Faculty Excellence Awards in Writing

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Sincerely,

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A small, introverted person buried behind stacks of books, dead to the world; unkempt hair and eyes that squint from too much reading in low light; someone who never leaves the library, and never accomplishes anything practical. This is more or less the visual picture most people get when they think of a “bookworm” (Figure 1). The image is that of a shy, awkward person with large glasses and a small voice, who is most at home in a library, or a used bookstore filled with shelves of dusty volumes. But what people do not always appreciate is how reading is becoming a lost art, and how bookworms with their acquired knowledge can contribute much to society, whether it is through library work, writing, or even government and leadership positions.

Literally, a bookworm is a small, wormlike insect that lives in and feeds off of papery materials like books. One could say that is almost what bookworms of the human variety do--they drink up words and information like wine. “I love the [library]; the magnificent books; I require books as I require air.” said 20th-century novelist Sholem Asch (“Libraries”). Bookworms see the beauty in well-written stories, the value in a store of knowledge, and the power in the printed word.

Not all bookworms are entirely cut off from society. Thomas Jefferson collected books like any modern bibliophile. While visiting in Europe he spent hours in the bookstores of Paris and the other great cities, and his home in Monticello contained thousands of volumes. Jefferson’s love of knowledge led him to send William Clark and Meriwether Lewis on their famous expedition to the Pacific coast (Coates). British author Jane Austen came from a family of book-lovers who would read to each other (Teuber). Twentieth-century author C.S. Lewis was a profound and influential bibliophile; "As adolescents, Lewis and his older brother, Warren, were more at home in the world of ideas and books of the past, than with the material,
technological world of the 20th Century” (Edwards). All of these people show us how the love of books can lead to someone being an educated, intelligent person with much to share with others.

There are many examples of heroic bookworms from fiction as well. The protagonist Bastian from Michael Ende’s The Neverending Story (Figure 2) is a boy with such a love for books and stories that he reads classics at a young age. He finds his way literally into a mysterious book, which he found in an antiquarian bookstore—he becomes first the savior, and then the emperor, of a world contained entirely within the pages of this one book (Ende). This could stand as an example—though perhaps a slightly far-fetched one—of just how far books can take you. In other cases, the bookworm ends up being the one that the protagonist turns to when in need of information. In the TV series Fullmetal Alchemist, Private Sheska is the stereotypical bookworm—she is absent-minded, a little silly, and wears the stereotypical glasses (Figure 3), but she has a surprising and incredible talent for remembering everything she reads word-for-word, a skill which other characters are grateful for at several times (“Marcoh’s Notes”). In the movie Van Helsing, the friar Carl appears as another bookworm who becomes a sort of hero; like Sheska, he fits the physical stereotype of the bookworm—from his pointed cap and fingerless gloves to the way he hunches over everywhere he goes (Figure 4). At one point Carl is asked how he knows so much when he’s never been out of the abbey, to which he replies, “I read.” (Wenham). Later in the movie, Carl’s knowledge and the work he does in the library in Romania are much appreciated, when he helps the other heroes in finding the door to Dracula’s castle and the way to defeat the vampire.

In my life, I’ve known many people who could be classified as bookworms, and they are all amazing people who I’m happy to call my friends. During my senior year of high school, I volunteered one morning a week at the public library in my hometown. Most of the time that I was there, I was working with either Mrs. Bartholomew or Mrs. Roberts, two of the resident librarians. Both of them were great women to work with—they have open minds and good senses of how to use the English language. My great-aunt Winnie is the same way. After having worked
in libraries for years, she has a sharp wit and a million things she can tell you about. People may say that being around books all the time makes you boring or anti-social, but I say it gives you more to say, more to think about, and more to share with the world, which librarians do very well.

This is why I’ve been considering a degree in library science--to put more information into my mind and therefore be better equipped to help people. According to Irish journalist Timothy Healy, "To those with ears to hear, libraries are really very noisy places. On their shelves we hear the captured voices of the centuries-old conversation that makes up our civilization" (“Libraries”) (Figure 5).

I come from a family of bookworms. Our house has shelves overflowing with the thousands of books we have collected over the years. We like to joke that when we’ve moved to a new house, half of the weight has been in books. My Dad alone seems to have collected the most of the books--mostly theology, biblical studies, and Christian history, but also politics, literature, and a small mountain of reference books. Dad has boxes of books still stored in the attic, just because we don’t have enough room in the house for them all. The rest of us all have our specific areas of interest as well. When we go on vacations, we’re always stopping at used bookstores, where we lose each other while browsing over tall shelves, or digging in boxes of books because “you never know what could be at the bottom.” Personally, I can’t think of a better way to spend an afternoon than book-hunting, or in a café enjoying a good book. Some people give me odd looks when I say this, but I like to smell books too. And I believe that my brother and sister and I were blessed with the opportunity to grow up in a house full of books, and with parents who read to us and encouraged us to read books on our own.

Bookworms, I believe, have a lot to give people. They have a love of knowledge, and still practice the skill of reading which is slowly disappearing these days. Not all bookworms are completely cut off from society – in fact, many of them (like librarians) work as public servants. Books are good for you, and the bookworms realize this.
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Figure 1 - “The Bookworm” by Carl Spitzweg
Figure 2 – *The Neverending Story* by Michael Ende

Figure 3 - Private Sheska from the TV series *Fullmetal Alchemist*
Figure 4 - Friar Carl from the 2004 movie Van Helsing

Figure 5 - A bookworm’s dream: the library at Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland.
Tripping Over Words

In the beginning there were a lot of plans. We had decided on an old spot we used to travel to in previous years; it was easy to get to--familiar territory--but we knew after so many years, the trees would be cleared out, a new dock or swing-rope added, and perhaps another log cabin built.

*I looked from my assignment to my sheet of paper. It was a simple enough idea; “write about where you are from.” But how does one explain one’s childhood in minimal detail, let alone a short poem?

We had packed the truck full, and I placed my bag in the right corner; my sister always took the left. My dad unfolded the map and gave it to me, I loved to trace my finger along the roads, pretending we were driving up to Alaska or visiting our neighbor, Alberta. My finger always started at home; all things started at home. It was the place I knew best.

*I picked up my favorite pen; I had taken it from some hotel we stayed at once, as it had the best ink, black and smooth. I began with my earliest memories of childhood, and worked up from there, jotting down prominent memories. I looked through pictures, tracing my finger along the faces I knew so well: my brother with his blonde hair during summer; my cousin holding the tiny kitten I picked out; the old Dutch ladies from my church making warm, doughy olliebollen in the garage.

As we drove through the lush forests of B.C., my eyes reveled in the natural beauty. As a child, the forest seemed like a green blur, and if there wasn’t any wildlife to look at, I took to reading during the drive. But now I focused on the details. I looked for special moments within the scenery. The sunset I saw would not be as magnificent if the light didn’t jet off that one jagged edge of the rocky hill, revealing fiery orange edges on the waves of a distant beach.
Short, precise words made the poem concise, leaving behind two vivid images. I honed in on details, knowing that otherwise, it would just be a blur of unorganized thoughts. After all, the poem had come together in bits and pieces; it needed organizing. Throughout the week, I’d written a line after seeing a young girl biking against the wind, and another after listening to a song played on the piano by my Alzheimer-suffering uncle. To organize, I focused on the details within the landscape of the entire poem.

My sister was pointing at a gas station coming up with one hand, the other shaking my dad’s shoulder. With a small nod, he turned the truck into the lot. He always wanted to drive as long as possible, much to my sister’s dismay given her small bladder. I needed the break myself, just to stretch my cramped body. I walked away from the confinement of the truck and embraced the temporary freedom of the breezy outdoors before buckling in again.

I dropped my pen and pushed my chair back. I ran down the hardwood stairs as my mom beckoned us for dinner. Writing always left me drained, my mind feeling as cramped as my hunched body that constantly leaned over the paper. The freedom from a break was a refreshing encouragement until the time came to buckle-down once more, and finish the piece I had begun.

The actual week of vacationing flew by, as vacations always do. I was frustrated with myself for not taking more pictures, a constant source of my forgetfulness. All that I had left were my memories and the sand collected in the bottom of my beach-bag.

Lost in thought, my sense of time was skewed. My poem was much shorter than I was hoping for; how could all these ideas, seeming so big in my head amount to so little on paper? All this time had passed, and here I was, at the end of the day, with a series of memories analyzed in my mind, only a few passing the test of paper. All I had were my thoughts and the meager collection of words forming my poem.

The drive home always brought me to reflection. I realized I had gifts like starting a campfire due to my patience and persistence, and that I beat my older brother for having the courage to jump off the dock into icy-cold water. I also discovered my dependency on electricity
and plumbing; the outhouses were an icky reminder. Roadtrips always brought out different sides in me, pieces of my character I hadn’t explored.

In my writing I took chances; I delved into my imagination. I explored places that were once only dreams, but with some creative license those dreams became words that gave life to my paper. And through the effort, I learned something about myself. As I put my history, my present, and my future hopes into that poem, I realized what I loved and why. I saw the blessings I once overlooked, and the development of my character and soul through the heart-wrenching times. I saw God working through each moment.

Why, I wondered, does it always take longer to drive back? Why is it harder to pack for home? At the beginning of the vacation, the drive seemed long due to my impatience. Now that the end had come, I felt attached. I didn’t want to return to the hustle and bustle of home. And yet I knew there would be more times like this, and not always big roadtrips. Sometimes just a short walk or a trip to the city is all that is needed.

It had been so hard to start the poem, so frustrating, but now that I was nearly finished, I hovered over the lines. I didn’t want to leave something I had put so much effort into, but at the same time I knew there were more poems to write. There were more stories to discover.

At the end of every trip, my mom and I would recap. We told each other our favorite moments, or things we wished had gone differently. We knew the trip was really good if relationships were strengthened through the memories, whether they made one cry or laugh. We could always point out what trips were the best; it didn’t matter how far we had traveled, or how exotic they were. It was the stories that came out of it, the meaning behind the memories, that mattered most.
Having been born into a missionary family, I have spent more of my life looking out of airplane windows than sitting in my grandparents laps. Therefore, family reunions are rare blessings in disguise: I discover the elements of the Kuvshinikov clan that make us so unique and so peculiar. It is all rooted in my Russian grandparents. Conversations will begin with a remark about the exquisite Russian borsht my grandmother would make, which would then somehow trickle to humorous stories about my grandfather. And despite knowing nothing of either, I’ve learned from tales told by my uncles, aunts, and father how deeply Dedushka (“grandfather”) and Babushka (“grandmother”) impacted the lives of each of their children. My grandfather saved the family physically; my grandmother saved them spiritually.

Dedushka was harsh, abusive, and incredibly strict, but he was an honest, hardworking man, a man who saved his family from death. Because of World War II, Dedushka and his family left Russia and lived in Germany. After the war ended, Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt signed the Yalta Agreement, a document freeing all POWs from the war and requiring them to return to their homeland. While most POWs celebrated this Agreement, Russian POWs dreaded it, for to return to Russia was to return to the hands of a psychopath who would put them to death (Hornterger). Those who were forcibly returned to Russia were instantly killed or sent to Siberia, where they underwent horrific tortures. According to Stalin, all Russian citizens who left their country were traitors, including the soldiers caught and put into prisoner of war camps. To him, a Russian soldier should commit suicide rather than be captured. My grandfather knew that to stay in Germany and allow the Yalta Agreement to take effect would be immediate death. Therefore, in the dead of night, he smuggled my grandmother and their seven children onto a boat and sailed to America.
No man can say that my Dedushka was not a hard worker. After settling down with his large family in Erie, Pennsylvania, Dedushka bought two hundred acres of standing timber and land, and with his six sons, he co-created a pulpwood business with his brother, Fred. If they weren’t camping out at the site, Dedushka would get the boys out of bed before sunrise and drive fifty miles into the depths of the woods where they would spend all day cutting, loading, and delivering timber to the Hammermill Paper Company. Dedushka valued every moment and believed that a man never truly worked unless he was exhausted at the end of the day. My father enjoys telling me about the time when he and his five brothers, after a grueling day of work, decided to play a game of football after dinner. Seeing them running around in the backyard, Dedushka called out to them, “Still have energy, do you? Well, then, we go back to work!” And to work they went.

While many of the narratives that my uncles and my father tell of Dedushka are not very praise-worthy, yet with each story, the Kuvshinikov brothers end up laughing with tears in their eyes, fondly remembering him. Each brother has a certain, inexpressible respect for him. Usually, the older siblings do not cherish the memory of Dedushka as much as the younger ones do. The former’s recollection of the past are sensitive to the terrifying times of Stalin, fleeing to America, and having to raise their younger siblings, for while Dedushka was a very dedicated worker, he tended to fancy a Budweiser binge or Port-Wine drowning every now and then.

During one of his drunken stands, Dedushka returned late at night to announce to the family that not only was he going to live in the garage on his own, but he was going to paint the house black as well. He woke the next day without any recollection of his dramatic threat. And while alcohol would leave him prone to do odd, wild things, his ideas of parenting were far from that. Dedushka ruled his home with an iron fist. Despite not being a man of faith for the majority of his life, Dedushka had a great respect for moral values.

My father and uncles were quite the rascals in their potluck neighborhood of immigrants. Being poor, the Kuvshinikov brothers tended to steal things from others, such as fruit from the
bordering orchards. One day, when they were picking apples from a neighboring yard, the Kuvshinikov brothers heard the unmistakable voice of their very Russian, very angry father who was simultaneously cursing at them and undoing his belt as he approached. The boys did what they always did: they ran in different directions, forcing Dedushka to single out a victim. Dedushka would pick the slowest and chase him, belt whipping around in his calloused hands, his face vivid with anger. All the brothers would eventually receive their disciplinary beating. In fact, most of the humorous stories that my uncles and father tell result in some sort of beating with Dedushka’s infamous leather belt. Dedushka was a very-quick tempered man and found a reason to use his belt on any of the boys at any given time. Luckily, the boys could sometimes evade his disciplinary hits. My father once commented, “I’d hear that angry voice of his and I just knew I was in for it. I’d take off running and would leave him alone for a couple hours. When I returned, he would have completely forgotten why he was going to hit me in the first place. I don’t blame him. You have to be strict when you’re raising six boys, especially when you’re running your own business in a country that you can’t even communicate in.”

Indeed, despite punishments that today’s society would consider child abuse, Dedushka helped raise six responsible and loving men, two of whom became missionaries. In reality, the “beatings” had no traumatic effect. The boys learned not to steal, learned how to work with their hands, and learned that results come from their own sweat. He also taught them that a man’s personal problem with another should remain his personal problem.

For instance, my uncle Alex bought a piece of land that was next to his aunt’s and Dedushka fixed up Alex’s land while she was away on vacation. Seeing how improved the property had become when she returned, she became jealous and blocked the road access that led to Alex’s property. Calmly confronting her, Dedushka asked her why she blocked the road, and in response, she hit him with a shovel. Dedushka pushed her away and she fell to the ground, screaming for her family to call the cops. They took Dedushka to court, but thankfully, the court ruled that this was a family matter and that they were to resolve it themselves. “It could have
resulted in a horrible feud,” my father reflected to me in awe, “but Dedushka told us boys, ‘You be nice to them. This is not your problem but mine.’ And for someone not claiming to be a Christian, he certainly acted like one.”

I credit my Dedushka for the wonderful people who have become my uncles and father. What I admire about them has come from him. Likewise, what is commendable of their spiritual side, I credit to my Babushka. My grandmother, beautiful in youth and old age, was one of the holiest women I’ve ever known. She exuded love from every fiber of her being. When I was a child, she would pat my head affectionately with her sun-darkened hands, soft with aged skin, and tell me in her thickly accented English, “I love you too much.”

Neither Dedushka nor Babushka knew enough English to get by in America, despite living in the country for fifty years; they depended on their sons to translate for them. But Dedushka did not need English to teach his sons a disciplinary lesson, nor did Babushka need English to express her love for her English-speaking grandchildren. A small woman who was sweet in nature, she was shorter than the large rocking chair she used to have in her living room. She stood slightly stooped over; her back conformed to bending down to nurse her garden or clean up after five rowdy boys or cook three full-coursed meals each day. I always recall her dark eyes that would strike fear into the strongest of men whenever she was angry and would fill the most frightened child with peace when she smiled. It pained me to see her eyes tear up when we would say goodbye to her, and I could not help but recall the stories that my father would share about her. When he was a child, he had seen her more than once in the living room crying on the floor, begging God to save her husband and to have the Holy Spirit influence the life of her children. As a result of her endless love and her ceaseless prayer, Dedushka did receive the Lord as his personal Savior, and my father and my uncles are the godly men that they are today.

God’s blessings and her love is still expressed through the recollected memories when we reminisce about her at family reunions. Sadly, I know more about my grandmother than my grandfather mostly because Dedushka had a fatal heart attack when I was five, and Babushka
passed away just four years ago. I have only to hear some of the stories about my Dedushka to know that Babushka was his backbone. While Dedushka demanded his children to become adults before their time, Babushka gave them love that kept them from fearing the transition. While Dedushka hurried them onto the boat that would carry them to America, Babushka dried their tears and prayed over them while they fell asleep to the lulling motion of the sea. While Dedushka exemplifies physical strength, Babushka glows with inner strength. Marrying at sixteen and struggling to keep her family alive during World War II, Babushka also gave birth to and lost three children in Germany, some no bigger than her hand due to malnourishment. She was orphaned and lost communication with her sole brother during the War as well. Dedushka and their children were the only things she had left.

Regardless of the brutality of life, Babushka found love and gave it back tenfold. It was that abundant love that kept her family together. Dedushka sounded like a hard man to live with, yet Babushka stayed with him for fifty-nine years of her life. She followed him, raised his children, supported and loved him, and prayed for his soul, finally receiving an answer three years shy of his death.

It is during those short and rare family reunions, when tales of Dedushka and Babushka are repeated for memory’s sake, that I wish I could sip a bowl of Babushka’s borsht or listen to Dedushka complain in his grouchy Russian disposition. It is then that I wish I knew them more about them than feeling as if I know nothing. It is then, when I look around at the smiling, laughing faces of my father, my uncles and my shy, meek aunt that I’m left speechless at the incredible grandparents that I’m related to and the incredible life they led. Neither drowning in nor slaving under the hardships that the world had forced upon them, they both overcame what many assumed would crush a person. Together they prevailed, and together, they have been and will always be inspirations to me.
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Writing 211 Winning Entries
I don’t remember the pine tree, but my mom says it was massive. An evergreen tyrant smothering our rickety porch, attacking with its arsenal of pinecones, strategically dismantling the roof with spiky fingers. It was the first thing to go. There’s a picture of my dad sitting on the peeling white porch railing after he and his chainsaw conquered the malevolent conifer; triumphant in a faded Bucknell baseball cap, a college professor turned Alexander the Great. Though he never admitted regret at purchasing such a rundown old house, I’m certain he didn’t completely anticipate the infinity of projects waiting to be discovered during our nine-year stay.

After the pine tree, the house itself required some intense care. Built in the 1920’s from red bricks, it had apparently received its only paint job around the time of its creation. The neighbor kids confessed to us the communal fear that our house was haunted. In spite of their suspicion the only things we ever found in the attic were bats, which went on my father’s list of things to take care of along with yellow jackets, mice, copperhead snakes, groundhogs, a broken water heater, ancient carpets, rotting kitchen floor tiles, leaky pipes, and hideous fake wood paneling from the 1970’s.

The upstairs was redone first, starting with the room I shared with my sisters, Anna and Bekah. My parents created for us a mostly pink haven, which we mostly outgrew. There were two other rooms upstairs; one for my parents and one for the prospect of a baby brother (John), who showed up after the bathroom was painted but before the kitchen floor was replaced.
As much as my father was preoccupied with indoor restoration, he dedicated himself to the outside as well. Consequently the acre or so of land that came with our house became adorned with brick-lined flowerbeds, dogwood trees, a garden with four plots (corn, tomatoes/eggplant, zucchini, rebellious asparagus), a grape arbor, and a small orchard. When we were little girls, Anna, Bekah and I loved to wander through the towering plants with our blue Mickey Mouse bucket and our father’s supervision, hunting for vegetables, “eww!”ing at bugs. Whatever we found was saved in the basement on musty sheets of newspaper. Sometimes if we picked enough corn for supper, my mom got out the husking brush and a big bucket for the silk. When I got braces in fifth grade my orthodontist said I couldn’t eat corn on the cob anymore. Not about to surrender, I sawed off the kernels, leaving square-shaped cobs in my wake. It almost tasted the same.

Zucchini however was a different story. The wannabe squash took over its designated plot with such zeal that my mom was giving it away through “Guess It’s Weight” games at my dad’s department picnics. There are only so many recipes to which zucchini is a welcome addition. Not that we disliked zucchini lasagna, grilled zucchini, and zucchini chocolate cake. But we did have limits.

Until we moved, (because for my father, the prospect of Messiah College was more fulfilling than tenure at Bucknell University), there was never store-bought jelly in our house. All year long in the red brick house there were canned tomatoes, mason jars of tomato soup, salsa, and grape jelly to fill up the dusty wooden shelves in the basement. But because of delays only
realtors can explain, we had to rent a house, a parsonage without a garden, for our first year away from home. It was a nice house, regardless of its avocado green walls and a refrigerator that harbored indistinguishable odors. We were too busy with field hockey, marching band, school plays and new jobs to really notice the Welch’s infiltration.

After a year of trying on other peoples’ houses (too big, too small, some even itched) my parents decided to have a house built especially for us. We moved into Pheasant Ridge Development, where all the roads are named after birds: Quail Dr, Grouse Rd, and Dove Ct. Our new house, complete with stark layers of siding that will never peel, sits on a cul-de-sac, which is really just a rounded dead end. This past summer I came home from work one day and saw that the thin layer of trees from our backyard had been demolished to make room for another house. On the heap of their mulched remains, someone had spray painted in fluorescent orange: “Free.” Turns out it wasn’t our backyard. From the kitchen window I could see construction workers hauling the dirt and rocks that got in the way of their project. Even when I decided not to watch I could still hear the calculated beep of a reversing front-loader.

It was only a matter of weeks before the property behind ours gave in to suburbia. Although we never ventured inside that house I know the walls are eggshell white. It’s the same white that glosses over cheap lumber in our house. Eggshell is a deceptive color; it implies depth, and makes you think that it’s covering up wine-red or night-sky-blue. But look twice and you’ll find yourself staring into brain-dead mass production. Even the best MD can’t bring a cooked chicken back to life. So, with bitterness unsurpassed even by my grandpa as he watched Penn State slip farther and farther from glory, I sat and willed color onto blank walls.
By my sophomore year of high school I could stand it no longer. At my request my parents and I picked out paint and a border, and I helped them paint my room. It took more than a few hours for my mom and I to get the edges of my sunflower border to line up with the gray-green edges of my walls. Stretching the sticky, wet paper between us, we joked about how difficult it would have been to attempt this job alone. I nearly teetered off the little ladder dozens of times, and my mom knocked over the tray of water twice.

I have yet to insist on a garden. Even if I did I doubt my father’s knee would allow him to grant my request. For now, he stakes twigs (that will someday be trees) and carefully spreads mulch around the geraniums once a year. We help him when he asks. John, now twelve years old, mows the yard when my dad goes away on business trips. Bekah organizes the bathroom on most Sundays, and Anna cleans the kitchen with spontaneous zeal. I cut off old roses to let new ones grow on the trellis by the garage. We work out of responsibility and obligation to our parents, unconscious of what we could potentially cultivate.

My sisters and I love to bake cakes: five-layer masterpieces from scratch, set high atop our cut-glass cake plate. Last December, before I left to spend four months across the Atlantic Ocean, Anna, Bekah and I created a coconut-walnut-vanilla-chocolate tower to commemorate my last few days at home. All six of us sat or stood in the kitchen with pieces of cake generous enough to ensure more than just a few minutes of common space. John told us how he wanted to play football in the fall, and I silently speculated whether or not he’d survive middle school sports. Anna and Bekah argued about which of them spread frosting better, and my mom shushed their debate: “You both did a good job.” Vegetables are better for you, but I like to think this is progress.
As a little girl, I used to ride the school bus to my grandparents’ house on Seymour Street for piano lessons. I was never very fond of playing, pounding out scales and chords in time with the metronome, but I was always excited to go during maple syrup season. Through the fogged window, I would see aluminum buckets hanging from the maple trees in the front yard and immediately I couldn’t wait to spring off the bus. I always skipped snack and Gram allowed lessons to be cut a few minutes short, just so I could go and sit with Gramp in his shack. With a silver serving spoon in hand, I’d bolt out the front door and join my grandfather in the ditch. I loved the taste of fresh sap from the trees, and Gramp never complained about me dipping from the barrels.

About nine years have passed since then and it wasn’t until a few days ago that I had come to fully appreciate Gramp’s operation. I approached the ditch and stood. I was taking it all in. Gramp had built the lean-to (his shack), complete with benches, a tarp to keep the weather out, and a crossword puzzle book. A fire roared below the cast iron pots that dangled from a metal bar resting in two pitch-forked limbs. The sap boiled ferociously. He stirred it intently with
a wooden stick and added fresh sap to the outside pots to begin boiling. Even from the hill, the smoke from the fire permeated my jacket.

At first he didn’t notice me standing there. But in time, he looked up, smiled, and bellowed for me to run inside and grab a spoon. After an entire day’s work, Gramp had fresh maple syrup ready to share, and I was happy to be the first to enjoy it.

“Try it, it’s good.” The warm, sugary syrup touched my tongue. I smiled. He could see that I agreed.

2.

_I thank my God every time I think of you. I have you in my heart…_

_Philippians 1:3&7_

My grandparents own a cottage in Brown’s Flat, New Brunswick, right on the St. John River. Each summer, my family spends about a week or two there with my grandparents and other extended family members, but one particular summer (about six years ago) I decided that I would ride to Beulah Camp with my grandparents so that I could stay in Canada longer.

Morning after morning, I would wake to the smell of oatmeal and brown sugar and to the warmth of a fire in the fire place. I’d launch out of bed and quickly make up my bed and run out to eat breakfast.

After a few days, I anticipated the oatmeal and fire, but what I looked forward to seeing each morning were the new wild flowers that stood in a small juice glass in the middle of the kitchen table. Some days there were wild roses or colts’ feet, while other days brought daisies.
Gramp rose each morning around six o’clock and walked a half-mile to the grocery store to get a newspaper. He always brought back flowers for Gram, never store-bought, just simply wild flowers that grew alongside the road.

3.  

*Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.*  
Mark 9:24

God has been an ambiguous idea for me my entire life. I struggle to fathom heaven and hell and this Savior who holds the world in His hands, who knows my thoughts and emotions. Honestly, is He really there?

I pray, go to church, and read my Bible, but I still can’t grasp this love that I hear about. I can’t see the Savior or hear his voice. The ambiguity is overwhelming! What I can identify with, though, is the way my grandparents act, showing service, compassion, kindness, sacrifice, and respect towards everyone. It is through them that I see Christ, or at least my idea of Him. I live my life seeking to walk in their footsteps. They are the way they are because they believe in a higher power which has established their purpose for living. I’ve seen His work through them--full of compassion, true servants--in His world, yet of His kingdom.

4.  

*Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts.*  
James 4:7-8
In my sixteen years of life, the thought of being baptized had always crossed my mind, but I never really understood what it meant for me and for my life. I lived naively, believing in Jesus Christ, yet never understanding that this figure of high significance and value to my family was more than just a concept. Many of my friends had been baptized as six or eight-year olds, but could never explain what role that symbol of commitment had played in their lives. I was skeptical of blind allegiance to tradition, both others’ and my own. I decided that before I was baptized, no matter my age, I would know why. I wanted my walk with Christ to be more than a game of follow the leader; rather, I wanted to be in an intimate relationship with Him.

The summer I was fifteen, I decided that I wanted to be baptized. I spent the following year contemplating what role this event would have in my life, and attempted to find out God in his ambiguity.

The year passed quickly and I found myself back on the Saint John River in Beulah Camp, my favorite place on earth, but as I sat on the beach this Sunday morning, I couldn’t sort out my confusion. I had planned for this event all year. I had prepared myself for this day, but I was doubtful, anxious, and still felt like pieces were missing. The weather conditions appeared to be imitating my emotions; as a tear drop slipped down my face, the grayness overhead began spitting at me. Soon it began to pour, so I headed back up to the cottage. Just as I arrived, the bell on the tabernacle rang, informing me that the service would begin in fifteen minutes.

After the service, I went back to the cottage; the rain had stopped, but clouds still hovered tightly together above me. Gram kissed me and slipped the white, freshly-starched robe over my head. I followed Gramp down the steep incline from the cottage to the beach. We stood beside one another, staring out at the river that had calmed. The chilly water snapped me from my
somnambulance. The robe clung uncomfortably around my legs as I waded to my waist. We turned. There on the beach were some of the people I loved the most, both family and friends.

Gramp began to read from James 4. It was all beginning to make sense. I couldn’t change on my own. The entire year had gone by and I had talked about change, but my life was really not as different as I thought. I had to have Christ in my life to change me and I needed those most significant to me to help me to show me God in ways that I could understand.

Gramp baptized me; the crowd cheered and broke into song. “Oh, Victory in Jesus, my Savior forever!”

As I waded out of the refreshing coolness, the sun broke through the army of clouds above and shone brilliantly.

5.

*Let us not give up meeting together...but let us encourage one another...*

Hebrews 10:25

The Mullen family has always valued the Renaissance man. From the time I was old enough to walk, my parents taught me to swim, throw a ball, kick a ball, and they constantly read to me. As I went through middle school and high-school, I found myself in any and every extra-curricular activity that I could be in.

It’s been said that apples don’t fall far from the tree and many times I’ve found this to be true, especially when it came to the number of activities that my parents were also involved in. This meant that they had little time to attend many of my extra-curricular events. I was often disappointed upon going to a soccer game, knowing that my dad was coaching the boys’
somewhere else, and once again, my parents wouldn’t be there. But what I did appreciate was that my grandparents never missed a game, honors’ program, art show, or concert. The thunderous clapping or strident holler from the sideline, audience, or stands coming from my biggest fan never went unnoticed.

6.

*Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.*

1 Peter 4:9

I can’t think of a time when we didn’t have “extras” for Sunday dinner. And by extras I’m not referring to leftovers, rather, people. Gram sets the table every Sunday for about ten, never knowing just how many might show up for dinner each afternoon. What amazes me is that she never complains when one of my siblings brings a friend or small posse or my boyfriend tags along or when Gramp stops to pick up a wandering college student or community member that looks like they could use a warm meal and a family to fellowship with. We may have eight or we may have fifteen, but in any case, the philosophy at the Mullen household remains—there is always room for one more.

7.

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, presents your requests to God with Thanksgiving. And the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*

Philippians 4:6&7
The last few months have been life changing. Just after Christmastime, I saw a side of my grandmother that I’ve never seen before. She was tired, shaky, ate scant meals, couldn’t be out of my grandfather’s sight, and began having anxiety attacks. She wasn’t the active, independent, and vivacious woman that I’ve known for the last nineteen years. I was scared.

I’m still scared to lose her, but my grandfather has demonstrated something that has greatly impacted me. He’s usually an early riser, 6 a.m., but he’s been waiting in bed for Gram to wake before he leaves. I know this is difficult for him because he enjoys his early morning walks, the sunrise, and silence to do devotions. He is also an outdoorsman and dislikes being confined to the indoors, but lately Gram has been going into spells where she panics when he’s not in sight, so he’s found things to do around the house, only stepping outdoors when she naps or is having a good day.

One day, last week, I stopped by to visit, and found Gram resting on the couch. Gramp sat next to her reading from a book of prayers and devotionals and from the Bible. She appeared to be peaceful. As I curled up in a recliner, sacrifice had a new meaning to me. Gramp vowed to be with her “through sickness and through health,” and there he sat beside her calming her anxiety through scripture.

8.
Love is patient
Love is kind.
It does not envy
It does not boast
It is not proud.
It is not rude or self-seeking
It is not easily angered
And it keeps no record of wrongs.
Love does not delight in evil
But rejoices with the truth.
Love always protects
Always trusts
Always hopes
Always perseveres.
Love never fails.
Route 15 into Harrisburg, Pennsylvania gets backed up during rush hour; there are too many traffic lights. Opposite me in the driver’s seat, my father inched us closer to the hospital while behind us my grandma chatted about making wine. “Once I said ‘Zookie help me pick these berries,’ and he was all excited so he was, he thought he was getting blackberry pie, but you know, I made wine instead!” She cracked up; there had to be more to the story.

“How long do you usually let it ferment?” my father wanted to know.

“I’ve never been here before,” I suddenly remembered. Like the first blow of a pillow fight, the thought thumped me in the face: “I don’t know the first thing about the ICU.”

My grandpa, affectionately nicknamed “Zookie” by most who know him, had gone in for open-heart surgery on the previous morning. My grandma was staying with us while he recovered, and today the three of us: my father, my grandma, and I thought he could use some visitors.

Finally inside the parking garage he navigated up the steep ramps, around tight corners, keeping my grandparents’ bulky white Lincoln from bumping the other silent, waiting cars. Great-Aunt Bertha goes to church. We hefted into the last parking space of the row. Great-Aunt Bertha fits on the end of the pew.

Gray signs pointed us towards the third floor, where my grandpa was supposed to be sleeping off a split sternum. Secretly, I hoped that he was awake. I wanted to tell him about my day at work, to ask him if he’d had any hospital food yet or whether he remembered the blackberry wine.
The humid elevator air was smothering as we made our ascent. Ding. A young man entered through the sliding metal door. After a couple of seconds, my grandma commented in his direction, “Whew, is it hot in here!” He nodded to her understandingly and fanned his face with his hand. I smiled at him, and he grinned back. My father folded his arms in the corner. “I’m not sure if it’ll be open to visitors now; we might have to wait a little while. They have to do their checkups and make their rounds,” my grandma was saying. I told her I didn’t mind.

Only two visitors per patient were allowed at a time, so I sat in the room designated for waiting. A hardcover picture book lay open, sprawled on the end table. All its photos were landscapes taken from airplanes or helicopters or the tops of very tall things, and I noticed that each picture had a heart-shape hidden in it somewhere. The obvious hearts were apparent immediately, while others took a bit more consideration. This book meant… I could find hearts anywhere? Everywhere? Sometimes trees form them; sometimes they are outlined in the contour of city streets. Up in the corner of the room was a television blaring Fox News like the Apocalypse. We Pennsylvanians like to stay informed about the end of the world. I tried unsuccessfully to find the volume button. Silence is a luxury apparently denied to visitors in this ICU.

I wondered what he would look like. “Will he be awake? Surely he’ll know it’s me…” I tried to remember what the word ‘supportive’ meant. I practiced a smile that had backbone (it comes from your eyes).

My father pushed open the door and my grandma came in behind him. “He’s not quite with it yet,” they said. “He’s still on a lot of pain medication, so he goes in and out. Did you still want to see him?”
Of course.

There was more machinery than I’d anticipated. Walking through the Unit, I couldn’t help being distracted by all the life-preserving technology. “Who came up with this, and why don’t I know his name?” I thought to myself. My grandma stopped beside one of the beds. “Hi, Grandpa,” I whispered.

They’d propped up his bed to halfway between lying down and sitting up. Dressed in a bed sheet hospital gown he looked a little like Caesar. I should have brought laurels with me, a chariot perhaps. On his chest I could see where he’d been sawed open, the deep wound now covered by a thick pad of gauze. I wanted to ask why his face was so swollen, or whether it was hard for him to breathe. It seemed like it was. His face got in the way of the air.

“Zookie,” my grandma said gently. “Zookie…” A little louder. Her voice is neither soothing nor grating. Not a mumble, not a cackle or a screech. It’s a pickled beet voice, died purple with vinegar, tainted by what defines it. She spoke to him like he’d overslept and was going to be late for work if he didn’t wake soon. My grandma is grown-up enough to know that she has one voice, good for laundry and hospital rooms alike.

Blinking slowly out of morphine-induced sleep, he recognized his wife. “Liz is here,” she told him. She pointed to where I stood on the other side of the bed. His eyes followed her motion. A rasp struggled from his throat,

“Lizabeth …’Lizabeth…”

“Hi, Grandpa,” I said again. Exhausted by the small conversation, he abruptly fell back to sleep. A nurse came over to answer any questions we had. She talked to my grandma, telling her
about platelets, reassuring her that the IV in his neck would be removed the following day. I imagined a masked doctor carefully extracting the needle.

“Oh, his eyes are open again.” My grandma leaned in over his face as he remembered where he was. His whole body heaved with the effort of attempted words. Lungs versus ribcage, will versus bone, man versus time.

“I…love…you. I love…you.” His eyes fell closed. I love you, too.

First one in the elevator tells it how many floors to go down. I looked at the round white buttons, drawing a blank, forgetting where we’d come from. “‘L,’ for Lobby,” said my father.

“‘L’ for Lizzy!” my grandma sang. “‘L’ for little girl.”

My grandpa is the reason I know how to drive. He’s the reason I like jelly on my bread at dinner, and he’s the one who let me help feed the lambs when I was small. Every year he hid Easter eggs for my sisters and brother and I to find (consequently, each year he forgot how many he’d hidden, resulting in multiple plastic egg casualties when the grass was cut in the beginning of the summer). The elevator lowered us floor by floor and I ran around my memory, gathering up all I could find of my father’s father, putting it in a basket to carry out to the car.

It was dark outside by the time we entered the parking garage. Unable to find her keys, my grandma wandered over to the streetlight around which hundreds of spiders had set up camp. She dug through the depths of her purse while little arachnid children scuttled safely home, fluorescently illuminated, instinctively knowing the right direction. “Found ‘em; all the way at the bottom….”

Traffic was much faster as we merged onto I-83 West, headed home. My grandma asked me how I liked working in daycare, and for a little while we all expounded on its inherent
problems. Our three-fold common ground expired in less than ten minutes, but even long after we’d stopped talking the agreement hovered around the inside of the car. I took a deep breath in and sighed it back out, wondering if they’d let me taste the wine when it was ready. Thus far, I’d only picked the berries, scratching my hands and arms on thorny bushes, staining my fingers reddish-purple.

Blackberry wine must be ambrosia.
Writing 212 Winning Entries
The topic of ethics is one which, at one level or another, holds interest for everyone. Christians seek to do what is right in the eyes of God, but the idea of ethics holds interest for adherents to every creed and religion. Every person wants to know what s/he “ought” to do, and what s/he can reasonably expect from others. A break from ethical behavior is typically viewed with contempt, fear or even hatred. Society as a whole demands that people live up to a certain standard of morality. This standard varies from culture to culture and from person to person, but in order to function properly a society requires a certain amount of ethical homogeneity. But where do these ethics come from? Upon what are they (and should they be) based? An average American today is exposed to a wide range of potential world-views, each of which comes with many ethical implications. Is a person to simply pick and choose which philosophy to espouse, or is there a single Truth which people ought to seek? More specifically, in a nation awash in relativism and uncertainty, how is a Christian to go about deciding what is right or wrong?

One way to obtain a thoroughly integrated ethical foundation is to seek wisdom in a variety of places. A Christian can turn to the Bible, and can find much wisdom and Truth therein. However, examining other worldviews can also be very beneficial to the quest for wisdom. Ayn Rand is the author of several books, including *Atlas Shrugged* and *Fountainhead*. She has a very thoroughly thought-out view of philosophy as a whole and of ethics in particular. Her philosophies of egoism and objectivism are rejected by many Christians--in large part because Rand herself unequivocally rejects Christianity (Rand, *Shrugged* 1027). In brief, Rand’s egoism holds that the chief end of man is to live (*Shrugged* 1013-1014) and that man has a “right to exist
for his own sake, neither sacrificing himself for others nor sacrificing others to himself” (Rand, Philosophy 67). Objectivism states that the universe exists independently from any observer, and that reason is the means by which man must deal with what he observes about the universe. (Rand, “Objectivism”). She reviles any idea of inherent depravity in man (Rand, Shrugged 1013), and scoffs at the idea of God who is beyond comprehension. (Rand, Shrugged 1026). But a thinking Christian should not simply reject Rand’s philosophy on religious grounds any more than s/he should reject all of Karl Sagan’s science or all of Billy Joel’s songs exclusively because of their atheism. Ayn Rand’s philosophy is well worth exploring; a Christian who is able to go through what Ayn Rand has to say about philosophy and discern the truths from the errors will come out with a deeper, broader world view and a more integrated way of looking at ethics.

Thinking through philosophy can be time consuming, mentally tiring and emotionally draining. There aren’t many people in the world who enjoy having to change their opinions. Frequently a study of philosophy requires just such a change. Moreover, a deeper look at philosophy requires time—time for reading and for meditation on what has been learned. Modern American society—whether in the education system or the work force—is incredibly busy, and people want to relax in their spare time. Is there a good reason to spend any of this precious time thinking about abstract concepts?

To answer this very question, Ayn Rand gave a speech to the 1974 graduating class at West Point, entitled “Philosophy: Who Needs It.” She says that there are three basic questions that all people need to answer (and which they spend their whole lives avoiding): “Where am I? How do I know it? What should I do?” (Rand, Philosophy 2). The consequence of avoiding these questions, according to Rand, is that “they are not very active, not very confident, not very
happy—and they experience at times a causeless fear and an undefined guilt, which they cannot
explain or get rid of” (Rand, Philosophy 2). Without an understanding of the world around them,
people are unsure of themselves and of their place. What is right or wrong? Is anything
inherently right or wrong? If so, do I have it right—am I doing the right things and avoiding the
wrong things? And if nothing is right or wrong, why do I care about ethics at all? Rand goes on
to assert that philosophy will answer these questions. Metaphysics answers the question as to
what sort of universe we are in: “Are you in a universe which is ruled by natural laws and,
therefore, is stable, firm, absolute—and knowable? Or are you in an incomprehensible chaos, a
realm of inexplicable miracles, an unpredictable, unknowable flux, which your mind is impotent
to grasp?” (Rand, Philosophy 2). Epistemology answers the question, “Does man acquire
knowledge by a process of reason—or by sudden revelation from a supernatural power? Is reason
a faculty that identifies and integrates the material provided by man’s senses—or is it fed by
innate ideas, implanted in man's mind before he was born? Is reason competent to perceive
reality—or does man possess some other cognitive faculty which is superior to reason? Can man
achieve certainty—or is he doomed to perpetual doubt?” (Rand, Philosophy 3). She then asserts
that ethics and morality are founded on the answers we find through metaphysics and
epistemology: “you cannot know what you should do until you know the nature of the universe
you deal with, the nature of your means of cognition—and your own nature” (Rand, Philosophy
3).

Rand is not alone in her assertion that philosophy is foundational to ethics. The renowned
preacher and author John Piper stresses that it is important for Christians to seek answers to life’s
questions from various sources. In reference to Ayn Rand’s philosophy, he says, “There are
pointers to Christ in every philosophy. And let us pray that we not be like the one-year-old who, when daddy points at the flower, looks at his daddy’s finger instead” (Piper, “Fifty”). God uses many tools to show us things about himself, and, while we need to be discerning, we need to be carefully not to be distracted from the lesson he’s teaching by the medium in which it is taught. Moreover, he adds that critical thinking—a skill developed by using it in the evaluations of new theories and belief systems—is essential to a deep understanding of Scripture: “The church of Jesus is debilitated when his people are lulled into…[giving] a merely practical education that does not involve the rigorous training of the mind to think hard and to construe meaning from difficult texts” (Piper, “Training”). If we seek our ethical guidelines in Scripture, we need to have a clear understanding of what we read in the Bible. In order to gain such an understanding, correct cognitive ability and the ability to evaluate and assimilate the different ideas we are reading are imperative.

Rand and Piper are joined in the assertion that philosophy is foundational to ethics by such famous thinkers as Aristotle and Solomon. According to a paraphrase by W. W. Fortenbraugh, Aristotle asserts that “while moral virtue makes the goal correct, practical wisdom [a result of a study of philosophy] makes the means correct” (Fortenbraugh 74). In other words, moral virtue (such characteristics as courage and generosity) ensures that in situations that demand it, we have the internal compunction to do the right thing. Practical wisdom, however, helps us view the situation correctly so as to know what moral virtues are to be exercised. Is it always right to stand your ground in danger, or are there times when a better choice is to flee? Is it better to give a homeless person a dollar, or a sandwich? A thorough view of the universe and of human nature will help us answer these questions correctly. And King Solomon, in the book
of Proverbs, strongly correlates wisdom with the knowledge of God and with virtue: “if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God” (Proverbs 2:3-5, New International Version). “Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding” (Proverbs 4:7).

Seeking wisdom and understanding is a concept that is biblically based, and it’s hard to argue that it’s a bad idea. But why go to such philosophers as Rand? Why not stick with the philosophy of Solomon and the other Biblical writers? It’s true that there is much to be gained by a careful study of God’s Word, and that God has the power to tell his people all kinds of things through the Bible. However, there is also much to be said for understanding alternative worldviews. Sticking to my original example, Ayn Rand has much to offer a Christian in the way of wisdom. Knowing how to weed through falsehoods in a philosophical system is an important tool for Christians. Christ said to his disciples, “I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves” (Matthew 10:16). We can extend this exhortation to refer to all of us as Christians: we live in a hostile world full of contradictory ideas. Since this is the case, we need to be able to evaluate systems of thought—both for our own sakes and for the sake of the people around us who are vulnerable to being deceived by false teachings.

Ayn Rand’s worldview is far from being perfect. There are some assertions she makes with which Christians have to take issue. But this, in itself, makes her ideas worth looking at. Examining an untrue viewpoint, besides making Christians aware of the views we might
encounter in the secular world, will also force us to reevaluate why we believe what we do. By way of example: in *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand’s character John Galt says, “The good, say the mystics of spirit, is God, a being whose only definition is that he is beyond man's power to conceive—a definition that invalidates man's consciousness and nullifies his concepts of existence” (Rand, *Shrugged* 1026). First, Christians do not hold that God’s only definition is that He is “beyond man’s power to conceive.” We hold that he is “love” (1 John 4:8). He is the originator of the universe (Genesis 1:1), which means that he is incredibly powerful—to the point that he can create something from nothing. God has revealed to us “his eternal power and divine nature” (Romans 1:20). Can man fully conceive these attributes? No. But that does not mean that our reasoning or our existence is demeaned; it simply gives us something toward which we need to perpetually strive. John Piper, in his response to Ayn Rand’s philosophy, wrote, “In view of the nature of reality, the rational man’s highest value will be the admiration and enjoyment of his Maker and Redeemer” (Piper, “Ethics”). Ayn Rand looked at an extreme branch of theism—liberal thinkers who proclaim that God is beyond understand as an excuse to live as they will and rest content in not knowing Him—and extrapolated that all of Christianity and all theists in general held a similar view. From this, and from the fact that Rand died an atheist, Christians can draw a hard lesson: going through life without asking the hard questions posed by philosophy can have eternal ramifications for the people around us. Perhaps, if she had seen more thinking Christians who could answer her charges and who showed what the life of a dedicated and thoughtful Christian looked like, her story would have ended differently.

Learning to answer the falsehoods in Ayn Rand’s philosophy is not the only thing of value to be gained from reading her ideas, however. Rand’s assertions regarding absolute truth
and the value of reason are extremely important—especially in today’s morass of relativism and uncertainty. She asserts, “Existence exists—and the act of grasping that statement implies two corollary axioms: that something exists which one perceives and that one exists possessing consciousness, consciousness being the faculty of perceiving that which exists” (Rand, *Shrugged* 1015). Rand exhorts, “Do not say that you're afraid to trust your mind because you know so little. Are you safer in surrendering to mystics and discarding the little that you know? Live and act within the limit of your knowledge and keep expanding it to the limit of your life” (Rand, *Shrugged* 1058). This echoes sentiments expressed by Solomon, who celebrated the pursuit of wisdom and knowledge by saying, “It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings” (Proverbs 25:2). Christians and the world in general need to be reminded of the importance of always seeking the Truth. The fact that we will never know God perfectly shouldn’t stop us from seeking to know him better. And beyond encouraging us to seek the truth, Rand goes on to say that we need to live by the truth that we find. “Happiness is a state of non-contradictory joy—a joy without penalty or guilt, a joy that does not clash with any of your values and does not work for your own destruction, not the joy of escaping from your mind, but of using your mind's fullest power, not the joy of faking reality, but of achieving values that are real, not the joy of a drunkard, but of a producer. Happiness is possible only to a rational man, the man who desires nothing but rational goals, seeks nothing but rational values and finds his joy in nothing but rational actions” (Rand, *Shrugged* 1022). This may sound like an overstatement, and perhaps it is. But John Piper responded to this quote by saying that it “rests on the conviction that reality is such that true happiness—‘non-contradictory joy’—is the inevitable outcome of a life devoted to the principle that A is A, and that there is no true joy to be
found in faking reality in any way” (Piper, “Ethics”). It isn’t enough for us to assert that there is absolute truth; we need to live as though it were so. This means seeking in every way to live by the Word of God. Emotion is a fickle master—an unreasoning internal response to an external stimulus. Living by our emotions leaves us vulnerable to our own unconscious fears and desires (which don’t always serve our best interests), and to coercion by others.

St. Peter writes, “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have” (I Peter 3:15, New International Version). Ayn Rand joins the rest of the world in reviling Christians for their “blind faith.” St. Paul writes to the Corinthians, “Greeks look for wisdom…but we preach Christ crucified:…foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:22-23). Reason and debate will never bring anyone to Christ. “Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see…. And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek him” (Hebrews 11:1, 6). However, in order to present a unified front to the world, faith and reason need to work together in alliance as we seek to understand God. John Piper’s assertion that “Blind faith is not a virtue” is well worth heeding. Does believing in God mean that we are not to ask questions about His nature, and does believing in physical laws mean that we are not to try to discern what they are? If the latter is absurd, then the former is the more so. Paul cries out, “I want to know Christ” (Philippians 3:10). Living under the assumption that God can be known through Christ (John 1:18) and seeking to know Him and His will (Matthew 6:32) is the highest calling a man can attain. John Piper’s summation of what is wrong with Ayn Rand’s philosophy beautifully illustrates what a
Christian’s life should look like: “The new fact of reality is that God cannot be traded with as a man. There is nothing that man can offer to God that is not already his. You cannot exchange value for value with one from whom you have life, breath, and everything. You must, as a creature, own up to your total dependence on mercy and be content with it or, by an act of irrational rebellion, evict yourself from the realm of reality and try to live a contradiction” (Piper, “Ethics”). “For in Him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28), asserts Paul. In paying our highest praise to God, then, we are not demeaning ourselves as Rand would suggest. Instead we are giving to Him at least part of what we owe Him. As she herself wrote, “to withhold your admiration from … virtues is an act of moral embezzlement” (Rand, Shrug1018). An infinite, perfect God--the ultimate paragon of virtue--demands our infinite admiration. The deeper we think--the harder we look--the more we seek to know about God and about the universe in which he placed us, the more we will learn of His greatness and the more we will have for which to praise Him.

Works Cited


The Bible. New International Version.
Advertising’s Negative Effects on Women

The images raced across the television screen and I inched forward to the edge of my bed, biting my fingernails. Sydney Bristow, CIA agent on the hit television show ALIAS, ran towards the skyscraper’s high ledge. She was trapped several stories off the ground with no escape and a muscular security guard coming up behind her. She promptly ripped off her tight-fitting leather jacket to reveal a skimpy, silky red spaghetti-strap top. In black high heeled boots laced up to her knees, she attached a metal hook to the top of the building and jumped over the side. As her parachute flew out, I began to picture myself in her shoes, wondering if I would have thought as quickly as she had and if I would have looked half as good as she did doing it. Sydney hit the ground and landed on her feet, still running in her high heels. As unrealistic and dangerous as her escape seemed to me, I found myself wanting to be her.

Most American young women have experienced a situation similar to the one that I have recounted. It is the women on display in American culture--specifically models and actresses--who imitate for young women who they want to look and be like. These well-known women and the way that American media portrays them have profound negative effects on the body image and self-esteem of the female sex, specifically on developing teenagers and college-age women.

One of the most significant forms of media that drives young women to be thin and warps their idea of the way they should look is magazine advertisements. Advertising is “one of the most potent messengers in a culture that can be toxic for girls’ self-esteem” (Kilbourne 131). In her video concerning advertising’s image of women, Killing Us Softly 3, Jean Kilbourne states,
“Advertising does sell products, of course, but it also sells a great deal more than products. It sells values. It sells images, it sells concepts of love and sexuality, of romance, of success, and perhaps most important, of normalcy…. Advertising tells us [women] who we are and who we should be.” Girls are one of the most desirable targets for advertisers because they are new consumers, are starting to develop a disposable income, and are developing long-term brand loyalty. Teenage girls typically spend over $4 billion each year on cosmetics alone. Seventeen magazine, devoted mainly to girls ages twelve to fifteen, displays an ad stating, “She’s the one you want. She’s the one we’ve got. She pursues beauty and fashion at every turn… It’s more than a magazine. It’s her life” (Kilbourne 131).

Advertisements give young women the idea that achieving the ideal, perfect body is actually attainable if the right products are used. This is part of why the airbrushed bodies of flawlessly beautiful women have the powerful impact that they do. Advertisers surround viewers with images of ideal female beauty. This ideal is based on absolute flawlessness including being genetically thin and having long legs, narrow hips, small breasts and broad shoulders. The fact is only five percent of women in America actually have this body type, making it rather unrealistic that it is attainable for everybody (Killing Us Softly 3). Just recently, I was scrolling across message boards on the website for the popular reality television show, Dancing with the Stars. On this show, celebrities pair with a professional dancer and compete against one another. As I read comments about my favorite dancer, Sabrina Bryan, from the current season, I was appalled at what I saw. Sabrina does not have the typical supermodel body type, but is in no way unattractive. While having wider hips, larger breasts and thicker thighs than the idyllic “size 0” body type, Sabrina’s hourglass shape was being ripped apart on the message boards. People
called her “fat” and “a cow.” I read one memorable comment by a man who wrote, “Sabrina Bryan is so fat she must eat a side of cow and drink a gallon of beer for breakfast.” Before reading these demeaning comments, I have never once thought of her as fat, especially considering the fast pace at which she was able to dance. She looked healthy, fit, and “real.” This is just one example of how women on display in American culture are so severely scrutinized. The pressure to be considered thin and beautiful takes precedence over everything else and sends teen women the message that they can and should make their bodies perfect.

Teen magazines send incredibly powerful messages to women regarding their weight. Sharlene Hesse-Biber, author of the book *Am I Thin Enough Yet?*, includes several statements made by girls and young women that she interviewed in researching her book. She includes twelve year old Darcey’s statement: “When I see these twigs of people on the magazines and on TV, I say ‘I’m going to go on a diet.’ I think I won’t look good in those clothes because I’m not that thin. You almost want to get thin just so you can wear the right clothes. I watch my junior high friends—they look like something out of a magazine” (96).

While being attractive has always been important for women, it has not always been the *only* important thing. Maturing and becoming a woman is much more difficult for many girls today than it was a century ago. Women today are concerned with even more body parts than ever before, idealizing the perfect body, flawless and thin. Author and researcher Joan Jacobs Brumberg claims that in the past century, the body has become “the central personal project of American girls…. Although girls in the past and present display many common developmental characteristics—such as self-consciousness and sensitivity to peers—-before the twentieth century, girls simply did not organize their thinking about themselves around their bodies” (97). In fact, before World War I, young women rarely mentioned their bodies in terms of their
struggle to find a personal identity. Being a better person involved helping others, forgetting about yourself, and doing well in school. For example, in 1892, a young lady’s diary resolved “not to talk about myself or feelings, to think before speaking…[to] interest myself more in others” (Brumberg xxi). Today’s American teenager thinks much differently about herself. A 1982 New Year’s resolution written by a young woman states, “I will try to make myself better in any way I possibly can…. I will lose weight, get new lenses, good makeup, new clothes and accessories” (Brumberg xxi).

The fashion industry contributes, as advertising does, to young women’s obsession with being thin. In fact, it was fashion that propelled the evolution of the first “slimming craze” in the early 1900s. French fashion designer, Paul Poiret, introduced a new silhouette that replaced the voluptuous Victorian hourglass shape by shifting more interest to the legs. The new figure was slender, fairly flat-chested, and long-limbed. In the 1920s corsets and petticoats were abandoned for the more fashionable and attractive “flapper” dress. It was around this time that young women began to diet and internalize control of their own bodies (Brumberg 99-100). Supermodels’ bodies are idolized by some young women and more well known today than they were in the 1920s, 30s and 40s. Beginning in the 1960s, Twiggy, Jean Shrimpton, and other models started to be known by name. By 1990, the “supermodel” phenomenon came into play when Vogue magazine featured Linda Evangelista, Christy Turlington, Cindy Crawford and Naomi Campbell as the top models of the world (Etcoff 224).

Today’s young women are concerned with the shape and appearance of their bodies, instead of their character and personality to express their individuality. Furthermore, advertising perpetuates the idea that it is a woman’s body that matters, not her personality. An ad for Lee
jeans displays the body of a very thin woman from the waist down in a pair of their jeans. The copy above the woman reads, “He said the first thing he noticed was your great personality…. He lied” (Killing Us Softly 3). This type of ad sends the message to girls that a great personality is never going to be what is most important about them. It is instead, a thin and attractive body that attracts men to women.

As soon as young girls today begin to develop, they are bombarded with pressures to promote their sexual appeal. Many of these pressures come in the form of advertisements. The ultimate message sent to women is communicated in the tagline of an advertisement: “You have the right to remain sexy.” According to this ad, Jean Kilbourne suggests, women have “the right to be a sex object, the right to be passive, the right to have our sexuality defined in a rigid, shallow, extremely limiting and clichéd way” (Killing Us Softly 3). Sex and relationships are trivialized in advertising. Teenagers and young people are surrounded by strong messages urging them to be sexually active (Kilbourne 145). This is evidenced in an ad for jeans displaying a teenage boy with his hand in the back pocket of a tight pair of jeans on a teenage girl. The girl has the boy pressed up against a brick wall. The copy along the bottom of the advertisement reads, “You can learn more about anatomy after school.” Similarly, a headline across the top of a popular teenage magazine, Jane, reads “15 ways sex makes you prettier” (Killing Us Softly 3). Even the images sent to women are confusing, wanting them to be both innocent and sexy, virginal and experienced (Killing Us Softly 3).

Sex in advertising is not about connection and closeness, but disconnection and distance. It is more about power and less about passion. Sex in advertising objectifies women and gives
viewers the idea that products can fulfill sexual desires and emotional needs (Kilbourne 271). Many ads are sometimes pornographic and dehumanizing towards women. An advertisement for Pepe jeans portrays a man sliding his hand under a woman’s shirt and the line “Wear it out and make it scream” (Killing Us Softly 3). Advertising gives its viewers, specifically men, the idea that women are “asking for it.” Men are encouraged not to take “no” for an answer. In an ad for Fetish perfume that ran in several teen magazines, the copy below a pretty girl with blackened eyes says, “Apply generously to your neck so he can smell the scent as you shake your head “no” (Killing Us Softly 3). These are toxic messages for both men and women to receive when being in a relationship. They communicate unrealistic and dangerous ideas to men that women are unimportant and replaceable, possessing a need to be controlled. They also influence how men feel about the real women they are with as opposed to the “fantasy women” they see in advertisements.

Young women growing up in America today are influenced by the images they see of women in advertising and the media more than they possibly know. So, what hope is there for them? Are all women destined to become pod people who only care about being thin and beautiful? The first step in walking away from the idyllic and flawless body that governs the minds of teenagers is for the public, including women themselves, to recognize the profoundly negative effects that advertising has on women and do something about it. The sooner that women realize the power that media images can hold over them and their daughters, the next generation of America, the better. It can be quite difficult to love your body in a society that is constantly telling you to hate it and change it. However, I came across a short story written by a
young lady in Kimberly Kirberger’s book, No Body’s Perfect, that gave me hope for myself and today’s young women. This girl writes:

I am not perfect. I never have been and I never will be...I don’t have a flawless figure.... My stomach is not concave, my breasts are not perfectly round and big, and amazingly enough, I have hips. I can’t hide or mask who I am.... My body curves and slants in different directions [than my friends’ bodies].... Why on earth are we trying to look exactly alike?...I like myself just the way I am. (166)

Works Cited


Causes of Familial Depression: Nurture vs. Nature

After a twenty-year study of the children of depressed and non-depressed parents, researchers concluded that “The offspring of depressed parents constitute a high-risk group for psychiatric and medical problems, which begin early and continue through adulthood” (Beardslee et al. 74). However, within the world of psychology and medical research, the extent of this effect upon children of depressed parents is a foggy, inconclusive issue. The question lies in the classic “nurture” or “nature” debate between whether genetics or a stressful environment plays a larger role in causing the chemical imbalance that leads to depression in children of depressed parents.

Clinical depression is a biochemical disorder caused by an imbalance in neurotransmitters. People of all ages suffer from this disorder, and studies have shown that in families with depressed parents, children often develop similar depressive symptoms. In addition, research by Lavoie and Hodgins in 1994 shows that 61% of the offspring of parents with Major Depressive Disorder will develop a psychiatric disorder during childhood or adolescence and are four times more likely to develop an affective disorder than children with non-ill parents (Beardslee et al. 73). What exactly causes the child to adopt this similar depression? Upon accepting the premise that depression is a biochemical disorder, yet another debate arises in whether depressive symptomatology in children of depressed parents is caused by genetics or environment.

Many depressed people have malfunctioning neurotransmitters that cause depressive symptoms such as sleeplessness, self-hate, self-isolation, and disinterest. This malfunction is
manifested in serotonin, a neurotransmitter that is involved in the body’s regulation of sleep, hunger, body temperature, and sensitivity to pain, and a transmitter of impulses in the body’s sympathetic nervous system called norepinephrine. Imbalances in these neurotransmitters create many of the apparent biological symptoms of clinical depression from which diagnoses are based (Robbins 47). While this stands as an undisputed fact within the realms of science and mental health, medical researchers and doctors all over the world debate whether the cause of the imbalance of neurotransmitters is hereditary or environmental. Looking into the American familial structure, we can explore the causes of the symptoms by examining the effect that parental depression has on their children. On this basis we assess the possibility that environmental stress builds risk-factors that spark the onset of depressive symptoms only in an individual that is genetically predisposed to suffer from depression.

On the condition that the imbalance is biologically caused (the “nature” side of the debate), people are presumed to inherit a biological diathesis (weakness) that predisposes them to develop the biochemical imbalance in neurotransmitters that is associated with depression if they have enough stressful events in their lives. In families with clinically depressed parents, this would mean that the children are genetically predisposed to develop depressive symptoms. Psychologist Eli Robbins of Washington University supports the idea that an “X-linked dominant gene (hereditary factor carried by chromosomes) may be a necessary condition for the development of at least some of the emotional disturbances” (Brussel 29), attributing the cause of the imbalance to a hereditary trait. In more recent studies at the University of New South Wales, researchers studied DNA strands from 127 monitored individuals in efforts to pinpoint the genetic predisposition that can cause the imbalance when extremely stressful circumstances
amount to three events within the span of a year. These studies demonstrate the possible validity of the biological argument.

From the “nurture” stand-point, depressed individuals have enough psychological risk factors to produce a psychological weakness or vulnerability that predisposes them to develop the biochemical imbalance in neurotransmitters that is associated with depression if they have enough stressful events in their lives. In this case the cause of irregular neurotransmission is attributed primarily to the stress levels of the home environment in which a child thrives combined with unpredictable life events that shape the child’s emotional state. Supporting this idea, Dr. Sidney J. Blatt asserts in his book *Experiences of Depression* that the vulnerability of depression can be minimized through “the internalization of a loving and caring relationship” (187). While his argument accurately demonstrates that one’s surrounding either positively or negatively impact the individual’s mental well-being, it is important to remember that the impact only adds to the risks factors of developing depression, and cannot be called a “cause” of depression. Theorist Aaron Beck admits that while beliefs and thought patterns of an individual can generate the depressed mood and unhappiness that is characteristic of clinical depression, the cause of depression should not be attributed solely to such negativity (Robbins 56), affirming that while environment does have an effect on the onset of depression, it is not a single-sided cause of the illness.

While some may argue that the effects of parental depression on children stem predominantly from the environmental, or “nurture” side of the debate, it is more likely that a depressive family situation does not cause depression, but rather increases the risk factors of developing depression. Studies by researchers Kockanska, Kuczynski, Yarrow, and Welsh in
1987 revealed that depressed mothers’ effectiveness in child discipline and setting limits for their children is significantly lower than the effectiveness of non-depressed mothers (Beardslee et al. 73). Such ineffective discipline in a home setting would evidently play a role in cultivating an environment in which a child could more easily grow depressive symptoms. Furthermore, research done by Cox, Puckering, Pound, & Mills in 1987 and Gordon et al in 1989 shows that in homes with depressed parents “Maladaptive interpersonal patterns between others and children have also been described as have higher levels of criticism and verbal abuse” (Beardslee et al. 73). Researchers Hirsch, Moos, and Reischl found in 1985 that depressed adults reported having grown up in contentious family environments tended to create a similar home environment for their own children (Blatt 200).

While evidence of the dominance of environmental causes of depressive symptoms in the children of depressed parents remains strong, one must examine both sides of the issue. Beardslee et al. and Podorefsky studied eighteen young adults with parents suffering from affective disorders, interviewing them twice over a time span of two and a half years, discovering that 15/18 were functioning well socially and academically at the end of the study. Although this could be seen as evidence against the claim that a childhood environment plagued by parental depression causes similar symptoms in their children, the fact that the young people reacted in such a manner is attributed to their increased awareness of the parents’ illness and acknowledgement that the young people were not the cause of the illness (Beardslee et al. 74). This increased awareness decreased the adolescents’ risk-factors for developing depressive symptoms, decreasing their likelihood to develop an affective disorder such as depression.
The biological diathesis model of causation of depression in children of depressed parents depends largely upon the intensity of genetic vulnerability that leads to the imbalance of neurotransmission. Even with our limited knowledge about the inheritance of such genes, it is evident that their existence greatly increases the likelihood of depressive symptoms with the right combination of risk-factors. That is to say that those who are genetically disposed to depression have a much greater chance of developing depression when pressured by numerous risk-factors of depression than those who possess a genetic resilience to depression. In a recent essay from summer 2007, doctors explain how genetic vulnerability serves as the initial cause for depression within the diatheses-stress model of causation of depression (Nemade, Reiss, and Dombeck). They argue that such vulnerability may or may not be sparked by stressful life events that would cause the onset of depression.

While the effects of environmental surroundings do play an important role sparking the onset of depression, it is not the environment that causes the initial imbalance in the neurotransmitters. More likely this imbalance is genetically inherited causing a vulnerability to react to certain stressful environmental circumstance with the onset of depressive symptoms. Thus, the “nurture” and “nature” sides of the debate should not be viewed as two separate possible causes of depression, but rather as part of the same chain-reaction that can cause depression with a certain combination of genetic vulnerability and environmental risk-factors.
Works Cited


Writing 213 Entries
A Search for Peace: The Parallel Journeys of Charlotte Brontë and Jane Eyre

[Charlotte Brontë’s writing is] rooted in personal faith, unchecked by external prescriptions or considerations of propriety, and uninhibited by any urge to find absolute answers. --Marianne Thormahlen

None of Brontë’s novels answer this description better than *Jane Eyre*. As a clergymen’s daughter, Brontë was well-versed in the ways of the Church and was a devout seeker of God. The reader can see the ascendancy of spiritual themes in *Jane Eyre* simply by noting the sheer volume of biblical and religious allusions in the novel. Brontë assimilates her own religious views into this work by presenting them as the views of her protagonist, Jane Eyre. This striking similarity between the author and her creation adds a deeper dimension to the novel, making Jane’s spiritual journey parallel to Charlotte Brontë’s lifelong spiritual search. *Jane Eyre* is often viewed as a novel depicting Jane’s journey toward and ultimate finding of spiritual fulfillment. A closer reading, however, presents evidence that the novel is just as much about its author as its heroine, and that the journeys of faith upon which both embark do not necessarily culminate in complete spiritual peace.

Charlotte Brontë’s childhood and family life had a significant effect upon the religious views she held, which in turn affected the writing of *Jane Eyre*. Her father, Patrick Brontë, was a minister in the Church of England and had a profound influence on her conception of other denominations. Although Patrick was a faithful Anglican, he also had definite leanings toward the more evangelical passion and spirit of Wesleyan Methodism (Lloyd Evans 75). This attraction did not lead to change, however. His fascination with other denominations was deemed unorthodox in his day, and to embrace Wesleyan doctrine was, in essence, to dissent from the Church of which he was a part--the Church of England (Lloyd Evans 76). Not only was Patrick
drawn to certain doctrines, but he also had a deep antipathy for others. Patrick intensely disliked both Roman Catholicism and Calvinism; this dislike was shared by his daughter and permeated her books (Lloyd Evans 83). The doctrines of Catholicism and Calvinism--Charlotte Brontë’s “twin abominations”--were openly discussed in the Brontë home (Lloyd Evans 75). Patrick’s curiosity about and seeming fixation with other religious traditions found their reflection in Charlotte. The fruit of their discussions about other doctrines, particularly Calvinism, is found in *Jane Eyre* in the form of various characters who hold to this creed. In short, Brontë’s upbringing fostered in her an unconventional and rather unorthodox view of religion for which she was later censured. She weaves this religion everywhere throughout the pages of *Jane Eyre*.

The emphasis of religion in Brontë’s home resulted in her possession of a very strict moral code. When she disapproved of something, it was often on moral grounds. For this reason, she was deeply upset when some of her contemporaries attacked *Jane Eyre* as immoral and disrespectful toward the Church. Some critics even went so far as to accuse Brontë herself of being anti-Christian (Gregor 19). She responded to these attacks in her preface to the second edition: “Conventionality is not morality. Self-righteousness is not religion. To attack the first is not to assail the last. To pluck the mask from the face of the Pharisee is not to lift an impious hand to the Crown of Thorns” (1). Her contention with the Church was that it overemphasized the letter of the law while diminishing the spirit, causing religion to fade into nothing more than an empty form untempered by true Christian charity. Brontë’s critics attacked her for presenting the Church in this light. Her novel *did* expose the bald hypocrisy of the Church in the shape of the morally grotesque Mr. Brocklehurst, yet she defended it by saying she was not attacking the person of Christ, but rather the injustices that were taking place in His name.

Both the unconventionality of Brontë’s beliefs and her sensitivity to moral principle are directly reflected in the character of Jane Eyre. As Jane develops throughout the novel, she systematically rejects either in whole or in part the various models of Christianity with which she comes into contact. She holds to her own creed--a creed that no one else in the novel shares. Not
only is Jane’s faith unique, but this faith also encompasses an acute sense of moral duty. It is as if her conscience is the direct means through which God speaks to her. Conscience is “a direct intermediary between God and created beings…obeying conscience amounts to obeying God” (Thormählen 165).

Brontë organizes Jane’s spiritual journey into phases based upon her physical location. She deliberately places Jane in five different settings throughout the novel: Gateshead, Lowood, Thornfield, Moor House, and Ferndean. In each setting, Jane comes into contact with people who shape her spiritual development. Many of these interactions with religious figures mirror events in Brontë’s own life. The reader can gain much insight about the spirituality of both Brontë and Jane by looking at each phase separately and attempting to understand what religious forces are in play at each location and how Jane reacts to them.

The novel opens at Gateshead with a young and misunderstood Jane beginning to rebel against the injustices she endures at the hands of her relatives, the Reeds. She has no standard by which to guide her conduct save that which she sees displayed in her aunt and cousins. As a result, the only religion that guides her is one driven by selfish motives—it is a purely natural religion of vengeance in return for hurt and passionate anger in reaction to unjust treatment. At this point in the novel no positive moral influence acts upon Jane. She lives according to the dictates of the nature born within her, and that nature tells her to return evil for evil. It is at the book’s beginning that Jane first tastes revenge: “Something of vengeance I had tasted for the first time; as aromatic wine it seemed, on swallowing, warm and racy: its after-flavour, metallic and corroding, gave me a sensation as if I had been poisoned” (31). This natural religion which demanded justice and reparation did not satisfy. Even at this early stage in the novel, Jane begins to understand that this religion based upon human passion alone cannot fulfill her needs.

Brontë introduces a new character, Mr. Brocklehurst, as the bridge between Jane’s old life at Gateshead and the new life she is about to begin at Lowood. It is in the figure of Brocklehurst that the first direct parallel between the fictional life of Jane Eyre and the real life
of Charlotte Brontë appears. Lowood is the fictional representation of Brontë’s own school, Cowan Bridge School, and the Calvinistic Mr. Brocklehurst is the representation of its administrator, William Carus Wilson (Thormahlen 183). Charlotte Brontë and her sisters suffered extreme physical and emotional privations at this school at Wilson’s hands. Brocklehurst embodies the very traits that Brontë so abhorred in Wilson--extreme hypocrisy, utter lack of Christian charity, and self-serving Calvinism. Two of Brontë’s sisters died at Cowan Bridge as a result of the deprivations they were forced to endure, causing Brontë to blame both the school and its superintendent for their death. It is for this reason that she so mercilessly portrays their literary counterparts, Lowood and Brocklehurst.

Brontë portrays Mr. Brocklehurst as a caricature of Calvinism; she allows him no redeeming features, physically or otherwise. She describes him as “a black pillar” topped by “a grim face…like a carved mask” (26). Already he is portrayed as cold and unfeeling. This physical description is supported by some of his first words to Jane: “Do you know where the wicked go after death?” (26). Brocklehurst’s is a religion of fear, a religion of punishment. It is a religion that mirrors Brontë’s conception of Calvinism. Brocklehurst is “a devil quoting Scripture, a beast who cloaks his action in the role of Christian ministry” (Keefe 109). His demands are unreasonable and his hypocrisy is incredible. Brontë’s description of his horror at one of the girls’ naturally curly hair is soon followed by a description of his own wife and daughters, who have a “profusion of light tresses, elaborately curled” (55). The hypocrisy and lack of charity he symbolizes are not fictional in any sense; the double standards he evinces were common in the Victorian Church (Thormahlen 184). It was not unusual for people who, like him, believed that their mission was to “mortify…the lusts of the flesh” (54) in others to be the last to mortify their own fleshly desires. Brocklehurst, who upbraids Jane for possessing a “heart of stone” (27), does not possess a heart at all. The preacher of humility flaunts his own place in society. The supposed guardian of the children’s souls causes those souls to be prematurely parted from their bodies because of the privations which he forces them to endure. Brontë
scathingly condemns the type of Christianity he represents, as does her counterpart in the form of Jane Eyre. Brocklehurst symbolizes spiritual coldness, as shown by the effect Jane claims his sermons had on her and the other children: “We set out cold, we arrived at church colder; during the morning service we became almost paralyzed” (50). His Calvinist religion is a fearful one; his views of salvation are paralyzing. Jane knows that the answer to her spiritual yearnings lies elsewhere. She must turn to another quarter.

Lowood itself is not a place of utter spiritual darkness; the seed of a truer religion resides there in the frail form of Helen Burns. The reader is first introduced to Helen as she reads a book, *Rasselas*, with its philosophical theme of the elusiveness of true happiness on this earth and the necessity of humanity’s resignation to that fact (Martin 70). This introduction shows the pith of Helen’s religion. She is an ethereal being whose thoughts and hopes lie beyond this life; she is a creature in love with death (Keefe 98). She is not bound by earthly ties and looks forward to death as the catalyst that will change her into God’s perfect image. Unlike Brocklehurst, who is not good enough for this world, Helen is too good for it. Although Helen’s role in the novel is transient and culminates in her death, it is essential to Jane’s spiritual development. Helen teaches Jane that she “thinks too much of the love of human beings” (59). She urges Jane to look higher for fulfillment: “The sovereign hand that created your frame, and put life into it, has provided you with other resources than your feeble self, or than other creatures as feeble as you” (59). Helen’s outlook on life is one that Jane can scarcely hope to emulate, however. Helen’s belief in the insubstantiality of this life results in her meek submission to unjust treatment. Although Jane learns much spiritual truth from Helen, she disagrees with Helen’s beliefs in this aspect. She refuses to accept such a religion of resignation. Her religion is much more geocentric; she seeks happiness on this earth despite Helen’s insistence that it cannot be found. She refuses to look forward to death. When she sees sickness and death all around her at Lowood, she recoils from it: “This world is pleasant--it would be dreary to be called from it, and to have to go who knows where?” (67).
Brontë’s own spiritual searching was affected by many aspects of the religion that Helen Burns preaches to Jane. Her faith was not simply a matter of principle and rule. She mulled over the foundational questions of the Christian faith. She herself asked the questions that find their echo in Jane when she asks Helen, “Where is God? What is God?” (69). Her answer to these questions comes from the mouth of Helen: “My Maker and yours, who will never destroy what he created. I rely implicitly on his power, and confide wholly in his goodness” (69). She advocated that faith grew from sincere exploration and control over the self (Edwards 118). She believed, like Helen, that “God, or ‘the impalpable principle of life and thought,’ reasserts Himself in the soul of man” (Gregor 27). When Jane doubts the reality of heaven and her ability to get there, Helen replies: “I am sure there is a future state; I believe God is good; I can resign my immortal part to him without any misgiving” (69). This was Brontë’s answer to the fearsome Calvinist doctrine of predestination. Similar to Helen, Brontë chose to believe that by God’s goodness everyone was capable of achieving salvation (Lloyd Evans 99). At the same time, however, Brontë held the more terrestrial view of life that Jane embodies. She firmly believed that God had a purpose for each human’s life on earth and that fulfillment in this life was attainable (Linder 61).

Brontë necessitates the further development of Jane’s faith by cutting her off from Lowood. When Miss Temple marries and moves away, Jane becomes restless and ready to move on; she feels as if “a motive were gone” (72). She advertises and finds a position as a governess at Thornfield. It is during her stay at Thornfield that she meets Mr. Rochester, the man who is to play the crucial role in her spiritual journey. The religious environment that surrounds Jane has shifted from Lowood’s atmosphere of strict moral duty back to an environment where passion predominates--a place reminiscent of Gateshead. During this phase, however, Jane’s faith is to be truly tested. She must determine if she will again yield to the sway of human passion as she did at Gateshead, or if the lessons she learned at Lowood will impart the strength necessary to follow the dictates of conscience while she resides at Thornfield.
In Rochester we see the juxtaposition of God and devil, life and death, conscience and passion. He asserts, “I have a right to get pleasure out of life: and I will get it, cost what it may” (116). His is a religion of pure passion. He seeks fulfillment in satiating his own human yearnings, despite moral obstacles. He manipulates his conception of morality to match his desires; he justifies the “overleaping of an obstacle of custom--a mere conventional impediment, which neither [his] conscience sanctifies nor [his] judgment approves” (186). Jane recognizes his flaws, but this awareness of his imperfection fades as she becomes more and more dependent upon him for happiness. She states, “My future husband was becoming…almost my hope of heaven. He stood between me and every thought of religion. I could not see God for his creature: of whom I had made an idol” (234). Rochester embodies the clash between passion and conscience; his is the role that ultimately determines the religion to which Jane clings. When she finds out that he has a wife, Bertha, she wakes to the reality that the heaven he represents is false, and that idols betray (Gregor 28). At this point, Jane truly embraces Helen’s exhortation to look higher for help in time of need. Her idol broken, Jane can only turn to the God of which her idol was a mere shadow. As she lay faint, longing for death, Jane says, “One idea only still throbbed life-like within me--a remembrance of God: it begot an unuttered prayer” (253). In the midst of her anguish, Jane knows that she must flee temptation; she must leave Rochester. The battle between love and principle wages: “Conscience, turned tyrant, held passion by the throat” (254). Ultimately, she does “what human beings do instinctively when they are driven to utter extremity--look for aid to one higher than man” (259). Only there does she find the strength to utter, “I will keep the law given by God and sanctioned by man” (270).

Brontë explores the nature of sin at Thornfield by including parallels from her own life. Brontë presents the mad Bertha as the physical evidence that sin results in the utter deterioration of all traits that make a person truly human. Bertha, ravaged by sin and unbridled passion, can be compared to Brontë’s real-life brother, Branwell (Linder 60). Branwell’s life as a slave to drugs and alcohol ended in complete dissipation and immorality. Brontë wrote in a letter to W.S.
Williams in January of 1848, “There is a phase of insanity which may be called moral madness, in which all that is good or even human seems to disappear from the mind, and a fiend-nature replaces it…sin itself is a species of insanity” (Linder 60). Brontë was an eyewitness to the ruination this “fiend spirit” enacted on Branwell. Brontë writes of Bertha’s madness as being the result of the same moral weakness that killed Branwell.

Not only can one see a parallel to Bronte’s life in the character of Bertha, but there is also a correlation between the passionate relationship of Jane and Rochester and the passion Brontë felt for one of her teachers, Constantin Heger (Keefe 123). Like Rochester, Heger also already had a wife. Brontë had to wrestle with the same temptations that assailed Jane and had to find strength in the same divine source. In a letter to Heger, Brontë wrote, “If my master gives me a little--very little--hope…. I shall have a reason for living, for working” (Keefe 123). This sentiment is almost an exact replica of Jane’s great attachment and dependence upon Rochester. Brontë herself had to look to God for the courage to defeat the siren call of an immoral passion.

After Brontë portrays Jane’s moral testing and her subsequent removal from Thornfield, she places Jane in the hands of Providence, Who guides Jane’s steps to Moor House. While Jane is at Moor House, the pendulum swings back from the temptation of passion as seen in Thornfield and Gateshead to the claims of strict religiosity that Jane encountered at Lowood. She comes under the influence of her zealous cousin, St. John, who, like Helen, preaches that human attachments are unnecessary. It is at Moor House that Jane undergoes yet another spiritual test, a test much more insidious than the one that preceded it.

Brontë paints another picture of Calvinism in the form of St. John. Although St. John and Brocklehurst hold the same creed and are similar in many ways, ultimately St. John’s form of Christianity is radically different than Brocklehurst’s. Their differences are as striking as their similarities. They both proclaim that nature and human passion are to be extinguished beneath the weight of divine duty, yet only one of them, St. John, follows his own teaching. St. John demonstrates his sincerity by crushing his feelings for Rosamond Oliver. While Brocklehurst
uses his narrow doctrine as an excuse to revel in subduing the flesh of others, St. John’s first victim is himself. Brocklehurst represents Calvinism at its worst, while St. John symbolizes Calvinism at its best. It is interesting to note, though, that in the end Jane rejects both.

Brontë gives deep insight into her view of Calvinism through the ways she has Jane react to the character of St. John. One of the first things Jane notices about him is that while he is “zealous in his ministerial labors…he yet did not appear to enjoy that mental serenity, that inward content, which should be the reward of every sincere Christian” (299). Jane goes on to describe his sermons: “Throughout there was a strange bitterness; an absence of consolatory gentleness; stern allusions to Calvinistic doctrines--election, predestination, reprobation--were frequent; and each reference to these points sounded like a sentence pronounced for doom” (300). Jane detailed her reaction in the following terms: “When he had done, instead of feeling better, calmer, more enlightened by his discourse, I experienced an inexpressible sadness…I was sure that St. John Rivers…had not yet found that peace of God which passeth all understanding” (300). She did not feel that St. John’s was a religion that would satisfy and fulfill.

Jane was searching for a religion of love, a religion in which God demanded His follower’s heart. St. John’s God needed only His people’s abilities: “God had an errand for me; to bear which afar, to deliver it well, skill and strength, courage and eloquence…were all needed” (308). As Marianne Thormahlen writes, “It was thus St. John’s powers that received a summons, not his heart. His adoption of a missionary’s calling was the outcome of a yearning to employ his faculties in a way that would satisfy his avid ambition; it was not the result of an ardent wish to transform the lives of other troubled and restless souls” (Thormahlen 208). Jane credits St. John with goodness and greatness, yet at the same time discredits him by saying that “he forgets pitilessly, the feelings and claims of little people, in pursuing his own large views” (354). St. John firmly believes in God’s sovereign election, and he uses this against Jane when he tries to get her to marry him and go with him to the mission field: “Do not forget that if you reject [my offer], it is not me you deny, but God…. Tremble lest in that case you should be
numbered with those who have denied the faith, and are worse than infidels” (348). He never doubts his own election, however. He is confident that his work on this earth will gain him entrance into heaven: “Relinquish! What! My vocation? My foundation laid on earth for a mansion in heaven?” (319). Jane is sorely “tempted to cease struggling with him…. Religion called--Angels beckoned--God commanded…” (357).

It is at this point that Brontë denounces St. John’s Calvinist religion through the occurrence of a supernatural event--Jane hears Rochester’s voice. Providence intervenes and prevents Jane from accepting St. John’s marriage proposal. St. John uses God as an argument for marriage, claiming that it is God’s will that they marry and that Jane will be bound for hell if she refuses to submit to the call of God. However, God Himself stops the marriage--God Himself repudiates St. John’s claim that Jane will be eternally punished if she does not marry him. This providential intervention illuminates the error of St. John’s claims. Jane is now liberated to go seek Rochester.

Brontë’s antipathy towards Calvinism permeates the Moor house section of Jane Eyre. Calvinism, with its emphasis on pre-ordained and selective redemption, Brontë both abhorred and feared (Lloyd Evans 99). Her tortured letters to Ellen Nussey resound with doubt about whether Calvinism was, in fact, true. She writes, “I am uncertain that I have ever felt true contrition…if Christian perfections be necessary to Salvation, I shall never be saved. I abhor myself. I despise myself--if the Doctrine of Calvin be true, I am already an outcast” (Lloyd Evans 99). In another letter to Nussey, she wrote that she “was smitten at times to the heart with the conviction that…. Calvinistic doctrines are true, darkened, in short, by the very shadows of spiritual Death” (Lloyd Evans 99). It would appear from the conclusion of the Moor House section that Brontë had finally made a bold declaration that Calvinism was a fallacy; however, the assurance that she shows here wavers at the novel’s end.

The novel rapidly comes to a close in the Ferndean section of the novel. At first glance, it seems almost as if Brontë neatly tied up any loose strings and simply ended the story with a
“happily ever after.” Jane makes her way to Rochester’s estate at Ferndean after discovering that Bertha has conveniently killed herself in the fire that destroyed Thornfield. Bertha’s death ends the conflict between passion and conscience and makes it possible for Jane and the now-repentant and newly-converted Rochester to marry with the full sanction of both God’s law and Jane’s own conscience. All moral tests have ended and Jane seems to have reached both spiritual and romantic fulfillment. God has rewarded Jane’s adherence to His law by opening the way for her to marry Rochester. However, Brontë complicates the novel by ending it with an inscrutable and controversial paragraph about St. John.

The last paragraph of Jane Eyre makes it appear that although the story of Jane and Rochester’s romance consummates in complete happiness, Jane’s personal journey toward spiritual peace has not yet reached its close. Some claim that the ending acts as a balancing of the book which leaves the reader to contemplate two very different “patterns of human endeavor under the Heaven to which both assign ultimate power” (Thormahlen 219). Although there is some truth in this claim, it does not sufficiently explain why Brontë chose to end her novel in such an unsatisfactory fashion. As Mike Edwards reasons, “There is a denial of moral stability in this ending, and a stressing of transience and of evolution. Concluding with St. John’s certainty has, ironically, the effect of stressing the lack of it in Jane: at the end of the novel she remains unended, undefined, and still to be” (Edwards 175). Jane’s spiritual search has not yet ended. She returns to the cold inhumanity of the religion of the Calvinist St. John with continued admiration and respect. She once again feels the fascination for what she had once rejected. It is this very doubt and uncertainty that characterized Jane’s creator, Charlotte Brontë.

Brontë continually sought after spiritual peace. As a clergyman’s daughter, she was brought up in a God-fearing household and educated at a school where religious principles were strictly upheld. Religion was “the medium in which she lived” (Edwards 110). However, her experiences with the hypocrisy of the standard religion of her day seem to have disillusioned her. She knew which spiritual answers were incorrect and she rejected them, but she never seems to
have discovered a religion to which she could cling without doubts and questions. This is reflected in Jane Eyre, who also struggled to find a place of spiritual security. Both Brontë and Jane were shaped spiritually by circumstances and people in their lives. During their spiritual journeys, they both grew to have great faith in God and a great compulsion to follow His law by living according to strict moral principle. They shared an intense hatred of religion’s tendency to elevate the husk over the kernel—the letter over the spirit. But in the end, neither journey ended with the embracing of a “true” religion that led them to a haven of spiritual peace. Neither Brontë nor her literary reflection found a conclusive answer. Neither creator nor created could find a place of spiritual certainty.

(Editors’ Note: Technical difficulties prevented the reproduction of the Works Cited page, which hopefully will be added at a later date to the online edition of this booklet.)
I see at intervals a glance of a curious sort of bird through the close-set bars of a cage; a vivid, restless, resolute captive is there; were it but free, it would soar cloud-high. --Mr. Edward Fairfax Rochester, *Jane Eyre*

It is remarkable that a bird who has lived all its life in a cage would know anything of the world outside of those bards. Yet that is the kind of woman who Charlotte Bronte describes in *Jane Eyre*. While exploring the social climate of Bronte’s era, it is clear that Bronte wrote *Jane Eyre* with an agenda. She is asserting in *Jane* that women are equal to men in both sin and righteousness. Diana Peschier, in her book on nineteenth-century religion, explains that societal restrictions were more stringent for girls, who “were in danger of ‘losing their souls’ for different reasons from boys. They were urged to follow a prescribed pattern of behavior in order to attain eternal life” (111). The tendency of Bronte’s day was to over-spiritualize girls, and often, like Mr. Brocklehurst, to treat them harshly so as to be sure they would not succumb to sin in their weakness. Jane wants, like Bronte, a fair perception of females as both sinners and as humans, who, like men, are in need of redemption. Jane sojourns towards this liberation, breaking fetters in every possible form: self-deception, idolization, duty-bound religion. Jane does not reject submission; instead she journeys to a state of free submission.

Charlotte Bronte was a career woman by choice; yet it does not seem that she chose career over marriage, rather she chose a career over spinsterhood. Bronte worked as a governess and a teacher for several years and saw firsthand the frightening aspect of a woman seeking a husband so as not to grow to be a drain on society. Bronte wrote to her friend, Mary Taylor,
about a teacher at Heger’s school who was so desperate to be married that she would write to her bachelor friends of her father and brother, a very forward gesture, trying to initialize a relationship leading to marriage. This teacher felt that her position at the school was tenuous, and her only other option a single woman would be to become a nun (Peschier 117). Inga-stina Ewbank writes in her book *Their Proper Sphere* of the impression made upon Bronte, claiming that Bronte wrote of the “ideal of independence for the unmarried woman” in many of her works, including *Jane Eyre, Shirley and the Professor* (157). The liberation realized in Jane displays that which Bronte desired her own life to characterize. This independence is not solely recognized by fortune; rather, “independence is much more a matter of status in the widest sense: personal identity and self-esteem” (Ewbank 158). It is unto this end that we follow Jane’s path toward liberation.

When Bronte introduces Jane, Mrs. Reed is constricting Jane by forcing upon Jane her own definition of a “good” child. Mrs. Reed’s attempts at suppressing Jane are some of the most surprising, for Mrs. Reed is the only existing family member that Jane knows for the first nineteen years of her life. Her undeserved cruelty towards Jane is perhaps justifiable toward herself. Indeed, the narrative Jane would acquit her completely on account of her ignorance. Jane was guilty in Mrs. Reed’s eyes ever since Mrs. Reed noted Mr. Reed’s partiality to Jane over her own children. On her death bed, Mrs. Reed relates to Jane, “Reed pitied it [his niece, Jane]; and he used to nurse it and notice it as if it had been his own; more, indeed, than he ever noticed his own at that age…in his last illness he had it brought continually to his bedside (Bronte 197-98). Aside from being jealous of her husband’s affections, she is also afraid of Jane’s quiet, submissive demeanor, always suspecting her of ill beneath the surface. In this woman, Bronte introduces Jane’s first obstacle to freedom; Mrs. Reed’s false accusations are the figurative bars of Jane’s cage. In speaking to Mr. Brocklehurst, Mrs. Reed states her own folly quite plainly: “This little girl has not quite the character and disposition I could wish…guard against her worst fault, a tendency to deceit” (Bronte 27-28). If Jane had surrendered to Mrs. 80
Reed’s deprecating chastisement, Jane would have lost a piece of her self-concept, or, perhaps better said, she would not have developed that part of her which recognizes injustice.

Had Jane agreed when Mrs. Reed called her a liar, or even believed that she deserved such reprimand, she would have been deceiving herself and therefore merited the harsh reproof. If Jane had agreed to practice this self-deception, she might have gained Mrs. Reed’s affection. Having tried to simply obey Mrs. Reed and failed to please, it would follow that Jane could simply believe her aunt and give up on herself as an innocent. But Jane rejects the association rather than degrade herself any further. And so Jane breaches the bars of her cage when she replies to Mrs. Reed’s self-defense in her first recorded outburst, “Send me to school soon, Mrs. Reed, for I cannot bear to live here” (Bronte 31).

Having learned the trick of dealing with hypocrisy at Gateshead with Mrs. Reed, Jane is familiar with the temptation of self-deception and is therefore equipped for the second battle at Lowood. But this time, instead of outward passion, Jane does not defend herself explicitly. She defeats Mr. Brocklehurst’s accusation of her being a liar by simply choosing to believe the truth. For though Jane knows that she was not a liar, she cannot with that knowledge alone regain the respect of her classmates. Thus, Jane triumphs over false accusation once more, this time by exercising her self-control to wait for truth to be revealed (Solomon 1). This triumph opens the door for Jane to be successful at Lowood and later to move further outward into the world, namely, to Thornfield.

In Mr. Rochester Jane finds a friendly companion. She respects him deeply, despite his marred past, and finds his conversation fascinating and compelling. When they finally make their love declarations, Mr. Rochester allows himself to admit to Jane all that he has felt since the day of their meeting. He calls her by numerous pet names, alluding to his admiration of her as a supernatural being. In his article entitled “Masculinity in Jane Eyre,” Bryce E. Civert writes that, for Rochester, “Jane represents all that is good in the world, all that he searched for…. She is immune to the soiling of her soul. She rises above the baseness of the world as a beacon of his
salvation.” Again and again Jane rejects her place on Rochester’s pedestal, even while she admits as narrator that her “future husband was becoming to me my whole world…almost my hope of heaven…. I had made an idol” (Bronte 234).

Jane does not overcome this idolization alone. Author Nicholas Johnson asserts that Jane would have lost her personality; it is only “Bronte’s intercession through the medium of the supernatural [which] preserves her character from passionate dissolution in the arms of Rochester.” She surely would have continued along the same path of idolization had it not been for the impediment of an existing Mrs. Rochester. Thus, in Mr. Rochester Jane finds a second temptation: the temptation to break morality and becomes his mistress. This impediment served to send Jane away from the danger of dependence upon Mr. Rochester for her soul’s existence. Richard Benvenuto writes of Jane’s principles: “Jane Eyre is a vessel of principles which come to her already formed. She is a dependent of the law which she receives from a morally ordered universe, and which she accepts as the basis of her existence” (635). It is because Jane will not disobey the “basis of her existence” that she exiles herself. As one commentary describes, “it is almost as if God has now taken over from the world the task of testing Jane and is applying a more direct pressure” (Evans 246). This direct pressure is the law, Jane’s “base of existence,” which she would not dare transgress. In one of her finest monologues, Jane declares, “laws and principles are not for the times when there is no temptation: they are for moments like this, when body and soul rise in mutiny against their rigour…. [They] are all I have to stand by” (Bronte 270).

Jane has not yet changed her name or affixed to it her luggage when Mrs. Rochester is revealed, so she leaves Thornfield with her own possessions, refusing to bring even her pearl necklace, a gift lovingly bestowed by Mr. Rochester. In this wilderness of self-exile, Jane’s love is purified from the idolatry that marred it. She finds that she loves Mr. Rochester despite distance and the possibility of his having moved to the continent and degenerated. Jane leaves
Thornfield miserably, but she is a free woman. Her cage is further away now than ever, and her world is expanding.

After leaving Thornfield and days of wandering in the wilderness, Jane is eventually welcomed as a beggar into the home of Mr. St. John Rovers and his sisters. She finds a place in society as the mistress of the new girls’ school for the community. It is Mr. Rivers who dins this job for her, and he eventually makes his intentions known to her. He has selected her to be his wife in order to accompany him to India as a missionary. Jane admires Mr. Rivers and desires to please him; this is even truer after having discovered that they are cousins. Unlike many critics have pointed out, Mr. Rovers is not an ignoble character to the Victorian audience (Beaty 500). As a matter of fact, Bronte gives Mr. Rivers special deference by ending her novel with his epilogue. Mr. Rivers has incurred much wrath in the latter century due to his speech, to Jane which lacks all feeling of love. Nancy Pell, in her article on Victorian economics, describes St. John as eager for “that absolute possession of property that legal justice permits” (416). Modern-day readers associate St. John with this fanatical need to own, thus making him a villain. However, Jerome Beaty argues as a Bronte scholar that “St. John’s way is wrong--for Jane; Jane’s way, which for him would mean marrying Rosamund Oliver, would be wrong for him” (500).

For Jane to follow Mr. Rivers’ path would be even more impounding than marrying a man who expected her to save him. Nancy Pell illuminates Jane’s predicament in her article, writing, “Refusal to accept death at the hands of others is Jane’s chief motive for resisting St. John’s commanding proposals of marriage…. It is a sacrificial death that Jane expects when she almost decides to accept his definition of her duty” (404). St. John continues to try to persuade Jane to what he presumably sincerely believes to be the will of God. Before leaving for Cambridge on business, he tells Jane, “Consider my offer: and do not forget that if you reject it, it is not me you deny, but God” (Bronte 348). Benvenuto describes Jane’s disposition in this instance: “The laws of grace are as instinctive to her as…questioning of moral authority” (635).
But Jane will not be convinced by St. John’s spiritual authority; she “could decide if I were but certain…were I but convinced that it is God’s will I should marry you” (Bronte 357). Accordingly, Jae appeals to God, “Show me! Show me the path!” (Bronte 357). Jane extricates herself from another set of chains upon her refusal of St. John, implicitly declaring her religious equality.

Jane’s strength of character refuses to be victimized or incarcerated. For a Victorian reader, Jane’s acting upon her own volition to realize her own freedom is an important, even outrageous, leap for a female. But in Western culture, by today’s standards, Jane could be considered outrageously submissive. At the outset of her narrative, Mr. Lloyd the apothecary seems to give Jane the option to be a brazen hero by exchanging her high-cast, abused lot in life for a humbler, possibly better future. She would not at the time choose poverty over caste (Bronte 20). But she makes exactly that exchange several times as her story progresses, for she bows low in submission, not necessarily to be a man, but to her principle. Even before she has had any moral training, Jane eschews the restraint of her aunt and cousins that would define her as a liar at the cost of any pending affection to be gained by compromise. Though she may not gain love or acceptance from her own family, she chooses to remain free in spirit by staying true to herself.

Jane somehow knows that the approval of others is not worth buying at the cost of her character. She will not remain with Mr. Rochester at such a cost. She abandons a white-washed villa in the South of France for an uncertain, impoverished future which begins unpromisingly by her wandering in the wilderness for several days. When faced with yet another inducement to imprison herself, this time with loveless religion in the fine-looking form of St. John, Jane cries out to God and flees the temptation to finally give in. She submits consistently to a set of standards that she has adopted as her own. It is this submission that makes Jane as free as she can be on her own. Bronte rewards and Mr. Rochester with a perfect, happy ending. Bronte purifies Mr. Rochester’s love for Jane. Jane has gained her independence through obedience to
the law and submission to her principles, as well as through divine providence; yet she lacks. “Intimately bound up with the drive towards independence in [Jane Eyre] is the awareness that, ultimately, independence is not enough” (Ewbank 159), as a need exists for something even more than freedom. Jane must find love in order to be fulfilled. “In the end,” writes Bette London, “Jane’s power comes not from her ability to look at Rochester, but rather to look for him, to be his eyes…. With Rochester blinded she thus perfects her position of instrumentality” (207). Bronte gives Jane even more independence; she gives Jane purpose. The new Jane, tempered by the waters of St. John and strengthened by her fights for freedom, and the new Mr. Rochester, refined by fire, can finally come together to complete one another (Solomon 2). Bronte draws all themes together ceremoniously at the wedding. Jane may now be untied with her love, the law (the clerk), and religion (the parson), as Bronte expresses in the finale: “A quiet wedding we had, he and I, the parson and clerk, were alone present” (Bronte 382). Jane is free to soar.

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The Morality of Madness and the Madness of Morality:

Charlotte Brontë’s Treatment of Insanity in *Jane Eyre*

O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall/ Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed.

--Hopkins

The references to madness in *Jane Eyre* are plentiful, and a little searching shows that they are not only directed toward the clearly deranged Bertha Mason—wife of Mr. Edward Rochester. Charlotte Brontë links Bertha’s insanity to her past immoral and sinful behavior by writing that, “her excesses had prematurely developed the germs of insanity” (Brontë 282). Brontë subscribes to a belief in “moral madness” (Wise 173); when characters such as John Reed, Rochester, St. John and even Jane lose themselves in cold apathy or heated passion Brontë sometimes describes that loss of control with the vocabulary of mental illness. In a letter to her friend W. S. William, Brontë wrote that “sin is itself a species of insanity: the truly good behold and compassionate it as such” (Wise 174). Is she positing that some people are free from the insanity of sin and that these saints must allow for such madness in common mortals? Though Brontë probably isn’t excusing sin in this statement, she may have expressed, through her characters, that mental frailty demonstrates itself in more ways than just Bertha Mason’s outrageous loss of wits. Her characters exhibit the delicate balance of the human mind along a continuum of sanity, and the sane may be closer to Bertha’s attic than they realize.

A reasonable beginning to the discussion of insanity and the characters of *Jane Eyre* would start with a background of Victorian opinions and Brontë’s own views on the subject. Victorian medicine was raising a higher standard of care and treatment toward the insane during this time (Small 167). The average person would still strongly connect the concepts of “mind”
and “will.” In their understanding “the will was generally interpreted as a mental faculty” (qtd. in Small 164). As a result, some forms of mental failure was more acceptable than others; this society still disdained those characterized with “moral insanity” (Small 163). Brontë likely chose this form of insanity for Bertha’s prognosis because of the disgust and distance her sin-tainted illness would provoke in her reader’s emotions. Her own attitudes toward this type of sickness are apparent. She wrote that “there is a phase of insanity which may be called moral madness, in which all that is

good or even human seems to disappear from the mind and a fiend-nature replaces it. The sole aim and desire of the being thus possessed is to exasperate, to molest, to destroy, and preternatural ingenuity and energy are often exercised to that dreadful end. The aspect in such cases, assimilates with the disposition; all seems demonized. (Wise 173-74)

The words Brontë attaches to this diagnoses are fierce and dramatic, from their vivid description she would seem to have once personally been in the presence of a human-fiend that has lost almost all vestiges of humanity. Though no indication exists of such a personal experience for Brontë, she possessed some kind of knowledge that gave her the vocabulary for her lively explanation of moral madness and for the creation of Bertha Mason. That knowledge probably came from the writings of the physician James Cowles Prichard, the medical superintendent of Northampton Asylum from 1838-45 and the popularizer of moral madness as a diagnoses (Hunter 897). Prichard defined it as a “morbid perversion of the feelings, affections, and active powers.” He said that “those affected do not feel remorse, and this moral madness sometimes does not always include a deranged mental state” (839). Helen Small states that Prichard’s delineation of moral insanity qualifies Bertha Mason for this prognosis (163); in fact, when Rochester tells Jane the story of his first marriage and of Bertha’s insanity “he reproduces virtually every symptom” in his description (165). Bertha Mason serves as the obvious expression of moral madness in this novel, but, according to Prichard, psychoses was not always 88
apparent as an effect of this illness. Brontë shows various levels of madness or else uses insanity’s terminology for characters such as John Reed, St. John, Rochester, and Jane, in addition to Bertha.

One of the book’s first mentions of madness involves an incident between the young Jane and her cousin John Reed. John verbally torments Jane and abuses her physically by throwing a book at her. She cries out, “You are like the Roman emperors!” (Brontë 16). In the privacy of her mind she “had drawn parallels” between John, Nero, and Caligula (16), tyrants more famous for their insanity than their exalted titles. Soon after the book-throwing incident, young Jane hears her silent accusation toward her cousin vocalized and thrown back at her two-fold. When she resists confinement in the Red Room one of the servants says “she’s like a mad cat” (17). When the same “mad cat” analogy is repeated in the presence of her aunt, Jane calls upon the memory of her late uncle Reed in an effort to provoke sympathy--or shame--from her aunt. This unremarkable conversation takes on a strange surreal quality because Jane-the-autobiographer asserts that she “pronounced words without my will consenting to their utterance” (31). Her lack of control could be seen as a having a preternatural cause, but if this was not the origin, the philosophy of that age suggested that a strong connection existed between the will and the mind. Jane’s loss of control over her will could have indicated instability of another kind.

Several chapters later, after years of no contact with her relatives, Jane inquires about the state of the family. Bessie, her former nurse, informs her that John’s unsavory behavior has affected Jane’s aunt. The report is that “she’s not quite easy in her mind” (89). This case of morality’s influence over the mind reaches full maturation at the suicide of John and the subsequent stroke of his mother--she is reduced to ”making signs…and mumbling” (206).

After Jane leaves her orphan home and school of Lowood, she falls in love with Mr. Rochester, her new employer. He loves her and they arrange to get married, but he forgets to inform Jane of one small detail--the wife he keeps in the attic. Upon discovery of Bertha’s existence Jane flees Thornfield and the temptation to become Rochester’s mistress. At her new
home she meets St. John: a cousin and a potential husband. St. John and Rochester’s personality and values could scarcely be further from the other: one is passionate and makes decisions based on his feelings; the other is aloof and cool. St John tries to choose Jane for his life partner by a calculated method that lacks any consideration of emotion. If Rochester and St. John’s natural tendencies would ever develop into insanity, their symptoms would manifest as polar opposites.

At one point, near to the time of St. John’s proposal to Jane, he displays a few instances of slightly irregular behavior. At these few deviances from St. John’s predictable behavior Jane wonders if St. John’s “wits were touched,” but she remarks that “if he were insane, however, his was a very cool and collected insanity” (Brontë 346). On the other hand, Rochester acts like a crazy man when Jane told him that she must leave Thornfield. As he reasoned with her, “his voice was hoarse; his look that of a man who is just about to burst…and plunge headlong into wild license” (298); he threatened violence (278); he “spoke with a gentleness” (298); and finally, he threw himself down on the sofa and sobbed (293). His rapid fluctuations of moods are bi-polar in their extremes.

Rochester had at least one other experience when the bottom dropped from his world and his mind and will momentarily plunged into the mists of dangerous unreality. One night, a little while after his marriage to Bertha, a storm raged over their home by the West Indian sea. Inside their house Bertha shrieked and cursed with “a tone of demon-hate” (283), and inside Rochester’s heart his hopes for happiness suddenly vanished. Rochester resolved “to shoot himself” (284). The moment passed, he loosed his grip on the gun and looked up from the insanity of suicide. After that experience he gave himself to the craziness of “dissipation” and sultry Paris women (286). Rochester tells Jane that his ability to resist the temptation of self-slaughter stands as sign of his sanity (284).

From the cold but religious St. John and from the warm but fallen Rochester, Jane receives dramatically different offers of future happiness. Jane contemplates the loveless missionary life St. John extends to her as “a viable alternative” (Gilbert 365) to Rochester’s
“pleasure,” his roses that conceal hidden thorns, and his “passion” (365). She ultimately rejects St. John’s “life of principle,” his “path of thorns (with no concealed roses),” and his marriage of spirituality, and turns to the man whose “loving tyranny recalls John Reed’s unloving despotism” (357). Jane has no delusions about the complex Rochester; she reveals that “in my secret soul I knew that his great kindness to me was balanced by unjust severity to many others” (Brontë 139). She cherishes the hope that the “excellent materials in him” would untangle by some means (139).

For most of the novel, Jane appears to be an unusually level-headed, steady woman; she doesn’t hesitate when Rochester asks her to staunch the flow of blood from Perry Mason’s bite wound, inflicted by his sister Bertha (197). Yet even the put-together Jane questions her hitherto tight grip on reality during a passionate mental battle. Jane explicitly declares that she has crossed into insanity: “I am insane—quite insane: with my veins running fire, and my heart beating faster than I can count its throbs” (Brontë 292). Her reference to fire might signal some truth to her statement. R. D. Laing, a modern psychologist, reports that “some psychotics say in the acute phase that they are on fire” and that this psychological symbolism is tied to the fear of one’s personality being absorbed in the identity of another (qtd. in Rigney 20). In harmony with this interpretation, Jane makes this reference to fire while standing up to Rochester’s desire to take her as his mistress.

As Jane battles for morality she also fights for the control of her mind. Jane internally struggles with her own desires but she speaks out of her resolve, declaring that “I will keep the law given by God…. I will hold to the principles received by me when I was sane” (Brontë 292). Barbara Hill Rigney writes that in the moment Jane can celebrate her moral triumph, her chastity—“the ‘un-mined treasure’ of the body,” becomes synonymous with sanity—“the mind’s treasure” (33).

Does Jane’s self-declared brush with madness connect her in any way to Bertha Mason, the book’s most overt case of insanity? If the self-possessed Jane sounds insane during her
goodbye to Rochester, than Bertha Mason’s loud frenzies would deafen the deaf with their volume. Even without Jane’s demure ways for a comparison, Bertha’s fits could carry “the ferment of tempest” (284) that would rival the fury of the storm that raged the night Rochester considered “self-destruction” as an alternative to life with Bertha (284). In spite of their great differences, many critics do compare the two women. In The Madwoman and the Attic, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar propose that the story of Jane and Bertha acts as “the book’s central confrontation” because in Bertha’s raw behavior Jane can see her own hidden, basic desires of “hunger, rebellion, and rage” (qtd. in Gilbert 339). This view suggests that Bertha’s greatest usefulness to the novel is her service as an embodiment of Jane’s deeper wishes. Rigney, an author who shares this opinion, states that “[Bertha] serves as a distorted mirror image of Jane’s own dangerous propensities toward ‘passion,’” a word that serves as a euphemistic nod to sexuality (16). Not all are so quick to join forces with Gilbert and Gubar. Helen Small strongly disagrees and reads Jane Eyre with a straightforward interpretation; according to her their “link between the outwardly composed governess and the raging madwoman” is contrived and stands opposite from the novel’s own assertions (167).

Small exalts Jane’s will as the most distinctive trait that separates Jane’s strength from Bertha’s weak mind and morality (167). Even though this idea is credible, her process toward this conclusion lacks sufficient viewpoints. As Mikhail Bakhtin expressed, an innate quality of novels is found in the multitude of voices and dialogue that the characters provide (Bressler 339). When Small insists that a comparison of the two women should demonstrate their “absolute difference,” she depends on Rochester’s point of view for her information (167). This unfair reliance on Bertha’s antagonist renders her argument unreliable. Then again, not one of the novel’s cast would be likely to give Bertha a favorable or a compassionate depiction. According to Jean Rhy, “Jane Eyre gives us almost no access to Bertha’s feelings” (qtd. in Small 168).

Does Bertha possess more humanity that the biting, shrieking, plotting animal that howls from the pages of Brontë’s novel? Bertha certainly found a sympathetic voice in Rhy; he
dramatically sides with Bertha in tone, plot, and sympathy. Under his renovations in the *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Bertha becomes the misunderstood and misnamed ‘Antoinette,’ and she transforms into an “innocent Creole heiress” (Oates 195). This book explores the suspicion Bertha/Antoinette’s foreignness would have earned her in the world to which Rochester brought her, even without her strange behavior. Her background is the West Indies and many of the novel’s Victorian readers would have had difficulty identifying with Bertha for this reason alone (Cho).

Not only did Bertha’s background and behavior put distance between her character and the reader, but the accusation of moral failure guaranteed her shunning. Her husband describes her as “obnoxious…low, narrow, and singularly incapable of being led to anything higher” (Brontë 282). He tells Jane Eyre that she was both “intemperate and unchaste” and that “her excesses had prematurely developed the germs of insanity” (Brontë 282). No other voice in the novel, however, confirms Rochester’s report of his wife’s symptoms (Small 168). Through Rochester’s description of Bertha’s madness, Brontë gives her own belief in moral madness, a category of insanity propagated by the physician James Cowles Prichard.

The possibility of a perverse corruption of a human’s feelings and cognitive abilities sits at the center of Prichard’s definition of moral madness, though he expressed many symptoms to give a fuller picture of this illness (Prichard 839). Richard A. Hunter says that this nineteenth century doctor “cast his net far too wide” in his efforts to identify this illness (837), and Prichard himself admits that the manifestations of moral madness are “perhaps as numerous as the modifications of feeling or passion in the human mind” (840). He characterizes the emotions of a sufferer by “excitement” or “melancholy dejection” (840), two terms which encompass such a wide spectrum of feelings that they practically cancel out one another. Prichard notes that “not infrequently persons affected with this form of disease become drunkards” (840), and he believes this illness was more difficult to cure than “other forms of mental derangement” (841). Hunter says that some of the cases Prichard diagnosed would be classified today as “mental
subnormality, schizophrenic states, manic-depressive psychosis, psycho-pathy, and...disease of the central nervous system” (837). The Bertha who Brontë introduced in 1847, who was locked in an unknown attic, and whose insanity was supposedly brought on by her “intemperate and unchaste” behavior (Brontë 283) would today be treated with pills and therapy. The moral accusations would scarcely be a consideration.

Though the treatment would be different, Bertha’s society wasn’t insensitive to the plight of the insane. An act passed in 1841 required a Commission from Parliament to inspect every British mental asylum (Iwama). Stringent rules existed for those seeking a license for running an asylum out of a house. Several of these rules were broken in the keeping of Bertha, but her keepers might not have been held culpable since she was kept privately at home. Her homecare would have been discouraged by Seymour, the Commissioner in Lunacy from 1830-38. He observed that “confinement of persons in private houses” should rarely occur because of the financial pressures of such care (961). Though money wouldn’t have been an issue for Rochester, this commissioner also believed that the insane could not get better when surrounded by family and friends. This point brings up a valid charge against Rochester and Mason’s treatment of Bertha; no evidence exists in the text that a cure for her was adequately sought (Iwama). Seymour admitted that he “never witnessed one case of cruelty” in home-care cases (961). Of the cruelty Bertha experienced, her greatest pain probably came from her extreme isolation and one of the commissioner’s stipulations was that “there cannot be any places of concealment in which a member of society” might be hidden (Sykes 145), a rule broken to bits in the care of Bertha.

The people in Bertha’s life did not stare out of bulging red eyes, they made no dog-like “snarling, snatching sound”(Brontë 194), they did not tear wedding veils “top to bottom in two halves (263), and they did not laugh like hyenas in the dead of night (140). Though the men, women, and children of this novel lacked enough dramatic symptoms for a full-blown diagnosis of insanity, they did demonstrate various levels of moral failure. Bertha may indeed have
indulged in the sinful lifestyle of which Rochester accused her, but the other characters demonstrate sinful faults or rampant moral failures. When Brontë pontificates that “sin is itself a species of insanity: the truly good behold and compassionate it as such” (Wise 174) she should have considered the implications of that statement for characters other than Bertha. When John Reed, Rochester, St. John, Jane, and other characters morally offend, in great ways or small, does Brontë advocate compassion for their “species of insanity”? Referring to her portrayal of moral madness, Brontë confesses that “I have erred in making horror too predominant” (Wise 174). Given her frightful description of Bertha, Brontë’s label of “insanity” for acts of sin can give the sinner thus identified little comfort or compassion from the diagnosis.

Works Cited


