PLEASURE AND PAIN IN CHARLOTTE BRONTË'S *VILLETTE* AND *JANE EYRE*

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Abstract

Like every character, Lucy Snowe and Jane Eyre, respective protagonists of Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* and *Jane Eyre*, grapple with pursuing pleasure and avoiding pain. Pleasure and pain are unavoidable universals, of course, but everyone treats their own pleasure and pain differently. Furthermore, pleasure and pain do not exist in a vacuum; there are other considerations—such as morality, self-respect, and lack of absolute control—that affect how each person treats and prioritizes them. Lucy and Jane, in particular, are not hedonists, so when looking at how they pursue pleasure and avoid pain, it is also important to account for the things that they care about more than either. Examining how Brontë's heroines approach pleasure and pain in relation to other facets of their lives reveals their priorities, an understanding of which is essential to understanding their choices and burgeoning selfhood.

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1. Introduction

Like every character, Lucy Snowe and Jane Eyre, respective protagonists of Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* and *Jane Eyre*, grapple with the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain. Pleasure and pain are universals, of course, but everyone negotiates their pleasure and pain differently. Some pursue pleasure above all else, risking significant pain to attain its heights. Others prioritize avoiding pain far above achieving pleasure, even if minimizing the risk of pain stunts their experience of pleasure. Furthermore, pleasure and pain do not exist in a vacuum; there are other considerations—such as morality, self-respect, and lack of absolute control—that affect how each person treats and prioritizes them. Lucy and Jane, in particular, are not hedonists, so when looking at how they pursue pleasure and avoid pain, it is also important to account for the things that they care about more than either. Examining how Brontë's heroines approach pleasure and pain in relation to other facets of their lives reveals their priorities, an understanding of which is essential to understanding their choices and burgeoning selfhood.

Here, I will examine the active pursuit of pleasure—or the meaningful lack thereof—more than the state of pleasure itself. Thus, pursuing pleasure comes into play when a character is deliberately seeking her own enjoyment or happiness, either in a specific moment or in her broader life. When Jane elects to leave Lowood and travel to Thornfield, for example, her choice is motivated by a desire for a more pleasant existence and not by necessity, and so that falls into the category of actively pursuing pleasure. When Lucy leaves England for the foreign town of Villette because her employer has died, however, she does so to avoid starvation, not to seek a more pleasure-filled life. Thus, only the former example will be treated. Moreover, both Lucy and Jane experience and pursue manifold small pleasures, such as creating art and walking

outside. Those pleasures are important, but will be ignored, because I am focusing on larger, more impactful decisions.

Pain and its avoidance are the other issues in play. Again, decisions about pain are more significant than the experience of pain itself. Everyone feels pain; the interesting questions lie in what each person decides to do about it. Furthermore, emotional pain is of more interest here than its physical counterpart, because physical pain is less frequent in *Villette* and *Jane Eyre*, and is not usually grounded in decisions of pursuit or avoidance. Jane's trek through the wilderness in the middle of the book, for instance, involves intense physical and emotional pain: she nearly starves, and she is suffering from both a broken heart and the humiliation of having to beg; but her near starvation is primarily relevant in its relation to the non-physical issues that led to it and the emotional pain that results from it, rather than the physical privation.

Lucy and Jane share many traits in their approach to the pursuit and avoidance of pleasure and pain, which makes sense given their shared authorship. They try to keep the pleasures they fight for in the attainable realm, which is just as much about avoiding the pain of disappointment as it is about achieving pleasure. They shy away from risking enormous pain in the pursuit of great pleasure. Most importantly, they refuse to allow balancing pleasure and pain to become their highest priorities, keeping morality and self-respect above and outside the pleasure-pain spectrum. There are key differences between them, however. Lucy is less apt to fight for things that she wants, and more willing to accept small pains rather than risk large ones. Jane is louder, her decisions less subtle, her wants more clearly stated. Thus, Lucy will be discussed first, so that her decisions can receive adequate attention, and not be overwhelmed by those of her brasher sister.

2. Lucy Snowe

From the very beginning of Lucy's narrative, her distaste for excitement is clear. In the first chapter, Lucy speaks of her time with her godmother: "The charm of variety there was not, nor the excitement of incident; but I liked peace so well, and sought stimulus so little, that when the latter came I almost felt it a disturbance, and wished rather it had still held aloof" (Brontë, *Villette* 8). A dislike of stimulus is by no means a rejection of pleasure or pleasant pursuits, but Lucy's attitude here forms the beginning of a pattern. Again and again, she will choose peace over excitement and passivity over risk. She sees passivity as safety, as a way to have control over pain and avoid it as much as possible. The fact that stimulus and excitement, whether good or bad, are seen as dangerous serves as the first indication that Lucy is not willing to risk pain in order to find pleasure. She would rather enjoy life less and correspondingly suffer less than enjoy more and suffer more.

Lucy's experience with her elderly and ill employer, Miss Marchmont, some years later, reveals her mindset best:

> Two hot, close rooms thus became my world, and a crippled old woman my mistress, my friend, my all…. I would have crawled on with her for twenty years, if for twenty years longer her life of endurance had been protracted. But another decree was written…. My little morsel of human affection, which I prized as if it were a solid pearl, must melt in my fingers…. I had wanted to compromise with Fate, to escape occasional great agonies by submitting to a whole life of privation and small pains. (Brontë, *Villette* 37-38)

As she says herself, Lucy was content to have Miss Marchmont's care become her life. Her desire to escape "great agonies" was so strong that she closeted herself in a tiny space and in

unconditional devotion to one other person, completely forsaking pleasure in the name of avoiding deep pain. Smaller pleasures, like walking outside and eating delicious food, certainly, but also larger pleasures—freedom, friends, a spouse. Lucy does not even view her job as a temporary diversion, after which she will get on with her life. Instead, she willingly accepts it as her permanent state. Her circumstances are pleasureless, but instead of seeking to change them, of requesting time off, better food, or some time outdoors, she adapts to them, making herself content amidst all the small pains.

In exchange, she gets that "little morsel of human affection," and the fact that she values it so highly speaks to her loneliness. Lucy explains little of her early life and development, except for her brief time with her godmother, but hints that she has already endured much, and emerged both homeless and alone. In fact, the great pain she tries so hard to avoid may already be familiar to her. As Robert M. Polhemus notes: "There is never a time when Lucy Snowe does not seem to be keeping back vital information about losses of loved ones, never a word before some first, unknown, alienating storm has already left her a stranded survivor…" (119). Without considering Lucy's background, it is easy to criticize her mindset, to call her a coward, and to reject her passivity and willingness to forsake pleasure as foolishness, but given the limited information about her past, that kind of criticism is dangerous. The fact that she prizes Miss Marchmont's affection so much that she would give up the rest of the world to retain it is not just about her passivity, but also about all the affection she has already lost. The isolation that she experiences upon Miss Marchmont's death is not unfamiliar to her, and will follow her through the rest of the book, so it is not so strange that she took affection where she could get it in this case, prioritizing it above all other chances for pleasure.

Lucy speaks as if her desire to compromise with fate ended with Miss Marchmont's death, but her tendency to accept small pains rather than risk large ones and to abstain from the hope of pleasure altogether is by no means conquered. After Miss Marchmont dies, Lucy must find a new way of supporting herself, so she travels out of England to Villette, capital of the country Labassecour, and becomes a caretaker for the children of Madame Beck, a schoolmistress there. That journey is based in necessity, as already mentioned, so it does not have much bearing on pleasure or pain, but it is important to note that when activity is required for survival, Lucy is quite capable of stepping outside her preference for passivity, even to the extent of traveling to a different country and finding a job there all by herself. Her real difficulty lies in pursuing or even accepting things that would make her life more pleasant but are not imperatives.

Further evidence of this appears when Lucy has been in Villette for some time, and Madame Beck offers her the opportunity to become an English teacher. At first, Lucy's response mirrors how she understood her job with Miss Marchmont: "If left to myself, I should infallibly have let this chance slip…. My work had neither charm for my taste nor hold on my interest; but it seemed to me a great thing to be without heavy anxiety, and relieved from intimate trial. The negation of severe suffering was the nearest approach to happiness I expected to know" (Brontë, *Villette* 76). Here again, Lucy has found work that is remarkable in its ability to deny her pleasure and preserve her from pain, which is exactly what she expects and has made herself accept. There is no need for her to work harder or to make use of her full potential, so she has returned to living as passively as possible. And as the last sentence of the passage indicates, that passivity and unwillingness to pursue pleasure is at least partially rooted in a belief that happiness (not synonymous with pleasure, but closely related to it) is unattainable for her.

On this occasion, Madame Beck's challenge goads Lucy into rising to the occasion despite all those things, taking over the lesson and becoming a permanent teacher. Despite her usual tendencies, Lucy takes a risk, and ends up reaping legitimate rewards. After she begins the position, she writes: "My time was now well and profitably filled up…. It was pleasant. I felt I was getting on—not lying the stagnant prey of mould and rust, but polishing my faculties and whetting them to a keen edge with constant use" (Brontë, *Villette* 81). Lucy's risk pays off with a more satisfying and fulfilling position, one that gives her room to grow, instead of trapping her in a series of mindless tasks with no upward momentum. While it is important to note that it was Madame Beck's influence, and not a drive toward pleasure or away from pain, that incited this change, Lucy comes to know more pleasure because of it, and the positive reward of this risk helps determine her future development and decisions that do involve both pleasure and pain. Without this first successful advancement, Lucy would not have been able to dream of opening her own school, which is the apex of her professional development in the novel, and a risk that she does take in the hope of a better and happier life.

Unfortunately, this incident is not the beginning of a positive trend on all fronts, and having a job more suited to her talents does not free Lucy from pain. Lack of interesting work kept her stagnant and pained her in one way; continued isolation does so in another. While Brontë's heroines are famed for their love of solitude and their rich inner lives, in Lucy's case, isolation definitely becomes too much of a good thing. As the introduction to *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development* states in relation to *Villette*: "Confinement to inner life, no matter how enriching, threatens a loss of public activity; it enforces an isolation that may culminate in death" (Abel, Hirsch, and Langland 8). Even when the school is full of people, Lucy cannot find a true companion within its walls, and when everyone leaves for eight weeks during

a break, her solitude is painful indeed. She sinks into deep depression and becomes physically ill. Desperately needing someone to talk to, Lucy makes her way to a Catholic church and confesses to a priest. Given her staunch Protestantism, this choice is testament to the seriousness of her condition. While speaking to another person helps, it is not enough to solve all her problems, and Lucy collapses shortly after leaving the church.

This collapse is unexpectedly fortuitous, because she is rescued by her long-lost godmother's son, John, a doctor with whom she is already acquainted. She wakes in her godmother's home, and is able to reconnect with her old friends, who provide solace for her. Being with them is a great improvement, but almost at once, Lucy starts carefully moderating her expectations: "'Do not let me think of them too often, too much, too fondly,' I implored [Reason]; 'let me be content with a temperate draught of this living stream…. Oh! would to God I may be enabled to feel enough sustained by an occasional, amicable intercourse, rare, brief, unengrossing, and tranquil—quite tranquil!'" (Brontë, *Villette* 173-74). It is clear that Lucy does not see the rekindling of this relationship as a fresh start, a new permanent home, or the end of her suffering. That is realistic, but also a little surprising from one who has recently suffered so much from isolation, and further evidence of her unwillingness to pursue pleasure. In her case, this refusal is often connected to allowing herself hope—the drive to pursue pleasure has to be grounded in some hope that it is in fact attainable, and Lucy has clearly stated that she does not have such hope. Instead of gaining as much emotional support as she can from this reunion or trying to build the relationships into something stronger that would provide more of the support she needs, Lucy reveals her hopelessness by preparing herself for its limitations. This might be in part to avoid disappointment—pain—down the road, but it is also related to her broader refusal to pursue or expect pleasure through relationships.

Lucy's behavior is often difficult to understand. Why does she restrain herself so much? Why does she see her life as so bound by pain? Why is pleasure always out of reach for her? Why does she refuse to even try strengthening her relationship with John and Louisa Bretton? The thoughts that plagued her during her recent despair, combined with her reaction to this reunion, are helpful in bringing the reasons behind her behavior into focus. Lucy speaks of turning away the hopes of youth: "I dared not give such guests lodging, so mortally did I fear the sin and weakness of presumption" (Brontë, *Villette* 153), dreams of her loved ones: "Methought the well-loved dead, who had loved *me* well in life, met me elsewhere, alienated" (156), and then brings hope and dream together: "The weight of my dreadful dream became alleviated; that insufferable thought of being no more loved, no more owned, half yielded to hope of the contrary" (157). It is this final shift of thought toward hope that sends her outside to the church. Lucy's past is mostly a mystery, but her lack of familial connection is not, and in her despair, it becomes clearer how much she misses her departed loved ones, and how their absence weighs on her. But if their loss is the primary source of her isolation and misery, why would she not leap at the chance to regain intimacy with former friends, whose home she has shared before?

Lucy's horrible fear of never being loved again is matched only by that first fear she mentioned, presumption. When the idea of presumption is attached to her desire to not ask too much of these friends, Lucy's whole policy toward hope, pleasure, and relationships becomes easier to understand. Her truly close relationships, the relationships of family, relationships that could be depended and imposed on, are all dissolved. As Gretchen Braun notes: "Her mysterious bereavement…separates her forever from what has been her only source of both affection and social standing, her family" (197). Even Lucy's intimacy with Miss Marchmont, a poor replacement for family, has been taken from her. Lucy is left, therefore, with no one to fulfill her

emotional needs or care for her deeply in any context at all. She is in a foreign, Catholic nation, and developing relationships that are as close as familial ones would not be easy even under ideal circumstances. It is those relationships that would bring her lasting and meaningful pleasure, so without hope of them, how could she have hope for a pleasant life? If she imposes too much on the Brettons, she may well alienate them. Her only hope is to do as she has been doing: live off relational scraps, deny her need for anything more, and abandon hope for a meaningful future. Devastatingly aware of this, Lucy repeatedly employs Reason personified to help her try to come to terms with her desolate, pleasureless existence, just as she does here in the Bretton household.

Lucy's iron self-control is complicated by growing feelings for John. She denies the depth and nature of her affection for him, but her protestations of mere friendly feelings do not line up with her actions. Brenda Silver aptly explains Lucy's reticence:

> Rather than an attempt to deny the strength of her feelings or to deceive herself about them…these passages speak to Lucy's recognition of the need to confront and control what she cannot realistically hope to gain or fulfill. To act out her emotional needs at this time might well threaten the economic and social security she achieves by ruthless, if painful, self-control. (105)

As Silver points out, this is definitely a case where Lucy's caution serves her well. She knows that John's affections are engaged elsewhere, and she has nothing to gain from declaring her feelings or trying to cling to him for emotional fulfillment. Taking that risk would be foolish, and leave her open to more extreme pain and deprivation than her self-control causes. In theory, a romantic relationship could be perfect for Lucy, removing her from her isolation and introducing genuine hope and pleasure into her life. At the very least, it is her only chance at gaining more family members. But since John is both unavailable and ill-suited to her, Lucy's best option is to

maintain hopelessness and suppress her feelings, recognizing that they can only bring her more pain.

After Lucy leaves the Brettons and returns to the school, John writes to her, and these letters and the accompanying friendship are the only substantive relational support (and thus the main source of pleasure) she has had in years. A mere five letters later, the Brettons drop out of her life, returning just in time to discover Paulina, who will become John's wife. Lucy, fully aware that John will not write again, bids the relationship and the letters farewell, using water imagery once more: "That goodly river…of whose waves a few reviving drops had trickled to my lips, was bending to another course…. But soon I said to myself, 'The hope I am bemoaning 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'" (Brontë, *Villette* 285-86). Hard as she tries, Lucy is not able to prevent herself from hoping for more from John Bretton, and given all the pain she feels in accepting that, it makes sense that she was so resistant to hope and reliance on the Brettons in the first place. It is certainly a good thing that she did not act on her feelings. The weakness of Lucy's ongoing strategy to survive her isolation and not want too much from others is more one of human necessity than an error in ideology; to succeed, she would need to excise her emotional needs completely, which is impossible. It is therefore understandable that her plan was to subsist on whatever meagre friendship and pleasure she received from Louisa and John Bretton, and just as much so that she could not prevent herself from wanting more.

Lucy buries John's letters as a way of letting him go, and in the process, she takes stock of her situation and considers her future, saying: "I pondered now how to break up my winter-quarters—to leave an encampment where food and forage failed…. But what road was open? what plan available?" (Brontë, *Villette* 288). Standing at the grave of her hopes for emotional

pleasure, which seemed doomed from the very beginning, Lucy begins to think about different avenues for fulfillment, and resolves to pursue pleasure in a professional capacity. It took Madame Beck to wake Lucy's ambition the first time, but here, in the midst of disappointment, Lucy gets to the second stage by herself, and begins planning to open her own school.

She writes more about it some time later, cheering herself on: "'Courage, Lucy Snowe! With self-denial and economy now, and steady exertion by-and-by, an object in life need not fail you…. But afterwards, is there nothing more for me in life—no true home, nothing to be dearer to me than myself…?'" (Brontë, *Villette* 349). Clearly, this goal is not Lucy's full life dream. It is even difficult to argue that she is considering it with any actual pleasure. However, it remains important to the subject of pleasure for two reasons. One is that Lucy is breaking out of passivity—the fact that she has hope and ambition and is seeking a life that she will enjoy more than her current one, even though she has no need to leave Madame Beck's school, is evidence that she has grown. Even though she does not see this professional opportunity as a fulfillment of all her desires, she is taking initiative to pursue something she wants for the first time. Here she has hope, a hope that she fosters instead of crushing. The second reason is that the opening of the school, which takes place near the end of the book, ushers in the most pleasure-filled three years of Lucy's life, so even if she is not specifically viewing her school as a source of pleasure in this moment, it will become one in time.

Alongside Lucy's professional plans, she is also developing another relationship, this one with the literature teacher, Paul. Their affection is not immediate, and only develops in the latter half of the book, when Lucy reports: "His affection had been very sweet and dear, a pleasure new and incomparable" (Brontë, *Villette* 341). In addition to providing companionship, Paul tutors Lucy in arithmetic, so that Lucy discovers pleasure in learning along with pleasure in her

friendship with him. While it is not explicitly stated, the education Paul helps foster no doubt puts Lucy in a better position to ably run her own school. Braun recognizes both the importance of Lucy's school in her development and Paul's contribution to it: "Paul both understands the professional challenges Lucy faces and appreciates (and cultivates) her growing competence…. As professionalism is crucial to Lucy's growing capacity for self-assertion, the importance of this connection with Paul should not be underestimated" (205-06). Even if Paul was not emotionally important to Lucy's development, he would still be professionally important. Thus, Lucy's dual progressions toward pursuing emotional and professional pleasures dovetail in her relationship with him.

The emotional aspect is equally significant, however. Lucy's relationship with Paul is different from her association with the Brettons. Where Lucy was right to try to keep her distance from them, attempting to do the same with Paul is needless. Instead, she finds in Paul the type of family and love that she had resigned herself to never feeling again. The first concrete sign that this relationship is emotionally superior to Lucy's relationship with John comes when Paul formally requests Lucy's friendship, asking her to be like a sister to him:

> "When I talk of friendship, I mean *true* friendship," he repeated emphatically; and I could hardly believe that words so earnest had blessed my ear…. If he *really* wished for my confidence and regard, and *really* would give me his, why, it seemed to me that life could offer nothing more or better. In that case, I was become strong and rich; in a moment I was made substantially happy. (Brontë, *Villette* 393)

Lucy's joy is obvious here—she does not use phrases like "strong and rich" and "substantially happy" to describe herself on a regular basis. The emphasis on true friendship, on a relationship as close as family, is just what she has been missing. Finally, real pleasure could be attained.

Also obvious, however, is her struggle to believe in his offer. Her "if," her repeated use of "really," and "in that case" all speak to her doubts, to the conditions she places on her joy. If Paul's offer is real, then Lucy has been granted a new chance at family. Not frail friendship like John's, wherein he wrote to her only a few times before forgetting her, but a depth of love and solidity that she can expect real support from. If not, she is no better off than she has been, and the old model of expecting no pleasure and trying to ward off pain is still in place. Thus, while Lucy is nearly transported with joy at the prospect of this hope, she is, as always, careful. After spending so long consigning herself to life without this type of relationship, it is hard for Lucy to trust Paul and to recognize the strength of his love as something she can depend on. Even if he is in earnest, trusting him and allowing herself to feel pleasure in their relationship would still leave her open to the great agonies she has always wanted to avoid.

The sibling-esque nature of their bond helps her here. At first, Paul's offer seems odd, because Lucy and Paul are quite obviously in love. Not only has Paul decided not to marry, however, but for Lucy, a sibling is emotionally safer than a romantic partner—the pleasure is less intense, but so is the risk of pain. Additionally, Lucy's Protestantism and Paul's Catholicism make the prospect of romantic attachment troubling at best, so at this stage, Lucy and Paul are careful to label and treat their relationship as a platonic one. It is familial, as she has long wanted, but she can still comfort herself with the knowledge that she is not throwing caution completely to the wind. Furthermore, romantic relationships in Brontë's novels carry certain risks. Isolation is terrible, but love that consumes or overwhelms the self is even worse, destroying identity and self-respect: "While love is the only means to establishing an identifying connection with the life outside, *excessive* devotion to another can result in the absorption and dissolution of one's selfhood" (Momberger 364). This quote illustrates the tension between

needing love and needing to preserve selfhood that is present throughout Brontë's works. Because Lucy has spent so much of the novel in isolation, her greatest threats have been internal—her own pain, passivity, and depression—and love so far away that need for it overwhelmed its potential costs. When Paul becomes important in her life, however, the potential dangers of love, which are more fully realized in *Jane Eyre*, come to the fore. Thus, the possible motivations for repressing the romantic and sexual components of their relationship at this time are manifold and easy to understand.

After Paul's familial offer, Lucy and Paul go through a settling period as they determine what siblingship means for them. Lucy describes it proceeding well: "The jar was over; the mutual understanding was settling and fixing; feelings of union and hope made themselves profoundly felt in the heart; affection and deep esteem and dawning trust had each fastened its bond" (Brontë, *Villette* 425). As Lucy's initial concern over whether Paul's offer is worth anything is answered in the affirmative, finally breaking up her isolation and allowing her to feel hope and a potential for pleasure that she might pursue for the first time, another problem overtakes their newly solidified relationship with the revelation that Paul is leaving the country for three years. This departure is facilitated in part by Madame Beck, who is jealous of their newfound closeness and seeks to separate them. As Lucy struggles to come to terms with the change, she wonders: will she see him before he goes? Does he care enough to say goodbye? Does she have the strength to fight for that farewell? To stand up to Madame Beck? Or will she let Paul go, wordless, and fall back into the pattern of passivity and hopelessness that has been her wont?

Here, Lucy struggles. She wants to see Paul, of course, but her life so far has not prepared her for a situation where fighting for a relationship is a worthwhile endeavor. She stands up to

Madame Beck one minute, evading a task meant to keep her away from Paul, only to stand still and do nothing while the schoolmistress responds with the simple device of blocking Lucy from Paul's view. When she finally defeats Madame Beck more thoroughly, it is over whether or not Lucy has to retire to her room for bed; Lucy gets what she wants, but that neither gets her closer to Paul nor changes her long term dynamic with her employer.

Unsurprisingly, the most interesting part of Lucy's struggle is internal, and not related to Madame Beck at all. It is played out on a night when she goes wandering under the influence of an ineffective sedative, finding the whole town awake for a festival. She sees Paul with his young ward, Justine Marie, and immediately assumes that he is going to marry her. With very little evidence, she fully accepts that as her new reality, saying:

> I invoked Conviction to nail upon me the certainty, abhorred while embraced, to fix it with the strongest spikes her strongest strokes could drive; and when the iron had entered well my soul, I stood up, as I thought, renovated. In my infatuation I said, "Truth, you are a good mistress to your faithful servants. While a lie pressed me, how I suffered! Even when the falsehood was still sweet…it wasted me with hourly torment. The persuasion that affection was won could not be divorced from the dread that, by another turn of the wheel, it might be lost." (Brontë, *Villette* 450)

At first, this response appears discordant. Why would Lucy immediately assume that her beloved, who she knows is unavailable for marriage, is going to marry someone else? In the context of her other behavior and experiences, however, it makes more sense. Despite her recently close relationship with Paul, Lucy has still been hesitant to presume too much, to fully engage with him in the trust that he will bear the weight of true affection. She says so right

here—she was waiting for the turn of the wheel, for the other shoe to drop. After so long alone, his love was too good to be true, and so now she pulls herself back at this feeble sign of trouble. The fact that Paul is about to leave and has not yet made time to say goodbye cannot be helping her to see this rationally. If she truly meant as much to him as he does to her, he would have come by now.

At the same time, accepting this "Truth" at once is savagely painful. Her language about the way Conviction nails the certainty to her makes that clear. In this moment, it is much more painful than denial would be. It might even be a great agony, so it would make sense for her to try harder to avoid it. But Lucy, always looking ahead, knows that if this pain, which she has already been feeling in Paul's absence, drags on any longer, it will get even worse. Odd as it appears, embracing the full pain of him loving someone else is a way to preserve herself from even more pain. And as for pleasure? She has already given up on it again. She uses Truth personified, just like she has previously used Reason, to jolt herself back to the harsh realities of her life. And if Paul really was engaged to his ward, it would not be unwise of Lucy to behave this way.

But he is not engaged. Lucy's tried and true method of accepting lesser pain now to avoid greater pain later does not help her at all, because she is wrong. Far from having forgotten Lucy and betrothed himself to someone else, Paul has spent his precious last days in Villette setting up the school that is Lucy's dream. All the pain that Lucy accepts in this single moment of terrible conviction is unnecessary, and if she had waited just a little longer for confirmation, she would know that. Paul comes, he sends Madame Beck away, and he takes Lucy to see her new school. Again, he proves himself a stronger and truer support than Lucy dared hope, and it is frustrating to see that Lucy gave up on him so quickly.

This part of the book can also be frustrating because Lucy requires so much help. Paul has to come to her, he has to rescue her from Madame Beck, and he gives her the school, so she does not even do that for herself. After so much passivity and so little ambition throughout the story, how can accepting this much aid from a man be a victory? For some readers, it may not be. Lucy's rarely-successful struggle to make her own way might seem like the ineffective flailing of a weak heroine who brings shame on the ideals of feminism. But after so often prioritizing the avoidance of pain over any hope of pleasure, and by extension refusing to take risks, especially relational ones, the fact that Lucy has actively built and participated in a relationship strong enough that Paul would do so much for her is her crowning achievement. She who perpetually hid from others allowed herself to be seen and loved, so that Paul knew what the perfect gift would be. Lucy still had doubts, yes, but she had enough faith in their relationship to make it strong, to imbue it with enough of herself that her love was fully reciprocated this time. After so much loss and helplessness, she built herself a new family in Paul. Additionally, while her graduation from Miss Marchmont's helper to nanny and from nanny to teacher were both career changes prompted by others—Miss Marchmont's death and Madame Beck's challenge, respectively—the idea to open her school was Lucy's own, and she was working toward that independent of Paul. His help only allowed her to realize her plan sooner.

Lucy and Paul's final status remains a mystery. They part betrothed, all barriers to romantic love seemingly overcome or forgotten, and exchange letters throughout his absence, during which time Lucy prospers as her own mistress, drawing pleasure from the professional risk she took. She refers to his letters as "real food that nourished, living water that refreshed" (Brontë, *Villette* 474), in stirring contrast to her attempt to live off of John's letters earlier in the text. At the end of Paul's voyage home, however, a storm strikes, and the book ends with his fate

uncertain. It would be difficult, after coming so far, to see Lucy lose yet another family member and relapse into isolation, but hopefully, her new strength and more fulfilling work would serve her well, and still afford her a more pleasant and hopeful existence than the one she has led thus far. Polhemus thinks so, citing Lucy's writing as proof that having love was enough to give her strength and fulfillment:

> Through their faith in one another, she achieves both vocational success—a career as head of her own school—and the power of imaginative expression. Though it seems clear that Paul dies at sea before they can be married, Lucy finds the strength to articulate her vision of the world out of her experience of being in love and being loved. (110)

In the end, love, so crucial to and absent from Lucy's existence, may be denied her, but her worst fear, which was to never be loved again, proves unfounded. Also, given the previously established trouble that love can cause in Brontë's world, Paul's possible death can be seen another way. The tension Brontë creates between Lucy's need for love and her need for autonomy is difficult to articulate, but Gilbert and Gubar explain it well:

> Despite her hope that women can obtain a full, integrated sense of themselves *and* economic independence *and* male affection, Brontë also recognizes that such a wish must not be presented falsely as an accomplished fact. The ambiguous ending of *Villette* reflects Lucy's ambivalence, her love for Paul and her recognition that it is only in his absence that she can exert herself fully to exercise her own powers. (438)

Paul's death would be a great loss for Lucy, certainly, but it would also provide her with continued freedom and autonomy, with no threat to her selfhood and no boundaries around her professional role as schoolmistress. Paul's love gave her the school and the strength to run it

well; his letters sustained her; and his absence would give her the freedom to be herself fully, unrestrained by a husband. Either way, in his death or his life, Lucy, having successfully pursued the pleasures of love and professional advancement, has a much greater chance of happiness and fulfillment than she began with. Her hard-won pleasures will not make her unassailable or protect her from pain, but no one can be protected from pain completely. In taking a few risks in pursuit of pleasure, Lucy has found a more balanced life, which can contain a reasonable amount of both pleasure and pain, instead of the overwhelming deficit of pleasure and surfeit of pain with which she began.

3. Jane Eyre

Unlike Lucy, Jane begins her story prepared to fight for what she wants. She is not afraid to object to the bad behavior of others in order to improve her situation, revealing a focus on affecting her external circumstances in order to manage pleasure and pain that Lucy shies away from. When she thinks a change of circumstances will bring her pleasure, she is willing to take some risks in order to achieve that. She is careful, however, not to risk extreme pain in search of pleasure. And while she wants to avoid pain and attain pleasure, those desires are not the sum total of her goals, and she holds other things, like morality and self-respect, more dear.

Jane's willingness to fight a painful situation is evident from the start; she attacks her cousin when he is bullying her, and later declares her feelings about her aunt's treatment of her: "'You think I have no feelings, and that I can do without one bit of love or kindness; but I cannot live so: and you have no pity. I shall remember how you thrust me back…into the red-room…though I was in agony, though I cried out…'" (Brontë, *Jane Eyre* 44). Jane's sense of personal justice is quite strong, so here, when she feels herself mistreated, she is not afraid to tell

her aunt that such treatment is hurtful and wrong. Because she depends on her aunt for everything, Jane's action is risky—yelling at Aunt Reed in this way could lead to a lot more pain for her—but she is willing to take that risk with the hope that her situation will improve.

When people mistreat Lucy, usually in small snubs instead of dramatic punishments, her reaction is internal, and she does not usually try to change others' behavior. Even when Madame Beck is preventing her from seeing Paul, it takes a lot of effort for her to fight back. Part of this is related to her typical passivity and reluctance to pursue pleasure, but there is also a real difference in the weight Lucy and Jane give to the opinions and behaviors of others. Lucy can brush off the ways that other people see her and treat her as being much less important than the way that she sees herself; Jane, on the other hand, needs external validation, especially early in her narrative. That need will become less important as her confidence in her selfhood grows, but obtaining better treatment and understanding from others will remain a key part of Jane's strategy to avoid pain and pursue pleasure.

In another departure from Lucy, Jane sometimes makes choices purely out of the desire to live a more pleasant life. Her decision to leave Lowood School, for instance, is not made out of necessity or desperation, but rather the urge to live a more adventurous and satisfying life. At first, she frames this desire in grand terms: "Now I remembered that the real world was wide, and that a varied field of hopes and fears, of sensations and excitements, awaited those who had courage to go forth…" (Brontë, *Jane Eyre* 101). Jane has courage, there is no question of that. For a moment, she lets herself dream of a completely different and exciting life, full of pleasure. Her first desire is for liberty, which would allow her to travel, explore, and claim the world she sees beyond her. Her second is for change and stimulus, which would at least afford her some entertainment and variety, assuaging her restlessness.

Liberty and change might both bring more pain than pleasure, but where Lucy could live in two rooms with only one other person for as long as necessary, with only a morsel of affection to sustain her, Jane is both more hopeful and less able to repress her restlessness, and so she allows herself to want them anyway. She is not reckless, however, and she talks herself down from liberty or change to a new form of servitude. "'A new servitude! There is something in that…. I know there is, because it does not sound too sweet. It is not like such words as Liberty, Excitement, Enjoyment: delightful sounds truly, but no more than sounds for me…. But Servitude!… I have served here eight years; now all I want is to serve elsewhere'" (Brontë, *Jane Eyre* 102). Jane's decision to leave Lowood is a large and unnecessary risk, one that speaks to her restlessness and strong drive for pleasure. The fact that she talks herself down from great adventure to new servitude, however, speaks to her sense.

Jane knows that her big dreams are likely to go unfulfilled, given that she has neither money nor family and she is a single young woman, but instead of giving up on pleasure altogether and consigning herself to a life of passivity at Lowood, Jane compromises with herself. She holds her desires in tension with her practical options, avoiding a life of boredom but not getting carried away by dreams that will never be realized. This careful balance is a measured way to pursue pleasure, but it is also a way to prevent pain, because allowing impossible dreams to blossom and take over her whole world would only bring Jane agonizing disappointment. So she risks some pain in her search for pleasure, but does not take either to extremes. The prioritization of balance and compromise is Jane's usual strategy for handling pleasure and pain.

Initially, life at Thornfield is not much more exciting than Lowood, and Jane's restlessness persists. Once Rochester arrives and befriends her, however, that changes, and Jane

flourishes, finding substantial pleasure in her relationship with him. Until, that is, she hears that he might marry another, and realizes that her own affections are dangerously tied up in her employer. She tries to stop her affection for him before it gets out of control, taking herself sternly to task:

> "You have nothing to do with the master of Thornfield, further than to receive the salary he gives you…. Be sure that is the only tie he seriously acknowledges between you and him; so don't make him the object of your fine feelings, your raptures, agonies, and so forth. He is not of your order: keep to your caste, and be too self-respecting to lavish the love of the whole heart, soul, and strength, where such a gift is not wanted and would be despised." (Brontë, *Jane Eyre* 189)

Once again, Jane is talking herself down from big dreams. This discourse is a bit harsh, and no doubt painful, but like Lucy, Jane has the tendency to accept and even embrace manageable pain in the present when she thinks that doing so will save her greater pain later on. Jane has no reason at this point to believe that Rochester loves her or would stoop to marry her, so trying to put a stop to her own feelings as soon as possible is the least painful, and indeed only practical, way to handle them. Dwelling in the hope that Rochester might grow to love her would bring Jane pleasure now, but would only result in greater disappointment when he marries someone more suitable.

Her management fails in this case, however, and she has to admit that her love for Rochester is beyond her power to stop. She is convinced of his intention to marry Blanche Ingram, so this is a painful truth, but just as she refuses to have false hope, Jane also refuses to deceive herself about her ability to control her own heart, and for the most part, she handles the

resulting unavoidable pain with grace and courage. When Rochester teases her about Blanche in an effort to learn her feelings, Jane has an outburst similar to her early fight with Mrs. Reed, condemning him for treating her like she has none. Again, this outburst is primarily leveled against pain, and since Jane has no expectation of the marriage proposal that her tirade provokes, there is little to indicate that she is seeking pleasure. That proposal does follow, however, launching a strange phase of Jane's life.

On the one hand, pleasures abound: Rochester's love is just the thing Jane has long desired and not dared hope for, a joy beyond the dreams she has allowed herself. On the other hand, the shift in Rochester's treatment of her makes Jane uncomfortable—his determination to buy her expensive gifts makes her feel like he is trying to remake her very self, and she is also unsure of what to do in the face of changing duties and shifting physical boundaries. All the same, on the night before their wedding she reports to Rochester: "'All day yesterday I was very busy, and very happy in my ceaseless bustle; for I am not, as you seem to think, troubled by any haunting fears about the new sphere, et cetera: I think it a glorious thing to have the hope of living with you, because I love you'" (Brontë, *Jane Eyre* 323). Jane does appear anxious about the marriage on various occasions, but she is clear about the fact that she loves Rochester and wants to be with him. This is the life she has decided will bring her pleasure, and she pursues it.

It is on the morning of their wedding that Rochester's dread secret comes out, and at that point, Jane's tendency to avoid unrealistic expectations looks more sensible than ever. After she spent so much time talking herself down from loving Rochester, only to both fail and find that ending her love for him was unnecessary, her efforts could seem needless, just like Lucy's were when she thought Paul would marry his ward. Jane's devastation now that she has allowed herself to expect to marry Rochester, only to have it fall apart, however, supports the validity of

her initial strategy. If she had managed to fall out of love with him, she would not have left herself vulnerable to the extreme pain she feels now, pain that equals the extreme pleasure he brought her.

This is where Jane's prioritization of pleasure and pain becomes most fascinating. As she is sitting in misery, her hopes shattered around her, Jane asks herself:

> "What am I to do?" But the answer my mind gave—"Leave Thornfield at once"—was so prompt, so dread, that I stopped my ears…. "That I must leave him decidedly, instantly, entirely, is intolerable. I cannot do it." But, then, a voice within me averred that I could do it, and foretold that I should do it. I wrestled with my own resolution: I wanted to be weak that I might avoid the awful passage of further suffering I saw laid out for me…. "Let me be torn away, then!" I cried. "Let another help me!" "No; you shall tear yourself away, none shall help you: you shall yourself pluck out your right eye; yourself cut off your right hand…." (Brontë, *Jane Eyre* 343)

This quote is lengthy, but it is important to establish the full weight of what Jane is doing when she decides to leave Rochester. From an outside perspective, Rochester has lied to her and manipulated her, making her the instrument of his happiness and the accessory to his wrongdoing. Of course she should leave. But for Jane, who adores him, it is not so simple. She planned to spend the rest of her life with Rochester; simply getting up and walking away, never to see him again, is the most painful thing she can think of. Still, it is what her mind tells her unquestionably that she must do, even though being with Rochester is pleasure and being apart from him is agony. Jane finds that she must divorce her priorities from the spectrum of pleasure and pain and make a decision that is not about either. She has a higher master to answer to, and

that biblical reference to cutting parts of herself off in order to avoid sin lays the groundwork for her ultimately moral choice to abandon her desire for pleasure and fear of pain to the higher priority of avoiding an immoral relationship.

The reason that Jane must leave becomes clearer during the lengthy conversation with Rochester that follows her initial realization. He begs her to remain, and be his wife in spirit, even though she cannot be so under the law. Jane retorts that this will make her his mistress, something she finds untenable. To argue against that, Rochester points out her lack of familial connection—she has no one to answer to, so why does it matter if she transgresses societal rules in the name of love? Another internal dialogue where Jane fights with herself is the result:

> "Soothe him; save him; love him; tell him you love him and will be his. Who in the world cares for *you*? or who will be injured by what you do?" Still indomitable was the reply: "*I* care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself…. 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. If at my individual convenience I might break them, what would be their worth?" (Brontë, *Jane Eyre* 365)

It is true that Jane has no one to answer to. The freedom of the orphan is that no one will care if she becomes Rochester's mistress. But the importance of her decision is that it is not about anyone else. It is about her, about what she can accept from herself and for herself. The pain that leaving will cause is great, the pleasure of staying would be equally so, but Jane's laws and principles are more important to her than either. It is her morality, not her temptations and fears, that is tied to her self-respect, and she values self-respect over her desires and even over her love.

When it comes to the practicalities of following her principles, Jane behaves a little foolishly. Afraid her resolve will break, Jane leaves before dawn the next day, taking little money and food with her. This impetuous choice leads to more literal physical pain than she may have expected when she referred to cutting parts of herself off. She is stranded, starving, heartbroken, and alone—Jane at her lowest. She is worried for Rochester too, because she does not know what he will do in her absence, and fears being the instrument of his emotional and moral undoing. The pain of starvation and the demoralizing effect that it has on Jane is an unexpected suffering, but no less real than any other. Emotionally and physically drained, Jane contemplates death, which is uncomfortably close, and gives up hope: "This was the climax. A pang of exquisite suffering—a throe of true despair—rent and heaved my heart.… Oh, this spectre of death! Oh, this last hour, approaching in such horror! Alas, this isolation—this banishment from my kind! Not only the anchor of hope, but the footing of fortitude was gone…" (Brontë, *Jane Eyre* 385). This quote is in some ways unhelpful, because it is not really about how Jane manages pain, or makes choices about pleasure and pain. Her choices have already been made, and here she deals with the consequences. But understanding how grim those consequences truly are is necessary to understand the gravity of the decision she made. Jane decided to honor her morality and self-respect over the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain, and when she doubted her ability to carry out her decision, she fled in the night with inadequate supplies. She spent all of her money getting as far from Thornfield as possible, with no specific place to go or person to care for her. The orphan status that would have left her free to be Rochester's mistress if she so chose leaves her with no options now.

It is also significant that like Lucy, Jane sees her isolation from humanity as something just as painful as physical privation. Brontë does not treat isolation lightly—Lucy uses metaphors

of food and drink to talk about letters and companionship, and here Jane classes her isolation on par with her starvation and imminent death. Referring to the importance of Jane's non-romantic relationships, Michael Vander Weele emphasizes her need for companionship: "Community enables self-assertion and…self-assertion does not always oppose community, in fact, may not be meaningful without it" (20). Without meaningful connections to others, Jane and Lucy flounder, their complete lack of community threatening their very selves. As a source of pain, isolation and alienation from others is at the very top. The highest pleasures, too, are found in true companionship, in relationships that allow each heroine to be fully herself, fully known and knowing, and well-loved; in essence, to assert herself in the context of community. This was evident with Lucy and Paul—reservations aside, Paul did know, accept, and love Lucy—and will be equally clear with Jane, both in how it does not work with St John and how it ultimately does with Rochester.

When Jane meets the Rivers siblings right after her moment of horrible despair, they are a balm to her, both physically and emotionally. She enjoys Diana and Mary a great deal, their peaceful pursuit of learning and their calm pleasure in it restoring Jane's own sense of calm and contentedness. Her new life also includes a new teaching position. When she begins, she reflects on it and its alternative:

> Much enjoyment I do not expect in the life opening before me: yet it will, doubtless, if I regulate my mind…yield me enough to live on from day to day…. Which is better?—To have surrendered to temptation; listened to passion; made no painful effort…. To be a slave in a fool's paradise at Marseilles—fevered with delusive bliss one hour—suffocating with the bitterest tears of remorse and shame the next—or to be a village

> school-mistress, free and honest…? Yes; I feel now that I was right…. (Brontë, *Jane Eyre* 413-14)

The first part of this quote reveals that Jane is carefully managing her current expectations for pleasure. Her chance at the life she wanted most was ripped from her, so now she is working not to expect too much, just as Lucy often does. Fresh from disappointment, Jane is trying to resign herself to her new situation and be glad for what is good about it, suppressing hope for more substantial pleasures just like her companion in *Villette*. The latter section, when she reflects on the alternative, clarifies Jane's understanding of her choice. She knows what pleasure she gave up when she left Rochester, but she also knows that being with him would have brought her equally heightened pain. Pleasure and pain are almost always in balance for Jane—both are muted when she is bored or restless; pleasure was heightened when she was in love, only for pain to even the score when it fell apart; and now she seems fully aware of that balance, knowing that ignoring her self-respect for the apex of pleasure would also have brought her the height of pain. She is glad that she did not accept that highest of pleasures, because then she would have been subjected to equal pain, and what she has already endured was painful enough. This awareness does not lessen the significance of her choice to put morality above and outside of the pleasure-pain spectrum, but it is an additional aspect of how she is managing and understanding that choice.

This is also the part of the story where Jane and Lucy's philosophies overlap most. Fresh from heartache, Jane is having the same symptoms of misery, restlessness, and troubled sleep that tortured Lucy, and she too manages to wake each morning and go calm and collected to teach. Another similarity is the way Jane reacts when she realizes that she is related to the Rivers. She says: "Glorious discovery to a lonely wretch! This was wealth indeed!—wealth to

the heart!—a mine of pure, genial affections. This was a blessing, bright, vivid, and exhilarating…. 'Oh, I am glad!—I am glad!' I exclaimed" (Brontë, *Jane Eyre* 444). Just like Lucy, Jane sees the prospect of new family as a bright gift indeed. The great pains that they felt when totally without family—Jane living as a dependent of her cruel aunt, tortured by unkind cousins; Lucy forced to travel to a foreign country alone, with no idea what she will do when she arrives; Jane adrift in the countryside, with no one to feed her or care whether she lived or died; Lucy fainting on the steps of a church, driven to illness by her loneliness and the pain of her lost loved ones—are never far from their mind or the purview of the reader, making it clear that having family is incredibly important to Brontë, and is one of the chief pleasures possible for her heroines. When Paul offers to be Lucy's brother, she, isolated and believing that romance is out of the question, thinks it the highest pleasure she can know. Jane, in the same place in terms of both isolation and romantic love, has comparably strong feelings about her own newly discovered cousins.

Also like Lucy, however, Jane's feelings of pleasure are soon challenged. She still misses and fears for Rochester, and St John's hopes for her become more oppressive each day. Failing both to find out what has become of Rochester and to revolt against St John's control, Jane experiences more pain than pleasure in the next six months. Both of these problems come to a head with St John's proposal, which is for both marriage and missionary work. The missionary work, Jane feels she can accomplish. It would not be a pleasant life, and she believes it would be a short one, but in another example of how her morality is above her desire to avoid pain and attain pleasure, she is willing to accompany him anyway. Her thought process is useful here:

> I must seek another interest in life to replace the one lost: is not the occupation he now offers me truly the most glorious man can adopt or God assign? Is it not, by its noble

> cares and sublime results, the one best calculated to fill the void left by uptorn affections and demolished hopes?… Consent, then, to his demand is possible: but for one item…. that he asks me to be his wife, and has no…husband's heart for me…. No: such a martyrdom would be monstrous. I will never undergo it. (Brontë, *Jane Eyre* 466-67)

Jane's decision about St John is not entirely based in concerns about pleasure and pain. She knows that going to India would mean a great deal of pain, but her strong devotion to morality ensures that that is not what stops her. Neither is it desire for a more pleasant life. Her decision is instead couched in both practicality and emotion: she cannot bring herself to throw her life away—practically speaking, she knows that she would not survive India's climate, and that her sacrifice would be a waste; on an emotional level, she cannot bring herself to marry St John. Now, if this is not about pleasure and pain, how does it relate to the overarching preoccupations of my thesis? There are two ways. First, the fact that Jane does not blindly follow her moral sensibilities here helps flesh out the hierarchy of her decision-making. Morality is higher than pleasure or pain, but it is not so all-consuming that St John need only mention a moral path in order to get Jane to do whatever he wants. Second, the fact that Jane is once again refusing to do something because of marriage or the lack thereof clarifies further the way that she sees marriage in relation to herself. To live out a marriage not sanctioned by law would have lost Jane her self-respect; to live out a marriage of law only would force her to repress all the parts of herself that St John has no use for, and thus lose her inner self. She can do neither.

The self, then, is the highest priority—not in the sense of selfishness, but in the sense of an intact, fully-formed, undesecrated identity. Helene Moglen makes a similar point in her discussion of this moment in the text: "In rejecting St. John…. She completes the move toward independence begun in the red-room and continued in her departure from Thornfield…. At every

previous point of parting…Jane's 'self,' apparently severed and divided, has become stronger and more integrated than before" (56-57). Even though leaving Rochester caused Jane pain and was compared to the loss of body parts, that departure, just like this one from St John, was actually essential to the creation and preservation of the self that Jane holds so dear. Taken together, these examples show that Jane puts her selfhood ahead of pleasure, pain, love, and morality.

This is true for Lucy also. For her, it is best displayed in her struggle to find community—the way that her isolation persists even when she is surrounded by others shows her unwillingness to give weight to relationships where she is not fully seen or accepted. Truly close familial or romantic relationships can be the highest pleasure, but only if those relationships validate the self, rather than threatening it. Just as having the self be fully accepted and fully known in such relationships is the height of pleasure, the breaking, desecrating, or destroying of the self is the worst pain, the untenable thing. Not only the desire to avoid pain, but also logic and sense rebel against the prospect.

But Jane's sense of self is not the only thing that saves her from St John's horrible proposal. It is strengthened by the sound of Rochester's voice, calling out to her. Jane already intended to find out what has happened to Rochester, but once his voice saves her from grave error, she is more determined than ever. She phrases her desire to find him as an innocent, even charitable one, but how she hopes to help him is unclear. After all, if he is still married, which she has no reason to doubt, her return will not change their situation, and at no point does she suggest that she has changed her mind and would now compromise her morals and selfhood to be with him. As far as she knows, they are still at a relational impasse. Gilbert and Gubar suggest

that there is an element of instinctual knowledge granted by the hearing of Rochester's voice, which would better explain Jane's decision:

> Her new and apparently telepathic communion with Rochester…has been made possible by her new independence and Rochester's new humility. The plot device of the cry is merely a sign that the relationship for which both lovers had always longed is now possible…. For to the marriage of Jane's and Rochester's true minds there is now, as Jane unconsciously guesses, no impediment. (367)

For Gilbert and Gubar, Rochester's cry signals Jane's fully realized and independent self—she has grown, found family, and become financially stable—as well as Rochester's new status as someone both available and humble enough to be her equal. Thus, Jane's decision to go to Thornfield is more the result of "'presentiment'" (367) than irrational hope.

Jane finds, of course, that all obstacles to marrying Rochester have been removed in her absence, and seeks him out with newly hopeful expectations of marrying him. Once they are reunited, Jane sums up Rochester's appeal in terms that should be familiar:

> With pleasure and ease I talked to him during supper, and for a long time after. There was no harassing restraint, no repressing of glee and vivacity with him; for with him I was at perfect ease, because I knew I suited him; all I said or did seemed either to console or revive him. Delightful consciousness! It brought to life and light my whole nature: in his presence I thoroughly lived; and he lived in mine. (Brontë, *Jane Eyre* 504)

Here is the key to both lasting pleasure and unrestrained selfhood, which are clearly tied together. Just as Lucy found Paul's love and acceptance of her self the height of pleasure and as sustaining as food, Jane finds in Rochester the chance to be her full self, loved and appreciated

for all that she is. St John would have forced her to cut half of herself off; Rochester allows her to escape isolation and still retain herself. For this reason, above all, they are suited to each other, and Jane's marriage to Rochester is the most pleasant avenue available to her in life. As Gilbert and Gubar assert: "Now, being equals, he and Jane can afford to depend on each other with no fear of one exploiting the other" (369). The radical changes of both circumstance and character that are needed to get them to this place, despite the genuine and strong love that their relationship began with, further illuminate the difficulties of love in Brontë's mind, giving credence to the idea that Lucy might do just as well on her own as she would with Paul. Selfhood and love are difficult to combine successfully, and Jane and Rochester might be the only success story.

4. Conclusion

The differences in their endings are not the only ways that *Villette* and *Jane Eyre* diverge from each other. As has been discussed at length, there are some key differences between the ways that Lucy and Jane approach pleasure and pain. Jane pursues pleasure actively, shunning a boring, safe life for one that she will enjoy more, even at the risk of correspondingly high pain. Lucy has given up on pursuing pleasure altogether, and only seeks for her life to be as painless as possible, enduring boredom and jobs that refuse to stimulate. Even so, her isolation hurts her deeply, which hinders her strategy's success. Jane's more balanced approach does not always serve her better—her three day starvation trek is every bit as painful as Lucy's horrible experience leading up to her breakdown. Brontë does not favor one strategy over the other—both women suffer, and both have the chance to be happy. The dissimilarities between their approaches might be simple differences in character, but it is more likely that the pain caused by extreme losses in Lucy's youth made pleasure, for a time, impossible for her to imagine as an

attainable thing. Therefore, she needed pleasure to reach out for her in the form of Paul in order to relearn how to pursue it for herself. Jane's childhood was hardly idyllic, but she had Helen and Miss Temple, and entered adulthood believing in her ability to successfully pursue pleasure. Her needs were related more toward understanding when pleasure could not be the goal, living through pain in order to uphold her principles and eventually return to Thornfield at the correct time, strong and autonomous enough to claim her place at Rochester's side.

Lucy and Jane's relationship to the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain also share a lot of common ground. They both try to keep their expectations low and manageable, understanding that dreaming too big would only lead to pain and disappointment. This strategy is not universally successful, but in most cases it serves them well. Both Lucy and Jane find that companionship in an intimate setting—either romantic or familial—is necessary to lasting pleasure, and that the pain of isolation is surpassed only by the pain of loss of self. Their selfhood is more important than either pleasure or pain, entwined with that spectrum but always prioritized above it. That elusive joining of relationship and selfhood is the true goal.

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