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A Washy Draught and a Husky Morsel: Feeling, Judgment,  
 and the Autonomous Self in *Jane Eyre*  
 by Patrick Fessenden

When Charlotte Brontë's fiction endorses self-control as an ethical ideal, that endorsement is equivocal and qualified. Brontë was acutely aware of the way self-control could be inhibiting and of the difficulty of capturing clearly just what self-control is. According to *The Professor*:

Look at the rigid and formal race of old maids ... self-control is so continually their thought, so perpetually their object, that at last it absorbs the softer and more agreeable qualities of their nature; and they die mere models of austerity, fashioned out of a little parchment and much bone. (171)<sup>1</sup>

It is possible, in other words, to take self-control too far. Through their devotion to principle and careful self-management, old maids have lost some quality essential to human life. Brontë's metaphors describing this essentially psychological claim are richly physical: the petrifying process of self-control eliminates what is soft and "agreeable," emptying them out like costumes hanging on a stand, mere "models" of "parchment and bone" rather than fully realized people. This implies there are two related failures: if there is an interpersonal dimension in the loss of one's agreeableness, there is an intrapersonal element as well. Too much self-control turns one into a model, making authentic action drawn from an inner humanity impossible.

Self-control requires, then, a careful balancing: paradoxically, moral agents must control their self-control and prevent it from overwhelming the "softer" parts of their nature. A fascinating passage from *Jane Eyre* returns to this idea at greater length; comparing Georgiana and Eliza Reed, Jane remarks, "here were two natures rendered, the one intolerably acrid and the other despicably savorless for the want of it. Feeling without judgment is "a washy draught indeed, but judgment untempered by feeling is too bitter and husky a morsel for human deglutition" (201). Again, Brontë uses physical metaphors: feeling without judgment will be diluted and weak.<sup>2</sup> Yet judgment without feeling is similarly flawed: it cannot be digested, either by agents who exert such judgment or by those who must live with them, thus preserving the inter / intrapersonal dimension of the reflections on self-control in *The Professor*.

In one sense, the basic idea that Brontë touches on here was common throughout the nineteenth century: a number of writers argued that moral judgment could not replace feeling but must exist in a dialectical tension with it. Brontë's version of this idea is significantly different from that of George Eliot, for instance, who is less interested in ideal moral judgment than in genuine authenticity.<sup>3</sup> For her, autonomy lies not in the mastery of feeling by judgment or the

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<sup>1</sup> The sentiment is Crimsworth's (*The Professor*); how a character articulates the balance between feeling and judgment says as much about who they are as it does about Brontë's views. My thanks to D.D. Morse and Amber Pouliot for their suggestions on this essay.

<sup>2</sup> *OED* adds that "washy" can mean feeble or lacking in force, a potentially interesting dimension of the claim—perhaps Brontë is suggesting that feeling without judgment lacks the strength to reach its goals.

<sup>3</sup> Eliot claimed that sympathy must correct principle-based moral judgments: see the "men of maxims" passage in *The Mill on the Floss*, which diagnoses the moral failures of those who believe "general rules" can lead to "justice" by themselves, without a "wide fellow-feeling with all that is human" (518). Also, Edmund Burke insisted that "public affections" are necessary "sometimes as supplements, sometimes as correctives, always as aids to law" (172). Brontë is not as concerned about how emotion might correct moral judgment as she is about the task of being oneself.

overcoming of judgment by feeling but in the interaction and balancing of the two.

Of course, this conflict is the great philosophical problem of Romanticism, particularly the alternate philosophical models created by Kant and Rousseau. If, for Kant, autonomy depends on the ability of rational agency to master inclinations, for Rousseau it depends on the expression of certain powerful inclinations, despite our rational attempts to repress them.<sup>4</sup> Rousseau is thus the starting point for what Charles Taylor calls the “Expressivist Turn”: “This notion of an inner voice or impulse, the idea that we find the truth within us, and in particular in our feelings—these were the crucial justifying concepts of the Romantic rebellion” (368-69). The tension between these views is deep and has persisted into contemporary thought. Yet post-Kantian writers like Schiller and ultimately Hegel did not want to abandon the role of rational judgment entirely; instead, they—like Charlotte Brontë—sought to find a model for balancing the two. In her depiction of autonomy, then, Brontë participates at a sophisticated level in the attempts to address a major philosophical problem.

Critics have long recognized the thematic importance of self-control and autonomy in *Jane Eyre*. Writing nearly fifty years ago, John Hagan stated flatly, “*Jane Eyre* is a novel of liberation. A series of quests by Jane for ‘freedom’ and her final attainment of that goal constitute its principle action” (351). Hagan’s summary claim expresses in condensed form what became a near-consensus interpretation of the novel: that the story shows Jane’s development through a series of challenges that threaten to limit her freedom, and that her ultimate success lies in her achievement of financial, psychological, and marital self-control.

What has changed in terms of Brontë criticism is the attitude with which critics regard this progression.<sup>5</sup> In their groundbreaking *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar celebrate Jane’s progress as a story of feminist achievement: here, the problems Jane encounters as she strives for “mature freedom” are allegories for the “difficulties Everywoman in a patriarchal society must meet and overcome” (339). The central concept here is “maturity”; many of the novel’s characters represent forms of agency Jane must resist and overcome in her pursuit of “independent maturity” (350). What this will entail ultimately is the death of Bertha Mason; if her literal death makes Jane’s marriage to Rochester possible, symbolically Bertha represents the uncontrollable sexual energies in Jane herself; it is only after she controls these energies that Jane as a self is firmly established, achieving “wholeness within herself” (362). Maturity, then, is a kind of integration, the “wholeness” that one achieves when potentially wayward and destructive desires are either eliminated or given a place within a structure. Yet Gilbert and Gubar admit that not just any wholeness or maturity will do: an agent cannot simply decide what her desires will be. A central part of Jane’s success, they contend, comes in her recognition that the self is not entirely a thing that is created but a thing that is discovered. In her final refusal of St. John’s offer of a loveless marriage, and corresponding recognition of her persisting love for Rochester, Jane has “wakened to her own self, her own needs” (368). The key word here is “wakened”: the self is not a thing that appears after the formation of a coherent whole: but, rather, a thing that is encountered, something waiting underneath our conscious deliberations. If the uncontrolled feeling Bertha represents must be domesticated in the name of maturity, eliminating it entirely is not good either.

Thus, our “needs”—our persistent desires—lie constantly underneath the wholeness achieved with such

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<sup>4</sup> See Taylor (355-67) for a clear explanation of this divide.

<sup>5</sup> See Nestor, who accepted the notion of *Jane Eyre* as a heroine because of her journey to independence (1987), then claimed the novel marks the limitations and evasions of the agency Jane achieves (1992).

difficulty and potentially threaten it. Subsequent criticism, particularly post-structuralist, has tended to emphasize this element of *Jane Eyre*'s progression. Conceding that the novel is indeed the story of the achievement of autonomy, the counter argument is that the real insight of the book lies in how thoroughly it challenges this model of the self. According to Sally Shuttleworth, "This famous novel of defiant self-assertion persistently undercuts notions of an originating, unified self" (161). She explains that the very structure on which Gilbert and Gubar rely—the self as composed of diverse and conflicting "energies" that are variously negated or endorsed—reflects assumptions about the nature of the self that are heavily inflected with Victorian ideology. Echoing Michel Foucault, Shuttleworth suggests that "Victorian discourse ... pre-defined the forms both of rebellion and conformity" (164).<sup>6</sup> Thus, Jane's expression of her own sexual energy is not a moment of proud self-assertion and resistance to the repressiveness of Victorian psychological discourse; rather, it is a form of agency defined precisely by that discourse: "Jane Eyre is a heroine of individualism who exposes the contradictions of individualist ideology" (176), because she shows how the Victorian individualist self is ultimately merely negative, a sort of arbitrary point that stands over the war between desires, cutting out those elements that seem undesirable. If the wholeness of selfhood is only attainable through an "ever-vigilant state of opposition and warfare," then it hardly seems like freedom at all (175).

This essay explores the possibility that both of these interpretations are correct, even though they disagree with each other. It is plausible that Brontë thoroughly questions the idea of an integrated, "unified" self while simultaneously offering a theory of freedom in which it is the source of autonomy. The worries Shuttleworth traces do not contradict the theory of freedom Brontë offers so much as demonstrate how difficult it is to achieve, and how tenuous it is. While autonomous agency can exist, and while Jane does achieve it, the achievement is not permanent or stable, and requires a constant openness about the possibility that the healthy integrity of self-control has faded into a repressive self-policing. To develop this theory of autonomy, I turn to a recent philosophical debate.

Essayist Harry Frankfurt developed a simple but powerful way of understanding freedom. As he argues in "The Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person" (1971), a straightforward way of thinking about freedom of the will explains it as analogous to freedom of action. If freedom of action is doing what one wants to do, then freedom of the will would be having the will one wants to have. The free agent in this view is thus someone who is "free to will what he wants to will" (20). This is to say that an agent is free not precisely when he is doing what he wants to do, but when he does what he wants to want to do—in other words, when the desire that motivates him to act is a desire he wishes to have. In Frankfurt's terms, freedom stems from the conjunction of first-order desires with second order volitions, and "it is in securing the conformity of his will to his second order volitions, then, that a person exercises freedom of the will."

This basic model of the self suffered from a damaging objection when Gary Watson pointed out that it was unclear why one ought to see the conjunction between second- and first-order desires as somehow especially constitutive of freedom or selfhood. Second-order desires were simply additional desires, without any immediately obvious claim to be the essence of the self, and it was unclear why they should be the end of the line (218). One might think that third-order desires—what we want to want to want to do—are what is really necessary for freedom. But then, of course, it's unclear why one should stop there; with fourth- and fifth-order desires looming in the background,

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<sup>6</sup> According to Foucault, resistance does not exist outside of power but is always, already inscribed within the relationship of power (95).

it becomes clear, Watson concludes, that stopping anywhere along the chain and designating that particular kind of coherence as “freedom” is arbitrary.

It took Frankfurt a number of years to formulate a response, and when he did, it involved a substantial development of a minor point in his original essay. There, he had claimed that a second-order volition involved a “decisive” identification with a first-order desire. In “Identification and Wholeheartedness” (1987), he sought to clarify what precisely was involved in the act of identifying, and why an identification with a desire did not introduce the problem of third-order desires. Here, he introduces the idea of a “decision”; as he puts it, “the person, in making a decision by which he identifies with a desire, *constitutes* himself” (170). Such self-constitutions create the possibility for autonomous action; identifications “define the intrapsychic constraints and boundaries with respect to which a person’s autonomy may be threatened by his own desires.” This is not to say that the desire disappears. Rather, it simply redefines the nature of the conflict: “it eliminates the conflict *within the person* as to which of these desires he prefers to be his motive. The conflict between the *desires* is in this way transformed into a conflict between *one* of them and the *person* who has identified with its rival” (172).

Marya Schechtman’s response to Frankfurt in “Self-Expression and Self-Control” critiques precisely this point. Schechtman notes that Frankfurt’s view rests in part on the common-sense notion that we are most ourselves when we are most self-controlled. This is, for instance, the sense that we invoke when we say something rude, and then excuse ourselves by saying something along the lines of, “I’m sorry, I’m not myself today.” To put it in Frankfurt’s terms, when I say something rude accidentally, I act on a desire that I do not identify with but which has overpowered my usual self-control. As such, there is a real sense in which it is not precisely my self that has acted, a philosophical point I invoke in apologizing.

But, as Schechtman argues, Frankfurt’s view “seems open to challenges based on the fact that we frequently view overly rigid self-control as an impediment to being oneself ... on this picture, the self resides in repudiated desires which break through despite a person’s struggles against them” (413-14). Schechtman goes on to specify this objection in a thought experiment:

Imagine a woman in a traditional American town in the 1950’s who is wholeheartedly committed to fulfilling her duties as a wife and mother as understood by the standards of her social context. She is, however, frequently troubled by desires to take courses at the local college, spend time with her friends, apply for part-time jobs, or get involved in political causes. As powerful and persistent as these desires are, the woman does her best to suppress them. She views them as selfish and unfeminine, and struggles hard to keep them at bay. (416-17)

Schechtman’s point is that our intuitions about this woman differ from those we have about Frankfurt’s examples of self-control. Far from thinking that this woman is succeeding at being herself, because she is effectively suppressing her desires, we think she is failing to be herself for precisely that reason. We imagine, in this sense, that the woman has a “nature” which is being repressed in part by her refusal to acknowledge it. She describes this alternate self-control as a complex of “robust inclinations”; while admitting that the idea of distinction between a “natural” and non-natural inclination is philosophically fraught, she argues that our “stable, coherent, and powerful” inclinations have a special claim to express who we are (415-16).

Schechtman goes on to diagnose Frankfurt’s view with an analogy to the state. He has a “Hobbesian picture of

self-government,” she contends, “because the danger of disintegration is taken to be so pressing that the main objective is to resolve conflicts decisively” (425). Because the self is constituted by its identifications, a failure to identify with any desire, or a conflict between identifications—a state which Frankfurt calls “ambivalence”—threatens the very existence of the self. Constantly in a potential state of dissolution, a firm structure for the self is essential.

Against this view, Schechtman offers the model of a liberal democracy: “stability is of little value if it means subordinating itself to a repressive sovereign” (426). This entails finding ways to give expression to robust inclinations, even when they do not accord with one’s self-conception or previous identifications, under the theory that we can be mistaken about who we really are. This is not to abandon Frankfurt’s basic insight, but to qualify it: “the task of being oneself thus involves seeking the appropriate balance between constraint and liberty—between self-expression and self-control.” Rather than a rigidly repressive structure expelling unwanted desires, the genuinely autonomous self is looser, setting parameters within which desires can conflict without threatening the basic structure of the agent.

As this brief discussion of *Jane Eyre* criticism suggests, the questions raised by Frankfurt and Schechtman are absolutely central to the novel and its critics. To a certain extent, my purpose is simply to bring these two traditions together; a more specific goal considers how *Jane Eyre* responds to Schechtman’s provocative idea of a democratic self, in which desires can conflict without being repressed. *Jane Eyre* shares Schechtman’s basic worry that sometimes self-control can be a form of repression and that autonomy consists in a balance between self-expression and self-control. Most importantly, Brontë is fascinated by the parameters of the self Schechtman gestures at: the progress of *Jane Eyre* is at many points a dramatization of conflicts between desires that hinges on whether such conflicts threaten the self.<sup>7</sup>

The question of the relationship between self-expression and self-control appears at the very beginning of the novel. Jane cannot help but assert herself at Gateshead by protesting her unfair treatment; after Mrs. Reed banishes her to the nursery, Jane famously responds: “What would uncle Reed say to you, if he were alive?” (22). This response was “scarcely voluntary,” coming despite and not because of Jane’s will: “[my] tongue pronounced words without my will consenting to their utterance: something spoke out of me over which I had no control.” Yet there is no doubt that this is Jane’s real self: unwilling to receive Mrs. Reed’s cruelty without protest, Jane’s natural self rises against her voluntary control. At this moment, Brontë’s account of the self aligns with the “robust inclinations” view, where voluntary self-control operates often as a restriction preventing truly autonomous action. This is confirmed a few pages later: when Jane summons the courage to call her aunt hard-hearted and deceitful, she experiences “the strangest sense of freedom . . . as if an invisible bond had burst” (30). The invisible bond, of course, stems from Jane’s tendency to withdraw and avoid notice, which has prevented her from uttering those hard truths.

At Lowood, Brontë sets up a contrast between two models of self-control, thus exemplifying both its promise as a model of agency and a significant objection to it. Helen Burns neatly exemplifies ideal self-control, receiving Miss Scatcherd’s punishment without resentment or anger (43). Moreover, when Jane insists on the importance of acting in a “natural” way, justifying her resistance to Mrs. Reed’s unjust punishment, Helen argues that this actually leads to less happiness: “What a singularly deep impression her injustice seems to have made on your heart! . . . Would you

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<sup>7</sup> These issues appear in Brontë’s other novels as well, notably *Shirley* and *Villette*.

not be happier if you tried to forget her severity, together with the passionate emotions it excited?" (49). In other words, Jane might think her uncontrolled bursts of self-assertion are essential for her happiness, that she cannot restrain herself without feeling repressed and alienated, but in fact this misunderstands her psychological condition. The "passionate emotions" would disappear, Helen implies, if they were not given the opportunity for expression.

Yet Mr. Brocklehurst's sermons on self-control, juxtaposed as they are with Helen's example, serve to call this model of the self into question. His overly rigorous insistence on self-denial, which approves of missing meals and insists on keeping hairstyles plain, satirizes Helen's advocacy of self-control. His conversation with Miss Temple about Julia Severn's curly hair demonstrates this point:

"Why, in defiance of every precept and principle of this house, does she conform to the world so openly—here in an evangelical, charitable establishment—as to wear her hair one mass of curls?"

"Julia's hair curls naturally," returned Miss Temple, still more quietly.

"Naturally! Yes, but we are not to conform to nature: I wish these girls to be the children of Grace . . . Miss Temple, that girl's hair must be cut off entirely." (54)

The point here, of course, is that this takes the repression of self ludicrously far. To cut off one's hair because it suggested a lack of Christian self-discipline is to turn from reasonable self-mastery to self-hatred. Moreover, it is telling that Brocklehurst is not appeased by the argument that Julia's hair curls naturally: clearly, he wants not merely the fact of self-discipline but also the appearance of it. Julia must visibly demonstrate the suppression of her desires, in addition to actually suppressing them. This emphasis on appearance over reality touches on the worry about self-control Schechtman's housewife example embodies: for Brocklehurst, self-discipline matters less as a way to help his students be themselves and more to align them with social norms.

What the dyad between Helen and Brocklehurst suggests is that one's attempts at self-control require constant scrutiny. If they are rational, in the sense that mastery over one's emotions affords a clearer and more direct path to happiness than their unchecked expression, it is always possible for them to shade into a socially determined fanaticism.<sup>8</sup> To fetishize self-control as such is to grant too high a status to socially conditioned forms of rationality, and to fail to recognize how we can be mistaken about ourselves.

The tension resurfaces when Jane returns to Gateshead. Eliza and Georgiana Reed exemplify two opposed failures of agency: Eliza is supremely self-controlled, with a carefully regulated schedule and a plan to become a nun; meanwhile, Georgiana has permitted full indulgence of her desires, becoming "full-blown" and "plump," and interested only in the "sentimental scenes" of her love affairs in London society (194; 199).<sup>9</sup> Not surprisingly, they dislike each other, and their arguments suggest Brontë's worries about their respective forms of self-construction.

Eliza pulls no punches: she calls Georgiana a "fat, weak, puffy, useless thing," who "had no right to be born" (201). The philosophical underpinning of this insult touches the themes of the novel, for Eliza accuses Georgiana of failing to be free, because she has nothing to live for. Georgiana makes "no use of life," in Eliza's diagnosis, and thus Eliza challenges her to "devise a system which will make you independent of all efforts, and all wills, but your own" (201). But Georgiana does not take the criticism at face value. She believes that the real source of Eliza's critique is

<sup>8</sup> There is something perverse in Helen's self-sacrifice: she insists on a self that transcends the social, as when she tells Jane that she cares too much about other people (Kucich 71).

<sup>9</sup> Contrasts between repressive and expressive personalities are characteristic of Brontë's novels (Kucich 41).

jealousy—"I know your spiteful hatred towards me"—and thus implicitly questions whether Eliza's self-control is as dignifying as it at first seems. Perhaps, Georgiana contends, Eliza's self-control is simply a way of hiding and justifying selfishness.

Jane in her narratorial stance waxes philosophical in response to this argument:

True, generous feeling is made small account of by some: but here were two natures rendered, the one intolerably acrid, the other despicably savorless for the want of it. Feeling without judgment is a washy draught indeed, but judgment untempered by feeling is too bitter and husky a morsel for human deglutition. (202)

What is striking about this passage is not that it portrays Eliza as lacking in "true feeling," but that it suggests the same about Georgiana. The adjectives "true" and "generous" do significant theoretical work: in particular, they indicate that a feeling can be transformed by its accord with judgment, and that this is part of what makes it "true." Sailing between the Scylla of feeling without judgment and the Charybdis of judgment untempered by feeling produces a new sort of human emotional life. The phrase "generous" is suggestive as well, particularly if it is taken as synonymous with "true." The suggestion, then, is that our genuine feelings are necessarily altruistic.

The peculiarities of this account of the balance between self-expression and self-control become particularly salient when placed in the context of the novel's most extended dyadic comparison of a self-expressive agent and a self-controlled one: the comparison between Edward Rochester and St. John Rivers. Each character offers his own version of an ideal balance between self-expression and self-control; thus, Jane's choice between the two men represents not a simple, reductive choice between two accounts of autonomy, but rather a more complex negotiation of alternate ways of balancing them.

That Rochester embodies an ideal of self-expression is clear in both the major and minor details of his plotline. Generally, he refuses to be bound by social strictures or his own principles, having affairs with mistresses across Europe and proposing marriage to Jane despite his already existing marriage to Bertha Mason. Minor details confirm this reading: Mrs. Fairfax's line that "none of us can help our nature" is emblematic of the way Rochester regards himself (108). Concordantly, Rochester both mocks and admires Jane for possessing a kind of self-control he does not have, perhaps cannot have, and certainly at moments wishes not to have. He alternates between admiring Jane's "unique mind," which can help him be a better man, and mocking Jane for her self-possession, as when he reads her forehead while pretending to be a gypsy: "Reason sits firm and holds the reins, and she will not let the feelings burst away and hurry her to wild chasms" (122, 171).

In keeping with this theory of the source of autonomy, for Rochester the primary role of judgment and "reason" is not to direct the self but to facilitate its expression, an ideal he articulates in an analysis of Jane's art. When he examines her drawings, Jane explains she has been "tormented by the contrast between my idea and my handiwork ... in each case I had imagined something which I was quite powerless to realize" (108). Rochester accepts this assessment at face value, remarking that she has merely "secured the shadow" of her thought, but that she lacks "enough of the artist's skill and science to give it full being." This account of art allegorizes the purpose of reason in Rochester's view: rational judgment is a kind of "skill," a technique one might use to realize the core ideas in oneself.

St. John Rivers offers a stark contrast. Explaining his view to Jane, he remarks that "It is hard work to control the workings of inclination, and turn the bent of nature," but "God has given us, in a measure, the power to make our



own fate” (308). In particular, we can counter our robust inclinations by focusing on other desires: “when our will strains after a path we may not follow,” we do not need to “starve,” but must simply “seek another nourishment for the mind.” This resonates with Frankfurt’s model of the self: our desires are strong, but we can build our own “fate” out of them, by cultivating some desires and resisting others. Moreover, St. John’s view of the self emerges as a central backdrop to his marriage proposal. When he asks Jane to marry him and be a missionary, she demurs precisely because she does not feel this would be an expression of herself: in her words, she has no “vocation” for the work St. John is calling her to do (343). Somewhat surprisingly, St. John says he does not care: as he puts it, “it is not the insignificant private individual—the mere man, with the man’s selfish sense—I wish to mate: it is the missionary” (347). In keeping with his theory of self-control, St. John freely admits he has no interest in Jane’s pre-reflective, “natural” inclinations; those are merely Jane’s contingent, human self. Rather, he is compelled by her capacity for self-control, and that “missionary” capacity is what he regards as her real self.

This informs his alternate account of what it is to balance self-expression and self-control. St. John explains the relationship between religion and nature thus:

From the minute germ, natural affection, she has developed the overshadowing tree, philanthropy. From the wild, stringy root of human uprightness, she has reared a due sense of the Divine justice. Of the ambition to win power ... she has formed the ambition to spread my Master’s kingdom ... So much has religion done for me; turning the original materials to the best account, pruning and training nature. (320)

Far from merely helping to realize nature, then, religion has taken natural phenomena and, through a process of depersonalization, turned them into elements that meet new goals. The natural affection of families becomes an impersonal philanthropy; natural self-assertion becomes abstract justice; and finally, selfish ambition is sublated and transmuted into the universal goal of spreading Christianity. Concordantly, the inclinations and drives of our psyche are useful primarily as raw materials: they form a clay that our reflective agency can shape into something worthy. Significantly, the regretful tone with which St. John concludes these remarks — “she could not eradicate nature, nor will it be eradicated” until the Judgment day—suggests that the truly principled self would have eradicated nature entirely had it been possible to do so. Given the unavoidable fact of our empirical existence, religion reformed those elements into something useful. Yet, the aspiration is still the entire elimination of our natural selves.

Jane’s own view emerges through the negotiation between these two extremes. The novel reveals how subtly Jane embodies a similar kind of agency to both men, and narrates ideals in accordance with them. Thus, when Jane is at Thornfield, her self-control slips, and she forcibly expresses herself: she tells Rochester he’s not handsome; she spills a cup of tea when a letter arrives from him; and most significantly, she falls in love with him, despite the attempt “to extirpate from my soul the germs of love” (112, 138, 149). But perhaps more interestingly, this slippage affects the adult Jane’s narration and the ideals she expresses: she asserts that she is not jealous of Blanche Ingram, since her rival “was not genuine ... nothing bloomed spontaneously on that soil” (158). Thus, Rochester’s own ideals, which stress genuineness and authenticity and minimize reflective self-control, reappear in both Jane’s actions and her reflections.

At the same time, Jane demonstrates significant self-control in her life at Morton. Witnessing St. John River’s harsh mastery of his feelings for Rosamund Oliver, which he curbs the way “a resolute rider would curb a rearing

stead,” so Jane too masters her frustration with the “torpid” qualities of her students in order to teach them (311). More important, she masters her lingering affections for Rochester: although she spends her nights in “burst[s] of passion,” when it is time to open school the next day, she is “tranquil, settled” (312-13). The ideals of the reflective narrator match this; in a revealing moment, when Jane learns she has inherited enough money to make her rich, the narrator addresses the reader: “It is a fine thing, reader, to be rich ... but one does not jump, and spring, and shout hurrah! ... One begins to consider responsibilities” (325). Given the transformative nature of this fortune, one might have thought a hurrah or two appropriate; it is difficult to imagine the Jane of Thornfield reacting with such sober self-control.

But Jane is not as malleable as these changes might suggest. She is committed enough to an ideal of principled self-control to leave Rochester when he proposes that she become his mistress, and committed enough to the importance of self-expression to leave St. John when he proposes a loveless marriage. In her final return to Rochester, she is not surrendering to self-expression, then, but rather demonstrating a new kind of integrated agency. We might characterize this agency by thinking about Jane’s own reflections on balancing self-expression and self-control. They are scattered but suggestive: for instance, she commends the school inspectors who can combine “compassion with uprightness” (71). More substantially, she speaks of how she is happy to submit to Diana Rivers’s judgment: “It was my nature,” Jane tells us, “to feel pleasure in yielding to an authority supported like hers: and to bend, where my conscience and self-respect permitted, to an active will” (293). Jane’s return to the idea of intersubjectivity is revealing: for her, natural feelings are inherently public, elicited by other people and experienced with and through them. The balance of compassion with uprightness appeals to the same structure: feeling in need of constraint is neither negative nor private, but instead an outflow of instinctive moral emotion. Again, such emotions only become “true, generous feeling” when they accord with principled reflection (202). This is to suggest that the way Jane mimics Rochester around Rochester and St. John around St. John is not an accident: it is instead characteristic of the balance between feeling and judgment she embodies. When sharing another’s ideals and forms of agency accords with her own core principles, she finds expression of her natural feelings in sharing them.

This is how Jane hides herself around Rochester. As she thinks at one point, “I like you more than I can say; but I’ll not sink into a bathos of sentiment: and with this needle of repartee I’ll keep you from the edge of the gulf too” (233). The key word is “bathos”: Jane is not afraid of her emotion or unwilling to express it, but she is concerned that this emotion is not really herself, not really “true.” As she eventually concludes, autonomy lies neither in self-expression nor self-control but in a state where the two forces constantly check each other, thereby constituting a healthy integrity. The force of natural feeling constantly pushes for expression, ensuring that the integrated self is not maintained purely through the force of repressive self-restraint but through a genuine integration of compatible feelings. Simultaneously, rational self-control is constantly monitoring, asking whether the expressed emotions are indeed reflective of the agent’s goals and not wayward psychic energies. While it is possible to emphasize Jane’s attempts to manipulate Rochester, it is also possible to see that manipulation not as a disguise but as self-realization.

Much has been made of the role of imperialism in Jane’s self-constitution, and of the connection between self-control at the psychological level and imperial rule at the political level.<sup>10</sup> As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak contends, the “imperialist self” must locate and domesticate the Other in a way that “consolidates” itself (253). Bertha’s role is

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<sup>10</sup> See Spivak; Boumehla; Hiltner; and Morse.

to be destructive and suicidal, her animalistic behavior serving to justify “the social mission of the colonizer” (251). Having produced the colonial subjectivity in Bertha that created her insanity, it is now possible for the colonizers to define themselves as rational saviors. The view Spivak attacks is close to that which Frankfurt defends: that is, we establish the self through a process of consolidation, one that precisely involves identifying various desires as different and “Other” than ourselves. While Spivak regards *Jane Eyre* as complicit in this project, Shuttleworth claims the critique of imperialism is present in the novel itself. In this view, the contrast between Bertha’s appearance and Jane’s self-control reveals a form of destructive policing: “Bertha functions less as a self-consolidating Other than as a destabilizing agent, undermining her attempts to construct a fiction of integrated selfhood” (164). Bertha does not permit Jane to consolidate herself so much as she negates Jane’s apparently successful project of self-constitution through integration and consolidation.

There is another way to read the novel, one that extends Shuttleworth’s point about its awareness of imperialist critique into the view of the self it advocates. Schechtman’s work offers a name for it: one might say Jane embodies a genuinely democratic self, contrasting with the imperial control that victimized Bertha. The worry about imperial selfhood is a version of the worry about a too-dominant self-control, one where the goal is to prevent insurgency of wayward desires and preserve unity above all else. Not surprisingly, it is most clearly instantiated in St. John’s ideals, which insist on de-personalizing and transforming nature into a useful element. In this sense, Jane’s rejection of St. John is at least partially a rejection of the imperial self; moreover, her alternative, in which self-respect delimits an area in which the expression of emotion might be permitted without restraint, is something much more democratic. Jane’s final self can tolerate dissent and outburst within a psychological structure, and in this way feeling and judgment can coexist.

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