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In her novel Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë established several elements that are still components of many modern novels, including a working, plain female hero, a depiction of the hero's childhood, and a new awareness of sexuality. Alongside these new elements, Brontë also engineered a new type of male hero in Edward Rochester. As Jane is written as a plain female hero with average looks, Rochester is her plain male hero counterpart. Although Brontë depicts Rochester as a severe, yet appealing hero, embodying the characteristics associated with Byron's heroes, she nevertheless slightly alters those characteristics. Brontë characterizes Rochester as a Byronic hero, but alters his characterization through repentance to create a new type of character: the repentant Byronic hero.*

The Byronic Hero, a character type based on Lord Byron's own characters, is typically identified by unflattering albeit alluring features and an arrogant although intelligent personality. This character is usually an anti-hero who has committed a great crime for which he may feel guilt, but for which he has not repented since he feels he is above societal or spiritual law. Famous Byronic heroes in literature include Heathcliff from *Wuthering Heights* and Edmond Dantes from *The Count of Monte Cristo*. In his book, *The Byronic Hero: Types and Prototypes*, Peter Thorslev summarizes some general characteristics of a Byronic hero:

> The Byronic Hero . . . is invariably courteous toward women, often loves music or poetry, has a strong sense of honor, and carries about with him like the brand of Cain a deep sense of guilt. He is almost invariably sympathetic in spite of his 'crimes,' none of which involve unnecessary cruelty. (8)

A Byronic hero is a man who is honorable and intelligent, but one who has made a mistake in the past and still carries that burden. As Thorslev points out, these past sins do not make a Byronic hero any less sympathetic; rather the mistakes can serve as a humanizing factor.

Brontë uses this template of Byron's to create the character of Mr. Rochester. Jane's first description of Rochester occurs when she meets him on his horse. She does not realize that this man is her employer, however, and honestly tells the reader of his unflattering appearance, noting his "dark face, with stern features and a heavy brow" (Brontë 120). Later, in fact, when Rochester asks her

himself if she finds him handsome, Jane bluntly answers that she does not (137), therefore proving that Rochester fulfills the appearance of the Byronic hero. Rochester continues to uphold the stereotype of the Byronic hero through his characteristics of arrogance and independence. As Nancy Pell points out, Rochester "continues to play the role of master not only with his household servants but toward all men and women" (82), as is evidenced by the authoritative role he takes in his relationships with Adele, his young ward, and Mr. Mason, his brother-in-law, neither servants of his, although both treated as though he is their master. He thinks himself above other and depends on no one else for anything. As he explains to Jane:

> I flatter myself I am hard and tough as an Indian-rubber ball; pervious, though, through a chink or two still, and with one sentient point in the middle of the lump. Yes: does that leave hope for me? . . . Of my final re-transformation from Indian-rubber ball back to flesh? (138)

Rochester uses the example of the Indian-rubber ball to explain that he is not a soft, lovable, warm person. He has a rough exterior and is not "flesh" anymore. But as he makes note of "one sentient point in the middle," he alludes to the fact that he has the potential to transform back into a person again, while also indicating that he was once a compassionate person. This self-awareness conveys Rochester as a man aware of his guilt and one who is beginning to look for a means of repentance.

Brontë further depicts Rochester as a Byronic hero by portraying him as a man burdened with a great sin of his past for which he has not yet repented. This great sin with which Rochester is burdened is rejecting his wife due to her insanity and falsely maintaining his status as a wealthy bachelor. Rather than accepting his mistake and repenting for it, Rochester, instead, buries his past mistake by locking his mad wife within his house: "Far from desiring to publish the connection, I became anxious to conceal it . . . and saw her safely lodged in that third story room of whose secret inner cabinet she has now for ten years made a wild beast's den" (305). Rochester represses Bertha into an innermost room in his manor in order to hide his crime. In this passage, he compares his wife to a wild beast, implying that she is not a wife, but more of an animal, and thus, he cannot be held responsible for his crime, as he does not consider himself to be married. But as Rochester committed the sin against Bertha in locking her up and ignoring her as his wife, he also commits a sin against Jane by attempting to marry her while legally married to another. This marriage between Jane and Rochester would have never been legal, and Jane would have essentially become another one of Rochester's mistresses. Again, Rochester has tried to place himself beyond the constraints of conventional laws. When confronted in the church, he admits his arrogance and his defeat: "Bigamy is an ugly word! —I meant, however, to be a bigamist: but fate has outmaneuvered me; or Providence has checked me" (288). He acknowledges he would have been a bigamist, and he would have willingly been leading Jane into a false marriage. Rochester commits crimes against both Bertha and Jane, although he does not see himself as at fault in Bertha's case. As Gail Griffin writes, "Rochester spends a great deal of energy blaming his fate, his family, his women for his predicament, rather than accepting it, painful and unjust though it is" (123). His movement from the typical Byronic hero to Brontë's modified Byronic hero is a result of his repentance, as the typical Byronic hero does not atone for his sin.

Brontë begins Rochester's transformation to his new repentant self by first altering his appearance and his moral characteristics. When Jane was with her relatives, the Rivers, Rochester suffered injuries attempting to save Bertha and the other residents of Thornfield when it was burning down: "He was taken out from under the ruins, alive, but badly hurt:…one hand so crushed that the surgeon had to amputate it directly. The other eye inflamed: he lost the sight of that also. He is now helpless, indeed—blind and a cripple" (418). Rochester's injury is not only interpreted differently by various critics, but also by those who have adapted the book to film. In Franco Zeffirelli's 1996 film adaptation, as well as in Cary Fukunaga's more recent 2011 adaptation, Rochester is blinded, but does not lose his hand. This detail is a crucial one to some critics as dismemberment of a man's hand may symbolize a loss of masculinity. Critics Richard Chase and Martin Day suggest the blinding and the maiming symbolize Rochester's castration. Chase argues, "the faculty of vision…is often identified in the unconscious with the energy of sex. When Rochester had tried to make love to Jane, she had felt a 'fiery hand grasp at her vitals;' the hand then must be cut off" (58). When Jane returns and finds Rochester blind and crippled, she realizes that he has become dependent and needs help from her. Prior to his injury, Jane depended on him, but now Rochester is in a position of weakness and therefore, his arrogance has disappeared, as is evidenced when he admits he has now learned to accept help from others: "Hitherto I have hated to be helped—to be led: henceforth, I feel, I shall hate it no more." (434) Before Jane left, Rochester would call her demeaning pet names, such as "my little darling" (297) and would belittle her intelligence; here, he abandons his superiority and arrogance and sees them as equals, thus becoming a new type of Byronic hero that evolves and learns from his past.

Rochester finally becomes a new type of Byronic hero when he repents for his sins against both Bertha and Jane. In order to fully atone for his sins, Rochester must not only make peace

with the two women, but with God as well, so he begins to pray for forgiveness: "Of late, Jane—only—only of late—I began to see and acknowledge the hand of God in my doom. I began to experience remorse, repentance; the wish for reconcilement to my Maker. I began sometimes to pray: very brief prayers they were, but very sincere" (435). Thus, by acknowledging the higher power above himself, Rochester concedes that he is not above any sort of law and repents for his previous inflated sense of self. Rochester then repents for his sins towards Bertha during the fire at Thornfield. He risked his own life to save her, not a beast he held in his house, but his wife whose life he valued. Although he failed in his attempt, he nevertheless sacrificed his own life and suffered injuries from it. Concerning Rochester's relationship with Bertha, Nancy Pell suggests,

> There is indeed a grim justice in the fact that Rochester's only instance of open, public involvement with Bertha comes at the moment of his physical crippling…Bertha is the psychological symbol of Edward Rochester's repressed awareness of his true social situation. (82)

The moment Rochester accepts Bertha as his wife and learns to accept his past is the moment that Rochester is freed from the burden and the restrictions of the typical Byronic hero. Bertha represents his true social standing as a second son forced to marry to maintain his situation, rather than his present façade of a wealthy bachelor. Now that he no longer carries guilt of the past, however, he can become the repentant hero that belongs with Jane. For as Day notes, "Only when he had suffered for his sins by maiming and disfigurement, only when his sins had been burnt away and his nature had achieved a transforming wholesomeness, only then could he be united with his true love" (499). Jane hears Rochester call out to her on a night when he needs her, after he has made peace with God, and after he has been relieved of the burden of his past. It is only when all these conditions have been met and Rochester has become the repentant Byronic hero that the two lovers are able to reunite at last.

When Jane and Rochester are reunited, however, there must be some change in the dynamic of their relationship before they can be married. During their first engagement, the two were not equal in their relationship, Rochester being the superior, and Jane the inferior. Rochester had money and land, while Jane was a young girl with nothing and no connections. When she finds Rochester at Ferndean, however, their positions have changed; Jane now has money and family, while Rochester has lost Thornfield as well as his sight and his hand. Mark Schorer suggests that Rochester's injuries subdued his sexuality and therefore have removed the last barrier between Jane and Rochester (63). Jane and Rochester are now equals in their relationship. When Jane says to Rochester, "'I love you better now, when I can really be useful to you, than I did in your state of proud independence, when you disdained every part but that of the giver and protector'" (434), it becomes apparent that she felt inferior before, but now feels as though he needs her as much as she needs him. Now that Jane has been elevated in monetary status, and Rochester "has risen so far towards Jane's moral rank that he has even begun to pray," (Craig 62), they are now perfectly suitable for each other and will have a happy, albeit flawed, marriage.

To suit her changing female hero, Charlotte Brontë needed to create a new type of male hero. Brontë used the character archetype of Byron's hero as a basis to construct the character of Edward Rochester. Brontë's redesign of the Byronic hero as repentant allows for the social balance to shift between the hero and heroine. Jane loves Rochester, but in order to have equality between them, he must repent and admit some inferiority. Rochester is a Byronic hero; he exemplifies the characteristic traits of an unflattering albeit alluring appearance, intelligence, arrogance, and an unwillingness to adhere to social and spiritual laws. Rochester then evolves as a character and repents for his past sins, altering from the stereotypical traits of Byronic heroes. This act of repentance, however, and the change in Rochester, is what allows Rochester and Jane to become compatible. Prior to his seeking forgiveness, the two lovers were incompatible and could not be wed. Only once Rochester sought forgiveness for his sins, dismissed his sense of superiority over others, and became a new, repentant Byronic hero, could Jane feel equal in the relationship and finally succeed in marrying Rochester. Rochester has succeeded in his re-transformation from Indian-rubber ball back to flesh, and thus, Charlotte Brontë has succeeded in her transformation of the Byronic hero.

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