



Not Sorry Works

Hot and Bothered: On Eyre

I Feel Now That I Was Right (Chapters 31-33)

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[Music fades in]

Vanessa Zoltan [00:00:02] In Chapter 31, Jane is now employed and housed again. She has been given some dresses by Diana and Mary and even has a servant girl to help her clean her new small house. She's on her feet again, but is depressed. The girls who she's teaching are poor and uneducated, and all of them seem the same to her. And she misses Rochester.

St. John comes and visits Jane on her first night living as a school teacher and senses her depression. He ministers to her by telling her about himself. He says that a year ago he was depressed, too. He was ambitious and wanted to be something glamorous, like a soldier or a writer, and felt stuck as a lowly minister. But then he realized that he could be a missionary and he felt better. Jane, too, will realize her calling and will be fine.

As their conversation is winding down, a woman approaches St. John and Jane: Rosamund Oliver. She is stunning, has the face of an angel and is clearly in love with St. John, who's all hot and bothered over her as well. Rosamund tries to get a rise out of St. John to no avail. So she leaves them.

In Chapter 32, Jane tells us that she's realized that not all poor, uneducated girls are alike. She's starting to find some pleasure in her work now that all the girls are learning some things—even some manners. She still misses Rochester, though.

Rosamund, it turns out, is the wealthy benefactor of Jane's school and stops by regularly to help Jane. But Jane suspects that Rosamund is also stopping by to try to run into St. John. When Rosamund realizes that Jane can draw, she asks Jane to draw a miniature of her. And Jane relishes the opportunity to draw someone so beautiful. St. John—the next time he is over visiting Jane—sees the miniature. Jane and he get to talking, and Jane teases St. John, saying that she will draw St. John a copy of the miniature as St. John is clearly as in love with Rosamund as Rosamund is with him. St. John relishes hearing that Rosamund is in love with him.

And here is the funniest part of Jane Eyre: he actually sets out his watch and says "it is very pleasant to hear this. Very. Go on for another quarter hour" and *times* Jane. Jane really tries to convince St. John to marry Rosamund, but he says he can't. He loves her. It's true. But he says she wouldn't be a good missionary's wife and his ambitions insist on his being a missionary. Jane says "you could do as much good with her money here as you could as a missionary without her." He says, absolutely not. He is ambitious and wants the glory of the life that he has already settled on. Here is Miriam Burstein on St. John, Rosamund and the missionary's life.

[Music fades out]

Miriam Burstein [00:03:05] St. John Rivers himself is based on a real person: a man named Henry Martin, who was a personal acquaintance of her [Charlotte's] father's and is one of the really big first celebrity missionaries in England. He's a missionary to India and to Persia, and he dies very young. He's about 31 years old when he dies. But St. John Rivers, the basic plot line in which Henry Martin had decided... He had been engaged, and then he decided, well, maybe I shouldn't get married. And then he went overseas. And then he had second thoughts and he sent back and said, please come marry me. And then the woman said, Well, no, actually. [chuckles] And that kind of of that plotline is then being built into *Jane Eyre* and then split between Jane and Rosamund Oliver, the woman that he's actually in love with.

[Music fades in]

Vanessa [00:03:59] St. John, like other "celebrity missionaries," is taking careful pains as to who to take with him on his mission. The question of who will make a good wife, what marriage plot he will take is happening in a miniature plot arc with St. John. As St. John is set to leave Jane, he notices something on one of her drawings and rips off a portion of the page. Jane finds it peculiar, as St. John leaves.

It is chapter 33, where Jane finds out that she is an heiress. St. John comes to her in the snow with a story: A baby was orphaned, raised by an aunt-in-law, sent to the Lowood School, became a teacher at the school and then a governess at Thornfield Hall. This woman was going to become the lawful wife of Edward Rochester, when she found out that he was married—though, to a lunatic. The girl ran off and no one knows where she is.

"Is Mr. Rochester okay?" is Jane's only response to the story at first. St. John says that he has no idea about Rochester, but they need to find this girl because—by the way—she has an inheritance of £20,000 coming to her, for her uncle died. This woman's name is Jane Eyre, which is the name St. John ripped off from that piece of paper the day before. Jane, without thinking, had scribbled her real name.

Jane is overwhelmed by the news of her newfound wealth. She's also confused by the hugeness of the sum. £20,000 in 1800 is about \$1,000,000 now. She's also confused why St. John was sent this information? He doesn't want to tell her at first. In fact, he tries to leave before she forces him to tell her. It turns out that she and St. John are cousins. She doesn't just inherit £20,000, but three cousins as well.

[Music fades out]

[Theme music fades in]

Jane, without a moment's thought, comes to a conclusion. She will split the inheritance four ways. She and her three cousins—Diana, Mary and St. John—will all get £5,000. St. John and Jane will be like brother and sister, she hopes.

I'm Vanessa Zoltan.

Lauren Sandler [00:06:23] And I'm Lauren Sandler.

Vanessa [00:06:24] And this is On Eyre from Hot and Bothered.

[Theme music fades out]

So Lauren, we're almost at the end of this book.

Lauren [00:06:36] I know. I'm feeling both grievous about that, but also very, very excited about the possibility of our next book.

Vanessa [00:06:45] Yeah. So we really want to do *Pride and Prejudice* next. And oh my God, it would be so exciting to do *Pride and Prejudice* next.

Lauren [00:06:54] I'm having a hard time, like, not already making a gazillion notes about all the things that I want to talk to you about.

Vanessa: I know!

Lauren: My head is so with Jane. My heart is so with Jane. And yet and yet when I lay awake at night, I think of *Pride and Prejudice*.

Vanessa [00:07:08] Lydia. I cannot wait to obsess about Lydia. But I just want to be really honest with our listeners—which is that we obviously believe in paying everyone living wages and paying everybody for their time. And so right now, we are losing money on this podcast every month, and it is our pleasure to do so. We are just losing our financial ability to keep doing that.

And so we have a goal of making \$4,000 a month on Patreon. We are halfway there right now, but we are going to really start working on *Pride and Prejudice* in January. And so we would love to hit that \$4000 a month goal by January. We have some really fun perks on there. We're about to add some perks, including watching the *Pride and Prejudice* BBC miniseries all together and weekly audio perks. And we really try to make it worth your while. We're going to be reading adaptations of it together.

So if you are someone who tunes in every week and gasped a little at the idea that we could do *Pride and Prejudice* next, please consider joining us on Patreon at patreon.com/hotandbotheredrompod and help us reach \$4,000 a month.

Okay, Lauren, this book. Things. Happen. What do you feel like we need to know about in order to read these chapters well?

Lauren [00:08:34] Actually, this is perfect, coming out of our economic appeal.

[Laughter]

Vanessa [00:08:40] We need to inherit £20,000.

Lauren [00:08:43] I know it's true. So, when we think about colonization, when we think about imperialism, we usually think about economics. We think about annexing, we think about the abuses of power that we've already discussed in the form of plantations and enslavement.

But of course, there's another form of colonialism which also grew the British Empire. Vastly. And unlike slavery, which at this point in history was really roundly seen by all moralists as evil, this kind of colonialism actually tended to have the opposite response. And that is about ideological and religious colonialism, right?

So: the missionary. Missions aimed to convert, to, quote-unquote civilize, and to spread the British Empire in the hearts and the minds of the dark world as it was seen. And that is, like, the biggest air quotes! My fingers could never be big enough for those air quotes.

And frankly, that sort of colonialism paid just as much respect to the beliefs and cultures of these incredibly rich civilizations as it respected the land, the bodies of the people who were enslaved—the land that was literally just turned into a profit machine. It's also worth noting that, of course, as you can tell I'm saying here, it was just as racist. And so, we talk a lot about racist imperialism in terms of patriarchal capitalism. We don't talk about it as much in terms of patriarchal religion and of white supremacist religion. And I think that what Brontë is doing in a very contemporary way is laying bare the ego at the heart of what is performed as good intentions with St. John.

But I think that this is something—this critique is something that has clearly come up currently in our national dialogue, about how we think about race in America, how we think about NGO work abroad, etc.. And I think that—while I wouldn't say that Brontë was by any respects [rueful chuckle] an effective anti-racist writer, and we've already spent so much time on this podcast talking about how, in fact, I believe it is the opposite of that that she's doing in so much of this writing. I think that she does really get this thing, or at least she's groping at this context. That she sees the speciousness, the ego and something that feels just inherently cold and self-reflecting in this white savior work.

Vanessa [00:11:20] Lauren, at Divinity School there was this very handsome guy who was an evangelical Christian. He was a Pentecostal Christian. And I sort of scoffed at him unintentionally as he was talking about how his goal after school was to go and try to convert as many people as possible. And he got so mad at me. He was like, "I believe their *souls* are on the line. And if you believed that billions of souls were on the line, you would be immoral if you did not crawl around the earth on *glass*, on your hands and knees, and try to save them all."

Obviously, I am someone, as an atheist Jew, who finds the idea of missionary work—I find it deeply offensive. I find it deeply, deeply offensive. And yet in that moment, I was like, okay, I see what you're up to. And I'm just wondering how much you think that we can take that seriously—specifically with St. John, right?

St. John tells us that he sees his missionary work as potentially interchangeable with being a soldier or a writer, that he just wanted glory and glamor. And then he starts describing himself—And I almost appreciate his honesty, right? He's like, I am ambitious and coldhearted and I want a mansion in heaven. And I feel like those two conversations of like, "I want to save

as many souls as I can” and “I want a mansion of glory in heaven” are always put side by side. And so I'm wondering what you think about that with St. John? How much are we supposed to think of him as a spiritual person, who in all credulity is like trying to go around the world and save souls?

Lauren [00:13:09] Oh, well, we're not. I mean, Brontë gives us, you know, almost no language at all around any really *felt* missionary zeal from a religious perspective from him. What she does, though, is heap on just these delicious, excoriating sentences about him just being the most specious, bloodthirsty, ambitious, ego-driven dude ever. And I feel like we recognize him and so many of these power-hungry people.

And I love the lack of subtlety in his portrayal, honestly. I think that in many situations Brontë can be interested in nuance and complication and I feel like then we get St. John and she's just like: uh-uh, this is not a man of nuance and complication. This is someone who literally could not see himself being satisfied in this sort of normative domestic world. And instead he longed for degrees of power, of people worshiping him, of some degree of glory that was so dis-consonant with the domestic setting in which we met him. Like, of course, this is how he's going to have to go get it.

You know, it's one of these things where he talks about wanting to be, you know, a glorious writer or artist in the same way that he talks about being a soldier or a politician or an orator. But of course, a writer needs to have something to write. An orator needs to have something to say. An artist—look at Jane. She's an incredible artist because she is driven to paint. And that painting is a creative, inherent act. She has her own motor for it. And his motor is for none of that, except for the glory. And I think that, you know, we continuously see this in people who are hungry for power for the sake of power, and adulation for the sake of adulation. And it almost feels like this is where it becomes in some ways almost like a comic-satirical novel to me. And I love it.

And honestly, that bit about the 15 minutes and putting down his watch—it's such a flag of that. I've known men, I think you have too, who are compartmentalizers like that, who systematize everything, who are, you know, scheduling intimacy and allowing that sort of very regimented access to the thing about themselves. And then when time's up, it's just shut off. And there's something almost sociopathic about it. And I think that if we were to delve into the psychological profiles of certain men in power, we would see elements of their personas that are so reflective of, not just St. John in general, but specifically this like, “okay, you have 15 minutes to tell me about my inner soul. Now time is up. I appreciate that. We're moving on to the next topic.” And it's the most unrelatable thing to me.

Vanessa [00:16:06] I've never hated you more because I feel like, rhetorically, you've put me in a position where I now have to defend St. John.

[Lauren giggles]

Vanessa: But I'm actually not going to defend St. John. I'm going to defend the nuance of St. John a little bit.

I agree with you that St. John is not nuanced, but he is a beautiful foil to someone like Brocklehurst, right? Who is also after glory and being worshiped, but is punitive and sadistic in the way that he goes about it, right? St. John is opening schools and, until late in the night, is going and visiting dying people and, you know, baptizing babies.

Lauren [00:16:44] What an asshole. What an asshole! [Laughter] No, you're totally right. I'm laughing at myself.

Vanessa [00:16:50] No, no, I—He is, right? Like, he's vacuous. But I think that St. John—and maybe it's just the placement in the novel, but I think it speaks so highly of Brontë's brilliance—is a foil for so many people at this point, right? He's a foil to Brocklehurst.

And then I think that he's a foil for Rochester in really interesting ways, right? Rochester, bless him, is not that guy. He cannot help but be passionate for what he's passionate about. And he's passionate for it all the time. And he doesn't care about glory, he wants domestic bliss with Jane on a French bluff! And I think that it puts Rochester into some sharp relief, as to the power of his capacity for love.

And then I also think that—the thing that I was most excited to talk to you about, Lauren, is St. John's prudishness in comparison with Jane's prudishness. I think that one of the things that Brontë is doing is essentially saying, like, Jane is not a prude. Jane still longs for Rochester. Jane still is having passionate dreams about Rochester. She couldn't stay with him for logistical reasons, but she was gonna offer herself heart and soul to this man she loved, even though it didn't make sense. It didn't make sense across class. It didn't make sense across age. And she was just going to throw all that caution to the wind until it became *illegal*.

Whereas St. John could have this woman who he loves and who he's attracted to and his future potential father-in-law would be super into it, and he'd be able to do a lot of good with that. And St. John is throwing that all away for this high and mighty ideal. I would love to hear your thoughts about St. John's decision to not be with Rosamund, versus Jane's decision to leave Rochester.

Lauren [00:18:42] I mean, we so clearly feel his degree of passion for Rosamund. I mean, there's so much heat. There's so much—I mean, he barely can contain himself. He's the most contained character, probably in literature, practically! And yet there he is, trembling, his eyes, flashing his, you know, pale skin, lighting up for a brief moment. He's having such a response to her. He's so clearly obsessed. And yet he's saying, "I have a feeling that this is not going to end well for me and that there is a bigger future for me than what this marriage can offer me."

And I feel like that in many ways is what Jane is telling us all along: that she imagines a bigger life outside of marriage, that she still yearns for these things, and that, frankly, she's not revealing her deep passion for Rochester. She's carrying it internally, secretly, just as St. John is carrying his internally and secretly. And so on the one hand, yes, I think he's totally a sociopath and like an ideological colonialist. And as you know, I am no fan of his. And yet, I see so much, so much in common here in a way that... I actually wonder how much Brontë saw it, too. I wonder how much Brontë doesn't know that there are elements of her, the author Charlotte Brontë, that [she] may have more St. John in her heart than she reveals.

Vanessa [00:20:06] I mean, whether or not it was intentional, there's an uncanny similarity. St. John says: "Yes, I am in love with Rosamund, but in a year it would be bad." Which is similar, but different to what Jane says to Rochester: "In six months you won't love me anymore, but hopefully you'll still like me." Right?

And the difference is that St. John is like "In a year it would be bad, and therefore no." And Jane seems to just be a little bit more of a romantic. Or maybe she just tactically still needs Rochester. And so it's like, "I don't care if in six months you're not going to love me anymore. You're going to be stuck with me. You're going to have to take me to France with you."

Lauren [00:20:44] Well, I think it's more that she would be stuck with him, right? We've seen what happens in a bad marriage for a man: you get to leave your wife on the third story and, you know, roam Europe. But in a bad marriage for a woman it's different. And I think that because St. John is so— he's such a rule based thinker. He's so norm-obsessed that there's no way that he could respond to a bad marriage the way that Rochester has. He would need to perform it forever.

And I think that there's sort of an inherent critique here about marriage that we haven't seen before. We've seen it in terms of structural economics, etc.. But I think that they are both people who worry about being stuck in a relationship that they won't want to be in and that won't want them, possibly.

And what that means—feeling like you can never get out of it. I mean, there's something on both sides of the aisle here, just fundamentally anti-marriage about both of them. And Jane is very, very direct about it, you know, especially once the money shows up and he says, "okay, now you can marry." And her response is, "no way, like, that's the last thing I'm going to do."

Vanessa [00:21:56] I think that that brings us to our close reading moment, which is, you know, Jane is in her house and she's alone and she's missing Rochester. And she's wondering about this decision that she made. And she says: "God directed me to a correct choice. I thank His providence for the guidance."

She's safe in this house and so everything is okay. And she is sort of congratulating herself in this humble way that, you know, because she did the right thing, she is safe in this house now.

Lauren [00:22:28] Here's my big frustration with this. And I say all of this with a lot of respect, knowing and loving many people who feel this way. I feel like it's not giving Jane the credit.

When someone achieves something incredible and then they thank God for it, I always want to say, "you did that. You did that. Not God. Take it upon yourself to own the fact that you made this miraculous thing happen. You were the miracle." And I want Jane to own the fact that she had that degree of foresight, that degree of willpower, that degree of strategy, if, in fact, this is where she was led. It feels like, not only is it not owning her own power, it also then kind of feels like a pass, like, "well, if this isn't what worked out, it's where God led me. It's what God had in mind." And I resist this all the way. What do you think?

Vanessa [00:23:20] I just want to say one more sentence from these paragraphs, which is Jane says that she would have been "fevered with delusive bliss one hour and suffocating with the

bitterest tears of remorse and shame the next," right? And that imagining of those two things, I think, is just so wise. And the thing that I suspect is: in the remorse is also fear, right? He could leave me at any moment. What would I do? He's going to stop loving me any second.

As an atheist who also profoundly, ethically struggles with a lot of things that people give God credit for... Anything that gave her the strength to make this decision that I know I would not make—even though I suspect I would have the same feelings about it as her—I'm like, "use whatever you have, use whatever you have to." I think I would have gone to France and had wonderful moments and then had shed the bitterest tears and been profoundly scared all the time. And that maybe it would have ended poorly, and that I would have been pregnant and he would have left. Because at the heart of it there would have been something dishonest or something scary about it. I think maybe I would have blown it up, right?

I think that, truly, had Rochester and Jane run away together to the south of France, I don't think it necessarily would have ended well for the two of them by virtue of the fact that she is who she is, that this would have been asking her to completely shift something in herself. She would have come to resent him for it. She would have—right? Like, this just would not have gone well. And so if she needs God in order to make that choice, I'm like, use *anything* to make the choice that is going to save you.

Lauren [00:25:07] Okay, so this is why this book has never had my heart on a romantic level. It's because I believe that every time we fall in love, there is this fear. Every time we take an emotional risk, there is this feeling of "it may be half incredible delirium and it may be half hell," and you never know until you're in it. And obviously, birth is a real complication.

But this notion that it is Rochester's past that makes her doubt that he can fully love her? That's not about Bertha. That is what it means to be with anyone who has a past. That is what it means to try to give your heart to anyone who you fear you can't trust with your heart, which is usually what the experience of giving in your heart to anyone is. And I feel like for someone who feels and desires and yearns as much as Jane does—

To have this notion that there is a moral imperative not to take that risk is something that I really, really struggle with. And I feel like she's saying the risk is not worth it. What we can do instead is protect our hearts and sequester ourselves away in a nunnery, so to speak. And I think it's so interesting that through this section she keeps reading "Marmion," which is this poem about a woman locked away. This is what it means to not share your life fully with another person. I mean this is sort of her nunnery, so to speak. Just as St. John is going into the priesthood, she's living a very, very similar monastic life here. And I feel like that monastic life is a way of avoiding the risk of heartbreak as well as the risk of her reputation, etc.. I mean, we're always risking our reputations when we end up in a relationship, especially a complicated one. And this is often the same sort of moralizing. And I think fear that keeps many of us from taking risks with our hearts that you don't know. She could have been happy in France all the time. She was just anticipating the nightmare.

Vanessa [00:27:21] I just think—and I feel like I'm just repeating myself—but I just think that Jane absolutely knew that that was the risk in marrying him and was willing to take the risk as long as she was going to be also physically safe and financially safe. And as soon as she was

not only risking her heart, but also risking her ability to be housed and safe and fed... *that is* when the risk was officially too much.

And I don't think that this is—she is saying that it's moral guidance, but I really think it's moral justification in order to buoy herself to make this really difficult decision. She tells us, “you are not going to love me and it'll be fine. I think you'll like me well enough.” And she knows that that will hurt her within the marriage. But the upside will be The Marriage, the security of the marriage, the fact that he will be stuck with her and she will be stuck with him. And that's the only thing that changes. And so that is the thing that gets her to leave.

Lauren [00:28:16] Right. And I guess the point is that when you are living in a system which is so unsafe and so unequal for women, you never just get to decide what your heart wants. St. John just gets to decide what his heart wants, Jane doesn't. And what she has to do to accommodate all of these impossible realities, of course, I think, to your point, requires some sort of impossible sense of guidance, some impossible rope. And I guess I guess that's what God gives her.

[Vanessa giggles]

Vanessa [00:28:51] I just think that this paragraph that we're turning to, the last paragraph just smacks to me of the language of rationalization, especially the fact that the paragraph starts. “Yes”. As if she's talking to herself, right? “Yes. I feel now that I was right when I adhered to principle in law and scorned and crushed the insane promptings of a frenzied moment. God directed me to the correct choice. I thank His providence for the guidance!”

And I agree! I wish she took credit for it because she did this impossible, herculean thing of separating herself from the man that she loved and the offer of a whitewashed villa. But the yes is like “Uh huh, uh huh. It's okay. I did the right thing, thank God.” Which is why it's never “God, I did this.” The thesis statement is never God. The thesis statement is I would have been in pain and then the *justification* is God.

Lauren [00:29:43] I also think it's worth noting that this very short paragraph ends in an exclamation point. [Affirmation] Which is very unlike the way these other paragraphs end, where she says, “I thank His providence for the guidance!” You know, you're right. There is sort of a psych up element of this. It is really tonally different to have that punctuation mark there.

Vanessa [00:30:03] You know, this has never occurred to me until our conversation, Lauren, but the other thing she does is, like, the next paragraph. She says, “Having brought my Eventide musings to this point, I rose, went to my door and looked at the sunset of the harvest day and the quiet fields before my cottage, which with the school was a distant half mile from the village. The birds were singing their last strains.”

Right? There is a kind of freedom in her sequestered convent that she's created for herself. She's not Bertha, which was her fear of being the mistress. I mean, it is a fear of being a wife also. But like, she can just open her door and look. There seems to me to be a real moment of freedom. She's not just pacing in this mansion anymore. She has her own door that she can open.

Lauren [00:30:59] There's also an incredible self-reliance in that. [Affirmation] And also a feeling that her primary relationship is with herself, which is an incredibly mature thing that [laughter] I have been working towards for a long, long time. Because I think that if you are a passionate girl like myself, it feels like the ideal is always that passionate communion with another person. And it has taken me into my forties to be able to find the incredible pleasure and peace of being alone, looking at a sunset. And maybe she just got there at 19.

Vanessa [00:31:34] I mean, she did and she didn't. I mean, this argument between us can go on forever because the next paragraph, she starts crying with how much she misses Mr. Rochester. Right?

Lauren [00:31:45] Yeah. That's the part that I relate to more. [Laughter]

Vanessa [00:31:49] It's a beautiful few pages. It's a really beautiful few pages about the ambivalence of her decision. And part of what I love about it is the truth to me, of: she didn't have much of a chance to think about it until now, right?

She was busy surviving and now she's in this house. And like now she's able to feel all these feelings and suss out, did I do the right thing? Because for so long it had to feel like she didn't, right? She was homeless and starving and she's like, "okay, now I'm on my legs again. Like, did I do the right thing?" And is essentially having this argument with herself that you and I are having.

[Music fades in]

So Lauren, you and I decided however many months ago that we were going to talk about power and desire. And it is wrapped up like a snake coiled around a staff here with Rosamund, right? This woman is power and desire. Her desirability is part of her power. She is wealthy. She has a pony that she rides up and she can just kind of come in and teach any time she wants to. And she comes in and is comfortable going through Jane's drawers. Like, this is a very spoiled young woman who is somehow, like, utterly charming. And I think part of her power is in her beauty. She gets away with a lot because she's so beautiful. But also part of her power is within her wealth.

My favorite paragraph about Rosamund is when Jane is like "I liked her similarly to how I liked Adèle. They both like pretty things." [Laughter]

Lauren: That's mine too. [Laughter]

Vanessa: And she's like, "Of course I could never love Rosamund as well as I loved Adèle because I taught Adèle and Adèle was a child. But like—"

Lauren [00:33:44] It's, it's throwing such great shade. It's totally like, "Oh, okay, now I get that you're totally lovely. I mean, you're so pretty and you're so wealthy, and sure, you can come up and volunteer once in a while. But honestly, I think that you have the mind of a child and I am here living a life of brilliance and solitude. And I may not look like you, but I've got what's inside, baby."

[Laughter]

Vanessa [00:34:09] Rosamund, bless her, is like, "Yes, you do." She's like: "Look at you speaking German in French, and you can draw better than the master at my school," right?

Lauren [00:34:19] Like, her response to that, as, "Oh, you could be a governess at a fine family."

And Jane's like, "Oh, honey, if you only knew, if you only knew."

[Laughter]

Vanessa [00:34:31] I'm also really curious what you think about this moment in St. John, because St. John says about Rosamund—he so believes in her beauty and her like adorable-ness, adore-ability, whatever the name of that is, that he's like, "She'll forget me in a minute," right? Like she has so many suitors that in a year she'll be fine.

And I'm wondering if that is belief in her or actually incredibly patronizing and dismissive of the true love she feels for him. Because this book believes in an eternal sort of attachment and love, right? Jane and Rochester really love each other. He still really misses her. They miss each other and they are yearning for each other across this deep divide. And St. John is in love with Rosamund, and he's so flippant. "Oh, she'll find someone else."

Lauren [00:35:22] I think that Brontë has a bit of a smart-girl bias [Vanessa laughs] that some of us might relate to, where it's like, "Oh, those pretty well-intentioned but kind-of dumb girls, you know, they don't feel like we do. They don't attach like we do, they don't think like we do. And so, yes, they may feel all of this, but then they're impressionable and they can move on." And indeed, she does show us that Rosamund moves on. We don't know how it feels for Rosamund to move on. We're never given a glimpse of her inner life in that way.

And I think—it's so telling that Rosamund so clearly wants a relationship with Jane, and Jane doesn't really engage in it. I mean, Rosamund just keeps showing up over and over and over, hungry for company. And Jane is just like, "Yeah, I'm going to sit over here and read German and you can, you know, prance around on your pony all you want. But I'm living the life of the mind over here." I do think that there's a lot of shade throwing here that's going on. But we don't know.

We also are feeling Rosamund perhaps falling in love with St. John's beauty as much as St. John has fallen in love with Rosamund's beauty. These are both people who are principally defined by their beauty. And I think that Brontë is showing us the ephemerality of that kind of love, when it isn't a love which is based in some sort of intellectual rapport.

Vanessa [00:36:50] Yeah, I sort of love Rosamund. I think she sounds fun. [Laughs] Like, yeah, let's go on a pony ride! But what she wants to do with her time is educate young girls. I'm like, "Yeah, that's great!" It's not this, like, big savior complex, right? It's just like, "Yeah, girls deserve an education, too. Let's get them a great teacher."

Lauren [00:37:11] I know, but she's that girl who's generous in spirit, and yet totally unaware, I think, of her powers. Unaware of how her powers fit into an oppressive system. The system of how women are judged based on how they look, the system of who gets to come and go and when and how, based on what family they're born into. And that naivete, I think, is why she reminds Jane of Adèle. So as much as she, you know, she does feel like a bit of a sequestered child, even though she's able to move freely in the world and dance until 2:00 in the morning. She's probably super fun to dance until 2:00 in the morning with, but I definitely don't know that she's the person who I want to debrief about the party the next day with.

Vanessa [00:37:58] Okay. So we have to talk about this inheritance and the fact that Jane also [laughs] finds, it turns out... wandered in the moors till, like, fall down nearly dead...

Lauren [00:38:09] ...To her cousin's house...

Vanessa: on the doorstep of her cousins. It's like—!

Lauren: Oh, Charlotte!

Vanessa [00:38:14] Yeah. So what do you make of this? Right. She faints and almost dies, and it turns out it's her cousins.

Lauren [00:38:21] Yeah. I just wish that Charlotte had handed me a draft of this book, and I could have said, "this is so good, but, sweetie, I think you really need to go back and spend a little bit more time thinking about this, because this is just a bridge too far." [Laughs]

Vanessa [00:38:34] Yeah. And it doesn't actually add anything, right? She could still decide to split it. Be like "you all saved my life. And this wouldn't have found me without you. And, like, please, I need to do this. I need to split this with you." And maybe St. John wouldn't have accepted it, but Mary and Diana would have. They would have been like, "Yeah, thank you. I don't want to be a servant in a house with spoiled kids anymore. And thank you for the money. I'm coming home."

And so I don't know what extra work it wanted to do. And it makes me more compelled by your previous arguments that there is something about just deserts here. Like, Jane did this really morally hard thing. And so God is rewarding her with the thing that she wanted most in the world, which is not just independence, but family. And I just wish that the novel was making an argument about kindred spirits rather than literal kindred.

Lauren [00:39:30] I do too. And it starts to. And then it loses it.

And you know, this is something that I've written about and thought about a lot: the notion of chosen family, right? So I wrote a book about only children or about only children as a way to talk about other elements in society. And I'm an only child with an only child. And this to me is such an only child chapter, in which you feel her wanting those immediate intimates in an idealized way. And we are shown these idealized siblings, right? We are shown Mary and Diana having this sort of perfect communion of books and the mind, which Jane fits effortlessly into.

I just wish that that sisterhood could have been enough through friendship, to show us a new model of how we can build those bonds without the old bloodline inheritance game, which is so oppressive through so much of this book. Then I feel like Brontë is just falling into it again, saying, “unless it's in the family, it doesn't count. Unless you're married into it, unless you're born into it, it somehow doesn't pass muster in the same way.”

There are all of these things that she takes such pains to make us believe in, in this universe that she has created, which is, of course, what every novelist does. Right? A novelist wants us to step into a universe that—unless they're a postmodernist—feels like it's this magically real place. And then I feel like this is where she breaks that spell a little bit. It's just, it's just too much.

Vanessa [00:41:05] So part of me, as a lover of romance novels, loves this ending, right? A good happily-ever-after in a romance novel, to me, is one in which the woman gets everything. She gets the money, she gets the family, she gets the house, she gets the spiritual fulfillment. Laws get changed in order to support her in what she wants. It is a revolutionary, happy ending. So part of me is like, yes! I want this for Jane.

The other part of me balks at it coming in this way. Because, to your point, I think that you can have that with friends. And also because of the God part of it. Because it does, I think, reify your idea of this moralism, of she made the right choice and therefore she is going to get rewarded with heaven on earth, with this mansion of perfection on earth. And I mean, I love that it's on Earth and not in the afterlife.

I'm so of two minds about this! And maybe Jane never would have felt secure if they were just her friends, and she would have felt like she was buying friendship by giving them the money. But because it's family, she feels more ready.

I'm just so of two minds. The romance reader in me is like, Yes, Jane gets everything. At the beginning of the book, she had three evil cousins. She had two girl cousins and a boy cousin, and they were all bullying assholes to her. And at the end of the book, she has persevered and she gets the same family dynamic but with three beautiful cousins. She was the needy cousin who was living off of the largesse of others that was really begrudgingly given. And now she is the opposite. She is going to be providing the largesse with an open heart, and with all the generosity and love in the world. Right? This complete one-to-one reversal is fantastic and is a great romance trope that I love.

And I agree with you. I just wish I was exactly the same *minus* the cousins thing. The only thing that I can imagine being necessary as a plot device is also the logistics around how St. John finds this out, right? Jane is like, why were you involved in finding Jane Eyre? This makes no sense. And St. John is like, because I would have been the benefactor, right? And so I also wonder if even though we read it now, as this like wildly improbable thing, readers at the time would have thought it was wildly improbable that the money would have found her on this remote hillside without this familial relation part of it.

Lauren [00:43:42] I don't know. I struggle with it. But then again, I think there may be a matter of taste here. I am someone who likes my novels incredibly ambiguous and unresolved. And this whole conversation is making me so impatient to talk about the ending of this book,

which we will not be doing for a few weeks. But, you know, it's both coming sooner than I want, and I also want to jump on it immediately, because I think that there are some fascinating aspects related to what you're talking about in where we end up.

Vanessa [00:44:13] Lauren, I will say that the way that Jane gets the information out of St. John, I find hilarious and just, I don't know, beautifully written as though they *are* cousins.

So she's like, why? How do you have this information? And he's like, I don't want to tell you, you've gotten enough excitable information tonight,—which is so patronizing and annoying. And she's like, No, no, no, no, you have to tell me. And he's like, No, I'm going to have Diana tell you, which would take weeks! He would have to write to her and she would have to write back. It's so annoying. And she's like, You have to tell me. And he's like, I am very cold. You are not going to convince me. And she's like, Well, I'm hot and hot melts ice. [Giggles] It is like I'm rubber and you're glue. And therefore you have to tell me.

And I just—I love this conversation between these two bickering cousins!

Lauren [00:45:09] Oh, God, this is so funny. I love this conversation, but for totally different reasons. [Laughter]

So I love this dialog. It's one of my favorite moments in the whole book, but I love it because there's this sort of peer element, in what feels to me like not necessarily a bickering, childish way, but like—these are just these are two adults, who feel like peers, who have kind of a weird rapport with each other and feel like opposites, but just feel like they can call each other on their shit all the time.

And there's this element of Jane being like, “I'm sorry, I'm not going to be this placid girl. You're not going to have this agency. I'm going to break you down because this is who I am. Deal with it” in a way that I just find exhilarating.

Vanessa [00:45:55] Oh, I think that that's part of it, too. Like, I love all of it. And it's so interesting, if we're comparing this dynamic to the Rochester and Jane dynamic, where you and I were both like, the way that this is flirtatious is sort of opaque to us. *This* I find completely, transparently approachable. He even relishes it, right? He's like, “You're very direct with me.” And she's like, “Yeah, I prefer it when I can be plainspoken with people.” As much as I hate St. John there is something about the way that they talk to each other that I find really endearing.

Lauren [00:46:30] I know. She's being so arch and hilarious and it's one of the only moments that you can feel her raising her voice, [Affirmation] like speaking at a certain volume with a certain comfort and passion of just being! Of just being and feeling and being impatient. I mean, she's always putting it all away and, like, *this* is the Jane I want to know. This is the Jane I want to have a drink with and be a little too loud in a bar with.

Vanessa [00:46:56] Yeah. And she... It's so funny because in the next chapters, she's going to be so intimidated by St. John and so many people are intimidated by him. But in this moment she's not. And you see something has come out in her, with the freedom of this money. And I just... yeah, I love her yelling at him. So charming.

Lauren [00:47:16] I love it.

Vanessa [00:47:17] So, Lauren, what are you looking forward to next week?

Lauren [00:47:21] Oh, I feel like so many of the ideas that we've been talking about come to a head in such a deeply meaningful way. And I don't want to spoil any of it, but I am really, I am really excited to dig into a different sort of resistance.

Vanessa [00:47:39] And I— one of my favorite things happens in the next chapter, which is that Jane talks about the joy of nesting. She's like, "I waxed the banisters and I arranged the furniture." And every time something deeply frivolous gives me joy. I'm like setting a beautiful table, I'm like, Jane would have found this joyful, too! She describes what cleaning products she uses. This just makes her so happy. And I love watching her be happy. We're going to get a moment to just watch her revel in her new home.

Lauren [00:48:14] We are, but then—and we can discuss this more next week—then St. John says, "Yeah, this is fun for now, but you're not going to want to clean your house forever. You want a life of the mind!"

And she puts him off and I'm like, "Oh, did I just agree with St. John?"

[Laughter]

[Music fades in]

Vanessa [00:48:48] So we really wanted to know where Jane's money is actually coming from. We've had these live questions about empire and about exploitation being the reason that people get wealthy. And we wanted to know where Jane's wealth fell on that scale. Is she making this wine money off of the backs of slaves, or is this a different kind of industry? And we are lucky enough to find a scholar of this topic, a wine scholar, Jennifer Regan-Lefebvre, and talk to her. She has an upcoming book called *Imperial Wine: How the British Empire Made Wine's New World*. And so let's give Jennifer a call.

[Phone ringing]

Vanessa [00:49:37] Hi, Jennifer!

Jennifer Regan-Lefebvre[00:49:42] Hi, Vanessa.

Vanessa: Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me.

Jennifer: My pleasure.

Vanessa [00:49:43] Okay, so I want to know about the wine trade. Jane inherits money from her uncle who got rich because he was on Madeira working in wine. Like, what would that have been?

Jennifer [00:50:00] Well, I can tell you a few things. I can tell you about the trade in Madeira and the British market, and also what Madeira wine was.

So when we're talking about the early 19th century, the first few decades of the 19th century, when *Jane Eyre* is set and supposedly being written by Jane, the main character, Madeira is a Portuguese territory, but it had been occupied briefly by the British during the Napoleonic wars. Which is not that unusual or special, because what Atlantic island has not been occupied briefly by Britain in the 18th or early 19th century? [Affirmation] It is a fairly friendly occupation, I guess as occupations go, and there is a vibrant British merchant community in Madeira. And their job is to purchase Madeira wine and then sell it back to the United Kingdom, where it's quite popular.

Something I should say about Madeira wine is it's considered to be excellent wine and has a really good reputation. It's considered to be one of the best wines, such that there's actually tons of really poor-quality imitation Madeira that's also coming into the British market at the same time.

So Madeira is a fortified wine, and that means brandy has been added, and that's important for a few reasons. One is it makes it much stronger in alcohol than, you know, a still table wine. So it brings it up to between, say, 22 and 25% alcohol. So it's not as strong as a whiskey, but it's significantly stronger than a table wine. And that just suits the tastes of the British market at the time. They like things alcoholic, right? And the most popular wines in Britain are the fortified ones. So also sherry, which becomes very popular with women in particular, and port, which comes from mainland Portugal. So Madeira is one of these fortified wines that's really popular.

The other reason that fortification is important is, we're talking about wine, which is an organic product that is shipped in wooden casks, which are slightly porous (they have to be). If you have bacteria that gets in there, it can spoil the wine. And what protects wine from being spoiled? Higher alcohol content. So it makes sense. And this is partly why, you know, for a maritime empire like the British, fortified wines become really popular. They ship really well and they last a long time.

Vanessa [00:52:18] So Mrs. Reed apparently has this man come to the door one day and say, "I'm a wine merchant. I think I have a niece who lives here. Can you tell me where my niece, Jane Eyre is? I would like to take her back to Madeira with me and raise her." What would she have perceived about his class and his education, right? As a, I don't know gentlewoman, right? As a lady, what would she have thought about this man on her doorstep?

Jennifer [00:52:48] That's a really great question. It's a little bit ambiguous. So, working in wine has only become a really high-end activity in the last 30 or 40 years. So if you are working in the wine trade, you're working in a trade. So that means you're not really a professional. That said, it's quite lucrative, especially for Madeira, which is a luxurious wine. And Madeira also has a reputation as an island that's quite safe [affirmation] and healthy.

So all sorts of wines were prescribed as medicine in the 19th century, in the 18th century, and Madeira in particular, because it's a fine wine, is seen as good. So if you are poorly, if you're not well, having a small glass of Madeira might revive you and might be good. And there are

all sorts of prescriptions of different wines for different ailments, and generally the sweeter fortified wines are considered good, for example, for nursing mothers, maybe a tiny little bit for children. Don't give them very dry wines. Don't give them, you know, a heavy, "manly" French claret, you know, give them a little something sweet.

So Madeira has a good reputation. It actually has a sort of minor reputation as a health resort. Like you could go there and enjoy the lovely ocean breezes and be safe from difficulty. So I would think that Mrs. Reed would think, well, you know, as a gentle woman, he's a little bit beneath us, but as a place for a young lady to go and be turned out, it might not be such a bad place.

Vanessa [00:54:17] Did the slave trade come through Madeira at all? What was the relationship between slavery in the wine trade at the time?

Jennifer [00:54:25] So the short answer is absolutely. But there is not, as far as we can tell, extensive use of slaves, enslaved people I should say, in creating wine.

So because Madeira is part of the Atlantic complex trading networks, which you could simplify by calling a triangle trade. It's a stop. So slave ships are certainly stopping there for supplies. Madeira, because it's a luxurious wine that holds its value, it ages well—that is a form of currency. So Madeira is implicated in the slave trade, the Atlantic slave trade, as any other Atlantic port would be. In terms of the actual usage of enslaved people's labor, it appears that by about 1800 most of the slaves in Madeira are domestic servants. They're actually not working on a plantation kind of economy.

Now, technically Portugal has banned slavery in, I believe, 1769, but enslaved people still seem to be employed in Portuguese colonies and in places like Madeira that are outside of the mainland.

Vanessa [00:55:30] So to be really crass about it, when Jane inherits the £20,000 from her uncle who made his money in Madeira wine,—did she benefit from the slave trade? Is she a, you know, slavery profiteer?

Jennifer [00:55:46] I think it's really important to recognize, and there's been fantastic research on this in the past decade or so: *everybody* in Britain benefited from the slave trade.

So there is this fiction that has persisted in British history and in many people's imaginations, that Britain was exempt from that, that slavery happened someplace else. And there was a lot of celebration in 2007, marking 200 years of the end of the Atlantic slave trade, or at least Britain's role in it. But Britain did not immediately abolish slavery as an institution in its colonies. And once it did, in the 1830s, there was a huge program to reimburse people who had owned slaves and slave plantations in the British colonies to reimburse them for their loss. And a fantastic project out of University College London has shown how that money—they have a big database of this, of legacies of British slave ownership. That money is put back into the British economy.

So all these things we think of as, "oh, products of British genius," you know, the invention of the railroad, the whole industrial revolution—that's really fueled by money that's coming from

the slave trade. So to the extent that Jane enjoys the British road network, that she sees public buildings or museums, that she lives in an elegant country house...That money has likely had an association with slavery at some point. And that's just how the economy worked in the 18th and early 19th centuries. It's how it works today. We're all implicated because it's an economy that's really dependent on global trade.

Vanessa [00:57:21] Yeah. Jennifer, thank you so much for taking the time to talk with us. It was just such a pleasure and so illuminating.

Jennifer [00:57:29] My pleasure. And I would also encourage your listeners to take my free online class on the history of wine, which is on EdX.org called The World History of Wine. And I've had 10,000 satisfied students come through and it's just super fun. So if you want to know more about the history of wine and how to think about it, that's a great starting point.

[Ending credit music fades in]

Vanessa [00:57:52] You've been listening to On Eyre. We're a small show, so we need your support to run and we are trying to get to \$4,000 a month in order to do *Pride and Prejudice* next season. So please consider supporting us on Patreon: patreon.com/hotandbotheredrompod. If you love the show, please leave us a review wherever you listen to our podcast.

We are a Not Sorry production. Our executive producer is Ariana Nedelman. Our associate producer is Molly Baxter. We are distributed by Acast. This week, we'd like to thank Miriam Bernstein and Jennifer Regan-Lefebvre for talking to us, Lara Glass, Julia Argy, Nicki Zoltan, Stephanie Paulsell and all of our patrons. Thanks so much. We'll talk to you next week.

[Ending credit music fades out]

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