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**Trauma and Emotional Manipulation
in *Jane Eyre***

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Trauma and Emotional Manipulation in *Jane Eyre*

Cristina-Mihaela Botîlcă

Abstract

Charlotte Brontë's 'Jane Eyre' has the characteristics of a love story, of a feminist manifesto, and of a bildungsroman. But we should also consider it as a story-world encompassing a series of traumatic events that lead to the ongoing emotional manipulation of the main female character. The thesis of this paper is built on the idea that trauma creates the inability to differentiate between love and dependence upon the partner. I will analyse Jane's intrafamilial trauma from her childhood and its effects on her vulnerable adult self, and Rochester's unsavoury and obvious seduction, trying to offer an answer as to why the victim returns to the perpetrator in the end, despite their toxic relationship. My approach and analysis are text-centred, so my arguments will be based on the inner world of the narrative, and I will interpret Jane and Rochester's relationship using contemporary psychological concepts that relate to trauma and emotional manipulation.

Keywords: manipulation, trauma, unsavoury seduction, Jane Eyre, Edward Rochester

Introduction

This paper aims to bring to light a new and modern perspective upon a relationship that might—at first glance—seem loving and passionate. With Jane's psychological background (her intrafamilial trauma, her experience with physical and emotional abuse, and the signs of PTSD that we witness in the novel), she becomes a manipulable and anxious adult in the hands of an untrustworthy man (who believes that keeping his former wife locked up in the attic is somehow alright), whom I will be presenting as a perpetrator of unsavoury seduction. The many interpretations that I encountered in my first years as a university student were connected to romance (Regis 2003), religion (Franklin 1995), and symbolism (Moore 1991). But then I came upon some feminist interpretations: Jane as 'a model of feminist resistance and liberation' (Kaplan 1996, p. 6), as a source of inspiration for women's fantasies (Wyatt 1985), and the novel as 'a cult text of feminism' (Spivak 1985, p. 244). From this, the road to a psychological interpretation was not that sinuous. As I read the novel yet again, I discovered some behavioural patterns in the case of Rochester and I categorized them as being manipulative and toxic. This is what I build my argumentation upon.

Presently, in the twenty-first century, toxic relationships, emotional manipulation, and traumatic experiences gather more than six hundred million Google search results, with websites that teach us how to spot a gaslighting, manipulation, and lying, and what to do to escape these relationships. *Jane Eyre* could be just another 'How to Spot a Manipulator' article and could show us what hides behind the façade of romance, and this is especially true when the victim already possesses some psychological traits acquired as a result of childhood trauma and lack of meaningful relationships as a child.

When Jane admits to us, the readers, that she married Rochester, some might feel a sense of injustice or amazement at her decision. The reason for this is the continuous witnessing of delicately thought psychological traumatic blows, which could only make us wonder why Jane returns to her manipulator after all the suffering she experienced both as a child and as an adult woman. To answer this question, we have to uncover the psychological relation that reveals itself between Jane and Rochester throughout the novel. My interpretation will focus on a relatively modern psychological reading centred on the relationship between the manipulator and the manipulated in a context heavily overpowered by trauma and emotional abuse. I will not make any reference to the author of the novel, nor to the literary or cultural climate of the time. This will be a textual approach, discussing characters, relations, and actions, as presented in the text. No factors that are external to the world of the novel will be used to build the argumentation.

It appears that *Jane Eyre*'s many interpretations and readings have been built upon what Showalter (1981, p. 183) calls 'male critical theory', which is entirely based on male experience being put forward as a universal truth. Instead, we should perhaps try and understand this novel from a female-centred point of view, not necessarily feminist in its theoretical framework, but

focusing on the experience of the woman as a potential victim of manipulation, presenting the realities of such a psychological state in a novel that does not allow us to make a definitive decision with regards to the truth of the characters.

Firstly, I will discuss how childhood trauma affects Jane both as a child and as an adult woman. Secondly, I will analyse how emotional manipulation takes shape in her relationship with Rochester, focusing on behaviour patterns and manipulative techniques used by the manipulator. I will refer to excerpts from the novel, as well as modern psychological and literary studies that have been written on this topic. This study aims to highlight the role played by Rochester in the adult life of a traumatized woman who seeks meaningful relationships.

Under no circumstance will I attest that one character is fully positive or negative. My approach is meant to uncover the psychological implications of such a toxic relationship as the one showcased by Jane and Rochester, and to pinpoint exactly where and how these implications arise due to traumatic events—lived and relived by the female character.

Childhood Trauma - Or How Janes Becomes an Easy Target

Jane's childhood seems to be one of physical and emotional abuse. As an orphan, Jane is already prone to develop a victim mentality that could label her as powerless from the very beginning. This could be the first inherent layer of trauma. The second layer is brought by the family she lives with, specifically Mrs. Reed and John Reed (her son), who perpetually assault her verbally and physically, leading to intrafamilial trauma. John exhibits violence and no sign of remorse when he attacks Jane, who falls and strikes her head against the door. She begins bleeding from a deep cut and reaches a climax of terror. The abuse never stops at the physicality level, for it is always accompanied by reproaches and threats, such as 'you would have to go to the poor house' (Brontë 2006, p. 20), 'Missis will send you away' (Brontë, p. 20), 'God will punish her. He might strike her dead in the middle of her tantrums, and then where would she go?' (Brontë, p. 20). These threats are meant to awaken in her a forced sense of gratitude, to place her on a lower level on the familial scene. However, Jane admits that the reproaches of her dependence become a 'vague sing-song in my ear, very painful and crushing, but only half intelligible' (Brontë, p. 20). She remembers the feelings she initially had when the reproaches started, but the repetition happens only at an emotional level, for solely the reaction is present, not the active comprehension of what is being said by the family members.

Herman (1992, p. 33) defines trauma as an event that can 'overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life', that may 'involve threats to life or bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with violence and death'. A traumatic event is not just a drama of the past, but also 'a drama of survival' (Suleiman 2008, p. 280). In the novel, the major traumatic event is presented as taking

place in the Red Room, which becomes central to the representation of trauma. The physical place of suffering becomes an identifiable source of pain for the traumatized child (Balaev 2008). At a future moment of suffering¹, Jane will have a dream of the Red Room again, more intense and more frightful than how reality presented itself when she was but a little girl. In the initial scene from the room, recounted later on by the narrator, Jane describes the place as ‘chill’, ‘silent’, and ‘solemn’, because it was the room where Mr. Reed ‘breathed his last’ (Brontë, p. 21). She walks in front of a big mirror and this encounter unveils a very unfortunate consequence experienced by the abused child: the loss of identity—another effect that traumatic events have is that they destroy identity and create fright in victims (Balaev 2008). Herman (1992, p. 86) writes that ‘the victim of the chronic trauma may feel herself to be changed irrevocably, or she may lose the sense that she has any self at all’—this is sometimes called depersonalization or dissociation. When she steps in front of the mirror, we discover that our character lost her sense of self and identity. She sees her reflection as a ‘strange little figure [...] with a white face and arms specking the gloom, and glittering eyes of fear moving where all else was still’ (Brontë, p. 21). The figure is strange because it does not belong to her anymore. The explanation is that it might belong to her former abused and traumatized self. The child desires a new and unharmed self so badly, that she refuses to recognize her own reflection. She describes her arms and face as if it were the first time seeing them; a new and dissociated identity of the victim tries to get to the surface.

Because she is locked in the room shortly after she is psychically assaulted by John, she begins experiencing symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, which can be caused by repeated exposure to traumatic events (Herman 1992, Haaken 1996, Freyd and DePrince 2004). She believes that she sees a ‘herald of some coming vision from another world’ in the form of a ‘gleam’ of light (Brontë, p. 23). The fast succession of intense stimuli that overwhelm her is presented to us in short sentences:

My heart beat thick; my head grew hot; a sound filled my ears, which I deemed the rushing of wings; something seemed near me; I was oppressed, suffocated; endurance broke down; I rushed to the door and shook the lock in desperate effort (Brontë, p. 23).

Her episode is met with disbelief by the family, who declare ‘in some disgust’ that ‘she has screamed out on purpose’. The child fears that room in such a way that she asks her aunt to punish her ‘some other way’. The answer comes in the form of an even more aggressive behaviour from Mrs. Reed, who thrusts her back into the room and locks her in again. Soon after, little Jane has a ‘species of fit’ (Brontë, p. 24) and loses consciousness, her coherence, as ‘she experiences her body as a disorganized assemblage of heterogeneous

¹Trauma creates both intrusive remembering, in the form of sudden and unexpected flashbacks, sometimes extremely intense and vivid (Loftus 1993), and amnesia accompanied by emotional numbness (Herman 1992, Freyd 1994).

portions, each of which is increasingly stimulated' (Nandrea 2004, p. 121). There is a sensory sequence that intensifies the emotional excitation felt by Jane, a proof that the little girl has begun experiencing signs of PTSD.

Moreover, exposing herself to the trauma inflicted by the Reeds, she begins not only losing her identity, but fashioning a new one, dictated by the opinion of the abusers (Winn 1983). She is permanently told: 'What we tell you is for your good' (Brontë, p. 20) and the verbal violence she is subjected to make her believe that *she* is the 'discord in Gateshead Hall' (Brontë, p. 22). At dawn, her 'habitual mood of humiliation, self-doubt, forlorn depression' turns into 'decaying ire', and she wonders whether she is not really 'wicked' (Brontë, p. 22). She is, in a way, captive both psychically (in the Red Room and in the Reed family) and mentally (in the role of a victim). In these situations of captivity, the batterer or the abuser becomes extremely powerful and shapes the actions and the beliefs of the victim (Herman 1992). However, even if Jane wonders whether she really is what the family tells her, her child self cannot help but see this as an injustice, as something that cannot be understood by a logical mind:

Why was I always suffering, always browbeaten, always accused, forever condemned? Why could I never please? Why was it useless to try to win anyone's favor? (Brontë, p. 21).

She is justly confused, as any other child would be, and tries to understand the reasoning behind Mrs. Reed's rage. Nevertheless, this does not change the traumatic triggers that are already set into motion.

Jane's case is a case of intrafamilial trauma or developmental trauma (Hughes 2018), which is caused by the trauma of absence (absence of her real parents, of understanding, of appreciation, of love), among many other traumatic factors. This places the child at risk when it comes to creating strong bonds with people later on in life because their attachment pattern might be toxic and disorganized. Here, the secure attachment between the child and the caregiver is completely missing. It could only be established by a nurturing touch and positive effects (Levy and Orlans 2014). Children who lack these elements of secure relationships will eventually become adults who fail to promote the same secure attachment with their adult partners (Sroufe et al. 2005). (In the second part of the study, we will discuss exactly how the adult Jane is affected by this childhood trauma in the context of her relationship with a manipulator). Maltreated and abused children have the highest rates of future anxious attachment (Crittenden 1985, Osofsky 1994), with cases of memory impairment and intrusive thoughts (Osofsky 1994). In the novel, it is clear that her relationship with Rochester is complex, complicated, and brings her intense anxiety at times, feelings and sensations caused by childhood abuse.

In terms of the presence of trauma in *Jane Eyre*, Balaev (2008, p. 150) discusses the term 'trauma novel', which 'refers to a work of fiction that conveys profound loss or intense fear on individual or collective levels'. The trauma novel has some distinguishing features: (a) the victim is transformed by an external experience that is often terrifying (in our case, the Red Room seems

to be the triggering point for Jane's PTSD), (b) the traumatic event may involve both collective human or natural disasters and personal traumas, such as violence or sexual abuse (Jane suffers physical as well as emotional violence in the Reeds house), (c) the victim comes to terms with the memory that informs them of the existence of a new perception of the self and the world (adult Jane admits that she understands why she suffered so during her childhood, although she does not overtly share the reason with us). The protagonist is an 'everyman' (or rather an everywoman): an individual who suffers and fights their own anguishes and demons, but who also paints the landscape of an entire culture and historical period, so the experiencer oscillates between the public sphere and the private life. Jane desires independence both socially and personally, and we learn that at the end of the novel, when her words to Rochester reveal that she gained said independence and she can make her own choices.

Trauma seems to be an important part of Jane's childhood years, turning her into an adult with attachment issues, oftentimes naïve in response to Rochester's seduction, and quite anxious and indecisive. In the following section, we will see exactly how Rochester manipulates this trauma riddled young woman and how she responds to all of it in the end.

Emotional Manipulation - Or Rochester's Unsavoury Seduction

Manipulation does not only involve some form of overpowering, but also an abuse of that said form of power, an exercise of illegitimate influence by means of discourse targeted to emotion and actions that the victim would not otherwise do, actions that are in the interest of the manipulator and against the interests of the victim (Van Dijk 2006). Manipulation as it is can be exercised directly by means of discourse, behaviour, and reactions that are meant to wheel the volition of the manipulated person in the direction wanted by the manipulator, and indirectly² via pictures, films, or photos (Van Leeuwen 2005).

Manipulation comes in many forms³. Cave (2007) offers some examples that fall under the following categories: manipulation by means of deception, by threat, by seduction, by artificial constraint, or unintentional manipulation (even if, morally speaking, most cases of manipulation are intentional). Usually, the perfect victim is a nurturer, a champion of the disadvantaged; they trust people and they have never developed a self-protecting mind. Also,

²Nowadays, we also encounter a form of multimodal manipulation, mostly through advertising and social media (see Day 1999, Messaris 1997).

³In a series of studies addressing manipulative behaviours, six major tactics were identified (Buss et al. 1987): (a) charm (this is where we might also place seduction); (b) silent treatment (for example, he ignores her until she does what he wants); (c) coercion (for instance, he screams at her until she does what he wants); (d) reason (for example, he gives her a list of reasons why she should do what he wants; most of the time, these reasons strictly refer to his needs); (e) regression (for example, he behaves childishly until she does what he wants); (f) debasement (for instance, he might place himself in a lower position so that she accepts to do what he wants).

women who believe that they have few relationship options usually ignore the ‘red flags’ and their desire and need to believe the manipulator are higher than their subconscious wish to know the truth. Once the manipulator feels that he earned his victim’s trust, he can revert to his main personality type; he can be jolly when it suits his purpose and aggressive when contradicted or opposed (McCoy 2006). However, the victim will already have created an attachment for the captor in the absence of other human connection (Herman 1992).

One might euphemise the word ‘manipulation’ and translate it as ‘persuasion’ (King 2016). Clearly, the two are psychological concepts found in a social relationship and they both involve two partners (the one who does the persuasion-manipulation and the one who receives it). However, the former entails the pre-existence of the psychological state of being persuaded, whilst the latter involves the lack thereof, which means that the receiver is not aware of the influence exerted by the transmitter. Even if that might sometimes be the case when it comes to persuasion, this act also involves a positive moral implication, when the persuader (the orator) has the hearer’s interests in mind, engaging him or her in some sort of dialogue through the art of rhetoric (Harré 1985). Manipulation, on the other hand, involves not only a negative use of rhetoric, but also physical engagement in the form of aggression. If persuasion targets mostly the intellectual side of the hearer, manipulation targets the emotional one, where the victim’s weaknesses can be easily found. Nowadays, persuasion and rhetoric have strayed far from the original virtuous meaning, leading to a ‘rhetoric of emotional manipulation’ (Ulanov 1966, p. 404), a clear combination of the two. However, in this study I will keep persuasion and manipulation separate because it is my belief that the latter has a negative connotation, one that involves types of aggression that we could not find in the former.

To see what techniques of manipulation Rochester uses, let us observe the following excerpts from the novel:

(A)

You are cold, because you are alone: no contact strikes the fire from you that is in you. You are sick; because the best of feelings, the highest and the sweetest given to man, keeps far away from you. You are silly, because, suffer as you may, you will not beckon it to approach, nor will you stir one step to meet it where it waits you. (Brontë, p. 194)

Rochester is frustrated because Jane will not share his feelings. He uses covert manipulation tactics to convince her that she is the one to blame for her suffering and for her loneliness. We might call it ‘crazymaking’ (Birch 2015) or guilt (Nepryakhin 2019); this method is often used by Rochester to make Jane doubt her own feelings and decisions. The manipulator tries to plant the seed of doubt in the victim’s mind (doubt regarding their personal future and their life far from the controlling hand of the manipulator), expecting positive reinforcements instead (that he is right and that she is indeed alone without him).

(B)

What love have I for Miss Ingram? None: and that you know. What love has she for me? None: as I have taken pains to prove; I caused a rumour to reach her that my fortune was not a third of what was supposed, and after that I presented myself to see the result; it was coldness both from her and her mother. I would not—I could not—marry Miss Ingram. You—you strange, you almost unearthly thing!—I love as my own flesh. You—poor and obscure, and small and plain as you are—I entreat to accept me as a husband. [...] I must have you for my own—entirely my own. (Brontë, p. 247)

Here, he uses what Birch (2015) calls triangulation, which involves using a third person to make the victim feel insecure, unworthy of the manipulator's attention and affection. It is meant to keep the victim in a state of obsession and anxiety, waiting for the manipulator to make a decision and choose between the two persons. If they are confronted, they will shift the focus or intentionally cause the victim to have an emotional meltdown. He admits that the 'games' he plays have the purpose of making her jealous. However, he also insults her and, by doing so, places her outside of her respected self, in a position of inferiority. Non-conventional language, even though it might sound rude, becomes a means of intimacy for Rochester (Craig 1993). The final statement shows how possessive he is when it comes to Jane's love and affection. His desire is to establish control over all aspects of the victim's life, to enslave Jane so he can satisfy his need of power. Herman (1992) argues that this is the perpetrator's first goal in the process of controlling the other person (making sure he has complete control and authority over the victim).

(C)

His fury was wrought to the highest: he must yield to it for a moment, whatever followed; he crossed the floor and seized my arm and grasped my waist. He seemed to devour me with his flaming glance: physically, I felt, at the moment, powerless as stubble exposed to the draught and glow of a furnace: mentally, I still possessed my soul, and with it the certainty of ultimate safety [...], his grip was painful, and my over-taxed strength almost exhausted. 'Never,' said he, as he ground his teeth, 'never was anything at once so frail and so indomitable. A mere reed she feels in my hand!' (And he shook me with the force of his hold.) 'I could bend her with my finger and thumb: and what good would it do if I bent, if I uptore, if I crushed her?' (Brontë, p. 306)

Here is maybe the most important passage from the book in terms of violent manipulation. We can clearly see that Rochester decides to use violence as a coercion device. Jane describes feeling 'powerless' confronting his 'fury'; his speech becomes odd because he talks as if he were alone, disregarding the presence of the woman. We can recognize what Herman (1992, p. 42) calls a 'state of surrender' manifested by the victim. She describes it as the shutdown of the person's self-defence system. Instead of trying to physically escape her torturer, the victim shifts her perspective and her consciousness into her mind. This is a response of defeat and helplessness that Jane adopts as well: 'Physically, I felt, at the moment, powerless [...], mentally, I still possessed my

soul.’ (Brontë, p. 306). As a psychological *va-et-vient* that is meant to startle and confuse her, he suddenly shifts his behavioural pattern:

You will not come? You will not be my comforter, my rescuer? My deep love, my wild woe, my frantic prayer, are all nothing to you? (Brontë, p. 307)

He is now the powerless one, who needs to be rescued, placing Jane in the role of the rescuer. When she answers that she indeed desires to leave, he becomes helpless and pitiful, begging her to consider his pain: ‘remember, you leave me here in anguish [...], cast a glance on my suffering—think of me’ (Brontë, p. 307). She is obviously affected by this sudden burst of affection and helplessness, and she returns: ‘I had already gained the door; but, reader, I walked back—walked back as determinedly as I had retreated’, and yet she still finds the strength to say ‘farewell forever’ (Brontë, p. 307). The night she leaves him, her childhood trauma haunts her and she has a ‘trance-like dream’ (Brontë, p. 308) in which she promises herself that she will flee temptation. And this is understandable because, as far as we, as readers, can see, this is the second moment of intense trauma, so it is natural that flashbacks containing past trauma, and even intense memories of the traumatic event, overwhelm the victim, who selectively preserves the episodes in her memory (LaBar 2007). Jane begins experiencing PTSD again as a result of Rochester’s paradoxical behaviour towards her (one moment he is aggressive and brutal, the next he is humble and worthy and pity). This ever-shifting behaviour is bound to render anyone anxious, especially if they have a past of trauma, attachment issues, and bonding issues. Unfortunately, even if Jane shows signs of independency, her ambition comes not from a place of positive motivation, but from an inherent desire to break free. Rochester’s violence stands now at the top of the manipulation pyramid.

(D)

‘It is your time now, little tyrant, but it will be mine presently; and when once I have fairly seized you, to have and to hold, I’ll just—figuratively speaking—attach you to a chain like this’ (touching his watch-guard). (Brontë, p. 262)

In this passage, we witness a covert threat towards Jane, both verbal and non-verbal (the touching of the chain, to somehow show her what expects her if she does not obey). At the beginning of their relationship, Rochester might be seen as the ‘buddy’ type and the prosecutor (Nepryakhin, 2019), trying to verbally wheel her in his desired direction using the foot-in-the-door technique (Freedman and Fraser 1966), while also critiquing and belittling her. Rochester’s threat is all the more certain because it is not a matter of ‘if’ but of ‘when’ he will seize and chain her. Jane, as any manipulated woman who becomes involved with a batterer, might see these initial outbursts of honesty as romantic and even flattering, but as he becomes more possessive and dominant, she might excuse his behaviour and find a way to adapt to his desires (Herman 1992). As the relationship progresses, he becomes the despot

type, characterized by high levels of aggressiveness, showcasing strength and control, and usually humiliating the victim.

(E)

‘Here is Miss Eyre, sir,’ said Mrs. Fairfax, in her quiet way. He bowed, still not taking his eyes from the group of the dog and child.

‘Let Miss Eyre be seated,’ said he; and there was something in the forced, stiff bow, in the impatient yet formal tone, which seemed further to express, ‘What the deuce is it to me whether Miss Eyre be there or not? At this moment I am not disposed to accost her.’ (Brontë, p. 125)

He is the passive-aggressive manipulator (McCoy 2006). He uses the technique of silent treatment (Buss et al. 1987) to make Jane doubt herself and his opinion about her. He also manifests a shift in his behaviour towards her, another particularity of the manipulator. Birch (2015) also calls this intermittent reinforcement: the manipulator creates a climate of doubt and anxiety that compels the victim to appreciate even the smallest crumbs of affection and positive reinforcement, depending on how they would like the manipulated part to behave. The more the manipulator uses intermittent reinforcement, the greater the bond between him and the victim will be, as the latter will eventually become ‘addicted’ to the spoon-fed appraisals of the manipulator.

(F)

[...] and while he spoke my very conscience and reason turned traitors against me, and charged me with crime in resisting him. They spoke almost as loud as Feeling: and that clamoured wildly. ‘Oh, comply!’ it said. ‘Think of his misery; think of his danger—look at his state when left alone; remember his headlong nature; consider the recklessness following on despair—soothe him; save him; love him; tell him you love him and will be his. Who in the world cares for YOU? Or who will be injured by what you do?’ (Brontë, p. 305)

In this passage, we can observe Jane’s inner struggle, intensified by the sight of a pitiful Rochester. The manipulator plays the victim part (Nepryakhin 2019), assuming the role of the helpless person⁴. Noticeably, he uses what Birch (2015, p. 43) calls ‘the pity play’. Jane is consumed by the thought that she might be blamed for Rochester’s unhappiness, and because he successfully plants the seed of self-doubt in her mind, she wonders who else would love and care for her, if not her manipulator. This is the special relationship brought about by the prolonged contact between Jane and Rochester, one in which the perpetrator uses ‘a combination of force, intimidation, and enticement’ (Herman 1992, p. 74). The fact that Jane experiences extreme highs and lows, always left in a state of uncertainty as to where the relationship will go, feeling inadequate and obliged ‘to save face’ and care for a man who plays the role of

⁴Ironically, he does become helpless at the end of the novel, and the dynamic of their relationship seems to shift dramatically, because Rochester becomes the dependent one and Jane plays the role of the master.

a pitiful and helpless lover, could only strengthen the master-slave relationship that Rochester carefully establishes.

Cave (2009, p. 236) calls this type of behaviour ‘unsavoury seduction’, a subspecies of sexual seduction, which ‘involves not just initial sexual unwillingness, but its conversion to willingness’. Even if, from an ethical perspective, seduction is perceived as evil and the seductor is a corruptive force (Parret 1994), most of the time there is a subjective desire that comes both from the one who seduces and from the one who allows the seduction to occur. To go from sexual seduction to unsavoury seduction, the seductor must appeal to motive manipulation (Cave 2007), which ‘is the attempt to move another by inducing changes in her motivational structure’ (Cave 2009, p. 237). Nonetheless, unsavoury seduction is not categorically immoral, like rape, nor is it seemingly innocent, like courtship, but it is wrong (Cave 2009) provided that the initial intent is to change the other person’s mind using manipulative techniques; it ‘violates an important and widely accepted moral principle prohibiting agents from undermining other’s capacity to reflectively manage their own motives’ (Cave 2009, p. 244). This is irrefutably a form of manipulation, whether we call it motive or emotional manipulation, the purpose is still to change something in the other person’s thought pattern and decision-making process, so that it can serve the manipulator-seducator’s selfish intentions.

Therefore, the purpose was her accepting his marriage proposal, so that the possessiveness would be complete. And so, Jane accepts and ‘succumbs to a new level of degradation, one that adds sexual enslavement to her prior experiences of physical victimization’ (Sun-Joo Lee 2008, p. 324). As the story develops, we find proof that the relationship between the two resembles the relation between a master and a slave. Jane admits that he is somewhat superior to her, that he has a certain control over her:

He smiled; and I thought his smile was such as a sultan might, in a blissful and fond moment, bestow on a slave his gold and gems had enriched. (Brontë, p. 261)

He is a ‘sultan’ and she is his mere ‘slave’. Pell (1977, p. 414) observes that ‘his demand for mastery and dependence upon such a woman recalls Hegel’s description of the relationship between master and slave’. This theory states that one is self-sufficient and the other exists only to please the master (Hegel 2018). Hegel describes in detail the relation between master and slave in neutral contexts, not necessarily referring to men and women. De Beauvoir (1953, p. 59) is the one to make this connection, writing that some passages ‘in the argument employed by Hegel in defining the relation of master to slave apply much better to the relation of man to woman’. And this makes perfect sense in *Jane Eyre* because Rochester is the self-sufficient one, always in control of the situation and of his own emotions, and Jane is the dependant one, never able to break free from the emotional chains that tie her to her master. However, the relation shifts towards the end of the novel, when we find that Rochester has a physical handicap now and he depends on Jane.

Rochester loses his sight and his right hand. But if we move beyond psychoanalytic theories, we can also see that Brontë deprives Rochester of literacy—the ability to read and write. Jane becomes ‘his vision’ and ‘his right hand’. (Sun-Joo Lee 2008, p. 327)

So, the manipulator (unconsciously) becomes the victim type, establishing an unbreakable relation between the caregiver (the victim) and the helpless man.

However, we notice that Jane fights his manipulation from the very beginning by displaying what Ford and Russo (2006, p. 336) call ‘avoidance’: ‘A traumatized individual may use avoidance as a means of shielding herself from experiencing unbearable emotions’. After Rochester's room is set on fire and Jane wakes him up and saves his life, he appears to show strong feelings of gratitude, which are normal under these circumstances. However, they begin to bother Jane: ‘Strange energy was in his voice, strange fire in his look [...]. But he still retained my hand, and I could not free it’ (Brontë, p. 154). Rochester begins to show his emotions towards Jane, but with a ‘strange’ behaviour, which makes her reluctant when it comes to returning his feelings and which urges her to avoid him:

I both wished and feared to see Mr. Rochester on the day which followed this sleepless night: I wanted to hear his voice again, yet feared to meet his eye. (Brontë, p. 155)

As Ford and Russo (2006) state, avoidance is a way of protecting yourself from the event or the person that traumatized you. To somebody else, the way Rochester behaves may not translate as the catalyst of tumult or emotional struggle, but to Jane, who experiences a traumatizing childhood of abuse and violence, Rochester is a source of confusion and novelty, which can lead to negative emotions. And yet this confusion begins to feel warm and familiar to her—*manipulation* begins to feel warm and familiar—and so Jane feels tied to this sense of comfortableness, even if it is harmful to her psychological, physical, and emotional wellbeing. In the end, this leads to her return.

The Return

Why does Jane come back to him after all these years? Why would she return to the source of her trauma? Chase (1962) accuses her of cowardice for refusing to stay with Rochester. He writes that Jane ‘sees only two possible modes of behaviour: meek submission or a flirtatious, gently sadistic skirmishing designed to keep her lover at bay’ (1962, p. 107). However, the accusation is quite unfounded, because during her time at Gateshead and Lowood Jane complains of her isolation and longs for human companionship. One possible answer is given by Herman (1992, p. 211), who admits that traumas never disappear and one can never fully recover from them: ‘resolution of the trauma is never final; recovery is never complete’. When Jane speaks to the blind

Rochester, she admits yet again that he is her master: 'My dear master, [...] I am come back to you' (Brontë, p. 412). However, she returns as an independent woman. Even so, she feels pity for him and offers to be his nurse. This possibility leads to the conclusion that Jane accepts herself as a victim and thus returns to the man who contributed to her traumatic past, only to experience some closure. Another possible answer is that Jane finds that her way of healing is to forgive Rochester. In Herman's opinion:

Once the survivor has mourned the traumatic event, she may be surprised to discover how uninteresting the perpetrator has become to her [...]. She may even feel sorrow and compassion for him. (Herman 1992, p. 190)

Whether it is forgiveness or pity, Jane certainly feels that she is connected to him that between him and her there is a relation that needs to continue. Even Rochester cannot immediately believe that she is willing to marry him, for he wishes to receive reassurance:

Will you marry me? [...] A poor blind man, whom you will have to lead about by hand? [...] A crippled man, twenty years older than you, whom you will have to wait on? [...] you delight in sacrifice. (Brontë, p. 422)

He questions her again and again to establish her role as a saviour and heroine, so that Jane can now be obliged to care for him because of his gratitude. The blunt announcement 'Reader, I married him' (Brontë, p. 427) marks the decisiveness with which Jane fights her past and struggles to find closure in the warm arms of familiarity.

Van der Kolk (2014) writes that there are four goals that the victim of trauma can achieve in terms of recovery, and these are: (a) finding a way to focus and be calm, usually by revisiting the trauma and dealing with the memory of it until it becomes something that you can accept; (b) learning to maintain that state of calm as a reaction to images and sensations that bring back the traumatic event; (c) finding a way to engage with the people around you; (d) not having to keep secrets from yourself, and that includes what you did to survive the trauma. Could we say that Jane recovers definitively from her traumas? On the one hand, instead of revisiting it until she finds acceptance, she chooses to marry 'it', and perhaps this is the only sensible solution that she is capable of accepting. On the other hand, this could also be a proof of stoic resignation. She might have accepted that there is no way she can heal, so she chooses, as Rochester says, to 'delight in sacrifice'.

Any way we might choose to interpret her return and their marriage at the end of the novel, we cannot deny the manipulation and the trauma inflicted by Rochester upon her. All throughout the novel we meet with grooming, pity plays, belittling, insults, passive-aggressiveness, and even violence, manipulation techniques that (in time) seem to have the desired effect. For the manipulator, it is not important *why* the victim returns in the end, but the fact that she *does*. Even though the context of Jane's return is not the same (from the perspective of youth and the manipulator's physical capabilities) neither for her, nor for

Rochester, and even though the dynamic of their relationship shifted, she *did* come back, this time as the real saviour, the real heroine of his pitiful life.

Conclusion

This study presented a psychological and contemporary approach to Jane and Rochester's relationship. We started from what the story-world of the text offers us, and that is: a female character that experiences physical, verbal, and emotional abuse during her childhood, which leaves her longing for meaningful human connection. And because of the negative psychological traits that she acquires as a result of these harmful experiences (anxiety, signs of PTSD, dissociation), she easily becomes the victim of a manipulative male character.

Rochester is the 'sultan', the master, and—paradoxically—he also plays the victim part. He uses covert manipulation tactics ('crazymaking'), triangulation, physical violence, threats, and he has an inconsistent behaviour towards Jane, which throws our female character into a 'will he, won't he' loop of doubt, expectations, and episodes of anxiety. We called this method of seduction 'unsavoury' because it is downright harmful for the other person. But this does not mean that it lacks efficiency and longevity (in terms of its effects on the victim); Jane's return is a strong example of this. Familiarity and the sense of 'cosiness' around someone (whether toxic or not) can sometimes be misjudged as love and romance. When the victim is gaslit by a perpetrator who plays the part of someone vulnerable and needy, it is often the case that their relationship will carry on.

Jane Eyre shows us that behind the top layer of love and romantic relationships there can be signs of manipulation that we might miss at first. This is why I only discovered negative behavioural patterns in Rochester when I read the novel for a third time and I dismissed all the factors that were external to the written text. Naturally, there is value in all interpretations, but we still have to be willing to discover more, especially today, when mental health awareness is a widely accepted topic of discussion. And we need to have these conversations about literary texts, because they involuntarily become subconscious guidelines for women and men alike—they show us a lifestyle that might inspire us to accept such types of behaviour.

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