



“Well, Propensities and Principles Must Be
Reconciled by Some Means”: The Conflict of
Happiness in *Jane Eyre*

Nadia Elmi

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Introduction

Rife with heterodoxies and originality, *Jane Eyre* stuck out from the common fare of Victorian novels and received a mixed response. Although critics condemned it for being class-hostile, indecorous, unchristian, and unfeminine, the novel was also an instant triumph, causing widespread enthusiasm among ordinary readers as well as critics (Newman and Nixon 475-77). However, it would take one hundred and twenty years after its original publication in 1847 before critics began to applaud many of the novel's heterodoxies, claiming that they direct attention to, among other things, women's "right to pleasure and happiness" instead of their fulfilment of the middle-class feminine ideal (Newman and Nixon 480). Indeed, a Bildungsroman and a governess novel, Charlotte Brontë plotted her heroine's development dangerously close to never-before-seen territories of feminine identity. Although Brontë overturned a spate of readerly expectations, she nevertheless answered other expectations through her conformity of the plot with a series of Victorian novelistic conventions, such as the happy-marriage ending (Moore 77, 101-03).

Jane Eyre therefore both defies and is swayed by the cultural currents of nineteenth-century Britain in various and complex ways, and the present essay focuses on how the novel responds to the prevailing gender norms. More specifically, I aim to investigate the interactions between gender identity and happiness in the sense of "the good life." The eponymous heroine's main drive in the novel is the attainment of her own self-defined good life, a type of happiness gained from the conviction that one is living one's best life (Nettle 18).

The pursuit of happiness is central in all human cultures (Nettle 183), but in a culture such as the Victorian, where female self-fulfilment was only achievable within the realm of the private sphere (Poovey 10), Jane is denied her right to personally determine the criteria of her own good life. Insisting on her need for both independence and human affection, however, Jane is forced to negotiate her obstacle-ridden path to happiness. Along the way, the constituents of

her good life prove to be ideologically contradictory. In her attempts to reconcile these contradictions, Jane engages in feminine and masculine performances that characterise her as gender fluid and gender incoherent. As is argued here, the brief gender-role inversion with Rochester is necessary for Jane to attain her self-defined good life. This attainment of her good life is dangerously political, as it exposes the instability of Victorian gender identities. As I will show, the happy-marriage conclusion attests to this danger, while it simultaneously masks the novel's criticism of the middle-class domestic ideal.

This essay is divided into two chapters. The first explains the functions of Victorian literature and the middle-class gender ideology. The chapter also includes an explication of the theories I have used in my textual analysis as well as a presentation of a selection of critical readings. The second chapter contains the textual analysis of the novel, where I investigate the ways in which Jane's gender identity is influenced by her pursuit of a good life. I shall illustrate how her gender identity fluctuates as the focus of her good life shifts, a situation which gives rise to an internal conflict indicative of gender discontent.

Chapter One

This chapter opens with a brief exploration of the relationship between Victorian literature and the middle-class ideology. Thereafter, the chapter touches on two novel forms of interest to this essay, the Bildungsroman and the governess novel. The next section offers an explication of the middle-class ideology of gender, with particular attention devoted to the domestic ideal and its symbolic work in Victorian Britain. In this context, attention will also be given to the special role of the governess. This is followed by a description of the theories on gender and happiness that I have deployed in my chapter-two analysis of the novel, including explanations of certain terminologies, such as the “good life” and “gender incoherence.” Finally, the chapter includes a section on previous studies that frame my analysis of the novel, particularly in terms of gender in a Victorian context. Five critical readings of *Jane Eyre* are presented, each adding valuable layers of meaning to the wider ideological setting in which the novel was produced.

The Middle-Class Ideology of Gender

Victorian Literature

Victorian literature is often regarded as a vehicle for contesting but also creating and distributing the middle-class ideology. This ideology was firmly underpinned by a logic of difference in terms of class, race, and gender that defined what it meant to be human (Newman 9). Both popular literature and non-literary material, such as etiquette guides, performed pivotal symbolic work in the creation and propagation of the middle class’s public image, especially the middle-class woman’s image and role (Langland 24-34; Poovey 6). In *A Short History of English Literature*, Robert Barnard explains that many Victorian novelists, especially writers of the 1840s, were, in fact, straitjacketed into composing pieces that agreed with middle-class ideology, lest they lose their new readership, the middle-class family, and so their income (105-06). Certain topics, such as sexual deviancy, were, he writes, excluded from these texts or

managed “with a falseness of tone” that betrayed the danger of the act (106). Grace Moore, in *The Victorian Novel in Context*, claims that Brontë, among many other authors, worked within the imposed restrictions (43). Central to an understanding of a Victorian novel such as *Jane Eyre*, therefore, is the middle-class ideology and how depictions of woman as a moral, domestic, and idealised angel were key in the creation and legitimisation of the middle-class cultural, political, and economic hegemony (Newman 8-10). One critic points out that accepting their roles as angels “was the price women paid for a kind of cultural influence” (Newman 10). Though Moore acknowledges that the Victorian novel replicated the angel (24-25), she places more emphasis on the novel’s resistance to this ideal: “Far from upholding the angel in the house ... the Victorian novel sought to challenge and liberate her” (25).

Importantly, *Jane Eyre* is a Bildungsroman and a governess novel. Moore observes that the Bildungsroman is a novel form that was widely favoured in the Victorian age. This literary propensity, she comments, was “hardly a surprise,” because the Victorians had a liking for personal progress (39). The Bildungsroman typically charts a protagonist’s journey along the paths of life, registering their mistakes and influences, with a view to illustrate their journey towards adulthood or success. Moore notes that the *female* Bildungsroman, such as *Jane Eyre*, tended to employ the “marriage plot” in order to demonstrate that marriage exemplified female success. The marriage plot frequently ended in a “happy marriage,” because the “marriage ending” was often conflated with the “happy ending” formula. Tellingly, just as certain topics were circumvented by Victorian writers, the happy ending, Moore continues, partly served to conceal social problems, particularly those pertaining to women (40, 43). On the other hand, the governess novel, which made its literary debut in 1839 (Thomson 43), signals the Victorian obsession with “the very nature of woman” (“The Victorian Age” 549). In her book *The Victorian Heroine*, Patricia Thomson says that the Victorian novelist generally portrayed the governess as an ideal female, who was indigent, unguarded, and miserable, and

without the prospect of other work or marriage. With the publication of *Jane Eyre*, however, the Victorian audience was introduced to an unprecedented and dangerous governess, who, Thomson claims, was at an astonishing remove from the stock governess (44-48).

The Angel and the Governess

As pointed out, the notion of difference is the cornerstone of Victorian middle-class ideology, a difference in class, race, and, most relevantly here, gender. In “Gender and Dichotomy,” Nancy Jay explains that the logic of difference is rooted in classical ideas that split the world into binary, hierarchically ordered positive-negative sides, what she calls A/Not-A sides: mind/body, reason/emotion, strength/weakness, order/disorder, stability/change, rationality/irrationality, light/dark, good/evil, morality/immorality, pure/impure, masculine/feminine, man/woman, etc. (38-47). She writes that “Those whose understanding of society is ruled by such ideology find it very hard to conceive of the possibility of alternative forms of social order. ... the only alternative to the *one* order is disorder” (54). In *Uneven Developments*, Mary Poovey observes that until at least the 1740s women were frequently portrayed in the negative, dark colours of, to borrow Jay’s phrase, the Not-A side. Interestingly, the nineteenth century ushered in a new, positive image of women without, however, discarding the old one (Poovey 9-11). Sometimes the old image was “articulated upon class or moral ‘type’,” and at other times it was invoked to justify female subordination (Poovey 11).

The new image is commonly known as the *feminine ideal*, and it was part and parcel of the *domestic ideal*. Moore observes that pre-industrial labour practices, where women and men laboured shoulder-to-shoulder, gave way in the eighteenth century to the forces of Industrialism, which pushed for a strictly gender-stratified society (23). She explains that even though women were instrumental in the transition to a capitalist economy, it had become an indication of a man’s wealth and success by the mid-eighteenth century to “have a leisured

wife,” so that “women were increasingly identified with the world of the domestic” (23-24). In the ensuing century, the gender stratification became cemented through a division of Victorian society into separate, gendered spheres – private/feminine and public/masculine (Moore 24). This division was, Poovey says, officially endorsed by “medical men,” who presented a new “medical model of reproductive difference” between male and female bodies (11). Their aim was to highlight women’s childbearing ability in order to promote new biological “facts” that assigned women the hallmark of *maternal love*. Through this hallmark, the dark portrait of women came to be lighted with a whole palette of positive colours, reflecting qualities such as selflessness, lack of passion, gentleness, caringness, loyalty, and superior morality (Poovey 5-9, 11). Poovey explains that this process necessitated that *virtue* in the sense of morality was severed from ideas of *noblesse oblige* (the inherited duty of the aristocracy to behave morally) and the public sphere “of competition, self-interest, and economic aggression” (10), and was instead affixed to the private sphere of the household. Already tied to the domestic world, middle-class women could then successfully be reconceived as defenders, avatars, and guides of morality, in short, as domestic angels (Poovey 8, 10-11). Poovey argues that Coventry Patmore eulogises this ideal female in his poem the *Angel in the House* as “the opposite and necessary counterpart to man,” as a “ ‘Naturally’ self-sacrificing and self-regulating ... domestic deity [who] radiated morality because her ‘substance’ was love, not self-interest or ambition” (8). In another well-known Victorian text by John Ruskin, the ideal woman was extolled as “enduringly, incorruptibly good; instinctively, infallibly wise—wise, not for *self-development*, but for *self-renunciation*” (Ruskin qtd in “The Victorian Age,” p. 550, my italics). Women’s labour was subsequently redefined as domestic, reproductive, selfless, emotional, unsalaried, and volitional - as the opposite of men’s labour (Poovey 10), or, as Elizabeth Langland puts it in *Nobody’s Angels*, as “oriented to the good of human lives rather than to the goal of personal wealth” (66). Langland further holds that the domestic ideal conceived of the

household itself as imbued with feminine qualities and managed by the ideal *domestic manager*, the angel (41-49, 53).

Symbolically, the domestic ideal worked to justify and secure middle-class ascendancy through manipulations of middle-class women's image and the notion of morality. In "linking morality to a figure (rhetorically) immune to the self-interest and competition integral to economic success," the domestic ideal gave middle-class men free rein to participate in the economy, while middle-class women protected the superior morality of their class (Poovey 10). In this way, the domestic ideal worked, on the one hand, to yoke the middle-class woman to the household, a yoke strengthened by an attendant rhetoric of woman's need of male control masked as a need of protection from the public sphere. The ideal was thus integral to the hegemony of middle-class men and, therefore, gender inequality. On the other hand, Poovey contends that the domestic ideal represented the ideological and symbolic depictions that underwrote and justified the middle-class's supremacy (10-11).

Ironically enough, Langland notes that Britain was ruled by a woman. She quotes that "if the stereotypical Victorian woman was well-mannered, self-effacing, demure and devoid of passion, Queen Victoria was so far from the stereotype as to be almost its opposite" (Thomson qtd. on p. 64). Langland declares that the queen, who held the highest public position in the nation, epitomised masculine independence in addition to female dependence, the angel (62-64). In thus being simultaneously independent/dependent, superior/inferior, masculine/feminine, working/nonworking, powerful/powerless, public/private, Queen Victoria, Langland writes, contributed to establishing a strange predicament, where "female power" could "exist as long as it was mystified by appropriate rhetorics of home, hearth, and heart" (65).

One figure who challenged these paradoxes and subverted the gender norms was the governess. Jay claims that the logic of difference assumes that a position between A and Not-

A, in this case, masculine and feminine, is logically impossible (42). Nonetheless, Moore asserts that in practice the public/private distinction – a concretisation of the masculine/feminine binary – was far from absolute, especially in the working classes (24), and Poovey demonstrates how the governess exposes this weakness. The latter writes that the governess performed critical “ideological work of gender because of the proximity she bears to two of the most important Victorian representations of woman,” the angel and the working-class woman (127). Poovey explains that the similarities in the work of a governess and the middle-class mother, the angel, made governessing into the most sought-after occupation by unmarried middle-class women in the 1830s and 1840s. As a middle-class woman, the governess was meant to perpetuate the domestic ideal by representing and teaching it to middle-class children. However, as a woman with a salaried job, the governess was affiliated with the working-class woman, who still embodied the old, negative image of women. The governess, therefore, straddled the fence between the man/public/working woman and nonworking, normal middle-class woman/domestic. This way, Poovey continues, the governess collapsed the boundary between the public and private spheres and threatened the fixedness of middle-class gender identities. Hence, the exaggerated public attention lavished on the governess in the 1840s signified a Victorian fear about protecting a moral barrier, disguised as a working-class-middle-class barrier, that preserved the ascendancy of the middle class (Poovey 14, 126-29, 131, 144).

Theories

Joy/Pleasure, Contentment/Satisfaction, and The Good Life

The theme of happiness is pivotal to my reading and therefore deserves some commentary, especially as it is a fluid concept. There are many possible approaches to analysing happiness, but since I am particularly interested in how the novel negotiates happiness as self-fulfilment

and its relation to the “good life,” I have chosen to depart from a theoretical perspective with its roots in psychology. Daniel Nettle, in his book *Happiness*, explains that, in psychology, three types of happiness are distinguished from each other. He terms the first type *level one happiness*, which is an immediate and ephemeral emotional experience, such as joy or pleasure. This type of happiness can be viewed as a tactic for identifying things or changes in our milieu that are beneficial for our well-being. *Level two happiness* involves a judgement of the general balance of the negative and positive emotional experiences in one’s life and could be expressed as an enduring feeling of contentment or satisfaction with one’s life. The frame of reference for one’s level two happiness varies depending on one’s mood, contextual factors, and individual impressions (15-18, 31-37). The meaning of *level three happiness* is chiselled out of Aristotle’s definition of *eudaimonia* or the good life (18, 33); this type of happiness is derived from the feeling of living the best life one can because of having achieved what one wants in life or fulfilled one’s potentialities. The good life, Nettle claims, is a state in an individual’s life and, as such, involves a hybrid of emotions that range from joy to contentment (20). Level three happiness is highly subjective, since, Nettle says, only the subject themselves can judge what their good life is and the degree to which they are living it (18). If, Nettle writes, society determines whether the subject has attained the good life, “then the concept has become a moralizing one; an ideology, in fact” (20). Shifting our focus back to the domestic ideal, it now becomes possible to rearticulate this ideal as an ideology that, by determining a Victorian woman’s *raison d’être*, also determines what she should strive for to live the best life she can. It follows that the fulfilment of the domestic ideal is synonymous with a Victorian middle-class woman’s attainment of the good life.

Gender Performativity

The idea that gender is a cultural rather than natural construction is also important for my reading of the novel. In her book *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler draws on feminist theory and French poststructuralism to illustrate, through a fine-grained critique of gender ontologies which contextualises gender and enables a reformulation of gender identity as a multiplex cultural construction, that gender can be performed.

Butler introduces the sex/gender distinction to lay the foundation of her claim that gender is a cultural invention. She explains that the sex/gender distinction asserts that the essentialist linkage between *gender* – the masculine/feminine binary – and *sex* – the man/woman dualism – is a cultural creation. The sexed body – the male or female body –, Butler argues, is assigned the culturally constructed gender – masculinity or femininity. She contends that the sex/gender link – that a woman is necessarily feminine and a man masculine – has transformed the biological male and female into gendered beings, who represent coherent gender identities and, therefore, advance the interests of patriarchy and reproductive heterosexuality (8-10, 18-22).

Coherent gender identities, Butler claims, is the effect of disciplinary practices meant to enforce a seemingly natural gender hierarchy for political reasons. Butler identifies two oppositional gender identities: the coherent and the incoherent genders. Coherent, or “normal,” persons establish and uphold an apparently coherent link between sex, gender, and sexual practice and desire. This link, she says, is consolidated, naturalised, and made culturally intelligible by practices that discipline the male and female body to conform with mandatory heterosexuality and hierarchical gender norms. Unregulated male and female bodies become the Others – the incoherent genders – who juxtaposed with the coherent genders strengthen the latter’s normativity. The ideology of coherent genders, she continues, entails that incoherent genders are unintelligible within the masculine/feminine binary and are considered deviant or logically impossible (23-33, 175-85, 200).

Consequently, Butler claims that since gender is a product of the idealised fantasy of heterosexual coherence, a fantasy that aims to control what it alleges to explain, the disciplined body comes to *perform* gender. Butler enlarges upon her concept of gender as a performance in her theory of *gender performativity*, which postulates that the body is only gendered through iterated gender performances. She holds that an individual's gender identity is, therefore, an internalised and corporeally or verbally enacted ideal that makes the fiction of gender manifest around, within, and on the body as an intrinsic quality of the self:

[repeated] acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality. (185-86)

Butler adds that, with time, these gendered acts produce the appearance of a “real man” or “real woman” and the illusion of naturally sexed bodies that relate to one another in a man/woman binary power relationship (45).

Gender performances can expose the performativity – the artificiality – of gender in a way that undermines the naturalised appearance of coherent gender identities. Butler belabours her point that there is no gender without gender performances, since these acts realise the cultural fiction of gender (33-34, 187-90). She writes that “because gender is a project which has cultural survival as its end” (190), performing one's gender wrong comes with a high cost (190-91). If a person fails to re-enact a gender norm – that is, acts incoherently – the resultant failed gender performance has the potential to expose the stable, coherent gender identity as a weak construction. In other words, the performativity of gender can be revealed through the deviant attributes of the incoherent genders (192, 33-34).

The mechanism of gender construction, Butler asserts, generates individuals who ostensibly act as the agents of gender. She holds that gender performativity conceives of gender as a “doing,” where the “doer” or agent of gender is not the subject themselves, even though the source of gender performances can be identified within the subject (34). Indeed, Butler describes the agents of gender as hidden and identifies them as “the political regulations and disciplinary practices” that institutionalise and naturalise heterosexuality (186). Butler subsequently argues that the body and self are effectively the subjects of gender performativity (186).

Nonetheless, the gendered individual is not entirely without agency, and this reality, Butler argues, makes gender-identity subversion possible. She maintains that the disciplinary practices that regulate cultural signification, while limiting the scope of gender intelligibility, open possibilities for new gender constellations that, being culturally designated unintelligible and logically impossible, are at odds with the intelligible/coherent identities and therefore make gender identity subversion feasible. It follows from this, Butler reasons, that the subject, although not having entered into a signifying world of regulated gender performances by choice, can still assert agency through a subversive repetition of the compulsory acts: that is, by repeating the gendered acts in a different way. The heterosexual gender norms, she contends, can be displaced by such subversion (198-203). As we shall see, Jane’s pursuit of her good life will prompt displays of agency through subversive gender performances, even while the middle-class good life – the domestic ideal – will push for her gender coherence and show her to be a subject of gender performativity. This struggle between the gendered individual and the Victorian culture forms the kernel of Jane’s internal conflict.

Critical Readings of *Jane Eyre*

Although critical readings of gender roles in *Jane Eyre* abound, few previous studies have looked specifically at the psychological conception of “happiness” in relation to gender identity in the novel. This section focuses on five seminal readings, selected because they view the novel through different lenses and offer competing or complementing readings of it, all of which are significant for my analysis of ideology and gender ideals in the novel. The first investigates rebellion.

Sandra M. Gilbert, in her classic essay “Plain Jane’s Progress,” states that Jane’s inner rage is of symbolic importance. She argues that at Gateshead Jane’s wish for independence is manifested as an inner female “rage,” the expression of which leads to her immurement in the red room (560-62). Jane’s brief escape from her confinement “through madness” presages her connection to Bertha (562). Through the lessons of Miss Temple – the angel incarnate – and Helen Burns, Jane eventually resigns herself to the impossibility of complete liberty. Gilbert suspects that Jane’s resignation is superficial, because although Jane has acquired a conventional appearance at Lowood, her rage, which expresses her repressed desires, still broods beneath the surface. Jane’s resistance to shedding her rage, Gilbert contends, is tantamount to a symbolic resistance against patriarchy and is central to the progress of her journey (562-66).

At Thornfield, Jane’s connection to Bertha is strengthened. Gilbert declares that Jane and Rochester’s imminent marriage is one of inequality on account of Rochester’s “sexual knowledge,” his “ultimate secret” (573), and “charades and masquerades ... of patriarchy” (574), which grant him the power to reduce Jane into his possession. His patriarchal behaviour, Gilbert holds, stirs Jane’s inner rage, which, in turn, tightens the bond between her and Rochester’s “ultimate secret,” Bertha (573-76). Gilbert parallels Bertha and Jane, arguing that

Bertha is Jane's unconventional self and the vehicle of her repressed rage (576-79); in other words, Bertha is Jane's double, who "not only acts *for* Jane; she also acts *like* Jane" (578).

Jane is bound to Bertha until she wakes "to her own self, her own needs" (583), which will occur, Gilbert says, at Marsh End. Through Diana and Mary, through a final resistance against patriarchal oppression and a marriage of more pronounced inequality, and through Bertha's death, Jane finally attains her sense of selfhood and mental autonomy. Only at this juncture, Gilbert argues, can Jane hear Rochester's disembodied cry, recognise what she wants for herself, resist St John's tyranny, and begin the final leg of her pilgrimage towards a marriage of equality with Rochester at Ferndean. Gilbert further asserts that Jane's ability to hear Rochester's cry and his ability to hear her answer testify to their equality (579-84).

Gilbert claims that Ferndean confirms the naturalness of their equality. The name *Ferndean* represents nature, and their new place outside society underscores the natural state of their equal marriage. Ultimately, Jane shows that patriarchy cannot dictate her place in society but that she leads her own way and decides her own place, which is, Gilbert continues, in a natural, admittedly idealistic, state outside the normal social order (584-86). In sum, Gilbert asserts that Jane's life journey is an irreligious pilgrimage towards selfhood, independence, and a marriage of equality. This reading, however, has not gone uncontested. For example, Lauren Owsley, in "Charlotte Brontë's Circumvention of Patriarchy," claims that Gilbert's analysis is lacking in that it does not consider "the pragmatic necessity of financial security" (56).

Owsley argues that Jane gains a position of authority due to her financial emancipation and Rochester's dependence on her. The death of her parents triggered Jane's economic dependence on men, and she learns the value of financial autonomy for self-agency and self-worth at both Gateshead and Lowood. When Jane escapes Thornfield, it is only to find herself a poor oppressed dependant again, to St John at Marsh End. She is somewhat relieved of her dependency when she obtains the position of schoolmistress. Jane, however, is not entirely

content; she wishes to be Rochester's equal and have the means to lift herself and the Rivers sisters out of the Victorian patriarchal labour system, which denied women financial success. Jane's inherited wealth, Owsley continues, gives her the power and agency to fulfil these wishes. The money elevates Jane's socioeconomic position, so that she now considers herself Rochester's equal. Financial independence ascribes to Jane the masculine quality of aggression and the masculine privileges of authority and choice, making her more inclined, Owsley maintains, to pursue her own happiness (54-55, 58-64). Tension is created, however, between the novel's stress on female independence and the Victorian domestic ideal, which equated women's social destiny with marriage. Owsley argues that Jane's "decision to marry Rochester technically transfers her fortune to him, but her active choice to marry him for her own contentment, in lieu of social advancement or domestic comfort, is indicative of the new agency which she has irretrievably purchased" (64). Put another way, financial independence has allowed Jane to experience the freedom of choice in matters of her own happiness, such as choosing Rochester. Rochester's dependence on Jane, Owsley adds, completes a gender-power reversal which sustains Jane's new agency and "grants Jane the circumstances necessary to achieve irrevocable equality in her relationship" (63). Jane's personal narrative, moreover, evidences her enduring agency in her marriage. In the end, Owsley contends, Jane finds herself in an unconventional, egalitarian marriage (54-55, 65).

Whereas Owsley suggests that a desire for happiness prompted Jane's choice of Rochester, Kathleen Vejvoda, in "Idolatry in Jane Eyre," argues that it was really idolatry. In Victorian culture, idolatry meant "any devotion to a person, thing, or idea that hinders or supplants one's relation to God" (Vejvoda 241). In Victorian marriage-plot novels, human idolatry took centre stage. The Victorian preoccupation with idolatry, which reached fever pitch in the decade of *Jane Eyre's* production, was symptomatic, Vejvoda argues, of a Victorian fear of, and consequent interest in, the swelling power of Roman Catholicism, a religious branch associated

in Protestantism with idolatry and regarded as dangerous to the British patriarchy. Women were the fulcrum of the Victorian fear of Catholicism, because they were considered naturally more susceptible to the charms of religion and, hence, idolatry (Vejvoda 241-42).

Vejvoda states that Jane's narrative contains Catholic and anti-Catholic sentiments with the view to illustrate the oppressive idolatry in the Victorian Protestant culture, "particularly in the gender politics of courtship and marriage" (243). Jane's inability to differentiate between human idolatry and love is at issue in her relationships. Jane, she argues, must realise that desisting human worship can make her stronger and more confident in controlling her own life and rights (243-44). Vejvoda writes that Rochester encourages Jane's idolatry mainly by representing Catholicism and through his own need of an idol (244-47). Thus he "becomes her 'master' and ultimate idol" (244). Her idolatry of Rochester and his unrestrained idolatry of her, which reach their apotheosis in the betrothal scene, are transformed into a psychological threat to her selfhood, which she realises and counters by channelling anti-Catholic ideas before eventually escaping Thornfield (244-45, 247-51). At Marsh End, Vejvoda contends, St John, who represents Protestantism, shows Jane that both the Protestant and Catholic institutions of marriage are equally oppressive of women, since both demand husband idolatry and the wife's subsequent submission. The only difference between these forms of oppression, she says, is that the one is culturally accepted while the other is not (252-257). Vejvoda holds that Jane only resists St John's idolatry because she still worships Rochester, whose disembodied and idolatrous cry reminds her of this. Their relationship, including their marriage, she goes on, is defined by irresponsible and irrational mutual idolatry (254-56).

In "Gender Must Be Defended," Nancy Armstrong calls attention to another Victorian institution, namely the household. Armstrong draws on Foucault's ideas of biopolitics and self-surveillance to reconceptualise the novel as a promoter of the household and its members as representatives of the Victorian gender ideals. She notes that Victorian novels tend to situate

gender-aberrant individuals outside the household and gender normative individuals within it, while equating an existence outside the household not only with a rejection of gender ideals but also with a refusal to live under the protection of men of property (530-45). Armstrong observes that Jane constantly seeks a secure position within a household, and, by the same token, Jane covets a place within the normative gender binary. Nonetheless, Jane meets with a few obstacles along the way: for example, she feels forced to leave Thornfield and subsequently literally assumes a position outside the Marsh-End household, peering in through a window at the domestic security of the normative women inside. Jane, Armstrong contends, is only vouchsafed entrance to the household by the male head, St John, who, as a man of property, has the power to redefine Jane from a homeless, “masterless,” and thus gender-deviant individual to a feminine woman through her new position of dependence on him (541-43). During Jane’s search for a household, the novel kills off several female characters, most notably Bertha, who fail to live up to the feminine norm. This is done, Armstrong argues, so that Jane can come to fulfil the feminine ideal by marrying into a patriarchal household that excludes gender-deviant women. Through this inclusion-exclusion strategy, Armstrong maintains, the novel discriminates between gendered and gender-aberrant persons (545-46). By doing so, Armstrong asserts, the novel pits positive and “negative” femininity against one another to single out the latter as a threat to the gender norms upon which the Victorian social order hinged (544).

The notion of gender deviancy is expanded on by Esther Godfrey in “*Jane Eyre*, from Governess to Girl Bride.” Godfrey recounts how working-class women and men were hired to work side-by-side in the developing industrial economy. Among the middle class, this gender mixing inspired the belief that working men and women were androgynous. The upshot of this belief was a strong concern among the mid-Victorian middle class that working-class gender

roles and sexual deviancy could penetrate class barriers and destabilise middle-class gender identities and interests (854-56).

Godfrey states that the novel deploys Jane to confirm the tenability of this concern by tying gender identity to wealth and age. At Gateshead, Godfrey writes, the Reeds “make her [Jane’s] different social position clear,” classifying Jane as a dependant and affiliating her with the working class (856). This class profile, Godfrey argues, is later strengthened at Lowood, where Jane and her fellow pupils are stripped of feminine trappings, thereby being associated with working-class androgyny (856-57). The class-aligned gender differences, Godfrey contends, are stressed when Jane assumes the governess role at Thornfield. As a governess, Jane is positioned somewhere between the working and middle classes. Although her class ambiguity compels her to make feminine gender performances, Jane, Godfrey observes, often falls short of the feminine ideal, specifically because Jane cannot afford the feminine accessories of middle-class women, which results in the accentuation of her working-class androgyny (853-59). Such suggestions permeate the text and serve to emphasise how only the higher classes have the monetary means to construct femininity as a way to affirm their class superiority (856-57). Nonetheless, Godfrey maintains that Jane, on account of her gender fluidity, becomes dangerous to the middle-class notion of the fixedness of gender identities. Jane’s romantic entanglements with Rochester pose yet another challenge to the idea of gender stability by teasing the fear of the transferability of working-class androgyny to the middle class (Godfrey 859-60). While class ambiguity allows Jane’s dismantling and consequent rejection of conservative gender identities, Godfrey claims that age completes this by bringing about a complete reversal of gender roles. Since Victorians associated the child with innocence and androgyny, Jane’s androgyny is intensified by her child-status. Although Jane’s child-status at first highlights Rochester’s masculine power over her, Godfrey contends that, in the penultimate chapter, Rochester’s feminine condition together with his high age has deprived

him of his former masculine leverage. Meanwhile, Jane's young age allows her to play on their significant age difference to demonstrate her masculine power over him. It is, Godfrey asserts, only after Jane's show of age-related power that Rochester yields to her new masculine role as his provider and protector. Through class and age, Jane has, in all, moved from androgyny to failed performances of femininity to what Godfrey calls *female masculinity* (860-69). The gender-role reversal notwithstanding, Godfrey holds that the novel ultimately conforms Jane and Rochester with middle-class gender identities. Despite this, Godfrey insists that *Jane Eyre* makes such a revolutionary demonstration of gender-identity subversion through class and age that it exposes the flexibility of gender identities (868-69). As we can see, these critical readings all address gender through different frameworks. Nevertheless, they do not examine how gender intersects with happiness, even though the concept of happiness is an especially important window into the world of a Victorian woman, in particular the inner conflicts that arise when the good life and gender are prevailing ideologies.

Chapter Two

This chapter contains an analysis of the text and is sectioned into six parts, the first five of which are named after each household that emblematises a destination in Jane's life journey. This division, therefore, follows the narrative linearly with the purpose of elucidating the development of Jane's good life and how it relates to her gender identity. The sixth part recaps the analysis and offers a brief discussion on the significance of happiness for an understanding of a woman's rights in Victorian society.

Gateshead: Independence, Masculinity, and A Lack of Human Affection

The Gateshead episode begins to lay the groundwork for Jane's good life, showing that independence and human affection are constitutive of this understanding of happiness in life. Contemplating the Reed family, ten-year-old Jane implicitly associates happiness with domesticity and human affection: "she [Mrs Reed] lay reclined on a sofa by the fireside, and with her darlings about her ... looked perfectly happy" (9; ch. 1). This warm image is contrasted with the ensuing, metaphorically resonant image of Jane's solitude in an adjoining room behind a curtain on a cold window seat, where she describes herself as being "shrined in double retirement" (10; ch. 1). Jane's ostracism is predicated on Mrs Reed's perception of Jane's deviance from "natural" behaviour (9; ch. 1). Following Godfrey's class discussion (856), one might say that Mrs Reed's perception is an expression of Jane's inferior socioeconomic position. This is only somewhat true, however, because it mostly proceeds from her thorough dislike of Jane, as Jane many years later remarks of Mrs Reed: "living, she had ever hated me – dying, she must hate me still" (276; ch. 21), before telling Mrs Reed that "as a little child, I should have been glad to love you *if you would have let me*" (276; ch. 21, my italics). Mrs Reed's perception of Jane as abnormal also springs from her awareness of Jane's new habit of breaking out in passion, in "fire and violence" (276; ch. 21), which Gilbert, alluding to it as an

inner female rage, attributes to Jane's newly devised wish for independence (560-62). Owsley weighs in with the valid suggestion that ten-year-old Jane is beginning to appreciate the disadvantage of dependence for her freedom of action and thought (58-59). Returning to Jane's description of her solitude, her word choice of being "shrined" is suggestive of the fact that her retreat affords her a protected but limited space of independence in which to indulge in a liberty that grants distraction and joy, or a level one happiness: "With Bewick [a book] on my knee, I was then happy" (11; ch. 1). In accordance with Nettle's reading (31), Jane's experience of joy allows for her identification of the retreat and its signification of independence as beneficial for her well-being. Jane's act of seeking out the retreat, then, intimates that she recognises her need for independence yet lacks a place in which to fulfil this need fully and openly. Admitting that she fears "nothing but interruption" (11; ch. 1), Jane perceives the precariousness of her independence at Gateshead. It is, therefore, mainly a lack of human affection and a desire for independence that keep Jane on the fringe of domesticity as well as, if we adopt Armstrong's view of the family as embodying the gender ideals (530), gender normativity.

Her independence is ephemeral, and so is her joy, since John Reed, the male head of Gateshead, comes to discipline Jane for her abnormality and liberties and to remind her of her dependent status in his household. It is noteworthy that Jane renames her retreat to "my hiding-place" (11; ch. 1), and that John, upon finding her, insists on his role as her "Master" (12; ch. 1). Jane's conduct under John's abuse is initially coherent – feminine –, exhibiting fear, tractability, silence, suffering, and endurance (12-13; ch. 1). However, when his abuse escalates, Jane uses her "hands" and begins to defend herself (14; ch. 1). In refusing to display feminine passivity and imitating masculine activity, Jane is, in accordance with Butler's discussion, re-enacting gender norms wrongly and differently; that is, she is acting incoherently – a female body exhibiting masculinity – and, thus, gender subversively. It is only by virtue of her incoherence that she can display agency. Granted that the struggle is staged as a

confrontation between a man and woman, it is, in a larger way, a power battle between the gendered individual and their culture, in this case, between Jane and patriarchy in the form of Master John. For that reason, the wider implication of her incoherence is that it challenges the middle-class patriarchy which claims her agency for its own survival. Indeed, images of slavery, rebellion, and despotism morph her defence into a fight for her right of independence (13, 15; ch. 1), proving this to be a principle that governs her behaviour. However, her increasingly incoherent, masculine behaviour, a side-effect of what the novel denominates “passion” (14: ch. 1) and Gilbert “rage” (561), causes Jane’s immurement in the “red-room” (14; ch. 1).

Arguably, Jane’s lack of self-regulation strengthens the Reeds’ gender normativity and accentuates her own need to conform. The servants quickly let Jane know that she should act submissively, that is, femininely, as this is the only way to gain the Reeds’ affection: “you should try to be useful and pleasant, then, perhaps, you would have a home here, but if you become passionate and rude, misses will send you away” (16; ch. 2). Here, human affection is again conceived of as attainable only within the scope of domesticity, which demands Jane’s conformity with the feminine ideal. Incorrect gender performances, Butler claims, come with a price, a punishment (190-91), and the novel reaffirms this by attempting to discipline Jane. The red-room, then, could be viewed, as a disciplinary practice enforced by the household, which Armstrong calls “a disciplinary apparatus” (530), with the objective to teach Jane gender conformity – which is impossible at Gateshead, seeing as she is there excluded from middle-class domesticity. Therefore, being shut-up in the red-room is, above all, expressive of the Reeds’ cruelty to her. Jane momentarily escapes the oppression of the red-room through a brief spell of madness, or so Gilbert argues (562). Yet her syncope can be redescribed as symptomatic of a shock at the cruelty of Mrs Reed, who perseveres in denying Jane human affection and a share in domestic happiness (44; ch. 4).

For her good life, then, Jane needs to attain independence, the freedom to govern her own thoughts and actions, a need whose protection prompts masculine performances. For this to succeed, she recognises that she must “leave” the domestic sphere epitomised by Gateshead (29; ch. 3). Her gender deviance is emphasised in this wish to leave, and, on this score, Armstrong cogently observes that by leaving a household Jane rejects Victorian gender norms and the protection of a middle-class man (541-45). Nonetheless, her desire for independence is accompanied by a desperate wish for human affection, which, besides injecting her orphaned character with pathos, complicates and further politicises the texture of her good life.

Lowood: Dependence, Femininity, and Human Affection

A closer analysis of Jane’s need for human affection reveals ongoing tensions in the representations of her good life and gender identity. Jane indicates that the emotional gratification provided by human affection contributes vastly to her self-fulfilment. When told by Helen Burns that human affection is redundant if Jane approves of herself, Jane replies that

that is not enough: if others don’t love me, I would rather die than live – I cannot bear to be solitary and hated, Helen. Look here; to gain some *real affection* from you, or Miss Temple, or any other whom I truly love, I would willingly submit to have the bone of my arm broken, or let a bull toss me, or to stand behind a kicking horse, and let it dash its hoof at my chest— (82; ch. 8, my italics)

Jane’s speech offers a usefully illustrative example of the importance of human affection for her to live the best life she can. In saying that she cannot survive without “real affection,” Jane reveals her irrational propensity for surrendering emotionally to people who grant her affection. In exchange for affection, Jane is even willing to sacrifice herself. Her self-sacrificing

behaviour hints at what Vejvoda refers to as Jane's "idolatrous tendencies" (244) and prefigures the threat posed to her independence by her need for human affection. Interestingly, the qualities of self-sacrifice, irrationality, and emotionality evinced by the quote resonate with Victorian ideas of the angel as well as age-long notions of femininity/Not-A. As the Lowood episode unfolds, Jane gradually gives in to her propensity for emotional submission, and this indulgence holds out the possibility that Jane might sacrifice her own definition of the good life for society's version.

Following Butler, one might say that Lowood school is an institution teaching disciplinary practices that coerce emulation of middle-class mores, as it is here that Jane begins to police herself in a distinctly Victorian fashion and almost loses her individuality. Gilbert espouses the belief that Miss Temple, Lowood's superintendent, represents the Victorian angel (565). Certainly, Miss Temple, assuming the role of Jane's "mother," does transform Lowood into "a home" for Jane (100; ch. 10), where she guides Jane's values and morals by middle-class philosophies. On Miss Temple's marriage and subsequent departure, Jane examines herself:

From the day she left I was no longer the same ... I had *imbibed from her* something of her nature and much of her habits; more harmonious thoughts; what seemed better regulated feelings. ... I had given in allegiance to duty and order; I was quiet; I *believed* I was *content*: to the eyes of others, usually even to my own, I *appeared* a disciplined and subdued character. ... another discovery dawned on me – namely, that ... my mind had put off all it had *borrowed* of Miss Temple ... that now I was left in *my own natural element*, and beginning to feel the stirring of old emotions. ... now I remembered that *the real world was wide* (100-01; ch. 10, my italics).

Jane's perceptual force comes from her sudden realisation of Miss Temple's deceptive effects on her sense of self-fulfilment. While Miss Temple was there, Jane's self-development had been corseted by Miss Temple's affection, which had induced Jane's emotional submission to her. Presumably, while kept in the fold by Miss Temple, Jane measured her approximation of the good life against society's standard of a woman's good life – the domestic ideal – which calls for her gender conformity. While it is true that Jane, as Godfrey states, appears more androgynous than feminine at Lowood (856-57), Jane does exhibit the feminine ideal in both her manners and character. Jane's feminine performances have clothed her in the appearance of coherence and normativity, an appearance that has finally permitted her a home and affection in Lowood. That being the case, Jane has here shown herself to be a subject rather than an agent of gender performativity. With Miss Temple gone, and with her the compulsion of middle-class conformity, Jane withdraws her focus to herself and samples her emotional state, finding that her level two happiness is low; to put it another way, that she is generally dissatisfied with her life. Thus, despite her outward conformity, there is a trace of rebellion within Jane that gives the lie to her coherence and lack of agency, what Gilbert astutely identifies as the still-brooding female rage (566). Accordingly, Jane renames Lowood and its surrounding area to "prison-ground" (101; ch. 10) and begins to once more desire "liberty" (102; ch. 10). Her quest for independence notably calls her back out into "the real world" – into the public sphere. Here, one might reframe the "wide" world as emblematic of freedom, whereas the household, in this case Lowood, becomes its counterpart, the prison. Having learnt the ways of gender, however, Jane, as Gilbert also notes (566), understands that she cannot expect complete liberty "But Servitude!" (102; ch. 10) Nonetheless, Jane's emphasis on her "own will" (102; ch. 10) and what she wants for herself and her ability to think about this rationally amount to masculine performances that express agency. Furthermore, the naturalness of her feminine position is

questioned. In view of her gendering acts and cultural criticism, Jane no longer exhibits gender coherence but is acting incoherently and subversively.

On the one hand, the contrasting elements of her good life, where Jane is alternately dependent on others and independent of them, rehearse received associations between femininity/dependence/private and masculinity/independence/public in a way that engages with the middle-class ideology by reaffirming gender polarity. On the other hand, Jane's paradoxical good life is an expression of an internal conflict that betokens gender discontent and a struggle to reconcile her propensity for emotional submission with her principle of independence.

Thornfield: Independence versus Human Affection

To Jane, Thornfield, with its closeness to life and more open and wider scenery, at once feels less constricting than Lowood. Then again, this is but an illusion, and it is not long before Jane begins to see Thornfield as more limiting of her independence. In this respect, the character of Rochester, the master of Thornfield, plays a central role. While I agree with Gilbert (573), Godfrey (863-66), Owsley (55, 59), and Vejvoda's (244-47) assertions that the danger of Rochester is embodied in his economic and sexual powers and his roles as her employer and idol, I contend that it has in the long run more to do with his endeavour to continue Lowood's attempts to shape Jane into a coherent person, attempts which intensify her internal conflict.

The novel uses Rochester to both endorse and mystify Jane's claim to power. Rochester is more than once compelled to physically depend on Jane's active protection. Whether Jane recognises the gendered significances of her protection or not, she at least acknowledges its importance for her self-fulfilment, at one point remarking that her protection was "an active thing, and I was weary of an existence all passive" (136; ch. 12). In casting Jane as Rochester's protector, the novel permits Jane to engage in dialogic and physical gender performances that

masculinise her and gives way for expressions of her agency. To prevent Jane's masculine protection from becoming an incoherent, subversive act and a usurpation of Rochester's masculine role, however, the novel begins to mystify the significance of her power by transforming her into Rochester's *moral* protector, his Victorian angel: "You are ... my better self – my good angel" (363; ch. 27). Rochester's belief that Jane can ennoble his character is explicable through the domestic ideal. It is implicit in this ideal that Jane, a governess who strides the public-masculine/private-feminine fence, becomes normalised through a conformity with the feminine ideal, which only marriage can achieve. Marriage cancels out the financial incentive behind her need to work, shifts all financial obligations to Rochester, the husband-to-be, and enables her to engage in reproductive and domestic work. Marriage can thus transform her into an ideal female, an angel. Yet, as Owsley also notes (59), financial emancipation is requisite for Jane's attainment of independence and, hence, happiness. It is evident, then, that Rochester's middle-class ideas about Jane's good life are incompatible with her own, unconventional ideas of it.

To be sure, it seems imperative for Rochester that Jane is converted into an ideal female. He builds up his image as her protector and reduces her capacity for self-protection, making a point of keeping her "safe," likening himself to a "shepherd" and her to his "pet lamb" (250; ch. 20). This animal imagery is repeated during their betrothal, when he refers to Thornfield as a "fold" from which Jane, "a stray lamb," has wandered to "seek" the protection of her "shepherd," Rochester (321; ch. 25). By invoking beauty, a classical feminine signifier, he endures in his advocacy of Jane's performance of femininity: "I will make the world acknowledge you a beauty" (299; ch. 24). When Rochester displays Jane's financial inferiority, swearing he will attire her in "satin and lace" (299; ch. 24), then calls Jane an "angel" to denote her moral duty by him and the whole middle class (300; ch. 24), he continues to press for her

gender coherence. Thus, Jane's attainment of happiness through human affection yet again necessitates her to assume a feminine identity.

Her happiness questionable, her dependence strong, her independence at its nadir, Jane is saved from kneeling to Rochester's power by the disclosure of Bertha's existence. Gilbert argues that Bertha "acts *for* Jane" (578); however, it also looks as if she encourages Jane to act, because the revelation of Bertha's existence actuates Jane to reclaim herself: "till now I had only heard, seen, moved – followed up and down where I was led or dragged – watched event rush on event, disclosure open beyond disclosure: but *now*, I *thought*" (340; ch. 26). As the essentialist perspective renders the mind and reason masculine, Jane's act of independence once more prompts masculine performances. Consequently, and in concurrence with Vejvoda (251), it is borne in on Jane that her emotional submission to Rochester constitutes a psychological hazard to her individuality, self-development, and rights. So, on the first opportunity, she absconds Thornfield to continue to pursue her good life.

Marsh End: Independence and Human Affection

This episode foreshadows the resolution of Jane's internal conflict by proposing a way to reconcile her principle of independence with her propensity for emotional submission through her affection for others. In line with Armstrong's viewpoint (542-43), I hold that the near-dying Jane's admittance into St John Rivers' household is a trope for male power, as it miniaturises Victorian women's position of dependence. Thus, Jane's admittance to Marsh End brings her imperative of independence to relief. When she inherits her uncle's wealth, Jane is at last financially independent, which, if we apply Owsley's logic, grants her self-agency.

Nevertheless, it is only through this agency that Jane's original wish for independence can begin to assume an increasingly domestic appearance. Jane implies that her joy at her

“independence” is offset by the absence of “a rejoicing family” to share her wealth with (441; ch. 33). So, when St John informs Jane that he and his sisters are her relatives, Jane’s joy surges:

Glorious discovery to a lonely wretch! This was wealth indeed! – wealth to the heart!
 ... This was a blessing, bright, vivid, and exhilarating; – not like the ponderous gift of gold: rich and welcome enough in its own way, but sobering from its weight. I now clapped my hands in sudden joy – my pulse bounded, my veins thrilled. (444; ch. 33)

The energy informing her thoughts reaffirms previous suggestions of the domestic ingredient of her good life. Jane’s first acts as financially independent are to share her wealth with the Rivers, free the Rivers sisters from labour and call them home – thereby turning them into normative (non-working), marriageable middle-class women –, and take over the management of Marsh End (445, 448; ch. 33: 450-52; ch. 34). These acts are both gender incoherent and coherent, being defined by masculine self-interest, resolve, and agency, as well as feminine selflessness, protection of the domestic ideal, and domestic management. Significantly, Jane appears to mostly enjoy how her domestic engagements, both household management and interactions with Diana and Mary, give her the opportunity to exercise her independence of mind, a masculine performance (450-52, 459; ch. 34). Jane’s domestic inclination seemingly contradicts her wish for independence, the household being a disciplinary institution meant to reinforce gender hierarchies and female subordination. This contradiction is mediated by the fact that Jane’s joy appears to arise from the right that having a family grants her to exercise power over Marsh End as the manager of its domestic affairs. At this juncture, it might therefore be said that the novel continues its earlier attempts to mystify Jane’s power by, to cite Langland, “appropriate rhetorics of home, hearth, and heart” (65), hence showing how it grafts contemporary gender paradoxes on to Jane’s good life. Jane’s simultaneous enjoyment of

human affection and financial and mental independence suggests that she has borne out St John's axiomatic words: "Well, propensities and principles must be reconciled by some means" (410; h. 30). However, this is not exactly the case.

Towards the end of her stay at Marsh End, it becomes clear that the contradictory elements of Jane's good life cannot be dovetailed but must bend to the dictates of the "happy marriage" plot, or rather the domestic ideal, which defines marriage as the zenith of female happiness. The novel seems to be conspiring for Jane's marriage with, and so submission to, either St John or Rochester, by covertly merging her desire for human affection with conjugal affection and, so, preparing her to give up her independence and give in to the domestic ideal. Owsley notes the implicatory tension as a clash between the novel's emphasis on female independence and the domestic ideal (64). Jane falling into a new "servitude" to St John (459; ch. 34), where she feels she must submit to him absolutely as his wife or suffer insupportable unhappiness due to his lack of affection for her is a good case in point. Her resistance against him is a crossroads in her life story, symbolising a fork in the road towards the good life, at which she is given the choice, at least on the surface, to yield to the domestic ideal and marry St John or leave his household and maintain her independence. On the brink of absolute emotional submission, Jane registers Rochester's disembodied cry, and her internal conflict is pushed to a crisis. In contrast to Gilbert (583), I claim that her hearing his cry does not bear testimony to her equality with him but rather, echoing Vejvoda (254), to her emotional submission to Rochester, her idol. Indeed, it is her reverence of Rochester that has kept her from pledging herself to St John this entire time, as St John himself discerns upon her repeated refusals: "I know where your heart turns and to what it clings" (477; ch. 35). Rochester's preternatural call enables Jane to assume the mental independence needed to pursue her own wants: "It was *my* time to assume ascendancy" (484; ch. 35). It is, as Owsley insists, only by way of her financial independence that Jane can act with such masculine self-assertion and confidently leave St John's household

to pursue Rochester (63). Nonetheless, in this scene, Jane's mental independence and emotional dependence are fused in such a way as to call into question the former, in Gilbert's discussion referred to as "mental autonomy": that is, is Jane really acting independently or from an emotional obligation to Rochester when she decides to search for him?

Ferndean: The Good Life

The resolution of Jane's internal conflict centres on the gender role changes of the final chapters. That there is a gender-power inversion between Jane and Rochester in the penultimate chapter, where the former is masculine/independent and the latter feminine/dependent, is now a commonplace, but, depending on the factors that bear on one's reading, various serious insights could be gained from examining this inversion. Godfrey holds that class induces and age completes the gender-power shift. As much as there is an element of truth in that, it seems more reasonable to assume that it is ultimately Jane's insistence on her good life and the novel's ostensible advocacy of it that makes the shift feasible. Through and during the shift, Jane is, at last, able to reconcile the contending ideas of her happiness and resolve her internal conflict: she is masculinely independent and enjoys the affection of Rochester, having now achieved what she wanted in life and being in a situation to live the best life she can.

Towards the close of the chapter, it becomes clear that to keep Rochester Jane must submit to social conventions and marry him. She tells Rochester that "To be your wife is, for me, to be as happy as I can be on earth" (513; ch. 38). It appears from her speech that being Rochester's wife gives her a sense of satisfaction that she has attained everything she has wanted in this life. If Jane desires to be a wife, she cannot expect to retain her independence. Thomson observes that a Victorian wife's identity was subsumed under her husband's, giving him full legal and economic power over her (13). Therefore, one may rather say that Jane has only arrived at the threshold of her good life. Whereas masculine qualities have brought her

there, she can only cross the good-life threshold feminine, as it coincides with the entrance to marriage. She claims not to consider marriage to him a “sacrifice” and avers that “I love you better now, when I can be really useful to you, than I did in your state of proud independence, when you disdained every part but that of the giver and protector” (513; ch. 38). Jane is beginning to conflate self-interest with care of Rochester, whose infirmities appear to serve the two-fold ideological end of preparing the ground for the role reversal and enhancing Jane’s self-sacrificial, moral, and caring disposition. Rochester once proclaimed Jane his angel, saying that “now I shall revisit it [Europe] healed and cleansed, with a very angel as my *comforter*” (300; ch. 24, my italics). Back then, Jane pointedly refused the role: “I am not an angel ... and I will not be one till I die: I will be myself” (300; ch. 24). Yet standing on the threshold of her good life, she now echoes his earlier proclamation and concedes to her role as his angel: “I gave him *comfort*” (512; ch. 38, my italics). Though independent and ready to live her best life, Jane is effectively preparing herself to give it up and become Rochester’s angel.

In crossing the good-life threshold a middle-class wife, Jane, in the final chapter, succumbs to the domestic ideal.

I have now been married ten years. I know what it is to live entirely *for* and with what I love best on earth. ... never did I weary of gazing *for* his behalf ... Never did I weary of reading *to* him; never did I weary ... of doing *for* him what he wished to be done. And there was *pleasure* in my *services* ... to yield that attendance was to indulge my *sweetest wishes*. (519-20; ch. 38, my emphasis)

The passage illustrates that Jane returns Rochester’s affection by sacrificing herself and literally living for him. This state of things grants her not only a level one happiness, “pleasure,” but also a level three happiness, her “sweetest wishes.” In other words, Jane is acting out her

independence insofar as she lives for Rochester, which is to say that the novel finesses the tensions in Jane's good life through a rhetoric of domestic happiness that confines her agency within the scope of her marriage and wifely "services." Vejvoda observes that their marriage is characterised by mutual idolatry (256), in a sense suggesting mutual submission. However, considering the symbolic work of the angel, Jane's wifely submission has greater significance, being a microcosm of a Victorian woman's submission to the middle-class patriarchy, which favours Rochester's superior role of patriarch. Owsley argues that Rochester's dependence conduces to the longevity of Jane's agency (63), yet Rochester recovers "the sight" of "one eye" (520; ch.38) and consequently some physical strength and, hence, masculine position, while Jane's wifely position negates any real claim to independence. In disagreement with Gilbert (584-86) and Owsley's (63-64) claims of an egalitarian marriage, I hold that Jane, in thus submitting to the domestic ideal, relinquishes her right to masculine independence for conventional feminine dependence. In the end, the pair have, as Godfrey similarly points out (868-69), assumed traditional roles. Jane's position is borne out by her feminine performances: she is now a mother, exhibiting *maternal love* and performing the typical unpaid, selfless, emotional, and reproductive domestic work of a normative middle-class woman (520; ch. 38); she defends middle-class morality by nurturing and praising her foster daughter, Adèle's, internalisation of English femininity (519; ch. 38). Indeed, in her care of Rochester, she is a Victorian angel (519-20; ch. 38). She reaffirms the association between marriage and happiness through her concluding comments on her own marriage and Diana and Mary's marriages: "My Edward and I, then, are happy: and the more so, because those we most love are happy likewise. Diana and Mary Rivers are both married" (520; ch.38). The novel, accordingly, resolves Jane's inner conflict by converting her into an ideal female, who lives the middle-class idea of a woman's good life rather than her own.

The Victorian Woman's Right to Happiness

In this chapter, I have analysed how Jane's pursuit of happiness impacts her gender identity. The theme of happiness is not tacit in the story. Indeed, the novel draws on a great deal of vocabulary related to being happy and reveals early on that Jane's story is organised around a woman's search for her own happiness. As the analysis shows, Jane's life plot translates into an internal conflict that reveals how a Victorian woman's pursuit of the good life is inevitably gendering, if her good life is self-defined in opposition to an externally imposed, ideological good life. Since the enactment of her happiness is inseparable from the enactment of gender in the Victorian context, one might even venture to suggest that Jane's self-defined happiness is a type of subversive gender performance in itself, where the happy woman is necessarily masculine. Nonetheless, the analysis illustrates that the cultural logic running through Jane's wish for human affection is the same as that which underwrites the contemporary gender ideology. Due to the puissance of the middle-class gender ideology, therefore, Jane eventually concedes to the middle-class idea of her good life, where being an angel is tantamount to living the best life a Victorian middle-class woman can live, or rather is entitled to live. Her concession offers an insight into the cultural oppression of Victorian women. It follows that looking at gender ideals in *Jane Eyre* through the lens of happiness offers a valuable perspective on the rights of women in Victorian Britain.

Conclusion

My objective with this essay has been to explore the interaction between Jane's gender identity and her pathway to happiness. I have found that this relationship expresses a power battle between Jane and the cultural forces that deny her right to personal agency, which is manifested as an internal conflict indicative of gender discontent. Following Butler's discussion, gender is created through iterated gendered acts, but Jane's gender performances are sometimes repeated differently. I have traced this discrepancy to the novel's central paradox, which I have defined as a tension between Jane's wish for both independence and human affection. This wish is written into Jane's definition of happiness, her good life, the pursuit of which the novel revolves around. Significantly, the quest for independence prompts Jane's journey through the public sphere and coincides with exhibitions of agency and masculine performances, while that of affection impels her towards the domestic sphere and coincides with feminine performances and a lack of agency, so that Jane's pursuit of happiness becomes gendering and is characterised by an oscillation between gender incoherence and coherence.

As the analysis has shown, a transient and politically charged reconciliation of female independence and human affection briefly resolves Jane's internal conflict. Jane obtains her good life – independence and human affection – through the gender-role reversal with Rochester. By tying her personal success to masculinity, the novel effectively shows how the construction of gender relates to the construction of social power. However, it does this in a way that confirms patriarchal gender power relations, because it affirms that masculinity generates social power while femininity is disempowering. For this reason, we may, on the one hand, conclude that the novel fails to transcend gender bias, and this failure could be read as indicative of a susceptibility to the dominant patriarchal culture. On the other hand, the novel's stereotypical usage of gender meanings does not take away from its subversion of the middle-

class gender ideology, since it is only by giving Jane a masculine identity that the novel can identify the woman as an individual. Masculinity successfully allows the novel to show the woman to have an independent will that takes her outside the private sphere and into the public sphere, there casting her as a rival to, as opposed to a subject of, men. Since it is Rochester's feminine dependence that facilitates Jane's appropriation of the male role, it might further be inferred from the gender-role reversal that for an individual woman to attain her own good life it is necessary not only to gain masculine power but also to challenge and subdue the male and, likewise, patriarchy. What is more, it is through Jane's masculinity that the novel can dismantle the sex/gender link and, consequently, denaturalise coherent identities, expose the artificiality of the middle-class gender ideology, and reveal the performativity of gender.

It cannot be overemphasised that the overarching implications of Jane's gender incoherence are dangerous to the gendered middle-class politics of Victorian Britain. Favouring Godfrey's contention on the point (860), I argue that Jane successfully proves that gender deviance can infiltrate the ranks of the middle class. Contrary to Godfrey, I claim that Jane proves through her pursuit of happiness, and not her class-belonging or age-related power, that subversive women such as herself are an ideological weapon against the idea of gender stability and thus middle-class interests. In all, the novel depicts Jane as a threat to the middle-class patriarchal social order by hinting at the vulnerability of gender structures, thus opening these to challenge. If we employ Butler's terminology, we might rephrase this and say that the novel uses Jane's happiness to suggest that gender incoherence can be associated with heterosexuality, which is dangerous to heterosexual power relations, exemplifying, as it does, that masculinity, and thus power, is not an exclusively male attribute. The marriage conclusion, which reproduces middle-class gender roles and assigns Jane a conventional good life, instantiates the novel's awareness of the danger of sustaining the gender-role reversal and granting Jane her good life. Since the marriage conclusion, according to Moore (40,

43), Owsley (64), and Vejvoda (241-42), reflects the domestic ideal and the novelistic conventions of coupling female success with marriage, concealing women-related social problems, and promoting female submission through husband idolatry, it is plausible that the core message of the novel is baked into the gender-role reversal, the most disruptive episode in the novel.

The relationship between the gender-role reversal and the marriage ending should be considered further. We might view the gender-role inversion as a disillusioning episode that reveals as much the danger of Victorian women pursuing a self-defined good life as their cultural oppression. As mentioned in the analysis, the gender-role inversion offers Jane a taste of her own good life. She is, nevertheless, not allowed to savour it. Rather, as her dialogue with the feminine Rochester demonstrates, Jane suddenly appears to perceive marriage to Rochester as inevitable for her good life. It seems reasonable to therefore argue that Jane's arrival at Ferndean can be reconceived as her arrival at the threshold of the good life from which she is barred to cross, if she is not feminine and a wife. That Jane's journey to Ferndean is enabled by masculine properties that are stripped away as she crosses that good-life threshold into a household reasserts the tacit notion that a self-defined level three happiness is a masculine, and so male, privilege. It also confirms the reality that there was only one kind of good life granted to Victorian women, the domestic ideal. Thus, in the final chapter, the novel appears to take a retrograde step by, in keeping with Armstrong (545-46) and Godfrey's (868) arguments, transforming Jane into a middle-class wife, an angel in the house. The marriage points to the ideological irreconcilability of the elements in Jane's good life and implicitly communicates the politic of the middle-class gender ideology, which insisted on the unintelligibility and illogicality of gender incoherence and the intelligibility and logicity of gender coherence. By pushing for Jane's coherence, the novel, therefore, affirms that masculinity is a property of the male, not female, body.

The novel's apparent resignation to the forces of middle-class culture culminates in Jane's marriage and subsequent adoption of the feminine ideal. However, prior to the marriage, the novel has shown itself weak to the power of the middle-class gender ideology through repeated promotions of Jane's enculturation and coherent behaviour. Glancing back at Langland's observation of the mystification of female power, one might argue that the novel deploys comparable rhetorical tactics: it exploits Jane's wish for human affection in order to gradually package her desire for independence in a domestic wrapping, slowly confining her power to her role as a domestic manager. That Jane achieves her goal of human affection through masculine independence that gives way to feminine dependence suggests the culturally more digestible notion that female use of masculine properties is only permissible if it leads the woman to the household. This would mean that any independence is meant to facilitate a woman's journey from one household to another household over which she becomes the domestic manager, the angel, all in harmony with the middle-class good life. Since Jane's good life is ultimately portrayed as self-defined – as originating in an independent mind –, the novel appears to limn the domestic ideal as a natural, female desire. Thus, the domestic ideal is not only replicated but also capitalised on to create a situation in which a woman fights for it using masculine qualities. In indicating women's misuse of their own power, the novel seems to flag up women's own blind participation in sustaining the domestic ideal and their own oppression.

Since Jane never lives out her own good life, the type of happiness she ultimately enjoys must be assessed. As suggested, Jane, in her role as a domestic angel, lives out the middle-class idea of the good life rather than her own, a situation made more poignant by Jane's inability to discern this. Owing to this inability, Jane's account of her domestic happiness is unsurprisingly idyllic and therefore rings with a falseness that calls attention to the discrepancy between the marriage and the role reversal. In view of her marital happiness, Jane appears, as Gilbert also

claims (583), to have shed her inner female rage and to be content with her life. Rather than a level three happiness, then, her marriage could be said to instead offer her a level two happiness, a general contentment with life, which might, as it did at Lowood, change if the truth of her situation dawns on her again.

So, although the novel conforms with the domestic ideal, I must stress that it has made some telling points about a society that interferes with and manipulates women's self-defined good life for its own cultural survival. Believing that she is independent in her marriage, Jane's retrospective narrative expresses this belief, even while it shows that she gradually loses her independence. Rather than being a sign of her continuing agency, as Owsley has it (54-55), Jane's narrative is likelier a reflection of a persisting but quiescent internal conflict about her principle of independence and her propensity for emotional submission. Above all, what Jane's pursuit of happiness does is offer a meaningful insight into the inward struggle of Victorian women, at a time when the nature, meaning, and scope of their identity was determined by men.

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