

Vanessa Zoltan

Today we're starting with Chapter 16. Chapter 15 ended with Jane rescuing Rochester from his flame engulfed bed. He was already showing signs of his attachment to her. He literally would not let go of her. But we also started to see signs of his changeable mood. One minute he said, "My cherished preserver, good night," while holding on tight to her. Then seconds later he said, "Well leave me," and let her go.

It's no wonder that at the beginning of Chapter 16, the morning after the bed fire, Jane is flustered. She sees Grace Poole, who does not seem to feel guilty at all about having lit Rochester's bed on fire. But Grace does warn Jane to start locking her doors at night. Even in a remote place like Thornfield Hall, danger lurks. But Jane is most flustered about Rochester. She doesn't catch sight of him all day, which at first is a relief, but then leaves her feeling bereft. As the servants discuss the false story that Rochester gave them about the fire, Jane realizes she's in love with Rochester. But for all of her obsessing, realizations, and looking for Rochester around corners, it turns out that she has been looking for a ghost. Rochester left Thornfield first thing in the morning. Jane just doesn't learn about his exit until evening tea. Mrs. Fairfax tells Jane that Mr. Rochester set off the moment he'd had his breakfast to a house party. Rochester will probably be gone for weeks and won't come back to Thornfield at all, most likely, after the party.

Also there's a beautiful lady at this party: Blanche Ingram. Blanche has been to Thornfield before, and Mrs. Fairfax describes her in great detail. It turns out that Blanche is everything that Jane is not: Blanche is quote, "tall, has a fine bust, sloping shoulders, a long graceful neck, olive complexion, dark and clear." The realization that Rochester has left, and that he is in the company of a beautiful woman of his own class, sends Jane spiraling in self-loathing. She commits that she will force herself to realize how stupid she is for falling in love with someone who could never love her back. She commits to drawing a picture of the woman who she imagines Blanche Ingram to be and a brutal self-portrait, to laugh at the comparison and shame herself into accepting that Rochester could never love her. After Jane is done with this drawing exercise, she congratulates herself on her wholesome discipline and goes to bed, heartsick.

At the start of chapter 17, a week has passed and Jane is still in pain, missing Rochester. She's doing a lot of negative self-talk, trying to get over him. Then, a letter arrives to Mrs. Fairfax. Rochester is going to come back and is going to bring a big party with him. Temporary servants must be hired, and the whole house must be prepared. Adele is delighted, and so is our Jane. Jane gets busy to distraction, helping set up the house. While she's in the kitchens and below stairs helping to set up, she overhears two maids talking about Grace Poole. They talk about how much money Grace gets paid, and that they wouldn't want Grace's job, but when they see Jane, they stop talking. "Doesn't she know?" one of them asks. It seems, dear reader, that Jane does not know. The party finally appears. Adele cannot contain herself. The beautiful ladies and beautiful dresses, so much excitement, and Rochester is back, too. Jane and Adele are summoned to go for the evening to spend time with the guests, and it is here that we meet Blanche Ingram. Blanche Ingram is beautiful and talented, but she's awful. She tells stories of how she tortured her governesses as a child with pride. She talks about Adele in front of her, pretending Adele is not

in the room. She is haughty and rude. Here is Roxanne Eberle talking about Blanche and comparing her a little bit to Helen Burns.

Roxanne Eberle

With Blanche Ingram, I think that's an example of the kind of female figure that Mary Wollstonecraft writes about in "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman," whose desire for power and the charisma of her personality warps her into this kind of tyrannical, cruel figure, who cannot see sisterhood with anyone - not with own sister, let alone with the governess in the corner of the drawing room. So both those figures are warped by the cultural demands upon them. The middle-class kind of pious minister's daughter in Helen Burns, and then the gentry, beautiful woman of the kind of striving, middle and upper classes.

Vanessa Zoltan

I worry about Blanche. She's in her mid-20s now, and there isn't much for her to do but get married. She's going for Rochester hard, and it's understandable why. Up until now on *On Eyre*, we've been talking about power and desire, and we've been using these two concepts as flashlights to go through this mammoth text. But up until now, who has the power and what's wrong with it is clear. Brocklehurst, Mrs. Reed, the church, the state - boo, bad power. However, at this point in the book, after Rochester has decided to marry Jane and Jane is in love with Rochester but the two haven't talked about it yet, the power gets much more confusing, and much more important. What are we supposed to make of the scenes in these chapters when Rochester summons Jane to watch a charade game where Blanche and Rochester act as bride and groom? It's such a strange power play and leads me to believe that he doesn't understand the power that he intrinsically has.

Rochester and Jane do not have more than a moment alone in all three of these chapters, in which Rochester catches Jane for a moment because her sandal has been untied. Rochester follows her out into the hall and asks Jane, "Why did you not come to speak to me in the room?" This moment is fascinating. Rochester, who can leave for weeks at a time and then come back with 15 people, who can require Jane not just to attend an evening but to endure insults at another woman's hand - he doesn't realize that Jane does not feel empowered to go up and talk to him. His desire for her has made him feel weak, as if she's the one with the power, and that weakness has made him blind to the other powers that he still has. A man who does not know his own strength can do a lot of damage with what he thinks is very little motion.

In chapter 18, two big things happen. While Rochester is out of the house for a day to tend to some errands in Milcote, a guest arrives. The guest, Mr. Mason, is handsome, but repels Jane for quote, "There was no power in that smooth-skinned face of a full oval shape." Even though Rochester isn't home, Mason tells us that he's close enough to Rochester that they should let them in, and they do. Then, another guest arrives: a woman fortune teller who everyone refers to, problematically, as the gypsy. It's not a great term. As someone who is 1/8 Romani, it's the term I use to describe myself, and it's the word the book uses. So when referring to that character, Lauren and I are going to use the term Bronte uses, but it feels important to say that we

obviously would not use it to describe a person in real life. This gypsy, who can tell fortunes, has a lot of demands: you will have me in! I will see all the young women, and no one else! Make me a fire! I asked Deborah Nord if this is really how a gypsy would be treated if one came to the door of a house like Thornfield. Here is her answer:

Deborah Nord

I actually think it's pure fantasy.

Vanessa Zoltan

Yeah.

Deborah Nord

[Laughs] I think it's pure fantasy. I don't think that gypsies walked into country homes or estates like Thornfield.

Vanessa Zoltan

Right.

Deborah Nord

And if they did, it could have been to offer to sharpen people's knives or to beg, but I don't think it would have been to offer fortune telling. And certainly there wouldn't have been this demand to see certain people and then later on to see only the women, and to demand finally to see Jane.

Vanessa Zoltan

There's a discussion as to whether or not the women should meet with the gypsy. Blanche insists on going in, when she comes out, she proclaims: "the gypsy spatted nonsense." And yet, Blanche then stares off into the distance for a while. Clearly troubled by what she heard. The other young women of the party go in and come out from their meetings with the fortune teller. [Intro music begins playing] The butler comes in and tells Jane that the gypsy knows there is one more young woman in the room and insists on seeing her. Jane says, "Fine, I'll go," and the chapter ends. I'm Vanessa Zoltan.

Lauren Sandler

And I'm Lauren Sandler.

Vanessa Zoltan

And this is On Eyre from Hot and Bothered. Okay, Lauren, what do we need to know? Please, professor, [Lauren laughs] before we jump in.

Lauren Sandler

Well, okay, so this is something that I think we all know already, and we've already discussed: the notion that in 19th century Britain and elsewhere, for those with land or money or titles, or

even for those in lower classes, you know, marriage was very much an economic institution. It was a business proposition. It was not something that was a story of love in the same way that we tend to tell it now. And in thinking about Blanche a little bit, that's interesting because one thing that we learn is that she is from this family with all this money, but of course the older brother got all the money, and Blanche and her sister do not have the money, and no matter how lovely they might be, Blanche especially, are just not that appealing to suitors. Because they aren't the best business proposition.

But I will say, at the same time, as much as this was an era in which marriage meant business, it also was an era that, in literature and art, we start seeing the notion of romantic love in marriage, and specifically the notion of a soulmate. So Coleridge, the poet, wrote in a letter actually in the 1820s, that he believed that marital happiness depended on the existence of a soulmate and marrying one's soulmate. And of course, we have books, like "Jane Eyre" and like all of these books that are coming out of the Victorian era - George Eliot's books, Jane Austen's books - that are telling us that love is possible, and indeed that life without love feels impossible. And so this isn't the romantic ideal with a capital R, this isn't Byron's romantic ideal. I mean so much of his romantic ideal involves his lothario, sort of just pummeling through the world. But this is about a really deep connection of souls. And many people look to the Victorian age as the time in which marriage was so loveless, and yet others see this as the time in our history in which our current expectations of what a permanent romantic relationship looks like really rooted itself in our culture.

And I think this is particularly interesting to think about as we're examining these themes, or as you put it so brilliantly these flashlights, of power and desire, because economic power was really the thing that mattered before, and desire felt so secondary, but in this way of thinking about the power of marriage, the power of commitment, the power of making a household together, there's a real shift in which desire is given such a bump up during this time culturally. And yet at the same time, it's not like women suddenly have more options. It's not like Blanche can choose to just, you know, marry the stable hand, if that's who she truly fancies. Or that Jane feels like Rochester is a shoo in for her as her employer.

Vanessa Zoltan

Yeah. I just really feel for Blanche, you know. She's so horrible in these chapters, she's so horrible. In front of Jane, she's like, ugh, that governess, I noticed her, she's so gross, and we always hated our governesses and pitied them and tortured them and, you know, insulted Adele and is like "why don't you send her to school?" But I also am just like: she thinks that's how she's going to get the guy, and she's trying to show him that, like, I'd run your household well. Like, I'd budget better, I would send her to school and get rid of the governess, because that costs more money. I don't know - am I wrong to like feel for this is like venal, rude woman?

Lauren Sandler

Well, I think that this is part of why I love you. And part of why you are a chaplain and I am a journalist. [Both laugh] I mean, I can't stand her. I think she's horrible. But I do, you know, I - I

think that Roxanne Eberle's point, you know the beloved and brilliant Roxanne Eberle, has such a smart point here, which is conjuring Wollstonecraft and looking at the structural circumstances here. That, because women have so few options, because competition is so fierce, because they were made to twist themselves into something that feels like just a different version of what Céline Varens had to do in the opera house, that there is something so fundamentally inhumane about the grotesquerie of these options, and that who could not fall prey to villainy here? You either die at Lowood like Helen Burns, or you put on your rouge and you dance the tarantella for Rochester. That's all you got. And I have structural empathy, but I do feel like the form that Blanche takes, the way that she just goes in for such nastiness and for such judgmentalness, and she's so dismissive and snide about it all - I just have [no truck] with that.

Vanessa Zoltan

I think that the reason that I feel for Blanche is that Blanche is right. Rochester is using her and using her badly. And this woman only has so many house parties to go to before she is going to be on the shelf and too old to get married, and he is wasting her time. And I just feel like: of course she's behaving horribly. Like, on some level, she can probably sense that. Right? Like, why is this governess in the room every night? That's not one of the social behaviors of the time. The governess and the child should be upstairs. They come down for a minute to be seen and not heard and told they're pretty and be given a kiss. I don't know - I would be out of my mind angry if a man brought me into his home, and like, had me sit in front of the woman that he's in love with, and like, hang out with the kid that he had with another woman, and like wasn't totally admitting to. Wouldn't you be - I would not be my best self.

Lauren Sandler

[Laughs] I would not be my best self. I do not know when I have been my best self [Vanessa laughs], but I do not think that these are the circumstances that would, that would spur my best self, no. However, I am not entirely clear how much Blanche sees and how much Blanche knows. And I don't think that Bronte ever flags so directly what Blanche's sense of this is. I mean, because it's told so close to Jane's chest. Because what we get is her anxiety, her self-loathing, her humiliation, we never quite get to see the more objective sense that I think you are giving us of what it feels like to have Jane in those rooms. And so, I do admire - I admire that you can see that, because when I read these scenes, I just feel horrified, because I feel like Blanche is that horrible, upper class girl who can't do anything except send her filet mignon young back at the country club over [Vanessa laughs] and over and over because no matter how rare or well-done it is, it's never cooked to her liking. And I just despise everything that she's showing us here.

Vanessa Zoltan

Yeah.

Lauren Sandler

Meanwhile, I do feel Rochester going through all the paces. I feel like he's putting on such a show for her, but - you know the charades, casting it as a wedding, singing the duets, or riding

with her. There's nothing he's not ticking off, and I don't know that that is simply to keep Jane's jealousy. I think that he is someone who enjoys the company of women, and I think that he's being entirely clueless on this whole situation.

Vanessa Zoltan

Oh, that is such an interesting read. Oh man, I read it so differently. I have a very generous reading for Rochester that I've been laughed at before for having, but I read it as he needs to make it really look like he's gonna marry Blanche so that Jane essentially has to proclaim herself to him, so that it is enthusiastic consent. It's not that he went for her as like the creepy boss; it is like she is going to have to come to him because she is going to be so sure that he is going to marry this other woman. So I read it as like, horrible to Blanche - like she's this unintentional mercenary. But that he really wants Jane to think that he's going to marry another woman, one to pique her jealousy, but two so that he never has to make the creepy first move. And any first move from him, being 20 years older than her and her boss would be a creepy first move. But, tell me why you think he's clueless. Or, sorry, tell me that I'm wrong.

Lauren Sandler

Well, I'm not convinced that Rochester would care about making that creepy first move. Especially when we think back on for many things that he's done already in his lifetime, many of which we don't even know about yet at this point in the book. But the things that we do know about - he was very comfortable taking a courtesan lover and shooting her lover [both laugh] and, you know, finding himself in precarious situations all over the world. And I do think that he probably feels as though perhaps he is supposed to marry Blanche, or someone like Blanche, if he can stand it. And that the process of being at Thornfield and longing for Jane is something that he finds unraveling.

But look at how he treats Jane. I mean, the day after she saves his life and he commits himself to her, the morning after she falls in love with him, he disappears without a word to her for weeks, and then comes back and doesn't even acknowledge her. I mean, the behavior is so outrageously cruel to me that even if it is just a form of manipulation, it's horrid to me. And I don't think it's just a form of manipulation, because I don't think that that's how, how love is treated, and I think that while he knows that there's this very special thing about Jane, she's, you know this 18-year-old pale faced governess when of course he's supposed to go off to the shooting parties and have the dinners and play charades and be surrounded by, you know, the bosoms and olive skin of all these appropriate conquests. I just think that in the end, he can't help himself, and he feels mad for stating such intentions and having such feelings. And I think he's horrible because of it. I despise him, I cannot believe that this is the man that our wonderful Jane has fallen for. And as we go through these pages and she hates herself for what she feels, I feel her so deeply because he's that guy. And then, once, you know, he starts coming around, I feel like, oh honey, no run for the hills, because look at how he's just treated you.

Vanessa Zoltan

Okay, let's look at the text that we brought today because I think that that will maybe help us? It will help us continue to disagree. Do you want to read it for us?

Lauren Sandler

Okay, so this is one of the many lines in these chapters that I think is now covered in highlighter and pen with marginalia next to it. If I may. "It does good to no woman to be flattered by her superior who cannot possibly intend to marry her; and it is madness in all women to let a secret love kindle within them, which, if unreturned and unknown, must devour the life that feeds it; and, if discovered and responded to, must lead, ignis-fatuus-like, into miry wilds whence there is no extrication." What does "ignis-fatuus" mean?

Vanessa Zoltan

Google says it is something deceptive or diluting, a will of the wits. Thanks, Google. So Jane is saying this, right?

Lauren Sandler

Jane is saying this. So let's wade into these miry wilds ourselves, because I am feeling the impossibility of extrication myself. I mean, there's so much in here. There's so much about what unrequited love feels like. There's so much about how that's doubled down when that love is felt for someone who seems out of your league, in a class sense or, frankly, I think in any sense. And there are so many points around this passage, in these pages, in which she is calling herself a fool, she refers to herself like, "Jane Eyre, make a portrait of yourself as this poor and lowly governess and never forgive yourself for feeling this way." So, this language though is different, this is not her speaking so specifically to herself as Jane and to this specific situation. This is an aphorism that it feels like she is delivering to us for the ages, at least at this point in the book, saying: ladies. Take it from me. Stay within your range. Don't feel too much. Keep it quiet. It's not worth it.

Vanessa Zoltan

And Lauren, this like second part - this "if discovered and responded to must lead ignis-fatuus like into miry wilds whence there is no extrication" - that's saying like: you'll get pregnant, right? It's like: if your love is discovered and the man responds to it, "the miry wilds," right - like, that's not marriage. "Miry wilds whence there is no extrication." Sure, you know there's no extrication for marriage, but they're not miry wilds. So I feel like this is saying like: and if it turns out that he digs you too, you're gonna get knocked up and like Celine, you're just gonna run off and be denigrated for the rest of your life by that man.

Lauren Sandler

Absolutely. And one thing that comes up in thinking about the rituals of courtship, especially amongst the upper classes, is that there is always the mother there. There's always that chaperone figure there -

Vanessa Zoltan

Yeah.

Lauren Sandler

- and the reason why is so nobody gets pregnant. Because that was the biggest fear of any mother - that her daughter would court with someone, get knocked up, and it would all be over. But, you know - Jane doesn't have that mother figure to be there leading her through this and protecting her from the downfall of where desire leads and I think that's really important here.

Vanessa Zoltan

Yeah, I mean - so what Jane is saying is like: I don't even know if he loves me back or not but either way, this is so dumb. Right, like - and I need to stop, and he is just making it impossible for her, by constantly making her come to him. And he even tells Mrs. Fairfax if she doesn't come, I will come and get her and force her to, right. There's like no use resisting, Rochester will have Jane there every night to hang out with these people who despise her.

Lauren Sandler

Which is part of why this enthusiastic consent argument doesn't quite line up for me, in part because he is obligating her, so painfully, in a way that it almost feels as though her employment is hanging by the thread of whether she shows up against her own will to watch charades after dinner. I mean she says, I don't want to be there. And he says, I don't care. You have to come no matter what - Mrs. Fairfax, make sure that she is there because I demand it. I mean, he is playing the superior so much. It's revolting to me.

[Ad content, changed by month] [Transition music]

Lauren Sandler

I'm thinking back to early in the book when she makes the reference to Pamela, which of course is not a consensual relationship and one that is very much across classes, and in some ways this was the cautionary allegory for Jane. And it does call to mind the fact that there are so many stories in the history of literature about crashing through that class wall. And sometimes it is purely sexual, sometimes it is purely an act of abuse of power, but there is also a whole history of love here. A whole genre of not being circumscribed by the structural expectations, by having a heart's desire and emotional connection, you know, a sexual spark, all these things braid together in something that feels so much holier and vast, almost spiritual, as though it exists outside the bounds of - of civilized structure. And when I say civilized, I don't mean versus savagery. I mean like - the way that at this point civilization is built in an entire class section. Where families or economic units, where there are landowners, where there are, you know, there have been serfs, there have been slaves, at this point there's still slaves - I mean, the way that our world is organized is so economically dependent upon the maintenance of gender and class norms that to feel something that transcends it so radically, I think, imbues that love with an even higher power.

Vanessa Zoltan

Yeah, I'm trying to think why - because I love cross-class romance novels, it's a lot of what I read. And I do think it's the added hurdle, and then it's also - to some extent it's a fish out of water story, right? It's a: I don't belong in my class, I belong somewhere else, right. And maybe in a third space, but certainly not somewhere where - for Rochester I am, you know, defined by the fact that I'm the second son and then defined by the fact that I've inherited and like have to live in this house that I inherited when I want to be traveling around the world; and for Jane she feels like she's not this woman who's dependent on an evil aunt, and there's something about this love that can create a third space for people to not be just who they were born to be, but to exist outside of that. And I think we all feel that way. Right? That the family we're born into isn't for us and that the world isn't for us and so we have to create that for ourselves in our adult lives through our friendships, through, you know our romantic relationships, whatever it is. And obviously in this novel it's through their love, their romantic love, that they can find this third space.

Lauren Sandler

And of course that is the magic of love: is the experience of feeling like a space exists that you did not know and could not exist outside of these two people coming together and feeling this thing that only exists between them. And I think that that's so powerful and this thing that that we yearn for. I also think that, just from a literary craft standpoint, making that love come off the page and into our hearts, having something like the hurdle of class to get through, having those two spaces defined and that third space being such a liberation - I think that makes the reader feel love in a different way. And I think that, to that effect, it makes love a radical act. And it also makes a work like this, when it's effective, a work of literary radicalism then, because it is obliterating the bounds of what we think class is and should do.

Vanessa Zoltan

And this is the chapter, right, where we get a lot of really beautiful language from Jane about her desire for Rochester, right? He made me love him without looking at me, right? Like she is just pining for him. And I can tell you, I don't know why but like my favorite part is: he follows her for a second, and this is my favorite part in these chapters, and she stops in the hallway, she's left the room that everyone is in, and she stops in the hallway because her sandal's untied. And he follows her out and he says, "How are you?" and she says, "I'm fine." And he says, as I talked about in my opening essay, he's like, "Why didn't you come speak to me?" And she's like, "uh, why don't you come speak to me? Like, I can't just go up to you." And he says, "You're paler than when I first saw you. What's wrong?" "Nothing." He says, "you're a little depressed. What about? Tell me." "Nothing. Nothing, sir, I'm not depressed." "But I affirm that you are so much depressed that a few more words would bring tears to your eyes. Indeed, they're there now shining and swimming." And then he says, "If I had time, and was not in mortal dread of some prating prig of a servant passing, I would know what all this means." I don't know, regardless of whether he, to your point, is like - doesn't even know what he's doing, and he's resolved to marry Jane, but has forgotten about that resolution, and is like "No, I'm supposed to marry Blanche." Or, I think he, regardless of whether or not it's consent, is like conniving on a singular path to get Jane. He wants to know her. He wants to know what's wrong. He's noticing when she's sad, and

he's like: I want to know why. And I, I don't know - I do. I think that's beautiful, like the -the hot guy who has another girl like preening for him, follows her out and is like, what is wrong? You hate him - your faces is like, ugh! Vanessa!

Lauren Sandler

I want to peel off my kid glove and smack him twice across the face with it, left and right, and then very slowly put my glove back on and walk away.

Vanessa Zoltan

Why?!

Lauren Sandler

That's what I want to do so badly. Because they have this incredibly intense night where she saved his life. He says: I am indebted to you forever. He grabs her hand, he won't let her go, she gets back in bed, she's fallen in love with him, and without a word, he disappears for weeks. And then he comes home with 15 rich people, and attempts to, you know, court another woman right in front of her face after these weeks of falling in love with each other. And then he's like, "Oh, have I totally not talked to you for the past few weeks? Oh, did I just bring my new girlfriend back, and am I totally making out with her right in front of you with the dance? Oh you're upset? I wonder why? Oh, sorry, I can't talk to you, I gotta go." [Laughs] I want to throttle him. And also, to say "oh, these prattling servants are the reason that I can't talk to you about this" - bullshit she's one of the domestics, too. He doesn't want to be caught talking to her by any of the Ingrams because he's performing class. And I despise it.

Vanessa Zoltan

One thing [Lauren laughs] and then we can disagree to disagree. At the end of chapter 15, she rejects him. Like, he's like stay and wants to hold her hand, and she's like, "I have to go. I'm cold. I have to go. Mrs. Fairfax is coming." Right? And he has just like laid his heart out to her. He's like, "it does me good to owe you my life. I feel no pain in your delight." Like he has essentially declared his love for her, and she has run away. And so like, "Oh yeah that time he almost drowned me, like that's so funny. Haha, look - I'm fine." I think that he sees this as a defensive move, and I think that that's idiotic of him, because I think he is forgetting that he is her employer, and that she, at minimum, even if the love is unrequited, that like she's scared for her livelihood, right? Like I think he's being an idiot, but I genuinely think that love can make us feel weak when we don't know if it's returned. And I think that that is what is making him act so dumb, and we will see in the next chapter: he acts even dumber, because he is so unsure if her feelings are reciprocated.

Lauren Sandler

I am genuinely convinced by everything that you just said. [Breathes out] Yet [Vanessa laughs], and yet it's not what I want for her. And I think that that's, but then that kind of raises to me an interesting question about this novel. And about, you know, about Pride and Prejudice, about so many stories with romantic heroes who are more of this ilk, which is: is it possible to be a reader

like myself, who can't stand these guys, and still feel drawn in and moved by these books? And I think it is, and I'm fascinated by why.

Vanessa Zoltan

And it's not this moment where he looks at her and is like you are sad, and I will know why. Like, that's not the thing that draws you in?

Lauren Sandler

Oh, it's so too late for me. [Vanessa laughs] If he came back - if he came back two days after he left Thornfield, two days after she saved his life, and he said, "I know, I didn't say anything to you, I left for two days. I am so sorry, come sit by the fire. I was scared." Fine. This, this is bullshit.

Vanessa Zoltan

Okay, so Lauren the one of the thing that I feel like we absolutely have to talk about is Grace Poole. We like hang out with her in these chapters, and the conversation, right - so the morning after the fire, Rochester and Jane had had this conversation where Jane was like, "I heard Grace Poole, I think it was Grace Poole," and Rochester was like, "Yes, it was totally Grace Poole. I can't believe she did that. Not gonna fire her, but she did super try to kill me." Then in the morning, Rochester is gone and Jane doesn't know it, and Jane and Grace have this conversation. And I just love Grace. I love her. Jane is accusing her, right? "Grace, you were the one who did it." And so Jane is saying like, "It's really weird that I heard you laughing and then the fire happened." And Grace Poole is like, "Yes, that is weird." But what Grace Poole does, right - she knows that Jane is accusing her, and what she says to Jane is, "Lock your door at night. This house isn't safe." And I just, I just love it. I love it, she's not - she's not mean, she's not like, "What? Are you accusing me of something?" She's like, "Sweet girl, I know what you think. Lock your door."

Lauren Sandler

And Jane has gone through this whole, you know, internal process with Grace Poole where she's thought, "Well, they are about the same age, maybe there was something between them. But how would I compete with Grace? I'm, I'm prettier than her - I'm not prettier than anyone, but at least I'm prettier than Grace. I'm certainly smarter than her," and she, you know - she feels like Grace has all this power, and then she needs in that way that we do to take her down and to elevate herself above Grace so that she gets to maintain this special relationship with a man that she loves. She feels threatened by Grace, and then there's something about this, it's almost like the opposite of what Roxanne Eberle was talking about, which is: when there isn't that competition, there's just caretaking. There's just this sort of quiet, mutual respect and sense that we are in this together, in both, you know, the small sense of what this household means and in the larger project of what it means to be women without money, who need to exist in service in situations that are mysterious and uncomfortable. And what we need to do is steal ourselves and look out for each other. And there's something very powerful about that to me.

Vanessa Zoltan

Yeah, and it also just shows Jane's complete lack of power. There's so many forces going on in this house that she doesn't know about, that she can't understand, there are like deals under the table and side deals and, and Grace Poole and Mrs. Fairfax I feel like are two people who are reaching out to her and are like, you know, let me untie your bonnet, lock your door, Like, you look sad, you're not eating enough. Right, like these women are really trying to take care of her.

Lauren Sandler

And there are so many forms of scarcity that we encounter with Jane. So many things that she hasn't had, right. She hasn't had nurturing or love or, at times, the right food or the right clothing or the right heat or the right education, you name it - but there is this element of scarcity of knowledge, which I think can be the most terrifying one of all. One of the areas in which I feel like Jane has the least ability to, to make her own life and control things for herself, and she just simply doesn't know. And we get this feeling of danger, and then that feeling that I think, you know, when poverty exists, it exists a much more acutely when it is set against wealth, you know. There's this wealth of knowledge all around her. Everyone is in on some secret except Jane, and I think that's a really disempowering place to be.

Vanessa Zoltan

Well, what are you looking forward to? We're going to do chapters 19 and 20 next week.

Lauren Sandler

Well that knowledge is going to get closer [Vanessa laughs] and closer. I mean this mystery just looms so large, the mystery of the third story. And we're going to go there.

Vanessa Zoltan

Yeah – first we're going to hang out with this gypsy, who has beckoned Jane, which is one of the weirdest freaking scenes that I've ever read in my life [both laugh]. And then yeah, and then we go to the third floor. Dun dun dun!

[Transition music]

Lauren Sandler

As I think everyone listening to this knows by now, I am feeling traumatized myself consistently by Rochester, which will only continue, and by elements of how he treats Jane, but also, you know, why it is that so many of us tend to fall at times for people who mistreat us, who gaslight us, who ignore us. And we have this incredible fortune to call Adriana Herrera, who's not only a bestselling author of romance novels, including a series about rakes which is out right now. She's also a trauma therapist. And so we wanted to get her on the phone to talk about what it means to do a trauma-informed reading of "Jane Eyre," and specifically see what her thoughts are about Rochester in this context. So, let's give her a call.

[Calling ringtone]

Hello, Adriana.

Adriana Herrera

Hi – I have lots to say about Rochester, specifically pertaining to trauma and women.

Lauren Sandler

Please tell us [laughs].

Adriana Herrera

Like, to me one of the big things with him is creating for Jane that sense of having to do all these mental acrobatics to justify his behavior. Or the ways in he, in which he is dismissive, and the way in which he minimizes her concerns, and the ways that he, like, feels entitled to, you know, behave in whichever way he behaves. And I think – I mean, as things develop in this story, we'll see just the heights that he reaches in that behavior. And how destruct- like, materially and emotionally destructive this man's persistence and like, be entitled to feel how he feels at the detriment of the women and the people in his life continues.

Lauren Sandler

Although I do always wonder about why it is that so many people are drawn sexually, romantically to the people they find irredeemable, right? There's who we can accept as a hero, and then there's who we want to go to bed with. Or, even more so, who we want to want to go to bed with us. So, it's reminding me of – I did this piece for *Elle* years ago, right after Neil Strauss had published his book "The Game," which was like a pickup artists' bible. And I went to the house off Sunset Boulevard where Neil lived with this pickup artist named Mystery who was Neil's guru. And I did a whole workshop with Mystery, and I – in this workshop, what the men were being taught in this workshop, was like a term that is now common, which is how to neg. How to put down women so they'll want you. How to ignore women so they'll want you. And we would go out to these clubs, and I would see it work – I would see it happen. And it really got in me, this feeling of like: what is it – and not just in gender terms, just in human terms, and in trauma terms – why is it that people are romantically drawn to people who treat them like shit? And specifically in a way that is gaslighting and just sort of making people scramble for their attention and question their own worth?

Adriana Herrera

Ok – trauma I think has to do a lot, a lot with it. Right? And I think – I mean, I think a lot of the ways that we as people react to people's abusive behavior towards us is really tied to our sense of self and our attachments. And there's these skills that, in the trauma field we call self-capacities, and these are like, certain things that people have or lack – like, for example, people who've experienced complex trauma in their childhood sometimes lack. And that's like the self-capacity to feel self-worth, know that you are worthy of being treated in a certain way; and the ability to self-regulate, manage your own emotion. And so, when we don't have those things, we are looking elsewhere – it's like, other people are regulating for us, or co-regulating. And we don't

have that set boundary sometimes to be like, “No, this is not ok. What you’re saying to me is not ok, and it’s not true.” And those are certain things that some people have, some people don’t have – a lot of us have childhood trauma. A lot of us have experiences in our childhood or in past relationships where we’ve internalized some of those things, and those things have become the lease, right? And so I think that’s part of it. And I think part of it is, too, that we live in a patriarchy, we live in a misogynistic world where women are socialized - and I mean cis-straight women largely - have been socialized to equate value to the men’s attentions. And men have no bar for their behavior. The standard of men’s behavior - the ground is not low enough. So it’s not so much women as it is white supremacy and the patriarchy, because it is what we are socialized to work with. Like, this is what we have to work with.

Lauren Sandler

It’s interesting because we’ve talked before on the podcast about romance with a capital R – the Romantic figure, the Byronic figure - one of the professors we spoke to, Roxanne Eberle, who calls the “mad, bad, and dangerous boy” – and that is something that boys created. Byron created his own persona and sold it, and then it was replicated. And it’s interesting to think about Bronte as a very smart woman, clearly, and as someone who has written a book that a lot of people think of as the first feminist novel, which is something that I struggle with a lot, as creating this Byronic figure as the love interest. And creating a heroine whose own trauma story is never getting what she needs at all, and then this man denies her what she needs and then gives it to her, and that, like it’s like – it’s got to be harrowing, right? To have that experience, from a trauma perspective?

Adriana Herrera

Yeah. I mean, and I do think a lot about women, right – like, last week, the horrific law that is basically making abortion not just illegal but extremely punishable in Texas has gone into effect. And as a woman, I feel like some fantasy of some man who can come and protect me from the dangers of the world and make me feel adored, worshipped, like everything in his life no longer matters. Just caring for me and keeping me happy and fed and buying me things and, also, looking after my sexual pleasure, in a world where women are literally – we are literally shielding ourselves from all the ways in which society can hurt us. And even when you see the writing on the wall - like this man’s a stalker. He just bought an entire publishing house just so that he could control my schedule - I’m talking about “Fifty Shades of Grey” [Lauren laughs]. It’s creepy, it’s creepy - and yet undeniably appealing. Because imagine just laying down all your concerns to someone else who has the currency to have power in this world that we could never have as women. I mean it’s so appealing.

Lauren Sandler

I wonder if, while we just have a couple more minutes of your time, if you can sort of talk us through the practice of trauma-informed reading. Like: how you pick up a book from your own therapist’s perspective and read things in a slightly different way than we might as lay people?

Adriana Herrera

Well, I always ask why. Why do people do the things that they do? Like a woman who is a smart woman – like, she’s a smart woman, why would she put up with this? It’s like, well – you have to think about context. You have to think about culture. You have to think about childhood trauma. You think about options. You have to think about: this might be the one thing she feels she has control over. And continue to question your own reactions, your own negative reactions, to the choices that this woman has that you’re not working with, right? Because I think that’s also something that for us as women is important to be mindful of. That our own trauma of the patriarchy and misogyny and the things that we have had to fight to have make us really project onto women that have different contexts and different choices than we do, a moralistic set of values that men have handed to us and that we have poured them into these characters. Like, that’s the other piece, too, that I think is important – and the reasons why some things for us are acceptable and some things may not be. And how we hold – like, I think holding, always holding, that the reason why people do the things they do usually comes from a place of history of traumatic experience, something that was lacking and something that they’re looking for. And that’s something that we need to hold as we read these books, too. And then always pay attention too to the things that are particularly hard for us and what that, where that’s coming from.

Lauren Sandler

Well, Adriana, thank you so much. I really do hope that we’ll get you back. Yeah, I could talk with this stuff with you for hours.

Adriana Herrera

Thank you for having me!

[Outro music begins]

Vanessa Zoltan

You’ve been listening to On Eyre. We are a small show, so we do need your support to run. If you can, please consider supporting us on Patreon at Patreon.com/HotAndBotheredRomPod. We are thinking about doing next season on “Pride and Prejudice” and need your support in order to make that happen. If you love our show, please leave us a review on Apple Podcast or wherever it is that you are listening to my beautiful voice right now. We are a Not Sorry production. Our executive producer is Ariana Nedelman, and our associate producer is Molly Baxter. We are distributed by A-Cast. Special thanks this week to Roxanne Eberle, Deborah Nord, and Adriana Herrera for talking to us, Julia Argie, Nickie Zoltan, Lara Glass, Stephanie Paulsell, and each and every one of our patrons. Thanks so much everybody, and we will talk to you next week.