

A Jane of Lantern Hill Analysis: Jane Stuart vs. Victoria Kennedy

L.M. Montgomery's *Jane of Lantern Hill* may have a fairytale happy ending, but the struggles that young Jane Stuart faces throughout the novel are all too real. She must not only live with the pain that often accompanies the experience of growing up with estranged parents, but also endure cruel emotional abuse inflicted daily by her maternal grandmother, Victoria Kennedy. Yet, throughout her story Jane grows into a smart, independent young adult who can stand on equal ground with her grandmother. Thus, Grandmother Kennedy serves not only as an antagonist, but also as a foil for Jane. This highlights Jane's character development over the course of the novel and her ability to reunite her family despite Grandmother Kennedy's attempts to tear it apart.

Jane of Lantern Hill was written in 1937, and it was one of Montgomery's final works before her death. According to Diana Arlene Chlebek, Montgomery wrote the novel in response to pressure put upon her to write more stories about Anne from her most popular novel *Anne of Green Gables* (Epperly, Gammel 145). A different kind of protagonist than Montgomery's more popular heroines like Anne or Emily from *Emily of New Moon*, Jane is an ordinary child. She is not remarkably creative or intelligent like Anne, nor does she have the writing passion or the mysterious "flash" ability that Emily possesses. Yet Jane becomes extraordinary when she finds a strength in her that she never knew she had—a strength that allows her to form her own identity outside her grandmother's harsh scrutiny.

Jane's story occurred before young adult literature became its own genre, but today there are shelves filled with novels about children and teenagers finding their identities, such as *Looking for Alaska* by John Green and *Wings* by Aprilynne Pike. Adolescence is a primary time for personal growth in one's life, and young adult literature commonly takes advantage of this in many forms, whether it is through the fantasy storyline or the more realistic problem novel. For instance, in the

Harry Potter series, the titular character continually has to find his inner strength while dealing not only the struggles of growing up, but also facing a major physical threat, Voldemort. In this fantasy story, the imaginative setting blend with more well-known issues such as the transition into adolescence and abuse at home, creating extra dramatic conflict.

Jane, however, fits better in the category of the problem novel or the coming-of-age novel. It lacks elements of speculative fiction, rather focusing solely on Jane's character development and family issues. The story is focused on her journey toward confidence and self-assurance, a common challenge for any child or teenager. Yet, she has an obstacle blocking her path, something to further challenge her and force her to reveal the depth of her inner strength and resilience. Like with many young adult novels today, Jane is forced to suffer in ways that no child should ever have to suffer.

Jane and her mother Robin live in a house ironically named 60 Gay under the thumb of Grandmother Kennedy, who manipulates them both in order to keep them under her control. Robin moved back in with her mother when Jane was little, after her relationship with her husband, Andrew, ended badly. Grandmother Kennedy now resents Robin's love for her daughter because she wants it all to herself, and she makes it her mission to keep them apart. At the beginning of the story there seems to be little hope for Jane, who is constantly belittled and treated like an outsider by her grandmother.

Because Grandmother Kennedy insults Jane's intelligence and makes her feel incapable, incapability is exactly what Jane presents to her as well as the rest of her extended family. This is shown early in the novel, when her Uncle William puts her in the spotlight by asking her the capital of Canada and she becomes paralyzed. Although Jane "knew perfectly well what the capital of Canada was," (Montgomery 12) her lack of confidence held her back.

It is no coincidence that, just lines earlier, Grandmother Kennedy patronizes Jane for her interest in cooking, using Jane's proper first name, "Victoria." She says, "I don't think Victoria wants very much to learn how to cook. It is just that she likes to hang about kitchens and places like that," (Montgomery 11) as if Jane's interests make her less deserving of respect, the way a common servant may have been regarded in the time period. This leaves Jane in an almost constant state of nervousness and insecurity, with a low sense of self-worth.

What Jane suffers from as a result of her grandmother's treatment is a very real psychological condition known today as the Gaslight effect, which Grandmother Kennedy inflicts upon both Jane and Robin so she can have her own way. Gaslighting is a tactic abusers use to stay in control and make their victims feel inferior and falsely at fault for the abuser's behavior. It "plays on our worst fears, our most anxious thoughts, our deepest wishes to be understood, appreciated, and loved" (Stern 4-5). It can cause psychological and developmental issues in children as well, which is the greatest challenge Jane faces in her story (Royse 5).

Not only does Grandmother Kennedy make Jane feel intellectually inferior, she takes away Jane's freedom to make her own choices. Jane is not allowed to choose what goes into her room or what she wears, nor is she allowed to help around the house. When Jane first meets her friend Jody, she asks, "Can I help you?" to which Montgomery the narrator adds: "Jane always wanted to help: and, though she was too young to realize it, the tragedy of her little existence was that nobody ever wanted her help... not even mother, who had everything heart could wish" (Montgomery 15).

These lines indicate that Jane lacks purpose and meaning in her current life at 60 Gay. Without the freedom to fully explore her own capabilities and interests, she cannot learn to develop

her own sense of identity. *Jane of Lantern Hill* portrays the idea of happiness and fulfillment as directly linked to freedom and independence.

Next to Grandmother Kennedy, Jane becomes small and insignificant, not even respected enough to be allowed to go by her middle name “Jane,” which she loves more than her more regal first name “Victoria.” Too submissive and guilt-ridden to stand up to Grandmother Kennedy, Robin cannot even protect her own daughter, even though they have so much love between them. Grandmother Kennedy’s frequent guilt trips such as, “You love that child... *his* child... better than you love me!” (Montgomery 5) keep Jane and her mother at a distance that leaves Jane wishing the two of them could move far away from 60 Gay together.

It is only when Jane learns that her father is alive and she goes to spend a summer with him that we begin to see change in her: change that allows us to fully see the disparities between her and Grandmother Kennedy. Jane’s sharp contrast with her grandmother allow us to sympathize with the former as she grows, making her happy ending all the more satisfying. Throughout the narrative, their characters seem to stretch farther and farther apart. This highlights Jane’s goodness and strength of character, while also highlighting Grandmother Kennedy’s bitterness and judgmental tendencies.

Jane is at first unwelcoming of the idea of visiting Andrew at Prince Edward Island because she is afraid to be separated from her mother. However, she ultimately embraces the change as a positive experience and takes full advantage of it. She realizes that life can be wonderful and that it is possible to find joy in learning and other activities she despised at 60 Gay. This is the first aspect of Jane that separates her from her grandmother. Unlike Jane, who develops and learns throughout the story, Grandmother Kennedy remains a mostly static character and an enemy of change. She is so set in her ways that she cannot accept anything that strays from them, or anyone

in her life who does. When Jane is at 60 Gay, Grandmother Kennedy forces her own ideas about morality and good social behavior on Jane to make her submit (Epperly, Gammel 148).

As a result, Jane endures a lonely childhood. Early on the story, she laments to herself, “that there must be something the matter with her when there were so many people she didn’t like” (Montgomery 13). Yet how can she like anyone when she constantly feels like the people around her are constantly trying to find something to criticize? Her gloomy attitude at first make it difficult to determine how she and Grandmother Kennedy act as foils.

Yet even restricted by her grandmother’s sense of order, Jane continually shows a kind of open-mindedness and sense of imagination that the former lacks. Before visiting Prince Edward Island, Jane escapes her home at 60 Gay by fantasizing herself having adventures on the moon at night. This alone gives readers the inkling that Jane may be a bit of a romantic at heart. She enjoys simple pleasures, which opposes her grandmother’s more extravagant tastes, and looks for friendship in those who have good hearts rather than those who are of a high class.

For instance, Jane’s only true friend before visiting Prince Edward Island is the little orphan girl Jody who lives next door. She is poor, overworked, and abused, but Jane enjoys spending time with her than she does the majority of the people associated with her grandmother’s family. She shows an affinity toward nurture, desiring to take care of Jody and protect her from the forces that would endeavor to harm her or separate them.

Jane would also be more comfortable in a small house that has a little bit of “magic” than the large and expensive but dark and lonely 60 Gay. She has an enduring desire throughout the novel to care for things and to be useful, whether it is through gardening, feeding a cat, or cleaning a cupboard. These are all pleasures she is able to take part in without guilt or hesitation once her grandmother is no longer waiting over her shoulder to criticize her.

Even though she still has to return to 60 Gay at the end of the summer, Jane finding Lantern Hill frees her from her grandmother's control (Epperly 225). This is a key point of Grandmother Kennedy's character; she wants control, not only of her home but of the other people in it. While Grandmother Kennedy's control is such a negative force on all the characters in the story, Jane's own sense of control becomes her freedom once she finds her sense of belonging at Lantern Hill. This is made possible thanks to Jane's father Andrew and the many friends she makes over the course of her first summer on Prince Edward Island.

Andrew gives Jane the ability to flourish as a person by allowing her to make the house on Lantern Hill her own. She cooks and cleans and makes it her mission over their first summer together to learn everything she possibly can about taking care of the home. While this might not sound empowering to modern feminists, Elizabeth Epperly notes that "Montgomery is not praising domesticity for its own sake, but for what it represents to Jane: discovery of her own powers of creativity and control" (Epperly 221). While Andrew has no cooking skills whatsoever, Jane, who has never been allowed to help out with the cooking at 60 Gay, is more than happy to take on the task of keeping her father and herself fed. By discovering her talents and honing new skills in her own space, Jane develops a passion for Lantern Hill, and more importantly, a sense of self.

However, Jane is not the only character in *Jane of Lantern Hill* who has a place to love. Grandmother Kennedy, in spite of all her faults, seems to have a love for her family home at 60 Gay. Their feelings for their homes, 60 Gay and Lantern Hill, create a parallel between them even though their home-building methods are quite different. Grandmother Kennedy is harsh and authoritarian in setting her home structure. This, combined with her interest in appearances and proper living, are part of what drive Jane away. While Grandmother Kennedy seems to think

domestic work is beneath her and unladylike, Jane believes that having the ability to take care of the home makes it more lovable.

To Jane, a home is a place with “magic about it,” (Montgomery 71) as Andrew puts it. This magic refers to the sense that a home has places worth exploring, where imagination can come alive, and that there can be joy found in caring for it. Jane likes being the keeper of her home because it makes her feel like the home is truly *hers*, a feeling she never had the chance to experience at 60 Gay. This gives Jane a new-found purpose and confidence.

In this way, Jane and her grandmother are not so different. They both have a desire for control, a desire to be needed; but Grandmother Kennedy takes this a few steps too far by trying to dominate the lives of the people around her, particularly Robin’s and Jane’s. Once Jane has her own home to return to, however, she is freed from Grandmother Kennedy’s ability to hurt her. As Jane grows, she further separates herself from Grandmother Kennedy’s narrow perspective of the world. At the beginning of her first summer, she starts learning how to cook, and by the end is able to cook almost anything she sets her mind to. She swims in the ocean, looks after herself, and even learns to love history and the Bible, two things she despised at 60 Gay.

Perhaps most importantly, the people in Jane’s life at Lantern Hill accept her and encourage her to be who she wants to be, rather than setting stern expectations and condescending to her when she fails to meet them. While at Lantern Hill, she is allowed to be “Jane” instead of the less preferred “Victoria.” In addition, Andrew constantly praises her and tells her how wonderful she is from the moment they meet, eventually applying to her the nickname “Superior Jane” (Montgomery 86). He trusts her to be confident and capable, and therefore confident and capable is what Jane becomes.

A critical essay by Janet Grafton argues that Jane's self-confidence and emotional health improve throughout the novel because of her interaction with nature in a different environment (Grafton 80). This may be partially true, but it is also entirely possible that Jane would have had the space to go through her character transition anywhere. Jane's father plays a significant role in the story as the kind of nurturer Jane needs. Andrew plays the role of financial provider and mentor, but more importantly, he encourages her and gives her the freedom to grow on her own. In this way, Andrew also serves as a contrasting figure to Grandmother Kennedy. While Jane remains stifled and isolated while living with her Grandmother, she flourishes under Andrew's care. She becomes independent, strong and capable of doing just about anything she sets her mind to (even securing an escaped lion later in the novel).

Jane's affinity for Lantern Hill on Prince Edward Island serves less as evidence that nature heals and more as a separator between her and her grandmother, who is attached to her home in the city. Furthermore, it is not the city that Jane necessarily dislikes, as she is eventually able to see the magic even in Toronto. While out shopping with Robin, Jane picks out a house she wishes they could live in together instead of 60 Gay.

Jane's idea of a perfect home is one that welcomes imagination and fosters love. Unlike Grandmother Kennedy, who takes her desire for control too far and uses it as the foundation for her relationships, Jane uses her warmth and compassion to establish closeness with both of her parents. At the end of the novel, it is Jane who inadvertently reunites Robin and Andrew. When Robin hears that Jane is ill on Prince Edward Island, she immediately drops everything to go after her, despite Grandmother Kennedy's protests. The bond Jane and Robin have ultimately prove stronger than Grandmother Kennedy's control over them. So while Jane does not actively seek to

reunite her parents, her love for them and vice versa brings them together again, leading them to their well-deserved and long-eluded happy ending.

And so, had this been a fairytale, the evil witch would be defeated, and Jane and her parents never have to live at dreary 60 Gay again. The homes of Jane Stuart and Grandmother Kennedy run parallel to one another in this story, but both represent contrasting ways of viewing the world. Grandmother Kennedy serves as more than a villain to be defeated, but also as an opposite for Jane to demonstrate where the lines between love and control blur.

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