

Emotions over rationality: jane eyre's final chapter

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



The protagonist and titular character in Jane Eyre faces an interesting decision in the final chapters of the novel. Jane's cousin, the missionary St. John Rivers, presents her with the proposal that she marry him and accompany him on a mission to India; however, her heart is with Mr. Rochester, the master of the manor at which she used to work. This brings about a dilemma for Jane: if she abandons missionary work, it may seem as if she is abandoning God. In this struggle between conscience and passion, passion is victorious, a victory that fits in well with the rest of the novel. However, the element of conscience that lost out to passion may not truly have represented conscience in the first place.

It is clear that Jane made the decision of passion in her choice between conscience and passion in the final chapters. St. John continually attempts to push Jane into coming with him to India for missionary work, even saying, "Do not forget that if you reject [my offer], it is not me you deny, but God". Jane, however, does not want to accompany him; much less does she want to accompany him as his wife, as she does not love him. Indeed, she clings to the love of someone else: "I heard a voice somewhere cry - "Jane! Jane! Jane!"— nothing more... It was the voice of a human being—a known, loved, well-remembered voice—that of Edward Fairfax Rochester; and it spoke in pain and woe, wildly, eerily, urgently. 'I am coming!' I cried. 'Wait for me!'" Clearly this display is of an illusion that Jane has forced upon herself, an illusion reflecting her passion and establishing her will to return to Rochester as the decision of passion, opposed to the decision of conscience in accompanying St. John. Jane, however, is her own woman, and despite St. John's insistence otherwise - e. g. "The interest you cherish is lawless and

unconsecrated" - Jane's passion is unwavering. In returning to Rochester, Jane has clearly made the decision of passion.

St. John Rivers and Jane's would-be journey to India with him represent the decision of conscience, but in actuality this is something of a sham. St. John Rivers is not presented as the best, most moral character in the novel, not by a far reach. Jane actually describes him as follows: " He was in reality become no longer flesh, but marble; his eye was a cold, bright, blue gem; his tongue a speaking instrument—nothing more." Such a description certainly doesn't conjure up the image of a determined man of the Lord; it actually hearkens back to the description of Mr. Brocklehurst: " I looked up at—a black pillar... the grim face at the top was like a carved mask, placed above the shaft by way of capital". Recall that Mr. Brocklehurst was a person of unabashed hypocrisy, preaching modesty, poverty, and self-inflicted shame and subsequently engaging in just the opposite, as observed by the narrator in the following passage: "' I have to teach [the girls] to clothe themselves with shame-facedness and sobriety, not with braided hair and costly apparel...' Mr. Brocklehurst was here interrupted: three other visitors, ladies, now entered the room. They ought to have come a little sooner to have heard his lecture on dress, for they were splendidly attired in velvet, silk, and furs... These ladies were deferentially received by Miss Temple, as Mrs. and the Misses Brocklehurst." The similarity in descriptions of Mr. Brocklehurst and St. John Rivers is definitely not a ringing endorsement of him and his journey. As such, it seems quite possible that the decision of conscience that Jane could have made would not have been such a decision anyway.

The decision that Jane makes in the final few chapters melds well with the rest of the novel. Jane always was her own woman, eschewing a life of richness and that of a cushy, hypocritical version of religiosity. The one occasion when she strayed from this path was when she was a very young child and said she wouldn't want to live with her own poor relatives even if they were nice, and she explains this decision away more than satisfactorily: "Poverty looks grim to grown people; still more so to children: they have not much idea of industrious, working, respectable poverty". Other than this occasion, Jane continually shows her lack of need for wealth and the more corrupt, more tangibly rewarding version of religion, as displayed by her having enthusiasm for her new family as opposed to enthusiasm for the money she learns she has inherited: "It seemed I had found a brother... and two sisters... This was wealth indeed!—wealth to the heart... not like the ponderous gift of gold". The overall message of the book as exemplified in that passage seems to be that one need not walk the socially-acceptable, traditional path to achieve happiness; the people who were most traditionally considered "best" at the time of this novel's penning were the rich and the religious, and in fact, both of those groups are portrayed mainly as antagonistic in Jane Eyre. Jane's final decision fits in neatly with this theme; just because she did not accompany St. John to India does not mean that she is a bad, disreputable person, she simply followed a different path.

All in all, Jane's decision between passion and conscience is an important decision; her choice of passion reaffirms many themes earlier presented in the novel. By choosing Rochester and thus her own path one more time, she

cements the theme that pervades the entirety of the novel: the path most commonly travelled is not necessarily the only, or best, path.