**Sartor Resartus: Thomas Carlyle(1833) first bildungsroman.**

* **Jane Eyre**, [novel](https://www.britannica.com/art/novel) by [Charlotte Brontë](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Charlotte-Bronte), first published in 1847 as Jane Eyre: An Autobiography, with Currer Bell (Brontë’s pseudonym) listed as the editor.
* Rochester, St.John, Mrs. Reed, Helen Burns, Mr. Brocklehurst, Alice Fairfax, Bertha Mason, Grace Pool, Adele Varens, Blanche Ingram
* Thornfield, Lowood School
* Despite the loftiness of its rhetoric and the heroic light it casts on St. John's endeavors, the closing passage of Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre is more likely to disappoint or confuse readers than inspire them. Perhaps the most perplexing ending of any Victorian novel, Jane's closing tribute to the rigid, patriarchal, and gloomy St. John presents a particular challenge to readings of the novel as a feminist bildungsroman. Classic feminist readings have tended to view St. John as one-dimensional patriarchal villain; accord? ingly, Jane rejects not only her pious cousin, but also the Christian worldview he represents. Since St. John's religious agenda serves only as a vehicle of masculine self-aggrandizement and domination (Gilbert and Gubar 366), Jane ultimately rejects his "patriarchal religious value-system" for an earthly paradise of marital equality with the reformed and chastened Rochester (Rich 490). To interpret the novel's conclusion as an exorcism of religious thought and belief, however, fails to account for St. John's virtual apotheosis on the final page.
* Consequently, some more recent studies suggest that Jane Eyre's Christian commitments are not necessarily incompatible with the book's presumably feminist emphases. Readings by J. Jeffrey Franklin, Janet L. Larson, Marianne Thorm?hlen, Susan VanZanten Gallagher, and Amanda Witt, for example, all highlight the assertion of Jane's religious and spiritual autonomy as a major component of her bildungsroman} By discerning for herself what she perceives to be God's will, Jane effectively resists Rochester's and St. John's attempts to possess her spirit as well as her body. Ultimately, Jane marries Rochester because it is her vocation-the divine call that only she herself can hear. Given the religious resonances of Jane's marriage, as Thorm?hlen and Franklin both suggest, the prominence of St. John (less a patriarchal bogeyman than a sincere if over-zealous Christian) at the novel's end "balances the book" (Thorm?hlen 217). "Both have sought and received Divine guidance and been faithful to the claims of their God-created selves," argues Thorm?hlen (218), while Franklin perceptively suggests that the novel's concluding emphasis on St. John underscores Jane's freely chosen vocation as "a missionary of spiritual love" (482). Gallagher's reading of Jane Eyre as a "Christian feminist bildungsroman" suggests a similarly balanced and unproblematic ending: "The novel's religious assertion of a woman's right to self-identity and its depiction of marriage as a relationship of equality," she argues, "anticipate twentieth-century Christian feminism" (68
* So intertwined were discourses of religion and gender in the Victorian period, that a close examination of Jane Eyre's religious themes inevitably furthers our understanding of the novel's gender politics: that is, we see more clearly what is at stake for Jane in her struggle against male control. Yet to read the ending simply as a harmonious "balancing of the book"-with Jane and St. John heeding separate, but equal, divine callings-is to overlook the difficulties Victorian women of faith faced in trying to reconcile their spiritual integrity with cultural norms of domesticity and femininity.
* Jane's religious convictions are presented as the primary force behind her resistance to conventional female subject-positions, whether as Rochester's mistress or as St. John's spiritual helpmate. Moreover, Jane's insistence on a direct, Unmediated relationship with her Creator uncovers a glaring inconsistency in Evangelical teaching that posed for women of faith a virtual theological impasse: Evangelicals championed the liberty of discernment and conscience for all believers, but also prized a model of marriage in which wives were spiritually subordinate to their husbands.
* Jane's spiritual bildungsroman requires that she develop a moral and ethical agency indepen? dent of male control. Yd Jane Eyre's conclusion leaves open the possibility that Jane, despite her efforts, has failed to reconcile the conflicting demands of domesticity and faith. And although scholars such as Barry Quails see within Bront?'s fiction a privileging of the here-and-now over the hereafter, this reading suggests that Jane Eyre's heroine is, by the novel's conclusion, precariously straddled between this world and the next.
* Jane's resistance to male control, as scholars have noted, is vexed by the fact that both Rochester and St. John cloak their agendas in religious language-that is, both presume that their desire to control Jane is compatible with God's will.4 Jane's resistance to this control, however, is not merely a refutation of two men's flawed theological arguments. In resisting Rochester and, especially, the pious clergyman St. John, Jane confronts a cherished Evangelical model of female piety-one based directly on Milton's portrayal of Adam and Eve in Paradise Lost-that often represented women as inca? pable of discerning God's will for themselves.5 A survey of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century conduct books and sermons on the topic of marriage reveals two points in common: first, a pressing concern over the growing secularization of marriage; and second, the extent to which the model of Milton's Eve enchanted male clergymen across religious denominations. Repeatedly, conduct books and sermons urged readers to choose marriage partners who were earnest and upstanding Christians.
* Jane is particularly susceptible to Rochester's seduction because he makes his appeal on religious and moral grounds. Rochester, that is, puts upon Jane's shoulders the responsibility for his moral rebirth: "Is the wandering and sinful, but now rest-seeking and repentant man," he queries, "justified in daring the world's opinion, in order to attach to him for ever, this gentle, gracious, genial stranger; thereby securing his own peace of mind and regeneration of life?" (246). Rochester insistently describes his romantic desire as a product of God's will when he proposes to Jane in his "Eden-like" orchard [278], contending that "my Maker sanctions what I do.”
* While Rochester's temptation is difficult to resist, Jane nonetheless remains firm in her resolution to leave Thornfield, and expresses little genuine doubt about her decision. Surprisingly, it is St. John Rivers-that ostensibly unattractive, even repulsive character-who poses to Jane the greater temptation, the one she clearly has the more difficulty resisting. The difficulty of Jane's position at this point of the novel only becomes evident once we accept that Jane truly and sincerely regards her cousin as a saintly, devoted Christian. In light of Evangelical tracts and sermons counseling women to think more of religion than love as a foundation for marriage, St. John would have been viewed in many circles as a most eligible bachelor indeed.9 Thus while Jane has no trouble resisting the sophistry of the religious hypocrite Brocklehurst, and can, with difficulty, see through the machinations of the all-too-human Rochester, how can she repudiate a "good man, pure as the deep sunless source," in possession of a "crystal conscience" (458)? Critics have detailed the reasons why St. John repulses Jane, but although he is clearly self-aggrandizing, manipulative, inflexible, and legal? istic, these traits are presented to the reader less as inconsistencies or blemishes within his otherwise sterling character, than as the inevitable result of it. In short, St. John buckles under the weight of his own perfection. His countenance-so perfect and regular it suggests the hard lineaments of Greek statuary-accurately reflects a soul made rigid by its own moral strengths.
* That Jane believes in St. John's cause is perhaps best demonstrated by her complete willingness to help spread the Gospel in India, despite all its attendant privations, on the condition that she be allowed to remain single. To complicate matters further, Jane must once again deal with a domineering male character who is firmly convinced of God's will for them both. Because God is all-knowing, St. John seems to believe that he himself, as God's servant, is likewise omniscient. "I am the servant of an infallible master," he exults, "I am not going out under human guidance ... my lawgiver, my captain, is the All-perfect" (447). Just as Rochester perceives in Jane "an instrument" of God, and tries to convince her that to abandon him would be an act of wickedness, St. John warns Jane, "[I]f you reject [my offer], it is not me that you deny, but God" (455).
* At this crucial juncture of the narrative, Jane-just moments away from being "chained for life to a man who regarded one but as a useful tool" (463)-cannot bring herself to rely solely on St. John's judgment: "I could decide if I were but certain," she tells him, "were I but convinced that it is God's will I should marry you, I could vow to marry you here and now-come afterwards what would ! " (466). At this point in the novel the reader arrives at that notorious "thumping piece of Gothic claptrap" (Prescott 90) which depicts Jane, in response to her frantic prayer, suddenly able to hear Rochester's voice summoning her. By the end of the chapter, Jane has successfully broken away from St. John: "It was my time to assume ascendancy," she says. "My powers were in play, and in force ... I desired him to leave me: I must, and would be alone. He obeyed at once. Where there is energy to command well enough, obedience never fails" (467)
* Although Jane, at the time of St. John's proposal and her subsequent mysterious summons, dismisses the voice as merely "the work of nature," she undergoes a sudden change of heart once she returns to Rochester at Ferndean. Rochester describes how-after supplicating God for an end to his torment-he cried out to Jane three times in a fit of despair and longing, and heard in response her voice: "Where are you?" This manifest coincidence astonishes Jane beyond all power of speech:
* Jane's progress suggests a kind of "mus? cular Christianity" that thrusts her, for much of the narrative, away from conventional women's roles and domestic spaces. Despite Evangelical visions of the home as a consecrated space, Jane experiences her most direct contact with the supernatural when outdoors-on the open heath after her flight from Thornfield, and at the time of St. John's proposal, in a mossy glen by a waterfall (446
* Although Bertha's death enables Jane to return to Rochester, the couple's happy union seems first to require a mutual spiritual purging. Like Jane, Rochester has been chastised through suffering. Yet while Jane's active suffering (tearing away her own "right eye" and "right hand") frees her from limiting feminine postures, coinciding with her wanderings from hearth and home, Rochester's literal mutilation (interpreted by many critics as a symbolic castration) is forced upon him. Having taken no action in the matter of his own redemption, Rochester's passive suffering-akin to that of Helen Burns-takes on a distinctly feminine quality: "Divine justice pursued its course," he tells Jane, "disasters came thick on me: I was forced to pass through the valley of the shadow of death. His chastisements are mighty; and one smote me which has humbled me for ever. You know I was proud of my strength: but what is it now, when I must give it over to foreign guidance, as a child does its weakness?" (495).
* Interpreted one way, the book's conclusion shows Jane victorious over two spiritual pitfalls: the dangers of human idolatry and the lure of excessive self renunciation. The renunciatory power which renders Rochester's suffering feeble in comparison must ultimately itself be relinquished, lest Jane, like St. John Rivers, become at the fireside "a cold, cumbrous column, gloomy and out of place." Both extremes, self-indulgence and self-restraint, must be purged from the text before Jane and Rochester's domestic paradise can be realized. Just as Bertha, the lascivious madwoman, conveniently falls to her death, St. John, Jane's other double, must remove himself to the deadly privations of missionary life in India. Consequently, Jane's marriage is framed as self-gratification (albeit one consistent with "the law given by God; sanctioned by man" [356]) rather than self-renunciation. In response to Rochester's suggestion that Jane's wish to marry him emanates from her "delight in sacrifice," Jane replies, "To be privileged to put my arms round what I value-to press my lips to what I love ... is that to make a sacrifice? If so, then certainly I delight in sacrifice" (494).
* For all Jane's heroic struggles, she may not have entirely freed herself from the dangers of human idolatry. While the conclusion's double portrait of Jane and St. John suggests two individuals who have found and fulfilled their respective callings, perhaps only one has found a sphere truly suited to his ambition and talent. "Well may he eschew the calm of domestic life," reflects Jane of her cousin at one point, "it is not his element: there his faculties stagnate-they cannot develop or appear to advantage. It is in scenes of strife and danger-where courage is proved, and energy exercised, and fortitude tasked-that he will speak and move, the leader and superior" (438). In the rose-tinted vision of Jane's long-deferred domestic bliss, however, it is easy to overlook the fact that Jane-in so many ways St. John's double-has no lack of ambition herself. Early in the narrative, we see young Jane dreaming of travels to faraway lands.
* Despite Charlotte Bronte's struggles to reconcile her heroine's spiritual integrity with female desire and with the rhetoric of nineteenth-century femininity, she cannot, in the end, give equal weight to all claims. Jane imagines a life that will accommodate both her passionate desires and her ambitious nature; her spiritual integrity, however, ultimately demands that she frame both passion and ambition within the constraints of Victorian domesticity. Numerous critics, of course, have expressed uneasiness with the final pages of Jane Eyre. There is much evidence to suggest that the redeemed, glorified figure of Jane is overshadowed, whether by a repressive Victorian culture, or-through the book's closing reference to the Book of Revelation-"a patrilineally mediated structure of authority and voice"