reconceptualized as “passionless”; they had sex in the interests of procreation, marital harmony, or motherhood, but rarely if ever in response to their own desire(Steinbach, 114). It is notable point is that Rochester described Bertha to “unchaste.” (303) His wrong impression of her is the opposite to ideal of women in England. Thus, he was so disappointed in his marriage. This is why Rochester hates her. He believes that English ideal is superior to that of Creole.

“The sweet wind from Europe was still whispering in the refreshed leaves, and the Atlantic was thundering in glorious liberty [. . .] “Go,” said Hope, ‘and live again in Europe[. . .] (305-06).”

It is so important for him that his wife is clearly designated as “The Other.” My own proposition is that Rochester’s consciousness as British compares white women with Creole in order to have sense of gentleman. Fulfilling the conditions of a “good man” is that he marry “good woman as wife”. Respectability was a Victorian watchword. Especially among the Middle class, being respectable was a way to maintain reputation. So the fact that a wife is a means that her husband for the branding the failure to keep her appearance. this responsible cannot keep her appearance.

Women—especially reduced to, and defined by, their bodies as reproductive, not desiring. The effect was to render women passive vessels who satisfied men’s desire and bore children because it was their destiny. Connected to this was new emphasis on women’s virginity and on the loss of virginity as the key sexual moment in a women’s life. (Steinbag 114)

This quote shows that naturally women should not have sexual desire, on the other hand, Bertha displays her alluring and exitonic body. Rochester is attracted by Bertha as sexual seducer, not as a wife. That is why Bertha is

hated by him after they married. Hence, as we can see his words, Bertha is repressed by both ethnocentric ethos and the patriarchal norm.

2. Bertha is called “it”

It is notable that imprisonment in the Thornfield’s attic arguably represents the repression of the racial inferior, a half-Jamaican Bertha. This novel clearly discriminates against Jamaicans, and characters of *Jane Eyre* don't pay attention to the differences in them. Mitchell argued that In 1830, England controlled the seas and accounted for about 45 percent of all world trade(Mitchell, 282). This shows that England gain supremacy from all over the world. Moreover, such imperialist ideas were internalized in English people’s mind. Edward Said analyzed about idea of white supremacy:

Along with all other people’s variously designated as backward, designate, uncivilized, and retarded, the Orientals were viewed in a framework constructed out of biological determinism and moral-political admonishment. The Oriental was linked thus to elements in Western society (**delinquents, the insane, woman, the poor**) having in common with an identity best described as lamentably alien. Orientals were rarely seen or looked at; they were seen through, analyzed not as citizens, or even people, but as problems to be solved or **confined** or—as the colonial powers openly coveted their territory—taken over.(129)

This could be applied to the racial inferior like Bertha because Bertha is also a woman who is discriminated against and confined by Westerners as an insane people. This racist perspective on Bertha could be seen through Jane’s narrative.

Fearful and ghastly to me—oh, sir, I never saw a face like that! It was a discolored face—it was a savage face. I wish I could forget the roll of the red eyes and the fearful blackened inflation of the lineaments!

—Ghosts are usually pale, Jane.

—This, sir, was purple: the lips were swelled and dark; the brows furrowed; the black eyebrows widely raised over the bloodshot eyes. (281)

Her remark clearly emphasizes on “exoticism” negatively. Whenever Jane is scared of “it”[Bertha], she describes as “savage” and “dark.” Here Charlotte

Brontë mixes gothic with realism in *Jane Eyre* in order to attract sympathy with Jane's hardship especially in Thornfield where Bertha is. Furthermore, Bertha is an 'obstacle' to Jane's marriage. This is supported by Spivak who insists that the unquestioned ideology of imperialist axiomatics informs Brontë's narrative and enables the individualistic social progress of Jane (244). Jane is heroine to fight her opponent in this novel, however, she just gazes at Bertha and has prejudice against the Creole woman.

What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it groveled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal—but it was covered with clothing, and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face. (290)

Jane calls Bertha "it". This shows that her narrative denies Bertha's humanity. Jane notices Bertha's suffering but she does not even make some concession to her, in addition, she always tries to keep her distance from Bertha despite her personality that she cannot leave the troubled person alone. That is why, for also Jane, Bertha is "the Other."

3. Bertha's unsparing and mean of liberation

Are Bertha's behaviors completely mad? Her violent actions are not caused by mental disorder but by her desperate means of liberation.

Firstly the most notable point about Bertha's resistance is that her behaviors of Bertha break the gender barriers at that time.

Bertha, in many ways, was ahead of her as her actions equal to those of a woman who is able to question the injustices practiced against them by patriarchy. Mason's act of burning Thornfield and her 'demonic laughter' tagged her as the 'insane ex-wife'. Victorian women were not expected to 'loiter' just like men. Bertha's forwardness as a woman can be constituted as one of the reasons why Rochester kept her locked in the attic. Women were supposed to be the 'angel in the house' and let men define their identity for them. So either a woman is a perfect wife or a perfect lunatic. (Velma)

He suggests that we question influence of the patriarchal system in her situations. She shows her furious and aggressive demon striations especially

toward Rochester. At Jane and Rochester's wedding, her rage reaches the most noticeable.

[. . .] the lunatic sprang and grappled his throat viciously, and laid her teeth to his cheek; they struggled. She was a **big** woman, in stature almost **equaling** her husband, and corpulent besides; she showed **virile** force in the contest—more than once she almost throttled him, athletic as he was. (291)

In this scene, "big", "equaling", and "virile" are emphasized on the representation of Bertha and Bertha's masculine power of fighting evenly with the Rochester is presented here. In this way, Bertha, which is depicted as a sign of her madness at first, may be a desperate appeal of her presence. This behavior of Bertha deviates from the Victorian view of a woman which values female weakness as her virtue.

Another notable point appears as "flame." Bertha uses flame as a means of self-liberation. According to Kamima, "flame" is used for slaves to express their desire to be freed. slaves has desire to liberate. They often resisted after having strengthened an earnest desire to freedom and caused a revolt, and a lot of people who committed suicide appeared in the end. I include two reasons about the suicide. One is the view of the slave on de cease and outlook on soul. Among the slaves, it seemed to be believed that the soul returned to the hometown if they died. It is resistance to the master one more. (Kamima, 56) Bertha is no better than a sex slave because Rochester is caught by only sees her sexual behavior, which his words "Such is the sole conjugal embrace I am ever to know—such are the endearments which are to solace my leisure hours! (291)". Thus, from my point of view, Bertha's furious action stands for her resistance to the imprison in the patriarchal system and antforeign sentiment. Moreover, "flame" is so important for readers to understand it. She was within Rochester's chamber, and "Tongue of flame(147)" darted round the bed and curtains in his room were on fire. "tongue" means not only part in the mouth but also "language". Although Bertha is not allowed to have a voice in this novel, flame she started by herself enables her to defy her situation, in other words, flame works as her voice. At first, her resistance starts gradually from small one candle. As the story continues, her fire that signifies her furious feelings grows. "flame" or "fire" is often related to the resistance of slaves in Jamaica. Susan said that When she [Bertha] actually emerges in the course of the action, the narrative associates her with blacks, particularly with the black Jamaican antislavery rebels, the Maroons(Susan, 151). The

Maroons descend from maroons, Africans. They escaped from slavery on the Colony of Jamaica and established free communities in the mountainous interior, primarily in the eastern parishes. While Jane who is narrate of in this novel discriminates against her as black, In fact, Bertha is not black but Murat. The origin of the ambiguous for Murat is so ambiguity, but often they thought to be Africa when they are repressed in England or their residence and Murat's novels or spiritual songs often mimic their go home, for example, Antoinette, the protagonist of *Wide Sargasso Sea*(1966), is called a “white cockroach” and laments that she wanted to be born black.

In this way, at the last scene of her life, she attempts to liberate herself in the flames.

[. . .] And then they called out to him that she was on the roof, where she was standing, waving her arms, above the battlements, and shouting out till they could hear her a mile off—I saw her with my own eyes. She was a big woman, and had long black hair: we could see it streaming against the flames as she stood. I witnessed, and several more witnessed Mr. Rochester ascend through the skylight onto the roof: we heard him call ‘Bertha!’ We saw him approach her—and then, ma’am, she yelled, and gave a spring, and the next minute she lay smashed on the pavement.” (424)

In the blazing flames, she waves loudly as if she calls for something, screaming. She chooses death without looking back on Rochester who is calling her name, frees her from the narrative itself, which is oppressive to her, and can be seen as death as resistance to her master. This is her own self-choice.

That Bertha kills herself in her attempt to burn down the house of her master can also be linked to Roxanna’s ultimately self-destructive rebellion in *Persian Letters*. Defying the master who has enslaved her, she asserts her freedom only to find death as its inevitable price. As long as the despotic system is in place, no woman can truly be free, yet the suicide of a rebellious woman serves as a powerful condemnation—and potential transformation—of a system. Thus it is no accident that Rochester is blinded in the conflagration caused by function as a sultan.(Joyce 178)

Joyce notes that Bartha's suicide is an action to resisted her master who made her a sex slave, freed herself, and it is condemnation of the system that had made her into this situation. Rochester is blinded by this huge fire and loses one arm. As Joyce points out, it's possible to interpret Rochester's fall

an accident as a punishment of his for oppressing her.

Conclusion

In this story, Bertha is silenced. This shows how ethnocentric idea creates “the cultural other”. All of Bertha's actions are represented as these of “non-Englishness”. Sometimes she is portrayed like a black woman from Jane's point of view. However, focusing on the actions of Bertha as an individual, some of her actions called “madness”, could be able to see as the means of resistance, rage, and self-liberation of Bertha. Regarding her fire, I signifiers her strong appeal to the reader of her existence and a resistance to the master who seeks to make her existence non-present.

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