Hot and Bothered: On Eyre

Paving Hell with Energy (Chapters 14 + 15)

VANESSA: These two chapters have a simple set of plot points.

[music starts while Vanessa speaks]

VANESSA: Rochester and Jane talk a few times. Rochester tells Jane where Adèle comes from, admitting some sins in the process of her procurement. Jane notices that Rochester's bed has been set on fire and saves him. Jane and Rochester fall in love. I will slow that down now. In Chapter 14, Rochester and Jane begin to talk. For a good amount of time, they don't see each other very much. He is in and out doing business now that his ankle is better. But one night he summons her and Adèle. Adèle's present has finally arrived. Part of it is a dress, and as she goes off to try it on, Jane and Rochester talk. "You examine me, Miss Eyre. Do you think me handsome?" "No, sir", she replies. Rochester begins confessing to Jane, but the confessions are in riddles. He was to makes a quote "retransformation from Indian rubber back to flesh." A comment which makes Jane thinks: "He's had too much wine." He demands that she speak, she refuses which delights him. Finally, she says that she is willing to amuse him but only he finds the topic. A deal is struck. They read each other, their faces, the structures of one and other's heads, their characters. There is attraction and mutual understanding and some confusion too. It's in this scene, I believe, that Rochester decides that he is gonna marry Jane. He says "This moment, I am paving Hell with energy. I am laying down good intentions which I believe durable as flint. My associates and pursuits shall be better than they have been." He, in short, is gonna make Jane his associate. He knows what his aim is, and he will change laws if he has to, to get them. Adèle then comes in to show off her dress. Rochester tells us that Adèle in this dress that he has bought for her has transformed into Céline Varens. Chapter 15 starts with the story of said Céline Varens. It turns out that Céline is Adèle's mother, who Rochester thought that he was in love with. She was a Parisian opera singer, which was synonymous with loose women at the time. Rochester caught her cheating on him and shot the man who cuckolded him in the shoulder. Céline eventually reached out that she had had Rochester's child. Rochester does not believe that Adèle is his but took her in anyway. Jane loves Adèle more for having been abandoned and unloved by Rochester. Here's Claudia Nelson who you've heard previously talk about Jane's role as an orphan on Adèle.

CLAUDIA NELSON: Adèle is a really interesting case because she gets to have the curly hair and the fancy toys and all those things, but she doesn't get to have the love either. Even though she quite possibly is Rochester's biological daughter. Or if she is not, she could be, so he has to take responsibility for her anyway. But I don't know if think the interesting thing there is that even through Rochester doesn't lover her, he does take responsability for her and he treats her in a way as a kind of pet. He will bring her back gifts. He doesn't expect work. He doesn't expect that she be a good Christian girl and properly grateful and so forth. Everybody refers to Adèle as a little monkey, or you know some kind of little non-human thing. And does Rochester thing of her as his daughter? No. But Jane ultimately kind of does or thinks of her anyway as a stepdaughter to whom she has responsibilities.

VANESSA: It is after this admission of past transgressions and having no love for Adèle that Jane begins to fall in love with Rochester. Obviously *[said ironically]*. She is quote "so happy and so gratified with this new interest added to her life that she ceases to pine after kindred." She doesn't need family anymore, she has Rochester. He becomes the face she best likes to see. More cheering than a fire. Then in my opinion, the first truly sexy scene in the novel happens. Jane wakes up on night to a sound. She thinks that Pilot is wandering around but opens the door to check. She hears a strange laugh and runs down the hall because a fire is burning. Rochester is passed out in his bed as flames burn around him. Jane douses the bed and gets Rochester out alive. He asks Jane what she thinks happens, and she says that she heard Grace Poole laugh and that Grace probably did it. He agrees and tells Jane to tell no one what happened, he will account for the damage. He then takes her hand and says "You have saved my life. I have a pleasure in owing you so immense a debt. I feel your benefits no burden. My cherish preserver, good night."

[music]

VANESSA: Jane then tries to exit, but he can't get himself to let go of her hand. She extricates it and runs back to her room, though she is unable to sleep. I'm Vanessa Zoltan.

LAUREN: And I'm Lauren Sandler.

VANESSA: And this is On Eyre, from Hot and Bothered.

[Music continues]

VANESSA: Lauren, a lot happened in these two chapters. What context do you think we need?

LAUREN: So, lets focus on Céline for a moment. Céline Varens, who we learn has been Rochester's paramour. Who he met as she was singing opera and dancing. So, Paris at this time

was exploding with population. It was one of many newly industrialized cities and people were flocking to them for work. And the people who were getting work of course, were men. And the people who were underemployed and living a life of great instability with very very few options were women. Women could either do incredibly underpaid service work, or they could find a man to either partner with or who might give them money in return for certain pleasures. And the place that this happened, outside of brothers, perhaps most significantly was the opera. So, every time you look at a Degas painting, know this: the dancers in the painting were not just beautiful girls in tutus. They may have been beautiful girls in tutus, but they were often poor girls who were brought to dance at the opera and who were lined up for the favors of the wealthy subscribers at the opera. In writings from the day, for example in the memoirs of a writer named Louis Véron who was one of the directors of the Paris opera in the 19th century, he writes "attending the opera was fashionable, keeping a ballet girl even more so." So, this was a place where men like Rochester would go to find women who they could set up in apartments with carriages and cashmere and diamonds. It was expected. And these were women who had reputation for being lascivious and yet most of them were born into poverty and had almost no options to get out of it. And so, you know, Rochester is horrified that the women he is keeping might actually have feelings for someone else and might have just curried favors with him, so that she could have a home, so that she could have clothing etcetera. But that was probably what she had as her only option in the world. And of course, as we've mentioned before, this writing comes up around the time of Marx, around the time of really thinking about what it would mean to empower workers and the amount of humiliation and degradation and struggle that it takes to not be born wealthy and to need to work for a living. And I think that Céline fits completely within that, even if Rochester's unwilling to see it because he's so blinded by his own desire and jealousy.

VANESSA: Yeah, I'm very confused by what the text wants us to think about Céline. I think that the text is trying to do double duty here of – it wants us to feel for Rochester, that he thought he really loved her and really felt betrayed by her, and yet I and maybe this is just because I am a reader of 2021, I don't judge Céline. Right, like it's very clear to me that she's financially dependent on him. And that when he leaves her it's really cruel, and that he then shoots this man in the shoulder. Right. So, I'm wondering what you think about that. Is it my modern reading of the scene that allows me to see how complicated this is, or do you think Charlotte Brontë was simultaneously trying to show us: look Rochester isn't all bad, he had his reasons but also Céline was put in a difficult situation?

LAUREN: I feel like it's how Brontë is introducing us to Rochester as a man of great passion. I mean, he evens refer to this as his "grande passion", right. You know as someone who's capable of incredible feeling, incredible commitment, incredible love, which has simply been misplaced. I do think though that our way of seeing that is she creates this really unfortunate Madonna-whore dichotomy, that I feels like Jane herself would struggle with. But there is this notion that we have pure Jane, and we have the horror of Paris. You know France of the time and continues to be I would say synonymous with sexual licentiousness, and a taste for finer things that may be unearned, and just a whole type of sort of snobbery. And I think that that is something that Brontë is buying into here a bit. I mean she's throwing crazy French shade all over this this book.

VANESSA: Oh, yeah.

LAUREN: I also think, you know this is a book that was published during the moralism of the Victorian era. It's not like she does the extra work to make us feel what Céline's position might be, which honestly, probably wasn't all that different than Jane's. She just didn't have Lowood; she didn't have the opportunity to be a governess. She had a different talent. You know, she had the talent to sing and dance and seduce and be what she needed to be in 19th century France. So, I actually struggle with it. I felt like this is one of the things about the book that I get really frustrated with, is this was a poor sex worker who clearly was not into Rochester for anything except for what she needed from him. I mean Rochester is someone who even Jane who is in love with him doesn't think is handsome. And yet Céline has told him that he is more gorgeous than Apollo. I mean obviously that's a line. And if Rochester chooses to buy it, that's on him.

VANESSA: Yeah, the thing that complicates all this for me is that Jane and Rochester have this conversation that he says, "you know I hope you don't mistake my informality for insolence". And she says, "I could never do that, one I rather like informality, I rather like and the other insolence, nothing freeborn should even submit to, even for a salary". And Rochester says, "no no, like people would do anything for a salary". And it's so interesting to me, right, that the person with wealth and power understands that. Is like there's a desperation that people do anything for a salary, and the poor girl is like, "no I have morals." And I feel like he is showing that he understands why Céline did what she did. Right, like people do anything for a salary. And like that to me shows some sort of empathy and understanding on his part. He's thought about this and seen it from some extent from Céline's point of view.

LAUREN: Well, I think he's also felt it from his own point of view, right. We've already heard that he has had a relationship with his own family that has required him to live in a certain way,

related to the family fortune that he found unconscionable. I don't know how much he sees it in Céline though. I think that the way that he describes his relationship with Céline is still so broken in heartbreak and jealousy that he refuses to see her as a courtesan. He still feels like he a wronged man, even if he is a fool, he is a fool not because he misjudged a business venture but because he fell in love with someone who cuckolded him and didn't love him back.

VANESSA: I'm wondering what you make of the fact that he shoots her paramour? Are we supposed to feel threatened by that? That he is a man capable of violence? It's sort of a throw away moment, he's like: "I told him to meet me at dawn in the parc and we met, and I lodge a bullet in the shoulder".

LAUREN: I love it, it's such an aside. *[Laughs]*

VANESSA: Yeah! I'm like you super shot someone, dude!

LAUREN: But it's funny because we've already heard from Ms. Fairfax that they are very violent people these Rochesters.

VANESSA: Right!

LAUREN: And we haven't learned what that means yet. And maybe she knows this. But there's this other type of violence that he uses against Céline. Which is he - he pulls the plug on his funding of her life. Which isn't just the cashmere and the diamonds, it's her shelter, it's her food, it's all of her stability. And here she is, a woman with a child. You know, he's saying that he rescues Adèle from the slime and mud of Paris, that Céline is destitute. Well, she's destitute because he was responsible for her stability, it's not like she could go on welfare, it's not like she could go to a shelter. And so, yes on the one hand he duels at dawn with the other cowboy, and the lover is left with, you know, a bummed shoulder I imagine after their shoot-out. But what Céline is left with is so much worse, she's left with nothing.

VANESSA: Yeah, he says right, like "I gave her such money as was necessary for her, right like he gives her some clothing and some money", but you're absolutely left to believe that it isn't enough, it isn't much, right. And that we know from other contemporanean stories like "Les Misérables", right like one piece of misfortune, one man leaving a woman can change the course of her life and make her completely destitute. And again, I feel like that's a foil for what we're gonna see Rochester do to Jane later, which is when the two of them have this big fight and potential ending of their relationship, he's like, "I will give you everything you want, like what do you want, take it all." And so yeah, I think that you're right about the Madonna-whore comparison, that Jane when she is gonna frustrate or betray Rochester, it's gonna be from a

place of purity and therefore he's gonna be able to treat her in a totally different way then he treated Céline.

LAUREN: And this is part of why Jane frustrates me so much. Because she owns that purity, right? She's saying, "I would never submit to anything that feels so problematic." And it just feels like right, of course you wouldn't Jane, you haven't had to. You found other ways. But not everyone has that capability, and there's just something that feels so self-righteous about it and so naïve at the same time, right? She is the 18-year-old who hasn't seen the world yet but who's making pronouncements about how pure she would be within it. And I love that he takes that down a notch. But then again, it is her purity that he falls in love with and that it's her purity that he thinks will save him. And that is in part why I find this romance so troubling.

VANESSA: So, there are two things I wanna say about that. One is that I think Jane by the end of the book implicates herself as not being as pure as 18-year-old Jane thinks she will always be, right? We know that Jane Eyre writes this from the perspective of a thirty-something-year-old. And she confesses to us, she does something that 18-year-old Jane would be shocked by at the end of the novel. And so, I think we're invited to judge Jane for this, for being like, "you are completely naive and like, yes you were abused but you were also a woman of tremendous privilege" right and Rochester, I think beautifully, calls her out on it, right, he's like "absolutely not, I've seen the world." And yet I totally agree with you that it is at least in part her purity and her naiveté and her youth that makes her so attractive to him. He's like, "that's who I could have been if I hadn't been sullied by the world, I could be that good and think that well of the world too." Lauren, I'm wondering if you agree with me that it is like super early in their relationship and conversation that he looks at her and is like, "I'm gonna marry you." And it's such a weird moment. So, Jane is like "speak truth sir, I don't understand you at all, I cannot keep up this conversation. It is out of my depth." And then she says, "I know one thing; you're saying that you weren't as good as you would have wanted to be, and you regret your own imperfections. And you have a sullied memory which is like always bothering you. So, it seems to me that you would try hard, and you would find it possible again to be good, to be something that you would approve of, to not, to not hate yourself." And that's it, like then he says, "I know what my aim is, what my motives are and at this moment I pass a law." And that law is, he's like, "I'm gonna do whatever I have to do to marry you." And it's just like, it's so early and it's so weird!

LAUREN: Right but he's already decided that she is going to save him. And he has said, "you know, when I first saw you, I knew that there was this thing about you, and I see your purity

and I see your goodness and I hate myself for being so wrecked and bad and old and it is you Jane who is going to transform me." And so, it's like he's already decided that she is his salvation. And it - it isn't something that is going to be based in behavior or attraction or anything like that. It is the fact that she is what he believes is this untouched, unsullied goodness that he's made this decision. And it almost feels like after that is when they begin falling in love. And yet, even if I'm frustrated with it, I feel Jane's desire build through it. Even though she may push back, even though I may find him infuriating, he is a different version of that mad, bad and dangerous guy. And I think that it's something that gets complicated around the question of desire here. You know we've been talking about these two different themes of desire and power and how they keep getting woven tighter and tighter and tighter together. This to me is the chapter when they become inseparable. Because I think that she does desire his power. And I think that it is difficult to fully separate sex from power. He bemoans the fact that they're not equals. He says, "you know, if I hadn't lived this life that I've lived, if I was still my 18-year-old pure self, Jane we would be equals." But do we want them to be equals, do we want the two of them both to be pure and redescent, or do we want him to throwing down the way that he is? Do we want to know that he is the man who would, you know, shoot Céline Varens' lover, that he would take lover in Paris to begin with, that he is someone who feels so much passion, so much jealousy and now so much certitude about Jane? I don't love that he's into Jane because he thinks that Jane will save him. That makes me wanna tell her to run for the hills. But I do love that he's saying "this sweet fresh pleasure that you haven't had yet Jane, how do you know you don't like it? You're gonna find out pretty soon that you do." And there's something exciting about that to me I got to admit.

VANESSA: Not only that I totally understand why he is exciting to her. She has none of this freedom. He has just gone around Europe and slept with who he wants to and shot someone at dawn. She's been pacing the second floor looking out of the window being like, "I wish I could do anything". And so, she can't, right? If she did anything like this she would be ruined. Like Céline. This is a cautionary tale for her, she has to stay the straight and narrow path of using her education in order to barter to be safe enough as a governess. And so yeah, how else is she gonna get any of these adventures? She can get in bed with the man who can tell her these stories, right? And like look up at him and be like what was that like?" And these aren't stories that she's gonna get anywhere else. Bessie maybe told her a version of them. And so, I just totally get why she is attracted to him. It's "tell me about your trips. Like I can't go around the world, but I can listen to you."

LAUREN: But there's also this other element of Jane which of course we saw when she was younger. When she did have Bessie telling her those stories, which is the sort of passion that is so quiet in these chapters, but we see so present in Rochester. It almost fells like he is this mirror of Jane's deeper repressed self. You know, Jane was someone who had a tendency to violence. Jane is someone who felt incredible jealousy and incredible loss. When she did, those were the moments that I loved her the most and this like quacker dressed, pale and quiet Jane. I wanna take her out drinking, but we do know that there are these parts of her that really really deep that match him. And that it's not that he would be her equal by being this quiet pure person, but that she is his equal in terms of having this depth of feeling and passion.

VANESSA: Right, and the only difference is that he is free to express it, and that maybe in their relationship, she would be free to express it. Because he would understand those responses in her. She's been trained over the last ten years to repress all of that. And with him she could say I wanna shoot her at dawn, and it wouldn't scare him, cause he'd be like, "yeah, I totally get that feeling."

LAUREN: It feels like he is undoing what Lowood did to her - in these pages in some way. It feels like what she has been taught is what life could and should be. He's turning on its head and that's what she's been craving all along.

VANESSA: The other thing that he does is see her weirdness. He summons her paintings portfolio in order to show his guests, right. He loves her purity but also those paintings are not pure. There are peculiar and passionate and literary. And he is like, "look how cool and weird this chick is," right. So, I think he makes the decision based on purity, is like you be like medicinally to me, good for me, you would be like a marriage cure for me. But he says right like, "Oh, you're stubborn" and he likes it. So, I think yes, it's her purity but also her fire.

LAUREN: But let's also remember for a moment, not that we ever forget this, that this is a 40-year-old employer and in many ways, he is overstepping a bound as an employer which is far more problematic than anything that he did with a French courtesan who was clearly in a business arrangement with him. I - I just think that if ever there's a moment to at least begin to talk about the fact that Jane is the virginal nanny who he has hired to educate his possible illegitimate daughter and now he is seducing her and saying I will have the fresh sweet pleasure of your body and your hand in marriage.

VANESSA: But I think you know there's also just a fairytale aspect of this. Right, she is the poor servant and he's the prince. He's also the boss, but if I imagine myself in the 1830s, I just

like can't imagine anything sexier than my boss *[chuckles]* falling in love with me. I like know it's so problematic and I just like totally get it. And while we are talking about the potential of Rochester being a total creep, he dresses up his maybe daughter in a dress that makes her look like a little courtesan. She goes to try on the dress and Rochester says to Jane, "Look, when Adèle comes back in this room, she is gonna have a dress on that makes her look just like her mother." What is that? To dress up a child in an outfit that like a courtesan ex-girlfriend would look like? It's so weird!

LAUREN: Girl, it is so weird. *[laughs]* Ha! I mean it just feels like what is Brontë saying here? About the French and also about Rochester's relationship to not just the horrors on the Madonna-whore spectrum of the world, but what does it mean to try to create one? Is that what he's doing? What is this?

VANESSA: I mean he's not insofar as like he's trying to get her an English governess, right, he's trying to Britishize her. But he also just like - it just feels cruel, like he's mocking her. He's like, "you're gonna love this dress and you're gonna love this dress because you're your mother's daughter. And I can try to English you all I want but at your core you're always gonna be right like a little slut." Like it's just the creepy creepy shit that middle-aged men do when they resent that they're attracted to young women. Ugh!

LAUREN: Or, or this is actually just sort of something great about Rochester. Where no matter how much he plays sort this of gruff dismissive pseudo father, he knows what Adèle wants. And he knows that like so many girls Adèle's age she wants the sparkly tutu, and she wants to rip it out of the box and to roll around in it and that this is just something that will bring her incredible joy. And so, he dismisses it but really all he wants to do is make Adèle happy.

VANESSA: Ugh, we got a freaky Friday moment, I love it.

Lauren laughs.

VANESSA: I mean there's a lot of evidence to your point, right. He's like, "I'm not gonna be able to tell her she looks cute in this dress, so let's get Mrs. Fairfax in here 'cause Mrs. Fairfax will tell her she looks cute in the dress and that's what Adèle wants right now." I just think that there's always gonna be this tension with Rochester where he has these really strange relationships with women, these complicated relationships with women and you're like, "Are his intentions actually really progressive and wonderful for their time or are they like twisted and weird?" And, I mean the answer of course, of course has to be both, because to your point like power and desire are intrinsically liked to this point. He wants Jane because he loves her

and also because she purifies him. And he is kind to Adèle because he is kind but is also kind to her in a slightly twisted way. And he employs Mrs. Fairfax and like invites her for tea because she's a relative but also like he doesn't like her. There's something about - like his absolute power over these women means that he, even though he tries to be good, his desires of contempt can just always play themselves out.

LAUREN: And I think that Brontë, whether she meant to or not, is delivering some of this ambiguity. There is so much description in this book, and yet the scenes with Rochester, they're just written like a script, right. There is no detail around the dialogue, we don't learn that he speaks to Adèle with a smile or a glint in his eyes, you know. We never know if these lines are being performed in an ironic way or a gruff way. We - we lose this sort of characterization that would let us know where he is positioned in any of this. And I actually wonder if there is an element of these scenes that invite all of these adaptations, especially on screen. Because they can be played all of these different ways. I mean, yes, this is this massive, seminal love story that has shaped us. But part of why that it shapes us is because it keeps getting interpreted and reinterpreted. Because you could play Rochester as someone who is really cold and gruff or you could be playing him as someone who is always saying things for the smirk and flirting and there's a way that he expresses affection by saying, "Oh don't bother me with your pleasure, please bring Mrs. Fairfax" and smiling at Adèle loving opening this box in the corner. Maybe he has no interest at all. Brontë never tells us. And I don't know why she chooses not to. It's like, it's like there's just a transcript of these dialogues after we've had so much rich detail from her.

VANESSA: Well, I'm wondering the extent to which you think that she thinks she has told us all that we need to know with again this physiognomy stuff. Right, she tells us in this chapter that he lifts his hair, and she says, "he showed a solid enough mask of intellectual organs with an abrupt deficiency where the sign of benevolence would have risen." Right, so this physiognomy stuff that you pointed us to - now that you have, I'm just like wholly shit! Like she's relying on this science that leads to eugenics to do so much of this descriptive work for us. She has described his forehead; we're supposed to know based on our physiognomy book that we have at home what that means and like that's supposed to give us the reading.

LAUREN: I think you're making a road to a really good point there and it's a point that really makes me uncomfortable. Not that you're making it, what you're saying feels like "Oh, right, one wouldn't have to have to describe all these behaviors if one has already described their

forehead, and that forehead is supposed to tell us everything that we're supposed to know about a person." That's so messed up! *[laughs]*

[Music]

VANESSA: So, we have to talk about the fire!!

LAUREN: Oh, the fire.

VANESSA: I mean the only think I wanna talk about the fire because we don't wanna spoil things about it, but obviously we can talk about more, is how sexy this scene is. There is soaking wet, she's just saved his life. He's holding her hand and like can't let it go, she wants him to let her go but also doesn't want him to let her go. She's like overwhelmed by this whole situation. She - she is the hero, and he is the damsel in distress. I just like, I fricking love this mini scene. I love it.

LAUREN: Again, she is a hero, and he is the damsel in distress. It's how we need him; it happens here, and it follows this whole scene in which he says, "I'm gonna marry your because you're going to save me." You know and as reader I'm reading it like 'Oh, my god get over it, enough with this salvation narrative." And then, low and behold, she saves him. I mean there's all the evidence you need *[chuckles]*, there's all the evidence at least he needs like this whole episode has proven his intentions. You know, and he's literally been set on fire, he's already said that he's paving his way to hell with these intentions. Here he is, finding himself in hell. And also finding himself asleep in such a metaphor. Right, the bed is burning. So, was the bed burning because the bed represents the flames of Hades? Is the bed burning because he can't contain the passion in his own body or is the bed burning the way that we would think about it in the 1980s after a certain Sarah Fawcett movie called "The burning bed" where when a woman is wronged, a women will set her husband's bed on fire?

VANESSA: I mean then of course if we're reading it in this previous definition of like the bed being this place of passion, Jane comes in and douses it. *[They both laugh.]* She's like, "No more bashing here! There's some water on this!" *[Lauren laughs]* But even when like when she throws this cold bowl of water on him, there's still no pun intended but there's still a heat between them, right? Just, I mean like this conversation at the end, like, "I'm glad I happened to be awake" I said and then I was going. "What, you will go?" "I am cold sir. "Cold, yes, you're standing in a pool, go." But like he can't let go and it's only the threat that like Mrs. Fairfax might come that he lets her go - but of course also, it's creepy that he won't let her go

she has to lie down to get out of his arms. I don't know. I mean just why, why do I like this so much Lauren?

LAUREN: So Brontë has this one short sentence that she sets of as its own paragraph which is: "Strange energy was in his voice, strange fire in his look." I mean, how do you not like that? What does any red-blooded human want other than strange energy in a voice and strange fire in a look? That is the stuff! And so that's what we read right before she is standing in her cold pool, and you know he is just gonna heat that up, girl. What can I tell you?

VANESSA: You're such a good friend, thank you for justifying this for me.

LAUREN: And yet! And yet!

VANESSA: *[laughs]* I knew you weren't gonna let me end happy, I knew it.

[Lauren laughs]

LAUREN: She cannot free her hand. [Vanessa interjects "I know."] And there is something that feels stricken about him. There is something that feels deeply uncomfortable about this. And so, I think that Brontë is giving us all of these mixed messages here. This is a deeply physically uncomfortable situation. This is an awkward situation. This is a situation which is filled with fear and danger in incredibly unsexy ways and yet, there's this thing about him.

VANESSA: I mean the other thing that I do love is he means to let go when she says I'm cold. Right, he's like "Yes, standing in a pool, go then", right. He like doesn't like the idea that she is cold. And he still can't get himself to let go of her, which we do have to get him some credit, he's traumatized. He just almost died, right. And was woken up being doused by water having passed out from smoke inhalation. I think we can give him some leeway here for not being able to let go. But he does have some concern for her, I don't know.

LAUREN: Listen, I get falling for Rochester. Rochester to me is smart, he has a certain charisma to him, he sees Jane and values her in ways that after being jettisoned, discarded, you know left in the slag heap of humanity in so many ways… I mean, how incredible to say you look like you're just a governess, but you have this thing to you that you would not have find in the raw power of three thousand governesses. The fact that he finds her so special is so extraordinary, but it also feels like the only thing that he values about her specialness is how it will save him. And that's a narrative that I just, I'm not gonna get with.

VANESSA: I don't know, isn't it to some extent true at the beginning of relationships where you're - you're projecting all sorts of things onto the person and then you sort of figure out whether or not you can actually live with them?

LAUREN: Absolutely. It's just in this situation everything about Jane and her relationship to Rochester is in service to him. She listens to him, she flirts with him, she saves his life, she educates his paramour's child. What is Jane getting here? Jane is making her salary. Jane still is gaining what a governess gains and there is some thrilling titillation from flirting with your boss, but what is Jane getting? Is Jane getting saved?

VANESSA: Yes! She doesn't even need kindred anymore; she doesn't need family anymore. She gets to look upon the face that gives her more pleasure than anything in the world. This was a job before, right. But a place that she felt totally trapped in and now it is a home that she is excited to be in just because he's there. I think that - I mean that line of like, "I no longer care that I didn't have a family, this man has made me so happy." *[in a falsely accusatory tone]* Why don't you want for Jane?

LAUREN: Well, I think that we'll find out. And I do think that Brontë has done a really great job of letting us feel what it will mean to have not searched for other kindred and to have put all one's eggs in one's professional and romantic basket. Yeah. But let's not get ahead of myself.

VANESSA: So next week we're in chapter 16 through 18, what are you excited about?

LAUREN: Well, I'm excited to delve a little bit more into the mystery of the burning bed. And also, to see what happens when this little bubble of people in Thornsfield, this pod so to speak, becomes broader and there are guests invited. Who will Rochester be when it's not just him and Jane?

VANESSA: Yeah, and this is the beginning of his strategy to making it true that she will marry him. And so, we will are gonna start seeing his strategy and man oh man, is it a strange strategy. *[Laughs softly]* It's just not as the crow flies!

[soft and slow music]

LAUREN: So, physiognomy keeps coming up, this way of understanding characters. Rochester especially at this point. By the shape of his brow and more, these details that seem to communicate a lot about these characters. But you know, it's feeling like a very curious science to me and as we've discussed certainly a problematic one and we wanted to talk to someone who knows far more, not just about physiognomy but also about physiognomy within English

literature, within the literature of the Victorian age. And there happens to be a professor at Dartmouth in the English department who studies the intersection of narrative and Victorian scientific culture who has studied just this named Christie Harner. So, let's get her on the phone.

[phone ringing]

LAUREN: Hey Christie!

CHRISTIE HARNER: Hey Lauren, how are you?

LAUREN: I'm great, I'm so excited to be talking to you, to have this opportunity. And I just want to dive right in. I know – I know you have written about physiognomy in literature and specifically how it's used to communicate both cross class sympathy and also anxiety. And those two things feel so present in what we're looking into here. Can you tell us a little more about the sciences to start with? Perhaps tell us about the difference between phrenology and physiognomy and how they work hands on sciences?

CHRISTIE HARNER: Absolutely. So, physiognomy really has an ancient origin. So, it was being used by the ancient Greeks and Romans. But it was repopularized in Europe by Johann Kaspar Lavater in the 1770s. So, his essay on physiognomy was translated into English, went through multiple translations in the 19th century before it fell out of favor. Physiognomy is focused primarily on facial features broadly speaking. Chins, noses, foreheads, eye shape. That type of thing. Phrenology was quote on quote "invented" in the secondy 90s by Franz Joseph Gall and then popularized by George Combe in the early 19th century. Phrenology is focused on the bumps of the heads. So, if you've ever seen one of those old-fashioned skulls that have all of these regions marked out, that's a phrenological cast. And the number of regions, or they were called faculties, changed over the course of the 19th century, they kept adding some in and taking some out, as they were finding the science. But the idea of that was that you could pinpoint basically bumps or recesses on the skull to identify character. Everything from benevolence which comes up in Jane Eyre and conscientiousness to love of children, which was right at the back of the neck.

LAUREN: So, if I had a bump at the back of my neck, did that predispose me to love or hate children?

CHRISTIE HARNER: So, the bump is that you were good with children. *[laughs]* What's really interesting about physiognomy and phrenology and this is part of the reason of the anxiety behind them is that physiognomy was predisposed more towards innate traits. So, the idea that you had characteristics that you really couldn't change. And we see a lot in this chapter about

Rochester's nature. And by nature, he is a better man, by nature he was as good as Jane. Phrenology was actually pitched to the middle classes as a way of knowing your character so as to change it if need be. And so, one of the texts from the 1840s that I always found funny was one that coached mother in how to train their children based on the phrenological traits that they had. So, "Oh, you've got a lot of X! Well, we can do something about that."

LAUREN: Did Brontë believe in these sciences?

CHRISTIE HARNER: It's always hard to say what people believed in. But she was certainly interested in them. So, in 1851, in June 1851, Brontë went with her publisher, George Smith, in London to a phrenologist named Doctor Brown. They posed a brother and sister pair, the Mister and Miss Fraser, which is hilarious because they would have had very different accents, I don't know who would have believed *[chuckles]* that they were actually siblings. But she had her phrenological reading done. The copy has survived, we have copies of the printed-of version that we got. And it's interesting in its, I don't know, surprising accuracy, Brontë would have been happy of it. It described her as intellectual, poetical and said that she possessed a fine organ of language.

LAUREN: Fascinating. It's interesting to me because Brontë at times gives us so much description through scenes, so much description that are just descriptions within dialogues of manner, of tone of behaviors. In this chapter and in other scenes with Rochester, she gives us so little. And it feels like there is so many ways that could be interpreted by a reader. I wonder if it feels like she's letting the physiognomy do some of the work of the description. That readers would know how someone with these features would be approaching this sort of scene.

CHRISTIE HARNER: I think that's part of it, although even there the specificity isn't extensive. We get a few very specific phrenological references, to benevolence and to conscience but not enough to really add up to anything. At various points in the 19th century, there were – the number of phrenological faculties generally numbered in the thirties. So, we're getting a very partial picture of Rochester here. I think what's interesting is that it's – to me this feels very characteristic of 19th century text around phrenology and physiognomy in the sense that it's a discussion. And part of the complexities of these sciences in the moment is that people were heavily debating them. So, texts that tend to include them, even texts that claimed to be proponents or to claim to reject them, they tend to stage a kind of debate or conversation about their status. And that's exactly what Brontë is doing here – is giving us a conversation in which these two characters negotiate their relationship to these sciences but also to what they represent. Is it innate identity, is it Rochester's experiences that make him different? Is Jane

just quiet because of Lowood and the experiences she's had or is that part of her innate character? And the fact that they're having a conversation a conversation about it is really important for the status of the sciences in that period. But I think is also really important for how we proceed with the relationship between the two of them. Because it is a dialogue. And neither one of them has the upper hand. Consistently in that dialogue, it goes back and forth between the two of them.

LAUREN: Within this debate at the time, was there any sort of concern for the racialized or classed based critique that would come oftently sort of discussion about the people who were being analyzed?

CHRISTIE HARNER: Absolutely. I'll talk to the class aspect first because that was more prominent in the debates. There were a lot of debates about the slipperiness of class identity, particularly in this moment when people, the middle classes are coming into a more consolidated form. And certainly, figures like Jane as a governess occupies, and I know you've talked about this already in the podcast, such a liminal class position in that she's educated but she's an employee, and where does she sit, where does Mrs. Fairfax sit similarly. So, there's a – there's a lot of conversations around that, there's a lot of suggestion into different directions about the relationship between employers and employees, there's a discussion that employers should have the right to do phrenological tests basically as character references on people that they want to hire. There are guides on how to hire servants based on their phrenology and physiognomy that are getting published. But on the other hand, there's a lot of critics of that, saying that employers can't take that liberty, that that's stereotypical, that it's biased, that it's gonna create more of a class divide, it doesn't allow for the recognition of natural traits. The racial version of it is - is more complicated because so many of the early texts left out race entirely. They weren't concerned with people who weren't white, who weren't part of the everyday traffic of most parts of the UK in this period, which were very very white in this period. The assumption generally was when race was included in these texts that people who weren't white didn't even fall into the same categories. Which was extremely dehumanizing of course, because they couldn't even really be analyzed in the same way.

LAUREN: I think there's such a temptation to think of Brontë as writing this spectacularly progressive book for some feminists or to say this is just a relic of colonial empire, of a past that we need to put behind us. And I'm constantly finding everything can be so much more complicated than that in this text. How do you approach that in terms of a relationship to these

sciences, because it's making me want to throttle her and it's making me feel like this is one the most problematic and perhaps least discussed elements in the book that I've encountered.

CHRISTIE HARNER: My general approach of the novel is that it is both. It's both incredibly problematic and incredibly progressive at the same time. And I think those two things are in some ways inextricable from each other. I don't think it's fair to try to put the novel into one category or another in the same way that I think it's fair for anyone today to into one category or the other. It's often messier than we want it to be. I think in this particular scene *[pauses]* Brontë is claiming an equal authority for Jane as a woman and as a member of the lower classes. And she is just as eligible and capable of reading on Rochester, as is a reading her. And so that I think is progressive. Because so often these sciences were in the hands of men. Anyone of course who was a professional phrenologist would have been a man. And in most of Brontë's other novels, because phrenology comes up in all of them, in most of the other novels, the person doing the phrenological reading is male. In "Villette" which is from 1853, there is this really famous scene where Monsieur Paul reads Lucie Snow to decide whether or not she can get a job. It's very much a power play in that moment. Here it's not. There's a sense of - not of equality is exactly the right word, but at least dialogism back and forth between the two of them that feels very important. And the upper-class pretentions of other characters like the Ingrams. Lady Ingram is incorrect, as I've already said, in her reading of Jane. Blanche is also incorrect, she directly uses phrenological terms in the gypsy scene, and gets it wrong. So, there's - there's definitely a calm down for the more aristocratic people that doesn't however address race.

LAUREN: Christie, thank you so much.

CHRISTIE HARNER: Thank you, this was really fun.

[music]

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