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Ethics and Moral Development in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*

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## Abstract

### Ethics and Moral Development in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*

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This thesis examines Aristotle's and Charlotte Brontë's respective treatments of character development in *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Jane Eyre*. By analyzing the works in tandem, I put Ancient philosophic discourse and Victorian literature into dialogue, thereby demonstrating the way in which the fields of philosophy and literature interact with, and illuminate, one another. While Aristotle's ethics rest at the center of the project, I supplement my analysis of the moral narrative in *Jane Eyre* by drawing upon Epictetus' *Discourses*, Augustine's *Confessions* and Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*.

This thesis argues that Jane, Brontë's protagonist, defies the contemporary gendered Victorian moral code and displays growth more congruent with Christian and Aristotelian teachings. To both strengthen my own analysis of Jane's internal makeup, and demonstrate the stylistic similarity of Aristotle's and Brontë's modes of writing, I contrast Jane's character with those of others. More specifically, I examine her moral character alongside that of Bertha and St. John, interpreting the three characters as literary embodiments of Aristotle's distinction between the states of deficiency, intermediacy and excess. I not only study other characters as a means of proving Jane's morality to be most conducive to leading a happy, autonomous life, but to also reveal the way in which they serve to test her morality and compromise her freedom. To do so, I have constructed my argument in accordance with Aristotle's *topoi*, dividing my chapters based on "places," and have studied an oppressive force in each. Tracking Jane's character development throughout the Bildungsroman, I reveal her increasing ability to resist the Victorian patriarchy; more generally, I draw attention to the moral and psychological strategies that allow women and men to overcome hardship.

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## Introduction

This thesis will focus on Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. By reading the texts in tandem, I seek to show how they mutually illuminate each other. My engagement with *Jane Eyre* will illuminate the relevance and utility of Aristotle's ethical vision for literary interpretation, while also revealing how the decontextualized nature of *Nicomachean Ethics* at times limits its ability to do justice to the intricacies of a literary text. My engagement with *Nicomachean Ethics* will bring heightened attention to the philosophical dimensions of Brontë's novel, which are often overlooked or deemphasized in *Jane Eyre* scholarship.

More specifically, I have chosen to bring Aristotle and Brontë into conversation because of their shared interests in the question of character development. Brontë's novel tracks the moral growth of the protagonist, Jane, paying close attention to her learned ability to reconcile her passions with reason. Aristotle's work is an engagement with practical science and highlights the 'mean' and 'decision' as central criteria of virtue. Both works stress the importance of character development by demonstrating its connection with one's fate and quality of life. In their respective ways, both Aristotle and Brontë suggest that morality paves the way for the development of happiness and agency. In elucidating this shared belief, I will examine Jane, Bertha and St. John from an Aristotelian perspective; specifically, I will argue that Jane represents an embodiment of the "mean," and that the latter two characters represent Aristotle's states of excess and deficiency respectively. In contrasting Jane's character against the two, I seek to prove that her morality is most conducive with happiness and autonomy. In a world where so much exists beyond one's own control, *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Jane*

*Eyre* urge their readers to cultivate a moral disposition that, ideally, can assist the human subject to better navigate his or her way through life.

Elaborating on the former work, I acknowledge that it is primarily concerned with delineating the means to attain the highest good, *eudaimonia*, which most literally refers to the “flourishing specific to humans” (Marcus *eudaimonia* handout, 2018), but is translated in Terence Irwin’s edition as “happiness” (Irwin 327). However, strewn throughout Aristotle’s philosophic discourse is a discussion of autonomy. His *Ethics*, which rests on the notion that “happiness consists primarily in character and action, not in fortune” (Irwin 188), elevates one’s internal makeup above external circumstances and thus emphasizes individual agency. In analyzing Brontë’s novel in conjunction with Aristotle’s work, I have found this very idea to be a central part of the Bildungsroman. That is, as Jane’s character develops throughout the novel, she gains a greater sense of agency and is consequently able to overcome the miseries that rigid Victorian social norms have inflicted upon her. More specifically, her morality, which I will argue resembles Aristotelian and Christian teachings, provides her with the means to navigate her way through an oppressive, male dominated society. In analyzing her relation with John Reed, Mr. Brocklehurst, Rochester, and finally St. John, I will demonstrate how each male poses a threat to Jane’s sense of self. I will follow each analysis with evidence revealing Jane’s improving treatment of these characters to coincide with her growing morality.

While Jane cannot control how the aforementioned characters treat her, she is not helpless. In Rabbi Davidson’s sermon delivered on Yom Kippur, 5778, he said “we do not control much of what befalls us, life’s hard winds and rains will beat against



us...still much of what happens to us results from our own decisions. We may not choose the cards were dealt, but we do decide how we play them” (Davidson 2). I have dedicated my project to the exploration of Jane’s “cards” and to an analysis of the way she “plays them”. More specifically, I will examine the unfortunate deck Jane has been dealt, namely her disadvantageous positioning within Victorian society, and reveal how her developing morality allows her to play her cards in a more productive, intentional manner. Just as Rabbi Davidson’s sermon reminds us that “we are the navigators of our life’s journey” (Davidson 6), both *Jane Eyre* and Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* acknowledge the potential for autonomy and delineate the means for its attainment.

Holocaust survivor and pioneering psychotherapist Viktor Frankl also influenced my thesis and has framed the way I have analyzed Jane’s character. He said “our freedom is a finite freedom...that is to say a human being is never fully free from conditions, be they...biological...psychological or sociological in nature...the ultimate freedom...remains always reserved to (us)...If we cannot change a situation we always have the last freedom to change our attitude to that situation.” (Frankl) *Jane Eyre* and Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* emphasize this notion of ‘changing one’s attitude’ as a key component of character development, and both demonstrate how one’s choices grant the human subject a sense of control and power. While he who acts as he pleases and satisfies his desires may appear freer than he who carefully chooses which urges to indulge and which to suppress, Aristotle and Brontë argue that the latter moral agent is in fact more liberated. By acting moderately and in accord with reason, one assumes an active rather than a passive relationship to his life and, consequently, is less captive to external occurrences. Not only do the two works both examine character development

but they also propose similar thoughts on the specific ways it contributes to one's happiness.

While reading each text through the lens of the other yields a richer understanding of both works, it is also important to acknowledge their conspicuous differences, the most prominent ones being: the disciplines to which they belong and the time and place of publication. Aristotle's work belongs to the realm of philosophy, and Brontë's to that of literature, a difference that has many significant consequences. First, philosophical works are typically devoid of characters and plots, and consequently explore their ideas and concepts in a decontextualized space, in which the human subject is largely stripped of psychological and historical particularity. On the contrary, novelists explore ideas through their characters and settings, and thus their representations of men and women are embedded within a plot; characters situated within a specific time and place are simultaneously more bounded and more richly conceived figures. Given the existence of a plot in a novel and the lack thereof in a philosophic inquiry, the former takes place in time, whereas the latter generally lacks temporal awareness. Therefore, literature tracks an idea in a more dynamic setting, in relation to the progression of the novel and that which changes throughout, whereas philosophy examines it from a more static perspective. Additionally, Aristotle's work is an intellectual pursuit while Brontë's was published initially as an autobiography whose retrospection influences the narration and presentation of ideas. This is not to say that either examination is somehow a "better" vehicle for exploring the lives of moral agents; rather, I will investigate how the conceptual and formal differences between Aristotle

and Brontë's texts shape their respective approaches to the question of moral development.

The other two points of contrast would be time and place of publication. Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* was produced in Ancient Greece, between 384 B.C and 322 B.C (the specific year is unknown), while Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* was published in 1847 Victorian England. Although Aristotle's work precedes Brontë's, I am not suggesting that Brontë was intentionally and consciously responding to *Nicomachean Ethics*. The vast historical and cultural differences between Ancient Greece and Victorian England impact and shape the rhetorical and intellectual strategies these authors employed, the cultural influences and biases these authors faced, and not least, the audiences for whom these authors wrote. In Aristotle's discussion of moral development, he targets male Greek citizens, whereas Brontë's novel focuses on a representation of a Victorian woman. By recognizing the significance of this gender difference, I will analyze Jane's character development from an Aristotelian perspective with caution, understanding that his *Ethics* were intended for males.

I have outlined only a few of the many elements that differentiate these two works, acknowledging that the comparative study I seek to pursue by no means suggests that Aristotle's and Brontë's texts can ultimately be equated with one another or rendered interchangeable. By foregrounding these differences, I hope to show how they have complicated and enhanced my project. Working with texts of such different conceptual and formal characteristics has facilitated my own growth as a scholar and has enriched my analyses of the two works.

## **Chapter I: Gateshead**

## **Section 1: John Reed as an Oppressive Force**

I will start by examining the external sources of Jane's misery, and will use the red room as a medium through which I can explore these sources. In claiming that the red room is much more than a mere physical enclosure in Gateshead, I will show how it serves to expose the rigidity of Victorian social standards and the consequences of straying from the unjust expectations. Victorian England, as Annika Mizel explains in "Righteous Restraint in Hard Times and *Jane Eyre*," "was largely dictated by concepts of hierarchy, authority, and propriety" (Mizel 177), all of which adds greater complexity to the scene of focus in this section, and influences the way the passages are interpreted. When examining the infamous instance that occurs between Jane and John towards the end of chapter I, the reader must be cognizant of the historical time period, and of both party's gender and social standing. When such identities are brought to the foreground of one's attention, the scene gains greater significance and yields societal implications, as it is no longer a mere conflict between cousins, but rather one between sexes and classes. I argue that John is a literary figure representing the Victorian patriarchy and the upper class, while Jane symbolizes the female race and the lower class.

Before delving into a discussion on the roles gender and class play in the scene, I will first more broadly discuss Jane's awareness of the injustices that confront her. As Jane reflects on the members of the Reed family, and their flawed characters, she is frustrated by their seemingly warm reception from the world, which starkly contrasts her unfortunate experiences. She notes "Georgina, who had a spoiled temper, a very acrid spite, a captious and insolent carriage, was universally indulged. Her beauty...seemed to give delight to all who looked at her, and to purchase indemnity for

every fault” (Brontë 18). By writing “purchase,” Jane ascribes a metaphorical monetary value to Georgina’s beauty, emphasizing the importance of appearance and the way it exonerates Georgina of her immorality. Just as Aristotle relies on the logic of opposition to provide a comprehensive definition of an idea, Brontë fills her narrative with juxtaposing characterizations in order to highlight a particular trait. By noting Georgina’s beauty, Jane’s plainness in comparison is underscored. Miss Abbot then reveals the downfalls of Jane’s appearance when she says “one really cannot care for such a little toad as that” (Brontë 31), illuminating the way the Victorian ideal of feminine beauty influenced the treatment of women. Thus, by contrasting Georgina’s misbehavior, along with that of John and Eliza, with her view that she herself “dared commit no fault” (Brontë 18), Jane acknowledges the overt discrimination that confronts her.

I will now investigate the gendered implications of the scene. Viewing the conflict and Jane’s subsequent punishment through a gender conscious lens, the reader gains insight into the ways in which the Victorian patriarchy acts as a contributing source to Jane’s misery. While John is but a mere “schoolboy of fourteen years old” (Brontë 12), he is the only male figure at Gateshead, and thus has authoritative power over the household and its inhabitants. Exploiting his power, John attacks Jane, both physically and verbally, upon finding her reading one of the Reed’s books. In demonstrating the workings of the Victorian patriarchy, Jane implies that violence was an acceptable masculine trait, and narrates “no one had reproved John for wantonly striking me” (Brontë 18). On the contrary, Jane is punished for her violence, in spite of it being an act of retaliation and defense. In further denoting his brutality, Jane writes

that he “twisted the necks of pigeons, killed the little pea-chicks” (Brontë 18). Given that “Pea-chicks” are baby peafowl, birds that are associated with Juno (the queen of the Roman Gods, associated with femininity), the image of John killing the pea-chicks can be representative of male dominance over the female race. Additionally, “pigeons” are street animals associated with filth, and so the image of his cruelty against such can be extended beyond the gendered implications and portray the Victorian class dynamic, in which the upper class (represented by John) exploits the lower class (represented by the pigeon). It is also worth noting that John’s cruelty to both birds contrasts Jane’s act of compassion towards a “little hungry robin” (Brontë 37) a few chapters later, marking their different characters and natures.

John, a literary figure representing the Victorian patriarchy, mandates that Jane call him “Master Reed” (Brontë 12), a title that demonstrates their unequal dynamic. Mentally and physically tormenting Jane, John refers to her as a “bad animal” (Brontë 11), stripping Jane of her humanity and personhood, and ironic for the way his physical attack is animalistic. As his inferior, Jane says she has been “Habitually obedient to John” (Brontë 12) and writes, “Accustomed to John Reed’s abuse, I never had an idea of replying to it” (Brontë 13). “Habitually” and “Accustomed” emphasize how engrained these gendered injustices were in Victorian society, and mark Jane’s initial adherence to the Victorian gender norms by highlighting her submissive and compliant attitude towards John.

However, as the scene progresses, Jane distinguishes herself from the typical Victorian woman by verbally and physically assaulting her male cousin. She shouts “Wicked and cruel boy!” (Brontë 13), an exclamation that illustrates her defiant candor

through both the negative descriptors and the liberty she takes in addressing him as “boy,” rather than the mandated title of “master”. Jane then exclaims “You are like a murderer-you are like a slave driver-you are like the Roman emperors!” (Brontë 13), a series of lines whose content and syntactical construction strengthen her rejection of gendered expectations. By drawing a broad historical reference in the second phrase, and then a more specific one in the third, Jane not only insults John but also reveals the knowledge she has acquired from reading, a skill that was deemed unsuitable for Victorian women. Additionally, by arranging her insults in a tri-colon, her words hold greater gravity, and her comment about the Roman emperor, positioned in the last of the three phrases, gains special importance.

In addition to her verbal defiance, her noncompliance manifests itself physically when she attacks John. This seemingly involuntary action in the face of John Reed’s harassment, reflects the crippling nature of the patriarchy. That is, Jane’s loss of agency in this moment exemplifies the effect of the Victorian patriarchy and the maddening impact it had on women. Mizel reveals that Jane’s actions are not only ridiculed for their unfeminine quality, but also for their sinful nature, writing “Since authority figures were often believed to have been instituted by God, disobeying authority meant disobeying the Creator” (Mizel 177). In this case, John is considered to be an authoritative figure, and so Jane’s disobedience gains greater severity with, from a Victorian perspective, as her actions can be perceived to not only transgress gender norms but to also violate religious duties and the divine word.

The room not only represents the consequence of rejecting gender norms, but also serves as “a symbolic reminder of the patriarchal society” (Maier 321). Jane’s

physical entrapment in the room, which she refers to as a “jail” (Brontë 17), reflects her imprisonment by the established patriarchy. Additionally, the description of the room, and Jane’s attention to its size and grandeur, serve to belittle her by comparison. Just as the patriarchy functioned in such a way that made females feel insignificant and small, the juxtaposition between the red room, described as the “largest and stateliest chambers” (Brontë 17), and its inhabitant, a small and plain poor girl, serves to diminish Jane.

Now, adopting a class-conscious perspective in response to the scene, I will argue that the red room becomes a symbol of Jane’s disadvantageous position in Victorian England, as a lower-class woman. Written during the Chartist movement, perhaps Brontë sought to make both Jane’s oppression emblematic of that which the working class was facing at the time, and her act of resistance to represent the “mass demonstrations, riots, strikes and monster petitions” (Brontë x) that were occurring in the 1840s. In dramatizing Jane’s low positioning, the scene is narrated with language pertaining to servitude, and according to Julian Sun-Joo Lee, resembles Frederick Douglas’s narrative (Lee 318). Jane employs this slave like language in the very first line of chapter II, bringing the theme to the forefront of the reader’s attention, when she writes “I resisted all the way” (Brontë 15). Her resistance resonates with the actions of slave refugees and introduces Jane’s quest for freedom.

To the same effect, Jane likens herself to a “rebel slave” (Brontë 15), again highlighting both her desire for escape, and her lack of freedom as a member of the lower class. Explicitly expressing that which Jane has been implying through her particular language, Miss Abbot says “And you ought not to think yourself on an equality



with the Misses Reed and Master Reed...They will have a great deal of money and you will have none: it is your place to be humble and to try to make yourself agreeable to them” (Brontë 16). This quotation demonstrates the correlation between wealth and behavior, in that Jane’s poverty subjects her to the will of her wealthier relatives.

Additionally, Miss Abbot’s statement reflects a common Victorian perspective in which equality is narrowly grounded in economic sameness, another social standard working against Jane. More significantly, Miss Abbot’s encouragement of subjugation is precisely what Jane learns to reject, demonstrated when she confronts Rochester and says “I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities...it my spirit that addresses your spirit” (Brontë 292). Despite what she is told, Jane comes to learn that her low positioning within society does not make her less worthy and warrant her maltreatment.

In further commenting on Jane’s slave like status, I will invoke Epictetus, an ex-slave and stoic, on the idea of servitude. In doing so I seek to offer another interpretation of the slave related language that pervades the scene, one that is based in character rather than class. I also aim to use Epictetus’ quite depriving philosophy to introduce Aristotelian moral philosophy into the discussion, an arguably more moderate, forgiving ethical model. In Epictetus’s *Discourses*, he discusses a common stoic belief, in which man is enslaved to the “tyrants within us” (Epictetus 302). In mentioning this sort of personal enslavement, he discusses the imminent danger for the slave whom “wishes to be set free immediately” (Epictetus 296), stating that this newly freed slave “falls into a slavery much worse than his former slavery” (Epictetus 296). In

explaining this new type of servitude, Epictetus argues that it arises when an individual “desires any of the things which depend on others” (Epictetus 299).

While I find stoicism’s rejection of all earthly pleasures and desires too depriving, I find Epictetus’ logic to be influential in my reading of Jane’s attempts to “achieve escape” (Brontë 19). In escaping, Jane may be free from “Master Reed” (Brontë 16) but I would concur with Epictetus in that she would be a “slave to many instead of to one” (Epictetus 296). Drawing upon notions discussed in Isaiah Berlin’s “Two Concepts of Liberty,” Jane’s escape would achieve “negative liberty,” not “positive liberty,” the former referring to freedom from external restrictions, and the latter to the attainment of self-control and actualization (Berlin 15). Berlin’s notion of “positive liberty” is that which I am more interested in, in regards to Brontë’s protagonist. That is, Jane’s attainment of liberty is contingent upon her moral growth, not her mere departure from Gateshead, and it is not until she cultivates character that she will reap the benefits of her sought after freedom. Thus, Jane’s imprisonment in the red room symbolizes her enslavement to the Reeds (lack of negative liberty) and to her own passions (lack of positive freedom).

Even though I agree with Epictetus that servitude exists in many different forms, I reject his definition of liberty, which rests on his statement “Keep then far...your desires” (Epictetus 301). While Jane’s involuntary submission to her passions leads to her imprisonment in the red room, and exemplifies what Epictetus would deem as actions of an enslaved person, I concur with what Sharon Locy wrote in “Travel and Space in Charlotte Brontë’s ‘Jane Eyre,’” that such actions “are the natural response of a trapped creature to an intolerable and unjust situation” (Locy 109). To embrace

Epictetus' notion of freedom would be to remain unaffected by John Reed's abuse, and would encourage behavior inconsistent with the feminist message of the novel. Thus, rather than keeping her passions "far," Jane learns to better manage them, and displays morality more congruent with Aristotle's than Epictetus's.

While Aristotle expresses a similar notion on slavery, he grounds his moral philosophy in a platform quite different than that on which Stoicism lies. In "Aristotle on Natural Slavery," Malcolm Heath writes, according to Aristotle's *Politics*, the philosopher believed that "the majority of human beings may be enslaved without injustice, because they are slaves by nature" (Heath 243). In analyzing Aristotle's theory on natural slavery, Heath explains that natural slaves lack practical reason, and have an "impairment that disrupts deliberation by detaching an individual's conception of intrinsic value from executive control of his behavior" (Heath 253). While Aristotle speaks about enslavement in relation to one's passions, just as Epictetus does, he does not advocate for their eradication. Rather, he discusses the importance of moral education in refining these passions such that the human subject "enjoys doing good things and does not have inclinations to the contrary that need to be quashed" (Gottlieb 53). Thus, while Epictetus believes that man should be devoid of all passions to live freely and happily, Aristotle claims that, insofar as the passions are in line with morality and expressed appropriately, they are ethical. In the next section, I will elaborate on Aristotle's moral philosophy and more closely apply it to Brontë's Bildungsroman.

## **Section 2: Aristotelian Morality**

Having analyzed the oppressive nature of Gateshead, representative of Victorian England, I now seek to identify the very tool that allows Jane to overcome future

instances of oppression, namely morality. By the nature of the Bildungsroman, Jane's character development at this point is in its earliest stages, which is suitable given Jane's age and limited experiences. Thus, given the connection I drew in the introduction between morality and Jane's ability to maneuver her way through difficult situations, the reader can infer that Jane's response to John's oppressive nature lacks productivity and tact. In proving such, I will conduct a closer analysis of Jane's conflict with John.

At the end of the first chapter, John finds Jane reading in the window-seat and immediately begins verbally attacking her, scolding her for both her "impudence" and "sneaking way of getting behind curtains" (Brontë 13). The verbal abuse quickly becomes physical, and the scene culminates in Jane's violent retaliation. She confesses "I don't very well know what I did with my hands...but he bellowed aloud" (Brontë 14), and for this incident, Jane is punished and locked in the red room. The implication that Jane's actions were involuntary, given that she remarks "I don't very well know what I did with my hands," underscores her lack of control and sense of agency in the moment. In analyzing this instance, I do not seek to denounce Jane's actions, but rather aim to introduce the pressing need for Jane to learn how to maintain her sense of agency, both mentally and physically, in the face of oppression. That is, within the scene, the red room serves to punish Jane and exacerbate her misery, but within the larger narrative of the novel, it serves morally didactic purposes by spurring Jane's character development and her quest in finding a way to combat oppression without compromising her freedom.

Additionally, by examining a moment early on in the Bildungsroman, I seek to illuminate Aristotle's emphasis on the learned nature of virtue. In delineating such,

Aristotle compares the development of moral virtues with that of a stone, stating “A stone, for instance, by nature moves downwards, and habituation could not make it move upwards” (*NE* II.1.1103a). In this example, the properties of the stone are determined by the force of gravity, and thus cannot be altered by practice. On the contrary, Aristotle explains that “none of the virtues of character arises in us naturally” (*NE* II.1.1103a), and consequently one can learn to be virtuous. Thus, in starting with an analysis of Jane’s character, in relation to John, I have set up my paper such that I can elucidate the “learned nature” of morality by portraying Jane’s progressing cultivation of character.

Now I will turn to Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, and reveal that Jane’s moral development resembles that which is discussed in the philosophic work. In revealing the similarities, I seek to show how Jane’s Aristotelian moral development, provides her with the means to better resist oppression. Specifically, I will discuss his notion of the “mean” and interpret Jane’s behavior in relation to it. Aristotle writes “Virtue...is a mean, insofar as it aims at what is intermediate” (*NE* II.6.1106b), existing “between excess and deficiency” (*NE* II.6.1106a) and encouraging moderate, but still expressive behavior. In elucidating this notion, Aristotle provides a helpful example; he writes “someone avoids and is afraid of everything, standing firm against nothing, he becomes cowardly; if he is afraid of nothing at all and goes face to everything, he becomes rash” (*NE* II.2.1104a5). In this example, it is easiest to imagine a spectrum on which cowardice and rashness mark the ends, and courage lies in the middle. The outer ends of the spectrum denote vices, and the middle, the balance between the two extremes, denotes virtue. Aristotle’s example not only elucidates the states of deficiency, mean

and excess, but also serves to depict the importance of evaluating one's circumstances and being cognizant of context. The moral agent in his example fails to do so and acts one way to "everything," failing to recognize when his behavior is inappropriate or unnecessary given the situation. Thus, important to Aristotle's moral philosophy, is acting in an intermediate condition, which consists in "neither total repression nor total indulgence of a natural desire or feeling" (Irwin 194). Brontë's novel exemplifies this philosophical notion and gives it practical utility through the way in which Jane's more productive responses to oppression is attributed to her growing ability to reconcile her passions with reason in a way that suits the specifics of the particular circumstance.

Also important to Aristotle's mean is the notion of the 'intermediate relative to us'. Unlike Kant's categorical imperative, Aristotle argues that ethics cannot be universalized. In discussing the 'mean,' he explains that there are no "numerical proportions" (*NE* II.6.1106a-1106b) or ways of finding the intermediate state through quantitative methods; rather, he emphasizes its circumstantial nature. Not only do means differ from person to person, but can also differ for a single individual in different times (*NE* II.6.1106ab). For an individual, finding the intermediate state comes after reasoning and deliberation, in which the person has decided on what sort of action will maximize his performance of the human function. Furthermore, "virtue, then, is a state that decides" (*NE* II.6.1107a), implying that the intermediate state varies and is landed upon only after correct reasoning.

### **Section 3: Demonstration of Character Growth**

Thus far I have discussed the oppressive environment in which Jane is situated, and have introduced Aristotelian morality. I will now reveal the way Jane's Christian

morality (more closely analyzed in the following chapter) functions within an Aristotelian framework, such that Jane's passions are subdued but not eradicated. Jane demonstrates forgiveness for Mrs. Reed, a central tenet of Christianity, but does not abide by the doctrine "Love your enemies" (Brontë 69). To love Mrs. Reed, who continues to undermine Jane's self worth, would be for Jane to disrespect herself and underestimate her value. I will keep my analysis within Gateshead, as to prove that Jane's improved response to oppression is the result of her internal character development rather than of enhanced external circumstances.

Jane, having been summoned to Gateshead per Mrs. Reed's request, arrives and says "received as I had been to-day, I should, a year ago, have resolved to quit Gateshead" (Brontë 265). This quote captures the precise utility of Jane's moral development, in that her character growth acts as a shield against oppression and cruelty. Before revealing the usefulness of her growth, I will examine her forgiveness, emblematic of Helen's influence on her. Helen Burns (a character I will analyze in the following chapter) explains her philosophy to Jane and says "revenge never worries my heart, degradation never too deeply disgusts me, injustice never crushes me too low; I live in calm"(Brontë 70). Jane now too experiences this "calm" by releasing her harbored anger and viewing her aunt without trepidation. In forgiving her aunt she writes the "flame of resentment extinguished" (Brontë 262), and by using terminology related to fire, Jane implies the consuming nature of her resentment and furthermore, the freeing effects of Christian virtue. In reflecting on this extinguished "flame," she writes "It is a happy thing that time quells the longings of vengeance and hushes the promptings of rage and aversion" (Brontë 265). Both verbs "quells" and "hushes"

highlight the soothing and tranquilizing effect of forgiveness, and prove it to be more for Jane's sake than for Mrs. Reed's.

Such forgiveness is manifested in Jane's greeting, when she says "How are you, dear aunt?" (Brontë 266). Given that Jane says "I had once vowed that I would never call her aunt again" (Brontë 266), the simple address of "aunt," emphasized by the endearing term "dear," highlights Jane's changed attitude. Her forgiveness is again presented by Brontë's portrayal of Jane kissing the "stern, relentless" (Brontë 265) face of her aunt. Despite Jane's recollection of her "childhood's terrors and sorrows" (Brontë 266) caused by her aunt, she puts such memories aside and writes "I stooped down and kissed her" (Brontë 266). This act of affection, whilst not displaying love, marks Jane's forgiveness and her release of harbored anger.

Now I will demonstrate the way such development allows her to navigate her way through the oppression that is Gateshead, and frees her from the once domineering grip of the Reeds. Jane, having developed a greater sense of self is less impacted by her relatives' degrading remarks and cold reception. She notes "The same hostile roof now again rose before me...but I experienced firmer trust in myself and my own powers, and less withering dread of oppression" (Brontë 262). By noting the sameness of the "roof," representative of the general spirit of Gateshead and the Reeds, Jane portrays herself as the variable and her external circumstances as the constant. While John has died, Jane is still confronted by similar hatred and disrespect and thus his absence does not significantly change her time at Gateshead. Acknowledging her "powers" in an environment in which she previously felt utterly powerless, is indicative of Jane's growing sense of autonomy. In the same spirit, Jane says "A sneer...had now no longer



that power over me it once possessed” (Brontë 264), again illuminating her diminished preoccupation with their coldness. Additionally, “Power” and “possessed,” emphasized by their alliteration, contrast Jane’s old feelings of imprisonment with her newer sense of freedom and agency, a shift attributed to her character growth.

## **Chapter II: Lowood**

Having analyzed Jane’s character at Gateshead, specifically in relation to John Reed, I will follow the progression of the novel and now focus on Jane’s behavior at Lowood. Specifically, I will study how her growing Christian and Aristotelian morality has enabled her to better face the challenges that confront her in this new phase of life. In the first chapter, I focused on the problems posed by her disadvantageous standing within Victorian society as a female member of the lower class; in this chapter I will shift to a discussion on Christianity, and examine her exploitation from a religious angle. Introducing Helen Burns and Mr. Brocklehurst, I argue that the former character represents a “saintly ideal” (Pearson 687-688) and that the latter embodies religious persecution. Through observing Helen’s unyielding kindness, and Mr. Brocklehurst’s heartless soul, Jane defines herself in between these two extremes. While her morality is unquestionably closer to that of Helen’s, Jane acknowledges that she herself “is not a saint; she is human, trying to cope with a world that she sees as completely hostile” (Pearson 688), and thus must develop a more active means of resistance, for which Helen’s doctrine does not account. In discerning which tenets of Christianity to uphold, and to what degree, Jane engages in *prohairesis* and deliberation, crucial to Aristotle’s definition of virtue, and demonstrates character growth consistent with that explicated in *Nicomachean Ethics*. Through her developing Christian virtue, and increasing ability

to reason with her passions, Jane handles the oppression at Lowood more adroitly than she did at Gateshead.

### **Section 1: Mr. Brocklehurst as an Oppressive Force**

In introducing my analysis of the Lowood section, I will first provide a brief description of its physical make up. In doing so, I seek to illuminate Epictetus' argument that man has many masters, and that while Jane has left the trappings of Gateshead, she is now imprisoned by new forces. Beginning with a sense of physical entrapment, Jane provides a vivid image of the school's garden. As the girls are summoned outside, Jane narrates "Each put on a coarse straw bonnet...I was similarly equipped, and, following the stream, I made my way into the open air" (Brontë 58). The image of "each" student wearing the same "bonnet," combined with that of Jane "following the stream," exemplifies the mandated uniformity and lack of autonomy within the school. Additionally, the positive connotations of "open air," resounding feelings of liberation and vivacity, are then muddied by Jane's description of the garden, which she describes as "a wide inclosure, surrounded with walls so high as to exclude every glimpse of prospect" (Brontë 58). Rather than relieving Jane from the stifling indoors, the garden retains a sense of imprisonment. The "walls," which physically isolate the students, also represent the students' lack of mental freedom, by controlling and limiting their engagement with foreign ideas. In continuing to portray this physical entrapment, Jane writes "During January, February, and part of March, the deep snows, and, after their melting, the almost impassable roads, prevented our stirring beyond the garden walls, except to go church" (Brontë 71). Not only does this quote support the constrictive nature of Lowood, but it also reveals the religious spirit of the school, and its

rigid adherence to Christian principles. More specifically, it illuminates the nature of Mr. Brocklehurst's affiliation with an "inhuman religion" (Shapiro 687), in that he elevates religious faith above the students' comfort and safety, mandating their attendance at church in spite of the harsh conditions.

Having discussed the oppressive nature of Lowood's physical makeup, I will now show how such oppression manifests itself in the character of Mr. Brocklehurst. Upon first meeting him at Gateshead, Jane describes Mr. Brocklehurst as "a black pillar" whose face seemed to be "placed above the shaft by way of capital" (Brontë 38). As written in the notes section of the novel, this image suggests that Mr. Brocklehurst is "A pillar of the church and community" (Brontë 548), and I would argue also highlights his societal prestige. In ascribing a sense of grandeur and importance to the character, further denoted by Jane's comment "he seemed to me a tall gentleman, but then I was very little; his features were large" (Brontë 39), Jane highlights the way his physical makeup, alone, serves to belittle her. The comparison to a "pillar" resonates with Jane's description of the red room, where she also observes "massive pillars" (Brontë 17), and thus the connection underscores her continued feelings of smallness and insignificance against larger, more prominent structures. Commenting on his Christian ideology, Sara Pearson argues in "'The Coming Man': Revelations of Male Character in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*," that Brontë "depicts Mr. Brocklehurst as an Antichrist" (Pearson 299). In supporting her claim, she argues that just as the arrival of the Antichrist is predicted to be followed by "famines, pestilences...and persecution" (Pearson 300), Mr. Brocklehurst, too, is associated with these very hardships. In analyzing the conditions at Lowood, Jane discusses the "Semi-starvation," and narrates that Lowood was "the

cradle of fog and fog-bred pestilence” (Brontë 91), both of which are connected with the biblical notion of an Antichrist, and thus support Pearson’s claim.

Further analyzing Mr. Brocklehurst, Jane focuses on the specifics of his hypocritical Evangelical ideology. A proponent of “Humility” (Brontë 41) and “consistency” (Brontë 42), Mr. Brocklehurst’s efforts are manifested in his daughter’s remark, “how quiet and plain all the girls at Lowood look” (Brontë 42). Augusta’s observation extending to “all” the students speaks to the lack of individuality at Lowood and represents the impact of Mr. Brocklehurst’s rules. Their “quiet” demeanors are representative of their silenced opinions, and their “plain” looks exemplify Mr. Brocklehurst’s general success in establishing consistency among the student population.

His interest in uniformity and modesty is again expressed in his disapproval of Julia Severn’s curly hair. In explaining their defiant nature, he says “I desire the hair to be arranged closely, modestly, plainly” (Brontë 76), and thus orders the removal of her curls. The fact that his “desire” trumps that of the student, in regards to how she chooses to wear her hair, demonstrates Mr. Brocklehurst’s exploitative power, and the way his authority compromises the students’ individualities. As Mr. Brocklehurst is in the midst of ridiculing the curls, Jane narrates that he was “interrupted” (Brontë 76) by his two sisters and mother. Observing these women, Jane notes their lavish garments and writes that one had “elaborately curled” hair, and that another had a “false front of French curls” (Brontë 77). The irony of this interruption is heightened by the fact that these women’s curls were fake, whereas the student’s were natural. Thus, Mr.

Brocklehurst's denunciation of Julia's curls not only illustrates his authority and ideology, but also proves the latter to be of a hypocritical and insincere nature.

## **Section 2: Christian Morality**

In supporting my claim that Jane's morality provides her with the tools to overcome adversity, I will introduce her growing Christian morality and reveal how it helps her resist the oppressive force that is Mr. Brocklehurst. Before elaborating on Helen's religious influence on Jane, I will first share a statement from the article: "Jane's Crown of Thorns: Feminism and Christianity in *Jane Eyre*" that reads "Helen models for Jane an independence of thought on matters of theology and doctrine" (Lamonaca 253). Prefacing my argument with this quotation, I seek to demonstrate Jane's self governing character; in that, her morality is influenced by others, but largely cultivated by her own sense of right and wrong. Just as Helen rejects elements of Evangelical Christianity, and has developed "another creed" (Brontë 70), Jane does not blindly follow Helen's beliefs, nor does her character growth follow one particular doctrine. Thus, Helen not only facilitates the development of Jane's Christian virtue, but she also models for Jane an individualized moral code.

While Jane does not strictly adhere to Helen's specific moral doctrine, she does digest and practice some of her beliefs, which Lamanoca writes "serve Jane in good stead later in the novel" (Lamonaca 253). Helen, who "represents an ideal within the Christian discourse of the novel" (Franklin 465), presents Jane with ambitious and unrealistic aspirations, which the protagonist does not seek to fully meet, but nonetheless provide her with guidance and direction. Explicating her philosophy she encourages Jane to "observe what Christ says, and how He acts; make His word your

rule, and His conduct your example” (Brontë 69). Fleshing out how to adhere to Christ’s will, Helen says the “Bible bids us return good for evil” (Brontë 66), suggesting that one should confront poor behavior with kindness. Unlike Jane, who asserts that “When we are struck at without a reason, we should strike back again very hard” (Brontë 68), Helen proposes that one should act in accordance with the teachings of the New Testament which says “Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you and despitefully use you” (Brontë 69).

Jane’s initial reaction to this statement is fueled by disbelief, as she thinks of Mrs. Reed and the impossibility of loving her. However, as her character progresses she moderately incorporates the aforementioned sentiments into her moral philosophy. As discussed previously, Jane’s visit to her dying aunt showcases the way Jane has chosen to uphold parts of Helen’s doctrine and ignore other parts. Upon receiving news from Richard of her dying aunt, Jane writes “I ought to go” (Brontë 256), expressing her adherence to Helen’s words to “do good to them that hate you”. As Jane watches her aunt die she utters the words “you have my full and free forgiveness: ask now for God’s, and be at peace”(Brontë 276). Her “forgiveness” and mentioning of “God” showcase the impact Helen’s doctrine has had on her, and the way Christian ideology has shaped her character. However, Jane’s visit is done out of a sense of moral obligation, not because she seeks to uphold the Christian tenet of “Love your enemies”. Thus, Helen contributes to Jane’s moral growth, in that Jane’s cultivation of character is a product of embracing and rejecting elements of Helen’s philosophy.

Additionally, I am particularly struck by the way Helen’s morality not only exemplifies Christian virtue, but also seems to contain elements of Augustinian moral

philosophy. Just as Helen grounds her morality in religious faith, Augustine teaches that the good life is reached through fostering a relationship with God (Miller 404). Whereas Aristotle devotes Books VIII and IX to the importance of interpersonal, and inter-city friendships, claiming “friendship...is a virtue” (*NE* VIII.1.1155a), Augustine stresses the moral duty of connecting with God, exemplified by Helen who says “God is my friend: I Love Him; He loves me.” (Brontë 97). However, while Augustine encourages one to focus their love on God, he does not exclude the potential for interpersonal relationships, and thus Helen’s ethics’ resembling Augustine’s morality, distinguishes her Christian morality from St. Johns ( a character I will analyze in chapter IV). In “Evil, Friendship, and Iconic Realism in Augustine’s *Confessions*,” Richard Miller argues that according to Augustine “True Friendship requires a framework for interpreting the meaning of one’s love on terms that are meaningful to the lover as well at the beloved” (Miller 405). In Book 4 of the *Confessions*, in examining his response to the death of his friend, Augustine reveals the pitfalls of a friendship only “meaningful to the lover,” and is awakened to the importance of a friendship based on mutual love (Miller 391). That is, he suggests that interpersonal friendship can be moral, as long as one understands the essence of friendship correctly. Thus, through Helen’s ability to love God and befriend Jane, she embodies Augustinian’s thoughts that a relationship with the former does not preclude a relationship with the later, contrasted with St. John, for whom human relationships were seen as distractions or hindrances.

Having explained Helen’s ideology, I will now analyze its practice and application. Helen, whose “doctrine of endurance” (Brontë 67) models the expectations

of Lowood, appears unperturbed by Miss Scatcherd's unwarranted scolding. After Miss Scatcherd incessantly ridicules Helen for trivial reasons, Jane narrates "Burns made no answer: I wondered at her silence" (Brontë 64). Continuing to observe Helen, Jane notices that she leaves the room and returns with "a bundle of twigs" (Brontë 65), with which Miss Scatcherd then uses to strike her. In watching this moment, Jane narrates "while I paused from my sewing, because my fingers quivered at this spectacle with a sentiment of unavailing and impotent anger, not a feature of her pensive face altered its ordinary expression" (Brontë 65). The juxtaposition between Jane's "anger" and Helen's pensiveness serves to underscore their different dispositions. Furthermore, their opposing reactions illuminate the difference between Stoicism and Aristotelian philosophy. Just like Epictetus' philosophy, which believes that man attains freedom when he is unaffected by that which exists externally to him, Helen's ideology shares a similar sentiment, and she advocates for a sense of removal, alike. On the contrary, Jane's anger resonates with Aristotle's claim that it is wrong to "define the virtues as ways of being unaffected and undisturbed" (*NE* II.3.1104b) as such indifference would undermine one's agency. That is, Jane's increasing ability to better navigate herself through an oppressive world is not about learning to passively endure such oppression, but about actively choosing when and how to resist it. In contrasting Helen's model of sympathy and tolerance against Jane's more passionate nature, Brontë reveals the gap between the two girls' moral philosophies. Having analyzed their different responses to Miss Scatcherd's oppression, I will now illustrate the way in which Jane's moral development includes a closing of this gap, to some degree. That is, Jane is able to suppress her "anger," but in moderation, such that she can still combat injustice and maintain agency.



### **Section 3: Demonstration of Character Growth**

Jane, in the face of Mr. Brocklehurst's oppression, endures his cruelty without compromising her autonomy. In examining Jane's response to his unjust treatment, I seek to draw a parallel between the scene and the one previously discussed, involving Helen and Mrs. Scatcherd. Jane, amidst the presence of Mr. Brocklehurst, accidentally drops her slate, and is consequently subjected to verbal attacks and public shaming. Mr. Brocklehurst declares that Jane is worse than "a little heathen" and asserts that she is "not a member of the true flock" (Brontë 78), deeming Jane impious. As Pearson notes "Brocklehurst's pompous and unjust condemnation of Jane" can be viewed as a parody of "the biblical Final Judgment" (Pearson 300). That is, by scorning Jane's supposed anti-Christian sentiments, and ordering the teachers to "punish her body" (Brontë 79), Mr. Brocklehurst, not only reveals his hypocritical nature, but also "usurps the divine role of judge" (Pearson 300). Thus, Mr. Brocklehurst serves as another evil, Jane must combat.

While initially Jane is enraged and terrified, eventually she is able to collect herself and withstand the public shaming, just as Helen did in response to Mrs. Scatcherd's rebuke. Having watched Helen's composure amidst public scolding, Jane emulates her classmate's behavior, without entirely adopting Helen's philosophy and mindset. Helen's impact on Jane is then reinforced by her appearance at the end of the scene. Jane recalls standing on the stool and seeing Helen pass. In passing, Helen looks at Jane, and the glance leaves a profound effect on the protagonist. While the comfort her glance offers Jane is indicative of the consolation found in human sympathy, the religious language pervading Jane's narration suggests Helen's character to be an

emblem of Christianity. In seeing Helen's eyes, Jane lists three exclamatory phrases in which she discusses the power her classmate's glance had on her. She writes "What a strange light inspired them! What an extraordinary sensation that ray sent through me! How the new feeling bore me up!" (Brontë 80). The image of Helen exuding light and lifting Jane's spirits is representative of Christianity empowering Jane and inspiring perseverance within. Jane then proceeds to narrate "It was as if a martyr, a hero, had passed a slave or victim, and imparted strength in the transit" (Brontë 80), foreshadowing the way Helen's religious teachings and friendship aid Jane in her efforts towards liberation, freeing her from her "slave" like position. Thus, viewing Helen as an embodiment of Christian virtue, I would argue that Jane's ability to withstand the public shaming can be partially attributed to the strength the Christian moral code imparts on her.

Even though Jane still compares herself to a "slave," she is arguably closer to freedom and Berlin's notion of "positive liberty," than she was at Gateshead. In proving her progress, I will draw upon Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. In Book III of his work, Aristotle states "Virtue...is a state that decides" (*NE* II.6.1107a), revealing the connection between morality and agency. In my first chapter I examined Jane's uncontrolled behavior, not to denounce her morality but to illuminate the way acting on impulse undermines one's agency. In agreeing with Aristotle who wrote "actions caused by spirit seem least of all to accord with decision" (*NE* III.2.1111b), I argue that Jane's actions lacked *prohairesis*, "decision," which in turn stripped her of agency. In contrast, in chapter VII, Jane employs "reason and thought" (*NE* III.2.1112a), components of *prohairesis*, and is consequently able to better manage her passions. In doing so, she

displays behavior more consistent with Aristotle's ethics, and consequently is able to better steer her way through the difficult moment. While she is still under the rule of Mr. Brocklehurst, her ability to decide upon her actions reflects the way her character growth keeps her from fully falling claim to his power.

In demonstrating Jane's character development and increasing agency, I will conduct a closer analysis of the moment Jane drops her slate. Upon first hearing Mr. Brocklehurst summon her to the front of the classroom, Jane recalls feeling "paralyzed" (Brontë 77). While her initial reaction is paralysis, this moment in which she lacks voluntary movement is fleeting, and countered by subsequent, and more noteworthy, displays of control and voluntary action. In gaining stability, Jane distinguishes herself from the previously analyzed instance with John Reed, where she lacked the faculty of control. While she writes "an impulse of fury against Reed, Brocklehurst, and Co bounded in my pulses at the conviction" (Brontë 78), Jane does not act on the impulsive inclination. Rather, she remains subdued, and even after Mr. Brocklehurst falsely, and hypocritically, rants about Jane's poor character, mandating her exclusion from the Lowood community, Jane writes "by this time in perfect possession of my wits" (Brontë 79). Acquiring "possession," Jane reveals her ability to self-govern and to seize control over that which rests in her domain.

Brontë further exemplifies Jane's growing agency within the scene by switching Jane's narration from the passive to active voice. Jane writes "There was I, then, mounted aloft" (Brontë 79) and then later writes "I...took a firm stand on the stool" (Brontë 80). While both sentences portray Jane standing on the stool, their construction varies and depicts Jane in relation to her circumstances differently.

Reading the two lines in tandem, I argue that the shift in Jane's grammatical role within the sentences, from direct object to subject, represents her increasing power and agency. Additionally, comparing these two lines in light of Berlin's paper, in which he explains that "positive liberty" is about being "a subject, not an object" (Berlin 23), I have interpreted the lines as a manifestation of Jane's growing freedom. Furthermore, the image of Jane's "firm stand," with her head "lifted up," compared to the prior image of the protagonist hiding behind her slate to "elude observation" (Brontë 77), captures her growing confidence and sense of self.

In continuing to describe her time on the stool, Jane writes "I mastered the rising hysteria" (Brontë 80). "Mastered" marks a shift in the narrative, as the term "master" has generally referred to John Reed, but now is used to describe Jane. Additionally her mastery over her "hysteria" is recognized as an even greater accomplishment when considered within a larger gendered context. In "Hysteria, Feminism, and Gender Revisited: The Case of the Second Wave," Cecily Devereux writes that hysteria has been "Historically linked with femininity for hundreds of years," and discusses the "somatic symptoms" (Devereux 20) of females' emotions. The reasoning for its connection to the female race traces back to the Ancient Greeks, who, according to Christopher Faraone's article "Magical and Medical Approached to the Wandering Womb in the Ancient Greek World," believed that "the womb moved freely about a woman's body causing a spasmodic disease" (Faraone 1), and that in order to prevent such disruptive movement "The Hippocratic doctors recommend a number of therapies" such as marrying young and repeated intercourse with one's husband (Faraone 4). Given these foolish, biased treatments, Jane's ability to master her "hysteria," independent of male assistance,

highlights her growing autonomy and resistance of the patriarchy. Furthermore, by comparing her mastery of hysteria in this moment with the lack thereof at Gateshead, I have sought to illustrate her development within the Bildungsroman and her growing sense of independence.

Drawing upon Aristotelian language to further explore the difference between Jane's behavior at Gateshead and Lowood, I would argue that she shares the same "feeling" and "capacity" but differs in "state" (*NE* II.5.1105B). That is, in both the red room scene and slate scene, Jane experiences anger, but her states, which Aristotle describes as "what we have when we are well or badly off in relation to feelings" (*NE* II.5.1105B), differ. While her refined relation to her anger affords her greater control and agency, it is the presence of her "fury" that I think is more noteworthy, as it is what distinguishes her character both from Helen's and the Victorian female moral code, which mandated that "a truly virtuous woman has no strong desires and passions at all" (Mizel 187). Had Jane eradicated her passions and been complacent with her current situation, she would be a product, rather than a maker, of her experiences.

### **Chapter III: Thornfield**

Having analyzed Jane at different stages of her life, first at Gateshead, and then at Lowood, I will now investigate her portrayal at Thornfield as a means of tracking her character development. In continuing to examine her character in relation to male figures in the novel, I will illustrate the challenges posed to her by Rochester, and the way she manages them. In my discussion, I will also introduce Bertha Mason, in order to supplement my analysis of morality, restraint and autonomy, and to elucidate Aristotle's notion of the excessive state. The chapter will conclude with an examination

of the wedding scene, which I will prove to be a pivotal movement within Brontë's Bildungsroman.

### **Section I: Morality and Agency**

To begin, I will analyze a conversation between Jane and Rochester in chapter XIV, and will argue it to be a literal exploration of the connection Aristotle draws between morality, happiness and autonomy. Not only does the content of their conversation resemble Aristotelian concepts, but the way Brontë explores the ideas through the two characters also resembles Aristotle's method of explanation. When introducing a new term, Aristotle often begins with what it is not. By offering examples of its contrary, he seeks to more clearly capture the essence of that which he is describing. In defining the virtues of character, Aristotle always discusses their opposing vices, thereby strengthening his description of each virtue. Brontë, too, uses this technique and applies it to her characterizations. In emphasizing certain traits of characters, she depicts the opposite quality in another character. In this specific scene, she uses Rochester and Jane to explore two opposing moral philosophies, the former's inconsistent with Aristotle's ethics and the latter's more congruent with it. More specifically, both characters have had unfortunate external circumstances, but are distinguished on the basis of their current outlooks; the female protagonist holds herself accountable for the attainment of happiness, whereas Rochester underestimates his role in designing his own fate. Thus, by analyzing their conversation, I seek to highlight Jane's sense of agency.

Before examining Jane's moral philosophy, I will highlight her subordination to Rochester in many respects. In doing so, I seek to support my claim that Jane's growing

morality helps her combat the challenges posed by her low positioning within Victorian culture. While Rochester is better off financially, Jane's understanding of morality is in fact more advantageous, as it provides her with a sense of responsibility over her life, and thus increases her potential for happiness. Jane begins the scene by narrating "Is Miss Eyre there?' now demanded the master" (Brontë 152), introducing their power dynamic by using authoritative language such as "demanded" and "master". By noting his high standing within Victorian culture, amidst their conversation about his unhappiness, Jane reveals this his status is not a sufficient condition for happiness. Further highlighting his social superiority over Jane, the protagonist recalls that "Mr. Rochester had such a direct way of giving orders, it seemed a matter of course to obey him promptly" (Brontë 153). Despite the powerful image he holds within society, Rochester lacks agency within his own life. Additionally, by acknowledging his "direct way" and compelling nature, Jane reveals the difficulty in resisting his will, and thus, her ability later in the Bildungsroman to do so, testifies her character growth.

Furthermore, while Jane is inferior in terms of position, age, class and gender, she gains a sense of superiority over her employer in the scene. Through their dialogue, Jane proves to be a more active agent and to possess a greater deal of autonomy, whereas Rochester's philosophy hinders his agency. Referring back to Epictetus' philosophy, I seek to distinguish Jane and Rochester on the basis of the idea of "circumstances as masters" (Epictetus 499). While Jane has learned to define herself independently of her circumstances, Rochester cannot separate himself from his misfortunes. In rationalizing his current state, Rochester explains that he has encountered hardships and had his past been different, he tells Jane " I might have been as good as you"

(Brontë 158). Not only does Rochester falsely presume Jane's "unpolluted memory" (Brontë 158), but he also seeks exoneration of his current character based on prior occurrences.

Additionally, Rochester says "Nature meant me to be...a good man" (Brontë 159), again suggesting that his moral compass has been corrupted by his experiences. The lack of responsibility Rochester takes for the makeup of his character is emphasized through the syntactical structure of the quotation, in which he is the direct object and thus lacks control. The line is also noteworthy for the way it contrasts Aristotelian thinking which believes "we do not become good or bad by nature" (*NE* II.5.1106a), but rather, are judged based on the quality of our states, none of which arise in us "naturally" (*NE* II.1.1103a). Similarly, Rochester says "I verily believe, rather to circumstances than to my natural bent, I am a trite, commonplace sinner" (Brontë 159), again implying that he is a product of his experiences. Reading this quote in light of Aristotle's explanation that he who "bears many severe misfortunes with good temper, not because he feels no distress, but because he is noble and magnanimous" (*NE* I.10.1100b) is virtuous, I argue that it is not Rochester's pain that warrants moral denunciation, but rather his submission to it. That is, believing that his internal makeup is entirely subjected to his "circumstances," Rochester lacks agency and the means for reform. He declares "happiness is irrevocably denied me" (Brontë 160), once more distinguishing his philosophy with Aristotelian moral philosophy, which argues that "complete happiness depends on himself, and not on external conditions" (Irwin 333).

Reflecting on his past, Rochester says "I should have been superior to circumstances...but you see I was not. When fate wronged me, I had not the wisdom to



remain cool...then I degenerated” (Brontë 159). His degeneration, referring to the outcome of his passionate behavior, or inability to “remain cool,” elucidates the connection Aristotle draws between morality and happiness, in that the latter is contingent upon the former. Additionally, I would argue that out of the “three conditions of character to be avoided,” discussed in Book VII of *Nicomachean Ethics*, Rochester, in this particular scene, embodies “incontinence” (*NE VII.1.1145a*). While he acknowledges that he previously lacked “wisdom,” he now demonstrates that he understands the importance of remaining “cool,” of controlling one’s passions, but neglects to do so. In discussing incontinence, Aristotle writes “one type....is weakness,” and asserts that “the weak person deliberates, but then his feeling makes him abandon the result of his deliberation” (*NE VII.7.1150b*). Similarly, Rochester, amidst recognizing the possibility of rising above one’s “circumstances” and taking accountability for his character, equates himself to a “vicious simpleton” (Brontë 159). That is, Rochester understands the responsibility he has in shaping his character, but chooses to remain inactive, and does not partake in efforts of reform.

On the contrary, Jane, who too has had a tumultuous past, differs from Rochester in that she does not define herself by her experiences. In responding to all that Rochester has just shared with her, Jane offers him hope in the name of “Repentance” (Brontë 159), mirroring Helen’s response when Jane shared her story with her, which also entailed turning to religion. However, unlike Helen, who sought consolation in repentance to better her afterlife, Jane encourages Rochester to take active measures to better his life. In doing so, she acts in accordance with Aristotle’s belief that “if someone can be set right, we should try harder to rescue his character” (*NE IX.3.1165b*). Jane,

furthering distinguishing herself from Helen, who said “I had no qualities or talents to make my way very well in the world” (Brontë 97), and believes such disposition to be out of her control, believes in the potential for reform and says to Rochester “you said you were not as good as you should like to be, and that you regretted your own imperfection; it seems to me, that if you tried hard, you would in time find it possible to become what you yourself would approve” (Brontë 161). This statement, echoing the spirit of Aristotle’s *Ethics*, perfectly captures the essence of Jane’s moral philosophy. Just as Aristotle believed that “virtue is...up to us” (*NE* III.5.113b), Jane also understands that an individual is responsible for the cultivation of his or her own character. In specifying the ways in which Rochester might better himself, Jane says “correct your thoughts and actions”(Brontë 161). By emphasizing both “thoughts” and “actions,” Jane illuminates Aristotle’s claim that in attaining virtue “actions are not enough” and that the “agent must also be in the right state when he does them” (*NE* II.4.1105a). Thus, according to the Aristotelian-inflected ideas that Jane expresses, Rochester’s reform cannot merely lie in improved moral behavior but must consist of a developed mind, in which decision making and deliberation in accord with reason take place.

## **Section 2: Morality and Self-Restraint**

Having discussed Jane’s thoughts on character, as they concur with Aristotle’s, I will now study her character in relation to self-restraint. In turning to a scene demonstrating Jane’s absolute suppression of her passions, I will reveal how excessive self-control hinders her happiness. Then in analyzing her moderate suppression in a subsequent scene, I will reveal how this sort of behavior, is more instrumental in her attainment of happiness. In other words, I will prove Aristotle’s moral philosophy to be

more conducive to happiness than the Victorian moral code, by exposing the downfalls of extreme self-restraint, embedded in Victorian ethics.

Up until chapter XXIII, Jane has concealed her feelings for Rochester. As Ayyildiz writes in “From the Bottom To The Top: Class and Gender Struggle in Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*,” “Grown up in a class-based society, Jane is also so class conscious that she tries to suppress her feelings towards Mr. Rochester ...as she is just a governess” (Ayyildiz 151). Despite her general lack of conformity to female expectations, Jane acknowledges the absurdity in assuming a man of the upper class, especially her employer, would take interest in a governess. In acknowledging the societal pressures she felt to suppress her feelings, I do not seek to denounce Jane’s character, but to reveal the problems that ensue from utter suppression.

Her efforts to repress her feelings are manifested in two portraits she creates, one of herself, and one of Blanche Ingram. Explicating her plan, Jane writes that one portrait will be entitled “Portrait of a Governess, disconnected, poor, and plain” and the other “Blanche, an accomplished lady of rank” (Brontë 187). The discrepancy between her degrading title and Miss Ingram’s glorifying one is indicative of Jane reminding herself that Blanche Ingram would be the more obvious choice for Rochester. In a similar spirit, Jane uses stylistic techniques that emphasize Blanche’s superficial superiority. For the self-portrait, Jane decides on “chalk,” whereas for Blanche’s portrait, she plans to use “delicate camel-hair pencils” (Brontë 187). The difference in utensils serves to distinguish the women not only on the basis of their appearances, but also on that of their classes, as “chalk” is considerably less luxurious than “camel-hair pencils”. Additionally, for her self-portrait Jane tells herself to “omit no harsh line,

smooth away no displeasing irregularity,” and for Blanche’s to “omit neither diamond ring nor gold bracelet” (Brontë 187). Talking to herself, and anticipating her temptation to minimize her and Blanche’s glaring differences, Jane reveals her split nature. Her narration, in which she addresses herself as if she were made up of two parts, represents Aristotle’s description of the divided soul, split into two parts, the “rational” and “nonrational” (*NE* I.13.1102a). Additionally, the two phrases, figuratively connected by the repetition of “omit,” again demonstrate the way in which Jane is using art to highlight the differences between herself and Blanche, as a means of proving her desires futile. After completing the endeavor, Jane’s art serves its purposes, and she reflects “I had reason to congratulate myself on the course of wholesome discipline to which I had thus forced my feelings to submit” (Brontë 188). Her success is emblematic of Aristotle’s claim that the nonrational part of the soul has the ability to be “persuaded in some way by reason” (*NE* I.13.1102b). Had Brontë ended the novel here, Jane’s moral growth would have arguably been more consistent with the Victorian moral code. However, Brontë’s novel continues, and proves Jane’s suppression to be detrimental to her well being, identifying the need for the protagonist to lessen her grip, and act in closer adherence with Aristotle’s mean.

Having so forcefully suppressed her emotions, Jane experiences the backlash of this extreme restraint, most clearly apparent in the scene where Rochester informs Jane of her completed service to him and recommends a job in Ireland. Unable to repress her emotions any longer, Jane narrates “The vehemence of emotion, stirred by grief and love within me, was claiming mastery...and asserting a right to predominate, to overcome, to live, rise, and reign at last: yes-and to speak” (Brontë 291). The way in

which Jane's emotions are personified, given their "asserting" manner, gives them greater power and a sense of independence, both of which are then used to enslave Jane. Jane's metaphorical enslavement to her emotions in this moment, juxtaposes the prior portrayals of her reason mastering her passions. Thus, the way in which Jane's suppression backfires, evident in her narration "I sobbed convulsively" (Brontë 291), exemplifies the novel's similar outlook on character as that presented in Aristotle's *Ethics*. Just as Aristotle believed "virtue is acquired by a mean-neither total repression nor total indulgence of a...feeling" (Irwin 194), Jane learns that character is not about her reason mastering her passions, or about her passions mastering her reason; rather, it is about their reconciliation, and ability to exist harmoniously.

Now transitioning into the scene where Jane unleashes her emotions, I will demonstrate the way such expression promotes happiness. By including this particular scene, I seek to prove that Brontë's Bildungsroman provides a literary example of Aristotle's connection between happiness and morality. The particular scene I will analyze, in which Jane confronts Rochester, may surprise the reader, as perhaps he does not think such analysis follows the natural trajectory of this paper. That is, chapter I analyzed a scene where Jane lacks control over her passions, chapter II introduced Jane's growing sense of control, and so one might expect the third to study Jane's complete mastery of self-control. However this is not true for Jane's character, and would undermine Brontë's feminist message that pervades the novel. Rather, the following analysis centers on a scene in which Jane expresses her passions. Analyzing this scene, I seek to prove that Jane's moral development highlights her maturation and

increasing autonomy, in that her morality is not strictly Victorian, Christian, or Aristotelian, but rather defies the first, and comprises elements of the second two.

Furthermore, by choosing a scene that disrupts the linear development of the protagonist, I can show how *Jane Eyre* does not satisfy the traditional criteria for a Victorian Bildungsroman, but nonetheless fits into the genre. In “Portraits of the Girl-Child: Female Bildungsroman in Victorian Fiction,” Sarah Maier defines Bildungsroman as a term “used to designate a genre of novel (roman) which demonstrates the formation (bildung) of a character” (Maier 317). In further discussing the genre, she explains that the path towards development varies depending on the gender of the protagonist, as such growth is confined and controlled by the particular society to which the protagonist belongs. Consequently, many literary critics either have rejected the existence of the genre for female protagonists, or have limited the character’s growth to “development of the self through marriage” (Baruch 341). Expanding upon the former critique, Maier discusses that which Annis Pratt wrote in “Archetypal Patterns in Women’s Fiction” in which Pratt argues that within the Victorian social structure “girl-children are schooled in dependency” (Maier 319) and thus a Victorian Bildungsroman with a female protagonist would be more of a “growing down” rather than “growing up” (Maier 319). That is, if we view the term within the social framework of the time period, then the female’s growth and education would lead her towards complacency, dependency and domesticity, and thus technically, a female Bildungsroman would detail this type of backwards development. However, Maier then asserts that “the female bildungsroman does exist” (Maier 320), a statement with which I concur. By framing the genre with Aristotle’s moral philosophy, I have sought to offer a reinterpretation of the female

Bildungsroman, and have proven that *Jane Eyre* does indeed belong to the genre. By illustrating Jane's moral development, I have shown how such growth has enabled her to mature within the strict confines of Victorian society, without "growing down" or surrendering her autonomy and sense of self.

Thus I will now introduce the scene, that breaks the linear development of Jane's growing self-control, by providing an analysis of Jane's surroundings. Contrary to the harsh climates and sullen nature imagery depicted at Gateshead and Lowood, Jane now finds herself amidst a flourishing garden. In opening the scene, Jane narrates "A splendid Midsummer shone over England: skies so pure, suns so radiant" (Brontë 286). Such light and warmth contrast the pervasive darkness and chill that has generally followed Jane thus far, while also foreshadowing the joy Jane is about to experience. Similarly, the descriptions "bloomed with flowers" (Brontë 286) and "trees laden with ripening fruit" (Brontë 287), noted for the sense of vivacity they exude, again juxtapose prior descriptions of melancholy nature. For instance, the blossoming garden in this scene, described as "Eden-like" (Brontë 286), contrasts Jane's prior narration of the garden at Lowood, where "all was wintry blight and brown decay" (Brontë 58). Given this change, perhaps Brontë sought to illuminate Jane's improving morale by manifesting such in the protagonist's natural surroundings.

Having described the setting, Jane then shifts to dialogue. Assuming that the ambiguous marriage plans Rochester speaks of include Blanche Ingram, and in fearing leaving Rochester for Ireland, Jane, as discussed earlier, is overwhelmed by the "vehemence of emotion" (Brontë 291). However, she collects herself, and rather than delivering an illogical tirade, Jane presents her thoughts in a clear, concise manner. The

first half of her speech consists of a series of rhetorical questions, in which she accuses Rochester of undermining her personhood. For instance, she asks “Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless?” (Brontë 292). The words “poor” and “plain,” emphasized by their alliteration, are also the words with which Jane entitled her self-portrait. Their previous purpose of making herself feel inadequate and not worthy of Rochester’s love, now contradict their current one, which is to prove that such superficial qualities are irrelevant to Jane’s nature. Additionally, by presenting these accusations in the form of questions, Jane softens their impact, without weakening their message. Her progression from exclamatory claims, seen in her verbal attack of John Reed in Chapter I, to the rhetorical questions she now implements, illustrates the way she has refined her means of expression. Jane’s rhetorical strategy then shifts, and she continues her speech as if Rochester had answered affirmatively to her questions. Excluding him from her monologue, Jane is able to maintain a sense of control and express all her feelings in a singular, orderly fashion. She says “it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if...we stood at God’s feet, equal” (Brontë 292), and in acknowledging their equality, Jane’s narration takes a major shift. The statement contradicts the theme of oppression that has pervaded the novel, and thus illustrates the way Jane has resisted the degradation imposed on her by the Victorian hierarchical social system.

Jane’s speech then culminates with an immediate kiss from Rochester, followed by his proposal. Inferring Jane’s happiness, I would argue that this scene illuminates the connection between character and morality, discussed in Aristotle’s *Ethics*. While this scene dramatically differs from the closing scene of Chapter I, detailing John and



Jane's conflict, I seek to compare them in regards to the nature of Jane's expression and its outcome. While, her expression in this scene is characterized as having an "eye towards relief and reconciliation" (Mizel 188), her expression in the scene with John was vengeful and vindictive. Additionally, Jane's expression in this scene, as noted earlier, leads to Rochester's proposal, whereas with John, it leads to Jane's imprisonment in the red room. In contrast to Jane's entrapment in chapter II, Jane's expression in chapter XXIII is followed by feelings of liberty, evident when Jane writes "no net ensnares me; I am a free human being with an independent will" (293 Brontë). Again, this moment marks a crucial turning point in the novel, as such freedom and independence contradict past descriptions of enslavement and dependency. While of course there is a multitude of reasons of why Jane is received differently, for the purpose of this paper, I am interested in the way Jane's character growth, resembling Aristotelian morality, brings her closer to attaining happiness. Comparing these two scenes, I have found that they illustrate three concepts crucial to Aristotle's *Ethics*. First, they indicate that expression is important, and one's passions should not be utterly suppressed. That is, had Jane emulated Helen's model of tolerance in this moment, or practiced Victorian virtue, she would not have confronted Rochester, and perhaps the change that takes place would have been delayed or nonexistent. The scenes also prove Jane's growth to be in movement towards Aristotle's "mean," given that Jane learns to reason with her passions and express them in a more moderate way. And lastly, they support Aristotle's notion that the attainment of *eudaimonia*, "flourishing," or "happiness," is heavily contingent upon virtue, in the way Jane's expression leads to different outcomes, one positive, the other negative.

### **Section 3: Demonstration of Character Growth**

To conclude this section on Thornfield, I will now closely analyze chapters XXVI and XXVII, which arguably contain the most convincing manifestation of Jane's moral development. In my examination, I will shift from the passion of anger to that of erotic love, and will reveal how just as Jane learned to employ reason in moments of anger, she learns to exert a similar restraint over Eros. In marking the wedding scene as the quintessential expression of her morality, I have questioned the underlying sentiment in "The Feminine Bildungsroman: Education Through Marriage," in which Baruch asserts that for female protagonists in 19th century literature, including *Jane Eyre*, "development remained inextricably linked to marriage" (Baruch 357). In elaborating on this link, Baruch claims that women "turned to marriage to achieve the goals of...increased knowledge...enhancement of feeling and experience" (Brontë 340). I would argue that Jane's development has largely been more of an individual pursuit, influenced, but not determined, by the various people she meets and the experiences she encounters, and minimally by her marriage to Rochester, which does not happen until the end of the Bildungsroman. In fact I will argue that the greatest example of her development is when she chooses to leave Rochester.

In introducing the wedding scene, I seek to examine the way in which Rochester challenges Jane's morality, and the way the protagonist upholds her ethical code in the face of such challenges. Immediately after Jane learns of Rochester's conjugal ties to Bertha Mason she recognizes the necessity of her departure. The immediacy of this decision should not be confused with impulsivity or rashness, but should be noted for its demonstration of Jane's deeply embedded moral code. While Jane's narration reveals

momentary doubts about leaving Rochester, evident when she writes “I cannot do it” (Brontë 343), the reader understands these feelings to be temporary, and knows that Jane has committed herself to her proposed plan of departure.

Given that Jane decides upon this plan while she is alone in her room, perhaps the reader anticipates that when she again sees Rochester, the very object of her desire, she will reconsider her decision. However, Jane proves her resolve as Brontë introduces Rochester back into the scene, bringing that which she seeks to leave, closer. As if his lone presence were not enough to complicate Jane’s feelings, Rochester launches into a heart warming retelling of their experiences together. Unlike Rochester, who is indulging himself with these memories, Jane recognizes the danger in such recollection and narrates “his language was torture to me; for I knew what I must do-and do soon-and all these reminiscences, and these revelations of his feelings only made my work more difficult” (Brontë 362). “Torture” exemplifies Jane’s profound feelings for him, which are then countered by her sense of obligation, underscored by “must,” to suppress these feelings and leave. After the delivery of Rochester’s powerful profession of his love, Jane writes “Terrible moment: full of struggle blackness, burning! Not a human being that ever lived could wish to be loved better than I was loved” (Brontë 362). These words capture Jane’s internal conflict, and through both hyperbolic language and the alliteration of the ‘b’s, Jane’s feelings are dramatized. Given Jane’s prior discussions of her desire to feel loved, at Gateshead and Lowood, this line reads all the more painfully, as she has finally found love, and now feels she must leave it. Amidst revealing the intensity of this love, she invokes reason and writes “One drear word comprised my intolerable duty-‘Depart!’” (Brontë 363). Again Brontë employs alliteration, connecting

“drear,” “duty” and “Depart,” emphasizing her understanding of her moral obligation, despite its execution seeming “intolerable”.

In steadfastly clutching to her sense of duty and refusing to let her Eros cloud her vision, Jane exemplifies her morality and sense of self-respect. In anticipating the challenges she will face in departing Thornfield, Jane writes “I wanted to be weak that I might avoid the awful passage of further suffering” (Brontë 343); but nonetheless, she is not “weak,” and resolves to take the right, rather than easier path. Analyzing her decision from an Aristotelian perspective, I would argue that her actions are in close accord with the virtue of “magnanimity,” which is applied to the person “who thinks himself worthy of great things and is really worthy of them” (*NE* IV.3.1123b). Jane, having cultivated a strong sense of morality, rightly knows her self worth supersedes that of a mistress, and understands she must leave. It is in the moment, when she chooses to leave that which she desires most, that Brontë’s protagonist exemplifies tremendous courage, independence and growth.

Next to this portrayal of Jane’s reaction to the news Briggs delivers at the wedding, Brontë includes a vivid portrayal of Bertha Mason, a character who is “antithetical to the heroine Jane” (Byrne 45). This depiction not only proves the “existence of an impediment” (Brontë 333) to the marriage, but also highlights Jane’s controlled behavior by contrasting it with Bertha’s unrestrained character. That is, Bertha’s portrayal embodies the Aristotelian vice of excess, and by setting this benchmark, it is easier to recognize Jane’s actions as consistent with the Aristotelian virtue, situated at the mean. In Gilbert and Gubar’s book “*The Madwoman in the Attic*,” the feminist critics argue that Bertha can be seen as Jane’s duplicate and is an

embodiment of Jane's uncontrolled passions (Byrne 46). Specifically they draw a connection between the language used to describe Jane in the red room scene and that used to depict Bertha in the scene after the annulled wedding, connecting the two women figuratively. Thus, Bertha's characterization, which is a hyperbolic reflection of Jane's past nature, serves to emphasize Jane's growth, specifically away from Bertha Mason (representing excess), and towards more moderate behavior (representing the intermediate state).

In characterizing Bertha, Jane uses animal like language, stripping Bertha of her humanity. By ascribing bestial qualities to Bertha, Jane implicitly highlights her lack of reason, as "reason belongs to human beings as opposed to other animals" (Irwin 346). Additionally such language resembles Plato's discussion of hysteria in the *Timaeus* in which he claims that "the womb is a living animal that wanders about the body" (Faraone 4). This language is first introduced when, upon first laying eyes on Rochester's wife, Jane recalls the difficulty in discerning whether "it" was a "beast or human" (Brontë 338) and then proceeds to narrate "it groveled...on all fours; it snatched and growled...and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face" (Brontë 338). Not only does the narration evoke animal like imagery, but also that of untamed animals, further emphasizing Bertha's unkempt nature. Additionally by noting "it," a neutral pronoun used to refer to Bertha, rather than "she," I seek to illuminate Armstrong's assertion that "Bertha Mason shows us what happens when the palpable physicality of sex obliterates the signs of normative femininity" (Armstrong 533). It is also worth noting the absence of her name in Jane's narration and its replacement with various terms such as "hyena" and "maniac" (Brontë 338). The many

names used in reference to Bertha all capture her uncontrolled temperament, but more interestingly, the absence of “Bertha” in the narration highlights her lack of autonomy and identity. That is, as proven previously, Jane’s morality, in close resemblance with Aristotle’s *Ethics*, grants her greater agency, and by the logic of the inverse, Bertha’s excessively passionate behavior strips her of such agency.

The scene then escalates and Bertha’s animalistic behavior manifests itself in beastly violence. She is said to have “grappled his throat viciously, and laid her teeth to his cheek” (Brontë 338), lacking any sort of human decency, let alone morality. Additionally, given that Aristotle limited *eudaimonia* to human beings, viewing Bertha’s animal like portrayal from an Aristotelian perspective, I can logically infer her unhappiness (or more technically, her inability to “flourish”) and support my claim that excessive behavior is detrimental to the attainment of happiness. The scene then culminates with the phrase “he bound her to a chair” (Brontë 339), serving profound implications within the discussion of morality. The image of Bertha constricted by rope and trapped in the attic represents the correlation between morality and freedom. Unlike Bertha, Jane acquires a tight grip on her passions, which may have felt restrictive at points, but has enabled her to become a freer agent. On the contrary, Bertha, who refrains from demonstrating restraint, is imprisoned by her indulgence of passions, represented by her entrapment in the attic. Thus, the juxtaposition between the characterization of the two women and their respective fates serves to exemplify the connection between freedom and morality, and prove that the former is contingent upon the latter.

Just as Bertha can be viewed as a tool to underscore the portrayal of Jane's control over her passions, Rochester's characterization in this particular scene, in which he admits that he is "not a gentle-tempered man" (Brontë 350), serves similar purposes. Through Brontë's juxtaposing language in her descriptions of Jane and Rochester, the author illuminates Aristotle's distinction between "feelings" and "states" (*NE* II.5.1105b), in that both Rochester and Jane share the same intense love for the other, but differ on the grounds of their relation to such passion. Rochester, acknowledging that he "meant...to be a bigamist" (Brontë 336), elevates his passion for Jane above ethics; whereas Jane, who full heartedly reciprocates his feelings, is guided by a sense of moral duty and refuses to "indulge the feeling" (Brontë 350). In portraying Rochester's character, Brontë writes "Suddenly he turned away...full of passionate emotion...he walked fast through the room and came back: he stooped towards me as if to kiss me" (Brontë 445). The sentence, long and packed with many actions, resembles Rochester's frantic mood. By starting it with "Suddenly," Brontë indicates the impulsivity of his movements and highlights his unsteady emotions. Perhaps the image of Rochester quickly moving about the room is meant to resemble that of Bertha from the previous chapter where Jane narrates "a figure ran backwards and forwards" (Brontë 338). Brontë again depicts Rochester as "walking fast about the room" (Brontë 348), and this time supplements the image with that of Jane who attempts to "assume and maintain a quiet, collected aspect" (Brontë 348). These disparate descriptions capture their different relations to their passions which is more explicitly demonstrated when Jane seeks to help Rochester restrain himself.

Upon observing Rochester, Jane compares his look to “that of a man who is just about to burst an insufferable bond and plunge headlong into wild license” (Brontë 349). Using terminology related to imprisonment and animals, Jane continues to draw parallels between her depictions of Rochester and of Bertha. Seeking to “control and restrain him,” Jane “took hold of his clenched hand, loosened the consorted fingers, and said to him, soothingly-‘Sit down; I’ll talk to you as long as you like’” (Brontë 349). This description not only elucidates the difference in their temperaments but also illustrates Jane’s forgiveness and unyielding love for Rochester. Again drawing on *Nicomachean Ethics*, this instance illustrates her magnanimity, as Aristotle writes “Greatness in each virtue also seems proper to the magnanimous person” (*NE* IV.3.1123b). Jane’s actions are not only commendable for their coherence with reason, but also for their relation to the virtues of bravery, mildness, truthfulness, etc. discussed in Books III and IV of Aristotle’s *Ethics*.

Now I will shift my discussion and reveal the way Christian morality influences her actions. The narration, filled with biblical allusions and religious references, reinforces the role religion has played in the development of Brontë’s protagonist. Firstly, the scene begins in a church, in which Jane and Rochester are to be married under God’s name. The illegality of the marriage, not only breaches societal law, but also defiles God’s name, as the couple would not be “joined together by God” (Brontë 333). By mentioning God, Brontë suggests that Jane’s uneasiness in regards to the situation is not motivated by her self-respect, but also by her allegiance to God, as she asserts “I will keep the law given by God” (Brontë 365). In addition to her Christian faith clarifying the necessity to leave Rochester, her Christian morality both shapes the



way she responds to Rochester and encourages her to remain strong in the face of temptation. That is, Jane's forgiveness of Rochester and her lack of ill will towards him resonate with Helen's doctrine, founded upon notions of forgiveness and distinguishing "the criminal and his crime" (Brontë 70). Similarly, Helen's influence manifests itself when Jane critiques the way Rochester speaks of his wife, saying "you speak of her with hate-with vindictive antipathy. It is cruel" (Brontë 347). Jane's denunciation of Rochester's wrath again demonstrates her growth of character, and reflects Helen's response to Jane's expression of hatred for Mrs. Reed. Additionally, in "longing to be dead" and ending this battle against her passions, Jane writes that she is enlivened by "a remembrance of God" (Brontë 342), which "throbbed life-like within" (Brontë 342). Finding solace in this higher being again exemplifies the growing role religion plays in the protagonist's life, specifically the influence it has had on her character. She seeks to share this solace with Rochester, telling him "Believe in heaven. Hope to meet again there" (Brontë 364). In sharing this with Rochester, who has just broken her heart, Jane embodies forgiveness, good will, and a recognition of the strengthening effects of religious faith.

In concluding this section, I will leave the reader with two quotes, one from Aristotle's *Ethics* and one from Jane. The first states that virtue is "in every case about what is more difficult, since a good result is even better when it is more difficult" (*NE* II.3.1105a). The second one reads "Laws and principles are not for the times when there is no temptation: they are for such moments as this" (Brontë 365). Thus, in the face of "temptation," Jane's decision to choose the path that "is more difficult" is exemplar of

her morality and strength, and while it puts her on a challenging path, she eventually comes to reap the benefits of her ethical decision.

#### **Chapter IV: Marsh End**

I will ground my last chapter in Marsh End, and provide a final analysis of Jane's character as a means of tracking her development. In supporting my claim that Brontë's Bildungsroman and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* share a similar perspective on morality, I will introduce St. John Rivers into my discussion, "a man who has stifled all humanity within himself" (Shapiro 693). In studying his character in relation to both Jane and Rosamond Oliver, I seek to reveal how his character illuminates Jane's morality. Just as I examined Bertha Mason in order to reveal the consequences of excessively passionate behavior, I will now analyze St. John's character in order to reveal the pitfalls of excessively controlled behavior. By exploring two extreme characters and discussing their moral shortcomings, I seek to underscore Jane's sense of moderation, and compare her to Aristotle's virtue, "a mean between two vices, one of excess and one of deficiency" (*NE* II.6.1107a). Just as I suggested that Bertha represents the state of excess, I will now argue that St. John embodies Aristotle's state of deficiency. Having examined his relationship with Jane, I will then support Maier's claim that his proposal serves as "a test of her newly affirmed sense of self" (Maier 329). I will conclude with an analysis of Jane's response to her acquisition of wealth, suggesting it to be a final demonstration of her morality.

#### **Section 1: Jane's and St. John's Varying Moral Philosophies**

To begin my analysis of St. John, I will first discuss the irony of his name, and further exemplify the similarity between Aristotle and Brontë's methods of explanation.

Just as Aristotle defines concepts by what they are not, St. John can be understood as what John Reed is not. In describing the former, Jane writes “not that he would have injured a hair of my head” (Brontë 473) and in portraying the latter she notes “I felt him grasp my hair” (Brontë 14). Their opposing treatments of Jane’s “hair” more broadly represent the juxtaposition between St. John’s calm, dispassionate character, and John’s uncontrolled temper. Similarly, Jane’s portrayal of St. John’s self-deprecating nature contrasts her description of John as someone who “gorged himself habitually at the table, which made him bilious” (Brontë 12). Just as John’s character emphasizes St. John’s restraint by comparison, St. John’s character highlights Jane’s opposing ethical makeup. Thus, by studying St. John’s character in this section, I seek to use the aforementioned technique to bolster my portrayal of Jane’s character.

Central to his character is his unyielding suppression of passions and his strict devotion to his missionary duties. In order to maximize his performance of his religious responsibilities, St. John concerns himself with neither humanly pleasures nor relationships. On the contrary, as Arnold Shapiro writes in “In Defense of Jane Eyre,” Jane refuses to “turn away from humanity, from the real needs of real people, to an other-worldly life-denying selfish existence nominally carried out in the name of god” (Shapiro 683). Her refusal is especially admirable given that St. John, as well as other religious characters, “accuse her of replacing God with people” (Kees 889). In spite of these accusations, Jane does not seek to reform herself and pursues her desires, evident when she chooses a marriage based on love rather than one based on serving God. That is, despite Jane’s Christian morality, “the austere faith of St. John Rivers does not suit her” (Kees 889-890) and she chooses to live a moral life compatible with fostering

human connections. Whereas Jane reconciles her religious faith with her humanly needs, St. John “makes no attempt to humanize it” (Shapiro 693), and thus lives a life devoid of human love. In illustrating the downfalls of St. John’s religious beliefs, Shapiro draws a connection between him and Mr. Brocklehurst who also practiced “inhuman religion” (Shapiro 687). Thus, once again Jane is confronted with the pressures to succumb to an unforgiving religious doctrine, and yet again she does not submit to this form of oppression and demonstrates an “affirmation of her own individuality” (Shapiro 683).

St. John’s philosophy incompatible with human affection is manifested in his interactions with Miss Oliver. Before examining his interaction with Miss Oliver, Jane offers a description of her alarming beauty, which glorifies the very temptation St. John refuses. When Miss Oliver first appears, Jane recounts “A vision...had risen at his side” (Brontë 417) and refers to her as an “earthly angel” (Brontë 418). Jane’s use of religious language, “Risen” and “angel,” ascribes a divine-like quality to Miss Oliver, dramatizing her beauty. Similarly, Jane notes her “form clad in pure white,” her “white, smooth forehead” and her “pure hues” (Brontë 418). By repeating “pure” and “white,” Jane emphasizes Miss Oliver’s chastity and innocence, suggesting that it is not her nature that disturbs St. John. In other words, St. John does not reject Miss Oliver because of her character, but because of his own morality, which strictly encourages him to “not give one chance of heaven, nor relinquish, for the Elysium of her love, one hope of the true, eternal Paradise” (Brontë 424). This idea of elevating religious duties above human relations echoes Helen’s ideology, but is practiced in a more intense manner, as Helen was able to connect with Jane.

Additionally, it is important to note that “Rosamond equals ‘Rose of the world’” (Shapiro 693). In drawing a biblical allusion to the “rose of Eden,” Brontë strengthens Miss Oliver’s divine like beauty. Jane also employs flower-related language in her description of Miss Oliver. She writes that she “looked like a bright flower” (Brontë 426) and supplements this comparison with the description of “there bloomed under his glance a face of perfect beauty” (Brontë 418), equating Miss Oliver’s face to that of a growing flower, marking its youth, health, and beauty. Similarly, Jane observes her “hues of rose and lily” and uses words such as “fresh” and “sweetness” to describe her features (Brontë 418). The flower imagery that pervades this description not only underscores Miss Oliver’s beauty but also gives symbolic meaning to the statement describing St. John, who is said to have “crushed the snowy heads of the closed flowers with his foot” (Brontë 418). This action represents an act of suppression, and figuratively captures the way he refuses to yield to the temptation presented by Miss Oliver.

After detailing her beauty, Jane observes St. John’s reaction and notes his transparent effort to stifle his feelings. Jane notes, “I saw his solemn eye melt with sudden fire, and flicker with resistless emotion” (Brontë 420), revealing his infatuation with Miss Oliver. “Fire” and “flicker,” words associated with passion, contradict his usual cold, emotionless countenance, and indicate his capacity for passion. In further characterizing his reaction, Jane writes that he is “flushed and kindled” (Brontë 420), carrying out the alliteration of the letter “f” from the previous line, and again evoking fire imagery in order to dramatize his uncharacteristic, subtle demonstration of feelings. Continuing to observe him, Jane writes his “chest heaved once, as if his large heart,

weary of despotic constriction, had expanded, despite the will, and made a vigorous bound for the attainment of liberty” (Brontë 420). The juxtapositions between “despotic” and “liberty,” and “constriction” and “expanded,” serve to highlight the tyrannical nature of his restraint and its imprisoning impact. However, his temporary efforts towards attaining liberty are fleeting as Jane narrates “But he curbed it...as a resolute rider would curb a rearing steed” (Brontë 420). In this analogy, the “resolute rider” would be St. John’s rationality and the “rearing steed” his passions, emphasizing his refusal to submit to any sort of feelings for Miss Oliver. Jane’s observations of St. John’s apparent feelings and effort to quell them are supported by St. John himself who recognized “the effort it cost him thus to refuse” (Brontë 420). Again his refusal to accept his feelings for Miss Oliver reveal the social implications of his strict restraint, and the way his character prevents him from enjoying and fostering human connections.

In further characterizing his aloof nature, Jane also evaluates the way he interacts with her. Given that Jane’s increasing happiness has been largely influenced by her cultivation of friendships, St. John’s detached nature is especially galling to her and perhaps serves to solidify Jane’s own morality. Upon first meeting St. John and his two sisters, Diana and Mary, Jane remarks that “the intimacy which had arisen so naturally and rapidly between me and his sisters did not extend to him” (Brontë 403). The juxtaposition between Diana and Mary’s warmth and friendliness towards Jane, and St. John’s cool reception, casts his nature in a negative light. As Jane continues to observe him, she writes “another barrier to friendship with him: he seemed of a reserved, abstracted, and even of a brooding nature” (Brontë 404). By discussing the “barrier” his

“brooding nature” has erected, Jane again reveals the negative implications of living a life strictly dedicated to religious duties.

Having drawn attention to how Brontë highlights the limitations of St. John’s moral character, I will now return to studying the protagonist’s character, whose morality is in fact compatible with human connections. In doing so, I not only seek to emphasize their different natures, but also strive to reveal the way the novel implicitly favors Jane’s morality to St. John’s, and expresses a similar perspective on character that is discussed in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. Just as Aristotle’s moral philosophy includes a discussion on friendship, and its contributions to one’s happiness, Jane’s ethics also acknowledges the correlation between the two. That is, much of Jane’s misery in the first half of the novel stems from her solitude and isolation, and likewise, her growing happiness in the latter half is partially attributed to her developing relations.

From the beginning of the novel Jane has longed for companionship. At Gateshead, when Mr. Lloyd, a stranger to Jane has completed his medical examination and leaves, Jane writes “I felt so sheltered and befriended while he sat in the chair near my pillow: and as he closed the door after him, all the room darkened and my heart again sank” (Brontë 24). Jane, minimally acquainted with the apothecary, felt so deprived of human affection, that she was impacted by his attentiveness to her wellbeing, albeit it being done out of professional duty. Additionally, writing “sheltered,” Jane indicates the protection she felt in Mr. Lloyd’s company, and introduces the way she associates the sense of home with human affection. For instance in chapter X after Miss Temple has left, Jane writes “with her was gone ...every association that had made

Lowood in some degree a home to me” (Brontë 100). Just as Jane felt “sheltered” by Mr. Lloyd, she associates Miss Temple with “home,” exemplifying the source of comfort Jane seeks in human relations. On the contrary, Helen defines home differently, and dying, tells Jane she is going to her “long home” (Brontë 96), referring to the “human destination of the grave” (Brontë 554). This distinction is representative of their varying philosophies, as Helen seeks solace in God and in the “future state” (Brontë 97), whereas Jane looks for support in humankind. Melodie Monahan comments on Jane’s perception of the home, in “Heading Out is Not Going Home: *Jane Eyre*,” writing “Going home is enacted each time Jane establishes community” (Monahan 591). The article, in distinguishing a hero from a heroine, claims that for the former “heading out” refers to returning home, whereas for the latter, the term refers to finding a sense of home, generally through the facilitation of relationships (Monahan 590).

In continuing to discuss her desire for companionship, Jane writes “I...sought shelter from cold and darkness in my crib. To this crib I always took my doll; human beings must love something, and, in the dearth of worthier objects of affection, I contrived to find a pleasure in loving and cherishing a faded graven image, shabby as a miniature scarecrow” (Brontë 35). Again Jane uses “shelter” and associates it with affection. While her “crib” offers her basic fundamental protection, Jane seeks to supplement this physical safety with love and brings her “doll” for companionship. By filling her void with a “shabby” inanimate object, Jane again reveals her desperation for friendship. Additionally, in claiming that all “human beings must love,” Jane shares Aristotle’s belief that by nature a human being is a *zoön politikon*, “a naturally social animal” (Marcus Phil 125 handout). In offering a last example of desire for friendship, I



quote Jane in Lowood where she says “to gain some real affection...I would willingly submit to have the bone of my arm broken, or to let a bull toss me, or stand behind a kicking horse, and let it dash its hoof at my chest” (Brontë 84). Here, her feelings are manifested in violent language, not only highlighting the intensity of her desire but also revealing her preference to suffer from physical pain rather than from an emotional void.

As the novel progresses, and Jane forms meaningful relationships, there is a conspicuous shift in her character, one marked by a growing sense of happiness. By attributing part of Jane’s happiness to her cultivation of friendships, Brontë delineates a character who embodies much of what is discussed in books VIII and IX of Aristotle’s *Ethics*. In his discussion of friendship, Aristotle acknowledges the “social character of happiness” and asserts that happiness “requires some contribution by other people” (Irwin 182). This idea plays a role in the novel not only through its manifestation in the protagonist but also through the way it influences Jane’s denunciation of St. John’s aloof nature. Thus, St. John’s strict restraint and aloof nature, by contrast, highlight Jane’s more moderate, social character; and furthermore, strengthens my portrayal of Jane’s Aristotelian character development.

## **Section 2: Demonstration of Autonomy**

In addition to portraying St. John’s aloofness, and thus proving his moral philosophy to be incongruent with Jane’s values and idea of happiness, Jane also discusses the dominating force of his character. In continuing the theme of male characters compromising Jane’s autonomy, Brontë portrays the effect St. John’s model of restraint has on Jane. Just as Bertha’s excessive passion resulted in entrapment, Jane

acknowledges that the other extreme—strict restraint—also has imprisoning effects. Not only does it imprison the agent of the moral position, as noted earlier when St. John’s heart “made a bound for the attainment of liberty” (Brontë 420), but also those acquainted with the individual and susceptible to his domination. Jane argues that she has felt restricted in his presence, comparing her state around him to one of “servitude” (Brontë 459). Jane’s use of language pertaining to liberty, specifically the lack thereof, in her descriptions of St. John, again draws a connection between morality and freedom, suggesting that his strict moral code impedes liberty.

For instance, she notes that “only serious moods and occupations were acceptable” (Brontë 459) around him, and describes feeling a certain pressure to submit to his restraint and emulate his character. To the same effect, Jane writes “he acquired a certain influence over me that took away my liberty of mind” (Brontë 459), revealing the way in which she feels her morality and freedom are challenged by his moral disposition. Elaborating on this “influence,” Jane narrates “I could no longer talk or laugh freely” (Brontë 459). Jane, then reveals her feelings to St. John, when she rejects his proposal and says “I am ready to go to India, if I may go free” (Brontë 46), and by “free” she means unwedded to him. It is important to note that Jane does not view the institution of marriage, as a whole, as an infringement on her freedom—only a marriage with St. John. Proving such, in reflecting on her union with Rochester, Jane writes, “To be together is for us to be at once as free as in solitude” (Brontë 519). Thus, her desire to go to India “free” is indicative of the freedom she anticipates she would lose by marrying St. John, not by merely marrying.

Continuing to discuss St. John as a hindrance to her freedom Jane imagines a life with him and writes “always restrained, and always checked-forced to keep the fire of my nature continually low, to compel it to burn inwardly and never utter a cry, though the imprisoned flame consumed vital after vital” (Brontë 470). These words echo Aristotle’s denunciation of the vice of deficiency, specifically Irwin’s statement in the introduction of Aristotle’s *Ethics* where he writes “the task of moral education, therefore, is not merely to subject the nonrational part of the soul to practical reason. Virtuous people allow reasonable satisfaction to their appetites” (Irwin xviii). Jane’s fear of feeling “always restrained” and “always checked,” emphasized by the repetition of “always,” indicates her concurrence with Aristotle’s sense of moderation in all activities. Additionally, in referencing “the fire of my nature,” Jane reminds the reader of her innately passionate behavior, and the way she has learned to manage her feelings, without suppressing them. Thus, Jane’s rejection supports my claim that her morality resembles much of what is discussed in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, specifically its denunciation of excessive restraint, and its understanding of the connection between morality and happiness.

Having highlighted the moral limitations of St. John’s character, I will now consider how Jane’s rejection of his marriage proposal represents her independence and character development. Within the moral narration, St. John’s character serves to expose Jane to the emotional and moral risks of strict restraint, and he himself functions as a test to her morality. That is, his proposal represents an opportunity for Jane to relinquish her happiness in exchange for religious service, and thus her rejection represents her “complete denial of River’s philosophy and view of existence, her

affirmation of her own individuality and right to self-expression” (Shapiro 683). As Gottlieb notes in “Central Works of Philosophy: Ancient and Medieval,” “Aristotle’s doctrine of the mean combines the two central ideas...’Nothing too much’ and ‘Know Yourself” (Gottlieb 51), both of which are demonstrated in Jane’s rejection. In regards to the former idea, Jane believes St. John’s morality to be too deprecating, and in regards to the second, she believes that his morality is incompatible with her own nature and idea of happiness.

Additionally, interpreting Jane’s rejection from a gendered perspective, I seek to further highlight her autonomy. Jane distinguishes herself from most Victorian women, for whom marriage was highly sought after, and for whom love was a secondary factor, proceeding stability and security. She also distinguishes herself on the basis of not conforming to the expected “subservient” and “obedient” behavior of Victorian women (Ayyildiz 147), evident when she firmly voices her opinion to her male cousin. Jane’s rejection also highlights her understanding that she herself is responsible for paving a path conducive to happiness. In the beginning of the novel, Jane criticizes Mrs. Reed by saying “You think I have no feelings, and that I can do without one bit of love or kindness; but I cannot live so: and you have no pity” (Brontë 44). In recalling this line, I seek to underscore how Jane’s rejection of St. John’s proposal represents a moment in which she remains faithful to the values she expressed earlier, as Jane bluntly observes, “we did not love each other” (Brontë 467). Thus, Jane takes an active stand in steering the course of her life, exemplifying her agency and lucid sense of self.

### **Section 3: Demonstration of Morality**

I will now conclude with an analysis of the scene where Jane learns of her newly acquired wealth. Before focusing on the specific moment, I will recall a conversation Jane had with Mr. Lloyd at Gateshead, to contrast her values from the beginning of the novel with those she holds at the end. In conversing with Mr. Lloyd, Jane shares that if she had anywhere else to go, she would gladly leave Gateshead. Mr. Lloyd asks Jane that if the opportunity presented itself, would she choose to go live with her “poor, low relations” (Brontë 29). Jane responds “no” and writes “poverty for me was synonymous with degradation” (Brontë 30). By equating “poverty” with “degradation,” Jane views her self-worth in regards to her financial standing, and judges her character based on her class. As the Bildungsroman progresses, Jane learns the value of morality, and understands Aristotle’s notion that one is praised or blamed based on his character (*NE* II.5.1106a). Mr. Lloyd then asks, “Not even if they were kind to you?” (Brontë 30), to which Jane responds, “I could not see how poor people had the means of being kind” (Brontë 30). Again Jane connects character to class and reveals her undeveloped sense of morality.

Had Jane’s character remained in this premature stage, the reader would have expected her to react much more enthusiastically upon learning of her inheritance. However, given the growth I have tracked thus far, her response should not be not shocking, as it appears to be consistent with her character. The scene of interest opens with Jane receiving news from St. John that her uncle has passed and has left her with his property and twenty thousand pounds. After receiving notice of her tremendous inheritance, Jane remains collected and writes, “One does not jump, and spring, and shout hurrah!” but rather should “consider responsibilities” (Brontë 441). This

response confirms Jane's ethical nature, and her sense of moral duty. Even in the heat of the moment, she demonstrates her rationality and acknowledges that this wealth is a "fine thing but that 'there are other chances in life far more thrilling'" (Brontë 441). It is the immediacy with which Jane reminds herself of this truth that makes her response all the more commendable. Additionally, in receiving such news, Jane is not blinded by the large sum of money she has just inherited and considers the larger context and implications of the inheritance; specifically that she has lost her "only relative," and is acquiring all this money because she is an "isolated self" (Brontë 442). Her feelings of disenchantment, amidst a great financial discovery, indicate her moral hierarchy of values, and her elevation of familial ties above wealth.

Conveniently and strategically, Brontë also includes Jane's discovery of her familial ties in this scene, and by conducting a comparative analysis of her reaction to both sets of news, I seek to both further highlight her hierarchy of values and demonstrate her morality. After learning that St. John, Mary and Diana are her cousins Jane exclaims "This was wealth indeed!-wealth to the heart!" (Brontë 444). The irony in using "wealth" to describe her new family connections, in a moment of a tremendously large financial influx, underscores her values and that which she desires the most. Similarly she writes "This was a blessing...not like the ponderous gift of gold" (Brontë 444), expressing greater appreciation for her newly discovered family than for her inheritance. Additionally, "ponderous" implies the weight of the wealth, suggesting that Jane does not seek to indulge herself but instead feels a sense of moral duty to use such in an altruistic manner.

As the scene progresses, Jane reveals her intentions of sharing her inheritance with her cousins. Her decision to do so is tremendously admirable on its own, but the fact that she resolutely upholds this choice, in the face of St. John's disapproval, warrants further praise. Upon sharing this choice with St. John, her cousin ridicules her impulsivity and instructs her to "tranquillise [her] feelings" (Brontë 445). Firmly standing behind her word, Jane reveals her clear sense of moral duty and observes, "I am not brutally selfish, blindly unjust, or fiendishly ungrateful...I must indulge my feelings" (Brontë 446). "Indulge" in reference to satisfying her altruistic desire, contrasts its more customary self-serving connotations, and highlights Jane's admirable character. Jane, having cultivated a strong moral character, wants to "benefit" those whom have kindly received and cared for her, and writes that by sharing her wealth "justice would be done-mutual happiness secured" (Brontë 445). By anticipating the joy she would feel in performing this deed, Jane embodies Aristotle's idea that "The virtuous person must take pleasure in being virtuous and in the actions prescribed by the virtues" (Irwin 343).

Most conspicuous of the particular Aristotelian virtues presented in this scene, are her "generosity" and "magnificence," the latter being "a sort of large scale generosity (*NE* IV.2.1122b). I would argue that Jane had already possessed the former virtue, and that her inheritance has afforded her the ability to attain the later. For instance, at Gateshead Brontë depicts Jane leaving the remains of her breakfast on the windowsill for a robin (Brontë 37), demonstrating her compassion and generosity. However, now she is able to perform larger acts of generosity, manifested in her sharing of her wealth, and again demonstrated in her pursuit to give Diana and Mary a "beau-ideal of a

welcome” (Brontë 451), consisting of decorating Moor house with “Dark handsome new carpets and curtains” and “antique ornaments in porcelain and bronze” (Brontë 452). Thus, Jane’s inheritance provides her with the means of attaining the virtue of magnificence, and thus illuminates Aristotle’s claim that “happiness evidently also needs external goods to be added...since we cannot or cannot easily, do fine actions if we lack the resources” (*NE* I.8.1099ab). Not only does her wealth facilitate the performance of moral deeds, but I would argue also serves as a physical, final, manifestation of her autonomy and independence. By portraying Jane’s new economic independence, Brontë extends her discussion of Jane’s autonomy beyond the moral narrative of the novel, and presents it within the larger context of her Bildungsroman.

## **Conclusion**

Having conducted a comprehensive survey of Jane’s character development and moral growth, I have analyzed the protagonist at four stages within the novel. My investigation has sought to illuminate both the nature and utility of Jane’s morality. I have interpreted Jane’s ethical makeup as the product of Aristotelian ethics interacting with Christian virtue, and I have shown how her ethical makeup is at odds with the Victorian moral code. In supplementing my analysis I relied heavily upon *Nicomachean Ethics*, which in turn also enhanced my understanding of Aristotelian moral philosophy. With a better understanding of Jane’s growth within the Bildungsroman, I sought to examine its application. Thus, I set the protagonist’s character at odds with an oppressive force in each section, manifested in a male character, and illustrated her improving management of these obstacles. I attributed this ability to her moral growth, as such maturation involved a developing sense of autonomy; and furthermore,



illuminated the connection between morality and freedom. Having shown Brontë's protagonist to be a literary example of the connection between one's morality, autonomy and happiness, I have sought to expose the utility of ethics, which extends beyond literary representations of the Victorian Era, and can be applied to contemporary humans.

Amidst my pursuit, I discovered the mutually beneficial relationship between Jane's character development and the oppression she faces. While my initial goal was to show how Jane's character development enables her to better navigate her way through hardships, I also came to find that her hardships facilitated her character development. Just as the first line of Theodore Roethke's poem reads, "In a dark time, the eye begins to see" (Roethke), Brontë's novel demonstrates the morally didactic benefits of pain. Jane shares a similar sentiment, evident when she is reflecting on her time in the red room, and thinks about the illuminating effect of such darkness. She writes "I could not answer the ceaseless inward question-why I thus suffered; now...I see it clearly" (Brontë 19). Just as Hegel said "the owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk" (Hegel), Brontë too understands the clarity retrospection affords an individual. While Jane's understanding of "why" she suffered is not explicitly delineated, I can infer that she too acknowledges the way it facilitated self-discovery and promoted self-growth. Viktor Frankl, having witnessed first hand the atrocities of the concentration camps, said "in the midst of suffering, he is given a chance to bare testimony of the human potential at its best, which is to turn a personal tragedy into a human triumph" (Frankl). Likewise, Brontë depicts many moments throughout the novel where Jane

doubts her ability to persevere, but nonetheless does. She is forced to dig deep and find strength within that she herself did not know she had.

Beginning my analysis at Gateshead, I explored Victorian society, claiming John Reed to represent both the patriarchy and upper class. In studying his interaction with Jane I introduced the first oppressive force Jane encounters. I argued Jane's imprisonment in the red room to be a symbolic example of her enslavement to external forces and to reveal the necessity of finding means towards liberation. However, in spirit of Roethke's poem and in pursuit of answering Jane's question "why I thus suffered?" (Brontë 19), I have also realized the productivity of John's cruelty in the way it contributes to the cultivation of Jane's character. Referring back to Rabbi Davidson's sermon, I have found great wisdom in the following words, "When the wind is at our backs and those we love surround us, seldom do we bother to count the treasures already ours" (Davidson 5). When life is easy, one is often blinded to his strength and takes his blessings for granted. At Gateshead, Jane, deprived of "love," and for whom the "wind" does not back, is tasked with the challenge of developing agency and uncovering the means to improve her miserable life. Had John treated Jane respectfully, her life would have been easier, but, as David Brooks writes in *The Road to Character*, "suffering becomes a fearful gift...The latter brings pleasure, but the former cultivates character" (Brooks 96).

I then followed Jane to Lowood, "the institutionalized extension of Gateshead Hall" (Shapiro 687), where she is again faced with oppression, this time in the form of Mr. Brocklehurst. I found this section of the novel to be particularly fascinating for the way it offers a complicated portrayal of Christianity. Between Helen and Mr.

Brocklehurst, Jane is exposed to opposing religious dispositions, and must decide upon how she will interact with the Christian doctrine. Observing Helen's behavior, Jane chooses parts of her doctrine to adopt and others to neglect, showcasing her individuality and confidence in her own judgment.

The religious narrative continues into the Thornfield section; a section that arguably contains the middle of the plot, namely the wedding scene. I believe Jane's commendable character in this part of the novel is a testament to the strengthening impact of her past sufferings. In Aristotle's *Poetics*, he writes "A whole is that which has a beginning, a middle, and an end," and defines the middle to be "that which follows something as some other thing follows it" (*Poet.I.7.1450b*). The decision Jane makes to leave Rochester, is representative of her character growth and thus logically follows prior events that have facilitated such growth. Likewise, given the pivotal nature of the moment, the scene necessarily must be followed by continued narration. This moment of *peripeteia* marks Jane's growing character, and thus the scene holds tremendous weight within the moral discussion of the Bildungsroman.

My project then concludes with Jane at Marsh End with a discussion of her morality and autonomy, both of which pave the way for her attainment of happiness, manifested in her marriage with Rochester. Culminating my analysis with an exanimation of this section of the novel, I sought to leave my reader with a hopeful message, grounded in the power of decisions and the freedom they promote. As Rabbi Davidson said, "we can reel like a sailor locked in irons, blown backwards" (Davidson 2) or "we can alter course and sail on...by hard-won tack upon tack" (Davidson 3). Just as a sailor's journey can be ruined by the wind, Jane's positioning within Victorian society

also had the potential to defeat her. However, rather than being “locked in irons,” Jane, liberated by her moral philosophy, becomes an active agent in steering the direction of her life.

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