

## The Victorian Ideal: Male Characters in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* Suzanne Hesse (2004)

The ideal Victorian male should have certain characteristics such as honor, loyalty, intelligence, moral uprightness and it does not hurt to have a good income. While this characterization is not terribly realistic, it was the societal ideal and for many authors of the time, their heroines could only marry such men and thereby secure a happy life. Anne Brontë demonstrates this in *Agnes Grey*. However, the male characters in Charlotte Brontë's works do not follow this tradition. Beginning with Alfred the Duke of Zamorna in her juvenilia, Brontë creates male characters that may fit certain characteristics of that male ideal, but generally fail to meet the high standards. Charlotte was a strong woman and her beliefs about gender inequality are widely known. It seems then that this need to denigrate her male characters, at least from that societal ideal, comes from a desire to make her female characters supplant their male counterparts while still maintaining their respectability and their "proper" place in society. From Master John, Brocklehurst, Rochester and St. John in *Jane Eyre* to Dr. John Graham and Paul Emmanuel in *Villette* we have male characters who are either greedy, prone to jealousy, dishonest, hypocritical, or some horrible combination of the above. These characteristics, not only break with the Victorian ideal and give us more realistic heroes, they serve another, more important, purpose for Charlotte. They give Jane and Lucy models to learn from and enemies to fight against, and in the end, allow them to surpass the ideal male "hero" and create a new feminine hero for the Victorian age.

The idea of the gentleman was changing during the Victorian era. It was no longer strictly a title given to those of high birth. The word gentleman began to take on a moral sense as well and the role and duty of the gentleman was focused more on conduct than on property wealth or station in life. One still would not call a coal miner a gentleman, but the dominant male characters in both *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* hold positions in life (clergymen, property owner, doctor, professor) that would have required they follow that gentlemanly code. One description of a gentleman's qualities comes from John Henry Cardinal Newman in a treatise on university education for Roman Catholics. Newman states,

It is almost a definition of a gentleman to say he is one who never inflicts pain. [. . .] From a long-sighted prudence, he observes the maxim of ancient sage, that we should ever conduct ourselves towards our enemy as if he were one day to be our friend. He has too much good sense to be affronted at insults [. . .]. He is patient, forbearing, and resigned, on philosophical principles; he submits to pain, because it is inevitable, to bereavement because it is irreparable, and to death, because it is his destiny. If he engages in controversy of any kind, his disciplined intellect preserves him from the blunder.

Whereas the male characters in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* encompass some of these characteristics, none have them in spades, or they take one of these particular characteristics to the extreme. What is interesting is that both Jane and Lucy Snowe have most if not all of these qualities. They are both resigned to their fates and accept what befalls them. They do their best to avoid causing pain, unless it is used to instruct for a moral good, and they are both disciplined and thoughtful and their discipline helps save them from predicaments that would impugn any other ladies' honor. In reality, these women are more gentlemanly than any of the gentlemen in the stories.

The first male character presented in *Jane Eyre* is young Master John Reed, and it is obvious from the start that he is not what we would call an ideal Victorian.

John Reed was a schoolboy of fourteen years old; [. . .] large and stout for his age, with a dingy and unwholesome skin; thick lineaments in a spacious visage, heavy limbs and large extremities. He gorged himself habitually at table, which made him bilious and gave him a dim and bleared eye and flabby cheeks. [Jane Eyre Vol. 1, 4]

He is described as sallow and sickly, stocky and gluttonous. He has an obviously overbearing presence, at least for Jane and, as we soon learn, for his mother and sisters too. He is domineering and bullies Jane simply because she is an orphan and not worthy of him or what "he" (by way of his future inheritance) believes he provides for her. He is indulged in this behavior by his mother who caters to his every whim and feels that he is the wronged party in any dispute. Jane is very aware of this indulgence and how it affects her. She is obedient to John even though she knows she will come to harm. For example, when he tells her to go stand by the window she does and the following happens.

I did so, not at first aware what was his intention; but when I saw him lift and poise the book and stand in act to hurl it, I instinctively started aside with a cry of alarm: not soon enough, however; the volume was flung, it hit me, and I fell, striking my head against the door and cutting it. The cut bled, the pain was sharp: my terror had passed its climax and other feelings succeeded. [Jane Eyre Vol.1, 6]

These feelings Jane talks about turn out to be rage and a feeling of injustice. She strikes back at John with her only available weapon; words. For her outburst, she is sent to the red-room and, after this experience, Jane feels true indignation for the first time. She knows the way she is treated in the Reed household is not what she deserves and she looks for a way out. This first dominant male character gives Jane an understanding of her own self-worth and an understanding of justice in general that she may not have had if she had been treated kindly by Master John. John, in his turn, sees an end that fits his life. He dies in disgrace of alcoholism and indulgence with many debts owed and nothing real to show for his life.

Jane is then introduced to Mr. Brocklehurst, the most hypocritical of all of the characters in *Jane Eyre*. He attests to his morality and charity and that all men, and especially young girls should be brought up in a way that teaches them humility and respect for their betters and he uses God and the Bible to make his points. He threatens his "wards" with hell and damnation if they don't walk the line that he pretends to walk himself. Yet, he does maintain some of the ideals of the Victorian gentleman. He attempts charity and supposedly, as a church man, that should mean his understanding of charity and his attempts to help should be genuine. We find, however, that his charitable actions are no more than a cover for what he believes will get him into heaven and a means to promote his superiority, his family and their wealth. When we first meet Brocklehurst, we aren't even presented with a man. We are given a statue. "I looked up at ða black pillar!-such, at least, appeared to me, at first sight, the straight, narrow, sable-clad shape standing erect on the rug: the grim face at the top was like a carved mask, placed above the shaft by way of capital" (Bronte 34). When Jane first sees him, she is frightened of him. She is aware the Mrs. Reed has told him things about her that are not true and she worries when he finally makes an appearance at Lowood that he will do something to her. While this does happen, it is his actions towards the entire population of students that evidence his hypocritical nature. After ordering only one clean outfit per week per girl and the cutting of their hair he gives a speech about his duty.

'I have a Master to serve whose kingdom is not of this world: my mission is to mortify in these girls the lusts of the flesh; to teach them to clothe themselves with shame-facedness and sobriety, not with braided hair and costly apparel; and each of the young persons before us has a string of hair twisted in plaits which vanity itself might have woven: these, I repeat, must be cut off; think of the time wasted, of-' [Jane Eyre Vol. 1, 78]

As he's finishing this speech, his wife and daughters enter the room wearing the finest fashions in the finest cloths and their hair is done in the latest style, with fake curls. It would seem that a man who truly believed in the dangers of beautiful clothes and hair would be more concerned about the actions and appearance of his wife and daughters than those of his wards. However, he is only concerned about those who are below him in class. They are baser, and, therefore, need more education and greater restraint.

We see that Jane is affected by this action and exchange simply by the fact that it is recorded for the reader. She allows us to see his hypocritical nature without having to state it. He then turns his attentions on her. Instead of helping her, the way a good clergyman would do if he believed she had done wrong, he instructs those around her to avoid her for fear she will poison the lot. He does not offer guidance or a helping hand, he simply impugns her character and leaves. But far from injuring her, his actions which show us his true nature, give strength to Jane.

I, who had said I could not bear the shame of standing on my natural feet in the middle of the room, was now exposed to general view on a pedestal of infamy. What my sensations were, no language can describe; but just as they all rose, stifling my breath and constricting my throat, a girl came up and passed me: in passing she lifted her eyes. What a strange light inspired them! [. . .] I mastered a rising hysteria, lifted up my head, and took a firm stand on the stool. (Jane Eyre Vol. 1, 82)

Jane senses that others see the injustice that has happened, and she no longer feels terrible. She realizes her power and that others see in her something that Brocklehurst does not.

Thus far in the novel, the domineering men in Jane's life have caused her anxiety, fear and anger. From the beginning of their acquaintance, Jane and Mr. Rochester seem to enjoy an amiable, if not always easy, relationship. Granted, later there are difficulties and misunderstanding, but for the most part they speak with ease and can share each other's company and ideas. They become, in turns, equals and finally, Jane becomes the hero of the story. The supposed "hero" of *Jane Eyre*, Mr. Rochester, does not follow the Victorian ideal. His appearance is not heroic in any way, he has an illicit past that we soon find out about, and he keeps secrets that, while adding to his mystery, subtract from his honesty and forthrightness. When Rochester is introduced he is definitely not the white knight riding in to save the day. In fact, Jane has to rescue her hero and rather than being inspired or awed by him, she finds him unremarkable.

He had a dark face, with stern features and a heavy brow; his eyes and gathered eyebrows looked ireful and thwarted just now; he was past youth but had not reached middle age; perhaps he might be thirty-five. I felt no fear of him, and but little shyness. Had he been a handsome, heroic-looking young gentleman, I should not have dared to stand thus questioning him against his will, and offering my services unasked. (Jane Eyre Vol. 1, 144)

This definitely does not inspire her to soliloquize on Rochester's goodness or how she was struck by his natural goodness. In fact, it seems the moment holds little sway with her memory. "The incident had occurred and was gone for me: it was an incident of no moment, no romance, no interest in a sense [. . .] (*Jane Eyre* Vol. 1, 147). The meeting only breaks up her otherwise normal day. In almost any other romantic novel, one would expect the lovers first meeting to illicit fireworks or exchanged looks of understanding, but none of this occurs because Rochester is not inspiring, at least not at first glance. At their first meeting Jane, not Rochester, offers assistance. She assumes the man's role and guides her would-be hero to a safe place.

Rochester grows in Jane's esteem, which is easily seen as the story unfolds. However, there are many elements of his character that leave the reader, and Jane, questioning

his integrity, his history and thereby his idealism. Unlike most Victorian heroes and heroines, Jane and Rochester do not flirt in the real sense; they don't share coy glances or have polite conversations about the weather. They are both plain speaking, frank and honest in their day to day conversation. In this sense, Rochester almost follows the ideal. He does not hide the truth about Adele's origins, and he is honest with Jane about his feelings for her and her abilities. In fact he even tells Jane about his faults and his unwillingness to repent. However, that admission does not make him the ideal gentleman. If anything, it demonstrates his lack of their most important quality; humility.

'Dread remorse when you are tempted to err, Miss Eyre: remorse is the poison of life.' 'Repentance is said to be its cure sir.' 'It is not its cure. Reformation may be its cure; and I could reform — I have strength yet for that — if — but where is the use of thinking of it, hampered, burdened, cursed as I am? Besides, since happiness is irrevocably denied me, I have a right to get pleasure out of life: and I will get it, cost what it may.'

(Jane Eyre Vol. 1, 174)

In this passage, Rochester shows himself the exact opposite of the proper Victorian gentleman. In fact, he sounds almost hedonistic. Rather than accept what life has given him, as Jane has done, Rochester is determined to tempt fate and throw caution to the wind. He remarks about his hardships and his trials, but he is unwilling to resign himself to them and reform his life. Jane seems to understand his feelings and rather than admonish him for his resistance to change, she uses logic to show him how he will eventually have to pay for the sins of his past. Her argument is strong because she takes his own words and uses them against him. "Only one thing I know: you said you were not as good as you should like to be, and that you regretted your own imperfection. I know one thing I can comprehend: [. . .]. It seems to me, that if you tried hard, you would in time find it possible to become what you yourself would approve;" (*Jane Eyre* Vol. 1, 176). What is interesting here is that Jane looks for Rochester to approve of himself. She does not look for him to change for her approval or for society or for the good of his ward, but simply for himself. It is arguable that if Jane had argued for his change for her benefit, the discussion would have had no benefit to Rochester. Jane understands her role in his life and how she can benefit him. She has placed herself as an equal and gives him guidance as a friend would, not the way an employee would advise an employer. Her steadfastness makes up for his questionable character and his contradictory nature.

Jane's final step to independence also derives from Rochester's failure as an ideal gentleman. His dishonesty leads to her running away and forcing herself to be independent, really for the first time in her life. Until this point, Jane has had another adult to rely on or a plan to follow. When Rochester's true history unfolds, Jane has no plan of action: she reacts and escapes. She does not know where she is going or what will become of her, but she understands the need to be free from the dangerous situation that was created.

Mr. Rochester was not to me what he had been; for he was not what I had thought him. I would not ascribe vice to him; I would not say he had betrayed me: but the attribute of stainless truth was gone from his idea; and from his presence I must go: that I perceived well. When I how - whither, I could not yet discern: but he himself, I doubted not, would hurry me from Thornfield; (*Jane Eyre* Vol.2, 74).

Because of Rochester's deceit, Jane is forced into a situation where she finally finds friends and family of her own. She is found to be independently wealthy and she finds herself, if not happy, at least with content her life. However, she still feels a strong connection and a duty to Rochester. He shaped part of her life and allowed her, through his faults, to become the heroine that Charlotte Brontë requires. Jane can return to Rochester, after he is fully beaten down and she takes the heroic role. She is not dependent on his money or his position in society. He is now dependent on her for her sight and her nursing skills and he has realized, as she told him he would, that he would reform. "'And to bear with my infirmities, Jane: to overlook my deficiencies.' 'Which are none, sir, to me. I love you better now, when I can really be useful to you, than I did in your state of proud independence, when you disdained every part but that of giver and protector'" (*Jane Eyre* Vol. 2, 274). They depend on each other, however, for mutual love and support. This relationship would not have been possible, however, without Rochester's deception and his crippling.

Before this happy ending occurs, however, Jane is met by another dominating male figure. St. John, whom we later discover is Jane's cousin, is overbearing and domineering in a way no other male character in this book has been. While, like Brocklehurst, St. John uses dogma and religion for his power, he is not hypocritical about his practices. Nor is he like Anne Brontë's Mr. Weston; the good, handsome, caring and unassuming clergymen. St. John uses religion like a weapon and is overzealous to the point of injury. He wants to use what he can around him to make his quest to God more effective, and, somewhat like Rochester, he is unafraid of the pain he may cause himself and those around him. The physical description of St. John is delayed almost a full chapter after he is introduced due to Jane's illness. When it comes, however, it is not necessarily what we would expect of her rescuer.

He was young I [ . . . ] his face riveted the eye; it was like a Greek face, very pure in outline; quite a straight, classic nose; quite an Athenian mouth and chin. [ . . . ] Yet he whom it describes scarcely impressed one with the idea of a gentle, a yielding, an impressible, or even of a placid nature. Quiescent as he now sat, there was something about his nostril, his mouth, his brow, which, to my perceptions, indicated elements within either restless, or hard, or eager. (*Jane Eyre* Vol 2, 140-1).

St. John is physically something like Brocklehurst, only younger and, instead of being described as a dark statue, he is more ivory or marble. Still, just as unmoving and set in

his ways. It seems that in some ways, St. John represents what Brocklehurst could have been.

For Jane, St. John becomes a family member, a provider, and then a tormenter. He urges Jane to marry him so that she may accompany him on his missionary work to India. Jane, knowing that he does not love her, and she not loving him, resists. Instead of accepting or plying her like a gentleman would, St. John threatens her with eternal damnation. His hardness and unwillingness to compromise with Jane and take her as a sister instead of a wife again puts Jane in a difficult position. If she goes with St. John, it will be as an equal, never as his wife because, as she has observed, he does not have the qualities of a husband. He is entirely too self-centered and focused on his goal. If she goes with him as his wife, it is entirely likely he will work her to death and then pray for her martyred soul instead of working with her, keeping her out of harms way. Jane understands this and rather than bend to his will, she remains strong and consistent in her will.

He prizes me as a soldier would a good weapon; and that is all. Unmarried to him, this would never grieve me; but can I let him complete his calculations — coolly put into practice his plans — go through the wedding ceremony? Can I receive from him the bridal ring, endure all the forms of love (which I doubt he would not scrupulously observe) and know that the spirit was quite absent? Can I bear the consciousness that every endearment he bestows is a sacrifice made on principle? No: such a martyrdom would be monstrous. I will never undergo it. (*Jane Eyre* Vol. 2, 220)

Jane knows herself to well to consign herself to a fate that does not agree with her physically, or spiritually. St. John's unwillingness to bend only strengthens Jane's resolve and she argues further. "The veil fell from his hardness and despotism. [. . .] I was with an equal — one with whom I might argue — one whom, if I saw good, I might resist" (*Jane Eyre* Vol. 2, 222). Jane knows her abilities, and she is able to see St. John for who he truly is. Her past encounters with hypocrites and liars and her experience with injustice gives her strong weapons with which she can defend herself and her honor against any man who might try to suppress her. St. John will not be successful because he is not sincere and Jane, it seems, despises insincerity more than anything else.

Jane surpasses all of the gentlemen in the novel to become the character with the truest qualities and the ability to deal with any situation presented to her with grace and dignity. She becomes a heroine in the true sense in that she not only saves herself multiple times, but she saves her hero from a life of desperate solitude. This evolution in her character would not have been possible, however, if it were not for the fact that there are no real gentlemen in the novel who would have taken Jane's place and swept her off her feet. Thus she is equal to a gentleman if not above him, and that allows the

reader to see her as the strongest character in the novel. Lucy Snowe's predicament in *Villette* is quite similar to Jane's. She is, we believe, orphaned at a young age and forced to make her own way in the world. Lucy, without any real prospects, takes a big chance and moves to *Villette*, a small European town and is able to secure a job in one night. Like Jane, she is determined and also like Jane she is forced to deal with two domineering "gentlemen." What is interesting in these dominant characters is that none of them can truly be called Englishmen. Dr. John, while born and raised in Bretton is of Irish descent, and that would exclude him from many high circles in England. Monsieur Paul is both *Villette*, and therefore a foreigner as well as Catholic. Because of their otherness these characters cannot and will not fit the Victorian ideal.

Lucy is faced with two men whom she both loves and admires, but who both cause her serious vexation and pain. Dr. John Graham Bretton, though known to her at a young age, does not have a strong influence on her life until she finds work at Madame Beck's school. At this time, Dr. John has become a respected member of the community, working with the poor and the wealthy alike. He assists Lucy when she first comes to *Villette*, though they do not recognize each other, and he is quick to help her when she suffers from what we assume is a nervous breakdown. In these ways John is very much the Victorian ideal. He works for a living and does not discriminate between the classes. He is quick to help those in need, and he has a kind and loving heart. However, he is also quick to jealousy, and he eventually forgets about Lucy and their friendship becomes more like an acquaintanceship. When we are first introduced to Dr. John (Graham) we are given an account of his character that does not seem to change much as he grows older.

Graham was at that time a handsome, faithless-looking youth of sixteen. I say faithless-looking, not because he was really of a very perfidious disposition, but because the epithet strikes me as proper to describe the fair, Celtic (not Saxon) character of his good looks; his wavy light auburn hair, his supple symmetry, his smile frequent, and destitute neither of fascination nor of subtlety (in no bad sense). A spoiled, whimsical boy he was in those days! (*Villette* 14).

When we are reintroduced to Graham (now Dr. John) he is still whimsical and somewhat spoiled. He has become more serious and is devoted to his work, but he still enjoys playing games, especially with Madame Beck and her daughters. He indulges their habits in calling on him when he is not needed because, it seems, he enjoys the attention and enjoys the fact that he has admirers. However, he has turned his true attentions to a beautiful, yet flighty and somewhat mean-spirited girl, Ginerva Fanshawe. Dr. John, blinded by her beauty is unable to see her true nature despite her flirtations with another man and Lucy's warnings to him until Miss Fanshawe slights his mother. Rather than forgiving the action, however, as a true gentleman would and attempting to maintain a friendship at least, Ginerva loses all his respect and his attention and he no longer even wishes to speak to her. Where Lucy has always known

Ginerva's faults and accepted her in spite of them, Dr. John realizes them and determines she is no longer worthy of him or his attentions.

'Do you know, the curling lip, and sarcastically leveled glass thus directed, gave me a most curious sensation?' 'Think nothing of it, Dr. John: it is not worthwhile. If Ginerva were in a giddy mood, as she is eminently tonight, she would make no scruple of laughing at the mild, pensive Queen, or that melancholy King. She is not actuated by malevolence, but sheer heedless folly. To a featherbrained schoolgirl nothing is sacred.' 'But you forget: I have not been accustomed to look on Miss Fanshawe in the light of a featherbrained schoolgirl. [. . .]' 'Hem! That was your mistake.' (*Villette* 205)

Not only is Dr. John incapable of seeing Ginerva's nature until she slights his mother, he is also unforgiving and projects qualities on her, like mean-spiritedness, that simply do not describe her. She is foolhardy and selfish and an attention-monger, but he forgets that she is young and rash and might change if given the opportunity. Lucy understands this, and is surprised at Dr. John's ferocity and unwillingness to forgive and accept. Where Lucy really should be the jealous one, and treat Ginerva like her rival, she does not. In this way, she assumes the character John should have. Women, generally, were supposed to be the petty and unforgiving sex (Ginerva exemplifies this). Dr. John, the gentleman, is supposed to forgive and move on. Lucy does this instead and in so doing raises in the reader's esteem.

Lucy is also slighted by Dr. John, but through no fault of her own. She develops an affection for him which is not reciprocated, mostly because John simply does not see her. His attentions are drawn away from her towards Paulina, and instead of going into a jealous fit, which she rightfully could have, Lucy resigns herself to her fate yet again. She takes what she believed were tokens of John's affections and literally buries them and her hopes for the future in order to appease her mind and move forward. "I wept one sultry shower, heavy and brief. But soon I said to myself 'The Hope I am bemoaning and suffered and made me suffer much: it did not die till it was full time: following an agony so lingering, death ought to be welcome'" (*Villette* 276). Lucy realizes that her love for Dr. John has gone as far as it can go and she must move on to something else. She states that her affection did not die until it had reached its fulfillment, and that realization and Dr. John's inability to see her, force her into a new stage in her life. Lucy must focus her attention elsewhere, and she submits to her pain and her fate because she understands its inevitability. Because of Dr. John's blindness, Lucy is able to build her friendship with Monsieur Paul, and she works to understand the fiery little man who is an enigma to her as well as to the reader.

Monsieur Paul Emmanuel gives Lucy her position as a *gouvernante* in the Beck household. But he is of little consequence to Lucy while she focuses her attention on Dr. John. When Monsieur Paul does show up, he is generally yelling at students or

admonishing Lucy for her "fiery" nature. His position as professor of literature at the pensionnant as well as at the local university demands respect. However, he is not a good model in the way he deals with those around him. He doesn't persuade or ask when he needs assistance, he simply demands. It seems he has no empathy for his students, his cousin, Madame Beck or for any other teacher, especially Lucy. When we are finally given a description of Monsieur Paul, he, like Rochester does not look like your typical Victorian hero.

A dark little man he certainly was; pungent and austere. Even to me he seemed a hard apparition, with his close-shorn, black head, his broad, sallow brow, his thin cheek, his wide and quivering nostril, his thorough glance and his hurried bearing. Irritable he was; one heard that, as he apostrophized with vehemence the awkward squad under his orders. (*Villette* 120)

Monsieur Paul is irritable at best, and fiercely critical at his worst. He has strong ideas concerning Lucy and her conduct and takes every opportunity to admonish her. Whether it is for studying a portrait of a nude Cleopatra, wearing a pink dress, or sitting too close to her friend Dr. John, Paul seems always to be in her ear, hissing and mocking. He does not keep Lucy from pain; he in fact is the cause of many of her tears. This information comes in bits and pieces, and it is not until after Lucy has finished her infatuation with Dr. John that we get a real representation of Paul and why he behaves the way he does. By the time we receive this information, Lucy is beginning to understand Paul more and more. "Yet, when M. Paul sneered at me, I wanted to possess them more fully; his injustice stirred in me ambitious wishes — it imparted a strong stimulus — it gave wings to aspiration. [ . . . ] but by and by it only warmed the blood in my veins, and sent added action to my pulses" (*Villette* 331). His mocking and admonishing spurs her on in ways that, if he had been sweet and gentle, might not have encouraged her to push herself the way she does. Through her tenacity and his observation of her hard work, Paul begins to bend much the way Lucy does, and in time, the admonishing and hisses stop and make way for a true friendship. It seems that Paul and Lucy are the only two characters in the novel who truly see one another and are able, then, to create a bond that turns into love.

When we discover Paul's background, he shows himself to be more like a gentleman than any of the others. He loved deeply once and, although his love is gone, he maintains a life for a woman who blocked his happiness, his dear teacher and a servant. He lives humbly himself in order to make others happy, and when he is faced with duty, namely leaving another love behind to secure a family estate at great risk, he goes. He resigns himself to his fate and hopes for a future with Lucy, as she hopes for one with him. She has become self-employed, thanks to Paul as well as to her own devices and intellect and she maintains her connections and her friends. She becomes well respected as a teacher and builds on the dream that Paul helped her start. She,

like Jane, hopes to provide a comfortable life for them both as equals, with neither of them more important than the other.

The secret of my success did not lie so much in myself, in any endowment, any power of mine, as in a new state of circumstances, a wonderfully changed life, a relieved heart. [. . .] At parting I had been left a legacy; such a thought for the present, such a hope for the future, such a motive for a persevering, a laborious, and enterprising, a patient and a brave course — I could not flag. (*Villette* 462)

Paul's leaving forces Lucy to work towards their mutual dream on her own. Yet when those dreams seem dashed Lucy continues on in the spirit of a true gentleman. In any other Victorian novel, Paul would not have left or he would have taken Lucy with him and that would have been the end of the tale. Charlotte Brontë, however, has to complicate matters for us again. It is intimated that Paul does not make it home, and Lucy remains alone. But Charlotte gives the reader the chance to imagine a happy ending instead of revealing what is probably the truth. Again, the heroine becomes the hero of the tale.

It is impossible to believe that either Jane or Lucy would allow themselves to be dominated by any man in their lives. In this way, they both have to take on the characteristics of the gentleman hero of the Victorian age. Yet, they are not afraid, after their early life experiences, of injustice, pain or death. They treat those around them with respect and dignity and admonish those who require it. They both become financially independent women who need not rely on a man's income. Most importantly, however, they create themselves as equals to their male partners. Granted, Rochester loses his property, is maimed and blinded for this to occur and Paul has to disappear for three years, most likely never to return. By pitting Jane and Lucy against men who do not follow the Victorian ideal of gentleman or hero, Charlotte shows her reader, in both cases, the fallibility of men and the strength and resolve of women. They are not shrinking violets who end their stories in fairy tale weddings and live forever in the largest house in the county. They are women who look after their men, a stronger, more active version of the angel of the house. In breaking with this tradition, the reader is given a new hero, a feminine hero, to champion. For Charlotte, the power and honor of her women seems far more important than their living happily ever after.

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themes of victorian literature are shared with Jane Eyre. Food was a reoccurring theme of throughout many Victorian novels because of the hunger that many people faced in this time period. This theme is reflected in the vivid description of under nourishment at Lowood School in Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre.Â Charlotte Bronte does a great job with reflecting the characters in Jane Eyre to the reader through her writing. One very unique and interesting character is Bertha, Rochester's insane wife.Â Rochester is depicted as the ideal hero of the Victorian times. He is very romantic and charming which adds to the gothic style of this novel (Lowes). Despite his charm, there was much controversy over Rochester's character in Victorian times.