Enemies of Freedom in "Jane Eyre"
Author(s): JOHN HAGAN
Source: Criticism, Vol. 13, No. 4 (Fall 1971), pp. 351-376
Published by: Wayne State University Press
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/23098539
Accessed: 27-02-2017 20:35 UTC

REFERENCES
Linked references are available on JSTOR for this article:
You may need to log in to JSTOR to access the linked references.
Enemies of Freedom in "Jane Eyre"

_Jane Eyre_ is a novel of liberation. A series of quests by Jane for "freedom" and her final attainment of that goal constitute its principal action. This fact places it in a large class of other nineteenth-century works of art: as Lionel Trilling has pointed out, "the prison haunted the mind of the nineteenth century, which may be said to have had its birth at the fall of the Bastille. The genius of the age, conceiving itself as creative will, naturally thought of the prisons from which it must be freed, and the trumpet call of the 'Leonore' overture sounds through the century, the signal for the opening of the gates, for a general deliverance..." Thus, to limit oneself to fiction, Charlotte Brontë's novel has its affinities not only with such an obvious example of the genre, and one as close to her, as her sister's _Wuthering Heights_, but with novels as diverse as _Little Dorrit_ (Trilling's own example) and _Vanity Fair, Middlemarch_ and _The Egoist, The Return of the Native_ and _Jude the Obscure, The Red and the Black_ and _Madame Bovary, Crime and Punishment_ and _War and Peace_. What differentiates Jane's case from that of the protagonists in some of these other books, however, and what is the essential determinant of the form of her story, is that she conceives of freedom in a rather special way.

On the one hand, a necessary condition of her freedom is that she serve and sacrifice herself for a man whom she loves and who loves her in return. The first three sections of the novel (Gateshead, Lowood, and Thornfield) are structured to show her moving progressively toward ever more satisfactory objects of love (her doll, Bessie Lee, Dr. Lloyd, Helen Burns, Miss Temple), which culminate in Rochester. St. John Rivers will later offer her what Rochester cannot—a legal marriage. But because the marriage he offers her is one without love she cannot accept it. His belief that she is "formed for labour, not for love" is a profound misunderstanding of her essential

* John Hagan is Professor of English at the State University of New York, Binghamton. He has published many articles on 19th century fiction, and was a Guggenheim Fellow in 1969-70.


2 Jane Jack and Margaret Smith, eds., _Jane Eyre_ (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 314. Henceforth all references to this text will be given above in parentheses. For the sake of brevity I use a consecutive numbering for the chapters rather than the editors' separate numbering for each volume.
tial nature. For Jane, liberation without human love is an impossibility. On the other hand, for Jane’s attainment of freedom human love is not sufficient. Submission to the loved one must not be total; an equally necessary condition of her liberation is that she must serve and sacrifice herself for the moral law of God. For a time her love for Rochester is so intense and complete that God is eclipsed (346, 356); but in Chapter 27, when the supreme test of her ability to prefer God to man on a moral issue is put squarely before her, her choice of God is unequivocal. Rochester can offer her love, but not marriage; at best she can become only his mistress, and because such an unsanctified relationship is repugnant to her conscience she rejects him. Marriage, in Rochester’s opinion, is “a mere human law,” but Jane knows that it is a “law given by God” (404), and in her submission to this law, as Rochester himself sees, lies her spirit’s freedom:

Whatever I do with its cage [i. e., the body which houses her spirit], I cannot get at it. . . . If I tear, if I rend the slight prison, my outrage will only let the captive loose. Conqueror I might be of the house; but the inmate would escape to heaven before I could call myself possessor of its clay dwelling-place . . . seized against your [the spirit’s] will, you will elude the grasp like an essence. . . . (405-06).

These words echo the imagery of liberation which had accompanied Jane’s earlier rejection of Rochester’s advances when she had still thought him engaged to Blanche Ingram:

I am no bird; and no net ensnares me; I am a free human being with an independent will, which I now exert to leave you.

8 No sooner, for example, does Jane begin to rebel against Mrs. Reed’s loveless regime, declaring, “You think I have no feelings, and that I can do without one bit of love or kindness; but I cannot live so,” than her soul “began to expand, to exult, with the strangest sense of freedom, of triumph, I ever felt. It seemed as if an invisible bond had burst, and that I struggled out into unhoped-for liberty” (39). Still more important is the hunger for freedom created in her by the faint stirrings of love which she feels after her very first meeting with Rochester, even before she knows his identity: to re-enter Thornfield Hall is “to slip again over my faculties the viewless fetters of a uniform and too still existence” (141). Moreover, as this love grows stronger and she feels in Rochester “an influence that quite mastered me—that took my feelings from my own power and fettered them in his” (218), it becomes clear that for Jane freedom cannot exist without submission of the self to the loved one, ultimately in marriage.
Another effort set me at liberty, and I stood erect before him (319).

Jane's flight from Rochester's house at the end of Chapter 27, therefore, is not only a literal act, but a metaphor of the liberation of her "spirit" from the "house" of her body, which occurred at the moment she decided to serve and sacrifice herself for the will of the Creator rather than that of His creature.

Jane can attain her goal of freedom only if her service of God and man are reconciled. This is what finally happens when she is reunited with the chastened Rochester at Ferndean. Not only has the wife who stood in the way of his marriage to Jane perished in the fire, but, more important for the novel's theme, Rochester, having come to experience "remorse, repentance, the wish for reconcilement to my Maker" (571), has achieved a decisive regeneration which places him at the same moral level Jane had achieved when she rejected him. Since both continue to love each other as strongly as ever, there is no longer any reason why they should remain apart, and therefore God effects their reunion by miraculously sending Jane Rochester's cry for help. His liberation has at last made possible her own; now the two conditions of her freedom—of serving and sacrificing herself for a man whom she loves and who loves her in return, and of living in accord with the moral law of God—are completely satisfied, and the novel can achieve its formal resolution. In essence, the movement Jane's quest for freedom has taken has been that of a succession of escapes from a series of prisons or conditions of servitude which, in one way or another, would have imposed an alien role on her, and, in doing so, would have denied her one or both of these necessary conditions of her liberation.

With this understanding of the novel's central issues as a foundation, then, I should like to examine in detail some of the more important methods by which the threats to Jane's freedom are defined and developed. The peculiar resonance of the book, the fascination it has had for several generations of naive and sophisticated readers alike, depends upon rich and often subtle manipulations of language and structural patterns that have not always received their due. For a long period in the nineteenth century Jane Eyre was preferred to Wuthering Heights; in more recent times when the latter's critical stock rose, the former's fell, and the prevailing view came to be that best summed up perhaps by Lord David Cecil, who saw all of Charlotte Brontë's novels as the somewhat clumsy and artless products of "childish naiveté, rigid Puritanism, [and] fiery passion," their merits, being
limited to the comparatively elementary ones of vivid characters and settings, effects of "eeriness," powerful love scenes, solitary emotions of "morbid intensity," and "suspense." During the last decade or so a larger and juster view has emerged: the faults of Jane Eyre have been adequately recognized, but because of the work of critics like Kathleen Tillotson, Robert B. Heilman, Mark Schorer, Barbara Hardy, Q. D. Leavis, Robert Bernard Martin, and W. A. Craik, who have brought to bear on its texture the kind of close scrutiny of imagery, metaphor, symbolism, and the like, that has long been customary in the treatment of more fashionable novels, we have become aware of new and more complex dimensions of its strength. I am indebted to all of these critics; but some fresh ground still remains to be turned, and even when I touch on matters which have been noticed before I shall try to place them in another context, or correct what I feel may be a faulty interpretation.

I

The series of prisons or conditions of servitude from which Jane must effect her escapes begins with the famous Red Room in Chapter 2, to which she is confined when, in her first bid for freedom, she defies the tyrannical authority of John Reed. "Alas, yes!" she exclaims; "no jail was ever more secure" (12). The Red Room is symbolic of the prison-like atmosphere of Gateshead as a whole, where, except for the consolation she receives from her doll and the erratic kindness of Bessie Lee, Jane is deprived of that love without which her freedom cannot be attained. Mrs. Reed epitomizes this atmosphere when she decrees that Jane can be released from the Red Room only on the alien terms set by Mrs. Reed herself: "... you

will now stay here an hour longer, and it is only on condition of perfect submission and stillness that I shall liberate you then” (16). Jane eventually does achieve her “liberation” through “submission,” but it is at the end, when she has come to serve not Mrs. Reed, but her beloved, regenerate Rochester and the law of God. As long as she is in the loveless household of Gateshead she can feel herself to be no better than a “rebel slave” (9; cf. 12) striking out futilely at John Reed, who is “like a slave-driver” and “the Roman emperors” (8).

Still another aspect of Jane’s imprisonment is revealed in the Red Room episode when she stands before the mirror and thinks of her image as resembling “one of the tiny phantoms, half fairy, half imp” (12) she has heard about from Bessie. This is the first of a prominent series of allusions to folk-tales, ghost stories, myths, and so forth, which show Jane’s mind, for at least the first third of the novel, to be a prisoner of superstition (cf. 15, 20, 23, 29, 55, 135-36). Since Gateshead is not only loveless but godless (the one religion there, that of Miss Abbott, is no more than a handmaid of social prejudice), superstition finds in Jane an easy captive. Until as late as her first meeting with Rochester, as she says, “all sorts of fancies bright and dark tenanted my mind: the memories of nursery stories were there amongst other rubbish; and when they recurred, maturing youth added to them a vigour and vividness beyond what childhood could give” (135). In spite of Helen Burns’s religious teachings, it is not until Jane has repudiated Rochester’s sinful proposal that she become his mistress and freed herself from his home that we see superstition decisively replaced in her mind by faith and trust in God; and only much later when she receives the repentant Rochester’s divinely sent voice does she liberate herself from it explicitly: “Down superstition! . . . This is not thy deception, nor thy witchcraft: it is the work of nature. She was roused, and did—no miracle—but her best” (56).

Equally godless and, during her first three months there, equally loveless is Jane’s next place of residence, Lowood: the religion of Mr. Brocklehurst is a copy of Miss Abbott’s, enlarged into a monstrous tool of social repression, and, until Jane becomes more intimate with the benevolent Miss Temple, her life is an “irksome struggle” (68). Accordingly, the prison motif recurs. The excessively harsh and rigid regimen she is put through on her first day there is like the discipline of a penitentiary (Chapter 5). The garden is “surrounded” by “high and spike-guarded walls” which “exclude every glimpse of prospect” (54, 88). Though Jane’s own image for this garden is “convent-like” (54), the equivalence of convent and prison in her mind is subse-
quently established when she thinks of Eliza Reed, who has decided to enter a convent, as becoming “walled up alive” (270).

There is, of course, an attractive side of Lowood, as Jane discovers when she makes the acquaintance of Helen Burns, when spring begins to reveal the loveliness of the landscape, and especially when she begins to enjoy the companionship of Miss Temple. Under the influence of the latter’s love Lowood is gradually transformed for Jane from a prison into a “home” (99). But Miss Temple eventually marries and moves away, and the shades of the prison-house begin to descend upon Jane again. She finds herself, in fact, in the position of those who enjoy the equivocal blessings of life in the Happy Valley of Johnson’s Rasselas. Charlotte Brontë seems to have introduced allusions to this work (55, 62) mainly to help define the nature of Helen Burns’s religion, but they have a resonance beyond this. The natural setting of the Happy Valley is an earthly paradise:

From the mountains on every side, rivulets descended that filled all the valley with verdure and fertility, and formed a lake in the middle. . . . The sides of the mountains were covered with trees, the banks of the brooks were diversified with flowers; every blast shook spices from the rocks, and every month dropped fruits upon the ground. . . . All the diversities of the world were brought together, the blessings of nature were collected, and its evils extracted and excluded (Chapter 1).

So too Lowood is surrounded by “noble summits girdling a great hill-hollow, rich in verdure and shadow”; and through it flows “a bright beck, full of dark stones and sparkling edges” (88). In the spring vegetation matured with vigour; Lowood shook loose its tresses; it became all green, all flowers; its great elm, ash, and oak skeletons were restored to majestic life; woodland plants sprang up profusely in its recesses; unnumbered varieties of moss filled its hollows, and it made a strange ground-sunshine out of the wealth of its wild primrose plants: I have seen their pale gold gleam in overshadowed spots like scatterings of the sweetest lustre (89).

The garden “glowed with flowers; hollyhocks had sprung up tall as trees, lilies had opened, tulips and roses were in bloom; the borders of the little beds were gay with pink thrift and crimson double daisies;
the sweetbriars gave out, morning and evening, their scent of spice and apples . . ." (90). Though sickness and death do find their way here, Jane manages to escape them. Yet neither she nor Rasselas is satisfied: each has come to crave experience of the wider world, and with this desire has come an awareness of his present condition as a prison. As Rasselas feels the frustration of living in a valley whose only exit is "closed with gates of iron, forged by the artificers of ancient days, so massy that no man could without the help of engines open or shut them" (Chapter 1), Jane begins to feel equally constricted at Lowood: all within the "boundary of rock and heath seemed prison-ground, exile limits" (100).

Jane escapes this prison by moving to Thornfield. In Rochester she also finds the man on whom the even fuller liberation she is to attain at the end of the novel completely depends. But Thornfield turns out to be a prison for her too. As we have noted, Jane can achieve freedom only if Rochester can. But so far he has not: he can give her love, but the love he offers her is in violation of the law of God. He is imprisoned not only by his marriage to Bertha, but by his passions—the same passions which led him into the marriage in the first place, drove him into his subsequent dissipations, and now, however tempered, sinfully lead him to tempt Jane into bigamy, and, when that fails, to propose that she become his mistress. This double imprisonment of Rochester is imaged in the mysterious third-story room which confines Bertha, who is both the wife who enslaves him and, in her raging madness, his grotesque alter ego—a hideous mirror of his own licentiousness. Because of this imprisonment all Thornfield becomes a prison for Jane herself, as the dream she has after learning of Bertha's existence and rejecting Rochester's proposal so clearly reveals. In this dream the apparition which urges her to flee temptation appears to her as she "lay in the redroom at Gateshead" (407), for Jane's imagination has instinctively grasped the fact that, insofar as each threatens her liberation, Thornfield and the Red Room are really one. Indeed, a resemblance between the two was suggested much earlier: the color-scheme of the Red Room, a combination of red and ghostly white, was repeated in the Thornfield drawing-room (with its "general blending of snow and fire" [126])—the very room in which Jane and Rochester were first formally introduced (cf. 11 and 125-26). Jane's imagination acting on her unconscious perception of this resemblance would appear to be a source of her dream.

However this may be, the dream prompts Jane into a flight that, like her previous ones, implicates her in another kind of servitude.
Whereas Rochester thwarted her freedom because he was himself a prisoner—a prisoner of passion—St. John Rivers thwarts it because he has attained a freedom from passion in his feelings toward Jane that is all too complete. Deeply restless and ambitious for a life of action in the world, St. John is at the same time a man genuinely and deeply committed to his religious faith. He has succeeded in reconciling these two apparently antithetical aspects of his character by deciding to become a religious missionary, a vocation for which "the best qualifications of a soldier, statesman, and orator were all needed" (462) and to which everything else in his life has been ruthlessly subordinated. This decision has given him a sense of complete freedom (462); to give up his plans and marry Rosamond Oliver would be to put his neck under "a yoke of flowers" (476). Marriage with Jane is desirable to him simply because, unlike Rosamond, she can be counted on to help him with his work. For Jane herself, however, his proposal is no less destructive of her own liberty than Rochester's that she become his mistress. She will accompany St. John on his mission because one condition of her liberty is service of God; but she will not go with him as his wife, for she sees marriage without love as no better than slavery. "Would it not be strange, Di," she asks one of St. John's sisters, "to be chained for life to a man who regarded one but as a useful tool" (531). "... As his wife—at his side always, and always restrained, and always checked... this would be unendurable" (520-21).

II

In the first four phases of the novel, then, Charlotte Brontë shapes her theme of Jane's thwarted freedom by various details which insistently define the actions of the major characters upon her as efforts to confine her to some kind of prison or condition of servitude. Simultaneously, our sense of Jane's predicament and of the issues connected with it is constantly being sharpened and intensified by details of other sorts. The unregenerate Rochester and St. John, whose characters and actions pose Jane's decisive tests, are naturally the focal point of the most important of these.

Consider, for example, the first and the last of the three symbolic pictures Jane shows to Rochester in Chapter 13. Until recently, critics of the novel habitually ignored these pictures, in spite of the con-

* The only studies of this subject which I have discovered are the two following: Thomas Langford, "The Three Pictures in Jane Eyre," The Victorian
spicuous attention they receive, their strangeness, the minuteness with which Jane describes them, and the fact that their meaning is by no means self-evident. A partial clue to this meaning lies in their placement. Though Jane painted them during her last two vacations at Lowood, she describes them to us only on the occasion of her first conversation with Rochester after their formal introduction. The result of thereby setting them at the head of a major new phase of the action is to constitute them a kind of preface to that action. Another clue to their significance is that, unlike the second picture, they have the sea for their setting, and that, beginning with several of the pictures in Bewick's Birds which Jane describes in Chapter 1, and continuing through a number of later passages, the sea in this novel is consistently used as a metaphor of danger, struggle, and suffering (e.g., 141, 174-75, 187-88, 342, 375, 386). These details hint at what closer scrutiny confirms—that the first and last pictures are a ground-plan of the latter two-thirds of the novel, an ominous foreshadowing or prophecy of the threat that will be posed to Jane's freedom by Rochester and St. John alike.

The third picture is the most obvious: as Thomas Langford has pointed out, it is an allegory of St. John, whose offer of a loveless marriage threatens Jane with spiritual death. The "colossal head" (153) signifies his intellectuality, his reason, the ruthless subjugation of all other feelings to his ambition of missionary service and martyrdom, and Jane's tendency to think of him as "a giant" (578). The "iceberg" against which this head is resting (153) anticipates not only the well-known association of St. John with ice, snow, frost, and cold throughout (e.g., 442, 481, 482, 501, 505, 507, 508, 509, 523, 524, 526), but Jane's specific remark that for her he is as "cold as an iceberg" (568)—in contrast to Rochester and Jane herself, whose capacity for passionate love is suggested by imagery of fire (181, 489, 520-21) and, at one point, by a comparison of Rochester to Vulcan (565). The "turban folds of black drapery" which are worn by the colossal head (154) probably point ahead to the fact that St. John will undertake his mission in India (578). And finally, the "pale crescent" which surrounds the head with "the likeness of a kingly crown" (154) comments with caustic irony on the discrepancy between St. John the missionary and St. John the man: whereas the faithful
labors of the former rightly ensure his receiving the "incorruptible crown" of heavenly reward (578), the emotional frigidity of the latter procures him the crown that "diademed..." (154)—that is, Death (Paradise Lost, II, 666-73). As the head conceals its lower features with a sable veil (154), so St. John will try to hide from Jane the reality of what marriage to him would mean for her, but Jane will see clearly that death-in-life for what it is: with each step of his persuasion, "my iron shroud contracted round me" (515).

The first picture, though at first sight more puzzling, also yields a clear meaning. The cormorant is almost certainly a forecast of Bertha, whom Jane later describes as "a carrion-seeking bird of prey" (264). Equally clear is the identity of the "gold bracelet" which the cormorant holds in its beak with either the "ring of golden peace" with which Jane feels surrounded as the warmth of Rochester's affection increasingly makes Thornfield seem a home to her (309), or the actual wedding ring which his proposal of marriage puts in prospect. In contrast, the image of drowning looks forward to the language with which she describes her suffering after the wedding ceremony is broken off: "in full, heavy swing the torrent poured over me. The whole consciousness of my life lorn, my love lost, my hope quenched, my faith death-struck, swayed full and mighty above me in one sullen mass..." in truth, "the waters came into my soul; I sank in deep mire: I felt no standing: I came into deep waters; the..."
floods overflowed me " (375). Every major detail thus points clearly
to the first painting as, no less than the third, an allegorical prophecy,
and, unmistakably, what is prophesied is the thwarting of Jane's mar-
riage to Rochester by the existence of his first wife.

Closely parallel to this use of the two paintings to forecast the
threats posed to Jane's freedom by Rochester and St. John is the use,
several chapters later, of two characters, Eliza and Georgiana Reed.
The detailed attention given by Charlotte Brontë to these minor
figures, on the occasion of Jane's return-visit to Gateshead in Chapter
21, at first seems excessive. They have been absent from the story
since Chapter 4, they contribute nothing now to the development of
the plot, and after the few opening paragraphs of Chapter 22 they
disappear permanently. The critics seem to have almost completely
ignored them. Nevertheless, Charlotte Brontë's treatment of them is a
piece of carefully considered strategy. Just as Chapter 13, in which
the paintings are introduced, sharply divides Jane's life before she
knew Rochester from her life after she knows him, so Chapter 21
sharply divides the Rochester phase itself: before the visit to Gates-
head, she has fallen in love with Rochester, but believes that he is
going to marry Blanche Ingram; after the visit, he welcomes her back
to Thornfield as if it were her home (Chapter 22), he proposes to
her (Chapter 23), and both prepare for their wedding (Chapters 24-
25). To underscore these crucial turning points in Jane's life each
employs foreshadowing, the role played in Chapter 13 by the first and
last paintings now being played in Chapter 21 by the Reed girls, with
the difference that, as the action has advanced closer to the wedding
fiasko and St. John's appearance on the scene, the foreshadowing has
become more distinct, less enigmatic. For the salient fact about the

*The second painting belongs to a different context, for its suggestions seem
primarily beneficent rather than threatening. The image of the Evening Star,
which dominates the picture, is probably akin to that "Mother" (Nature) who
appears in the dream at the end of Chapter 27 and urges Jane to flee Rochester's
temptation. It may also symbolize hope, for Jane later speaks of hope as a star:
"To prolong doubt was to prolong hope. I might yet once more see the Hall
under the ray of her star" (541). (Cf. Villette, Chapter 23: "nobody ever
launches into love unless he has seen or dreamed the rising of Hope's star
over Love's troubled waters." ) The hope, presumably, would be that of an
ultimate reunion with Rochester, which her resistance to his temptation makes
possible. Rochester himself is perhaps suggested by the moonlight, an image
repeatedly associated in the book with his love and especially prominent in the
scene in Chapter 35 in which the reunion is effected by Rochester's miraculously
transmitted voice.
Reed sisters is that their characters present a striking contrast between the puritan and the voluptuary (286, 293-97) which is the counterpart of that to be developed between the fanatically messianic St. John and the unregenerate Rochester themselves. Georgiana, like Rochester, is “feeling without judgment,” and Eliza, like St. John, is “judgment untempered by feeling” (297). Between them they define the kind of threat to Jane’s freedom which Rochester and St. John will pose by forcing her to choose one or the other. Jane already knows that her freedom is to be achieved only by a synthesis of the two (“Feeling without judgment is a washy draught indeed; but judgment untempered by feeling is too bitter and husky a morsel for human deglutition [297]), but such a synthesis will be achieved by Rochester only at the end, after his moral purgation.

III

Meanwhile, the threat he and St. John pose to Jane’s freedom is suggested by Charlotte Brontë in several additional ways. The paintings and the Reed sisters invite us to consider the two men jointly; a number of other details are related to each one individually. Rochester’s marital predicament, for instance, is powerfully symbolized by the charade in Chapter 18. The first syllable (“bride”) shows Rochester participating in “the pantomime of a marriage” (228); the tableau of the whole (“bridewell”) shows him as a prisoner in a cell. That a metaphorical equation between marriage and prison is being hinted here seems obvious. The fact that the charade marriage is only a pantomime may also be a wry allusion not only to the empty form of his marriage to Bertha, but to the illegal and immoral wedding in which he eventually tries to trap Jane. Still another element in the complex of meanings generated by this episode is Rochester’s “disordered dress” in the prison scene, “his coat hanging loose from one arm, as if it had been almost torn from his back in a scuffle” (230). Two chapters later Bertha will scuffle with her brother, and Mason will emerge with his arm mutilated and “almost soaked in blood” (262). The common element in all of these suggestions is the fact of Rochester’s entrapment by both his marriage to Bertha and the passions which led to that marriage.

These passions and their affinity to Bertha’s own are still more distinctly connoted by patterns of fire and animal imagery. The fire functions partly, as we have seen, to signify Jane and Rochester’s capacity for love in contrast to St. John’s emotional frigidity. But Eric
Solomon and Robert Bernard Martin have made clear that it has this other reference as well. The destructive potential of that uncontrolled licentiousness which originally bound Rochester and Bertha together and subsequently drove him into the arms of his mistresses, and which underlies, in modified form, his illicit proposals to Jane is rendered metaphorically when Bertha sets fire to Rochester's bed in Chapter 15 and finally, as we learn in Chapter 36, burns down Thornfield Hall itself. The fact that Rochester's passion is ultimately to be chastened by recognition and humble acceptance of God is also adumbrated when Jane speaks of rescuing him on the first occasion by having "baptized" his bed with water and extinguished the flames "by God's aid" (183).

Less familiar, but equally important, are the animal references. These are connected most frequently with Bertha, whose animal nature is manifest in her violence and her former insatiable lust. On some occasions she is described as a "wild beast" (264) or "strange wild animal" (370) or a wolf (392), and the room in which she is imprisoned is called "a wild beast's den" (394) or "a wolf's den" (271). At other times she is likened to a dog (262, 264), a "tigress" (266), a "hyena" (370), a vampire (267), or simply a "monster" (394). Such metaphors provide a context for Rochester. On his initial appearance in the novel, he is preceded first by the sound of his horse, and then by the arrival of his dog: "a rude noise broke out... a positive tramp, tramp, a metallic clatter... a horse was coming... It was very near, but not yet in sight; when, in addition to the tramp, tramp, I heard a rush under the hedge, and close down by the hazel stems glided a great dog... a lion-like creature with long hair and a huge head..." (135-36). In addition to allowing Rochester to make a theatrically effective delayed entrance, this passage projects symbolically the animal element in his character that has made Bertha his alter ego. The physical resemblance between Rochester and the dog, in particular, is indeed striking (137-38, 146). He himself half-jokingly calls attention to it when disowning paternity of Adèle ("Pilot is more like me than she" [176]), and Jane, comparing him to Mason, likens him to a "rough-coated, keen-eyed dog" (238). There may be further significance in the names of the two animals. The horse's exotic name, "Mesrour," is that of the executioner at the court of

Haroun-al-Raschid in *The Arabian Nights,* and as such may relate Rochester's animal nature to his potential destructiveness. This would accord with what seems like a symbolic episode that occurs a moment or two after Rochester's entrance, when the horse falls and he, carried down with it, suffers a sprained ankle, and requires Jane's help to remount. Even more explicitly, the name "Pilot" may suggest that until far more severe sufferings have humbled him, it will be his animal nature which continues to guide him. These ominous implications of his initial appearance are amplified by a parallel scene in Chapter 25, when he returns to Thornfield after a short absence: once again Jane has left the house, and once again, "ere I had measured a quarter of a mile, I heard the tramp of hoofs; a horseman came on, full gallop; a dog ran by his side" (350). Prior to this moment Jane has been greatly troubled, first by two very disturbing dreams (one forecasting her separation from Rochester, the other the destruction of Thornfield Hall), and then by Bertha's having entered her bedroom and torn her wedding veil. Now, with Rochester's arrival, she bids all "vile presentiment" begone (350). Ironically, however, Rochester's return with his animal companions is completely of a piece with the other omens: on the very next day there occurs the wedding fiasco and with it the full disclosure of his sordid animality both of the past and of the present. As Jane resists his proposal that she become his mistress, his behavior becomes increasingly like that of a terrifying wild beast (385, 387, 388, 403-07).

But more terrifying and threatening to Jane's freedom than Rochester's wild animality is the radical impiety from which it springs. His love for Jane is certainly genuine; it is no mere lust. Yet it has an affinity to lust because Rochester refuses to recognize that there is a law higher than his love to which it must submit. Like Jane herself at the first height of her love for him, he cannot "see God for His creature"; he allows her to stand between him and "every thought of religion" (346). Both of his proposals—that Jane marry him bigamously, and, after she refuses, that she become his mistress—originate in his profoundly mistaken conviction that marriage is "a mere human law," which he may break at will (404). In his opinion Jane's conviction to the contrary is merely the result of "early instilled prejudice" (402). But, even if she is right, he believes that the sincerity and depth of his love will atone for everything (321-22). His sole criterion of living "a higher and worthier existence" than he has

---

lived before (402) is simply to be "free to love and be loved" (396). Freedom means freedom of self, nothing more.

For Charlotte Brontë this sort of moral lawlessness is incarnated preeminently in two figures. One is Byron. Winifred Gérin has reminded us that "Charlotte was fully acquainted [with Byron's works] at 13; from Childe Harold and Manfred she quoted freely . . .". His influence on her own early writings, particularly the Angria saga, has been well documented. Indeed, by the mid-1830s, she, like Caroline Vernon, the heroine of one of her later tales, "thought Lord Byron and Bonaparte, the Duke of Wellington and Lord Edward Fitzgerald the four best men that had ever lived...". By 1846-47, however, when she came to write Jane Eyre, Charlotte was a mature woman for whom this naive adolescent idolatry could no longer suffice. Although to some extent she could still admire Byron the artist (her real literary passion now, however, was for Thackeray), she emphatically repudiated the moral flaws of the man. In a letter of May 1, 1848, to W. S. Williams, she wrote: "There is something divine in the thought that genius preserves from degradation, were it but true; but Savage tells us it was not true for him; Sheridan confirms the avowal, and Byron seals it with terrible proof." In Jane Eyre itself the fact that she makes the morally shallow Blanche Ingram "dote on Corsairs" (225) and admire other outlaw heroes of a distinctly Byronic cast (224, 230) implies the same judgment. To discredit the unregenerate Rochester, therefore, Charlotte Brontë has only to associate him with Byron, and this is precisely what she does. The well-known Byronic aspects of his physical appearance

---

13 Ibid., pp. 41, 47-49, 51, 53, 81, 91.
14 Ibid., p. 82.
16 Winifred Gérin perceives this association, but misunderstands its purpose. She sees it not as a way of discrediting Rochester, but as expressing Charlotte’s “acceptance of his moral imperfections,” for “such an acceptance . . . was present on every page of Byron, and in every embodiment of his heroes . . .” (op. cit., p. 89. Cf. 131, 132, 299). The difficulty with this argument is not only that it ignores the evidence of Charlotte’s explicit and implicit criticism of Byron’s morality which I have just cited, but it fails to recognize that her attitudes toward Rochester before and after his moral reformation are quite different. The Rochester she “accepts” is not the very imperfect Rochester Jane
and demeanor are complemented by the lurid events of his career, which, though not corresponding in detail to events in the life of Byron or any of his characters, do have, in combination, a distinctly Byronic flavor. The Faustian defiance of the song he sings in Chapter 24, when he has resolved to possess Jane (343), might be derived from Childe Harold, Manfred, or Cain. And the "hoof" on which he "flew through Europe half mad" (327), besides relating to the pattern of animal imagery, may possibly be a reference to Byron's club-foot.¹⁷

But it is also a reference to the archetype of the Byronic hero, Satan, and this is the second figure of moral lawlessness to whom Rochester is assimilated. His marriage proposal to Jane in Chapter 23 derives much of its moral ugliness from its echo of Satan's temptation of Eve. Charlotte Brontë carefully prepares us to hear this echo by means of a succession of hints whose cumulative implications are unmistakable. The orchard at Thornfield where the proposal takes place is ominously anticipated, for example, by the garden and environs of Lowood: in spring and summer both places are rich in natural beauty (cf. 88 and 311-12), but just as "fog and fog-bred pestilence" bring physical contagion to the school (89), so Rochester's proposal will bring moral contagion to the hall. Later, in Chapter 13, as we have noted, Jane's description of her third painting contains an explicit allusion to the appearance of Death in Paradise Lost. Still later, in Chapter 20, on the morning after Bertha's attack on Mason, Jane and Rochester actually meet in the orchard itself for the first time, and, hinting at his desire to marry her, he begins to justify his proposed bigamy in an argument full of Satanic sophistry and blasphemy: his first marriage is only "an obstacle of custom—a mere conventional impediment"; to overleap it is to secure his "regeneration of life" and to live "in a way more worthy of an immortal being" (273-274). Like Satan, he would tempt his Eve to become a law unto herself (cf. Paradise Lost, IX, 705-12). Finally, all these suggestions are crystallized three chapters later in the proposal scene itself. Jane explicitly calls the orchard "Eden-like" (311)—an epithet repeated in her subsequent references to Thornfield as "a paradise" (443) and a "lost elysium" (450); flowers and trees "laden with ripening fruit" (312) abound as in Milton's Eden (cf. Paradise Lost, IV, 214-68); Rochester offers her "the paradise of

knows at Thornfield, but the regenerate Rochester with whom she is reunited at Ferndean. Before both Jane and her author can "accept" him his moral imperfections have to be purged.

union” (321); and, to climax the chapter, just as Eve's tasting of the forbidden fruit sends a pang through all of nature (IX, 782-84), so Rochester's blasphemous proposal of marriage and his overweening confidence that “my Maker sanctions what I do” (322) provoke an outraged God, acting through nature, to raise a violent storm and blast the giant chestnut tree.

Nor are these the only links between the unregenerate Rochester and Satan. Indeed, the proposal scene helps to clarify an earlier passage that is otherwise quite puzzling, and that interpreters of the novel seem to have universally ignored. This is the description of the curious cabinet which stands in the third-story room that connects with Bertha's den, and which Jane sees when she is summoned there on the night Mason is attacked (Chapter 20). The front of this cabinet, divided into twelve panels, bore in grim design, the heads of the twelve apostles, each inclosed in its separate panel as in a frame; while above them at the top rose an ebon crucifix and a dying Christ.

According as the shifting obscurity and flickering gleam hovered here or glanced there, it was now the bearded physician, Luke, that bent his brow; now St. John's long hair that waved; and anon the devilish face of Judas, that grew out of the panel and seemed gathering life and threatening a revelation of the arch-traitor—of Satan himself—in his subordinate's form (263-64).

The problem is why this description should be introduced at just this point—or why, for that matter, it should be introduced at all. That it contributes in a general way to the sinister atmosphere of the scene is obvious, but the minuteness and careful deployment of the detail suggest a purpose more specific and almost certainly symbolic. The clue lies in Jane's emphasis: as she sees the image, the central theme which emerges is that of Christ's betrayal by the “devilish” Judas, surrogate “of the arch-traitor . . . Satan himself.” The implication, surely, is that Christ has been, or is to be, betrayed again in this very household, and that, as we gather from the circumstances under which we have come to see the cabinet, this betrayal is somehow to be connected with Bertha. Perhaps, we may also suspect, there is some correlation between the idea of betrayal and the fact, revealed in Rochester's conversation with Jane at the end of the chapter, that he already desires to marry her. With the appearance of the proposal scene in Chapter 23 and the revelations about Rochester's past in Chapters
26-27 to shed a retrospective light, all of this falls into place. Indeed, when Jane returns to the room after the interruption of the wedding and is shown Bertha in person, our attention is called to “the pictorial cabinet” once again (370). Judas/Satan, it has become clear, is Rochester, and the betrayal is his proposal itself. By attempting to marry Jane while he is still married to Bertha, he is defying the law of God, and, in doing so, crucifying Christ all over again.

IV

But Judas, we remember, is only one of the apostles depicted on the cabinet. Though Jane makes him the thematic center of her description, her eye glances in passing at St. John, and thus anticipates her encounter in the fourth main section of the novel with St. John Rivers. If the unregenerate Rochester is like Judas and Satan in wishing to betray Christ, Rivers is like his namesake in wishing only to serve him. Yet he poses as much a threat to Jane’s freedom as Rochester, and Charlotte Brontë makes us aware of this in a number of subtle ways still to be noted.

One of the most effective of these is the ironic use she makes of the implications of his name itself. St. John the Evangelist, we recall, is pre-eminently associated with the image of light. He declares that God is “the light [that] shineth in the darkness,” and that he himself was sent from God “to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe” (John, 1: 5-7). Jesus too speaks of the Jews as having rejoiced in John’s “burning and shining light” (John, 5:35). This explains why the first thing Jane sees of St. John Rivers’s house is the light shining from one of its windows:

My eye still roved over the sullen swell and along the moor edge, vanishing amidst the wildest scenery, when at one dim point, far in among the marshes and the ridges, a light sprang up. . . . I expected it would soon vanish. It burnt on, however, quite steadily, neither receding nor advancing . . . shining dim but constant through the rain. . . . This light was my forlorn hope: I must gain it (422-23).

Ironically, however, the light leads her “through a wide bog,” and as she draws closer to the house “the rough stones of a low wall” and “a high and prickly hedge” cut it off entirely from her sight: “the guiding light shone nowhere. All was obscurity” (423). The allegory is obvious: like his Biblical namesake, St. John will offer Jane a way of life which he is convinced will lead to her spiritual salvation,
but she will see it as leading only to her spiritual death, a meaning reinforced by her original fear that the light coming from the house might turn out to be nothing more than an *ignis fatuus* (422).

The significance of this light is further clarified by its contrast with the light emanating from Rochester's dining and drawing-rooms. Jane describes the former as it appears from the hall a few minutes after she and Rochester have first met and he has entered it: a "ruddy shine issued from the great dining-room, whose two-leaved door stood open and showed a genial fire in the grate, glancing on marble hearth and brass fire-irons, and revealing purple draperies and polished furniture in the most pleasant radiance" (142). On the following evening, after being summoned to the drawing-room to be formally introduced to her new master, she discovers that the same radiance accompanies his presence there: "Two wax candles stood lighted on the table, and two on the mantelpiece; basking in the light and heat of a superb fire, lay Pilot—Adèle knelt near him. Half reclined on a couch appeared Mr. Rochester . . . the fire shone full on his face" (146). Several days later, when he calls her to the dining-room where he has been entertaining friends, she notices that "the lustre which had been lit for dinner filled the room with a festal breadth of light; the large fire was all red and clear . . ." (159). These experiences lay the basis for the remark, inspired soon after by her growing fondness for him, that "his presence in a room was more cheering than the brightest fire" (181). How different is St. John's "light," which threatens to lead Jane astray, because it emanates from a nature totally lacking in the ability to love her.

But it is not the false light alone that defines this nature. If St. John's association with light links him ironically to his Biblical namesake, so does his last name, "Rivers." To bear witness to Jesus, who baptizes with "the Holy Ghost," John baptizes "with water" (*John*, 1:25-33). Moreover, he is the only Evangelist who records Jesus's words, "He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" (*John*, 7:38). Yet St. John Rivers is associated not with water, but with its opposite, the wasteland. Whereas Rochester lives in the south of England, in the midst of natural abundance, fertility, and vigorous life typified by his orchard, St. John lives on "the stern North-Midland moors of Morton" (540. Cf. 412). This contrast between north and south, moor and orchard, is hinted at as early as Chapter 25, on the eve of the wedding fiasco, when Jane seeks shelter in the orchard from a storm, and there sees the trees "bending their branchy heads* north-
ward." (348. My italics). The forbidding quality of the landscape is even shared by St. John's house—a “crumbling grange,” with a “row of scathed firs behind,” a “patch of moorish soil,” and “yew trees and holly-bushes in front” (451. Cf. 446, 447). When he finally proposes to Jane they have followed “the wild track” of “Marsh Glen,” “shut . . . quite in” by hills, and have come to rest among a “battalion of rocks, guarding a sort of pass,” a little beyond which “the mountain shook off turf and flower, had only heath for raiment and crag for gem . . . exaggerated the wild to the savage, and exchanged the fresh for the frowning” (512). By this time, it is true, Jane has come to discover a certain charm in surroundings like these; but it is unthinkable that she should ever make her permanent home here. She may very well wonder, indeed, like the speaker in Bessie's ballad, “Why did they send me so far and so lonely,/Up where the moors spread and grey rocks are piled:/ Men are hard-hearted, and kind angels only/Watch o'er the steps of a poor orphan child” (21).

When water does appear in this bleak landscape, Jane's imagination can relate St. John to it only obliquely. Though a stream, “swelled with past rains,” pours along “plentiful and clear” through the glen, “catching golden gleams from the sun, and sapphire tints from the firmament,” and eventually rushes “down a waterfall” (512), it is to neither the stream nor the waterfall that Jane compares her austere suitor but to the rock underneath: “he asks me to be his wife, and has no more of a husband's heart for me than that frowning giant of a rock, down which the stream is foaming in yonder gorge” (517). Rochester brought new vitality and excitement to Thornfield as if he were “a rill from the outer world . . . flowing through it” (144), but Jane assimilates St. John to water by thinking of his anger as the breaking-up of a “frozen sea” (526), or of his character as being “cold as an iceberg” (568).

Such images and the Biblical allusions which underlie them make clear that St. John's first action in the novel—his rescue of Jane from banishment and death as she lies on his doorstep—is deeply ironical: far from being her true savior—a bringer of light and purifying water like his Biblical namesake—his proposal of marriage will threaten her with a living death. But this menace is also forecast by an even more explicit literary allusion—to Schiller's Die Räuber, from which Jane hears Diana Rivers quoting as she first approaches the house. The passage is from Act V, Scene 1, and is a part of the speech of the conscience-stricken villain Franz Moor in which he describes to his faithful retainer a terrifying dream he has had of three angels of wrath
who will punish him for his sins after death: "Da trat hervor Einer, anzusehen wie die Sternen Nacht. . . . ' Ich wäge die Gedanken in der Schale meines Zornes und die Werke mit dem Gewichte meines Grimms'" (425). Then there stepped forth one, in appearance like the starry sky. . . . "I weigh thoughts in the scale of my anger, and deeds with the weight of my wrath").18 These lines convey perfectly what is soon to become Jane's view of the frighteningly lofty and resolute will of St. John himself—a will which Diana, clearly establishing its link with what she has been reading, calls "inexorable as death" (455. Cf. 466). Though Jane concedes at the end of the novel that St. John has been a noble and heroic missionary, what she has emphasized throughout is his sternness. His habitual posture is less that of the compassionate Christian comforter than that of the unyielding Old Testament judge, in whom severity predominates over gentleness, justice over mercy. Between the extremes of sensual desire for Rosamond Oliver and the completely utilitarian view of Jane as an apt "tool" for his work (531) there is a void which love has never filled (478-79). Though his sermons thrill the heart and astonish the mind, "neither were softened. Throughout there was a strange bitterness; an absence of consolatory gentleness" (449). Above all, his resemblance to the figures of divine judgment in the Schiller passage emerges most distinctly when he preaches his zealous Calvinism: "stern allusions to Calvinist doctrines—election, predestination, reprobation—were frequent; and each reference to these points sounded like a sentence pronounced for doom" (449). It is no accident that on the day he first urges Jane "to give up German and learn Hindostanee" (507), in preparation for her role as his wife which he is soon to propose to her, the text she is reading is Schiller himself (507). In his pages is an image and a warning of the doom, the "iron shroud" (515), to which that proposal threatens to condemn her.

But this method of defining St. John's character by relating him to Die Räuber and the Gospel of John is not Charlotte Brontë's final one. She also defines him by means of images which relate him to threatening characters in the novel itself. There are three of these images: cold, the column, and St. John's "Grecian" appearance. The first we have observed when discussing the significance of Jane's third painting; it is the most frequently reiterated image of all, and few critics have neglected to point out its obvious importance in connoting St. John's emotional frigidity toward Jane. What is less obvious is the way it suggests his ominous potential by linking him to the earlier sinister

18 Ibid., p. 603.
figures of Bertha and the Reeds, who unite cold with death. As we have seen, Chapters 20 and 36 associate Bertha's passions with destructive fires; but in Chapter 11, before Rochester has arrived at Thornfield, bringing with him the fire of his own passion and love, Bertha's presence in the house is suggested by Jane's remark to Mrs. Fairfax that "the air [in the rooms] feels chilly" (126). The closer one gets to the attic where Bertha is imprisoned, the more noticeable does this cold become: the "very chill and vault-like air" which pervades the stairs and second-floor gallery makes on Jane an "eerie impression" from which she is only too glad to escape (117). As the word "vault" confirms, this is the cold of death. Hence its appropriateness when Jane uses it again to describe the darkness of the attic itself (129), and when much later Rochester, echoing her words in revulsion against his enslaving marriage, calls Thornfield an "insolent vault, offering the ghastliness of living death to the light of the open sky" (383). Similar associations gathered earlier around the Red Room at Gateshead. This not only served as a prison, when Mrs. Reed confined Jane there to punish her for her first act of rebellion, but became in the child's imagination "the permanent home of death," and, as such, was always "chill, because it seldom had a fire" (11).

Another important link between St. John and menacing characters whom Jane encountered earlier is the image of the column. Before St. John appears, the "stone pillar" supporting the road signs at Whitcross (itself—"white cross"—a related image) serves as an augury (412). Later Jane reflects that as a husband he would be "too often a cold cumbrous column, gloomy and out of place" (502), and after his proposal itself, when she sees him lying on the ground, she notes that he is as "still as a prostrate column" (517). The obvious parallel, as several commentators have remarked, is the other forbidding clergyman in the novel, Mr. Brocklehurst, whom the child Jane saw as a "black column" (70), or "black pillar" with a "grim face at the top . . . like a carved mask, placed above the shaft by way of capital" (33). Though Brocklehurst erred by being insufficiently religious, whereas St. John errs by being exclusively religious, both threaten Jane's freedom by their pride, rigidity, ambition, and lack of human warmth, for all of which the column is a perfect symbol. But Jane is also threatened by these qualities as they exist in a purely social context, for she fears that Rochester will violate the claims of his affinity to her by marrying into the effete and mercenary set represented by Blanche Ingram and her mother. The metaphor of the column is thus

enemies of freedom in “Jane Eyre”

Evoked to describe the latter as well: “She had Roman features and a double chin, disappearing into a throat like a pillar: these features appeared to me not only inflated and darkened, but even furrowed with pride…” (215).

Furthermore, there is an imagistic connection between St. John and Blanche herself. Several times Jane describes St. John as if he were a piece of statuary: he reads so intently that “had he been a statue instead of a man, he could not have been easier” (440); his forehead is as “colourless as ivory” (440), as “still and pale as a white stone” (501); and his features and his kisses are like “marble” (469, 509, 524). These suggestions of the marmoreal are echoed in the name Blanche and in the fact that she first appears in the novel “attired in spotless white” (216). Above all, they come to a focus in the resemblance of both characters to classically “Grecian” prototypes—St. John’s “Greek face, very pure in outline” (440; cf. 509, 564) and his resemblance to a “graceful Apollo” (565) having their counterpart in Blanche’s “Grecian neck and bust” (202) and her figure like Diana’s (215). The contrast, clearly, is with Rochester, who resembles a “Vulcan” (565) or a “British gnome,” and was discarded by Céline Varens for a lover having “the elegance of the Apollo Belvedere” (173). Charlotte Brontë, showing her preference of the “Romantic” to the “Classic,” thus reverses traditional mythic associations by making her creature of the south and her true bearer of heat and light the dark, conventionally ugly man, and her creature of the north and missionary of cold and death the fair, calm, conventionally handsome Apollo.

But not all the characters inside the novel to whom St. John is significantly related are menacing. The threat he poses to Jane’s freedom is suggested even more subtly by his relationship to his two sisters and Rosamond Oliver, characters in whom Jane and the reader find much to like. I shall conclude with a brief consideration of each.

The sisters are especially attractive. The kindness and compassion they feel toward Jane leads to the development of a “mutual affection—of the strongest kind” (447) which lasts for many years after all three are married (578). Nonetheless, when these sisters first appear in the novel, as observed by Jane through the window of Marsh End, there is something disturbing about them: “Two young, graceful women—ladies in every point—sat, one in a low rocking-chair, the other on a lower stool; both wore deep mourning of crape and bombazine…they were all delicacy and cultivation….” I cannot call them handsome—they were too pale and grave for the word; as they each bent over a book, they looked thoughtful almost to severity. A stand between them supported a second candle and two great volumes,
to which they frequently referred. . . . This scene was as silent as if all the figures had been shadowy and the firelit apartment a picture” (424. My italics). Primness and austerity, hyper-refinement and cerebration, remoteness and silence, pallor and death—these are the keynotes of the scene. And these are the keynotes of the sisters' brother, St. John himself. Charlotte Brontë is using her vignette not so much to tell us the full truth about the sisters as to adumbrate the ominous traits of St. John's character before he appears. The details constitute a metaphor of the world of values—a world of severe restraint, ascetic rigor, discipline, self-denial, and personal sacrifice—in which we will come to see that St. John has his being, and to which he will try to confine Jane. The sisters, like their brother, are scholars; as such they hint at his ability to sacrifice emotion, and specifically erotic emotion, to duty. Jane, in contrast, is an artist: her skill in drawing is stressed throughout (153-54, 292, 447). Emotion is therefore essential to her; instead of sacrificing it to duty, she lives in the desire that the two be reconciled. The image of the sisters poring over their texts and their dictionary thus helps to lay the groundwork for the conflict of values between St. John and Jane soon to develop. Perhaps the disturbing qualities of this scene are also enhanced for us, in retrospect, when we learn that the names of the sisters are Mary and Diana. Besides suggesting virginity, the counterpart of their brother's ultimate celibacy, these names inevitably derive ominous associations from the Ingram sisters—not only from the one actually named Mary, but also from Blanche herself, who, we have seen, was "moulded like a Dian" (215). As Rochester was unable to love the latter because "she could not charm him" (232), so Jane will withhold her love from St. John Rivers for the same reason.

The Ingram girls, moreover, anticipate another symbolic aspect of the Rivers sisters: just as there is a striking temperamental difference between the former—Mary being "deficient in life," while Blanche is all vivacity (216)—so, in spite of their scholarly proclivities, there is a similar difference between Mary and Diana: Diana's "whole face seemed to me full of charm. Mary's... expression was more reserved, and her manners, though gentle, more distant. Diana looked and spoke with a certain authority: she had a will, evidently" (439. Cf. 447). Appropriately, Mary marries "a clergyman" and Diana "a captain in the navy" (578). The importance of this contrast between the two sisters is that it corresponds exactly to that between the outward appearance and the inner nature of their brother. The former, as Jane makes clear in her initial description of St. John, is suggestive of classic grace, poise, and calm—of a character thoroughly at peace with
himself and the world (440). This is the side of St. John which
preaches “contentment with a humble lot” (454-55) and responds to
the beauty and soft charms of Rosamond Oliver. But a closer look
at his features reveals that “quiescent as he now sat, there was some-
thing about his nostril, his mouth, his brow, which . . . indicated
elements within either restless, or hard, or eager” (440. Cf. 455).
This is the impatient, ambitious, would-be man of action—the man who
contemptuously rejects “the tranquil, hidden office of English country
incumbent” (452) because he is consumed by “insatiate yearnings and
disquieting aspirations” (449) for “the destiny of an artist, author,
orator, anything rather than that of a priest” (462). This split in his
nature is at the root of the special kind of threat he poses to Jane’s
freedom: the only way he can reconcile the opposing tendencies is by
becoming a missionary, and it is in order to serve this end that he
proposes marriage to Jane, even though he cannot love her. The
objectification of the two sides of St. John’s character respectively in
his two sisters thus focuses with almost allegorical sharpness on one of
the novel’s essential sources of conflict.

The woman St. John does love is Rosamond Oliver. Strictly speak-
ing, her presence in the action is not essential: the threat St. John
poses for Jane—that of being willing to marry her without loving
her—could be posed whether or not he loved anybody else. All that
is necessary is that he be incapable of valuing Jane as anything more
than an instrument in the service of his implacable ambition. But
Rosamond performs the important rhetorical function of providing
St. John with a relationship through which the crucial limitations of
his character—the limitations which make possible his threat to Jane—
can be forcibly dramatized. Two points are central. One depends
on our recognition of the limitations of Rosamond herself. Though
in many ways she stands in obvious contrast to the obnoxious Blanche
Ingram, and though Jane confesses to a liking for her, there is no
mistaking Rosamond’s shallowness, especially when she is compared to
St. John’s sisters (470). Yet this is the kind of woman of whom
St. John is so fond, whom he “would have given the world to follow,
recall, retain” (469), and against whose temptation he has to struggle
with all the force of his moral nature, curbing his desire for her “as
a resolute rider would curb a rearing steed” (465). No such struggle
complicates his relations with the spiritually superior Jane; indeed, he
can consider choosing her as his helpmeet in his missionary labors pre-
cisely because she is so devoid of Rosamond’s powerful attraction for
him. Surely this makes clear a major weakness in him, and sounds
one of the novel’s more telling ironies. The woman who, on her re-
religious side, is most akin to the spirit of the missionary is less appealing
to him than the woman of superficial and conventional charm. The
reconciliation of the opposing tendencies of his nature which was
effected by his decision to become a missionary has left at least his
erotic tastes quite untouched. Jane's marriage to St. John would
have been a prison for her not merely because St. John could not love
her, but because he is the kind of man who would always prefer only
the Rosamond Olivers.

It is true that St. John represses his love for Rosamond and commits
himself to his mission in spite of it. But this only exposes his flawed
character the more. Rosamond's name, meaning "Rose of the World,"
and the name of her home "Vale Hall," obviously a pun on Valhalla,
suggest that she represents for St. John the same temptation of a
secular paradise as the unregenerate Rochester did for Jane, who speaks
of Thornfield as her "lost elysium" (450) and who was invited by
Rochester to enter a "paradise of union" (321). Both Rosamond and
Rochester offer a kind of love to St. John and Jane that violates their
conscience and that they must therefore reject. But the analogy
between their situations points up the profound differences between
their characters. A man with a simple vocation for a missionary's
life would have been able to love Jane; a pure secularist would have
married Rosamond. St. John's problem is that he is caught in between.
He is too much of a secularist to love Jane as she deserves to be loved,
but he is also too much of a religious devotee to marry Rosamond.
He must therefore repress a vital part of his nature, and here is where
he and Jane stand in crucial contrast. As he has chosen to reject Rosa-
mond in the interest of God, so Jane for the same reason has chosen
to reject Rochester. But whereas he can live permanently in this con-
dition, Jane cannot: she is miserable, incomplete, unfulfilled, until her
need for Rochester's love and the voice of her conscience can be
reconciled, and her life would have ended tragically had not circum-
cstances arisen to resolve the dilemma. St. John bifurcates himself,
choosing to live in accord with one need of his nature at the expense
of another. Jane prefers to remain whole, struggling to avoid a com-
mmitment to either St. John or the unregenerate Rochester, until the
claims of love and God can be satisfied alike. The prison in which St.
John threatens to confine Jane is thus not only that of a marriage in
which she would have been unloved, nor only that of a marriage in
which her husband would have loved another, but ultimately a mar-
rriage which would have destroyed that vital wholeness of being in
which throughout the book she struggles so heroically to keep herself
alive.