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The social context of Charlotte Brontë's most famous work, *Jane Eyre*, provides a set of expectations for the novel's central romance; Jane and Rochester seem to enjoy a relatively egalitarian relationship, while simultaneously occupying traditional gender roles of dominance and submission. These roles, when exaggerated or performed, push the relationship to a more intimate space; dominance becomes sadistic, and submission becomes masochistic. Introducing pain as a sensual dimension to the relationship allows for the development of an exciting tension, and ultimately enables Jane and Rochester to subvert social expectations by performing them. This tension is exciting because it turns on the instability of Rochester's attention and affection toward Jane, which causes her to feel pleasurable and painful emotions. In his 1757 *Philosophical Enquiry into The Sublime and the Beautiful*, Edmund Burke's explanation of the relationship between pleasure and pain shows that these emotions can be present simultaneously or even occur as a byproduct of one another. Burke suggests that pain is stronger, more intense, than pleasure, and that the blending of the two emotions creates an intensity of feeling which transcends simple pleasure. Using Burke and contemporary ideas of the sublime to approach *Jane Eyre* is advantageous for several reasons. First, it is perhaps obvious to any scholarly reader that the primary relationship of the text possesses a sadistic or sadomasochistic quality; however, this argument has been largely supported in recent scholarship with Freudian theory and other anachronistic psychoanalytic approaches. Using Burke's study of the pleasure and pain excited by sublime delight offers a

productive lens through which to consider sadomasochism in the relationship. Burke's theory predates Brontë, and thus avoids an ahistorical bias; it allows us to pose these questions in contemporary terms. The theory of sublime delight can also introduce useful language to define the strategic code through which Jane and Rochester express forbidden desire and access pleasure indirectly. The sadomasochistic tension of their relationship overlays their proper dominant/submissive roles, and it is the exaggeration or performance of these roles which allows a space for sensation and (negative) pleasure. If we assume an ultimately egalitarian ground at the core of their relationship, as I attempt to show, we will find that the pain he subjects her to exists at a tolerable distance and generates a sadomasochistic sublime delight.

“FANCIES BRIGHT AND DARK”: SADOMASOCHISM
AND THE SUBLIME IN *JANE EYRE*

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Much critical attention has been given to *Jane Eyre's* central romantic relationship and has explored, at length, the ways in which it is marked by a complex negotiation of power that both develops and subverts the traditional gender roles the novel initially establishes: those of dominant masculinity and submissive femininity. Jane and Rochester cultivate this relationship from the outset of their acquaintance through a process characterized by mutual legibility, strategy, and subterfuge. The complexity of their turbulent love story, which maintains a veneer of social propriety while constantly testing its boundaries, manifests itself in several ways. Despite its prescribed dynamic of master/servant, man/wife, the relationship's center of power shifts constantly, blurring the lines of authority. The ability of each to read the other's physiological and nonverbal responses, their drive to know one another, signifies a profound intimacy—within the bounds of propriety, but just. In moments adhering to the proper dominant/submissive model, Rochester's stern command and Jane's meek deference show a kind of exaggeration or performance; a vividly descriptive quality to their language emphasizes awareness and conveys a certain relish of their roles. And in moments when the nature or existence of their relationship is at stake, all pretense to a power differential vanishes and equality is firmly and unequivocally asserted. It is this prevailing egalitarian attitude

which allows Jane and Rochester to develop the exciting tension of their surface relationship, which subverts social expectations by performing them.

This tension is exciting because it turns on the instability of Rochester's attention and affection toward Jane, which causes her to feel pleasurable and painful emotions, wholly dependent on his unpredictable whim. In his 1757 *Philosophical Enquiry into The Sublime and the Beautiful*, Edmund Burke's explanation of the relationship between pleasure and pain shows that these emotions can be present simultaneously or even occur as a byproduct of one another. He introduces his understanding of sublime "delight", which involves a mingling of the two emotions:

The passions which belong to self-preservation turn on pain and danger; they are simply painful when their causes immediately affect us; they are delightful when we have an idea of pain and danger, without being actually in such circumstances; this delight I have not called pleasure, because it turns on pain, and because it is different enough from any idea of positive pleasure (14)

He further clarifies that "when danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are, delightful" (9). Burke suggests that pain is stronger, more intense, than pleasure, and that the blending of the two emotions creates an intensity of feeling which transcends "positive pleasure": "Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger . . . is a source of the sublime; that is, it is

productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling” (9).¹ Burke also suggests that the force of this sublime provokes an uncontrollable emotional response:

The passion caused by the great and sublime in nature, when those causes operate most powerfully, is astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it. Hence arises the great power of the sublime, that, far from being produced by them, it anticipates our reasonings, and hurries us on by an irresistible force (16).

In Vijay Mishra’s study of the Burkean sublime, he suggests that sublime astonishment is a totally dominating force: that “we are compulsively and negatively attracted to what subjugates (the sublime)” (45). He also finds an inherent excitement in sublime passion: “It is not a feeling that arises out of static or ‘restful’ contemplation; on the contrary, it has a certain kinetic energy, a vibration, a motion, ‘a sense of power’” (Mishra 33, 34). This seems to anticipate modern ideas about sadomasochism: Michel Foucault explains that sadistic and sadomasochistic relationships possess “a perpetual novelty, a perpetual tension and a perpetual uncertainty, which the simple consummation of the act lacks” (O’Higgins 20). The excitement inherent to such relationships mirrors the “kinetic energy” Burke notices in sublime delight.

¹ The writings of the French philosopher, the Marquis De Sade (1740-1814) are the source of our modern ideas of sadistic behavior. The pleasure/pain relationship of Burke’s sublime finds a parallel in Sade’s philosophy of pain: “They are not pleasures you must cause this object to taste, but impressions you must produce upon it; and that of pain being far keener than that of pleasure, it is beyond all question preferable that the commotion produced in our nervous system . . . be created by pain rather than by pleasure” (Sade 269).

Using Burke and contemporary ideas of the sublime to approach *Jane Eyre* is advantageous for several reasons. First, it is perhaps obvious to any scholarly reader that the primary relationship of the text possesses a sadistic or sadomasochistic quality; however, this argument has been largely supported in recent scholarship with Freudian theory and other anachronistic psychoanalytic approaches. Using Burke's study of the pleasure and pain excited by sublime delight offers a productive lens through which to consider sadomasochism in the relationship. Burke's theory predates Brontë, and thus avoids an ahistorical bias; it allows us to pose these questions in contemporary terms. Another advantage of this approach is that the theory of sublime delight can introduce useful language to define the strategic code through which Jane and Rochester express forbidden desire and access pleasure indirectly. The sadomasochistic tension of their relationship overlays their proper dominant/submissive roles, and it is the exaggeration or performance of these roles which allows a space for sensation and (negative) pleasure. If we assume an ultimately egalitarian ground at the core of their relationship, as I attempt to show, we will find that the pain he subjects her to exists at a tolerable distance and generates a masochistic sublime delight.

CHAPTER II

EQUALITY AND RESPECT

Jane's relationship with Rochester is in part one of reciprocal respect and mutuality. They both "read" each other's emotions, language, manner, and bodies continually in the text, and the habit of reading one another's responses enables a continually adaptive and interactive understanding of one another. Sally Shuttleworth suggests that the novel's "erotic struggles . . . center on the issue of legibility" and show "a romantic engagement . . . that centers on the ability of each partner to read, unseen, the hidden secrets of the other" (4, 3). She later suggests that their dynamic is more power-play than power struggle: "The rules of their 'game' are defined . . . by an attempt to read the inner territory of the other while preserving the self unread" through "surveillance and interpretive penetration" (170, 171). Beyond simply reading the attitudes and responses of the other, Jane and Rochester also indicate an understanding that they are themselves being read. This suggests the possibility of a code spoken between them; awareness of the other's attention leads to a clandestine form of communication through their responses.

After only one brief encounter Jane shows a familiarity, even an intimate knowledge of Rochester; she already knows "my traveller with his broad and jetty eyebrows . . . I recognised his decisive nose" (190). Shuttleworth calls Jane's analysis of Rochester's every movement and feature an "interpretive proficiency" (171). Jane shows

clarity in her acknowledgment of the effect he has on her: “(His eyes) were full of an interest, an influence that quite mastered me,—that took my feelings from my own power and fettered them in his” (252). She even reads Rochester’s response to Blanche Ingram’s advances, the account of which is articulated in the language of skill and warfare and suggestive of a kind of expertise with this particular target:

When she failed, I saw how she might have succeeded. Arrows that continually glanced off from Mr. Rochester’s breast . . . might, I knew, if shot by a surer hand, have quivered keen in his proud heart—have called love into his stern eye . . . or, better still, without weapons a silent conquest might have been won (266).

Jane does not feel sorry for herself here in the usual way of unrequited love; her grief is rather about critique of her rival’s substandard tactics. As Heta Pyrhönen suggests, Jane’s fascination with Blanche is another way of striving to understand Rochester: “Painting the rival’s portrait is Jane’s means of trying to fathom Rochester’s enigmatic sexual desire as well as the equally enigmatic object of his desire” (38).

It is this desire for understanding that infuses the language of the sublime in the description of Rochester’s hidden nature and articulates Jane’s desire to pursue it and him—

The strange depth partially disclosed; that something which used to make me fear and shrink, as if I had been wandering amongst volcanic-looking hills, and had suddenly felt the ground quiver and seen it gape: that something, I, at intervals, beheld still; and with throbbing heart, but not with palsied nerves. Instead of wishing to shun, I longed only to dare—to divine it (267).

Jane’s primary lament in losing Rochester to Blanche is that she will not be allowed to know the sublime “strange depth”—she says, “I thought Miss Ingram happy, because one

day she might look into the abyss at her leisure, explore its secrets and analyse their nature” (267).

Jane also reads Rochester reading her, noting that “he seemed to read the glance . . . as if its import had been spoken as well as imagined” (207). Rochester is able to name her hidden emotions with precision: “with a single hasty glance (he) seemed to dive into my eyes. ‘Stubborn?’ he said. ‘and annoyed’” (205). He warns her to “beware . . . what you express with that organ, I am quick at interpreting its language” (207). His reading of Jane deepens when he demonstrates his understanding of her ability to read him:

I believe you felt the existence of sympathy between you and your grim and cross master, Jane; for it was astonishing to see how quickly a certain pleasant ease tranquillised your manner: snarl as I would, you showed no surprise, fear, annoyance, or displeasure at my moroseness; you watched me, and now and then smiled at me (405).

Rochester echoes Jane’s desire for deeper intimate knowledge, recalling when he was first acquainted with her character, he desired to “search it deeper and know it better” (72).

This careful attention to the emotional identity of the other reveals a “kinship”, almost a shared self. As Terry Eagleton argues, Rochester “conceives of (their) union in terms of spiritual equality” (29). Rochester aligns their physical bodies when he tells her he feels “akin” to her:

It is as if I had a string somewhere under my left ribs, tightly and inextricably knotted to a similar string situated in the corresponding quarter of your little frame . . . I am afraid that cord of communion will be snapt; and then I’ve a nervous notion I should take to bleeding inwardly (337).

Jane understands their “kinship” as a code, a secret language read on the body. While watching Rochester entertaining other women, she concludes that

He is not of their kind. I believe he is of mine . . . I feel akin to him—I understand the language of his countenance and movements . . . I have something in my brain and heart, in my blood and nerves, that assimilates me mentally to him . . . I have certain tastes and feelings in common with him (253).

The repeated reference to blood and relation suggests a familial intimacy, and Jane admits that “I felt at times as if he were my relation rather than my master” (219).

The skill with which Jane and Rochester are able to read emotions and responses in one another seems to result in something beyond the feelings of kinship they describe—beyond the language of shared blood and familial relation. Something like a shared identity, a possession, an emotional reciprocity creeps into the language they use to address one another and define the stakes of their feelings. This is perhaps most readily apparent in the frequent appearance of the word “my”, used by both Jane and Rochester to describe their relation to the other beginning very early in their acquaintance. When Jane recognizes Rochester at Thornfield following the mishap with his horse, she conspicuously uses the word “my” to describe the “traveler”, which suggests a shared secret or illicit intimacy with the traveler, meeting as they have outside the boundaries of polite society with its established scripts and drawing rooms (190). Almost right away, Jane begins to refer to him as *her* master, which takes on an almost fetishized tone considering the fact that the other servants refer to him as simply “master” or “the master”. She can still be found referring to him as “my master” even after they are married. Though she also calls him by his given name at this point, it still bears the

possessive “my Edward”. As for Rochester, his possessive language begins more hesitantly, struggling for purchase in his “Good-night, my—” following a particularly charged interchange (259). He seems to settle on “my little friend” as a suitable placeholder until his marriage proposal allows a shift to “my little wife” and the more possessive “my own—entirely my own” (299).

The easy ownership felt for one another occurs alongside a recognition of the self in the other person. Rochester understands Jane to be another self in his choice of words in one such possessive statement— “my equal is here, and my likeness” (339). Jane reinforces the concept of their physical and emotional union when she recognizes Rochester’s face and voice (in disguise) as “as familiar to me as my own face in the glass—as the speech of my own tongue” (282). Pyrhönen points out that when she hears him cry out her name from across the moors, the voice seems to come from within herself: “Again I questioned whence it came, as vainly as before: it seemed in *me*—not in the external world” (Pyrhönen 47, Brontë 521). In these examples we see possession take on an egalitarian tone—a kind of second self, a shared identity.

Mutual possession and shared identity develop into a confident self-containment of the relationship. There is a stability to Jane’s devotion to Rochester which is immaterial to being physically near him; she tells him that “all my heart is yours, sir: it belongs to you; and with you it would remain, were fate to exile the rest of me from your presence for ever” and “wherever you are is my home—my only home” (546, 330). She underscores this containment, recognition, and reciprocal possession confidently and adamantly, using matching declarative phrases in this passage describing her married life:

I am my husband's life as fully as he is mine. No woman was ever nearer to her mate than I am: ever more absolutely bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. I know no weariness of my Edward's society: he knows none of mine, any more than we each do of the pulsation of the heart that beats in our separate bosoms . . . to talk to each other is but a more animated and an audible thinking. All my confidence is bestowed on him, all his confidence is devoted to me; we are precisely suited in character—perfect concord is the result (554).

This echoes Rochester's earlier suggestion of the same reciprocity—that marrying Jane will be able to “make my happiness—I will make yours” (340).

This well-established theme of mutual ownership and shared selfhood contributes to the ways in which Jane and Rochester approach their relationship in order to make clear its egalitarian goals. For all Rochester's stern posturing and domineering banter, he is at all times respectful of Jane, not just in a predictable display of chivalric acts, but in a careful consideration of her feelings and her full consent. We see this most obviously in his concern with establishing limits at the outset of their acquaintance, which takes on an almost apologetic tone. Mary Ann Davis argues that

Unlike the tyrannical and despotic dominance of John Reed and Mr. Brocklehurst, Rochester seems to have no intention of subjecting Jane to a lack of convention without at first obtaining her agreement. The negotiation of the conventional boundaries of their interactions also contains explicit references to mastery and command, which are distanced from their social roles of master and servant. While Rochester does most of the talking, this is a negotiation participated in by both. Jane is able to give her assent or to clarify his meanings, to counter with her own reasoning, to qualify the sort of yielding she would offer (130).

From their first introduction, Rochester adopts a dominant attitude in his conversational style which he makes mention of explicitly, a gesture that shows respect for Jane's

feelings while also calling attention to his performance of mastery—which functions as a kind of sadistic narration.

The way Rochester structures this social contract can show how it functions for his purposes. He begins by merely showing deference in an apologetic tone—“excuse my tone of command”; a few pages later he has seized upon a rationale for it: “I don’t wish to treat you like an inferior: that is” (correcting himself), “I claim only such superiority as must result from twenty years’ difference in age and a century’s advance in experience” (194, 205). Here, he rejects an established social order, showing his desire to bend the rules for their purposes; he shows respect for Jane’s intelligence while establishing a logical reason for his dominance. Following Jane’s rejection of his premise (that age alone may grant authority) he counters, “Leaving superiority out of the question, then, you must still agree to receive my orders now and then, without being piqued or hurt by the tone of command” (206). Though at first glance this seems an imperative, authoritarian conclusion to settle the matter, the phrase “you must still agree” suggests that he still desires her cooperation and corresponding interest or excitement. The word “agree” could have easily been omitted without changing the meaning of the sentence, and his reference to her emotions base the directive in an intimate context. Situating his mastery in pedantic terms, more teacher/student than employer/employee, he directs their relationship to an inherently erotically charged space; as Patricia Menon argues, the “interplay between power and eroticism (is) intrinsic to instruction” (2).

Rochester’s careful treading of the line drawn between respect and subversive arousal makes clear the distinction between power and power play in this relationship. As

I have suggested above, his sardonic attitude toward social convention and approved master/servant relationships makes space for a new kind of relationship. Judith Mitchell explains that the banter between them is erotic precisely because of its crossing of boundaries, seen in Rochester's improper familiarity and scrutiny, and in Jane's little disobediences and impertinence (53). Even as early as the interchange I examine above, in which Rochester asks permission of Jane to proceed in this way, we can see the beginnings of these transgressions—his consideration of her feeling, her rejection of his explanation. As John Maynard suggests, "Rochester really doesn't want her to be submissive", merely to establish her acknowledgement of the need to submit to him, which can be subverted or disobeyed, then scolded or punished—a process which excites them both (113). Maynard also points out that Rochester halts his threatened sexual violence after realizing that his gratification requires her freely-given consent; that he would not be able to subdue her "inner self" (130). This shows that the performance of his dominance more requires her permission than her submission.

The "tastes and feelings" that form Jane's and Rochester's bodily economy of sameness also signify Jane's willing participation in their relationship; it is important to note the degree to which she is responsible for the nature of that relationship herself. She is able to play at their response relationship while maintaining socially prescribed boundaries. Her description of her strategy shows us that careful navigation; she says that

I knew the pleasure of vexing and soothing him by turns; it was one I chiefly delighted in . . . on the extreme brink I liked well to try my skill. Retaining every minute form of respect, every propriety of my station, I could still meet him in argument without fear or uneasy restraint; this suited both him and me (234).

This behavior can be read as the same sort of manipulation that Rochester engages in. Davis sees this navigation of boundaries as a way to enhance Jane's own pleasure: "The novel makes clear that, for Jane Eyre, it is not the full transcendence or transgression of the social forms that pleases her, but a play with the forms" (131). Menon adds that Jane has this in common with Brontë's other heroines, who all desire egalitarian relationships but perform submission and disobedience (which is an extension of submission, in that it acknowledges a rightful authority to be disobeyed) for libidinal play (3).

Daniela Garofalo shows that this careful negotiation of social forms works toward establishing an ultimate gratification for both Jane and Rochester:

Inequality, then, is freely established based not on social and economic differences but on a fantasy of sublime power . . . material inequality must be minimized so that Jane and Rochester can indulge in the much more tenacious inequality constituted by this fantasy (151).

Her emphasis here is on Jane's conscious election of equality and ultimate gratification—"The point of the narrative is to eliminate inequality that is not freely chosen . . . The inequalities of caste and gender can be minimized in favor of a new inequality that allows Jane to submit with pleasure" (148).

Jane's active pursuit of pleasure, indirect as it may seem, has been well documented in the critical conversation. Mitchell refers to Jane as a desiring subject, rather than a desired object of attraction, and suggests that Jane's plain features work to reinforce this status by making her an unsuitable candidate for conventional objectification associated with female beauty (45). This subjectivity enables Jane to actively participate in the relationship, shaping it and painstakingly describing it as it

develops. As Davis indicates, this ability to describe and narrate their relationship is a pivotal component of Jane's desiring subjectivity; she argues that "the role of the first-person narrator in conveying her strategic erotic power cannot be overstated, as it is the full range of emotion and personhood conveyed through Jane Eyre's voice" (144).

It is this voice that defines her experience as desirer, and though her candor is uncharacteristic of the time, her nod to traditional values and the ways in which she positions her pinings make the narrative less scandalous than honest, and this honesty serves as a defense for the boldness of the text's subject matter. The eighteenth century Scottish minister James Fordyce warns in his 1767 conduct guide, *Sermons to Young Women*, against being the sort of woman who denies passionate emotions too fervently or as a pretense:

Under the mask of this seeming severity, this violent affectation of virtue, harbor passions of a very different kind. Who does not know, that the greatest prudes have often dropt their disguise at last; and betrayed such dispositions as many a young woman of good nature, and courteous behaviour, is incapable of indulging? Everything overdone is liable to suspicion (87).

Jane's honest, confessional account of her feelings and impulses provides an authenticity which excuses certain indiscretions of propriety.

The pleasure Jane seeks and ostensibly attains is developed through the tension of the master-servant relationship. Garofalo argues that this kind of relationship has for its impetus a suggestion of erotic fantasy; much like the mentor-mentee and instructor-student structured relationships there is an inherent erotic draw. Her assessment of Jane's ultimate pleasure and happiness does include the possibility of extant inequality—

Once the inequalities that torment the protagonist seem at least superficially removed from her relationship with the master, the novel reveals how the last bastion of true inequality is found at the level of erotic gender fantasy. The lower classes and women remain wedded to their aristocratic masters because their masters make modern life exciting by lending a Gothic intensity to an otherwise mundane existence (138).

I disagree somewhat with this reading. Though dominant/submissive, sadomasochistic relationships always confuse this point to some degree, I would argue that Jane chooses this fantasy and derives pleasure from it, by all accounts an equal measure of gratification as Rochester's own. Garofalo later shows this apparent equality in her reading of the novel's ending:

Jane Eyre naturalizes the desire for mastery as one of these "basic qualities" at the same time that it also naturalizes a desire for equality and freedom. In the home and under Jane's purview, the erotic pleasures of mastery and the desire for democratic freedom coexist as the most intimate truths of "human identity" (147).

The "desire for democratic freedom" is shown in those moments in which the nature of their relationship is questioned. These instances carry high stakes, and stand in stark contrast with the more playful context of their easy banter. Jane's language of independence and equality demonstrate for Rochester the kind of treatment her happiness requires. One of her most famous speeches delineates unapologetic rejection of his perception of her capacities—

"I tell you I must go!" I retorted, roused to something like passion. "Do you think I can stay to become nothing to you? Do you think I am an automaton? —a machine without feelings? and can bear to have my morsel of bread snatched from my lips, and my drop of living water dashed from my cup? Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong!—I have as much soul as you,—and full as much heart! . . . I am not

talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, nor even of mortal flesh;—it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God’s feet, equal,—as we are!” (338)

She asserts that “I am no bird; and no net ensnares me; I am a free human being with an independent will, which I now exert to leave you” (338). Her shouted rejection of perceived injustices here are accompanied by declarative absolutes, the combination working to complicate the coyly submissive, bantering Jane we have seen in drawing rooms past. Where before she acknowledges her status as a “paid subordinate”, here she makes no apology, no qualification of her claim to equality and fair treatment (206). Her demands will not be tempered by social expectations, or differences in class or gender; she puts their souls on unequivocally equal ground and shows the ultimate indication of equality in a relationship—her ability to walk away from it.

Later, during the disastrous wedding, she uses language which asserts not just an equal posture, but a dominant one, and revisits her lament from chapters before; now, instead of “he made me love him without looking at me,” she tells us that “I looked at Mr. Rochester: I made him look at me” (252, 377). Here she possesses a gaze, as before, when her eyes are “drawn” to him, but this gaze is unflinching, active, confrontational. She rejects his refusal to look at her and makes him do it. In the text’s final chapters when Jane returns to Rochester, after all impediments to their relationship have been removed, her submissive, provocative banter returns. She tells him, “I am my own mistress” but follows the statement with a deferential “sir” and continues to refer to him in narration as “master” (536). The low-stakes moment of anticipatory happiness allows for the playful submission to accompany her declaration of independence.

CHAPTER III

JANE'S MASOCHISTIC TENDENCIES

Davis claims that “*Jane Eyre* engages questions of Western female erotic agency with complexity, rather than with authority, (which) suggests its continued relevance as a feminist literary production that treads the brink of our most unsettling desires” (144). The complex tension felt in Jane’s play at submission and simultaneous desire to be mastered, shown above to be separate from the functional hierarchy of her relationship with Rochester, comes from her masochistic attraction to sublime delight, danger, and adventure. We see this tendency in Jane even independent of her relationship with Rochester, so it may be useful to briefly explore the way this tendency manifests itself in her nature.

Though Jane cannot imagine herself wedded to St. John, she admits that after a while in his company she begins to notice facets of his character which could potentially ensnare her. It is in these worried lines that we find Jane’s own definition of ‘sublime’ and find it is not far from Burke’s own:

All men of talent . . . whether they be zealots, or aspirants, or despots—provided only they be sincere—have their sublime moments, when they subdue and rule. I felt veneration for St. John—veneration so strong that its impetus thrust me at once to the point I had so long shunned . . . I was almost as hard beset by him now as I had been once before, in a different way, by another (518).

Here she uses the example of dominant figures and suggests that their achievement of sublimity issues directly from their ability to “subdue and rule”, to “beset”. As a consequence of her recognition of these traits in the exacting St. John, Jane uses the word “veneration” to name her feelings for him—a word that suggests fear as well as reverence. It is this awe, this fear which suggests to Jane that she may be unable to refuse him, that his severe dominance will ultimately “thrust” her into love for him.

Similar proximations of romance and fear or violence are found beginning very early in Jane’s accounting of her narrative, a process which, she tells us, includes only what she deems important to her story (149). She tells Helen Burns that she would “willingly submit” to bodily pain to gain love; the structure of this declaration, as Massé has pointed out, implies that love requires pain or is a kind of reward for having endured it (Brontë 133, Massé 196). When Jane is traveling to Thornfield (and to Rochester) for the first time, she describes her feelings in language of uncertain excitement tempered with hesitant fear; words and phrases such as “sensation”, “inexperienced youth”, “charm”, “sweetens the sensation”, “glow”, “throb”, and “fear” somewhat eroticize the danger of the unknown (160). Later, we see her language again confuse excitement and dread; she describes her experience to be characterized by “flowers and pleasures, as well as thorns and toils”, continuing the constant theme of pain and hardship intermingling with pleasure or joy, as almost supplementary to one another (165).

Before Jane knows who Rochester is or what he will be to her, she comes away from their chance meeting in the woods breathless and wistful— “what good it would have done me to have been tossed in the storms of an uncertain struggling life, and to

have been taught by rough and bitter experience to long for the calm amidst which I now repined!” (186). Jane’s frustration here signifies that her tranquility and pleasure are not able to be appreciated without knowledge of pain; she longs for the novelty of the danger and excitement she felt in their brief interaction. This echoes an earlier passage in which Jane tells us that a “restlessness was in my nature; it agitated me to pain sometimes”, and that she routinely imagines a “greater world”, as Garofalo terms it, which “let my heart be heaved by the exultant movement, which, while it swelled it in trouble, expanded it with life” (Brontë 178, Garofalo 142). As noted previously, Foucault captures Jane’s longing sentiment here in his explanation of the draw of sadomasochistic relationships: they possess an inherent excitement which arises from “perpetual tension and novelty” (O’Higgins 20). John Kuchich echoes this idea using language similar to Jane’s—“the paleness of tranquility and satisfied desire as opposed to the vitality of disruptive change, even if—or precisely because—change brings isolation and “passionate pain” (925).

We see this “passionate pain” starkly in a passage describing the feverish dreams which reveal Jane’s inner turmoil during her separation from Rochester:

After a day passed in honourable exertion amongst my scholars, an evening spent in drawing or reading contentedly alone—I used to **rush** into **strange** dreams at night: dreams **many-coloured, agitated**, full of the ideal, the **stirring**, the **stormy**—dreams where, amidst unusual scenes, **charged with adventure**, with **agitating risk** and **romantic chance**, I still again and again met Mr. Rochester, always at some **exciting crisis**; and then . . . the hope of passing a lifetime at his side, would be renewed, with all its first **force and fire**. Then I awoke. Then I recalled where I was, and how situated. Then I rose up on my curtainless bed, **trembling** and **quivering**; and then the still, dark night witnessed the convulsion of despair, and heard the burst of passion (463).

This passage is interesting for several reasons. I have bolded the words which seem to evoke Jane's sublime (masochistic) "delight". The way the passage is structured, placing the description of her dreams immediately following that of a typical day spent in cold, repressed respectability, implies that Jane's true nature is signified by this burst of passion struggling to the surface. Additionally, the repetition of the word "then" in the final lines of this passage is interesting for several reasons. First, it serves to abruptly bring to an end the fantasy depicted, replacing it with matter-of-fact, sequential phrases. The repetition of "then" also implies repetition of the experience of the dream; it almost functions as recitation and implies a memorized ritual, many times repeated. Finally, the sequential use of "then" necessarily builds the tension to the eroticized, painful release in the last clause.

Immediately prior to our first introduction to Rochester, whose "sternness has a power beyond beauty", Jane's mingling of the language of pleasure and danger extends past description of emotion and characterizes the sublime imagery of nature and setting (330). The liminal, anticipatory language here establishes a tone for the meeting and for Rochester in general: a surface of pleasure tempered by a darkness or danger. Here Jane finds a "pleasure brooding"; she explains that "the charm of the hour lay in its approaching dimness", describes "sunny horizon and blended clouds", and recalls "fancies bright and dark" (180-1). Michelle Massé draws helpful attention to the text's constant proximate definitions of pleasant and painful emotions—hope and fear, rapture and agony are often confused (213-214).

Describing the man himself, this conflicting language is seen again. Mrs. Fairfax characterizes Rochester's inscrutable manner as difficult to tell "whether he is in jest or earnest, whether he is pleased or the contrary" (173). This perception implies a certain native tension. Jane's early accounts of his physical appearance recalls a "dark face, with stern features and a heavy brow" and repeats this description with little variation in adjacent passages, suggesting that the "dark, strong, and stern" aspect of this man has quite struck her. (185,182) Some of the most interesting descriptions of his manner are those which are accompanied by an explanation of the comfort or interest she feels in response to his stern personality. Jane tells us that "the frown, the roughness of the traveler set me at my ease" and that his "harsh caprice laid me under no obligation . . . the proceeding was piquant: I felt interested" (183, 190).

Later, after she has made better acquaintance of Rochester, we see a shift in his mood which indicates the beginnings of friendship. However, Jane makes clear that he still maintains the air of mastery which initially captures her interest; she tells us that "he was imperious sometimes still; but I did not mind that" (219). Though he is "not quite so stern", he remains "preciously grim", and his eyes have a look sometimes "which, if it was not softness, reminded you, at least, of that feeling" (202). In this way we understand that the impetus for Jane's interest and attraction remains, though tempered by a kinder, more palatable representation of Rochester. During the brief happiness of their engagement, Jane flirts with Rochester by claiming that "I like rudeness a great deal better than flattery"; as Judith O'Neill points out, when "his caresses become grimaces, pinches, and tweaks, she records that, sometimes at least, she 'decidedly preferred these

fierce favours”” (Brontë 347, O’Neill 34). Eagleton suggests that Jane has this interest in common with Brontë’s other heroines, who “habitually welcome male domination as a stimulant to their fiery natures” (21).

Jane’s complex comfort in harshness and pain is recognizable throughout the text and certainly carries markers of the sublime. As Shuttleworth points out,

Jane revels in the pleasures of dominance even in the agonized moments after her aborted marriage . . . Brontë cuts through the niceties of romance tradition, daring to give her heroine . . . a sense of enjoyment at the conventional moment of supposed greatest suffering (173).

In this moment, Jane assures the reader that “I was not afraid: not in the least. I felt an inward power . . . The crisis was perilous; but not without its charm: such as the Indian, perhaps, feels when he slips over the rapid in his canoe” (393). Garofalo’s reading of this passage offers a similar suggestion, that Jane is harnessing Rochester’s sublime power rather than combating it; that she savors the danger:

The crisis is perilous but charming because Rochester’s threatened violence is the occasion for Jane’s adventure. His power is the “field” for her exertions as she discovers that her strength is stimulated by his mastery. Here, influence means the capacity to engage with a greater power while enjoying one’s capacity to keep it in check. However, the crucial point here is that keeping it in check is a means of keeping it. The Indian riding the rapids tests his strength against a far greater power, not to destroy or eliminate the danger, but to participate in and share that power while exerting force over the rapids by controlling their effects (147, 148).

Jane describes her initial romantic feelings for Rochester as “billows of trouble (rolling) under surges of joy”; the joy she feels here is both anchored and produced by trouble (225).

As Shaw points out, “the OED (describes) the effect of the sublime as crushing or engulfing, as something we cannot resist”; he concludes that “common to all these definitions is a preoccupation with struggle” (2, 4). Jane routinely captures this struggle, this inability to resist, in her account of the feelings he arouses in her. Massé has usefully examined the proximate emotions of Jane’s “raptures” and “agonies”; she suggests that passages in which Jane “feared, or, should I say hoped” and “both wished and feared to see Mr. Rochester” indicate the similarity of these emotions and produces a feeling which is stronger for its complexity (Massé 213, 214, Brontë (229). Jane confirms this stronger feeling in a passage following her engagement, at the proposition of being “Mrs. Rochester”: “The feeling, the announcement sent through me, was something stronger than was consistent with joy—something that smote and stunned. It was, I think almost fear” (343).

The draw of this feeling which blends pleasure with danger and hope with dread is the essence of Jane’s sublime—her attraction to Rochester. The constant struggle between her longing to know and her fear of knowing, her desire to approach the abyss and her fear of falling, are represented in some of the most vivid passages of the text. After his sudden and prolonged absence, Jane savors a forbidden gaze—

I looked, and had an acute pleasure in looking,—a precious yet poignant pleasure; pure gold, with a steely point of agony: a pleasure like what the thirst-perishing man might feel who knows the well to which he has crept is poisoned, yet stoops and drinks divine draughts nevertheless (252).

For Jane, the delicious danger of confronting Rochester’s poisoned well is irresistible, as is made plain in a passage I have referred to previously:

That something which used to make me fear and shrink, as if I had been wandering amongst volcanic-looking hills, and had suddenly felt the ground quiver and seen it gape: that something, I, at intervals, beheld still; and with throbbing heart, but not with palsied nerves. Instead of wishing to shun, I longed only to dare—to divine it (267).

Jane's explicit desire to explore Rochester's dangerous nature, her attraction to it, her excitement by it, make clear her status as participant and agent. Jane has found something vital in her love for him, and her deep understanding of his "tastes and feelings" empower her to reproduce his treatment of her when he disengages. During absent or "push" periods of Rochester's push-pull attentions, Jane imitates some of the more sadistic elements of their response-relationship; she in a sense performs Rochester in order to replicate the emotions his little dominations provoke. By standing in for Rochester and perpetuating the emotional state his treatment constructs, Jane develops an intentional share in their relationship's power dynamic.

In his 1821 article, "An Essay on the Sentiments of Attraction, Adaptation, and Variety", published in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, William Howison introduces a concept of attraction rooted in "adaptation, or imitative feeling, which refers to the movements, extension, and character of what is contemplated" (393) According to this principle, Jane's surrogacy of Rochester seems to result in "an agreeable emotion in accommodating itself to the nature of the object upon which its attention is fixed" (394). Bette London shows the ways in which this imitation is an active, participatory engagement, suggesting "the central pattern of Jane's narrative—a movement not from bondage to freedom but through increasingly powerful and interiorized forms of discipline" and that "what Brontë does, in effect, is to transform the duty of silent

suffering into the site of pleasure and passionate investment” (201, 198). Kucich argues a similar point concerning interiority, but suggests the emotions arising from Jane’s imitation of Rochester function as more end than means: “At its highest pitch, Brontëan desire never seeks to achieve union between two selves or to complete the self in the other . . . In general Brontë’s characters use others only as the friction necessary to a heightened inward dynamic of feeling” (921).

Kucich further argues that in *Jane Eyre*, “Brontë cultivates withdrawal . . . as the preferred field for a turbulent kind of emotional experience” (51). Jane begins to imitate Rochester’s withdrawal and deprivation immediately following his model of sudden absence; she “endeavor(s) to bring back with a strict hand such as had been straying through imagination’s boundless and trackless waste” in a “course of wholesome discipline”, forcing her emotions “to submit” (236, 238). Jane shows us the ease with which she replaces joy with cold pragmatism: “I stopped once to ask myself what that joy meant: and to remind reason that it was not to my home I was going, or to a permanent resting-place, or to a place where fond friends looked out for me and waited my arrival” (328). As Judith Mitchell indicates, Jane reasons that “such idolization is dangerous, a tendency to be resisted, controlled, mitigated and above all concealed from the male” (52).

This belief is consistent with conduct expectations of the period. Shuttleworth finds that the contemporary understanding of “two conflicting models of selfhood, of mental control and physiological instability, are played out in Brontë’s fiction, heightening and intensifying the erotic struggles for control”, a situation we see Jane

describe in her intention that “sense would resist delirium: judgment would warn passion” (Shuttleworth 4, Brontë 225). Shuttleworth quotes a nineteenth century physician who explains that when women are “prohibited from outward expression of their sexual feelings, they are forced to ‘feign a calmness and indifference when an inward fire devours them and their whole organization is in a tumult’” (157). This violent language is echoed in Jane’s own description of this process; in a single moment she notices Rochester’s deprivation of attention and replicates it— “it was pleasure enough to have the privilege of again looking on Mr. Rochester, whether he looked on me or not . . . And then I strangled a new-born agony—a deformed thing which I could not persuade myself to own and rear” (328). Violent language recurs in these moments and is suggestive of the great effort taken in suppressing naturally occurring emotion— “I know I must conceal my sentiments: I must smother hope; I must remember that he cannot care much for me” (253).

Discussing an eighteenth century conduct authority (Ellis), Bette London shows the demands of regulation and self-discipline associated with social expectations of the period:

Commenting on the ‘fatal mistakes’ young women are liable to fall into in ‘the regulation of their emotions of attraction and repulsion,’ Ellis blames such lapses on a lack of ‘whole-some discipline’ in their early training . . . To counterbalance ‘the besetting sin of woman-her desire to be an object of attention’, Ellis recommends ‘wholesome rules’ for the ‘early exercise of self- discipline’ (212).

The repetition of the word “wholesome”, here and elsewhere, is mirrored by Brontë in Jane’s attitude toward her efforts to subdue emotion. This sort of hard virtue is evident in

the language of effort, of control. Jane tells us that despite her most ardent efforts she has failed: "I had not intended to love him; the reader knows I had wrought hard to extirpate from my soul the germs of love there detected; and now, at the first renewed view of him, they spontaneously arrived, green and strong!" (252). More surprising is the resistance in the following passage, situated as it is in the narrative after Jane has already been romantic with Rochester: "I *do* love you," I said, "more than ever: but I must not show or indulge the feeling: and this is the last time I must express it" (393). Here we see that it is not merely forbidden for Jane to act on her romantic feelings; she must also hide the (known) fact that she has the feelings in the first place. Massé explains that for Jane, this suppressive compulsion to resistance is the beginning of a cycle of "ceaseless excitation and ruthless restraint" (216).

Jane's version of Rochester's sadistic scrutiny involves a self-confrontation which exposes and acknowledges painful feelings. As referenced previously, this confrontation is felt when Jane finds pain revealed in her own "gaze"; she experiences

An acute pleasure in looking, —a precious yet poignant pleasure; pure gold, with a steely point of agony: a pleasure like what the thirst-perishing man might feel who knows the well to which he has crept is poisoned, yet stoops and drinks divine draughts nevertheless (252).

Her pain here is linked to observation and careful attention, and is similar to the pain caused by Rochester's scrutiny and confrontation. Jane employs a similar style of interrogation when she grills Mrs. Fairfax for information about Blanche Ingram. She asks a series of detailed questions about the specifics of Blanche's beauty and suitability for marriage to Rochester, even advocating for the match when Mrs. Fairfax demurs. This

amounts to self-torture, but Jane forces herself to confront her most heartbreaking reality with direct questions, a process Massé compares to the sadistic “narration” Rochester uses to sharpen her pain (Brontë 236, Massé 215).

Following her interrogation of Mrs. Fairfax, Jane’s beautiful painting of Blanche and rough drawing of her own likeness act as a kind of self-interrogation which forces her to substantiate her ideas of Blanche’s beauty while confirming her own plainness. The exercise also parallels Rochester’s later demand that Jane be made to observe Blanche at length. Taking an approach which would expand the Howison ideas of imitation and surrogacy, Pyrhönen suggests that

Painting the rival’s portrait is Jane’s means of trying to fathom Rochester’s enigmatic sexual desire as well as the equally enigmatic object of his desire. While painting, Jane divides herself into two: she becomes Blanche as the assumed desired object and Rochester as the assumed desiring subject (38).

The rough, rudimentary drawing Jane does of herself is what London calls “self-flagellation”, which “reenacts the scenes of punishment her earlier narrative recounts: to discipline a rebellious spirit, she makes a spectacle of herself” (201). Taking care to avoid an overly psychoanalytic reading of the events of Jane’s childhood, it is nevertheless not difficult to draw parallels between the deep insecurity Jane feels in being punished at Lowood and the painful spectacle depicted here.

Jane undertakes this repressive, flagellant tasking ostensibly for her own good, noting that she “derives benefit” from painting Blanche, which Massé calls her “self-imposed punishment” (Brontë 238, Massé 214). When it occurs to Jane that she will be just another mistress to Rochester, she says that “I did not give utterance to this

conviction: it was enough to feel it. I impressed it on my heart, that it might remain there to serve me as aid in the time of trial” (403). Here again it seems Jane is using painful discipline in order to avoid further emotional pain. However, she must also see immediate desirable results develop from this outlet, as she indicates that “I had reason to congratulate myself on the course of wholesome discipline to which I had thus forced my feelings to submit” (238). This provides her with a private “grim pleasure” and “austere pride”. As Massé suggests, it is significant that Jane chooses to inflict this treatment upon herself rather than blame Blanche, take it out on Adele, or confront Rochester (214). Overall, Jane’s approach to her “course of wholesome discipline” seems to align with Mr. Brocklehurst’s philosophy at Lowood—that she must “punish her body to save her soul” (129). For Jane, pain and punishment are transcendent. She finds that her disciplinary measures are to her ultimate benefit, but she also places emphasis on her desire to simply feel that “grim pleasure”—to approach the danger on her own terms and under her own mastery.

A sort of tertiary sadism we see in Rochester’s behavior, as a kind of extension of his deprivation and scrutiny, involves frequent harsh language or scolding. This manifests itself in Jane’s surrogacy in some interesting ways. At times she actually employs a second voice, an authority which is able to convincingly scold her and assign punishments. When Jane finds herself feeling joy at the thought of returning to Thornfield (and Rochester) the voice scolds, “you know very well you are thinking of (him), and that he is not thinking of you” (328). After cruelly browbeating Jane extensively, the voice commands her to paint the two images for punishment—

‘You,’ I said, ‘a favourite with Mr. Rochester? And you have derived pleasure from occasional tokens of preference—Cover your face and be ashamed! Listen, then, Jane Eyre, to your sentence: No snivel!—no sentiment!—no regret! . . . Whenever, in future, you should chance to fancy Mr. Rochester thinks well of you, take out these two pictures and compare them: say, “Mr. Rochester might probably win that noble lady’s love; . . . is it likely he would waste a serious thought on this indigent and insignificant plebeian?” (237).

Here Jane is totally divorced from the second voice; in addressing Jane by name the voice defines itself as something wholly distinct. In another instance, Jane interestingly seems to name the voice and gender it male:

Conscience, turned tyrant, held Passion by the throat, told her tauntingly, she had yet but dipped her dainty foot in the slough, and swore that with that arm of iron he would thrust her down to unsounded depths of agony. “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: your heart shall be the victim, and you the priest to transfix it” (387).

Jane (the “I”) entreats a voice here which is not attributed, immediately following a parallel scene featuring a personified, male Conscience and a female Passion. Conscience displays sadism and cruelty, and threatens Passion, whose response and place is seemingly assumed by the “I”, or Jane. The ambiguity here confuses and blends the two interchanges, making them read as a single conversation.

Jane’s masochistic tendencies are rooted in a social expectation of submission and obedience. It is the existence of this expectation which provides for the possibility of disobedience, which opens a space for purposeful transgression and provocative tension. If a socially prescribed dominant/submissive relationship expects a structure of obedience, then a disobedience or transgression can push it to a sadomasochistic one,

depending on the response it elicits. Jane's sometime disobedience is made more significant, given higher stakes, precisely because her first impulse is to obey.

At their first meeting, Jane obeys Rochester when he is a stranger to her, which indicates her natural orientation to general submission, independent of a master/servant authority relationship. She also tells the reader here that she feels significant distress in obeying the stranger's command, which further indicates the strength of the imperative to submit: "I should have been afraid to touch a horse when alone, but when told to do it, I was disposed to obey . . . I made effort on effort, though in vain: meantime, I was mortally afraid" (184). After Jane is re-introduced to him as her master, she continues this pattern of submission even when doing so causes distress and discomfort— "I did as I was bid, though I would much rather have remained somewhat in the shade; but Mr. Rochester had such a direct way of giving orders, it seemed a matter of course to obey him promptly" (201-2).

We see this distress extend to Jane's physiology when she marvels at the cool response other young ladies maintain when interacting with Rochester; she tells us that "I wondered to see them receive with calm that look which seemed to me so penetrating: I expected their eyes to fall, their colour to rise under it" (253). This submissive bodily response of what Fordyce calls "shamefacedness" is interesting in that it suggests both submission and transgression. That a "penetrating" look from Rochester should command downcast eyes and burning cheeks implies an enforced sense of shame or wrongdoing in merely returning a look. Given Jane's feelings for Rochester at this point in the narrative, it would be fair to say that Jane welcomes his "penetrating" gaze, and by extension the

squirming physiological distress it arouses. As she assures him later: “I like to serve you, sir, and to obey you in all that is right” (299).

Susan Weisser suggests that Jane’s masochistic disobedience is a kind of “coy sex-play” which demonstrates the “self-defining aspect of sexual love: a wish for a father-like figure who will punish and master with cruelty” (64, 65). This desire is arguably evident from the first time Jane “thrillingly, dangerously disobeys” Rochester’s command; as Mitchell points out, the language used shows that her impertinence is deliberate and self-aware: “I retained my station when he waved me to go” (51, 183). Perhaps most tellingly, Jane notices Rochester noticing this; she comments that he had not paid attention to her before. It is her disobedience which piques his interest, and she notices that not only does this makes him look at her, but also that it is the only thing that has so far: “he looked at me when I said this; he had hardly turned his eyes in my direction before” (183). She takes this first indication of his interest and makes a pattern of mild disobedience, testing the line where she may; a few pages later we find her provoking response to Rochester’s command that she speak: “Instead of speaking, I smiled; and not a very complacent or submissive smile either” (205). Her intention here, made clear in the description of her smile, is less to defy than to provoke.

The signals Jane reads in Rochester’s response to her disobedience are largely unclear. From the first little defiance which arouses his interest, Jane instinctively treads a fine line. Early on she confides that “I was on the point of risking Mr. Rochester’s displeasure, by disobeying his orders”; the word “risking” here implies that Jane is not certain that disobedience would bring his displeasure (223). She takes a decidedly

ambivalent attitude in a previously noted passage, focusing on the thrill of her teasing impertinence:

It little mattered whether my curiosity irritated him; I knew the pleasure of vexing and soothing him by turns; it was one I chiefly delighted in, and a sure instinct always prevented me from going too far; beyond the verge of provocation I never ventured; on the extreme brink I liked well to try my skill (234).

She takes “pleasure” in “vexing and soothing him”, and the word “skill” implies that this provoking behavior, when done properly, is pleasing to Rochester as well.

After their engagement, Jane tells us that she regularly “worked him up to considerable irritation”; a statement that could as easily refer to arousal as annoyance (360). She confirms the double meaning soon after, recalling that

He was kept, to be sure, rather cross and crusty; but on the whole I could see he was excellently entertained, and that a lamb-like submission and turtle-dove sensibility, while fostering his despotism more, would have pleased his judgment, satisfied his common-sense, and even suited his taste less (360).

Jane perceives Rochester’s gratification in the chance to be severe and understands that he does not really want her to be submissive—his sadistic “tastes” require transgression.

Jane’s masochistic attraction to severity and sadistic treatment can be further underscored in her interactions with men lacking these qualities. She first compares him with the other gentlemen who visit Thornfield:

What was the gallant grace of the Lynns, the languid elegance of Lord Ingram,—even the military distinction of Colonel Dent, contrasted with his look of native pith and genuine power? . . . I saw them smile, laugh—it was nothing . . . I saw Mr. Rochester smile:—his stern features softened; his eye grew both brilliant and gentle, its ray both searching and sweet (253).

These men lack the “genuine power” that draws her to Rochester, and she calls their easy smiles “nothing”. For Jane, the value of a smile is in the earning of it, the stern expression must be softened, and the intensity of the eyes must be compelled to kindness.

She offers a similar observation of Mr. Mason, in language which suggests that it is his lack of dominance that repels her—he is depicted in terms suggesting utter passivity. She says that she

detected something in his face that displeased, or rather that failed to please. His features were regular, but too relaxed: his eye was large and well cut, but the life looking out of it was a tame, vacant life . . . his physiognomy . . . struck me as being at the same time unsettled and inanimate. His eye wandered, and had no meaning in its wandering . . . he repelled me exceedingly: there was no power in that smooth-skinned face of a full oval shape: no firmness in that aquiline nose and small cherry mouth; there was no thought on the low, even forehead; no command in that blank, brown eye (269).

The other young women are quite taken with him, but for Jane, Mason’s looks are missing something critical; she says between him and Rochester “the contrast could not be much greater between a sleek gander and a fierce falcon: between a meek sheep and the rough-coated keen-eyed dog, its guardian” (269).

Much could be said about Jane’s complex and arguably parallel relationship with St. John, though in light of the available space here I have focused solely on the Rochester relationship. It is interesting to briefly contrast the two, however, as there are complicated similarities to contend with. As I mention earlier, though Jane does not love St. John or feel loved by him, his “sublime moments”, that is, his tendency to “subdue” and to “rule”, are what will eventually bind her to him (518). Though St. John possesses a stern manner and an air of command, and is in some ways even more dominant than

Rochester, he takes no satisfaction or sadistic pleasure in this. If anything, whatever pleasure he feels is decidedly masochistic: martyring himself in India, rejecting his consuming love of Rosamond Oliver, torturing himself with a deliberate study of a painting of her likeness. St. John is also beautiful, and does not possess the “roughness” of appearance which attracts Jane and puts her “at ease” (183). These crucial differences between St. John and Rochester may help to explain why Jane is repelled by the prospect of a romantic relationship with the former.

CHAPTER IV

ROCHESTER'S SADISM

Rochester's "tastes and feelings" are gratified through Jane's show of submission and his threatening, domineering part in their banter. His sadistic tendencies first suggest themselves even before Jane gets to know him, in the language describing his manner, appearance, and actions. Rochester responds to Jane's obvious distress in managing his horse by first laughing at her, then stating, "necessity compels me to make you useful" (184). He "laid a heavy hand on my shoulder", "mastered the bridle directly", bites his lip "hard", and tells her to fetch his whip (184). This language, coupled with repeated descriptions of his "dark, strong, and stern" appearance and manner, suggests a certain sadistic quality in the stranger which the reader takes to the first proper introduction of Mr. Rochester (185). Even before this, Jane calls Thornfield a kind of "Bluebeard's castle", which also suggests certain truths about its master (175).

Rochester's own language carries a certain narrative quality common to sadistic dialogue. Sadism finds additional gratification in not just the sadistic acts themselves, but in the excessive description of the acts, explained before their commission. We will see this narrative over-description on many occasions from Rochester, but an early example of this indulgence happens in one of their first conversations, as I have noted previously. Under the pretense of seeking permission, he asks her, "do you agree with me that I have a right to be a little masterful, abrupt, perhaps exacting, sometimes?" (205) It is

significant that Rochester expands his language in this area, a passage which is surrounded by even more descriptive words and phrases communicating his meaning and forcing her to understand and acknowledge it. This attentive, narrative language suggests a relish or excitement for Rochester and seeks a similar response in Jane.

As Massé has pointed out, Rochester's sadism necessarily takes pleasure in Jane's pain and distress: "the greater her pain, the greater his joviality" (217). This is shown throughout the text; Jane says that "If . . . I lacked spirits and sank into inevitable dejection, he became even gay" (331). Rochester also shows another key characteristic of sadistic gratification—provoking provocation, or a desire for the partner's disobedience, which will require punishment. He orders her to "Look wicked, Jane: as you know well how to look: coin one of your wild, shy, provoking smiles; tell me you hate me—tease me, vex me; do anything but move me: I would rather be incensed than saddened" (369).

Romana Byrne explains the Sadean idea that

Beauty may be perceived as a quality of criminal actions, whether they are conceptualized or physically performed, inflicted upon others or upon oneself, and this mode of perception . . . produces a feeling of pleasure in the judging subject (20).

Rochester's sadistic dominance is complicated in this passage from their engagement period:

Jane, you please me, and you master me—you seem to submit, and I like the sense of pliancy you impart; and while I am twining the soft, silken skein round my finger, it sends a thrill up my arm to my heart. I am influenced—conquered; and the influence is sweeter than I can express; and the conquest I undergo has a witchery beyond any triumph I can win (345-6).

Here Rochester confirms that her seeming submission excites him, and as Garofalo argues, he “feels assured of his own strength in binding her to himself” (145). However, she also suggests that “his control over her is reversed . . . his strength is weak compared to her influence, which, although submissive, is more triumphant” (145). Rochester is mastered by Jane’s submission; his desire demands it. Incidentally, this capacity for the exchange of power and submission shows fluidity and emphasizes the play inherent to these relationship roles.

Rochester most directly exhibits sadism through harsh language and threats of punishment and violence. At first, this language takes the form of a disciplinarian father; Dianne Sadoff suggests that “the master who is a figurative father owns the power to dominate and fetter, to approve and punish Jane” (131). When Jane speaks a little too candidly, Rochester declares that she “shall be answerable” for her “blunder” (203). He insists that she appear among his houseguests, and anticipating her reluctance, dictates this threat be communicated to her: ““If she objects, tell her it is my particular wish; and if she resists, say I shall come and fetch her in case of contumacy”” (247). This shows both his desire to see her in distress, and his readiness to provide consequences should she disobey him.

In his role-play as the gypsy woman, Rochester tells her she has an “audacity that wants chastising out of you”, again threatening corporal punishment (280). Later, when Jane tells him she will be advertising for a new position due to his presumed impending marriage to Blanche, he scoffs, “You shall walk up the pyramids of Egypt! At your peril you advertise!” (308). Rochester’s threats begin to take on a flirtatious tone after they are

engaged. London, discussing Richard H. Brodhead's study of discipline and fiction in the nineteenth century, suggests that Brodhead's terms "discipline through love" and "disciplinary intimacy" "take on doubled significance when they are appropriated by the structures of romance, as they are in *Jane Eyre*" (211-12). Threats of punishment here are offered in tender language, which certainly captures the idea of "disciplinary intimacy": "But listen—whisper. It is your time now, little tyrant, but it will be mine presently; and when once I have fairly seized you, to have and to hold, I'll just—figuratively speaking—attach you to a chain like this" (357). Jane notes that "Mr. Rochester affirmed I was wearing him to skin and bone, and threatened awful vengeance for my present conduct at some period fast coming"; her language here is playful and exaggerated, and in no way communicates real fear or dread on her part (361).

The stakes of Rochester's threats increase in the next part of their relationship, after the truth about Bertha has come out and Jane is preparing to leave him. Here we see threats of violence which are eroticized and suggestive of rape. Interestingly, Jane shows no fear or dread here, either, feeling instead a sort of calm power from engaging with so great a force. It is worth mentioning the parallel with the sublime; as Shaw points out, "the threat of violation is a constant theme in Burke's writings" (5). Rochester's threats are eroticized in their whispered delivery: "Jane! will you hear reason?" (he stooped and approached his lips to my ear); "because, if you won't, I'll try violence"—as well as their sexual associations: "I am not long-enduring; I am not cool and dispassionate. Out of pity to me and yourself, put your finger on my pulse, feel how it throbs, and—beware!" (393,

394) In a passage that John Maynard suggests a threatened rape (130), Rochester's words halt his actions even as they seek to draw Jane to him:

“A mere reed she feels in my hand!” (And he shook me with the force of his hold.) “I could bend her with my finger and thumb: and what good would it do if I bent, if I uptore, if I crushed her? Consider that eye: consider the resolute, wild, free thing looking out of it, defying me, with more than courage—with a stern triumph . . . If I tear, if I rend the slight prison, my outrage will only let the captive loose . . . And it is you, spirit—with will and energy, and virtue and purity—that I want: not alone your brittle frame . . . Oh! come, Jane, come!” (409)

Rochester asserts his dominance and his role of “punishing father” through infantilizing language toward Jane throughout the novel. He constantly refers to her in childish terms, using words like “child”, “girl-bride”, “little nonnette” to address her, and at the beginning of their relationship he diminishes her contribution to their conversations (335, 343). When she describes her art as having been “one of the keenest pleasures I have ever known”, he counters, “that is not saying much. your pleasures, by your own account, have been few”. He gives a begrudging, critical praise of her work (tied to this same inexperience), then immediately scolds her for keeping Adele up too late (197). When he remarks that there is something unique about her which sets her apart from other “raw school-girl-governesses”, he quickly qualifies the compliment by dismissively reasoning, “if you are cast in a different mould to the majority, it is no merit of yours: Nature did it” (207). Later in their relationship, Rochester eroticizes their difference in age and experience by placing their newly romantic relationship in terms of father/daughter affection. He calls her his “good little girl” and encourages her to ask him for things; “it is my delight to be entreated, and to yield” (347). During this period of

their engagement, he insists on buying her fine things, having her sit on his lap, and generally coddling her in a paternal respect.

Following her return to him at the end of the novel, Rochester refers to a father/daughter relationship, which feels especially jarring considering their most recent romantic involvement and the physical intimacy of the exchange—he is holding her in his arms and she has just kissed his face repeatedly. Even the way he poses the question urgently demands its denial: “I suppose I should now entertain none but fatherly feelings for you: do you think so? Come—tell me” (537). Laura Green argues that this sort of treatment constructs a dynamic of “erotic pedagogy”, or a kind of tension resulting from the master/pupil, parent/child relationship (35).

As we have considered examples of Jane’s rejection of less dominant men, it is worth noticing that Rochester’s ultimate distaste for Blanche Ingram has a similar basis. Eagleton points out that Blanche is the full inverse of Jane; she is shameless, proud, entitled, and conceited (31). She twists the erotically-charged banter of Jane and Rochester into a perverse mirror-image, as demonstrated in the following interchange:

(Blanche) “Take care, then: if you don’t please me, I will shame you by showing how such things *should* be done.” (Rochester) “That is offering a premium on incapacity: I shall now endeavour to fail.” “Gardez-vous en bien! If you err wilfully, I shall devise a proportionate punishment.” “Miss Ingram ought to be clement, for she has it in her power to inflict a chastisement beyond mortal endurance” (258).

At this point, Rochester is performing a show of flirtation to arouse the jealousy of Jane, but he later comments that this affectation of female dominance is what most offends him about Blanche. When Jane expresses concern for Blanche’s hurt feelings at the thought of

having been used and cast off, Rochester scoffs, “Her feelings are concentrated in one—pride; and that needs humbling” (348).

Unsurprisingly, Rochester’s distaste here has ample support in contemporary conduct texts, which reject ostentatious presentations of beauty and naked assertion of desire:

There is nothing so engaging as bashful beauty. The beauty that obtrudes itself, how considerable soever, will either disgust, or at most excite but inferior desires. Men are so made. They refuse their admiration, where it is courted: where it seems rather shunned, they love to bestow it. The retiring graces have been always the most attractive (Fordyce 96).

Rochester makes clear his preferences for a romantic partner:

To women who please me only by their faces, I am the very devil when I find out they have neither souls nor hearts—when they open to me a perspective of flatness, triviality, and perhaps imbecility, coarseness, and ill-temper: but to the clear eye and eloquent tongue, to the soul made of fire, and the character that bends but does not break—at once supple and stable, tractable and consistent—I am ever tender and true (345).

This language—“the soul made of fire” and “bends but does not break” suggests both endurance and grit; it describes a beauty which must be teased out or proven to be credible. More than unthinking submission, these criteria seem to require answering passion and provocation. His words suggest an intention to test the character of his romantic partner, and a desire for a kind of surface submission which gives way to firm self-assurance.

Rochester’s sadistic treatment of Jane functions as a part of their response-relationship, which is developed through each character’s reading of the other’s

responses. As I call attention to earlier, what attracts Rochester to Jane in the first place is her insolent disobedience of his order. She has been emboldened here by his rough, stern manner and appearance, and he notices her provoking impertinence and admonishes her: this is where their response-relationship begins to function.

For Rochester's part, he employs a simple binary pattern of attention which directly speaks to what he reads in Jane—what I call his push/pull sadism. The pattern begins even before he is introduced in the novel: he is described as having a “changeable” nature, being difficult to read, and showing ambivalence in his moods. The aforementioned “perpetual tension and novelty”, which Foucault calls the draw of a sadomasochistic relationship, is supported by Rochester's hot/cold, push/pull sadism (O'Higgins 20), and satisfies Jane's desire for “uncertainty” and “a new servitude” (186, 151). Rochester strategizes a painful response in Jane to gain her love through the intensity of this push-pull pattern of attention, by turns applying pressure through intense scrutiny (“pull” periods) and inflicting cold isolation through stark deprivation (“push” periods).

Jane handily summarizes the nature of Rochester's sadistic unpredictability when she tells him, “you will turn cool; and then you will be capricious; and then you will be stern, and I shall have much ado to please you” (345). As Shuttleworth suggests, this caprice is by design and contributes to the ultimate gratification of both partners: “The courtship of Jane and Rochester, which revolves around the activities of surveillance, and the maintenance of the energies of both self and other in a state of productive, dynamic

tension” (173). Jane’s constant inner turmoil burns hot under his gaze, and quickly turns cold with his neglect.

Rochester’s “push” sadism is manifested in sudden cruelty or deprivation of attention. Michelle Massé suggests that Rochester’s unannounced and sudden absence shows Jane’s powerlessness and “emphasizes the limits of her right to see and to know” (212, 214). As I have noted earlier, Dianne Sadoff draws a similar conclusion—that Rochester possesses the ability “to approve and punish Jane with his presence at Thornfield or his absence” (131). As Grant Allen suggests, this strategy will be effective because “any ideal pleasure is greatest when we have been longest deprived of the actuality” (210). Not only does Rochester disappear from Thornfield without warning, but returns with Blanche Ingram and remains at an emotional distance as Jane is forced to bear witness of their courtship during an extended visit.

His distance, even when physically present, is very much a part of Rochester’s deprivation strategy. Jane experiences this firsthand soon after their acquaintance, recalling that “he would sometimes pass me haughtily and coldly . . . and sometimes bow and smile with gentlemanlike affability” (200). To intensify her pain at the prospect of having to leave him, Rochester explicates the extent to which they will be estranged, savoring her distress as he casually mentions, “I shall never see you again, Jane: that’s morally certain”, and “we should never more be destined to sit there together” (336). In exposition much later, Rochester confirms that his cruelty and emotional distance was a plot undertaken to manipulate and to arouse her interest, as well as for his own “gratification” (405). Maynard suggests that Rochester plans this strategy from the

beginning (118). Here Rochester recalls with fondness the object of his subterfuge and the distress his tactics caused Jane—

“I was at once content and stimulated with what I saw: I liked what I had seen, and wished to see more. Yet, for a long time, I treated you distantly, and sought your company rarely. I was an intellectual epicure, and wished to prolong the gratification of making this novel and piquant acquaintance . . . There was a curious hesitation in your manner: you glanced at me with a slight trouble—a hovering doubt: you did not know what my caprice might be—whether I was going to play the master and be stern, or the friend and be benignant” (405, 406).

His goal in this strategy extends to his relationship with Blanche; as he explains to Jane, “Well, I feigned courtship of Miss Ingram, because I wished to render you as madly in love with me as I was with you; and I knew jealousy would be the best ally I could call in for the furtherance of that end”, to which Jane replies that his “designing mind” has caused her “bitter pain” (347).

Whatever else may be said about the ethics of this approach, Rochester’s strategy seems to be effective; Jane tells us that “to taste but of the crumbs he scattered to stray and stranger birds like me, was to feast genially” (329). This passage focuses directly on the pain of deprivation, which seems to have a drawing effect; as Jane confides, fear and pain temper her pleasure but do nothing to stamp it out: “I knew there would be pleasure in meeting my master again, even though broken by the fear that he was so soon to cease to be my master, and by the knowledge that I was nothing to him” (329).

Rochester’s sadistic treatment is also felt in his scrutiny and interrogation of Jane, which force her to confront and acknowledge painful feelings and expose that which she would rather keep hidden. He looks at her frequently with a probing scrutiny that

Michelle Massé reads as sadistic in its own right, claiming that “to be looked at is to be threatened” (200). From the very beginning, Rochester’s looking is associated with judgement and harshness. Jane notices that he disdains her simple clothing at their first meeting— “my raiment underwent scrutiny” (184). His gaze is, for Jane, something uncomfortable to be passively endured; she says that “he searched my face with eyes that I saw were dark, irate, and piercing” (191). We see this discomfort again in a moment when Rochester orders her to come closer to him, which makes her more visible. Here it is not the way in which he scrutinizes her but his mere act of looking which causes Jane discomfort; Allen suggests that “directing the attention to any part of the body has a noticeable effect upon its vasomotor nerves: the sensation of itching and the blush are conspicuous examples” (210). Rochester includes others in this sadistic scrutiny when he encourages Blanche Ingram and his other guests to disparage governesses, and Jane specifically, within her earshot; Lady Ingram says of Jane, “I noticed her; I am a judge of physiognomy, and in hers I see all the faults of her class” (255). As Massé suggests, this spectacle also evokes Jane’s punishment at Lowood; here she is once again on display for her alleged moral failings (215).

Rochester’s exposing scrutiny develops a natural extension in his frequent demanding interrogation of Jane. At their first meeting, he takes an interrogative, scolding tone in response to her first mild disobedience. He then questions her about her life at Thornfield and her service to “Mr. Rochester”, posing the inquiries as a stranger in order to test her responses—a kind of entrapment repeated later with considerably higher stakes, in his gypsy woman disguise. His “cross-examination” of Jane also makes use of

leading questions, particularly in moments where Jane hesitates due to acute pain or distress; in one such moment Jane struggles to articulate her despondence at the thought of a situation in Ireland— “the sea is a barrier—” “From what, Jane?” “From England and from Thornfield: and— “ “Well?” “From *you*, sir” (544, 336). Rochester certainly knows the answer to these questions, knows that their posing will force Jane to confront a painful truth, and asks them expressly, sadistically, for that purpose.

In another particularly emotional moment, we can see Rochester’s sadistic scrutiny and interrogation at its most rapid-fire and imposing: the scene which follows Jane’s exit from the drawing room party.

“What is the matter?” “Nothing at all, sir.” “Did you take any cold that night you half drowned me?” “Not the least.” “Return to the drawing-room: you are deserting too early.” “I am tired, sir.” He looked at me for a minute. “And a little depressed,” he said. “What about? Tell me.” “Nothing—nothing, sir. I am not depressed.” “But I affirm that you are: so much depressed that a few more words would bring tears to your eyes—indeed, they are there now, shining and swimming; and a bead has slipped from the lash and fallen on to the flag. If I had time . . . I would know what all this means. Well, to-night I excuse you; but understand that so long as my visitors stay, I expect you to appear in the drawing-room every evening; it is my wish; don’t neglect it.” (259)

Here he goes beyond the leading questions and actually answers for her when she fails to give honest or satisfactory responses, catching her in lies and half-truths and speaking in a scolding tone. Commenting on her heightened emotional state, his attention stops short of sympathy; instead, he uses detailed, artful language to savor her pain, which suggests the sadistic “narration” mentioned before. He seeks to sharpen her pain; first in his command for her to stay and endure more, and then in his instruction for her to report to the drawing room each night his guests are present. These commands are sadistic,

perhaps punitive in nature; his emphatic admonition (“it is my wish; don’t neglect it”) shows his awareness of the distress it will cause Jane in mentioning her apparent inclination to disobey.

A similar episode takes place when Rochester, in disguise as a gypsy woman, tells Jane’s fortune. Here he reads her pain and again “narrates” it in descriptive language, this time hinting at the masochistic self-denial he finds there—

You are cold, because you are alone: no contact strikes the fire from you that is in you. You are sick; because the best of feelings, the highest and the sweetest given to man, keeps far away from you. You are silly, because, suffer as you may, you will not beckon it to approach, nor will you stir one step to meet it where it waits you (276-281).

Elsewhere, his interrogation accompanies a presumption of Jane’s wrongdoing. When Mrs. Fairfax introduces Jane to him with favorable commentary, Rochester snaps, “Don’t trouble yourself to give her a character . . . eulogiums will not bias me; I shall judge for myself. She began by felling my horse” (193). At the suggestion that Jane has shown talent in her drawing skills, Rochester assumes that she had the help of a master and anticipates that she will perhaps lie about it; he commands her to “fetch me your portfolio, if you can vouch for its contents being original; but don’t pass your word unless you are certain: I can recognise patchwork” (195). When she presents her work, he “deliberately scrutinizes” the paintings and commands her to “resume your seat, and answer my questions” (195). Rochester’s sharp language in these early scenes establishes his stern authority and shows a sadistic manipulation of Jane’s feelings.

CHAPTER V

THE BODILY SUBLIME

Jane's body is a useful study of the effects of the dynamic of Rochester's sadistic treatment as well as her own masochistic tendencies. It is the location of the most intense sadomasochistic effects—here her physical pain is effected, felt, and narrated, and her painful bodily responses connect sadism to masochistic surrogacy and legibility. Not only does Jane's body feel the effects of Rochester's sadism, her overall health is manipulated by it. In her book *Bluebeard Gothic*, Heta Pyrhönen sees Jane as a physical embodiment of Rochester's mood—during “pull” periods her body thrives, and during “push” periods it suffers (48). Jane reflects that during her developing friendship with Rochester, “my bodily health improved; I gathered flesh and strength” (219). After he returns to Thornfield and Jane has been made to feel the sharp emotional pain of his surprise absence, Rochester notices (with some satisfaction) her degraded health: “What have you been doing during my absence?” “Nothing particular; teaching Adèle as usual.” “And getting a good deal paler than you were—as I saw at first sight” (259).

The painful physiological responses read on Jane's body function in a strange reciprocity. In many cases, they are aroused by pleasure or desire, that is the shame or mortification caused by these sensations. However, in some cases these painful physical sensations complete a circle and arouse pleasure once again through a kind of bodily sublime, or what Mary Ann O'Farrell calls an “erotics of mortification”. She argues that

the blush, as a burning reminder of shameful desire or illicit pleasure, can actually intensify a sensual feeling of those forbidden emotions.

A similar effect arises from the uncontrollable nature of the body, which causes distress and discomfort, then finds relief in a sensation of surrender. The confusion of bodily feeling can be understood as a function of sublime delight; as Byrne notes, “pain and pleasure (are) independent sensations not contingent upon the removal of the other” (20). Pleasure as the source of the shame and pain of blushing can produce the blending of intense emotions found in Burke’s ideas about delight.

In his 1839 physiological study, Thomas H. Burgess provides some analysis of the emotional physiology of blushing and involuntary bodily markers which are useful in understanding how Jane experiences these moments:

The head itself hangs, as if endeavoring to conceal from external gaze the mental emotion . . . upon the face. There is a thrill or throbbing of the heart . . . we feel a momentary oppression in the region of the stomach . . . all self-possession is lost for the moment —*the voice becomes changed*, and the vague manner of speaking is not infrequently the harbinger of the deep and burning blush which is soon to follow . . . the blush is now felt stealing to the surface of the cheek—the skin begins to tingle, and before the phenomenon is perfected, there is pain, heat, redness, and swelling . . . When the blush is intense, an overwhelming embarrassment is the result; there is not a vital organ in the body which does not participate in the general emotion . . . blushing not infrequently terminates in the involuntary shedding of tears, both being produced by the impulse of shame (135, 181).

Burgess’ careful, almost pornographic description of the pain and distress of the physiological response of shame is incidentally very similar to Rochester’s own sadistic

“narration”, and the language he uses suggests confusion of the sensations of shame and sexual desire.

We watch Jane experience these distressing responses, born of her illicit desire. That the responses are legible in her features only deepens the pain she feels; at one point Adèle exclaims that Jane’s fingers “quiver like a leaf” and that her “cheeks are red; red like cherries”, and Mrs. Fairfax mistakes Jane’s distressed anticipation of seeing Rochester for illness: “I am afraid you are not well to-day: you look flushed and feverish” (223, 235). When news of Rochester arrives, Jane herself is aware of “a fiery glow which suddenly rose to my face. Why my hand shook, and why I involuntarily spilt half the contents of my cup into my saucer, I did not choose to consider” (240). Jane’s tortured physical manifestations of suppressed desire are exacerbated by Rochester’s manipulative strategies—as O’Neill suggests, his “oblique amatory manoeuvres become almost punitive . . . and once reduce her to sobbing . . . the intensity of the pressure which he puts upon her is matched . . . by a responsiveness which she barely masters” (34, 35). This “responsiveness” is as involuntary as it is painful, providing a physical outlet for the emotional distress of shame. Burgess explains that

It is a law in physiology, that the sensibility and contractility of living and organized bodies are the primary causes of all the phenomena which such bodies exhibit . . . without sensibility and perception, blushing (in the moral sense of the word) could not be produced . . . the internal emotions exhibiting themselves, for no individual blushes voluntarily; it would, therefore, appear to serve as a check on the conscience (18, 24).

Dictated by her sense of morality, Jane’s forbidden desire for Rochester demands a painful physical display of her transgression.

I mention above that these painful physiological responses are often sharpened through their legibility, that is, their ability to be read on the features. Never is this more apparent than in the pornographic care with which Rochester observes and narrates her distress; he rarely misses an opportunity to show Jane that he is able to read her pain—and by extension, her desire for him—like a book. He describes the emotion “with which your eyes are now almost overflowing—with which your heart is heaving—with which your hand is trembling in mine” (397). His language in these moments is artful and detailed, as in the previously considered passage where he reads her depression: “But I affirm that you are: so much depressed that a few more words would bring tears to your eyes—indeed, they are there now, shining and swimming; and a bead has slipped from the lash and fallen on to the flag” (259).

To provide some insight into Rochester’s apparent interest in Jane’s physical distress, consider the opinion of Burgess, describing the allure of a marked complexion:

What picture can be more interesting than the virgin cheek in the act of blushing? . . . It may, indeed, be very interesting to see a young lady in a drawing room blushing for some trivial cause, as the blush invariably heightens the charms of beauty; and as it is, in this instance, considered to be a test of purity and innocence (9, 55).

The painful ordeal of a legible embodiment of shame is appealing to a (male) observer because it suggests desire and a capacity for pleasure, even while it punishes these impulses.

Burgess further explains that responses such as the blushing and weeping we see Jane experience are often “not the result of an exciting nor, strictly speaking, of a

depressing emotion—but it is a compound of both—in other words, (are) the product of a MIXED emotion of the mind” (181). He goes on to say that “blushing not infrequently terminates in the involuntary shedding of tears, both being produced by the impulse of *shame*. We may, therefore, infer that *weeping* is, strictly speaking, more the product of a *mixed* emotion than of one truly depressing” (181). This blending or complication of emotion seems indicative of feelings produced by sublime delight. Mishra explains that the nature of the sublime, that is, “the paradox of pleasure arising from the seemingly unpleasurable—from terror, from pain, from the grotesque and ugly, in short, from the body itself—was . . . enormously fascinating to the English mind” (29).

The blend of emotions associated with these physiological responses is important to understanding the eroticized language which is often used to describe them. O’Farrell defines her term, “erotics of mortification”, as “the pleasures taken with the pains of blushing” (9). She derives meaning from the ambivalent origin of the blush: “When I read a reddened complexion as blushing, I interpret it already as a response to embarrassment or even to embarrassed delight” (3). Her point here of being able to read a complexion raises some interesting questions. The legibility of these markers on the body may also serve to heighten either the pleasure or pain felt in the process: shame may intensify with the knowledge that it may be seen, and desire may be gratified in making itself known (without compromising “shamefacedness”). O’Farrell regards the blush as a kind of “incorporate enforcer of moral regularity (the blush as product of discomfort and of tension)”, and she suggests that this has particular utility in the novel as a genre: “the novel values this sense of identity, even or especially when it is produced by the pains as

well as the pleasures of mortified self-recognition and self-revelation” (7). Her description of the “erotics of mortification” notably shares some language with texts on the sublime; words like “tension” and “delight”, as well as attention to the close relationship between pleasure and pain, seem to find support in Burkean theory.

Blushing is only one way in which Jane’s body is routinely beyond her control; however successful she is in repressing her speech or emotions, control of her body usually eludes her. The shift here involves physiological as well as physical control; Jane experiences “uncontrollable bodily reactions during which desire bypasses censure” (Pyrhönen 21). We see this powerlessness before her arrival at Thornfield, when she uses language like “stirred”, “shaking”, “passionate”, “thrilled with ungovernable excitement”, and “turbulent impulse of my nature” to describe her emotional physiology (95-6). Unsurprisingly, this lack of control is compounded when Rochester begins to manipulate her turbulent inner landscape.

Unruly bodily responses are provoked by Rochester’s attentions repeatedly. When Jane returns to Thornfield following her long absence at Gateshead, seeing Rochester waiting for her makes her feel that “every nerve I have is unstrung: for a moment I am beyond my own mastery. What does it mean? I did not think I should tremble in this way when I saw him, or lose my voice or the power of motion in his presence” (328). He acknowledges her and calls her to him; Jane obeys, though she is unable “to control the working muscles of my face—which I feel rebel insolently against my will, and struggle to express what I had resolved to conceal” (329). She tells the reader that she “meant to leave him calmly. An impulse held me fast—a force turned me round. I said—or

something in me said for me, and in spite of me” (330). Here Rochester provokes emotions in Jane which limit her ability to move freely, to speak or refrain from speaking, or even to conceal her emotional distress. Immediately prior to Rochester’s proposal, he has wrought in Jane such heightened emotional distress—by his torturous suggestion that Jane must go to live in Ireland after he is married to Miss Ingram—that she cannot fully contain her response: “I said this almost involuntarily, and, with as little sanction of free will, my tears gushed out” (336). Even in Rochester’s absence, the mere mention of his name can set her off: “Why my hand shook, and why I involuntarily spilt half the contents of my cup into my saucer, I did not choose to consider” (240).

Perhaps most remarkably, Jane’s body responds to Rochester not only when he is not present, but even when calculated effort is taken to repress any thought of him. Her physical body feels the effects of his stifled memory and forces her to confront it. As noted previously, this sort of painful self confrontation is forced through dreams and subconscious engagement when Jane refuses to voluntarily acknowledge it. In language evocative of the pleasure and danger of the sublime, Jane recalls these dreams, which come “after a day passed in honourable exertion”:

Dreams many-coloured, agitated, full of the ideal, the stirring, the stormy . . . charged with adventure, with agitating risk and romantic chance, I still again and again met Mr. Rochester, always at some exciting crisis . . . then the still, dark night witnessed the convulsion of despair, and heard the burst of passion (463).

Dreams like these force the exposure of Jane’s painful truths despite her efforts to suppress them in the austere, daylight virtue of her waking life. As I mention previously, Burke suggests that “the passion caused by the great and sublime in nature” creates a

“state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other” (16). This seems to be true of Jane’s involuntary outbursts; the pain she feels so completely occupies her mind that it must be articulated, whether consciously or not. Burgess’s study suggests that Jane’s failure to govern her bodily responses is a foregone conclusion; he argues that it is impossible for “the will . . . to overcome or control the genuine emotions of the soul” (53).

The language used to describe her lack of bodily control often conveys a kind of relief, a palpable release of tension that comes with emotional expression and involuntary surrender. In the passage previously considered, Jane describes a moment in which she is “scarcely cognisant of my movements, and solicitous only to appear calm; and, above all, to control the working muscles of my face—which I feel rebel insolently against my will, and struggle to express what I had resolved to conceal”; this suggests a therapeutic effect in expressing repressed emotion (329). A similar effect is felt when Jane allows her eyes to be “drawn involuntarily to his face; I could not keep their lids under control: they would rise, and the irids would fix on him” (252). After she has learned the truth of Rochester’s first marriage, she says that “I had been struggling with tears for some time: I had taken great pains to repress them, because I knew he would not like to see me weep. Now, however, I considered it well to let them flow as freely and as long as they liked. If the flood annoyed him, so much the better” (393). This shows a different, almost provoking release; it feels good to cry and to express her emotions, and she seems to find

some satisfaction in imagining the detrimental effect her weeping will have on the culpable Rochester.

In one of the novel's most tense moments, Jane describes this release in very physical terms, describing her inability to control her emotions in terms of dominance—echoing the submissive masochism she shows in her relationship with Rochester. The suspended syntax of the last sentence builds the tension even more within the already high stakes of this scene and communicates the rising motion and release of the feeling itself:

In listening, I sobbed convulsively; for I could repress what I endured no longer; I was obliged to yield, and I was shaken from head to foot with acute distress . . . The vehemence of emotion, stirred by grief and love within me, was claiming mastery, and struggling for full sway, and asserting a right to predominate, to overcome, to live, rise, and reign at last: yes,—and to speak (337).

The language here surges and struggles, finding its eventual culmination in cathartic self-expression. Her ability to speak comes only after she is able to sob.

CHAPTER VI

ACCESS AND DESIRE

Jane and Rochester develop their idiosyncratic modes of desire in order to access pleasure or gratification in a restrictive, repressive social context. In much the same way that sublime delight is accessible only through a measure of pain or danger, Jane must confront physical pleasure from a contiguous position of emotional pain. Richard Sha confronts the conflicted relationship between sublime delight and corporeal sensation:

By insisting that the sublime must be about delight or negative pleasure, Burke preserves the essential experience of the sublime as aesthetic, and insulates the aesthetic from the corruption of the body . . . The negative pleasure that can only be imagined relies upon an idea of sensation rather than sensation itself (171).

A (sodomasochistic) pattern of desire mimicking sublimity in this way builds an anticipation, a tension, stopping short of gratification; this places physical sensation or sexual pleasure in a context suggesting its incidental, inessential status—what Foucault refers to as sadomasochistic “desexualization of pleasure” (165). As I have previously noted, Burke maintains that “at certain distances, and with certain modifications, (danger or pain) may be . . . delightful”; it is the distance, the removal from the object which brings a more articulated, complex emotion approaching pleasure (9).

Susan Weisser suggests that we see a dramatization of this sublime delight in Rochester's sadistic harshness: "(his) irrational ill-humour parallels the attitude of the Reeds towards Jane as a child, but the anger is here reduced to the delicious tyranny of love, rendered innocuous by the promise of a 'real' kindness underneath" (63). This "delicious tyranny of love" is provoked by Jane's teasing impertinence, the tension of which, she implies, provides a secret thrill: "I'll not sink into a bathos of sentiment: and with this needle of repartee I'll keep you from the edge of the gulf too; and, moreover, maintain by its pungent aid that distance between you and myself most conducive to our real mutual advantage" (360).

This secret thrill, the tension cultivated in the suggestion of pleasure, seems to be a kind of code. I have mentioned this code briefly in my discussion of Jane's and Rochester's reading of one another's emotional response, and I would suggest that the code is necessary to provide a workaround for the repressive social culture of the novel. Concerning the social context at work here, Mitchell suggests that "the sexual reticence of the Victorian novel does not preclude preoccupation with the erotic (in fact, as Michel Foucault points out, such reticence more likely betrays a ruling obsession)" (3). William Cohen echoes Mitchell and Foucault: "the very conditions of sexual unspeakability generate resources for pleasure, both aesthetic and erotic" (239). The limiting social expectations require the use of a code of desire, and if repression actually suggests obsession, it seems that the code itself is probably generative of more excitement and desire. As Shuttleworth suggests, "such tactical play now figures not only as a goal in itself . . . but also as a source of pleasure" (172). The transgression of boundaries and

secret subversion of expectations may represent a kind of social and sexual sublime—the thrill and danger of treading Jane’s “extreme brink.”

One of the most obvious ways in which Jane complies with expectations is through the self-denial and reluctance we have already considered. Annika Mizel explains that “women were exhorted to ‘a feminine self-denial, which they represented as a spontaneous and essentially static surrender of the will to external authority’” (177). I have shown that this expectation is subverted through Jane’s surrogacy and the ways in which she manipulates it in order to intensify her masochistic feelings. The social imperative to observe a contract of propriety and to reject displays of desire, when coupled with the pair’s disparate positions of caste, creates a kind of dramatization of compliance which actually subverts its model. Jane’s own perception of the obstacles to the expression of her desires describes their differing social status as the primary concern, more isolating than even physical distance of hundreds of miles:

The thought of all the brine and foam, destined, as it seemed, to rush between me and the master at whose side I now walked, and coldest the remembrance of the wider ocean—wealth, caste, custom intervened between me and what I naturally and inevitably love (336).

Davis argues that this intervention of caste and custom is the reason Jane feels she must leave Thornfield following the interrupted wedding:

What has been depicted as a private drawing room game of testing skills on “the extreme brink” of propriety has become a public threat to the social fabric. Jane Eyre can no longer preserve “every propriety of [her] station”—a dynamic that depends upon the idea of stations, the performance of them, the performance of them which Jane used until the marriage day to keep Rochester, and perhaps

herself, "excellently entertained". But the stations no longer exist, especially in the forms of governess and master (136).

The lack of clarity, the missing script for their new social relationship, compels Jane to leave for propriety's sake. It seems it was possible for the couple to subvert established roles when they filled them, but the lines have become undefined and Jane cannot be certain that she will not put a foot wrong.

The ways Jane and Rochester use their code of desire rely entirely upon their ability to read one another and tailor responses based on that reading. This kind of perpetual assessment involves subtext communication as well as visual appraisal. Mitchell discusses Jane's feminine submission and reluctance as a means to satisfy social expectations; I would argue that the strategy she deliberately employs is not meant to merely maintain appearances, but to further arouse his interest (53). Attentive to both verbal and nonverbal cues, Jane comes to understand that Rochester is fascinated by these qualities, and she endeavors to make them more apparent. Rochester, for his part, understands that these are not necessarily representative of Jane's true nature. He tells her that he likes that she "seems to submit" and declares that "you fear in the presence of a man and a brother—or father, or master, or what you will—to smile too gaily, speak too freely" but ultimately concludes that "you are not naturally austere, any more than I am naturally vicious", (211). Here he shows his awareness of a kind of game they are playing; her submission and his severity are merely personas assumed to navigate their prescribed relationship.

For Jane, there is a kind of gratification in having her distress and desire witnessed and acknowledged. There is almost a desire to be looked at, for to be looked at is to be able to communicate the distress of frustrated desire without upsetting the social boundaries which forbid it. Davis concludes that

It is not the eradication of form and convention that brings (Jane) "pleasure"; rather, it is navigating the "verge" and the "brink" of "form" and "propriety" that "suited both" of them. The novel offers an explicit explanation for the erotic power dynamics, one that evidences sadomasochism's erotics of form: the "delight" is determined by an attention to boundaries and etiquette, by treading the verge, stepping out of them just far enough to entice (132).

Like Burke's "delight" associated with the sublime, there is no real contact with the dangerous or forbidden, only an illusion or simulation. Davis goes on to explain:

The "extreme brink," for Jane, is the paradoxical erotic dynamic that generates its pleasure in performing form while simultaneously pushing its boundaries . . . Jane's existence between resistance and yielding—the verge—is a pleasure to them both; but Jane is the one who wields this pleasure (132).

This resistance and yielding, the response relationship working between them, develops a specific kind of sublime pleasure; as Foucault suggests, this repressive resistance does not represent "a renunciation of pleasure or a disqualification of the flesh, but on the contrary an intensification of the body" (122). Shaw argues that sublime delight functions in its distance from the essence of the thing; "there is a difference between engaging in a fight for survival and contemplating it from afar" (54). As Jane and Rochester access their pleasure as a kind of sublime delight, achieved at a distance

and through a teasing pattern of intensity, the text accordingly condemns direct or unabashed pursuit of pleasure.

Early in their acquaintance, Rochester tells Jane about his desire for “sweet fresh pleasure”, to which she quickly warns, “it will sting” (208). Later, Rochester acquiesces to her way of thinking, speaking contemptuously of “pleasure—I mean in heartless, sensual pleasure—such as dulls intellect and blights feeling” (300). Contextually, this does not seem a very different kind of pleasure from what he was referring to earlier, but his attitude here suggests his personal growth and rejection of “sinful” pleasure. In the following passage from their engagement period, there is a palpable feeling of tension and anticipation very like pleasure throughout, but the denotative assertion of the passage is the need for rejection, even inversion, of pleasure.

He had no such honeyed terms as “love” and “darling” on his lips: the best words at my service were “provoking puppet,” “malicious elf,” “sprite,” “changeling,” &c. For caresses, too, I now got grimaces; for a pressure of the hand, a pinch on the arm; for a kiss on the cheek, a severe tweak of the ear. It was all right: at present I decidedly preferred these fierce favours to anything more tender (361).

This resistance/provocation game Jane plays with Rochester is amply supported by prevailing attitudes of the time, a fact which conveniently provides social cover for what amounts to obvious flirtatiousness. In his 1767 *Sermons to Young Women*, Fordyce says:

There is nothing so engaging as bashful beauty. The beauty that obtrudes itself, how considerable so ever, will either disgust, or at most excite but inferior desires. Men are so made. They refuse their admiration, where it is courted: where it seems rather shunned, they love to bestow it. The retiring graces have been always the most attractive (96).

The “inferior desires” mentioned here seem to recall Rochester’s rejection of “heartless, sensual pleasure”, and both are scorned in favor of the “retiring graces” (though admittedly not completely retiring, in that a reader of this conduct manual would presumably adapt such behavior in plain pursuit of men).

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

As Menon suggests, Brontë's strength lies in "arousal rather than consummation" and "power struggles rather than the victory" (108). It is worth taking a moment to consider the way that Rochester's push-pull strategy is mirrored in the actual plot structure of the novel, an observation that has been productively developed by Brontë scholars. Caroline Levine draws attention to the "hints and halts" in action that has the "tantalizing" effect of making the reader wait (277). O'Neill suggests that this kind of narrative tease "finds new ways to achieve the ends served by old Gothic—the discovery and release of new patterns of feeling, the intensification of feeling" (33). The reader finds herself complicit in this feeling; as Jean Wyatt observes, "readers do not just skip to the end: for more than two hundred pages, they vicariously experience Jane's attraction to a powerful, authoritative, distant man who is twice her age" (25).

This makes the text as potentially problematic for Brontë's contemporary readers as it is for modern readers. However, though a nineteenth century reader may have been mildly scandalized (one review is affronted by "scenes of passion, so hot, emphatic, and condensed in expression, and so sternly masculine in feeling"), there is a kind of insulation from the scandal (Levine 280). In much the same way the sublime allows Jane an indirect outlet for feelings of pleasure and desire, the fiction removes the reader from

impropriety while still encouraging that intensity of feeling. As Wyatt suggests, this has meaningful implications for modern feminist readers: “perhaps reading the novel with the intense identification that the underlying fantasy structures compel can allow a reader’s imagination, thus heated and heightened, to infuse a new fantasy vehicle with desire, take it in, and make it her own” (201).

The relationship between Jane and Rochester is grounded by mutual respect and equality. The concept of sublime delight helps to characterize a sadomasochistic dynamic working on the surface of this egalitarian relationship, which functions in three distinct ways. First, the blending of pleasure with pain results in the experience I have previously described, which Burke argues is “the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling” (9). The intensity of this emotion is perhaps secondary to Jane’s thrill in the knowledge of Rochester as its author; as Jane claims at several moments in the text, to feel anything from him, even bitterest pain, is better than nothing. The tension and excitement arising from the uncertain threat of danger or pain is a second marker of the sublime, which Jane longs for prior to the relationship. In Rochester she finds an irresistible abyss, a subjugating force, which excites and attracts her. Finally, the sadomasochistic character of their relationship aligns with the prescribed, platonic model of dominant master and submissive servant. By performing a coded exaggeration of these roles, Rochester and Jane produce and experience intense emotions, and indirectly access forbidden pleasure.

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