

The Realization of Passion in Jane Eyre

It is believed that we are born with a predestined personality . Our spiritual individuality is just as much a product of our genetic makeup as the color of our skin or our eyes. With our soul firmly planted , we can then build upon this basis as we are educated of the world. The social climate and cultural atmosphere shape our personalities, however, it is the people in our lives who have the greatest influence. Charlotte Bronte's novel Jane Eyre reveals this idea by the development of the protagonist. Through a series of character foils , Bronte expresses her idea of self-development and growth of the human spirit by contrasting passion with reason. By my interpretation of the novel, Bronte suggests that in one's life time, they will encounter a number of people and experiences that will arouse enough emotion in them to have the power to change their direction in life. St. John Rivers plays one of these life determining foils to Jane Eyre. His confidence, devotion and reason intrigue Jane almost enough to silence her inner passionate spirit , but it is the forces of nature that prove to be stronger than human will.

The life path of a Victorian woman was somewhat limited in it's direction and expression of individuality. Jane Eyre strongly adheres to the Victorian morality which was dominated by the Anglican party of the Church of England in which passion and emotion were kept concealed. Jane's instinct for asserting herself was stifled at an early age and could only be expressed through defiance. The defiant declaration of independence from Mrs. Reed , "You are deceitful", (v.i.37) gives Jane the power of freedom and opens up a life of "unhoped-for liberty", (v.i.37).

Through the preceding years Jane develops into a highly educated, well spoken and strong willed woman . She is taught to be patient and thoughtful during her years in Lowood , and is introduced to the emotions of the heart and spirit in meeting Rochester.

Bronte makes an emphasis on the spiritual and supernatural atmosphere of

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Thornfield. The reference to the "Gytrash" and the mystical atmosphere she illustrates of their first meeting in the woods (v.i.113) could suggest that she is playing upon natural imagery and allusions to express the idea that Jane and Rochester are a destined, yet mysterious match of the souls. " I knew ...you would do me good in some way... I saw it in your eyes when I first beheld you," Rochester tells Jane. (v.i.152) and the use of the repeated references to fire foreshadow and symbolize their growing passion for each other. However, it is the symbolic interpretation of the lightning striking the horse-chestnut tree in half that hints that their love will not evolve without a

crisis.

(v.ii.259)

It is this crisis that throws Jane into the life of the Rivers family . Moor House and the values of the Rivers are the mirror image of Thornfield. Where Thornfield was mystical and romantic , Moor House has a comfortable and domestic setting. Jane's instant rapport with the " spontaneous, genuine, genial compassion", of Mary, Diana and

St. John allow her to feel at ease and safe. The contrast between Rochester and St. John

play a major part in the development of Jane's self-fulfillment.

It is in Jane's description of the two men that the reader gets the most tangible

picture of their contrasts. Bronte uses words such as "wild" and "moody" to describe

Rochester, whereas St. John is "compressed, condensed and controlled", (v.iii.356).

A disciplined and educated missionary, he is focused on his one devotion and remains

static through-out the novel. His ambition drives him and does not believe in the importance of revealing emotions. As Jane comes to know him , she senses that ,like her,

he seems to be not at peace. They are both restless and seeking the greater power that

rules them; for St. John it is judgment, for Jane it is passion.

Jane's admiration of St. John is of his thirst for knowledge and his unresting

mind. She has the utmost respect for him and his devotion, and learns diligently and

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faithfully under him . However, it is in the contrasts between them that we see the true

nature of Jane. St. John's moral beliefs suggest that he fears his own sexuality and views

female sexuality as a threat to his purity of vision.(Diedrick 1993) This is evident in his

dealings with Rosamond Oliver, whom he clearly has feelings for , " Does she like me?"

he asked. 'Certainly', Jane replied. ' It is pleasant to hear this... go on for another quarter

of an hour."(v.iii.377) He does not give back a reply of his feelings and does not act with

his emotions. It is his reason that he calls upon and instead of asking Rosamond to marry

him, he knows that it is Jane who would be the more appropriate wife to accompany him

in his missionary work. He attempts to succeed where Brocklehurst failed and render

Jane submissive; his selective praise of her as "docile, diligent, disinterested, faithful,

constant..." (v.iii.355) expresses his desire to subdue her to his needs .(Diedrick 1993)

If anything , St. John has taught Jane to act with reason so when he proposes that she go

to India with him as his wife, it is her better judgment that tells her that , " he prizes me

as a soldier would a good weapon; and that is all." (v.iii 356) She realizes that he could

never love her the way she needs to be loved.

St. John represents a life of Christian servitude and moral ambition. Jane has only known of a life of serving others, and for a time, the power of this identity had kept freedom a secret from her. Jane's experience of a life of servitude is only , "what I knew of existence. And now I felt that it was not enough: I tired of the routine... I desired liberty; for liberty I gasped; for liberty I uttered a prayer..."(v.i.86) It is the responsibilities of servitude that suffocate her and constrain her. Her anger at St. John's demand that she sacrifice all her desires to his missionary ambition enables her to see him clearly for the first time and gives her the strength to refuse him.

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As St. John persisted in subduing Jane , Jane became weaker in her fight. Just as Jane was about to succumb, it was as if destiny and nature were stronger than human ambition. A "freshening gale" created by delirium and passion blew in the opposite direction of the "counteracting breeze" of judgment and brought with it the voice of Rochester's love. Jane's "human affections and sympathies" took a "most powerful hold of her", (v.iii. 360) and she knew without a doubt that she could not live if she was forced to stifle her passionate heart. It is in her nature to love wholly and because of the antagonistic relationship between Jane and St. John that she was able to become aware of the intensity of her love for Rochester and allow it to complete her soul. As the symbol of the split horse-chestnut suggested, their love could be put through disaster, but they are fundamentally one at the roots.

