

## Cultivating Eyre: Edward Rochester as Jane Eyre's Doppelgänger

Kathryn R. Martel  
Agnes Scott College

Feminist literary theorists such as Hélène Cixous have argued that women can reclaim what the patriarchy has confiscated by symbolically representing what the female character is thinking in relation to herself rather than men. The autobiographical essence of the narrative employed by Charlotte Brontë in *Jane Eyre* allows subordination of the male voice and assertion Jane's physical and psychological freedom within the male realm that has sought to define her limits. The Eyre-Rochester romance may seem counterintuitive to said freedom since Jane's growing sense of self is so intertwined with that of Rochester, but the dynamic changes when viewing Rochester as her doppelgänger. Brontë constructs Rochester as the male alter-ego of Jane and, while acknowledging that Jane recognizes this extreme gender imbalance, I will argue that Jane admires and is drawn to Rochester because of their deep affinities and essential equality, not what he has as a man what she lacks as a woman. The progressive physical manifestation of their emotional, psychological, and spiritual affinities ultimately leads to a union that fulfills the best in each of them so that they may emerge as equals. In viewing the externalization of Jane's two psychological parts into a shared whole, which Brontë fuses together in a marriage to the doppelgänger, Jane is in one sense marrying herself. By marrying her doppelgänger Edward Rochester, Jane assimilates her two selves into one and enters an adulthood of self-love that is independent from the Victorian societal standards for women and their marriageability.

*"The double . . . comes to be seen as an aspect of the psyche,  
externalized in the shape of another in the world."*

– Rosemary Jackson

**A**s feminist literary theorists have argued, women can reclaim what the patriarchy has confiscated by symbolically representing what the female character is thinking in relation to herself rather than men.<sup>1</sup> This may appear counterintuitive in the Eyre-Rochester romance in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* since Jane's growing sense of self is so intertwined with that of Rochester. The dynamic changes, however, when viewing Rochester as Jane's doppelgänger. Brontë

gives to Edward Rochester the freedoms Jane could not attain herself within her sociocultural limits as a penniless female orphan. While acknowledging that Jane recognizes this extreme gender imbalance, I will argue that Jane admires and is drawn to Rochester because of their deep affinities and essential equality, not what he has as a man what she lacks as a woman. Brontë constructs Rochester as the male alter-ego of Jane, someone whose passions and rebellion against Victorian socialization echoes those of Jane, and which implicitly challenge middle and upper class Victorian social norms of rationality and constraint. Over the course of their romantic relationship, Edward Rochester mirrors the passion and imagination she has been socialized to

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<sup>1</sup> See Hélène Cixous' "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1975), Karen Horney's *Feminine Psychology*, 1922-1937 (1967) and Luce Irigaray's *The Sex Which is Not One* (1977), in which all three authors argue against Freud's theory of penis-envy and the concept of women acting on the basis of "lack."

restrain, and encourages the emergence of these qualities in Jane herself. The progressive physical manifestation of their emotional, psychological, and spiritual affinities ultimately leads to a union that fulfills the best in each of them so that they may emerge as equals.

Acknowledged as the mother of poststructuralist feminist theory for her essay “The Laugh of the Medusa,” Hélène Cixous reacts against Sigmund Freud’s theory of penis envy to emphasize the female individual as a source of power and accomplishment, and calls upon her to reclaim this power through writing. Brontë, through Jane Eyre, exercises this power directly by constructing a fictitious autobiographical narrative that subordinates the male voice and asserts Jane’s physical and psychological freedom within the male realm that has sought to define her limits. By viewing Rochester as Jane’s doppelgänger, we can recognize that he is often the only character who consistently encourages, articulates, and illuminates Jane’s repressed self, thus acting as an agent of her growth and development into autonomy and freedom. In anti-feminist criticism of the novel, the Eyre-Rochester relationship is viewed as a manifestation of false consciousness on Jane’s part and the whole work cannot be viewed as fully feminist due to the ill-treatment of Bertha Mason, Rochester’s mad wife kept locked away in the attic, that is permeated by the negative influences of imperialism.<sup>2</sup> While

this is valid criticism, discussing Bertha Mason is irrelevant to the current argument strictly viewing the interactions between Eyre and Rochester. I believe that an equality of the sexes is possible within the novel, and that it is observable in the externalization of the couple’s emotional, psychological, and spiritual affinities, which enable the best qualities within each character to emerge and thrive.

Modern studies of the Doppelgänger in Gothic and Romantic literature emphasize the psychological implications of the double. In the case of Jane, her double Rochester represents the more imaginative and powerful aspects of Jane’s psyche that have been restrained since childhood for “the sake of cultural continuity” (Jackson 46). As a child, Jane suffers physical and verbal abuse from her cousin John that results in a passionate outburst against him. Jane’s assertiveness while defending herself against her socially superior cousin is deemed animalistic in comparison to Victorian expectations of docility in young women. In attempting to physically restrain and punish Jane for her transgressive behavior, the servants lock the “mad cat” in the red room (Brontë 9).<sup>3</sup> Jane observes an alternate vision of herself within the looking-glass, allowing a self-discovery and understanding of the social implications of her passionate nature. Fear at the sight of the “half fairy, half imp” that does not reflect her physical self represents the social shame and danger that could arise out of being a defiant female (Brontë 11). Her later acceptance of her limits in relation to Victorian rationality and constraint forces Jane to hide her imaginative side, relegating it to periods of

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<sup>2</sup> With modern scholarship on the negative influences of imperialism and the response to *Jane Eyre* in the prequel novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys (1966), anti-feminist criticism tends to focus on the poor treatment of Bertha Mason by Edward Rochester as well as by Brontë as the writer in constructing her. Examples of this anti-feminist critic can be found in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism” (1985) and Susan Meyer’s “Colonialism and the Figurative Strategy in Jane Eyre” (1990).

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<sup>3</sup> The childhood experience of the red room echoes throughout the book in Jane’s supernatural fantasies that allow the escape of her imprisoned double self as exhibited in the looking-glass (Gilbert and Gubar 340-341).

self-reflection and expression through art. Brontë constructs the duality of Jane through the connotations of the two parts of her name. Thus, Jane begins the battle between her two selves: the humble servitude of “plain Jane” and the imaginative, boundary-defying sensibility in “Eyre.”

Jane’s restlessness in restraining her second self often manifests itself in socially rebellious thought. Jane contemplates: “Women are supposed to be very calm generally but women feel just as men feel...they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer...” (Brontë 93). Brontë immediately introduces the reader to the notion that the sexes are equal in feeling and desire for freedom from the rigid restraints of Victorian patriarchal society. Her release of inhibition in the dark woods when coming across Edward Rochester for the first time allows both characters to see each other as supernatural beings—creatures of the imagination. Jane believes Rochester may be a Gyrash, a goblin or spirit that takes the form of a horse or dog, while Rochester later admits he believed Jane to have bewitched his horse. Interestingly, he is the only one to verbalize his fairy-tale imaginations. The supernatural is meant to be kept within the childhood sphere of the imagination that adults of reason are supposed to overcome, but both Jane and Rochester are using the supernatural to psychologically hold onto their youthful selves and imaginations. During their second meeting, Rochester allows Jane to confront the self she stifles by initiating a fanciful conversation that causes Mrs. Fairfax, the housekeeper, to raise her eyebrows at its impropriety, signaling a transgression of Victorian socialization. Rochester’s observations imply his symbolic role as Jane’s doppelgänger: he is the first to judge her “elvish” watercolors that mix the natural with the spiritual, presenting the

psychological essence of Jane for Rochester to reflect on (Brontë 108). Rochester’s insight to Jane’s artwork shows that he understands and accepts Jane’s duality. Jane says she was not able to adequately express her mental ideas on canvas; she merely “secured the shadow” of her thought (Brontë 108). Rochester essentially becomes the voice of Jane’s imaginative impulses, which she often stifles due to Victorian civility and rationality. This scene allows the creation of a safe space in which Jane can express her dual self without the shame and punishment she received at Gateshead Hall or Lowood School. The first sit-down between Jane and Rochester catalyzes the growth of a psychological connection that allows Jane to acknowledge her “Eyre” sensibility.

Rochester recognizes that he is in fact the double of Jane by revealing he was once her equal when at he was her age. “I might have been as good as you—wiser, almost as stainless. I envy your peace of mind, your clean conscience, your unpolluted memory” (Brontë 115). It is Rochester who envies Jane, rather than the other way around, because he finds within her an affinity with the self he could not preserve. In hopes of cultivating and preserving the youthful spirit of Jane he had once known himself, Rochester criticizes how unnatural she acts due to her constrained upbringing at Lowood. His outspokenness while detecting that her “self-love dreads a blunder” encourages Jane to embrace all psychological parts of herself (Brontë 118). Jane’s experience with Rochester allows her to liberate her own mind. Jane grows more self-aware by appropriating his male gaze, and she claims that only she, not Blanche Ingram, can charm him. After observing her double with another woman, Jane realizes the unique psychological compatibility they share. While reflecting on her love for Rochester, Jane thinks, “I have something in my brain and heart, in my blood and nerves,

that assimilates me mentally to him” (Brontë 149). By freeing both her heart and her rational mind, Jane is planting the seed of their future union. The use of the word “assimilate” implies a conversion into physical resemblance, allowing their equality within a romantic union to begin despite their differences of class.

Brontë continues to use Blanche Ingram, a socialite Rochester temporarily courts, as the inverse of Jane, giving Blanche the opportunity to say what Jane cannot in her socially submissive station as a governess. Blanche announces to the party at Thornfield, “I am resolved my husband shall not be a rival, but a foil to me” (Brontë 153). This is said before Blanche requests that Rochester sing with her “con spirito,” but Rochester agrees only after saying he will show her how things “should” be done. Implying that there is a different way things should be done with Blanche tells the reader that Rochester and Blanche are not spiritual equals and do not highlight traits of the other as foils. It is no coincidence that Rochester proposes to Jane instead of Blanche as he is the true foil to Jane. Foils in literature depend on each other and often explore a different path for the antagonist. Rochester is the experienced gentleman of society to Jane’s inexperienced but questing spirit. Despite differences in Victorian constructs of gender and society, Jane and Rochester are equal in their feelings and respect for one another. Their psychological likeness provides a gateway out of Victorian propriety and emerges as a divine “con spirito” in the text: “...it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God’s feet, equal, just as we are!” (Brontë 216). Their equality of souls surpasses Victorian social authority and allows the two individuals to become one. In the proposal scene, Rochester feels he is physically tied to Jane as her *doppelgänger* by an

inextricable “string” under his left ribs knotted to her bodily frame. The biblical reference to Eve’s rib feminizes Rochester as being created of Jane, merging their likeness physically as well as externally and foreshadowing their becoming each other’s second selves in marriage.

While Jane accepts the marriage proposal, she has confronted her dual self in Rochester without breaking the shackles of Victorian restraint. Joining the life of the gentry would require Jane to exchange her independent identity and sensibility for something dependent and material. Even before the reveal of Rochester’s marriage to Bertha Mason, the mad woman in the attic, Jane is wary of Rochester’s insistent wedding presents of dresses and jewels because they represent a Victorian imprisonment of the woman’s identity. Her rejection of Rochester emphasizes that she does not love him for having access to the wealth and freedom of the patriarchy that she will never be able to obtain by herself.<sup>4</sup> Connecting back to Rochester’s original refractive judgement that Jane was not loving herself, she rejects becoming his mistress by declaring, “I care for myself...I will keep the law given by God; sanctioned by man. I will hold to the principles received by me when I was sane, and not mad—, as I am now” (Brontë 270). Jane is socially rebellious in creating her independent identity through encouragement by her own self within Rochester. Adrienne Rich argues that “...work of self-creation—is undervalued, or seen as the bitter fruit of “penis envy,” or the sublimation of repressed eroticism, or the meaningless rant of a ‘manhater’” (Rich, “Compulsory” 652).

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<sup>4</sup> Gilbert and Gubar argue that the real impediment to Jane’s marriage with Rochester is Jane’s imprisoned female “hunger, rage, and rebellion” in a “secret dialogue of self and soul” that the coming-of-age depends on (Gilbert and Gubar 339)

Jane refuses to give into passion over reason until Rochester becomes her double in relation to Victorian conventions as well as psychological and spiritual affinity. Once Jane Eyre develops love and acceptance of herself, she must physically leave Thornfield to allow Rochester to complete his own evolution to return to the spirit of Jane he had lost under Victorian socialization.

If Jane cannot become one with Rochester in a morally upstanding, legal marriage that exists within her own terms of equality, she will not have him at all. To remain at Thornfield would compromise everything that Jane confronts and strengthens about herself through her doppelgänger. Brontë then provides Jane a path that leads to St. John Rivers, a cousin and clergyman who proposes Jane a strict partnership marriage, which deviates from the personal growth of her dual nature she found with Rochester. Jane finds a common ground with St. John in their “physical, emotional and spiritual exile” at Morton (Bennett 19). Their repression, equal social status, and their family ties as cousins seemingly makes St. John Rivers a better match for Jane than Rochester. The Eyre-Rivers relationship is conceivably a more realistic outlet for Jane; a relationship that upholds Victorian rationality and constraint founded in a moral servitude. Jane leaves her unequal match with Rochester, gaining the strength to “discover her place in the real world”, which leads her to a match of equality in sense with St. John Rivers (Gilbert and Gubar 364). However, this match is unequal in terms of their views of love and marriage. St. John’s is a conjugal love that intends to use Jane as an extension of himself and his religious work whereas Rochester’s is a passionate love that has no other use of Jane but to love her. Jane rejects her cousin’s marriage proposal because he is like a brother rather than a “kindred,” referring to the kindred spirit and romantic

love she shares with Rochester (Brontë 330). St. John is the suffocating ice to Jane’s internalized passionate spirit whereas Rochester is the communing fire. After Jane rejects St. John, he grows colder and his presence reminds her that her “vivacity” is distasteful to him (Brontë 339). Jane’s inability to act freely around her cousin gives insight to what their marriage could be like: one of obedience and restraint, both of which have caged Jane except while at Thornfield. Brontë composes the Eyre-Rivers relationship for Jane to act without the guide of her doppelgänger to resist and liberate herself from the hand of Victorian society. Once Jane refuses to settle for St. John Rivers and removes her inhibitions, she may return to Rochester with more certainty in herself than ever before.

Rich discards the Freudian critical belief that the blinding of Rochester in the burning of Thornfield is castration, and instead argues that this allows Rochester and Jane to achieve “sexual equality—spiritual and practical” instead (Rich, “Temptations” 481). In following this ideal, the youthful passion within Jane demands an equal parallel that transcends biological sex or gender. This requires Rochester to revert back to this spirit he failed to preserve due to his malleability by Victorian society. Rochester returns to his younger personhood by both the literal and figurative burning of everything Victorian society has constructed of his life since he was Jane’s age, pre-marriage to Bertha Mason. He is absolved of his marriage, the stately symbol of his status and privilege in Thornfield, and his sexual promiscuity to become equal to Jane. With Jane’s discovery of her inheritance, she emerges in her own evolution as equal, if not superior, to Rochester, but she strips away the constraint of class that comes with wealth by sharing her inheritance with her cousins. Like a phoenix out of the ash of Thornfield, Rochester has completed his

physical rebirth into the essence of Jane he has recovered from within. Their equality in the physical world now matches their equality in the spiritual world. Jane returns to Rochester after hearing his spirit call for her. Their superstition shared within their blood assumes being of the same flesh. Jane tells the reader, “I am my husband’s life as fully as he is mine. No woman was ever nearer to her mate than I am; even more absolutely bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh” (Brontë 384). Her mirrored likeness within her doppelgänger is now externalized and forms a single identity, completing her confrontation with her psychological duality. Recognized by God in matrimony and by Victorian society in law, Jane and Rochester marry and she becomes his “prop and guide” (Brontë 382). As a married couple, Jane gives birth to a son as a final corporeal realization of their beings in body and spirit becoming one.

By marrying her doppelgänger Edward Rochester, Jane is assimilating her two selves into one and enters an adulthood of self-love that is independent from the Victorian societal standards for women and their marriageability. To claim that the ending of *Jane Eyre* is un-feminist is itself un-feminist; it fails to respect a woman’s personal choice in attempting to best serve herself while navigating a world dominated by men—even if that means entering a marriage. In fact, Jane does not subscribe to the institution of marriage as set by Victorian conventions. As Adrienne Rich so perfectly describes Jane’s decision to go back to Rochester, “It is not patriarchal marriage in the sense of a marriage that stunts and diminishes the woman; but a continuation of this woman’s creation of herself” (Rich, “Temptations” 483). Jane is returning to what has been confiscated from marriage by the patriarchy—the idea that a man and woman can enter a union without a power dynamic and mutually coexist in

earnest love and respect. The marriage to Rochester rejects marriage as a social and economic necessity in using women to secure male wealth and power. In viewing the externalization of Jane’s two psychological parts into a shared whole, which Brontë fuses together in a marriage to the doppelgänger, Jane is in one sense marrying herself. Her marriage to Rochester is symbolic of Jane’s commitment to self-acceptance that frees her second self from the looking-glass in the red room. As a doppelgänger, Rochester provided a psychological conscience that encouraged Jane to release her passionate identity, showing her the life she could have had in an upside down universe, where she is male and of status, where there is equality under Victorian conventions. Acknowledging that Jane and Rochester come together by shedding the identities that society has reflected onto them or perhaps even predetermined for them, they enter life together as one at Ferndean in marriage. This is where Jane can finally be free to be herself; isolated from society in a place of nature with a man who has no other motive but to love her as his emotional, psychological, and spiritual equivalent.

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