THANKS BEING RETURNED: GRATITUDE IN MANSFIELD PARK, HEARTSEASE, AND JANE EYRE

By

ABRA GIBSON

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To Mercedes, April, and my sister, Sara
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 SIR THOMAS' CONSCIENCE: FANNY PRICE AND MANSFIELD PARK</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 RELIGION AND GRATITUDE IN YONGE'S HEARTSEASE OR THE BROTHER'S WIFE</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 A REVERSAL OF FORTUNE: GRATITUDE IN JANE EYRE</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 CONCLUSION</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF REFERENCES</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THANKS BEING RETURNED: GRATITUDE IN MANSFIELD PARK, HEARTSEASE, AND JANE EYRE

By

Abra Gibson

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Chair: Pamela Gilbert
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This project examines the function of gratitude as a social control in Mansfield Park, Heartsease or the Brother’s Wife, and Jane Eyre. In these novels, the courtship and marriage plots reveal how the notion of gratitude as feminine or feminizing contributed to its force and efficacy as a mechanism for behavioral control. Jane Eyre is this study’s negative example, in that Jane’s rejection of such socially constructed gratitude results in a marriage that departs drastically from the kind of marital power structure commonly depicted in Victorian fiction.

Further, this study considers gratitude’s role in these novels as it relates to George Boulukos’ recent works on the trope of the grateful slave in literature, as well as his commentary on the rise of an ameliorationist attitude toward slavery in the late eighteenth century. I have appropriated his fundamental questions of how and whether gratitude was to be earned, and also explore his assertions about differences between the quality and power of the gratitude of fictional heroines as compared with that of the character of the grateful slave.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In his recent works:\footnote{“The Politics of Silence: Mansfield Park and the Amelioration of Slavery,” and The Grateful Slave.}, George Boulukos explores the literary trope of the grateful slave as it developed during the eighteenth century in Europe and evolved in the antebellum literature of the United States. He refutes the modern interpretation of many novels as critical of slavery, specifically addressing Said’s reading of an exchange in Mansfield Park, in which Said claims that the characters’ silence at the mention of the slave trade derives from a sense of shame. Boulukos convincingly asserts that many novels, and this passage in particular, actually espouse amelioration (Silence 362). In his recent book The Grateful Slave, Boulukos notes that “[s]lavery was always held to be regrettable, but at the end of the eighteenth century, attitudes arose that the English could change the immorality of it” (8). Ameliorationists, though critical of slavery, did not oppose the institution itself, only the manner in which it was practiced: they believed that the humane treatment of slaves would encourage productivity and reproductivity among them.

Clearly, amelioration was a moral middle ground between slavery and abolition, and the projected improvements in slave productivity were expected as the result of the slaves’ gratitude at their masters’ kindness. Boulukos notes that the grateful slave trope was born out of sentiment, and that further:

[T]he trope depends for its success on two key assumptions: first, that plantation slavery will continue in a brutal form that makes the humane reformers’ efforts remarkable, and second, that Africans can be induced not just to accept slavery, but to embrace it, to be overwhelmed by ecstatic gratitude toward someone who continues to claim mastery over them. As if to underline the difference implied in the second point, “white” characters in
grateful slave novels reject the constraints of gratitude, not only for themselves, but also for their white servants. (Grateful 3-4)

Boulukos’ examples illustrating this rejection, however, are all male. Later he notes that the gratitude of the heroines of women’s fiction is more complex than that of slaves, and qualitatively different, and I quote again at length:

[H]eroines are put in the position of falsifying their emotions due to the obligations of gratitude, which are explicitly contrasted to deeply felt, genuine forms of emotion. In other words, the untrammeled feelings of grateful slaves contrast with the rational independence of white men, but also with the deeper, more genuine feelings, the much more complex psychic interiority, of white women in late-century fiction. (Grateful 26)

That complexity allows a more in-depth analysis of the negotiation of gratitude and power than the grateful slave stories. Moreover, this difference notwithstanding, certain resemblances exist, as elements of the eighteenth century grateful slave narrative are echoed in heroine literature (by which I mean to refer to popular fiction with a female protagonist, often focusing specifically on her courtship experiences) in the nineteenth century.

Further, heroine gratitude does not always stem from falsification of emotion. Boulukos uses the example of Mansfield Park’s Fanny Price to demonstrate this point, claiming that she “is pressed to marry Henry Crawford out of the gratitude she is expected to feel for his proposal” (“Politics” 26). I find, however, that this proposal functions differently: it reveals that Fanny cannot feel such gratitude to him precisely because her gratitude is already more appropriately directed at Edmund Bertram, who functions as a sort of proxy for Sir Thomas, his father and Fanny’s benefactor. While Boulukos is correct in asserting that the gratitude Fanny’s society expects her to feel rings hollow, it is her honest gratitude toward Edmund that directs her behavior. Rather than distinguishing Fanny from the grateful slave trope, her refusal to abandon her true
benefactor reinforces the necessity of her gratitude. Therefore, as I will argue, while
nineteenth-century heroine fiction does not include gratitude as a constant, identifying
trope, examples exist in which gratitude functions similarly to its role in the grateful slave
novels.

In three novels, Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* (1814), Charlotte M. Yonge’s
*Heartsease* (1854), and Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* (1847), gratitude and its shifting
role are critical to the development of the heroine, and subsequently the characters
whose lives she affects. The similarities of plot in these novels are well-established in
the work of Kathryn Sutherland and Barbara Dunlap²: a young heroine must learn to
navigate the social realm of a higher-class family despite not being accepted as a full
member on the basis of her lower-class roots. In each of these works, moreover, the
middle class family’s wealth results from colonial activities in the West Indies. In each,
the young girl marries into the family and must prove herself ready to join its society and
fulfill the role that the family/social dynamic provides for her.

These novels variously depict the heroine’s experience of gratitude, each in its
own way inviting critique of gratitude’s function within the novel. The first depicts a
grateful heroine who learns to direct her gratitude as her patron becomes increasingly
kind; the second, a working-class heroine and her middle-class double who experience
gratitude in extremely class ways; and the third, a character who questions the nature of
gratitude itself, and creates her own rules for its negotiation. Each of these novels

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² See Kathryn Sutherland, “Jane Eyre’s Literary History: The Case for Mansfield Park.”
*ELH* Vol. 59, No. 2 (Summer, 1992), pp. 409-440, and Barbara Dunlap, “*Heartsease*
depicts women with divergent understandings of the power roles between themselves and their 'masters.'

Boulukos enumerates various avenues of critique for gratitude’s role in the grateful slave narratives, noting that:

Slaves, like servants, children, wives, predictably are expected to be grateful. The key questions are, first, whether or not slave gratitude is understood as an inevitable debt, or as being earned by the master’s active benevolence; second, whether or not slave gratitude differs from that of children, wives, servants, and subjects; and, finally, whether slave gratitude undergoes the same process of reevaluation, or instead takes a unique—and therefore especially revealing—course. (21)

In the texts this study considers, heroine gratitude is subject to similar inquiries and stressors. Ultimately, the main difference is that the gratitude of the heroine is directed to another object than the master/lover, and that object is usually God. The heroine is typically grateful to God for the lover, whereas the slave may be grateful to both the master and God. Further, when the heroine is grateful to the lover, it is for seeing her in a way that, though supposedly indicative of her ‘true’ subjective self, is often recognition of the spirituality in her personality. Somehow, individuality and conformist religiosity are conflated.

The sentimental basis of amelioration links the movement with the feminine, as sentimentality and emotion were strongly feminized traits. In some cases, the mere presence of women in some colonial settings was presumed to provide an impetus for kindness to slaves. As Hilary McD. Beckles notes in a discussion of the eighteenth century writings of William Dickson, in Barbados “the overwhelming presence of white women tended towards the gradual amelioration of slave relations. Conversely, it has been suggested that the shortage of white women in eighteenth-century Jamaica…accounts for the undeveloped state of the planter households…” (71). For
observers like Dickson, women’s natural tenderheartedness and goodness were believed to prompt men to improve the conditions of their slaves as well as their plantations.

As mentioned above, the expectation of gratitude was not restricted to the presence of an ameliorationist slaveholder. The tension Boulukos illuminates between gratitude as inevitable, or as resultant from kind treatment, exists in the novels this study will examine. Amelioration is a factor in *Mansfield Park*; Sir Thomas is presented as an ameliorationist slave-holder, and Edmund is depicted from the outset as caring similarly for Fanny in her dependent status. Amelioration is much more problematic in *Jane Eyre*; Rochester’s sudden personality shift after their engagement causes revulsion and fear in Jane. In *Heartsease*, Violet Martindale experiences no increasing kindness from her negligent husband, while her sister-in-law Theodora learns that kindness had always been waiting for her grateful acceptance.

Boulukos’ second question, whether slave gratitude differs from other dependents’ gratitude in that it cannot be reevaluated, or renegotiated, is also replicated in these books. That is to say, I assert that even within this small selection of white European women, some of them are incapable of reevaluating the terms of their gratitude. Boulukos uses examples from Ann Radcliffe’s *The Italian*, Maria Edgeworth’s *Belinda*, and even *Mansfield Park* to prove that gratitude is not acceptable as a basis for marriage (26). However, if the condition of marital life is divorced from the contract of marriage, as the chronic reliance on slave labor is from the slave trade, we can see that gratitude is indeed expected from the women in these novels. For example, Fanny Price’s refusal of Crawford’s proposal serves a couple of different functions in this
reading, one being its role as a refusal to locate her romantic attachment in the world of financial contracts. Fanny must not be grateful for an offer of mere material comforts and class privilege, but she must be grateful for an offer of sincere affection, and that gratitude is critical to her love for Edmund.

The conditions in which gratitude was appropriate began to shift during the late eighteenth century, and the role of religion as object, briefly mentioned above, is caught up in this shift. As Boulukos notes, Maaja Stewart writes that “the servant was grateful to his master for protection and nurture and the master was grateful to his master for service, and all—masters and servants—were grateful to God for his bountiful and unpayable gifts” (523). The hierarchical nature of these relationships became problematic “as masculinity and economic agency are redefined in terms of “independence,” so that slaves and women shared the position of exclusion from the possibility of masculine ownership” (25). In Heartsease, Violet’s gratitude to God for her life and her opportunity to sacrifice for others mirrors the “untrammeled feelings of grateful slaves;” her gratitude is not complicated by having any actual object, or any of the “rational independence of white men,” or indeed of some of the other heroines this study will examine.

In short, this study will discuss the ways in which these novels show that heroine fiction, while in some cases as different from grateful slave fiction as Boulukos asserts, is in others quite similar. Imagery tying the “woman question” to slavery abroad helped to illuminate both questions about slavery and about English women’s lives. This examination of these novels reveals that true gratitude serves to legitimate dominance on the part of the object, and that when gratitude is not truly felt, dominance is not
appropriate. I will also examine the role of amelioration in this process, considering the ways it both supports and undercuts the power of the dominant male figure.
CHAPTER 2
SIR THOMAS' CONSCIENCE: FANNY PRICE AND MANSFIELD PARK

Mrs. Norris had been talking to her the whole way from Northampton of her wonderful good fortune, and the extraordinary degree of gratitude and good behavior which it ought to produce, and her consciousness of misery was therefore increased by the idea of its being a wicked thing for her not to be happy.

Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park*

From the start, Fanny Price understands that her life at Mansfield Park must be experienced from a specific point of view, as determined by her extended family. Mrs. Norris, the Prices, and the Bertrams all expect Fanny to be grateful for her improved circumstances, and that this gratitude is to override any other subjective emotions that she might experience. The family at the estate (the Bertrams and Mrs. Norris) find Fanny’s initial homesickness baffling; only Edmund acknowledges her feelings and attempts to assuage them by helping her write to her brother.

As Claudia Johnson notes, “like a grateful slave she [Fanny] lets particular and small acts of kindness overshadow a larger act of cruelty” (468). This particular act of Edmund’s catalyzes Fanny’s love for him, partly because it offers her a way to meet the expectations of the family: it provides something immediate for which she may feel truly grateful. Afterwards, “[a]s her appearance and spirits improved, Sir Thomas and Mrs. Norris thought with greater satisfaction of their benevolent plan; and it was pretty soon decided between them, that though far from clever, she showed a tractable disposition, and seemed likely to give them little trouble” (15). Fanny’s gratitude for Edmund’s attention gains her a degree of belonging and acceptance at the estate.

Moreover, though the Bertram’s adoption of Fanny is seen as a benevolent act, it is simultaneously seen as an investment. This conflation of benevolence and self-
interested gain mirrors the moral contradiction that problematized English colonialism and slavery. Joseph Lew notes that “Fanny improves her position at Mansfield by demonstrating her economic value… [as] an unpaid companion to Lady Bertram” as well as through the opportunity that Henry Crawford’s proposal to her indirectly affords Sir Thomas (508). Lew further observes that Fanny’s refusal of Crawford is “as absurd and as infuriating as a cargo of sugar (or of slaves) refusing to be sold to the highest bidder” (509). As Boulukos notes, “[p]erhaps because of the tradition of rhetorical attacks on the slave trade rather than slavery itself (Gould 12-42), the discourse at the time allowed—indeed encouraged—a disarticulation of the slave trade (although not slavery itself) and colonialism, with the result of facilitating the moral redemption of the larger colonial enterprise” (“Politics” 367). Thus, removing the economic element from slavery allowed it to be considered as a philanthropic project to enlighten the masses. Further, that enlightenment, based on intellect and reason, devalued the emotional—and along with it, the moral—as feminine and irrational. Boulukos notes that the presence of “a strong—and familiar—distinction of guilt between owning slaves and trading them at the turn of the nineteenth-century helps make sense of the political situation in which abolition of the slave trade (1807) was politically feasible a quarter century before emancipation (1833)” (“Politics” 367).

Just as the acute act of buying slaves was treated differently than the chronic condition of slave ownership, Mansfield Park depicts a divide between the economic transaction of marriage and Fanny’s life of service. She protests, not her servitude, but the possibility of being forced into a new servitude to a master who will be less kind than Sir Thomas and Edmund. Further, Sir Thomas’s fury at Fanny’s refusal to marry
Crawford exposes Sir Thomas’s expectation to gain by publicly trading her. At her stubborn refusal, Sir Thomas decides to send Fanny to her parents’ home in Portsmouth. Though he presents the plan to Fanny as another of the acts of kindness she stores up, the narrator clarifies:

[H]is prime motive in sending her away, had very little to do with the propriety of her seeing her parents again, and nothing at all to do with any idea of making her happy. He certainly wished her to go willingly, but he as certainly wished her to be heartily sick of home before her visit ended; and that a little abstinence from the elegancies and luxuries of Mansfield Park, would bring her mind into a sober state, and incline her to a juster estimate of the value of that home of greater permanence, and equal comfort, of which she had the offer. (250)

Lew notes that Sir Thomas’s “exiling a young woman in already dubious health to a city becomes a judicial murder or a domestic equivalent to the colonial practice of starving slaves into submission,” and the text relates the episode in similar terms, noting that “though Sir Thomas, had he known all, might have thought his niece in the most promising way of being starved, both mind and body, into a much juster value for Mr. Crawford’s good company and good fortune, he would probably have feared to push his experiment farther, lest she might die under the cure” (Lew 507, Austen 281).

Of course, this plan is paradoxically subverted by the more genuine acts of kindness Edward performs for Fanny. Despite the fact that Fanny keenly feels the loss of Mansfield Park’s material comforts, she suffers more through the hostility and insensitivity among her parents and siblings; “[a]t Mansfield, no sounds of contention, no raised voice, no abrupt bursts, no tread of violence was ever heard…If tenderness could be ever supposed wanting, good sense and good breeding supplied its place…though Mansfield Park might have some pains, Portsmouth could have no pleasures” (267). Though financial strain clearly contributes to the emotional tumult at
Portsmouth, Fanny’s discomfort cannot erase her knowledge that Edmund will provide her with better care than Henry Crawford would. When Crawford comes to visit her at Portsmouth, she is swayed by his boasting of charity, and “was willing to allow he might have more good qualities than she had been wont to suppose. She began to feel the possibility of his turning out well at last; but he was and must ever be completely unsuited to her” (275). Sir Thomas’s hopes are doomed to failure, because his son’s ameliorative efforts toward Fanny have provided a contrast against which she may measure Crawford’s behavior.

In fact, her time at Portsmouth only intensifies her longing for Mansfield Park specifically rather than the class life Sir Thomas mistakenly believes she experiences there, which he believes she will generalize to her potential life with Crawford. But Fanny misses her life at Mansfield because she believes herself to be of importance there. Lady Bertram’s reliance on her proves to Fanny that she has an important role to fill in the household; when Fanny returns from her exile to the now-tumultuous Mansfield, she is “devoted to her aunt Bertram…thinking she could never do enough for one who seemed so much to want her” (305). She also finds satisfaction in Edmund’s comfort in her presence, such that “her happiness sprung from being the friend with whom it [his tired mind] could find repose” (191). Thus Fanny contrasts the fulfillment in her relationships at Mansfield to her sense of alienation in the Portsmouth house, rather than contrasting the material comforts of each home. Not only does Fanny resist leaving the Bertram family, but her gratitude and loyalty show Sir Thomas that his “charitable kindness had been rearing a prime comfort to himself” (320). Edmund’s kindnesses, his
attempts to ameliorate her suffering, only render her too grateful and devoted a servant to be traded away.

The firmest proof of Sir Thomas’s belief comes during Fanny’s visit in Portsmouth. When Mr. Price reads aloud from the newspaper about Maria’s affair with Crawford, Fanny insists it must be false, though she instantly knows the report is true, effectively lying “from the instinctive wish of delaying shame” (299). Fanny, the moral center of the novel, lies to her birth father to protect her imperial father’s interests. This deception of her biological father is further proof that her loyalty now lies with Mansfield Park; her shame and even despair are now tied to the Bertram name rather than the Price name.

Though she resists essentially being traded away from Mansfield because of the fulfillment her assistance there provides her, her position is far from easy. Still, Fanny never demurs over the exhaustion she often experiences as a result of her domestic service. After Lady Bertram and Mrs. Norris employ her in cutting and delivering roses on a particularly hot day, she lies hidden on a sofa nursing the resultant headache. When she reveals her location in response to Edmund’s inquiry, Mrs. Norris berates her for laziness: “That is a very foolish trick, Fanny, to be idling away all the evening upon a sofa… You should learn to think of other people…” (52). Even before the end of this provoking speech, Fanny has silently joined the other women in sewing. The other women reveal the reason for her fatigue to Edmund, who brings Fanny a glass of Madeira. Only this finally brings Fanny to tears, which “a variety of feelings created” (54). We can easily believe Fanny experiences a variety of feelings in this scene; as she retires for the evening, she realizes that “[t]he state of her spirits had probably had its share in her indisposition; for she had been feeling neglected, and had been struggling
against discontent and envy for some days past...the sudden change which Edmund’s kindness had then occasioned, made her hardly know how to support herself” (54). Clearly, only the addition of gratitude to her pain, exhaustion, and indignance elicits her tears.

Fanny struggles to reconcile her religious morality with her social and material reality, both of which predicate from her position of helpless dependence. Edmund provides the perfect site for this reconciliation: he is the second son of a wealthy landowner, and he plans to join the clergy. His status as second son eliminates the question of economic motives on her part, and his religious vocation grants Edmund the moral voice for the estate (itself a feminized position), while the patriarch Sir Thomas emblemizes the political force. The religious aspect of Edmund’s role also facilitates a relationship with Fanny: because their bond is underwritten by their shared faith and morality, their intimacy evokes little concern. Edmund’s religious nature and his general feminization encode him as nonthreatening, affirming for Fanny that he will be a kinder master/husband than Henry Crawford.

His religion and his kindness feminize Edmund, and, more interestingly, so does his attraction to Mary Crawford. Mary is an extremely active—and therefore extremely problematic—woman. Her reaction to the news of her brother’s elopement with Maria Bertram Rushworth encapsulates her unfeminine energy, her lack of discretion, and her failure to adhere to the patriarchal morality held by Sir Thomas. Edmund tries to downplay the significance of her energy because of his desire for her, but he is horrified by her blunt discussion of the affair, and can no longer minimize her flaws. Edmund lectures Mary quite strictly for her immoralit—"the manner in which she considered the
dreadful crime…considering its consequences only as they were to be braved or
overborne by a defiance of decency and impudence in wrong; and…recommending to
us a compliance…in the continuance of sin”—and immediately (and repeatedly)
unburdens himself to Fanny in a manner reminiscent more of Marianne Dashwood than
any male character in Austen (311). The genuine pain Mary causes him shows Fanny
his vulnerability, and his openness in discussing it with her assures Fanny that she has
the power to comfort him in return for the kindness he has shown her.

The novel also provides a foil for Fanny’s gratitude in Mrs. Norris. Fanny’s aunt
Norris initiates Fanny’s adoption, but once Fanny arrives, her aunt realizes that her
presence only highlights the fact that they are both essentially dependents of the
Bertrams. Mrs. Norris begins to distinguish herself from Fanny by discounting Fanny’s
contributions to the family, and calling Fanny ungrateful at any sign of resistance.
Though not the only character to accuse Fanny of ingratitude, Mrs. Norris is unique as
the only character to do so from a similarly dependent position, and therefore subject to
the same criticism.

Considered in this light, her behavior is easily recognized as an attempt to divert
attention from her own discontent, which, in the psychology of this reading, ultimately
stems from ingratitude. Though she acts within the constraints of Sir Thomas’s
mandates, Mrs. Norris pursues her own interests within that framework, not his. Even
worse, she claims the role of Sir Thomas’s voice in his absence, making it seem that
her desires are his. In contrast, partly through her gratitude to Edmund, Fanny has
internalized his and Sir Thomas’s morality to such a degree that she believes that she
shares physical sensations with Edmund, and she has no other desires of her own. But
Mrs. Norris has, and in their pursuit, she challenges Sir Thomas and disrupts the peace of the household. Upon his return from Antigua, “Mrs. Norris felt herself defrauded of an office on which she had always depended, whether his arrival or his death were to be the thing unfolded; and was now trying to be in a bustle without having any thing to bustle about, and laboring to be important where nothing was wanted but tranquility and silence” (124). Fanny, of course, offers just that, being more comfortable when Sir Thomas is home to maintain order than when he is away.

Sir Thomas finally realizes this, and the danger Mrs. Norris represents in contrast. Mrs. Norris lacks the slavish desire to please him that dread, gratitude, and respect produce in Fanny. Mrs. Norris supports the theatricals, and, as Maria’s confidant, directly participates in the ‘degeneration’ of the family’s future: “That Julia escaped better than Maria was owing, in some measure, to her having been less the darling of that very aunt, less flattered and less spoilt…education had not given her so very hurtful a degree of self-consequence” (316). Mrs. Norris has mis-educated Maria, and shares Maria’s fate once Sir Thomas has proof of her disloyalty. Sir Thomas banishes Mrs. Norris from Mansfield as he had Fanny, but with different results:

Mrs. Norris’s removal from Mansfield was the great supplementary comfort of Sir Thomas’s life. His opinion of her had been sinking from the day of his return from Antigua; in every transaction together from that period…she had been regularly losing ground in his esteem… He had felt her as an hourly evil…she seemed a part of himself, that must be borne for ever. To be relieved from her…there might have been danger of his learning almost to approve the evil which produced such a good. (316)

While Fanny’s temporary exile only proves that the family functions much better with her in it, Mrs. Norris’s exile is permanent, and leaves only relief in her wake.

When compared with Mrs. Norris’s resentment of her dependent status, we can see that Fanny’s gratitude and acceptance of her position within the household actually
grant Sir Thomas and Edmund authority over her. In *Mansfield Park*, the hierarchical nature of the power structures requires that dependents must feel gratitude to authorize the continuance of those structures, and that further, the gratitude must be deserved. Only when Fanny truly experiences gratitude and belonging does the reader feel Mansfield is the right place for her. Thus, if we appropriate Boulukos’ first question, we can see that in *Mansfield Park*, gratitude is not inevitable; or, if such gratitude exists, earned gratitude certainly takes precedence over it. Boulukos’ question of whether gratitude undergoes a process of reevaluation has a slightly more complex answer. Fanny is, in significant ways, renegotiating the terms of her gratitude. She proves that her loyalty makes her an asset to the Bertrams, and takes the place of a daughter in the family, first as a replacement for Maria, then as Edmund’s wife. For Sir Thomas, “Fanny was indeed the daughter that he wanted….His liberality had a rich repayment, and the general goodness of his intentions by her, deserved it” (320). In these roles, Fanny’s gratitude has shifted and decreased her role as alienated dependent; she is now family. In the other two novels to be discussed, this question yields different answers.
CHAPTER 3
RELIGION AND GRATITUDE IN YONGE’S HEARTSEESE OR THE BROTHER’S WIFE

Though Boulukos specifically refers to heroines of late eighteenth century novels as distinct from grateful slaves, he uses works that treat both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to contextualize his argument. Moreover, his use of Mansfield Park as a specific example of the differences between these heroines and grateful slave characters opens the door for a consideration of nineteenth century heroines. As we shall see, of the heroines we will examine, Violet Martindale of Charlotte M. Yonge’s 1854 Heartsease or the Brother’s Wife most closely resembles the grateful slave as described by Boulukos. Like those of grateful slave characters, Violet’s feelings are contrasted with the supposed “rational independence of white men,” and she lacks what Boulukos calls the “much more complex psychic interiority… of white women of late-century fiction” (26). Further, Heartsease contains a secondary heroine—Violet’s sister-in-law, Theodora—who exhibits a lack of emotional control and reason that also resembles the “untrammeled feelings” that, according to Boulukos, exemplify the character of the grateful slave (Grateful 26).

Heartsease borrows heavily from Mansfield Park; the heroine is a virtuous working class girl selected from among numerous siblings to join a middle class household, and who marries the second son of that family. In this novel, however, that character, the bride Violet (née Moss) Martindale, is able to guide her sister-in-law Theodora Martindale as Fanny was unable to help Maria Bertram. Violet and Theodora must follow different paths to gratitude because they begin from different classes, but the women’s journeys lead to equivalent places of belonging within the family. Further, Theodora’s repentance of pride grants her status as the second heroine of the novel,
unlike Maria, whose defiance removes her from the novel and the family. The duality of these women as heroines complicates the novel: both Violet and Theodora are referred to in the full title *Heartsease, or the Brother’s Wife*, and it would be impossible to divorce their stories from one another completely. That said, however, Violet’s story is the natural place to begin, as her gratitude and acceptance are foundational for Theodora’s.

In Yonge’s novel, gratitude simplifies these character’s lives by removing all doubt, except, logically, the doubt of one’s self-worth. As the novel begins, Violet is already grateful, and keenly aware of her unfitness for her new role. One of her first conversations with her new brother-in-law John reveals that she has already made the same shift of allegiance that Fanny Price makes near the end of *Mansfield Park*: she prioritizes her new husband’s family over her biological family. She tells John of her mother’s warnings that men of Arthur’s standing “didn’t care what nonsense they talked” to poor young girls like herself, and immediately defends Arthur, “ready to resent it for her husband” if her brother-in-law indicated that such resentment were the correct feeling for her to display (20). Since she has now shown her gratitude to her husband by this display of allegiance, any conflict that Violet experiences derives from this sort of doubt of her worthiness to assume her newly designated role.

Moreover, this conflict arises from her uncertainty of the correct object for her gratitude, which is complicated by class issues. During her initial meeting and reception of John into her home, she is described as having “the rapid ill-assured manner of a school-girl receiving her mamma’s visitors” and being “in a tremor lest she should have been uncivil” (8). Later, she hesitates over even the simple act of buying her own biscuits: “a doubt seized her whether she was transgressing the dignities of the
honourable Mrs. Martindale” (28). Violet initially attempts to make Arthur the object of her gratitude, and this nervousness over social forms and class concerns is the result. The class difference between Violet’s families, the Mosses and the Martindales, causes this complication that her gratitude must negotiate.

The temptation to set her middle class husband as the object of her working class gratitude is overcome by two forces: Arthur’s failure to provide Violet with anything for which she might be grateful, and his elder brother John’s providing her with a more appropriate object for that gratitude. As she tries to build relationships with the Martindale women soon after her precipitate marriage, she turns to Arthur for advice, but his advice is confusing and contradictory because of the conflicts within his family, as well as his indifference to her plight: Arthur Martindale is not concerned with ameliorating his wife’s suffering. For instance, the offer of a personal maid from his mother, Lady Martindale, reveals Theodora’s class prejudices as a source of familial discord: as Violet questions her own self-effacing decision to unpack for herself rather than having a servant do it, Arthur remarks that:

[S]he (Lady Martindale) never thinks people can help themselves. She was brought up to be worshipped. Those are her West Indian ways. But don’t you get gentility notions; Theodora will never stand them, and will respect you for being independent. However, don’t make too little of yourself, or be shy of making the lady’s maids wait on you. There are enough of them—my mother has two, and Theodora a French one to her own share. (35)

Arthur’s response exposes many complications within the household; not the least of which his desire that Violet should model her behavior in such a way as to placate Theodora’s temper. (As we will see later, the family desires but is unable to control Theodora’s willfulness, a problem that has become more and more pressing since she
has reached an age of marriageability.) Though Arthur’s response is full of warnings, it is devoid of actual advice on negotiating the pitfalls he points out to her.

Arthur Martindale is, at best, an inadequate husband, regardless of the standard by which one judges the marital relationship. Arthur fails to provide social instruction, financial or emotional support, respect, or companionship for his wife. Once the novelty of Violet’s beauty fades for him, and her dependence reveals his responsibility to meet her needs despite her sweet nature and tendency to self-denial, he begins to neglect her and to resent her mild requests. He cheerfully gives her a pittance with which to run the household, but denies her access not only to her mother’s advice: “I won’t have my affairs the town talk at Wrangerton,” but his own as well: “Don’t ask me: it is woman’s work, and always to be done behind the scenes” (91-92). His nonsensical reassurance, “[n]ever mind, you’ll get on. It comes as naturally to women, as if it was shooting or fishing,” contains the poorly concealed message that he has no intention of taking care of her (ibid). Moreover, he is now her responsibility.

Arthur’s failure to provide for Violet in any meaningful way, taken on its own, would suggest that Violet has little for which to be grateful. Certainly, the only benefit he provides is as an object of affection for her, however inexplicable that affection may be. Even his role as the conduit by which she improves her class rank is insignificant in this regard, as the novel takes pains to stress Violet’s lack of interest in the material or potential societal advantages her marriage to Arthur provides. When the Martindale women fail to embrace her as a new member of the family, Violet feels strongly the lack of intimacy, but to a much lesser degree regrets the lack of social assistance usually provided by such relationships. The women’s exclusion of Violet demonstrates that
marrying Arthur did not guarantee her the benefits of increased class status, and further, her preoccupation with her role in the family dynamic rather than the larger social setting proves that Violet appreciates that the object of her gratitude must not be anything so clearly materially advantageous to herself as class power.

The women’s resistance to Violet is in response to the sole instance in this study of a woman’s unsatisfied demand for gratitude: the matriarch Mrs. Nesbit believes that her financial power entitles her to the gratitude and obedience of the family. John’s desire to remain unmarried has incurred her wrath, and she bullies the Martindales by threatening to withhold her personal fortune unless they bow to her desires. Arthur’s marriage to Violet disrupts the family because Mrs. Nesbit tries to rule her family in a highly class-oriented manner. She had opposed John’s early attachment to Helen Fotheringham because she was the daughter of the local pastor, and after John refuses to marry, she expects to settle her property on Arthur, who has now married even further below himself than John had threatened. Her outrage at this marriage, and at not being consulted or even informed until after the fact, is directed at everyone in the family, but the women, whose relationships with Mrs. Nesbit are more frequent and less equal, are most affected by it.

Mrs. Nesbit’s behavior toward her family—including her final power play: leaving her fortune to Violet’s and Arthur’s son in such a way that they cannot benefit from it—helps to establish that this novel does not share Mansfield Park’s ameliorative thrust. Though eventually Violet’s extreme goodness helps her to form positive relationships among her new upper class peers, many years pass before she develops intimacy with her new relatives, and these relationships are formed in an unusual manner: she earns
the respect of Arthur’s relatives through her long sufferance of Arthur’s mistreatment. At no point, however, does anyone suggest she ought to attempt to improve her situation, and none of the women suggest to Arthur that he should amend his behavior to her. Though Lord Martindale and John sneak Violet money and advice, and rebuke Arthur for his lengthy absences and financial greed, the general message of the family and the novel is that Violet’s attitude needs to adjust to her situation, rather than the opposite. John’s advice to Violet, while kind and thoughtful, makes this clear.

John’s character is feminized in that he is in poor health resulting from emotional turmoil; specifically, Helen Fotheringham’s death. This feminization allows him greater freedom with Violet, as Edmund’s emotional pain following the loss of Mary Crawford afforded him intimacy with Fanny. Violet’s resemblance to Helen further hastens her intimacy with John by increasing his sympathy for her situation. He provides as much support as possible within the context of their relationship; that is to say, he cannot provide the kinds of support a husband or other women would. His illness and avowed celibacy authorize a more intimate relationship than might otherwise be proper, as does the fact that the basis of their bond is the still-mourned Helen. Through their mutual contemplation of her loss, John provides Violet with a religious object for her gratitude. He counsels her financial woes by referring her to Helen’s favorite Bible passage, “As the day, so shall thy strength be,” thereby establishing Helen as the model for Violet’s gratitude (96). The just-adequate strength of these women is spiritually derived.

While Violet has excessive gratitude, Theodora has none. She feels that her obligations to her family and her class thwart her desires, and she chafes under society’s expectations of her. In resistance, she is proudly unfashionable as well as
practically unmarriageable, focusing all her affections on her brother Arthur; and she
tries to command all of his affection in return. Naturally, therefore, Theodora resents
Violet extremely, and her resentment leads her to devalue Violet’s beauty and
sweetness as signs of weakness which will eventually bore Arthur. She justifies clinging
to him despite his marriage, because “he cares most for me. Poor Arthur! I must stand
alone, ready to support him when his toy fails him” (V. 1 51). Thus her purported
selfishness in resisting her obligations is translated into sacrifice for the family:
Theodora presumes here to know the needs of the family better than Mrs. Nesbit or her
father. This pride precludes any possibility of her experiencing gratitude for anything, for
there is no one above her.

Early in the novel, the reader sees that Theodora is in love with Percy
Fotheringham. If Violet can be traced back to Fanny Price, then Theodora may similarly
descend from Emma Woodhouse: in her attempts to control others, she ignores even
the possibility of her own desires. Upon hearing of Arthur’s entanglement with Violet,
she wishes for Percy to stop Arthur, “Oh, if Mr. Wingfield were but Percy
Fotheringham—he who fears no man, and can manage any one!” but proceeds to place
herself above even his abilities, “Oh! If I could go myself; he heeds me when he heeds
no one else,” (5). Such a man as Percy cannot take second place to Theodora’s pride,
though he admires her. Later, as Percy expresses relief at Violet’s convincing Theodora
to stay home from Richmond and her unsavory friend, Georgina, Theodora bristles.

‘That’s your way,’ said Theodora, with the bright smile that was an act of
oblivion for all her waywardness. “All you value is a slave with no will of her
own.’

‘One who has a will, but knows how to resign it.’

‘That you may have the victory.’
'No, but that you may be greater than he that taketh a city.’ (21)

As John does with Violet, Percy uses scripture to direct Theodora’s behavior. These men provide religion as the authority for these women, thus ensuring religion as an appropriate object of gratitude for them.

In nineteenth-century fiction, religion is often the answer to the complex question of who can and cannot teach, speak to, or even be seen together, especially across the gender divide. Issues of class, marital status, social standing, and race all contribute to this complexity. Among women, questions of contamination prevent a woman who has lost her social position from speaking to a woman in good standing, and can only serve as a warning, from a distance, of the consequences of incorrect action. Similar restrictions exist between a man and any woman who is not clearly his responsibility in the eyes of society: essentially, only the man who is financially responsible for the woman may speak to her about such intimate matters. For Violet, whose husband neglects her, his female relatives would normally be the next source of support. Since they, too, are neglectful of her, his brother John steps in, but must translate his advice to her through religion, and, further, not his own religiosity, but that of his dead fiancée, so he is now acting as proxy to Violet’s would-be sister-in-law. Religion provides a conduit through which such information can safely be relayed.

One reason that religion was so useful in these situations is its hierarchical structure, and therefore the position of women in that hierarchy, was much less complex than the social hierarchies these women had to negotiate. The circumstances for the management of social relationships like Violet’s were carefully structured to hide the fact

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3 The scripture to which Percy refers is Proverbs 16:33 KJV: “He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.”
that women functioned largely as commodities in Victorian society. Marriageable women were particularly vulnerable, as we may see in the Martindales’ responses to Violet. Marriages with clear financial advantage to the bride were problematic because they brought the financial element of courtship and marriage to the forefront. Religion dictated that these women be sensible of their dependent position, and provided a focus for that dependence that elided the financial element. They might express gratitude for their care, but in an abstract way that aligns the feminine and the female with spiritual rather than physical concerns.

In *Heartsease*, gratitude is facilitated by the intercession of religion between women and their quotidian needs. Though certain men with specific and strategic relationships to these women may guide them by referring them to instructive scriptures, ultimately, even this remove is insufficient: Percy advises Theodora through the example of Violet, whom John advises through the example of the dead Helen, now an entirely spiritual being. Women must interpret their own experiences through not only the religious framework of gratitude, but they are led there via the examples of better women.

Violet Martindale and Fanny Price both controvert Boulukos’ assertion that:

[U]nlike the protagonists of English novels (Crusoe and Clarissa being classic examples), or the English colonists in the Americas, or indeed representations of servants in English households, the slaves in this scenario never chafe against their masters’ demands, never try to assert their own independence or maturity, and never seek to renegotiate their contract of gratitude” (22).

Though Violet and Fanny do struggle with their gratitude, they, like these slaves, never attempt to alter the structure of their gratitude. The work of these women is to interpret their experiences in such a way as to fit in that structure as revealed to them through
religion, the mouths of men, and the examples of other women. Other women, such as Theodora and, as we shall see, Jane Eyre, do indeed struggle with the very idea of gratitude. Though Theodora eventually follows Violet’s example and learns humility and gratitude—after which Percy is only too happy to marry her—Jane’s development takes quite a different path.
CHAPTER 4
A REVERSAL OF FORTUNE: GRATITUDE IN JANE EYRE

*Jane Eyre* was published in 1847, a few years before *Heartsease*, and Jane’s beginnings are even more lowly than Violet’s; she is essentially a foundling and completely at the mercy of her clearly hostile aunt. These factors as a context might lead new readers to expect Jane to be bound rather severely by gratitude, yet her relationship with gratitude is significantly more liberated than that of Fanny, Violet, or even Theodora. As was the case with Fanny Price, Jane’s wealthier relatives expect her to feel grateful for their care, though, interestingly, in Brontë’s novel, the specific term “gratitude” is rarely used. The term underwrites but is absent from much of the discussion of her position. Her abusive cousin John tells her she “ought to beg, and not live here with gentlemen’s children like us,” and the servant Bessie admonishes, “you are under obligations to Mrs. Reed…you ought not to think yourself on an equality with the Misses Reed and Master Reed, because Missis kindly allows you to be brought up with them. …it is your place to be humble, and to try to make yourself agreeable to them” (5, 8). But even in her youth, Jane, though keenly aware that her unhappiness results from not fitting in at Gateshead, never believes she should change herself in order to belong. When the term “gratitude” finally appears, it is when Jane tells Bessie that the night before Jane was to leave for Lowood School, Mrs. Reed had come to her and “told me to remember that she had always been my best friend, and to speak of her and be grateful to her accordingly,” and that she, Jane, had refused complicity with this history of events (42).

Jane rejects the zealous gratitude of Violet Martindale, the more moderate gratitude of Fanny Price, and the pride-curing gratitude of Theodora. Violet’s gratitude is
all-encompassing; she is grateful for whatever circumstances she finds herself facing; the positive are rewards, and the negative are opportunities not to grow, but to sacrifice herself. Fanny’s gratitude is more directed; she is grateful for what her society tells her is appropriate for her gender: she is not grateful for Henry Crawford’s proposal, since her feminine sensitivity tells her he is not what he seems; but she is grateful for Edmund’s attentions and kindness, and ultimately his love. Theodora learns that her class pride must not supersede her humble gender status, and finds an appropriately middle class object for her gratitude.

Jane’s struggle is quite different; she recognizes the distinction between her own views and those of her society, and while she realizes she must live within society’s framework, her struggle is with her inner awareness that she trusts her own views more. Jane at no point acts against her conscience to meet the needs of her society. She certainly does not share Violet’s need to suppress the awareness, or ameliorate the severity of her lover’s faults in order to preserve the family structure. Unlike Fanny, she does not feel responsible to protect other characters from themselves; she does not agonize as Fanny did over Maria’s indiscretions. When Jane visits her aunt Reed’s deathbed and learns of her cousin Georgina’s frivolity and her cousin Eliza’s rigidity, she has no impulse to instruct them. Though she forms her own opinions of their choices, she allows them to make those choices, telling Eliza, “it is not my business, and so it suits you, I don’t much care” (289). Finally, Rochester’s and St. John’s assaults on her pride do not elicit tantrums like those Theodora indulges; they instead provoke a response rooted firmly in Jane’s self-awareness and self-love.
At Thornfield, Jane begins as a servant; unlike the other women we have discussed, Jane is a wage laborer. While her position as a governess is in many ways complicated by liminality that in some ways resembles that experienced by Violet and Fanny, her work in the household is officially recognized by society. Further, though on the surface, the kind of labor she is engaged in as a governess seems very similar to the labor of a female family member, whether wife, mother, or sister, it is actually quite different to the psychic labor with which Violet, Theodora, and Fanny actually struggle. While these women are struggling to make their value systems conform to those of their societies, Jane instead seeks a place in society where she is safe to operate under her own value system, and that place is in the spiritual kinship she feels with Rochester.

*Jane Eyre* is a remarkably fruitful text. There seems to be little left to say about it; it has been critiqued from post-colonial, feminist, psychoanalytic, and religious perspectives throughout its long life. As noted in the introduction to this study, its plot’s resemblance to *Mansfield Park* and *Heartsease* is well-established, and yet despite these parallels, *Jane Eyre* is rarely discussed in this context, presumably because of the significant difference in the circumstances in which Jane proves herself ready. As discussed above, Jane does not mold herself to fit the world she wishes to enter. She rather *only* wishes and ultimately consents to enter a world that fits her. For Jane, to be “ready” means to have fully developed into herself, rather than learning to limit herself. This self-development is discussed symbolically in criticism and metaphorically within the novel as finding or heeding her own voice.

J. Jeffrey Franklin situates Jane’s growth within the blending of spirituality discourses evident in the novel. Jane literally grows into her voice: as a child, she is
horrified by her victory over her aunt Reed, who is unable to defend her abuse of Jane in response to Jane’s accusations. Franklin argues that Jane’s increasing ability to overcome this childhood discomfort with her own convictions is but one example of her “increasing ability to form her own subjectivity and to both control and experience her own passions” (471). Moreover, he argues that “contact with the supernatural—or with what it serves as a proxy for—appears to contribute directly to Jane’s empowerment, to the finding of her own voice,” such that Jane’s imprisonment in the red room leads to her defiance of her aunt, though she is not yet ready to claim that voice (471-2).

Franklin further notes that Jane’s ultimate assertion of her own voice follows her extrasensory experience of hearing Rochester’s call. Her trust in the call and what it signifies empower her, and “saves Jane from a sacrificial marriage to a masculine Evangelical God” as embodied in St. John (476).

The religious basis of many of *Jane Eyre*’s negative contemporaneous reviews, including those of Matthew Arnold and Elizabeth Rigby, is well-established. Gilbert and Gubar note that these negative responses stem primarily from the novel’s “anti-Christian’ refusal to accept the forms, customs, and standards of society” (338). This refusal, however, does not indicate a complete rejection of Christian values. The alternate forms of spirituality that Jane employs in creating her selfhood do not entirely replace Christian beliefs; Jane blatantly rejects the supernatural as a replacement for Christianity (543). Further, though Jane does claim her own voice and her own ascendancy, she is listening for the will of God to be spoken in that voice. Just before the psychic connection with Rochester, she tells St. John, “were I but convinced that it is God’s will I should marry you, I could vow to marry you here and now,” then asks
“Heaven” to “Show me, show me the path!” (508). Finally, for the revelation of Rochester’s cry, she thanks God: “my soul rushed out in gratitude at His feet” (509).

A restatement of Gilbert’s and Gubar’s above claim, therefore, is that Brontë’s contemporaries deplored Jane’s refusal to accept not Christian beliefs or values, but Christian forms, customs, and standards. If Jane does not accept these traditions, she exempts herself from traditional notions of gratitude, which is problematic because as our examinations of *Mansfield Park* and *Heartsease* reveal, gratitude operates to police female desire, and derives from Christian morality.

Though she maintains her faith and merges it easily with the other forms of spirituality Franklin discusses, Jane largely eschews the trappings of formal, organized religions as exemplified in Brocklehurst’s Calvinism and St. John’s evangelicism. Franklin notes these renunciations, and contrasts then with the example of Helen Burns, claiming that “Helen Burns is the character in the novel in whom the merging of these multiple spiritualities is prefigured,” also referring to her as “the novel’s Christian paragon” (465). Though Jane loves Helen, and does adopt Helen’s example of Christian forgiveness, she never relinquishes her passion for life, as Helen instructs her. Helen tries to comfort Jane after Brocklehurst’s accusations of dishonesty by telling her, “you think too much of the love of human beings…Why, then, should we ever sink overwhelmed with distress, when life is so soon over, and death is so certain an entrance to happiness—to glory?” (78). Jane relates that though Helen’s speech had calmed her, “in the tranquility she imparted there was an alloy of inexpressible sadness. I felt the impression of woe as she spoke, but I could not tell whence it came; and when, having done speaking, she breathed a little fast and coughed a short cough, I
momentarily forgot my own sorrows to yield to a vague concern for her” (78). In Jane’s response, we can see that Jane resists this abnegation of life and passion. Though she cannot locate the source of her disquiet at Helen’s comforting words, her acceptance of them is clearly conflicted, and the paragraph ends with Jane again thinking “too much of the love of human beings” by focusing her concerns on Helen’s infirmity rather than her own spirituality.

This self-possession is the difference between Jane and our other heroines. Though Helen is clearly a safe, virginal source from which Jane may learn her role in society and to accept the burdens of this life cheerfully, Jane is not simply a blank slate on which Helen may inscribe these lessons. Jane does not suppress her desires, nor does she punish herself for not doing so. When Jane is cleared of the dishonesty of which Brocklehurst accused her, she is energized, and feels “relieved of a grievous load,” without even a thought of berating herself for her concern with human praise (84). Further, after the day during which Helen is forced to wear the “Slattern” sign, Jane notes, “I ran to Helen, tore it off, and thrust it into the fire: the fury of which she was incapable had been burning in my soul all day, and tears, hot and large, had continually been scalding my cheek; for the spectacle of her sad resignation gave me an intolerable pain at the heart” (83). Unlike Helen, Jane is not content to endure suffering for the promised reward of heaven.

Her grieving of Helen’s death is as significant to Jane’s story as is her relationship to Bertha Mason, though much less dramatic. During her visit to Helen’s deathbed, Jane thinks, “she is not going to die; they are mistaken: she could not speak and look so calmly if she were” (92). Though she loves Helen, Jane understands her no better than
she does Bertha; she cannot relate to Helen’s detachment from life any better than she can Bertha’s uncontrollable passions. This passion for life is Jane’s defining characteristic; and Jane’s later admonishment of St. John, that “God did not give me this life to throw away” as a missionary in India reminds readers not only of Eliza Reed’s walling herself up alive in a convent, but also of Helen’s acquiescent acceptance of punishment and death (501).

Both Eliza’s and Helen’s choices predicate from a renouncement of the world in favor of the religious. Eliza exerts rigorous self-control to deny the pleasures of the flesh, while Helen exhibits no earthly desires at all. Although these women do not speak of gratitude, their adherence to the formulas of the coming reward is clearly based on the same kind of scriptural rhetoric that directs Fanny, Violet, and finally Theodora. These women learn to be grateful for the paternal support of both the church and their husbands’ families, and their stories provide no opportunities for alternate paths of development.

Jane, on the other hand, determines for herself, through the merging of the spiritual and the religious, to be master of her own fate. In an early conversation, Helen tells her that “it is weak and silly to say you cannot bear what it is your fate to be required to bear,” and though young Jane fails to “comprehend this doctrine of endurance…or sympathise with the forbearance she expressed for her chastiser,” the adult Jane does not meekly endure such chastisement, but rather decides that as long as she feels her behavior just, she need not heed criticisms nor those who would criticize her. We see this throughout the novel as she forgives Mrs. Reed, ignores the comments of the Ingrams, yet asks Rochester to explain their midnight meeting to Mrs.
Fairfax; saying that “it pains me to be misjudged by so good a woman…I believe she thought I had forgotten my station and yours, sir” (315-316). After Helen’s lessons, Jane continues to care greatly about the feelings of others, but limits her concern to the opinions of those whom she respects.

Her education and position as a governess empower Jane in ways that the other heroines in this study lack. Her time at Lowood has a complicated effect on her religiosity; though she leaves behind her fears of the ghosts of the red room and notions of vengeance, the multiplicity of spiritualities Franklin discusses emerge here. In the same speech in which Helen urges Jane to renounce her human passions, she also provides Jane with a new conduit for the less institutionalized spirituality implicit in her fear of vengeful ghosts:

Besides this earth, and besides the race of men, there is an invisible world and a kingdom of spirits: that world is round us, for it is everywhere; and those spirits watch us, for they are commissioned to guard us; and if we were dying in pain and shame, if scorn smote us on all sides, and hatred crushed us, angels see our tortures, recognize our innocence (if innocent we be). 78

In this passage, Helen uses interchangeably the words “spirits” and “angels” to refer to protective forces that lie outside the realm of men, and that act as messengers of God’s love. Jane translates these spirits into the voices that guide her at pivotal moments in her life. Franklin asserts that these voices are all manifestations of the “still small voice” that “speaks to Jane, guiding her to advertise for a position that will take her way from Lowood and saving her finally from the marriage with St. John: it is the voice that she is striving to claim as her own” (478). The interchangeable use of “spirits” and “angels”

4 Just as formal religion has a positive relationship with gratitude in the novels discussed here, there is a negative relationship with education; Violet has none, Theodora and Fanny a light, feminine education, and Jane has formal schooling.
turns the vengeful ghosts of Jane’s childhood into the protective voices that guide her along her path to self-actualization.

Though Jane’s is a journey of self-actualization rather than of self-control, gratitude still plays a role in her development. This gratitude and its function are logically different for Jane than for the other women discussed in this study, in that Jane determines for herself what she is grateful for. Jane is grateful to Rochester for his love, but not out of dependence on that love, rather, because his love is a form of respect and acknowledgement of what she already knows to be true: that she is worthy of him. Further, she is grateful to God, not for the chance to prove her worthiness for the afterlife, but for showing her how to enjoy her life rather than renounce it.

Gratitude’s role in religion is linked to that of forgiveness; Emmons and McCullough note that “By offering …burnt gifts to God, the Israelites received atonement for their transgressions,” thus receiving forgiveness in exchange for expressing gratitude (84). Gratitude functions similarly for the grateful slave, and even more fruitfully for Fanny, Violet, and Theodora: by expressing their gratitude for the support of the male authority figure, each earns a formal admission into the family. Jane deploys her gratitude toward a different end: to put it simply, Jane is grateful for her own power to enact and deserve positive changes in her life, not for backhanded glory earned through suffering. Jane is not grateful for her place at Thornfield; or rather, the gratitude she experiences upon arrival there is joined to a prayer for “aid on my further path, and the power of meriting the kindness which seemed so frankly offered me before it was earned” (113). In other words, she is grateful, but even as she utters her gratitude, she places that emotion in the service of her own path, and also expresses a
desire for the power to render further gratitude unnecessary by proving herself worthy of what she has been granted. Further, she admonishes herself “to be grateful for such respectful and kind treatment as, if you do your duty, you have a right to expect at his [Rochester’s] hands. …be too self-respecting to lavish the love of the whole heart, soul, and strength, where such a gift is not wanted and would be despised” (192). Jane only appreciates praise that she has earned, not charity.

This is not to say that Jane fails to recognize the occasional necessity of charity. When St. John takes her into his home, she accepts and appreciates that charity. However, her gratitude does not extend to granting him complete power over her. She refuses to disclose her identity, saying, “This benefit conferred gives you an unlimited claim on my gratitude, and a claim, to a certain extent, on my confidence. I will tell you as much…as I can tell without compromising my own peace of mind—my own security, moral and physical, and that of others” (419). Though she owes St. John her gratitude for saving her life, she makes clear, both here, and ultimately in response to his proposal, that she does not owe him that life. Unlike our other heroines, Jane’s gratitude has its limits.

She is grateful to Rochester for his proposal; and here, she resembles Fanny Price most among the other heroines in this study: each is grateful to her fiancé for acknowledging her worthiness. Similarly, Edmund and Rochester must suffer and learn the error of their ways before they may marry. However, Jane proves herself to Rochester, while Fanny proves her worth to Edmund’s father first: Sir Thomas must send Edmund to retrieve Fanny from her parents’ home in order that Edmund may
follow his example and realize her value to the family. *Jane Eyre* makes clear that the Rochester family deserves no such gratitude, and refuses to grant any.

Moreover, the novel subtly critiques the notion of such gratitude, and in fact, the most striking shift in gratitude occurs within Rochester’s character. He uses the term gratitude most frequently of any character in the novel, and in significant ways. Initially, he expresses satisfaction at, or a wish for, Jane’s gratitude to him: as the sorceress, he asserts, “I wish to foster, not to blight—to earn gratitude, not to wring tears of blood—no, nor of brine: my harvest must be in smiles, in endearments…” (240), and in his proposal he admits, “I permitted myself the delight of being kind to you… I liked my name pronounced by your lips in a grateful happy accent” (379). He is preoccupied with winning Jane’s gratitude, primarily through gifts that tend rather to demonstrate his power and wealth than to please her.

Jane recognizes the change in Rochester’s behavior upon their engagement: he embarks on a course of amelioration. In so doing, he ceases to celebrate Jane’s individuality; he seems only to know how to value her as a possession. Once they are engaged, he stops referring to her distinctive spiritual nature as he had; where he once called her a sprite, an elf, a capricious spirit, he now attempts to formalize their relationship. He announces, “I will myself put the diamond chain round your neck, and the circlet on your forehead…and I will clasp the bracelets on these fine wrists, and load these fairy-like fingers with rings,” and though he tells Jane that these jewels will suit her noble nature, the rhetoric of enslavement is clear, as is his focus on himself as its enforcer (310). He begins to speak of her delicacy as angelic rather than elfin, attempting to bring her spirituality within the recognizable constructs of the church, but
Jane tells him, “I had rather be a thing than an angel” (314). Jane knows that the angel Rochester sees is an emblem of his own satisfaction and pride, and understands that, if unchallenged, it will replace her permanently in his mind.

Further, Rochester identifies her as an object of economic exchange, just as Sir Thomas’ desire for Fanny Price to accept Henry Crawford marked Fanny, by comparing Jane—“this one little English girl”—to “the Grand Turk’s whole seraglio” (323). Jane recoils immediately, and famously declares, “I'll...go out as a missionary to preach liberty to them that are enslaved” (323). Even more significant are the terms she sets for their marriage: Jane requires that she be allowed to continue to earn her living as Adele’s governess after the wedding, and that she will accept nothing from Rochester but his “regard; and if I give you mine in return that debt will be quit” (324). Jane here informs Rochester quite clearly that he can expect no dependent gratitude from her; only that which relates to her paid labor as Adele’s governess.

Soon thereafter, the revelation of his deception forces Rochester to accept that he deserves no gratitude; his wealth cannot compensate for his behavior in attempting to marry Jane under false pretenses. After the fire, when Jane returns to him, Rochester’s talk is rather of his own gratitude to God’s mercy in Jane’s return, “I thank my Maker, that, in the midst of judgment, he has remembered mercy. I humbly entreat my Redeemer to give me strength to lead henceforth a purer life than I have done hitherto!” (543). and in the return of his sight, which permitted him to see his newborn child, “he again, with a full heart, acknowledged that God had tempered judgment with mercy” (547). Rochester, rather than Jane, experiences the gratitude that is the appropriate response to God’s mercy.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

Ultimately, the divide between the function of gratitude in the grateful slave novels and in heroine fiction of the nineteenth-century is not as absolute as Boulukos claims. Certainly, these women changed their positions with relation to their masters by marrying them. However, Maria Bertram’s marital status did not protect her from being cast out from both her blood and marital families, and Bertha Mason’s marriage did not prevent her from being chained up in her husband’s attic. These women, though not the focus of this study, serve as foils and warnings to the heroines. Their experiences, and Fanny’s temporary exile, remind the reader of the kinds of punishments that existed for ingratitude and disloyalty.\(^5\)

Moreover, they remind us that, once accomplished, marriage as a legal and economic transaction did not provide much more protection than the purchase of a slave. This is not to equate the life of even a fictional Victorian orphan with that of a slave; the heroines of these novels, like their living counterparts, had at least the semblance of choice. Gratitude’s role was often to teach these women that the wisest choice was to select a husband toward whom she felt most truly grateful, which, even if that gratitude were for emotional rather than material reasons, inherently meant choosing the man to whom she felt most indebted. The mere fact that these women exercise even a symbolic choice acknowledges their ability to reason, so in that way, their interiority transcends the unreasoning emotion to which grateful slaves are limited.

\(^5\) Maria fails to show gratitude for her new husband, or her own family, while Bertha’s failure to evince gratitude can be explained either by her madness, or by a personal history such as the one provided for her in Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea.*
Certainly Jane exercises her reason, and more than any other heroine in this study, escapes the sort of helpless gratitude resultant from desperation. Even so, only after Jane and Rochester have both correctly negotiated their relationships to gratitude are they able to marry and join the social network Jane’s familial connections provide. Clearly, Rochester only reforms after punishment; his gratitude must be earned, whereas that of a woman like Violet’s need not. Arthur Martindale does nothing to earn the gratitude of his wife, and therefore she turns her gratitude toward God, and only asks of her husband, “would you dislike only just kneeling down with me, that we may give thanks or all this happiness! Oh! What seemed like thorns and crosses have all turned into blessings!” (315).

*Jane Eyre* ends with a reformed husband expressing gratitude for his wife, on whom he is physically and emotionally dependent; a complete reversal of both relationships in *Heartsease*, and far beyond Edmund Bertram’s indifferent courtship of Fanny in *Mansfield Park*: “exactly at the time when it was quite natural that it should be so, and not a week earlier, Edmund did cease to care about Miss Crawford, and became as anxious to marry Fanny, as Fanny herself could desire” (319).

Grateful slave characters must believe in their own inferiority, and express gratitude for the care of their owners by remaining loyal and working without complaint. In cases involving ameliorationist slave owners, gratitude for perceived kindnesses legitimates the practice of amelioration. In cases of slaveholders who do not believe in the humane treatment of slaves, gratitude is directed to God. Boulukos discusses the historical experiences of Olaudah Equiano, one of several black Atlantic writers who specifically refuses to “allow the conflation of gratitude to God for their conversion with
gratitude to their enslavers,” and notes that while being tortured by his captain, Equiano prays “to God to forgive this blasphemer, who cared not what he did” (184). Despite the fact that the now free Equiano directs his gratitude to God, that gratitude, which sustains him during his time of trial, is deployed on behalf of his torturer. Regardless of its object, gratitude simultaneously provides a psychological coping strategy and a form of social control. While fictional heroines have more varied opportunities and circumstances in which to negotiate gratitude than grateful slaves, an examination of the two together reveals the significant role of gratitude in maintaining power structures.


Yonge, Charlotte Mary. *Heartsease or The Brother's Wife, Volume 1*. London: John W. Parker and Son, 1854.
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Abra Gibson received her Bachelor of Arts degree in English from the University of Texas at Austin in 2007. This thesis marks the May 2010 completion of her Master of Arts in English from the University of Florida. Her other academic interests include postcolonial theory and gender studies. She intends to explore those interests as she continues her work in the Ph.D. program and the University of Florida.