

## Helping Hand: Two Parallel Scenes that Represent Jane and Rochester's Destiny

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In Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Jane and Rochester both experience the warm feeling of attachment and the pain of separation before their ultimate happy union. From their very first, dramatic encounter in Chapter XII, Brontë shows that Jane and Rochester, despite their differences in life happenings and morals, are destined to be together. Of course the scene itself is enough to recognize the importance of Jane and Rochester's first meeting—practically speaking, they would have never wedded had they never met—but it is through the odd circumstance in a later parallel scene that the author illuminates the initial encounter as more than just a chance plot point bringing two people together.

Brontë's use of a fantasy-to-reality turn immediately before Jane initially sees Rochester is the first time the author has Rochester snap Jane from a sort of dream. Jane, out late at night on a narrow path, as Brontë so eerily describes it, hears a noise approaching in the distance. She admits that her youth made her imagine "all sorts of fancies bright and dark," specifically some of Bessie's tales "wherein figured a North-of-England spirit, called a 'Gytrash': which, in the form of horse, mule, or large dog, haunted solitary ways, and sometimes came upon belated travellers" (181). According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a Gytrash is "an apparition, spectre, ghost, generally taking the form of an animal," and the *Jane Eyre* usage is *Oxford's* earliest example.<sup>1</sup> Here, a brief fantasy, represented by the Gytrash, flits across Jane's mind, long enough and importantly enough to have her name it four times (181). But she is instantly brought back to reality—and most importantly her rational thinking self—when "[t]he man, the human being, broke the spell at once" (181). Perhaps the haunted "solitary" way is also an emotional and spiritual one, and it takes another human being's arrival to eliminate Jane's lonely and fantasy-laden reverie. Moreover, Brontë is emphasizing the realness of "the human being" and the fact that its coming is important in helping to bring Jane back to reality; otherwise there would be no need to meticulously write both "the man" and "the human being" as a sort of double-subject of the sentence and incidentally a correction of the previously envisioned Gytrash. The "human being," for Brontë, places the emphasis on the real and the fact that such reality is what has broken Jane's spell symbolized by the Gytrash fantasy.

Shortly after the Gytrash is effectively replaced with a real living human being, Jane, now firmly planted back in reality, is able to lend Rochester a helping hand for the first time after he and his horse fall on the ice. Rochester "felt his foot and leg, as if trying whether they were sound; apparently something ailed them, for he halted to the stile whence [Jane] had just risen, and sat down" (182). After a lengthy exchange where Rochester is reluctant to allow Jane to help him, he finally "laid a heavy hand on [her] shoulder, and leaning on [her] with some stress, limped to his horse" (184). Here, Brontë allows Jane to help Rochester regain his footing, both physically and

figuratively, much like the author has Rochester symbolically help Jane regain her “footing” in the land of reality a moment earlier. Speaking of the incident immediately thereafter, Jane tells the reader exactly what the opportunity to help means to her:

[I]t 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; I had given it: I was pleased to have done something; trivial, transitory though the deed was, it was yet an active thing, and I was weary of an existence all passive. (185)

It becomes clearer, then, that the haunted “solitary” way is in fact representative of Jane’s life. The monotony that has marked her mere existence has been injected with vitality, and because she is a good human being she is all too ready to reciprocate and help a man in need of it himself.

This scene then becomes the front end of a frame when one considers that Rochester again snaps Jane from a sort of reverie later in the novel, when she is about to acquiesce to another sort of “monotonous life,” another “solitary” way, in marrying the loveless St. John and going off to lead a utilitarian, missionary life with him. Jane “ferverently longed to do what was right...and only that,” and she entreats of heaven, “Shew me—shew me the path!” (520). Here the word “path” is used in the place of “way,” but they are essentially the same. Jane is again alone and seeking direction, but her mind is stuck in a fantasy, albeit not a desirable one, of doing the “right” thing and potentially marrying St. John. But in an instant this reverie shifts, and what follows her prayer speaks to a woman coming out of a sort of trance.

Suddenly [my heart] stood still to an inexpressible feeling that thrilled it through, and passed at once to my head and extremities. The feeling was not like an electric shock; but it was quite as sharp, as strange, as startling; it acted on my senses as if their utmost activity hitherto had been but torpor; from which they were now summoned, and forced to wake. (519)

It is a confession somewhat similar in tone to her reaction after the initial encounter (qtd. above on p. 2-3). This shock is birthed by “a voice somewhere” that cries, “Jane! Jane! Jane!” Jane relays to the reader just how important this voice is to her, and to whom it belongs.

[I]t did not seem in the room—nor in the house—nor in the garden; it did not come out of the air—nor from under the earth—nor from overhead. I had heard it—where, or whence, for ever impossible to know! And it was the voice of a human being—a known, loved, well-remembered voice—that of Edward Fairfax Rochester; and it spoke in pain and woe—wildly, eerily, urgently. (520)

The voice, as unreal as it is to Jane in the physical, is real enough to snap her from her thoughts of marrying St. John—a contemplation this time that had her imagining the “torpor” of a life similar to the “passive” and “monotonous” one she previously described after her first encounter with Rochester. Where the reverie is fantastical and unreal in the Gytrash passage, this latest reverie could have taken her to a very real place and a very real marriage she didn’t covet at all. But Rochester’s voice, that of a “human being,” brings Jane back to the mindset she needs to make the right choice, much like the “man, the human being” broke the spell at once in the first scene.

In addition to the content of the St. John scene itself, Bronte implies the momentous nature of Jane’s coming back to reality through her punctuation of the above passage, specifically the use of the dash, which adds suspense and hope to the scene, practically churning the reader forward into believing—along with Jane—that the voice is real and must be heard; but more than this, that the voice of Rochester—as it speaks “wildly, eerily, urgently”—is calling out to her at the

very climax of his need as well. Where he is hesitant to allow Jane to help him in the initial scene, this time Rochester implores her from afar, a pleading voice in the metaphorical storm both are experiencing. He needs her. He wants her. He cannot endure the fall of his physical deformity without her. And right on cue, just as she is considering going off with a man whom she doesn't love, she hears him, and she responds, just as she does to his fall in their first encounter.

In the end, Jane and Rochester's relationship has evolved because they have simply chosen to love each other better. But what hasn't changed for Bronte is that Rochester wants to be there for Jane and Jane wants to be there for Rochester, and the author uses shifts in fantasy and reality to illustrate. Since both characters rescue each other in different yet similar ways in these two bookend scenes, it seems they were perhaps destined to be together all along.

## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> Looking back even further, blogger Mimi Matthews finds brief mention of Gytrash in William Holloway's 1839 *A General Dictionary of Provincialisms*: "an evil spirit; a ghost"; and in Reverend William Carr's 1824 *Horæ Momenta Cravenæ*: "An evil spirit, a ghost, a pad-foot." A writer in the 1895 report of the *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Society* says, "No one, so far as I know, has recorded any views as to the origin of this word."

## Works Cited

Bronte, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. Canada: Broadview Press, Inc, 2004. Print.

Matthews, Mimi. "Jane Eyre and the Legendary Gytrash." *Mimi Matthews: Romance -Literature - History*. WordPress. Web. 4 April 2016.

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