Becoming Jane:

Subject and Narrative Formation through the Language of Suicide and Marriage in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*

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Introduction

Scholars have understood Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre,* a quintessential female *Bildungsroman* or coming-of-age novel, as ultimately a conservative work, since the marriage at the end of the novel appears to subsume and domesticate the rebellious, feminist actions of the eponymous protagonist.[1] As both a *Bildungsroman* and a fictional autobiography, the novel, published in 1847, tracks the psychological development and maturation of Jane that allows her to become a productive citizen and the author of her own story. From the beginning of the novel, Jane is aware that she must actively cultivate herself as a subject to establish her place in society. This awareness complicates the conservative understandings of the novel, because it compels Jane to develop her narrative abilities so that she can determine her own fate and suggests that Victorian women can do the same. Both as the narrator and the protagonist, Jane uses language to differentiate herself from the "other" and to redefine what constitutes success and failure in her life. More specifically, she uses the language of suicide and marriage to describe failed and successful processes of development for herself and other characters throughout the novel, demonstrating her awareness of these developmental processes. Jane's self-conscious development as both a subject and a narrator parallels Brontë's blending of the *Bildungsroman* and autobiography. By tracking Jane's development as both a subject and a narrator and demonstrating Jane's awareness of this process through the narration of her own story, Brontë provides a model for Victorian women to assert themselves by becoming the authors of their own lives.

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[1] See Baxter's *Coming of Age,* pp. 27-28; Boone's *Tradition Counter Tradition,* p. 97; Cho's *An Ethics of Becoming,* p. 103; Downward and Summerfield's *New Perspectives on the European Bildungsroman*, 138; Ellis' *Appearing to Diminish,* p. 141, 161; Fraiman's *Unbecoming Women,* p119; Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic,* p. 369; Green *Literary Identification,* p. 5; Levine *How to Read the Victorian Novel*, p. 4; Maier's "Portraits of the Girl-Child," p. 320. Pell notes in "Resistance, Rebellion and Marriage" that Brontë considered herself one of the "Christian Tories," implying a certain conservatism through Brontë's political attitudes, p. 399.

Jane's maturation and self-development depends upon her ability to manipulate the language of suicide and marriage to invert social definitions of success and failure in life and redefine these terms for herself. Through language, Jane develops as both a subject and a narrator. This deliberate self-fashioning complicates the reflexive models of subject formation described by Jacques Lacan in his theory of the mirror stage and Julia Kristeva's conception of the abject. Contrasting these models, Brontë's conception of self-development for Jane requires an active engagement with language. After learning about social norms and articulating these understandings for herself, Jane deploys language against other characters and situations in order to ensure that she will succeed in her development as a subject and narrator. What Jane does at the level of narration, Brontë does at the level of genre. Jane's ability to invert social understandings of suicide and marriage to define failure and success in the novel respectively reveals how Brontë similarly manipulates social understandings implicit in the *Bildungsroman* form by blending it with the fictional autobiography. Both Jane and Brontë uphold the female agency gained through such actions; thus, *Jane Eyre* has more radical implications for asserting female agency than scholars have considered.

Section I: Suicide

Victorian Conceptions of Suicide

Contextualizing the novel within popular, nineteenth-century social and medical definitions of suicide reveals certain assumptions about suicide during the Victorian Era that are incorporated in the literature of the time. Medical definitions radically changed the popular conceptions of suicide in nineteenth-century Britain. In her article, "From Statistics to Diagnostics," Åsa Jansson describes how the adjective "suicidal" arose from a shift in the nineteenth-century medical attitude towards suicide (Jansson 717). Once an abominable deed

that signified moral deviance, suicide in the nineteenth century was understood as an explainable and possibly understandable act.[2] The word "suicidal" encompassed a vast range of meanings during this time, from a vague wish to die to actual attempts to kill one's self.[3] This term was first used on "medical certificates of insanity" to determine whether a "lunatic" was "suicidal" upon being committed into the asylum (Jansson 717). The connection between madness and insanity implicit in the definition of the term entered into medical discourse; medical professionals increasingly understood madness as a cause of suicide in the nineteenth century.[4] Such a link secularized conceptions of the act, because the possibility of lunacy allowed suicidal victims to be buried in consecrated ground.[5] Moving from religious to secular conceptions of suicide resulted in the professionalization of the study of suicide, as sociologists, doctors, legal and law enforcement professionals became the main authorities on the subject rather than religious figures.[6] Changing conceptions of suicide during the nineteenth century connect madness and suicide in a way that secularized the term.

The gender binary evident in Victorian society deeply influenced understandings about the causes and methods of suicide. In his article "Suicide, Gender and the Fear of Modernity in Nineteenth-Century Medical and Social Thought," Howard Kushner illustrates how Victorian medical professionals agreed that the causes of suicide were different for men and women

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[2] See Gates' *Victorian Suicide,* p. 13; Kushner's "Suicide, Gender and the Fear of Modernity in Nineteenth-Century Medical and Social Thought," p. 471; Jansson's "From Statistics to Diagnostics," p. 717.

[3] For more about general conceptions of suicide in the nineteenth century, see Jansson's "From Statistics to Diagnostics," p. 718.

[4] See Jansson's "From Statistics to Diagnostics," p. 717, for a discussion about madness as a cause of suicide.

[5] Both Gate in *Victorian Suicide,* p. 6, and Shepherd and Wright in "Madness, Suicide and the Victorian Asylum," p. 178, discuss how the connection between suicide and madness secularized understandings of suicide in the nineteenth century.

[6] See Kushner's "Suicide, Gender and the Fear of Modernity in Nineteenth-Century Medical and Social Thought," p. 466, and Shepherd and Wright's "Madness, Suicide and the Victorian Asylum," p. 178.

because of perceived temperamental and social differences between the sexes.[7] Medical professionals and sociologists became concerned about suicide as a social phenomenon when coupled with the rapid social changes promulgated by the Industrial Revolution.[8] These professionals argued that the evils of the city and modernity increasingly caused men to commit suicide. Suicide in men revealed the stress of their active positions in a rapidly changing society; thus, male suicide became "a barometer of national economic and social well-being" (Kushner 469).[9] In contrast, medical and other professionals claimed that women who killed themselves simply deviated from their societal role; these professionals considered female suicide an "individual emotional act" that reflected a transgression against societal codes.[10] Thus, modern urbanization did not have a direct effect on their behavior.[11] Furthermore, the means by which a person took his or her life varied based on gender, with women preferring more passive methods like drowning or poisoning and men employing violent means.[12] The overdetermined gender binary in Victorian society affected the medical understandings of suicide in nineteenth-century Britain.[13]

Nineteenth-century artistic representations encoded this gender distinction in the causes and

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[7] See Kushner's "Suicide, Gender and the Fear of Modernity in Nineteenth-Century Medical and Social Thought," 468. For a contemporary view about the difference between the sexes, see Ruskin's "Of Queen's Gardens."
[8] Kushner in "Suicide, Gender and the Fear of Modernity in Nineteenth-Century Medical and Social Thought," writes "self-destructive behavior became a prima facie example of the corrupting effects of urbanization" and "hypotheses about the causes of suicide were tide to…an ambivalence towards social change," p. 461. Shepherd and Wright in "Madness, Suicide and the Victorian Asylum" make a similar argument about higher rates of suicide in industrial areas than in the country and explicitly reference the Industrial Revolution, p. 178.
[9] See Anderson's *Suicide in Victorian and Edwardian England*, pp. 43, 57 and Shepherd and Wright's "Madness, Suicide and the Victorian Asylum," p. 178.
[10] For more discussion about female suicide, see Anderson's *Suicide in Victorian and Edwardian England,* p. 57; Gate's *Victorian Suicide,* p. 125; Kushner's "Suicide, Gender and the Fear of Modernity in Nineteenth-Century Medical and Social Thought," p. 469; Shepherd and Wright's "Madness, Suicide and the Victorian Asylum," p. 178.
[11] See Anderson's *Suicide in Victorian and Edwardian England,* 43; Kushner "Suicide, Gender and the Fear of Modernity in Nineteenth-Century Medical and Social Thought," pp. 462, 470.
[12] See Anderson's *Suicide in Victorian and Edwardian England,* pp. 43-44, 196; Baily's *This Rash Act*, p. 141; Gates' *Victorian Suicide,* p. 125 and Shepherd and Wright's "Madness, Suicide and the Victorian Asylum," p. 186, for a discussion of medical and popular understandings of the gender distinction in the causes and methods of suicide during the Victorian era.
[13] See Anderson's *Suicide in Victorian and Edwardian England,* pp. 51, 195-196, for a discussion about the representations of suicide in art.

methods of suicide through tropes of men killing themselves owing to financial ruin and "ruined women" committing suicide in a fit of passion for breaking societal codes.[14] For example, popular authors like Charles Dickens emphasized this gender understanding of suicide to reinforce the Victorian ideal of separate spheres for men and women.[15] In her book *Victorian Suicide,* Barbara Gates argues that "suicide was displaced to [women] much as it was to demonic alter egos" in fiction (Gates 125). This "othering" of suicidal women became a popular literary trope to account for women who did not fit the mold of "angels in the house" (Gates 12). Suicidal women, particularly drowned women, became a popular subject of paintings and engravings, such as John Everett Millais' *Ophelia* (Figure 1), George Frederic Watts' *Found Drowned* (Figure 2) and Hablot K Browne's *The River* (Figure 3), illustrated for Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield.*[16] Art historians concur that Thomas Hood's immensely popular poem "The Bridge of Sighs" of 1844 resulted in a proliferation of artistic depictions of suicidal women. [17] In his work, Hood describes the descent of a young "fallen" woman after a sexual encounter outside of marriage and her subsequent death as a type of honor killing. This understanding became the norm for Victorian female conceptions of suicide.[18] Both paintings by Watts and Millais depict the passiveness of suicidal women through the pale, white, listlessness of the prostrate female body. Such passiveness connotes suppressing rebellious sexuality, the implicit impetus for female suicide. Nevertheless, the erotic underpinnings of these women's deaths become evident in the way that the artists aestheticize suicide through use of beautiful, bright colors and light. In contrast, masculine suicide was not a pervasive subject in art; Linda

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[14] For a discussion of these gendered tropes, see Anderson's *Suicide in Victorian and Edwardian England,* pp. 44, 57, and Kushner's "Suicide, Gender and the Fear of Modernity in Nineteenth-Century Medical and Social Thought," p. 469.

[15] See Anderson's *Suicide in Victorian and Edwardian England*, p. 196.

[16] See Gate's *Victorian Suicide,* pp. 134, 138 and 139, for discussions of each painting.

[17] Nochlin in "Lost and Found" describes various paintings of suicidal women in the context of Thomas Hood's poem, p. 143.

[18] See Nochlin's "Lost and Found," p. 143.

Nochlin humorously observes, “fallen in the masculine tended to inspire rather boring sculptural monuments and sarcophagi. Fallen in the feminine, however-understood as any sort of sexual activity on the part of women out of wedlock—exerted a peculiar fascination on the imagination of nineteenth-century artists, not to speak of writers, social critics, and uplifters” (Nochlin 139). The gendered distinction between women and men evident in Victorian literature and art embody gendered norms that Brontë contends with in *Jane Eyre*.

Images

Figure 1
John Everett Millais, *Ophelia,* 1851-1852.
Oil on canvas, 30 by 40 in.
Tate Britain, London, acc. unknown.

Figure 2
George Frederick Watts, *Found Drowned,* 1850.
Oil on canvas, dimensions unknown.
Watts Gallery, Surrey, acc. unknown.

Figure 3
Hablot K Browne, *The River,* 1849-1850.
Steel Etching, dimensions unknown.
Location unknown, acc. unknown.

Early Examples of Suicide in Jane Eyre

Epitomizing masculine suicide that Victorian sociologists and medical professionals understood as a "barometer for social health," John Reed's suicide links him to Victorian ideologies that Jane must invert in order to establish her place in society (Kushner 461). Robert Leaven, the former coachman from Gateshead, the home of Jane's Aunt Reed, informs Jane that "'Mr. John died…at his chambers in London'" and that others "'say he killed himself'" (Brontë 255). He implies that John Reed's suicide results from the increasing pressures of urbanization that created an "association of suicide, vice, urbanization and modernity" for Victorians (Kushner 462). Taking such an association for granted, Leaven attributes the cause of John Reed's suicide to his reckless behavior and debauched ways: "'his life has been very wild: these last three years he gave himself up to strange ways, and his death was shocking'" (Brontë 255). By using language such as "wild" and "strange ways," Leaven suggests that John Reed has become involved in something illicit or improper, such as gambling, living beyond ones means or indulging in the "vices" of the city. Such behavior ultimately results in John Reed's unexpected, "shocking" death. Upon further prompting from Jane, the coachman admits that John Reed's gambling led to economic problems: he "'ruined his health and his estate amongst the worst men and the worst women. He got into debt and jail'" (Brontë 255). The syllepsis of "ruined" highlights John Reed's deterioration on a personal and economic level and grammatically links the two. Economic issues were one of the leading causes for men committing suicide in the city (Kushner 469). By connecting John Reed's suicide to his economic ruin in the city, Brontë taps into the prevailing sociological and medical discourses about male suicide to provide a normative understanding of the act.

While Leaven outlines the causes of John Reed's death, Mrs. Reed expounds upon this description by ascribing John Reed's suicide to the pressures of urbanization and modernity. Lamenting that her son continues to ask her for money, Mrs. Reed admits that he "'gambles dreadfully, and always loses'" (Brontë 267). Mrs. Reed defines the cause of John Reed's suicide as economic ruin that suggests that the vices of the city led to his death. By using the words "sunk" and "degraded" to describe her son, Mrs. Reed implies that his honor compelled him to commit suicide when the pressures of city life became too much to bear.[19] Furthermore, she states, "'he continually threatens me with his own death, or mine: and I dream sometimes that I see him laid out with a great wound in his throat, or with a swollen and blackened face'" (Brontë 268). These violent forms of suicide, slitting one's throat and hanging respectively, are gendered masculine, since Victorians considered men to be more active than women.[20] Although Mrs. Reed states that she "dreams" of her son's suicide, the reader knows from the coachman's earlier description that John Reed has already died. The news of his death caused his mother to suffer a fit of apoplexy. In her deluded state, she cannot acknowledge that her son is dead. Nevertheless, her discussion of John Reed's continual threats to kill himself and the possible circumstances surrounding his death characterize his suicide as the masculine type steaming from economic in the city. Significantly, such discussion exposes Jane to the discourse about masculine suicide and the implicit gendered understandings.

John Reed's suicide allows Jane to critically engage with Victorian conceptions of suicide by challenging gendered understandings implicit in popular and professional

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[19] See Anderson's *Suicide in Victorian and Edwardian England,* pp. 421, and Kushner's "Suicide, Gender and the Fear of Modernity in Nineteenth-Century Medical and Social Thought," p. 469, for a discussion about the link between city life, economic ruin and suicide in men.

[20] Bailey in *This Rash Act,* pp. 30, 141-142 and Shepherd and Wright in "Madness, Suicide and the Victorian Asylum," p. 186, both discuss the gendered understandings of suicide based on generalizations about the temperament of the genders.

understandings of the act. Explaining why she must visit her aunt at Gateshead, Jane tells Mr. Rochester that "'John Reed is dead, too, sir: he ruined himself and half-ruined his family, and is supposed to have committed suicide'" (Brontë 258). Although she ostensibly uses the phrase "ruined himself" to connote the economic ruin of John Reed and his family, the ambiguous term "ruined" evokes the trope of "ruined women."[21] Olive Anderson in *Suicide in Victorian and Edwardian England* argues that fallen women and economically ruined men were two types of "sad" suicide according to Victorian popular conceptions (Anderson 421). Jane makes use of this ambiguity and begins to play with gendered notions of suicide through her awareness of language. Furthermore, this statement demonstrates how Jane learns to describe other characters as suicidal. Indeed, as the novel progresses, suicide functions less as a physical act and more as a narrative tool for Jane. Jane develops her narrative skills by first absorbing the language that Leaven and Mrs. Reed use to describe John Reed's death and subsequently relaying their description to Mr. Rochester. Her articulation of John Reed's death as a suicide marks the first instance of the word in the novel. She later deploys this language against the characters Bertha and St. John to characterize them as suicidal. This method of absorbing, articulating, and deploying the language of suicide effectively chronicles Jane's growth as a narrator as she listens to, copies and then masters the language of suicide in the novel.

While Mr. Rochester does not commit suicide, his contemplation of the act epitomizes the prevailing professional and popular discourses about the secularization of suicide during the nineteenth century. Forced to reveal that Bertha is his wife after he attempts to marry Jane, Mr. Rochester describes how his hopeless position as a man married to an "'intemperate and

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[21] Nochlin in "Lost and Found," discusses the trope of suicidal "fallen women," p. 141-143. See Anderson's Chapter 2, "Gender, Age, Mortality and Suicide" in *Suicide in Victorian and Edwardian England*, p.41-73, for a discussion of these tropes in contrast to the historical reality of suicide in the nineteenth century.

unchaste'" woman led him to contemplate suicide (Brontë 353).[22] In an impassioned speech, Mr. Rochester exclaims, "'This life,' said I at last, 'is hell…I have a right to deliver myself from it if I can…Of the fanatic's burning eternity I have no fear: there is not a future state worse than this present one- let me break away, and go home to God!'" (Brontë 355). His use of terms, such as "hell," "fanatic's burning eternity," and "go home to God," describe suicide in a religious register; however, Mr. Rochester inverts the religious understanding of suicide to define the act as secular. The term "fanatic" underscores how outdated the religious conception of suicide is in the novel and Mr. Rochester describes the cultural shift towards a secular understanding of suicide by rejecting the traditional religious understanding of suicide. This shift occurred as medical professionals and sociologists began to view madness as a reason for suicide during the Victorian era.[23] By describing his marriage to Bertha as "hell," Rochester asserts his right to reject his social position through suicide, since his present situation cannot possibly become worse than being trapped in a loveless marriage to a madwoman. Relocating hell to his present situation rather than the afterlife, Mr. Rochester inverts traditional understandings of the link between suicide and divine punishment to suggest that his actions simply violate the laws of men, not of God. Through the phrase "right to deliver myself," Mr. Rochester uses suicide to reject his prescribed position as a married man and models how to assert his linguistic agency to counter social norms for Jane. He absolves himself from any religious damnation through the suggestion that his suicide will allow him to "go home to God." This process of redefining his social situation through contemplating suicide models for Jane the way to narratively manipulate and invert traditional understandings to redefine her social role.

[22] Such an articulation connects Bertha to the "fallen" woman to characterize her as suicidal.
[23] Jansson describes the connection between the use of the term "suicidal" and the Lunacy Acts in the early nineteenth century to describe the connection between madness and suicide as well as the professional study of the act in "From Statistics to Diagnostics," pp. 719- 723. Also see Bolivar's "The Madhouse Divorce," p. 258; Shepherd and Wright's "Madness, Suicide and the Victorian Asylum," pp. 178-179.

Although Mr. Rochester's contemplation of suicide has connections to John Reed's masculine suicide in the city, Mr. Rochester focuses explicitly on the connection between madness and suicide to convey why he did not commit suicide and implicitly characterize Bertha as suicidal. After explaining his situation to Jane, he admits, "'I meant to shoot myself. I only entertained the intension for a moment; for, not being insane, the crisis of exquisite and unalloyed despair, which had originated the wish and design of self-destruction, was past in a second'" (Brontë 355). In this blunt statement, Mr. Rochester draws out the connection between madness and suicide implicit in the definition of the word. By linking suicide and madness, Mr. Rochester characterizes his mad wife as suicidal, providing a model for Jane to describe other characters as such. Explaining his predicament to Jane, Mr. Rochester states, "'the doctors now discovered that *my wife* was mad—her excesses had prematurely developed the germs of insanity'" (Brontë 353). Mr. Rochester connects madness and overt female sexuality, Bertha's "excesses," in a way that parallels Victorian attitudes towards "fallen women" to imply that Bertha is suicidal. [24] In an aside, he mentions "'(since the medical men had pronounced her mad, she had, of course, been shut up)'" (Brontë 354). The reference to medical professionals and madness suggests that Bertha has been locked away in a type of asylum, which recalls the use of the term "suicidal" on medical certificates of insanity.[25] The parenthesis reinforces such a connection between imprisonment, madness and suicide by enclosing the text in the same way that Bertha is imprisoned. Moreover, the parenthesis suggests that Bertha is imprisoned and marginalized by the language of medical professionals and Mr. Rochester. Although he does not

[24] Bertha's "excesses" only seem to differ in degree from Jane's "passions." See Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* for more about the connection between Jane and Bertha, p. 362.
[25] Jansson and Shepherd and Wright explicitly discuss the idea of the "suicidal lunatic," locked up in an asylum, in "From Statistics to Diagnostics," p. 719, and "Madness, Suicide and the Victorian Asylum," 177, respectively. Gates in *Victorian Suicide* discusses the claim of "temporary insanity" that some Victorian professionals used to describe the cause of those who committed suicide, p. 12-15.

explicitly state that Bertha is suicidal, Mr. Rochester uses language to marginalize his wife, a lesson that Jane learns and later deploys against Bertha.

While John Reed and Mr. Rochester epitomize masculine suicide, ten-year-old Jane's suicidal thoughts reflect a female version caused by a rebellion against Victorian norms. In the scene where she was imprisoned in the red-room for "attacking" John Reed, Jane states that, "Resolve…instigated some strange expedient to achieve escape from insupportable oppression—as running away, or, if that could not be effected, never eating or drinking more, and letting myself die" (Brontë 19). Despite her fiery resolve to escape from the tyranny of her aunt and cousins at Gateshead, Jane contemplates passively starving herself in a typical, Victorian mode of female suicide.[26] Although Jane does not act, her desire to die labels her as suicidal in this era.[27] This early understanding of the relationship between suicide and rebellion persists throughout the novel through the motif of Jane starving herself, although Jane's attitude changes drastically as she develops as a subject and a narrator. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar note in their pivotal work, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, a similar connection between suicide and rebellion in *Jane Eyre*. While they define *Jane Eyre* as "a story of enclosure and escape" and a distinctly female *Bildungsroman,* Gilbert and Gubar understand Jane's contemplation of suicide only as a type of escape (Gilbert and Gubar 339). However, they do not address the link that Jane articulates between her identity and suicide, since this suicidal motif occurs at major moments of self-development. More specifically, suicide remains a looming threat in the novel if Jane cannot resist the external forces that attempt to define her. This contemplation of suicide

[26] Female suicide by starvation is discussed in Shepherd and Wright's "Madness, Suicide and the Victorian Asylum," 189

[27] See Jansson's "From Statistics to Diagnostics," pp. 718, 723 for a discussion about the range of meaning connoted by the term "suicidal."

by starvation persists throughout the novel and represents the possibility of Jane's failure to assert herself narratively to complete her *Bildungsroman*.

Like Mr. Rochester's connection between madness and suicide, Jane's contemplation of suicide in the red-room emphasizes the notion of imprisonment. Reflecting back on the red-room incident years later, Mrs. Reed characterizes Jane as mad, stating "she talked to me once like something mad" (Brontë 267). In the same way that Mr. Rochester describes the need to lock Bertha up because of her madness, Mrs. Reed dehumanizes Jane by referring to her as "something mad" and implies that she needed to lock her up. Since Mrs. Reed moves from discussing Jane's potential madness to the suicide of her son, she suggests these two ideas are connected, just as they were in the medical discourse of the time and Mr. Rochester's rhetoric about Bertha. From the first scene in the red-room, Jane learns the consequences of a failed rebellion against her aunt and cousins and failure to assert her own identity: imprisonment. Imprisonment, madness and suicide are implicitly connected in the novel; Jane must resist one and all of these to develop as a subject in society.

Although Jane does not characterize her death as a suicide, Helen Burns, Jane's precocious friend from the Lowood school, has certain suicidal tendencies that young Jane resists. Reflecting back on her experiences at Lowood, Jane-as-narrator defines Helen's willing acceptance of the way that others characterize her as a "doctrine of endurance" (Brontë 67).[28] This doctrine of endurance extends to her death, where she willingly gives herself up in the hopes of joining God, using language such as "resign myself," "very happy," "my mind is at rest," and "comfortable" (Brontë 97). The phrase "resign myself" in particular highlights the willing negation of one's agency, which Jane struggles against throughout the novel. Like Jane's

[28] I use the designation Jane-as-narrator to distinguish Jane's role as the narrator of her story, writing ten years after the events of the novel, from her position as a character, although these roles become increasingly blended as the novel progresses.

contemplation of suicide by starvation, Helen's death emphasizes the same sense of passivity that typified female suicide for Victorians. Jane-as-narrator, however, does not overtly depict Helen's death a suicide; instead, she characterizes Helen as a martyr to separate her from other suicidal characters in the novel. After Helen's death, the narrator admits, "Her grave is in Brocklebridge churchyard: for fifteen years after her death it was only covered by a grassy mound; but now a grey marble tablet marks the spot, inscribed with her name, and the word 'Resurgam'" (Brontë 98). While she does not admit that she gave Helen a tombstone, Jane-as-narrator implies that she commemorated her friend with and inscribed the word *resurgam,* "I will rise again," on this grave marker. Thus, the narrator demonstrates how she is the one responsible for declaring Helen a martyr, because her behavior suggests that she harbored suicidal tendencies. Jane later connects the language of martyrdom and suicide through the figure of St. John, but can distinguish between the two based on her narrative skill.

The examples of John Reed, Mr. Rochester, Helen and Jane's own contemplation of suicide defines the social norms that Jane understands and then drastically destabilizes as part of her *Bildungsroman*. These initial conceptions of suicide change as Jane develops as both a subject and the narrator in the novel using the absorbing-articulating-deploying method. To establish her narrative agency in the novel, Jane articulates herself as a Victorian subject by deploying the language of suicide against other characters.

Subject Formation: Lacan and the Other

Jane's articulation of the difference between herself and other characters determines Jane's creation of herself as a subject in society, a crucial element to her *Bildungsroman*. Throughout the novel, Brontë uses the motif of mirrors to reflect the "otherness" of both Jane as a child and Bertha that Jane must learn to counter narratively. Through the use of mirrors, Jane establishes

her own identity by first recognizing and then setting up an artificial contrast to the other. This method of forming identity parallels that described by Jacques Lacan in his essay, "The Mirror Stage," with some crucial differences in conception of the other and the age at which subject formation happens. Lacan argues that the formation of identity, the "I," occurs when a child "recognizes as such his own image in a mirror" and "the self is constituted by what is reflected back" (Culler 115; Lacan 441). Lacan emphasizes the reflexive, manufactured nature of identity. In the same way that the construction of the self is an artificial process, the other must also be a construct, since definitions of the other only arise when recognized as distinct from the self in both Lacan and Brontë's conceptions of otherness. However, Brontë complicates Lacan's process of identity creation by emphasizing how the formation of a subject is not a reflexive process of early childhood, but a deliberate construction that occurs as one separates him or herself from the other, specifically through narrative. By questioning what happens when the other is the image reflected back in the mirror, Brontë suggests that identity is created through the initial recognition and the subsequent, deliberate rejection of the other as distinct from the self. The language of suicide, in particular, helps Jane establish herself as a subject by rejecting the other, although this rejection depends upon artificial distinctions between the self and other. By describing how this process begins at age ten instead of very early childhood, Brontë highlights the conscious process by which Jane recognizes and delineates her differences from the other to form her own identity and gain agency in the novel.

Jane's recognition of the other in herself complicates Lacan's theory of identity creation by stressing the ambiguity between the self and the other that constantly threatens to collapse. To prevent this collapse, Jane must exert effort to distinguish between the two. When locked in the red-room, Jane confronts her image in the mirror:

> Returning, I had to cross before the looking-glass…the strange little figure there gazing at me, with a white face and arms specking the gloom, and glittering eyes of fear moving where all else was still, had the effect of real spirit: I thought it like one of the tiny phantoms, half fairy, half imp, Bessie's evening stories represented as coming out of lone, ferny dells in moors. (Brontë 17-18)

By grappling with the reflection in the mirror, Jane creates her identity as someone unique from her tyrannical Aunt Reed and cousins by identifying with the supernatural that the servant, Bessie, described in her bedtime stories to Jane. This process parallels the method by which a child identifies with his or her *imago,* image or reflection, in the mirror according to Lacan. Like Lacan, Brontë suggests that the creation of identity from what is reflected in the mirror is a failure or delusion based on "*méconnaissance* [misrecognitions] that constitute the ego, the illusion of autonomy," since the self is a false construct of wholeness built upon partial identifications (Lacan 445). Jane's constructed self, however, would be wholly constituted by the other in Lacan's theory of the mirror stage, since the other is what Jane sees in the mirror. In order to construct her identity, Jane initially identifies with the supernatural creatures that Bessie described and subsequently rejects them as different from herself. The rejection of the other comes from Jane's attention to language and her deliberate attempt to distance herself from the other in the production of her own identity. Jane begins to constitute herself as a subject by making the distinction between herself, the "I," and the other, the "strange little figure," "it," "one of the tiny phantoms." Unlike Lacan, Brontë asserts that the deliberate creation of a binary between self and other through narrative, the use of "I" and "it" in this example, gives Jane crucial control over the production of her identity when other external forces, like her Aunt Reed, attempt to do so for her. By understanding the distinction between the self and the other as

a deliberate rather than a reflexive act, Brontë demonstrates how Jane must use language to distinguish herself from the other.

Although the scene when Jane speaks with Helen at Lowood does not involve an actual mirror, Helen operates as a foil or double for Jane. Jane defines her identity as the opposite of Helen, which becomes a paradigm for Jane's identity formation and relation to other characters. As a child, Jane takes issue with Helen's "doctrine of endurance," described above (Brontë 67). Young Jane states, "'I must resist those who punish me unjustly. It is as natural as that I should love those who show me affection, or submit to punishment when I feel it is deserved'" (Brontë 69). Using the language of rebellion, namely "resist" and "unjust," Jane contrasts her resistance to societal forces that attempt to define her, such as her Aunt Reed calling her a liar, with Helen's acceptance of any characterization from an authority figure. In particular, Helen submits to Mrs. Scatcherd's critiques and physical punishment without any resistance.[29] The narrator recognizes this contrast this contrast as crucial to Jane's identity formation. Where Jane actively resists the "unjust" characterization of others through narrative, Helen simply accepts. Jane-as-narrator's statement "I was no Helen Burns" demonstrates how she establishes herself by defining what she is not, Helen in this case. Enumerating these differences becomes a paradigm of Jane's process of identity formation.

Likewise, the scene where Jane sees Bertha in the mirror demonstrates how she actively distances herself from Bertha by defining her as an other in order to define herself. In this scene, Jane does not clearly explain what she sees in the mirror, but states "'But presently she took my veil... she threw it over her own head, and turned to the mirror. At that moment I saw the reflection of the visage and features quite distinctly in the dark oblong glass'" (Brontë 327). The phrase "the reflection of the visage and features" is ambiguous, designating either Bertha's or

[29] See Brontë's *Jane Eyre,* pp. 64-65.

Jane's reflection. Jane, thus, conflates her reflection with that of Bertha's through the mirror in the same way that she initially recognized the connection between herself and the supernatural in the mirror at Gateshead. However, this conflation compels Jane to make a distinction between the self and other through narrative: she chooses to shape her identity as different from that of Bertha. Jane sets up a distinction between herself as sane and thriving and Bertha as suicidal. She foreshadows what happens in the novel with Bertha's death and Jane's marriage to Mr. Rochester by contrasting her successful development from the failure of Bertha to do the same.

Jane uses Bertha as her double in order to resist the dark fate of Mr. Rochester's mad wife: death. As Lacan writes, "we observe the role of the mirror apparatus in the appearances of the *double,*" a theme which Gilbert and Gubar similarly address by defining Bertha as Jane's "dark double" (Gilbert and Gubar 360; Lacan 443). Through the mirror scene, Jane initially identifies with Bertha, the image in the mirror, in keeping with Lacan's theory of the mirror stage. Neither Lacan nor Gilbert and Gubar, however, describe how a subject reinforces his or her own identity by consciously rejecting the other. As Jane's double, Bertha helps create Jane's identity by allowing Jane to delineate specific differences between the two. Such action ultimately paves the way for Jane to become the new Mrs. Rochester, since Bertha does not have the narrative skill to counteract Jane's characterization of her as suicidal, as I will discuss in more detail later. Thus, the struggle between Bertha and Jane demonstrates the importance of establishing narrative agency in the text, because Jane's success in constituting herself as a subject depends upon Bertha's failure to do the same.

Through the mirror scenes, Jane makes the distinction between herself and the other through narrative to assert her agency and survive. By emphasizing the role that narrative plays in this process, Brontë explores how narrative control and the language of suicide give Jane

agency to create her identity as separate from the other. More specifically, Bertha's role as Jane's "dark double" elucidates the life-or-death stakes of the struggle between Bertha and Jane. Jane's ability to recognize Bertha's failed processes of development and name her as suicidal becomes necessary for Jane's success. Brontë argues that taking control of one's own narrative not only allows women to establish their position in society, but also determines whether they successfully complete the marriage plot and the *Bildungsroman* or die.

Suicide and Identity

Jane's production of herself as a Victorian subject is intertwined with the notion of suicide, a symbol for her fate if she fails to assert her own identity. As described above, Jane admits that she resolved to either run away from her Aunt or starve herself to death when imprisoned in the red-room. By positioning this claim about suicide directly after the mirror scene, in which Jane first constitutes herself as a subject, Brontë connects suicide to Jane's process of identity formation. This connection complicates Gilbert and Gubar's account of the same process. Gilbert and Gubar define the red-room as a "kind of patriarchal death chamber" that functions as an organizing principle for the rest of the novel through a tension between escape and imprisonment (Gilbert and Gubar 340, 341). They argue that Jane contemplates three possible rebellious responses to this patriarchal imprisonment: starvation, flight and madness (Gilbert and Gubar 341). Although they claim that suicide by starvation becomes a declaration against the threat of imprisonment and the patriarchal society in which Jane lives, Gilbert and Gubar do not analyze how this threat of suicide shapes Jane's formation as a subject and, more specifically, how she rejects all three types of escape in the novel.

The motif of suicide by starvation that appears during major moments of personal growth for Jane represents the possible failure to establish herself as a subject in society. After Mr.

Brocklehurst, the strict proprietor of the Lowood school, publicly shames and denounces Jane as a liar, she admits, "ardently I wished to die" and refuses to eat when Helen brings her coffee and bread (Brontë 81). Jane's attitude, however, radically changes after she convinces Miss Temple, her teacher, that she is not a deceitful child. Jane's ability to persuade results in Miss Temple giving her a large piece of seed-cake and creates the link between physical nourishment and narrative growth. Early in the novel, suicide by starvation represents a type of failure to flourish, both physically and narratively.

Jane's description of suicide by starvation becomes increasingly negative and a less desirable outlet for her passions and frustrations with the world as she develops as both a subject and a narrator in the novel. As Jane flees Thornfield and the temptation to become Mr. Rochester's mistress, she wishes, "that this weary frame, absolved by death from further conflict with fate, had now but to decay quietly, and mingle in peace with the soil of this wilderness" (Brontë 374). This passive type of death parallels her early assertion of starving herself to death. However, Jane's tone and attitude towards death is negative; she rejects the absolution of death and refuses "to decay quietly," a critique of the passivity of female suicide. Thus, suicide does not represent a positive escape from patriarchal society as Gilbert and Gubar suggest. Jane declares that she must live and explains why she cannot reconcile herself to death by starvation: "'In all likelihood, though, I should die before morning. And why cannot I reconcile myself to the prospect of death?...to die of want and cold is a fate to which nature cannot submit passively'" (Brontë 379). The passive submission to death reflects a failure contrary to Jane's rebellious, passionate nature.[30] In the same way that Jane consciously rejects the other, she rejects starvation as an option for escaping her unfortunate situation. Suicide operates as a

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[30] The term "nature" is a charged term in the text and seems to represent a Romantic conception of authenticity that counters the artificiality of society. See Pell's "Resistance, Rebellion and Marriage," p. 398, note 4.

looming threat of failure and, thus, encourages Jane to cultivate her own identity in order to survive. As Gates astutely states when discussing Brontë's other novel, *Shirley,* the suicide of the protagonist represents a type of "suppressed rebellion" that Brontë does not endorse, but neither does she champion a type of stoic endurance that other characters represent (Gates 129). Jane's manipulation of language becomes the method for channeling Jane's rebellion in a positive, productive way through out the novel in contrast to suicide.

Subject Formation: Kristeva and the Abject

While Brontë's theory of subject formation is an active process that depends upon a woman's ability to manipulate language, Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject helps explain how Jane characterizes suicidal characters as subhuman to jettison them from her life and the text. In her book, *The Power of Horror,* Kristeva builds upon Lacan's theory of the mirror stage by describing the moment when an infant distinguishes her or himself from the mother as "abjection" (Kristeva 13). She defines the term "abject" as the potential collapse of meaning resulting from a lack of distinction between the self and (m)other.[31] The abject is "what disturbs identity, system and order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (Kristeva 4). This sense of ambiguity and a lack of borders suggests an anxiety about the potential slippage between the self and other. Since Bertha is Jane's "dark double," this potential slippage poses a narrative as well as psychic threat in the novel. Like Lacan, Kristeva describes this recognition and distinction of the self from the (m)other as a reflexive moment. Jane, however, recognizes and responds to this threat of the abject by deliberately jettisoning the suicidal characters from the novel, namely John Reed, Bertha and St. John, to establish her place in society as Mrs. Rochester. By dehumanizing them, Jane defines

[31] See Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*, p.2. For a summary of Kristeva's argument, see Dino Felluga's "Modules on Kristeva."

these characters as abject, that which "lies outside, beyond the set" (Kristeva 2). Furthermore, the reflexive model by which the infant distinguishes him or herself from the mother becomes an active one of distinguishing the self from the other and maintaining such boundaries through narrative. The connection between Jane's development as a narrator and as a subject complicates Kristeva's theory of the abject by defining the process as active, and yet understanding the suicidal characters through this term highlights how Jane dehumanizes them so that she can remove them as obstacles to her marriage to Mr. Rochester. Through this process of naming, Jane recognizes their failed narrative development and ensures the success of her own.

Jane's visceral reaction of disgust to Bertha renders her abject so that Jane-as-narrator can establish a clear distinction between herself and Mr. Rochester's mad wife. By rejecting Bertha, Jane establishes herself as a subject in society. In the mirror scene with Bertha at Thornfield, Jane describes her physical repugnance to Bertha in an attempt to establish their differences. Jane states, "first surprise, then bewilderment, came over me; and then my blood crept cold through my veins" (Brontë 326). Such a description evokes Kristeva's account of "food loathing" (Kristeva 2). Kristeva describes "the spasms and vomiting" and "the repugnance, the retching" that ensues from an encounter with the abject (Kristeva 2). While not as vehement as what Kristeva describes, Jane's physical reaction to Bertha characterizes the other woman as abject. Bertha is not simply "othered"; Jane renders Bertha subhuman in the same way that Kristeva explains that "food is not an 'other' for 'me'" (Kristeva 2). Instead of thinking about Bertha as a human, the other for the self, Jane dehumanizes her to prevent Bertha from responding to her characterization of her as suicidal. This dehumanization becomes clear in the repetition of the word "it," descriptions such as "'the foul German spectre—the vampire'" and

Jane's question to Mr. Rochester, "tell me who and what that woman was?" (Brontë 326). Terms such as "it," "the vampire" and "what" all categorize Bertha as something subhuman, but defining Bertha as such allows Jane to assert her narrative agency and redefine the "I."[32]

While Jane's description of her cousin is not as overtly dehumanizing as her characterization of Bertha, Jane portrays St. John as a corpse and a marble statue to define him as abject and to suggest that he must be jettisoned from the novel. Jane's diction to describe St. John, "hard," "cold" "white stone," "cold cumbrous column," renders him not only dead, particularly with reference to his pallor and coldness, but also inhuman. By describing St. John as both a corpse and a marble statue, Jane characterizes him as abject, something that threatens her identity, which relates specifically to his marriage proposal as I will discuss later. This tension between the subject and the abject becomes clear through Kristeva's discussion of corpses. As Kristeva writes, "wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit- *cadere*, cadaver " (Kristeva 3). The phrase "so that I might live" highlights the life-or-death stakes of the tension between the abject/ waste/ dead body and the subject/ the I. The abject must be removed so that the subject can thrive. This tension must be understood in order to trace Jane's process of development, her *Bildungsroman.* Furthermore, the corpse elucidates the threat of the abject in blurring boundaries between the self and the other. As with Bertha, Jane combats such a threat by using her narrative abilities to separate herself from St. John. In response to his exacting nature and coldness, Jane states, "I must disown half my nature, stifle half my faculties" to please him (Brontë 460). She must become as cold and hard, i.e. dead, in order to be like him. By defining St. John as a corpse

[32] Jane's slippage between characterizing Bertha as a woman and as an "it" highlights Bertha as the abject, because the abject defines categorization through the lack of boundaries.

and marble statue, Jane demonstrates why she cannot marry him and foreshadows his removal from the text at the end of the novel.

Brontë complicates Kristeva's theory of the abject by revealing how Jane uses her narrative agency to make the distinction between the self and the other. Jane dehumanizes the suicidal figures so that she can remove them from the text and establish her place in society as Mrs. Rochester. The constant threat that the abject poses to the subject, as Kristeva describes, best exemplifies the stakes of Jane's self-development. In the same way that Lacan and Kristeva discuss certain actions that a subject must take as part of his or her process of development, Jane-as-narrator describes how Jane-as-character must learn to assert herself through narrative to distinguish herself from the other or abject. The importance of narrative in this process links Jane's process of self-development to her *Bildungsroman* and autobiography, since her development as a character depends upon her development as a narrator.[33] In order to succeed in the novel and establish her place in society, Jane must learn to exercise her narrative agency, partially by deploying the language of suicide to eject abject characters from the novel.

Developing Jane's Narrative Agency: The Red-Room Scene

By tracing Jane's narrative growth in the novel through the red-room scene, the reader understands how she hones her narrative skills throughout the novel. Jane grows as a narrator by recounting the red-room scene four times to different individuals and tweaking her story to elicit a desired response. Jane's development as a narrator blends the *Bildungsroman* and autobiography to track Jane's development as a narrator so that she can establish herself in society.[34] The critical distance between Jane-as-character in her own story and Jane-as-narrator,

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[33] Cho writes that "the narrative of the marriage plot and the marriage of the artist plot converge seamlessly" in *Jane Eyre*; see *An Ethics of Becoming,* p. 103.

[34] Pell in "Resistance, Rebellion, and Marriage" writes, "Obviously, the shaping consciousness is always Jane's; the novel is subtitled "an autobiography" and is narrated as such," p. 401. Similarly, Sharpe notes that Brontë deploys

writing ten years after the events of the novel, lessens as the novel progresses and Jane develops her narrative dexterity to manipulate her social situations.[35] The red-room scene demonstrates Jane's self-conscious development as a narrator.

Jane's first iteration of the story occurs when she becomes ill after the incident in the red-room and marks her initial recognition of the power of narrative. When the apothecary Mr. Lloyd asks her recount what transpired, she bluntly states, "I was shut up in a room where there is a ghost, till after dark…it was cruel to shut me up alone without a candle" (Brontë 28). Instead of agreeing that she has been treated cruelly, Mr. Lloyd dismissingly calls Jane a "baby" and her story "nonsense" (Brontë 28, 29). Jane cannot express what the experience meant to her; therefore, she does not initially obtain an empathetic response from her audience. Jane-as-narrator, however, recognizes her inability to express herself as a child and states, children "know not how to express the result of the process in words…I, after a disturbed pause, contrived to frame a meager, though, as far as it went, true response" (Brontë 29). The critical distance between Jane-as-narrator and her younger self becomes evident both by Jane universalizing children's inability to persuade and through her critique of her younger self's narrative abilities. Jane the narrator admits that she "bunglingly enounced—'But John Reed knocked me down, and my aunt shut me up in the red-room" (Brontë 29). The term "bunglingly enounced" emphasizes Jane's lack of narrative control that prevented her from communicating and connecting with Mr. Lloyd. Young Jane, moreover, is not yet aware that language has the power to persuade. She does not expect anything from the apothecary other than recognition of the truth and the "opportunity of relieving my grief by imparting it" (Brontë 29). Despite her

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"a common literary convention to create a fiction that transforms the narrator in *Jane Eyre* into the author of her own life...autobiography is an exemplary text for establishing female literary authority," p. 37.

[35] Downward and Summerfield similarly notice this critical distance in *New Perspectives on the European Bildungsroman,* p. 141.

lack of narrative control, her answers convince Mr. Lloyd to speak with her Aunt Reed about sending her to school. Although she finds herself unable to produce a specific, desired response in this early example, Jane learns the power of narrative to elicit a response from an audience.

Building upon her realization that narrative has an effect in the world, Jane threatens to publish Mrs. Reed's cruelty to her by recounting her experiences at Gateshead. After listening to Mrs. Reed impugn her honor to Mr. Brocklehurst, Jane avers, "*Speak* I must" (Brontë 43). The impulse to verbalize the wrongs committed against her begins Jane's development as both a subject and a narrator. In an impassioned speech, Jane details the wrongs Mrs. Reed committed against her by locking her in the red-room: "'I shall remember how you thrust me back — roughly and violently thrust me back— into the red-room, and locked me up there, to my dying day; though I was in agony; though I cried out, while suffocating with distress, "Have mercy! Have mercy, Aunt Reed!" And that punishment you made me suffer because your wicked boy struck me— knocked me down for nothing'" (Brontë 44). Jane expresses her vehement feelings through language like "roughly and violently," 'remember…to my dying day," "agony," and "suffocating with distress," but Jane-as-narrator recognizes that such effusive language detracts from the force of her narrative (Brontë 44). Quoting her own impassioned plea for mercy demonstrates her growth as a narrator as she begins to play with different forms of narrative representation. Jane's passionate narrative does elicit a response from Mrs. Reed: "Mrs. Reed looked frightened…she was lifting up her hands, rocking herself to and fro, and even twisting her face as if she would cry" (Brontë 44). Because of her burgeoning rhetorical skill, Mrs. Reed treats Jane like an adult opponent rather than a child.[36] Jane's threat that she will tell everyone the truth makes her a formidable opponent to Mrs. Reed and demonstrates how she has learned

[36] Jane-as-narrator writes that "she asked, rather in the tone in which a person might address an opponent of adult age than such as ordinarily used to a child," in *Jane Eyre*, p. 44.

the power of narrative from Mr. Lloyd. Once Jane realizes that recounting her grievances can have a tangible effect on her life, such as allowing her to go to school, she consciously develops her narrative abilities to become more persuasive, despite her initial failures to elicit a sympathetic response from her audience.

In the same scene, Jane demonstrates her power to reject the definitions that other characters attempt to impose on her through narrative. She exclaims to Mrs. Reed, "I will tell anybody who asks me questions, this exact tale. People think you a good woman, but you are bad, hard-hearted. You are deceitful!" (Brontë 44). The first statement directly refers to Mr. Lloyd's process of questioning Jane; young Jane thinks about narrative in a reflexive way as a response to a prompt. In this example, Jane also redeploys the word "deceitful" against Mrs. Reed. Learning from Mrs. Reed's previous characterization of her as a liar to Mr. Brocklehurst, Jane appropriates this language to define Mrs. Reed as such. After absorbing the language that Mrs. Reed uses, Jane articulates what Mrs. Reed has done and implements such language against her: "You told Mr. Brocklehurst I had a bad character, a deceitful disposition; and I'll let everybody at Lowood know what you are, and what you have done" (Brontë 45). This threat to expose Mrs. Reed as a cruel woman allows Jane to challenge and invert the status quo through narrative. Where suicide represented a passive rebellion, narrative agency becomes a crucial method for actively rejecting societal norms.

In her third attempt to recount her experience of the red-room, Jane fails to convince Helen that Mrs. Reed has acted cruelly. Jane-as-narrator only focuses on this failure to persuade rather than the content of the story to describe the importance of developing her narrative process. After Mr. Brocklehurst denounces her as a deceitful child and publically humiliates her at Lowood, Jane tells Helen the story of the red-room: "I proceeded to pour out, in my own way,

the tale of my sufferings and resentments. Bitter and truculent when excited, I spoke as I felt" (Brontë 69). Critically distant, Jane-as-narrator criticizes her younger self's attempt to convey her "sufferings" and "resentments." The use of the past tense distances Jane-as-narrator from her younger self. The narrator does not reprimand her young self for what she felt; rather, she recognizes that such emotions prevent others from empathizing with her. The verb "pour out" connotes the uncontrollable onslaught of emotions that fuel Jane's narrative and render it less effective. By allowing her raw emotions to dictate her narrative process, Jane is unable to convince Helen that Mrs. Reed is "'a hard-hearted, bad woman'" (Brontë 69). Through this example, Jane learns that her bitterness hampers her ability to persuade others and must tone down the vehemence of her emotion when speaking. The narrator, however, does not reprimand herself for feeling such emotions or rebelling against her situation. By focusing solely on her narrative failure to convince Helen of Mrs. Reed's bad character, Jane learns how to edit her story so that it will be well received.

Realizing that her delivery does not prompt a desired response with Helen, Jane changes her tactics with her teacher, Miss Temple, in the fourth iteration of the story. By focusing on her method of delivery without quoting what her younger self said, Jane-as-narrator highlights her improved narrative abilities. She recounts her younger self's feelings and thought process when speaking with Miss Temple:

> I would be most moderate- most correct; and, having reflected a few minutes in order to arrange coherently what I had to say, I told her all the story of my sad childhood…my language was more subdued than it generally was…mindful of Helen's warnings against the indulgence of resentment, I infused into the

> narrative far less of gall and wormwood than ordinary. Thus restrained and simplified, it sounded more credible. (Brontë 84).

Her experience with Helen affected the way young Jane retold the same story to Miss Temple. Terms such as "moderate," "correct," "subdued," "restrained" and "simplified" demonstrate how Jane tempers her vehement emotions when discussing the red-room to ensure that her story would be well received. Interestingly, Jane only admits that the story "sounded more credible;" the vehement emotions behind her first descriptions of the red-room remain despite the rhetorical polish of the story. Jane makes the reader aware of her deft narrative skill in this example; her attention to language and delivery becomes evident in the phrases "having reflected" and "arranged coherently." By focusing solely on her narrative process, Jane-as-narrator reveals her self-conscious narrative decisions, which suggests that she as the narrator continues to make similar decisions.

After these four retellings of the red-room scene, the reader realizes that the first description is the most rhetorically polished and demonstrates all of the narrative lessons that Jane has learned from these earlier iterations. By beginning the novel with the most persuasive description of the scene, Jane-as-narrator subtly manipulates the reader's sympathy to ensure that her version of the story will be accepted. After a lengthy, objective description of the room itself, the narrator accounts for her childhood fear of the room by calmly stating that Mr. Reed died there. Unable to articulate what the room meant to her before, Jane-as-narrator describes how the red-room represented imprisonment: "no jail was ever more secure" (Brontë 17). By setting this scene up with a description of John Reed's behavior and the attitude of her aunt, Jane-as-narrator renders this imprisonment unjust to elicit sympathy from the reader. This undeserved imprisonment explains why Jane feared that the ghost of Mr. Reed would come back

to avenge her: she was “fearful lest any sign of violent grief might waken a preternatural voice to comfort me, or elicit from the gloom some haloed face, bending over me with strange pity” (Brontë 20). Jane-as-narrator uses language such as “strange pity” and “comfort” to contrast her treatment at the hands of her aunt and cousin. The narrator admits her critical distance from the scene and the understanding that developed through such reflection: “I could not answer the ceaseless inward question- *why* I thus suffered; now, at the distance of- I will not say how many years- I see it clearly…I was like nobody there” (Brontë 19). The sense of injustice for her imprisonment becomes clear through the phrase “*why* I thus suffered,” as Jane attempts to explain why her Aunt Reed disliked her. The lack of sympathy between Jane and the other characters results in her imprisonment; thus, the narrator takes great pains to ensure that the reader will sympathize with Jane by maintaining a cool, objective attitude towards the scene, as she learned how to do through the various iterations of the red-room scene. Jane-as-narrator also demonstrates her control over narrative through her ability to withhold specific information from the reader, evident in the statement “I will not say how many years.” By leading with her most highly polished iteration of the scene, Jane demonstrates her narrative skill and elicits sympathy from the reader.

By emphasizing her narrative development through the various iterations of the red-room scene, Jane-as-narrator demonstrates her self-conscious development as a narrator and her deliberate use of language throughout the novel. Jane’s narrative development becomes crucial to her *Bildungsroman,* because it allows her to change and shape her situation in life and relates to the creation of her identity. As Gilbert and Gubar state, the red-room scene is a paradigm for the novel in terms of the tension between imprisonment and escape, but it is also a paradigm in terms of Jane’s narrative development and practices. The critical distance between Jane-as-

narrator and Jane-as-character begins to lesson as she develops her narrative abilities. As the novel progresses, it becomes increasingly more difficult to separate the narrator from the character in the story. This blurring of the lines between Jane as a subject and as a narrator relates to the absorbing-articulating-deploying model, since she first learns about social norms, articulates them and then deploys language in order to assert herself as a subject and narrate her own story.

Deploying the Language of Suicide

Through her manipulation of language, Jane characterizes Bertha and St. John as suicidal before they die to remove them as obstacles to her marriage with Mr. Rochester. After learning about suicide from the earlier examples, Jane inverts traditional conceptions of suicide by characterizing Bertha's suicide as masculine and St John's suicide as feminine in a demonstration of her narrative ability to undermine social norms. Such ability not only reflects her mastery of the language of suicide but also demonstrates how she uses suicide to conceptualize personal failure in the novel. After revealing how she consciously hones her narrative skills through her retelling of the red-room scene, Jane uses the language of suicide to contemplate the development of a subject in society. She defines what constitutes a success and failure in society by manipulating and inverting traditional understandings of suicide and the roles of men and women in Victorian society. Through an understanding of the prevailing social discourse about suicide, Jane has the power to appropriate such language to ensure the completion of the marriage plot and her *Bildungsroman.*

Jane uses the language of suicide to define Bertha as Mr. Rochester's "mad," suicidal wife using the absorbing-articulating-deploying model. From her Aunt Reed's description of John Reed's "swollen and blackened face" after he commits suicide, Jane appropriates such

language to describe Bertha as suicidal: "'It was a discoloured face- it was a savage face. I wish I could forget the roll of the red eyes and the fearful blackened inflation of the lineaments'" (Brontë 268, 327). The "fearful blackened inflation of the lineaments" implies death by hanging, as evident in Forbes Winslow's "The Anatomy of Suicide," published just seven years before *Jane Eyre*. He writes, "The following are the signs of death from strangulation:- The countenance is livid and distorted; the eyes protrude, and are often suffused with blood…with sugillation on the neck…with swelling" (Winslow 247). The red eyes and the blackened, swollen skin are evidence of death by hanging. Such a description foreshadows later descriptions of Bertha's suicide. By describing Bertha as suicidal before she actually dies in the novel, Jane indicates her removal from her life and the text, since the two are intertwined in this eponymous work. More specifically, Jane contrasts Bertha's failure to develop as a subject in society with her own personal development.

Bertha's failure to counter verbally the way that Jane and others characterize her renders her suicidal before she kills herself.[37] Upon her return to Thornfield, Jane learns from an innkeeper that Bertha set fire to Thornfield and the property now lies in ruins. Upon Jane's prompting, the innkeeper admits that "'the mad lady, who was as cunning as a witch, would take the keys out of her pocket, let herself out of her chamber and go roaming about the house, doing any wild mischief that came into her head'" (Brontë 492). Although the innkeeper characterizes Bertha as "mad," her actions seem quite deliberate and conscious. The innkeeper reveals that Bertha "'made her way to the chamber that had been the governess's—(she was like as if she knew somehow how matters had gone on, and had a spite at her)— and she kindled the bed there'" (Brontë 492). The innkeeper's parenthesis implies that Bertha acted deliberately, "as if

[37] Some scholars have argued that Bertha may not have committed suicide because the scene is rather ambiguous. See "Pell Resistance, Rebellion, and Marriage," p. 404.

she knew," and as an outraged wife, "had a spite at her." This conscious attempt to kill Jane suggests that Bertha is just as aware of the life-and-death stakes of their conflict as Jane is. Instead of characterizing Jane as suicidal to remove her from her life, Bertha actually attempts to murder her. Despite this murder attempt, Bertha has no agency because she cannot counter Jane's previous description of her as suicidal or the designation of madness that various men—Mr. Rochester, male medical professionals and the innkeeper—have assigned to her. Bertha has already committed a type of suicide; she has succumbed to these external forces that define her and negated her identity in the process.

Jane-as-narrator uses these characterizations of Bertha as already dead to influence the reader's understanding and define her death as suicide. The innkeeper, an eyewitness, declares that Bertha "yelled and gave a spring, and the next minute she lay smashed on the pavement" (Brontë 493).[38] Jane's prediction of Bertha's violent, masculine suicide is fulfilled in the same way that her imprecation against John Reed as a tyrant and her rejection of St John, as I will discuss subsequently, were affected through their suicides. While Jane is not directly responsible for the deaths of these characters, her narrative sets up reader expectations and suggests that their suicidal behavior is part of their normal character to conceal the fact that she has used certain language against them as part of her own process of subject and narrative development. The innkeeper's description of Bertha's actual death as a suicide reflects how Brontë conflates a physical death with this failure to develop as a subject in society. Through this tension between Jane and Bertha, Brontë reveals how women must actively counter the social forces that attempt to define them in order to succeed in life.

Like the example with Bertha, Jane characterizes St. John as suicidal to remove him as an obstacle from her marriage to Mr. Rochester. However, she first defines her potential journey to

[38] This innkeeper was also the former butler of Mr. Rochester's father. See Brontë's *Jane Eyre,* p. 490

India as St John's missionary wife as suicide to set up her portrayal of him as suicidal. Upon learning about St John's plans, Jane states, "I feel that mine is not the existence to be protracted under an Indian sun…when my time came to die, he would resign me, in all serenity and sanctity, to the God who gave me…If I join St John, I abandon half myself: if I go to India, I go to premature death" (Brontë 466). By connecting her marriage to St John with a willing resignation to death, Jane describes the life-or-death stakes of her choice both physically and metaphorically. Jane would physically commit suicide by traveling to India and would metaphorically commit suicide by marrying without love, which she describes as abandoning half of herself. In an assertion of her agency, Jane avers to St John that his proposal is tantamount to suicide, stating "'God did not give me my life to throw away; and to do what you wish me would…be almost equivalent to committing suicide'" (Brontë 477). Through this impassioned declaration, Jane resists St John's marriage proposal and sure death. After articulating that St John's proposal is suicidal, Jane must then define St John himself as suicidal to save herself and remove him as an obstacle to her marriage to Mr. Rochester.

Through her use of the language of suicide, Jane prepares the reader for St. John's death at the end of the novel as she did for that of John Reed and Bertha. Interpreting his final letter, Jane reveals that St. John resigns himself to his death: "he anticipated his sure rewards…his mind will be unclouded, his heart will be undaunted, his hope will be sure, his faith steadfast" (Brontë 521). Jane first seems to characterize St. John as a dauntless crusader for his faith with no fear of death through the terms "unclouded," "undaunted," "sure" and "steadfast."[39] These terms, however, evoke the "serenity and sanctity" in which St John would be prepared to give Jane up to death. Transferring this idea of suicide from herself to St. John, Jane reveals how

[39] For the Victorian understanding of men as more vigorous and active than women, Ruskin's "Of Queen's Gardens."

exercising her narrative skills allows her to manipulate her specific situation and reject the desires of others that run counter to her own. The passivity of St John's willing death parallels Jane's earlier contemplation of suicide by starving herself, gendering his death as feminine. Through this inversion of traditional gendered understandings of suicide, Jane undermines the characterization of St. John as a manly missionary bravely accepting his death and defines his death as a suicide, a negation of identity, rather than a laudable example for Victorian men to follow.

Comparing St John's willing death to that of Helen elucidates how Jane must resist this form of suicide in order to marry Mr. Rochester and complete her *Bildungsroman*. By emphasizing both of their hopes for eternal rewards, Jane removes the religious connotation from suicide in a process that Mr. Rochester previously described and characterizes them as martyrs instead. While Mr. Rochester's description of the secularization of suicide absolved him from his guilt or consequences for rejecting the social norms, Jane uses this process to explain that suicide does not damn St John or Helen; rather, their doctrine of passive endurance does. In contrast to St John, Jane reveals how her rejection of him through her description of his suicidal nature and inversion of gender norms allows her to assert her agency and, therefore, prevail while he perishes.

Through the process of Jane deploying the language of suicide against other characters, Brontë suggests that Jane does not simply suffer, but makes her fate by developing her skills as a narrator. Using the absorbing-articulating-deploying model, Jane uses the language of suicide against Bertha and St. John to remove them as obstacles to her marriage with Mr. Rochester. Jane's success in the novel depends upon recognizing the failures of Bertha and St. John. Her characterization of their deaths as suicide reflects her conscious understanding of the process of

subject formation. The female subject develops as she creates her own narrative that allows her to establish a place for herself in the world through the ability to distinguish successful and failed processes of development.

Section II: The Marriage Plot

To counter the looming threat of suicide in the novel, Jane defines her personal growth both by her ability to narrate her own story and her marriage to Mr. Rochester. Jane's marriage to Mr. Rochester appears to exemplify the traditional culmination of the female *Bildungsroman*.[40] Although Jane's coming of age story seems to be predicated on a conservative reabsorption into society, she nuances societal definitions of success and failure by redefining these terms for herself.[41] Marriage has multiple interpretations in the text that Jane absorbs and then articulates in order to produce her working understanding of marriage as a bond between equals.[42] Jane rejects traditional attitudes towards marriage to reflect the changing understanding of marriage from primarily an economic and political relationship between families to companionship based on love and spiritual equality, a radical assertion for the time.[43] By manipulating the definition of marriage and highlighting her choice of Mr. Rochester as a spouse, Jane establishes marriage as the opposite of suicide in the novel. Jane complicates the traditional understanding of the marriage plot not only by emphasizing female choice, but also by describing how such a choice determines what constitutes success in the novel in contrast to the failure that suicide represents.

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[40] For more discussion about the relationship between the marriage plot and the *Bildungsroman,* see Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland's *The Voyage In,* p. 74; Elaine Hoffman Baruch's "The Female 'Bildungsroman,'" 334; Lorna Ellis's *Appearing to Diminish,* p. 16-19; Charlotte Goodman's "The Lost Brother, The Twin," p. 29.

[41] Marriage as a conservative reabsorption in *Jane Eyre* is argued by Wightman in "'Not Now…Not Yet': Developmental Difficulties in *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso* Sea" in Baxter's *Coming of Age,* p.72; Bossche in "What Did *Jane Eyre* Do?" p. 52; Pell in "Resistance, Rebellion, and Marriage," p. 418.

[42] For Jane's understanding as marriage between equals, see Pell "Resistance," p. 407.

[43] For a discussion of the development of "companionate marriage," see Hammerton's "Victorian Marriage and the Law of Matrimonial Cruelty," p. 270 and Phegley's *Courtship and Marriage in Victorian England*, p. 2.

Societal Definitions of Marriage

While feminist scholars have viewed Jane's marriage to Mr. Rochester as a conservative move, Jane's assertion of a companionate marriage based on love over the marriage of convenience based on socio-economic concerns is a radical rejection of social norms.[44] Despite the greater acceptance of companionate marriage during the nineteenth century, economic and social concerns continued to be the primary focus of marriage.[45] By suggesting that a couple is equal spiritually rather than materialistically via wealth or rank, Companionate marriage, which exemplifies the "idea of an equivalent meeting of the souls," inverts the traditional understanding of marriage as an economic venture between people of the same class (Phegley 5).[46] Since the idea of a soul mate transcends social expectations and rigid hierarchy, "the sentimentalization of married love in the Victorian period was a radical social experiment" (Coontz 368).[47] Companionate marriage posed a threat to the Victorian social hierarchy that depended upon marriages of convenience to benefit the family. With the power to transcend class, the emphasis on romantic love had radical undertones of egalitarianism.[48] By asserting the primacy of the connection between two souls, Jane rejects marriage of convenience and develops her definition of marriage as a bond between equals.

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[44] In *Unbecoming Women,* Fraiman argues that Jane's role as Rochester's nurse has "uncanny resemblance to the maternal role women conventionally play in relation to men," p. 118.

[45] Phegley in *Courtship and Marriage in Victorian England* describes the growing popularity of the companionate marriage, p. 2, and the tension with economic factors, p.13-17.

[46] Phegley defines the companionate marriage using the works of Coventry Patmore, poet and literary critic, and Annie Swan, a late nineteenth-century woman's activist, in *Courtship and Marriage in Victorian England* p. 5. In *Marriage and Love in England*, Macfarlane highlights the "blending of two personalities, two psychologies" in the companionate marriage that contrasted traditional marriages in which the happiness of the couple was not necessary to term the marriage successful, p. 154.

[47] For a discussion about the Victorian interest in the economic and social implications of marriage, see Phegley's *Courtship and Marriage in Victorian England,* p. 13.

[48] In her review of *Jane Eyre*, Rigby comments on the radical nature of the text, stating, "We do not hesitate to say that the tone of mind and thought which has overthrown authority and violated every code of human and divine abroad, and fostered Chartism and rebellion at home, is the same which has also written Jane Eyre," p. 174.

Despite the growing acceptance of companionate marriage by the end of the century, other factors, related to maintaining a strict social hierarchy, continued to play a major role in Victorian marriages. The marriage of convenience created economic and social connections between families of the aristocracy and gentry, who were concerned about issues of property and inheritance.[49] Through the right of primogeniture, only first-born males inherited the property and money from the family estate, although families sometimes reorganized the estate for the benefit of the other children.[50] Additional sons could pursue professions, generally the church or the army, but many married heiresses in order to maintain their lifestyles.[51] Daughters were married off, since high-ranking women had few respectable opportunities to make a living.[52] As evident in this lack of agency in selecting a spouse, the courtship between members of the aristocracy and gentry led to married couples who were almost unknown to each other in order to solidify economic, political and social ties. As John Gillis notes, "marriage played a central role in mobilizing wealth and power, and the control of courtship, particularly that of heirs and heiresses, remained essential…the courtship process was carefully constructed to prevent misalliances" (qtd. in Phegley 39). The highly orchestrated nature of Victorian courtship reveals the importance of the marriage of convenience in maintaining the strict social hierarchy. The various factors that influenced Victorian marriages besides romantic love reflect an older, societal understanding of marriage that Jane deliberately rejects in the novel.

The legal attitudes towards marriage and women's rights demonstrate the central tension between marriage based on equality and on socio-economic concerns. Legally, a woman's

[49] See Phegley, *Courtship and Marriage in Victorian England,* pp. 13-14, for a discussion of the marriage of convenience.
[50] See Louis P. Cain and Donald G. Paterson's *The Children of Eve,* p. 240, and See Allan Hepburn's *Troubled Legacies*, p. 7, for a discussion of primogeniture.
[51] Pell briefly mentions the "economics of primogeniture" in reference to Mr. Rochester's marriage to Bertha, p. 413, and in contrast to Jane's later inheritance, p. 418.
[52] In *Family Ties in Victorian England*, Nelson discusses the lack of careers for women and the discrepancy between the historical and literary accounts, p. 22-23.

property belonged entirely to her husband after she married and she had no legal identity outside of her marriage.[53] The law of coverture, which stated that a woman was "covered" under the legal identity of her husbands as *feme covert*, rendered marriage a kind of suicide for women.[54] The author of a 1847 Victorian courtship guidebook, *The Etiquette of Love, Courtship, and Marriage,* explains, "A lady of high rank does not raise her husband to the same position as she formerly occupied; but sinks down to his standard" (qtd. in Phegley 35). Such a statement illustrates the subordination of women in Victorian society, since their position depended entirely on that of their husband. The marriage of convenience relies upon the subordination of women and need to make an economically and socially beneficial match. This subordination has led feminist critics to argue that marriage for Victorian women meant socio-economic security at the price of liberty and autonomy. However, Jane complicates such critiques of marriage by asserting her agency to choose Mr. Rochester as a partner based on their mutual love.[55] Jane's actions parallel that of advocates like Barbara Bodichon, Frances Power Cobbe, John Stuart Mill and Caroline Norton, who championed the companionate marriage in order to challenge Victorian marriage laws.[56] Like these other vanguards advocating equality between the sexes through the companionate marriage, Jane uses this type of marriage to counter societal norms.

Conduct books, a genre that tutored the reader in social norms, conveyed the longstanding connection between class, economics and marriage evident in society. The genre

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[53] Laws about a woman's right to own property did not come about until the late-nineteenth century with The Married Woman's Property Act in 1871. See Cain and Paterson, *The Children of Eve,* p. 240; Macfarlane's *Marriage and Love in England,* p.149; Shanley *Feminism*, p. 8.

[54] Phegley describes the law of coverture in *Courtship and Marriage in Victorian England,* p. 17, as does Marcus in *Between Women*, p. 204. Also see Bolivar's "The Madhouse Divorce," pp. 254-255, for the connection between a loss of female identity and the law of coverture.

[55] Shanley in *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law in Victorian England* describes "women entering marriages out of economic necessity," p. 190. Similarly, Foster in *Victorian Women's Fiction Marriage, Freedom and the Individual* discusses the "economic hardship" faced by women who did not marry, p. 7.

[56] For more about companionate marriage as a tool to break down the laws of coverture, see Phegley's *Courtship and Marriage in Victorian England,* pp. 17-18.

became widely popular after the publication of Samuel Richardson's novel *Pamela; or Virtue Rewarded*, in 1740. This novel recounts the experience of Pamela, the fifteen-year-old protagonist, as she first resists her employer's seduction, marries him and then navigates her duties of a proper wife.[57] Despite the conservative discussion of a woman's conduct before and after marriage, *Pamela* radically addresses the eighteenth-century social anxiety about class mobility by describing how Pamela made a drastic change in her social status through marriage.[58] In her infamously vitriolic review of *Jane Eyre*, Elizabeth Rigby, a contemporary critic of Brontë, describes Jane as "merely another Pamela, who, by the force of her character and the strength of her principles, is carried victoriously through great trials and temptations from the man she loves" (Rigby 162).[59] Throughout her article, Rigby expresses a Victorian anxiety about class mobility by defining Jane and governesses in general as social climbers. She writes, "Jane becomes attached to her 'master,' as Pamela-like she calls him, and it is not difficult to see that solitude and propinquity are taking effect upon him also" (Rigby 164). Rigby's diction in this statement suggests that she finds the relationship between Jane and Mr. Rochester suspect. Through her reference to the character Pamela, Rigby claims that economic security is one of Jane's main motivations. Such a reaction to *Jane Eyre* demonstrates a contemporary, conservative response to the novel based on conceptions of marriage as a socio-economic enterprise.[60]

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[57] For a discussion about Pamela as a conduct book, see Bowers' *The Politics of Motherhood,* pp. 31, 163-167; Levine's *How to Read the Victorian Novel,* p. 21; Weisser in *The Glass Slipper*, p. 46. Fraiman in *Unbecoming Women* makes a connection between the "'conduct' or 'courtesy' books written between the 1760s and 1840s" and the *Bildungsroman,* pp.13-16.

[58] Baruch describes the "Pamela tradition" as when the "heroine seeks upward mobility in marriage," p. 336

[59] Samuel Richardson's novel *Pamela* as an influence for *Jane Eyre* has been explored by Baruch in "The Feminine Bildungsroman," p. 335-336, Pell in "Resistance" p. 408; Weisser *Glass Slipper*, p. 46. Green connects *Pamela* and *Jane Eyre* by staying, *Jane Eyre* "features a prominent and triumphantly resolved plot of courtship and marriage, and a heroine whose virtue is rewarded," in *Literary Identification,* p. 5.

[60] Rigby's understanding of Jane as a social climber has parallels to the argument that post-colonialists have made about the connection between Jane's rise in status and that of the British Empire. Cho writes, articulating Spivak's

Societal Definitions of Marriage in Jane Eyre

In the same way that Jane first learns about suicide from her experiences at Gateshead, Lowood and Thornfield, Jane's early experiences shape how she initially understands marriage. In particular, Jane absorbs and articulates the traditional understanding of marriage as based on socio-economic concerns, since this type of marriage undergirded Victorian society and represented the social norm. Tracking her early development and understandings of marriage, Jane-as-narrator begins to subtly undermine the marriage of convenience in these early sections. The critical distance between Jane as a narrator and a subject highlights the distinction between her passive acceptance of social norms and her inversion of them so that she can establish her place in society. Jane's narrative abilities allow her to bridge this gap and reformulate her understanding of marriage without completely rejecting the social system. Understanding Jane's initial understanding and discussion about marriage highlights her growth processes as both a subject and narrator that allow her to become Mrs. Rochester.

As an orphan at Gateshead, Jane first learns about the marriage of convenience indirectly from her position as a dependent in her Aunt's household. However, Jane-as-narrator sets up a tension between companionate and socio-economic based marriage, the latter which the Reeds and the servants champion, through reference to her parent's love-based marriage.[61] The servants reveal to Jane her own backstory after she is locked away in the red-room and becomes ill: her mother married below her social station, was cut off by Jane's grandfather and died of typhus along with her husband, a clergyman working in the industrial north of England (Brontë 31). Quite literally, her mother's inability to marry well resulted in her death and epitomizes the

reading of the novel, that "the heroine's dramatic ascent to the status of Mrs. Rochester symbolizes the historical rise of bourgeois individualism and is tantamount to the capitalist colonial expansion of the British empire," p. 37.

[61] Maier astutely notes that "Brontë creates the Reed family as a microcosm of Victorian society," p. 321.

high stakes of marriage in Victorian culture, particularly for women.[62] Jane learns about this definition of marriage indirectly through the actions of her mother. From the few details young Jane remembers of her uncle, he approved of her parent's match and the product of their union: Jane. She recalls that he was "my own uncle—my mother's brother—that he had taken me parentless into his house; and that in his last moments he had required a promise of Mrs. Reed that she would rear and maintain me as one of her own children" (Brontë 20). His continuing love for his sister, manifested through his request for the solicitous treatment of Jane, suggests that he found his father's actions too harsh. The promise he exerts from Mrs. Reed that she would treat Jane like one of his own children reflects how Mr. Reed attempts to restore the social status that Jane's mother lost in her marriage to a poor clergyman. The critical distance between Jane as a child and narrator allow her to depict the tension between the companionate marriage and marriage of convenience in this early scene.

Unlike Mr. Reed, the servants and Mrs. Reed disdain the marriage of Jane's parents and explain how marriage based on love without the sanction of the family results in death. As a child, Jane first absorbs this lesson, although her awareness of her uncle's attitude begins to undermine this conception of marriage. Through their reference to Jane's position as a penniless orphan, the servants implicitly critique Jane's parents for leaving her as a poor relation and warn Jane not to aspire above her social station: "'You ought to be aware, miss, that you are under obligations to Mrs. Reed: she keeps you: if she were to turn you off you would have to go to the poorhouse'" (Brontë 16). Jane learns how her mother's poor marriage directly affects her social position in the household. As the servant, Miss Abbot, states, Jane cannot 'think [herself] on an equality with the Misses Reed and Master Reed, because Missis kindly allows [her] to be

[62] Shanley in *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law in Victorian England* describes "women entering marriages out of economic necessity," p. 190. Similarly, Foster in *Victorian Women's Fiction Marriage, Freedom and the Individual* discusses the "economic hardship" faced by women who did not marry, p. 7.

brought up with them. They will have a great deal of money, and [Jane] will have none'" (Brontë 16). By using the language of equality and economics, Miss Abbot reminds Jane of her humble social position and her limited options for marriage in the future, since she does not have wealth or rank. Through the interpretation of her mother's actions by members of the Reed household, Jane learns about the relationship between marriage and social standing predicated on an understanding of the marriage of convenience.

Although Jane learns about the connection between socio-economic position and the marriage of convenience at Gateshead, she discovers that the marriage of convenience is predicated on the subordination of women at Lowood. While Miss Temple's marriage provides a normative example by emphasizing a wife's obedience to her husband, Jane-as-narrator inverts the patriarchal understanding to demonstrate how she actively counters such definitions through her narrative ability to privilege positive, female relationships in the novel.[63] Glossing over the eight year period of her maturation at Lowood, Jane, a teacher now herself, admits that Miss Temple, "had stood me in the stead of mother, governess, and, latterly, companion. At this period she married, removed with her husband (a clergyman, an excellent man, almost worthy of such a wife) to a distant county, and consequently was lost to me" (Brontë 100). Through her use of terms such as "removed," "distance" and "lost," Jane-as-narrator demonstrates how marriage breaks down close female relationships and notes the gender hierarchy that privileges the heterosexual relationship over female friendship. She underscores how women were expected to follow their husbands and give up their work to assume the duties and responsibilities of a wife.[64] The tension between societal expectations of married women and

[63] For more discussion about the role of a Victorian wife and obedience to her husband, see Shanley's *Feminism*, p. 8.

[64] Nelson in *Family Ties in Victorian England* discusses the duties of a Victorian wife and the lack of careers available to women, p 16-25.

Jane's attitude becomes clear through the punctuation she uses in this statement. Through the parentheses, Jane-as-narrator deemphasizes the importance of the man and keeps the focus on the women. Jane's sentiment that Miss Temple's husband is "almost worthy" of her inverts the traditional gender hierarchy. While women were expected to take their husbands' name, Jane-as-narrator neither addresses Miss Temple by her married name, nor names the husband at first. By addressing Miss Temple by her maiden name even after her marriage, Jane-as-narrator resists the loss of identity that results from a woman marrying, which relates to a married woman's lack of legal identity separate from that of her husband.[65] Although Jane can never fully counter social norms about marriage, she nonetheless challenges patriarchal expectations through her deft narrative maneuvering.

During her stint as a governess at Thornfield, Jane learns about a conservative understanding of marriage through discussions about Mr. Rochester's marriage prospects and his eligibility. Like the servants at Gateshead, the housekeeper, Mrs. Fairfax, expresses her conservative view about the reasons that the gentry marry. Before Mr. Rochester arrives with the house party, Mrs. Fairfax notes that he is an eligible bachelor, despite his age and looks: "his acquirements and abilities, perhaps his wealth and good blood, make amends for any little fault of look" (Brontë 184). Her discussion of Mr. Rochester's "wealth" and "blood" relate directly to economic and social elements that motivate marriages of convenience. Such factors seem to prevent Jane from being a possible romantic partner, since she conspicuously lacks wealth and rank; thus, this discussion serves as a warning to Jane not to aspire above her social station as a governess. Discussions about marriage at Thornfield provide the first opportunity for Jane to

[65] For a discussion about the loss of identity and names for Victorian married women, see Edmund Richardson, *Classical Victorians*, p. 120. This also reminds the reader that the title of the book is *Jane Eyre,* not *Jane Rochester* or just *Jane* in the tradition of the conduct book. Through the title of the work, Brontë makes a statement about female identity.

engage with the tension between the marriage of convenience and the companionate marriage that she champions.

While other characters support the marriage of convenience at Gateshead, Lowood and Thornfield, Mr. Rochester critiques the marriage of convenience in his discussion of his courtship of Bertha. Through his discussion, Mr. Rochester models for Jane how to complicate definitions of the marriage in the same way that he demonstrated how to define Bertha as suicidal. Explaining his reason for marrying Bertha, Mr. Rochester notes that he was expected to marry well to provide for himself through marriage as the second son. Speaking of his father's motivations, Mr. Rochester tells Jane that, "it was his resolution to keep the property together…I must be provided for by a wealthy marriage. He sought me a partner betimes" (Brontë 351). By describing his lack of involvement in the courtship process, Mr. Rochester critiques societal practices, such as the London Season or the quasi-arranged marriages between business associates and wealthy acquaintances, that simply threw together couples based on wealth and rank, without regard to personal feelings.[66] Mr. Rochester states that he was required "to espouse a bride already courted for me," to emphasize his lack of agency and to expose the ills of a marriage of convenience (Brontë 352). Stressing how he "had very little private conversation with her," Rochester reveals the artificial nature of this type of marriage, which was based on Bertha's "thirty-thousand pounds" and not any of her personal characteristics or compatibility between the couple (Brontë 352). The desire to procure a wealthy heiress at any cost reveals the problems with marriages of convenience and Victorian courtship practices for the aristocracy and gentry.

[66] In *Courtship,* Phegley describes Victorian courtship practices and attempts of wealthy families to create advantageous matches, pp. 35- 51, with particular emphasis on the London Season.

Mr. Rochester further problematizes the marriage of convenience by describing how marriage legally binds a poorly matched pair together. He notes that Bertha was "called by the law and by society a part of me. And I could not rid myself of it by any legal proceedings: for the doctors now discovered that my wife was mad" (Brontë 353). To counter the law of coverture that linked him and Bertha, Mr. Rochester dehumanizes Bertha by referring to her as "it" to suggest that the law unnaturally yokes together couples that have nothing in common. His main complaint is his inability to divorce her. Before the Matrimonial Causes Act or Divorce Act of 1857, a couple could only divorce through an Act of Parliament, an extremely expensive enterprise, and the divorce would not be granted if one party was declared insane.[67] Interestingly, Mr. Rochester does not pursue a typical "madhouse divorce" (Bolivar 253). This option allowed men to rid themselves of unwanted wives by locking them away in asylums when legal divorce was not a viable option.[68] Locking Bertha in the attic, however, shares some similarities with this method.[69] Saddled with a supposedly lunatic wife, Mr. Rochester's only marriage options are to wait until Bertha dies or to become a bigamist, as he attempts to do with Jane. Bigamy was, of course, illegal; the Victorian wedding ceremony specifically addressed any known "impediment" to marriage (Brontë 333). Mr. Rochester's attempted bigamy reflects his rejection of the normative social system. Upon proposing to Jane, Mr. Rochester remarks, "'For the world's judgment—I wash my hands thereof. For man's opinion—I defy it'" (Brontë 295). Mr. Rochester's complete dismissal of the legal and social constraints placed upon him rejects the marriage of convenience and models a particular way for Jane to reject social norms.

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[67] See Bolivar's "The Madhouse Divorce," p. 255; Stevie Davie's note 12 from Chapter XXVII in Brontë's *Jane Eyre*.

[68] See Bolivar's "The Madhouse Divorce" for more about the legal implications of this historical reality.

[69] Bolivar discusses *Jane Eyre* specifically in "The Madhouse Divorce," p. 253.

However, Jane-as-narrator distinguishes her radical understanding of marriage as a bond between equals from that of Mr. Rochester, who uses the same language Jane deploys to try to circumvent his unfortunate legal situation. While contemplating Mr. Rochester's proposal to become his mistress, Jane-as-narrator provides an account of her younger self's thought process, "'I will respect myself. I will keep the law given by God; sanctioned by man…Laws and principles are not for the times when there is no temptation: they are for such moments as this, when body and soul rise in mutiny against their rigour; stringent are they; inviolate they shall be'" (Brontë 365). By articulating her adherence to her conscience and the law, Jane differentiates her conception of marriage from Mr. Rochester's blasphemous and illegal attempt to commit bigamy by emphasizing the need to adhere to both human and divine law. Thus, Jane's assertion of the companionate marriage is a type of contained radicalism, where she seeks to subvert certain social norms without destroying the entire system.[70]

Jane-as-narrator describes her initial understanding of the marriage of convenience to demonstrate how she must assert her narrative agency to reject social understandings of marriage that would prevent her from flourishing in society. As evident in the examples at Gateshead, Lowood and Thornfield, marriage has specific social consequences for women and their progeny. Accepting such definitions of marriage would be indistinguishable from suicide, because both result in the negation of one's agency and identity. Although Mr. Rochester's rejection of the social norms is too radical, Jane learns how to complicate the marriage of convenience from his example in order to revive the love-based match of her parents and assert the equality of women to their husbands. The critical distance between Jane-as-character and

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[70] Ellis in *Appearing to Diminish* similarly writes, "By demonstrating that Jane gains power and autonomy by working within conservative social expectations, Brontë, like other female *Bildungsroman* authors, both upholds the social order and offers a way for women to work within it," p. 160.

Jane-as-narrator lessens as Jane articulates and then deploys language to establish the companionate marriage over the marriage of convenience.

Suicide and Marriage

The inverse relationship between suicide and marriage becomes clear as Jane continues to use the absorbing-articulating-deploying method to develop as a narrator. Jane self-consciously describes her development as both a narrator and subject in the novel through the language of marriage and suicide. After learning about the traditional understandings of marriage, Jane applies these definitions to her social situation. Since she lacks rank and wealth, she recognizes that Mr. Rochester would not consider her an eligible match according to the requirements of the marriage of convenience. Since she only understands the socio-economic based form of marriage at this stage in the novel, she describes her initial failure to entice Mr. Rochester using the language of suicide. As Jane continues to develop, her relationship to marriage and suicide subtly changes so that she can carve out her position in society through her manipulation of language.

Contemplating the social difference between herself and Mr. Rochester, Jane initially articulates her failure to woo him as a type of suicide in keeping with societal definitions of the marriage of convenience. The discussion about Mr. Rochester's marriage prospects causes Jane not to eat, another iteration of the starvation motif, and implies that her failure to marry Mr. Rochester is tantamount to suicide. She highlights the difference in their social ranks by defining Rochester as "a gentleman of family and a man of the world" and herself as "a dependent and a novice" (Brontë 186). These descriptions represent Jane's formulation of what the servants and society have told her. The rhetorical question "How dared you?" underscores the radical nature of her presumption that Mr. Rochester might favor her or regard her as a potential wife (Brontë

186). Berating herself, Jane continues, “It does good to no woman to be flattered by her superior, who cannot possibly intend to marry her; and it is madness in all women to let a secret love kindle within them, which, if unreturned and unknown, must devour the life that feeds it; and, if discovered and responded to, must lead, ignis-fatus-like, into miry wilds” (Brontë 186). Jane’s belief that Mr. Rochester cannot “intend to marry her” reveals how influenced she has been by definitions of marriage as a social and economic enterprise. The phrase “must devour the life” describes a type of suicide from unrequited love, but also spiritual suicide through an indulgence in a sexual relationship outside of marriage. The attentions of the “superior” man-of-rank, who does not intend to marry the lower class woman, can only lead the woman with false hopes of marriage into a murky moral territory, suggested through the phrase “miry wilds.”[71] In either scenario, Jane articulates the unfortunate position that lower class women are put into if constrained by the social understanding of marriage as a socio-economic enterprise through the language of suicide.

Continuing to understand marriage in terms of the marriage of convenience, Jane articulates the tension between marriage and suicide through her consideration of Blanche Ingram, one of Mr. Rochester’s house-party guests and neighbors, as a rival for his affections. Jane’s refusal to eat when discussing Mr. Rochester’s marriage prospects reflects the threat Blanche poses to her and stages the conflict between the two women. Jane’s actions imply that she, crushed by social definitions of marriage, is suicidal and has already failed to develop as a Victorian subject. In contrast, Jane thinks that Blanche will be married and has succeeded in life.

[71] This scenario also foreshadows the offer Mr. Rochester makes to Jane after it is revealed on his and Jane’s intended wedding day that he already has a wife, pp. 346- 351. Jane’s response to his proposal also remains the same. She emphasizes how she will become “ice and rock to him,” p.346, and refuses to become his mistress, pp. 359, 363.

To remind herself of this predetermined success and failure, Jane creates contrasting portraits of herself and Blanch to highlight the difference in their ranks:

> draw in chalk your own picture, faithfully, without softening one defect; omit no harsh line…write under it, 'Portrait of a Governess, disconnected, poor, and plain.' Afterwards, take a piece of smooth ivory…take your palette , mix your freshest, finest, clearest tints; choose your most delicate camel-hair pencils; delineate carefully the loveliest face you can imagine; paint it in your softest shades and sweetest lines, according to the description given by Mrs. Fairfax of Blanche Ingram…call it 'Blanche, an accomplished lady of rank.' (Brontë 187)

This action reflects her attempt to suppress her feelings for Mr. Rochester and societal definitions of marriage through art. The use of different media, chalk on paper and paints on ivory respectively, as well as the captions highlight the difference between the two rivals. Jane suggests that Blanche has already won based on her looks, wealth and rank.[72] The subsuming of her own identity in her role as governess, a tenuous social rank as neither a lady nor a servant, further differentiates the two and enacts how others in society view governesses.[73] Moreover, the activity that Jane prescribes for herself of directly comparing the portraits highlights the competitive nature of the conflict between Jane and Blanche, although Jane firmly humbles herself: "Whenever, in future, you should chance to fancy Mr. Rochester thinks well of you, take out these two pictures and compare them: say, 'Mr. Rochester might probably win that noble lady's love, if he chose to strive for it; is it likely he would waste a serious thought on this indigent and insignificant plebeian?'" (Brontë 187). This exercise becomes a method for Jane to

[72] The possibility of a relationship between governesses, unattached women, to their male employers made certain conservative Victorians, like Elizabeth Rigby, Lady Eastlake, anxious. Rigby states, ""A governess has no equals, and therefore can have no sympathy," p. 177. see Rigby's "Vanity Fair--and Jane Eyre" and M. Jeanne Peterson in "The Victorian Governess" for more about this anxiety.
[73] Peterson in "The Victorian Governess" defines this liminal social position on p. 15.

inculcate the social definition of marriage in herself. Nevertheless, terms such as "might probably" and "if" coupled with the rhetorical question demonstrate Jane's hesitation about the social understandings of marriage and implies that she refuses to completely give up on Mr. Rochester.

Redefining Marriage: Jane's Conflict with Blanche

Through her characterization of Blanche during the house party, Jane uses the companionate marriage to reject societal definitions of marriage. Upon seeing Blanche, Jane admits that she studied her rival to determine "whether [her appearance] were such as I should fancy likely to suit Mr. Rochester's taste" (Brontë 200). The project of imagining Rochester's preferences extends from Jane's exercise in comparing and humbling herself to Blanche, albeit not because of a "slavish notion of inferiority," but out of self-respect and an attempt to be realistic about her social position (Brontë 189). Already, Jane-as-narrator begins to build up her case against societal definitions of marriage by refusing to view herself as inferior to Blanche. She describes Blanche's "pride," "low brow," "her arched and haughty lip," and her "not good-natured" behavior towards Mrs. Dent to make the implicit comparison between herself and this mean-spirited woman (Brontë 200, 201). Observing how Mr. Rochester interacts with the house-party guests, she admits, "'he is not of their kind. I believe he is of mine…though rank and wealth sever us widely, I have something in my brain and heart, in my blood and nerves, that assimilates me mentally to him" (Brontë 203). The language of likeness allows Jane to contrast herself with Blanche to argue that she is a more suitable mate for Mr. Rochester. With an emphasis on the psychological connection between herself and Mr. Rochester, Jane rejects the social hierarchy by privileging the companionate marriage.

Although the charade scene during the house party, a matchmaking event in itself, relates to Victorian courtship rituals, this scene more importantly demonstrates Jane's narrative ability.[74] Jane-as-narrator forgoes commenting on these scenes and withholds information from the reader so that the plot of the novel will not be spoiled. The import of these scenes only becomes clear retrospectively. Refusing to participate in the charades, Jane watches Mr. Rochester and Blanche enact three scenes that play on the word or notion of bride: a pantomime of marriage, the story of Eliezer and Rebecca, and the idea of the prison, Bridewell. The first scene, the pantomime marriage, operates as a type of false trail to make Jane think that Mr. Rochester is interested in Blanche, but is actually the only form of marriage Mr. Rochester can indulge in, since his wife, Bertha, is living. The pantomime foreshadows Mr. Rochester's attempt to marry Jane. In the second scene, the irony of casting Blanche as Rebecca, renowned for her kindness, becomes clear through Jane-as-narrator's pervious descriptions of her haughtiness and cruelty towards the other house party guests and Jane herself. This scene also mimics Mr. Rochester's behavior towards Jane as his fiancé, when he lavishes jewels on her before their wedding: "'I wrote to my banker in London to send me certain jewels he has in his keeping,—heirlooms for the ladies of Thornfield… I hope to pour them into your lap'" (Brontë 298-299). Finally, the last scene connects marriage to imprisonment, which reflects Mr. Rochester's actual situation, since he is married to Bertha. While the charades ostensibly function so that Mr. Rochester can flirt with Blanche, they also reveal the reality of Mr. Rochester's situation when understood retrospectively and, thus, highlight Jane's abilities as a narrator in denying the reader specific information.

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[74] In *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History*, Mark Girouard discusses the "match-making function" as men and women were invited to house parties together and provided a perfect opportunity for young women to meet eligible young men, p. 232. Charades, in particular, were a popular courtship game, because women and men could interact more informally and the game did not require a great deal of preparation, as described by Phegly 48.

Regardless of Mr. Rochester's apparent preference for Blanche, Jane undermines her rival by negatively characterizing her and suggests that she herself has an opportunity to win over Mr. Rochester in the process. Discussing of how Blanche vies for Mr. Rochester's affections, Jane inverts social norms by describing Blanche as inferior to her despite their difference in social class: "Miss Ingram was a mark beneath jealousy: she was too inferior to excite the feelings" (Brontë 215). The comparative "too inferior" and word "beneath" both denote a lower order in a hierarchy and demonstrate how Jane inverts social understandings through language. She asserts herself over Blanche and, by extension, the companionate over socio-economic based marriage. To reveal the other woman's inferiority, Jane lists Blanche's faults: "she was not genuine," "her mind was poor, her heart barren by nature" and "she did not know the sensations of sympathy and pity; tenderness and truth were not in her" (Brontë 215-216). By contrast, Jane implies that she has all of these qualities. Through narrative, Jane indicates that she is a more suitable wife for Mr. Rochester based on her own merits and rejects the social definitions of marriage that would uphold Blanche.

As the novel progresses, Jane more explicitly rejects the marriage of convenience and connects this process of inverting social norms to her self and narrative development. In particular, she criticizes the social forces that compel Mr. Rochester to marry a woman he does not love. Reflecting on her situation, Jane-as-narrator recounts, "I saw he was going to marry her, for family, perhaps political reasons, because her rank and connections suited him; I felt he had not given her his love, and that her qualifications were ill adapted to win from him that treasure. This was the point…she could not charm him" (Brontë 216). The semicolon in the first line visually separates and balances important considerations for the marriage of convenience—familial connections, politics and rank—against that of the companionate marriage—love—to

convey Jane's argument that love trumps the various factors crucial to the marriage of convenience. Blanche's inability to charm Mr. Rochester allows Jane to assert herself over her rival, despite their difference in rank. Jane describes the conflict between herself and Blanche again by articulating marriage as success and death as failure. In a hypothetical statement, Jane-as-narrator asserts, "If she had managed the victory at once, and he had yielded and sincerely laid his heart at her feet, I should have covered my face, turned to the wall, and (figuratively) have died to them" (Brontë 216). Her use of the word "victory" underscores the competitive aspect of vying for Mr. Rochester's affections. Although the term suggests that Blanche has already successfully marginalized Jane and caused her death, Jane emphasizes her agency through the use of "I" as the subject of the sentence and the strong action verbs. Thus, Jane characterizes such a death as a suicide, a deliberate relinquishment of agency. Moreover, this articulation marks a change from her earlier contemplation of the differences between herself and Blanche; Jane transitions from a comparative exercise to inculcate social norms to her use of a hypothetical to questioning them. Jane peppers her prose with the terms "failure" and "success" to further demonstrate the competition between the two women and indicates that she has a chance with Mr. Rochester (Brontë 216-217). Through such language, Jane marginalizes Blanche to even the playing field and to imply that she and the companionate marriage will ultimately prevail.

Jane universalizes the conflict between marriage for social reasons and marriage for love on a larger scale to demonstrate the radical nature of her assertion. Moreover, Jane demonstrates her ability to narratively manipulate the sympathy and understanding of the reader by only revealing arguments that promulgate and uphold her main point. Explicitly referencing her own narrative abilities, Jane-as-narrator notes, "I have not yet said anything condemnatory of Mr.

Rochester's project of marrying for interest and connections…I had thought him a man unlikely to be influenced by motives so commonplace in his choice of a wife" (Brontë 217). The tone of this line reflects Jane's disapproval of Mr. Rochester's apparent conforming to societal norms. Nevertheless, Jane admits the strong influence of society and cannot fault Mr. Rochester and Blanche for "acting in conformity to ideas and principles instilled into them, doubtless, from their childhood. All their class held these principles: I supposed, then, they had reasons for holding them such as I could not fathom" (Brontë 217). Although Jane understands the reasons that the gentry marry for socio-economic reasons, her use of the terms "doubtless," "supposed," and "could not fathom" emphasize how the marriage of convenience is a foreign concept to her. This foreignness parallels her othering of other characters and, thus, something she must reject to succeed. By calling attention to the way that she manipulates the reader's understanding, namely withholding certain information and deploying language of otherness, Jane emphasizes how her narrative abilities are a crucial to her development as a narrator and a subject.

As she moves from her contemplation of the Mr. Rochester-Blanche dynamic to the gentry more broadly, Jane-as-narrator manipulates language to develop her own definitions of marriage. Her conception of marriage radically differs from typical Victorian understandings of the class and economic based marriage. Jane states "were I a gentleman like him, I would take to my bosom only such a wife as I could love; but the very obviousness of the advantages to the husband's own happiness offered by this plan convinced me that there must be arguments against its general adoption of which I was quite ignorant" (Brontë 217). Her failure to articulate the arguments against a companionate marriage by claiming ignorance allows Jane to assert that there are no persuasive arguments against marriage based on love, in contrast to the obvious

benefits. She exerts her authority as a narrator to withhold information from the reader to prove her point.

Marriage as Equality

Using the language of liberty and freedom, Jane stresses her egalitarian and radical position in an impassioned speech that defines the marriage as a relationship between equals. When discussing Mr. Rochester's impending marriage to Blanche, Jane-the-narrator realizes that "wealth, caste, custom intervened between me and what I naturally and inevitably loved" (Brontë 290). Jane juxtaposes artificial social constructs, "wealth, caste, custom," with romantic feelings to argue that her love for Mr. Rochester is natural, despite the class crossing. Stirred by her emotions, Jane declares, "'I have known you, Mr. Rochester; and it strikes me with terror and anguish to feel I absolutely must be torn from you for ever. I see the necessity of departure; and it is like looking on the necessity of death'" (Brontë 292). Through the repetition of "the necessity of" coupled with the semicolon, Jane links her departure from Thornfield and Mr. Rochester to death, as she has stated numerous times as the narrator. The similarity between her the declarations of Jane-as-character to Mr. Rochester and Jane-as-narrator reflecting back on her experiences illustrates Jane's process of narrative development that allow her to manipulate and invert social norms. She continues, even after Mr. Rochester begins to reveal that she is the object of his affections, arguing first that they are equal and then that she is superior to him:

> I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, nor even of mortal flesh;— it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God's feet, equal,— as we are!... you are a married man—or as good as a married man , and wed to one inferior to you— to one with whom you have no sympathy— whom I do not believe you

> truly love; for I have seen and heard you sneer at her. I would scorn such a union: therefore I am better than you. (Brontë 292-293)

In this speech, Jane contrasts "custom, conventionalities," which marks the difference in their rank and power, with "mortal flesh," which is natural, to assert their equality. The reference to the "spirit" evokes the idea of a soul mate, a key aspect of transcendent, romantic love that supports the companionate marriage. The blatant verb "scorn" emphasizes Jane's vitriolic attitude towards marriages based on socio-economics that do not factor in "sympathy" or "love"; moreover, her assertion that she is superior because of this view overtly inverts Victorian social hierarchy. Her use of rebellious language later in her speech, such as "free human being," "independent will, which I now exert to leave you," "liberty," and "stood erect," all emphasize Jane's independence and rebellion against societal norms (Brontë 293). By tapping into the language of rebellion and redefining her position as equal to that of Mr. Rochester, Jane not only positions herself as the appropriate choice for a wife over Blanche, but also demonstrates her growth as a narrator.

By responding to Jane's assertion using the same the language of equality, Mr. Rochester renders himself a suitable husband for Jane. After Jane refuses to believe he only intended to marry her, Mr. Rochester states, "'My bride is here…because my equal is here, and my likeness'" (Brontë 294). Such an assertion has a Neoplatonic sense of oneness, but also illustrates how he rejects societal definitions of marriage like Jane. He describes Blanche as a fortune hunter by emphasizing her "coldness" after he spread a rumor that he was not as rich as expected to further reject the marriage of convenience (Brontë 294). Rochester also describes Jane's radical position and their equality through the language of rebellion, stating, "you mutinied against fate, and claimed your rank as my equal" (Brontë 303). The strong verbs

"mutinied" and "claimed your rank" demonstrate his recognition of Jane's active, narrative process by which she asserts herself as his equal and inverts social norms. Despite the similar language they use, Rochester's own mutiny against society through his attempted bigamy differs from that of Jane. Where she seeks to assert her identity and establish her position in society, he wishes to defy the rules that chain him to Bertha. He states, "I know my Maker sanctions what I do. For the world's judgment- I wash my hands thereof. For man's opinion- I defy it" (Brontë 295). Although the reader does not realize it at the time, this odd soliloquy, not addressed to Jane like the rest of his speech, reflects his rejection of the society that forced him into an arranged marriage with Bertha. His defiance contrasts that of Jane, because she does not act out of vengeance, but from a need to establish herself by developing as both a subject and narrator. Nevertheless through their mutual understanding about the importance of love as the basis of marriage and emphasis on equality, Jane and Mr. Rochester become a seemingly ideal companionate couple, until Mr. Rochester's marriage to Bertha is revealed.

Failed Marriages and Suicide

The two characters—Bertha and St. John—that Jane actively defines as suicidal also are partners of failed marriages or relationships. Bertha's "madness" and St. John's "martyrdom" prevent both characters from marrying happily and cause their suicide, according to Jane. As Jane consciously analyzes her subject and narrative formation, she articulates an inverse relationship between marriage and suicide to assert her agency in choosing her spouse. While Jane begins to formulate this connection in regard to Bertha, this relationship becomes most clear through Jane's contemplation St. John's marriage prospects. Through her descriptions of St. John as a suitor, Jane defines him as suicidal because he refuses to marry for love and, instead, proposes a marriage of convenience to her. Jane defines the marriage of convenience as a

suicide to explain that marrying St. John would also render her suicidal and hinder her personal development.

Through her depiction of St. John's relationship with Rosamond Oliver, Jane highlights the unnatural repression of his feelings to characterize him as cold, unfeeling and dead before he has actually died. While Jane speaks with Rosamond, Jane watches his physical reaction to Miss Oliver: "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. But he curbed it, I think, as a resolute rider would curb a rearing steed" (Brontë 420). Through the language of vigor and freedom, such as "expanded," "vigorous bound" and "attainment of liberty," Jane-as-narrator compares St. John's feelings for Rosamond to her own relationship with Mr. Rochester and suggests that both relationships could develop into marriages based on love. This connection to her own relationship with Mr. Rochester makes the language of control that she deploys to describe St. John's refusal to indulge in his love for Rosamond more stark. Jane-as-narrator negatively colors St. John's control of his passions through her use of words like "despotic constriction" and the simile about curbing a rearing horse. This sense of constriction has overtones of suffocation and strangulation to suggest that such restraint renders St. John suicidal, because he does not allow himself to love Rosamond. Moreover, Jane's narration shapes the reader's understanding of St. John's actions. When he "crushed the snowy heads of the closed flowers with his foot," St. John strangles his emotions for Rosamond and demonstrates the connection between his restraint and death (Brontë 418). Both St. John's actions and words foreshadow his demise based on his obstinate focus on missionary work and control of his feelings that Jane-as-narrator has articulated through her use of specific language.

While Jane's description of St. John's ambitions and denial of his love for Rosamond describes him as suicidal and defines the inverse relationship between suicide and marriage, this process, more importantly, allows her to assert herself narratively based on the implicit contrast between herself and St. John. Ventriloquizing him, Jane imagines that St. John says to Rosamond, "'I love you, and I know you prefer me. It is not despair of success that keeps me dumb. If I offered my heart, I believe you would accept it. But that heart is already laid on a sacred altar: the fire is arranged round it. It will soon be no more than a sacrifice consumed'" (Brontë 424). Again, Jane deploys the language of success and failure to describe marriage and suicide to assert that St. John has suicidal tendencies. Her use of the term "already" renders St. John a corpse, the abject, once again to connect his failure to marry based on love to a negation of identity. Moreover, such imagery evokes the Indian practice of sati, where widows self-immolate after the deaths of their husbands, to gender St. John's actions as feminine and further connect marriage and suicide.[75] Jane-as-narrator's willingness to speak for St. John illustrates how she can carve out a position for herself in a male dominated society through her control over language and narrative. Similarly, Jane-as-character confronts St. John about his feelings after she paints a portrait of Rosamond, "You are wasting away" (Brontë 431). Jane not only inverts the gendered understandings of suicide by describing St. John as starving himself, she also ascribes his unwillingness to love as the cause of his suicide. Jane's assertions against St. John as a character and narrator converge and this connection reflects the culmination of her growth that develops from her ability to manipulate language and to make the connection between suicide and marriage.

[75] Jenny Sharpe in *Allegories of Empire* describes the Indian practice of sati as it relates specifically to St. John, pp. 52-53

Having developed as a narrator, Jane can reject St. John's marriage proposal by describing him as suicidal and arguing that her acceptance of him would also signify a negation of her identity. Jane describes her marriage to St. John through the ritual of sati: "'if I do make the sacrifice he urges, I will make it absolutely: I will throw all on the altar— heart, vitals, the entire victim. He will never love me; but he shall approve me'" (Brontë 466). By connecting marriage to St. John with this suicidal practice, Jane demonstrates how she cannot possibly marry him and succeed or live in the novel. Indeed, she claims, "such a martyrdom would be monstrous" because he does not love her (Brontë 467). The repetition of the term "despotic" to describe St. John reveals Jane's fear that he will attempt to overpower her rather than be her equal in marriage. The phrase "chained for life" evokes Mr. Rochester's charade of Bridewell (Brontë 472, 477, 479). Marriage to the wrong person—Rochester and Bertha, St. John and Jane—results in imprisonment, death or ultimately both. Through her characterization of St. John and his marriage proposals, Jane effectively demonstrates how marriage for any other reason than true love has dangerous, negative consequences.

Marriage as Choice

In contrast St. John, Jane chooses to marry Mr. Rochester to demonstrate her agency and define companionate marriage as a positive act for women. In this process, she rejects the marriage of convenience and redeems the love-based match that her parents made by stressing the success of her marriage with Mr. Rochester. The emphasis on choice challenges scholarly understandings of the marriage plot as a reintegration back into patriarchal society at the expense of a woman's identity.[76] In the last two chapters of the novel, Jane defines herself as an

[76] In *How To Read the Victorian Novel,* George Levine defines the marriage plot or the tendency to "conclude in a movement towards union in marriage and in social harmony" as typical of the Victorian novel and the female *Bildungsroman* (Levine 13). For more discussion about the feminist critique of the marriage plot, see Sonjeon Cho's *An Ethics of Becoming,* p.26-27; Ellis's *Appearing to Diminish,* pp. 71, 116, 118; Esty's *Unseasonable Youth*, p. 50;

independent woman and then establishes her position as Mrs. Rochester. This distinction highlights how her marriage itself does not define Jane's identity. Rather, Jane's development as a narrator and ability to manipulate language allow her to select a spouse and reject others so that she can marry on her own terms. By first establishing her independence, Jane renders marriage her choice.[77] She challenges feminist conceptions of the marriage plot by demonstrating how she manipulates language and asserts her agency to maintain her own identity.

Understanding the critiques that feminist scholars have of the marriage plot elucidates how Jane's conception of the companionate marriage addresses some of these concerns. Specifically, Jane contends with the critiques about the reabsorption of women into society through a systematically oppressive, patriarchal institute: marriage. In *The Madwoman in the Attic,* Gilbert and Gubar argue that Brontë ultimately undermines Jane's "rebellious feminism because she is "unable clearly to envision viable solutions to the problem of patriarchal oppression" as evident in Jane's marriage to Rochester and their retreat to Ferndean Manor (Gilbert and Gubar 338, 369). Lorna Ellis nuances this interpretation by arguing that Jane pushes the boundaries of social reintegration through her "continuing overt insistence on her own point of view," but agrees that the novel succumbs to the "conservative reintegration" and "social accommodation" of Jane through her marriage (Ellis 138-139). Ellis claims that marriage undermines the independence and identity that Jane gains through her narrative abilities. Similarly, George Levine claims that a Victorian heroine was "reconstrained" by marriage and that her "upward mobility… depend[s] entirely upon her marrying the right man" (Levine 89).

Kaplan "Girl Talk," p. 20; Levine's *How to Read the Victorian Novel*, p. 97; Rowe's "Fairy-born and human bread," p.70.

[77] In *New Perspectives on the European Bildungsroman,* Downward and Summerfield likewise note that Jane first declares her independence and then accepts Mr. Rochester's marriage proposal, which renders their marriage "a partnership of equals," p. 139. They briefly address the tension between marriage as success and suicide as failure through the statement "Further proof of Jane's successful achieving of independence and denial of self-sacrifice can be found in her refusal to accept St. John's marriage proposal," p. 139.

Levine describes marriage for women in terms of social climbing, as espoused in Richardson's *Pamela.* These general critiques of the marriage plot in *Jane Eyre* highlight the conservative and patriarchal nature of marriage.

But by stressing the importance of companionate marriage, Jane suggests that the institution is not patriarchal *per se,* but only becomes so when equality between the couple is denied, as often the case in arranged or financially based marriages. Brontë disentangles marriage from upward mobility by first establishing Jane's independence as an independent, wealthy heiress after her rich uncle dies and leaves her a fortune. Within this narrative framework, Jane's marriage to Mr. Rochester becomes entirely her choice. Jane's criteria for finding the "right man" are influenced by her definition of companionate marriage rather than social expectations. Her emphasis on equality and her choice inverts Ellis and Levine's idea that she is "reconstrained" by marriage to suggest that love-based marriages are liberating and positive for women; Jane's contained radicalism allows her to undermine certain aspects of the system without rejecting it entirely. Through the same process that Jane uses to define suicide as a failure in the novel, she asserts that companionate marriage is a success. Jane's control over narrative does not merely push the boundaries as Ellis argues, but redefines them.

To avoid the designation of a Pamela-type of social climber and to establish her identity, Jane describes the independence her inherited wealth affords her and explicitly highlights how marriage is not a necessity. When Jane's uncle leaves her 20,000 pounds, this money drastically changes her social position and provides her with the economic stability to remain a wealthy unmarried lady if she desires.[78] After learning that she is related to the Rivers, Jane decides to split the money with her three cousins—St. John, Mary and Diana—and states, "'I will attach

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[78] Jane does not have to marry because her merchant uncle's wealth is not tied up in land; therefore, her wealth is not subject to the right of primogeniture or other restrictions. See Kenny and Laurence's *Two Essays on the Law of Primogeniture* for the contrast between "ready money" and money tied up in an estate, p. 46.

myself for life to Diana and Mary'" (Brontë 446). At this stage in the novel, Jane radically bypasses a heterosexual relationship with Mr. Rochester, who she believes is still shackled to Bertha, in favor of friendship with the Rivers sisters.[79] The finality of the phrase "attach myself for life" indicates that Jane refuses to marry except for love and happily substitutes female relationships for marriage when such an option is closed to her. Carla Kaplan uses the term "discursive intimacy" to explain that "conversation is the 'paradise of union' to which Jane aspires" (Kaplan 7-8).[80] Jane's favorite relationships depend upon meetings of the minds regardless of gender. As Jane herself states, "I could never rest in communication with strong, discreet, and refined minds, *whether male or female*, till I had passed the outworks of conventional reserve, and crossed the threshold of confidence, and won a place by their heart's very hearthstone" (Brontë 432, emphasis mine). Jane strives for an intellectual connection in her relationships with both men and women; she does not merely desire the heterosexual norm of marriage. Furthermore, she specifies that she will only marry if her intellectual demands are satisfied. Marriage as an institution is not championed in the novel; instead, particular relationships between people are upheld. The companionate marriage becomes an acceptable option because it necessitates a personal connection between the couple. Jane uses her economic independence to demonstrate how she does not have to marry to change her social status like Pamela and describes the narrow parameters in which she will marry: companionate marriage to her intellectual equal.

Refusing to marry for socio-economic reasons simply because she has inherited wealth, Jane establishes herself as the author of her own life to declare her independence. St. John

[79] For more about the tension between female friendship and the marriage plot, see Cho's *An Ethics of Becoming,* pp. 60, 64; Sharon Marcus' *Between Women,* Chapter 2.
[80] Marcus makes a broader argument about the tension between Victorian female friendship and the heterosexual norm in *Between Women,* pp. 32-38, 62.

attempts to remind her that 20,000 pounds opens up various marriage opportunities when he states, "'your aspirations after family ties and domestic happiness may be realised otherwise than by the means you contemplate: you may marry'" (Brontë 447). St. John's mention of "family ties" evokes the marriage of convenience and illustrates how he and Jane differ in their conception of marriage. In response, Jane rejects this financially and socially driven type of marriage by exclaiming "'Marry! I don't want to marry, and never shall marry'" (Brontë 447). While the exclamation and repetition of the word "marry" augments Jane's resolve not to marry except for love, the real force of the statement comes through the parallel structure of "don't want" and "never shall," because her personal desires, not social forces, determine whether she will marry. Jane articulates her position and deftly manipulates language to define herself as independent and marriage as her choice.

Furthermore, Jane uses the language of likeness to define what constitutes failure (suicide), and success (companionate marriage) in the novel. She deploys the language of suicide not only against other characters in the novel, but also against certain instances of marriage to define her own process of development as both a subject and narrator. Discussing her marital situation with St. John, Jane explains, "'No one would take me for love; and I will not be regarded in the light of a mere money speculation. And I do not want a stranger—unsympathising, alien, different from me; I want my kindred'" (Brontë 447). Through "I" statements, Jane asserts her personal preferences and her agency in selecting a partner. The semicolon and conjunction "and" put the phrases "take me for love" and "mere money speculation" in tension to reflect the conflict between companionate marriage and the marriage of convenience. Yet, Jane explicates this tension through the diction she uses. "Stranger," "unsympathizing," "alien," "different" are othering terms that Jane applies to her potential

suitors; thus, she connects the marriage of convenience to suicide. While Jane's inherited wealth would make her the equal of wealthy men, she others them, like Bertha and St. John, and defines any potential marriages as suicidal. In contrast, "kindred" refers literally to Diana, Mary and St. John, her cousins, and signifies healthy, successful relationships like her connection to Miss Temple, the Rivers' sisters and, ultimately, Mr. Rochester.

In her discussion with Mr. Rochester, Jane demonstrates how the companionate marriage supports both her independence and choice of a spouse. After she returns to find Thornfield a ruin and visits Ferndean, Mr. Rochester playfully asks, "'And you do not lie dead in some ditch, under some stream? And you are not a pining outcast amongst strangers?'" (Brontë 501). Mr. Rochester's reference to suicide presumes that Jane has not thrived after leaving him and Thornfield. Such a statement reveals how he recognizes the connection between companionate marriage and success in the novel as Jane articulates. Jane replies, "'I am an independent woman now'" in a declaration of her position as a Victorian subject and her success without Mr. Rochester (Brontë 501). By emphasizing her ability to survive without him, Jane ensures that she does not define their marriage as a necessity. When Mr. Rochester presses her about her wealth, Jane responds, "'I told you I am independent, sir, as well as rich: I am my own mistress'" (Brontë 501). Jane makes a distinction between her independence and wealth, although they are obviously connected, to suggest that she has always been independent and able to exercise her agency, such as when she articulates her independence during Mr. Rochester's proposal to her: "'I am a free human being with an independent will, which I now exert to leave you'" (Brontë 293). Her wealth simply allows her to stop working. The repetition of the "I am" highlights her autonomy and renders her marriage to Mr. Rochester as her decision. Such statements of her identity are the culmination of Jane's process of development. She reveals that her marriage to

Mr. Rochester does not define her or force her into a specific normative female role as critics argue.[81]

Like Jane, Mr. Rochester connects the companionate marriage to a radical assertion of equality between the sexes that undermines the social norms. Convinced that she loves her cousin, Mr. Rochester laments, "'your heart is not with me: it is with this cousin…Jane, leave me: go and marry Rivers'" (Brontë 511). Despite his use of imperatives, Mr. Rochester responds to what he thinks is her choice of a husband and indicates his awareness of her agency in selecting a mate. The parallel structure of the two lines highlights how he asks her to leave because he thinks she no longer loves him. As before, Mr. Rochester firmly believes in companionate marriage, but he demonstrates the strength of his convictions by stating that he will let her go if she loves another. Mr. Rochester designates marriage as Jane's choice through the dictate for her to go "'with the husband you have chosen'" (Brontë 511). Although Mr. Rochester appears to give Jane a command, the past tense of the word "chosen" demonstrates how he concedes to the choice she has already made. Mr. Rochester's recognition of Jane's agency in choosing a partner challenges the usual feminist conception of marriage as an oppressive, patriarchal device. Instead, Mr. Rochester's willingness to yield the choice of a spouse to Jane radically subverts the gender hierarchy and renders the couple equal.

In her acceptance of Mr. Rochester's marriage proposal, Jane uses the inverse relationship between suicide and marriage to define success and failure in the novel and to mediate on her development as a subject and a narrator. Unable to believe that Jane will marry him, Mr. Rochester considers marriage a sacrifice for Jane. In reply, Jane states, "'Sacrifice! What do I sacrifice? Famine for food'" (Brontë 513). The substitution of "food" for "famine"

[81] See Cho's *An Ethics of Becoming,* p. 103; Ellis's *Appearing to Diminish,* p. 33, 71; Esty's *Unseasonable Youth,* p. 22.

renders marriage to Mr. Rochester as a positive act in contrast to suicide. This substitution also reflects Jane's personal triumph, since she represented the threat of failure in her personal development as a suicide by starvation throughout the book. Jane nuances the definition of marriage as a sustaining force by emphasizing how companionate marriage, like that of her parents, and not the marriage of convenience satisfies. In contrast, other forms of marriage are equivalent to suicide.

"Reader, I married him." Thus begins the conclusion to *Jane Eyre* that ostensibly conflates the marriage plot with the end of Jane's process of development and establishment of her identity (Brontë 517). However, the conclusion to the novel actually highlights the equality of Jane and Mr. Rochester in their marriage that results from her assertion and his acceptance of her narrative ability. To begin, this statement itself expresses Jane's agency; she does not write that Mr. Rochester married her or that they were wed. Through this declarative statement, which parallels her "I am" statements in terms of her asserting her narrative agency, she presents herself as a main actor in the novel. Explaining how she is writing ten years after the events of the novel, Jane-as-narrator describes her relationship with her husband: "I am my husband's life as fully as he is mine" (Brontë 519). The first half of Jane's statement seems to be a conservative declaration of a woman subsuming her identity into that of her husband; however, the second half of the statement reflects the mutuality of such an action and renders their relationship one of equality. The phrase "as fully as" stresses their equality. Furthermore, Jane describes how they "talk" together all the time and stresses their connectedness by stating, "to talk to each other is but a more animated and an audible thinking" (Brontë 519). Jane's marriage to Mr. Rochester

represents the epitome of Kaplan's "discursive intimacy."[82] The term "perfect concord" highlights the ideal nature of their relationship, which depends upon their mutual feelings. By emphasizing their equality, Jane defines her relationship with Mr. Rochester as ideal.

Marriage and Narrative Agency

As she concludes the novel, Jane becomes most explicit about her role as the narrator to demonstrate how her success in life is the product of her narrative abilities. By ending with a discussion of her life after her marriage, Jane-as-narrator privileges her narrative skill over her marriage, subtly challenging the traditional marriage plot.[83] Jane's awareness of her development as a subject and a narrator becomes clear through her manipulation of the language of marriage. Jane advocates the companionate marriage that allows women to remain independent and select their spouse through the emphasis on the equality between the partners. Moreover, her overt discussion of her narrative abilities through her dexterity with the language of suicide operates as an exhortation to other women, like Mary and Diana: they can also assert their narrative abilities to create a position for themselves in society. The connection Jane makes between marriage and narrative agency reflects her contained radicalism and nuances the traditional marriage plot so that she and other women can assert their agency within the social system.

Through her role as Mrs. Rochester, Jane explains how she acts as both a wife and a narrator for her husband, which accounts for their domestic bliss. Due to Mr. Rochester's blindness, Jane both interprets books and describes the world for him: "he saw books through me; and never did I weary…of putting into words the effect of field, tree, town, river, cloud,

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[82] This mental connection explains the seeming *deus ex machina* incident when Mr. Rochester calls for Jane hundreds of miles away, Jane hears him and responds that she is coming. See Brontë's *Jane Eyre,* p. 485, for a description of the incident and Mr. Rochester's account of what happened and Jane's reaction, pp. 515-516.

[83] For more about the typical marriage plot, see Cho's Chapter "The Marriage Plot and Its Discontents," pp. 47-97.

sunbeam— of the landscape before us; of the weather round us— and impressing by sound on his ear what light could no longer stamp on his eye" (Brontë 519). Through the statement "he saw books through me," Jane highlights her interpretive role as a narrator. In this passage about their mutual happiness, Jane makes a connection between the closeness she feels with her husband and her narrative abilities to explain why they are "precisely suited" (Brontë 519). Her ability to exercise her control over narrative defines the concord and equality between her and her husband.

To demonstrate the potential applicability of the companionate marriage, Jane defines her relationship with Mr. Rochester and the marriages of the Rivers sisters as happy and successful. Jane explicitly states, "My Edward and I, then, are happy: and the more so, because those we most love are happy likewise. Diana and Mary Rivers are both married" (Brontë 520). By repeating the word "happy" and through her direct comparison, Jane characterizes success in life in terms of the companionate marriage and expands such a definition to others. As Jane states, "Both Captain Fitzjames and Mr. Wharton love their wives, and are loved by them" (Brontë 520). This chiastic structure speaks to the content of the line and parallels the mutual relationship between Jane and Mr. Rochester. By extending her sense of happiness and contentment to Mary and Diana, Jane demonstrates how her relationship with Mr. Rochester is not, as Gilbert and Gubar suggest, solitary and isolated. They argue that Ferndean expresses "their spiritual isolation in a world where such egalitarian marriages as theirs are rare, if not impossible" (Gilbert and Gubar 369). Jane, however, explicitly demonstrates that these "egalitarian marriages" are neither "rare" nor "impossible" for women through the example of her cousins' marriages and their frequent visits to Ferndean. By including Mary and Diana within the context of companionate marriage and defining their relationships as happy and

successful, Jane demonstrates how her relationship with Mr. Rochester is not unusual, but a possibility for all women.

In contrast to these happy, companionate marriages, Jane connects St. John's death to his unmarried state to make a larger connection between the companionate marriage and processes of development. After Jane describes St. John's energy and zeal as a missionary in India, she couches his imminent demise within the context of his unmarried state to demonstrate how his rejection of the companionate marriage results in his death. To introduce his death, Jane states, "St. John is unmarried: he never will marry now" (Brontë 521). These short, declarative sentences reflect the narrative technique the Jane learned as a child to temper her emotions to make her story more believable; these sentences are worded to render the connection between his refusal to marry for love and his demise a fact rather than Jane's opinion. The connection between his unmarried state and death contrasts the happiness that stems the companionate marriage. Although she seems to cede the narrative to St. John at the end of the novel by quoting his letter to her, Jane does not subordinate herself to the male voice. Instead, she uses his own language to demonstrate his willing acceptance of death to characterize him as suicidal. She explicitly states, "His own words are a pledge of this—" (Brontë 521). "This" refers explicitly to his "unclouded," "undaunted," "sure," "steadfast" acceptance of death. While such language adheres to Victorian conceptions of masculinity and honor *prima facie,* Jane's previous characterization of St. John as abject, deploying imagery of the corpse and a marble column, troubles the obvious interpretation of his actions as masculine and honorable at the end of the novel. Understood in the light of Jane's previous characterization, St. John's letter becomes a suicide note. Through her previous characterization of St. John as suicidal and by contrasting his

unmarried state with that of herself and his sisters, Jane solidifies her identity to conclude the novel and her *Bildungsroman* through the ejection of St. John from her life and the text.

Section III: the *Bildungsroman* and Autobiography

As I have argued, Jane's narrative dexterity allows her to establish herself as a subject in society and develop as a narrator of her own story. This process renders *Jane Eyre* a *Bildungsroman.* With its roots in nineteenth-century German Romanticism through the publication of Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, the *Bildungsroman* gained great popularity in England, particularly during the nineteenth century.[84] In his seminal work, *Season of Youth,* Jerome Buckley defines the *Bildungsroman* as, "the 'novel of all around development or self-culture' with 'a more or less conscious attempt on the part of the hero to integrate his powers, to cultivate himself by experience'" (Buckley 13).[85] Feminist and post-colonialist scholars have understood this integration of a character into society as a conservative reabsorption; the genre as a whole has been understood as a conservative one.[86] Feminist scholars have problematized this genre by arguing that the novel of development unfolds differently for women and men, because the "education" and expected social roles of men and women differ greatly in a patriarchal society.[87] Brontë, however, had already accounted for some of these later critiques of the *Bildungsroman*, particularly the difference between the

[84] See Baxter's *Coming of Age,* p. 27; Goodman's "The Lost Brother, The Twin," p. 28; Moretti's *The Way of the World* p.3; Parkin-Gounelas's *Fictions of the Female Self,* p.17. Esty in *Unseasonable Youth* argues that such popularity stems from the "discourse of culture" in the *Bildungsroman* that was both a universal ideal and "its restricted cultural dimensions," p. 48. Karl Morgenstern coined the term in 1819; see Boes' *Formative Fictions,* 1; Jeffers's *Apprenticeships,* p. 49; Maier's "Portraits of the Girl-Child," p. 317.

[85] See Cho's *An Ethics of* Becoming, p. 22; Laura Green's *Literary Identification,* p. 3; Franco Moretti's *The Way of the World* p.16; Parkin-Gounelas's *Fictions of the Female Self,* p.3.

[86] For more discussion about the critiques of the *Bildungsroman* as a conservative genre, see Cho's *An Ethics of* Becoming, p. 26; Ellis's *Appearing to Diminish,* p. 33, 71; Esty's *Unseasonable Youth,* p. 22; Jeffers *Apprenticeships,* p. 51.

[87] See Baxter's *Coming of Age,* p. 30; Cho's *An Ethics of* Becoming, p. 26; Baruch's "The Feminine Bildungsroman," p. 335; Esty's *Unseasonable Youth,* p. 22; Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic,* p. 339. Green's *Literary Identification,* p. 2; Maier's "Portraits of the Girl-Child," p. 318.

masculine and feminine *Bildungsromane,* by stressing the importance of Jane's ability to manipulate language.

Jane's deployment of language determines the success of her *Bildungsroman* and blends the coming of age novel with the genre of autobiography.[88] Despite the subtitle, *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography*, recent scholarship has neglected this crucial aspect of the novel.[89] Building off of the review of George Henry Lewes, a contemporary critic of Brontë, Christine Alexander notes, "As the subtitle ambiguously suggests, then, *Jane Eyre* represents the author's [Brontë's] own spiritual growth to maturity, not least her experiences as an amateur artist" (Alexander 11). Alexander's substitution of Brontë for Jane neglects the way that Brontë uses the fictional autobiography to describe the developmental process of Jane as the protagonist and narrator.[90] By blending these genres, Brontë suggests that women must develop their ability to use narrative as Jane does to become the authors of their own lives.

The Male and Female Bildungsromane

The difference between the masculine and feminine *Bildungsroman* parallels different social realities for men and women in the Victorian Era. John Ruskin's widely popular essay, "Of Queen's Gardens," published in 1866, expresses the social expectations for Victorian woman and delineates the strong contrast between a woman's role and that of a man. Describing the role of women in society, Ruskin uses the term "within their sphere" to argue that a woman's

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[88] Jane's *Bildungsroman* is also a *Künstlerroman*, a subset that tracks the development of an artist. See Buckley's *Season of Youth,* p. 13. Cho writes that "the narrative of the marriage plot and the marriage of the artist plot converge seamlessly" in *Jane Eyre*; see *An Ethics of Becoming,* p. 103.

[89] Boes notes in *Formative Fictions* that "Oftentimes (as in *Jane Eyre, Great Expectations,* or *Green Henry*) the narrator is identical with the hero, and now looks back on past errors from a magnanimous distance," p. 37. Kaplan in "Girl Talk" writes, "The conceit of fictional autobiography…suggests that Jane tells her story not, as Showalter and others would have it, because she is a heroine of "fulfillment," but rather because she is still looking for a 'fit listener,'" p. 23.

[90] Parkin-Gounelas in *Fictions of the Female Self* contextualizes the conflation of the author's life with that of the protagonist and argues that there was a conservative expectation that "a woman could 'only' write about herself given the confinement of her life and, by extension, of her mental process," p. 24.

growth occurs within a domestic sphere (Ruskin 49). He implies that marriage helps sustain this development in a domestic sphere by transferring the woman from her father's home to that of her husband. Ruskin becomes even more explicit about the "separate characters" of men and women: "the man's power is active, progressive, defensive. His intellect is for speculation and invention; his energy for adventure, for war, and for conquest" while the "woman's power is for rule, not for battle,--and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision" (Ruskin 59). The active, vigorous nature of a man's energies and intellect contrasts, as Ruskin explains, the passive, delicate faculties of women. These cultural distinctions are evident in the different conceptions of the masculine and feminine *Bildungsromane.* Female writers in the nineteenth century had to contend with such social definitions of women and the *Bildungsroman* provided an opportunity to comment upon this stereotypical characterization of the difference between men and women without completely rejecting the social system.

The distinction between the male and female *Bildungsromane* became clear as feminist and post-colonialist critics took issue with traditional definitions of the *Bildungsroman* that privileged the growth and development of a man.[91] Since the term *Bildungsroman* has masculine implications, scholars like Laura Green prefer the term "novel of development," because it is "'a neutral term, free of prior critical associations'" (Green 2). Taking issue with Jerome Buckley's focus on male protagonists and their development, Elizabeth Abel, Marrianne Hirsche and Elizabeth Langland argue, "definitions of the *Bildungsroman* presuppose a range of social options available only to men" (Abel, Hirsche and Langland 7).[92] In contrast to the formal

[91] See Downward and Summerfiled's *New Perspectives on the European Bildungsroman,* pp. 109-142; Esty's *Unseasonable Youth,* p. 22-23; Fraiman's *Unbecoming Women,* pp. 2-3; Maier's "Portraits of the Girl-Child," p. 318.
[92] George Levine makes a similar argument in *How to Read the Victorian Novel,* p. 82.

education of male heroes and their experiences in society, women are generally limited to marriage. Elaine Baruch in her article "The Feminine Bildungsroman" distinguishes the masculine and feminine *Bildungsromane* by emphasizing the connection between the marriage plot and the female *Bildungsroman.* Addressing contemporary conservative conceptions of female development, the *Jane Eyre* as a female *Bildungsroman* complicates this connection between female development and marriage. By blending the *Bildungsroman* and autobiography to highlight Jane's development as a subject and narrator, Brontë uses the companionate marriage and the novel itself to make "incipient revolutionary statements" against these patriarchal definitions (Baruch 357).

Through the blending of the *Bildungsroman* and autobiography, Brontë tracks Jane's development as a subject and a narrator and stresses how narrative skill allows women to invert but work within Victorian social bounds. Analyzing Gilbert and Gubar's main argument in *The Madwoman in the Attic* elucidates this argument. In their introduction, Gilbert and Gubar describe the purpose of their book in revealing the "anxieties" associated with female authorship in the nineteenth century and in "redefining…male-defined literary history in the same way that women writers have revised 'patriarchal poetics'" (Gilbert and Gubar xiii). The authors astutely suggest that female writers of *Bildungsromane* combat the societal expectations of women, as evident in Ruskin's article. In particular, they claim that the theme of escape from enclosure (patriarchal society for women) becomes a crucial aspect to the female *Bildungsroman,* which is reflected throughout in *Jane Eyre.*[93] By demonstrating how Jane develops her narrative agency in response to the red-room scene, Brontë argues that women can escape patriarchal enclosure by exerting such agency. Brontë uses the language of suicide and the marriage plot to define the way that women can establish their places in society. She similarly manipulates certain aspects

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[93] See Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic,* pp. xii, 339.

of the masculine *Bildungsroman* to create and define the female *Bildungsroman* in response to patriarchal values about the place of women in society.

Marriage Plot and the female Bildungsroman

The main difference between the masculine and female *Bildungsromane* is the conflation of the marriage plot with the culmination of female development. Sonjeong Cho argues that the marriage plot "becomes the primary vehicle to realize the promise of the Bildung narrative" and success or failure in marriage becomes "an absolute measurement of personal fulfillment" in the female *Bildungsroman* (Cho 26).[94] According to Cho, a Victorian heroine finds true fulfillment and becomes fully developed only through marriage. In contrast, the Victorian hero completes his development after her reflects upon a series of adventures outside of his family home and claims his place in society; this "painful soul searching" signals his "completed passage to maturity" and ultimate integration into society (Buckley 17; Able, Hirsche and Langland 8). In her article, "The Feminine 'Bildungsroman'" Elaine Baruch writes, "the ultimate aim of her [the Victorian heroine's] development is not life within the larger community as it is for the male hero, but rather marriage with the partner of her choice" (Baruch 341). Through the conflation of the woman's process of development with marriage rather than integration into society for the man, Baruch teases out the main distinction between the male and female *Bildungsromane.* Levine links the culmination of the female *Bildungsroman* in marriage to economics; women must marry because they have few other options for "upward economic mobility" (Levine 89). Like Baruch, other feminist scholars argue that the culmination of the female *Bildungsroman* in

[94] For more about how the marriage plot distinguishes the masculine from the feminine *Bildungsroman,* see Goodman's "Double Bildungsroman," pp. 29-30; Green *Literary Identification*, 5.

marriage is a conservative move that stresses devolution of the female subject in contrast to the evolution of the male subject.[95]

Jane Eyre, however, does not culminate in a simple marriage plot, but a discussion about Jane's life after marriage to demonstrate how melding the process of subject and narrative formation relocates the completion of this process from the marriage plot to a discussion about narrative abilities. Although she begins with the statement "Reader, I married him," Jane-as-narrator emphasizes actions such as reading, talking and writing to illustrate how her definition of the female *Bildungsroman* blends elements of the fictional autobiography (Brontë 517). The temporal distance from the events of the novel and her emphasis on communicative acts reveals how Jane's process and novel of development do not conclude with marriage. As she writes, "My tale draws to its close: one word respecting my experience of married life, and one brief glance at the fortunes of those whose names have most frequently recurred in this narrative, and I have done" (Brontë 519). This "one word" highlights how Jane-as-narrator defines the boundaries of her *Bildungsroman* through her narrative agency. The discussion of the Reed sisters' happy marriages in contrast to the death of St. John at the end of the novel highlights how the focus is not only on her marriage, but defining what constitutes success and failure in the novel. The novel ends, not with Jane's marriage to Mr. Rochester, but with her defining St. John's death as suicidal.

By challenging this direct connection between the female *Bildungsroman* and the marriage plot, Brontë defines a specific version of the female *Bildungsroman* that depends upon the development of and exertion of narrative agency. While Jane defines companionate marriage to Mr. Rochester as a success in the novel, this act of defining constitutes success for her, not the

[95] See Cho's *An Ethics of Becoming,* pp. 27, 31. Able, Hirsche and Langland in *The Voyage In* argue that "the protagonist grows significantly only after fulfilling her fairy-tale expectation that they will marry and live 'happily ever after,'" p. 12.

marriage itself and determines Jane's completion of her formation as both a subject and a narrator. This link between narrative agency and marriage in the novel complicates traditional understandings of the female *Bildungsroman,* because Jane does not simply marry Mr. Rochester and assimilate back into society. Instead, she defines the terms of her marriage and what constitutes success and failure in the novel using the language of companionate marriage and suicide.

Suicide as a Failed Bildungsroman

The connection between a lack of narrative agency and suicide results in a failed process of subject formation and, thus, a failed *Bildungsroman.* This relationship becomes evident through Jane's ability to deploy the language of suicide against others and their inability to respond to such a characterization. Characterizing others as suicidal illustrates Jane's recognition of their stunted processes of development. Jane discusses this looming threat of failed development through the motif of suicide in the novel. Suicide becomes a particularly useful characterization in order to consider examples of stunted development, because suicide is *self*-murder.[96] The term itself emphasizes the personal agency required in such an action, which Jane connects to a process of development. Although Jane becomes the main actor in deploying this term against other characters, she uses the term to make the argument that they have failed in their process of subject formation.

The connection between a lack of narrative agency and suicide in *Jane Eyre* has not been explored by critics; however, understanding scholarly conceptions of suicide in other *Bildungsromane* illustrates how Jane-as-narrator's definition of the act connects directly to issues of subject formation. Discussing Brontë's *Shirley,* Gilbert and Gubar argue that suicide is a

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[96] Jed Esty describes "the trope of the frozen youth, the stunted individual who cannot or will not grow up" in *Unseasonable Youth,* p. ix. Jeffers in *Apprenticeships* similarly describes the novels that "end with heroes dead, blocked, or deracinated," p. 50.

"symbol of female protest" and escape from patriarchal society (Gilbert and Gubar 388). Suicide in *Jane Eyre,* however, is not simply an act of a rebellious female. Jane's ability to apply the term to both men and women, inverting gendered understandings of the term in the process, suggests that suicide in the novel functions more broadly than Gilbert and Gubar consider. Describing suicide in Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers,* Lisa Downward and Giovanna Summerfield write, "Suicide, a personal decision to end this torment to oneself and to others is to be clearly distinguished from death through external circumstances…this type of death cannot be seen as a sign of strength but of subjugation and resignation to other forces" (Downward and Summerfield 66). Downward and Summerfield highlight both the personal agency involved in suicide and the sense of failure in development through the phrase "subjugation and resignation to other forces." In *Jane Eyre,* the suicidal characters submit to Jane-as-narrator's characterization of them as suicidal by not exercising their narrative agency to counter her. Jan's process of development depends upon defining others as suicidal and abject to remove them from her life and the text, because she must establish the differences between herself as a successful subject in society in contrast to these figures. Their inability to counter such a force results in their suicide.

Jane defines failure in the novel as suicide to describe both a physical death and a failure to develop as a subject. This connection between suicide and failure becomes clear through Jane's condemnation of suicide as a passive submission. While starving on the moors before she reaches Moor House, she writes, "to die of want and cold is a fate to which nature cannot submit passively" (Brontë 379). While I have previously discussed the term "submit passively" in the context of Jane's rebellious nature and her refusal to succumb to death, this term more broadly connects to the development of a subject. In contrast to Jane's narrative dexterity that allows her

to become a main actor in her story, suicide reflects a capitulation to external forces that stunts the subject's development in Jane's conception of the term. By deploying the language of suicide against others, Jane highlights their failed development as a Victorian subject. This characterization allows her to jettison them from her life and the text, since they cannot counter such a designation through narrative. This development as a narrator, so crucial to her *Bildungsroman*, depends on her ability to conceptualize success and failure of development. Suicide become a particularly useful term for Jane when considering her own *Bildungsroman,* since she recognizes that her failure to deploy her narrative agency would reflect a passive submission to external forces that would stunt her growth as a subject and a narrator

Conclusion

By blending the genres of the *Bildungsroman* and autobiography, Brontë asserts that women must develop their narrative abilities to establish their places in society. In the same way that Jane redefines success and failure through the language of marriage and suicide, Brontë manipulates traditional understandings of these two genres to provide a reason for women to develop their narrative abilities. By calling attention to Jane's ability to define what constitutes success and failure, Brontë argues that narrative ability allow women to counteract societal forces that attempt to define them. Such action reflects her contained radicalism, because Brontë does not advocate a complete rejection of the system, but explicitly delineates how women can carve out a position for themselves in society that allows for their independence and choice.

The blending of the *Bildungsroman* and autobiography lays the foundations for the modernists' anti-*Bildungsromane.* With an emphasis on Jane's self-conscious processes of development and her ability to articulate what constitutes success and failure, Brontë uses the autobiography and *Bildungsroman* to reveal the agency required in a woman's process of

development as a narrator and a subject in Victorian society. This agency highlights the artificiality of subject and narrative development. As Summerfield and Downward state, "the end product of Bildung is an apparent coalescence of the ego" (Downeard and Summerfield 144).[97] Their use of the term "apparent" highlights the artificially constructed nature of the ego, recalling Lacan's *méconnaissance*. The fragmentary and false coalescence of the subject develops from an awareness of the active process of development, because Jane uses her narrative abilities in order to deliberately construct herself as separate from the other. This self-conscious process prefigures the twentieth-century novels of awakening.[98] In the "novel of awakening," the female protagonist "will grow mainly by means of her increasing awareness of the limits her environment imposes. Once the developing character has achieved this understanding she may act to improve it" (Downward and Summerfield 149). The tropes of marriage and suicide that proliferate in these later texts reveal the influence of female *Bildungsromane* like *Jane Eyre* that require a self-conscious process of development as both a subject and a narrator.[99] Brontë provides an outlet for the female protagonist based on the "limits her environment imposes" by suggesting that one can maneuver the limits of society through narrative control.

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[97] Moretti in *The Way of the World* similarly argues that the "*Bildungsroman* attempts to build the Ego, and make it the indisputable centre of its own structure," p. 11.
[98] See Downward and Summerfield's *New Perspectives on the European Bildungsroman,* p. 148-149.
[99] Marriage and suicide as themes in the novel of awakening are discussed in Downward and Summerfield's *New Perspectives on the European Bildungsroman,* p. 149.

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