‘I’ll try violence’: Patterns of Domestic Abuse in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847)

Keywords: Domestic abuse; domestic violence; Charlotte Brontë; *Jane Eyre*

Abstract:

Recent years have seen a significant revision and expansion of legal definitions of domestic abuse – in particular the inclusion of forms of abuse beyond physical and sexual violence. Coercive control was criminalised in 2015, and the Domestic Abuse bill, currently passing through parliament, further seeks to expand definitions of controlling behaviour. In a recent study published in the journal *Violence Against Women*, criminologist Jane Monckton-Smith examines 372 murder cases in which the (female) victim had had a relationship with the perpetrator, and identifies an ‘eight stage relationship progression to homicide’, which includes forms of coercive control.[1] This article reads the relationship between Jane and Rochester in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) through the lens of these eight stages, and offers a reassessment of the novel as a domestic abuse narrative. I argue that Rochester clearly follows the pattern identified by Monckton-Smith in his relationships with Jane, Céline Varens, and especially Bertha, and examine the implications of this for both his victims and our understanding of the novel.

Introduction:

The Domestic Abuse bill, currently making its way through parliament, contains the first statutory definition of ‘domestic abuse’. According to the bill:

> Behaviour is “abusive” if it consists of any of the following—

[1] Jane Monckton-Smith, ‘Intimate Partner Femicide: Using Foucauldian Analysis to Track an Eight Stage Progression to Homicide’. *Violence Against Women*. 26:11 (August 2019), pp. 1267-1285. Further references appear in the body of the essay.

(a) physical or sexual abuse;

(b) violent or threatening behaviour;

(c) controlling or coercive behaviour;

(d) economic abuse;

(e) psychological, emotional or other abuse[2]

The bill is intended, in part, to address the misperception that abuse necessarily includes physical violence. As MP Rosie Duffield noted, speaking in the House of Commons in October 2019 about her own experience of an abusive relationship, 'Domestic violence has many faces [...] Abuse isn't just about those noticeable physical signs, sometimes there are no bruises. [...] Abuse is very often all about control and power'.[3] The passage of the bill coincides with a report by criminologist Jane Monckton-Smith, which examines 372 murder cases in which the victim had had an intimate relationship with the perpetrator and identifies an 'eight stage relationship progression to homicide' (1267). These stages include the perpetrator having a history of abusive relationships, a fast-developing relationship, coercive control, and a trigger which potentially threatens that control. These recent developments in our understanding of the definitions and behaviours of domestic abuse have potential implications for contemporary perceptions of historical and fictional relationships. This article reads Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847)[4] - particularly Rochester's intimate relationships with Céline Varens, Bertha Rochester, and the eponymous heroine – in light of

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[2] Anon. 'Domestic Abuse Bill'. London: House of Commons, 2019. Available at: https://services.parliament.uk/bills/2017-19/domesticabuse.html (accessed January 2020).
[3] Anon., 'Rosie Duffield's domestic abuse speech' (October 2019). Available at: https://labourlist.org/2019/10/watch-rosie-duffields-domestic-violence-speech/ (accessed January 2020).
[4] Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (1847; New York: Norton, 2001). Further references appear in the body of the essay.

these developments, specifically through the lens of Monckton-Smith's eight stages, and offers a reassessment of the novel as a domestic abuse narrative.

In mapping these stages onto a Victorian fictional text, I am acutely aware of the sensitive nature of Monckton-Smith's research, which draws upon the experiences of women murdered by their partners or former partners between 2009 and 2015. However, the analysis seeks to illustrate the deeply problematic manner in which discourses of romantic love ignore indications of abusive behaviour. Such discourses, as Monckton-Smith observes, can work to 'normalize an all-encompassing "grand passion"', and construct '[j]ealousy' and 'possessiveness' as 'normal output[s] or love'; thus 'love becomes a powerful justification for all sorts of possessive and fixated behaviours' (1275). These discourses, 'where love justifies possessiveness and even violence and homicide, have power [...] in masking risk' (1275). Literary works such as *Jane Eyre*, perennially popular and the subject of multiple screen adaptations (most of which preserve the emphasis on romantic love), form part of a wider cultural discourse on romantic love which contributes to popular perceptions and potentially masks the risks posed to women by abusive partners. As this article illustrates, Brontë's novel contains clear evidence of abusive relationships, including coercive control, threats of – and actual – violence, which is ultimately overshadowed by the narrative emphasis on romantic love.

Reading a nineteenth-century novel through the lens of contemporary definitions and discourses around domestic abuse raises the spectre of cultural relativism. Whilst acknowledging the potential pitfalls of this approach, the popular (and, to a lesser extent, critical) tendency to read *Jane Eyre* primarily as a love story demands a response. The legislative structure of the time in which the novel was produced, as I discuss below, effectively functioned to enable husbands to exert considerable coercive control over their wives, and bears enough resemblance to recent definitions of domestic abuse to warrant

further exploration. Furthermore, in adopting this approach, I engage with recent critical discourses around presentism in Victorian studies – notably the work of the V21 Collective, whose manifesto recognises 'a new openness to presentism: an awareness that our interest in the period is motivated by certain features of our own moment'.[5] This article enacts this approach through its application of recent work in the field of criminology to Brontë's novel.

The recognition of coercive control as a form of abuse is a relatively recent development, and not something explicitly recognised in Victorian discourses around domestic abuse: 'controlling or coercive behaviour in an intimate or family relationship' was first criminalised in Section 76 of the Serious Crime Act 2015.[6] Nevertheless, Victorian feminist campaigns were instrumental in challenging legislation which effectively functioned to legalise the coercive control of married women by their husbands, in particular via property and custody laws. The Child Custody Act of 1839 granted mothers limited custody rights; the Custody of Infants Act of 1873 extended mothers' rights to custody of their children. The first Married Women's Property Act was passed in 1870. Further acts followed in 1882, 1884, and 1893.[7] All of these acts functioned to reduce the coercive control which husbands could *legally* exert over their wives. *Jane Eyre*, however, is set prior to these legal developments which served to grant women greater autonomy within marriage, and, as such, coercive control functions as an inevitable part of marriage for women such as Bertha and Jane. Victorian protests against wife abuse (outside of the campaigns for marriage law reform) tended to focus on *physical* violence, as indicated by Frances Power Cobbe's important intervention on this topic, 'Wife-Torture in England', first published in *The Contemporary Review* in 1878. Cobbe identifies typical wife-abusers

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[5] Anon. 'Manifesto of the V21 Collective: Ten Theses' (2015), available at: http://v21collective.org/manifesto-of-the-v21-collective-ten-theses/. See also, 'V21 Forum on Strategic Presentism', *Victorian Studies*, 59:1 (Autumn 2016), pp. 87-126.

[6] See 'Controlling or Coercive Behaviour in an Intimate or Family Relationship', https://www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/controlling-or-coercive-behaviour-intimate-or-family-relationship (reviewed 20 June 2017; accessed January 2020).

[7] See Mary Lyndon Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

as ‘men of the lower class’ – a stereotype strategically employed to enhance her appeal to ‘the better sort of Englishmen’ to legislate to protect women from violent husbands, but nonetheless problematic in its characterisation of the poorer classes.[8] Crucially, though, like later analysts, including Monckton-Smith, Cobbe identifies a process of escalation in cases of domestic abuse, observing that, ‘wife-*beating* in process of time, and in numberless cases, advances to wife-*torture*, and the wife-torture usually ends in wife-maiming, wife-blinding, or wife-murder’ (72). Cobbe’s analysis, then, drawing on statistical and narrative evidence of contemporary cases, anticipates the now widely accepted view of escalation as a key characteristic of domestic abuse.

Cobbe’s stereotypical wife-beater is not immediately apparent in the figure of *Jane Eyre*’s Rochester, and this, perhaps, goes some way towards explaining the relatively limited critical work on the subject of domestic abuse in the novel. By contrast, both Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and Anne Brontë’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) have received significantly more attention in this respect.[9] Lisa Surridge, for example, in her work on marital violence in Victorian fiction, *Bleak Houses* (2005), offers a detailed exploration of the subject in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, and some discussion of *Wuthering Heights*, but makes no mention at all of *Jane Eyre*. However, both Heathcliff and Arthur Huntingdon align more closely with Cobbe’s characteristic ‘wife-beaters’. Heathcliff’s uncertain background renders his status ambiguous, and his connections to Liverpool, in turn suggesting a possible Irish connection,[10] align with one of the sources quoted by Cobbe, who suggests that ‘no-

[8] Frances Power Cobbe, ‘Wife-Torture in England’, *The Contemporary Review*, Vol. 32 (April-July 1878), p. 56. Further references appear in brackets. There is also an element of ‘victim blaming’ in Cobbe’s account: she describes the wives of these ‘rude, coarse, and brutal’ men as ‘devoid, in an extraordinary degree, of all the higher natural attractions and influences of their sex’ (60).

[9] See, for example, Judith E. Pike, ‘“My name was Isabella Linton”: Coverture, Domestic Violence, and Mrs. Heathcliff's Narrative in *Wuthering Heights*’. *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 64:3 (2009), pp. 347-83; Meghan Bullock, ‘Abuse, Silence, and Solitude in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*’, *Brontë Studies*, 29:2 (07/2004), pp. 135-41.

[10] See Terry Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture* (London: Verson, 1995).

where is the ill usage of women so systematic as in Liverpool' (59), and declares, 'In the worst districts of London [...] four-fifths of the wife-beating cases are among the lowest class of Irish labourers' (58). Furthermore, both Heathcliff (as well as Hindley Earnshaw) and Huntingdon engage in more 'obvious' abusive behaviour than Rochester, including acts of drunkenness, cruelty, and violence.

Jane Eyre, by contrast, is positioned more clearly as a romantic narrative – and Rochester as romantic hero. Margarete Rubik and Elke Mettinger-Schartmann, in their exploration of the afterlives of *Jane Eyre*, argue that it 'is […] above all the romantic love story […] that [has] exerted the most enduring popular appeal'.[11] The book is persistently marketed as a love story: more than forty editions of the novel feature images of Jane and Rochester on the covers, frequently in a romantic pose.[12] Taglines used by publishers on front covers of the text include 'An immortal story of undying love that's pointed straight at your heart' (Royce Publishers, 1944), and 'One of the world's great love stories' (Pocket Books, Inc., 1962). Similarly, screen adaptations consistently privilege the romantic elements of the text – casting Rochester in the role of romantic hero, often via significant alterations to Brontë's original story in order to evade the more problematic aspects of his character. As with the various book covers, marketing materials for these productions frequently feature images of Jane and Rochester in romantic poses, and include taglines which emphasise the romantic plot. Director Robert Stevenson's 1943 screen version, featuring Orson Welles as Rochester, carries the tagline 'A love story every woman would die a thousand deaths to live', and Franco Zeffirelli's 1996 film was advertised as 'this year's most romantic love story'.

[11] Margarete Rubik and Elke Mettinger-Schartmann, eds., Introduction to *A Breath of Fresh Eyre: Intertextual and Intermedial Reworkings of Jane Eyre*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007, p. 10
[12] These include a World Publishing Co. edition (1946), Pocket Book Inc.'s Cardinal edition (1953), Oxford University Press's Pictorial Classics edition (1961), Dell Publishing Co.'s Laurel edition (1968), a Milano Lucchi edition (1976), and Chatto and Windus's Zodiac Press edition (1980). See janeeyreillustrated.com.

Critical responses to the novel have not ignored the flaws in Rochester's character, but neither have they explored the text specifically as a narrative of domestic abuse. Elizabeth Rigby's early anonymous review of the novel described Brontë's 'hero' as 'coarse' and 'brutal',[13] echoing Cobbe's description of the 'lower-class' husbands who beat and torture their wives. Subsequent critics have also identified concerns in regard to Jane's marriage to Rochester – several noting the narrative's problematic parallels with the Bluebeard fairytale.[14] John Sutherland holds Rochester responsible for the death of his first wife – by neglect if nothing else. He sounds a note of warning for Jane's future as his wife: 'Could one be entirely confident his wife-killing ways would not return?'.[15] In their study of domestic violence in Victorian literature, *The Marked Body* (2002), Kate Lawson and Lynn Shakinovsky make only brief reference to *Jane Eyre*. Crucially, the figure associated with domestic violence here is Bertha, as a consequence of her attacks on her brother and Rochester. By contrast, they note Rochester's 'commendable "restraint"' in dealing with his wife, observing, 'Even Jane, sensibly appalled by Bertha Mason's violence is [...] seemingly impressed by Rochester's self-control'.[16] This reading effectively and problematically posits Bertha as the *perpetrator* of abuse, and Rochester as the *victim*. By contrast, this article evidences Rochester's abusive behaviour and Bertha's and Jane's positions as victims. Whilst critical (and to a lesser extent creative) responses to the novel have at times recognised Bertha's role as victim,[17] Jane is typically framed as heroine -whether as romantic or (anti-) feminist. It is possible that this seeming resistance to positioning Jane as victim tends from

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[13] Anon. [Elizabeth Rigby], '*Vanity Fair* and *Jane Eyre*', *The Quarterly Review*, Vol. 84 (December 1848), p. 166

[14] See, for example, Heta Pyrhönen, *Bluebeard Gothic: Jane Eyre and its Progeny*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010.

[15] John Sutherland, *Can Jane Eyre Be Happy? More Puzzles in Classic Fiction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 80.

[16] Kate Lawson and Lynn Shakenovsky, *The Marked Body: Domestic Violence in the Mid-Nineteenth-Century Novel*. Albany: State University of New York press, 2002, p. 5.

[17] On creative responses to Bertha, see my chapter, '"The Insane Creole": The Afterlife of Bertha Mason' in Amber K. Regis and Deborah Wynne (eds.), *Charlotte Brontë': Legacies and Afterlives* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), pp.222-49.

the fact that she evidently, judging from her first-person narrative, does not perceive herself in these terms. Further, it is also Jane's perspective which influences readers' perceptions of Rochester as romantic hero. The various creative and critical responses to the novel are suggestive of the tension that exists between Rochester's problematic behaviour and his position as romantic hero. As Sandra M. Gilbert demonstrates, both readers and (feminist) critics alike have been drawn into the novel's romantic plotline, at times in spite of themselves:

> I had to rigorously repress my own desire for Jane's and Rochester's "furious lovemaking" to reach a romantic—and more specifically a sexual—climax and undertake instead a weary journey across the moors to a political position where […] I could rejoice in our heroine's new life as "a village schoolmistress, free and honest, in a breezy mountain nook in the healthy heart of England".[18]

However, reading the narrative through the lens of Monckton-Smith's study illustrates the extent to which Rochester's marriage to Bertha, as well as his relationships with Jane and Céline, represent abusive relationships. The risk markers which are evident when these relationships are examined from this perspective suggests that the novel's apparent 'happy-ever-after' conclusion in fact depicts Jane's return to an abusive relationship which places her at significant risk of future abuse, and thus dramatically undermines the notion of the novel as love story.

Central to Monckton-Smith's and others' studies of domestic abuse is the idea of patterns of behaviour, which can be used to identify those women potentially at risk from intimate

[18] Sandra M. Gilbert, '*Jane Eyre* and the Secrets of Furious Lovemaking', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 31:3 (Summer 1998), p. 355.

partner femicide. *Jane Eyre* provides details of three of Rochester's intimate relationships: his marriage to Bertha, his affair with Céline, and his relationship with Jane, culminating in their marriage at the end of the novel. It is through an analysis of these that patterns of behaviour become evident, suggesting his position as abuser. Particularly relevant here is the significance of coercive control in studies of domestic violence. Monckton-Smith builds on previous work in the field, which 'situates controlling patterns as driving domestic abuse' and 'threats to that control as raising risk for homicide' (1270). This desire for control is clearly evident in Rochester's character, and exhibited multiple times throughout the novel, frequently via manipulative behaviour, such as his adopting the disguise of a gypsy woman in an attempt to elicit information from Jane. Crucially, Monckton-Smith notes that 'control is considered as influencing' each of the eight stages identified (1273). These stages, which map distinctly onto Rochester's relationships, comprise of pre-relationship; early relationship; relationship; trigger event; escalation; change in thinking; planning; and, finally, homicide (1273). Whilst not all these stages map onto all three of the relationships described in the novel, they are all evident across the three, with the marriage to Bertha progressing through every stage, including homicide. The sections that follow summarise the characteristics of each of these stages and map them onto the representation of Rochester's intimate relationships in *Jane Eyre*.

Stage One: Pre-Relationship

Monckton-Smith's study builds on earlier research which demonstrates that 'previous history of abuse [...] predict[s] future abuse' (1274). In the 372 cases examined, 'a history of controlling patterns, domestic abuse, or stalking was present in every case where a prerelationship history was recorded' (1274). Monckton-Smith notes that, 'Victims had often

been aware that the perpetrator had a history of abuse on entering a relationship, but did not always believe reports from former partners' (1274). Crucially, evidence suggests that perpetrators of abuse 'will continue with the same behavioural patterns in all relationships' (1274).

In *Jane Eyre*, the eponymous heroine's relationship with Rochester is preceded by two earlier relationships for which some details are provided: his marriage to Bertha, and his affair with Céline. In both these cases, there is some narrative evidence of abuse. His first wife, Bertha, has been confined in a windowless room on the third storey of Thornfield for a period of ten years, allegedly as a consequence of her mental illness. Though Jane notes, on encountering a frenzied Bertha, that Rochester 'could have settled her with a well-planted blow, but he would not strike' (250), suggesting a reluctance towards physical violence on his part, her long containment in the care of Grace Poole (a woman given to drink), her physical appearance, implying neglect ('a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face' [250]), and inarticulateness ('it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal' [250]), speak to Rochester's abuse of his wife. Evidence of abuse is also apparent in Rochester's own account of his relationship with Céline. His generosity towards her (installing her in a hotel, providing servants and a carriage, and lauding her with gifts) might be read as a form of coercive control. This is reinforced by his account of the termination of their relationship, which occurs after he 'happen[ed] to call one evening when Céline did not expect [him]' (120) – a brief allusion suggestive of a monitoring of his lover's movements. He awaits her return, and, on seeing her with another man, conceals himself and spies on her, experiencing intense jealousy. In his 'abridge[d]' account of what follows, he 'liberate[s]

Céline from [his] protection', and the following morning leaves 'a bullet in one of [Céline's lover's] etiolated arms' (123).[19]

It is significant that the accounts of Rochester's two previous abusive relationships come from Rochester himself, and that Jane does not identify any risk to herself from the information provided. This tallies with Monckton-Smith's observation that the perpetrator's account of previous events is crucial in convincing victims they are not in any danger: the study quotes one relative of a victim who observes, 'She believed him when he said his ex was just vindictive' (1274). The narrative silence of both Bertha and Céline allows Rochester to control the version of events presented to Jane and subsequently the reader, so both are persuaded to believe the abuser's account of these relationships and overlook the evidence of abuse. Evidently, though, Rochester's pre-relationship history suggests that Jane is at significant risk when she enters into a relationship with him. It is also worth noting here that Monckton-Smith observes a 'resistance to "labelling" men as abusive because of their histories' (1274) – a resistance which is also evident in popular and some critical interpretations of *Jane Eyre*, which persistently ignore Rochester's relationship history and continue to position him as romantic hero.[20]

Stage Two: Early Relationship

[19] Attacks on new partners of victims of domestic abuse are not uncommon, and in several cases abusers have killed their victims' new partners. Monckton-Smith notes that perpetrators may also kill others who are perceived as obstacles (1280).

[20] Although Jane's narrative recognizes Rochester as flawed (and many adaptations of the text maintain this aspect of his character) he largely escapes accusations of abusive behaviour (towards Jane in particular) – within the narrative and in critical and creative responses. The reasons for this are multiple – including Jane's evident desire for him, her failure to recognize the signs of abuse towards both her and Bertha and, in terms of the various film versions of the novel at least, a long cultural history of positioning (reformed) 'bad boys' as romantic heroes.

Monckton-Smith identifies clear patterns in the early relationships of women subsequently killed by their partners:

> relationships often started with the perpetrator being attentive, and progressed to possessiveness and control in most cases. This is an identifiable stage which is not characterised by abuse, but more about seeking commitment from the victim. It appeared that normal romantic expectations and activities were present, but speeded up. (1275)

She also observes the use of 'possessive language' by perpetrators, and 'early declarations of love' (1275). As noted above, she draws on earlier work which notes that 'Discourses of heterosexual romantic love normalise an all-encompassing "grand passion"' and that 'Jealousy is constructed as a normal output of love, as is possessiveness' (1275). Such discourses, Monckton-Smith suggests, can serve to 'mask[...] risk' (1275). This stage, then, is 'dominated by attempts to seek early and firm commitment [...] and once commitment is given by the female, it cannot be withdrawn' (1276).

Again, Monckton-Smith's account of this stage tallies closely with Jane's relationship with Rochester in particular, but also with some of the information given about his relationships with both Bertha and Céline. Significantly, Rochester's description of his feelings for the latter parallel the phrasing used by Monckton-Smith: he tells Jane that his ward, Adèle, 'was the daughter of a French opera-dancer, Céline Varens, to whom he had once cherished what he called a "grande passion"' (120). This relationship appears to be marked by jealousy and possessiveness, as well as grand romantic gestures in the form of material gifts. This 'grande passion' appears to be of some duration: he informs Jane that Céline presented Adèle to him as his child some six months prior to the end of their affair. However, the rapid development of a romantic relationship is more clearly evident in the cases of both Jane and Bertha –

though in the case of the latter, Rochester presents himself as the deluded victim, swept off his feet before he was aware of his wife's 'true' nature:

> I was dazzled, stimulated: my senses were excited; and being ignorant, raw, and inexperienced, I thought I loved her. There is no folly so besotted that the idiotic rivalries of society, the prurience, the rashness, the blindness of youth, will not hurry a man to its commission. Her relatives encouraged me; competitors piqued me; she allured me: a marriage was achieved almost before I knew where I was. (260)

It is significant that Rochester, in detailing his marriage to Bertha, repeatedly portrays himself as victim – effectively sold to Bertha's family by his father as a consequence of his status as second son. This positioning of himself as victim assists in the process of obscuring the signs of abuse, and convincing both Jane and the reader of his 'honourable' nature. However, here, as in Monckton-Smith's account of abusive relationships, 'the way a relationship started, was different to what it would become' (1275). The development of Jane's romantic relationship with Rochester is similarly rapid: she initially meets him in January, at which point their relationship is that of employer and employee (crucial in terms of the power dynamic between the two). He proposes in the June, moving the relationship onto a romantic footing, and their wedding is arranged for a month subsequent to this. During this interim period between the proposal and the planned wedding, the relationship is characterised by Rochester's declarations of love, and use of possessive language. He initially works to provoke Jane's jealousy by informing her that he is going to marry Blanche Ingram. He proposes to Jane by declaring, 'I must have you for my own – entirely my own' (217), and immediately on her acceptance refers to her as 'my little wife' (218). In this early stage of their romantic relationship, then, Rochester's behaviour again mirrors that of the perpetrators described in Monckton-Smith's study.

Stage Three: Relationship

Stage Three refers to the relationship once 'confirmed and committed', during which time 'at least some of the high-risk behavioural markers' are apparent (1276). This period is characterised by 'controlling patterns', with 'stalking and monitoring patterns' also frequently evident, often accompanied by paranoia, expressions of distrust, and a demand for 'demonstrations of devotion and loyalty' (1276), which often result in the imposition of strict routines, the disruption of which can serve as a potential flash point. This phase of the relationship, then, is marked a pattern of 'coercive control'. The 2019 draft Domestic Abuse bill incorporates the government's earlier definition of 'controlling behaviour' as:

> a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape, and regulating their everyday behaviour.[21]

Significantly, the study observes that 'This stage was found to have the most diversity in length of time. Some cases saw this stage last as little as 3 – 6 weeks, in others it was as long as 50 years' (1277). Consequently, the ten-year marriage of Jane and Rochester at the conclusion of Brontë's novel does not necessarily indicate a mitigation in the risk posed to Jane.

Again, we can see examples of behaviour in all three of Rochester's relationships which mirror this third stage in the pattern established by Monckton-Smith, despite the limited detail the narrative provides. As noted above, there appears to be an element of monitoring in

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[21] Home Office , 'New definition of domestic violence' (September 2012). Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-definition-of-domestic-violence. Accessed January 2020.

Rochester's visit to Céline's hotel when she is not expecting him – which takes a more literal form when he spies on her and her lover. His bestowing of expensive gifts upon her might be seen as a way of securing her loyalty – and the fact that these include servants and a carriage potentially offers further opportunities for monitoring her actions. The characteristics of this stage are less immediately apparent in Rochester's marriage to Bertha, but it is significant that Rochester finds 'her nature wholly alien to [his]', and 'her tastes obnoxious' (261). Again, Rochester is painting himself as the victim here, and we have only his word to validate the truth of his marriage (which, as his multiple untruths suggest, is hardly reliable), but it might be reasonably deduced here that Bertha's refusal to conform to Rochester's expectations and demands, to demonstrate the loyalty and devotion expected by abusers, is central to his decision to lock her away. To this end, Bertha might be considered a victim of nineteenth-century patriarchal society more generally: as Jane Ussher observes in her exploration of madness, 'If […] sexually nonconformist women could be treated as madwomen their threat to the discourse of femininity was neutralized'.[22]

This stage of Jane and Rochester's relationship occurs in both the month following their engagement, and at the conclusion of the novel, which provides brief details of their seeming peaceful ten-year marriage. Prior to the disrupted wedding, Rochester repeatedly refers to Jane as 'Mrs Rochester' (220), as well as 'Fairfax Rochester's girl bride' (220). He offers to lavish jewels upon her, mirroring his earlier behaviour with Céline, and when she declines, responds, 'I will myself put the diamond chain around your neck, and the circlet on your forehead, [...] and I will clasp the bracelets on these fine wrists, and load these fairy-like fingers with rings' (220) – the anticipated jewellery symbolic of the chains that will bind her should she marry Rochester. His possessiveness is further evident in his references to 'my

[22] Jane Ussher, *Women's Madness: Misogyny or Mental Illness?* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), p. 73.

Jane' (221), 'my pale, little elf' (220), 'my good little girl' (224), and 'my treasure' (221) – allusions which variously serve to both objectify and infantilise Jane. She appears besotted, declaring, 'He stood between me and every thought of religion, as an eclipse intervenes between man and the broad sun. I could not, in those days, see God for his creature: of whom I had made an idol' (234). This phase of their relationship is marked by Rochester's attempts to gain power and control over Jane, sometimes in the face of her resistance. He tells her: '"it is your time now, little tyrant, but it will be mine presently: and when once I have fairly seized you, to have and to hold, I'll just – figuratively speaking – attach you to a chain like this" (touching his watch-guard)' (231). The power dynamic is problematic, as he continues to issue orders to her in the manner of an employer, 'summon[ing] [her] to his presence' (231). The relationship is inflected by inequality – reflected in their ongoing positions as master and servant (Jane continues to instruct Adèle during this time), as well as in respect of gender, class status, and age (Rochester is around forty, Jane eighteen). Jane demonstrates some awareness of this in the language she selects to describe their dynamic at this point: 'his smile was such as a sultan might, in a blissful and fond moment, bestow on a slave his gold and gems had enriched' (229). There are few indications of threats of explicit violence against Jane, but the potential for these is suggested by the 'grimaces', 'pinch[es] on the arm', and 'severe tweak[s] of the ear' (234) Rochester subjects her to at this point, in response to her refusal to submit to his passionate advances – which also seems to raise the possibility of sexual violence. Other passing allusions similarly speak to Rochester's possessive and potentially violent nature: on the way to the church for the wedding, he holds Jane's hand with 'a grasp of iron' (245), and at the moment the wedding is interrupted, with 'a hot and strong grasp' (247) – again suggestive of the dangerous power he will wield over Jane once she becomes his wife. This behaviour appears indicative of Rochester's desire to marry Jane,

and in doing so to acquire the coercive control granted by the legal institution of marriage in the early nineteenth century.

When Jane and Rochester do eventually legally marry, at the conclusion of the novel, there has been some shift in the power dynamics between them as a consequence of Rochester's injuries, as various critics have observed.[23] Nevertheless, upon Jane's return to Rochester following the fire, we again see indications of Rochester's possessive nature and desire to control her. Immediately on her return, he exhibits signs of jealousy towards St. John Rivers, interrogating her as to her interactions with and feelings for him. The intensity of their relationship is quickly resumed, with Rochester proposing the day following her return, and insisting they marry 'instantly' (380). He quickly reverts to his use of the possessive pronoun, addressing her as 'my fairy' (372), 'my skylark' (374), 'my darling' (375), and 'my little Jane' (378). She, in turn, refers to him as 'master' (370), implying the problematic power dynamic remains in place, despite Rochester's injuries. Rochester berates Jane for leaving him, and declares, 'he would never have forced [her] to be his mistress. Violent as he had seemed in his despair, he, in truth, loved [her] far too well and too tenderly to constitute himself [her] tyrant' (375). In fact, this, too, is behaviour fairly typical of perpetrators of abuse, who frequently express regret for previously abusive behaviour and look to reassure their victim. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar construct Rochester's behaviour towards Jane as 'loving tyranny',[24] but this threatens to obscure within the text's narrative of 'grand passion' the evidence of domestic abuse. Rochester *is* tyrannical and, at the conclusion of the

[23] See, for example, Beth Lau, who follows in an earlier critical tradition in arguing that 'Rochester's blindness at the end of the novel [...] reverses the dynamics of their relationship' ('The Place of *Pamela* in *Jane Eyre*', in Diane Long Hoeveler and Deborah Denenholz Morse, eds., *Time, Space, and Place in Charlotte Brontë* [London: Routledge, 2017], p. 114).
[24] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 357.

narrative, is further enabled in this tyranny – in spite of his disability - by nineteenth-century marriage laws.

Jane's return to Rochester in relation to the novel as domestic abuse narrative is in itself significant. Refuge, a charity working with domestic violence victims, notes that 'Women often attempt to leave several times before making the final break'.[25] Jane's initial departure and subsequent return are, therefore, fairly typical. Jane's isolated position is in evidence at Thornfield: to some extent, as a friendless orphan estranged from what little family she has, she brings elements of isolation with her, whilst the relatively small household staff, from whom she is separated as a consequence of their relative social positions (as servants / governess), further enhances this condition, and leaves her vulnerable to abuse. At Ferndean, where she returns to Rochester, she is even more isolated; like many victims of domestic violence, Jane is removed from close contact with friends and family. Rochester's description of Ferndean as 'buried [...] in a heavy wood, where sound falls dull, and dies unreverberating' (381) take on a sinister connotation in this context.[26] Monckton-Smith observes this pattern of isolation in victims of domestic abuse. She cites the family member of one victim, who states, 'she started spending all her time with him, we hardly ever saw her. She always spent a lot of time with us before, but that all stopped' (1275). Jane has few friends and family to begin with, and this fact is not unnoticed by Rochester. Upon proposing to her, he states, 'man meddle not with me: I have her, and will hold her' (218), again suggestive of his possessiveness. She responds, 'There is no one to meddle, sir. I have no kindred to interfere', and his reply – 'No – that is the best of it' (218) – highlights the parallels with the

[25] Anon., 'Barriers to Leaving', https://www.refuge.org.uk/our-work/forms-of-violence-and-abuse/domestic-violence/barriers-to-leaving/ (accessed January 2020).
[26] This reading challenges earlier critical interpretations which perceive Ferndean as a paradise and / or refuge from conventional society, although several critics have identified the negative connotations of the place. For a useful overview of the various critical responses to Ferndean, see Yoshiaki Shirai, 'Ferndean: Charlotte Brontë in the Age of Pteridomania', *Brontë Studies*, 28:2 (2003), pp. 123-30.

characteristic abuser who attempts to isolate his victim. Following their marriage, Jane takes Adèle out of school, intending to become her governess again, but finds her 'husband needed' all her 'time and cares' (383), indicating that she is unable to forge a life for herself beyond her role as Rochester's wife. 'We are,' she notes, 'ever together' (384) – a statement which serves to highlight the tension between the text as romantic or as domestic abuse narrative.

The ending of the novel appears to be a happy one, but it is clear that Jane is both compliant and subservient – typical demands made by abusive partners. Indeed, several critics have noted that Jane's survival depends on her restraining her rebellious instincts. Gilbert and Gubar are correct when they identify Bertha as Jane's 'double',[27] but that doubling is rooted in their respective positions as Rochester's victims. Jane must 'repress'[28] her passions in order to survive because Bertha's passions – her sexual behaviour and refusal to conform – appear to be the trigger event leading to her imprisonment. Jane, then, is relatively safe as long as she behaves in a way that is acceptable to Rochester. As Monckton-Smith notes, the relationship stage with which Jane's story appears to conclude can last indefinitely, but the threat of violence has not necessarily been eradicated. As Sutherland's observation suggests, there is no proof that Rochester will not return to his 'wife-killing ways', and the presence of patterns of domestic abuse suggest this is a strong possibility. If the power balance has shifted in Jane's favour as a consequence of Rochester's injuries, his improving vision potentially heralds another shift in the dynamic. This is suggested by the first object he questions Jane about in relation to his returning sight: a 'gold watch-chain' (384), which recalls the earlier allusions to the chains with which he threatened to bind Jane. The marriage itself has provided Rochester with a significant degree of legalised coercive control over Jane: her inheritance becomes rightfully his, so she loses her financial independence, and she has no

[27] Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 360.
[28] Ibid.

right to divorce, or even to custody of her own children should they separate. The control which typical perpetrators of domestic violence seek to exert over their victims is therefore granted to Rochester via the early nineteenth-century legal system. Whilst Jane's relationship with Rochester appears to conclude during this third stage, in fact it is earlier disrupted by the next stage in the pattern – the Trigger/s stage.

Stage Four: Trigger/s

This stage, according to Monckton-Smith, is characterised by a trigger of some kind which serves to disrupt or threaten the relationship, often taking the form of a 'withdrawal of commitment, or separation [... -] real or imagined, or just threatened' (1277). In the cases examined by Monckton-Smith, those women who attempted to separate from their partners 'met with significant resistance' (1277). Such triggers threaten the abuser with a loss of control, and a perceived loss of status: 'challenges to that control produce an environment where homicide is more likely' (1268). She notes that, 'Dominant discourses provide justifications for restricting the civil liberties of women in heterosexual relationships and construct female rejection, infidelity or disloyalty as provocation' (1277). These discourses, significantly for this reading of *Jane Eyre*, are partly rooted in legal history: 'Historically women have been legally unable to ask for a divorce, and subsumed into the legal persona of their husbands [...] The residue of these practices and beliefs are still evident', and for many abusers 'control is perceived as a right' (1278).

Again, this stage is evident in Rochester's three relationships. In the case of his marriage to Bertha, this occurs when Bertha exhibits what Rochester terms her 'giant propensities' (261). He describes her as both 'intemperate and unchaste' (261), significantly echoing Cobbe's

description of the 'coarse' wives of 'lower-class' wife-beaters,[29] and implying she is engaging in sexual relationships with other men – something which would certainly entail a perceived loss of status and control, particularly in light of nineteenth-century gender ideologies, which emphasised women's sexual purity (whilst condoning sexual licence in men). The trigger event in his relationship with Céline occurs when he discovers she has another lover – a betrayal again threatening his control of the relationship (if not his status, given that this relationship occurs outside the confines of 'respectable' marriage). In Jane's relationship with Rochester, the trigger occurs following the disrupted wedding, when Jane refuses to become his mistress and threatens to leave Thornfield. In mapping these various relationships, it is worth emphasising that Jane's relationship with Rochester initially runs concurrently with his marriage to Bertha. In respect of the Trigger stage, Jane's threat to leave Thornfield, and her subsequent departure, represent a crisis point not only in terms of her relationship with Rochester, but also his marriage to Bertha as well, as is indicated by subsequent events. This trigger event leads to a rapid escalation in Rochester's abusive and controlling behaviour, marking the next stage in the pattern established by Monckton-Smith.

Stage Five: Escalation

Monckton-Smith defines escalation as 'an increase in frequency, severity or variety of abuse, control or stalking' in 'an attempt to re-establish control or status' (1278). The various behaviours and tactics exhibited at this stage may include 'begging, crying, threats of violence, violence, stalking, or suicide threats' (1278). Significantly, Monckton-Smith notes that although 'progression to Stage 6 is not inevitable', (1278), '[t]ravel through stages 4 and

[29] Cobbe suggests many of these women are 'wofully unwomanly, slatternly, coarse, foul-mouthed – sometimes loose in behaviour, sometimes madly addicted to drink' (60) – a description which clearly chimes with Rochester's description of his wife.

5 are [the] clearest indication of the increased potential for homicide' (1282). This notion of progression in terms of the level of abuse recalls Cobbe's earlier work, and again is demonstrable in Rochester's behaviour.

In his relationship with Céline, escalation is suggested by his decision to monitor her – to let himself into her hotel room when she is not expecting him, await her return, and subsequently spy on her and her lover. Significantly, though, this takes place both prior to and concurrently with what I have identified as the trigger event (the revelation of Céline's affair), and this quickly escalates towards the act of violence carried out against her lover, so there is some ambiguity here in terms of the mapping of Monckton-Smith's stages – further emphasised by the fact that it is not Céline who is victim to Rochester's act of violence, but her lover. In the case of Bertha, the 'escalation' in response to the trigger arguably takes the form of her imprisonment as a madwoman – an extreme example of an abuser's attempts to assert control over the movement and behaviour of his victim. However, as noted above, the trigger event in Jane and Rochester's relationship also has significant implications for Bertha's fate, leading to an escalation in abusive behaviour towards both Jane and Bertha.

The escalation stage in the case of Jane and Rochester is relatively brief and is followed by her departure from Thornfield. Nevertheless, an examination of the crucial scene in which this occurs reveals striking parallels with Monckton-Smith's study. Following the trigger event – Jane's threat to leave Rochester and refusal to become his mistress following his failed attempt to lure her into a bigamous marriage – Rochester immediately threatens a violent response, prompting Jane to realise that she must manage the situation carefully in order to avoid him losing control and possibly becoming violent:

> "Jane! will you hear reason?" (he stooped and approached his lips to my ear); "because, if you won't, I'll try violence." His voice was hoarse; his look that of a man

> who is just about to burst an insufferable bond and plunge headlong into wild license. I saw that in another moment, and with one impetus of frenzy more, I should be able to do nothing with him. The present – the passing second of time – was all I had in which to control and restrain him – a movement of repulsion, flight, fear would have sealed my doom, - and his. (258)

Jane's attempts to pacify Rochester in this scene, which she achieves by weeping,[30] present an interesting parallel with one of the cases cited by Monckton-Smith, in which the potential victim 'managed to convince [her abuser] that she would reinstate the relationship' and escape (1279). Jane recognises that 'the crisis was perilous' (258) and manages to 'subdue' (258) Rochester – temporarily at least. That this respite *is* only temporary unless she escapes is illustrated by his subsequent words: '"you must be reasonable, or in truth I shall again become frantic". His voice and hand quivered: his large nostril dilated; his eye blazed' (259). Later in their conversation, the danger is again made clear: '"Jane!" recommenced he, with a gentleness that broke me down with grief, and turned me stone-cold with ominous terror – for this still voice was the pant of a lion rising' (269). The 'ominous terror' Jane experiences as a consequence of Rochester's threatening behaviour is startlingly at odds with popular views of the novel's romantic discourse, reinforcing its status as a domestic abuse narrative. Rochester, like the perpetrators described by Monckton-Smith, can here be seen 'instilling fear and anxiety' (1278) in his victim. Furthermore, Rochester's own words make it evident his behaviour at this point is motivated by a threatened loss of control over the relationship: 'I am not angry, Jane: I only love you too well; and you had steeled your little pale face with such a resolute, frozen look, I could not endure it' (258). As in Monckton-Smith's study, abuse and control is characterised by Rochester as a not unreasonable response to Jane's

[30] 'I had been struggling with tears for some time: I had taken great pains to repress them, because I knew he would not like to see me weep. Now, however, I considered it well to let them flow as freely and as long as they liked' (259).

threat to leave the relationship. At this point, then, Jane is evidently at significant risk of escalating violence and abuse. That this risk is demonstrably higher at the point at which she decides to leave Rochester also supports the analysis of the text as domestic abuse narrative. Monckton-Smith notes that 'leaving escalates risk', and 'Separation is [...] significantly associated with [intimate partner femicide]' (1277).

This stage, in which there is a demonstrable escalation in Rochester's abusive behaviour, is followed by Jane's escape, and although she returns to stage three (relationship) at the end of the novel, her relationship with Rochester does not progress into the final three stages identified by Monckton-Smith, culminating in homicide. However, her departure following this escalation is paramount in moving Rochester's relationship with Bertha into these final stages, which end in her death, for which Rochester is directly responsible.

Stage Six: A Change in Thinking / Decision

This stage occurs 'at the end of a period of escalation' and represents 'a response to perceived irretrievable loss of control and / or status' (1278). At this point, 'homicide risk escalates' and 'a considered decision to kill [may be] made' (1279). Crucially, in terms of Rochester's marriage to Bertha, Monckton-Smith observes that 'The change in thinking appears to have an association with feelings of injustice, entitlement to act, and a belief there is social or cultural solidarity with the offender's position' (1279). This is 'underpinned by beliefs that the perpetrator is the real victim, the system is against them, and the [victim] is in some way to blame and deserving of the abuse' (1279).

The idea that Rochester is 'entitled to act' and of 'social and cultural solidarity' is evident in his decision to shoot Céline's lover, which is implicitly justified by nineteenth-century expectations about women's fidelity and gentlemanly behaviour. This is reinforced by

Rochester's lack of remorse and the lack of any narrative condemnation of this act (echoed in the novel's critical and creative afterlives which also, as noted above, fail to recognise the extent of his abusive behaviour). However, this stage maps most closely onto his marriage to Bertha. His change in thinking regarding his relationship with his wife is precipitated by Jane's departure, which leads to a realisation that he cannot marry Jane whilst Bertha is still alive – something not previously acknowledged, as evidenced by his attempt to dupe Jane into a bigamous marriage. His explanations to Jane following the disrupted wedding highlight his 'feelings of injustice' and perception that he is the 'real victim' (1279). Following the revelation of an existing marriage, Rochester declares, 'You shall see what sort of a being I was *cheated* into espousing, and judge whether or not I *had a right* to break the compact, and seek sympathy with something at least human' (249, my emphasis). Returning to Thornfield and introducing the wedding party to his wife, Rochester is physically attacked by Bertha – a scene which suggests a temporary role reversal and reinforces the idea of Rochester as 'victim'. In response, he 'wrestle[s]' her before pinning her arms behind her back and tying her to a chair (250). Following this, he declares, 'That is *my wife* [...] Such is the sole conjugal embrace I am ever to know – such are the endearments which are to solace my leisure hours!' (251, emphasis in original) – a declaration which appeals to the sympathies of both his immediate audience and the reader, and serves as a means of justifying his behaviour (his attempts to entrap Jane in a bigamous marriage should also be viewed as an act of abuse) and blaming his victim (Bertha), instead constructing himself as victim.

His longer explanation to Jane in which he details the background to his marriage to Bertha further reinforces his perception of himself as victim – not only of Bertha's 'giant propensities' (261), but also of his father's machinations borne out of a desire to keep his estate together and secure a 'wealthy marriage' (260) for his second son. He accuses his father and brother of keeping the fact of the hereditary madness in Bertha's family from him,

and ‘plot[ting] against [him]’ (261).[31] It is crucial here that Rochester paints himself as victim, and that his is the only testimony we have to the background of his marriage to Bertha and her subsequent imprisonment. Within this testimony is the justification for Rochester’s subsequent actions: his wife, by his account, has ‘sullied [his] name,’ ‘outraged [his] honour’, and ‘blighted [his] youth’ (263). By his own admission, she deserves to be ‘buried in oblivion’ (263). His plan to marry Jane despite Bertha still living having failed, the next obvious step is to dispose of his living wife in order that he may take a new one. The comparison he draws between his wife and ‘some corpse in yonder graveyard’ (270) in his attempt to convince Jane to stay is thus chillingly foreboding. There is an oblique acknowledgement of this on Jane’s part when she ‘consider[s] the recklessness following on from despair’ (270), which may ensue if she leaves him, and subsequently fears the consequences of ‘his self-abandonment’ (274). This recklessness ultimately manifests itself in Bertha’s death.

Stages Seven and Eight: Planning and Homicide

The final two stages identified by Monckton-Smith involve the preparation and planning of the victim’s murder, and the murder itself. Although Brontë’s narrative appears to suggest Bertha’s death is a result of suicide, there are suggestive parallels with Monckton-Smith’s study. Whilst this aspect of my reading of the novel is inevitably more speculative than my

[31] The question of Bertha’s madness has been widely explored elsewhere, and is not the subject of this essay, but it is worth emphasising that we only have Rochester’s account as an explanation for his wife’s mental state. A diagnosis of poor mental health was sometimes employed by husbands in the nineteenth century to dispose of unwanted wives. The novelist Edward Bulwer Lytton attempted this, and Dickens also considered it. Elizabeth Foyster, in her work on marital violence, cites the case of Mary Veitch, who brought a case against her husband in 1837: his treatment of her included forced confinement in the home, and threats to send her to a madhouse (*Marital Violence: An English Family History, 1660-1857* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005], pp. 1-2) – suggesting clear parallels with Bertha’s experience. Though Bertha’s behaviour, as described by Jane, is suggestive of mental illness, there is no clear evidence, beyond Rochester’s word, of her mental state at the time she is first imprisoned, and it might reasonably be speculated that ten years in a windowless room with limited human contact would have a significant impact on her mental health.

analysis of the narrative's representation of the earlier stages identified by Monckton-Smith, it is nonetheless worth flagging the parallels here, not least because abusers frequently make attempts to conceal domestic abuse, including intimate partner femicide, and there is some evidence to suggest that this may be the case in *Jane Eyre*. As noted above, several critics have pointed to Rochester's culpability. In fact, I argue that there is evidence to suggest that Rochester is *directly* responsible for his wife's death, and plans and executes it in a manner which parallels the experiences of victims of domestic violence. At this stage, Monckton-Smith identifies 'evidence of planning', and 'evidence of creating opportunities for the killing to happen', including 'attempts to isolate the victim' (1279). Her assessment of the final stage, the murder itself, is also relevant to this reading of *Jane Eyre*. She notes that 'it may involve attempts to cover up the homicide' or 'may be completely hidden as homicide' (1280). Further, it 'may occur in public, or more usually in the home of the victim' (1280). There may also, crucially, be false 'claims of suicide or misadventure' (1280).

A careful examination of Brontë's text supports the claim that Rochester both plans and carries out his wife's murder, by starting the fire which leads to her death. The account of the fire is given to Jane by the innkeeper at the Rochester Arms. Bertha is blamed for starting it, but it is clear that there is no direct evidence of this. When Jane asks if it is 'known how it originated', the innkeeper responds, 'They guessed, ma'am: they guessed. Indeed, I should say it was ascertained beyond a doubt' (363). However, the lack of direct eye-witness testimony means a question mark remains. While the earlier incident in which Bertha escapes her room and sets fire to Rochester's bed would appear to support the hypothesis that Bertha starts the fire which destroys Thornfield, the details provided by the innkeeper lend credence to the theory that Rochester may have been responsible. He informs Jane that 'she set fire first to the hangings of the room next her own' (364), but her previous escapades suggest there is method in her madness: the earlier fire is a clear attempt to avenge herself on

her husband. Setting fire to the curtains in an empty room at least a storey removed from where her husband sleeps serves no obvious purpose. Rochester has a clear motivation for starting the fire, in light of Jane's refusal to become his mistress (signifying his 'change in thinking'), and his debates over the extent to which he is justified in acting to achieve his own happiness over the course of the narrative suggest the action is a consequence of a new resolve influenced by Jane's departure. Rochester earlier declares he would not countenance even the 'indirect assassination' of his wife, but even if this assertion can be deemed reliable, the innkeeper's testimony indicates that Rochester has undergone a significant transformation following Jane's departure: 'he grew savage – quite savage on his disappointment: he never was a wild man, but he got dangerous after he lost her. […] He would not cross the door-stones of the house; except at night, when he walked just like a ghost about the grounds and in the orchard as if he had lost his senses – which it is my opinion he had' (364). This description is significant, both in its construction of Rochester as 'dangerous', and in its suggestion that he had begun to mirror his wife's behaviour: he has become 'wild', 'savage' – terms earlier used in descriptions of Bertha. Like his wife, he now walks around at night, replacing her as the 'ghost' which haunts Thornfield. This can be read as another of Rochester's 'performances' – evidenced earlier in the narrative when he adopts the disguise of gypsy woman, as well as in his performing the role of victim. The possibility then emerges that this performance extends to mirroring his wife's fire-starting behaviour, so that he once again appears as victim, and Bertha as perpetrator.

The innkeeper's account also provides evidence of 'planning': prior to the fire, Rochester sends Mrs Fairfax and Adèle away, and distances himself from the local gentry (364), an act of isolation which might be seen in terms of preparing for the destruction of Thornfield and the death of his wife by either protecting its other inhabitants or removing potential witnesses. On the night of the fire, we are told, he 'went up to the attics when all was burning

above and below, and got the servants out of their beds and helped them down himself – and went back to get his mad wife out of her cell' (364-5). The order of Rochester's actions here raises further questions: why rescue the servants first, when they are presumably capable of rescuing themselves, while his wife is prevented from doing so by her physical imprisonment and mental state? Is this an attempt to increase the likelihood of Bertha's dying in the fire? There is also a discrepancy in this part of the innkeeper's account. He reports that after setting fire to the hangings in the room adjacent to her own, Bertha 'got down to a lower storey' (364), but subsequently states that Rochester returns to rescue his 'mad wife' from her 'cell'. Having made her way to a lower storey, why would Bertha then return to her cell, and subsequently need rescuing from it? This then raises the possibility that she requires rescuing from her 'cell' because she hasn't left it, and that someone else started the fire. The innkeeper's account, then, points to 'evidence of planning', 'evidence of creating opportunities for the killing to happen', 'attempts to isolate the victim' and 'attempts to cover up the homicide'. The legacy of *Jane Eyre* as romantic narrative suggests Rochester's success in 'completely hid[ing] [the] homicide'.[32] Eyewitnesses see Bertha throwing herself from the roof of Thornfield: there is no suggestion that Rochester pushes her, but, as Sutherland notes, 'it could well be that he said something, inaudible to those below, that drove her to jump'.[33] Regardless, if, as this reading suggests, Rochester is responsible for starting the fire, then he is also criminally responsible for his wife's death, which marks the final devastating stage in the pattern of domestic abuse identified by Monckton-Smith.

[32] Another piece of evidence to support this reading is found in Rochester's reference to himself as 'Vulcan' (376) when he and Jane are reunited at Ferndean. This allusion to the Roman god of fire might be read as a tacit confession of his involvement in Bertha's death. The association between Vulcan and sacrificial fire is also relevant: Bertha is sacrificed to make way for Jane. There is also a link between Vulcan and fertility, and it is significant that the fire that destroys Thornfield opens up the way for Jane and Rochester's marriage and subsequent children. In some versions of the myth, Vulcan is the consort of the beautiful but unfaithful and promiscuous Venus, recalling Rochester's account of the early years of his marriage to Bertha.
[33] Sutherland, *Can Jane Eyre be Happy?*, p. 70.

Conclusion

In light of the overwhelming evidence, it is startling that *Jane Eyre* continues to be viewed primarily as a love story. Even without this close mapping of these eight stages of abuse leading to intimate partner femicide, the text's romantic narrative is, at best, problematic: Rochester is 'near forty' (136) when he becomes involved with his employee, Jane – an eighteen-year-old with few friends or family, and a traumatic childhood history. He manipulates and deceives her throughout their relationship: concealing his true identity at their first encounter, disguising himself as a gypsy woman to try and elicit an expression of feeling from her, convincing her he intends to marry Blanche Ingram and has found a position for her in Ireland, attempting to dupe her into a bigamous marriage, and urging her to sacrifice her reputation and become his mistress. This raises the question of why generations of readers, and film and television producers, continue to privilege the romantic storyline. The answer may lie in the fact that the novel places the reader in an analogous position to the heroine and victim of domestic abuse, Jane, who, like her real-life counterparts, is deceived into perceiving a romantic hero rather than a manipulative abuser. This is achieved by ensuring our sympathy lies with Jane. The reader, as Lisa Sternlieb has discussed, is 'seduced by the position of confidante'[34] to Jane, who is blind to Rochester's faults and the danger he poses. Rochester's continued standing as one of literature's great 'romantic heroes', then, is testament to his ability to manipulate his victim, Jane, and with her generations of readers.

This reading of the novel is an attempt to shift a long-standing and well-established focus, to counter those discourses which position the novel as love story, for in doing so they implicitly condone Rochester's abuse of Céline, Bertha, and Jane, and contribute to a wider

[34] Lisa Sternlieb, '*Jane Eyre*: Hazarding Confidences', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 53:4 (March 1999), p. 453.

cultural discourse which serves to blur the boundaries between love and abuse. Rochester's behaviour is justified – or at least excused – by nineteenth-century law, by Jane's first-person narrative, by reader responses, and by creative adaptations of the text. By adopting a presentist approach, and viewing Brontë's novel through the lens of contemporary work on domestic abuse, this article centres and illuminates the violence at the heart of the narrative.

Word Count: 9023