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Charlotte Brontë

JANE EYRE



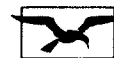
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internal reading of the literal text as an unresolved dialogue between the values of both Janes and those of St. John's way.

LISA STERNLIEB

Jane Eyre: "Hazarding Confidences"†

The first overt suggestion in *Jane Eyre* that the relationships between Jane and Rochester and between Jane and her reader are built on a series of parallel confidence games occurs in the first extended conversation between Jane and her future husband. Rochester says:

"Know, that in the course of your future life you will often find yourself elected the involuntary confidant of your acquaintances' secrets: people will instinctively find out, as I have done, that it is not your forte to talk of yourself, but to listen while others talk to themselves; they will feel, too, that you listen with no malevolent scorn of their indiscretion, but with a kind of innate sympathy; not the less comforting and encouraging because it is very unobtrusive in its manifestations."

"How do you know?—how can you guess all this, sir?"

"I know it well; therefore I proceed almost as freely as if I were writing my thoughts in a diary." (chapter XIV)

Rochester takes Jane into his confidence in order to lie to her; Jane masquerades as a confidante in order to obtain stories that she will later write about; and the gentle reader is made to overlook Rochester's miscalculation of Jane's unobtrusively innate sympathy while recognizing his misreading of her talents. For Rochester has, of course, misread Jane: he sees no novelist in his shy, unassuming governess. It is no mere accident that Rochester overlooks Jane's forte for telling of herself; it is the calculation of the character Jane and the basis of narrative design of the narrator Jane. Jane's novel develops out of the interplay between her voluntary role as confidante to Rochester and her part as confessant to her gentle reader. From Rochester she obtains information while masking her literary aspirations; to the reader she reveals her literary aspirations while imparting what may be unreliable information.

Toying with us as she has been toyed with, the narrator convinces us that she is flattered by Rochester's attention:

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"Strange that I should choose you for the confidant of all this . . . [that I should] tell stories of [my] opera-mistresses to a quaint, inexperienced girl like you! But . . . you . . . were made to be the recipient of secrets."

The confidence he had thought fit to repose in me seemed a tribute to my discretion; I regarded and accepted it as such. (chapter XV)

Soon after this speech, Rochester is glad that it is Jane who finds him in his burning bed, for as he says to her: "you are no talking fool; say nothing about it" (chapter XV). After their engagement Jane admits that she "would much rather have all [his] confidence" than his fortune, and Rochester responds: "you are welcome to all my confidence that is worth having" (chapter XXIV). The night before their wedding Rochester urges Jane: "give me your confidence . . . relieve your mind of any weight that oppresses it, by imparting it to me" (chapter XXV). Yet he deliberately misinterprets the stories she will tell him about Bertha. The following night Jane realizes that "never more could [she] turn to him; for faith was blighted—confidence destroyed!" (chapter XXVI). Disguised as the gypsy, Rochester has admitted that it is in fact Grace Poole, not Jane, who is "close and quiet: any one may repose confidence in her" (chapter XIII). In his final extended confession the night after their aborted wedding, Rochester corroborates this position. In his view, Jane and the surgeon, Carter, "are the only two" that he has "ever admitted to [his] confidence" (chapter XXVII). Conveniently forgetting how he has won Jane's love, Rochester apologizes for his long string of deceptions by claiming: "I wanted to have you safe before hazarding confidences" (chapter XXVII).

Jane confides as comfortably in her reader as Rochester has confided in her. Brontë has written what is arguably the first important female bildungsroman in English literature, and it is crucial to her novel of education that the heroine learn to lie. Paradoxically, in order to argue that Jane is lying to us we must accept much of what she tells us as the truth. We must accept her version of Rochester's words so that we can see how her narrative style echoes his. We must notice that he has learned from his own family and from Bertha's family how to win and keep a spouse through lies. We must accept that Rochester is a liar in order to see how Jane beats him at his own game—how she is a better liar, for her narrative is able to expose all of his lies without revealing her own. The extraordinary power of Brontë's novel is that we are being seduced—as is Jane the character—by lies. Aware that she is being lied to, Jane is no less seduced by Rochester; and we are still less resistant to seduction. Jane flees after learning the truth; and so we read on. In this essay I will show how Jane's narrative strategy belies the lessons

learned by the character Jane, the moral messages with which the novel sums itself up. Generations of readers have been charmed by the prospect of a marriage of mutuality that the *narration* of the novel makes clear cannot be Jane and Rochester's.

In the opening chapters of *Jane Eyre* Jane must repeatedly defend herself against charges of duplicity and falsehood. But in the pivotal scene at Lowood she gains the confidence of Miss Temple and Helen Burns by learning to "[infuse] into the narrative [of her life at Gateshead] far less of gall and wormwood than ordinary." That is, she learns not to tell. * * * I find this scene crucial in that just as Jane finally gains the confidence of others, she stops talking. Within the story of her life we do not see her developing as a storyteller; instead, we watch a young girl who vents her anger verbally in the opening pages and retreats further and further into silence as the novel progresses. Jane's reluctance to communicate with other characters is not readily apparent to us, for the direct addresses to the reader occur more frequently in the latter half of the novel. Jane is most likely to share intimacies with her reader, however, when she is most loath to tell her story to anyone else in her narrative.

Although Jane has had no confidants, she refers to herself as a storyteller: "I told [Miss Temple] all the story of my sad childhood. Exhausted by emotion, my language was more subdued than it generally was when it developed that sad theme" (chapter VIII). Yet within several pages she has lost her gift. Her friend Mary Ann Wilson "had a turn for narrative, [Jane] for analysis; she liked to inform, [Jane] to question" (chapter VIII). She has gained Miss Temple's confidence—and she will go on to gain Rochester's, Adèle's, Mrs. Fairfax's, and her cousins'—by not telling. To make the transition from her Lowood to Thornfield chapters Jane writes; "I now pass a space of eight years almost in silence" (chapter X). The bizarre syntax of this sentence suggests both that Jane omits eight years from her narrative and that the years themselves were spent almost in silence. In one of the only scenes that Jane gives us from this period she describes her annoyance with a roommate's "prolonged effusion of small talk" (chapter X), which keeps her from uninterrupted thought. After the death of Helen Burns, Jane is paired with chattering females such as Adèle and Georgiana Reed, with whom she is the silent listener. At Gateshead, Jane had remained silent until her anger toward Mrs. Reed could no longer be contained, and because of her outburst she is banished to an inhospitable place where her bad reputation has preceded her. Jane's narrative does not trace the development of her voice but rather the movement from her sulking, unproductive silences at Gateshead to her cultivated silences at Lowood and beyond.

While still at Gateshead, Jane's taste for vengeance is acute and

overt. Questioned by Brocklehurst about her favorite books from the Bible, she names Daniel, Genesis, Samuel, Exodus, Kings and Chronicles, Job, and Jonah. She finds precedence for her hatred of John Reed in the stories of Cain and Abel and Joseph and his brothers, and she finds hope in the tales from Exodus that the guilty will be punished and the oppressed will be rewarded. Young Jane likes only one book from the New Testament: Revelation, the first book that she mentions to Brocklehurst, and presumably her favorite, figures prominently in the novel.¹ Just before she leaves St. John he reads to her from its twenty-first chapter: " 'He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But,' was slowly, distinctly read, 'the fearful, the unbelieving, &c., shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.' Henceforward, I knew what fate St. John feared for me" (chapter XXXV).² The crucial words that "&c." replaces are "all liars." Like Brocklehurst, St. John appears in Jane's narrative to warn her against the dangers of deceit. But by refusing his hand and his diagnosis, by closing her story with a quotation from Revelation 22:20 and her own response to it, Jane celebrates her own achievement and triumphantly rejects any fear of being judged. As critics have noted, Jane figures her life story as a pilgrim's progress.³ She ends her religious journey by placing herself in the site of Christ's last biblical appearance, in the position of judgment.

Revelation ends as the beast is defeated and the beast's city, Babylon, "the great whore," is destroyed. God judges the world; a new heaven and earth replace the old; the holy city, Jerusalem, the bride, comes down from God, and all of earth's splendor is gathered into it. *Jane Eyre* ends with the destruction of Thornfield and its would-be mistress, the "unchaste" (chapter XXVII) Bertha—"what it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours" (chapter XII). Rochester is punished for his sins. His bride returns to him, and together they build what Jane describes as an idyllic life in their new home.

* * *

1. I am grateful to David Czunchlewski for sparking my interest in Jane's relation to Revelation.

2. Most biblical scholars agree that the John who wrote the Gospel is not the same John who wrote the Book of Revelation. While St. John Rivers may be named after the writer of the Gospel, Jane clearly associates her cousin with the author of Revelation. If Helen Burns teaches Jane to love the Christ of the Gospels, St. John labors to make her fear the Christ of Revelation.

3. See, for example, Carolyn Williams, "Closing the Book: The Intertextual End of *Jane Eyre*," in *Victorian Connections*, ed. Jerome J. McGann (Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1989), pp. 60–87. Williams notes that Brontë uses John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) as both a model for Jane's progress and "a negative model, finally positioned within [*Jane Eyre*] in order to be contradicted" (p. 81).

Like John's epistle, Jane's epistle to her reader purports throughout to be the truth, the exact rendering of the experience of her eyes and ears. But as Elaine Showalter writes: "Brontë . . . expresses her heroine's consciousness through an extraordinary range of narrative devices. Psychological development and the dramas of the inner life are represented in dreams, hallucinations, visions, surrealistic paintings, and masquerades. . . . Jane's growth is further structured through a pattern of literary, biblical, and mythological allusion."⁴ I am concerned, however, not with Brontë's but with *Jane's* decision to model the end of the novel on and to take its final lines from the Book of Revelation. * * *

In a compelling argument Janet Gezari has shown that the name "Eyre" may be pronounced "ire" or "eyer" rather than "air."⁵ Both the fact of Jane's ire and of her position as "eyer" are crucial to [her last] encounter with Mrs. Reed. Jane feels "ire" after succumbing to the icy stare of Mrs. Reed's "stony eye—opaque to tenderness, indissoluble to tears." Mrs. Reed explains that her hatred for her niece stems from Jane's "continual, unnatural watchings of one's movements!" (chapter XXI). Although Mrs. Reed is not blind, she has difficulty recognizing her niece, and just before her aunt's death Jane "gaze[s] awhile on her who could not now gaze on me" (chapter XXXI). Mrs. Reed plies her with the same question—"Is this Jane Eyre? . . . are you Jane Eyre?"—to which Jane replies, "I am Jane Eyre" (chapter XXI). Mrs. Reed seems unable to accept that Jane is alive: "The fever broke out [at Lowood], and many of the pupils died. She, however, did not die: but I said she did—I wish she had died!" (chapter XXI).

The parallels between these scenes and Jane's final reconciliation with the blinded Rochester are striking. As with Mrs. Reed, the moment of Rochester's recognition of Jane is delayed and must be reaffirmed repeatedly: "Who is it? What is it? . . . Is it Jane? . . . My living Jane?" She replies, "I am Jane Eyre" (chapter XXXVII). Just before Mrs. Reed confesses her sin against Jane she orders her to "bring me some water" (chapter XXII). Jane is reunited with Rochester as she brings him the water he has demanded of a servant. Early in the novel Jane "long[s] for a power of vision which might overpass" the limits of Thornfield's estate (chapter XII), and by the end of the novel her pain-

4. *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1977), pp. 112–13.

5. See *Charlotte Brontë and Defensive Conduct: The Author and the Body at Risk* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1992). Gezari notes that "the only clue in the text to the pronunciation of the name is ambiguous, for Adele asks Jane's name and, being given it, declares it unpronounceable: 'Aire? Bah! I cannot say it.' . . . The umlaut appears in the Clarendon edition and has its authority from Brontë's manuscript, but the first three editions of the novel (and all later versions before the Clarendon edition) omitted it, thereby helping to establish the literary tradition that has determined the usual pronunciation" (pp. 61–62). Gezari does a fascinating job of noting the recurring eye imagery in the novel.

fully nearsighted creator grants her wish. It is no accident that Rochester and Mrs. Reed meet with similar fates, for Jane's ability to see long after Mrs. Reed's "eye of flint was covered with its cold lid" (chapter XXII), or Rochester's once brilliant eyes are blinded, cannot be divorced from her desire for revenge against both of them. Jane takes her revenge through the written word, and Brontë herself was all too familiar with the necessity of strong eyesight for a writer. Two years before beginning *Jane Eyre* she wrote: "once upon a time I used to spend whole days, weeks, complete months in writing . . . but at present my sight is too weak for writing—if I wrote a lot I would become blind."⁶

* * *

Because Jane's eye implicates her in her own crime, the narrator needs a blinded Rochester to carry out her project. Seeing without being seen is crucial to Jane writing her narrative about Rochester, and it is also a narrative technique whose importance, like that of winning a confessor's confidence and telling a tale in retrospect, Jane first learns from Rochester.

* * *

* * * Jane's narrative is able to expose all of Rochester's lies while disallowing such exposure of her own. She covers herself beautifully, far better than Rochester ever could. When the plot doubles back upon itself, we accept Jane's version simply because the competitor's is so flawed. For example, at the end of the novel the innkeeper tells Jane the story of her life at Thornfield while explaining how Bertha has died. The innkeeper's overt condemnation of Jane involves a simultaneous elevation of Rochester: "a more spirited, bolder, keener gentleman than he was before that midge of a governess crossed him, you never saw, ma'am. . . . for my part I have often wished that Miss Eyre had been sunk in the sea before she came to Thornfield Hall" (chapter XXXVI). Jane's former fiancé becomes a gallant figure risking his own life to save Bertha and the servants. Such a hero is difficult to reconcile with the Rochester whom Jane has described, the same man who needs her help when he falls from his horse and is burned in his bed, who comes to her for assistance when Mason is bitten. His gallantry is also at odds with his cruelly false courtship of Blanche and Jane, his aversion to accepting Adèle as his own, and his attempt to entrap Jane in adultery or bigamy. The power of the written word is made manifest in this encounter with the innkeeper. Although the oral tradition of the town

6. Charlotte Brontë, letter to Constantin Heger, July 24, 1844, in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë, with a Selection of Letters by Family and Friends*, Vol. 1: 1829–1847, ed. and trans. Margaret Smith (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 358.

will remember Jane as the one who bewitches, distracts, and emasculates the spirited, keen, bold gentleman, and Bertha as the one who blinds and cripples him, Jane's written account will redeem herself and implicate Rochester in Bertha's crime.

* * *

By reading Bertha as the instrument of Jane's suppressed anger, feminist critics have tended to neglect readings of the novel that allow for the actual expression of that anger. By consistently referring to Bertha as a figure for Jane's subconscious or repressed desires, they erase Jane's narrative agency, her part in the creation and construction of Bertha. But I read Jane as actively and consciously using Bertha to draw attention away from her own act of revenge. Instead of looking at how Jane's unexpressed anger prefigures Bertha's violence, then, I want to consider how Bertha's demonic malignity is consistently followed by Jane's exaggerated benignity.

Jane purposefully sets herself up in contrast to Bertha. Her description of the night of the "sharp," "shrilly" attack on Mason, for example, is replete with references to her own noiselessness—"[I] moved with little noise across the carpet," she assures us. Rochester is grateful that she is "shod with velvet," and when he orders her to "make no noise" she obeys, walking across "the matted floor as softly as a cat." The silent cat spends the night there, first hearing "a snarling, snatching sound, almost like a dog quarrelling" and later detecting "a momentary renewal of the snarling, canine noise." A docile carrier pigeon, Jane "flew thither and back" from Mason's to Rochester's room while she likens "Grace" to "a carrion-seeking bird of prey." Rochester himself calls Jane his "pet lamb" whom he has left "near a wolf's den" (chapter XIX).

* * *

Thus Jane uses Bertha's attacks as opportunities to advertise her own utter harmlessness. Jane's victory over her harsh upbringing never gives her reader cause to question her strength. Yet when Bertha tears her wedding veil, Jane faints with terror, providing Rochester with the opportunity to treat her like the hothouse flower that passed for the upper-class female of his day: "I must be careful of you, my treasure: nerves like yours were not made for rough handling" (chapter XXV).

Moreover, while Jane uses the biting scene to describe her silence and patience, she uses Bertha's first attack on Rochester to illustrate her own resourcefulness and efficiency, as she speedily douses the flames engulfing her master's bed. She again creates an explicit contrast with Bertha, whose beastliness is shown to be incompetent. Ber-

tha is no Frankenstein's monster, for Shelley's creation, whether seen as a figure of Romantic excess or as a fantasy of female empowerment, is successfully, mortally dangerous. Bertha, however, bungles all of her attempts to kill and succeeds only at self-destruction. (Why have critics never questioned Bertha's ineptitude? She manages to set fire to Rochester's bed, but she cannot find a way to escape from Thornfield. She tears Jane's veil and mysteriously ends up in her prison cell again.) Bertha's pretensions to vampirism are beyond her own scope. In the only words she is reported to speak, she swears that, through sucking Mason's blood, she will "drain [his] heart" (chapter XIX). Through Bertha, Jane demonstrates a kind of revenge that does not work. Her own revenge is successful because it is everything that Bertha's is not—controlled, sustained, articulate, and above all, disguised. Striking out, biting, and burning are no match for obedience silence, and unquestioning contentment.

* * *

Clearly, Jane's innocuousness is a mask. At the end of Mason's visit, Rochester and Jane engage in a typical confidence game. He tells her the story of his life while omitting all pertinent details, confesses that he has made a serious error without ever naming it, and ends by extracting a promise from her that she will sit with him the night before his marriage to Blanche. Yet it is Jane who has drawn both of them into this game with the admission that "if you have no more to fear from Mr. Mason than you have from me, sir, you are very safe" (chapter XIX). Rochester immediately responds to this avowed benignity by inviting her to share a seat with him. Jane's calculated harmlessness thus works as both a weapon of self-defense and a sexual invitation.

Perhaps the most puzzling aspect of the criticism of *Jane Eyre* over the last fifty years is its reliance on psychoanalytic readings that find evidence of sexual disturbance and malfunction in the novel.⁷ Does not Jane's rejection of St. John's sterile proposal indicate as healthy a sexual appetite as Bertha's? If Rochester is symbolically castrated, as many critics argue, then why is he able to father children? And where is the evidence that what Jane lacks in her marriage is sexual fulfillment? In the most passionate of her thirty-five references to the reader, Jane reveals the rich fantasy life that sustains her through her difficult days at Morton:

... reader, to tell you all, in the midst of this calm, this useful existence—after a day passed in honourable exertion amongst my

scholars, an evening spent in drawing or reading contentedly alone—I used to rush into strange dreams at night; dreams many-coloured, agitated, full of the ideal, the stirring, the stormy—dreams where, amidst unusual scenes, charged with adventure, with agitating risk and romantic chance, I still again and again met Mr. Rochester, always at some exciting crisis; and then the sense of being in his arms, hearing his voice, meeting his eye, touching his hand and cheek, loving him, being loved by him—the hope of passing a lifetime at his side, would be renewed, with all its first force and fire. Then I awoke. Then I recalled where I was, and how situated. Then I rose up on my curtainless bed, trembling and quivering; and then the still, dark night witnessed the convulsion of despair, and heard the burst of passion. By nine o'clock the next morning, I was punctually opening the school; tranquil, settled, prepared for the steady duties of the day. (chapter XXXII)

The passage seems to have been lifted directly from Brontë's "Roe Head Journal." But in her journal entry that begins "all this day I have been in a dream," Brontë's passion is not for a flesh-and-blood man but for writing and a life of the imagination:

Then came on me, rushing impetuously, all the mighty phantasm that this had conjured from nothing to a system strange as some religious creed. I felt as if I could have written gloriously. I longed to write. The spirit of all Verdopolis, of all the mountainous North, of all the woodland West, of all the river-watered East came crowding into my mind. If I had had time to indulge it, I felt that the vague sensations of that moment would have settled down into some narrative better at least than anything I ever produced before. But just then a dolt came up with a lesson. I thought I should have vomited.

Christine Alexander has written that the Angria of the "Roe Head Journal" had become "an 'infernal world,' a 'world below,' to be expiated only in confession. But Brontë could not betray her secret. The nearest she came to revealing the truth to the unsuspecting Ellen Nussey was on May 10, 1836, when she wrote: 'If you knew my thoughts; the dreams that absorb me; and the fiery imagination that at times eats me up and makes me feel Society as it is, wretchedly insipid, you would pity and I dare say despise me.'"⁸

Are the secrets that Brontë found too terrible to share with her dearest friend the same secrets that Jane cannot articulate to her gentle reader? Quite possibly Brontë is using an obsession with writing to sublimate her sexual desires. Yet Jane appears to be doing exactly the opposite—freely describing her sexual frustration in order to sublimate

7. Gilbert finds "an element of truth" in Richard Chase's oft-cited reading of the sexual punishment of Rochester (see *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 368). See also, for example, Dianne F. Sadoff, *Monsters of Affection: Dickens, Eliot and Brontë on Fatherhood* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1982); and Martin S. Day, "Central Concepts of *Jane Eyre*," *Personalist*, 41 (1960), 495–505.

8. See "Charlotte Brontë at Roe Head" (p. 398) [Editor].

still more unacceptable thoughts. While Jane's sexual feeling is a constant theme of the novel, her desire to write, and the circumstances under which this novel was written, are secrets that are as closely held from the reader as Jane's romantic past is from the community at Morton.

As readers of the novel, however, we have an insight into Jane that Rochester is never allowed. While Jane never writes in front of us, her moments of greatest closeness with the reader are always when she is most invested in concealing her position as narrator from Rochester. For instance, as she hides in a window seat during Mr. Rochester's party she directly addresses the reader and moves immediately into the present tense: "You are not to suppose, reader, that Adèle has all this time been sitting motionless on the stool at my feet" (chapter XVII). It is one of the reader's most "intimate" moments with Jane, yet Rochester has no inkling of his governess's literary pretensions, for as he enters the room the book in her hands magically transforms itself into a set of netting-needles. * * * Without ever revealing her passion for writing or letting us read her surreptitious scribbling, Jane makes the reader aware of her position as author while simultaneously masking this effect to Rochester. Never does she write in Rochester's presence until, in the novel's final paragraphs, he gains partial vision (but not enough to "read or write much") as Jane is "writing a letter to his dictation." * * * Jane becomes the first great female narrator of the Victorian novel by masquerading as an amanuensis.

It is impossible to know to what extent we do not "know" Jane, but it is possible to recognize the strategies by which she convinces us that we do. When she writes, "I had not intended to love him: the reader knows I had wrought hard to extirpate from my soul the germs of love there detected" (chapter XVII), we remind ourselves of Jane's ugly crayon self-portrait and her ivory miniature of Blanche. If we begin to think her fickle, she chides us for our own disloyalty: "Perhaps you think I had forgotten Mr. Rochester, reader, amidst these changes of place and fortune. Not for a moment" (chapter XXXIV). She saves her fiercest challenge to the reader for the end of her novel: "And, reader, do you think I feared him in his blind ferocity?—if you do, you little know me" (chapter XXXVII). For one hundred and fifty years romantic readers have reviewed the case that Jane has made for herself as the soul of fidelity and devotion. The young girl who clings passionately to the neck of her dying friend, the discreet young woman sitting silently by the side of a bleeding man, the newly made heiress who shares her fortune with her cousins, could never turn away in disgust from the man she has loved. We have passed all of Jane's tests, and in these last chapters we are assured that we do know her, that the girl who has never tried to rise above her own physical and social inferiority has finally met her equal in the transformed Rochester.

The reader is repeatedly pitted against Rochester for Jane's affections. The narrator frequently moves into the present tense when addressing the reader, giving her the illusion of being on an equal footing with Jane's master: "Stay till he comes, reader; and, when I disclose my secret to him, you shall share the confidence" (chapter XXV). In the novel's last pages, after telling most of the tale of her life with the Riverses, Jane immediately adopts the mask of the silent confidante. Rochester describes hearing her voice in the middle of the night: "Reader, it was on Monday night—near midnight—that I too had received the mysterious summons. . . . I listened to Mr. Rochester's narrative; but made no disclosure in return" (chapter XXXVII). Her description of these events is couched between addresses to the reader: "'Shew me—shew me the path!' I entreated of Heaven. I was excited more than I had ever been; and whether what followed was the effect of excitement, the reader shall judge" (Chapter XXXV). So, in fact, her telepathic communication with Rochester is never communicated to him, but only to the reader: "that mind, yet from its sufferings too prone to gloom, needed not the deeper shade of the supernatural. I kept these things, then, and pondered them in my heart" (chapter XXXVII). This is Jane's most explicit confession that Rochester never has and never will read the novel to which the reader is afforded such intimate access.

Yet as we are taken in by Jane's confidences, we must recognize that she woos her reader as Rochester has wooed her. He tries to shock her with stories of his mistresses; she titillates her reader with a tale of averted bigamy. He tests her loyalty each time that Bertha menaces him; she proves her fidelity to him by questioning her reader's to her. Even the pace and frequency of Rochester's avowals of intimacy are echoed in Jane's direct addresses to the reader. While Rochester begins by playing the distant master in Hay Lane and at the party, he ends by demanding Jane's constant company. Jane, too, cautiously makes her reader's acquaintance, addressing her only twice in the novel's first one hundred pages, thirteen times in the last one hundred.

Most readers have abandoned themselves to the narrator's seduction, but there is certainly evidence that we should follow Jane's example and chasten ourselves against such temptation. In the final chapter of her novel she begins with her penultimate address to us: "Reader, I married him." This chapter, like those that conclude nearly every nineteenth-century novel to precede or follow *Jane Eyre*, describes marital bliss. * * *

* * * Jane [claims that she and Rochester] have achieved "perfect concord" because, she writes, "all my confidence is bestowed on him; all his confidence is devoted to me" (chapter XXXVII). Since Jane's first engagement she has expressed the desire to have Rochester's confidence rather than his fortune. And yet it is in these last chapters that

we learn most explicitly that whatever confidence Rochester has bestowed on her has not been reciprocated:

I began the narrative of my experience for the last year. I softened considerably what related to the three days of wandering and starvation, because to have told him all would have been to inflict unnecessary pain: the little I did say lacerated his faithful heart deeper than I wished.

I should not have left him thus, he said, without any means of making my way: I should have told him my intention. I should have confided in him; he would never have forced me to be his mistress. (chapter XXXVII)

Like a good Victorian housewife, Jane keeps her book out of her husband's hands, ostensibly not to hurt but to protect him. Yet in this episode—the reverse of their early conversation about confidantes—Rochester, believing that Jane is fully confiding in him now, wishes that she had done the same earlier. Like Jane in the earlier scene, Rochester cannot distinguish the truth from its edited version. Like Rochester under the guise of protecting his lover, Jane demonstrates her own fierce need for self-protection. Were this an unedited version of her story, it would nevertheless reveal her strong resistance to confiding in her husband, for to confide is to relinquish an advantaged position. Instead of seeking comfort from Rochester, Jane seeks to comfort. Instead of pouring out her heart, she tests the waters. As Rochester assumed the more empowered position during their courtship, Jane will assume it during their marriage. By lacerating his heart *deeper than she wished*, is Jane indicating that she fully intended to lacerate his heart, at least a little? She does not tame her man; she tortures him.

In writing the last pages of *Jane Eyre* Brontë proved to herself that she could successfully complete a novel without her blind father's knowledge. Only after receiving favorable reviews did she reveal her secret to Patrick Brontë. Her motivation does not seem to have been to punish her father but to protect him, as well as herself. She knew, by then, that Jane could complete her novel without Rochester's knowledge; moreover, she knew that it could not exist *with* his knowledge. After Bertha blinds Rochester, Jane can perpetrate a more damaging and permanent form of revenge. She does not submit to anything, least of all mutual limitation; nor does she easily equate domestic bliss with the sharing of confidences. What Jane makes clear in these last pages is that there is little that is mutual or shared in this marriage. She has won the confidence game. Beginning her days at Thornfield as the silent listener to a great storyteller, she begins her marriage by "putting into words the effect of field, tree, town, river, cloud, sunbeam—of the landscape before us; of the weather round us—and impressing by

sound on his ear what light could no longer stamp on his eye" (chapter XXXVIII). Rochester is in a position of helpless dependence. His perception of their marriage cannot be hers; it is derived from what she deigns to tell him.

* * *

JEFFREY SCONCE

[The Cinematic Reconstitution of *Jane Eyre*][†]

* * * "Prestige" films such as [David O. Selznick's 1944] *Jane Eyre* were of value to a studio in that they presented pre-sold commodities, proven stories with high audience interest and an aura of "quality" ripe for exploitation. To successfully realize the cultural capital of a novel as a prestige film, however, required integrating the story within conventional cinematic narrative practice in such a manner that it signified its quality as "literature." In other words, while *Jane Eyre*, as a title in the public domain, cost virtually nothing to acquire, the narrative, as circulated in the public domain, presented a substantial challenge to a standardized system of narrative production obligated to acknowledge and accommodate the work's cultural stature.

* * * Hollywood literary adaptations represented an attempt to differentiate studio product through an "elite" quality of story material that, for both studio profit and audience comprehensibility, had to be reconciled with the dominant standardizing procedures of cinematic narrative production. A literary adaptation thus involved assigning the economic capital of the studio to convert the cultural capital of the novel back into the economic capital of a successful motion picture. This process of adaptation required more than a simple transcription of the material into a new medium, and involved a complex reconciliation of the interrelated demands between fidelity to the material, practices of the medium and expectations of the audience.

The development of the *Jane Eyre* project between 1940 and 1944 demonstrates the complex negotiation of these economic and cultural concerns. As a motion picture, *Jane Eyre* was to present a "unique" story through a conventionalized, popular medium, integrating the story's contemporary identity within the medium's contemporary structures of narrativity. The final product of this negotiation represented a specific version of the literary work, a text that encapsulated the novel as articulated both by a contemporary audience and by that audience's most familiar mode of cinematic narrative. The process of

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