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the reader become aware in fact of the dimensions of Cereno’s personality, of the extent of the damage done to him, and of the precise causes for his fear. And the deposition serves the third purpose of preparing for the real climax of the story. Had the horrors, both stated and implied in the deposition, been dramatized rather than reported, the reader would have been limp, emotionally drained, before he reached the climax.

Having been separated from Delano’s point of view, the reader is able to come to an understanding which Delano never achieves. This point is made dramatic at the end when Delano is brought back into the narrative, it would appear a major purpose being so that he might say to Cereno: “But the past is passed; why moralize upon it? Forget it. See, yon bright sun has forgotten it all, and the blue sea, and the blue sky; these have turned over new leaves.” “But they have no memory,” Cereno replies. “You are saved,” Delano cries out. “What has cast such a shadow upon you?”

Cereno’s answer, simply stated, embodies the most horrifying moment in a story filled with horrors. His words, “The Negro,” must carry the full implications of the story, must suggest the dominance of darkness in the world, a world that stretches far beyond the limits of Delano’s view, a nightmare world where, in Cereno’s words, “malign machinations and deceptions impose,” a world of mystification, shrouded in ambiguities, where there is no clear cut distinction between master and slave, captor and captive, leader and follower, but a sickness and a delusion of the soul caused by the relationship itself. This is a world where a white skeleton for a figurehead is an emblem of a society overrun by the dark desires and destructive lusts of men. This, Melville says, is the difference in point of view; this, the reality.

The “I” of Jane Eyre

Earl A. Knies

Jane Eyre has been widely admired as a character, and critics have also noted her importance as the narrator of the story. Walter Allen, for example, says that it is in the novel’s “intense, intransigent subjectivity that the tremendous power of Jane Eyre, together with its unity, resides... If it were not for the unity of tone, Jane Eyre would be incoherent, for as a construction it is artless.”1 But many question whether first-


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"center of consciousness," which Grabo prefers, could not.

When we search for the evidences of Charlotte's struggle to get the situation of the story before us, we have difficulty finding them. Weaknesses there are, but they are not the result of an inadequate method. On the other hand, most of the strengths clearly are the result of the method. The opening chapter does a masterful job of getting the story going, giving us enough of the basic situation to make the action meaningful but at the same time avoiding extensive exposition. At the end of the chapter we are drawn forcibly into the story as those four sets of hands are laid on Jane—and, in effect, on us, for we have already been compelled to make an emotional commitment. Charlotte's first novel, The Professor, had begun with the awkward letter device and then proceeded in a reasonably strict chronological order from that point onward. Jane Eyre plunges immediately into the action of the story without any preliminary flourishes, and, although its development is also chronological, necessary information about events preceding the time of the story is periodically presented in a thoroughly natural way, for we learn about them at the same time that Jane does. Thus, although the chronological arrangement keeps the story line perfectly clear and easy to follow, Jane Eyre is really a mosaic of bits of the past and the present.

The skill with which these expository passages are blended into the forward motion of the narration is easily seen in a few examples. While Jane is lying ill after her terrifying experience in the Red Room, she overhears Bessie and Abbot, the maids, talking about her parents, and she learns "for the first time" the conditions under which she had become an orphan. The revelation does not seem unnatural, however, for it is worked smoothly into the maids' conversation. Bessie is inclined to feel some pity for Jane, but Abbot will have none of it: "... one cannot really care for such a little toad as that" (I, 27).8 Further information about Jane's background is revealed by Mrs. Reed on her deathbed. She tells how her husband had taken Jane at the death of her parents and how Mrs. Reed had hated her from the first. This bit of exposition is functional in the scene, since it emphasizes the intensity of a hatred that Mrs. Reed is unable to overcome even when death is imminent. She also tells Jane of her Uncle John's visit, earlier hinted at by Bessie when she visited Jane at Lowood. The rest of that sub-plot is sketched in by St. John Rivers near the end of the book, when he tells of her inheritance. And the background of the Rivers family is sketched in in a conversation with Hannah, the maid, while Jane helps her clean gooseberries.

Jane learns about Rochester partly from Mrs. Fairfax, but largely through his own confessions. That such conversations might seem unnatural must have occurred to Charlotte, for she has Rochester admit that it is strange that he should choose "a quaint, inexperienced girl" to tell "stories of his opera-mistresses to"; yet he feels that she was "made to be the recipient of secrets" and that hers is not the sort of mind "liable to take infection" (I, 183-4)—and we know her well enough by this time to agree. The full story of Rochester's past, the history of his marriage and subsequent debauchery, is told when it has to be: after Jane's marriage ceremony has been interrupted.

The finest piece of exposition of all is that which occurs when Jane returns to Thornfield after hearing Rochester's call. She discovers the hall in ruins, and to learn what happened she goes to the local inn, where the host is perfectly happy to answer her questions but is at

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8 All citations by volume and page refer to the two-volume Shakespeare Head Brontë edition of Jane Eyre (Oxford, 1931).
the same time unaware of her identity. He therefore replies to her questions with a true innkeeper’s expansiveness, telling her not only what she wants to know but also a great deal about herself. Try as she will to keep him on the subject, he continually wanders back to what must have been a subject of great local interest and conjecture—Jane’s relationship with Rochester. The scene is brilliant not only for its naturalness, its dramatic irony, and its suspense, but also for its usefulness. For in addition to serving the first three purposes, it reviews key situations from a new perspective. We are given some idea of how the whole affair looked to those who were not a part of it, at the same time that some of the related intensity necessarily lost during the Moor House interlude is re-established.

The examples of exposition discussed above illustrate the skill with which Charlotte Brontë conducted her first-person narrative. That skill is even more apparent when we consider some of the other difficulties traditionally attributed to first-person narration. Some of these “attendant disadvantages,” as Clayton Hamilton calls them, are “that it is often difficult to account for the hero’s presence in every scene, that he cannot be an eye-witness to events happening at the same time in different places, and that it is hard to account for his possession of knowledge regarding those details of the plot which have no immediate bearing on himself.” None of these difficulties are apparent in Jane Eyre. There simply are no details of plot which do not have an immediate bearing on Jane; the only things that are important are the things she knows. She must learn some important things at second hand, but the manner of their presentation is, as demonstrated above, perfectly natural. Because she presents exposition dramatically—

through scene rather than through summary—we are present when Rochester tells about his past, when the innkeeper tells about the burning of Thornfield—and so everything seems to be happening within Jane’s consciousness even though the events took place when Jane was not actually present. And certainly there is no problem explaining her presence in every scene that she reports.

The real triumph of Jane Eyre, as almost every commentator on the book has noted, is, of course, the character of Jane. Yet Grabo is not alone in his feeling that first-person narration creates difficulty in character portrayal. Why can’t the narrator make an elaborate portrait of himself? “All means of direct delineation are taken from him,” says Hamilton. “He cannot write essays on his merits or faults; he can neither describe nor analyze himself; he cannot see himself as others see him. We must derive our sense of who and what he is, solely from the things he does and says, and from his manner of telling us about them” (p. 120). Moreover, the characterization of a first-person protagonist has inherent dangers. Trollope sees two equally distasteful alternatives: “The reader is unconsciously taught to feel that the writer is glorifying himself, and rebels against the self-praise. Or otherwise the ‘I’ is pretentiously humble, and offends from exactly the other point of view.” Esther Summerson is an obvious example of the second type of narrator, and Charlotte Brontë’s feeling that she is merely a caricature of an amiable nature has been shared by many readers. What Charlotte is saying, however, is not that Dickens’ method is wrong but that his management of it in this instance is faulty.

For within the conventions of first-person narration it is possible to present


an admirable character without obvious self-glorification or pretentious humility. Charlotte Brontë's heroines have a particular advantage because they are characters not liked by everyone they meet and because they are plain. The frankness with which these facts are accepted by Jane and Lucy makes us more willing to accept the good things they must tell us about themselves. Moreover, even though a first-person narrator cannot write essays on himself, he can see himself as others see him if he is the kind of person who invites frank comments from other people. Every person in the book helps, to some extent, to characterize Jane, either by direct comment about her or by her reaction to them. Much of her characterization comes through Rochester, who constantly amazes Jane with his ability to read her thoughts. But, as Kathleen Tillotson comments, "we are so much occupied in discovering his own still more mysterious character and attitude that we hardly notice how we are being helped to see Jane." And it is not simply what he says about her that helps to characterize her; the things he chooses to tell her about himself also provide a great deal of information. We cannot conceive of his telling Blanche Ingram about his Byronic past any more than we can conceive of her listening without horror or shock.

The interaction among the personalities of the novel, then, carries much of the burden of characterization. Even though Jane enlists our sympathy in such a way that we feel about the various characters much as she does, still, we are not forced to accept her feelings simply because they are hers; her friends and foes are presented in such a way that we can accept or reject them on the basis of their actions. We do not dislike Mrs. Reed or Brockenhurst or Blanche Ingram merely because Jane does, but we do dislike them for the same reasons that she does: we are repelled by their meanness, their hypocrisy, their pettiness. The elaborate use of foil characters—the Reed sisters and the Rivers sisters, Rochester and St. John, Brockenhurst (the black pillar) and St. John (the marble pillar), Blanche Ingram and Rosamond Oliver, to name only some of them—also helps to portray various personalities, and, because they all come into contact with Jane, to portray her.

Of course, Jane does characterize herself through the things she says and does, and her frankness, both in talking to characters within the novel and in talking to us, convinces us of her reliability. We never get the feeling that she is trying to varnish the truth. "You examine me, Miss Eyre," says Rochester; "do you think me handsome?" "No, sir," she blurts out, without pausing to grope for a more conventional and less honest reply (I, 167). The scene is echoed after the existence of Rochester's mad wife has been revealed. "You know I am a scoundrel, Jane?" he asks wistfully. Her reply is again disturbingly brief and honest: "Yes, sir" (II, 78). Nor does she hesitate to tell us, her "Reader," about feelings that a respectable young girl of the 1840's would be likely to conceal carefully. Watching Rochester mingle with his guests at Thornfield, Jane compares him with them: "My master's ... features ... were not beautiful, according to rule; but they were more than beautiful to me: they were full of an interest, an influence that quite mastered me... . I had not intended to love him: the reader knows I had wrought hard to extirpate from my soul the germs of love there detected; and now, at the first renewed view of him, they spontaneously revived, green and strong! He made me love him without looking at me" (I, 224). It is small wonder that Charlotte's contemporaries found Jane Eyre shocking; it is also easy to understand why we believe her.

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This complete honesty, this perfect candor, then, provides a structure upon which the reliability of the narrative is built. Once we believe in Jane, we are willing to suspend our disbelief about incidents in the novel which seem improbable. Jane’s belief in dreams and the supernatural provides a setting in which the call from Rochester can take place: the imagery running through the novel sets a tone and creates an atmosphere within which supernatural occurrences do not seem improbable. When Jane is imprisoned in the Red Room the sight of what may have been the gleam of a lantern seems to her “a herald of some coming vision from another world.” When she hears Rochester coming through the dusk on his horse, she immediately thinks of “a North-of-England spirit, called a ‘Gytrash.’” Rochester constantly refers to her other-worldly characteristics; when she returns from her aunt’s deathbed he asks where she has been: “I have been with my aunt, sir, who is dead.” His response is not entirely playful: “A true Janian reply! Good angels be my guard! She comes from the other world—from the abode of people who are dead; and tells me so when she meets me alone here in the gloaming!” (II, 6).

In criticizing Shirley for its “wilful departures from probability,” G. H. Lewes set up a standard of credibility that might well apply to Jane Eyre: “We are by no means rigorous in expecting that the story is to move along the highway of everyday life. On the contrary, we are willing to allow the imagination full sweep; but we demand, that into whatever region it carry us, it must be at least consistent: if we are to travel into fairy land, it must be in a fairy equipage, not in a Hansom’s cab.” Charlotte has chosen her equipage carefully. At the heart of her book is the statement in which Jane declares her belief in presentiments and sympathies and signs (I, 285). The world of Jane Eyre is one in which dreams come true—literally.

But point of view is more than a way of getting the events of the story before the reader, more than a method of characterization. It is also a way of looking at the material which provides definite effects which no other point of view could. Often—as in Robinson Crusoe, for example—the first-person narrator is so quick to interpret every incident he describes in terms of his total experience that the immediacy of his initial reactions is obscured. In Jane Eyre, however, Jane seems to be trying to dispense with time completely, and in exciting or particularly memorable moments it does disappear; Jane is there again, living the experience for the first time with no later knowledge. At least seven times in the novel she shifts her narrative from past to present tense, bringing key moments into brilliant focus and suggesting that past and present are very nearly one in this intense life of Jane’s. Elsewhere in the novel the tense is, as Kathleen Tillotson says, “the just-after-present.” “We watch a personality discovering itself not by long introspection but by a habit of keeping pace with her own experience” (pp. 298, 299).

There are spatial limitations in Jane Eyre as well as temporal ones. The intense focus of the novel is well illustrated by two incidents from the party at Thornfield. In the first Jane and Adele sit at the top of the stairs to listen to the music and singing below: “I listened long; suddenly I discovered that my ear was wholly intent on analyzing the mingled sounds, and trying to discriminate amidst the confusion of accents those of Mr. Rochester; and when it caught them, which it soon did, it found a further task in framing the tones, rend-

8Edinburgh Review, 91 (1850), 166.

erred by distance inarticulate, into words” (I, 216). The second takes place after Rochester’s group has finished its charade (which Jane has described in detail) and Colonel Dent’s group is about to begin; Jane can remember absolutely nothing of that performance, but she still sees (in the present tense) how the spectators, Rochester and Miss Ingram, conducted themselves. When Jane turns her head, everything outside the range of her vision passes out of existence. Any novelist focusses his attention and excludes irrelevant details, of course, but very few novelists do so in such an obvious way. There is no life going on around the fringes of this narrative; nothing exists except those things which Jane perceives. But they exist with an intensity seldom equalled, for Jane does not merely tell about an event; she recreates it. Thus *Jane Eyre* is almost as “dramatic” (in a critical sense) as a novel can be. Jane the narrator does not come between us and the narrative but rather becomes part of it. Because she seldom analyzes her experience from the vantage point of time, narration and narrator become one.

The implications of this technique in interpreting the novel become important. G. Armour Craig finds the single vision a decided limitation: “The power of the ‘I’ of this novel is secret, undiscoverable, absolute. There are no terms to explain its dominance, because no terms can appear which are not under its dominance. The violence with which it simplifies the differences labeled ‘inferior,’ ‘poorer,’ ‘richer,’ ‘better,’ or ‘higher,’ the killing and maiming and blinding which are the consequences of its dialectic, tell us as clearly as fiction can that even fantasy must subdue a real world.” His point becomes clearer when, a little later, he compares *Jane Eyre* and *Bleak House*. Noting that there are two narrators which are kept distinct, he says, “The goodness of this ‘I’ [Esther] cannot engulf the world of *Bleak House*; it cannot dissipate the fog or dry up the pestilence of the city.” In other words, Dickens does not oversimplify as Charlotte Brontë does.

Craig fails to take two things into account. First, Dickens was writing a different kind of novel from that which Charlotte Brontë was. Esther Summerson is only a part of that novel and perhaps not the most important part. Jane can dominate, or at least comprehend, her world because it is a personal one, a more limited one—just as Esther dominates that part of her world which is closest to her. Even though *Jane Eyre* raises some social problems, they are carefully limited to her own situations. There is no need for a second narrator to examine them in a broader context. Second—and more important—Craig fails to distinguish between Charlotte Brontë and Jane Eyre. Jane herself does not create Mrs. Reed, or Lowood, or Rochester’s past, or St. John Rivers and his sisters; she perceives and reacts to them, but she does not dominate them. It is Charlotte Brontë who shows that Jane’s decisions are the right ones through the patterns of the novel. It is Charlotte Brontë’s dialectic that makes mutilation and blinding necessary, just as Dickens’ dialectic makes the death of Esther’s mother, Lady Dedlock, necessary. The “‘I’ of *Jane Eyre*, therefore, is absolute only in the sense that it is reliable, that we need not suspect that Jane is lying to us, and in that it creates a fictional reality, a framework within which potentially absurd situations seem credible.

In other words, although *Jane Eyre* is a subjective novel, it is not wholly so. Most of the characters and situations might be said to have an objective reality in addition to the subjective interpretation that Jane superimposes upon them.

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If we do not accept the convention that Jane reproduces conversations with accuracy, for example, it becomes impossible for us to make anything at all of the novel. Unless there is something objective for us to balance against her subjectivity, we can have no idea of its quality. Certainly the characters in the novel have no existence apart from Jane's perception of them. But because their characterization is handled, at least in part, through scene rather than through summary, we are able to balance Jane's reactions to them against our own.

In conclusion, there is a considerable difference between "I" and "she": third-person limited omniscience is a distancing factor that would make the events of the novel truly improbable. Once we got outside of Jane and looked at her instead of seeing the world through her eyes, we could no longer be convinced by the Byronism of Rochester or the improbability of mental telepathy or any of the other potential absurdities in the book. If we take any passage in Jane Eyre and change the "I" to "she," immediately something is lost, and that something is more than vividness. It is a whole way of looking at fiction and at life.

RESEARCH IN THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

A New Journal

A new journal, Research in the Teaching of English, has been authorized by the National Council of Teachers of English for publication twice a year during an initial three-year period beginning in the spring of 1967. Designed for people regularly conducting or reading research in the teaching of English ("teaching" as broadly conceived), the journal will consist of two parts. Part I will consist of theoretical articles on the methods and directions of research, rather full summaries of unpublished studies, briefer summaries (often followed by critiques) of published studies, and occasionally the reprinting of an article or report not generally available (from a foreign periodical, for example). Part II will regularly present abstracts of selected studies, more briefly annotated references to books and articles, and an exhaustive listing of research known to have been completed since the preceding issue. The Editor, with special responsibility for Part I, will be Richard Braddock, Rhetoric Program, University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa 52240. The Associate Editor, with special responsibility for Part II, will be Nathan S. Blount, Research and Development Center for Learning and Reeducation, University of Wisconsin, 1404 Regent Street, Madison, Wisconsin 53706. A board of Consulting Editors will be announced later. Manuscripts, which should follow the style sheet of the American Psychological Association, and invitations to abstract or list specific studies may be submitted to the editors at any time, with November 1, 1966, the deadline for the first (spring) issue and May 1, 1967, the deadline for the second (fall) issue. A three-year subscription may be entered by sending a check for $6.00 to NCTE, 508 South Sixth Street, Champaign, Illinois 61820.