"I will break obstacles to happiness": An Analysis of how Mr. Rochester Challenges the Victorian Masculine Norm and the Boundaries of Separate Spheres in *Jane Eyre*

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Introduction

The remarkable love story between Jane Eyre and Edward Fairfax Rochester takes place in Charlotte Brontë's epic novel, *Jane Eyre,* published in 1847, initially under the pen name Currer Bell. Through the novel, Brontë shocked the aristocratic Victorian elite with her outspoken critique of the prevailing Victorian ideals by creating a love story that should not have been possible. This is confirmed by the contemporary Victorian critic Elizabeth Rigby in her scathing criticism of the novel, delivered in her review "Vanity Fair–and Jane Eyre" (1848), in which she, at the time, was unaware of the identity of the author but concluded: "Whoever it be, it is a person who, with great mental powers, combines a total ignorance of the habits of society, a great coarseness of taste, and a heathenish doctrine of religion" (175), and states that: "The hero and heroine are beings both so singularly unattractive that the reader feels they can have no vocation in the novel but to be brought together; and they do things which, though not impossible, lie utterly beyond the bounds of probability" (162). Despite the sharp critique, the success of this love story lies in Brontë's ability to challenge social conventions and test "the bounds of probability", not only by her female protagonist Jane but equally with her male protagonist, Mr. Rochester.

In his efforts to achieve happiness, Mr. Rochester transgresses boundaries of both social conventions and Victorian masculine ideals. Tired of being burdened and haunted by a dark past, Mr. Rochester decides that he deserves happiness in his life at any cost. He is trapped in a marriage to a mentally ill woman, Bertha, whom he keeps hidden from public knowledge in the attic of Thornfield Hall, and when his path crosses Jane's, he is prepared to take unconventional, even ungodly, measures to secure a life with her as he declares "I will break obstacles to happiness" (148). These words function as a starting point for my claim that the obstacles he refers to reflect not simply the marriage he is trapped in, but in a much

larger perspective, refer to the Victorian ideals which he finds suffocating and that prevent him from finding happiness. Returning to England after years on the continent, Mr. Rochester appears lost in the Victorian ideals that he claims are forced upon him. He struggles with the ideals of masculinity and the masculine power that he is expected to show. In addition, he is struggling to adapt to the ideal life in separate spheres, where women served as fragile and shielded domestic angels and a retreat for men who were worn out by the demands of their public sphere. Historians of the period, such as John Tosh, have addressed the impact of the challenges that followed the shift of male ideals from Georgian male politeness to the ambitious Victorian man. Mr. Rochester seems to be a man who got lost in this transitional shift.

This essay will be divided into two chapters. Chapter One will contextualise *Jane Eyre* and provide a review of previous readings on the ideology of Separate Spheres and Masculinity and manliness in Victorian England, as well as present various views on Mr. Rochester's characteristics. It serves as an important foundation for my analysis in Chapter Two, in which I will analyse how Mr. Rochester tackles the prevailing ideals of masculinity and how he, in his own way, manoeuvres in a society organised in separate spheres to finally reach his goal of happiness.

1. Chapter One

Jane Eyre was published in the first decade of the Victorian era that commenced when Queen Victoria ascended the throne in 1837. In her near 64 years of tenure on the throne, she left a significant imprint on English society and societal organization. During the Victorian era the difference between men and women was enforced, new gender ideals implemented, and men and women were expected to live their lives in separate spheres under completely different conditions. Chapter One provides, through previous readings, an historical and societal context to *Jane Eyre* focusing on the ideology of Separate Spheres as well as describing the ideals of Masculinity and manliness in Victorian England. In addition, previous readings on the characteristics of Edward Fairfax Rochester end this chapter that serves as the foundation for my analysis of Mr. Rochester in Chapter Two.

1.1. The Ideology of Separate Spheres

In the late Georgian era and during the following Victorian era, the view on gender was primarily characterized by stressing the differences between men and women, rather than emphasizing any equal traits. Industrialization drove demands for male professionalization and achievement but also for a space where men could calm down from a bustling work life, the home sphere, with a domestic angel by his side. Women were considered fragile 'angels in the house' and were to be silent observers, protected from the dangers and temptations in the public sphere.

In 1864, the English philosopher and writer, John Ruskin, delivered two lectures in Manchester, *Sesame: Of King Treasuries* and *Lilies: Of Queens' Gardens,* in which he emphasized the gender differences. The lectures, later published in 1865 under the name *Sesame and Lilies,* became one of the most significant and well-known published works

on separate spheres. In *Sesame and Lilies* Ruskin deems males and females so fundamentally different that any comparison is fruitless: "they are in nothing alike" (76). Ruskin stresses, though, that it has nothing to do with the superiority of one sex over the other, but instead that the sexes' fundamentally different qualities required their separate spheres, and he writes:

> Now their separate characters are briefly these. The man's power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender. His intellect is for speculation and invention; his energy for adventure, for war, and for conquest, wherever war is just, wherever conquest necessary. But the woman's power is for rule, not for battle, - and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision […] By her office, and place, she is protected from all danger and temptation. The man, in his rough work in open world, must encounter all peril and trial: (77).

Through his lectures and the publication, Ruskin injects new life into a longstanding, but not unchallenged, ideology that confined women to a shielded domestic life while allowing men to thrive exclusively in the public sphere. About twenty years before Ruskin's lectures, in 1847, Brontë publishes *Jane Eyre*, which offers critique of the idea that men and women have different natures. Unlike Ruskin, though, Brontë points out similarities between the sexes that Ruskin later adamantly denies. In Jane's interior monologue, Brontë outlines the unfair expectations of women as 'angles in the house':

> Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex. (Brontë, 117-118)

Amanda Vickery, the author of "Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History" (1993), states that while the Separate Spheres ideology dates back to ancient times, its systematic use is a more recent phenomenon and "one of the fundamental organizing characteristics of middle-class society in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century England" (Hall qtd. in Vickery, 387). Vickery

claims that the focus during this period to define masculinity and femininity, and separate them, created the middle-class and its disparate groups: “It was separate gender spheres which allegedly put the middle in the middle-class” (387). Vickery mentions, though, that there are several other perspectives among prominent historians on the reasons for the re-establishment of separate spheres.

Cathy Ross focuses on the importance of the evangelical movement in combination with industrialization in her article “Separate Spheres or Shared Dominions?”. She refers to works by prominent eighteenth-century evangelicals, such as the Anglican clergyman Thomas Gisborne, whose writing intended to enhance moral, pious, and proper behaviour in English society. In his work, *Enquiries Into the Duties of Men in the Higher and Middle Classes of Society* (1794), Thomas Gisborne specifically aimed to address men’s moral responsibilities in professional and industrial settings. Ross argues that, in addition to the evangelical movement, the Industrial Revolution was of great importance in re-enforcing separate spheres. A public male-exclusive sphere was created as industries and trade grew and male professionalization gained momentum. The natural consequence, thus, became a separate domestic sphere for women, in large intended as a sanctuary for worn-out men.

Ross points out, though, that the insistence on separate spheres “held within it the seeds of its own subversion” (230). Enclosing women together in their own sphere created strong bonds of sisterhood among them and awakened the spirit of the female liberation movement, not least through their influence in philanthropic activities. Charitable work, especially through church, gave women an entitled space in the public sphere “[a]nd so “the angel in the house” becomes “the angel out of the house” and maintaining the ideology of “separate spheres” becomes increasingly problematic” (230). Ross finishes by concluding that the reality of the spheres might not be what it looks like from the outside and that “[i]t seems that the spheres are perhaps more porous than strict adherence to the ideology allows” (230).

This is further discussed in Sarah Fitzpatrick's study "Separate Spheres: A Closer Look at Ideological Gender Roles in Victorian England through the Sensation Novel", where she argues that the general view of Victorian social culture is seen in an overly simplistic way, leaving little room for recognition of any alternative to the separate sphere order within the Victorian middle class "and include[s] very little about those who transgressed these boundaries of normalcy" (2). She establishes that Victorian sensation novels, featuring protagonists that transgress the boundaries of normality, actually show realistic proof of a society much more complex than the boundaries of separate spheres allowed. More recent research moves in the same direction and finds the correspondence between ideology and reality limited: "Wherever angelic uniformity was to be found it was not in Victorian sitting rooms, despite the dreams of certain poets, wistful housewives, and ladies' advice books" (Vickery, 391). Whether or not it is John Ruskin that Vickery refers to by addressing "certain poets" is not specifically expressed. However, she concludes that "[m]ost historians now concede that few women actually lived up to the fantasies of Ruskin and Patmore" (391).

Whereas the situation for women is well described, most historical studies offer limited knowledge about how men lived up to life in separate spheres. However, a modern study by historian Martin Pugh on four Victorian marriages within the aristocratic circles shows some evidence of similar non-compliance as shown for women. Pugh found that "each of these husband-and-wife teams included a partner who tended to be home-loving, unambitious, and easily exhausted by the stress of public life; in every case, it was the male" (Pugh qtd. in Vickery, 390). Pugh's conclusions then further confirm the porosity of the separate spheres' ideology.

In summary, this review shows that the longstanding ideology of Separate Spheres was injected with new life in the Victorian era, in which women were confined to a

shielded domestic life, while men thrived in the public sphere in line with new masculine ideals, driven by new social and professional demands. The review reveals, though, that the spheres were not as watertight as the ideology claimed and that the correspondence between ideology and reality was likely limited, at least in some parts of society. In keeping with the focus on masculinity in this essay, Chapter Two will include an analysis of how Mr. Rochester, as an aristocratic man with his own agenda in the pursuit of happiness, meets the challenges of a Victorian society organized in separate spheres.

1.2. Masculinity and Manliness in Victorian England

Life in separate spheres required strict adherence to set gender ideals and any deviation from the norm, either by men or women, challenged its intended functionality. Men and women were deemed fundamentally different in the Victorian era and subsequently existed under separate norms and expectations. This section will map the dominating ideals of masculinity and manliness in Victorian England and describe its development, establishment, and challenges. The prevailing norm and expectations on the manly man function as an important basis for my analysis and understanding of Mr. Rochester's masculinity.

The Victorian masculine ideals were a result of a gradual change in the ideals that existed during the earlier Georgian era and were driven by new societal and professional demands, not least due to the ongoing industrialization. In "Gentlemanly Politeness and Manly Simplicity in Victorian England", John Tosh presents a comprehensive picture of Victorian masculinity and discusses the shift that had taken place from the Georgian ideal of genuine male politeness as a core quality to the Victorian ambitious man, for whom politeness became merely a feigned instrument to achieve set goals: "Its [politeness'] place as a marker of social and political virtue was taken by 'manliness'" (Tosh, 2002, 456). In line with the declining politeness, fashion and appearance lost their position as manly ideal qualities, and

the *English Dandy*, for whom these qualities were essential, ceased to be a model for young men. The manly man who emerged instead was to be better suited for new societal demands, than a gentleman who could perform gracefully in social establishments. A place to start was the school system, although the reformation from 'outward to inward gentlemen' did not proceed as quickly as some would prefer. In 1844, Lord Ashley (later the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury) commented on the elite school Eton's stagnation in the old system of educating polite gentlemen, stating that "it does not make the man required for the coming generation. We must have nobler, deeper, and sterner stuff; less refinement and more truth; more of the inward, not so much of the outward, gentleman" (qtd. in Tosh, 456). The public Rugby school led by Tomas Arnold was instead an example of a school leading the way in this transformation.

Being born into noble circumstances did not alone make a manly man and the list of required qualities Tosh presents is extensive: having high work ethics, courage, endurance, high morality, virility, being both chaste and promiscuous, energetic, truthful, strong, decisive, assertive, independent and straightforward. Victorian men needed, in the words of the prominent Scottish essayist Thomas Carlyle, "'toughness of muscle' and 'toughness of heart'" (Tosh, 460). Eighteenth-century leisure and sociability, built on politeness, became in the Victorian era synonymous with inherited money and/or lack of ambition.

Work had a prominent position as a measure of masculinity in the Victorian era, and self-discipline and personal achievements were highly regarded. In *How Men Are Made*, the author William Landels stated (1859) that "[i]t is by work, work, work – constant, never-ceasing work – work well and faithfully done… that you are to rise out of things into men" (qtd. In Tosh, 466). The all-important individualistic approach sparked competition, not least

among bourgeois men who struggled to find the balance between being individualistic and at the same time following the expectations of conforming to certain ideals.

Sexes were separated not only in separate spheres but also in the contemporary exaggeration of the actual biological difference between the sexes: “Women were now typecast as sexually passive, men as consumed by an all-powerful libido” (Tosh, 464), thus expecting Victorian men to be sexually promiscuous while, in a true double standard, being chaste to emphasize high morality and power. Stressing the gender differences and downplaying the female sex was a prerequisite for affirmed manliness. Women were generally regarded as unstimulating company by Victorian men, as expressed by the 19th Century British historian and Bishop, Mandell Creighton, who said: “I find ladies in general are very unsatisfactory mental food” (qtd. in Tosh, 465).

In “Sexing the Male: Manifestations of Masculinity in *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *Villette*”, Emma Foye Quinn refers to Lord Byron, who unlike Creighton does not view the company of women as “unsatisfactory mental food” but quite the opposite. Byron writes: “There is something to me very softening in the presence of a woman, some strange influence, […] But yet, I always feel in better humour with myself and every thing else, if there is a woman within ken” (Byron, *Letters* qtd. in Quinn, 12). The differences in opinion demonstrate the complexity of masculinity in the Victorian era. As Quinn shows, the transition from the previous romantic and gentlemanly male to the Victorian self-made professional male was not a smooth shift: “This contradiction led to complications in codes of behaviour, as men were caught in a transition and were expected to emulate Romantic qualities in some senses, and Victorian attributes in others” (10). Quinn argues that the contradictions of male expectations and ideals were particularly noticeable within the different spheres, the public and the domestic one, ultimately revealing an instability in the masculine identity. Whereas the domestic sphere, governed by a female hand, was the

relaxing environment the masculine man needed, he was not supposed to indulge in pleasure, but keep a virtuous masculine approach. A soft, feminine, wasteful approach was "not in honor of the state's goals" (9). The new Victorian societal order required manly men to uphold a tough masculine approach in all spheres. Quinn argues, though, as do Cathy Ross and Sarah Fitzpatrick, that in reality, the separate spheres were more of hybrid spheres than actually separate, making it even more complicated for men to follow the expected codes of behavior. Quinn, furthermore, notes that works by the Brontë sisters often showcase this complexity in their "depictions of power in the public and private spheres in the relationships between men and women, highlighting the interactive and unstable relationship of the domestic and social worlds" (58).

Quinn and Tosh both share a constructivist view of gender. However, they do not seem to be in full agreement in all parts, especially concerning how male sexuality was to be understood. While Tosh argues that men were seen as "consumed by an all-powerful libido" (Tosh, 464) and expected to sow their wild oats, Quinn states that Victorian men were expected to be sexually abstinent to show moral strength and signal patriarchal power and refers to Eliza B Duffey, who in her book, *The Relations of the Sexes* (1876), described male power in the terms of liquid energy, and semen as "the most important agent for the nourishment of the brain" that should be kept and not wasted. Men who, nevertheless, indulged in these pleasures, Duffey continues: "in either lawful or unlawful indulgence, become weak, vacillating, and unenergetic in their natures, less firm in bone and muscle, have voices more approaching the feminine tone, and have lighter beards. They are, in fact, imperfect men, for they have been spendthrift of their manhood" (Quinn,78). This, Quinn states, is the ultimate contradiction for the Victorian male; being sexual is considered masculine but acting out the sexual energy could be considered an effeminate act.

In summary, this section has addressed the shift in masculine ideals from Georgian politeness to the Victorian ambitious man, characterized by "'toughness of muscle' and 'toughness of heart'" (Tosh, 460), and the challenges posed by this change. In addition, conflicting expectations of Victorian men's sexuality, the emphasis on the biological gender differences between men and women, and the Victorian man's view of women are three more aspects adding to the complex code of masculine behavior in the separate spheres. Mr. Rochester's own masculinity mirrors the complexity posed by the shift of ideals and will be analyzed in Chapter Two.

1.3. Previous Readings on the Characteristics of Mr. Rochester

In previous readings, Edward Fairfax Rochester is assigned a range of characteristics from queer to Byronic hero to Jane Eyre's doppelgänger. However, in most cases, his traits are not described as especially charming. This is something that Elizabeth Rigby does not hesitate to emphasize in her contemporary review of the novel "Vanity Fair–and Jane Eyre" (1848), as she deems him a "*blasé* monster" (167) with blunt, anti-Christian and sarcastic manners: "He talks to her [Jane] at one time imperiously as to a servant, and at another recklessly as to a man. He pours into her ears disgraceful tales of his past life" (164). Here, Rigby refers to Mr. Rochester's liberate talks with Jane, especially about his amorous life with his French mistress, Céline Varens, and these are words not suitable for a young woman's ear, according to Rigby. Given the novel's huge success, not everyone seems to have agreed. With great dissatisfaction, Rigby concludes that because of the great number of female readers who showed an unexpected predilection for Mr. Rochester, the natural desire for illegitimate romance seems to have a greater power in the nature of mankind than to remain faithful to purity and pious morality: "Mr. Rochester is a man who deliberately and secretly seeks to violate the laws of both God and man, and yet we will be bound half our lady readers are

enchanted with him for a model of generosity and honour" (166). Rigby is not only referring to Mr. Rochester's immoral sexual allusions here, but also to his intentions in marrying Jane, despite knowing that a bigamous marriage would inevitably break both the law of God and of state: "in his self-constituted code of morality, he had thought it his right, and even his duty, to supersede by a more agreeable companion" (165).

In "'He is rather peculiar, perhaps': Reading Mr Rochester's Coarseness Queerly", Claire O'Callaghan presents a modern, 21st century, interpretation of Mr. Rochester as queer. She initially comments on the aforementioned Elizabeth Rigby and states that through her critique, especially commenting on illegitimate romance and deeming Mr. Rochester 'coarse', Rigby undoubtedly, though possibly unintentionally, raised the question of his queer masculinity early on. O'Callaghan emphasizes the queerness in Mr. Rochester's choice to live as a bachelor (although Mr. Rochester technically was not a bachelor but presented himself as such) as this is a clear departure from the contemporary marriage norm. Self-chosen bachelorhood "suggested an abdication from patriarchy and an indifference to lineage and posterity" (Tosh, 2007, 173). Another important episode is when Mr. Rochester dresses like a gypsy woman and O'Callaghan claims that this "cross-dressing" shows proof of a queer identity crisis. Brontë's well-known obsession with Lord Byron's work may also have inspired her to mirror Lord Byron's polymorphous life and travels in Mr. Rochester's many amorous travels in Europe (O'Callaghan, 7-8).

The Byronic inspiration in Brontë's writing is further explored in Marybeth Forina's review, "Edward Rochester: A New Byronic Hero", but from quite a different angle. While she argues that Brontë's creation of Mr. Rochester is inspired by the seemingly arrogant and unflattering, although honorable, heroes in Lord Byron's work, she concludes that Brontë's Byronic hero develops into a *repentant* Byronic hero following the devastating fire in Thornfield Hall. When Mr. Rochester goes from completely denying the existence of

his mad wife in the attic, to risking his life to save hers, he is showing remorse not typical of a Byronic hero "as the typical Byronic hero does not atone for his sin" (86). Forina states that the crippling injuries he suffered in the fire are symbolic of a weakening transformation, castration and thus loss of masculinity. However, in various film adaptations, Mr. Rochester loses his sight, not his hand, as opposed to in the novel, which might be an important sign of extant masculinity (Forina, 86).

In "Picturing in me a hero of romance": The Legacy of Jane Eyre's Byronic Hero", Sarah Wotton is focusing on the resemblance between Brontë's Byronic hero and Lord Byrons' protagonists, and whilst she asserts their similar outer appearance, she focuses on deeper traits and discusses the proof of concealed identities apparent in the novel, among them the gypsy cross-dressing episode. She further notes that just like Byron's character Conrad in *The Corsair*, Mr. Rochester has been "Warp'd by the world in Disappointment's school" (Byron qtd. in Wotton, 231) and formed and hardened into an unsympathetic man by previous experiences in life.

Kathryn R Martel presents a reading of Mr. Rochester far from the world of Byronic heroes and focuses instead on Mr. Rochester as Jane Eyre's Doppelgänger. Her thesis in "Cultivating Eyre: Edward Rochester as Jane Eyre's Doppelgänger" sets aside the gender perspective and focuses on Mr. Rochester's and Jane's "deep affinities and essential equality" (13). She claims that Brontë has constructed Mr. Rochester to mirror, respond to, and encourage Jane's feelings, thus functioning as Jane's male alter-ego. In a complex argument, Martel discusses how Mr. Rochester and Jane share a spiritual space. His strength and respect for her make it possible for her to grow beyond the limiting Victorian boundaries. Both protagonists also claim a mental connection, Mr. Rochester with the famous "string somewhere under [his] left ribs, tightly and inextricably knotted to […] [her] little frame" (Brontë, 250) and Jane who claims that "I have something in my brain and heart, in my blood

and nerves, that assimilates me mentally to him" (Brontë, 178). The weakening injuries Mr. Rochester suffered in the devastating fire in Thornfield Hall made their spiritual and physical union possible, Martel argues, and enables him and Jane to reach "sexual equality – spiritual and practical" (Martel, 17).

Finally, Edward Fairfax Rochester is not only the main male protagonist in *Jane Eyre* but also in the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) by the Dominican-British author Jean Rhys. This novel is published more than a century after *Jane Eyre*, and acts as a prequel to *Jane Eyre*, telling the story of Mr. Rochester's colonial past, and as it turned out, his disastrous marriage to his first wife, Antoinette Cosway Mason, known in *Jane Eyre* as Bertha Mason, the mentally ill woman in the attic of Thornfield Hall. It is undeniably so that through Rhys's later creation of an earlier version of Mr. Rochester, Brontë's exclusivity to her character is lost, and his characteristics henceforward a subject for debate. In "Edward Rochester and the Margins of Masculinity in *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*", Robert Kendrick comments on the fact that Mr. Rochester's masculinity appears weaker in Brontë's *Jane Eyre* than in *Wide Sargasso Sea*: "When one approaches Brontë's text after reading Rhys's, this change makes it difficult for readers of *Jane Eyre* to position Rochester as a stock representative of the patriarchy, because he cannot see himself as such" (246).

Both Tosh and Quinn talk about the transition of masculinity between eras as a time of hybridity and heterogeneity, with several competing masculinity ideals existing simultaneously. It is also clear from the studies of the ideology of Separate Spheres that its boundaries were not watertight, but rather porous, as pointed out by Ross, Vickery, and Fitzpatrick, and more so than some moralists, like Rigby and Ruskin, would have liked and acknowledged at the time. Charlotte Brontë was, though, as noted by Quinn, ahead of her time both in recognizing and demonstrating the real complexity of English society in her works. It is thus not surprising that she created not one, but two, protagonists as symbols of

this complexity in a sensational novel, that to use Fitzpatrick's words, transgressed the boundaries of normalcy, not only by the female protagonist Jane but also by the male one, Mr. Rochester. Previous readings on Mr. Rochester's characteristics show a sprawling picture, allowing, as shown, various interpretations of his character. In the shadow of her message on incorruptible female strength and determination in Jane, Brontë creates doubt about the manly man, and the traits of masculinity in the character of Mr. Rochester, and in that way breaks away from the myth about the existence of the ideal man and a conformist society as the only way to reach happiness.

2. Chapter Two

This chapter's main focus is the analysis of the meaning behind Mr. Rochester's utterance "I will break obstacles to happiness" (148). My thesis assumes that his words do not refer to specific obstacles but to the social norms that he feels suffocate him and prevent him from finding true happiness. Mr. Rochester seems to struggle with the prevailing masculine norms and the organisation of a society in strict spheres. Defined gender norms and the ideology of Separate Spheres are closely connected and presuppose each other to function smoothly. It is thus hard to strictly separate them completely in the analyses below. The section on masculinity will inevitably touch on separate spheres and vice versa.

2.1. Mr. Rochester's Masculinity

Mr. Rochester is a true representative of the conflicting ideals of masculinity, both in relation to appearance, strength, and sexuality, which in turn, confirms the complex shift in masculine ideals. Several scenes show how he appears lost in the masculine ideals of the time. He lingers in an era where attributes defined masculinity rather than inner traits, and in boasting his sexual ability, he does not meet the Victorian manly ideal of sexual abstinence. In addition, he does not show the toughness and strength expected of a masculine man but instead shows weakness and self-doubt, which is especially evident at the occasions where Mr. Rochester conceals his identity and intentions. Concealing his identity allows Mr. Rochester to secretly acknowledge the complexity of masculinity without revealing his doubts to others.

Mr. Rochester resists the norms which he feels are imposed on him by Victorian society and which prevent him from achieving happiness in life. He shows frustration when he speaks about the society he is born into: "I am a trite common-place sinner, hackneyed in

all the poor petty dissipations with which the rich and worthless try to put on life" (142). Forced into a catastrophic marriage by his father and his brother for the sake of securing the family fortune and Thornfield Hall, and still haunted by its aftermath, he claims that he "was thrust on to a wrong track at the age of one and twenty, and ha[s] never recovered the right course since" (142). In this respect, Mr. Rochester fits into Wotton's, and Forina's description of the typical Byronic hero, as a man who is carrying the burden of previous mistakes in life. Whether he is honorable, though, could be questioned. In addition, his desperate search for love on the continent, in true Byronic style, outside the boundaries of the prudish English society, has left him with a bitter aftertaste, betrayed as he was by his mistress, the French opera dancer Céline Varens. He criticizes himself, though, for being stupid enough to believe in such a volatile romance: "I had – as I deserved to have – the fate of all other spoonies" (147). Even if Mr. Rochester shows several signs of "abdication from patriarchy and an indifference to lineage and posterity" (Tosh, 2007, 173), the use of 'fate' in his utterance contradicts that his 'bachelorhood' is self-chosen, as claimed by O'Callaghan, but rather the contrary. This is something that he intends to change. Outwardly, he plays the social game of his class but inwardly he confesses to Jane that he has other plans. He claims: "I don't doubt myself: I know what my aim is, what my motives are; and at this moment I pass a law, unalterable as that of the Medes and Persians, that both are right" (144). Selfishly, Mr. Rochester considers his aim for happiness, and his motives, so rightful that they should not even be questioned. In constructing his own laws and ethics, he shows indifference to adhering to societal conventions, laws, and morals in reaching this goal. Blinded by self-pity he seems to wonder what could possibly be worse than the situation he now finds himself in? He considers himself unfairly treated by life and exclaims: "since happiness is irrevocably denied me, I have a right to get pleasure out of life: and I *will* get it, cost what it may" (143)

whereupon he declares that “unheard-of-combinations of circumstances demand unheard-of rules” (144).

At the stage when Mr. Rochester presents the need for his own laws, Jane is unaware of the existence of his mentally ill wife Bertha who is hidden away in the attic of Thornfield Hall. Subsequently, she is unaware that ‘the unheard-of rules’ refer to his intentions to enter a bigamous marriage and much less that the marriage he envisions is not what everyone expects. Nevertheless, driven by godly morals, unlike Mr. Rochester’s, Jane immediately senses his intentions as “a dangerous maxim” and gives him a warning of breaching the laws of God: “The human and fallible should not arrogate a power with which the divine and perfect alone can be safely entrusted” (144). It is hardly surprising that putting such ungodly intentions in writing, as Brontë bravely did, evoked sour criticism from the Victorian guardians of morality.

In line with his concealed agenda, Mr. Rochester encourages the prospect of marrying the beautiful heiress, Miss Blanche Ingram, and the Ingram family is invited to Thornfield Hall for a relatively long stay. Like Jane, the guests are completely unaware of Mr. Rochester’s previous marriage and his secret wife in the attic. Hiding his mentally ill wife from public knowledge allows him to play the role of the outwardly perfect host but with a hidden agenda. On an evening gathering in the drawing-room, Miss Ingram declares her expectations of a manly man, apparently satisfied with the qualities she sees in Mr. Rochester. As he is skilled at concealing his true self and his insecurity, she could not be more wrong.

> “Oh, I am so sick of the young men of the present day!” exclaimed she, rattling away at the instrument. “Poor, puny things not fit to stir a step beyond papa’s park-gates: nor to go even so far without mama’s permission and guardianship! Creatures so absorbed in care about their pretty faces and their white hands, and their small feet; as if a man had anything to do with beauty! As if loveliness were not the special prerogative of woman – her legitimate appanage and heritage! I grant an ugly *woman* is a blot on their fair face of creation; but as to the *gentlemen*, let them be solicitous to possess only strength and valour: let their motto be: —Hunt, shoot, and fight: the rest is not worth a fillip. Such should be my device, were I a man (182).

These words by Miss Ingram sum up well the new Victorian masculine ideals and show the demand for a transition from "outward to inward gentlemen". In addition, her rather derogatory comment about the overplayed *English Dandy* also supports the complexity of the transition of male ideals. Miss Ingram's utterance shows the same impatience as expressed by the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury, who commented on the elite school, Eton's, stagnation in old gentlemanly values, rather than educating men equipped for the Victorian era's societal demands. It is also clear that Miss Ingram does not read her intended husband very well as she continues: "I am resolved my husband shall not be a rival, but a foil to me. I will suffer no competitor near the throne; I shall exact an undivided homage: his devotions shall not be shared between me and the shape he sees in the mirror" (182-183). Being a masculine foil to his future wife is not in line with Mr. Rochester's intentions. Rather the contrary.

There is a clear discrepancy between the new manly ideal that focuses on inner traits rather than appearance and Mr. Rochester's preoccupation with outwardly masculine markers. Early on, when he and Jane are still unacquainted and before Miss Ingram has uttered her opinion on the insignificance of male beauty, Mr. Rochester demands Jane's assertion regarding his appearance. She does not offer him the answer he expects. To his question "do you think me handsome?" she frankly answers, "No, sir." After asserting, albeit unconvincingly, that he considers "[b]eauty of little consequence, indeed!" he still demands an explanation from Jane: "Go on: what fault do you find with me, pray? I suppose I have all my limbs and all my features like any other man?" (137-138). Mr. Rochester's focus on appearance and beauty, while simultaneously desiring confirmation of his masculine traits "like any other man", is a contradiction proving his lack of adherence to the masculine ideals and does not correspond with being simple and masculine in manner and mind. Nor does it correspond with Miss Ingram's idea of the characteristics of a masculine man: "as if a man

had anything to do with beauty! […] let them be solicitous to possess only strength and valour: let their motto be: — Hunt, shoot and fight: the rest is not worth a fillip" (182).

The sexual expectations of a manly Victorian man are characterized by a complex double standard of being both chaste and promiscuous, which Mr. Rochester only partially fulfils. In his eagerness to affirm his masculinity, he reveals his sexual ability to Jane by referring to his preserved limbs "like any other man", thus mediating that his sexual capability is intact, and subsequently, his masculinity. However, the fact that he shortly thereafter gives Jane a detailed recapitulation of his intimate relationship with his French mistress: "Strange that I should choose you for the confidant of all this, young lady: […] as if it were the most usual thing in the world for a man like me to tell stories of his opera-mistress to a quaint, inexperienced girl like you!" (149), signals that he does not fulfil the masculine part. Whereas Mr. Rochester, by having a mistress, clearly fulfils the promiscuous aspect of masculinity that Tosh addresses, he subsequently fails to meet the conflicting expectation, raised by Quinn, that Victorian men were expected to be sexually abstinent to signal moral strength and patriarchal power. In that respect, Mr. Rochester fails in both morality and strength. Equally, relating to Duffey, who argued that semen was regarded as nourishment for the brain and that abstinence was a prerequisite for masculinity, Mr. Rochester's relation with a mistress, which supposedly resulted in an illegitimate child: "My spring [Céline Varens] is gone, however: but it has left me that French floweret on my hands" (146), would prove him an imperfect man having spent his manhood through unlawful indulgence.

Quite contrary to the proponents of the toughness of heart as a prerequisite of success for the Victorian man, Mr. Rochester appears to doubt its benefits. On one of the first evenings after he and Jane first met, he opens up to her in the drawing-room of Thornfield Hall. He questions if being hard and tough, as life has taught him to be, is the way forward or if he is to reclaim the softer heart he once had: "now I flatter myself I am hard and tough as an

Indian-rubber ball; pervious, though, through a chink or two still, and with one sentient point in the middle of the lump. Yes: does that leave hope for me?", "Hope of what, sir?" Jane asks, and his answer is: "Of my final re-transformation from Indian-rubber back to flesh?" (138). By reflecting on his sentimental core and pondering if transforming into a softer person would be beneficial for him, as his tough personality has not proved successful, Mr. Rochester takes the exact opposite direction in masculinity transformation compared to the masculine ideal. In this respect, he, additionally, deviates significantly from Miss Ingram's idea of the ideal man with a 'tough heart' essential for a masculine Victorian man. This scene is also a clear example of Brontë's ability to communicate social criticism through her protagonists in making them question this new masculine ideal.

Despite claiming himself hard and tough as an Indian-rubber ball, weakness and self-doubt shine through in Mr. Rochester's character and he craves Jane's approval on several occasions. As early as in their first abrupt meeting, there is symbolism in the way Mr. Rochester needs Jane's support to mount his horse after the fall on the icy path. The episode marks a starting point for Mr. Rochester's henceforward dependence on Jane. In Jane's own analysis of the situation, one can sense a bit of surprise in the aid needed in relation to the seemingly "dark, strong, and stern" masculine man she had in front of her: "My help had been needed and claimed; I had given it: I was pleased to have done something; trivial, transitory though the deed was, it was yet an active thing, and I was weary of an existence all passive" (123). In this short section, Brontë twists the gender ideals and presents not only a man who fails to live up to the image of the ideal strong man but also emphasizes female strength and ability, which challenges prevailing social ideals. In the same episode, Mr. Rochester's self-doubt is further confirmed in the way he immediately tests Jane on her knowledge about him and Thornfield Hall, as he talks about himself in third person without revealing who he is to find out any possible preconceptions about his person:

> "Whose house is it?"
> "Mr. Rochester's"
> "Do you know Mr. Rochester?"
> "No, I have never seen him."
> "He is not resident then?"
> "No."
> "Can you tell me where he is?"
> "I cannot.'"
> (122)

He is obviously expecting rumors to surround his person after a long time on the continent, and he is now using the opportunity to potentially find them out. In "Edward Rochester and the Margins of Masculinity in *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*," Kendrick makes a crucial point about this particular episode where he claims that "Brontë's Edward Rochester [...] represents a man who is quite at odds with the dominant narrative of being an "English Gentleman" in that "[his] first appearance in *Jane Eyre* is by way of a pratfall, while his dog comes off looking more myth-like and masterful than he" (Kendrick, 247). This picture contradicts Martel's claim that Mr. Rochester, as Jane's doppelgänger, represents the powerful aspect of her psyche, and shows instead that their relationship might be the opposite. This is further confirmed in the scene of his later proposal to Jane when he claims his need for her and asserts that he "should take to bleeding inwardly" (Brontë, 250) should the imaginative string between them snap.

Mr. Rochester's insecurity and self-doubt breed an immoral behavior that serves his own interests. As previously shown, in the horse episode, he uses concealed identity to find out preconceptions about himself. This is further demonstrated in the cross-dressing episode, in which Mr. Rochester dresses as a gypsy woman and in disguise presents himself to Jane and the party of his prominent guests, the Ingrams, as a fortune-teller. As it proves, he is only interested in his own fortune and uses misleading and false statements to find his prospects. After impressing the rest of the party with 'her' knowledge about them, 'she' turns

the attention to Jane but places himself as the subject of interest and tries to find out if Jane is jealous of his intended marriage to Miss Ingram:

> "You have seen love: have you not? – and, looking forward, you have seen him married, and beheld his bride happy?"
> "Humph! Not exactly. Your witch's skill is rather at fault sometimes."
> "What the devil have you seen, then?"
> "Never mind: I came here to inquire, not to confess. Is it known that Mr. Rochester is to be married?"
> "Yes; and to the beautiful Miss Ingram."
> "Shortly?"
> "Appearances would warrant that conclusion; and, no doubt (though, with an audacity that wants chastising out of you, you seem to question it), they will be a superlatively happy pair. (202)

Jane, though, refuses to be duped: "But, mother, I did not come to hear Mr. Rochester's fortune: I came to hear my own; and you have told me nothing of it" (202). When eventually disclosed, Jane is upset by the way Mr. Rochester treats her: "In short, I believe you have been trying to draw me out – or in; you have been talking nonsense to make me talk nonsense. It is scarcely fair, sir" (204). When she at a later stage confronts him and asks "Why did you take such pains to make me believe you wished to marry Miss Ingram?", his answer is "because I wished to render you as madly in love with me as I was with you; and I knew jealousy would be the best ally I could call in for the furtherance of that end", and with this Jane concludes, "Excellent! – Now you are small – not one whit bigger than the end of my little finger" (260). High morality and directness are, as mentioned by Tosh, core values in Victorian masculinity and Mr. Rochester thus fails on both accounts.

In conclusion, as these episodes have shown, Mr. Rochester fails to meet the Victorian masculine ideals on many levels. However, seen as a masculine man from the Byronic point of view, he meets more of the criteria in line with Lord Byron's masculine heroes, who like Mr. Rochester seem to struggle with the difficult transition of the masculine norms. Travelling the continent for amorous relationships, being arrogant and unsympathetic, focusing on outer appearances rather than inner traitsa, and showing concealed identities. And

he is a man that has been "Warp'd by the world in Disappointment's school" (Byron qtd. in Wotton, 231), which has made him ignorant enough to contemporary norms and conventions to create his own version of masculinity that allows him to "break obstacles to happiness" (148). With this in mind it is easy to relate to Elizabeth Rigby's contemporary critique of the author of this novel: "Whoever it be, it is a person who, with great mental powers, combines a total ignorance of the habits of society, a great coarseness of taste, and a heathenish doctrine of religion" (Rigby, 175), and conclude that her critique fits equally well on the characteristics of Mr. Rochester as on the author of *Jane Eyre.*

2.2 Mr. Rochester in Separate Spheres

The ideology of Separate Spheres is largely based on the enforcement of contemporary gender ideals and since Mr. Rochester turns out to deviate quite significantly from the Victorian masculine norm, it is not surprising to find that he also struggles with this societal organization. As the scenes below will show, Mr. Rochester craves Jane's company, but in the presence of others, he hides his intentions. He explores his options with, at times, concealed intentions that allow him to freely move across the boundaries of the separate spheres. In addition, because of Bertha, his home does not offer him the sphere of domestic sanctuary he longs for, and in a moment that could be perceived as a desire to conform to societal conventions, he expresses a desire for Jane to become his comforting 'angel in the house', which she immediately resists. It soon becomes clear, though, that women with angel-like qualities are not for him.

Mr. Rochester is aware that his wish for transgressing the boundaries of separate spheres is unconventional but cannot resist Jane's company:

> "The Lowood constraint still clings to you somewhat; controlling your features, muffling your voice, and restricting your limbs; and you fear the presence of a man and a brother – or father, or master, or what you will- to smile too gaily,

> speak too freely, or move too quickly: but in time, I think you will learn to be natural with me, as I find it impossible to be conventional with you" (Brontë, 145)

Asking Jane, as a Governess and a woman, to speak freely and be natural with him, as a man and her Master, clearly shows his indifferent attitude towards the conventions expected of him as a man. As shown in previous readings, the separate spheres ideology was a class phenomenon, in particular associated with the Victorian middle- and upper classes in societies. It was also a fragile ideology that in some places seemed to exist more as wishful thinking by prominent ideologists, rather than a reflection of actual reality. As such, Mr. Rochester's actions show evidence of the porosity in the separate spheres' ideology.

Unlike Mandell Creighton, who found women to be "unsatisfactory mental food", Mr. Rochester craves Jane's presence:

> "Impatiently I waited for evening, when I might summon you to my presence. An unusual – to me – a perfectly new character I suspected was yours: I desired to search it deeper, and know it better […] I made you talk: ere long I found you full of strange contrasts. Your garb and manner were restricted by rule; your air was often diffident, and altogether that of one refined by nature, but absolutely unused to society, and a good deal afraid of making herself disadvantageously conspicuous by some solecism or blunder; yet when addressed, you lifted a keen, a daring, and a glowing eye to your interlocutor's face: there was penetration and power in each glance you gave; when plied by close questions, you found ready and round answers." (307-308)

The urge to spend time with Jane made him hesitant, though not for setting conventions aside but in fear of losing her: "I was for a while troubled with a haunting fear that if I handled the flower freely its bloom would fade – the sweet charm of freshness would leave it" (308). After all, this shows that Mr. Rochester was aware that his way of approaching Jane was controversial, and would potentially scare even an open-minded, albeit conscientious soul like Jane away. In addition, by acknowledging to Jane the pleasure he finds in her company, he is not showing the virtuous masculine approach expected of a man in the company of a woman and is thus showing instability in his masculinity. In a bigger picture, both these excerpts from the novel contain societal critique in that Charlotte Brontë lets Mr. Rochester convey the

consequences that come from women's unfamiliarity with society following their strict existence in the domestic sphere.

Despite being ignorant of conventions, Mr. Rochester does not appear to be completely indifferent to other people's opinions. His position, as opposed to Jane's, allows him to play the game of exploring his options in this porous ideology without revealing his intentions to the members of his class. This is evident in the way he acts when the Ingram family are guests at Thornfield Hall. His request for Jane's, albeit withdrawn, attendance in the drawing-room at night with the party of high-born, provides him with the perfect solution for a double game. Even though a few eyebrows are slightly raised by Jane's attendance, she is insignificant enough for the guests to ignore her presence and openly judge her, as Mrs. Dent does: "I noticed her; I am a judge of physiognomy, and in hers I see all the faults of her class" (180). This allows Mr. Rochester to keep a close enough eye on Jane and to observe her, which he later admits to: "I wondered what you thought of me – or if you ever thought of me; to find this out, I resumed my notice of you" (308), while at the same time entertaining his guests and pursuing his pretended interest in marrying Miss Ingram. Jane, though, is left utterly confused by his mixed messages, as his intimate conversations with her when they are by themselves, signal otherwise. He is torn between the expectations of him following contemporary norms and his wish to pursue his own agenda. Like the cross-dressing episode, this is a scene where Mr. Rochester's self-doubt shines through, and he fails to meet the masculine ideals in both directness and high morality as he uses Jane to test his possibilities.

A domestic sphere, a home, managed by a loving wife is an important cornerstone in the ideology of Separate Spheres. For Mr. Rochester, Thornfield Hall does not offer him a domestic sanctuary but quite the contrary, because of Bertha: "On a frosty winter afternoon, I rode in sight of Thornfield Hall. Abhorred spot! I expected no peace – no pleasure there" (306). Similarly, at an earlier occasion, when he asserts to Jane his fondness of

its architecture, he nevertheless adds: "and yet how long have I abhorred the very thought of it; shunned it like a great plague-house! How I do still abhor-" (148). It is in this setting, viewing Thornfield Hall with "Pain, shame, ire – impatient, disgust, detestation", as a symbol for the battlements in his life, that he now decides to take control over his destiny and utters the words: "I will break obstacles to happiness" (148).

Having now secured, he thinks, a loving future wife in Jane, he foresees her as his and Thornfield Hall's salvation and during the courtship leading up to their marriage, he claims: "I flew through Europe half mad; with disgust, hate, and rage, as my companions: now I shall revisit it healed and cleansed, with a very angel as my comforter" (257). By referring to Jane as his comforting angel, Mr. Rochester quite unexpectedly alludes to the conventional grounds of separate spheres, where the 'angel in the house' traditionally refers to a dependent woman, shielded from public life and whose aim is to please her husband. Jane's answer is immediate: "I am not an angel," I asserted; "and I will not be one till I die: I will be myself. Mr. Rochester, you must neither expect nor exact anything celestial of me" (257). The desire to have an angel in his home is perhaps not so much about what he expects of Jane, but more about knowing what other people expect of him. Potentially it is also what he thinks he needs to 'heal' Thornfield Hall and make it a home again. However, as many times before, Jane's prompt and honest answer puts an end to his doubts, as he concludes that such a woman would not be right for him after all:

> "To women who please me only by their faces, I am the very devil when I find out they have neither souls nor hearts […] but to the clear eye and eloquent tongue, to the soul mate of fire, and the character that bends but does not break – at once supple and stable, tractable and consistent – I am ever tender and true." (258)

Jane, who like him is aware that this is controversial, asks: "Had you ever experience of such a character, sir?" Did you ever love such an one?", whereupon he answers, "I love it now" (258).

After once more receiving Jane's confirmation, Mr. Rochester finally seems to leave other people's opinions on their relationship behind. This is clear from the conversation between Jane and Mr. Rochester the day after his proposal to her, and following the kiss in the hall of Thornfield Hall, which was observed by Mrs. Fairfax, the housekeeper:

> "Communicate your intentions to Mrs. Fairfax, sir: she saw me with you last night in the hall, and she was shocked. Give her some explanation before I see her again. It pains me to be misjudged by so good a woman."
> "[...] I will enlighten the old lady's understanding. Did she think, Janet, you had given the world for love, and considered it well lost?"
> "I believe she thought I had forgotten my station; and yours, sir."
> "Station! Station! – your station is in my heart, and on the necks of those who would insult you, now or hereafter" (261).

This scene is a reminder of how unstable the boundaries between spheres actually were, and it is also a good reminder of Quinn's words about the Brontë sisters' ability to picture the complexity and fragility of this ideology in their "depictions of power in the public and private spheres in the relationships between men and women, highlighting the interactive and unstable relationship of the domestic and social worlds" (Quinn, 58). It is clear, from this scene, that both Mr. Rochester and Jane are aware of the controversy in this arrangement, but at this stage, they both intend to pass the boundaries of their respective class, and spheres, for good.

Mr. Rochester's past, though, caught up with him at the altar when he was about to marry Jane, and his secret wife in the attic was disclosed. Utterly devastated, but staying true to herself and her morals, Jane escaped Thornfield Hall in the early hours of the following day after rejecting Mr. Rochester's pleas to stay with him as his mistress. Equally devastated, Mr. Rochester was hit by disaster as "[d]ivine justice pursued its course" (431). In his fruitless attempt to rescue Bertha from the flames in Thornfield Hall, he lost his hand and his sight, and possibly, as both Forina and Martel suggest, his masculinity. In this process he "began to experience remorse, repentance; the wish for reconcilement to [his] Maker" (431) and accepted God's hand as guidance. In his prayers, he called for Jane's return and was

heard. Upon her return, she found a crippled, remorseful man, whom she claimed to love even more than before. Shortly after their emotional reunion they got married: “All my confidence is bestowed on him, all his confidence is devoted to me; we are precisely suited in character – perfect concord is the result” (435).

To summarize, in this chapter I have provided an analysis of Mr. Rochester’s masculinity as well as his approach to the ideology of Separate Spheres to understand the meaning behind his statement “I will break obstacles to happiness” (148). In my thesis, I assume that the obstacles Mr. Rochester refer to are related to an aversion to the Victorian norms as a whole, rather than to individual obstacles hindering his pursuit of happiness. I find that my assumption is confirmed throughout the analysis, both in relation to the complexity of Mr Rochester’s masculinity, where he obviously struggles with the shift in masculinity ideals, and in the way he approaches life in separate spheres.

Conclusion

In this essay I have focused on the male character, Mr. Rochester, in Charlotte Brontë's epic novel *Jane Eyre*, and the meaning behind his utterance: "I will break obstacles to happiness" (148). The simple solution would be to assume that the main obstacle he is referring to is the marriage he is trapped in, but my claim encompasses a broader perspective including both Victorian masculine ideals and the Victorian societal organization, as obstacles preventing him from finding happiness. My analysis of Mr. Rochester, in relation to Victorian masculine ideals and the ideology of Separate Spheres presented in Chapter One, shows a man who is clearly at odds with both. Mr. Rochester mirrors the complexity and hybridity in the shift of ideals from Georgian gentlemanly politeness to the ambitious Victorian man. He fails to meet or conform to most of the new masculine norms like high morality, directness, strength, sexuality, independence and appearance. In failing to meet the expectation of a Victorian masculine man, he instead creates his own "unheard-of rules" to pursue happiness. The very fact that he saw himself forced to create his own rules to bypass prevailing norms, is in itself a confirmation that Mr. Rochester saw these norms as obstacles.

Simultaneously, his relationship with Jane mirrors the complexity of the ideology of Separate Spheres in showing its porosity and as concluded by Quinn: "highlight[s] the interactive and unstable relationship of the domestic and social worlds" (58). Defined gender norms and the ideology of Separate Spheres presuppose each other, meaning that failing in one aspect consequently means failing in both, as in the case with Mr. Rochester and Jane. In casting doubt about the gender ideals, Charlotte Brontë manages, in a brilliant way, to show the complexity of English society and the fragility of the separate spheres.

After all, she was right, Elizabeth Rigby, who claimed Mr. Rochester and Jane to be a couple who "[did] things which, though not impossible, lie utterly beyond the bounds of probability" (162). What Elizabeth Rigby may not have been equally convinced about is that by challenging boundaries of probability, obstacles to happiness can be broken.

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