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On the conclusion of *Jane Eyre*

Brontë's conclusion to Jane Eyre is the rather gray appendage of an otherwise black-and-white novel. From the direct, almost jarring tone of the previous chapter—full to the brim with brisk exchanges between Jane and Mr. Rochester—Brontë retracts to a simple, straightforward statement: "Reader, I married him" (Brontë 521). Brontë develops Jane's character as a woman who strives to be independent: to rely on no one but herself; yet, the swansong of Jane's journey is marked by none other than the single most binding contract between two individuals: marriage. Moreover, the clash between heat and cold, fire and ice, passion and asceticism that remains a recurring theme throughout the novel, is strangely absent; Brontë uses absolutely no imagery pertaining to heat or cold in the entirety of the final chapter, which reveals Brontë's main point: unity and harmony are more desirable than discord and fragmentation. Thus, in an odd, almost twisted way, Brontë's sedated conclusion to the gripping novel that is Jane Eyre is the perfect finale, much like the bitter garnish on a sweet dish.

Almost immediately, it becomes clear through Brontë's change in syntax that the conclusion is almost set a step apart from the rest of the novel. The previous chapter contains, as previously mentioned, a multitude punctuated, pithy dialogues between Jane and Mr. Rochester:

> 'Ah! Jane. But I want a wife.'
>
> 'Do you, sir?'
>
> 'Yes: is it news to you?'
>
> 'Of course: you said nothing about it before.'
>
> 'Is it unwelcome news?'
>
> 'That depends on circumstances, sir—on your choice.'
>
> 'Which you shall make for me, Jane. I will abide by your decision.'
>
> (Brontë 516)

Brontë's short, curt syntax both increases the perceived pace of the text and the tension present

in the tone of the text. In marked contrast, the final chapter has a longer, more flowing syntax, with parallelism and extensive use of colons and commas:

> A quiet wedding we had: he and I, the parson and clerk, were alone present.
> When we got back from church, I went into the kitchen of the manor-house,
> where Mary was cooking the dinner, and John cleaning the knives.
>
> (Brontë 521)

Here, Brontë's syntax has the opposite effect of the quick bursts of dialogue present only five pages before: the pace of the text is slowed, and the tone is much calmer and quieter. Indeed, Brontë's near omission of dialogue in the concluding chapter seems to reveal a tantalizing insight: there is little to be gained from binary interpretations, both on the individual level and the interpersonal level. Instead, there must be compromise: not black and white, fire and ice, light and dark, but a simple gray, mundane water, or dull twilight.

Also of importance is Brontë's use of contrast—or lack thereof—in the concluding chapter. Where in the rest of her novel, there are recurring themes of contrast, as in the contrast between Mr. Rochester, with his "black eyes darting sparks" (Brontë 236), and St. John, with his "blue-pictorial looking eyes" (399); in the concluding paragraph, Brontë is much more direct, writing through the lens of Jane herself:

> My tale draws to its close: one word respecting my experience of married life,
> and one brief glance at the fortunes of those whose names have most frequently
> recurred in this narrative, and I have done.
>
> (Brontë 523)

This, interestingly, has a simple, but important side effect: Jane's thoughts seem more direct, becoming, in a sense, the centerpiece of the writing. This, as opposed to Jane's dissociative descriptions earlier in the novel, where she merely describes the events transpiring around her:

> I had put on some clothes, though horror shook all my limbs; I issued from my
> apartment.
>
> (Brontë 236)

As a result of this shift from the passive to the active tense Brontë's tone becomes warmer and more inviting. Taking this into consideration, an intriguing observation can be made of Brontë's text: when the writing is unified and direct, the tone is warmer; when the writing is fragmented and passive, the tone is colder. This seems to suggest that unification—cooperation between many elements—is better than having many discontinuous parts. This, essentially, returns to Brontë's message of the importance of unification and compromise: unity is superior—the only option, even—when compared to discord. Considering the previous two points, what is arguably the most contradictory characterization in the conclusion becomes easier to understand. Through the course of her novel, Brontë characterizes Jane as a woman who cannot bear being controlled, who "[cares] for [herself] [;] [t]he more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained [she is], the more [she respects herself]" (Brontë 366). However, in the concluding chapter, Jane seems quite the opposite, speaking of marriage and belonging:

> I know what it is to live entirely for and with what I love best on earth. I hold myself supremely blest—blest beyond what language can express; because I am my husband's life as fully as he is mine. No woman was ever nearer to her mate than I am: ever more absolutely bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh.
>
> (Brontë 523)

While there is, at first glance, a contrast between Brontë's previous characterization of Jane and her current characterization, closer inspection yields a different conclusion; Jane's current characterization seems to be more an evolution of her previous personality, instead of a contrast. Regarding this, it is important to reiterate that Jane does not want to be controlled; while a relationship in which both sides are of equal power is acceptable, one where "[she] must be [another's]" (Brontë 364)—where her will is superseded—is not acceptable to her. Noting this, Brontë's characterization of Jane in the final chapter begins to seem less contradictory; Jane is married, yes, but she and her husband—Mr. Rochester—have a reciprocal relationship, where "[she] is [her] husband's life as fully as he is [hers]" (523). Essentially, Jane's relationship with Mr. Rochester is one where they are unified, which

further reinforces Brontë's point: harsh, hardline separation is neither productive, nor preferable in comparison to compromise and unity.

Ultimately, however, everything must come to a close: loose ends must be tied together, ideas solidified and unified, a cohesive argument presented; and that is precisely what Brontë does in the conclusion of Jane Eyre. Jane, throughout the novel, is straining against limitations imposed on her by herself, by others, and by Victorian society; she tries to "run" from limitations by isolating herself, but Brontë, in her conclusion, recognizes the fact that regardless of how much an independent woman wants to shed the shackles of her own self-doubt, other's judgment, and society's expectations, a balance must be struck in order to continue as an active participant in the surrounding world.