Araştırma Makalesi
Research Article

ISSN 2548-0502

söylem
FİLOLOJİ DERGİSİ

2025; *10(2):* 1017-1027

Surrogate Mothers: Subversion of Motherhood in *Jane Eyre*

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Abstract

In her much-discussed novel *Jane Eyre* (2001), Charlotte Brontë introduces an unconventional female character who defies nineteenth-century norms, highlighting women's freedom and equality with men. Orphaned at a young age, the protagonist Jane navigates the difficulties of life, first at her aunt's house, then at a girls' boarding school with strict rules, and later at a mansion where she becomes a governess. The character's rebellious nature against the injustices she faces enables her to educate herself and go beyond social expectations. Not only the defiant spirit of the protagonist, but also the influence of the maternal characters serve as a milestone in Jane's identity formation. Thanks to these, Jane eventually begins to reject both male supremacy and the gender roles ascribed to women. Given motherhood's strong association with female gender, this paper analyzes the representations of mothers, especially those of Mrs Reed, Miss Temple, Mrs Fairfax, and, to some extent, Bessie, in *Jane Eyre*, exploring their influence on Jane's quest for the self. Also, the study examines how the dialectical relationship between the mother and the daughter–that is, their dynamic interplay of contrasting perspectives and influences–subverts the traditional perception of motherhood.

Keywords: *Jane Eyre,* motherhood, mother-daughter relationship, subversion, surrogate mother

Sembolik Anneler: *Jane Eyre*'de Anneliğin Altüst Edilmesi

Öz

İngiliz yazar Charlotte Brontë, çok tartışılan romanı *Jane Eyre*'de (2001), kadınların özgürlüğünü ve erkeklerle eşitliğini ön plana çıkararak on dokuzuncu yüzyıl standartlarına karşı çıkan bir kadın karakter sunar. Küçük yaşta yetim kalan Jane, önce yengesinin evinde, ardından katı kuralları olan yatılı bir kız okulunda, daha sonra da öğretmen olarak görev yaptığı bir malikanede hayatın zorluklarıyla başa çıkmayı öğrenir. Kadın kahramanın yaşadığı haksızlıklara karşı isyankâr doğası, kendini eğitmesini ve toplumsal beklentilerin ötesine geçmesini sağlar. Yalnızca ana karakterin meydan okuyan yapısı değil, aynı zamanda anne rolü üstlenen kadın karakterlerin etkisi

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Gönderim tarihi: 1 Mayıs 2025 Kabul tarihi: 26 Ağustos 2025

de Jane'in kimlik oluşumunda bir dönüm noktası işlevi görür. Böylece, ana karakter hem erkek üstünlüğünü hem de kadınlara atfedilen toplumsal cinsiyet rollerini reddetmeye başlar. Kadın 'cinsiyetiyle' ilişkilendirilen bir diğer konu annelik kavramı olduğundan, bu makale *Jane Eyre*'deki anne betimlemelerini, özellikle de Mrs Reed, Miss Temple, Mrs Fairfax ve Bessie karakterlerini, inceleyerek anne rolü üstlenen bu bireylerin Jane'in benlik arayışı üzerindeki etkisini araştırmaktadır. Ayrıca, ilgili çalışma, anne ile kızı arasındaki diyalektik ilişkinin–yani, iki taraf arasındaki zıt bakış açıları ve karşılıklı etkileşimlerin–geleneksel annelik algısını nasıl altüst ettiğini incelemektedir.

Anahtar sözcükler: *Jane Eyre,* annelik, anne-kız ilişkisi, altüst etme, sembolik anne

INTRODUCTION

Elaine Showalter (1977) and Cora Kaplan (1986) note that Charlotte Brontë presents an unconventional female character far ahead of her time in *Jane Eyre* (2001). In the novel, Jane rejects male superiority and actively resists restrictive nineteenth-century gender expectations. To understand how Jane's quest for identity is shaped by these forces, this study examines the representations of surrogate mothers as a social construct. Drawing on Julia Kristeva's (1982) concept of motherhood as a site of both symbolic law and semiotic rupture, Nancy Chodorow's (1978) psychoanalytic-sociological theory of the reproduction of mothering, and Sara Ruddick's (1989) notion of "maternal thinking" as an ethical and intellectual practice, this paper identifies how maternal figures in the novel oscillate between nurturing bonds and the necessity of separation for individuation, illuminate the reproduction of patriarchal norms, and offer alternative, empowering forms of care.

Luce Irigaray, in "And the One Doesn't Stir without the Other," explores the mother-daughter relationship as a shared imprisonment, noting the daughter's deep-seated resentment when the mother perpetuates her own subjugation (1981, p. 60). This dynamic reflects the societal imperative for daughters to emulate self-sacrificing maternal roles imposed by patriarchy. Adrienne Rich (1995) similarly argues that daughters may resent mothers who accept societal constraints, and that independence can only emerge when the daughter resists this cycle (p. 245). By integrating Irigaray, Rich, Kristeva, Chodorow, and Ruddick, this study situates *Jane Eyre*'s maternal figures within a multidimensional theoretical framework, shedding light on their roles in empowering or constraining Jane's development

In this study, the term "surrogate mother" refers to female figures who, in the absence of Jane's biological mother, assume varying degrees of maternal responsibility, moral authority, or emotional influence. This definition extends beyond biology to encompass socially constructed roles shaped by nineteenth-century patriarchal norms. Drawing on seminal theories of motherhood, this paper identifies three broad categories of surrogate mothers in *Jane Eyre*: oppressive (e.g., Mrs Reed), empowering (e.g., Miss Temple), and ambivalent (e.g., Mrs Fairfax). By this we recognise the diversity of maternal influence while underlining its shared role in shaping Jane's identity.

REPRESENTATIONS OF MOTHERHOOD

Jane Eyre, a Bildungsroman, traces Jane's development from childhood to maturity. The text presents three narrative units, respectively, Gateshead, Lowood, and Thornfield, unified by "the theme of character formation, that is to say, by Jane's process of development according to the principle of chronotope" (Golban, 2003, p. 191). Jane is introduced as a ten-year-old child living with her relatives in Gateshead Hall, and her orphan condition immediately stands out. This biographical detail holds particular significance given Charlotte Brontë's own background; her mother died when Brontë was just five, and she and her sisters were subsequently raised by their aunt, Elizabeth Branwell, who profoundly influenced them. Chodorow (1978) observes, "women's mothering reproduces itself cyclically because women, as mothers, produce daughters with mothering capacities and the desire to mother. At the same time, mothers–particularly when they are the sole or primary parent–play a central role in shaping their children's personalities and gender identity" (p. 7). In this light, Jane's encounters with symbolic mothers become even more salient, as they significantly shape her journey to womanhood, reinforce preoedipal patterns, and reflect the author's perception of motherhood. Ruddick (1989) further clarifies that "to be a 'mother' is to take upon oneself the responsibility of child care, making its work a regular and substantial part of one's working life… committed to meeting these demands by works of preservative love, nurturance, and training" (p. 17).

In Gateshead, Mrs Reed, Jane's aunt, acts as Jane's surrogate mother; as John G. Peters (1996) contends, she treats her distinctly by excluding her from her own children (p. 60). For instance, after a rainy walk, Jane observes her cousins enjoying their mother's company by the fireside, while she is excluded. Mrs Reed justifies this exclusion by claiming Jane's "improper questions" and "taking up her elders" disqualify her from the family's privileges. Mrs Reed demands Jane adopt "a more sociable and childlike disposition" (Brontë, 2001, p. 5), forcing her silence and compliance. However, Mrs Reed does not impose the same restrictions on Eliza and Georgiana, revealing her resentment towards financially supporting a child she did not bear. This inconsistency highlights Mrs Reed's contradictory nature. She adheres to social etiquette and gender roles in her words, yet violates them in her actions, notably by breaking her promise to her late husband to treat Jane as her own. Furthermore, this constant undermining of Jane's self-worth by Mrs Reed, amplified by the attitudes of Bessie and Abbot, intensifies Jane's struggle to accept her mistreatment.

Scholars such as Jean Wyatt (1985), Eric Solomon (1963), and J. Jeffrey Franklin (1995) underline Mrs Reed's brutality, hypocrisy, and toxic maternity. Mrs Reed's surrogate motherhood presents a paradox: she outwardly conforms to maternal norms with her own children, yet actively victimizes Jane. This "othering," however, prompts Jane to challenge Mrs Reed's authority. Irigaray's "mirror theory" suggests mothers often trap daughters in repetitive, constrained roles. Yet, Jane's situation fosters conflict, not imitation. Recognizing Mrs Reed's negative influence, Jane, echoing Adrienne Rich, begins her journey toward independence by rejecting prescribed gender roles–a response akin to what Chodorow describes when "these mothers maintained their daughters in a nonindividuated state through behavior which grew out of their own ego and body-ego boundary blurring and their perception of their daughters as one with, and interchangeable with,

themselves." (1978, p. 100). Mrs Reed demands Jane's submission while ignoring her children's transgressions. John Reed's cruelty highlights this double standard echoing maternal boundary-blurring. He abuses Jane, asserting patriarchal dominance, enabled by Mrs Reed's indifference. As Ruddick (1989) observes, "Preserving the lives of children is the central constitutive, invariant aim of maternal practice; the commitment to achieving that aim is the constitutive maternal act" (p. 19). Mrs Reed's consistent refusal to shield Jane from harm reveals a major breach of this core maternal responsibility. John views Jane as economically dependent, denying her access to "his" books and demanding she call him "Master." Alina Bujor (2014) clarifies his awful behavior as follows:

> [It] is encouraged by his mother's indifference. Mrs. Reed is not only indifferent to the relationships between her children and Jane, but she is guilty of them. As a mother, she ought to have taught her children to respect Jane and to treat her as equal to them, not to see her as dependent on their family and without any rights, because she had no money. (p. 35)

When John injures Jane, Mrs Reed blames Jane and locks her in the red-room. This injustice fuels Jane's resistance against both Mrs Reed and the male-dominated environment John represents. Crucially, Jane's self-education provides her with the intellectual framework to recognize and voice the oppression she faces. Through her extensive reading, young as she is, she develops a critical perception that allows her to identify the patterns of injustice and articulate her grievances using a sophisticated vocabulary and historical allusions. This intellectual development, in turn, reinforces her intellectual superiority, which undermines John and Mrs Reed, who seek to control her. In John G. Peters' (1996) words, Jane's "fiery temper and strength" also "challenge Mrs. Reed's authority as head of the family" (p. 61). She even becomes "a startling power" and a source of "malevolence" for her aunt through her untypical behaviors (Gribble, 1968, p. 284). Thus, when Jane compares John to 'slave-drivers' and 'Roman Emperors' from her reading of Goldsmith's *History of Rome*, demonstrating her ability to draw upon historical precedents to contextualize his tyranny, he reacts defensively, seeking his mother's support. Showing no empathy, Mrs Reed allows Jane's imprisonment, fully aware of the child's terror of confinement stemming from her earlier trauma in the red-room.

While the red-room is often interpreted as a symbol of "oppression" used by Mrs Reed to "maintain the order of patriarchal society" (Xiaojie, 2010, p. 2), this space also becomes pivotal for Jane's conscious recognition of her exclusion and marginalization, marking the genesis of her resistance. It embodies what Kristeva (1982) calls "the in-between, the ambiguous" that "disturbs identity, system, order" (p. 4), signalling a shift away from maternal "oneness." Locked within, Jane confronts the inhumanity of her situation, disturbed by "all John Reed's violent tyrannies, all his sisters' proud indifference, all his mother's aversion, all the servants' partiality" (Brontë, 2001, p. 11). Reflecting on these forms of segregation and unfair treatment, she acknowledges her attempts to fulfill her duties and conform to Mrs Reed's expectations, only to be met with disregard. This realization leads her to question her constant suffering and undeserved condemnation, ultimately prompting her rejection of both psychological and physical violence, and a rebellion against Mrs Reed's injustice.

Jane's resistance culminates through her confrontation with Mrs Reed after overhearing her aunt's discussion with Mr Brocklehurst, the director of Lowood School. Aligned with John Stuart Mill's observation that women are taught "submission and yielding to the control of others" (1985, p. 15), Mrs Reed, determined to rid herself of Jane, exploits these societal expectations. During the interview, she portrays Jane as naughty and deceitful, justifying her need for constant surveillance. This exchange reveals the unwritten social codes governing women's roles and Mrs Reed's expectations. Mr Brocklehurst's interrogation of Jane, particularly regarding her dislike of the Psalms, reinforces this. He insists that female children should be plain, quiet, and humble, adhering to Christian values. As Adrienne Rich describes, this "Pharisaical male figure" embodies the "hypocrisy of the powerful, using religion, charity, and morality to keep the poor in their place" (n. d., p. 466). Lowood's educational design aims to enforce female submissiveness. Mrs Reed, in her role as oppressive maternal figure, not only treats Jane cruelly but also betrays her with false accusations, provoking Jane's defiant response:

> You think I have no feelings, and that I can do without one bit of love or kindness; but I cannot live so: and you have no pity. I shall remember how you thrust me back–roughly and violently thrust me back–into the red-room, and locked me up there, (…) I will tell anybody who asks me questions this exact tale. People think you a good woman, but you are bad, hard-hearted. You are deceitful! (Brontë, 2001, p. 30)

In this moment, Jane liberates herself from Mrs Reed's authority by exposing the latter's hypocrisy. This act of defiance brings Jane a sense of victory. Kristeva (1982) calls this a "violent, clumsy breaking away"–"repelling, rejecting… Ab-jecting" (p. 13). Mrs Reed, fearing exposure, retreats, justifying her actions as necessary correction. This exchange highlights the social construction of motherhood, as Mrs Reed exploits norms for social approval, distorting maternal roles. Her inability to serve as a positive role model ultimately strengthens Jane's resolve, fostering her development into a rational and rebellious woman.

While Jane finds no identification with Mrs Reed, the nurse Bessie emerges as the closest maternal figure, offering the sole semblance of sympathy within Gateshead Hall. In contrast to Mrs Reed, Bessie displays compassion towards Jane. However, as a maid within a society that upholds female submission to male authority and rigid social norms, Bessie's actions are constrained. She attempts to shape Jane's character according to the Victorian ideal of the "angel in the house," characterized by "piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity" (Welter, 1966, p. 152). This adherence to societal expectations is evident in her repeated admonitions for Jane to be obedient. Bessie's compliance is starkly illustrated when she and Miss Abbot lock Jane in the red-room. While Miss Abbot harshly condemns Jane as wicked and undeserving of her cousins' respect, Bessie remains neutral, offering only a pragmatic warning: "You ought to be aware, Miss, that you are under obligations to Mrs Reed: she keeps you: if she were to turn you off, you would have to go to the poorhouse" (Brontë, 2001, p. 10). Bessie further advises Jane to be "useful" and "pleasant" to secure her place within the household before leaving her alone in the red-room, thereby unintentionally contributing to the oppressive experience Jane endures. This passivity suggests Bessie's acceptance of punishment as a necessary tool for disciplining a rebellious child. Simultaneously, Bessie's own economic dependence on Mrs Reed compels her to instruct Jane on

how to navigate life peacefully within the Reed household, reflecting what Kristeva labels as socially patterned mothering.

Bessie attempts to assist Jane within the limitations of her own worldview, however questionable it may be. Her subsequent actions reveal a gentler side, sparking Jane's interest in education. When Jane succumbs to fear in the red-room, particularly of Mr Reed's ghost, and faints, Bessie tends to her with care. She remains by Jane's side, providing food and her favorite book, *Gulliver's Travels*, demonstrating an understanding of how to comfort her. This reflects what Ruddick (1989) calls a maternal "double vision"–"seeing the fact of biological vulnerability as socially significant and as demanding care" (p. 18)–as Bessie recognizes Jane's fear and responds with both physical and emotional support. Furthermore, Mr Lloyd, the apothecary, visits Gateshead Hall to assess Jane's condition and learns of her unhappiness and desire to leave. Upon his suggestion of school, Jane recalls Bessie's descriptions of the education offered to young ladies. She reflects on Bessie's "boasted" accounts of "beautiful paintings of landscapes and flowers," musical abilities, needlework, and French translations (Brontë, 2001, p. 20). Despite Bessie's emphasis on "genteel" and "precise" conduct, Jane finds these accomplishments appealing. Driven by the oppressive reality of Gateshead and her yearning for an escape, Jane envisions school as a transformative "long journey, an entire separation" into a new life (p. 20). While this unconventional view of education defies prevailing ideals of female domesticity, it is also a direct response to her intolerable circumstances. Thus, as Nilay Erdem Ayyıldız (2017) notes, "instead of accepting her role in the household of Gateshead" (p. 148), Jane expresses to Mr Lloyd her desire to attend school, a path that offers a potential relief from her misery.

Following her confrontation with Mrs Reed, Jane finds a connection with Bessie. When Bessie invites Jane to lunch, Jane declines to join the Reed family. Aware of Jane's impending departure for school, Bessie initiates a conversation, asking if Jane will miss her. Jane initially dismisses this, citing Bessie's frequent scolding. However, Bessie reveals her affection for Jane, explaining that her sternness stemmed from Jane's shyness and timidity. This supportive presence, as Janet H. Freeman (1984) contends, inspires Jane to be courageous and to resist being intimidated. Jane finds the strength to stand up to the Reed family thanks to Bessie's presence (p. 690). This exchange culminates in an embrace, bringing Jane a rare moment of peace and harmony within Gateshead Hall. Consequently, Bessie's maternal care fosters Jane's hope for the future. As Adrienne Rich (n.d.) observes:

> Bessie is the first woman to show Jane affection; and it is partly the alliance with her that makes it possible for the child Jane to maintain her hope for the future, her will to survive; which prevents her from running away–a self-destructive act under these circumstances–or from relapsing into mere hysteria or depression. (p. 465)

This highlights the crucial role of a maternal figure in a child's life. Knowing she has an ally, Jane regains her strength, shedding the victimized feeling she experienced in the red-room. Bessie's support and affection transform her seemingly negative treatment into a positive force for Jane.

Miss Temple, a teacher at Lowood Institution, emerges as another significant maternal figure in *Jane Eyre.* In stark contrast to Mrs Reed, Miss Temple is portrayed as merciful, kind, and considerate. Jane's initial encounter with her on her first day at Lowood leaves a lasting impression,

particularly her voice and appearance. Jane even notes Miss Temple's fashionable attire, appropriate for the era. However, Jane's first days at Lowood are marked by a sense of alienation, as she describes her thoughts bring "too undefined and fragmentary to merit record" (Brontë, 2001, p. 41). The girls at Lowood endure harsh conditions, including poor food, ill-fitting clothing, and arbitrary punishments. For instance, Helen Burns, Jane's friend, is punished for unclean nails, a consequence of frozen water. Jane is struck by Helen's patience and refusal to justify herself to Miss Scatcherd. Beyond Miss Temple, Helen also assumes a parental role in Jane's life, teaching her patience, resilience, and restraint. Despite their contrasting personalities, they develop a close bond. Helen supports Jane during her initial struggles at Lowood, offering sisterly advice against vengeance and impulsiveness.

Moreover, Miss Temple, not being overly protective and controlling, helps the girls express themselves to a certain extent. She even goes against Mr Brocklehurst's rigid rules and lets the pupils have another meal when their breakfast service is inadequate. Although the education at Lowood is designed to thwart women's self-actualisation, Miss Temple supports the girls by her gentleness. Brontë positions Miss Temple as part of Lowood to show that even in an institution limiting girls' capacities to improve, other possibilities emerge to break this confinement. To exemplify, when Mr Brocklehurst visits the school, he declares Jane a liar, demanding her isolation. He leaves right after punishing Jane by having her stand on a stool for half an hour. Feeling ashamed, Jane thinks that everyone would hate her, but Helen argues that Jane's innocence should be her comfort. Subsequently, Miss Temple intervenes, summoning Jane to her room. She seeks Jane's account of the incident, upholding the principle of fair hearing. After listening to Jane, Miss Temple promises to investigate and publicly exonerate her. Furthermore, she treats Jane and Helen as honored guests, offering tea and cake, and displays affection by kissing them, mirroring a mother's tenderness. This care provides Jane with a sense of relief, enabling her to manage her distress.

Miss Temple's compassion and support indicate that she is not biased like Mrs Reed. As opposed to Mrs Reed, Miss Temple does not take sides and jump to conclusions. She behaves fairly and tries not to subjugate her students by allowing them to speak for themselves. The events in Lowood section complement Jane's experiences in Gateshead. For instance, Jane is punished for something she is not guilty of in Lowood, just like she is locked in the red-room because of John Reed's false claims in Gateshead. The night that Helen and Jane find solace with Miss Temple parallels the night John, Eliza, and Georgiana spend with their mother, Mrs Reed. However, although the events are similar, the way each woman addresses the situation differs; therefore, these parallels highlight the impact of their respective approaches on the children.

Unlike Mrs Reed, Miss Temple neither accuses Jane of something nor excludes her from other girls at school. Her compassion and support improve Jane's understanding and make her rationalize the events by being more observant. Both Miss Temple and Helen help Jane find a middle ground to balance her anger and rebelliousness. Acquiring a new perspective, Jane learns to combine what she learned in the past with her present knowledge and stays at Lowood for eight more years, the last two years being a teacher. During this time, despite Helen's death from tuberculosis, Miss Temple remains a constant source of support. Miss Temple embodies a nurturing maternal figure,

liberated from societal constraints. By defying Mr Brocklehurst's rigid rules, making independent decisions for her students' well-being, and empowering them to challenge injustice, she presents alternative models of female behavior. In this way, Miss Temple embodies what Ruddick (1989) describes as the maternal "demand to foster children's growth… [which] appears to be historically and culturally specific… yet children's spiritual and intellectual growth requires nurturance" (p. 19), nurturing Jane's intellect and moral reasoning even within an institution designed to suppress them. Jane does acknowledge Miss Temple's profound influence:

> Miss Temple, through all changes, had thus far continued superintendent of the seminary: to her instruction I owed 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, 2001, p. 71)

As evidenced above, Miss Temple serves as both a maternal figure and a friend, providing Jane with a sense of security. Miss Temple's eventual departure proves equally significant, prompting Jane to recognize the world beyond Lowood's confines. Recalling the restrictive environment of Lowood, Jane yearns for new experiences, excitement, and even fear. She opens her window, symbolically seeking to transcend Lowood's boundaries. Prompted by Miss Temple's departure, Jane decides to pursue her own desires, in other words, her freedom by leaving Lowood for good. Miss Temple's positive influence on Jane lurks in her liberating effect as she symbolically releases Jane from her confinement. Thus, the departure of the symbolic mother creates a chance for the daughter to decide her future. As it turns out, Jane becomes a governess at Thornfield. This is quite a transformation for a young girl struggling to build up an identity of her own. In this way, Miss Temple facilitates Jane's liberation from societal constraints, rather than perpetuating her 'immobilisation', as Irigaray describes it.

The last maternal figure in *Jane Eyre* is Mrs Fairfax, the housekeeper of Thornfield Hall. Although she does not have a huge impact on Jane like Mrs Reed and Miss Temple, her kindness highlights the importance of humane treatment within the confines of Victorian social hierarchy. It is also significant to note that Jane is an adult now. She arrives at Thornfield as a governess for Rochester's ward, Adele, no longer an orphaned dependent. As an educated and self-sufficient woman, Jane embodies the independent, educated woman seeking autonomy in the Victorian era. Upon her arrival, Mrs Fairfax warmly welcomes Jane, inviting her to the fireside and offering food. This initial encounter signals a departure from Jane's experiences at Gateshead and Lowood.

The strategic use of spatial settings throughout *Jane Eyre* highlights the changing nature of Jane's relationships and her search for belonging. The recurring motif of the fireside, for instance, acts as an indicator of the emotional warmth and acceptance Jane receives. At Gateshead, the fireside was a place of exclusion and torment, where Mrs Reed's coldness dominated. At Lowood, Miss Temple offered a more benevolent, if still constrained, form of comfort by the fire. However, at Thornfield, Jane is immediately made to feel at home by the fireside, fostering a genuine sense of belonging and signaling a true departure from her past.

In this regard, Mrs Fairfax resembles Miss Temple. As their conversation unfolds, Mrs Fairfax treats Jane as a companion, eliciting Jane's sympathy. Jane reflects, "my heart really warmed to the worthy lady as I heard her talk" (Brontë, 2001, p. 83). Jane later confirms that "Mrs. Fairfax turned

out to be what she appeared, a placid-tempered, kind-natured woman, of competent education and average intelligence" (p. 92). Furthermore, Mrs Fairfax, lacking a family of her own, dedicates herself to the care of Jane and Adele, contributing to Jane's sense of belonging at Thornfield.

However, Mrs Fairfax's role is complex, shaped by her internalization of Victorian social norms. She maintains a clear separation from the servants, expecting them to adhere to their designated social roles, revealing her acceptance of the era's class distinctions. This adherence to social hierarchy influences her interactions with Jane, particularly regarding Jane's relationship with Mr Rochester. Mrs Fairfax exhibits disbelief and concern over their engagement, warning Jane about the implications of crossing class and age boundaries. This reflects what Ruddick (1989) describes: "The criteria of acceptability consist of the group values that a mother has internalized… If a group demands acceptable behavior that, in a mother's eyes, contradicts her children's need for protection and nurturance, then the mother will be caught in painful and self-fragmenting conflict" (pp. 21-22). Mrs Fairfax's adherence to Victorian norms places her in precisely this conflict, torn between protecting Jane and upholding the values of her social group. As Esther Godfrey (2005) notes, for Mrs Fairfax, their union represents "the flaunting of a doubly violated social taboo in which class and age boundaries, and their accompanying gender norms, are subverted through sexuality and legitimized through marriage" (p. 863). Furthermore, Mrs Fairfax's protective instincts, while well-intentioned, manifest in actions that can be perceived as deceptive. She consistently attributes unexplained noises to Grace Poole, concealing the truth about Bertha Mason's existence. This omission, though aimed at preserving social order, threatens Jane's self-development by withholding critical information and, in Kristeva's terms, limiting full individuation. John G. Peters (1996) discusses such marginalization through labeling, suggesting that Mrs Fairfax's actions, though not overtly malicious, contribute to Jane's constrained understanding of her environment.

Had Rochester's marriage not been revealed, Jane would have been reduced to the position of a mistress, subject to male dominance and societal condemnation. Nevertheless, Jane's previous struggles and experiences have turned her into a resolute individual. Despite her disillusionment, stemming partly from Mrs Fairfax's actions, Jane asserts her independence by leaving Thornfield, thereby breaking the maternal figure's authority. Her eventual return to Thornfield to marry Rochester stems from her love and the self-confidence and independence she exercises as a 19th-century woman. In synthesizing these perspectives, Mrs Fairfax emerges as a maternal figure embodying both care and constraint. Her kindness provides Jane with a sense of belonging, yet her adherence to societal norms and protective omissions reflect the complexities of managing and balancing personal relationships within the rigid social structures of Victorian England. This duality underscores the intricate interaction between personal affection and societal expectations that defines Mrs Fairfax's role in Jane's journey toward self-realization.

CONCLUSION

Beyond depicting a female protagonist's social, intellectual, as well as moral development from childhood to maturity, *Jane Eyre* highlights the significance of the mother-daughter relationship. Since the main character is an orphan, Charlotte Brontë employs symbolic maternal

figures to highlight their impact on Jane Eyre's personal development. Each maternal figure in the novel plays a special role in Jane's identity formation. Although Mrs Reed's impact is profoundly negative, it forces Jane to free herself from her control through rational thought and self-education. Jane's inquisitive mind and strong sense of justice drive her to challenge Mrs Reed's authority, ultimately allowing her to escape her control. In other words, Jane manages to turn Mrs Reed's negative treatment to her own advantage. In contrast to Mrs Reed, the nurse Bessie shows compassion towards Jane and helps her feel at home in Gateshead Hall. When Jane leaves Gateshead, she meets Miss Temple, who becomes a role model by reinforcing her ideals of justice and compassion. Despite working for the oppressive Mr Brocklehurst, Miss Temple's actions become exemplary for the girls at Lowood Institution, showing them how to deal with negative situations, thus disrupting male superiority. Like Miss Temple, Mrs Fairfax offers Jane companionship, but her passive acceptance of Rochester's deception, by not warning Jane of his prior marriage, nearly compromises Jane's autonomy, echoing Mrs Reed's controlling tendencies.

What unites Mrs Reed, Miss Temple, and Mrs Fairfax is their subversion of conventional motherhood. Though Mrs Reed pretends to be a good mother, by keeping Jane away from her children, she excludes and victimizes her. Miss Temple, though seeming to obey the rules of Lowood Institution under the hegemony of male power, utilizes her resourcefulness and unconventional approach to empower her students, including Jane. In the end, Mrs Fairfax, despite her good nature, subtly manipulates Jane by withholding vital information about Rochester, thus jeopardizing Jane's autonomy and highlighting the socially constructed nature of maternal roles within Victorian society.

Ultimately, Jane Eyre's interactions with these maternal figures equip her to face various obstacles in her life. One could assert that her ability to learn from these experiences culminates in her transformation into a figure of female agency, possessing intellectual clarity, moral conviction, and self-assurance. Consequently, by the end of the novel, she achieves happiness, fulfilling her quest for identity. In a Victorian society where women were largely confined to domestic roles and subjected to male-imposed values, Jane's struggle and liberation from both maternal and, thus, patriarchal control serves as an empowering example. Read through an eclectic feminist lens that draws on the insights of Chodorow, Rich, Kristeva, Irigaray, and Ruddick, this reading also challenges essentialist notions of motherhood by revealing its diverse forms, contradictions, and capacity for both oppression and empowerment. Brontë's reimagining of maternal influence not only reshapes the Victorian ideal of womanhood but continues to reverberate in contemporary feminist debates about autonomy, care, and identity.

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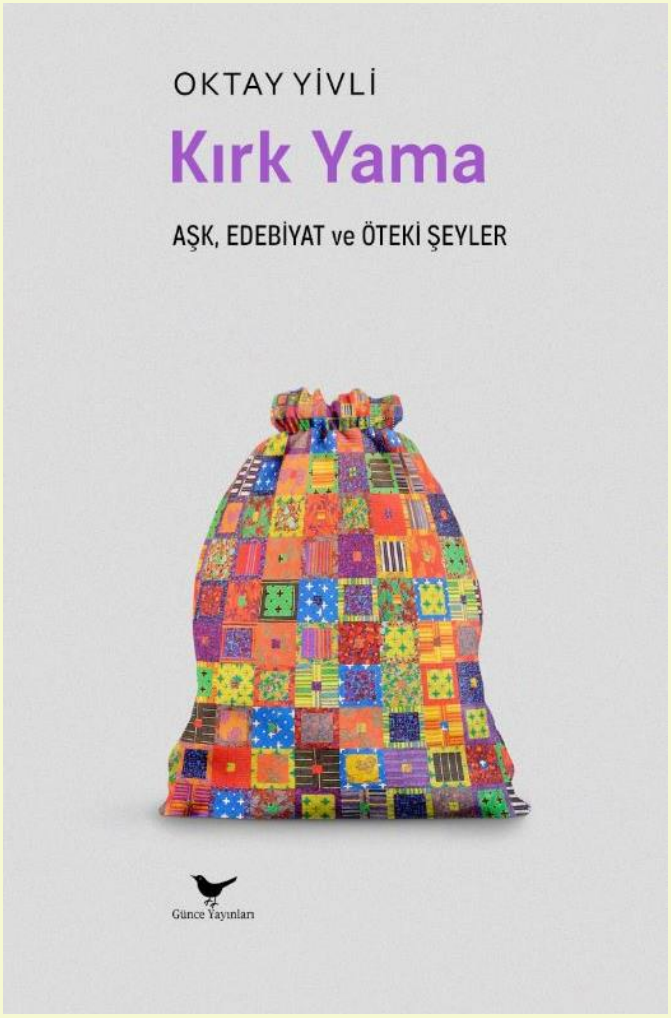
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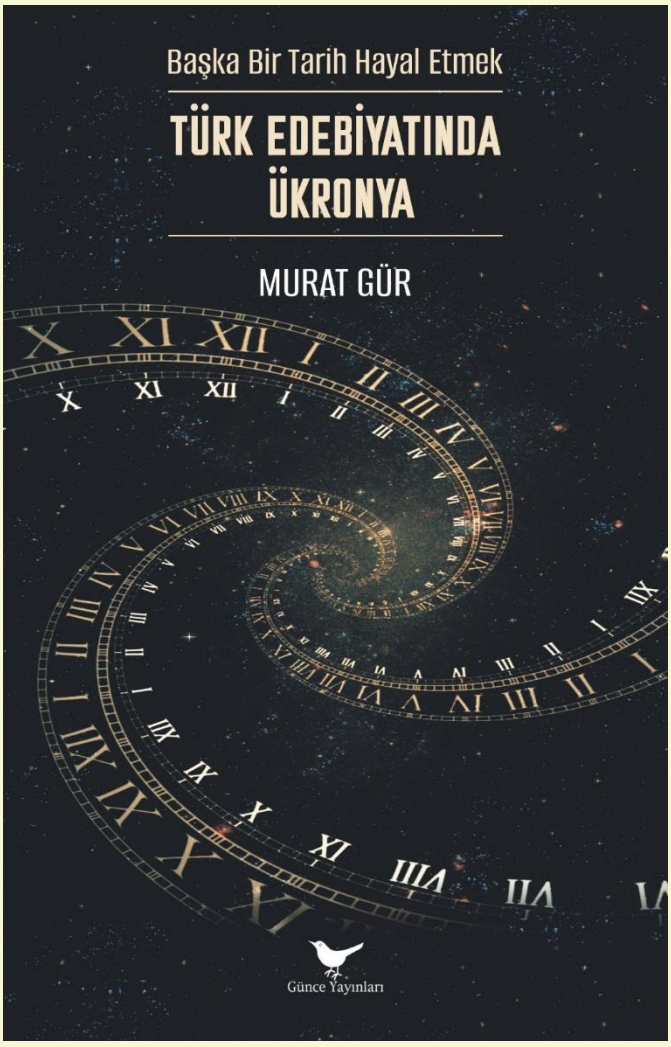
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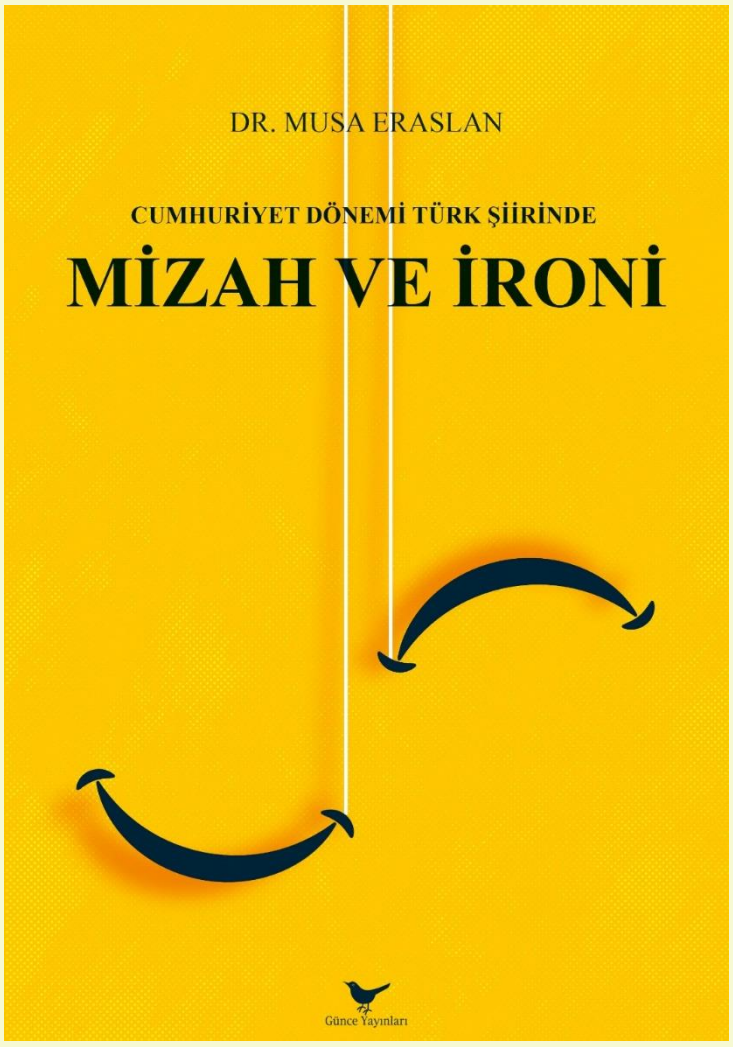
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