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THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL RELIABILITY OF *JANE EYRE*:

The Narrating Self's Function in the Novel

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Abstract

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Abstract: The fact that Charlotte Brontë intended *Jane Eyre* as an autobiography is easily overlooked. Therefore, one tends to not take into account that the stated author Jane Rochester is technically both the main character and narrator of the story. That is why in this essay I separate the younger and older Jane, and focus solely on Jane Rochester's, the narrating self's, voice. More specifically, my aim is to determine where the narrating self is reliable or unreliable, and through that prove how the narrating self is trying to protect her pride and justify her decisions. By analysing the narrating self with the use of narratological and psychoanalytical concepts I have determined a possible reason for unreliability in the novel. This focus is interesting because not a great deal of research has been done regarding the narrating self, especially her unreliability and how she uses it to her advantage. These findings will hopefully highlight another way of looking at both the main narrator and the novel, and give a fresh perspective on a highly important book.

Keywords: Jane Eyre, Jane Rochester, Charlotte Brontë, narratology, psychoanalytic criticism, narrating self, unreliability, self-preservation

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1 Introduction

The autobiographical novel *Jane Eyre* (1847) is deeply complex, which is understandable for a deeply complex central character. Charlotte Brontë's multifaceted work is praised for being one of the first examples of a female-empowered rags-to-riches tale. By now, the novel has been dissected by different types of theories that frequently try to find Brontë in the story or to credit or discredit Jane Eyre as a feminist role model. However, it is fascinating, and not sufficiently researched, that Brontë chose to position herself only as a looming presence in the background, and instead depicted Jane (Eyre) Rochester – a fictional character – as writing her own story.

This makes Jane Rochester the stated author of the novel, an unofficial concept I will be using in this essay, which denotes that Jane is presented to the reader as the writer of her story.

Additionally, when the novel was released it was titled *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography*, a title that got lost in time, which further proves that Brontë intended Jane as the stated author of the work.

Even though the novel presents both the perspective of the younger Jane Eyre and the older Jane Rochester, it mostly maintains the young Jane's point-of-view from her time as a passionate ten-year-old at Gateshead to the woman that chooses to return to Thornfield and marry Rochester.

However, there are instances in the novel where the stated author addresses her readers directly and indirectly as well. More importantly, Brontë's choice to depict her novel solely from Jane's perspective bestows the readership with a number of peculiarities, and the one I find most interesting has to do with instances of misreporting done by the stated author, Jane Rochester – so how can the reader trust her?

First person narration is usually chosen when authors want their characters to retell, guide, or explain from their point-of-view how they got to a specific point in life. Since it offers the reader a very narrow perspective, first person narration brings with it an element of uncertainty and unreliability. That is why, when the fictional main character is consciously writing a book about her own life ten years after the last specific event of the novel it spurs on only more questions about trustworthiness. Therefore, the analysis in this essay will examine Jane as either a reliable or unreliable narrator in her stated autobiographical novel. In order to ascertain this, my research will try to answer the following questions: How does one know that

Jane's memories of her childhood are consistent? As far as the readers know, Jane did not keep a diary. How does one tackle her descriptions of characters and events, and are they unbiased? For example, I will be looking at the descriptions of Bertha's animalistic features and of the happy ending. What do the nature elements and supernatural elements of the novel mean? Why does Jane – the stated author – choose to use them? As far as the readers know, *Jane Eyre* is not set in some kind of parallel universe where magic exists. Hence, the aim of this paper is to present an approach which helps one understand whether Jane is reliable or unreliable, and through that prove how the stated author is guiding the reader in different sections of the novel to justify her actions and protect her pride – self-preservation.

To begin with, I have to explain and create a clear path for how I am going to distinguish the two versions of Jane in the novel. As Manette Reinitz Berlinger states: “Jane Eyre is a two-part invention: a protagonist's journey towards self-discovery and a narrator's memory of that experience” (110). Therefore, I will be using the terms, adopted by Cohn and Warhol, ‘the experiencing self’ and ‘the narrating self’. Firstly, there is Jane Eyre who is the experiencing self. In other words, she is the protagonist of the novel: “the experiencing self does more than see, in that she takes in more than visual information, as the heroine experiences stimuli of all the senses” (Warhol 863). Through most of the novel, it is Jane's experiencing self that is the focalizer in the story as it is happening in her world. However, there is also Jane Rochester, who is approximately in her thirties, writing her autobiography. She is the narrating self of the novel, which is defined as the main narrator of the story: “the narrating self does more than speak: she writes, textualizing the experiences she recalls retrospectively” (863). Hence, it is the narrating self that guides the story forward as the main narrator. Thus, by using these terms in the essay one can finally distinguish the two Janes, and better understand what their function is in the novel.

Looking at previous research, one can see that generally most scholars analyze Jane as simply Brontë's character throughout the different stages of her life (e.g. Dupras; Pell). Therefore, they do not tend to spend much time considering how reliable Jane, the narrating self, is, but rather focus on how “(un)true Jane Eyre” (Dupras 396), the experiencing self, is. Dupras, who even mentions Jane's position as a writer, still only focuses on the story within a story. Even though I do not share his point-of-view, I find that he missed a crucial opportunity, by not

considering narratology, to further his interpretation and argument that Jane is unreliable and corrupted.

On the other hand, there are some scholars who have considered the narrative aspect (e.g. Kneis; Warhol; Levy), but their focus is directed from the outside in. What I mean by this is that it is focused on style or theory regarding Brontë herself, not Jane as the stated author. The closest research regarding Jane's, the stated author's, narrative is Reinitz Berlinger's study. The study is a detailed close reading of Jane's presence in the novel. Even though the study complements my research, as we are both interested in Jane Rochester, I have a different interpretation and focal point. My focal point is based on separating the experiencing self and the narrating self, and then focusing specifically on the reliability of the narrating self. Reinitz Berlinger, additionally, bases a lot of her study on the linguistic and stylistic choices Brontë makes, which I chose not to do. Furthermore, she does not fully address the crucial aspect of the supernatural elements, which I find need to be considered further in relation to reliability. In general, questions regarding the reliability in *Jane Eyre* have only been slightly addressed in different essays, and often never fully examined. In contrast to the studies mentioned above, my essay will focus on the frame of the story and the key narrator, Jane Rochester – the stated author, and her reliability when looking at various aspects in the novel.

To fully comprehend the reliability of Jane, this paper will be divided into three sections. The first section will explain the theory and method that I will be using to analyze the novel. In the second section I will try to establish the voice of Jane, the narrating self, so that the presence of the narrator becomes clear for the continuation of the essay and the analysis. The third section is the main analysis of unreliability and it is divided into two subsections: reshaping memories and descriptions; and nature and supernatural elements. In these subsections I will be examining Jane's memories as a child and how she remembers them; her portrayal of other characters and events in the novel; and the use of nature and supernatural elements to further the story. Specifically, the purpose is to first establish some kind of base from where one can measure when the narrating self is reliable or unreliable, and then understand why she reshapes her story. Finally, at the end I will conclude by summarizing the content of the essay and hopefully showing how my aim to examine Jane Rochester's reliability and need for self-preservation has shed some new light on the novel.

2 Theory and Method

For the purpose of my study of *Jane Eyre* I will, through close reading, analyze the novel. Since I am interested in the reliability of the narrating self I will be using narrative theory as my main method. The first approach I am interested in is based on Gérard Genette's narrative theory. Genette's theory, which is influenced by the terminology of Tzvetan Todorov, is split up in three categories: tense, the relationship between time and order; aspect, the narrator's point-of-view; and mood, the narrator's discourse (Genette 29-30). Furthermore, Peter Barry has separated Genette's key concepts into six different areas to consider when analyzing the narrative: mimesis and diegesis; focalization; covert or overt narrator; time; frame narratives; and narrative of words: direct, indirect or tagged speech (222-31). The last two areas are not relevant for my study; however, I will be using the first four areas, which I will define below. Firstly, one can define the area of mimesis or diegesis as respectively the showing or telling of the text. Or, in other words, mimesis is "defined by a maximum of information and a minimum of the informer, diegesis by the opposite relationship" (Genette 166). Secondly, there is the definition of focalization, which has to be distinguished from narration (the function of telling the story). Focalization is the focus of narration: the "'viewpoint' or 'perspective', which is to say the point-of-view from which the story is told" (Barry 224) – focalization can be zero (common for omniscient narration), internal ("what the characters *think* and *feel*" (224)), or external (what the character *say* and *do*" (224)). The third area is the covert or overt narrator, which falls into a similar description as mimesis and diegesis. In other words, it has to do with the amount of intrusion or control of the narrator (Rimmon-Kenan 96). Lastly, there is time: "the relations of chronology between story and text" (44). That is, narrative time has to do with order, duration, and frequency of aspects of the novel. These 'tools' are going to help me analyze and explore the voice of Jane as the stated author, and how she structures her own story.

The second approach, and perhaps the most crucial one, I am applying is narrative reliability. A helpful definition of the term is given by Dan Shen: "In its narratological sense, unreliability is a feature of narratorial discourse. If a narrator misreports, -interprets or -evaluates, or if she/he underreports, -interprets or -evaluates, this narrator is unreliable or untrustworthy" (np.). Still, the term 'unreliable narrator' has been subjected to debate ever since

it was coined by Wayne C. Booth in 1961. The disagreements, which stem from how to define and use the concept, are split most commonly between two definitions. The first definition is that it is “a primarily moral and text-internal matter” (Hansen 227), which correlates with Booth’s definition. The second definition is that it is “a reader-dependent issue” (227), which falls in line with more modern post-classical narratology, for example, Ansgar Nünning’s approach. For the purpose of this essay, however, I am not distinguishing between the two approaches, but incorporating them together. Booth’s approach about excluding conscious liars out of his analysis and focusing on “[the] concept of *inconscience* [sic]; the narrator is mistaken, or he believes himself to have qualities that the author denies him” (229) actually corresponds well with Nünning’s position that one needs “some kind of semiosis, synthesis, or interpretation to determine the narrator to be unreliable” (235), which commonly is developed from the reader’s perspective. Yet, Genettian scholars do not consider reliability as a part of narrative discourse analysis. Genettians state reliability to be a “pre-narratological way of thinking” (Hansen 230) because it is focused on the story told and not how it was told. However, I believe that the classical and post-classical narratological approaches can definitely be combined. This could be done by using Genette’s ‘areas’ as the tool to examine the voice of Jane Rochester, while, with Shen’s definition in mind, using Booth’s and Nünning’s approaches to examine reliability.

Whether a narrator is reliable or unreliable is determined by voice, distance, and focalization according to Booth. Therefore, it is crucial to understand what type of person the narrator/character is; how close the narrator/character is to the story; and how the narrator/character feels about and views the world (Abbott 64-69). I agree with a great deal of Booth’s moral and text-internal approach, as well as the exclusion of conscious liars from the category of narrative reliability. However, Booth also believes that unreliability has to do with the narrator’s “deviating moral standard compared to that of the implied author” (Hanson 227). This is where I disagree, and agree with Hanson’s view that to assert that “unreliability is based on a deviation from the morals [...] of an implied author makes just about as much sense as claiming God to be responsible for our actions and doings” (233). By agreeing with Hanson that one cannot measure the reliability with the implied author, one is left with two choices: either unreliability is consciously selected by the real author, or unconsciously formed when looking to create a human narrator/character. This parallel of either conscious selection or unconscious formation applies to the narrator as well – whether a narrator is consciously unreliable when

choosing to deceive or unconsciously unreliable when confusing facts with feelings. For the purpose of my essay, what I am looking into is not a conscious deceiving unreliability, as suggested by Booth, but a narrator trying to tell her story with her dignity intact. In other words, I do not believe, nor do I see proof in the novel that the narrating self is continuously trying to deceive the reader, but that the questionable unreliability derives from a place of justifying her own actions to herself and others – protecting her pride. That is why this definition of unreliability corresponds with Nünning's reader-dependent approach that it is up to the reader to identify the morals and ethics of the time, and interpret, from the information and clues one receives from the narrator, the narrator's reliability. To conclude, in *Jane Eyre*, it is the stated author Jane – on the extradiegetic level – who holds the clues in the novel, and by excluding the aspect of conscious liars and including my interpretation of the narrating self I can start drawing my conclusions about Jane Rochester's reliability.

Furthermore, because I do not want to base my study purely on formalist theory, I will be drawing conclusions from psychoanalytic theory. This way I will not only look at the narratological aspects of unreliability but also the intention behind those elements in the novel. The use of psychoanalytic theory will be significantly beneficial in order to explain the reason for unreliability, because of its insight into the human psyche and impact on human actions. Specifically, Freud's concepts of "the conscious and the unconscious mind" (Barry 100) in relation to Jane will help me explain why she deviates from reliability in different places in the novel. For example, that she is consciously sincerely retelling her story, but at the same time her unconscious mind is working to protect her pride by reshaping and justifying events from her life. In conclusion, with narratology and psychoanalytic theory at my disposal, I will be able to first identify and then explain some of the reliability issues in the novel.

3 The Narrating Self's Voice

Before I can examine whether Jane Rochester is reliable or unreliable I have to establish when the narrating self is present. In the first ten chapters of the novel, it is Jane, the experiencing self, whose perspective the readers are faced with. Consequently, the narration is mostly internally focalized through the eyes of a ten-year-old. Therefore, it is important to find moments of variable focalization, of overt narration. In other words, it is important to reveal the rare occasions when the focalization moves from Jane the experiencing self to Jane the narrating self. This change in focalization is highly significant when determining the reliability of the narrating self's memories, since the novel is stated to be written ten years after the fact of the last event in the story. Furthermore, the ability to recall a ten-year-old's traumatic experiences objectively is doubtful. The uncertain credibility of a ten-year-old further ascertains the importance to find the voice of the stated author of the novel – Jane Rochester.

Instances of overt narration, where Jane the narrating self is present, are addressed to the reader either directly or subtly, but the narrating self's voice is always there to guide the reader along. Thus, when the voice of the narrating self is present it is frequently done through diegesis, most commonly on an extradiegetic level. In contrast, the young Jane, the experiencing self, is the one that generally communicates through mimesis, since she is for the most part the focalizer in the story. As a result, the novel is a balancing act of descriptions presented through diegesis and mimesis. The easiest way to find the voice of the narrating self is in diegetic moments that are addressed outward – toward the reader. Most commonly the narrating self is addressing the reader in sections of explanation, transition, foreshadowing, or when seeking affirmation.

Clear examples of Jane, the narrating self, directly addressing the reader are inserted during specific moments, like mentioned above, of explanation: “in those days, reader, this now narrow catalogue of accomplishments, would have been held tolerably comprehensive” (Brontë 75); conversational transition: “You are not to suppose, reader, that Adèle has all this time been sitting motionless on the stool at my feet: no; when the ladies entered, she rose” (151); in the guise of a playwright transition: “A new chapter in a novel is something like a new scene in a play; and when I draw up the curtain this time, reader, you must fancy you see a room in the George Inn at Millcote” (80); or in search for affirmation: “I had not intended to love him; the

reader knows I had wrought hard to extirpate from my soul the germs of love there detected” (153). All these elements will be further expanded in the paragraphs below.

Firstly, one can examine the subtle occasions Jane, the narrating self, addresses the reader. For example, when she is seeking the reader’s affirmation in chapter two, when thrown into the red room as a punishment for quarrelling with her cousin John Reed. Even though Jane forgives Mrs. Reed at her deathbed later on in the book, there is no forgiveness by the narrating self for how she was treated in her youth. When describing great injustice, as believed by the ten-year-old girl, the narrating self addresses why she suffered as a child: “– *why* I thus suffered; now, at the distance of – I will not say how many years, I see it clearly” (Brontë 10). After this insert by the narrating self follows a paragraph describing and explaining how she was different from the Reeds, “a heterogeneous thing” (10). In conclusion, she divulges that if she only had “been a sanguine, brilliant, careless, exacting, handsome, romping child ... Mrs Reed would have endured my presence more ...; the servants would have been less prone to make me the scapegoat of the nursery” (10-11). Hence, by the narrating self inserting commentary and seeking affirmation she makes the reader pity the young girl, or as Pell describes she urges “us to give our sympathy and encouragement to the child who resists and defies [the adults]” (402). In conclusion, the intentions of the narrating self in this chapter function not only as a way to further the story as she had envisioned it but also to subtly seek affirmation for her actions as a child.

Another example where the narrating self is present to further the story can be found in chapter nine. Here the narrating self foreshadows that the joy is not going to last. The young Jane, the experiencing self, has just described a warm May day that she enjoyed at the Lowood School for girls. Following the description there is a small paragraph which is presented diegetically by the narrating self: “Have I not described a pleasant site for a dwelling, when I speak of it as bosomed in hill and wood, and rising from the verge of a stream? Assuredly, pleasant enough: but whether healthy or not is another question” (Brontë 65). The overt manner of narration in this section proves that it is clearly the narrating self’s voice. The first sentence – the question – is directed outward. The question asks the reader if she recollected her memory pleasantly, if the reader is at ease? As indicated in the second sentence with “whether healthy or not,” there is something dark coming. In other words, the narrating self foreshadows that there is

an impending outbreak of typhus at the school and soon those pleasant days would become filled with sorrow and sickness.

There are also longer paragraphs that show typical signs of overt narration and where the diegesis is used in transitioning the story. In chapter ten Jane, the narrating self, decides to jump over eight years of the story and transitions into her leaving of Lowood and journeying to Thornfield. The focalization in the first two pages of chapter ten is purely by the narrating self, which is uncommon and only occurs in one other location – the end of the novel, which will be analyzed in the next chapter. Furthermore, in the two-page summary of her time at Lowood, the voice of the narrating self undoubtedly comes through and can be found in multiple paragraphs. For example, the voice rings out in the first sentence of the chapter: “Hitherto I have recorded in detail the events of my insignificant existence” (Brontë 71). This sentence and the following paragraph overtly explain what has and will happen. Other sentences in the following paragraphs such as “which I discharged with zeal for two years: but at the end of that time I altered” (72), and “to the eyes of others, usually even to my own, I appeared a disciplined and subdued character” (72) turn slowly vaguer. However, the subtle uses of words such as “end of that time” or “even to my own, I appeared” confirm that it is not the experiencing self speaking, but the narrating self. The reason for such a large section of Jane Rochester narrating is crucial as the transition break brings with it a massive change in the story and in the character’s existence. That is to say the narrating self is presenting her transitioning from a girl into a woman.

In the end, the voice of Jane, the narrating self, is most dominant in sections where she needs to guide the reader to see the story the way Jane wants one to experience it. Hence, it is mostly found in explanations, transitions, foreshadowings, and when seeking affirmation that also further the story.

4 The Elements of Questionable Reliability

The ways Jane, the narrating self, guides the story can be both reliable and unreliable. Based on the theory and examples explored in the previous two sections, one can start to ascertain whether she is one or the other. Since she is guiding the story there is an assumption that she has an authoritative grasp of the truth. However, finding reliability in a novel is more complex than just accepting the authority of the narrator. In the previous chapter I established that the narrating self is clearly present in the novel. Furthermore, the narrating self's voice is usually found during sections of explanation, transition, foreshadowing, and when seeking affirmation. These sections can most often be found in chapters of emotional distress or elation. In this section, I will be focusing mostly on the questionable reliability of explanations, transitions, and foreshadowing. My aim is to determine whether Jane, the narrating self, is reliable or unreliable, and what purpose the reliability or unreliability serves for the telling of the story.

4.1 Reshaping Memories and Descriptions

The sections with questionable reliability are those that contain the largest number of explanations – Jane's childhood. Therefore, one has to look into: How does one know that Jane's memories of her childhood are consistent? The main goal is to resolve or at least highlight where reasons for doubt dominate. The consistency and reliability of Jane's childhood memories can be summarized in one sentence, which is expressed by the narrating self in chapter three: "Children can feel, but they cannot analyse their feelings; and if the analysis is partially effected in thought, they know not how to express the result of the process in words" (Brontë 18). This sentence is a considerable clue in understanding the first couple of chapters of *Jane Eyre*. If young children cannot comprehend and express their feelings eloquently, then the sections in the novel that are too rational for a young child are most likely in the words of the older Jane. So in those instances the focalization transitions from the experiencing self to the narrating self. Henceforth, the story is narrated through the passive filtration of memories and emotions by the narrating self in order to coherently relate her childhood memories as a storyteller. Carol Bock agrees that there is a correlation between Jane being a storyteller and the motif of storytelling within Jane's narrative. She writes that efficient storytelling is a skill which one has to learn, a process Jane needed to

adapt to since she had to go up against people who would try to invalidate her experiences (102). In fact, there is an instance in the novel where young Jane is recounting her childhood to Miss Temple in chapter eight after she has been accused by Mr. Brocklehurst of being a liar: “I resolved, in the depth of my heart, that I would be most moderate – most correct ... I infused into the narrative far less of gall and wormwood than ordinary. Thus restrained and simplified, it sounded more credible” (Brontë 60). This lesson of restraint is something that is fairly new and an unusual characteristic for young Jane. For the first time, the readers are able to see a more composed Jane, that has the ability to process her feelings eloquently into words and lead the story. In other words, in Freudian terms, from that point on Jane represses her passionate nature through the process of sublimation to the advantage of the more collected features one finds in her late teenage years in order to protect herself from punishment and judgement. Therefore, when coming across instances of a more rational and eloquent Jane earlier in the novel, one can largely assume that they are additions by the narrating self. Hence, one can start to have an idea of what is reliable or unreliable in Jane’s childhood by the amount of reshaping of memories done by the narrating self in order to protect herself.

There is another crucial question relating to reliability, which concerns the explanations of characters – descriptions. Given that the descriptions in first person narrative are from a subjective perspective they produce a narrow picture and could raise doubts. Therefore, it is important to look into Jane’s depiction of characters, to see whether they are unbiased. The consistency of character descriptions in *Jane Eyre* follow pretty much the same pattern. They are frequently set in blocks, where Jane describes what she sees and how she perceives a person. Most of the descriptions are a bit complicated when trying to determine if they are focalized by Jane the experiencing self or Jane the narrating self, especially since there is not a clear distinction for either case. Nevertheless, the overtness of the detailed observation and scrutinizing tone is very interesting. Each description is fueled with Jane’s overt narration and opinion of the character. Kneis suggests that “we are not forced to accept her [Jane’s] feelings simply because they are hers; her friends and foes are presented in such a way that we can accept or reject them on the basis of their actions” (553). However, I do not fully agree with this. The way the descriptions are presented is through a narrow point-of-view by Jane, and there is no other presence that could give an objective view. As mentioned above, the descriptions are biased, and they are either fueled with admiration (Rochester), jealousy (Miss Ingram), or hate

(Mr. Brocklehurst). Moreover, and most peculiarly, there is the description of Bertha, or more specifically the description of an animalistic woman. By following Kneis's view of the descriptions, one either accepts Bertha as a woman who is part animal, as presented by Jane, or rejects Jane's view and chooses to base the opinion on Bertha's "actions" in the novel: actions that do not portray her as anything other than an animal locked up in a tower (e.g. see the quote below). Kneis's theory contradicts itself in this case, because Jane's description only leaves one with an image of an animal. Therefore, one cannot, in Bertha's case, justly perceive the character based on her nature or actions, because she is solely narrated and focalized by Jane, whether it is the narrating self or the experiencing self. In contrast to the other characters, the character of Bertha never speaks. She is heavily underreported and misreported in the novel. The few instances when Jane describes Bertha are mostly by comparing her to some devilish animal: "This was a demoniac laugh – low, suppressed, and deep" (Brontë 129); "I heard thence a snarling, snatching sound, almost like a dog quarrelling" (183); and in more detail in chapter twenty-six when she officially meets her for the first time:

[A] figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it growled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing, and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face. (258)

As a consequence, the image of Bertha, as a "clothed hyena" (259), conveyed to the reader is highly blemished. The description offered is of a savage animal, and not of a very ailing woman. The first couple of descriptions could be overlooked since they are coming from ignorance and describe sound not visuals. However, the last description comes after Rochester has revealed the story about his mad wife in the church. The narrating self has at that point both a backstory and all of her senses present when choosing to portray Bertha as a thing rather than a woman. In addition, the narrating self carries with her the death of Bertha in the back of her mind and still presents this point-of-view. The portrayal simply attests that it is fueled by Jane's feelings regarding the character and not at all objective. Therefore, this proves that the description of Bertha is not just unreliable, but also unjustifiable. Perhaps, one can state that this is the only place in the novel where the narrating self is truly unfair and cruel in order to protect her own subjectivity, to attain a happy ending, by trying to rationalize and convince the reader that this biased view is reasonable.

The concluding chapter is probably the best example when it comes to analyzing unreliability, because there are so many gaps and overcompensations that come with this transition break. It is presented as one long “happy ending,” truly a chapter to tell the readers that the princess got her prince and will live happily ever after. In addition, the chapter acknowledges that Jane did not lose her dignity in the process, and that the choice to marry the prince is not an example of conformity. Now, once the reader has ‘understood’ the intent here, one can truly question the details of the happy ending. For example, the narrating self affirms that her marriage is equal by comparing it to a “perfect concord” (Brontë 399). This concord is not only associated with Jane’s marriage, but the narrating self associates it with Mary’s and Diana’s marriages as well: “[Their husbands] love their wives, and are loved by them” (400). As a result, one can see attempts to solidify the reader’s belief in the happy ending. However, there is a very good point made by Dupras: “Instead of balancing ‘He loved me’ with ‘I loved him,’ she [Jane] says, ‘He loved me ... he felt I loved him’; this syntactic mismatch suggests some discrepant ideas” (405). It highlights, as psychoanalysts would suggest, “contradictory undercurrents” (Barry 110) of the happy ending. In other words, there is a subconscious meaning underneath the conscious text. In the paragraph where this sentence belongs, the narrating self tells the readers about the first two years of marriage, and how she needed to take care of Rochester because he was blind. Her duties entailed reading to him, guiding him, and helping him in whatever wishes he had. Jane had to some degree become Rochester’s nurse, bound to him in every aspect. This is a role she fought against: “they[women] suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation” (Brontë 95). In other words, being bound to Rochester as simply his nurse could not make her happy. It perhaps did not make her resent him, because Jane loves him and is a loyal person; however, more than loyal, Jane is proud. This is why, the amount of happy adjectives poured out in the paragraph strikes one as artificial and clearly an act of preservation of pride. Consequently, it fails to support the reliability of the happy ending. The concluding chapter may strain the consistency of the novel, but it is clearly there to transition into the happy ending of the story as the narrating self imagines it.

In contrast, perhaps the clearest aspects of reliability stem from Jane’s earlier days with Mr. Rochester. Those chapters are infused with their conversations and the experiencing self’s feelings. The facts seem clear, since the narrating self does not interrupt that often, nor does she intrude with additional explanations. The narrating self is more covert and the focus is on the

experiencing self. Hence, such moments in the novel seem more reliable, since the stated author is simply painting and expressing her own young love, which she holds dear.

In conclusion, the instances of unreliability are, therefore, most prevalent in the novel when the narrating self tries to repress her own passionate nature, and present a more composed character; when she is unable to separate her feelings and present an objective perspective, even in older age; as well as when she is maintaining her pride. Thus, unreliability can be found when the narrating self attempts to shape the story the way she envisions it and present a specific persona to the reader.

4.2 Nature and Supernatural Elements

Thus far, I have established when the voice of the stated author, Jane, is present, and when one can question her reliability. The next step here is to look into the nature and supernatural aspects of the novel. I have separated this section from the one of reshaping memories and descriptions, because in contrast to Jane's memories, which coincide with a realistic autobiography – the nature elements and supernatural elements are by default unreliable since the novel is not stated to be set in a world where magic exists, and thus need to be separately and more closely examined. If I was looking into Brontë's authorship and her writing style, I would be more interested in the artistic choice and influence of the time period – the Gothic conventions. However, even though I acknowledge that the time period is probably a crucial reason for the inclusions of Gothic elements in the novel, I am more interested in what purpose they serve for the narrating self. For example, both the nature elements and the supernatural elements foreshadow events to come and represent Jane's feelings, and through that try to justify her decisions. As a matter of fact, they complement each other, because the eeriness and force of the nature elements in turn provide the possibility for supernatural elements to occur, in order to further the same subconscious story. When examining these elements, I will be looking into questions such as: What do the nature and the supernatural elements of the novel mean? Why does Jane – the stated author – choose to use them? More precisely, my aim is to further prove that Jane, the stated author, uses these elements as a tool for self-preservation, specifically the preservation of her pride.

The nature elements are a reflection of Jane Rochester, the narrating self, because they both foreshadow and guide the story. The clearest example of nature foreshadowing is represented in the split of the old horse-chestnut tree in chapter twenty-three, which is a metaphor for Jane and Rochester's relationship. After the joyous proposal, which propels the reader towards a happy ending, the voice of the narrating self interrupts with:

But what had befallen the night? The moon was not yet set, and we were all in shadows ... And what ailed the chestnut tree? it[sic] writhed and groaned; while wind roared in the laurel walk, and came sweeping over us. 'We must go in,' said Mr. Rochester: 'the weather changes. I could have sat with thee till morning, Jane.' 'And so,' thought I, 'could I with you.' I should have said so, perhaps, but a livid, vivid spark leapt out of a cloud at which I was looking, and there was a crack, a crash, and a close rattling peal (Brontë 225)

The change of weather foreshadows the deception of the marriage proposal, especially since it occurs after Rochester murmurs about leaving himself to be judged by only God and defying man's opinion. As mentioned in chapter three of this essay, it is this type of foreshadowing, the breakup of something joyous and the implication that something dark is approaching, that is a pattern with the voice of the narrating self. Additionally, Jane's overt indecisiveness and contradictory inner thoughts dictate this section. It seems as if nature distracts her from truly accepting something that she knows is wrong. Before Rochester's murmurs, the narrating self does mention that "if I had loved him less I should have thought his accent and look of exultation savage" (225). This proves that she found something odd about the proposal, and that nature mirrors her recklessness which interrupts her evaluation of the situation. Therefore, one could assume that this recklessness goes against the strong independent persona the narrating self tries to create. She is simply using the nature elements to excuse her lapse of judgement. In other words, this questions the reliability, because it can be seen as an attempt by the narrating self to justify herself.

Perhaps the most questionable section regarding the narrating self's use of nature can be seen in chapter twenty-five: when Rochester is away on a trip and Jane is haunted by dreams and visited by Bertha who shreds her veil in the night. The narrating self prepares the reader early on in the chapter with: "Stay till he comes, reader: and, when I disclose my secret to him, you shall share the confidence" (Brontë 243). Thus, there is an allusion to something important that is to come, but also to the fact that this chapter has a heavy presence of overt narration by the

narrating self. Nature's role is represented in metaphors that are supposed to mirror Jane's, the experiencing self's, feelings and foreshadow the despair that is about to befall. The amount of detailed descriptions of the gloomy weather, the wind which blew strong from the south, or the red moon that covers herself with dark clouds clearly reflect the fear the experiencing self is harboring. This suggests to the reader, who so far has no knowledge of Bertha, that there is a force from the south (Caribbean) coming, the south winds; and that there is someone in the shadows covering themselves, the red moon hiding from Jane. Another example of metaphorical descriptive importance in the chapter is the paragraphs regarding the chestnut tree: "the trunk, split down the center [...] The cloven halves were not broken from each other, for the firm base and strong roots kept them unsundered below" (243) The importance of that tree is that it is a metaphor for Jane and Rochester's relationship, and once again, the narrating self is clearly foreshadowing the split between them. However, the narrating self implies hope and support in that their base and roots are strong enough to keep them connected to each other. The use of these nature metaphors clearly benefits and encourages the reader to sympathize with Jane, and enhances the reader's wariness before she discloses her secret– the unofficial meeting with Bertha – to both them and Rochester. This seems extremely planned, by default not as real, and one is reminded of Jane's acquired skill as a storyteller at Lowood. Hence, the repetitive uses of nature as a storytelling tool become questionable with regard to reliability. Consequently, the intent of the storytelling is to make sure that the reader is constantly engaged and emotionally invested. In other words, the narrating self is making sure that the reader is on her side, because she might need to justify her actions soon (the revelation of Bertha) in order to protect herself from disgrace and to protect her pride. On the other hand, it is successful in guiding the story and enlightening the reader about the intense feelings that the experiencing self goes through.

As with the forms of nature, the supernatural elements are also used to justify Jane's actions in the story. In other words, they reflect Jane's emotions and help to guide the reader in the narrating self's intended direction. The supernatural elements in *Jane Eyre* occur in two crucial moments: when Jane is haunted by a light in the red room and when she hears Mr. Rochester calling for her. Despite the fact that both moments refer to something supernatural, they are rather different. The red room scene is not as mysterious as Rochester's voice traveling miles to find Jane. However, both of these moments transpire during intensely stressful situations for the experiencing self. They are situations that indeed need guiding, because both of them are

crucial to the life changing events that occur thereafter: Jane faints in the red room, sees a doctor, confronts her aunt Reed for all the neglect she has been feeling, and eventually gets sent off to Lowood School for girls; and after Rochester's call Jane realizes she loves him, despite the deception and the mad wife, and decides to go back to Thornfield. Hence, these supernatural occurrences are crucial aspects which further the story. Still, only one of the examples goes against the persona set up by the narrating self and could be deemed unreliable.

In case of the first example, the red room, the immense fear the experiencing self feels about being locked in a room where her uncle had died is valid and could cause all kinds of delusions for a young child. As mentioned earlier, in section 4.1, young children have a hard time expressing their thoughts and feelings. This is why one has to examine other clues provided in chapter one and two of the novel in order to understand the meaning of the event. Looking at the family dynamic, one could assume that the events that transpire in chapter one are common in the Reed household. Furthermore, being punished by Mrs. Reed would not be uncommon, and being locked up in the red room would be the ultimate punishment. This gives a sense of familiarity and reliability. The reason I believe the event is reliable is because the additional trepidation and imagery distortion could be caused by an accumulation of triggers: "John Reed's violent tyrannies, all his sisters' proud indifference, all his mother's aversion, all the servants' partiality, turned up in my disturbed mind like a dark deposit" (Brontë 10). In other words, the child had reached her point of agitation. Additionally, the event of the haunting light comes right after the experiencing self has been thinking about her uncle; these are thoughts that clearly indicate that she terribly misses a parental figure, since the current parental figure, Mrs. Reed, has let her down. This understandably brings the notion of his spirit to her consciousness and makes her imagine all kinds of things in her fragile state. Moreover, the narrating self suggests to the reader what could have been the mysterious light that frightened her: "I can now conjecture readily that this streak of light was, in all likelihood, a gleam from a lantern ... prepared as my mind was for horror, shaken as my nerves were for agitation, I thought the swift darting beam was a herald of some coming vision from another world" (12). This realistic clarification proves that Jane is not trying to reshape the memory of her childhood, as opposed to what I mention in section 4.1. Even though the narrating self does intervene and guides the story here, there is nothing she tries to justify, nor is there anything that goes against her character, which gives the event reliability.

The second example of the supernatural, when Jane hears Mr. Rochester's voice calling her name "Jane! Jane! Jane!" (Brontë 371), also happens during immense pressure: in this case, the question of whether or not to accept John Rivers's marriage proposal. In the first example Jane, the narrating self, offers a straightforward clarification as to where the delusion of supernatural elements derives from. However, in this example she gives, even ten years later, multiple questionable explanations of what it could have been: "[The cry] 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[sic] impossible to know!" (371). Then she adds in the next chapter that "[The voice] seemed in *me* – not in the external world" (373). This once again suggests contradictory undercurrents – the mismatch of the language between "impossible to know" and "seemed in me." Firstly, the use of "for ever[sic] impossible" indicates that this is the narrating self addressing the reader. Secondly, as the narrating self consciously states that it is "impossible to know," even ten years later, she unconsciously tells the readers that they are not meant to know. However, just a chapter later she tells the reader that it was an inner calling. Additionally, later on in the novel she even offers up Rochester's explanation of the cry – that he indeed did cry out for her at the specific time she heard him and that he heard her response as well. Yet, even with this information Jane chooses not to disclose her own experience to Rochester for supposedly the fear of his fragile mind. This makes one wonder if he ever, during the ten years together, gets to hear about this crucial supernatural event that brought them back together; or does the narrating self simply use his story and creates a supernatural element of destiny in her autobiography? I do not believe that Jane actually heard Rochester calling her name, but that it was intuition. As evident in the experiencing self's plea in the former paragraph: "'Show me, show me the path!' I entreated of Heaven" (371), she is asking for some kind of sign. This action is something that is recurrent in the novel. Jane asks, throughout the novel, either nature or a higher power for guidance multiple times. These entreaties occur always in transitioning moments – when she was leaving Gateshead; when she was looking for a new position at Lowood; when she found out about Bertha and decided to leave Thornfield; and when she was on the run from Thornfield and found Moor House. In those moments of transition, the narrating self can be found, as I have already explained in chapter three of this essay. The next aspect to examine is whether the calling as a transitioning instigator is unreliable – is she repressing her nature, letting her emotions cloud an

objective perspective, or maintaining her pride, as seen in section 4.1? Through the consistency of the experiencing self asking a higher power and receiving some kind of answer, intuitive answer, one can assume that she is not repressing her nature. However, because Jane depends upon a higher power as a tool during transitions, one can question whether she feels comfortable in her own decision making. In other words, is Jane both letting her emotions cloud her judgement and trying to maintain her pride? Judging by the urge the narrating self has for self-preservation, it is not unlikely for her to put the responsibility for her decisions on a supernatural force. Finally, there is no doubt that Jane's intuition led her to certain paths, and Bernard Yeazell states this beautifully: "the mysterious summons is an outward sign of that inner readiness" (129). Thus, it is very doubtful that there was a supernatural element in play, but very probable that the metaphorical meaning of the supernatural element is used as a tool for self-preservation.

In conclusion when analyzing a proud and idealistic narrator like Jane, one can agree that the actions taken throughout her life have not always honored her younger self's ideals. However, the instances of unreliability are not meant to be deceiving, they are a human's desperate effort to protect herself to the point of adding nature and supernatural elements to explain or obscure decisions and events. Specifically, these efforts point to a strategy of self-preservation.

4 Conclusion

In summary, the main aim of this essay was to assess Jane Rochester's reliability by looking at her childhood memories, descriptions of characters, the happy ending, nature elements, and supernatural elements. I hope one can see now that Jane's unreliability is connected to the preservation of her pride. Jane's quest for self-preservation can be noticed when the narrating self is guiding the story and asserting a specific persona, and more specifically in instances of explanations, transitions, foreshadowing and when seeking affirmation. Hence, as established in the essay, Jane is not always a reliable narrator and the elements mentioned above are significant to further the story in the intended direction of the narrating self.

Since Brontë chose Jane as the stated author of the novel, her voice is highly important, and the focus should fall on that narrative voice. Many critics have previously considered the qualities of Jane Eyre, the experiencing self, but rarely of Jane Rochester, the narrating self. However, that is precisely why unreliability of the narrating self is an interesting aspect to research. Furthermore, as I have demonstrated in this essay, by combining Genette's 'areas' to examine the narrating self's voice; Booth's and Nünning's approaches to determine reliability; and keeping in mind the amount of misreporting or underreporting in the novel, one can get a sense of the reason behind the narrating self's reliability.

My hope is that this essay will offer a fresh assessment of a novel that is part of the literary canon. For further research I believe that one can focus on the details of nature and supernatural elements even more, which was difficult to do in this essay. That is why the next step would be to either further analyze the narrating self, or apply the same narratological approach to other similar autobiographical novels.

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