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**Powers to Create and Step into the Right Picture:
Developing Personal Vision in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre***

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By *Heidi Meulenberg*



Thesis Director
Dr. Deborah James



Thesis Advisor
Dr. William Revere

Powers to Realize the Right Picture:

Developing Personal Vision and Character in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*

Given the original title of *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography* and written as if the protagonist, Jane, is speaking directly to her readers, this feature might have helped spark the deep vein of interest in this fictional bildungsroman. In the story, Jane tells us that her life begins as an abused orphan dependent in the home of her Aunt Reed, but through discovered agency she soon leaves this place and attends a boarding school. Though her life is better in the new location due to healthy relationships, when these dissolve, Jane applies for a governess position and is hired for the ward of a Mr. Rochester. Mr. Rochester and Jane form a connection and plan to marry, but the reveal of his living wife prevents this, and Jane leaves him. When Jane reconnects to Rochester he is now widowed, crippled, and repentant and she marries him.

Published in 1849, Charlotte Brontë's novel led to controversial reviews with its instant success. One famous review by Elizabeth Rigby claims the story attempts "to overthrow authority and violate every human and divine code" (Peters 53). The very idea of overthrowing codes led to the novel being widely discussed in the 1970s, especially for those who wrote with a feminist lens. Many modern discourses, from 2002 to 2018, also tend to form around this lens and often focus on themes of religion and self-discovery. Building on these approaches, this work explores how Jane's inner sight appears to develop.

Noticing Jane as a reader and artist allows her to serve as both the critic and visionary of her world. Books help Jane develop powers of recognition while painting lets her envision pictures of possible worlds. Through these outlooks, and the people who influence her, her inner sight and character develop, allowing her to both find and form the right picture of the world she

desires to live within. Some of Jane's powers of recognition come from linking words and images in novels to emotions and scenes in her life. Other powers come from linking book characters to the people in her life. Though dormant until it seems Jane needs them, this combination of recognition in self, environment, and others allows Jane to gain a deep inner sight. This especially aids with identifying the people in her life who abuse their authority over her. Once Jane identifies the source and type of power, this knowledge helps give Jane strength to resist the dominance and often leave the realm this person controls. As Jane becomes stronger and develops relationships with supportive role models, she learns to rely on their strength as well. Painting serves as a link between books, relationships, and her spiritual journey, allowing Jane to create pictures of possible worlds.

Jane begins developing her insight while living as a dependent in her Aunt Reed's home, Gateshead. Alone in a window seat and enclosed by curtains, Jane reads *Bewick's History of British Birds*, and describes the activity as if it is the only joy in her life. "With Bewick on my knee, I was then happy: happy at least in my way" (Brontë 9). It is not difficult to imagine why this might be Jane's only joy, since her story begins by describing how Jane's aunt excludes her from family love. In what sounds like a living portrait of Aunt Reed surrounded by her children, Jane tells us she is forbidden from joining this picture unless she acquires a more happy and attractive disposition. This exclusion prompts Jane's retreat to the window seat where she feels "shrined in double retirement" (7). Intentionally choosing a book with pictures, Jane reads of bleak and forlorn Arctic regions where sea birds live among the solitary rocks and ice fields. Then she tells her reader, "Of these death-white realms I formed an idea of my own; shadowy, like all the half-comprehended notions that float dim through children's brains, but strangely impressive" (8). Jane continues by explaining how she links the words with the following

pictures which makes images such as a solitary rock stand out. However, when Jane describes pictures of a cemetery and fiends she says she is unable to understand the “sentiment” within the “solitary churchyard” (9). Yet, it seems that Jane already names the sentiment by using “solitary” to describe both the graveyard and the rock. Perhaps this shows Jane is beginning to form an idea of her own existence being a solitary one and is linking solitude to death. Her insight becomes sharper when she encounters the trauma soon to come. After this trauma, Jane asks the maid, Bessie, for the cherished volume of *Gulliver’s Travels*. Instead of finding her usual delight in its pages, Jane says, “all was eerie and dreary” and now views Gulliver as “a desolate wanderer in most dread and dangerous regions.” Jane adds, “I closed the book, which I dared no longer peruse” (21). However, even in all Jane’s dreary comparisons, a bit of hope seems to be leading her forward. In the graveyard picture she notices a moon that is “newly-risen” (9). Possibly, this is Jane hoping to rise out of her current life’s picture.

Almost as if events must link directly with Jane’s new way of seeing her world, a horrible trauma occurs while she reads Bewick. Her older cousin John intrudes upon her haven, declaring she has no right to take his family’s books as a dependent. He claims this house and its books will soon belong to him and he will teach her a lesson. Before Jane can cry out, he grabs the book, throws it at her, and this results in a bloody cut. Though she is accustomed to regular abuse and is “habitually obedient” to him, in this moment, she explains, “my terror had passed its climax; other feelings succeeded.” Jane cries out to him, “Wicked and cruel boy! You are like a murderer-you are like a slave driver-you are like the Roman emperors!” (Brontë 11). Even though Jane says she has been “drawing a parallel” with John and these emperors, she never intended to tell him. Here begins Jane’s process of recognizing not only her landscapes and

emotions, but also of identifying the power source in these realms and challenging its right to rule.

As punishment for defending herself, the household's current head of power, Jane's Aunt Reed, locks Jane in the room where the late uncle died. Fearing the sight of his ghost, Jane pleads against the imprisonment, but her request is denied and Jane later faints after seeing a light she thinks is a ghost (Brontë 18). Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in "A Dialogue of Self and Soul: Plain Jane's Progress," believe this room serves as a "patriarchal death chamber" imprisoning Jane further into feelings of "isolation and vulnerability" (47-48). Though Gilbert and Gubar see the link between imprisonment and Jane's deepening solitude, they seem to miss how this causes Jane to create a stronger association with solitude and death, for this room could also serve as a picture of a "graveyard" in Gateshead. If Jane remains at Gateshead, the abuse will probably increase, especially now with her new ability to defend herself, and could even lead to her own death.

Even as a child, Jane manages to play a strong role in freeing herself from Gateshead. The doctor called after Jane's faint asks if she likes her home, but Jane seizes this opportunity to speak out her true desires. She corrects him by saying it is not her home and is told by everyone living here, that as a dependent, she has less right to be here than the servants. Jane asserts, "If I had anywhere else to go I should be glad to leave it" (Brontë 24). When the doctor suggests she attend school, Jane takes time to consider this new picture of a life. She thinks of stories she has heard of diverse experiences with school, ruling out the negative accounts from her cousin and focusing on the ones Bessie told her. Bessie said that girls could learn accomplishments such as painting beautiful landscapes. Remembering this causes Jane's spirit to rise in "emulation" (25). First, Jane tells herself, "Besides, school would be a complete change: it implied a long journey,

and entire separation from Gateshead, an entrance into a new life.” Then Jane replies to the doctor, “I should indeed like to go to school” (25). The doctor suggests to Jane’s aunt that school would be a good place for Jane, and the aunt complies, eager to unburden herself from a dependent. The picture seems ready for Jane’s smooth transition when the aunt plans a meeting with the school’s headmaster, but Jane’s new powers of recognition have not been exercised enough in this realm. Both the powers and Jane’s character must undergo two more tests before they reach the highest capacity possible at Gateshead.

In these tests Jane learns to recognize and overcome two more power structures, both the one that presides over her currently, and the next one to come. The first test happens when the school’s master, Mr. Brocklehurst, interviews her. As with her cousin, Jane compares this figure of authority to a book character. Based on her word choices, this character is plausibly the big bad wolf Jane might have encountered in stories Bessie reads her. Jane describes Brocklehurst saying, “what a great nose! and what a mouth! and what large prominent teeth!” (Brontë 32). This association, though not spoken aloud, still appears to give Jane power of defense. For example, when he asks Jane how she can escape hell she replies, “I must keep in good health, and not die” (32). Contrasted to the reactive outburst with her cousin, Jane’s calm and collected answer shows a rising sense of self. Comparing the next villain in her life to a fairytale character instead of a tyrant also suggests that Jane’s fears are diminishing. This fiend may huff and puff, but Jane will not let him blow away her confidence.

Jane’s approach to Brocklehurst and John Reed’s attacks help prepare her for the next trial of standing up to the main oppressive power source in her life, Aunt Reed. Though, initially, Jane does not associate a book character with Aunt Reed, nor does she do this with other women in the novel, perhaps this is due to Aunt Reed serving as a “male-dominated mouthpiece” as

Sandro Jung asserts in “Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, The Female Detective and the ‘Crime of Female Selfhood’” (23). Jung believes that as Jane develops her sense of self and confronts “male notions of normativity,” this allows her to identify the “crimes” of both sexes (23). If a mouthpiece for her late husband and a stand in for her son John, then Aunt Reed could represent both the embodiment of a “patriarchal death chamber” and a Roman emperor. Jane describes her as a figure of authority whose “household and tenantry were thoroughly under her control.” Mrs. Reed’s visual appearance is defined with masculine descriptors such as “square shouldered and strong-limbed” with a “much developed and solid jaw” (Brontë 36). Jane tells us that Aunt Reed not only shunned Jane and punished her unjustly, but that she was aware of the physical and verbal abuse her son inflicted on Jane yet did nothing to stop or prevent it. Jane says that, “Mrs. Reed was blind and deaf on the subject; she never saw him strike or heard him abuse me; though he did both now and then in her presence...” (10). Rather than turn a blind eye or ear to the interview with Brocklehurst, Aunt Reed fuels his abuse by telling Brocklehurst Jane has a “tendency to deceit” and asks him to make sure the teachers “keep a strict eye on her.” Brocklehurst responds by asserting he will ensure Jane is watched and giving Jane a book. This book tells of the sudden death of a little girl who Brocklehurst says is “addicted to falsehood and deceit” (35). In doing this, Brocklehurst is comparing Jane to this book character, and though Jane does not immediately refute the parallel, her mind begins to assimilate the charge of association and its effects. She soon realizes that being compared to a deceitful girl will “obliterate” the “new phase of existence” she hopes to live within (34). To have her next picture of hoped for happiness suddenly eclipsed by the destructive power of the scene she currently inhabits, causes new emotions to rise in Jane.

Rather than lash out automatically or defend herself calmly, Jane mentally prepares for this next conflict. After Brocklehurst leaves and Aunt Reed and she are left alone, Jane begins to struggle with the desire to defend herself and remove the oppressive obstacle, but she is unsure how to do this. Jane's thoughts in this moment show this conflict. She tells herself, "*Speak I must: I had been trodden on severely and must turn: but how?*" (Brontë 36). Jane then draws on her inner strength and says to Aunt Reed, "I am not deceitful: if I were, I should say I loved you..." and these words are followed by Jane declaring that she will take revenge when she is an adult, partly by telling others that Aunt Reed treated her with "miserable cruelty". In the last words of the speech Jane says, "You are deceitful!" (36-37). By starting her speech with the words, "I am not deceitful," Jane is declaring she is not like the book character Brocklehurst compares to her. Yet, in the final words, Jane appears to be linking Aunt Reed to this character by claiming Aunt Reed is deceitful. In confronting Aunt Reed, Jane is beginning to recognize a key attribute to an abusive source of power. It is not a threat you have to submit to as a slave does to a Roman emperor, nor is it harmless like a fictional character, but it is a force that must be reckoned with directly at its source. However, after Jane makes these declarations, she feels new but conflicting emotions linked to what she thinks is freedom. Though Jane tells us her "invisible bond had burst" and this was the "first victory I had gained," she also says, "I was left there alone-winner of the field." Jane soon begins to call her emotions "furious" and "uncontrolled." By noticing that her victory is followed by solitude in being "left alone as the winner," Jane might begin to realize that violent emotions also link with solitude and death (38). Though Jane has learned how to defend herself, the ability to balance her emotions is lacking and the results of her victories are not entirely satisfying.

At Lowood school Jane feels “treated as an equal of those my own age, and not molested by any” (Brontë 69). Acquaintances Jane meets at Lowood become her comrades in this changing landscape, and they serve as models of how to face conflict with balanced approaches that do not result in solitude. Miss Temple, the school’s headmistress, and Helen, Jane’s close friend, present portraits of strength who begin their friendships with Jane by helping her rise above the shame and despair of her next trial. This next trial involves another encounter with Brocklehurst. Rather than only have Jane “watched” as he told Aunt Reed he would, it looks as if he utilizes the view he formed of Jane as a liar to showcase his authority. On one of his rare visits to Lowood, he decides to announce not just to the teachers, but to the whole student body, that Jane is a liar and not likely to ever experience reform. He condemns her to public humiliation by making her stand on a stool for hours and forbidding anyone to talk with her or to look at her during this time (67). Jane’s previous victories seem insufficient in preparing her for the magnitude of this experience. For here, Jane is unable to describe her emotions, but mentions death-like physical sensations instead. Jane says she experiences a “stifling” of her breath and a “constricting” of her throat (68). Yet, in this picture, unlike the “death chamber” punishment of Gateshead, Jane does not remain alone nor faint out of fear. Helen passes by, and rather than obey Brocklehurst’s order not to look at Jane, she lifts her eyes and meets Jane’s gaze. Jane responds to this action by describing Helen as a heroic figure. Jane says, “It was as if a martyr, [or] a hero, had passed a slave or victim, and imparted strength in the transit.” Helen’s support instantly helps Jane control her panic, allowing Jane to take “a firm stand on the stool” (68). However, after Helen leaves the scene and Jane is left alone, Jane begins to think of that moment as only “a brief spell of support” and her feelings of being sustained quickly fade. For the first time in the story, Jane claims she desires death. She says, “here I lay again crushed and trodden

on: and could I ever rise more? ‘Never,’ I thought; and ardently I wished to die” (69). The eclipse Jane feared might obliterate her next scene of hope, seems in this moment as if it will follow her no matter what new picture she tries to enter. Though Helen provides comfort after this trial, it is a person with more agency who helps Jane rise out of her despair.

Rather than blindly agreeing with Mr. Brocklehurst’s opinion of Jane, as Brocklehurst did in sharing Aunt Reed’s view, Miss Temple, the school’s headmistress pursues a character reference. Through writing to Jane’s former doctor for an account of her character, Miss Temple clears Jane’s reputation among her peers. Kristi Sexton, in her article “Jane Eyre: Jane’s Spiritual Coming of Age,” sees this action as “choosing to do what is right in the sight of God rather than adhere to a man’s authority” (Brontë 181). Miss Temple is also presenting Jane with the example of finding the true source.

Now in a loving community, any contentment Jane might have felt in solitude at her story’s beginning, appears to completely melt away and be replaced by a burning desire to be loved. This shows in what Jane says to Helen, “Look here; to gain some real affection from you, or Miss Temple, or any other whom I truly love, I would willingly submit to have the bone of my arm broken, or to let a bull toss me, or to stand behind a kicking horse, and let it dash its hoof at my chest...” (Brontë 70). In response to Jane’s outburst, Helen directs her to seek a higher power in God rather than rely on “her feeble self,” or on “creatures feeble as you” (70). Perhaps their affection does not feel real because Jane senses its impermanence. If so, this intuition is sadly proved later by Helen’s death and Miss Temple’s marriage.

Annika Mizel in her article, "Righteous Restraint in *Hard Times* and *Jane Eyre*," notes that Jane begins her story with an unbalanced agency, but through her friendship with Helen Burns, Jane begins to find ways to balance these strong emotions (186). Mizel points out a time

when Jane tells Helen of the abuse she suffered at Gateshead. Here, Helen encourages Jane to forgive the abuses and separate the criminal from their crime (Brontë 59). Mizel notices that future relationships in Jane's life, especially with Rochester, show an unprecedented balance when contrasted with Jane's childhood encounters with oppressors (Mizel 188). In Helen, Jane finds both a confidant and an equal who shows her a better way to view people and God, which helps Jane perceive environments with a clearer and more balanced insight.

It looks as if Jane begins applying this better insight when she begins envisioning possible worlds through the medium of painting. Jane says her art subjects are seen first with her "spiritual eye before she attempts to embody them" (Brontë 126). This process allows Jane to better record her insights formed through books, by allowing her to link ideas with pictures she creates rather than looking for books with pictures. Painting also serves as an act of maturity allowing Jane to become a creator rather than just a critic of her world. Though Jane begins to paint at Lowood, she begins describing her visionary paintings after she meets Rochester, the authority figure in the next picture she enters. Yet, before this can happen, the picture of Lowood must become a solitary state to propel Jane out of its frame. Jane tells us that this happens the day of Miss Temple's wedding (85). To Jane, who is now a teacher at Lowood, it has become an atmosphere where she begins to feel the "reason for tranquility was no more" (85-86). Her solution to this need is to find "a new servitude," thinking this is the only way to leave Lowood (86). Jane advertises and is hired as the governess for Rochester's ward at Thornfield.

When Jane enters the new picture of life at Thornfield and meets the ruler of this realm, she does not assign a book character to him, at least not initially. Likely this has much to do with their first encounter, for in it Jane does not realize he is her employer nor does he know she is his dependent. The meeting occurs as Jane is walking to town and sees a man riding a horse with a

dog running in front of him. Although Jane associates the picture with fairytales Bessie told her, comparing Rochester's dog to Gytrash (a lion-like creature), Jane's association ends with the scene. She says, "The man, the human being, broke the spell at once" (Brontë 113). After this man passes Jane on the road, his horse slips on ice causing him to fall. Jane helps him to his feet and during this encounter Jane says, "I felt no fear of him," and that to her he looks like a non-heroic being who could have sympathy with her. For in Jane's imagination, a heroic being would be "bright but antipathetic" (114-115). This initial reaction to Rochester looks as if it helps start Jane on a more equal footing with him that continues even after their business relationship is revealed. During the first business interview, Jane neither exhibits fear nor does she mention any newly formed associations with him, but rather says, "I knew my traveler" (121). James Phillips believes this equal footing continues through the way Rochester and Jane communicate. He refers to their conversations as a "transgression of social taboos" in his article, "Marriage in *Jane Eyre*" where Jane's bluntness allows her to negate Rochester's insults and level conventions (205). Phillips refers to moments such as when Jane says of Rochester, "his harsh caprice laid me under no obligation; on the contrary, a decent quiescence, under the freak of manner, gave me the advantage" (Brontë 121). The interview is one of many conversations where Jane's bluntness shows. Here she remains unshaken, even though Rochester insults aspects of her art.

During the interview Rochester commands Jane to fetch her portfolio and prove her work is original. Confidently, Jane asserts her work's legitimacy, but frees him to be the judge (Brontë 125). While Rochester reviews three works, Jane describes them to her reader. Although at first Jane appears to be dissatisfied with her skill, telling us these are "pale portraits of things she conceives," later in the interview she says to Rochester how happy she was painting these. "To paint them, in short, was to enjoy one of the keenest pleasures I have ever known" (127). Here

Jane is letting us know that painting shares the “seat” with reading in being the source of her happiness. Yet this new form of insight, like the previous one formed with books and pictures, might be frustrating to Jane because of what she senses is missing. When Rochester asks if she is satisfied with her work, she replies by saying, “I had imagined something which I was quite powerless to realize” (127). Though he begins to insult her talent saying, “you have secured the shadow of your thought but no more, probably,” he seems unable to discredit her originality or skill as seen by his next comment. Of a painting where a woman is pictured as the Evening Star, he says, “These eyes...you must have seen in a dream. How could you make them look so clear, and yet not at all brilliant? For the planet above quells their rays” (127). Both his and Jane’s comments might hint at a deeper critique than that of Jane’s artistic skill. Like the clear eyes of her Evening Star, her inner sight could be clearer than she realizes. Rather than a frustration with her artistic skill, it could be that Jane is unsatisfied, for she has yet to experience these visions and feels unfulfilled with her current life picture.

As Rochester points out, her pleasures in life seem few, but her relationship with Rochester begins to create a life filled with more pleasures and more trials (Brontë 127). Not only do her paintings forecast the next set of events in Jane’s life, but she lets the reader know her life is about to change. This is done through the comments she makes after meeting Rochester on the road. She tells us, “It was an incident of no moment, no romance, no interest in a sense; yet it marked with change one single hour of a monotonous life. My help had been needed and claimed...” (116-117). Then Jane contrasts this change to how she feels at Thornfield after returning from the encounter. Jane finds herself not wanting to go into the house and now thinking it looks “gloomy,” “hollow,” and filled with “rayless cells.” Her eyes are drawn instead to the sky above with its “ascending” moon (117). Jane also tells her readers that

she did not appreciate her calm life at Thornfield saying, “What good it would have done me at that time to have been tossed in the storms of an uncertain struggling life, and to have been taught by rough and bitter experiences to long for the calm amidst which I now repined!” (117). By telling us these things, Jane is letting her readers know that Jane’s calm and solitary life here will not last for long. Yet, the rising moon perhaps still offers hope amidst the trials we know will come.

Jane’s three paintings also appear to forecast the trials by appearing to show symbols relating to Jane’s possible life pictures with Rochester. In the first painting, Jane describes a scene of death, but nothing hopeful like a new moon shines in the scene. Instead, the arm of a corpse is seen above water with no land in sight. A cormorant bird perches on a submerged mast holding a gold bracelet with gems (Brontë 126). This picture looks as if it predicts the type of marriage they would have, but also forecasts the despair Jane suffers after this wedding is stopped. During their engagement, Rochester begins making declarations such as, “I will myself put the diamond chain round your neck, ...I will clasp the bracelets on these fine wrists...,” showing how determined he is to turn her into what Jane calls a “visionary bride” (261, 324). Even though Jane protests saying that she will not know herself, nor will he know her, because she will be “a jay in borrowed plumes,” Rochester pays her wishes little heed and buys her many expensive gifts (262). Jane tries to resist, because to her these gifts show Rochester is trying to make her someone she is not. Jane also begins noticing how Rochester’s approach to her shifts. No longer do their conversations bear the type of equality Phillips sees, but Rochester begins to treat Jane more like a dependent and less like an equal. In one of these moments, Rochester is telling Jane why he likes her and says, “you seem to submit, and I like the sense of pliancy you impart” (263). Contrasted with statements he says before their engagement such as, “My bride is

here, because my equal is here, and my likeness,” this shift causes Jane to also change her approach with him. Though Jane previously did not assign a character parallel to him, she responds to his dominant statement by telling him that he resembles the characters Hercules and Samson, men Jane says would make severe husbands. She adds, “I wonder how you will answer me a year hence, should I ask a favor [and] it does not suit your convenience or pleasure to grant” (263). Jane theorizes that he might keep liking her if she keeps pleasing him, but the love he claims he has for her will “turn cool” (262). Rochester no longer acts like the “fellow traveler” she met who seems unheroic and can sympathize with who she is. However, instead of escaping this scene of dominance, as she did with Gateshead, Jane comes up with a plan. Jane declares that she will continue to work as a governess, and then he “will give her nothing but his regard, and if I give you mine in return, that debt will be quit” (272). Mizel notices how Jane’s approach to Rochester contrasts with how she talks to Aunt Reed as a child and notes, “although she is still expressing irritation at being treated like a lesser being, Jane no longer speaks from a place of hatred or malice” (188). Although Jane is attempting to save this picture of her happiness, later she seems to recognize this plan to stay a glorified servant is not sufficient to create the equality she seeks. Sarah Maier points out in “Portraits of the Girl-Child: Female Bildungsroman in Victorian Fiction,” that although a governess is a capable role, it is one where Jane will inevitably remain a dependent. Maier asserts that “In order to overcome this sense of obligation, Jane requires status, money, and family on her own terms” (328). While it is obvious that there is a power struggle between Rochester and Jane, perhaps there is a deeper matter that needs dealt with beyond Maier or Jane’s notions. Even though Jane looks as if she is trying to figure out what kind of power struggle is happening and negate it, her weak idea suggests she still lacks the vision and power to realize what the right picture is.

The next experiences Jane has, resemble ideas in her second painting and might help explain what type of power she is facing. In this picture, the woman depicted looks like a harem slave. Only her large head is visible and thin hands hold a veil over the lower portion of her face. The woman's brow is bloodless, and her eyes are "blank of meaning but for the glassiness of despair." On her head she wears a turban decorated with the "likeness of a Kingly Crown" and her head rests on an iceberg (Bronte 127; Milton 2.673). The way this woman is described as wearing a veil over the lower portion of her face and a turban on her head suggests Middle Eastern imagery. This type of imagery begins to show in the narrative when Rochester is buying Jane apparel. Jane tells us that she compares Rochester's smile to one "a sultan might, in a blissful and fond moment, bestow on a slave." Rochester jokes, in the same moment she is forming this parallel, about how he would not exchange Jane for the Grand Turk's harem. Jane retorts by stating she is not the "equivalent" of a harem (271). This comparison also soon brings to Jane's mind the character of Céline Varens who was a former mistress of Rochester's and the mother of his ward. Jane declares, "I am not your English Céline Varens" (272). This moment closely resembles the moment Jane has with Aunt Reed where she declares "I am not a liar," but this time Jane is also negating the character association directly with the source who formed it. By comparing Rochester to a sultan, Jane is assigning him a new character association that resembles what his actions have become towards her. Although Jane does not credit *Arabian Nights* directly with this link, she mentions reading this book as a child, telling us she could not understand the "subject" at the time (38). Likely this is because she had yet to encounter situations or people who parallel those in the stories. Now with being compared to the equivalent of a harem, it looks as if this is bringing the story of the sultan Shahryar and his wife Scheherazade alive for Jane. Yet this comparison does not create an association of a happy

ending as in that story. Instead, Jane senses that the power Rochester is exerting over her is one that attempts to enslave her.

This parallel to slavery becomes more evident the day Rochester's and her attempted wedding is stopped due to the revelation of his living, but insane wife, who lives in the attic of Thornfield. Rochester asserts that his marriage to this woman is only technical, since her madness prevents him from divorcing her, and he states that Jane can still live with him as if she is his wife. He says to Jane, "You shall be Mrs. Rochester-both virtually and nominally," but Jane recognizes how false this picture is and says, "Sir, your wife is living: that is a fact acknowledged this morning by yourself. If I lived with you as you desire, I should then be your mistress..." (Brontë 308). Though Rochester thinks he is only contrasting Jane with his former mistresses, to her his next words complete the parallel of him being like a sultan and wanting her to be like his slave. Rochester says to Jane that "Hiring a mistress is the next worst thing to buying a slave: both are often by nature, and always by position, inferior: and to live familiarly with inferiors is degrading" (316). Jane responds by inwardly saying, "if I were so far to forget myself ... to become the successor of these poor girls, he would one day regard me with the same feeling which now in his mind desecrated their memory" (316). Phillips sees this response forming because, to Jane, this type of relationship is a "romance unmoored from real conditions" (205). He believes that, for Jane, marriage has the illusion of surety (Phillips 205). Though Jane also begins to view marriage with him as slavery, it seems that Phillips is correct in noticing how much stronger this sense of enslavement becomes without the security of marriage. It is only when Jane is faced with this type of slavery, that she steps out of the picture by leaving Thornfield the next morning.

Unlike leaving Gateshead for Lowood, or Lowood for Thornfield, Jane's escape does not have a preformed new picture of life to enter. Rather she is choosing to enter a desolate and solitary region of not knowing what type of life she might have, over staying in a picture of slavery that she views as a living kind of death. Though Jane's picture of marriage also leads to drowning, it is important to distinguish that the parallel of drowning forms in Jane's life experience only after she finds out about Rochester's wife. Jane describes her grief as if her soul is drowning. She says, "the waters came into my soul...the floods overflowed me" (Brontë 299). Though Jane is willing to become his wife and experience the cooling of his love, this picture of becoming his wife has no possibilities of coming true, making the next picture initially seem somewhat hopeful. In this other picture, the woman looks alive, and the kingly crown is described as looking like a "pale crescent," an image Jane associates with hope (127). Yet this woman is described with the words "hollow" and "bloodless" which denote images of death. This is possibly a spiritual type of death and the references Jane makes to *Paradise Lost* in these paintings further suggest this. The quote "the likeness of a Kingly crown," that Jane uses in the painting's description, is taken directly from this epic poem (Milton 2.673). In *Paradise Lost*, the quote is associated with Satan who wears this crown. Also, in this same poem Satan is described as changing his form to a cormorant bird which allows him to enter the Garden of Eden (Milton 4.194). Since Jane is using images associated with Satan, it seems the message of these paintings might be that the source of abusive power comes from Satan, or evil, rather than being inherent in humans. If so, then Jane is putting into practice Helen's advice by not associating a human with evil, but rather separating the crime from the criminal. By seeking the true source of this evil, she also appears to be following Miss Temple's example of seeking the truth. If the source of evil is Satan, then the living death of the second painting would be just as real as the

physical death in the first painting. Hence, why Jane would be leaving this scene for it is as lifeless as the first scene became.

For Jane, the third painting she mentions seems to embody both the picture of life Jane desires and the woman she wants to be. The picture is of a woman depicted as the Evening Star. Rather than just an arm or the head of this woman being shown, her full face and shoulders are seen. In the background stands the peak of a hill rather than an iceberg. Her forehead is crowned with a star and her eyes shine “dark and wild” rather than being “hollow and fixed” (Brontë 126). The reflection of moonlight on her chest also represents the hope of a new moon. Even though this painting contrasts with the others, there is still tension in Jane’s description of the woman’s hair looking like a “beamless cloud torn by storm or by electric travail.” Rochester’s comment mentions a tension in the work yet, oddly, he does not mention a cloud or a storm, but a planet. This planet he sees is quelling the evening star’s rays (127). It may be that here, Rochester begins to develop the beginnings of inner sight in recognizing the source of oppressive power in the work. Though he does not link his actions to oppression until later, this moment gives him hope as a character.

Though Jane does not mention there being a planet in the work, she also seems to associate Rochester, or rather the force behind him, with the planet who quells her rays. However, rather than putting the blame on him or evil alone, she takes responsibility for how she lets this happen. During their engagement, not only is Rochester becoming more dominant, but Jane allows this “feeble human” to take the place of God in her life. Jane tells us that “He stood between me and every thought of religion, as an eclipse between man and the broad sun. I could not, in those days, see God for his creature: of whom I had made an idol” (Brontë 277). The time between Jane leaving Rochester and returning once more, allows both a life changing experience

for him and a spiritual awakening for Jane. Sexton believes that this awakening happens during Jane's time of wandering on the moors after leaving Rochester (183). Sexton references Jane's prayer of gratitude where she says, "I turned my prayer to thanksgiving: the Source of Life was also the Saviour of Spirits. Mr. Rochester was safe: he was God's and by God he would be guarded" (Brontë 329). Not only is Jane able to recognize the source of power in her world, but she is turning to the source of love and life, God, to help her and another feeble creature. Though Jane is tempted once more to succumb to death, this new hope rises in her, allowing her to decide once and for all that she will live regardless of what picture forms. Jane says, "Life... was yet in my possession...I set out" (329). This desire to live seems to be what Jane is trying to gain earlier in the story as she mentally prepares to leave Rochester. Yet, her later wish for death makes it seem that she is still "powerless to realize" this desire at the time. During this previous moment Jane says to herself, "I care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself. I will keep the law given by God; sanctioned by man...Preconceived opinions, foregone determinations, are all I have at this hour to stand by: there I plant my foot" (321-322). At this time, Jane says the right words, but her heart is not connected to the right source. She is relying on her feeble self and allowing her love for Rochester to block the rays of divine love. Now, that the obstacle is removed, Jane no longer feels solitary nor desires death.

A similar encounter happens for Rochester during their time apart. The loss of sight in both eyes and the loss of his arm cause him not only to be physically dependent but help lead him to spiritual repentance. He says to Jane, "Of late, only of late, I began to see and acknowledge the hand of God in my doom. I began to experience remorse, repentance; the wish for reconcilment to my Maker" (Brontë 452). Even though he is no longer an eclipse between

Jane and God, his repentance, combined with his wife's death, allows Jane and him to be reconciled and marry.

It appears that Jane begins to associate the picture of the Evening Star with herself. First, she negates the associations formed with her in the previous pictures. Though in her childhood she recognizes and states that she is not a liar without asking for confirmation from Aunt Reed, perhaps she asks Rochester's opinion to ensure she is not "left alone the winner of the field." Jane asks him, "I am not cold like a corpse, nor vacant like air, am I?" He replies, "My living darling! These are certainly her limbs, and her features; but I cannot be so blest after all my misery" (Brontë 439). Here, he confirms that he does not associate her with lifeless women like those in the paintings. Rather than ask him to confirm her alliance to the Evening Star, Jane gives her reader clues that suggest she is becoming like this woman. If Rochester has been representing the planet who quells her rays, then when Jane describes his eyes being "once brilliant and now rayless," this signifies that is no longer true. The end of his oppressive power also shows in their lives. Rather than the previous notion Jane forms of Rochester's love growing cold, perhaps like an iceberg, his declarations about their future relationship also resemble descriptors of this painting. He states, "Our honey-moon will shine our life-long: its beams will only fade over your grave or mine" (455). This ideal appears made possible by Rochester gaining powers of insight and refining his character. Gilbert and Gubar believe that Ferndean, the new realm Jane and Rochester live within, serves as a neutral location, in that it is not associated with Rochester's previous dominance at Thornfield. This allows Ferndean to become like Lowood for Jane, and here Jane becomes Rochester's teacher (Gilbert and Gubar 66). Due to being blind, Rochester is, in a sense, Jane's dependent for the first couple of years they are married. Here, Jane's original desire after meeting him is restored, for now he is once again "a fellow traveler" who she can

help. Jane furthers this notion by declaring to him, “I love you better now, when I can really be useful to you, than I did in your state of proud independence... (451).” However, this quelling of Rochester’s physical sight is only temporary, but it seems to help Jane share her powers of insight with the once proud man. Jane muses that, “He saw nature-he saw books through me; and never did I weary of gazing for his behalf, and of putting into words the effect of field, tree, town, river, cloud, sunbeam-of the landscape before us... (456).” It appears that once Rochester’s inner sight develops, then his physical sight can be restored, for Jane says he gains some of it back after two years (457). Now, perhaps, they can both resemble evening stars. As for Jane’s happiness with this scene, her own words to Rochester say it best, “To be your wife is as happy as I can be on earth” (450). Jane has found her earthly paradise in Ferndean, and here she can continue to live in a picture where she is loved by a Source who will never leave her and be included in a family portrait with another human being.

Through the character of Jane Eyre, Charlotte Brontë presents a person who learns to recognize her surroundings and herself. The journey of discovery begins in childhood and matures with age. It starts with books, expands with art and people, but is realized when Jane recognizes her true Source of happiness and strength. This allows Jane to see herself and others as fellow travelers and recognize that the sources for powers, both good and evil, are like book characters. They can take on human form, but humans are not the source of power, happiness, or lasting relationships. This knowledge helps Jane ultimately become the woman she wants to be and to live in the picture of life she desires.

Not only does this novel connect to the lives of Victorian readers, but its messages are directed to anyone who desires a better life. It continues to help all generations through its ideas of developing powers to realize personal vision and character. Rather than step into a picture that

looks agreeable at first sight, or simply better than the one we left, like Jane, we must learn patience and intuition in waiting for the right picture to emerge, one which will need our help in its creation.

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