

Jane Eyre's Revelation

Olivia Garcia-McKean, *Harvard University*

Olivia Garcia-McKean is a senior at Harvard University concentrating in English.

He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

—Revelation 22:20

"My Master," [St. John] says, "has forewarned me. Daily he announces more distinctly,—"Surely I come quickly!" and hourly I more eagerly respond,—"Amen; even so come, Lord Jesus!"

—Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*

Containing at least 176 Biblical allusions,¹ Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* employs references to scripture in order to convey character and forecast plot. Understanding these Biblical ideas and images greatly enhances a reader's appreciation of the novel. A reader must also realize that because Jane narrates her life story *after* the events have already taken place, she has had time to reflect upon the parts of her life that she is discussing before telling her tale. This foreknowledge makes Jane's allusions to scripture all the more significant, because they carry the added insight of reflection rather than just being the mere realizations of the moment.

The concluding lines of the novel contain the most memorable use of scripture. Jane's decision to end her autobiography by reading St. John's letter that quotes the penultimate line of the New Testament can strike readers as both arrogant and strange. Jane is depicting an obvious parallel between John the apostle and St. John Rivers beyond just their shared name. It is no coincidence that Jane refers to the "last letter"² that St. John has sent her from his secluded missionary work in India (in Asia) and that the apostle John wrote his last letter that is considered part of the Bible, the book of Revelation, while he was in exile in Asia. Needing to emphasize the connection between St. John Rivers and John the apostle, Jane chooses to mention St. John and his letter at the end of her autobiography in order to connect herself to John the apostle and his writing of the divine book of Revelation.

Although sensibly the writing of a revelation should belong to St. John Rivers, in this case it belongs to Jane. While St. John Rivers uses the book of Revelation to express his feelings in a letter, Jane uses the concepts of the book of Revelation in order to share her own personal revelation, the

understanding that living a Christ-like life is possible and ultimately rewarding. The ending of her autobiography confirms the idea that Jane's writing of her life story has actually simultaneously been a writing of her own book of Revelation, not meant to undermine Christianity by fixing the Bible, but rather to show that she has learned to apply the lessons of Christ by living like Christ. Even though Keith A. Jenkins insists that "[t]hrough the vehicle of autobiography...[Jane] consummates her rebellion against patriarchal religious traditions by redefining the will of God,"³ Jane's autobiography actually demonstrates her desire to follow Christ in his surrender to God, rather than her desire to be subversive to the Bible's teachings.

Not presuming to equate herself with Christ, Jane makes a very clear distinction between her book of revelation and the sacred text. The book of Revelation declares that Jesus made known this revelation to "his servant John" (Revelation 1:1). Written during the apostle John's exile on the island of Patmos, the book of Revelation addresses the seven churches of Asia, and "the main purpose of the book is to encourage the saints to steadfastness against enemies of the truth."⁴ In addition to giving confidence to the seven churches, the holy book of Revelation "points out great epochal changes that would effect the church in the future."⁵ Even though Jane does try to make her story a source of encouragement, Jane does not try to predict the future, which clearly shows that she is not proposing that she is a holy deity. The power of her narrative lies in her humanness, that as a mortal, she has the strength to follow Christ's example.

Throughout the text, Jane is very conscious of her reader, going so far as to directly and familiarly address the reader several times. This awareness substantiates that her autobiography is intended to have an audience, while the familiarity suggests that the narrator considers herself on the same level as the reader. By using the concepts of the book of Revelation, a book that endeavors to help the churches, Jane also suggests that her tale also aims at helping people just like herself realize that Christ's life can be imitated.

Yet attempting to write a revelation about learning to apply the lessons of Christ is a daunting task that requires a certain amount of personal experience, of trials, and of tribulations. Qualifying her to share her revelation about living like Christ, Jane undergoes suffering that invites

¹ Tkacz, Catherine Brown. "The Bible in *Jane Eyre*" in *Christianity & Literature*, vol. 44 (Autumn 1994), p. 3.

² Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. Beth Newman, ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's Press, 1996), p. 441.

³ Jenkins, Keith A. "*Jane Eyre*: Charlotte Brontë's New Bible" in Diane Long Hoeveler and Beth Lau, eds., *Approaches to Teaching Brontë's Jane Eyre*. (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1993), p. 74.

⁴ Hinds, John T. *A Commentary on the Book of Revelation*. (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1980), p. x.

⁵ *Ibid.*

comparison to the Passion of Christ. In Mark 8:34, which Jane also refers to when she discusses St. John, Jesus says, “Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.” Jesus is not insisting that every Christian must literally die on a cross in order to follow him, but rather the cross symbolizes the decision to make a meaningful sacrifice and do what one least wants to do in order to stay righteous. By deciding to leave Rochester after Jane learns that he is still married, Jane resolves to take up her cross. Jesus did not want to die on the cross, just as Jane does not want to leave Rochester. Jane’s Christ-like obedience creates an allusion to the Passion. Recalling Jesus’ anguished prayer to God in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jane denies herself by deciding that “[t]he burden must be carried; the want provided for; the suffering endured, the responsibility fulfilled.”⁶ She must do what she least wants to do by leaving Rochester, and in the process, she must undergo great physical and emotional affliction.

Despite the intensity of the physical suffering, the most painful aspect of the crucifixion was that Jesus had to be separated from God for the first time—he suffered through the crucifixion completely alone. Jane must also endure this same kind of separation and excruciating solitude. Leaving with a broken heart, Jane desperately “long[s] to be [Mr. Rochester’s] [and] pant[s] to return”⁷ to him, but she knows that if she does not leave Thornfield, she will be reduced to the status of mistress and will be guilty of committing the sin of adultery. Not having time to make preparations for her journey, Jane does not even get the chance to say goodbye to Rochester. Both Jesus and Jane must experience the agony of leaving the one they love most and then must endure the physical pain alone.

The correlations between Christ’s Passion and Jane’s journey continue to be very clear. The driver of the coach that picks her up asks for thirty shillings as a fare,⁸ just as Judas asks for thirty silver coins to betray Jesus. Yet in another subtle demonstration that Jane does not presume to be Jesus’ equal, the driver of the coach settles for twenty shillings, which shows that Jane recognizes that she is worth less than Jesus.

As she begins her agonizing journey, Jane says, “As to my own will or conscience, impassioned grief had trampled one and stifled the other. I was weeping wildly as I went on my solitary way.”⁹ Her reference to Milton’s *Paradise Lost* alludes to the expulsion of Adam and Eve, when they went on their solitary way and were separated from God. The use

of this reference shows that, at this point, Jane, like Christ and Adam and Eve, is going through the torture of being separated from everything familiar.

Death is soon to follow. “The moral degradation, blent with the physical suffering,”¹⁰ is too much to bear, and soon a “weakness, beginning inwardly, extending to the limits,”¹¹ seizes her, and she falls. At this moment, Jane completes the spiritual process of making a significant sacrifice and dying to her own desires; her body has suffered all that it can in the process of separating itself completely from her old life at Thornfield.

Next, enduring a wandering journey in which she has no direction, Jane is spiritually “dead” for three days during a time of hopelessness, just as Christ was dead for three days. Contrary to Keith Jenkins’ thought that Jane’s resurrection occurs with Rochester at Ferndean, Jane is spiritually “resurrected” by the company of the Rivers. At Moor House, “[t]here was a reviving pleasure.”¹² She even assumes a new name, Jane Elliot, to represent her new life and to disassociate herself with her old life. Following Christ’s example by denying her own desires in order to remain righteous, Jane undergoes suffering that brings about a comparison to the Passion of Christ. Due to this period of trial, spiritual death, and then faithful resurrection, Jane’s revelation about her own experience in trying to apply the teachings of Christ’s to her life provides an earthly example of Christ’s sacrifice.

In addition to Jane’s helping others learn from her experiences in applying Jesus’ example to life on Earth, she is also, in her mind, hastening Jesus’ return by sharing the story of Christ with others through her own personal account. Therefore, she is being obedient to God’s will to spread the news of his son’s coming. In Matthew 24, Jesus’ disciples ask him “What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?” Jesus answers them:

Ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet...All these are the beginnings of sorrows. Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted...But he that shall endure until the end, the same shall be saved. And the gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then the end shall come (Matt. 24:6,8-9,13-14).

The book Revelation describes this end and Christ’s return to Earth. Since Jesus wants as many people as possible

⁶ Bronte, p. 320.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 316.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 317.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 323.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 317.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 343.

to hear and accept his message, he waits until everyone has heard the gospel before he returns. Jane's return to Rochester also invites comparison to Christ's return to the Earth. Just as Jesus cannot come back until the gospel has been preached in all the nations, Jane's return to Rochester is also conditional; she cannot return to the sinful world of Rochester until he has repented and learned to follow Christ's example.

The inclusion of Jane's return to Rochester in her narrative not only marks the culmination of this romantic relationship, but also continues to follow the model of the book of Revelation in Jane's writing of her own book of revelation, not to subvert the teachings, but to show that she has emulated Christ in her life on Earth. Since she does make the difficult decision to leave Rochester, "Jane has rejected the tempting false role of 'his comforter—his pride; his redeemer from misery'; that is God's role, and she does not try to usurp it. While her sacrifice recalls Christ's sacrificial love, she does not presume to replace Christ himself."¹³ Recognizing the role that Christ must play in Rochester's life in order for them to be together again, Jane surrenders her desire to return to Rochester to God's will. God then works in Rochester's life, so that Jane may return to her love.

Unfortunately, in order for God to show his authority in Rochester's life, Rochester must suffer, beyond just losing the love of his life. Although God does give him the opportunity to repent, he must first endure the consequences of sin discussed in the Sermon on the Mount,¹⁴ because he does not take the initiative on his own to follow Christ's example. As Tkacz notes, when his crazy wife, Bertha, sets fire to his home, Rochester's losses in the fire are striking realizations of this stern justice in Matthew 5: "And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee....And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell" (Matt. 5:29-30). Destroying his home, the fire also physically injures Rochester in these two body parts that the scripture mentions; "one eye was knocked out, and one hand so crushed that Mr. Carter, the surgeon, had to amputate it directly. The other eye inflamed: he lost the sight of that also. He now is helpless indeed—blind and a cripple,"¹⁵ and at this point, he begins "to experience remorse, repentance; the wish for reconciliation with [his] Maker."¹⁶ Since Christ's return and the apocalypse coincide with the whole world's hearing of the gospel, Rochester's coming to faith is not enough to bring about Christ's return, but given that

Jane is a human merely trying to follow Christ's example and that her actions are held to a lower standard, Rochester's repentance allows her to return to the circumstances of her old life. Jane's return in her revelation is a necessary element, since the Book of Revelation includes the return of Christ; Rochester must suffer severely, both physically and emotionally, in order to recognize quickly his need for God, so that Jane can return, and then share her revelation with the world.

The book of Revelation also has consoling words in regards to people such as Rochester. Christ says in Revelation 3:18-9, "I counsel thee to...anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent." The anguish caused by the justice of Rochester's losses is alleviated by what he gains through his atonement with God and in the redemption of his relationship with Jane—she is both "his right hand" and "the apple of his eye."¹⁷ While he regains the love of his life, physically, he is also partially restored. After he accepts God's authority in his life, he recuperates and has enough sight in his remaining eye to be able see his firstborn son. When Rochester recognizes all these blessings, he "acknowledge[s] that God ha[s] tempered judgment with mercy."¹⁸

Jane also appreciates that she has been greatly blessed. In reclaiming her relationship with Rochester, at a state that is better than ever, Jane realizes that her sacrifice, her following of Christ's example, is a small price to pay for the reward she has now. Her reasoning for writing her autobiography is to share this powerful revelation.

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¹³ Tkacz, p. 11

¹⁴ Tkacz, p. 12

¹⁵ Bronte, p. 418.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 435.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 439.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 440.