austere and self-controlled heroine. Rochester himself describes her as a "fine woman, in the style of Blanche Ingram: tall, dark, and majestic" (332) at the time of their first meeting, and like Blanche, she is a woman who has willingly offered herself as a sexual trophy on the marriage market.

Unlike any of the Englishwomen we encounter in *Jane Eyre*, however, Bertha is the product of a symbolic as well as literal tropic in which desire flourishes, or so Rochester claims. After marriage, he tells Jane, "her vices sprang up fast and rank ... and what giant propensities [she had]!" (333–4). Although his language is guarded (he is after all talking to a supposedly pure English virgin), Victorian readers would certainly have been able to decode what Rochester is saying when he describes such "giant propensities" as causing his wife to be "at once intemperate and unchaste," noting that her nature was "gross, impure, depraved," and adding that "her excesses had prematurely developed the germs of insanity" (334). Even if she is not, in his phrase, "a professed harlot" (335), Rochester is explaining to Jane that Bertha's virtually nymphomaniac abandonment to excesses of desire—to the heat of lust—has "sullied [his] name" and "outraged [his] honor," while driving *her* to madness (336).

Significantly, too, the "third story" of Bertha's desire-driven madness has both masculinized and, as it were, *animalized* her (a not-so-surprising phenomenon in a culture professing that "men are beasts"). Thus, when Jane, Rochester, and the other members of the interrupted wedding party finally view the madwoman in the attic at Thornfield, she is described as a sort of beastly "it": "at the farther end of the room, a figure ran backwards and forwards. 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" (321; emphasis added). A minute later, as Rochester strives to subdue her, she is revealed as "a big woman, in stature almost equalling her husband, and corpulent besides," who shows "virile force in the contest" (321) while the contest itself, taking place "amidst the fiercest yells and the most convulsive plunges" (322), is cast in terms that simultaneously evoke mud-wrestling and sexual intercourse.

Considered as a scene of instruction, this episode—with its overtones of what Mrs. Oliphant called "furious lovemaking"—would seem at the very least darkly monitory to a Cinderella who experiences herself as utterly enthralled by her Bluebeard. Shortly before the disrupted marriage, after all, Jane had struggled to check not only Rochester's desires but her own. In one of the novel's more explicit love scenes, the heroine's "master"—now her fiancé—sits down at the piano and sings meltingly to her, but she quails when

without bringing the female into the class of maniacs" (Gay 134; emphasis added), while Elizabeth Cady Stanton (with a candor rather like Jane Eyre's) was announcing "I have come to the conclusion that the first great work to be accomplished for women is to revolutionize the dogma that sex is a crime" (Gay 119).

Thus, yes, on the one hand, Jane herself—along with Charlotte Brontë, Dr. Acton, and Mrs. Oliphant—would second Rochester's contention that in imprisoning the snatching, growling, and groveling Bertha, Thornfield guards a heart of darkness no proper virgin should confront. Stanton had not yet, after all, revolutionized "the dogma that sex is a crime." "This girl," declares Rochester to the bemused Reverend Wood (who would have married the pair but now cannot) "knew no more than you ... of the *disgusting secret*" (320; emphasis added) in the attic. But on the other hand, like Stanton herself, Jane knows all too well the intricacies of that secret. Defining herself as "an ardent expectant woman" (323), she has to battle the desire that mounts in her even as she exerts her will to renounce Rochester. Just as "the clothed hyena [that was Bertha] rose up, and stood tall on its hind-feet" (321) before falling on Rochester in what he feared would be "the sole conjugal embrace I am ever to know" (322), so Jane responds to her master's seductive pleas by considering herself "insane—quite insane, with my veins running fire, and my heart beating faster than I can count its throbs" (344). Her project throughout the novel, indeed, will be not (as most critics have thought) to eradicate but to accommodate and decriminalize this fiery and desirous animal self that marks her as a most unusual Cinderella: the mate rather than the prey of Bluebeard.

In the light of recent work on Victorian sexuality, what makes this point especially important is that after all, from Bluebeard's point of view the problem of the conjugal embrace—that is, how, when, where, and with whom desire should be satisfied—was also difficult to resolve. Was a "disgusting secret" about masculinity imprisoned in the virtually official sexual double standard of the age? If so, Rochester's story implies that it was not easy for men themselves to come to terms with the erotic "beastliness" that could easily drive a woman mad, despite the fact that an animal nature was supposedly part and parcel of their own sexual structure. Thus, just as Brontë rings changes on a number of Cinderella stories in order to investigate the life possibilities available to Jane, she offers virtuoso variations on the theme of Bluebeard to represent the life options available to Rochester. In particular, through the subplots she spins around a range of minor and major male characters, she comments on the choices made by the man Jane calls her "master" and specifically about what it would mean either to give in to beastliness or to try conquering it altogether. Unlike as the

he "rose and came towards me, and I saw his face all kindled, and his full falcon-eye flashing, and tenderness and passion in every lineament" (301). My "task," she goes on to explain, "was not an easy one; often I would rather have pleased than teased him," for "[m]y future husband was becoming to me my whole world; and more than the world.... He stood between me and every thought of religion.... I could not, in those days, see God for his creature: of whom I had made an idol" (302). Sunk in the abyss of desire, this apparently decorous and dainty Cinderella may well be in danger of yielding to the same "giant propensities" that (as we will soon learn) turned her Bluebeard's first bride into a beast monstrously swollen or bloated ("corpulent"!) with intemperate sensuality. For from one Victorian perspective, the pious position that would seem to have been official dogma, it's not just rage and rebellion, but sexual hunger that threatens to leave a woman gibbering the "eccentric murmurs" and "low slow ha! ha!" of an animal imprisoned in an attic. At the same time, however, from a less officially pious point of view, it may have been, even pre-Freud, *unsatisfied* sexual hunger that could turn a lady into a tiger (or, as *Jane Eyre* later puts it, a "clothed hyena").

I return to, and meditate on, "official" and less official positions because I want to claim, following Mrs. Oliphant's insight into the charisma of this novel's "furious lovemaking," that in her role as Jane's as well as Bertha's author and alter ego Charlotte Brontë was far more ambivalent toward female sexual hunger than has usually been conceded. Elaine Showalter's influential analysis of Bertha's sexuality, for example, depends heavily on Dr. William Acton's notion (articulated in his 1857 textbook on the "reproductive organs") that strong sexual appetite in women might lead to "moral insanity," to "nymphomania [as] a form of insanity" (Showalter 120). But more recent commentators—beginning most notably with Peter Gay—have significantly complicated our picture of Victorian attitudes toward the erotic, allowing us a more nuanced understanding of the "giant propensities" of desire that drive Jane as well as Bertha toward "furious lovemaking."[7] In his incisive *The Education of the Senses*, Gay devotes a chapter to the sexually charged diaries of Mabel Loomis Todd, a woman only a generation or two away from the Brontës who was not only the mistress of Emily Dickinson's brother Austin but also one of the (notoriously insensitive) editors of Dickinson's poetry. Noting Todd's frequently and fervently expressed delight in the erotic, he argues that her experience was exemplary rather than exceptional—a joy in the kinds of "Wild Nights—Wild Nights!" of sexual "Rowing in Eden" for which Dickinson herself also expressed a passionate, if more obliquely formulated, desire. Indeed, Gay observes, by the 1880s, the Scottish gynecologist J. Matthews Duncan was insisting that "Desire and pleasure ... may be ... *furious*, overpowering,

child's mother Celine (Rochester's French mistress), and even the practiced charm of Blanche Ingram (his supposed fiancée). As Jane clearly sees, each of these characters is eager to overcome her sexual helplessness in a male-dominated society by selling herself to the highest bidder. Prancing and flouncing like a living doll, Adèle is plainly in training for the career of polished coquetry that in different ways shapes the destinies of Celine and Blanche, since if Celine openly prostitutes herself, Blanche is perfectly willing to sell herself on the marriage market. To Jane, who vehemently declares that "I am a free human being with an independent will" (282), all these modes of sexual slavery represent a degradation far more radical than the self-abnegation of the consumptive and the self-repreSSion of the governess.

But if, taken together, many of these minor characters demonstrate to Jane the problems Cinderella faces in a male world, the "eccentric murmurs" our heroine hears echoing in her mind and in the corridors of her Bluebeard's chambers—the "low, slow ha! ha!" she herself associates with Grace Poole, but which Brontë also connects with Jane's own self-defined "restlessness"—suggest that, whatever form it takes, female desire may breed dissatisfaction, resentment, and even madness. I have argued elsewhere that the intensity of this Cinderella's own anger at the inequalities she has had to face throughout her life is ultimately embodied in the source of the "eccentric murmurs" and "low slow ha! ha!" that haunt the third story of her master's mansion, for Rochester's mad wife, Bertha Mason Rochester, might be said to represent a kind of "third story" about Jane-as-Cinderella, a tale in which, instead of practicing unearthly renunciation or gaining earthly reward, the hapless heroine gives way to rage. Specifically, as I've also argued, Jane's own incendiary "hunger, rebellion and rage" are theatrically enacted by Bertha when the madwoman sets Rochester's bed on fire, when she attacks her own brother like a vampire, when she rips up Jane's bridal veil, and finally, most dramatically, when she torches the central symbol of Rochester's power, his ancestral mansion.[5]

At the same time, however, even while Bertha enacts Jane's rebellious rage at servitude, she may also be said to dramatize the sexual "hunger" that all the women in this novel either repress (in the hope of spiritual reward) or pervert (for financial gain)—sexual hunger that (as Showalter also noted in the seventies) some Victorian physicians thought could drive a woman to madness. The beautiful but dissolute daughter of a "Creole" (probably French and Spanish) mother, Bertha is most likely of European descent, although her upbringing in the hot West Indies has led to a tradition of critical speculations that she is racially mixed.[6] Whether or not this is the case, she certainly appears to be "other" than Brontë's small, pale, outwardly