

“He Felt I Loved Him So Fondly...”
The feminist truth behind Jane Eyre’s fairytale ending

Ten years after her fairytale marriage ending, Jane Eyre writes her autobiography. She recaps these ten years in a compact passage that describes how her marriage to Mr. Rochester has played out. This passage narrates their chronology as a couple, the evolution of their love, and their happiness at present. Upon closer inspection, however, this is not the typical tale of happily ever after. For example, not once does Jane mention in this passage that she loves Rochester. She emphasizes his blindness, his disability, and her pleasure in tending to him. This is perhaps surprising because a recurring theme in Charlotte Brontë’s novel is the strong feministic independence Jane craves and serving a man is the very opposite of this. After a previous failed attempt at marriage both Jane and Rochester experienced things that reversed normality and threw both their perceived Victorian gender roles in the dust. After this reversal Jane returns to return to Rochester because she could have the choice to leave him if she desired to do so. The ending, then, is actually quite the opposite of that of a fairy tale, for Jane returns to Rochester not because she loves him but *only* because he is completely dependent on her.

In recounting her happiness with Rochester Jane expresses her joy in being able to tend to Rochester’s physical disabilities in a very heartfelt, loving way. She explains that it was his blindness that had brought them together, using the words “union,” “close,” and “knit” to describe their bond (Brontë 384). She also describes herself, literally, as his vision and his “right hand” (384). This exemplifies the importance of her in his life

because she takes the physical abilities that he lost and metaphorically replaces them with herself, symbolizing his dependence on her. She explains in depth her love of caring for him by saying that “never did I grow weary of gazing for his behalf” or “of doing for him what he wished to be done” (384). This suggests that Jane loves caring for Rochester and his disability much more than she loves him for the person he is.

She further explains her happiness by describing her actions, stating in particular that she would “[impress] by sound on his ear what light could no longer stamp on his eye” (384). Although to impress and to stamp are almost synonymous terms, one could claim that the process of “stamping” is a little more quick and straightforward than that of “impressing,” which takes time to make a mark. Jane associates the verb stamp with Rochester’s vision, implying that what he used to see was stamped on his eye, and that was simply all he saw: first impressions. It wasn’t until after he literally could not see Jane that he became aware that she was a strong, independent woman. By using “impress” in conjunction not with his vision but with his hearing, or in other words her voice, she has the power to make a mark and sway anything she sees into something different to be painted in his mind. This is an example not only of his dependence on her, but also of the power she has over him and her ability to have control in the relationship. Furthermore it strongly emphasizes the independence she has from him while still being married to him.

Although she has achieved independence and also power in the relationship, her choice to be by his side is nonetheless odd. Her concluding sentence of the passage is important for a number of reasons. The shift that it creates is addressed later in this essay; for now I will discuss the symbolic language. She explains, “he felt I loved him so fondly

that to yield that attendance was to indulge my sweetest wishes” (384). She prefaces this declaration, however, with the statement that “he loved me so truly that he knew no reluctance in profiting by my attendance” (384). The earlier portion of this sentence notes his benefit from the relationship, and she goes on to say that she wouldn’t rather be anywhere else but at his disabled side. This is substantially important to the explanation of Jane’s reasoning for deciding to spend the rest of her life with Rochester. It means, simply put, that she loves him *most* in his disability and would have it no other way. The meaning of it, also simply put, is that due to her strong independence values, Rochester’s disability is the *only* reason she was able to stay with him. This disability offers her an independence not in terms of money (because we know that they are on the same financial terms by the end of the novel) but rather an independence from his personal control over her life choices. It also offers her an escape, so that she won’t lose her independence. Rochester does not have any power over her in his state; instead, she is the one who has power over him and he is completely dependent on her. Thus, she feels she has the freedom to walk away from him and still be comfortable, although maybe not happy. She loves caring for him and such wouldn’t happen, but nevertheless she has the option, making her completely independent even while being married to him.

The second to last sentence in the passage uses tension and alliteration to suggest the reversals in the expected happy marriage. She explains, “there was a pleasure in my services, most full, most exquisite, even though sad,” repeating the letter “s” to emphasize the joy and pleasure she finds in helping him, although it is upsetting at points (384). The tensions between “exquisite” and “pleasure” *versus* “sad,” “painful shame,” and “damping humiliation” emphasize her regretful feelings as well as(?) his *lack* of self-

pity, showing his willingness to be dependent on someone else. The fact that Rochester is not ashamed is the obvious claim for this specific use of words. Looking beyond it one could also make the assumption that it may suggest that a man like Rochester is too proud to be shamed or humiliated. In fact, these feelings *should* be found in such a man who has been physically degraded. The importance of it is that Rochester is so humiliated by actually being humiliated, instead of forever proud, that he hides behind the pride he has always had. It is obvious that Jane knows this and therefore sees him as even more vulnerable, further strengthening her ability to stay with him and further diminishing her estimation of his independence.

Although “painful shame” and “dampening humiliation” are referring to Rochester in this sentence, her selection of words to describe a blind man are interesting. Although such a person could be ashamed and humiliated, one without vision would be more sad and regretful. Again, another explanation can be found. These words are so intriguing, actually, that they could also be referring to Jane’s secret regretful feelings of having previously given in to Rochester. After this passage, Jane explains that she is now happy and perfectly independent, but these words imply her undecided feelings when she first agreed to stay with him. Being a woman of such strong values for depending on herself, it is difficult for her to get over even the small part of herself that she has given him.

Although taking the step to return to him was a small blow to Jane’s strong feminist personality, she comes closest to declaring her love when she says that tending to him was to “indulge [her] sweetest wishes” (384). Ending the passage in such a way draws our attention to the fact that she did not start off in the same form. Jane actually begins her expressions explaining how her husband “continued blind for the first two

years of [their] union,” thus simply explaining his disability and how it had brought them together (384). Beginning with this straightforward statement about only the situation is important to understanding how, at the beginning, that was simply all their relationship was about: his blindness and how it made them close. She goes on to say that she was literally his vision and does not even mention her joy and happiness at being with him until the very end, exemplifying how, at the time she is writing, she is completely happy but may not have previously been. What is even more interesting is that she never actually says that she loves Rochester in this passage. She mentions “he felt I loved him so fondly...,” which is a tricky statement because at first glance one notices “I loved him so fondly,” but the modifying phrase “he felt” almost goes unnoticed. She is explaining that she made him *think* that she loved him, when really the only thing about him that she actually truly loved was the fact that he could not be without her.

This shift is symbolic of Jane’s pride in her independence and the shame she once repressed for returning to Rochester. The overall movement of the passage supports the theory of her “painful shame” and “dampening humiliation.” The passage starts at his disability and how it “knit” them together and continues on to her not being bothered by helping him. The fact that she does not mention her own happiness at being with him until the end of the passage is a play-by-play of her feelings from the beginning of the relationship to her current standing (writing the book ten years later): undecided and “painfully shamed” morphing into a love that “indulge[s] [her] sweetest wishes” (384). It serves to say what I mentioned earlier. First, that returning to him was a struggle at the beginning because it contradicted everything for which she had worked up the strength to leave him; and second, that although she is ecstatic with the circumstances of his

disabilities, those circumstances were the only string strong enough to pull her back to him, rather than love or her own liberating financial independence. They married, which she expresses earlier that she would never do; but because of Rochester's disabilities she was still able to be completely independent from him and not be controlled.

It is most interesting that some would compare *Jane Eyre* to a fairy tale.¹ It is true that the protagonist finds love in the end, but fairy tales have no mention of money, class, sexuality, feminism, and certainly not complete role reversals between man and woman. For this is ultimately how the relationship between Jane and Mr. Rochester ends up: the man is completely dependent on the woman who is financially stable and would not be left on the street without such a man. Prior to their reunion Jane does long for Rochester and does hear his call for her, but it was a call of desperation on his part. She sensed his weakness and acted upon it. So, maybe in a way *Jane Eyre* is like a fairy tale: both end up happy and very much in love, even though the processes that allow that happy ending are never mentioned in traditional tales. Brontë's novel is really a claim that fairytales are only fairy tales. Real life stories may have fairytale endings but the ways in which these endings come about are very far from love at first sight and glass slippers. *Jane Eyre* shows us that most love stories take a much thornier path between once upon a time and happily ever after than fairy tales would have us believe.

1 See, for example, Robert K. Martin, "*Jane Eyre* and the World of Faery."

Works Cited

Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography*. Ed. Richard Dunn. New York: W.W. Norton, 2001.

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An Alternate Ending to Jane Eyre After Reading Wide Sargasso Sea

It seems to me the man I have married was a different soul years ago. But when did he change? It is true that one could pity him for how he was treated by his family but I am disappointed that he goes on to disrespect others in the same manner. It is a fact of life to treat people as you should wish to be treated, not with the same bad will that has been placed on you. But I do pity him; for he knew not the person he was until he was punished for his doings. He took for granted his freedom and now has none.

I feel sad for the girl he married. She seemed so vibrant and full of life and possibly wanted him to be happy. I wonder to where those sentiments have gone. It seems the fault could be her mother's, who lost control of herself when a man came around. The two of them shared that characteristic. I blame it on Rochester, as the man who stole her prospects. How unfortunate it is the way women are treated in this age; to find love and then find oneself on the street the next day would be a heavy burden on a woman's soul. I think him cruel to leave her shut up in an old house in England. Even if her mind has left her, do not drag her across the world away from everything she has ever known to just lock her up in an attic. In such a place her mind plays tricks on her, and makes her believe she is more insane than she may be. She was insane because she had been beguiled and left to never see the light of day again in that dreadful attic. The poor child was cheated, mind and body; I would feel as she had if I were left in her position.

Yet, although I pity her, I must thank her for taking such a blow. After seeing the

power Rochester could have over a human soul, I thought it fit for myself to leave his side instantly. To be his mistress would equate to being laughed at by the entire modern world. I could not allow myself to make such a mistake. I must elaborate on how cruelly he treated her as his newlywed for it will not cease to quiet in my head. Taking on another woman days after his marriage is, in my eyes, the most disrespectful thing. I would like to think that I have changed him; it is hard to believe that he would be a different man if he had not been so unfortunately disabled. The characters of some people are so unfortunate, indeed.

I am fond of the woman called Christophine. I especially liked her when she tried to tell poor Antoinette to get away from my Rochester. She is a wise woman and she stamps on her the role of a devil, although she is kind and does nothing but good for the girl. She is certainly right to believe he is an evil man with an eye after money, for that is what he is, what he was born to be. Nevertheless, I fear Antoinette brought his adultery upon herself. The good woman Christophine tried to warn her of the masculine ways and how they do not keep their minds on a woman's heart but on her body. But Antoinette insisted on poisoning him, and poison him she did; it was not only with the potion but also with the mind to cheat, the mind to be kept from the face of a wife. I would equally claim that it is partly the fault of him for her behaviour in England. I was quite terrified of her and her manner during our first encounters. Thankfully, her caring brother came along and tried to help, although he ended up with what looked like a rabid badger bite.

It quite brought the contents of my stomach to the floor with what her brother told me, and how I hated Rochester for it. When I found her diary, the pages of its second half were nothing but scribbles and gibberish, written down by no one but her. The first half,

however, was heart wrenching and deadening to read. I found the truth and the evil Rochester possessed and that he was nothing but a man of his time. When his mentality was changed, I do not know, but I love him to this day for the sake of that poor soul, Antoinette. I understand now that the Lord punished him that day for being so wretched, and with my help, He will continue to do so. I tell him not of the beauty I see when spring breaks through the ground, nor of the taste of fresh water from the river; I read to him not from my favorite novels but of the news of wars and death that persist in the world. I do it because her poor soul never experienced to the fullest the beauty of England, and from this day forth I will shut out such wondrous scenes and sensations from his mind. Although Rochester loves me dearly, I know it kills him and weakens him to allow himself to be guided by a woman. But I feel Antoinette's lively presence, and I imagine what she would do if she were still here, and I incorporate her heavy heart into my actions each day with hopes that the pain will someday lift from her.