

12-2023

"My daughter, flee temptation!" "O, do go, dear mother!": Gender, Race, and Body Politics in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

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"My daughter, flee temptation!" "O, do go, dear mother!": Gender, Race, and Body Politics in
Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English from
The College of William and Mary

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December 6, 2023

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Introduction

Readers of Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre (1847) and Harriet Jacobs' Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl (1861) have long been interested in the novels' engagement with gender and race. Though much scholarship has separately interpreted these constructs' intersectionality in both works, reading Jane Eyre and Incidents together appears to construct a unified resistance dialogue. That is, both works' shared emphasis on gender and race seems to form a concentric critique about women's bodies and their constriction within 19th Century culture and society. To corroborate this claim, Jean Fagan Yellin's extensive research into the life and legacy of Harriet Jacobs revealed that, before Jacobs began her narrative, she was influenced by Jane Eyre's "story of a woman's struggle of autonomy" (Harriet Jacobs 145). Yellin's work hence reveals a powerful model of influence between Jane's body within constructs of oppression and its echoes heard in Harriet Jacobs' harrowing narrative of her time in enslavement. These echoes, however, are not limited exclusively to both novels. Instead, a larger, comprehensive overview of the 19th Century's socio-political backdrop and leading examples of politically-charged literature give context to Jane Eyre and Incidents' communicative framework.

17th Century British colonialism tied a desire for economic prosperity to emerging hierarchical power imbalances within the transatlantic slave trade. Though European powers were heavily involved in the slave trade as early as the 14th Century, British monarchical powers created an intrinsic link between economic ventures and the subjugation of enslaved people during the mid 1600s. "After the Restoration," Hugh Thomas writes, "a new company, that of the Royal Adventurers into Africa, was founded in London" (*The Slave Trade* 198). The undercurrent of an English trading monopoly established the RAC as a dominating force within the transatlantic slave trade. In turn, the RAC and British monopoly solidified a centuries-long

foundation for the Empire's exploitation of enslaved people. Substantiating evidence for the Empire's trading prowess emerges from the RAC's economic domination—roughly sixty percent of the RAC's income was derived from newly-procured forms of enslaved labor at the end of the 17th Century (*The Slave Trade* 203). During the next 200 years, plantations would facilitate the *physical* sale of enslaved people between the British Empire and Antebellum America.

Yet, cargo ship analyses substantiate the origins of racialized, *mental* deterioration and systemic inequity manifesting in the waters between active sites. Maritime abuse stripped enslaved people of their cultural identity. Specifically, enslaved people were captured from regions surrounding trading ports; indoctrinated into Eurocentric religion through crude forms of 'salvation,' imprisoned beneath trading outposts; and ushered onto cargo ships in coffles (Emanuel). Once boarded, enslaved people were forced to endure the Middle Passage in both physically and psychologically restrictive quarters. Within these spaces, enslavers acted upon imperialist constructs of domination that would bolster the emergence of racial inequity and degradation. "The ocean was not just *where* the story of slavery transpired as black bodies were ferried beyond coastal ways and into unknown lands," Sowande' Mustakeem writes, "...it also became a central conduit for *how* bondage unfolded and consequently devastated lives" (Carnegie 5). Institutionally, the devastation Mustakeem describes lies in the act of denoting enslaved people as domestic property—no longer viewed as human, enslaved people were considered to be an enslaver's economic capital. As enslavement crept into Antebellum America during the next two centuries, doctrines of oppression from both land and sea would undercut 19th Century abolitionist movements.

During the last quarter of the 18th Century, however, William Wilberforce pioneered the surmounting British abolitionist movement through his responses to large plantation systems. As

previously mentioned, cargo ships illegally transported enslaved bodies to large plantation systems, which resulted in centuries-long appropriation of enslaved labor. William Wilberforce sought to address the oceanic trade by calling forth The Commission:

The Commission, called for by William Wilberforce, was charged with collecting information that would determine the direction of colonial policy regarding those Africans whose indentures were reaching their expiry. The general question underpinning the inquiry was whether the constituency supported the abolitionists' argument that Africans could, and indeed would, become civilised colonial subjects willingly engaging in free wage labour (Rupperecht 436).

Though Wilberforce's efforts allowed for enslaved people to influence "colonial debates about subjecthood, servitude and self-ownership," they were neglected from the 1807 Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade (Rupperecht 437). The collective body of voices, despite Wilberforce's efforts, were absent during British abolitionism's early history; even so, these narratives did not "become the subjects of popular abolitionist literature" (Rupperecht 437). As the 19th Century political landscape began to fully embrace imperialism, however, abolitionist movements emphasized intersectional forms of oppression. This emphasis created a unified body of protest that would appear in the mid-19th Century's political *and* fictional works.

19th Century abolitionist movements, on a global scale, facilitated an intersection between activism surrounding women's and enslaved people's rights. At the turn of the 19th Century, the British Empire and Antebellum America legally disbanded their involvement in the transatlantic slave trade (Bosworth and Falvin 24). In June of 1840, the World Anti-Slavery

Convention¹ was held in London to unite both British and American abolitionists to discuss the issue of enslavement. The Convention would produce a twofold effect: both abolitionism and “the woman question” dilemma would be discussed by leading global powers. Lisa Hogan states that arguments against women’s involvement in the Convention were rooted in:

traditional conceptions of womanhood based on the notion of a ‘woman’s sphere.’

Ascribing women to the private sphere of morality and domesticity, the delegates argued that women’s participation in political and social causes violated their divinely sanctioned roles in the traditional family and corrupted their femininity (“A Time For Silence”).

Post 1840, the Convention framed the convergence of patriarchal oppression and enslavement. In the case of free, married women, “their right to their wages and property when subsumed under the legal identity of their husbands seemingly lacked the accompanying justification for citizen rights” (Bosworth and Falvin 107). Women’s domestic inequity thus entered the public sphere and operated under the doctrine that, “if the family exists to reproduce property through biological reproduction and patrilineal inheritance, its success requires women to serve as passive conduits of both” (Bosworth and Falvin 109) Henceforth, married women in the British Empire took to describing their condition as a form of “legal slavery” (Bosworth and Falvin 105). Women’s condition descriptions in the 19th Century therefore reflected forms of hierarchical and patriarchal oppression imposed onto enslaved women in plantation systems. Namely, enslaved men were denoted as forms of manual, chattel labor; enslaved women, however, “had no legal control over her sexual intimacy or sexual reproduction. The authority of

¹ Two leading American suffragettes, Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, met at the World Anti-Slavery Convention. The attack on women’s rights inspired the two to begin advocating for women’s rights and, eventually, inspired the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848.

her master determined with whom she was allowed to engage in sexual relations” (Bosworth and Falvin 24). Their revoked sexual autonomy, in turn, reflected inequities in the model of domesticity that was perverted through the institution of enslavement. These intersections transformed the 19th Century’s political sphere, in which free women who deemed themselves neglected from the British Empire’s protection began advocating for enslaved people’s equal legal representation. The legacy of such protest would be found through the efforts of female anti-slavery societies, as well as appeals to both gender and race found in the politically charged fiction of the 19th Century.

The woman’s body becomes a locus of social activism and protest in *Jane Eyre* and *Incidents*. However, their bodies are not bound solely to their works’ pages; instead, Jane and Linda diffuse into Frederick Douglass’, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, Written by Himself* and surmounting inequity under imperialist constructs. For context, Douglass’ *Narrative* was published in 1845—two years before *Jane Eyre*’s publication and sixteen before *Incidents*’. Julia Sun-Joo Lee describes the convolving 19th century political climate and Douglass’ *Narrative* as a locus of cultural exchange. In the case of Douglass’ *Narrative* and *Jane Eyre*, the cultural exchange gave rise to what Sun-Joo Lee calls “textual contact zones, or literary spaces where the novel’s heteroglot structure reveals itself” (*The American* 19). Alongside Sun-Joo Lee’s interpretations, scholars have conjectured that Charlotte’s abolitionist upbringing² influenced her possible engagement with Douglass’ *Narrative*. “The most compelling evidence that Brontë was influenced by American slave narratives,” writes Sun-Joo Lee, “is...textual.

² Johnnie Briggs, a Brontëan historicist in Yorkshire, revealed that Patrick Brontë was sponsored by William Wilberforce to attend Cambridge University. Wilberforce was also from Kingston upon Hull, Yorkshire; his proximity and sponsorship influenced Patrick Brontë to become immersed in the abolitionist movement. His abolitionist perspectives were then shared with his three daughters, Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Brontë, which further supports the echoes of enslavement narratives heard in their fiction.

With its emphasis on literacy, its teleological journey from slavery to freedom, and its ethics of resistance over submission” (*The American* 30). Deborah Morse³ corroborates Sun-Joo Lee’s claim, as she explored Douglass’ influence on Emily Brontë’s depiction of Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*. Noting the plausibility of both sisters incorporating Douglass’ narrative adds a textual nuance to the debate. Specifically, it is known that both Charlotte and Emily Brontë composed *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* during a similar period and, more intimately, read their pieces to one another around the same kitchen table. The sisters’ exchanges, alongside Sun-Joo Lee and Morse’s identification of textual engagement, supports this narrative ‘loop’ that would be completed after *Jane Eyre*’s publication. Namely, Harriet Jacobs’ *Incidents* was published fourteen years after Charlotte’s novel became a transatlantic sensation. Though commenting on diametrically opposed institutions, Jacobs was influenced, through Jean Yellin’s biographical research, by *Jane Eyre*’s commentary on body autonomy, submission, and resistance. Upon producing her narrative, Jacobs had not only reclaimed the rights to her *physical* body, but she had now laid claim to the rights of a *literary* body that would speak against enslavement’s model of cyclical torture. Body autonomy thus unites the complex intersections of gender and race displayed throughout centuries of subjugation and protest. Reading the plights of both Jane Eyre and Linda Brent under the proposed socio-historical conditions depicts body autonomy as a nexus of gendered and racialized negotiations shared between the narratives of *Jane Eyre* and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*.

³ Deborah Denenholz Morse, an esteemed literary scholar at the College of William & Mary, furthers the connection between Brontëan fiction and the American enslavement narrative in her article, “‘The House of Trauma’: The Influence of Frederick Douglass on Heathcliff in Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*.”

Chapter 1: The Initiation

Jane Eyre and *Incidents* begin with echoes of Douglass' initiation into enslavement. Douglass, while hiding in a closet, witnesses Aunt Hester's brutal torture at the hands of her master, Colonel Lloyd. Through Douglass' retrospective narration, his witnessing forces him to pass through a blood-stained gate of slavery (*Narrative* 44). His abrupt awareness of enslavement's brutality shifts his narrative's perspective, in which inequity and corporal punishment define his experiences while enslaved. Jane Eyre and Linda Brent use trauma to initiate their narratives into themes described by Douglass. Jane's earliest memories, for instance, are defined by her rejection from the Reed family. The now-writing Jane uses avian⁴ and enslavement⁵ metaphors to describe how the constructs of gender and race tyrannize her rebellious body. Linda Brent, rather than being oppressed by a domestic structure, is initiated into enslavement through the breakdown of familial structures. After death and relocation isolate

⁴The avian metaphor, or correlating a woman's entrapped body to a bird, embodies the theory known as reverse anthropomorphism. This theory describes how people are stripped of human qualities and are treated as nonhuman beings. In Jane's case, the avian metaphor is used to negotiate her regression under Gateshead Hall's regime. That is, her 'othering' from the Reed family is explicitly negotiated through bird imagery—whether it be her time in the windowsill or her affinity for *Bewick's History*, birds are depicted as explicit negotiations of Jane's body. See "'Resolute, Wild, Free': Leisure and Avian Ecologies in *Jane Eyre*" by Robyn Miller and "'No net ensnares me': Bird Imagery and the Dynamics of Dominance and Submission in *Jane Eyre*" by Kathleen Anderson and Heather R. Lawrence for further reading.

⁵The enslavement metaphor describes how mastery-submission relationships, social inequity, abuse, and environmental echoes of plantation life can be heard in some Victorian novels. Though this metaphor is problematic in the 21st Century, Victorian writers implemented this metaphor to convey heightened physical and mental oppression, as well as subordination under imperialist powers. See Julia Sun-Joo Lee's book, *The American Slave Narrative and the Victorian Novel* for further reading.

Linda, racial inequity gradually situates her closer to enslavement. Racial inequity quickly intersects with gendered oppression as Dr. Flint subsumes Linda's reproductive autonomy. These centering manifestations of trauma define Jane and Linda's first encounters with oppression; however, Bessie, a maid at Gateshead Hall, and Linda's grandmother nourish the women's isolated, degraded bodies. Bessie and Linda's grandmother's care ultimately connect the novels' initiation sequences by absolving the physical and mental trauma enforced onto Jane and Linda's bodies.

The now-writing Jane describes Gateshead Hall's model of domesticity as the genesis of her struggles against social inequity. *Jane Eyre* begins with Jane's memories regarding the traumatic, "dreadful" feeling of returning to Gateshead after taking a walk (Brontë 5). Upon re-entering, Jane's observations of her "physical inferiority to Eliza, John, and Georgiana Reed," marks Jane's body as an intruder within Gateshead's social structure (Brontë 5). Seated in what appears to be her throne, "the said Eliza, John, and Georgiana were now clustered round *their* mama in the drawing room" (Brontë 5, my emphasis). The Hall's matriarch, Mrs. Reed, "lay reclined on the sofa...and with *her darlings* about her...looked perfectly happy" (Brontë 5, my emphasis). Jane uses physical separation to demonstrate her positioning within the Reed family. Her perception of the Reed siblings "[looking] perfectly happy" further suggests a symbiotic fulfillment between a mother and her children—a theme that, in conjunction with physical separation, haunts Jane as her social inequality becomes magnified throughout *Jane Eyre* (Brontë 5). The opening scene, however, gains its nuance through Jane's early lack of autonomy. Namely, Mrs. Reed "had dispensed [Jane] from joining the group" and would only allow her to enter if Bessie, an outsider in the Reed's domestic model, could attest to Jane's docility (Brontë 5). In this instance, Mrs. Reed exercises authority to 'other' Jane—a decision that, at the time,

appears to be based solely on the mistress' subjective interpretation of Jane's actions (Brontë 5). Jane's existence within Gateshead is thus dependent on her body's subjective adherence to the Reed's hierarchical system. In tandem, Jane's right to testify for herself is revoked by Mrs. Reed's order to "remain silent," which forces her to bear the label of a troublesome child. The false label results in Mrs. Reed "[excluding Jane] from privileges intended only for contented, happy little children" (Brontë 5). From her earliest memory of Gateshead Hall, Jane bears the label of a social deviant; unable to speak or act for herself, Jane is preemptively subjected to social inequity that exposes her to gendered and (metaphoric) racial oppression.

The avian metaphor depicts Jane's gendered regression under Gateshead Hall's domestic model as a bird becoming consumed by its cage. Mrs. Reed's neglect encourages Jane to exist in solitude. As Jane retreats to a window-seat, the word "mount" corroborates with the "gathering up" of her feet to illustrate Jane's body as a perched bird (Brontë 5). Rather than confining herself to an inescapable cage, Jane enacts her first display of autonomy, in which the "red moreen curtain nearly [closed]" functions as a curtain laid over a bird cage (Brontë 5). Upon resisting the silence imposed by Mrs. Reed, Jane quiets herself by becoming "shrined in double retirement" (Brontë 5). While in her safe-haven, Jane reads of distant lands in *Bewick's History of British Birds* (Brontë 6). These birds, as well as actions linked to the book itself, act as Jane's first encounter with gendered oppression. Kathleen Anderson and Heather Lawrence, elaborating on Elaine Shefer's *Birds, Cages, and Women in Victorian and Pre-Raphaelite Art*, construct the avian metaphor as a call to gendered inequality in Victorian society:

the caged bird represents an archetypal image of women's imprisonment by patriarchal culture...the popular visual conflation of women and birds ... both interrogates their circumscription in metaphorical cages (of frustrated aspiration, objectified plaything, and

inhabitant of either brothel or convent) and reinforces as fitting their ‘ideal cage’ of the house (Anderson and Lawrence, citing Shefer 240-1).

Anderson, Lawrence, and Shefer’s reading highlight the larger social forces constraining Jane to the window seat. While isolated, Jane actively resists Gateshead Hall’s ‘ideal cage’—submission, docility, and silence. Though protected, patriarchal imbalance subsumes the latter half of Jane’s time in the windowsill during her altercation with John Reed. When John identifies Jane as a “bad animal,” her enclosure shifts to the embodiment of patriarchal dominance through his continued, animalistic ‘othering’ of Jane’s body (Brontë 7). His spatial violation, alongside his verbal ‘othering’ of Jane, uses emerging gender inequity as a catalyst for Jane’s first explicit use of the enslavement metaphor.

Julia Sun-Joo Lee’s reading of the altercation with John Reed highlights Douglass’ narrative through an explicit bloody initiation into subjugation. Upon discovery, Jane removes herself from her enclosure in fear “of being dragged forth by the said Jack” (Brontë 7). The scene’s physicality uniquely functions to push the scene out of metaphoric negotiations of gender and initiates *Jane Eyre* into metaphoric racial inequity. As Jane is physically removed from her enclosure, John’s jurisdiction over *Bewick’s History* and Jane’s positioning depicts her body as a piece of domestic property. The idea of domestic property reverberates against John Reed’s order for Jane to call him “Master Reed” and his “gesture” suggesting that she “was to approach and stand before him” (Brontë 7). Jane’s imagining evokes the dynamics of an enslaved person being forced to stand before their enslaver to receive corporal punishment. Julia Sun-Joo Lee interprets Jane’s metaphoric depiction of enslavement as a ‘burst of consciousness’ of her condition. “In a fit of proprietorship,” Sun-Joo Lee states:

[John] exclaims, “You have no business to take our books,” a claim that encompasses both the material form of books and the act of reading itself. Wielded by the master, literacy becomes a weapon of subjugation, a fact made clear when John Reed flings the volume of *Bewick* at Jane and causes her to fall and hurt her head (*The American* 31).

The bleeding cut, in conjunction with Sun-Joo Lee’s reading, functions as Jane’s initiation through the figurative “blood-stained gate” described by Douglass (*Narrative* 44). Rather than maintaining its liberative role for Jane, Sun-Joo Lee’s reading characterizes John Reed’s wielding of *Bewick’s History* as his persecutory authority over Jane’s freedom (i.e., independence and solitude). Alongside avian and enslavement metaphors, domestic space both literally and figuratively *builds up* around Jane, henceforth entrapping her body within Gateshead Hall’s tyrannical, familial model.

Linda Brent’s initiation derives its power from the *breaking down* of domestic models and structures to expose her body to Southern plantation enslavement. Linda’s initiation is circumvented by an early memory of domestic comfort. Namely, Linda’s father, “a carpenter...on condition of paying his mistress two hundred dollars a year, and supporting himself...was allowed to work at his trade, and manage his own affairs” (Jacobs 1). His unprecedented agency links building homes to his family’s safety, as his job would prospectively allow him to “purchase his children” (Jacobs 1). Joined by her mother’s nurturing presence, her family’s connection to homes provided comfort for Linda during the first six years of her life. Her mother’s abrupt death and her father’s inability to purchase his children, however, forces Linda to realize she “was born a slave” (Jacobs 1). Syntactic irony proceeds Linda’s realization, as she remembers her parents living “together in a comfortable home; and though we were all slaves, I was so fondly shielded that I never dreamed I was a piece of merchandise, trusted to

them for safe keeping, and liable to be demanded of them at any moment” (Jacobs 1). Including ‘home’ and ‘merchandise’ tangentially in the sentence’s structure evokes comparisons between the home’s metaphoric significance and her family’s status as *literal* property. The scene’s unfortunate irony becomes solidified through Mark Rifkin’s analysis of how the Southern landscape was “permeated and structured by whiteness, where blacks literally have no place, except as contingent dependents” (“A Home” 73). Contingency and its relationship to Linda’s regressing body thus undercuts Linda’s movement into wider, *literally* deconstructed plantation systems.

After Linda’s childhood domestic model collapses, she uses familial dynamics to identify oppression within enslavement. Linda’s first description identifies her grandmother as a compensatory maternal figure. Linda’s grandmother “went to work with renewed energy, trusting in time to be able to purchase some of her children” (Jacobs 3). Her domestic work echoed Linda’s father’s wish to free his children through carpentry; their actions’ tie to the domestic sphere highlights the Brents’ generational attempts to free their bodies through the structures that actively oppress them. Linda’s grandmother, like her father, was unsuccessful in liberating her children. The recurring trauma forces Linda to make a larger, more explicit reference to enslaved bodies within Southern plantations: “the reader probably knows that no promise or writing given to a slave is legally binding; for according to Southern laws, a slave, *being* property, can *hold* no property” (Jacobs 3). Dreams of agency and freedom, to the generations of Linda’s family, are intrinsically bound to a system that views enslaved bodies and the home in tandem—the enslaved family’s ability to achieve freedom through domestic space, henceforth, is sundered under Southern legislation.

Gendered oppression appears through Linda's attention to her family's generational subordination within enslavement. Namely, Linda states, "my mother's mistress was the daughter of my grandmother's mistress. She was the foster sister of my mother; they were both nourished at my grandmother's breast" (Jacobs 3). The glimpse into enslaved motherhood highlights the domestic breakdown of maternity. Viewed as property, Linda's mother was "weaned at three months old, that the babe of the mistress might obtain sufficient food" (Jacobs 3). Skewed depictions of gender through enslaved maternity carry into Linda's perception of her first mistress. Her new "happy" home, in turn, embodies the beginnings of maternal conflict undercutting Linda's experiences within enslavement (Jacobs 3). As Linda was "proud to labor" for her mistress and viewed her "almost like a mother," her mistress' conflicting maternal role jaded her early experiences within enslavement (Jacobs 4). However, her mistress does not free Linda and, instead, "bequeathed [Linda] to her sister's daughter" (Jacobs 4). The treachery exhibited by her first mistress, as well as Linda's affection, complicates Linda's attachments: "if Linda were to condemn outright her mistress for her betrayal," Stephanie Li writes, "she would ultimately privilege a relationship determined by slavery over one involving genuine affection" ("Motherhood" 19). This complication, in turn, negotiates Linda's attachment and its influence from competing perspectives—familial support and enslavement. Through her first mistress' perverted maternity, gendered and racial forces coalesce within Dr. Flint's plantation and deplete Linda's enslaved body.

Though Jane and Linda's initiations differ, Bessie and Linda's grandmother unite the works' narratives by nourishing the degraded women's bodies. Their reconstructive role, however, is undercut by an adherence to oppressive social norms. Their later rejections illustrate an unprecedented level of compassion, as it is evident that they enforce conformity to shield the

women's bodies. In *Jane Eyre*, Bessie's maternal role is complicated by her adherence to Mrs. Reed's expectations. Later, her complacency is explicitly negotiated when she restrains Jane to a chair in the red-room. Linda's grandmother also adheres to social expectations, which further links her to Bessie. Namely, Linda's initiation into enslavement is quickly followed by Dr. Flint's sexual violence. Enslaved maternity in *Incidents* is complicated by the expectations of white motherhood within an institution that exploits a subordinate's reproductive autonomy. Conflict emerges when Linda preserves her reproductive rights by becoming pregnant with Mr. Sands' child. Operating under the belief that Linda has given in to Dr. Flint's sexual subjugation, Linda's grandmother states, "'You are a disgrace to your dead mother...Go away!'" she exclaimed, 'and never come to my house again'" (Jacobs 61). Her grandmother's anger comes before her support; by adhering to trauma and expectations characteristic of enslaved motherhood, Linda's grandmother evokes Bessie's conformity and unites the maternal figures' social adherence.

Yet, these reactions support the maternal figures' abilities to empower the oppressed female body. Through social adherence, both Bessie and Linda's grandmother are able to observe the root of Jane and Linda's suffering and empower the depleted women. Bessie, for instance, foreshadows her supportive role as she restrains Jane. "Miss Abbot," Bessie states, "give me your garters; she would break mine immediately" (Brontë 9). Garters reflect the strength of each woman's imposition of Gateshead's social expectations onto Jane. The unrelenting Miss Abbot, uses *her* garters to restrain Jane; Bessie, however, recognizes that an extension of herself could not restrict the orphan child. The contrast between Miss Abbot and Bessie takes shape when Jane later wakes in the nursery. After Jane is removed from the red-room, "Bessie stood at the bed-foot" of Jane's crib (Brontë 15). Acting as a mother-figure for

Jane, Bessie asks, “would you like to drink, or could you eat anything?” (Brontë 15). Her question acts as a resolution to Jane’s earlier proclamation while in the red-room: “to achieve escape from insupportable oppression—as running away, or, if that could not be affected, never eating or drinking more, and letting myself die” (Brontë 12). Offering, in this instance, reveals Bessie’s desire to assume a maternal role. Later, when Bessie brings Jane food, the “birds of paradise” on the plate appeal to Jane’s use of the avian metaphor and suggest that Bessie offers to nourish Jane’s body (Brontë 16). Bessie’s maternal role is continued through the song she later sings while making a bonnet for Georgianna’s doll. The song tells the story of an unnamed orphan’s tumultuous journey towards God’s comfort. Mary Jean Corbett describes how, in Bessie’s song, “we can see how Bessie’s ballad suppresses particular elements—the race, gender, and origins of the orphaned adoptee among them—in order to achieve a universalizing tenor” (*Other Mothers* 232). Yet, the orphan’s ambiguous identity alongside the lines, “my feet are sore, and my limbs are weary” and “men are hard-hearted,” suggest that the song mimics the tenor Douglass describes while on Colonel Lloyd’s plantation (Brontë 17-18, *Narrative* 50). Almost in mirror, Jane’s description of the melody’s “indescribable sadness” and correlation to a “funeral hymn” echoes in Douglass’ statement, “the hearing of those wild notes always depressed my spirit, and filled me with ineffable sadness” (Brontë 17, *Narrative* 50). As Jane begins to cry, her cathartic, emotional release echoes Douglass: “Slaves sing when they are most unhappy. The songs of the slave represent the sorrows of his heart; and he is relieved by them, only as an aching heart is relieved by its tears” (*Narrative* 50). Once empowered, Bessie’s “enchanted stories” and “sweetest songs” continue to absolve Jane’s ‘othered’ status during her final moments at Gateshead Hall (Brontë 33).

Linda's grandmother rejuvenates her granddaughter's oppressed body through domestic labor. Namely, Linda states that "I also had a great treasure in my *maternal* grandmother, who was a remarkable woman in many respects" (Jacobs 1, my emphasis). Her statement explicitly correlates her grandmother's presence to a maternal figure, in turn marking the significance of Linda's grandmother's actions within domestic spaces. Her grandmother's younger years were categorized by unprecedented amounts of domestic agency, in which she was "officiating in all capacities, from cook and wet nurse to seamstress" (Jacobs 2). Her domestic prowess transferred over into her role as a renowned cook, in which "her nice crackers became so famous in the neighborhood that many people were desirous for obtaining them" (Jacobs 2). Her actions resist a lack of agency imposed onto her family's condition, as the funds obtained were used to "clothe herself and her children" (Jacobs 2). Linda concludes her grandmother's description by stating, "to this good grandmother I was indebted to for many comforts. My brother Willie and I often received portions of the crackers, cakes, and preserves, she made to sell; and after we ceased to be children we were indebted to her for many more important services" (Jacobs 3). The act of offering food reappears through Linda's grandmother's domestic labor. Food, both produced from and sold into domestic spaces, physically and metaphorically nourishes Linda's devolving autonomy. Linda's description of the "unusually fortunate circumstances of [her] early childhood," embodies Jane's concluding memory of Bessie's care, in turn uniting the maternal figures in *Jane Eyre* and *Incidents* (Jacobs 3).

Chapter 2: Maternal Space

Jane Eyre's red-room and *Incidents*' garret echo Douglass' confinement in a closet during Aunt Hester's torture. Previously stated, his aunt's torture functions as his initiation into enslavement. However, Douglass' attention to spatial dynamics provides a second touchstone to analyze the maternal spaces⁶ in both *Jane Eyre* and *Incidents*. Aunt Hester is tortured by Colonel Lloyd after she is found in the company of Ned Roberts, a free colored man on Lloyd's plantation. After Aunt Hester's discovery, Colonel Lloyd "[crossed Aunt Hester's] hands" and "tied them down with a strong rope, and led her to a stool under a large hook in the joist...He made her get upon the stool and tied her hands to the hook" (Douglass 45). Once bound, Colonel Lloyd "commenced to lay on the heavy cowskin, and soon the warm, red blood... came dripping to the floor" (Douglass 45). While hidden, physical and emotional constriction within the closet

⁶ Maternal space is a term I use to describe rooms that, through environmental dynamics and the condition of its inhabitant, use maternity as a force that both degrades and empowers a woman's condition. Jane and Linda's mothers passed early in their narratives; as explored, maternity is a recurrent symbol for depletion and nourishment in *Jane Eyre* and *Incidents*. The red-room and the garret, through literal and metaphoric constructions of space, become a symbolic mother's womb that depletes and empowers Jane and Linda's resistant bodies.

deluge his initiation. *Jane Eyre* and *Incidents* echo the dynamics Douglass observed while hidden, in turn embedding imagery of bondage and subjugation into their novels' constricting spaces. Namely, Jane is sent to the red-room as punishment after rebuking John Reed. Darkness, isolation, and flesh colored walls evoke symbolism of a mother's womb, which mocks Jane's orphan status. Jane's feelings of being "rather out of [herself]" within the maternal space reference Douglass' narrative and, more explicitly, the items and dynamics shared between the scenes (Brontë 9). Linda also echoes Douglass' interpretations of space while in the garret. The enslaved mother imprisons herself in the garret for six years to evade Dr. Flint. The attic shrouds Linda in darkness and simultaneously constricts her body. Linda's entrance into the symbolic, womb-like space forces her body to gradually regress to a physically disabled state. Congruent spatial dynamics, as well as their oppressive relationship to Jane and Linda's bodies, thus unite the functional importance of both spaces.

While in the red-room, Jane evokes the enslavement metaphor to rationalize her punishment. Hierarchical power imbalance, in Jane's case, corroborates the physical punishment enforced onto her prior to entering the red-room. Isolation and intimacy during the transitional scene function to inhibit Jane from attributing her degradation to specific individuals at Gateshead. In turn, the red-room becomes a space that encourages Jane to evoke Douglass' narrative to rationalize both her condition and suffering. Julia Sun-Joo Lee identifies a similar trend when she states "As Jane is dragged to the red-room, she describes, 'I resisted all the way: a new thing for me... and, like any other rebel slave, I felt resolved, in my desperation, to go to all lengths'" (*The American* 32). Her reading suggests that the chapters' opening line evokes Douglass' "[resolve] to fight" against Mr. Covey, which establishes both scenes as resistance "that is likewise triggered by an act of violence" (*The American* 32). Sun-Joo Lee's description

of physical violence appears to end after Jane's initial statement; however, enforced bondage and restraint, through Jane's account, continues the red-room's emphasis on Douglass' narrative. Namely, Jane states that Bessie and Mrs. Abbot, "had thrust me upon a stool," which appears to reference Mr. Covey's insistence for Aunt Hester to "get upon the stool" (Brontë 9, Douglass 45). Though the scene could also be applied to Jane's punishment at Lowood, Jane's "preparation for bonds, and the additional ignominy it inferred" appears to echo Aunt Hester's powerlessness against her enslaver (Brontë 9). Hierarchy, and its role within Jane's punishment, thus introduces a resonant allusion to Aunt Hester's torture.

Jane's disorientation complicates her ability to rationalize her experiences when left alone in the red-room. Disorientation, in this instance, is both literal and metaphoric. Not only is Jane experiencing physical distress that distorts her reality, but she also faces heightened oppression that dilutes her consciousness. The first instance in which Jane must negotiate her condition occurs when Bessie and Miss Abbot comment on her dependent status. After Jane is bound to the stool, the maids state that Jane is "under obligations to Mrs. Reed" and that any reproach would result in her being sent to the "poorhouse" (Brontë 10). Including a reference to Jane's possible status reduction functions as an implied force of submission. Unless Jane succumbs to the Reed's hierarchy, her ability to exist in terms of equality with those at Gateshead diminishes. The cognitive weight implied by the maids' statement deluges Jane's consciousness as she is left alone. Like Douglass, Jane's patchy memories produce a disorienting effect upon readers, which magnifies the tumult she experiences while in the red-room—an effect that, as her oppression surmounts, assimilates her narrative strategy with Douglass'.

Physical binding enforced by Gateshead Hall's regime figures Jane's lowly position within it. Jane's response to Bessie and Miss Abbot's prior statement identifies the root of her

suffering, both within the Reed family and the red-room: “I had nothing to say to these words: they were not new to me... This reproach of my *dependence* had become a vague sing-song in my ear; very painful and crushing, but only half intelligible” (Brontë 10, my emphasis).

Assumed dependence magnifies Jane’s lack of biological family—the very reason she is first taken in at Gateshead Hall. Family, and its connecting role within Jane’s experiences, function to cast the room in maternal imagery to mock her isolated condition. Colors such as “deep red damask,” “red,” “crimson,” “a soft fawn color, with a blush of pink to it,” and “white” cast the room in flesh and blood tones (Brontë 10). Jane’s attention to the room’s items deepens the maternal symbolism through her focus on the bed—the site of birth, sex, and death. Jane’s status appears to reflect in the bed’s “massive pillars of mahogany,” which uses the symbolic item as an overarching symbol for the room itself (Brontë 11). Though highlighting her oppression’s origins through the maternally coded space, Elaine Freedgood notes that mahogany’s presence in the red-room nods to enslavement and imperialist themes embedded in its acquisition along the transatlantic slave trade. Mahogany wood, in conjunction with its historic legacy, also operates to denote the Reed family’s socioeconomic status (Freedgood 31-2). Gender and race thus culminate through Jane’s spatial observations and cast the red-room as a figurative convergence of oppression.

Douglas’ echo reverberates throughout the furniture that actively degrades Jane’s condition. Specifically, the “high, dark wardrobe with subdued, broken reflections varying gloss of its panels” evokes Douglas’ hiding place while witnessing Aunt Hester’s torture (Brontë 11). This explicit tie depicts Jane’s fragmented reflection as the slippage between her narrative and Douglas’⁷. Jane then glances towards “a great looking glass” situated between the bed and the

⁷ Rather than being locked in the closet like Douglas, her peripheral location suggests that Jane metaphorically peers into Douglas’ consciousness while he observes Aunt Hester being flogged by Mr. Lloyd.

wardrobe (Brontë 11). The items' symbolic presence depict Jane as existing between the constructs of gender and race—the two forces that actively oppress her body. While gazing into the central looking-glass, Jane states, “all looked colder and darker in that visionary hollow than in reality: and the strange little figure there gazing at me, with a white face and arms specking the gloom, and glittering eyes of fear moving where all else was still, had the effect of a real spirit” (Brontë 11). Her reflection illustrates the corporeal distortion of her body within the red-room; existing between two oppressive constructs, Jane's physical body disseminates throughout the room and depicts a ghostly, frail spirit gazing back at her. Upon seeing her distorted reflection, Jane uses the enslavement metaphor to revolt against her imprisonment.

Jane experiences a degradative epicenter after viewing her reflection, which empowers physical and supernatural forces to render her unconscious. After interpreting her reflection, Jane embodies the “mood of the revolted slave” through her critique of the Reed family (Brontë 11). The Reed's tyrannical rule within Gateshead Hall results in Jane addressing corrupt qualities characteristic of each family member. Specifically, Jane describes: Eliza's “headstrong and selfish” nature, which was “respected”; Georgianna's “spoiled temper and acrid spite,” which was “indulged” because of “her beauty”; and John Reed animal cruelty, which, through his “[twisting of] the necks of pigeons,” uses the avian metaphor to describe his patriarchal dominance over Jane (Brontë 12). Though invigorated by her critiques, Jane still could not answer “the ceaseless inward question—*why* [she] thus suffered” (Brontë 12). Like Douglass, the magnitude of suffering experiences required “the distance of—I will not say how many years” to retrospectively understand the weight of suffering endured (Brontë 12).

Jane's suffering culminates through Mr. Reed's haunting of the red-room. The spirit's haunting qualities stem from Jane's belief that "if Mr. Reed were alive he would have treated me kindly," and would have alleviated her condition by providing nourishing paternal care (Brontë 13). Jane then recalls "what I had heard of dead men, troubled in their graves by the violation of their last wishes, revisiting the earth to punish the perjured and avenge the oppressed" (Brontë 13). Further depicting Mr. Reed as being "harrassed by the wrongs of his sister's child, might quit its abode...and rise before me in this chamber" suggests spiritual violation as a mutilation of Mr. Reed's (deceased) body (Brontë 13). Violation, when read alongside West Indian enslavement⁸ and Jane's reliance on racial metaphors, becomes identified with bodily mutilation. Vincent Brown notes that West Indian enslavers mutilated dead enslaved bodies to "impress Africans not only with their power over life, but with their influence on the afterlife" ("Spiritual Terror" 26). Mutilation meant that, when resurrected into the afterlife, enslaved Africans would bear the aftereffects of their enslaver's violence. Like Mr. Reed's ghost, the ghastly figure Jane sees in the looking-glass will continually haunt her body. This explicit, recurring mark of trauma causes Jane to fall unconscious, in which she is figuratively *reborn* into the nursery. Though persecuted by the image of herself in the red-room, her rebirth gives Jane the ability to resist her oppression.

Linda Brent echoes Douglass' description of enslaved womanhood while in hiding. Douglass later reveals that Aunt Hester was flogged because Colonel Lloyd suspected her of sexual disloyalty (*Narrative* 44). Colonel Lloyd's decision to strip Aunt Hester "from her neck to

⁸The West Indies, in particular, is an important location in *Jane Eyre*. Historically, the West Indies was a large-scale plantation system that catalyzed the development of plantation systems in the transatlantic world. The horrific working conditions and bodily torture in the West Indies garnered attention from both abolitionists and pro-slavery individuals seeking economic gain. More explicitly, Bertha Mason—Mr. Rochester's imprisoned wife—is from the West Indies. Both a signal for West Indian enslavement and plantation owners, Bertha's presence within *Jane Eyre* has long since been interpreted by scholars due to her identity's malleability.

her waist” further evokes themes of sexual dominance and body ownership through his ability to torture the enslaved woman’s exposed body without repercussion (*Narrative* 45)⁹. Bodily violation and manipulation on the basis of assumed sexual promiscuity, like Aunt Hester’s flogging, permeates Dr. Flint’s relationship with Linda Brent in *Incidents*. Namely, Linda echoes Aunt Hester’s dynamics when describing Dr. Flint’s control: “When he told me that I was made for his use, made to obey his command in every thing; that I was nothing but a slave, whose will must and should surrender to his” (Jacobs 15). Her enslaver’s desire to make Linda his concubine magnifies her lack of bodily autonomy and agency within enslavement. Dr. Flint demands that she relocate from “under the same roof as him” to “a small house for me, in a secluded place, four miles away from the town,” which illustrates how domestic structures reinforce her condition (Jacobs 27, 57). To resist her regression, Linda exercises sexual agency and becomes pregnant with Mr. Sands’ child. Her efforts, however, are not enough to evade Dr. Flint. To liberate both herself and her children, Linda must spend six years in her grandmother’s attic.

Linda’s entrance into the garret maternally codes the space through imagery of a mother returning to a symbolic womb. Linda’s grandmother is the central maternal figure throughout *Incidents* due to her protective role over Linda’s body. Before entering, Linda describes the room as “a very small garret” above a “small shed” added onto her grandmother’s house and states that it was “never occupied by anything but rats and mice” (Jacobs 128). As structures in *Incidents* mimic the condition of their inhabitants¹⁰, the garret’s vacancy reflects the death of Linda’s

⁹ Contextually, Colonel Lloyd’s actions reflect in his desire to inflict unobscured pain onto Aunt Hester. However there is an interpretative element here that magnifies sexual submission and ownership within enslavement.

¹⁰ Structures reflecting their inhabitants is a sub-theory that I address throughout my thesis. Contextually, I make this claim because, as explored, the dynamics within a given building tends to characterize the home itself. For example, I turn to Dr. Flint’s foreboding home compared to the safety Linda finds at her grandmother’s. In *Jane Eyre*, too, this idea is even more explicitly negotiated through Mr. Rochester’s relationship to Thornfield Hall as a structure.

mother and its effect on her grandmother. The garret's newness highlights Linda's grandmother's ascension into a maternal figure for Linda and depicts the space as a constricting, yet rejuvenating extension of her grandmother's compassion and maternity. Describing the exaggerated "slope" and small dimensions evokes structural symbolism and its correlation to a mother's womb (Jacobs 128). Corroborating spatial symbolism appears when Linda describes a "concealed trap-door" and states that "to this hole I was conveyed as soon as I entered the house" (Jacobs 128). The trap-door acts as a vaginal entrance into the maternal space and depicts the garret as a spatial symbol of a mother's body. Within the garret, Linda notes that "the air was stifling; the darkness total" (Jacobs 128). Her "cramped position" suggests that Linda was forced to remain in fetal-adjacent positions, which situates her body as a regressed 'child' within the maternal space (Jacobs 128). Rather than succumbing to the room's constrictions, Linda "bored three rows of holes, one above another; then...bored out the interstices between" to add light and a connection to her children while in the garret (Jacobs 129). By creating the "loopholes," Linda would sit "by it till late into the night, to enjoy the little whiff of air that floated in" and "in the morning [she] watched for [her] children" (Jacobs 129-30). Symbolically, the loopholes function as the garret's umbilical cord due to their nourishing, connective role. Motherhood, in this instance, provides a concentric model for Linda to resist her condition and free both herself and her children.

Narrative body-doubling¹¹ mediates Linda's time both within and 'outside' of the garret.

Linda first describes Southerners' conversations she overhears while in hiding. "Southerners

¹¹My interpretation of narrative body doubling is directly influenced by Anne Warner's interpretations in her chapter of *Haunted Bodies: Gender and Southern Texts* titled, "Santa Claus Ain't a Real Man: *Incidents* and Gender." In her chapter, Warner describes Linda's body-doubling: "During the ordeal of concealment and paralysis in *Incidents*, Jacobs dramatizes her power through doubling; she creates a fugitive double through false letters she arranges to be sent to the North. In order to deflect Dr. Flint's local search, Jacobs/Brent writes two letters, one to

have the habit of stopping and talking in the streets,” Linda states, “and I heard many conversations not intended to meet my ears” (Jacobs 131). Contextually, the conversations and observations Linda gathers while in the garret allow her to exist temporally consistent with those around her. Her enforced silence within the garret, alongside her observations, empowers Linda’s ability to exercise narrative trickery on her enslaver. Her physical silence and narrative prowess against Dr. Flint evokes Anne Warner’s analysis of body-doubling, in which Linda’s restricted contact allows her to double as a free woman in the North through letters she sends to Dr. Flint (Warner 195). While this relationship aids Linda’s surmounting resistance, body doubling also takes shape through the maternal forces at play in the garret. Just as she is able to double as a free woman, she is also able to double as a mother. A notable example comes from Linda’s memories regarding Christmas in the garret. After making clothing for her children, Linda observes Benny and Ellen finding the garments she had made while in hiding (Jacobs 132-3). Her distress over being unable to reveal herself reflects the resolve embedded in Linda’s desire to flee—for Linda to be able to break the cycle of maternal doubling, her body must remain in hiding. The degradative nature of this relationship is solidified through Linda’s attention to a mockingbird. Namely, the town constable and a free colored man were invited up stairs to look at “a fine mocking bird [Linda’s] uncle had brought home” (Jacobs 134). Birds, and their symbolic relationship to a woman’s body, mirror Linda’s imprisonment in the garret. The mockingbird, however, can freely draw attention to itself within the cage; if Linda were to do the same, her doubling would be diminished and she would reenter the institution of enslavement. Such exchanges henceforth reveal the powerful narrative strategies undercutting Linda’s imprisonment.

her grandmother and one to Flint himself...The war of fictions...is waged between Flint’s and Brent’s false doubles, and Flint’s unsuccessful deception makes Brent’s northern twin all the more powerful” (Warner 195).

Body trauma completes the garret's oppressive figuring by physically disabling Linda. Analyzing Linda's time in the garret across the chapters in which it is depicted reveals that critiques of enslavement are followed by descriptions of physical discomfort. Most notably, this relationship appears during Linda's first comparison to Dr. Flint while imprisoned: "Yet the laws allowed *him* to be out in the free air, while I, guiltless of crime, was pent up here, as the only means of avoiding the cruelties the laws allowed him to inflict upon me! I don't know what kept life within me" (Jacobs 135). Reflecting upon Dr. Flint's sexual domination and harassment magnifies patriarchal abuse imposed onto Linda's body. The memory's pain appears to influence Linda's attention to the "hot boards" underneath her bed and "storms [that] sometimes wet [her] clothes through and through" (Jacobs 135-6). Henceforth, the garret represents Linda's confrontation with enslaved patriarchal oppression, which forces Linda's body to relive the trauma through physical discomfort. This relationship is furthered as Linda describes the prolonged effects of her imprisonment. Specifically, Linda draws attention to her body's cohesive, physical breakdown during the second winter in the garret. "I suffered much more during the second winter than I did during the first," Linda states, "my limbs were benumbed to inaction, and the cold filled them with cramp. I had a very painful sensation of coldness in my head; even my face and tongue stiffened, and I lost the power of speech" (Jacobs 136). Her physical suffering's severity reflects in the widened, critical scope Linda uses to address enslavement. "I asked why the curse of slavery was permitted to exist, and why I had been so persecuted and wrong from youth upward" echoes throughout Linda's prior descriptions of her regression within the garret (Jacobs 137). Her regression, as she is figuratively reborn into her grandmother's home, illustrates her body as a young child learning to walk:

I found myself so stiff and clumsy that it was with great difficulty I could hitch from one resting place to another. When I reached the storeroom, my ankles gave way under me, and I sank exhausted on the floor. It seemed as if I could never use my limbs again. But the purpose I had in view roused all the strength I had (Jacobs 140).

The newly-born “wretched mother,” through her time in the garret, sacrifices her physical body so that her metaphoric, maternal body can resist her condition (Jacobs 140). This resistance, though strong, meets resistance from religious structures that attempt to prolong Linda’s suffering.

Chapter 3: Religion

Mr. Covey’s religious hypocrisy appears within the orthodox structures and doctrines in *Jane Eyre* and *Incidents*. In “Chapter X,” Douglass notes that “the religion of the south is a mere covering for the most horrid crimes—a justifier of the most appalling barbarity...and a dark shelter under which the darkest, foulest, grossest, and most infernal deeds of slaveholders find the strongest protection” (*Narrative* 90). Douglass’ broad critique of southern religiosity is narrowed though his attention to Mr. Covey’s hypocritical piety. Namely, Mr. Covey “seemed to think himself equal to deceiving the Almighty” and “took to compelling his woman slave to commit the sin of adultery” (Douglass 80-1). Douglass’ observations highlight an emerging

relationship between a powerful individual's religious hypocrisy and their ability to exercise unprecedented control over their subordinate's body. In turn, Douglass states, "Mr. Covey succeeded in breaking me. I was broken in body, soul, and spirit... the dark night of slavery closed in upon me; and behold a man transformed into a brute!" (*Narrative* 81). Douglass' explanations of religion thus appear in *Jane Eyre* and *Incidents*. Though their oppression manifests differently, maternal figures in both works once again nourish Jane and Linda's bodies so they can resist their conditions.

Jane's first interaction with Mr. Brocklehurst introduces the relationship between corrupt religiosity and bodily suffering. Abruptly one morning in January, Bessie ushers Jane to the breakfast-room per request of an unknown person. Mr. Brocklehurst, the unknown visitor, quickly takes to ridiculing Jane through his interpretations of religious doctrines. After Mr. Brocklehurst quickly judges Jane based upon her 'deviant' religious views, "Mrs. Reed interposed, telling [Jane] to sit down; she then carried on the conversation herself" (Brontë 27). Revoking Jane's agency within the exchange posits Mrs. Reed's belief that Jane has a "tendency to deceit" amidst her transferral to Lowood (Brontë 28). Mr. Brocklehurst accepts Mrs. Reed's identifications, which results in Jane feeling as though her benefactress "was sowing aversion and unkindness along my future path; I saw myself transformed under Mr. Brocklehurst's eye into an artful and obnoxious child" (Brontë 28). Recurrent trauma, through Jane's label, later manifests during Mr. Brocklehurst's daughter, Augusta's observations of Lowood's pupils looking "almost like poor people's children" (Brontë 28). Her observation evokes Jane's earlier fear of being sent to a poorhouse and her statement that "poverty for me was synonymous with degradation" (Brontë 20). Her earlier comparisons and feelings settle firmly under Mr.

Brocklehurst's authority. Her submission, however, is not without resistance empowered by the enslavement metaphor.

Mr. Brocklehurst evokes Jane's confinement to the nursery while at Gateshead Hall, which inspires her later revolt against Mrs. Reed. The superintendent describes Jane's transition to Lowood as being "placed in that nursery of chosen plants" (Brontë 29). Spatially, Mr. Brocklehurst evokes Jane's oppressive confinement to the nursery while at Gateshead Hall. As Mr. Brocklehurst previously described Lowood as "plain faire, simple attire, unsophisticated accommodations, hardy and active habits," his description reinstates that Jane will be brought up amidst hardship and moral persecution (Brontë 28-9). The ensuing dread Jane experiences forces her to confront the origins of her oppression. "Sitting on a low stool, a few yards from her armchair," Jane states, "I examined [Mrs. Reed's] figure; I perused her features. In my hand I held the tract containing the sudden death of the Liar: to which narrative my attention had been pointed to as an appropriate warning" (Brontë 29). Jane's past trauma, while being transferred to her future home, evokes Julia Sun-Joo Lee's correlations to Douglass' narrative:

From her dramatic account of physical victory over an oppressor to her language of spiritual liberation, Jane channels the voice of Frederick Douglass... In Jane's case, she bursts the "invisible bond" of familial oppression; in Douglass, he throws off the "crush[ing] weight of psychological oppression (*The American* 32-3).

Once Jane declares, "I am glad you are no relation of mine," she bursts the bonds tying her to Gateshead Hall's regime and reassumes her orphan status (Brontë 30). Isolation, both literal and metaphoric, resonates through Jane's following statement: "I stood awhile on the rug, where Mr. Brocklehurst had stood, and I enjoyed my conqueror's solitude" (Brontë 31). Solitude in Jane's account bears irony, as Mr. Brocklehurst's presence at Gateshead Hall foreshadows Jane's

continued encounter with oppression. Her conquest, in turn, dislodges Jane from Gateshead's oppression and locates her closer to Mr. Brocklehurst's ruling over Lowood. The "aromatic wine it seemed, on swallowing, warm and racy: its after flavour, metallic and corroding, gave me a sensation as if I had been poisoned," functions as the now-writing Jane informing her readers of the tyrannies soon approaching (Brontë 31). Henceforth, Mr. Brocklehurst subsumes her momentary autonomy and diffuses it into Lowood's rigid social structure.

Lowood quickly becomes a second, oppressive structure through its emphasis on class and deprivation. During Jane's introduction to Lowood's routine, Miss Miller, an instructor, issues a statement that categorizes Jane's body within Lowood. Namely, Miss Temple's statement to "form classes," leaves Jane to enter where "the smallest of the children were assembled: to this interior class I was called, and placed at the bottom of it" (Brontë 37). Negotiating status is important in regard to Jane's first day, as Susan Meyer's reading of class and its relationship to enslavement permeates Jane's consciousness during the stool-scene (*Imperialism* 63). Amidst class distinctions, food quality and bodily depletion consistently demean Lowood's pupils. For example, Jane identifies food as a recurrent form of abuse: "Ravenous, and now very faint," Jane states, "I devoured a spoonful or two of my portion without thinking of its taste; but the first edge of hunger blunted, I perceived I had got in hand a nauseous mess...famine itself soon sickens over it" (Brontë 38). Food depravity's long term, negative effect on Lowood's pupils is described by Jane when discussing the later typhus outbreak: "*semi-starvation* and neglected colds had predisposed most of the pupils to receive infection" (Brontë 65, my emphasis). With sickness identified as a locus of oppression at Lowood, it is useful to examine a second contributing factor: physical exhaustion. To best understand this relationship, it is pertinent to move back to Jane's first observations of Lowood's

food quality. After Jane describes her first meal, she then states, “discipline prevailed: in five minutes, the confused throng was resolved into order” (Brontë 39). Order and its relationship to bodily degradation, through another, distant example, coincides with the current progression of physical depletion. As Jane and the other pupils later walk to a Church service, Jane describes how Lowood’s rigid expectations result in bodily harm. Jane explicitly states, “Sundays were dreary days in that wintry season. We had to walk two miles to Brocklebridge Church, where our patron officiated. We set out cold, we arrived at the church colder: during the morning service we almost became paralysed” (Brontë 50-1). Neglect, as revealed through Jane’s description of the sickness’ origins, manifests through cyclical, bodily depletion enforced by Lowood’s corrupt social structure. It is now pertinent to analyze Mr. Brocklehurst—the tyrannical superintendent responsible for the pupils’ abasement.

Mr. Brocklehurst’s plan reveals the religious hypocrisy embedded in Lowood’s social structure. While briefly visiting Lowood, Mr. Brocklehurst communicates the aims of his ‘religious’ institution. Order at Lowood is not achieved through religiosity; rather, Mr. Brocklehurst states that, “pampering the body...[obviates] the aim of this institution...a judicious instructor would take the opportunity of referring to the sufferings of primitive Christians...you may indeed feed their vile bodies, but you little think of how you starve their immortal souls” (Brontë 53). Mr. Brocklehurst’s attention to bodily suffering under religious doctrine illustrates the superintendent as a hypocritical enslaver described by Douglass. Combined with Jane’s earlier class distinction, Mr. Brocklehurst’s false piety evokes Jane’s use of the enslavement metaphor to both interpret and resist her condition. The stool-scene, for example, epitomizes Mr. Brocklehurst’s authority through his ability to publicly shame and isolate Jane’s body. She attempts to draw attention away from herself by regressing further into the crowd of pupils.

However, her “treacherous slate somehow happened to slop from my hand and [fell] with an obtrusive crash, directly [drawing] every eye upon [her]” (Brontë 55). Mr Brocklehurst then calls Jane forward to belittle her body as an example for the other pupils. Through his demand, Jane’s physical body becomes depleted and leaves her “paralysed,” rendering her incapable of protesting against Mr. Brocklehurst (Brontë 55). Jane’s punished body is then displayed to Lowood’s pupils. By placing Jane onto a stool in the middle of the room, Mr. Brocklehurst evokes Gateshead’s punishment by forcibly calling Jane forward to testify against false accusations placed onto her body. He epitomizes his method of corporeal punishment by stating that the observers should “punish [Jane’s] body to save her soul” (Brontë 56). Amidst Jane’s spiritual and physical distress, she evokes Douglass’ narrative to rationalize her isolation and lack of agency to testify for herself. Julia Sun-Joo Lee notes Jane’s reference as a Garrisonian, nonviolent response to her punishment and states that:

Jane, who had previously vowed...that she “could not bear” such a disgrace and would even wrest the ruler from her teacher’s hand should she be flogged, now submits to her punishment with no visible resistance. She neither lashes out physically, as she did with Master John, or verbally, as she did with Mrs. Reed (*The American* 37).

Sun-Joo Lee’s salient reading illustrates Jane’s use of Garrisonian resistance as a powerful, silent protest that gains power through her description of her pupils passing her punished body as if they “had passed a slave or victim” (Brontë 57). While Sun-Joo Lee describes an explicit display of condition inequity and its bodily effects, a more explicit example of Jane’s resistance appears when she states, “I *mastered* the rising hysteria, lifted up my head, and took a firm stand on the stool” (Brontë 57, my emphasis). As Jane’s first description illustrates her as Mr. Brocklehurst’s victim, her conditional inequality is challenged when she illustrates that, through self-discipline,

she can master herself. Though momentarily triumphant, Jane “now ventured to descend” from her punishment and describes her reentrance into Lowood’s oppression: “The spell by which I had been so far supported began to dissolve; reaction took place, and soon, so overwhelming was the grief that seized me, I sank prostrate with my face to the ground” (Brontë 57).

Much like Jane, Linda utilizes self-liberative and Garrisonian techniques to resist unionized oppressors in the wake of Nat Turner’s Rebellion¹². Both Linda and Jane use retrospective narrative style, which fosters intimacy between the women and their immediate surroundings. Through prior explorations of Jane’s time at Lowood, the heroine widens her interpretations of oppression by noting the experiences of other pupils. Linda Brent depicts a similar, widened criticism of enslavers and their power over enslaved people after Nat Turner’s Rebellion. Figuring Linda’s response to socioeconomic inequity surrounding the rebellion is necessary to understand enforced religious persecution from Southern enslavers. Specifically, Linda notes that it “was always custom to have a muster every year,” which results in poor white men exercising authority over enslaved people (Jacobs 68). Poverty, in Linda’s account, plays a significant role in its figuring of power structures. Linda states, “[the poor whites] exalted in such a chance to exercise a little brief authority, and show their subserviency to the slaveholders; not reflecting the power which trampled on the colored people also kept themselves in poverty, ignorance, and moral degradation” (Jacobs 69). Through Linda’s account, poor whites use enslaved people to alleviate their economic-based oppression. By uplifting wealthy plantation owners, the poor marauders heighten an enslaver’s ability to oppress enslaved people, while

¹²In 1831, Nathaniel Turner, an enslaved man and preacher, revolted against his master. After breaking into his enslaver’s home, Nat Turner and six others murdered the Travis (Nat Turner’s enslavers) family. Shortly after, Turner enlisted other enslaved people to revolt and subsequently killed roughly fifty-five white individuals. Turner then went into hiding for two weeks, but was found and sentenced to be hung in Virginia. The effects of Nat Turner’s Rebellion, as Linda describes, resulted in enslavers enforcing stricter laws on the rights of enslaved people.

rendering the very same oppressed group further under race-based control. Yet, it is at the hands of the poor white community that directly threatens the safety of Linda's family.

Linda's masterful use of Garrisonian resistance highlights the significance of retaliating against organized forms of oppression—a method that, in the following chapter, becomes magnified by observing her resistance against the marauders. Linda's resistance against emerging powers is firmly rooted in the domestic sphere: "I knew the houses were to be searched: and I expected it would be done by country bullies and the poor whites. I knew nothing annoyed them so much as to see colored people living in comfort and respectability" (Jacobs 69). Linda's cultivation illustrates orderly enslaved domestic space as a threat against those participating in the second muster. Her retaliation, much like Jane's while on the stool, emphasizes passivity rather than passionate resistance. In Linda's case, her resistance derives its power by heightening her status in relation to the marauders. Her intrinsic awareness of her condition in relation to the poor white men infiltrating her grandmother's home thus widens the ironic display of power structures. Linda states, "I had no positive fears about our household, because we were in the midst of white families who would protect us" (Jacobs 70). Ironically, Linda pulls from her protection to magnify the marauder's social conditions: "Mr. Litch, the wealthy slaveholder whom I mentioned...felt above soiling his hands with the search. He merely gave orders; and, if a bit of writing was discovered, it was carried to him by his ignorant followers, who were unable to read" (Jacobs 71). Linda's juxtaposition of power and social condition between wealthy plantation owners and poor white marauders thus delineates the trajectory of religious persecution evident in the following chapter. Namely, her critical religious observations are empowered by her observations of "a spectacle...for a civilized country! A rabble, staggering under intoxication, assuming to be the administrators of justice!" (Jacobs 71).

Linda Brent's widened, critical scope of power structures existing in the wake of Nat Turner's Rebellion empowers her religious observations and self-liberation in her chapter, "The Church and Slavery."

From her observations during the second muster, readers become aware of Linda Brent's widened, critical scope and its ability to infiltrate power structures. The emerging framework takes hold in "The Church and Slavery" and illustrates her prior observations as a technique that encourages her self-liberation from religious oppression within enslavement. Sharon Carson also describes Linda's exploration of white religious hypocrisy and notes:

Her rhetoric here is sharply directed at hypocritical Christians who abuse the black community. Right before this chapter begins, *Incidents* exposes white attitudes toward black religious autonomy.... In religion, as well as most other aspects of African American life, the white community attempted to assert dominance and control. Self-definition by African Americans, individually or collectively, religiously and/or politically, threatened the structure of white society ("Dismantling" 62).

While Carson focuses heavily on enslaved people "[begging] for the privilege of again meeting at their little church in the woods" and their "[permittance] to attend the white churches," applying her reading the Mr. Pike's sermon reveals a more intimate tie to Linda's religiosity and its reflection within the enslaved community ("Dismantling" 62). Most notably, Mr. Pike's repetition of God's sight in his sermon gives rise to the hypocrisy Linda describes::

Hearken, ye servants! Give strict heed unto my words. You are rebellious sinners. Your hearts are filled with all manner of evil... Instead of serving your masters faithfully, which is pleasing in the sight of your heavenly Master, you are idle, and shirk in your work. God sees you. You tell lies. God hears you. Instead of being engaged in

worshipping him, you are hidden away somewhere, feasting on your master's substance... Your masters may not find you out, but *God sees you*, and will punish you... *God sees you*. You men steal away to every grog shop to sell your master's corn that you may buy rum to drink. *God sees you*. You sneak into the back streets, or among the bushes, to pitch coppers. Although your masters may not find you out, *God sees you*; and he will punish you... Obey your old master and your young master—your old mistress and your young mistress. If you disobey your earthly master, you offend your heavenly Master (Jacobs 75-6, my emphasis).

Repetition throughout Mr. Pike's sermon operates twofold. Carson promptly identifies how Linda "uses irony to rearrange the familiar religious landscape, to place common white religious perceptions in context where their hypocrisy is raised to the surface" ("Dismantling" 62). Yet, Linda's reflection also operates as a cathartic release from the bonds of religious persecution throughout her narrative. As previously noted, communal persecution grants Linda the ability to exercise her unique forms of resistance. Religion—an intimate, oppressive force throughout Linda's narrative—follows a congregational pattern of resistance after Mr. Pike's sermon. In the chapter, "The New Tie to Life," Linda epitomizes religiosity and its suffocating presence within the conventions of enslaved motherhood. As Linda rebels against Dr. Flint's sexual abuse, her enslaver states, "You are *blinded* now; but hereafter you will be convinced that your master was your best friend... You are my slave, and shall always be my slave. I will never sell you, that you may depend on" (Jacobs 64-5). Dr. Flint's reference to blindness takes shape amidst Mr. Pike's insistence that God sees all actions of enslaved individuals and their defiance of white perceptions of religiosity and servitude. As these instances occur close to one another, one can read Linda's ability to pierce through Mr. Pike's hypocrisy as a consolidation that resolves her

struggles with religiosity and enslaved motherhood. Much like Jane's self-mastery upon the stool, Linda exhibits a momentary triumph against religious persecution.

...

Miss Temple assumes Bessie's maternal role while Jane is at Lowood, which encourages Jane to resist against the institution's religious persecution. Jane's first encounter with Miss Temple occurs during the first lesson. Jane's phrenological¹³ evaluation of the Lowood superintendent correlates her features to a modestly graceful individual. In contrast with Jane's harsh descriptions of the other instructors¹⁴, Miss Temple's antithetical figuring illustrates her as a figure that persists, rather than succumbs to, Lowood's oppression. Jane's phrenological perspective is then corroborated by Miss Temple's first act of kindness. Namely, the burnt meal and its negative, physical effects on Lowood's pupils becomes resolved through Miss Temple's "[ordering] that a lunch of bread and cheese shall be served to all" (Brontë 40). Miss Temple's first act of kindness mirrors Bessie's offering. Like Bessie, too, Miss Temple does show an immediate affinity for Jane. Helen Burns' friendship with Jane, as well as Miss Temple's maternal figuring within Helen's life, bridges sororal and maternal connections that resolve Jane's religious persecution at Lowood.

Helen Burns acts as a mediating figure between Jane's growing, internal resistance and her reception under Miss Temple's maternal care. Jane notes that she first approaches Helen because she is observed reading (Brontë 41). Jane's statement, "I think her occupation touched a

¹³ Charlotte Brontë was an avid believer in phrenology. Phrenology, defined in the Norton Critical Edition, was a "popular practice of identifying qualities of individual character from the shape of various parts ("organs") of the skull. Together with physiognomy, which relied on the face or countenance as an index of character, phrenology furthered confidence in the visual interpretation of human nature" (Brontë 39, footnote 4).

¹⁴ "I was still looking at them...none of whom precisely pleased me; for the stout one was a little coarse, the dark one not a little fierce, the foreigner harsh and grotesque, and Miss Miller, poor thing! Looked purple, weatherbeaten, and overworked" (Brontë 39).

chord of sympathy somewhere; for I too liked reading,” evokes literacy as a congruent liberative action that enables the two to question Lowood’s principles (Brontë 41). Liberation manifests through Jane’s ability to explicitly ask Helen, “and why do they call it Institution?” and gain insight into her degraded condition while at Lowood (Brontë 42). Later on, Helen educates Jane on how to both cope with and resist against Lowood’s constraints. Namely, Helen represents a “doctrine of endurance” and an uncanny ability to “bear to be subjected to systematic arrangements” (Brontë 47). Alongside her doctrines of resistance, Helen takes on a second, coded role amidst Jane’s oppression. As Helen and Jane become closer, Helen appears to operate as a metaphoric body double of Jane.

Jane’s symbiotic relationship with Helen locates her closer to Miss Temple’s maternal care. The pupils’ sororal connection is heightened following Jane’s isolation on the stool. Much like Bessie, Helen nourishes Jane’s body by bringing Jane “coffee and bread” (Brontë 58). Her offering supports the idea of body doubling, as Helen offers food that “would have choked [her] in her present condition”—unable to empower her own body, Helen offers Jane food so that she may overcome her body’s punishment (Brontë 58). The two are then depicted as physically inseparable: namely, Jane describes how she “put [her] hand into [Helen’s],” “[rested her] hand on Helen’s shoulder,” “put [her] arms around [Helen’s] waist,” and how Helen “drew me to her” (Brontë 58-9). Throughout their embrace, a prior statement made by Helen foreshadows body doubling’s true role in her friendship with Jane: “God waits only on the separation of spirit from flesh to crown us with a full reward” (Brontë 59). The reward Helen mentions—achieved through metaphoric body doubling—is “the approaching figure, which we once recognised as Miss Temple” (Brontë 59). Helen and Jane’s sororal connection henceforth locates Jane under Miss Temple’s maternal care. Her vigilance transforms the pupils relationship, as Jane notes that,

while with Miss Temple, Helen's eyes "shone in the liquid luster of her eyes, which had suddenly acquired a beauty more singular than that of Miss Temple's" and her "soul sat on her lips, and language flowed, from what source I cannot tell" (Brontë 62). Helen's physical body adopts a mediating role between Jane and Miss Temple, as her physical and emotional proximity encourages Jane to take her place as Miss Temple's child. Miss Temple embodies the transferral through her statement, "God bless you, my children," suggesting that the superintendent has metaphorically adopted Jane as her daughter (Brontë 62).

The parental model created by Miss Temple becomes an adaptive trauma response after Helen's death. As typhus plagues Lowood, Helen Burns' prolonged symptoms evolve into consumption, otherwise known as tuberculosis. Helen, on her deathbed, tells Jane that she is returning to her "universal Parent"—in the absence of Helen's physical presence, Jane is then located closer to Miss Temple's maternal care (Brontë 69). When Helen passes the next day, Miss Temple "found [Jane] laid in a little crib" and removed her as a mother would carry her own child (Brontë 70). Helen's body doubling, through her final moments, operates to absolve Jane from Lowood's suffering. The result, as Jane states, establishes Miss Temple as a consistent maternal figure during her next eight years at Lowood: "Miss Temple, through all changes, had thus far continued superintendent of the seminary: to her instruction I word the best part of my acquirements; her friendship and society had been my continual solace: she had stood me in the stead of mother, governess, and latterly, companion" (Brontë 71). Through Helen's sacrificial death, Jane becomes located under Miss Temple—the maternal figure Jane has desperately longed for and, after eight years, gives Jane the skills to persist from Lowood and seek employment at Thornfield Hall.

Much like Jane, a maternal figure empowers Linda to resist religious persecution. Linda's triumph over Mr. Pike's sermon magnifies her observations of a grieving mother. Linda states, "I well remember one occasion when I attended a Methodist class meeting. I went with a burdened spirit, and happened to sit next to a poor, bereaved mother, whose heart was still heavier than mine" (Jacobs 77). Just as Jane and Helen appear to body double, Linda's explicit attention on the unnamed mother seemingly functions as a figure of her maternal anxiety. The unnamed mother, in a fit of agony, states, "God has hid himself from me, and I am left in darkness and misery... They've got all my children... O! O! Pray for her brothers and sisters! I've got nothing to live for now. God make my time short!" (Jacobs 77). Linda then observes the congregation and notes that they "struck up a hymn, and sung as though they were as free as the birds that warbled around us" (Jacobs 78). As Linda had previously endured intimate punishment regarding her pregnancy, her widened perspective illustrates religious, communal solace as a liberative tool for Linda. Her communal perspective is then heightened by the Episcopal clergyman, as his presence correlates to "the first time they had been addressed as human beings" (Jacobs 79). As Linda previously noted that the unnamed mother endured ridicule from the constable class leader, the clergyman's efforts operate to resolve Linda's distress through religious compassion (Jacobs 77-8). These fragmented observations made by Linda's weaving in-and-out of other's consciousness thus culminate in her passionate resistance against religious hypocrisy within enslavement. Namely, Linda describes how clergymen describe enslavement as "a beautiful 'patriarchal institution;' that the slaves don't want their freedom; that they have hallelujah meetings and other religious privileges" (Jacobs 83). After Linda's targeted critique of southern Christianity, she then describes her resistance against Dr. Flint's involvement with the Episcopal church. Dr. Flint, during his coercion, states, "You can do what I require; and if you

are faithful to me, you will be as virtuous as my wife” (Jacobs 83). Linda powerfully responds to his comment by “[answering] that the Bible didn’t say so” (Jacobs 83). Sharon Carson’s reading of the chapter’s final exchange epitomizes Linda’s doubling and communal perspective to resist against corrupt southern Christianity:

In a single sentence, Jacobs makes a radical claim to a hermeneutics of religious and political freedom. As she recounts this very personal encounter, she asserts her self-definition, her theology, against the religious (and sexual) claims of Dr. Flint, and by extension, against the theological underpinnings of white slaveholding Christianity, which she has just so carefully exposed. The house of the Lord, already left on a wobbly foundation, collapses (“Dismantling” 66).

As the perverted southern church figuratively crumbles following her statement, Linda’s passionate resistance against her enslaver encourages her to resist the bonds of religious persecution imposed onto her condition. Linda’s growing resolve, achieved by absolving perverted southern religious expectations, encourages her to flee to the North in an attempt to liberate both herself and her children.

Chapter 4: The Master and His Mistress

Douglass’ *Narrative*, thus far, frames Jane and Linda’s initiations, existences within maternal spaces, and experiences within corrupt religious institutions. However, the gendered experiences in *Narrative* complicate Douglass’ influence on Jane and Linda’s submission to their master and mistress. Throughout this section, it is pertinent to examine how power systems degrade a *woman’s* body, as well as how race and gender uniquely assimilate Jane and Linda’s condition. I propose a hierarchical dominance model, or the social organizations that define

power and its enforcement within *Jane Eyre* and *Incidents*. This model is heavily influenced by Susan Meyer's reading of power in *Jane Eyre*, in which she states, "each man's dominating relationship with a colonial people is represented as a substitute for his relationship with the rebellious heroine" (*Imperialism* 60). The West Indies, in particular, aligns Mr. Rochester with Meyer's reading. Yet, Dr. Flint's prowess over colonial bodies is a tricky connection to make. Legacy, in this instance, becomes a powerful connecting force between Dr. Flint and his oppression. Namely, large Caribbean plantations were the foregrounding models for Southern plantations. As these systems moved, power structures evolved and Southern plantation systems became a microcosm of larger plantations. Through this legacy, Dr. Flint embodies the offshoots of power exhibited by Mr. Rochester, in turn aligning their mastery under the hierarchical dominance model. The proposed model has three components: the all-powerful master, the suspended mistress, and the subordinate woman. Mr. Rochester and Dr. Flint possess the most power when compared to their mistresses and subordinates. Their power specifically arises from masculinity and whiteness—constructs that, during the 19th Century, enabled white men to hold the highest positions of social power. The mistresses, on the other hand, hold a conflicting position in the proposed model of power. Marital status, for example, encourages both Bertha Mason and Mrs. Flint to antagonize the subordinate character; yet, marriage locates the mistresses under their husband's control, as they are viewed socially as domestic property inherited by their husbands. Jane and Linda, within this model of power, are subordinate. Their positions within the domestic sphere align both women's regressions towards a space that embodies their masters' prowess. After Jane and Linda evade the tainted domestic sphere, Bertha Mason and Mrs. Flint become catalytic agents that influence the subordinate women to flee from oppressive domestic structures.

Thornfield Hall atmospherically constructs Mr. Rochester's role as master. Mrs. Fairfax, a relation of Mr. Rochester's and a housekeeper at Thornfield Hall, welcomes Jane in a confusing manner. Though Jane "anticipated only coldness and stiffness," Mrs. Fairfax greets the governess warmly and embodies the "ideal of domestic comfort" (Brontë 81). Jane's initial, positive interpretation of Thornfield, however, is quickly contradicted by Mrs. Fairfax's statement, "Leah is a nice girl to be sure, and John and his wife are very decent people; but then you see they are only servants, and one can't keep them on terms of equality: one must keep them at a distance, for fear of losing one's authority" (Brontë 82). Mrs. Fairfax's embodiment of domestic comfort, as well as undercurrents of inequity, foreshadows Jane's existence within Thornfield. Namely, as Jane's affection for Mr. Rochester alleviates the social constraints from governessing,¹⁵ inequality appears within their burgeoning relationship and disguises Mr. Rochester's enforcement of racial and gendered hierarchies. This complex negotiation forces Jane to pivot her attention to "a very chill and vaultlike air [that] pervaded the stairs and gallery, suggesting cheerless ideas of space and solitude" (Brontë 83). Jane's observation rounds out Mr. Rochester's relationship to space, as the air's qualities seem to represent Mr. Rochester's pervasive demeanor as Thornfield's master. Mrs. Fairfax's domestic comfort, amidst her acknowledgement of inequity, thus foreshadows Mr. Rochester's amiability that acts as a facade for his secret wife, Bertha Mason.

¹⁵ The governess, though a popular literary archetype, was a form of employment for educated, middle-class women in the 19th Century. Educated women, for instance, were employed to teach children at home, resulting in governesses leaving behind their families to enter a new domestic model. In *The Victorian Governess*, Katherine Hughes states that governesses faced three main tensions: "social respectability, sexual morality and financial self-reliance" (xiii). Indeed, Jane struggles against the forces outlined by Hughes; however, it was *Jane Eyre* that popularized the governess as a character in Victorian fiction, as well as William Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (Hughes 1). When read against *Vanity Fair*, Jane's governess status pushes against the "wicked governess" trope and embraces what Hughes describes as the "feminisation" of the Victorian genre (*The Victorian* 2-3). Hence, Jane's governessing imbues her time at Thornfield Hall with rigid expectations of femininity and servitude, which magnifies her subordinate status under the Hall's unrelenting master.

Once Jane becomes acquainted with Mr. Rochester, Thornfield becomes an explicit mirror of its master. Jane, while exploring the Hall, notes that its interior “appeared very stately and imposing” (Brontë 84). The environment’s wealth, alongside furniture turned “ebon black with time and rubbing¹⁶,” illustrates Mr. Rochester’s darkness after his fall from status (Brontë 84). The furniture’s luxurious, yet worn exterior influences Jane’s external observations after passing through an open door. While outside, she describes Thornfield as “a gentleman’s manor house” surrounded by “an array of mighty old thorn trees, strong, knotty, and broad as oaks, [which] at once explained the etymology of the mansion’s designation” (Brontë 84). Though etymology refers to the origins of Thornfield’s name, the Hall’s title also reflects its master. Mr. Rochester, “a gentleman, a land proprietor—nothing more” (Brontë 89) is entombed within the thorny Rochester legacy of being “rather a violent than a quiet race in their time” (Brontë 90). Like the land, Jane moves in and out of Mr. Rochester’s proximity; as she is dragged through the metaphoric thorns of his past, Mr. Rochester’s mastery physically and cognitively degrades Jane while under his jurisdiction.

After Jane uses the environment to characterize her master, Thornfield embodies its master’s oppressive qualities. After Jane meets Adele, her pupil at Thornfield Hall, Jane states “I withdrew to the library; which room, it appears, Mr. Rochester had directed should be used as the schoolroom. Most of the books were locked up behind glass doors” (Brontë 88). Literacy and liberation—a relationship evident in both *Jane Eyre* and Douglass’ *Narrative*—are physically kept

¹⁶ In *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel*, Elaine Freedgood’s notes that the mahogany furniture at Thornfield Hall (and Ferndean, for that matter), traces Jane’s uncle’s wine trading alongside mahogany wood in the West Indies and Britain. Through Freedgood’s reading, the furniture Jane describes carries the legacy of transatlantic enslavement into the environment (*The Ideas* 34-5). The furniture’s darkness, as well as evidence of rubbing, further suggests that the Rochester family has long attempted to rid themselves of their legacy within the transatlantic slave trade, thus imbuing Thornfield Hall with powerful manifestations of imperialism that function to indoctrinate Jane into the mastery-submission relationship I describe throughout this section.

away from Jane as she traverses the library. Liberation, however, is not completely withheld from Jane: “the one bookcase left open,” for instance, reflects Mr. Rochester’s seemingly amiable nature that disguises his desire to manipulate and control Jane’s body (Brontë 88). Freedom and its convoluted relationship to Jane then gathers around a focal domestic structure: Thornfield’s third-story attic, which Jane notices as Mrs. Fairfax locks the trap-door. Jane first describes the third story attic, “like a corridor in some Bluebeard’s castle”—a note in the Norton Critical Edition of *Jane Eyre* reveals that, “in Charles Perrault’s fairytale, the young wife is given keys to many rooms but is denied entrance to the one containing bodies of Bluebeard’s former wives” (Brontë 91, footnote 8). The mature Jane, who is writing her narrative ten years later, uses observations of Thornfield’s interior to identify a focal domestic space that embodies Mr. Rochester’s dark past. This narrowing of perspective, in turn, locates the third story attic as a domestic space Jane regresses towards as she falls under Mr. Rochester’s authority.

In *Incidents*, “The Lover” is followed by two chapters that, like Jane’s interpretation of Thornfield, narrow the scope of Dr. Flint’s mastery. In “What Slaves are Taught to Think of the North,” Linda describes how Southern plantation owners manipulate enslaved people to prevent them from exercising bodily autonomy. Enslavers, upon returning from the north, describe fugitive slaves, “to be in the most deplorable condition” (Jacobs 45). The fear of bodily suffering prevents enslaved people from bettering their condition and, in turn, empowering their physical person. Linda negotiates a broader confrontation with enslaved autonomy by stating:

I admit the black man *is* inferior. But what is it that makes him so? It is the ignorance in which white men compel him to live; it is the torturing whip that lashes manhood out of him; it is the fierce bloodhounds of the South, and the scarcely less cruel human

bloodhounds of the north, who enforce the Fugitive Slave Law¹⁷. *They* do work (Jacobs 46).

Linda's observations depict a universal enslaved reality; enslaved inferiority becomes dependent upon enslavers' false narratives, as their dominance relies on preventing self-actualization. Linda confronts this issue earlier through her statement, "[enslaved people] would know that liberty is more valuable than life. They would begin to understand their own capabilities, and expect themselves to become free men and women" (Jacobs 46). Reversing Patrick Henry's famous, "give me liberty or give me death" speech emphasizes that liberating the psyche, to enslaved people, is more valuable than existing within their current condition. The enslaved condition is pertinent to Linda's following chapter, "Sketches of Neighboring Slaveholders," as succumbing to enslavement without a notion of liberty renders the enslaved body powerless against their master's exploitation.

"Sketches" narrows observations made in "What Slaves are Taught" through Linda's attention to enslaved women's experiences. Linda concludes her description of Mr. Litch, a violent enslaver, by stating, "cruelty is contagious in uncivilized communities" (Jacobs 49). After describing violence's infectious nature, Linda diverts from her masculine perspective and references women's bodies within enslavement: "women are considered of no value, unless they continually increase their owner's stock. They are put on par with animals" (Jacobs 52). Linda's decision to reference enslaved womanhood after discussing pervasive violence intrinsically

¹⁷ According to a publication from the American Anti-Slavery Society, Samuel May states that the Fugitive Slave Law was an "infamous kidnapping law" (4) passed by Congress in 1850 (3). Sections six and seven provide the most comprehensive overview of the Law's principles: "(Section 6) The claimant of any fugitive slave, or his attorney, 'may pursue and reclaim such fugitive person,' either by procuring a warrant from some Judge or Commissioner, 'or by seizing and arresting such fugitive, where the same can be done without process'" and "(Section 7) Any person obstructing the arrest of a fugitive, or attempting his or her rescue, or aiding him or her to escape, or harboring or concealing a fugitive...shall be subjected to a fine of not exceeding one thousand dollars, and to be imprisoned not exceeding six months" (May 3-5).

weaves her condition into her broader observations. Namely, Linda describes how an enslaved woman's reduction to her master's concubine "drove her mad"—an observation that, through the now-writing Linda, begins to assimilate these disjointed narratives to her body's subordination under Dr. Flint (Jacobs 54). The proposed relationship between Linda's observations and her body materializes through a following statement:

The slave girl is reared in an atmosphere of licentiousness and fear. The last and the foul talk of her master and his sons are her teachers. When she is fourteen or fifteen, her owner, or his sons, or the overseer, or perhaps all of them, begin to bribe her with presents. If these fail to accomplish their purpose, she is whipped or starved into submission to their will. She may have had religious principles inculcated by some pious mother or grandmother, or some good mistress; she may have a lover, whose good opinion and peace of mind are dear to her heart; or the profligate men who have power over her may be exceedingly odious to her. But resistance is hopeless (Jacobs 55).

The hypotheticals regarding age, piety, a maternal grandmother, and a good mistress incorporate Linda's prior figures of comfort into her widened view of plantation life. The dynamics evident in "this wicked system" then encourages Linda to borrow Jane's avian metaphors to describe her existence within "that cage of obscene birds" (Jacobs 56). Her body, through a gendered perspective of Southern plantation life, becomes almost trapped in the cage Linda describes in the following chapter, "Perilous Passage in the Slave Girl's Life": "In the blandest of tones, [Dr. Flint] told me that he was going to build a small house for me, in a secluded place...to give me a home of my own, and to make a lady of me" (Jacobs 57). This cage, through her narrowed perspective, thus describes Dr. Flint's methods of rendering Linda powerless under his authority.

Space and its relationship to Mr. Rochester and Dr. Flint introduces the second component of their mastery; that is, both masters force Jane and Linda to regress into a domestic space that harbors their darkest forms of bodily appropriation. Romance in both *Jane Eyre* and *Incidents* mediates this exchange, as expectations and conventions of womanhood are intertwined in each work's focal, romantic relationship. In Jane's case, her infatuation with Mr. Rochester initially distorts her objective interpretations of his darker qualities. When Bertha Mason assaults her brother, Richard Mason, Jane is ushered into Thornfield's third story attic and becomes firmly placed under Mr. Rochester's control. Interestingly, the writing-Jane previously nodded to Bertha Mason's existence by referencing Bluebeard's Castle; however, it is clear that the writing-Jane uses her encounter with Richard Mason to depict her powerlessness while infatuated with her master. Unlike Jane, Linda's romantic interest lies outside of her oppressor's grasp. Her growing relationship with her first love threatens Dr. Flint's plan to turn Linda into his concubine, in turn influencing her master to construct a space so that he may appropriate her body in private. The cottage and third-story attic, rather than *solely* romance, unites Mr. Rochester and Dr. Flint. Specifically, romance is a catalyst that supports the masters' conquering of their subordinates; in both works, perverted domestic spaces represent an epicenter of abuse imposed onto both Jane and Linda's bodies. Through the patriarchal constraints imposed by the novels' romance plots, Jane and Linda regress in the domestic spaces that act as extensions of their masters' domination.

Jane's first intimate exchange with Mr. Rochester negotiates a romance-submission relationship through Jane's assimilation to Bertha Mason. Space, at this point, operates twofold: not only does space characterize its inhabitants (i.e., Mr. Rochester *and* Bertha Mason), but it also encourages power dynamics to manifest between those within Thornfield Hall. For example,

Mr. Rochester, upon first talking to Jane, states, “go into the library—I mean, if you please. (Excuse my tone of command; I am used to say ‘Do this,’ and it is done: I cannot alter my customary habits for one new inmate)” (Brontë 106). Mr. Rochester’s tone of command subtly depicts his tendency to enforce his status upon those beneath him. ‘Inmate’ uniquely functions within his statement, as it can be read as a subconscious acknowledgement of the imprisoned woman Mr. Rochester hides in Thornfield’s attic. Jane’s assimilation to Bertha Mason is then explicitly negotiated through her watercolor painting. Mr. Rochester’s inability to recognize Jane’s artistic prowess intrinsically relates to her lack of autonomy expressed through the contents of her painting:

One gleam of light lifted into relief a half-submerged mast, on which sat a cormorant, dark and large, with wings flecked from with foam: its wings held a gold bracelet, set with gems, that I had touched with as brilliant tints as my pallet could yield, and as glittering distinctness as my pencil could impart. Sinking below the bird and mast, a drowned corpse glanced through the green water; a fair arm was the only limb visible, when the bracelet had been washed or torn (Brontë 107).

Julia Sun-Joo Lee identifies Jane’s painting as a reference to William Turner’s 1840 painting, “The Slave Ship,” in which the enslaved woman depicted by Turner is replaced with Jane’s insertion of herself into the subject matter (*The American* 43-4). While Sun-Joo Lee appropriately interprets that “Jane’s version of Turner’s painting prefigures her own demise, replacing the leg of the ‘n—’ with ‘a fair arm,’ the shackle with ‘a gold bracelet,’” her painting evokes Bertha’s transfer from Spanish Town, Jamaica to Thornfield (*The American* 44). As Bertha is a signal for West Indian plantation systems, her metaphoric presence evokes racialized understandings of power dynamics embedded in Mr. Rochester’s treatment of women’s bodies.

Bertha's legacy, alongside Jane's first introduction to Mr. Rochester, assimilates the women's fate under his control.

Jane's growing attachment to Mr. Rochester depicts romance as an underlying, degrading force. Prior to the gypsy scene, Jane states that Thornfield's visitors "flocked in" the drawing room (Brontë 145). Jane continues the avian metaphor by describing the women as "a flock of white plummy birds" (Brontë 146). Their assumed freedom when entering the dining-room contrasts against Jane's position in a window seat in which "the window curtain half hides [her]" and reflects her "double retirement" at Gateshead Hall (Brontë 148, 5). The partial coverage, however, influences the dynamics present in her following speech. As Jane physically restrains herself, she mentally assimilates herself to her master. Specifically, Jane states, "I understand the language of his countenance and movements; though rank and wealth sever us widely, I have something in my brain and heart, in my blood and nerves, that assimilates me mentally to him" (Brontë 149). The congruences Jane describes pulls her out of her window seat and into the Hall's larger social dynamics. During the gypsy scene, however, Mr. Rochester indoctrinates Jane into Thornfield's system of abuse and begins to locate her closer to the third story attic.

Jane's submissive role during the gypsy scene reveals Mr. Rochester's appropriation of Bertha Mason's body and, by extension, the authority he plans to exert over his governess. Carl Plasa introduces Mr. Rochester's appropriation through his reading of Sibyl's (Mr. Rochester's) clothing. "These garments are Bertha's," Plasa states, "their removal and appropriation to other uses itself a glancing reminder of the relocation of meaning from literal to figurative in *Jane Eyre* as a whole" (*Critical Issues* 92). Plasa's reading is continued as the disguised Mr. Rochester "'nichered' a laugh under her bonnet and bandage: she then drew out a short, black pipe, and lighting it, began to smoke. Having indulged a while in this sedative, she raised her

bent body” (Brontë 167). His loud laugh, combined with a constricted, sedated countenance, directly mirrors Bertha Mason’s physical, imprisoned condition in Thornfield’s attic. Mr. Rochester’s appropriation thus represents his mastery; while donning the trophies collected by conquering Bertha Mason, Jane succumbs under her master’s appropriation of a woman’s body. Jane’s literal submission¹⁸ to Mr. Rochester, combined with his evaluations of her body, thus locate Jane under Mr. Rochester’s authority and, by proxy, closer to her fate that is negotiated in Thornfield’s third story attic.

As Mr. Rochester physically pulls Jane closer to Bertha’s cell, space and Mr. Rochester’s control within it enact the dynamics between the master and his subordinate governess. As Jane and Mr. Rochester progress towards the wounded Richard Mason, Mr. Rochester gives quick orders to Jane, in which she responds with short statements of unwavering obedience (Brontë 178). Jane’s attentiveness thus far reflects her growing attachment with Mr. Rochester. Though romance develops alongside the aforementioned scenes, it is the wounded Richard Mason that encourages Jane’s growing attachment to her master. However, space warns against Jane’s surmounting affection for Mr. Rochester. For instance, “a great cabinet” that depicts “the heads of the twelve apostles” is overshadowed by “the devilish face of Judas, that grew out of the panel, and seemed gathering life and threatening a revelation of the arch-traitor—Satan himself—in his subordinate form” (Brontë 179). The now-writing Jane’s perspective appears to correlate Richard Mason’s presence to Judas, as his treachery would reveal the secret hidden within Thornfield’s attic. Jane then responds to her symbolic reading of the wardrobe as she questions, “why did he so quietly submit to the concealment Mr. Rochester enforced? Why *did* Mr.

¹⁸ “Kneel, and lift up your head” marks Jane’s positioning as beneath Mr. Rochester (Brontë 168). While Mr. Rochester is disguised, her submission bears a heavier interpretation, as she is submitting to the constraints of marriage. Submission, throughout this scene, reflects her interjection into his hidden marriage, in turn using the withholding of information as a powerful representation of appropriation Jane soon encounters.

Rochester enforce this concealment?” (Brontë 179). Space, through Jane’s perspective, encompasses this negotiation of secrecy, concealment, and submission. As Jane firmly grasps the dynamics evident between Mr. Rochester, Richard Mason, and her master’s characterization through space, she pivots to conveying her master’s style of degradation. Jane promptly describes Mr. Rochester’s “impetuous will” and how “the passive disposition of the one had been actively influenced by the active energy of the other”—as if echoing this realization, Jane later notes that Mr. Rochester states, “I had the key in my pocket: I should have been a careless shepard if I left a lamb—my pet lamb—so near a wolf’s den” (Brontë 180 ,184). This active energy described by Jane translates into a universal will of domination; a force that, combined with Bertha Mason’s active role within Thornfield Hall, culminates in Jane’s later, *full* submission under her master.

Linda also depicts romance as a complicating factor while under Dr. Flint’s mastery. In her chapter titled “The Lover,” Linda begins with a powerful emotional appeal to her readers: “Why does the slave ever love? What allows the tendrils of the heart to twine around objects which may at any moment be wrenched away by the hand of violence?” (Jacobs 37). This larger appeal to body autonomy and its complicated role within enslavement diffuses into the dynamics between her and Dr. Flint. As her master’s verbal and sexual abuse surmounts, Linda entertains fantasies of marrying her lover. “My lover wanted to buy me;” Linda states, “but I knew that Dr. Flint was too willful and arbitrary a man to consent to that arrangement” (Jacobs 38). Focusing upon her lover and master, Linda delineates the trajectory of her body through the statement, “for the husband of a slave has no power to protect her” (Jacobs 38). Though a life with her lover is intangible, her idealization allows for her to resist Dr. Flint’s pervasive grip upon her body. His emotional violence, which quickly materializes following Linda’s description of her lover, thus

becomes correlated to her ability to resist subordination through love. When Linda faces the “hateful man who claimed a right to rule me, body and soul,” her attempt to assume the right to her autonomy manifests itself through her ability to testify against her master (Jacobs 40).

Assimilating her lover with her condition, Linda states, “if he is a puppy, I am a puppy, for we are both of the n— race. It is right and honorable for us to love each other” (Jacobs 40). Linda’s statement appears to derive its resistant voice from Jane’s statement while in the window seat:

For when I say that I am of his kind, I do not mean that I have his force to influence, or his spell to attract; I mean only that I have certain tastes and feelings in common with him. I must then repeat that we are for ever sundered;—and yet, while I breathe and think I must love him (Brontë 149).

By evoking Jane’s statement in her narrative, Linda Brent uses romance as a contradiction to Dr. Flint’s appropriation of her body. Much like Jane, Linda’s statement renders her powerless under Dr. Flint’s growing control over her autonomy.

In the chapters, “A Perilous Passage in the Slave Girl’s Life” and “A New Tie to Life,” Linda Brent describes a focal structure of her master’s oppression that enforces her subordinate status. “After my lover went away,” Linda states, “Dr. Flint contrived a new plan...In the blindest of tones, he told me that he was going to build a small house for me, in a secluded place, four miles away from the town” (Jacobs 57). The house, in particular, represents Linda’s regression into Dr. Flint’s concubine, as he plans to use the space to “make a lady” of Linda (Jacobs 57). In protest, Linda becomes pregnant with Mr. Sands’ child and states that she would never enter the cottage because “in a few months I shall be a mother” (Jacobs 61). Her refusal to enter Dr. Flint’s cottage evokes comparable similarities to Mr. Rochester’s treatment of Richard Mason while at Thornfield Hall. Beginning with Dr. Flint, Linda states that “he looked at me in

dumb amazement, and left the house without a word” (Jacobs 61). His disposition mirrors Mr. Rochester’s sudden shift in mood upon hearing that Richard Mason had arrived at Thornfield Hall; as both of these occur in the spatial depictions of the masters’ abuse, the dumbfoundedness characteristic of Dr. Flint and Mr. Rochester signifies a breach in their plan that threatens to reveal a contradictory force against their degradative techniques. Mrs. Flint also echoes Jane’s time in Thornfield Hall’s attic through her embodiment of Bertha Mason. Linda describes that Mrs. Flint entered her grandmother’s house “like a mad woman” (Jacobs 61). Mrs. Flint, upon hearing of Linda’s pregnancy, embodies Bertha Mason’s madness after her husband violated the sacrament of marriage by locking her in the attic and pursuing other lovers. Similarly, in the chapter, “A New Tie to Life,” Dr. Flint borrows Mr. Rochester’s coercive language to maintain his grip over Linda’s autonomy. Subdued physicality also becomes a pervasive force within Dr. Flint’s reconciliation with Linda’s pregnancy; his metaphoric ‘iron grip’ on Linda’s consciousness materializes through his statement:

The future will settle accounts between us. You are blinded now; but hereafter you will be convinced that your master was your best friend. My lenity towards you is a proof of it. I might have punished you in so many ways. I might have whipped till you fell dead under the lash. I would have bettered your condition. Others cannot do it. You are my slave (Jacobs 64).

The violence evident in Dr. Flint’s statement reverberates against Mr. Rochester’s physical grip and positioning over Jane alongside his contrasting tones of reassurance and distress. Linda’s prematurely born son completes the echo of Jane’s time in Thornfield’s attic, as an individual’s suffering acts as a catalytic entrance into both works’ foremost encounter with driving oppressive forces. As both women evade remaining in the epicentral spaces, both Mr. Rochester

and Dr. Flint's wives¹⁹ finalize the congruences drawn between both works' progression toward the core negotiation of oppression.

...

The mistresses in *Jane Eyre* and *Incidents* negotiate power, social constructs, and historic legacies between the masters and their subordinates. Figuring Bertha Mason and Mrs. Flint requires a comprehensive overview of historic and social forces that construct their presentation in both works. Bertha Mason's significance in *Jane Eyre* has long been debated by literary scholars since her appearance in 1847. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in The Attic* pioneered literary explorations into Bertha's complicated legacy. Gilbert and Gubar describe how Charlotte Brontë "seems here definitively to have opened her eyes to female realities within her and around her: confinement, orphanhood, starvation, rage, and even madness" (*The Madwoman* 336). Gilbert and Gubar's foregrounding interpretation of Bertha attributes her presence as a manifestation of the Victorian's horrified reception of Jane's anger (*The Madwoman* 338). The anger that disturbed Victorian era readers directly manifests during "[Jane's] confrontation, not with Rochester but with Rochester's mad wife, Bertha...[and] the book's central confrontation, and encounter..not with [Jane's] sexuality but with her own imprisoned 'hunger, rebellion, and rage,' a secret dialogue of self and soul" (Gilbert and Gubar 339). As Gilbert and Gubar identify, Bertha acts as a locus of thematic power that, once in

¹⁹ As I discuss mistresses in my following analyses, I want to make an important distinction about the roles of Bertha Mason and Mrs. Flint. Both women *are* married-mistress, throughout the next analyses, relates more to a woman in a position of authority and control, rather than a position of sexual exploitation. While Mrs. Flint is explicitly described as a mistress in *Incidents*, the theoretical framework surrounding Bertha Mason is, admittedly, convoluted. However, I interpret Bertha Mason as a signal for *both* West Indian enslavement and plantation owners in Spanish Town, Jamaica. This doubling, as my analyses progresses, becomes more clear as to why I describe Bertha Mason similarly to Mrs. Flint (while still preserving the echoes of the oppressed in her time at Thornfield Hall).

contact with Jane, creates a sense of body-doubling that acts out the main, degradative forces at work in *Jane Eyre*.

Recent scholarship, however, pushes against solely considering Gilbert and Gubar's reading of Bertha Mason. Susan Meyer's *Imperialism at Home* highlights the growing colonialist interpretations of Bertha's character and identifies her as "the central locus of Brontë's anxieties about the presence of oppression in England, anxieties that motivate the plot and drive it to its conclusion" (66). Carl Plasa also incorporates Sue Thomas' reading of Bertha Mason by stating that Mr. Rochester's wife represents "the very body against whose interests she, as a white Jamaican heiress, would be openly opposed — the Caribbean slaves themselves" ("Prefigurations" 8). Evidently, Bertha Mason's existence within the imperialist imaginations of gender and race illustrate her role in *Jane Eyre* as an echo of both Mr. Rochester and Jane's conditions. This reading of power structures and its conflicting display in Bertha's condition allows for her to be read as both a signal for Jane's oppression and as the mistress to Mr. Rochester's mastery over Thornfield Hall.

Mrs. Flint also occupies a conflicting position as mistress in *Incidents*. Marli Weiner describes plantation life in South Carolina—the neighboring state to Dr. Flint's plantation—and describes how gender and race were competing constructs within plantation life and a mistress' role. "Gender and race ideologies had particularly telling consequences for plantation women," Weiner states:

because they contained contradictory messages. As whites and as slaveholders, mistresses were told they were superior in every respect to slaves and that slaves were at once their responsibility and necessary for their livelihood...At the same time they were taught to

see themselves as devoted wives and mothers whose benevolent nurturing and caring were supposed to extend to those in need—including slaves (*Mistresses 2*).

Weiner highlights a recurring dynamic that Linda Brent describes in *Incidents*. As mentioned, Linda's first mistress helped her become literate—a tool of freedom that, in the wake of her inability to free Linda upon her death, negotiates her first mistresses' benevolence and adherence to white expectations of womanhood. Mrs. Flint's 'benevolence,' or, her disguised jealousy, introduces a tension into Weiner's observations. The tension, in particular, arises from Mrs. Flint's inability to resist her husband's conquest of Linda's body. His actions violate the sacrament of marriage that empowers Mrs. Flint, which also disempowers her ability to enact the expectations outlined by Weiner. The slippage in Mrs. Flint's social role assimilates her actions with Bertha Mason's. Intertextually, Bertha Mason and Mrs. Flint use beds to categorize their conflicting display of power—actions that, for both Jane and Linda, catalyze their rebellions against Mr. Rochester and Dr. Flint.

Bertha's actions are dependent on the presence of beds and their symbolic positioning within Thornfield. Bertha's first action against her master occurs while Mr. Rochester sleeps. Jane first hears "a demonic laugh" and "something [that] gurgled and moaned" throughout Thornfield. She then describes Mr. Rochester's open bedroom door "and the smoke rushed in a cloud from thence" (Brontë 127). Heroically, Jane extinguishes the fire and saves Mr. Rochester from burning at the hands of his mistress (Brontë 127-9). Fire and Mr. Rochester's bed holds symbolic weight in the scene. As Bertha Mason creates an untamable blaze, Jane steadily fetches Mr. Rochester a candle and maintains the flame she ignited. Fire, in this instance, symbolizes Jane and Bertha's existence under Mr. Rochester's control—one wild and destructive, while the other maintains partial authority. Also, the bed plays a significant role in the consummation of

marriage. As consummation rendered Bertha Mason completely under Mr. Rochester's power, the bed remains as a symbol of her relinquishment. In Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Bertha Mason's bed in Spanish Town, Jamaica is an active site of folk magic that attempts to assimilate Mr. Rochester to Bertha Mason. Mr. Rochester, during the supernatural scene, even remarks that "the light changed her. I had never seen her look so gay or so beautiful" (Rys 82). By setting the bed on fire, Bertha reimagines the dynamics Rhys describes by using an unruly flame to remind Mr. Rochester of his role within his wife's regression from beautiful enchantress to mad woman.

Bertha Mason's tearing of Jane's wedding veil pushes her presence at Thornfield farther into Jane's reality. Before Jane marries Mr. Rochester, she dreams of abstract representations of their relationship. The most notable piece from Jane's dream lies in her statement, "On sleeping, I continued in dreams the idea of a dark and gusty night. I continued also the wish to be with you, and experienced a strange, regretful consciousness of some barrier dividing us" (Brontë 240). As if infiltrating Jane's subconscious, Bertha Mason appears and "rent [the veil] in two parts, and flinging both on the floor, trampled on them" (Brontë 242). Though Jane considers her encounter with Bertha to be another dream, she wakes to find "the veil, torn from top to bottom, in two halves!" (Brontë 243). Bertha's action, on one hand, pushes Jane's anxieties into reality. However, her presence over Jane's bed evokes consummation and a warning for Mr. Rochester's soon-to-be wife. That is, Bertha's action mirrors Jane's sexuality in regards to her marriage with Mr. Rochester. Like Bertha, consummation would lead to Jane falling even more under Mr. Rochester's influence. Rather than reading this scene as a dark invocation of Bertha's actions, her tearing of the wedding veil appears to embody a mistress' benevolence previously described by Weiner. The conflicting display of power and compassion through Bertha's action operates as a mediation of a mistress' roles. As her warning does not prevent Jane's marriage to Mr.

Rochester, Bertha's final action against Mr. Rochester epitomizes her role as both oppressed woman and mistress at Thornfield Hall.

Bertha Mason's destruction of Thornfield Hall begins in Jane's room. A complex negotiation emerges from Bertha's decision to use Jane's room as the catalyst for Thornfield's destruction. When Richard Mason stops Jane's marriage, Mr. Rochester forces the attendants to follow him to Bertha Mason's prison. "In a room without a window there burnt a fire," describes Jane:

Guarded by a high and strong fender, and a lamp suspended from the ceiling by a chain. Grace Poole bent over the fire, apparently cooking something in a saucepan. In the deep shade, at the further end of the room, a figure ran forwards and backwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it grovelled, 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 (Brontë 250).

Her intrusion into Bertha's prison forces Jane to reconcile with the effects of marrying Mr. Rochester. Susan Meyer's imperialist reading of Bertha Mason's connection to Jane emphasizes how this scene "represents the 'dark races' in the empire, particularly African slaves, and gives them a human presence that lends a vividness to Brontë's metaphorical use of race" (*Imperialism* 72). Jane's confrontation with Bertha Mason thus pushes the enslavement metaphor from a rhetorical strategy to a literal embodiment of her oppression at Thornfield Hall. Under Mr. Rochester's control, Bertha signals that Jane has located herself under the strongest manifestation of abuse thus far. In Bertha's case, however, she also witnesses Jane as Mr. Rochester's prospective bride within her prison. Building upon an explicit reference to

enslavement, Bertha's decision to kindle the destructive fire in Jane's room evokes an antithetical power evident in the scene's enslavement dynamics. Susan Meyer comments on Bertha's destruction of Thornfield and invocation of West Indian rebellions. "As [Bertha] emerges in the novel," Meyer states, "anxieties that have been located elsewhere, notably in the character of Jane herself, become absorbed and centralized in the figure of Bertha, thus preparing the way for her final annihilation" (*Imperialism* 66-7). Upon viewing an explicit manifestation of Jane's rhetoric strategy, confronting the dynamics of enslavement forces Jane to rationalize her condition by viewing Bertha's body. Her flee, as mentioned, is categorized by this explicit 'passing of oppression' from Bertha onto Jane via proximity. When Bertha kindles the flame in Jane's room, her act of defiance bears a twofold interpretation: on one hand, she is mocking Mr. Rochester in her final attempt at seeking justice; on the other, Bertha is cleansing Jane from the stigma placed onto the bed and, in a way, liberating her from Mr. Rochester. As Bertha enacts Meyer's envisioning of a West Indian uprising, the reference to enslavement absolves the submission and resistance evident in Jane's relationship with Mr. Rochester. When Thornfield is set ablaze and Bertha "lay smashed on the pavement," her rebellion cleanses Thornfield Hall of Mr. Rochester's appropriation—both the physical structure and the unquiet land it rests upon (Brontë 365).

Mrs. Flint's bed harbors similar negotiations evident in Bertha Mason's actions at Thornfield Hall. In the chapter, "The Jealous Mistress," Linda epitomizes Mrs. Flint's control over her body. Before Mrs. Flint appears, Linda describes how:

Mrs. Flint possessed the key to her husband's character before I was born. She might have used this knowledge to counsel and screen the young and the innocent among her slaves; but for them she had no sympathy. They were her objects of her constant

suspicion and malevolence. She watched her husband with unceasing vigilance; but he was well practised in means to evade it (Jacobs 30-1).

Linda's observations contradict Weiner's statement that mistresses were both benevolent figures and oppressors; instead, Linda narrows the scope of violence she uses to describe Mrs. Flint, in turn illustrating her figuring as a pervasive breach into Linda's bodily autonomy. As Dr. Flint begins to enact his plan to subsume Linda's sexual agency, Mrs. Flint contradicts Linda's statement that Dr. Flint "had never punished me himself, and would not allow any body else to punish me" (Jacobs 32). His statement's irony exists within the fact that, due to his 'harmless' coercion, Dr. Flint inspires his wife's persecution of Linda. After describing the situational irony, Linda is forced to spend the night in Dr. Flint's bed. Mrs. Flint retaliates against her husband's actions and forces Linda to testify for her sexual purity. Physical submission characterizes the latter half of their exchange, as Mrs. Flint states, "now take this stool, sit down, look me directly in the face, and tell me all that has passed between you two" (Jacobs 33). The bed, in this instance, acts as a locus of degradation, as Linda's perceived sexual impurity empowers Mrs. Flint's heightened oppression over Linda.

Mrs. Flint's obsession with maintaining her image as a plantation wife influences Linda's description of how "[Mrs. Flint] pitied herself a martyr; but she was incapable of feeling for the condition of shame and misery in which her unfortunate, helpless slave was placed" (Jacobs 33). Like Bertha Mason, the bed and its symbolic implications sparks the mistress' revolt against her husband. Linda then acknowledges that "the fire of her temper kindled from small sparks, and now the flame became so intense" and that she also "knew I had ignited the torch" (Jacobs 34). Again, Bertha's prowess over fire and beds materializes in Linda's description of the dynamics between herself and Mrs. Flint. A direct invocation of Bertha Mason comes from

Linda's account of "an unpleasant sensation it must produce to wake up in the dead of night and find a jealous woman bending over you. Terrible as this experience was, I had fears that it would give place to one more terrible" (Jacobs 34). Like Mr. Rochester's imprisoned wife, Mrs. Flint harbors an obsession with maintaining surveillance on Linda's body. Her surveillance, in turn, restricts Linda, as both master and mistress are enforcing competing forms of oppression onto Linda. The competitive nature of a perverted husband and, to use Linda's terminology, a jealous mistress, thus encourages Linda to further describe Mrs. Flint's nature:

Though this bad institution deadens the moral sense, even in white women, to a fearful extent, it is not altogether extinct. I have heard southern ladies say of Mr. Such a one, 'He not only thinks it no disgrace to be the father of those little n—, but he is not ashamed to call himself their master. I declare, such things ought not to be tolerated in any decent society!' (Jacobs 37).

"The Jealous Mistress" makes a powerful appeal to the institutional structures of both *Jane Eyre* and *Incidents*. While both the master and his subordinate hold clear roles in the relationship, the mistress' conflicting role, through Linda's statement, highlights the crux of gender and race within an oppressive institution. The very concept of a mistress embodying the power and submission of both the masters and their subordinates mediates slippages in expression that have characterized Jane and Linda thus far. The women's encounters with their masters enact competing gendered and racial powers and influence them to culminate at a chaotic epicenter—Bertha Mason and Mrs. Flint. Within this chaos, Jane and Linda are able to rationalize their conditions, in turn depicting the mistress' role as a powerful, catalytic force in the women's quest for bodily autonomy.

Chapter 5: The Escape

Douglass' *Narrative* ends with a description of his escape from enslavement. Douglass, however, suppresses the specifics of his escape to protect those involved and other enslaved

people attempting to flee from their plantations (*Narrative* 104). His escape's lack of description calls forth Douglass' emotional interpretation of both his flight from his last enslaver, Master Hugh, and his escape to the North. Douglass states:

Let him be a fugitive slave in a strange land—a land given up to be the hunting-ground for slaveholders—whose inhabitants are legalized kidnappers—where he is every moment subjected to the terrible liability of being seized upon by his fellowmen, as the hideous crocodile seizes upon his prey!—I say, let him place himself in my situation—without home or friend—without money or credit—wanting shelter, and no one to give it—wanting bread, and no money to buy it,—and at the same time let him feel that he is pursued by merciless men-hunters, and in total darkness as to what to do, where to go, or where to stay,—perfectly helpless both as the means to defense and means of escape,—in the midst of plenty, yet suffering the terrible gnawings of hunger,—in the midst of houses, yet having no home—among fellow-men (*Narrative* 110).

Douglass' appeal to his readers highlights core themes that appear in *Jane Eyre* and *Incidents*. Specifically, Jane embodies Douglass' attention to hunger, homes, and lack of money to support her depleted condition. Linda, on the other hand, emphasizes Douglass' attention to greed and its underlying role in motivating enslavers to recapture fugitive enslaved people. By using Douglass' narrative as a centering point for Jane and Linda's escapes, both women resist their prolonged oppression and reacquire their autonomy lost under the control of Mr. Rochester and Dr. Flint.

Prior to Jane's escape, her body autonomy is negotiated through a mock-Garden of Eden at Thornfield. The mock-garden scene, in particular, uses the fallen woman narrative²⁰ as an

²⁰The fallen woman trope was a popular literary device in 19th century women's literature. Specifically, Eve's fall in the Garden of Eden was a popular metaphor to describe a woman's fall from grace. 19th Century fallen women

explicit mediation of Jane's submission under Mr. Rochester. The temptation Jane describes, both through her environment and conversation with Mr. Rochester, relies on alluring imagery and language to move her body closer to her master's authority. A subtle example comes from Jane's observation that "the east had its own charm of fire, deep blue, and its own modest gem, a rising and solitary star: soon it would boast the moon; but she was yet beneath the horizon" (Brontë 211). Peter Nockolds' observations of the lunar structure in *Jane Eyre* reveals that, at the beginning of the novel, "the full moon shines on Jane and Helen. The remaining full moons link Jane with Rochester, and seen thus, Helen prefigures Rochester" ("Midsummer" 157). Through Nockolds' interpretation, the full moon in *Jane Eyre* links the novel's greatest loves to one another; however, the moon, through both its connection to Helen Burns and its later role in Jane's escape, becomes shrouded in maternal symbolism. The moon's symbolism, according to Nockolds, resolves a lack of maternal guidance—a force that has empowered Jane to resist her condition and, in this case, is absent as she first enters the garden. As she walks towards her seducer, Jane describes "sweet briar and southernwood, jasmine, pink, and rose,²¹ have long been yielding their evening sacrifice of incense: this new scent is neither shrub nor flower; it is—I know it well—it is Mr. Rochester's cigar" (Brontë 211). The smoke from Mr. Rochester's metaphorically phallic cigar lures Jane into the mock-Garden of Eden; similarly, the act of smoking suggests that Mr. Rochester is inhaling and exhaling the tempting smell. His speech becomes mixed with the cigar's enchanting scent, in turn depicting his exchange with Jane as a

were typically sexual deviants—for example, prostitutes, women who had premarital sex, and women who violated the sacrament of marriage were all forced to exist amongst the lowest social class. A few popular examples of fallen women narratives are *Ruth* by Elizabeth Gaskell, *Tess of The D'Urbervilles* by Thomas Hardy, and Christina Rossetti's poem, "Goblin Market."

²¹ The illustrated version of the 1884 book, *Language of Flowers*, describes the meanings behind the flowers Jane notes. The following interpretations are in order of how they appear in Jane's statement: "I wound to heal," jest and bantering, amiability, boldness, and love (Evans 24, 33, 36, 39). Each meaning appears in her conversation with Mr. Rochester, which further casts the environment as a method of characterization in *Jane Eyre*.

continuation of the cigar's effects. Once Jane meets Mr. Rochester, he describes the wings of "a West Indian insect; one does not see so large and gay a night-rover in England: there! he is flown" (Brontë 212). The insect, through Mr. Rochester's attention, implies Bertha Mason's presence within Thornfield's garden. His attention to the insect's flight highlights Mr. Rochester's imprisonment of Bertha Mason; namely, Mr. Rochester's pursuit of Jane is dependent on Bertha's continued imprisonment at Thornfield Hall. By suggesting that Bertha, like the insect, flies away, he figuratively removes the barrier that separates Jane from himself. Finally, the mock-garden scene centers itself around a large chestnut tree.²² As the chapter concludes with Jane's statement that "the great horse-chestnut at the bottom of the orchard had been struck by lightning in the night and half of it split away," she is given an answer to her prior question, "but what had befallen that night?" (Brontë 218). Jane, under Mr. Rochester's influence, has fallen, leaving her autonomy under her master's impetuous will.

Patriarchal inequity within the mock-garden scene evolves as Mr. Rochester prepares Jane for their wedding. The next day, Jane greets Mr. Rochester after they agree to marry one another. Mr. Rochester insists on Jane responding to "Jane Rochester," which further reinstates his ownership over Jane's body (Brontë 220). Mr. Rochester then describes the Thornfield heirlooms he will give to Jane. Beth Kalikoff reads the economic undertones evident in Mr. Rochester's appraisal, and states, "in *Jane Eyre*...the lower caste of women functions as erotic intoxicants for their socially superior pursuers—even, perhaps, for the women themselves" ("The Falling" 358). Erotics, through Kalikoff's reading, uses mastery and submission as a mediating force between *Jane Eyre*'s romance plot and the undercutting forces of submission and mastery.

²²According to *Language of Flowers*, the chestnut tree means "do me justice" (Evans 12). When Jane describes the chestnut tree's split, the tree's meaning suggests that justice has been sacrificed through her ensuing union with Mr. Rochester. Whether justice is attributed to Jane herself or Bertha Mason is ambiguous, as both women succumb under his authority.

The relationship's dynamics are furthered through Mr. Rochester's descriptions of how "I will myself put the diamond chain *around your neck*... and I will *clasp* the bracelets on *those fine wrists*" (Brontë 220, my emphasis). The diamond chain evokes Mr. Rochester's prior statement, "it was my intention to put my old bachelor's neck into the sacred noose" (Brontë 213). These congruences suggest that, though their relationship appears romantic to readers, the mastery-submission relationship belittles both Jane and Mr. Rochester. Jane, on one hand, is forced to submit under Mr. Rochester's control; on the other, Mr. Rochester continues to abuse Bertha Mason, in turn suggesting that his violation of his first wife's body perpetuates his degradation of Jane's. The bracelet, too, calls forth Jane's watercolor painting that Sun-Joo Lee interprets as an invocation of William Turner's "The Slave Ship." Specifically pointing to "a cormorant, dark and large, with wings flecked with foam: its beak held a gold bracelet, set with gems" negotiates the painting's ability to reveal Jane and Bertha's conditions under Mr. Rochester (Brontë 107) . The painting's reemergence evolves through the current social dynamics, as "a fair arm was the only limb clearly visible, when the bracelet had been washed or torn" describes the transferral of oppression from Bertha's imprisoned body onto Jane's (Brontë 107). The bracelet, which would have been given to Bertha Mason, now becomes a marker of Mr. Rochester's ownership of Jane through the sacrament of marriage. Beth Kalikoff again comments on the scene's dynamics and states:

the preparations for the wedding, however, fill her with foreboding. Rochester's attempts to load her with jewels and gaudy dresses of elaborate design seem more appropriate for a mistress than a demure bride. Already married, Rochester treats Jane like the fallen woman she would become after their union ("The Falling" 364).

Through Kalikoff's reading, gender and its emphasized role within Jane's prior engagement to Mr. Rochester foreshadows the forces evident in her "I care for myself" speech (Brontë 270-1). Though Jane does invoke Turner's painting and mastery-submission dynamics to describe her condition, patriarchal constructions of power undercut Jane's involvement with Mr. Rochester. The fallen woman trope and her metaphoric figuring as Mr. Rochester's property all circle the issue of marital rights during the 19th Century²³. Marriage, in this instance, prefigures Jane's deterioration under her prospective husband's authority.

Mr. Rochester's appropriation of women's bodies infiltrates Jane's consciousness after the wedding scene. Before Jane confronts Mr. Rochester and escapes from Thornfield, she states, "Jane Eyre, who had been an ardent, expectant woman—almost a bride—was a cold, solitary girl again: her life was pale; her prospects were desolate" (Brontë 252). Third person perspective suggests that Jane had detached her consciousness from her physical body. Her ability to consciously evaluate her body while outside of her physical self magnifies the disconnection between her autonomy and Mr. Rochester's appropriation. Jane's use of third person perspective culminates when read alongside her prior statement, "I was in my own room as usual—just myself, without obvious change: nothing had smitten me, or scathed me, or maimed me. And yet where was the Jane Eyre of Yesterday?—where was her life—where were her prospects?" (Brontë 252). Drawing attention to space while interpreting Jane's condition further implicates Mr. Rochester into her awareness of her condition. As Jane is still at Thornfield Hall, her retirement

²³ Per my introduction, women were considered their husband's property until the Married Women's Property Act of 1870. Under the Act, women were able to maintain the rights to their wages, property, and, by extension, the rights to their own body. Published in 1847, *Jane Eyre* embodies the social tensions of Victorian England's treatment of women's bodies within the sacrament of marriage. For further reading, Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* tells the story of Helen Huntingdon, an artist who, married to Arthur Huntingdon, is slowly rendered to a piece of his domestic property. Anne's novel provides a unique glimpse into Brontëan interpretations of Victorian England pre-the Married Women's Property Act of 1870.

to her room evokes a form of cyclical imprisonment that Jane encounters throughout *Jane Eyre*. Her bodily disconnect highlights the overwhelming degradation enforced onto her body; for Jane to rationalize her body's existence within Thornfield Hall, she must metaphorically detach her consciousness from her diminished condition. To parallel this notion, Jane powerfully resists Rochester by earlier stating, "I am no bird; and no net ensnares me: I am a free human being with an independent will; which I now exert to leave you" (Brontë 216). Her prior statement incorporates Jane's imagining of patriarchal resistance through avian metaphor; however, her regression into Thornfield Hall's physical space subverts her claim of agency, in which Jane has once again fallen victim to Mr. Rochester's tendency to imprison. Much like how Thornfield embodies Mr. Rochester's mastery, the Hall also represents Jane's entrapment in a patriarchal system under the control of a master. Jane's bodily disconnect, when read alongside *Incidents*, aligns their conditions amidst different constructs of oppression.

Linda Brent, unlike Jane, describes racial inequity as the force that obstructs her bodily autonomy. An important distinction, however, must be made before examining Linda Brent's escape. The garret acts as a focal point for Linda's *flights* from Dr. Flint. Her first attempt leads her to the garret, in which she spends six years of her life in hiding. Her second escape—which I will be focusing on—depicts her flight to the garret as a predecessor of the forces that evolve while Linda is in hiding. The evolution, much as in Jane's case, allows for one to interpret prior negotiations through a mode that more closely follows Linda's flight to Europe and the North. Beginning with the chapter, "Competition in Cunning," Linda's body doubling forces her to conceptualize what her condition would be like were she to be in the North. For example, Linda states, "to my grandmother I expressed a wish to have my children sent to me at the north, where I could teach them to respect themselves, and set them a virtuous example; which a slave mother

was not allowed to do in the south” (Jacobs 143). While in hiding, Linda’s attachment to the North and its promise of freedom encourages her to resist the degradation imposed upon her body. This split evaluation functions similarly to Jane’s use of the third person narrative, as both women must consciously detach themselves from their oppressed body to rationalize their suffering. As “Competition in Cunning” ends, Linda’s grandmother rounds out Linda’s doubling: “I shan’t mind being a slave all *my* life,” her grandmother says, “if I can only see you and the children free” (Jacobs 144). Her grandmother’s statement, when read alongside Linda’s body doubling, thus functions to empower Linda to become the free woman she is depicting through a facade. As Linda’s resolve to flee from the garret increases, so does Dr. Flint’s desire to permanently render Linda a figment of his plantation.

The chapter, “New Destination for the Children,” highlights the epitome of Dr. Flint’s dominance over Linda. Prior to the chapter, Linda describes her children’s evolving condition within Southern plantation life. Linda states, “how earnestly I prayed to him to restore me to my children, and enable me to be a useful woman and a good mother” (Jacobs 149). Linda then notes that her children “were now becoming valuable property,” which highlights Dr. Flint’s intrusion into Linda’s position as a mother (Jacobs 149). Specifically, motherhood is the recurrent force that encourages Linda to flee from the garret. Dr. Flint’s control over Linda’s expression of motherhood, in turn, illustrates his mastery over Linda. This negotiation is continued throughout “New Destination for the Children.” Linda begins the chapter by stating that Dr. Flint, “kept a close watch over my children, thinking they would eventually be led to my detection” (Jacobs 153). Linda’s statement correlates Dr. Flint’s remaining predominance over her body to his ownership of her children. As the imprisoned mother exists within the garret, her children’s existence within Southern plantation life allows her master to manipulate an extension

of Linda's physical body. Corroborating evidence stems from Linda's later statements, in which she reveals, "I was tried almost beyond endurance. Was this all I was to gain by what I had suffered for the sake of having my children free?" (Jacobs 154). Suffering and its link to Linda's children, reinstates Dr. Flint's authority over her condition.

The latter half of "New Destination for the Children" describes the mastery-submission relationship between Linda and Dr. Flint through Linda's role as an imprisoned, enslaved mother. Mr. Sands, Linda's brother's master, becomes a second figure of mastery over her children while she is in hiding. A letter from Mr. Sands reveals that:

The children are free. I have never intended to claim them as slaves. Linda may decide their fate. In my opinion, they had better be sent to the north. I don't think they are quite safe here. Dr. Flint boasts that they are still in his power. He says they were his daughter's property, and as she was not of age when they were sold, the contract is not legally binding (Jacobs 154).

Mr. Sands' letter introduces complex negotiations of power that are exerted onto Linda's condition. Mr. Sands reinstates the concept that Dr. Flint still controls an extension of Linda's body. As her children have been used by Dr. Flint as a way to coax Linda out of hiding, his statement magnifies ownership and its power within the institution of enslavement. Also, Mr. Sands' whiteness complicates his ownership over Linda's children. Though he is kinder to Linda than Dr. Flint, his lack of compassion²⁴ towards Linda and her children reflects in his inaction to

²⁴ Status preservation is an influential component of Mr. Sands' decision to not free Linda and her children.. For example, I have always read Mr. Sands' compassion as an authentic love for the mother of his children. However, Mr. Sands is both white and a lawyer. His racial and economic statuses prevent him from fully liberating Linda, as doing so would threaten the status he maintains within Southern plantation life. Also, his economic prowess and whiteness threatens Dr. Flint's control over Linda, as her master would have to confront a man with more financial power than himself. In a way, Mr. Sands' involvement prevents Dr. Flint from physically abusing Linda, as he would have to face ramifications from a man whose status overpowers him.

free them. Linda's sexual agency, through Mr. Sands' refusal to help free Linda's family, thus pushes their domestic model under Dr. Flint's abuse. Jennifer Fleischner describes how, through Dr. Flint's sexual exploitation of Linda, his ownership of her children perverts a dual model of family that renders Linda powerless in the garret. Namely, Fleischner states that, "calling the plantation household a 'family' served rhetorically to sentimentalize and naturalize slavery as a structure of relations based on domination and dependence" (*Mastering* 31). Linda first endured Dr. Flint's sexual advances at fifteen years old; through what Fleischer describes as Dr. Flint's "willingness to make the extended Jacobs family hostage to his obsession," Dr. Flint's obsession with Linda's children becomes his evolving control over Linda's sexuality and, by proxy, her body (*Mastering* 72).

Linda's body, through its relationship to both Dr. Flint and her children, prevents the enslaved woman from resisting her condition. Benny and Ellen, for example, mock Dr. Flint's assumed sexual prowess over Linda. Her children are specifically used as leverage against the enslaved woman as a part of Dr. Flint's obsession with her remaining under his power. In the chapter, "Months of Peril," Linda states that "[her] life was bound up in [her] children" (Jacobs 113). Her life, through her children, reflects her experiences within enslavement. Most notably, when Ellen is born, Linda describes how, "when they told me my new-born babe was a girl, my heart was heavier than it had ever been before. Slavery is terrible for men; but it is far more terrible for women...they have wrongs, and sufferings, and mortifications purely their own" (Jacobs 85). For Linda, her gendered experiences intertwine her daughter's fate with her own experience, which forces her to superintend her daughter with a fear unique to women in enslavement. Her first-born son, Benny, forces Linda to reconcile that "[she] could not forget he was a slave...death is better than slavery" (Jacobs 68). Ironically, Benny's birth occurs in the

chapter titled, “A New Tie to Life”; as her children reflect facets of her abused condition within enslavement, Benny and Ellen are intrinsically bound to Linda’s body. This relationship, when compared to Dr. Flint’s obsession with imprisoning Linda, causes her to state, “so, then, after all I had endured for their sakes, my poor children were between two fires; between my old master and their new master! And I was powerless” (Jacobs 155). As Linda’s model of family becomes intertwined more expansively with ownership, the racial degradation evident in both Dr. Flint and Mr. Sands extends onto Linda’s children and momentarily prevents her from escaping her imprisonment.

Prior to their escapes, Jane and Linda rely on maternal symbolism to resist their subordinate conditions. Once Jane learns of Bertha Mason’s existence, her relationship with Mr. Rochester mirrors an enslaver declaring his ownership over an enslaved person’s body. Mr. Rochester states, “‘Jane! Will you hear reason?’ (he stooped and approached his lips to my ear) ‘because if you won’t I’ll try violence.’” (Brontë 258). Mr. Rochester’s violent nature, when read alongside *Incidents*, evokes the dynamics created when Dr. Flint “began to whisper foul words in [Linda’s] ear” (Jacobs 26). Mr. Rochester’s physical threat and proximity to Jane diverts attention from patriarchal inequity and pushes the scene into the enslavement metaphor. The intertextual congruences drawn between Jane and Linda’s resistance are also present when Linda borrows Jane’s language while talking to her daughter, Ellen. As Jane describes her plan to leave Thornfield, she tells Mr. Rochester, “I must leave Adele and Thornfield. I must part with you for my whole life: I must begin a new existence *amongst strange faces and strange scenes*” (Brontë 259, my emphasis). Jane’s role as a governess figures her as a mother archetype for Adele; her statement, when read through Jane’s maternal role, manifests through Linda Brent’s adherence to motherhood as her children prepare to leave for the North. Linda states, “Ellen was made ready

for the journey. O, how it tried my heart to send her away, *so young, alone, among strangers!* Without a mother's love to shelter her from the storms of life; almost without a memory of a mother!" (Jacobs 155, my emphasis). Linda's call to Jane's statement reintroduces patriarchal constructions of enslaved motherhood into Linda's narrative. As both Jane and Linda evoke each other's voices, their resistance meets in an epicenter that diffuses into their resistance against their master.

Maternity assimilates Jane and Linda's narratives before fleeing. Descending mothers, such as Jane's dream of the moon-goddess²⁵ and Linda departing from the garret, catalyze their resistance by providing nourishment that is absent under their master's control. Before Benjamin and Ellen leave for the North, Linda resolves to leave the garret. "I slipped through the trap-door into the storeroom," Linda states, "and my uncle kept watch at the gate, while I passed into the piazza and went up stairs, to the room I used to occupy. It was more than five years since I had seen it, and how the memories crowded on me!" (Jacobs 156). As the memories infiltrate Linda's consciousness, her evolved body submits "to God, in anguish of heart, to forgive the wrong [she] had done" (Jacobs 157). As Linda descends, she simultaneously re-enters the house of trauma and becomes absolved through her pleas to God. This act cleanses the space around her, as she has exited as a woman capable of resisting the constraints attached to the home. Though Linda's exit represents a powerful form of protest through bodily evolution, it also allows for a

²⁵ In her book, *Charlotte Brontë*, Penny Boumelha states that, "the mothering moon of myth and the mothering earth of nature cannot fulfil the most minimal needs of the woman as a fully social being, and this fantasized matriarchal world of social organisation that is necessary for survival" (68). While this is true during Jane's time on the moors, I push against Boumelha's reading of this scene. When read alongside the fugitive narrative, bodily suffering—which Jane and Linda both experience—is almost necessary to achieve freedom. This deprivation, in turn, is quite important in regard to Jane's flight, as she must 'rid herself' (through the act of physical depletion) of past trauma to heal and nourish herself in different domestic models and environments. In essence, the maternal moon I discuss here is a pivotal component of Jane's escape from Thornfield Hall, as it is the predecessor of her time at Marsh End/Moor House, which reinvigorates her body and tests her newfound autonomy when she refuses St. John.

congruence to be drawn between the descending maternal figures in Linda's narrative and *Jane Eyre*.

Jane, for instance, describes the night following her rebellion against Mr. Rochester. "I dreamt I lay in the red-room at Gateshead;" Jane states, "that the night was dark, and my mind impressed with strange fears. The light that long ago had struck me into syncope, recalled in this vision, seemed glidingly to mount the wall, and tremblingly to pause in the center of the obscured ceiling" (Brontë 272). Jane's subconscious regression to Gateshead Hall locates her memories within her oppression's genesis. As Linda embodies Jane's regression and evolution, both women are forced to regress to their holistic, degraded condition. Almost in mirror of one another, Jane and Linda depict a descending maternal figure as the main force that encourages Jane and Linda to flee. Famously, Jane describes the moon taking shape of a goddess and, upon descending, states, "My daughter, flee temptation!" to which Jane responds, "Mother, I will" (Brontë 272). The absent maternal figure descends to Jane and inspires her to escape from Thornfield Hall. As the lunar goddess sinks to Jane's position, her words uplift Jane from her fallen status and usher her to escape. Ellen creates a similar dynamic after Linda descends from the garret. Ellen states, "But I shan't have Benny, or grandmother, or uncle Phillip, or any body to love me. Can you go with me? *O, do go, dear mother!*" (Jacobs 157, my emphasis). Through Ellen's statement, Linda becomes the descending maternal figure for her child who, upon departure, bears an orphan-like status similar to Jane. Rather than the mother empowering her daughter to run away, Ellen's isolative transition depicts Linda as a mother devoid of her child. Similar imagery permeates a later exchange, in which Linda:

drew aside the window curtain, to take a last look of my child. The moonlight shone on her face, and I bent over her, as I had done years before, that wretched night when I ran

away. I hugged her close to my throbbing heart; and tears, too sad for such young eyes to shed, flowed down her cheeks, as she gave her last kiss, and whispered in my ear, “Mother, I will never tell.” And she never did (Jacobs 157-8).

The prior scene, through both attention to the moon and word choice, directly evokes Jane’s encounter with the lunar goddess. As Linda evokes this comparison, her daughter’s separation acts as the catalyst for Linda to flee.

...

Jane’s first description of her escape from Thornfield borrows conventions from American enslavement narratives. She first tells of how “drearily” and “mechanically” she traverses through Thornfield Hall before escaping onto the moors (Brontë 273). Her warped interpretations of reality, however, become grounded through Jane’s attention to her “shoes, which [she] had put on when [she] left the house” (Brontë 273). Jane’s grounding reference echoes Douglass’ statement, “my feet have been so cracked with the frost that the pen with which I am writing might be laid in the gashes” (*Narrative* 58). Textual notes in *The Bedford Series in History and Culture* edition of Douglass’ *Narrative* state, “note the two senses of time in this passage: then and now, past and present. This metaphor of the pen in the gashes caused by shoelessness in the cold is one of Douglass’ uses of indirection to stress the meaning of literacy to a slave” (*Narrative* 58). The now-writing Jane’s attention to her dampened shoes act as a locus of memory, or a grounding, physical sensation amidst Jane’s emotional tumult. In regard to literacy in Douglass’ *Narrative*, the connection made by the now-writing Jane evokes the American enslavement narrative. Specifically, Jane follows her description of her shoes by stating:

He who is taken out to pass through a fair scene to the scaffold thinks not of the flowers that smile on his road, but of the block and axe-edge; of the disseverment of bone and vein; out of the grave gaping at the end: and I thought of drear flight and homeless wandering—and oh! with agony I thought of what I had left (Brontë 274).

The slippage between Jane's use of masculine pronouns and first-person narration depicts her statement as a blending of Douglass' consciousness into hers. Through descriptions of physical violence, pain, flight, and homeless wandering, Jane evokes Douglass' attention to isolation as he flees from Master Hugh (*Narrative* 110). This initiation into Douglass' narrative, alongside Jane's distress, culminates in a plea to the readers that appears in Linda Brent's narrative:

Gentle reader, may you never feel what I then felt! May your eyes never shed such stormy, scalding, heart-wrung tears as poured from mine. May you never appeal to Heaven in prayers so hopeless and so agonised as in that hour left my lips: for never may you, like me, dread to be the instrument of evil to what you wholly love (Brontë 274)²⁶.

Henceforth, Jane's time on the moors embodies the desperation characteristic of enslavement narratives. As Jane echoes the voices of American enslaved people, her existence within the small village, Whitcross, uses the enslavement metaphor to describe both Jane's distress and inequality as a fugitive woman.

Linda Brent embodies Jane's disoriented perspective while fleeing in the chapter, "Preparations for Escape." Time holds a unique relationship to Linda's imprisonment. While my analyses have focused upon the space's functions, little has been given to Linda's temporal

²⁶ "Pity me, and pardon me, O virtuous reader. You never know what it is to be a slave; to be entirely unprotected by law or custom; to have the laws reduce you to the condition of a chattel, *entirely subject to the will of another*. You never exhausted your ingenuity in avoiding the snares, *and eluding the power of a hated tyrant; you never shuddered at the sound of his footsteps, and trembled within hearing his voice*...I feel that the slave woman ought not to be judged by the same standard as others" (Jacobs 60, my emphasis).

relationship with the garret. Linda begins “Preparations for Escape” by stating, “I hardly expect that the reader will credit me, when I affirm that I lived in that little dismal hole, deprived of light and air, and with no space to move my limbs, for nearly seven years” (Jacobs 166).

Readers, through Linda’s beginning statement, experience a distorted sense of time in relation to Linda’s imprisonment. While readers understand focal pieces of Linda’s hiding place, her statement functions to prompt readers that they will never know the monotonous, internal struggles Linda grappled with while in the garret. The temporal component embedded in Linda’s statement magnifies the cyclical nature of her suffering; its effects materialize through Linda’s description of how, “sometimes it appeared to me as if ages had rolled away since I entered upon that gloomy, monotonous existence. At times, I was stupefied and listless; at other times I became very impatient to know when these years would end” (Jacobs 167). Linda’s invocation of Jane’s distortion leads the imprisoned, enslaved woman to root her conscious perception around a physical marker—like Jane’s attention to her shoes. For Linda, her grounding presence is her daughter, Ellen, as “after Ellen left us, these feelings increased” (Jacobs 167). Deprivation, as the chapter continues, culminates into a powerful moment of reconciliation: “Always I was in dread that by some accident, or some contrivance, slavery would succeed in snatching my children from me. This thought drove me nearly frantic, and I determined to steer for the North Star at all hazards” (Jacobs 169).

Jane evokes Douglass’ attention to the lack of homes, support, money, and nourishment while wandering through Whitcross. Jane’s isolation after exiting a coach is followed by a statement that aligns Jane with the condition of a fugitive enslaved person:

I might be questioned: I could give no answer by what would sound incredible and excite suspicion. Not a tie holds me to human society at this moment—no charm or hope calls me

where my fellow-creatures are—none that saw me would have a kind thought or a good wish for me (Brontë 275).

The disconnect between civilized society and Jane's use of the word 'creature' *others* Jane from those at Whitcross. Her statement, which places her narration close to Douglass', explicitly culminates when Jane describes her fear that, "some poacher or sportsman might discover me" (Brontë 275). Jane furthers the scene's fugitive imaginings through her statement, "I looked at the sky; it was pure: a kindly star twinkled just above the chasm ridge... and I, who from man could anticipate only mistrust, rejection, and insult, clung to her with filial fondness" (Brontë 276). The feminine pronoun in Jane's statement references all of nature; combining the star with nature's ambivalence, the environment reflects Jane's underlying resolve to flee from Thornfield Hall by following what appears to be a reference to the North Star. These congruences push Jane's narrative even further into the enslavement metaphor, which culminates through her direct call to Douglass' narrative while in Whitcross. Namely, Jane states, "much exhausted, and suffering greatly now for want of food, I turned aside into a lane and sat down under the hedge" (Brontë 278). To curb her hunger, Jane pleads to a woman for an opportunity to work to sustain herself. The woman's rejection forces Jane to evoke Douglass' language regarding his escape: "If she had held it open a little longer, I believed I should have begged for a piece of bread; for I was now brought low" (Brontë 279). Jane's invocation of the line, "wanting shelter, and no one to give it—wanting bread, and no money to buy it" from Douglass' narrative corresponds with her description of how "[she] was so sick, so weak, so gnawed with nature's cravings, instinct kept [her] roaming round abodes where there was a chance of food. Solitude would be no solitude—rest no rest—while the vulture, hunger, thus sank beak and talons in [her] side" (Brontë 279).

Even so, Jane continues to reference Douglass' narrative through her lack of description regarding her escape:

Reader, it is not pleasant to dwell on these details. Some say there is enjoyment in looking back to painful experience past; but at this day I can scarcely bear to review the times to which I allude: the moral degradation, blent with the physical suffering, too distressing a recollection ever to be willingly dwelt on (Brontë 280).

Her distorted perspective aligns not only her experiences with Douglass, but the very narrative in which Jane tells to her readers. Almost in explicit mirror, Jane describes her near-death experience on the steps of Marsh End:

and I sank where I stood, and hid my face against the ground. I lay still a while: the night-wind swept over the hill and over me, and died moaning in the distance; the rain fell fast, wetting me afresh to the skin. *Could I but have stiffened to the still frost—the friendly numbness of death*—it might have pelted on: I should not have felt it; *but yet my living flesh shuddered to its living influence*. I rose ere long (Brontë 282, my emphasis).

The rain, which evolves from Jane's attention to the dew on her shoes, culminates in a call to Douglass' description of the gashes on his feet. Past and present, through Jane's description, appear in the now-writing Jane's consciousness as she reflects on her body's suffering. Like Douglass, Jane's attention to her body mirrors the temporal degradation she endured at Thornfield Hall; rather than describing benumbed and injured feet at the hands of a master, Jane's attention to her body, alongside the sequence's physical abuse, depicts the complete cycle of torture that Jane endured from Mr. Rochester's control. As Jane moves closer to death, the

welcoming hands of Diana, Mary, and St. John²⁷ carry the depleted woman into her final model of domesticity that gradually nourishes her condition.

“Preparations for Escape” and “Northward Bound” align Linda’s narrative to Douglass’ through themes of listlessness and disorientation. The final sentiments described in “Preparations for Escape” depict Linda’s plan to flee and the rush of memories that mark a transitory component of her narrative. Once Linda’s plans to travel on a small boat to a ship heading North are revealed, she concludes the chapter with powerful, retrospective memories of her initial escape:

For the last time I went up to my nook. Its desolate appearance no longer chilled me, for the light of hope had risen in my soul. Yet, even with the blessed prospect of freedom before me, I felt very sad at leaving that old homestead, where I had been sheltered so long by the dear old grandmother; where I had dreamed my first young dream of love; and were, after that had faded away, my children came to twine themselves so closely round my desolate heart (Jacobs 176).

Linda figuratively places her past trauma in the garret and reflects upon it with uncanny fondness; this conflicting display of emotions dislodges Linda from her prior experiences within enslavement and empowers her body to escape. After her retrospective prose, Linda meets Peter, a rowboat captain, to begin her Northward journey. Peter’s introduction appears at the beginning of “Northward Bound,” in turn shifting Linda’s perspective from her grandmother’s home to the

²⁷ In her book, *Charlotte Brontë*, Penny Boumelha notes that Hannah, Marsh End’s housekeeper, initially prevents Jane from entering the home. Specifically, Boumelha states that St. John’s welcoming fully incorporates Jane into “patriarchal society” (*Charlotte Brontë* 69). While Boumelha’s analysis does relate to St. John’s desire to make Jane a missionary’s wife, I take issue with reading the patriarchy as a force that merely dislodges Jane from St. John and locates her closer to Mr. Rochester. Without St. John’s persistence, Jane would not have given the “It was my time to assume ascendancy” speech that concretely illustrates her as an autonomous woman (Brontë 358). Jane’s re-entrance into patriarchal inequity, through my reading, explicitly functions as a point of contrast against her newfound personal freedom.

wider world. While in the boat, Linda uses retrospect to highlight a darker component of her escape. “As we passed the Snaky Swamp,” Linda states, “[the captain] pointed to it, and said, ‘There is a slave territory that defies all the laws. I thought of the terrible days I had spent there, and though it was not called Dismal Swamp, it made me feel very dismal as I looked at it’” (Jacobs 179). Environmental trauma, through Linda’s memories, evokes Jane’s description of her time on the moors and in Whitcross. The environmental locus of Linda’s trauma holds an important role in her narrative. Like Douglass, Linda ““never could tell how we reached the wharf. My brain was all of a whirl, and my limbs tottered under me”” (Jacobs 176). Her omission functions twofold: as Linda uses aliases for those involved in her escape, she is able to provide more details of her experience. However, her distorted perspective casts her escape as a mirror of Douglass’, as disorientation within enslavement functions as a trauma response that appears in the American enslavement narrative genre. Distortion, however, abruptly ends when Linda states, “we were alone in the world, and we had left our dear ties behind us; ties cruelly sundered by the demon Slavery” (Jacobs 180). Like Jane, Linda’s degrading experiences culminate in a moment of hope; the hope, as will be explored, encourages both women to rejuvenate their bodies and resist their novel’s final oppressive constructs so that they may assume the rights to their bodily autonomy.

...

Space rejuvenates Jane and Linda’s condition once successfully escaped, which calls forth the importance of first looking at setting, rather than interactions. Beginning with Jane, her time at Moor House invigorates her depleted condition through laboring. As Jane establishes a strong sororal connection with Diana and Mary, her familial void is remedied while at Marsh End. Her employment at Moor House, however, provides Jane the solitude needed to synthesize

her new condition. “My home, then,” Jane states, “when I at last found a home,— is a cottage: a little room with white-washed walls and a sanded floor” (Brontë 305). The space itself appears desolate and empty; however, Jane fills the room with emotional responses to the degradation she endured before entering Moor House. Specifically, Jane is given: a calm, isolative home that contrasts to her earliest memories of Gateshead Hall; the opportunity to honor Miss Temple and Helen Burns through her teaching and maternal role for her pupils; and the opportunity to independently nourish her body that was once abused under Mr. Rochester’s control. Jane’s cottage mirrors her corrective efforts as she comfortably assumes the role of instructor and maternal figure: “All about me was spotless and bright—scoured floor, polished grate, and well-rubbed chairs. *I had also made myself neat*, and had now the afternoon before me to spend as I would” (Brontë 315, my emphasis). Jane’s rejuvenation is then followed by St. John—the male figure in Marsh End’s familial model—professing his knowledge of Jane’s past. His narration weaves in and out of Jane’s tumultuous past, which ends with his statement, “your uncle, Mr. Eyre of Madeira²⁸, is dead; that he has left you all his property, and that you are now rich—merely that—nothing more” (Brontë 325). Through property and wealth, Jane combines her model of nourishment at Moor House and describes how:

I stopped: I could not trust myself to entertain, much less to express, the thought that rushed upon me—that embodied itself,—that, in a second, stood out a strong, solid probability. Circumstances knit themselves, fitted themselves, shot into order: the chain

²⁸ In Alexander Valint’s “Madeira and *Jane Eyre*’s Colonial Inheritance,” Jane’s uncle bestows his niece with money procured through wine trading. Madeira, through Valint’s analysis, exported popular wine during the 18th and 19th centuries. Susan Meyer and Elaine Freedgood read Jane’s inheritance as a tie to colonial powers and, by proxy, enslavement. However, Valiant argues that “Excessive consumption threatens to poison not only Jane but also the British Empire more generally, as the novel suggests that the foreign luxury products of which the English grew increasingly fond, like Madeira wine, contain the threat of rebellion that ‘ferments’ among the disenfranchised people whose oppression sustains the empire” (“Madeira” 321-2). As Jane uses her money to free the Rivers family, her tie to her uncle’s speculated colonial legacy, through Valint’s reading, diminishes through her act of reinvigoration.

that had been lying hitherto a formless lump of links was drawn out straight,—everything was perfect, the connection complete (Brontë 327).

The invisible bonds of oppression, which have haunted Jane for her entire life, are suddenly resolved through St. John's revelation. In turn, Jane directs her rejuvenation to her newfound family, in which she "could free them" and "reunite them—the independence, the affluence which was mine might be theirs too" (Brontë 328-9). To share her newfound autonomy and freedom, Jane declares that, "my first aim will be to *clean down* (do you comprehend the full force of the expression?) to *clean down* Moor House from chamber to cellar" (Brontë 332). Susan Meyer reads Jane's cleansing of Moor House as "a more successful attempt at washing away injustice than the one at Thornfield...With Jane, from the perspective of the middle class...the novel suggests, requires, distributing wealth equally, not with an injustice that emanates from the upper class, letting a middle-class brother or sister remain a penniless 'slave'" (*Imperialism* 86-7). Through Meyer's reading, class and its intrinsic tie to the enslavement metaphor meets its end through Jane's invigorating efforts. Gender and its manifestation through her role as an instructor also becomes resolved at Moor House through the village's admiration of her teaching. Though Jane achieves the freedom she has yearned for, she must resist St. John before ascending to her independent condition.

Space functions similarly for Linda as she enters the North and spends time abroad. Once in Philadelphia, Linda describes her encounters with anti-slavery advocates and the effects it has on her spirit: "That night I sought to my pillow with feelings I have never carried to it before. I verily believed myself to be a free woman" (Jacobs 183). Linda's feelings of freedom are continued, as she "heard women crying fresh fish, berries, radishes, and various other things. All this was new to me. I dressed myself at an early hour, and sat at the window to watch that

unknown tide of life” (Jacobs 184). Her positioning starkly contrasts her imprisonment, as Linda can freely observe life’s ebbing and flowing. These ties to freedom encourage Linda to liberate her body from enslavement, as she recognizes that “I called myself free, and sometimes felt it so; but I knew I was insecure” (Jacobs 189). To achieve freedom, Linda sets out to find work. Like Jane, Linda states, “my greatest anxiety now was to obtain employment” (Jacobs 189). Her eventual employment under Mrs. Bruce, an Englishwoman who hires Linda to take care of her child, introduces Linda to Europe’s anti-slavery ideology. While abroad, Linda and Mrs. Bruce “went to Steventon, in Berkshire. It was a small town, said to be the poorest in the country” (Jacobs 206). Linda’s following observations of class and the rights of people introduces a possible critique Linda makes against Jane’s use of the enslavement metaphor: “I had heard much about the oppression of poor people in Europe...I felt that the condition of even the meanest and most ignorant among them was vastly superior to the condition of the most favored slaves in America” (Jacobs 207). Jane’s class reduction during her flight and its relationship to the enslavement metaphor, through Linda’s observations, magnifies the separate, yet converging oppressive constructs apparent in both novels. Linda specifically states that, to an enslaved person, Jane’s peril does not compare to the experiences characteristic of enslavement. Through her critique, however, Linda exists among a class of people that share solace in their degraded condition. Unity, through Linda’s statement, reveals, “during that time, I never saw the slightest symptom of prejudice against color. Indeed, I entirely forgot it, till the time came for us to return to America” (Jacobs 208). Linda’s travels henceforth absolves the trauma Southern enslavement imposed onto her body and depicts both the North and Europe as nourishing safe havens. Much like Jane, however, Linda’s time in the North and Europe becomes complicated by a final

manifestation of oppression: Dr. Flint's journey to the North in attempt to concretely subsume the rights to her body.

Jane and Linda's final experience with oppression builds upon their nourished conditions and propels them towards achieving freedom. St. John's role in Jane's life meets a tumultuous crossroads as he transitions from a fraternal presence to an oppressive lover. After learning of Jane's fortune, St. John abruptly approaches Jane and asks if she will be his missionary wife in the East Indies²⁹. St. John disguises his dominating request through his appeal to "the mission of [Jane's] great Master," in which religiosity manifests as the final, all-powerful master that seeks to oppress Jane's body (Brontë 346). Through a perverted rendering of God's intent, St. John urges Jane to accept his marital offer because he deems her "docile, diligent, disinterested, faithful, constant, and courageous" (Brontë 344). St. John manipulates Jane's newfound autonomy through his statement, as he embeds themes of submission and ignorance into his appeal to her heightened sense of self. Jane prematurely resists his oppression by stating, "if I go to India, I go to premature death" (Brontë 344). Jane introduces a unique dichotomy through her statement, as she both exercises autonomy to resist St. John, yet faces the possibility of succumbing to a premature death. Jane reconciles with this ultimatum and states, "consent, then, to his demand is possible: but for one item—one dreadful item. It is—that he asks me to be his wife, and has no more of a husband's heart for me than that frowning giant of a rock... He prizes me as a soldier would a good weapon; and that is all" (Brontë 345). Through Jane's

²⁹ The East Indies categorized British involvement in India and (East) Asian countries primarily from the-late-eighteenth-to-early-nineteenth centuries. Britain, in particular, was interested in the 'exotic' products available in the East Indies and sought to establish trading ports alongside other powerful countries (i.e., the Dutch). As these countries infiltrated the East Indies, imperialism slowly crept into power structures established through trading. Susan Meyer writes that "the [East Indian] environment is not, however, to the taste of St. John, who wants to force Jane into an inegalitarian marriage and take her to the unhealthy atmosphere of British India...to help him preach to dark-skinned people his rather different values of hierarchical subordination" (*Imperialism* 87). Rochester's alignment with the West Indies' legacy reverberates against St. John's reinvigorated desire to conquer bodies echoes Jane's former master, suggesting that she is entrapped in subordination characteristic of British trading ports.

interpretation, the trauma she endured at Thornfield Hall makes it clear that, should she marry St. John, she would fall back under the constraints of marriage and once again become a piece of her husband's domestic property. Rather than succumbing to his desire, Jane resists St. John's advances. After concretely recognizing that she was experiencing "refined, lingering torture," Jane states, "If I were to marry you, you would kill me. You are killing me now" (Brontë 350-1). By stating her injustices, St. John reverberates against Jane's autonomy by depicting her as a tyrant: "Your words are such as ought not to be used: violent, unfeminine, and untrue" (Brontë 351). Jane's ascension into a powerful, masculine figure correlates her protest to assuming the rights to her body. As Jane completely assumes her autonomy, she delineates the trajectory of the novel's final events:

I broke from St. John, who had followed, and would have detained me. It was *my* time to assume ascendancy. *My* powers were in play, and in force...I must, and would be alone. He obeyed me at once. Where there is energy to command well enough, obedience never fails...[I] took a resolve—and lay down, unscared, enlightened, eager but for the daylight (Brontë 358).

Jane, now a fully autonomous woman, ends her cycle of oppression. Through her reconfiguration of power structures, a disembodied voice calls Jane to return to a reformed version of Thornfield Hall. Upon seeing a disabled Mr. Rochester, her ability to marry her true love and preserve her autonomy exist in tandem.

Linda, in the wake of Dr. Flint's oppression, legally assumes the rights to her body.

Linda, though empowered by the glimpses of freedom in the North, is still haunted by Dr. Flint's pervasive desire to reassume her bodily autonomy. Before Dr. Flint arrives, Emily's brother³⁰

³⁰Emily Flint is Dr. Flint's daughter and legal owner of Linda in *Incidents*. Also, Linda reveals that the letter was not written by Miss Flint's brother and, instead, was written by Dr. Flint himself.

sends Linda a letter. The letter's core theme centers around Dr. Flint's belief that "[Emily] was always attached to you, and that you were never treated as a slave...you were taken into the house, and treated as one of us, and *almost* as free" (Jacobs 194). Dr. Flint's coercive letter haunts Linda's newfound freedom, as returning to the South would inevitably lead to her regression to Dr. Flint's concubine. Stubbornly, Dr. Flint embarks to the North to find Linda and subsume the rights to her body. Linda recognizes the hypocrisy embedded in his desires by stating, "and the affectionate [Flint] family, who were waiting for me with 'open arms,' were doomed to disappoint" (Jacobs 196). Linda's statement highlights that, to return to Dr. Flint, the familial structures she has since preserved would diminish under his control. In quick succession, Dr. Flint discovers Linda's location, which threatens the comfort she has since established in the North. Domestic space acts as a figuring point, in which Linda states, "again I was to be torn from a comfortable home, and all my plans for the welfare of my children were to be frustrated by that demon Slavery!" (Jacobs 202). As enslavement threatens again to pervade Linda's freedom, she succumbs to prior trauma amidst her condition's evolution in the North. Specifically, Linda describes the agony of paying for herself, figuring her body as a piece of domestic property, and existing within a patriarchal institution that derives its power from enslaved people's subservience (Jacobs 210, 216). In "The Fugitive Slave Law," the notion of "following the condition of the mother" haunts Linda as her former master draws nearer. At an oppressive epicenter, however, Linda's autonomy in the North is preserved through "the bill of sale" (Jacobs 225). Linda's autonomy, now hers, produces a larger call to her audience:

The bill of sale is on record, and future generations will learn from it that women were articles of traffic in New York, late in the nineteenth century of the Christian religion. It

may hereafter prove a useful document to antiquaries, who are seeking to measure the progress of civilization in the United States (Jacobs 226).

Linda's final statement preserves the legacy of her body within enslavement and stands as a testament against Southern enslavement. Dr. Flint, and his relinquished power via Linda's bill of sale, marks her full ascension into the role of free woman. As Linda concludes her narrative, her freedom diffuses into the domestic models that continue to nourish her body. Freedom, through Linda's account, also calls forth a final connection to *Jane Eyre*; that is, through a final address to the *readers* of both texts.

Conclusion

Perhaps the most striking comparison between *Jane Eyre* and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* occurs at the end of both works. Jane, after reuniting with Mr. Rochester, begins her final chapter with three famous words: “Reader, I married him” (Brontë 382). As “[Jane’s] tale draws to its close,” it begins once more when Linda Brent states: “Reader, my story ends in freedom; not in the usual way, with marriage. I and my children are now free!” (Brontë 383, Jacobs 227). Freedom and its relationship to *Jane Eyre* and *Incidents* centers itself around the women’s evolved bodies and conditions. For Jane, she is welcomed into the manor-house, Ferndean, to care for a disabled Mr. Rochester. As his body suffers due to Bertha Mason’s powerful rebellion against her prisoner, the once-powerful master regresses into a home “deep buried into the wood” (Brontë 336). The hunting lodge, with its “considerable antiquity,” illustrates how Mr. Rochester has abandoned the Rochester stigma of being a “violent race in their time” and retires quietly into a home that, unlike its meaning, harbors Mr. Rochester’s docility and dependency (Brontë 90). Jane, upon meeting Mr. Rochester, proclaims, “I am an independent woman now...I told you I am independent, sir, as well as rich; I am my own mistress” (Brontë 370). Jane, too, absolves Mr. Rochester’s body through her attention to the chestnut tree:

You are no ruin, sir—no lightning-struck tree: you are green and vigorous. Plants will grow about your roots, whether you ask them to or not, because they take delight in your bountiful shadow; and as they grow they will lean towards you, and wind around you, because your strength offers them so safe a prop (Brontë 379).

Like the chestnut tree, Ferndean and its presence within nature nourishes the equality between Jane and Mr. Rochester. Through her ascendancy, Jane cures Mr. Rochester of his blindness; her

body, now autonomous, enlightens Mr. Rochester by allowing him to see that “he loved me so truly that he knew no reluctance in profiting by my attendance: he felt I loved him so fondly that to yield that attendance was to indulge my sweet wishes” (Brontë 284). It is through this love that Jane creates her own family³¹ and assumes the maternal role she has longed for since her earliest memories at Gateshead Hall.

For Linda, her freedom manifests in a different form. Though she does not have “a home of [her] own,” she exists as a free woman in the North under the care of her friend, Mrs. Bruce (Jacobs 227). What truly characterizes her freedom, however, is the liberated consciousness she exhibits as her narrative comes to a close:

It has been painful to me, in many ways, to recall the dreary years I passed in bondage. I would gladly forget them if I could. Yet the retrospection is not without solace; for with those gloomy recollections come tender memories of my good old grandmother, like light, fleecy clouds floating over a dark and troubled sea (Jacobs 228).

Her liberation, in turn, preserves the legacy of her maternal grandmother. Her grandmother’s legacy within her narrative stands as a testament to her escape from enslavement, as it was she who nourished Linda’s body and preserved her autonomy while in hiding. Yet, Linda’s story does not end at her narrative’s final page. Almost 150 years later, Jean Fagan Yellin’s book, *Harriet Jacobs: A Life* attributed *Incidents* to Harriet Jacobs’ authorial prowess and experiences within enslavement. Through Yellin’s later analyses, we learn that Harriet Jacobs followed a

³¹ In Clara Poteet’s “Restored by God, Restored as God: An Exploration of the Genesis Myth in *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*,” she reads Jane and Mr. Rochester’s restoration at Ferndean as an invocation of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Poteet states that, “they attempted to create their own Paradise, but failed because they did not establish God as the cornerstone of their relationship. They were only restored to Eden once they both submitted to the importance of God in their life (Genesis 2:23)” (“Restored” 262-3). Indeed, this imagery at Ferndean evokes biblical underpinnings that illustrate Jane as a vessel for righteousness within her relationship. My attention to the chestnut tree also applies to this scene, as the Tree of Good and Evil (where the snake tempted Eve) is restored through Jane’s union with Mr. Rochester.

second North Star; that is, Jacobs closely worked with Frederick Douglass in the mid-19th Century and, through her time hearing about *The North Star* and anti-slavery ideology, wrote *Incidents* to add to the abolitionist narrative in Antebellum America. *Incidents*, as Harriet Jacobs intended, “[aroused] the women of the North to a realizing sense of the condition of two millions of women at the South, still in bondage, suffering what I suffered, most of them far worse” (*Incidents* xx). By narrating her experiences in the South, Harriet Jacobs helped liberate the bodies she sought to address and became a powerful figure of resistance in Antebellum American politics. As both works meet their separate endings, I now turn to a final comparison about literature’s power in the 19th Century.

What truly emerges from reading *Jane Eyre* and *Incidents* as echoes of sociopolitical issues in the 19th Century is a voice of hope. As explored, the 19th Century relied heavily on hierarchies of power that posited women as subordinates under constructs of whiteness and masculinity. Charlotte Brontë and Harriet Jacobs reflected this enforced subordination in their works, yet reinvented what it meant to be a political voice of protest amidst hypocrisy and inequity. Space in my analyses has been a focal point of analysis; to end, I turn to the fictional spaces of both works and suggest that these echoes reverberate within a reforming landscape. Specifically, Charlotte Brontë and Harriet Jacobs were able to subjectively craft the fictional spaces in which their novels coalesce and diffuse. By granting space to foregrounding authorial voices, Charlotte Brontë and Harriet Jacobs created a transatlantic dialogue that gradually turned unified subordination into collective resistance.

Yet, I turn to another important piece of the dialogue created through the links between *Jane Eyre* and *Incidents*. Much like how the 19th Century was dominated by masculinity and whiteness, our understandings of history conform to these same principles. Diverting from the

dominant narrative in history and, instead, turning to the prowess of female authors, highlights underrepresented narratives that fundamentally changed the political landscape during the 19th Century. Even now, few scholars have observed the Victorian novel's engagement with the American enslavement narrative. By continuing the pioneering work done by Julia Sun-Joo Lee and Deborah Denenholz Morse, I have attempted to give space to these suppressed narrative connections and reinvigorate their applicability to 21st Century understandings of history. *Reader*, it is the voices of those left behind that oftentimes make the most impact in the world; this legacy—identified in *Jane Eyre* and *Incidents*—stands to attest to women authors' literary bodies and their prowess within 19th Century culture and society.

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